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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 1936

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LONG NOVELETTE
Short Stories

160 PAGES

The SINISTER COMPANY
by Walter Ripplinger

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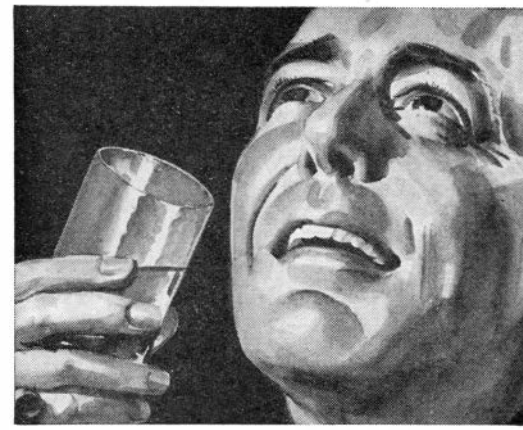

SOMETHING new is going on—something that will interest you if you are subject to colds and sore throat.

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

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CONTENTS FEBRUARY, 1936 VOL. CLI No. 4

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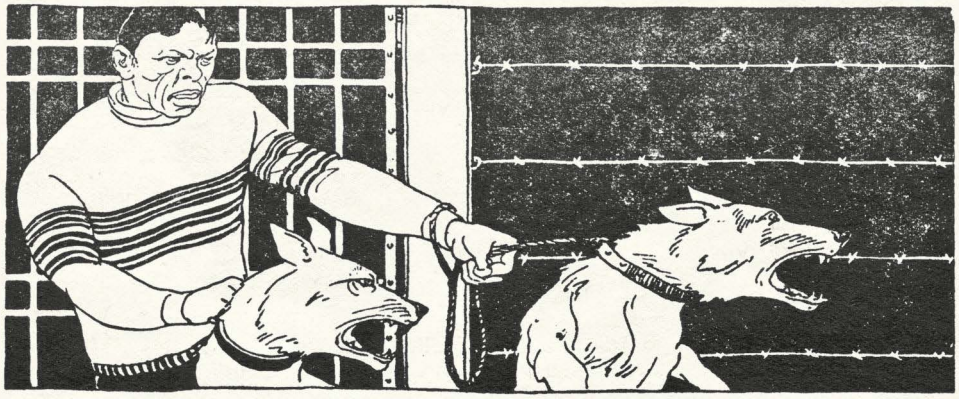

THE SINISTER COMPANY

BY WALTER RIPPERGER
Author of "Murder Will," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE FACTORY IN THE WOODS.

JOHN BATTLE'S low black roadster shot along the Jersey roads at a pace far in excess of the legal limit. He wasn't a reckless driver nor was he at the moment in any particular hurry to arrive at his destination. It was simply that he drove his car in the same way he did everything else, with a fierce, relentless intensity, unmindful of the possible consequences either to himself or to any one else.

John Battle might have been thirty or he might have been fifty. His well-knit, tall frame, the ease of his movements, his upright, alert carriage, suggested a young man; but then again there was that in his face which made him look much older. His dark hair showed a touch of gray at the temples. His fine, almost æsthetic face was deeply lined and had an underlying hardness. His eyes were purposeful, but along with that purposefulness there was bitterness and disillusionment.

Just now his habitual expression of controlled savagery was more marked than usual. Things were not going as per schedule at the factory of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. of which he was vice president and general manager. The corporation had its offices in New York down at Nassau Street, and it was a routine matter for John Battle to visit the factory in Jersey once a week. But to-day he was going on a special mission, urgently summoned over the telephone by the superintendent.

John Battle glanced at the speed-

DEFENDING THE CONVICT'S DEFENDER.

ometer. He was doing seventy-six. Boonton was just ahead, and another ten miles or so beyond it lay the plant of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. He slackened his speed a little until he had passed through the town, then once more the speedometer went up, After a few miles he came to a dirt road which he took after a hair-raising turn. It wasn't a good road, but his car was heavy and the occasional bumps which threatened the life of his springs left him unperturbed.

Presently a patch of wood came into view. The people in the neighborhood were wont to refer to it as Dusty Woods, because the foliage was never quite as green as it ought to have been. The trees looked dry, unfriendly, as though nature had forgotten to give them the urge to live and grow. All in all, no more suitable site or a more fitting background could have been found for the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp.

John Battle turned left. The road that led him through the woods was narrow, just wide enough for his car or the small truck that the factory used. He kept on until he came to a clearing. The clearing was completely inclosed by a barbed-wire fence. The gate was of steel, high and spiked. The sign did not give the name of the company, just a forbidding: KEEP OUT. He brought his huge roadster to a halt and blew his horn.

From a little shack inside the clearing to the left of the gate a surly, red-faced individual emerged. In his right hand he carried a huge club. At his heels two German police dogs yelped fiercely. He peered through the gate at John Battle, then unlocked it, at the same time quieting the dogs with two well-directed kicks.

John Battle drove through with a scarcely perceptible nod to the gatekeeper. He drove past a small shed of corrugated iron painted a dirty red that bore across its side in letters a foot high the legend: EXPLOSIVES! DANGER! The factory was a hundred yards beyond that, a long one-story building of gray, dismal concrete. He stopped the car, leaped out and with quick, energetic strides mounted the few steps that led to the office. Inside, he went past the sallow young man at the railing without a word on into the superintendent's office.

Kernochen, the superintendent, a burly individual with a heavy face and red untidy hair, lifted himself out of his rickety chair with an effort. He said. "Hello, Mr. Battle," without any welcome in his tone.

John Battle looked at him, saw the slightly bleary look in Kernochen's pale eyes, went closer to him and got a whiff of the man's ginny breath.

"You've been drinking again," John Battle said, his voice hard.

"You've never seen me drunk, have you?" Kernochen snarled. "You'd be drinking, too, if you had my job."

John Battle's lips curled contemptuously, but he did not dispute the superintendent's statement; instead he asked:

"What's the trouble?"

"It's Shieber. He's been loafing on the job. We haven't progressed a step since you were here the last time. He's been doing it on purpose. He wants us to let him go—to let him out of here. He says he wants a vacation—some stall about his mother dying."

John Battle said nothing. He only looked steadily at Kernochen, a look which the superintendent interpreted as a reflection on his own competence.

"What do you expect me to do with him? I can't make him work if he doesn't want to," Kernochen demanded resentfully. "I damn near knocked his block off the day before yesterday, but it didn't do any good. What's more, I can't tell whether he's really soldiering or not. What he's doing is so complicated that I can't understand it. Nobody but you can. He's always got an excuse. How do I know whether or not it's on the level? If I were you, I'd let him go and get some one else. You can't make a man of that caliber work if he doesn't want to."

"Can't I?" John Battle said softly, coldly. "As for letting him go, if your brains weren't soaked in gin you'd realize that we can't let him go. Let's go through the plant."

Kernochen flushed but said nothing. He went and held the door while John Battle went through.

The factory of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. was laid out in a peculiar way. It was divided into sections and, while there were communicating doors between the various sections, these doors were invariably kept locked. Each group of workmen entered its own section directly from the outside. In this way the workmen of any one department never saw, never became acquainted with what the workmen of another department were doing. This procedure naturally excited the curiosity of the men. Speculation was rife. Some had it that the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. was engaged in the manufacture of a new linotype machine; others that it was a new type of steam turbine, and again there were some that maintained it was nothing more novel than a power lawn mower. But whatever it was, one thing was certain, no one tried to discover the secret; to do so would undoubtedly result in a most unpleasant encounter with Kernochen, the burly Irish superintendent, who on more than one occasion had demonstrated what he could do with his gnarled fists.

With Kernochen now leading the way, unlocking the doors between the different sections, John Battle went swiftly through the plant. He didn't stop in Section A, where two draftsmen were bending over drawing tables littered with blue prints and complicated graphs, nor did he pause in Section B, the laboratory,

where an experiment with some grayish powder was being conducted. He kept right on, stopping only occasionally for seconds in the subsequent rooms which were practically all alike, fitted with lathes, boring machines, millers, shapers and similar tools; each crew busy in the manufacture of a single part to be ultimately delivered to Section M, where three men would assemble the various parts and in due course complete the device that was being manufactured.

The three men in Section M, of whom the recalcitrant Shieber was the head, alone knew what was being manufactured, and those three men for varying reasons had little, if any, opportunity to divulge the carefully guarded secret of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. They were never permitted to leave the grounds. They lived within the barbed-wire inclosure in a small cottage fifty yards distant from the plant. They were never allowed to correspond with any one outside except through Kernochen who censored their outgoing mail as well as any incoming mail.

When John Battle and Kernochen went in, Lon Shieber looked up sullenly from a machine with which he was tinkering. John Battle stared at him silently, then shifted his glance to Shieber's two assistants. One of them stood with his back to a lathe at which he was working. A large casting was fixed between the head and tailstock of the lathe revolving slowly while a thick shaving was being cut from its outer edge. He was a small man with a weak chin and watery eyes. A cigarette hung limply from the corner of his thin mouth. John Battle watched him for a minute, then went over and slapped the cigarette out of the man's mouth. The man drew back and growled something unintelligible.

"It isn't that I mind your smoking," John Battle said. His tone was low but penetrating with cold, dispassionate fury. "That casting in your lathe cost six hundred dollars, and what is more important, it took a month to have made. Keep your eye on the lathe and see that nothing happens to that casting."

The man's lips moved. He seemed on the point of uttering a protest, but changed his mind and turned back to his work.

Oddly enough, Shieber and his two assistants, although they were all markedly different in build, in physical characteristics, did seem somehow to have come from the same mold. They had something in common, a furtive, cowed manner, a shuffling walk, a shiftiness of eye, a way of looking up from underneath.

John Battle went over to the piece of machinery at which Shieber had been puttering at their entrance. It was an odd-looking contrivance, an extremely complicated piece of machinery, a shining steel tube some two feet in diameter mounted on a platform at an angle of forty-five degrees. From its mouth protruded more than two dozen thinner tubes. It bristled with innumerable cogs, levers and wheels. John Battle bent over it, examined it carefully, moved some of the levers, changed the elevation of the steel barrel as well as its direction. Then he straightened up and fixed Lon Shieber with his frosty eyes.

"You're no further along than you were the last time," he said harshly.

Shieber avoided his glance. He was a small man with dark, hopeless eyes. He ran his long, thin fingers through his sparse hair, then wiped his mouth and said, "That ain't my

fault. The parts ain't accurate. The rifling is different on some of the barrels. The firing device don't synchronize. What do you expect me to do?" His voice was piping and whiny.

John Battle turned to Kernochen. "What about it?" he demanded.

Kernochen took out a plug of tobacco and bit off a generous portion. He spat into a pile of steel turnings. "Nothing's ever his fault," he said. "I had some of them barrels measured myself. They're all true, exact to the thousandth of an inch."

Lon Shieber shifted uneasily on his feet. "It's the rifling," he muttered. "It ain't accurate."

Somewhere a bell clanged loudly.

John Battle looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. The man from whose mouth he had knocked the cigarette stopped the lathe. His companion shut off the power. It was quitting time. They stood for a moment watching John Battle and Kernochen with nervous sidelong glances.

"You can go," the former said. "You, too, Kernochen. I want to have a talk with Shieber."

Alone with the general manager of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. Shieber stood looking uneasily down at the floor. There followed a silence which lasted until the little mechanic could endure it no longer. He suddenly lifted his head and unexpectedly looked John Battle squarely in the eyes.

"I can't stand it any more," he said desperately. "I gotta get away. I gotta get away. This place is driving me nuts."

"What is the trouble?"

His first quick outburst over, Shieber was once more looking down at the floor, digging into it with his toe.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess it's what you would call the atmosphere; it gets on my nerves—everything being sort of secret, never being able to get off the place, never seeing any one practically excepting them two jailbirds that's working with me."

"The company of jailbirds I shouldn't think would disturb you, Shieber," John Battle interrupted tonelessly.

The other winced. With an effort he looked up once more. "I don't ask you to let me off for good," he said. "Just give me a little vacation. I got a mother what's sick in Akron, Ohio. I want to go and see her; I'll be right back, back in a week."

"You have no mother, Shieber, in Akron or anywhere else as far as I know," John Battle declared coldly.

"Why can't you let me go for a little while? I won't run out on you for keeps. You know you can always *make* me come back."

John Battle shook his head. "I know we can make you come back, but the risk is too great. You might talk. My associates would never consent to it even if I would, which I won't. There are millions involved here and we can't take any chances. You're being well paid, Shieber, getting ten times what you could earn anywhere else."

The other's deadly impersonal manner convinced Lon Shieber of the hopelessness of his position, and it drove him into a frenzy.

"What do I care about money?" he shrilled out hysterically. "Money money, that's all you and your gang think about. Why can't you get somebody else in my place? All I want is my freedom. I want to be free, free to starve if I have to. Money, huh. This place is worse than being in jail."

"You ought to know, Shieber," John Battle said absently.

"You know when your time's up when you're in stir," Shieber interrupted, "but here—— Say, how long are you planning to keep me here—is this going to go on forever?"

"That depends on you, Shieber," John Battle explained in his lifeless monotone. "I drew the plans, but I can't make it work without you. You're the finest mechanic I know. That's why I picked you. You see, you had established a reputation with your work on safes." A faint, sardonic smile came to John Battle's lips, then his face hardened. He advanced a step toward the smaller man, and his words now came with the cold impact of a trip hammer. "You're going to stay here until this job is finished whether it takes a month or ten years!"

Lon Shieber fell back. His lips quivered. His hands trembled.

"No, I'm not!" he whispered hoarsely. "I'm not! I'm gonna give myself up. I'd rather be back up the river than here. Sing Sing isn't so bad."

John Battle looked at him steadily. There was understanding in John Battle's eyes, understanding but no sympathy. His own past was such that while he could understand others, for himself he no longer had faith nor hope and least of all sympathy for the difficulties of a fellow creature.

"You've done a stretch at Atlanta," John Battle said quietly, "and you've escaped from Sing Sing. As prisons go, you don't think they're so bad. You think you can do the rest of your stretch 'standing on your head' at Sing Sing, but what about Alcatraz? You've heard of Alcatraz, Shieber?"

The little man's mouth fell open. His face turned the color of putty.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I mean that if you give yourself up, or try to make a get-away from here that that's where you're going. That's where they take the tough prisoners, Shieber, and you're tough. My associates will see to that; they are influential. If you don't think so, just remember how you managed to escape from Sing Sing."

Lon Shieber looked about him wildly. It was as though he were at that very minute trying to find an escape for himself. He seemed to grow smaller, a pathetic, broken thing. After a long time he looked back at John Battle.

"I didn't mean what I said, Mr. Battle. You wouldn't do that to me —no Alcatraz. I'll have this thing" —his eyes shifted to the machine on the floor—"going in no time—honest I will. You'll see."

John Battle nodded. "You may go now, Shieber."

He watched the little man shuffle out of the side door, then stared off into space, lost in thought. He passed a hand over his tired eyes. Yes, he could understand Shieber, but then the poor fool had no one but himself to blame for his predicament. If his life was ruined it was his own fault. He had no cause for bitterness the way that he, John Battle, had. Fate had destroyed him.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO HATED HIS COUNTRY.

ON his way downtown the next morning John Battle stopped off at the offices of the Yoshimo Trading Co., a pretentious suite in the Equitable Building, as befitted one of the largest Japanese export and import houses in the world. It had the reputation of having more influence

with the Nipponese government than any other firm.

John Battle was admitted into the presence of Baron Ioto Yoshimo immediately upon his arrival, which was, whether he realized it or not, a distinct honor. Baron Yoshimo seldom saw any one, and when he did he made it a practice to keep his visitor waiting an impressive length of time. But John Battle had something that Baron Yoshimo wanted, and whenever the former called, the wily Oriental took good care to treat him with marked courtesy.

He rose from behind his desk, bowed ceremoniously, and remained standing while his visitor took the chair to which he had waved him with a slender hand, that held a cigarette fastened in a long black holder. He resumed his own seat, sat back placidly, and with his slanted eyes half closed waited for the other to speak.

John Battle frowned. This trick of Yoshimo's, making the other man speak first, always irritated Battle, made him feel at a distinct disadvantage. On his previous visit he had wondered what would happen if he himself remained silent, and had resolved some day to try it. However, this was not the day for the experiment. John Battle had too many things on his mind to waste any time. He said:

"We'll be ready in approximately two weeks."

"Yes," Baron Yoshimo said. It was amazing how much he managed to convey by the manner in which he uttered that one word. It sounded as though he believed John Battle absolutely, and then again as though he had his doubts. Also, as though he had been waiting breathlessly for such news, yet that the matter was only of casual interest.

John Battle stirred restlessly.

"In accordance with our agreement," he went on tersely, "you are to have your experts ready at that time to witness a demonstration. If they are satisfied, I will turn over the—my invention—to you, along with a complete set of plans and specifications, in exchange for a first payment of five million dollars." He stopped and waited.

"Yes," said Baron Yoshimo again, with that same noncommittal inflection.

John Battle leaned forward in his chair. "What I've come to find out is," he said, "when will your experts and the money be available? We want no delay. We've guarded the secret carefully up to now, and will continue to guard it, but we are anxious to be rid of the responsibility the minute our part of the agreement has been fulfilled."

Baron Ioto Yoshimo puffed silently at his cigarette. His round bland face remained inscrutable. At last he said in his faultless English, marred only by a mere trace of an accent:

"My men and the money will be ready whenever you are. I assume that you have found a suitable location for the demonstration to take place in secret?"

"We will take care of that."

"And that if we accept your invention, you will be prepared to carry out the rest of our agreement immediately thereafter, so that we may pay you the balance?"

"I will be ready to take the first steamer for Yokohama after we have received the initial payment. I will stay there until the erection of your factory has been completed and the manufacturing is satisfactorily under way."

"What happens to the men here, those who are now making the demonstrator? What assurance has

my government that after we have paid, these men will not disclose the secret to the ordnance department of your own government, or sell us out to some other foreign power?"

"There are only three of them," John Battle declared grimly, "and they'll sail with me. You can put them to work in your factory, keep them there as long as you want, or," he added savagely, "you can drown them—if you want to."

"I have your definite assurance on that?"

"Absolutely."

"That is very good. You see, I trust you, not only because I have to, as matters of this kind cannot be put down on paper, but also because I am a good judge of men."

"Then everything is settled?"

John Battle started to rise, but the other waved him back to his seat.

"There is something else," Baron Yoshimo said, his guttural tone now soft. "I said I trusted you, but that does not apply to any one—to every one in your company."

John Battle's face darkened. "I don't understand you. I've already explained on a previous occasion the steps I've taken at our factory to prevent any leaks——"

"I am not referring to the men at your factory. One of your directors, perhaps, has views that differ from yours?"

The lines in John Battle's face deepened. He flushed angrily. Then he uttered a dry, mirthless laugh.

"My directors couldn't build this machine if they tried. There isn't one of them that has the faintest technical knowledge. They could study the blue prints for a month and yet not be able to explain the mechanism to any one."

He stopped and glared at the man across the desk from him. Baron Yoshimo remained silent while he inserted a fresh cigarette into his holder. After a while he said:

"You do not control the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp., Mr. Battle."

John Battle leaned farther over the desk, fixing the Japanese with his cold, fierce eyes.

"What I'm trying to convey to you," Baron Yoshimo continued imperturbably, "is that without your knowledge one or more of your directors has secretly been negotiating with another country for the sale of your machine at a price higher than that which you and I agreed upon."

"I don't believe it," the other declared bluntly.

"I am creditably informed," the baron declared suavely. "And while I am quite satisfied that I can rely on *your* word, you can readily see it might go beyond your power to carry out your company's agreement if the other directors overruled you."

John Battle's hands closed more tightly about the arms of his chair. He glowered for a time, speechless, at the man opposite, then abruptly he rose to his feet and began to pace the floor until eventually he came to a halt in front of a window. For a time he stared out into the street far below, conscious that his pulses were throbbing madly, aware of a queer pounding at the back of his head. Was Yoshimo telling him the truth? Was he, John Battle, to be frustrated at the last moment? Was the only thing for which he had lived during these last few years to be snatched from him, just when his goal was in sight, and by some one in his own company, some one who already stood to profit to the extent of millions by his, John Battle's brains and work? He spun about, strode back to where Yoshimo sat.

"Whether or not what you say is true," he said through compressed lips, "your country is going to get my invention—no one else—you have my word on that."

Baron Ioto Yoshimo's half-closed eyes widened, but he did not look at John Battle when next he spoke.

"Am I right, Mr. Battle, when I say that you have no love left in your heart for your own country?"

The other's face grew black. "I came here to discuss our business affairs, not my personal feelings."

"Excuse the impertinence," Yoshimo begged smoothly. "It is not idle curiosity. Your directors see an opportunity to make more money with your invention by selling it to another power than Japan, yet you do not care about this, so I judge you are not in this for money. I am really paying you a compliment. In this instance money would be the lowest of motives. Any other motive—hatred, for instance, a desire for revenge—would be a far nobler one."

John Battle, his whole body taut, struck the top of Yoshimo's desk with the flat of his hand.

"I said I didn't come here to discuss my personal feelings."

"Excuse it," Baron Yoshimo said softly. "I bring it up only to be reassured. I am making a shrewd guess, a guess, Mr. Battle, that you hate your country, hate it with the same passion that some people love theirs."

"What is that to you?" It was no more than a snarl. John Battle's face was distorted as though with excruciating pain.

"You want your invention to go to Japan," the baron went on unmoved, "because for some reason—one that I have never been able to understand—your countrymen look upon mine as their natural enemies."

Baron Ioto Yoshimo stood up. He fixed the man that stood across from him with his shiny black eyes. "So you want this invention, this marvelous product of your genius, to come to us in Japan because you think it will hurt your country more to know that you gave it to us rather than to your own country or even to Germany—or to Russia. Isn't that true?"

"What difference does it make to you as long as you get it?"

"I ask only to be reassured," Yoshimo said, again looking away. "If you tell me that I have surmised your motive correctly, then I will *know* that we will get this invention, no matter what any one else in your company does. I have great confidence in you. What is more, if it comes to a division of policy in your company, you may need me. I have great resources, as you know. I will stand by you, ready to help, in return for a simple answer." Once more Baron Yoshimo faced John Battle. "You hate your country, don't you?" he hissed softly.

John Battle stared beyond him, stared into the past and recollected the bitterest day of his life. After a long time he heard himself speak in a voice that seemed to be coming from a great distance.

"All right—have it your own way."

CHAPTER III.

THE WARDROBE.

JOHN BATTLE walked the few blocks from the Yoshimo Trading Co.'s offices to his own in a shorter space of time than he had ever done the distance before. He was in a towering rage. Some one in his own organization was betraying him, was carrying on secret negotiations behind his back. Cas-

ual pedestrians eyed him curiously as he elbowed his way along, his lips tight, his eyes dark and stormy. Occasionally he muttered something, rehearsing what he was going to say to Krausmeyer, to Garrett, to Kern and to Measley the minute he got to the office. He'd get to the bottom of this thing. He'd have an immediate show-down. True, he didn't control the company; the others had put up the money. He, Battle, hadn't any money. But it was his invention, and they needed him. He'd show them where they got off, if any one or all of them thought they could thwart him in carrying out what had come to be more than his life's work, a passionate obsession.

Gustaf Krausmeyer was a tall, thickset man with a large, heavy jowled face. He wore his hair closely cropped and went about with an ever jovial expression, his blue eyes twinkling, his thick lips always smiling. This constant air of geniality was, however, by no means a true indication of Mr. Krausmeyer's character. He put it on every morning in the same way that he donned his clothing, and had Mr. Krausmeyer found it expedient to cut his grandmother's throat—a matter of which he was quite capable—he would have done so without wiping the smile from his lips, any more than he would have thought of removing his immaculately tailored suit during the operation. Instead, his smile would probably have broadened. He might even have chuckled. Mr. Krausmeyer was most dangerous when he chuckled.

He looked up slowly from his desk as John Battle burst into his room and said, "Goot morning."

Without preamble, John Battle said, "I want you to call a meeting. There's a matter to discuss now."

Gustaf Krausmeyer scrutinized the other, his smile fixed, his eyes twinkling.

"Someding wrong at de factory? *Was?*"

"There's nothing wrong at the factory," John Battle barked. "But there is something decidedly wrong here."

Mr. Krausmeyer's expression remained unchanged.

"Someding has made you angry, *ja?*" he declared. "Dot is not goot. De general manager must not be disturbed. It is not goot for business. I will call de meeting now. We will have it in your room. I am de president, but you are de real boss. *Ja, ja.*" He rose heavily to his feet and said, "Come," at the same time he clapped Battle soothingly on the back.

John Battle jerked his body away. He was in no mood to be patronized or patted on the back by Krausmeyer. He led the way to his own office.

The smile on Krausmeyer's face widened as he lumbered along behind him. He said again in his deep voice, "*Ja, ja,* you are de boss."

The offices of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. were unpretentious. True, each member of the firm had his own private office, but the rooms were small, formed by cheap wooden partitions that went clear to the ceiling and so insured privacy. They were cheaply furnished and gloomy, facing as they did on a narrow court which, the building being old and poorly laid out, gave but little light. The outer office used by four clerks and the office boy, had no windows and was dependent entirely on artificial light. The general air of desolation and shabbiness seemed to have communicated itself to the very souls of the employees, a drab lot who

seldom looked up from their tasks and never spoke unless it was absolutely necessary.

John Battle's office was at the farthest end. He went in first, holding the door briefly for Mr. Krausmeyer. His room was larger than any of the others. It had to be, because he needed more furniture. Besides the flat-topped oak desk and the half a dozen inexpensive office chairs it held a drawing table, a wardrobe, and a cabinet for the filing of blue prints. John Battle sat down and pressed a button.

Eddie, the office boy, a pimply-faced, emaciated lad, came in.

Mr. Krausmeyer said, "Like a goot boy, Eddie, go and ask Mr. Garrett and Mr. Kern and Mr. Measley to come here. Tell dem it's important. Dot's a good boy, Eddie."

If Eddie was flattered by being thus addressed by the president of the company, he failed to show it. His narrow face remained expressionless as he turned on his heel and went out.

Presently, Woolf Kern, followed by Sigmund Measley, came in.

Woolf Kern was a tall man, but not quite as tall as Krausmeyer, nor was there any of the latter's geniality in Kern's face. His eyes were quick and alert. He seemed at once furtive and apprehensive. His look of apprehension was not one of fear, rather the look of a man who wanted to be prepared for anything. He walked with a slight limp, the result of a wound acquired in the War.

Sigmund Measley was a head shorter than Kern, a thin, unpretentious figure with long, grayish hair neatly parted in the center and slicked down close. His yellow skin was so tightly drawn across his face as to reveal clearly the bone structure underneath. He was the sort of individual who would look first at the papers on a man's desk and then at the man himself.

Woolf Kern's eyes went from Krausmeyer to Battle, then back again to Krausmeyer.

"What's up?" he demanded shortly.

"Mr. Battle wants to have a meeting," Krausmeyer explained. "Mr. Battle is mad about someding," he added in the tone of one who is indulging a precocious child.

Sigmund Measley's pale eyes came up from the desk for a quick glance at John Battle, then he looked away.

"Where is Mr. Garrett?" Gustaf Krausmeyer asked. "He should be here."

"He's not in to-day," Mr. Measley said. His voice was thin, reedy.

Krausmeyer turned in his chair and looked inquiringly at John Battle.

"You want to have de meeting anyway? *Ja?*"

The other nodded. He was gazing at Woolf Kern and Measley.

"Sit down, gentlemen," John snapped.

Little Measley jumped and sat down. Mr. Kern growled something under his breath, hooked a chair with his foot, drawing it over closer to John Battle's desk.

"Now," Gustaf Krausmeyer said, smiling, "wot's de trouble? Everyding's got to be straightened out. Everyding's got to be harmonious here."

John Battle went straight to the point.

"When I went in with you gentlemen," he said in icy tones, "it was agreed that if we could come to terms with the Japanese government, my invention was to go to them and to no one else. Wasn't it?" His eyes traveled around the group, coming to rest on Measley.

The little man shifted uneasily and began studying his finger nails. "Wasn't it?" Battle barked.

"*Ja, ja,*" Krausmeyer agreed good-naturedly. "And why not? Japanese money is goot."

"Then how does it happen," John Battle demanded harshly, "that behind my back negotiations have been going on with another country, Germany, to be exact?"

There followed a moment's ominous silence.

Gustaf Krausmeyer, still smiling, began caressing his chin with his thick fingers. Woolf Kern, his legs stuck out in front of him, his hands in his pockets, was studying John Battle. Sigmund Measley exhibited a more intense interest in his nails, considering them from different angles.

After a while, Woolf Kern said, "Why should you care if we can make a better deal with some one else? You get your proportionate share."

John Battle leaned forward. "Then it *is* true?"

"I didn't say so," Kern said angrily. "But if it were, I frankly don't think it is any of your concern. Your job is to make the damn thing, to see that it works—ours is to sell it, to sell it for the most money. What the hell do you care where it goes?" A look of suspicion came into his eyes. "Say, why are you so dead set on having this go to Japan? You haven't—you haven't made a little deal on the side of your own?"

John Battle half rose in his chair, a look of uncontrolled fury on his face. Gustaf Krausmeyer, without moving or raising his voice, said, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, didn't I say everyding must be harmonious mit us? I'm surprised you should say a ding like dot, Mr. Kern."

Kern gave an angry toss to his head. "Well, why the devil is he so anxious to have it go to the Japs? What's the idea?"

John Battle sank back in his chair, his lips curled contemptuously. "I doubt whether you would be able to understand one of my reasons. The other is that on our behalf I entered into an agreement with Yoshimo, and it's got to be carried out."

Krausmeyer looked thoughtful. "I'm sure you got a goot reason, Mr. Battle. Not dot dot agreement means so much. Agreements like dot don't mean anyding. It's not in writing. They couldn't sue us. And if we could show you how we could make more money, you would listen to reason. *Ja?*"

John Battle, his face hard as granite, said, "There'll be no change in the original arrangements."

Mr. Measley stirred uncomfortably. "Perhaps the Japanese can be induced to raise their price," he ventured. "Then everybody will be satisfied."

"How about it, Battle?" Woolf Kern demanded in a more conciliatory tone.

Before John Battle could answer, Gustaf Krausmeyer said, "I don't dink dot would be possible. I don't dink dot would be edical."

Woolf Kern stared at him.

"Ethical? I suppose the other is," John Battle sneered.

Krausmeyer said nothing. Still smiling he let his eyes travel slowly around the room, studying each separate piece of furniture, until they came to rest on the wardrobe. After a time his gaze went back to John Battle.

"Now I dink it would be nice, Mr. Battle," he said, "if you left all dose dings to us. We're business men. We know all about dose dings. You're not. You're a genius."

John Battle shook his head angrily.

"You put all de blame on us," Krausmeyer went on. "If Yoshimo doesn't like it, you tell him you couldn't help it. We'll take all de blame. And you get more money, much more money. *Ja?*"

John Battle's hand came down on top of his desk with a bang. "It goes to Yoshimo, and that's final! Either that, or I won't go on with it!"

A heavy silence, oddly portentous, followed.

Little Measley opened his lips to speak, then shut them again without uttering a word. Woolf Kern drew back his lips, displaying strong, yellow teeth.

After a few minutes, Gustaf Krausmeyer said, "Dot would be too bad. Dot would be a *katastrophe.*" Again his twinkling eyes roved about the room and again they came to rest on the wardrobe. With his thick fingers he drummed thoughtfully on the arm of his chair. "We shouldn't come to a decision," he continued after a while, "widout Mr. Garrett. De matter is too important." And to Kern and Measley, "You boys go back to your rooms. Mr. Battle and I will have a little talk. Just we two. We will have a nice little talk, and everyding maybe will come out all right."

The two men rose. Woolf Kern turned back at the door. For a moment it looked as though he were going to give utterance to an angry thought as he glowered at John Battle, but he changed his mind and stalked out, followed by Measley.

Alone with Battle, Krausmeyer got up and began to wander aimlessly about the room. Eventually he came to a halt beside Battle's desk.

"You should be reasonable, my boy," he said. "You should be sympadetic."

"What's sympathy got to do with it?"

"Now dose two boys, Kern and Measley, dey're goot boys, but all dey dink about is money. Mit you and me and Garrett, too, maybe, it's different. We got our edics. Money isn't everyding——"

"I don't know what you're driving at."

"Now you got a goot reason, Mr. Battle. You want dis ding to go to Japan because you gave Yoshimo your word. Dot's a goot reason. But if you can't keep it, dot lets you out. Me, I got a goot reason, too—a better reason. Dot's wot I meant when I say you should have sympady."

John Battle shifted irritably in his chair. "What the devil are you trying to say?" he demanded harshly.

"You wasn't in the War," Gustaf Krausmeyer said. "You was too young. But I was."

John Battle rose and confronted Krausmeyer. He was as tall as the latter. Their eyes were on a level. John Battle, his manner unyielding, his expression stubborn, said:

"Listen, Krausmeyer, I'm not sympathetic: I've forgotten how to be sympathetic. Whether or not you were in the War doesn't interest me. The fact that we can make more money by breaking our agreement with the Yoshimo Trading Co. doesn't interest me. I made a deal with Yoshimo, and we're gonna stick to it—till heil freezes over!"

Nothing in Gustaf Krausmeyer's face changed except that his smile broadened. "So-o," he said. "So-o." He turned away from Battle and made for the door. As he passed the wardrobe he stopped as if his eye had caught something unex-

pected. He stooped down, ran his index finger along the lower edge of the closet. A puzzled expression came into his face. He held his finger for Battle to see. "Wot's dot?" he asked.

"What's what?"

"It looks like blood."

John Battle frowned, then went over to the wardrobe. He did as Krausmeyer had done, ran his finger along the bottom. It came away a dark muddy red. He stared at Krausmeyer.

"What does it mean?" he said.

"You should know," Krausmeyer answered. "It's your wardrobe."

John Battle seized hold of the knob and tried to open the door; it wouldn't budge. It was locked and there was no key in the lock. A sudden, inexplicable feeling of apprehension seized him. He again stared at Krausmeyer.

Krausmeyer was smiling, a brittle sort of smile, like glass.

John Battle went to the drawing table and pulled open the drawer. There was a small claw hammer inside. He came back with it and inserted the claw in the edge of the door and yanked. It was a flimsy lock and the door gave way easily, springing wide open.

Involuntarily John Battle fell back a step. An inarticulate cry came from his lips.

There, a rope around his neck, dangling from a hook at the top, was the body of Martin Garrett! It was a ghastly sight. His head was lolling to one side; his body was swaying gently, set in motion, no doubt, by Battle's assault on the door. There was a dagger protruding from his breast, a Malay creese which John Battle recognized instantly as his own. There was no doubt that Garrett was dead.

John Battle stood rooted to the spot. He turned his head and looked at Krausmeyer.

The big German grinned back at him, then he went and locked the door that led to the outer office. He came back and said:

"Dis is bad business, Mr. Battle. *Ja,* it is very bad." His solemn tone presented a strange contrast to his expression.

"You don't think I had anything to do with this?" Battle asked, his eyes burning fiercely.

Krausmeyer shrugged. "Wot I dink doesn't matter. It's wot the police will dink—unless we can do someding. Maybe we can get rid of de body. *Ja,* dot would be best, to get rid of de body, to hush it all up."

John Battle stared at him, speechless, for a minute, then he shouted, "Damn you! What are you trying to do?"

Krausmeyer shut the door of the closet gently.

"We do noding till to-night after every one is gone. Den I get some one to help us."

John Battle remained silent, standing there rigid like a figure of stone, though he had a feeling that he was swaying; a sensation of dizziness threatened to make him collapse. He wanted to move and couldn't. There was something he wanted to do, yet didn't know quite what. Then it came to him, but it seemed ages before his legs responded to the dictates of his brain. He turned slowly and walked stiffly like a man in his sleep to his desk and picked up the telephone.

Krausmeyer said, "Wot are you going to do?"

Through compressed lips John Battle said, "I'm going to call the police."

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVESTIGATION.

THE police came, headed by a medium-sized, stocky individual with a squarish face and large round lackluster eyes. He wore an aged derby and held the butt of a cigar clamped in the corner of his mouth. Followed by his men, he ambled into John Battle's room as though he had all the time in the world.

"I'm Sergeant Ponder," he said. "C. O. Ponder from headquarters."

John Battle, sitting at his desk, his bearing tight, expectant, nodded.

"My name is Battle. This is Mr. Measley, Mr. Kern, and Mr. Krausmeyer."

Measley and Kern said nothing but Krausmeyer, grinning faintly, said:

"C. O. Ponder? Dot's funny. You're a——"

"Yeah, I know," C. O. Ponder broke in wearily. "My initials spell cop. It's a scream. I laugh every time somebody points it out to me. Now, if my last name had been Dugan instead of Ponder, my initials would spell cod, and if I was in the fish business, instead of being a policeman, it would even be funnier. Where's the body?"

"In there," John Battle said, indicating the wardrobe.

Sergeant Ponder evinced no surprise, and stepped over to the wardrobe as though there was nothing unusual about a dead man being in a closet. He opened the door and at the same time, over his shoulder, gave instructions to one of his men.

"See what you can learn, Lipschitz, in the office outside. Maybe you can solve the case all by yourself."

Lipschitz, a plain-clothes man, grinned and went out.

C. O. Ponder devoted his attention to the ghastly dangling figure of Martin Garrett in the wardrobe. He made no move to touch the body, just stood there staring at it long and earnestly. Eventually he said:

"All right, boys, take a picture, then cut him down and put him over there in the corner. See what you can do in the way of finger prints. And you, doc"—turning to a short, fussy little man with a black bag, an assistant medical examiner—"give me an idea how long he's been dead, and all the rest of it."

To the four members of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp., Sergeant Ponder seemed singularly unimpressive. He came back into their midst, took a chair, tilted his slightly greenish derby far back on his head and, without removing the stump of his black cigar, said, "Let's have it." He looked straight at the white, drawn face of John Battle.

"Mr. Krausmeyer here," John Battle said, "is the president of our firm; Mr. Kern is first vice president; Mr. Measley is the secretary, and I am the second vice president and general manager. The dead man is Martin Garrett. He was our treasurer."

"Whose room is this?" C. O. Ponder asked.

"It's mine," John Battle said, and stopped. After a time he added harshly, "And that dagger, the dagger that killed him, is mine, too."

C. O. Ponder said nothing. He removed his dead cigar, knocked the ashes off on the sole of his shoe and relit it.

"Maybe," he said after a time, "maybe he wasn't killed by the dagger. Maybe he was hanged and the dagger stuck into him afterwards. Let's have the rest of the dope."

John Battle told him how they had discovered the body; how they

had been under the impression that Garrett hadn't come in that morning. No one in the outer office had seen him come in. None of the members of the firm had seen him. He was either murdered the previous night, before he had left the office, or else had arrived that morning before any one else and had been killed. No, he had no idea as to why any one should want to kill Garrett; knew of no one who could gain by his death; knew of no possible motive.

Sergeant Ponder apparently was not greatly interested. True, he asked endless, meaningless questions; questions that led nowhere, such as, how many people the firm employed; the addresses of the various members of the firm. Was Garrett married? And learned that he was, but that his wife was dead, and that he had a daughter. Ponder instructed one of his men to call up Garrett's house from the outer office and request Garrett's daughter to come down. "Maybe she can tell us something," he said with ingenuous hopefulness. He turned away and for a moment surveyed the activities of his men.

The body of Garrett had been taken down and placed on the floor. The dagger had been removed. One man was busy testing it for finger prints. Two others were similarly occupied with the door of the wardrobe. The medical examiner was on his knees bending over the dead Garrett.

Lipschitz came in.

"What they know out there you couldn't write a book about," he reported. "You couldn't write even a letter—a note. To talk to them, it's a waste of time."

"Nice work," C. O. Ponder said. "What I like about you, Lipschitz, is that you never find out anything. Some detectives find out things that only make the case harder. Now, with you, it's different."

Lipschitz looked aggrieved.

The man who had been examining the dagger came over. He was holding it gingerly between his thumb and forefinger.

"There are a lot of prints on this, sergeant," he said, "but they're all the same, all made by one man."

C. O. Ponder studied the stump of his cigar regretfully. It was down two inches. Then he turned slowly and fixed John Battle with his round, expressionless eyes.

"They're mine, of course," John Battle said harshly. "I told you the dagger—it's a Malay creese—belongs to me. I use it every day to open letters. Sometimes I use it to remove thumb tacks from the drawing board."

"How long have you had it?" the sergeant asked casually.

"For years. I picked it up in Singapore while on a cruise."

"What kind of a cruise?"

"Just a cruise," John Battle answered, as if annoyed.

C. O. Ponder remained silent for a short time, then:

"I'm kind of dumb. Little things interest me. Was any one with you on this cruise?"

"A lot of people—hundreds of people. What difference does it make?" John Battle's voice broke.

"What kind of a ship was it?" the sergeant asked phlegmatically. He appeared not to notice John Battle.

The latter had suddenly stiffened. It looked for a moment as if he would refuse point-blank to answer. Oddly enough, there was bitterness in his face.

"It was a battleship," he ground out at last.

At that, C. O. Ponder seemed to

lose interest. He turned to the medical examiner.

"What's the dope, doc?"

The doctor straightened up.

"From the brief examination that I've been able to make, I should say that the man has been dead at least twelve hours, perhaps longer. He was stabbed first and then hung up. I think it's safe to say that he died instantly from the dagger thrust."

"Anything else?"

The doctor looked mysterious. He stepped close to C. O. Ponder and whispered in his ear:

"He's got something stuck between the fingers of his right hand. I left it there for you to see."

The sergeant went over and knelt down beside the dead man. He took his time about it. Garrett's hands were open; they weren't clenched. Between the second and third fingers Ponder saw a small black object. The dead man's fingers were stiff, close together, and the sergeant's own fingers being thick and stumpy, he had some difficulty in getting what he sought. When at last he managed to dislodge the object, he discovered it to be a button, an ordinary button, such as might have come off a man's coat.

C. O. Ponder got to his feet, and with his back to the others, stood for a moment looking at the thing in his hand, then he went to the wardrobe and peered inside. There were no clothes there. He came back and studied the four men he had just examined. John Battle was still sitting at his desk, staring broodingly into space. Sigmund Measley was standing with his back to the window. He looked frightened. Woolf Kern stood next to him, his flexible mouth curled into a sneer, a sneer which the sergeant surmised was for him. Gustaf Krausmeyer was perched on top of the cabinet that held the blue prints. He was dangling his left leg to and fro. He was smiling, but there was a look of keen interest in his eyes. Sergeant Ponder wasn't interested in their facial expressions. He was interested in their clothes. If a button were missing——

He turned away—there was no button missing—and beckoned to one of his men, the one who had been busily but unobtrusively taking notes and was, therefore, in possession of the home addresses of the four men. Ponder gave the detective some instructions. The latter nodded and disappeared.

C. O. Ponder went back to where John Battle and the others were. He stood there for a time without looking at them, just kept flipping that button up and down in the palm of his hand. After a while he put it down on the desk in front of John Battle.

"Ever see that before?" His unreadable eyes traveled slowly from one to the other.

Battle stared at the thing. Sigmund Measley looked down at his coat, so did Woolf Kern. It was an involuntary gesture, having no special significance. Krausmeyer stood motionless, smiling. After a time, John Battle said:

"I don't know. It looks like a button from some one's coat. I might have seen it on anybody without realizing it." There were sharp little creases over the bridge of his nose.

"It's a clew, is it?" Woolf Kern sneered. "Something you combed out of Garrett's hair, I suppose." The whole business, especially this Ponder with his lethargic ways and his evil-smelling cigar butt, was getting under his skin.

Sergeant Ponder picked up the

button and stuffed it into his vest pocket.

"It's a clew, all right," he declared affably. "And I didn't comb it out of his hair. I found him holding it between his second and third fingers." He removed his cigar and studied it long and pensively; then he held it up for them to see; then made an astounding observation. "You know, it's a funny thing. The clew lies not with the button itself, but in this cigar—well, maybe not this particular cigar, but in any cigar."

They stared at him nonplused while the policeman who had been stationed in the outer office came in.

"She's here, sergeant," he said. "Miss Garrett."

"Does she know?"

The policeman looked uncomfortable.

"She figured something was wrong," he explained hesitantly, "and I kind of hinted around, but I didn't have the nerve to tell her he's dead."

Sergeant Ponder nodded understandingly; then he went over to the chair on which he had flung his overcoat when he had first entered, picked it up and covered the body on the floor with it as best he could.

"Let her come in," he instructed the policeman.

Ann Garrett was slender, with dark, fluffy hair and bright, luminous eyes. She carried herself well and betrayed no sign of the apprehension she felt. She searched the faces of the men, as though trying to determine whom she should address.

For once there was some expression in C. O. Ponder's face. He appeared decidedly distressed, obviously not relishing the task of breaking the news to this girl. A little awkwardly he placed a chair for her, saying, "Sit down, Miss Garrett."

"Something's happened to my father. What is it?" Her glance crept slowly from one to the other, meeting only averted faces and receiving no answer. She turned back to Ponder. Her lips quivered for the fraction of an instant; then tonelessly, "Is he—is he dead?"

Sergeant Ponder nodded silently.

Once more her eyes traveled about the room until they came to rest at the body lying on the floor. She rose to her feet, walked steadily to where her father lay, knelt down and drew back the sergeant's overcoat, remaining there for a long time, looking down on Martin Garrett's upturned face. At last she replaced the coat gently. She rose, stood where she was, surveying them all. She was dry-eyed, self-contained, but her grief was apparent and far more poignant because of the way she held on to herself. After a while she murmured to Ponder:

"Murdered?"

Without looking up, C. O. Ponder said, "Yes."

She turned away, looked at John Battle, at Measley, at Krausmeyer, and longest at Woolf Kern. Slowly she walked up to the last.

"Are you Mr. Battle?"

Woolf Kern stared at her. It seemed ages before he made up his mind to say, "No." With a motion of his head he indicated where John Battle sat.

She faced about until her glance centered squarely on John Battle. C. O. Ponder watching her, saw the trim figure grow taut, her small hands clench and her dark eyes fill with anger or hatred, he wasn't quite sure which. "You——" she said to John Battle, then stopped as if unable to go on with what she had in

mind. She swayed a little and Ponder thought that at last she was going to break. He went over to her quickly, took hold of her arm gently and said, "Sit down, Miss Garrett. There are a few questions I have to ask you. This is a mean way for you to have heard the news. I'm sorry."

She recovered herself instantly and took the chair he indicated. He took another facing her.

"I'm from headquarters——" he began, then broke off abruptly. It just came to him that he was still wearing his derby. He removed it hastily and perched it on his knee, conscious that he was blushing like a schoolgirl. "Excuse it," he said sheepishly, and then deliberately trying to inject a lighter note to get her mind off the tragedy, he added, "If you ever meet Mrs. Ponder, don't tell her, will you? She'd lay me out for a thing like this."

