DETECTIVE
FICTION WEEKLY

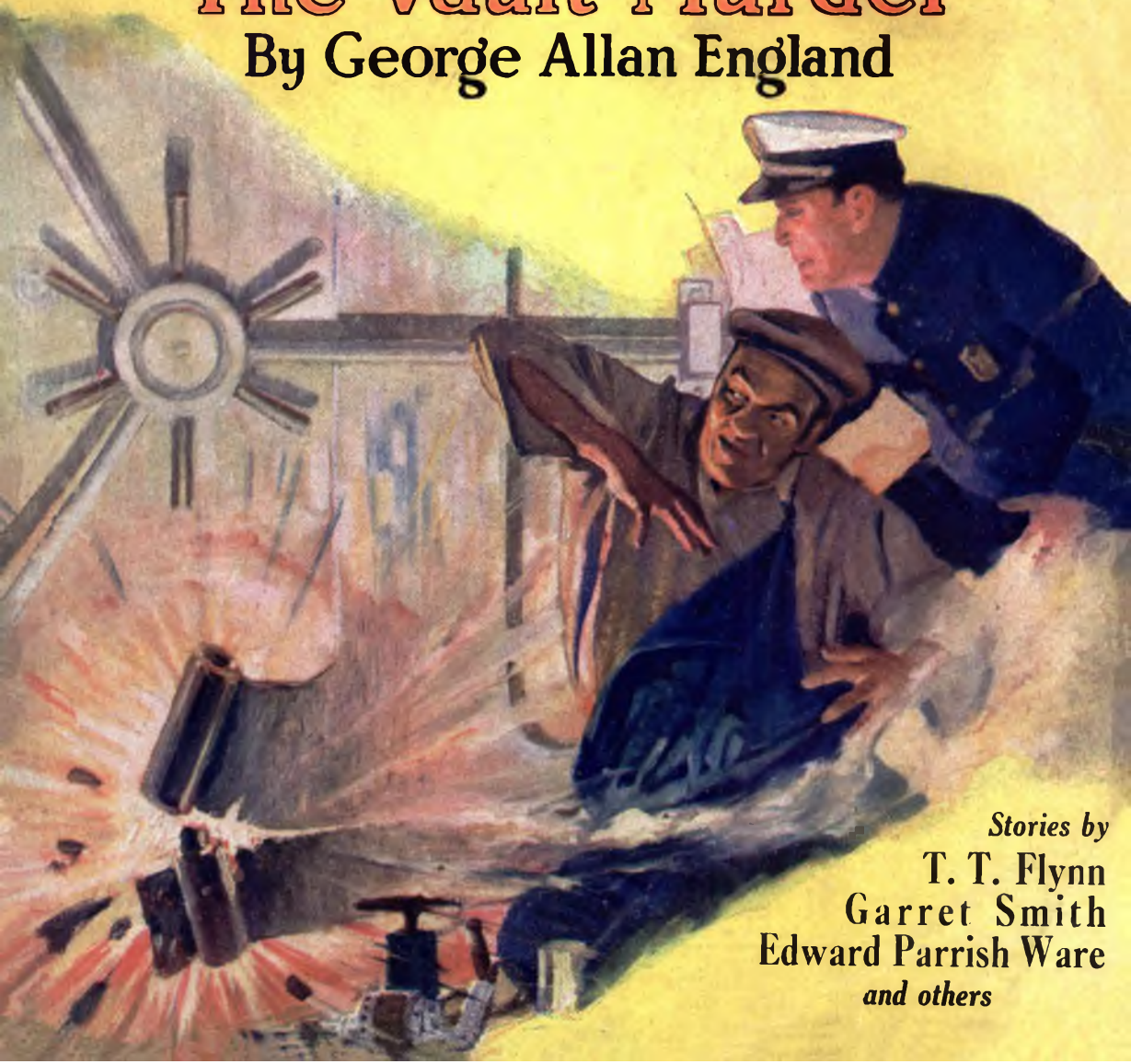
OCT. 5
10¢
Canada 15¢

With Thrilling True Stories

FORMERLY FLYNN'S

The Vault Murder

By George Allan England



Stories by

T. T. Flynn

Garret Smith

Edward Parrish Ware

and others

Newest Styles
Dignified Credit at Saving Prices

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

12 Months to Pay

$50.00

DT1-Newest Butterfly design, of 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring set with sparkling, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a mo.

$29.50

DT28-Gorgeously hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold "Bridal Blossom" wedding ring; 5 fiery genuine blue-white diamonds. $2.37 a mo.

$75

DT23-Modern, square-prong engagement ring in new "step" design 18K Solid White Gold set with specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. $6.16 a month.

$50

DT7-New, massive, gentleman's ring of 14K Solid Green Gold and 18K Solid White Gold top; with a flashing, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a month.

No Red Tape No Delay

$27.50

DT 31 - Nationally known **ELGIN** or **WALTHAM**! Handsomely engraved new style case. Guaranteed Elgin or Waltham movement. **Warranted 14K White or Green Gold filled 25-year case.** Latest style flexible mesh wrist band to match. $2.21 a mo.

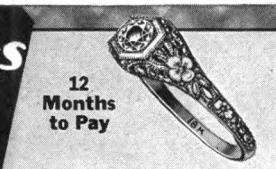
$27.50

DT22-Gentleman's massive, hand engraved ring of 14K Solid White Gold Imported black Onyx with a genuine diamond and any carved initial or emblem desired. $2.21 mo.

IT'S A BULOVA $29.75

DT5 - Nationally advertised guaranteed 15-jewel Gent's BULOVA watch. White Gold filled case, "dust-tite" protector; radium dial and hands; latest style woven wrist band to match. $2.39 a mo.

CASH PRICES AT CREDIT TERMS



$42.50

DT27-The "Bridal Blossom"—Hand pierced lace design engagement ring of 18K Solid White Gold, genuine blue-white diamond of rare brilliance. $3.46 a mo.

$48.50

DT12-Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like $750 solitaire. $3.96 a mo.

$42.50

DT10-Gorgeous lace design hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold dinner ring; 3 fiery, genuine, blue-white diamonds; 2 French-blue sapphires. $3.46 a mo.

$29.50

DT26 - Latest style, modernistic effect 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring; fiery genuine blue-white diamond. $2.37 a month.

Sent for $1 — **Balance 12 MONTHS TO PAY**

$37.50

DT8-Diamond wrist watch. 14K Solid White Gold engraved case; **2 genuine diamonds, 8 emeralds or sapphires.** Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible bracelet with sapphires or emeralds to match. $3.04 a month.

Guaranteed Savings

Direct Diamond Importations and large volume buying for both our National Mail Order business and our Chain Store system enable us to offer you superior quality genuine diamonds, fine standard watches and exquisite jewelry at saving prices which are beyond comparison. All of this with no extra charge for the added convenience and advantage of dignified, liberal credit.

How to Order

Just send **$1.00** with your order and your selection comes to you on **10 Days' Free Trial. No C.O.D. to pay on arrival.** After full examination and free trial, pay balance in **12** equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed 10 Days' Free Trial

You have the full privilege of 10 days' free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond with every purchase.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential

A whole year to pay! No extra charge—no red tape. **You take no risk**—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

Gift Cases Free

Every article comes to you in a most beautiful and appropriate presentation case.

Send for this **CATALOGUE!**

FREE To Adults

Completely illustrated new catalog of genuine diamonds; Bulova, Elgin, Waltham, Hamilton, Howard, Illinois watches; fine jewelry and silverware at special prices. **Write now to get your Free Copy.**

$27.50

DT19-Nationally known 15-jewel **WALTHAM** movement; **20-year** warranted engraved **White Gold** filled, 12 size, thin model, decagon case. Tested and regulated. White Gold filled knife, fine Waldemar chain. All complete in handsome gift case. $2.21 a mo.

$24.50

DT9-The "Princess Pat"—14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristacrat" flexible bracelet to match. $1.96 a month.

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND AND WATCH CO.

Address Dept. 42-X, 170 Broadway, New York

NEW BODIES *in 24 hours*

HAVE you ever watched a magician pick wriggling rabbits out of a high hat? A wonderful trick, you say. Well, I'm a magician of a different sort—a magician that builds health and strength into your body in just 24 hours. And it is no trick. It took me 19 years of tireless planning and experimenting to be able to do it.

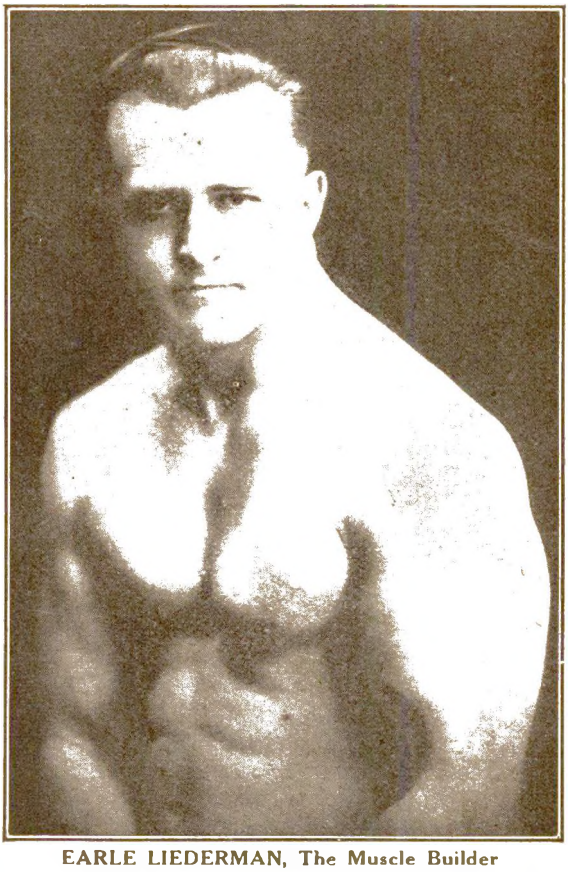
People call me the Muscle-Builder, because I take weak, run-down bodies and transform them into strong, virile, handsome bodies in double-quick time. *And I actually do it in 24 hours.*

In the Privacy of Your Own Room

By this I do not mean that you must exercise 24 hours continuously. My scientific short-cut to healthy, handsome, broad-shouldered bodies must be taken in short 15 minute doses. Because, if you exercised more than that in my high-pressure, quick development way, you would tear down more than I can build up. So all I ask of you is 15 minutes of your spare time each day for 00 days (actually only 22½ hours' time) doing simple, easy exercises under my guidance. You can do them in the privacy of your room, if you wish, but you must do them every day to get the best results.

And What Results!

In the first 30 days I guarantee to add one whole inch of real, live muscle on each of your arms, and two whole inches of the same revitalizing strength across your chest. I'll take the kinks out of your back, strengthen and broaden your shoulders, give you a wrist of steel, and a fighting, peppy personality that just yells youth, vigor and vitality all over.



EARLE LIEDERMAN, The Muscle Builder

Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," Etc.

I Work Inside As Well As Out

Your heart, your liver, your kidneys, your lungs—all your internal organs get the jolt of their young lives when I start to work on them. And they settle down to an orderly, well-mannered existence that means a new kind of happiness for you—the joy of living that only a healthy, virile body can give you. And the headaches, constipation troubles, aches and pains that are always caused by weakened, flabby bodies somehow miraculously disappear.

You'll See It in Her Eyes

And will your friends notice the difference! Just watch that girl you love so dearly open her eyes, and *fight* to hold your attention! And the men in your crowd—they'll look up to you as a real leader. Instinctively they worship strength and leadership that must go with it. But let me tell you all about it. All you have to do is

SEND FOR MY NEW 64-PAGE BOOK

"Muscular Development"

IT IS FREE

I do not ask you to send me a single cent until you are convinced that I can help you. All I do ask is that you write today for my free 64-page book "Muscular Development" so you will be able to read for yourself just what I do for you and what I have done for others. This book contains 48 full page photographs of myself and many prize winning pupils I have trained. Many of these were pitiful weaklings. Look at them now! You will marvel at their physiques. This book will thrill you. I want you to have a copy for the sake of your future health and happiness, so send today—do it now before you turn this page.

EARLE LIEDERMAN
DEPT. 1110 305 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

EARLE LIEDERMAN
Dept. 1110. 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—Please send me, absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name.....AGE.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

(Please write or print plainly.)

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME XLIV — *Saturday, October 5, 1929* — NUMBER 6

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

TRUE STORIES

SERIALS

FEATURES AND FACTS

This Magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur

C. T. DIXON, President ARTHUR B. GAUNT, Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; in Canada $7.00, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY.

Entered as second-class matter September 4, 1924, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

TITLE REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE

"I think that the letter that you sent to my employer had great weight in his decision to employ me. I like the position that I have very well."
William L. Olsasky,
Shawnee, Kansas

"I am very well satisfied with the results of your and my efforts to get me a job in the drafting rooms of the Michelmann Steel Construction Co., Quincy. The gentleman there spoke highly of your correspondence courses."
Marcus Linse,
Danvers, Ill.

"Thank you very much for your assistance, which enabled me to secure a position as draftsman with the Mississippi Valley Power Company."
Lowell Perry,
Fort Smith, Ark.

"I have obtained a position as a junior draftsman with the Muncie Oil Engine Co. I appreciate your aid in obtaining this position very much."
Maurice N. Bareham,
Muncie, Ind.

Who Else wants a good Drafting Job?

DURING the past few months we have placed HUNDREDS of former clerks, mechanics and beginners in fine positions—with Contractors, Architects, and in big manufacturing plants. (Read a few typical letters above.)

These men came to us because they were dissatisfied with their earnings and with their future prospects. Now they are doing work they like—making good money—**and have a real chance to advance still farther.**

If you are trying to solve a similar personal problem, we invite you to get in touch with us. We'll be glad to tell you how you, too, can get a well-paid Drafting job—without risking a penny of your money.

Why we recommend DRAFTING

We believe it will pay you to investigate Drafting. Many of our most successful Contractors and Engineers STARTED in the Drafting room. That opportunity to get to the top—to meet big men—to take charge of important projects is the best feature of Drafting.

The work is interesting and pleasant. The hours are easy. You work with a wonderful bunch of fellows. Salaries range from $35 to $50 a week for beginners, up to $100 and more a week for experienced Draftsmen.

One man puts it this way: "I really didn't know exactly what Drafting was. I thought it required artistic talent and a high school or college education. I was much surprised to find it wasn't any harder to learn than my former trade of plastering."

NOW — Jobs for STUDENTS!

For the past five years the American School has provided a free Employment service for all who **completed** this home-training in Drafting. Now we have found a way to place all STUDENTS when only half-way through the course. Mail coupon for complete information of this remarkable service.

Promotion for office and factory workers

If you're a shop man you can realize that the man who **makes** the plans is a step above the workman who **follows** the blue-print. If you're a clerk you know that copying figures all day cannot compare in salary or responsibility with creating designs and plans of buildings, machinery, or the products of industry.

How are you going to get away from routine work—how can you even get a $10 a week increase in pay—how can you get into a line where there is a real future? Let us show you that Drafting offers you all these things—in less time, and with less effort than any other line.

FREE--Drafting Book

Over 70,000 fine Drafting positions have been advertised in the past year. Electrical, Architectural, Mechanical, Structural and Automotive lines, all need Draftsmen. Here is one of the biggest fields you can get into. Get our free 36-page book and see how easily you can learn and how we help you get a well-paid position as soon as you are ready for it.

The American School — Dept. D-72
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

Please send FREE and without obligation 36-page Drafting Book and your offer to help me get a Drafting job when only half-way through the course.

Name.....Age.....

St. No.....

City.....State.....

The American School

Dept. D-72, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

All-Story (Combined with Munsey)
Argosy - - - - - -
Detective Fiction W'kly
Minimum space 4 lines.

Combination Line Rate $3.00 Less 2% cash discount

Nov. 9th Classified Forms Close Oct. 15th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS CAN MAKE $240 MONTH. BONUS BESIDES. AUTO FURNISHED TO PRODUCERS. INTRODUCE FINEST LINE GUARANTEED SILK HOSIERY YOU EVER SAW. 126 STYLES, COLORS. GUARANTEED TO WEAR 4 MONTHS OR NEW HOSE FREE. HIGH CLASS PROPOSITION. NEW SALES PLAN. CREDIT GIVEN. SPARE TIME SATISFACTORY. Samples furnished. Silk hose given for your own use. Write. WILKNIT HOSIERY CO., Dept. 3799, Greenfield, Ohio.

WISE AGENTS. NO CANVASSING. PLEASANT WORK. NO DELIVERING. BIG MONEY. NO INVESTMENT. APPOINTING AGENTS. WELCOME FOODS, HARVEY, ILL.

$12.00 Daily Showing New Table Cloth. Looks like Linen. Wash like oilcloth. No Laundering. You just take orders. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. Write at once for Free Sample. BESTEVER, 640 Irving Park Station, Chicago.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the CLASSIFIED MANAGER, MUNSEY COMBINATION, 280 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS WANTED—40 TO 50% COMMISSION. BOX ASSORTMENTS and personal Christmas Cards. Write for details. ARTISTIC CARD CO., Elmira, N. Y. Dept. 20.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—MEN, YOU CAN EARN $12 DAILY WEARING FINE FELT HATS AND SHOW FRIENDS. SMARTEST STYLES. LATEST SHADES. $2 TO $5 SAVING ON EVERY HAT. SAMPLES FREE. TAYLOR HAT AND CAP MFRS., DEPT. PC-330, CINCINNATI, OHIO.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-601, 32 NO. STATE ST. BLDG., CHICAGO.

HELP AND INSTRUCTION

Want a Government Job? $1260—$2400 year. Men—women, 18—50. Steady work. Vacation. Experience usually unnecessary. 25 coached free. Full particulars FREE. Write immediately. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. B-1, Rochester, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WOMEN MAKE $9 DAILY WEARING AND SHOWING NEW INVENTION. PREVENTS SHOULDER STRAPS SLIPPING. Real comfort at last! For Particulars—Free Offer, write LINGERIE "Y" CO., 16 Lake, North Windham, Conn.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIG OHIO CORPORATION WANTS COUNTY MANAGER. OPPORTUNITY $50 TO $75 WEEKLY. Earnings start immediately. GOOD FOR $5,000 YEARLY. We furnish everything, deliver and collect. Capital or experience unnecessary. FYR-FYTER CO., 1907 Fyr-Fyter Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

MAKE YOUR OWN PRODUCTS. EMPLOY AGENTS YOURSELF. TOILET ARTICLES, SOAP EXTRACTS. We furnish everything. Valuable book FREE. NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC LABORATORIES, 1961W BROAD, Richmond, Va.

$12.00 DAILY EASY SELLING NEW TABLECLOTH. WASHES LIKE OILCLOTH. NO LAUNDERING. FREE SAMPLE. JONES, 802 N. CLARK, CHICAGO.

AGENTS WANTED—ON A FAST SELLING 25C ITEM FOR THE KITCHEN, COSTS YOU 8 1-3C. SAMPLE SENT PARCEL POST PREPAID FOR 10 CENTS. M. SEED FILTER MFG. CO., INC., 353 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY—$100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at $23.50 and $31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. J-409, Chicago.

STRANGE BATTERY COMPOUND CHARGES BATTERIES INSTANTLY. Gives new life and pep. Immense demand. Big Profits. Gallon Free. LIGHTNING CO., St. Paul, Minn.

EDUCATIONAL

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the CLASSIFIED MANAGER, MUNSEY COMBINATION, 280 B'way, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write For Our Guide Book, "How To Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND ADVICE. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED— Preliminary advice furnished without charge. Booklet and form for disclosing idea free. IRVING L. McCATHRAN, 703D International Building, Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

I Will Train You at Home to Fill a Big-Pay Radio Job

If you are earning a penny less than $50 a week, send for my book of information on the opportunities in Radio. It's FREE. Clip the coupon NOW. A flood of gold is pouring into Radio creating hundreds of big-pay jobs. Why go along at $25, $30 or $45 a week when the good jobs in Radio pay $50, $75 and up to $250 a week? "Rich Rewards in Radio" gives full information on these big jobs and explains how you can quickly learn Radio through my easy, practical home-study training.

Salaries of $50 to $250 a Week Not Unusual

The amazing growth of Radio has astounded the world. In a few short years three hundred thousand jobs have been created. That's why salaries of $50 to $250 a week are not unusual. Radio simply hasn't got nearly the number of thoroughly trained men it needs.

You Can Learn Quickly and Easily In Spare Time

Hundreds of N. R. I. trained men are today making big money—holding down big jobs—in the Radio field. You, too, should get into Radio. You can stay home, hold your job, and learn in your spare time. Lack of high school education or Radio experience are no drawbacks.

Many Earn $15, $20, $30 Weekly On the Side While Learning

I teach you to begin making money shortly after you enroll. I give you SIX BIG OUTFITS of Radio parts and teach you to build practically every type of receiving set known. M. E. Sullivan, 412 53rd St., Brooklyn, N. Y., writes: "I made $720 while studying." G. W. Page, 1807 21st Ave., S., Nashville, Tenn., "I picked up $935 in my spare time while studying."

Your Money Back If Not Satisfied

My course fits you for all lines—manufacturing, selling, servicing sets, in business for yourself, operating on board ship or in a broadcasting station—and many others. I back up my training with a signed agreement to refund every penny of your money if, after completion, you are not satisfied with the lessons and instructions I give you.

Act NOW—64-Page Book Is FREE

Send for this big book of Radio information. It has put hundreds of fellows on the road to bigger pay and success. Get it. See what Radio offers you, and how my Employment Department helps you get into Radio after you graduate. Clip or tear out the coupon and mail it RIGHT NOW.

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 9XK

National Radio Institute

Washington, D. C.

RADIO NEEDS TRAINED MEN!

Here's the PROOF

$375 One Month In Spare Time

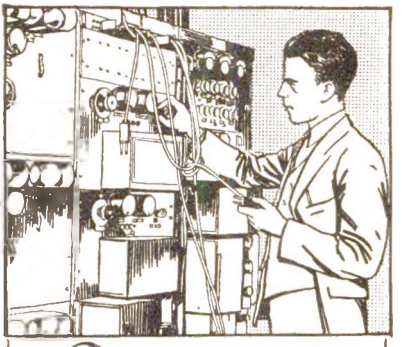
"Recently I made $375 in one month in my spare time installing, servicing, selling Radio Sets."

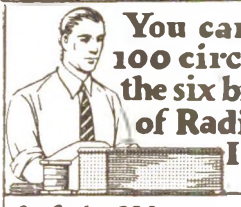
Earle Cummings,
18 Webster St.,
Haverhill, Mass.

$450 a Month

"I work in what I believe to be the largest and best-equipped Radio shop in the Southwest and also operate KGFI. I am averaging $450 a month."

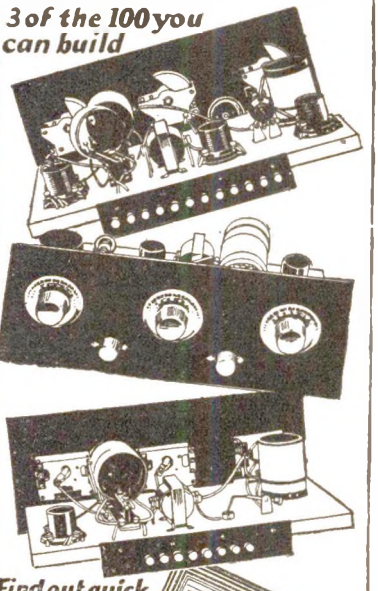
Frank M. Jones,
922 Guadalupe St.,
San Angelo, Tex.





You can build 100 circuits with the six big outfits of Radio parts I give you

3 of the 100 you can build



Find out quick about this practical way to big pay

Mail This FREE COUPON Today

J. E. SMITH, President,
Dept. 9XK, National Radio Institute,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your Free book "Rich Rewards in Radio," giving information on the big-money opportunities in Radio and your practical method of teaching with six Radio Outfits. I understand this places me under no obligation.

Name.....Age.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Employment Service to all Graduates

Originators of Radio Home Study Training

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

MISCELLANEOUS

CAMERA AND PHOTO SUPPLIES

TOBACCO

TEN MILLION MEN
must be right in their choice of RAZOR BLADES

See the special displays of

RAZOR BLADES

in 10¢ Packages

during the October Sales at Woolworths

The handiest way to buy razor blades . . . and as serviceable blades as you can buy in any form or at any price can be bought at Woolworth Stores.

Speedway Blades (a package of two double-edge safety razor blades for 10 cents) and Sha-Ve-Zee Blades (a package of three single-edge safety razor blades for only 10 cents) continue to be the choice of more than ten million men a year. Because every Speedway blade and every Sha-Ve-Zee blade is of guaranteed quality. Each blade is inspected . . . and each blade is guaranteed to hold up against the toughest beard or to shave the tenderest skin.

Manufactured and guaranteed by
International Safety Razor Corporation
Bloomfield, N. J.

F.W.WOOLWORTH CO 5-10 CENT STORE

Win $1000.00 CASH

This Offer Is Open to Every Reader of This Announcement

It makes no difference who you are or where you live we want you to send us a name for our toothpaste. Whoever sends the most suitable name will win—nothing more is necessary to gain this cash prize of $1000.00.

NOTHING TO BUY—NOTHING TO SELL

You can use a coined word or a word made by combining two or more words, such as "Snow-White," "Gum-Strength," etc., or any other name you might think would fit the high quality of this dental cream. There is nothing to buy or sell—simply the person sending the best and neatest suggestion for a name will receive $1000 cash prize, or, if prompt, $1100 in all.

ANY NAME MAY WIN

No matter how simple you think your suggestion is you cannot afford to neglect sending it at once. Any name may win.

NAME THIS

Win this $1000 cash prize by a few moments' thought. How can you earn this amount of money easier or more quickly? Remember, there is no obligation! The person submitting the winning name will have nothing else to do to win the $1000 and the extra $100, if prompt. In choosing a name bear in mind this dental cream is marvelous for teeth and gums. It is designed to sweeten the breath, beautify the teeth, cleanse cavities and promote teeth and gum health. The only thing necessary to win is to send the name we choose as the neatest and best suited for this dental cream. Only one name will be accepted from each contestant. This unusual offer is only one of a number of offers embraced in our novel distribution plan, whereby those taking part may win any one of twenty-odd prizes, the highest of which is $3500 cash. By participating in our distribution plan the winner of the $1100 cash prize may win an additional $3500 making a total of $4600. Everyone sending a name regardless of whether it wins or not, will be given the same opportunity to win the $3500 or one of the other cash prizes. Get busy with your suggestion at once—do not delay! Neglect may cost you thousands of dollars.

$100 EXTRA for PROMPTNESS

To get quick action I am going to pay the winner an extra $100 for promptness, or $1,100 in all—so send your suggestion AT ONCE!

CONTEST RULES

This contest is open to everyone except members of this firm, its employees and relatives.

Each contestant may send only one name. Sending two or more names will cause all names submitted by that person to be thrown out.

Contest closes November 30, 1929. Duplicate prizes will be given in case of ties.

To win the promptness prize of $100 extra, the winning name suggested must be mailed within three days after our announcement is read.

MR. H. E. RAY, *Contest Manager*
745 McCune Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa.

Enclosed with this coupon on separate sheet is my suggestion for a name.

Date this announcement was read.....

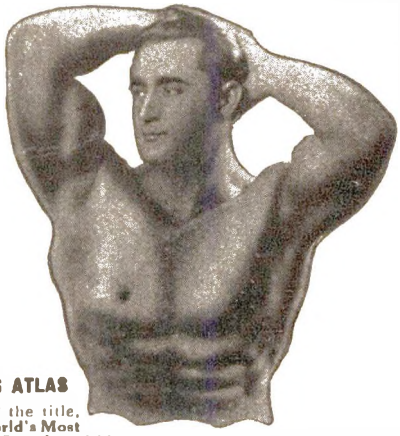
Date my suggestion is mailed.....

Name.....

Address.....

NOTE: Being prompt qualifies you for the extra $100.00 as outlined in this announcement.

Add 5 Inches To Your Chest



CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of the title, **"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."** No other living man can claim this title.

Old or Young—Thin or Fat—I'll Give You Health and Great Strength

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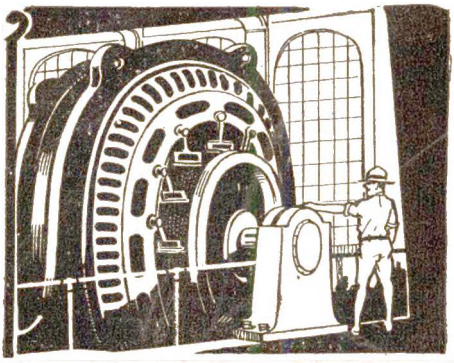

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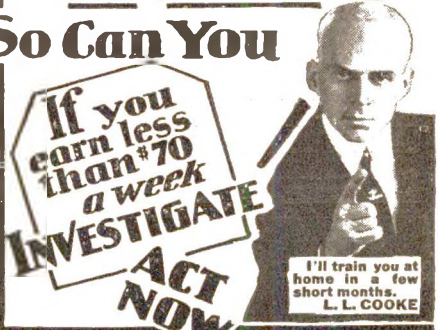

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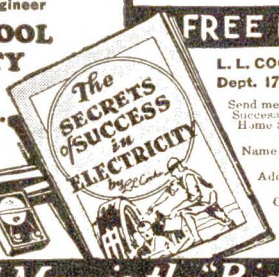

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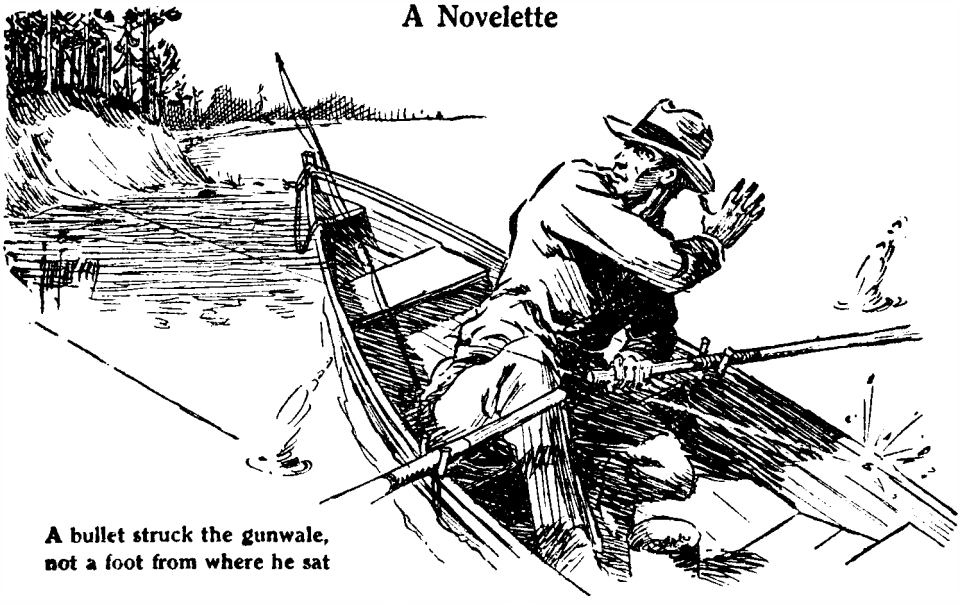
The Vault Murder

A Novelette



A bullet struck the gunwale, not a foot from where he sat

Ashley Goes Fishing, and Solves the Mystery of the Man Who Shot Himself Without a Weapon

By George Allan England

CHAPTER I

Locked In!

IT was exactly twelve minutes past two, on the afternoon of May 26, when William J. Blair, vice president and cashier of the Middleburg, New York, First National Bank, casually remarked:

"Guess I'll have to get that other ledger from the vault."

Bookkeeper Joslyn Harrison, in the next cage, distinctly heard him say this. Harrison also heard him get up, open the grilled door leading into the corridor that ran toward the bank vault, and walk down that corridor. Paying Teller Marden, who just then

happened to glance down the corridor, plainly saw Blair enter the vault.

It was some four minutes later that bank president Harvey Nelson Payne came unsteadily to the grilled door, hoarsely exclaiming:

"Blair—he's shut himself in! The time lock's sprung!"

Harrison, a meek man with perpetually inky fingers, looked up from his desk. He faced round at Payne, his pale blue eyes blinking as he tried to grasp what had happened.

"What? What's that you say, sir?"

Even to his rather dull brain, skilled only in figures, it was obvious that something serious indeed had taken place. The bank president's appearance was full guarantee of *that!* Now, not at all his usual dignified self, he stood there a picture of dismay. That picture was anything but agreeable. For Payne bore nearly seventy years on his bowed shoulders. Paunchy and baggy jowled, with his mane of white hair all dishevelled his deep-set black eyes staring and his jaw agape, he now presented anything but the conventional portrait of the president of the oldest and largest bank in a hustling American city of more than forty thousand.

"What—what's that you say?" Bookkeeper Harrison mustered breath enough once more to query. "You don't mean Cashier Blair has gone an'—"

"That's what he has, Harrison! He's shut himself up in the vault! And the time lock—"

For a tense moment the two men, chief and subordinate, stared at each other. From Harrison's poised pen a large, flat blob of ink dropped to the immaculate page of a ledger that constituted his greatest pride. That this catastrophe remained unnoted showed what perturbation of spirit Harrison was now undergoing. The president's seemed no less. His alarmed figure looked almost grotesque as the old man still remained framed by the door of the bookkeeper's cage.

Leading from that cage and ending at that door, extended the corridor, down to the back wall of the bank building; a corridor that with its six-foot width separated Payne's private office from the bank vault where this alarming event had just been so startlingly reported.

Harrison was first to break the silence.

"The time lock?" he thickly exclaimed. "You don't mean to say it's—"

"Sprung! And that means it'll be at least fourteen hours before—"

"But it couldn't spring, sir!"

"Damn it, are you arguing against a fact? We're up against a fact now, and we've got to get that man out o' there! Get him out, quick. If we don't, good God, he'll stifle to death! He'll die!"

The old man's voice broke into almost a falsetto. Never in all the years that Harrison had known him, and those years had been many, had Payne exhibited any such flood of emotion.

"Die?" cut in another voice, as Paying Teller Marden—sallow, thin shouldered and spectacled—thrust his way into the bookkeeper's cage. The gray-uniformed watchman, special policeman or whatever his title might be, who had been pulling down the shades in the public part of the bank —now that the business day was over —came shuffling on flat feet.

Jethro Tibbetts, his name was; a silent, glum and taciturn old fellow; confirmed woman hater, and man without vices. Loyal to the bank, with a kind of doglike tenacity, his lean face

and emotionless eyes—gray as his uniform—had time out of mind been identified with the fortunes of the institution. Now, for once a little shaken out of his aplomb, he queried through the metal bars:

"The combination, sir! Won't that open it? Ain't there no way to get him out?"

Feminine footsteps sounded as Hattie Forster and Winnifred Alden came hurrying. Hattie, plump and personable, was the bank stenographer. Winnifred, who wielded a wicked finger at an adding machine, uttered disjointed words that mingled with the jumble of exclamations now confusing the atmosphere of the First National:

"Oh, dear me!" "How *did* it happen?" "Die? He'll die in there?" "What the—" "But we've *got* to open it!" "How the devil could a man do such a fool trick as that?" "Get a safe expert, quick!" "How long can a man live in there?" "Help! Get help!"

The only cool person in the bank, apparently, was Waldo K. Wheeler—"Wally," as his Country Club pals all knew him. Wally was receiving teller. For about three years, now, his sandy hair, smooth ruddy face, suave manners had formed part of the bank's social assets. For Wally's family was one of the very best in town, ranking only second to president Payne's itself.

Now, as with a green celluloid eyeshade pushed back from his untroubled brow, this young Chesterfield stood his hands on hips surveying the scene, he proffered sage advice:

"Don't go into high, folks! Take the grade on low! We'll snatch old Blairey out of his box just as quick as we can drag a couple o' men up from Plummer & Tagle's. They installed the vault. And can't they crack it, too. If they *can't*—"

Turning to the bookkeeper's desk he caught up the phone, called: "Main, 318!"

"Get him out, nothing!" ejaculated Marden. "When a time lock lets go—"

"That means blowing open the vault, if it's to be opened inside the time limit," tremulously put in President Payne. "Shattering the door! And that, by gad, sir, may kill him!"

Already, even as Wally Wheeler was just getting in touch with Plummer & Tagle down on Division Street, the old watchman had entered Payne's office and was advancing through it to the door that opened on the corridor opposite the vault.

Turning, Payne half stumbled down that corridor, reaching the vault door just as old Jethro Tibbetts got there. All the others, excepting Wally, came crowding after. The corridor echoed with footfalls and broken words.

In front of the vault they all anxiously gathered. The massive door, they saw, was indeed fast shut. It presented only a baffling complex of huge hinges, bars, levers, wheels and dials that, to the uninitiated, seemed like a mere confusion. Somewhere behind this impenetrable barrier—though how such a thing could have happened rather staggered the imagination—a human being was immured.

In that cramped space a man who only a few minutes before had been one of them, and had been most commonplacely bent over his desk, now might have found a living tomb. More than one tongue tried to moisten dry lips. More than one forehead gleamed with a sweat not justified by the cool freshness of that late May afternoon.

Harvey Payne, walking like a man in a daze, turned and entered his office. Outside, a motor siren hooted.

A girl's laugh drifted in from Commercial Street. As yet ignorant of the tense drama there in the bank, the life of Middleburg was flowing on, untroubled.

"God grant they can do something, in time!" groaned the old president, as he swung to the little wall phone that communicated with another similar instrument inside the vault.

Clotting at the office door, the bank personnel stared and listened as their president, in a queer and shaking voice, called:

"Hello, in there! Hello there, Blair! Can you hear me? Can you—"

Old Payne broke off short. He listened intently. So too did all the rest, with unbreathing intensity.

Through their silence, the voice of Wally Wheeler — snappy, crisp — echoed back to them:

"Hello, there! *Hell*-o! Plummer & Tagle? Oh, is that you, Ed? Say, this is the First National. Bill Blair, he's got himself locked in the vault. What? *Sure* he did it by accident! What d'you think a— Yeah! And listen! The time-lock's sprung! How can we open it? What? *Can't* be opened except by force, till the time's up? Yeah, that's what I thought. Send a couple o' your best men up, right off! What? And you'll come yourself? Fine! Make it on high, Ed! This is a hell of a jam we're in! S'long!"

The click of his instrument, as he hung up, blent with the resuming voice of old Harvey Payne:

"You hear me in there? Good! How in the name o' Heaven did you ever happen to— But never mind *that!* Thing is to keep cool. Don't get excited, William! Whatever you do, don't get excited!"

The president's face, twitching and dewed with perspiration, his trembling lips and panicky eyes contrasted strangely with his advice, as he stammered on:

"If you get excited, you'll breathe more air! Listen—don't breathe any deeper than you positively have to. And—what's that you say—"

Again he broke off, the receiver pressed to his ear. He nodded, and the tension in his face visibly eased off.

"What's he say?" demanded somebody. "What—how does he feel, and—" A confused hum of questions rose from men and women alike. "What's—"

"Shhh! Wait!" commanded Payne, raising his free hand. "Let me hear what he says, can't you? Oh, all right, William! I'm glad you feel O. K. And —what's that? *You'll* be all right! Better lie down on the floor. Air will stay fresher there. And listen; don't get excited! Yes, we've sent for help. Phoned Plummer & Tagle. They're rushing a couple of their best men. Tagle's coming himself. We'll get you out of there in time, if we have to tear the door down, plate by plate. And meantime, we can drill through, pipe in oxygen to you, and—"

"That's right, oxygen!" exclaimed Joslyn Harrison, as Wally joined the frightened group. "Wheeler, call up the Memorial Hospital and tell 'em to send down a cylinder, with plenty of rubber tubing!"

"Just a minute!" put in old Payne. "Tell them at the hospital to keep this strictly quiet. Plummer & Tagle won't say anything, but the hospital might. And any news of this leaking out would hurt the bank. Can't tell *what* it mightn't do! Might even start a run, or—"

"I know, sir! I'll tell 'em to keep it quiet!" And once more the jaunty Wheeler returned to the phone.

President Payne began talking again into the instrument that communicated with the vault:

"We're doing everything humanly possible, William. Ordering oxygen up from Memorial. Count on me, William—count on all of us! Not a thing in the world to get excited about. It 'll be a joke by to-morrow—sooner, too! You'll be none the worse for it, and—"

His voice died. His face went blank with horror and amaze. He clutched the receiver till his knuckles whitened.

"William! *William!*" he gasped, in a voice of tense panic. "What—for God's sake— What's that I heard? What—can you hear me, William? *Are you there—*"

Marden, round-shouldered and spectacled, pushed forward to the president, and clutched his arm.

"What is it now? What's happened?"

The others crowded, stammering questions. But old Payne gave no heed. Frantically he was thumping the hook of the receiver up and down, with a hand that shook as with the ague; trying to signal the instrument inside the vault.

"What's the matter?" half hysterically choked Hattie Forster. "Telephone broken? Can't you—"

"William! You, in there!" the old man hoarsely commanded, his panic plain to all beholders. "For Heaven's sake, William, answer me! What's happened? What've you *done*—"

His voice trailed off into a groan. Dropping the instrument, that swung loosely a-dangle, he stumbled back and all but collapsed into the big leather-padded chair at his desk. With horror-smitten eyes he sagged there, vacantly staring at the group of white-faced bank employees.

"What is it, sir?" the watchman queried. "What—what's happened now?" His voice was hardly a whisper.

"I—only wish I knew!" thickly the president made reply.

"Don't Mr. Blair answer?"

Old Payne shook his white-maned head.

"I heard—" he began with trembling lips. "I—"

"Heard what, sir?"

"A shot, in there."

"A shot?"

"Yes! A revolver shot. And now—all's silent in the vault!"

CHAPTER II

The Missing Gun

THE silence that greeted this terrifying announcement was so utter that through it could be heard the tense breathing of those there present, the *tick-tack-tick* of the big clock in the public space of the bank, the buzz of an early bluebottle fly on a window of the president's room. Then the rumbling growl of a motor-truck as it jolted down Porter Avenue, at the side of the building, seemed to break the spell.

"He—he can't have shot himself in there, can he?" half whispered Harrison. "If he has—"

"If he *has*," old Harvey Payne took up the word, "we're all in for a terrible time! And the bank—" Now, as ever, his main thought seemed to be for the reputation of the First National Bank, the institution that had grown with the growth of Middleburg itself. The institution in which he had worked up to the presidency, from a minor clerkship, and around which for more than forty-eight years all his business life had centered. "If Blair *has*—but, my God, that's too horrible a tragedy to even think of!" groaned Payne.

He sat there loosely, as if ready to collapse at his desk. Young Wally Wheeler, running to the vault phone, caught up the still dangling receiver.

"Hello, in there!" he echoed, rattling the hook. "Hello!" No answer, while bonds of horror tightened to the breaking point. "Blair! What's happened? What's the matter in there? For God's sake, answer!"

Ashen-faced and quivering, old Payne tugged a huge handkerchief from the breast-pocket of his well-worn black suit, and mopped his brow.

"No use," he managed thickly to articulate. "He's done it, all right. He's—he's shot himself there in the vault!"

"But, holy heavens! Why?" demanded Marden; while Hattie Forster began to cry and Winnifred Alden showed symptoms of a fainting spell.

"That's right, why?" Joslyn Harrison echoed, his mild and pale-blue eyes winking. "Why should a man with a fine position, new house up in Myrtle Park, one o' the best wives in town, and three children growing up—"

"Never mind!" Payne interrupted. "Thing to do now is—"

"Call the police! Ring up Frank Dexter, the new chief—"

"No! Wait! We've got to minimize the terrible publicity we're bound to get." Something of a fighting gleam lighted his eye. "When the yellow journals get hold of this—"

"Can't we keep 'em out, sir?" Marden queried.

"Keep 'em out? How? Tell me that!" demanded the old president; while Wally Wheeler hung up the useless phone. Harrison turned away, stepped to the door of the vault—across the six-foot corridor—and stood there, with inky fingers rather absurdly scratching his bald-spot as he stared at the massive and impenetrable door. The door behind which now lurked a mystery of such terrific potentialities.

"How *can* we keep the yellow press out of this?" Payne once more questioned. "Is there any known way? No, sir, by gad, they'll flock to this like flies to carrion! This horrible thing will be flashed from Maine to California, and the First National Bank of Middleburg, New York, will be—"

He finished only with a groan.

Two or three stood there in his office, frightened, confused and helpless. Others, including Jethro Tibbetts the watchman, drifted out to where Joslyn Harrison was futilely peering at the vault door, the time-lock. In this emergency useless, they murmured banal questions and senseless answers.

A vague sense of personal danger had begun to penetrate their first sense of shock and pity. After all, "my shirt is near me, but my skin is nearer." And with the swift down-swooping of dire, tremendous complications, with possible losses, a run on the bank or its ruin, more than one of these people might be thrown out of a position that gave them not only a comfortable living, but also the respect of the entire community. A banking job is not to be plucked from every blackberry bush; no, indeed!

Thus, within a very few moments of the fateful announcement by Payne: "I heard a shot in there!" reactions had begun to develop. The personal equation of selfishness had begun to make itself felt. And as in panic aboard a sinking ship, each human being—save perhaps the heroic captain—may think only of his own escape, so now each member in the personnel of the First National had already begun to ponder: "Well, if worse comes to worst, how can *I* save myself?"

Marden was first to voice a selfish thought.

"If we call Chief Dexter, or let the *Times-Express* get hold of this before things are straightened out a bit," he ventured, "there's going to be one hell of a scandal. We've got to hold the lid on, sir—at least, a little while."

"But how?" groaned the old president in a hopeless tone. His gesture was tremendously sketched. "A pistol shot—no answer—our cashier, one of this town's biggest citizens, dead in the vault. How in God's name can we keep the *Times-Express* out? Or Frank Dexter and the police? And you know Dexter's on the other side of the political fence from me. You know how he'd like to crucify me, and this bank, and all of us! You know—"

Another silence followed, while Harrison, Wheeler and the watchman fingered the mechanisms of the vault door; the knob of the combination, the polished wheel, even the mocking and defiant time-lock itself, as if by some miracle or magic they might find an "Open Sesame!" to fling the barriers wide. As if some hope might exist that human muscle, unaided, might penetrate complex and costly mechanisms of tool-steel. As if some possibility still existed that they might find, once more alive, their companion they knew only too well was lying dead within that vault of tragic mystery.

Then all at once, the sharp-toned rrrrrrrrr! of an electric bell, startlingly loud through the echoing spaces of the bank, set every nerve crisply a-tingle. Everybody stiffened, keyed to the next unfoldment of the drama that so swiftly, so unexpectedly had swooped down vulturelike into their quiet lives.

"Oh, what's that?" cried Winnifred Alden.

"That's Tagle, with his men!" Wally made answer. "I'll let 'em in!"

And turning on his heel, he ran diagonally through the president's office, then into the space occupied by Miss Alden and the stenographer. Beyond this he traversed a swinging gate in a railing. His footsteps sounded over the marble floor of the public room, as he reached the front door.

Seeming to fear the approach of fate itself, old Payne and the bank employees held utter silence as the door swung open.

John Tagle and his two safe experts entered with bags of tools and explosives.

"Hello, what's all the row about?" Tagle demanded.

Wally jerked a thumb toward the rear of the bank.

"Talk to *him!* I've got nothing to say. Ask Payne."

"We got here as quick as we could," declared Tagle. "Took some time get the stuff together. An' we sure burned the pavement on the way here. You say—"

"*I* don't say a word. Ask the old man!"

"Hmph!" grunted Tagle, and stalked officeward, his two mechanics following. Wally came last, cynically pondering:

"Good thing these birds are going to operate while we're watching 'em. If that biggest one isn't an ex-yegg, I lose my guess!"

His guess was right. Ex-yeggs are notoriously useful when they go straight and take jobs with safe companies.

"Well, what's all the excitement?" was Tagle's pointblank question as he and his henchmen strode into the president's office. An extinct cigar ornamented his mouth. He looked, and was, an abrupt sort of person. "Got

a man locked in the vault, have you?"

Dumbly, old Payne nodded. Fear dwelt in his cavernous eyes.

"Blair, is it?"

"Yes—Blair."

"And you're all scared stiff, ain't you? Well, say! Snap out of it!" commanded Tagle, while his experts stood rough-clad and grimy, with their much-worn leathern bags of implements. "There's nothin' in *that* to paralyze you all. Happens every now an' then. O' course, the air ain't so good in there. An' if a man had to stay a few hours, he'd prob'ly be all in. But we'll have Blair out in time, never you fear!"

"You can get him out," groaned Payne, "but not in time. It's too late, now."

"Forget it! Inside of a couple hours—"

"He's dead, already!"

"He's *what?*"

"Dead."

"The hell you say! He ain't been in there half an hour, an' yet—"

"It's true, or we're afraid it's true," put in Marden, as the old man choked, unable to say more. "The whole thing's changed, since we phoned you. If Blair isn't dead, he's at least seriously wounded."

"Wounded? What with?"

"Fact is, he's shot himself."

"He's—? Say! Quit your kidding!"

"No kidding at all, Tagle," Harrison added his word. "Mr. Payne, here, heard the explosion of the gun. Heard it over the vault telephone."

"That's right," gulped the old man, nodding.

"And since then," Harrison went on, "not a sound out of the vault. Still as a—tomb."

"Well, by God!" ejaculated Tagle. The cigar dropped from his sagging jaw of amazement. "Can you beat *that?*" A moment of blank silence followed. "But, say, he mightn't be dead yet, after all. Quicker we get into that vault—!"

"Call the cops!" demanded the workman who looked like (and was) an ex-yegg. "I seen too many jams, in my day, to want to get in any more. If the cops ain't here when we cracks this here crib, somebody's liable to get somethin' pinned on 'em good. Cops, here, or I'm quittin' right now. That's me!"

Wearily old Payne assented:

"*We* don't need the police in on this, Mr. Payne!" the gray-uniformed watchman protested. "I'm a special officer, myself. I rank as a policeman, and if I make a report—"

"Not good enough," the president negatived this vigorous declaration. "Joslyn, or some of you, phone the Chief."

But Wally was first at the telephone on the president's desk. Hardly had the fateful, the now irrevocable news shot over the wire to Police Headquarters on Forrest Avenue, when once more the trilling of the electric bell announced another arrival at the front door.

Marden, at a gesture from old Payne, went to admit the new-comers —two men from the Memorial Hospital with a cylinder of oxygen and with piping.

"I guess the beans are pretty thoroughly spilled, by now," judged young Wally, as the hospital attendants carried their apparatus into the corridor before the vault. "All this phoning and everything. Everybody in town'll get it, now—and when the cops show up here—"

Old Harvey Payne groaned:

"And after that, the buzzards of the press will begin closing in. And

after *that—!"*

Three hours and seventeen minutes from that time—the vault door having proved more recalcitrant by far than expected—a haggard and nerve-strained bank staff watched the very last bond broken that kept concealed the tragic mystery within.

Chief of Police Frank Dexter and two of his captains were also present. So, too, were Mayor Carter Hayes and half a dozen leading citizens who could not be denied; to say nothing of editor Amos B. Ferguson and a couple of the *Times-Express's* brightest reporters. Also a representative of the Amalgamated Press.

The event seemed already to have assumed something the character of a public reception, a big sporting event. Up at the Eagle House, rumors stated that bets were being laid as to whether William Blair would be taken out alive or not; the odds being quoted at one to twelve in favor of his being dead.

If old President Payne had foreseen and dreaded publicity, now, indeed, had disaster on blackest wing plunged down upon him and the bank that for so many decades had been his life!

Late afternoon, inside the building, brought the electric lights into full glare. Harsh shadows cut across pale and anxious faces. The place echoed with the clank of metal. Disrupted steel, once of high value but now only junk, lay bent, riven, shattered in the corridor. The smell of sweat, of toiling flesh, of fumes from muffled explosions made the close air rank and foul inside that place of misery.

