DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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JULY 7

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THE CRIME CREW

by Wyndham Martyn

The Strange Voyage of the Albatross

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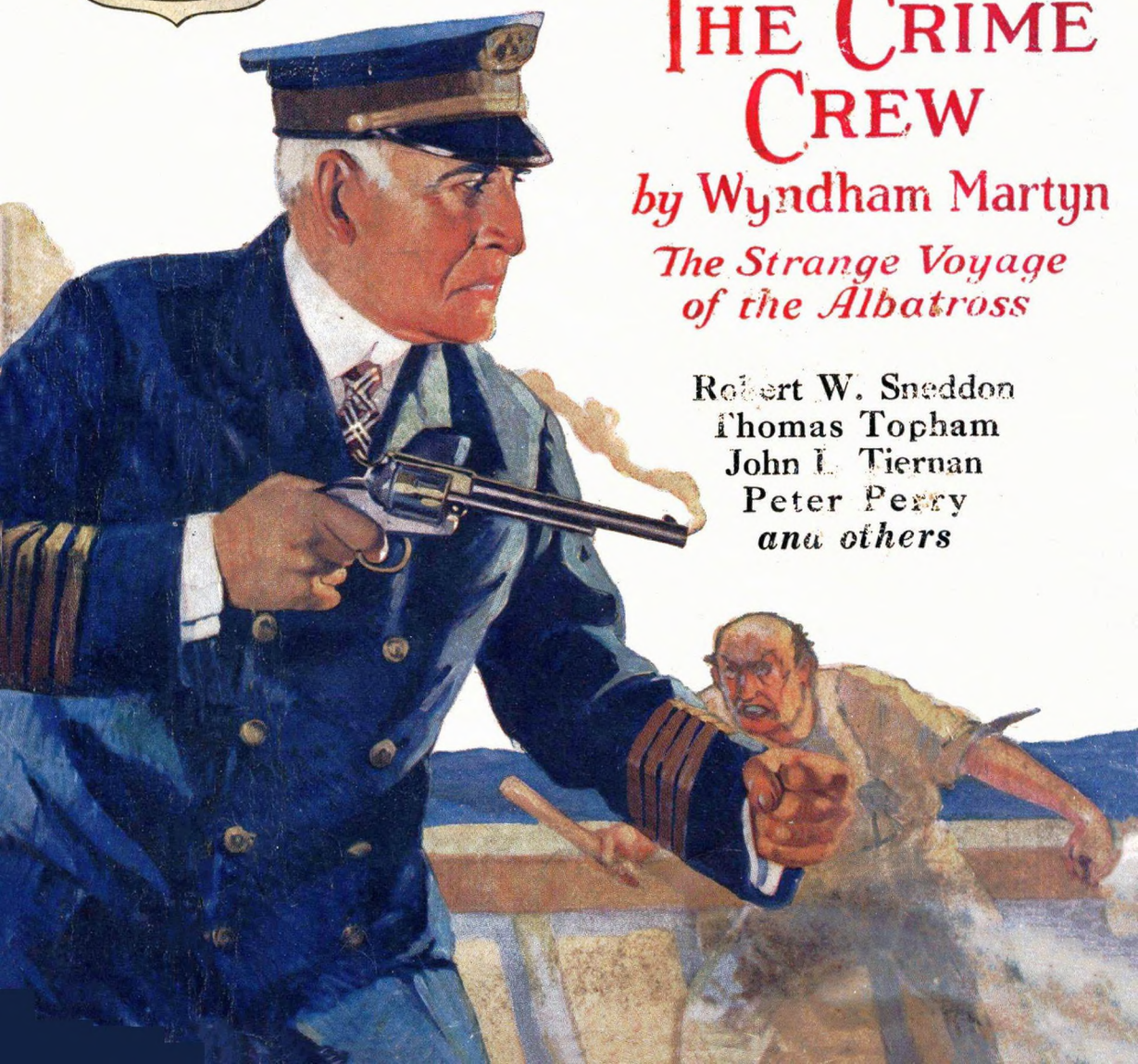

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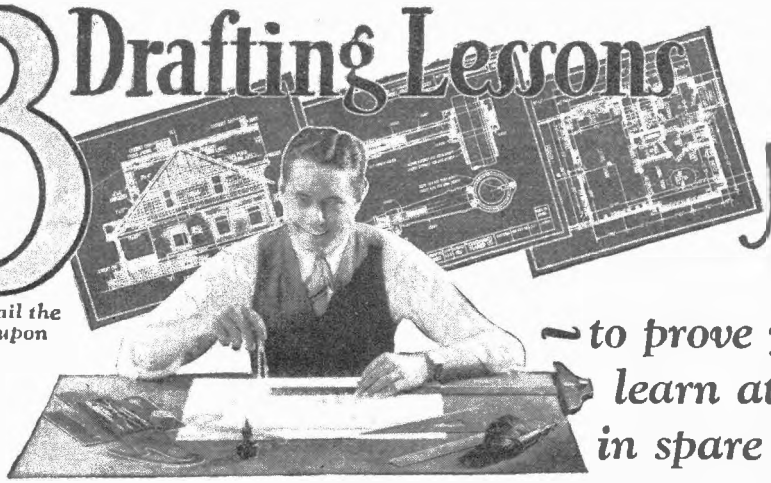

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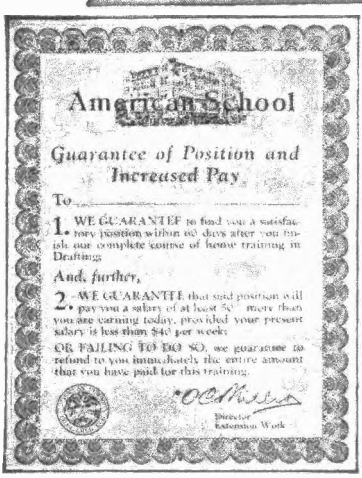

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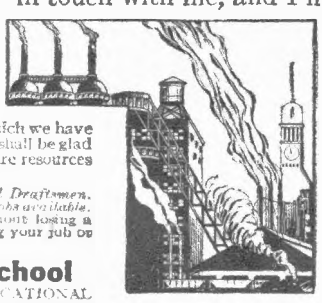

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

VOLUME XXXIV — *Saturday, July 7, 1928* — NUMBER 1

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

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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.

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Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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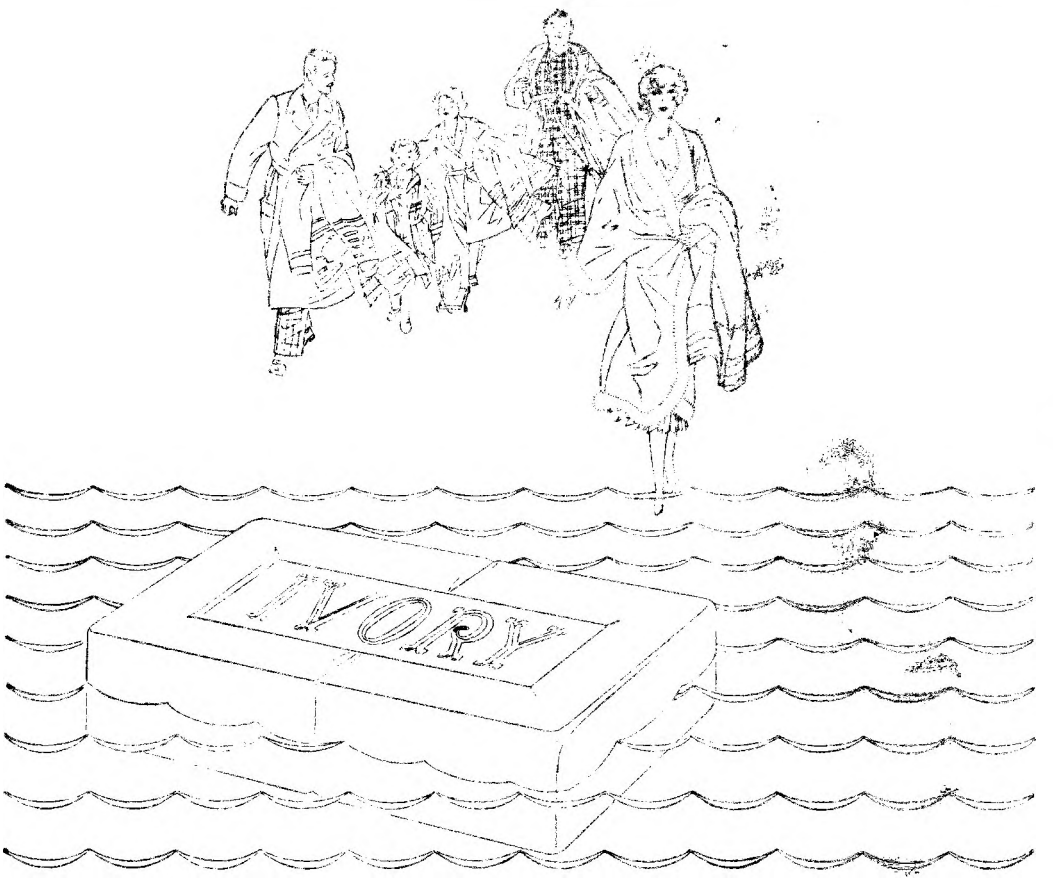

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Here's a lot of people walking, and the artist says they're talking—they've already told him secretly, "We're going for a bath."

He says they seem so hopeful they will find tubs floating soapful that he dares not give them *sinker*-soap because he fears their wrath.

So, dancing on their bath horizon, *there's* a sight to rest their eyes on! Now they'll change their bathrobes for an Ivory lather coat!

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KIND TO EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

VOLUME XXXIV | SATURDAY, JULY 7, 1928 | NUMBER 1

"Who are you?" said Gibbs

THE CRIME CREW

A Mad Lust for Gold Leads to Startling Ends in the Grim Mutiny of the Albatross

By Wyndham Martyn

CHAPTER I

Mr. Unwin Makes a Call

THE financier, sitting alone in his remote and splendid library, was engaged in the task of marshalling his forces, estimating his losses and wondering if it would be necessary to call in reënforcements for this battle to the death with Radway.

He looked up with a scowl at the apologetic secretary who came softly in. Gibbons's secretaries were always apologetic and rarely lasted six months. It was the Gibbons way to terrorize, to override, to make the inferior damn-

ably conscious of being the underdog.

"But," the secretary was reiterating, "he says he is a very old friend. Unwin is the name."

"Unwin," Gibbons repeated. "I know a dozen Unwins."

"Tubby Unwin, sir," said the secretary. "He said you would remember him by that."

He could see that his employer remembered. Something of the hardness fell from the dreaded face. Gibbons had gone back in that moment of recollection almost twenty years. What a difference from the present.

Too Busy

He was now living in a day when eminence in financial circles seemed as unattainable as the fountain of youth. Of course, he remembered "Tubby" Unwin. And with Tubby there swam back into memory that other one of the three, Howard Bettington. They were inseparables at Cambridge in the old days. Every year they swore to have a reunion; and in the eighteen years that had gone by he had not seen them once!

"What does he want?" Gibbons demanded.

"An opportunity for a talk," said the secretary.

"Tell him I'm too busy to see any one for three days. Then ask him to dinner." Gibbons thought a moment. "Find out from him if Betty—Howard Bettington—is in New York. If he is, ask him to dinner and let me know when they are coming."

Gibbons waved the pale secretary away. The gesture was final. The instructions must be carried out successfully and no aid solicited in the doing of them. The secretary who asked questions had a short life in the Gibbons home.

The secretary, assuming an intimate of his employer's must be of the favored classes, gave Unwin the message and supposed he was telephoning from another fine residence.

These millionaires, the secretary sighed, what was there in modern civilization that they could not reach out for and pluck!

Floyd Unwin's home was not of the kind to awaken envy even in a Gibbons secretary. It was a small apartment on the fourth floor of a structure now dwarfed by light absorbing and scornful buildings which hemmed it in.

Unwin's daughter, Mary, used to say it looked as though it wanted to run away and hide, but dare not. If the place had no beauty it was home to the Unwins; and there was a roof garden which endeared the commonplace flat to them. Here, among brick shafts, was a green garden place bright with potted flowers and shrubs.

It was to this retreat that Floyd Unwin took his way on the receipt of Gibbons's message. The children had not yet come home. His wife, who spent most of her invalid hours on a couch, looked up with a smile.

Next Wednesday

She was one of those really good women who accept bodily ills as God's judgments; she felt her long illness was sent in some mysterious way to prepare her for eternal life.

"I'm to go there to dinner next Wednesday," Unwin said, "and I'm to ask Howard Bettington. I know he's in town, because there's an exhibit of his paintings in a shop on Forty-Sixth Street. I passed it yesterday."

"Was his manner cordial?" Mrs. Unwin asked.

Her husband explained that a secretary had given the message.

"I'm very nervous at the prospect," he admitted. "Gibbons is a very big man. They say, in ten years' time he will be the greatest capitalist in the country." Unwin mused a moment. "He was always inclined to be hard and masterful. And yet, to think that but for me and my coaching, he would never have got his A. B. They call him the master manipulator of high

finance, and yet I could hardly drill elementary mathematics into his head."

Unwin suddenly ceased and fell into a mood of depression. At college he had been esteemed brilliant, and Gibbons had been accounted dull. And Gibbons was a multi-millionaire. And Floyd Unwin solicited advertisements for a trade journal and was its associate editor!

Then he thought of Howard Bettington, who had made some success as a painter of seascapes. Bettington was the best of the three. He was better looking, better bred and could have attained eminence in anything he set his mind upon. And he had chosen to adventure into far corners of the earth and seas and every now and then exhibit his unusual canvases to the appreciative few who admired but did not buy.

Tight Money

"Did you close that contract?" he heard his wife ask. The contract had been talked over a great deal. The commission would have removed the steady calling of an intolerant individual who concerned himself with payments of furniture on the instalment plan.

Unwin removed a dead leaf from a plant. He did not want to meet his wife's eye.

"The time was not ripe," he said, a little weakly. "Also they complain that our circulation is not large. I explained it was a quality circulation, but it was no good. Next month, perhaps."

His wife said nothing. To her it was an evidence that God desired her to be yet more strengthened and purified by suffering. To her there often seemed something impious in trying to avert the obvious punishment. But she never grumbled or found fault with her husband. Her affection was strong and sincere.

"Do you think Mr. Gibbons will?" she asked presently.

"Yes," Unwin answered. "Why shouldn't he? It's a solemn moral obligation, and I'm not sure it isn't a legal one also. Gibbons was always a man of his word. I know he has the name of being hard in his dealings, but this is different."

He paused as he heard footsteps. "But not a word to the children. I don't want to raise their hopes and then have to disappoint them."

It was Mary, eighteen and sweet, and now hopeful. She held in her hand a packet of the literature that Smith College sends out to those who seek to know her charms and terms. Mary was more than anxious to enrol. What money she could save was put by for that purpose. And during the last week her father had been letting fall sly hints that Northampton might not seem so far away as she thought.

"Did you close the contract?" she asked, when she had kissed them.

"Money is tight," said Unwin, again plucking leaves. "I shall try them in a month's time."

Up His Sleeve

He saw Mary droop a little. He knew the disappointment. It nerved him to give her encouragement.

"I've something up my sleeve better than that old contract. On Thursday morning ask me what I mean. It may mean Smith for you and Tech. for Bob."

"It seems too good to be true," the girl said. "Daddy, I'm so tired of being Mr. Radway's stenographer. I'm in a constant atmosphere of fear, and it's bad for me. Every one in the office trembles when he comes in. If it weren't that he pays more than I'm worth I'd leave to-morrow."

When she had gone down to prepare the evening meal Unwin looked at his wife anxiously. "Mary is a very beautiful girl," he said. "I wonder if undesirable men try to force themselves on her. There's an intimacy in business relations that one can't wholly approve of."

He walked about the roof garden aimlessly. That was his chief defect, this uncertainty of aim. He was, for example, never to know he had convinced the firm that his paper was the right medium in the matter of the full-page contract for a year. He had gone out at the moment of victory, thinking he was defeated.

Bob, the seventeen-year-old son, with the mechanical turn of mind, came in. Unwin turned to greet him with a cheerful smile. He anticipated the unasked question.

"I didn't get it," he said; "money was tight. I went in at a bad time. Next month, perhaps. I'm sorry, Bob."

The boy was taller than his father. In a sense he was a more resolute and reliable man. He put his arms about the elder with a protective gesture. "I know you did your best," he said simply."

And all through the dinner poor Unwin was haunted by the certainty that he had not done his best.

Real Friends

"Never mind," he said, with a suddenness that almost startled the boy and girl. "Never mind. That contract was not all I had up my sleeve." He snapped his fingers with a gesture which implied that the contract was unworthy of another thought. "Friendship counts for something. In dark moments one thinks of friends."

He ceased suddenly and would say no more. When he had taken a tray to his wife, Bob looked at his sister.

"What do you suppose he meant by that?"

"I can't guess. Something is buzzing around and around in his dear old head. By to-morrow he will have forgotten."

She was tired. She leaned on her elbows. The thought of the Radway office and its dread efficiency overcame her. She had other than the business instincts and ambitions

"Oh, Bob," she sighed, "if I could only go to Smith."

"They say the M. I. T. is the best in the world," he said.

CHAPTER II

A Financier At Home

WHEN the hour for dinner drew near Gibbons was inclined to blame the pale secretary that men like Bettington and Unwin, with whom he had now no common ground of intercourse, should be his guests.

Mrs. Gibbons had been frankly amazed. Resolutely she had cut adrift from all her old friends. In the pursuit of social success the new friends are the ones who count.

She had a few minutes' talk with her husband before she went to a dinner party of prominent women who were about to found a really exclusive club.

"I've never even heard you mention their names."

"I'd forgotten them," he said. "The word 'Tubby' brought it all back. Unwin was 'Tubby' and Bettington was 'Betty.' We were thick as thieves once."

"And you?" she asked. "What did they call you, by way of a nickname?"

"I've forgotten," he lied.

Outside, Floyd Unwin was waiting for Howard Bettington. He needed moral support. He was come, so he told himself, upon a task that hardly promised success. He cursed himself for his perpetual enthusiasms.

It had looked so simple, so probable, so assured. He had been losing courage ever since he had donned his evening dress. The refusal of his well preserved but ancient clothes to adapt themselves to new and ampler measurements had brought anxious moments.

Would the cloth hold? Might not buttons fly off in resentment and leave him naked to an unkind world? And he had punctuated these efforts to ar-

ray himself by pathetic asides. He had declared that he was a small eater; that he walked daily many miles and yet the time of trial had found him over weight!

It was not fat. A man who ate so little and walked so far could not be fat. It was a laxity of form, an unwillingness of the flesh to adapt itself to long discarded garb.

He had not seen Bettington for almost ten years, but there was no mistaking the tall form that came toward him out of the gloom. On his part, Bettington would have passed Unwin by without recognition.

A Big Success

The non-success of Unwin's career had stamped itself upon the man. He was ineffectual, apologetic, without assertion. He expected to be passed by and overlooked.

Together they knocked at the bronze doors. Even in the few moments that elapsed before a footman opened to them, Bettington found himself ashamed that the old friendships had meant so little. He was conscious, vividly, of the good, dreaming student days, when Unwin had been so close a friend. Did friendship, he wondered, feed only on its constant recognition?

He had forgotten Unwin after the first few years. Unwin had married while at Cambridge. Then came the girl and the boy. Bettington had once sent his old friend a painting. That was all. As to Gibbons, that was different.

The financier was so constantly spoken of that he was fresh in the mind. But all these years Howard Bettington had not once tried to meet him. He had heard him speak at a public banquet and had seen that the man he used to like was dead. In his place had come the grasping, unscrupulous capitalist who was to carve his way to power.

The footman, when he had ushered the guests into a hall, where the butler stood commandingly, looked curiously at them. He knew they were not habitués of the Gibbons home, or, indeed, of any of those great homes where such as he were content to serve.

At Bettington the lackey looked with faint approval. Bettington wore, as was his custom, a black velvet dinner coat. But it was well cut, and the man moved as though these magnificent halls were his usual haunts.

It was at Unwin, poor Floyd Unwin, scholar and failure, that the menservants looked with scorn. Such garments were not now worn. Even the cloth was different. Unwin made useless efforts to push his shirt front into a less inflated position.

Proudly it swelled out; he felt it accentuated the tightness of his waistcoat. It was a cheap shirt which bore itself as if it were fine linen. It was a blatant, aggressive shirt, and its glaze was unrestrained.

Unwin felt the disapproval with which the footman gazed at his opera hat. It had lain these many years in desuetude, and there was an air about it of wrinkled old fashion.

Measuring a Man

Bettington saw that Unwin was losing what small confidence he possessed. He patted the shorter man almost affectionately on the shoulder and simulated approval. "You look splendid," he murmured. "I suppose I ought to have worn full dress, too."

Unwin trotted by his side vastly gratified. He confided in his friend that this was the same suit he had made for him in Boston when at Harvard. He said that the years had shrunk it somewhat.

His further confidences were checked at a sight of his ghost. Gibbons was standing with that faint sneer on his face which had become habitual. The financier was prepared to be thoroughly bored.

He judged man by his ability to make money; and with these standards

he had only contempt for the small, nervous man who peered through thick lenses at him. He looked with deeper interest at the painter.

"It doesn't seem possible we are all of an age," he said, when they were seated. "Tubby looks fifty, I look forty, and I'm damned if Betty doesn't look ten years less. How do you do it?"

Bettington resented the sneering manner in which the successful man of affairs regarded Unwin.

In a Palace

"To me you look the elder," he said suavely. "Tubby may have put on weight, but there's age in your face, Three Brass Balls, and wrinkles a half-inch deep."

Gibbons flushed. He had not forgotten the old nickname given him in jest, for his ability to make small gains in loan and barter. He looked across the silver-laden table at Bettington. Bettington and he were born within a week of each other, and yet they looked vastly different.

The painter had a clear eye and a clear skin. There was a youthful poise of body and a litheness which had long since left Gibbons. He glanced sourly at the other man. Even there he felt beaten. Unwin's gaze was serene and untroubled. There was a certain simplicity and directness about him which seemed childish.

"I've worked," Gibbons snapped; "that gives one lines and wrinkles."

"You've hated," Bettington answered; "your face is a chart of uncharitable emotions. Your sort of success stamps its victim. Tubby and I have worked, too, remember."

"Indeed, I have," Tubby sighed and thought of his non-success as a solicitor of advertising.

Gibbons looked about him. His guests, following his glances, saw what he meant. There was superb luxury everywhere. The chestnut-wood ceiling, for instance, had once graced a European palace. The silver was what the Dukes of St. Aubyn were once wont to set before royalty. Bettington had long since noted that a Romney looked at him from the wall opposite.

"This is my reward," said Gibbons. "What has your toil brought you, Tubby?"

Unwin thought of his little drab flat, his roof garden among the chimney pots, his invalid wife and the two children. It was this thought of his boy and girl which heartened him.

"Hopes," he said smiling, "and it means more to have hopes at forty than at twenty."

Gibbons raised his eyebrows. Such talk seemed worse than foolish. Did not these two men realize that they were being sumptuously entertained in magnificent rooms by one who had no greater opportunities in youth than they? Less opportunities.

Stinging Mr. Gibbons

Unwin was always a student to whom academic tasks were easy. Bettington had a small property when Gibbons had but an allowance from a distant relative. From the pale secretary Gibbons had learned that Bettington had passed his life mainly in traveling and painting the sea in her sterner moods.

His pictures were not such as to attract the dealer, although his fellows revered him for his art. Economically he was a failure. And yet Gibbons could not rid himself of the feeling that they were not impressed by his position. There was something stinging and irritating in it. The flavor left his Château Mouton Rothschild. It was as though some one had put a piece of ice in it.

And he was annoyed to find that these two quiet guests were reëstablishing that sense of unasserted superiority which they had exercised in college.

Unwin, but for an early and improvident marriage, might have been one of his country's greatest classical schol-

ars. The memory of his distinctions returned and blotted out his poor clothes.

Gibbons had always been envious of Bettington's personal grace and charms. Always the girls to whom Gibbons paid his addresses interrupted his fervors with questions concerning Howard Bettington. And here was Bettington sitting at his table with the quiet ease which Gibbons knew for good breeding.

A Million or So

There had been a time when these two meant more to him than any other men. And when success came to him he forgot them. Gibbons grew a little ashamed; but the feeling lasted only a few moments. His arrogance banished it. He had succeeded; they had failed. He was even a little gratified when the pale secretary bowed his way in with two cables which demanded immediate attention.

"Made a million or so?" Bettington asked quizzically, when the secretary had taken down the answers and gone out. "Or lost one?"

"Radway is the loser," Gibbons smiled. "I have just taken a railroad from him and he's too drunk to know about it till to-morrow."

Tubby Unwin made an unexpected remark.

"That will be the Memphis and Toledo road," he said. "It is Radway's pet lamb."

"How the hell do you know that?" Gibbons snapped.

Unwin came to himself with a start. He realized that he had repeated something Mary had told him in confidence. He made a gesture as though to say financial secrets were not hidden from him entirely.

"Well, as you know so much about Radway, you'll be astonished to learn I've got him on the run. There isn't room in New York for Radway and me."

He told them something of his detestation for Radway; of how these five years he had been setting snares for him. When Radway was winning and dining beauties of the front row, he, Gibbons, was working, and now the reward was coming. "I never forgive or forget," Gibbons boasted.

"I see that all marked on the chart which is your face," Bettington answered.

"Anything else you see?" Gibbons sneered. He had not made the impression he desired. Men, big men in the "Street," were talking over this duel and here his guests took it calmly.

Bettington gazed at him steadily. Again the painter's good looks and splendid features forced themselves on the capitalist. And there was still that air of detachment about him. He seemed a passionless judge.

"I see what all charts mark. Rocks, quicksands, reefs. You're headed for them, Gibbons."

Feasting Two Failures

Gibbons was amazed to find that he would have preferred the old opprobrious nickname to this attitude. There was something dominating about Bettington. Gibbons felt it even now in his magnificent home in a moment of financial triumph. He sought to dissolve it by a resumption of his harsher manner.

"The unsuccessful," he said acidly, "always feel they have the right to criticize. It's about the only thing they can do; and they do that badly."

"So you call me unsuccessful?" Bettington demanded. Then he smiled a little. "You are wrong. I've accomplished what I set out to do. I have health. I live the life I like. Wall Street flurries do not affect me. And I have what you will never have—contentment. The difference between us is we measure success by different standards."

"I'm the unsuccessful one," Unwin declared. "I have not done what I set out to do."

"You don't have to advertise the fact," Gibbons said, still a little irritated. "I can see it."

Bettington felt the protective instinct calling him to defend the small, shy friend of other days.

"It amazes me to think you troubled to give so elaborate a feast for two unsuccessful men. Why?"

"Ask Unwin," the host returned. "He told my secretary he had important business with me, and as I was busy all day and every evening but this I suggested a dinner. Thinking of Tubby brought you to my mind, and I asked you, too. I'm waiting to know just how important this business is."

An Old Contract

Bettington could see that Unwin was flushing with nervousness.

"What is it?" he demanded.

Unwin drew from his pocket a half-sheet of paper and passed it across the table to Gibbons. The dinner was now at the coffee and liqueur stage, and the menservants had withdrawn from earshot. Gibbons took it with a frown and read it through:

> We, the undersigned, being about to separate, do hereby swear that if one of us attains fortune and the others do not, the lucky one shall aid the unsuccessful cheerfully and unasked in any way he is called upon to do.
>
> HOWARD BETTINGTON ("Betty").
> FLOYD UNWIN ("Tubby").
> ALFRED GIBBONS ("3 Brass Balls").

Gibbons handed it back to Unwin.

"It's interesting," he admitted, "but not legal. It contradicts itself. It would have no value in a court of law. I tore my copy up years ago."

Bettington reached for it and scanned the document.

"I'd forgotten all about it," he said.

"Had you?" Gibbons said with a sneer.

"It may not be legal," he heard Unwin saying nervously, "But in a matter of old friendship the spirit counts, not the letter."

"Which shows you to be as foolish at forty as you were at twenty," said the financier.

Bettington was conscious more fully than ever of Unwin's dejection. The hope which had sustained him seemed now to have left him dull, broken and speechless. Bettington put his arm about the bowed shoulders.

"Oh, Tubby," he cried, "are you so poor a judge of human nature as to come to Gibbons for help? If I had known you were in need you might not have had this humiliation. Within this very week I've bought a camp and paid for it. I could have deferred payment easily enough. What do you need it for?"

"It's my children," said Unwin quietly. "They are crying, not for food, but for education. It's another species of starvation. I thought if Gibbons would advance enough money to get them where they want to be, I'd pay it off little by little. I see I was wrong. He is not the man we knew."

"Thank God!" Gibbons ejaculated. "But you two seem to know precisely where I stand all the same. How do you know what I might do?"

"I Hope I'm Wrong"

"Tubby isn't a spectacular charity," Bettington told him, "and won't advertise you. Gibbons, I hope I'm wrong about you. I'd like to apologize for hasty judgment. This document may not be legal, but do you remember the day we signed it and how you would have felt if I had suggested you would sneer at it less than a score of years later?"

Gibbons moved a little uneasily. The years he had almost forgotten awoke in his mind with a peculiar distinctness. He did not like to remember that he was the author of the document and executed it with the feeling that he was a beneficiary under its terms.

He had thought nothing could stay Howard Bettington in his fight for fortune. Even Tubby Unwin, distin-

guished scholar, seemed far more likely to make a name than the undistinguished Gibbons. Changes. Changes.

"How old is the girl?" he demanded.

"Eighteen," said Unwin. "She wants to go to Smith."

"What about the boy?"

"He's a year younger. They tell me he's a genius mechanically. He yearns to enter the Massachusetts Institute of Technology."

"Nothing to it," said Gibbons scornfully. "If he had a yearning for business I might help. Let him think it over. What's the girl doing?"

Radway's Stenographer

"She is one of Radway's stenographers. She has great opportunities there, but her heart isn't in the work."

"Radway!" Gibbons snapped. "That's a good way to recommend her to me. Radway is my open and avowed enemy." He frowned as he thought of it. Then he smiled almost amiably. "Private stenographer?" he asked. "Or just one of the bunch in the office?"

"Private." Unwin answered. "You see, she knows French and Spanish perfectly. Even Radway approves of her."

"She knows a lot about his private affairs, I suppose. I wondered how you learned of the Memphis and Toledo road. You got it from her. Look here, Tubby. Tell her the chances of bright women in business are enormous; they far exceed any jobs colleges offer. I may make a place for her in my organization if she is as bright as you say. Tell her to leave Radway and come to me."

"What about the boy?" Bettington asked.

"I'll attend to that later. I'll begin with the girl. Send her to see me tomorrow. If she's bright she'll make more money than her father."

"This is one of the times I wish I had taken to commerce instead of art," Bettington commented. He had every sympathy with a girl who wanted more education; apparently Gibbons had none.

"You'd have failed at it," Gibbons retorted. "Men of your kind always seem to think any fool can make a success of business and get where I am. I'm the sort who wins.

"Where would you be in a situation where supreme courage and resolution were required? I'll answer. You'd be found wanting. You've lived a remote life. If you haven't liked a place or a climate you've gone somewhere else, looked for something easier."

Bettington smiled a little. Gibbons's outbreak seemed to amuse him.

"I don't know," he said. "I've been in some tight places in far corners of the earth and I have not always lost. After all, Gibbons, what do you know of me or Unwin?"

"I know," said the capitalist hotly, "that one seeks the security of a trumpery job and the comfort of a pitiful pay envelope, and the other gets out of the fight by daubing canvases." His manner became less bellicose. "Don't forget to send the girl around. I'll see that she is sent right into my private office and that's a privilege some would pay high for."

His guests understood that the audience was over. Alfred Gibbons had no more interest in them. In a sense, they were dismissed.

CHAPTER III

Planning the Cruise

"THE place stifled me," said Unwin, when he was alone in the street with Bettington. "I was conscious of high blood pressure. The physical symptoms alarmed me. My clothes felt like constricting armor."

"Walk as far as my studio," Bettington suggested. "Isn't it strange that we should have lost sight of one another. I feel guilty. Here I have been wandering around the globe and

contenting myself with merely thinking about you. It's true I'm not often in New York. Tubby, I'll not lose sight of you now."

Bettington's studio was more a collection of marine objects, a museum of the sea, than a place to work in. There were two rooms at the top of an old brown stone house on the north side of East Thirty-Fourth Street. He had a yearly lease of the place and used it but rarely.

Waking Himself Up

There were quaint figureheads of old sailing ships now long broken up or sunk. Great numbers of fishing rods, with quantities of tackle, littered up shelves and corners. There were guns of assorted caliber and strange weapons brought from stranger lands.

"I have not always led the simple uneventful life Gibbons assigned to me," the painter said smiling, when he noted his friend's interest. "A deep sea painter who tried to put on canvas what Conrad puts in his books has to adventure far afield. Sit down, Tubby, while I make real coffee."

Later, he began: "I had a small fortune when I left Harvard. I spent most of it in seeing the world. With what was left and some small savings I have bought a camp.

"At present I'm hard-up, but there's plenty of money in this very room if I'm energetic enough to get it. I have sold very few of my paintings. I have been able to afford not to. Those I have sold have been to men who understood. I have commissions for a number which I have not filled.

"That was selfish of me. I'll execute them and sell some of these canvases. Your girl Mary shall go to Smith, and your boy shall have the Tech. Seawater and paint shall take them both there. It has been a fortunate evening for me. I needed waking up."

Wrapped in a dressing gown of Bettington's, Unwin discovered his physical symptoms of high blood pressure diminish. He did not associate the evening coat and waistcoat lying on a chair with this relief.

All he thought of now was how soon this miracle might be accomplished, which should give his children their opportunities. The narrow things at home had trained him to calculate with great niceness such adjustments. Bettington planned to start for the painting expedition within two days' time.

He would start at Gloucester and wander up the coast, reaching his new camp in far Northern Maine in a month's time. It was now in the hands of carpenters and painters. It were wise, he thought, to send Mary to Gibbons's office. The pictures might not sell. Gibbons might offer the girl a splendid stipend. He might seek to make amends for his brusqueness by unexpected kindnesses. Perhaps they had wronged Alfred Gibbons.

Thirty a Week

Unwin was led into moods of unsuspected optimism. He felt he had the courage to win advertising from those who had hitherto thrust his eloquent letters into wastepaper baskets.

Mary looked at him next morning over the breakfast table and her eyes asked the question her lips did not formulate.

"Smith must wait just a little," he said, "but don't be cast down, Mary. There is hope; you will yet win to Northampton. Take an hour off this very day and go and see the great Alfred Gibbons."

"What for?" she asked listlessly.

"He wants to see you. Commercially speaking, your fortune is made. He is expecting you. If I were you," her father added, and spoke as one to whom such matters were made plain, "I would ask not less than thirty dollars a week."

"That would be a great help," she said quietly, "but am I worth that?"

"It's what one gets that counts," he said profoundly. "I think you are. You speak and write three languages perfectly. That's so much money in your pocket."

Mary Unwin had been almost a year an inmate of the office of Elgar Radway; she had quickly accommodated herself to the routine of her work. She worked always at top speed, as did her employer himself, and was paid eighteen dollars weekly.

Pleasant Work

In itself the tasks set her were not arduous. The people were kindly, and Radway—notorious as a man-about-town—never mixed his pleasures with his work. She was as free from harm when taking his dictation as she would have been with a decent-minded man.

It was to him she preferred the request for an hour off. He was not pleased.

"I'm busy," he grunted. "I'm off for a vacation soon, and there's a lot to do. Don't be longer than an hour."

She was the only girl he had ever dictated to who never made grammatical errors or put commas when periods were intended. He looked at her curiously as she went from the office.

As a connoisseur of women he admired her charm, but she was worth more to him in the office than out of it. Radway was a voluptuary of sixty who was finding out that he lived now in a soberer age and could not adapt himself to it. Gibbons's victory pointed the moral.

He did not greatly fear Gibbons. He comforted himself that after a few weeks on the sea he would come back refreshed for the big game.

He was thinking of Gibbons's triumph over the Memphis and Toledo road, only made possible by the treachery of a trusted manager, when Mary Unwin entered the office of her father's one-time friend. Mary was so accustomed to the overenthusiasms of her father that she quite expected to have to wait.

It was likely, she thought, that she might never even be admitted to the capitalist's presence. But the office manager seemed almost to be waiting for her. She was accorded uncommon courtesy and found herself in a big walnut-lined room, facing Alfred Gibbons.

Gibbons was often a matter of speculation among the Radway staff. It was known that he had once been Radway's clerk and had left suddenly, breathing threats against his employer. And it seemed he had devoted his life to getting even for some grievance of whose origin none in his office had any definite idea.

Although he had been sneered at in the beginning, some of the older men in the office were growing to respect him. Some, indeed, saw in him one destined to wrest supremacy from Elgar Radway.

A Girl of Class

Mary looked at him with a curiosity that had nothing to do with his financial position. She looked at him as one who had in the other years been a close friend of her poor, blundering, clever, but unstable father, whom she loved the more because she saw his need.

Gibbons was a spare man of middle height. There was a hint of the bird of prey in his face. She thought if one might say a hawk sneered, that Gibbons resembled a sneering and avid hawk. But he smiled when he saw her and rose from his seat. It was a courtesy the clerk who ushered the girl in reported to his friends in the outer office; it was a mark of great distinction.

Gibbons was not prepared for a beauty. It was true, Unwin had fine features and brilliant eyes, but one remembered Unwin as the man who perpetually failed and looked apologetic. There was a cloud of depression about Unwin, which seemed to make his car-

riage mean and inconspicuous.

Mary was slim and held herself as though no failure or self-depreciation had ever come near her. There was something fine about her. There was something which Gibbons, for want of some better word, told himself was class.

And the brown eyes which looked at him under level brows raised a doubt in his mind as to the successful outcome of the scheme which was working in his crafty head. He first set himself to disarm her by the adoption of the air of an old and privileged friend.

Earning Her Money

"So this is little Mary Unwin," he exclaimed, shaking her hand. "Well! Well!"

It was a banal beginning, the girl thought. But she smiled. There must be something good in a man whom her father had liked.

"So you want to go to Smith?" he went on.

He could see her vivid interest now.

"More than anything on earth," she answered. She leaned forward and clasped her long slender hands nervously. "I don't suppose you can ever guess how much I want it."

"Perhaps I can," he smiled. "Your father helped me to understand." He chatted on pleasantly enough of his college days; and he was wise in talking of the distinctions Unwin had gained. She was proud of that. It was almost with distress that she saw how fast the minutes had sped.

"What's the matter?" he asked, seeing her look.

"I must go back. Mr. Radway is very busy and gave me only an hour."

"Why go back?" he returned. "Eighteen dollars a week isn't much to hurry back for, is it?"

"I need it," she said, rising.

"Sit down," he insisted. "You may need it, but it isn't going to take you to Smith or your brother to the Tech." His air was now one of delight in well-doing. There was born in her heart a fluttering hope that for old friendship's sake he was going to help her.

The cheeks that were usually pale took to themselves a lovely flush. She could not bring herself to ask what he meant for fear of meeting disappointment. It was good to hope after so much despair.

"I told your father I would help you. The world knows me as a hard man, but it knows me for a man of my word. I'm going to help you and your brother."

"Oh, Mr. Gibbons," she cried, "I can't believe it. It is one of those things too good to be true! How can Bob and I ever thank you enough?"

He looked at her keenly. This was the ripe moment.

"You would like to feel you earned the money, rather than be under a monetary obligation to me? Is that what you mean?"

He Was a Hawk

It had not so presented itself to her, and she felt ashamed that she had accepted without even a thought of actual repayment.

"Of course," she replied, "I should expect to earn it. But how can I?"

It was the hawk who looked at her now. The glance was rather frightening, and when it was succeeded by the benevolent smile, she thought she had imagined it.

He leaned over the glass-topped table. The fleeting fear that he was one of those who forced attentions on young girls was banished. It was a cold look he bent on her.

"You can," he said. "You can very easily repay me for the few thousand dollars your education will cost. First, you must leave Radway and come here. You can earn what you and Bob need in a week's work."

"But that is impossible," she cried. "How?"

"You are Radway's private stenographer. Very well, you must have taken many letters from him to three men named Harrod, Harte, and Buford. Haven't you?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"What I want is this. I wish you to leave Radway and bring to this office the notebooks with the letters written since the fifth of the month to these men. You will find a typewriting machine in the adjoining office. You will transcribe the letters and then forget all about it."

She Didn't Want a Chance

"Forget?" she answered, "forget all about it?"

"That's the idea," he said delightedly. He was very much relieved. He had dreaded the idea of tempting her. "Forget it entirely. Go to Smith and feel that you have earned the money. I'll tell your father it is a loan, so he will feel satisfied."

She rose listlessly; the color had gone from her cheek. She felt physically weakened. After all it was to be a life of office drudgery. Gibbons did not understand this sudden alteration.

"What's the matter?" he said irritably.

"Oh, not very much," she said, "I was only wondering how my father could ever have called you his friend."

"What?" he exclaimed. "You are going to throw away a chance like that?"

She made a little gesture of despair.

"I am going to throw it away."

He was now thoroughly angry. He had not been so upset for months.

"You deserve to starve," he snapped, "with that damned fool of a father of yours; and you will, too."

She shook her head.

"I shan't starve, but I think I'd rather starve than do that."

It was with a certain childish glee that Radway, two hours later, discovered an error in her transcription.

"This won't do," he said, showing it to her. "I thought you prided yourself on your work."

Mary meekly bent her head over the typewriter. She was thinking, "I shall do this for years and years and years."

"You needn't cry about it," said Radway uneasily.

Women with the gift of tears had cost him a great deal of money in his past. He was one of those men, not chivalrous by nature, who are affected when women weep. He found himself looking more closely at this ordinarily efficient stenographer. He had worked her too hard, he supposed. This last three months had been even harder for him.

He had had to battle with Gibbons and his crowd, and he had been forced to moderate his eating and drinking. High blood pressure, physicians had told him with grave looks. It irked him who had denied his gross body nothing, that he should have to practice this pale uninteresting temperance. But Gibbons must be beaten to the dust, and a clear head was needed for the task.

His Wife Knew

Gibbons had been wrong in declaring that the Memphis and Toledo road had been taken from him because he was drunk. Gibbons had bid so high, that one on whom Radway relied wholly had sold him. Well, that would not happen again. For the moment there was a lull in the warfare.

It was not until some allies of Gibbons returned from Europe that the struggle would begin again. And before that happened there would be one perfect month on shipboard, where he could fill himself with alcohol and feel he was not ruining his prospects. It was the debauch of an alcoholic long denied his pleasure.

Elgar Radway always deceived himself and others about this annual voyage. The press gave forth the news that the eminent financier needed the

tonic of the high seas. He was popularly supposed to flit from port to port, meeting other eminent capitalists and increasing his millions.

But he never deceived his wife. There had been a day, ten years earlier, when he was a national figure in politics.

The death of a Governor had made him, a little-heard-of lieutenant-governor, the head of a great State. His financial knowledge was at the service of the White House at a moment when a black panic seemed about to devastate the country.

An Unhappy Marriage

Senator Whitburn, of his own State, looked upon Radway as his own discovery, and talked of him so much that his daughter, carried away by that spirit which is found so much in Washington society, found the disparity in years more than offset by his name, prominence and promise.

From the beginning the marriage was unhappy. He had found that the scandals discovered by a political rival were not to be lived down in an era when women were powers.

He had gone back to his financing in New York. Evelyn Radway was a splendid hostess. She was beautiful and she was clever. The Radway dinner parties were internationally famous. He was bound to admit that she had been a great asset to him.

It was at a dinner party that he announced his intention of taking a month's vacation. There were as guests some foreign financiers.

"I've just bought a curious craft," he said; "it's a sort of ocean-going houseboat, which means it's more comfortable than the usual yacht, but doesn't promise safety in the North Atlantic in the winter months. She's now at Bar Harbor."

He knew that his wife realized why he was going. He had never been able, wholly, to meet the glance of those almond-shaped violet eyes with the calmness he wished. In ten years she had learned most of his secrets.

"One hears," said the president of a Paris banking house, "that you work even when making holiday, but I never believe that. No, no. It is what you call the bluff."

"I'm taking a secretary and a wireless operator," Radway retorted, "and they're there for business. And my wife will probably come, too—that is, if she cares to."

"Thank you, Elgar," she answered to his extreme surprise, "the change will do me good."

He smiled as though the prospect entranced him. He now saw himself committed to at least two extra guests. What on earth had he wanted to talk about taking a secretary for? He was even more astonished to find that his wife consented to come. She did not care for the ocean as a rule.

A Dangerous Trip

He rather suspected that his physician had been warning her that this trip might be dangerous if he reverted to his old habits. She was coming to see that he kept within bounds. After all, it might be a good thing. He looked at his red hands with their swollen fingers; he realized the oppression that a heavy meal brought him, the constriction at the throat and the need for more air than his lungs gave him.

Perhaps he ought to go slow. He might die during one of those prolonged drinking bouts, which would inevitably leave Alfred Gibbons the victor.

"I am glad you are coming, Evelyn," he said, when his guests had gone. "It will do you good."

"You are really taking a secretary?" she demanded.

"Certainly," he said, a trifle impatiently. "This is a business trip, as I told M. Detamps."

"There's accommodation for my maid?" she said.

"Ample," he answered.

"What secretary will you take?"

He thought a moment. The two men in his office who might answer were well enough in their way, but the enforced intimacy of shipboard would probably discover unsuspected shortcomings.

"Would you be annoyed if I took a pretty girl?"

"Do you mean that slight dark girl I have seen? Oh, Elgar, I wish you would. It would be such company for me."

The Millionaire's Ship

"If you can arrange it, I'll take her. Probably her people wouldn't let her come if I suggested it. I'll phone you her address from the office tomorrow and you can go and see her mother, if she has one. Tell her she will get twenty-five dollars a week. She ought to jump at it."

It was with the hope the girl would go that Mrs. Radway called next morning at the Unwins' home. Mr. Unwin had not yet gone to his work. He so much disliked broaching the subject of advertising to reluctant buyers of space, that he leaned on any excuse which might seem legitimately to keep him from the task.

On the morning that Mrs. Radway called he was waiting to interview a prospective advertiser who usually cleared up his morning's mail by eleven. Unwin explained to his wife that to force himself upon his client ere this would be to imperil the success of the adventure.

When the bell rang he thought instantly of bill collectors. The optimist who collected for a furniture instalment house would not come until tomorrow; the gas man had delivered his ultimatum yesterday. It should have been a peaceful morning.

He recognized Mrs. Radway instantly. At her marriage her portrait, by a famous painter, had helped to make her famous; since that time the society columns and Lavery's painting of her had kept her in the public eye.

The Unwins were delighted at the idea of Mary getting a whole month on shipboard. And the additional saving meant something to them. It was known that Radway had an evil reputation, but with Mrs. Radway aboard it was plainly to be a decorous cruise.

It was Mary herself who seemed dubious. She confided in her brother.

"I have a feeling," she said, "that I ought not to go. It's a kind of presentiment. I shall be a month in a big boat all alone. What have I that will interest Mrs. Radway? I wish you could come."

"I wish they would find a job for me in the engine room!" he exclaimed. His eyes brightened at the prospect of such nearness to machinery at work. "Gee! Wouldn't that be luck. I could look after you and be learning something all the time.

"A millionaire's craft has all the latest improvements. I'm only getting thirty dollars a month at the office and I eat that. Sis, do you think it could be managed? Do you think there's something I could do?"

She Won Her Point

"If there isn't," she decided, "I won't go."

Radway was astounded at her demand.

"What do I want with an engine-adoring boy aboard?" he snapped. "Perhaps your father would like to go also?"

She colored a little. He decided that when she flushed she was prettier than any girl in the Winter Follies.

"I'm rather relieved," she said quietly. "I didn't much want to go and now I certainly shall not."

"I suppose I shall have to find a place for him," Radway grumbled. He took up some plans and glanced at them. "There are four boats carried, I see, and one of them's a twenty-one

foot launch. He shall look after it. Of course, he'll have to mess with the crew." Radway looked at her. "You don't seem very much pleased, Miss Unwin, at gaining your point."

Mary said nothing. She felt she would rather have lost it. There settled on her a sense of depression as she thought of the trip.

"Thank you," she returned formally. "I am sure he will be useful."

"Tell him to report to Captain Hallett, of the Albatross, at the yacht club float, at the foot of East Twenty-Third Street. She leaves Bar Harbor tomorrow night and will be here by Sunday."

When she was gone, Radway sank down into his padded chair and told himself he was getting old. There were physical troubles multiplying with a frightening rapidity. After all, he might not be able to turn this trip into one of the old-time carouses. Presently he rang a buzzer and Mary came in.

"Take this telegram," he said. "'W. Clement, S.S. Albatross, Bar Harbor, Maine. Ship competent doctor aboard for trip. Health not too good. Radway.'"

As she was leaving the room he called out more cheerfully. "You can insert 'young and handsome,' if you like. You'll have some one to play with then."

CHAPTER IV

The Kidnaping

CURIOUSLY enough, Bettington, as he made his way northward from Gloucester, felt a sense of happiness in that he had engaged himself to lift the Unwin family from its monetary troubles.