Ann Garrett smiled wanly.

"That's better," C. O. Ponder said. "I won't keep you long. I was just wondering if maybe you could tell me something that might give me an idea as to what or who is responsible for this—this tragedy."

Minutes went by before she spoke, then slowly and evenly she said, "Yes, I think I can."

A hush fell over the room.

Gustaf Krausmeyer, who was in the act of lighting a cigar, stopped and was only recalled to himself when the flame of the match burned his fingers. He dropped it and stepped on it. Woolf Kern moistened his dry lips. Sigmund Measley was rubbing one moist palm against the other. John Battle sat grimly silent, motionless, never taking his eyes off the girl. The two men still busy with the finger-print tests on the wardrobe turned and glanced at her.

The silence was broken at last by the doctor who had finished and was putting away his instruments.

"I'll be getting along," he said. "I suppose you'll want a quick autopsy?"

"Yes," C. O. Ponder said absently, without looking at him. Like Battle he was gazing fixedly at Ann Garrett. To her he said, "You were saying that you had something to tell me."

"Yes," she declared simply. "It is something my father said—said in his sleep."

Ponder's dull eyes widened. *"Tch—tch.* Something he said in his sleep," he murmured a trifle dubiously. "What was it?"

"Up to a few months ago," she explained, "my father was a very sound sleeper. I was generally up at night much later than he, and since my bedroom is across the hall from his, I would have known if that hadn't been so. But one night as I was about to retire I heard him moaning softly. I heard the bed creak as he tossed about. I thought perhaps he was ill, and went inside. He was sound asleep. But he was tossing about and mumbling unintelligible words. I thought he was having a bad nightmare, and woke him up. I asked him if anything was the matter. He said, 'Nothing, nothing. I was just having a bad dream.' The same thing happened several times during that week. Something was preying on his mind, something that had made such a deep impression on him that it even troubled his sleep.

"I made it a practice after that to sleep with my door open with the idea of waking him whenever his nightmares got too awful. For a while it seemed to me that there was never a night when he didn't go through the most ghastly tortures

while he slept. I used to listen, trying to make out what he was saying, hoping to find a clew that would enable me to help him. He always denied, whenever I asked him, that anything was wrong. Finally I suggested that he take some sleeping powders, and he did for a while and things went better. Then he gave up taking them, and it was as bad as before." She stopped, turned, and looked for a moment steadily at John Battle.

"And then," C. O. Ponder suggested gently.

"And then two nights ago," she went on, "I was awakened in the middle of the night by my father. He had turned on the switch in my room, and was standing there—sound asleep. Suddenly, in a terrified voice, he cried out, '*Battle will kill me!*' "

CHAPTER V.

THE ARREST.

ALL eyes fastened themselves on John Battle. He half rose in his chair, bracing himself with his fists on top of his desk. His knuckles showed white. His face was ashen. His eyes were burning as he glared at the girl.

"Miss Garrett, who told you to say that?" he rasped.

She spun around, facing him squarely.

"Nobody told me to say it," she flashed at him. "I have told what I heard my father say, and he's dead, and he's been murdered in your office."

The lines of strain in John Battle's face deepened. His lips moved as though he were about to give voice to something else, then he dropped back in his chair without a word.

Gustaf Krausmeyer came over. He placed one of his thick hands on Battle's shoulder.

"Now don't get excided, Chon. Maybe Mr. Garrett did say it, but dot don't mean anyding. He was asleep. Miss Garrett she says herself he was asleep. Dot's so, isn't it, sergeant?"

To Ann Garrett, C. O. Ponder said, "You're sure that's what your father said? Those were his exact words?"

She nodded.

"Did you ask him at any time later what he had meant by saying such a thing?"

Before she could answer, a detective whom the sergeant had sent on an errand some time ago came in. He carried a bundle under his arm, a bundle which he placed in C. O. Ponder's lap, at the same time bending down and whispering to him.

Sergeant Ponder waved him away and pulled on his cigar. It was cold. What was more, it was too short to light without burning his fingers. With great deliberation he produced the inevitable pin from the lapel of his coat. By holding the pin between his thumb and forefinger and impaling the stump on the end of it, he was enabled to light and enjoy it further. After blowing a few poisonous clouds into the air, C. O. Ponder undid the package the detective had brought. It proved to contain a coat. Sergeant Ponder held it up, looked at it curiously. He looked into the inside pocket for the tailor's label.

"I didn't think you wanted the pants and vest," the detective who had brought the coat was saying.

C. O. Ponder ignored him. He was looking directly at John Battle.

"I sent a man out," Ponder said laconically, "with instructions to visit the various homes of you gentlemen. Maybe that was a little

irregular, but I did it. The idea was to see if he could find a coat with a button missing. He found it at the first place he went to—your apartment, Mr. Battle."

John Battle was breathing hard. The arms of his chair creaked, he held them so tightly.

"This is the coat of one of your suits, isn't it, Mr. Battle? It's got your name on the tailor's label on the inside pocket."

John Battle, his voice hollow, said, "Yes, it is my coat."

The sergeant went and spread it out on the desk in front of him. "Take a look," he said. It was a double-breasted coat. The lower right-hand button was not present. C. O. Ponder dug into his vest pocket, fished out the button he had taken from the dead hand of Martin Garrett and placed it alongside of one of the other buttons. "Would you say they matched, Mr. Battle?"

"Yes, they match," John Battle said through clenched teeth.

Sergeant Ponder stuck the button back into his vest pocket. He threw the coat to the detective who had brought it. Then he went back to his chair, sat down and took a few thoughtful puffs. When he spoke it was with even more than his customary deliberation.

"The dead man, Mr. Battle, was found in your private office. He'd been stabbed with a dagger that you admit belongs to you. It's got your finger prints on the handle and no one else's. I find a button between the dead man's fingers. That button has come off your coat. You admit it yourself. Miss Garrett heard her father say—he was asleep, that's true—'Battle will kill me.' Now, any one of those things by itself doesn't mean much. But you take them all together, well——"

"Well?" It sounded like two rocks being crushed together.

"There's only one thing I can do," said C. O. Ponder almost apologetically.

"You said the button in itself hadn't much significance," John Battle rasped desperately. "You said something about it having to do something with a cigar. Does that fit in, too?"

Sergeant Ponder looked about for an ash tray and, having found it, flicked the last tiny remnant of his butt regretfully off the pin. He stuck the pin back into his coat lapel; then:

"You already know all the evidence I've got. Leave me a little something—for the trial." He looked at his overcoat covering the dead Garrett and decided to leave it there for the time being. "We might as well get going," he added.

John Battle rose. His face was white, the lines in it like rough hewn gashes. For a moment he turned and looked at his associates—into Woolf Kern's dark, scowling features, into the frightened face of Measley, into the heavy features of Gustaf Krausmeyer, still smiling thickly—then he went and picked up his overcoat and hat from the chair, where he had thrown them.

"Just a minute, inspecdor, or sergeant, or wodever you are," Krausmeyer suddenly broke forth, "you are making a big misdake. Mr. Battle wouldn't do such a ding. It's just a coincidence—dese dings."

C. O. Ponder looked at him solemnly. "Maybe you're right," he said; and to Battle, "Ready? I guess you and I can go to the D. A.'s office just by ourselves. We won't need any of the boys. They can stay here and finish up. We won't need any handcuffs or anything like that. We'll just take a taxi. In case what

I'm doing is a mistake, I'll pay the fare."

Eddie, the pimply-faced office boy, watched them going side by side through the outer office and waited till he was reasonably sure that they had gone down in the elevator, then Eddie, without taking his hat or coat, himself went out. He lingered a few minutes in the hall; then he pushed the elevator button.

Out in the street Eddie looked cautiously right and left. There was no sign of John Battle or the sergeant. There was a small lunchroom half a block away to which Eddie made his way hastily. He entered a phone booth, closed the door tight, then inserting a nickel, he dialed a number. When he got his connection he would be in direct contact with the office of the Yoshimo Trading Co., but on a wire which did not go through the switchboard of that company. Eddie waited. Presently a guttural voice said:

"Hello."

Eddie shivered; he said, "This is G 12-21."

The guttural voice said, "This is X 42-3."

Eddie said, "No go."

The voice said, "Excuse it, please. I meant this is X 48-3."

Eddie in his thin, quavering voice, said, "That's no good, either. Do you want me to ring off?"

The guttural voice said, "I am glad to note that you are discreet, G 12-21. This is X 58-3."

"Now you're talking," Eddie said. His tone was flippant, but his manner extremely nervous. "Mr. Martin Garrett was murdered in the office. Martin Garrett is the treasurer."

"I know who Martin Garrett is," the voice at the other end said peremptorily. "Don't waste words."

"They've taken Mr. Battle away for murdering him," Eddie explained hastily.

"Anything else?"

"No," Eddie replied. He felt cold. He should have worn his coat, but then those in the office would have known that he was going out.

"Report again when anything new develops," the guttural voice directed.

A click at the other end told Eddie that the conversation was over.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEARING.

JOHN BATTLE was arraigned in court the following morning.

He sat at a long table with his attorney, Phil Barton, beside him. Two plain-clothes men sat directly in back, keeping a wary eye on John Battle. Over to the left at another table a young but experienced assistant district attorney—Bertrand Randall—had taken his place. This wasn't an important hearing; it would only be a matter of mere routine. All that Randall had to do was to cite the evidence against Battle, and ask that he be held on a short affidavit. He would be held, and in due course the grand jury would indict him. The whole thing was a formality to be handled impersonally and with a chilling lack of interest on every one's part except on the part of John Battle. His Honor, Magistrate van Loomis, had not yet put in an appearance.

In an undertone Phil Barton said to Battle, "I am telling you again, Battle, that I'm not the right lawyer for you. I don't know anything about criminal law. I'm just a little corporation lawyer. I don't know the procedure here. What you need is some big shot; some one who can

make a showing and impress the magistrate sufficiently to let you out on bail."

John Battle laughed mirthlessly. "I told you," he said, "I haven't any money. I don't even know when I can pay you." Then he lapsed into silence, half closing his sunken eyes. He didn't want to think; he had spent a sleepless night thinking; and yet his mind even now refused to give him any rest. What an incredible situation! For the second time in his life within a few short years something unbelievable was happening to him. The first time Fate had seen fit to destroy his career, his spirit, his very soul. And now Fate seemed bent on destroying his very life. That couldn't be just chance. Some human agency was directing the malign forces arrayed against him. The first time perhaps had been chance, but now—and yet he hadn't an enemy as far as he knew, not a real enemy, any one who would wish utterly to destroy him. For a moment his thoughts were distracted by leisurely heavy steps. That detective, Sergeant Ponder, who had arrested him, was coming in and taking his place beside Randall, the assistant district attorney. No doubt he was there to give evidence. John Battle looked wearily about the room.

It wasn't crowded—just a few idlers, a shifty-eyed individual in the back between two men who were obviously police officers; another prisoner, probably. Farther to the right, a few young men were cracking jokes. Presently two of them came over. They were reporters. They spoke to Phil Barton without much enthusiasm, wanting to know if he had anything for their papers. Who was his client? What was the nature of the case? And so forth, and so forth.

Phil Barton turned to John Battle. "Want to make a statement?"

John Battle said, "No."

The reporters shrugged and drifted over to the district attorney's table. But he also had little to say; it was obvious that he considered that there wasn't much news value in having John Battle held for the murder of Martin Garrett. The two reporters returned to their companions and went on with their spicy stories.

Presently a voice said, "All rise."

His Honor, Magistrate van Loomis, came in. He made his way to the bench in stately fashion, like a full-rigged ship under sail, paused for a moment to look about the room, striving to combine in his round features an expression of benevolence, of mercy, and stern justice; an expression which he had practiced before the mirror when his appointment was imminent.

The clerk went through the reading of the calendar; various trifling matters were disposed of. A bail bond was submitted and accepted. All of which John Battle heard as though in a dream, and even when Assistant District Attorney Randall was on his feet, reciting in a monotonous, dreary tone the evidence against John Battle and his reasons for asking that the defendant be held for the grand jury, it took some time before John Battle realized that his own case was on. It seemed incredible that so little fuss should be made about the matter. Here he was accused of murder, and yet no one seemed particularly interested, least of all, his honor, who, so far, beyond his original nod to the district attorney to proceed, hadn't even looked up, was busy scribbling on a paper in front of him. A feeling of utter helplessness overcame John Battle, that it

was all a formality, that he had absolutely no say in the affair. They were just going ahead with their deadly routine, and it would go on and on like this, and weeks hence, perhaps months, he would be tried and—convicted. He looked at his lawyer.

"There's still time," Phil Barton whispered. "I can ask them for an hour's postponement or so. I can try and get you somebody, somebody that knows the ropes here, knows how to handle this thing. At that it mightn't do any good; this kid's making out quite a case against you."

"What's the use?" John Battle said dully.

The assistant district attorney had finished and sat down. His Honor, Magistrate van Loomis, threw a disinterested glance in John Battle's direction, a glance which the latter interpreted to mean, "I'll hear what you have got to say, but it won't do you any good."

Phil Barton rose. He was visibly embarrassed and out of his element.

"If your honor please," he began, "in view of the fact that my client is a reputable citizen——" he stopped and involuntarily looked at the assistant district attorney. In his face he read instantly what the verdict would be. Assistant District Attorney Randall, despite his youth, had presented quite a number of these cases and he was serenely sure that nothing that this unknown lawyer, representing the defendant, could say would alter the outcome of the hearing.

Phil Barton started to resume, then stopped and turned around. Behind him had come the sound of steps, not the muffled sort of steps one expects to hear of a person coming into court while it is in session, but a firm, very deliberate tread.

His honor, a look of displeasure on his judicial features, looked up; then his expression changed. His face became wreathed in smiles. He motioned Phil Barton to sit down and beckoned to the man who had just entered in his most gracious manner.

Phil Barton sat down, at the same time nudging his client.

The man who was coming down the aisle was a tall, broad-shouldered individual with statesman-like features, crowned by a wealth of silvery gray hair. His manner was easy, immensely assured.

His honor said, "Good morning, Brother Gore. What brings you down here?"

"It's Peter J. Gore," Phil Barton whispered, "the greatest criminal lawyer in New York—in the country."

At the back where the reporters were lolling a buzz of interest rose. One of them said, "I wonder what Gore is doing down here. Believe me, boys, when he comes into a magistrate's court he's slumming. Even when he's got a big case he doesn't appear in a preliminary hearing in person. He sends some one from his office. If he's here defending somebody, it will be a senator at least."

His honor rapped with his gavel to still the buzzing in the back rows, then turned an attentive ear to the great Peter J. Gore.

Mr. Gore was saying, "I regret having been delayed, your honor." For some reason he had backed away a few steps from the bench until he was standing quite close to Phil Barton. "My talk with the district attorney has detained me somewhat."

One of the reporters poked a fellow reporter in the ribs. "That's the way with these big guys," he

said from the back of his hand. "They go to the D. A.'s office, fix it up with him, and then they come into court. I wonder who he's appearing for."

"May I ask that the minutes of what has gone before be read?" Mr. Gore went on in his impressively soft tones.

His honor nodded graciously. He was no longer preoccupied. He was all attention. It wouldn't do to offend the great Gore, the big man of his honor's own party.

In a droning voice the stenographer read off the minutes.

He was almost through with them before John Battle realized the unbelievable thing that was happening; the stenographer was reading the minutes of his, John Battle's, case. He turned to Phil Barton and said, "What does it mean?"

Phil Barton looked bewildered. He cast a suspicious glance at his client and was convinced that John Battle was as much in the dark as he himself.

"The great Gore is here in person to defend *you!*" he whispered. "An angel must have sent him."

John Battle looked incredulous, and yet——

The reading of the minutes had been concluded. Peter J. Gore gave Assistant District Attorney Randall a condescending glance, then looked at his honor as though to say, "We mustn't blame these young district attorneys. They're ambitious. Of course, there's no case against my client."

His honor nodded faintly, ever so faintly, in agreement with the unspoken words, but he said nothing, being quite sure that Mr. Gore would shortly show him his way out. The case against this Battle, of whom his honor had never heard, was far stronger than the cases against nine men out of ten whom he had held for the grand jury, and for the sake of the record he must not show any favoritism—if it could be avoided.

Peter Gore was saying, "Mr. Battle, my client, is a reputable citizen, a man of vast affairs——"

Almost the identical words with which Phil Barton had begun, but how different, how infinitely more impressive they sounded coming from Peter J. Gore. The whole atmosphere in the courtroom had changed in the twinkling of an eye. People were looking with interest, more than that, with respect at John Battle. Even his honor ventured one quick benevolent glance in his direction. This Battle, if he could retain Gore, must really be a man of importance. The reporters began to scribble furiously. Assistant District Attorney Randall suddenly sat forward in his chair, galvanized into action by the realization that this was to be no cut-and-dried proceeding. This was important. Here was a chance for some of that long coveted publicity that could be the making of an intelligent district attorney. He was on his feet the instant that Mr. Gore had concluded, shouting his objections vociferously, repleading his case, and discovered that instead of having a friend in his honor, he had a distinctly hostile magistrate to contend with.

"Please don't shout, Mr. District Attorney," said his honor icily. "And may I remind you that the court is most capable of deciding for itself the weight of your evidence?"

Young Randall bit his lip. But he kept on stoutly. He might go down, but he'd go down fighting, and he would give the great Gore, who so obviously had captured the

sympathy of the magistrate, something to worry about.

"Before your honor comes to a decision," he said, "I ask that I may be permitted to place the police officer who made the arrest on the stand. I think I should have the privilege of doing this in the interests of justice——"

"The interests of justice have always been served in this court," his honor declared even more frigidly. "You may put the witness on the stand." Whereupon his honor proceeded to set himself ready to express by his demeanor incredulity at everything that this policeman would have to say.

C. O. Ponder looked just a trifle uncomfortable on the stand. This, however, was apparently due only to the fact that he wasn't permitted to wear his derby and that he was obliged to be without his inevitable cigar butt. Now and then he would unconsciously reach for his lips, forgetting that there was no cigar there.

"The murder weapon," young Randall began after the preliminary identifying questions had been concluded, "was a Malay creese. Will you, sergeant, as an officer of long experience in homicide cases, be good enough to tell the court what significance you attach to the fact that there were no other finger prints, besides those of the defendant, on the hilt of the dagger?"

"I would say," C. O. Ponder said slowly, "that any one who had worn gloves could have used that dagger to kill Martin Garrett."

The assistant district attorney looked at his witness aghast. Of all the dumb answers! But he rallied hastily.

"On the other hand, you could also draw from that the inference that the defendant was the one and the only one who had used the dagger in committing the murder, couldn't you?"

"If you wanted to," said the sergeant laconically.

Assistant District Attorney Randall took no pains to hide his disgust.

"Just answer yes or no," he said testily. "Now on the day that the murder was discovered, the defendant wore a hat and overcoat when he came into his office, and instead of going to the wardrobe and hanging up his coat and hat, as would be only natural, he left them on a chair. Would you, in the light of your experience, attach any special significance to that?"

Mr. Gore was instantly ready to interpose an objection, but he saw a peculiar whimsical expression now creeping into C. O. Ponder's face, and he shrewdly withheld his comments, waiting to see what trend the witness's answer would take.

"In the light of my experience," said Sergeant Ponder, "or maybe I ought to say in the light of *Mrs. Ponder's* experience, it is more natural for a man to throw his hat and coat onto a chair than to hang them up in a closet where they belong."

The assistant district attorney purpled with indignation. His own witness was betraying him. His Honor, Magistrate van Loomis, chuckled. John Battle gazed curiously at C. O. Ponder. It almost seemed as if the latter were going out of his way to help him.

"You found one of the defendant's coats, did you not?" Randall demanded sharply.

"One of my men did," Ponder qualified.

"And there was a button missing on that coat, was there not?"

"There was."

"And the button which you found clutched in the dead man's hand was identical with the buttons on that coat—the defendant's coat—wasn't it?"

"The button wasn't clutched in the dead man's hand," Sergeant Ponder declared bluntly. "It was stuck between his second and third fingers."

"All right, all right," Randall said exasperatedly, "it was stuck between his second and third fingers. But it was unquestionably the button that was missing from the coat?"

"I can't testify as to that," C. O. Ponder said carefully. "It matched the other buttons, but it is just an ordinary button. There must be thousands of buttons like that on thousands of——"

"Please don't make speeches," the assistant district attorney cut in. He paused for a moment's consideration, then stepped up in front of the witness and asked sarcastically, "Did you have *any* reason for arresting the defendant, or was it just a passing whim?"

His honor turned and favored Randall with a look of displeasure.

"It seems to me, Mr. District Attorney, that you are attempting to impeach your own witness. I won't permit you to do that."

"I don't know what I'm expected to do under the circumstances," Randall said, choking with wrath. "If the police department won't cooperate——"

His honor stopped him with a look and turned expectantly to Peter J. Gore.

"It must be obvious to your honor," the great Gore said, "that there is not one scintilla of real evidence against my client. No case whatsoever has been made out, and it must have struck your honor as especially significant that no motive of any kind for the murder has been advanced. That in itself ought to be sufficient to stigmatize the whole proceeding as puerile, outrageous, unworthy of your honor's consideration. But, if your honor has the slightest doubt, let me say that I am here prepared to put up any amount of bail guaranteeing my client's future appearances. A representative of the bonding company is in court."

John Battle was completely bewildered. What mysterious agency was active behind the scenes, interceding on his behalf? Who had arranged, not only for the great Gore to represent him, but also arranged for his bail as well, bail that might run to such a huge sum as fifty or a hundred thousand dollars? He stared at Peter J. Gore, but that gentleman wasn't looking at him. He was sitting majestically with his arms folded, giving all his attention to the magistrate.

His honor was clearing his throat. His face was a picture of benevolence. He was beaming not only on Peter J. Gore, the spectators, the reporters, but on John Battle, too. Once more clearing his throat, he said, impressively:

"After giving due consideration to all of the facts, I hold that no case has been made out, that nothing has been adduced that would warrant my holding the defendant for the grand jury." He bowed in the direction of the great Gore and bowed again graciously toward John Battle. "The case is dismissed."

The whole thing was over.

Peter J. Gore went and said a few words to the magistrate, then he came and shook hands with Phil

Barton as though the latter had done a magnificent piece of work. He shook hands with John Battle who responded mechanically, too dazed to grasp the situation.

Gore said, "If you hear anything more on this, get in touch with my office. Don't worry, we'll take care of you." With that he was gone.

At the instance of Phil Barton, John Battle followed a minute later. On the steps of the courthouse, Barton eyed him curiously.

"Say, you've got friends! What beats me is why you didn't go to them in the first place."

John Battle stared at him. "Friends?" he said, then shrugged, said good-by, and walked away.

A minute later Sergeant Ponder, followed by the assistant district attorney, came out.

"Just what was the big idea?" Randall demanded angrily. "You had no business to let me down like that."

C. O. Ponder looked blank. "I don't get it," he said. "I answered all your questions, didn't I? Maybe I didn't answer them right. I'm kind of dumb."

"You're dumb all right," Randall said wrathfully. "Dumb or—something."

The sergeant was busy chewing at the tip of a thick, black cigar.

"You know," he said, "while you were presenting the case, it came to me that we didn't have so much of a case after all; that we ought to get more stuff on this fellow Battle, and that the way to get it was to turn him loose, not to keep him locked up."

The assistant district attorney gaped. "Is that on the level?"

C. O. Ponder grinned. "What do you think?" he said.

CHAPTER VII.

KRAUSMEYER SUGGESTS.

WOOLF KERN was pacing the floor in Krausmeyer's small room. The slight limp with which he walked seemed only to accentuate the nervousness of his strides and his present irritability. Little Measley, his ordinarily neatly combed hair now rumpled—he had run his fingers through it many times during the course of the afternoon's conference—sat watching him, moving his head from side to side like a man following the flight of a ball in a tennis match. Gustaf Krausmeyer, deep down in his revolving chair, was smiling. Eventually, Woolf Kern came to a halt in front of Krausmeyer.

"What made him do it?" he demanded fiercely. "What reason could Battle have had for killing Garrett?"

Krausmeyer shrugged. "How should I know? Maybe he didn't do it. Maybe some one else did it."

"Well, who?"

"You're asking me riddles. Anybody could have done it. Maybe Measley did it."

The little man looked up startled. "Why should I want to kill Garrett?" he squeaked.

Krausmeyer paid no attention to him. To Woolf Kern he said:

"Maybe you did it."

Something like a snarl escaped Woolf Kern. He glowered at the big man lolling in his chair.

"Yes, maybe I did it," he sneered, "and then again, Krausmeyer, maybe you did."

Krausmeyer nodded placidly. "*Ja, ja,*" he said, "dot's possible. I could have done it."

"Let's not quarrel," Sigmund Measley protested weakly. "We are

wasting time. The question is what's going to happen with Battle in jail? Who's going to finish the gun? Who's going to supervise the demonstration?"

"That's it," Woolf Kern declared angrily. "If the damned fool wanted to commit murder, couldn't he have waited? Perhaps we ought to have gone to his aid, gotten him a lawyer or something—anything to get him out of jail until he's finished his job. Maybe there's still time; perhaps we can get him out on bail."

"I don't know about dings like dot here," Krausmeyer said. "In Germany it wouldn't be so easy. Anyway, a few days in chail——"

"Yes," Kern agreed, "a few days in a cell might soften him up. Perhaps if we get him out after that he'll be more ready to fall in with our plans."

Gustaf Krausmeyer nodded in agreement. "Anyway," he said, "we don't need him. I talked to Kernochen over de telephone dis morning. Shieber says he can finish de gun alone. He's got all de plans. And de demonsdration—dot's easy."

Woolf Kern's face cleared. "You mean it?"

"Absolutely. Dere isn't any doubt about it," Krausmeyer declared emphatically.

"In that case," Woolf Kern spat savagely, "Battle can rot in jail for all I care. We're through with him. He's served his purpose. If he were here, he'd only make trouble."

Little Measley ran his fingers through his disheveled hair.

"I think," he said timidly, "we ought to take care of Mr. Battle. He's not the kind of a man to drive too far. If he ever found out——"

"How's he going to find out if you keep your mouth shut?" Woolf Kern barked.

"Ja, ja," Krausmeyer said. "If nobody talks, everyding will be all right." He was staring steadily at the little man, a speculative light in his eyes, and then he chuckled.

Woolf Kern's eyes narrowed, and Sigmund Measley shifted nervously in his chair. He didn't like it when Krausmeyer chuckled.

"It's a funny ding," the big German declared. "Maybe dot's why Garrett is dead. Garrett had a conscience." Again he chuckled. "Maybe he was going to talk, to tell Mr. Battle everyding. And maybe Mr. Kern here found it out and killed him; or maybe I found it out and killed him; or maybe you, maybe you, Mr. Measley, found it out. You wouldn't hesidate, would you, Mr. Measley?"

Sigmund Measley's face took on the color of putty. He scraped back his chair until the back of it was against the partition. He cringed with fear.

"What are you saying?" he squeaked. "Are you accusing me of having murdered Garrett?"

"Nein, nein," Krausmeyer said soothingly. "I'm not accusing you any more dan de rest of us. Mr. Kern and I we wouldn't have hesidated to do away wid Garrett if we had found out dot he was going to talk. We wouldn't hesidate," he was still grinning broadly, but his voice was no more than a hoarse whisper, "we wouldn't hesidate to kill anybody whom we dought was going to desdroy our plans, would we, Mr. Kern—not even each other—would we, Mr. Kern?"

Woolf Kern glowered at him steadily through the minutes of silence that followed.

"I don't think you would," he said slowly, "and—I don't think I would."

Sly Gustaf Krausmeyer nodded

brightly. "You see," he said to Measley, "I told you."

The little man hunched down in his chair, a terrified figure. He kept moving his lips but no sound came forth.

Gustaf Krausmeyer looked at his watch. "It's after five," he said. "Time to go home. I wonder if de liddle lady, Mr. Garrett's daughter, is still in his room. She asked me if she could go drough her fadder's papers and I told her, *ja.* A very preddy liddle lady; beautiful. It's a shame dot her fadder was killed. But——"

"You shouldn't have let her do that," Woolf Kern interrupted him.

"Why not? De police were dere first. I don't dink dey left anyding word finding."

"Just the same," Sigmund Measley ventured, "there might be papers there which would have no significance to the police, yet mean a lot to her, in view of the fact that she's Garrett's daughter."

Gustaf Krausmeyer smiled. He started to rise, then dropped back in his chair. The door was thrust violently open.

John Battle stood there.

For a moment they stared at him as though he were a ghost.

Krausmeyer was the first to recover himself.

"Good," he said. "Good. You got away. Dey let you go."

"Yes, they let me go," John Battle said tersely. "Thanks for your help."

They thought he was being sarcastic. He wasn't. He had deliberately made that remark with the idea of discovering whether or not he was indebted to them for Peter J. Gore's appearance in court. He had spent the day, ever since his release that morning, studying the situation from every angle without coming to a definite conclusion.

"We were just having a conference, Chon," Krausmeyer said quickly, "trying to find wot would be best to do, but I see you didn't need us."

John Battle had his answer. It wasn't they who had come to his assistance. Then who had and why? Some one who had something to gain by giving him his freedom. Unconsciously his forehead puckered into a frown. Was he ever to be master of his own destiny, or was he forever to be kicked around by forces unknown over which he had no control? Subconsciously he heard Krausmeyer say:

"It looked bad, Chon."

"So bad," Woolf Kern interjected, "that even a flat-footed policeman like this Ponder could see the answer. What made you do it?"

The corners of John Battle's lips drooped. He looked Woolf Kern hard in the eye.

"The way I feel these days," he said with harsh precision, "it wouldn't take much to make me kill a man." Then he turned to Krausmeyer. "I trust that during my brief absence, nothing unforeseen has happened."

"*Ja, ja.* Everyding is fine, Mr. Battle." Mr. Krausmeyer was always formal with his associates when discussing business. It was only on rare occasions that he used their first names, at moments when he wished them to realize that he was a friend to be relied upon. "I talked to de facdory dis morning. Shieber dinks he can get de gun finished in a week. You don't have to worry about it any more." He stopped and looked speculatively at Battle. There was just a chance that Battle was holding out on them, that he had something up his sleeve

which would be necessary to complete this invention from which they expected to reap so vast a fortune. "*Ja*, he can finish it all by himself, danks to your plans," he went on.

"Can he?" Battle said shortly. "I've got some work I want to finish. You'll excuse me." He started toward the door, turned and gave them all one sharp glance.

Sigmund Measley stuttered. "I'm glad everything turned out all right, Mr. Battle."

John Battle walked out.

CHAPTER VIII.

EDDIE'S STRANGE BEHAVIOR.

THE outer office was deserted. John Battle, instead of going directly to his own room, went farther along the corridor to Garrett's room. During the day the notion had come to him that it might be wise to go through Garrett's things to see what he had left behind. Battle wasn't well versed in police procedure and it had never occurred to him that their investigation, as far as the office of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. was concerned, hadn't been concluded with his arrest, that the police would subject the dead man's office to a thorough search. He didn't know just what he expected to find among Garrett's belongings. Possibly something that might incriminate him further, that he had better destroy; and then again perhaps something that might prove useful in his defense in the event of the case against him not having been finally dropped. He pushed open the door, started in and stopped.

Ann Garrett was sitting at her father's desk. It was piled high with papers and little leather-covered books in which Garrett had kept his records.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were here."

Closing the door behind him, he advanced farther into the room and met the look of loathing in her eyes steadily.

"They let you go!" she breathed, after a long silence.

"Yes, they let me go, despite your best efforts," he said sardonically.

She looked at him dazedly. She couldn't understand it. To her way of thinking the case against him was so strong, so clear. And the thought that he had been promptly arrested and placed behind bars had in a measure assuaged her grief.

"You really think I'm guilty?" he said.

"Of course, I do," she flared up at him. "Everybody does. My father said you would kill him. I told the police the truth."

"And nothing that I can say will convince you that you're mistaken, will it?" he demanded bitterly.

"No, nothing."

"I thought not," he said. "The world is full of people like you." And then for some reason that he could never afterward explain to himself, he unleashed on her that sense of life's injustice that he had carried with him for the last few years, ever since that day when, charged with treason, he had stood defending himself futilely before the general court of the United States Navy. "Yes, the world is full of people like you," he stormed. "You meet them in every walk of life, stupid, unimaginative people, swayed by prejudice, by unintelligent feelings; people who'll damn a man thoughtlessly, who are swayed by straws, who don't care what they do to their victims, who'll tear the

souls out of them to satisfy their lust for revenge."

She drew back, staring at him, wide-eyed. She wasn't frightened, just overwhelmed by the intensity of his passion. She had a feeling that she was seeing a glimpse of the man's inner self and coupled with that a doubt arose in her mind, a doubt as to his guilt, and yet——

"Why should my father say a thing like that, even in his sleep? Why would he say 'Battle will kill me' if he weren't afraid of you, had reason to fear you?" she asked.

"How do I know why he would say a thing like that?" he demanded angrily. "What's more, I don't care." He wasn't being rude. It was simply the way he felt. "I don't even care what happens to me as long as I'm not interfered with now. All I want"—each word came like the crack of a rifle—"is time—time—time——"

Ann Garrett experienced a sudden desire to flee. She had a feeling that she was looking upon something that she had no right to view. The man's tortured eyes, the harassed look in his face, the way he was unconsciously revealing himself to her was almost more than she could endure. This man was no weakling, far from it, and if he stood there baring his soul without realizing it to a complete stranger, something terrifying, something that had happened to him must be driving him on relentlessly. She wanted to run from the room and yet she couldn't. Somehow he fascinated her, and before she was aware of it her hatred of him had tempered.

"You want time," she said softly; "time for what?"

"Time to finish my job," he said. He wasn't answering her. It was as though he were answering himself. "And when it's finished——" He stopped, shook himself, gazed at her as though he were now aware for the first time of her presence. "What are you doing here?" he asked coldly.

A sense of disappointment took hold of her.

"I asked Mr. Krausmeyer if I might go through my father's papers," she explained with a certain listlessness. "I was looking for something in particular."

"What?"

"I don't know exactly," she admitted. "Three days ago, on the night—on the night——"

"On the night that he said 'Battle will kill me,'" John Battle helped her out raspingly.

"Yes," she conceded firmly. "On that night my father was working on what looked like a long report, writing it himself by hand. There were pages and pages of it."

"And why are you looking for that?"

"Because when I went to kiss him good night I got a glimpse of one page, the top page. I got a glimpse of the name of the man to whom it was addressed. It was you."

He looked at her blankly.

"I thought I might find it," she continued, "and I thought if I did that it would prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that you had killed my father and why you had killed him. Am I wasting my time? Did you get the report?"

She looked at him level-eyed, steadily, yet deep down inside she felt a little forlorn. The desire in her to convict this man somehow seemed to be weakening.

"No, I didn't get it. You can believe that, if you don't want to believe anything else about me."

She stood up, looked down at the desk piled high with papers.

"I haven't had time to go through

these," she said, "only sufficiently to know that the report is not among them. I'd like to read them all. I don't want to take them home; some of them may be office records. May I come again?"

"If you want to."

She put on her hat, her gloves, and picked up her coat.

He made no move to help her with it, not for the lack of politeness; it was simply that she didn't exist; nobody existed for him in a personal way.

She stood with her hand on the door, faced him for a final word.

"Did you kill my father?"

He laughed discordantly without a trace of mirth.

"What do you expect me to say to that?"

She opened the door a few inches and still stood there apparently about to say something else, but suddenly he held up his hand. He was listening. He thought he had detected a sound in the outer office. Ordinarily he would not have given it a thought, but to-day his nerves were so frayed, he was so on edge by the unexpected happening of the previous day that the most ordinary things acquired a peculiar significance. That sound he had heard was the sound of some one walking softly. It couldn't be Krausmeyer, Measley, or Kern. They had left; he had heard them depart a while ago.

Treading swiftly, lightly, he walked over to the girl, took her hand away from the knob, and shut the door.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Some one's out there." For a moment he was lost in thought, then said, "Stay where you are. Don't make a sound. I'm going to turn out the light."

He plunged the room into darkness and noiselessly opened the door a few inches, listening intently. He heard a voice which he recognized immediately. It was Eddie, the office boy. Eddie had apparently returned under the impression that every one had gone home for he made no attempt to keep his voice low. He was saying:

"This is Mr. Krausmeyer's room."

John Battle was about to step out to discover the meaning of it all when another voice caused him to pause. The second voice was deep and had a peculiar accent. It said:

"Show me Mr. Battle's room, please."

John Battle opened the door wider, peered cautiously around it and was in time to see Eddie conducting the stranger, a small stoop-shouldered individual, into his, Battle's, private office. The upturned collar of his overcoat hid the lower part of the man's face and he wore a cap pulled far down over his eyes. Under his breath, John Battle said, "What the hell——" He went back, switched on the lights in Garrett's room and snapped at the girl:

"You stay here. I'm going to find out what this is all about."

He stepped swiftly out and with noiseless steps made his way to his own office and flung the door wide.

Eddie let out a little frightened cry. The stranger oddly enough was busy examining the wardrobe in which the dead Garrett had been found. At the sound of John Battle's entrance he turned without haste.

"Mr. Battle!" Eddie gasped.

John Battle, his face grim, said, "What are you doing here?"

Eddie tried, but couldn't answer him. He was obviously paralyzed with fear.

John Battle turned to the stranger. For a moment he wondered if

the man could be from the police department, and was conducting a further investigation.

"Well, what is it?" John Battle snapped. "Speak up!"

The stoop-shouldered, narrow-chested individual coughed a hollow racking cough. He said nothing, just put a hand in his overcoat pocket.

John Battle tensed. For a moment the thought came to him that the man was reaching for a gun. He was mistaken. When the hand came forth it held a small envelope. He passed it silently to John Battle. The latter with one eye on the stranger opened it and discovered a card inside, a card that bore at the top in neat engraving "YOSHIMO TRADING CO." In a fine spencerian hand it said:

I would appreciate it if you would come to see me at your earliest convenience. YOSHIMO.

John Battle stared at the message perplexed. He and Yoshimo had long ago agreed that it was advisable that John Battle's visits to the office of the Japanese firm should be as infrequent as possible. But if Yoshimo wanted to see him specially, it surely wasn't necessary to send a messenger long after office hours, and in this strange manner. And why was the man busy examining the wardrobe? John Battle said:

"What's your business here besides this?" He flicked at the card with his finger.

The man whose features were practically entirely concealed, save for tiny black eyes that shone with an unhealthy light, shook his head.

"Bring message," he said.

And suddenly he did a startling thing. He made a leap, a leap that took him past Battle standing in the doorway. He scuttled around the desks in the general office with remarkable speed, and was out the door before Battle could realize what had happened. His first impulse was to follow, then he changed his mind. He took a threatening step in Eddie's direction.

Eddie shrank away.

"I want to know what this means," John Battle insisted harshly.

The terror in Eddie's face mounted.

"Please, please, Mr. Battle," he quavered, "don't ask me!"

John Battle seized Eddie with one hand by the lapels of his coat and shook him.

"Why shouldn't I ask you? I want to know the meaning of this."

"I can't tell you," Eddie gasped. "I can't!"

Battle held him for a minute longer, then flung him off. Something told him that he wouldn't get any answer out of Eddie just then, at least not a true one.

"Get out," he said.

Relief came into Eddie's face, then the terrified expression came back into his eyes.

"Mr. Battle—Mr. Battle, please, please, don't tell Mr. Krausmeyer. Don't tell any one. It will be terrible for me. Please—please. Sometime, sometime maybe I can do something for you."

John Battle let out an oath. This pimply-faced boy, just out of his teens, thought he could do something for him. Did he know anything? What could it possibly be? Could it have anything to do with the murder of Garrett, or had he in the course of his snooping about the office discovered something about the other men, about Krausmeyer, Woolf Kern or Measley? Those three had made it plain enough that they intended to sell the thing that Battle had invented, the thing that

Shieber was working on feverishly, not to Yoshimo but to some one else prepared to pay more money. Had Eddie stumbled on some plot that those three were devising? Was that what he meant when he said that some day he would help him, Battle?

Suddenly John Battle felt the heat of his anger die down, felt himself grow cold, calculating. He contrived a smile, a humorless smile. He said:

"All right, Eddie, we'll forget all about it. You come and talk to me when you get ready."

A look of gratitude swept over Eddie's face. He stuttered a "Thank you," and all but ran out of the room.

John Battle went back to Garrett's office, but Ann Garrett had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERER.

WHEN late the next day John Battle called on Baron Yoshimo he was as usual admitted immediately into Yoshimo's presence. If anything, the Japanese seemed more certain, more assured of himself than on any previous occasion. He smoked and watched Battle blandly, waiting as was his custom for the other to speak first.

John Battle sat down and flung the card that the stranger of the previous night had given him on Yoshimo's desk.

"Did you send me this?"

With scarcely a glance at the white pasteboard, the dapper Yoshimo said, "Yes."

"Why did you have it sent to me late, after office hours, by a man who kept his face hidden, who sneaked into my office, who was plainly bent on doing something there which he had no business to be doing?"

Yoshimo smiled thinly and arched his eyebrows as though he were surprised that his visitor should ask such a question. He said:

"It will all be clear to you."

He reached over and with a delicate finger pressed a button.

A secretary came in and Yoshimo said a few words in Japanese.

The young man disappeared and presently returned accompanied by another man, a figure that set Battle's pulses throbbing. There was no doubt about it; it was the same man who had invaded his office the night before. Battle was certain of it. He recognized the man by his stooping posture and presently by that hollow cough as he stood there immobile, his wrinkled, monkeylike face turned toward Yoshimo.

The Japanese dismissed his secretary and, with unwonted kindliness in his tone, said, "You may sit down," to the stoop-shouldered individual. To Battle he said, "This is Hiroshi."

John Battle didn't understand. He kept his face stony.

Yoshimo snuffed out his cigarette, smiled that thin superior smile of his.

"Hiroshi," he said, "you knew Mr. Garrett?"

"Yes, I knew him." He spoke as though every word required a terrific effort.

"Where did you see him last?"

"In the office there, that gentleman's office, late at night."

"When, Hiroshi?"

"Three days, three days before."

"What were you doing in Mr. Battle's office?"

"I go look for Garrett. Garrett a very bad man. Owe Hiroshi money; a lot of money."

"You went there to ask him to pay you, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Garrett said he wouldn't pay you, wouldn't ever pay you, that you had no proof that he owed you money?"

"Yes, that's what him say."

"And what did you do?"

"I kill him," said Hiroshi with devastating simplicity.

John Battle half rose in his chair. He glowered at the withered little Japanese.

"You killed Garrett!"

"Yes, I kill him. I——" A fit of coughing seized him. When it was over, a tiny drop of blood showed on his nether lip. "I take knife from table," Hiroshi continued, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "I stab him and hang him up in closet. Hiroshi sick, but strong, very strong."

John Battle glared at Yoshimo, then at the little man perched gingerly on the edge of his chair, then back again at Yoshimo.

"Something doesn't jibe here," John Battle barked. "Garrett was found with a button in his hand, a button that came off one of my coats. Can he explain that?"

"Hiroshi can explain everything," said Baron Yoshimo sweetly. "It appears that when Hiroshi opened the wardrobe, he discovered a coat of yours hanging there and Hiroshi being a man of few scruples and realizing that muddy waters best conceal the fish, decided that it would be wise to remove one of the buttons from the coat and place it in the hand of the man who had defrauded him. He placed it between the second and third fingers. Thereupon he left, taking the coat with him and, discovering by the label inside that it was your property, he waited until you had departed for the office on the following morning. Hiroshi is a man who has a way with locks. He found no difficulty in entering your apartment and leaving the coat with the rest of your clothing. It may appear to you as a needlessly vindictive thing for him to have done, but aside from the reason already mentioned, it seems that Mr. Garrett informed him that if it were not for you, he, Mr. Garrett, would have had the funds wherewith to pay Hiroshi, so Hiroshi had no love for you. Have I stated the facts correctly, Hiroshi?"

The little man with the monkey-like face appeared slightly bewildered, but he nodded earnestly.

"You may now go," Baron Yoshimo said to him, and added a few words in Japanese.

Without a word Hiroshi obediently rose and left the room.

A strange silence filled the atmosphere.

After a long time Baron Yoshimo said, "Excuse it, please. It was not polite of me to speak to Hiroshi in a language with which you are not familiar. I was merely telling him to guard his health. It is necessary that he must live."

The manner in which this last was said impelled John Battle to ask, "Why is it necessary that he must live?"

"He must live," the Japanese said calmly, "so that he may die—so that he may die for you."

John Battle leaned forward in his chair. He bored into Yoshimo with his eyes.

"Enough of this. Why do you see fit to entertain me with these lies? Hiroshi did not kill Garrett."

"You are undoubtedly in a position to know," Baron Yoshimo said softly. "But why do you say Hiroshi did not kill Garrett?"

John Battle hesitated; then, "For

one thing that coat never hung in the wardrobe. It was in my home. Are you planning to enlighten me as to the purpose of all this?"

Baron Yoshimo began tapping the top of his desk with his long finger nails.

"It is necessary," he said, after an interminable pause, "that nothing should happen to you. If you were confined at this stage in our affairs, it would be a great catastrophe for us—for Japan." He lowered his voice and almost hissed the next words, "With your multiple anti-aircraft gun that will make my country impregnable to attack from without—we can defy the world."

"I understand that, but the rest of it is a riddle. This business of Hiroshi. I tell you I know he didn't kill Garrett."

"I know it, too," Yoshimo said suavely. "But it is of no consequence. Your eminent attorney, Mr. Gore, has had a talk with the district attorney. He has been put in possession of all of the facts, and it is clear that your position is extremely precarious now. The case against you will be prosecuted further. It will in due course be presented to the grand jury." Yoshimo rose, stood for a time looking out of the window. When he turned back his face was extremely grave. "When that time comes, it is important that we are able to produce the actual murderer of your former associate, Mr. Martin Garrett, and that murderer is—will be, Hiroshi."

John Battle, too, had risen. For a time he stood speechless.

"You are insane," he stormed. "Why should Hiroshi confess to a crime of which he's innocent? Why should he have himself be sent to the chair?"

"We need you not only here, but in Japan to start the factory. Hiroshi is a great patriot. There are many such men in my country," Baron Yoshimo proclaimed proudly; "men who are ready to die for Japan. But in Hiroshi's case the sacrifice will not be so great. He is old. He is in the grip of a deadly malady. He cannot live in any event. And his wife in Kobe and his two sons shall be well rewarded; great honor will accrue to them."

"What was Hiroshi doing in my office last night?"