Outside it, along Porter Avenue and up Commercial Street—yes, and even in Patriot Square, one corner of which commanded a view of the bank—curious idlers congregated, formed little groups, then dissolved to listen to some fresh exponent of a guess, a rumor, a theory, a slander.

Newsboys were shouting:

"Here y'are. *Times-Express!* All 'bout the bank mystery! Cashier Blair shoots himself in the bank vault! Leadin' citizen suicides! Shortage o' funds suspected! Get the news, now—here y'are—suicide mystery—!"

Yes, and up in Myrtle Park, in the new $25,000 house that (so tongues of malice had already begun more than to whisper) had fatally over-strained the bank cashier's resources, a stricken and gray-faced woman with three frightened children awaited news that might mean ruin, desolation, anguish intolerable.

Clang! fell the last obstruction. It echoed like a note of doom through the fevered tension of the bank.

"Well, there she is!" announced Tagle, sucking at the butt of another dead cigar. In shirt sleeves and with rumpled hair, sweaty, grimy, he looked as much a yegg as the helper who had really been one. "A damn tough job, I'll say. Don't understand it. When this here time lock was set to snap on at six, for a fourteen-hour lockup, how the hell he set it back to 2.15 an' why—?"

"Forget it!" growled the ex-yegg. "There's the job, now; an' a good, A-1 wreck I calls it, too." His lips, brown with tobacco juice, grinned as he smeared them with the back of an ape-hairy paw. "We're done. It's up to the bulls now. *They* got the right o' way now!"

It was Chief Dexter who pioneered the investigation. He it was who first sniffed into the littered gloom of the vault, while outside it fear and morbid exultation reigned, and fading hopes and ever-growing terror. The chief himself it was who, clad in his best

uniform and with his most impressive voice solemnly declared:

"Yes, gentlemen, I reckon I smell powder smoke, even now!" Sniff, sniff! "You smell it too, Sam—? I mean, Captain Bailey? An' you, Henry an' Charley—? Hm! I mean, Captain Nuttall an' Coroner McIntyre?"

All the officials, at the door of the shattered vault, agreed that they could smell something that at least suggested powder smoke. Only with some difficulty could an Amalgamated Press photographer be prevented from adding the very real smoke of a flashlight explosion, as he struggled to get a view of the opened vault—with (he hoped) the body lying in sight.

The powder smell, if indeed anybody could detect it after so long a time, was dissipated even as the officials made their way in.

"Hello, in there! Hello, Blair! Where are you?"

No answer to the chief's hail.

"Where are you, William?" cried the coroner—a neighbor of Blair's, up at Myrtle Park. "William!"

"Gosh, he don't answer!"

"Reckon he's dead, all right."

"Yeah! Looks that way!"

"Somebody switch on the light in here!"

A hush fell, as the old watchman pushed a button that flooded with electric glare the interior of that tomb-like place. Indeed, a tomb! For there, a little more than half way to the rear of the vault, they saw the huddled bulk of Cashier Blair.

Pitilessly the raw light revealed him. Face down, drabbled with blood that had clotted from a neat little wound on the right temple, there he lay—just a lax, distorted thing that once had been a man.

"Only Coroner McIntyre an' my men in here now!" commanded the chief, removing his cap. Through all his horror for the death of one of his best friends—they had gone to school together as boys, and had known each other all their lives—yet, in this moment he could hardly suppress a thrill at being, if only for a flash of time, in the world's limelight. This find would mean being photoed, interviewed, having his name heralded to the four corners of notoriety. "Only officials in here now!"

He knelt by the body, closely scrutinizing it, while the coroner bent close and the other police officers craned their necks to see. In tense silence they studied the corpse.

"God!" breathed the chief, at last. "He done it himself, all right. That's so, ain't it, Charley?"

"Yes, that's so," agreed the coroner. "Can't be any two ways about *that*, Frank. Though why he should have—well, that'll all come out later, when the books an' accounts are gone over!"

A certain malice trembled in his voice. He had been a political enemy of the dead man, now lying a mere lump of helplessness on the blood-drabbled concrete before him. The cashier had, moreover, held a second mortgage on the coroner's home. McIntyre added:

"Yep, clear case o' suicide, all right. I don't even hardly have to impanel a jury to settle *that!*"

"Wonder where he dropped his gun?" asked Captain Nuttall; while outside at the vault door eager faces trembled and pressed forward; and while—slumped in a collapse in his big desk chair—old Harvey Payne shuddered and groaned. "Where the devil an' all is his gun?"

"Must be round here somewheres," the chief opined. "Locate it. That's

an important exhibit in the case."

"That's so, too," Captain Sam Bailey affirmed. "Gotta have the gun, to make a clear case of it. Hmmm! Let's see, now—where in time—?"

"Gosh, that's funny!" exclaimed Nuttall, searching. "I don't see no gun in here! Do you, Charley? You, Sam?"

"No, but she *must* be 'round here, some place. Look in that there corner. No? Not there? By jing! Well—"

They all hunted for the gun. With increasing puzzlement, with an astonishment that swiftly mounted almost to panic, they searched. They "fished" the body for it, rolling it over, emptying the pockets. No gun!

Into every corner, nook and cranny of the vault they poked, using electric flashlights to render the search more vivid. They even had Wally Wheeler bring keys with which they opened drawers, doors, boxes, every and any place that could possibly conceal a weapon. Nor did they forget to look on the little shelf that supported the electric fan. Even to ridiculous lengths (while outside, excitement grew to fever-pitch) they carried their hunt, examining places that by no possibility could have hidden a weapon the size of a revolver.

No weapon of that size or any other whatsoever came to light. In all that place where it seemed so utterly obvious a pistol must be found, nothing was found.

High or low, no gun!

Baffled, the imagination of the bank personnel, of the police, the press, the townsfolk, and presently the world at large, shrank in a kind of superstitious horror from a mystery whereof no one could devise any possible explanation.

A mystery, indeed!

The mystery of this utterly, maddeningly established fact that Cashier William J. Blair had either shot himself, or been shot to death, in a time-locked vault. And yet that the weapon had absolutely and entirely vanished, as if it never had existed!

A mystery supreme!

CHAPTER III

An Interview

WHEN, as was his custom, T. Ashley—Connoisseur of Crime—next morning read his newspapers with an eye out for startling cases and apparently inexplicable events, he was not long in picking up this item:

EXTRAORDINARY SUICIDE!

Cashier Dead in Bank Vault; No Gun Found

SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF FUNDS DISCOVERED

Middleburg, N. Y., May 27—This city is at fever heat of excitement over the ultra-mysterious suicide of Cashier William J. Blair, 54, who yesterday afternoon shut himself up in the time-locked vault of the First National Bank and there put a .38 revolver bullet through his brain.

The problem of how he managed to do this, when the breaking open of the vault and the most painstaking search have failed to reveal any firearms, has strained the nerves of Middleburg almost to the breaking-point.

After this eminently "journalese" introduction, several paragraphs followed, in great detail rehearsing events as we have already seen them. The article ended thus:

Although up to this time Mr. Blair, a lifelong resident of Middleburg, has borne an unblemished reputation, his suicide in so spectacular a manner has

created an immediate examination of the bank's funds to be made. This has already revealed a shortage of at least $256,000 in cash and negotiable securities, which loss may be far greater when a more complete check-up is made. The loss is partly covered by Mr. Blair's bonding company; and President Harvey N. Payne states that the bank can continue business, but from other sources less optimistic reports are current.

Indications are that Mr. Blair's peculations have extended over more than three years, dating back to about the time when he began the construction of a $25,000 home in the exclusive Myrtle Park section. To meet this expense, unwarranted by his salary, Mr. Blair evidently began speculating with the bank's funds, and became so hopelessly involved that yesterday he solved his personal problem in a manner both quick and efficient.

The mystery of how he was able to manipulate the books so cleverly as to cover his trail would be a major one, were it not completely overshadowed by the far greater one of how, when at last confronted by an impending bank examination due next week, he managed to commit suicide in a manner that suggests the doings of spiritism or at least of the late Houdini. Never in all its history has Middleburg been confronted by so baffling a problem.

T. Ashley smoked a couple of pipes over this, in his office-laboratory on Boylston Street, Boston.

"Here's a good one," he decided, his mild blue eye and smoothly ruddy face expressing a very lively interest. "If the facts are as stated, it looks like spiritism, Houdini-ism or the Fourth Dimension. Seems to me this case may be just what I need for a spring tonic."

Before his second pipe was burned to ashes, he had decided that Middleburg, N. Y., probably needed him; that certainly he needed Middleburg, N. Y.

"Which amounts to the same thing, for all practical purposes," he concluded, and looked up Middleburg in his atlas. It turned out to be a thriving little city in the eastern part of the state, not far from Saratoga Springs. "Things have been a trifle dull for me, of late. Nothing really to stir my imagination. Looks to me as if the suicide of an embezzling cashier in a time-locked vault—a suicide by shooting, yet without any gun at all—might offer certain novel and pleasing elements.

"Yes, decidedly, I think I'll have to take a run out to Middleburg, and see what's what!"

Though not ordinarily a fast driver, the investigator that day rather stepped on the gas. So it was that by 3:55 his eight-cylinder special pulled up in front of the Jefferson House.

A little stiffly T. Ashley got out of his car, and for a moment stood gathering general impressions. The town might have been any one of dozens of those standardized, rubber-stamp communities which make America monotonous—a public square with the usual granite Civil War soldier stiffly holding the customary musket; the brisk and bustling business section; the Masonic Hall and Y. M. C. A.; and, leading away toward "additions" and the Country Club, well shaded streets where all types of architecture engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

"Looks like anything but the scene of a first-class mystery," thought the connoisseur, "or the setting for a spooky drama such as a Fourth Dimensional expert like Einstein would enjoy, or Houdini would have revelled in!"

After a bit of a clean-up, he sat in a rocking chair on the broad, old-fashioned piazza and found the man next him—a cigar salesman from New York—only too willing to discuss the case.

"Tough on old man Payne. The bank's been kind of his own vest property, good many years. You know what I mean. And now—! And the old boy's all alone, too. Wife and daughter, they're in Yurrup. Been gone a month. Makes it bad for him. Rough on Blair's widow, too. And kids. Sure, I've known 'em all for years. The men, I mean. Been makin' this burg ever since '17. This here smash has sure shook the place up some!"

"Must have," agreed the connoisseur. "Bound to make things bad here. I suppose, though, the loss can be partly made good by the bank taking over the cashier's property."

"Yeah, but that's hell for the widow. She'll lose everything. Insurance, too. Suicide knocks it cold—thirty-five thousand, I hear. Feller ought to think of them things. Think of the frau and kiddies before he starts going wrong. Now, if it had of been *me*—! Guess the widow'll have to take in boarders, or washing. Hell, ain't it? You know what I mean!"

After a few minutes of this, T. Ashley yawned and excused himself. He strolled off across the square, toward Walnut Street where—so the salesman had informed him—old man Payne lived. Without difficulty he found the banker's house at the corner of Walnut and Pleasant, four blocks up from the monument. Both streets were arched with elms now feathery-green in all the beauty of their new spring foliage. Life and the spirit of life, inherent in the springtide, somehow made death and ruin strangely incongruous.

Old Harvey Payne's house, the connoiseur saw, was Victorian, with a porch that could be reached either *via* a front gate or by way of a side gate and a walk leading past a garage where a heavy type car—visible through open doors—lent about the only touch of modernity there visible. So old style was the property, which occupied half a block, that the investigator saw an iron fence, and, still better, a cast iron deer on the lawn.

"Great!" he approved. "It's been a good while since I've seen an iron deer on a lawn. But then, it's been a good while since I've had dealings with a place like Middleburg, New York!"

The maid, frankly Irish, admitted that Harvey Payne was at home, but:

"He ain't seein' anybody now, sor. All them newspaper fellers has got him so wore out, an' so has all this black trouble down to the bank that—"

"I know. It's too bad," murmured the sympathetic T. Ashley. "He must be fearfully tired." A five-dollar bill found its way deftly into the maid's hand. "But I'm not a 'newspaper feller' at all. I think Mr. Payne will find me helpful. And it's really very important, so if you'll please take in my card—"

The maid, capitulating before the V and the genial smile of this so pleasant stranger, took in the card. Some few minutes later a very drawn and haggard bank president was offering the investigator a chair in an old-fashioned library.

"Well, sir, since you've come all the way from Boston to see me, I suppose I'll have to talk," Harvey Payne agreed. "But in heaven's name, make it brief. After what I've been through, yesterday and to-day—"

"Of course," nodded T. Ashley. He felt real sympathy for the stricken old man. "Hard as this tragedy is on Mr. Blair's family and friends, I can see it's equally hard for you."

And, sitting down, the connoisseur of crimes threw a much-seeing glance about him.

The library, he perceived, was of curious octagonal form, occupying the lower story of a tower that rose at the southwest corner of the mansion. Its many shelves of leather-bound books, many of them by forgotten authors, and its heavy black walnut furniture seemed to exhale an atmosphere of dust and age. The place harmonized with Harvey Payne. A relic, too, he made one think of decades long and long ago.

Rugged and rough-hewn, as if of old pioneer stock, the bank president sat there a figure of dejection. His impressive mane of white hair, his deep-set and heavily pouched black eyes, stubby-fingered hands maculated with the brown spots of old age, made him a figure not easy in these modern times to duplicate. His well-worn and decent black suit, round cuffs with huge onyx buttons, square-toed boots and slightly yellowed linen shirt with the black string tie, reminded one of family portraits.

Heavily his nearly seventy years now bowed his once straight shoulders; more heavily than ever, since disaster had with lightning stroke shattered the bank wherein his whole life work and interest had been centered.

"Well, sir?" he queried, fixing a vacant eye on his visitor. "And what —if anything—can I do for you?"

"You can answer a few questions, sir."

"I hope you'll make them brief. For, by gad, sir, I'm at the ragged edge of a collapse."

"And not to be wondered at, either, Mr. Payne. So, yes, I'll try to be as brief as possible. Now—"

"But, by the way, who are you? And why do you want me to talk about this terrible affair?"

T. Ashley concisely explained his professional interest, and then added:

"So you see for yourself, Mr. Payne, that if this mystery can be solved, it will be a great relief to you as well as to all concerned."

"Yes, yes. It's enough to drive a man mad! Do you believe in spirits, sir?"

"Sometimes I'm almost tempted to. But never mind about that. For the present we'll discard the supernatural. And now, sir, to our questions!"

Under the investigator's succinct queries the whole story was very quickly developed, its every detail just as we have already seen it. Perhaps twenty minutes were thus consumed, during which T. Ashley, lighting a cigar, half closed his eyes and listened with keenest attention. Now and then he fired an incisive word that hit the mark like a bullet. At the end of the interview he smiled and summed up:

"So then that ends the tale! With all possible refunds from the late cashier's estate the bank will lose one hundred and thirty-one thousand, five hundred dollars. And a hitherto respected citizen is lying dead in a ruined home with a bullet hole in his head. A widow and three children are reduced to beggary. Your institution is involved in a mystery that is giving it the most unfavorable sort of publicity. A 'run' is threatened; the bank may go under. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir, correct! To say nothing of the destruction of that very valuable door, time lock and all. And now, if you'll be so kind, I'll ask you to excuse me. I'm totally exhausted. And to-morrow, by gad, sir, promises to be even worse than to-day!"

The connoisseur rose to go.

"I quite understand," he assured

the old banker. "I thank you most heartily. If by any chance I discover anything of value in this tragic affair I'll let you know. By the way, Mr. Payne, do you mind if I inspect the bank building to-morrow?"

"Not in the least, sir," answered Payne, also getting up. The old man leaned heavily against his library table, piled with papers and banking reports that almost snowed under the telephone. "If there's anything I can show you."

"That's very kind of you. And—just one thing more—has the bullet been located?"

"Yes, sir, it has."

"Where?"

"The autopsy found it lodged inside Mr. Blair's skull, just below the left ear."

"Ah, so? And Mr. Blair was shot on the right side of the head?"

"Yes. Right temple. The bullet went through his brain."

"Did, eh? What caliber?"

"Thirty-eight, I hear."

"And where is that bullet now?"

"They've got it at police headquarters, over on Forrest Avenue. Frank Dexter—he's our chief of police—is keeping it, for the insurance people, in case it's needed."

"I see. Was Mr. Blair's skin much powder burned?"

"Not hardly at all. Dexter says the cartridge must have been loaded with some kind of smokeless powder that wouldn't burn a great deal."

"That may furnish a clew to solving the mystery. Though at present it seems utterly insoluble," judged the investigator, rubbing his carefully-razored chin, "where that gun could have possibly disappeared to—"

"Yes, sir, where *could* it have gone?" demanded the old banker, his voice shaking. "That's the question that's driving me half mad! Where, in heaven's name? A mystery like that is enough to send a man to the insane asylum!"

"Just one more question, Mr. Payne. Have you ever heard of any insanity in Mr. Blair's family?"

"No, sir. None of his folks on either side, that I ever heard of, were ever crazy. But *I'll* be, if this impossible thing isn't explained before long! It'll kill me, sir—that, and the horrible situation my bank is in now! Oh, by gad, sir, it's awful, awful—"

Sensing that the aged banker stood on the very brink of collapse, T. Ashley took his leave without further ado. Harvey Payne went with him out of the library into the front hall with its wide curving stairs, its furnishing in a gloomy and almost funereal style of decades long past.

At the door Payne extended a shaking hand.

"Good-by, sir," he said in a broken voice that betrayed tones of the falsetto which old age brings on. "If you can manage to help me in any way—"

As the investigator took that withered and wrinkled hand he felt its trembling. Impersonal as he almost always remained, none the less he could not now help feeling a thrill of pity for this lonely and afflicted old man.

"Too bad," he thought, as the door closed and he took his way down the walk, past the iron deer.

CHAPTER IV

The Fourth Dimension

CHIEF of Police Dexter, red-faced and rotund and with no mean idea of his own importance, viewed the investigator with ill-concealed provincial suspicion. It was only

after having been somewhat rigorously questioned himself that T. Ashley was allowed to examine the fatal bullet.

"Well, there she is," said Dexter at last as he opened the top right-hand drawer of his desk and took out a match box. "An' you can consider it quite a special privilege, in this man's town, that you're gettin' to see it at all!"

Inasmuch as every reporter in Middleburg, to say nothing of every visiting journalist, every policeman and prominent citizen—to say nothing of a good many others not prominent at all—had already inspected this bit of lead, Chief Dexter very largely overstated the privilege. T. Ashley, however, cared nothing for all this. He wanted only to see the bullet.

And now, as he held it in his deft fingers—just a tiny bit of metal that had snuffed out a human life and brought woe to how many other lives!—he felt a certain hunch; the hunch that so often before had tingled through his nerves when on the right trail of a criminal mystery.

"Thank you very much indeed, chief," he murmured. "I do indeed consider this a favor." His blue eyes crinkled with an amused smile. Then they grew serious once more as he went to one of the windows of the chief's office, a window that looked out over the square, to westward. He drew a fairly powerful lens from his pocket, and at once began examining the fatal piece of lead.

Though the hour was now well past six, sufficient light still slanted from the ruddy sky to make all details plainly visible. Perhaps three minutes T. Ashley studied the bullet, turning it this way and that. Then finally, with another smile, he came back to Chief Dexter.

"Well, chief, here you are—and many thanks."

Dexter's match box, once more heavy with a leaden "exhibit," was closed and dropped into the desk drawer.

"Reckon you make a whole lot out o' that, mister?" half sneered the chief.

"More or less."

"An' you've reached the valuable conclusion that if you could only locate the gun that fired it you'd have this here mystery all buttoned up tight, eh?"

"Less or more."

"Humph!" And Dexter slammed the drawer. His eye was hostile. "Well, what else d'you happen to want now?"

"Nothing, thank you. I'm very grateful, believe me. Good evening, chief!"

Dexter's only reply was another grunt as—puzzled just how it would be safe to insult this stranger—he watched the connoisseur take a well satisfied leave.

That night, T. Ashley once more idled in one of the big rockers on the piazza of the Jefferson House.

"Too bad they can't prove it a murder," opined a ready-to-wear salesman in the next chair. "If they could Blair's widow could get the insurance, an' I don't see how—it bein' *hers*—the bank could touch it. Sure is one tough case!"

"Tough, yes," murmured the investigator. "Especially on old Payne."

The ready-to-wear man rambled on at considerable length, while T. Ashley sat there watching the life of the little city as it passed and repassed along Patriot Square.

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had taken place there, save that a casual knot of curiosity seekers lingered near the bank. Inside the building lights were visible. All funds and securities had been temporarily transferred to the vaults of the Middleburg National for safe keeping, while already repairs had been begun.

After watching for a little while, the connoisseur went up to his room. From his suitcase he extracted some books on the Fourth Dimension, by Simeon Newcomb and Oudspensky. He settled himself to read till nearly midnight. Even at that hour, as he got ready for bed, he could from his window still discern the knot of morbid idlers gathered before the bank. Nothing to see there; not a thing in the world. And yet like ants around a dead beetle they clustered.

"After all," thought the investigator, "how much more important than ants are they, in the cosmic scheme? How much more valuable is any man or woman than an ant in the infinite universe that includes not only the Fourth Dimension but endless others?"

His smile was a bit cynical as he put out his light and, leaning at the window, finished his good-night cigar.

Next morning, about ten o'clock, he called at the bank and was admitted by the grim old watchman, Jethro Tibbetts. This worthy fellow looked more glum, thin-faced and cadaverous than ever. His emotionless gray eyes, that for decades had seen so many changes in the bank, were no more revealing than those of a codfish as he led T. Ashley through the railing and to Harvey Payne's private office at the rear.

A tense hush reigned in the bank. Its doors were now closed to ordinary business, while two State bank examiners subjected the books, cash and securities to rigid inspection. Marden, paying teller, with Winnifred Alden, was absent at the Middleburg National. Now only Wally Wheeler, receiving teller, and bookkeeper Joslyn Harrison, together with Hattie Forster, remained. Harrison's fingers were inkier than ever, his pale blue eyes more mild and worried. Miss Forster looked flushed and agitated. As for Wally, he had lost a good deal of his self-satisfied assurance. For at least once in his life his sleek sandy hair was ruffled, his smooth and ruddy face singularly anxious. This possibility of the bank going under, after all; this prospect of losing a good position, weighed heavily on him as on all the personnel.

Everybody seemed ready, almost officiously eager to be questioned; to do any and everything required to prove entire innocence in this disaster. The atmosphere was strained almost to a point of rupture.

Old President Payne looked far from unscathed. After an almost sleepless night he seemed—during only those few hours since the connoisseur had last seen him—to have aged five years. More heavily now hung the bags of loose skin under his deep-set black eyes. More pendulously sagged his wattles. Contrary to all his life-long custom, he had that morning forgotten to shave; and now stiff white bristles dotted his cheeks and chin.

Profound discouragement, prescient of defeat, dragged on his bent shoulders like a cloak of lead. At seventy it's hard to face business annihilation. At seventy one does not easily begin life again.

As Jethro Tibbetts ushered the visitor into Payne's office—

"Well, sir?" he dully asked, with-

out getting up from his now badly littered desk.

"Good morning, sir," said the investigator. "I'm sorry to trouble you again. But you remember you promised to let me look at the premises, and here I am."

"Oh, all right," the president returned, as if painfully recalling his agreement. "If you think any good purpose can be served by your inspecting the scene of the tragedy."

"I hope so, at any rate."

"What would you like to see, first?"

"The bank vault, sir. And that, I think, will be the last thing too. Just that alone will suffice."

Payne nodded, and heavily arose.

"It's right there," he pointed, and led the way out into the corridor.

"Hmmm!" said the investigator, following, while Jethro Tibbetts—sharp-eyed and suspicious—kept close behind him. "They've certainly made a wreck out of that door, haven't they?"

The process of dismantling the ruins still was under way, with grimy and oily men at work, tools scattered all about.

"Thousands of dollars went into building that door," grieved the bank president. "And now, by gad, sir, look at it! Just look at it, will you?"

"That's what I'm here for," smiled T. Ashley; and for a moment stood inspecting the débris of what had only two days before been one of the show sights of Middleburg—one of the best advertisements of the bank, in attracting deposits.

Débris, indeed! Had it been necessary merely to open the door without urgent and almost frantic haste, the task could have been accomplished without wrecking everything. But as possibly life and death had depended on speed, as possibly William Blair might have been only wounded and not killed outright all considerations of economy had been thrown to the wind.

No means, no violence had been spared; not even the use of "soup," or nitro-glycerine, nor yet of thermit, and of "strippers," "drags" and "spreaders"—with all of which methods the ex-yegg employee of Plummer & Tagle was only too familiar.

Now only a sad and twisted mass of wreckage met the eye. All the delicate mechanisms of the time lock and the combinations had assumed the appearance of a junk heap struck by lightning. The heavy outer door sagged on bent hinges that once had so delicately balanced it that a child's hand could have swung it shut. The inner door, of steel bars, hung awry with drunken mockery of its once faultless accuracy. Sad, indeed!

Before these ruins, old Tibbetts, the watchman, shook a mournful head. To him the bank property, in its tangible and physical aspects had long been sacred. Of loans, interest and discounts he understood nothing. Mortgages, securities and surplus meant nothing to him. But the building, its doors and windows, walls, metal grilles and bars, vault, mechanisms, everything of that sort had been a sort of *sanctum sanctorum*, a holy of holies, not to be defiled or desecrated by any profaning hand.

Death, to his mind, would have been far too light a punishment for any one injuring the equipment of the Middleburg First National Bank. No wonder that he now viewed this ravaged crypt with eyes of almost fanatic horror—as perhaps some Maya high priest might have regarded a shattered Yucatan pyramid temple after the Spanish con-

querors had riven it and flung its idol down the lofty stairway!

"Well, sir, now you see the condition we're in," President Payne all at once wearily remarked. "If we ever recover from this it will be a miracle. By gad, sir, a miracle from Heaven!"

"Don't say that, Mr. Payne," the connoisseur tried to cheer him up. "A few days will make a great difference here. So this is where the tragedy took place, eh?"

"Yes, sir, right in there."

"Do you mind if I look at the inside of the vault?"

"Not at all, sir. Tibbetts, will you please shove that inner door open?"

"For *him?*" sullenly demanded the old watchman.

"There now, Tibbetts!" the president sharply rebuked his employee. "No argument! This gentleman is a—an inspector. He wants to see the inside of the vault."

"All right, sir," agreed the watchman. He kept on grumbling as if to himself: "Though Lord knows why we can't have an end of all this pokin' and pryin'. I'm fair sick of it myself, sir. But if you say so, well—"

Still growling like a watchdog required to admit some suspicious-looking character to a house he had been set to guard, the watchman switched on the lights inside the vault, and with considerable effort shoved back the inner door of bent steel bars, T. Ashley plainly saw the interior of the chamber where events so tragic, so baffling to all human reason had recently taken their amazing course.

With both President Payne and old Tibbetts closely following him, the connoisseur of crime stepped into the vault. By the raw glare of the lights overhead he stood looking round, making a preliminary inspection.

At his right extended several rows of safe-deposit boxes; at his left the cash-vault presented an impassive front. Drawers, boxes and safes of various sizes, at the end of the chamber, held different kinds of securities and negotiable paper, also the bank's books and records. On a shelf stood an electric fan; and near it was the vault telephone.

"That, of course," remarked the investigator with a gesture, "is where you heard Mr. Blair speaking from?"

"Yes, sir," nodded old Payne, while Tibbetts stood glowering with an expression of sullen hostility. "That's the instrument that brought his voice to me, and"—with a shudder—"the sound of the shot."

"Must have been a terrible shock to you, sir."

"By gad, sir! I'll never forget it, the longest day of my life. Not though it's a thousand years—which, thank God, it won't be!"

"Yes, yes, a terrific shock, no doubt," murmured T. Ashley, with commiseration. Then, after a pause, he asked: "And the unfortunate Mr. Blair was found lying—"

"Just in front of where you're standing."

"Spot o' blood there yet, on the floor!" in an aggrieved tone, added the watchman. A spot of any kind on his floors—even in the vault—seemed to constitute a grievance of the most deadly.

"Spot, eh?" asked the connoisseur. Kneeling, he looked at it. Yes, even though the place had been scrubbed, a faint dark trace still vaguely discolored the rough concrete.

For a long minute T. Ashley studied this. Then once more he got up, and with something like a smile remarked:

"I think I've seen enough."

"And *I've* seen far more than enough, sir!" half groaned the old banker. "When you've known a man intimately, cheek-by-jowl neighbors with him all his life, and worked with him more than a quarter century, and then by gad, sir, see him lying dead with a bullet hole in his temple—"

"Terrible, terrible!"

"And not be able to figure out any possible way it could have happened!"

"Not according to any obvious and natural ideas, at all events," T. Ashley said. "It almost makes one believe in some sort of Houdini mystification, doesn't it? Or in the Fourth Dimension!"

"The Fourth Dimension, sir? What's that?"

"It is—but, well, never mind. It would take me far too long even to begin an explanation. And your time's valuable, Mr. Payne. So is mine. Again I thank you—and good-by!"

CHAPTER V

In a Boat, and Out

FOR a man who claimed his time was valuable, T. Ashley that afternoon appeared to be extremely wasteful indeed of values. For he devoted himself to idleness. At least so any casual observer might safely have assumed.

Inquiries of the obliging clerk at the Jefferson House informed him that about six miles to eastward, on level reaches of Green River, there was located an amusement resort, rather ambitiously named "Paradise Park." And there, he learned, boating and fishing were to be had.

"Pout an' pickerel, sir, if you know where to look for 'em. Try the reedy places for pickerel. Now, just last summer, a feller named Ferrell Garland hooked one he said weighed close on six pounds, an'—"

To Paradise Park, after a quiet and solitary lunch, T. Ashley drove his car. The road, skirting Green River for more than half the way, offered wild and rugged beauty, with now or then really entrancing bits of river glimpsed through forests of pine, oak and birch.

Hiring a boat and fishing tackle, and by no means overlooking the detail of paying the legal fee for an out-of-state fisherman, the connoisseur rowed about three miles up the winding stream. There, along a reed-grown stretch, he dropped the piece of railway iron that served as an anchor, and for a couple of hours cast his hook. Seemingly without a thought or care in the world, he now or then snatched a fish from the sun-sparkled river, smoked his pipe, and luxuriated in the spring-tide. An idle fellow, he!

Two hours' fishing, however, seemed to satisfy him. At the end of that time he reeled in; then, taking the oars, began to ply his little craft a bit further upstream. Charming prospects surrounded him, seeming infinitely far from all suggestions of pain or death.

Three days before, rain had fallen; and now with her face freshly washed, Mother Nature was outdoing herself, prinked gaily in all the charm of her new spring garments. Rarely had the investigator seen prospects more alluring. On the other side of the river extended forest, some of it virgin growth. Now or then, half glimpsed through thickets of trees, a car swiftly passed along the river road.

Save for that slight reminder of civilization, one might have thought one's self a hundred miles from human habitation. No sound of voices troubled the stillness. No other boat was visible. Only a bird song, among

cool branches, drifted across the water. If solitude in which to ponder was the connoisseur's goal, here indeed he was finding it.

"The Fourth Dimension," he was thinking, as after a time he rested on his oars and let the boat begin drifting slowly downstream. "If it only existed, how easily it would explain everything! If only—! For just as a flat, two-dimensional creature shut up inside a circle drawn on paper, couldn't imagine any way of putting anything outside of that circle without breaking the circle, so a man shut up in a closed container can't possibly imagine any way of putting anything outside that container without breaking its walls.

"And yet we—as three-dimensional creatures—can easily throw an object outside a circle, without breaking that circle, merely by moving it in the third dimension, up or down.

"Likewise," he continued his reflections, as lazy pipe smoke drifted, "if a man in a container could only move an object in the Fourth Dimension, he could easily throw that object out of the container, without anywhere piercing its walls. Yes, if—!"

After a pause he murmured:

"But as all human beings are, after all, only three-dimensional creatures, have I the right to suspect that so incomprehensible a factor as the Fourth Dimension has been used in this case? That, ah, is a very delicate point!"

He was just engaged in considering this very delicate point more in detail when a swift jet of water, up-spurting from the surface of the river, dashed him with spray. Instantly half a dozen other jets leaped up in a long line, each smaller than the one preceding it, till the last one became a mere ripple.

"Hello!" thought the investigator. "That looks like the richocheting of a bullet, now!"

As if to echo his realization—

Tunk!

A bullet, indeed, struck the inside of the gunwale, not a foot ahead of where he sat. Splinters flew.

"A bullet, by jove!" he knew. "And somebody's shooting at *me*!"

Even though he heard no report of firearms, the fact was clear that he was a target for somebody's purposeful marksmanship. With the presence of mind that had on more than one occasion saved his life, he flung up both arms and pitched forward, flat in the bottom of the boat.

Face-downward he fell into the muck of such uncleanness as usually is found in boats hired out for fishing. When life itself is the prize at stake, what matters a little mud and water?

Lying now completely masked from observation by any one on the highway skirting the river, he let the boat drift.

One oar slid from its rowlock, and with a *plash*! dropped into the water. There it began slowly to lag away. Never mind that oar! All the investigator's senses were now sharpened down to just the one sense of listening for any further signs of his assailant.

That assailant, up there somewhere on the thickly-wooded bank — what was he doing now? Was he satisfied of the investigator's death; or, penetrating the ruse, was he still waiting for another chance to shoot? Might he not, indeed, have a boat of his own concealed somewhere along the shore; a boat in which he could row out, to make sure the job was completed?

"If so, what a damn fool I am not to be armed!" thought T. Ashley. "Never occurred to me I might need a gun, out here on this peaceful river.

Well, even Achilles had a vulnerable heel. And this river may reveal mine!"

But almost at once his anxieties were set at rest by a growl of gears, the sudden purr of a swiftly-accelerating exhaust.

"Somebody 's stepping on the gas," realized T. Ashley. "If I only knew who it was, now—"

Though all danger of further attack by this unknown foe now seemed ended, the investigator took no unnecessary chances. For full ten minutes he let the boat drift, as he lay snugly hidden in the bottom. The bullet, he saw, had buried itself almost out of sight in the gunwale. This bullet he intended to have, as soon as he could safely get it. For the present, however, he let it remain.

"Time enough for that, and to spare," he smiled to himself, "once this confounded boat decides to go ashore."

The boat seemed little disposed to follow any such program; but after what seemed an eternity, the current gently drove it into an eddy that presently grounded its keel on a muddy bank under close-arching alders. Here, after a little intent waiting, he decided it would be safe to get up.

No untoward results followed this move. His assailant, whoever this might have been and for whatever motive, had obviously enough departed in that speeding car. Convinced that the second shot had proved fatal to the interloper, that assailant would in all probability not risk discovery by remaining anywhere near the river road. Continued danger from that source now seemed unlikely.

"Though not," reflected the connoiseur with due caution, "though not, of course, impossible."

His first care, after getting up and brushing some of the dirt from his clothing, was to dig the bullet out of the gunwale. This he did with his pocketknife, destroying a good deal of woodwork, but taking extreme care not in any way to mar the precious pellet of lead.

No sooner had he got it clear than he once more took out his lens and carefully studied the bullet.

"Come, little bit of metal that just by one foot missed teaching me life's biggest lesson, death!" he apostrophized his trophy. "Come, give up your secret—if you have one!"

For several minutes he gave the bullet a most painstaking scrutiny, at last nodding with considerable satisfaction.

"Not bad!" he murmured. With a half whimsical smile he added: "If there *is* any Fourth Dimension, I wonder whether material objects acting in that dimension act noiselessly? Or whether they can act at all?"

He wrapped the bullet in the softest bit of paper he had, namely, a well-worn ten-dollar note, and very carefully stowed it in his pocketbook. Then, clambering ashore, he tied his boat and pushed through the clump of alders by the river's edge, up toward higher ground.

Listening from moment to moment for any sound that might mean danger, he mounted a slope covered with heavy spruce timber, and thus presently reached the motor road. No car was in sight, nor any human creature. Turning upstream, he walked at a round pace in the direction of the place whence the shots had been fired at him. This he reached in a few minutes.

"Now then!" And he began casting about like a hound seeking the spoor of game.

The center of the road was dry and hard; but along its edges here or there

a little half-dried mud still remained from the rain of three days previously. In a small patch of this mud, on the riverward side of the highway, some tire tracks plainly showed. Very painstakingly the investigator studied these telltale revelations.

"Now we *are* getting on!" he smiled. Then, without any loss of time, he swung about and struck a rapid gait back toward the boat.

The hum of an approaching motor warned him to take cover. He must not, at all hazards, be seen anywhere along this road. A woodside thicket received him. In this he lay flat till the vehicle—a heavily-loaded truck—had roared and rumbled past. This gone, and out of sight around a curve, he once more took the road, arriving presently at the boat by the clump of alders. With some relief he saw it again, inasmuch as he had half feared to find it gone.

He cast the boat off, and, using his single oar as a paddle, started downstream toward Paradise Park. Though he kept a sharp eye and ear out for any possible menace, none revealed itself. Neither did he succeed in locating the lost oar. Aided by the current, however, he succeeded in reaching the park in something more than an hour. A two-dollar bill and the gift of his pickerel squared the loss of the oar—an old one, anyhow, and beginning to crack. And his untidy state excited no comment; such being the common lot of every fisherman since Jonah.

With nerves beginning pleasantly to tingle, now that he felt himself on the right trail, he drove directly back to town. He stopped at the Kash Klothing Kompany, on Maple Street, and (hinting at having had to "get out and get under") bought a complete new outfit. Into this he changed, in the establishment, taking care to transfer all the contents of his pockets into the new clothes.

This done, and the hour now being a little past six, he stepped into a drug store at the next corner and called the house of old Harvey Nelson Payne.

"Hello?" he recognized the Irish maid's voice. "Hello, who is it, then?"

"Mr. Payne at home?"

"Yes, sor. But he can't see nobody. Nobody at all. Them's his strick orders!"

"Where one five-dollar bill came from," he murmured into the transmitter, "there's another one waiting."

"Oh, sor!"

"But don't mention the fact that I'm coming. If you do, colleen, no five!"

"Oh, faith then—"

Smiling to himself in an odd way, T. Ashley hung up the receiver. As he left the drug store, with thumb and finger he assured himself he had a V neatly folded in his vest pocket, ready to be slipped to that invaluable maid.

"There's a wonderful lot of power in a fiver," he reflected. "And just at present there's a lot more inside that wrapped-up ten-spot I've got in my pocketbook. Power enough, if nothing slips, to blow this case wide open—and with it, all of Middleburg and all the newspapers from Eastport to El Paso!"

Getting into his car, he drove to the Jefferson House. There he bought a couple of cigars in the office, asked the clerk whether any mail had come for him, and also inquired whether anybody had phoned, asking for him. Some one had. With what appeared a merely casual interest, he listened while the clerk told him of an inquiry that had been made for him, only half an hour after he had gone fishing.

"Sorry to have missed the call," he

affirmed. "But I can see that party any time, no doubt."

He yawned, set his watch by the clock in the office, idly strolled out on the piazza and lit one of his cigars. Then, once more in his car, he drove round the square and finally approached the house of the iron deer; the staid, old-fashioned residence of Harvey Payne, deeply-stricken president of the wrecked First National Bank.

CHAPTER VI

Grooved Bullets

FOR what reason, who can say, he approached the house by way of Pleasant Street—that is, at the side—and halted his machine near the back of the lot. Getting out here, he walked along Pleasant, to the side gate. This he entered. When he reached the house, a swing to the left brought him to the small end steps of the front porch.

These tactics seemed a bit peculiar, but perhaps the connoisseur's wits were just a trifle abstracted by reason of the nerve-shaking events of the past two hours. At all events, he reached the front door, rang with a firm touch, and stood a moment waiting, while sunset glowed golden through a fine, tenuous haze that hung beyond the new-leaved elms and oaks of Banker Payne's broad-reaching lawn.

Presently the massive door swung open, and the Irish maid appeared.

"Yes, sor, lib'ary," she smiled, five dollars richer. Without waiting for her to lead the way, T. Ashley walked down the gloomy hall, turned to the left and—not even knocking—entered the odd, octagonal room.

He saw old Payne immediately, sitting with his back to the library door. On the desk masses of papers were heaped. The old man was intently reading a document. Others, torn and crumpled, lay in a wire wastebasket or scattered over the rug.

So absorbed was the banker in his task, whatever it may have been, that he did not hear his visitor. T. Ashley had to knock sharply on the door-jamb, to call the old man's attention.

At sound of this rapping, Payne swung round. He half started up, fixed widening eyes on the intruder, and for a moment remained tense, rigid.

"*You?*" he exclaimed. "*You* again?"

"Yes, Mr. Payne," the investigator smiled. "Back again, for another little talk."

"But, by gad, sir! I'm not at home to anybody. I told the maid—"

Harvey Payne's air was hostile in the extreme. Had he been a younger man, he might have undertaken to eject this unwelcome visitor by force. But as any such attempt would have been manifestly absurd, he only growled an oath, shoved his papers into a heap and laid a bronze weight on them, then acidly demanded:

"Well, what the devil is it now? I'm busy. Make it short, sir, and let's have no more of you!" And Payne sank back in his chair.

"I'll make it as short as possible," promised the connoisseur, advancing into the library. "And after that, I promise you'll have no more of me. No occasion to get excited, my dear sir. I've only come to ask your opinion about a matter of considerable importance."

"My opinion, sir? My opinion! Everybody's asking my opinion these days. As if I hadn't enough to bother me without giving my opinion to Tom, Dick and Harry! Why, damn it—"

And the old man, his nerves frayed to tatters, spluttered incoherently. "Well, what the devil opinion do you want *now?* Out with it, sir, and let's have no more of this!"

T. Ashley laid his hat on a revolving bookcase, sat down quite at ease in a chair across the table from the old banker, and in his smoothest tone queried:

"Do you happen to know anything about the Fourth Dimension?"

"The fourth what?"

"Dimension, sir."

"Never heard it! Why?"

"I dare say you never have. Fourth mortgages, now, might be more in your line. But anyhow, no harm in asking. It's just a mathematical concept, a speculative property of space. In the Fourth Dimension, for one thing, objects can enter or leave closed boxes without anywhere breaking the walls, and—"

"If you've come here to talk nonsense, sir," interrupted the banker, "or if you're an escaped lunatic—" And he cast a glance at the phone on his library table.

"In the Fourth Dimension," T. Ashley implacably continued, "a shot could be fired from outside a safe or vault, and kill a man inside it. But as this dimension still remains only an abstraction, we may rule it out as a practical means of solving crime mysteries. Such being the case, we must proceed on the basis of the physically possible, as mere human beings understand those terms. And, this being understood, let me tell you a little story."

"I want to hear no stories, sir!" retorted the banker. "Can't you see I'm busy? My bank is wrecked. I'm trying to straighten out matters, and salvage what I can." He gestured at his papers. "And yet you intrude in my home, probably by bribing my maid—"

"Most certainly by bribing your maid," smiled the investigator.

"Damn her, I'll fire *her!* And as for you—"

"As for me, you'll listen to my story!" T. Ashley's tone hardened a little. The old banker's fist clenched, but in conflict with this younger man he remained powerless. All he could do was cast a poisonous look at the intruder, and growl:

"Well, out with it then! But I warn you—"

"As a story, it is not without a certain interest. But before I begin, do you know I was nearly killed this afternoon?"

"Nearly killed, were you? Why couldn't it have been quite?"

"It might been, if somebody using a pistol with a silencer had been a little better shot. A silencer, Mr. Payne. The very same silencer which was on the pistol that killed William Blair!"

At this the banker visibly stiffened.

"The pistol that killed Blair?" he repeated, in a voice that seemed to vibrate with utter amazement. "You mean—you've found that gun?"

"Not yet," smiled the connoisseur, "but none the less I know something about it. That, however, is only part of my story. And after all, why bother you with this story? If your time is really so very valuable, perhaps you'd rather not hear it." And T. Ashley glanced at his hat. "Perhaps I'd better be going now."

"Wait!" commanded Payne, raising a thin, corded hand. "I can give you a few minutes more. Let's have your story—fantastic though it is!"

"Well, just as you wish. It's not long, sir. I can't positively guarantee every detail, but in its main outlines

I believe that when I get through you'll agree I'm correct. Your opinion will be valued."

"And your story's about—"

"It's about the murder of Cashier Blair."

"His suicide, you mean."

"No, sir, his murder!"

"Of course, that's absurd to begin with," affirmed the banker. "But I can't expect anything else from *you!* What makes you claim he was murdered? In a locked vault, mind you, and all alone!"

"I've come to that view by a process called cogitation, sir. A process you probably have never developed to any high degree. In this way I have brought Mr. Blair's death out of the Fourth Dimension and into the Third—that is to say, out of a maddening and supernatural mystery, into the plain, everyday world of human actions."

"You have, eh?" And Payne scornfully laughed. That laugh sounded as if it needed oiling. "And how have you done all this?"

"Merely by excluding all impossibilities, one by one. Then by including all possibilities. And finally by arranging all details of the puzzle so that they fit nicely together. Do all this, sir, and—presto, you have the answer. What could be simpler?"

This is all Greek to me," declared the old banker, shaking his head with its mane of white hair. "I'm not quite sure, even yet, you're not an escaped lunatic from—"

"Your opinion as to my mental qualifications, sir, is a matter of no importance. The only thing that is important, now, is my story. That, and your statement as to events. Are you positive, Mr. Payne, you heard the shot that killed Cashier Blair?"

"Positive? What do you mean, sir?"

"Aren't my words sufficiently explicit? Your cashier was killed by a shot. You heard that shot over the vault telephone?"

"Heard it? Of course, I heard it!"

"Think hard now! Would you swear to that in court?"

"I most certainly would!"

"Would, eh? Then you'd be committing perjury."

"Perjury? Why, damn it—what d'you—"

"If you weren't so agitated, Mr. Payne, you'd recall what I just said a minute ago—that there was a silencer on the pistol that killed Blair."

At this, the old man's face grew blank with seeming amazement.

"A—a *what?*" he demanded.

"A silencer. Are you not familiar with the apparatus? It reduces the explosion of a firearm to a mere hiss; and in many States the mere possession of one is a criminal offense."

"Yes, yes, I know. I've heard of such things. But—how could there have been a silencer in this case when I distinctly heard—"

"I think you'll understand when you hear my story. I have examined the bullet that killed Mr. Blair. Examined it under a rather good lens. I have that bullet now. Here it is!"

He extracted a wad of paper from his vest-pocket, unwrapped it, and held up a bit of lead. The old man's jaw gaped.

"You told me smokeless powder was used," said the investigator grimly. "That was a deliberate lie. This bullet bears traces of having been propelled by old-fashioned black powder. And inasmuch as Blair's skin showed no powder burns, the bullet was fired at him from a considerably greater distance than if he had committed suicide.

You, Mr. Payne, are a liar—and not alone in this instance."

"It's you that's lying! Telling me you have the fatal bullet—when Chief Dexter's got it!"

"He had it, you mean," smiled the investigator. "When he showed it to me, I had another one of the same caliber in my pocket, to substitute, and without any difficulty borrowed the fatal one. Now this bullet, Mr. Payne, shows certain markings due to an irregularity in the rifling of the revolver that did the killing. The bullet that I dug out of the woodwork of the boat, this afternoon, shows the same markings. Two shots were fired at me. There was no report. Those bullets passed—must have passed—through a silencer. And here is one of those selfsame bullets."

Taking from his pocket the folded ten-dollar bill, T. Ashley showed the banker the bullet that had barely missed killing him. He held both pellets on his outstretched palm, in front of the banker's widening and startled gaze.

"Same kind and caliber, both of them!" he exclaimed. "Both bear the same markings. I could gamble that the one which killed Blair also passed through a silencer, like this other one. Well, sir, now what have you to say?"

CHAPTER VII

Poetic Justice

OLD Payne gripped the arm of his chair.

"I—you—" he stammered. "But—I don't understand at all—"

"Listen! This bullet was fired at me, without noise. The bullet that killed Blair—from a distance, as it didn't powder-burn his skin—must have had an equally silent course. Therefore, in stating that you heard a pistol-shot in the vault, you told another monumental lie!"

The banker jumped up, as if actuated by a spring.

"Damn you! I'll make you eat those words!"

"Indeed? How interesting!" The two men—as T. Ashley also arose—confronted each other across the table. "None the less, I affirm that by no human possibility could Blair have shot himself inside a time-locked vault, and then disposed of the gun. Therefore, when you stated that he met his death inside that vault with the door shut, you told lie number three."

"You'll suffer for this!" the banker menaced.

"Never mind about *me!*"

"I have other testimony to support my statements."

"None whatever, as a matter of fact!" And the connoisseur laughed a little harshly. "In the confusion and the great excitement of the moment, you most shrewdly counted on the fact that no details would be very closely inquired into. You reckoned—and cleverly—that no one would perceive *the essential fact that you and you alone claimed to have talked with Blair over the vault phone! That you, and only you, claimed to have heard the fatal shot! No other testimony whatever exists, on those vital points, except your unsupported word!*"

"But—damn you, sir—"

"The fact is, Mr. Payne, you're rather a consummate actor." And T. Ashley, slipping the bullets back into his pocket, smiled a bit grimly. "But, like a good many actors, you've overplayed your part. You've lied with such excessive cleverness that you've trapped yourself in your own web of falsehood, and—"

"You're crazy, man! You're—"

"Here's how the whole puzzle fits together, to a nicety. These years and years past—though just how many years I can't exactly say, and it's quite immaterial—you have been more or less juggling with the bank's funds. Your reputation for sterling integrity protected you for a long while, but at last the time came, as it always does, when you'd be 'caught with the goods' if you didn't do something to cover your tracks."

"You outrageous slanderer! I'll sue you for criminal libel! I—I'll—"

"How could you avoid impending disaster?" implacably the investigator continued. "Only by throwing the blame on somebody else. Blair made an admirable victim. He was known to have incurred large obligations that greatly worried him. It could easily be made to appear that *he* had misappropriated the bank's funds. But to succeed in that accusation, you must get Blair out of the way. Put him permanently beyond all power of proving his own innocence and your guilt. In other words, kill him."

"Out with you, sir!" cried the banker in a terrible voice, the voice of a man outraged in the deepest recesses of his soul. "Out of my house, before I—"

"Before you shoot me out? Is that it, Mr. Payne?" smiled the investigator. "Well, if your aim now is no better than it was this afternoon, I'm in no great danger."

"This—this afternoon? What—"

"Nothing simpler than for you to phone the hotel and find out I'd gone fishing, down Green River—which, in fact, I have discovered you did. I was fired at, twice, from a car on the river road. When I came here, just now, I entered by the walk past your garage, and needed only a glance to show me the tire-pattern on the car down the river was the same as the pattern on your rear tires. Two and two still make four, Mr. Payne, even in the much-juggled world of figures that you inhabit!"

"God curse you! Are you accusing —*me?*"

The investigator laughed, as with a certain mild amusement.

"No need to, Mr. Payne," he answered. "The facts are quite sufficient. You've had this thing planned a long time. My inquiries have brought out the information that you installed a time-lock some months ago, and also put in a vault telephone. What could be clearer than that you installed that phone so you could 'hear' your victim talking in the vault, and also 'hear' the shot that killed him? You sent your wife and daughter to Europe, so as to have a freer hand. And then, at last—"

"Why—why, these are the ravings of a maniac!" gulped Payne, still fighting even in the last ditch. But his baggy face had turned ash-gray; his eyes had sunk, gone hollow and deathlike. "When I confront you, sir, in court—"

"Very well! But just another word and I'm through. The psychological moment arrived. A bank inspection was due, and, moreover, very probably Blair had begun to find discrepancies, to suspect you. You simply had to get rid of him. You had to make him seem to commit suicide. But how? How, without any risk to yourself?

"Thus, Mr. Payne. While the bank forces were all busy, day before yesterday afternoon, the unfortunate Blair happened to go to the vault. The instant was propitious. It might never return.

"Seated at your desk you had a clear view through your office door, right across the corridor and into the open vault. From your desk drawer you took a pistol with a silencer attached. It was a close, easy shot. Blair fell in the vault, the victim of a most atrocious and cold-blooded murder.

