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APRIL 16, 1927
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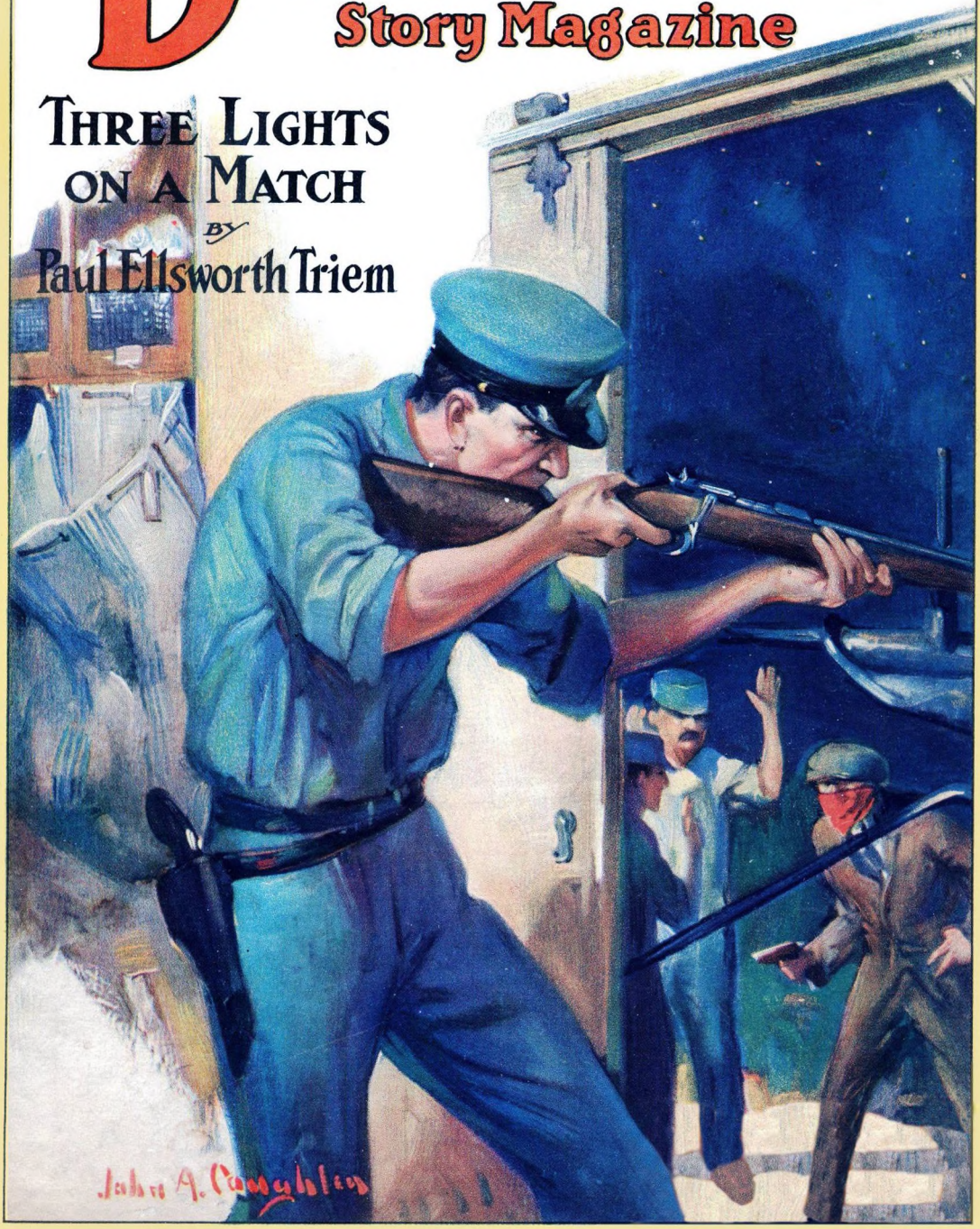
Detective Story Magazine

THREE LIGHTS ON A MATCH

BY

Paul Ellsworth Triem



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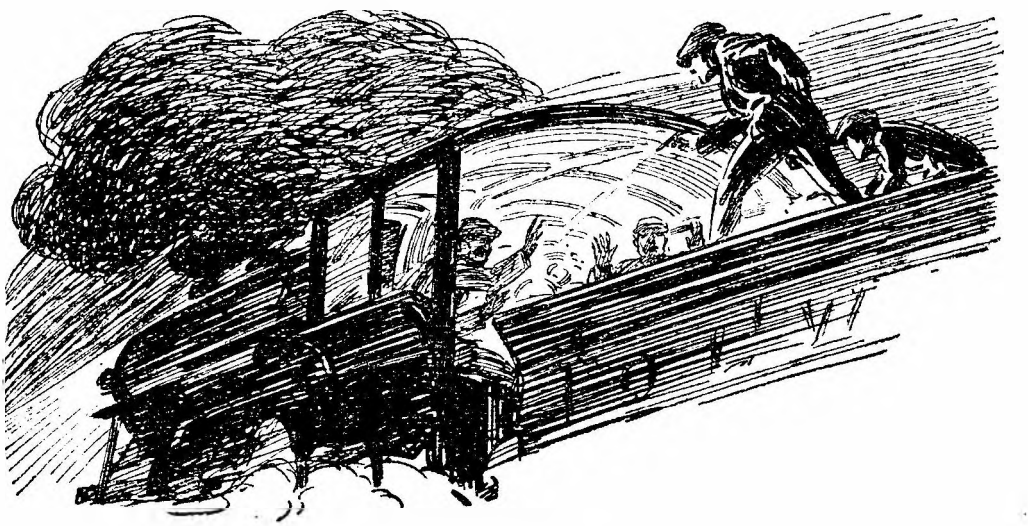


THREE LIGHTS ON A MATCH

By Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "The Throbbing Crystal," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AN OMEN OF EVIL.

FOR reasons which will appear later, Monte Duncan hadn't expected to consider the enterprise seriously. Now, however, sitting in the unlighted automobile and watching the mail train glide to a smooth stop, bell ringing, myriad windows casting shafts of soft radiance into the night, he found himself becoming interested.

Lee Keller, who was driving the car, gestured into the warm darkness.

"It has to stop there, every night!" he declared. "That's the law, where two lines cross each other at a grade crossing. They stop, and a brakeman with a lantern goes ahead to be sure the

track is clear in both directions. That gives us our chance, see? We get aboard somewhere in front of the blind baggage and the storage mail car—neither of them has any vestibule—then we climb over the tender, stick up the engine crew, and make them tie up at the highway crossing. We'll have a car waiting there——"

"It isn't so easy to break into one of these mail cars." Monte Duncan broke in. "I can remember a lot of guys that tried it and spilled out."

"Sure," his companion agreed with a sneer, "that's what you'd remember. It's what the public is told about. If some tinhorn tries to hold up a train and is grabbed, the railroad companies see to it that every newspaper in the country is full of the story. How about the De Autremont brothers? Read anything about their being captured?"

"De Autremont brothers?" Monte repeated. "I remember reading about them. They held up a Pacific & Eastern train—killed some one, didn't they?"

Lee Keller chuckled. The sound was so disagreeable that his companion moved restlessly and protested.

"Cut out that row! You sound like you enjoyed slaughter!"

"Well, I don't, but they did! They pulled that job right; plugged the fireman and engineer through the head, as soon as the engine came to a stop, plugged a brakeman that ran up to see what it was all about, blew up the railroad mail-clerk——"

"What did they get out of it?" Monte asked, attracted and at the same time repelled by the gruesome tale.

Lee Keller was silent for a moment. Monte could see him shifting the gear lever. He stepped on the starter and next moment the car got into motion. The mail train had gone on by this time, and was now simply a vanishing red light in the distance.

"Well, they didn't get much of anything out of it," Lee admitted glumly. "But wait a minute—don't go off half cocked! That was their own fault. You see, they blew up the mail car, but they didn't know how much explosive to use, so they blew it clear up! Folks say it exploded like a giant cracker, and next moment was on fire. Then the dynamite fumes filled the tunnel where the train was stalled, and these hombres had to beat it.

"But even at that, they made a clean get-away. Don't forget that, old-timer. Everything was against them, a couple of posses were on the trail within an hour, and the officers played every card in the deck. They used bloodhounds and airplanes. They sent out reward notices, close to twenty thousand dollars, for the bandits—dead or alive! Twenty grand! Say, the dicks have been churning the universe to get that good money! And they've never laid a hand on these boys!"

The car was humming along through the darkness. Lee Keller glanced at his wrist watch.

"The mail train stops at the crossing at ten fifty every night," he mumbled. "We can figure she'll never be early. Got to stick to her schedule as close as she can. All right, think it over till we hit the big burg. I ain't crowding you. As a matter of fact, I can get plenty of guns to go in on this dicker, but I'm giving you first crack at it!"

Monte sat slouched back in his seat, brooding. He needed the money, as he usually did. But there were objections. For one thing, learning the bad luck of the De Autremont brothers had done little to reassure him. If they had slipped up——

Lee Keller had a mind as sly and subtle as that of the traditional serpent. Now he spoke, his habitual sneering cynicism coloring his tone.

"The mistake they made was in using dynamite. There are better ways of getting into a mail car than that. The best explosive is brains!"

Silence again, long continued, as the car sped along the smooth highway toward the city. Monte felt himself coming under the spell of his companion's arguments. Eventually they entered the outskirts of the big town, and half an hour later the automobile was driven into the little private garage Lee Keller rented, and the two crooks then went to the latter's apartment.

"All right, old-timer!" Lee announced, as he snapped on the lights and took his visitor's soft felt hat, "now let's get down to brass tacks. Have you made up your mind?"

"I'd like to know how you think you can get inside that mail car," Monte told him. "If that can be done——"

"It can. I didn't just blunder onto this lay, brother. The fact is I got the inside information first. During the war, you'll remember, I served my country by getting a job in a bank. At any other time they'd have turned me down in a hurry, but men were at a premium about then. I got a job, and I kept my eyes open. I learned about shipments of currency to various points, at various times. I spotted a lot of likely jobs, but just after the Armistice was signed I got bounced, and soon after that I was picked up on an old count and sent to the big house for a year.

"Well, it looked like all these good things I'd spotted were spoiled by the time I got out. Schedules had changed, everything shot to pieces. However, there was one thing: I'd scraped acquaintance with some of the mail clerks and express messengers. One in particular I was interested in. I could see he was crooked, although he'd never had the nerve to pull anything. Well, I looked him up recently, and that's how I'm going to get into that car. He'll leave the door unlocked—and lie down to us when we climb aboard!"

"Then all we've got to do is hold up the train, get the mazuma out of the mail car, and beat it?"

"That's all. And I know when to pull the job. Every Thursday night they carry a bunch of heavy stuff!"

Monte Duncan sat laxly in his comfortable chair. He studied the lean, crafty, dangerous face of the man sitting opposite him. Then he cleared his throat and voiced his real objection.

"Look here, Keller," he said, "there's one thing about you I don't like. You and I never pulled a job before, but other folks have worked with you. You've got a bad reputation. You've got brains, every one admits, but if you're yellow——"

The narrow face flushed and then paled. Lee Keller stared defiantly at his questioner.

"I never rumbled in my life," he declared boldly. "And anyhow, what you fretting about? There'll be just four of us in on this job—you and me and two others. I'll take the lead. I'll be one of two to get aboard the tender at the track crossing, and stick up the engine crew. That doesn't give me much of a chance to talk, afterward, does it?"

There was something hypnotic about the fellow. Monte, handsome, selfish, inclined to play safe, had realized that from the start. Now he felt all his uneasiness melting away.

"Who else would we have with us?"

"I've thought of one lad, 'Bull' Purvis. I'd take him with me to stick up the fireman and engineer. You know Bull, he looks like a killer. We don't want to have to do any croaking, and Bull's ugly mush would throw such a scare into those babies that it wouldn't be necessary. Maybe you can think of some one else we could tie to!"

Decision was coming into Monte's face. He eyed his companion cryptically for a moment, then slowly stated his proposition.

"What's the matter with taking a moll for the fourth member of the mob? Now wait a moment, don't blow up till

I've told you. You want some one that can think fast, that's got plenty of nerve, and that can handle a gun so it looks like business. All right, I know just the party, but as I was getting at, she's a skirt. I'd take a chance on her brains and nerve before I would on yours or mine. She'll come in and ask no questions. She won't try to hog all the loot, and she wouldn't talk if the bulls were to burn her eyes out. What more can you ask?"

Silence hung heavy in the room. Monte could see that the man opposite him was thinking hard. His narrow face was frowning and intent.

At last Lee Keller nodded.

"You mean the young dame I saw you with at the Granada Dance Hall? Blonde baby—eyes like icicles? She'd stick. I know something about faces. I believe you're right, old-timer. We'll take her on, if she'll come!"

"Leave that to me," Monte said. "Dolly is crazy about me. She'd jump through a fiery hoop if I asked her to. You sure Bull will come in with us?"

For answer, Lee Keller went into the vestibule hall and took down the phone receiver. He got his connection and spoke briefly into the instrument.

Fifteen minutes later Bull Purvis entered the room. He was a muscle-bound giant with the face of a Chinese dragon—huge, grotesque, formidable. His voice was a reverberating growl, his deeply sunken eyes gleamed with positive animosity on all the world.

Bull listened to the brief outline of the purposed job. He smoked a series of cigarettes, glowered about the room, and finally nodded.

Lee Keller was slyly jubilant. He had known that his sinister reputation for "rumbling" was against him, but in spite of it he had managed to pick out a mob which he felt confident he could handle. The selection of the girl, Dolly, as the fourth member of the gang was satisfactory. He had seen the expression of admiring devotion in her eyes, when she looked up at Monte, and he knew she would stick.

Producing from a drawer in his desk a box of perfectos, the leader of the purposed train-robbing expedition passed it round. Monte and Bull helped themselves and were ready to light up. Lee hospitably lit a match and held it for first one and then the other of his guests.

Absent-mindedly he applied what was left of the tiny flame to the tip of his own cigar.

A quavering cry rang through the apartment. Monte Duncan was on his feet, one hand stiffly outthrust, the straightened forefinger rigidly pointing.

"Three on one match!" he moaned. "The worst luck in the world! For gosh sake, *bust the stick!*"

But the match had burned out, and this method of averting disaster was impossible of execution.

The three gonophs stood staring pallidly at each other.

Lee Keller spoke, a sneer quivering on his lips.

"Saints save us, I thought you'd seen a bull!" he snarled. "What are you, anyhow—a man or an old woman? Three on one match? What has that got to do with anything?"

Monte had sunk into a chair, his face wet with cold perspiration.

"It's bad luck, sure!" he mumbled sullenly. "I was raised down South, and I know. There's a hoodoo on us!"

Bull Purvis jeered.

"Hoodoo? Say, kid, I eat them things for breakfast! Come on now, get a tumble to yourself! Say, Lee, I was just thinking—how's this boy friend of yours—the one in the mail car—going to get by after we leave him? He's sure to be suspected!"

"I've got that all fixed!" the capable leader of the mob replied, his appraising glance still fastened inquisitively on Monte Duncan. "We'll tie him up and

leave him with his head in the doorway. Then we'll break some bottles of ammonia in the end of the car. He'll tell the dicks that we threw the ammonia through the ventilator and made him open the door for us. He'll be all right."

"When we going to pull it?"

"Thursday of next week—September twelfth. Feeling better, Monte?"

Monte Duncan had loosened his collar and was sitting limply back. He looked sick, but now he grinned feebly.

"I guess I'm crazy, boys," he admitted, "but I was raised by an old colored mammy, and she filled me up with talk about 'hants' and 'signs' and stuff of that kind. It's second nature with me. Sure, I can see that you're right. There isn't anything in a match, one way or the other. It—it can't really do us any damage!"

Lee Keller turned away with an imperceptible shrug. The fellow would stick, he told himself, but he certainly was a nut on this superstition business!

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLDUP.

LEE KELLER glanced irritably at his watch.

"Three minutes more!" he said. "My belief is that young dame has got cold feet on the whole business, kid!"

Monte Duncan looked angrily round. He was standing in an expectant attitude beside the parked automobile, in the front seat of which Keller and Bull Purvis sat smoking.

"You don't know Dolly!" Monte replied. "She'll—ah, there she comes now!"

In spite of the confidence which he had been on the point of voicing, it was obvious that the young rodman was relieved by the appearance of the hurrying figure coming along the deserted street toward them. It was apparently that of a rather slenderly built boy, but as Dolly came swiftly up to the car its occupants and the man beside it could see a wisp of blond hair sticking out from under her tweed cap. The girl's eyes were vividly blue and dancing.

She nodded cavalierly to the three waiting crooks.

"On time to the minute!" she declared. "Don't spring that old one about me keeping you waiting while I powdered my nose. I just looked at the clock!"

"You might have got here a bit ahead of time!" Monte grumbled. He opened the door of the tonneau and shoved the girl roughly in ahead of him. "This car is 'hot,' and we don't want to be seen loafing around in it."

"I got here right on time!" Dolly insisted, with spirit. "What's eating on you, anyhow, Monte? Are you scared?"

A chuckle came from the front seat. Bull Purvis was looking admiringly round. His grotesque face was that of a grinning mastiff, but Dolly smiled gayly at him.

"Monte isn't really scared of anything," the girl added, "but he's got too much artistic temperament! Don't mind him!"

She glanced placatingly at the young fellow at her side, but Monte was glowering straight ahead. The car had slid out from the curb and was running decorously along through the moderate traffic of the evening.

It was a two-hour run to the point where the train robbery was to be pulled, and during most of this time the mob of four were silent, each immersed in his, or her, own thoughts. Their criminal intent was the one thing that really united them. Lee Keller was the brains of the expedition; but Lee, according to underworld rumor, had a streak of yellow in his make-up as wide as his shoulders. He had this job so well organized that he felt confident of his ability to carry it successfully through. There seemed not a chance

of its slipping up anywhere; but even if an unforeseen emergency should arise, Lee was determined to go through with his part. Otherwise, he was done for. He had selected the members of his present mob with care and anxious calculation—he felt that he had picked good hands, although he had had little choice. One more case of trickery on his part and he would be a pariah, an outcast.

Bull Purvis was a big, hulking brute of a man, not particularly vicious as a rule, in spite of his grotesquely ugly face. That mush of his had been valuable to him, for it had usually made it unnecessary for him to use a gat. He had been a jack-of-all-trades in his little universe—a peterman, house prowler, stick-up artist and drifter. He had the courage of a bulldog or a gamecock, but he had no brains worth mentioning. Now he sat slouched in his seat, smoking endless cigarettes, occasionally casting an admiring glance toward Dolly.

The girl smiled back at him. She was eupeptic—had a perfect digestion and the habitual good humor which is apt to go with bodily harmony. Now she was uncomfortably aware of Monte's surly temper, as she would have been of a pebble in her shoe. She had seen the big, handsome sheik that way before, however, and wasn't worrying too much about him. She looked forward with eager interest to the adventure of the night. Dolly was young, and she still regarded crime and criminals as romantic, almost heroic.

As for Monte Duncan, he was rather wishing he hadn't gotten into this adventure. Monte had drifted into a life of crime by following the line of least resistance. He had comparatively expensive tastes, and no honest way of satisfying them. He had no education, no special training of any kind, no aptitude for anything in particular, and a chronic distaste for regular employment and "office hours." During the war he had held a job for several months, at six dollars a day as a rivet boy in a shipyard. That had given him a bad start.

And so the stolen automobile with its assorted crew sped on through the night. The city was left behind, and on each side of the smooth highway were farm houses. Only an occasional light showed in them now. It was after ten o'clock and most of the honest folk in this farming community were abed and asleep.

Ten thirty, and the bandit car drew up at the side of the highway. Ahead was a green-and-red traffic signal—the railroad crossing. The two men in the front seat were quickly on the ground. Lee Keller was talking, his voice instinctively lowered.

"All set. Bull and me'll hike up the track to where she stops. Now, remember your stations: Monte at the head end, in charge of the engine crew after Bull and me have brought them to a stop; Dolly with the machine. You know how to start the engine, kid?"

Dolly nodded.

"Leave it to me!" she said. "I'm an A-1 chauffeur!"

"All right. You've got a gat? Sure—don't plug any one if you don't have to, but don't let them rush the car. There probably won't be any rough stuff. We'll let off a few shots at first, just to put fear into them!"

He and his ugly faced companion adjusted their masks, nodded, and headed into the darkness. The sound of their retreating footsteps could be heard after they had disappeared. Then silence.

Monte muttered to himself. Dolly eyed him with appraising coolness. She climbed into the front seat, behind the wheel.

Minutes passed and Monte began to fidget.

"Time he was hearing that train whistle," he mumbled, after a long wait. "I've got a hunch things aren't going to be as easy as that snitch talks about.

He's yellow. He'll talk his head off if anything goes wrong and he gets speared. I wish I hadn't come!"

"Don't be a baby!" Dolly advised him.

She sat composedly at the wheel, an automatic pistol in her lap, her clear eyes fastened on the darkness in the direction the two bandits had taken. More delay, and Monte climbed nervously out and began to walk up and down, muttering to himself. The girl's face was inscrutable.

"They must have changed the schedule—that train may have been taken off!" Monte growled at last. "This waiting business gets my goat. I'm going to hike up the track."

But at this moment, tenuous and far away, there sounded an engine whistle. It came again, presently, and later the white-hot spot that stood for the headlight punctured the night.

The grade crossing where the two tracks intersected, was nearly half a mile up the right of way. The two in the waiting automobile saw the lighted cars at last, saw the train roar down grade through the darkness, and come to a stop.

Presently it was again in motion.

"Now, if they made it!" Monte muttered. "But I'm betting——"

The engine was coming toward them, they could hear the click of the rails, and then, suddenly on the still midnight, the raucous blast of the whistle. It blew stridently, again and again, not the usual signal for a crossing.

The whistle ceased and the squeal of the suddenly applied air brakes took its place. The train was jolting and rattling to a standstill. It dragged its massive coil across the highway—and in the moment of silence which followed the jarring stop, a pistol shot rang out, clear and ominous.

The engine was just beyond the crossing. Monte slipped his mask into place and hissed a command.

"Turn the car around and run back a ways—we can't take any chance on their rushing it! Keep the engine going—about a hundred yards up the road! Step on it!"

He was alert and capable enough now. Dolly gave him a flashing glance, compounded of admiration and understanding. She had known Monte was all right—just temperamental and nervous. Now he would show them!

Monte ran forward to where Lee Keller and Bull Purvis stood, guarding the engine crew. The engine and tender were uncoupled.

"This egg was playing a tune on his whistle—I had to let off my gat past his ear to show him we meant business!" Lee snapped, as Monte hurried up. "All right, keep a gun on 'em! I had 'em uncouple the engine so they couldn't pull out as soon as we get into the mail car. Watch 'em close, and put a bullet through the head of the first one that makes a move!"

The train beyond was in an uproar. Monte could hear excited voices—men and women screaming questions, prayers for mercy. It might have been a wreck, from the sound. Lee had disappeared on the other side of the track. The crack of his automatic came again, and at the same time Bull Purvis fired over the head of a trainman who had swung down from one of the rear vestibules.

The fellow promptly retreated up the steps.

Bull ran back toward the mail car. He reached up and tried to slide back the door. It was locked. Monte, watching, decided that the door on the other side had probably been opened for Lee. If it was all arranged, as the latter had claimed——

He turned toward the two men in his charge, both of whom stood white and silent beside their big, black engine. From the corner of his eyes he caught a flash of fire in the gloom, the sound of the shot reaching him in the same

moment. The door of the mail car had slid unexpectedly open a few inches and some one had fired into the night.

Monte heard Bull Purvis cough and cry out in a hoarse, murderous voice. Then the big fellow was down, floundering like a fish out of water. Monte felt himself turning sick and cold. So that was the friendly mail clerk—Lee Keller's friend!

Bull was on his feet, staggering about, oaths and racking coughs coming alternately or tumbling together from his deep chest.

He raised his pistol and fired three shots at the door of the mail car.

From under the car a figure appeared. Monte caught the voice of the leader of the mob. Lee Keller had crawled through from the other side and was yelling excitedly.

"Give me that bottle of ammonia! The fool won't open up! Blast his eyes, I'll bring him out of there!"

The mail car stood, silent and ominous. Keller was running back and forth, looking for an open door or window.

"I got to get up on top and throw it in through the ventilator!" he snarled, his face a mask of rage and baffled desire. "Watch those sheep up at the other end—they may try to rush you!"

A group of huddled figures showed at the farther end of the train. Monte snarled a threat at the engine crew.

"Move a finger, you eggs, I'll fill you so full of lead that they'll have to haul you away from here in a stone boat!"

But the pallid engineer and fireman stood motionless, hardly venturing to breathe. Bull Purvis was coughing and muttering to himself. He staggered, nearly fell, then got to his hands and knees and crawled under the mail car. Lee Keller had disappeared, after seizing the bottle of ammonia which Bull had been carrying in one of his side pockets.

Monte fired over the heads of the distant group of passengers and trainmen. Unexpectedly the shot was returned. He caught the spurt of flame and heard the bullet sing. He fired again, then stood poised and tense, listening.

A shot sounded from the other side of the train. He heard a man scream, and a moment later a huddled figure came crawling back under the car. It was the big fellow, Bull. He straightened to his feet like a wounded bear, and came staggering toward Monte.

"I got something!" he muttered thickly, holding out a small, indistinct object in one of his big hands. "Take it, kid—I'm—I'm sunk!"

Monte automatically accepted the little package, a fat wallet, he made out partly by the sense of feeling. He thrust it into his inner pocket.

"Stuck up a bally oaf that tried to shoot me!" Bull mumbled.

He stood swaying, looking confusedly round.

"Did you croak him?" Monte snapped.

"Croak him? Croak who? Come on, we got to beat it!"

"Where is Lee?" Monte demanded. Sudden suspicion flooded his mind. "I'll bet the sneak has run away—afraid to face us after getting us into this mess!"

Bull Purvis was coughing and staggering away, in the direction of the highway. Monte flashed a look at the engineer and fireman. They stood, still frozen in their tracks. The group at the farther end had disappeared, but suddenly he heard some one moving on the other side of the stalled train.

"Lee!" he shouted.

There was no response. More than one man was moving over there, he realized. Many feet crunched the gravel, and at last the young rodman realized that the time for departure had come. He fired a couple of shots into the air to hold back pursuit, turned, and

quickly reached his wounded companion's side.

Behind sounded shrill, excited voices, and the fear and pleadings had now given place to threats and clamor for vengeance. The mob spirit was shifting from cowardice to lust for reprisal. Monte shivered in spite of himself. He laid his hand on Bull's arm to steady him.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, as they reached the waiting car. He jerked open the rear door and helped the wounded bandit inside. Bull sprawled to his hands and knees, then settled himself on the floor against the seat.

"Where is Lee?" Dolly demanded. "We can't go without him!"

"He went without us!" Monte snarled. "The snitch, he got us into this mess and then ditched!"

"Did you get the money?"

"Money? Probably there wasn't any. We didn't get into the mail car, but Bull got a slug between his ribs for trying. He lifted a wallet off some one—I've got it here!"

The girl sat irresolute at the wheel. Monte had climbed in beside her, his breath coming fast, his teeth inclined to chatter.

Suddenly, as they sat there, they heard again the engine whistle; repeated, prolonged blasts. A moment later came the click of revolving wheels, and they looked back to see the locomotive headed swiftly away up the track.

"Headed for town to raise a posse and telegraph ahead!" Monte snapped. "Step on it, kid! I knew this thing would go blooie—three on one match is certain bad luck!"

CHAPTER III.

BULL'S LITTLE SECRET.

DOLLY had started the machine and was headed back toward the city. Monte Duncan, glancing down and sidewise at her, saw the pallor of the cheek that was nearest him. A sudden feeling of remorse smote him.

"Gee, kid!" he muttered, "I didn't mean to get you into a mess like this! I believed that sneak, Lee——"

"Forget it!" Dolly ordered him peremptorily. "I came in because I wanted to. It isn't your fault!"

The sound of the racing locomotive had died out in the distance; and now, before them, there appeared a fan of mysterious light. Monte, staring abstractedly at it, made out that another car was coming toward them, beyond a low hill. The fan of light was from its headlights, tipped up as it climbed. Soon it would be coming down the near side.

"Turn into that road!" he commanded the girl at the wheel. "We don't want to meet this party!"

Dolly obediently swung over the wheel and the stolen automobile slid round into a lane, brush-bordered and deeply rutted. Monte stooped and snapped off the driving lights.

"Go slow!" he commanded. "We can't risk their seeing us!"

Dolly's eyes were young and keen. Now she held the car steadily in the lane, driving cautiously forward, listening.

Monte watched the track behind.

"They're going on," he commented in a low voice. "We'll keep on straight ahead!"

They were beginning to climb. The country road was obviously almost unused. A tangle of scrub oak bordered it, and there was a stiff grade, leading up toward the unseen summit of a range of hills.

A sound of stertorous breathing came suddenly to the young fellow slouching in the front seat. He looked back. In the gloom he could just make out the burly form of the wounded gunman, collapsed on the floor.

"Better pull up!" he said to his companion. "I'll have a look at him!"

Dolly stopped the car and they both slid out. Monte opened the door of the tonneau and stood, leaning forward, peering into the darkness. Bull was lying with his head cramped, apparently unconscious.

"How you feeling, buddy?" Monte Duncan asked him. There was no response. Monte climbed in and managed to move the big fellow around till he was resting more easily. "Drive on," he commanded. "I'll steady his head!"

The road they were following grew rougher; and, in places, was obviously dangerous. Winter storms had washed the compacted gravel into great gulleys and slides. Dolly guided the car skillfully forward, her lights again in service. Monte sat steadying the unconscious bandit's massive head. They were climbing, but after half an hour or so of this they reached the summit of the ridge and headed down.

A strong wind was blowing now. The hills had sheltered them before. It smelled of the sea, and from time to time their came the sepulchral voice of a distant bell buoy. They were heading into the desolate region given over to rum runners and moonshiners. Monte had heard of the region. It bore no enviable reputation, but that made it all the better for their purposes.

Sometimes the track ahead narrowed, due to washouts, till the young fellow seated in the tonneau could look over and down into a pit of darkness which might be fifty feet deep, or five hundred. There were no farmhouses, no other automobiles—only the night, and the sea wind.

They had been winding slowly down for fifteen minutes when the headlights suddenly struck upon a building.

Dolly stopped the car and she and Monte sat staring anxiously ahead. There were no lights, and after a time there came to them the banging of an unfastened shutter. The moon was peering over a distant ridge, green and unearthly in the hushed quiet of midnight.

Monte opened the rear door and climbed out.

"I'll see what I can make out!" he muttered. "There's a track running in here through the hedge!"

It was an old track, with no recent wheel marks, he discovered as he advanced along it. In a moment the hedge was behind him. He made his way soundlessly forward, his pistol ready under his coat, his muscles tensed and alert.

But the first close look at that old house showed him that it was deserted. The chimneys were crumbled, the windows smashed. A great owl fled silently out of one of the latter, the wind from its swift-moving wings fanning Monte Duncan's face. He stood for a time looking at the house, then strode on along the unused road which advanced through the brush before him.

Soon he came into a clearing, and saw outlined in the greenish moonlight the length and breadth of a log barn.

Monte made his way back to the waiting automobile.

"We can run in here. The house is a wreck, but there's an old log stable behind, where we can hang up for a while. It'll give us a chance to catch our breath and decide what to do next," the young man commented dispiritedly.

Dolly nodded cheerfully.

"Buck up!" she advised him. "You're worrying about me."

"I got you into this," Monte persisted, "and we're in a bad mess."

Dolly drove in through the break in the hedge and along the old wood road till they were close to the barn. Here the car was left, while its two conscious occupants managed to lift the bulky figure of the limp and sprawling gunman, and carry it along the trail and into the barn.