Baron Yoshimo smiled. "We are not creative like you here in America, but we are wonderful imitators. We imitate meticulously. Hiroshi is planning to imitate a murder and when the time comes for Hiroshi to confess to his crime, he will be questioned, and it will be necessary for him to be familiar with the ground. He must know the place where he committed the murder; where the wardrobe stood and such details, otherwise he will not be believed. I myself have furnished him with much information, details the police gave the district attorney, who in turn very kindly gave them to the eminent Mr. Gore."

"It was you who sent Gore to represent me?"

Baron Yoshimo nodded. "I promised to assist you, to befriend you. I am a man of my word. And now an opportunity has arisen to do more for you than even I had expected. On the day that the multiple anti-aircraft gun comes into our possession, on that day, Hiroshi will walk into the station of your police and will give himself up as the murderer of Mr. Martin Garrett. He will die in your place. You will be forever free—free even of suspicion."

"That isn't necessary," John Battle said sharply. "You have my word that the gun will be turned over to you and to no one else."

"You have a phrase," Baron Yoshimo said smoothly, "that is called 'making assurance doubly sure.' That is what I am doing. And Hiroshi won't mind. He'll be only too glad to confess—or to testify to anything. If it were more expedient, Hiroshi would be prepared to swear that he saw Mr. Krausmeyer, or Mr. Measley stab your ex-treasurer, Mr. Garrett." Yoshimo stopped and looked for a long time unblinkingly at John Battle; then, "He would even testify that he saw you do it."

The blood rushed to John Battle's face.

"I am not to be moved by threats," he said harshly. "Besides, in this instance, they are wasted, unnecessary."

"Yes, I know," said Baron Yoshimo softly. "You hate your country."

"I have no country."

CHAPTER X.

PONDER DROPS IN.

THE next two days John Battle spent at the factory, working with the ex-convict Shieber and his two assistants to finish up.

Shieber's attitude had changed. The threat of being sent to the dreaded prison of Alcatraz, America's Devil's Island, had had its effect, and he had made amazing progress. Lon Shieber was an extraordinarily clever mechanic. It was a pity that he hadn't from the outset decided to devote his talents to an honest career, instead of the one he had selected. Now working directly under Battle, inspired by the latter's driving force, Shieber forgot his position. He forgot that he was working under compulsion, forgot the menace hanging over him if he didn't succeed. The ingenuity of the device had captured his imagination and he found himself as anxious as John Battle to make the thing work. At the end of the second day he ventured to approach Battle.

"It's a wonderful piece of mechanism, Mr. Battle," he said. "I know machines and what they can do, but I've never seen anything like this."

John Battle nodded without comment.

"There's only one thing," Shieber went on hesitantly. "I don't think it's gonna work. I can't quite tell you why, because it's not finished yet, but the firing control don't synchronize the right way. I've been studying the plans, and it kind of looks to me as if you'd forgotten something, as if something had been left out."

John Battle smiled grimly.

"I haven't forgotten anything, Shieber. But you're right. Something's been left out. Don't worry about it. Keep on with your work."

Late that afternoon John Battle drove back to New York and went directly to his office and sat for an hour at his desk, motionless, completely lost in thought, wondering what life would be like when his task had been completed, reviewing in his mind the events of the past few days. The consequences to himself of Garrett's death; Yoshimo's implied threat and what would happen to him if he failed to deliver his multiple anti-aircraft gun to the baron he ignored. The Yoshimo Trading Co. would get the gun. He had determined on that long ago. It wasn't necessary for Yoshimo to threaten him. But his controversy with his associates who wanted to sell the gun to Germany troubled him. Could he handle them? He no longer needed them. They had put

up the funds, had backed him during the years necessary for the tedious experiments, had advanced the money for the expensive machinery needed to construct his invention. They had known how to get their hands on men like Shieber, who could be trusted, because they were afraid.

John Battle wasn't grateful to them in the least. They were in this thing for money, and he was willing that they should have the money, even that they should cheat him out of his share. He was in it for something else—for revenge. And by God, he'd have his revenge! He'd have it at any cost. He'd double-cross Krausmeyer and the others, if necessary. He'd send Shieber and his two jailbird assistants to a life of exile in Japan. He didn't try to justify himself.

But after his task was completed, then what? Life would hold nothing more for him. He would be as badly off as Hiroshi. He would be dying, not physically, the way Hiroshi was dying, but mentally. He'd be no better off than that poor devil. He made a sound that was like laughter, and yet wasn't laughter. A whimsical, sardonic idea had come to him. He saw himself together with Hiroshi, the monkey-faced, stoical little Jap. They were having a drink together, and suddenly he, John Battle, was saying, "I'll flip you, Hiroshi, to see who goes and confesses to the murder of Martin Garrett." What an amusing idea.

Unexpectedly his mind jumped to Martin Garrett's daughter. She was an attractive girl, a girl of courage and spirit. Idly he wondered what her future would be like. Now that her father was dead, she, too, was alone in the world. He half closed his eyes, then shook his head, as though trying to clear his mind. What concern of his were women?

There was a knock on the door.

John Battle said, "Come in."

Eddie appeared.

With a note of apprehension, Eddie said, "That detective what was here the other night is back again. He wants to see you."

With a scowl, John Battle instructed the boy to show the detective in.

Sergeant Ponder, in the wake of a cloud of cigar smoke, wandered in. As usual, he had the air of one who had nothing in particular on his mind; was just there for a sociable little chat. Uninvited he took a chair and deposited his derby on the corner of John Battle's desk.

"I just dropped in," he said, "to talk over old times."

Battle stared at him, an expression of perplexity on his face. What did the man mean—old times?

"I'm the dumbest detective in the world," C. O. Ponder declared amiably. "The trouble with me is that I haven't any system. I just go poking around, digging up this and digging up that, without knowing what it's all about. If it weren't for people helping me out, I don't know where I'd be. I thought maybe you'd help me out now."

"Why should I?"

"There isn't any particular reason," Sergeant Ponder conceded, "unless maybe you think that when I was on the stand I didn't do you any harm. I thought maybe you appreciated that and——"

"I lost my capacity for appreciation long ago," said John Battle frostily.

"Yeah, I guess that's right," C. O. Ponder replied slowly. "I don't know as I can blame you."

John Battle looked at him intently. "What do you mean by

that? What do you know about me?"

"A lot," said the detective with some satisfaction. "I know for instance, that you were in the navy, up to a few years ago; were quite a big man, a lieutenant-commander, which is a big job for a young man like you. I know that you were attached to the ordnance department. I know that everybody thought that you had a tremendous future in the navy, Mr. Battle. There never was a man in the navy who had the talent for engineering that you showed."

"Stop it!" John Battle said through his teeth. "I have no desire to discuss my past with you or any one."

C. O. Ponder considered his cigar with satisfaction. It was longer than usual.

"Battle," said the sergeant, reflectively, "it's a fine name—a fighting name."

"It *was* a fine name."

"Something happened. You were summoned to appear before the general court at Washington. The plans of some invention on which you had been working for the navy had been stolen. They accused you of having had something to do with it, and you can hardly blame them; the case against you looked pretty bad, just like this one that I'm working on now. This Garrett murder looks pretty bad as far as you're concerned."

"Where did you hear all this?"

"I flew down to Washington; got it from a friend in the ordnance division. He showed me the records. You were court-martialed. They let you off easier than they might have, in view of your past record and the fight you put up at the trial. At that, they did plenty to you. They called you a traitor. You were dishonorably discharged from the navy, and they took away your citizenship. I don't blame you for being sore—if you weren't guilty."

"And suppose I was?"

"Tch—tch," said C. O. Ponder. "I'm supposing that you were not guilty. I read the evidence, and I could see where it could point to some one else just as easy."

John Battle's features were distorted as though he were in pain.

"If you've come here to sympathize with me," he muttered, "consider that you've fulfilled your errand. What's more, I want no sympathy from any man—or woman, for that matter."

"Sure, sure," said Sergeant Ponder soothingly. "I was only wondering whether that case, that old case, couldn't in some way be hooked up with what's happened here."

For an instant John Battle looked startled, then contemptuous.

"That's a ridiculous suggestion," he said shortly.

"Well, maybe," said C. O. Ponder, in no way offended. "Did you know that Garrett had an office in Washington while you were stationed there? Did you know his business was to buy munitions for foreign governments, to pick up inventions which could be used in the manufacture of armaments?"

John Battle's breath came faster. He stared intently at C. O. Ponder. Was it possible that this dull-looking individual had stumbled on something in his circuitous way, had discovered the thing that John Battle would have given his life to discover?

"Go on," he said tensely.

"I have checked up on every one in this office," Sergeant Ponder said, "so I know a lot more than you think, but you've got to help me.

Nobody apparently benefited by Garrett's murder. He left all his money to his daughter. And *she* didn't kill her father. The most likely motive for his death, the way I look at it, is one of two—revenge, or to keep his mouth shut. Revenge alone won't let you out. Let's say maybe that you had found out that Garrett had done you dirt while you were in Washington. A man of your temperament, and considering what has happened to you, wouldn't hesitate a minute to put Garrett on the spot, would he?"

"No, I wouldn't," John Battle said again through clenched teeth. "As it happens, I found out nothing about Garrett. I didn't even know until this minute that he had ever been in Washington or connected with the munition industry."

"Then let's suppose that this Garrett was going to squeal and he was killed to shut him up."

John Battle rose to his feet and began to pace the floor with long quick strides.

"This is all just guesswork," he declared impatiently. "Garrett could have been killed from a dozen other motives."

"Tch, tch. I'm not saying he couldn't," C. O. Ponder admitted patiently. "Say, don't you want me to find out who killed Garrett?"

"No, I don't care who killed him. I've got other things to worry about."

There was for a time a silence, a period which the sergeant devoted to smoking industriously. Then suddenly he said:

"What are you making out at that factory of yours—out there in that place they call Dusty Woods?"

John Battle spun around. "How did you discover that we had a factory there?"

"I had you tailed," said C. O. Ponder. "You seem to forget that you're an important suspect, and it's up to us to pin something on you, if we can. What's your business with the Yoshimo Trading Co.?"

Ponder wasn't looking at Battle or he would have noted that the latter was poised on the balls of his feet, as though about to spring. It lasted only for a few seconds before Battle recovered himself.

"I don't care to answer," he declared icily, "any questions in connection with the affairs of my company."

"All right," said the sergeant. He replaced his worn derby on the back of his head, rose and made for the door. "If I were you," he said with his hand on the knob, "I'd keep an eye on Eddie, that office boy of yours. He came back here late a few nights ago and met a Jap named Hiroshi and let him into your office." C. O. Ponder began rolling his cigar between his thumb and fingers. "I guess that's no news to you," he added; "probably you saw him, because you came out of the building after he did."

"No, it's no news to me."

"I guess you now realize," Sergeant Ponder said ingenuously, "that I've got plenty of men watching this place, watching everything. Maybe that'll do you some good; then again—maybe it won't."

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER MURDERER.

JOHN BATTLE left the office. He hailed a taxicab and gave the driver an address on the lower East Side. When the address was reached, Battle got out, paid the driver, and dismissed him. But Battle did not enter the building, which bore the address he had given the taxi driver.

Instead, he took a rambling walk. Suddenly he stopped and stepped into the basement of a dilapidated old brick building on Second Avenue, just below Twelfth Street. Battle stood at the entrance of a small machine shop.

An individual clad in overalls, which, along with his hands and face, were grimy with grease, came to meet him.

John Battle said, "Is it finished, Tony?" His words came tight, expectant.

"Yeah, it's finished, Mr. Battle," Tony said. "It's finished and every part is exact to the thousandth of an inch. I never did a better job in my life."

John Battle wasn't interested in that. "Where is it?" he demanded quickly.

"Here, I'll show you," said Tony, and led the way between power drills, machine pressers, lathes, and shapers to a bench at the rear where, alongside of a vise, a shining contrivance reposed. "I made it according to your blue print; it doesn't mean a thing to me. I can't even guess what it's supposed to be."

John Battle picked the thing up. It was no bigger than the works of a small alarm clock; a thing of cog wheels, of cams, of tiny points, all made of hardened tool steel. John Battle examined it. His expression softened. He looked at it almost lovingly, turned the delicately balanced wheels, touched the little steel points with the tips of his fingers.

"It looks all right, Tony," he said. "Give me a pair of calipers, and where's the blue print?"

Tony produced both.

John Battle with one eye on the blue print began to measure the various parts, did it delicately, with the precision of a practiced mechanic. Eventually he said:

"It's a good job, Tony; perfect, in fact."

"Dot's good," a voice behind them said. "I am glad to hear it, Chon."

John Battle spun around. He and Tony had been bending over the bench, so intent upon checking the measurements of the contrivance Tony had manufactured that they hadn't heard the steps of the man who had come in behind Battle only a minute after his arrival.

Gustaf Krausmeyer was standing there, his thick lips in a wide grin, his eyes twinkling as they rested on John Battle.

John Battle's lips grew into a tight line. His sunken eyes burned fiercely. He held the thing behind him as though to keep it away from the big German.

"You are a smart man, Chon," Krausmeyer said. "You dink of everyding."

Battle said nothing. His eyes remained fixed on Krausmeyer. He noted that the latter kept his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

Tony stared at the two men without understanding.

"Maybe I bedder take care of dot ding," Krausmeyer said significantly.

Still John Battle made no reply. He picked the blue print off the bench and wrapped it around the piece of mechanism he held in his hand.

"Maybe you had," he said carelessly, throwing a glance about the shop.

Over to the right, less than ten feet away, a small furnace which Tony was accustomed to use in melting the metals for his castings was seething, burning white hot.

John Battle walked toward it listlessly, as though he had nothing in mind.

Krausmeyer, his smile widening,

said, "Wot are you doing, Chon? I dink I said I would take care of dot liddle machine."

John Battle nodded. He held the contrivance out but not toward Krausmeyer. Instead he held it directly over the furnace. The heat seared his hand.

"You know me, Krausmeyer," he said with deadly calm. "I wouldn't be afraid to die. That gun in your pocket won't do you any good. I'll prove it to you. I'll give you five seconds to take it out and chuck it over to me. If you don't, I'm going to drop this thing in the furnace where it won't be of any use to anybody. The blue print is going with it. If you shoot, it'll fall in anyway, because I'm holding it right over the furnace. So you better throw it over to me."

The big German's body grew taut, his eyes twinkled steadily. He held his smile. The veins in his forehead stood out, thickened. One could almost see his brain working, calculating his chances. After what seemed like hours, Krausmeyer chuckled.

"Why, Chon, wot a ding to say. As dough I would shoot you! Sure, I carry a gun; I always carry a gun. Look." He drew a small shiny automatic from his pocket, held it with the butt toward Battle. "Here, take it."

"Throw it," John Battle said without budging an inch.

Gustaf Krausmeyer shrugged. "Don't drop it," he said, and flipped the weapon at Battle who caught it neatly with one hand and dropped it into his own pocket. Then he came away from the furnace.

Krausmeyer studied the other speculatively. "I dink you and I bedder go some place where we can have a talk. Der's some dings dot got to be straidened out—dey got to be straidened out now. It's for your own good, Chon."

John Battle, stern-visaged, unbending, considered. Then:

"All right, we'll go to my apartment. A cab will get us there in a few minutes."

John Battle had a small apartment at Eleventh Street, just east of Fifth Avenue. They rode across town in silence, and not until they were inside the apartment did either of them speak.

Battle took the contrivance out of his left-hand overcoat pocket and placed it on a book case in back of him. He took out the gun and held it carelessly in his hand while he divested himself of his coat and hat. His eyes sultry, he said:

"Don't ever try anything like that again, Krausmeyer."

The big German smiled and made no pretense that he had misunderstood, nor did he attempt to defend himself.

"Dot ding," he said, "I suppose is part of de gun?"

"Part of it?" John Battle said, twisting his mouth into a sardonic line. "Yes, it's part of it. It's the *'brains'* of the gun. It times the firing of the various barrels, synchronizes the entire mechanism. The gun isn't worth a hoot without it. With it, it's the greatest defense that was ever devised against an airplane attack. Properly handled nothing but a miracle would enable an airplane to escape the gun, Krausmeyer, once this little device has been attached to it."

"*Ja*, I understand." Krausmeyer's smile dwindled. He looked thoughtful; then, "You're a hard man to fight, Chon, and I'm a bad man, too. De trouble is we don't understand each odder; at least I don't understand you. You would like to see your gun go to Japan. But Japan

or Germany, it don't make so much difference, Chon, and it means a lot to me. It's not only de money, Chon, but wid a dousand of dose guns, Germany can laugh at de rest of Europe. Dey don't have to be afraid of nodding. Dey can be big and powerful again. I was in de last War, Chon." For one brief instant a startling change came into Krausmeyer's expression. The twinkle went out of his eyes. That ominous smile left his lips. He looked wistful, indescribably sad. But when John Battle spoke, the old expression came back.

"It's no use," said Battle, his voice hard and uncompromising. "The gun goes to Yoshimo. That's where it will hurt most. In Washington they think of nothing but Japan, Japan, Japan."

Gustaf Krausmeyer looked about for his hat. He kept running the brim through his thick fingers.

"You wouldn't let anyding stand in your way, would you, Chon?" He kept looking down at his hat. "And I wouldn't let anyding stand in my way. Dink it over, Chon. I'm a bad man, a very bad man to say 'No' to, Chon."

John Battle's short scornful laugh echoed through the room.

"You're not nearly as tough as you think you are."

Krausmeyer lifted his eyes. Behind the twinkle a steely glint shone viciously.

"Maybe not," he said evenly. "Who do you dink killed Garrett? I did, Chon. I did. And it looks as dough in the end dey'll send you to the chair for killing him—unless maybe you'll change your mind about where dot gun is going."

"You killed Garrett?"

"Sure, Chon. Don't bodder to tell the police. Dey won't believe it. Dere's no evidence against me. It's all against you, Chon. If Yoshimo gets your gun, you'll go to de chair as sure as I'm standing here. I'll take care of dat."

John Battle stared at him, bereft of speech. Krausmeyer couldn't know the irony of the thing he was saying. He couldn't know about Hiroshi; couldn't know that Yoshimo had made the same threat, that if Yoshimo *didn't* get the gun, he had promised to see that Battle was convicted. Suddenly John Battle laughed, gave forth a sound that had something of madness in it.

Krausmeyer stared at him for a moment, then shrugging, walked out.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "BRAINS" OF THE MACHINE.

JOHN BATTLE slept that night with Krausmeyer's gun under his pillow, his door securely locked and a chair against the knob. The priceless device, the thing that he called the "brains" of his multiple anti-aircraft gun, lay beside him on a little table. In the morning he had his breakfast sent up from a near-by restaurant. And there was an extra large pot of coffee, which Battle consumed while he gave thought to his position.

He felt completely hemmed in by foes on every side. Ponder was determined to fasten the guilt of Martin Garrett's murder on him. There was Krausmeyer, Woolf Kern, and Measley trying to prevent him from delivering his gun to Yoshimo. The fact that Krausmeyer had seen fit to follow him the previous night to Tony's machine shop, indicated clearly, not only that they had suspected him, but the lengths to which they would go in order to frustrate his plans. Then there was Yoshimo. Yoshimo had made it plain that un-

less he got the gun, Hiroshi would swear that he had seen Battle kill Martin Garrett instead of taking the blame for the murder. That would make Ponder's case complete.

Of course, he could trust Yoshimo to help him against the others. But what could Yoshimo do? The difficulty lay in getting the gun, when it was completed, out of the factory. Kernochen, Shieber, and the others there weren't working for Battle; they were working for Krausmeyer, and would take Battle's orders only as long as Krausmeyer supported him. If Krausmeyer left instructions that Battle was not to be admitted to the factory, he, Battle, would be helpless. It wasn't likely that such instructions would be issued, as long as he had the "brains" of the gun in his possession. It was far more likely that they would let him finish the gun, and then take it away while he, John Battle, was restrained by force at the factory. He could expect, in the meanwhile, that further attempts, such as Krausmeyer had made the night previous, to steal the "brains," would be made.

He swore. A feeling of desperation came over him. If he only had one friend, a single person whom he could trust! And then some odd quirk in his thoughts suggested Ann Garrett. She wasn't a friend, anything but a friend, but she could be trusted. He was convinced of that. If he could hold out the proper inducement to her, she might help. He didn't exactly know how, but that would come later. He gave way to the new impulse immediately, searched through the telephone book, found Martin Garrett's name and picked up the receiver.

She answered the phone; seemed in no wise astonished when he asked her if she would come to his apartment now, immediately.

He didn't bother to explain that he himself couldn't leave, didn't dare leave until he had hit upon some secure hiding place for the "brains" of the gun.

Yes, she would come. She would be there in less than half an hour.

John Battle hung up, went into his bedroom, and picked up the little mechanism where it still lay beside his bed, wrapped in the blue print. He took off the blue print, tore it into small bits, then burned them one by one over the ash tray. At least the specifications wouldn't fall into Krausmeyer's hands; Battle required no specifications. If ever he found it necessary to construct another, every measurement, every dimension was etched in his brain.

True to her word, Ann Garrett arrived in less than half an hour.

"You wanted to see me," she said. She looked cool, competent, and self-contained as she took the chair that Battle indicated. She didn't seem to think it strange that she should be here.

"You want to find the murderer of your father, don't you?" he began without preamble. "Nothing but that will satisfy you? No one can understand that better than I. The irresistible urge to get even, to get revenge. I've been living for that for years, and when I get it, what happens after that doesn't matter." He stopped as though waiting for her to confirm what he had just said.

"Go on," she said quietly.

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes," she said.

"I may need some one to help me, some one I can trust. I haven't a friend in the world; there isn't anybody I can trust except perhaps you. You have a double interest in this matter. That little machine there," he said, indicating the "brains," "is part of something that I'm building.

It will be finished shortly. It's going to be sold for millions. Your father's share will naturally go to you. My associates want to sell it to some one else rather than to the people to whom I want to sell. My people are going to get it or nobody is going to get it. It sounds a little mad; it is mad. It's become an obsession with me, I know. What I need is your help, and you're interested because if I don't succeed you won't get a cent."

She looked at him long and steadily. "You said there were two reasons why I ought to help you."

"The other is—if I can count on you when I need you, I'll deliver the murderer of your father into the hands of justice. That'll make you happy, won't it?" he said bitterly. "The day that my plans are completed, I'll give myself up. It won't take more than a week. I'll give you a signed confession now if you want it, dated ahead. You won't be able to use it until my job is done because the district attorney will think it's a phony if it's dated ahead. You can rely on me, because when my task is finished I won't care what happens to me."

Now her eyes widened. She was staring at him incredulously. She looked somehow a little horrified. There was something shattering about the tense, passionate way he spoke; about the way his hands gripping the arms of his chair quivered.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he burst forth. "What is there so strange about what I'm saying? Why shouldn't I give myself up? Confess that I killed your father? Why should life be so precious to me, who has no friends, who'll have nothing, once my work is finished? People are always committing suicide, aren't they, with less reason than I have?" He looked off into space, then back at her and swore. "Damn it! What are you doing—crying?"

She blinked rapidly several times and shook her head. It was ghastly to look at him, to see that hunted, desperate expression in his eyes. Her pity for him threatened to overwhelm her.

"There's nothing to cry about," he snapped. "Here I'm offering you money, tons of money and revenge in return for a little help."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I don't know yet," he said, "for the present I want your assurance that you'll stand by, that I can call on you to help in any way you can. If I have your word of honor, I'll write out the confession now." He took out his fountain pen, went to a small writing table and snatched a sheet of paper. "Do I get it?"

"I'll help," she said, "don't write—don't write the confession now."

"Why not?" he said harshly. "I may not get another chance." He took the cap off the pen.

The house telephone rang.

He went and lifted the instrument off the hook. "Hello."

The hallman said, "There's a Mr. Krausmeyer and two other gentlemen here. They're on their way up."

John Battle said, "Damn!" and replaced the instrument.

Krausmeyer was here. With him, probably were Woolf Kern, and Measley, and they had come for the "brains." John Battle was certain of that. He picked the device up, looked wildly about the room for a hiding place, at the same time he opened the drawer of the writing table and took out the gun that he had taken from Krausmeyer.

Ann Garrett watched him fearfully. "What is it?" she said.

"Nothing," he snapped, "nothing.

Get out. Go through there; there's a servant's entrance. It's Krausmeyer, Kern, and Measley. I don't want them to see you here." He was pulling some books out of the bookcase feverishly with the idea of hiding the thing in his hands, there.

She was quick to understand. "It'll be the first place they'll look," she said.

"I'll be here to defend it," he said with a savage gesture of the weapon in his hand.

"They're too many for you—I made a bargain with you—I promised to help." She stretched out her hands. "Give it to me."

Instinctively he drew back. He couldn't part with this priceless thing, he couldn't, and yet——

The buzzer rang. Krausmeyer and the others were at the door.

"You said you trusted me," she whispered, looking him fixedly in the eye.

Still he hesitated.

The buzzer rang again, more peremptorily this time.

He snatched a newspaper from the waste basket, wrapped it hastily about the little machine and thrust it into her outstretched hands. He seized her by the wrist so that it hurt.

"If you think," he whispered hoarsely, "that I killed your father, the way for you to get even is to turn this thing over to Krausmeyer."

She said nothing, turned quickly and made for the door he had previously indicated.

"Wait in the pantry," he whispered, "until you hear me letting them in, then go out the back way."

He slipped the gun into his pocket, went to the door and let them in.

Krausmeyer, big and smiling, stood there; beside him Woolf Kern and, a little to the rear, little Sigmund Measley.

"Come in," John Battle said. He turned on his heel and preceded them to the living room where he flung himself in an armchair.

They followed him slowly, with an air of caution, Measley hanging back more than the other two. Once inside they cast quick, darting glances about the room.

John Battle knew the thing for which they were looking.

After a time Krausmeyer said, "Good morning, Chon. It's early, I know. But we wanted to make sure dot you hadn't left before we called."

Woolf Kern said, "Let's not waste any time. The difference, Battle, between the offer we've got and the amount that Yoshimo is able to pay is three million dollars. Don't forget we put up the money. We risked our capital. You only invented the damn gun."

"Yes," John Battle said, "I only invented the damn gun. That's why it's going to Yoshimo."

Woolf Kern's face darkened. He looked quickly at Krausmeyer.

Krausmeyer said, "Don't be foolish, Chon. You can't get away wid it. Dere are a dousand ways dot we can stop you. Where is it—where's de ding you call de 'brains' of de gun?"

"In a safe place," John Battle said slowly.

Gustaf Krausmeyer smiled broadly. His hand came out of his pocket holding a flat-nosed, ugly-looking automatic. With his free hand he reached for a chair and seated himself opposite Battle. To Kern and Measley he said, "All ready, boys, look around."

Ann Garrett had been right. The first place where they searched was behind the books. Woolf Kern tear-

ing them savagely from the shelves, dumping them on the floor. Sigmund Measley was more gentle about it. Occasionally he threw a half-apologetic glance over his shoulder at John Battle. When they had finished with the bookcases they went through the writing table, looked behind the radiators, searched everywhere and, discovering nothing, went into the bedroom.

Alone with John Battle, Krausmeyer, who had been scrutinizing Battle's features intently, all of a sudden said, "I guess, Chon, it isn't here. I guess somehow you got it out. I can tell by your face."

"There's no hurry," John Battle said. "Let 'em look."

"No, I'm sadisfied," said Krausmeyer. "You're a smart boy, Chon; I always knew it. I'm gonna play my last card, Chon, before I get unpleasant. You know I can be unpleasant, Chon, don't you? I told you I killed Garrett. Do you want to know why I killed him?"

John Battle leaned forward in his chair. "Why?" he asked.

"Because Garrett was going to talk. He was going to give de whole show away, Chon. He was going to tell you how you had been framed in Washington dot time dey court-martialed you. He had it all written out, but I found out about it. Dot's why I killed him."

"I don't believe it."

"Maybe not," said Krausmeyer carelessly, "but I got Garrett's report to prove it. Would you like to have it, Chon? Would you like to be able to show the world dot you wasn't a traitor? Wouldn't you like to be able to go back to Washington and tell a lot of stupid admirals dot if dey had treated you fair, de greatest gun dot was ever invented would be in de hands of de United States Navy instead of—instead of Germany? Your way—when dey find out about de gun—dey won't dink much about it. Dey'll just dink dot's de sort of a ding a traitor would do, sell a gun to Japan instead of to his own country. It won't be so much of a revenge. But if dey find out dot you were innocent all de time, it will hurt dem, Chon, it will really hurt because dey will blame demselves."

John Battle, his teeth clenched tight, said, "You say I was framed? If I was framed, you were in it, too. Garrett's report will incriminate you."

"*Ja, ja,*" Krausmeyer said indifferently. "Sure I was in it. But wot do I care about being incriminated. I'll be in Germany wid your gun. I'll be a great man, Chon. You see, I'm being honest wid you."

"If I turn the gun over to you," John Battle said, "you'll give me Garrett's report? And will you give me a signed confession that you killed Garrett?"

"I couldn't do dot, Chon. Dey can extradite you for murder. Dey could bring me back from Germany. But dey couldn't for dis odder ding dot I'm willing to clear up for you."

"And what'll happen to Kern and Measley?"

Krausmeyer bared his teeth. "Why should you and I care what happens to dem? Dey're in dis ding for money. You and I are in it for nobler dings. Wot do you say, Chon?"

Woolf Kern, followed by Measley, came back. The former's face was black with rage.

"We can't find it. We turned the place upside down." He started to take off his coat. "But I guess we can find a way to make him talk."

Little Measley let out a squeak.

Krausmeyer said, "Mr. Kern, I'm

surprised at you. You forget Mr. Battle is one of our partners."

Woolf Kern glared at him.

"We've got to be going," Krausmeyer continued, "Mr. Battle is going to dink dings over. He's going to let us know to-nide—to-nide by six o'clock, no later." He gave John Battle a significant glance, then added, "We've got to get to de office. I want to hear how dings are going at de facdory."

He started out with Measley in his wake.

Woolf Kern remained behind for a moment to say, "I don't know what Krausmeyer has in mind, but you better come through, Battle; you better play with us. We've got too much at stake to be fussy with you, if you don't."

John Battle waved him out.

He stood staring at the door that closed behind them. Was Krausmeyer telling the truth? There was a chance that he was. His statements seemed to bear out C. O. Ponder's guess that Garrett was killed because he had been about to talk. Then that horrible thing that had happened hadn't been just a mistake, the result of a blundering court, but planned with a view to getting him to join the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. when they came with an irresistible offer at the psychological moment. Should he accept Krausmeyer's offer? Could he trust the German to give him Garrett's report, if such a report existed? How would it feel to be rehabilitated? To look those men, with whom he had been associated for so many years, in the eye and say, "You condemned me unjustly."

And then the hopelessness of it all struck him. He wouldn't be really rehabilitated. Garrett's confession would exonerate him of the first crime, but in order to get it he would have to commit another. He would have to sell his invention to a foreign power, which, by every code, he ought not to do. No one had a right to that marvelous gun except his own country. An incredibly ironical situation, enough to drive one to distraction.

And then he thought of something else. He thought of Yoshimo, resourceful, vindictive. The Japanese had made it only too clear that unless John Battle kept his word to deliver the gun to him, he would see to it that Hiroshi would complete the chain of evidence that C. O. Ponder had against Battle. What good would it do him then to be exonerated? Whether or not he lived hadn't mattered up to now, but now things were different.

If he were to be reinstated, his citizenship restored, why damn it, he wouldn't want the gun to be sold! It was his gun and it would be his country once more. And that's where the gun belonged.

John Battle raised his hands to his throbbing head, pressed them against his temples. The complications of the situation were too much for him just then. What could he do? What could he possibly do?

CHAPTER XIII.

EDDIE TALKS.

IN the meantime the leisurely Ponder had taken it into his head to pay another visit to the offices of the Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. He was anxious to interview Eddie. That pimply-faced individual interested him strangely. He had had him shadowed continually as he had the members of the firm, and on the previous day Ponder's men had reported that Eddie had gone to make a deposit at his bank. It required only a little

effort to discover the extent of Eddie's balance, and it proved to be of such a size that C. O. Ponder involuntarily let out a low whistle.

"What do you want with me?" Eddie demanded with more courage than he actually felt.

"Just a nice little talk," Sergeant Ponder said laconically. "Nobody seems to be able to help me, but maybe you can, Eddie. I've got great faith in you."

Something akin to fear came into Eddie's eyes. "What do you want to know?" he asked reluctantly.

"Different things," C. O. Ponder said. "But this isn't a good place. Put on your hat and coat, Eddie, and we'll go for a little walk."

"I can't leave the office," Eddie said. With his hands he seized the seat of his chair as though to keep himself from being forcibly dragged away. His pale, shifty eyes avoided the sergeant's.

"Yes, you can, Eddie. It will be all right if you're going for a walk with me. Of course, I could take you to the station house, but I don't want to do that unless I have to. The boys are sort of rough down there. Some of them like to play games with a rubber hose, Eddie."

Eddie looked wildly about. "You can't do it," he cried. "I'll call Mr. Krausmeyer."

There was a show of interest in the faces of two or three of the clerks in the office.

"Or, yes, I can," said C. O. Ponder, lowering his voice. "I can even take Mr. Krausmeyer down there, if I want to. There is nothing to be afraid of, Eddie. This is just going to be a friendly talk."

Eddie hesitated only a minute longer, then slowly he got to his feet.

"Get your hat and coat," said the sergeant, keeping at Eddie's side as he went to the hat rack.

Out in the street C. O. Ponder took Eddie by the arm.

"We're going to go down to the Battery and pick out a nice comfortable bench looking out over the harbor. That will take your mind off of things and maybe you'll concentrate on just what I'm interested in."

Eddie gave him a fearful sidelong glance from time to time as they made their way along in silence. Eventually they found a bench that stood apart from the others, and as they seated themselves the sergeant reached into his upper pocket and extracted a thick black cigar.

"Here, Eddie, have a smoke," he said.

"I don't smoke cigars," Eddie said.

"I didn't think you did," said C. O. Ponder. "Mr. Krausmeyer doesn't either, does he?"

"No, he doesn't—not cigars—and neither does Mr. Kern," Eddie said. After all, the sergeant didn't seem so formidable. He was beginning to feel reassured. "If it interests you, Mr. Measley smokes cigars," he volunteered pertly.

"That interests me very much," said Mr. Ponder. "I always like a man who smokes cigars; makes me feel at home." Then suddenly, "How much do they pay you where you're working, Eddie?"

"Not much," said Eddie. "Twelve dollars a week."

"And how long have you been working?"

"Three years; with the same people, ever since they started."

"Are you good in arithmetic, Eddie?"

The boy shifted uneasily. The sergeant's vague questions somehow disquieted him.

"Twelve dollars a week, Eddie, is how much a year?"

"About six hundred dollars," Eddie said sullenly.

"That's right," C. O. Ponder agreed brightly. "And you've been working three years, so all together you've made about eighteen hundred dollars?"

"I guess so."

"I was wondering, Eddie, if you could tell me how you managed to save more than three thousand dollars out of such a little salary?"

Eddie's mouth fell open.

"I didn't," he gasped.

"But you got that much in the bank."

Eddie's shifty eyes searched the bay as though for an inspiration.

"I inherited some money," he said at last.

"That's nice," said C. O. Ponder. "Did you inherit it all at once or in little pieces?"

Eddie gulped twice; then, "I got it all at once from an uncle who died, but it's being paid me a little at a time." Considering the explanation adequate, he relaxed a trifle, but the sergeant's next question brought him up sharply.

"I suppose this uncle of yours," said Sergeant Ponder, looking out to sea with his round opaque eyes, "was a Japanese?"

Once more Eddie gulped, tried to speak and couldn't.

"Don't tell me," said C. O. Ponder. "Let me guess. This uncle of yours worked for the Yoshimo Trading Co. and the Yoshimo Trading Co. is paying you your inheritance a little at a time; there's a little Japanese chap that brings it to you a hundred dollars at a time. Isn't that right?"

Eddie's brain began racing at a furious pace. He was by no means stupid. It was obvious to him that the sergeant was toying with him, that he knew or had a pretty shrewd suspicion of his relationship with the Yoshimo Trading Co. Considering the matter, Eddie decided that complete frankness was the best course. After all, what could the sergeant do to him? At best, he could report him to his employers and Eddie would lose his job, which was no serious matter for one in his financial position.

"No, my uncle never worked for the Yoshimo Trading Co. To be honest with you, sergeant, I didn't inherit any money. The Yoshimo people pay me to keep them informed of what's going on down at our office. I think we're making something that they want to buy."

"What are you making?"

"I don't know. Honest, I don't, sergeant. That's the God's honest truth."

"I believe you," C. O. Ponder said. "You've been a good boy so far, Eddie."

That last sounded so much like the way Mr. Krausmeyer was in the habit of addressing him that unconsciously Eddie shivered.

"You've never been in trouble, Eddie, have you?"

"No," Eddie said.

"You've always been a good boy?"

"Always tried to," Eddie declared virtuously.

"Except that one time," Sergeant Ponder suggested in his most casual way.

Eddie started to jump to his feet, but C. O. Ponder's restraining hand kept him there.

"You see, I know all about it, Eddie. There's no use trying to hide anything from me. I've got some more questions to ask you, Eddie, and if you lie to me, it will only mean trouble for you."

With a trembling hand Eddie

reached into his pocket and extracted a crumpled package of cigarettes. Unsteadily he lit one.

"How—how did you know?" he said.

"I've been looking you up," C. O. Ponder told him frankly. "A few years ago you were charged with grand larceny, stealing a couple of thousand dollars from the payroll of the people you are now working for. The charge wasn't pressed. Why wasn't it, Eddie?"

Eddie was shaking in every limb.

"I'm trying to help you," said the sergeant kindly; "that is, I'll try to help you if you'll try to help me."

"If I tell you," Eddie quavered, "if I tell you the God's honest truth, sergeant, will you promise not to do anything to me? You won't let them arrest me? You won't let them send me to prison?"

"If it's that old charge you're worrying about," Sergeant Ponder said, "I think I can promise that nothing will happen to you."

"Anyway, I paid half of it back, and Mr. Krausmeyer said that I didn't have to pay the rest as long as I was a good boy and did what he told me to."

C. O. Ponder's head came around slowly. His vacuous eyes rested on Eddie.

"And what did he want you to do?"

"Nothing special," said Eddie; "just to keep my eyes open and tell him what was going on around the office."

C. O. Ponder was disappointed. For one brief moment he had thought that he had hit a trail that might lead somewhere.

"Think a little harder, Eddie," he said in a voice that held little hope. "Wasn't there ever anything special, anything to do with Mr. Garrett, or Mr. Battle, or any of the other of your bosses that Mr. Krausmeyer wanted you to do?"

"Nothing," said Eddie firmly. He was taking heart from the sergeant's manner, "except maybe a few days ago when he sent me up one night to Mr. Battle's house with some papers for him to sign, and then he was only playing a joke."

"What sort of a joke?" Ponder asked slowly.

"He wanted me to snitch something out of Mr. Battle's house; a handkerchief or a cuff link or something personal like that—nothing that was worth anything."

With some difficulty C. O. Ponder kept his tone casual as he asked the next question.

"And did you do it, Eddie?"

"It wasn't much," Eddie explained. "Mr. Battle didn't leave the room where I was. All I could do was to yank a button off of Mr. Battle's coat, which was hanging on a chair next to where I stood."

"And what did you do with it, Eddie? You didn't give it to Mr. Krausmeyer, did you?"

"Why, sure I did," said Eddie in a tone of surprise. He was obviously telling the truth.

Sergeant Ponder was so astonished that he opened his mouth wider than he intended. His cigar butt dropped to the ground and went unheeded.

"You gave it to Krausmeyer—you didn't give it to any one else?"

"No," said Eddie simply.

"And what did he say?"

"Why, he seemed satisfied. He said, 'Dot's a good boy, Eddie.' You never heard him say that to me, did you, sergeant? The way he says it sends shivers down your back, makes you feel that he's going to do something terrible to you if you're not a good boy. Then he said not to mention it to anybody; he was

just playing a joke on Mr. Battle. Then he said again, 'Dot's a good boy, Eddie.' Don't tell him I told you about it, sergeant. You'll only get me into trouble."

C. O. Ponder, with a look of almost comic bewilderment, was studying the boy. It wasn't possible that Krausmeyer could have been so rash as to place himself in this boy's hands by taking that button from him. He couldn't possibly have killed Garrett and been so simple-minded, under the circumstances, as to have stuck that button in Garrett's dead hand. But still——

"Did you ever hear what happened to that button, Eddie?"

Eddie was plainly nonplused; no, he hadn't heard.

After a long time C. O. Ponder said, "Run along. Forget all about our little talk. You won't get into any trouble over it. Take my word for it."

With a sigh of relief, Eddie hastened away, and C. O. Ponder, watching his retreating figure, soliloquized:

"I suppose he told me the truth, and, if he did, poor old Ponder's one little clew is knocked sky high—poor old Ponder's one little real clew——"

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. MEASLEY TAKES A NAP.

C. O. PONDER got home late that night. His wife, Molly, a trim little figure, though slightly buxom, with jolly blue eyes and a sweet mouth, chided him with, "If you had been late for dinner again, Charley, I would have taken you right out of that police department. I'm a trusting soul, I am, with a husband that's always staying out late, claiming that he's working on a case."

"Don't scold me, Mommer," said Sergeant Ponder.

"You're tired, darling," she said, and came up to him and threw her arms around him, giving him an affectionate hug.

"I'm not so tired, Mommer; just a little mixed up. I was playing a hunch on this Garrett case, but I guess I was wrong. I just got one more chance."

"You forget all about it," she ordered; "wash up and sit down. I'm just putting dinner on the table."

C. O. Ponder followed instructions, stopping on the way to pick up an ash tray from the sideboard. He placed his butt in the ash tray, right beside him, and started on his steaming soup with relish, conscious that the watchful, motherly eye of Molly was resting on him, to make sure that he ate every spoonful. Having finished his soup in silence, he looked up and said:

"You won't mind, Mommer, if I don't talk much? I've got to do a lot of thinking. There's a lot of work ahead of me to-night. It's going to be a long evening."

"You're not going out again?" she protested.

"No, I'm not. Some one's coming here; some one that I want to talk to about the case."

"Now, Charley, how many times have I told you not to bring your filthy old murders home." She tried to put indignation into her voice but couldn't quite manage it. As a matter of fact, it sounded much more like sympathy.

"It's got to be that way, this once, because—well, because," he went on apologetically, "I need you to help me."

Mrs. Ponder looked surprised, but thoughtfully refrained from questioning him. He would tell her all in good time, and in his own way.

"Forget about it now," she said, "if you don't want to talk, don't—till you've finished your dinner. There's one thing though I've got to say: I got a letter from Katie and she says you forgot to mail her her allowance again."

C. O. Ponder grinned. Nothing could prevent his wife, thoughtful and considerate though she was, from reminding him whenever he was remiss in his duties toward the pride and joy of their life, their daughter, Katie, away at college.

"I didn't forget it," he declared stoutly. "I didn't get paid until yesterday."

"Go on with you," Molly said. "You've always got an excuse."

Her husband, busy with a juicy steak, said nothing. That finished, he waved the dessert aside, relit his half-smoked cigar, and relaxed on the sofa. After a while he got up and went into the kitchen where his wife was busy with the dishes. From his vest pocket he took a little white paper package.

"Listen carefully, Molly," he said. He invariably called her Molly instead of Mommer when he had something serious to discuss, "There's a man coming to see me. I'm going to keep him talking a long time, and some time or other I'm going to ask you to bring in some coffee or some tea or drink of whatever he wants, and I want you to put this in his coffee or whatever he's drinking. Be sure you put it in *his* cup and not in mine."

She stared at him incredulously for a time, then with unwonted firmness said, "Charley Ponder, what are you up to?"

"Nothing much," he said soberly; "only something that the commissioner would throw me off the force for, if he found it out. I just want our guest to have a nice little nap. Maybe it will do him good—maybe it will do me good, too."

"But why?" she said in a puzzled tone.

"Why?" said Ponder, as though it were a novel question, "why, because I want to see what he does with his cigar when he falls asleep."

Sigmund Measley arrived half an hour late. He looked about the simply furnished room and then at C. O. Ponder. There was about him an air of trepidation that he strove valiantly to conceal.

"Really, sergeant," he began, "this is a most extraordinary request. I can't understand your asking me to come here."

"I told you over the phone," C. O. Ponder said in his leisurely way. "It's about the Garrett case. I've got a lot of information that I know will interest you. I feel that you're the best man with whom to discuss it." No one would have suspected it, but in his way, Sergeant Ponder was quite an actor, and he suddenly managed to look secretive and to give an ominously dramatic note to his voice. "I'm not sure, Mr. Measley," he said, "that Battle is the guilty party. There are things about this case that point to Krausmeyer!"

The way that C. O. Ponder said, "Krausmeyer," literally made Sigmund Measley jump.

"Really," he managed, "really, you surprise me."

"Take off your hat and coat; make yourself comfortable." He pushed forward a huge armchair. "It's going to take a long time to discuss this. Have a cigar."

Mr. Measley looked askance at the thick, black, villainous weed that Sergeant Ponder held out to him. "If you don't mind," he said timorously, "I'll smoke one of my own."

Ponder held a match for his guest, then for himself lit the cigar that

he had proffered Measley. It was an important occasion, had the latter only realized it, when Mr. Ponder lit a fresh cigar. Then the sergeant began to talk; and it soon became apparent that he was out to establish a record, a record of which any filibustering congressman might have been proud. He began with the history of John Battle, his life in Washington, the brilliance of a career cut off in its prime. He recited the evidence submitted at Battle's court-martial; from time to time he plied Measley with endless questions, questions which the latter answered with care while he fidgeted, waiting for what was to come.

Mr. Measley was several times on the verge of telling Sergeant Ponder that he knew all of these things, knew them better than the sergeant did, but he perceived a certain danger to himself in that, and wisely held his tongue.

When the old clock on the little table in the corner of the room struck eleven, Sergeant Ponder had gotten as far as the discovery of Martin Garrett's body hanging in the wardrobe, and that was still a long way from home.

Mr. Measley had by now given up even the few feeble attempts to hurry the sergeant along, that he had made earlier in the evening. He was watching C. O. Ponder, somewhat drowsy-eyed, yet with the fascination of a bird watching a snake. So far the sergeant had said nothing that might definitely alarm him, yet the latter had the conviction that all this was leading up to something, something that would involve him somehow unpleasantly.

The sergeant himself was somewhat fatigued. He thought he saw at this point a chance to get a little well-earned rest.

"Now you heard all the evidence so far, Mr. Measley, that connects Battle with this crime. You look like a smart man and maybe you can give me some ideas. I want you to give me your opinions, in detail, mind you; tell me everything you think about it. Sometimes an outsider's angle is a big help."

But all that Mr. Measley said was, "I don't know what to make of it."

C. O. Ponder groaned inwardly, and went on as before. He was on his third cigar. Sigmund Measley had finished his fifth.

"Better light up again," the sergeant suggested. "We've got a lot to talk over yet."