"You put the silencer back into your desk, pocketed the pistol and—watching your chance—crossed the corridor. The peril at this second was extreme; but it was only *for* a second. None of the employees saw you. You reached the vault, entered, and dragged the bleeding victim a few feet nearer the phone. My examination of the vault floor shows that the body *was* dragged. A tiny smear of blood, from near the door and extending in the direction of the phone, adequately proves this.

"What next? You had, of course, intended to lay the gun beside Blair. But—as so often happens in a crime—something slipped. Your plan went awry. You may have heard a sound outside and thought somebody was coming. Or else, suddenly panic-stricken, your mind may for a second have failed to function properly. No matter; you forgot to leave the gun. It was still in your pocket when you stole out of the vault, and—again risking discovery, but none the less escaping it—set the time-lock and noiselessly closed the vault door.

"Back in your office again you acted quickly. It *had* to be quickly, so that you yourself could make the dramatic announcement before anybody else, and be the chief actor. Even though the gun wasn't in the vault, you had to make it appear that the cashier had shot himself in there. Otherwise, a suspicion of murder might have arisen. You were caught on the horns of a dilemma, for a suicide without any weapon being found was certain to make a tremendous sensation. Never mind, it was that or nothing now!

"So you hid the gun in your desk, roughed up your hair, and assumed an expression of terror and dismay—not hard, since you really were frightened almost to the point of collapse. You ran to the grilled door of Harrison's cage. You stammered:

"'Blair—he's shut himself in! The time-lock's sprung!'

"And lo! the cycle is complete. The last bit of the puzzle is fitted snugly home. The story's told, the mystery all solved. No Houdini business; no Fourth Dimension at all. Just murder. The murder of a trusting friend and long-time associate; a murder involving the ruin of his reputation and his family. Reptilian, long-premeditated murder—the kind of murder that sends even a most highly-respected citizen and substantial banker to the electric chair, and—"

"Damn you, it won't send *me!*" screamed the entrapped old man. His voice broke into a shrill falsetto; his face became a mask of terror, hate and rage.

He snatched open his desk drawer. T. Ashley, leaping, struck up the muzzle of a revolver—a muzzle fitted with a silencer—just as with a hardly-audible whistling hiss, Harvey Payne fired at him.

The bullet, clipping past his head, shattered the glass front of a bookcase and sprinkled the floor with tinkling splinters.

T. Ashley wrenched the gun from his raging assailant. Thrusting the old man away with a contemptuous arm, he "broke" the weapon. Into his palm he emptied six cartridges. Three of them had been fired.

"So you didn't even bother to reload, after your pot-shots at me down the river, eh?" gibed the investigator. "Thought you'd finished me. You're a good actor, Payne, but maybe I'm not such a rank amateur myself!"

He dropped the cartridges into his vest-pocket, while the old man gulped and stammered wordless mouthings. Twisting the silencer from the gun-muzzle, he thrust gun and silencer into pockets of his coat.

"More exhibits in the case!" he laughed.

Then with no further word he turned, walked out of the library and started along the hall. Wide-eyed, from a doorway, the Irish maid stared at him. She had obviously been eavesdropping, and now was frightened almost numb.

To her ears, as to the investigator's, came the confused sound of oaths, of exclamations as old Payne raged in impotent desperation. That sound, as T. Ashley left the house, was music to him; music whereof the theme was justice, restitution.

Surely Payne's estate would liquidate for enough so that the bank could continue, and the fortunes of so many townsfolk be protected. Surely now Blair's widow would be protected, too!

Warm with satisfaction in this knowledge, T. Ashley walked toward the front gate, with police headquarters as his goal.

Hardly had he passed through that gate and turned along Walnut Street on the way to his car, when the front door of the gloomy old house burst open. A shrill feminine screech startled the peace of evening.

Pausing, the investigator looked round.

"The master! Saints preserve us!"

It was the Irish maid, now distractedly running down the walk. As she sped, she cried in panic:

"The master! Help—*help!* The master, then!"

T. Ashley met her just at the gate.

"What's happened?"

"Sure, then, just now I heard a heavy fall in the lib-ary! An'—an'—"

She grew hysterical. The investigator shook her by the arm.

"Tell me! What is it?"

"Hiven help us! It's that pizen, same as he killed a cat with last week. The cat give one kick, an' dead as—"

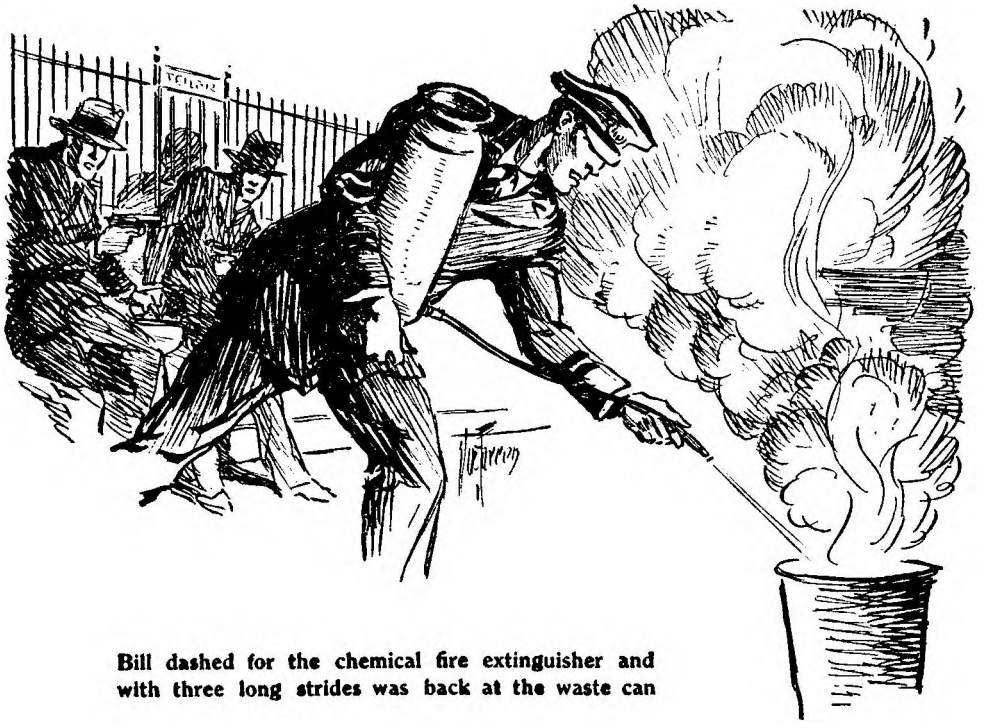
"Mr. Payne's dead?"

"He is, then! An' wid the bottle in his hand, an' him layin' there on the floor—"

A block down Walnut Street, the investigator saw a leisurely-sauntering policeman who was just now waking up to the fact of a disturbance of the peace, at Banker Payne's front gate. With a loud and imperative whistle, T. Ashley still more forcibly attracted his attention.

"What's all the row?" demanded the officer, arriving on the run. "What's happenin' here now?"

"Justice," replied T. Ashley, pointing toward the house. "You'll find it, in Harvey Payne's library. Poetic justice, there—the finest in the world!"



Bill dashed for the chemical fire extinguisher and with three long strides was back at the waste can

The Widow's Might

"A Guy Can't Change His Profeel," Old Bill Declared, and He Solved the Mystery of the $100,000 That Vanished

By Garret Smith

BIG BILL FARLEY, special policeman and head doorman of the Bellmore Trust Company, was bedevilled by even more distractions than usual this morning. It was not enough that it was one of the nerve-twitching days when a Federal Reserve shipment would arrive—one hundred thousand dollars in currency—and the papers full of the doings of daylight bandits. In addition, Bill had his hands full coaching his new assistant, Dick Slade. And on top of it all came one petty interruption after another.

"It never pours but what it throws in a coupla cyclones an' two or three earthquakes," Bill complained to Slade.

To begin with, just after the doors opened, a rat-faced, bewhiskered little pest from the company supplying the bank with fire extinguishers came to inspect their apparatus. He was a new man and Bill had to take him around and locate the tanks for him. As a result, the green Slade offended an important depositor by not knowing his name when he asked to see the manager. Bill arrived back just in time to save the day, partially.

"Remember it's might important to

be able to call everybody by name and make 'em feel at home," he admonished. "That's one thing Mr. Hazelton's made a big point of ever since he was made manager. 'Remember you're the bank's first line diplomat,' he's always sayin' to me, and that goes— Good-morning, Mr. Dunn. Nice morning— That's Dunn, the hardware man. His account's growin' fast an' he swells up another inch with every dollar."

"Judas! I'm gettin' a headache already," Slade grumbled.

"It's some job all right," Bill agreed. "And remember it ain't only ticklin' the regular customers you're here for, an' makin' strangers want to come again. You got to keep an eye out for crooks. There's too dang many bank hold-ups these days. Many a one's been blocked by a bank-cop havin' a good eye for faces.

"Hello, Tom. How's the boy? Bringin' us in another load of kale? That's the stuff— That's Tom Martin. He was just a garage mechanic five years ago. Got a good business of his own now.

"But speakin' of crooks an' rememberin' faces, that's where studyin' profeels comes in strong," Bill went on, returning to a hobby of his. "It ain't so easy to disguise a profeel. I've seen 'em bedevil their faces pretty complete many a time when I was on the New York force, but a guy can't change the shape of his nose much, ner the slope of his forehead, ner the cut of his jib, especially the shape, size an' location of his ears."

Slade was a new man in town, but he knew the veteran bank policeman's reputation. It was said among Bill's numerous admirers that he carried around under his thick graying thatch a camera and a rogue's gallery. His deceptively merry blue eyes never missed anything and anything they caught stayed put.

"Hey, Chief. This can's on the blink," the fire extinguisher inspector's voice interrupted at Bill's elbow, just as he was greeting another important patron. The fellow stood holding the brass tank from the bracket in front of the cages. "I got a fresh one out in the car. I'll bring it right in."

"All right, governor," Bill said, swallowing his irritation. "Make it snappy, please. It's a busy mornin' an' havin' a mess around the cages annoys the customers."

A string of patrons distracted his attention.

"Jerusalem!" he exclaimed when he next noticed the inspector. "He made it snappy but not neat. Say, governor," he added to the fellow who was scooping up the wrappings from the new extinguisher and stuffing them in the zinc waste-can. "Next time unwrap your stuff out in the car, will you please?"

"I'd have bawled that guy out," Slade told him.

"Now that won't do on this job," Bill warned. "That half-wit might get to be a depositor here some day. Got to be polite to everybody. That guy lives here in town, I think. Sure I've seen his profeel in here before, but can't just place him."

He presently forgot the annoying fellow under the pressure of other pests. There was an hour more of this and that, Bill doing double duty while Slade looked on and learned.

"Oh Judas H. Priest!" Bill exclaimed suddenly. "Here comes the widow Van Fleet! She's a new depositor, been in town about a month, got wads of kale, and thinks she owns the bank. She'll have us both runnin'

errands fer half an hour. An' of course Tom Kincaid and George Brewster have to come in at the same time, both big ones too. Just slip over and say good-morning to Kincaid and Brewster and be ready to do anything they want while I handle the widow."

The voluminous Mrs. Van Fleet wheezed past them with a breathless "good-morning" in response to Bill's polite greeting. Slade got a fleeting glimpse of a puffy, flushed face under an old-fashioned mourning veil.

"You can remember her from her rig," Bill whispered. "Ain't another like it in the country these days, I'm bettin' you."

For once, however, the widow had no demands to make, though Bill stood at attention in the offing while she filled in a counter check and drew some money. Then she headed for the safe deposit vaults and Bill turned back to Slade.

"Ten o'clock," he remarked. "About time for that currency shipment from the Federal Reserve. Remember what I told you about that. I'll go back to the cage with 'em and you stick by the door and don't let anybody in that looks suspicious."

He glanced around the big room.

"Thank the Lord, there's no strangers in the bank just now."

"Here comes the stuff now," Slade informed him a few minutes later and Bill peered out just as an armored car swung toward the curb. He noticed at the same time that the only other persons approaching the bank at the moment were two eminently harmless regular patrons.

"First one's Horton Sprague," he told Slade. "An' that's C. K. Jennings behind him."

Bill hurried down the steps greeting Sprague and Jennings as he passed. At a glance he noted that there were still no suspicious loiterers in sight.

The driver of the armored car opened his steel door and stepped out, gun in hand. From the tonneau another armed guard emerged and stood at attention. Then appeared the two armed messengers carrying the leather bag containing the currency. A moment later Slade swung the bank door shut behind Bill, and the messengers, and another currency shipment was safe inside the bank. A few steps and it would be back of the grille of the assistant cashier's cage.

Then, just as the triple guard of the currency were half way to the rear, Bill heard behind him a sound like the sudden opening of a high pressure hose. There was a shrill scream from the widow Van Fleet, who had just come from the safe deposit vaults and was on her way out. Bill whirled about in time to see the zinc waste-paper can at the front end of the forward counter turned into a small volcano. Its flaming contents mounted half way to the ceiling, giving off a thick cloud of rapidly spreading black smoke.

Several patrons who had been standing near the counter made a rush for the door. The messengers carrying the currency whirled to the wall and stood with their backs to it, guns ready for action.

Almost automatically Bill dashed for the can of chemical fire extinguisher on its wall-bracket a dozen feet away. He snatched it down and with three long strides was back at the waste-can with the extinguisher inverted and shooting a stream on the blaze.

The next instant it seemed as if white hot needles had been thrust into his eyes. Bill staggered back. His hands flew to his face and the fire extinguisher clattered to the floor. Chok-

ing and sneezing, he fumbled about for the fallen apparatus, at the same time trying to open his smarting, streaming eyes. He was stone blind.

Bill Farley had been in the trenches in 1918. Instantly he recognized the sting of tear gas. And at the same instant he knew where it came from. That fire extinguisher inspector had been a fake.

What happened during the next half hour was largely a blank to Bill until told about it afterwards. Dick Slade was one of the best witnesses, but he had been so taken by surprise that it was not altogether clear to him. He had been standing outside on the steps watching the street when he heard the tumult break inside. Through the glass of the door he saw the eruption from the waste-can rapidly obscuring his view of the interior. Out of the black pall burst the frantic little group of patrons feeling their way toward the door. Slade dashed to the rescue.

As he opened the door the fugitives dashed by him. He recognized Horton Sprague, C. K. Jennings, Mrs. Van Fleet, and two other old patrons whose names he could not recall.

Then Slade felt a warning sting in his eyes and dodged back through the door just in time to prevent being completely blinded himself. He promptly recognized the symptoms.

"They're shooting off tear gas," he shouted to the officer who had stayed with the armored car. "Have somebody send for reserves and the fire department. Guard the back door."

II

POLICE and firemen arrived a few minutes later and the work of rescue began. The refugees, regardless of who they were, employees and patrons alike, the police took to the lobby of the hotel across the street. Their eyes received emergency treatment and they were retained under police surveillance until a thorough examination could be made into the mysterious affair. Among them were the two express messengers who had been carrying the bag of currency, but the money had vanished.

The fire was confined to the waste-can whence it started. When the building was ventilated sufficiently, police with drawn guns went through the building. Somewhere in the building they half expected to meet dangerous yegg men. But the last of the inmates were brought out without the discovery of any suspicious stranger. Nor did a minute search of the building from top to bottom reveal any one in hiding, nor any sign of the currency shipment. And yet it seemed manifestly impossible that either the thief or his loot could have left the building.

A hasty conference was called in the board-room of the bank. Bill Farley and the two messengers were present, still bleary-eyed from tear gas. The chief of police had arrived to handle the case in person. Manager Hazelton presided. Slade told his story first, then John Drake, the messenger who had been carrying the currency bag.

"The second the fire broke out," the latter testified, "my partner and I backed up against the wall expectin' some kind of an attack. Then Farley here spilled the gas and I went blind. I got the idea right off. I hung onto the bag, ducked down and started feelin' my way along the wall. I figured if there was a yegg at work the smoke might bother him and give me a chance to break for the door. Then something hit me on the head and I went dead."

The other messenger had little to add. He had lost track of his partner.

in the confusion and when rescued was feeling his way helplessly in the opposite direction to the door.

"But," Hazelton, the manager protested, "how could this yegg see to operate when the rest of us were blind? I suppose he could wear a gas mask, but that would be a pretty clumsy affair. How could he get in and out with it and not be spotted?"

"How could he get out carryin' that bag of money either without havin' it taken away from him at the door. That's what bothers me," Bill put in. "The mask and smudge and tear gas are all clear enough. Good tight-fitting goggles are good enough for tear gas, and Slade and I watched a fellow fix up the smudge and plant the gas right under our noses. But the guy who did it wasn't here when the big show was pulled off. He was just a helper."

"What!" Hazelton exclaimed and the police chief echoed him.

Bill told them about the call of the fake fire-extinguisher inspector and turned to the smoke-stained extinguisher can which lay on the table as an exhibit.

"This looks regular on the outside, but it's really a high-pressure gas cylinder, fixed to hold liquid tear gas and spray it good and proper when it's turned over, just as you do a fire extinguisher," Bill explained. "One of this gang, pretendin' to represent the company, put this in place of the real extinguisher this mornin'. Then the next thing was to fix up a fire so some boob like me would use it. And at the same time he wanted a smoke screen so nobody in the street would see what was goin' on. Well that paper he took off this dingus when he unwrapped it, and dropped in the zinc waste can, probably was soaked in some kind of oily mixture inside that would make a big, quick blaze and a heavy smoke. Probably had some gun powder mixed with it, judgin' from the way it flared up. Then all that was needed was for somebody to drop a light in the can at the right moment. And here's what he did it with. I found this in the bottom of the can.

He exhibited an ordinary pocket cigarette lighter badly damaged by fire.

"Easy enough for him to snap a light on this dingus under the corner of his coat an' then back up to the waste can an' drop it in."

"Well, then," the police chief put in, "the guy we want to find is the fake fire extinguisher inspector, if he was a fake, as you say. Guess I'll talk to the extinguisher people first on a chance."

Bill Farley came suddenly out of a fit of abstraction.

"Sure. That can't do any hurt, chief," he said and then lapsed into silent thought again.

Bill roused from his reverie only long enough to describe the fire extinguisher inspector.

"He was an oldish, slight, stoopin' guy with gray hair and full grey beard, seemin'ly," Bill told them. "I'm bettin', though, he'll have a hair-cut an' a clean shave by now an' that his hair won't be gray after it's cut. I wouldn't even be sure I'd know his profeel now without that bushy mustache and the rest of the spinach."

The chief called the fire extinguisher people only to learn what Bill expected, that no authorized inspection of the Bellmore Trust Company extinguishers had been made that day, that their old inspector for this district was still on the job, and that they had no inspector answering to Bill's description.

"That sort of blocks that end," the chief admitted, but, to cover every-

thing, phoned his headquarters to have a general alarm sent out for the man. "Now let's see who might have got out of the building carrying that money. Somebody working with that fake inspector, of course. Who got away without being detained? I'm having everybody we're holding searched and questioned."

Slade declared that the only ones he passed, or could have possibly got away, were five well-known citizens whom Bill had named and described as they came in. None of them had been carrying a bag or any kind of a package. Every one was a person of considerable wealth and a reputation beyond suspicion.

"No help there," the chief admitted again. "There's just one answer left. It was an inside job all right, when it came to the actual robbery and passin' out the loot. Either an employee of the bank, or one of the express messengers here, pulled the inside stuff. But somebody else had to pass the loot through to the outside man. That took a second inside man. Near as I can figure it, Slade here is the only one had any chance to take the stuff at the door and pass it along without being held up. Sorry, Slade, but I'll have to hold you on suspicion for the present."

Slade started an indignant denial, but Bill Farley came out of his trance and interrupted him.

"There was one other way it might have been passed through, chief," he declared. "But it's too plumb ridiculous to talk about, too dangerous to talk about, you might say. It just can't be an' yet it's the only way it could be.

"Bill, you talk like a nut," the chief declared.

"Sure I do," Bill admitted. "It's a nut subject. Maybe I am a nut, but I can find out quick enough an' no harm done if I am, as long as I keep my mouth shut. If Mr. Hazelton will give me the rest of the day off, I'll prowl around a little and let you know if I find anything, but I'm doin' no talkin' yet. I've made ass enough of myself for one day."

And Bill stuck to his policy of silence in spite of considerable cross examination. Hazelton finally gave him his roving commission, with a warning to watch his step.

When Bill left the conference, those of the staff who had been exonerated beyond question and whose eyesight had been restored sufficiently, were back at their posts getting ready to open the bank's doors again. The janitors had already cleaned up the worst of the mess made by the firemen.

"Gosh almighty, what a wallop this gives the bank," Bill remarked to the teller whose cage was opposite the burned out waste can. "Must have pretty near singed your eyebrows, too, when that can blew up. I didn't hear of anybody gettin' burned, though. Who was standin' near the can when it blazed up? Did you notice?"

"Didn't you hear the old widow Van Fleet yell?" the teller asked with a grin. "She was standin' at the counter there lookin' over some papers she apparently just got from her safe deposit box. She wasn't more than a foot from the waste can and Mr. Sprague was right on the other side of it. Mr. Jennings was right here by the window."

"Say," Bill chuckled. "The thing that makes me sorest about bein' blinded is not seein' that fat ol' dame beat it for the door. I'll bet she ain't made more'n two miles an hour before in ten years. I'm guessin' she made sixty when them fireworks began. Slade says when he caught sight of her feelin' her

way out of the smudge and yellin' like a steam calliope, he ducked in an' headed her an' two or three others for the door. Once she got her bearin's, he says, she went by him like a bat outa hell. I'm bettin' even money she'll be takin' her account away after this."

"Well, that's a funny thing about it," the teller confided. "I thought maybe she was closin' it out this mornin'. She cashed a check for fifteen thousand before the trouble began and that wiped out her balance within a dollar. I was talking to Bruce in charge of the safe deposit vaults just now and he thinks she cleaned out her box, too. He came on her stuffing a lot of papers into her bosom after he let her in to her box. She seemed kind of shy about him catching her at it, he says. I understand she's been keeping a good three hundred thousand worth of securities with us."

"Phew!" Bill exclaimed, "that'll cut Hazelton a lot if she pulls out. Only been here a month, too. Where'd she come from, do you know?"

"Somewhere out West. Don't know much about her."

"I wonder, now, if Hazelton himself knows much about the old dame," Bill asked himself as he turned away. "It's crazy to think anybody with all that money would pull a stunt like this, of course, an' crazier still to think that wheezy old dame could get away with what's a tough job for a hard-boiled he-yegg. Nevertheless and notwithstandin', as the feller says, I see no way that bag coulda got outa the bank exceptin' under the widow's black robe. And she coulda put gas-tight goggles on under that veil and got away with it, too. I'd be fired just for suspicionin' such a thing, if Hazelton knew it. But if the chief thinks Slade did it, he's full of prunes."

Bill slipped into plain clothes and called up the widow's house from an outside phone. There was no answer.

"Not so good," he thought, "and there ought to be a maid there to answer the phone. Guess I'll call personal."

A half hour later Bill got out of a taxi in the rear of the comfortable house the widow had leased in the hill section of Bellmore. Again he got no reply to his ring. There was the same result at the other doors. Drawn curtains at all the windows agreed with his conclusion that there was no one home.

There was a yard-man working across the street. Bill approached him.

"Do you know whether the Van Fleet house is closed?" he asked.

"The missis went away this mornin' in taxi wid a beeg trunk," the fellow told him. "I see nobody roun' since."

Bill went away from there quickly. He hopped into his own cab and told the driver to make time for the offices of the taxi company. There he learned that they had sent a man up to the Van Fleet house in response to a telephone summons that morning. Within a half hour Bill had located the driver who had answered the call.

"Sure I took her old trunk an' the devil take it and her," the man said with deep feeling. "I had to drag it out all alone. It weighed a ton, the old-fashioned kind they used to call Saratogas and I bet full of bricks."

"Where did you take her?" Bill demanded.

"Up to the station first and checked her old elephant of a trunk to New York. Then I left her at the bank."

"Thanks. That's all. Keep this under your hat. You and I both might

lose our jobs if it got out we was gossipin' about the private affairs of the rich widow," and Bill was gone.

III

TEN minutes later he caught a train for New York, thirty miles away, and chafed inwardly all the way in to Jersey City. Arriving at the terminal he went directly to the baggage room. The much occupied baggagemen there not unnaturally remembered nothing about the mammoth trunk and all trunks shipped in from Bellmore that morning had already been claimed.

"Beats me how many guys goes around with their eyes shut," Bill grumbled to himself as he turned away.

The baggage-transfer people remembered as little, but gave him a slight clew. They had forwarded all but one of the trunks from Bellmore that morning, but didn't recall handling anything of the size and weight Bill described. That one trunk might be the one Bill was seeking. Thereupon, he betook himself to the taxi starter and stated his problem, first impressing the man by the sight of his private officer's badge.

"Now I figure," he added, "that this party wouldn't be likely to let that trunk out of sight any more than necessary an' so wouldn't be likely to use the transfer people. It either went out on a taxi or on a private car. Either case it would be so big it would have to go on the runnin' board an' I thought likely you might remember it."

At last Bill had struck a man after his own heart, an observer with some measure of acuteness.

"There was such a trunk went out of here in a taxi," he recalled. "An ol' bull of a trunk belongin' to a man in a big hurry. Don't remember just what he looked like though. Guess we can pick up the cab that took it because I gave the job to one of the regulars at this stand. He ought to be around in an hour or so."

The fact that the trunk had been in charge of a man set Bill back a little, but the starter did not recall seeing any old woman in widow's weeds around the trunk. Bill tried to reassure himself with the thought that the man having the trunk in tow would be the widow's accomplice, probably the fake fire inspector, in case his fantastic suspicion of the aged widow proved true by some miracle. Bill was troubled more than ever with doubts. He was in a fair way to make a mess of things and lose his job in the bargan. Only the fact that any other theory seemed impossible kept him on this possible but highly improbable trail.

There was nothing to it but to wait, so for over an hour Bill stuck to his post beside the starter. At length a cab drove up which the starter declared had taken the big trunk. The driver admitted it readily enough when Bill showed him his badge. The trunk, he said, had been in charge of "a lean, dark guy," and this man had accompanied the trunk to an address in Bayer Street, Greenwich Village. He didn't recall the number, but was confident he could locate the place.

"Take me there double quick," Bill directed. "It's a good bonus for you if you're right and a better one if I'm right."

A little way from Bayer Street, he stopped the cab at the precinct police station. Introducing himself to the captain, he divulged as much of his story as was necessary and got an escort of two plainclothesmen. With them he cruised through Bayer Street, a typical Village thoroughfare, half de-

voted to arts of a sort, half to plain squalor. And the aged house which the driver presently pointed out as the place where he had delivered the trunk was no exception to the general surroundings, an old three-story private dwelling converted into studio apartments.

They stopped a few doors away and one plainclothesman was sent around to the rear of the building and the other assigned to the front. Then Bill had the taxi man drive him back and stop in front of the house.

"You come with me, son, an' say nothin' unless I tip you off," he ordered the driver. "Which floor is it?"

"Top."

"O. K. In we go. An' here's where I lose my job or win a raise."

Half way up the first flight of stairs, they met a man in workman's garb carrying an iron pail full of rubbish.

"You the janitor?" Bill asked.

"Yeh."

"Which apartment was a trunk delivered to this morning?" he shot at him, showing his badge.

The man was anxiously obsequious, but unhelpful.

"Don't know nothin' about it, boss," he asserted. "I didn't come on till a little before noon. You see I got three houses and I don't live here."

"Who lives on the top floor?"

"Mr. John Forrest. Lives there alone. Some sort of inventor.

"Is he in there now?"

"Yep. I just come from there."

"Has he been there right along for the last few days?"

"Far's I know. I ain't seen him go out."

"All right. Stay around where we can get you if we want you. We'll call on Mr. Forrest."

But as the man started down, Bill, on second thought, turned and followed him to the street. He surreptitiously signalled the plainclothesman to keep an eye on the fellow, then rejoined the taxi driver.

"Sure you got the right place?" he cautioned the man.

"Sure. I remember these stairs with the red and black paint on the rails.

Bill, with his hand on his hip, where he could feel the reassuring butt of his gun, knocked at the door of the top floor apartment. He had to rap twice before steps were heard and the door was flung open. Bill studied the face of the man who presented himself, hoping to recognize it as that of the pseudo fire extinguisher inspector. Size and build of the man were favorable, but he was smooth-faced and the hair was dark. Bill couldn't be certain even of the profile, but there was nothing really contradictory yet. He noted that the fellow's hand rested on his hip as he opened the door and that an almost imperceptible twitch of the dark eyes had noticed the similar position of the caller's hand.

But beyond that there was no hint of fear or guilt in the face or manner of the man Forrest, nor any sign that he recognized the Bellmore bank policeman.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded crisply.

"We came for the trunk that was delivered here this morning," Bill answered in the same style.

Again there was no suggestion of uneasiness. The dark brows raised in slightly bored annoyance.

"Wrong address," he snapped, starting to close the door.

But as he turned away, Bill caught a second glimpse of the profile. Something about it was a little more remi-

niscent. Bill took a chance and shoved his foot across the door sill.

"Just a minute," he insisted and turned to the driver. "Is this the fellow who had you bring up the trunk?" he asked.

"That's him all right," the man asserted positively.

The features of John Forrest relaxed as if he suddenly understood what it was all about. He grinned indulgently.

"Why to be sure. Now I recognize you," he admitted. "You brought my old trunk up this morning. I take it there's been some mix-up and you suspect me of having someone's baggage by mistake. Well, mistakes will happen. Sure, come in, gentlemen and look my old box over and make sure it isn't the one you're looking for."

But the man was too smooth about it. Bill, wary of ambush, kept his foot on the threshold and made no move to enter.

"Go call the officer in front and bring up the janitor, too," he ordered the taxi driver.

Mr. Forrest flushed angrily for an instant, then shrugged. Again he seemed to Bill too casual. An innocent man should have been boiling with indignation by now.

"Oh, very well," said Forrest nonchalantly. "You suspect something more than a mistake, eh? Take your time, boys. Convince yourselves of your error, then it will be my turn."

He turned wearily away from the door. Bill, alertly suspicious, watched him closely, but the man made no move to get out of sight, merely puttering about among some magazines on a center table in the big living room, exposed to view through the open door.

A closed door at the rear of the room might conceal an ambuscade of the fellow's pals, Bill thought. Something more than sheer bravado, he felt, lay behind the man's unconcern. In a moment of misgiving, Bill reminded himself that he still had no evidence that would defend his high-handed course if he was unable to make good his suspicions. But at this moment, the janitor and the officer arrived and he decided to go through with it.

"This is Mr. Forrest," he told the officer. "He says we are mistaken about a trunk that we believe was brought here this morning and don't belong to him. Of his own free will an' accord he invites us to search his place. That right, Mr. Forrest?"

"Righto, old top. Go to it."

Again the fellow's calm self-assurance shook Bill's confidence. The other officer was already eying him doubtfully. There was only one thing now that could save Bill from becoming a laughing-stock. That was to find the bank loot on the premises.

Obviously there was no trunk or any other hopeful sign in the scantily furnished living-room. Search in the one closet and about the furniture failed to turn up any hidden treasure. Cautiously Bill opened up the door in the rear. It exposed a smaller room, evidently meant for a bedroom, but now equipped as a chemical laboratory. Against the wall was a big, battered steamer trunk. Except in size, however, it in no way resembled the one Bill sought.

"That's the trunk this fellow brought this morning," Forrest asserted calmly. "You'll find my initials on it."

"That ain't it," the driver contradicted without hesitation.

"Your memory is as faulty as that of your big friend here," Forrest taunted him.

But neither in this room, nor in the

kitchen beyond, the one remaining room in the apartment, was there any sign of what they sought. The annoying Forrest actually snickered.

Bill doggedly went over the apartment again, this time in search of the contents of the missing baggage. All the old tricks of concealment were tested out. Walls and floor boards were sounded. Upholstery was pried into in vain. In due course, he knelt and peered up the chimney of the big fireplace and thumped the brickwork speculatively. He was about to rise from his knees again baffled, when suddenly he stopped and stared at the blackened hearth.

IV

HE had caught a sensation of undue warmth as he leaned under the yawning flue. Placing a hand against the bricks, he found them hot as from a recent fire. And yet it was a warm spring day, giving no excuse for a blaze. The hearth, too, was swept clean. In fact, it was too clean swept, not at all in keeping with the general dust and neglect of masculine housekeeping in the rest of the apartment.

"Just been havin' fire and mighty careful to clean up after it," Bill commented.

"Ah, how acute is our big sleuth!" softly exclaimed the suspected man. "It is even so. I did indeed burn up a bunch of rubbish, and, being annoyed by the remains of the holocaust, asked my friend the janitor to remove it."

"What did you do with the ashes?" Bill demanded of the janitor.

"Dumped 'em in the ash can out front. Prob'ly collected by now."

Bill hurled himself down the stairs three steps at a time. The ash collectors were two doors away, but Bill swore with relief as he pounced on the still untouched can belonging to the house. A few moments later he returned to the Forrest apartment with a double handful of ash-coated rubbish. Triumphantly he dumped on the table a trunk lock, some metal straps and rivets and a bit of half burned leather.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "I'm gamblin' that stuff comes from the trunk I'm lookin' for. Perhaps you can explain, Mr. Forrest, why you took so much trouble to burn up this trunk and deny so positive that you had it."

"Perhaps I could explain a lot of things if I thought it was any of your damned business," the suspect retorted a little heatedly at last.

Bill plucked up his courage a little hopefully. But he was still baffled to know what had become of the loot which he now felt certain had been in this apartment this morning. He was really as far as ever from proving that. And if he could, where was it now?

Slowly Bill strolled back to the rear of the apartment again, reviewing his previous searches. At the rear window, looking out on the fire escape, he paused again, still baffled. But this time he noticed something about the fire escape that he had missed before. The iron rails of the landing platform were badly rusted, as were the rungs of the descending ladder. But the grilled flooring was worn bright in spots and so were the rungs of the ladder that led up to the roof. Forrest, he reasoned, frequently visited the roof.

Bill climbed out the window and up to the roof. Peering over the low parapet, he looked upon a roof-garden fresh with spring verdure and bloom. All about the roof space were ranged deep wooden troughs full of earth, in

which grew sturdily a variety of flowering plants and dwarf evergreens.

Bill crawled over the parapet and stood on a flooring of washed pebbles looking speculatively around him. The earth in those troughs, he thought, would make an excellent hiding place. But there was abundant evidence that it had not been disturbed for many days. Its surface was sodden and crusted by water and sun. The plants grew too near together to leave room for the insertion of even so compact a package as the bag of bank currency, to say nothing of whatever had been packed in the widow's heavy trunk.

It seemed like another false hope. Nevertheless Bill poked the earth in each tub tentatively with a pocket rule. One by one he tested them, striking nothing but soft earth in each, until he came to the last and largest one. In that he hit a solid obstruction about twelve inches down. The trough was a good two feet deep. Suddenly hopeful again, Bill dug eagerly into the earth with his fingers only to strike a smooth wooden surface. He explored the length and breadth of the tub. It was the same everywhere, nothing but wooden bottom.

But as he stood up, disheartened again, he saw the trick. A false bottom, of course. A moment's study proved it. The sides of the trough were made of two twelve-inch planks each, held together by cleats, the whole covered by weathered green paint. But closer inspection showed dabs of fresh paint on the nail heads. Bill kicked the cleats loose, then wrenched them off with his fingers. The top of the tub came off intact like the tray of a trunk, without disturbing the plants or the earth in which they rested.

In the lower compartment thus revealed, he found a neat package containing the plundered currency shipment intact and beside it a pair of tight-fitting goggles such as might be used to prevent tear-gas from affecting the wearer's eyes.

But he found something more that put the finishing touches on the proof of his audacious theory. There was also a second package of money containing fifteen thousand dollars in large bills. That was the amount the widow Van Fleet had drawn that morning. As final evidence there was a compact bundle of securities of various kinds. He thumbed them over hastily. They were all gilt-edged and bore on their face the name of Frances E. Van Fleet. So the widow had cleaned out her strong-box, too, before looting the bank. But the end of the trough was filled with more bulky valuables, a costly set of solid silver bearing the initials "F. E. Van F." and a collection of jewelry that made Bill's head swim.

Bill stood up and contemplated his find, still hardly able to believe his own eyes. So the widow, with all her wealth, had been the able accomplice of this clever bandit! Why? And it still seemed impossible that the fat, decrepit old woman would have had the nerve and physique to go through with it. Yet there was the proof.

Then another thought struck him. Where was the widow now? Not strange that her accomplice should have hidden their joint loot, but why were her personal belongings cached in the same place. Had this crook used her for his purposes and then robbed her, perhaps done away with her?

With this new possibility in mind, Bill hastily descended the ladder to the apartment. But as he approached the living room where the rest awaited him, he slowed down and resumed his

air of dejection. He had his hand on his gun, however.

"Well, is the able sleuth satisfied?" asked Forrest tauntingly.

For answer Bill suddenly shoved his gun in the other's face.

"Stick 'em up, bo," he ordered. "I found the loot. You are under arrest for the robbery of the Bellmore Trust Company."

The surprised man stared at his captor for a moment with intense chagrin, then he shrugged and accepted the situation.

"All right," he said. "You win. Where do we go from here?"

"What I want to know first is where is Mrs. Van Fleet?" Bill went on ominously. "I advise you to tell me if you can, otherwise I'll lodge a murder charge too."

Again Forrest looked intensely surprised.

"Well I'll be damned!" he exclaimed." I supposed you'd found her and got the tip from her about the trunk. Don't worry. She's all right by now. I saw to that."

Forrest turned away and again Bill got a good look at his profile. Bill started as if stung by a bee.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed. "I see it now. There's something more to profeels than just the cut of the jib. You got to take into account the slant of it."

With which cryptic remark he turned to the wall phone near by and got the chief of police of Bellmore on the wire.

"Hello, chief," he crowed. "I got the bird and the loot, includin' all the valuables of the widow Van Fleet. Say, chief, this was a one-man job. This fake fire extinguisher inspector, after fixin' the tear-gas this mornin', robbed the widow and shipped her stuff to New York in her own trunk. That wasn't the widow at all came into the bank. It was this guy hid under her veil an robe. It was a cinch for him to hide his goggles and the currency bag under that black tent. But what worries me is the widow. Maybe the guy murdered her. Better beat it up and break into her house."

"Don't worry about her, Bill," the chief told him. "We found her O. K. except that she's a little cramped yet and a bit sick from chloroform. Somebody called up from New York an hour ago and told us to go up to her house right away because she was in trouble. We found her and her maids bound and gagged. They'd been doped in the night while they were asleep and didn't know a damned thing about who did it. And we didn't know what it was all about till now, except that her place had been looted. Good work, Bill." Bill hung up and turned back to the prisoner.

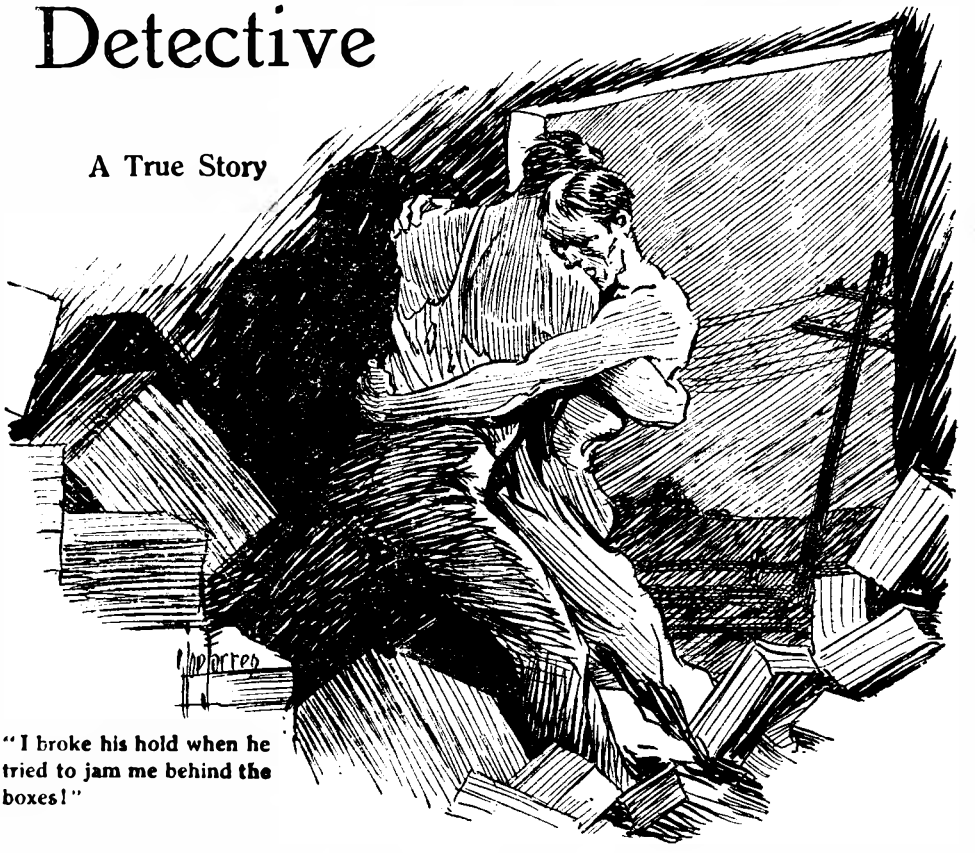
"Did you call up and tell 'em to let the widow out?" he asked.

"Sure," Forrest told him. "I wouldn't have a bunch of ladies suffer any longer than necessary. Now you tell me something. How in hell did you dope it out I'd dressed up as the widow if you didn't know till now where she was."

"Why, you see my memory backfired a little just now when I saw your profeel again," Bill told him with a grin. "I remembered all of a sudden that the party we took for the widow in the bank stood round-shouldered and head thrown forward under her veil, just like you do now. The real widow stands up like an ol' battleship with her head thrown back tellin' the cock-eyed world to go to hell. I've always said it's the profeels you want to go by when you aim to see through disguises."

Manhunts of a Great Detective

A True Story



"I broke his hold when he tried to jam me behind the boxes!"

Murray Gets Taken for a King and a Lunatic, and Is Finally Put to Bed With a Shotgun at His Head

By John Wilson Murray

Late Chief Inspector in the Department of Justice of Ontario

As Told to **Victor Speer**

CHAPTER IV

The Women Burglars

A COMPARATIVELY short time after Knapp was sent away, thieving began in Erie. It was not on quite the same wholesale basis, but what was lacking in quantity was present in quality, for the thieves made it a point to steal the finest silverware and jewelry. Instead of sneak-thieving it was burglary. The marks of jimmies on doors and windows were sufficient to demonstrate this.

"Crowley thought at first that Knapp might have returned and changed his tactics," said Murray. "We drove out to Knapp's and made

sure he was not there, although after his escape from the penitentiary no one could tell what had become of him. I was satisfied from the outset that Knapp had no hand in the thieving. Knapp prided himself on his cleverness as a sneak thief. Burglary would be a clumsy way of stealing, according to Knapp's ideas.

"After the second or third job it was apparent that no lone burglar was at work. There was a gang, for some of the jobs necessarily called for a watcher or lookout on the outside while a pal was inside a house. Silverware, fine clothing, and jewelry began to disappear with a regularity that reminded us often of the day when Knapp was in his prime. Mr. Skinner's house was ransacked and a great quantity of silverware taken, and soon after the Skinner robbery, the home of Mr. Bliss was plundered and a big haul of silverware and jewelry was made.

"Crowley was worried. So were the rest of us. We put in about twenty hours a day, and I verily believe we scrutinized every man in and around Erie. We made every stranger account for himself. We gathered in all our regulars in the suspicious character line. We redoubled our patrol precautions at night. It was of no avail. The burglaries went on just the same. One night a house in one end of the town would be robbed and the next night the burglars would do a job in the other end of the town. The only clew or trace of them that I could get was a peculiarity in the jimmy marks, showing a piece had been chipped or cut out of the jimmy. But to tell the truth we were at our wits' end and could make no headway. There were so many burglaries, yet we could not get on to them.

"Our last hangout at night was the Reed House. We would step in there regularly before going to bed. As we stood talking in the Reed House in the early morning hours or shortly after midnight, I noticed by the merest chance a woman slip quietly down the back stairs and out into the night. For three or four nights I observed her doing this. The clerk told me she was a scrub-woman, who worked late and lived outside the hotel. There was nothing suspicious about that. I asked the clerk where she lived. He said he did not know.

"It was a pleasant night and I felt like taking a walk, and just for amusement I decided to follow the old scrub-woman. She slipped down the back stairs as usual and went out. I trailed after her. We had not gone five blocks when I lost her. She seemed to have been swallowed up by some hole in the earth that vanished after devouring her. I laughed at the joke on me, unable to trail an old woman, and I went to bed.

"The next morning Crowley was glum. 'Another burglary last night,' he said, and named a house four blocks from where I lost the old woman.

EDITOR'S NOTE:—*John Wilson Murray, more than thirty years a manhunter, had one of the most checkered and thrilling careers of any of the world's great detectives. His reputation was international and his shrewdness and courage by-words. Fortunately for readers of* DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, *he gave the amazing story of his life to Victor Speer, close friend and collaborator, before he died several months ago.*

Last week, Murray described the beginning of his detective career, and told of the capture of Knapp, "The Weazened Wonder" of Erie.

"I said nothing, but that night I was at the Reed House, waiting for my old scrub-woman. About one o'clock in the morning she appeared, a flitting figure on the back stairs, and darted out. I was after her in a jiffy. For about fifteen blocks I followed her. Then she suddenly turned a corner and when I came up she was gone.

"The next morning Crowley was mad as a hornet. 'Another burglary last night,' said he.

"I was a little hot myself. But that night I turned up at the Reed House, and at one o'clock out came my vanishing scrub-woman again and away she went, with me on her trail.

"I have shadowed many people in my life, but that old scrub-woman was one of the most artful dodgers I ever knew. I followed her from one o'clock until after four o'clock in the morning, up streets and down streets through alleys, across lots, around buildings, and then across lots again. But I stuck to her and there was no corner she turned that I was not close up to spot her if she dodged.

"Soon after we started a cat suddenly mewed and startled her mightily. Along about dawn she headed away to the outskirts of the town and stopping in front of a double house tossed a pebble up against a window and a moment later went in. I sat down some distance away and thought it all over. I was puzzled. Women burglars were something unknown in Erie or anywhere else just then. Yet to think that an old woman after scrubbing for hours in a hotel would go out for a stroll and prowl around all night for her health was out of the question. I waited until daylight and when she did not come out I went to headquarters.

"'Another one last night, Murray,' said Crowley.

"Then it could not have been my old scrub-woman, for I had her in sight every minute. However, I determined to pay her a visit. I took Jake Sandusky of the police force and went out to the house. On one side of the double house lived Mrs. O'Brien, a respectable woman. She knew nothing of the occupants on the other side of the house, beyond the fact that they were women and had lived there less than a year.

"I knocked at the door. There was no answer. I banged again, loud and long. I heard a scurry of feet inside and finally the door opened. A big, fine-looking girl, about twenty-three years old, stood in the doorway. I walked right in.

"'What is your name?' I asked her.

"'Mary Ann Hall,' said she.

"'Do you live alone?' said I.

"'I live with my mother,' said Mary Ann.

"'Call your mother,' I said.

"Mary Ann opened wide her mouth and let out a bawl like a donkey's bray.

"'Ma-a-a-aw!' she bellowed.

"Out from the adjoining room pranced my old scrub-woman as sprightly and spry as any being of sixty years I ever saw.

"'What's your name?' I asked.

"'Mrs. Julia Hall,' said my old scrub-woman, and if ever there is a gallery for the portraits of sixty-year-old coquettes I will contribute the picture of Julia Hall.

"'Who else lives here?' I asked.

"The answer was the opening of Mary Ann's mouth in another prolonged bellow.

"Out from the adjoining room trotted a second old woman, a little bit of a body about fifty years old, with a face like an eagle's. She had a loose ringlet that flipped around her cheek, and she constantly blew at it out of

the side of her mouth to fleck it back to her ear.

"'Ladies,' said I, 'sit down.'

"To my astonishment all three promptly sat on the floor. I observed that the chief articles of furniture in the room were a cook stove, a rough kitchen table, and one dilapidated rocking chair.

"'Mrs. Julia Hall,' I said, and I can see her coy leer as she sat on the floor, 'you were out all night, last night.'

"'I always am,' she said.

"'Yes, Julia cannot sleep in the dark,' spoke up the eagle-faced woman, who hastened to add apologetically: 'I am Mrs. Maggie Carroll, her friend.'

"'I never sleep in the night,' said Mrs. Hall. 'I work or walk all night, and when daylight comes I sleep.'

"'It's an affliction,' said Mrs. Carroll. 'She had the fever when a child.'

"I talked on with these three strange creatures squatted on the floor. They puzzled me. I mentioned the burglaries to them. They knew nothing of them, they said. Mrs. Carroll was particularly vehement in protestation of ignorance. I crossed over and sat down in the dilapidated rocker beside the range. There was a kettle on the stove, but no fire. Suddenly the chair collapsed with a crash. Over I went with my heels in the air. One of my feet struck the kettle and it fell to the floor and the lid rolled off. The three women had laughed uproariously when the chair broke down; Mary Ann hawhawing, Mrs. Hall tittering, and Mrs. Carroll cackling. But when the kettle fell and its top rolled off there was sudden silence. I looked at the three women and then at the chair and then I saw the kettle. Its top was toward me and inside I observed what I thought was a jimmy! Moreover, it was a nicked jimmy!

"I stood up and eyed the three women. Mrs. Carroll feigned weeping, but Mrs. Hall tittered and made saucer eyes, as if bent on conquest, even on the penitentiary's verge.

"'Mary Ann,' I said, 'you might save me the trouble of searching the house by hauling out the plunder.'

"At this Mrs. Hall struck Mary Ann a resounding whack on the head and bade her: 'Squat where you be, you hussy!'

"I searched the house. I found silverware, jewelry, linen, fine clothes in amazing quantities. The Skinner silverware, the Bliss silverware, the plunder from many houses, all was recovered. I found also a complete set of pass-keys and a house-breaking kit of burglar tools.

"We arrested the three women. All three were tried. Two, Mrs. Julia Hall and Mrs. Maggie Carroll, were sent to Alleghany for four years, and Mary Ann was let off. While in jail Mary Ann gave birth to a bouncing baby.

"I asked Mrs. Hall about her tramp through the night when I was following her. She laughed in a flirtatious way that was ludicrous. From Mrs. Carroll I learned that she and Mrs. Hall were to have done another job that night, and Mrs. Hall was to meet Mrs. Carroll at two o'clock in the morning. But Mrs. Carroll had spied me trailing Mrs. Hall, and had mewed suddenly like a cat, a signal to Mrs. Hall that she was being followed. That was the cat's cry that had startled Mrs. Hall, and caused her to prowl around all night, while Mrs. Carroll was doing the job, and not go home till morning.

"They were the only pair of professional women burglars working alone that I ever met red-handed. They had been caught first in Ireland and were sent to Australia, when they got

into trouble again and jumped to the United States. Mrs. Julia Hall was the genius of the two. I often thought she was foolish to have used a nicked jimmy. Her cracked smile would have broken into almost anything."

CHAPTER V

A King and a Lunatic

MURRAY had his full share of exciting experiences during his service in Erie. One episode in particular he laughed over, for in it he was mistaken for a king, a lunatic, and a burglar, all in a single night.

"In November, 1872, a Miss Julia Oliver, sister of a prominent man in Erie became demented," Murray explained. "Her family were English people. She imagined they had large estates in England, and one of her delusions was that her brother was trying to beat her out of them. At times she had brief lucid intervals, but gradually she became worse, and they decided to send her to the Dixmont Asylum, up on the mountain near Pittsburgh. I was acquainted with her and her family, and they suggested that I would be the proper person to take her to the asylum.