The logs which composed the walls of the latter had been laid with wide

spaces between them. Now the moonlight spread in stripes upon the floor. The effect was unearthly and disturbing. Monte felt his scalp creeping, but he spoke reassuringly.

"I'll keep track of him. You lie down and get some rest. You'll need it!"

Unwillingly, after a time, the girl obeyed. Monte had scraped a little pile of hay against the wall for her, and presently he caught the sound of her steady breathing. Bull was lying, silent and uncouth in the striped moonlight, on another bed of hay. Monte sat on an old box, his chin in his hands, staring down at the grotesque face. The big fellow was in a desperate condition. He ought to have medical attention, and that quickly. But it was impossible, for that would mean surrendering himself and the girl to the law. Bull couldn't expect it.

But, otherwise, what was to be done? Let Bull Purvis die like a wounded wolf? The problem was too much for Monte. He knew nothing about amateur surgery, and after a half-hearted attempt to strip away Bull's shirt—an attempt which caused the wounded outlaw to turn and mutter and strike out fretfully—Monte sat back, trying to think of a way out for them all.

The night passed with torturing deliberation. There was no sound from the outer darkness, not even a cock crow or the yelp of a dog. The watcher fought off his own drowsiness and sat on, hour after hour. Toward morning Bull began to turn and mutter. Later he was talking steadily, and by the time Dolly sat up, rubbing her eyes, the big fellow was yelling at the top of his lungs. His words were thick and meaningless.

Monte stood up and faced the girl.

"We've got to beat it, but I don't know what the deuce we're to do with him!" he groaned. "We can't stay on here. They're sure to run us down. And we can't travel with that steam calliope running full blast! I ought to bump him off! That's what most mobs would do!"

Dolly nodded.

"I know—and Bull would do it. But we can't. We've got to have food, and we ought to know what the cops are doing!"

Her companion agreed wearily. He began to smooth his rumpled clothing, and adjusted his cap.

"There must be a burg near here," he commented. "I'll hike in and see what I can find out."

"And have them grab you? I should say not! I'll go myself!"

Monte protested. He didn't want the girl to expose herself to the danger of arrest. Dolly stuck to her point.

"Wait a minute—I'll show you something!" she commanded him, disappearing abruptly through the barn door.

When she returned, three minutes later, her boy's clothing had disappeared and she was dressed in a trim little frock, somewhat wrinkled from having been worn inside her other costume.

"They won't be looking for a girl!" she explained. "And I've as good eyes and ears as you!"

"Better," Monte admitted. "But I don't like the idea——"

"Nonsense! I'll bring us something to eat!"

Monte nodded unwillingly. He drew from his pocket the thick wallet Bull had handed him the night before. Inside were yellowbacks—a sheaf of them, with nothing smaller than fifty dollars.

"Must be five grand here!" he muttered.

Then he closed the flap of the wallet and slid it back into his pocket.

"We'll tend to that later," he added. "Here's a ten-case note of my own. Buy whatever you think we ought to have!"

Dolly set off at a brisk pace, following the wood track into the road and

walking along the latter till it lead her back to the summit of the hills. From this vantage point she was able to make out, apparently four or five miles away across the lower hills, a small town. All she could see of it was a church spire and one white building. She took a short cut down across the hills, following an old cattle path. The sun was warm and comforting upon her shoulders and neck, and the fragrance of curing grass came to her. She came at last to a long field and then to a country road. She began to feel faint and hungry, but pushed resolutely on.

The little town nestled among wide-spreading eucalyptus and pines. The girl went demurely along a shaded street, reached the business portion of the village; and saw before her, crowded about the steps of a building which she took for the town hall, a great concourse of people.

A lean, wild-eyed man with flowing whiskers was yelling.

"Hang 'em, I say! If they go to trial, it'll be in this county—and we'll have to pay the bill! Hang 'em as soon as they're caught! I ain't ashamed nor scared to say what I think!"

A big fellow in a serge suit was standing near Dolly. He had a broad, red face and a smile. The girl's eyes lingered on that rubicund countenance. She had never seen a man who seemed so thoroughly good natured—and *smiling!* The stranger moved away. His serge trousers were unpressed and baggy. He looked somehow like a circus elephant, bringing up the rear of a procession.

Her attention swung back to the crowd. Another honest citizen was speaking.

"What's the use of orating, Jim?" this one wanted to know. "Ain't the railroad got all them there special agents here, looking fer the crooks? Them fellers'll grab the outfit that held up the train, sure. The sheriff an' his posses ain't got a lookin! We won't git no chance to hang no one!"

Jim, the patriarch with the whiskers, fairly hissed with rage.

"They'll ketch 'em and lodge 'em in the county jail! Then we'll have to foot the bill fer trying 'em!" he shouted.

Dolly turned quietly away. Down the street a small boy was shouting something. She looked in his direction—a diminutive figure, carrying across his right arm a bundle of papers. Tenuously his voice came to her.

"All about the robbery!"

The gun moll made her way in the direction of the newsboy. She purchased a paper and then, after sauntering carelessly about for a time, made her way back along the deserted residence street. At a little neighborhood grocery, the last building before she reached the fields, she purchased some crackers, sardines, and sweet chocolate.

Dolly went on across the fields. From time to time she stopped to rest, looking back to be sure she was not followed. There was no one in sight.

It was a weary climb back to the summit of the ridge. She nibbled at a bar of chocolate, but refused to eat more till she could share the food with Monte.

At length she reached the top of the ridge, headed down across a rocky slope, and toward noon came within sight of the deserted house. She paused for a time, cautiously studying the entire neighborhood. It was utterly desolate and silent.

But at that moment there came to her a wild, inhuman scream. The girl shuddered, although she recognized the voice of the delirious bandit.

"If any one comes within half a mile, Bull will tell them right where to look!" she realized.

She struck down across a steeply tilted patch of brush and rocks, and five minutes later was approaching the barn.

Monte stood in the doorway, his face lowering and weary

"How is Bull?" the girl asked.

"Crazy as a loon! I found a spring, and I've been giving him all the water he wants. I don't know whether that's good for him or not, but it was the only way to keep him quiet. What did you find out?"

"Nothing much. They're looking for us, of course. The railroad detectives and the sheriff are at work. I brought you a paper. I was too tired to read it."

She handed Monte Duncan the newspaper and dropped the paper bags containing food to the floor. She felt sick and tired—and now she was no longer hungry. She crossed over to where Bull was lying.

His face was red, his eyes wild and feverish. He glared up at her, evidently without recognition.

"Cops!" he muttered. He fell to jabbering.

At a sudden startled exclamation Dolly whirled. Monte was holding the paper taut between his stiff hands. His eyes were focused upon it.

"Do you know what became of Lee?" he cried, next moment. "No wonder he didn't show up—he was shot! Through the heart. Say, I'm betting it wasn't the cops! Bull did it or I'm crazy! That was what he crept under the mail coach for! Bull shot Lee Keller!"

Dolly stood, breathless and confused. A wild voice sounded from the ground at her feet.

"Bull shot him—Bull shot Lee Keller! Bull shot him—through the heart! I'll say he did!"

Bull Purvis was proclaiming his guilt at the top of his lungs.

CHAPTER IV.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

OVER Monty's shoulder the girl read part of the front-page story of the train holdup.

Finger-print experts from the city have identified the slain bandit as Lee Keller, an ex-convict. It was supposed for a time that Keller was slain by a bullet from the revolver of Conductor Sands, but the autopsy surgeon negatives this. The death bullet corresponds minutely to others found in the wall of the mail car, which had been fired through the door by one of the outlaws. Whether Keller was slain by mistake or in revenge, the conclusion is irresistible that he met death at the hands of one of his companions.

An interesting side light is thrown on this problem by the fact, brought forward by the city police assigned to assist in the solution of this baffling crime, that Keller was known as a "snitch" and had even been accused of being a stool pigeon. His death may therefore have been a matter of revenge for some old act of treachery.

On the other hand, there is the interesting circumstance that no attempt was made to dynamite the car, as is often done. The three bandits involved in the robbery were either stupidly inefficient, or they had reason to believe they would have no difficulty in getting into the car. In the latter connection, Postal Inspector Pittman, in charge of the federal end of the investigation, is awaiting a report from one of his assistants, stationed at the bedside of Mail Clerk Russel.

Russel, but for an unforeseen development, would have been in charge of the car last night. Late in the afternoon he was rushed to the hospital and operated on for acute appendicitis. Inspector Pittman's famous smile is much in evidence, but an unconfirmed and undenied rumor persists that the job failed because inside assistance was counted on by the bandits. This in turn suggests that Keller may have been slain because of some mysterious failure on his part to secure such coöperation. Three men are known to have taken part in the holdup.

Monte turned mechanically. Bull Purvis was tossing about, muttering the single word "water." Monte crossed over to where he was lying, picked up a tin can which he had previously filled at the spring behind the barn, and applied it to the delirious gunman's lips.

"Russel must have been the guy Lee made his dicker with," Dolly commented, a frown on her usually smooth forehead. "Monte——"

She ceased speaking. Monte Duncan looked around with a nod of comprehension.

"That fellow will tell all he knows,"

he agreed. "They'll land on him as soon as he is able to whisper. They'll scare him into thinking he is dying, and get a full confession out of him."

"Did he know that you and Bull were in on this job?"

"I don't know how much Lee told him. He may not know our names."

Bull had drunk eagerly from the can placed at his lips. Now he settled back and closed his eyes. He turned restlessly a few times, and seemed to sink into a lethargy.

Monte stared down at him.

"We ought to get out of here to-night!" he declared. "In fact, we'll be lucky if we aren't run down before that. A posse may come snooping in here any minute. But I don't know what we're going to do with this bird——"

"We'll have to take him with us!" Dolly interrupted. "We can't leave him!"

"And we can't take him. For one thing, he'd yell so that every car we passed would hear. The first traffic patrolman we ran into would stop us, or put a bullet through our gas tank. There's another reason why we can't take him. We aren't going far in this car, or in any other. I've figured out a scheme for getting back into the city —one that will stop them for a while. We've got to leave Bull!"

Dolly was drooping like a flower plucked in the heat of the sun. The long walk and the excitement and the lack of food were telling on her exuberant vitality. Monte Duncan eyed her understandingly.

"But don't worry about that just now," he concluded. "Eat something, and then climb up on that platform and go to sleep. I'll run things."

"But you haven't closed your eyes!"

"I can't. I've got to keep track of things till it's dark enough to leave. Do as I tell you!"

Dolly obeyed, and five minutes later had climbed an old ladder to the roof of a little built-in platform, evidently once used in mowing away hay in the log barn. Monte sat down near the door, wearily bracing himself for the vigil of the next few hours.

Bull was lying so still now that he might have been dead. Occasionally the young gunman turned to look at the big fellow, sprawled on his back, his great arms stretched out, his eyes half open.

A shudder went through Monte Duncan's overwrought body.

"We were hoodooed from the start," he told himself. "Three lights on one match—I told them it was the worst luck in the world! Well, it sure worked out that way. Lee was the last to light his cigar, and he's dead. Bull was just before him, and he's headed for the boneyard. I came first, and things aren't so good with me. And the hoodoo still working. I wonder who this Inspector Pittman is?"

An uneasy remembrance which hitherto he had succeeded in refusing to consider assailed him now. He had heard that the Federal government never gave up its pursuit of a mail robber. In the case of the De Autremont brothers, referred to by Lee Keller, for instance, the crime was comparatively old, but the postal detectives evidently were still relentlessly following up every rumor that could lead to the arrest of the bandits.

"Lee and Bull were a bad outfit!" he muttered. "I never ought to have tied up with them, and I sure was a fool to get Dolly into this dicker. Well, I'll get her out, Inspector Pittman or no! When we pull out of here to-night, if they don't grab us before that, I'll show them something in the disappearing line that will give them a thrill for the next fifty years!"

The sun shone slantingly in through the open barn door. Monte's eyes were bloodshot and sensitive from lack of sleep. He rested his head against the log wall behind him, closed his eyes, and

let his thoughts drift. For a time vivid pictures formed in his turbulent mind. He saw the stalled passenger train—the long row of lighted windows, the white faces of fireman and engineer. He caught the sharp report of the mail clerk's pistol. That fellow had been dead game, risking his life by opening up the door to fire at Bull! Foolish—if they had been ready, they could have rushed him before he could have slid the door shut and fastened it. But they weren't quite ready. Blunderers they were.

Gradually the pictures became dim, the thoughts confused. He was warm and comfortable and relaxed. Bull seemed to be sleeping almost restfully. With the dim consciousness of these details stirring lazily in his mind, the young fellow fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

Monte Duncan awoke and leaped to his feet. Somewhere in the darkness that surrounded him a hoarse voice had screamed—or had he dreamed it? Monte pulled himself together. His pistol was in his hand and he stood staring with pulsing eyes into the somber night. The moon had not yet risen, but the sun must have been long gone. It was dark in here, a thick darkness that seemed to cling to him like a wet blanket. But that voice——

From somewhere behind him, inside the old log stable, there came a whisper of sound. Monte whirled. He could see nothing.

"Dolly!" he said; and again, "Dolly, is that you?"

A gibbering laugh greeted him. Something big and black rushed upon him. There was a flash of fire, a smashing explosion, and he felt the bite of burning powder grains on his neck. In a moment he understood. Bull was up; he was mad, and he was armed! The young fellow cursed himself for not having thought to remove the wounded bandit's pistol. In the confusion of these tumultuous hours he had thought nothing about it.

All this went through his mind with the swiftness of a knife stab. He leaped aside, ducked under a huge, outstretched arm, and was behind his assailant. His own pistol was in his hand. He had jerked it out without having been aware of the action.

Now he slid it back into its holster. He didn't want to shoot the poor devil.

"Bull!" he said, "this is me—Monte! Lie down, there's a good fellow. You'll hurt yourself if you go tearing around this way! No one is going to harm you!"

His eyes were adjusting themselves to the turbid darkness of the night. He could make out the bulky figure of the wounded bandit, silhouetted for a moment against the dim panel of the door. Bull was turning his big head craftily, listening, peering about. Monte could even make out the pistol the big fellow was holding ready.

It came up, cautiously.

"Monte!" Bull said in a thick, unnatural voice. "Sure, I know that feller—he's got my moll! He ain't good enough for her; he ain't half good enough!"

Monte moved and his foot struck against the can from which he had given the sick man water. Instantly Bull jerked up his gun and fired. The bullet went wild, but Monte realized the danger of this sort of thing. He compressed his lips, studied the gigantic figure in the doorway for a moment, and then began a cautious advance. A foot at a time he moved forward. His arms were tensed, his hands tingling. Bull stood turning his head like a turtle, silent, and evidently waiting for another trickle of sound.

Monte advanced more and more slowly. The slightest slip would betray him. In the last moment he poised himself, then leaped. He felt his fingers close over the barrel of the automatic.

Again the crashing report filled the night. Monte felt the jerk of the barrel as the automatic mechanism responded to the recoil. He had gripped it firmly, however, and now the gun would be hopelessly jammed. He tried to wrest it from Bull's clutch, but with a sudden, violent movement the man he had set himself to subdue freed the pistol, brought it up and then down.

The blow struck Monte glancingly on the head and landed with almost full force on his shoulder. Then they were locked together, chest to chest.

Monte hadn't planned the affair so. His idea had been to avoid hurting Bull. He could easily enough have knocked him senseless with a blow from his own gun; and now suddenly he found himself wishing, in an agony of remorse, that he had done so. Bull's great body was as hot as heated metal. He had all his old strength, augmented by delirium. With his arms locked around Monte's body, he kicked and gouged, using knees, chin, and even the top of his head. Bull was a master of rough-house fighting, and he outweighed his antagonist in this night battle by a good fifty pounds.

"Bull!" Monte cried breathlessly, "let go—you're busting my ribs!"

"I've got you!" Bull screamed. "Monte—Monte Duncan! You ain't good enough for her! I'm a-going to fix you! I got you!"

His parching breath was on Monte's face. The young fellow felt a wild horror at the contact of his clean, healthy body with the burning hulk of this mad beast.

"Let go of me!" he snarled, suddenly losing all self-restraint. He kicked and butted. His hands came up and clenched themselves with overlapping thumbs about Bull's neck. He felt the swift, feverish throb of the jugulars.

But he himself was being crushed, broken, in that bear's hug. The strength was going out of him in a rush. The darkness was shot with sparks. And in that moment of defeat and anguish, there sounded close to him an excited voice.

"Monte, just a moment——"

Monte had fainted. He felt himself going, but in the instant when utter darkness was closing down over him he also felt the terrible grip about his body relax. He had fallen to the hard-packed dirt floor.

Now he was coming back. Some one was bathing his head with cold water, and the croon of a voice—Dolly's voice, he realized—came dimly to him.

"You're all right, but I'm afraid Bull is done for! I didn't realize how hard I hit him!"

Monte stirred and groaned. He felt as if every bone in his body were broken, with the jagged ends sticking out through the flesh.

He sat up and raised his hand to his face. His nose had been bleeding. Bull had struck him a stunning blow with that grotesque head of his.

"Where is he?" he asked, his voice still unsteady.

"Over there. I dragged you away from him. But, Monte, I'm afraid—he's dead!"

Monte staggered erect and made his way across to the dim figure of his recent assailant. Stooping, he laid his hand on the big fellow's chest. It was warm, but still.

"We did the best we could for him!" he declared. "And it's just as well things happened as they did. We couldn't have taken him with us. Come on, kid, it's time for us to make our get-away!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WHO SMILED.

IN the office of Sheriff Mack, of Albion county, four men sat in varying attitudes, probably characteristic of their inner natures in moments of excitement.

Sheriff Mack himself, a hulking, broad-shouldered fellow with jutting brows and retreating forehead, leaned across his battered desk and scowled. He looked like an educated gorilla, attempting to conduct an intricate investigation. Luck had been against the sheriff so far in this case, and he was growing angry. As a matter of fact, Mack had been elected because he was big and husky, overlooking the fact that ninety-nine per cent of his work would involve mental rather than physical characteristics. He was usually in difficulties, due to his lack of mental development; and when in such difficulties, he sulked and grumbled and blamed the country.

The man he was questioning was the fireman of the train held up the night before. Now the early morning sunshine was slanting cheerily in across the office floor.

Fireman O'Brien fidgeted, looked uneasily at the scowling sheriff, and made a statement.

"He was a broad-shouldered guy, about the size of you, sheriff!" he declared. "And his eyes were—well, you might say they were blue. Kind of blue-gray, with maybe a bit of brown in thim."

Sitting on the edge of the sheriff's desk was a trimly dressed, middle-aged man who might have been a banker or a lawyer, but who in fact was Special Agent Johnston, representing the detective branch of the railroad company.

Mr. Johnston began to laugh; a jeering, unpleasant laugh.

"Blue-gray-brown eyes! Broad-shouldered; about the size of Mack, here! Well, there goes our identification!"

The sheriff made a noise distinctly resembling that of a grizzly bear suffering from a toothache. He looked ferociously at Fireman O'Brien, as if the latter had been a badly cooked sausage.

"The trouble with you guys was that you was scared stiff!" he growled. "The engineer says this egg was maybe five foot eight, slim, and light complected, and he had some sort of mask over part of his face——"

"Sure, thin, he had a mask, if the boss says so!" O'Brien broke in amiably. "And as for being scared, why shouldn't I be? I'm hired to shovel coal, not to stop bullets!"

The sheriff and the special agent eyed each other gloomily. Then, with one accord, they turned upon the fourth occupant of the little room. This was a large, smiling person, in a serge suit and cheroot—the latter so constant a part of his equipment as to seem almost an article of wearing apparel. He sat comfortably back in a chair, regarding the fireman with a mildly reproachful look.

"I guess you can't help it, brother," he commented. "Now, then, how many of these road agents should you say took part in last night's entertainment?"

"There were three of thim!" Fireman O'Brien replied without hesitation. "There was the two that come down over the tinder and stuck up me and Denny—the boss of the ingine. They made us stop at the highway crossing; and thin this other divil shows up, and keeps his gun p'inted at us!"

"What I can't understand is, why they didn't dynamite the mail car!" Special Agent Johnston commented gloomily. "They must have been dubs, to think they could get in just by knocking at the door!"

"Maybe——" the sheriff began hopefully.

He was interrupted by a brisk rap at the office door. It opened and the head of one of his deputies was thrust in.

"We've got 'em, chief!" this individual declared excitedly. "One of the posses just brought them in—three yeggs, hiding in a jungle down the river! The engineer recognized them, first crack out of the box!"

A clatter of steps sounded outside the

sheriff's office—hurried, shuffling steps, suggesting excitement. The door was swung fully open, and three hard-faced, shabbily dressed men, rather white about the mouth and with sullen, defiant eyes, were shoved unceremoniously in. Half a dozen honest citizens—a glance showed them to be that—armed with shotguns and rifles, brought up the rear.

Fireman O'Brien thrust out his head—he had a long, lean neck, with more Adam's apple than one man was entitled to—and regarded them unwinkingly.

"By golly, ye have thim!" he cried. "There's the one that held the gun on me—the b'y in the middle!"

The "b'y" in the middle was middle-aged, of medium height, and hollow chested. Sheriff Mack bellowed a protest.

"You said he was about the size of me!" he shouted. "And this bird has got eyes about as black as they make them!"

"This is the outfit that stuck up the train!" Mr. O'Brien maintained stubbornly. "And if it wasn't the bird in the middle, it was the one beside him!"

"Which one, beside him?" Special Agent Johnston asked, with weary patience. "He has two sides, you know!"

The fireman shook his head slowly. A look of deep cunning came into his honest face.

"Both sides!" he declared. "It was one of thim!"

The smiling gentleman in the serge suit—and cheroot—had not arisen from his chair. Now he gestured with his attenuated cigar and addressed the three prisoners.

"Well, boys, what have you got to say for yourselves?" he wanted to know. "Been doing a little amateur train robbing? Or perhaps you've got an alibi?"

The consumptive-looking fellow in the middle of the little battalion snarled a reply.

"Of course we've got an alibi! An' it's a good one, big man. I guess these gents are going to be sorry they laid hands on us. We're going to sue this burg for damages. You said it—fifty thousand dollars for false imprisonment! We got an alibi, all right, and you can't bust it!"

"All right," the smiling man agreed. He gestured again, vaguely, with his cheroot. "Spill it, boys, spill it! We're prepared for the worst!"

"All right, then, old funny face, put this in your pipe and smoke it! Me and my pals just got out of the hoosegow this morning. He was in the booby-hatch over at Portal for the last ten days—and you can ask the judge and the jailer if you want to!"

There was an excessive confidence in this statement that evidently impressed every one in the room. The little office was silent for a moment, save for the excited breathing of its occupants. Then the sheriff reached out and one of his big hands picked up the telephone at the back of his desk. He asked to be connected with the sheriff's office in the adjoining county, Portal being in that jurisdiction. A tiny voice squeaked and Sheriff Mack asked his questions. He grunted, hung up without a "thank you," and turned gloomily to the spectators of this little byplay.

"Three bums were kicked out over there, first thing this morning. Sounds like this outfit—oh, rats, of course it is! We'll hold them for identification, but you can bet these jungle rats never held up no train. They haven't got nerve enough!"

This prediction proved accurate, and later in the day the three hobos were conducted to the outskirts of Albion and launched upon their way. They departed, threatening to sue the town for damages.

In the meantime, Sheriff Mack had betaken himself gloomily to his automobile and, accompanied by the railroad detective and by "Smiler" Pittman, rep-

resenting the post office department, had quickly driven to the scene of the robbery.

The now thoroughly discredited fireman and engineer accompanied this official party. Arrived on the ground, the engine crew diagramed things as they remembered them. Frequent disputes arose between them. Several empty brass pistol shells were found beside the track, and Special Agent Johnston drew a map of the crossing, filled in the positions of the cars and engine, and continued his cross questioning of the trainmen.

Smiler Pittman, cheroot and all, hung about for a time. Then the postal inspector wandered away by himself. The fireman had pointed out a place, along the hard-surfaced highway, where he had seen the tail lights of the parked bandit car. Smiler ambled along, his small but remarkably keen gray eyes studying the side of the road. He reached the spot in question, and stood looking down at a set of clearly cut tire tracks.

He was interrupted in this perusal by the voice of Sheriff Mack. The peace officer also had exhausted the resources of the railroad track, as far as he was concerned.

Now he stood looking broodingly down at the tire tracks.

"We've got a line on the car they used," he growled morosely. "It was stolen last night from in front of the Liberty Theater, in the city; a maroon-colored, five-passenger machine."

He went into details, giving the make and license number of the automobile which the bandits were suspected of having stolen. It had later been seen speeding past a road house, two miles from the scene of the robbery.

"But that's all the good it will do us," he added.

Smiler Pittman beamed down at the tire tracks, produced an extra cheroot, and handed it to the sheriff.

"Cheer up, brother!" he counseled. "This case is young yet."

"If we don't grab them while it's young, we'll never set handcuffs on them!" Sheriff Mack broke in. "Looks to me like they'd made a clean get-away!"

For the first time that morning, the smile was gone from the face of the postal inspector. His eyes snapped and his mouth became, for the moment, a straight, hard line.

"There isn't any such thing as a clean get-away!" he said distinctly. "Every crime is a violation of law, and it leaves traces. All we've got to do is to plug, see? Don't get any foolish notions, sheriff. Government property has been interfered with, and I'm going to have the parties that did it if I have to run you and Johnston and myself flat-footed and into a decline! Get that straight now!"

His smile came out of eclipse. The sheriff stared.

"Talk like that is cheap!" he muttered. "The city police had the dragnet out half an hour after the robbery, to head off any red hots that tried to make the city. And that's all the good it did them. Figure it out for yourself!"

A noticeable coolness toward the Federal agent sprang up about this time, on the part of Sheriff Mack and Special Agent Johnston, to whom the sheriff communicated Smiler Pittman's ultimatum. They let him distinctly and severely alone.

Pittman continued to amble about, like a friendly elephant in a circus parade. He might have seemed to be loafing, but, among other things, he was waiting for a report from one of his men concerning the condition of a certain mail clerk who early the evening before had been stricken with acute appendicitis and rushed to the hospital.

The report arrived, in code, soon after Mr. Pittman returned to the vil-

lage. He went to his hotel and deciphered it, then sat thinking.

"A full confession!" he muttered. "This lad, Russel, had made a dicker to open the car when the bandits showed up. But, thanks to his appendicitis, he wasn't there to do it, and his substitute was a game lad, and straight. That was why they didn't use dynamite. They didn't expect to have to and weren't prepared.

"This gonoph, Keller, was the go-between. The mail clerk doesn't, apparently, know the other two. Now, what do you know about that? Of course, it had to be him—and him dead as a doughnut—we get a full identification of! It couldn't have been one of the others; of course not. That would have made things too easy!"

An expression almost of disgust came into the inspector's usually jovial face. Again he muttered, "Lee Keller—and we've got him already, down at the morgue!" Then he shrugged his shoulders, lit a fresh cheroot, resumed his smile, and went out into the street.

Smiler Pittman spent most of the day sauntering about town, his eyes unobtrusively on the activities of the sheriff and railroad detective, both of whom were pawns in the game as far as Pittman was concerned. The city dicks had gone back to their routine duties.

Gradually he was forming a synthetic picture of the little town, its inhabitants, and its environment. Albion lay in the middle of a productive but limited valley, bounded on one side by the river and on the other by a range of hills, paralleling the ocean.

"The flat land is worth three hundred dollars an acre, and the hill land ain't worth a cent!" one of his informants drawlingly assured him. "Over in them hills you can't raise nothing but moonshine. There is six houses and ten stills in twenty mile. An' the rum runners is petitioning the county to build a highway over to the coast, so's their trucks'll have smoother going back and forth from the rum ships."

"Kind of hard nation lives over in the hills, eh?" Smiler commented.

"No one *lives* there, mister! There's only six families exists over in that neck of the woods, but they're all hard eggs, an' even the sheriff pretends he don't know they're hid away there!"

Smiler drifted on. The sun had set and darkness was falling, but when he reached the end of the little street and looked speculatively across the flat farming land he could dimly discern the outlines of the maligned foothills. He turned after a time and headed for a garage. He had decided to rent a car and go for a drive. The moon would not rise for several hours, but he could find his way.

Arrived at the garage, however, he discovered that the sheriff had just driven up to have his gas tank filled. Sheriff Mack looked so disgusted and angry when he saw Smiler approaching that the postal inspector pricked up his ears. He sauntered over to the automobile and experimentally opened the tonneau door.

The ruse worked.

"Well, come along, then!" Mack growled. "It beats the deuce how a man like you gets by, Pittman! All you've done to-day is loaf around and smoke, but as soon as I pick up a lead that looks like something, you come snooping around! Who told you the news?"

"You did!" Smiler replied, with a chuckle of enjoyment. "You looked too much like the egg-stealing pup to get by, sheriff. Now ease your conscience. What's in the air?"

Sheriff Mack gritted his teeth. He started his engine and ground the gears. The back of his thick neck was purple.

"Well, one of my deputies just came in with news about that stolen car—the one I was telling you about!" he confessed. "Ted was out scouting through

the bad lands to-day—the hills over on the coast. He didn't see anything till just after dark, and then as he was headed home, this machine came out of one of the hill roads and he got a look at it. Maroon color, five passenger, going like sin. The bandits must have holed up over there till they thought we wouldn't be looking, then made a shoot for the city!"

The sheriff's machine headed in beside the courthouse, and three deputies, armed with rifles and small arms, climbed in. Smiler offered them cheroots. A thrill was in the air.

Ted Geery, the deputy who had spotted the bandit car, directed the sheriff to head for the East Cañon road.

"There's hardly any traffic out of that part of the hills," he added, "and with plenty of soft clay and mud, we can check up on the tire tracks. I tried to follow this outfit, so I didn't stop."

"Why *didn't* you follow them?" Smiler asked, although he had a pretty good idea.

Ted's eyes narrowed.

"They were going seventy an hour," he commented, evidently considering that sufficient explanation.

"How many were aboard?"

"Couldn't say. Only saw the car from behind!"

The sheriff's machine reached the place where the cañon road joined a narrow thoroughfare running east and west. It was along the latter the young deputy had been heading when he saw the suspected automobile. Now they pulled in at the side, turned the car so that the headlights would illumine the road, and climbed out.

Twenty feet back from the junction of the two roads was a patch of soft, gray clay. Imbedded in it were tire tracks—exact reproductions of those Smiler Pittman had studied, near the scene of the holdup, early that morning.

Having briefly assured himself of this fact, the postal inspector glanced at his companions, then stepped unobtrusively into the brush beside the road. It came above his head—a scraggly growth of scrub oak and manzanita. Smiler pushed into an old cattle path, stood for a moment listening, and after that began to advance rapidly but cautiously. His big body made no sound as he slid through the brush. Soon he was well beyond any possible view of his recent companions, even if they should turn the spotlight into the brush. Thereupon, he sat down on a stump in the darkness, and waited.

Voices came to him presently—voices raised in profane halloo.

Mr. Pittman shook his head.

"It won't work, boys!" he murmured. "I'm lost. So long. Maybe you can find where that machine went to. I want to find out where it came from!"

He got up after a time, and made his way cautiously back to the hill road. The sheriff's car was gone. Smiler had heard the roar of the open exhaust as it betook itself through the darkness toward the cross-country road.

"On the trail, bless 'em!" the postal inspector said comfortably. "If they catch up with these red-hots, they'll be able to 'tend to them without my assistance. On the other hand, if I can find out where the bandits have been hiding to-day I may pick up something that'll come in handy!"

Pittman had often secured astonishing results by doing the reverse of the obvious. The logical thing to do, tonight, was to follow the bandits. Leaving that to the local officers, he headed up grade along the little-traveled hill road, back tracking.