"Couldn't we—couldn't we," Mr. Measley ventured, "abbreviate it a little? Really, it's getting quite late."

"We haven't come to the most interesting part yet. I'll tell you what. You light a fresh cigar and I'll have my wife make us some hot coffee."

Mr. Measley felt his upper pocket and, finding it empty, said, "I guess I better not smoke any more."

C. O. Ponder went to the door and called out, "Molly, would you be good enough to make us some coffee? Mr. Measley and I are having a hard evening. We are going to need it."

He came back and resumed where he had left off, asking Mr. Measley at great length to consider if it were reasonable to think that a man as intelligent as John Battle would commit a murder and then leave all that evidence around. "Man to man," he demanded, "doesn't that seem a little foolish?"

Mr. Measley ran his tongue across his lips. He felt again for a cigar and looked a little helplessly at C. O. Ponder.

"I don't know," he said slowly.

"I haven't had any experience in these things. What makes you think that Krausmeyer had anything to do with it?" he asked with a sudden inspiration. That ought to bring matters to a head.

"The funny thing is," said the sergeant, "I have investigated the matter and Krausmeyer has an unshakable alibi for the night on which Garrett was killed. More than a dozen people can vouch for the fact that he was nowhere near your office."

"Well, then?"

"That's just the point," said C. O. Ponder, contriving to look very shrewd. "Most people suspect the man who hasn't any alibi, but I suspect the man who has, Mr. Measley. The very fact that a man's got a perfect alibi makes me think that he's the guilty party."

Mr. Measley looked a trifle bewildered. It was a mistake, for it only led the sergeant to recite the history of a half dozen cases in which he had participated where alibis had subsequently turned out to be entirely false. Sigmund Measley looked suggestively at his watch and in a tired voice said again, "It's getting late." He also looked longingly at the butt that was clenched between C. O. Ponder's teeth.

At this point Mrs. Ponder, with a tray bearing two cups of coffee, came in.

"This is my wife," said Sergeant Ponder with pardonable pride. "Mr. Measley, who is interested in the Garrett case."

Sigmund Measley rose halfway from his chair. He was very tired and was grateful to Mrs. Ponder for telling him not to get up. It was a deep chair, and one from which it was difficult for a short man to rise. He sank back and appreciatively accepted the coffee proffered by Mrs. Ponder. No, he took neither sugar nor cream.

C. O. Ponder helped himself to the other cup, dropped six lumps of sugar into it and said, "Thank you, Molly," whereupon his wife withdrew.

"Now you've got to have a cigar. I'll bet you're out of them. Try one of mine. They're not as bad as they look. You get to like the flavor when you're used to them."

Mr. Measley accepted the proffered cigar with some hesitancy, but to an inveterate smoker any cigar is better than none. He bit off the end, lit it and started to sip the coffee.

C. O. Ponder in the meantime resumed with renewed energy from the point where he had been interrupted.

When presently Mr. Measley had finished his coffee, his eyes were half closed. He puffed mechanically at his cigar.

Sergeant Ponder leaned over and took the cup from his unresisting hand and placed it beside his own on the table.

"I'm very tired, very tired," said Mr. Measley. Unconsciously he shifted his cigar from one hand to the other and allowed his arms to droop in slack fashion down the sides of the armchair.

C. O. Ponder kept on talking. His voice grew lower and lower, and presently, when Mr. Measley's eyes were entirely shut and a faint but unmistakable snore kept wheezing through his nose, Mr. Ponder stopped entirely. Then he arose and stood contemplating Sigmund Measley, or rather, Mr. Measley's hand—the one that held the cigar. C. O. Ponder tiptoed toward the door. Almost there he heard it open softly. Molly was standing there. He beckoned her to come into the

room. He pointed to the sleeping Measley.

"A good guest," he said in a whisper. "He'll never burn a hole in the rug and he'll never set a bed on fire."

The satisfied smile on Sergeant Ponder's face was not entirely due to the fact that he had his arm about Molly's waist as he led her softly from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

JOHN BATTLE WON'T QUIT.

JOHN BATTLE had scarcely finished bathing, shaving and dressing before Ann Garrett was announced over the house telephone.

"Let her come up," he told the doorman.

There was a little package in her hand. She placed it on the table in front of him.

"You see, I didn't turn it over to Mr. Krausmeyer—or to any one else."

He said, "Thank you. Does that mean you think I didn't kill your father?"

She looked him in the eye for a long time; then, "Yes. I don't think you had anything to do with my father's death, in spite of what he said, in spite of everything. What is it?" she said, indicating the little machine that she had returned. "I looked at it. It doesn't mean anything to me. It doesn't look like anything that would make me millions. I'm not being mercenary; in fact, I don't need the money. I'm just interested why you and the others should fight over it."

He shook his head without replying.

"Why won't you tell me?" she said curiously. "I've shown you that you can trust me. Krausmeyer and the rest must know what it is or they wouldn't want it. Father must have known. I think perhaps I've got a right to know."

And still he maintained his stubborn silence.

"The trouble with you is," she said spiritedly, "that you're all tied up inside. You won't confide in anybody. You said yourself you hadn't a single friend. You don't make friends by not confiding in people, by being secretive."

He had been looking away, but now he turned his dark, sunken eyes full on her.

"What you say is true," he said coldly. "It's all true, especially that I'm all warped, twisted deep inside. What was once a soul is nothing but a sense of injustice, hatred, and an overwhelming desire to get even with those that wronged me and the country they represent. And now that I'm on the very verge of getting my revenge, I find that I can't do it, and all because of something that a man I can't trust, Krausmeyer, said yesterday, after you left." He stopped and stared into space.

"What did he say?" she asked.

"He said that the court that condemned, disgraced me, had been misled by a conspiracy, a conspiracy in which Krausmeyer and probably the others were involved——" He stopped suddenly. He had thought that he was devoid of any human feelings, but he must have been mistaken, for now that he was confronted with the necessity of telling her that her own father had participated in that conspiracy, he couldn't bring himself to do it. She was clean and decent, trustworthy and friendly, and considering what she had done for him and what more she was ready to do, it would be a poor return to tell her.

Then, as from afar, he heard her

say, "This conspiracy which ruined you, embittered your whole life—was my father in it?" And as he maintained a stubborn silence, she said more insistently, "Tell me; it won't make any difference. My father was good to me. We loved each other dearly. The knowledge that during his life he succumbed to some temptation, that there was a weakness in his character isn't going to change all that."

Without looking at her, he said, "Krausmeyer says that your father made out a report that would establish my innocence; his conscience troubled him. You see, he was rather decent after all. He probably couldn't bear to see me the way I was. I can't blame him. I can't bear myself." He stopped, looked listlessly about; then added, "Of course, you can't believe Krausmeyer. He says he has the report; that he'll turn it over to me if I give him this little machine."

"He's speaking the truth," she said excitedly. "Don't you remember my telling you about the report my father was writing? The first page was addressed to you."

John Battle started. Of course. He had forgotten about that entirely.

"What were you accused of?" she asked.

"Of being a traitor to my country. I was a lieutenant commander in the navy, in charge of a section in the ordnance department. Some plans were stolen. They got into the hands of the Japanese. And I was accused of having sold them. They found money in my desk; quite a large sum. I don't know how it got there. I can't tell you all the details, but it did no good, my defending myself, my throwing the money into their faces. I was court-martialed, thrown out of the navy; my citizenship was taken away from me. Do you wonder that I hated my country?"

"I wonder how you stood it," she declared with deep sincerity. "But it's over now. It's so simple. Let Krausmeyer have this thing, this little machine. I still don't know what it is, but if he wants it so badly that he'll give you my father's report, so that you can prove your innocence, there's nothing else to do. I don't like it myself. I don't like the idea of my father's name being dragged in the mud, but I insist on your doing it. You've got a right to do it."

A sad, half-whimsical smile came to John Battle's lips.

"It's not as simple as you think. The thing I'm building at a factory out in Jersey, and of which that thing there is only a part—it's the essential part—is an anti-aircraft gun. I'll tell you just a little so that you'll understand why it isn't so simple. It's a gun that every time it's fired—it can be fired at the rate of a hundred and twenty times a minute—it shoots not one bullet but fifty bullets out of fifty barrels and each barrel is set at a very slight angle so that the gun, when it sprays the sky with bullets, covers a wide area. The gun revolves continuously and so constantly changes the direction of the shots. An airplane might as well attempt to pass through a snowstorm untouched, as to cross a battery of these guns. A country equipped with these weapons can laugh at airplane attacks. Do you understand now why I can't turn this over to Krausmeyer?"

She looked as if she only half understood.

"It was my idea to give it to the Japanese. I have, as a matter of fact, a contract with them. That was the way I was going to get even

with my country for what it had done to me. But I find that I can't do it. You can't sluff off a country. It's in your blood. And you can't sluff off the navy, not if you've been in it the way I have. I belong to the navy. My brains belong to the navy. My gun belongs to the navy." His voice was low, but the hand with which he gesticulated trembled a little. "Krausmeyer wants that gun to take back to Germany——"

She stood quite close to him, looking into the desperate misery in his eyes. He swayed a little, then sank into a chair.

"Excuse me," he said, "I haven't slept all night, trying to think of a way out. The last two weeks have been a little too much for me, I guess. I worked so hard to get the thing finished, and I never realized before how much I wanted to talk to somebody. There's some whisky over there. Would you—would you pour me a drink?"

She nodded, went to the table and filled a small glass to the brim. He emptied it at a single gulp.

"You see," he continued wearily, "the gun is in Krausmeyer's factory, but it's no good without that thing that you guarded so well, and that thing is no good without the gun. I want to get my gun out of the factory, but, of course, they won't let me. In the meantime, they're going to try and steal this thing from me." Suddenly that strained, hard look of old came back into his eyes. "We'll see," he said. "We'll see."

The house phone rang. He started to rise, but she waved him back. "I'll see who it is." And presently she announced, "It's Ponder."

"I don't want to see him."

"I think you'd better," she said. "I think you'd better tell him about my father's report—and about the gun, too. I like the sergeant. I think he's the sort of man who would stand by."

C. O. Ponder looked quizzically from one to the other when he came in, but his glance finally remained on John Battle.

"You're all in," he said brusquely. "If it's the Garrett case you're worrying about, forget it. I never did think you had anything to do with Garrett's death. I couldn't believe that any sane man would commit a murder and leave all the evidence in the world against himself."

John Battle regarded him without a change of expression.

It was Ann Garrett who spoke up indignantly.

"Then what did you arrest him for? For practice, I suppose," she demanded sarcastically.

Sergeant Ponder was amused. "You wanted him arrested, didn't you? Besides I thought that if he were arrested it would throw the guilty party off his guard. It didn't," he added ruefully.

Ann Garrett colored slightly, then contrived to look as though it was all C. O. Ponder's fault, and that if he were a gentleman he wouldn't mention the matter at all.

"You appear to have been right, sergeant," John Battle spoke up, "when you told me that you thought Mr. Garrett had probably been killed because he was on the point of talking. Shortly before his death he was busy on some sort of a report. Miss Garrett got a glimpse of it. The report was addressed to me. It's now in Krausmeyer's possession and he is offering it to me in exchange for something he wants."

C. O. Ponder chewed fiercely on his cigar. For once he was really put out.

"Why didn't you tell me about this before, from the beginning?" he asked Ann Garrett. "And you, Mr.

Battle, why didn't you tell me that Krausmeyer had the report?"

Ann Garrett said, "I didn't think it mattered."

"Tch—tch, you didn't think it mattered," the sergeant mimicked her impolitely. "It's always a great help to the police when people decide for themselves what's fit and what isn't fit for the police to know. In this particular instance, if you had told me about the report, I might have relieved your mind right away concerning the thing your father said: 'Battle will kill me.' Mr. Battle had some trouble a few years ago and it looks to me very much as if it had been a frame-up and your father was going to tell him about it. I don't like to say it, but I'm afraid he was connected with it in some way. And when he talked in his sleep what he meant was, '*When he sees this,* Battle will kill me,' or, '*When he hears about this,* Battle will kill me,' or something like that. It's the sort of thing everybody is constantly using."

"I'm sorry," Ann Garrett said, but she said it to John Battle and not to C. O. Ponder.

"Maybe you can tell me how Krausmeyer got a hold of this report?"

"He says he killed Garrett and took it away from him."

Part of the wrapper on Sergeant Ponder's cigar became loose. He moistened the tip of his finger and pasted it back. Then:

"Krausmeyer may have that report, but he didn't kill Garrett. I've found a dozen reliable witnesses that give him a perfect alibi."

Ann Garrett was watching the sergeant steadily. The color mounted in her cheeks, her eyes took on a deeper hue.

"I thought that what I wanted more than anything else in the world," she said slowly, "was for you to find my father's murderer. I still want that, but it's not as important right now as some other things. What I want now is for you to get the report my father made, so that Mr. Battle may be exonerated—and we want you to help us with something else."

"Tch—tch," said Sergeant Ponder, good-naturedly. The "we" had not escaped him. "You want me to help you with something else. What do you want me to help you with?"

Ann looked at John Battle.

"Tell him," she said. "Tell him about the gun—please."

For a moment it looked as though John Battle would refuse. His mouth was set in a grim line, then suddenly he changed his mind. The girl was right. C. O. Ponder looked like a decent sort, and he, Battle, would need all the help he could get. So he told Sergeant Ponder about the gun; how he had had a sudden change of heart; he no longer wanted the gun to go to Japan, nor to Germany; told him about Yoshimo and Hiroshi. And when he had finished, C. O. Ponder whistled softly.

"I never knew a man in a worse fix," he said. "Who's got a legal right to this gun?"

"The Warlock Tool & Steel Corp. When I agreed to associate myself with them, I, of course, had to assign the rights to my invention to the corporation in return for the money that Krausmeyer and the others were putting up. At the time I told them that I wanted the gun to go to Japan. None of them raised any objections. I suppose they calculated that it was time enough to bring up the final disposition of the gun when it had been completed."

The sergeant said, "That's bad. If the gun legally belongs to them, the

police can't do a thing. Even if you could manage to steal it out of the factory in Jersey, we couldn't help you. If they took it away from you by force, we couldn't interfere. What's more, the chances are they'd probably have you locked up for theft, and it wouldn't do you any good if an understanding jury acquitted you, because by that time the gun would be in Germany or in Ethiopia or wherever they wanted to ship it. There's nothing I can do for you there, Mr. Battle, except of course, to try and see that they don't beat you up—or kill you. If you want a police guard, you can have it, but I don't see what good that'll do you. It won't help you get your gun."

"No," said John Battle, "it won't help me get my gun." He said it hopelessly, wearily, in a desperate way.

C. O. Ponder rose, bestowed a look of sympathy on John Battle and shook his head.

"The breaks a man gets sometimes make you kind of sick. You said Krausmeyer gave you till six o'clock last night to make up your mind to come across with that thing you call the 'brains' of the gun? You didn't do it—has anything happened?"

"No," John Battle said listlessly. "I called him up last night and told him that I was considering his proposition favorably and would let him know in a day or so. I was only trying to gain time; probably nothing will happen for a few days."

"Maybe not," said Sergeant Ponder dubiously. "If I had the slightest case against Krausmeyer, I'd clap him into jail for you, get him out of your way for a time, but there'd still be this Kern guy and Measley and the people at the factory for you to worry over, and Yoshimo. You don't have to worry about the Hiroshi angle of that. We'll take care of him. But from what you tell me, Yoshimo wants this gun as badly as Krausmeyer, and when these Japs want something, they go after it. Watch your step. If I wasn't a policeman who's got a job on his hands, I'd go out there and help you steal that gun myself. Well, I'll be seeing you. I've got to go and look for my murderer."

With that C. O. Ponder ambled out.

John Battle sat slumped deep down in his chair, staring at the floor. He was engulfed in a feeling of lethargy, dejection, despondency.

Ann Garrett watching him said, "You're not going to give up now, are you?"

"What can I do?"

"When you were against your country, you had courage," she said. "You fought and you were ready to continue to fight—fight them all. But now that you're for it"—it hurt her to put so much disdain into her voice; he looked so tired, so worn; but she had to do it, she had to rouse him—"but now that you're for it, you're lying down; you're quitting."

His head came up. His eyes far back in his head, burning, took her in from head to foot.

"Give me a drink," he said harshly.

Obediently she went and poured him a drink. It struck her as odd that she felt as though she belonged here in his apartment, waiting on him, looking out for him, spurring him on to one final effort, lending him some of her courage, and when the time came she would give him her sympathy and her understanding.

He drained the glass, placed it

down hard on the table and straightened up in his chair.

"I'm not quitting," he said in a tone so low that she scarcely heard. "I told you, your country is something that gets into your blood. The service gets into your blood, too. Something inside me won't let me quit. Maybe it's you, Ann Garrett" —he jerked his head back and said again—"maybe it's you."

CHAPTER XVI.

ANN DRIVES A TRUCK.

JOHN BATTLE got to his feet. He began to walk the floor, thinking rapidly.

Ann Garrett sat watching him quietly without saying a word, not wishing to interrupt the trend of his thoughts. Sometimes her gaze strayed to the window. It was snowing, the first snow of the year. She had a strange feeling of contentment, and attributed it to the snowflakes falling gently, softly. That feeling couldn't be due to the fact that she was there with him. How could there be any peace just being with him when he was confronted with so many difficulties, immersed in a turbulent, dangerous situation? And yet perhaps she was wrong. Perhaps in spite of everything, sharing his troubles accounted for the way she felt.

Suddenly John Battle came to a halt in front of the writing table. He opened a drawer, took out his check book, looked at his balance, and with a shrug flung the book on the desk. He turned to her.

"Have you got any cash?"

"Plenty," she said. "How much do you need?"

"Enough to buy a second-hand truck," he said. "Do you think you could buy a truck? Do you think you could drive it late at night? Do you think you could hide it in a patch of woods?"

She felt her heart beat wildly. "Why not?" she said.

He gazed at her for a long time, doubtfully she felt; then:

"You said you'd help. You've been urging me on not to quit. I'll need somebody, and there isn't anybody but you."

"You're not very gracious about it, John Battle."

He brushed that aside with an impatient gesture of his head.

"There isn't time to be gracious; just time to tell you that you're a fool to stand by me; that you're running a big risk. If you stand in the way of Krausmeyer or Woolf Kern or any of them, they'll wipe you out, just the way they would me—the way they did your father." He stopped, stared out of the window, then spun around. "Go on home. Mind your own business. I am a man that the Fates have selected for destruction. Anybody that ties up with me will go the same way."

"How big a truck do you want?" she asked evenly.

He glowered at her. "A five-ton truck; a second-hand one will do. You ought to be able to get a good one for about fifteen hundred dollars or less. An open truck will be best. Do you know Jersey?"

"Yes, I know Jersey."

"If there were anybody else," he said, "I wouldn't let you do this. I can't do it myself. I know that they're going to watch me, watch my every move. Sooner or later they hope I'll slip up and they'll get their hands on that little contraption there, the 'brains' of the gun."

"I'm sorry," she said, "if I seem so inadequate."

"Damn it!" he roared at her. "Stop being a woman. You're not important; I'm not important; only

what we're going to do is important."

She accepted the rebuke without protest.

"What do I do with the truck?"

"Wait till it's dark. A girl won't attract so much attention when driving a truck, and go out to Boonton. When you come to the third traffic light beyond the town, you'll find a road that bears left. Take it, stay on it for about eight miles, till you come to a sign advertising a motor oil. There's another left turn there, a road that's no more than a cow pasture. Take it; it leads you into a patch of woods. You'll see an abandoned shack on the right-hand side. There's a clearing there. Drive the truck into that and as far as you can into the woods beyond. Leave the truck there."

"And what happens to me?" she said. Despite the seriousness of the situation, there was merriment in her eyes.

He looked nonplused, even crestfallen.

"I hadn't thought of that. The worst of it is that I'll need you back here."

"Otherwise you wouldn't mind my staying there till spring, and the robins had come and covered me up with leaves."

But she couldn't shake him out of the seriousness of his mood.

"I'll tell you what happens to me," she said. "I'll walk back to the other road."

"A matter of almost two miles," he said.

"Don't be silly. Two miles, what's that? I'll walk it and then get a lift home or to the railroad station at Boonton."

He started to protest, but she silenced him with:

"It's your job to tell me what you want done, and mine to do it in my own way. I've never driven a truck. It ought to be fun. What happens when I get back?"

"You telephone me, and I'll tell you what to do next."

She rose, put on her coat, captured as much of her fluffy hair as she could underneath her perky little hat, then held out her hand.

"Good-by, John Battle. You'll hear from me when the truck is safely tucked away in the woods in Jersey."

"It's no sort of a job for a girl," he said moodily.

"I couldn't think of a girl with an ounce of adventure in her," she replied, "who wouldn't give a year of her life to be in on this."

Before he could say more, she was gone.

John Battle sat down at his desk and began to write a long letter to a man he hadn't seen for years. It took him over an hour. When he had finished, he stuck it in an envelope, sealed, stamped, and addressed it. He put on his hat and coat, went over and stuffed the "brains" into his overcoat pocket. He felt that he was perfectly safe with it on his person in broad daylight. It was far safer that way than to leave it behind. He went downstairs, mailed the letter, hailed a taxicab, and gave the driver the address of the Yoshimo Trading Co.

Baron Yoshimo eyed him curiously, and for the first time during their intercourses he was the first to speak.

"I trust," he said sibilantly, "that there is nothing wrong."

"Not yet," John Battle said, "but there will be, unless I have your assistance."

Yoshimo flicked an invisible speck from the trousers of his immaculate suit.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"My associates," said John Battle, "are determined that my gun shall go not to Japan but to another power. You know where it is being manufactured. You can appreciate that they actually control the factory, that the gun weighing more than two tons is not the sort of a thing that can be smuggled out. Nevertheless, I think I will get it out. I want some men to help me."

Baron Yoshimo nodded. "I was not mistaken in you," he said. "You are a man of determination, a man of great genius, and it is a pity that your services are lost to your own country. How many men do you wish, and what do you wish them to do?"

John Battle reached over for the memorandum pad on Yoshimo's desk. Quickly and deftly he sketched a map.

"Here," he said, indicating a square, "is our factory. It is completely inclosed with barbed wire. The gate is guarded. It would be impossible for me to take your men inside. I am counting on my authority in the factory and on the element of surprise to get the gun out. But once on the road, I expect to be followed by men that are as unscrupulous as yours are—are determined," he amended quickly.

Baron Yoshimo smiled thinly. "Well put. And what are my men to do? I presume they are to be waiting there in a car. Do you wish them to transfer the gun from your car into theirs?"

"That would hardly be feasible," John Battle said. "It will be on a truck, on a truck that I will drive myself. In any event, the time required to make such a transfer would take too long. If I am pursued, the pursuers would be on top of us before we could complete the transfer. What I want your men to do is to run the pursuing car off the road. Failing that, somehow or other, to get between them and my truck; to guard me from attack in the rear."

Baron Yoshimo blew smoke rings at the ceiling. After a time he said thoughtfully:

"It looks like a dangerous proceeding, to which great risk is attached. Is there not some other safer way?"

"There is no other way," John Battle snapped. "I am counting on your men to be resourceful and intelligent. Perhaps I won't need their assistance. Perhaps my actions won't arouse suspicions. The factory may not be warned by my associates in time. A dozen things can happen."

"When do you want the men there?"

"I don't know. I shall have to act quickly, at the most suitable moment. Have them ready at all times, and I will telephone you when they are to start from New York. One thing more. How will I recognize them? How will I know that it's your car and not some other car, which happens to be there by chance?"

"The men will be ready whenever you want them," Yoshimo said succinctly. "They shall have the use of my own car, a light-blue sedan, capable of great speed, and," he added enigmatically, "the men will be under a capable leader."

John Battle rose. He pushed the pad toward Yoshimo. "There's the map," he said. "The X indicates where they are to wait. It mightn't be a bad idea for your men to study the map."

Yoshimo rose, bowed politely to John Battle as the latter turned on his heel and left.

John Battle went back to his

apartment. He had luncheon sent up. Afterward he called the factory, got Kernochen on the wire.

"It's all finished," Kernochen said. His voice was thick. "But the damn thing won't work, Battle. Shieber says it won't work."

"Never mind that," Battle barked. "I'll be out to make it work."

"When?"

"To-morrow, or the next day."

John Battle hung up with a feeling of relief. Apparently Krausmeyer had taken no steps to apprise Kernochen of the rift in their relations. Kernochen hadn't been told to withhold any information from him, Battle, hadn't even been instructed not to permit Battle to come to the factory, or Kernochen would have mentioned it. He called up Krausmeyer at the office.

"How are you, Chon?" the big German's voice came cordially over the wire.

"A little under the weather," John Battle said. "I just spoke to the factory. Kernochen tells me everything is in shape except for the final attachment. I'm going out there to-morrow or the next day, as soon as I feel able, and fix it up. We can talk about what happens to it after it's finished."

"You're going to be reasonable, Chon, aren't you? You're going to do de right ding?"

A grim smile twisted John Battle's face as he called back. "Yes, Krausmeyer, I'm going to do the right thing."

He spent the afternoon trying to make up some of the sleep he had lost the previous night, but he slept fitfully, constantly waking up, listening for the telephone, hoping for word from Ann Garrett.

At five o'clock it came.

He snatched the receiver off the hook, said, "Hello."

"It's the most beautiful truck you ever saw," Ann Garrett's voice came to him. "The man said it was a great bargain. I told him I was going into the trucking business and he promised to throw a lot of business my way."

Underneath the lightness of her voice, he caught an undertone of excitement.

"You're not scared?" he said.

"No," she said. "I'm starting right now for the Holland Tunnel."

The hours that followed seemed to John Battle the longest he had ever spent in his life. His own enforced inaction made him nervous, drove him into a frenzy. Every now and then he brought himself up sharply, conscious of the fact that he wasn't worrying about the thing that he ought to be worrying about, a successful carrying out of his plan, but was worrying about the girl. It was perfectly insane to let her do a thing like that. Anything might happen to her walking along those roads by herself at night. He had confidence that she would manage to get the truck there. But what would happen to her after that?

At half past ten the buzzer rang. Some one was at the door.

John Battle reached for his pocket. Krausmeyer's automatic was there. He went to the door, opened it part way and heard a voice say:

"You haven't got any trucking you want done, mister, have you?"

He threw the door wide and literally pulled her inside.

She stood there smiling, a béret covering most of her hair, a great coat concealing the slim lines of her figure. One hand was tucked in the pocket of her coat, in the other she held something out to him.

"The key," she said, "for your truck, Mr. Battle."

"Are you all right?" he said.

"Yes, I'm all right. I'll have one little drink with you, then I'm off for home. It's highly improper for me to visit you alone at this hour, chaperoned by nothing more than the 'brains' of a gun."

CHAPTER XVII.

LON SHIEBER.

DIRECTLY after lunch on the following day John Battle had his car brought around to his home. He was waiting with his hat and coat on. The little machine—the "brains"—was in his pocket. He had no intention of attaching it while he was out at the factory, but he wouldn't be parted from it. He stopped only long enough to make two telephone calls. First he called Yoshimo, to tell him that he was starting. Then he called the man to whom he had written the day before.

"You got my letter?" he said. "All right, then you understand. I expect to be there sometime late in the afternoon. See that the gate is open the minute I signal. It's going to be close work."

Then he went out and entered his car.

He made no effort to look around, but once inside he looked into the driving mirror. He wasn't sure, but parked less than a block away he saw a big touring car, a touring car which he thought he recognized as Gustaf Krausmeyer's. He had once driven to the factory with Krausmeyer, and he remembered the car well. Now there were three men in it.

He started his car. The other car started. He took another look in the driving mirror. The big man at the wheel was Krausmeyer.

He hadn't outwitted the big German; he hadn't fooled him by saying that he would let him know when he planned to go out to the factory. Krausmeyer had anticipated him, had very likely bribed some one in Battle's garage to let him know the instant that Battle sent for his car. The question was, had he anything to fear on the road? Battle decided not. He decided that they would follow to make sure that he actually went to the factory. It would be much easier for them to handle him there than right out in the open road, in broad daylight.

John Battle drove directly to the garage, and took the elevator up to the second floor. He instructed the garage attendant to go downstairs and get him a tire gauge, then he looked around.

From behind one of the many cars, Ann Garrett came.

"Get in," he said. "Quick!"

She got in and sat down beside him.

"Get down on the floor. I don't want even the garage man to see you, if I can avoid it."

She squatted down on the robe that he had provided for her.

He drove back on to the elevator and ran the car down to the main floor. He climbed back behind the wheel, started the car in motion heading downtown. After a few blocks he glanced again into the driving mirror. The big touring car was some distance behind. He drove along at a leisurely pace.

"I don't want to lose 'em," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because if I lose them, they'll stop off somewhere and telephone Kernochen. They're following me only to make sure that I actually go to the factory. Nothing would suit them better than to find me there."

Once through the Holland Tunnel and out on the open road and

certain that Krausmeyer and the others were behind him, John Battle picked up speed, and after he had passed Boonton and taken the first turn to the left, he fairly raced along. The big touring car behind him had difficulty in keeping up. Perhaps they weren't trying too hard, now fairly satisfied that he was making straight for the factory.

As they were approaching the second turn that gave on the little road that led to Dusty Woods, he said, "Your job begins now, Ann. You'll have to do some quick driving."

He looked into the driving mirror. The pursuing car was more than half a mile behind. If they could see what he was doing, the chances were that they would attach little significance to his actions. He took off his felt hat and dropped it down to the girl.

"Put this on," he said, "and turn up the collar of your coat. The minute we come to the turn where you drove the truck into the woods, I'm going to turn in and stop the car. We'll be lost to view for a minute or two. I'm going to jump out and you'll take my place, back the car into this road again and keep on straight ahead. Drive like hell, Ann! This car can do ninety without trying. They'll go after you with the idea that I suddenly realized that they're following me. They'll think I'm trying to escape with the 'brains.' You won't find any towns on this road for quite a while or any traffic cops. Keep going as long as you can without letting them catch you. When they do, don't try anything funny; don't try to wreck their car or anything like that."

"Why not?" she said.

"Because, you little fool, I don't want anything to happen to you."

"That's what I wanted to hear you say," she said, sweetly giving his knee a friendly little pat.

He paid no attention, the turn was at hand. He skidded around it sharply, so that the tires groaned, brought the car to an abrupt stop, leaped out, said softly, "Good luck, Ann!" then stepped behind a tree. He watched her as she maneuvered the car back on to the road they had just left and start forward at a breakneck speed.

John Battle stood where he was, waiting, waiting till Krausmeyer's car shot past straight ahead after Ann without turning into the little road that led to Dusty Woods. Then he started for the factory. He walked fast, sometimes breaking into a trot. Every minute was precious. After fifteen minutes the shack came in sight. He hastened through the clearing, found the truck. He leaped behind the wheel, fished the key out of his pocket, inserted it, took a look at the gas. There was over ten gallons, enough to take him to where he ultimately planned to go.

When he came to the gate, the dogs came running out, barking fiercely. Behind them came the guard with his club in his hand.

"What do you want?" the man snarled. "This is private property."

"Open up," John Battle shouted at him. "Are you blind?"

"Didn't expect you to come in a truck, Mr. Battle," he grumbled, striking out at the dogs with his club.

John Battle said nothing. He drove on to the factory, not stopping at the office, but directly to the far end of the building, the section where Shieber and his men worked. There was a loading platform there. He backed the truck up so that the end of it was flush

with the platform. Then he pounded on the door.

It opened slowly. Lon Shieber stuck out his head. He started to say something, then stopped, struck with surprise that John Battle should be there with a truck.

Battle went inside, looked around, saw the gun. There it was, finished. A thing of gleaming, menacing steel.

Shieber looked troubled. "It's all there, Mr. Battle, every part, according to the blue prints, but I told you, you left something out. It don't revolve. The barrels fire only intermittantly, not the way they ought to."

"I know it," John Battle said. "We're going to put the other part on later, Shieber. You've done your job. Now help me put it on the truck."

"Do you want us to load it on the truck? You mean you're gonna drive it away yourself, Mr. Battle?" The emaciated little man could hardly believe it.

"Yes," John Battle barked. "Don't waste any time. Run that block and tackle over here. Put some cables around the gun, so that we can hoist it up. You," he snapped at one of the other men, "get those rollers; put them over by the door. Snap into it!"

The excess of his energy paralyzed them for a moment, but they came to life after a time.

It was slow and tedious work. Parts of the gun consisted of delicate mechanism. They couldn't put ropes around those without distorting the machinery. Everything had to be adjusted with great care. Sufficient cable had to be found. The gun had to be unbolted from the floor where its base-plate had been fastened.

John Battle kept looking at his watch. It was after two. Almost an hour had elapsed since Ann Garrett had gone off by herself, decoying Krausmeyer, Kern, and Measley somewhere into the hills of Jersey, he hoped. How far could she have taken them?

At last they were ready. John Battle said, "Pull away." Shieber and his two assistants seized hold of the rope and tugged; the gun came off the floor an inch at a time. Then they began to push it forward, the block running on a rail overhead. They had it halfway to the door, when the other door, the one that led into the rest of the factory, burst open.

Kernochen, a towering figure, stood there, his face livid, distorted with an evil smile.

"What's going on here?" he said, coming forward with slow, deliberate strides till he was close to John Battle.

"Get out of the way, Kernochen," Battle ordered. "We're loading the gun on the truck."

"Is that so? Is that so?" the big Irishman sneered. "You boys lower that gun to the floor," he told Shieber.

John Battle swung around. "You'll do no such thing," he said sharply. "I'm giving orders here."

"Oh, no, you're not; not any more, you ain't," Kernochen said, coming even closer. His breath reeked of gin, and then John Battle noticed that the man had a short, stubby revolver in his hand. "It may interest you to know, Mr. Battle, that I've just had a telephone call from Mr. Krausmeyer. I guess I don't have to tell you what he said, do I?" Kernochen leered.

John Battle, his temples throbbing madly, looked around. The men were letting the gun down slowly. Kernochen was watching

him with a baleful eye. Even if he could overcome this drunken sot, armed though he was, could he now persuade Shieber and the others to load the gun on the truck? Was this the end? He looked at Lon Shieber. There was something in the little man's eyes that made John Battle think.

Slowly the gun was going down. It was once more resting on the floor. Shieber released his hold on the ropes, brushed his hands. He looked a little sadly at the gun.

John Battle turned to Kernochen. He said:

"Kernochen, you're a drunk and a fool, but I think at heart you're a decent man. Krausmeyer wants to sell this gun abroad. I want to keep it here, where it belongs, in your and my country. Are you going to see it go?"

Kernochen's leer became more pronounced. "Nuts!" he said. "I'm working for Krausmeyer, and whatever he says goes."

John Battle turned to the others. "What do you say? Do you feel the way he does?" He saw no hope there. "You're jailbirds, escaped convicts, and I guess you don't think much of the way society's treated you." His voice dropped with utter hopelessness.

Lon Shieber was looking at him.

"All right," John Battle said, "if that's the way you feel. But this gun won't do Krausmeyer any good; it won't do anybody any good." And to Kernochen, "Ask Shieber. He knows. There's something missing in this gun, and if I don't put it on, it won't work. I'm going to destroy the part that's necessary for the gun. Think of that, and maybe you'll consider it best to let me take it away." His words came desperately, tumbling over one another.

Lon Shieber had picked up a mechanic's hammer in his hands. He was toying with it. He was edging over, a little at a time, to where Kernochen and Battle stood, and then suddenly he struck.

The head of the hammer came down on Kernochen's wrist with terrific force. The gun went clattering to the floor. Kernochen let out a howl of mingled pain and rage. He started for Shieber. The little man backed away, came closer to Battle.

John Battle lashed out with his fist, and Kernochen, unsteady on his feet from drink, went down.

Lon Shieber turned to his men. He had picked up Kernochen's revolver and stuck it into his pocket.

"Get busy with them ropes," he screamed. "This is Mr. Battle's gun. And it's my gun. We made it, and nobody's going to take it away from us. Him and me built it."

He was half sobbing, and when Kernochen started to get to his feet, he went over and kicked him in the face.

Then he took hold of the rope. Shieber and the men worked with frantic energy till they got it to the door, on to the rollers, and on to the truck. While John Battle kept an eye on Kernochen trying to read the meaning of the glint in the man's eyes, Shieber and the men lashed the gun to the truck.

Presently Shieber was back. "All set, Mr. Battle," he said.

"Tie him up," John Battle said indicating Kernochen with a motion of his head.

That took only a minute, then John Battle mounted the truck. Before he started he looked back at Shieber, standing in the doorway with his two men beside him.

"Hop on," he said. "I'll take you through the gate. After that, you'll

have to shift for yourselves. I can't take you with me."

They hopped aboard.

The truck went roaring to the gate, and as they reached it, John Battle understood that glint in Kernochen's eyes. The gate was closed; the gatekeeper was standing there with his unleashed snarling and growling dogs.

"Open the gate," Battle shouted.

The man shook his head. "Nothin' doing," he said. "Kernochen says you can't go out."

So Kernochen had taken the precaution to notify the gatekeeper before he had made his appearance. John Battle looked at the gate, weighed the possibility of crashing through and realized instantly that it would be impossible. His radiator would be smashed, to say the least.

And then there was a shot and another.

Once more Lon Shieber had come to the rescue. With two well-directed shots he had disposed of the dogs, and his thin voice, remarkably penetrating for the moment, was saying, "You'd better open the gate! There's a couple of more shots left in this thing."

Sullenly the gatekeeper complied.

The truck went through.

John Battle wondered how long it would be before Krausmeyer would be on his trail, whether he would be waiting for him at the end of the road where the first turn was. He went on half a mile, then stopped.

"You better jump out here, boys. There may be trouble when I get to the other road." To Shieber he said, "If I get through with this, they'll owe me something and I'll do something for you—just the way you did for me."

He threw the car into gear, shot ahead with Lon Shieber's, "Don't let nothing happen to our gun, Mr. Battle," ringing in his ears.

A few minutes later he was at the turn. He swung around. There was nothing in front of him. He looked back and experienced a sudden sense of elation. Krausmeyer's car was not in sight. He went on for a couple of miles. The truck was a stanch one, but not very fast, something that he realized more poignantly, when a minute later he heard the distant honking of a horn. He looked in the driving mirror. Not more than a quarter of a mile back was Krausmeyer's touring car. Unquestionably the gatekeeper had informed Krausmeyer of what had happened, and the latter had set out in hot pursuit. It would only be a matter of minutes or so before the touring car caught up with Battle. He gave the truck more gas, but it was useless. The touring car was now directly behind.

John Battle held the center of the road. Fortunately the road was narrow.

Presently there was a shot; a bullet went over his head. It was intended to frighten him. They wouldn't dare risk hitting him for fear the truck would be wrecked, and along with it, the gun. If they took it into their heads to shoot at the gas tank, if they succeeded in puncturing it, all would be over. And then he realized why they weren't firing at the tank. They had no desire to disable the truck. They were perfectly content to follow him along this road, knowing that when he came to the traffic light he would have to stop, and they could then catch up with him. At that point, things would be simple for them. They could even call a policeman and announce that he had stolen the gun from the factory.

Where were Yoshimo's men?

If ever he needed them, now was the time. If they had arrived, they ought to be somewhere along here. He hadn't counted on their arriving before he got to the factory, knew as a matter of fact that they wouldn't, being less familiar than he with the roads, but he certainly expected them to be here by now. And then straight ahead he saw the blue sedan parked on the side of the road.

He blew his horn several times. The men in the sedan understood. Their car slowly got under way. John Battle drew to one side and, when he got abreast of the blue sedan, he heard Krausmeyer's horn blowing frantically. The touring car had kept some fifty yards back, afraid, no doubt, that John Battle would take it into his head to apply his brakes and pile up the car behind. But now it started closing up the gap. Whether or not Krausmeyer realized that the blue sedan was coming to Battle's aid, John Battle had no way of knowing. It was more likely that he thought nothing of it, that he simply didn't want it between himself and Battle's truck.

The blue sedan slowed up a little. The truck crept ahead and then John Battle saw in the mirror a curious sight. Krausmeyer's touring car and the blue sedan side by side, neither giving ground. And then it happened. It happened during a moment when John Battle had been obliged to take his eyes away from the mirror because of a coming curve.

There was a crash, the horrible sound of metal tearing into metal; despairing cries of fright. And when John Battle ventured to take his eyes off the road for a brief instant and looked back, he saw the blue sedan coming on alone. The touring car was no longer in sight. He knew what had happened, realized that those cries had come from the touring car; that Yoshimo's men had driven the other car off the road.

It must have been a remarkable piece of driving for as far as John Battle could tell the sedan had come off unscathed save for a battered bumper and a crushed fender. It was following now as sedately as an aged nurse, sheparding a playing child, and it stuck to him, never trying to come up with him or attempting to pass him. Obviously, Yoshimo had instructed his men well. They were to guard him, and to see where he was taking the gun.

In the Holland Tunnel, where trucks take one lane and pleasure cars another, the blue sedan for the first time came abreast. From his high seat John Battle looked down. A figure in the back of the sedan was leaning forward, making a graceful gesture with its hand in his direction. A yellow sardonic face smiled up at him—Baron Yoshimo himself!

John Battle smiled back grimly. He went across Canal Street, south to the Brooklyn Bridge, across the bridge, the blue sedan still trailing. He turned left on Sand Street, then right and left again on to Flushing Avenue, until he came to a wall, a long wall that seemed to inclose an institution of some sort. Halfway along there was an iron gate, and as he approached it, John Battle honked his horn three times, then twice more. As if by magic, the gates flew open.

John Battle turned in, and the gates were closed, but not before the blue sedan had also gone through.

He stopped his truck, climbed

down. A curious thing happened.

From nowhere apparently a half dozen marines appeared, stood at attention with shouldered arms guarding John Battle's truck.

John Battle walked back toward the sedan. The chauffeur was holding the door and the elegant figure of Baron Yoshimo stepped out.

He met John Battle halfway, looked at him curiously, then looked at his surroundings. A sad, bitter smile formed on the baron's lips.

"Am I mistaken," he said, "or is this——"

"You're not mistaken," John Battle said. "This is the Brooklyn Navy Yard."

"Ah!" said Yoshimo. "You've had a change of heart."

"What heart there was left in me," John Battle said, "has changed."

"A proper sentiment," said Yoshimo. "I wish for my sake, Japan's sake, that it had not occurred to you. Japan could use a man like you. Yet I, who know what the love of one's country means, cannot blame you."

The little Japanese's disappointment was keen, terribly apparent. He clicked his heels together, bowed, hesitated, then held out his hand.

John Battle took it. He stood watching Yoshimo making his way back to his car.

A voice behind John Battle said, "How was the service?"

John Battle turned. Beside his truck the commandant of the navy yard stood.

John Battle went over. The commandant, a grizzled veteran, was smiling at him.

"It's been years, John," he said.

"Yes," John Battle said soberly. From his pocket he took the "brains," passed the contrivance to the commandant. "See that nothing happens to this. It belongs to the gun there," he said. "Without it, the gun's no good."

"Will you come up to the house, John, and have a spot and tell me about it? If that gun is all you said it was in your letter, you've done a marvelous thing."

"It's all I said it was," John Battle said. "I'll be back to-morrow to tell you about it. Just now I've got something that's more urgent. Will you lend me one of your boys to drive me home?"

John Battle inserted the key to the door of his apartment. He was glad to be back. If she was all right, if nothing had happened to her, this is where she would get in touch with him. He pushed open the door, advanced a few steps, and then stopped.

Ann Garrett was sitting there. Beside her stood Ponder smoking his inevitable cigar.

Ann Garrett sat there, looking smilingly at John Battle, who looked back at her in silence, until C. O. Ponder considered that it was time for him to say something.

"Maybe you'd like to know why I'm here," he said. "There's been a bad accident just outside of Boonton. The car was all smashed up. The Jersey police reported it to us because the car had a New York license plate. There were three men in it, three partners of yours. Krausmeyer, dead; Woolf Kern has got a broken leg, and Measley is in a hospital—dying.

"When I heard who they were, I got the chief of police to send a man over to the hospital to see if he could get a statement out of Measley. The little fellow came through with the dope. It was just

the way I figured. Measley killed Martin Garrett."

"Why did you figure that?" John Battle asked.

"Well, it was either Measley or Krausmeyer or both. In a way, Krausmeyer killed him, too. It was he who suggested it. Mind you, I got all this over the phone from the chief of police of Boonton, so I can't give you all of the details, but somehow, Krausmeyer found out that Mr. Garrett was going to tell you how you'd been framed, and little Measley was so scared of what you'd do to him, that Krausmeyer only had to suggest to him that the only way to save the situation was to get rid of Mr. Garrett. Krausmeyer got a hold of that button that came off your coat, but it was Measley who stuck it between Mr. Garrett's fingers. Only an inveterate cigar smoker like me, Mr. Battle, would hit on a thing like that. If you ever think you're going to fall asleep in your chair while you're smoking, instead of holding your cigar between the first and second fingers, stick it between your second and third fingers. Those fingers close automatically. You won't drop your cigar, even if you fall asleep, and you won't burn any holes in your rug." C. O. Ponder picked up his derby. "You don't smoke cigars, do you?" he said. "They found Mr. Garrett's report in Krausmeyer's pocket. He probably took it along with him, figuring that when he met you out at the factory he'd try to make a deal with you once more. I've got to get back to the station. There ought to be another murder by this time."

Alone with Ann Garrett, John Battle stood looking out of the window. After a while he turned.

"I'm going back to Washington," he said, "back to where I belong."

She said, "Yes," and then: "You'll be strutting around, loaded down with gold braid, sailing all over the world, being an admiral."

"No," he said, "I won't be sailing on battleships. I'll stay right there in the ordnance department, back at my old job—I think I can get it back—and I won't be an admiral. I won't, that is, unless you can't be happy with anything less."

She came close to him then, and said in a tone so low that he scarcely heard, "You can be anything you want to, if you'll be it with me."

TWICE DROWNED

BY CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

Author of "Death Hath No Feet," etc.

A STEAMING hot bath was Raoul Erskine's personal prescription for his jumpy nerves, and, if his nerves had ever needed soothing, they needed it to-night. The stock market had unexpectedly slumped during the afternoon, and he'd been forced to use some of Roberta Strickland's bonds. That was a serious risk to take, putting up a customer's securities for collateral, and, when the customer was a woman, the hazard was even greater. Most of them are hard losers.

Roberta Strickland, for all of being a bully good sport, was likely to squawk as loud as the next one if she got nicked for thirty or forty thousand dollars. Only, of course, Raoul Erskine didn't expect that to happen. The market would recover in a day or two and Robbie's bonds would be back in the vault where they belonged.

The tub was half full. Raoul Erskine, always a fastidious man, reached toward the glass shelf for the bottle of lavender bath salts, sprinkled in a generous quantity of the pleasant-smelling crystals, replaced the bottle, and reached for the cord of his silk dressing gown.