As a rule he avoided taking upon himself any obligations, less from selfishness than a fear they would cramp him and hurt his work. The sketches he made—which would afterward be transferred to his big canvases—were the best he had ever done. He was pleased, who was ordinarily a hard critic. "This," he cried, as he looked at a study of surf and rock, "will pay Mary's tuition and board for a year."

He was so engrossed in perfecting the thing, that he took little heed of time. He was perched upon a little island of rock, some three miles from Blackport. His enthusiasm led him to overlook the signs of a coming storm.

It was his fate to be blind to the approach of the worst storm which late August ever brought to the Maine coast. The north Atlantic, which has in abundance all maritime perils, borrowed for the time the character of a southern ocean and projected a typhoon on a holiday coast.

Fighting for Life

With the first puff of that fearful storm a great wave, like a tidal bore, rolled in and overwhelmed the rock. In the desperate fight for life poor Mary's first six months' tuition and board were swept away. The portable easel and paint-box sank beneath the foam.

Only owing to his great strength and ability as a swimmer was Bettington able to reach shore. And then good fortune aided him. He was lifted clear of needle-pointed rocks and thrown on a mass of kelp.

With the storm came an awful darkness which presently merged into night and left Bettington, bruised and weary, trying to make his way to the village. The storm blotted out all familiar landmarks and all sense of direction. Where Blackport should be was darkness.

It happened that the damage to wires had plunged the town into blackness and he was misled. It was midnight when a dim light showed him he was near a small house of some sort. Investigation proved it to be a lonely cottage on an island connected with the mainland by a rough plank bridge. Fishing nets and lobster pots were evi-

dence of the calling of the owner. He was a fisherman.

Bettington had come to the shack of one Jonathan Gibbs, a surly man, who had no traffic with his neighbors. He supported himself indifferently with his fishing and chickens.

Unlike his fellows, he had no use for the summer visitors from which they reaped a harvest. He was known for a bad-tempered man who preferred his own company to any other. To the men of Maine he was a foreigner from Cape Cod.

In the Shack

There was no answer to his knock upon the door, so Bettington, now chilled to the bone, opened it. He found the shack had but two rooms. A living room with a bed in a corner of it, and a kitchen. A soapstone stove gave what heat the larger room required. Driftwood furnished the visitor with his fuel and he was soon thawing before the fire. It was a poor room; the owner would probably be glad enough to make a few dollars. Bettington knew the fisherfolk; they were hospitable men wherever one met them. He had no fear he would get a reception that was not cordial.

But he did not know the Jonathan Gibbs that the village boys never dared to mock openly. The process of getting warm was so comforting that Bettington did not hear footsteps outside. Gibbs had been out to drag his boats from their customary moorings at the dock to the shelter of the shore. On such a night as this they might easily break away. The first premonition that a stranger had invaded his home was the pungent smoke which beat down on him as he came toward the front door.

He stopped suddenly. His spare form tautened. Weariness had given place to sudden, bewildering fear. He had come up from his dock treading heavily, caring little what noise he made. Now he retreated stealthily, noiselessly. The smoke pouring from the squat chimney might, so far as the effect was apparent, have been a signal of grave disaster.

At the side of a rowboat, which he had so lately drawn up into the safety of the beach, he paused. His blanched face took on something of its normal color. The instinct to flee was conquered. There came yet more strongly to him the desire to know by what he was menaced. But his progression to a woodshed showed no abatement of his caution. From the top of a closet he took down a shotgun, into whose twin-barrels he put No. 4 cartridges.

He opened the door of his living room so softly that Bettington did not hear him. It was the cold gust that made the painter look around. He saw a tall, keen-faced man at whose shoulder was the butt of a twelve-bore.

"Don't move," said the fisherman.

Gibbs advanced slowly into the room. He had never, to his knowledge, set eyes on this stranger. But he looked so searchingly and with such obvious menace that Bettington broke the silence.

A Suspicious Host

"I ought to apologize for this, I suppose," he said, "but surely, on a night like this a man may seek shelter without being threatened with a scatter-gun." There was a faint irritation in his tone.

"If you'll look through your property you'll find nothing disturbed but that heap of driftwood, and I'll pay for that."

"Who were the two men you were with in the post office yesterday?" Gibbs demanded.

"I was not in any post office yesterday," said Bettington stiffly. "I have not been in company with any two men for a fortnight."

Gibbs lowered his gun. He tried to assume a look of amiability, but there was still anxiety written plainly. He had, in truth, shown too much appre-

hension for one wearing the garb and character of a humble fisherman.

This holding up a strayed painter with a gun now showed itself an unusual act. But Bettington, watching and guessing little of what was taking place in his mind, noted that the gun was still held in such a position as to constitute a threat.

"Who are you?" said Gibbs. His voice now took on the accent of the locality. It was this change which made Bettington glance at him with renewed interest.

He Had Enemies

The man who had first spoken had in his tone something of the inflection which refinement gives. Now it was a man with a less bellicose look and a rougher accent.

Bettington related his misadventures.

"A painter, eh?" said Gibbs. He crossed the room, took down from a shelf a pencil and a piece of paper. These he handed to the other.

"Prove it," he commanded. "Draw something."

Bettington hesitated for a moment. He was not a man who went the better for being driven. But the look on the fisherman's face was not reassuring.

It occurred to him that here was a solitary who was mentally unbalanced. He sketched in a few skillful strokes a portrait of the man standing there, his gun balanced in the crook of his arm.

Jonathan Gibbs looked at it in silence.

"It is good," he said deliberately. "Whatever else you may be you are a draftsman."

"Why should I be anything than I pretend?" Bettington reached for the drawing, but the fisherman threw it into the maw of the stove.

"You've never seen me before?" Gibbs demanded.

"Never," Bettington said a little irritably, "and I shall pass a contented existence if I never see you again. What sort of Maine fisherman are you to behave like this?"

Gibbs put down his gun and assumed a more friendly air.

"I've been threatened," he said rather vaguely. "I've made enemies hereabout. I have to be careful. I was startled. That was it. I was startled."

"You certainly startled me," said the other. "I hoped to be able to pass the night here and dry my clothes."

"You surely can," said Jonathan Gibbs. "I'll boil the water and make you some coffee. I guess you're hungry."

It was after the meal that Bettington asked him: "Why should any one threaten you here?"

"Jealousy," said Gibbs, after a pause. "I'm not a State of Maine man, and I don't mix with any one around. They don't understand that."

"But that gun?" Bettington persisted. "This isn't a feud district like the Kentucky mountain regions."

The Next Morning

"They try to steal my chickens," Gibbs answered, "and I won't stand for it."

Plainly the man had something to conceal. After all, Bettington told himself, it was none of his business. He had often met queer, ingrown characters.

It were wiser to let the gun-carrying man with the different accent remain hidden. He could not go out into the black night, now made doubly impassable by the deluge of rain. Gibbs made up the fire by packing a huge armful of wood into it.

Bettington was awakened by the aroma of coffee. Gibbs was holding Bettington's shoes up. He smiled when he saw his visitor was looking at him.

"Dried stiff as boards," he announced. "They'll need to be greased before you can get into 'em, and your

pants are torn pretty bad. I guess you'll need a new outfit."

"We are much of a height," Bettington said, looking at him. "If you have anything to spare I'll buy them from you."

"I'll lend you an outfit," Gibbs said, "and you can get what you want down to Blackport. The sea's calm now and you can row across the bay in half an hour. I'll be sorry to see you go," he added a little nervously. "I get kinda lonely here. I used to have a dog, but he got poisoned—"

Knocked Out

The summer sun had tanned Bettington to a rich brown. In his sea-boots—the only ones Gibbs had to lend—his faded blue sweater and khaki shirt, he looked the sort of fishing type he had often painted.

At the dock he took a ten-foot row-boat and set out to the village, now plainly to be seen a couple of miles across the bay.

He had gone, perhaps, half the distance, when a fast motor boat overhauled him, slackened speed as it passed and then swung round and waited in the path he was taking.

There were two men in it. One was a vastly broad-chested man with a trim sweater and white canvas trousers. He had the look of a yacht sailor.

The other, who was steering the boat, had no physical peculiarities other than that general air of following the sea.

"We've had an accident," said the broad-chested man, and pointed to something at the bottom of the launch, something as yet out of Bettington's range of vision.

Bettington clung to the side of the drifting motor boat and stood up. There, lying on the bottom of the other craft, was a man. And as the artist stooped over him, the recumbent sailor gave a tremendous half-arm jab which caught Bettington on the point of the jaw.

The other two grabbed him as his head fell forward and hauled him on board where, unconscious, he took the place of his assailant, who rose grinning.

The broad-chested man, who was called Sam, clapped him on the back in approval.

"Dandy," he cried. "And that rock prevents any one seeing us from the village." Sam bent over the unconscious form and neatly trussed it up with rope. "The boss will be tickled to death over this. Stove in that row-boat, one of you."

A man with a boat hook smashed in some bottom boards and Jonathan Gibbs's dinghy slowly filled with water.

Then the motor boat put out of the bay, past the buoys, and headed north for Bar Harbor.

Bettington had recovered from the knockout within five minutes. He could see from the brightly polished brasswork and mahogany that he was in a yacht's launch. He knew that the hum of the motor would make any call for help useless.

It Was a Mistake

He had been neatly knocked out and was now to be expeditiously shanghaied. So far as he knew he had no enemies. Although not a mixer with men, he was popular with those whom he knew.

Unlike Gibbons, he had no burning animosities. There were no dark passages in his life in which revengeful women figured. It was incredible. Then the real meaning of the thing flashed on him.

He was mistaken for Jonathan Gibbs. He was rowing Gibbs's boat and wearing his clothes. With a two-days' growth of beard and a face burned with sun, he might pass for him.

He called to mind the curious reception he had met in the shack. Gibbs was armed in readiness. Perhaps he had been expecting these very men.

The insistence that the visitor should prove his ability to support his character as artist was all proof of fear and doubt. Bettington was now suffering for Gibbs's unsavory past.

"This is all a mistake," he said, addressing himself to Sam. "You think I'm Jonathan Gibbs."

"I know damn' well you're not," said Sam, without animus.

The thing was inexplicable. All the plausible reasons why he might be abducted in the other's stead were swept away. They knew him for himself, and knowing it, they were carrying him off, bound with ropes, to the open sea.

Waiting for the Boss

There was seemingly no sort of personal grudge in this high-handed matter. The three men looked at him without vengeful emotions. They were carrying out orders.

Doubtless some one in command had given them orders and they had obeyed. Even the man from whose fist Bettington was even now suffering, regarded without malice his victim.

"Didn't know but you was armed," he explained later.

"Why should I be armed?" Bettington demanded.

"Wouldn't be the first time," said Sam. "Listen, bo, we've got orders not to say a thing to you till the boss sees you. It won't do you no good asking why we did it, or who we are. We had to get you alive and unharmed and we did the best we knew how."

The three paid no more attention to him, except to put a blanket under his head and shoulders. It was dark when the lights of Bar Harbor came in sight. He was carried up the gangway, across a deck and then placed in a small cabin lighted with a single porthole.

Sam untied the knots and watched the victim stretch his stiff and cramped limbs.

"Just a word of warning," Sam remarked. "You can't get out of that porthole and you can't get out of this cabin. If you did, it wouldn't help you. If you're wise you'll wait till the boss sends for you."

Sam turned the key in the door and left him prisoner. There was no way of escape. As he examined his dungeon he heard the throbbing of machinery. From the porthole he could see the boat was moving.

Bettington knew Bar Harbor well and saw the vessel was settling her course to the south. He pulled off the heavy sea boots of Jonathan Gibbs and flung himself on the berth.

In many adventures Bettington had learned that fretting and fuming were handicaps that men in danger should not take upon themselves.

Presently he fell asleep and was awakened by Sam. Sam had entered with caution, half expecting to be met by violence.

"You ain't worrying," said Sam, grinning. "They tell me you always had your nerve with you. You won't be able to see the boss to-night." Sam sat on the foot of the berth and waxed confidential. "He's hitting the pipe and it's as much as a man's life is worth to go in now. I haven't no authority to let you out till he gives the word, so I'll bring you a bite to eat here."

Bound for New York

Sam waddled out. Bettington was still puzzled by his apparent friendliness. As a physical specimen of humanity Sam did not awaken confidence.

On his broad, flat face were written lust and brute courage. He would be a bad man to cross. His weakness, Bettington thought, would be women and food. He had the small, greedy eye of the glutton and the mouth of a sensualist.

But why should he regard Howard Bettington, painter of seascapes and man of integrity, with such an air of comradeship?

"Where are we bound for?" he asked of Sam, when a tray of food was brought in.

"Noo York," said Sam, his mouth filled with one of the hot biscuits he had filched from the prisoner's plate. "This ain't a fast boat—she makes about ten knots—and we'll be lucky to get there by Sunday."

"Can't I go on deck?" Bettington asked. "I can't escape."

Sam shook his head.

"Not till the boss gives the word."

"Who is the boss? The captain?"

"The captain?" There was scorn in Sam's tone. "Him! Hell, no!"

"You mean the owner?"

Sam's scorn of the owner was just as emphatic.

"He may think he's the boss and Cap'n Hallett may think *he* is, but they don't know—yet." Sam rose to go. "Just one bit of advice, bo, don't make a noise. If you do you'll go to Noo York gagged."

CHAPTER V

The End of Gibbs

BETTINGTON had not been gone on his errand to Blackport a half hour when Jonathan Gibbs, in his motor dory, went out to his lobster pots. He was returning when he saw a smaller boat, its gunwales awash, almost across his bow.

He knew it instantly for his own. Investigation showed that some of the planking had been stave in. He supposed that one of the needle rocks must have done it. He blamed himself for allowing the stranger to cross the bay.

Almost certain death would await any man dressed as Bettington had been in such currents as these. The water getting into heavy hip boots would effectually prevent even a strong swimmer from saving himself.

Gibbs went to his shack with an uneasy mind. The whole episode spelled publicity to him. There would be an inquest, he supposed, a police investigation and the notoriety inevitable at such a tragedy. Crowds of people would flock, sheeplike, to his retreat.

He would even be photographed and thus attract even a wider public. He cheered himself with the hope that his guest might have been rescued. In that case he would soon be back at the shack.

But by midnight Bettington did not return and Gibbs went carefully through the things which were in the torn coat. There was a gold watch with the initials "H. B." on it. A wallet contained almost four hundred dollars. There were no letters.

But there was a reference on a memorandum of repairs to the skylight of a studio at a given address and a receipt for the rental of it to the end of the current year. And there was a bunch of keys.

Deserting His Home

For almost an hour Gibbs sat motionless. Then he rose to his feet, put a kettle on the oil stove and presently shaved himself carefully and trimmed his hair.

There was an air of excitement about him now and something furtive in his movements. He rubbed the grease which Bettington had applied to his shoes so carefully into the leather that it became at length flexible and he was able to put them on.

Hasty repairs to the torn trousers and coat enabled him to wear them. With an iron which had been little used of late, he pressed them into something of their former shape.

Dawn was breaking when Jonathan Gibbs, now a new man, bade farewell to the shack he had inhabited for six years. None saw him as he made his way inland to Westfield. A sleepy ticket agent gave him a ticket to Portland and forgot the occurrence instantly.

In Portland he spent only a few hours. New York received him with a thousand others at the Grand Central and he walked eight blocks down to a brownstone house opposite an armory.

Bettington's name was on a plate

over a letter box. A key on the bunch fitted it and he drew out some mail and walked, having met not a soul, to the top of the house. Then, after a moment's pause, he opened the studio door and found himself in a haven so secure that he could hardly believe it had been attained so easily.

In his cautious ascent he had not failed to notice the names on the doors he passed. Immediately under him was a dressmaking establishment. Below that was a floor devoted to small offices. Under that was a flower store. It seemed unlikely that any one else would sleep in the house.

Gone for Good

The studio was dusty. There was no evidence that any janitor had cleaned it. Looking about him at the odds and ends Bettington had collected —some of considerable value—he judged that the owner would not permit a janitor or maid to come unless under his supervision. There were small ivories and bronzes that could easily be stolen and disposed of.

He was glad that there was no telephone to startle him with its sudden imperative ringing. But he was glad that the electric light and gas had not been turned off. His eyes brightened when he saw that the former occupant had cans of milk, soup and fish in abundance. There were at least two pounds of tea. Further search revealed sugar and coffee.

He could live for a week on what he found and never venture outside the door. During the day he must be careful not to be seen. But at night New York was his own. Those who had known the dour, suspicious fisherman would not have recognized in the alert housebreaker the same man.

Jonathan Gibbs was gone, dead and buried. And this, too, in a sense he did not know. Other fishermen had found his waterlogged rowboat. And when he was not seen in his familiar haunts and had not called at the village store to exchange his eggs for groceries, a search was made.

His home was found unoccupied, his chickens famished. Plainly, Jonathan Gibbs had been drowned and his body swirled out to sea in the undertow.

At first the New York Gibbs ventured out only at night within a short radius of his sanctuary. There had been no mail. There had been no prying janitor. Those he passed upon the stairs took no notice, after the fashion of the metropolis.

He saw himself living there in safety until he made up his mind how to start again to get his living. Well, he had plenty of time. He had still almost four hundred dollars and almost four months' rent paid. He felt assured that Bettington was dead.

Sometimes he rehearsed a possible meeting of the two in the event that Bettington were rescued and came back. He would carry it off lightly. He would call the thing a jest. He had saved Bettington and now was exacting payment.

On His Trail

It was on the third evening of his occupancy that this calm and pleasurable optimism was swept away. He had gone to the subway entrance to buy an evening paper.

It was not yet seven and crowds were still in the street. After his six lonely years it comforted him to see humanity, hurrying and unheeding, pass him by.

As he stood on the steps before the front door feeling for his latchkey, he was conscious that a policeman across the street by the armory was looking at him.

Although it was dark he felt stricken with the certainty that the officer looked at him alone. He had never before at this time seen a policeman in this position.

From the front windows of his unlighted rooms he had an unobstructed view. The officer was now speaking to

a smaller man, who seemed to be pointing directly at the windows through which Jonathan Gibbs gazed. The coincidence was food for somber thought. As though concerting some plot aimed at Gibbs, the two slowly crossed the street. Then he heard his bell ring three times.

It was the first time its rasping voice had ever sounded during his tenancy. Gibbs opened the door to the landing silently and listened. He heard the front door open and steps advance along the flagged passage.

Then he heard the footsteps begin the ascent. They passed the floor of offices; they passed the dressmaker's door and began to climb the flight that led to him alone.

Softly he locked the door and stood a few feet back from it. To the knock he returned no answer.

Instead, he advanced to the front window; this time there were two policemen by the armory steps. And as he looked the raps at his door grew louder.

He looked about him wildly. "Trapped!" he groaned. "After all these years to be caught!"

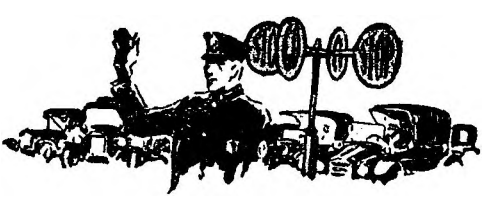
Fear roused him from inaction. Before long they would burst in the door. He wondered how many were skulking there in the shadows.

The fire escape at the rear was his sole hope. It was pitch dark, but he dared risk no light or make the descent slowly. He had gone but half a flight when he trod upon a flower pot placed there in violation of all the city's fire ordinances.

He clutched about him wildly and found only a piece of rotting rope. For a moment it promised to stay his fall; then he felt the old strands giving.

The paved yard to which he crashed was fifty feet below. They had not been wrong in Blackport who assumed that the man they called Jonathan Gibbs was dead.

TO BE CONTINUED

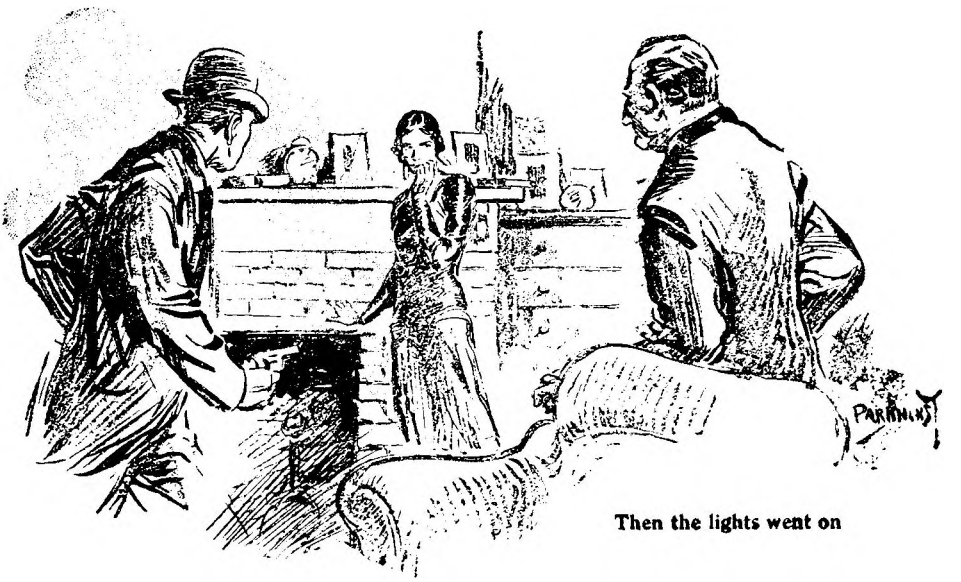


They Signed on the Dotted Line

BUSINESS cannot be troubled by such trifles as being arrested; this is the slogan of an Omaha, Nebraska, life insurance salesman.

Pinched for reckless driving, the purveyor of policies was brought into a police station and booked. While the accommodating desk sergeant was arranging to let the violator out on bonds, the salesman was delivering a lecture on the extreme importance and absolute necessity of the sergeant being at once insured; said insurance, of course, to be taken out in the company the salesman represented.

Before the astonished policeman realized that anything had happened, he was signing his John Henry on the dotted line. This same supersalesman has been credited with selling a policy to a man with whom he had a collision; informing the other motorist that he was taking chances on driving without being insured.



Then the lights went on

THE CLOCK TOLD

Inspector Hogan Thought He Had the Murderer Locked Up. But Do Ghosts Wind Clocks? The Clock Told a Different Tale

By John L. Tiernan

CHAPTER I

A Midnight Call

IT was after eleven o'clock when the taxicab with George Lowe and the other man drew up before the Gilbert home. The only illumination in the house was a night lamp in the lower hall. The Gilberts had retired.

But George Lowe did not hesitate about the propriety of a call.

He dismissed the taxicab, led his companion to the porch, and rang the doorbell three times. There was no answer.

He rang again—insistently. George Lowe was determined.

He walked nervously up and down the narrow porch, puffing at a cigarette. His companion leaned against a pole, silent and patient.

Thirty seconds later George Lowe was at the bell button again, pushing.

"Give 'em a chance," suggested his companion mildly.

"Never mind!" snapped Lowe.

He was still jabbing at the button when an upper window opened.

"Yes?" called a man's voice.

Lowe ran to the edge of the porch.

"Is that you, Mr. Gilbert?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Well, this is George Lowe."

The man at the window coughed.

"It is a rather late hour, George," he said significantly.

"I know it," replied George.

"And," added the man at the window, "Cleo isn't home."

"I don't want to see Cleo," said George; "I want to see you."

"Is there—is there any trouble?" asked the man at the window.

"Yes," said George, "there's plenty of trouble."

He resumed his walking as the window went down. He lit another cigarette from the stub of the one he held. His companion leaned against the pole, silent and patient.

When Stephen Gilbert, clad in bathrobe, opened the door, Lowe was directly in front of it.

"Mr. Gilbert," he said tersely, "me and this man have got to see you."

Some Information

Gilbert merely nodded and motioned for the pair to enter. He eyed them speculatively as they came into the hall.

George Lowe, thirty-five, fastidious, fashionable, passed Gilbert without a word.

He went into the living room and took it upon himself to turn on the lights.

The man at his heels was a stranger to Gilbert. He was middle-aged, fat, placid, slouchy. He nodded rather awkwardly as he followed the other into the living room.

It seemed to Gilbert, holding the open door, that there was something ridiculous about the whole proceeding. He was curious, a little apprehensive, but also amused. He had a faint smile on his face as he went in to receive his guests.

George Lowe stood before the fireplace, staring at the floor, frowning. He looked up quickly as Gilbert entered.

"Mr. Gilbert," he said solemnly, "I came here to tell you that I am not going to marry Cleo."

Gilbert started. He hadn't expected that. He looked, amazed, at the stranger, sprawled indolently in an easy chair. He hadn't thought that George would discuss a family affair before a stranger. He considered his daughter's engagement a distinctly family affair.

Lowe caught the significance of his look.

"That's all right," he said tersely. "That man's all right—he's a detective."

"A what?"

Gilbert's voice rose crescendo.

"A detective," repeated George. "I brought a detective with me to announce that the engagement is off. I think it is my privilege—my duty."

He talked with stilted emphasis, like a man delivering a eulogy or a funeral oration.

Gilbert stared at him with unbelieving eyes. He wondered if George had suddenly gone mad. He walked slowly across the room and took a chair opposite the detective.

"Why the dramatics, George?" he inquired softly. "Why the midnight call, why the detective?"

"Because," said George, "he has obtained some information that has caused me to break the engagement and that I believe you should know."

"What!"

To Prove a Lie

Gilbert began to color.

"Yes," said George, "he has obtained some very interesting information."

He paused to light a cigarette. The eyes of Gilbert were upon him, steady, narrow, menacing.

"Go on!" Gilbert snapped.

"I will," said George.

He drew languidly at his cigarette.

The detective stared blankly at the wall.

"I suppose that you believe Cleo is visiting her aunt in Poughkeepsie?"

"I do."

"She isn't. Right now she is in the apartment of that young rat, Tom Hale."

Gilbert rose slowly to his feet. His face was flushed.

"You have hired a detective to follow Cleo?"

"Yes," George said.

Gilbert looked pityingly at the fat man.

"He says she is in Tom Hale's apartment?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, what of it?"

There was menace in Gilbert's voice.

"Nothing," said George quietly, "except that she was there all night last night."

Stephen Gilbert swayed, took a step forward.

"You dirty—you dirty—"

"Wait! Wait!"

The detective was on his feet, between the men. He held out his hands, conciliarly.

"Wait! Wait!" he mumbled. "No fight! No fight!"

"Who are you?" Gilbert growled.

"Joe Pearl, private dick."

"Do you say what this man says?"

Pearl nodded.

"You lie!" cried Gilbert.

George held up his hand.

"It might," he said, "be a good idea not to disturb your wife."

Gilbert lowered his tone.

"You both lie!" he repeated.

"It might," said George, "be a good idea to come and see if we lie."

Gilbert hesitated. He hadn't thought of that. He was sure they lied—they lied about Cleo. Yes, he'd go and see—go and prove they lied.

Without a word he walked toward the hall—to go to his room and dress.

In the doorway he turned. His face was livid under his tousled white hair.

"I'll go," he said. "And if you lie, George Lowe, I'll—*I'll kill you.*"

George smiled.

Joe Pearl stared blankly at the wall.

CHAPTER II

Two Visitors

SOME one was ringing the bell of Tom Hale's apartment in Sixty-Fourth Street. One o'clock in the morning! Some one was ringing the bell in short, peremptory jerks.

Brr-ring, brr-ring, brr-ring.

No answer.

Brr-ring, brr-ring, brr-ring.

There was a click in the latch, and two men shoved the door open, retreating hurriedly into the warm hallway from the icy blasts of a raw December night.

The men had the collars of their heavy overcoats close around their necks. Stephen Gilbert and George Lowe.

They walked through the hallway in silence, entered the elevator in silence, rode to the sixth floor.

Again a bell rang—at the hall door of Hale's apartment.

Tom Jokes

In a moment the door flew open—wide—and Hale, in bathrobe, stood staring at them. There was a slight flush on his young face. He stared at them speculatively, apprehensively.

For many seconds the trio stood silent—looking at one another. The eyes of Stephen Gilbert seemed to bore through Hale. The young man shifted uneasily under the scrutiny.

"Hello, Tom," said Gilbert, friendly, softly.

"How-da-do, Mr. Gilbert," said Tom Hale nervously.

"I'm fine, Tom," said Gilbert.

There was another awkward silence. All three stood staring.

"Good evening, Mr. Hale," said Lowe sweetly.

The youth flushed crimson.

"Hello, you," he said.

There was a contemptuous twang to the words. They seemed to help him to regain his composure.

He made a stiff bow.

"Come in, gentlemen."

He turned and led the way to the interior of the apartment, his attitude indifferent, his hands in the pockets of his bathrobe.

He drew up chairs in the living room.

"Be seated, gentlemen."

Without a word Gilbert and George sat down.

Tom could feel those eyes of Gilbert, questioning, menacing.

He flung himself on the wall bed, then extended on the floor. He lit a cigarette—tossed away the match. Still Gilbert was looking at him. He puffed at the cigarette.

"Up kind of late, aren't you, George?" he queried airily.

"Tom, don't try to be funny!"

Gilbert's tone was solemn.

The youth turned to him, surprised.

"Tom, do you know why we are here?"

Cleo Found

The question came slowly. Gilbert's eyes were unwavering.

Tom drew at his cigarette, exhaled the smoke, shook his head.

"You don't know why we're here?" demanded Gilbert.

"No."

Still the eyes of the older man were upon him.

"Tom," said Gilbert, "is Cleo here?"

Hale shook his head emphatically, looked surprised.

"No," he said.

He was puffing nervously at his cigarette.

"Was she—was she here last night, Tom?"

"No."

There was a silence.

"Are you sure, Tom—are you sure you are telling the truth?"

"Certainly I am. Why?"

His voice trembled.

"Because," said Gilbert, "George Lowe says my daughter spent last night in this apartment."

Tom turned to Lowe savagely.

"You're a dirty rat!" he snarled, a dangerous light in his eyes.

Lowe smiled.

"But am I a liar, Tom?"

The youth leveled his eyes to him.

"Yes," he said, "you're a liar—Cleo Gilbert never was inside this apartment."

"Wasn't she!"

George Lowe's words came more as an exclamation than a question. He had risen to his feet. He was smiling triumphantly, almost laughing. He was bowing with exaggerated politeness in the direction of the door leading to the kitchen.

Gilbert turned quickly toward the door.

He groaned and buried his head in his hands.

There, standing in the door, held by Pearl, the detective, was Cleo.

"Wasn't she?" yelled Lowe. "Was I such a liar?"

Then—

"Good evening, Miss Cleo," he said succulently. "It must have been cold out there on the back porch with just your nightie and an overcoat—"

Gilbert Is Shocked

Tom Hale swung, caught him square in the mouth. George fell backward in the chair, blood on his mouth. He looked up, dazed. Tom was standing over him; Joe Pearl was holding Tom's arms.

But Stephen Gilbert paid no attention to that. He had lifted his head, was staring at his daughter standing in the doorway.

Yes, it was true. She was wearing an overcoat—Tom Hale's overcoat—over something that was flimsy and pink. Her brown bobbed hair was awry. Her bright eyes were defiant. She looked straight at him.

A moment Gilbert felt an impulse to murder Tom Hale. What was the use? He realized he was old and helpless and that life was futile.

He looked again at his daughter—standing there, eyes blazing defiantly.

God, she was beautiful, he had to concede.

She took a step forward, and faced Pearl, who still held Tom's arms.

"Say, you big brute," she exclaimed,

"you leave my husband alone!" She pushed the fat detective.

Stephen Gilbert gasped.

CHAPTER III

Cleo Is Defiant

STEPHEN GILBERT was delivering a lecture on proprieties to young Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edward Hale. He was sitting in an armchair in their apartment, and he was telling them just what was what. Neither young Mr. Hale, slouched on the arm of a chair, nursing a bruised eye, nor the young Mrs. Hale, sitting on the bed, kicking her feet, seemed very interested in what was what.

Lying, Gilbert was saying, is not a virtue under any circumstances.

"But I didn't lie," protested Tom. "I just told that monkey Lowe that Cleo Gilbert never had been in this apartment. And she never was. The only woman ever in this apartment was Mrs. Cleo Hale."

"Yes, yes," said Gilbert. "The worst liar in the world is the man who always technically tells the truth."

"I know, but—"

"And," interrupted Gilbert, "Mrs. Hale or no Mrs. Hale, by the order of things Cleo is still Cleo, and you told me Cleo wasn't here."

"I know, but—"

"And," continued Gilbert, "there was no need breaking up half the furniture in the apartment trying to assault George Lowe after everything had been settled."

"I know, but—"

Stephen Gilbert turned away without listening. He looked upon his daughter disapprovingly.

"As for you, young lady," he said sternly, "I suppose you are proud of the fact that you bit Mr. Pearl's hand."

"No big brute is going to—"

"And," continued Gilbert, "I imagine your mother will be pleased to hear you threw a book at George Lowe as he went out the door."

"No big brute," said Cleo firmly and decisively, "is going to hit my husband."

She tilted her chin defiantly; there was fire in her eyes.

"And," continued Gilbert, "your mother, of course, is going to be tickled to death to learn that you jilted George."

"Mother," said Cleo Hale firmly and decisively, "will have to find somebody more a sap than I am for that foolish marriage."

Gilbert tried to look scandalized. He knew he had to look scandalized. Secretly he was having the time of his life. But he had to look scandalized; it was the proper thing to do.

He didn't know what his wife was going to say when she heard all this—and he didn't care much.

"Young lady," he said sternly, "is that the proper way to talk about your mother, especially after you have probably broken her heart by not marrying George Lowe?"

Daddy Retreats

Cleo again tilted her chin.

"George," she said, "is a disgusting individual at most times and he is a jaded fish at all times."

"A what?"

"A jaded fish."

She was still kicking her feet. Her father looked at her helplessly. He had no answer. He decided to let the subject drop at that. All right, George was a jaded fish.

"Well, children," he said resignedly, "I'll leave you with wishes for the best of luck. And," he added slowly, "you'll need luck when your mother arrives."

"Mother," said Cleo, "can—"

"Cleo, stop!" commanded her father.

"Mother," said Cleo firmly and decisively, "can visit us any time she desires."

Gilbert sighed in relief. He wanted to get out of there. He was rather

afraid of his daughter when she was aroused. He had never been able to do much with her at any time.

When he reached the door he turned. He thought of something that was important, that he had intended to ask before.

"I hope," he said solicitously, "that Tom realizes his obligations as a married man and is in a position to meet them."

"My husband," said Cleo, "is making forty-five dollars a week, and next year he'll get fifty dollars."

"Good Lord!" murmured Gilbert to himself as he closed the door.

He heard his daughter call to him:

"Good-by, daddy, sweetheart!"

He smiled, but his expression quickly turned to one of apprehension. He was thinking of his wife.

While Gilbert walked toward the elevator, Tom and Cleo sat in silence.

Tom was nursing his bruised eye.

Cleo was kicking her feet.

After a minute Tom got up and walked across the floor.

"Eye hurt, honey?" queried Cleo.

"No," said Tom sullenly. He went from the room.

"Get Lowe!"

"Honey is sure sore," said Cleo to herself.

She took a cigarette from the stand at the side of the bed, and lit it with the silver lighter she found in Tom's overcoat pocket.

It was a nice lighter; she had admired it when she had seen Tom use it. She always had a suspicion, though, that some other girl had given it to him.

A nice lighter from some other girl; that was just what she would like to have for herself. With a malicious smile Cleo got up, tiptoed to the closet, and put the lighter in her fur coat.

She had just closed the door, when she was aware that Tom had come back, fully dressed.

Cleo stared.

"Why, Tom," she exclaimed, "it's three o'clock!"

Tom nodded.

"Where are you going?" inquired Cleo.

"I'm going—to *get* Lowe!"

"Tom!"

Her husband darted across the room—out the hall—out the door. The door slammed on her cry.

"Tom!"

She heard the iron door of the elevator shut, heard the car start downward. She ran to the elevator and beat upon the glass. Why, he had gone even without his overcoat. She was wearing his overcoat.

CHAPTER IV

Cleo Follows

CLEO HALE had a premonition of trouble. And she wanted to be happy.

For a moment she stood with her face pressed against the glass in the elevator door. She heard the car stop at the street floor, heard the door open and shut. Tom was gone.

There would be a fight and trouble. Maybe terrible trouble.

She must follow her husband. She must stop the fight. George Lowe's apartment!

She dressed with frantic haste, threw her fur coat around her shoulders. She glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes after three.

She ran out of the apartment, down the hall. She pressed the button for the automatic elevator and waited impatiently while the car ascended.

Her heart beat furiously.

There were no taxicabs in Sixty-Fourth Street. Neither was there any sight of Tom.

Cleo ran the half block to Fifth Avenue. She looked up and down the avenue. There were only a few lights. None of them looked like a taxicab—milk trucks, vegetable trucks, private cars—no taxicabs.

Cleo hurried toward Sixty-Third Street. The sidewalk was slippery with ice and she had to be careful. There was snow in Central Park across the street.

She crossed Sixty-Third Street, hurrying toward Fifty-Ninth. There ought to be a taxi at Fifty-Ninth.

Suddenly she heard the click of tire chains on the icy street. She turned and recognized the red and green lights of a taxicab. It was on the other side of the street, going south.

Barred Windows

She ran into the street, waving her gloved hand. The taxi didn't stop. Cleo's heart sank. She followed it with her eyes—forlornly.

It had rounded the corner into Sixtieth Street before Cleo realized another car had drawn up slowly beside her.

"Cab, madam?"

Cleo opened the door, jumped in without answering.

"Drive me to 1412 Tenth Street, in Greenwich Village, and hurry—please hurry!"

The taxicab was skimming along the icy pavement of Fifth Avenue. Fifty-Seventh Street. Fifty-Fourth Street. Fortieth Street. Lights—few lights. Policemen stood in darkened doorways, out of the cold wind.

Cleo had been to George Lowe's for tea — when her mother had insisted. He had a studio apartment just below the street level in a big apartment house.

There was a private entrance.

She would just ring the doorbell, Cleo decided, go in and get her husband, take him home. The whole thing would take a minute. She wouldn't say a word to George Lowe. But if he got fresh she'd slap his face.

She tapped on the window to attract the driver.

"Swing into Sixth Avenue and park near the corner," she said.

The cab swung into Sixth Avenue and drew to a sharp stop, skidding on the pavement.

"Wait here a moment," Cleo said to the driver; "I'll be right back."

The taxi man looked dubious.

"Oh, don't worry about your fare," Cleo said petulantly, "I'll be right back."

The driver nodded. He was still doubtful, however.

Cleo hurried around the corner. All she wanted was to get her husband. It was a half block down Tenth Street to George Lowe's apartment. It seemed to Cleo it was unusually long now.

Maybe she was too late. Maybe something serious had happened already. Cleo was prepared for anything.

Maybe a fight—maybe Tom or George hurt, badly hurt — maybe the police there already.

The windows of George Lowe's apartment were lower than the street, had iron bars, and she could look down into them.

The Silver Lighter

Cleo stopped, amazed. The windows were dark. All was quiet.

She stood staring in perplexity. Surely Tom had had time to get there. She had been delayed, had lost time getting a taxicab.

God, maybe Tom had been there already! Maybe—

Cleo shuddered.

She realized why she had come. She feared Tom might kill George Lowe.

And yet, maybe George Lowe was asleep in his apartment and Tom was home waiting for her and everything was all right.

If Cleo was only sure of that she could stop worrying. If she could only make sure that George Lowe was in that apartment, unharmed, she'd be satisfied. She'd go home.

One of the windows behind the iron gratings was open.

She walked down the two steps, crossed the narrow stretch of pave-

ment, and peered in. Everything was dark. She listened intently. She could hear a clock ticking somewhere in the apartment. She wasn't sure whether she could hear breathing or not.

If she only had a light. Then she could look into the apartment. As she remembered, when she had been there for tea George Lowe's couch was against the farther wall. If George Lowe was in the apartment, he was probably on that couch.

Cleo reached into the pockets of her fur coat. Her right hand found something small and hard. She brought out the silver lighter—the silver lighter she had taken from Tom's overcoat. Good. She'd snap the lighter and hold it inside the window.

Somebody Shot

She didn't care if George Lowe woke up. She'd just run away and get in her cab. It would be a good joke.

Let's see you press the little knob on the side and the handle flies up, then the lighter lights.

Cleo put her arm in between the iron bars and held the lighter as high as she could.

Just one look to see if George Lowe was there, and then she'd go away.

Cleo pressed, and the lighter didn't work. But what—

She stood holding her hand there—frozen with horror.

What she had heard, what had rung in her ears and numbed her senses, was a short sharp explosion.

That was it, she had heard a short, sharp explosion and seen a flash.

Then a groan, an anguished, sickening groan.

Cleo Hale ran, up on the sidewalk, frantically, slipping on the ice.

What was she doing? Why was she running, running away?

She reached the corner and started to run across the street when the taxi driver called to her.

Oh, yes—the taxi. Cleo had forgotten.

She ran to it, jumped in.

"Drive me home," she said weakly.

The driver turned to her.

"Where's home?"

"Oh — 124 West Sixty-Fourth Street!"

Cleo was very sick. She knew she was ghastly white. She couldn't think. She was numb. She stared blankly at the picture of the cab driver in front of her.

What had happened? She couldn't think. What had happened? Cleo knew what had happened. She told herself what had happened—softly.

"Somebody shot somebody in George Lowe's apartment."

The cab speeded up Fifth Avenue. She was glad it was speeding, glad it was taking her away from Tenth Street.

"Somebody shot somebody in George Lowe's apartment!"

That's all she knew, and that's all she wanted to know. She didn't want to think any more.

Home Again

The taxicab was in front of her apartment house. She must have been in a daze. She hadn't realized that they were there.

She was glad, though. She was glad to be home. She'd go inside. She'd lie on the bed and pull the covers over her head—and think. She was glad to be home.

She got out of the cab hurriedly and walked toward the door.

"Hey—fare!"

Oh, yes—the fare. Cleo had forgotten about the taxi fare.

It was a dollar and sixty cents. She gave the driver two dollars. She didn't notice that he was looking at her very curiously.

She went into the apartment house, up to her apartment.

She threw herself on the bed and pulled the covers over her head—to think.

"Somebody shot somebody in

George Lowe's apartment," she said softly.

There was something she should think about—but she couldn't remember what it was. What should she think about? There was something very important she should think about. Oh, yes—she remembered. She should think about the fact that Tom wasn't home.

Now she knew that George wasn't home, but she couldn't think about that. She just had to let it go at that—George wasn't home.

The apartment door opened. Fifteen minutes—or half an hour later. Cleo lay with her head under the covers.

Somebody walked into the room. Somebody stood looking at her. She didn't want to move her head.

"What's the matter, honey?"

She sat up on her elbows.

"Hello, Tom," she said weakly.

"Dearest, you look sick."

"Yes," said Cleo, "I am. Tom—and you—you look sick, too."

CHAPTER V

Hogan Fumes

INSPECTOR HOGAN of the Homicide Squad was in a bad mood.

Everything that had happened so far had been wrong. Things weren't breaking at all as he desired. The men were stalled. Inspector Hogan was stalled.

He walked up and down the basement apartment at 1412 Tenth Street—fuming, fretting. Inspector Hogan didn't like to be stalled. He turned on Patrolman Phil Tobias.

"Have you," he asked sarcastically, "any reason to offer yet for moving that body?"

The luckless Tobias faltered and wet his lips.

"I thought," he stammered, "I thought he might still be alive."

"Alive!" Hogan fairly roared the word. "Alive—with his head almost blown off?"

Tobias wilted.

"You flatfoot!" roared Hogan. "Leave bodies alone when you find 'em."

Hogan resumed his walking—fuming, fretting. He and his squad had been working on the murder of George Lowe for one hour and they were stalled already. They hadn't one single lead. All that Hogan knew was that George Lowe was dead. And that fact had been self-evident when he had walked into the apartment.

He had learned nothing from the janitor nor the landlady. He didn't believe they had much to tell. He stopped walking, looked at himself in a mirror, adjusted his derby hat at a new angle.

A Discreet Janitor

Well, he might as well question the janitor and the landlady again. There was nothing else to do.

"Jack!" he called. "Bring that Andreas in here again."

Jack disappeared and reappeared, almost instantly, dragging a little bald-headed man, who walked hesitantly, into the room.

Hogan eyed him.

"What you say your name is?"

"Andreas," said the little man, in a voice that trembled.

"What time you say you got up?"

"Seven o'clock, sir."

"What time you say you saw the body?"

"About nine o'clock, sir. I looked in the window and saw the blood on the wall."

"Never saw it before?"

"No, never saw it before to-day."

Hogan groaned.

"I'm asking you," he bellowed, "didn't you see the blood on the wall at any time between seven o'clock and nine o'clock this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't look."

The inspector deliberated. Then he narrowed his eyes.

"Why did you look when you did?" he demanded.

The janitor hesitated.

"Because," he said finally, "because sometimes Mr. Lowe—sometimes he has young lady in the apartment."

"Oh," said Hogan, "sometimes he has young lady in the apartment, and that's why you look in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" asked Hogan.

Mademoiselle Marie

"You didn't ask me," said Andreas.

"You a smart little guy, ain't you?" Hogan said sarcastically.

"No, sir," said the janitor.

"You say you never heard anything during the night?"

"No, sir, nothing."

"Well," said Hogan, "as soon as you saw the blood you unlocked the door and came into the apartment?"

"Yes."

"Then you got a cop, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Didn't touch anything?"

"No, sir."

Hogan turned with a withering look toward Patrolman Tobias.

"The touching part of it," he announced, "was taken care of when the cop comes in and does everything but take the corpse out for a walk."

"I didn't do anything," protested Tobias, "but turn him over to see if he was dead."

"Yes," said Hogan caustically, "and I suppose if you found dynamite you'd drop it to see if it worked."

Tobias watched enviously as Andreas, dismissed by Hogan, walked toward the door. He wanted to get out, too. He felt very uncomfortable. He could hardly believe his ears when he heard Hogan tell him he could go to precinct headquarters. He crossed the room with unusual alacrity.

"And," said Hogan as the patrolman disappeared out the door, "if you find another body, bring it down to headquarters—you'll save us the trip up."

Hogan wasn't particularly worried about the fact that the body had been moved. He could judge where the bullet had come from—somewhere on the other side of the room. He had berated the luckless Tobias merely as a matter of principle.

When Tobias had gone, Hogan called Jack again.

"Let's have Madame Buttermilk again," he growled.

Mademoiselle Marie Beautaire, landlady of No. 1412 Tenth Street, lived on the twelfth floor. It was fifteen minutes before Jack returned.

Hogan heard them coming, heard Mademoiselle Beautaire's shrill, protesting feminine voice in the hallway of the apartment. Wrapped in a form fitting green dress, she swept into the room. Huge oval earrings of tortoise hung almost to her shoulder. Her jet black hair was tied in a knot. Her black eyes were blazing and she was breathing heavily.

"Know Notings"

She surveyed Hogan with a fiery look.

"Now, listen," said the inspector, "don't throw a fit."

"I tro no feet."

Mademoiselle Beautaire arched her chin haughtily.

"Well," said Hogan, "just don't do it."

"Tch, tch—in de contree ver I come from de gentleman he take off hees hat ven he talk to de laid-tee."

"S-s-s-h," said Hogan confidentially, "it's glued on."

"And, pesights," continued mademoiselle, "I tolt you I doan know notings."

"Yes, yes," said Hogan sympathetically, "I know you don't know nothing, but you got ears and eyes and nose and maybe by accident they might learn something."

"I tolt you," said mademoiselle, more haughty than ever, "that I doan know notings. Meestair Lowe he is, as I know, de perfect gentlemen. Anyvays, he take off hees hat ven he talk to de laid-tee."

"Yes, yes," said Hogan.

"And, beeyont dat, I doan know notings. He paid hees rent, he pehave heemself, he make no noise, he nevair get drunk. He is de perfect gentleman. He he-ar seex monts and he alvays pehave heemself and paid hees rent."

Hogan was whistling "Bye, Bye Blackbird," softly and sweetly.

"—— sugar's sweet and so is she."

"Say," he said suddenly, "go on upstairs and collect some rent."

Mademoiselle Beautaire turned with a regal sweep and marched out of the room.

"What I would like to do," said Hogan to himself, "is kick that dame in the teeth."

He was meditating on this pleasantry when the doorbell rang.

CHAPTER VI

Hogan Entertains

AGAIN the doorbell rang.

Hogan barked an order or two. Three men slipped into the room from the hallway. One pulled up the covers on the couch—the couch where the body had been found. Another placed a screen in front of the stained wall. The third tidied up the room, picked up cigar butts, put Hogan's notebook in a drawer.

And Inspector Hogan took off his hat. Then he went to the front door. The men slipped into the bathroom, closing the door behind them. A fat, placid, slouchy man of middle age stood in the entrance.

"Good morning," said Hogan.

The fat man looked at him dubiously.

"Lowe—Lowe in?"

"No," said Hogan, "but come in—I'm waiting myself."

He was excessively cordial. He led the fat man into the living room, took his hat, drew up a chair for him. He presented one of his black cigars—smiling. The fat man took it. Still there was a dubious expression on his face.

"Nice morning," said Hogan as he slumped into a chair.

"Yeh," said the fat man, spitting cigar leaves.