The road itself was not hard to follow, though it was no more than a gouge in the hills, dimly lit by the chilly stars. From time to time he drew out his flash light and assured himself that the tire tracks he had discovered at the foot of the grade were still in evidence.

"Two sets of them!" he communed.

"A round trip. Now, where did these lads hole up for the day? Two of them—there must have been two. One we've got. He won't trifle with no more government property. Two to locate. But I've got a lifetime to do it in!"

He marched on, studying the dim contour of the hills. Eventually he topped the ridge and stood looking off to the west. The night wind struck him full force, and he had the sensation of quivering, like a harp string in a blast of air.

"Brrr!" He shivered, drawing his coat collar up about his neck. "Well, here we go!"

He plunged into the down trail, and some time later he saw before him, ghostly and indistinct, the silhouette of a house.

There were no lights. Smiler Pittman made his way cautiously forward.

"One of my friend's six hard-boiled families!" he decided. "Kind of early for them to have gone to bed!"

He continued his cautious advance. No sound came to him, no glimpse of light, no smell of smoke. Only the night wind from the sea; and, far away and infinitely mournful, the tolling of a bell buoy.

Smiler reached a gap in the hedge at his left. He paused here, eyed the house keenly, and decided to risk the use of his flash light. He turned it upon the ground and confirmed a suspicion.

"That machine holed up here! Maybe part of the gang is still roosting here!" he decided. "There may have been more than three—may have been half a dozen. Any number. That train crew wouldn't have known if Coxey's Army had descended on them! Smiler, my good man, it's up to you to be careful! You don't want to get yourself extinguished!"

He decided after several minutes of anxious thought that he would follow the old road in through the hedge. He might have gone along to the front gate, directly in front of the house, so he could hear it creaking and banging in the wind. Or was that a shutter?

"I'm darned if I don't think this place is abandoned!" he told himself, as the old road turned to the right and brought him almost under the eaves of the unlighted and silent house. "Why, sure it is! The windows are all busted in!"

He had had to come close to discover that. Now he stopped in his tracks, staring at the ancient ruin with pursed lips and calculating eyes.

"So this is where my friends, the bandits, holed up!" he murmured. "All right, let's have a look-see! They may have left something behind! It strikes me——"

Whatever it was that struck Inspector Pittman, the concussion was not violent enough to hold his attention above the sound that at this moment greeted his ears. He took an involuntary step backward and reached for his gun.

Then he stood staring into the darkness. It didn't come from the old house, that sound. Instead, it seemed to echo mournfully from the dimly seen scrub oaks at the rear—the voice of a human being, or was it? Conceivably, a lost soul visiting the scene of its earthly downfall might have cried out in that tortured, despairing voice.

"There ain't no ghosts!" Smiler told himself stolidly. His hair moved on his scalp, however, and a snail seemed to be crawling down his spine. "Some one is out there. Some one——"

The cry came again, low and long drawn at first, then rising into a scream of mortal agony. The night had settled down thick and black as the inside of a cave. A mist from the ocean had obscured even the faint stars. Somewhere at his right a shutter squeaked and banged.

"I've been to tea parties I got more pleasure out of!" Smiler Pittman grunted. "All right, let's go!"

He set off again along the old road, and presently had approached so close to the old log barn recently vacated by Monte Duncan and his moll that he could see it rearing up above him, like a prehistoric monster about to suck him into its maw.

Again came the banshee voice, so close now that Smiler had no difficulty in making out its distinctly human quality.

He slid out his flash light and advanced toward the door.

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

MONTE DUNCAN, seated behind the wheel of the stolen automobile, had seen the deputy sheriff swing in behind and try to follow. He had ascertained by previous experiment that the machine he was driving was a fast one, and now he muttered a comment to his companion.

"We were bound to be seen, sooner or later. They evidently have figured out the car we used, though I don't see how. But this hood can't catch our dust. Look at her pick up!"

The maroon-colored automobile shot through the night. Monte maneuvered it along a narrow and none-too-smooth road, then slowed down and made the turn into the cross-county highway. The headlights of the pursuing machine had disappeared.

"He's headed for town to give the alarm!" the young fellow said.

"You think we can outrun them?" Dolly asked anxiously.

"Perhaps we could, but we'd run into the bulls at the city end. They'll phone ahead. Now, let's see. There ought to be a road turning off to the west along here somewhere. I used to come out to clam bakes and picnics. There's a big billboard right at the turn!"

They reached this landmark a few minutes later, and again Monte slowed the machine he was driving to a decorous pace and made the turn. The main highway was hard surfaced, and the road leading toward the coast was firm and dry. He nodded.

"No tracks!" he commented with satisfaction. "Here's where we disappear, kid!"

The girl was silent. That last harrowing scene with Bull Purvis had shaken her usually steady nerves, and now she sat quiet and observant. Monte ducked his head toward her.

"Don't you fret!" he said. "We'll fool them!"

The car was steadily climbing. Monte kept track of the highway, running at right angles to his present course, and each moment farther behind. There were no lights on it up to the time he reached the top of the ridge. He sighed.

"Safe!" he muttered. "They've lost their last chance!"

"Where does this road lead?" Dolly asked.

"Nowhere—that's just it!"

The girl looked trustfully up at him. Monte felt himself thrilling. He had been a spoiled boy. He knew that now; but to-night he was a man, a leader, a lone wolf fighting for his mate. He crouched over the wheel, staring into the night.

The windshield broke the force of the wind, howling in from the sea. The road dipped before them, with not so much as a twinkle of light on either side. They coasted down the long, smooth grade. Five minutes later the headlights picked up the approach of a pier, running out into the mist-wrapped water.

"The shrimp boats used to put in here," Monte commented, his eyes alertly on the rickety platform of the ancient structure. "It isn't used any more, I fancy, but we're going to use it to-night!"

He stopped the car and had Dolly

slide out. She stood with wide, bewildered eyes as Monte Duncan cautiously drove the car along toward the end of the pier. The headlights showed the warped and broken planks, and then a crumbling stringpiece at the end.

Monte stopped the machine, climbed out, and stood for a moment listening. No sound came to them, save the pound of breakers on the beach. The young fellow lifted out the front cushion and fumbled about.

"Good!" he said, a little excitedly.

His fingers closed over the round, firm tube of a flash light. He started the engine, shifted the gear lever, and then, standing on the running board, reached down and shoved in the clutch with his hand.

The car moved forward with increasing speed. At the last moment Monte Duncan leaped off, the big machine struck the remnants of the stringpiece, and an instant later had swung over, gracefully, like a living thing, toward the surface of the unseen water. It struck with a great splash. Dolly was at her escort's elbow and now together, with the aid of the flash light, they stared in silent fascination over at the seething surface of the sea.

"I guess that'll hold them for a while!" the young fellow laughed, excitement and triumph in his voice. "They'll be watching for us to try to make the city in the car. After that they'll scurry around, looking for a five-passenger car like ours in all the valleys and side roads. It'll take their minds off us and give us a chance to get back to the big burg by the back way!"

"I don't see——"

"We're going to hike in along the beach. It'll be quite a pull, but we've got to do it. Come on, we'll have to keep moving or this wind will freeze us stiff!"

It howled and sung around them, the night wind from the sea. They made their way along the wharf and found a path that led down to the firm surface of the sandy beach. Away to the left, hidden under its garment of eddying fog, the ocean heaved and rolled. They caught the continuous pound of great waves on the shore, and the splash of collapsing breakers.

Monte had been drawn toward the city as an iron filing is drawn toward a great magnet. From the first, he had told himself that if only he and Dolly could get back to the big burg, all would be well with them. The unfriendly silences and empty spaces of the country filled him with apprehension. He felt as conspicuous as a lighthouse.

With Dolly's hand tucked under his arm, he strode on along the sodden sand. The great black wings of the night had closed down over them now. There was a sort of ghostly twilight, reflected from sky and fog and sea—a diffused, unnatural illumination that was more confusing, almost, than utter blackness. Monte squared his shoulders and bowed his head. He realized with sudden misgiving that they were far from any human habitation. In a way that was good—they didn't want to meet any one, and on this desolate coast there was little chance of their doing so. But as the wind increased in violence, and great black cliffs broke the level expanse of the beach before them, he began to wonder if the girl trudging so gamely on at his side would be able to endure the hardships of so strenuous a journey.

The shore wound in and out. Sometimes the precipitous cliffs came squarely down to the sea, and they had to climb round and over them. Dolly was no weakling, but this sort of thing—in the face of the chilling wind and the clouds of spray that soon soaked their outer garments and began to run in dreary trickles down their faces—approached the hazardous. Monte peered anxiously into the girl's face. It showed as a luminous blot at his side.

"Making it all right, kid?" he grunted.

"Don't fret about me! I'll stay with you!"

She sounded a little breathless, he noted with dismay. He pressed her hand reassuringly against his side.

Again the cliffs towered, dark and dim, before them. But now there was a narrow margin of sand at their foot. Monte paused, turned his flash light into the mist, and nodded.

"We can get past!" he muttered. "Save us climbing around this time!"

He headed forward. Soon the path was so narrow that he had to go ahead. Dolly stuck close at his heels. The wind smashed against the flat face of the cliff, at their right, and drove gritty particles into their eyes. Monte stumbled on.

Suddenly a great wave came driving out of the fog and struck them, almost knee-high. The path had petered out.

"We've got to go back!" Monte gritted. "The tide must be rising!"

Turning, they ran for it. Breathless and stumbling, with Monte in the lead and Dolly close behind, they raced back for the open beach. Now wave after wave caught them. The air was full of spray and the crash of masses of water against the unfriendly cliffs. Breathless and exhausted, the two fugitives reached their point of departure, and fled up beyond the reach of the rising tide.

Monte's shoes were sodden and splashing, and he knew that his companion's must be in even a worse condition, because of the thinness of her oxfords. He paused, looking forlornly around. Swirling darkness, and the howl of the sea wind, and the crash of great breakers! The solid earth quivered like jelly under their feet.

"I'm going to try to start a fire," the young fellow announced. "We'll dry out and rest a bit. You sit here in the shelter of this rock, kid."

Dolly collapsed, her trim, square little shoulders cowering against the great boulder Monte had indicated. He turned away from the water and began to gather driftwood, flung high by the high tides of spring. After he had a good-sized armful of fuel, he piled it crisscross against the rock, drew out his pocketknife, and shaved off a little mound of fine splinters and fragments. Three minutes later he had a small fire going, and by careful nursing and additions of driftwood he eventually produced a blaze that did something to really counteract the rigor of the night.

Dolly dropped asleep, her head tipped back against the slanting face of the boulder. Monte cared for the fire and brooded over their problems. He told himself that his idea was feasible, and that it would enable them to slip unobserved into the city if only they could survive. But during these hours of darkness—the chill, cheerless hours when vitality is at its lowest and the world is prone to assume ominous shapes and meanings—he found himself shaken and frightened.

"We *got* to go through!" he snarled aloud. "And we're going to—I'm going to! If Dolly can't hike it, I'll carry her!"

Slowly the night wore away. The wind abated and became a series of gusty attacks, rather than a steady drive. Monte fed the fire and brooded. Off in the east, the darkness was changing to drab, cheerless gray.

But with the coming of dawn on that forsaken and forbidding coast, the young gunman found his spirits rising.

"If we just had a good pot of coffee, we'd be fine!" he said, squaring his shoulders again and casting a defiant glance toward the sea. It was visible now—a gray, heaving surface, under an eddying garment of mist.

The sun came up, at last: a blood-red globe, banded with thicker layers of fog

that made it look like a carnelian. Monte awakened his companion.

"All right, kid, we're off!" he said with assumed cheerfulness. "Have a good rest?"

Dolly smiled up at him and climbed stiffly to her feet. She said nothing, but faced toward the distant city.

Many a time, during the hours that followed, Monte Duncan wished he had not had the brilliant idea of getting into the big burg by the back door. They stumbled on and on, silent, drooping, but desperate, driven forward by the very hopelessness of their position. Long before there was any sign of buildings or highways, they began to come upon solitary salt-water fishermen, strung out at wide intervals along the beach. Later came a road, and then an occasional cottage. It was mid-afternoon when the two refugees tramped into a resort café, and collapsed beside a friendly open fire of driftwood.

Monte ordered coffee and fried potatoes and two big steaks. The waiter brought Dolly a pair of slippers, so that she could dry her oxfords.

"We gets lots of hikers that have seen a bit too much of the sea," he commented. "Just you give yourself a good warm, miss—there ain't nothing like a driftwood fire for taking the chill out of a body, and heading off rheumatiz!"

Monte left the girl by the fire, after they had finished their meal, and went out to find rooms. Eventually he discovered something suitable. There was a little neighborhood restaurant up the street, a moving picture theater around the corner—everything they would need. He paid a week's rent in advance, taking the money from his own meager supply rather than break in at this time on the contents of the fat wallet. He had a superstitious feeling about those stolen bills—couldn't bring himself to touch them till he had to. He went back and fetched Dolly, who was warm and cheerful again.

"The world ahead of us, kid!" Monte told her, as they swung briskly along the street. "What's that the fellow in the book said—'The world is mine oyster, which I with sword will open?' That's you and me, only we'll use a gat! And we won't go in with a pair of pikers on the next job."

Dolly nodded. Her face was thoughtful, a little troubled.

"I wish we hadn't had to leave Bull!" she said, regretfully. "Somehow I feel——"

"We stayed with him till it was all over!" Monte declared. "We did better for him than he'd have done for either of us!"

Dolly was silent for a time. Then, as they were approaching their new quarters, she spoke slowly.

"I've been wondering if he was really dead!" she stated. "I don't believe he was! And if he wasn't——"

"Nonsense!" Monte broke in. His glance had narrowed. "He was finished—dead. And we couldn't have brought him with us, anyhow!"

Dolly was silent, but he could see that she was worrying.

CHAPTER VII.

OBEDIAH PURVIS.

SETTLED in their rooms on the beach, Monte and his companion studied the papers and tried to figure out what was taking place in the camp of the enemy.

Monte was jubilant when he read of the mistaken identification by the engine crew.

"Those lads were so scared they didn't see anything!" he commented. "And now they're sunk as witnesses! If we should ever be speared on this job, our lawyer would have them thrown out of court. They aren't worth a jit a piece to the prosecution. And with Lee and Bull dead——"

"I don't believe Bull is dead! I've

got a feeling that he's alive," Dolly insisted.

"He can't be. Think it over. Even if he was alive when we left, which I don't believe, he wouldn't have lasted long with no one to look after him. He's gone, and you can bet on it. There's only one thing that bothers me, and that's the fellow that was to have let us into the mail car. The papers say he's made a full confession. There's a postal inspector—a fellow by the name of Pittman—that seems to be running the show. I wish he'd stub his toe and break his neck!"

"If it wasn't him, it would be some one else," Dolly reminded him.

"Well, I don't like the sound of his name. I've taken a dislike to him and if he ever tries to get flossy with me I'll make fish bait of him!"

Monte flushed and scowled. Then he cheered up and promptly forgot all about the man named Pittman.

The fact was that Monte was beginning to feel convinced he and Dolly were safe. With the two other participants in the holdup out of the way and the recent clever escape from the trap in the hills an accomplished fact, he told himself they really had nothing to fear.

"They don't know who did it, and if they did, they couldn't find us!" he summed up. "You can see from the stories in the papers that they're up a stump. Out there in the sticks, I felt like a bug pinned in the middle of a piece of white cardboard. But here there ain't enough cops to find us, even if they knew who to look for!"

He continued in this pleasant mood for several days. He bought a fishing outfit, and he and Dolly spent much of their time along the beach, trying their luck with the other anglers. Sometimes they went into the little moving picture house in the afternoon, for a change of entertainment.

Monte was beginning to plan another venture against the grim bulwark of the law.

"I reckon the hoodoo has worn off," he commented. "Of course we could tap this wad Bull lifted, but I've got a funny feeling about it—as if I had to take care of it, but couldn't touch the money for our own use! Just a notion, of course, but I'm kind of notional, sometimes. I'll slip out one of these nights and pull something, just for expense money!"

It was while they were sitting in the little restaurant up the street that he got his big jolt. Monte had purchased a paper on the way to the eating establishment. Now, having ordered his meal, he sat glancing idly through the front page headlines.

There was nothing of interest. His eyes sank, by a sort of gravitation, and then he shoved back his chair and seemed about to stand up.

Dolly stared at him.

"What's the matter?" she whispered. "Monte, you look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

Monte sank back, his eyes fastened on the page. He looked slowly up at her, and shoved the paper across.

"Look there!" he said, indicating a paragraph near the bottom of the page.

There was a caption:

OBEDIAH PURVIS DIES.

Dolly's eyes dilated. She read on through the single paragraph. Obediah Purvis, aged forty-six, had died the previous afternoon at the city hospital. He had been ill a week.

"A week?" the girl said aloud, looking up into the tense face of her companion. "Why, Monte—but it doesn't say anything more about him! Who he was——"

"Bull's name was 'Obediah.' I heard him grumbling about his folks tying such a label onto him. And it was tattooed on his left forearm!"

Dolly nodded.

"I remember. But this must be some one else—some one here in the city—some well-known person! It doesn't say anything about him!"

"If it were a local big wig, there'd be a story all about how he started the art institute, or patronized something or other. I can't make it out!"

They sat staring at each other. The restaurant was nearly empty, but presently Monte picked up the paper and spoke in a low tone.

"Don't look so scared, kid! That red-headed waitress has been watching us! But I'm going to find out—we've got to find out somehow if this was Bull!"

"I knew all the time he wasn't dead!" the girl murmured. "And if he's been alive all this time they must have found him and brought him to the city! Monte, I wonder if he got over his delirium before he died!"

Monte nodded, in agreement with the thought behind the query. If Bull had recovered consciousness, if his mind had cleared, he might have made a death-bed statement.

"I don't believe Bull would talk," Dolly said after a time. "But I wish I knew."

"We've got to find out," Monte told her.

There was a drug store down the street, and after the two fugitives from the law had finished their meal, which had suddenly become unappetizing, they adjourned hurriedly to it. Monte consulted the city directory, his companion, at his elbow, also looking down at the closely printed pages. There were just three Purvises in town, and none with the given name for which they were looking.

"He might belong to one of these families," Dolly suggested.

The young gunman shook his head.

"Not a chance! When they make up the city directory they count all the hoses! They want to make the town look as big as possible. There's only one thing to do. I'm going to call the hospital and find out who he was. I'll say I have a friend of that name—something like that!"

They went back to the telephone booth. Monte hunted up the number and reached for the receiver. Then his hand jerked back, as if he had touched a snake.

"Fool—I pretty nearly did it!" he snarled. "The cops are sure to be running things, if this is Bull. They might trace the number and come tumbling out here! Gee, that was a close one."

He was sweating and weak-kneed. Dolly followed him from the drug store and together they headed for the beach. They walked silently for hours, both of them absorbed in this new problem. Toward evening they returned to the little suburban business center and bought a late paper.

Together they went through it, page by page.

"Nothing," Monte mumbled.

The girl beside him pointed.

"There, among the death notices!"

Sure enough, the name "Obediah Purvis" again appeared. His age and the name of an undertaking establishment were given, in addition to the statement that the funeral services would be held the second day following.

"That settled it," Monte muttered. "I'm going to find out who this dead guy is! You go on up to the rooms, kid. I'll just mosey over there and have a look!"

Monte struck off through the late afternoon. He chose to walk instead of taking a car, because he wanted to have this chance of thinking things straight. He found that his mind had begun to go over that brief paragraph in the morning paper, and in that direction lay disaster. He must think his way out. If this were indeed Bull——

It wasn't so easy to go in a straight line. It couldn't be the bandit, he felt

sure. Why should they be printing a front-page story—which wasn't even a story, at that—about Bull Purvis? And then suddenly an added incongruity struck him. If it had been Bull, the newspaper would have had a rewrite of some sort concerning the train hold-up, and the part the dead man had played in it. Or was it possible they didn't know that Bull was one of the outlaws? Was this really——

Monte clenched his hands in a frenzy of bewilderment.

"I'm going nuts!" he grated. "I'll be barking at the moon next! But I'll find out, and that may settle everything!"

The street he was seeking was just ahead. He reached the corner, turned it, and halfway down the block saw the undertaking parlors—a dignified building with a somber carriage drive at the side. There was a recessed entryway leading into the offices, and toward this the newcomer directed his steps.

He was across the street from the undertaker's. As he came opposite, he left the walk and headed straight for that main entrance. The building was on the shadow side of the street so that the little recess was almost entirely dark.

Abruptly Monte's feet froze to the pavement. A spot of light was reflected out of the entryway—a spot of light which next moment he made out to be the glimmer from a bright object, pinned to the coat of a large, dimly seen man, standing with his back to the entryway wall. A policeman's stare!

As he made this discovery, Monte Duncan promptly turned and went back to the farther sidewalk. He hurried along it, with an occasional backward glance. No one was following him. The officer, policeman, or whatever he was, hadn't come out of his place of concealment. But that he had been stationed there, waiting for whoever might come to inquire about the recent death featured in the paper, Monte hadn't the slightest doubt.

"He didn't get his eyes on me!" the young fellow muttered. "And all he'll see now is dust!"

There was a taxicab at the corner. Monte hurried to it, climbed in, and had himself driven home. A glance through the rear window had showed him that he was not followed.

Dolly listened with absorbed attention to his story. His clear, blue eyes were troubled.

"I had an uneasy feeling about Bull all the time!" she said. "And I don't feel any better about him now!"

"It isn't Bull—it's the hoodoo!" Monte told her. "Three on one match—the worst luck in the world! I thought it had worn off, but it hasn't. I'm going to stick close to first base for a while. No night work till I see how things are going to break!"

They went out to dinner at the little restaurant, later in the evening. After he had retired to his own room for the night, Monte sat smoking and staring at the carpet. His mind had taken up the baffling problem again. He found himself going round and round, like a man lost in the desert.

On the way to breakfast, next morning, Monte bought a paper and glanced hastily and fearfully over the front page. There was nothing here of interest to him or to the girl at his side. They strode on, absorbed and silent. Monte turned the pages and they stared up and down, searching, dipping into vague paragraphs. Nothing. They were at the restaurant door, and with a sigh Monte folded the paper and thrust it under his arm. He reached out toward the latch——

He stood, his hand arrested, his eyes dilated. Just beside the entrance, about level with his eyes, was a handbill. At the top was the single word, "Reward!" Below that was a picture which for a moment the young man stared stupidly

at. There was something familiar about it.

At a low cry from the girl at his side, he turned and headed up the street toward the beach. Dolly's fingers trembled on his forearm.

"Monte, that bill was about you! They must know——"

"They don't know anything!" the young fellow muttered. "If they knew where I was, they'd pinch me. But that must have been Bull, at the hospital. And he came to enough to make a dying statement!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE RUN.

"THAT was an old snapshot, taken of me at a picnic," Monte commented, after he had begun to pull himself together. "It doesn't look like me."

"I didn't know it was supposed to be you until I read your name under it," his companion agreed. "Where did they get it?"

"It was probably among my junk in my room. They must have got a dying declaration out of Bull, and he knew where I lived. I had him and Lee up to my place just the night before we pulled that rotten job. It won't help them much to use that photo, but it's the best they could do. I've never been mugged!"

Dolly looked pensively at him. He didn't think much about it till afterward, but about this time the manner of the girl changed. She talked less and was often so absorbed in thoughts of her own that she failed to reply to his remarks.

"They must have the town plastered with reward bills!" Monte commented after a few moments of silent walking. The wind blew steadily in from the gray sea, and in a dim way he was conscious of it and of the raucous screaming of gulls, down the shore. "That's funny, too. Usually they put those things just in the post offices and railroad stations—places connected with the job that's been pulled. They must be after us hot and heavy!"

Dolly said nothing. She was looking down at the hard-packed sand, her eyes absorbed, her face troubled. Monte thought nothing of this change of mood. He himself was still in a tremor.

"Right beside the restaurant door!" he muttered. "They must have the burg papered with bills!"

The sight of the handbill had effectually driven all thought of breakfast out of the minds of the two fugitives, but along toward noon Monte discovered that he was faint and almost dizzy.

"Come on," he commanded, "we've got to have some chow. We'll go back to the place where we've been eating. We're as safe there as anywhere."

He led the way back to the little restaurant. As he and Dolly approached, he saw an old man and a gray-haired woman standing beside the restaurant door, evidently reading the reward notice. Monte eyed them suspiciously, but it was impossible to see in them anything dangerous. He strode on with the girl at his side. They paused behind the other two.

The old man turned. He had a humorous face and benevolent eyes.

"I was just telling the old woman," he commented, gesturing affably toward his wife, "that I wouldn't mind having the thousand dollars they're offering for this thief, but that picture ain't no good, and neither is the description that goes with it. Why, both of 'em might be of you, or most any other young fellow on the street. Gen'ally they have two pictures, a front one and another taken from the side, and a long description that means something. This ain't no good!"

Monte nodded. He was reading down through the brief description of himself. There were no misstatements in it, but as the old man had said, it

might have applied to almost any one. It was vague and general.

He turned and boldly opened the restaurant door. If that was the best the cops could do—if that was all they had on him—he would never be arrested.

The meal passed in silence. Monte was trying to think it out, the predicament in which he and his companion were involved. All the old feeling of safety and assurance was dissipated, and a sensation of being watched, spied upon, began to assert itself.

He covertly studied the red-headed waitress. He hadn't liked her from the first. She was elderly and dour, and had served them with scant courtesy.

"She's that way with every one," he reminded himself. "It's just her way. But there's no telling who might get suspicious and raise a squawk. Maybe we ought to move!"

But moving might be more dangerous than staying where they were. After all, the police couldn't know where he was, or they would arrest him.

"But it's funny, that bill being stuck right beside the door of the place where we eat!" he realized. "I thought they just put them in the lobbies of the post offices, and in railroad stations and trains. I never saw one anywhere else before!"

After the meal was finished and he and Dolly were again in the street, Monte led his companion along through the limited business section. He didn't explain the object of this journey until it was completed.

As he and the girl were headed for their rooms, Monte spoke. There was a strange look in his eyes—a look almost of fear.

"Kid," he said, "there's just one of those stickers in this part of town, and it was put beside the door of our chow house! Of course it may just have happened that way!"

Dolly looked silently at him. He saw that her lips were trembling. He shook his head and led the way slowly back to their rooms.

There followed several days of growing uneasiness. Nothing happened, no more reward notices appeared, and the papers were empty of news concerning the recent holdup. Dolly had formed the habit of sitting at her window, looking broodingly out at the sea. Monte studied the papers, smoked, and worried. That feeling of being watched was growing upon him. He felt as if a great skeleton hand were stretched out, ready at any moment to descend and crush him and his companion.

"I wonder if Lee was fool enough to tell that postal clerk my name!" he asked himself. "Maybe they didn't get a declaration out of Bull, before he died. Maybe that was all bluff. He may have been dead when the cops found him, or they may not have found him!"

There was a possibility here that stopped his restless mind for a time and that afterward came back into it at intervals. He pictured the sprawling body of the dead gunman, lying as they had left it in the deserted log barn. He saw the bars of vivid moonlight upon the distorted face, and heard again the fiddling of katydids in the stunted oaks outside the stable.

"I wish I knew if that piece in the paper really was about Bull!" he told the girl. "Suppose they didn't find him!"

"He'd be dead by now, anyhow!" Dolly said listlessly. "We may as well forget him!"

Monte went on thinking to himself. The feeling came to him that he ought to go back to that bowl in the hills and see for himself! It would be safe enough. If the various posses had missed it until now, they probably would overlook it altogether. If they had already found it and had taken Bull away, alive or dead, they would not return.

The feeling grew upon him that he must settle this doubt.

"For two cents I'd go back to that buzzards' roost and see if Bull is lying there," he told the girl. "Somehow I can't get it out of my mind!"

"Forget it!" Dolly said, almost angrily. "It wouldn't do any good!"

She turned to look into Monte's face. Her eyes softened. He saw tears in them.

"You're getting yourself all fussed up," she added. "Better go out and have a long walk on the beach. I don't feel like stirring out of the house—you go by yourself!"

It was nearly evening, Monte realized. The passing of the day had made little impression on him. Another idea had come into his feverish mind. He nodded.

"All right, I'll go," he agreed. "I'll be gone maybe a couple of hours. Don't worry about me. If the bulls really knew who they were looking for, they wouldn't be messing around the way they are!"

He went out into the evening. The quiet street was nearly deserted as Monte strode swiftly along it. After a time he caught a car and rode eastward till he was in the main business portion of the city.

Monte Duncan left the car after a time. A short walk brought him to the massive building which housed the post office and some Federal bureaus. He went in through the revolving door and glanced cautiously around. The lobby was almost deserted. A watchman sat reading near the elevators, and a straggler or two showed in the distance, in the direction of the lock boxes. Monte made his way directly to the bulletin board and began to examine the various documents tacked there.

There were sheafs of formal notices from the office of the United States Marshal, whose quarters were somewhere upstairs. The newcomer glanced indifferently over them—nothing that concerned him. Then he was standing before a row of reward bills, all of them bearing photographs and several giving Bertillon measurements and finger print formulae of wanted men.

Monte stared at these exhibits with morbid interest. There was one dealing with the notorious De Autremont brothers and their raid on the Southern Pacific. He read it through, fascinated. That was the bait that had gotten him into this trap! But afterward he examined the others, and a strange, hunted look came into his face. There was no copy here of the bill he had seen beside the restaurant door. Here, in the post office, where such things were usually posted!

Monte left the Federal building, stood irresolute for a time, and then turned south. He walked nearly a mile before he came to the Union Station. He went in, betook himself to the smoking room, and again was carefully examining a row of reward notices. Again the De Autremont brothers, and half a dozen others, but the bill he had come all this distance to find was not here.

The feeling of that "hant hand," poised diabolically over him, was like an overshadowing physical presence. His teeth set and he turned back into the city. Some time later he again climbed aboard a street car and journeyed out to the beach. His head was bowed and he tried hard to still the nervous activity of his mind. He dreaded to face Dolly with this new and ominous discovery, although she probably would not feel the force of it as he did. He hurried along the street, resisting an impulse to break into a run.

Eventually he found himself in front of the little house. He paused, looking up through the heavy dusk. Those upper windows were unlighted, and he half fancied he could see the whitish blur of the girl's face, looking down at him. Then he decided it was just a reflection on the windowpane. He went up the path and let himself in at

the front door. He mounted the stairs two at a time and tapped at Dolly's door.

There was no response. He turned the handle and stepped inside. The room was dark as an old hat.

"Dolly!" he said, his voice harsh and strident in the hush of the evening. "Dolly!"

There was no response, and when Monte's shaking fingers found the light switch and shoved it down, the ensuing blinding light showed him that the room was empty.

Smiler Pittman sat comfortably back in an armchair, looking down through the smoke of his cheroot into the small, ugly eyes of a man lying in an iron bed. Mr. Pittman's recumbent companion had a face that must always have been grotesque, but now sickness and suffering had ground it down into a hideous mask. Under a thatch of wiry whiskers, the skin showed yellow and drawn.

Bull Purvis returned the postal inspector's benevolent gaze with one in which chagrin and rage struggled for the mastery.

"I expect you think you're smart, hauling me back into this ornery world where I ain't never got nothing but kicks and bad treatment!" he observed in a voice that trembled with passion. "But it ain't going to do you no good. I got nothing to say!"

"Dear, dear!" murmured the big man in the armchair. "And the doctor says you can have a squab for dinner!"

"Squab? One of them canary birds? I could eat a barbecued elephant!"

Smiler nodded.

"I haven't a doubt of it, and you shall, as soon as doc gives the word! But you're lucky to be here at all, you know. If I hadn't found you——"

"I didn't ask you to. You ain't going to get no thanks out of me!"