As he did so, the doorbell rang. Had it not been for the fact that Thurman had promised to wire a tip from Chicago if certain things occurred, Erskine might have ignored the bell; but there was a chance it might be a telegram. He shoved his feet into a pair of straw sandals and padded swiftly through the ground-floor bedroom of his seashore cottage to answer the ring.

A man who lives by the stock ticker learns to mask his emotions

and guard against sudden surprises, but the coincidence of finding Roberta Strickland standing outside his door was almost too much for him.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Why the great surprise?" demanded Robbie. "Do I intrude?"

It was; to be sure, no occasion for surprise, since Robbie Strickland was quite an informal person, and this wasn't the first time she had dropped in on him unannounced. She had always been welcome. Erskine liked the sight of her extremely pretty face, and found her breezy manner refreshing.

"No, of course not!" Raoul Erskine hastened to assure her. "You caught me a bit negligee—that's all. I was about to take a plunge in the tub. But that can wait if you feel like having a drink."

Robbie, once a showgirl and twice divorced, did not allow the sight of a man in a dressing gown to embarrass her. She came in.

"That's always a temptation. You have such perfect liquor, Raoul. Getting dressed for the evening out, I suppose. Well, I shan't keep you but a moment. This is a business call, old dear. All those new laws congress has passed to curb wicked Wall Street doesn't make it a prison offense for a girl to consult her broker after business hours?"

Raoul Erskine became uneasy with a vague presentiment.

"The law expressly says that, when the broker's lady client is beautiful and charming, she must always call after eight and remain until midnight—unless she prefers to go dancing."

Robbie swept off her béret and fluffed back her naturally blond hair as she sat down.

"While you mix the drinks, I'll talk. Hold on tight to the cocktail shaker while I explode a bomb. Maybe I'm smart and maybe I'm crazy, but I've done gone and bought myself a hotel."

Raoul Erskine stared at her, his sense of impending disaster increasing. It took money to buy hotels, and the only money Robbie had was the fifty thousand in 3½ per cent Liberty bonds that he had bought for her with the divorce settlement money she had gotten from Bob Strickland, her second husband.

"You look a little startled," said Robbie. "Well, it's not exactly a new idea. The notion bit me a couple of months ago. I've been watching the Breakwaters Inn dying on its feet and deciding that I was just the gal who could nurse it back to health. The bank's stuck with the joint, see, and it's costing 'em plenty of dough to keep it running. So they're practically giving it to me. All I do is assume the mortgage."

Erskine was instantly relieved. "Well, you can't lose much on a deal like that."

"Oh, but I can. I'm going to spend some jack fixing up the place. The real swank, see, to pull in the right people. I'm going to shoot the works, Raoul, and, if I lose—well, I've gambled before. What I dropped in to tell you was that I want you to sell my bonds and have the cash ready for me not later than noon to-morrow. I'm moving fast."

The mouth of the cocktail shaker chattered against the rims of the glasses as Erskine poured out the drinks. He couldn't keep his hands steady. "Have the cash ready for me not later than noon to-morrow!" Those were words of doom, passing the death sentence on his career. Noon to-morrow was impossible.

Raoul Erskine didn't trust himself to speak until he had gulped down his own drink. Some of it slopped over the edge of the glass and made

a stain on the front of his dressing gown. Robbie, whose eyes never missed a trick, saw that Raoul was not his usually suave self.

"Must have been hard going in the Street for you to-day," she observed. "You're all jittery."

"No, not at all," lied Erskine. "I did pretty well, as a matter of fact. Now, about this hotel business. I'd go slow on that, if I were you. The Breakwaters is a lemon. You'll lose your shirt."

Robbie laughed. "Then I'll have to joint the nudists. Besides, old dear, it's my shirt."

Erskine tried to reason with her. Always an earnest, convincing talker when there was a point to gain for himself, he overplayed his hand. It was the earnestness of desperation —and Robbie Strickland was nobody's fool. Broadway and two husbands had wised her up plenty.

As she listened, a chilly frost came into Robbie's eyes, which were no longer friendly.

"Listen, Raoul," she snapped, "I've played too much poker not to know when a guy is trying to bluff out a busted flush. I'm calling you. They're my bonds. Is there any reason I can't get 'em at noon to-morrow?"

Erskine refilled his glass and drained it at a gulp. He wiped his lips with the tips of his fingers.

"Robbie, I'll tell you the truth. Your bonds are safe. You'll get every dollar of your money, but I want you to do me a favor. Let me keep them until the end of the week."

Robbie Strickland was on her feet. Now her eyes were blazing with a cold fury. "In other words," she said, "you've put my bonds in hock."

"They're safe, I tell you! I—I've merely sent them over to my bank as evidence of good faith. The market went off this afternoon because of some wild rumor. It caught me unawares."

"To hell with that stuff!" snapped Robbie. "Do I get my money at noon to-morrow?"

Raoul Erskine dashed the perspiration from his forehead. "That's impossible, Robbie, and you'd better not press me. If you stir up a mess, you won't get a dime."

Robbie stood for a moment, staring at him in contempt and wrath. Abruptly she turned and moved across the room. She reached for the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" blurted Erskine.

"I've never had any use for crooks," answered Robbie, "and the kind I hate most are those who steal from their friends. Now what would you think I'm going to do? One guess ought to be enough."

One guess was enough. Raoul Erskine knew that she was going to have him arrested. In a frenzy he rushed at her and grabbed the telephone from her hand.

"Wait, Robbie! Wait until we've talked it over! Give me a day!"

She was in no mood for reasoning. Robbie was a wild cat when her temper got away from her. She tried to get back the phone.

Erskine couldn't remember exactly how it happened. Robbie Strickland ceased being a woman. She became merely an enemy bent on accomplishing his ruin. He struck her with the telephone, heard the beginning of a shrill scream which died away in her lovely throat, then stared at her in horror as she fell away from him to lie like a dead woman at his feet.

Raoul Erskine couldn't move. He could hardly think. His palsied hands put the telephone back on the table.

"If she's dead," he whispered thickly, "I'm in for murder!"

But Robbie was still alive. Her breath fanned faintly against his cheek as he dropped to his knees and bent over her.

"Phelps!" called Erskine loudly. "Phelps!" Then he remembered it was the butler's night out, and that he and Robbie were alone in the house. He shook Robbie's shoulder, called out her name. She did not respond.

"May have fractured her skull," groaned Raoul. "I'd better get her to the hospital. If she dies, I'm in for it."

But he was also in for it if Roberta Strickland lived. Any hope of placating her was gone now. She'd never forgive him for that blow. She would accuse him of trying to kill her. Arrest would come even more quickly. There would be sensational headlines in the morning papers. Erskine could see them in his mind. The bank would call his loans. No matter whether the market went up or down, he was done.

Raoul Erskine stumbled numbly to his feet. Above the hammering of his own pulse, which made a pounding noise in his ears, he could hear the gurgling sound of water in the bathroom. The hideous plan was born in his brain at that instant.

In a moment of fiendish inspiration, spawned by his desperation, he saw how simple could be his escape —with Robbie dead. Even if the market didn't come back, he would be safe. His own stock transactions had been masked under a cryptic, "Account No. 19, Special." If the bottom dropped out, he could claim that it was Roberta Strickland's account.

"I'm crazy," muttered Raoul, "to think of such a thing."

But the idea persisted, accumulating detail. Erskine rushed to the window and peered out into the driveway. As he had expected, Robbie's car, a small coupé, was parked under the portico.

He leaped back across the room and gathered Robbie up in his arms. She stirred slightly and a moan escaped her parted lips—lips that Raoul Erskine had often wanted to kiss. He didn't think of that now. Again she had ceased being a woman.

"Can't take the risk of letting her recover consciousness," muttered Erskine. "She'll start screaming as sure as hell, and I mustn't hit her again." That would have endangered his scheme, for the police were to believe she had died of accident.

Erskine was a big man, and Robbie was no great burden for him to carry. He strode through the communicating passageway and, through the bedroom, into the bath. With a steely coldness which was amazing even for himself, he lowered Roberta Strickland's body head-first over the rim of the tub and submerged her face.

She didn't struggle. Raoul turned his eyes away so as to not watch the bubbles of air which kept coming up through the water. Presently there were no longer any bubbles, for she had ceased breathing.

Robbie was now quite dead, and, as Raoul Erskine realized that, he was seized with a frenzy of fear.

"I must be mad," he whispered. "I've drowned her. This is murder. My God, to think I've done a thing like this!"

He carried Robbie's body into the bedroom, put her on the bed, and hurriedly began to dress. His fingers were clumsy in his haste.

Five minutes later he had Robbie's body in the car, her own coupé, and was driving through the back streets, headed for Sands Point,

which was a deserted stretch of ocean front with a handful of half-completed cottages to mark the failure of a real-estate scheme. Nobody lived out here, and it was a perfect spot for Erskine's purpose.

There was an old pier, jutting out into the water, and Erskine drove onto it, the loose and rotting planking making a rumbling thunder under the rolling tires. He drove to the very edge, stopped the car, but not the engine, got out and looked around. The night was very dark, the water black as ink, sucking and slapping at the piles.

Reassuring himself that there were no prying eyes to watch what he was doing, he moved Robbie's body across the width of the seat behind the steering wheel. He shuddered a little, for one of her hands touched his. It was cold with that awful clamminess of death.

The ancient piles had settled, the pier slanted sharply, and it was just a matter of reaching inside the door with one of his gloved hands and releasing the emergency brake. The car began moving. Raoul Erskine leaped back and slammed the door. In fascination he watched the front wheels reach out across empty space, poise there for an instant, and then plunge down to strike five feet of water in a loud splash.

"They'll find her at low tide," muttered Erskine. "Only one explanation—the car got away from her and she drowned. That bruise on her head—where she struck the windshield. Now I'm safe."

As horrible as it all was, Raoul was stirred by a perverted pride. He had accomplished what everybody said could not be done—a perfect crime.

Erskine got back home at a quarter of nine, and he had no more than let himself inside the house when the telephone rang. He answered without hesitation.

It was Kate Thomas on the wire. Kate and Robbie shared a bungalow at the far end of the beach.

"Hello, Raoul," said Kate. "Has Robbie left yet?"

Erskine was surprised at his own calmness. "Almost an hour ago," he answered. "She just dashed in, had a quick drink, and dashed out again."

"That's queer," complained Kate Thomas. "We've got a date for dinner. Trouble with her car perhaps. She's always smashing into somebody's fender, or having somebody smash into hers. The little fool drives like a lunatic."

"Yes, probably trouble with the car," agreed Erskine. "We'll have to lecture her about careless driving. Anybody can have one smash too many." He thought that was being pretty clever.

Raoul Erskine had a better sleep that night than he expected. Phelps, the butler, awakened him at eight.

"A man to see you, sir," explained Phelps. "He says he's a detective."

Erskine felt no cause for alarm. Kitty, of course, had told the police that Robbie had come to his house last night. The police would want to question him, merely as a matter of routine.

"Detective?" repeated Raoul in feigned astonishment. "I haven't sent for any detective. What does the fellow want?"

"It's something about the death of Mrs. Strickland, sir. It seems that she drove her car off the old pier at Sands Point and was drowned."

Raoul Erskine tossed back the bedcovers. "Robbie—drowned! Good Lord, Phelps, are you serious?"

"It must be quite a shock, sir. You and Mrs. Strickland were very good friends."

"Right, Phelps. Robbie Strickland was the salt of the earth. I can't believe it! Tell the detective I'll be right out."

"If it's just the same to you," said another voice, "I'll come in." The detective entered the bedroom. "Callaghan's the name, Mr. Erskine. I spell it with a 'g.' Officer from police headquarters. We're looking into the death of a Mrs. Strickland."

Raoul Erskine brushed his hand across his forehead, like a man bewildered. "Yes, so my butler told me. It's almost impossible to think of Robbie being dead. She was so alive, so vital. This news hits me pretty hard."

Callaghan nodded. "The dame she lived with told us you and Mrs. Strickland were very good friends."

"The best!" exclaimed Erskine. "Now, don't get me wrong. Not sweethearts, nothing like that—just friends."

"When was the last time you seen her?" inquired Callaghan.

"About eight o'clock last night. She drove here to my place for a minute, had a drink, and left within a few minutes. She seemed in a bit of a rush."

Again Callaghan nodded. "That checks all right. Wasn't despondent or anything like that?"

"Robbie Strickland despondent? If you'd known her, you wouldn't ask."

Callaghan looked around the room. "Left about a quarter past eight, eh? Didn't say anything about driving to Sands Point?"

"Why, no," answered Erskine.

"Kind of queer," said Callaghan. "She left here at a quarter past eight to have dinner with some people at eight thirty, and yet she drives in the opposite direction, out to a God-forsaken place like Sands Point. Yeah, that's kind of queer. Unless something happened to make her go out there—maybe for the *purpose* of driving her car off the pier."

"Suicide, you mean?" exclaimed Raoul Erskine. "Nonsense!"

Callaghan acted like a restless man. He moved his position again, seeming, inadvertently, to get closer to the open door of the bathroom.

"You was her broker, I'm told," said the detective. "Been losing any money in the market?"

Erskine shrugged his shoulders. "She may have lost a few thousand in yesterday's slump. I don't personally watch all the accounts. But Robbie could take it on the chin. If you're thinking she drove her car off the pier because she lost a little money, forget it."

Again Callaghan had shifted his position and, as he cupped his hands to his mouth to light a cigarette, his gaze had drifted through the open door and into the adjoining private bath. For the first time Raoul felt a faint uneasiness. Why was this fellow interested in the bathroom?

"This is an odd case," said Callaghan. "It's one of the oddest I ever run into. What makes it so odd, Mr. Erskine, is that a person can't drown twice."

The hackles of Raoul Erskine's neck stood up. He was glad that Callaghan was looking into the bathroom instead of at him. He knew that the color had drained out of his face, and he made a grab for a cigarette as an excuse for concealing his features while he fought to regain his composure.

"This flatfoot will not take me by surprise a second time," he thought, and said aloud: "Twice drowned? That doesn't make any sense to me."

"I thought maybe it would—to you," said Callaghan, and then Erskine saw that Callaghan had been watching him through the mirror.

"See here," snapped Raoul, "I'm not so sure I like the tone of your voice."

Callaghan's smile was grim. "I'm sure you don't, Mr. Erskine. "Drowned twice! You didn't like to hear me say that. Meant something to you, didn't it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean by talking such nonsense!" blustered Raoul.

"Then I guess I'd better make it more clear," went on Callaghan. "As I said, people don't drown twice. We fished Mrs. Strickland's car out of the Atlantic Ocean, with her inside of it. She was drowned, right enough—but not with the right kind of water.

"You see, Mr. Erskine, when people die they stop breathing. And when they stop breathing they stop getting anything inside their lungs. Now you'd sort of figure that for a person to drown in salt water, there ought to be salt water in their lungs."

Raoul Erskine's eyes were bulging. The bedroom seemed to spin and rock before his eyes. He continued to hear Callaghan's voice, but the words sounded as if they came from a far distance.

"There wasn't any salt water in Mrs. Strickland's lungs," continued the detective. "Only fresh water. Even more peculiar, it had a funny odor—sort of perfumedlike—the odor of lavender. . I see you've got a bottle of lavender bath salts in there on your bathroom shelf, and I guess that ties everything up nice and tight."

Raoul Erskine knew that it did.

THE HATED WOMAN

BY Q. PATRICK
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CHAPTER I.

A SELFISH WOMAN.

LIFE was easy for Lila Trenton—too easy. And yet she was discontented. Even now, when she had just awakened safe and warm beneath her rose-colored quilt, there were little lines of discontent around her mouth. Her movements were petulant as she fingered the hair net which preserved the stiffness of her hennaed waves. Restlessly she stretched her silk-covered limbs, which, despite a slight thickening, were still well molded and voluptuous.

Through the wall she could hear her husband's slow, indecisive footsteps as he moved about his separate bedroom. For the thousandth time she wondered why she had married Paul Trenton. She, the pretty Lila, deserved something so much better than this dried-up, useless stick of a man.

She looked back to the time when she had first met him. Then he had seemed so distinguished, and everybody had said he was going to become famous with those chemical experiments of his. Lila Trenton—wife of the celebrated Paul Trenton. That's what she had hoped to be. Well, he had fooled her. Fifteen years had gone by, and he was still just an ordinary research worker down at the university—never made more than two thousand dollars a year.

Lila Trenton despised her husband because she had money and he had not; because he worshiped her slavishly despite her indifference to him; because she had perfect health,

whereas he, who never complained, seemed to look older and more frail each day.

The careful footsteps had passed through the living room to the kitchen. Soon they returned, and there was a soft tap on the door.

"Are you awake, dear?"

A sallow, middle-aged man with graying hair slipped into her room, carrying a cup of tea in uncertain fingers.

"I've brought the tea rather early, dear. I want to be at the laboratory by ten. There are some interesting developments."

"There've been interesting developments for fifteen years," snapped Lila as her red-nailed hand reached for the cup. "Oh, Paul, you've slopped it all over the saucer!"

"I'm sorry." Paul Trenton's pale, sensitive face regarded her with anxious attention. "How do you feel this morning, dear?"

"Feel! It's too early to feel anything."

Paul Trenton drew back the curtains and the morning light fell full on his tired face.

"He *does* look old," Lila was thinking not without a certain satisfaction. "Any one seeing us together would take me for his daughter."

She stirred the tea, crushing three lumps of sugar with her spoon. "You look simply terrible, Paul. I suppose you've been working all hours of the night with those crazy experiments of yours. You never think how dull it is for me sitting all day alone with nothing to do but read magazines and listen to the radio."

"I had no idea you were lonely." Her husband's lips curved in a slight smile. "But you won't be alone tonight, dear. I've asked Professor Comroy for dinner. I hope——"

"Oh, Paul"—the cold cream on Lila's face puckered into lines of irritation—"you know how I hate fixing dinner for those stuffy university friends of yours."

"We can have dinner sent up, dear." Paul Trenton took the empty cup patiently and laid it on a table. "And Comroy is the head of my department. I owe him a great deal."

"Well, it's quite out of the question to-night," snapped Lila. "I don't feel up to it. And I think I've got a cold coming on. Yes, I'm sure I have. I just couldn't cope with that—that old windbag."

She sniffed with what conviction she could and produced a lace handkerchief from under the pillow.

"Very well, dear. I can put him off. And I'm sorry about the cold. Why don't you spend the day in bed and take plenty of fruit juices?"

Lila had been staring meditatively at her expensively manicured finger nails. Suddenly she looked up, a crafty expression in her eyes.

"There's no reason for you to give up your date with Professor Comroy, Paul," she said as though making a generous gesture. "Why don't you take him out somewhere to dinner? I don't mind an evening alone."

"Why, that would be nice, Lila. If you're sure you don't mind."

He bent to kiss her, but she pushed him away with bored distaste.

"Oh, Paul, not now! I can't bear you to come near me in your working suit. It always smells of chemicals."

She watched him move into the hall and heard the front door shut behind him. Then, with a curious, inward smile, she slipped her feet into feathery pink mules and hurried to the hall telephone.

"Hello, Larry. . . . Yes, this

is Lila. I've got a lovely surprise for you. I'm going to ask you round to dinner to-night. . . . Yes, just us two. It hasn't been that way for weeks, has it?"

There was a short pause at the other end of the wire. Then a man's voice replied hurriedly, awkwardly:

"Well, Lila, I don't know whether I can make it. Business is picking up, and there's a lot to be done around the garage. But . . ."

"Oh, of course you'll come." Lila's face had hardened, but her voice was silky smooth. "I know you'll come if your own Lila asks you."

"O. K. But listen, I've got to see you sooner than that." The voice was curt now and determined. "Is your husband there? . . . Then will it be all right if I come straight away?"

"Oh, not now, Larry!" Lila gave a playful little scream. "Why, I'm hardly out of bed. I look a fright."

"Never mind what you look like," replied the man gruffly. "I'll be there in half an hour."

"Larry, Larry!" Lila jolted the hook, but the man had rung off.

For a moment she stood by the table. Then she ran to the mirror in her bedroom and started to remove the cold cream from her face.

The image in the glass was entirely satisfactory to her. Although she was over forty, to herself she looked no more than twenty-eight. True, the gray was showing through at the roots of her hair. But she could have a touch-up before the evening. Her skin was still smooth and firm, and her eyes were as clear and lustrous as those of a young girl. There would be no time to heighten the interesting shadows beneath her long lashes. But Larry would be so pleased to see her, he would not notice little things like that.

While she worked at her toilet, Lila Trenton looked almost as young as she felt.

"Wanting to see me at ten o'clock in the morning!" she thought complacently. "These young men are so impetuous."

CHAPTER II.

CORNERED.

LARRY GRAVES slammed the receiver. As he gazed around the garage which he had bought and fixed up with Lila Trenton's money, his young, almost too handsome face went grim. Swiftly he hurried into a small back room, slipped off his greasy overalls, and wiped the oil from his hands with a piece of cotton waste.

He felt utterly disgusted at the thought of the scene ahead of him. He could see Lila Trenton waiting for him, saccharine, seductive, and yet so predatory—so suffocating. Well, he'd gotten himself into this mess with his eyes open. He'd have to find some way out—anyway. Slicking down his thick blond hair, he took his coat from its hook and moved through the lines of parked cars toward an old roadster.

"Be gone about an hour, Jack," he said as he swung open the door. "Finish fixing the brakes on that Dodd, will you?"

As he drove through the busy morning streets, the words Claire had spoken to him last night kept repeating themselves in his mind. "You're nothing but a gigolo—a gigolo." Well, she'd hit the nail pretty squarely on the head.

He drew up outside the Vandolan apartment hotel, hurried into the opulent lounge, and, leaning over the desk, grunted a curt:

"Mrs. Trenton, please."

Lila had left the apartment door ajar. She was carefully draped on a divan when Larry entered. The pink pajamas had been supplemented by a diaphanous pink wrap. It would have taken a more observant person than Larry to detect the hard work which had gone to create this tableau of seeming spontaneous charm. She held out both hands and crooned:

"Larry, how sweet!"

"I've got to talk to you," said the young man shortly. He stood motionless by the door, clutching his hat in two bronzed fists. "It's about the garage."

"Come and sit here with Lila."

Mrs. Trenton patted the edge of the divan invitingly and smiled. For an instant the young man did not move. Then he walked slowly to her side and sat down within the range of her exotic perfume. His untidy, oil-stained suit was in striking contrast to the expensive elegance of her negligee.

"That's better," Lila was murmuring, taking one of his hands in hers. "Now tell Lila all the trouble and she'll fix it."

"There's no trouble, Lila. Business is on the up and up. I'm doing fine. But the repayment on your loan falls due to-morrow. I—I want to ask you to extend it."

"But of course I will, darling. You know I never begrudge money to a friend. Five thousand dollars isn't a matter of life and death to me. I don't mind what happens to it just so long as it makes you happy."

"That's swell." Larry shifted uneasily. "Of course, I'm darn grateful for all you've done, but I want you to know that the garage is a good business proposition. You took a gamble when you lent me the capital to start. It was grand of you and I'll never forget it. In fact, I'm going to work like the devil to justify your belief in me. I can go on paying good interest, and in time I'll be able to pay back every cent of the loan. But just at the moment——"

Lila patted his cheek and murmured: "Oh, darling, let's not talk about dull business. Let's talk about us—and to-night."

"That's just the point, Lila." Larry rose and passed a hand through his blond hair. "I can't come to-night. At least, not the way I used to. Something's happened and I've got to tell you about it now."

"Happened, Larry?" The curves of Lila's lips straightened into a hard red line.

"Yes, it's a—a girl. I met her last month, Lila, and—well, I guess we fell for each other. I want to get married."

"Married!" The powder could no longer hide the lines around Lila Trenton's mouth. Her voice had frosted. "But, Larry, is it wise to think of getting married when you have—er—other obligations?"

"I know it was crazy of me, but Lila"—the blond young man sat down by her side again and gripped her arm—"you've always been so understanding. I know, if you'd meet her, you'd realize I couldn't help it."

"Meet her!" Lila pulled her hand back swiftly.

"Yes. I was wondering if I could bring her round to-night. Then you could explain that it really was a business arrangement—that I hadn't taken anything from you under false pretenses."

"You mean she isn't willing to accept *your* explanation," put in Lila sharply.

"Well, she was mad when I told her about you, of course. Didn't like the idea of my having taken money

from a woman. But if she could see you, she'd realize how decent, how—er—disinterested you've been."

Lila Trenton rose from the couch. All the softness had left her. She had become harsh, strident.

"My gosh, you expect me to do your dirty work for you, do you? You expect to bring this woman round here to meet me as if I were your—your grandmother! You expect me to give you my money to get married on and then stand back and say 'God bless you, my children!' Why, of all the——"

"It isn't that, Lila. You know it's just——"

"Just that you want me to tell your lies for you." Lila twisted the expensive pearls around her throat. "Listen to me. I didn't lend you that money as a business proposition—and you knew it. I'm not such a fool as to throw away money on stray young men and their dirty garages. I lent you that five thousand dollars because I liked you. As soon as I stop liking you, I want my money back. And I don't like married men."

"But, Lila, I can go on paying the interest."

"Interest! Why should I trust a man like you? Think what you were doing when I first met you! You were little better than a crook. Since you seem to have told that girl so much about me, maybe I should tell her a thing or two about you—tell her that you used to deal in stolen cars, for example. I guess that would interest her—and the police, too."

"But, Lila, that's all over now." Larry's young face looked old and haggard. "You know I've gone straight."

"Strait-laced, I'd say." Lila moved to the mantel and stood there, a sneer on her lips. "You've got all you wanted out of me, and now you tell me you're going to be a good little boy and marry some sweet young thing you met at a church social. Well, let's hope she sings in the choir and gets a salary, because, Heaven knows, it'll be her job to support you after you get married. I'm through."

Larry strode across the room and stood squarely in front of her. "I know what you are now, Lila. We understand each other perfectly. I know why you lent me the money, and I realize exactly what you're going to do about the garage. Well, you can take it and be damned to you. You can ruin me, but you can't get me to come near this filthy, overheated place again."

Lila was laughing at him—and her laughter was not pretty. "You look so funny," she cried weakly. "So damn funny!"

"Funny, do I?" With a sudden gesture of fury, Larry's arm shot out and he brought his palm onto her cheek in a stinging blow.

"You—you——" he muttered.

Lila's fingers flew up to her cheek and the laughter drained out of her eyes. In its place there came a new, stranger expression.

"Larry!" she whispered hoarsely. "You struck me."

The young man stood in front of her, stiff and dazed. Then the realization of what he had done seemed to dawn on his face.

"I'm sorry, Lila. I'm all worked up. I didn't know——"

Lila did not take her eyes off him. As he stood there, angry and ashamed, she realized suddenly that she had never seen him so handsome before. In the past she had thought him weak, pliable, but this new streak of firmness intrigued and attracted her. He had just struck her, but she still had the whip hand. She

was not going to let him get away from her.

"I'm sorry," he repeated dully.

"You should be," said Lila slowly, "but I think—I think I shall forgive you. That is, if you come and apologize very nicely—when we have dinner together to-night."

Larry turned away. As he moved to the door, she crossed the room swiftly and took from her pocketbook the key to her apartment. She handed it to him, and he snatched it fiercely.

"I'll come back," he muttered thickly.

"That's right," she whispered. "You're going to think it over, aren't you? You don't want to lose that lovely new garage, do you?"

After he had gone, she stared at herself in the mirror. On her left cheek were the red imprints of his fingers. It was a new, exciting sensation to think that a man had struck her. Larry!

She touched the marks gently, almost caressingly. Somehow, she did not even want to cover them with powder.

CHAPTER III.

JEALOUSY.

LARRY GRAVES could still smell Lila's perfume as he hurried out of the Vandolan Hotel. He felt sick—disgusted with himself and with her. He had been crazy to accept that loan. He saw it clearly now. But at the time it had seemed his salvation. He had not realized there would be these complications—that it would end in this. His mind turned back to the picture of Lila handing him the key a few minutes before. He hated her now with a hatred which was almost physical in its intensity. He saw her as a spider, and himself as a wretched creature struggling futilely in her scented mesh.

He thought of the old days before the garage, when there had been no regular job, nothing but small commissions on cars doubtfully bought and sold. Of course, if he had strength enough, he could throw it all up, return the money and start from the beginning again. But Larry Graves knew that he would not have the courage for that—that he would not have the courage to face the investigation into his past which a break with Lila would inevitably involve.

As he got into his car, he was gripped by an impulse which made him half sick with excitement and apprehension. No one except Claire knew Lila had lent him that money. Lila would not have dared tell because of her husband. She had written a check to herself and given him the cash. He, Larry Graves, had tried to play square with her. But she had not any intention of playing square with him. Why should he be so scrupulous? If only he could get that receipt!

Then as his thoughts ran swiftly along this new channel, he remembered the key. No one knew he had that key. Lila Trenton would be alone to-night—quite alone. He could imagine her there, waiting, triumphant in her victory over him. The remembered scent of her perfume made him feel dizzy. Well, maybe he would go. Maybe she'd get something she wasn't expecting.

But Claire knew. He had told her about Lila last night. He would have to see her again before—before he made up his mind. If only he could get her to understand the way he had felt when he borrowed that money. If only she would see that things weren't as ugly as they seemed. Then everything might

still be all right. There might be no need—— He released the clutch and sent the car sharply forward.

Claire French ran a beauty parlor a few blocks away from the Vandolan Hotel. She had money of her own—money she had earned. Larry had never thought of that before, but Lila's cynical words brought it back with fresh bitterness. Perhaps that was why she had been so hard on him. She didn't realize how it was when a guy——

Larry pushed open the door marked "Mayfair Beauty Shop," and hurried to the girl behind the cash desk.

"Miss French, please."

"What name is it?"

"Graves."

"Just a moment." The girl disappeared and returned almost immediately. Her voice was flat and impersonal. "Miss French says you must have mistaken the address. The Vandolan Hotel is three blocks east."

"Tell her I've got to see her," said Larry fiercely.

"I'm sorry. She's very busy just now."

"I can't help that."

Larry pushed the girl aside and made for the inner door. He strode down a line of cubicles where women were sitting with electrical equipment on their heads, having permanent waves, face massages, manicures. In a small office at the back he found Claire sitting alone at a desk, busy with accounts. She rose swiftly.

As they stood staring at each other, the physical contrast between these two young people was almost as violent as the state of their emotions. Claire was as dark as Larry was fair. And while his features were regular, if a trifle weak, hers had the irregularity of strength—a strength which came from within and did not in any way detract from the elusive charm of her face. Her wide-set, gray eyes smoldered as she spoke.

"I thought I told you last night that I didn't want to see you again."

"But, Claire, we've got to have this thing out. You've got to understand."

"I'm afraid there's nothing about you that isn't very easy to understand."

"After all, Claire, I'm only human. Lila was an attractive woman. You're not a prude. You wouldn't have objected to my knowing her before I met you if it wasn't for this darn money. And can't you see that a loan like that has nothing to do with her and me? It was just a business deal—a perfectly good investment for her. She wasn't doing me a favor."

Claire French sat down wearily. "It's no use, Larry. I can't get worked up over the problems of a man who accepts money from a woman he's having an affair with. It doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether she was getting good value for her investment or not."

"Well, maybe I have made a mess of things, Claire, but you said you loved me. Can't you give me a break—can't you take my word that I'm doing my damnedest to straighten everything out?"

"Are you going to pay her back her money, Larry?"

"I can't yet. You know I can't. And she won't extend the loan unless——"

"Unless you go round regularly—paying your interest," said Claire bitterly.

"She—she did ask me round tonight." Larry drew away slightly. "You know I don't want to go, but

she threatened to have me dispossessed, to make me bankrupt if I didn't."

"Well, why not let her!" Claire's gray eyes fixed his squarely. "You can start over again. Other people have to."

"Oh, what's the use? You see, you don't know everything. It's not just a question of the money. I guess I could raise that. I could sell the garage for half of what it's worth. But Lila Trenton would still have her hooks in me."

"You mean there's something else?"

Larry thrust out his jaw. "I'm not handing you a sob story. Heaven knows I've had all this coming to me. But I got out of college in the middle of the depression. I tried to get a job—tried for about a year. Then I got tired of starving. When people came along and made offers that weren't exactly—honest, I didn't see the sense in having scruples. I got tied up with a concern which dealt in cars and wasn't too particular about their titles. Lila's car was stolen, and it was brought around to our place. That's how I met her. She guessed what the racket was, and I thought it was swell of her at the time not to do anything about it. But now she's threatened to tell." He looked down at his feet. "I can't let her do that, Claire—not so long as there's any hope with you. I couldn't ask you to marry me without a cent and with a possible prison sentence hanging over my head."

"You'd have more chance if you actually *were* in prison," said the girl quietly, "than asking me to marry you on that woman's money."

"Well, I guess I can't blame you. That means we're really through."

"I thought I made that point clear last night." Claire turned away. She did not want him to see her face. "I don't give a damn if you bought or sold a million stolen cars. I don't give a damn about your being weak, either. Heavens, we're all of us weak most of the time. It's—it's just that I think your type of weakness is particularly unattractive."

Larry gazed at the back of her head a moment in silence and then turned toward the door. As he reached it, Claire spun round suddenly.

"Larry, are—are you going to see her to-night?"

Larry's hand was in his pocket. His fingers were clasped tightly around the small, steel key. He stared at Claire with a grim, determined look in his eyes.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I'm going to see her to-night. Now that we're washed up, I don't give a damn what happens to me. I'm—I'm going to do exactly what I want to do."

For a few seconds after he had gone, Claire's eyes remained fixed unseeingly on the closed door. Then, throwing herself into a chair, she covered her face with her hands. She did not cry, but her whole body shook with long, strangled sobs.

"Larry said he loved me," she was thinking desperately, "but it's Lila Trenton who still owns him, body and soul. Oh, how I wish she was dead, dead, dead!"

She sat there a while, motionless. Her pale face set in a strained, expressionless mask. Then, suddenly, as though an idea had just come to her, she lifted the telephone receiver. Her fingers trembled as she spun the dial.

"Hello, hello. . . . Is that the Vandolan Hotel . . . I want to speak to Mrs. Trenton."

CHAPTER IV.

A WARNING.

AFTER Larry had gone, Lila Trenton returned to her room. In the thrill of his violent parting she had completely forgotten her spurt of anger against him. He would come back. He would have to. The very fact that he would come against his will added a fresh excitement. And she could soon make him forget about that girl, she reflected, feeling assured of her own experienced charms.

She was still enjoying the reassurance of her mirror when the telephone rang.

"Good morning, madam." A girl's voice was speaking with saccharine politeness. "This is the Mayfair Beauty Shop. We are running a special to-day for new clients and we're eager to get your custom. Is there anything in particular you were wanting?"

"Well, I don't know," said Lila cautiously. "I *was* thinking of having a touch-up this afternoon. But I usually go to the beauty parlor here in the hotel. It's disgracefully expensive."

"Our specials are extremely reasonable," said the voice hurriedly.

Although her appearance meant more to her than anything else, Lila Trenton was always interested in a bargain.

"I might try you out, but I can't leave the hotel to-day. I've got a nasty cold."

By this time she had persuaded herself that she really had.

"That's all right, madam. We can easily send a girl over. No extra charge."

"Very well. Make it four o'clock." Lila gave a few details as to her requirements and concluded: "Tell the girl I'm very particular."

"Thank you, madam. And don't worry. We are very particular, too."

Lila had hardly rung off before the phone sounded again. It was the desk downstairs.

"Professor Comroy to see you, Mrs. Trenton."

"Tell him my husband's out," snapped Lila.

"But it's you he wishes to speak to, madam."

"Tell him I'm in bed with a cold."

There was a pause. "Professor Comroy says he will not keep you a moment. It's urgent."

What did that old fool want, thought Lila impatiently. He was to dine with Paul to-night and he couldn't have anything to say to her. It was only curiosity that made her give a grudging, "All right" to the telephone operator.

Lila was suspicious of all her husband's university colleagues. She felt they tried to be intellectual and superior. But even though intellectual, middle-aged and plump, Professor Comroy was a man. Instinctively she hurried to her vanity dresser, bathed her cheeks with astringent lotion, and fluffed the pink wrap around her. She was ready to greet her husband's friend with a sweet, invalidish smile.

"Oh, professor, I'm simply miserable about our dinner together to-night." She pressed a lace handkerchief to her face and held out her left hand. "But you see what a dreadful cold I've got. I don't want to spread it. Please sit over there—away from the germs."

Professor Comroy took the chair that she indicated and leaned ponderously forward. He was a shortish, rotund man with the spectacled face of a benevolent owl. Behind

the thick lenses his eyes, usually bright and twinkling, were grave.

"You must forgive my insisting on seeing you when you are unwell, Mrs. Trenton. But I have come to ask a favor—a favor which I feel sure you will be only too willing to grant."

"Favor!" echoed Lila with a slight diminution of effusiveness.

"As I expect you know, your husband has been working for several years on a most important piece of research which has been financed by a special endowment fund. Yesterday I received a letter from the Abel Foundation which stated that the fund was to be discontinued immediately."

"Oh, how terrible!" Lila forgot to control the guarded expression which had slipped into her eyes. "But—but what can I do about that?"

"Your husband has given all his time and energy to that research, Mrs. Trenton." The professor had removed his spectacles and was wiping them deliberately on a corner of his handkerchief. "He has very nearly obtained results which would mean a great deal to chemistry—and to himself. But if we cannot raise five thousand dollars at once, the work will have to be abandoned."

"Poor Paul!" sighed Lila. "But with a big, rich university like that I——"

"That's just the point, Mrs. Trenton." The professor slipped his spectacles around his ears and smiled sadly. "The university is not rich. It is heavily in debt to the city. Besides, even if the trustees were willing to listen to me, they could not possibly put through an appropriation until the end of the academic year."

Lila patted the back of her head but did not speak.

"Your husband is not only a very brilliant man," went on Professor Comroy. "He is also my greatest friend. If I had the money, I would gladly offer it myself. But I'm afraid I haven't. That's why I came to you."

"But I don't understand," said Lila with a tightening of the lips. "Do you mean you want me to put up five thousand dollars?"

"It would only be a loan. There is some rather expensive apparatus to be bought. I'm sure you are as eager as I am that your husband should continue uninterruptedly with his work."

Lila thought a moment. Then she said with sudden, overripe sweetness. "Oh, I'm afraid it's impossible. You don't know how sensitive Paul is. Why, he'd rather starve than feel he was using any of my money."

"I haven't told him that the fund has stopped," said the professor quietly. "He need never know. It can be a little secret between the two of us."

"Well, of course, I'd be delighted, but—but I'm afraid it's quite out of the question." Lila plucked nervously at the down on her cuffs. "Five thousand dollars is a lot of money. What with the depression and everything—I couldn't possibly find it."

Professor Comroy screwed up his bright, short-sighted eyes and he looked from the genuine pearls on Lila's throat to the expensive furniture in the apartment. "I can only repeat," he said at length, "that it means your husband's happiness—the crowning of his life's work. Surely, that is worth making a few sacrifices for, Mrs. Trenton."

"Sacrifices!" Lila rose and stared at him with narrowing eyes. "Really, Mr. Comroy, I hardly feel it your

place to tell me how I should spend my money."

"I'm sorry." The professor had also risen and his cherubic face had lost something of its pleasantness. "But I want you please to consider this matter very seriously. I cannot believe that you are indifferent to your husband's career even if you are not interested in the progress of science."

"Science!" exclaimed Lila scornfully. "Do you suppose I've heard about anything else for the past fifteen years? It's always, science, science, science. He's going to do this. He's going to do that. But he never gets anywhere so far as I can see. There's no reason why I shouldn't be frank with you, Mr. Comroy. My husband has been a great disappointment to me. He's weak—got no push. Why, he's never made more than two thousand a year. If it wasn't for my poor father dying and leaving me my money, we couldn't even live here at the Vandolan. That's why I wouldn't dream of letting you have five thousand dollars. I have to support him at home. I fail to see why I should support him at the university, too."

"Very well, Mrs. Trenton," said Professor Comroy with steely quietness. "I see that it was foolish for me to come."

"It was not only foolish," replied Lila who was working herself up into a pitch of righteous indignation. "It was impertinent."

The professor crossed abruptly to the door. "There is no need to tell you that I think your attitude a wrong one. Your husband is one of the finest men I have ever known."

Lila shrugged the pink silk of her shoulders and lighted a cigarette.

"And what's more, Mrs. Trenton, I feel I am old enough to tell you something for your own good." Gilbert Comroy's rotund form was standing by the door and he was peering fixedly at her through his spectacles. "It is easy to feel that you owe obligations to no one. But there will come a time when you yourself may be in need of help; when you see all that you care most for in life falling about you like a pack of cards. It will not be very pleasant then to find yourself—absolutely alone."

"Thank you, Mr. Comroy." Lila spurted smoke from her nostrils. "Thank you for the charming little sermon."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN HATING RIVALS MEET.

ALL the rest of the morning Claire French struggled with the confusion of her thoughts. The night before when Larry had first told her about Lila Trenton, she had felt she hated him; had told herself that she could not even bear the sight of him again. But now she realized she had been deliberately blinding herself. He had been foolish, weak, but it takes more than that to make any real difference. Slowly, illogically, she had felt her anger and disgust shifting from him and settling upon Lila Trenton, the woman whom she had never even seen.

She could not get the thought of her out of her head. While she massaged, shampooed, chatted with clients, her mind was fixed on one thing only—her four-o'clock appointment at the Vandolan Hotel.

Her fingers were trembling when at last she collected her things, packed them in a suitcase, and hurried out into the street. She looked very young and very determined as she gave Mrs. Trenton's name to the

desk clerk and took the elevator to the twenty-seventh floor.

Lila opened to her with a rather querulous "Come in." Claire stepped into the hall and, controlling her voice with an effort, said professionally:

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Trenton. I'm from the Mayfair Beauty Shop."

As Lila languidly shook the folds out of her wrap, Claire regarded her with shrewd, critical eyes. She was handsome, the girl had to admit that. But her looks wouldn't last much longer. Claire, with her expert knowledge of cosmetics, could detect instantly all the little devices which held up the slipping structure of Lila Trenton's beauty.

Not a day under forty, she thought with sudden satisfaction. She eats too much and doesn't get enough exercise.

"I'm not altogether pleased with the touch-ups they give me here," Lila was saying, as she helped herself to a piece of chocolate candy without offering the box to Claire. "I hope you're going to be more satisfactory."

Suddenly a vision of Larry with this woman slipped into the girl's mind. She had to grip tightly to the suitcase to keep herself steady. Her thoughts were racing. Everything that had been so confused before now seemed clear. She knew that she loved Larry—that she would do anything for him. All her high-sounding moral principles boiled down to the one, vulgar word—jealousy. She was insanely, overpoweringly jealous of the woman who had played such an important part in Larry's life. It was this moment of honest self-revelation that made her feel calm, assured.

"I'm ready, Mrs. Trenton—ready when you are."

Claire fixed up a miniature beauty parlor in the large, black-tiled bathroom. Lila was patronizing, but gossipy, telling little intimate physical details about herself.

"It's only at the roots that the gray patches show," she murmured as the hot soapy water trickled around her ears. "Be careful it doesn't get spotty."

"Oh, it won't be spotty." Claire's fingers worked firmly across the other woman's scalp—more firmly, perhaps, than was strictly necessary.

Lila gave an irritated "Ouch."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Trenton. But it's worth suffering a bit to be beautiful, isn't it? Maybe there's a boy friend coming around to-night."

"Maybe there is." Lila's voice was glossed with self-satisfaction. "I don't see why all fun should stop when you're married, do you? Particularly when you're a girl and your husband's so much older."

Claire dried off the hair with a towel, put on her rubber gloves and started to work in the henna paste. She was amazed at the almost physical pleasure she felt at having Lila Trenton helpless and unsuspecting beneath her fingers.

"How about a facial when you're through, Mrs. Trenton? The skin around your chin is getting rather flabby."

"Flabby!"

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about. Most women of your age have trouble with sagging muscles. I think I could do wonders to those lines around the mouth, too."

"Listen," said Lila tartly, "I asked for a touch-up. If I need anything else, I'll tell you."

There was an inscrutable smile on Claire's lips. "Oh, I didn't mean it that way, Mrs. Trenton. Really, you're marvelous. You could easily pass for thirty-eight in an artificial light."

Lila jerked her head backward. She was just about to speak when Claire cut in:

"Don't talk, Mrs. Trenton, the henna might get in your mouth."

The atmosphere grew thicker as Claire rinsed out the hair and, selecting a warm, dry towel, wrapped it around Lila's head like a turban.

For a moment the two women looked at each other's reflections in the misty mirror without speaking. Lila's exotic perfume had impregnated the steamy air. As it invaded Claire's nostrils, she felt a vague wave of nausea. Once again she thought of Larry and knew that her control was weakening.

"Hot in here," gasped Lila.

"Yes, it is." Claire's hands fell suddenly to her sides. Her voice, which had been soft, almost sycophantic, was hard as flint. "You fat, useless women always live in a stifling temperature."

"What—what did you say?" Lila was gazing at her in utter astonishment.

"I said that fat, useless females like you always pamper yourselves. You overeat. You——"

"How dare you!" Lila's voice rose to a high, furious scream. "Of all the impertinent, disgraceful—— Get out of here. Get out, I say."

"But your hair's not dry, Mrs. Trenton. Surely, with the boy friend coming in, you want to look your best."

"This—this—I'll report you. You'll be dismissed instantly."

"Lovely," said Claire.

"And this Mayfair Beauty Shop—I shall call up your employers immediately."

"Oh, I don't think they'll mind." Claire was standing by the door, her gray eyes blazing. "And it would be worth it, anyhow. There's lots of things I'd like to say to you, Mrs. Trenton. And lots of things I'd like to ask you, too. How does it feel to be getting old and fat? How does it feel to be cheating on your husband? How does it feel to be giving money to young men because you can't get them any other way? Oh, there are so many things, but I guess you don't even know the answers yourself." Her laughter rose shakily. She was almost as hysterical as Lila herself. "If you knew how funny you looked sitting there with that towel around your head."

Lila was completely taken aback. For a moment her lips could form no words. Then she rose to her feet and shouted stridently:

"Get out! Get out before I call the police!"

"I'm going." Swiftly Claire assembled her things and packed them in the suitcase. "I guess you'll be able to dry your own hair, Mrs. Trenton. There will be no charge for what I've done to you. You'll—you'll be able to make yourself beautiful for that date with the boy friend to-night. But before he comes round, take a good look at yourself."

She gripped the suitcase, ran out of the apartment, and slammed the door behind her.

CHAPTER VI.

A COVETOUS MAN.