"Lowe expect you?" queried Hogan.

"Yeh."

"What's your line?" asked Hogan.

Joe Has a Clew

The fat man looked at him disapprovingly.

"I'm a cop," he announced.

"Oh!" exclaimed Hogan—humbly.

He whistled through his teeth.

"Well, well, well," he said softly, "I'm kind of in that line myself."

"Yeh?"

"Yes," said Hogan. "I'm Inspector Hogan of the Homicide Squad."

The fat man's mouth opened.

"And," continued Hogan, "your friend Lowe was shot and killed last night."

The cigar fell from the fat man's lips.

"Dead?" he queried.

"Yes," said Hogan solemnly, "shot and killed dead."

The fat man's eyes bulged. Hogan watched him—watched him like a cat.

"Say!" exclaimed the fat man. "Say!"

"Yes?" said Hogan encouragingly.

"I know who done it!"

Then he stopped short. "Wait. I don't know who done it either."

"Say," said Hogan, "what the hell's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," protested the fat man, "except I either don't know who done it or I know two guys who done it." He appeared hopelessly muddled.

"Who are you?" demanded Hogan.

"Joe Pearl, private dick."

"And what's all this info?"

"Well," said Joe Pearl, "first there's old man Gilbert, Steve Gilbert up in Pelham Park. Lowe had me follow his darter and when I trails her to a guy's flat we goes up and tells him. And as thanks for our trouble he tells Lowe he'd kill him."

Hogan coughed and one of the men who talked in whispers came out of the bathroom.

"Stephen Gilbert—Pelham Park—find him—lay on him—half hour reports."

The words came softly, swiftly and the man was gone from the room.

Another Visitor

"And then," continued Joe Pearl, "we all goes down to this guy's flat on Sixty-Fourth Street to show this old boy that Joe Pearl ain't a liar by any man's clock. Course she ain't there, but I goes up the back way and finds her on the porch."

The fat man stopped to swell out his lungs.

"Go on," snapped Hogan.

"Well, then there's hell to pay. We goes inside and there's a general rough house. This snippy dame bites me on the hand."

He raised his bruised member.

"Go on," snapped Hogan.

"Well, first this guy she's with—"

Joe Pearl took a slip of paper from his pocket.

"This guy Thomas E. Hale, who turns out to be her husband, begins raising hell with Lowe. This Hale beats up Lowe and says he'll kill him, and the dame throws books at us and she bit me on the hand."

Again he displayed the bruise.

"Where are they?"

Pearl looked at his notes.

"Six-naught-seven East Sixty—"

Hogan coughed twice and scribbled on a slip of paper. He handed the slip to the first of the two men who came from the bathroom.

"And," he said as they went out the door, "fifteen-minute reports."

Then he turned to Pearl. He was so interested that he condescended to examine the bruised hand. Their conversation was long and exhaustive.

Hogan was still talking to Pearl when a man silently slipped into the room and whispered something to the inspector.

Hogan frowned.

"What does he want?" he demanded.

"Won't say," whispered the man.

Hogan's expression darkened. "Well, send him in."

He motioned Pearl to silence. He turned his chair so he faced the door. He wasn't particularly pleased at being disturbed.

In a moment a man entered—a long, gawky man, clad in a ludicrously small uniform of green corduroy, a cap that was down over his ears and dirty leather puttees.

Hogan had an idea he was smelly. He eyed him with utmost disfavor.

"Well?" he demanded sternly.

The man grinned from ear to ear. "Somebody moidered here?" he queried.

"Yes."

A Witness

The man nodded his head in satisfaction.

"How did you know?" demanded Hogan.

"I read it in de poipers."

"Oh, you read!" exclaimed Hogan.

The man's grin widened. "Sure—and I know somethin'."

Hogan feigned amazement.

"How much does an expoit witness get?"

"Come on," said Hogan petulantly, "what time did you drive Lowe home?"

"I didn't drive nobody home—wit my own eyes I seen this guy croaked." The taxi man smiled triumphantly.

"You what?"

"I seen a swell-looking goil take a shinin' gat from her pocket and plug

dis guy trew de window. I even seen de gun flash. She left me at de corner and I follered her here because I tot she was gonna jump de meter."

"What time was this?"

"'Bout four."

"Where did you get her?"

"Picked her up as fare on Fif' Avenue and Sixtieth."

"Where did she go after she shot him?"

"Comes runnin' up de street and I calls her to de cab."

"Then what?"

"I took her home."

"Where to?"

"Number 607 East Sixty-Fort' Street."

CHAPTER VII

Cleo Is Sick

WHEN Stephen Gilbert rode down Fifth Avenue in a taxicab there was another taxicab following him.

When his cab turned into Sixty-Fourth Street the other cab turned, too. When his cab parked in front of No. 607 the other cab parked across the street.

When he alighted from the cab a man alighted from the other cab—on the side adjacent to the sidewalk.

When Stephen Gilbert hurried into the apartment house the man walked across the street, joined two men who were loitering on the curb, talked to them in whispers, and then departed in search of a telephone.

Gilbert hadn't noticed the other taxicab or the men loitering on the curb. His mind was concentrated on one subject—a most disturbing subject. He drummed with his fingers against the back panel of the elevator as he rode to the sixth floor. His face was unusually flushed and his brow was knit.

He rang the apartment bell and Tom Hale answered. His face was drawn and white—haggard.

"Cleo's sick," said Tom.

Gilbert walked into the apartment. His daughter was in bed, her eyes red and her face very pale.

"She's—she's hysterical," said Tom.

Gilbert nodded. He was staring at his daughter.

"What's the matter, Cleo?" he asked simply.

"I—I don't know—I'm sick."

Cleo's voice trembled. She turned her head toward the wall.

"Cleo," said her father, "what is the matter?"

"She's hysterical," said Tom.

Gilbert nodded and sat down upon the edge of the bed.

"Tom," he asked solemnly, "did any one leave this apartment after I went last night?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"Who?"

"Well, I went out and Cleo she—"

"I went out, too," Cleo said.

She turned her head from the wall.

Stephen Gilbert winced.

Pistol and Bullets

"Where did you go, Tom?"

"I was going to go down and lick George Lowe for the stunt he pulled, but I—I took a long walk and cooled off."

"Where did you go, Cleo?"

"Cleo went—"

"Wait a minute, Tom," said Gilbert.

"Where did you go, Cleo?" he asked again.

There was no answer.

"She went looking for me," said Tom, "she went down to George Lowe's apartment. She thought I would be there. She wanted to get me. And she heard somebody shoot George Lowe and it made her sick."

Cleo was crying softly beneath the covers.

Stephen Gilbert was staring at the floor.

"Tom," he said suddenly, "you once told me you had a revolver, didn't you?"

"Ye—yes."

"Let me see it."

Tom Hale walked across the room to a bureau. He opened the bottom drawer and reached in.

Cleo had taken the covers from her head. She was watching her husband.

Tom took out a nickel-plated revolver. He carried it across the room and handed it to Cleo's father. Cleo was watching him.

Stephen Gilbert examined the weapon. It was empty. He smelled it. It had no odor of smoke.

"Where did you get this, Tom?"

"I bought it while I was in college to go hunting."

"Have you any bullets?" asked Gilbert.

"Yes."

"Get them."

Who Is Guilty?

Tom walked across the room again to the bureau. Cleo was watching him. He reached into the bottom drawer and drew out a box of cartridges.

He brought the box back and handed it to Gilbert, who dumped the cartridges into his lap and counted them. There were eighteen.

"How many were in this box yesterday afternoon, Tom?" he asked.

"I don't know. I suppose there were just that many."

"You suppose so—you have no way to prove how many cartridges were in this box, to prove that none was taken out last night?"

Tom Hale shook his head. Cleo was watching him intently.

Gilbert stood up, holding the gun and the cartridges in his hand.

"Did either of you take this gun out of this apartment last night?" he asked.

"No, I didn't," said Cleo.

Tom shook his head. "No, I didn't," he said.

Cleo watched him.

Stephen Gilbert put the revolver and the cartridges on the table, walked up and down the apartment several times, finally went into the hall. He motioned with his head to Tom, and the youth joined him. They were out of Cleo's sight.

"Tom," Gilbert asked in a whisper, "did you kill George Lowe?"

"No," said Tom simply. "Mr. Gilbert, did—did you?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because," said Tom—his voice broke—"because you might have."

"No!"

They were silent a moment, then both looked instinctively toward the room where Cleo lay.

Tom shook his head violently.

"No, she didn't! That's crazy! I'll be damned if she did!"

Gilbert nodded. He went back into the living room and got his hat, bent over his daughter and kissed her. He left the room without a word to her. In the hall he stopped and whispered to Tom Hale. He told him not to worry. He'd be back in an hour.

Stephen Gilbert scented trouble. He was going to get a lawyer.

He opened the apartment door. He stopped. There was a man standing on the other side of the door and he blocked the way.

He was smiling and he was wearing a derby hat.

"Good morning," said Inspector Hogan of the Homicide Squad pleasantly.

CHAPTER VIII

Hogan Is Disturbed

"MAY I come in?" asked Inspector Hogan pleasantly.

Hogan could be pleasant when he wanted to. He bowed politely to Gilbert. He didn't seem to notice the look of consternation on the man's face, nor the pallor of the youth who stood behind him.

"You are—" stammered Gilbert.

"Yes," said Hogan, "I am an officer."

"Come in."

Gilbert and Tom stepped aside.

"There is a young lady here who is ill," Gilbert said softly.

Hogan was visibly disturbed. He didn't like that. He didn't like to have to talk to a young lady who was ill.

"Who do you wish to see?" asked Gilbert.

"All of you," said the inspector.

"The young lady?"

"I'm sorry, yes."

One of Three

Gilbert nodded and led the way to the living room. He flushed when he looked through the kitchen door, half ajar, and saw a man standing beyond the glass panel in the back door. There was no need of that, he thought. And there was no help for it either, he realized.

He tried to reassure Cleo with a look. He started across the room to get Hogan a chair. Suddenly he halted.

That gun—that damnable gun! The revolver and the cartridges were lying on the table.

And Hogan had seen them. Hogan was walking to the table, was picking up the gun, was toying with it. He spun the barrel of the revolver, sniffed for burned powder.

Then he turned around slowly, holding the weapon in his hand.

Stephen Gilbert was standing near the wall, beside a chair. Tom Hale was in the doorway. Cleo's eyes were visible over the top of the covers. All were silent, tense.

"This gun," said Hogan, "is a .38 caliber revolver, isn't it?"

He looked at Tom Hale.

"Yes," said Tom.

"There was," said Hogan, "a man killed last night shortly after he had been with you three."

"We know it," said Tom.

"What kind of a bullet killed him?" asked Gilbert.

"A bullet," said Hogan slowly, "from a .38 caliber revolver."

Gilbert sat down in the chair—the chair he had intended to get for Hogan. Tom walked to the bed and sat on the edge. He wanted to be near Cleo. He wanted to protect Cleo. He took her hand and pressed it.

"And, frankly," continued Hogan, "I come here this morning under circumstances that obligate me to make an arrest."

Tom squeezed Cleo's hand. She was watching him. Stephen Gilbert nodded gravely.

"Are we to understand," asked Gilbert, "that you suspect some one here, that you have evidence against some one in this room in connection with the murder of George Lowe?"

"Yes," said Hogan.

Cleo was watching Tom.

"Is it me?" asked Tom.

"No," said Hogan, "it's not you."

Gilbert smiled.

"Then," he said, "I am to understand I am under arrest."

"No, I don't want you."

Tom Hale jumped to his feet.

"If you mean—if you mean Cleo," he yelled, "you're crazy!"

The Cab Driver

His voice broke into a sob.

Cleo, calm, unperturbed, watched her husband.

"Tom!" she said softly, and grasped him by the arm. She pulled him to the bed, patted his hand. Then she turned to Hogan.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

Hogan hesitated. He had been prepared for hysterics, but he hadn't expected this.

"Hogan," he said sheepishly, "Inspector Hogan."

"Well, Mr. Inspector Hogan," said Cleo, "what makes you think I killed George Lowe?"

Hogan was himself again, pleasant but firm. His eyes narrowed.

"Because, young lady," he said "some one saw you do it."

"It's a lie—it's a lie!" wailed Tom.

"It is a lie," Cleo said weakly.

Two men, two strangers, walked into the room—a big, tall, gawky individual in a green uniform that didn't fit him and another man. They came out of the kitchen.

"Here," announced Hogan, "is the man who saw you."

"He lies!" wailed Tom.

Cleo didn't say anything. She was staring at the big, tall, gawky man with the foolish smile. Where had she seen him before? She was certain she had seen him before. Oh, yes, the taxicab driver!

Hogan Smiles

"It's the taxicab driver," she announced.

"Yes," said Hogan, "it's the taxi driver—the man who drove you down to Tenth Street at four o'clock this morning and drove you back."

"What of it?"

Hogan turned to the driver.

"Is this the girl?" he demanded.

"Don't know, fer sure," the driver answered sullenly.

"She says so," snapped Hogan; "now tell us your story."

The driver hesitated, stammered.

"Tell it," snapped Hogan.

"Well," said the driver, "I follered de goil that got outa my hack and I seen her take a shinin' gat from her pocket and plug de guy in de basement in Tent' Street."

What a lie! What an outrageous lie! Tom squeezed her hand until it hurt and her father came over and had put his arm around her. Cleo paid no attention. Why did that man lie so? She gasped for breath.

"I didn't, I didn't," she stammered.

Why did that man say she had a shiny gun and that he saw it flash? Why should he say such a terrible thing?

Then she remembered—remembered the silver lighter with which she had tried to see into George's apartment.

"That wasn't a gun," she cried.

"No?" queried Hogan.

"No—it was a cigarette lighter. A silver cigarette lighter!"

"What were you doing with a cigarette lighter?"

"I was trying to light it—to see if George Lowe was home. I was afraid he and Tom—he and my husband might fight. I put the lighter in the window and tried to light it and then—then somebody inside fired a shot."

Cleo was breathing heavily. She saw Hogan was smiling—Hogan didn't believe her.

"Do you mean to tell me, young lady," he said, "that at the exact moment you stuck a cigarette lighter in that window and tried to light it a gun flashed?"

"Yes—that is the truth!"

Again Hogan was smiling. Why did he smile? Why didn't her father and Tom stop telling her to be calm, to keep quiet. She didn't want to keep quiet. She wanted to tell Hogan the truth, make him believe the truth.

The Whole Truth

Still Hogan smiled. He motioned with his hand and the detective started to lead out the taxi driver.

"Wait!" called Hogan.

The pair stopped.

"Was it a gun or a lighter?" he asked the driver.

"I—I wasn't very close," stammered the gawky one.

"What was it?" demanded Hogan.

"I t'ink—I t'ink it was a gat."

Hogan nodded as the driver disappeared into the kitchen.

Why did he say that, Cleo wondered.

"It was the lighter!" she insisted.

"Then, where's the lighter," Hogan asked.

"It's—it's in my fur coat—in the coat on the chair."

Hogan picked up the coat, held it to Cleo.

"Get it—get the lighter," he ordered.

Cleo reached into the pocket, brought out Tom's silver lighter, and triumphantly handed it over.

The detective took it, inspected it. He held the gun in one hand, the lighter in the other. He walked up to the bed, stood in front of Cleo.

"T. E. H.," he read from the lighter; "whose initials?"

"They're—they're mine," said Tom.

"Did you give your wife the lighter?"

"I—yes, I did!" said Tom.

"No," protested Cleo, "don't lie, Tom. I took it from his pocket."

She didn't want Tom to lie. She was going to tell the truth. She was determined to tell the truth.

"I Shot George!"

"When did you take the lighter?"

"Why—why, I took it last night."

"What time?"

"Just a little while before I went out."

"Why?"

"Because—" Cleo hesitated. Why had she taken the lighter?

"Because I liked it!"

"You didn't take the lighter because you knew you'd find Lowe's apartment dark and you knew you'd need a cigarette lighter to see if he was home?"

"Of course not!"

"Then," said Hogan, "it was just by a lucky accident that you happened to take it."

"Ah—yes, I guess that's it."

Hogan lit the lighter and blew it out, lit it again and blew it out, lit it a third time and blew it out.

"Lighters," he said, "have a habit these days of working."

"Wait!"

Tom jumped to his feet.

Hogan and Cleo and Stephen Gilbert looked up at him in alarm. His face was pallid. His eyes were unusually bright.

"Listen," he commanded. "Cleo's telling the truth. She did have the lighter, but it didn't work, just flashed."

"How do you know?" demanded Hogan.

"Because," said Tom Hale, "I was in the partment and saw her. I shot George Lowe just as she stuck the lighter through the window."

That was it—that was what Cleo had feared. Tom had killed George Lowe! Tom was a murderer, was a murderer on account of her! Cleo's head was reeling. She felt very sick. She could hear again that explosion, and the groan.

But Hogan was laughing.

"Now listen, young man," he cautioned, "don't get heroic."

"I did it!" exclaimed Tom.

"I don't believe you."

Hogan didn't believe Tom killed George Lowe. Why? Because he didn't know what she knew.

"Tom, be quiet," said Gilbert.

Her father didn't believe it. Her own father believed she killed George Lowe.

"Why, why, of course he's—" Cleo stopped. She had intended to say Tom was telling the truth. No, she wouldn't say that. She would never say that.

Hogan was talking. Hogan was saying something about the lighter alibi being weak.

What did she care what he said? It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. She couldn't think.

Tom had killed George Lowe on account of her.

CHAPTER IX

A Legal Tidbit

"HOGAN," said Henry Krotzmeyer decisively, "is a fool.

"Hogan is great," he continued, "with anything he finds right under his nose. Beyond that, he's awful!"

Krotzmeyer patted his shiny bald head to give emphasis to his words.

"Yes, yes," said Stephen Gilbert patiently, "but he has my daughter and my son-in-law in jail."

"And that," announced Krotzmeyer, "is just why he is a fool. In the first place, two positives make a negative. The district attorney is going to have a fine mess on his hands if he gets into court and tries to hang an accessory before the fact charge on this young man who howls that he did it and a murder charge on this young lady who says nothing."

Krotzmeyer hesitated and drew at his cigarette. "My," he exclaimed, "it would be as good as a three-ring circus."

His eyes gleamed in anticipation of such a legal titbit.

Krotzmeyer Begins

"But," protested Gilbert, "it must never get to court—it can't get to court. It would kill my wife and it might kill me."

Gilbert's voice broke. He looked very old.

Henry Krotzmeyer peered at him through the haze of cigarette smoke. His expression was not one of compassion. His eyes narrowed.

He was in a dilemma. Never in his spectacular career as a criminal lawyer had he ever been confronted by such a situation. He had a suspicion that Gilbert, the man who had hired him to defend Tom and Cleo Hale, might have killed George Lowe. Not that he had any definite evidence against Gilbert. But he had a habit of suspecting everybody who might under any conceivable circumstance be implicated in a crime.

Henry Krotzmeyer didn't take anybody's word for anything, didn't believe anything until he had proved it a fact by personal investigation. Such was the code by which he had risen from a magistrates' court hanger-on to the eminence of one of New York's most famous criminal lawyers.

"We'll do our best," he finally said encouragingly. "We'll do our best. You know we're handicapped because neither Tom Hale nor the girl will come clean with me."

"I know it," said Gilbert sorrowfully. "They won't even talk to me. Tom insists he did it and Cleo won't say anything."

Krotzmeyer coughed and turned to the papers on his desk. He was busy. Gilbert took the hint. He rose, reached for his hat and started for the door. His shoulders were bent. He seemed very old.

"Be sure," called Krotzmeyer, "to always leave word at home where I can get in touch with you at a moment's notice."

Gilbert nodded and was gone.

The lawyer stared with a puzzled expression at the door Gilbert had closed behind him. He was in very much of a dilemma. Never before had he undertaken to unravel such a tangled skein of circumstantial evidence. He cursed Inspector Hogan, of the Homicide Squad.

"I always begin," he said to himself, "when Hogan stops, and what a swell dish he left for me this time."

With another whispered malediction he turned to the notes and the huge pile of newspaper clippings he had collected on the mysterious murder of George Lowe.

A Newspaper Solution

He reread one statement that he had doubly underlined. The paragraph said:

> Police believe that Mrs. Hale concocted the weird story of having extended a cigarette lighter into the window of George Lowe's apartment in a desperate effort to establish an alibi when she learned that she had been observed.

Krotzmeyer winced.

For once he had to agree with the police. He had to admit the appropriateness of the word "weird" in describing the story. He hoped the district attorney didn't see it and set it aside for use before a jury.

He continued to read:

> A strong point in the police case is Mrs. Hale's inability to give any plaus-

ible reason for possession of the cigarette lighter. The girl admits that her husband did not present it to her and alleges she took possession of it on the impulse of the moment just before she left for Lowe's apartment.

Again Krotzmeyer cursed softly—cursed the newspapers and every man who had ever worked on a newspaper. Krotzmeyer believed there should be a law against newspapers meddling in criminal cases. They were too adept at amassing the evidence in a concise, damnably logical manner for the benefit of the district attorney.

He read on:

It is the police theory that Cleo Hale took the revolver from the bottom drawer of the bureau in the living room of the apartment, shot Lowe with it and then, on returning to the apartment, cleaned it with or without the aid of her husband.

Krotzmeyer grumbled. "No policeman thought of that."

He pushed the newspaper clippings to one side, stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, lit it and sat blowing thin streams of smoke through his nostrils. He drummed with his fingers on the top of his desk.

A Hopeless Job

Then he grabbed another newspaper clipping and read an underlined paragraph:

The medical examiner was unable to state positively from what position the bullet had been fired. The body of Lowe had been disturbed by a patrolman before detectives arrived. Reconstructing the scene in the room before the body was disturbed, the medical examiner declared, however, that it was not only possible, but probable that the shot had been fired through the window.

Krotzmeyer grinned maliciously. "I'll tear hell out of that," he said to himself, but he realized that it was not a major point.

He sighed wistfully, got up from the desk and took his hat. He was going down to Tenth Street to inspect the scene of the crime. He didn't feel the least elated—or hopeful.

CHAPTER X

A Ring of Keys

THERE was a patrolman on duty in front of the basement apartment at No. 1412 Tenth Street, where George Lowe had been brutally murdered in his sleep. The patrolman had explicit instructions to see that no one went into the apartment—absolutely no one. A crowd of curious people stood around him.

Henry Krotzmeyer left his taxicab at the corner and walked to No. 1412 Tenth Street without ostentation or without any particular hurry.

"Hello, Pete," he said pleasantly.

"Oh, hello, Henry," the patrolman said meekly, "how 'bout dat leave of absence?"

"It's all right, Pete," reassured Krotzmeyer. "We'll fix it—got to get to those things indirectly."

He winked knowingly, and the patrolman smiled.

"Say," whispered Krotzmeyer, "anybody been inside?"

"Nobody at all—twenty-four hour patrol here."

"Since when?"

"Since Hogan and his dicks pulled out de day of de murder."

"Has Hogan been back?"

"Naw, nobody."

Krotzmeyer nodded and whispered something.

"I got orders!" protested the officer. "Anyway, I ain't got a key."

"Who has the key?"

"Hogan."

"Anybody else got a key?"

"I think de janitor—wanted to get in to fix de radiator, but I wouldn't let him."

Krotzmeyer whispered again and walked to the main entrance.

He pushed the bell marked "Janitor."

He was inside the apartment house for quite awhile, for nearly half an hour. When he came out he was putting his wallet back in his pocket. In his left hand he held a ring of keys.

"Gawn, get out of here!" bellowed the policeman as he strode up to the crowd on the sidewalk. The murder addicts retreated a few feet. The policeman drove them farther, twenty, thirty, forty feet down the street, waving his hands, bellowing.

Henry Krotzmeyer slipped behind him, and disappeared through the basement entrance.

The Search

It was rather dark inside the apartment after the brilliant winter sunshine in the street.

Krotzmeyer blinked. He looked around the entrance hall. There was nothing promising in there. A hat tree against one side of the hall, a mirror against the other, a carpet on the floor. Nothing more.

He walked quietly into the living room. He took in the arrangement of the room with one swift glance. There was a couch against the wall, the wall farthest from the street. There was a door on either side of the couch. Both were ajar. One led into a bathroom, the other into a kitchen. There was a dining table in the center of the room, three chairs around it. There was an easy chair in a corner, a bookcase against one wall, a built-in cabinet against the opposite wall, a brick fireplace beside the cabinet. On the street side were two windows, barred for protection against burglars.

There seemed nothing promising in the living room. It was only a room where a man had been killed, a room that was in fair order.

Krotzmeyer did not feel the least bit elated or hopeful.

Then he noticed the clock on the mantel above the fireplace. It was a cheap dollar clock. He stared at it, went over and picked it up, examined it carefully before he put it down again on the mantel.

He lit a cigarette, blew thin spirals of smoke through his nostrils. He began a minute inspection of the room. He examined the couch, lifted up the covers. He went over to the built-in cabinet. He pulled at the drawers. Some opened; some didn't.

He bent over the drawers that were locked. None of them had keys. He ran his fingers across their surfaces.

All the while he was smoking cigarette after cigarette, careful always to put the stubs and the burned matches in the fireplace. Finally he went into the bathroom, examined the walls, ran his hands over them, and looked into the medicine cabinet.

Then into the kitchen, where he spent fifteen minutes examining the back wall. He seemed very interested in the back wall. He looked into the cupboard where the dishes were kept, looked under the sink where the pans were hung.

On the Floor Above

There was a big closet on one side of the kitchen. Krotzmeyer turned on a light and went through it. There was a trunk on the floor of the closet, not locked. He examined the lock carefully, then opened the top. He did not disturb the contents.

There was a pile of newspapers on the shelf of the closet. Krotzmeyer did not touch them.

He was still in the kitchen, when he heard the patrolman tapping on the window of the apartment. He turned out the light and hurried into the entrance hall. He tapped on the door, and when there was a return tap Krotzmeyer opened the door and slipped out.

"Gotta get out," said the patrolman. "Relief coming soon."

Krotzmeyer nodded and walked with the policeman to the sidewalk.

"Are you sure," he asked, "no one has been in the apartment?"

"No—no one."

Krotzmeyer nodded and went to the main entrance of the apartment house. He let himself in with the janitor's keys. There was a vacant apartment on the first floor, and Krotzmeyer let himself into it with the pass-key. He closed the door behind him. Twenty minutes later he came out, went out to the street, hurried to the corner, and haled a cab. He gave the driver an address and told him to hurry.

He went a distance of three blocks, stayed fifteen minutes, and came back to Tenth Street. Krotzmeyer had been to a locksmith.

When he arrived back at No. 1412 Tenth Street he rang the janitor's bell. He paid little attention to that individual's protest over the long absence of the keys. He calmed Andreas's ruffled feelings with a greenback.

"Say," he asked, "has anybody been in that apartment?"

"No," said Andreas.

Krotzmeyer nodded and left.

Krotzmeyer Makes Sure

When he reached the street he found another patrolman on duty.

"Say," said Krotzmeyer to the new policeman, "has anybody been in that apartment?"

"No—no one," said the policeman.

Krotzmeyer got a cab, went to precinct headquarters. He obtained the name and address of the third policeman who participated in the twenty-four hour watch on the apartment in which George Lowe had been killed.

He took another taxicab—to the policeman's home. The policeman was asleep, but Krotzmeyer insisted that he be wakened.

"Say," said Krotzmeyer to the bleary-eyed officer, "has any one been in that apartment at 1412 Tenth?"

"No."

When Krotzmeyer was again in the street he took out his watch. Quarter to seven. He went to a drug store and telephoned Inspector Hogan at his home.

"Say," he said pleasantly, "has any one been in Lowe's apartment since you left?"

"No," said Hogan, "and you're not going in, either."

"Thanks," said Krotzmeyer, and hung up.

He went to his office, took a revolver from the drawer, loaded it with bullets, put it in his overcoat pocket. He was taking no chances.

Then he took a cab to Tenth Street. He left the cab at a corner, and walked to No. 1412. He didn't bother the patrolman on duty. He went to the main entrance and let himself in with a key.

CHAPTER XI

Strange Footsteps

MIDNIGHT. A patrolman impatiently paced the pavement in Tenth Street, waiting for his relief. There was no movement, no sign of life in the apartment where George Lowe had been murdered. There was nothing but black walls and somber shadows.

In the darkened quiet a clock ticked steadily.

It was four days since George Lowe had died. Why did his clock tick?

At twelve thirty the patrolman was still waiting for his relief—muttering curses.

At twelve thirty-five a shadow crossed the sickly light that was thrown upon the floor of the apartment by the street lamp. There were voices of men on the sidewalk.

"You're late, Joe."

"'S all right."

"You're drunk again, Joe."

"'S all right."

"Better not leave here."

"'S all right."

"Good night."

"'Night."

There was the sound of steady footsteps retreating. Silence. Then the sound of unsteady footsteps retreating. A drunken policeman had aban-

doned his post. There was no guard at 1412 Tenth Street.

At one o'clock all was quiet except for the steady tick of the clock.

At two o'clock it was quiet—at three o'clock, three thirty, three forty-five.

A milk truck rattled through Tenth Street and the noise resounded harsh in the silence.

There were footsteps—*pat, pat, pat.* They trod the bare floor of the vacant apartment upstairs. They advanced across the floor, began to descend—somewhere in the rear. They came lower, lower, hollow, ghostly. There was a creak in the back wall of George Lowe's kitchen. Some one was coming in through the wall.

The Mad Charwoman

A light went on in the kitchen, gleamed yellow beneath the living room door.

Slowly the door opened. An arm extended, a body followed. Fingers touched a switch, and the room was flooded with light.

"Oh!"

The little old lady clasped her hands to her breast.

"You—you scared me!"

"Yes, I scared you," said Henry Krotzmeyer.

Krotzmeyer stared at her intently from his position in the easy chair in the corner. He watched her pat herself on the chest, pant. He looked at her white hair, her wrinkled, sunken face, her bright eyes.

He lowered his revolver.

"Yes," he repeated, "I scared you."

"My, my, such a fright! And I haven't been very well since my son hurt me. He was always playful, even before he died. He died when he was four, you know. And he came back grown up and a real angel, and he had Gabriel with him."

The bright eyes. A cold chill ran down Henry Krotzmeyer's back.

"You know, they came all the way to see me. They wanted me to dance and—bless me—I haven't danced since I was seventeen. And I slipped and I—"

Henry Krotzmeyer lowered his head to his hand. His hand trembled.

"And I suppose you are a friend of Mr. Lowe, and that Mr. Lowe is coming back. I am his cleaner, you know, and I give his apartment a thorough cleaning, just like I would my old home for four dollars a week."

Henry Krotzmeyer looked up into the bright eyes of the little woman with the white hair and the furrowed face.

"Madam," he said solemnly, "it's four o'clock in the morning."

"My, my—and I thought it was afternoon."

Krotzmeyer trembled.

"I did that before, you know, and Mr. Lowe was mad. I don't pay much attention, you know, and when I wake up I look at the clock and think it's time."

The Secret Stairs

She took a lace cap from her pocket and pulled it over her head.

"But there isn't much to do, you know, because Mr. Lowe has been away for a long while."

"Yes," said Krotzmeyer, "for a long, long while."

"But I'll just dust off the chairs and wind the clock. You know, I always wind the clock for Mr. Lowe."

"Yes," said Krotzmeyer, "I know that you always wind the clock and that you come down the back way."

"Yes," said the little old woman, "this is a remodeled house. It was once an old family home, you know, and there was a stairway leading from the main floor to the basement. When they made it into apartments they left the stairway. It runs from the vacant apartment upstairs to Mr. Lowe's kitchen. They just covered up the door with beaver board on the side that faces Mr. Lowe's kitchen. You can't see it unless you look real close, but it's there."

"I know about it," said Krotzmeyer. "That's the way I came in to-night."

"I use it," said the little old woman, "because I have another place to clean in the building, and because I always go in the front door. But it's good I didn't go to the other place now, because I thought, you know, that it was afternoon."

The little old woman tittered.

Krotzmeyer sickened.

He watched, fascinated, as she ran a rag over the chair—futile efforts by a mad woman for a dead man.

Waste Paper

"And I'll throw out the papers, and then I'll go, because Mr. Lowe says I'm not to bother his friends."

She went into the kitchen, took the papers from the shelf in the closet, and piled them on the living room floor.

All the while Krotzmeyer watched her.

"I always take out the waste paper, and I always wind the clock."

Krotzmeyer nodded.

"Do you ever look in the drawers?" he asked.

"My, my, no!"

"Did you force open one of those cabinet drawers and glue on the broken wood?"

"My, my, no."

"Did you go looking all over this place for something?"

"My, my, no."

Krotzmeyer pondered.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Lady," he asked solemnly, "has there been, to your knowledge, any one else in this apartment during the last four days?"

"Not that I know of."

Krotzmeyer was puzzled. He stared stupidly at the mad old woman as she tied the papers in a bundle.

His eyes were set upon an object in the bundle, something oblong and wrapped in newspaper.

"Wait," he called. "Stop a minute."

He leaned over and picked up the package.

"Mr. Lowe may want this," he said.

"But he always throws everything out that's on the top shelf."

"Yes, yes," said Krotzmeyer as he unwrapped the newspaper. It contained a packet, a packet of envelopes held together by a rubber band.

"And I always do what he says," the old lady was saying.

Krotzmeyer paid no attention. He was examining the envelopes. Each envelope had the single word "George" written upon it. No stamps, no address—just the word "George."

And in each envelope there was a letter.

They were letters that George Lowe had wrapped up in newspaper and placed in the closet to be thrown out with the waste paper.

Still the little old woman was chattering.

"Well, I'll throw the rest of the paper out anyway," she was saying.

"Yes, yes," muttered Krotzmeyer abstractedly.

He had begun to read the letters.

"And I guess I'll go now," she said finally.

Krotzmeyer looked up. "Did you wind the clock?" he asked.

"Yes."

She went up the concealed stairway, out through the vacant apartment, into the street. She walked through the darkness and the cold alone—a little old woman with bright eyes, who was happy because her son had brought the Angel Gabriel down to earth to see her.

Henry Krotzmeyer read the letters.

CHAPTER XII

Until the Hour

HENRY KROTZMEYER was missing.

Stephen Gilbert couldn't find him anywhere. He hadn't been home all night, he wasn't at his office, he hadn't been to see Tom or Cleo.

Krotzmeyer's clerk said he didn't know where his employer was. He hadn't had a call from him, hadn't been able to find him in any of his usual haunts. Nobody knew where Krotzmeyer was.

He was hiding in a most efficient and thorough manner. He was registered at a hotel in Twenty-Sixth Street under a fictitious name. He was spending most of the day sleeping, because he didn't want to see any one and he didn't want any one to see him.

He was ready to act, had set a zero hour to begin operations. He didn't want anything to happen before the zero hour that might disturb him, disrupt his plans. So he slept.

Andreas Is Suspicious

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he awakened. He lay in bed until three-thirty, reading the newspapers. Then he rose and dressed hurriedly. It was almost four o'clock when he left the hotel.

He knew exactly what he was about, knew every move he intended to make within the next twelve hours, knew exactly what he hoped to achieve.

From the hotel he went to a restaurant, drank black coffee and smoked a cigarette. Then he got into action.

He first went to No. 1412 Tenth Street and found his friend the patrolman.

"Stand in the main entrance," said Krotzmeyer, "and under no circumstances let any one go into that vacant apartment on the right."

The patrolman nodded.

"Tell your relief to do the same—tell him they are orders from Hogan."

"Well, that'd be going a little too strong."

"They will be orders from Hogan," said Krotzmeyer, "before you tell him."

The patrolman smiled and sauntered toward the main entrance to the apartment. He liked to please Krotzmeyer. He was firmly convinced that that gentleman wielded some mysterious and sinister influence over the powers of the police department.

When Krotzmeyer saw the patrolman installed at the strategic point, where he could prevent any entry to the basement apartment, he let himself in by the main entrance.

He walked through the lobby to the rear, where Andreas, the janitor, had a room. He found the door ajar and he walked in. He advanced quietly, and he was in the middle of the room before Andreas, washing his hands in a basin, turned and saw him.

For a moment they stood looking at each other in silence.

"Hello," said Krotzmeyer softly.

The janitor's eyes narrowed.

"How did you get in?" he demanded.

"Followed a tenant in," said Krotzmeyer.

Andreas nodded, but his manner was still suspicious.

The Strong Box

"Well, you can't have no more keys," he announced. "I won't lend them to you no more—you keep 'em too long."

"Don't want any keys," said Krotzmeyer.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Did you know that some bricks in the side of the fireplace were loose?"

"No," said Andreas.

"Didn't you build a strong box in behind the loose bricks in the fireplace?"

"No. Never heard of it." The janitor was interested. "Maybe," he suggested. "Mademoiselle Beautaire knows something about it."

"Maybe," said Krotzmeyer.

"I'll ask her."

The janitor went to the automatic phone and pressed the button for the landlady's apartment.

He asked her if she knew there were some loose bricks in the side of the fireplace in George Lowe's apartment, and

that there was a strong box beneath them? He told her that the attorney for the prisoners had found it.

When she had answered Andreas turned to Krotzmeyer.

"She doesn't know anything about it," he said. "She wants to know if you opened it."

"No, I didn't, I'm going to let Inspector Hogan open it," said Krotzmeyer.

Andreas told that to the landlady.

Krotzmeyer went out into the hall, hurried to the street. He took a taxicap to the office of Inspector Hogan of the Homicide Squad.

Hogan Weakens

He slipped past Hogan's outer guard—as was his custom. And he was as welcome in Hogan's office as usual—which was not at all. The inspector glowered at him. Krotzmeyer seemed oblivious of any hostility. He was beaming with cordiality.

"Your guards at Lowe's apartment—" he started.

"Listen," bellowed Hogan, "you're not going to get in that apartment."

"I've been in that apartment," Krotzmeyer said calmly.

"What!"

Hogan flushed. He leaned over his desk. Krotzmeyer was as cool as ice.

"And," he continued, "there has been a whole parade of people in that apartment—right around your guards. As I was going to say in the first place, your guards ain't so hot.

"One of them," the lawyer continued, "ain't letting duty interfere with his drinking. But that doesn't matter so much. It just happened that he hasn't been there to notice that a whole parade of people has been visiting the apartment in the early morning hours."

"How did they get in?" stammered Hogan.

"Well," said Krotzmeyer, "it happens that there is an old stairway leading from the apartment upstairs to Lowe's apartment. The doors of the stairway are covered up with beaver board, but they are there and you can see them if you look close."

He smiled.

"If you look close," he added significantly.

Hogan scowled.

"Say," said Krotzmeyer suddenly, "did you know there were some loose bricks in the fireplace and there is a strong box behind the bricks?"

"No."

Hogan's answer was weak. He felt very weak.

"Well," said Krotzmeyer, "there isn't."

He smiled diabolically. Hogan began to view him with alarm.

"Then, why did you say there was?"

"I spread the word around," said Krotzmeyer, "because I want a certain person to believe there is a strong box behind the bricks in the fireplace. There's been a crazy woman in there, dutifully cleaning up the apartment, and there's another person in there, ransacking the place for letters."

Music With Murders

"How do you know?"

"Because," said Krotzmeyer, "the place has been ransacked, all the clothing has been turned topsy-turvy, even a drawer was pried open and then the split board was glued back on again."

"How do you know the person was looking for letters?"

"Because," announced Krotzmeyer, "I've got the letters. The crazy woman turned them up under my nose in a pile of waste paper."

"And—and—" stammered Hogan, "who is this person?"

"The person," said Krotzmeyer solemnly, "is the murderer of George Lowe and—we'll be there to-night when the person comes looking for the strong box."

"Maybe, maybe the person has been there already and found there is no strong box," suggested Hogan.

"Oh, no," assured Krotzmeyer, "I've attended to that. I've actually put your guard to work. I've got him watching to see that nobody goes into that vacant apartment and down the concealed stairway."

"How did you do that?"

"I told them you said to watch the vacant apartment," said Krotzmeyer blandly.

He grinned and leaned over the desk.

"Now," he said, "you might do something that amounts to something."

"What?"

"Ring up the precinct captain and tell him that if that big stiff that goes on guard at the Lowe apartment at midnight isn't cock-eyed when he reports for duty to have some one take him out and get him good and plastered. We won't need any guard there after midnight."

Hogan hesitated, then picked up the phone. He was hopelessly at sea. He could do nothing but obey.

He got Captain Timothy Kail on the phone and told him to make certain that the patrolman who went on duty at the Lowe apartment at midnight was drunk. It was a very strange order. But orders are orders.

"And now," announced Krotzmeyer, "you wait for me here while I buy a small phonograph."

"Why the phonograph?"

"Because these letters talk about a song and we might as well have the song when I read them to-night."

The lawyer got up.

"Anyway," he added, "I like music with my murders."

CHAPTER XIII

Darkness and Quiet

NOBODY had to help Patrolman Joe Hewitt to get good and drunk. He could attend to that himself, thank you just the same.

He was fifty minutes late when he showed up as midnight relief for the patrolman on duty in front of the apartment wherein George Lowe had been murdered five days previous.

"You're late, Joe," said the patrolman.

"'Sall right."

"You're drunk again, Joe."

"'Sall right."

"You'd better stand this watch to-night."

"'Sall right."

"Better not leave here."

"'Sall right."

"Good night."

"'Night."

There was the sound of steady footsteps retreating. A lull—heavy breathing, and then unsteady footsteps retreated in the opposite direction.

Again the murder apartment had been abandoned to the darkness and the quiet—and the monotonous ticking of a clock.

Haunting Waltz

Two o'clock came and went—two fifteen, two thirty.

Pat, pat, pat.

Hollow and ghostly was the sound of footsteps on the bare floor of the vacant apartment above.

Pat, pat, pat.

Somebody was coming down the concealed stairway.

The footsteps paused. Silence. Then —*pat, pat, pat.*

The back wall creaked. Somebody came in through the door in the kitchen wall. There was the sound of a hand running across the wall. Some one was feeling the way through the kitchen.

The living room door creaked, opened slowly.

All was silent. The clock ticked staccato.

There was a movement of a body and the door squeaked on its hinges. Some one had come into the living room.

The footsteps advanced, muffled by the soft carpet. They advanced to the fireplace, stopped. A hand ran over

the bricks, ran up and down the bricks. Then music began to play in the darkened apartment, soft and muted.

There was an exclamation of alarm —a feminine exclamation of alarm from near the fireplace.

On played the phonograph.

"Years and years ago—"

Violin, cello and barytone.

"With some one I know—"

Rose and fell. Then muted.

And a voice spoke above the music.

Krotzmeyer, in the hall, was reading letters by the light of a pocket flash light.

There was a rustle near the fireplace, a rustle of silk clothing.

"Are you that way?" read Krotzmeyer from the letters, softly and solemnly. "Do you not remember the dancing and the love and the music? You were tender, once. You were nice, once. You danced with me, once, and they played the Haunting Waltz and I closed my eyes. Do you not remember that?"

"Haunting waltz—tender memories—" sang the phonograph.

On read Krotzmeyer, relentlessly.

"You drive me to madness. Does it all mean nothing to you? I give to you everything. I give you your home. I give you food. I would gladly give to you my life. I love you. But I cannot stand too much. This is the last chance I warn you."

"When the lights were low—" sang the phonograph.

"Would you drive me to madness?" read Krotzmeyer. "Would you make my heart break and die? How can you take the other girls? You must not. You must stop. For I shall watch, I shall see you. I shall be there when you think not. I shall see you and if the other girls come I shall kill you."

Then the lights went on!

And Inspector Hogan and Henry Krotzmeyer were standing in the room, leaning against the wall, staring at Mlle. Beautaire, at Mlle. Beautaire of the black eyes, the jet black hair, the green dress, the tortoise earrings.

There were two great tears upon her cheeks. Her eyes were wide with fear.

"Years and years ago—" sang the phonograph.

"There was no strong box in the fireplace," said Henry Krotzmeyer. "There were no loose bricks in the wall. I just said that to get you here. I've got your letters, lady.

"You missed them when you ransacked the apartment. They were in the closet all the time, lady. George Lowe had wrapped them up in newspaper and tossed them on a shelf to be thrown away."

Wistfully, Marie Beautaire smiled.

"And you missed the point when Cleo Hale came here that night. She wasn't one of them. She was only looking for her husband."

The telephone jangled. One of Hogan's men answered:

"Yes?—you say it's there—where? —under the mattress—good-by."

"The gun," said Inspector Hogan, "has been found under the mattress of her bed—the gun with which she killed George Lowe."

Wistfully, Marie Beautaire smiled.

"And tender memories—" sang the phonograph.

"Haven't you anything to say, anything?" asked Hogan, softly.

"Who tell, who tell on me?"

"The clock told," said Henry Krotzmeyer, "when I found that dollar clock still running I knew some one had been here and I looked around, saw things. The mad woman wound the clock and the clock told—told that this apartment had been ransacked."

"Haven't you anything to say—anything?" asked Inspector Hogan softly.

Marie Beautaire's mouth straightened—her face was hard.

"Turn off zat infernal musick!" she exclaimed.

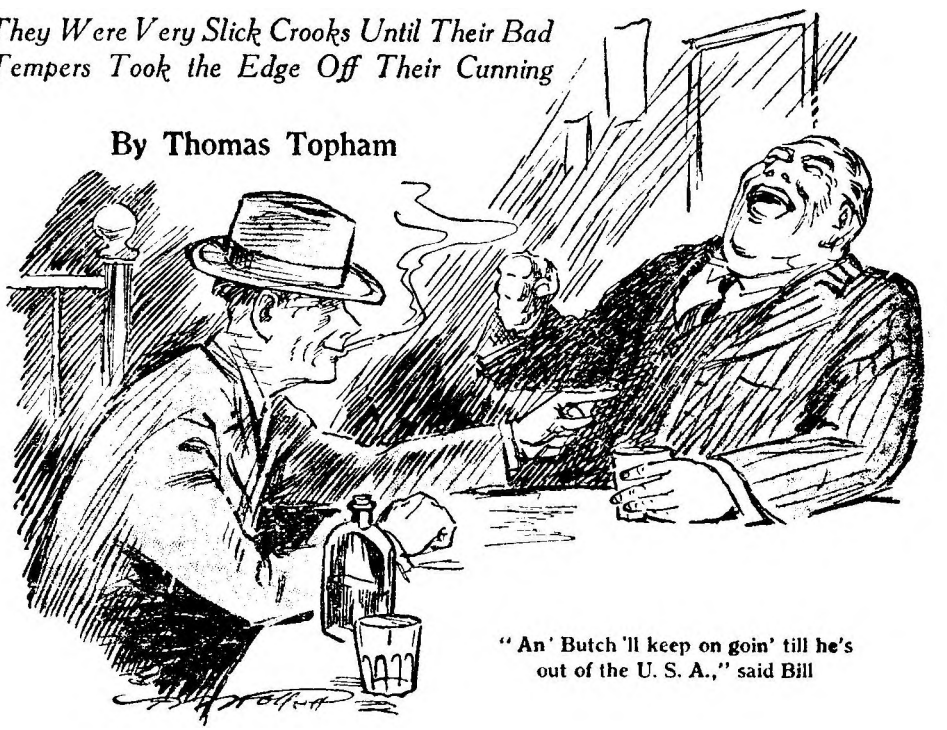
"Years and years ago—" sang the phonograph softly, succulently.

THE END

WHEN DIPS FALL OUT

They Were Very Slick Crooks Until Their Bad Tempers Took the Edge Off Their Cunning

By Thomas Topham



"An' Butch 'll keep on goin' till he's out of the U. S. A.," said Bill

SAMMY the Dip and "Butch" Murray, equally proficient pickpockets, had a big row over their spoils. Having robbed an old man of his life savings of six hundred dollars he was carrying to pay off a mortgage, they failed to agree upon the division and much trouble ensued.

The result was that Sammy stole the entire amount from Butch, leaving that pickpocket in a towering rage and uttering dire threats as to what he would do to Sammy the Dip.

A stool pigeon of the underworld told a detective about the quarrel and both Sammy and Butch Murray were arrested and brought to trial for robbing the old man.

Sammy went free and Butch went to the penitentiary, for Sammy, having the six hundred dollars, bought himself a witness who testified that he had seen Butch Murray do the pocket picking and that Sammy had been nowhere near, thus raising a reasonable doubt as to Sammy's participation.

Butch Murray couldn't see why the witness, since he was testifying to an entirely fictitious story, could not have sworn him free, too, but since Sammy put up the money to buy the witness, Sammy thought he was entitled to his exclusive services.

Of course, they had been operating together, but it was Butch's hard luck that he had no money to assist in paying the witness.

"I'll git you for that," snarled Butch in the court room, but Sammy had merely smiled, shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Secretly Sammy was glad that Butch Murray would be "put away" for a couple of years, for Butch was of a

dangerous type. He always wanted more than his share of the loot and he was given to threats of "bumping Sammy off" when things did not suit him.

So Sammy hung around until Butch was safely behind the walls of the "big house," then he gathered Bill Ross under his wing and resumed his activities.

A Prosperous Looking Fellow

Sammy had used Bill before, and Bill was a good "wire," and what was better, from Sammy's standpoint, he was satisfied with a percentage of the profits.