"All the plans were made. We intended to start in the morning, but she locked and barred her bedroom door and windows, and we could not get into the room until after the morning train had gone. Fearing to have her at home another night, lest she should do some overt act or kill herself, the family decided I should take her on the afternoon train. It was an hour or two late. Miss Oliver and I arrived at the small asylum station long after dark. I remember it was a bright, cold, moonlit night in the latter part of November. The train steamed away, leaving this crazy woman and myself alone on the platform of the little station.

"There was not a soul around, no agent, no one from the asylum, not even a station lounger. It was as deserted as the North Pole, and almost as cold. The asylum was a mile or so up on the mountain from the station. There was a terraced walk for a part of the distance. The wind was howling, and everything was frozen tight. I looked far up the mountain, where I could see the asylum lights shining out in the night. The crazy woman passively waited.

"'Come, Miss Oliver,' said I. 'We will have to walk. I am very sorry, but there is no other way.'

"She looked at me with big, innocent, reproachful eyes. She had a very sweet, childlike voice. She made no move.

"'I know you are going to kill me,' she said so sorrowfully, and with such sweet simplicity and directness, that I started guiltily at the very candor of the accusation. 'Do kill me here,' she continued. 'Do not kill me on the mountainside, and let me roll down the hill. The one thing I dread after death is to have to roll down long hills.'

"There was no use to argue. She was insane. Yet she was so self-possessed, so gentle a lady, so frank, that if I had not known positively she was crazy, I would have believed her as sane as any other person I knew.

"'If you will not walk with me I must carry you,' I said.

"'I weigh one hundred and forty pounds,' she said solemnly. 'I will not resist, although I prefer to be killed here rather than on the mountainside. Please kill me here.'

"No one likes to be regarded seriously as a murderer, even by insane folk. So, without further ado, I picked

up Miss Oliver in my arms and started up the mountain. She certainly had stated her minimum weight. She lay in my arms like a sack of salt. The wind raged about us. Step by step I made my way up the mountain, heading for the lights of Dixmont. Despite the bitter cold I sat her down and threw off my overcoat, then picked her up and labored on. It was weary, toilsome work. I stumbled and staggered, but ever nearer shone the lights. The insane girl begged piteously to be killed.

"'Kill me, why don't you kill me?' she kept crying. 'Oh, think how far I must roll after I am killed!'

"It was useless to be angry. I trudged on. Then she began to resist. She kicked and screamed and clawed. I was compelled to put her down and sit on her while I threw off my undercoat. Then up the mountain we went, in a perambulating wrestling match. She fought valiantly. Once she tripped me, and we rolled far down the path before I could stop. She shrieked with delight as we rolled.

"Then slowly, laboriously I worked our way back over the lost ground. All the asylum lights went out while we were on our way, except the few that burned all night. Finally I got her up to the door and rang the bell. As I rang, she wrenched away. I grabbed her, and she began to shriek so piercingly that it seemed as if her family away back in Erie must hear it. We were in a tangle on the ground when the door opened, and a flood of light poured out on us.

"There I stood—hatless, coatless, disheveled, wet—with a wild woman wailing piteously, struggling, and crying to be freed from a monster. They well might have wondered which of us was insane. I carried her inside, and the doors were closed. I knew Dr. Reed, the superintendent, but he was away. They roused the assistant superintendent out of bed. He was none too pleased at being disturbed. I had my commitment papers in my shirt, and I drew them forth. They were as wet as if they had fallen into a basin of water. Miss Oliver was a pay patient, of course, and her bed was ready. She looked serenely around the reception room, noting the paintings and the furnishings.

"'What do you think of my castle, King George?' she said to me. 'Is it not beautiful, your majesty? Pray make yourself at home, your majesty.'

"There never was a King George who looked as I looked just then. Small wonder a nurse sniggered. They took Miss Oliver to her quarters, and I returned to the office. I could hear the wind whistling around the corner outside. I asked if I could stay all night. They said no, it was against the rules.

"'If Dr. Reed was here I could stay all night,' I retorted.

"'Dr. Reed is not here,' was the icy reply, matching the zero weather outdoors.

"They showed me the door. I went out, hatless, coatless, into the night. I stumbled down the mountain, and hunted for my undercoat. I found it, and then found my overcoat. But my hat was nowhere around. The wind must have blown it away. I made my way down to the station. I was getting cold, and my damp clothes were stiffening on me. I tried to find warmth or shelter at the station, but there was none. I shivered and stamped to and fro, endeavoring to keep warm. There was no hotel around, none within a couple of miles. The only house near was a gas-house, where they made gas for the asylum. It was across from

the station. I saw a light in it, and I went over and stepped in. A lone man was sitting by the fire, watching the drafts. He turned as the door slammed, and seeing me hatless, with scratched face, he groaned and jumped over to the other side of the room.

"'Get out! Get out!' he shouted, waving his arms. 'You cannot stop here! Get out; I'm closing up now!'

"'You poor fool,' said I, 'I want to get warm, that's all. Nobody will hurt you. Sit down.'

"'Go back to the asylum if you want to get warm!' he yelled, as if I were a deaf lunatic. 'I don't warm crazy men here.'

"The fellow was beside himself with terror. He thought I was an escaped madman from Dixmont, and I did not blame him. I certainly must have looked the part. Suddenly his manner changed.

"'If you're really cold, my friend, I'll show you the new tavern that has been built right down the road,' said he.

"I thanked him heartily. He put on his hat and overcoat, and we started out of the door. As I stepped outside he slammed the heavy door behind me, and locked it from within. It simply was a ruse to get me out. I saw it was useless to try and get into the gashouse again, so I started on a brisk walk down the road, looking for a tavern or boarding house. I banged on the door. There was no answer. I shook the door by its handle. Suddenly the upstairs window was raised, and a hoarse voice shouted: 'Who's there?' I answered that I was an officer who had come from the asylum and desired a bed for the night.

"'Get out of here!' roared the voice.

"'Come down and open this door!' I shouted in reply.

"The answer was the bang of a shotgun, and a charge of buckshot bored into the woodwork about a yard from where I stood. I scooted around the corner of the house as the second barrel followed the first. I crawled along behind fences until I struck a bend in the road, and then crossed to the railroad track, and started on a fast walk back toward the gashouse. On my way I met the gasman. When he saw me he let out a shriek of terror and fled across the fields. I walked fully three miles, past the gashouse, which was locked, before I came to a tavern. Profiting by my former experience I knocked, and when I heard a window raised upstairs I got around to the other side of the house.

"'Vat you vant?' asked a heavy German voice.

"'I want to get in,' I said.

"'Go away!' said the voice.

"'I want to get in,' I shouted.

"Bang! Bang! went a gun. But I was around the corner of the house. I waited a few minutes, then thumped again on the door. Three times I thumped, and every time the old German roared. Finally I crossed the road and got behind a tree.

"'Hello, there!' I shouted. 'You'll kill some one if you don't stop.'

"'Vell, vat you tink I am shootin' for, eh?'

"I began a long palaver with nim.

"'I want to get a bed for the night,' I said in conclusion.

"'So? Why ain't you say so first?' said he.

"I could hear him talking to his wife. They went away from the window. I waited fifteen minutes, and kicked again on the door. Presently a light appeared in the hall. Through the glass alongside the old-fashioned door I could see them coming down the stairs. The wife was ahead carry-

ing a lighted candle. The husband was behind carrying the shotgun.

"'Hello, out there!' he shouted, as they neared the door.

"'Hello!' I answered.

"'Who are you?' he asked.

"I told him.

"'How do I know you are who you say you are?' he demanded.

"I recited a list of people I knew.

"'How do I know you know them?' he asked.

"I pondered. The only way to convince him was to hit upon some man he would be sure to know well. I saw a whisky sign by the door.

"'Do you know Fred Applebaum, of Pittsburgh, the singer and whisky man?' said I.

"'Fred Applebaum? Do I know him?' he said, and I could hear the bolt shot back.

"I fairly leaped inside. The old German kept pointing the shotgun at me. He said there had been many burglaries in the vicinity, some of the robberies having been committed by men who called late at night and said they wanted lodgings. His wife brought me whisky, and I took a long drink. The old German meanwhile held the shotgun full upon me. I sat close to the fire, and after thawing out I went to bed.

"The old German followed me with the shotgun and a candle. He sat down in a corner of the room with the candle on the window sill and shotgun pointed at the bed. I fell asleep. It was daylight when I awoke. There sat the old German sound asleep in his chair, with the shotgun across his knees and the candle down in the socket. I coughed, and he awoke with a snort. When I came to pay my bill he said: 'Fifty cents for bed, fifty cents for breakfast, and fifty cents for extra.'

"'What's the extra for?' I asked.

"'For keeping watch on you,' said he. 'How do I know you ain't a burglar?'

"'Would you take in a burglar?' said I.

"'If he was half froze,' said he.

"I took the first train for Erie, after buying a hat in Pittsburgh, and patching my scratched face with court plaster. It was the only night of my life in which I had been invited to a palace as a king, locked out of a gashouse as a lunatic, shot at as a burglar, and put to bed with a shotgun pointed at my head."

CHAPTER VI

The Box-Car Battle

IN addition to his regular work on the Erie police force, Murray was gradually drawn into the service of the men at the head of the Pennsylvania Central Railroad. His success in the cases he undertook attracted their attention to such a degree that they finally urged him to sever his connection with the Erie police and devote himself exclusively to railroad detective work. William L. Scott, the railroad magnate, whose home was in Erie, and for whom Murray had done considerable difficult railroad detective work, was particularly desirous of obtaining Murray's undivided services.

Mr. Scott, Milton Cartwright, who built the Dismal Swamp Canal, and was interested in the building of the Elevated Railway system in New York, James Casey, George Ham of Boston, and others, united in the building of the Canada Southern Railroad, now the Michigan Central, between Buffalo and Detroit, with its route in Canada from Fort Erie, opposite Buffalo, through St. Thomas to Windsor, op-

posite Detroit. They had difficulties in Canada. Station houses were burned. Trains were derailed. Bridges were fired. The trouble primarily grew out of the right of way. Some of the country folk seemed to think the railroad should make them all rich.

The officers of the company knew Murray, and they held a conference and urged him to leave Erie and straighten out the Canada Southern's troubles. Their offer to Murray was so flattering that he agreed to go for three months, with the right to return at the end of that time if he did not find matters satisfactory.

So Murray left Erie and went to Canada as head of detectives of the Canada Southern Railroad of which William L. Scott was president and F. N. Finney was general superintendent. He established headquarters in St. Thomas and traveled between Buffalo and Detroit, and frequently Chicago.

"The bridge-burning stopped first," said Murray. "I began a systematic watch of the bridge that was the scene of the most trouble. Night after night I lay in a clump of brush by the railroad track. They were hard to catch, but eventually the bridge-burning stopped, along with the firing of stations, for I gave chase in earnest and caught some of the incendiaries and they were sent to the penitentiary.

"Soon after the bridge-burning was broken up, L. D. Rucker, of the Canada Southern, called my attention to complaints of wholesale robbery of cars. Goods consigned from Boston and New York to the West were found to be missing on the arrival of the cars at their destination. The various roads over which the cars passed had to pay pro rata the loss to the shippers."

The selection of Murray to run down this wholesale train robbing, affecting various railroads, indicates the reputation he had earned at that time as a clever detective. It was a hard case.

"I went to Boston and started over the route of the goods," said Murray. "I saw the cars go through unbroken to Black Rock at Buffalo, where customs officers and sealers inspected and resealed the cars, after which they went on West through Canada. After following the route of goods several times I became convinced that the robberies were committed at Black Rock, and that car sealers and railroad employees were in collusion. They, alone, could have the necessary knowledge or opportunity.

"Mose Mills was customs officer at the International Bridge at that time. I put up a job with Mills. We made a fake manifest showing boots, shoes, silks and clothing, making a fat car. We gave the number of the car and sent the manifest out as usual, and then had the car placed at the Old Bathurst Street yards at Black Rock. I got Police Captain Dixon, of old No. 5 station in Buffalo and two of his men, Joe Henderson and Andy Dayton, a brother of Mayor Dayton. A fence ran along by the tracks. We got outside the fence and lay in wait.

"I remember the night well. It was the night of July 12, 1874. It was blazing hot, breezeless, suffocating. We crouched alongside the fence for several hours. About one thirty o'clock in the morning we saw two lanterns dodging in and out among tthe trucks. Three fellows slipped along silently, looking for the car numbered in the fake manifest.

"'Here it is,' said one of them.

"They broke the seal, slid the door, climbed in and began to open the boxes. When they were well along with their

work we made a break for the car. Two of the three ran, with Dixon, Henderson, and Dayton after them. I grabbed the third fellow, a powerful giant in a cotton shirt and overalls.

"We grappled in the car and fell among the boxes. It was stifling hot in the box car and the water began to pour off us. I recognized the fellow as one of our road's employees named Sweetman, counted one of the huskiest men in the business. He tried to strangle me to death, tried it so deliberately I had to admire his coolness.

"I broke his hold and, when he tried to jam me behind the boxes where he could shove a big packing case on me and crush me, I forced him over by the car door. There we heaved and strained amid the big boxes. Neither spoke a word. It was a silent struggle in the darkness.

"I had stripped him naked in the first grapple of the fight. His cotton shirt and overalls had come off like the peeling of a banana. In his fury he tore my clothes off me and as we lurched toward the car door we fell out to the track below, two naked men, drenched with perspiration as if a tub of water had been emptied on us.

"We fell in a bunch and over we went on to the cinders and ballast and ties. There was no let up. Whichever man got the chance banged the other's head on the rails, jammed his face in the cinders or thumped his bare body on the ballast and ties. A free hand meant a stunning blow. We fought under the car and out on to the other tracks. All the while we were silent as two mutes. It was a case of which or t'other on top. He was worrying me. I was busy as I could be and I could not yell, and my gun was gone.

"We came to a full stop on the track between the rails beyond the car where our fight began. Neither of us was on top. We were a tangled bunch. As we lay straining, gasping, we heard a creaking and crunching. Instinctively both of us looked down the track. An engine had backed some cars in and they were bearing slowly, steadily down on us. Sweetman was a game man, he never flinched.

"'You first!' he gasped, as he strove to roll me nearest the approaching cars.

"My answer was a heave that turned him prone between the rails and there I held him, panting and desperate, not daring to relax my hold. Nearer and nearer came the cars. We could hear the grind of the flange. Sweetman writhed and strove to drag me down and force me over.

"'Give up?' I gasped.

"Sweetman shook his head and butted me full between the eyes. Together we reeled back on the track. The trucks of the nearest car were not thirty feet away, when Joe Henderson came running down the track, from the chase after the other two men, and dragged us back and snapped the handcuffs on Sweetman.

"Henderson had captured his man and the third escaped. I was somewhat disfigured and had to borrow some clothes, but I was mightily relieved when I saw the grim trucks of the freight cars go by and felt my bones safe beyond their reach.

"Sweetman was a partner of Slip Lewis. He was locked up and later his attorney made a fight on some technicality.

"But this stopped the car burglaries. The railroads thanked me, and thereafter goods went west and arrived at their destination unmolested."

When Murray returned to St. Thomas, after breaking up the car burglaries, he found complaints of train-

tapping and quickly located it at the west end of the road in the vicinity of Amherstburg, on the Canadian side of the mouth of the Detroit River. Cars laden with grain would lose bushels in transit, in some unknown way. The cars were weighed at Detroit to make sure of their cargo and when weighed later by the railroad they were many bushels lighter. Murray by a plan of frequent weighing of the cars, narrowed the territory where the thefts were committed to the vicinity of Amherstburg.

"The method employed by the train-tappers," said Murray, "was to crawl under a grain car at night, bore holes in the floor of the car with an auger, fill as many bags with grain as they could cart away, and then plug up the auger holes, and the car would bear no visible outward sign of having been robbed. Hundreds of bushels of grain would be stolen in this way. One night a single train was rifled of enough grain to make two wagonloads of filled bags.

"The quantity stolen in such a short time satisfied me that a gang of six or seven did the job, and that it was not the work of only one or two. So I nosed around looking for sixes or sevens who would be apt to engage in train-tapping. I was puzzled to learn what became of the grain, if the thieves were people in the vicinity, for I could find no trace of any sales of grain apart from the usual barter in crops by farmers.

"I arranged for a string of grain cars to be laid out on a siding, and the first night I spotted a figure sneak under some of the cars and bore holes and put in plugs. No attempt was made that night to steal any of the grain, and evidently the cars were being prepared for the next night's raid. I decided to follow the fellow to his home on the first night, and I did so. The trail led to the home of the five Thrashers, a father, mother, and three sons, whose constant companions were two fellows named Johnson and Mike Fox.

"I went back and got two constables, and told them to meet me at a point in the yards, where I would have a freight engine. I got a switch engine, but the constables failed to appear, so I went alone with the engineer, John Savina, by name, and the fireman. The engine stopped opposite the Thrashers, and I went out to the house to arrest the five people. I told the engineer and fireman to be prepared to come in a jiffy.

"I knocked at the door, and no one answered. I knocked again, and when no response came I shoved against the door and walked in.

"No one was in sight. I passed through the kitchen, and was about to enter a room opening off it when a tremendous screech came from the room. I stood and listened. It was like the high, quavering note of a calliope or steam piano. Without further ado I shoved open the door and entered.

"All I could see was a big, old-fashioned bed, surmounted by a mosquito net. Sitting upright in this bed was one of the ugliest women I ever saw in my life. She would glance at me, and then throw back her head and screech just like a coyote howls when he serenades the moon. She was Mrs. Thrasher. I bade her get up. She answered with a series of ear-splitting screeches. I spent about ten minutes trying to persuade her to get out of bed. When words were of no avail I laid hold of the mosquito netting and pulled it out of the way.

"'I am palsied!' shrieked Mrs.

Thrasher. 'I am paralyzed, and cannot be moved!'

"I approached the bed, and she dealt me such a thump on the head with her clenched hand as no paralytic ever was able to do. I sought to take her out of bed, but she buried herself in the bedclothes. So I simply took the tick, and pulled it off the bed, and was preparing to take the bed apart with her in it, when she sprang out and fled through the kitchen. I knew I could get her later.

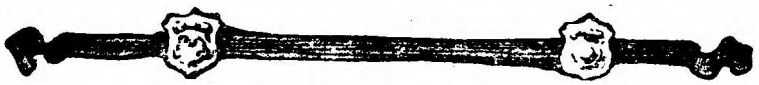
"The tick had seemed very heavy in my hands. I slit it open and found it filled with new boots and shoes. While I was emptying them out I heard a stealthy step behind me, and whirled around just in time to see Mrs. Thrasher swing an ax and aim it at me. I dodged and laid violent hands on Mrs. Thrasher's ankles, and landed her on the floor with a thud. Before she could regain the ax I just rolled her into the emptied tick, and fastened her by one of the tall bedposts, where she kicked and screeched, and probably well-nigh suffocated while I was searching the house.

"They had a number of bedticks all filled with wheat. They also had a big chimney that was unused. They had stuffed this chimney full of bags of wheat. Old man Thrasher came out of a closet, and I arrested him. The engine hands helped me take the plunder away. I went to the place of Mike Fox, near by, and arrested him after finding more of the stolen stuff on his premises. I also arrested Johnson, and took the whole batch before Magistrate George Gott, who also was Canadian customs officer, and he committed them to Sandwich jail for trial before Judge Horne, who sent them to Kingston Penitentiary for four years each.

"That broke up train-tapping. Mrs. Thrasher averred that after she was bagged in the tick she experienced a sensation similar to that caused by smiting the outside of the tick with the open hand. I suggested to her that perhaps she had wriggled and kicked so much as to bump herself against the bedpost.

"But she seemed to cling to the idea that she had been spanked soundly, not beaten or bruised, but simply spanked strenuously. What could a woman named Thrasher expect?"

TO BE CONTINUED



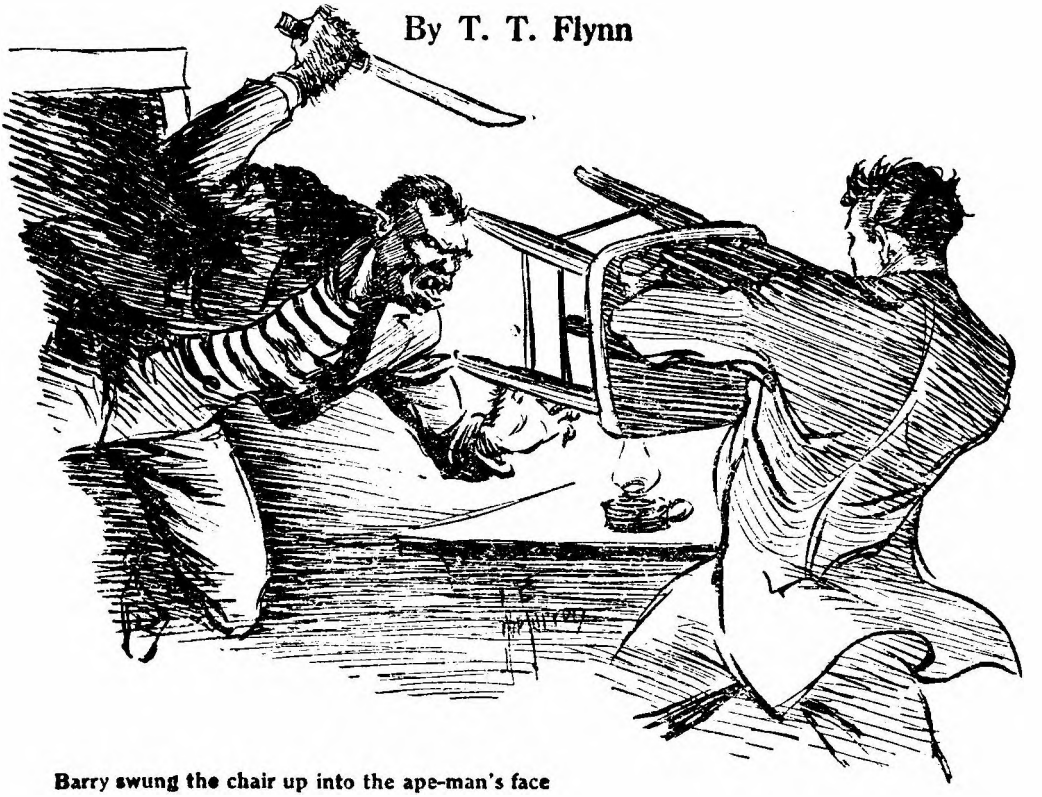
Dog Gets His Man

WITH a bullet in his head, Jepp, a gallant German police dog, chased and caused the capture of two of a quartet of stick-up men who had robbed his master.

Simon Noveck, proprietor of a Jersey City, New Jersey, drug store, found himself suddenly staring into the muzzle of a gun, one night recently, when four youths entered his store. Jepp sprang at them. One of the men shot, and the bullet plunged into Jepp's head, but he shook himself and gave chase, barking furiously. The barking attracted a crowd, and a policeman. Two of the holdup men were captured. Jepp did not quit until he collapsed. He was taken to a surgeon and treated.

The Red Menace

By T. T. Flynn



Barry swung the chair up into the ape-man's face

A Duel to the Death, With Barry's Penknife Pitted Against the Blade of the "Brotherhood's" Ape-Killer

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

BARRY SLOAN, adventurous young millionaire, on his way home after a trip to Europe, surprises a mysterious woman in his locked stateroom as his ship docks at New York.

At the point of a revolver the woman makes her escape, leaving behind her finger-prints on a safety razor blade. In New York Barry runs into his old army buddy, Dan Brady, secret service agent following Ivan Alexandranoff, a revolutionary.

Barry, in his hotel room, again encounters the mysterious woman in black. She had secreted valuable papers in Barry's valise, which she recovers by firing a gas-filled revolver at Barry when he tries to restrain her, leaving him unconscious. Dan is convinced that the woman, Olga Cassarova by name, is closely linked with the revolutionaries he is shadowing, and that she is an important agent of theirs in America.

Dan obtains fake revolutionary

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for September 28

credentials for Barry, who is to get in the good graces of the crowd.

CHAPTER VII

The Brotherhood

SHORTLY before noon the letter came, Barry tipped the boy who brought it to the door, and closed the door, and stared at it.

In stilted, crooked, penned writing, the envelope was addressed to Porter Brown, Editor, *The Brotherhood.* The flap of the envelope was loose. Barry took out the single sheet that formed the letter. In the same handwriting, in French, was written: "The bearer, Barry Sloan, is a friend. He can be trusted. Rene Garre."

That was all.

The telephone directory gave him the address of *The Brotherhood.* It was on lower Second Avenue. He crumpled the letter a little, rubbed it a trifle, to make it look as if he had carried it for a week or so, and then went down and took a taxi to the place.

Might as well get the thing started, he reflected as he leaned back and watched the cab turn into the heavy Fifth Avenue traffic.

The communistic paper, *The Brotherhood,* was in a fitting location—the second floor of a dingy flat in the middle of a lower Second Avenue block. After dismissing the cab at the corner, Barry looked for some minutes before finding it. He went past the spot and had to retrace his steps. A faded sign inside the hall entrance finally got him started right, and he went up to the second floor, and found the door that was his goal.

He came into a long room with two desks up at the front windows and tables, type fonts, a linotype, and a small power press farther back. A blackened railing separated that from a small space inside the door that served as a waiting room.

A bobbed-hair girl, smoking a cigarette, came to the railing and looked inquiringly at him.

"I have a letter here for Mr. Brown," Barry told her.

A man sitting at one of the desks heard the words, and looked up quickly, and then got to his feet and lumbered toward them.

He was fat, this man, exceedingly fat. In a greasy, unhealthy sort of way. The hair was almost gone from his head, and the shining dome of it capped a wide, greasy, moonlike face, with a great flattened nose, and little deep-set eyes that seemed never still. The deep, sagging, triple chin descended into a soiled collar, around which flamed a vivid red necktie. At first glance Barry knew that he could never like this man.

It seemed to Barry that the other looked at him suspiciously, with dislike. In a wheezing, high-pitched voice he asked: "You have a letter for me?"

"Yes, if you are Mr. Brown.

"I am. Let's see it." A fat, grimy hand thrust out for it.

Barry drew out the letter and laid it in the hand, and watched closely the other's face as he opened it and read. At first there was a frown, and tight-pressed lips. These gradually relaxed. The lips smoothed out.

Porter Brown looked up abruptly and surveyed Barry with a sharp glance.

"What you want?" he asked.

Barry managed a smile. "Nothing in particular. I brought that letter back with me the other day on the Leviathan and I thought that to-day would be as good a time as any to present it. Garre told me I might be able to do some

good while I was on this side. I'll only be here two or three months. At any rate I wanted to get acquainted and have some friendly spirits to talk to. The damned capitalists drive me crazy after listening to their smugness for a few days."

Porter Brown looked down at the letter again, and suddenly a smile spread across his greasy face. He held out a hand. "We are glad to see you, comrade," he said heartily. "Come in and have a seat. What is your name?"

Barry shook the hand—it felt cold and clammy. "Sloan," he told the man. "Barry Sloan is the name. I'm surprised you haven't heard of me before. Hasn't Garre mentioned me—or do you hear from him often?"

"The comrades coming and going bring word. Not often direct. And our ranks are growing all the time. One finds it hard to keep track. Come in—right in the gate there."

Barry was conducted to the desk near the front window, and given a hard, worn chair, and offered a cigar from a box. It seemed to be a good cigar too—the comrades evidently did themselves well at times—but he declined it and filled his pipe.

They talked, Barry sitting easily with one leg crossed over the other, Brown lolling back in his creaky chair, staring with his little deep-set eyes. And it was easy to spot the manner in which the man tried to drag out information. Barry followed the leads willingly, telling who he was, how he happened to become interested in communism in his college days, how his father had left him several millions, and the terrible asses most of the people he knew were. He grew quite earnest as he smashed a clenched fist in the palm of the other hand and declared fiercely that they would learn their lesson before long.

And Porter Brown nodded, and smiled broadly, and agreed with him. The man looked like a great bloated spiderous parasite of humanity as he sat there. A spreader of poison, of evil.

And after a time Barry looked at his expensive watch and, noting that it was lunch time, invited the other out to lunch with him.

The invitation was accepted. Barry called a taxi and took his man over to a better section of town, and set him down in a good eating place. The man ordered the best on the bill of fare, and plenty of it; made no apologies either. He seemed to regard Barry as a good find.

Just before they left the table he said: "There will be a meeting to-night that you must attend. Good comrades all. Come to this address, and knock five times on the ground floor door." He took out a business card of the paper and scrawled an address on the back of it.

"I will be there," Barry promised. "And, to make sure that every one knows I am all right, I wish you would send a cable to Rene Garre and ask him about me. One can't be too careful, you know." He said the last meaningly as he took out his wallet and handed Brown a twenty-dollar bill from it.

The bloated fingers closed about it quickly and the man nodded ponderously. "One can't," he agreed. "I know there is no use; but to make you and the others feel better I will do it."

Back on Second Avenue, in front of the office of the paper, Barry bid the other good-by for the time being, and then had the driver take him uptown. The figure of the man went with him all the way, bloated, unhealthy. He was practically sure that the twenty

would never be used for a cable; would instead remain right in Brown's pocket. Well—no matter, as long as it convinced them that he was all right.

It was thirty-five minutes after eight that evening when Barry's cab let him out at a street corner in the twenties, on Seventh Avenue. He walked to the right.

This was a neighborhood of colorless three-story walk-ups. At one time they had been fine houses; now they were flats, warrens of furnished rooms. Children scampered and played in the middle of the street, dimly lit by the curb lights. The numbers of the houses were hid by the darkness.

Barry walked along, trying to see them, without success. Finally, by the light of a curb lamp, he made out a figure seated on the steps of a house. He went to that man and held the card out and asked: "Can you tell me where this number is?"

The other took the pipe from his mouth—and Barry, looking at him directly for the first time, felt a shock of surprise. His memory was good. This tall, poorly dressed fellow with a dark beard that swept his chest, was no other than the man who had been leaning against the light at Seventh Avenue and Twenty-Fourth Street the day before. Dan Brady's pardner. There was no doubt in Barry's mind as he stared at the other.

The man paid little attention to him. He handed the card back and said casually: "I reckon it's the second door down that you want. I don't know the name there, but that's the number I'm pretty sure."

"Fine. Thanks," Barry said, taking the card back.

Out of the corner of his eye as he went down the sidewalk he saw the bearded figure looking carelessly the other way, apparently forgetting about him already. Barry smiled to himself, knowing that every point of his appearance had been taken in by the man. Dan might even have told him, and he might have sat there, knowing all the time what was up. In any event it was good to know that some one was close by, keeping an eye on things. There would be help if needed.

The second door down had an ascending flight of narrow stone steps with cast iron handrails on either side, and another flight of steps that led down into a sunken areaway. There was a door down there under the other steps—a door surrounded by dark shadows.

Barry went into them slowly, and knocked five distinct times on the door. Curtains were drawn tight. He could see no light, hear no sound. And no sound greeted his knocks. He tried again after a few moments of fruitless waiting.

Nothing seemed forthcoming from the second attempt either. But just as he was on the point of trying for a third time a beam of light shot through the door glass and illuminated his face and body. He blinked, suppressed a desire to turn away, and looked right into the light.

After a moment it winked off. The door opened. A voice with a heavy foreign accent said briskly: "Enter, comrade. Who is it you wish to see?"

"Is Comrade Brown here yet?" Barry asked as he went into a dark hallway. The light had been turned off, and he could not see a step before him; could not even see the man who had spoken to him.

"Yes. Back this way." And the light flashed on, boring a path down a long hall. As they followed it voices became audible. The unseen guide,

stopped at a door, turned the knob, and opened it. And light sprang out to meet them, conversation burbled in their ears, and the fetid smell of thick heavy cigarette smoke welled into their faces.

Barry walked into a dimly lighted room, where chairs and divans were disposed carelessly about, with a profusion of pillows; and some ten or fifteen persons were sitting and sprawling at their ease.

A large fat figure heaved itself up and waddled to meet him. A cold, clammy hand seized his and pumped it up and down; and the wheezy voice of Porter Brown rose loudly:

"Here is my friend I was telling you about. Step up and meet him, comrades. Mr. Barry Sloan, Comrade Sloan."

They crowded around, a mob of them, men and women, and Porter rolled their names off quickly. More than half were obviously foreign; some of them could speak very little English. None would have been at home at the Plaza. Most of the men needed shaves. The women's hair was all bobbed, most of them were smoking industriously.

Barry shook their hands heartily, spoke to one or two in French when they tried a word or so out on him, and wished that he had worn an older suit of clothes. He had neglected to shave, however.

The last person to come before him appeared with a kind of feline grace. It was Ivan Alexandranoff.

CHAPTER VIII

Confidence—or a Trap?

YES—it was the same medium-sized, thin, smooth-shaven man who had caused Dan Brady to cower back in the taxi so suddenly. A small, white, womanlike hand clasped his laxly; the thin, cruel mouth broadened in a bit of a smile.

"So you are the man from Rene Garre?" Ivan Alexandranoff asked softly.

"I am," said Barry.

"We are glad to see you here, comrade," the soft voice declared silkily. "We need good workers in this country. Need them badly. What did you do in France? What kind of work did Garre allot to you?"

All conversation had ceased; the whole roomful of people was listening to their words. Barry suddenly had the feeling that this man, this monster with the womanlike feet, the soft hands, and the silky voice was putting him on trial.

He had the feeling that Ivan Alexandranoff accepted no man's word for a thing, and relied on his own judgment. And in the dim light, with the memories of all that Dan Brady had told him fresh in his mind, Barry felt that the other was little less than a devil reincarnated in human flesh. A devil, a soft-voiced devil in human guise. And his answers and his action in the next few moments before this man would make him or break him.

"I listened to others better qualified than myself to talk," he said coolly. "And I helped them along with money, of which I happen to have some that was left me, and in between times I did odds and ends that Garre asked me to, and enjoyed myself as best I could."

The other looked fixedly at him. There was a burning quality about his eyes, a flaming, fanatical light that added to the Satanic air about him. It seemed to Barry that the hot eyes were boring right through him, seeking out the inner thoughts that he was trying to stifle and hide away; those thoughts of scorn, dislike, hatred for these

sappers at the foundations of the great destiny of the United States.

And the heavy, smoky little silence that seemed to crawl over the room was like a blanket of ill omen.

"Is that all you did?" Alexandranoff asked softly.

There was a greenish tinge to his eyes; green as the hat he had worn the day before; catlike, staring with feline watchfulness.

Barry thought as he had never thought before, groping desperately in his mind for the right thing to say. And it suddenly seemed to him that he had found it.

"Garre thought," he told the other, "that I could do more good talking among my rich friends than I could mixing in with certain other matters. He often pinched my arm and told me to leave risky matters to those who had wooden legs. They were not so likely to get hurt."

Some one laughed. Others laughed also. The ripple of mirth ran through them like a soothing wave. Ivan Alexandranoff smiled—and the tension was broken.

At that moment an inner door of the room opened. Olga Cassarova came into the room. She and Barry saw each other at the same moment. She stopped. Barry stiffened a little. He had thought over what would happen if a scene like this should occur, but when she had not appeared with the ones who were introduced, he had put her from his mind. Now—there she was.

"You!" she exclaimed.

And Barry, not to be outdone, exclaimed in just as startled a tone: "You! What are you doing here?"

She countered swiftly: "What are you doing here?"

Once more one of the fateful little silences had fallen over the room. All eyes were on them. Ivan Alexandranoff was staring from one to the other with swift, calculating glances.

"You know each other?" he asked softly.

"We have met," Barry answered swiftly. "Who is she?"

Olga came a little nearer him. Her face was slightly pale, or perhaps it was the natural color of her skin when she was not flushing in anger. Barry could not tell. All he knew was that she was extraordinarily beautiful as she stood there staring at him. Beautiful—as a poppy, from whence comes the opium that brings delusion and death.

Ivan said to Barry: "She is a loyal comrade from England. A credit to the cause. She has only been here a few days. Where was it you met? How is it you know each other, and yet do not know each other?"

Barry laughed suddenly, forced himself by sheer strength of will into a gale of laughter. "She broke into my room twice," he chortled. "I thought she was a common thief at first, and at last I did not know what she was. She had secreted some papers in my luggage, and I was curious and tried to keep them. She shot me with a gas gun, and when I went down she seized the papers and escaped. I almost called the police, and then thought better of it and let the matter drop. Now I find her here. Funny, is it not?" He wiped his eyes, still chuckling.

Olga said swiftly: "He is the man whose luggage I used to hide the papers. I did not know who he was. Some rich fool I thought, and used him as I saw fit."

Another ripple of laughter ran around the room. Even Ivan smiled again. And then he said to Barry, with formality which held a trace of

mockery: "May I present Miss Olga Cassarova, one of our Russian beauties, who is doing so much to help our cause in different parts of the world? Olga, the young man you treated so unkindly is Comrade Sloan, who comes to us with letters from Rene Garre, in Paris."

Barry bowed, and said smilingly as he did so: "If you had let me know on the ship I could have helped you."

She smiled joyously at him.

"I would have—if I had known. How much trouble it would have saved me. The papers were very important."

How different she was now from the girl who had faced him with a weapon, and without hesitation cut him down with poisoned gas. Barry smiled at her, and back of that smile told himself how much he hated her. Hated her the more because she was so beautiful and deceptive.

Porter Brown wheezed, "Everything's all right now. I vote we have a drink."

The vote was seconded on all sides, and the company drifted back to the cushions and seats it had occupied when Barry entered. Ivan sank back in a comfortable chair, like a cat relaxing after a seige at a mousehole. Olga caught Barry's arm and led him to a divan, piled with cushions.

"Now that I have first claim on you, I'll assert it," she chuckled.

"I was just going to say something like that," Barry answered gallantly. "I've been thinking about you ever since I came to—and wishing you could be a friend instead of an enemy. It's just like dreams coming true."

"If you wanted to be so friendly, why did you act so nasty about the letter?" she said in mock anger.

"I thought from the way things had been happening that there might be something in the papers that would be of use to the cause," he told her earnestly. "You never know what can be used, you know."

He sensed Ivan's eyes on them when he said that, and hoped that it had been heard and noted. She gave his arm a laughing tap. "I see you are a real comrade. I forgive you because of that. Here are the drinks. Let us forget the past and drink to the future."

That became the toast; they all drank to the future. And there was an undercurrent of grimness about the rite that impressed Barry. They all seemed to know something about the future—at least part of them did—and their earnestness and suppressed elation was like a cold dank wave of warning.

After that the talk soared to other things, fast and furious. They touched on the world revolution, the capitalists, abstract principles of Karl Marx, and half-baked ideas that came from their lips with the surety and force of the commandments of a religion.

Olga Cassarova was as bad as any of them. Barry kept her company as best he might, thinking all the time what a great pity it was that such a girl had been ruined in the muck of communism.

The gathering broke up around midnight.

"Can I see you home?" Barry asked Olga.

"Of course," she smiled. "I don't live very far from here. We can walk."

Barry did not get straight as to who owned the place, and lived there. He and Olga went out amid a chattering group, which said good night to no one in particular.

As the sweet cool night air struck his face it seemed that he was coming

up out of the sordid depths into wholesome life again. It hardly seemed that the things he had heard, and the things he knew to be connected with the people leaving, were possible, least of all in connection with this tall, graceful girl at his side.

They walked to the corner in silence. Barry broke it. "I didn't think I would see you tonight," he said, slowly, quite as if he had not said it before.

And just as slowly she answered too: "I never would have thought I would meet you again, this way."

They fell silent again. And while they were in that state, steps came up behind them, and the soft, silky voice of Alexandranoff spoke at Barry's elbow. "Comrade Sloan, I would like to see you to-morrow and have a talk with you."

"Of course," Barry answered quickly, facing the man.

The soft tones said, "I think we can work together very well."

It might have been imagination—but Barry thought he felt a slight tremor pass through the arm that lay in his. But when he darted a side glance at Olga, she was composed.

"Where do you want to see me?" Barry asked coolly.

"There is a restaurant on Second Avenue—the Russian Stag. Meet me there at seven in the evening. We will dine, and talk. Eh?"

"Fine," said Barry heartily.

"Au revoir, comrade. And take good care of our little Olga." Chuckling down in his throat, Ivan turned away and walked silently down Seventh Avenue.

The arm that lay in his tightened a little as Ivan spoke of her, and when the man was gone she said slowly, "I think we had better go."

Barry had the feeling as they walked along that some one was following them; but in the several times that he looked behind he saw nothing suspicious. He said nothing about it to Olga, and she apparently was not aware of it.

She lived in a row of houses much like the ones they had come from. Barry took her to the door, and stood there with his hat in his hand. Olga, in the dark shadows of the hallway, seemed to hesitate a moment. Then she said casually: "Ivan Alexandranoff usually finishes what he starts—at all costs." There was a queer note about her voice that, to Barry, sounded almost like a warning.

Wondering, he replied, "So I have heard."

She hesitated again, seemed about to say something, and then apparently thought better of it. Holding out her hand she said coolly, "Good night, comrade. May you be successful in whatever you undertake."

Her hand lay in his a moment, and then she was gone in the darkness of the hall. Barry turned away with the warm feel of her clasp still in his, and the thought of that warning note in her voice lurking back in his mind. Had he been mistaken about it?

He pondered that as he took a subway to Times Square, and a taxi from there to the hotel. He was still thinking about it when he put up the window of his room, turned out the light, and slipped under the covers.

CHAPTER IX

Harris on the Spot

"WE need," said the soft, silky voice of Ivan Alexandranoff, "money." His soft white hands put a cigarette to his lips, and

then took it away and tapped the ash into a cracked glass ash receiver that rested on the table between them.

Barry nodded slowly, and inhaled from his cigarette also. About them a haze of smoke drifted, and the murmur of voices came from closely set tables, packed with diners. A stringed orchestra thrummed an eerie Russian air; bloused Russian waiters hurried between the tables.

"Will five thousand dollars do you any good?" Barry asked quietly.

The other's thin, cruel mouth broadened in a smile. "It will," he said.

"I will give you a check to-morrow," Barry told him. "Isn't—Moscow coming through"

Ivan shrugged. "Slowly."

Barry suspected that he was lying. These people had no source of income that he could discover; they must be getting money from the Soviet. This demand was probably nothing more than a test to see if his principles went deeper than words. "Did Garre tell Porter how often I helped them with money?" he queried. And waited tensely for the answer.

Ivan smiled blandly. "No. He merely cabled that you were to be trusted, as far as he knew."

Barry relaxed inwardly. So they had looked him up, and the unknown Rene Garre had come through for him.

They were waiting for the dessert. In the first part of the meal little of importance had been said. Now Barry had the feeling that more was coming. He was not mistaken. Over the dessert Ivan said casually, "This is the second of March."

Barry nodded.

"You were in the army I believe?"

"Yes. I see you've been looking me up further."

Ivan merely smiled. "Good shot?"

"Pretty good."

The soft white fingers were slowly rolling the cigarette between them. The movement did not falter one whit as Ivan said casually: "There is a man back there who needs to be killed."

"What?"

"A man who needs to be killed." Ivan's cat-like eyes narrowed a trifle. "Have you any scruples against the shedding of blood to help the party?" he asked suavely.

Barry smiled with an effort, and hoped his mental condition did not show. "Of course not," he answered easily. "Have you?"

Ivan did not deem that worth answering, evidently. He stated: "It will be better for all concerned if you attend to this matter."

Barry's throat felt a little dry. "Where is the man?" he asked. "It is a man, isn't it?"

"Yes—this time."

"This time?"

"This time," said Ivan evenly, and in the subtle flow of his words there was a world of meaning; of horror and things indescribable if this man ever got into the seat of power.

Barry wondered whether Ivan could be quite sane, as he twisted in his chair and looked back toward the rear of the room. Tables were back there, and many people; he could not see any particular person that Ivan might have meant. Out of the corner of his mouth he asked: "Who?"

And Ivan, without moving his lips, said: "Under the picture of the stag painted on the wall. The single man. You have seen him before—no?"

Large landscapes had been painted along the walls. At one point near the rear a great antlered stag stood proudly staring out over a vast barren sweep of snow. Beneath, at a small table,

Barry saw a man. And his heart beat a little faster as their eyes met, and the other grinned sardonically. It was Harris, the short, grizzled man who had caused Olga Cassarova so much trouble on the Leviathan.

The cigar was absent; Harris was smoking a cigarette this time, and he seemed to find something humorous in the sight of Barry sitting there with Ivan Alexandranoff.

Barry looked back at Ivan, shaken a little. "Who is that man?" he demanded.

"You recognize him?"

"Yes. He was on the Leviathan. The one who bothered Olga."

"Ah—it is Olga now? You are good comrades already?"

Barry felt his cheeks flushing at the slur in the other's tones. But he checked his temper in time and merely nodded. "Who is the man?" he asked again. "Olga called him Harris. That's all I know about him."

Harris is a Scotland Yard man. A clever man; far too clever to be around us. He is assigned to the branch that harries our comrades in England, and he is over here for some reason connected with us. There was some trouble—Olga was connected with it distantly. Not enough for a charge—and she got out of the country before they could detain her. But Harris is here. We can—do without him."

Ivan snuffed his cigarette end and lighted another, and inhaled calmly. He might have been discussing the weather, or the quality of their dinner. His greenish-tinted eyes lingered on Barry narrowly.

Murder — murder — murder — murder—the words chanted through Barry's mind dully. Murder! He had been selected for murder by this fiend across the table, and if he refused he might as well give the whole thing up and clear out of town. He had half a notion to push back his chair, speak his mind, and walk out.

Thought of Dan Brady and the unknown Rene Garre in Paris stayed him. Dan was counting on him now—Rene Garre had put himself on record, vouched for him. If he blew up, other important plans would probably crash, Garre would be discredited—no telling what damage it would do. And for all he knew Harris might be killed anyway, and Ivan and his people go their mad way.

"When must it be done?" he asked in a steady voice that he could hardly believe was his own.

"To-night."

Barry ran the end of his tongue over his lips.

"I haven't a weapon," he stated.

Ivan smiled again. "I have one in my coat pocket. An automatic. Loaded. Ready to use. You press the trigger—and it is all over."

"But the noise. Suppose I am chased and caught?"

Ivan's voice cracked tensely. "One doesn't suppose when it is a question of the party." Then his voice became calm. "This is not that kind of a gun," he said. "It shoots—gas. Like Olga's. Only—this gas is different. One doesn't come back after one gets a whiff. Hold your breath, press the trigger, and then run. You will be safe."

Barry nodded.

Ivan picked up his napkin, fumbled at the side of his coat with it for a moment, and then held his hand under the edge of the table. "Here," he husked.

Barry took it, felt the hard shape of metal under the cloth of the napkin, and dropped it in his pocket.

Ivan lighted another cigarette. "I will leave," he said casually. "The rest is up to you. If you do this well, there will be bigger, better things. And the party does not forget its friends. Remember that." He inhaled, and his eyes narrowed. "Or its enemies," he finished softly. "Remember *that.*"

He pushed back his chair, stood up, nodded a farewell, and left the check for Barry to settle.

Barry did, mechanically, and sat there smoking, trying to think of the best way out of this mess. If he went to the police they would probably laugh at him, or at the most tell him they could do nothing. It was merely a question of his word against that of Ivan.

If Harris got free, he would be discredited. He looked over at that man, and met another sardonic smile. Harris had finished also, and now he got up and threaded a way to Barry's table, and dropped down in the chair that Ivan had vacated.

"So you were one of them after all?" he asked bluntly.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" Barry answered coolly.

Harris nodded, and drew an unlighted cigar from his coat pocket, and thrust it in the corner of his mouth. "What's a likely looking young fellow like you training with a mad bunch like that for?" he asked abruptly.

"What's it to you?" Barry demanded.

Harris shrugged. "Not a great deal. But men like me are the ones who arrest men like you, and sometimes we hate to have to take the trouble to do it. You don't look like one of them."

Barry said nothing.

"No," continued Harris, almost as if he was arguing with himself, "you don't look like one. I'd say on a guess that it was the girl that was attracting you. Olga Cassarova. She's a bad one."

Barry liked the man and his straight blunt talk, but at the same time he remembered that he was in character. "Never mind about Olga," he replied shortly.

Harris nodded. "It *is* her then. Well, you're over twenty-one. I wonder if you know what a bad egg Ivan Alexandranoff is."

"I'm going to take a taxi downtown, and then back uptown," said Barry. "Suppose you come along and tell me on the way. I'd like to listen to you."

Harris shifted the cigar to the other corner of his mouth and chuckled dryly. Bless me—what is this, an attempt to deal roughly with me?"

"In a taxi?"

Harris nodded. "It's been done. But I'll take a chance, young man. But I'm armed, and not afraid to shoot. Don't try anything queer with me. I warn you. I've dealt with your breed too long to take chances with them. Besides, it always makes me feel good when I can pay some of you back with your own medicine. Come on."

Barry liked him still more as they went out and climbed into the taxi that had been summoned. There was dirty snow in the gutter, and some of it banked around the steps leading up into the Russian Stag. Barry caught sight of a figure standing out against that snow—Ivan Alexandranoff, and beside him another man.

As their cab drew away from the curb that second man hurried out and leaped into a car waiting there. Through the back window Barry saw that car move out after them. And he faced forward with his heart thumping faster. They were being followed; his work was being checked. Perhaps

if he did not come through they both would be finished off by others.

It was a fantastic thought, but anything seemed possible after knowing Ivan Alexandranoff, hearing of his past deeds, and seeing some of the company that was at his beck and call. Fanatics all, who counted any act justified that helped to spread their doctrines and advance their cause.

"We're being followed," said Barry tensely.

Harris chuckled. "Haven't a bit of doubt of it."

"I'm supposed to kill you."

Harris made a quick movement that took him over to the other side of the seat—and twisted the coat pocket nearest Barry. "You're covered!" snapped Harris sharply. "I've a gun in this pocket!"

"Never mind," grunted Barry. "If I had been going to do it, you'd never have got a chance to use your gun. They gave me a gas gun. One puff and you're out."

"Oh-ho. I've seen them. Well, what's the story?"

"You seem to be bothering Ivan. I think he wants you out of the way, and wants to see if I measure up. I'm a new one to them."

"Thought so," breathed Harris. "The girl?"

"She started me. Not the way you think, however. I'm after their damned hides as well as you are. Unofficially, with a little discreet help from some who are official. Look here—why can't I pretend to have put you out of the way? If you disappear for two or three days, I'll tell them I bumped you off and pushed you in the river."

Harris slapped his leg with his free hand. "The very thing!" he exclaimed. "I have to go down to Washington for the third and fourth of March. Tomorrow and the next day. Inauguration of your President is on the fourth, and I have business at the embassy then. I would like to see Ivan Alexandranoff when he finds out that he's been taken in."

"I wouldn't," Barry said. "Let's not think about that part of it right now. Shall we go down to the docks?"

"Yes."

An order to the driver changed their destination. The taxi took them down to the somber, lonely East River docks. Barry paid him off at a street corner and they walked, their steps sounding hollow on the crunchy snow and frost.

It was a very simple matter—a lonely pier full of dark shadows—two of them going in where no eyes could see—and then a splash as Barry rolled a chunk of wood he found into the water—and then Barry coming out alone.

He had walked less than a block away from the spot when an automobile drew up at the curb. "Taxi?" the driver said.

"Yes. Take me to Times Square."

He was submerged in his own thoughts as they drove uptown. So much so that he hardly noticed when the car swerved in near the curb and almost stopped. But he sat up abruptly as the door opened and a figure slipped in with a cat-like movement.

"You worked fast," said the silky tones of Ivan Alexandranoff as he sank back in the seat and the car went on.

CHAPTER X

Disaster

BARRY'S pulse ticked faster as he answered. "Yes."

"What happened?"

Barry told him, trying to make it sound as plausible as possible.

"In the river, eh? How did you get Harris out on the pier?"

"I told him Olga was to meet me there."

Ivan laughed mirthlessly in the darkness. "Yes—that would bring him. You did well, comrade. Now give me the gun again. I will take care of it."