"Well, I'm not surprised. You're an ungrateful cuss, Purvis. And as for your having anything to say, it won't be necessary. I just picked up a little friend of yours—anyhow she says she knows you well. And her deposition clears up the few little details I hadn't worked out for myself. It won't be necessary for you to talk, although if you felt it would make you rest easier——"

Bull Purvis had been studying his companion's face with malignant intensity. Now a sneering smile came about his lips.

He grunted.

"A deposition from the skirt, eh? Well, that's nice. Then you won't have to pester me, trying to get me to rumble!"

He caught the flicker of annoyance in the Federal sleuth's small, keen eyes. This confirmed him in his resolution to say nothing.

Smiler Pittman sighed and stood up.

"You may change your mind," he stated.

"I won't! I ain't the talking kind!"

"And he isn't," Mr. Pittman told himself, silently, as he opened the bedroom door and went out into the hall.

A short, deep-chested man with close-cropped, black hair revealing a bullet head, slouched beside the door. He nodded.

"All right, chief, I'll watch him!" he announced, in answer to an unspoken order. "Did he rumble?"

"Not a word. Beyond what I got out of him while he was delirious—the name of this Duncan party, and the moll—he hasn't been of much use so far. Keep an eye on him. He's a bad actor!"

Smiler Pittman continued along the hall to a room at the front. He tapped on the panel and entered.

Two women sat inside. One might have been the matron of a modern city prison, or even a "lady cop." She was middle aged, substantially built, and had one of those grimly sympathetic faces one sometimes sees about police headquarters. She sat composedly in a chair

beside the room's one window, knitting. In another chair, nervously erect, sat Dolly.

"Well, how is our little friend?" the postal inspector asked amiably. "How has she been behaving, Mrs. McCann?"

"Perfectly!" said Mrs. McCann, with her grim smile. "She's a regular little lady!"

"Now, that's what I call nice!" Smiler enthused. "I've just been having a long talk with your old friend, Bull Purvis," he added, turning to the girl. "He's getting along nicely—asked after you and Monte and sent you his regards. He's been telling me all about this little job; talked as much as the doctor would let him, of course."

Dolly looked steadily at Smiler Pittman. Her face was colorless, so that her blue eyes seemed almost dark. Tragedy was in her expression.

"I wouldn't believe you on a stack of Bibles!" she said distinctly. "Let me go. You haven't got anything on me—I haven't done anything wrong!"

Smiler shook his head reprovingly.

"Mustn't!" he murmured. "Every time you open that pretty mouth, you give yourself away! Who but a gun moll would say, 'You haven't got anything on me?' That's regular crook talk, you know!"

Dolly flushed, and tears sprang into her eyes.

"Let me go!" she pleaded. "I don't know anything about anything. I want to get away from here!"

"What do you suppose Monte will think?" Smiler asked softly, his merciless eyes boring into the girl's face. "We didn't pinch him, you know. He's back at the little cottage, by this time. And he'll think——"

A tortured cry came from his prisoner's lips. She buried her face in her slim hands. Mrs. McCann, interrupting her knitting for a moment, looked with wincing sympathy at the bright, bowed head. Smiler pursed his lips and studied both women. He didn't resent the obvious sympathy of his employee—rather he valued it highly. If he couldn't get a direct confession from this stubborn young woman, he might be able to lacerate her feelings so that she would confide in Mrs. McCann.

"Business is business!" he reminded himself philosophically. "I hate to do this, as the old man said to his son when he ruined his best razor strop on him. But folks mustn't fool with the mails. It simply can't be done!"

And, having refreshed his agile mind with these reflections, he turned with renewed determination upon the girl in the chair.

"Monte is certainly going to think you've pulled your freight on him, sister," he remarked. "Now, just you look at it this way: if you come through with a nice little statement, Monte will be out of his troubles right off. I'll pick him up and let you have a long talk with him. You know as well as I do that he's suffering the tortures of the damned at this moment. He thinks you've turned him down, right when he was in trouble. Before long he'll begin to tell himself you must have had some other guy, or you wouldn't have done it! The tortures of the damned, writhing in jealous despair——"

"Don't!" the girl cried. "I can't bear it!"

"I was hoping you couldn't. Now you just get busy and dictate me a little statement—names, dates, and everything."

Dolly leaped unexpectedly from her chair. Before Smiler Pittman knew what was happening, she had flown at him and seized him by the hair.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she screamed, her voice rising higher at every repetition of the explosive monosyllable. "Oh——"

But Smiler had had enough. He gently disengaged himself and handed the hysterical young woman over to Mrs. McCann. Somewhat ruefully he

smoothed down his ruffled crest. He shook his head at his assistant, grinned sheepishly, and withdrew into the hall.

"Round one—Pittman receives right and left to the jaw and hard jab in the stomach!" he mumbled. "And that ain't the worst of it. That young woman won't rumble, not in a thousand years. She'll cool down pretty quick, dab at her eyes with her handkerchief, and go into a sulk; refuse to talk and most likely to eat. I know her kind!"

The postal inspector's prediction proved eminently correct. Dolly turned her face to the wall, metaphorically speaking. She even ignored Mrs. McCann. And the big gonoph with the rapidly healing pistol wound between his ribs was equally obdurate.

Smiler Pittman went methodically from one to the other, his eyes narrowed, determined, alert. There was something feline in the big man's soft movements. But for all this watchful determination, he was baffled. He had no case, none that a skillful criminal attorney would not laugh out of court. He was playing for the only thing that would clinch things for the government —a full confession.

Men came and went, big men and little ones, fat men and thin fellows. They entered Mr. Pittman's offices, on the lower floor of the building in which he was holding his prisoners, at all hours of the day and night. Smiler never seemed to sleep. He was always "on tap," always fresh—and smiling. But that smile was mechanical, in these latter days. There was beneath it an undercurrent of uneasiness and of indecision.

One evening a little old man in gold-rimmed glasses came quietly in to report. Mr. Bickdale was one of Smiler's oldest operatives, both in years and in service. Now he was smiling.

"He moved again to-day, chief!" he commented. "Sure, the third time in four days! And he's been tramping the streets. I slipped in while he was out, this afternoon, and posted a bill beside his door. He's getting a wild look in his eyes."

Smiler was about to reply, but the phone bell rang and he turned to pick up the instrument. In a confidential tone he said, "Hello?"

Then for a time he listened. His face was alert. With a brisk, "Right!" he hung up.

"On the run at last!" he said. "And that means we've got him! Jamison just phoned from the station. Our man has bought a ticket for a little dump down the line—Sommerville. Jamison and O'Neil are on the spot!"

Smiler slammed down the lid of his roll-top desk, glanced swiftly around his office, and headed for the door.

"He'll talk!" he snarled. "I'm giving him just ten days, and I'll have him so tame he'll be begging to be allowed to talk!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE.

MONTE DUNCAN, in Sommerville, had a strange experience. He had come here on a sudden, feverish caprice, with the feeling of that ghostly hand stretched out exultantly above him. The city was unbearable, with Dolly gone. He found himself beginning to wonder if there could have been any one else.

Madness lay in that direction, and he knew it. He caught up his hat, drove his weary body as fast it could go to the railroad station, and bought a ticket at haphazard. For several hours he rested.

Finishing his first meal at the Hotel Sommerville, he left the dining room and entered the lobby. A terrific row broke out in front of the hotel. Monte saw the row of fat traveling salesmen who had been holding down the comfortable chairs in the window on the street depart hurriedly for the front

door. Frowning but wearily curious, he followed them.

Yells and execrations and the sound of scuffling feet came to him, as he reached the doorway. Next moment he saw that two khaki-clad town officers—a marshal and a deputy sheriff—were engaged in a hand-to-hand battle with a big, roughly dressed tramp. One of the officers had pinioned him from behind. His companion had just wrenched a wicked-looking revolver from the hobo's fist.

The officers were unceremoniously shoved, jerked, and kicked. They redoubled their zeal and the marshal shouted at some men who were standing at a safe distance, staring, open-mouthed.

"Give—give us—a hand here!" he panted. "I summons you in the name of the law!"

The unwilling posse closed in, but by this time the deputy sheriff had succeeded in tripping his prisoner. The marshal leaped upon his back, flourishing a pair of handcuffs. With the assistance of the citizens' committee, he soon had the hobo manacled.

The thing had happened so swiftly that Monte had had no time to adjust his mind to it. He saw that the captive was smeared with crimson across his villainous-looking face, and that his big arms were tensed as he strained like a wild beast against the clutch of the handcuffs. Then he was being shoved off down the walk.

"What's it all about?" one of the traveling salesmen asked Monte.

The latter shook his head, but a fat citizen who had danced about and made a bluff at helping suddenly spoke excitedly.

"That fellow was a bank robber. The marshal's been watching him for a couple of hours. You saw that revolver he had, and there's been a rumor around town that one of the bandits that held up the train last month was headed this way. I expect Zeke is after the reward!"

Monte was aware of a queer, sick feeling in his chest. Turning hurriedly, he went back into the hotel.

So, his flight was known—or suspected? That pot-headed clown thought he had caught one of the train robbers! He went through the lobby and up to his room. Seating himself beside the window, he began to think.

Just rumor, and the chances were that every country town in the State was having similar convulsions. The tramp had probably been doing a little panhandling. Monte's mind steadied, and presently he hauled out his packet of cigarettes and began to smoke. The bitter tang of the tobacco comforted him.

"I'm safe!" he told himself dully. "If it's bums and hobos they're looking for, they won't bother me!"

He looked down with a pondering frown at his natty suit and slim, polished shoes. No, he would never be mistaken for a tramp. And having arrived at this conclusion, he stumbled across to his bed, placed a thick, goatskin wallet under the pillow, and lay down to rest. He closed his eyes and saw before him, as plain as life, the smiling face of his Dolly. With a low, tortured cry he sprang up and began to pace the floor.

At six that evening, the young gunman left his room and returned to the lobby. At the double door connecting with the stairway he paused. He saw no one but the plump traveling men, sitting again like contented Buddhas in the big window facing the street. Monte left his place of observation and walked toward the dining room. He passed the compartment where the baggage of outgoing guests was stored. Next moment, as he was continuing his journey across the lobby, his strange adventure began. A hand was laid on his arm!

Monte whirled, his face suddenly

white and stiff. Through distended eyes he stared into the red, scowling face of the town marshal.

"Don't make a move, young feller!" the latter commanded. "Look behint you!"

Monte did. The deputy whom he had seen that morning stood covering Monte Duncan with a sawed-off shotgun.

"We ain't taking no chances!" the burly marshal declared. "Hold your arms up over your head!"

Monte stammered a question.

"What you want me for? I haven't done anything!"

"Oh, most likely not, but you got a gat strapped on under your coat! A certain party seen it there and tolt me about it. Mebbe you got a license to carry concealed weapons?"

Monte shook his head. He realized that part of the harness by which his pistol was swung under his arm must have shown above his coat collar—or perhaps the weapon itself had worked back and proclaimed its presence by a telltale bulge. His mind was floundering.

"You're pinching me for carrying a gat?" he asked thickly.

"You said it! We don't aim to have no gunmen roosting in our town!"

The prisoner's thoughts began to clear. His arrest was a fluke, but it might easily lead to his undoing. If they telegraphed up to the city and had an identification expert sent down——"

"Look here," he growled, "I'll pay my fine!"

The marshal, who had by this time relieved him of his pistol, shook his head.

"You got to be locked up till morning, mister, and then you'll be taken before the squire. He may fine you, and he may give you a jail sentence. We don't believe in folks toting guns in this here city!"

The strange adventure continued. Monte was hustled along the street and marched up six steps that led to the iron-faced door of the jail. He saw a row of barred windows, in the brick wall to his right. Then he was quickly inside.

A cell door clanged shut and the voice of his captor came triumphantly to him.

"Better sit down on your cot and take it easy, young feller! You'll have something to eat when the sheriff gets around to bring it to you."

Monte sat down. He didn't believe the marshal's yarn that his arrest had been for carrying concealed weapons. There was a feeling of unreality about it, as if he were in the grip of a particularly vivid dream.

Monte had forgotten about the other prisoner, gathered in earlier in the day, but some time after dark the fellow brought himself to the young gunman's attention. The sheriff had come in with supper. He was a plump, jolly-looking little man, who now wore a kitchen apron tied about his neck. He rested an iron tray on one fat knee while he unlocked Monte's cell door. Afterward he deposited a substantial supper on the end of the canvas cot, let himself out, and again turned the key.

He disappeared down the dimly lighted jail corridor and presently Monte heard him unlocking another grating. A door creaked open, and next moment there came a cry, quickly muffled; a scuffling sound, and after that the thud of a heavy body striking the cement floor.

Swift, running steps were approaching—not the sheriff's steps. Monte realized that even before he saw the hulking figure hurrying past his cell.

Instantly he was at the bars. He caught them in his trembling hands and tried to rattle them.

"Wait!" he cried. "Let me out! If you don't unlock me, I'll raise a row that will bring them all running!"

He knew what had happened. The hobo in that other cell had throttled the

sheriff, grabbed his keys, and was escaping.

Now the ruffian paused. That threat to raise a disturbance stopped him in his tracks.

"What you in fer?" he growled.

"For toting a rod—and other things!"

A moment of hesitation, then a disparaging grunt. Keys rattled and the cell door was unfastened.

"Be careful! If you get me jugged again, I'll do for you!"

From the first, Monte Duncan felt the quality of menace in that other man's presence. He recognized the type—the big fellow was an old-time yegg; one of the sort that stole rides on freight trains, blew up small-town banks and post offices, "shot it out" with posses and with the law.

"I got the clown's gat!" the big fellow said, over his shoulder. "Don't think I won't croak you, bo! Watch your step!"

Monte hurried silently along, and a moment later the two were outside the jail, in the night.

"I'm going this way, an' you're going that!" the yegg snarled, as they stood face to face in the darkness. "Beat it, see?"

Monte was confused and shaken.

"I'm not going to bite you or give you the itch!" he protested. "They've got me on the run. Let me travel with you a while!"

The man stared murderously down at him. He seemed to reflect. Then he jerked his head. Perhaps he had decided that it would be safest to take this encumbrance with him.

"Come on, then. But, so help me, if you make any breaks I'll bump you off!"

In spite of the threat of death, the company of this surly, ill-natured outlaw was comforting to Monte Duncan. It was like forming a partnership with a wolf or a mastiff.

"They'll never think of looking for me in a hobo jungle!" the younger bandit realized with a throb of hope. "All I want now is to get away. I want to forget it all!"

But again he was seeing the dancing, blue eyes of his moll smiling at him out of the dark.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE ROAD.

MONTE DUNCAN was fighting his way through a night incredibly black and ominous. Away to his left roared the ocean, its voice low-pitched and moaning, like a reverberating growl, and then rising into a roar that shook the earth. The sea wind blew into his face and took his breath away. He was shivering with cold.

But there was a hand upon his arm—a small, warm, comforting hand. Slowly he remembered. That was his moll, Dolly. She was the stanch kid. Neither the threat of men nor the brute force of Nature could shake her. She believed in him, and that helped him believe in himself. Let it blow!

And it did. Hoarse voices screamed in his ears. The wind had him in its grip; it was squeezing him, shaking him——

With a wild cry, the young fellow sat up and opened his eyes. His face was ghastly, and he was fighting for breath. The storm was gone. A lopsided moon swung high above him and close at hand burned the embers of last night's fire. Monte groaned again. The touch of those warm fingers had gone from his arm. The lowering face turned observantly upon his was the face of the yegg, Robinson. He sat with his knees folded like a Turk or a tailor, staring into the bemused eyes of the younger man.

"At it again, bo!" the big fellow grumbled. "It's my opinion you're going bugs!"

"I was dreaming of my girl," Monte replied. "I thought she was here!"

"Not likely. And we ain't going to be long. Get the sleep knocked out of your head."

They were camped in a gully near the railroad track. Robinson had mended the fire and now crouched beside it, making his way laboriously through a handbill he had torn from one of the supporting timbers of the water tank, back in the last little town. Monte got to his feet and approached. Over the big fellow's shoulder he read.

For the arrest or capture, dead or alive, of two bandits who on the night of October 3d escaped from jail in Sommerville, after killing the sheriff, a reward of one thousand dollars will be paid. These men are dangerous. If seen or apprehended, telegraph the chief of police, Sommerville.

The yegg looked up at his companion. A relishing grin contorted his red, dirty face.

"You know, bo, they stretch them ropes a year before they use 'em!" he gloated. "That's to take all the slack out of them—so's when a man's weight comes down he won't get no spring out of the hemp. And they tie a big knot so's it'll hit his spine, in the neck."

"Don't!" Monte groaned. "For the love of heaven——"

"Hey? Love of what? Say, there ain't no heaven. When the chaplain gets through mumbling his piece, and they slip the hood down over your eyes——"

"Don't!" Monte cried, his voice suddenly breaking. "I can't stand it! I didn't know you'd killed that poor devil!"

"Oh, didn't you? I suppose if you had you wouldn't have come out? Oh, no, you was just crazy to stick. I couldn't hardly get you to come along with me! Go on, you make me sick. You're a crook, ain't you?"

Monte was silent. His face glistened with sweat.

"A crook ain't got no right to believe in heaven," Robinson growled. "If he believes in that sort of truck, he ort to believe in law. Me, I don't believe in nothing. You was talking about a dame, your girl. Don't you know a woman just takes up with a man for what she can get out of him? Parasites, that's what they all are. Where's this skirt now? Double crossed you for another guy that could buy her more perfume and fur coats, I'll bet!"

Monte stared down. The yegg still crouched by the fire, like a gigantic bullfrog. His eyes were greedy and he licked his lips.

"It's a rotten world, and every one in it is crooked!" he droned on. "The women are parasites, and every man-jack you meet will turn you in if he can get a price for your ears. You'd tip the cops off to me if you dared. I'd serve you the same way. But when we think of that last jig they'll make us dance, with nothing but air under our feet, and a noose about our necks, shutting off our breath——"

"In the devil's name, shut up!" Monte shouted, beside himself with terror. "You act like you enjoyed thinking about it!"

"I do," Robinson agreed. "You got no business sitting down to a meal if you don't like the kind of dessert they'll serve you. Every crook knows he's headed for the pen or the gallows. There never was one of them yet smart enough to beat the law—not because the bulls are clever, mark you. They ain't. Most of them belong to the boob class. But it's like any other gambling game—the house has a percentage against you and that'll get you in the end. The whittlers and clowns and cops can make forty mistakes and start all over, as good as ever. But you and me—the first time we slip is likely to be the last. So far we've kept ahead of them. They've posted their bills—we've tore down six, but there's plenty more, you can bet. We're giving them a run for

their money. Come on, now, we got to catch the rattler that comes through here at five!"

Dawn was in the air. Monte Duncan watched his companion warm up the remnants of the stew and brew a pot of coffee. Robinson was clever at this sort of thing. And, as he had said, he made the flight a strenuous, mile-eating affair.

Flight—the very spirit of breathless, heart-bursting departure! They had traveled on foot and under trains. They had huddled in box cars and clung to the top of passenger trains, where the hot sparks from the engine burned holes in their clothing, and the smoke turned them black as Africans. Robinson was a man of iron. Monte came to look upon him as a sort of Flying Dutchman, speeding over the earth with gigantic strides, his coat tails flying out behind him.

"Step on it, bo; we can go faster!" was his watchword. "They'll get us in the end, sure. Our hemp is growed, and twisted into rope. It's hanging with a hundred pounds of scrap iron fastened to it over at the big house, right now. They'll hang us by the necks till we are dead, and then take us over and plant us two feet deep on a rocky hillside. All over, but we'll make them work for it! Step on it—faster—faster!"

They caught the early train, where it topped a stiff grade and was slowed almost to a man's walk. They were inside an evil-smelling car which had been used for conveying ground bone at some recent date. Monte cowered in a corner, brooding over what his companion had said. All men snitches, and all women——

"It's a lie!" he muttered, half aloud.

"Is that so? Thinking of what I was saying to you, bo? Listen; I'll bet that moll of yours has had many a good laugh about you. Ditched you, I'll gamble. Sure, there's only one way to beat that game—ditch them first!"

"I wouldn't have done it to save my life!" Monte snarled. "And I don't believe Dolly ever turned me down!"

"Oh, yes you do!" the yegg chuckled. "I can tell from your voice you know darned well she got another sweetie. Never mind, it won't make no difference to you much longer!"

Monte shivered. He closed his eyes, but the face of the girl he was trying to forget stood out before him as if a spotlight had been turned on it. He got to his feet with a muttered oath.

"I want to get out of this!" he said in a thick, feverish voice. "You can stay, if you want to."

"Where you want to go?"

"I'm going back to the big burg as fast as I can get there! You go where you want to!"

He slid open the side door of the car. The sun was up now, and before him, seeming slowly to revolve as the freight train moved ahead, lay a smiling countryside. The young fellow leaped. He struck the slanting gravel roadbed, rolled over a couple of times, and heard a disgusted voice at his elbow.

"You're a fool—but I'll stay with you. The big burg? All right, I know that town!"

Monte was silent. His thoughts were becoming confused. He and his companion walked back along the track till they reached a country station, with a deserted waiting room and a siding. Here they hid in the brush beside a creek and waited.

Monte dropped into fitful sleep. He was dreaming again of Dolly. She came toward him over pastures spangled with buttercups. She was smiling, but there was a question in her eyes.

She came close, her lips parted, her eyes like stars.

"What have you done with the wallet, Monte?" she asked. "The wallet Bull stole?"

He was unable to reply. A terrible fear came over him, and he saw the

girl's face turn sorrowful. Her back was toward him now and she was walking away, over the flower-sprinkled fields. Monte tried to shout after her.

He again awoke, trembling, his hair stirring on his frozen skull. He sat up and instinctively touched the goatskin wallet in his inside coat pocket.

Robinson, the yegg, was watching him narrowly, as if he were spelling out a page of coarse print. He seemed to linger on the sunken, desperate eyes, the twitching, defeated mouth. He seemed to weigh and appraise the substance left in this worn and broken creature.

"Ten days!" he muttered. "That was what I gave him—and we've made it in nine!"

After that the big hobo straightened his broad shoulders, which he had carried in a sort of sinister crouch. He stripped off and threw from him his foul old coat. He stretched his arms above his head, and drew in deep breaths of the pure fall air. Magically his scowl had given place to a grin.

"Brother," he crooned, beaming down upon Monte, "let's make a dicker! Let's just pretend I'm your godfather. I'm going to give you two wishes, see? Now, be careful. Remember about the old woman that ended with a loaf of bread hitched to the end of her nose—she had her wishes, but she threw them all away! Go slow—what you wishing for most of all, at this minute?"

Monte stared. Broken and faltering, he replied to the question.

"My girl—Dolly!"

"Meaning that you'd give your right eye to know she didn't turn you down? All right. I'm as good as my word. Here goes—hoc obiter dicta presto come a seven! Now the young lady is in my house in the city, and she sent you this note! You can have it read in a moment. But let's have that second wish over with!"

"About—the murder?"

"Meaning you wish to have it wiped off the slate, and our friend the sheriff restored to good standing in this world of flivvers and radios? It's did, brother! No more hanging hemp for you or me! And I hope I never have to give another guy a line of talk like that again—never'll be plenty soon for yours truly! But I had to keep up the barrage, brother.

"Now, about this note. Before I hand it over to you, I want you to write me out a little statement on your own hook. You'll see what Miss Dolly has told me in a minute, nice and complete. And Bull—good old Bull! Why, that man's got a memory for detail that's amazing! But I want your story of that little holdup, in your own words. Here's my fountain pen, and a pad to write on!"

Monte silently accepted the writing equipment his amazing companion handed him. He moistened his cracked lips and croaked a question.

"What you want me to say?"

"The truth, brother! All of it, and nothing but! I guess you know by now that there ain't no good substitute for it. Just you spiel your story in your own words—how the job was planned, how you undertook to put it through, how it went blooie—with names and dates."

Monte pondered and began to write. He was too tired to think clearly, but he knew this sordid story by heart. He wrote slowly, read through his account, and handed the paper to his companion.

The latter glanced over it with swiftly moving eyes. His face was alert and capable. His smile was like a second sun. He nodded.

"Just put your signature to the foot of that!" he commanded.

Monte signed the confession. The big man twitched it out of his fingers, folded it twice, and thrust it into his trousers pocket, which he buttoned shut. Then, with a genial grin, he handed

Monte the dainty note he had been holding in plain sight all this time.

Monte Duncan felt a sob in his throat as he unfolded it, and read:

DEAR MONTE: I am sending this by the man who took me away from the cottage. He is some sort of dick or bull, and he's so crooked his shadow looks like a corkscrew. Be careful what you say before him. He claims that Bull is here in this house, but he probably is lying. I didn't run away from you, dear. I love you now, and always will!

DOLLY.

Smiler Pittman nodded, and sighed.

"A nice little lady, and as soon as you and her are out of the big house, you get married. I'll be your best man. I'll do what I can to get you both off with a short sentence. You didn't actually get into that mail car, you know, and that'll help some. Also, you ain't built to be a crook, and neither is little bright eyes.

"I got a pretty good line on you both, while I was shadowing you. That was why I grabbed Dolly. I knew it would bust both your hearts, but they had to be busted. Folks can't fool with Uncle Sam's property and get away with it, you know. Yes, I had to play a pretty low brand of poker, but business is business."

Smiler winced at some unpleasant memory, then again turned on his jovial expression. He shook his head slowly. "You're wondering how I got the spot on you, after you was so clever in sinking that automobile? Well, to begin with, Bull wasn't dead—he'll be tried same time as you. I had a bright idea and got some boys I know on the newspaper to run that little yarn, and the obituary notice.

"Then I stuck around with a big tin star pinned onto my coat till you showed up. I had a good description of you from some of your old pals, after Bull gave your name away in his delirium. But I couldn't be quite sure it was you till you turned round and hot-footed it away from the undertaker's. Then I knowed I had you. You took the taxicab I'd planted at the corner and sailed home. After that I got those fake reward bills printed, and had one stuck up for you to run onto every so often. That got your goat—it always does!"

Monte's mind was groping toward the light.

"You got yourself pinched—in Sommerville?" he whispered.

"Absolutely! I wanted a chance to run around with you, and I hit on the idea of making you pick me out, and ask to go with me. Then the yarn about murdering the sheriff, and some more bills—my men looked after that for me. I've kept in touch with them, right along, while you were snoring. Anything else, brother? There'll be a train along in about five minutes!"

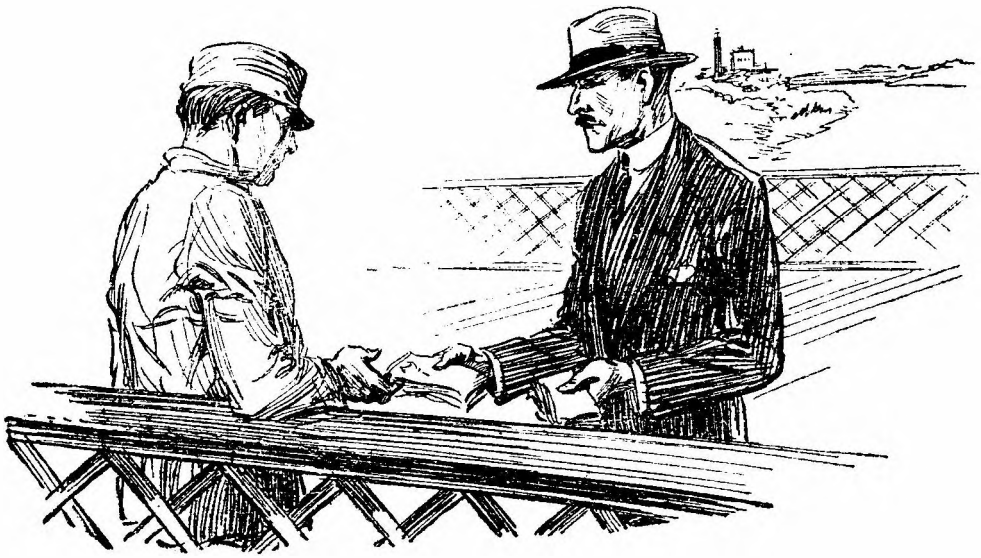
Monte sighed. He shook his head resignedly and reached into his pocket. Drawing out the wallet he had come to look upon with mingled dread and fascination, he handed it across to Smiler.

"I didn't touch a cent of it," he muttered. "Somehow, I couldn't bring myself to it! I felt that the money was hoodooed!"

"Sure—stolen money always is. Besides, getting so fond of Miss Dolly was turning you straight, without you knowing it. A little stretch in one of Uncle Sam's homes'll do the rest for you. But I knowed all about this junk."

Smiler Pittman slid off the rubber band about the wallet and spread the latter open. It was stuffed with cigar coupons.

"You see, the gent that lost this money had a hankering to connect with it again!" he concluded. "So I slid it out of your pocket that first night after we left Sommerville, and switched these little slips of paper for the goldbacks. I sent the mazuma back to the fellow it belonged to. I knew you'd never try to spend none of the toadskins—I could see it in your eyes!"



THANKS TO THE DOCTOR

By Donald Van Riper

Author of "Where He Aimed," etc.

TO Bill Harland it seemed that life was an endless succession of troubles. He had steadily sunk lower and lower beneath the weight of misery until, at last, he had reached the uttermost fringe of respectability. Looking back, he was amazed at the idea that he ever had quit a good job voluntarily. That had been the first step.

He had quit a job. The very thought wrung a queer smile from Bill Harland. For one reason or another he had quit many jobs. In one place there was no chance ahead. In another the boss played favorites. In another there were three sons who would get the plums as they came to manhood. Always he had been displeased with conditions. The thing finally came to be a habit.

Then he had been fired. The memory brought a shamefaced flush to Bill Harland's tanned face. The stigma clung to him. Only drifters and bums were fired in the town of Wirecliff. Too late, he discovered, that drifting is but the prelude to sinking.

With him he had taken Jeannie and the kids. Her faith in him was as blind as the children's. She believed that some day hard luck would cease hounding them. Jeannie kept on smiling. Some day they would catch up with their debts. Some day the children would all be well at once. Some day they would get their share of happiness.

Bill Harland's luck had turned. The pathetic feature of that turning was that he did not dare to share the knowledge with his wife. She would not understand that if he did not take the money it would be his finish on the Wirecliff drawbridge. Jeannie would never understand that bootleg money was fair game to those lucky enough to be in its path.

It was not enough that Land had political pull sufficient to get him fired.

He must be bought. The man on that bridge had to be on Land's pay roll. He must be part of Land's organization. It was cash money, easy money. Bill Harland had come already to like the feel of it beneath his fingers.

This morning he was waiting for Land's coming. Last night there had been two of Land's trucks that had rumbled over the bridge, and so Land would have a little present to make this morning. It was easy to wait here. Shoreward, stretched the bridge across the sun-flecked river. Over there was Wirecliff with the factory stacks showing above the trees. In plain view on the other bank was Harland's house.

He glanced that way and saw Jeannie running across the sun-baked yard in pursuit of the baby. The two older children were at school. He had watched them trudge by on their way to Wirecliff an hour before. Good boys, both of them. Young Bill, big and vigorous, showing at twelve a promise of duplicating Harland's powerful build. The second boy, Eddie, was different. He had a slight and wiry strength, a gentler face. He was more Jeannie's child. Both good kids, and the baby, named after Jeannie, was just about all that a baby could be in Bill Harland's eyes.

He looked around swiftly as he heard the swish of tires dragging against the flooring of the bridge. It was Land. He sat there in the roadster and contemplated Harland.

"Well?"

Harland waited. When Land wore that thoughtful look it behooved men like Harland to wait.

"Well," repeated Land, "why the daydream."

Harland grinned. "I was thinking about a little cash transaction."

Land drew a crisp ten-dollar bill from his pocket. "There you are," said Land. "A ten-spot."