The man who was crossing the street was a prosperous-looking individual, and Sammy the Dip knew that he had a fat roll of bills in a wallet stuffed in his hip pocket.

Sammy had watched him at a cigar stand when he had inadvertently exposed the roll of money.

A moment after the prosperous-looking man had restored the wallet to his pocket Sammy rubbed his left eye. Big Bill Ross caught the signal.

It told Bill that Sammy had game in sight, and when Sammy rubbed his left eye a second time Bill knew that it was big game.

So Bill took his accustomed position back of Sammy, ready to receive whatever Sammy passed to him and make off.

As they progressed down the street in the wake of the prosperous-looking man Bill got another signal. It was to the effect that the victim would be an easy one. No "stalling" would be necessary. All that Bill had to do was to receive the money.

It was all done in the flash of a moment. Sammy bumped a woman on the street corner, she bumped the prosperous-looking man, and before the man had recovered, Sammy had his wallet and had passed it expertly to Bill.

Then Bill walked rapidly away from the scene of the predatory expedition, while Sammy effaced himself and started across the street.

Well satisfied with himself was Sammy the Dip. He had performed in an excellent manner, there wasn't a chance in the world that he could even be suspected, and if by a miracle he should be accused, he knew that conviction would be impossible without the evidence—and Bill had the evidence.

Accordingly Sammy was mildly surprised when he saw Bill Ross hurrying toward him. By all rights Bill should be far away in their room waiting for him so that the spoils could be divided.

As Bill came closer Sammy saw that something was radically wrong. Bill had a wild look in his eye and he pulled at the lobe of his left ear, which in their private signal code meant that he must hold conversation with Sammy at once.

Ordinarily such a signal would mean that the two would repair to their room, but Bill clutched at Sammy.

"Say, Sammy," croaked Bill in a throaty whisper, "I got knocked over for that wad we jest lifted."

Bumped for the Roll

"You did what?" asked Sammy unbelievingly.

"I got bumped for that roll," croaked Bill again. "My pocket was picked."

Sammy's jaw dropped and he stared at Bill.

"I was tapped, touched, if that's any plainer," rasped Bill.

Sammy pulled Bill into the entrance of an office building that was virtually deserted.

"Now, what's this you're givin' me?" demanded Sammy. "Say it again an' plainer."

"Why," said Bill plaintively, "when you pass the roll I make off safe, see? I turn a corner. I been workin' the kale outa the wallet in my pocket, so I see a mail box with nobody around

an' I ditch the leather in the box. So far, so good.

"The roll, an' it musta been near a grand, is in my coat pocket. While I'm liftin' up the mail box lid to chuck in the wallet I'm bumped by two guys, an' when I pick myself up the money's gone. It was dead easy for them."

"Holy sufferin' mackerel," croaked Sammy. "You pulled a boob stunt like that? You, the guy I been educatin', leavin' a wad in his coat pocket an' lettin' a couple saps who probably is yeggs off on a vacation, pry it outa your pocket?"

Nursing a Grouch

Bill flared at the criticism.

"For two cents I'd knock in your nose," threatened Bill, doubling his fist menacingly. "You're a wise guy, you are, but how could I help it? Jest tell me that."

"Looks mighty funny to me," said Sammy. "Looks mighty funny you'd let another dip gyp you outa that roll. An' you didn't even git a sight of 'em? Can't you describe even one?"

"There you go, accusin' me," complained Bill. "When I recover after this slam in the ribs there are four people near an' any of 'em might have been the ones who pulled the job. An' besides, I couldn't squawk to a cop, could I?"

"Huh?" snorted Sammy. The "huh" was fraught with sarcasm and deep distrust. Bill interpreted it as an aspersion on his honesty.

"So you think I crossed you?" almost yelled Bill. "Well, take that."

Bill doubled a powerful hand and swung at the exposed jaw of Sammy. Sammy went down with a yell.

For two days Sammy nursed his jaw and a grouch at Bill Ross. For one day he had felt positive that Bill had double crossed him and had stolen the fat wallet he had "lifted." On the second day he dismissed his suspicions of Bill. Bill had always been trustworthy and apparently proud of his connection with Sammy. There was no reason why Bill should steal from him, for Sammy had been generous.

Once when Bill had been sick and in a hospital Sammy had worked alone and had paid all of Bill's expenses, refusing to let Bill pay him back. In the end he concluded that the unbelievable had occurred and that Bill had actually been the victim of a couple of transient pickpockets.

On the third day Sammy decided to hunt up Bill. He found him drunk in Jerry the Bootblack's outlaw barroom. No use to try a reconciliation then, Sammy knew. He canvassed the possibilities of procuring another assistant, but could think of none who was sufficiently expert or trustworthy.

With a sigh he decided to work alone. It was somewhat dangerous, but he was an expert in his line and by carefully choosing his victims he felt that he could keep the wolf from the door until he could pick up another partner or make up his quarrel with Bill.

Down the Trail

The edge of the financial district was Sammy's particular field of endeavor. Generally he could pick a "live one," and on this occasion he did not miss his guess.

He selected a man of rural appearance who showed evidences of prosperity, trailed him. As he hoped, the man did some shopping, and Sammy succeeded in locating his pocketbook. It was carried in his breast pocket.

Sammy continued his trail until the man was in a crowded street, then walked rapidly ahead, turned and advanced, facing his victim.

The next instant Sammy bumped headlong into the man, his darting hand found the pocketbook, and a moment later he was gone in the resulting confusion, while the victim was apologizing to a woman whom Sammy had pushed in his way.

It had been remarkably easy and Sammy loitered along the street, watching for his opportunity to reach a secluded spot and get rid of the pocketbook. And then suddenly some one jabbed him in the ribs and he turned his head.

A man bumped heavily into him and Sammy realized in the flash of a second that he was being given a dose of his own bitter medicine.

Dirty Crooks

But the realization came too late. When he had recovered his balance a woman whom he had bumped in turn was glaring at him angrily, and Sammy, in fear that an officer might be attracted to the scene, made off hastily.

He knew without feeling that the pocketbook he had stolen had been, in turn, stolen from him, and his rage ran high.

"The dirty crooks," muttered Sammy, "pullin' a stunt like that on me."

It was inconceivable, outrageous.

Bill's experience came to mind, and Sammy regretted that he had been so hasty in his implied doubt of Bill's honesty. Now he knew that Bill had been robbed, just as he had.

But this was certain. The pickpockets who were prying on him and Bill were certainly no amateurs. Nor had they picked out their victims by accident.

As Sammy passed an officer he had an almost overpowering impulse to tell his troubles to the policeman. The little pickpocket felt highly virtuous over his loss, indignant that officers of the law did not keep better watch over citizens with money in their pockets.

He progressed down the street, turned in at Jerry the Bootblack's barroom in hopes of finding Bill. To his joy he was successful. Bill was there and sober. Sammy approached his former assistant in the gentle art of "lifting leathers."

"'Lo, Bill!" opened Sammy.

"'Lo!" growled Bill, warily eying Sammy to forestall a possible assault.

"Workin'?" asked Sammy.

"No."

"Bill," said Sammy, "I wanta say they ain't no hard feelin's over you crackin' me the other day. I was a sap to doubt you'd been touched. Bill, some fresh dip knocked me over today, myself."

"Huh?" grunted Bill, vastly surprised. "You got touched? How much?"

"A big fat wad," replied Sammy bitterly. "Don't know the size." Then he recounted in detail the misfortune that had overtaken him after his successful raid.

Bill ordered a pint of liquor, and they sat at a table to discuss the astonishing experience that had befallen both.

"It's an outside mob," declared Sammy. "It's a mob from Chi that got in here an' they don't give a durn for nobody. We don't know them, but they've got us spotted. An' they know it's perfectly safe to knock us over because we can't yell to the police. We do the work an' they git the kale. Swell racket."

Out Again

"The big crooks," exploded Bill, accepting Sammy's explanation of what was happening. "They'll drive us off our beat, an' it the best in town."

"They won't do no sech thing," proclaimed Sammy viciously. "Come on, le's go."

Together the two walked up the street toward their particular section. They were crossing at a corner when Sammy clutched at Bill's sleeve.

"Bill," he whispered hoarsely, "ain't that Butch Murray right ahead?"

Bill looked, dropped back.

"Yeh, it sure is," he whispered. "I didn't know he was out."

As two men with a single thought

the pickpockets faded into the crowd, separated, so that the object of their solicitude would not see them.

Separately and rapidly they made their way to their own room, for each felt that a conference was highly necessary.

"Well," said Sammy, when they were safely behind the locked door, "it's Butch doin' this highway robbery on us, an' he'll never let up. When he got put away he swore he'd put the skids under me when he gets out. An' now the big bum's doin' it."

"He probably won't try anything more" hazarded Bill. "He'll know we're wise to him now."

In for a Fall

"You can't tell about Butch," objected Sammy. "He's changed in looks considerable, an' he figgers I wouldn't recognize him easy. It was his walk, like he was sneakin' along, made me spot him.

"If he's after me he'll most likely git me in a swell jam. Of course, we could move, but he'd most likely foller us up."

"He won't rob me no more," boasted Bill. "I'll top the son-of-a-gun if he monkeys with me."

"You jest think he won't rob you no more," replied Sammy. "I know him well an' you don't. He'd jest as lief bean you an' take everything you had. He's a tough guy."

Sammy sat and pondered over the dilemma. If he left his particular section he would likely start a row with another "dip" upon whose preserves he poached. That would please Butch mightily.

Sammy wanted to stay where he was and get back to regular work with Bill. At last he looked up, reached for the bottle on the table and poured himself a generous drink.

"We got to let Butch in for a fall," decided Sammy. "Bill, we got to trap Butch. I don't care nothin' about his mob."

"You can't yell copper on him," objected Bill, horrified.

"I don't intend to yell copper," said Sammy indignantly. "I'm only after teachin' Butch a good lesson. I wanta scare him off."

"We'll git in the hoosegow," said Bill. "I never knowed a wise guy yet to start out to bump somebody that he didn't git bumped hisself."

"You watch me," boasted Sammy. "I ain't no spring chicken. I'm goin' to fix up a bunk wallet an' it's goin' to have in it nine hundred dollar counterfeit bills.

"I nipped them counterfeits off'n a guy once an' I saved 'em safe hid away, thinkin' they'd come in handy some day, an' to-morrow is goin' to be the day. Won't Butch be surprised when he lifts 'em off me?"

"I expect he will be surprised," answered Bill, looking slightly surprised himself, "but you're sure screwy. What good is it goin' to do you to surprise Butch? I ain't hankerin' to surprise nobody jest for the joke. I don't see where that gits us anything."

Easy Enough

"You jest wait," said Sammy ominously. "I take that fake wallet an' parade. When I'm sure Butch is follerin' me I pull a fake touch on some guy. Butch will think I've pulled a leather an' I'll flash that bunk wallet an' let him see me put it in my pocket. Then he'll nab that wallet off'n me an' things will begin to hum."

"He'll only throw 'em away."

"That's where you're off your nut," said Sammy. "You know Lester Brown, the guy they call Sad Eye?"

"Yeah."

"Well, Butch don't," said Sammy. "Sad Eye come in since Butch got sent up. I got a old deputy United States marshal's badge I nipped one time thinkin' the diamint set in it was a real diamint. Well, I'll shine that up an' slip it to Sad Eye. He's a big guy an' not afraid of nothin'.

"When Butch gits my fake wallet Sad Eye will be near. He'll grab Butch, flash that badge an' pull a fake pinch. Of course, Sad Eye will open that wallet an' drag out them bills. Then he'll yelp, 'Counterfeit, heh?' an' Butch will faint. He'll see hisself bound for a United States pen, an' when Sad Eye turns his head away, like he will, Butch will try a lam. He'll skip an' we'll never see him any more."

A Quick Job

Bill laid back his head and roared.

"Sammy," he bellowed in his mirth, "Butch will keep on goin' till he's out of the United States of America if he thinks Uncle Sam is after him. You'll be rid of Butch for life." But he sobered, then voiced an objection. "How about some cop mebbe buttin' in. There'll be considerable excitement, an' you can't tell, a bull might come wanderin' by."

Sammy derided the idea.

"I ain't goin' to pull this on a main highway," explained Sammy. "Soon as I see, or git your signal that Butch is tailin' me, I turn into a side street. An' then we'll do the job so quick no bull can have a chanst to horn in. It'll all be over in two, three minutes."

Bill was satisfied. "I'll be right along clost," he promised, "because this ought to be good."

With much chuckling Sammy went to a hiding place and got his nine hundred dollar counterfeit bills and the old United States deputy marshal's badge, then called upon the sad eyed Lester Brown to help him out. Sad Eye was willing; in fact, when the plot had been fully unfolded he was eager.

"All you do," instructed Sammy, "is walk along close beside me, but not like you was with me. When Butch gives me the touch you're right there to grab him. Don't miss. He's quick as lightning, but you ought to git him, because you're quick yourself."

"I'll git him," promised Sad Eye.

Sammy staged a rehearsal, with Bill acting the part of Butch Murray. Then he began making up his dummy wallet. At the last minute he put only five counterfeit bills in the fake wallet and stuffed the other four in another pocketbook.

"I'll put a wallet in two different pockets," quoth the cautious Sammy. "Then if he misses one he'll grab the other."

So the trap was laid and the three conspirators, Sammy, Bill and Sad Eye Lester Brown started on their expedition to fool a too exuberant pickpocket. Bill was only a spectator and the signalman.

Sammy had not walked far when he caught Bill's signal that Butch Murray was in his wake. He grinned to himself, turned off the crowded street to another, where there was still plenty of traffic but less chance of encountering officers of the law.

The Big Act

Carefully picking his victim he perpetrated a rather spectacular job of fake pocket picking. Then as he moved away from the center of the disturbance he transferred a wallet from one pocket to another, eagerly aware that Butch Murray's keen eyes would see the maneuver. Anyhow, Butch couldn't very well miss one of the two wallets.

Shortly afterward Sammy, out of the tail of his eye, saw that Sad Eye Brown was close at hand. He loitered along carelessly, and suddenly Butch Murray made his strike for the wallet. He got it, and Sad Eye grabbed him before Butch could shove the wallet to his confederate. Sad Eye grabbed the wallet.

"Don't move," commanded Sad Eye, flashing his deputy marshal's badge. "You're pinched." Then he opened the wallet. "Oh, ho," he ejaculated, "counterfeit money, an' lots of it. Well, I'm a United States marshal. I guess this is lucky, gittin' a guy with a wad of the queer."

"Deputy United States Marshal" Sad Eye Brown prepared to turn his head to allow Butch Murray to escape, but at that moment an astonishing sight met his eyes.

A man whom Sad Eye instinctively knew to be a detective stepped up, dragging Sammy. As he got close Sad Eye recognized Detective Sergeant "Gloomy" Wilson from police headquarters.

"Here's another," said the detective to Sad Eye. "I saw a disturbance and lamped you grabbin' one an' I caught this guy sneakin' away. It's Sammy the Dip, an'—why, that bird you have is Butch Murray."

Keeping the Evidence

Deputy United States Marshal Brown's mouth sagged open as if he could see jail doors yawning for him because of his impersonation of a Federal officer. But the detective brought him to his senses.

"Didn't I hear you say you was a United States marshal?" asked the detective.

Sad Eye's wits snapped into play.

"Yeah," he replied briskly. "I got this guy you say is Murray an' he had some counterfeit money. I don't want that feller you got, that Sammy the Dip, so let him loose an' take this bird Murray an' stick him in the can for me. There's another guy up the street, pardner of this one, I want to go after."

"Well, I want Sammy," said the detective. "He was up to something, so I'll take both of 'em down."

Sammy felt his knees sag with horror as he thought of the other wallet in his pocket with four hundred-dollar counterfeit bills packed neatly in it.

He would get a stretch in Federal penitentiary if he were taken to Central Station and that money was found. No explanation could ever be made of having four such bills. It would be small consolation also that Butch Murray had five and would probably get the same penalty.

But Marshal Brown suddenly played another trump card.

"Say," said Sad Eye to Detective Sergeant Wilson, "le's see, mebbe this feller Sammy you nabbed has some counterfeit, too." He reached his hand in Sammy's pocket, dragged out the wallet, despite the feeble struggles of Sammy, who had the idea that Sad Eye had suddenly decided to double cross him to save his own skin.

"Yep," said Sad Eye, wagging his head, "this is a good ketch. I'll keep this evidence an' you hustle them two birds to the coop while I hop up the line an' see if I kin ketch the other one. Book 'em 'Hold for United States' till I come down."

"Fine," said the detective, and marched off his prisoners.

Sammy drew a deep breath of relief as they turned away, and he saw the pseudo deputy United States marshal moving off in the opposite direction, carrying with him evidence that would have sent him and Butch Murray to a Federal prison.

Outwitting a Detective

A wave of gratitude swept over him toward Sad Eye, who had risen so nobly to the opportunity and had outwitted a detective. He even smiled as he thought of the police waiting for a United States officer who would never arrive. There would be a fine mix-up and eventually a much disgusted and puzzled detective.

Even his hatred of Butch Murray melted under the gentle glow of his satisfaction at his narrow escape, his triumph over the law again. As they marched into the police station he was close to Butch Murray for a moment. He nudged his one-time enemy.

"Don't worry about that queer stuff, Butch," he whispered. "That United States officer was a fake an' a pal of mine. Mebbe they kin vag us, but that's all."

Butch, very much mystified at the whole proceeding, grinned as he began to understand. He had been badly frightened when he had found himself in the clutches of a supposedly Federal officer with a bale of counterfeit money in his hands. But now he was reassured.

Sammy grinned back, turned, and, lo! he looked at Sad Eye Lester Brown, who stood beside the booking officer's desk. Another detective was at Sad Eye's elbow, and beyond the officer was Bill Ross, his confederate,

Detective Sergeant Gloomy Wilson saw the surprise on the face of Sammy.

"Kind of surprised to see 'em here, eh?" asked Detective Wilson. "Well, you sure got me puzzled yet. I knew that bird wasn't no United States deputy, but I didn't savvy his game, so I let him walk off an' signaled to George Kline, who was workin' with me, to tail him an' pick him up later—"

"You mean he's arrested?" gasped Sammy.

"He sure is," asserted Detective Wilson. "He sure is, an' that other feller, too." He pointed at the dejected Bill Ross. "That feller there joined this bunk United States marshal an' they was goin' off together when Kline nabbed 'em both.

"Some real United States officers are on their way down, an' I wouldn't be surprised if they don't stick all four of you in the big house because of that counterfeit coin you had."

"You can't do nothin'," blustered Sammy.

"I ain't worryin' about that," said Detective Gloomy Wilson. "You guys was sure pullin' off a funny stunt, an' I don't know yet what you was up to."

"Neither do I," snapped Sammy disgustedly, and turned away wearily as a turnkey indicated the route to a cell.

"Lonely Freedom" Kills Ex-Convict

"I CAN'T stand the loneliness of freedom," declared the murderer, James Brackett, when he was paroled from Sing Sing recently, after having served seventeen years for manslaughter.

He committed suicide. He was found in bed with the gas jets open.

Brackett's parole officer, the only relative or friend he had, Captain Stanley Shepard, of the Salvation Army, had tried to cheer him on in his new existence outside the prison walls.

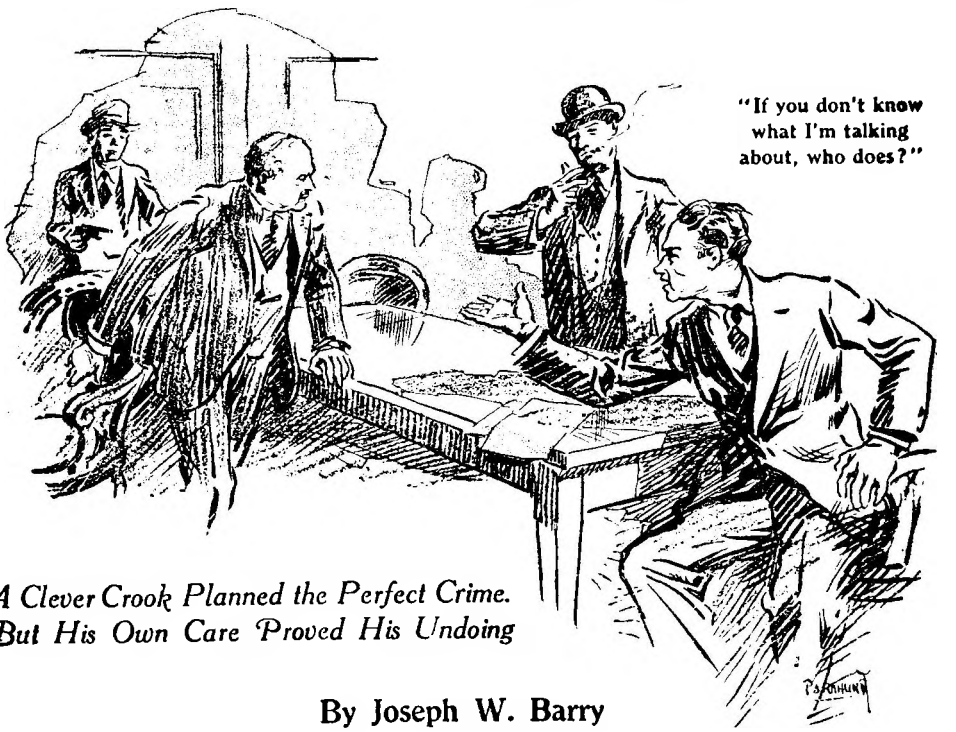
But the loneliness of it made him sad. "All my pals are up there," he said. "It's so different outside. I want to go back."

Seventeen years ago Brackett was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. One hour before the time of execution a reprieve was granted.

For the next two years he was an inmate of the death house awaiting a new trial. The second verdict gave him a sentence of from twenty years to life. After fifteen years of exemplary conduct he was released on parole several months ago. Three months of freedom were all he could stand.

Brackett was buried in the Mount Olivet, New York, cemetery by Captain Shepard, who saw to it that his remains did not lie in the potter's field.

TOO PLAUSIBLE



"If you don't know what I'm talking about, who does?"

A Clever Crook Planned the Perfect Crime. But His Own Care Proved His Undoing

By Joseph W. Barry

CHAPTER I

The Holdup

"PULL over there!"

The familiar command of the traffic policeman rang out in the stillness.

Without turning his head the driver of the roadster jammed on the brakes and turned into the curb, stopping.

He looked, expecting the usual reprimand, but was surprised to see a sedan stop alongside.

Two men leaped from the running-board. One approached the left side of the roadster. The other dashed to the right side.

A sharp command and the driver moved from back of the steering wheel, making room for the man at the left. The other man squeezed in. The driver was pinned between them.

The squeaking of the brakes as the cars came to a halt attracted the attention of the mechanics in the service station across the road.

They looked at each other.

"What do you make of that?" one of them asked as the roadster shot down Michigan Boulevard, followed by the sedan.

"Search me," shrugged the other, his eyes following the rapidly disappearing tail lights. "Looks like they were copping that roadster."

"Or racing each other home from a road house," suggested his companion indifferently.

"Guess you're right, at that," agreed the other. "Seems too tame for a hold-up." And the two men returned to their work.

The roar of the motors was now barely audible.

Scott, the assistant chief of the Federal Protective Association, handed the telegram to Jones.

"Read this," he said.

The chief of the F. P. A. glanced at the telegram and dropped it on his desk.

"Have you had any word on this from Regan?" he asked.

"No," replied Scott.

"Well, I don't fancy running out there to Chicago unless it's absolutely necessary. Let me read this again.

"'Teller found bound and gagged in bank this morning. States he was compelled to open vault for robbers. Loss over two hundred thousand. Can you take personal charge of case? Advise. Signed: Hayward, Empire Bank, Chicago.'"

Jones Goes Alone

"Seems peculiar that the teller was compelled to open the vaults," commented Scott.

"Yes," agreed Jones; "must have happened this morning, after the time clocks on the vaults had run off, and before any one else of the staff had showed up. By the way, Scott, did this telegram come through in code or as it is here?"

"Code," replied Scott, "A. B. A."

"I guess the first thing we'd better do is call up Regan to see what he knows about this. Have Miss O'Neil put through a call for him. After that we'll decide whether to make the trip to see Hayward, or have Regan handle it."

"Right," said Scott, as he left the office.

Jones walked over to the window. The rain and hail beating down on the sidewalks made thoughts of the southern vacation he had planned seem more interesting.

He had been working hard lately, he reflected, and had been looking forward to this rest. Away from all things wintry, with a summer sky overhead, to plunge into warm waters and forget that criminals and crime and prisons and pens ever existed.

His thoughts came to an abrupt halt when Scott entered.

"Just talking to Regan," said the assistant chief. "The only information he's had on this Empire Bank job is substantially the same as we've had."

"Hum—not so good," said Jones. "I was hoping he might have had some more news, however—" He broke off with a concise order.

"Scott," he said, "reserve a lower berth on the Twentieth Century leaving to-night."

"Going alone?" asked Scott.

"Yes, you'd better stay here in case anything breaks."

"Too bad," said Scott sympathetically, "that this had to come just now and spoil your vacation!"

"Yes," nodded Jones, "but I guess we can pull through all right without the vacation."

Scott moved to the door.

"I'll put that reservation through right away."

A Leak Somewhere

Jones nodded absently. His mind was already ferreting another criminal, another crime, another case for the F. P. A. Would they never stop? If only the criminal would realize that the long arm of the law would eventually overtake him, that he can't win. One slip means capture, and still the criminal keeps playing the game against the inevitable, Jones sighed.

"Well, Regan," said Jones, "I haven't been out this way in over a year."

"It's all of that, I guess."

"Of course," Jones smiled, "that's because we have an able man at the head of our Chicago office."

"Thanks," replied Regan, "but the fact of the matter is things have been quiet here, a lot of small stuff, but nothing big—that is, until this Empire Bank job broke."

"Yes, of course. Have you had any new developments on it?"

"No, nothing since the first report."

"Who's handling it, in the police department?"

"Inspector Conroy."

"Conroy—Conroy," reflected Jones. "I don't believe I know him. What's his opinion?"

"That there was a leak somewhere. He thinks somebody tipped off the gang who staged the job that there was an unusual amount of cash in large bills in the vault that night.

Cool Workers

"Evidently they had been watching the movements of the teller. When they wanted him they knew just about where they could pick him up."

"How do you mean?" asked Jones.

"Well, you see, the teller, Grady, was at a dance at a country club that night. Along after midnight he and his young lady started home. Evidently, they stopped off at a night club for something to eat, because it was near three o'clock when Grady started for his own home, after leaving the girl.

"According to Grady's statement he was going down Michigan Boulevard when he was ordered to stop. He thought first it was a traffic cop. Instead, a couple of gents hopped out of a sedan and covered him.

"They climbed in with him, took the wheel and continued down the Boulevard. About two blocks away from the bank they stopped, walked to the bank and made Grady open the door."

"Where was the watchman?" Jones asked.

"They haven't any. The bank is situated in the corner of an apartment house and the superintendent of the building is supposed to keep his eye on it. This particular night, his eye didn't seem to have been working. He never showed up. But Grady told the gang that the vaults couldn't be opened until eight o'clock."

"What time was it then?"

"About three thirty."

"All right," said Jones, "go ahead."

"Well, the gang made themselves comfortable and decided to wait. A few minutes before eight o'clock they ordered Grady to snap into it and open up. He did.

"Then after picking up all they wanted, dividing it up in packages, they trussed Grady up, hands and feet, shoved a gag into his mouth and beat it."

"No trace of the gang at all?" Jones asked.

"None whatever."

"The roadster as well as the sedan, you say, were parked a couple of blocks away from the bank?"

"That's right."

"Didn't the policeman on the beat notice them?"

"He did," replied Regan, "but didn't get the license plate numbers."

Jones shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose they were phony, anyhow."

"Probably."

"Where's Grady now?" asked Jones.

"Over at the Empire Bank."

"In the cage?"

"Yes, he's on his regular job. I didn't see any reason for ordering the bank to do otherwise. Why?" Regan looked at Jones questioningly. "Do you—"

"No, not at all. Just thought that the bank would put him on some other work, so that the depositors wouldn't do any talking with him about the hold-up. Let's run over to the Empire. I want to see Hayward, anyway."

CHAPTER II

Jones Hears Rumors

HAYWARD, president of the Empire Bank, greeted Jones enthusiastically. "Mighty glad you came. Of course, our insurance covers the loss, but the thing that bothers me is the hopelessness of the situation."

"How's that, Hayward?" the chief of the F. P. A. asked.

"Why, the police here are not doing anything in the matter. There's a rumor that the whole thing was faked."

"Is that so?"

Jones's eyebrows arched in surprise. Here was a new angle.

"Yes, and you know how rumors spread."

"Of course," acknowledged Jones, "but just how do these rumors explain that the money actually disappeared?"

A Run Threatens

"Well, you see, we've been hit pretty hard lately on loans extended to the fur trade. This line has been at a stand still for months now, and any number of manufacturing furriers as well as importers and retailers have failed.

"Word has gone around that we've sustained losses running into hundreds of thousands. Fact is, we've been hard hit, but nowhere near that mark.

"One report that came to me this morning was that we had framed this robbery in order to collect the insurance and that if this one gets over we'll most likely pull another."

"Idle gossip," Jones sniffed.

"True, but we have had heavy withdrawals the past three days. Almost a run on the bank—in orderly fashion, of course. No bank is prepared for anything like that.

"Fortunately, we've been able to borrow from the Federal Reserve. But the business that's going out now will be a long time coming back."

"There's no doubt about that," Jones agreed. "These things have far-reaching effects, but there's no way of stopping it. Nothing to do until we can round up some of this gang."

"That's all we can do. Of course, the police department claim that they are doing all they can do, but the talk we hear is that the police department is skeptical and is laying down on the job."

"That's probably just as well," commented Jones; "it will give us a free hand to work with—no interference.

"Getting back to the robbery, however. I understand that Grady is the name of the teller who was held up, is that right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Is he here now?"

"Yes, do you want to see him?"

"If it can be conveniently arranged, I'd like to go over this thing with him."

As Hayward left the office Jones turned to Regan.

"This is a pretty busy bank," he remarked, watching the crowds hurrying into the corridors. Long lines were forming at the paying teller's window; only occasionally a depositor would approach the receiving teller's window to make a deposit.

"It's unusual, though," mused Regan; "no doubt about it being a run on the bank, however. It's a question how long they'll be able to hold up.

"A run on a bank is always dangerous. Anything can happen. Of course the Federal Reserve will help them out, but most people don't understand that. They think when the last of the cash is reached—why, that's all there is to it; they're stuck."

Grady's Story

Hayward entered the office, followed by a tall, slim youth.

"This is Grady," said Hayward as he motioned the teller to a chair.

Jones scrutinized him shrewly.

Grady was the bank clerk type, studious, sharp-eyed, sallow-complexioned.

"Tell us, in your own way," Jones ordered the boy. "What happened the night of the holdup."

"From the beginning?"

"Yes, right from the start."

"Well, I'd been to a dance—" He had told the story so often. It was beginning to be mechanical.

Finally he settled back in his chair; his eyes never leaving Jones. He had heard much of this bank sleuth from the East. The chief of the F. P. A.

studied the design of the rug at his feet. He suddenly looked up at Grady.

"Then from three thirty until eight o'clock these bandits sat around waiting for the time clocks to run off. Is that right?"

"That's right," replied the teller."

"Where were you all sitting?"

"Back of the teller's cages, in the dark."

"What lights were on?"

"Only the night light directly over the vault."

Jones Wonders

"So that if the policeman on the beat happened to look in at the window, it would have been impossible for him to see any of you?"

"Absolutely impossible."

"The rest of the bank was dark?"

"Yes."

"How many men were there?"

"Four."

"Did they say anything during this wait?"

"Only warned me against making an outbreak."

"I see. Were they armed?"

"Yes."

"Did they talk among themselves?"

"Yes, but I couldn't understand them; they were talking in Italian."

"Were you down to the rogues' gallery?"

"Inspector Conroy showed me a number of photographs at police headquarters, but I didn't recognize any of them."

"After you had left your young lady and started home—what time was that?"

"About three o'clock."

"You drove down Michigan Boulevard, is that right?"

"Yes."

"How long had you been driving when this other car overtook you?"

"About ten minutes, I imagine."

"That would allow the other twenty minutes to carry you and the bandits to the bank?"

"Yes; of course they drove very fast."

"Of course," agreed Jones.

Grady edged to the front of his chair. He was anxious to supply all the necessary details to this detective. He wanted to help him, to make a good impression. He was so unlike the other detectives who had questioned him, with their bulldog tactics.

"During this ride into town, with the bandits, did any motorcycle policeman stop you?"

"Didn't see any."

Jones rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The facts had been related too smoothly, just a little too carefully for him. He wondered why.

"Now, when you were held up, of course you were taken unawares, but when you saw they were not police officers why didn't you step on the gas again and beat it?"

"It came too quickly, Mr. Jones, I suppose. Before I had turned my head a gun was poked into my ribs."

"Hum—didn't give you a chance at all, did they?" Jones smiled.

Grady Is Nervous

"None whatever."

"I suppose the spot they picked to get you was along a quiet stretch of the road, dark—"

"On the contrary, it was directly in front of a service station," interrupted Grady, "or repair shop—something of the sort."

"Oh, yes? Anybody come out to see what it was all about?"

"I don't know, Mr. Jones—at least, I wouldn't have noticed."

"Of course, you reported the exact location on Michigan Boulevard to the police?"

"Why, no." Grady appeared a trifle ill at ease. "Fact of the matter is, they didn't ask me."

"And," suggested Jones, quick to note the change in the teller's attitude, "it never occurred to you that it was important, eh?"

"No, I guess it didn't."

"All right, Grady. That 'll be all for the moment. Later I'll ask you to oblige the F. P. A. with some more facts."

The teller rose. He was a little nervous. He glanced at Jones's smiling countenance, nodded, and left the office.

Jones turned to Hayward.

"How long has Grady worked for the Empire Bank?" he said casually.

"About three years," the president replied. "Fine chap and a good worker."

No Resistance

The chief of the F. P. A. was satisfied that the president had not observed something that Jones felt worthy of much consideration.

Jones rose abruptly and, with a slight nod, started for the door.

"See you later, Hayward," he called, as he and Regan passed into the bank corridor. The press of people had not subsided, the small line at the paying teller's window was gone altogether now.

"I wonder how much longer they can hold out?" asked Regan.

"I'm thinking of the same thing."

They reached the street.

"Regan," said Jones, "I don't like this chap Grady. Put somebody on his tail pronto. Watch everything he does. I'll meet you at your office in an hour."

Jones signaled a taxi, and a second later was dashing down State Street.

Jones had proceeded but a short distance on Michigan Boulevard, when he spotted a gasoline station, elaborately decorated with electric bulbs on all sides of the office and shop.

The chief of the F. P. A. ordered the cab driver to stop. He got out of the taxi and accosted a mechanic in front of the garage.

"A couple of nights ago," Jones said, "two cars stopped near here. One was a roadster, the other was a sedan. Two men left the sedan and entered the roadster, and both cars drove off. Do you remember anything about it?"

The mechanic looked at Jones curiously.

"What makes you ask?"

"We're checking up on it in connection with another matter." Jones showed his shield. "We're anxious to find out the truth of the statement as it came to us."

"I guess you've got the right dope, all right. I don't know anything about it, except what I saw."

"Sure; but you did see a roadster jammed to the curb and a couple of men hop into it from another car, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I figured it out this way—that they had been out to one of the country clubs and were probably racing each other down the Boulevard to see who'd get home the quickest—that's all. Of course, we did think that possibly it might have been a stickup, but when both cars started up again I thought no more about it."

"Why? Because there was no outcry?"

"Well," replied the mechanic, "it seems to me that if I was the chap in the roadster I wouldn't have stopped. Just kept going, hell-bent for election."

All Business

"Yes, but I suppose he was afraid of getting shot—too scared to call for help—or try to escape."

"H-m. Then the driver of the roadster didn't have a chance. Only thing he could have done was what he did."

"Did you hear any of the conversation?" asked Jones.

"Nothing at all. The roadster stopped, and these other birds worked fast. A matter of a few seconds and the thing was over. So, it was a stickup, after all? Well, I'll say they were good, all right—a neat trick."

"Did you notice the license numbers on either car?" asked Jones.

"No, I didn't. You see, I was pretty well convinced that it was just a booze party, and of course when they dashed off as quickly as they did I didn't think much more about it."

"Now that you recall the incident, does it occur to you that there was any—familiarity or friendliness about the whole affair?"

"You mean—set-up?"

"Well, something like that—framed."

"Not a chance. These gents were all business, from what I saw of them."

Jones Investigates

Jones was satisfied that there was nothing else to learn from the mechanic. He reëntered the waiting cab and started back to the Loop.

The down town section of Chicago, at its best, is a pretty congested thoroughfare, particularly during the early hours of the afternoon. The cab went at a snail's pace.

Finally stopping in front of the Empire Bank, Jones hurried in.

"Hayward," he said, "I'd like to take a look at that vault of yours for a minute."

"Surely," replied the president, pushing back his chair and leading the way to the interior of the bank.

"Any news?" he asked anxiously.

"None yet."

The vault was located in the rear of the bank. It was a huge affair, constructed as a separate unit, with a passageway on both sides.

The outer door of the vault stood open, with its tremendous hinges brilliantly polished. On the back of the round door, inclosed in glass, were three time clocks.

As Jones glanced into the vault he observed the usual grilled day door.

Hayward advanced with the key.

"Which compartments do the tellers use?" asked Jones, as he scrutinized the hundreds of various sized safe-deposit boxes.

"These four," replied the president, motioning to the largest compartments in the vault.

Each of these had its own combination.

"Which one was Grady compelled to open?"

"The two top ones, I believe. The bottom two contain only silver, too heavy for the robbers to carry off."

"How many feet would you say there are from the door to these compartments?"

"About twenty feet, I judge."

Jones walked to the door slowly, then turned back again. He appeared to be reconstructing the scene. Finally he looked at Hayward.

"I guess that's all, thanks," he said, opening the day door.

Jones paused at the outer door to examine it, and Hayward joined him.

"When do you wind and set your time clocks?"

"Mooching Around"

"Every morning. One of the assistant cashiers does that, winding the clocks for the number of hours until the next opening."

"You mean the next day?"

"Not necessarily the next day—it might be a Sunday or holiday."

"Oh, yes, I get your meaning. The assistant winds them for the hours intervening. And at closing time the clocks are checked to see they are set correctly and running."

"That's right," Hayward replied.

"Who usually opens up in the morning?"

"The teller and one of the assistant cashiers."

"You mean Grady?"

"Yes, or an assistant teller in Grady's absence."

"But always two men?"

"Yes, two men at opening and two men at closing."

Jones peered through the grilled doorway. At the end of the straight passage was a mirror.

It occurred to him that a passer-by could very easily see any one in the vault, from the street.

Hayward looked at Jones curiously. "Naturally the robbers didn't break into the vault, and I can't help wondering why you appear so interested. Surely you don't expect to find finger-prints or anything like that, do you?"

Jones looked at the president for a moment, a trifle annoyed.

"No," he replied slowly; "the robbers were not put to the necessity of forcing their entrance, of course. Finger-prints? If there had been any they'd have been obliterated by this time. No, I'm just mooching around. Sort of smelling things out, as it were."

The Push Button

Jones stepped around to the side of the vault and looked at the front of the vault door. The massive chrome steel reflected the prodigious work of the polisher.

After a minute or two the chief of the F. P. A. walked into the passage on the side of the vault. A square box held his attention.

"That's the signal button," informed Hayward, pointing to the black circle in the center of the wooden inclosure.

"Yes, I imagined as much. This button notifies the protective company when you open or close the vault?"

Jones concentrated his attention on the signal box.

"Have you a certain number your man uses when he opens the vault, and a different one when he closes?"

"Yes," Hayward replied. "Our opening signal is four-two, and the closing signal is three-five."

"Well, that signal is sent in before your man starts to work the combinations, is that right?"

"Yes. If he forgets to send in the signal, the protective company rings a bell attached to that box."

"What happens if the signal is sent in wrong?"

"The protection company keeps ringing until the correct number is sent in."

"And if it isn't, then what?"

"Why, they send a couple of men right over."

"They have a set of keys for the street door?"

"Oh, yes; and there would be very little delay in their arrival."

The president's secretary appeared with a card.

"What is it?" he asked, as he took the card from her. Then, turning to Jones: "Inspector Conroy of the police department is in my office, probably about this robbery. Would you care to see him?"

"No," replied Jones hastily. "It's just as well that you don't mention anything about my being here." He smiled. "There is such a thing as professional jealousy, you know, and I think Conroy might resent my presence."

"Very well," said Hayward, and walked to the outer office.

Jones was interested in the little push button on the side of the vault wall. He studied it minutely.

To think that a little round disk kept eternal vigil over the millions of dollars of cash and securities. Something in that, he reflected, which reminded him of the elephant and the mouse.

Finally, with a smile of satisfaction, he shrugged his shoulders and made his way out through the street entrance.

CHAPTER III

Inspector of Police

"WELL, what's new, inspector?" asked Hayward, as Conroy entered the office.

"Nothing very encouraging," the police inspector replied; "that is, up to the moment."

"Then, you expect something?"

"Yes; at least, we hope so. Fact is, we did pick up a fellow last night, on suspicion. Haven't been able to make him talk yet, but I think we will before the day is over."

"Where did you get him?"

"Over on the South Side. He is down at headquarters now on a charge of vagrancy."

"How long can you hold him on that?"

Conroy Is Hopeful

"Twenty-four hours anyway. You see, we started to round up all the well-known characters in town, checking up to see whether they've had any unusual amount of spending money lately, and in making the quiz we picked up this chap. A newcomer to us. Probably a drifter from over the Lakes. Seems intelligent enough, but doesn't appear very anxious about holding long conversations."

"Sounds very interesting. What is his name?"

"His name? I guess it's so long since he used it himself he's probably forgotten it. Malloy is the name he is booked under, but unless we can tack something on him he'll be released tomorrow morning."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Pick him up again on a charge of disorderly conduct. The complaint will be signed by a patrolman who'll state, when the case is called, that this fellow Malloy was told to move on by the patrolman on the beat, and he refused; became abusive, and finally had to be locked up. That's the story."

"Sounds plausible."

"You see, I've got this affair doped out that the job was staged by a mob from Detroit, and this chap admits having been in Detroit recently."

"I most certainly hope you'll be able to get those men. I was never more anxious about anything in my life."

"We're doing our utmost," assured the police inspector, "and I'm inclined to think we've got something definite to work on now."

Hayward suddenly looked up, to find Grady, the teller, standing near his desk, holding some checks. His eyes were fixed intently on the police officer. He was surprised by the drawn features of the sallow-skinned youth. Hayward wondered how long he'd been listening.

Conroy, following the direction of Hayward's eyes, turned to look. The teller asked hurriedly:

"Would you mind signing these checks, Mr. Hayward?"

The president reached for them, and a moment later handed them back, signed.

Grady quickly left the office.

"Well, that's all there is to report. I thought I'd let you know about it."

"Yes, yes, of course," Hayward replied, his thoughts on Grady. "Come in again, inspector, and good luck."

As the police inspector left the office, Hayward crossed in the direction of the door leading into the bank.

Always a Weak Spot

He pushed the door open quickly.

Grady, eavesdropping on the other side, was surprised into a cry of exclamation. His head got a nasty bump.

"It strikes me," Regan was saying, "that there is a missing link."

Jones laughed.

"Sure; there's a missing link in every job, until you find it. That's our job, and until we do there's something else missing—about two hundred thousand dollars."

"I don't mean that. Something that points to an inside operation."

"Inside? You mean that it was framed by some one inside the bank?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know, Jones. I never play hunches, as you know. Usually stick to facts. But in this case there doesn't appear to be any facts around."

"Well," Jones replied, "you couldn't expect any clews to be lying around at this late date."

The chief of the F. P. A. looked at Regan with a complaisant smile.

"True," replied Regan, "there wouldn't be any clews to operate on, but the point I'm getting at is there never were any."

"Regan," said Jones slowly, "whether the job was an inside one or not, the fact remains, nevertheless, that a crime was committed. That, at least, is obvious. And admitting that—the criminal always leaves some weak spot, no matter how insignificant. It's just a question of seeing it. Unless, of course, time obliterates it. Then you're stuck.

"Sounds Plausible"

"Now take this case. Somewhere there's a clew or, I should say, there *was* a clew, which if properly handled, will lead us directly to the criminal. Sometimes a detour is necessary, but eventually the right road opens up and somewhere along this road we find the criminal.

"After all, none of us are miracle workers. That applies to the criminal as well. And if we keep everlastingly on the job, eventually we'll come pretty near finding what we're looking for.

"Don't overlook the fact, Regan, that when a criminal stages a job, he's got to work fast, never knows when something will happen to interfere with his work.

"It's different with us. We can take as much time as we want to reconstruct the crime, to get the criminal's mental reaction, to get the why and wherefore. And, incidentally, to find the clew.

"After that, it's just routine work."

Regan sat silent. Finally he said:

"Of course, there's no need of looking for finger-prints. Grady opened the vaults for them and—"

"And," interrupted Jones, "if there had been any they'd have been polished off in the interval. No, we won't find any left-handed gloves lying around, or any footprints on the carefully scrubbed marble corridors of a gent wearing number twelve shoes.

"Those 'heavy' artists are rapidly disappearing. Some still exist in the movies, few in real life. Besides, that kind of a mob usually celebrates after any job as big as this one was, or at least they'd have plenty of jack on display.

"And if that had been the case, our friend the inspector would have had word of it."

Regan looked anxiously at Jones.

"Then you don't believe Grady's story?"

Jones, with a faint glimmer of a smile, slowly shook his head.

"No, I don't believe Grady's story," he replied, "that is—not all of it."

"That's the way I feel about it," Regan said. "His story *sounds* plausible enough, particularly the checking up at the gasoline station—too plausible—"

Jones Looks Around

"You're using your head now, just keep it up," smiled Jones. He rose to go. "Rattle the facts around in your head overnight. To-morrow is another day. Don't try to reach your conclusion to-night."

"But hadn't we better arrest Grady before he gets away?"

"No: I don't think so. Grady isn't going to start anything now. He's laying low. Besides, he's—"

Hayward, the president of the Empire Bank, looked up from his desk and smiled a greeting to Jones and Regan as they entered his office.

"You gentlemen are around pretty early this morning," he commented as he glanced at the clock on the wall.

"Yes," said Jones, "I thought that we might be able to talk with Grady again before he gets too busy."

"Why, certainly. I'll call him."

Jones raised his hand as Hayward started to his feet.

"Don't bother, Hayward. We'll go on inside—want to take another look at that vault of yours—and see Grady at the same time."

Hayward smiled in a quizzical manner, shrugging his shoulders.

"Go ahead. If you want me I'll be here."

As they passed the tellers' cages, Grady looked around and Jones motioned to him.

"Grady," he said, "I'd like to have you show us where you waited with those crooks that night."

The Code Number

The teller, slightly flushed, nodded and walked some ten feet in the direction of the vaults.

"Right here," he said.

"I see. Now starting from this point, you all sat around until it was time for the clocks on the inside of the vault to run off. Then, what happened?"

"Why, I was ordered to open the vaults."

"Which, of course, you did. Now it's customary, isn't it, before you actually open the vaults, whether it's morning or night, to send in the code signal to the protective company?"

"That's right," admitted Grady, the flush spreading over his face.

"Well, after you give the signal on opening, if the signal is the correct one, you then hear two short taps or rings, after this comes through you immediately proceed to the business of getting your cash out and all that sort of thing. Right?"

"That's quite right."

"Naturally if you happened to send in the wrong signal to the protective company, they would immediately send some one to investigate. Is that also correct?"

"Yes," the teller replied.

"Well, if you had sent in the wrong signal the night of the robbery, what do you think would have happened?" Jones asked.

Grady braced himself.

"The protective company would have dashed up immediately—that is, they would have sent over some of their men, I suppose."

"Of course, they would have," said Jones with narrowing, piercing eyes. "Why didn't you?"

Grady's face was flushed. He stalled for time.

"What do you mean, why didn't I? Why didn't I what?"

"Why didn't you send in the wrong code number, and warn the protective company?"

"It didn't occur to me," Grady replied.

Jones dropped his aggressive attitude. After a moment he spoke.

"I see," he said. "Let's go into the vaults again."

The chief of the F. P. A., followed by Regan, entered the interior of the vaults.

Grady's Part

Grady stood silently at the gate through which the others had entered.

"How many of the employees have safe deposit boxes here?" Jones asked.

"Only two of us."

"Who, beside yourself?"

"Mr. Hayward."

"Which box is yours?"

Grady pointed to one of the smaller boxes.

"This one," he said.

"Where is Hayward's?" asked Jones.

The teller walked to the other side of the vaults.

"Right here," he replied, and indicated one of the larger boxes.

"Let's go into one of these booths for a few minutes, I want to talk to you," Jones said to Grady.

Grady nodded his head. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Silently he led the way. At the side of the vault several safe deposit booths were

located. The teller picked out the largest one and pushed back the door as Jones and Regan entered.

Jones reached into his pocket for a cigar, calmly lit it and leaned back in his chair. He could feel the teller's eyes upon him.

Grady fidgeted nervously with his tie.