Barry handed the weapon back with relief. "I was going to Times Square," he said.

"We will go somewhere else," Ivan retorted. "You are in no hurry?"

"No—I guess not. Where do you want to go?"

"You will see, comrade. Rather I do not wish you to see right now. The place is a secret." He pulled down the side curtains, and the one in front, between them and the driver.

Barry frowned as they sat in pitch blackness, with no way of seeing what course the car was taking. Things were moving in a queer manner. How had the taxi picked him up so, and then gone straight to Ivan, and now was taking them both to an unknown destination without further orders? Where was that destination, and what was going to happen when they got there?

He put those questions to Ivan—and the man merely laughed softly.

They drove for full fifteen minutes, turning many times. Barry hadn't the slightest idea, after the first five minutes, where they might be. Finally the cab slowed, crept for a bit very slowly, and then stopped. The driver rapped on the glass.

"We have arrived," Ivan declared cheerfully, and opened the door and got out. Barry followed.

The night was dark, with no moon in sight. He could make out the black sides of buildings going up on every side, and could see that the car had driven into an enclosed court. Where, it was impossible to say.

"This way," said Ivan—and led the way to a brick wall, and opened a door. They went in a dark hall, down steps, along another hall, in a door, across a room, through another door, and another—and came into light.

Olga Cassarova stepped forward to meet them, smiling. "You are late," she said to Ivan.

He nodded, drawing off his overcoat. Barry's eyes, growing accustomed to the light, saw some six other people in the room, all of them men. One was Porter Brown, the fat, greasy editor of *The Brotherhood*. The other five were men whom Barry had not seen before and was glad he hadn't. They were not prepossessing. Ivan spoke in Russian.

Olga said to Barry with a smile: "Ivan seems to have accepted you at last, to bring you here."

"He should," Barry answered rather shortly. "I've just killed a man for him."

Her eyes opened wide, and she almost uttered an audible gasp. "Killed a man," she said under her breath. "You—?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Better ask him that. He seems to be running it. Are you glad?"

"I—I don't know." She turned to Ivan and spoke rapidly in Russian. Barry wished he knew the tongue. Her words were explained, however, when Ivan answered with one word. "Harris."

She laughed, shrugged, and whirled back to Barry light-heartedly. But when she looked at him it seemed that a change came into her eyes, although her tones did not show it. "So you,

got Harris out of the way?" she smiled.

Barry nodded dully, thinking of her as a witch, beautiful and deadly. What kind of a woman was it who could laugh at the news of a killing, could take joyfully the death of one who had never done her mortal harm?

She threw an arm about his waist and led him to a divan, and sat down beside him, resting her head on his shoulder.

Ivan took it in with a smile. "Our little Olga is a true comrade," he said. "She gives her favors to those who have shed blood for the cause."

"Ho, *kapoosta*," Olga retorted gaily. And if that was so, you would never escape me."

His thin, cruel mouth was still smiling when he went through a door into another room. But when he came back a few moments later he was not smiling. He went over to Barry and Olga, and looked down at them somberly.

At that moment there was a scuffle outside the door. A peculiar knock. Weapons appeared in the hands of the men as if by magic. One of them sprang to the door and jerked it open.

Two more men entered, carrying between them a limp body. Barry went cold at the sight. It was Dan Brady, unshaven, in his rags and tatters, head lolling over on one shoulder, unconscious, dead, or dying.

The door was closed and locked. A babel of voices broke out, through which the cold tones of Ivan Alexandranoff cut like a keen blade of steel. The two men who had brought Dan in answered his questions rapidly.

Olga translated. "They found him spying outside. They hit him over the head and brought him in. He will die now. Death to spies." She said the last loudly, and the men clustered about Dan nodded their heads.

Ivan spoke a curt word. Dan was lifted and carried to the divan where Barry and Olga had been sitting, and dumped there carelessly. Barry's heart went out to him; his buddy smashed into unconsciousness, and now facing death. And in the same breath he knew that he would offer up his own life before he would let them get away with it.

Ivan went to work on Dan as though he was anxious that nothing happen to him. There was a great bruise on top of the head, but after an examination of that and Dan's heart he announced that the blow had not been serious, and Dan would come around quickly. To help matters, water was dashed on Dan's face, and his wrists were worked about and chafed.

Presently he opened his eyes, and a few moments later struggled to a sitting posture, holding his head. Barry stepped back behind Olga. He didn't want Dan to see him first thing, and give him away with an exclamation of recognition.

There was no danger of that, however, when Dan looked up. He did it warily, estimatingly, and Barry knew that behind the vacant, unshaved face, and lowering eyes, the keen brain was working as usual.

"What happened?" Dan muttered.

Some one laughed. Ivan was in front of him, and he answered: "You made a mistake, fool."

Dan wagged his head and peered at the man. "Mistake?" he repeated unsteadily.

"Yes." Ivan held out his hand, and in his voice there was cold, cruel humor. "You are, I suppose, a beggar, a loafer?"

Dan nodded. "On the bum."

"Wearing a badge under your clothes?"

Dan looked up sharply, and then at the small badge in Ivan's hand. "Found it," he mumbled.

"Yes?" Ivan sneered. And then louder: "You fool! You blundering fool! I know! It will do you no good to lie. You were spying on us. Now, as a special favor, you are going to hell to spy. It is the fate of all fools." He laughed. The others laughed. Olga laughed.

Behind her Barry stood in ghastly silence, trying to think of something to do. He was one against nine—and they were all armed.

Ivan turned his head and searched out Barry, standing behind Olga's willowy form. "Comrade," he said, "come here."

Slowly Barry went to his side, and stood there before Dan. He was recognized, but Dan did not show the fact by so much as a twitching muscle. Barry stared down at him, throat dry, heart thumping away. He felt that they were both very near death. Nearer than they had ever been before, even in the days when they were fighting the Boche. Then a man had a chance. Now, as far as he could see, neither of them had any part of a chance. Certainly Dan hadn't, and when he ranged himself on Dan's side he wouldn't have either.

Ivan Alexandranoff's voice was like a purr, close to Barry's ear. "Comrade—you have done one good deed to-night. Done it well. You have earned the chance for another. This spy has earned death. You shall be the one to give it to him."

Barry shuddered in spite of himself, and strove for time. "Isn't one a night good enough?" he asked. "Give the job to some one else."

"No. You have earned it."

"I don't want it."

"How is this? You are faltering? You have a weak heart?" Ivan's tones were mocking. His thin face was smiling.

"Do you think so?"

"I should not, should I, after the way you killed the man Harris to-night?"

Dan's head came up, and his eyes searched out Barry's face. In that look was surprise, unbelief.

One chance for escape came to Barry. One small ray of hope. He acted on it at once. He shrugged. "I killed one man as you say. I might as well make it two. Especially since you've spoken out in front of him. Give me the gun. Better make it a real one this time, for there's no place to run and I suppose you want him killed inside the building.

"Yes. You suppose right." Ivan reached into the pocket of his coat and produced an automatic much like the one that Barry had handled earlier in the evening. However it felt heavier when he lifted it, and he knew that it was a regulation thirty-eight.

He caught sight of Olga's face as he took the weapon. It was sober, the eyes were wide, fastened on him with an intent stare.

The others were gathered around, looking at him, waiting. Dan was staring at the automatic as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes and ears. Barry, seeing that, knew that Dan almost believed that he was going to death at his old buddy's hands.

Dan's muscles tensed, too. Barry knew also that if the gun had been in the hands of any one else, Dan would be ready now to leap at him. He wondered if Dan would tackle him.

"Now," Ivan urged, smiling. "And have no thought for the noise. No sound can go out of here."

Barry clutched the butt of the pistol hard in his hand, rested his finger against the trigger, and faced them abruptly, his jaw thrust out.

"Hands up, every one!" he rapped out. "I'll kill!" He swept the blunt muzzle over them.

It talked better than his words. Hands shot up. The men stood rigid. Dan surged to his feet, crying: "Good boy, Barry! Now we've got 'em!"

Only Ivan Alexandranoff kept his hands down, in the pocket of his coat. And as he looked into the muzzle of Barry's automatic, he *laughed*.

There was something diabolic about it.

He spoke in shrill Russian.

The uplifted hands of the nearest man came down swiftly, and dived into his coat pocket. The other men followed suit.

Without hesitation Barry pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Frantically he jerked on the trigger, trying to stop the man nearest him. And all that followed was the hollow click of the falling hammer inside. The gun was empty.

CHAPTER XI

Taken Prisoners

IN that split-second of failure Barry tasted the bitter dregs of despair. And with despair came desperation, and reckless decision to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

"Fight 'em, Dan!" he cried out, and hurled himself at the big bearded man who stood between him and Ivan Alexandranoff.

Just as the other's hand came out of his coat pocket clutching an automatic, Barry whipped hard steel at his head. The soft *crunch* of steel against bone ended that matter. The other's hand went limp, and he tottered, and dropped like a great log to the floor.

Dan was not far behind him. With no weapon in his hand and no time to get one, he launched himself at the nearest man with clenched fists. An outflung arm tried to ward him off. Dan went through that arm as if it was not there and hooked two mighty smashes to the man's face. The fellow tottered. Dan set himself and swung again.

All that took time. The rest were not idle. Even as Barry stumbled over the falling body of the man he had felled, another hurled himself on him, grabbing at his arms, smothering his free actions.

Ivan leaped back. Olga stepped back, watching the affray with bright eyes. Her fists were clenched also, her breath coming in little gasps as she watched tensely for victory.

Two men closed in on Dan.

Ivan drew a second weapon from his pocket and waited tautly to see what was going to happen.

The end was inevitable. There were too many men. They smothered Dan and Barry by sheer weight of numbers. And even had they been able to get free, they would have had to pass Ivan Alexandranoff who guarded the door with a deadly weapon.

They didn't have a chance after the first mad rush. Fists and the ends of revolvers and automatics rained at them as they struggled with the men who piled around them. Dan went down first. Barry followed a moment later, and they lay limp there on the floor, the kicking thud of boots sounding hollowly against their sides.

There was no doubt that they would have been manhandled to death then and there by the furious communists if

Ivan had not called loudly in Russian; and when some did not heed, had not pushed in their midst with his drawn weapon and flung aside the men who did not obey.

They slunk back before the angry lash of his words, and stood there sullen and panting.

Four men were on the floor—Barry and Dan, and the two men they had put out. Olga got a pitcher of water in silence and administered to them all.

In five minutes every man had regained consciousness. Barry and Dan were bound tightly, hand and foot, as soon as they stirred. The other two men were lifted up into chairs and left there while Ivan spoke to Dan and Barry.

He stood before them for long seconds, eying them fixedly, his cruel mouth nothing but a gash across his face. There was something terrible about the man as he stood thus. It was not the man himself, but the things he suggested.

Finally he spoke; rather spat out: "Fool!"

Barry stared at him without emotion. If this was the end, he'd give them no more pleasure by asking for mercy or showing emotion. Dan seemed to have the same idea.

"Fool!" Ivan snarled again, at Barry. "You should have fired your gun at least once before you told me that you had killed a man with it!"

And then Barry remembered with chagrin that he had not bothered to fire the weapon off. He didn't quite understand how it worked, and had not thought that it would be necessary. Ivan had looked, seen, and known right away that he was lying about Harris. Why—he had known it when he asked Barry to kill Dan. The whole business had been staged to give amusement for the man. That was why he had furnished an empty gun to do it with. It had been a neat trap.

"First a fool—and then an ass!" Ivan sneered. "You had no more brains than to give yourself away. A spy! You shall get the same as the other!"

The toadlike figure of Brown, editor of *The Brotherhood,* had remained in the background during the mêlée. Now he waddled forward, his wide, greasy, moonlike face one mass of vicious rage, his little deep-set eyes blazing.

"Spy! Deceiver! Bourgeois!" he mouthed. "Liar! Capitalist! Death for you!" He shook a bloated fist in Barry's face. "It is such as you who grind the working man down, who take the bread out of his mouth and the roof from over his head! Liar! Deceiver!" The bloated form shook with the rage that seethed within it; one might easily imagine it as leaping on their helpless bodies and sucking their very life's blood out.

Olga Cassarova shoved him aside and stood before Barry, scornfully. "So you were a spy all the time?" she whipped out cuttingly.

He managed a wry smile for her. "So it seems," he agreed. "I'm happy to say I'd rather be a spy than ever become a convert to your rotten, lopsided ungodly creed of life. You are beautiful—and poisonous. I'd sooner be friendly with a snake than you."

Her face whitened with anger, and then flushed red.

"Bourgeois!" she hissed furiously, and there was no doubt that she considered it worse than a curse. Even as Barry's reason repudiated her, he was struck by her appeal, her beauty.

Ivan laughed at her, clapped her on the shoulder.

"Spoken like a true communist,

Olga," he remarked approvingly. "Would you like to have the pleasure of paying him back with lead or steel? A knife blade for a kiss! A fair exchange, is it not?" And he laughed softly.

Olga shrugged.

"I want nothing more to do with him," she said angrily. "I have seen all of him I can stand!"

"Give them both to Nicolas," a voice cried.

And a grin ran around the circle of men at the suggestion. Even Ivan grinned. The wheezing, high-pitched voice of Porter Brown urged shrilly: "Nicolas! The very thing! Turn them over to Nicolas and let him teach them a few ways to play! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" And the sagging triple chins and huge middle of the man shook with the unhealthy mirth that filled him.

"Ay, Nicolas," another voice agreed; and the rest fell in with the suggestion.

Barry shot a glance at Dan—and Dan gave a slight shake of his head and a bit of a shrug. Neither of them had the slightest idea who Nicolas might be, or what the purpose was of suggesting him. But there was a grim undercurrent to the mirth, a strata of maliciousness that was relentless and foreboding.

"You think it an apt suggestion, Olga?" Ivan asked her with a smile.

She hesitated, and then shrugged. "What does it matter what I think? I have no thoughts about them any more. I wipe them from my mind. I banish them."

Ivan agreed, and announced to the gathered men with finality: "Nicolas it shall be. He will be pleased to see them. Gag them, and we will gas them, and take them at once. Olga can go along and see how Nicolas receives them. She has heard of him, but has not seen him. It will do her little heart good." And he laughed again, with his cruel mouth, but not his eyes.

After that matters proceeded swiftly. Both were gagged, roughly, thoroughly. The people all went out of the room. One man remained, and he fired a gas pistol almost into their faces, and retired for a few moments.

Both Dan and Barry were in hazy unconsciousness when men came in with gas masks and carried them out into the fresh night air. They were loaded into a cab; men got in with them, and they drove off.

Neither ever remembered anything much about that ride. They began to come to when they were lowered over the side of a dark dock into a boat; and they heard the low sound of its motor driving the craft through water. After a time it stopped, and they were hauled roughly out, and lifted by powerful arms.

Voices spoke around them; after a little light shone brightly in their eyes. And that light stayed there while they came back from the shadowland where the gas had sent them.

Dan was the first to come into consciousness; and as he looked about and saw their surroundings his face grew pale and strained.

Barry, a few minutes later, saw the same thing.

They were in a dirty, dim inclosure, with uncovered beams over the ceiling and tar paper lining the walls. Two marine lanterns furnished the light. Several broken chairs were about, and a bunk, and a wooden shelf that evidently served as a table. Several tin plates and cups were on it, still dirty with the remains of the evening meal.

They were on the bunk, their backs propped against the wall. Ivan was

there, and the two men who had first captured Dan, and Olga Cassarova, looking like a fair white flower in a refuse heap.

It was the fourth man who brought a cold chill to Barry, and put a strained, haunted look on his face kin to the one on Dan's. A huge, hulking, shambling brute was this man, swaying in the middle of the floor like an ape in the center of its cage. His arms hung down almost to his knees, and the hands were as big as hams. Great gnarled fingers seemed claws, with a heavy growth of coarse black hair on their backs.

The head was small, far too small for that great body, and it sloped up at the top, narrow, gruesome. The nose was flattened, hideous, while the mouth was one wide gash, seemingly bare of teeth when it opened, save for three broken, snaggled tusks that came down from the upper jaw. The eyes were narrow, cunning.

This apparition was grinning at them with desire. It was a monster, just over the border line from a Mongolian idiot, probably extraordinarily cunning along certain lines, lacking all moral impulses. The story of the brain in the little pointed head was written on the face. Nicolas! No wonder they all had laughed at the suggestion. It would have been much better to have been shot outright.

Ivan Alexandranoff was puffing a cigarette with the womanlike, feline grace that hovered about him always. When he saw that Barry and Dan were in possession of their faculties he waved a hand and said briefly: "Gentlemen—Nicolas."

Nicolas ran a moist red tongue out of the corner of his mouth and leered at them.

Barry suppressed a shudder.

"We will leave you here with best wishes," Ivan told them silkily. "I wish I could stay and enjoy the end with you. I will be thinking of you, however. Olga—shall we go?"

"Yes—the quicker the better," she said quickly. "But before I go I want them to know how I feel about them, want them to know how I hate them!" Her voice rose at the last, and she advanced to Barry, and pushed her white face near his, and glared at him. "Bourgeois!" she spat out furiously. "Pig! Your time has come. I laugh at you. How I hate you!"

Her arms shot out and gripped his shoulders, and she shook him with all her strength, and dug something sharp into his shoulder. Abruptly she whirled away, and as she did so something dropped down behind Barry, and struck his bound hands, and lay there on the dirty quilt that covered the top of the bunk.

"Let us go!" she panted to Ivan.

"Yes," he agreed, smiling. "There are bigger things waiting than the disposal of these animals. Come." They went out.

Nicolas followed them.

Barry and Dan were left alone—and Barry's mind turned on the small object that had dropped behind his back.

CHAPTER XII

The Ape-Man's Knife

THE barely audible sound of the departing motor boat came to their ears.

Dan looked at Barry. He could not speak through his gag, but his look was eloquent. It asked what hope they had. And Barry was not able to give a comforting answer.

His fingers, behind his back, were

groping over the quilt, trying to find what it was that had dropped and struck them. It had bounced a little, and for some moments he was not able to locate it. Then finally he touched it, and got his fingers about it.

A great wave of hope ran through him. For unless he was vastly mistaken, he was feeling the smooth handle of a small penknife.

At first it did not seem possible; it could not be. And yet it was. He felt the two blades plainly. This then was what Olga Cassarova had dropped behind his back. This was what she had dug into his shoulder so cruelly. And his mind went into a whirl at the thought. Had she been trying to hurt him and dropped the knife by accident? Or was there another reason?

It was all mixed up. The only concrete thing about it was the knife itself. He tried to open one of the blades. The effort cost him his weak grip on the knife and it fell to the quilt again. He was just picking it up when shuffling steps sounded. The great shambling figure of Nicolas came through the doorway.

The monster stopped in the middle of the floor and looked at them. Just looked. His long pink tongue curled out of the corner of his great wide mouth and retreated again. He grinned horribly, showing the three dirty broken snags in the pinkish cavern that was his mouth.

Barry and Dan returned the stare, fascinated. It hardly seemed possible that such a sight could exist outside of the fairy tales they had read as children. Yet—there he was. Nicolas!

The fellow turned around and shambled out.

Barry groped for the knife.

Dan struggled with his bonds, unsuccessfully.

Barry got the knife, tried and tried again to get one of the blades open. His wrists were tied tightly. It was almost an impossible task.

Nicolas returned, shambling, carrying a long butcher's knife in one hand. He stared at them again, ran out his pink tongue, and then came toward them.

Cold sweat broke out on Barry's forehead. Quick death he could have faced with a grin. But this—

Nicolas lifted his eyes from them, and bent over them and groped along a shelf that was fastened up over the bunk. His body smelled unwholesome. After a moment he grunted, the first sound he had made, and turned back. The other hand held a worn whetstone now.

He sat down on a chair near the door and began to sharpen the knife. Back and forth the blade went—back and forth along the stone, and the sound of the steel against the rough stone rasped at their nerves—

Back and forth, back and forth—*scrrrrp—scrrrp—scrrrrp—*

Every few moments Nicolas would look at them—and the pinkish end of the tongue would curl out of the corner of his great wide mouth, and go in again.

Dan turned his head, and on his face was writ hopelessness, horror, and agony of spirit. Barry tried to smile at him, and made only a grimace because of the gag; wanted to speak words of comfort, and could not because of the gag. Behind his back, his fingers worked at the knife.

They were so cramped, they had so little room to move. And the singing seconds seemed to flow past, piling on each other with remorseless haste; marked out, mocked by that maddening *scrrrp scrrrp* of the steel.

The little pointed head bent over the ghoulish task with inhuman earnestness. And that tongue, that tongue coming out now and then like a lizard's, like a snake's—

Outside, somewhere along the river the deep dull note of a tug boat's whistle sounded suddenly. Out there was life, help, hope—that held no hope for them. The sluggish current of the river gurgled low, and the little lap of wavelets mocked against the side of the craft they were on.

His fingers got the knife just right—a thumbnail hooked into the indentation made for it—he started to lift the blade—and at that moment the chair by the door scraped and Nicolas got to his feet, and came toward them.

He came, shambling slowly, with the stone in one hand and the knife in the other. Came to Dan. There was no time to do anything. Barry watched with helpless horror.

The great hairy-backed fingers lifted the knife and laid the keen edge of the blade against Dan's throat. Dan pulled his head back until it was hard against the wall, and he could do nothing more. Rigid he sat there, and his eyes closed, and his lips moved just a little. It might have been a prayer. There was prayer in Barry's heart.

Nicolas pressed the knife in a little more. The skin bowed under it. A trifle more pressure and it would cut, and the hot blood pour forth, and Dan would start the long journey from whence there was no returning.

It was monstrous. Nicolas stood humped over the still bound form, his little eyes taking in every move of Dan's face, drinking in with cunning pleasure the emotions that he was torturing.

After a moment he made an inhuman little sound of pleasure in his throat, and took the knife away, and turned back to the chair. Once again the *scrrp, scrrrp, scrrrp* came in steady rhythm. Dan opened his eyes. A tremor ran through his body. He turned a waxen face toward Barry.

Barry got the blade open with a tug that broke the end of his finger nail.

Carefully, lest he make a movement that betray him, he reversed the knife and started a weak steady sawing against one of the cords.

It took time. Time made vivid and precious by the terrible need that was on them. A strand parted. He could feel it, and his heart leaped. Another strand—and his heart leaped again. And a third strand—and finally the ends parted and his wrists came free.

There was still the matter of his ankles. If he made so much as a move bending over, it would be caught by Nicolas, and his efforts be in vain. He relaxed his arms, bringing them a trifle farther apart, that the blood might go through them freely, and they be ready for use when he needed them.

Dan, looking sidewise at him, caught that movement, and looked closer and made out that Barry's wrists were apart. For a moment the astonishment was visible in his eyes, as they widened and fixed in a wondering stare. Then he dropped the lids and veiled it.

Barry winked at him. Dan winked back to show that he understood. So with that secret between them they waited.

Barry, racking his brains for some way that would give him free movement for a brief space, hit upon a way Without delay he acted. Leaning forward, pretending to look out of the doorway into the next, dark room, he made a sound behind the bag.

Nicolas wheeled like a flash, the knife ready in his hand. And Barry

continued to stare a moment before he sank back again.

The cunning eyes of the other saw. He swung around toward the dark doorway, and crouched. There was no sound. He crouched more, and crept forward. The rays of light from the lanterns winked and glittered against the shiny steel knife blade. The great hairy fingers clutched it tight, and the shambling form advanced into the doorway throwing a creeping shadow before it.

Barry bent over soundlessly and sawed frantically at the cords around his ankles. They parted. He turned to Dan. And in that moment some sound that he made reached the ears of Nicolas. He whirled about.

There was no time to think, to plan. Bloody death was a few paces away. The knife in his hand was no help at all. Barry flung it down beside Dan and leaped for the nearest chair.

His fingers closed upon it just as Nicolas leaped for him, making a sweeping gesture with the long knife.

Barry swung the chair up before him and shoved the four pointed legs into the other's face. There was no time to do anything else. It was the best move he could have made anyway.

The knife cut futilely against the hard wood. One leg caught Nicolas in the eye as he tried to duck, and that eye ceased to function.

He made uncanny, whining sounds in his throat. Barry, hearing them, knew that the other was a mute. He seemed all the more horrible because of the added deformity.

One of Nicolas's great hairy hands caught the legs of the chair and wrenched it from Barry's grasp with a mad heave; and hurled it to the end of the room. Barry darted to the door and seized the chair that stood there.

Nicolas dived at him again. Barry swung the chair with all his strength. A great hand thrust out, stopped it, caught it and wrenched hard. Barry held on. The other's strength was enormous; it almost lifted Barry off the floor.

Nicolas thrust out his long right arm and slashed at Barry's fingers. Barry let go of the chair and sprang back to save them. And Nicolas, spurred by one fixed idea in his distorted little brain, dropped the chair and lunged after him with the knife.

Barry caught a lamp from the wall socket and hurled it. Nicolas tried to duck. He was too late. The thing struck him full on the narrow sloping forehead. Glass shattered. He reeled back under the searing touch of hot glass. Animal rage filled his great form. The flame snuffed out before the lamp struck the floor and oil flowed from it.

Dan had the knife that Barry had dropped beside him, and was working frantically with it; but progress was slow. He had to watch helplessly the battle that raged before him.

Barry retreated through the doorway, into the dark room. He stumbled over a chair, and pushed it behind him just in time to foul the advance of Nicolas, who stumbled hard over it also, and went down on his hands and knees.

There was just enough light to see what had happened: to make out the knife and the knife hand on the floor as Nicolas scrambled there. Barry leaped in and stamped hard on the hand. Stamped again and again.

The puling sounds in the mute throat rose to a squeal, and the fingers jerked away from the knife. Barry kicked it away into the darkness and flung himself on the fellow, exulting.

And from that moment the darkness

became a mad shambles. Nicolas heaved to his feet, shaking Barry's weight from his back. The powerful hands groped around for a hold. And Barry slipped clear and hooked a fist to the other's face.

Back and forth, from one side of the dark room to the other they went, crashing over chairs and into a table that stood there. Barry was far from Nicolas's strength, but his body was whipcord, his muscles fast and tireless. He chopped in blows and sprang back; used his feet when the other got in too close.

Nicolas fell over a stove, and the pipe came down with a crash, and cluttered the floor, and both stumbled over it as they reeled and moved about.

A sweeping blow of a fist caught Barry's shoulder and spun him back against the wall. It gave, a door opened, and he reeled back out on the open deck. There, with one sweeping glance he saw the twinkling lights that spangled the other shore of the river, the dark deserted docks on their side, and black river water wandering past on its way to the sea. The craft they were on was a coal barge; the deck was flat and there was no railing.

Nicolas rushed out of the open doorway at him. Barry dodged, and planned for the end. Nicolas wheeled about, charged again, breath whistling angrily between his lips.

Barry backed toward the edge. Nicolas penned him in the corner of the deck, and closed in. There was no escape now, save leaping over into the river. Leaping, and leaving Dan alone with this fellow. Barry did not even think of that.

Nicolas rushed. Their bodies came together. Barry went down underneath helpless. The hairy-backed fingers clutched at his throat as he went down. Nicolas made savage sounds of victory in his throat.

The next moment they vanished in a grunt of surprise. Barry's back struck the planks heavily. And as it did so his hands caught the clothing of the other and gave a hard jerk. His right foot came up and shoved, and he turned a partial back somersault.

Off balance, taken by surprise, Nicolas went on over. His body shot out beyond the edge of the deck where they had fallen, fell twisting, and struck the dark water with a heavy splash. Barry leaped to his feet and stood panting.

Nicolas came up farther downstream, thrashing the water heavily with his arms, squealing in his throat. And then went down again, and came up and went down—and stayed down! The oily river flowed on with one more secret in its depths.

Barry turned his back on the sight.

CHAPTER XIII

A Cable From Garre

DAN was just cutting the cords about his ankles when Barry entered. He stood up anxiously, asking, "What happened?"

Still panting, Barry told him, and Dan's face fell into lines of relief. "My God, I never spent such a few minutes in all my life," he confessed. "I thought sure he'd get you, and it seemed like I couldn't do a thing with the lashings on my wrists."

"He was a bad one," Barry admitted. "If I hadn't of got the chance to stamp the knife out of his hand I guess he might have got me. One sweep—and it would have been all over."

Dan shrugged. "He's gone now, and I can't say I'm sorry. He should have been locked up years ago. I wonder where they ever got hold of him."

And Barry had to shake his head.

Dan's jaw thrust out grimly. "Alexandranoff made his big mistake this time. He let the bloody side of his nature get the best of him. I've got him now. He's done enough to-night to put him behind bars for some time. Enough to get him deported. I'll round up the lot of them that were there, if the chief O K's it."

"Ivan said something about bigger things waiting than the disposal of us," Barry reminded thoughtfully. "What do you suppose he could have meant by that?"

Dan looked thoughtful also.

"I forgot that," he admitted. "I'm glad you remembered. He has got something up his sleeve then. I've had a hunch for some time that they were hatching up something. And it must be pretty important to make Alexandranoff go away from us so quickly. I wonder if the girl is in it, too."

"She seems to be in everything. There are times when I look at her and can hardly believe that it's so."

Dan smiled wryly. "When you've been in this business as long as I have, you'll begin to believe everything and anything. The face and the figure never mean much. It's what's in the brain behind the face. That girl has a bad record in England. There was some question about her being mixed up in a scandal involving an M. P., just before she came over here. They weren't able to do anything about her, and she got out as soon as possible."

"I can't think why she should have left that knife."

Dan smiled. "Probably is a little sweet on you—if she left it on purpose. From the way she acted I'd say it was more of an accident. She was all excited. It might have slipped from her fingers and she never noticed it."

"That's probably what happened," Barry agreed. Down in his heart he wondered, however.

"Let's take a look around the place here and see if we can find anything incriminating, and then go ashore and get to work," Dan said briskly.

They searched both the rooms of the crude deck house, using the single lighted lantern that was left. The search disclosed nothing of much value aside from some radical and communistic literature of violent content. Dan wrapped the knife in some paper, stuffed the literature in his pockets, and then they lighted their way ashore with the lantern.

They were far upstream on the Brooklyn side; the wharf and neighborhood were deserted. After a walk of some distance they found an open drug store, and went in and called for a taxi.

The proprietor looked at them curiously, and indeed they were a strange sight—Dan looking like a bum, and Barry with soot-covered face and hands, and dirtied clothes. There was a rent in one trousers leg also where a nail had snagged it at some point in the fight.

But eventually the taxi came, and they were taken over to the other side of the river swiftly.

On the way Dan did a great deal of thinking.

"I don't think," he announced finally, "that we'd better call in the police. Ivan Alexandranoff thinks we are dead by now, and he'll be working more openly. He's seen me often—I was supposed to be a poor sort of a drifter who lived around some of the places where they hang out. Good material for their teachings. He tolerated me, and some of them would take time to talk and air their views. They got

pretty open after they saw I seemed to agree.

"Now, he knows I was a secret service agent; but, with me out of the way, they'll go ahead rapidly before some one else gets on their trail. I think, however, that they'll only trust the tried and true ones after their experience with me." He chuckled.

They stopped at the Grand Central and Barry washed himself and procured a pin for the rent in his trousers. Dan used the telephone while Barry was doing that.

"My partner's gone out to look for Alexandranoff," he said when he met Barry. "I think you and I had better start out looking also. He and I are the only two working on this case right now. If we can make contact with Alexandranoff we'll work from there and try to get next to what he's up to."

But getting contact with the man was easier said than done. The lot of them seemed to have dropped out of sight. Dan knew the place where Alexandranoff lived, and places where he usually might be found. He was at none of them. The office of *The Brotherhood* was black and deserted.

And one of the queer things about the business was that Dan had never seen any of the men who had been present when they were both exposed.

Olga had dropped out of sight also. An inquiry at her house brought the reply that she rented her room by the week, and attended to her own business. They had not seen her that evening and had no idea where she was. Furthermore, people had a lot of nerve coming around at midnight arousing a house.

"Guess we'll have to get the police to help us after all," Dan decided as they sat in the taxi they were hiring by the hour. "I want to have a look at that place where they caught me—but there's no use walking right back into a trap."

By 1 A.M. the necessary formalities had been gone through and they were riding toward the spot in an automobile that contained four detectives. Dan was armed now. Barry had no permit and so carried no gun.

Dan directed them to the spot, in the warehouse district near the river, and showed them how to enter the courtyard. The same dark walls were visible all around; and as the beams of light swept over the cement courtyard two big rats scurried across it and vanished.

They found the door fastened securely. A skeleton key opened it. Dan led the rush down the hall. They found nothing. No papers. No evidence. One or two basement rooms of the warehouse had been fitted up as living quarters for a janitor or watchman. He was gone, too. The radiators that had heated the place were growing cold.

"We might as well go," Dan growled finally. "They've flown the coop for good."

One of the detectives suggested: "Can't do much more to-night. Better let it lay till morning."

"Looks like we'll have to," Dan assented gloomily.

The telephone bell woke Barry at eight the next morning. It was Dan. "I'll give you a call at noon," Dan said. "This thing is looking funnier all the time. Everybody that we want to see has disappeared."

Noon came, and Dan's call. "Nothing yet," Dan reported. "It's looking queerer all the time. I'll call you at six."

"Isn't there anything I can do?" Barry asked.

"Nothing."

And at six Dan's voice was gloomier than ever.

"Not a thing," he said. "I've run myself raggedy."

"Have you tried to get Brown?"

"Down at *The Brotherhood?*"

"Yes."

"Had several men go around there and ask for him. The young lady is in the office, and she says he didn't show up to-day. His bed wasn't slept in last night, his landlady says."

"Olga hasn't been seen?"

"Not a sign of her."

"Funny," Barry murmured.

"Funny as a crutch," Dan agreed. "It's so funny that it's exciting. They can't all be hiding on account of us. If they were that worried they never would have left us on the barge with friend Nicolas. It's something else—that business that was more important than attending to us."

An idea struck Barry, and he mentioned it to Dan. "Have you thought that Brown might be in contact with his office? The girl there looked like a good communist. He would very likely have one around him."

"That's an idea, old son."

"And," continued Barry, warming to the idea, "have you thought that if the girl got a terribly important message for him, she would try to get hold of him at once?"

"I ought to be kicked for not thinking of it," Dan said with increasing eagerness.

"Try it."

"Think I will. What kind of a message would be likely to hook her—let's see—" Dan's voice trailed off and the wire went silent while he thought.

Barry was thinking also. Several ideas came up and he discarded them at once, as not being strong enough. Finally he pulled the phone closer and said, "Dan?"

"Yeah. I'm still here—just trying to work the old bean."

"How about telling her there's a cablegram from Paris for him, from Rene Garre?"

"Great!" exclaimed Dan—but on top of that he said dubiously: "He's been hooked once. He may be leery."

"May be just the opposite, too. It may put him between the devil and the deep sea, and he'll want to see the thing and find out what's in it. Anyway, we're working through the girl. She knows who Garre is, and she's the one who will act."

"I'll try and get hold of her," Dan stated briskly. "She may be in the office yet. I've seen lights up there after dark several times."

Barry hung up and waited by the phone, smoking. Fifteen minutes or so passed before Dan called back. At the first sound of his voice Barry knew that something good had happened.

"I called her," Dan said quickly. "She was there, and when I told her I was the cable office calling about a cable for Mr. Brown she got a little flustered. Asked me to read it. I told her there were some charges due, and it would have to be sent around and collected for and signed for. She said she would wait for it. Then I called the manager of the cable office and gave him the low-down. He's cooperating. A boy is going to start out in a few minutes with a fake cable that I will type on a sending blank. She'll never notice the difference."

"Can't I get in on this?" Barry asked hurriedly.

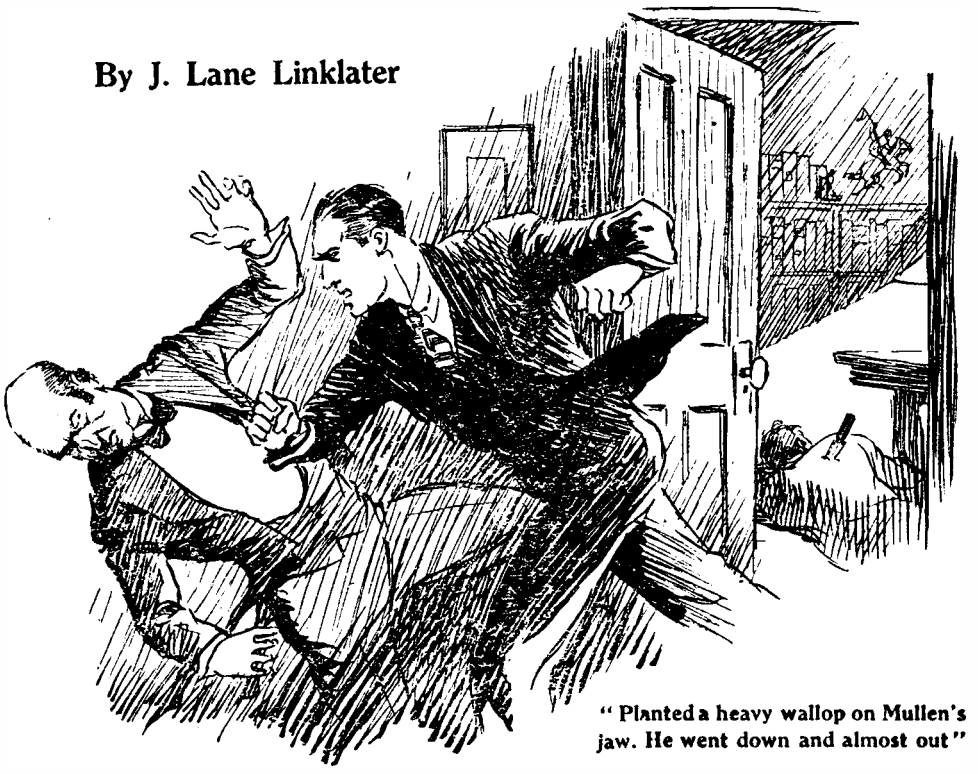
"I guess so. Meet me at the cable office as quick as you can."

"I'm on my way," Barry retorted.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Court Costs Saved

By J. Lane Linklater



"Planted a heavy wallop on Mullen's jaw. He went down and almost out"

Hugo Oakes Follows the Trail of a Blue Vase, a Buzzer, and a Twelve-Inch Plank to the Murderer of Philip Brandon

HUGO OAKES, eloquent defender of innocent victims of the law—they were always innocent—was sitting at his desk trying to roll a cigarette. The paper broke in the middle, and he poured the tobacco back in the can and started over again.

Oakes was short and pudgy, his face was round, and his domelike forehead reached vaguely back into the vast open spaces of a bald head. His stubby fingers fumbled desperately with the cigarette paper, and most of the tobacco used in the second attempt slid on the floor. Then the phone bell rang.

"Oakes speaking."

"I'm in a rooming house on the corner of Lambert and Frederick," said a man's voice. "Room 24. On the second floor. I want you to come up and see me right away."

Oakes swore vigorously. He could roll the English language around elegantly in a court room, but outside of it he talked just like any ordinary detective sergeant.

"Who are you? And what you think I am—a bell hop?"

"I've got to see you," the man's voice was urgent. "And I can't come

up to your office. You—you're my only chance."

"Well," Oakes weakened a little, "I might come, if you tell me who you are. Otherwise, absolutely no."

There was hesitation at the other end of the line.

"I'm Van Courtney," said the voice at last, in a very low tone.

Oakes's blue eyes fastened themselves on the mouthpiece with sudden interest. As a patron of the daily press, and, in addition, being professionally interested in murder, he knew that Van Courtney was a young man for whom the police had been searching assiduously for a day and a couple of nights.

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Oakes. "Have you got any money?"

"No, Mr. Oakes, but I—"

"Then you got the wrong number, ain't you?" he roared. "What kind of a double blanked idiot do I look like? Every cock-eyed, triple-blasted mutton-head in town that gets into trouble comes to me—if he ain't got any money. Say, I gotta eat. I gotta pay rent. I even gotta wear clothes. I'm through, I tell yer. I don't want no more customers unless they put money on the bar!"

There was stunned silence at the other end of the line. Hugo Oakes slowly recovered his breath.

"What room did you say you're in?" he asked, almost meekly, after a pause.

"Room 24, sir."

"Be there in about twenty minutes," said Oakes, and hung up the receiver. Then he grabbed his hat, which was sitting on a pile of papers, and turned to his stenographer.

"S'long, Mamie," he mumbled. "Try to stall the landlord off another week, will ye? I'll be back about noon."

"Sure," said Mamie.

When some one phoned a few minutes later, she told him that Mr. Oakes would be gone all day.

II

HUGO OAKES stood on the corner of Lambert and Frederick and looked up and down the dingy street. Then he ducked into the doorway of a cheap rooming house—featuring "Light Housekeeping Rooms" on a shabby window card at the entrance—and puffed up the stairs.

The second floor corridor was dirty, dark and deserted. Oakes found and knocked on the door of Room 24. No sound came from within, but in a few moments the door was opened slightly, then the opening was widened to permit the entrance of the lawyer.

Van Courtney was still a good-looking, pleasant-faced young man, in spite of his unshaved condition and the worry that had made him nervous and apprehensive.

Oakes sat down and began to roll a cigarette.

"How long you been here?" he asked.

"Since the night before last—the night of the murder."

"Where did you phone from when you called me?"

"There's a phone out in the hall. I watched my chance and phoned when there was no one about. It's pretty dark out in the hall anyway."

"You're a musical comedy actor, ain't you?" asked Oakes.

The young man nodded.

"Thought so. Saw you once. You ought to try something else."

Courtney ignored the insult; he was too anxious to get to business.

"I want you to find out who killed old Philip Brandon," he told Oakes.

"In the first place," Oakes objected brusquely, "the cops say *you* did. And

in the second place, I'm a lawyer, not a detective."

"In the first place," said the young man, "I didn't. And in the second place, I've heard that you're a pretty good detective yourself."

Oakes looked at Courtney somewhat more kindly. The young man's spirit appealed to him. Besides, that reference to his being a good detective hit him squarely on his one vanity. Hugo Oakes never hired a sleuth; if the defense of a client called for detective work, Oakes did it himself and kept down the overhead.

"Well," he said, in a somewhat more conciliatory tone, "I'll tell you what I've read about the case in the papers, and then you can fill in the story.

"Mullen, the butler at the Brandon place, was in his room about eleven o'clock the night before last, when the buzzer rang. This buzzer was operated from the library downstairs. Mullen assumed that old man Brandon wanted him, of course, and went down. He opened the library door just as you were coming out. According to Mullen, you were pale and scared. Right?"

"Sure," said Courtney.

"Then you planted a heavy wallop on Mullen's jaw, and he went down, and almost out. When he got up, you were gone. Right?"

"Sure," said Courtney.

"All right. Now Mullen goes into the library, and there is old Phil Brandon, lying on the floor, with a knife in his back. Right?"

"Guess so," said Courtney. "Of course, I wasn't there when Mullen went into the room, but that's an accurate description of Mr. Brandon as he was when I last saw him."

Oakes was still struggling with his cigarette. Much of the tobacco was scattered on his vest.

"The knife," Oakes went on, "was a hunting knife that Brandon usually kept around his desk. Right?"

"Yes," said Courtney. "I remember the knife."

"Good. So much for the evidence. Now for the motive. It is known that —up to a few weeks ago—you had an affair with Phil Brandon's niece, Beth, who lived with him, she being an orphan. But the old man busted it up. Not only that, but he was backing the company you were with, and he had you fired. Right?"

"Sure," said Courtney, somewhat bitterly. "He was a stubborn old fool. He tried to make a bum out of me."

"And he come near doing it," commented Oakes, placidly. "Anyhow, you ain't got any money to pay me with."

"Just as soon as I can make some money," urged the young man, "I'll pay—"

"Old stuff," said Oakes. "As I see it, you can't blame the cops for picking on you. The evidence points to you, and there's a good strong motive. And then you had to go and run away. What the devil did you do that for?"

Van Courtney hesitated.

"Say," he said, anxiously, "as my lawyer, anything I tell you is confidential, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Oakes, "as your lawyer, anything you tell me is confidential—even if you don't pay me a dime."

"Well," confided Courtney, "old Brandon didn't really succeed in separating Beth and me. Beth had a suite on the second floor—and I was up there all of that evening."

"What of it?" asked the lawyer blandly.

"Look here!" exclaimed Courtney angrily. "I refuse to let it be known that I was up in Beth's suite. Beth

means more to me than anything in the world."

"Tell me," said Oakes, "how you came to be in the library when the butler came down."

"Well, Beth and I had been talking it over, and we decided that I should make one more appeal to the old man. Beth said she thought he would be in the library, and when I went downstairs the door was slightly open and I could see a light. So I went in—and found him with a knife in his back."

"And then you started out just as Mullen came in," suggested Oakes.

"Yes. I knocked Mullen down, ran right back up to Beth's rooms and told her on no account to let it be known that I had spent the evening with her. Then I got out of the window and climbed down the ivy. I didn't tell her that her uncle was dead. I suppose," he added, moodily, "that she thinks I did it."

"You're crazy as a bed bug," stated Oakes. "You should have stayed right there and—"

"I tell you," Courtney retorted passionately, "I won't have it be known that I was with Beth. And if you abuse my confidence, I—I'll kill you!"

Oakes's left hand jerked a little, and the rest of his tobacco spilled on his knee.

"Gimme one of your cigarettes," he demanded petulantly.

"By the way," said Oakes, "was there any one else close to old Brandon who might help—some one who knew his affairs pretty well?"

"The best man," Courtney said promptly, "would be Henry Timmons. He was always friendly to me."

"Timmons—he was Brandon's lawyer, wasn't he?"

"Yes. His partner, too, in a small way."

"And Brandon had a secretary, didn't he?" asked Oakes reflectively.

Van Courtney scowled.

"Yes. Name is Warburton. No good."

Oakes drew on his cigarette like a man enjoying an unaccustomed luxury. Then he got up to go.

III

HUGO OAKES slipped away from the rooming house on Lambert and Frederick, took the street car out to the Biltmore Park district, and walked around to the Brandon mansion.

He had little trouble in obtaining an interview with Miss Beth Brandon, although Mullen, the butler, a large gentleman of distant manner, showed no great willingness in arranging it.

Beth Brandon was diminutive and pretty, about twenty, with a habit of looking at people with brown-eyed, round-eyed wonder. It was evident that her uncle had done rather better than his best in trying to shield her from the wiles of a wicked world. Yet, as sometimes happens, she was astonishing her friends by bearing up quite bravely under the weight of the tragedy that had so recently broken about her.

Oakes was sitting with her in a reception room across the hall from the library.

"Miss Brandon," he said, "I'm acting for Mr. Courtney."

Beth Brandon's eyes became liquid.

"You mean," she said, "that you know where he is?"

He nodded.

"But you're not going to tell, are you?" she said, anxiously. "I mean, you're not—you won't—you don't have to let the police know, do you?"

"Young lady," said Oakes, "did you ever hear of habeas corpus?"

"No, sir."

"Thought not," said Oakes largely. "Well, that's a legal term, originating way back in primogeniture, meaning that you don't have to tell the cops where a suspected man is—unless they know that you know."

"Oh!" said Miss Brandon, relieved.

"So you mustn't tell any one that I know," said Oakes.

"I'll do anything that you say," she assured him. "I'll do anything that will help Van."

"All right. Now, first thing I want to do is look over the library."

Beth Brandon led the way across the hall. Just as they were entering the library a young man came down the wide staircase in a great hurry; a handsome chap, blond, with cool gray eyes. He approached them.

"This is Mr. Oakes, Keith—Mr. Warburton," the young woman introduced them.

"Hello," said the lawyer gruffly.

"You should not have disturbed Miss Brandon," Warburton reproved him. "What is it you want?"

"I'm a lawyer, Mr. Warburton," said Oakes. "Young Courtney was a friend of mine. In his—er—absence, I am taking care of his affairs. The bulls are bound to pick him up sooner or later, so I thought I'd look around a little."

"I don't see why you should be permitted—"

"I want Mr. Oakes to do as he sees fit," interrupted Beth Brandon, with unusual spirit.

Warburton shrugged his shoulders. The young lady led the way into the library at once.

The library was a large room, and its appointments were the last word in comfort. It ran lengthwise along the side of the house.

"Where was Mr. Brandon lying when he was found?" asked Oakes.

Warburton pointed to a spot on the floor near one end of the library, toward the front of the house. Oakes strolled in that direction, gazed at the spot indicated, walked around and stopped before a curtained doorway. He stood still for a moment, and then pulled the curtain aside.

Behind the curtain was another small room, practically a continuation of the library. It was fitted up, apparently, as a small office.

He stepped into the room. Beth Brandon and Warburton followed him.

The blinds were drawn over the one window, a large one opening to the garden in front. Oakes released the blinds, and the room was flooded with light. He opened the window and leaned out. Then he ran his hand over the outer window ledge.

He closed the window, retreated into the room, sat down on the edge of a desk and glanced rapidly around the room. His gaze finally came to rest on a tall screen at one end of the room. He walked across the room and moved the screen, exposing a built-in safe.

"H'm. Ain't that rather a large safe for a house?"

"Yes," agreed Warburton, "but Mr. Brandon kept quite a lot of his personal effects—bonds, stocks and other documents—as well as his personal records right here."

"Have the contents of the safe been checked up since his death?"

"Not yet. We had planned to do that to-day. His lawyer, Mr. Timmons, is due here any minute. Mr. Timmons had expected to leave for a vacation, but, of course, this affair prevented."

"Who knew the combination of the safe?"

"Just three of us; Mr. Brandon himself, Miss Brandon, and me."

"Not Mr. Timmons?"

"Oh, no. As a matter of fact, no one has used the safe except Mr. Brandon and myself. Miss Brandon had the combination written on a slip of paper in case she wanted to get her jewelry out when neither of us were here. But I don't believe she's ever used it."

Oakes turned to the young woman.

"Have you?" he asked.

"No," said Beth Brandon. "I never had occasion to use it."

"And where is the slip of paper with the safe combination on it?"

"In my writing desk upstairs."

"Are you sure?" persisted Oakes.

"Well, I haven't paid any particular attention to it. The last time I remember seeing it was—well, perhaps ten days ago."

"You haven't seen it since then?"

"Not that I remember."

"If it ain't there now," Oakes blundered on, "then some one must have taken it, huh? Somebody that was up in your room, huh?"

Beth Brandon was visibly embarrassed.

"I suppose so," she admitted, "but—"

"I don't see the sense of this line of interrogation, Mr. Oakes," young Warburton interrupted, rather angrily. "There has never been even a suggestion that robbery was the motive."

Oakes gazed blandly at Warburton, and sighed gently. Then he walked back into the library proper. The others, not knowing what else to do, followed him.

Hugo Oakes, however, merely strolled around the room. Presently he reached for his hat, which he had left on a table.

"Well," he said, "I guess that's all—"

At that moment the library door was opened, and Mullen, the butler, was ushering in Mr. Henry Timmons, legal adviser of the late Philip Brandon.

Mr. Timmons, like Mr. Oakes, was a lawyer, but there the similarity ended. Mr. Timmons had a cheerful smile, a helpful manner, and a suavity of approach that was sadly lacking in Mr. Oakes. And Mr. Timmons was patently prosperous.

Warburton introduced the two.

"Ah!" smiled Timmons. "Of course I've heard of you, Mr. Oakes. We're in different branches of the law, of course, but I've heard many comments on your ability in court. Quite a detective, too, I understand."

"Oh, sure," Oakes acknowledged, none too graciously. "But I have a hell of a time paying my rent."

"You're interested in the Brandon matter?" inquired Timmons.

"Well, not much. Only I knew Van Courtney. Sorry for him. I figure he'll get pulled some of these days, and I want to go over the ground in advance."

Timmons shook his head gravely.

"Too bad!" he murmured. "I always rather liked Courtney. And somehow I can't quite reconcile myself to the idea that he's guilty. At any rate, you may count on me to help in any way possible—barring any actual thwarting of the ends of justice, of course."