The money fairly flashed out of sight into Bill's pocket. He was not quite hardened to this sort of thing. He was still conscious of the taint of easy money.

Land smiled. There was nothing pleasant in this expression. Basically there was nothing pleasant about the man, anyway. There was a brooding shadow of thick brows over Land's hard eyes. There was a grim set to the mouth that no forced smile could really wipe out. In his heart Bill feared Land. It was not only the danger of losing his job as bridge tender. His fear went deeper than that. It even went deeper than the hold of that tainted money. Beneath that prosperous exterior was still the creature of Land's beginnings. Balked or crossed there was nothing that Land would not be capable of doing.

Land's voice roused him like the crack of a whip. "To-night," said Land, "I want to change the program a little." He shut off the motor and climbed out. Bill Harland followed him as he walked over to the rail of the bridge. As his leader propped his elbows on the railing and stared out on the river, Bill followed suit.

"To-night," said Land. "I am going to give you a chance to make some real money."

Bill shot a sidewise glance at the other man. Real money? He wondered what Land's definition of real money was. He wondered just what he would have to do to earn it. Bill's glance returned thoughtfully to the river flowing deep and swift beneath them.

"Could you use three hundred dollars?"

Bill gasped. Could he use three hundred dollars? That would clean up all his bills—all the money he had borrowed. He could get Jeannie a dress. He might even let young Bill have a ball glove. Three hundred dollars! He almost doubted his own ears.

"Three hundred dollars," repeated Land. "What do you say?"

Bill looked at him. Land's face was a mask. He could read nothing there. The very size of the sum staggered Bill. There would be more involved than a mere matter of silence. The bills in his pocket had been easy money. All that he received them for was to keep his mouth shut concerning Land's rum-running trucks. Simple hush money that was, but this would, he well knew, be something entirely different.

"Don't stand there like a dummy," snapped Land. "Can't you talk?"

Bill nodded.

"What do you say then?"

"Of course I can use three hundred dollars, but——"

"But—what?"

"That's it," choked Bill. "What do I have to do to earn it?"

"Earn it?" Land's laughter was hard as nails. "Get it, you mean. No one ever earns three hundred dollars for doing a favor for a couple of hours."

"What do I have to do?"

"Next door to nothing," answered Land. "I just want you to see that this bridge is out of commission when I want it to be to-night. If you ever get easier pickings than that, let me know."

Bill stared at Land. There must be more to it than this. Why, it was the same thing as handing him three hundred dollars for nothing!

Land spoke now with understanding. "Of course, you're wondering what it is all about. You're trying to guess what else you have to do. And so I'll tell you that it is important. I'll tell you, too, that I want this bridge open at the right time. I want this bridge pointing up and downstream to-night, and I want you to keep it that way, no matter what happens. Can you loosen anything that'll give you a good yarn about how you got the draw open and couldn't get it closed?"

"Three or four things like that could happen," answered Bill. "You can leave that end to me. What I want to know is what it is all about?"

"The less you know the better off you'll be," murmured Land. "And if you fail——"

The pause was significant, packed full of promised penalty for failure.

"If"—Bill hesitated, frightened at his own daring—"if it is as important as all that, maybe three hundred dollars is a cheap price."

"I said three hundred dollars!"

"When do I get paid?"

"To-morrow, of course."

Bill slowly shook his head. "I'd rather get paid now. If this thing is worth three hundred dollars, then I want my money now. Something might happen that I wouldn't get my money to-morrow." He did not deem it wise to be too explicit on this last point. One thing was certain. If Land was paying him three hundred dollars, then this must be some master stroke of criminality that lay ahead. Land, in such an event, might easily be killed if the stakes were big enough. Besides this there was one other idea in Bill's mind. It would be easy for Land to promise three hundred and then conveniently forget the price when the morrow came.

However, Land hauled forth a great roll of bills. "How do you want the money?" he demanded. "Big bills? Little bills?"

"The smaller the better," answered Bill. He was thinking of Jeannie. The possession of anything larger than a ten-dollar bill would quickly stir her to suspicion.

Methodically, but with the speed of experience, Land counted out the money. Then as he leafed back more slowly in a second count, he addressed himself once again to Bill Harland.

"The big thing I'm buying from you is a shut head. You can do everything else as I say, but if you talk——" Land pushed back his lips in a mirthless grin. Bill could not mistake the deadly inference of that sudden silence.

"Don't worry about my talking. And if all you want to do is to fake a breakdown of the draw, why, that'll be very easy."

"That isn't quite all of it," said Land. He turned once more to the rail and pointed to the little rowboat, fastened at the downstream side of the center pier. "That boat better be set adrift along about ten o'clock to-night."

"Say," protested Bill, "I need that boat when there is a real breakdown on this bridge. There isn't another boat for a mile in either direction."

"Cut the boat loose like I tell you at ten to-night," was Land's response. "If you aren't going to follow orders to the dot you'd better hand me back that money."

"All right," sighed Bill, "I'll do as you say."

"And now," added Land, "just give me one of those signs out of the bridge shanty. One of those that says 'Detour—Bridge not Working.' I want to stick one in my car. I can use it to-night."

Land did not have anything further to say until he had stowed the sign safely out of sight under the back deck of the roadster. Then he climbed into the driver's seat. From that point of vantage he spoke to Bill.

"At ten you come out here. Tell your wife you hear a queer noise out on the bridge. First thing you do is to cut that boat loose. Then as soon as you get a chance, open the draw. Without fail have it open at half past ten. That'll leave you out here in the middle and no one will be able to prove that the bridge wasn't broken down. And then, no matter what happens, I want you to stay here and not swing the bridge back until twelve o'clock—no matter what happens. And listen to me, Bill, if you fail me I'll guarantee you'll not live to make another mistake."

This was said in a calm, matter-of-fact voice that made the threat doubly impressive. Had Land pointed a gun at his head, Bill Harland could not have been more convinced that he stood in deadly danger if he failed Land. So he stood there as the other drove off. In his pocket was Land's money. In his heart was fear.

The whistle of an approaching barge roused him. When the draw was open he watched the barge come slowly past. At either end of the bridge he could see the warning gates in place, and there he saw cars waiting impatiently while the barge puffed its weary way upstream. All in a day's work was that sort of thing. Open the draw, close the draw, hold up the land traffic that the slow-going river commerce might go by. Five miles above and a bit more than that below there were other draws. There this same business must be enacted. There some other men earned a monotonous living in a monotonous way.

It was well past noon before he had a chance to hurry over to his house for dinner. He had seen his boys go and come from dinner. As they had passed he had called to them. Now he must face Jeannie. If only there was some way that he could account for the money. He must think up a good story about finding it.

When he walked in the house he forgot all about the money at sight of Jeannie's face. She looked tired and worn. He sensed bad news with one look into her eyes.

"Baby's not feeling very good, Bill."

Bill said nothing. It was an old story. Always there was one thing wrong or another. He waited to hear the rest with his heart aching within

him. Always there was something wrong.

"I just couldn't keep her out of the sun."

"I know," said Bill. "I saw you chasing her early this morning. Where is she?"

"Bed," answered his wife. "She felt a little feverish."

"Best place for her," approved Bill. "It sure is tough, isn't it? You having to do all the work and being nurse most of the time to boot. More hard luck."

"More hard luck," echoed Jeannie. "But"—she braced herself and faced him with a pitifully cheerful smile—"she'll be all right. You better hurry through with your dinner. The fellow at the upper bridge just phoned that there was a string of brick barges coming down."

Bill went at his dinner forthwith. More than ever he wished that he could tell Jeannie about the money in his pockets. That was just the sort of news she needed just now. Yet he was afraid. He must figure out a story that would fool her completely. If she ever guessed the truth that would be the end of everything.

At about four that afternoon, young Bill came limping over the bridge. "Ran a nail in my foot, dad."

Bill told him what to do and warned him not to bother his mother. He sat there wearily then. More hard luck. Always the same story. Bill Harland sat and pondered just how he would account for that three hundred dollars.

Meanwhile Mike Land had been pushing ahead with his plans. Mike had planned one master stroke of crime. He contemplated a haul that would bring him the earnings of half a dozen lifetimes in the space of a few hours. Mike was through with the town of Wirecliff. After to-night his erstwhile acquaintances would see him no more. They might crave the sight of him, but, if possible, he intended that such desires should be in vain. Beginning at nine o'clock to-night, two of the most seasoned bank yeggs in the country would be at work on the strong boxes of the Wirecliff Trust Company. The watchman of the Wirecliff Trust believed that he and Mike Land were equal partners in the scheme and the profits. Mike Land's yeggs would work undisturbed. As Mike thought of that gullible watchman he smiled in that unpleasant way of his.

Besides the two safe experts there were two other men in on this job. These two, Gillin and Searing, were the pick of the bootlegging mob that Land had formed. They were, in fact, the only two who had remained loyal in the face of Land's recent adversity. Land had kept up a front in Wirecliff. That he had been hijacked out of most of his fortune, was the unbelievable truth. That he had lost thousands on thousands, trying to gamble back his lost money, was just as unbelievable.

To the citizens of Wirecliff it was a matter of common knowledge that Land was unduly prosperous for a truckman. If once they found out that he was practically broke it would not take long for them to be after him. So now he was planning one desperate coup. He was buying his way with Bill Harland and with the two safe-cracking gentlemen. Gillin and Searing were each to have a split. Searing and Gillin were going to leave the country with him. It had all been planned out. Their transportation even now reposed in Mike Land's pocket.

When he left Bill Harland that morning, Mike Land sought out "Whip" Gillin and "Red" Searing. To these two alone did Mike Land confide his real plans. The three spent several hours in the privacy of the office of the Land Trucking and Carrier Corporation. It was well past noon

when Mike went over the plan of their escape for the final time.

"Whip, here," he said as he nodded toward Gillin, "has all the dope on the telephone business. So he starts clipping the wires at ten thirty sharp. You say it'll take half an hour."

Whip Gillin nodded and puffed prodigiously at his cigarette.

"Then he can be ready to clear out at eleven. So I don't start the rumpus at the bank till then. And you, Red, you're to be waiting with the boat at the river, and on the other side you're to have your car planted."

Whip Gillin spoke up. "I suppose I'm to get to the boat and wait, too?"

Mike Land nodded and went on. "After the rumpus in town, I'll start off for the bridge. The yeggs will follow me. After that leave it to me."

"There's only one thing that's worrying me," sighed Red Searing. "Suppose that Bill Harland boob doesn't have the draw swung open? You've got it all figured safe enough. We have the only boat for a couple of miles in either direction. The pursuit has to detour twenty miles, no matter which of the other bridges they take. And Whip will have the phones dead all along this side of the river. But——" Searing paused as if again he was weighing the horrid doubt in his mind. "Just suppose that boob doesn't swing the bridge into midstream and keep it there?"

"Don't worry about that," answered Land. "But one thing sure is true—if ever a man had the fear of death in him, it's Bill Harland. And outside of that I've a blame good hunch that Bill Harland will go a long ways for three hundred dollars. Why, when I mentioned that three hundred bucks to that piker you would have thought I'd said a million. From half past ten till midnight he'll be sitting out there seventy-five feet from either shore, and if all the police in the world come he'll stay there. He has a pretty clear idea that I'll get him if anything slips."

"You're the doctor," sighed Red Searing, "and outside of bringing Harland into this I'll say you wrote a swell prescription. We'll get off to a flying start. We'll travel through the open country and be on the train at Wolverton before the alarm is out. Wirecliff being off here on the spur line and the last train going out at ten will leave it so they won't even know we've cut the telegraph wires, too."

Land puffed visibly with pride. "Don't forget that we're leaving the barracks of the State police on this side of the river. This scheme, as I said before, is fool proof."

Land thought that he had a fool-proof scheme. So, too, did Whip Gillin. Only Red Searing had his doubts, and the other two discounted these, for Red was something of a pessimist at best. Land's plans were laid. He had figured everything out. At ten thirty Red Searing was to place that detour sign on the approach road to the bridge. That would turn back all traffic coming into Wirecliff, and none of it could reach Wirecliff by the other roads before quarter past eleven.

Land did not have to wait till ten thirty. He was savagely glad when at nine he and his two hired helpers slipped in to a side alley and thence through a window of the Wirecliff Trust. Alex Cosgrove, night watchman, was the man that let them into the bank.

Cosgrove had been bold enough in the preliminary planning, but now, with the arrival of actuality, his face was pasty white and his hands fairly quivered. The two safe-cracking gentlemen stared at Alex Cosgrove with a sneering sort of pity. Land did not waste a second glance on the older man.

"You two lads get to work," he ordered. "I want this joint cleaned

neater than a turkey the day after Christmas."

The yeggs knew their trade. The Wirecliff Trust represented easy pickings. With the watchman in on the job everything looked rosy. The bank itself was antiquated. Lulled by good luck, the officials had fallen far behind the modern standards of bank protection. Against two modern gentlemen of an old craft, armed with tools and metal-cutting torches, the so-called vaults were almost as futile as so much pasteboard.

Land wanted time. Before he left the bank he was going to toss aside the non-negotiable stuff. There would be a tremendous haul in cash alone. There was the money for three big pay rolls. There was also a large amount of cash from taxes. Land wanted it all.

Land's job was to travel from post to post with Cosgrove while the latter rang in on the watchman's boxes. From time to time he made Cosgrove show himself on the main floor so that passers-by would not be in the least suspicious. At such times Land was madly sorting over securities back of the counters.

The two professionals were going at the vaults like a couple of rats after unguarded cheese. Land was gloating as he packed the loot carefully into the suit case he had brought. At this rate to-morrow would find the Wirecliff Trust a ruined and beggared institution.

At one side Land placed eight thousand dollars in cash. That was the split he had promised the two safe men. He could look at it now and laugh at its insignificance. In contrast with the wealth he was packing, it was but a trifle.

Everything was going with clocklike precision. Land laughed. He was rich —rich beyond his wildest dreams. He looked up to find Cosgrove staring down at him.

"It's like a dream," muttered Cosgrove, "and it is too late now to get out of it."

Land looked up and regarded him with a veiled glance. "I'll say it's too late. I should think you'd be grinning to think that half of this is yours."

Cosgrove shook his head silently and went on mechanically to ring his next watchman's box. Land looked after him and there was something in that look that would have set Cosgrove to screaming if he could have seen it. Land chuckled deep within his throat. The doddering old fool! Did he suppose that Mike Land was going to calmly hand him half of this loot? At eleven o'clock——

It was at ten that Bill Harland left the house. Behind him he could hear the baby whimpering. He looked to see Jeannie with the baby. She was rocking slowly back and forth, the baby in her arms, crooning a bit in time with the moving chair. Bill shook his head as though something had blinded him.

"Don't be long, Bill," whispered Jeannie. "I'm a little frightened. Her eyes look shiny and she feels hot."

Bill growled unintelligibly in his throat. He dared not trust himself to speak. He dared not tell Jeannie that they could afford to have the doctor. He turned back indecisively, thought a moment, and then went on toward the bridge. Dirty money or not, he would earn that three hundred dollars.

Mike Land had been wrong about that. He had earned that money a thousand times in mute agony since he had placed it in his pocket. Perhaps "earned" was the wrong way to put it. He had paid for it. Even money had its price. He was actually sweating as he stepped upon the bridge.

The action of crawling down the center pier and setting the boat adrift steadied him. He swung there, looking at the single light on the darker shore. His wife was there. His flesh

and blood was there. He gulped hard as he thought of the baby. They need never know about this. They would think like all the rest that some accident had happened to the mechanism of the bridge. He looked aloft now.

Up there was the power cable swung high above the bridge level. There was the power he would loose from the controls, and that long span of steel-cased road would swing parallel with the stream. Slowly he started up to the road level again.

He would not move the bridge at once. He would wait a bit. As long as he did it before half past ten it would be all right.

At twenty-five past the hour he still stood staring at the lonely little house. In the opposite direction was the reflected light from the Main Street white way of Wirecliff. He had no eyes for that.

Then his eyes widened. The door of his little house was open. Across the low-voiced river he heard Jeannie calling him. "Bill, oh, Bill!"

There was a note in that distant call that he had never heard before. She had always been so brave. And now in that awful darkness he heard terror calling to him.

Bill ran. When he arrived she was crouched by the phone that the county supplied. He looked at the baby on the couch. Restless little hands, wide eyes shining with fever. He heard that baby voice calling, prattling in delirium.

"The phone, Bill," whispered Jeannie, "I just had central, but now the wire's dead. We'll have to get a doctor. Oh, Bill, she's worse, I tell you."

"I'll go," he gasped. "I'll go." His teeth chattered as though the air he breathed were ice.

He dashed out of the house again. He must get a doctor—the nearest doctor. There was a young fellow, named Richardson, not half a mile from the end of the bridge.

Midway on the bridge he halted. He had remembered. Land wanted that bridge swung wide. And he, Bill Harland wanted it just where it was. He laughed as he thought how Land had threatened him. What were threats now? There was something in the balance now that he cared more for than he did for life itself.

Yet if he left the bridge, Land might contrive to swing it open. And he, Bill Harland, had to get that doctor back there as fast as he could.

Suddenly he found himself in the bridge shanty. There were the controls. Shining pieces of metal. Bill stared wildly. Then inspiration. Three minutes later and he was racing on toward Wirecliff. As he ran, he sobbed with sheer helpless anxiety. Suppose Richardson should be out? Suppose? Suppose? The word pounded in his brain at every stride. He knew fear, but not that selfish fear he had felt under Land's glowering eyes. At this moment he could have faced a dozen dull brutes like Land. He was afraid he would lose this race.

At eleven o'clock young Doctor Richardson reached Bill Harland's house. Bill slumped down in a chair and watched as the doctor leaned over the child on the couch. There was a sureness about this crisp young fellow that put heart in Bill.

At eleven o'clock Mike Land carefully sighted the gun with the silencer at Cosgrove. Before he could press the trigger, Cosgrove turned and screamed. The scream died away in a horrible rattle. Land did not look twice at that wound. Cosgrove was dead. They would mourn him in Wirecliff as a hero.

The yeggs were already in their car. Out came Land and jumped into his own. As the two vehicles rounded the corner into Main Street there was a small group peering curiously in at the bank windows.

Land was exultant. He was getting away with a fortune. He was leading the two yeggs into the hopeless trap of that opened draw. They had reached the outskirts when Land heard the fire siren shrieking the alarm. That would turn every one out. Land was gloating as he thought of the way he had handicapped all pursuit.

Then he saw the bridge. He saw, too, Whip Gillin and Red Searing wildly waving their arms for him to halt. The bridge was in place!

He pulled up sharply. "What's the matter with the bridge?"

"Can't do a thing!" gasped Gillin as he clambered into the car. "The bridge is locked in place. Harland or some one ripped out all the controls and even disconnected the power wires that come to the tower."

Searing was aboard now. He croaked out his eternal pessimism: "I told you that big boob Harland would gum it. The boat's not much use to us now!"

"Shut up!" hissed Land as he stepped down hard on the gas. "I croaked one guy to-night."

Searing uttered a prophecy. "Hear that siren? I guess you'll have to croak more than one to get clear of this."

Gillin had been looking back. "There's another car besides the safe-crackers' rig. And it is coming hell bent for blazes."

At dawn Bill Harland stood with young Doctor Richardson, looking at the ruined controls of the bridge. "There goes my job. I've told you the whole truth. What do you advise?"

"Land is dead," observed Richardson. "You have a wife and three children——"

"Thanks to you."

"And," went on Richardson, "I'd advise you to pay off all your debts. Quit your job before they fire you. Don't confess to another soul. Your wife knows—I know—the truth. You can get a job taking care of my place and driving for me without a recommendation."

Bill tried to speak, but Richardson cut him short. "I believe fate meant you to get a fresh start. Take it."

TWO NEW COUNTERFEITS

THE diligent counterfeiters of the nation's currency are still busily at work on the always fascinating though dangerous game of trying to beat the United States treasury at its own favorite pastime. Two of the most recent specimens of the counterfeiting art against which the public has been warned are a five-dollar national bank note, and a twenty-dollar gold certificate.

The five-dollar bill bears the portrait of Benjamin Harrison and is on the National Bank of Commerce in St. Louis, of the series of 1902, with the check letter M. The signatures of W. T. Vernon, register of the treasury, and Lee McClung, treasurer of the United States, are forged. The counterfeit is described as skillfully executed, without imitation silk threads, and dangerous.

The counterfeit twenty-dollar bill has a likeness of George Washington. It is of the series of 1922, with the check letter F. The original was signed by Frank White, treasurer of the United States, and H. V. Speelman, register of the treasury. This counterfeit is rather a careless piece of work, but it will fool the unwary. It has the word "treasury" spelled "treasary" under Speelman's name, so that it should not be difficult to detect, even by one unfamiliar with bogus currency.

POWDERED PROOF

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

Author of "Tragedy Tower," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

RETURNING to the country club at dawn, Arthur Mason, who has thought to warn Mrs. Barnes, pretty wife of the steward, and Holcomb, a wealthy married clubman, that Barnes probably knows of the affair, finds partly in the water of the swimming pool the body of Nancy Barnes. He calls the police, and they immediately prove that she was electrocuted. By whom? Mason tells all he knows, throwing suspicion strongly toward Barnes and Holcomb, but also suspected is the mysterious Black Bandit, who has been habitually holding up the exclusive club members.

When visited by the police, Holcomb takes the matter calmly, despite the fact that Mason had heard him make an appointment to meet Nancy after the dance. His wife also is unperturbed, although a chiffon rose from her gown was found near the pool. Their chauffeur provides them both with an alibi. Barnes, on the other hand, is shaken, and the fact that he had just badly burned his hand—as though to obliterate finger prints—strengthens the case against him. Barnes tells a story of having been knocked out by the bandit, and thereafter finding bits of white substance in his fingers. A message to some unknown person by Nancy reveals that she was trying to placate some one jealous of her.

At the inquest Barnes is held for the murder, after testimony is heard from Mason, from a caddy who insisted that he had seen Barnes watching Holcomb and Nancy as they danced alone in the club—which is denied by both Holcomb and the steward. Others testify, including Barnes' sister, Kitty, who has come to do what she could to clear her brother, being convinced of his innocence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PORTRAIT.

SLIPPING out the side door of the courthouse after the verdict, Arthur Mason made his way to his roadster. It would be just as well to go to the office for a while and let Edith cool off. She and the whole country club were down on him. But what else could a man have done? He was not smart enough to have concealed what he knew about Nancy and Grant Holcomb. He would have become involved in all sorts of difficulties.

And why should he suffer for Holcomb? As far as he could see, both Grant and his wife were capable of taking care of themselves. Holcomb, the skunk! Denying everything there in the courtroom! And Barnes, after all

—*was* Barnes guilty? The evidence was certainly strong against him. But was it such a simple case, to be disposed of so summarily? And what about The Black Bandit? If Barnes was in jail, and there was another holdup, they would know, at least, that the club steward had not been playing the part of the polished highwayman!

Mason was no sleuth, but somehow he could not get rid of the idea that in some way, the mysterious Black Bandit who evaded even the clever Ben Horton, was entangled in the tragedy of Nancy Barnes' death. Two such outrages in a heretofore peaceful community seemed grotesquely impossible unless they were in some way connected.

It was hard to fancy one of the fastidious club members fooling with that electrical wiring and getting all grubby and mussed up. A man of his class would have used a gun or a knife, or wouldn't he? On the other hand, would a man of Barnes' class have resorted to the unusual and troublesome means by which Nancy had come to her tragic end? Suppose she had found out that Barnes was The Black Bandit, fattening on the club members, whose jewels he was well able to watch and spot, and threatened to tell Holcomb? Ah, there was a motive! But Mason recalled the polished manner of the man who had held him up a week since, and could not confuse that with the slinking, illiterate club steward.

A hand on his arm startled him and he swung about to look into Kitty Barnes' bright eyes.

"Mr. Mason?" she asked. "I am, as you know, I guess, Andy's half sister, Kitty Barnes. I think that verdict was a wicked crime! The idea of Andy thinking up a thing like that and being smart enough to burn his hand so that it would be weeks before they could get his prints! You don't know how goodhearted he is. He still sends my stepmother money for my board. I work, but he insists on being generous and he has been goodness itself to me. He always has. I am here to help him."

"And his wife made her own clothes and had scarcely any spending money," said Mason dryly.

"I didn't know that," said the girl. "I only visited them down here once, and that was three years ago. Nan seemed happy enough then, though nobody ever knew why she married Andy. She had a little knowledge of music and the piano and she danced well. Then she read and studied a lot. She was so different! But he was always good to her and he must have made grand money at the club.

"What I stopped to ask you was this. Do you think a right-minded person should let that verdict stand? They will try Andy! And that Holcomb man and woman just strolled out and got in their car! If Holcomb got tired of Nan, or she found out maybe that he was this Black Bandit I hear such a lot about, what was to prevent him doing that stunt himself?

"He has no more alibi than Andy. Any of those swell men would have put it on Andy. He is the goat. I am going to stay at his house until I get somebody to take up the case who isn't afraid of these country-club snobs! One of those men killed Nancy Barnes! I am going to stick until I find out which. Will you help me?"

Mason glanced about the deserted side street in a growing embarrassment. He desired not to have anything else to do with the case, whatever. He was ostracized because of the part he had already played.

"How could I help you?" he asked, and ran his fat finger around his collar. "My dear young woman, I told absolutely all I know and you heard it. You were in there."

"Not like that," said Kitty and stamped her pretty foot. "I mean—where do we go from here?"

Mason stared at her. He certainly did not wish to further complicate matters by going anywhere with Andy Barnes' pretty little sister.

Before he could reply a quiet voice spoke close beside him.

"The young lady is right, Arthur. There is no surety that Barnes committed this crime. Every man should have his chance. I don't blame Miss Kitty for feeling as she does."

Stephen Yarrow nodded at Kitty as he spoke, his soft hat crushed beneath his arm.

"No introductions are necessary," he smiled, meeting her startled gaze. "After that ordeal in yonder, we all know each other."

"I thought perhaps Mr. Mason could suggest some one I could get to take up the case," said the girl. "This man Horton is smart, but he is dead set against Andy. He thinks he is through."

"Maybe he is," said Mason brutally. "I admire your faith, but maybe he is. These policemen are keener than we are."

Kitty Barnes turned to Yarrow.

"Won't you help me, Mr. Yarrow?" she flung him a bewitching glance from her soft eyes.

"If you will point the way," said the artist with a sigh. "I am at a loss just now. I think there is a reasonable doubt regarding the guilt of your brother, but I do not number plain-clothes men or cops among my friends. But if you need me, don't hesitate to come to me."

Kitty Barnes glanced from one man to the other, and then with a toss of her pretty head she turned and walked briskly away.

"There goes a girl who will stir things up if she can," said Yarrow with a grin.

"There is nothing to stir up," growled Mason as he got heavily into his car. Barnes did it. He'll confess."

"I am not so sure," said Yarrow musingly. "I don't consider that Holcomb is exactly outside the thing. As for that rose business the chief dug up——"

"Ugh! Absolute rot," grunted Mason.

"On the contrary, I thought it decidedly clever," said Yarrow mildly. "Would never have expected it of Brown. But I followed you out to ask if you wouldn't like to come down and see the picture I had just about completed of Nancy Barnes? Most exquisite thing I ever did. It will bring me fame. But rather uncanny to look at just now, so dashed lifelike, and—er—that."

"I am not at all sure I want to see it, Stephen," said Mason quite slowly.

"Well, I want you to," said Yarrow impatiently. "Not a squeamish old woman, are you? I set it in the best light before I came up here with the idea of taking you back with me. I'm no end proud of it."

Stephen Yarrow's studio home was a vine-covered, low-lying frame structure that was as picturesque as any large mansion designed by some famous artist. The gardens were exquisitely Japanese with funny little humped bridges spanning a tiny stream, and urns were set about on unexpected pedestals. Swans strutted on the lawn or swam where the stream was widest, and the imposing figure of a Buddha guarded the broad front door. Later the small place would burst into glory with the mingled tints of iris, lilies and morning glories.

A man and woman kept house for Yarrow, but he explained as he opened the door that they were away for the day.

"You may think me heartless, but I've been putting the last touches to Nancy's picture," he said apologetically, "before my memory of her living charm fades. I thought my servants would

throw a fit if they saw me at it, and so I let them go."

"Stephen," said Mason heavily as he followed his friend back to the sunny glass-ceilinged studio, "I told the truth about Holcomb. He *had* a date to meet her that night at the club."

"I don't doubt it," replied Yarrow pleasantly. "But you won't get Brown to be ugly to any of our country-club crowd. He has a great awe of the swells. And Holcomb has mapped out his course. Denial. Keeping out of it."

"Do you think Barnes capable of that carefully thought out stunt?" Mason plodded on. "I feel that I got the poor boob into this."

"You sort of did do your best," grinned Yarrow. "Why the devil couldn't you have stayed in bed that night? Weren't you scared of the wicked Black Bandit? But cheer up. Barnes is a long way from the chair. And it is likely that he really is guilty."

They had reached the studio, a bright sunlit apartment in the center of the house. Yarrow turned toward an alcove, draped in gay Japanese curtains, and a sharp exclamation escaped him. Mason saw the color leave his face, saw his hand go up to his throat.

"Arthur!" he gasped. "Look! It's gone! Somebody has stolen Nancy's painting while I was up at the inquest!"

There before them, in the pretty alcove, between those picturesque drapes, stood an empty easel!

"Somebody has robbed me, taken the best thing I ever did—her picture!" said Yarrow, staring in unbelief at the alcove.

"But are you sure you left it there?" stammered Mason.

"Sure?" Yarrow gave a flinty laugh.

"But I don't see how any one could steal a thing the size you told me that painting was!" said Mason.

"Size?" Yarrow was striding about the room. "They could roll it. Any one who knew how could. I'll likely find the frame somewhere. Arthur, I'll never stop until I find the thief!"

Suddenly he paused and stared at Mason, his eyes holding a strange light.

"Good heavens, Art, who took it?" he cried. "Everybody was at the inquest!"

"The Black Bandit!" grinned Mason in a sickly fashion. "We may be wrong about the whole thing and the man who killed her was not at the courthouse at all! Are you thinking The Black Bandit has departed from his usual routine and broken into your house in broad day?"

"I don't know what to think," said Yarrow, examining a window catch. "Here is where the devil got in. See how he broke the catch? Arthur, Kitty Barnes was right! Barnes never killed his wife!"

"It will take a master mind to prove that he never did," said Mason grimly.

"Then a master mind we shall have," said Yarrow. "I will pay any amount myself just to get that painting back! Why, man, it never occurred to me that any one would break in here and steal it! Who would ever have thought of such a thing?"

"Yes, but why would they steal it?" asked Mason. "There's the rub."

"Ellis Zane called here several times for Mrs. Barnes," said Yarrow musingly. "He seemed jealous of me, the young fool. To-day at the courthouse he seemed pretty much upset. I say, Art, has it ever occurred to you that possibly this Black Bandit might be one of our own crowd?"

"It occurred to me the night he stopped my car and relieved me of my stickpin and money," answered Mason grimly. "Although I was aching to kill him, I had to admit that he was a gentleman."

"This is his first attention to me, if indeed, I have to thank him for this colossal theft," said Yarrow dismally. "If The Black Bandit is responsible for

this, Arthur, in him we will find the murderer of Nancy Barnes. Only a man infatuated with her would steal her painting. Why else would he want it?"

"But almost everybody was in court!" protested Mason.

"I am going to report the thing at once," said Yarrow, and picked up the telephone.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE PAPER.

KITTY BARNES let herself into the empty Barnes house with a dismal sense of helplessness. With its mistress dead and its master in jail, no wonder the little home on South Street, now stared at by the neighbors and pictured by reporters, wore an air of decided dejection.