Finally the chief of the F. P. A. spoke:

"Grady," he said slowly, "just what part did you actually play in this robbery?"

"I? Why, I didn't play any part."

The teller's face was flushed. His denial lacked the ring of truth.

"Oh, yes, you did, Grady!" Jones said quietly.

Enter Hayward

The teller struggled to keep his control. His nerves, at high tension, were equal to a definite accusation, but the quiet confidential tone of the chief of the F. P. A. was disarming.

"What makes you say that?" asked Grady.

Jones flicked the end of his cigar.

"A number of reasons," he said. "One of them is that while you were actually held up on Michigan Boulevard that night, it was not unexpected on your part—"

"You mean that it was a frame-up?" the teller's voice rose in anger. He stepped closer to Jones.

"That's the idea," smiled Jones. "Grady, you're only a dummy in this. You know that. Frankly speaking, you haven't the guts to pull a job of this size."

The teller stepped back to the wall. The flush had disappeared from his face. In its place there appeared a sickly pallor.

Regan gazing intently at Grady, moved slowly to the door.

Jones rose and faced the teller.

"Grady," Jones said firmly, "you think that I'm bluffing about that hold-up when I tell you that it was framed. All right. I'll prove to you that I'm not.

"What kind of a car does your brother drive?"

At the mention of his brother Grady cringed.

"But he doesn't know anything about this. I swear."

"Well, if he doesn't, you do. And right now is the time to talk—you or your brother."

Grady, with an effort reached a chair.

Jones puffed vigorously on his cigar.

"What do you want me to say?" the teller asked.

"All you know."

Regan, standing with his back to the door, suddenly felt it being pushed open. He turned quickly and confronted Hayward, a trifle startled, but with a smiling countenance.

"I was just wondering where Grady was. His window has quite a line at it," Hayward looked from Grady to Jones. "But if you need him, Jones, I'll put another man in his place."

Grady Breaks

"Yes," Jones replied, "we'll need him here for a little while longer. And as long as you're here we'd like to have you stay, too."

"Oh, yes? Why, what's happened?"

"Grady was about to explain how the holdup was planned. Why he sent in the correct signal to the protective company, and several other things, all of which you happen to be very much concerned about."

"I concerned about?" Hayward forced a smile. "Just what do you mean?"

"I should imagine you'd understand that better than any one else."

Grady was sobbing.

Jones put his hand on his head.

"Come, come, Grady," he said, "give us the facts as they happened—perhaps it's not as bad as it looks."

Grady raised his head.

"I don't care about myself—it's my

brother I'm thinking about. He's married and has a couple of kids. Oh, why did I bring him into this anyway?" he moaned.

"What are you talking about, Grady?" asked Hayward in amazement.

The teller looked up at him.

"What am I talking about? What the hell do you think I'm talking about? If you don't know, who does?"

Jones turned quickly to Hayward. Regan, gun in hand, had the banker covered.

"Hayward," ordered Jones, "sit down there!"

A Confession

The president of the Empire Bank slumped into a chair. Every vestige of courage and nonchalance had gone. He was overwhelmed.

Jones waited for a moment or two then addressed him:

"Where is this money?"

The president sobbed convulsively.

"The money is in my safe deposit box," he confessed.

"All of it?" asked Jones.

"Yes, all of it," Hayward repeated.

"You should have known better than to attempt a thing like this, Hayward," said Jones. "Why did you do it?"

"Why? Because, well—I might as well tell you. It doesn't matter now—I guess nothing matters.

"I made a couple of bad loans during the past few months. I knew if I reported them as lost the directors would ask for my resignation. I couldn't afford to lose my position and standing in the city.

"I made the loans good by selling some of the bonds the bank held as investments. This naturally would not be discovered until the bank examiners came as these securities are kept in my possession.

"Sleepless nights that I've endured were getting on my nerves. I conceived this phony holdup idea. Worked on it until I felt that it was perfect. I had to have assistance from some one, so I thought of Grady.

"At first he refused to help me; finally he consented.

"It was Grady's brother and myself who stopped the roadster in Michigan Boulevard. That's all there is to it. I intended to replace the missing bonds by purchasing others in the market with the money we'd recover from the insurance company."

Jones had listened intently to Hayward. He didn't particularly dislike him, he thought to himself.

Jones considered. An arrest, he felt sure, would precipitate the collapse of the Empire Bank. The institution had to be saved at any cost.

"Why did you send for me? I should think you would have left it entirely in the hands of the local police." Jones was speaking to Hayward.

"I felt confident that all the detectives in the world would never get at the real facts; and I didn't want the insurance company to delay payment."

The Broken Pane

"Well, we'll have to call a meeting of the board of directors of the Empire—immediately. They are responsible to the depositors and the State of Illinois for the money placed on deposit with the Empire.

"It will be up to them to decide what attitude to assume, as far as you and Grady are concerned. Until the directors can get here, both of you are to remain in this room, under Regan's supervision."

"How about taking that vacation now, Jones?" Scott was saying.

"Oh, I don't know. I think that little trip to Chicago answered the purpose very nicely."

Scott continued to read the newspaper. Suddenly he looked up.

"Speaking of Chicago, here's an interesting news item: Says that Hay-

ward, president of the Empire Bank, has resigned and is planning to take a long vacation. Doctor orders a complete rest. Warns Hayward against a nervous breakdown."

"Poor fellow," sympathized Jones, "I'm glad they let him down easily."

"Who made up the loss?"

"Why, the directors, in all probability. If the insurance company had to pay it, Hayward would have gone to jail and the Empire would have lost a lot of business—if not failed entirely."

"I suppose so. By the way, how did you tumble to the fact that the sedan belonged to Grady's brother?"

"The mechanic out on Michigan Boulevard had an idea he had seen it somewhere before. The glass in the rear of the sedan was badly cracked, but not broken.

"I got him to watch out for it, in fact, had him do nothing else but drive around town. Finally he spotted the car.

"Of course, as soon as we found out the owner's name I was satisfied that it was an inside job."

"Sure, but how did you connect Hayward with it?"

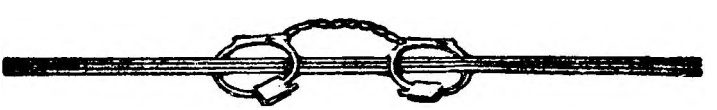
"I didn't, at that time. In fact, it was only when Regan discovered Hayward listening in that I was sure of it. Though I did have my suspicions.

"You see, I found that Hayward was being considered for the presidency of another bank. That alone didn't mean anything, but when I realized that he was stirring up a feeling among the depositors I became suspicious.

"In several cases I found that he had actually recommended this other bank to depositors of the Empire, suggesting that they make the transfer there."

"He was working it both ways," said Scott.

"Yes, that was about the size of it," yawned Jones drowsily. "But it was one case, at least, where we didn't have to send some poor damned soul to hell!"



He Earned His Freedom

SOME forty years ago the city of San Luis Potisi, Mexico, imported six American stone cutters to aid in erecting a large governmental building.

The masons were fairly well started when one of the regular Mexican national holidays hove in sight.

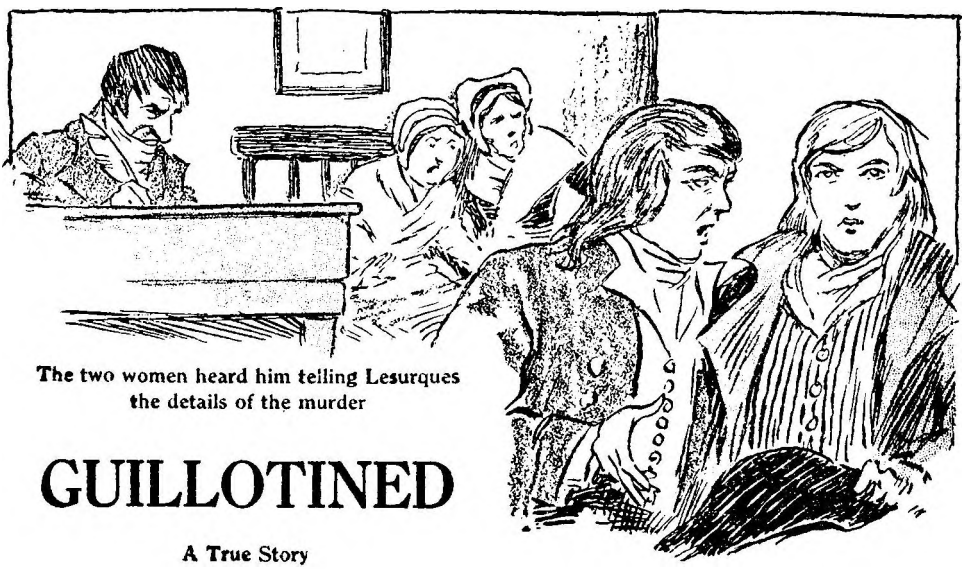
The stone cutters entered the celebration. One citizen took offense at something and a battle royal began. During the fracas a native was killed. Knowing they stood very little chance, the six men decided to leave the country immediately, but, while five managed to escape, the sixth was caught.

His sentence was death—

Then came consternation. If the last and only stone mason was shot, who was going to finish the building? A clever solution was arrived at—he could live until the work was finished.

The mason went back to his job. If he might live until it was completed, he had a full life ahead of him, for never did a man work more slowly.

At the end of seven years the authorities estimated he would be two hundred and fifty years completing the work, so a decree was issued granting him a pardon when he set the last stone. He finished the work in eight months.



The two women heard him telling Lesurques the details of the murder

GUILLOTINED

A True Story

Seven Men Were Beheaded and Eight Years of Searching Were Necessary Before the Lyons Mail Robbers Were Wiped Out

By Robert W. Sneddon

ON a chill morning there was already a crowd pressing about the gates of the prison of the Conciergerie, and lining the streets to the Place de la Grève, where the guillotine reared its stark outline on a platform dark with the soaked-in blood of innumerable victims.

Along this same route in Paris had traveled a procession of French citizens only three years before, in 1793, caught up in the bloody machinery of revolution, and cast forth headless into common graves in quicklime pits.

A queen had passed this way, a dictator, tyrants, martyrs, noble men and noblemen, fine women and fine ladies—the executioner's carts had been packed with them.

But it was for none of these that the crowd was waiting this morning. Behind the prison gates Sanson, the executioner, was making the last toilet of three men condemned to die for the robbery of the mail cart between Paris and Lyons, and the atrocious slaying of the carrier and his assistant. Their names were Lesurques, Couriol and Bernard.

Of these three, one was wholly innocent of any crime. This one was Lesurques. Contrary to the judgment of the law and the state, the opinion of the people was that he was innocent, and this morning they still hoped that justice would prevail.

Within the prison the preparations were going on. The Sansons, father and son, were with the prisoners. Lesurques, aged thirty-three, tall, fair haired, blue eyed, with a soldier's bearing, had donned white knee breeches and a white shirt.

Couriol, dark, hawk-nosed, black haired type of the gypsy horse thief and smuggler, was not concerned with his appearance. He looked from Lesurques to the white headed elder

executioner and appeared to be struggling with suppressed emotion. It was not fear, but the sense of injustice which was working within him. From the first he had proclaimed the innocence of Lesurques.

The third member of the party, a dark little fellow, stood dazed, scarcely able to stand. As he collapsed, Sanson motioned to one of his men, who laid the unhappy Bernard on a bench.

Calm and Fearless

Lesurques, calm and fearless as ever, as Sanson the youngest and last of this family of headsmen tells in his memoirs, gave his executioner a letter, and begged him to have it published in the papers. This Sanson promised he would attend to, and now all was ready. The hair of all three had been cut, and their necks bared for the keen knife.

Lesurques stepped first into the cart, and Couriol followed. Bernard could not stand. He was laid upon the straw.

The gates were flung open. The cart rumbled out in the midst of the guards. The crowd swayed with an indistinct murmur which swelled to a great shout and then died to nothing at the sight of Lesurques. And in that moment of quiet, Couriol leaned forward and, filling his lungs with air, cried loudly:

"Lesurques is innocent! Lesurques is innocent!"

With a steady finger he pointed to his companion.

"He is innocent!"

And he did not cease to repeat this anguished cry at every turn of the twenty minutes' slow drive.

Lesurques mounted the slippery steps.

"I go before the only judge Who makes no mistakes," he said to Sanson. "I pardon those who have condemned me."

A shudder ran through the crowd, that mob which one would have thought almost insensitive to the thud of the guillotine knife.

Bernard was next to go. He was laid on the plank in a state of coma. As the executioners approached Couriol, that stout-hearted rogue, who was a man, motioned them away, advanced to the edge of the scaffold and cried once more:

"I am guilty, but Lesurques is innocent."

He laid himself down on the plank.

"Lesurques is in—"

The knife cut short his last words on earth. He died thinking not of himself, nor of the woman who had proved false to him, but of a man the contemplation of whose unjust fate had given him a soul.

To more than one, the night of April 26, and the morning of the 27th, in the year 1796, were dates to be remembered. Between dusk and dawn a crime was committed and discovered.

Between four and five in the morning the guard at the Rambouillet barrier in Paris wakened from a doze just in time to see five horsemen spur their spent and smoking horses past him and vanish into the narrow streets of the city.

A Discovery

And about the same time several peasants on their way to work in the fields made a discovery nearly two miles beyond Lieusaint, a small place twenty miles from Paris, on the way to Fontainebleau.

About a couple of hundred feet off the highway which is the route from Paris to Lyons, they discovered a mail carriage deserted. One of the two horses was still attached, the other was gone. There were blood stains on the carriage, a sort of hooded cart with a rumble behind for the conveyance of mail and packages, and the ground about it was strewn with papers, wrappings of packages, *et cetera*.

A few steps off lay the body of the postilion, Audebert. Near the bridge of Pouilly, where the carriage as it

slowed up to cross, had been stopped, the grass was trampled, and there lay the body of the mail carrier, Excoffon.

News of the murder was carried to Lieusaint at once. Duclos, the posting master, whose horses had been in the carriage and whose rider Audebert was, saddled a horse and sped to the scene.

Duclos was horrified. Besides money and jewels, the Lyons mail had been carrying seven million livres in paper money for Napoleon's army fighting in Italy.

The Ghastly Spectacle

A rider was sent posthaste to the town of Melun, eight miles farther on, to fetch the public prosecutor.

The spectacle was ghastly. The skull of the postilion had been split with a saber, a hand cut off, and there were three great wounds in his chest. The grass showed that the poor fellow had fought for his life.

Near by lay a saber, the blade broken and stained with blood, which bore the inscriptions: "Honor is my guide," and "To save my country."

There were also picked up the sheath of this saber and of another, a knife blade, and a silver gilt spur mended with heavy twine.

Excoffon's body had been treated in the same savage way. Under the bridge were found Audebert's heavy leather iron shod boots, one of which was swimming with blood.

The robbery had been carried out with method. The waybill of the carrier was picked up. It bore a thumbprint in blood, and had evidently been used to check off the packages stolen. The robbers had made a clean sweep.

An inquiry was started at once. Two mounted gendarmes traversed the road to Paris making inquiries. They picked up a bloody saber which fitted the other sheath found. They were not long in coming upon the traces of four horsemen who had stopped at various inns, wine shops and cafés.

Seven people who had seen the mail cart said there had been a passenger in it, sitting beside the carrier. It was concluded that this passenger had been an accomplice, and that after the crime he had taken one of the horses from the cart, and, with the others, ridden back to Paris.

There was no doubt in the minds of all that the four horsemen were the criminals. They had been hanging about the wayside all day, and were plainly not *bona fide* travelers. The five horsemen who had spurred into Paris in the morning were evidently those four men and the missing passenger.

Confirmation of this theory was supported by the picking up of a horse in Paris on the morning of the twenty-seventh by the police, and identified as one harnessed to the Lyons mail.

The police investigated the inns and stables of the city, and found that soon after five on this morning four horses had been stabled in an inn on the left bank of the river.

An Interrupted Snooze

Two hours later, Etienne, the man who left them, returned with a Jewish feed merchant by the name of Bernard, and removed them to another stable, from which they were taken again at night. Bernard was found, and it is supposed that through him the police traced Etienne Couriol.

Couriol, a man of no known occupation, had on April 27 moved to the lodging of his mistress, Madeleine Breban, who had a room in the house of a certain Richard, an itinerant merchant.

The couple stayed there until May 6, when they moved to a town which is known to most of us, Château Thierry. The carriage had been provided by Bernard, and Richard and another friend, Bruer, went part of the way.

In Château Thierry, Couriol and his fair companion engaged a room in the house of a man, Gohier, who was in the military service as a transport officer,

and there the officers arrested their man.

Couriol was enjoying a snooze in bed when the police arrived, and offered no opposition. In his possession was found over a million livres in paper money, gold, silver and jewels, the whole forming about one fifth in value of the total amount stolen. This was more proof that five men had been involved.

The police commandeered a traveling carriage and made ready to take Couriol and Madeleine Breban back to Paris.

A Suspicious Coincidence

At the time of the arrest there was also staying in Gohier's house another transport officer, Guenot, a sharp-nosed, thick-lipped man of middle age, strongly marked with the smallpox.

Though there was nothing against this man, nor against Gohier, except that they had been under the same roof with Couriol, the police were suspicious of them, and advised them to present themselves before the authorities in Paris at an early date and establish their standing as good citizens.

Both men, anxious to get to Paris quickly, asked if they might not be allowed to go in the same carriage as the police and their two prisoners. The police agreed.

The two men got in with the others, little thinking that their desire to comply with the requirements of the law was to be twisted into a guilty complicity.

In Paris the investigation of the Lyons mail case was in the hands of Magistrate Daubanton, an official who was honestly bent on eliciting truth.

He at once began to examine witnesses and questioned the prisoners. The case was clear against Couriol. The woman Breban preferred her own life to the robber's love and made no effort to screen him.

Gohier and Guenot paid their respects to the magistrate at once, and this worthy man saw that there was nothing against them. Guenot explained how he came to be lodging with Gohier, that he was in the same service. He had gone to Château Thierry on business.

Asked to explain a most suspicious coincidence, that while staying in Paris, before going to Château Thierry, he had lodged in the house of Richard, from which Couriol had also started for Château Thierry, he said that he and Richard were both born in Douai and knew each other well, and that, naturally, when he came from Douai to Paris on business he preferred to lodge with a man he knew.

His credentials, as well as those of Gohier, were in order, and the magistrate discharged both men. He told Guenot to come back next day for his papers, of which an extract was being made for reference.

As Guenot, much relieved in mind, was on his way next morning to the magistrate's office, he met another citizen of Douai. This was Joseph Lesurques, who had made fortune enough to retire while yet a young man, and had come, with his wife and three children, to enjoy the benefits and pleasures of Paris.

His Elegant Friend

Guenot was overjoyed to see his elegant friend, and the two men stopped to chat, Lesurques eager to hear news of what was going on in his native city, and Guenot bubbling over with an account of his great adventure.

Had Lesurques read anything about the attack on the Lyons mail? Lesurques confessed he had only read the most meager details printed in the scanty sheet which masqueraded then as a newspaper.

"Will you believe it," said Guenot, "they arrested this fellow Couriol in the very house I was staying in, and I all but got headed for the scaffold. Luckily I came before a man of sense,

Magistrate Daubanton—I am on my way there now to get back my papers. You are walking that way. Come along and I will tell you how it all happened."

Guenot kept up his talk until the two men reached the central office, and still he had not reached the end of his deeds and speeches.

He was not going to let Lesurques go until he had heard everything, so he begged him to come into the office with him, wait a moment while he got his papers, and then they would go and have a glass of wine together.

Only a Minute

Lesurques said he feared he had not time to wait.

"I'll only be a minute. Come along!" Guenot insisted.

There was no warning angel at the door. The unsuspecting Lesurques, in this fatal moment of friendliness, stepped into a net of circumstances from which there was to be no escape.

But little he thought of this as he climbed the stairs with Guenot and entered the waiting room of the magistrate. Gathered there were about twenty or thirty men and women in peasant costume, mostly witnesses from the neighborhood of Lieusaint, summoned for questioning.

Guenot advanced to the desk of a clerk and was told that the magistrate would see him in a few moments, so he came back to Lesurques and making him sit down on a bench by his side went on with his story.

He was describing with great gusto the details of the murder which were unknown to Lesurques, and had raised his voice, all unknowing that two women, who had caught his words, were staring at him and his companion with startled eyes.

The two women, who were waiting maids from the country where the crime had been committed, were called into the magistrate's office. In a moment or two an officer came out and tapping Guenot on the shoulder said the magistrate wished to see him and the citizen who was with him.

Lesurques was rather amazed, but thinking he might be wanted to testify to Guenot's character or something of the sort went after his friend.

Daubanton greeted them soberly, and made them sit down with the light upon their faces, and in view of the two women, then asked them several unimportant questions. He nodded his head, said they might go out, but must wait in the anteroom.

The two women had told a strange story, as soon as they entered the magistrate's presence. One of them, Santon, said she had at once recognized Guenot and Lesurques as two of the horsemen who on the afternoon of April 26 had taken coffee and played billiards at the café in Montgeron where she was employed.

This little place was between Paris and Lieusaint. The other, Grosstete, said the four horsemen had dined at an inn in the same place, where she was a waitress. Two of them were Guenot and Lesurques. She had brought them pipes and tobacco.

Being Careful

Magistrate Daubanton warned the witnesses to be careful, that one of the men, though suspected, had come back to his office of his own accord, and that the other, Lesurques, was not suspected at all.

If the man were guilty it was anything but likely he would put his head into a noose. The two women were not to be shaken. They maintained their recognition of the two men.

Daubanton sent out for Guenot again. Guenot said he could account for his movements. He could prove where he spent the night of the 26th, and said he had first met Couriol at Richard's house on the 28th and breakfasted with him the following day.

Lesurques was then sent for. He said he was a native of Douai, who had made a fortune in real estate, buying

and selling land and houses confiscated by the revolutionary government.

He had now been in Paris for a year, and had not left the city for a day. Three or four days after the date of the crime, of which he had only heard the particulars that day, he had breakfasted with Guenot at Richard's house, and there met for the first time a man named Etienne.

Lesurques was asked for his identification card, and said he had none, as he was always home in good time at night and had never been asked to display any, but that if the magistrate would allow him to communicate with his lawyer in Douai, that citizen would send on his passport and other credentials.

The Blank Card

He was asked to exhibit his pocketbook and it was searched. In it were found an identification card in the name of André Lesurques, and a blank card. He said the first had been picked up by him from the mantelpiece of a room in a cousin's house where he was staying, as he was afraid it might get lost.

The blank card he had not seen before, but it must have been among some note paper given him by his cousin.

Daubanton was sorely perplexed. It was not at all likely that a man of Lesurques's standing would suddenly leap to the saddle of a horse and go upon the dangerous business of murder and robbery, if he were in the receipt of a yearly income of ten thousand livres as he said.

There was nothing left for Daubanton but to hold Lesurques and Guenot for further investigation. Lesurques, who was an easy going fellow without an enemy in the world, was appalled. He was of good family, and had served in the army until 1789, rising to the rank of sergeant, which was as high as a plain citizen could climb. His real estate operations had made him a man of importance in his native town and he had held office before coming to Paris. As matters stood he was a wealthy man.

Two of his best friends were the artists Ledru and Baudard, and he had an intimate friend in Legrand, a wealthy goldsmith and jeweler whose store was in the old Palais Royal.

Some time before the date of the arrest of Guenot, a friend of his youth had come to Paris on business, and had called on him to repay an old debt.

The two men had renewed their friendship, and it was as a friend that Lesurques had gone to call on Guenot, then lodging in Richard's house.

He had invited Guenot, and Richard and his wife, whom he found to be Douai people, to dinner with him, and had accepted a return invitation to Richard's, where he had for the first time seen the man known to him as Etienne and the woman who passed for his wife.

Lesurques said he had no intention of using either of the cards found on him, and repeated that his conduct was so exemplary, and that he had so many friends who could speak for him, that he was sure it would only be a matter of a day or so before he was at liberty.

In a Cafe

He called many witnesses as to his probity and general good conduct and character.

He was ready to say how he had spent the day of the 26th. The hour of the attack on the mail had been fixed as nine o'clock in the evening.

"That day," said Lesurques, "I spent the morning until two, with Citizen Legrand. I dined in Rue Montorguil where I am staying until my apartment in Rue Montmarte is ready.

"In the evening about six I took a stroll on the boulevards with my friend Ledru. We met Guenot and all went together into a café at the corner of the Italian comedy, where we had a drink. I was not out of Paris on that day or any other."

Ledru and Legrand confirmed this.

The workmen papering his new apartment had seen him that day. But the case against Lesurques gathered impetus. Seven out of ten witnesses from Lieusaint swore that he was the tall blond man they had seen, one of the four horsemen.

A café or wineshop keeper and her husband swore absolutely to his identity, and that he asked them for twine to repair a broken silver gilt spur. They were sure that the spur shown them was the one.

His Weak Alibi

The waitress Santon said the tall, blond man, who she said was Lesurques, had wished to pay her in paper money, but that Couriol whom all the witnesses recognized, paid her in cash.

As stable boy at the inn where the four robbers dined, identified Lesurques. A woman, Alfroy, identified him as Couriol's companion and said they had passed her door in Lieusaint several times that evening.

A cow keeper swore to seeing Lesurques go past his house, and was sure of it, because at the time he had noticed what a likeness he bore to a friend of his.

Against this flood of evidence growing larger each day, Lesurques's alibi grew weaker. From his prison cell in the Conciergerie he wrote desperately to a friend in Douai. The letter is still preserved. It says in part:

> My friend, I find myself mixed up in the case of murder and robbery of the carrier of the Lyons mail. Several men and women whom I do not know, not even where they hail from, for you know I have never left Paris, have had the impudence to swear that they know me and that I came to their houses on horseback.
>
> Now you know I have never ridden a horse since I came to Paris. You understand how important evidence of this kind is, and how it may lead to my being judicially murdered. Oblige me by helping me with your memory, and try to recall where I was, and what people I saw in Paris and the date when they have the audacity to say they saw me out of Paris—the 26th or 27th of April, I believe—that I may be able to confound those infamous slanderers, and make them suffer the penalty prescribed by law.
>
> JOSEPH LESURQUES.

Couriol had at first denied everything, in spite of his identification by all witnesses, but he was confounded by the confession of Madeleine Breban, who told all she knew, in order to save herself from suffering as an accessory.

She said that on April 26 Couriol, the third man accused, had packed a bag, put his pistols into it and gone off, saying he was bound to the country. When he did not come home next night she was much worried and went to inquire at Bernard's if he had heard anything of his friend.

Bernard told her Couriol was all right, and that he was waiting for her at the room of another friend, Dubosc, and wished her to bring him a complete change of clothes. When she heard this she went right to Couriol's lodging and got a suit, linen, shoes and a hat, and cloak, and took them to the place appointed.

The Mysterious Passenger

She found Couriol, partially dressed, chatting with Dubosc. Next day he had come to lodge at Richard's, and a few days later they traveled to Château Thierry and took a room in Gohier's house, where they had been arrested.

She named as Couriol's most intimate friends, these men, Dubosc, Durochat, Roussy, and Vidal.

Diligent search had not uncovered any traces of the mysterious passenger who had traveled in the mail cart. He had given his name as Laborde, and had paid well for his trip.

His description had been finally adjusted to a dark-haired, lantern-jawed man in a dark brown coat and a round hat, whose only baggage was a saber.

Others already mentioned as friends or acquaintances of Couriol were in

custody: Richard and his friend, Bruer, described as a round-faced, emotionless man who had traveled about and was surprised by nothing.

Richard said he knew Lesurques very slightly; Bruer said he had never met him. Bernard, who was also in prison, said Lesurques was an absolute stranger to him.

Two witnesses had sworn to Bruer being among the horsemen, two to Bernard. How wrong all were we shall see later.

Marks of Identification

We know now that Lesurques had a scar upon his face, and that one of the fingers of his right hand was crippled, yet not a mention of these marks of identification was made in the trial, not even by his own counsel.

Had the case been left in the hands of Daubanton, Lesurques would have had a fighting chance to prove his innocence, but unfortunately it was taken out of this magistrate's hands, and all of his preliminary investigation quashed on the ground of illegality.

The case was transferred to the criminal court of Melun, within the jurisdiction of which the crime had been committed.

Everything had to be done over, and Daubanton's progress toward sifting the true from the seeming was nullified.

Lesurques was most unfortunate in coming under the power of a local Dogberry, who instead of imitating the prduence of his Parisian colleague, tried to discover nothing but evidence of guilt.

The testimony of citizens of Paris and of Douai in favor of Lesurques was as nothing compared to that of local witnesses against him.

The magistrate of Melun regarded all city folk as liars and perjurers, and he was not at all induced to change his opinion, in spite of Lesurques's repetition that the witnesses who had testified against him were deceived.

He said: "Unless there be some resemblance between me and one of those whom they saw that day, they cannot honestly swear to the truth of such a thing."

On June 27, the president of the court presented to the jury his act of accusation.

It stated that the Citizen Excoffon, carrier of the mail from Paris to Lyons, set out from Paris on the 26th of April at half past five, carrying a hundred and two packages to Lyons. With him set out as passenger on the same day a certain Laborde.

Nothing out of the way happened on the way to Lieusaint, which place they left at half past eight at night. Three-quarters of a league from there, between the Round Fountain Inn and the Commissary General Inn, four horsemen stopped the postilion, led the coach to a little wood just off the road and there they murdered in a most brutal fashion Audebert, postilion, who appeared to have defended himself determinedly.

In League With Brigands

Then Laborde, who was in league with the brigands, murdered Citizen Excoffon and cut his throat.

It is established that four certain individuals were seen on horse riding from Paris to Melun, with no apparent object.

Between noon and one o'clock, the first, proved to be Etienne Couriol, arrived alone at Citizen Edvrard's inn in Montgeron. There he called for dinner for himself alone, but having gone out several times with an uneasy air to ask if any one was coming along the Paris road, he then hastily ordered dinner for four.

A few minutes later three other horsemen arrived. They were seen and closely noticed during dinner and after.

After dinner they called for pipes, and went to taket heir coffee at Citizenness Chastelain's café. They remounted at three, and went on at a slow gait to Lieusaint.

When they got there Couriol got down at Widow Feiller's, and while he was having a drink, one of the three others, a blond, whom witnesses declared to be Lesurques, went to talk to Couriol at the window, drank a glass with him, then brought him back to rejoin the others in the inn.

Couriol asked Citizen Champeau to have his horse shod, which he saw to, and meanwhile he and Lesurques strolled about the village for some time, as attested to by several witnesses.

At last they set off at half past seven on the road this side of Melun, and asked several witnesses what time the mail usually went past.

The Mad Rider

Apparently they learned it did not pass till later, and so Couriol retraced his way back to Lieusaint, ostensibly to get his saber which he had left behind in Citizen Champeau's stable, but really to watch for the coming of the mail coach.

Couriol put his horse into the stable and fed it. He went out to the road, then hearing the mail coming, dashed into the inn, called for a glass of brandy and tossed it down, then galloped off at full speed to rejoin his comrades.

The horses were changed, and the new postilion, Audebert, mounted. The mail set off. This must have been about half past eight.

Not more than fifteen minutes later, Excoffon and Audebert were murdered.

Out of the crowd of witnesses who testify to having seen these four horsemen on the highway, there is not one who can say he saw or met one of them at any point beyond the spot of the murder.

Witnesses testified most positively to the identity of Couriol, Lesurques, and Guenot as three of the individuals seen that day.

It was testified that a short time after the departure of these four riders from Lieusaint, two other horsemen arrived at Champeau's inn, leaving a short time before the arrival of the mail.

Champeau and his wife believe they recognized Bernard and Bruer as these two persons. As to the passenger Laborde, who has not yet been found, all facts point to him as the actual murderer of Excoffon.

Couriol, who stabled the four horses and got them again in Paris, who left his lodging to go to Richard's house, who left Paris in a carriage furnished by Bernard, accompanied on the way by Richard and his wife and Bruer, who turns up with Guenot at Château Thierry, who is found in possession of money and jewels forming one-fifth part of the loot, accused by his mistress and many others, was undoubtedly justly accused.

Richard gives Couriol a refuge, helps him to escape, lodges Guenot, and welcomes Lesurques to his house.

Search in Richard's house revealed a quantity of silver plate, jewels and money of which he can give no good account.

Assisting the Guilty

If Richard was not identified as one of the murderers, he was at least an accomplice, a fence, and one who had hidden and assisted the guilty.

Guenot, who had the audacity to drive back with Couriol, though then under suspicion, only wanted to throw dirt into the eyes of the police by his apparent innocence in hanging about the Central police office, and was arrested, as was Lesurques, by the special intervention of Providence.

The magistrate at Melun was most bitter against Lesurques.

As to the man, Joseph Lesurques, witnesses testified against him in the most positive way. Some had seen him on the 26th of April, dining at Montgeron with Couriol and Guenot.

There is a citizen who is sure that he dined that day in the same room with these men, and that he took especial notice of Lesurques and of a silver gilt

spur he was showing to Guenot, boasting of the advantage of a spring catch it had.

This spur was found on the very spot of the murder. The inkeeper at Lieusaint swears that he gave one of the horsemen twine to mend this spur and believes this horseman was Lesurques.

A witness swears to having seen Couriol and Lesurques stroll past his door three times during the evening. It is established that Lesurques and his companions stayed some time in Lieusaint, and that the night was not spent in their homes.

In Paris

When Joseph Lesurques is asked where he spent the afternoon and evening of the 26th, he replies he spent it in Paris, but can bring forward no proof of this.

He is arrested at the magistrate's office on the comparison of his description with that of one of the murderers of the mail carrier, and on the positive testimony of two witnesses.

Concerning the two identification cards found in his pocketbook, the blank one bears the signatures of the president and secretary of the district of the city, but the name of the bearer is blank, so that it can be filled in by an unscrupulous person who wished to use it. His explanation as to the possession of these cards is not acceptable to reasoning minds.

If to all these be added the facts that since the commission of the crime he has been frequently seen in the company of Guenot, Richard, Couriol, and Bruer, and that he continued to see them until they left for Château Thierry, that since Guenot's return he has been constantly with him, that he is living in Paris in an expensive way and far beyond his means, as compared with what he used to spend in Douai—then, considering all these facts, there can be no doubt he is one of the murderers of the carrier and postilion, or at least an accomplice, and one of the receivers of the profits of the crime.

Next there was an open attack on Lesurques' character and financial standing. No attention was paid to several attestations to the accused man's good character, including one signed and sworn to by the leading citizens of Douai.

One section of the act of accusation said: "Lesurques's claim to have made a fortune which brings him in an income of ten thousand livres in specie is refuted by the authorities of his native town, who say that he has money, but not enough to live on comfortably without working, and that he is a man without character and very extravagant."

Yet the state itself was to nail this statement as a lie. When confiscation was made of Lesurques's estate, it was proved without doubt that he was a rich man; he had land, several houses, and valuables, amounting to two hundred thousand livres.

Lives At Stake

The inexactitude in much of this act of accusation is frightful when we remember that men's lives depended on it.

The trial was about to begin when the prisoners, availing themselves of a right of choice, formally asked to be tried by the criminal court of Paris, a request which was granted.

Lesurques and Guenot petitioned that the trial be hastened, not as a favor, but as a right.

The behavior of Lesurques in the prison of the Conciergerie was noted by a Captain Le Roy. Lesurques went with Guenot and kept apart from the others accused of the crime. His wife and children came to see him often and he would play with the children.

Once when the prisoners had to pass through what had been the chapel on the way to the hearing, Le Roy saw Lesurques, calm and dignified in the midst of the others who were sobbing and moaning, go down on his knees,

and pray aloud: "O God, Thou knowest mine innocence. I implore Thee to make it known."

The trial opened on the 2nd of August. The president of the Tribunal, Jérôme Gohier, member of the Legislative Assembly, was a harsh, obstinate, single-minded man.

The first day was taken up with identifications. Six witnesses appeared to swear to Lesurques being one of the horsemen, three were doubtful.

Deceiving the Court

The first witness to Lesurques's alibi was his friend Legrand, the jeweler, a man of wealth and standing. He reaffirmed what he had said on first examination, that on the morning of the 26th of April, Lesurques had been with him until two o'clock.

He remembered that date because he had taken some earrings from a fellow jeweler, Aldenhof, to whom he had sold a soup ladle, and had entered both transactions in his day book—the date being the 26th of April.

The importance of proving this date as confirmation of the statements of other witnesses will appear later.

Legrand then stated he had brought the book into court with him and wished to exhibit it to the president. The judge took the book, and was about to lay it down as examined, when suddenly he was seen to start, and hold the book closer to his eyes.

When he laid it down, he was in a fury, and bluntly charged Legrand with attempting to deceive the court. The page bore traces of a deliberate change of a figure. The date 26 had been superimposed over the figures 25.

The astounded Legrand was asked to look at the book, as also was Lesurques. The figures had plainly been changed.

Legrand said he had no recollection of having changed this entry, though there were erasures and changes elsewhere in the book. He could not explain, and was arrested for perjury.

Guinier, Lesurques's counsel was browbeaten by the president through lack of experience. He might easily have said that Legrand had not been summoned to bring the book into court, but had done so voluntarily, that he might easily have made an error, that when he was making the entry on the 26th he had accidentally written 25th and corrected the mistake at once, and that, in spite of this *contretemps*, he was ready to swear to Lesurques's visit on the 26th.

We are offered two reports of what Legrand did next day when brought into court. One, that being intimidated he said he withdrew his former statement, which was founded on the date in the book, the falsification of which had only just come to his notice.

He said the book had lain openly on his counter, and swore neither he nor his wife had made the alteration, and could not say how it came to be made or who made it.

The Real Culprits

Guinier did not make a point of the accessibility of the book. The real culprits might have had access to it and made the change to ruin Lesurques's alibi. Use was made of this in the famous play, "The Lyon's Mail," in which the villain of the piece steals into Legrand's house and makes the change of entry.

The other report, which was given to the world by Guinier, later in his memoirs, denies that Legrand recanted. He did not, it was asserted, but continued to swear that the date was correct, and that any alteration had been made at the time of entry. There had been a slip of the pen and nothing more.

The president asked Lesurques what he had to say to the discrediting of his witness. Lesurques said Legrand was not the only witness to his whereabouts on the fatal day, and that he begged the court to dispense with the jeweler's testimony. But the mischief was done.

One vital witness had lied, so the judge believed. Why not all the others?

Aldenhof, the jeweler, was heard next. He swore to seeing Lesurques in Legrand's store on the 26th, and related the transactions he had had there. He said he had dined with Lesurques that day. No attention was paid to his testimony.

Ledru, the artist, said he also had been with Aldenhof to dinner with Lesurques that day. He could not be mistaken, as it was his first dinner in Lesurques's lodgings. He remembered noticing how affectionate he was to his wife, and how he caressed the children.

By Unfair Means

He had arrived there early, and it was a little time before Lesurques entered, bringing Aldenhof. In the evening they had strolled with Guenot, and come back to supper, at which there had been present a common friend, Baudard.

No credence was placed in the testimony of Ledru and Baudard.

André Lesurques, and his wife, who swore to Lesurques, their cousin, being at home that day, were not listened to.

Five workmen who had been papering Lesurques's new apartment, swore to his having come that day to place a bust of himself in the sitting room. They were silenced by the judge, and threatened with arrest for perjury.

Other witnesses were so intimidated that one of them, an engineer by the name of Eymery, having been warned by the judge as customary, to speak "without hate," retorted indignantly, "Yes, citizen president, I shall speak without hate, and what is more important, without fear, in spite of all that is being done here to intimidate witnesses."

Lesurques replied firmly and simply to the charges against him, and related how merely by accident and coincidence he had been involved.

The judge summed up, laying stress in Lesurques's case, on the fatal circumstances, his friendship with Guenot, his going to lunch at Richard's, the presence there of Couriol, his meeting with Guenot, his going with him to Magistrate Daubanton's office, his encounter with and recognition by the two women, and the apparently damning matter of the erasure in Legrand's day book.

"He—the judge—did not sum up," said Lesurques's counsel later on; "he argued, and as the hearing was ended after his charge, neither the prisoners nor their defenders had any opportunity to point out his mistakes. The trial of this shocking case disgusts me—my heart stands still—I have to master my indignation."

The jury were ready to go out when Madeleine Breban sprang up in court and begged to be heard. She was permitted and said:

A Strange Likeness

"Out of the accused, only one is guilty, and that is my lover, Couriol. Five innocent men are going to be condemned. Guenot and Lesurques are victims of a strange likeness to two of the murderers. Guenot resembles one Vidal, and Lesurques is the image of Dubosc. His resemblance is increased by the blond wig worn by Dudosc the day of the crime."

"The trial is closed," said President Gohier curtly. "It is too late."

Too late to verify what was afterward proved to be the truth. Surely justice was far from this court on the fourth day of the trial, if indeed it had been present on the opening days.

For six hours the jury debated. It is a pity we have no means of knowing what went on in the jury room. They returned to court at eight in the evening, and found Couriol, Bernard, and Lesurques guilty of actual share in the attack on the mail and the two murders, and sentence of death was passed upon them.

Richard, for having received part of the proceeds of the crime, was sentenced to thirty-four years in the hulks.

Guenot, who had proved his alibi by means of a police official, who swore the accused had spent the night with him, was discharged, as also was Bruer.

The property of Lesurques, Richard, Bernard and Couriol was confiscated by the State, as reparation for the amount taken from the mail.

The verdict fell upon the court like a thunderbolt. If Guenot was innocent, how could Lesurques be guilty? The same witnesses had sworn to seeing them together.

Innocent Victims

How could they be right in one instance and wrong in the other? Bernard, who was not near the scene of the murder, branded as one of the actual murderers. An angry hum ran through the crowd.

When Lesurques heard the ominous words which sent him to the scaffold, he grew very pale, but in a moment he rose to his feet and said:

"The crime which is imputed to me is atrocious and deserving of death, but if it is horrible to murder on the highway, it is no less horrible for the law to strike down an innocent man.

"The day will come when my innocence will be recognized, and then may my blood be on the head of the jurors who have so lightly convicted me, and on the judges who influenced them."

On top of this, Curiol sprang to his feet, and without a thought for his own life, now forfeited, shouted, "Lesurques and Bernard are innocent. All Bernard did was to hire the horses. Lesurques had no part whatever in the crime."

A woman fainted in the court. It was Lesurques's unhappy wife.

The prisoners were taken back to the Conciergerie, and Captain Le Roy happened to be present when they were brought in.

He said Couriol kept saying that Lesurques was innocent, and that Lesurques said nothing. He adds: "This unfortunate man will never fade from my memory. I can never think of him without a shudder of pity."

Lesurques himself felt all was not yet lost, and framed a statement of his case to the government.

Couriol was hell-bent on getting Lesurques's freedom. He demanded to be taken before the magistrates of the central court and made a statement. It said:

"The real murderers are Dubosc, Vidal, Durochat and Roussy. Durochat, under the name of Laborde, engaged a place in the mail carriage and sat beside the carrier. The others left Paris mounted on horses. I myself joined them an hour later at the Charenton barrier.

Setting the Execution

"We dined and took coffee at Montgeron. Next day we all went back to Paris at five in the morning. I and Vidal led the horses to Aubry's stable in Rue Fosses St. Germain. The three others were at Dubosc's where we joined them to share the loot.

"Roussy and Durochat were the leaders in the business. It was Dubosc and Vidal who strolled on foot about Lieusaint, Dubosc who had the spurs, and wore a blond wig."

Action was taken by the police authorities to procure new testimony. Several witnesses said that during the trial Madeleine Breban had spoken to them of Lesurques's innocence.

Madeleine Breban said that before the crime she had often seen Vidal, Roussy and Dubosc at Couriol's, but had never seen Lesurques there. She swore she had only seen him once, and that at Richard's, after the crime, and that he was very like Dubosc. She revealed where these men had been living.

On October 8 the court rejected Lesurques's appeal, and the execution was

set for the nineteenth. Guinier, his counsel, made a final plea to the members of the body known as the Directory, who on the eighteenth sent a message to the Council of the Five Hundred, asking them to reconsider the case, and delay execution until the matter of Lesurques's resemblance to one of the actual murderers might be cleared up.

A Double Murder

The Directory had already received one letter from Couriol, which he had dictated to a prison clerk, and he now sent another to the Council who appointed a committee of three to inquire into the matter.

He reaffirmed that he did not know Lesurques, and saw him for the first and only time at Richard's, after the crime, and that he did not see him again till in prison.

He swore that his statements had never varied as to this fact, and asked, "Is it then true that my crime is to provoke a double murder?"

Public opinion more than anything else caused the Directory to delay matters, and the Council would no doubt have been glad to wash its hands of the business. Unfortunately the report upon the case had been intrusted for its drawing up to a lawyer Simeon, who later on rose to eminence in his profession.

His report was more a defense of the newly instituted trial by jury procedure than a fair consideration of the case. It plainly stated that Couriol's word could not be taken, he had no doubt been bribed to save Lesurques, no doubt by Lesurques himself, with some of the loot taken from the mail.

No doubt it was also to express his gratitude to Lesurques who had hung about Magistrate Daubanton's office with an idea of lobbying in favor of Couriol, or perhaps giving him physical assistance in trying to escape.

This report was read rapidly to an assembly eager to proceed to the business of the day, namely a motion to prevent relatives of aristocrats who had fled the country from holding public office, and was accepted as correct without discussion.

Lesurques was doomed, as also was his pitiable companion in misfortune, Bernard, who died for his association with thieves.

Lesurques prepared to die. He cut three locks from his hair and put them into an envelope for his wife, with this letter:

> MY DEAR ONE:
>
> When you read this letter I shall be no more. A cruel knife will have cut short the days which I devoted to you with so much pleasure. But such is fate, we cannot escape it.
>
> I am to die the victim of a judicial murder. I have endured my lot with the firmness and courage I have always shown. May I hope you will do the same. Your life is not yours alone, you owe all of it to your children, and to the memory of your husband, if he was dear to you. That is my last wish.
>
> I bid you farewell forever. My last sigh is for you and my unhappy children. They will give you my hair, which I hope you will keep and divide among my children when they grow up; it is the only heritage I have to leave them. Your husband,
>
> JOSEPH.

To his friends he wrote a plea to keep their friendship to his wife and children, and help them in every circumstance.

"Remember Their Shame"

The letter which he had handed to Sanson the executioner for publication was addressed to his supposed double, Dubosc:

> You, in whose place I am to die, be satisfied with the sacrifice of my life. If ever you are brought to justice, remember my three children covered with shame, and their mother reduced to despair, and put an end to the many misfortunes caused by our unfortunate resemblance. Confess that you are the man.

And with this last appeal to the man in whose place he was dying, the vic-

tim of an amazing destiny went to his death.

While the family of Lesurques, deprived of all property, was reduced to poverty, and without means to fight for the good name of the father betrayed by his double, certain men were working in the cause of justice.

The conscience of one man, troubled by the thought of error, was at work. Daubanton, awakened to the truth that a grave wrong had been done, a wrong which he must try to right. Once he embarked on the restoration of honor to the dead man, and of his estate to the family, he rested neither night or day.

The Real Actors

"I will find the four men, not yet executed, who were the real actors in this fearful drama," he swore.

How this good man would have raged with fury, had he only known that within nine days after the head of Lesurques had fallen into the basket, Simeon, reporter to the committee of the Council, had received a letter from a lawyer in Besancon—a letter which through carelessness or purposely Simeon suppressed. It was not found until 1832, in the files of the Minister of the Interior.

This lawyer in Besancon said he had read an account of the trial, and suddenly remembered a criminal named Dubosc, whose chestnut colored hair was concealed beneath a blond wig. The lawyer had been instrumental, two years earlier, in sending this crook to prison, but he had managed to escape almost immediately.

He was sure that this was the fellow in whose place Lesurques had died, and advised Simeon to have a search made in the jails.

It had occurred to Daubanton himself to inspect the prisons of Paris, and he was overjoyed to find confined within the Conciergerie the missing Durochat who had masqueraded under the name of Laborde, the passenger on the Lyons Mail. Durochat was serving a sentence of fourteen years.

Daubanton took him out and charged him with participation in the robbery and murder. He was soon identified and made confession. The scheme had been Dubosc's. The other three men were Vidal, Roussy and Couriol. Bernard had done nothing more than rent the horses.

Durochat said, according to Daubanton's own account, "I understand there was a man called Lesurques condemned. I owe it to the truth to say, I never knew this man, who had no connection whatsoever with the plot or its execution. I never knew him, and I never saw him."

This criminal gave a complete description of Dubosc, thirty years of age, blond, with fresh complexion, well set up, a criminal from youth.

He had been condemned at various times to the galleys and to prison, but had always managed to get away. He had been so audacious that he sat in the court room in disguise during the trial.

Four Murderers

On April 7, 1797, Durochat was sentenced to death, in spite of the story he had told of having tried to defend the carrier.

Vidal was also discovered in prison and his identity sworn to. He denied his guilt.

The commission of a petty theft led Dubosc to prison in Melun, and word was sent to Daubanton at once, who set out with Durochat to confront the rascal.

Judge of his chagrin when Durochat, face to face with his chief, said he was not the Dubosc he meant. On the scaffold, however, he confessed that he had lied, and that Dubosc was the man wanted, the brains of the plan to rob the Lyons Mail.