"Fine!" said Oakes. "I guess you have business with Mr. Warburton, so I'll move. I might like to see you at your office this afternoon though."

"I'll be only too glad," said Timmons warmly. "I'll be there at three o'clock."

"Thanks," said Oakes.

Beth Brandon accompanied Oakes out to the hall. On the way they passed the butler.

"Oh, Mullen," Oakes called him.

"Yes, sir."

"On the night Mr. Brandon was bumped—that is, on the night your master was killed, you were in your room when the buzzer called you to the library, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, that buzzer; it isn't in the library proper, it's in that little office room adjoining the library, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yep. I thought I saw it there. Now, another thing. How long did it take you to get down to the library after your heard the buzzer?"

"Not long, sir. Less than a minute, I should say. You see, I was still dressed, sir. And Mr. Brandon was—well, he was inclined to be quite impatient. So I hurried."

"Less than a minute, eh?" Oakes pondered this a minute. "All right. That's all, Mullen."

The butler hurried away.

"Miss Brandon," said Oakes, in his most confidential tone, "can I meet you in the front garden in about fifteen minutes, where we won't be seen?"

"Yes, of course," said Beth Brandon readily. "Just the other side of the holly hedge would be a good place."

"Good. Keep it to yourself."

"Do you think—you haven't found anything, have you?" asked Beth Brandon eagerly.

"Found anything!" repeated Oakes. "Well, I know who did it, if that's anything."

"You know! Why, then there's nothing more to be done, is there?"

"Young lady," said Oakes, benevolently, "did you ever hear of *corpus delicti?*"

"No," confessed Miss Brandon.

"Thought not," said Oakes. "Well, that's a legal phrase that means that it's one thing to know who done it and something else again to prove it."

IV

WHEN Oakes called at the office of Henry Timmons at three o'clock in the afternoon he found that worthy gentleman in a very grave mood.

"I returned from the Brandon residence," said Timmons, "about an hour ago, and—"

"How much was missing?" asked Oakes absently.

Timmons looked at him, visibly startled.

"You knew of the theft?"

Oakes avoided a direct response.

"What did the check up show?" he countered.

"Over a hundred thousand missing from the safe—a hundred thousand in negotiable securities."

"Looks bad for that guy Warburton, don't it, him being the only one that used the safe, outside of old Brandon himself?"

"Well," said Timmons, thoughtfully, "it does, in a way. Yet he seemed to be as much surprised as I was when we discovered the shortage."

"Naturally, he would act surprised, wouldn't he?" suggested Oakes.

"Yes," agreed Timmons, "but not all of the suspicion falls on him, of course. You see, there was that slip of paper with the combination of the safe that was in the possession of Miss Brandon."

"Huh," said Oakes. "They ain't accusing her, are they?"

"No," Timmons assured him promptly. "But, you see, she can't produce the slip of paper. As soon as we

discovered the shortage we called the police, and Inspector Mallory came out at once to investigate. He requested that Miss Brandon bring him her copy of the safe combination. She went up to her rooms, but later came down and reported that she couldn't find it."

"Warburton had the run of the house," Oakes pointed out. "Maybe he went up there some time and removed it so as to divert suspicion from himself."

"That's a possibility," admitted Timmons, "and I imagine that the inspector will keep close watch on him, but I think Mallory is rather inclined to the theory that young Courtney was in Miss Brandon's rooms, and helped himself to the combination."

"Yeah. That's a nice theory. But can they prove it?"

"They may be able to, unfortunately. Miss Brandon, you see, says that she hasn't used her writing desk for several days. Well, there were fingerprints on the desk. Mallory had photographs taken of them. They'll be compared with prints already secured in Courtney's rooms."

"They'll be Courtney's prints, all right," commented Oakes abruptly.

"Eh?" Mr. Timmons was startled again; he had a right to be, with Oakes's suspicions apparently veering suddenly from one to the other.

"Well, don't you think so?" Oakes challenged.

"I confess that one is compelled to entertain the suspicion," admitted Timmons.

"At that," said Oakes, "I want to do what I can for Van Courtney. You're much better acquainted with the family than I am; will you give me the benefit of your knowledge?"

"Certainly," Timmons assured him.

"So far as you know, was there any one in the Brandon house at the time of the murder, except Brandon, his niece, and the servants?"

"Not so far as I know; unless, of course, the murderer was some one outside of the household."

"Is there any one you can think of who might have entered Miss Brandon's rooms for the purpose of taking the combination of the safe?"

"Well, as you say, Warburton might have done it, although I doubt it. And Van Courtney, too. But I know of no one else, except Miss Brandon's personal attendant."

Oakes was silent for a moment.

"Inspector Mallory, of course," he suggested, "went up to Miss Brandon's room after she had reported the loss of the combination. Did you go with him?"

"Well, yes," said Timmons, "but I could only stay a minute or two."

"Good. Then you can tell me—by the way, I suppose that was the first time that you ever saw Miss Brandon's suite?"

"Of course," said Timmons smiling.

"H'm. I was just wondering if any one could have gone into the room and located the slip of paper in the dark, or would he have needed a light—or perhaps you weren't in the room long enough to notice?"

"Now that you speak of it," said Timmons, "I should say that it might have been difficult in the dark—he might easily have knocked over the desk vase, for instance."

"Just what I thought," said Oakes. "You mean the blue vase that was on the desk?"

"Yes, the blue vase."

A bell rang, and Mr. Timmons reached for his telephone.

"Probably Inspector Mallory," he remarked as he lifted the receiver. "I

asked him to call me when he had checked those finger-prints."

Timmons's conversation with Mallory was brief.

"Says they're Courtney's prints, all right," he said over his shoulder.

"Let me talk with him when you get through," requested Oakes.

Oakes's relations with Inspector Mallory were the reverse of what might have been expected. They had often come in contact with each other, had been in conflict frequently. They berated each other in public, but liked and respected each other in private.

"Say, Mallory," said Oakes into the mouthpiece, "I'm representing young Courtney."

"Well, well! And who appointed you?"

"Why, Courtney did."

"What?" exploded Mallory. "Say, don't you know that guy's wanted for murder? Where is he?"

"Oh, I guess I can find him," said Oakes amiably.

"Listen," shouted Mallory heatedly, "you ain't got no right to conceal a man charged with murder. Now—"

"Aw, I know that," broke in Oakes. "I'll turn him over to you all right—when I'm ready."

"You better be ready quick!" was Mallory's fervent response.

"I'll have him ready for you to-night, inspector," Oakes promised him. "Come out to the Brandon residence to-night at eight o'clock and I'll introduce you to him."

Mallory stuttered incoherently for a few moments and then agreed.

"All right," he grumbled, "I'll be there. You're keeping all this under your hat, I hope, until we make the pinch?"

"Oh, sure," Oakes assured him. "Nobody knows about it yet, except me and Timmons—and Timmons only just found out."

"Well, be sure there ain't any slip-up," Mallory warned him, "or you'll get your fat carcass in a jam."

Oakes chuckled and hung up.

"You've known all this time," demanded the amazed Timmons, "where young Courtney is?"

"Oh, sure," Oakes admitted.

"I'm really a little disappointed," said Timmons. "I've always liked the boy, and it looks so bad for him that I was half hoping that he'd made his get-away."

"You might come out to the house to-night," suggested Oakes, "and see the finish."

"I'll be there," said Timmons gloomily.

"By the way," said Oakes, "I have to go to the post office. Is there a sub-station near here?"

"Right downstairs, off the main lobby," Timmons told him.

V

OAKES was at the Brandon residence in good time that evening—seven o'clock. But Inspector Mallory, anxious and impatient, was ahead of him.

"Glad you're here, inspector," Oakes greeted him. "I called you up again to get you to come early because I thought maybe we could look around a bit before—"

"Never mind looking around," growled Mallory. "Where you got this guy Courtney?"

"Oh, him," said Oakes. "He'll be here all right. But first let's look over the ground a little. Now, I expect to prove, sir, that the stealing of the securities was premeditated, but that the murder of Philip Brandon was not premeditated, nor was the bringing of

my client, Courtney, into the case, premeditated. I expect to prove, sir, that—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Mallory. "This ain't no court room, and I ain't no judge. If you got anything to show me go ahead."

"Oh, all right," agreed Oakes cheerfully.

He at once led the way from the library proper into the small office room immediately adjoining it, and switched on the lights, also released the blinds.

"Suppose we examine the window ledge," suggested Oakes, "since it's a possibility that the murderer came through the window."

"I've done that already," objected Mallory.

"Sure," said Oakes, "but let's look again—bring your flash light here."

Oakes raised the window, which was not fastened, and Mallory turned his light on the ledge outside.

"As you say," Oakes went on, "you examined this ledge before and you found no finger-prints nor footprints either."

Mallory grunted.

"In addition," Oakes continued, "there are a number of marks and indentations on the ledge, such as are often found on such ledges. They are of no particular significance. But if you will look very closely, inspector, you may observe two indentations just a trifle deeper than the others. They are somewhat square in nature, and they are almost a foot apart."

Oakes was using his court room manner, which always irritated Mallory.

"What about it?"

"Well, you have, of course, noted that outside the window there is a strip of garden—about four feet of garden between the window and the cement walk. There are no footprints on the soft garden soil. It is quite likely, therefore, that the murderer laid a plank across from the walk to the window—which is only about three feet from the ground—thus producing the indentations to which I have already referred."

"You're a smart guy," said Mallory. "But suppose the window was fastened from the inside."

"I was working on the theory," said Oakes modestly, "that it was some one more or less familiar with the premises; some one not necessarily an occupant of the house, but who was enough at home here to have unfastened the window earlier in the day."

"Go ahead," prompted Mallory.

"My theory," resumed Oakes, "was that the murderer crossed the plank, opened the window and entered, then opened the safe and was concluding his act of burglary when surprised by Philip Brandon himself. Knowing that Brandon would show no mercy to a thief, particularly one whom he had trusted, he grabbed the knife on the desk as Brandon, unsuspecting, was turning away for a moment, and stabbed him.

"He then returned to the office here, just as young Courtney came in the door from the hall. It occurred to him at once to implicate Courtney by simply ringing the buzzer, which would bring the butler down to discover Courtney in the room with Brandon's corpse.

"Thereupon he slipped out of the window, closed it, returned the plank to the place from which he had obtained it."

"Simple, the way you say it." Mallory was slightly sarcastic. "Did you find the plank?"

"A logical question, inspector,"

said Oakes. "Let's climb out of the window—you may step on the flower bed if you're too fat to jump."

They reached the walk outside of the window, and Oakes led the way around the corner of the house. About a half a dozen paces along the side of the house Oakes halted before some steps leading down into a section of the basement.

With the help of Mallory's flash light they walked down the steps and opened the basement door. In a corner, not far from the door, were a pile of cases, old tools and discarded odds and ends.

And, leaning against the pile was a twelve-inch board, between five and six feet long.

"That board," Oakes pointed out, "is about the right size. Let's examine it. Now—look out!"

The roof in that section of the basement was so low that the men had to bend over, and Mallory, who was the taller of the two, just escaped bumping his head against an over-hanging rafter.

Mallory played his flash light on the board.

"I have ascertained," said Oakes, "that this pile of stuff has not been disturbed for months. You will observe, however, that the thick layer of dust on the board has been disturbed very recently."

The inspector acknowledged the truth of this.

"The murderer," Oakes proceeded, "was careful to replace the board exactly where he found it. Of course, he was in quite a hurry, since his crime was already known. And it occurred to me that he might have done exactly what you almost did yourself—bumped his head against that rafter."

Mallory took the hint, and his flash light was directed upward. The rafter was rough, bristling with splinters. A few moments careful scrutiny revealed three light-colored hairs caught in the splinters.

The inspector proceeded to remove the hairs with the utmost care. He folded them in a piece of paper, and put them in his pocket.

"A good idea, that," Oakes approved, "but maybe it ain't necessary. What you want to do is find a man with an abrasion of some kind on top of his head—that bump probably did too much damage to be healed up by this time."

They left the basement, and returned to the library, where Oakes make himself comfortable in a chair.

"No, inspector," he repeated, "you won't need them hairs, because I already got a full description of your man."

Mallory glared at him.

"What you holding out on me now?"

Oakes took out his tobacco can and instituted an attempt to roll a cigarette.

"I hope I ain't trespassing on your territory, inspector, but this afternoon I made a few inquiries. I assumed that the man who stole the securities, being a man of intelligence, would not want to keep them in the vicinity of himself; he would very likely send them away."

"I know that much," asserted Mallory belligerently.

"Of course you do," Oakes soothed him. "The difference between you and me, inspector, was that you had your eye on the wrong man in the first place—and, believe me, that makes quite a difference. Anyhow, my little investigation disclosed that a package was mailed from Sub-station C, which is a station I have often used myself, yes-

terday morning. The clerk remembered it because the man who mailed it said that it contained hardware."

"We ain't looking for no hardware," Mallory put in.

"No, but even the clerk, who is not very intelligent, thought it funny that a package that size should weigh only two pounds, whereas if it were hardware it should weigh at least eight or ten."

"Do you know where it went?"

"Yeah. I know where it was sent, and I also know who sent it. The address on the package was Arthur Little, Little Springs. The peculiarity of the address, you see, also helped the memory of the clerk."

Mallory jotted down something in his notebook.

"A good idea, that," commented Oakes, "but it ain't necessary. I wired to Little Springs and asked for a description of this Arthur Little. I got the answer just before I came out here this evening."

He stuck his hand in his pocket and brought out a telegram, which he handed to Mallory.

"That," added Oakes, "is a description of Arthur Little. It is also a description of the man who mailed the package."

Mallory read the message. He stared thoughtfully into space for several moments. Then he jammed the yellow sheet savagely into his pocket.

Oakes was busy with his cigarette when they were joined by Keith Warburton and Henry Timmons. It was eight o'clock.

VI

INSPECTOR MALLORY, deep in a big chair, was in a strangely contemplative mood as he scrutinized the newcomers. He appeared to have forgotten that he was out to nab Van Courtney.

Warburton took a chair in sullen silence. Timmons drew up another chair, so that the four men were sitting in a circle.

"Where's Courtney?" queried Timmons.

"Oh, he'll be here soon," Oakes told him. "How are you?"

"A little tired," said Timmons. "I've needed a rest for some time, and this affair has been rather disturbing."

"You should take that little trip you planned," Oakes suggested.

"I thought I'd leave to-night," Timmons said.

"Got your transportation yet?"

"Transportation!" repeated Timmons, a trifle shocked. "Why, yes."

"Lemme see it," said Mallory. "I might want to get in touch with you."

Timmons fumbled in his pocket and handed Mallory an envelope. The inspector took out the strip.

"Lemme see it, too," genially requested Oakes, and he took it from Mallory.

It was a ticket to Little Springs.

Oakes reached over to hand it back to Timmons, but, apparently by accident, he lost his grip on it, and the envelope fluttered to the floor in front of Timmons.

Timmons stooped over to pick it up.

"Sorry!" apologized Oakes. "Careless of—why, that's a mighty nasty bruise you have on top of your dome, Mr. Timmons. How in the world did you get it?"

Timmons's hair was straw-colored; it was also quite sparse, so that when he bent over the bruise on his head was plainly visible. Instinctively his hand went up to his head.

"Oh, that! Why, I—er—caught it on the corner of—"

"Horsefeathers!" broke in Mallory harshly. "You got that down in the basement here when you bumped your head against a rafter a few minutes after you murdered Philip Brandon!"

Timmons sat quite still.

"Inspector," he managed to say at last, "you—you are joking!"

Inspector Mallory, however, was referring to the telegram that Oakes had secured from Little Springs.

"Timmons," said Mallory, "when were you at Little Springs last?"

"Eh?" stammered Timmons. "Why—er—I never—well, I was there a week or so a couple of months ago."

"You were known there as Arthur Little, were you not?"

Timmons was silent.

"Timmons," Mallory went on, "yesterday morning you mailed a package to Arthur Little at Little Springs. That package contained the securities stolen from Philip Brandon's safe by his murderer. I have the description of this Arthur Little, and the description fits you to the last detail."

"Wait a minute, inspector," put in Oakes in great good humor. "We mustn't be too hasty in convicting Mr. Timmons. There's an important detail that you appear to have overlooked."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Mallory testily.

"Miss Brandon's copy of the combination of the safe," remarked Oakes. "What happened to it? It seems to me that if you find the man that stole it, you will find the murderer."

Mallory moved in his chair uneasily.

"Now the point is established, I think," went on Oakes, "that he couldn't have entered the room and taken the slip of paper from the desk without running the risk of breaking the desk vase."

He turned cheerily to Timmons.

"That's so, isn't it? You said that a man in the dark looking for the slip of paper on the desk might easily have knocked over the desk vase, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Timmons, uncertainly.

"Good. The blue vase?"

"Yes, the blue vase."

"What's all this about a blue vase?" Mallory rumbled impatiently. "I never saw no blue vase."

"But Mr. Timmons did," said Oakes.

"I was up in Miss Brandon's room with Inspector Mallory for only a minute or two," said Timmons uneasily.

"Sure," said Oakes. "If you had been there longer you might have observed that the blue vase—which you saw when you took the slip of paper—had been removed!"

Timmons was too dazed to respond.

"You see, inspector," said Oakes, "there was a blue vase—before to-day. But this morning I had Miss Brandon remove and conceal it. You did not know about the vase, of course—but the man who stole the combination—and later killed Phil Brandon—did know about it."

The library door opened, and Van Courtney, accompanied by Beth Brandon, came in.

"Good evening. I'm Courtney," the young man told Inspector Mallory. "Did you want me?"

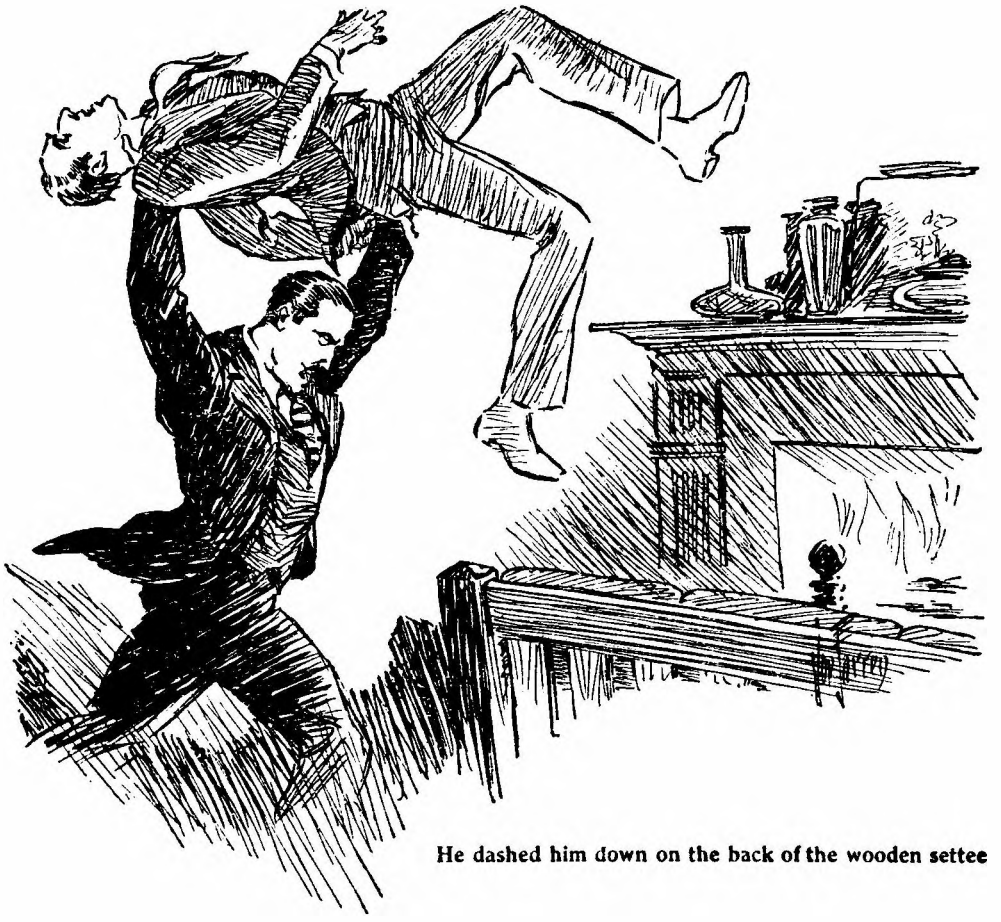
"You!" said Mallory. "No, I don't."

Courtney, smiling, walked over and shook hands with Hugo Oakes.

"It seems to me, Mr. Oakes," he said, "that you cheated yourself out of a good court case by your detective work."

"Maybe," said Oakes. "But you ain't got no money anyway. Saved myself court costs. Gimme one of your cigarettes."

The Death Dread



He dashed him down on the back of the wooden settee

Trent Matches His Wits Against a Maniac's Cunning and Solves the Riddle "Where is John Addison?"

By Wyndham Martyn

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

JOHN ADDISON, Wall Street financier, tells his daughter Cynthia to send the servants to bed and stay indoors. Later that night Cynthia and Roger Ellis, Addison's secretary and her fiancé, hear the dragging step of Hubbard, the lame butler.

Ellis investigates at once, but finds Hubbard in his room, at least the butler's voice answers his knock.

The next morning Addison is found

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on the floor of the library, his face horribly battered. He is not dead, and explains it was an accident. Hubbard has a black eye which he sullenly refuses to discuss. Inspector Edwards, who has been called, arrests and releases both Ellis and Hubbard. Mr. Jessup, an invalid; Nurse Gregory, Mrs. Addison and the other servants are all questioned. It was learned that Ellis had received a mysterious blackmail call from a woman the day before the attack, a call which he declines to explain.

Anthony Trent, millionaire sportsman, takes an interest in the case. Addison hires a corps of private detectives to guard his place. Trent smuggles his way into the house to continue his investigations. Addison and his wife quarrel, she accuses him of hitting the faithful Hubbard, and then replacing him with a detective-butler. He denies hitting the butler, saying it was the same person who attacked him. Night before Addison planned to return to New York he is again attacked and kidnaped from the locked library room. Trent visits a Robert Camplyn to run down a new clew.

Ellis tells Trent that he believes foreign powers are after financial secrets held by Addison, to use in swaying the stock market. Trent confides in Ellis, confessing that he was the fake Mr. Jessup outside the door of the library the night Addison disappeared, and he then demonstrates to all in the house that he can escape from the locked library. Trent learns from Mrs. Colton, Addison's first wife, that John Addison's cousin, Marcus North, is insane and his whereabouts unknown. Trent also learns from Hubbard that a fist greeted his queries at the library door the night of the first attack.

Clarke, city editor of a New York paper, tells Trent Marcus North murdered Addison's valet, but was saved on an insanity plea. Inspector Edwards criticizes Trent for his long absence, but capitulates when Trent shows him hollow pillars in front of the Addison home, pillars which enabled Addison's attacker to escape. Trent concentrates on Dr. Lang, ex-warden of the insane asylum where Marcus North was confined. He learns that North killed an attendant; that he was granted privileges by a crooked guard, and that North is still *alive!* The new warden is a drinker. Trent decides to cultivate him.

CHAPTER XV

"Repeat My Message"

TRENT knew the Haggerty type well. He was a tall heavy man, a huge eater, and he drank what he could get. A man, Trent judged, used to getting his own way, the sort of bully who would not be a coward. He easily dominated the men in the poolroom. It was felt by the new men at the asylum that Haggerty was an influence not to be antagonized. He boasted that Dr. Gross was his friend, and that while Gross held a big position Haggerty would not need a job. And since the discipline in such institutions as Deerfarm is strict and physicians no more fraternize with attendants than West Point officers with enlisted men, there was food for thought in Haggerty's braggings. What had Big Haggerty on Dr. Gross, who, in the absence of his father-in-law, was in charge?

Of Dr. Gross Trent had learned from Stephen Lang. The man did not stand high in his profession, and until recently had been always pressed for money. Lang supposed that his larger

salary and the greater opportunity for credit explained his new sedan and the better style in which he lived.

More was a better player than Trent had supposed. Haggerty's proficiency was probably the result of wasted opportunities and the long haunting of pool parlors. Trent could see he was a better player than he allowed More to know, the sort of player who arranges money matches and then exhibits a pace that surprises.

It was Big Haggerty's voice he listened to. It was not necessary to strain his ears much. The man had been drinking and was jovial. He told stories and jested with players at other tables. But there was a malicious tang to his repartee. A bad enemy, Trent decided. Few noticed Trent smoking a pipe in the shadows, and none noted his departure. He drove back to the Inn for a talk with Lang and left it at half an hour past midnight.

It was at one fifteen that the Haggerty door opened and the three matches united to show up More's round face. Apparently More was saying good night. When he was out of sight of the Haggerty home Trent pulled his car in to the side of the road and opened the door.

"Nothing much to report," More said, "except that he had the man from Worcester on the wire a few minutes ago. I couldn't hear the other end, but Haggerty said for him to keep quiet and everything would turn out all right. He told me it was a message from his brother about some trouble at Deerfarm. Haggerty is going to quit, he says. He's got some investments that are turning out pretty good down in Oklahoma."

"So have I," Trent said. "I bought acreage outside Tulsa ten years ago."

More started. It was as though Big Haggerty was at his side. "You kind of scared me for the moment," More admitted. "It was Haggerty speaking I thought."

"Mimicry is a gift which has been very useful to me," Trent said as he stopped a block from the Hillsbro House and let More out.

From his room at the Inn he called the Worcester number More had procured. A very great deal devolved upon his gift of mimicry now.

"This is Haggerty," he said. He could hear a sudden interest in the tone the man on the other end who said "Yes?"

"When I was talkin' to you awhile back there was fellers in the next room and I didn't want them to catch on it was a long distance an' I had to speak low. Did you get what I said? Better repeat."

"You said you'd call for me on Sunday morning at about seven, and advised me not to go outside."

"Okeh," Haggerty's voice answered. "Anything to say before I ring off?"

"Gross called me up not ten minutes ago. He's very nervous. He said that every minute of the six weeks I've been out might have been his ruin, and he isn't sure that my substitute quite fits my description." The unseen man laughed. There was something in it that made Trent shudder. "I told him that you did not think my substitute would last very long, as you had had to protect yourself from his homicidal violence. I hope you won't be too hasty, Haggerty. We want it to seem a natural death under the circumstances. I shall be waiting for you on Sunday at seven. Good-by."

When Trent was sitting in his chair again he sighed with relief. He would have been willing to bet a lot of money that he had been talking with Marcus

North. As always in his cases, Trent had come to a point where he had sufficient evidence to call in the police and be assured that they would not fail with the clews given to them.

And as usual, Trent decided to go through with the thing on his own account, to run into danger rather than share it, or, by giving the command to other men, to evade it altogether.

Before going to bed he routed More from his slumbers. "We are going to Worcester to-morrow. Take your samples and inspect new territory."

More enjoyed the prospect. He wished to engage in the hosiery business on a larger scale. He had found that women, no matter what their age or condition, were disinclined to sheathe their legs—of no matter what shape—in the coarser weaves of other days. And he liked these long motor trips with a fast yet safe driver.

More was in a contented mood. He had two sons in New Jersey, who had the makings of excellent salesmen, and a daughter soon to graduate from high school, where she had taken a business course and done well in it. More believed that stockings were the answer. He was amazed at the possibilities of it. He had enough money saved to embark on it without prejudicing his future. Effie should look after the business at home in Fort Lee and the boys should travel.

"What I want you to do," Trent said, breaking in on his meditations, "is to find out the address of the number you got last night. You may not find the number listed, and if so, there may be a rule against letting you have it."

"I'll get it," said More. "Stockings is better than candy. They all wear stockings, but lots of 'em have cut out the candy. I ought to know. I've got some new, sheer beige samples here that are winners." Mr. More plainly identified himself with the stocking industry. "A nice clean game." He spoke of it at length and with affection, but Anthony Trent had shut out his chatter and was reflecting on the possible danger of the enterprise he was now engaged in.

That Marcus North lay at the end of the trail was not, according to Trent's way of thinking, an unreasonable supposition. The Addisons had for years expected that a successful break would bring North to the old colonial house. Mrs. Addison now believed him dead. Trent knew very certainly that he was alive. He had come to Deerfarm for the double purpose of identifying him and then seeking to fasten Addison's disappearance on him and eventually of discovering whether the banker were alive or dead.

More's testimony that Haggerty had been disturbed at mention of his charge was not to be dismissed as likely to be wrong. More always understated things. He had seen Haggerty's agitation as evidenced by his hands, those hands which, if properly studied, can betray so much mental conflict. At first Haggerty had said that More could not see North. Then he had shown him a poor devil lying in the dim corner of a cell. It might or might not have been North.

It was the voice on the telephone, the cultured voice, speaking as though engaged in a conspiracy which had brought Trent to Worcester rather beyond the legal rate of speed. In this case, as in others, Trent had his own way of doing things. More timid men would have counselled an interview with Dr. Gross and a demand to see North. There were difficulties in the way. Legally he had no status. And the

law would defer to the physician's assertion that the patient could not be seen. Perhaps the delay would enable them to put North back and defeat Trent.

Dr. Lang had pointed out certain weaknesses in the Deerfarm system, the old buildings situated in ill-lighted grounds and the lack of efficient supervision. Lang had said no more of the Haggertys than More had been able to find out. These same Haggertys whose salary was less than five hundred a year had suddenly bought new automobiles and one of them a five-roomed bungalow. And Big Haggerty had boasted of his hold on the same Dr. Gross, of whom the unknown voice on the telephone had mentioned.

Some one had stolen fifty-eight thousand dollars from John Addison's safe. Split it three ways and there was an amount large enough to tempt venal men.

Luck had helped Marcus North. The new staff had not begun to function intelligently at the time of his escape. With the two Haggertys in control of his ward, and with Dr. Gross in command, the story they chose to tell was the one which would be believed. The best way out of the affair would be for the plotters to arrange a fictitious escape from which Marcus North would never suffer. It would be assumed that at last he had made good those many attempts. Perhaps Haggerty feared discovery ultimately and was even now preparing to get away. Why was he calling so early on the man in Worcester, and where did they propose to go?

How, Trent wondered, could he get into the room of Marcus North without instantly arousing his suspicions? If he had rightly guessed the identity of the man to whom he had spoken over the wire he was an extraordinarily dangerous person. He would expect no visitor but Haggerty, and the visit of a stranger would spell danger. And, since there could be no added punishment given him, why should he hesitate to kill? On the whole there was a time reasonably close when Trent would be able to tell whether his luck held. If North were indeed a paranoiac he might, in his wrath, be the most dangerous man Trent had ever tackled.

"Excuse me, Mr. Trent," More ventured to say. "But aren't you going a trifle fast?" He felt a successful future in hosiery was in danger.

Trent looked at the speedometer, which was creeping toward seventy. "Perhaps I am," he said, "but I'm in a hurry to get there. You'd better meet me at the Touraine at three. That will give you time enough, I expect."

"Fine," More exclaimed. A little later he talked of Deerfarm and its people. "I got an earful about the Haggertys last night from one of the new men," he volunteered. "A young feller from Jersey who used to work at the State Hospital at Skillman. Didn't like the uniform they had to wear there, although the pay was better. Got tired of being with epileptics all the time. This Jersey boy says it's all right here if you are a yesman to the Haggertys. Says they could get away with murder."

Trent listened without finding any of this information of added value to what he had picked up himself. It was not More alone who was engaged in finding out particulars about the conduct of Haggerty's ward, the number of attendants who passed through it by day and night, the visits of the physicians and so on. Trent did not think it would be difficult for the Haggertys to

maintain their supremacy. Attendants were chary of making complaints to superiors, Trent had learned, afraid to earn thereby a reputation for being trouble makers, which might hurt chances of advancement.

"This feller," More's monotonous voice went on, "says the Haggertys could get away with murder."

More had no idea that his principal believed himself to be on the trail of Marcus North. So far as More knew, Marcus North was even now lying bruised and beaten in the cell where he had seen him. It was not More's way to offer unnecessary advice, but it occurred to him that it might be as well to tell Trent more of what his young Jersey friend had confided. He set about it with what he considered great diplomacy.

"This feller from Skillman," he began, "Mannix is his name, says as far as he knows everything is okeh. I thought maybe that there'd be a patient missing." He saw that his driver was instantly aroused from his lack of interest.

"What's that?" Trent snapped.

"Mannix says that this North is still there, but that he won't be long unless Haggerty lets up on him."

More noticed that the brakes were applied and Trent ran his long car to the grass at the side of the paved road.

"I want to get this straight," Trent began. "You say North is still there. How do you know?"

"Mannix saw Haggerty beat him up cruel and throw him into that cell where I saw him. He described North. A big strong fine-looking man around fifty, and he put up some scrap, but Haggerty knows the tricks and he didn't have a chance. When Haggerty found Mannix had seen it he said, 'You saw him make a murderous attack on me.' Mannix said 'Sure.' He wasn't losing his first month's check."

"My God!" said Trent. "So that explains it." He let the clutch in with less than his ordinary care. "Don't talk," he commanded More. "I've some thinking to do."

There was no word said until Worcester was reached.

"The Touraine lobby at three," Trent said. Then he went into a telephone booth and called up Roger Ellis. There was nothing to report.

"There's something important for you to do," Trent told him. "I'm at the Touraine at Worcester. Get Barton Dayne and bring him up here at once. Wait in the hotel until I send for you. Let Perkins drive the limousine and he is to be in livery."

"What's happened?" Roger cried.

"Keep that excitement out of your voice," Trent commanded. "Not a thing so far, and I have no news for Mrs. Addison, but tell Cynthia not to go to bed to-night as usual. She's to remain up until we return."

"You're coming? Fine," Roger said. "It may take some time to get hold of Barnes."

"It's one o'clock, and I shan't need you yet. I imagine if you make Worcester by seven it will be all right. Bring the forty-eight automatic. I haven't a weapon of any sort. Don't try any short cuts. I don't want you to get mired. Good-by."

Watching him smoking cigarette after cigarette it would have been difficult for any one to realize how much Anthony Trent was on edge. This curious tension, beyond anything he had ever experienced even in the college days when he had been a Dartmouth star, always came to him before one of the great moments. He had felt

it in that big gallery in the Avenue Louise in Brussels when he had come to grips with Charles Garland. The same emotion had possessed him when, in Lower California, he had made his last fight with Bamp. It was a warning, he believed, that grave danger was ahead.

It was almost four when David More came to his side. On a piece of paper there was an address. Trent looked at it. Since he knew little of Worcester it was idle to ask directions.

"Take me there," he commanded.

More led him to a part of the city where fashionable residences were decaying. The people who had occupied them now, through the ability of the motor to conquer distance, lived in country homes.

"A party by the name of Mitchell subrented the studio at the top of the building," More said, and pointed out the skylight with the northern exposure. "I couldn't get any dope on him at all except that he hasn't been there a month yet. The telephone is not in his name."

The basement of the old house was used by a local express company. A small artificial flower concern occupied the first floor. The second was vacant and More had been shown over it. He had heard above him the footsteps of the tenant walking up and down the long room incessantly. It was just the place, Trent admitted, for one who wished to remain in hiding. A section given over to foreigners mainly. Italians manufactured artificial flowers and a Greek owned the express company. The house next door was unoccupied, covered with signs of agents offering it for sale at a bargain price. Some day the city would grow sufficiently to warrant these ill-kept streets being made into paved avenues and the sites of these houses used for apartment dwellings.

"Shall I wait?" More demanded. He pointed to a little cigar and candy store across the street. "I'll be in there. I feel like a sandwich and a cup of coffee."

"All right," Trent said. "That's a good idea."

More watched him ascend the steps and lose himself in the dim hallway. More shook his head. He didn't understand it at all. More wished he had dared ask what interest his employer had in this unknown Mitchell. Was it possible that Trent had this time made an error? If he thought Mitchell was North—and More felt reasonably certain he did—he was riding for a fall. Mannix had described North to him in such a way that he felt certain the paranoiac was back again at Deerfarm, if, indeed, he had ever escaped.

More went to the dingy shop opposite and found himself talking enthusiastically of silk stockings and their universal application to the needs of modern womanhood.

CHAPTER XVI

A Maniacal Attack

ANTHONY TRENT made the ascent of the stairs very quietly. He came to the door of the studio suite and noted that it was a very big and heavy one. Inside he could hear the tramping of footsteps. Backward and forward monotonously they came. It was when he judged the walker was at the farthest point from the door that Trent turned the handle. The door was locked or bolted—or both.

He knocked upon it briskly. The footsteps instantly ceased, and when Trent knocked again there was no further movement audible. The new oc-

cupant, therefore, did not welcome visitors and did not intend to investigate his caller. Trent was sure that the man had crept to the door and was listening.

Trent began to whistle as boys do, and then allowed his retreating footsteps to be heard. He made unnecessary noise in going down the stairs. As he had learned that there was no window in the studio other than the north light he did not fear observation as he crossed the street and bought the afternoon paper, some cigarettes and a box of matches. As he took no notice of More, the little man took his cue and did not speak.

It was half an hour later, and the man known as Mitchell had resumed his pacing the room when an acrid odor assailed his nose. Under the half inch space at the door and through the partly opened transom white smoke was curling. These old houses were fire traps he knew, and he flung the door open and rushed into the hallway, now smoke filled. He very soon found that a garbage pail with old papers and oily waste was the origin of the smoke. Carelessly they had been placed in the passage to which none need have access unless his business was with the tenant of the studio. A boy's practical joke.

He stamped out the slow fire and went back to his room, a big bare apartment almost all devoted to the studio. The bathroom and kitchenette were tiny in comparison. He locked the door and bolted it and then turned about and started back in alarm.

A stranger was sitting on the settee before the open fire, the only source of heat the place had, a man with a thin face and piercing eyes, well dressed.

"Fire is always alarming, isn't it?" the man remarked.

Anthony Trent was not sitting as carelessly free from fear of assault as the other imagined. He was ready at a sign of threatened assault to spring to his feet, the settee interposed between himself and the other.

He looked into the face of a man who would attract attention in any gathering. He had dark eyes, a well cut aquiline nose and his mouth was hidden by a mustache and his chin covered by an imperial. They were strange eyes, Trent thought, eyes that always gave the impression of a man who tried to see into the soul of another, steady unwavering eyes with a hint of sadness in them. Those unskilled in discerning character would have said it was almost a noble face and head. And yet Trent felt instinctively it was only a mask that concealed something abnormally cruel.

"You remind me," Trent said, "of that portrait of himself by Durer that hangs in the Prado at Madrid. You are holding your hands as he did."

"I am not interested in what I remind you of," said the other, and Trent noted that this was the man to whom he had spoken over the telephone. "I suppose you are one of the salesmen trying to sell me artists' supplies and choose this mode of attack. Clever, no doubt, but, as it happens, useless. How did you get in? You had no right."

"I walked in while you were stamping out a fire I had carefully prepared in a borrowed garbage can."

"What do you want?" the man asked, edging a little nearer.

"To talk to you."

"You don't know me."

"I know you're Marcus North. Is that enough?" Trent smiled. He presented the appearance of one wholly at his ease. "I'm here to take you back to Deerfarm."

"Are you one of the new staff?"

"No, just a man who indulges his hobby now and again. My hobby is to solve problems that other people cannot. Sometimes I fail, but not often."

"You will here," said the other. "I am not Marcus North."

"When I get you back to the charge of the Haggertys—your esteemed helpers—I shall find out. If I'm wrong I shall apologize very handsomely, bring you back here and admit I erred. If you are not Marcus North, call up the police and have me arrested."

Marcus North hesitated. To call up Haggerty would be of little use. Haggerty was hours distant. "Well," he said, "admitting I am North, what then? What am I to you?"

"Where's John Addison?"

Hate leaped for a moment from those strange eyes and then died down. "How should I know?" he retorted.

"Why shouldn't you? You knocked him out and dropped him down that pillar into the coal and you carried him across the cellar and put him in a car driven by Haggerty probably. You thought of this second attack only when you found you hadn't killed him the first time. Having fifty-eight thousand dollars you were able to buy Gross and the Haggertys and probably some more lesser fry. I talked to you on the phone at one twenty this A. M. You won't be able to reach Haggerty any more."

Trent admitted the tall man had extraordinary control of his emotions. When he saw that the game was up he still did not betray fear. The great Garland, too, had refused to be intimidated. Perhaps these two were spiritually akin. "I imitated his voice."

"I need proof of that," he said. "What do you want with me?"

"I want you to come back to Deerfarm."

"And as I unconditionally refuse, what do you propose to do?"

"Take you there." Trent saw that the moment for the struggle was at hand. But he had not anticipated that the settee into which he had sunk was old and its springs flaccid. It took him a second longer to get to his feet than he expected. And a second was all that Marcus North needed. Madness, or the rage that is its counterpart lent him amazing strength. He seized Trent by the back of his neck and the seat of his trousers and raised him aloft and then dashed him, not to the floor, but to the wooden back of the old settee. Never had Trent experienced such sudden and acute agony as when his spine met the oaken rail. He fell first on to the seat and then to the slab of stone by the open fire. His neck was twisted and his lips drawn back in agony. Staring down at him through those eyes was the homicidal spirit which had killed two men, possibly three, and perhaps was to kill Anthony Trent. North made no further effort to assault him. Instead he sat on the settee and leaned forward.

"A trick," he said, "and a very neat trick that I learned from Big Haggerty. He used it on patients who annoyed him when he wanted to snooze on duty. It takes a strong man to do it. It would be beyond you. The only thing against it is that the broken spine leaves the body numbed to pain." He kicked Trent savagely in the ribs. "What did you feel?" he demanded.

"Nothing," the man at his feet answered. "I cannot move."

"You'll live a long while," North said. "I need company and I shall be able to talk to you. So you solve problems that others cannot."

"I solved the Addison case," Trent said faintly.

"Oh, then your interest is merely academic, a pure rather than an applied science? I imagine, though, the world if it knew what had happened to you would concede your failure. Now I, my dear sir—may I have your name—I like to write epitaphs on those who meet their death at my hands."

"Anthony Trent."

"I have never heard of you. I see that pricks your pride. Well, my dear Mr. Trent, what I shall write about you? My Latin was never good so it must be an epitaph in the vernacular. So you seldom fail. I hate men of your sort, calm, certain and borne up by dreams of superiority. That was John's fault too. So you think I abducted him."

Trent's eyes were only half opened and his voice was fainter.

"You daren't admit it even when I can't move," he said.

"Dare not admit it," North cried. "There is nothing I dare not admit. Of course I did it. Why not? Was any man wronged as he wronged me? I went to that accursed Deerfarm only on the understanding that if I performed my rehearsed symptoms I was to be let out in a few years. My uncle and aunt swore it, and they have kept their word, but that yellow dog John persuaded them not to. He poured out money like water to have me kept there. He was always jealous of me because he loved Edith and so he betrayed me. I was justified in killing him. How he survived that first beating up I can't imagine."

"That was a clever idea," Trent said slowly, "to try to crush his head by slamming the heavy safe door on it. I suppose the door went back too stiffly to make a good job of it?"

"So you found that out," North commented. "How?"

"Bits of skin and hair adhering to the lower edge of the door, too far from the lock to attract the detectives."

"I am ingenious," North confessed. "I shall think up some new way to account for your injuries. Do you suffer? No. Well, I'll attend to that presently, but I want you to be able to listen to what I'm saying first. You are entitled to some consideration. I did not think any one would find out the pillar or the way I tried to kill him. It was John who discovered the pillar one day years and years ago. His pet cat was lost and he found it up in there. He must have forgotten or else thought it too narrow for adults.

"You are right in thinking I bought Haggerty and Gross. Gross jumped at the offer, because if he had not paid some debts there would have been scandal enough to make him lose his position. The little money that has been supplied to me from time to time has been well spent on the Haggertys.

"It may interest you to know that I am spending my future days in Mexico.

"I shall have ample funds. John was silly enough to have a good deal of money with him on that last occasion. It is all hidden. I do not trust my friends at Deerfarm entirely. They have been paid in part only." Marcus North laughed. "They believe that on Sunday morning they will watch me disinter this money. I get much amusement in disappointing people. I should like to see Big Haggerty's expression when he finds that I have fled."

"Is John Addison dead?" Trent asked feebly.

Again Marcus North laughed.

"John Addison is dead, or if not

dead yet, dying in extreme agony," he replied, "and I think that I have repaid him in full for his behavior to me." North flicked the ashes from his cigarette to Trent's face.

"I am wondering," he went on, "just how best to dispose of you. That fire idea of yours may be best. I defer to your superior skill in matters of this sort, but isn't it quite a usual stunt to dress a man in your position in my clothes and burn him into a state where no recognition is possible? That would solve the Haggerty business very admirably. He would know if he read of Edward Mitchell's death that all hope of getting his money had perished with me. I am disappointed that you do not beg for mercy. Why don't you see if you can save yourself? My heart may be more tender than you think." North kicked Trent again. "Damn you, don't you understand I'm talking to you?"

Trent's voice came with greater difficulty. "I'm getting cold," he whispered, "and your voice seems a long way off. I cannot hear what you are saying."

Marcus North bent lower. As he did so Trent's leg, which the other had believed paralyzed, shot up and the sharp-edged heel of his heavy walking shoes caught the other square in the mouth. North fell back with a cry and Trent was on him, pinning him down, before he could recover. Trent bound North with rags that were in a basket by the easel. His lips puffed up and two of the even, white teeth were missing.

"A very neat trick that I learned from Haggerty," Trent said when he sat down again. He was still in great pain, but he did not think he was badly injured, although at first he had believed his spine fractured. Both of North's kicks had hurt him severely, and the agony relieved his mind and made the torture almost welcome. He had simulated the symptoms that North seemed to expect, but the strength of the leg muscles, far superior to those of the strongest arm, had inflicted bad wounds. It was with great pain that Trent was able to stand erect and not betray his injury as he crossed the street. More, nervous at the length of time that had elapsed, was waiting anxiously. Together they returned to the studio.

"Gee! Mr. Trent," he said as he looked down at the unconscious man from whom Trent was taking the binding rags, "is he dead?"

"I don't think so," Trent answered. "He must have hit his head on those fire dogs as he fell."

More watched the other fill a glass with water and dissolve in it a white amorphous powder. "Listen," he said. "When he comes to, as I think he soon will, he is not to see me. I'll stand so his eyes don't take me in. With that black bag of yours and this glass in your hand he'll think you're a doctor. Offer him the glass and say, 'Take this and you'll feel better.' And see he takes it, More."

A little troubled, but his faith in Anthony Trent surviving it, More did as he was bid. What Trent had foretold came to pass. North gulped down the liquid and then gripped More's hand. "What have you given me?" he cried.

"Search me," More said innocently. The man on the floor tried to rise, but his efforts grew feebler and he sighed heavily and his eyes shut. It was either death or sleep, More thought uneasily. Supposing he had given the man some drug from whose effects he died?

"At the Touraine you will find Mr. Roger Ellis waiting for me. He has a Rolls limousine driven by a slim, tall-

ish man in livery whose name is Perkins. There's another man, too, in all probability. Bring them here at once, but don't tell them anything except that I am here. Arrange matters if you can so that no crowd collects when we carry this," Trent looked at the man at his feet, "out to the car."

Over Trent's physical injuries there triumphed that feeling which came to him at moments like these. He had attempted a task that had baffled the police and he was nearing its close. There was still danger ahead, but he had few qualms about that.

His moment came when half an hour later Roger Ellis and Barton Dayne entered.

"Mr. Marcus North," Trent said, pointing to the senseless man. "You must excuse him if he takes no notice of you; he is fatigued. He is the man who assaulted John Addison and abducted him. He very nearly got me, too. No, he is not dead—merely drugged."

"But surely he died years ago," Roger Ellis protested. "It can't be."

For a moment he was oppressed by the thought that Anthony Trent had made a fearful mistake.

"I was told so, too," Trent said. "We'll discuss that later. I want you two boys to carry him to the limousine. Fortunately, it's dark. More, see that the coast is clear and have the door open." He turned to Barton Dayne. "Here's the ticket for my car which is in the Touraine garage. You'd better follow us."

The unconscious Marcus North was placed in the big car without attracting attention. Near the hotel Dayne got out and presently joined them in Trent's coupé.

"If you miss us," Trent said to him, "make for Deerfarm and wait outside the Hillsbro Inn. We are returning North to the asylum from which he has several times escaped."

When the two cars were on the cross-country trip, Roger, now recovered from the shock of his astonishment, saw that his companion was in considerable pain.

"Yes," Trent admitted, "it hurts like the devil. The sleeping gentleman at your side lifted me up as though I weighed no more than Hubbard and dashed me down on the oak ridge of a settee. I suppose I instinctively gave a little turn as I fell and saved myself a cracked spine, but I'm wondering how long it will be before I can swing a golf club again. Roger, you never saw any one as quick as he was and I was expecting him to start something, too. I thought I'd be able to judge the time by his eyes, but they showed nothing." Trent reached for the speaking tube. "Speed up a bit, Evvyndike, old man, I want to get to Deerfarm as soon as possible. You'll have some slow driving later."

"But won't it hurt your back to go fast?" Roger asked.

"Yes, but it will hurt some one else more."

Roger sighed. "I don't understand you at all. You say your back is almost broken and yet you urge more speed over these rough roads. And the chauffeur, whose name is Perkins, you address familiarly as 'old man' and call him by another name."

"I called him by the name he was christened with. He is a Captain Evvyndike, formerly of the Royal Flying Corps. I looked him up and he was an ace all right. Incidentally he seems to be something of a genius in motor design and we are giving him a contract at the Zodiac works." Trent laughed a little. "There are lots of

things you don't understand, my dear Roger. That silent gentleman at your side into whose system I introduced—quite illegally I admit—enough dope to hold him for several hours yet, you don't appreciate his stunts. You've seen telephone men climb poles to fix things, I suppose? Well, you must have noticed how they fix climbing irons so that steel spikes dig into the wood and help the ascent? I thought so. Well, the silent passenger did it in reverse English. He fastened the steel spikes on the outside and he was able to climb up a hollow wooden pipe very easily. That reminds me. I must return those I unblushingly swiped from a gang at work on the road between Marion and Wareham. They were at lunch arguing on the merits of Schmelling and were mighty careless with their equipment. Years ago when North and Addison prowled about that old house they saw how ants, white ants I suppose, had eaten away a lot of the woodwork of the frame supporting the pillars. It is so rotten one could break it with the fingers. I had to bury what North and Addison brought down with them in their descent in case Edwards might find it. They must have seen the fungoid wood on the coal, but perhaps they thought that not unusual."

Roger Ellis looked at the drugged man at his side apprehensively. "Suppose he comes to?" he said.

"We'll have to put him out again," Trent said. "Just get this in your head, Roger. I'm not cruel and I don't like to hit a wounded man, but if ever you saw an adroit and evil brute he's leaning up against your shoulder now. He has made attempt after attempt to break out and has been within a few miles of the Addison house more than once. I suppose Addison knew of it. That's why he lied to his wife so that she shouldn't worry. I should have done the same thing to my wife."

"I suppose he really is mad?"

"I think so. His eyes, Roger, his eyes. They haunt me. At first you think them sad and then, in a moment, the devil jumps out of them at you and that helpless feeling gets you, the feeling that seems so unreasonable in dreams, the feeling that makes your steps lag when you want to escape. For seventeen years now he has been waiting until he could get at John Addison. He thinks Addison is responsible for keeping him there. I imagine he has a grievance; but his uncle and aunt who administered his estate are the ones to blame although he persists in saddling it on his cousin."

"You took an awful risk," Roger said. "Man, why didn't you get in the police or take me or Barton with you?"

"And give him the chance to say I was afraid of him?" Trent shook his head. "I prefer working alone." He thought of Camplyn's prophecy that his end would be one of violence. "Some day, Roger, I shall try it once too often—but I shall have had a run for my money."

"If this speed Perkins, or whatever his real name is, is taking, hurts you—and it does—why not slow down? I can take care of this bird in case he wakes up." Roger was concerned for his friend. "I don't see the need for this rush. Why?"