Kitty Barnes, who was an Irish sprite of a girl, the laughter always near her eyes, the dimples peeping about her lips, fought the depression as she turned on Nancy Barnes' pretty lamps and set about getting herself some supper from the few little packages she had purchased at the store.

Kitty was not afraid to stay in the place until the affair was cleared up, which she hoped would be soon. The police had their eye on it and she was not one to have nerves. Even with the tales of a Black Bandit surging about the agitated town, Kitty knew no fear. She was only devoured by a vast fury when she thought of the unjust verdict and the swell country-club bunch filing out of the courtroom with their noses in the air.

"And the murderer among them," muttered Kitty as she sat down in the little kitchen and drank her tea and consumed her chop.

Just what she was to do—a lone girl, with little funds, against the wealth and social influence that were she felt sure, hiding the criminal at that moment—she had no idea. But she was not a person to give up easily, and she had come to Dahlgren to help her older brother, Andy, who had always been good to her. Just what deviltry Nancy's bright, defiant spirit had aroused in him, she could not say, but she fiercely believed him innocent and the criminal only too glad to hide behind him.

As she sat there, staring ahead of her, mechanically eating, the evening paper that she had brought in with her packages, caught her eye. She picked it up, glancing unseeingly down its columns, skipping with a shudder, all accounts of the inquest and Andy's burned hand. On the next page a small item caught her eye. Just why she could not have said, for it was tucked away down in one corner. Sitting there, eating with no sense of taste, starting at every noise, the rich color faded a bit from her tired face as Kitty Barnes read that little item.

The Charlton Harmers of The Sedges, West Burlington, have as their house guest the famous investigator, Levering West. Mr. West has just returned from a trip to——

But Kitty saw no more.

Levering West! Wasn't that the great detective she had now and then read about in the Sunday supplements? Yes, she would hardly forget the name. What could a man like that make of the case there in Dahlgren? What would he discover? Would he unmask that Black Bandit they talked so much about, and expose Nancy's murderer? But it took a fortune to get a man like Levering West to take up a case.

A sharp ring at the bell brought Kitty to her pretty suède feet with a start. The sound in the hushed house of mystery was as though some one had laughed out in church.

When she opened the door a young man stepped into the hall.

"Are you Kitty Barnes?" he asked cheerfully, and the very sound of his voice sent away the shivering horrors that lurked in the corners of the house. "Andy Barnes' sister?"

"Yes," said the girl, a bit coldly, for the stranger certainly had a pert way with him. "And who are you?"

"I'm Jerry Quillen, Nancy's brother," was the reply. "They told me down at headquarters you were here. I didn't arrive in time for the inquest."

"Oh, sure, I've heard of you," said Kitty slowly. "You're her brother! You live in New York. Nancy has told me about you."

"Yeah, I'm in the plumbing business, wholesale, and I knocked off work as soon as possible and come here when I heard what had happened to Nan. Never saw much of her, but when anything like this is pulled off—well, you know, a fellow has to put in an appearance and see justice done!"

"That is what I am here for," said Kitty grimly. "To see justice done. It wasn't done by bringing in a verdict against Andy."

Mr. Quillen, who was a slight, tall young man in the latest cut clothes and with a very recent shave and hair cut, stroked his smooth chin and stared admiringly at the slender girl in the hallway.

"Well, now, I don't know," he said slowly, "it seems by the accounts that your brother has got himself pretty well into it."

Kitty's face flamed scarlet. Her lovely eyes snapped.

"Now, look here, if you're against him, there is no room for you in his house, and you can be gettin' out of it!" she cried. "Andy is no more guilty than you are. And maybe *you* are, for all I know! If you had seen that swell country-club bunch!"

Instead of getting out of the house, Mr. Quillen firmly closed the front door and escorted Kitty back to the kitchen, where the evening paper was still propped against her cup.

"Now, you're all nerves," he soothed, "and it's bad for you to be alone. Let us sit down here and talk about it. We've got to prove Andy didn't do this thing. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it," sighed Kitty. "But how? That Holcomb man is guilty and he is rich and a regular social light. I bet he's The Black Bandit."

"For an exclusive, aristocratic town, I'd say this place is running a bit amuck," said Quillen dryly.

"I had just seen in the paper where Levering West, the criminal investigator, was visiting some big house in West Burlington," said Kitty, "when you rang. I was wondering how much you had to pay a man like that to take up a case."

"If you can cook up a queer enough case he might do it for nothing, or to get himself a slab of fame," suggested Quillen, reading the article.

"This man doesn't need fame," said Kitty scornfully. "Haven't you ever heard of Levering West?"

"Sure I have. But he has been known to take cases for sheer interest in them. Where is this West Burlington hick town?"

"It is not a hick town," said Kitty indignantly, "and you needn't come putting on airs because you live in New York! West Burlington is a swell suburban place where folks have mansions, and if we started at midnight we'd get there about three a. m."

"Are we going to start?" asked Quillen mildly.

"*I* am," snapped Kitty. "I'd made my plans before I heard of you. I——"

She paused and a change passed over her flushed, eager face. The color drifted from it and she bent forward, staring.

"What's the matter?" snapped Quillen, swinging about to the window at which the girl was looking with such dreadful fixity.

"There—I saw a man at the window—listening!" cried Kitty, coming out of her trance and springing to her feet. "I saw the shadow of him plain!"

She darted to the window and found that it was raised a bit from the bottom. Slamming it down she looked about for Quillen, but that young man had darted out the back door, being evidently one who permitted no grass to grow beneath his feet. In a moment, however, Quillen returned, looking slightly crestfallen but pleasantly excited.

"Never saw a soul," he admitted. "Sure you spotted somebody?"

"Oh, sure I did," whispered Kitty. "A shadow. I saw an outline, though, plain as could be. And what do you think? It seemed like the man didn't have a hat on—like his head was *draped*. I thought of the descriptions of The Black Bandit. They say he wears a cape that has a top part for his head, and a mask—flowing black clothes."

Quillen whistled, but his eyes twinkled.

"This sounds exciting enough," he nodded. "I'm staying. And I'm not contradicting you. That back yard is a lonesome, dark stretch. He could have got away easy. You realize what he heard, though, if he *was* there?"

Kitty nodded, but her eyes were like jewels.

"He heard me say I was going to West Burlington to try to interest Levering West," she whispered.

"He did," said Quillen grimly. "And he will likely have objections to Mr. West entering the case or even being asked to. We shall have to look out for trouble, Miss Kitty."

As he spoke a second sharp peal at the doorbell startled Kitty.

CHAPTER XV.

THE START.

QUILLEN, with Kitty close behind him, opened the door, and confronted a slight young man in knickers, his cap in his hand. A handsome car, a sport model, stood at the curb.

"Is Miss Kitty Barnes here?" asked a pleasant, cultured voice—the sort of a voice that possibly had often enough inquired at the door of Nancy Barnes' humble home.

"I am Kitty Barnes," said the girl, stepping forward. "And this is Jerry Quillen, Nancy's brother from New York."

The caller bowed. His audacious eyes lingered upon Kitty.

"I am Ellis Zane, Miss Barnes. You probably forget that I testified to-day at the inquest," he said. "I remembered you. I called to ask if there was anything I could do for you or for Andy. I liked Andy and I'm mighty sorry things went against him to-day."

Kitty's face flushed delightfully. The first hideous idea that she had had, namely that this well-dressed caller might have been the skulking figure who had so lately listened at her raised kitchen window, took flight. These were the sort of men who had turned pretty Nancy from her mediocre husband and her common little home! Young Ellis had called merely to express sympathy.

"Oh, that is kind of you," she murmured. "But there is nothing you can do. I am going to stay on here and keep his house open in case—in case, well, I hardly know why! Except that I do not believe Andy is guilty."

"Neither do I," said Zane with a frown. "I don't think he had a deed like that in him. I know Andy pretty well. I called to say, too, Miss Barnes, that you must not feel antagonistic to the country-club members because of this. We are a well-meaning bunch and we will do anything for Andy that we can."

Kitty's eyes shone. A thought popped into her head.

"Mr. Zane, if you all would!" she cried eagerly. "If you could take up a collection or whatever it is people do, and make a purse and ask Levering West, the detective who is stopping now at West Burlington with some friends,

to take up this case for Andy! That is how you could all help us! We are alone and we have no money."

"Levering West?" Zane lifted his brows. "His name is rather familiar. An investigator, is he? A private man?"

"Oh, yes!" Kitty shook off the hand Quillen had laid on her arm. "But I suppose he would want perfect piles of money to clear poor Andy!"

"Where did you say he was stopping?"

"With some people called the Charlton Harmers, at The Sedges, in West Burlington," replied Kitty eagerly, paying no attention to the severe pinch Quillen administered to her plump arm. She would settle with that young man later!

"I am glad you spoke to me of him," said Zane gravely. "I shall take it up with Art Mason and Yarrow and a couple of others to-night. We all want to help Andy and we feel that the country club has a reputation to save."

"Mr. Zane, did you know my sister?" asked Quillen then with a queer glance at the young man.

Zane met his eyes fairly as he replied.

"Yes. Well enough to have an intense desire to avenge her dreadful death. Her life and her death were tragedies. I am sorry for Andy and I don't blame him. They were just—unfitted."

"They tell me you were held up by this Black Bandit the night of the crime," went on Quillen.

"I was. But we are all having a turn. The highwayman is growing bolder and the police seem unable to do anything."

"Well, why couldn't he be implicated in this crime?"

Zane shrugged. His face looked drawn and tired.

"How do we know? We don't know who the man is, and it is undermining friendships here, our social life, life at the club, at the very doors of which he pulls off his robberies."

"My sister might have stumbled upon his identity," offered Quillen.

"I have thought of that," said Zane briefly. "Well, Miss Barnes, I am glad you spoke to me about this detective chap. I shall bring up the subject with the other gentlemen at the club, and what can be done for Andy we shall do."

As Zane stepped into his car and drove noiselessly away, Quillen gave a short sarcastic laugh.

"Well, you *have* done it now, and nothing would stop you!" he said. "The idea of telling the chap about getting West!"

"Why wouldn't I?" Kitty flushed angrily. "And I'll thank you to keep your hands to yourself! Pulling at me and pinching my arm all the while I was talking! If there is to be any money put up or any real thing done to get this detective here, that country-club bunch is the crowd to do it! I thought it was fine of him to call here to-night."

"Yeah, after maybe sneakin' around at your kitchen windows!" shrugged Quillen. "All right. It's done now. But I'm in this to help. Remember, if your brother is in jail, it is my sister who is dead!"

Kitty's face softened. She saw that young Quillen's nerves were ragged and she thought of the funeral on the morrow.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she said gently. "I guess we're both worked up. But I don't suspect that young man who just left us. And they are the ones to help Andy, the crowd he's served for so many years up at the club. Mr. Zane is a perfect gentleman."

Jerry Quillen made a sound midway between a grunt and a snort. He tapped a cigarette on the back of his slender brown hand.

"So, if all accounts are true, it is the Black Bandit," he said briefly.

Kitty overlooked this. She had turned back to the kitchen.

"The saints forgive me, I forgot to ask if you'd had any supper!" she said with an arch glance beneath her long lashes.

"Well, then, I have," smiled Jerry. "And I propose if we are going to West Burlington to-night we had better start. Something tells me the sooner the better."

"You're not going to wait until Mr. Zane tells us what the country-club bunch will do?" asked Kitty hesitantly.

"I'm not going to wait for Mr. Zane, you can bet," said Quillen grimly. "Right now I'm going to get the car I hired to-day to be at my service while I'm in town, and then I'm coming back for you, and if you are a smart girl you'll lock up this house and stay in it and not answer any bells until I get back."

"Good gravy, you've got me scared!" said Kitty as she followed Quillen to the door.

Half an hour later the man and the girl quietly emerged from the dismal little Barnes house, locked the door behind them, and entered the battered sedan Quillen had left at the curb.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE ROAD.

THE junction where the train for West Burlington stopped, was some eight or ten miles from Dahlgren, and was reached by a winding, picturesque road that in the summertime was much used as a lovers' lane and the route for moonlight drives. Auto campers reveled in the pretty spots along it, and picnic parties always found ideal places to spread their luncheons beside the brook that ran close to it almost to the junction.

But summer had not come as yet, and on the spring night that Kitty Barnes and Jerry Quillen set out in their hired car to catch the only night train for West Burlington, a lonelier place than the pretty road out of Dahlgren would have been hard to find.

Jerry Quillen was fully alive to the loneliness, but he said nothing to his bright-eyed companion. If Kitty shivered, she kept it from him.

Mr. Quillen was an excellent driver and he observed no speed laws. Once or twice Kitty gasped, but she said nothing. Perhaps she felt that in speed lay safety. Yet neither of them could have said what they were fleeing from, or what lay behind them that they feared!

"Only one train to-night," said Jerry at last. "If we miss that we shall have to drive back again."

"The morning train goes at six," said Kitty calmly, "I shall wait at the junction for that. You've got me scared about going back to Dahlgren. I was brave enough when you rang the bell. Now I wouldn't stay alone in the Barnes house on South Street for anything!"

"Oh, nothing would happen to you," said Jerry cheerfully. "It is just my idea that the criminal don't want West brought into the case. They say, seems to me I've read, that this West always gets his man. Took him a year once but he landed him. Found him in Pekin or some such outlandish place."

"Oh, if he would only come to Dahlgren!" sighed Kitty, looking fearfully down the dark road behind them. "I feel sure he would get Andy out of jail right away!"

Mr. Quillen was silent. He did not have so much faith in Andy. He had always known that his sister had been unhappy in her marriage, and he had not exactly approved of it. Now there certainly seemed to be enough piled up against Andy. Suddenly he started and instinctively put on the brakes. A man, a tall dark figure, was standing directly in the road before him. A little choked

scream from Kitty brought him to himself.

"It's The Black Bandit! Oh, you'll run over him!"

Jerry earnestly desired to. But it is not so easy to deliberately run a man down. Swearing under his breath, he brought the car to a halt, being aware of the gleam of a revolver in the outstretched hand of the bandit.

"Step out into the road, if you please," said a soft, refined voice, husky and obviously disguised. "Like he had a sour ball in his cheek," thought Kitty.

Jerry and Kitty obliged. Kitty was staring at the head of the bandit which was completely covered with part of the long cape he wore. It was the shadow of that she had seen at the kitchen window of the Barnes house, she could have sworn.

"From what I hear," said Jerry pleasantly, "you are a long way from your aristocratic hunting ground."

The bandit laughed softly. He even swung the revolver about his finger and Kitty watched him, fascinated. A graceful way he had of doing it and yet there was a horrible alertness about that playful revolver!

"I have no designs upon your wallet or your watch, my dear chap," said the smooth, husky voice. "All I want is your car. Sorry to inconvenience you. But I must have it just now. Not much of a car, is it? Couldn't Dahlgren give you a better one?"

"It is good enough for me," said Jerry, his face red with anger. "And if you think you are going to stop us from getting to West Burlington you have another guess. There is a day coming. To-night will be over before so very long."

The Black Bandit bowed. The fascinating way he did it intrigued Kitty. She stood there, shivering a little, beside Jerry Quillen, staring with all her bright, scared eyes at the famous figure that had long terrorized the community.

"It is far from my intention to prevent you from enjoying the coming day, my dear Quillen," said he pleasantly. "And I have stopped you in a fairly convenient spot. You are halfway between Dahlgren and the junction. You have your choice of directions. Not quite five miles either way. Now and then a car does come along here at this time of the year. You may have luck. Let us trust so. In the meantime, au revoir!"

Stepping past the nervous pair at the side of the road, The Black Bandit sprang into the driver's seat in Jerry's hired car, set his foot on the starter and with a wave of his hand, flashed past Jerry and Kitty Barnes and was off down the curve of the road.

Jerry and Kitty stared after the red tail light of the battered sedan.

"Well, what do you think of your precious Mr. Zane from the country club now?" grated Jerry, his fists clenched. "Gosh, the nerve of that!"

Kitty gasped. "you don't think that brute is Mr. Zane!" she cried. "Why, I recognized his head and it was the same that listened at the kitchen window! I know it!"

"Yeah, and a minute later Zane rang your doorbell!" said Jerry tartly. "And he had his car out front, all nice and handy. Depend on it, Andy is innocent. One of those swell guys at the club did for Nancy, this very Black Bandit we were talking to just now! But if he thinks that a little matter of a delayed train can keep me from getting West on this case, he has another think! He's got to shoot me now to make me quit!"

"Oh, don't!" shuddered Kitty. "This is such a lonesome spot, you frighten me to death!"

"What I want to know is," said Jerry looking about and feeling that in the eyes of this girl whose champion he desired to be he had just cut a sorry figure, "how that black brute got here

himself. From what I hear he works alone and nobody knows his identity. He must have a car somewhere about here, then. His sole object was to delay us for some reason or other."

Kitty glanced into the black woods behind them.

"If you go looking about in there, I shall faint!" she said shivering. "Let's walk. A car will pick us up sooner or later. He didn't succeed in changing our minds, anyhow. Just holding us up won't stop us."

"No, but I'm wondering what, in the meantime, will happen to Levering West!" said Jerry thoughtfully as they walked briskly along the road. "Delay was evidently necessary."

Only one car, however, passed them on the deserted road, and that one was driven by a farmer who was going to Dahlgren and whom no amount of persuasion could induce to turn about and take the couple to the junction. And so, some time later, Kitty found herself shivering with a fear she was ashamed to let her companion guess, once more on the porch of her brother's home.

"I don't much like to leave you here, but I don't believe any harm will come to you, Miss Kitty," said Quillen, hesitating after he had turned on the hall light. "To-morrow you had better make other arrangements."

Kitty Barnes summoned all her natural courage and there was a goodly amount of it. She flashed a smile at the young man.

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" she assured him. "Why would anybody do anything to me, especially that polite devil, The Black Bandit?"

But Quillen lingered while Kitty went back to the dining room and snapped on the light. He felt a strange reluctance about leaving the girl. He was just hesitating about the propriety of asking her to permit him to go over the house when a shrill scream from Kitty wrung his taut nerves.

"Mr. Quillen!" cried the girl. "Somebody has broken into the dining-room window and the whole place is turned upside down!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE DARK SHADOW.

LATE that same evening, Zane, Holcomb, Yarrow, Arthur Mason and Doctor Miles were sitting in the smoking room of the Dahlgren Country Club. The Barnes case had, of course, been under discussion, and was, indeed, the reason for the meeting. Ellis Zane had been telling them about Kitty Barnes and her request regarding West, the detective.

"It is only fair that we do something to help out Andy," he said, and several of the men glanced at his pale face. They knew that he had felt more than a passing interest in the attractive wife of the club steward.

"I agree," said Holcomb abruptly. "You all know that I am in this thing rather deeply, thanks to Mason, here. And yet I shall be glad to get Andy out of the muddle."

"If we all made up a purse I fancy West would consider the case," said Yarrow thoughtfully. "As for me, I had determined, anyhow, to look up some smart chap to trace that painting of mine. I have no intention of losing that work. It is the best thing I ever did."

"We can probably thank The Black Bandit for that," said Mason. "If your detective finds out his identity, Stephen, possibly he will also have the painting back for you."

"The thing that puzzles me is this," said Zane. "If The Black Bandit had nothing to do with Nancy, why did he steal her picture?"

"Of course he had something to do with Nancy if he is the thief!" snapped Yarrow. "He must have been insanely in love with her to break into my house

in daylight and take a thing like that picture away! Of course, he rolled it. I found the frame from which he had neatly cut the painting. But even so, he is daring."

"We know that," said Mason with a slight shiver. "The night he held me up he was every bit as cool as a cucumber."

"But if he killed her, loving her like that?" asked Zane slowly.

"Sure, love and jealousy form the basis for half the crimes!" said Yarrow sharply. "Money and revenge make up the other half. It was not money in Nancy's case. We shall have to stick to the love and jealousy part of it here."

"Well, are we going to listen to this pretty little Kitty's plea for the famous detective?" asked Ellis Zane, glancing about. "As far as I am concerned, I say send for him."

"And I say so, too," said Mason.

"I am willing, of course," agreed Yarrow. "If he is as good as they say, he should certainly get back my painting. I have left the studio and the window exactly as it was, purposely."

"Oh, dash your old painting!" said Holcomb impatiently. "What I want is some clever chap to get me out of this mix-up I'm in! Between Art Mason and Timmy Ryan, I come near being the criminal himself."

Mason said nothing. His round eyes were fastened upon Holcomb. That tense little scene in the dark smoking room, almost upon the spot where they sat at that moment, was again being enacted in his memory. He had little to say to Holcomb.

"I should say," said Doctor Miles dryly, speaking for the first time, "that this case requires a detective who is not from the first convinced of Andy Barnes' guilt."

"You mean that you think Horton is, and that you don't consider Barnes guilty?" asked Mason eagerly.

Miles spoke slowly. He had evidently weighed his words.

"I don't think Andy Barnes capable of arranging or thinking out that electricity stunt," he said. "I admit that he had opportunity and that it would not take a large amount of brains. But it would take the sort of brains Andy hasn't got. He just hasn't that make-up. The case looks bad against him. I agree that West should be sent for, and I consider it a bit of luck that he should be visiting so near us. He has a great reputation."

"Then we shall send for West," said Zane with a nod. "I'll tell Miss Barnes to-morrow. It may relieve her mind a trifle. Do you fellows fancy a telegram or a telephone call would bring him? It takes too dashed long for letter writing."

"One of us should go to West Burlington," said Mason. "His interest, I fancy, will have to be aroused, before he will consider the thing."

"I'm willing to go," said Ellis Zane.

Mason spoke with heavy emphasis.

"Why not send Holcomb? He wants to vindicate himself. No better way than by going in person to engage a man whom we all think will expose the guilty party."

As Mason's words fell upon the tense atmosphere every man there knew that he definitely suspected Grant Holcomb. And did not all of them? Holcomb's position and money in the small exclusive town had been, they knew, the only thing that had saved him from sharing Andy Barnes' fate.

"Why, of course, I can go!" said Holcomb stiffly. "I'm not afraid to get this chap, if that is what you mean."

"All right," said Doctor Miles. "Let Holcomb go. After all, he is in a tight position. It may help him if he gets West."

Yarrow rose, glancing at his watch.

"I must be going. Have some work to do yet to-night. Whatever you fel-

lows decide upon will be agreeable to me. Perhaps some of the other members will want to be in on it. Let me know."

As Yarrow strode from the room, Mason looked after him.

"A darned queer thing that, about Nancy's painting being stolen," he mused. "It knocked Stephen in a heap. I was with him when he discovered it."

"My dear chap, that is the smallest of our mysteries," said Doctor Miles with a short laugh. "The trouble began with the first holdup by The Black Bandit."

For a moment the men smoked in silence, the specter of suspicion stalking among them in the luxurious smoking room of the Dahlgren Club. Who was The Black Bandit and who had killed Nancy Barnes? Was the criminal in their midst? That was the question that occupied every mind, and Doctor Miles was about to open his lips and speak about something that had troubled him for some time, when the tall figure of Stephen Yarrow again strode through the room. He carried a long, dark, trailing thing in his hand.

"Look here!" he said a bit dramatically as he held it up before their eyes. "I found this outside, flung down in a corner beside the steps. I saw a dark shadow there while I stopped to light my pipe and upon investigation I discovered—this! Just where the bandit had thrown it upon entering the clubhouse! Or that is how it looks to me! This seems, gentlemen, to lend strength to our theory that The Black Bandit is a member of our exclusive club!"

The men lounging in the comfortable chairs, smoking their expensive cigars, stared at the thing Yarrow held up before them. The long, dark cape that, as every man knew who had been a victim of his holdups, The Black Bandit had worn! Or if it was not that selfsame cape, it was one exactly like it! A strange, voluminous, oddly-shaped thing that savored of the ancient days of the king's highway and the stopping of His Majesty's coach!

Arthur Mason looked from the sinister garment in Yarrow's hands, to the other men in the circle. Who had flung off that thing as he entered the clubhouse? It could not have been Yarrow himself, or else why would he come among them showing it? No, decidedly, it could not be Yarrow. No sense to that. But no one else looked in the least guilty. They all looked exactly as he knew he himself was looking. How could he suspect his friends and fellow members? How could he even suspect Grant Holcomb of these monstrous things?

"We've all had a run in with The Black Bandit save you, Yarrow," said Zane then, slowly. "And I, for one, should swear that this cape is the thing the thief wore."

"I, too," nodded Holcomb.

"And I," said Mason. "It looks just like it."

"I should say that was the cape," said Doctor Miles slowly, "but of course, no one could swear to that. Better let me take it to the police, Yarrow."

"Keep it for West," said Yarrow with a laugh and flung it to the doctor. "He should be able to describe the bandit fully after he examines this. What worries me is not the fact that this looks like The Black Bandit's cloak, but that I found it where I did! I advise you all to make sure who is in the clubhouse at present."

"That's easy," said Zane, rising. "The swimming pool is still closed off. We can trot around and jot the names of the chaps who are at present roaming about. There are a couple of them over there. If I were you, Yarrow, I should give that cloak to the doctor here and keep mum about it."

"And keep mum, too," said Yarrow significantly, "about this idea of getting Levering West on the case."

CHAPTER XVIII.

KITTY GETS THERE FIRST.

"YOU have told me everything?" Levering West glanced across the handsome library of the Charlton Harmers, and smiled slightly at Kitty Barnes' excited face.

It was Quillen however, who replied.

"We have. You have heard the whole story."

As he spoke, the young man studied with increasing interest the famous detective who lounged in the huge soft chair opposite. Levering West was in the prime of life, a tall, well-groomed, spare type with a keen, rather homely face that was lighted charmingly now and then by an unexpected smile. Somehow he gave the impression of being as dependable as chilled steel and as cool. His preception, too, had a stiletto-like quality.

"Last night's performance seemed crazy to me," went on Quillen. "Holding us up didn't stop us from coming to you. And what the Barnes house was broken into for is beyond us. We couldn't find a thing missing, and the upstairs wasn't touched."

"Depend upon it, it was most important to break into the house," said West. "Later, we shall no doubt learn why. As for the delay—perhaps there was a forlorn hope in this."

As he spoke he took from his pocket a telegram and handed it first to Kitty. The girl read, "Stay away from Dahlgren. Everybody sooner or later meets his Waterloo. Be warned in time."

The message was unsigned, but it had been daringly sent from Dahlgren!

"I have had enough of those things in my day to paper a small den," smiled West as the girl's horrified eyes sought his.

"But, don't you—won't it——"

She was fearful of his answer. As yet the investigator had not told them he would take the case.

"This shows a lack of fear, at any rate," said the detective, not replying to her unfinished question. "There was no pretense of sending it from anywhere else. I have, of course, unconsciously formed a theory already, and it appeals to me. The real test of a theory comes when it can absorb every clew."

"Do you think this Black Bandit is mixed up in my sister's death?" asked Quillen.

"The fact that he took your car last night is a reply to that," said West. By that action he identified himself with the crime. I don't say he committed it, but it looks to me as though—I beg pardon, Miss Kitty—the guilty party is a keener type than Andy Barnes."

"We can't offer you a purse," sighed the girl. "It was sheer desperation that brought us here. We didn't know what to do."

"But the purse is to be offered by the Dahlgren Country Club, is it not?" asked West with a smile.

"Oh, good gravy, we won't hear from that interview with Ellis Zane!" said Quillen disgustedly. "That's what started all our troubles last night, Miss Barnes telling him what we were planning to do."

"Pardon me, but I think you will find that I shall be offered a purse by the members of the country club to come to Dahlgren and solve the mystery, or try to," said West still smiling. "That is exactly what they will do. It is the obvious thing. The reputation of the aristocratic and exclusive country club is at stake. In a short time, unless I am mistaken, one of your fashionable community will come to me with the offer. It would not greatly surprise me if it proved to be the gentleman who sent me this telegram last night!"

"I think they'll stay out of it," grumbled Quillen. "Why should they soil their blue-blooded fingers?"

"Speaking of fingers, I am interested

in those of your brother," said the detective, turning to Kitty.

The girl flushed. "Oh, Andy burning his hand like that influenced the jury against him," she cried.

"I don't mean that," said West, looking across the room with a musing frown. "If what I think is right, the criminal at the very beginning made a grave mistake. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. But of course, I may be away off the track. I've only heard your story so far. Still, I have a fair idea of what it was the thief broke into the Barnes house to get possession of."

"Oh, but the important thing is now, will you come and help us?" cried Kitty nervously. "It is nervy of us when we have nothing to offer——"

West lifted his hand.

"The money does not interest me," he said a bit tartly. "But the man who will presently appear to ask me to accept a purse to come to Dahlgren, does."

As though in answer, the butler appeared in the door and announced, "Mr. Holcomb!"

With young Quillen and Kitty Barnes staring at him in indignant amazement, Grant Holcomb, immaculately groomed as usual, sauntered across the floor with insolent independence.

CHAPTER XIX.

WEST CONSENTS.

HOLCOMB merely glanced at Kitty Barnes and Quillen. His bow and smile were for West.

"My name is Holcomb," he said pleasantly, "Grant Holcomb, and I am here on behalf of the members of the Dahlgren Country Club, Mr. West. We are in trouble and I have been asked to induce you to help us out. I fancy Miss Barnes here, has forestalled me."

"What sort of trouble, Mr. Holcomb?" asked Levering West.

"Oh, come now, Mr. West. You of course, know the entire story, and also my own unfortunate part in it, after an interview with Miss Kitty Barnes," smiled Holcomb. "Why go over the whole wretched business again! I'm glad to be spared the trouble."

"I daresay," said West dryly, "but I am a bit queer about such matters. I like to get every viewpoint. Suppose you speak as though Miss Barnes and Mr. Quillen—who is, by the way, the late Mrs. Barnes' brother—were not here."

If the fact that the dead girl's brother was so close to him disturbed Holcomb, it was not apparent even to the rapier-like glance of the detective.

"Well, of course, if you insist," shrugged the clubman. "I am not anxious to give you the story since I may as well tell you that some people regard me as a suspect, even if they are holding poor Andy for the crime."

"Then why have you been chosen to interest me?" asked West.

"In a way I chose myself," smiled Holcomb. "I thought it might react in my favor if I came to engage the services of a famous private investigator."

For a moment West's eyes met the clubman's, and the detective decided that this man was clever. For the thing that he had just boldly stated that he had done, was exactly what the criminal would have done.

"I believe that you also have a bandit in Dahlgren who is causing a bit of excitement," said West then.

Holcomb fell into a more serious mood.

"Mr. West, you've simply got to come and get us out of this muddle!" he said. "We—to tell the truth—some of us are afraid that this bandit who has been holding up club members on the road that leads to the club, is a member himself."

"Indeed? Why do you think that?"

"I don't know exactly," Holcomb laughed ruefully. "The suspicion just got about. And then last night, after

Andy was held, some of us met at the club to talk over what should be done to get him out of the thing. Stephen Yarrow, when he went home, found a cloak in a dark corner of the club steps that looks a lot like the old-fashioned affair the bandit wears over his head and shoulders. There it was, just where the fellow might have dropped it off as he entered the club."

"Who has the cloak now?"

"Doctor Miles. He is the coroner, as well as a mighty fine fellow, and an excellent physician."

"I see. Stephen Yarrow, you say, found the cloak? He is the artist chap?"

"Yes. A very keen and talented man."

"I see. Now do you wish me to come to Dahlgren to expose the murderer of Mrs. Barnes, or the identity of this mysterious Black Bandit?" asked the detective.

"Mr. West," said Holcomb quietly, "some of us think The Black Bandit is the murderer. Nancy might have stumbled upon his identity, you know, making it necessary to shut her mouth. This fellow is getting a haul off the club members. He acts like a man who knows us all."

Levering West's eyes sparkled. He regarded his caller with increasing admiration. If Holcomb were guilty, what an actor he was, and what nerve he had! In a quiet voice he requested the entire story, and with a sigh of annoyance Holcomb began it, not glancing at the excited Kitty or her interested companion.