As Durochat's head fell, Daubanton might well have grimly counted:

"One!"

Vidal and Dubosc were now in prison, but stone walls and iron bars could not hold them long. Vidal got clear away, but Dubosc broke a leg.

As soon as it was healed he was up and out by some mysterious means, and sent a letter to the prison doctor complimenting him on the good job he had made of his leg.

Some months were to pass before Daubanton was able to gather in Vidal again, and bring him to trial. Witnesses who had sworn to Guenot's identity, now said the pock-marked Vidal was the robber. Vidal would not say a word, he denied everything, and went to his death cursing.

"Two!" counted Daubanton.

Dubosc meanwhile was impudently living in Paris, and there, but for an anonymous betrayer, he might have continued to elude justice.

He was seized near his lodging, bound hand and foot, and taken to Versailles. This was in September of 1800.

The witnesses from the country who had identified Lesurques were called upon, but four years had passed, and only one of them could positively identify Dubosc as the blond-haired horseman. Some said he did bear a slight resemblance to Lesurques, others that he bore none.

It was soon realized that the witnesses were afraid of Dubosc, who had a formidable reputation, and that they were also afraid of being sued for damages by the Lesurques family, if they did anything, now, to clear Lesurques's name, and thus acknowledge their error.

Dubosc played the part of the innocent man, and denied all knowledge of those said to be his accomplices. He maintained he was the victim of conspiracy.

Daubanton was trying to railroad him to death.

Madeleine Breban identified him positively, as did Bernard's servant, and others. Jailers in the prison in which Durochat and Dubosc had been confined reported conversations overheard between the two men which left no doubt as to Dubosc's guilt.

Out of a number of witnesses from Montgeron and Lieusaint, only one said: "I now firmly believe that it was not Lesurques, but Dubosc, I saw. Yes, I recognize him."

"That woman is a liar," snarled Dubosc, shaking off the blond wig which had been clapped on his head. "I hate her."

He went to the scaffold without confession.

"Three!"

Daubanton's task was not yet complete. Roussy had to be found. In 1804 the Italian came to light in a Spanish prison. Daubanton had him extradited to France.

He was a gentleman crook whose real name was Beroldi; an identification of him was made almost instantly by means of a birthmark on his right hand.

He declared that he did not know, nor had ever known Lesurques.

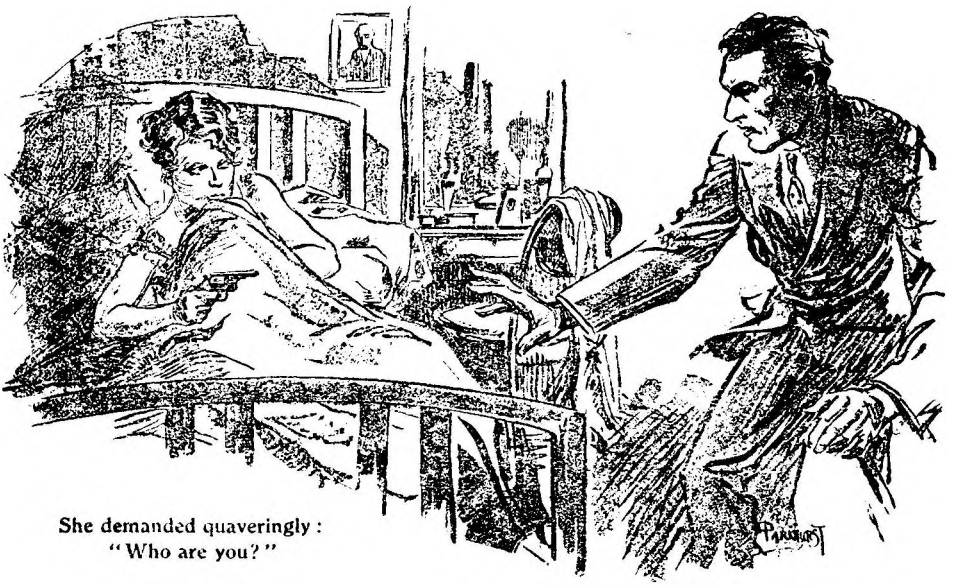
"Four!" said Daubanton as the last of the murderers rendered up his life.

He was now free to give his time to helping the Lesurques family. Lesurques's mother had gone insane and died in the asylum. His wife had also lost her reason, and did not regain it for seven years.

Oddly enough, Legrand, the jeweler, lost his reason, too, and whenever mutual friends went to see him, he would say: "Why doesn't my friend Lesurques come to see me—bring him next time," and then suddenly remembering would groan and wring his hands.

Lesurques's champions were unfaltering, but twenty-five years were to pass before the state recognized that the confiscation of the property was illegal, and this property was duly restored to the children.

But official acknowledgment of this injustice has never been made.



She demanded quaveringly: "Who are you?"

THE BLUE CHRYSANTHEMUM

He Made His Life the Stake When He Picked Up the Flower a Beautiful Girl Lost

By Peter Perry

YOUNG Dr. Austin Winfield is surprised when he finds himself the object of Eva Bryan's affection. But he cannot doubt it, for the Sanatorium nurse had caught him in the hall one day and plainly told him of her love. She even presented him with a present, but he was not to open it until Christmas.

The rather bashful young doctor was bewildered at this and wished it had not happened. For his interest had been aroused in another young woman, whom he had only laid eyes on for a brief moment.

It was late one afternoon after visiting hours and a girl hastening from the Sanatorium suddenly came upon him. When she had gone, Dr. Winfield discovered she had lost a blue chrysanthemum from her coat, and, out of curiosity, he took it to his room.

Only a few moments later the head of the Sanatorium, Dr. Nichols, is found murdered in a passage under an arcade of the buildings.

And to his surprise Dr. Winfield soon finds himself involved in the crime by Eva Bryan.

The murdered Dr. Nichols was thought to have been fighting a ring of dope peddlers, who had made his son a victim. And the package given to Dr. Winfield by Miss Bryan is found to contain narcotics. This was discovered in Dr. Winfield's room along

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for June 23

with the blue chrysanthemum. The flower further incriminates the young doctor because some of the stained petals of this same chrysanthemum were found near Dr. Nichols's body.

After his arrest and while he is being held in jail for the murder, Dr. Winfield is slipped a note telling him to feign illness and that on his removal to the hospital, he will be assisted in escaping.

Eva Bryan enables him to make a sensational escape, but promptly turns him over to the "Czar" of the dope ring. This Czar forces Dr. Winfield to sign an agreement to inoculate a certain victim with a deadly germ.

The doctor does this in a desperate play for time, as it offers his only possible hope. He is able to carry the plan through by feeding the victim's cat some meat containing black diphtheria germs.

Then he learns that this person to be killed is none other than the girl who lost the blue chrysanthemum. And yet his submission to the plan had offered his only chance.

Shortly afterward a new clew is found.

Detective Greer, who is investigating Dr. Nichols's murder, discovers, in a burned haystack near the sanatorium, a blood-stained uniform he knows is Eva Bryan's.

The detective's careful questioning of witnesses next leads him to a cemetery known to be a rendezvous for lovers, and he catches by surprise the son of the murdered doctor, Fred Nichols. He was in the act of posting a love note.

CHAPTER XIV

Love and Mystery

THE youth offered no resistance when Greer drew him into the lodge. He stood twirling his cap, sullenly defiant.

"What are you doing here?" asked Greer.

"Nothing—just wanted some exercise."

"Give me that note," Greer commanded sharply.

He tried to brazen it out. "What note?"

"I saw you take it," Greer told him. "Hand it over."

Reluctantly Fred Nichols obeyed.

"Now, who wrote it?" demanded Greer.

"I don't know."

"What is the meaning of it?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Why did you come for it, then?"

"Somebody sent me," was the sullen answer.

He Won't Tell

"Who?"

"I won't tell you!" rebelliously.

"Has Tim Tyler been leaving drugs in the tomb for you?"

"No—no! It hasn't got anything to do with that. It's just—just a note from my girl."

"Who is she?"

"I can't tell. I won't have her name mixed up in all this trouble," theatrically heroic. He drew his lanky undeveloped body up to its full height. "And you can't make me tell."

"Did you leave a note there for her?"

"Yes," defiantly.

Greer sent the gardener to secure the letter. The bow-legged little man returned bristling with importance and handed the detective the folded slip of paper. Excitedly he looked on as Greer opened it.

There was only a line:

Everything Fine. Will Soon Be Through

This note, too, was printed.

"Did you write this?" Greer asked.

Fred Nichols nodded.

"Why did you print it?"

"Because—because I didn't want any one to recognize my handwriting."

"Why didn't you send it by mail?"

"My girl's father won't let her have

anything to do with me—since—since this trouble."

He stuck to that story, and nothing could shake it, although Greer took him to headquarters and the chief himself quizzed him the following morning.

Mrs. Nichols also was summoned and questioned. She swept into the chief's office like an Amazon into battle, her felt hat pulled low over her eyes and slightly askew.

"Have you kept my boy here all night?" she demanded indignantly. "Why have you arrested him?"

Greer explained.

Checking Up on the Boy

"But I'm sure Fred is telling the truth," she said, her manner still antagonistic. A strong-minded, strong-willed woman, prepared to defend her weakling offspring. "I have always found Fred truthful."

"But the drug habit makes even the best cunning and deceitful," Greer reminded her.

"I'm sure Fred is practically cured," she said confidently. "A boyish experience like that would not make him a drug fiend."

"From his condition, it is apparent he is still using drugs," Greer told her.

"But he couldn't be," returned Mrs. Nichols sharply. "I've kept him at home since his father's death—he's hardly been out of my sight. I'm sure he hasn't had anything since the little dose Dr. Lancaster gave him the day of the inquest."

"A physician has just examined him," Greer said. "If you can't persuade him to tell us what he knows about these notes, we'll have to hold him for investigation."

Mrs. Nichols glared at him. "This is outrageous! I'll see my attorney about it. You are prejudiced against the boy. Isn't it natural, at his age, he should have a love affair and be very chivalrous about protecting the girl's name?

"Didn't the cemetery gardener tell you he had seen a girl going to the tomb? Isn't that proof that his story is true? Don't the notes sound like love notes?"

"Not like the kind a sixteen-year-old boy writes," said Greer. "But if you are so certain they are love notes, you should have some idea who the girl is."

Mrs. Nichols frowned and bit her lip. "Boys are so bashful about their first love affairs," she explained.

"Is your son infatuated with any of the nurses at the sanatorium?"

"He may be," she said stiffly.

"But in that case they would hardly go to so much trouble to exchange notes," the detective pointed out. "Has your son been in the habit of stealing out of the house at night?"

"Certainly not," was the rather curt reply.

"That is—to your knowledge," added Greer unruffled. "Has he been out during the day?"

"Not without me."

"Has he been over to the sanatorium?"

"Yes," Mrs. Nichols answered reluctantly.

"Whom does he go to see?"

A Real Flapper

Mrs. Nichols hesitated. "Miss Jarvis, I think."

"Dr. Nichols's secretary?"

"Yes." The woman's mouth was drawn into a hard line.

"How long has Miss Jarvis worked there?"

"A year or more." Stern disapproval was stamped on Mrs. Nichols's face.

"Your son found her attractive?"

"I suppose she is the type that would appeal to a boy that age," said Mrs. Nichols, and added bitingly: "And some men."

"Why don't you like Miss Jarvis?" Greer asked sharply.

Mrs. Nichols's lips parted in a little gasp of surprise. Then she closed them

firmly. "I haven't said I didn't like her."

"You couldn't have said it more plainly," Greer told her. Then resorted to more diplomatic measures. "You're a level-headed, sensible woman, Mrs. Nichols. You wouldn't be prejudiced against Miss Jarvis without good reason—that is, I don't think you would judge her by appearances.

"I've seen Miss Jarvis myself, and she impressed me as being affected—a *poseur*—and rather an artificial type of beauty—the kind that usually is associated with a shallow mind."

She Was Feared

"There's not many men that could see that," Mrs. Nichols responded bitterly.

"Don't try to shield this young woman," Greer urged. "What do you know about her?"

"Very little," said Mrs. Nichols, tight-lipped; "but I feared her influence over my son."

"Did Dr. Nichols know?"

"Yes; I spoke to him about it. He laughed and said Miss Jarvis wouldn't look at a youngster like Fred."

"He seemed confident of that?" Greer asked.

"Yes."

"As if he had some reason for knowing?"

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Nichols asked quickly.

"Weren't you jealous of your husband's secretary?" Greer demanded.

Mrs. Nichols's answer was contemptuous. "Of a girl like that?"

"I realize you want to protect your husband's name," Greer said. "But if there was an affair of this sort, it may have some connection with his death."

Mrs. Nichols was silent for the space of several minutes. Then she said: "I really know nothing—except that my husband seemed anxious to get rid of me lately.

"About two months ago he suggested that Fred and I go to Europe for six months or a year. I was surprised. I told him we couldn't afford it. He insisted, so that I became suspicious. What his purpose was, I never found out."

"You believe he wanted to be free to devote himself to Miss Jarvis?"

"That is the only reason I could think of."

"Did you speak of this to your son?"

"Yes. He said Inez Jarvis would not be interested in a man as old as his father. But, of course, he's too young to understand."

"Why did you dismiss the private detective you had engaged to investigate Dr. Nichols's death?" was Greer's next question.

"He hadn't discovered anything," Mrs. Nichols answered. "And it wouldn't do any good if he should—I believe almost I'd rather not know who killed my husband. So I thought I'd better save the money."

The explanation seemed to Greer unsatisfactory. Mrs. Nichols was not the type of woman who would prefer not to know her enemies; she was not the kind to avoid trouble.

In Love

A moment the detective sat thinking over this new situation. It seemed to him more likely that Mrs. Nichols had dismissed the detective because she was afraid he would learn something she did not want disclosed.

Perhaps the son would reveal something. He went to the door and gave an order for Fred Nichols to be brought to the office.

When the youth was seated before him, the detective asked: "Are you in love with Inez Jarvis?"

Fred Nichols squirmed in his chair uncomfortably, and said: "Yes." His voice was husky.

"Was it she who wrote you that note?"

"No."

"Does she return your love?"

The boy regarded his shoes with apparent interest. "I guess not," he confessed miserably.

"When you went to your father's office the afternoon of his death, did you find him there with Miss Jarvis?" the detective asked sharply.

"No; he had gone."

"No one saw him leave the office except Miss Jarvis," Greer said. "We have only her testimony as to the time he left. Is she trying to shield herself or you by saying he left fifteen or twenty minutes before you came?"

Fred Nichols looked surprised and frightened. "I don't know what you mean."

"What would you have done if you suddenly discovered Inez Jarvis thought more of your father than she did you? What would you have done if you discovered your father making love to Inez Jarvis?"

Suddenly Mrs. Nichols cried out: "Don't answer him, Fred! You don't have to answer these questions."

"Why are you so concerned?" Greer asked her.

"You're trying to lay a trap for Fred," she returned warmly.

"I haven't been able to learn where Dr. Nichols went or was going when he left the office that afternoon," the detective said.

"It was a bad day and hardly any of the patients went out for exercise; most of them were in the amusement rooms, and there were visitors passing continually through the halls.

"It's possible that Dr. Nichols didn't leave the office at the time Miss Jarvis said—or that he didn't leave at all—alive."

CHAPTER XV

Shielding the Slayer

IT seemed probable now that Dr. Nichols might have been killed in his office, and the body carried through the tunnel to the south wing. The towel might have been wrapped around his neck to prevent a trail of blood from the wound.

True, there had been no sign of murder in the office when the police arrived. But the floor was covered with linoleum; the walls were of plain painted plaster; the furniture of oak—all washable. And there was a lavatory in the coat closet connected with the office.

The door to the tunnel opened near the office door. Two people might have carried the body down unnoticed.

But if Dr. Nichols did leave the office, as Miss Jarvis said, why was there so much mystery about it?

All Dressed Up

Inez Jarvis was as cool and composed under Greer's questioning as she had been at the inquest. Not a hair was out of place on her satiny head; her eyelashes were black and oily; her nails lacquered like pink sea shells.

A flame-colored blouse buttoned up to her chin made her look as if she were incased in a particularly gay cocoon.

"Haven't you any idea where Dr. Nichols was going when he left the office?" the detective asked for the dozenth time.

"I'm no mind reader," answered Miss Jarvis impatiently.

"What had Dr. Nichols been talking about just before?"

"He'd been dictating letters?"

"Did he talk to you very much?"

"What about?" she asked suspiciously.

"His personal affairs."

"No," said Miss Jarvis, a little huffily. "I'm not that kind of a girl."

"Wasn't Dr. Nichols in love with you?"

"If he was, he succeeded in keeping it to himself," tartly.

"His wife seems to think your relations were not confined to business."

"Say, what do you take me for?"

"Fred Nichols was in love with you, too, wasn't he?"

"Well, what of it? And don't say 'too.'"

"When a man is murdered," said Greer, "we usually find some kind of entanglements in his life. Nine times out of ten, it's a woman."

Miss Jarvis looked thoughtful. "Well, if it was anybody, it was that Eva Bryan," she said. "Once she was in here talking to him when I came, and he sent me out again.

"Another time he sent me over to the medical building for some papers he didn't need, and when I got back Eva Bryan was here.

He Changed His Mind

"But maybe Dr. Nichols was just bawling her out about something. He never got fresh with me, I know, and don't you make any mistake about it."

"Then if there was no secret love affair in Dr. Nichols's life, what was the trouble?"

"I'm no fortune teller," said Miss Jarvis.

"But you were with Dr. Nichols every day. Did he seem worried about anything?"

"He did seem a little irritable and absent-minded lately," she answered thoughtfully.

"Was he in a hurry when he left?"

"I suppose so. He closed the files up and locked them without taking anything out. He didn't really open them. He just unlocked them and was about to put his keys back in his pocket when he seemed to change his mind.

"He stood there a minute with the keys in his hand—just looking at them. Then he looked at his watch and kind of jerked himself up with a start and locked the files again. He said he'd be back soon, and went out the door."

"You say he looked at the keys on his ring?"

"Yes—turned them over."

"Then he must have missed the key to the operating room," Greer concluded. "And if he thought his son had taken it, he might have gone home."

"He always put his hat on when he left the building—summer or winter," Miss Jarvis pointed out. "And as cold as it was, I think he would have put on his overcoat, too, if he had been going home. But he may have gone to the operating room to see if Fred had been there," she suggested.

Greer shook his head. "He would have borrowed a key from one of the other physicians then."

The question remained as much a mystery as ever. Dr. Nichols had looked at his watch as he left. Was it possible he had an appointment with some one?

Had he gone to meet Eva Bryan or the man with the crooked arm or the girl with the blue chrysanthemum? Greer was forced to fall back on the theory that Dr. Nichols was murdered by members of the drug ring whom he had been about to expose.

A Regular Winner

The letter received by Louis Atwood might have been written after the murder. Atwood would not tell who had written it, but Greer inquired at the messenger service office and had no difficulty in finding the boy who had delivered it—a chubby, freckle-faced youth.

He remembered the incident perfectly—he had waited at the sanatorium until the arrival of the police and as long after as he dared, he said, trying to find out about the murder.

"Where did you call for the note?" Greer asked.

"I didn't call anywhere. The girl stopped in here and wrote it out."

"Do you remember how she looked?"

"She was a regular winner," said the freckle-faced youth enthusiastically. "She gave me a fifty cent tip, too, and told me to hurry. She had on a blue coat that was silky looking like velvet, with a lot of black fur on it,

and her eyes were almost the same color.

"I don't know how to describe her face, except it was—delicate looking. She was just kind of slim and silky and dainty all over."

"Was she long writing the letter?" asked Greer.

"No; I was sitting there on the bench watching her and hoping I'd be the one that would get to deliver it, because I thought maybe she'd give me a tip.

"She just scribbled a line or two, that's all. And she was awfully particular about sealing it—pressed the flap down tight."

The Blue Coupe

"Did you notice if she came in a car?"

"Yes; it was a blue coupé. She was driving it herself."

"What make?"

"I didn't notice that or the license number or anything about it. All I could see was just the hood with the street light shining on it—it was after dark, you know."

Now that he had linked the girl in blue with Louis Atwood, Greer sought to trace her by watching Atwood. On the day of the murder, and for several days previous, he had been confined to his room because of a slight flare up in temperature.

On being questioned, he said he had had no visitors on the day of the murder, and added, a little too emphatically, that he knew no one in town.

It was difficult to check up on his statements. He was a reserved sort of person, who talked little and made few friends. He had never spoken of the girl to the other patients; nobody knew her name.

Atwood had been to town twice since his arrival at the sanatorium a month ago, but for what purpose Greer could not learn.

The patient who had the adjoining room said he had heard a woman's voice in Atwood's room on the afternoon of the 2nd, the day of the murder. But he hadn't seen the visitor enter or leave the room.

"Could you hear anything they were saying?" Greer asked.

The patient, a big awkward country boy, frightened and overawed by the murder, answered respectfully, "No, sir."

"Could you distinguish their tones? Did they seem to be quarreling or laughing or talking seriously?"

"I don't know—they were just talking, I guess. Not quarreling, anyway. They didn't talk very loud, and there was a radio going downstairs—in Ogden's room, I think—that drowned out everything else."

Blake had also heard Atwood telephoning some one on the morning of the 2nd. His voice had been extremely low, but as Blake passed through the hall, where the telephone was located, he heard him say: "Just come on up to my room, number thirty-one, upstairs in the south wing." And then, in answer to something:

Glad He Told

"We may as well try it to-day and get it over—if we can—though I don't suppose we'll be any better off." That was all Blake had heard. He hadn't thought anything about it at the time, but since the murder the words had been troubling him.

"I'm glad you asked me," he said to Greer. "I couldn't make up my mind to tell you for fear you'd laugh at me. But there it is, and I'm glad it's off my conscience."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about Atwood's actions since the murder?" Greer questioned.

"Nothing—except he's restless at night. Sometimes I hear him walking up and down his room in the middle of the night. And he turns on the light and reads late sometimes. Dr. Lancaster called him down for that—it's against the rules, you know."

From the sanatorium records Greer learned that Louis Atwood had come from Baltimore. A wire to the authorities there brought out the information that his was a respected and moderately well-to-do family, though he was the only one left of the name since his father's death a few years ago.

He had been attending the State University before the doctors ordered him to a higher altitude. His reputation had been above reproach. Yet Greer had reason to believe he was shielding the girl who had lost the blue chrysanthemum and who must know something concerning Dr. Nichols's death.

CHAPTER XVI

A Risky Plan

IN the apartment on Emerson Street, Dr. Winfield was panic-stricken over the fate he had meted out to Joyce Rogers. The vision of her frightened, wistful face rose to call him traitor—and murderer.

Frantically, he devised a hundred schemes to save her and was forced to dismiss them all as hopeless. Always Tim Tyler, with his little automatic, stood between him and his plans.

Hour after hour Tyler sat in the corner of the room, his back to the wall, following his prisoner with a wary eye and smoking innumerable cigarettes.

Winfield wanted to throttle the man. The sight of his plump, oily face, his greasy black hair, his heavy-lidded, suspicious eyes, drove Winfield almost mad. But if he could escape from this jailer, if he could save Joyce from the death he had unwittingly planned for her, there was still the Czar to be reckoned with.

Winfield paced up and down the room, and Tyler, mistaking the cause of his restlessness, said:

"Well, it'll soon be over now. You won't have to stay here much longer."

Winfield sank his teeth into his lower lip to keep from cursing Tyler. All through the afternoon his eyes roved to the window and the little blue coupé at the curb below.

If the girl should go away, he would have no chance to warn her. Would he have the nerve to shout out the truth to her as she was leaving the house?

How could he say: "I've sent you diphtheria by your cat. For God's sake, go to a doctor before it is too late!"

The girl would think him crazy—it would probably mean his own death. He couldn't tell her he had done that—but he must. What did it matter if she should call him a murderer?

But even that slender chance to save her was denied him. Before dark a garage man came and drove the car away.

In the evening there rose from the apartment below the tinkle of a piano and a girl's fresh young voice caroling popular melodies. The sound was agony to Winfield—to think of her singing like that when she had been sentenced to die.

She Was Afraid

She must know, too, that she had incurred the Czar's displeasure. He had made her rent that apartment for them. She must know that some danger threatened her.

There was a note of bravery and defiance in the voice, now that he listened with understanding. She was singing to keep up her courage. She was afraid—in those lonely rooms by herself. A time or two her voice trembled, dangerously close to tears.

Winfield tried to move Tyler to pity. "If I'd known it was a girl like that," he said, "the Czar could have done the worst before I'd—"

"I told you she was a classy jane," Tyler reminded him.

"It isn't too late yet to undo what I've done. We can't sit by and let that girl die a horrible death—and endanger other lives," he pleaded.

"I ain't got nothing to do with it," said Tyler, unmoved.

"It will be your fault if she dies—as much as mine. Let me go, and I'll save her."

Tyler regarded him coolly. "You must be forgetting about the Czar, ain't you? Don't forget you're an escaped murderer, too—according to the newspapers."

"That doesn't matter!" Winfield cried impatiently.

"You might change your mind when they put a rope around your neck," Tyler returned. "Save your tears, there's plenty more pretty girls."

When You Die

It was useless to argue with him, Winfield saw. If only he could frighten him into leaving the apartment. Winfield thought of pretending to have contracted the disease himself. But Tyler, unless he should lose his head, could easily tell he was not feverish.

He thought of trying to convince Tyler that he, Tyler, was coming down with diphtheria. He had seen men made ill by imagination and worry. But Tyler, though he was a coward, might not be so easily persuaded. Winfield searched the apartment for drugs that might aid in the deception, but found nothing.

"If diphtheria breaks out in a crowded apartment like this, there'll be other victims," he predicted gloomily. "You ought to get something to gargle."

He had the satisfaction of seeing his jailer squirm uneasily. Tyler threw away the cigarette he was smoking. He ground the ash into the rug, then, after fidgeting a moment, lighted another.

"I'm not afraid," he said jauntily.

"You've been exposed to it, though," Winfield argued. "You ought to take antitoxin. You couldn't go to a doctor, though—you'd be sure to be recognized with that arm of yours. If I had the serum, I could give it to you."

If only he could get the antitoxin, he would find some way to give it to the girl, Winfield thought.

Tyler grunted doubtfully. "I'm used to taking chances," he said, but his tone was less jaunty.

"You have to look out for yourself when you're working for a man like the Czar," Winfield told him. "He doesn't care if you die.

"In fact, I expect he's counting on both of us getting caught in our own trap. And if we don't, he probably has other plans for keeping us quiet."

"You can't tell me anything," Tyler muttered.

"Did you ever see any one die of diphtheria?" Winfield went on. "It's terrible. The patient struggles and fights for air—it's just as if a cord were around his throat suffocating him slowly."

Tyler shuddered. "Talk about something cheerful, can't you?"

After a moment's moody silence, Winfield continued: "I'd hate to be shut up with you here when you die and not be able to do anything to save you. You must have a lot of nerve to sit here so calmly when your life is in danger."

Like a Corpse

"Well, what can I do?" growled Tyler.

"You could get some antitoxin. I would—even if I had to break into a drug store. Of course, it doesn't matter to me—I'm safe."

Tyler puffed nervously at his cigarette. Winfield stared at him pityingly and sighed.

"What's the matter with you?" snapped Tyler. "You needn't look at me like I was a corpse yet."

"I was just thinking," said Winfield apologetically, "that your eyes look a little red. You don't feel feverish, do you?"

Tyler ran a hand over his forehead. "I wouldn't be taking it yet."

"You were exposed to it the other

day, too, when you went with me to get the culture," Winfield reminded him. "With this virulent form—"

"I didn't go in the house," Tyler blurted out, troubled.

"With this virulent form—" Winfield murmured. His voice died away and he shook his head gravely. "That child died."

"What's got into you?" Tyler cried. "You never talked like this before."

Winfield appeared reluctant to answer. "Of course, I may be mistaken," he said. "I hope I am."

Tyler fidgeted in his chair. "Well—speak up. What's on your mind?"

"You don't look—just right," said Winfield. "There are some faint red splotches under your skin I never noticed before. And the whites of your eyes look—queer. It may not amount to anything, but it's my duty as a physician to warn you."

Tyler dropped his cigarette and ran his tongue over his lips. Then forced a sickly grin.

Outwitting Tyler

"Does your mouth feel dry?" asked Winfield.

Tyler nodded.

"Throat parched?"

Tyler ran a finger inside his collar as if it were choking him. He swallowed once or twice, then nodded.

"Let me see your tongue," said Winfield with professional gravity.

Tyler stuck it out. Winfield sighed. He felt Tyler's pulse, raised an apprehensive eyebrow and drew out his watch. Tyler jerked his hand away impatiently.

"That isn't doing me any good!" he barked.

Winfield walked over to the window and looked out. After a moment he said: "There's a drug store at the corner that looks up-to-date enough to have what you need.

"I'll risk being recognized to get it for you. I can go in late at night. I'll say I've just been called on a case that looks like diphtheria. The clerk will probably be so sleepy he won't look at me."

"Will you?" said Tyler gratefully. Then, on second thought: "I'll go with you and wait outside to see that you don't get away."

But escape was not part of Winfield's scheme now. He had conceived a plan to outwit Tyler without even arousing his suspicion—a risky plan, but, with luck, he might save Joyce Rogers and himself, too.

CHAPTER XVII

A Matter of Courage

WINFIELD secured the antitoxin and a hypodermic needle without trouble. A few professional remarks, carefully dropped, forestalled any awkward questions.

The prescription clerk hardly looked at him. He did not attempt to buy a hypodermic syringe, for that might arouse suspicion. With the needle and a medicine dropper he had discovered in the apartment, he could make a fairly serviceable syringe.

Safe in the apartment again, he fastened the needle into the glass tip of the dropper with a little mending cement. Then time must be allowed for the cement to harden thoroughly. Not until the following night could he carry out his plan.

He went to his room, but not to sleep. He heard Tyler draw the couch across the door as usual. His jailer was restless to-night. Winfield heard him tossing and turning on the couch—too worried to sleep.

Winfield lay staring into the dark, going over his plans. His ears, alert for all the little sounds of the night, distinguished the rattle of windows being raised in the apartment below.

Wrapping a blanket around him, Winfield crossed to his window. The room below was in darkness. From somewhere came a muffled, mysterious sound, so faint he could barely hear it.

Joyce was sobbing. Her courage had not been equal to the darkness and silence of the night.

Winfield longed to speak to her and reassure her, but he stifled the impulse. Tyler would hear him. Besides, what could he say? He might only frighten her more. She must have sensed the danger threatening her.

Perhaps she was already afraid of him. She must never know. He felt that he would prefer death to seeing Joyce Rogers look at him with horror and loathing and fear in her dark-lashed eyes.

The Next Morning

The cold wind that blew in the window made him shiver. He went back to bed.

The next morning he gave Tyler a shot of antitoxin. Tyler was soon feeling reassured, and Winfield didn't worry him again now that he had got the serum.

The day seemed interminable. The hands crawled snail-like around the clock. Winfield watched and listened for a sign of Joyce, but evidently she did not leave the apartment all day.

Evening came. Tyler was in no hurry to go to bed. He lounged about drinking near beer and talking boastfully of the things he had done.

Winfield would have given much for a sleeping potion to drop in his glass, but he had not dared buy it at the drug store with Tyler watching him through the window.

He must not arouse Tyler's suspicion. Already his jailer was regarding him curiously.

"Get over your softness for that jane?" he asked.

Winfield simulated a callous indifference. "A fellow gets hard-boiled when it's a question of his own neck," he said.

"It did give me a queer, all-gone feeling when I first saw her, I admit. But I've got nothing to do with the quarrel between her and the Czar."

Tyler grunted approvingly. "The Czar ain't such a bad guy—at least, he always does what he says he will. I've got a hunch he's some big guy—respected and all that—who'd be ruined if it got out about his side line."

Winfield did not press the subject further. But he meant to continue this dangerous game until he could learn the Czar's secret.

When his jailer was ready for bed, Winfield carried the beer bottles into the kitchen. He turned the water on in the sink and asked Tyler if he wanted a drink. A sleepy grunt that sounded like, "Water? Hell—no," was the answer.

While the water was running, Winfield drew from his pocket a roll of twine—one long string with four shorter ones tied to it. The four ends he tied to the handles of the gas stove, and drew the long cord across the kitchen and dining room. Then he moved aside the serving table.

In the wall behind it, he had that morning torn away a flap of paper and bored a little hole the size of a pencil through the plaster. It came out on the other side behind the head of his bed. That end of the opening he had bored the night before after Tyler was asleep.

All Ready

Now, with the aid of a pencil, he poked the string through the hole. The whole operation had taken but a minute, and the splashing water had covered the sound of his movements.

Then he returned to the living room, leaving the doors open behind him. The kitchen gave onto the little hall, at the other end of which was the living room. Unless Tyler closed the living room door, the gas would easily flood the whole small apartment except the bedroom.

Tyler was waiting for him impatiently—he was already half asleep, sprawled out on the couch. Winfield went into the bedroom. Tyler rose with a yawn and rolled his couch before

the door as was his custom. Winfield was thankful he had neglected to get a key for that door.

If Tyler should go into the kitchen now, all would be lost. But he did not. Winfield, with his ear to the panel, heard him switch off the lights and throw himself heavily on the couch. Luckily, he slept with the windows closed.

The apartment below was already dark, Winfield discovered. It would be better, perhaps, to wait till after midnight to carry out his scheme, but the long vigil might unnerve him. He stood by the door, listening.

The Sleeping Guard

After minutes that seemed hours, the welcome regularity of Tyler's breathing told him his keeper was asleep. Then Winfield crossed the room and pulled the cord that opened the gas burners.

How long it might take the gas to overcome Tyler, he had no way of knowing. But he was confident that he could use it for an anæsthetic without causing death or serious injury.

There was some risk, of course, but, with luck, Tyler would awake in the morning none the worse and entirely ignorant of Winfield's activities.

Winfield counted the minutes as he waited at the door. He stood there motionlessly, listening. It would be fatal to awaken Tyler now with the room full of gas.

Winfield could distinguish the heavy, sweet odor of it drifting through the crevices around the door. Noiselessly, he opened one of his windows.

Tyler's breathing grew deeper and hoarser—then stertorous—he would not waken now. Winfield opened the door. The light from his room fell on Tyler's flushed face.

He stirred slightly as the fresh air rushed over him, and Winfield trembled for fear he would revive. Hastily he closed the door and resumed his patient waiting.

When he opened it again, Tyler did not move. Winfield felt his pulse—it was growing feebler. His unfamiliarity with the action of the gas frightened him.

He had an impulse to throw open the windows and revive the man, but, conquering it, closed the door again.

He continued opening it and feeling Tyler's pulse every minute until he judged he had administered enough anæsthetic to keep him unconscious an hour or more.

Then, pushing back the couch, he entered the room and raised the windows. He gulped down a long draft of fresh air, hurried to the kitchen and turned off the gas.

He removed the telltale cords, glued down the flap of paper and moved the table back into place. He worked quickly, going to the window occasionally for a breath of fresh air. In a few moments nothing remained to arouse suspicion.

The Hypodermic

The key to the outer door and the key to the apartment below he found in Tyler's waistcoat hanging on a chair. He let himself out and closed the door behind him so the gas would not escape through the building.

Cautiously he inserted the key into the door of Joyce Rogers's apartment, and turned it. The door swung open with a series of most disconcerting and alarming squeaks.

Winfield stepped into the darkness of the little hall and closed it behind him. A moment he stood there, his heart thudding, dreading what lay ahead of him.

What could he say to the girl if she should awaken and find him there? How could he make her believe him? What if she should arouse the other tenants or call the police? No one would believe him then.

This action, with the charge already against him, would cost him his life, for it was his plan to gag and bind the

sleeping girl before she could make an outcry.

Then he would blindfold her—she must not see his face—turn on the lights and give her the antitoxin.

But if he should fail, who would believe that he was trying to save her life after exposing her to diphtheria?

His fingers touched the improvised hypodermic syringe in his pocket, and it gave him courage to go on.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dangerous Moments

THE bedroom door was ajar. Winfield groped his way across the living room toward it. He stood there listening to the girl's faint regular breathing. A breath of cold air fanned his face. Her windows were open. A cry in the frosty stillness of the night would carry far.

He felt the gag and ropes in his pocket. His eyes, grown accustomed to the dark, could distinguish the slim outline of her figure under the covers; and against the pillows, the shadowy black cloud of her hair.

Two steps, and his fingers could grasp the slender white throat. But could he force himself to choke back the scream she would utter? Could he trust his fingers to shut off her breath? And thrust the gag in her mouth?

A sound from her might mean his death—on the gallows. He wondered if it would be better to waken her. Could he make her understand?

If she would not trust him, perhaps he could persuade her to send for another physician. But how could he confess he had tried to kill her?

As he stood there in uncertainty, something brushed against his leg—something soft and terrifying in the dark. He stepped back, jolted against a table, nearly upsetting it. A telephone crashed to the floor.

Winfield stood paralyzed. Joyce Rogers awakened with a little gasp and sat up in bed.

"Don't—don't!" she cried in a choking voice. "Don't kill me!" The words ended in a little sob.

For a moment there was silence. Winfield could hear the girl's quick, uneven breathing. He stepped back into the corner where he would be concealed behind the door if she should open it.

She could not have heard his movement, for he made no noise, but in a quavering little voice, she asked of the darkness:

"Who's there?"

The cat rubbed against Winfield again and purred. The faint sound seemed to reassure the girl, for she turned on the light. He could hear her getting out of bed, reaching for her slippers.

Timidly she pushed open the door. The light streamed into the living room. Winfield flattened himself into the corner. The door touched the wall, and he was hidden completely in the small triangular space.

Joyce saw the cat arching himself against the table now, and the telephone lying on the floor. She picked up the instrument and replaced it on the table.

A Bad Cat

"Naughty Fuzzy Wuzzy," she scolded in a voice still unsteady. "You're a bad cat to knock over the telephone and scare me so."

She took the animal in her arms. Through the chink of the door Winfield could see her cuddling it up to her face, nestling her cheek in its long fur, comforting herself with its cheerful purring.

She shivered, then crawled back into bed, taking the cat with her. He heard its loud purring as she stroked it.

He must have been mad, he thought, to have given the diphtheria culture to the cat. Only a fiend would have done that.

It was worse than knifing her in the back. Worse than common murder, for

at least the common murderer endangered his own life. But he, with his scientific knowledge, had played so revoltingly safe.

He saw now that he must tell Joyce Rogers everything—even his own hideous deed—and risk the consequences. She knew her life was in danger; she was living in fear of some horrible death. He must not add to that cruel torture.

Winfield stepped from behind the door. In a low voice he said: "Miss Rogers."

"Don't Be Afraid"

The girl smothered a scream.

"Don't be afraid," Winfield went on hurriedly. "I won't hurt you. I'm a friend."

He entered the bedroom. His fingers found the switch, and he turned on the light, thinking she might remember his face and be less terrified.

She was sitting up in bed, the back of her hand pressed to her mouth, staring at him with fear-widened eyes.

Before Winfield could say anything else, she shrieked hysterically—a shrill, terrorized wail.

"Don't—please, don't!" he pleaded, fear in his own voice now. "Listen to me a minute. I want to help you."

Her eyes darted to a small automatic pistol on the table beside her. Her fingers snatched at it with a sudden convulsive movement. With a shaking hand she pointed it at him.

It seemed to give her courage. Her screams died away into the long-drawn, quivering sobs of a frightened child. The fact that he did not come nearer or try to take the gun away from her seemed to reassure her. With her free hand she drew the blankets up under her chin and shrank back to the farthest corner of the bed. Still holding the little pistol, she demanded quaveringly:

"Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. Winfield," he said. "I saw you at Downing Sanatorium—that day—in the hall. Don't you remember?"

She stared at him, but said nothing.

There were running feet on the stairs now, and excited voices in the hall.

Her screams had aroused the other occupants of the building.

"Don't let them find me here," Winfield whispered. "It means my life—if I am found here. Give me a chance to explain. Tell them you're all right. You must trust me! I can help you—against the Czar."

"Why are you here? Why are you here?" she cried, panic-stricken.

Winfield's lips twisted. "I was sent here—to kill you!" The words were wrenched from him. "But I can't—I want to save you. And I can. You must listen to me—give me just a few minutes. You have that gun, and I'm not armed—"

The doorbell shrilled raucously. Fear was like a weight on Winfield's chest, pressing out his breath.

"Lock me up in the closet," he whispered. "I can't hurt you there, and I can talk to you."

There was a heavy rap on the door.

A man's voice called: "Miss Rogers, did you scream? Miss Rogers, are you all right?"

The knock was repeated.

CHAPTER XIX

Seeing It Through

THE man outside shouted and beat on the door. He tried the knob, but the door had locked when Winfield closed it. Still, Joyce did not answer. Winfield stepped aside so that she could leave the room.

Cautiously she thrust one foot out from the covers, eyes still fixed distrustfully on Winfield, gun still leveled on him.

Incongruously he noticed how slim and white her foot was. Then she pulled a quilt around her shoulders and was out of the room like a flash, run-

ning barefooted across the living room. He heard her open the hall door.

A stony indifference to his fate enveloped Winfield now like a cloak. He was about to follow Joyce to the door to give himself up, when her voice, a little breathless, but steady, reached him.

He stopped and listened in amazement.

To the man outside she said: "I'm sorry I screamed so. It was only the cat. He knocked the telephone over, and the noise woke me up and frightened me. It's awfully kind of you to come up."

Winfield's Chance

The man murmured something. There was a woman with him who laughed nervously. After a minute they went away, and Joyce closed the door again.

Winfield crossed the living room to the hall. She turned to face him, her back against the door, one hand still clutching the little automatic, the other holding the heavy quilt about her shoulders.

"Now, what have you to say?" she demanded as fiercely as one could with quivering lips.

The courage of her, Winfield thought admiringly, to send those people away, to give him his chance.

"I want to convince you first that I won't hurt you," he began. "I saw you in the hall at the sanatorium and showed you the way to the door—you were lost. And you dropped a blue flower you were wearing."

She caught her breath with a gasp. Her chin went a little higher.

"Are you a detective?" she asked. "Have you followed me because of that flower?"

"No," Winfield told her wonderingly. Was she really one of the Czar's gang? Why was she afraid of the police? He went on hurriedly: "I'm a physician at the sanatorium—Dr. Winfield."

"Oh—oh—I didn't know it was *you*," she murmured, more to herself than him.

"What do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"I didn't know it was you they arrested. I mean—I didn't know you were Dr. Winfield. I remember seeing you now."

She left the door and deliberately laid the gun upon a table.

Winfield felt that he did not deserve so much.

"You'd better wait," he said, "until—"

"I'm not afraid."

She sat in a chair, her feet curled up under her, chin resting in her palm. Her shoulders looked very slim and fragile rising out of the bulky thickness of the down quilt.

"You're not afraid of me now—when you know I'm an escaped prisoner, accused of murder?" Winfield asked incredulously.

She shook her head. "Who sent you here?"

He Means to Kill

"A man known as the Czar. He helped me escape. I went only to try to find out who he is—you must believe that. But he had laid a trap for me. I couldn't escape. It was the gallows—or *this*. At least, he made me think that."

Winfield forced himself to tell the whole wretched story. The minute or two it took seemed endless. He kept his eyes on the floor, afraid to face the horror in hers. When he paused she was silent.

He raised his eyes. She was not even looking at him, but at something beyond, which he could not see, and there was terror in her eyes. A little moan escaped her lips.

"He means to kill me—he'll get me yet," she whispered.

She buried her face in her hands.

"Who is he?" demanded Winfield. "Tell me who he is. Why would he want to kill you?"

"Oh, don't ask me—please!"

"Do you know who he is?"

"Yes—but—I can't tell you. I'm afraid—"

"I want to help you," said Winfield earnestly.

"There's nothing you can do—nothing anybody can do."

"We can't talk long now," said Winfield, suddenly remembering Tim Tyler in the apartment above. "You must let me give you the antitoxin. Will you?"

"If I Don't Die"

She thrust out her bare arm. Winfield felt a curious lightness that she should trust him—as though the world were resuming its normal course again. He unrolled the napkin that held his hypodermic syringe.

"It doesn't look very professional," he remarked, "but it will serve. It's sterile, anyway. I boiled it thoroughly."

She winced as he plunged the needle into her arm.

When he had finished he asked huskily:

"If no harm comes to you now, will you forgive me?"

She seemed to resent his tone.

"What does it matter?" she returned coldly.

"If you knew how much it means to me—"

"It's a good deal to forgive," she said slowly, "but, at least, I understand."

"You couldn't!" Winfield burst out. "You can't imagine the horror—the threats—"

"I *know*," she interrupted in a voice so full of passion that it startled Winfield. Then, more quietly: "I know you were forced to do it."

"Have you been through that, too?"

She nodded; then quickly asked:

"But what will happen to you if—if I don't die?"

Her words sent a warm glow through Winfield.

"Never mind that," he answered.

"But the Czar—his threats—he will send that paper you signed to the police. They will think it was a contract to kill Dr. Nichols."

"I'll work out of it some way," he said.

And at the moment it seemed that he could. Her interest in him, her quick understanding, made him feel that everything must turn out right.

"But I must know," she insisted anxiously. "I can't let you sacrifice yourself for me."

"But for all you know, I may have killed Dr. Nichols," he answered.

"No," she said fiercely. "I know you didn't."

There flashed through Winfield's mind the memory of that bloodstained blue chrysanthemum and those petals Detective Greer had found beside the murdered man. He had almost forgotten that it was this girl who had worn them.

"How do you know? What do you know?" he asked sharply.

Her Look of Horror

"I mean, I'm sure—I feel sure you didn't," she amended. "I don't know anything about it."

Her voice was strained and a little breathless. Again that look of horror in her eyes.

Winfield knew she had lied to him—because she was afraid to tell the truth. But whatever the reason, whatever she had done, he had nothing but pity for her. He wanted to help her. But there was no time to question her now.

"There is another thing I must attend to before I go," Winfield told her. "You must let me kill the cat—we can't allow him to endanger any more lives."

"Oh, poor Fuzzy—my aunt will miss him. She's had him so long."

"I'm glad he isn't your pet, anyway. It won't hurt him—I'll give him gas."

"No—I'll do it," she said with a

little catch in her breath. "I—I'll shut him up in the oven."

"You mustn't fail," he warned her. "It's the kindest way now—he would die anyway of diphtheria."

She nodded—tears in her eyes.

"And you must bury the body—or better, get the janitor to burn it, if you can," he told her.

She nodded again. And drew the back of her hand across her eyes like a child.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I wouldn't have hurt you like this for anything."

"It isn't the cat," she sobbed. Then in a husky little whisper: "It's you—I'm afraid they'll kill you."

Winfield caught his breath. He dug his nails in his palms to keep from taking her in his arms, big down quilt and all.

"Would you care?"

"Of course. It would be my fault—for not dying."

Absurdly, he wanted to laugh at that. "Why, I could walk out of here now, and they'd never see me again—the Czar or the police, either," he told her confidently.

To the Finish

"But I'm going to play this game to the finish. I'm not going to let the Czar get the best of me. I'm going to find out who he is, and see him behind bars, I hope."

"Oh, but you don't know what you're attempting!" she cried. "Please go away—now."

"I'm going—but only upstairs."

"Oh—if there were only a way we could talk to each other—or write. I can't let you go and never know—never know what is happening to you." Impulsively her hand went out to his arm.

"I'm afraid for you. We must manage some way to write." Her glance fled up to the ceiling. "Couldn't you make a hole through there—just a tiny little one to pass a note through?"

"No need," he said exultantly. "I'll let it down from my window on a string. No one will see at night."

"Oh, of course," she agreed. She seemed to want to tell him something, but was afraid. Her brow wrinkled in a troubled frown. After a moment's indecision, she said: "You mustn't be afraid they could convict you. I know a way out."

"What is it?" he cried.

"No, no—I can't tell you. It won't be easy—for me."

What did she mean?

"We're going to be partners in this?" he asked.

She nodded gravely. He had never hoped for so much. He felt as if nothing could harm him now.

CHAPTER XX

Would He Lose?

WINFIELD regained the apartment above without encountering any one. He pushed open the door. The air was still odorous of gas, but fit to breathe now, and quite cold.

There was a light in the living room. Winfield was sure he had turned it off. If Tyler had revived, he might be waiting with a gun to take his revenge.

Winfield stepped across the threshold of the living room—and stood there frozen. Facing him was Eva Bryan, her face pallid with fury under the rouge and powder.

"You tried to kill him!" she accused, eyes blazing.

Winfield was speechless. His eyes were fixed on the stubby little automatic she held in her hand.

"Now you'll take your medicine!" she said.

With an effort Winfield spoke: "You're mistaken—I wouldn't do that," he told her truthfully. If only he could think of some way to conciliate her.

His eyes darted to the couch. A glance showed him that Tyler was in no danger—still unconscious, but

breathing more naturally. The fresh air would soon revive him.

"Then who did it—if it wasn't you?" Eva Bryan demanded belligerently.

Winfield said: "I don't know."

He would have to lie out of it. Several different stories leaped into his brain. He fenced for time while he considered them. He could not say that Tyler had attempted suicide because Tyler would soon be able to deny it.

He could not say he had gone for help because he was a physician himself and should know that Tyler needed only fresh air.