FOR one dreadful moment after Claire had gone, Lila Trenton's anger gave way to a sensation bordering upon panic. Growing old! Could it be true? Swiftly she bent forward and gazed at her reflection in the steamy mirror. Despite the towel around her hair and the absence of make-up, the blurred reflection looked fresh, young, reassuring. Lila breathed a little sigh of relief. The girl was

crazy. Of course, that was the explanation. Still, it had been very unpleasant. All that about buying young men! What a ridiculous thing to say. The girl must have a nasty mind—jealous, probably, or sex starved.

She had almost calmed down sufficiently to call the Mayfair Beauty Shop and complain when there was a knock at the door. For some reason she started nervously. The knock sounded again and she cried out an agitated:

"Who is it?"

"Hotel electrician to look at the refrigerator, madam."

Lila crossed to the door. A young man in overalls stood on the threshold. He was dark, strong, rather attractive. Instinctively, Lila smiled.

"Come in," she said, patting the towel around her head. "I was just washing my hair."

The young man grinned back rather too intimately as she conducted him to the kitchen.

"Been working here long?" she asked.

"Just a couple of months, Mrs. Trenton." The young man grinned again and moved his arm slightly so that it brushed against Lila's thigh. "There's not much money in it, but I sometimes get odd jobs on the side. I got a kid brother, you know. Putting him through school."

"How nice of you! Oh, excuse me a moment."

With her best smile Lila hurried away as the telephone rang.

"Hello, what is it?"

"Mrs. Trenton?"

"Yes."

"This is the manager speaking. There is nothing to be worried about, but several of our guests have registered complaints of petty theft the past few days. We are asking every one to keep their doors locked —especially in the apartments like yours which have back doors leading onto the fire escape."

"Oh, all right," said Lila testily. "But why must you bother me with things like that? There's a house detective, isn't there?"

"Yes, Mrs. Trenton," said the voice wearily. "We do all we can to protect our guests, but the detective can't be everywhere at the same time."

Lila put down the receiver and returned to the kitchen. The young man unbent as she entered.

"Well, Mrs. Trenton, the refrigerator's in pretty good shape." His dark eyes were appraising her boldly. Thrusting his hands in his trousers pockets, he sauntered into the living room. "Nice place you've got here. Gee, it must be swell to have money."

Lila was wondering whether her hair was dry enough to look pretty without the towel. She decided to go into the bedroom and see. The young man followed her in.

"Geez," he said, "I wish I was a girl. Maybe then you could use me around this place, Mrs. Trenton. I'm pretty good at housework, too. Used to be a houseboy when I was a kid."

Lila felt a tingling thrill of excitement. The young man was very near.

"Is there anything you'd like me to do for you before I go, Mrs. Trenton?"

His dark eyes were playing on the rose-colored quilt.

"Why—er—yes," said Lila hurriedly. "You might light the fire in the living room. I—I want to dry my hair."

"O. K., Mrs. Trenton." The young man had taken out a cigarette and was glancing at her over the match flame. "Got kindling?"

"What? Oh, I—I don't know. No, I don't think so. But there's some wood on the little balcony just outside the back door. You'll find a hatchet there, too."

The young man strolled into the kitchen, and Lila could hear the strong blows of the hatchet outside. For some reason which she could not define, she felt nervous. That crazy girl from the beauty parlor must have upset her more than she had thought.

She actually started when a few minutes later the bedroom door was pushed open and the young man stood on the threshold.

"The fire's ready and waiting," he said.

"Oh! Oh, thank you very much. Did you lock the back door?"

"Sure. I locked it all right."

His gaze moved casually around the room, settled on the dressing table, and then flicked away.

"If ever you need me, Mrs. Trenton, it's easy to get me. Sam Nolan's the name."

He made no attempt to leave. After a second's indecision, Lila rose and slipped past him. She felt his breath warm against her cheek. Once again she experienced that momentary sensation of nervousness.

But the living room reassured her. When she saw the fire crackling cheerfully in the grate, she felt her silly fears disappear and her coquetry return.

"Well, Sam, thanks a lot. And I'll certainly think of you if I want anything."

"Do that, Mrs. Trenton."

He had moved close again. His dark face with its slightly full, drooping mouth was smiling meaningly. A sudden glow swept through Lila. This man was young, attractive. And yet he obviously found her desirable. To think that girl had said she was old!

Sam Nolan was still gazing at her fixedly. Lila flushed. Then the color drained from her cheeks. Suddenly she realized what the boy was looking at. That eager, covetous expression was not directed toward herself. His eyes were fixed, not on her face but on the string of pearls around her throat. Almost instinctively she had moved toward the telephone.

"Well," she faltered, "what are you waiting for?"

The young man jerked his eyes away. "Sorry, Mrs. Trenton. Just daydreaming."

The door slipped shut behind him. Sam Nolan moved down the corridor with a hand thrust deep in his trousers pocket. Between his fingers he was gripping a key—the key to the back door of Mrs. Trenton's apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

A CALL FOR HELP.

AFTER he had gone, Lila felt the sensation of panic returning. "Why was he looking at my pearls?" she repeated time and time again in her mind. "Why was he looking at my pearls?" And then the words of that girl from the beauty parlor slid back into her thoughts. "You're getting old. You're getting old."

She gave a little shiver and moved toward the fire as though its very warmth would bring comfort. She had reached the hearth before she noticed the hatchet. It was standing propped against the wall by a box of logs. The blade shone dully. Somehow, she could not tear her gaze from it. And yet it was just the wood hatchet, she told herself. The young man—Sam Nolan—he had brought it in from the balcony

and hadn't taken it back. There was nothing to be afraid of.

Suddenly everything about the day seemed sinister to Lila Trenton. First there had been that scene with Larry; then the professor with his strange warning; the girl from the beauty parlor; and now this boy, Sam Nolan, with his queer looks and hints. Every one was against her. They were jealous—that's what it was—they were jealous because she had money, because she was still young and pretty.

For a moment Lila Trenton stood motionless, twisting her scarlet-nailed fingers. Then, as usual, she ran to the mirror for reassurance. With trembling fingers she pulled the towel from her hair. She was not old. She——

Lila Trenton's eyes widened. Her mouth dropped half open and hung there. Then she gave a low, strangled sob.

Half blind with panic, she rushed to the mirror in the bathroom. It gave her no comfort. The girl's words were ringing in her ears. "Before the boy friend comes, take a good look at yourself!"

She stumbled to the telephone and swiftly, clumsily dialed a number.

"Hello, is that the university? . . . I want to speak to Paul Trenton. . . . Yes, yes, it's urgent—urgent! I need his help."

In the pause that followed Lila Trenton twisted the beads around her throat hysterically. Her voluptuous breasts were moving quickly, jerkily. She had never felt this way before—never. For the first time in her married life she was conscious of a desperate need for her husband. He would understand. He would comfort her.

"Hello, Paul, is that you? . . . Oh, you must come, darling. Come quickly. . . . Something awful has happened. I'm frightened—terribly frightened."

CHAPTER VIII.

DOOMED!

GILBERT COMROY thought he would never forget the look in Paul Trenton's eyes when he told him about the discontinuance of the Abel Foundation Fund. He had hoped desperately to raise the five thousand dollars so that his friend should never know. He had interviewed trustees, scientific organizations. He had even contemplated the money lenders. But there had been no success.

Trenton was not an expansive man. He never showed or spoke of his feelings. But Comroy had seen that brief instant of disappointment and frustration in his friend's eyes, the momentary droop of his mouth. He knew that there had been taken away from Paul Trenton something which could never be replaced.

He had worked with Trenton at the university for nearly twenty-five years. He had seen him as an enthusiastic, vital young man; had seen him through his disastrous marriage to Lila, through the years of his life with her during which her contemptuous selfishness had slowly, relentlessly turned him from an ambitious young scientist into a frail, broken old man. Comroy had watched the gradual change in his friend with a bitterness that held Lila wholly responsible. His dislike of her was the only violent element in his otherwise mellow, placid existence.

He knew that Paul Trenton had given his all to the Abel research in a last, desperate attempt to prove to himself and to Lila that he was not a failure. Results were near; success almost within his grasp. But

here—as in everything else—Lila Trenton had let him down.

Not only had she failed him, but she had added petty insult to real injury. That afternoon she had called Paul back from the laboratory. That was typical of Lila. Even at the moment when she knew her husband had found the ground cut away from beneath him, she had called him home—called him most likely to do some trivial errand for her.

And he had gone meekly! That was Paul's tragic weakness. He had never got over his blind infatuation for that useless, heartless woman.

Although he looked as calm and benign as ever, Gilbert Comroy felt hatred in his heart when, at seven thirty that evening, he stood outside the Trenton's apartment at the Vandolan Hotel.

Paul Trenton's face was pale and drawn when he let him in.

"I'll be ready in a few minutes, Comroy. Poor Lila's had quite a shock. She's in bed and there are just a few little things——" He broke off, hurrying back to his wife's bedroom. "She says she doesn't mind being left alone. We can go out to dinner. But she's very upset."

Comroy moved into the living room and stared around him moodily through his thick spectacles. From the open door he could hear his friend's voice, soothing, consolatory.

"Don't worry, Lila, dear. Just stay in bed and drink all the fluids you can. Comroy and I won't be long. We'll be back by ten." There was a pause. Then he added in a louder voice, "Ready, Comroy?"

"Yes. I'm ready."

"Well, good night, dear." Trenton closed the door of his wife's bedroom.

As Comroy followed him out of the apartment, his expression was placid but his thoughts were turbulent. For the first time in his benevolent life, he was consciously wishing evil to a fellow creature—he was wishing fervently that Lila Trenton was dead.

Over dinner at the Davenham Grill, Gilbert Comroy made no reference to the Abel Research Fund. He did his best to chat lightly about unimportant university topics. Trenton listened gravely, but his mind was obviously straying. Once or twice Comroy had the impression that he was trying to tell him something, but it was not until dinner was finished and they were smoking over coffee that he spoke. His drawn, almost ethereal face had taken on a strange determination.

"There's something I want to tell you, Comroy. It's about the Abel research. I think that it can go on for a while. At least we'll be able to get that new equipment."

"You mean you've raised some money?" asked Comroy, his plump face alight with pleasure.

"Well, hardly." Trenton's mouth twisted in a smile. "You see, I went to my doctor this morning. I've had pain for some months, but I've been busy, never had the time——" He broke off and added softly, "The doctor told me it was too late to operate."

"Is—is it——"

Trenton nodded slowly. "Yes, cancer. It's just a matter of months—weeks, possibly. I've got a small insurance policy, Comroy. Just about three thousand dollars. I've left everything to the university. Fleming's a good man. He's been working with me and he could carry on. I think he might get what we want very soon."

"But, Paul, this is terrible!" Comroy felt a sudden constriction of the throat. "You mean there's no hope?"

"Don't worry about me." Trenton stirred his coffee slowly. "I've been pretty much of a failure. I admit it, and now I don't care a great deal. If I felt that Fleming could complete the work with my money, that's all I'd want. Lila has ample to support herself. And I think she would be willing to pay the funeral expenses."

"Don't talk that way, Paul." Comroy had gripped his friend's arm. "You never know. To-morrow I'll go to the doctor with you. There's always——"

"No," said Trenton quietly. "I'm happy that it will solve the problem for us. Now, let's forget about it. I'll order some brandy—a little luxury."

While they sat there sipping their old cognac, Comroy's mind was working feverishly—thinking of Lila Trenton. It was she who had done this. For years she had been taking advantage of Paul's almost reverent love for her. She had worn him down, neglected him. This morning she had willingly cut off his career. And now—now he realized that she had been letting him die before her very eyes.

"Another brandy, Comroy?"

"Yes. I think I will."

Trenton glanced up at the clock. "We've got plenty of time. But I'd like to get back at ten o'clock because poor Lila will be alone."

And so they sat together until ten o'clock, those two old friends, thinking their thoughts of life and death. But to the waiters and other diners they were just a couple of commonplace middle-aged men who could not possibly have anything interesting to say to each other.

CHAPTER IX.

MURDER.

IT was ten minutes after ten when finally Paul Trenton and Gilbert Comroy returned to the apartment.

"Excuse me a moment," said Trenton, "I'll just look in the bedroom and see if Lila wants anything. Why don't you go into the kitchen and get yourself a high ball? While you're at it, mix me one, too. You know where the refrigerator is."

Trenton moved to the door of his wife's bedroom and, tapping gently, murmured: "Lila, are you awake?"

Comroy made his way through the living room toward the kitchen. Lila Trenton! The image of that woman was still haunting him like an obsession. He glanced at his own reflection in the mirror and was startled at the pallor of his face. God grant he would not have to see her again to-night. If she were there in front of him, he thought suddenly, he could not be answerable for what he would say—or do.

When Paul Trenton hurried anxiously toward the kitchen a few seconds later, Comroy's ample figure was blocking the doorway. His shoulders were bent, his hands hanging limply at his sides.

"Is Lila there?" asked Trenton. "She's not in her room. I'm worried. I——"

"She's here." Comroy's cheeks, usually so pink and unlined, were now a rough parchment ivory. "She's here!"

Slowly he moved aside. The two friends stood together in the doorway, Comroy peering shortsightedly forward, Trenton pressing against the woodwork in a kind of trance.

The kitchen was in a state of utter chaos. The glass panel in the back door leading to the balcony and fire

escape was shattered. The door of the refrigerator had been flung open. And on the floor, with a hatchet at her side and surrounded by sharp splinters of glass, lay Lila Trenton. She was hunched in an awkward, ugly posture across the gray linoleum. The diaphanous pink wrap was torn and spattered with red. Around her head was a wide, crimson pool. But there was one thing —one thing which added a final touch of macabre horror to that ghastly scene.

Her tangled, untidy hair was not of the auburn tint which Lila Trenton had so carefully and expensively preserved. It gleamed in the hard illumination from the ceiling light —*and it gleamed green, a dull metallic green.*

For a second neither of the men spoke. Then Paul Trenton stumbled forward and knelt shakily at his wife's side. His head was against that crumpled pink silk that covered her left breast.

"She's dead, Comroy," he whispered tonelessly. "Dead. You'd better call the police."

The little professor did not seem to hear. He was clasping his hands in front of him and gazing at the twisted body at his feet with glazed eyes.

"The police, Comroy." Once more Trenton's voice rose, swift, agitated. "And call a doctor, to make sure there is no hope. Quick."

Comroy seemed to gather his wits with an effort. Throwing a last glance at Lila Trenton, he turned and hurried into the living room. In the shock of what had happened, his mind was confused with a thousand terrible thoughts. Visions of Lila Trenton swept before his eyes; visions of her as he had seen her that morning in the pink dressing gown; visions of the hatchet and of the scarlet pools on the linoleum.

"The telephone," he found himself repeating half out loud. "The telephone. I must call the police, the police—and a doctor."

As he reached the passage which led toward the front door, he saw something which at first his numbed senses could not take in. The door of the hall closet was opening slowly. He paused and looked over the top of his spectacles. A man in a gray hat and raincoat had slipped from the closet and was moving swiftly toward the front door.

The sight of another living creature, appearing however unexpectedly, instantly banished the nightmare images from Professor Comroy's mind and brought him back to reality.

"Stop!" he called. "There's been a murder done."

The man's hand clutched the front-door knob. He swung round, his young face pale with fear.

"Murder!"

He stood motionless for a second as though unable to make up his mind what to do. Then, as Comroy hurried purposefully toward him, he threw open the front door and started to run out.

Comroy could not see what happened next, but he heard a woman's voice exclaiming sharply, "Get back in there, Larry." And while the professor's fingers moved toward the receiver of the hall telephone, the young man backed up the passage, followed by a girl. The lines of her face were set and determined. In her gloved hand she held a revolver.

Comroy watched her shut the front door slowly behind her and point the gun at the young man.

"I knew you'd be here, Larry. I had to come, too. I wanted to be sure that nothing would happen."

Her gaze flicked to Comroy and instantly her gray eyes faltered. "Who—who are you?"

"I have no idea what all this is about," Comroy said calmly. "Mrs. Trenton has been murdered, and I'm just about to telephone for the police."

"Murdered!" The girl's lips turned pale. Slowly she moved the revolver so that it was aimed at the very center of the professor's expansive vest. "Stay where you are," she said softly. "If you use that telephone, I'll shoot."

Her eyes had flashed back to the young man. "So I was too late. You *did* do it—did kill her, Larry!"

Larry Graves did not seem conscious of what was going on. He was gazing at the girl dazedly. "I waited around the garage all evening, Claire. I hoped you'd call, but you didn't. I guess it was crazy for me to come here. But nothing seemed to matter, and I knew there was only one way to clear up this mess."

"Oh, I'm not blaming you." Claire French's voice was swift, breathless. "But you've got to get away. The police will soon be here. You've got to go."

"But you don't think that I——"

"What's the use? There's no need to lie to me, Larry. But I'm for you. Don't you understand that?"

Both the young people seemed to have forgotten the professor, although the girl was still pointing the gun at him. Gilbert Comroy watched them closely, with understanding gradually dawning on his face.

So he was not the only person who had wanted Lila Trenton dead. There were other lives besides her husband's in which she had been a destructive influence.

"Get out of the country, Larry," the girl was whispering. "The midnight train to Canada. I'll keep this man quiet—stop him calling the police until you've gone. Only hurry."

Larry Graves's square-cut face broke into an expression of grateful relief.

"Claire, you mean you can forgive me?"

"Oh, Larry, how can anything like that matter now?" She broke off and then, impulsively, she laid her hand on his arm. "If you get away, I'll follow. I'll find you wherever you are."

"But you don't think I would leave you here alone!"

Claire turned on him impatiently, almost fiercely. "Go, you fool, while there is yet time! *Go!*"

For a moment the young man stood gazing at her irresolutely. Then he turned and hurried out, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER X.

NOLAN ON THE SPOT.

AFTER Larry had gone, the girl passed a weary hand across her eyes. Professor Comroy regarded her face thoughtfully through his spectacles.

"Well, this is a most extraordinary affair," he said. "It is my duty to call the police, you know. Do you still intend to prevent me from doing so with that revolver?"

The girl continued to menace him with her gun. "I—I suppose you're her husband."

"Lila Trenton's husband!" The professor's mouth moved in a slight smile. "Heaven preserve me—no! I'm sure it would be idle to ask whether you or your friend committed this murder. I do think I am entitled to some explanation."

"I'm sorry. I can't tell you anything." Claire French's lips tight-

ened. For a moment she was silent. Then she added suddenly: "But there's one thing I do know. If Larry did kill her, she deserved it. She was a wicked, despicable person. She had no right to live."

"Sh-h!" The professor glanced over his shoulder as faint sounds came to them through the living room from the kitchen. Then, to the girl's utter astonishment, his smile returned. "My dear," he said softly, "I agree with you absolutely."

"You—you mean——"

"I mean that it might be a very good plan if you were to put that revolver back in your bag and leave the Vandolan Hotel as quickly as possible." Gilbert Comroy crossed his hands over his vest. "The police have been kept waiting as it is. I feel they can wait a little longer."

Claire was looking into his sympathetic eyes, and, before she knew what she was doing, she had poured out the full story of Larry's relationship with Lila; the instinct of jealousy which had led her to go and see Mrs. Trenton that afternoon; and the scene which had taken place between her and the other woman.

"It was crazy of me," she concluded, "but Mrs. Trenton's the kind of person who'd make any one do crazy things. That's why I came back to-night. I realized she'd be furious and make things worse for Larry. I've got to save him somehow. So you will help me?"

The professor did not speak for a moment. "It may be difficult. Even if neither of you—er—killed Mrs. Trenton, it's rash to run about with guns and hide in closets. In a civilized world you can't turn life into melodrama without getting into trouble."

"I'm so grateful——"

"Oh, don't be grateful, my dear." Behind his spectacles the professor's eyes were benevolent. "It is unconventional of me to say this. But I feel Lila Trenton's death is—is a benefit to society, and I do not want any one to suffer for it. Now you'd better hurry up and go. Mr. Trenton is still in the kitchen. He may not feel the same way as I do."

As he spoke, there were slow footsteps in the living room. Paul Trenton appeared, looking very gray and ill. He was holding a hand to his side, and his eyes were glazed. He did not seem to notice the girl.

Swiftly Claire slipped the revolver into her pocketbook and moved to the door. Then, as her fingers touched the knob, she gave a little gasp and stepped backward. Some one was knocking, loudly.

The sound seemed to bring Paul Trenton back to the reality of the moment. As a swift glance passed between Claire and the professor, he hurried to the door and swung it open. "Are you the doctor?" he asked eagerly.

A policeman stood on the threshold. "Mr. Trenton? Is anything wrong here? I'm Patrolman Davis."

"Why—er——" Trenton seemed unable to form the words.

"The hotel detective arrested a man on the fire escape," continued the policeman, as he stepped into the hall. "Sam Nolan—he was an electrician around here—and for some time they've had their suspicions here that he was a thief. I was called in when the house detective found Nolan on the fire escape, injured. He had a valuable pearl necklace in his pocket and also the key to the back door of this apartment. He's being held downstairs. I came up to find out if you'd missed anything."

"I'm afraid it's not merely a ques-

tion of missing things," murmured Comroy. "A murder has been committed. You'd better come, look things over, and take charge."

The policeman hurried after Comroy to the kitchen. There, Comroy swiftly outlined the details of their discovery. For an instant the policeman gazed at the dead body of Lila Trenton. Then he snapped:

"Have you called the police?"

"Er—no, not yet. I was just going to when you came."

The policeman moved back to the hall, and for the next few minutes replied rapidly to questions from the other end of the wire. At length he hung up the receiver.

"Captain Lee will be round right away," he said. "Meanwhile, no one's to leave the apartment. It looks as if Nolan had done it, but we can't take chances." His eyes rested on Claire. "How about the young lady? Did she come in with you?"

Comroy looked momentarily nonplused. "No, Miss—er—she had dropped in to see Mrs. Trenton just before you arrived. Naturally, she didn't know anything about the murder."

The policeman grunted.

"Perhaps," continued Comroy, "it would be all right for her to leave."

"Sorry. You'll all have to stay."

As the policeman spoke, Paul Trenton gave a little groan and doubled forward. Instantly Comroy was at his side.

"He's a sick man," he explained. "And it's been a terrible shock. Paul, can I do anything?"

"Tablets," gasped Trenton. "Green bottle in the bathroom."

As Comroy hurried away, the policeman lifted Trenton's slight body and carried him into his bedroom. When the professor returned, Claire was standing by the bedside.

"I'll stay with him," she said.

Leaving the girl with Trenton, Comroy and the policeman returned to the kitchen. Where before the professor had been numbed and stupefied by the shock of that grisly scene, his mind was now clear. While the policeman's eyes darted around the room, he stood on the threshold, thinking.

"Look at that hair!" exclaimed the policeman.

Watching carefully where he stepped, he moved to the body and, tilting forward the grotesquely coiffured head of Lila Trenton, revealed an ugly wound on the back of the skull. Instantly his gaze flashed to the stained hatchet at her side.

"Easy to see how it was done," he muttered.

"The pearls are gone," put in Comroy. "She was wearing them last time I saw her alive."

"I guess that puts Nolan on the spot."

The professor was looking down at the broken fragments of glass which strewed the floor. Gingerly he turned one of them over with his foot.

"Don't touch anything," snapped the policeman.

"Looks like part of a pitcher," said Comroy reflectively. "And there are some drops of fluid still in it; tomato juice, I think. That explains the open refrigerator door. Mrs. Trenton had a cold and was taking a liquid diet. She must have been getting some tomato juice when she was attacked."

The policeman glanced quickly at the piece of glass and then at the refrigerator. "Yeah. Looks that way. Nolan must have come in through the back door with the key, picked up the hatchet, and hit her from behind while she was still pouring the

tomato juice. It's all over the floor."

Gilbert Comroy had moved almost fussily to the back door and was gazing through the smashed glass panel. "This is extraordinary."

"What?"

"You said Nolan had a key to this door." Gilbert Comroy looked thoughtful. "Surely, if he had the key, he wouldn't have bothered to break the glass in the panel in order to get in."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean," said Comroy, shaking his head sadly, "I mean that I believe you are suspecting quite the wrong person."

The policeman's eyes narrowed. "Well, we'll soon see. But whoever did it, it's a pretty nasty piece of work."

"Oh, undoubtedly, it's—terrible."

Professor Comroy took out a handkerchief and wiped the shiny skin of his forehead.

Poor Lila, he was thinking. And for the first time he felt some vestige of pity for this woman he had always hated. How ironical that she, who had always lived for her appearance, should die like this, with her negligee torn and stained, her face distorted and ugly, and her hair so grotesquely discolored.

CHAPTER XI.

"I CAME TO KILL HER."

WITH the arrival of Captain Lee and his men, the Trentons' apartment became a scene of professional activity. The captain hurried into the kitchen, accompanied by the medical examiner, the finger-print man and the police photographers. Comroy and Claire French were taken to Lila's bedroom to await questioning. Only one room was quiet, that of Paul Trenton, who had yielded to the narcotic effect of the tablets and fallen into an uneasy sleep.

At length the body of Lila Trenton was removed and a policeman summoned Professor Comroy into the living room. Captain Lee sat at a table. He was a quiet, middle-aged man with alert eyes and broad shoulders.

"Well, professor," he said with a smile, "I didn't realize who you were at first. My son is in your chemistry class at the university. He thinks the world of you. Too bad we should meet in such unpleasant circumstances."

"Too bad, indeed."

The professor drew up a chair and outlined the salient facts of his discovery, omitting to mention either Claire French or Larry Graves. Lee listened keenly. When Comroy had finished, he said:

"Doctor Jones has made a cursory examination. From the congealing of the blood and the rigidity of the limbs, he thinks Mrs. Trenton died between nine fifteen and ten. That means she was probably killed a very short while before you and Mr. Trenton found the body."

"She died instantaneously?" asked the professor.

"Doesn't need an autopsy to tell us that. Her skull was crushed like an eggshell. Of course, this looks like a pretty clear case against Nolan. He was caught with the pearls a few minutes before ten. I haven't had a chance to talk to him yet because he sprained his ankle trying to get away and a doctor is still fixing it. But before I see him, there are just a few things I'd like cleared up. I suppose I can't talk to Mr. Trenton to-night?"

"He's a very, very sick man," said the professor gravely. "But I think I can tell you anything you want to know."

"Well, Mrs. Trenton was well off. I happen to know that. Do you know how she left her money?"

"As I understand from something Trenton once said," replied Comroy reflectively, "his wife made no will. She liked to think of herself as younger than she really was and I believe she felt making a will suggested age. Of course, if she dies intestate, the money, or a good share of it, goes to her husband."

"I see." Captain Lee glanced at his hands. "And you were with Mr. Trenton all evening? It wouldn't have been possible for him to——"

"Quite impossible." The professor shook his head emphatically. "Mrs. Trenton was alive when we left here at seven thirty, and we were together every moment until we returned. You say she was killed before ten. We were just leaving the restaurant at that time."

"No family quarrel, I suppose?"

Comroy's eyes grew cold. "Paul Trenton was always devoted to his wife."

"Just another matter." Lee's gaze was still fixed on the professor's face. "You say you arrived here at about ten minutes past ten. The police were not notified until ten thirty. Why did those twenty minutes elapse?"

The professor removed his spectacles and began to wipe them thoughtfully. "Naturally, we were both rather upset by our discovery. But I did hurry to call you. Unfortunately, however, the young lady, Miss French, arrived just as I was about to lift the receiver."

"What did she want?"

"I really don't know. To call on Mrs. Trenton, I suppose. But I didn't care to tell her about the tragedy. I was trying to get her to leave when the policeman arrived to report about Nolan's arrest." The color in his face deepened. "That's why there was the small delay."

The captain nodded slowly and glanced at the policeman by the door. "If the doctor's through with Nolan, you can bring him up."

"I was wondering," remarked the professor, "whether you would permit me to stay for this interview. Being an old friend of the family, I am naturally interested."

"Sure, you can stay, professor, only too pleased. Perhaps you can learn something you don't teach at the university."

When he hobbled in with the officer, Sam Nolan was a very different person from the self-assured, impudent young man who had attended to Lila Trenton's refrigerator and built a bin for her that afternoon. His youthful face had lost its easy grin. His dark eyes seemed strained.

"Well, Nolan," said the captain curtly, "you're in a pretty tough spot. Are you going to talk? Of course, you needn't if you don't want to."

The young man lowered his head and said nothing.

"You took that back-door key when you fixed the refrigerator, didn't you?"

Sam Nolan's eyes shifted uneasily.

"And to-night you came up the fire escape to steal those pearls. You let yourself in with the key and killed Mrs. Trenton."

"I didn't kill her!" Sam Nolan's voice was dull and toneless.

"What's the use? You had the pearls on you. You——"

"Might I interrupt for a moment?" put in the professor mildly. "I would like to ask the young man a question."

Captain Lee's eyes widened slightly, but he shrugged his assent.

"Tell me this." Comroy looked over his spectacles at Nolan. "Was

the glass panel in the back door broken when you came up the fire escape?"

"Why, yes, sure it was."

"I thought so." The professor turned his solemn gaze to Lee. "We all know this man had a key to the back door."

"You think some one else broke that panel and got into the kitchen?"

"That is a possibility."

"I'm afraid you're going a bit scientific on us, professor." Lee's voice was slightly sarcastic as he added: "If you didn't kill Mrs. Trenton, Nolan, maybe you can tell us what happened."

"If I did, you wouldn't believe me." A look of fear had come into Nolan's eyes. Then he shook the dark hair from his forehead and continued fiercely: "But it's God's truth. Yeah, I did steal that key. And I did come up the fire escape to get them pearls. What's the good of saying I didn't? But there's one thing I didn't do. I didn't bump her off. When I got into that kitchen, she was dead already."

"Ah!" exclaimed the professor.

"Yeah. When I got up onto the balcony, the kitchen was all dark. But I wasn't taking no chances. I flashed my light in before I unlocked the door. And she was there on the floor, lying with blood all over her and that—that green hair."

Sam Nolan looked very young and very frightened.

"At first," he went on, "I was going to scram just as quick as I could. I didn't want to get mixed up in no murder. But I could see them pearls sort of gleaming on her neck. Although I was scared, I thought I might as well get 'em. I went in and lifted them. And—and then, as I was bending over her, I heard some one open the front door and call out 'Lila,' so I beat it."

Lee looked interested. "You're sure of that? Was it a man?"

"Yes, a young man. He sounded kind of excited."

"And then," put in the professor.

Sam Nolan gripped the arms of his chair. "You won't believe it. I know you won't. But it's the truth, I swear it. After I was out on the fire escape, I flashed my torch back in, just for a last look." He paused, and added almost inaudibly: "Mrs. Trenton was still there on the floor, but she was moving. At first I thought it was just my eyes and the light and everything, because I knew she was dead. But she moved again. Sort of turned, as if she was going to come after me. God, it was awful. I couldn't do anything, not run, not move—nothing. I could see that green hair and the blood all over her clothes. And she'd been dead, I tell you—dead."

Slowly Sam Nolan's hands slipped to his sides. "Then I guess I lost my nerve and started to run like hell. On the fire escape I slipped and turned my ankle. It hurt so, I let a yell out of me, like a damn fool. That's how the house dick got me."

There was a moment's silence. Then Captain Lee smiled wearily.

"As a story, Nolan, that's not so hot. You say Mrs. Trenton was dead when you came in, and the doctor says she was killed instantaneously. She couldn't possibly have moved."

"But I tell you it's true. Honest, that's what happened."

"Davis!" Lee glanced at the policeman by the door. "Get Mallory to take this bird down to the station house. I'll talk to him again later."

Sam Nolan made no resistance as the policeman slipped on the handcuffs. He rose dazedly and limped out of the room with Mallory.

"These small-time crooks," exclaimed Lee, "when it comes to faking up a story, they have the imagination of a louse."

Professor Comroy's round face was thoughtful. Absently he tapped a button on his vest.

"Of course," he murmured, "one cannot go against the medical evidence. The boy must have been suffering from some sort of hallucination. But wasn't it possible that the body was being moved by some one whom he could not see? After all, he said he heard a voice in the next room."

"Well, if he isn't lying, I'd like to know who that man was. It couldn't have been you or Mr. Trenton, because it all happened before ten o'clock." Lee turned to the officer. "I'll see the girl now."

Claire French was very pale when she entered. She clutched her pocketbook firmly, and her eyes turned swiftly to Comroy, trying to guess how much he had told. She was reassured by an infinitesimal movement of the professor's eyelid.

"Well, Miss French," began Lee, "there are a few routine questions."

Claire nodded.

"Professor Comroy tells me you arrived here just as he was going to call the police. You had come to see Mrs. Trenton?"

"Yes," said Claire instantly, "I came to see Mrs. Trenton."

"You were a friend of hers?"

"No. I was not."

"Then why——"

Claire bit her lip. "I own a beauty parlor a few blocks away. This afternoon I came round at Mrs. Trenton's request. It was the first time I had attended to her hair. She asked for a touch-up and I used a henna compound. It was not until later that I remembered that this compound, if used on hair that's been dyed already, turns it a sort of greenish color. I was very worried and came to—er—find out if anything of this sort had happened."

"So that explains the color of the hair," mused Lee. "But why didn't you realize your mistake when you were here this afternoon?"

"Oh, Mrs. Trenton wanted to dry her hair herself. The discoloration wouldn't show until after the hair was dry."

"And that was your only reason for coming here to-night?"

Claire inclined her head slowly.

"All right, Miss French. That will be all for the moment."

Swiftly Claire French rose. As she did so, the pocketbook slipped from her lap and fell to the floor with a heavy thud. She bent instantly to retrieve it, but Captain Lee was too quick for her. His lips tightened as his fingers gripped the soft material and flicked open the catch. For a second there was absolute silence. Then he said slowly:

"If you were merely going to discuss hairdressing with Mrs. Trenton, was it necessary to bring a revolver?"

Comroy flashed the girl a warning glance, but she did not seem to notice. Her gray eyes fixed the captain's in a level stare.

"I lied to you," she said calmly. "I did use the wrong henna compound, but it wasn't by mistake. I'm afraid I gave way to a thoroughly spiteful instinct?"

"And the revolver—was that a spiteful instinct."

"No." Claire's face had gone cold. "That was more serious. I came here to-night to threaten and, if necessary, to kill Mrs. Trenton."

For the first time that evening, Captain Lee seemed shaken out of his official composure. He was still gazing at the girl in speechless

astonishment when there were swift noises in the hall and a policeman hurried in.

"There's a guy out here who——"

He broke off as Larry Graves pushed past him and strode to Claire's side.

"Larry!" The girl swung around on him almost fiercely. "You fool! I told you to go. Why—why on earth did you come back?"

"Did you think I'd leave you here? I waited for you downstairs. But you didn't come. Then I saw the police arrive. I had to see if you were all right."

"What is all this about?" asked Lee sharply.

Larry was standing very close to Claire. "I don't want Miss French mixed up in this. She hasn't anything to do with it. She didn't even know Mrs. Trenton."

"She seemed to know her well enough to fix her hair and then want to kill her."

"If she said she wanted to kill her, it was a lie, just a crazy attempt to shield me." Larry lighted a cigarette with fingers that shook. "You see, she thinks I killed Lila Trenton. Of course, I didn't, but——"

"Why does she think you killed Mrs. Trenton?" put in Lee quickly.

"Because I was right here in the apartment to-night."

"So it was you who came here just before ten?"

"Yes. I had a key. Mrs. Trenton gave it to me this morning." Larry produced the key from the pocket of his raincoat and tossed it across the table. "I might as well tell you exactly what happened. When I let myself in, the apartment was in darkness. I called Mrs. Trenton's name, but she didn't answer. I thought she was out, so I turned on the light in the living room and waited for her there."

"Did you look for her in the kitchen?"

"Why—no. The door was shut. I never thought about it."

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"And how long did you wait?"

Larry jerked his head toward the professor. "Until that man and Mr. Trenton arrived. Then I hid in a closet in the hall. I waited till they had gone into the kitchen, and ran out."

Captain Lee turned to the professor, who was tapping mildly on his chair arm. "Do you know anything about this?"

"Why—er—perhaps I may have heard a scuffling sound, but I was very upset at the time. And then I am slightly myopic. I——"

The detective did not appear to be listening. Once more he was addressing Larry Graves.

"That's the third unlikely story I've heard in this place to-night. You don't expect me to believe it?"

"Of course. It's the truth."

"Well, then, there's one thing you haven't explained. Why did you come to see Mrs. Trenton to-night?"

The lines of Larry's face were set and resolute. He was speaking to Claire rather than the captain and, without knowing it, he used almost exactly the same words as she had used.

"I came here," he said slowly, "to threaten Mrs. Trenton and, if necessary, to kill her."

CHAPTER XII.

A FLAWLESS ALIBI.

AFTER these two dramatic confessions, Captain Lee had no alternative but to take Larry Graves and Claire French to the police station for further questioning. At length Gil-

bert Comroy was left alone. He had pleaded the necessity of spending the night with his friend and had promised to make himself available the next morning.

When the door closed behind the captain, the professor gave a sigh of relief and crossed to one of Lila's mirrors. For the first time in his life, he was eager to see his own face. There should, he felt, be some radical change in his appearance, for he was not used to lying. And he had been telling or acting a lie the whole evening.

The plump, benevolent countenance which looked back at him seemed much the same as usual.

"Well, well," murmured Gilbert Comroy, "I ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself."

But he wasn't.

He tiptoed to his friend's bedroom and silently opened the door. Paul Trenton was still asleep. One shaded lamp played on his sallow face, smoothing from it the lines of pain and leaving only peace and serenity. Softly Professor Comroy crept to a chair and sat down.

The hours passed. The clock in the living room chimed two—three—four—five.

Once during the night the professor's round eyes closed like a sleepy owl's, but he shook them open again and moved into the bathroom for a glass of water to keep him awake.

The pale rays of the February dawn were filtering through the shades when Paul Trenton finally stirred. He moved his head on the pillow and murmured:

"Lila."

Comroy jumped up. "How do you feel, Paul?"

"Gilbert! It's you." A look of remembered pain had come into Trenton's eyes. "Poor Lila. Did they find out——"

"Don't worry, Paul." Gilbert Comroy bustled out of the room and returned shortly, carrying a cup of tea. "Drink this. It'll make you feel better."

As he passed the cup, the hot liquid spilled over into the saucer. "Tut," he exclaimed, "what a mess I've made!"

Paul accepted the tea gratefully.

"Do you know, Gilbert," he said suddenly, "this is the first time I've had a cup of tea in bed since I was a boy."

As he drank it, Comroy told him, as gently as he could, everything that had happened the night before. Trenton nodded sadly.

"Poor Lila," he said at length. "So both those young people wished her out of the way."

"The man Nolan is under suspicion, too."

"Well, I only hope that an innocent person will not be convicted."

"Don't worry, my friend. Innocent people are very seldom convicted, despite popular prejudice to the contrary."

"Poor Lila," murmured Trenton again, and his voice was very low. "She was such a pretty girl. And now she's dead. Died before me, after all. Do you have any ideas about it, Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"You suspect one of those three people?"

"No."

Comroy took the empty cup from his friend's hand and set it down on the bed table.

"Things will take their course, Paul, and there is nothing much that we can do about it. I may be an old meddler, but I did tell Captain Lee my own reasons for thinking that two of those three young people

were not guilty of murder. Eventually, I feel sure, any grand jury would be forced to the same conclusion, and not indict them."

Almost without realizing it, Comroy had started to speak as though he were discussing a scientific experiment in the laboratory rather than the death of his friend's wife.

"Obviously, there will be no serious charge against Miss French other than carrying a revolver and obstructing justice in a rather theatrical attempt to help the young man. She arrived at the apartment *after* the murder had been committed. Doubtless, she will come to her senses and furnish an alibi for her actions before ten. And although I am no expert criminologist, I cannot help thinking that guilty people are not so eager to admit that they had guilty intentions.

"That is also true in the case of Larry Graves. He came back when there was no need to come back. Besides, from Nolan's story, it can be proved that Lila was already dead when Graves first let himself into the apartment."

Gilbert Comroy rose and drew the shades so that the early-morning light struck across his friend's bed.

"I have no particular sympathy with Nolan," he went on. "A man who steals from a dead body deserves the prison sentence which he will most certainly get. But I do not think him guilty of the more serious charge. There was something about him as he told that tale last night which made me feel he was speaking the truth. And there is one real piece of evidence in his favor, the broken panel in the glass door. Nolan had a key. He was an experienced thief. He would never have broken that glass at the risk of being heard. No, it was broken by some one else, by the person who really did kill Lila."

"And who was that person?"

"I hope that the coroner's jury will reach the only acceptable conclusion." Gilbert Comroy was looking curiously at his friend. "That your wife was killed by another prowler—one who broke into the kitchen before Nolan arrived. A prowler who I trust will always be described in the official records as person or persons unknown."

There was a long silence. At length Paul said irrelevantly:

"It is curious that Lila was willing to lend that young man five thousand dollars when she would not make a loan to help us continue our work at the university."

"But you have money now, Paul," put in Comroy gently. "You will be able to finish your research."

Trenton smiled sadly. "Yes, if there's time."

"Nonsense, of course there will be time. To live and the will to live are closely bound together, Paul."

"Perhaps," said Trenton dreamily. "And there is always Fleming. He's a good man. At least the university will benefit by all this unhappy business. But those two young people, Gilbert—they are going to have a hard time."

"A hard time works wonders when you are young and in love. They'd had a pretty serious misunderstanding; this will bring them together."

"I hope," continued Trenton quietly, "that you, as my executor, will consider that garage a good investment and continue the loan. I do not want them to suffer."

Once more the bedroom was strangely quiet. At length Gilbert Comroy spoke:

"Paul, I must be frank with you. I have another reason for being cer-

tain that none of those three people killed your wife. You see—I *know* who really did it."

"You mean that you don't believe in that 'unknown prowler,' Gilbert?"

"Officially—yes, but actually—no. Of course, I have taken a great deal of liberty with the truth. And I have a certain amount of responsibility on my shoulders. But while I sat here during the night, I gave the matter much thought. I am sure I was justified in everything I did. Can you bear the truth, Paul?"

"As a scientist the truth should be one thing that I can always face." Trenton smiled wanly as he sank back on the pillows and regarded his friend with questioning eyes.

The professor was cleaning his spectacles. "The medical examiner stated that Lila died instantly from a blow which was struck before ten o'clock. He was right, and there is no need to question his statement."

"Yes?"

"But there was something that the medical examiner could not tell. This crime—as I suppose it must be called—did not begin at ten, Paul. It had already started much earlier in the evening."

Trenton was still looking at him fixedly.

"Sam Nolan told a seemingly incredible tale, but it happens to be true. He did see Lila lying there on the kitchen floor at ten o'clock. And he did see her move."

"Poor Lila!" echoed Trenton tonelessly. "I do hope she didn't suffer."

"Sam Nolan said he saw her lying dead and covered with blood—just as you and I saw her later. But it is easy to deceive the eye. Lila was not dead when Nolan stole the pearls. She was unconscious. And he did not see blood. He merely saw—tomato juice."

"Comroy!"

"Yes," continued the professor calmly, "earlier in the evening Lila was struck with what is usually referred to as a blunt instrument. Let us suppose that in this case it was the flat side of the hatchet. The blow was hard enough to keep her unconscious for a long time. But it did not kill her and it did not draw blood. If there had been blood, the medical examiner could have told at once that she had been wounded earlier. But in this case, there was no means of guessing."

Trenton's lips parted slightly, but he did not speak.

"The man who struck Lila," went on Comroy after a pause, "knew that he would be returning to the apartment later with a witness. He decided that he and the witness should find Lila apparently dead. Therefore, he poured tomato juice over the floor and over the unconscious body—tomato juice which would give a convincing impression of blood at first and which could later be explained away by the fact that Lila was about to take some fruit juice from the refrigerator at the moment of death."

"And then?"

"The tableau was set. He returned with the witness—and a short-sighted one at that. They found Lila lying there, and the witness was sent to telephone the police." The eyes behind Professor Comroy's spectacles were closed. He was not looking at his friend. "While the witness was out of the room, he completed what he had begun with a blow of the hatchet—a blow which must have killed instantaneously. *The medical examiner—even after an autopsy—could not have told that she had been unconscious for over two hours before she was killed. But the rigidity of the muscles would incline him to set the time of death*

earlier than it actually occurred. A lucky occurrence, and one which gave both you and myself an unshakable alibi. If any one were suspected, it would be the imaginary prowler—the man who had broken through the glass panel in the door."

"And yet," said Trenton softly, "the man who killed poor Lila could not have foreseen that, instead of an imaginary prowler, there would be a real one. And then those two young people, they complicated things, too."

"They did." Comroy looked long and closely into his friend's eyes. "I guessed almost at once, Paul, but only by instinct. No one else will guess. And yet I am still curious—curious to know what exactly it was that made you decide yesterday to kill Lila."

Paul Trenton did not speak immediately. His worn face had a strange, far-away expression. "It is difficult to tell exactly why one does things, Gilbert. For years now I've known about Lila—known that she despised me, that there were other men, that—well, one need not go into her shortcomings now. About the five thousand dollars to young Graves. But in spite of everything, she was an attractive woman. I still thought I loved her. It was only yesterday that I realized I had been blinding myself."

"But what—what was it that changed you, Paul?"

"When Lila called me back from the university in the afternoon, I'd had two terrible shocks. I had heard about the Abel research and I'd been to see my doctor. I suppose that in itself was enough to make any one deviate slightly from the normal. And then, when I got home, I—I saw Lila with that horrible, dyed hair and her face lined and distorted with anger. It's strange how important little things can be. I think it was that one stupid detail which shifted my whole point of view. Suddenly I seemed to realize that she wasn't young any more—wasn't attractive."

Comroy was listening in rapt attention.

"We were together in the kitchen," continued Trenton, "and all the time she was talking indignantly about some girl from a beauty shop, I could think of nothing except that one fact: 'She isn't attractive any more.' She wanted to start a lawsuit, spend money to satisfy some little quirk of her vanity. And then, when I wouldn't take it seriously, she told me about your visit and started sneering at my work. I—I tried to tell her what the doctor had said, but she was too busy to listen—too busy telling me how weak I was, what a failure I'd been. She said something—I can't remember what—but suddenly I lost control. Hardly knowing what I was doing, I picked up the hatchet and hit her. I meant to kill her, Comroy, but I've always been a bit of a bungler. I suppose I must have used the flat of the blade."

"You meant to kill her! So you had planned nothing deliberately?"

"No. I did nothing deliberate. And I really thought I *had* killed her. It was merely a vague instinct of self-preservation which made me break the panel in the door and pretend to talk to her in the bedroom when you arrived a few minutes later. The tomato juice was just a coincidence. She had it in her hand when I struck her."

"So when you and I found her there in the kitchen—you still thought she was dead?"

Trenton nodded. "It was only later—after you had gone to tele-

phone the police that I felt her heart still beating. At first I was glad. But then I realized that, if she lived, I'd be charged with attempted murder. That's why I struck her the second time."

For a moment there was deep silence. When Trenton spoke again, his voice seemed to come from far away.