"I'm almost afraid to tell you. Thanks Heavens we've got a six-mile straightaway here and Evvyndike can let her out. I see Barton isn't going to be shaken off; he's right behind us."

It was two in the morning when the cars rolled into Hillsbro and stopped in the deep shadows thrown by the high

stone walls of the Deerfarm Asylum. Trent produced a key and opened a small door in the masonry.

"Just listen to me, boys," he said in a low voice. "I think it's a thousand to one against any one having seen us or that we shall fail in what I plan. Roger, you and Barton are to carry North. I'll go ahead and Evvyndike is to bring up the rear. More, you stay here with the cars. One thing more. You're all going to be shocked at what you see and hear, but all you have to do is to follow me and do as I direct. We are probably breaking the law—but that doesn't matter now."

The big men with their heavy burden followed Trent across a paved yard until they were stopped by another door to which Anthony Trent had the key. It was a door, as they could see, of a building that loomed out of the mist, high and reaching out of sight.

An indescribably fetid odor met them as they entered and grew stronger as they mounted stone steps and stood by a third door. This door led into a long ward dimly lighted. Beds on each side of it could be seen. The procession had gone no more than a few yards down this long room when an old man sat up suddenly near them and howled. Then other voices, some seemed sub-human, took up the alarm and the air was filled with horrors.

The two Haggertys seated by a table at the end of the ward had been discussing the absence of the usual long distance call from Worcester and wondering what had happened to North that he had not answered their call. The sudden noise was not an infrequent happening. They switched the lights on and prepared to quiet the noisy inmates.

Then they saw this strange procession advancing to them.

"What's this?" Big Haggerty blustered. He saw very well that the man they carried was Marcus North whose eyes were closed and whose face was bruised. Then Haggerty, realizing his danger, changed his manner swiftly and his more silent brother followed suit.

"Well, well," said Big Haggerty, "so you've found our wandering boy. Where did you pick him up this time?"

"That will come out later," Trent snapped.

Haggerty saw he had already met defeat, but he blustered.

"You've no right breaking in here," he cried. He did not know who these silent strangers were, but he knew that this was the moment for his escape. The money on which he had been depending must be sacrificed. There was no life of ease for him in Mexico now.

The man leading the intruders looked him in the eye.

"Take me to where the other one is," he commanded.

Haggerty led them to the little room which Mannix had described and unlocked it. Then he turned and ran. Trent made no effort to detain him. It would not be difficult for the police, later, to pick up Big Haggerty. Trent turned to Roger. "You're going to be terribly shocked," he said kindly. "He'll remember you and Perkins, so you two go in." Trent switched on the light and pulled aside the little shutter. On the floor in the corner they found John Addison.

He was delirious, wasted and terribly bruised, but did not resist them as they carried him to the limousine. There were tears in Roger's eyes at the lightness of the burden he carried.

"I dread to take him home," Roger repeated when they were under way. "What will Mrs. Addison say when she sees him!"

"Do you suppose she will feel anything but rapture at getting him again? I've got some brandy here that Dr. Lang gave me. I think we had better try a little on him."

John Addison awakened suddenly from the painful dreams that had tortured him for what seemed an eternity. He had left in his dreams a hell. Now he was in a place he knew. This was his own car. It was the back of Perkins's livery cap he could see. Beside him was Roger Ellis."

"Who is that man there?" he demanded, indicating Trent.

"Anthony Trent," Roger said. "He got you out of that living hell."

John Addison thought things over. "I remember," he said, at last. "I was afraid of him before. I do not understand even now." He dropped presently into a sleep so deep that Roger feared it was death. He did not wake up when the car stopped at the house of his physician who accompanied them home. "I'll tell you about it later, doctor," Trent said, in answer to his questions. "I want some of your professional skill when you're through with him."

When Addison had been carried to his room, Trent reclined on a big divan in the hall and buttressed himself with soft pillows. "Edwards will be here soon," he announced. "I saw him hold up Barton. That's his footstep."

Edwards had just learned how completely right McWalsh had been in his estimate of Anthony Trent and how very difficult it would be to explain his lack of understanding in the affair. Edwards hoped he might be able to salvage something for himself. And as Mallon was not with him he could afford to speak the truth.

"Mr. Trent," he said, "you win again and I guess in a day or two I'll be roasted by every paper in the world."

"I don't think so," Trent said. "You'd better arrest Dr. Herman Gross at Deerfarm and the two Haggertys—George and Michael. Also subpœna Edward Mannix who can tell a whole lot—and will. Here are a few facts to go on." Edwards listened rapturously. He saw himself again a man who need not fear ridicule. "But, Mr. Trent," he stammered, "this is all your doing."

"Edwards," Trent said, "my interest in it has already ceased. I got what I went after and if there's any flotsam and jetsam you're interested in, grab it quickly. David Moré, outside in my car can help you, but don't let Mallon begin hectoring him or he'll shut up."

"You can trust me, Mr. Trent," Edwards said gratefully. "Do you think they could have kept Mr. Addison there for long?"

"Only until he died. That might have been a week or less. After that the death of Marcus North would have been announced."

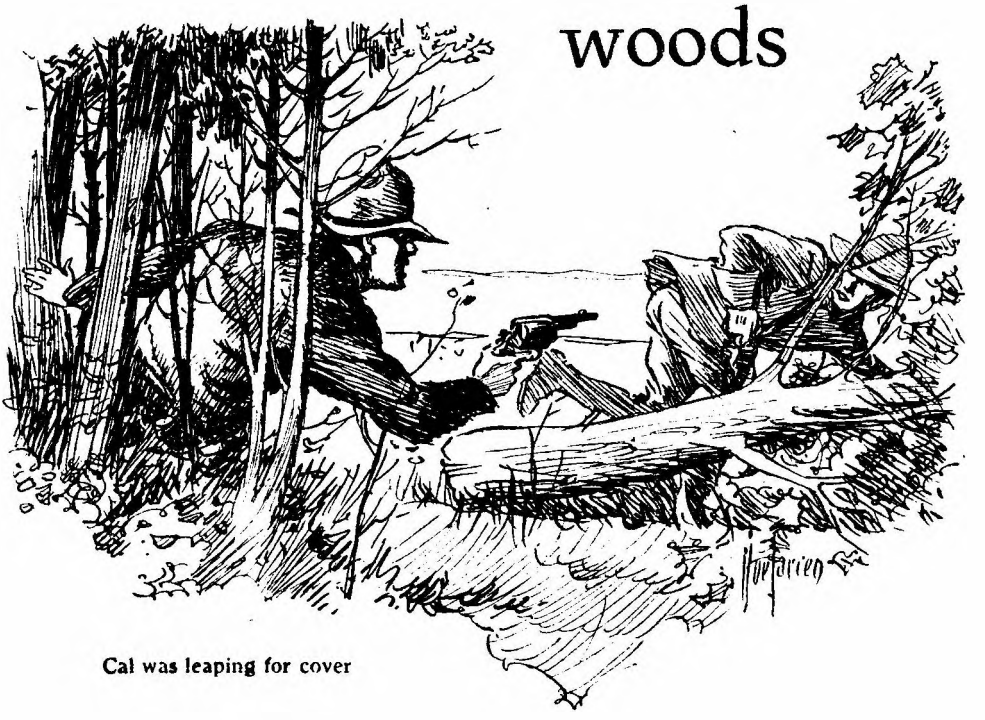
The physician came downstairs presently. "Mr. Addison will pull through," he declared happily. "He has just fallen into a deep, natural sleep."

"Why your spine didn't crack I don't know," he said when he examined it. "You must be suffering." As he spoke the clock chimed out seven strokes and his patient laughed aloud. Barton looked at him anxiously. Was Trent, the strong man, giving way? Was this hysteria?

"No," Trent said, reading his thought, "I'm not mad. Just about now, North is waking up and recognizing old landmarks and the old indescribable odors." Trent laughed again.

THE END

The Clew of the Cotton-woods



Cal was leaping for cover

What did Four Pieces of Useless Timber Have to do With Calhoun's Solution of the Levee Murder?

By Edward Parrish Ware

THE building of the Maple Bend Levee, in the Arkansas Sunken Lands, had been a gigantic undertaking, but it had been eminently worth while. Five miles of levee had resulted in the reclamation of three-hundred thousand acres of virgin soil. Land that soon would bloom under the minstrations of hardy homesteaders.

The last lap of the work had been finished under high pressure. Men and mules against the rising tide of the St. Francis River. The men and mules, under the able direction of Major Thomas Boyd, U. S. Army engineer, had won. The river now running bank full, had found a new order of things at Maple Bend flats. Never again would it spread out over miles and miles of wilderness, for the levee had had been completed many days before, and the St. Francis, grumble and growl though it might, must submit to the harness Boyd and his men had placed upon it.

The officials of the Kansas City, Ft. Scott & Memphis Railway were already preparing to extend a branch line down the river back of the levee,

and civilization had been advanced many long strides into what had hitherto been but a hopeless waste.

Boyd, walking along the top of the completed embankment was thrilled with the importance of the job. Soon he would be leaving, the following day in fact, and he was taking a final look at the thing he had so finely wrought.

The hoarse, but musical whistle of a steamboat, crawling on its up-stream trip to Marked Tree, attracted the major's attention. When the boat came opposite him, he recognized her as one of the Blue Star Line's freighters, the *Modoc*.

The pilot appeared to recognize the sturdy, military figure on the levee. He signaled his engineer, and presently four long blasts of the whistle saluted Major Thomas Boyd, master builder.

Boyd's face flushed with pleasure. He continued his course down the top of the embankment, pausing at length where a strong current—a "crossing," in river parlance—sliot athwart the stream, churning the water into a froth, beating with fierce but ineffecual force against the levee below, a levee adequately protected against the most terrific onslaught the frenzied river could bring to bear.

"Have at it!" Boyd cried jeeringly. "You're beat there, old river! Raise all the hell you want to—but you're beat!"

Logs and other drift shot along in the crossing, rammed against the reenforced section of the levee, sometimes forming the nucleus of a drift.

Boyd stood looking down at the spot in the levee which was his especial pride. Logs and drift might assail that point from then until doomsday, he thought, and never make a dent.

That big cottonwood log yonder, a monster of the wilderness, was coming with weight backed by terrific force—but what of it. It too, would rebound from its earthy contact, then drift along as the others had done.

Boyd laughed with deep satisfaction. The big cottonwood came on, rammed heavily against the levee, slid along the muddy waterline for a few feet, was caught in an eddy and driven against the shore again—

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, the river seemed to rise in mighty wrath against the obstruction in its customary path. A great spout of curiously colored water shot up to a towering height, the earth trembled as though in the grip of a quake, and all other sounds were drowned in the roar of a deep-throated explosion which shattered the river silence to shreds. A roar unlike that of thunder, or the discharge of cannon. A roar which, to experienced ears, signified one thing, and one thing only.

Dynamite!

The spouting water subsided, to be gathered back into the current from which it had come and swept on—on through the ragged breach in the levee which stood revealed. A breach which was ever widening, as the flow of the river battered and tore at the ruined mass.

Major Thomas Boyd, who had been standing directly above the cottonwood log, had vanished as completely as if he had never existed!

II

THE Blue Star freighter, Modoc, brought the news to Marked Tree.

"We were no more than half a mile above the Bull Run Crossing," Captain Kendall reported when he reached the village, "when a terrific explosion occurred. We knew instantly that

something of a most unusual nature was afoot. Fortunately there was river-way enough for Brady to bring about, and we promptly headed down stream. The levee, where Bull Run Crossing comes against the west shore, had been utterly wiped out, gentlemen," he finished, "and the gap was widening alarmingly. By now, I judge that fully a mile must have gone. That is all we were able to discover, so we came on with all the speed possible, stopping only at Jordan's Landing to take on a couple of passengers."

"Did you sight any other craft on the river near the spot, captain?"

The question was asked by a tall, homely young man in the brown garb of the rangers.

"Not a boat of any kind, steamer or skiff, was to be seen," Kendall replied. "Nor did we sight anybody at all until we reached the place where Boyd's construction camp stands. There were still some hands about, moving the equipment down to the levee for loading, and they were strung out along the top, racing toward the scene of the explosion. But there was nobody in sight in the vicinity of the breach."

Brady, the pilot, confirmed the captain's statement in regard to the absence of human beings and boats near the spot where the breaching of the embankment had occurred.

"I'd of seen 'em, had there been anybody clost," he asserted. "Had my eyes peeled at that crossin', you can bet! Nobody did I ketch sight of."

Inspector Jack Calhoun, who had been at Marked Tree when the *Modoc* landed, wasted no more time querying the officers of the boat. They, it was patent, had nothing further of interest to relate. Instead, he turned to meet the levee hands who soon began arriving in boats. They, he thought, might know something.

Their first disclosure was a distinct shock to all who heard.

"Major Boyd is missing!" exclaimed a young assistant engineer who had been in charge of removing the camp and equipment. "Can't find him anywhere! About an hour before the explosion," he went on, "the major set out down the levee. He was walking; having a last look at the work. I—I'm afraid, men," he ended huskily, "that he went out with the levee! He'd have had just about enough time to reach the spot—and, well we can't find him!"

"If he was alive," declared a hand, "th' major shore would of been right thar wharat th' 'splosion happened, soon as his laigs could of took him to it! You-all kin lay to that!"

"Was Major Boyd alone?" Calhoun queried.

"Left camp alone," the assistant replied.

"Maybe he had passed the place where the breach was made," Cal suggested, "and is marooned on the far strip. That might easily account for his absence. Did you try to learn whether or not he was there?"

"We could see the far section of the levee across the flooded breach," the assistant declared. "And there's little hope, sir! Major Boyd was not on it!"

"Git outten th' road!" bellowed a voice on the outskirts of the crowd which had gathered around Calhoun. "Lemme in here! I got to see Mister Calhoun! One side, you-all!"

"Bowlegs" Belcher, a trapper from Honey Island, shoved his way through the crowd and stopped before the ranger. His eyes were round with excitement, breath coming in gasps.

"Well, Bowlegs," Calhoun ordered, "spit it out! What's on your mind?"

"A whole heap!" the trapper exclaimed. "Fust off, Major Boyd done been blowed up, erlong with th' levee! He war walkin' down th' top, an' when he come to wharat Bull Run romps ag'in' th' shore on th' west side, he stops thar an', hit looked to me like, bent over to look at somethin' jist below him in th' water. Then—b-b-b-l-l-l-o-o-m-m!

"Th' whole dang river riz right up betwixt me an' him! Mud an' sticks an' logs filled th' air, an' th' St. Francis looked lak hit had stopped dead in hits tracks. But only fur a minit. Then Old Bull Run went roarin' off into th' timber, wharat th' levee war done gone! Gone as slick as ennythin'!

"An' Major Boyd war standin' right wharat th' river tore through, Mister Calhoun," the native finished. "I seed him right at th' minnit hell broke loose, an' thar wa'n't a chanst on earth fur him! He's a goner, gents—went out with th' levee, shore as shootin'!"

"By God!" cried Hollister, the young assistant, while tears streamed down his face. "This is murder! The damned scoundrels have killed him!"

"What 'damned scoundrels'?" Calhoun was quick to demand.

"I don't know!" Hollister replied. "How should I? But it's clear that somebody has deliberately destroyed the levee at Bull Run Crossing, and Major Boyd was killed! It's murder—cowardly and dirty!"

"Where were you, Bowlegs?" Cal asked the native. "How come you to see so much?"

"I war acrost th' river, below Bull Run," the native replied. "Settin' some mussrat traps in th' aidge of th' water. I seed the *Modoc* come up an' cross Bull Run. Jist afore she hit th' current th' ole *Modoc* whistled four long whissels. When them whissels sounded, Major Boyd looked to'ard th' boat an' waved his hat. I seed hit with my own eyes, and heered hit with my own ears! That's whut!"

"Nobody is doubting you, Bowlegs," Cal assured him placatingly. "I just wanted to know where you were and what you were doing. Did you see anybody else near there, or any boats?"

"Nary a pusson ner boat!" the trapper declared emphatically.

"Could you say, at a guess, what Major Boyd was looking at so closely, there at the base of the levee?"

"Couldn't see nothing 'cept a lot of logs an' drif'."

"No sign of smoke there? Are you certain?"

"Nuthin' lak that. Nuthin' a-tall, 'cept logs an' bresh which war scootin' acrost th' stream an' tryin' to hang up ag'in th' levee. Nothin' else."

"The *Modoc* gave four long blasts on her siren, you say," Cal went on. "She was, at that moment, just heading into the crossing. Sure about the number of times that whistle blew?"

"In course I'm shore," Bowlegs replied. "Jist afore she hove in sight frum down stream, th' *Modoc* blowed a couple of times. Then when she war right abreast of the crossin', headin' ag'in it, she blowed four times. Four long, loud ones. W-h-h-o-o-m-m-m! W-h-h-o-o-m-m-m! W-h-h-o-o-m-m-m! W-h-h-o-o-m-m-m! Jist lak that, she went!"

Calhoun joined the crowd in a chuckle over Bowlegs's faithful imitation of the *Modoc's* four blasts. A chuckle that almost died a-bornin', as the gravity of the situation, and the tragic element in it, weighed down the spirits of all. Major Tom Boyd had

been well liked in the section, despite his dignity, West Point applied, which was only skin deep.

"Stay in town, Bowlegs," the ranger ordered the native. "I may want to ask you some more questions later."

He left the crowd and went down to where the *Modoc* was unloading. Riggs, the mate, Pilot Brady and Captain Kendall formed a group on the foredeck, and Calhoun joined them.

"You took on two passengers at Jordan's Landing," he reminded Kendall. "Who were they?"

"Just a couple of tie-hackers," was the reply. "Wanted to go to Lake City."

"Are they aboard now?"

"Somewhere ashore, I think," Riggs said. "Asked me how long we'd be here. Gittin' up, I reckon."

"Quite likely. Is it your usual custom to whistle for Bull Run Crossing, captain?" Cal asked.

"Not for the crossing. But just above it is Big Bend, and we always whistle for it. The channel is narrow there, and we can't see more than a cable's length ahead in some places. Whistle to warn other boats."

"And the customary signal is four long blasts?"

"Well, it is with the *Modoc*," Kendall replied. "You see, there are four boats belonging to the Blue Star Line. We are number four. Quite often it is Mr. Barrett's habit to whistle four times, notifying any other of our craft what boat is meeting them. Mr. Barrett is the engineer, you know."

"I see. And what boat did you expect to meet at the bend?"

"The Arrowhead," Kendall informed him. "Listen!"

A steamboat whistled, just around the bend above the village.

"That's the Arrowhead now," Kendall went on. "She's overdue, for some cause or other. High state of the river, probably. We expected to meet her in or about the bend."

The Arrowhead came on to a landing, and Calhoun stood watching the passengers unload. Among them was a tall, dark, distinguished looking man of middle age, who came down the gangplank and immediately set out for the *Modoc*. The man was unknown to the ranger.

But the officers of the *Modoc* knew him, it transpired.

"Mr. Carlin!" exclaimed Kendall, hastening across the gangplank and shaking the newcomer's hand. "Never expected to see you here, sir! On your way down to Helena, I take it?"

Carlin nodded. "Yes. Business of an unexpected nature came up yesterday. How's the river, farther down?"

Kendall immediately recounted the mysterious breaching of the levee, and the probable killing of Major Boyd. The other listened with deep interest, and when the death of Boyd was announced his face paled slightly.

"That's bad!" he declared seriously. "Damned bad!"

"Who is Carlin?" Calhoun asked Riggs.

"Andrew Carlin? Why, you surely have heard of him? He's the new owner of the Blue Star Line. Old Lee Line man, he is— and a darned good one to work for, I'm telling you!"

So that was Carlin, of whom Calhoun had heard, as a matter of fact, but whom he had never seen. Well, owners came and went on the St. Francis, and the rangers had no particular interest in their movements. Carlin, Cal thought, was a business-like looking chap, and had dignity to burn.

He went down the gangplank, having it in mind to look up the two tie-hackers who had come aboard at Jordan's Landing. Just as he reached the top of the levee he thought he heard his name called. Turning on his heel, he looked back toward the landing. Riggs and Brady had disappeared from the foredeck of the *Modoc*, and Carlin and the skipper still stood in conversation, backs to him.

"Mistaken, I reckon," Cal told himself, and continued on his way.

But there came another interruption. Cal had gone only a few feet farther when a muffled explosion from the direction of the landing brought him to a halt. The next instant he was walking rapidly back toward the river. Carlin and Kendall were running across the gangplank to the *Modoc's* deck. He crossed on their heels.

As the trio reached the bottom of the cabin-deck companionway, Riggs, the mate, appeared at its head. His eyes were wide with horror, and his voice freighted with excitement when it boomed down the walled passage.

"Brady, cap'n—he's—he's shot himself!"

Calhoun waited for no more. Taking the companionway in two leaps, he caught the mate by the arm.

"Brady—where is he?" he demanded sharply. "Take me to him!"

A moment later Calhoun stood in the pilot's narrow stateroom, looking at a limp figure sprawled upon the floor. Pilot Brady was dead. A bullet had penetrated his brain.

III

"MY GOD!" The exclamation came from Captain Kendall, who stood just outside the stateroom door with the others, having been halted by an order of the ranger.

"I've been expecting something like this! Not really, maybe—but poor Brady has been acting queerly—"

"How?" Calhoun demanded.

"Bad health," Kendall explained, his face ghastly. "Nerves getting the best of him lately. Told me no longer than yesterday that he feared his steamboating days were about at an end. Poor devil!"

"Told me, more'n once, that he'd sooner be dead than have to quit his callin'," Riggs mourned. "An' I reckin, seein' what he's done, that he meant it!"

"You are an officer of the rangers?"

Carlin's sharp, colorless voice broke a short silence which followed the mate's words. Cal turned slowly, his mind grappling with this new problem, and faced the Blue Star's owner. Carlin had blue eyes, he noted. Widely spaced, and not overburdened with expression.

"Yes," he said briefly. "Inspector. Riggs," he went on, turning to the mate, "you were with Brady on the foredeck just before this happened. Did he, or you, call to me when I reached the top of the levee?"

Riggs looked at him blankly. "No," he said. "I never heard anybody call you, inspector."

"All right. Now, did Brady go up by himself, or did you accompany him? When you left the foredeck, I mean."

"We went up together," Riggs told him. "I stopped in the texas, and Brady went on down the passage to his stateroom. Said he aimed to lay down awhile. Had a hard run ahead of him, and all the excitement had told on him. That's the last I saw of him."

"And directly afterward, you heard the pistol shot. What did you do?"

"I ran out into the corridor, and to Brady's door—"

"Why to his door?" Cal interrupted sharply.

"Because I knew it had to be Brady," Riggs replied. "There wasn't another soul above th' freight-deck, and I knew it. Our crew ain't big, and all was on th' lower deck. It had to be Brady."

"I see. You opened the door?"

"Yes—and found him like you see him now."

"Don't you think it rather strange," Cal asked, "that Brady's door wasn't locked? Contemplating suicide, don't you think it likely that he would lock his door against possible intrusion?"

"I—I hadn't thought of that," Riggs exclaimed.

"The door shows no signs of having been forced," Cal pointed out. "So I infer that it was not locked—"

"Just what are trying to establish?" Carlin asked, directing a cold glance upon the ranger. "It was suicide, of course. Mr. Kendall and Mr. Riggs have both borne evidence of Brady's condition, physical and mental, and it is clear that the poor fellow took his own life. You must agree that it is, inspector?"

"Maybe so," Cal told him. "Maybe not. Is this Brady's gun?" he asked, picking up a thirty-eight caliber weapon from under the pilot's hand.

"Yes," Kendall declared. "I've seen him have it many's the time. No mistake about it."

Calhoun looked through the scant possessions of the pilot, discovered nothing in the way of a note, or anything to suggest that he had died by a hand other than his own. Just the slight incident of the unlocked door; that was all that kept him from dismissing the matter as a clear case of suicide.

"But," he muttered to himself, as he returned to the foredeck below, "that door was unlocked—and there's something to think about in that circumstance. Somebody called my name, too, when I was leaving the boat. I'm certain of that now, although I was inclined to doubt it at the time. Humph! I reckon I'll have to take a measure that won't please Mr. Carlin—but he'll have to bear it, with or without a grin, just the same!"

The crew had all but finished loading, and Captain Kendall and Owner Carlin were standing by the capstan when Cal approached.

"I'll ask you to remain here for a short while, captain," he said courteously. "The coroner will be down presently, and there may be a few questions to ask after he has made his examination."

"Very well, inspector," Kendall replied. "We are at your orders."

"Thanks. Something else, too," Cal went on. "I don't want any communication between those aboard the *Modoc* and the crew of the Arrowhead until I give the word. Is that understood?"

"I—why, hell, Calhoun!" Kendall exclaimed, traces of sudden anger in his voice. "What does that mean?"

"That I don't want any communication between the two boats," Cal replied evenly. "Wasn't that clear in the first place?"

"A matter that calls for some explaining!" Carlin cut in. "We are ready to coöperate with you in the matter of Brady's death, but submitting to high-handed nonsense on your part is something we won't stand! I propose to go aboard the Arrowhead whenever it pleases me!"

"In which case I'll be forced to throw you in the lock-up and keep you there, Carlin," Cal told him quietly.

"You have not been long in these parts, so I will say for your enlightenment, that we rangers are never intentionally high-handed. But when we give an order, that order must be obeyed. Sorry to put you out, Carlin, but it can't be helped."

He turned from the angry owner and skipper, went down the gangplank of the *Modoc* and crossed to that of the Arrowhead.

"Ask Mr. Shores to come down," he instructed a clerk whom he encountered. "Tell him Inspector Calhoun would like to see him."

A tall man, weatherbeaten of face and horny of hand, soon joined the ranger on the foredeck. It was Pilot Bill Shores.

"Howdy, Mr. Calhoun," he greeted affably. "Ain't seen you fur a long spell."

"You've heard the news about Brady?" Cal opened at once.

"Yeah. Too durn bad, about that!" Shores said, shaking his head sorrowfully. "Brady was a fine feller, an' as good a pilot as ever sailed."

"Bad health, Shores, will drive a man to extremes sometimes," Cal told him. "Brady's river days were about over—"

"Th' hell they was!" Shores interrupted. "Brady in bad health. Whoever told you that?"

"I heard it somewhere." Cal replied uncertainly.

"Ain't nary word of truth in it!" Shores declared. "A healthier, finer specimen of a man couldn't 'a' been found on th' St. Francis nowhars! Brady an' me was clost friends, an' I know whut I'm talkin' erbout!"

"I thought he had the look of a healthy man," Cal commented. "Still, his nerves were awfully ragged of late—"

A hearty guffaw interrupted Cal's speech. "Nerves!" Shores cried. "Old Brady sufferin' with nerves! Ef that don't beat all I ever heerd tell of! Why, Calhoun, he had nerves as stiddy as th' rock of Gibraltar its own self! Who done fed you-all with that rot?"

"Oh, well," Cal replied indifferently, "it's of no consequence. You got in a bit late to-day, I notice," he commented casually.

"Say," Shores protested, "you-all air plumb filled up with misinformation to-day, Calhoun! Late? Us late at Marked Tree? Why, feller, we actually run in ten minutes ahead of schedule. That's whut!"

"I thought you were to meet the *Modoc* down near Big Bend," Cal told him. "My mistake."

"We not only wasn't to meet th' *Modoc* at th' Bend," Shores assured him, "but was ordered at Lake City not to move frum Marked Tree ontil th' *Modoc* docked here. Now, ennythin' else I kin set you-all right on?" Shores queried, a broad grin on his weathered face.

Cal laughed ruefully. "Guess I'm all straight now, Shores," he said. "Funny how a fellow will hear such false reports, ain't it? Well, so long. I'll see you again sometime. Oh, by the way," he called, turning back to the pilot, "what signal do you whistle aboard the Arrowhead, when you want to advise other Blue Star craft that you're headed their way?"

Shores gave Cal a stare of blank astonishment. "Plumb locoed!" he muttered to himself. "Better see a doc, Calhoun, an' not wait ontil hit gits worser! How long you-all been ailin'?" he queried with feigned anxiety.

Cal grinned. "I guess I'm answered," he said. "But, seeing that

the *Modoc*, being boat number four, whistles four long, spaced blasts as her signal, I thought maybe the Arrowhead had some official signal too. Seems not. Well, I sure had a lot of bum steers this afternoon, for a fact. So long, Shores—and thank you."

"Better see that doc!" the pilot bawled after him. "Whissel an offceshul signal—my aunt's spotted cat! Whoever heered sich nonsense!"

He continued to mutter his disgust, long after Cal's figure had disappeared in the gathering gloom.

Calhoun was saying something to himself too, as he walked back toward the *Modoc*, where he could see the coroner crossing the gangplank.

"That was a lucky hunch," he congratulated himself, "getting to Old Bill Shores before Kendall or Carlin did. They lied in half a dozen different places—and they didn't do it for the fun of it. That's certain."

IV

NEWS travels swiftly in the Sunken Lands, and by the time Coroner Simms had made his examination, Ranger Tom Murdock and half a dozen men reached Marked Tree. Murdock reported to Calhoun, on board the *Modoc* immediately.

The coroner, after due deliberation, decided that Pilot Brady had come to his death by his own hand.

"Don't you think it would be wise to have a jury decide on that?" Cal queried, enjoying the black looks Carlin and Kendall gave him at the suggestion.

"Don't know but what it is a case for a jury," Simms agreed, taking his cue from the ranger. "Might be something that needs looking into, for a fact. What time would you suggest for the official inquest, Calhoun?"

"Ten o'clock to-morrow morning," Cal said promptly.

"Oh, see here!" exclaimed Carlin. "That's all damned foolishness! Brady did for himself, as a blind man could see! Now you chaps want to hold the *Modoc* here over night, and most of to-morrow, causing us a delay and a loss! It's rank injustice, I say!"

"To-morrow morning at ten o'clock," Simms announced, no whit disturbed by the owner's protest.

There was more fussing and fuming on the part of Carlin, oaths and argument on the part of Skipper Kendall, but the order stood. The *Modoc* was not to drop her shorelines until officially permitted to do so.

As soon as the examination was over, Cal gave certain orders to Murdock, then went to the cubby-hole he maintained as an office in Marked Tree. Half an hour later Murdock showed up in charge of two burly woodsmen, and trailed by Bowlegs Belcher.

"You two men boarded the Modoc at Jordan's Landing?" Cal queried the woodsmen, motioning them to seats.

"Yeah. We aimed to go to Lake City," one answered.

"What's your name?"

"Stallings is mine," the taller of the two replied. "His'n is Pritchard."

"Been in these parts long?"

"Naw. Walked in frum down at Tyronzy, huntin' fur a place to set in makin' ties. Didn't have no luck, but heered they was plenty of work up clost to Lake City. We air goin' thar."

"Know anybody at Jordan's Landing?"

"Naw."

"How long were you there?"

"Jist over night."

"You heard the explosion, of course?"

"Shore did."

"See anybody on the river, shortly thereafter, or just before?"

"Not ontel th' *Modoc* cum erlong."

"All right. You fellows can go. The *Modoc* won't resume her journey until sometime to-morrow, but there's plenty of entertainment in Marked Tree, so I reckon you won't mind."

The pair assured him that they wouldn't mind in the least. After they were gone, Bowlegs, at a nod from Cal, broke into speech; speech he had been trying to utter for several minutes, but held back each time by a warning glance from the ranger.

"Them fellers lied lak a house a-fire!" he declared. "They cum frum down th' river, on th' *Modoc*, four days ergo! I seed 'em go ashore at th' Honey Island landin', carryin' their saws an' broad axes with 'em! That's whut I seed 'em do!"

Cal nodded. "I suspected they were liars," he commented. "Did you observe their shoes, Murdock?" he asked his aid.

"Not especially," was the reply. "What about 'em?"

"They never hacked a tie in those shoes," Cal declared. "Although, from their scuffed and worn condition, it is patent they have worn them for a long while. There's not a mark of an ax on them, and I never knew a tie-hacker who didn't have little nicks chopped out of the soles of his shoes where he miscued with his ax.

"And, about those soles. If you had looked at them closely, Tom, you'd have noticed the peculiar pulpiness of the leather; swollen to nearly twice the original thickness. Spongy. Water does that. Sloppy decks, for instance, and muddy levees. Our tie-hackers are probably rivermen, Murdock.

"Now, here's your instructions, Tom. Watch that pair of tie-hackers, and don't let them leave Marked Tree. Hold the *Modoc* here until I give orders to let her go. Also, see that Carlin, Kendall and Riggs stay right here with the boat. If they try to leave, arrest them.

"No, I haven't got anything on them—yet," he answered the ranger's look of inquiry. "But to-morrow is another day—and I'll have plenty before it passes. Either that, or I'll own myself beat, and worse beat than I have ever been before.

"Intelligent men, Tom, don't lie about serious matters unless they've got something to hide. All three of those bozos lied. Lied about Brady, about somebody calling to me, about those four blasts of the *Modoc's* whistle—hell, they lied forty ways from the ace! There's something dead up the creek, Murdock—sure as shootin'. I'm going to find out what and where it is."

Until far into the night, Calhoun sat alone in his office, thinking. There were many angles to the affair. The native trappers and hunters for instance. They would be tooth and nail against that levee at Maple Bend Flats. It would deprive them of one of the finest and most fruitful fields in all the Sunken Lands. They had, as Cal well knew, contested every inch of reclaimed ground then in the swamps, sometimes backing up their protests with powder and lead. In their untaught minds, the idea had lodged that the government was imposing upon them, robbing them of their rights. They had not hesitated to stand up for those supposed rights.

At first, Calhoun had been inclined to think that the natives had set off the dynamite blast which wiped out a section of the levee, and utterly destroyed its usefulness. Bowlegs, even,

might be implicated. But then had come another suspicion.

The natives were willing enough to obstruct the government's operations in the swamp, but hardly ever took the initiative. They almost invariably had to have the way pointed out to them. Reasoning thus, Cal had considered the theory that some big fur buyer, seeing in the continued activities of the government in reclaiming the swamp, a threat to a lucrative business, had backed the natives in the job. Yes, that was plausible. There was motive there in plenty.

But, speaking of motives, what about the Blue Star Line?

Cal probably would not have followed that thought far, had it not been for the incident of the four long, spaced blasts of the *Modoc's* whistle, and the subsequent lie Kendall had told about it. Cal was a riverman, every inch of him, and that explanation Kendall had given about the four blasts was so much rot to him. Kendall was lying.

Then had come Brady's seeming suicide. A very doubtful explanation of the pilot's death, that of suicide. It was especially so since Pilot Shores had so positively contradicted Kendall and Riggs about Brady's health. Brady, according to his friend, Shores, was in perfect health, and his nerves were all that could be desired of them.

Why, then, had Kendall and Riggs lied about it?

Also, why had the Arrowhead been ordered to remain at Marked Tree until the *Modoc* should arrive? Why had Kendall told him they had expected to meet the Arrowhead at the Bend, and that she was running behind time? He must have known the Arrowhead's schedule just as well as did her own skipper.

And, lastly, there were the two pseudo tie-hackers whom the *Modoc* had, even in the stress of the excitement attending the discovery of the breached levee, stopped to take aboard. Why had the skipper done that, and why had the pair posed as tie-hackers, strange to the country? Bowlegs had seen them in that section, unloading from the *Modoc*, four days before.

The pair had lied.

"Everybody seems to have acquired the lying habit," Cal concluded, as he finally turned in for the night. "But I think I begin to see a thin thread of truth running through it all. Tomorrow will tell."

V

DAWN of the following day found Calhoun and Bowlegs Belcher ashore where Bull Run Crossing takes off from the east bank of the river. It was a wet, dreary day, but neither man paid the slightest attention to the weather.

"Scout around, Bowlegs," Cal instructed the trapper, "and see if you can find a shack anywhere; one that shows signs of having been used lately. There ought to be something of the kind, and not far off."

Bowlegs disappeared in the timber, and Calhoun stood at the head of the crossing, looking off toward where the levee had been. Nothing there now to indicate that a levee had ever existed. Wiped out, labor and expense gone for nothing.

And somewhere beyond the shore line, the torn and mangled body of Major Thomas Boyd, snatched from life at the peak of his usefulness, was being buffeted about by the flood.

"They never meant to kill Boyd," Calhoun muttered, his face grim in the pale light. "Never meant to kill any-

body, in fact, but they did—and they're going to pay!"

His glance followed the course of the crossing, as plainly marked as though it were a broad line traced upon a sheet of paper.

"Right here is where that charge of dynamite had its start," he assured himself positively. "But how the devil they managed it, timing it so accurately, beats me. But they did it, and it's up to me to find out how."

Cal began ranging about the spot, eyes open for whatever he might find. He knew that men had been there the day before, that they had launched death and destruction from that very place, and he felt certain that somewhere near would be found the clew he sought.

Presently, about fifty feet back in the timber, he paused, eyes narrowing, thought lines marking his brow. Just ahead of him somebody had thrown a big cottonwood tree. The top lay upon the ground, and beyond it he could see the stump upon which it had grown.

"Newly done," he reflected, walking toward the stump. "A whale of a tree, too; four feet through, if it was an inch."

Then a peculiar circumstance claimed his attention, and he began carefully pacing the distance between the stump and the tree top, ascertaining the length of a section of log which had been taken away.

"Ten feet!" he exclaimed. "Somebody threw this tree and cut a ten-foot log from it—and that's damned odd. Sixteen feet is the standard length for logs; sometimes twelve feet, but not often. Ten feet, never. Now what the devil would anybody want with a ten-foot log of such size?"

It puzzled him, and a moment later, when he caught sight of another tree top and another new stump, his puzzlement grew. He made his way to the second cutting, and sized up things there.

"Same size tree, approximately, and another short log—about eleven feet, I'd judge—"

He broke off, his eyes ranging toward where yet another cottonwood had been thrown. In an instant he was standing beside the third stump, estimating the length of the missing section.

"Another one, ten feet long and about four feet through!" he exclaimed under his breath, while his eyes began to glint with the light of understanding. "Now I wouldn't be surprised if I haven't stumbled onto the clew I was hunting?"

A further search disclosed another cottonwood cutting. A fourth log, same dimensions as the other three, had been cut at the spot.

"And not a wheel mark anywhere near," Cal reflected, after a brief examination of the ground, "so the logs were not moved overland. It follows that they were rolled to the river bank and thrown in. Thieves didn't do it, because no thief would steal cheap stuff like cottonwood. That's certain And ten-foot cuts—that's unaccountable. Except, of course, if they were used as I begin to believe they were."

Calhoun's speculations concerning the cottonwood logs ceased abruptly, his mind centering on something altogether different. Somewhere in the brush back of him a twig had snapped, then another. A man or an animal was moving in that direction.

"More likely a man," was his swift conclusion. "And Bowlegs went in a different—"

The next instant Cal was leaping for

cover in the cottonwood tree top, snapping a gun out of his holster as he leaped.

"Wham! Wham! Wham!"

Three pistol shots back of him testified to the character of the body which had been moving through the timber, and the whine of lead in the foliage of the fallen tree left no doubt of what his intentions were.

Cal moved swiftly, once he had the leafy cover to protect him. Back into the brush he slid, then began circling, eyes scanning every tree trunk, querying every bushy cover. Suddenly he stopped, crouched behind the bole of a tree, eyes on a man who had likewise chosen a tree trunk for cover. Wholly unaware of Calhoun's soft footed approach in his rear, the skulker was peering around his bulwark, his six-gun in hand, scanning the tree top into which the ranger had plunged so short a time before.

"Steady as you are!" Cal called sharply. "Drop your gun, or I'll drill a hole through you!"

The skulker gave a convulsive leap, then seemed to freeze where he was.

"Drop it—pronto!" Cal snapped.

The weapon in the skulker's hand thudded to the ground, and Calhoun, thrusting his own gun into a holster, advanced upon him.

"Face around!" he ordered sharply, "Let's see if you're who I think you are!"

That order was obeyed—swiftly and with deadly intent. The man by the tree wheeled around, his left hand flashed down and up, there was a glint of steel as he whipped a gun from under his coat.

But Calhoun had only appeared to be off his guard. With such speed of movement as would have defied any eye to follow, his weapon was in his hand and spitting lead. One shot only, and the gun arm of the other hung useless at his side.

"Damn you!" snarled a familiar voice. "If that twig hadn't snapped under my boot, I'd of got you shore!"

"But it snapped, Riggs," Cal pointed out, a slow grin parting his lips— a grin that was not pretty to look at. "I'd have drilled you right, you skunk, only I want you for evidence. You've got that to thank for your—"

"Like hell!" snarled Mate Riggs, of the *Modoc,* baring his yellow teeth much as a wounded and cornered wolf might have done. "You won't never learn nothin' frum me! I'll see you in hell first!"

"There's very little you could tell me that I don't already know, Riggs," Cal assured him quietly. "I know that you killed Brady, for instance, and that's enough to hang you. But get up on your pegs. We're through here. I've heard the whole story here among the cottonwoods, and there's nothing left now but the showdown. Get up and get going!"

At that instant, Bowlegs, wonder and anxiety on his face, raced up through the underbrush. At the sight of Cal and his prisoner he stopped short.

"Done ketched a skunk, huh?" he drawled, pointing a thumb toward Riggs. "Somehow ernuther, I ain't never had no use fur that'n, an' ain't a-tall s'prised at him bein' mixed up in this thing. Yep," he went on, answering a look of inquiry from Cal, "found a tie-shack wharat two men done had a camp right recent. Not more'n a day or two ago."

"Good. Now for the river, and Marked Tree."

They reached the village two hours

later, and Calhoun, herding his prisoner ahead of him, followed by Murdock, who had the two tie-hackers in charge, Bowlegs, and two rangers, immediately went aboard the *Modoc*.

The time for a showdown had come.

VI

CARLIN and Kendall stood against the rail just outside the texas and observed the approach from shore. When Cal came up the companionway from the boiler-deck, Kendall demanded:

"What's all this? What's happened to Mr. Riggs?"

Riggs, his left arm in a bloodstained sling, looked down at the deck sheepishly, making no comment.

"Find chairs, men," Calhoun suggested. "We'll sit out on deck, seeing we'd crowd the texas somewhat."

"What's the meaning of this?" Carlin demanded truculently, his eye balls contracting to pin-head dimensions.

"Four odd-length cottonwood logs, a pack of lies, a murder called a suicide, an attempt to slay me, and a stall about a certain official signal whistle of four long blasts, coupled with a lot of other things, has cleared up the manner in which the Maple Bend levee was wrecked—and indicated the identity of the wreckers. That's what it means," Cal replied coldly, seating himself against the rail.

"Naturally the levee was wrecked by somebody with a motive. After looking over the possibilities, I recalled the fact that a railroad was soon to be built along the west shore of the St. Francis, protected in the lowlands by the levee. That railroad would put a certain steamboat line out of business. There was a strong motive.

"Now, here, men, is just what happened there at Maple Bend," he went on. "Four or five days ago, the *Modoc* landed Stallings and Pritchard, fake tie-hackers, at Honey Island Landing. They proceeded up the shore, thinking themselves unobserved, to a shack in the neighborhood of Bull Run Crossing. They carried, along with some saws and a couple of axes, a large supply of dynamite.

"You will observe that Stallings, there, has a lot of faint blue spots under the skin of his face, and that his hands are likewise splotched. I observed that circumstance last night. Stallings has been a powder-monkey. Understands how to use dynamite—particularly how to time fuses.

"The object Stallings and Pritchard had in view was the destruction of the levee. They had been hired to do it. But it must be done in a way that would baffle attempts to solve the mystery. A log, thrown into the crossing on the west shore, would be carried directly over against the levee; the current would attend to that. So it was patent that a log, to which had been affixed sufficient dynamite to do the job, would blow the embankment up—provided the little matter of timing the fuse could be reckoned. The powder-monkey solved the problem of timing."

Cal paused, looking at the two tie-hackers. The face of Stallings had turned the color of a catfish's belly, and his eyes were fixed steadily upon the ranger. Pritchard likewise was listening intently, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Here's how he managed the timing," Cal went on. "He and his pal cut down a cottonwood tree, sawed out a ten-foot section of the trunk, then dumped it into the Run. Watch in hand, Stallings timed its progress

through the crossing, noting the exact minute of contact with the levee. Fine! But one trial was not considered enough, so a second log, same size and aproximate weight as the first, was cut, thrown in, and timed. The result was satisfactory, but one cannot be too careful about such matters. A third, and last, trial log, however, was convincing. The job was as good as done.

"Yesterday afternoon, another log was placed in the water—but it was not a trial log. It was freighted with destruction and death. But the dynamite log was not to be released until a certain signal, agreed upon between the wreckers and their backers, should be heard. That signal would come from the siren of a boat—the *Modoc*—"

"That's a damned lie!" bellowed Kendall, leaping to his feet, his face congested. "A most damnable—"

"Sit down, you!" The command, from Tom Murdock, was accompanied by a heavy hand clamped on the skipper's shoulder. He dropped heavily into his chair, still muttering protests.

"The *Modoc* was to whistle four long, spaced blasts, when she was at the crossing," Cal continued imperturbably. "That was to notify the wreckers that she was passing the danger spot, and that it was time to release the log and make speed to Jordan's Landing, where they would be picked up a short while later and carried out of the country.

"The four blasts, which Belcher heard distinctly, were given, and the *Modoc* bucked the current past the danger point; the dynamite log was released, and the wreckers were off to the landing, where they were taken aboard a short while later.

"That, men, is how the thing was done. Kendall lied to me about those four blasts, about the Arrowhead being late, about Brady's ill health—which Brady's crony, Bill Shores, denies emphatically. All those things aroused my suspicions.

"The killing of poor Brady must have occurred after this wise," he went on, "but I can only guess at that. I heard my name called just as I reached the top of the levee, after leaving the *Modoc* yesterday. I believe now that it was Brady calling me. Why? Just this:

"Brady was willing enough to help destroy the levee, thereby prolonging the life of his job, he thought—but he never would have consented to murder. Yet that's what resulted when he whistled the signal for the release of the dynamite log. Major Boyd was killed by the explosion, and his death was as much a murder as if it had been done intentionally. Brady, I am certain, never saw the engineer on the levee. When he learned, at Marked Tree, that Boyd had been killed, he must have broken down and determined to tell the whole thing. He was prevented from doing so by a bullet fired into his brain—"

"Nonsense!" Carlin declared heatedly. "Absolute nonsense! Brady killed himself—"

"For what reason?" Cal broke in sharply. "His health was good, and so were his nerves. Why did he call to me? Why did he go directly to his cabin and, without bothering to lock his door, blow out his brains? There must have been a reason, and his partner, Shores, says that the reasons supplied by Kendall and Riggs were nothing but lies.

"But never mind that. We are coming to something that does count—and heavily. Riggs learned that I had gone down the river, suspected what

my mission was, and, managing to slip away at dawn, he followed—with his trigger finger itching. There in the timber where the cottonwoods had been cut, he tried to pot me and got potted instead. After he got his, his nerve broke—and this is what he told:

"'That fellow Stallings was hired to kill off Brady, an' he hid in the stateroom an' done it.'"

"That's a dang lie!"

Stallings was on his feet instantly, face blazing with wrath and excitement.

"We-all did float them logs, jist lak Carlin an' Kendall hired us to—"

"Shut up, you damned fool!" Riggs bellowed fiercely. "I never told him nothin' of th' kind! He's lyin'—"

"And it's too late to cover up now, Riggs!" Calhoun laughed coolly. "I guess the jig is up. Carlin, you and Kendall and Riggs are under arrest. The charge is the wrecking of the Big Bend Levee, and the murder of Major Thomas Boyd. Riggs is also charged with the killing of Pilot Brady although this is something that may never be proved. However, there's enough already to insure a hangman's rope for all of you—including Stallings and Pritchard. Snap the cuffs on 'em, boys!"

"We didn't aim to kill nobody!" Pritchard bleated, shrinking away from the clutch of a ranger. "Carlin hired us to blow the levee—"

Wham!

The spiteful bark of a revolver cut him short, and Carlin, who had fired the shot, leaped to the rail of the boat. He had missed Pritchard clearly, but prepared to fire again. Once more he leveled the gun he had drawn, this time full on Calhoun.

"At least I'll have the satisfaction of taking you with me!" he snarled, as he squeezed the trigger.

There came a second report—but not from Carlin's gun. Tom Murdock's weapon, drawn in a flash, flamed and roared.

Carlin straightened to his full height, his tall frame balanced for an instant on the rail—then toppled overside into the swollen St. Francis.

Riggs and Kendal, inescapably implicated by the unshakable testimony of the two bogus tie-hackers, decided to confess at last, and throw themselves upon the mercy of the court. A court which proved to be singularly devoid of mercy.

They were hanged for the murder of Major Thomas Boyd, U. S. Army engineer.

Golf Dog, New Underworld Menace

NEW YORK CITY police are looking for Mashie. He's a bulldog that works the same way as the golf club he's named after. He lifts golf balls.

His master, serving a sentence in the workhouse, denied that he had trained Mashie to steal golf balls from the Van Cortlandt Park links, but a detective disguised as Walter Hagen spotted Mashie at it, and though the detective arrested Mashie's owner, Mashie himself made a get-away. Anyhow, police are culling the underworld now for this new and sinister canine crook.

Camille and his sisters paraded around the garden, chanting, supremely happy

Priestess of the Dead

A True Story

An Old Hag With Staring Eyes and a Ghostly Step Brought an Unknown Terror to the House of Beautiful Elodie

By Robert W. Sneddon

PARIS was only eight miles away, yet its suburb of Villemomble might have been set in some remote corner of the earth. At this time of the night, in the badly lighted street with its rows of villas and gardens behind high walls, the sound of a single person walking was disquieting to the timid.

Mlle. Elodie Menetret, lying in bed in the room lit by the flickering of a dying fire, stirred uneasily.

Footsteps had halted outside. There was a faint noise as though some one was fumbling at the handle of the gate. Upstairs a shutter banged.

"Euphrasie! Euphrasie! Come quickly!"

Elodie was afraid of this woman whom, a month earlier, she had engaged to keep her company in the villa she had bought, but she felt she must have her near or die of fear.

She gasped. The door opened noiselessly. Candlestick in hand, Euphrasie Mercier stealthily entered. The light threw the gigantic and menacing shadow of her hooked nose and determined chin upon the white screen of the ceiling, like the hideous conception of a nightmare.

The old woman, she was sixty, held the candle high and with a strange smirk upon her wrinkled face, focused her cunning, beady eyes upon her benefactress.

She had been a pretty girl, Elodie Menetret, when an orphan she had struggled to make a living in Paris by giving music lessons; a pretty woman when, driven by despair and poverty, she had found there were other ways to force society to support her. And she was still pretty at forty-two when she had left the world of gayety, which she had not found so gay, and had come to find a refuge for her sorely taxed nerves in this suburb. Now, with her blond hair spread upon the pillow, her blue eyes open in frantic terror, she looked almost like a frightened child.

"Oh, Euphrasie, did you hear it?"

"Hear what, mademoiselle?" asked Euphrasie.

"Downstairs — outside — footsteps on the pavement. Some one trying the gate."

"Ah, that would be the Corsican," said the old woman lowering her voice to an impressive and compelling whisper. "I never go out, but I see him watching. I believe if he can not make love to you, he will kill you."

"Kill me?" gasped Elodie.

"You never know what these savages will do," said the old woman nodding her head vehemently. "They think nothing of using the knife and cutting people's throats—like this." She made a horrid gesture.

"Oh, but he can't get into the house."

"Those who want to get in can always get in," said Euphrasie solemnly. "Thieves and burglars. Who's to know there isn't one climbing up now, getting ready to come in that window."

She shot a finger out at the window of the bedroom.

The woman in the bed uttered a moan.

"Euphrasie! Don't, please. Oh, are you sure there isn't a thief there now. Look—no, don't, don't open the window."

The old woman had advanced to the window, now she opened it, and undid the outer shutter. The chill air leaped in.

"No, there's nobody there that I can see," she reported reluctantly," but there might be a thief in the garden, and there's others, too, only you can't

always see them. This is just the time when they like to come out of their graves—do you feel that chill air?"