Ignoring the Pistol

"How is he now?" he asked. "He's coming along all right, isn't he?"

Ignoring the pistol Eva Bryan held, he stepped past her and bent over Tyler with feigned concern. She regarded him suspiciously.

"What are you stalling for?" she demanded. "I want to know who did this."

Winfield was taking Tyler's pulse. He nodded, as with satisfaction. "Yes: he'll soon be able to tell us what happened," he said.

Fortunately for him he had guessed right in timing the gas and had removed the cords from the stove. He could pretend ignorance now.

Eva Bryan eyed him through narrowed lids. "Come on—where have you been?" she demanded with a toss of her head. "Did you come back to finish the job?"

"Do you think I would have shut off the gas and opened the windows if I'd been trying to kill him?" Winfield returned warmly.

She was already half convinced of his innocence, he saw. If only it did not occur to her that he had used the gas as an anæsthetic.

"Where did you go then? Why did you leave him?" she inquired skeptically.

"I was looking for the man who did it," Winfield answered cautiously. He remembered it had been nearly half an hour since he left the apartment.

Eva Bryan gave a little sniff. "It sounds fishy to me," she remarked candidly.

Winfield had by now evolved an explanation of his actions that seemed satisfactory. He assumed an attitude of righteous indignation.

"If it hadn't been for me, Tyler would be dead. It was lucky for him I happened to wake up and smell the gas."

"Yeh; I guess you love him just like a brother," was Eva's ironical comment.

Winfield ignored her. "I was shut up in the bedroom there," he went on. "There's only one door, and Tyler's couch was drawn across that. I couldn't have got out without waking him. It was Tyler's business to keep me here," he explained with a show of impatience.

The Intruder

"You don't think he'd leave the door open so I could walk out, do you?"

"I'll wait and see what Tim has to say," she answered coolly.

"All right—wait," retorted Winfield. "But I can tell you now—Tyler won't know anything. It's my opinion some one was trying to kill both of us. But my door was closed, and he couldn't open it without arousing Tyler.

"I don't know how long the gas had been on when I woke up. I called Tyler. He didn't answer, so I opened the door. The rooms were full of gas. I raised the windows and looked out.

"There was a man going down the walk—he turned around and glanced up at these windows, I thought. So as soon as I shut off the gas and saw that Tyler was all right, I got into my clothes and tried to follow him."

"How could you follow him after

all that time?" asked Eva, still doubtful.

"I thought he went into the drug store at the corner," said Winfield. "Some man did go in and buy cigars, but the clerk didn't know who he was, and I couldn't get any further trace of him."

He wondered if Eva Bryan knew how long he had been gone. Perhaps she had only just come. In that case, he would say he had been out only a few minutes. But her next words destroyed that hope.

It Was the Czar

"So you walked around the block for half an hour?" sarcastically.

"I inquired at the garage and the taxi stand down the street," Winfield told her. "You don't think I'd just sit here quietly after somebody tried to kill me, do you?"

If only she did not guess the truth! All his night's work would go for nothing if they knew he had saved Joyce.

"I know!" exclaimed Eva Bryan with sudden conviction. Her little round face hardened.

A chill passed over Winfield in the moment before she said harshly:

"It was the Czar! I believe he'd kill us all to save himself—even me. He's afraid." Then she cried. "Now I know who the Czar is!" Her voice was strident and vindictive.

"Hush!" Winfield warned. "Some one will hear you."

She clenched her fists. "It was the Czar!"

"Who is the Czar?"

She looked at him with sudden suspicion, not quite trusting him yet. "I've been a fool not to guess it before," she said bitterly.

"Tell me," Winfield urged. "We've got to stand together now." If only he could bring about the arrest of this master criminal, he would feel well compensated for all he had been through.

Eva Bryan shook her head. He could see that she was thinking of something else. She shivered in the cold air sweeping through the open windows.

"I want to talk to Tim first," she said.

As if at the sound of his name, the man on the couch stirred slightly and gasped.

"He's coming around," said Winfield.

Eva Bryan rushed to him and shook him. "Tim, Tim! Wake up, boy! Tim, don't you hear me?"

As she bent over him, Winfield read the concern in her face and knew it was Tim Tyler she loved—if she was capable of real love. Was it Tyler who had killed Dr. Nichols? Had Eva Bryan helped him?

Tyler opened his eyes now and asked bewilderedly: "What's happened?"

"You're all right now, Tim," said Eva Bryan quietly. "Listen, honey, some one tried to do you in—came in here and turned on the gas while you were asleep. It must have been the Czar!"

What Would Happen

Winfield was thankful Tyler heard it from her lips—he would believe her. Winfield wanted very much now to gain the confidence of these two.

To Tyler he said: "I suppose the Czar will have it in for me, too, now—for saving you."

Tyler nodded, still dazed. But he did not question the statement. He sat up, gripped his aching head between his palms.

"The Czar's a devil," he said between closed teeth. "If I dared, I'd get even with him for this. But how can I? He sits there in the dark—he can see every move I make.

"If I didn't hit him the first time, he'd get me. Maybe he would, anyway. He'd get me before I could draw."

"No, no; listen," said Eva. "There's a way—" She glanced up at Winfield

distrustfully. "Go in the other room—I want to talk to Tim."

Winfield had to obey. He closed the door of the bedroom and listened with his ear to the keyhole. But the two were conversing in whispers—he could hear nothing. But he knew they were planning some revenge against the Czar.

Sleep was out of the question now. Winfield turned out the light and dropped down on the bed without undressing.

But he could not lie still. He was wondering what would happen, now that he had turned the Czar's subjects against him. Would this imitation czar, like the real one, lose his life in revolution?

CHAPTER XXI

Another Way Out

WINFIELD rose and turned on the light and wrote a note to Joyce.

JOYCE, DEAR:

I know now why I kept the blue chrysanthemum. It was because I loved you the very first minute I saw you there in the hall. I think I must have known you were afraid and wanted to help you even then. That was the beginning for me of all this nightmare, but now that I have found you again, nothing else matters except to keep you safe.

And the worst of the nightmare is to remember how near I came to killing you. If I hadn't seen you coming up the walk in that blue coat and hat, I would have gone on with my cowardly plans.

I would have gone on trying to convince myself that it was self-defense—my life or yours. I must be a weakling and a fool to have allowed myself to be put in such a position. Yet I see no place where I could have avoided this fate, unless I had not picked up that blue flower of yours. And if I hadn't done that, I might never have seen you again, so I cannot regret it.

I think now the best thing we can do is to call up the police and tell them everything. I don't know what you have done nor why you are afraid of the Czar, but I know you couldn't have done anything so dreadful—at least not of your own free will.

You are too just and fair—I realized that, when you gave me a chance to explain to-night. But whatever it is, it is worse living in fear of this invisible, unknown enemy than taking our chances with the law.

Whatever it is will make no difference in my love. I almost hope that you are guilty of something so that the crime I almost committed will not seem so black to you.

So I want you to telephone the police, darling. I can't do it myself, because this telephone is disconnected, and Eva Bryan and Tim Tyler are in the next room talking, so I've no chance to get away.

Don't think I've given up my quest of the Czar. I think I have almost succeeded. Eva Bryan knows who he is, and I believe she would tell if she were arrested. She hates him, too.

At any rate, I think we had better not wait any longer. Eva and Tim Tyler are planning, I think, to kill the Czar. If that should happen, I might never be able to prove his guilt and my own innocence.

Write your answer, dear, and tie it to this string.

Always yours,

AUSTIN.

There were lights in the apartment below. Joyce was still awake. Winfield folded the letter, tied it to a string, then fastened a key above it. He lowered it from the window until he could swing the key against the glass below.

Her Answer

Its light tapping soon brought Joyce to the window. He heard her raise the sash, and felt the tug on the string as she removed the note.

He all but closed his window, and kept the string wrapped around his finger so he would know by the pull on it when Joyce was ready with her answer.

In the next room Eva Bryan and Tim Tyler still carried on their whispered conversation—or argument, for, from their voices, Winfield guessed that she was urging him on to some

action and that Tim Tyler was objecting.

Once he caught the word "afraid"—Tyler was afraid. If the police should come now, he might confess. Perhaps they were already on their way—if Joyce had telephoned at once.

Then he felt her signal on the cord. A moment later he had her answer in his hand and was reading:

MY DEAR:

Don't ask me to call the police now—anything but that. I am afraid—you don't know how dreadfully I am afraid. But there is another way out. I have been thinking of it for some time. It will be hard—but the suspense and terror has become unbearable. I could tell the police who the Czar is as well as Eva Bryan, but I would not dare. You must destroy even this confession.

I said it would be difficult to forgive you, but I spoke without thinking. It is I who should ask forgiveness. I have done you more harm than you have me. But I am going to make up for it if I can. When you understand, please don't think too harshly of

JOYCE.

Winfield read the note a dozen times, but the more he puzzled over it, the more worried he became. There was a tragic undertone to her words. What did she mean? Hastily, he penned another plea:

DARLING:

You frighten me. I don't care what you've done. All I want is your confidence now. How can I help you unless you tell me everything? I know you are afraid of the Czar, but why are you afraid of the police? And what is the other way out? You must trust me, because I love you.

AUSTIN.

The answer came back:

MY DEAR:

I can't tell you. If you knew, you would hate me, and I couldn't bear that.

JOYCE.

Winfield sat until dawn studying those enigmatic scrawls. Then he burned them.

Tyler opened the door and called him to breakfast. They were a gloomy trio. Tyler was suffering from a headache. Winfield was worried and distraught. Eva stared moodily into her coffeecup.

"Are you going to carry a note for the Czar to the cemetery to-day?" Winfield asked.

"Not much," said Eva emphatically. "Not after what happened last night. The Czar showed his hand. If he's trying to kill Tim and you, he'd like to get rid of me, too. He might have a dozen bulls hiding behind the tombstones as a sort of reception committee for me.

"Does the Czar go to the cemetery for the notes Fred left there?" Winfield asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

Eva Bryan's eyes met Tyler's questioningly. Her voice was guarded when she answered Winfield: "I don't know whether he went there himself or not. I always thought he sent somebody else until—"

Tyler interrupted: "Eva's got an idea that one of the fellows we know is the Czar himself, but I think she's crazy."

Eva said: "I wanted Tim to hide there some night and watch and see who comes for the note, but Tim's scared to go there after dark, anyway," contemptuously.

"I am, and I don't mind admitting it," said Tyler. "A boneyard is no place for live folks—we'll be there soon enough anyway.

"I'd rather go to jail than go there again at night. And I'm not going to try to buck the Czar, either. I'm going to clear out of here while I've got my health."

He was thoroughly shaken, Winfield thought. Last night's experience had increased his fear of the Czar's mysterious power. And even yet they were not certain of the identity of their master.

TO BE CONTINUED

The pilot was in for a big surprise

FLIGHT

He Went Up as a Joyrider, But He Came Down a Grim Fugitive, With a Price on His Head

By John Ames

THROUGH the noise of the propeller blast Joe Brookley yelled back at his passenger in the rear cockpit:

"All set?"

The passenger nodded with a quick, nervous jerk of the head, his goggles masking his face a bit grotesquely.

"Safety belt hooked?"

Again the nervous nod.

"First flight," thought the pilot. "Got the wind up a bit already. Better not stunt him."

The sight-seeing plane took off neatly against a light but somewhat moist breeze from the south.

Joe hoped the fog would hold off for at least another hour. There was a good Saturday afternoon crowd at the field from Los Angeles and the suburbs. Lots of them willing to pay for flights to-day.

It was past mid afternoon, business had been excellent, and he wanted to make as good a day of it as possible. He needed the cash for his experimental work.

He climbed in wide circles for altitude. A couple of thousand feet would be enough. Ten minutes of ordinary flying around the neighborhood of the field and he would go down for the next passenger. If the fog didn't roll in too quickly.

The air was becoming cool and hazy. The slanting sun was losing its brilliance. This bird behind him probably would be satisfied with a few minutes

less than the usual ten. The plane was beginning to roll a bit; he might get airsick pretty soon. Flying was becoming a trifle rough.

Suddenly the pilot felt something poking against his left shoulder blade. Likely his passenger had enough and wanted to land.

He turned his head to assure him that he was about to take him back to the field—and looked with a good deal of amazement into the short barrel of an automatic.

Behind the weapon, pointed with sufficient steadiness at his head despite the slight pitching of the plane and the gusty air-stream, Brookley saw a pale but grimly determined face. And its pallor was not that of airsickness.

Taking Orders

The amber-colored lenses of the goggles only partly concealed a pair of closely-set eyes, narrowed by the intensity with which they were fixed upon the face of the pilot. Thinly compressed lips were slightly twisted, under a sharp nose bent a little toward the right.

The passenger silently shoved forward with his left hand a small sheet of paper, evidently torn from a pad, leaning over the side of the windshield of his cockpit so that Brookley could reach what was evidently a written message.

The pilot, holding the control stick with his right hand, had begun to hold up his left. But the grim passenger, after handing him the note, motioned for him to keep his hands down. Brookley read:

> Keep heading south toward the Mexican border and make for Calexico. This is no joy ride. You'll be paid plenty if you do as I tell you. I am taking the precaution to keep you covered, in case you try to land before I tell you.
>
> There's a stretch of flats southwest of Calexico, on the Mexican side, where I want you to put me down. If you fail to obey orders I'll drill open the back of your head from where I'm sitting.
>
> If you think I'm afraid of being killed with you, with a dead pilot at the controls, you'll be out of luck. I can fly the ship myself.

There was no signature to the penciled note.

It is an important part of an aviator's job to think quickly in an emergency, but nothing in his training or experience suggested to Brookley anything to do under the circumstances but keep flying south.

For a moment he thought of throwing the plane upside down, in the hope that his passenger's safety belt was unfastened and he would be thrown out of the cockpit and down upon the sun-baked bosom of Southern California.

In order to lean out over the front of his cockpit, as he had when he delivered the note, he must have unhooked the belt.

To kill the passenger whose act of piracy had shanghaied him in his own plane he felt would be justifiable. He knew now that he was not dealing with an insane man, as he at first had conjectured, but a desperate criminal who had conceived this means of escape, probably realizing that the roads to the frontier were being watched for him.

Steve Janis, Robber

But Brookley immediately discarded the notion that it might be possible to eject the man in the rear cockpit. He must have refastened the belt again. And any sudden maneuver of the plane, he realized, might send a shower of hot lead through his brain.

The passenger who had so surprisingly assumed command of his ship, he was now convinced, was Steve Janis, whose description had been sent to every airport in Southern California after the robbery of the Industrial Bank of Los Angeles ten days ago.

Janis's three associates in the job had been captured, but Janis had shot his way out of the grasp of the police, one of whom had been killed and another wounded. Steve, the leader, had got

away with most of the stolen money, more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, mostly in cash.

It was thought he might try to escape by airplane, and the airports had been warned not to let any one of Janis's description hire a ship. That description fitted as much of his passenger's physical make-up as he had seen.

Why hadn't he taken a good look at the man before the takeoff? But so many passengers had been flown that afternoon that he was paying no attention to them individually as they presented their tickets and climbed into the cockpit—the cockpit from which he was now menaced.

A Bold Chance

It was a bold chance Janis had taken, the pilot reflected, but a fairly possible one under the circumstances.

The first heat of the chase for him had cooled down, and when, after more than a week, he had not appeared at any other airports, vigilance would be relaxed.

The hurrying of sight-seeing passengers into and out of the planes—there were four or five others—and the open concealment afforded by the crowd, had given him his opportunity.

He might be caught but, hiding in Los Angeles, he faced that possibility anyway, and he would have to make the break some time.

He had made the break, and so far had got away with it. He might be bluffing about his ability to fly and land the plane—and he might not be. And Brookley thought of the automatic.

He throttled the engine down to idling speed, greatly reducing the noise of the propeller blast, and shouted over his shoulder:

"Haven't got gas enough to make it!"

He throttled on again immediately, fearful that his passenger might think he was purposely losing altitude in order to make a landing. They were now flying fifteen hundred feet through increasingly bumpy air and thickening fog.

The pilot received this scribbled reply:

> You're a liar. I saw the tank filled up just before you took off with the passenger ahead of me. It's good for a couple of hundred miles. Keep ahead for Calexico, and no monkey business.

Brookley climbed in an effort to get above the thickening vapor in which the plane was flying. Condensed moisture rolled over and under the wings and was blown off in heavy rain drops. The plane bored through large, cumulous gray clouds so full of potential rain that it was like flying through great sponges.

The ground had disappeared from sight, and Joe began to realize that he would have to fly a careful compass course, as high as he could, to avoid crashing into one of the higher mountains of the Coast Range.

Flying Into Danger

He found himself beginning to hope that Janis was not bluffing about his knowledge of flying. If he was not, he would now begin to realize that they were flying into danger to both of them as great as any contained in the chamber of the automatic.

It was about two hours' flying from the field to Calexico. As nearly as he could judge from the course he had been flying, and from his knowledge of the terrain ahead, he was in a sub-valley of the Imperial Valley, between two ranges, which in many places were only a few miles apart.

The light headwind had become a stiffening crosswind from the southwest, blowing fog up the valley in increasingly heavy waves.

He watched his drift indicator and altimeter, and hoped he could get through and above the gray quicksands of the sky before he collided head-on with one of the higher mountains.

Intently occupied with the job im-

mediately in hand, he had for some minutes practically forgotten about his passenger when he was nudged again and received another message:

Can't you get above this fog?

He penciled a reply and handed it back:

If I can't, we're both out of luck.

At six thousand, five hundred feet almost suddenly the air cleared above them. Overhead was an almost perfectly clear blue sky; below was a rolling sea of light-gray clouds and fog. Here and there the top of a mountain reared itself like a mound-shaped island above the vaporous mass. Toward the west the sun was sinking in a golden haze.

A Close Margin

Brookley glanced behind and to the left and saw that they had missed one of the peaks by less than a hundred feet —plenty of leeway in automobile traffic, but a close margin in the sky, with a plane speeding through space at a mile and a half a minute in a drifting air current.

He saw, too, when he looked back, that whatever Janis's fear of the fog might have been, he still kept his weapon pointed toward the front cockpit from just behind the windshield, from which it could be brought into action whenever its owner so decided.

Brookley was himself unarmed, and he reflected that it probably would have done him little good had he been. He could not hope to get a shot at a man who had him covered from behind and had nothing else to do.

Calexico now must be little more than half an hour's flying away, but would this apparently impenetrable sea of fog and clouds present an opening to let them safely down?

The fuel gauge showed him that he had enough gasoline remaining in the tank for less than an hour's flying, after which the law of gravity, which must be obeyed by bank robbers as well as aviators, would stretch forth its hand to pull them to earth.

Brookley couldn't have safely turned back to the field now, even if Janis had been willing. And a glance at his passenger convinced the pilot that the hold-up man had no such notion.

Joe was heading for Calexico and the Mexican border by dead reckoning. The first town he saw, if the fog opened up in time to let him see one, might be either Salton, Niland, Holtville, El Centro, Calexico, or Sesbania.

He believed, from the position of the setting sun and his instrument readings, that he was too far east to pick up San Diego, on the Pacific Coast, or La Presa, or Tia Juana.

The blue of the sky above him was turning to purple haze, and the long shadow of the plane as it scudded over the misty floor of the fog bank was becoming dim. The air was colder, but less bumpy.

Over Calexico

Toward the southwest the fog bank showed signs, in the fading light, of becoming thinner. Brookley figured that the plane must be almost over Calexico, but thought it best to veer toward the dissolving vapor.

If he could get down through and under the fog there would still be enough sunlight underneath for a fairly safe landing on the desert near Calexico. He penciled a note to his passenger:

Less than half an hour's gas left. Going to dive down through thinning fog toward southwest. Our only chance. Believe we are near Calexico.

The grim one nodded in silent agreement.

The plane slithered down through the drifting vapor on half-throttle. Brookley held his breath as he pushed forward gently on the stick and, keenly alert, strained his eyes for the first sight

of the ground—or a mountain peak. He was ready to use rudder and ailerons for all they were worth.

Fifteen hundred feet down he breathed again, for below him was a valley—more than half a mile below—and red sunlight, refracted by the under side of the fog and clouds. He glanced about quickly and saw that he had missed the nearest mountain by a hundred yards, and thanked his luck.

But no sign of a town. The pilot wondered by how much he had miscalculated.

Heading for the Desert

Perhaps he had already crossed the Mexican border and was heading for wild desert country or the watery vastness of the Gulf of California. Aviators lost in Lower California had a slim chance of coming back to tell about it.

Brookley was trying to decide whether to turn and make a landing wherever he could find a sufficiently long and level place, when the plane was suddenly engulfed by a last wave of fog from the Pacific, which swept northeastward in a final attempt to smother and crush.

But almost as suddenly as it had come it cleared away, and Brookley, who had dived sharply to reach the clearer air below, now saw the junction of the Southern Pacific tracks at El Centro.

In a few minutes Calexico would be sighted. He had not overshot the border after all. There was enough gas left to make it with a fairly safe margin.

As if he suspected that the pilot might try to land at El Centro, the passenger, when Brookley banked the plane and pointed down toward the town, shook his head violently and motioned for him to fly ahead.

Brookley nodded—and permitted himself the first smile since he had taken the sky pirate aboard.

He smiled again when he read Janis's final note of instruction, and nodded his assent:

> Give Calexico a wide berth so as not to attract attention, and approach the flats from the southwest.

There remained enough light for an easy landing on an ample stretch of desert reasonably free from mesquite or other growth large enough to injure the plane.

Brookley swept downward in a wide circle, and came in at an angle calculated to stop the plane near the edge of a tangled growth of chaparral and mesquite, but without danger of crashing into it.

The wheels and the tail-skid touched the ground lightly in a perfect three-point landing; the plane rolled with decreasing speed and stopped.

Brookley and his fugitive passenger were just south of the border and in Mexico, the flight successfully concluded according to Janis's order.

A Good Job

When the roar of propeller and motor had abated Janis gave his first verbal order:

"Stay in your cockpit five minutes. Better not get out at all, if you have enough gas left to hop back across the border. Then you'll avoid trouble with the Mexican cops. I'm leaving five hundred on the seat. You did a good job. Adios."

There was controlled elation in the bandit's voice. The pilot saw, however, that he was taking no chances with him, even now, and continued to keep him covered as he sidled toward the brush.

Suddenly there was a sharp command:

"Drop that gun—hands up high!"

A tall figure in the uniform of the border patrol sprang out of the brush. It was followed instantly by several others.

Janis, taken by surprise, fired wildly. The sergeant did not. The robber,

shot through the right arm, dropped his smoking weapon.

Sergeant Dabney put the wounded and cursing fugitive in care of his men and turned to the pilot:

"Thanks, Brookley. Your radio messages were picked up at Rockwell and relayed to us at Calexico by telephone. He never suspected you were sending?"

The pilot smiled. "No. I was using a small portable set I've been experimenting with. It was hidden down in my cockpit, and as I wasn't using headphones, but sending Morse by key, he couldn't see what I was doing."

"Well, you're sitting pretty. There's a reward of five thousand for him, and as you delivered him to us, it's yours."

"My passenger—or rather his banking connection—has a rebate coming," said Joe. "He left five hundred in the seat back there. You'd better take that in charge."

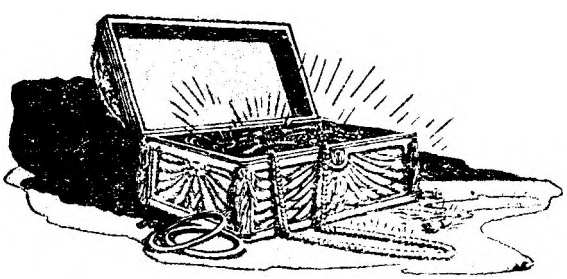
In the meantime Janis had been searched, and in a large money belt was found most of the cash stolen from the bank.

"We'll have to hurry back over the border," said the sergeant. "International law doesn't permit us to cross, and we don't do it except in special cases.

"I don't think the Mexicans will raise any hell over this one, but it'll be best not to stay over too long. Can you fly back?"

"Just about make it," replied Brookley. "I think there's a pint or so of gas in the tank."

The plane was turned around, and in a moment took off in a cloud of dust.



"Lookin' fur a man named Laven. Leastwise, that war his name"

THE LAST REPORT

Darkness Came, Illuminated by Intermittent Lightning, and the Rain Poured In Torrents: It Was Springtime In the Sunken Lands

By Edward Parrish Ware

RANGER NASH stepped ashore on Cypress Donnick, anchored his dugout, shouldered pack and rifle, and struck out eastward toward Racket Run, fifteen miles away.

The rain, which had fallen steadily throughout the day, increased in volume as night came on, promising rough going. But Nash had an appointment with Jack Calhoun, his chief, and the state of the weather did not matter.

"Cal said he'd be on Racket Run, where Little Bayou takes off south, at daylight to-morrow. That means he'll be there," Nash reflected, "and at the time appointed. And," he grinned, "maybe he won't be plumb pleased when I make my report!"

Another dugout glided down the St. Francis, and a second man went ashore on Cypress Donnick. A tall, heavy-set man, wrapped to his eyes in a slicker. He took his bearings, then set off on the trail Nash had left.

Half an hour later he dodged aside into a clump of buckbrush, swung the butt of a rifle to his shoulder and fired

once. At the expiration of five minutes, during which he kept close under cover, he went forward to where Newt Nash sprawled in the mud, rain beating down on his face.

"Dead enough!" the tall man gritted. "I'll send Buck and one of the fellers to plant him in a bog. That'll be the end of him—damn him! And Mr. Inspector Calhoun is due to git a dose outen the same bottle!"

He slipped into the brush and was gone.

Darkness came, illuminated by intermittent flashes of lightning, and the rain poured in a steady torrent. Wind and rain and lightning. Springtime in the Sunken Lands.

Nash stirred, moaned, struggled to rise. The cold rain whipped his face, reviving him somewhat. He managed to sit up.

"Chase—damn him!" he muttered weakly. "And I—thought I'd given—him the slip!"

Nausea attacked him, and he crumpled up on the ground, face burrowing into the mud. After a bit he struggled up again.

At Daybreak

"To-morrow—at daylight—Racket Run!" he mumbled. "Cal will—be there, and I must—be! Got to—make that report!"

That thought injected strength into the body, and Nash got to his feet unsteadily, a hand clasped tightly against his side where a bullet had torn its way into the lung.

"Got—to be—there!" he told himself, and staggered off toward the east.

Newt Nash had not many hours to live, and he knew it. Had medical aid been available he might have stood a chance to beat death off, but nothing of the kind was to be had in that part of the Sunken Lands.

There was not even a native living within miles, so far as he knew. So Nash gamely resolved to make good use of what time remained to him.

Before daylight merged into darkness, during a short period of enforced rest, he took out his notebook, scribbled in it with an unsteady pencil, tore out what he had written and tucked it into a pocket of his vest. It was his report.

Short, not so complete as he had hoped to make it, but sufficient to put Calhoun on his trail. It would have to serve.

"Call will get—this off—my body," he told himself with assurance. "It 'll be the—last report I'll ever—make to him, but—it 'll tell him—what he wants—to know. What he—sent me out to—learn.

"If I can—just make it to the—appointed place, and not die short—of there! Just—strength—enough to—make my—last report! All—I—ask!"

II

DAY was not far off when Nash broke from cover, soaked with blood and drenched with water, feverish, babbling incoherently, at the spot on Racket Run where Little Bayou takes off from the larger stream. The place of appointment in the wilderness.

"Made—it!" he gasped, then pitched down on his face.

Death, after stalking him through the night, had at last come up.

A few miles to the south, covering the ground in long, distance-eating strides, Jack Calhoun, inspector of rangers for the Arkansas Sunken Lands, was making in a direct line for the spot where Ranger Nash lay. Daylight was a mere hint as yet and, true to his invariable habit, he meant to be on time.

"Newt's report, along with what I already know, ought to enable us to put these Racket Run timber thieves behind bars before the week is out," he reflected triumphantly.

"This spring will find the government on the job in this section—and that isn't half of it! B-b-b-b-r-r-r-r!" he shivered. "Damn the weather!"

He neared the place of rendezvous just as daylight was making vague ghosts of the trees. "Hope Newt has found a place dry enough for a fire," he thought. "Coffee won't go bad right now."

A few minutes later he swung out of the brush on the north bank of Racket Run, stared for an instant at something huddled on the ground near by, then slipped into cover again.

Crouching in the brush, a hand on the butt of a gun, he looked with searching eyes out before him. Then, satisfied that no one was near, he approached the huddled figure on the ground.

Immediate Action

Action followed immediately on the heels of recognition. Snatching Nash's body up in his arms, Cal ran for cover, gained it and deposited his burden gently on the ground.

"So they got you, old man!" he exclaimed softly. "You learned too much, and they silenced your tongue with a bullet!"

He took note of the clothing, almost torn in shreds, and the face and hands which had suffered from contact with brush and brier.

"You carried that slug a long ways," was his swift deduction. "Game to the core. Wonder, now, where it happened, and if you didn't leave a clew somewhere—"

A pistol shot broke harshly into his train of thought. It was followed by another, then a leaden hail shredded the foliage of the brush about him.

Cal, flat on the ground, wriggled farther back into the brush, circling toward the place from which he thought the bullets had come. After a bit he heard low voices in conversation. Working closer, he made out fragments of what was being said.

"—ontel I'm shore, Buck Laven! You-all kin go back, if you air so minded, but I ain't goin' ontel I'm shore I got him!"

"He's gone, grantin' we missed!" another voice exclaimed. "Gone off through the timber like a skeered wolf. I, fur one, ain't goin' to poke into th' bresh to make shore!"

"Wasn't we told to git th' carcass of this'n that's dead, an' sink it in a bog? Didn't we foller him clear here where he finally petered out? Think I'm goin' back ontel I obey them orders, an' take chances on whut th' boss will do to me?"

"We kin say we sunk him in th' bog," the other urged. "An' not open our traps about this other feller. I ain't got no stomach fur prowlin' in th' bresh, over yonder, an' maybe stoppin' a pound or two of lead!"

Cal crept closer. Maybe there would be names mentioned—the name of the man who had given them orders. But the game he stalked was wary, as he promptly found.

"Lissen!" the first speaker exclaimed. "I heered somethin'!"

The next instant a tall native crashed through the brush—to be confronted by Cal, gun in hand.

"Put 'em up—quick!" the inspector ordered.

"Like hell!"

After the Man

Two reports mingled like one—but Cal's gun spat lead a fraction the quicker. The native's bullet went wild.

Leaping over the fallen body, Cal dashed after the man called Buck, only to lose him in the brush—but not until he had caught a glimpse of his face.

"I'll know him when we meet again," he said grimly. "And we are pointedly going to meet again. When I get through collecting Newt Nash's debt—well, they'll think long before sinking lead in another ranger."

A search of the clothing of the dead native failed to reveal anything of significance at first, but patience finally dug up something that proved enlightening. It was merely a logger's tally-sheet, recording the measurements of a

number of logs delivered to a man named Tom Chase. The paper bore no other name.

Cal read it, then placed it in a pocket. Returning to where he had left Nash's body, he searched it. But somebody had been before him, as the rifled pockets showed.

"Newt came a considerable distance after he was shot," Cal reasoned. "The condition of his clothing and his face and hands prove that. He struggled in an almost exhausted state to get here and report. I'm certain he wrote that report, trusting that I'd find it when I found his body. That would be obeying orders, and in accordance with his training.

Virgin Territory

"But there isn't a scrap of paper on him. The dead native didn't have it, so the man called Buck must have it. I've got to lay hands on Buck, and do it before he can get back and report to his boss—Tom Chase—or I'm all wrong."

He wrapped Nash's body in a slicker, then lodged it among the boughs of a tree. That would have to serve until he could return, or send somebody in. The native was left lying where he fell.

Calhoun was aware that a logging outfit, owned by a man named Chase, was operating on Bone Lake under a government permit, but that was the extent of his positive knowledge. That Chase had become a subject for investigation at his hands was due more to Cal's natural thoroughness than to any real cause for suspicion.

The country north of Racket Run was virgin ground to the rangers, they having been on patrol there but a very short while, being sent in primarily to check the theft of government timber, but acting also as general law-enforcement officers.

There remained much territory embraced by the new district which was as yet unexplored. Bone Lake, remotely placed, was such territory.

Certainly law-enforcement officers were needed in the Sunken Lands, an immense timbered bowl created by the earthquake of 1811, in the northeast corner of Arkansas.

Removed from what may be termed a civilized center, unsettled, subject to annual floods, the swamp was the stronghold of native hunters and trappers, who bitterly opposed all law save what they themselves laid down.

Slowly, but surely, the rangers, under Captain Hubbard Wheeler, had brought certain portions of the wilderness into a state approximating subjection, but the task had been laborious, extremely dangerous, and was as yet hardly begun.

The almost impregnable fastnesses of the great swamp had appealed to others, too—outsiders. Men on the dodge, escaped convicts, and those who for whatever reason desired to lose themselves, found sanctuary there.

They found congenial souls among the natives, themselves in a constant state of outlawry, and it was a mighty task to bring a wanted man out, once he got inside.

Beset by Danger

On every hand, the way of the rangers was beset by danger. Every clump of brush was a potential ambush, and every inland village a hotbed of opposition and rebellion. But the Sunken Lands were worth reclaiming, and Calhoun liked his job.

Late afternoon found Cal on the west side of the St. Francis, and nearing Bone Lake. Never for an instant had the rain ceased falling, and his only food that day had been a cold snack eaten on the go.

What he needed right then was a deserted shack where he could, unobserved, build a fire, partake of hot food, and dry his clothing. But first he had to locate the man called Buck Laven.

"If I've got him sized up right," Cal thought, "he won't be in much of a

hurry to return to his boss—Chase, presumably—with the sort of news he bears. Probably will think things over and decide on a good lie; one that will clear him nicely.

"Even then he may not attach any importance to any writing he may have found in Newt's pocket. Chances are he can't read. Still, the report would be proof to this boss of his that he actually found the body.

"That report, if it exists, must not fall into other hands than mine, if I can prevent it. How? That's a question!"

III

THE gray of dusk was settling when Cal reached the southern shore of Bone Lake, a long, narrow body of water which feeds through Cane Creek into the St. Francis River.

Across the lake, perhaps an eighth of a mile, were a number of unpainted board and log cabins. In the water in front of the shacks were many rafts of logs, anchored and awaiting the spring rise, when they would be floated out to market.

Smoke arose from the chimneys of the shacks, reminding Cal that it was supper time.

"The man I shot," he told himself, gazing across the lake, "came from this section. The tally sheet settles that. If I had been quieter when approaching the place where Newt lay, I'd have come upon them while they were searching the body. But they heard, and took cover.

"That can't be helped now. Newt came in here, saw too much, and that's why they got him."

Spirals of smoke here and there above the trees informed the ranger that not all the cabins were huddled together on the other side of the water.

There were others, probably those of the natives employed as loggers, scattered around in the immediate vicinity. He set out toward the west end of the lake, having it in mind to drop in on the occupants of one of those isolated cabins.

When Calhoun departed from his headquarters, twenty miles west of the rendezvous on Racket Run, he had discarded his uniform in favor of the conventional jeans of the swamper. There was nothing in his appearance to suggest that he was not a native.

He counted on that to gain entry on an easy basis at one of the cabins, and then get what information he could.

Presently he heard somebody chopping wood, located the place, and went toward it.

In a clearing before a one-room log shanty a native was swinging an ax, and Cal hailed him.

"Howdy, stranger!" he called, approaching the axman. "Fine weather fur ducks an' geese, ain't it?"

The native stuck the blade of his ax in a log, combed his beard with spread fingers, and answered:

"An' frawgs, too, yo' mought say," he grinned. "Cum fur to-day?"

A Cousin of Mine

"Frum Bresh Lake," Cal replied. "An' a hell of a trip, if you-all axes me. This here's Bone Lake, I reckin?"

"It shore is, whut thar is of it," the native grinned. "Lookin' fur Bone Lake?"

"Lookin' fur a sort of cousin of mine," Cal returned. "Las' I heered of him he was workin' somewhar hereabouts."

"Whut air his name?"

"Laven. Buck Laven. Leastwise," Cal added, grinning widely, "that's th' name he ginneraly uses."

"He's a usin' of it yit," the native assured him. "Buck lives at th' head of th' lake, fust cabin you come to atter you passes th' deadnin'. You kaint miss it, an' you won't miss Buck if you hurries. He went by here an hour, or sich matter, ago."

"Reckin I'll git erlong," Cal told him, shouldering his pack. "My

chances fur supper depends on ketchin' Buck at home. See you later, stranger."

Cal hurried off, passing an occasional cabin, but managing to do so unobserved. At length he came to the "deadnin," and directly thereafter halted in the brush to survey a one-room cabin at its edge.

"Buck is at home," he conjectured, eying the smoke which curled from a chimney. "Guess I'd just as well drop in on him now as later."

He kept under cover until almost at the door of the cabin, then went forward quickly and rapped hard on the panel.

"Better Warn 'Em"

A chair moved inside, and the door opened directly. Buck Laven, water soaked and weary, stood in the aperture. Cal, watching his face, saw when recognition came—and acted.

Swinging the muzzle of a gun into Laven's middle, he ordered him inside. "If there's anybody here except you," he served notice, "I'm going to blow you in two—provided they make trouble. Better warn 'em."

"Ain't nobody here but me!" the native quavered, eyes wide with terror. "Whut you-all mean, treatin' me like this? I ain't never done nothin' to you!"

"You're Buck Laven, aren't you?" Cal queried, closing the door and taking possession of the native's gun.

"Yeah. That's who I be. Whut of it?"

"Work for Tom Chase, don't you?"

"I does."

"Logger?"

"Yeah."

"Killer, too, sometimes. That right?"

The native shivered slightly, eyed Cal apprehensively, and shook his head in a negative. "I ain't never kilt nobody—"

"What about the dead man on Racket Run? Didn't you have a hand in his death?" Cal snapped.

"No!" Laven protested. "Gawd is my jedge, I didn't!"

"Just ordered to find him and bury him in a bog, eh?"

Laven nodded. "You-all talks like you knows all erbout it," he said sullenly. "Whut's th' use to axe me?"

"Who shot the ranger?" Cal demanded, ignoring the remark.

"I ain't knowin' that," Laven answered. "I jist knows that Tom Chase told me an' Jim Haynes to find him an' sink him in a bog. That's all I knows.

"I'm tellin' it straight, mister, because I knows you-all must have heered Jim an' me a talkin' thar in th' bresh, atter we shot at you an' missed. Ain't no need to lie, seein' you knows all erbout it."

"Right!" Cal agreed. "Where are the things you took out of the dead ranger's pockets?"

"I still got 'em," Laven admitted, reaching for the inside pocket of his coat. "They's here—"

His hand darted into the pocket, flashed out again gripping the butt of a gun, while a sneer parted his lips in a grin.

The Last Report

"Just what I expected you to do!" Cal snapped, as he stretched the native on the floor with a hard sock to the chin. "You were altogether too meek and ready to confess everything."

With swift but thorough fingers Cal turned out the contents of Laven's pockets, then bound him with a bit of clothes line and rolled him far back under the bed.

"Any chance callers won't see him there," he said. "And I'm pretty certain he won't make any noise with that gag in his mouth."

Drawing a chair up to the table where he had deposited the contents of the pockets, Calhoun sorted the articles belonging to Nash into a separate pile. Then he gave them his attention. A moment, and he had the dead ranger's

written report spread out under his eyes. It read:

CAL:

Tom Chase is floating out curly maple logs, covering them with bark peeled off cotton wood and gum, and mixing them in rafts with honest timber. At Bone Lake. Nearly got caught. Chase discovered me prowling the rafts, and I had to run for it. He followed. I thought I lost him, but didn't. He got me, and I'm going to try to make it through to Racket Run with this report—the last. Good-by. NEWT NASH.

"And he made it!" Cal muttered softly. "Game to the core!"

He got up, face grimmer than was its habit, eyes cold in spite of the tiny flames that flickered in their depths. Those tiny flames were danger signals to all who knew Jack Calhoun.

Back and forth across the puncheons he paced, brow wrinkled in thought.

Would Chase, thinking that the ranger had died without disclosing his knowledge concerning the camouflaged logs, as he had every right to think, rest easy and attempt to carry the theft through?

An Excellent Scheme

It was an excellent scheme, and a new one to Cal. He had unmasked many smooth tricks whereby thieves smuggled stolen logs outside, but this one had never before made its appearance. Simple, too.

"Cotton wood and gum peel easily," he said to himself. "And they are cheap compared to curly maple, or walnut. A few logs mixed in with a raft of gum and cotton wood, carefully covered with the peeled bark, would pass unnoticed except to a particularly prying eye.

"And Chase doesn't intend to tolerate prying eyes. Anyhow, there never has been strict inspection in this part of the swamp, and he doesn't count on it now.

"There's two things I've got to do. One is to prevent the theft of those logs. See that Newt didn't make that report, even while death was on him, in vain. The other is," he ended grimly, "to make it plain that a United States Ranger can't be killed in the Sunken Lands just like he was a wolf or a bear. Our safety here demands it—and I'm in the mood for it."

He thrust Nash's belongings into a pocket. Paused beside the table, listened intently, then sat down in a chair and calmly filled a pipe.

IV

A HAND fumbled at the door-latch, and Jack Calhoun turned casually, flaming match held above the pipe bowl.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and a tall, heavy-set man, wrapped to his eyes in a slicker, surveyed him from the door-step outside.

"Where's Buck?" he asked.

"Gone t'other side th' lake," Cal replied. "Had to see th' boss, Mr. Chase. Come on in outen th' wet."

The newcomer walked in, hands concealed under the folds of the slicker. He kicked the door shut with a foot eying Cal the while.

"Who air you?" he asked, keeping near the door.

"I'm Buck's kinfolks," Cal answered, grinning hospitably. "Move a cheer up to th' fire an' rest yore laigs. It's shorely a wild night, if you-all axes me."

"When did you come?"

The stranger made no move to avail himself of a chair beside the fire.

"I come this mawnin'," Cal informed him. "Found Buck away somewhars, so made myself at home. Reckin, mebbe, you-all done forgot to mention yore name?"

"My name is none of yore damned business!" the stranger snapped. "When did Buck leave fur the other side of the lake?"

Cal gave him a hurt look. "I'm a plumb stranger to you-all," he said

plaintively, "but that don't make it right fur you to cuss at me. Kain't you axe questions frum a willin' answerer without damning him thataway?"

The stranger let the folds of the slicker drop back, showing both hands on his hips. There was a steely glitter in his eyes.

"You heard my question!" he gritted. "Answer it, damn you!"

Cal seemed to shrink visibly before this exhibition of wrath.

"I—I aims to answer—" he stammered.

"Then git about it!"

"He lef' here erbout twenty minutes ago!" he declared. "Honest to Gawd—"

A Smothered Groan

A low, smothered groan from beneath the bed caused Calhoun to break off. A second and louder groan came hollowly.

The noise had instant effect upon the man by the door. His hands snapped up, armed with a pair of guns, while his eyes blazed into Cal's.

"You've lied, damn you, frum the minute I come in that door!" he exclaimed, voice brittle. "Buck air under the bed! Onbuckle yore belt an' drap them guns on the floor, or I aim to plug you. Drap 'em!"

Cal reached slowly for the buckle of his belt, eying the other, meaning to chance a draw. The untimely return to consciousness of Buck, and his betraying groans, had queered the game for him, and further attempt at deception would be only farcial.

"I got him covered, Tom!"

The voice came through the open window at Cal's back, and brought a laugh from the man called Tom. A mocking, jeering laugh.

"You ain't so damned smart after all, Mr. Ranger!" he derided. "Abe Fowler reported the matter to me, and I investigated like you see! Drap them guns!"

Cal promptly obeyed. He would willingly chance a draw against one man, but certain death hovered at the window in the rear. He still had his wits upon which to rely.

"Killing rangers seems to be quite a sport with you, Chase," he remarked, as his gun-belt thudded on the puncheons. "How long do you think you can get away with it?"

"One more time at least!" was the retort. "Come on in, Abe!"

A moment later the man called Abe entered. He it was who had got the drop from the rear. The wood-chopping native of the afternoon. He grinned at Cal.

"Reckin you-all found yore cousin Buck!" he jeered. "An' frum whut I seed through th' winder, right atterward, you shore give him right smart of a love-tap when you found him! Lordy, that was a wallop!"

"I ought to have handed you one while I had the chance," Cal said with a grin. "Next time—"

"There ain't goin' to be no next time!" Chase interrupted. "Git Buck frum onder the bed, Abe. You step back away frum them guns, Ranger!"

V

FROM the moment the native entered the door Cal had been hoping for such an order.

Obeying it, he could move within a few feet of the open window without arousing suspicion, and that he promptly did. Chase expected that. What followed was a complete surprise to him.

Without turning to look, Cal, already aware of the exact location of the window, wheeled and plunged forward, clearing the sill and falling with a thud and a splash in the mud outside. Two guns roared an accompaniment to his exit, but astonishment may have accounted for Chase's poor aim.

At any rate, Cal, unhit, leaped to his feet and dashed away into the timber.

But Chase and the native were on his heels without delay, shouting for other loggers near by to turn out for the hunt. Cal ran, sloshing through mud and water, bumping into trees and stumbling over logs in the darkness, hampered by a sharp pain in his left ankle as well. He had turned it when he struck the ground under the window.

The chase fell away, and presently he came into a small clearing centered by a cabin on stilts. No light glowed from within. The injured ankle was shooting sharp stabs of agony clear to his knee, and he knew that further flight was impossible.

The Vacant Cabin

The hunt had missed the scent, and he decided to enter the house, bind the ankle, rest awhile, then resume his way if possible.

He pushed the door open and hobbled in. The cabin proved to be vacant, but a pile of dry wood littered one corner, as a match revealed.

"Too dangerous," he decided. "No fire to-night. I'll have to do the bandaging in the dark."

Sitting down on the floor, he took off his shirt, and tore it in strips, bandaged the swollen ankle tightly, and lay back in the hope of undisturbed rest until the pain lessened.

But it was not to be. The splashing of heavy feet in the mire of the yard warned him just in time to act. The match he had lighted upon entering the cabin had revealed a short ladder against the wall in a corner, giving access to the usual loft-room above.

Like a flash he was across the floor and scaling upward. He reached the loft just as the front door opened and a man, bearing a lighted lantern, stepped in.

Cal peered down through a crack in the floor.

"Chase!" he exclaimed softly. "By gad! It's Chase—and I haven't got a gun!"

Chase peered into the dark corners of the room, muttered something Cal did not hear, and turned to depart. Suddenly he stopped, attracted by the damp spot which Cal's soaked clothing had left on the floor. His white teeth showed in a grin, and his eyes flashed toward the opening of the loft.

"Jest as well come on down, Mr. Ranger!" he called triumphantly. "You ain't got a gun, and I know it! Come down and take yore medicine—yore p'isen, damn you!"

Cal's answer was a deep groan.

Chase's sharp ears caught it. "Whut you-all groanin' fur?" he demanded. "Hell! One of my slugs must of hit after all! I thought I couldn't miss both times at sich close range! Come on down, damn you!"

Cal moved again, then dragged himself noisily across the floor.

"You ain't going to shoot me, and me wounded—are you?" he asked plaintively, showing a white face in the square opening. "I'm dying anyhow, so it doesn't make much difference.

Important Information

"Only—only this: I've got some mighty important information to trade you—trade you for a chance to live. Want to talk it over?"

Chase laughed easily. "You ain't in no shape to talk trade to me!" he declared. "But what is this information?"

"It's contained in a report written by the ranger you shot last night," Cal replied, his voice coming in gasps. "You didn't kill him then. He managed to live for several hours—"

"I know that!" Chase interrupted. "Where is that report?"

"That's what I want to trade you," Cal told him. "I hid it, thinking I was going to die from that bullet of yours—"

"Where?" came the demand.

"I won't tell, unless you promise not to finish me," Cal objected.

"Then come on down, if you're able, and le's me and you-all have a little talk," Chase invited. "Can you make it?"

"I can try," Cal answered. "Sure you won't shoot—"

"Hell, no! Come on, you damned fool!"

Cal lowered himself slowly and with seeming difficulty through the opening, fumbled for the ladder with palsied feet, found it, turned and supported himself by gripping the edge of the square hole.

"Can you make it?" Chase demanded.

"Yeah—and here's how!"

Cal suddenly swung free of the ladder, gripping the edge of the loft while doing so, then let loose. His body shot downward, full upon the unsuspecting man below—and a heavy boot caught him with a sickening thud just under the chin. There was a snapping noise, and Chase crashed to the floor.

Cal, white and weary, whose face was lined with pain, caught up the lantern and held it close to the logger's face.

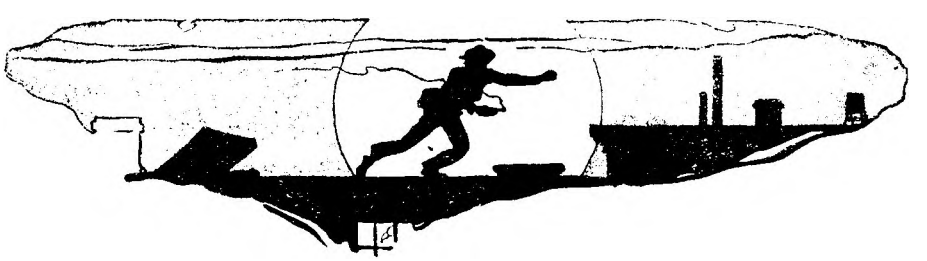
"Dead," he said, after a moment. "Broken neck. Well, Newt," he added, "I guess your debt is paid."