"I thought I was a scientist," he said musingly. "A man whose passions and emotions were nicely under control. But there are some things we don't learn in laboratories —and one of them is how very human and frail we all are."

"There is always a lot to learn about ourselves, Paul. I never dreamed that you would do what you did, and I never dreamed that I would be a willing accessory after the fact."

The light was brighter now. It played on those two middle-aged men sitting together and regarding one another solemnly. Paul Trenton turned his face toward the sunlight.

"It's strange," he murmured. "Somehow I don't feel any remorse for what I have done. People like Lila do not give happiness. Nor can they get it themselves. But I am human enough to wish that I might not be punished until after my work is finished."

"But no one will ever suspect you, Paul." Gilbert Comroy moved to his friend's bed and laid a hand gently on his shoulder. "By a series of coincidences you have given yourself a flawless alibi."

"But you must tell the truth, Gilbert. And so must I. I am little better than a dead man. The doctor told me I had but a few weeks more to live, and there is an unmistakable feeling within me that tells me I am all but dying now. And no living person must suffer because of me. If they do not find out who really murdered Lila before I am gone, I will leave a written confession and put it in your care."

"You can trust me, Paul. Write your confession; but unless it is absolutely necessary, I shall never dare to use it."

"And why not?"

"Because you might set a precedent, Paul." The professor's voice was so low that his friend could not hear. "There are many husbands in the world and many Lilas. I believe that unintentionally you have stumbled upon the perfect method of killing a wife."

HIS DUMB CONFEDERATE

BY ARTHUR V. CHESTER

Author of "Sixth Sense."

THE problem in human relations which Doctor Redmond had been trying to straighten out had been settled so suddenly and so completely that he would have laughed aloud if the situation had not involved tragedy. Under this roof, three people lived in a hopeless tangle of hatred. Redmond had thrown up his hands, feeling that nothing could be done to heal their enmity. Yet, in one second, the problem had been solved, illustrating, Redmond reflected, the advantage of action over argument.

The gunshot, still echoing in the house, might mean that John Neeny was dead or wounded; or it might be that Neeny had murdered Eugene Gregory. One thing was certain: the question which Doctor Redmond had been discussing with Bess Neeny was answered, once and for all time. The heavy crash of the gun was answer enough.

Fred Redmond had come to the Neeny home because, at nine thirty, just as he had been looking forward to carpet slippers and a book, Bess had telephoned: "Come right away, Fred. No one else will do. We need you!" With that she cut him off, leaving the impression that some one was very ill.

Under that delusion, he had driven from his home in Flatbush, at breakneck speed, to the salty flats of Bergen Beach, where the Neenys lived, in less than twenty minutes. Parking his car in front of the lonely two-story house, he jumped out and walked up a graveled path, past a suspicious but neutral Airedale, to the front door. Before he could ring the bell, the door swung open

and Bess Neeny stood on the threshold—an attractive young brunette, wearing black-and-gold pajamas.

"I'm awfully glad you're here, Fred!" Her alto voice sounded unsteady. "Come in."

"Who's ill?" he asked as they sat in the living room. "I noticed a light in John's study."

"He's writing a paper on the praying mantis to read before the Naturalist Club. Nobody's ill."

Redmond tried to conceal his annoyance.

"I wanted you because there's trouble," Bess went on in a lower tone. "It's John—and Eugene Gregory."

The doctor's eyes narrowed. Eugene Gregory, the young fellow who was writing lyrics for Bess Neeny's music—tall, athletic, with blond hair and a massive chin. A big, petulant, spoiled child. "What's it about?" he asked.

"You know, Fred, it's convenient to have one's lyricist on the premises. Whenever I think up a tune, he's right here to furnish words. Poor Eugene wasn't doing too well financially and we had an extra bed, so, when I asked him to stay with us, he accepted."

"An arrangement which John does not approve?" Fred Redmond suggested.

"John has been spiteful about it," snapped Bess.

Redmond stood up and glanced at his wrist watch. "In that case, Bess, ask Gregory to go. After all, a man has certain rights in his own house."

Her great dark eyes blazed resentfully as she rose to face him. "How about a woman?"

"Of course—within limits. However, I will not interfere in family matters, Bess. You might have spared me this. I'll say 'hello' to John, then go home."

She clutched his sleeve, and he felt her hand trembling. "Don't tell John that I asked you to come. Don't mention this business!" She scanned his face anxiously. "If John knew that I spoke to you, I dread what might come of it."

Surprised at her intensity, Redmond agreed, wondering meanwhile what influence had destroyed the serenity of the household.

He found John Neeny in his study on the upper floor, sitting at a desk in the midst of specimens in cardboard boxes, piles of books, and sheets of paper scattered all over the desk. Neeny, whose eyes were very bad but who boasted keen eyesight and refused to wear glasses, blinked toward him, trying to make out his identity.

"How are you, John?" Fred Redmond inquired cordially. "Just passing and saw your light. I won't stay a second."

"Oh, it's you, Fred. Too bad you must go," Neeny murmured. His short full lips parted in a mild smile, and one of his large hands—he was built out of proportion, as though some of his ancestors had been giants and others pygmies—brushed the scanty hair atop his small skull. "I am just about to begin my paper, 'Love Life of the Praying Mantis.'"

Redmond chuckled. "Which reminds me, John, how is Sophy?"

Sophy was John's prize specimen of the mantis family.

Neeny's face flushed and he scowled darkly. In all his acquaintance with John Neeny, Redmond had never before seen him in a temper. "I haven't got her any more," he muttered. He changed the subject abruptly. "I must start typing. I'll put the machine on the desk."

Redmond helped him clear a space for the typewriter, moving an arm-

ful of books, a dozen or so mummified insects, some card files, a small microscope, an inkstand and a large microscope. After half a dozen remarks, for politeness' sake, he took his leave. The brief interview had been most embarrassing. John Neeny had acted in a most peculiar manner. Something was preying on his mind. As he went downstairs, Redmond wished that Bess had left him out of it.

She sat in the living room staring toward him anxiously. "You didn't tell him?" Her eyes explored Redmond's brain.

"Tell him? Fiddlesticks! What is there to tell him? I don't know what it's all about and I don't intend to know."

"The knowledge may be"—she paused and he distinctly saw the firm flesh of her shoulder quiver—"may be forced on you."

Prophetic words, proven to be true almost as they left her lips by the terrific reverberations of the gunshot!

Followed the tinkle of broken glass, than an ominous silence of several seconds.

Bess, clinging to Redmond with both arms, opened her red lips. "Too late. What on earth shall we do now? What will become of us?"

In the hall above some one was running—the footsteps of a man, a man in great haste. They pounded the stairs! Over Bess's shoulder, Redmond stared at the door, watching the foot of the stairs in hope and fear. Which one of them was coming down? Neeny or Gregory? Which one would never come down of his own free will—have to be carried down?

After that eternity of seconds, it was Neeny who stood before them, waving a pen in one huge hand, his lips moving jerkily without uttering a sound. He was badly shaken but apparently unhurt.

Bess found her tongue. "Eugene! It's Eugene!" she cried, breaking from Redmond's grasp to run into the hall and upstairs. Unafraid, a dark-haired, shapely Amazon! Redmond brushed past the dazed Neeny to follow her. He found her, on the upper floor, pounding the panel of a locked door with her fists.

Redmond stood beside her. "Mr. Gregory! Are you all right?"

The silence on the other side of the locked door became darkly sinister. Bess turned upon Redmond fiercely: "The ladder! It's in the garage."

They rushed downstairs and out of the house by the rear door. Bess switched on the light inside the garage. "I'll carry one end, Fred. Hurry! You may save him."

"It's too heavy," he objected. It was certainly too heavy for him, as he was not used to such tasks.

By way of reply, Bess had already picked up the end of the ladder and was bearing it toward the front of the house. They set one end on the concrete walk beneath Gregory's window. Bess would have gone up, but Redmond held her back.

"You hold it steady!" he ordered, as he started to climb. In his pocket, he had the flashlight which he always used on night calls.

His first glimpse into Gregory's sleeping porch showed him that a major catastrophe had occurred. Gregory, in pajamas, sat in a chair close to the window sill. He had been hit in the forehead, above both eyes, by scatter shot, and his head rested against one side of the jamb. The glass had been shattered.

A thought even more shocking than the sight of the dead man flashed across the doctor's brain. It was so terrifying in its implications

that he caught his breath and swayed dizzily on the ladder. Here was murder! He recalled the way John Neeny acted, the peculiar, frightened manner of Bess. Against his will, he began to marshal the evidence mentally.

These two men, hating each other, sitting in rooms with facing windows, so that John could easily have fired the lethal shot. Redmond recalled that the study window had been open. The sleeping porch jutted out from the body of the house and John's study occupied the farther end. Most appalling of all, there was, apparently, no one else who could have done it.

"Is he hurt?" Bess called tremulously from below.

Redmond looked down. "There's nothing I can do," he said slowly.

Bess groaned once, then turned and walked toward the house. She was a true fatalist, Redmond reflected.

Descending the ladder, he seemed, for one terrible instant, to be looking into the future. In his vision he saw poor John Neeny, more dead than alive, being carried to the electric chair by burly guards. A pitiful figure, more grotesque than usual in prison clothes, appearing anything but a murderer with his high forehead, his scanty remnant of hair and his absurd Cupid's bow lips moving in prayer. It was so real, so much more moving than the sight of Gregory's remains, that Redmond almost fell off the ladder. When he finally placed a trembling foot on the ground, he stood for a while leaning against the wall in order to pull himself together.

He had to help John Neeny. That much was clear. The difficulties of his course loomed ominously, and, as he stared out over the marshes toward the gray-black mass that marked the water's edge, the somber scene reflected the state of his mind. Only too well he knew the efficiency of the Brooklyn homicide squad. Was he not, as medical examiner, part of it? The mere thought of Lieutenant Dirk, in charge, sent a chill down his spine. What chance had an amateur murderer against a man of Dirk's stamp? Furthermore, Redmond, as an official, would be bound to aid the investigation. He shuddered.

Inside the house, a telephone bell rang insistently. Startled, Redmond hurried to reach it before John or Bess, neither of whom, under present conditions, could be trusted to answer. For that matter, they made no attempt, but sat in the living room, silently staring at each other as he passed the door on his way to the dining-room closet where the instrument was installed.

Suppose some one should ask for Gregory, he thought as he picked up the receiver. "Doctor Redmond?" To his relief, the voice was that of his own resident secretary, Miss Cates. She sounded sleepy. "Doctor, a policeman just came here. You're wanted right away at Neeny's, he said, so I called to check up."

"Neeny's?" He heard his own voice croak strangely in reply.

"Yes. I told him you were already there. Showed him the notation on your appointment pad. He said the police just had a message that some one had been killed there."

"Killed? . . . Oh, yes. That is—Good-night, Miss Cates." He hung up.

"The police are on the way," he told the Neenys in the living room. "They are not losing any time. Who called them?" He looked toward Bess.

She frowned. "No, I didn't. Why should I? It's bad enough."

"You, John?"

John Neeny, with his scanty black hair plastered down on the top of his head, looked like a painted Japanese doll. He wagged a dull negative. "No, Fred. I never thought of doing that. I—I sort of left it to you. You see——" He stopped and began to rub his palms together.

Pondering this mysterious, unknown quantity, Redmond peered into the gloomy hall. "Any one else in the house?" he asked.

"Only the girl," Bess informed. "I hired one last week because of—there was extra work."

Outside, a dog began to howl. Bess shuddered. "Brom Bones, Eugene's Airedale. He knows." Her tone was sepulchral.

"Nonsense!" Redmond snapped, holding up his hand for attention. "Hear that?" From far off came the wail of a siren, rising and falling like the despairing shriek of a short-winded monster. "The dog heard it first," he added. "It's the headquarters car."

Lieutenant Dirk entered with his peculiar gait, a kind of swift glide. He stood on the living-room threshold, eying the Neenys suspiciously. Finally he caught sight of Redmond. He directed his inquisitive nose, long, and ending in an accusative point, at the medical examiner.

"First time in my experience," he remarked, in his peculiar staccato tone. "Medical examiner usually a little harder to find than the murderer. Have to dig 'em out of bed, night clubs, where-not. Wonders never cease. Can you smell a murder, doctor?" While he spoke, his alert, beady eyes missed no move of the Neenys.

Redmond explained matters and introduced his friends.

Dirk nodded curtly at each. He was never over-cordial toward suspects.

"Let's have a look at the body while it's fresh," Dirk suggested briskly, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. "One of the boys can go up the ladder and open the door." He stepped to the front door and gave an order.

"Did you touch the window sash, Redmond?" he inquired as they went upstairs together, leaving a patrolman in charge of the Neenys. "It's been raised about two inches from the bottom, I noticed as I came in."

"It wasn't necessary," Redmond explained. "The whole pane is out. All I did was to look in by the light of my flash."

"Jim Perley, the finger-print man is going up the ladder to let us in," Dirk said as he champed impatiently about the hall outside the locked door of Gregory's room. "He'll know how to get in without destroying any prints that might be around."

"Finger prints won't tell much about this case," ventured the doctor.

"Agreed. Still, we have to follow the routine." Dirk shot a suspicious glance at Redmond. "Come on in. Perley has the door open."

Dirk surveyed the macabre scene inside the room with quick, darting glances. "Corpus delicti got ready for bed. Lavender pajamas. Then sat on chair, close to window, probably looking out into the night as the blast came. What was he looking for?"

"Perhaps his dog," suggested Redmond, building up the idea of a prowler.

"What's this?" asked Dirk who

had been nosing around the sleeping porch like a beagle on a hot scent. "Corpus seems to have written something. Ink pretty fresh. Not turned black yet."

He picked up a sheet of manila paper and read aloud:

"I'm like the poker in the grate,
I like to deal with flaming fate.
Each girl's to me just one flame more,
Each little flame I do adore."

"Tripe!" ejaculated Detective Perley who was dusting various objects with finger-print powder.

Redmond explained that the dead man had been writing song lyrics for Bess Neeny.

"La Neeny rather attractive," commented Dirk. "Hubby no hero type. This Gregory gent handsome, romantic. Hubby sore." He made the motion of pulling a trigger with his forefinger. "What say, doctor?"

Redmond's heart, or something, came up in his windpipe. "I don't believe so, Dirk," he replied slowly. "Not from what I know of these people. Mrs. Neeny is interested in her music to the exclusion of everything else in the world. Even if John Neeny were jealous, he's too sane, too much the calculating type, to commit a murder. You should have seen him, when he ran downstairs after the shot. Why, he still had a pen in his hand."

"Does he write this stuff also?"

Redmond forced a grin. "No, Neeny was interested in the study of insects. He was preparing a paper on the habits of the praying mantis.

"Queer thing to be doing at this hour."

"Many people like to write at night," defended Redmond. "They think better."

"If they kept on thinking, we wouldn't have to be here," Detective Perley interjected grumpily. "Trouble is when they stop thinking."

"Got to do something for your salary," observed Dirk. "Find anything?"

"Only this." The detective tendered a piece of cardboard about six inches square with an uncooked meat ball on it.

"Where'd you find that?"

"Believe it or not, in the top bureau drawer," returned Perley.

Dirk examined the meat critically. "What's that on top of it? Grated cheese?"

"Powdered arsenic, by the looks of it," put in Redmond. He took the cardboard from Dirk, sniffed at the meat, touched it with the tip of his tongue. "Right. Enough to kill a dozen men."

Dirk went into a trance. For several minutes, he stood as motionless as a statue, then he snapped out of it to turn a bewildered face toward Redmond. "I don't get it," he admitted manfully. "Poisoned meat balls, ballads and bullets!"

Redmond agreed, rather cheerfully, that much remained to be explained. The more obscure the case became, the more chance for Neeny to escape.

"And now, doctor, if you don't want to mess around with the body, we'll go downstairs and put the heat on some of these birds around here. Oh, I'm sorry. Forgot that you know them."

Redmond grinned wryly. "All in the game, Dirk. I'll gladly watch you work, and to-morrow I'll perform an autopsy at the morgue. And, by the way, I have the utmost confidence in the innocence of my friends."

"Undoubtedly," Dirk murmured. "Still, routine. Matter of routine to be pursued."

Underlying the lieutenant's tone, Redmond thought he detected a note of sarcasm.

Fortified by a big black cigar, Dirk established his temporary inquisitorial throne in the dining room. Having made himself comfortable in Bess Neeny's rocker and installed Redmond in an armchair at his side, Dirk called for Patrolman Howard, whom he always used on these investigations as a sort of major-domo and office boy, combined.

"Who does the cooking and cleaning here, Howard?"

"Woman named Gladys Scholp," returned the cop earnestly. "I have her under restraint." Patrolman Howard had acquired a semi-legal vocabulary from loitering around courtrooms.

"Well, unrestrain her and bring her right in," directed Dirk.

Gladys Scholp proved to be a tiny woman of thirty-eight or so, with her hair in curl papers and wearing a moth-eaten fur coat over pajamas. She seemed to be exceedingly irritable, to judge by a venomous gleam in her watery eyes.

She took a chair, while Dirk fixed his glance upon the table as though he were totally oblivious of her. An old trick which Redmond, who knew what was coming, had seen Dirk work a thousand times.

With the most startling abruptness, Dirk lifted his head and thrust it toward the woman so that his long thin nose pointed accusingly and his intense black eyes burned holes in her consciousness.

Gladys Scholp uttered a short involuntary scream. She was by no means the first person to give way beneath the strain of Dirk's tactics.

Dirk lifted his brows and smiled knowingly. "Nervous, Miss Scholp?"

She glared at him vindictively. "Yes—and you'd be, too, if some one popped at you like a jack-in-the-box!"

He flushed. "I thought possibly the idea of being questioned——"

"I don't mind that. If I did, why should I"—she stopped and glanced uncertainly toward Redmond who was sitting on a chair to one side—"telephone for the police?" she finished.

"At whose request?" inquired Dirk, glancing at Redmond from the corner of a roving eye.

"No one's," Gladys Scholp replied sullenly.

"You have not been in domestic service very long?"

"Only a week." She sniffed. "I was a bookkeeper before."

It was clear to Redmond that this woman felt herself to be superior to her station in life—a trait that made her a dangerous witness. Probably she resented John Neeny. The fact of her telephoning without orders indicated that she could not be trusted.

If this realization made Doctor Redmond most unhappy in fearing for his friend, it had the opposite effect on the lieutenant who chewed his cigar with evident satisfaction.

"Then, you are interested in seeing justice done?"

"Very much," she returned with spirit. There was no mistaking her sincerity. "I have a special interest," she enlarged.

Redmond perceived that she could scarcely refrain from blurting out some significant fact. Whatever this might be, he hoped that poor Neeny would not be incriminated too deeply for explanation. Had this uppity serving wench been an eye-witness to the crime?

Dirk leaned forward slowly. "Tell me," he encouraged gently.

Miss Scholp needed very little urging. "Mr. Gregory and myself were secretly engaged," she stated proudly.

Redmond sat up straight. Here was a complication he had not expected. Only a week in the house, this woman was engaged to marry Eugene Gregory. Having met the man casually, Redmond knew that he would never have married a poor woman. Therefore, either the maid was lying or Gregory had permitted her to believe this monstrous deceit for some hidden purpose of his own.

"Why secretly?" Dirk pursued.

"He—he wanted it so."

"Did he give you a reason?"

"Yes. He said we'd have to wait until after the depression to get married."

"I see," Dirk commented. "Gregory was waiting until hard times were over, then he'd look for a job?"

Gladys Scholp nodded.

Dirk reflected silently for a minute or so, then his inquisitorial nose was again lifted. "Did Gregory borrow money from you?"

Redmond, who had expected the question, watched the woman intently.

"He did not! Do you think——" It was apparent that she was on the verge of tears.

"Remember! We can secure the bank records," Dirk shot at her.

"Whose business is it?" the woman demanded.

"How much?" asked Dirk gently.

"One—one——" She broke into a gust of tears. "One hundred and twenty dollars. Oh! Oh! All I had." She fished a handkerchief from some recess inside the sealskin coat and mopped her eyes. "I never begrudged it—for Eugene," she concluded dramatically.

"Had Gregory any enemies?" Dirk inquired.

"At least one," she snapped. "You don't suppose a friend fixed him up like that." Here she motioned with her head in the direction of the sleeping porch.

"Do you know who this enemy might be?"

Gladys Scholp compressed her lips and looked across her nose, which needed powder badly at the moment. "I only know what I heard and saw."

"Well, what did you hear and see?" Dirk showed every sign of being delighted with his witness.

Redmond, on the other hand, felt that the woman could do John Neeny no good.

"When the shot went off, I woke up. The wonder is that any noise could reach the place I sleep. I'm sure no air can. As I was saying, the noise woke me. I heard people running, so I got out of bed and slipped into this coat. I heard voices."

"Whose?"

"This gentleman's"—she flickered an eye toward Redmond—"and Mrs. Neeny."

"You know Doctor Redmond?"

"No, sir. I'm only here a week and never saw him before, but I guessed who he was because Eugene told me they only had this one friend. Mrs. Redmond and the doctor ran outdoors together, but, after five minutes or so, she came in alone. I heard her say to her husband: 'Well, you've done it. Eugene is dead.'"

"What happened then?" Dirk asked.

"Nothing, sir. Mrs. Neeny began talking about disgrace. So I—you can't blame me—I sneaked into the dining-room closet where the phone is kept and got the police and told them a man had just been murdered here."

"Excellent!" commented Dirk. "You did the right thing."

Miss Scholp bridled proudly. "I always try to," she whined.

Silently, Redmond consigned this officious busybody, who was pushing poor John Neeny nearer and nearer to the electric chair, to perdition. Dirk, who had been eying the table top again, let his nose veer slowly toward the woman.

"How did Gregory and Neeny get along?"

She compressed her lips savagely. "They didn't—not at all. I've overheard Mr. Neeny demanding that his wife ask poor Eugene to leave the house. When she wouldn't do it, Mr. Neeny got angry."

"What reason did Mrs. Neeny give for not putting Gregory out?"

"Music! She wanted him to write words for her songs."

"That's the only trouble they had?"

"No, sir. There was more. Mr. Neeny keeps bugs in his room."

"Bugs?"

"Yes, sir. Horrible things. Praying mantes. It's bad enough to clean after humans, without having to do for insects."

"Some unpleasantness developed over these bugs?"

"Oh, yes! Day before yesterday. Eugene was sitting in the library, writing a song. All of a sudden, we heard——"

"Where were you at the time, Miss Scholp? You haven't told us that."

"Dusting around where Eugene sat, so I could be near him. It was the only chance I got to see him."

"I understand. You said you heard something?"

"Yes, we heard Mr. Neeny coming downstairs, pretty fast. At least, I did. Poor Eugene was so full of his work, he probably heard nothing. Well, Eugene jumped up from his chair, and I saw him fighting something off with a book that he had in his hand."

"What do you mean?" Dirk leaned forward intently.

"I mean he was hitting at something I couldn't see. I ran to help him, thinking he had gone crazy, when Mr. Neeny popped in the door, all excited. This all happened in a few seconds. Then, just as Mr. Neeny came in, Eugene killed it."

"Killed what?"

"Why, the praying mantis, sir. It had escaped from Mr. Neeny and flown into the library and right against Eugene's face. Eugene squashed the thing against the davenport with a rhyming dictionary. Mr. Neeny carried on something awful. If ever a man had murder in his face——"

Redmond recalled Neeny's expression when he had brought up the subject earlier in the night.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Neeny was in a dreadful temper. I thought it would come to blows. For all Eugene's size and strength, I was afraid because Mr. Neeny was in such a terrible rage. But then Mrs. Neeny came in on the fly."

"What did she do?"

"I can't say, because the very first thing she did was to order me out." Gladys Scholp quavered weepily.

Patrolman Howard stuck his head in the door at this juncture. "If it wouldn't be inconvenient," he announced grandly, "Detective Perley would like a word with you, lieutenant, on the upper floor in Mr. Neeny's study."

Redmond stirred uneasily in his chair. What had Perley discovered in John's study?

Dirk pricked up his ears. "All right, Howard, tell him I'll be up in a few minutes. You, Miss Scholp, please wait in your own room."

The woman left, sniffling viciously.

"There you are, Redmond," Dirk continued. "Just a mess of gossip and suspicion. Not a word of it any good for evidence except the motive. Even there, it's weak. Would any jury of New York peers figure a man committing murder to avenge a sort of flying grasshopper?"

"Probably no man would—or did," commented Redmond significantly.

"I'm not so sure about this Neeny guy," Dirk countered. "But I must get up to see what Perley has in the way of clews. I'll be right back."

It turned out that Dirk did not keep his promise. Instead, Redmond waited fully half an hour without any sign of the detective lieutenant's reappearance. Redmond sprawled in his chair, tapping the floor with his shoe and gritting his teeth in excess of nervous energy. He was disturbed. For the first time since the two men had been together on the homicide squad, Dirk was acting distrustfully. Well, after all, Dirk could not be counted a fool—and there was good reason for his suspicions. Nevertheless, it gave Redmond a cold chill to think that Dirk must be closing in relentlessly on his prey. Poor John Neeny! How unfit he would be for the ordeal of awaiting execution!

After an eternity of suspense, Dirk barged into the room, in a nasty temper. Muttering to himself, he flopped into a chair and pulled viciously at his cigar. The light had gone out, and he had no match. Neither had Redmond. Dirk threw the cigar stub against the wall in a spasm of rage.

"Case going badly?" inquired Redmond, with show of solicitude.

"That Neeny woman!" Dirk exploded. "I just cornered her for a ten-minute session. She doesn't know a thing. She says"—Dirk imitated the speech of an affected female—"she had no idea of who could have done it, except some tramp, passing by." Dirk glared at Redmond. "She's a liar, doctor."

"Come, come, Dirk, you can't expect the murderer to put handcuffs on and jump into your lap," Redmond pointed out.

"Well, I don't expect to leave this house without cleaning up the case. I'll have Neeny on the mat here in a few seconds. Howard is rounding him up."

Redmond felt his muscles grow tense. He made no reply.

Neeny appeared, tiny and pale against the background of Patrolman Howard's majestic, blue-clad torso. He subsided apologetically into a seat at his own dining table and peered respectfully at Dirk who was up to his old trick of gazing at the table top fixedly.

Suddenly, the tip of Dirk's nose threatened Neeny. "You quarreled with Gregory because he killed your praying mantis?"

Neeny drew back slightly but maintained a fair degree of composure. "Yes," he admitted. "Why shouldn't I be angry? I'd reared that creature in my own study. She was tame. Many a time she sat on my hand to eat a fly I caught for her. I've watched Sophy survive three husbands—she ate every one of them down to the last morsel—then Gregory had to crush her. Wouldn't you be angry?"

Dirk ignored this query. "You wanted to oust Gregory from the house, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I didn't like him. He made me uneasy."

"Is that the only reason you wanted him to go?"

"Well, it's reason enough," Neeny responded, "but not the only reason."

"Something else?"

"Yes. The fellow had too much effrontery—crust, if you prefer."

"In what way?"

"A matter of personal mannerisms and habits. For instance, he kept a scrapbook—abominable habit."

"Why?"

"Because he cut up the morning paper for clippings—my morning paper—before I had a chance to read it. Would you like that?"

"You disliked Gregory intensely," Dirk observed instead of answering.

"I merely despised him," Neeny corrected. "He also developed a fondness for my ties and my socks and my handkerchiefs. Luckily, the rest of my clothes didn't fit him."

Dirk thrust his face toward Neeny in a menacing manner. "Now, Mr. Neeny, how about your movements just before the shooting?"

"I really didn't make any."

"You were not in a coma by any chance?"

"Close to it. I was absorbed in study."

"I see. Mantes?" Dirk put a withering accent on the word.

"Mantes," Neeny repeated doggedly.

"Still, you heard the shot?"

"Yes. Distinctly."

Dirk drummed on the table with his finger nails in a nerve-racking manner. "Now, listen, Mr. Neeny. Would you care to state just where that gun report seemed to take place?"

Neeny flushed. "Really, I would not," he said slowly.

"Why not?" Dirk snapped.

"Because you would not believe me. Moreover, it would sound absurd. It *is* absurd! It is *impossible!*"

"Impossible?" Dirk repeated with a leer.

"Yes. My senses must have played a trick on me. On second thought, there's no reason I should keep it back from you. The shot sounded as though it had been fired almost in my ear!"

Dirk fidgeted ecstatically. "You saw the flash?"

"No. I was sitting in the dark at the moment, with my eyes closed."

"But you claimed to be studying!"

"I was. That's my method of study. I switch off the light, close my eyes and think. Then, when the thought comes clearly, I put on the light and write it on my typewriter. During one of these dark periods, the shot went off, you might say right under my nose!"

Dirk squinted sagely at his victim. "Did you smell burning gunpowder?"

Neeny appeared bewildered. "Smell it? I didn't wait around there. I ran downstairs to tell my wife—to get away. I was not interested in sniffing for odors at the moment."

"Hm-m-m. You were not, eh? Do you keep a gun in the house?"

"I? By no means. Don't like 'em. Dangerous."

"This one was, at any rate. Now, Mr. Neeny, I want to ask you whether or not you were alone in the room at the time of the explosion."

"Yes, positively. After Doctor Redmond left me, I locked the door against further interruption and went to work."

Dirk stared blankly at Redmond. "This is the first time any one mentioned that you were in the room, doctor."

Beneath the implication contained in the lieutenant's remark, Redmond flushed. "What of it?" he asked abruptly.

Dirk went into one of his moods and glowered at the table. He

cocked a leery eye at the doctor. "Do you mind stating just what you did in Mr. Neeny's study?"

Redmond felt his breath coming with difficulty. What on earth was Dirk after? What should he reply? After a slight hesitation, he waved his hand airily.

"Why, I did nothing, you might say. Spoke a few words of greeting to John here, helped him clear away his books, insects and microscopes to make room for his typewriter, then I left."

Dirk's lower jaw dropped in show of amazement. "Nothing at all," he repeated. "Sure, Mike. Nothing at all." He planted both elbows on the table and held his head in his hands.

Redmond perceived that Dirk was going into one of those deep trances or comas that usually preceded his most important decisions. He knew that Dirk would remain in this mystic state for a while. It might be ten minutes or even as long as half an hour, depending on the problem. Sometimes, on a really tough case, Dirk went to bed in a darkened room for twelve hours of highly concentrated thought. He never went into one of his famous trances unless he had enough clews to work out a solution. And rarely did he return from the land of dreams without the answer he sought. Redmond felt a cold chill creeping over him. This business boded no good to John Neeny.

Neeny, unaccustomed to Dirk's idiosyncrasies, stared first at the detective then at Redmond, in bewilderment. Redmond explained the situation in a few words.

"We might as well make ourselves comfortable and forget this mess until he comes out of it," he told Neeny.

Perhaps a quarter hour passed before Dirk sprang to his feet, waving both arms. "Howard! Howard!" he shouted.

That patrolman barged into the room, pop-eyed.

"Fetch Mrs Neeny at once! Get her here!"

Howard spread his palms. "She's retired, lieutenant."

"Retired?"

"Yes, sir. She is reclining on a settee in the living room." Howard never used a short word if a long one would do.

"Rout her up! Rout her up!" yelled Dirk excitedly. "I want her at once."

Howard lumbered off on this mission and returned in a short time, convoying Bess Neeny. He heaved a sigh of relief as they entered, and Redmond judged that Bess—suddenly awakened—had been giving the luckless cop a piece of her mind. She started in on Dirk.

"This thing gets on my nerves. If I hadn't already submitted to a lot of nonsensical questions——"

"Just a second!" rapped Dirk. "We have to follow routine. You can sleep again after I find out something about your marketing arrangements."

Bess shot a furious glance at him. "What do you want to know?"

"Who buys the household supplies?"

"I do. No one else."

"You go to the store?"

"No. It's too far away. I telephone and they deliver the order."

"What day did you buy hamburger?"

Her upper lip curled. "We never eat hamburger. Have not had it in the house for years."

Dirk's small hard eyes searched her soul. "You—are—sure?" he asked in a slow impressive manner.

"Positive," she replied pertly.

"In that case, you can go back to sleep, Mrs. Neeny."

She sniffed at him scornfully. "And I suppose you are now ready to tell us who killed poor Eugene?" she remarked sardonically.

"Yes, I am," Dirk stated tersely.

All eyes focused on him. Redmond was aware that John Neeny moved uneasily in his chair.

"Well—who?" gasped Bess.

Dirk's glance covered them all, while a cryptic smile played around the corners of his mouth.

"I'll reveal the killer's name," he said quietly, "on one condition. Do you all grant the condition?"

They nodded agreement.

"You too, doctor?" Dirk inquired.

"Certainly," Redmond responded.

They bent toward the detective who stood with his hands in his pockets, balancing on his heels.

"My condition is that no one should ask me to prove what I have to say until morning." He looked at his wrist watch. "It's one o'clock now, and I'm going home for a few winks. I'll be back at six thirty."

He clapped on his hat and took a step toward the door. Bess Neeny stretched out a hand to clutch his arm. "You didn't tell who did it."

"I must be getting absent-minded," Dirk muttered. "If you want to know—Doctor Redmond did it." Before any one could say a word, he was gone.

After a few seconds of silence, Doctor Redmond heard his own laughter ringing out in the room. It sounded, even in his own ears, hollow and insincere.

True to his word, Dirk reappeared at six thirty sharp carrying a long package, wrapped in brown paper.

"Good morning!" he called cheerily as he came into the living room, where Redmond had passed the night on a couch. "Stay all night, doctor?" he asked, showing surprise.

"I did. After your parting nonsense, I believe Howard would have shot at me if I attempted to leave the premises."

Dirk grinned. "I gave no orders of the kind." He uncovered his package, revealing a child's air rifle. "I'm ready now for the big demonstration," he announced to Patrolman Howard who was hanging around in the hall outside the living room like a sentinel. "Get the Neenys and all hands into Gregory's sleeping porch. The body has been removed, I take it?"

"Yes, sir. The morgue wagon conveyed it for autopsy," Howard informed.

Dirk sat on a chair, looking out the window of Gregory's sleeping porch—the same position, but not the same chair, that the body of Gregory had occupied. Behind him were grouped the Neenys, Detective Perley, Patrolman Howard and Doctor Redmond. The door swung slightly ajar, and Redmond saw the tear-stained face of Gladys Scholp at the crack. An air of tensity pervaded the little gathering.

Dirk raised the air rifle, which had been lying across his knees, rested the stock on the window sill, and aimed carefully across through the open window of Neeny's study.

"Looks like a large microscope on the desk over there," he observed oratorically. "It is a very good duplication of Mr. Neeny's large microscope—a forgery so clever that neither its owner, whose eyesight is poor, nor Doctor Redmond detected the substitution. The contraption is fitted out with a barrel and a trigger. Instead of being a microscope, it is really a sawed-off shotgun!

"If any of you like to work out

problems of this sort, I can tell you, in addition, that we found a BB shot, flattened on one side, on the desk over there. That's all we had to go by.

"Before Doctor Redmond moved the 'microscope' to help clear the desk last night, the muzzle of the device pointed at Neeny's chest. Redmond accidentally changed the aim, thus saving his friend's life and fixing matters so that Gregory destroyed himself instead. Now watch!"

He pulled the trigger of his air gun. There was a flash and a terrific report inside the study.

"Don't worry, it's only a blank shell. I had Perley reload it. The trigger of Gregory's infernal machine is well oiled and fairly large. You couldn't miss it. By hitting it with the BB shot, the micro-gun is set off. Gregory may have taken aim while the light was on, then held the rifle steady and fired after Neeny put out the light."

"But what happened to Gregory's air gun?" Perley interposed.

Dirk's face clouded. "I'll show you. When Gregory fired, he must have been killed instantly. His rifle dropped to the lawn below, just as this one is dropping from my hand."

There was a short sharp bark and, as all in the sleeping porch crowded to the window, they saw Brom Bones, the dead man's Airedale, pick up the rifle in his teeth and run off in the general direction of the bay. A uniformed cop started after him, using an easy but swift lope.

"That cop is Tom Ellery, champion distance runner of the department," Dirk remarked. "I brought him here to follow the dog and find out where Gregory taught the animal to hide that air gun. Unless I am very much mistaken, the one that Gregory used will also be found there. If Gregory's plan had not miscarried, the dog, returning from his first errand, would have been given the false microscope to hide in the same place—probably some deep water hole, not far from a bank."

"Isn't a dumb animal likely to be a dangerous confederate?" inquired John Neeny.

Dirk's mouth tightened to a hard line. "That's the worst part of this business," he said bitterly. "This fellow Gregory had prepared to poison his own faithful dog to cover himself. He had a poisoned meat ball ready for Brom Bones. Lucky for him he is dead, instead of in our hands."

Bess Neeny wept softly. "I want to apologize to John before you all. He was right from the start," she sobbed. "Oh, why did Eugene do these things?"

"That's easy," Dirk explained. "He was on the verge of losing a comfortable, free boarding house. To a man of his sort, who would poison a dog and become engaged to a poor woman in order to borrow her savings, that's motive for a dozen murders."

The law considers suicide a crime. How about incurables? Have doctors the right to let them die or help them to die? This is the question which is agitating the minds of thinking people. Murderers might use it as an excuse for killing.

Quirks in Crime

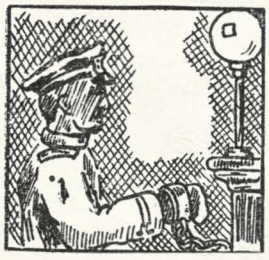
by PETE OF COURSE

Taxpayers wonder sometimes just where their money goes. The department of justice reports show that the "tax" levied through the medium of crime in this country is by far greater than all of that which is collected by the Federal, State and county authorities combined.

The county courthouse in San Jose, California, was recently burglarized when a daring thief carried off the gallows upon which the notorious bandit, Tiburcio Vasquez was hanged in 1875. Perhaps the thief felt he would thereby put an end to all hanging.

It has been estimated that every three hundred and sixty-five days there are ten thousand persons murdered, fifty thousand robbed and three thousand kidnaped in this country. Were foreign figures available there would be many more added to this already overlong list.

The worst crime that can be committed in the Andamen Islands, Bay of Bengal, is fire-stealing. The reason for this is because the aborigine natives do not know how to tinder a fire, so must get coals from their nearest neighbor, if any one is careless enough to let the last spark die.



John Ensminger, of the Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, police department, arrested and arraigned himself under the charge of assault and battery upon Earl Robinson. After this rather unusual but perfectly legal procedure was consummated, Ensminger was released under bond pending police magistrate examination.

No. 1 Wall Street is located within the Missouri State Prison at Jefferson City. It is the home as well as the office of Mr. C. L. Simpson, who is serving a life sentence. It is said that "Simmie" has amassed a considerable fortune acting in the capacity of jeweler and pawnbroker.

STRIKING SILENCE

BY DICK CALLINGHAM

AS the *Firefly Limited* neared the end of its run to New York, the four men in the wash room checked each station as it flashed momentarily out of the night. The monotony of the long journey from the Middle West had exhausted their interest in big fundamental subjects. Now it was the punctuality of the train which seemed the only thing of real importance. They were comparing times and watches.

The clergyman, rosy and cherubic, suddenly slipped a hand into his vest pocket and fumbled for a moment. He did not withdraw his fingers as his attention turned to the man who was talking.

"This watch," said the speaker, holding up a thin, gold timepiece, "was given to me by my associates in the bank on the occasion of my appointment to the vice presidency. It is as reliable as the bank itself."

The salesman, seated beside the clergyman, compared the watch on his wrist with the one the banker held. Both seemed childishly delighted to find that, within a very few seconds, they were agreed as to the exact hour.

A smile stole over the salesman's face. "Did you ever hear the one about the fellow who put his watch under the pillow?" He broke off abruptly and glanced hastily at the clergyman.

The man beside the banker took a large, silver watch from his pocket. He of them all had given no hint as to his occupation or character.

"This old turnip," he said, "saved my uncle's life in the Civil War. You can see the dent where the bullet hit."

The clergyman's even glance went from the salesman to the nondescript. He folded his hands over his ample belt line.

"Before I show you my watch," he said, "I want to tell you about it. One of my parishioners, a young man with a remarkable turn for invention, gave it to me. It is one of the most amazing watches in America."

The three others looked at him with increasing interest.

"Yes," continued the prelate, "I flatter myself it is quite unique. It actually strikes the hour. You probably noticed the chime at ten o'clock. Or, maybe we were too deep in argument."

"I have heard of repeaters," said the banker incredulously, "but I have never heard of a watch that strikes of its own accord."

"Why not carry an alarm clock and have done with it?" remarked the salesman a trifle sourly.

"Show it to us," cried the nondescript.

"Certainly, certainly I'll show it to you," announced the clergyman. "We'll all hear it strike eleven in a very few minutes now."

He raised a plump hand toward his waistcoat and pulled at his watch guard. It came out limp in his hand. There was no watch at the end of it.

For a moment the others stared at him as though he were performing an unsuccessful conjuring trick. The cherub rose to his feet. An expression which was almost stern had overspread his smooth, ingenuous countenance.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "within the last few minutes one of you three has stolen my watch. I had it when we passed by Princeton. Now it is gone!"

There was a moment of incredulous silence.

The banker straightened in the seat. "Impossible," he snapped.

The salesman hit the cuspidor with uncanny accuracy. "Boloney," he said.

The nondescript leaned forward. "Search us," he challenged.

"Come, come, gentlemen," continued the clergyman calmly, "there is no need for any fuss. Let us keep this matter, as one might say, within the family. The train is on time and we are due in New York at 11:03. Very shortly we will be going under the Hudson. That watch is going to be returned to me and there will be nothing to worry about."

He looked around with a smile that disarmed all protest. Then he turned to the Pullman porter who for some time past had been standing in the doorway; a whisk broom ready in his hand.

"Not a word about this, porter. I want you to turn out all the lights in here as soon as we reach the tunnel. Also those in the passage outside. Stand there and don't let any one come in."

The porter, obviously impressed by the authority of clerical garb, nodded agreement. But the salesman sprang to his feet.

"If you want to play 'Hide in the Dark,' hop to it," he said, "but I'm going to my seat."

The clergyman's rotund figure suddenly blocked the doorway. He had moved with surprising agility, considering his girth. "It is either this," he explained pleasantly, "or calling the conductor and having every one searched. The Good Book tells us to avoid strife and I am a man of peace. That is why I am using this means to have my watch returned."

"Well, hurry up," the banker urged. "Let's get it over with."

As though he were about to pass round the offertory plate, the clergyman placed his shovel hat carefully on the floor.

"Gentlemen," he said, "whichever of you has taken my watch need have no cause for alarm. It will not chime for two minutes, at least. The room will be in darkness while I count twenty. At the end of that time, I expect the watch to be lying in my hat."

He glanced at the three men, each of whom had edged away from his fellows into a corner. "Otherwise," he concluded, "we can easily tell which one has it from the direction of the chime."

As the train started its journey beneath the river, the porter pulled down the shades and turned out the lights. There was no sound except the slow, deliberate counting of the clergyman. He might have been pronouncing a benediction at the conclusion of an impressive service.

"Eighteen, nineteen—twenty."

The lights snapped on. All eyes were riveted on the shovel hat which lay like a dark pool in the center of the floor. In it there gleamed a fine, gold watch. The clergyman picked it up and placed it in his pocket.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said politely. "I need not trouble you longer."

Without waiting for any comment, he left the wash room and made his way to his seat in the coach. The porter followed. A strange look passed between the two men.

"Do yo' notice, rev'run, that they was oney one of them as didn't feel his pockets when yo' said yo' watch was stole?" the porter asked. He respectfully lowered one of his eyelids. "That there one as said he was a banker. Can I brush yo' off, suh?"

"We must not accuse people," the clergyman murmured, as the whisk broom sped over his dark cloth. We must be thankful for what we have."

But as the train nosed its way into the station, the porter made no move to go away. He seemed to have forgotten about the three other men. "Beggin' yo' pardon, rev'run, but it's sure after 'leven o'clock now, and I ain't heard that watch strike yet."

The clergyman gave a fat smile as he slipped a dollar bill into the colored hand.

"Strikes, your grandmother," he whispered, "and this watch was given me by an aunt of mine when I entered the ministry. I only hope the poor old lady didn't turn over in her grave when I told that little fib about it striking the hours."

LEGGING IT OUT

THE new jail in Mulshoe, Texas, was severely wrecked when one of the inmates nearly sawed his way to freedom. It was the last set of bars that was occupying him when he was caught. His tools consisted of a hammer, hacksaw and blade, chisel, punch and an acid that softens toolproof steel. Although the prisoner had been thoroughly searched when he had arrived at the jail, no one had thought about looking in his toolbox, which in this case was an artificial leg, constructed to carry his kit.

HEADQUARTERS CHAT

MRS. M. G. RUYTER
10 SUMMIT AVENUE, EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY
WINS THE READER'S CONTEST

In the December issue, a story, "Who Did It?" by Herman Landon, was printed unfinished—the dénouement—solution—being omitted. $100.00 was offered to the person, who, after reading this unfinished story and the conditions, supplied the best dénouement. No, it is not chivalry that makes us give the $100.00 reader contest award to a lady for the third time. Truth to tell, we were rooting for a man to win it, but, after due, careful, and painstaking consideration, we made up our minds that Mrs. M. G. Ruyter's solution, taking everything into account, was the best, so with our congratulations, and with our hat off to the ladies, we have sent her a check for $100.00.

For the benefit of all those who did not read "Who Did It?" we are printing below a brief synopsis of Landon's story. This is followed by Mrs. Ruyter's solution, and, after Mrs. Ruyter's solution, is Landon's solution.

SYNOPSIS

Martha Drew, victim of a blackmail plot, has decided to kill her blackmailer who has forced his way into her penthouse. He is now in her bedroom, lying down on her bed, having taken suddenly ill. She enters the bedroom with a knife in her hand, all set to kill him, when something within her stops her and she drops the knife and rushes into the sitting room.

Her husband, Julian, who was supposed to have gone on a business trip, unexpectedly enters the sitting room. He accuses her of having a man in her bedroom—Carl Winter, the man of whom he is jealous. She tells him the man in her bedroom is a stranger to her, that he forced his way in, and that after several drinks, he staggered to the bed.

Julian goes into the bedroom, and, when he comes out again, he announces that the man on her bed is dead. Julian accuses his wife of having murdered the man. He is about to call the police when Carl Winter pays a call. Martha goes to the door. Winter tells her that he knows about the blackmailing scheme of Ducky Dowling and Larry Boyd, and that Larry Boyd has been murdered.

Later Ducky Dowling, in the guise of a detective, enters through the bedroom window and searches Larry Boyd's pockets. Winter sees through the make-up.

The police, who have been summoned by Julian, arrive and proceed to examine the suspects. After a careful cross-examination, Pettridge, the detective, is ready to handcuff the guilty man.

MRS. M. G. RUYTER'S SOLUTION

The officer whom Pettridge had called Jimmie looked at the big detective with a puzzled, questioning stare.