Intangibly, though, no one could have said how it was done, there in that handsome room, the line that had been drawn between tragic Nancy Barnes and the aristocratic club members with whom she had longed to mingle, seemed to have been drawn between the well-groomed Holcomb and the pretty Kitty and Quillen. West felt it and he got closer somehow, to the story of the murdered wife of the club steward.

Grant Holcomb told frankly of his own interest in the dead girl, of the days he had taken her out in his car. In fact, he simply went over the evidence that had been brought out at the inquest, but he shrugged as he repeated Tim Ryan's testimony.

"I don't know why on earth the boy said that," he said simply.

"You never, then, met Mrs. Barnes at the club after her husband had closed it for the night?" asked West.

"I never did. I have no reason to think that Nancy would have consented to such a thing," said Holcomb.

"I see. And you deny being in the smoking room with Mrs. Barnes when those lights went out and Mason heard you arrange to meet her later?"

"I should say I do!" said Holcomb indignantly. "I don't know whatever got into Art Mason that he should tell such a thing as that."

To Kitty's amazement, West asked nothing else. He sat for a few moments while Holcomb offered him the big sum the members of the club had decided would tempt the investigator, and then without saying whether he regarded it as big or little, or probing into the case any further, he glanced up quickly at Holcomb and said simply: "I shall arrive in Dahlgren to-night at eight thirty, Mr. Holcomb."

CHAPTER XX.

WARNING NUMBER TWO.

IT was Grant Holcomb who drove his car down to the station to meet Levering West.

"Art Mason says you have simply got to put up at his place, Mr. West," said Holcomb ruefully as he escorted the detective to the handsome machine. "We all wanted you, but Art discovered the body and all that and we thought perhaps he would be of more help to

you. Of course, he is down on me, for some reason. You understand that. His story is enough to ruin me."

"It doesn't seem to have done so," said West smiling.

Holcomb shrugged, seating himself at the wheel.

"Who can tell? The affair is young yet. Only the fact that Andy Barnes burned his hand and that Tim Ryan swore he saw him looking into the clubhouse window at Nancy and myself one night, swayed the jury against him."

As he spoke Holcomb turned his car about and for a moment the round, white spots of the headlights lay flatly against the wall of the new bank across the street. West uttered an involuntary exclamation and bent forward. In both circles of light there shone plainly the black outlines of a pistol! The effect of the two shadowy guns on the walls of the bank was indescribably uncanny.

"Good heavens!" cried Holcomb. "What is that?"

"I fancy," said Levering West dryly, "that it is the second warning I have had to let this case alone. Examine your headlights, Mr. Holcomb. Some one has tampered with them."

Holcomb was out in the street unfastening the lens of the two powerful lights. On the inside of each there had been pasted a perfect pistol cut from black cardboard!

"I say, Mr. West, I had nothing to do with this," protested Holcomb earnestly. "And this car was all right when I drove up here for you. Who would have thought of a thing like this? I never got such a queer shock in my life!"

West was examining the cardboard pistols. He thrust them in his pocket and reëntered the car.

"Had you been waiting for me long?" he asked when Holcomb finally joined him.

"Well, the car has been standing here about twenty minutes," replied Holcomb. "I was over at police headquarters for a while. They are hot about your coming into town. I thought I would sit a bit prettier, perhaps, if I told them I had gone to get you myself."

"There was, then, plenty of time for our ingenious friend to fix your lights," mused West. "Your car stood at the end of the platform where it was not so brightly illuminated. He had ample opportunity."

"Whoever did this trick, knew that I would turn the car about instantly and that the headlights would fall on the bank," said Holcomb. "It was a regular movie screen for him. He figured on your seeing this warning the moment you arrived."

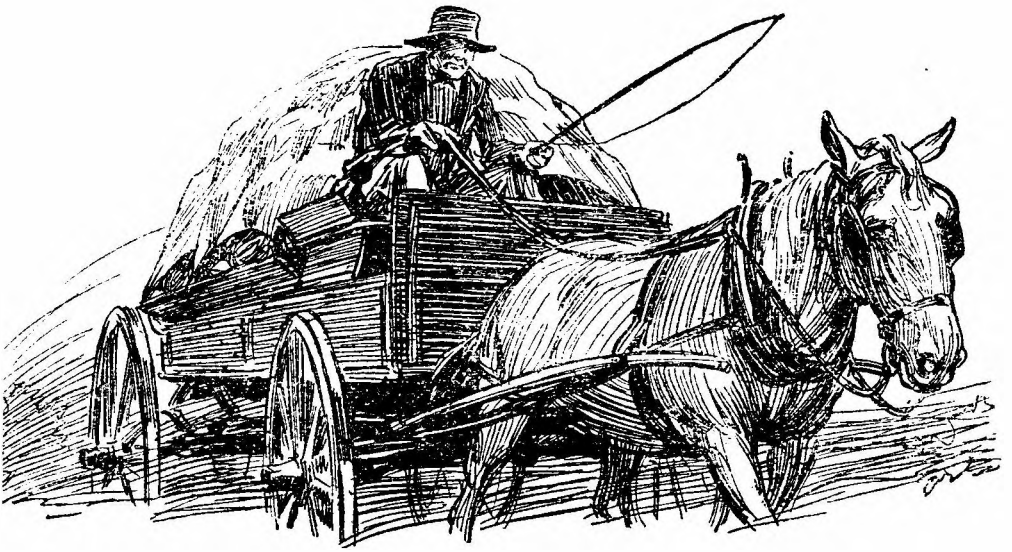
"Right," nodded West. "And a bit fantastic our friend must be. Still, his work must be taken seriously enough. You must admit that Andy Barnes never sent me that telegram or pasted these very realistic guns inside your lens."

"It is a confession!" said Holcomb hotly. "Depend upon it, whether Andy burned his hand or not, the bandit committed that crime."

West was regarding his companion quizzically. His admiration for him was mounting.

"I agree with you," he said. "I think he did myself!"

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



BEHIND THE GRAY MARE

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

Author of "Tissue of the Devil," etc.

WHEN Demiter, with soft cluckings and hissings, had hitched the mare to the generous cartload of vegetables, and was ready to set off to market, the dawn had not yet broken. Against the starlit sky he could see the familiar, gnarled forms of his seven apple trees. They gave only pucker-mouth fruit, but it was a marvel what Valma, his wife, could do, granted a little sugar and a hot fire. In their branches Demiter's five children could play, and among them was his house set. Others might call it a shack, as they might call this place of his on the edge of the city, perched high above a maze of railway lines, waste land. An acre or two on a crumbling brow of a steep descent, irregular, rocky—but to Demiter a farm! From the house, slumbering in the dusk, came a spark of fire that was a lantern in the hands of Valma.

"All ready, papa?"

"Yes!"

They kissed, with a stolid enthusiasm. The mare threw up her head at this signal to go. The wheels gritted against rocks. Valma ran beside with her hand as if to stay the wagon.

"You will see the man, papa, about the rent? Remember, it is the last day!"

"I go by his office! After market, I go there first off!"

Demiter clucked to the mare, now pausing to browse again. Down the crooked, rutted way the wagon creaked, then turned into the main road. For a moment the man's spirit halted, though the wheels revolved on their axles and his body moved toward the city. Somewhere within sight of the Carpathians, he and Valma had both been born. Of mixed stock then, they had come as children to a new land and a strange tongue. In this new land they had grown up, in this land married—he and Valma.

His spirit, as the wagon bore his body

on, was not alone with Valma. This bit of ragged land, on the crumbling edge of things—much happiness lay in it. Below might lie railway yards edging a swamp, but, beyond, lay a reach of river where the distant houses ended, and, beyond that still, mountains where beauty stirred with every mood of wind and cloud.

And, from the land itself, came good things, born of moist earth, and animal fertilizer, and sunlight of heaven! The best, they sold—proud cartloads as at present moved in a dark-green mound behind him through the fading night. The scraps and leavings came by the skill of Valma to nourish and sustain life. A good life it was to sustain. Peace! Tranquillity! Independence! Than these what could one ask more?

For a road leading directly, and by no great distance, into a city of complex traffic and teeming life, this way by which Demiter traveled was singularly lonely. Long since, the city had grown out parallel with it, but a railway line and some fields still in cultivation shut it off to the north, as the steep declivity did on the south. It was a strip of country remaining beyond its time; a place of scattered farm houses, mostly disintegrating, many deserted. Occasionally, in his early morning drives, Demiter would be dazzled by the glare of great eyes of light as motors, like huge owls, went winging through the darkness. Sometimes he had his doubts as to the legitimacy of these night flittings, but he was never molested.

He would jog along, often more asleep than awake; though he never ceased to love the familiar road, so isolated, so quiet, lined in many places with great, branching elms under which his wagon moved with homely slowness.

But last night Valma had warned him:

"Demiter, see now to the money, eh? It will be dark and the way is lonely!"

He had laughed at her. The money, so carefully collected, was to pay the rent on this land. Old Smithson, who looked like the picture of St. Nicholas, had said they should have the place as long as they paid the rent on the day it was due. A queer, just, but grasping man, old Smithson! Demiter was shrewd enough to know that the old fellow repented now of his bargain, yet being just he would abide by the letter. But once fail him with the rent——

Usually he had managed to pay a day or two ahead. This time, through pressure, he had left it until the last. Well, what could happen now? He felt in the inner pocket of his faded coat for the worn purse containing the bills. All safe! He clucked to the mare, and the wheels revolved more quickly, the wagon moved forward, threatening to joggle not only Demiter from the seat, but the cabbages from their green pyramid behind.

Before him, the lights of the city gleamed brighter. He would be glad to reach them to-day. A faint breath of chill air out of the east presaged the dawn. He shivered. Valma had slightly stirred his fear. She had read in the paper of a holdup affair west of their farm only last week, and was nervous. Demiter had laughed.

"Who would touch a poor man, my Valma? Crime concerns the very poor and the rich, not us who are neither one nor other!"

So he told her, shrugging his shoulders and speaking in their own tongue.

To their peace and tranquillity crime came no nearer than the newspaper.

Thought of this sustained Demiter now. Who would think that a poor farmer, market bound, had much money about him? He adjusted himself, from a certain tenseness that had held him; with a better accommodation of his body to the jogging pace of the vehicle. It was in that moment that he heard a noise behind him, in the distance, and

saw two eyes of light. Like a great owl, this car, but whirring its way at an incredible and alarming pace! He drew to the side of the road cautiously, to give it such passage as even a drunken driver might need.

Now the mare that Demiter drove was a beast of quiet if mixed ancestry, and personally of a sedate turn of mind, but she had a streak of that timidity that, in less enlightened days, used to be considered a natural weakness of her sex! Never very partial to the mechanical monstrosities that had driven so many of her kind from the roads, she would ordinarily have let this whirring creature pass with a single resentful blink of her eyes; but when it suddenly ground to a halt beside her, swung its great, glowing eyes partly upon her, and seemed, indeed, about to leap at her, her nerve failed her.

Skittishly balancing her clumsy gray form on her hind legs, she dashed sideways and forward in a manner that sent the green pyramid of cabbages trailing behind the wagon along the road. Demiter, almost jerked from his seat, would have shouted, but that his tongue suddenly clung to the roof of his mouth.

This was no ordinary accident, he feared. This was a thing of intent. Quieting the mare, he turned and regarded the car where it stood half across the road, and the two men who had jumped out and were running toward him, shouting something. But for a thrifty hesitation over the trail of cabbages behind him, which for an instant deflected his attention from larger issues, Demiter would have lashed the mare into a gallop, and fled for his life. Second thoughts showed the folly even of this. What chance had he against a high-powered car?

And then his brilliant idea came to him.

That purse of money in his pocket! Quick as the thought came he pulled it from its hiding place, and flung it across the fence into the darkness of the wayside bushes by which they had stopped!

His heart was fluttering with an ecstasy of fear, but he felt more secure. For his own safety he had little regard, but the money meant independence, tranquillity, growth of soil, a house on the edge of the world, and seven apple trees against the sky.

One of the men now approaching turned a flash light upon him.

"Hullo!" said this individual. "Looks like we'd unloaded you pretty well. Sorry, but our driver didn't see you until we were almost up, and turned sharp, and lost his nerve. Lucky it's no worse. Look here, you hold your horse's head, and we'll pile up your cabbages again for you. Least we can do!"

Demiter's jaw dropped. Here was amiability, not assault! Instantly his face was wreathed with smiles.

"No, no—my horse, she stand. I go help!"

"No, let us," said the man. "It's our fault."

Such conduct toward a poor farmer with a foreign twist to his tongue was new to Demiter. From broad, ingenuous smiles, he began to laugh outright.

"Me—I t'ink you bad men. T'row money away!" he confessed, his white teeth agleam.

"Naw?"

"Sure. T'row it over fence!"

The man laughed..

"Well, see here, you go ahead and look for it now, while we load up your cart!"

One thing to look, another to find! Demiter, anxiously upon his knees in the wet grass, impeded by the bushes, began to shake with a new fear. Oh, the good saints help him, he must find it!

A pencil of light picked out his white face.

"Any luck?"

"Not find, mister!"

"Here, let me help!"

But the flash light revealed nothing.

"Much in it?"

Demiter confided the extent of his loss. Kneeling there in the circle of light, his limbs soaked, his misery showed in his face.

"Tough luck," said the other sympathetically. "Look here, I'll tell you what we'll do. You forget the market to-day. Just cart your vegetables into town, and take them—the whole load just as it is—to this address."

They had moved out now to the road. Demiter leaned despondently beside his cart. A faint light from the east began to grow, pallidly illuminating the scene—the roadway, with the car and wagon, the cabbages piled neatly in their green pyramid again.

The spokesman scribbled an address on a piece of scrap paper.

"Know where that is?"

Demiter deciphered it, and nodded.

"Well, you take your vegetables there. There's a lane and a yard right beside that house, you drive in, and we'll meet you there."

Demiter shook his head.

"If I don't get market early no good!" he said.

"Market, nothing! How much is your stuff worth—the whole load?"

Demiter calculated and told them.

"All right. We'll give you that, and as much more as you lost. On the way back it'll be daylight and maybe you'll find your purse, too!"

"You—give—me?" began Demiter slowly, unbelievingly. He stammered out the terms.

"That's it!"

"My golly!" said Demiter.

"Remember, you go direct there, eh?"

"Sure! Sure!"

He climbed to the seat, and clucked to the mare again. He was in a daze. The wagon moved off under the elms. At the turn of the road, Demiter looked back. The car was not following. He listened frequently, but no sound came. The road was lonely, deserted in the dawn. A little prick of suspicion began to goad him. What if he had been tricked after all? Daylight was quickly coming, and those men might find his purse! Was that their game, and all the rest a means of fooling him, getting rid of him easily? Why should any one buy his stock of vegetables at such a fabulous advance on market prices?

Should he go back? No, that would be greater folly. They were three to one, and might even be away by now, with his purse. No, he must cling to this mythical hope, and go to the address given. If it were a trick, he would lose as well the early market. Please the good Heaven to help Demiter now! He thought of Valma, up with the sun.

Valma said the sun never rose so well as over their little piece of ground on the crumbling edge of things. It came up out of the misty mountain distance, and gilded the seven apple trees that stood out blackly against its gold. Even here it was beautiful enough to watch. But when it lifted far enough to find the face of Demiter, eastward bound through the city streets, it discovered in his eyes more misery than hope.

The country road by which Demiter had come diverged at a point which permitted of entrance to the city by more than one way. By passing straight ahead, Demiter would enjoy well-dressed rows of houses rather than the shabbiness that would meet him by a right-hand turn. When he passed the junction point where cheaper flats and tenements ran right out against this remaining strip of country, three policemen on motor cycles were holding conference. He scarcely noticed them, and would have quite forgotten them, had he not heard, in the gradually engulfing traffic of the city, the chug-chug of a cycle behind him, and found himself halted and addressed by the uniformed rider.

"You drove in along the Upper Road, there?"

Demiter, uneasy before the law, admitted as much.

"See anything of a motor car, old model, touring—three men in it?"

The misery in Demiter's eyes became a flashing suspicion.

"But yes, mister! They frighten my horse, spill my cabbages! They——"

"Which way did they go?"

"Don't know, mister. Not pass this way after me. But see, mister. I think they bad men. I——"

"Bad men! You guess right. We just got word they broke into a house out the Lakeshore. Frightened away, but they got a lot of stuff, and were headed toward the city with it! What's your name—and address?"

Demiter gave it. His mouth was dry, his eyes large with despair.

"Mister, I——"

But the man had gone. Demiter watched him chug quickly back with his news. If they had turned the automobile and fled west again, the officer would have to go smartly to catch them. Perhaps if they were caught, his purse of money would be found! Meanwhile, what of old Mr. Smithson and the rent? Demiter spread his hands despairingly, and clucked to the mare. No use now going to that address the man gave him. He took the scrap of paper and, crunching it violently in his hand, tossed it away. Only one thing remained for him to do at the moment—take his cabbages to market. There he might sell and borrow enough—a far chance, but worth trying—to pay the rent.

The market was already in full swing. He was late and a usurper had his usual place. He sought another, too dumb with despair to mind that he was among strangers. There he began to set out his cabbages. For once his heart was not in it. He unloaded mechanically. Underneath were boxes of other vegetables, in which, ordinarily, he took a large pride. The pyramid of green began to grow less, and suddenly, from his precarious stand on the wheel of his wagon, Demiter almost fell.

The strong sunlight was reflected back to him from something which felt hard and strange in his hand. He worked it out from among the cabbages. It was a small jug of a beauty such as Demiter had never intimately known! Such things he had seen in jewelers' windows. He gasped when he thought what it must be worth. He turned it up to see the bottom, knowing enough of such things to confirm his belief with the imprint "sterling." As he did so something fell to the ground. He picked it up. It was a small, square box that had been stuffed inside. He opened it, dazedly, and all the beads he had ever bought, in moments of opulence, for Valma's neck, became suddenly the pitiful things they were.

Demiter, holding the precious thing up, and still too dazed to reason the matter through, became conscious of eyes upon him. The old woman with the straw bonnet presiding over vegetable boxes next to him, whispered something to a neighbor. A man strolled over to ask:

"What you got there? Goin' in for jewelry? My gosh!"

"No!" said Demiter, quickly, fear upon him. He tried to say: "It is my wife's!" but the lie stuck on his unaccustomed lips.

"Some things," he said, "I am ask by a man to bring into town for him!"

That was true! How true came only now to Demiter's dazed mind. So that was their game, to smuggle their stolen goods into town under his cabbages! If they were caught now, they would at least be caught without the stolen goods! Slowly the full significance dawned upon him.

Meanwhile, he carefully restored the loot. As he did so, he became aware, with a sinking heart, that his wagon

was a repository for much more than this. He shook down a little avalanche of remaining cabbages and drew over all a tarpaulin. He was shrewd enough to realize that he must be offhand about it. If he hitched the mare now, and drove off, there would be suspicion, and a hue and cry. He set about putting his cabbages on display.

"Not unpackin' the rest?" asked the curious man, shifting a quid of tobacco.

"Keep better so—from the sun!" replied Demiter timorously.

He was glad when the fellow moved off. He didn't like his face, or his inquisitive tongue. He tried to concentrate on cabbages, and the sale of them. His head was in a whirl. Oh, what had he done to get mixed up in this?

He could not even drive a bargain.

"Why not give them away?" sniffed the old woman, whose cabbages were neglected for his. More often she whispered to her next neighbor, and their heads bobbed, and their eyes seemed to be watching for something. Then Demiter heard them gasp with satisfaction; their eyes glistened with scandalous pleasure.

A blue-coated officer was pushing his way through the throng. He halted before Demiter's cabbages, and Demiter's heart stopped beating.

"Got some more stuff in the wagon there?"

"Y-yes, mister!" How dry his throat was!

"Let me see it!"

Demiter hesitated, evaded.

"Come on, now. What little game are you up to?" The pudgy hand of the law was pulling aside the tarpaulin.

"Mister, I tell you all—I tell you it——"

"Better save your breath for the court," said the big man, not unkindly, but with decision. "Quite a haul you got there, eh? Maybe you'd better hitch up your nag and come along with me!"

The ignominy of the drive shut Demiter in upon himself. Even had the policeman been in a mood to listen, the truck farmer, thus escorted through the streets, and stared after by interested eyes above grinning mouths, would have found explanations impossible. Like an unsuspecting fly he was caught in a web, hopelessly entangled. Time and the world moved on. Back home Valma would be washing the children's clothes under the seven apple trees, singing after a fashion of her own, and thinking of him at market, of him going presently to pay the rent to old Smithson.

"How long, mister, it take?" He managed that much. "I lose my market, I lose——"

"You'll probably come before the recorder to-day, and be remanded?"

"Not understand!"

"Why, they'll shut you up until your case is called in a day or two, unless you can furnish bail!"

Shut him up! Overnight, away from Valma, and the farm! Who would send her word? Tears gathered quickly in his eyes. And there was old Smithson unpaid. Before them loomed up the gray building he knew to be the courthouse. It was not far from the market. A hunted look came into his eyes, his heart beat with a terrible desire to leap from the seat and run, to be free until he could see Valma and Smithson. But his feet were leaden, and he knew that he would only make things worse.

Waiting his time, deep in the bowels of the gray place, he sat with misery-filled eyes staring at the grim pageant about him. A clock striking the hours intensified his anguish. The day was moving on without him. They brought him something to eat, but he scarcely tasted it. Now the shadows began to join the clock in warning him.

He started up. His name! A little thrill of hope ran through him. He was

ushered into a crowded, stuffy room, and the machinery of the law moved him onward. His name, the charge against him, a greasy Bible to kiss——

Heaven help Demiter now! Help him for Valma's sake, and the children, and the seven apple trees!

So, in his heart, he prayed.

"What have you to say for yourself?"

The big man at the desk asked that. Demiter tried to speak, but his words got all mixed up with his eagerness and fear.

"A queer story! H'm! Where was this place you were to take the things?"

"Mister, I forget. It was on piece of paper!"

"Where is that paper?"

"I t'row him away!"

The big man at the desk grunted again.

"Remanded until Friday," he said. "Bail fixed at five hundred dollars! Next!"

Demiter was brushed away. Slowly it was borne in upon him, as he returned to his incarceration, that until Friday he would be here, a prisoner, unless he paid five hundred dollars. As well might they ask for five thousand! What about his mare? Who would feed and care for her? What about Valma? Who would tell her? What about Smithson and the rent?

In a sudden loosing of his tongue he poured a flood of difficult English upon his guards. Oh, if they would only give him an hour or two! They could go with him. He must find his purse. It *might* still be there. That flashed across him like a sudden revelation. With so many bigger things at stake, why should those men bother with a poor man's purse, lost in a field? Yes, he felt sure now it was there. He could see the very place—the familiar tree, and bushes, the broken fence, the field. If he could get there while daylight lasted, and find it, and send Valma with the money to Smithson, they might take him then and do with him as they would.

They only shrugged their shoulders. Other prisoners looked at him with contempt for his broken pleadings. If he could only *make* these men listen to him, make them——

What was the use? These men about him had faces that said plainly: "Do not trouble us. We have heard such pleadings before!" He did not blame them. They could not understand that he was of the innocent ones! No, if there was any help for Demiter it must come from himself, or from Heaven.

If only he could get out long enough to find that purse!

A sudden beam of late sunlight slanting into that gray place was not less wonderful than the illumination that as suddenly came to Demiter's mind. That man on the motor cycle this morning who had stopped him. To him Demiter had given his name and address like an honest man, to him he had told word of the robbers. Not clearly, but with a queer certainty, Demiter knew that this was the man he must find. And, on top of the thought, came his radiant idea!

They must listen to him now!

"What's that? Something about a robbery. Want to confess, do you?"

He couldn't even shake his head. No matter what they thought, if only they would take him to some one with authority. He could have shrieked aloud at their hesitation.

"Better take him to the chief, Jim! He's mixed up in that Lakeshore robbery, and it may be important!"

Heaven had helped Demiter! Helped him with this radiant idea, with the iron-gray chief of detectives, who sat behind the great desk, and bored right through Demiter with his eyes. Helped him now to temporary freedom.

To be sitting here behind the wagging ears of the gray mare, clucking encouragement to the homing animal, was almost to believe the thing had

never happened. But then, like the leaden clouds that began to gather in the west, his burden descended upon him again. His scheme had given him only temporary freedom. He could see now the tall officer standing before the chief, stating: "Yes, sir! That's the man I stopped this morning. This is the address he gave me. I checked it back, and it's O. K.!"

That had given him freedom enough to look for his purse while daylight lasted. But what was beyond that? What if the rest of his scheme failed? What if even the purse wasn't there? Remembrance of the prison car—a black, barred thing standing on the driveway by the courthouse to take away convicted men to the jail—came to him. He shivered. That possibility he must yet face. And what of Valma—Valma, and the children, and the seven apple trees?

He was on the road now. Mellow light on ancient elms! Straggling roadside fences! He turned, and over what remained of his load of unsold vegetables, adjusted the tarpaulin more carefully. But the very action seemed part of a nightmare that the familiar turnings of the road dissipated. So often he had driven thus, pleasantly weary, homeward from market. All this other was like a strange, impossible dream. He began to lull himself into a semblance of belief in this—and then he saw the tree, the broken fence, the bushes, the field where he had tossed his purse.

A quick trembling seized him. As he stopped the mare, and jumped down, some birds flew, frightened, from the thick wayside bushes. Demiter, hastily entering by the break in the fence, threw himself on the ground in anxious seeking.

There was no sign of the purse to be found.

He widened the circle of his search. The mellow sunlight touched him presently in the attitude of prayer, its level rays through a slit in the leaden clouds, fully upon him.

His search continued, despairingly at last. He had worked close into the bushes now. Then, suddenly, his jaw gaped in quick surprise and terror. The thick bushes opened to reveal a man—a tall, cadaverous, unmistakable fellow. Before his eyes this man was holding out the purse!

"You're looking for this," said the man coolly. "I thought you'd be back for it!"

Demiter blinked, and the blink hid a sudden shrewdness, a remembrance of instructions.

"Where's our stuff?" said the man. "We might as well be plain about it now! We couldn't get in to meet you."

Demiter trembled, but he grabbed his courage with both hands.

"Why you put that stuff in my wagon, eh? I tell you—you steal, people make alarm, send word ahead. You afraid police search motor car, eh?"

"That don't matter now! What you better say—and speak quick about it—is what you did with it!"

Demiter's eyes glinted.

"Have you it out there, under the tarpaulin!"

"No!"

"What? Then where——"

"Look here, mister, suppose I tell just you? Other two men afterwards say also: 'What you do with our stuff? I tell all together, not one, see? And you give me back purse then, too, eh?"

The man stared at Demiter, considering.

"All right," he said sharply. "You drive your wagon in at the gate there!"

Demiter obeyed. His heart was beating tremendously, but he clucked bravely to the mare. The wagon lurched in weed-grown ruts; Demiter, turning, adjusted the tarpaulin again, and drove on. The cadaverous man walked at the horse's head. The edge of the earth

cliff being near, the road was not long. Demiter noticed slight traces of tires in a muddy patch. Hitherto the short grass and weeds had not betrayed it. At a quick turn, hidden well by trees, was an abandoned shed.

"Got him," said the man at the mare's head. "Just about when I was ready to call it off!"

The other two men appeared. Demiter could see the car in the dim recesses of the shed. From the road no one would even suspect that the place existed.

"Well, where's our stuff?"

"You give my purse," said Demiter eagerly, "I tell!"

The men looked at each other, nodded, handed over the purse. Demiter caught it to him with a cry. Cautiously, he counted it. The money was intact. His face was radiant.

"Get a move on," he was advised. "Have you got the stuff in the cart there?"

"He says not. I think he's a liar!"

Demiter stuffed his purse safely away, and at the same moment his hand sought another pocket. In it was a hard, unfamiliar object, at touch of which Demiter trembled still more, but he forced himself to grasp it. The feel of it, however, was in a sense comforting. He even managed a tremulous grin.

"You look and see!" he suggested.

One of the men caught the tarpaulin and wrenched it off. Cabbages, on top of boxes! And, on top of a box, too, surrounded with an upholstery of vegetables, a tall young officer with a revolver.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" he ordered curtly. "Quick now! Whew, but that was stuffy! Just shoot that fellow near you, Demiter, if he moves an inch!"

The unfamiliar weapon in Demiter's hand wavered a little. But his grasp on it tightened grimly. Until the handcuffs were on he must be very brave. But let the officer be quick! There was a purse in Demiter's pocket that old Smithson must have, a drive to town in prospect before the mare would head homeward in the darkness to where Valma, lantern in hand, would greet him, and seven apple trees would stand out against a starlit sky.

A CONVICT'S HOBBY

A CURIOUS echo of a sensational murder case that startled New York some years ago has recently been brought to public attention in the daily press. The case was that of the city editor of one of the leading newspapers who was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife.

The lifer-editor is reported to spend a great deal of his spare time in taming five unruly parrots. These birds make their home in the prison hothouse, where the prisoner tends flowers and vegetables. He is said to have been very successful in making gentle, well-mannered pollies out of a quintet of erstwhile uncouth, profane parrots. One of the birds was a particularly bad actor and had been sent to Warden Lawes by its owner because all efforts to cultivate its speech or otherwise tame it were met with profanity and abusive language. Under the uplifting influence of the convict-editor, this parrot now says "Nice Charley," and has abandoned its liking for violent language.

THE GOLDEN BALL

By Lilian Bennet-Thompson and George Hubbard

Authors of "The Beak of Death," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KEEFER REAPPEARS.

STILL whistling softly Jimmy Clyde had reached the edge of the crescent-shaped grove of lindens, and was skirting the first of the trees, when he heard an angry hail from Palmer. Slackening his pace, he waited for the chief to come up. The official was red in the face and somewhat out of breath.

"Look here, Mr. Clyde," said he, "I'd just like to have you explain what you meant by that last crack of yours about the feather pillows and the mattress! Whoever said they were trying to pack 'em in a traveling bag?"

Clyde shrugged. A little mocking smile lurked in his eyes as he turned.

"Why, it seemed to be your idea that the upset condition of the room was due to their tossing things carelessly about in the confusion of packing, that's all, and as the bed was stripped—the mattress rolled back and both covers off the pillows—the natural inference would be that they intended to take the things along with them when they left, wouldn't it? Isn't that about the only reasonable deduction from your hypothesis, chief?"

"Well, then, Mr. Clyde, what's the deduction from *your* hypothesis?" Palmer's eyes swept him from head to foot truculently. "You can enjoy yourself quite a bit laughing at my theory—what's yours, if you please? I suppose you have one, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Clyde. "As it happens, I have, Mr. Palmer, although it's only a hypothesis, of course."

"Well, what is it?"

"That the room was searched, and searched very thoroughly, too!"

"By Flora, you mean?"

"Flora," said Clyde gently, "was dead. She was very neat, you know, and always very careful of her pretty clothes and belongings. She would

never have flung them around helter-skelter, and dumped them down any old way, as we found them this morning."

"But Keefer might have done it. In his maniacal rage, wouldn't he have ripped everything up and pitched things all over the place?"

"Possibly. But the appearance of the room suggests a search, to me. I'm only offering my opinion, you know, Mr. Palmer, for which you asked."

"Then you think Keefer killed her first and searched the room afterward? Sort of a second act to the same play that he staged upstairs in old Mr. Peyton's room, eh? Is that your candid opinion?"

Clyde stood still, his back to the house, looking out toward the west.

"Why," he said, "I think the search of Flora's room was a sort of second act in the same play that was staged in Mr. Peyton's room upstairs, yes."

"Being Keefer's way of making his attack on Flora also appear to be the work of a burglar? A bungling attempt to conceal his identity, the same as he did in Mr. Peyton's case?" persisted Palmer.