The country north of Racket Run soon became less deadly for rangers. The death of Chase, and the subsequent revelations concerning his method of robbing the government, had a very desirable effect on the inhabitants in general—desirable from the rangers' point of view.

Newt Nash was buried in a grave in the swamps, but his epitaph hangs in a frame on the wall of the assembly room at Oak Donnick.

It is often pointed out as an evidence of the spirit the ranger training instills, and new additions to the force are advised to emulate it.

Newt's epitaph was his last report.



Two Burglars Cut the Cards

TWO burglars, prowling each on his own route through the home of a wealthy Oakland, California, man, each not knowing the other was there, came suddenly face to face in the darkened library. Each had some loot, but not enough. Each was indignant that the other was on his premises, but a fight would make too much noise.

Later one was captured. This was the story he told.

"We didn't know just what to do, but finally decided to leave the swag to the turn of a card. We found a deck and cut—high man to get the boodle. I lost."

The previous police investigation bore out the statement. On the library table was the pack of cards—two faced up.

A SINNER AT SEVENTY

A True Story

He Is Perhaps the Oldest Murderer on Record and It Is a Strange Coincidence That His Victims Also Were Over 80 Years Old

By Alison Murphy

IF this were fiction the reader would probably lay it aside with the scornful comment that it was not only improbable, but impossible.

For the modern individual, being sophisticated, is no longer to be placated with the incredible villain who satisfied the requirements of the old-fashioned detective story.

But even the most skeptical must come to heel in the face of fact. From this unassailable refuge we present to you the astonishing story of Charles Bonier.

The beginning of most stories is an arbitrary matter. We will begin this on a cold November evening in Buffalo, New York, in the year 1903.

The neighborhood is one of small, detached houses, each with its own back yard, largely the homes of thrifty German working people. The ill-paved streets are dimly lighted by gas lamps, while an icy wind coming from Lake Erie blows through the trees bordering the sidewalk.

On this Monday evening, November 23, Charlotte Heinicke, who kept house for her two brothers, went with them to pay a belated visit to their grandparents, Johanna and Franz Frehers, who lived around the corner in Jefferson Street. It had been a week since their last visit, and they were a bit troubled lest their grandparents should accuse them of neglect.

Hastening down the dark street, the young people knocked at the door of the Frehers's house. They waited for the usually prompt footfall of their grandfather, but there was no sound.

While the old couple owned the whole house, they lived in the rooms on the ground floor, and as they never went out at night the delay was unusual.

The young people waited shivering on the doorstep, then knocked again more loudly. After a long interval steps sounded across the floor inside. Slowly the door opened and an old man stood silhouetted in the doorway—an absolute stranger.

The visitors drew back startled. Their grandparents seldom had callers. Over the old man's shoulder Charlotte could see that the chair where her grandmother always sat was empty.

"Why, where are my grandmother and grandfather gone to?" she exclaimed.

The old man leered at the three outside.

"I know, but I won't tell," he answered.

His manner was so insolent that Charlotte lost her temper.

"I will force you to tell by the police," she announced indignantly.

The stranger laughed.

"Call all the police in Buffalo," he said. Waving his hand in a sweeping gesture he added: "It's all mine."

Charlotte stared at him speechless. Her host pursued his advantage.

"If I would know where they were I wouldn't tell," he scoffed. "What do I know about them?" he added, and slammed the door in their faces.

Utterly bewildered, they made their way to the nearest police station. To the lieutenant in charge they told the tale of the strange old man, and the still stranger disappearance of their grandparents.

Charlotte told him that the Frehers were both over eighty years old. Franz was able to hobble about the neighborhood on an occasional errand, but Johanna was practically a cripple, just able to move from one room to the other with the aid of a cane.

Most of the time she sat in a rocking

As one policeman withdrew his pick, something came with it

chair, knitted bedroom slippers on her feet and a woolen shawl wrapped about her aged shoulders. Charlotte had seen that this chair was empty.

In answer to questions put by the skeptical policeman, Charlotte told him that her grandparents had always been sober, thrifty people.

Franz, in his younger days, had been a cabinet maker, saving enough money to buy the Jefferson Street house in which they lived and another smaller house around the corner in Cherry Street, which they rented.

The Lost Grandparents

On this rental they managed to satisfy their simple wants. Never in their long lives had they been guilty of a flighty action. Now they had vanished without a word.

With the police of a big city the impossible is a daily occurrence, but the loss of two sober grandparents was a little beyond even their sense of the credible. Though promising to investigate, the officers at No. 8 Police Precinct apparently did not take the matter very seriously.

However, in the morning they made inquiry about the old man so oddly in possession of the Frehers's house. Interested neighbors supplied the information that his name was Charles Bonier, and that he had moved in the previous Saturday with a young woman named Louise Lindholm and her two children from their near-by lodging in Monroe Street.

Inquiry there elicited the further fact that he had left owing a month's rent. He had told Mrs. Johnson, his landlady, that he was expecting large sums of money in the near future. As to this she was more than skeptical. He had never had any money, and his wife had died in the county poorhouse the year before.

It is hard to imagine why the police did not interview Charles Bonier at this time. But if they let the affair drop so easily, not so the neighbors. Tongues buzzed and the air hummed with surmise and suspicion. The aged couple were respected by every one, but no one knew anything of Bonier.

A delegation headed by Mrs. Mose, next door neighbor of the Frehers, called upon William Yox, a private detective living a few doors away, and besought him to lend his professional skill in solving the mystery.

Yox listened with interest to Mrs. Mose's recital, and agreed to help.

The first intimation of anything unusual, said Mrs. Mose, was when Bonier drove up Saturday morning with his household effects. On seeing the strangers she had put her head out of the window and asked what had become of the Frehers. Bonier told her that they had gone to a home.

Mrs. Mose was much surprised at this, as the Frehers had always expressed the greatest horror of having to end their days in a home.

She inquired of Bonier: "What home have they gone to?"

He replied shortly: "I won't tell," and had turned his back on her.

No One Saw Them

"And," interposed another neighbor, "no one saw them go. How could such helpless old people go off without any one knowing?"

Yox went at once to Bonier, who told him that the old people had gone to a farm and that he was now the owner of the property. Yox asked Bonier if he had seen them leave.

"No," Bonier answered. "I got here early Friday and they were gone."

Yox reported this conversation to the police, but nothing happened. But by Thursday, Thanksgiving Day, gossip had become so clamorous that Captain Regan, of No. 8 Police Precinct, took a hand.

His first effort was to seek enlightenment from the uncommunicative Bonier. In this he was no more successful than the others. Bonier assured him that the Frehers had gone to

a home. Regan tried to pin him down to admit something.

"How do you know where they went?" he asked.

Bonier answered that he had seen them early Friday morning driving off in a hack.

It was obvious to the dullest that Bonier had something to conceal. But how to arrive at the truth? A new witness appeared to add to the maze of contradictions.

Early Friday Morning

Ralph Newton, a milkman, said that he had seen Bonier early Friday morning pacing up and down the Frehers's yard between the house and a shed in the rear. As Newton was about to leave the milk, Bonier called to him not to leave it, as the Frehers had gone away to a farm.

Newton expressed his surprise, saying that he could not imagine such aged people taking up such a hard life as farming.

Bonier said yes, and that he was moving in shortly. He agreed to take milk beginning Tuesday.

On Tuesday morning when Newton came with the milk Bonier went out to him and asked:

"Where did you tell me the Frehers had gone to? To a farm?"

Newton, much surprised, answered: "You told me where they had gone; that they had gone to a farm."

Bonier insisted that he had told him nothing of the kind.

The police were completely at sea. Captain Regan sent for Charlotte Heinicke. She said that she now knew Bonier to be a man about whom her grandfather had spoken.

He had told her that a man had been trying to buy his house, but that the man had no money. When Frehers refused his offers the man resorted to trickery, trying to induce him to sign papers without reading them. Frehers refused to sign anything.

She was sure that her grandfather had not sold the place. He was rich and kept a cigar box filled with gold and bills hidden somewhere in the house.

Phillip Bundische, a nephew of the Frehers, confirmed Charlotte's statement. He said for the past year Bonier had been devising schemes to get the house, and had persisted until he became a nuisance. Only a few weeks ago Phillip had been helping his uncle in the yard when Bonier came up to them.

Frehers, whose patience was exhausted, announced loudly: "Here comes that old swindler. He wants to buy my property, but he hasn't any money to buy it. I wish he would stay away from me."

Phillip added: "Bonier gave a kind of grin, and I eyed him and went on with my work."

The story of Wilhelmina, Phillip's sister, only added one more contradiction to Bonier's already lengthening list of lies. The day before Thanksgiving she had gone to see whether she could not extract some definite information from him.

Where Were They?

She had asked: "Where are my aunt and uncle?"

Bonier answered shortly: "They are gone."

"Where to?" Wilhelmina asked.

"I don't know," Bonier replied. "They told the milkman to a farm. They went in a carriage."

This sea of contradictions branded Bonier as suspect in the eyes of every one. But no one knew anything definite.

Captain Regan consulted with Police Magistrate Murphy as to the best way to handle the situation. The judge considered possibilities, and summoned Bonier to appear in court on December 2 in a John Doe proceeding. He also gave Regan a warrant to search the Jefferson Street house.

Hopefully Regan sent men to con-

duct a search, but nothing was found except two deeds drawn to Charles Bonier and signed with the curious, if not ominous signature, Franz Frehers, *widower.*

On December 2, Charles Bonier duly appeared in court in answer to the summons. But the mystery, complicated by the two deeds, was darker than ever. The judge postponed the hearing until the next day, hoping that something further might materialize in the meantime.

A Strange Affair

At this point the strange affair would probably have been added to the list of unsolved police mysteries, had Providence not intervened to arrange a conference between Judge Murphy and Captain Regan within earshot of the suspected Bonier.

It was to this surprising act on the part of two officers of justice that we owe the solution of the enigma. In Bonier's hearing the judge told Regan that the only lead left untried was to find the notary who had drawn the deeds from Frehers to Bonier.

Now, on the eventful Saturday when Bonier moved into the Frehers's house, while Louise was setting the place to rights, he had taken himself to the office of Vincent Burzyski, notary.

Showing Burzyski two old deeds conveying the Jefferson Street property to Franz Frehers, he asked him to draw new deeds from the descriptions set forth in the old ones, but conveying the property to Charles Bonier. To these new deeds Bonier affixed the signature Franz Frehers, widower. These were the deeds which Captain Regan found in Bonier's house.

On December 3, the day set for the postponed hearing, Bonier left the house very early in the morning, telling Louise that he had to be in good time to get a seat in the court room. Instead of going to court, however, he made all possible speed to the office of Vincent Burzyski.

Burzyski was dressing in a rear room when Bonier entered the office, but through the glass door which separated the two rooms he saw him come in.

The notary, who had read in the newspapers of the mysterious disappearance of the aged couple, at once recognized his visitor as the man who had signed the name of Franz Frehers to two deeds the preceding week.

In great excitement, he telephoned the police that the missing Franz Frehers was in his office. Then, hastening into his clothes, he hurried out to greet the man he supposed to be Frehers.

"Why, hello, old man," he exclaimed. "The whole city is looking for you."

Between sobs, Bonier confessed his real identity. He explained brokenly that he had paid cash for the property, but the Frehers had gone away without signing the deeds. Fearful of losing both his cash and his title to the property, he had resorted to the subterfuge of signing the deeds himself.

He Got Into Trouble

The notary shook his head.

"Well, old fellow," he said, "you've got into trouble."

Bonier answered: "Yes, yes, I know. I'll have to go to a State's prison."

He then offered Burzyski two hundred and fifty dollars to tell the police he had never seen him. This the notary refused, but told Bonier to find Frehers and get him to sanction the signature on the deeds. Bonier said the Frehers were in a home somewhere, but he did not know where.

During this conversation a police sergeant entered the outer office and waited behind the door listening. When Bonier left the office he followed him. Bonier went at once to the railroad station and took a train for Erie, Pennsylvania.

In the meantime the court had convened and impatiently awaited Bonier's coming. As the minutes passed impatience changed to anxiety. At length a telephone call came apprising the judge of Bonier's flight. He at once ordered another search of the Jefferson Street premises, and two policemen were sent to the house.

Their first act was to question Louise Lindholm as to what she knew of Bonier and his suspicious behavior. But she knew little of either.

75 Years Old

Meeting Bonier the summer before, she had entered into an agreement with him to act as his housekeeper and take in washing in return for his life insurance on his death. He also promised to leave her a house he was expecting to buy in the near future. They had lived in Monroe Street until moving into the present house two weeks ago.

Bonier had told her that he was seventy-five years old. Coming from Germany, he had worked most of his life in the Erie shops in Buffalo. He was now too old for active work, but did odd jobs in the vicinity.

The officers asked her if she had noticed anything odd in Bonier's behavior. She answered that until two weeks ago Bonier had lived a most methodical existence, coming and going at regular hours, and always appearing on time for meals. The only time he had departed from his routine was on Thursday, two days before they moved.

On this day he left the house about one o'clock, as usual. It was his habit to return about four, but the afternoon passed into evening before he stumbled in, very tired, and collapsed in a chair before the fire.

As he stretched his legs to the heat Louise noticed that his shoes were caked with queer light-colored mud, different from any in the neighborhood. She asked Bonier what he had been doing.

He answered: "Digging celery at the Jefferson Street place."

She thought nothing more of this at the time, but offered him his dinner, which she had been keeping hot for him. He refused it, but gulped some tea which she brought to him and went at once to bed.

The next morning, Friday, he wakened the protesting Louise at five o'clock. She was angry, because their usual rising hour was seven. He insisted that she get him breakfast, as he had to go to Jefferson Street to say good-by to the Frehers, who were going away.

About noon he returned, triumphantly flourishing an envelope. As Louise came to the door he shouted:

"I have bought both the Jefferson Street and the Cherry Street houses, and we are moving in to-morrow."

Louise obediently started packing. By noon the next day they were settled in the new house in time for lunch.

The Small Black Bag

The officers asked Louise if she had found anything belonging to the Frehers in the house. She said that when cleaning the house Saturday afternoon she had found, under a bed upstairs, a small black bag. She dragged it out, finding it very heavy, and took it downstairs.

On opening it she discovered, to her amazement, that it was almost filled with bills and gold pieces. She emptied these on the table and found at the bottom of the bag some old-fashioned jewelry and a bank book.

In great excitement she called Bonier. Seeing the heap on the table he carefully pulled down the window shades. Thus protected from outside priers, he carefully counted the money —over five hundred dollars. Bonier was elated over the discovery, and gave Louise a twenty dollar gold piece, saying:

"Here is a big cent for you for being so honest."

Louise admitted that it had not been incompatible with her honesty to take the money, though she said that she told Bonier that he must find the Frehers and return their valuables. He promised vaguely to keep the find until the Frehers should send for it. "Though," he added, "God knows where they have gone."

On Sunday nothing of any moment occurred except that Bonier asked Louise to "fire" the trousers which he had worn digging celery Thursday. This the thrifty Louise had been unwilling to do. She hung them on a nail in the kitchen, deciding to fix them some time. Later in the day he asked her:

"Firing" the Pants

"Did you fire my old pants?"

Louise assured him that they could be fixed, and he did not press the matter.

"Have you still got those pants?" asked one of the policemen.

Louise said they were on a nail in the kitchen, and the man went to find them.

The other officer continued to question her, but she could remember nothing else out of the ordinary.

"Well, what did Bonier do on Monday?" he asked.

Louise recollected that on Monday it had rained all day. In spite of the weather, Bonier decided to tear down an old shed in the yard. He persuaded a relative of hers to assist him. In the cold downpour they demolished the building, piling the boards in another shed in the rear of the premises.

At this point in her narrative the policeman returned from the kitchen carrying a disreputable pair of trousers, stiff with mud and covered with dark stains which might have been blood.

Encouraged by this discovery, the police searched the house foot by foot from roof to cellar, but nothing more of an incriminating nature rewarded their zeal.

By this time the early November dusk obscured everything outside the house. The men borrowed a lantern and, by its flickering light, directed their search to the grounds. For hours they dug and prodded and tapped, but nothing seemed amiss.

It was midnight before they reached the shed behind the house. The floor was entirely covered by the lumber that Bonier had taken from the other shed. It took some time for them to move this, but at length the dirt floor was visible.

It consisted of earth, of a peculiar yellow color, nowhere else evident on the premises, the same color that Louise had described as being on Bonier's boots the night he had come from digging celery.

Holding the lantern aloft they examined the ground. It gave no evidence of having been disturbed. One of the men seized a pick and started to sound it. One corner after another was tried without result—the ground was hard.

In Front of the Shed

He had almost covered the whole surface, without results, when, directly in front of the shed door, he hit on a spot where his pick sank in readily.

He began to dig carefully. After a few blows his pick struck a soft obstacle. As he withdrew it something came with it. Bringing the lantern closer the man scraped away the dirt. Projecting from the hollow was a human arm.

Very cautiously they shoveled away the earth. Presently the body of a man came to view, lying face downward—an aged man, shoeless and wearing an old sweater.

They lifted him from his shallow resting place and beneath him found the body of poor Johanna wrapped in the shawl she always wore, her knitted bedroom slippers still on her feet. The heads of both the old people had been brutally crushed in.

A further search in the shed revealed a bloodstained hammer, to which still clung a few strands of gray hair.

Bonier was arrested in Erie the next day. He talked freely to Sergeant Hunafelt, who brought him back to Buffalo, but told no kind of plausible story. When bluntly accused of killing the old couple he merely said:

"I'm too old."

He complained bitterly to the police, saying that the Frehers had never told him they had any relations. He seemed to feel that they had not played fair with him by not warning him that relatives would be interested in their fate.

His final comment as the train pulled into the Buffalo station is a complete summation of the philosophy of the old scoundrel, avaricious even in so desperate a situation. Turning to his guard with a sigh he said:

"I wish they were alive and I had my money back, is what I wish."

Words can add nothing to this picture which he gives of himself.

Still more remarkable is the fact that a man of his age could have had the cool daring to plot and carry out such a cold-blooded crime.

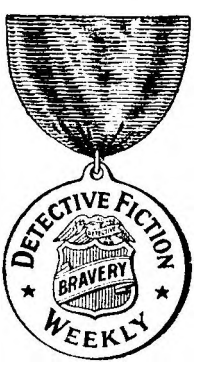
But his age did not exonerate him in the judgment of the Erie County jury, which convicted him on January 11, 1904, of first degree murder. He was executed at the astounding age of seventy-eight.

We Pin a Medal On—

Patrolman Guyot W. Craig, of Detroit

ON June 6 Officer Craig, of the Central Station, Detroit, fought a gun duel with six bandits who were escaping with the *Detroit News* pay roll. Though an easy target for their roaring guns, he held his ground and dropped one man before the bandits escaped.

The holdup men entered the *News* office carrying a large package. On the second floor, in the editorial and business offices, they broke the package open and grabbed the sawed-off shotguns in it.



While three bandits held the employees at bay the others invaded the cashier's cage, dumped the pay envelopes in a satchel and fled down the stairs.

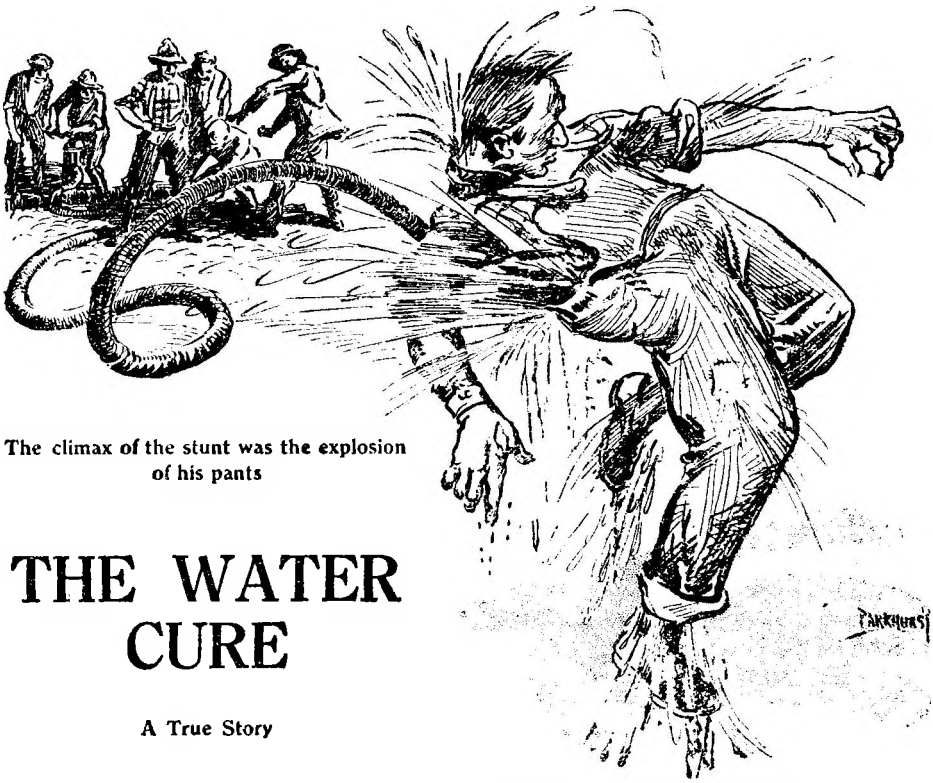
At the door they were met by two men, one a traffic officer. The bandits fired point-blank, and the two dropped, wounded. It was then that Craig, standing across the street, ran forward.

He opened fire with his pistol as the bandits dashed for a car standing at the curb. One bullet from the patrolman's gun struck the first bandit and sent him reeling to the road. The others bundled their wounded companion into the car and turned their shotguns on Craig.

The officer stood unprotected on the sidewalk, firing coolly while the bandits blasted at him, hitting him in the foot. When his gun was empty he retreated into an opening in a brick wall and reloaded.

By that time the bandits were speeding away.

This is not Patrolman Craig's first decoration for bravery. Four years ago he received the Detroit Police Department's Distinguished Service Medal for capturing four bandits single-handed.



The climax of the stunt was the explosion of his pants

THE WATER CURE

A True Story

No Man Was Brave Enough to Budge Big Alex After His Saturday Night Spree Until the Tinhorn Gambler Appeared

By Bob (Robert H.) Davis

THIS story has nothing whatever to do with Mr. Volstead or his nation-wide movement. It does, however, illustrate the influence that water, properly directed, may have upon an intoxicated citizen. Drastic? Yes, but there are times when heroic measures only bring about necessary reforms. This is a top side case.

Virginia City, Nevada, is located on the side of Mount Davidson in a spur of the Sierra Nevada foothills. The water supply of that historic city came in early days from Marlette Lake, some twenty miles distant and nearly seven thousand feet above its consumers.

In consequence the pressure was terrific, so great, in fact, that in the event of fire the procedure was to couple a hose on any one of the several hundred fire hydrants located about the city and literally blow the blaze out.

Within fifty feet of the nozzle the water became mist and immediately blended into a blizzard of such force and velocity that no blaze could withstand its blast. It required ten men to hold a fire hose under full pressure.

Before a conflagration could make any impression at all it was practically blasted off the map. Frequently the building disappeared also, but insurance companies had few losses to pay.

Along the principal streets were small hydrants for wetting down the pavements and laying the dust.

Among the best known characters of the Comstock was one mastodon Cornishman who weighed close to three hundred pounds on the hoof. Six days out of the week Big Alex, as he was known among the populace, slaved valiantly in the Savage mine and deported himself as an honest miner.

It was his custom on Saturday night to make a tour of the numerous barrooms and take on a cargo of mixed drinks, arriving about nightfall at the Alhambra saloon, where he lifted in a few chasers of redeye.

Taking a Nap

After that he walked out on the pavement and stretched himself across the main entrance for a nap. When stewed Alex weighed not less than four hundred, and could not be successfully moved.

He was the Rock of Gibraltar under such circumstances, a fixture which it was easier to step over than to remove.

Some of the Alhambra customers thought it good form to walk up and down Alex's entire person while entering and departing from the place he obstructed. Nevertheless, he became considerable of a nuisance and rewards were offered for his elimination.

One Saturday night about ten o'clock a rat faced tinhorn gambler announced to Jim Orndorff, the proprietor of the Alhambra, that he had an idea for starting Big Alex away from there.

"It's worth twenty dollars to you the minute he gets under way," said Mr. Orndorff. "Commence."

"I'll have to get a little help at the go off; just a few willing hands to turn him over on his face," said the gambler, "and after that I'll do the rest."

A detachment of miners volunteered and Alex was rolled over on his map.

"That's about right," remarked the master of ceremonies, viewing the obstruction with a critical eye. "Now I'll just pull up his coat and arrange a few details. Fine!

"If you gentlemen will stand back a moment, I'll show you something new. I'll need plenty of room. This is going to be fast. Gangway, there! Gangway!"

After opening a space he stepped over to one of the street hydrants along the curb, unwound the hose and promptly shoved the nozzle down between Alex's back and the waistband of his overalls.

"Will one of you gents please open up that water supply. Full blast. All you got."

A stream of three thousand pounds of water pressure to the square inch tore down the right leg of the slumbering elephantine Alexander, instantly converting the fat limb into a rigid projection from the foot of which hurtled a six pound hobnailed shoe that went smashing into the show window of a drug store across the street.

Escaping from Perdition

Bang! The other brogan came off with a loud screaming note and knocked a spectator into the street.

One of Alex's socks smacked the roof of the awning, hung a second and dropped back to the sidewalk; the other floated out into the ozone and sailed around like a drunken bat, falling at last exhausted to earth.

Alex, roused from his dreams and shrieking as one escaping from perdition, left the sidewalk, went straight into the air, lit again and started to run.

When he had exhausted the length of the hose he found himself yanked backward on his spine with no hope of liberty. Both legs of his saturated, bulging overalls began to spout red flannel underclothes, which came away from their owner in two crimson streams fluttering far and wide.

Alex clawed at the viper stinging him from behind and tried again to escape. The climax of that maneuver was the explosion of his pants, which appeared to vanish in a sudden blue eruption.

Terrified, he performed a contortion that twisted the strong and still intact waistband like a tourniquet and brought the hissing muzzle upward so that it promptly blew his blue top shirt off.

His red undergarment followed like a fountain of bloodshed.

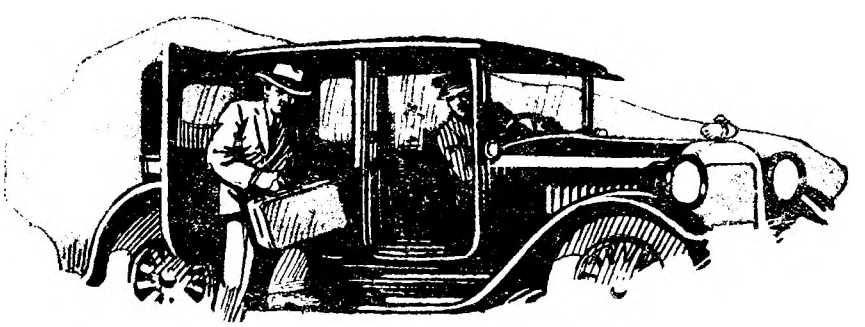
By this time Alex was galloping hand in hand with insanity. Suddenly the waistband gave way.

Freed at last, and with a wild sense of liberty, Alex, now reduced to a massive pink blurb, tore through the mob of highly entertained eyewitnesses to his shame and ran over the grade into Gold Hill, where he took refuge in a livery stable.

Old residents still recall the singular marathon, its one entry wearing the fragments of a suit of blue overalls and moving down C Street to Gold Hill at the rate of thirty miles an hour under cover of the benignant dark.

For the next three years big Alex shied like a horse whenever he saw a water hydrant, and a hose gave him the *delirium tremens*.

The sad part of the tale is that Big Alex was scared of hard liquor and afraid of water. At the time of his death he was the only double barreled prohibitionist in all the world.



A NEW manhunter joins the ranks of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY in next week's number.

When Peter Pepper is not busy scaring up news for his daily paper, he is on the trail of some crooked scheme.

No job is hopeless to this nervous newshound. What's more interesting is that he can solve a hard case without making a lot of work of it.

You'll find out that the young and shrewed Mr. Pepper was really born for his job, and no matter how tough it is, he has a good time at it.

For the next several weeks he is going to entertain you with some of his lively pranks. For that's what they're like—and they're amusing, too.

But every time he fools you. You think he's out for a good joke, but he comes back dragging his man by the collar.

Meet this genial young sleuth in his first appearance next week in "Peter Pepper Plots."

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 in handwriting at one dollar a specimen; 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 free to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY *readers. A handwriting specimen must be sent on the coupon in this department and accompanied by two-cent stamp for reply.*

I am particularly impressed with the stories of former Criminals and would like

R. J. M., New York City—Your handwriting indicates that you are a broad-minded, practical fellow, and believe in asserting yourself. Your imagination is rather weak. You are not a bit curious when it comes to new pursuits or hobbies. A nature like yours is apt to be quite satisfied with what you are doing.

On the other hand, you have a certain activity of mind and a quickness of perception which is a splendid asset in any man. I observe you are of a suspicious nature, and believe in taking most stories with a "grain of salt." I like your liberal-mindedness. Your type gets more enjoyment out of life than those of a churlish disposition.

You have been blessed with a good memory, and have the faculty of remembering incidents and faces. There is also a strong trait of pessimism running through your nature. Your worst troubles are those which never happen. It would pay you better to live in future on the "sunny side" of the road of life, and get rid of those "blues" which seem to haunt you too often. You are very affectionate, and have a strong preference for the fair sex. You like their company, and they don't dislike yours.

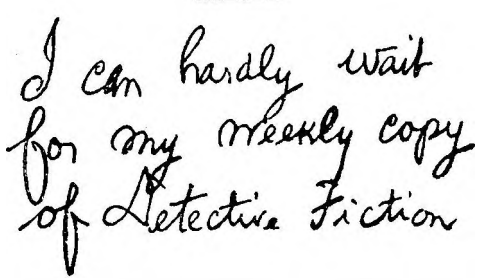
I think the fact stories in Detective Fict Magazine are very in

G. McM., Birmingham, Ala.—Your penmanship signifies that you lack af-

fection, and have got very little of that heart magnetism which attracts one human being to the other. You are also timid, and never seem to be sure of yourself nor your ability. In this connection you need more backbone and confidence. The world will just take you at your own valuation. Don't forget that. Of course, I believe your sensitive nature coupled with a certain physical weakness is responsible for this shyness and lack of aggressiveness.

Your imagination is not so good as it might be. You are self-contained, and very discreet at times. You never believe in betraying a confidence. This seems to be one of your strongest traits. Your word is as good as your bond.

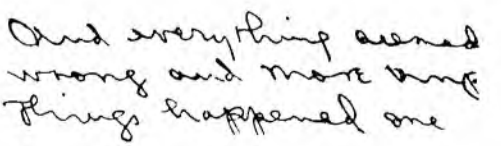
Then again, you are a spender. No one can call you stingy, or a tight-wad. I wouldn't say your spending has always been so wise as it might have been. A little more thought in this direction might bring you more peace of mind in the years to come. Why some folks should be in such a hurry to make themselves beggars has always been a mystery to me. Furthermore, you have a nature which loves to dominate others if you can get away with it. This is not so good in a girl. Live and let live is the best and easiest way to get through life. Every one has a right to his own opinions, so remember that in future.



A. L. T., Austin, Texas—Your calligraphy reveals that you have lots of self-esteem, and try to impress your fellows with your self-importance. You have been blessed with a lively imagination. The art of stretching is not unknown to you. Imaginations like yours are not at all scarce in America. You are, on the other hand, a very conscientious sort of fellow, and are careful and honest in whatever you undertake. You possess fine business acumen, and have a good head on your shoulders.

You are of the type that believes in "making hay while the sun shines." In other words, you are vivacious in mind and body. Then again, I observe you are a peace-loving citizen, and one who avoids quarrels as much as possible. You are selfishly-inclined, and somewhat conceited. This is nothing short of a detriment to your success in life. None of us likes meanness in another, and as far as egotism and pride are concerned, no one cares to hear a fellow blow "his own horn."

Your temper is also worth the watching. Exercise a little patience with those around you. They are not infallible any more than you are. Don't "get off the handle" so quickly. Nothing is improved by anger unless it be the arch of a cat's back. Otherwise you are all right.

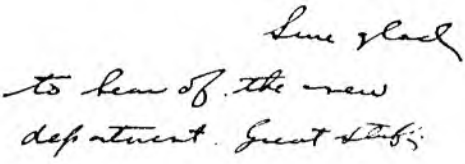


T. R., Hollywood, Calif.—Your handwriting shows me that you are a cultured and well educated girl. You are inclined to be spiritually-minded, and have no strong bodily appetites to contend with at all. There is a certain refinement about you which makes you distinctive, and beloved by others. Of course, like many another woman, you love to talk, and don't object to a little gossip now and then. You are also inquisitive and are inclined to be a little too much interested in other people's business. In this connection, my advice to you is, boil your own potatoes, and leave the other fellow alone with

his. Every cat cleans its own fur, and licks its own kittens. Some of us humans would do well to take a lesson from the cat.

You are in possession of a good memory, and that same trait ought to stand you in good stead if you are a business woman. Furthermore, you have all the earmarks of a successful executive. You are blessed with acute perceptions, and give special attention to details. You have a logical and deductive mind, and can see things through to a finish.

You are by no means a stingy girl.



R. M. S., Seattle, Wash.—Your penmanship indicates that you have a very analytical and concentrative mind. You seem to be quick and active to a degree. You are fond of the girls, and your happy, care-free, open nature appeals to those fair ones very much. In other words, you are a great ladies' man, and prefer their company to men any day.

Then again, I notice you are depressed at times. You get into your head that the "world is against you." Remember, no man is trouble-proof, and that you are no exception.

I also observe that you are stubborn, and determined when it comes to your opinions of men and things. From what I can see you are far too opinionative and "set" in your ideas. It's all right to have opinions, but don't be a Mr. Know-it-all. The gas jet which makes the most noise doesn't always give the most light. Your temper is not of the best. It is nasty while it lasts. If you would go in for some mental adjusting, there would be no doubt about your future success. In the meantime there is. Why not start at once and be master of your circumstances? It will pay you.

For an analysis of your handwriting, fill out the coupon below, *in pencil*. Mail it, with a two-cent stamp inclosed for return postage, and John Fraser will send you his diagnosis of your character and abilities.

If you have some definite likes and dislikes about DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, the editors will appreciate it if you use the three lines to express your opinions.

To John Fraser, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway, N. Y. City

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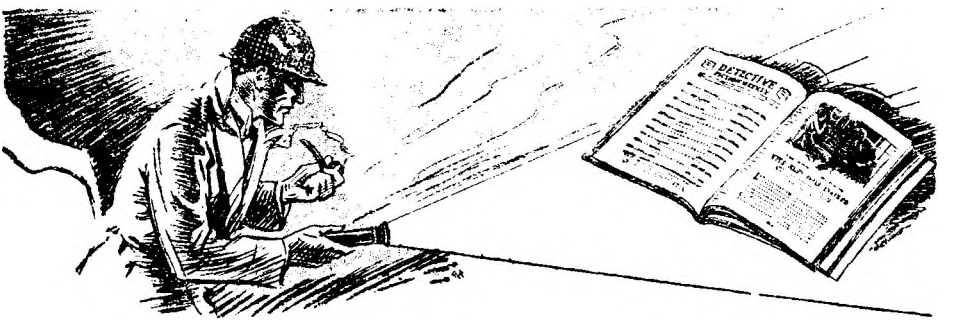
Signature.....

Address.....



FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

RECENTLY we used a short fact story called "Don't Touch That Watermelon!" It told about a California melon grower who paid a colored boy ten cents a day to load watermelons on wagons, and refused to let the boy eat a melon. In consideration of the boy's age, his wages, his color, and the refusal of even a slice of melon, a judge fined the big watermelon man two hundred and fifty dollars for cruelty to the youngster.

And we were still telling ourselves the judge was exactly right when along came this letter:

DEAR SIR:

As a Californian of the vintage of 1876, and still in the ring, please permit me to file a protest. No *real* Californian could by any possibility have been guilty of such an infernal bit of parsimony! If his skin were scratched, I am sure you would find some retired Mid-West farmer, or mayhap a penny-squeezing New Englander—I am a Yankee myself!—but a real Californian—never, never!

Sincerely yours,
G. F. W.
Washington, D. C.

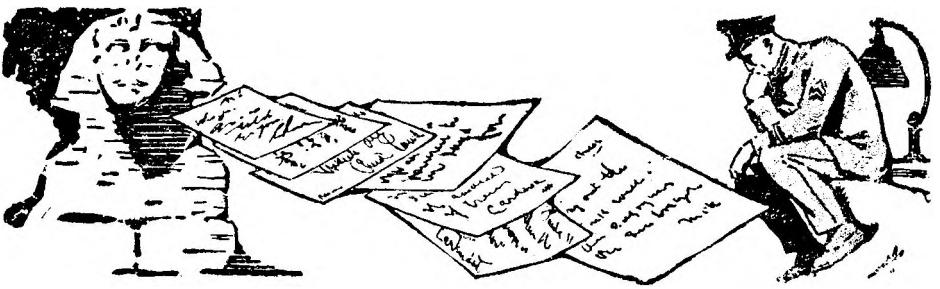
It's hard to please a Californian. That true story about the watermelon manufacturer was sent to us by a man who lives in San Francisco, and this man has a reputation for truthfulness that beats anything ever seen in real estate.

At one time we lived in California, and we'd like to go back, but we doubt there are any real Californians. They all seemed to be half-Californians, depending on which half of the State they lived in. We'll explain.

We went to San Francisco telling people we were on the way to Los Angeles, and they coldly told us Los Angeles was a movie location near Mexico that made a lot of noise for its size. Then we went to Los Angeles with some words of praise for San Francisco and this time people said frozenly that while San Francisco had been in California, and there probably were still some traces of it, nothing definite had been heard from the deserted village in quite some time.

This goes to show there are San Francisco-Californiacs and Los Angeles-Californiacs, and if you please one you offend the other.

What can you do?



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

A New Solvers' List—Also a New Method for Determining the Key Length of a Multiple Alphabet Cipher

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*"Solving Cipher Secrets" will not appear again until the issue of August 4, when it will appear in this space again.*

IT frequently happens that a problem in a multiple alphabet system, such as the Porta cipher with which we have been experimenting, will not provide the necessary repeated groups for determination of the period, or key length by the well known Kasiski method.

Even in such instances, however, it will often be possible to find the period mathematically, and without any need of guessing at the contents of the message, by recourse to another simple process which we shall now describe.

The method in question is best applied to short cryptograms, or to short sections of longer cryptograms, and depends on the fact that oftentimes a given letter will be enciphered at each occurrence in the same cipher alphabet, the key length being determined by factoring the intervals formed by that letter.

Last week's Porta Cipher No. 193 will be used in explaining the method. In this particular example, to be sure, the groups CSV—16 and 64 and FV—49 and 53—with intervals of 48 and 4, respectively, are sufficient to indicate a key of four letters by the Kasiski method. But it will also serve our present purpose.

```
     5          10         15         20
KGHGW TYVWF QQVGE CSVGD
    25         30         35         40
VZBOR NBBFJ RCEJV TSYBG
    45         50         55         60
MLUUQ GNCFV ATFVX UOKUY
    65
BLBCS V
```

Perhaps the best procedure for this method is to prepare a table showing all the letters and their places in the cryptogram, similar to that herewith. Then, taking the least frequent letters first, try for the period by factoring their intervals. Here, for example, J, L, and W, each used twice, and at intervals of 4, 20, and 4, respectively, seem to point to a four-letter key:

A	51	N	26-47
B	23-27-28-30-61-63	O	24-57
C	16-32-48-64	P	
D	20	Q	11-12-45
E	15-33	R	25-31
F	10-20-40-53	S	17-37-65
G	2-4-14-19-40-46	T	6-36-52
H	3	U	43-44-56-59
I		V	8-13-18-21-35-50-54-66
J	30-34	W	5-9
K	1-58	X	55
L	42-62	Y	7-38-60
M	41	Z	22

Glancing over the table, we now find two other letters, C and S, which seem to support the four-letter key supposition. For example, S, occurring as the seventeenth, thirty-seventh and sixty-fifth letters, provides the intervals 20, 48, and 28, with the predominating factor, 4, as before. And the intervals of C further bear out the hypothesis.

Once the period is known, solution may proceed by any desired method. The determination of a single letter in any Porta alphabet, of course, automatically fixes the whole alphabet.

Trying the most used symbols in the present four alphabets for E, T, A, O, and so on, would soon lead to the solution here. Or the solver could look for THE, which occurs twice in the message. This cryptogram used the key word CRAG, the message being: "You will find a horse at the old fortress. Ride down the coast and take a ship to sea." How did you make out with it?

Now for No. 191, Mrs. Fitzpatrick's "limerick crypt." The groups PXT —saw, TXP—was, and X—a, afforded a ready clew. With this lead other groups follow in rapid succession. An interesting crypt, though easy. Here is the translation:

Lindbergh saw a very queer sight
In Mexico, 'twas a bullfight.
"Amazing!" folks cried.
"Please keep the bull tied."
But our hero enjoyed it all right.

No. 192, the transposition problem by L. Bekasi, conveyed the message: "This system is a simple one requiring no tables to be memorized, no kind of apparatus besides paper and pencil, and is fairly difficult of solution." The message was first transcribed by fives (a). Alternate letters of these groups were then interchanged (b) the cipher being written as at (c).

(a) THISS ISASI
YSTEM MPLEO
(b) TSIES MSLSO
YHTSM IPAEI
(c) TSIES MSLSO...YHTSM IPAEI...

This week's ciphers start out with an unusually interesting crypt by John R. Edwards. Note that every letter of the alphabet is used, and take a look at that "f. t."

Now turn to No. 195, about which its author writes: "I wonder how many fans can decipher this, *and determine the key!*" It is only fair to add that the cipher is of the fixed substitution class, each number standing for one letter and no other. Easy to solve *if* you catch on. But what has Mr. Hood used as key?

No. 196 is an interesting variation of the Porta system. By using the numerical alphabet, results practically identical with those of the Porta cipher can be had without the special table. Thus, to encipher the message (a), "Come to me," using the key (b), PAL, first replace letters of both key and message with the proper numbers. This illustrates the method:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	
(a)	C	O	M	E	T	O	M	E					
	3	2	13	5	7	2	13	5					
(b)	P	A	L	P	A	L	P	A					
	3	1	12	3	1	12	3	1					
			25			14	16						
			13			13	13						
(c)	6	3	12	8	8	1	3	6					
(d)	S	C	Y	U	H	A	P	S					

Then add the numbers thus brought together, subtracting 13 when the sum exceeds 13, and you have the series (c). Substituting for (c) you have the cipher (d), which can be grouped by fives, if desired, for transmission. Note that each substitute (d) is taken from the opposite line of the key from that of the letter it represents.

For example, C—top line—is represented by S—bottom line; O—bottom line—by C—top line; and so on. Problem No. 196 was prepared in the manner just described, but using another key word. There are plenty of clews, so we are going to expect plenty of answers. Try to solve it!

CIPHER No. 194, by John R. Edwards, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Abcdcbef ghijbcklfm frxp ibonp jh mkaafefon tfig, f. t., ribot Ubckgp npf aktsernkqf efuefgfonrukbo ha Rstsgn vrg grembohy, vknp Pfjefvg xreofckro. Akegn ifron xbowstrc pruukofgg vpkef crnnfe dfun rvrh kokzsknbsg ikgabensof.

CIPHER No. 195, by J. Lloyd Hood, Bastrop, Texas.

35-24-53-33-55-35-42-34-24-60-44-15-13-30-25-20-51-33-43-15-31-33-51-53-34-03-43-11-16-11-34-13-30-23-11-35-03-32-10-52-11-43-53-03-22-15-00-44-15-23-35-20-24-36-01-02-42-32-51-22-11-55-24-10-53-51-23-12-15-36-23-34-03-13-00-51-43-00-61-36-60.

CIPHER No. 196.

MZSBH QTVKW OVLLV WINHX
TQZLN WVSCP GMLHS UMKHZ
XKBSK WOFWL VWQNH WMZSU
HASJX VVGHP

A battle of no mean proportions is being waged these days among the fans for supremacy in our solvers' lists. Line-up for Ciphers Nos. 152 to 163, inclusive, is shown on the list herewith.

Alfred N. Pray, fourth on the last list, has now forged to first place with nine scalps to his credit. Lieutenant Commander E. H. Barber and J. Lloyd Hood, each with seven solutions, occupy second and third places. Other solvers are to be commended for their efforts, and congratulated for their success.

Alfred N. Pray, Los Angeles, California.—152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 161, 162.

Lieutenant Commander E. H. Barber, San Diego, California.—152, 153, 155, 156, 158, 161, 162.

J. Lloyd Hood, Bastrop, Texas.—152, 154, 155, 156, 158, 161, 163.

H. L. Bellam, Reno, Nevada.—155, 156, 158, 160, 161, 163.

M. Walker, Akron, Ohio.—152, 153, 155, 156, 158, 161.

John Q. Boyer, Baltimore, Maryland.—155, 156, 158, 161.

Arthur Bellamy, Boston, Massachusetts.—156, 158.

Richard Miller, Indianapolis, Indiana.—161, 163.

L. Bekasi, New York, N. Y.—158.

H. Milton Benson, Boston, Massachusetts, 152.

Keep your answers coming, fans. Another solvers' list will be published in a few weeks. Watch for it!

HE had his alibi. Whatever happened, if the whole frame-up collapsed and revealed the job stark to the police, he had his alibi, and he could crawl out from under. No, sir, they'd never send him to jail!—the others, maybe, but that was their hard luck.

He quaked, though, when the time drew nigh, when he knew his confederate was on his way to stage the holdup—a holdup of which he was to be the victim—a holdup which he had helped plan. But why did *he* worry? What did *he* have to fear? He had an alibi and he knew it was airtight. But he was afraid—fear clutched his heart!

Read "Not Guilty," John L. Tiernan's gripping story of a coward in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

"BEST hick detective in the world!"

Behind an untidy desk Ellis Parker sits, head of the Detective Bureau of Burlington County, New Jersey. He is a stout man with a round, bald head, and a kindly smile beneath his mustache. A fatherly man, puffing slowly at a pipe.

There are no frowning deputies in his office, only a brown-haired young lady, his stenographer. He might be a small-town merchant. There are no signs of a policeman's office—except a pistol and a sawed-off shotgun, used as evidence in cases long past, serving on his desk now as paper weights. A kindly, gentle man.

But the underworld fears and respects this "hick" detective. Gangdom pays him its highest tribute by steering clear of Burlington County. Burlington County, one of Jersey's richest sections, offers "good pickings." But suggest that to a professional badman—he crosses his fingers and excuses himself.

Crooks don't care to have Chief Parker on their trail.

Parker started to be a fiddler and won renown as the "Boy Fiddler of South Jersey." But he gave that up for the more fascinating career of man-hunter. Keen-eyed, keen mind, he has ferreted out the criminals when the best city detective minds have failed miserably.

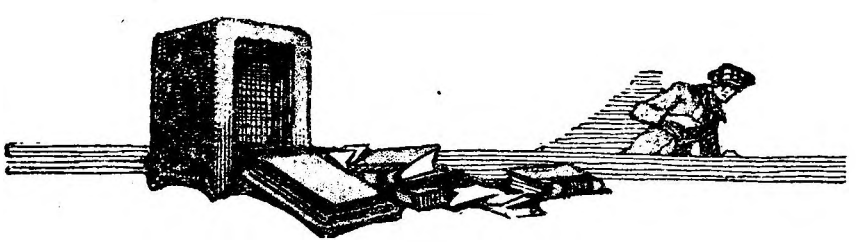
Scotland Yard knows about him. Canada has heard of his prowess. And the metropolitan police of this country from New York to San Francisco pay tribute to his skill.

Some of Chief Parker's discoveries have been so extraordinary as to sound more like fiction than fact, but the inside stories which Mr. Somerville has written for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY are all authentic. The tales are full of thrills. Chief Parker has lived a life of climaxes.

Who was the man that robbed Schuyler Ranier of twenty-seven thousand dollars? The housekeeper, a clergyman, and two substantial citizens pointed accusing fingers at Will Hamilton. But Parker had another theory—a theory he based on a peach tree. It is the story told in "The Peach Orchard Clew."

Succeeding stories will cover the most sensational exploits of Chief Parker's thirty-three years as head of the Burlington detectives. The series will include "The Clew of the Storm," "The Baby Detective," "The Skeleton in the Woods," "The Maze That Cleared a Mystery," "Dead Man's Riddle," "Baffling Judge Lynch," "The Fiends of Lollipop Inn," "The Brunen Case," and "Poison Ivy."

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY
JULY 14



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Inside back cover

HAVE A CAMEL

It's the favorite.

WHEN smoking is recognized as a pleasure, Camel has the call.