Pettridge remained silent for a moment, twirling that ludicrous lock of hair just above his forehead. He looked at each of the four suspects in turn. It was a tense moment for them. Finally, Pettridge answered the uniformed man's unspoken question:

"Jimmie, put those bracelets on this man, Drew."

There were gasps of relief from the other suspects. Julian Drew's face flushed, but his crafty, secretive eyes and unemotional features otherwise gave no hint of his real thoughts. He meekly submitted to the handcuffs, but, in his most supercilious tone, remarked: "You'll have one hell of a time proving I did it."

"Who else could have?" replied Detective Pettridge querulously, and continued: "Under other circumstances, you might have been justified in killing this blackmailing rat. But you're the cowardly, sneaking sort who'd even direct suspicion to your own wife in order to protect yourself.

"Being suspicious of your wife and Carl Winter, you pretended you were flying to Chicago; but you had no real intention of doing that. Instead, you returned here around eleven o'clock to-night, hoping you'd find Winter here, and in your wife's bedroom at that! Snooping around that window, you heard some one inside breathing heavily, drunkenly. Winter, you thought it was. You crawled inside, intending to strangle him; then you stepped on something—the knife! That would be a lot easier—noiseless, too! And your wife would be accused—the knife was from her desk!

"One thrust! The man you thought was Winter was dead. The knife handle you cleaned with the lady's handkerchief, which you returned to her bureau drawer. More evidence against her!

"I knew you had lied about using that flashlight when I played that little trick—loosened that connection so it wouldn't work. Larry Boyd died in the dark! And were you surprised that it wasn't Carl Winter when, later, you saw the body in the light?"

Turning to Winter, Pettridge said: "I don't blame you for protecting the woman you love—but you lied to me. At that open window you overheard the Drews' conversation and learned of the dead man in her bedroom. Knowing her story, you quickly realized the man had been one of the blackmailers. Raising the window while they were in the other room, you slipped inside, searched the body for incriminatory papers, found them, and burned them outside, where we found those ashes.

"Ducky, here, was out of luck. He wanted those papers badly, and took a long chance on getting them back, but you had already destroyed them."

To the policeman, Pettridge said: "O. K., Jimmie. Bring Ducky along, too, on that impersonation charge. This man Drew's going to have one devil of a time proving he didn't do it!"

Martha Drew almost collapsed in Carl Winter's arms. "I just *knew* Julian did it," she said.

HERMAN LANDON'S SOLUTION

While the policeman rattled the handcuffs, Pettridge swung his great bulk toward Carl Winter.

"Don't look so glum," he said. "I know what you've been thinking all the time—that Mrs. Drew lost her senses and killed Larry Boyd. She didn't."

The young man started as if doubtful he had heard aright.

"Surprised?" Pettridge asked. "You lied to me. You did crawl in the window. It was just after Mrs. Drew and her husband returned to the sitting room. You went through Larry Boyd's pockets and found the blackmail papers. Maybe you also wiped the knife handle, thinking Mrs. Drew had left her marks on it. Did you?"

"Yes," said Carl, still a little dazed. "I did."

"You couldn't know," Pettridge pursued, "that somebody else had already wiped it with one of Mrs. Drew's handkerchiefs."

Martha's auburn head jerked erect. A quick gasp was heard.

"Afterward," Pettridge went on, "you burned the papers in one of those pretty vases out on the terrace. You meant nobody should ever use them against Mrs. Drew."

"And nobody ever will," Carl declared, a great sigh rolling off his big chest.

Pettridge turned to the blackmailer.

"Ducky," he growled, "you're a rat. I hope you rot in jail. But you didn't kill your pal. If you had, you could have killed him and taken the papers all in one trip. You wouldn't have burned the papers afterward. You came here to see what had happened to him. When you found out he was dead, you wanted the papers so you could play the rotten game on your own."

Ducky made a face at him, and Pettridge turned to Julian Drew.

"Drew," he said, trying to keep a crackle out of his voice, "I was some time getting around to you. You weren't jealous of Boyd. You had no motive for killing him. That's what stumped me. The whole question turned on the matter of the light. If the room was lighted, you would have seen the man was a stranger and let him alone. If it wasn't lighted, you might have mistaken him for Winter and killed him.

"Your wife was in the next room, with the radio going. As you said yourself, you couldn't turn on the light because she would have seen it under the curtain. And you didn't use your flashlight. I made sure of that when I tricked you into the lie about dropping it on the terrace. We all know you lied. An innocent man wouldn't have acted that way. You had Winter on the brain. When you found a man asleep on your wife's bed, you were so sure it was Winter you didn't even bother to investigate. Probably you meant to strangle him to death.

"The knife was on the floor where your wife had dropped it. You happened to touch it with your foot, and a hellish idea got into your mind. You did the killing with your wife's knife. Then you took one of her handkerchiefs, dipped a part of it in the blood from the wound, wiped your finger prints off the knife handle, and then put the handkerchief back in her dresser drawer, where you knew we would find it."

Julian was silent. The perspiration of mortal terror beaded his face.

"And then," Pettridge added, "you sat here and gave us a tune that almost fooled me, half lies and half truth. It was great stuff."

Julian Drew slapped his hands to his face and groaned.

"I was crazy!" he shouted. "I hated Winter. I hated my wife—hated her and loved her at the same time. I wanted to kill Winter and let my wife bear the blame. If she went to jail for life, I would never again be tormented by this hellish jealousy. And now"—he gave a hoarse, maniacal laugh—"now I hate myself. I hope you send me to the chair."

He stretched out his hands for the waiting handcuffs. The officer took him and Ducky away. Pettridge glanced enviously at Carl Winter's athletic form. His eyes twinkled.

"If I was in love with a woman who was married to a rat," he pronounced, "and if her husband was on his way to jail or maybe a worse place——"

He paused, pulled a cigar from his pocket, and looked at it soberly.

"Well," he said, "I'm human."

DIVORCE DENIED

BY MEL WATT
Author of "White Hell," etc.

IT had to come to a head sometime. So when Sam Hayward, swaying a little drunkenly, entered his wife's room, she knew just what she was going to say.

He demanded surlily: "I'm through arguing, Louise. I want a divorce."

She said with cold finality: "There will be no divorce, Sam, now or ever." She looked at him steadily, in her eyes a faint disgust. "And please stay out of my room when you're in this condition. Must you drink so much?"

Drunk or sober, Sam Hayward's face never seemed to lose its square, handsome fitness. His chin set stubbornly. There was a hard glint in his narrowed blue eyes.

"All right, I'm drunk. Why not? You can't live in an atmosphere of hate and——"

"Sam! I don't hate you!"

"Oh, call it anything you like," he said harshly. "We can't go on like this. I love Neva, and she loves me. If I was hurting you, it might be different. But I'm not. We never were in love; our families expected us to marry, and we drifted into it, that was all. But that's all changed now."

"Is it?"

"Yes. I've a right to happiness. You won't be hurt."

"That's where you're wrong." A bleak smile, just a little tragic, passed across her lips. "You see, Sam, I happen to be a Langley. I'm not boasting. I'm just stating it. No Langley has ever suffered scandal or humiliation, and I don't intend to be the first. You're very much mistaken if you think I'll be publicly thrown over for a common little——"

"Shut up!" he cried angrily. Blood rushed to his face and all civilized restraint dropped from him. "You're so damned superior, aren't you! A Langley! A hypocrite, that's what you are! You'd keep us in this hell, to save your silly pride! You think I haven't the nerve to get out of it!"

She answered wearily, with a faint underlying note of disdain: "I don't think you'll be an utter fool. Your profession demands a certain dignity and restraint, you know. It doesn't like sensationalism."

Her quiet contempt stung him. "You think you've got me there, don't you, Louise? Your trump card is that no banker can afford the notoriety of a sensational divorce, so you think I'm trumped."

He gave a rash laugh that shattered all former caution.

"That's where you've guessed wrong, Louise. You wouldn't know, but a man will do a hell of a lot to get a woman he loves. I want Neva that much. I'll *force* you into divorcing me, and to the devil with the consequences!"

She went white, and the set smile left her. But she did not weaken. Her pride was adamant. She held her head high and spoke quietly, coldly:

"No matter what you do, I'll never consent to a divorce. I've told you no Langley can be thrown aside. I mean it."

"We'll see," he said brutally. "Perhaps humiliation will change your mind. I'm sorry, Louise. Your stubborn pride has made you cruel. Well, I can be cruel, too."

He turned abruptly to leave the room. "Good night. I'm going out."

Her voice carried across the room after him. It was still modulated, but there was a hint of quiet desperation in it now:

"No matter what you say or do, Sam, I'll never be thrown aside. Remember that."

When Sam Hayward entered the cocktail bar of the Sixty Club, he saw Neva Remmer talking and laughing with a slim handsome man, dark-skinned, who was obviously a Latin. Sam scowled. He didn't like it. He was instantly jealous. She saw him approaching, said something hurriedly to the man, who bowed quickly and walked away. Sam sat down beside her, with a feeling of possessive pride in her striking blond beauty. She gave him a bright smile.

"Hello, darling."

"Who's the Latin from Manhattan?"

She gave a light laugh. "The Latin from Brazil. Rio de Janeiro. I met him once or twice on a voyage down there. I'd forgotten him." She hugged Hayward's arm. "Let's both forget him. Sam, dear"—her tone became instantly serious—"how did it turn out? Will everything be all right?"

He shook his head morosely, spoke bluntly: "She says there will be no divorce, no matter what happens."

"Oh!" There was deep disappointment, but annoyance, too, in the short expression. Then, sharply: "We can't go on like this. Something's got to be done."

"Yes, something," he said gloomily. After a minute: "Oh, come on, let's forget it for a minute. Drink up. One nice thing about you, Neva, is that you're not always telling me I'm drunk."

Around eleven o'clock on the night of April 27th, an old resident whose place was about a half mile from the Hayward place, turned out his lights and started upstairs for bed. He looked out a window and

saw a queer light in the sky—a murky yellow, like that rising from a city at night. Puzzled, he went outdoors to have a better look. At the rear of the house there was a cleared space that afforded an unobstructed view of the Hayward place. He gave one look, let out a loud gasp, and ran back into the house shouting to his wife:

"Martha! The Hayward place is on fire!"

Telephone wires buzzed. Neighbors from estates round about—the nearest being half a mile away—sped in cars through the darkness to the blazing mass. It was impossible to get near. The Hayward place was an inferno. People stood around helplessly. There was nothing that could be done. This was in the country, and there was no fire-fighting apparatus, no hydrants.

"Oh, heavens!" a woman said shakily. "I hope no one was caught in there!"

County officers and workmen were on the spot the next morning. The house had burned to the ground. A smoking, hissing pile of black débris was all that remained. They soaked the heap with buckets of water from a tank wagon. Then they dug and explored the ruins. They were digging beneath a mass of soggy, charred timber which broke with every spade thrust, when the workmen called out excitedly:

"Hey! Look!"

Under the débris they had found the remains of a human body. What was left of it was little more than a skeleton.

Mark Loder looked down at it and pursed his lips. No one had paid much attention to him. He was a thin, gray man, quiet and unobtrusive. He was an insurance investigator for the World Mutual. While county officers acted important all over the place, Mark did his scouting around pretty much in the background.

He moved away, and his eye suddenly caught an expensive car down on a road away from the immediate scene. He strolled toward it, and, as he came up, a stylishly dressed woman called out: "What is all the commotion?"

Mark took off his hat and told her: "They've just uncovered a body; skeleton is more like it. A man's."

The woman's eyes and mouth opened in awe. "Oh, good heavens! Poor Mrs. Hayward!"

Mark said nothing; but his eyes asked a polite question.

"She won't know yet, poor thing," the woman went on. "She left two days ago to visit some people in Boston."

"Do you know who they are?" Mark asked. He thought it best to add: "You see, I'm an insurance man."

"I'm sorry, I don't," the woman said. "I don't know the Haywards very well. They are rather—er—aloof people."

"Thanks, anyway," Mark said. He went back to the scene of the fire.

It wasn't more than an hour later that a rural mail car sputtered up the road. The driver came up holding out a letter and grinning somewhat foolishly.

"Who do I deliver this to, when there ain't no Hayward place any more?"

The county sheriff took it. It was addressed to Mr. Sam Hayward in a woman's handwriting. The sheriff, going perhaps a little beyond his authority, promptly ripped the envelope open and read the letter. Mark Loder, at his elbow, asked quietly: "May I see it?"

The sheriff knew who he was and handed it over. It was from Boston

—from Hayward's wife. Just an ordinary wifely letter—although a trifle stiff and cold, Mark thought. The only thing in it that interested Mark was the one sentence: "I trust you are getting along all right, and that Betts is taking good care of you."

"Betts," Mark murmured. "Manservant, I suppose."

Shortly afterward, he did not need to suppose. A car brought onto the scene a harassed figure who was plainly a "gentleman's gentleman." He ran up to the officers, gasping in horror-stricken tones: "I've just heard. I shouldn't have left him. He was in no condition——"

When they got him calmed down a little he explained tearfully: "Mrs. Hayward had gone away for a visit, and all the servants were on leave but myself. Yesterday evening, early, Mr. Hayward told me I could go and visit my brother in town overnight. I hesitated, but he had —er—been drinking, and he was—er —out of sorts. I recall his very words: 'Oh, get out!' he said. 'I'd like to be alone in peace for once in my life.' So—so I went."

The valet stared at the débris, at the tarpaulin that covered the body, and hid his face in his hands.

"Oh! This is too ghastly!"

The sheriff had been glaring suspiciously. He made a wry mouth and said bluntly: "Hold this man."

The timid servant nearly fainted. He could not even find voice to protest much. Deputies took him away whimpering: "See here—oh, see here——"

Mark felt a little sorry for him.

He said mildly to the sheriff: "A little hasty, wasn't that, sheriff?"

The sheriff growled: "Hell, no. His story sounded too pat. Don't ever let these *Caspar-Milquetoast* guys fool you. They're often slick as grease. He was the only person alone with Hayward, wasn't he? There's nobody to contradict his story, is there?

"Anyhow," the sheriff added defensively, "I ain't so sure but what there may have been murder and arson committed. I'm holding him till I find out. Arson usually ain't so hard to discover, is it?"

Mark smiled thinly and pointed at the ruins. "It is in this case. The house burned to the ground. Finding proof of arson here is like looking for a needle in a haystack—when you're not even sure if the needle is there."

They tried to make a great to-do about it, of course. But the long and the short of it was that there wasn't much to go on. And, besides, it looked perfectly obvious: Hayward had been drunk, and a burning cigarette or cigar had set fire to something, and the house had become a flaming pyre for Sam Hayward.

There was no proof of arson. Louise Hayward's sister and brother-in-law, whom she was visiting, swore to her presence with them every minute since she had arrived in Boston. Other cases ran through Mark Loder's mind. Cases, for instance, where a bottle of combustible chemical is suspended upside down, so that when it eats through the cork, the chemical falls out and ignites some substance lying prepared for it. The actual criminal can be miles and days away when this happens. But such a plan, Mark knew, would have required the cooperation of Betts, the manservant. And poor Betts, under grilling, was obviously innocent. He was scared to death, but his conscience was clear. If it had not been, he would have broken, for he was a soft type of man. Both the sheriff and Mark

had the perception to see that. Betts was set free.

No proof of arson. And a coroner's jury found: "Death caused by an accident."

Mark, in his sympathetic talks with Louise Hayward, found her a charming woman, although a little too conscious of her pride and position. Still, she came of a proud line. The random thought crossed Mark's mind as to what lengths such pride might go, to save itself from humiliation and ridicule. Such people can stand tragedy, for that wins sympathy. But they cannot stand scandal and humiliation, for that makes them a laughingstock. But it was only a random thought, and Mark let it go.

As for the life-insurance policy, Mark saw nothing else to do but allow the claim. It was considerable. Sam had provided well for his wife.

She would not permit the remains to be cremated. What was left was buried.

And yet, when the case was presumably closed, rumors reached Mark's ears. The "other woman" in Hayward's life. Mark supposed it was none of his business; but he had a funny hunch. He believed in hunches. Maybe it was just suspicion. He was in a business where you have to be suspicious. It wouldn't do, however, just to break in upon the woman without any good reason. Indirection is the method of a skilled investigator. He finally decided to go see Hayward's lawyer.

George F. Harkness proved to be a stiff, middle-aged man with tight lips and a puritanical gleam in his eyes. Mark explained who he was and came right out with it:

"Do you mind telling me, was Mrs. Hayward the only legatee of Hayward's estate?"

"I am not, sir, in the habit of discussing with others my clien's affairs."

Mark saw he would have to be more smooth and circumspect. This stuffed shirt had to be handled with gloves.

"You're right, of course," he said gravely. "I haven't any right in the world to ask that. It's only that we want to make sure everything is fair and square—that nothing will pop up later. It's the least we can do for poor Mrs. Hayward."

The lawyer perked up, and his cold voice held as much human warmth as it was capable of: "Mrs. Hayward is a splendid woman. Fine family. Proud, as she has the right to be." His thin lips pulled down at the corners. "Too bad Sam Hayward didn't always show the same sort of pride."

Mark nodded solemnly. "Yes. There was that Remmer woman, wasn't there? I've heard he was supposed to be pretty far gone on her."

Harkness snapped: "Where did you hear it?"

Mark made an apologetic motion, as if it was all too unfortunate: "Whispers get around, after a tragedy like this," he said.

The lawyer's lips tightened to a mere threadline and his sallow face got red with anger. "Bah! That woman! An adventuress, sir! She would have ruined him. She was well on her way to doing it, as things were."

"How do you mean?" Mark prompted gently.

"She——" Harkness's lips snapped tight. He peered skeptically at Mark for a few moments, but again he burst out: "See here! Perhaps I shouldn't be telling this, but that woman makes me boil! Will you keep it to yourself?"

Mark nodded. "Of course. What-

ever I hear, in my work, is confidential."

"Sam Hayward left her something," the lawyer said. "Money, bonds, I don't know. All I know is that the key to a safe-deposit box was given into my keeping, to be turned over to her in the event of his death."

"Has she got it?" Mark asked mildly.

"Yes," said Harkness disgustedly. "She came here, sniffling into her handkerchief and babbling brokenly of 'poor Sam'—a lot of cheap theatrics, if you ask me! I noticed her eyes were perfectly dry when she grabbed the key."

"When was she here?"

"Oh, it must have been about a week ago."

"Know where she is? Keep track of her?"

"No!" Harkness sniffed primly. "I was glad to see the last of her."

Mark nodded, rose, said "Thanks a lot," and left.

Adventuress, eh? Well, maybe. The lawyer was prejudiced, of course. Mark was no narrow-minded puritan. Just because a man might be in love with a woman other than his wife, it didn't follow that the woman was an "adventuress." You can't imprison human emotions in tight little cages. Still, it might be a good idea to look the woman up. He found her name, simply enough, in the phone directory. But, at the apartment building, the janitor only shook his head.

"Miss Remmer left several days ago. Huh? No, she didn't leave no forwarding address."

Mark went on to the postal substation. He got the same shake of the head there. No "Neva Remmer" had filed a change of address with them.

"Funny," Mark said to himself. His hunch grew stronger.

From the bits of gossip that had come to him at the time of the tragedy, he had learned that Sam Hayward frequented the Sixty Club. In that case, perhaps the employees there might know something about this Neva Remmer. He took a taxi out. The place was quiet. It was several hours till opening time. But the manager was there. He was a decent sort and friendly.

"That Hayward business? Terrible thing, wasn't it?"

Mark had told who he was. He spoke somewhat apologetically: "We're sort of looking into this and that angle of it. You know how it is. The woman who was Hayward's companion, do you know much about her?"

"No." The manager shook his head. "Not much. Very attractive blonde. Sophisticated. She looked O. K. to me."

"Did she——" Mark hesitated. "Well, what I'd like to know: did you ever notice if she was friendly with any other men here?"

The manager grinned. "No, can't say I did. Oh, yes, I do recall she did talk several times to a handsome dark-skinned chap. South American, I think he was. Rio, I heard some one say."

Mark asked quickly: "Did she ever talk with him in Hayward's presence?"

The manager looked puzzled, but covered it with a grin of amusement. "No. Come to think of it, no."

"Thanks," said Mark. He rose to leave. The manager laid a hand on his arm. "Listen, maybe I've talked too much. I don't want to get in any trouble, you know."

"You won't," Mark said, shook his hand, and left.

A South American, eh? And Neva

Remmer had disappeared. Why? There was a stubborn streak in Mark Loder—especially when he was following up a hunch—and there were some queer angles to fit in with it.

"No, sir," he said to himself. "I don't think we'll call this case closed, just yet."

He went out to the office of the county medical examiner, and made that bored gentleman sit up when he asked: "Doctor, if some inflammable liquid were poured on a body, could it be proved, even if most of the body was burned?"

"What's that?" the physician exclaimed. "Say, what are you getting at? The Hayward business? That's absurd!"

"Maybe," Mark said quietly. "You haven't answered my question."

"Eh?" The doctor shrugged irritably. "Why, yes, if there's enough tissue left it might—I say 'might'—be possible to discover it by chemical tests."

Mark calmly tossed a bomb at the doctor: "I'd like Hayward's remains disinterred."

There was a great deal of snorting and objecting, but—when Mark had told the doctor as much as he thought he needed to know—the upshot of it was that Mark's request was granted.

It proved a waste of time. If any inflammable substance had been used on the body, tests did not discover it. Perhaps the remains were too far gone to show anything. The only foreign substance discovered was a bit of shrapnel in the right thigh bone, doubtlessly received in the World War.

Mark apologized a bit sheepishly. He left with the doctor glowering silent curses at his back. But he stubbornly clung to his hunch. Why the strange and swift disappearance of the Remmer woman?

He called in at Mrs. Hayward's in her temporary apartment in town. She was greatly upset over the disinterment, especially as it had proved nothing. Mark was sympathetic, but noncommittal. He asked her a few casual questions. At her answer to one, he suddenly sat bolt upright, staring at her.

"Is something wrong?" she asked frightenedly.

"What? No. No." He smiled easily. "I just thought of something I should have attended to."

He took his leave, but, as he hurried along the street, there was a light in his gray eyes that was no longer vague or puzzled. The hunch was, suddenly, no longer a mere hunch. It was dead certainty.

It would doubtless be boring to detail the long days that followed. They were taken up with routine stuff. And yet they involved the hardest part, the most trying part, of an investigator's work—slowly, patiently, laboriously trying to trace a person who has left a blank trail. It was no use. He ran up against a wall every time.

At last, in a burst of impatience—and with that certainty in his mind—Mark decided to cut the Gordian knot. It was bold, maybe foolhardy; but nothing was ever accomplished by being afraid to try. He put the proposal up to his superior.

"But, good heavens, Mark! A trip down to Rio, on a mere hunch——"

Mark shook his head, said decisively: "The thought that I can pick her up there may be a hunch, I'll admit; but it's a pretty logical hunch in view of her friendliness with that fellow from Rio. As for the other part of it, that's no hunch. A crime has been committed. Of that I'm sure."

The chief knew Mark Loder's past

record of success. He hesitated only a little longer. Then he nodded.

In the Brazilian capital, Mark realized his job was looking for one certain fish in a great big ocean. Hotels, cafés, night spots—there were hundreds of them in Rio. He had, of course, a picture of Neva Remmer. He would recognize her. She was not the type that could disguise herself successfully, even had she tried—which was unlikely—for, as far as she knew, what had she to fear? But finding her was another matter.

There was no spot that he overlooked, no matter how small or out of the way. He knew this could go on indefinitely, of course. In any of those places he visited, she might have been there just the night before, or might come the following night. But he put his faith in the law of average. If Neva Remmer was in Rio—and his hunch was still that—he figured he must run across her sometime, somewhere.

Several weeks went by. Every evening the night life of the city saw—or would have if it had noticed, which it didn't—a quiet gray man unobtrusively dropping in at this place and that. Searching, searching, for a face that would leap out at him the moment his eyes settled on it.

He was about ready to give up in weariness when one night the face did leap out at him—the face of Neva Remmer—and in the last place he would have thought: the most popular night club in the city. A place where men and women of all nations congregated. Still, why not? Why should she hide herself? So far as she knew, she had nothing to fear.

Seated at the table beside her was a dark-skinned man, a handsome fellow with a pointed mustache and a somewhat stiff expression, as if he would not unbend enough to smile.

Had not Mark Loder possessed a certain secret knowledge in his mind, he might have hesitated about what to do next. But he did not hesitate. He smiled thinly and proceeded to make his play.

It was all very commonplace; he meant it to be so. Passing their table he bumped against it and upset a glass of wine. The woman and the dark-skinned man looked up sharply, annoyed. Mark was all apologies. He acted the part of a good-natured simpleton.

"Oh, there, I'm terribly sorry! Stupid of me. I tripped on a chair leg." He gazed at the woman and effused: "Say! You're an American, aren't you? I mean, from up North? This is my first trip down here. Great place, isn't it? I'm sort of lonesome, though."

He looked at the toppled wineglass, and laughed vacuously as if a great idea had struck him.

"See here, that was all my fault. Let me buy you some more wine."

The man started to object: "But, señor——"

"Oh, that's all right," Mark interrupted quickly. "It's the least I can do. And to tell you the honest truth, I'm dying for some one to talk to."

He called a waiter, and sat down, pretending not to notice the amazed, and partly amused, glances between the man and the woman. He kept chattering away, and, when wine was brought, he smacked his lips and appeared wholly satisfied. He smiled at Neva Remmer and asked her:

"May I ask where you're from—up North?"

"Boston," she said dryly. He could see she took him for a complete fool.

Mark slapped one hand against the other. "Well, what do you think of that! A coincidence! My home town's not far from there—Waverley."

She went tense, but he pretended not to notice. After a brief suspicious look, she shrugged and faintly sneered, as if she were annoyed with herself for letting such a clown upset her.

Mark went into a rapid-fire chatter about Rio. The man and woman, politely bored, looked down at the tablecloth. That was as Mark intended. All the while he talked, his eyes, without seeming to do so, were taking in every bit of the dark-skinned man.

At last satisfied, Mark prepared to shoot his thunderbolt.

"Say," he asked the woman, "do you get the papers from up home?"

"No, I do not," she said in a tone that implied she wasn't the least interested in "home."

"Oh." Mark spoke like a disappointed boy. "Well, I don't suppose it would interest you anyhow, if you've been away for quite a while. It was quite a sensation, though," he rambled on, "for the folks around home. Man by the name of Sam Hayward, big banker, burned to death in his country house!"

A glass clattered down on the table.

Mark looked, with innocent surprise, at the woman.

"Did you know him?"

"K-now him?" She seemed paralyzed of speech for a moment, until she got hold of herself. "Yes, of course. That is, I knew of him. Who didn't?"

Her next words were spoken with an effort: "But how did it happen? An accident?"

The music and laughter and noise of the place was in striking contrast to the tense stillness at the little table. Neva Remmer was chalk-white, and literally forcing herself not to tremble. Her companion was as rigid as a rock image. His eyes, heavily lidded, looked like the points of icicles.

"They thought so, at first," Mark went on relentlessly. "But you know how the police are. They nosed around and found out things. There wasn't much left of Sam Hayward, of course. Hardly more than the skeleton——"

The dark-skinned man sat up like a ramrod and struck the table with a hand.

"That is enough, señor! Can't you see you are making the lady ill? We are not interested in your ghastly description of a thing that in no way concerns us. Waiter! My bill to sign!"

The waiter hurried over with a card and pencil. The man obviously ran an account here. He took the waiter's proffered pencil. His hand was twitching ever so slightly.

"Well, I'm sorry," Mark broke in huffily. "I just thought it might interest you. It goes just like a fiction story. It turned out that they're holding this Hayward's wife on suspicion of murder."

There was a gasp from the woman, which she stifled with a hand. The man flinched under his dark skin and gave her a lightning glance of anger. His lips tightened, and his fist tightened around the pencil as he signed the card.

Mark Loder suddenly gave an involuntary start. An exultant light blazed in his eyes. He had had his plan of campaign, but he had hardly hoped for anything as astonishing as what he now saw. His probing eyes had flicked over the card—caught the writing on it.

Before the waiter could pick it

up, Mark grabbed it. He stopped the waiter's exclamation with a curt: "Leave us. I'll see you later." The new brittle tone of his voice was a command.

The waiter left.

The dark-skinned man shot forward in his chair, fist on the table, anger blazing.

"Are you mad? What is the meaning——"

He never finished. Mark stopped him with the calmly grim statement: "You can cut the act—Hayward."

Something like a quivering moan escaped the woman. The strangely stiff face of the man twitched. His right hand drew quickly from the table. Mark smiled humorlessly.

"If you've any idea of starting something, don't! My hand's on a gun in my pocket."

For a space of perhaps a dozen seconds, the three sat like stone figures in a hilarious nightmare of music and laughter and noise.

The man made one pathetic and futile denial: "I don't understand you, señor! There is some stupid mistake!"

The grim smile still on his lips, Mark shook his head.

"No mistake, Hayward. I hardly blame you, though, for making a bluff. Plastic surgery and skin dye have made another man of you. You probably even figured it wasn't likely we could get your finger prints back home. Well, we didn't. But that derelict—he was some poor derelict, wasn't he?—you brought to your country house and got drunk and burned, he happened to have a bit of shrapnel in his leg. And your wife said you hadn't been in the War. You couldn't know about that bit of shrapnel, but it was a dead give-away."

Hayward cringed back in his chair like a man drawing away from a searing flame.

"The money or bonds in the box were all prearranged, of course." Mark grinned sardonically. "A new life far away from a wife who was too proud to countenance a divorce. You even left her plenty insurance. That was clever. You weren't greedy."

Mark laughed dryly. "But I never expected you to give yourself away as completely as you just did. When I upset you and sent you into a panic just now by telling you a lie about your wife's arrest, you reverted to long habit and signed this. Look!"

He held up the card. It was not signed with a fictitious name. It was signed: "Sam Hayward."

Both Hayward and Neva Remmer sagged like cloth dolls, slapped down by a brutal fact to which there was no denial possible.

Mark Loder's voice was faintly ironical: "You're not the first to trip on that one, Hayward. A French traitor, named Ullmo, got hooked by the same panicky blunder once." Mark rose. "Now we'll go quietly to my hotel, where you'll be locked in separate rooms."

The aftermath was swift and conclusive. If Mark suspected it might happen, he gave no sign. When you ask him about it, an inscrutable smile hovers about his lips, but he does not commit himself.

The following morning when they went to Hayward's room to get him, they found him dead. He had taken poison. He must have carried it with him always, prepared for something like this. It was dreadful, of course, but it was logical. It was unquestionably the best way out, for all concerned. Neva Remmer was

turned loose. After all, there was no proof she had actually aided in the murder. And Mark Loder—for Louise Hayward's sake—didn't want to stir up a hornets' nest all over again.

But before Neva was set free, Mark got the details of the sordid scheme from her. Hayward had fired the house with the derelict's body in it. Neva, waiting near by in her car, then drove him to an airport some hundred miles distant. He had chosen to wear glasses and a fake little mustache, but the precaution really proved unnecessary. She dropped him near the airport and returned to her home. He had flown to a seaport and taken a small steamer to Rio. In Rio, he underwent at once the operation to change his identity to that of a Latin. Neva explained that that idea had popped into Hayward's head after he had caught a glimpse of a Latin acquaintance of hers back in the Sixty Club. Mental suggestion. This may, indeed, have been the spark that started the whole train of Hayward's dreadful scheme. Who knows? Anyway, after his "death," and after his estate was settled, Neva got the cached money and departed quietly to join him in Rio.

All quite simple. Mark Loder grinned wryly. Had it not been for the accident of the bit of shrapnel in the corpse's leg, and Mark's discovering from Louise Hayward that Hayward had not been in the War——

"There's always something," Mark muttered.

Neva Remmer disappeared and was never heard of again.

The best way out for all concerned. Mark thought so, too.. Sam Hayward was actually dead now, so his wife was legally entitled to his insurance.

Mark bore the brunt of his chief's displeasure, of course, when he reported failure to find what he'd gone looking for. But why make a proud woman like Louise Hayward suffer all over again, when there was no need? Let the sordid thing stay buried, and leave the innocent in peace. Mark Loder was that kind of a man.

BURNING THE RED TAPE

SOMETIMES it is fear of the consequences that causes people to commit crimes, in the mistaken belief, of course, that one crime will cover up another. Then again, it is simply poor judgment that causes the first misdemeanor and a still further expression of that same poor judgment that offers an escape in the way of a second misdemeanor or crime.

It was probably a combination of both fear and poor judgment that allowed a substitute mailman in Bridgeport, Connecticut, to burn up the letters that he did not have time to deliver. His excuse, when arrested and held in the U. S. district court, was that he did it to save red tape.

WRONG ARM OF LAW

BY GERALD VERNER

Author of "Fever Fright," etc.

THE man crouching in the shelter of the pile of boulders had no false idea about his danger. Although he had succeeded in outwitting the police up to now, he knew that he could not hope to remain free indefinitely unless he could think of some scheme that would enable him to get past the cordon that would be thrown around that stretch of bleak moorland country. And if he was caught, it meant the nine-o'clock walk, for he was guilty of the "big thing."

They had tracked him to the cottage which had been his refuge for six weeks, and he had only gotten away by the skin of his teeth. They knew he was somewhere out there on the moor, and sooner or later they would get him. So long as he stayed where he was, he was comparatively safe—there were countless places where a man could hide—but he couldn't stay there indefinitely. Hunger and thirst would, before very long, drive him into the arms of the very people he was so anxious to avoid.

Propping himself up against the pile of rocks, he glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. He had barely eight hours in which to think of something. In eight hours it would be getting light, and with the light his danger would be trebled. If only a fog would come up, one of those sudden, dense, white mists for which Dartmoor is famous—such a fog as that which had enveloped London on the night when old Garside had—died!

He could see the old man now as he had fallen in the gutter, after that one swift stab. Well, he had paid

the old devil for squealing, and he'd as soon have toed the trap as be sent down for a lifer. Garside had squealed because he had refused the miserable pittance the old man had offered for that last lot of diamonds. Fifty quid for over five thousand pounds' worth of stones. He glanced anxiously at the sky, but it was clear and starry. There was no sign of the fog for which he prayed.

Perhaps, on second thought, it was just as well, for the fog would not only blind the men who were searching for him, but would make it impossible for him to move.

He had very little money, scarcely four pounds all told, and that was not going to see him very far. There was no getting away from it, his case was a desperate one. He knew where he could get money in London, but the job was to get there. He searched his pockets for a cigarette, found a packet, and risked the momentary gleam of his lighter. The rock would screen the light from being seen, and he had to smoke. He inhaled deeply and the tobacco soothed his frayed nerves and set his brain working. How the devil could he take advantage of his luck in having dodged the "busies" and get clear away?

Thoughtfully he smoked, his brows drawn together in a frown of concentration. When he had finished his cigarette, he lighted another from the stub, but, rack his brains as he would, he could find no solution to his urgent problem. It was an impossible situation. If only he could think up some means of disguise! Once he was away, safely out of the net which he knew was at that moment spread in all directions to catch him, he stood a very good chance of making a clean getaway. But every road from the moor, every town and village, every railway station would have vigilant watchers on the lookout for him, and he would be easily recognizable.

He came to the end of his stock of cigarettes and flung the empty packet away with a savage gesture. He might just as well face it; he was caught like a rat in a trap. There was *no* way. That inspector fellow who had come to take him had known there was no way; that was why he had abandoned the chase so easily.

The cold night air began to penetrate his thin clothes. He had neither overcoat nor hat. There had been no time for them in that mad dash for freedom and safety. Presently he found himself shivering violently. He had imagined that he was quite safe until, glancing out of the little cottage window, he had seen the police at his very gate. And now he was an outcast—a hunted thing the same as any little sneak thief who had pinched a hand bag except—the thought sent a more violent shiver than the cold—except that, if he was caught, he would hang. There was no doubt about that. Nothing could save him from suffering the extreme penalty of the law, not the cleverest counsel in the world.

The cold was getting worse. A biting wind was blowing across the waste of rolling moor—the wind that heralded the dawn. Already the sky in the east had lost its indigo and was slowly lightening—slowly and imperceptibly, but very surely. He shifted into the lee of the rock. As he moved, he felt the hard shape of the automatic in his hip pocket pressing into his flesh. Well, anyhow, there was one way out. Better a flash of flame and an instantaneous searing of hot lead than the long, drawn-out agony of the trial with its foregone conclusion.

He drew the little weapon from his pocket and pulled back the jacket. It was fully loaded. He remembered putting in the fresh clip of cartridges that morning. Was it only that morning? It seemed centuries ago. It was a comfortable feeling to have it, although he wouldn't use it until every hope had gone. Every hope! There wasn't very much chance, anyway, but still you never could tell. A miracle might happen. Who was it who had said that the most wonderful thing about miracles was that they sometimes happened?

He pulled himself up sharply. This would never do. He was wasting what few remaining hours were left in trying to remember quotations when he ought to be racking his brains to find a way out. He wasn't a fool, after all. Surely, he was as clever as the police. Of course, there was a way out, if he could only think of it. There was always a way out of everything. He wished he had a cigarette left. Funny how one always wanted a thing more when it was unattainable!

The blueness of the east was turning gray—a long streak like a horizontal sword. If only he could concentrate instead of letting his mind slip from one thing to another! He was tired. That's what it was. He was so tired that his weary brain refused to obey him. It would never do to let that tiredness get the better of him. If ever he had wanted to be wide awake, it was now. He must think—think—think.

He woke with a start, and his forehead, in spite of the coldness of the early morning became bedewed with perspiration. In the midst of his determination not to, he had fallen asleep, and he must have slept for some time for the gray sword had changed to a flaming spear of crimson—or a streak of blood smudged across the horizon by a giant finger. Stiffly, for his limbs were frozen and numbed, he got to his feet. From the cover of the rock, he could see along the road, and, coming toward him, was a fast-moving speck—a man on a bicycle. He watched the fast-moving little blot with his haggard eyes, and presently saw that it was a policeman. So the cyclist patrols were out, covering the roads, were they?

He crouched back in the shelter of the rock, taking up a position so that he could still see the approaching cyclist. Then suddenly it flashed through his mind that here was the answer to the question that had puzzled his brain throughout the night—the miracle that sometimes happens.

He looked swiftly up and down the ribbon of road. There was no other living thing in sight, and his eyes glittered and his lips compressed into a thin, hard line. He took the automatic from his hip pocket and thumbed back the safety catch, and then, leaving his place of concealment, walked swiftly toward the road. By the time he reached it, he calculated, the policeman would have drawn level with him.

The man, quite a young constable, saw him when he was still a hundred yards away and shouted to him to stop. Luke Mason smiled grimly and waited. The policeman braked his machine, and, dismounting, came toward him. There was a triumphant grin on his red face.

"Got yer, 'ave I?" he cried exultantly. "Well, this be a bit of luck for me."

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend," snarled Mason, and the hand holding the pistol came out from

behind his back. "Keep still and do as I tell you or I'll drill you full of holes!"

The triumphant smile died from the policeman's face, and he looked foolishly at the menacing muzzle of the wicked little pistol.

"Take off your helmet!" ordered Mason coming a step or two nearer.

The constable hesitated. He was unused to this sort of thing. Up to now he had only had to deal with tramps and chicken stealers or boys, in whose souls the mere sight of him brought terror. This was beyond his experience—this grim-faced man with the desperate eyes and the hard mouth, and the little black circle of death that showed over the fingers of his hand.

"Quick," repeated Mason harshly, and his right forefinger whitened on the trigger.

The constable saw the movement and hesitated no longer. His hand went up and bared his reddish-brown head.

"That's right," said Mason and approached until he was within two feet of his captive.

"Look 'ere——" began the policeman. That was all he had time to say, for, with a lightning movement, Mason shifted the pistol so that he gripped it by the barrel and brought the butt down with all the force of his muscular arm on the policeman's unprotected head. The man gave a little gasp and dropped.

Pocketing the pistol, Mason gave a sharp look around. The moor and the road were still deserted, and, stooping, he picked up the unconscious form of the policeman and carried it over to the mass of rock. Dropping it down, he went back and retrieved the bicycle, trundling it over the rough grass to the cover of the rocks, and then he began to work swiftly and feverishly. In less than two minutes, he had stripped the policeman of his uniform and boots. The man's shirt, he took off and tore into strips, and with these he bound him securely, ending by stuffing a lump of grass into his mouth and binding it in place so that it formed an effective gag. When he had done this, he began to remove his own clothing, and dressed himself in the constable's uniform.

It was a fairly good fit for the two men were almost the same build. The boots were a little large, but that was a detail. When he had finished and adjusted the helmet, Luke Mason had disappeared and in his place was a young policeman. The helmet concealed, to a great extent the difference of features. He rolled his own clothes into a bundle and stuffed them under a slab of rock, dragged the bound and helpless body of the constable farther into concealment, and, taking a last look round, picked up the bicycle and wheeled it toward the road.

The first pale, yellow streaks of the rising sun were tinging the sky with golden light as he mounted and pedaled off toward Exeter. With a little luck he might, after all, make good his escape. Unless he ran into some one who knew the man he was impersonating, his disguise was unlikely to be challenged. He was feeling almost cheerful as he rode along. So far so good. If by any chance he should meet any one, they would take little notice of the solitary policeman. Certainly, never for one moment would they dream that he was other than he appeared to be, and if he came across the cordon, he could say that he was on his way to the station to report.

Yes. He ought to get away with it, and once in London he could lay his hands on sufficient money to get

him out of the country. There was a place where he could lie low for a bit—until, say, he had grown a mustache or a beard, or dyed his hair. He'd do it. He'd outwit them all yet.

He increased his speed slightly, and, rounding a bend in the road, saw before him a car and a group of men. The barricade! Now was the time. A little bluff, and he was through. As he drew near a sergeant stepped forward and held up his hand. Mason halted, remaining in his saddle, and saluted.

"I'm in a hurry, sir," he said, his heart beating painfully. "I've got a message to deliver at the station."

"All right," said the sergeant. "What's the news? Have they found the fellow?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir," replied Mason respectfully. "I was asked by the sergeant in charge of one of the search parties to go to the station and ask for reënforcements."

"All right, my lad," said the sergeant. "Off you go."

Mason's heart leaped. His scheme had worked. His bluff had remained uncalled. He saluted and was just getting the cycle under way when:

"Here, just a moment!"

It was a young constable who spoke, and, as he spoke, he came running forward.

"What is it?" snapped the sergeant.

"There's something wrong here, sir," said the constable. "Look at that fellow's armlet."

Mason glanced down quickly at the circle of blue and white on his arm, the badge that every policeman wears to signify that he is on duty.

"What about it?" began the sergeant, and then: "Of course. He's wearing it on the wrong arm!"

INEFFECTIVE CRIME CURES

EVERY so often some bright and energetic mind hits upon a new cure for the crime menace. The new idea may be carried out, but sooner or later, unforeseen problems arise and the idea is cast among the limbo of useless projects.

For instance, a law is passed making it illegal for a citizen to carry any kind of firearms without a permit. Gangsters manage in one way or another to secure needed permits. Another law is passed to prevent any one from buying a gun in a certain State without a long red-tape routine to go through. This blocks the gangster for a time, but arsenals sprout up like mushrooms around the prohibited area and guns appear again. The gangster, in making his plans for a hold-up, takes into serious consideration how he is to get rid of his gun for which he has no permit, immediately after the consummation of the crime. Guns bear numbers. Numbers are filed off. Science reproduces the numbers regardless of their apparent disappearance.

So it goes on. First the criminal is a step ahead, then the law catches up to him. He manages to evade the latest detriment to his progress, only to have another inhibition plastered on him. But the modern bad man seems to thrive on inhibitions. They only serve to whet his wily and crooked brain.

But it wasn't too late, Ben found, to mend the trouble

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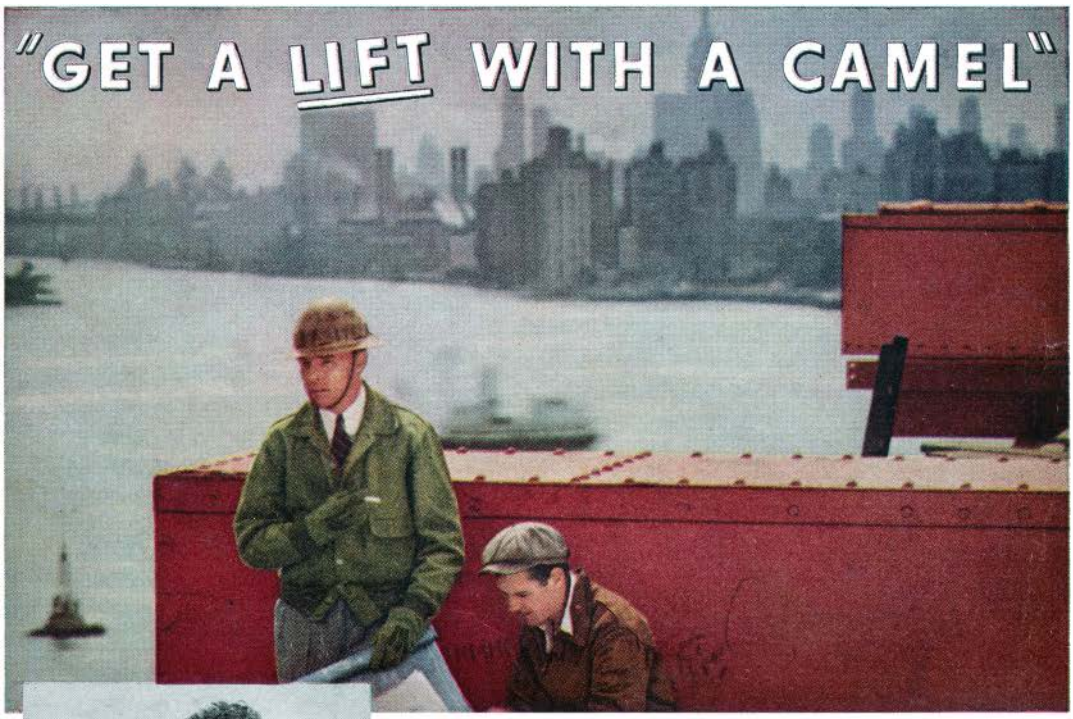

THE TOWERS OF MANHATTAN from a new angle—New York's new Triborough Bridge. In the foreground: Howard Hougland, wearing the picturesque engineers' "hard hat." "An engineer's life is packed with action," he says. "When my pep is at low ebb, there is nothing like a Camel. I always get a 'lift' with a Camel. I also prefer Camel's good taste."

"I AM A STEEL WORKER on the Triborough Bridge," says Ben Parsons (*above*). "When tired, I get a 'lift' with a Camel."

WINTER SPORTS TAKE ENERGY TOO. Says Margaret Lynam (*left*): "When I feel exhausted from a long day outdoors, Camels renew my flow of energy."

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