"Shut the window quick. What do you mean—they?"

Euphrasie turned her head away to hide the malicious grin which distorted her mouth.

"The spirits! Ghosts!"

Elodie shuddered. She drew the covers up to her chin and peered at her companion.

"Yes," continued the old woman, "The dead come out of their graves and walk about. I've seen lots of them in my time. You never know they are near you till you feel their cold breath on your neck."

"Stop, stop, Euphrasie, you are killing me."

"You're in a fine state of nerves, mademoiselle. I don't know what's come over you lately. Shall I give you some medicine?"

"Yes, yes," cried her mistress eagerly. "Yes, dear Euphrasie, something to make me sleep. And you won't leave the room till I am asleep? Promise me."

She clung to the old woman's hand feverishly. It was a strong and capable hand still. Euphrasie smiled triumphantly. Who was now the mistress of this house, she or the poor panic-stricken, nervous creature cowering under the blankets? She moved away. Her mistress sat up.

"Euphrasie! Don't leave me!"

"One moment only till I get your powder. I'll be right back."

She was gone, and the heart of the poor woman in the bed pounded jerkily. Of what comfort to her was this rosy boudoir with the trinkets on the lace-trimmed dressing table, the rest of the villa with its well chosen furniture, the jewels and securities in a tin box, the knowledge that as long as certain of her old friends lived they would provide her with a pension? What were these bodily comforts in comparison with the mental terrors of the night, conjured up by this old witch who preyed upon her weakened nerves and gentle unresisting nature?

To-morrow she must send for her friend Mlle. Griere. She would tell her what to do.

Stealthy shadows crept into the room and hid themselves in the corners. Upon the flooring in front of the fireplace a long, dark shadow in the rough semblance of a human body seemed to writhe for a moment and then be still.

The door creaked.

"It is I, mademoiselle," said Euphrasie in a coaxing voice. She came over to the bed and held a glass to the woman's purpling lips. "There now, go to sleep. Lucky you are to have me with you, or the neighbors might come in some morning and find you with your throat cut from ear to ear."

The old woman sat down on a chair. After a little while, seeing her employer was asleep, she put out her hand toward her, then shaking her head, drew back sharply, and with hasty steps left the room.

The time had not yet come.

Mlle. Menetret was sitting in her little drawing-room with her friend Mlle. Griere, a brisk, well preserved little lady.

"Now, what is it, Elodie?" demanded Mlle. Griere. "You can't deceive me. You sent for me for some purpose. What is it? I wish I could say you were looking well, but you look worried."

"Marie, Euphrasie's killing me by degrees with fear. I'm afraid now to be left alone with her."

"Why don't you get rid of her. That's easy enough."

"I daren't, Marie. If I told her to go, she'd kill me, I'm sure. Besides who else could I get? And then I pity her."

"You're foolish, Elodie."

"I know, but she's had such a hard life, and she's supporting two half crazed sisters, Honorine and Sidonie, and a harmless idiot brother, Camille. If I sent her away, what would she get to do?"

"You always had too kind a heart, Elodie. I hope it isn't the ruin of you yet. How did you happen to meet Euphrasie Mercier?"

"Well, about a year ago, I saw a shoe store on Boulevard Haussmann, Paris, and I went in, and there was Euphrasie. She seemed such a nice woman and so obliging. I bought a pair of shoes, and I used to go in and talk to her, and she told me all about herself. Her father started a spinning business and made quite a fortune. Euphrasie was the eldest of the children and when the father died she took over the business. It failed, however, and the family were ruined. They went everywhere trying to make a living. Honorine had a son by the Count of Chateauneuf."

"Humph!" said Mlle. Griere. "Whatever possessed you to engage Euphrasie as your companion?"

"I pitied her, and she was so kind and obliging then. I wouldn't know her for the same woman."

"Have you missed anything yet, Elodie?"

"You don't think she'd steal from me, Marie."

"I don't trust her. My advice to you is to make up a list of your jewels and securities in duplicate, and let me keep one copy."

"Yes, that is a good idea, Marie. I'll get the tin box, and you'll find paper and pen over there on the desk."

The taking of the inventory went on slowly. All at once Mlle. Griere looked at the little clock on the mantel. "I must run, but I shall come back tomorrow and we can finish this. And my advice to you is, get rid of that woman as soon as you can. Till tomorrow, then, Elodie."

Elodie threw her arms about her friend and kissed her.

"What a comfort you are, Marie. Come early to-morrow then. *Au revoir.*"

As she went with her friend to the door, she whispered into her ear:

"I did tell Euphrasie she must go, but she begged me to let her stay on just for her bed and board. She said she didn't want any wages."

"That sounds worse than ever, Elodie," said Mlle. Griere, "but we'll settle it to-morrow."

Unfortunately when this brisk little lady got home, her heel caught in a rug, she slid on the highly polished floor and falling dislocated her shoulder. The doctor promptly sent her to bed, and in her excitement the injured lady forgot her friend. When she remembered, she sent for a mutual friend, an old bachelor, M. Grassner, and told him the story. The old gentleman—he was sixty-odd years old—set out, much disturbed.

When he came to the villa, he could see no signs of life, but he rang the bell lustily. Finally Euphrasie came and peered at him through the bars.

"It's no use your ringing," she said gruffly, "mademoiselle has gone to Paris, and I don't know when she'll be back."

The old gentleman had to leave without getting any further satisfaction,

and carried his report back to Mlle. Griere.

To all other inquirers after this first call, the dragon behind the gate returned one answer:

"Mlle. Menetret is dead to the world. She has entered a convent, and I have sworn not to divulge the place of her retreat."

Euphrasie Mercier's life, before she crept into the safe haven of the villa at Villemomble, had been a strange one. She had held a fortune in her hand and had seen it dwindle away. Accustomed as a girl to every luxury, she had learned to have recourse to every makeshift to hide her poverty. But one legacy which their father had left the Mercier children, no one could take from them. Cursed as they seemed to be, moving from country to country, this inheritance went with them, increasing with the years. Their father had endowed them with his mysticism and religious fanaticism.

Least touched of all by this shadow was a son Zacharie, who had married and had a daughter, Adele.

But Sidonie, Honorine and Camille each had a different character. Honorine, in spite of the fact that she had borne a son out of wedlock was the missionary, the Crusading spirit. She wrote letters to high ecclesiastics reproaching them for not defending and proclaiming the church more strongly.

Sidonie was the taciturn, gloomy visionary, a simple soul weighed down by the burden of imaginary sins and strange crimes, beating her breast and muttering remorseful prayers. Both of the sisters were beset by an invisible world of enemies, and saw enemies surrounding all those with whom they came in contact. They tried to chase away these tempters and demons with incantations and ceremonies.

Camille, now a middle-aged man, was a gentle, harmless creature. Wherever he lived, he spent most of his days in the church, kneeling for hours before the pictured saints and following the priest round like a child with a tender and reverent simplicity.

Amid these afflicted ones, Euphrasie stood out like a genius. In spite of the fact that she, too, believed in the supernatural and the miraculous, that she had visions of the Deity whom she addressed familiarly and asked for advice on all matters, she had an essentially commercial mind in dealing with material things. She had a great determination, an indomitable will. Nothing could turn her aside from her purpose—especially when the question of her three charges was involved.

The spirit of her father had appeared to her and commanded her to look after the three weaklings. She was their guardian, their protector, their champion. She fought like a tigress against the world. Such family affection is rare.

For years Euphrasie had tried to run a shoestore in various streets in Paris. She had even learned to make shoes. And wherever she went, there went also her "children."

It was while at Boulevard Haussmann that she had made the acquaintance of the timid, shrinking, slightly hypochondriacal Elodie Menetret with her fine clothes, her expensive shoes and furs, but she had not marked her down as her future employer.

When the shoe business, which had been on its last legs, crashed to failure and Euphrasie found herself with a hungry family to feed, Providence, so it seemed, set Elodie in her path again. She had just bought the villa, and was looking for some one to stay with her in the double

capacity of servant and companion. Euphrasie, who was expert in flattery, and a clever actress in concealing her real character, suggested herself as a devoted friend, and was engaged.

For the first week or so Euphrasie fawned on her employer. She heaped her with exaggerated compliments, she fussed over her, she discovered new ailments and ran to and fro with medicines. She was indefatigable in screening her from currents of air, in darkening the room, in protecting her from noises and visitors.

This diligence soon alarmed Elodie. She had wanted a companion, not a shadow. The woman was a perfect pest, even if her kindness was sincere, and Elodie had begun to wonder if it was. Yet she was afraid to dismiss Euphrasie. Euphrasie was quick to see her opportunity, and she peopled the villa with terrors. With this ghostly host at her beck and call she was able to so dominate her shrinking mistress that Elodie would rather suffer Euphrasie's presence than be left alone.

It was on April 18 that Mlle. Griere saw Elodie for the last time. A week later M. Grassner was told his friend had gone to Paris. A day or so later another friend, M. Riquier, was met with the astonishing news that his friend had entered a convent.

M. Riquier got in touch with Elodie's niece, Louise Menetret, who was a dancer, and gave her the news and advice as to what to do. Louise hastened out to the villa, and met with the same story. She was not allowed to pass the gate. So she carried her story to the police commissary at Montreuil, M. Oberinger, and said she was sure her aunt was being held a prisoner by Euphrasie Mercier.

The policeman hummed and hawed, and said he would look into the matter.

He sent for Euphrasie, who came dressed with the utmost neatness and wearing her best manners and most convincing tones.

"Why, what a lie," she said indignantly when told of the accusation; "God will surely punish the authors of these lies. My dear Mlle. Menetret has left the world and all its wickedness. I wish she would allow me to tell you where she is, but she strictly forbade me. But she has written to me—see, there is the letter. Just look at the date—Wednesday night."

The policeman glanced at the letter. He did not notice that there was no other date than the indefinite one of "Wednesday night."

Euphrasie also exhibited a paper which she called by the high sounding name of Deed of Gift. It said: "I am leaving France—I leave all I possess to Mlle. Mercier—let her transact my business."

This document was undoubtedly in the hand of Elodie, though written in pain or with difficulty.

M. Oberinger was completely taken in by his visitor, and promised that he would dispose of any interference from Elodie's niece and her friends.

Within a week the villa had become an asylum, in every sense of the word, for the Mercier family. In a couple of days Honorine and Sidonie were strolling in the little walled garden, decked out in clothes which had belonged to the lady who had retired from the world.

One room of the house was fitted up as a chapel, and there candles burned all day before a banner of the Virgin worked by Honorine.

Sometimes in the evening Camille took down the banner, and his two sisters, candles in their hands, followed it in procession round the garden,

chanting. The poor things were supremely happy in their imitations of sacred ceremonies.

In August, Euphrasie, dressed in some of Elodie's clothes, journeyed to Luxembourg. She put up at a hotel, and then took herself to a lawyer's office.

"Monsieur," she said with an important air, "I am Mlle. Elodie Menetret, and I have quite some property in France. I am going to make my residence in your charming city, and I want to give a general power of attorney to one of my friends living in Villemomble. The name is Euphrasie Mercier. Will you kindly draw up the document."

"Have you any papers establishing your identity, Mlle. Menetret?"

"Surely," said Euphrasie in her most elegant manner, "here they are."

She laid the papers on the table. The notary examined them.

"Quite so. These appear to be in order, but—pardon the formality—I must do as the law demands—two witnesses are required to testify to your identity."

"I will get them," said the indomitable Euphrasie and went out of the office.

She was back in half an hour with two witnesses, a musician and a barber, who swore that the lady with them was Elodie Menetret.

Afterward they went out and enjoyed a glass together out of the ten francs Euphrasie had paid to them for their friendly perjury. She had told them some cock and bull story, and they had swallowed it.

It was plain sailing for Euphrasie now. Armed with this fake power of attorney, she returned to Villemomble and began to dispose of Elodie's securities and other property.

She took a lively interest in the house and garden, had flowers planted, and herself took care of a dahlia bed. The gardener whom she employed had strict orders not to touch that bed. Once a dog strayed in and began to scratch up the dahlia bed. Euphrasie came upon the beast and drove it out with screams and yells. Henceforth no animal was allowed to get as much as its nose past the gate.

Rather recklessly she undertook some repairs upon the house, and when the workmen began to press for payment, sent for her niece Adele, and made a fictitious sale of the property to her, to get herself out of the lawsuit with which she was threatened.

Euphrasie had been in her mysterious convent two years when Adele arrived. The girl was soon bored to death by her life and the crazy atmosphere in which she lived, so that she gladly welcomed a new inmate of the house. This was Honorine's son, Chateauneuf, a redheaded little runt of a rascal, who had deserted from the French army and gone to America. Aunt Euphrasie cherished the same devotion for this young scoundrel as she did for all the rest of the family. She sent money to him, paid his passage to Brussels, went there to get him, and disguising him as a woman, managed to smuggle him into the country and convey him to Villemomble.

Chateauneuf was not long in making the most of his opportunities. One fine morning he and Adele were missing. They had run away to Brussels, and had been married. Euphrasie wrote to the bride and bridegroom to return to the shelter of her home.

The happy day of her nephew's return was the beginning of trouble for her.

From the first moment of Chateau-

neuf's stay in the house of mystery he scented something wrong. Less gullible than the general public and Elodie Menetret's friends, he suspected that the convent to which this lady had gone was nearer home than had been hinted.

He kept his ears cocked wide open to the talk of his mother and his aunt Sidonie, who were continually praying for the dead, and suggesting that the dead might well walk in the garden.

He never had much faith in this power of attorney which his aunt had obtained, and the more he pondered over the business the queerer it seemed to him.

Besides, his Aunt Euphrasie gave way to strange fits of religious exaltation, in which she let fall highly suspicious remarks. Also there was her strange and jealous regard for the dahlia bed. If she sat at a window overlooking it, her eyes were drawn to it as though by some magnetic attraction.

Putting two and two together and reaching a more or less satisfactory answer, the young man began to test his theory. He was engaged one day in the pastime of spinning a knife on the table and watching where it would stop.

"That's funny," he said, looking up at his aunt. "Do you see where the blade points every time. To the garden. That's where we can look for trouble when the corpses begin to speak."

"Will you keep still," said his aunt with a shudder. "What nonsense are you talking?" And then she added, after a pause, "Do you really think the dead can speak?"

"Sure thing!" said Chateauneuf.

A few days later he tried to borrow a large amount of money from his loving aunt, but, unfortunately, in this case her avarice was greater than her affection, and she refused. Burning with injured innocence, Chateauneuf packed up a hand bag, appropriating such articles as were unattached and available and once more fled with his wife to Brussels. From there he wrote a formal denunciation of his aunt to the attorney of the department of the Seine, and at the same time sent a letter to Elodie's uncle, in which he said that Elodie had been poisoned with phosphorous from match heads, cut up, burned in the bedroom and buried in the garden.

To both letters he attached a neat little plan of the garden, on which the dahlia bed was marked—"Dig here."

Prompt action was taken by the authorities. Euphrasie was arrested. Under the bed of dahlias which she had so carefully guarded were found some charred bones, and some teeth, one of which was gold-filled. Doctors Riche and Brouardel declared these bones to be that of a woman of the approximate age of Elodie Menetret, and that they had been subjected to the action of fire. A dentist stated that one of the missing woman's teeth had been filled by him. A corsage buckle found among the ashes was identified.

In the house was found a hatchet with certain dark stains which the experts said were those of human blood.

An examination of the lily and dahlia bulbs found buried with the remains led an expert gardener to say that they had been put into the earth in the spring of 1883, at which time the mistress of the villa had disappeared.

A search was at once made in the convents of France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Needless to say, Mlle.

Elodie Menetret was not found in any of them. Her clothes, even a braid of her hair, was in Euphrasie's possession. A most damning point against the prisoner was her assumption of the missing woman's identity, her substitution before the notary in Luxembourg, and her disposal of jewels, securities, *et cetera*.

Three alienists declared that in spite of her tendency toward religious mysticism, Euphrasie was responsible for her acts. They dealt more tenderly with the two sisters and the brother, who were committed to an asylum.

The court in Paris was crowded when Euphrasie Mercier was brought in to stand trial for her life. She was an amazing figure who might have stepped from a Spanish canvas, one of Goya's or Zuloaga's old hags. Over her head she wore appropriately a Spanish mantilla—it was probably some of Elodie's finery, and out of this shroud peered a withered, wrinkled face with hooked nose, an age-worn mask in which gleamed and twinkled two bright, malicious, knowing eyes.

Insane she might have been, but her voice, her gestures were those of an actress. She had the makings of a player in her, and it was plain that she had found an outlet for her emotional talents in that curious strain of religious fanaticism which ran through her actions and speech.

When the question put to her was one concerning business or material affairs, she was briskly attentive, and fought the point like a shyster lawyer. But when she spoke of spirit messages, of the presence of angels, or the temptations of the devil, she laid down her lorgnette, and, with hand uplifted, intoned like a prophetess delivering an inspired message.

M. Dubard presided over the Court of Assizes, and, before hearing the eighty-two witnesses, put Euphrasie through a searching questioning.

"Elodie Menetret took you to Villemomble as her companion in the house she had just bought?"

"It was I who bought the house," retorted Euphrasie. "I bought it on God's command."

"But Mlle. Menetret paid for the house?"

"With fifteen thousand francs I lent her."

"Have you the receipt to show for this payment?"

"I'm no business woman. Mademoiselle said, 'You are in your own house, and possession is nine-tenths of the law.'"

"As a matter of fact you were her servant?"

"Oh, we arranged that between ourselves. I wanted to hide my state of finances from the rest of my family, whom I had been supporting all my life. You see I was getting old, and I wanted to keep some of my savings for God's share."

"At Villemomble you excited mademoiselle's weakened nerves by telling her stories of ghosts, of murderers. You used to say that the police never got there until after the crime. You were right in this lamentable case. The police did not do anything until two years after the murder."

"I know nothing about any murder!" Euphrasie snapped.

"She started to make an inventory of her jewels and other property on April 18. That was the date of her disappearance. Since then no one has seen her. She has been sought everywhere, but not a trace of her has been found."

"I can explain that," answered

Euphrasie glibly. "She made up her mind to leave society. She was dead in love with a young man whom she could not marry. She adored him even as the angels worship. And then she was afraid to live in the house. Men with a sinister look were prowling about the garden walls. One night she went and threw herself on her knees at the feet of a priest, and he told her what to do to find peace. She spent the whole night burning letters, and then next day she went away. She left me a farewell bequest—a deed of gift."

"Yes, a few lines in scribbled writing, a few unfinished frantic phrases, as if she had been paralyzed by terror, as if some one had guided her hand in her last moments of dying agony."

"May God forgive you," remarked Euphrasie calmly.

"We have just listened to your version of the departure of your mistress. Do you know what the prosecution allege? That Elodie Menetret never left the house at Villemomble, that you murdered her and buried her there."

"No, I haven't the heart to harm a cat or a rabbit. Me, kill a poor lady I was so fond of?"

"Where is she?"

"I don't know."

"You were very fond of your nephew?" continued Judge Dubard.

"Yes, unluckily for me. The spirits had told me that this boy would bring me misfortune."

"How did he happen to discover your secret?"

"What secret?" inquired Euphrasie blandly.

"The death of Mlle. Menetret."

"Mlle. Menetret is not dead."

"Chateauneuf came to the conclusion that you had murdered her."

"He is plotting with my enemies."

"He asked you for money, and when you refused to give it to him, denounced you to the authorities."

"Yes, yes—yes; he wanted to go to America. I said to him: 'My boy, I haven't got the money by me. If I had it, I'd let you have it.' But he wouldn't wait. Satan had put greed into his heart."

"It is significant of his knowledge that he accurately designated the spot in the garden where the remains of Mlle. Menetret would be found. And there they were found."

"What—what was found there? A bone or two, not enough to fill a pocket handkerchief. The garden is an old cemetery."

"Nothing of the kind. The only skeleton found there is that lying over there on the table among the exhibits in the case.

"When your sister Honorine arrived at the house, the day after the disappearance of Mlle. Menetret, you greeted her with a strange remark: 'I have just accomplished a great work with the help of the angels.'"

"I had just cleaned up the garden and scraped the walls. God always gives me strength when I need it. I am innocent, I tell you, and may your conscience answer as much for you."

"You know the extraordinary publicity which has been given to your case. If Mlle. Menetret is living, she, your friend and confidante, would surely have come forward to deliver you. But she is dead. Look upon that skeleton and swear that these bones are not the piteous remains of Elodie Menetret."

"Before God, I swear it," said Euphrasie strongly, "I have never killed any one, and when I am called upon to appear before the highest judge of all, I will ascend straight up to heaven."

Adele's evidence was anything but favorable to her aunt. Her aunt made a will in her favor leaving her everything provided she take care of the fools of the family. Her aunt had showed her Mlle. Menetret's papers and said she was her heiress and that there was no chance of her returning to claim her money. "When I die," she said, "bury me in the garden. I'd rather lie in the earth than in a coffin."

"Did your aunt ever speak to you of the existence of an old cemetery in the garden?"

"No, it was Aunt Honorine who said one day: 'There are corpses in the garden. We ought to get the priest here to bless them.' Chateauneuf knew lots of things. One day when I was there he looked hard at Aunt Euphrasie and said: 'Some day the dead will speak here.'"

"Did your aunt ever show you hair belonging to Mlle. Menetret?" Adele was asked.

"Yes, monsieur, a long blond braid."

"It was a braid of false hair. Oh, how can you say such things, you wretched girl, and I did so much for you? You have deceived me, and I hope the Holy Virgin will punish you."

The star witness of the trial was Chateauneuf. He spoke in a whining singsong voice. He was very meek and chastened, it nearly broke his sensitive heart to admit his relationship to the wicked old woman accused of murder, whose crime he so deplored. As he looked like a scoundrel and bore every evidence of being a treacherous hypocrite, he was not what one might call a popular figure. But he was the backbone of the case against Euphrasie and so had to be listened to.

"I ought to warn you," said the presiding judge, addressing the jury, "that this man is an informer."

"Yes, that's him," chimed in Euphrasie. "Take a good look at him. That's my nephew, the same that used to call me dear aunt in his letters."

Chateauneuf kept his eyes away from his irate aunt.

"I am twenty-seven," he said, "and I was brought up by my old man. My mother, Honorine, was as daffy over religion as my aunt. I joined the army where I had a great time, and then I beat it for the States. My aunt wrote me there to come home—she said she was rich.

"I couldn't come back to France, so I took up residence in Brussels. My aunt came for me. She said: 'You've got to come back with me, deary, or I'll die.'"

"He's a downright scoundrel," said Euphrasie. "God will punish him yet."

"Stick to the facts," said the presiding judge to Chateauneuf. "Shortly after you came to Villemomble you guessed that Mlle. Menetret had been murdered?"

"I was suspicious about the power of attorney, and when I asked my aunt what had become of mademoiselle, she couldn't tell me. And then there was her fuss about the dahlia bed."

"So you discovered the crime by a process of deduction."

"I could play the spirit game with the best of them. I told her I had visions just like her, and the day was coming when the dead would speak. I wanted her to get the idea I had guessed about the murder."

"Lies, lies, every word of it!" shouted Euphrasie. "Oh, I thought you were an honest boy, but I was wrong."

"I never let up," Chateauneuf continued with a virtuous sniff, "till I could point out the very spot where the bones could be found."

"My enemies buried 'em there. God told me to be on my guard," Euphrasie interjected.

"Why did you inform against your aunt?" the court asked.

"To save her soul. Besides I had to think of other people. My aunt was getting ready to croak some other victim. At least that was the impression I got."

"What precise fact led you to believe Mlle. Menetret had been murdered?"

"There was a holy banner that my mother had embroidered, and it was hung up in the house at Villemomble, and they kept candles burning before it, night and day. They were always kneeling in front of it. Aunt Euphrasie used to get down on her knees, and kiss the floor sixteen times. Then she would crawl backward and get up on her feet and open the window, and cry out:

"'In the name of God, be driven out, Beelzebub, Lucifer, Satan and all the host of hell. Avaunt ye terrors. Avaunt judges, police and law courts. Avaunt phantoms of my garden. Menetret now dead, rest in peace, in the peace of the Lord and the glory of the elect. Amen.'

"That finished me. I left Villemomble and wrote to M. Kuehn, head of the detective department."

The witness then begged to be excused. He had to get away before his safe conduct expired, otherwise he would have been arrested as a deserter from the French army.

His wife was recalled for a few more questions.

"Don't lie," screamed her aunt, "I forbid you to lie, little hussy. The devil's got into you. God orders me to fast three nights and three days to drive the demon out of your body, you little Judas, you."

The last witness was a shabby little dancer, Elodie Menetret's niece, Louise.

"I'm delighted to see you," said Euphrasie in mincingly polite tones. "You are the image of your dear aunt."

The only person in the whole trial for whom she had a good word was the blundering police commissary, Oberinger. He was hailed as being a "good, kind gentleman!" which did not go far to console him for the sarcastic comments passed upon his conduct of the case by the bench.

At ten o'clock in the evening of the fourth day of the trial, the jury went out, and after an hour and a half returned with a verdict—guilty of murder, theft, and forgery.

Sentence of twenty years' imprisonment was pronounced. It was the severest punishment which could be inflicted on one of the prisoner's age—after the jury had strangely enough granted extenuating circumstances.

Euphrasie Mercier this time was dumb. She uttered neither prayer nor curse as she was led away. It may be doubted whether she had the vaguest comprehension that she had become entitled to have her portrait added to the Gallery of Crime, but she had at least this doubtful satisfaction, that whatever ghastly scene had been enacted within the bedroom of Elodie Menetret, she alone was the unconquered guardian of the secret details.

CHARACTER REVEALED IN YOUR HANDWRITING

EDITOR'S NOTE — *After making character analysis, through handwriting, his hobby for more than a score of years, John Fraser has recently won wide renown in New York City as a popular lecturer on this subject.*

He conducts a thriving business of analyzing character from handwriting; and many notables in this country and abroad have complimented him on the accuracy of his findings.

JOHN FRASER

By special arrangement his personal analysis is given to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *readers for ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE, or free with a $1.00 subscription for thirteen issues (in Canada $1.75 for subscription). Please fill out the special coupon.*

character and which kind

J. McC., Davenport, Iowa—You impress me as a very self-important young fellow. You certainly love to strut around where the girls are. You are in your element when those fair ones' eyes are turned on you. Of course you are magnanimous and lavish in the spending of money, an explanation perhaps, of your colossal popularity.

The Good Book says that in Heaven the sheep and the goats will be divided. I have found it to be different in America. The sheep are usually the goats in this old land of ours. So beware brother, and stop being a human lollipop before it is too late. I'm glad to see that you have the makings of a big man, if you would only get down to earth and be yourself.

I like your logical turn of mind. You could be constructive in your thinking. One of your strongest traits is your good judgment. You have the faculty of just knowing how things should be done. You appear to be a good-natured chap. Always candid and outspoken. Sometimes too much so, which bears out the fact that all the gush in the oil business is not confined to the gushers, nor to the State of Texas, since *you* live in Iowa. Another thing is your self-dependence. You also carry this a little too far. I believe in a man standing on his two feet, but when it comes to sheer domination, as it is in your case, you descend to the bully class of men who believe in the mailed fist. When you read this, you would do well to stop, look, and consider, before you get a day older.

send the coupon & your handwriting

Mrs. L. O. F., Asbury Park, N. J.—

I should say that you possess many strong positive traits, and have enough faults and failings to make you an interesting woman.

Mentally, your thinking is somewhat diffused, and you are not able to keep the various matters occupying your attention clear and separate in your mind.

You are inclined to mix one with the other, and the obvious result is that your decisions are vague, and your mind is never strongly convinced on any question you are considering.

You seem to be very susceptible to sentiment, and your sympathies are easily aroused. You are given to fretting and worrying about the trivialities. You would do well to get out of this habit. A fretter is a disagreeable person to have around, at any time. You are also self-contained. You are able to rely on your resources to a very great extent.

Your strong will-power makes you opinionative. You do not like to meet people who entertain different opinions than yourself. It also makes you impatient with those who you think are inferior to you in ability and in general intelligence.

Toward such unfortunates you hand out a sample of your temper, which, to say the least, is fiery and quick. Any woman possessing such a temper is bound to be hard to live with, and, I'm sorry to say, you are no exception to the rule.

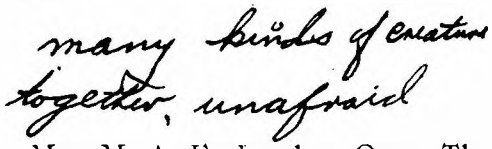
I further observe that you are a very discriminating woman. You practice diplomacy and tact when you think it advisable to do so. This is your saving grace and enables you to get out of a difficult situation. You have a distinctive personality, and considerable inherent ability. Your faults are not serious, but it would be better for you if they were eradicated.

P. M. F., Los Angeles, Calif.—I'm afraid I am going to have to class you as a mediocre person. You show no very great aptitudes. You do not possess an interesting mind. You lack intellectual depth, consequently you will never occupy a very high position. All this is seen by the flamboyancy of your pen strokes. Like many others who recognize their own shortcomings, you try to make up for your lacks by display and ostentation. You fool no one but yourself, however, and this piece of bravado adds nothing to your reputation.

As I have said before in these columns to some of your competitors in self-importance, the man who has to stand on his dignity to make others see him, resembles the Chinaman who sat on his pigtail to keep his head erect. You should remember that modesty is the garment of wisdom. The greater the knowledge, the greater the modesty. Your looped letters reveal a mine of information to me. By them I see that you are inherently clever.

When it comes to the superficial things in life, you have the faculty of seeing quickly the funny side of a situation. You belong to the type of men who spend most of their time in telling their fellows a "brand new story." We find one of your sort in every office. Up to a point your tribe is very entertaining company, I'll admit, but unfortunately the gilt soon wears off their gingerbread, with the result they become "marked men" and are minus friends in the long run. My advice to

you is, instill a little more seriousness into your thinking. Popcorn minds may be in great demand at a flappers' party, but their face value doesn't amount to much in the world of business.



Mrs. M. A. F., London, Ont.—The circles over your "I's" don't impress me very much. They may look pretty, but to the graphologist, they are simply a mannerism.

You are trying vainly to be eccentric and unconventional, but I'm afraid you are not succeeding very well. I wouldn't be surprised if many of your friends have already said that you were crazy. Of course, these peculiar pen-strokes could also be the result of some mental disturbance brought about by a sudden shock to the nervous system. In your case, I see nothing in your handwriting to indicate the latter. It is nothing more nor less than an attempt to be different from other people.

Then again, you are inclined to be passive, and show very little power of resistance. You are extremely reserved with strangers, and consequently you do not make friends very readily. Your tendency to get into the "blues" is very pronounced. If I were your physician, I would prescribe to you a mental exterminator. It is as necessary to you as your tooth brush. You have far too many germs in that mind of yours. If you only knew it, you are killing the most precious thing any human being could possess—peace of mind.

I further observe a very affectionate strain in your character. In this connection you are really demonstrative, and, as a rule, you would not hesitate to show your likes and dislikes. Regarding your question, as to how long I think you will live, well, Mrs. F., my answer to that question is, how did you feel this morning?

Do you want Mr. Fraser's analysis of your character and a personal letter from him? Then send us the coupon and six lines of your handwriting, in ink, with ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE. Mr. Fraser will send you an analysis. Or, send us one dollar for a thirteen-weeks' subscription to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *(in Canada, one dollar and seventy-five cents), and Mr. Fraser will send you a FREE analysis!*

To John Fraser, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway, N. Y. City

Signature_____

Street_____ **City**_____

10-5

FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

READERS are taking a lively interest in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. They are not satisfied merely to form their opinions and keep quiet. They are writing in to tell us. And that's exactly what we want. We want to hear from you about what you like, what you dislike. Here are some interesting comments—like hundreds we have been getting every week. See if you agree with the writers.

HOW TO SUCCEED!

DEAR EDITOR:

I read your magazine since its first number and am considering never more to buy one issue because, instead of improving, it is getting worse and worse.

In the first place: why do you cut out more and more the true stories? Those are the ones which are, without any doubt, the most interesting ones for the real intelligent people.

Stories like *Chanda-Lung* and other Oriental nonsense are an insult to the intelligence of the educated readers. The *Lester Leith* stories are impossible ones; the first and maybe the second one, were interesting enough, but to give us so many about an impossible character as *Leith* is not right at all.

It was a good thought of yours not to continue the stories with a character like that half-wit sheriff who repeated in every one of his stories: "As my grammy used to say." It was also good to discontinue stories about *Dizzy McArthur* and *Saxophone Smithers*.

The *Riordan* and *Jack Calhoun* characters are splendid ones, but the trouble is you have given us much too much of them. The stories with *Ruggles* as the star were *all* the bunk. *Bill Lawson*, the shoe-shining detective, is absolutely overdone, and I am quite sure the majority of your regular readers don't wish to read ever again of him.

The serials are all far too much drawn out, and I am sure only a few readers ever read them. I never read a serial any more.

Let me give you the following good advice: Give us every week at least five or six true stories (not in serial form), four or five snappy short stories, *cut the serials entirely out* or, if you wish to keep a certain class of people content, give never more than *one* per issue. A novelette now and then—not too long, and not with impossible stars as *Ruggles* or *Lester Leith*—will be all right.

And cut out, in the first place, John Fraser's analyses; they are absolutely the bunk. He was not a mile out in mine, as Mr. Lewis, of Pittsburgh, Pa., wrote in your issue of August 3, but about *ten* miles. Also cut out the Cipher Secrets, which interest only a very few of your readers, and also the "Coming Next Week"; and if you do all this you sure will not require any more the "Flashes From Readers," because all readers will be content and nobody will have any more reason to complain. And the letters full of praise, which then surely will come in a great number, keep those in your files and look them over now and then with great satisfaction, but please don't publish them; it is not good policy to do so and most of us don't believe, anyhow, in published praise; we think you write them yourself.

If you follow my advice entirely you surely will have one of the finest magazines on the market and although you will lose some of your old readers—the ones who crave serials, *Chanda-Lung, Ruggles, Lester Leith* and other impossible nonsense—you surely will win ten times more new readers.

The above opinion is not only mine, but also that of dozens of my friends in the film colony, many of whom already have stopped reading your magazine.

Yours sincerely,
CHAS. A. MILLSFIELD,
Hollywood, Cal.

EDDIE GUERIN'S STORY

DEAR SIR:

I've read your magazine for two or three years and have always liked it. In fact, I'm fond of any detective stories. I like Victor Maxwell's stories very much. Hope he will continue to write for your magazine.

Now I would like to state my mind about Eddie Guerin's story. I've been reading his story because I thought it would be very interesting—I've read and heard so much about him. To me his story was a great disappointment, especially the last installment. I positively know that Robert Considine, alias Charles Smith, was not drunk when he shot Eddie Guerin. I also know that Chicago May never betrayed Guerin to the police. It was through Chicago May Churchill that Guerin was able to escape from Devil's Island, otherwise he would have died, as nearly every prisoner does that is sentenced to Devil's Island.

After all Chicago May had done for him, and the way he showed his appreciation, I wouldn't have blamed her for betraying him to the police.

I'll always uphold my sex whether crook or Christian. I think Chicago May was far too good to have a man such as Guerin speak the untruth about her.

A stanch admirer.

Yours very truly,
BOOTS BOND,
Prescott, Ariz.

AS HISTORY UNFOLDS

DEAR EDITOR:

I would like to air my opinion of your stories, being a regular reader and detective story fan of *Flynn's* for three years, attracted from the start by the true stories.

First come the true stories. As history unfolds human nature, so do your true stories. *Flynn's* would not be *Flynn's* without them. Next, because they are more like true stories, come E. P. Ware's *Calhoun*, head and shoulders above most of the other fiction. Then *Riordan*, Don H. Thompson's, H. de Polo's, with the *Leith* stories entertaining, but too much inclined to ridicule the detectives.

A. MCCABE,
Nevada City, Calif.

MOST OF THEM LIKED IT

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a steady reader of your magazine and would continue to read it if only for the *Lester Leith* stories. However, a few more stories like "The Secret," by John Hunter, and your public will be one less. I have read many mystery stories, but that was the worst yet. People like to see an exciting climax, and not find out at the end of the story that the mysterious killer was dead all throughout the story. Wonder what your other readers think about it.

Yours,
EDWARD R. KELLY,
Detroit, Mich.

Get an artist's original illustration of a story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. Fill out and send us coupons from ten different issues of the magazine.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

Editor,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

10-5

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

WITH the publication of Primrose's celebrated "Equus" crypt in the July 6 issue there arose throughout the land a great cry of protest and bewilderment.

However, Primrose was quick to offer in last week's Crypt No. 2 a simplified and more understandable version of the same text, the answer to which appears below. To further quiet the outburst, Primrose has also submitted the following authentic interpretation of his original message.

"The contribution," explains Primrose, "was a cryptogrammatic potpourri containing three statements, with a challenge to solve. The first statement—'Equus, horse tribe, flops'—meant that the horse is falling into disuse; the second statement—'woodruff, near draw-well, flavors wine'—that the herb in question can be used in flavoring wine; the third—'cross-staff, shilly-shally nixey, past'—that the 'cross-staff,' a former sea instrument, is now 'past,' and undecidedly no, a literal meaning of 'shilly-shally nixey.'"

The actual decipherment of this cabalistic concoction apparently afforded less difficulty than the interpretation of the meaning, so that, practically, the crypt was a cipher within a cipher. However, most of the fans started by guessing "shilly-shally" outright, proceeding then with "cross-staff," "woodruff," and so on. Upon the whole, solvers were agreed that the doubled letters afforded the readiest means of attack.

"Nutmeg" is entertaining you this week with a cipher transcript of a humorous newspaper advertisement. Compare D and GDHH, MBJ and BJ, OAN and CQOA, and you will get all but one letter in word 23. The suffixes -XUS and -XSE, and the two-letter word XL, should start you with M. O.'s crypt, but will still leave you with work to do. Try your own methods of solution with Mrs. Alice S. Zimmer's interesting No. 3.

No. 1—By "Nutmeg."

ABCDEF: D GDHH ABC IF JFKLBA-KDHF MBJ NFICK EBACJOECFN MBJ BJ IP OAP BCQFJ CQOA RPK-FHM. RP IFN OAN IBOJN DK OIK-FAC GDCQBSC EOSKF.

No. 2—By M. O.

PUMVIB IGBMVL QBUSMXIBL LJG-BJIAZ IDXLM MUHGZ. JXCXAXN-GMXUS XL OXHILWBIGH. UTB WXUSIHBL GBI HGBXSE GCXGMU-BL. JUSLMGSMAZ BXLFXSE MVIXB AXCIL.

No. 3—By Mrs. Alice S. Zimmer.

AZBYBC AULPBC AXDWECVAEX-CW FVUEB GCBFVBDEZT AXDGV-WB SIHUEUXVW WXZYBCW EPCX-VNP WTWEBISEUA BILZXTIBDE XG "GSZWB ZBSRW."

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

1—Lester Leith schemed safe, smart, stirring stratagem. Indeed, it was "A Peach of a Scheme." So simple, swift, satisfyingly sure. I read it twice, chuckling the while.

2—The horse is disappearing; woodruff, near cistern, helps wine; cross-staff now past, undecidedly no; three statements, or potpourri.

3—Aviation student essays loops during solo flight, stalls motor, goes into nose dive, crashes through hangar.

Answers to this week's cryptograms will appear in the next issue. Solvers' Lists are published monthly. Send us your cryptograms and solutions, fans!

COMING NEXT WEEK!

IT was the shrill ringing of the telephone that startled Dr. John Field out of his sleep that night when horror first stalked into Himbledon.

It was Roger Thames's voice, choked and breathless, that froze the physician with the nameless fear of something terrible, something unknown.

"Thank Heaven you're in, Field!" Thames cried. "Come right over. Life and death—don't call any one else. Come right away!"

Strangely, Thames's house was dark and silent when Dr. Field ran across the broad front porch. He did not pause to ring. He put his hand on the door. It was open. Inside, the hall was black and abysmal.

"Thames!" he shouted. "Where are you?"

He heard a half-strangled, inarticulate cry, and followed it into Thames's study.

A single lamp burned there, a ruby lamp that threw a scarlet glow over an amazing sight.

Roger Thames stood leaning against a wall, both hands clutching a handkerchief to his face, shuddering in excruciating agony.

And as he hurried across the room toward him, Field stumbled.

"Thames, what has—" Field paused, horrified, staring down at the body of a woman which lay at his feet.

In a flash the physician noted her beauty, took in the blond hair that spread under her head on the dark carpet, saw the pistol that rested a few inches from her dead fingers.

And he turned back to his friend, who was rocking with pain, sobbing over and over: "Do something for me, John. Oh, God! What agony!"

The horror had come to Himbledon.

Before the police arrived, Dr. Field knew two things. That a malignant fate was on the trail of a dozen people; that a ghastly mystery held suddenly in its grip the lives of an uncomprehending household.

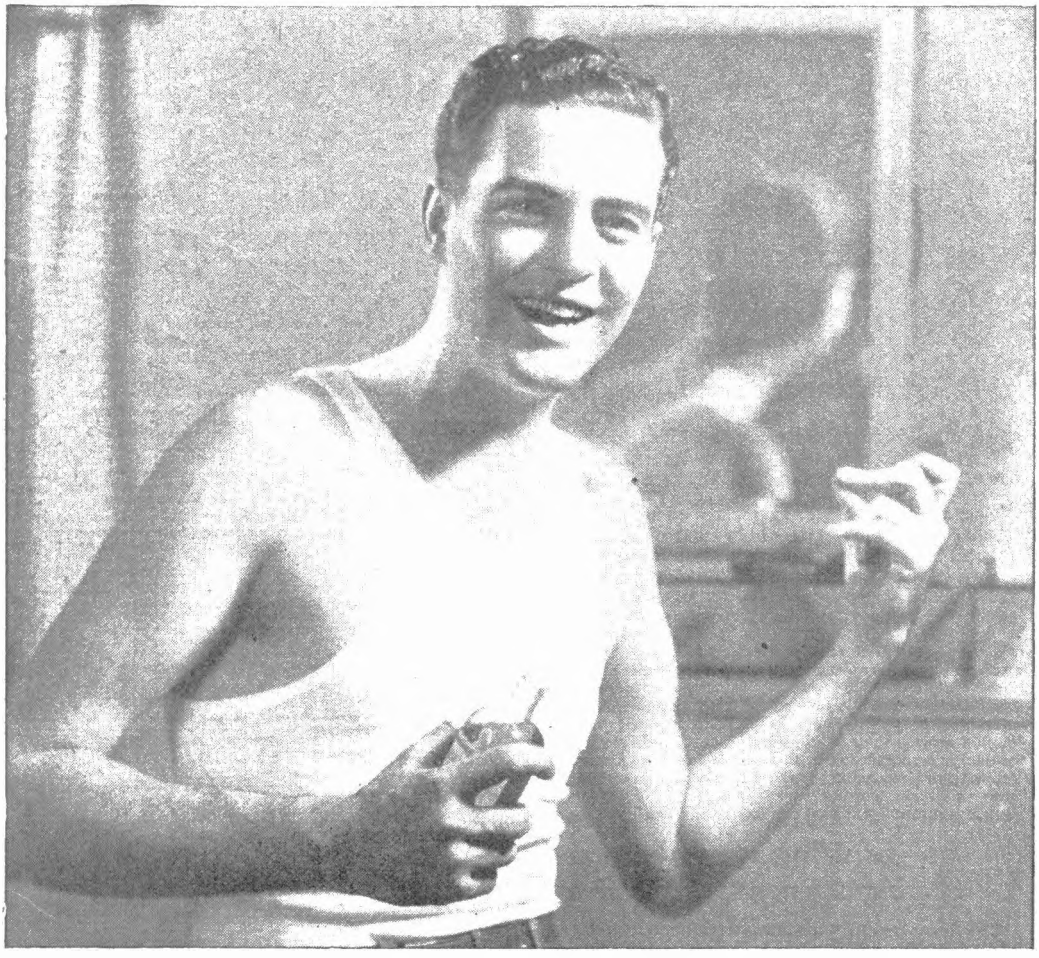
Read this new serial by the author of "The Red Yacht Sails."

White Scars

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

And thrilling stories by J. Allan Dunn, Victor Maxwell, T. T. Flynn, Frank King, Eugene Cunningham, John Wilson Murray and others in

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—October 12



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There's the germ of a story in this picture. What can you do with it? What couldn't you do with it if you were a newspaper-trained writer?

What makes a salable salary?

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Nerve is capitalized, because lack of nerve—lack of confidence—is the steel chain that fetters many a natural-born writer to some dull, uncongenial task. "Maybe I haven't got it in me" brings many a potential best-seller to a premature close. Ability without enterprise seldom finds its target.

Have you ever noticed that every year scores of young men graduate from the newspaper profession into the ranks of successful writers? Why? Most newspaper men know that writing "salable stuff" is no dark and mysterious secret. Day after day, they write—and write. The very nature of their calling crowds their minds with ideas. Their copy is painstakingly corrected and criticized—by experts. Occasionally, friendly (or threatening) advice is thrown in. And gradually, fewer and fewer corrections are necessary. Astonishing how quickly an intelligent man can *learn to write by writing.*

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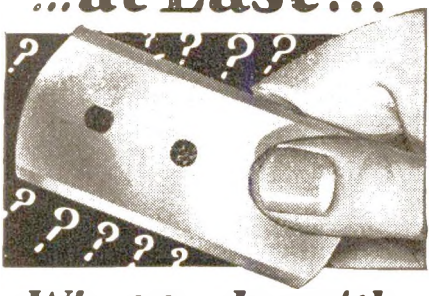

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DON'T throw them away! For old razor blades are worth **real** money now that KRISS-KROSS rejuvenates them an amazing way and gives them the kind of edge you have only **dreamed** about until now. And not only that, it can take a **new** blade right out of a fresh package and increase its sharpness almost 100%! KRISS KROSS makes blades **last** astonishingly, too. Ten weeks of slick shaves from a single blade is only a low average while any number of cases are on record where one blade has lasted for 365 keen, cool shaves a year!

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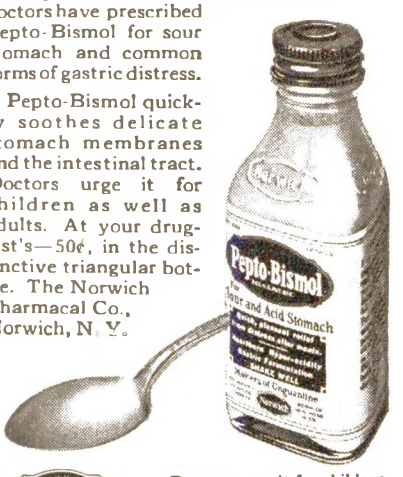

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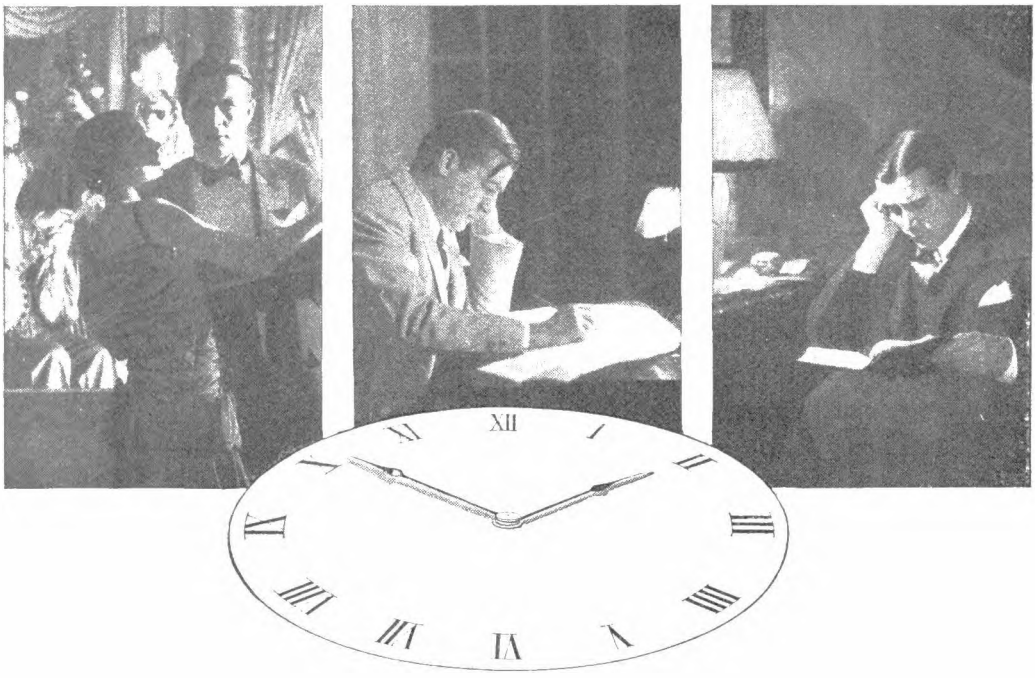

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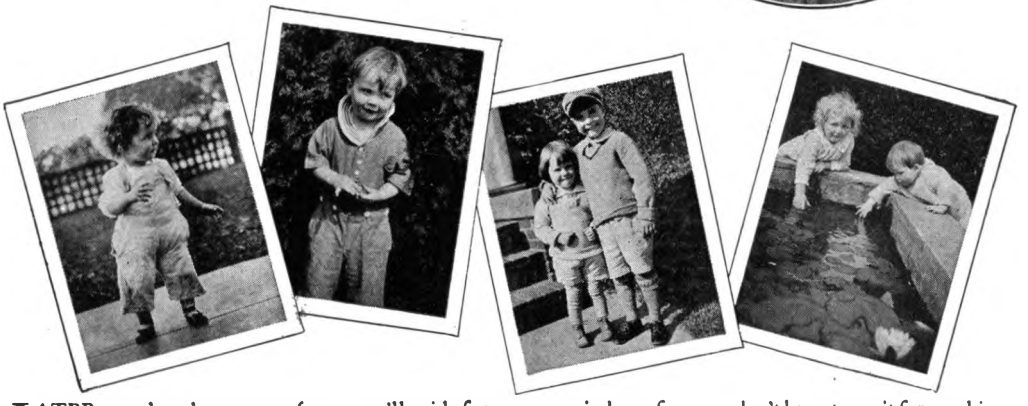

LATER on, when they step out for themselves, snapshots of their early years will become your most precious possession.

Today you are looking ahead. Tomorrow you'll want to look back, to see them as they are now, as they will never be again.

This is the time when your Kodak can be of greatest help, the time to take more snapshots than you have ever taken before.

Children Today—Adults Tomorrow

They change so quickly. You can almost *see* them getting taller, broader, more mature. Perhaps now you're tucking them into bed, buttoning up their clothes, cutting up their meat in little pieces, and keeping them away from open windows. But in only a few years more they'll be telling *you* what to do and looking the part.

When your Boy becomes a Man and your Girl becomes a Woman you'll wish for more reminders of their childhood days. Don't leave this wonderful period to the fickleness of memory. Keep your Kodak next to your hat and coat. Then you won't miss any picture chances because you meant to bring it with you but forgot.

Don't Wait for Sunshine

Then, too, snapshots are fun to take. That is another reason for the extraordinary popularity of Kodaks. They are on sale everywhere and at prices that do their bit toward bringing down the high cost of living. The Brownie, a genuine Eastman camera, sells for as little as $2, and Kodaks as low as $5.

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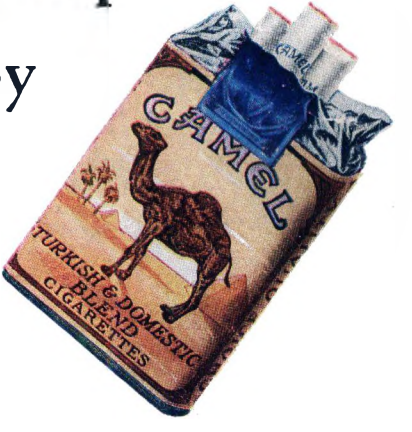

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