Clyde considered a moment. The chief of police, almost dancing with impatience, noticed irritably that he kept glancing with a sort of eager expectancy toward the thick screen of shrubbery that hid the hemlock ledge from the house.

"Well," the detective said at last, "I shouldn't call it such a bungling attempt, really, chief; not for a novice in crime. A great many smarter men, men experienced and adept in covering their tracks, have left behind them some simple clew that could be read as plainly as if they'd dropped a visiting card. They know the game, they've played it successfully for years, and they're sure they haven't overlooked a single thing that could tie them up to any particular crime. They stake their liberty and perhaps their lives on their thoroughness. Yet they do overlook something, and then——" He spread his hands.

"And here this fellow we're after, an amateur absolutely, lays his plans for a get-away so cleverly that he doesn't leave so much as a finger print for us to use in running him down and identifying him. No, I shouldn't call it bungling at all—except in so far as he neglected to scratch that hook on the balcony screen, and perhaps break a branch or two on the rose trellis underneath, to indicate that he'd entered by way of the window.

"I'd say that if he had lived in a small town all his life, and hadn't come in contact with experienced criminals, he'd made an excellent beginning, and showed real aptitude for that particular class of work."

"What d'you mean, he never left so much as a finger print?" demanded the chief, opening his eyes. "Didn't you tell me a while ago that you'd examine those marks on the outside of that girl's window yourself, and hadn't any doubt who'd made 'em, eh? Is that what you call not leaving 'so much as a finger print for us to use in running him down and identifying him,' Mr. Clyde? Is it?"

"Well, he didn't leave any on his first job, in Mr. Peyton's room." Clyde pointed out. "Or," with possibly exaggerated politeness, "perhaps you were fortunate enough to discover some in your examination?"

Palmer looked blank, scowled, and hesitated, but only for a minute.

"There's a lot of nonsense talked of the importance of this so-called 'finger-print evidence,'" said he pompously. "I've looked into it, and I don't consider that it amounts to much. They call it an exact science; but half the time, a clear print can't be had, and the other half, it's a case for experts at the trial, and the experts never agree. They always find some little hole to crawl out of. You can't do that sort

of thing with 'exact science,' Mr. Clyde. If Keefer left finger prints in the old man's room, I didn't see 'em. Anyway, I didn't believe they'd be of any mortal use to us, and I didn't look for any."

"No? Well, I did," said Clyde quietly. "And there weren't any. I looked particularly on the outside of the glass in the bathroom—the glass where the old man kept his false teeth at night, and there wasn't one to be found, except Peyton's own. Our man had left none; and he left none on the inside of Flora's room, either, if you remember our discussion this morning. Does that mean anything to you, Mr. Palmer?"

"But plenty on the outside! Plenty to hang him, or I'm much mistaken! Doesn't seem to me to matter if you looked on every piece of glassware in the house. What's that got to do with it, anyway? The thing that matters is that Keefer *did* leave the marks of his hands all over the frame of the window to Flora's room. Bit of carelessness to stand there and smear grease around that way!

"I'll grant you, he was pretty smart, but not quite smart enough. His madman's cunning made him mighty cute when it came to that business with the watch and all; but he stubbed his toe, so to speak, when he didn't stop right there. His success went to his head, I s'pose. He thought he'd gotten away with one murder, and he could get away with another, if he pulled the same stunt. But he wasn't quite smart enough!"

"I believe you're right, chief," agreed Clyde. "If he'd stopped right there, with the murder of Mr. Peyton—but he was obliged to put on a little extra embroidery. And those few fancy touches will convict him."

"You're meaning the finger prints?"

"No. I'm talking about the fake evidence on the screen, and the watch and wallet stuff, chief, and other things. The finger prints," he added gently, "might have been made some time during the late afternoon, when Flora was downtown, quite as well as last night or early this morning, when she was at home, might they not?

"We've the evidence of the chauffeur and Susie to prove that they were not there while Flora was dressing to go downtown for the afternoon, but there's nothing to show that before Keefer drove off in his car, just about dusk, he didn't stand at her window and talk to her, is there? Ah!"

A pleased note had come into his voice. His glance had strayed once more to the fringe of shrubbery about the hemlock ledge beyond the edge of the grove where they were standing, and this time, was rewarded. "Ah! There she is!"

"There *who* is?" Palmer jumped back, mouth and eyes wide, as if he expected to see Flora or her disembodied spirit emerge from the encircling greenery.

But the woman who parted the thick bushes and came toward them, slim and trim and graceful in the plainest of plain-white sport silks, her exquisitely cared for dark hair gleaming in the sunlight with the burnished, blue-black sheen of a grackle's wing, was Irene King.

Palmer stared at her in undisguised admiration as she approached, and made an awkwardly stiff bow over the slender hand she cordially extended when Clyde made the introduction.

"I'm so glad to meet you, Chief Palmer," she said. "Mr. King and I have been so distressed over all this, but he assures me that there is nothing we can do, because the investigation could not be in better hands."

She did not say whether she referred to the private or to the official investigation; but Palmer, blushing like an embarrassed schoolboy, immediately took the compliment to himself, delightedly flustered to think that Dalton King of

Weldover, president of one of the most influential banks in the county, was aware of and appreciated the efficiency of the chief of police of Abbotts' Hollow!

"Well, now, ma'am, that's—er—mighty handsome of Mr. King!" he stammered. "I'd no notion a man like him was interested in the way we run things over here. I'd be obliged if you'd give him my compliments, ma'am, and tell him I'll certainly try to merit his good opinion of me."

"Indeed, I'll be very glad to, Mr. Palmer, and I'm sure he'll be much interested to receive your message!" There was a whimsical sparkle in the great dark eyes she turned on Clyde. "Mr. Clyde," she said. "Roger has been asking for you. He's out on the ledge by the ravine, you know. Doctor Kenyon thought it would do him good to be outdoors, providing he didn't exert himself, and he did so want to get out of bed."

"He's better this morning?" Clyde asked. "I looked in, about eight o'clock, but he seemed to be sleeping so soundly that I didn't think I should go into the room. You really think he's feeling more fit?"

"Oh, much more! But when I think of what might have happened to him if you hadn't come along just when you did last night!" She shivered. "He's out there lying in a steamer chair, but he's restless and keeps fidgeting. He wants to see you, and I volunteered to act as messenger. Can you spare a few minutes to talk to him?"

"Certainly! Doctor Kenyon just told me you were out on the ledge with him, and I was on my way to you, when I stopped to speak to the chief. I'll go right away. You're not leaving yet, are you?" she asked, turning to Palmer.

"No. I'm waiting for the county prosecutor or some one from his office to show up. Ought to be here pretty soon now. He'll want to see you, too, Mr. Clyde, so I'll just ask you not to go too far away."

"Oh, I shan't leave the place, chief. And if Doctor Kenyon can find it convenient to remain—could you suggest to him that he stay here for the present, chief?"

"Why—er——"

"Suggest officially, I mean. He's the coroner's physician, I understand, and Mr. Wheeler will want to talk to him anyway, so there'd be nothing strange or out of the usual in such an order being issued by you, would there?"

"Of course not! I'm in charge here, and I can give him any order I choose!" The irritable quality was again apparent in Palmer's voice at the beginning of his speech, but disappeared as he looked at Irene King. "Of course not, Mr. Clyde!" he repeated with great heartiness. "He'll be on hand, don't you worry. Naturally, I had intended to have him remain. I'll see to it that he's right here where you can reach him if you want him, Mr. Clyde!"

He wondered whether he had succeeded in conveying to Mrs. King the impression that he knew his business perfectly well, and needed no one to point out to him the proper and regular thing to do; while at the same time being possessed of sufficient good-humored tolerance to avoid hurting the feelings of this officious young fellow, Clyde—a much overrated individual, if he'd ever met one!

But, before he could be sure whether or not he had succeeded in registering this delicate point with the lady, a cry from the front of the house created a diversion that banished her and her influential connections completely from his mind, for the time being, at least. The doctor had appeared on the veranda above the stone terrace, and was calling out to him, making wide, excited gestures.

Palmer had left the car, a shabby sedan, parked in the driveway, opposite

the front corner of the house. Perhaps a hundred feet beyond it, just rounding the curve, unshaven, dishevelled, his shaggy bare head swaying slowly from side to side with the shambling movement of his great, cumbersome body, came Morton Keefer!

For a moment, Palmer stood as if petrified. Then, with a shout of triumph, he ran forward, flourishing his revolver as he went. It was an incredible bit of luck that the elusive quarry should walk right into the very arms of the law, and Charles Palmer was not one to let one iota of dramatic interest be lost!

"Stop! Stop!" The official bellow could have been heard a great way off, and Keefer had already stopped when Palmer's hand fell on his shoulder. "Morton Keefer, you're my prisoner. I arrest you, in the name of the law! And I must say that it is my——"

With a snarl, Keefer turned on him.

"Shut yer noise! D'ye have ter tell th' county? S'pose I dunno what you want me fer?"

"It is my duty to warn you that whatever you say may be used against you! For your own sake, I advise you to say nothing." The chief flung open the door of the sedan. "Get in here! Brady!"—to a deputy who had come hurrying up—"you take the wheel. One suspicious move out of you, Keefer, and I'll drill you! Better put those bracelets on him, Brady—he's crazy as a loon!"

The sullen, burning eyes of the gardener glared angrily as the handcuffs were snapped into place about his wrists.

"Crazy, am I? Well, who drove me to it? Who lied an' cheated, an' got me so's I didn't care what happened to her ner me neither?"

"Good thing you don't care what happens to you!" the chief told him with satisfaction. "You'll pay the penalty, don't you make any mistake about that. I've got you dead to rights, Keefer. I know you did it——"

"I did it, yes! An'"—the harsh voice rose stridently—"I'd do it again, too! Rot, her, she promised me to run straight, the——"

In the midst of a burst of appalling oaths and vituperation, he was bundled unceremoniously into the car, the chief scrambling after him. The deputy had already taken his place behind the wheel and started the engine.

"Step on it, Brady!" came the order, and the vehicle started off down the drive.

"Poor fellow!" Irene King said softly. "I suppose it's weak and sentimental of me, but I can't help pitying him, Mr. Clyde. He loved that girl, and with all his strength and brute courage, he was nothing but putty in her hands."

Clyde nodded.

"Yes, he loved her. And she deviled him until he went clean out of his mind. I suppose it doesn't help matters much to say that she brought her doom on her own head, but it's the truth, just the same. She——"

"Hark!" Irene held up her hand, her lovely face paling a little. "What's that?"

On the wings of the warm summer wind, a sound from the receding car was borne back to their ears—a long, wailing screech, like that of some tortured animal in mortal agony.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT FLORA KNEW.

ROGER FREDERICK had half risen from the steamer chair in which he had been reclining. The light coverlet that had been spread over his knees had slipped to the ground, and his blue eyes were bright with alarm when Clyde and Mrs. King parted the thick screen of the shrubbery and crossed the ledge toward him.

"What is it?" he cried. "I heard—it sounded like some one screaming out in awful pain. Don't tell me there's been another——"

"It's all right, Mr. Frederick," Clyde interrupted reassuringly, while Mrs. King hurried to his side and gently pushed him back among the pillows. Only that unfortunate, hag-ridden Keefer. He's just confessed, and Palmer's taking him down to the jail. I suppose he's just raving, his mind gone completely, poor devil."

"He confessed?"

"Yes. With detectives and deputies scouring the country for him, and keeping a lookout for his car, he turned up here in front of the house not two minutes ago, and Palmer promptly put him under arrest. Had the goods on him, even before he admitted his guilt."

Mrs. King sank down in a wicker chair, deep and cushion filled, that stood on the opposite side of the table drawn up near the rustic railing.

"He—he sounded like a wild beast," she said, and shuddered a little. "It made my hair fairly stand on end when I heard him!"

"A madman *is* a wild beast, really," Clyde said quietly, "and no one but a madman, or, at least, a man temporarily unbalanced by fear or ungovernable fury, could have committed these cold-blooded crimes." He stooped to pick up the chic little cloche hat which lay on the grass beside Irene King's chair, and handed it to her with a courtly little bow.

She smiled her acknowledgement.

"Thank heaven that, mad or sane, he'll be put where he can do no more harm!" she said fervently. "Did you suspect him at first, Mr. Clyde? Roger told me the substance of your talk with him yesterday, but I'm not clever enough to make anything out of it. I thought, while he was talking, that Flora must be involved in the murder somehow—perhaps that she herself was even guilty of Mr. Peyton's murder. But then, when he got to the last part, and I learned that she, too, had been killed, I realized that there must be a lot more to it. Still, somehow, I didn't suspect Keefer at all. Did you, Mr. Clyde?"

"No, I can't say that I did," the detective answered. "I know that there were two or three things that might have directed my attention to him in the first part of the investigation, but when Mr. Frederick was attacked last night, I was positive that Keefer, and no one but Keefer, could have been responsible for it. And that set me thinking along a slightly different angle, you see."

"But what made you think he'd attacked Roger? Why should he make an utterly unprovoked assault?"

Clyde smiled, glancing round him for a chair. None was near him, so he perched himself on the top of the rustic railing, tucking his hands in the pockets of his coat, and hooking his heels over one of the lower rails to preserve his balance.

"Well, I'm afraid I'll have to go back a bit farther than last night," he said. "I've been over and over it, and I don't want to bore you, but if you'd really like to hear——"

"Indeed, we should!" she cried warmly. "It's always seemed marvelous to me for any one to be able to start with next to nothing in the way of information, and build up a whole case on that foundation!"

"With Clyde," Frederick put in, his voice croaking hoarsely, "it seems to have been mostly observation—noticing things that nobody else saw, and drawing deductions from them." He relaxed in his chair with a sigh of contentment, arranging his dark-blue silk dressing-gown carefully about him, and drawing the light coverlet well up over his knees. "Go ahead and tell us, Clyde, will you? I can't talk very well yet, but you'll find me a good listener."

"Well," Clyde remarked, "if you've repeated to Mrs. King what I told you—and what transpired up in Horace Peyton's room—yesterday, there's no use in my going over the same old ground. Did you tell her everything?"

Frederick nodded, and Mrs. King said quickly:

"It was perfectly safe with me, Mr. Clyde, all of it. I hope you don't think Roger was disloyal to Miss Crawford because he did tell me. While she and I are not what you'd call close friends, I rather pride myself on my ability to judge people, and from our first meeting, I set Miss Crawford down as a splendid girl. Roger knew how I felt about her, and I knew how he felt about her. He thought perhaps that, being a woman myself, I might be better able than he—even than you, with all your experience—to understand the peculiar psychology that led her to——"

"To comply with Horace Peyton's demands that she enter his rooms that night?" finished Clyde, as Mrs. King hesitated. "He was right, Mrs. King. At any rate, your woman's wit and subtle, understanding sympathy would give you a clearer insight into the mind of another woman than any man could hope to achieve. With the story before you, how did you finally decide?"

"I decided she went because she wanted to avoid a scandal, if possible. She wasn't exactly afraid of the old man, but she did fear that if he were capable of sending her the sort of letters that Roger tells me he wrote her, he'd be capable of worse—if anything could be worse.

"She was in a quandary. She saw no way out, except to plead with him, try to bring him to a realization of what a dreadful thing he was doing. She went into his room for that purpose and for on other in the world, Mr. Clyde. That's what I decided!"

"Right!" exclaimed the detective. "I was convinced of it myself, even before I talked to her yesterday afternoon, and she told me the whole story from beginning to end. But," with keen interested eyes, he watched to see what would be the effect of his words on his hearers, "but I wasn't prepared to have her admit that, after a scene with Peyton, she had—killed him!"

"What!" exclaimed Frederick and Mrs. King in chorus. "She admitted that *she* killed him? But——"

"Of course, I knew she hadn't," the detective said composedly. "And the part of the story you haven't heard, Mrs. King, really begins there. Roger didn't tell you for the very good reason that he didn't know it. I've had no opportunity of talking to him since my interview with Miss Crawford yesterday afternoon.

"There was more than one reason why I knew she didn't kill Peyton, even though she implicitly believed that she had. Coming to the conclusion that she could accomplish nothing by reasoning or pleading with him, she started to leave him. He attempted to detain her, and she thrust him from her so that he staggered into the bedroom and either stumbled against something or fell to the floor. She didn't wait to see what had actually happened, but fled to her own room and locked herself in.

"For a long time, she did not sleep, expecting that any minute would find him outside her door. That fact is rather important, because it virtually proved what I told Roger yesterday—that Mr. Peyton's late caller was no stranger to him. Had there been any altercation in the hall, any objection, say, to the caller entering Peyton's room, or had there been any violent scene in the bedroom, Miss Crawford, with every nerve strained in frightened anticipation, would surely have heard it. She was wakeful and restless until nearly daylight, and we have established that the murder took place between a quarter after and half past one.

"Next morning, when Flora, after dusting and straightening up Mr. Peyton's sitting room, was unable to arouse him, she reported to Miss Crawford, whose first thought was that he was feigning illness to trick her into coming up to speak to him. She insisted, therefore, that Flora accompany her. But when they found him dead, she instantly concluded that the scene of the night before had proven too much for his weak heart, and that he had collapsed and died where he had fallen as she ran from his rooms.

"Doctor Kenyon's diagnosis of strangulation, threw her into a panic. All her energies were concentrated in an effort to keep any hint of her part in the tragedy from leaking out. She did not try to reconcile the absence of the man's valuables and the fresh scratches on the window frame, with her belief in her own guilt. I doubt if their real significance registered on her brain at all. She was like a woman distraught.

"She was tremendously relieved when the coroner decided against the necessity for an inquest, and correspondingly disturbed again when I informed her that I should like to undertake a private investigation of my own.

"In that investigation—already begun, to be honest—I had determined two things, namely: first, that Flora was in some way connected with the crime, and, second, that it had probably been committed by a man. Of this second assumption, however, I was, I might say, prepared to use a word even stronger than 'probably.'

"I believed Flora innocent of the actual deed itself for the same reason which led me to believe that, although Miss Crawford had been in Peyton's rooms the night that he was killed, she had left them while he still lived. And that reason was that his false teeth had been removed from his mouth and put into a glass of water on the shelf in the bathroom.

"He was carrying on a more or less questionable affair with Flora; he was writing letters to Miss Crawford and pursuing her with his attentions. Consequently, to neither of them would he willingly have revealed himself as the utterly unlovely spectacle such as a man minus his false teeth presents."

"Wonderful!" breathed Irene King. "Imagine, reasoning a thing out like that! It seems so simple when one hears it, and yet one would never——"

"It *is* simple," Clyde said modestly. "It's just a question of observation, as Roger says, plus deduction; and that's a matter of training, of course.

"Well, that let both Flora and Miss Crawford out as the actual perpetrators of the crime. Both, however, had been in his rooms. Miss Crawford by the evidence of her handkerchief, and also by her own confession, was there on the night of the murder. Flora, by the evidence of her heel print in the quilt, was there either that same night or the following morning.

"We knew, of course, that she was there in the morning. Her emphatic assertion that she hadn't been 'within ten foot' of the body, although I knew she had, would naturally tend to suggest that she had been there the night before. There was no valid reason why, during the time that elapsed between the discovery of the dead man and the arrival of the police, she should not have stepped up close to look at him. Her insistence that she hadn't was in itself suspicious.

"Yet, I was inclined to assign another reason for her deliberate lie. I thought that Peyton would hardly have insisted on making an appointment with her on the same night that he had intended to waylay Miss Crawford—and that he *did* intend to waylay her, seemed to be clear from his whisper at the lawn concert—that he'd see her later.

"Nor would Flora have taken the initiative. She had no need to make ad-

vances to Peyton. She had her hands full thinking up ways to get money and presents from him without giving value received. Her game was to keep just out of his reach and to keep him keen and interested, while taking no risks herself and, at the same time, taking care not to arouse Keefer's suspicions. The chances were a thousand to one against her having gone up to Peyton's rooms that night.

"I decided that she had been ignorant of the fact of the murder until the actual discovery of the body, but that she had approached it and stood very close to it while Miss Crawford was telephoning for Doctor Kenyon. At no other time was she alone in the room.

"The problem then was to ascertain why she was so determined that no one should find out she'd been where she declared she had not. What did it matter? The only reason I could assign was that she must have taken something from the body. If there's a fire of suspicious origin, and a man swears he hasn't been near the building, although it can be established he has, the inference is that he is perhaps the incendiary.

"But what, if anything, had Flora taken? If the watch and wallet, the fact that she had been nowhere near him wouldn't have signified, for she could have secured both these articles without approaching the body at all. They were on the candle table on the other side of the bed.

"And Peyton had on his pajamas, with a dressing-gown slipped on over them. He surely wasn't carrying any money in his pocket, nor was he wearing jewels. All the rest of his jewelry was accounted for.

"It was the little golden ball, hidden between the braids of the rug, and entirely overlooked by the coroner and Chief Palmer in their examination of the room, that gave me the clew I was seeking. I asked myself if it were possible that the article from which the ball had been broken could have been clutched in Peyton's hand. If so, and Flora had caught sight of it, she might have been curious to know what it was. In order to find out, she would have *had* to step sufficiently close to the body to leave the imprint of her heel in the satin quilt on the floor!"

Again Clyde smiled and shook his head in whimsical fashion at Mrs. King's murmur of admiration, and turned to Roger Frederick.

"You remember," he said, "we tried to figure out what the golden ball could have been broken off of? We thought of a lavallière or an earring and I asked you if Miss Crawford possessed any article of jewelry from which it might conceivably have been snapped?

"Well, it was my intention to make a thorough examination of her jewels, and of such as Flora possessed, as well. But when I came to look more closely at the golden ball, I reached the conclusion that it was part of a cuff link. I showed it to Doctor Kenyon, and he agreed with me. In fact, I believe it was he who said he thought so, before I had given him my opinion.

"So, unless I was guessing very badly indeed, it was a piece of a cuff link that Flora had taken, either from the dead man's hand or from the floor where the body lay. She picked it up while Miss Crawford was out of the room telephoning for Doctor Kenyon; and, although at that time there had been no announcement that murder had been done, when the doctor arrived and declared that Mr. Peyton had been choked, Flora still kept silence about her find—and kept the find!

"Then I began to ask myself questions about her, and about her motives in concealing a piece of evidence that might have a very important bearing on the solution of the crime.

"I could make no direct charge against her. Such a step would defeat its own end inevitably. She would

merely deny everything, and destroy the evidence. You may be sure she hid it carefully at the first opportunity! The only thing I could do was to give her plenty of rope and let her tangle herself up in it, which would also involve the tangling up of Horace Peyton's murderer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KEEFER'S CRIME.

"IN working on any case," Clyde continued, "unless I know the identity of the criminal from the start, or until I have established it absolutely, he is known to me as X, if he happens to be a man, and as Mrs. X, if a woman."

"Assuming that the female of the malefactor species is always married?" queried Mrs. King with amusement.

Throned like a queen in the deep armchair, the brilliant colors of its heaped cushions but served to emphasize the slender whiteness of her. Her head rested against a background of jade-green satin that brought out the rich, dark sheen of her hair and the creamy pallor of her complexion, showing the lines of her small head in graceful silhouette. Her fingers, long and slim, with perfect almond-shaped nails, twisted a flame-colored tassel, as she smiled up at the detective. "You have no bachelor maids in your roster of evildoers, Mr. Clyde?"

"We have surprisingly few, in comparison!" was the reply, made with unexpected seriousness. Then, with a grin, "Which presupposes, if you like, that the women are all right until they get married, and then they're led from the paths of rectitude by the men!

"Well, to get back to our mysterious Mr. X. There were certain characteristics that he must possess in order to fit the rôle of Horace Peyton's murderer, and he was also subject to certain very specific limitations. Any person who didn't check up with all of these could be definitely discarded as a suspect, and the field narrowed down by the process of elimination. Without going into minute details, the test eliminated all the male guests in the house, the groom, the chauffeur, and nearly every one in the neighborhood. By 'neighborhood' I mean the village and its environs."

"But I wish you would go into details!" objected Mrs. King. "I want to know what Mr. X's limitations and characteristics were—the specifications he had to live up to, if you please!"

"That," croaked Frederick, "is just morbid curiosity, Irene. And what difference does it make?"

"Well, how can I tell how Mr. Clyde went to work to fasten the crimes on Keefer, if he doesn't explain how he checked the man up with his Mr. X?" she insisted. "Please, Mr. Clyde, don't pay any attention to Roger! Tell me."

"I didn't go to work to fasten the crime on Keefer," returned Clyde slowly. "I went to work to find out the identity of Mr. X, that was all. And if you want to hear the details, I'm willing to give them—at the risk of being tedious!

"First: He must have ready access to the house, so that if he were met downstairs or in the halls by any of the guests or by Miss Crawford herself, his presence there could be readily accounted for.

"Second: He must be well known to Mr. Peyton—sufficiently well and favorably known for the old gentleman to be willing to admit him in the middle of the night.

"Third: He must be possessed either of a superior grade of intelligence, or else an unusual amount of crafty shrewdness—witness the faked evidence of burglary in the murdered man's room, the entire absence of incriminating finger prints, and the disposal of the watch and wallet.

"Fourth: He must, somehow, enter into Flora's scheme of things, else why should she run the risk of concealing

evidence against him, thus, in effect, becoming his accomplice?

"Fifth: He must possess a strong physique, and tremendously powerful hands—especially the hands.

"Sixth: He must be the owner of, or he must have possessed and been wearing at the time of his interview with Mr. Peyton, a pair of cuff links, which were made of twenty-two-karat gold.

"Seventh: He must have a motive. I've put that at the end of the list, but it's by no means the least, of course. I added an eighth, which was not an absolute requirement in the specification, Mrs. King, but a sort of sub-heading to the motive: Probably not premeditating murder, and certainly not a professional burglar or criminal.

"I don't mind admitting that for a while I was absolutely nonplused. It looked to me to be next door to impossible to find any one who would check up with that list."

"I can see how it would be," nodded Irene King. She had pulled a square blue-and-gold cushion onto her lap, and, resting her elbows on it, cupped her chin in the palms of her hands as she leaned forward interestedly. "But the 'tremendously powerful hands' and Flora's odd behavior must have given you a hint, even before the attack on Roger last night."

Clyde nodded.

"Quite right," he said. "And Flora's odd behavior continued to the extent of her listening outside the door, while I was talking to Miss Crawford. I heard a sound in the hall, but when I got there, no one was in sight. Yet Flora—I realized it had been she, on account of the reek of lilac perfume all over the place—Flora had not had time to go downstairs, either by the front or the back way. She must have ducked into one of the rooms and hidden there."

"Did you make inquiries?"

"No. I——"

"That must have been while I was down in the living room, being pumped by old Mrs. Milton, wasn't it?" asked Frederick. "Do you suppose Flora could have slipped into my room? The door was unlocked."

"Very likely. At any rate, she slipped out again, left the house, and went to the village. She stopped at the bank, drew out all her savings, and then made a round of the shops. Her purchases included a traveling bag, a quantity of silk stockings and lingerie, a couple of pairs of smart pumps—all quite expensive for a girl who was working as a domestic servant."

"Why, she was buying a trousseau!" exclaimed Mrs. King. "That's what it was—a trousseau! She was going to run away and be married!"

"Exactly how I figured it out, Mrs. King!" said Clyde. "From the village, she came back here to the inn, managed to get to her room without any one seeing her and reporting her return to me, changed her dress, and engaged in some conversation with Keefer. He went to her window and spoke to her, and then, a little later, while he was cranking his car outside the garage, she ran out and held a whispered conference with him. It was understood that they were to go to the movies together, and that he was to meet her. But when I started for Doctor Kenyon's house, Keefer was down by the rhododendrons in the driveway, talking to little Billy Noonan, and he had Mr. Peyton's platinum watch in his hand!"

"What?" cried Frederick. "Keefer had the watch, you say?"

"Yes. The other Noonan boy, Sam, had found the wallet, while the two of them were searching for hellgramites in Coombes' Creek. Keefer had told them to go and collect bait for a fishing trip he and I were to have taken this morning."

Irene King drew a long breath.

"Well!" she said. "That must have

given you something to think about, Mr. Clyde!"

"It did," said the detective. "Especially Keefer's presence at that time in the precise spot where later Mr. Frederick was attacked and nearly strangled! He was, I take it, watching for Flora, but it was then too late to go to the movies, so something must have happened to detain her. When I talked to her in her room last night, it was evident that she had been packing. Her suit case was pushed under the bed, and she had been sorting over her clothes and belongings. She denied having seen Keefer, and pretended anger at him, because, she claimed, he hadn't shown up to take her to the pictures as he promised."

"And what," Frederick wanted to know, "did you make of that?"

"That she was late in meeting Keefer at the appointed place; that he started back toward the house to find out what was keeping her; that he suspected her of having a rendezvous in the garden, and when you came down the drive, promptly decided that you were coming to meet her and pounced on you like a wild beast!

"Then, recognizing you, or frightened away by my approach with the light, he fled through the shrubbery probably in the direction Flora had already taken. We have no means now of knowing just what passed between them, but it is probable that she managed to convince him of the utter absurdity of his suspicions.

"At the same time, knowing that I had seen him in that spot earlier in the evening, it must have been clear to him that he would have trouble in explaining; and, if it could be shown that he had attacked you, he would then be called upon to prove that he hadn't killed Mr. Peyton. Suspicion of that crime was almost certain to attach to him.

"His only safe course, then, was to get away before the police arrived and searched the grounds, and remain in hiding until this morning, when Flora could join him. Meanwhile, she would deny all knowledge of having seen him. She would pack her bag, and, at the first opportunity, slip out of the inn here, make sure she was not followed, join him at the place agreed on between them, and thence go to some place where they were not known to be married.

"That, I believe, is what Flora Barnes and Morton Keefer planned after Keefer's attack on Mr. Frederick last night. They did not carry out their plan for more than one reason, the principal one being that Flora was dead. She couldn't go to her rendezvous with Keefer, even if she had wanted to, or had intended to in the first place.

"When she failed to appear to-day, Keefer became uneasy. He knew she had tried to double-cross him before; he wasn't sure that he could trust her. He decided to come back here and find out for himself why she hadn't met him, as she had promised to do."

"But"—a little puzzled frown creased Irene King's white forehead—"but Mr. Clyde, how do you make that out? I don't understand why you say he decided to come back here and find out for himself the reason she hadn't joined him this morning, when he killed her last night!"

"He didn't kill her last night, Mrs. King. He had no more to do with killing her than I had—less, in fact, for I shouldn't have been so sure of my ground. I knew she didn't want or mean to marry Keefer, and that her promise to meet him was merely a ruse to get him out of the way so that she could safely carry out her plans with regard to the man she did want and meant to marry if she could. But the place was carefully guarded outside, and I knew she couldn't leave it without being arrested. I was certain, too, that nobody could get in. Keefer——"

"But he confessed!" Mrs. King cried. "I heard him!"

"He confessed to attacking Mr. Frederick, yes. That was why he thought he was being arrested. When Flora failed to show up at the appointed time to-day, he came back here, as I've said, to find her, to see why she hadn't come. And when Palmer rushed at him, flourishing a revolver, and shouting that he had him dead to rights, Keefer supposed, of course, that Mr. Frederick had recognized him and sworn out a warrant for his arrest.

"The cry that distressed you so, Mrs. King, when the car was being driven off down the road, was Keefer's cry of horror at learning of his sweetheart's death. He didn't know the first thing about it until Palmer or Brady told him. He never dreamed that she'd been murdered or that any harm had come to her. And out of a clear sky, comes the word to him that not only has she been brutally choked to death, but that he himself had been arrested and has confessed to the crime! Is it any wonder that he screamed like a tortured beast?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MURDERER DISCOVERED.

IRENE KING'S slim fingers had ceased to play with the tassels ornamenting the gorgeous cushions piled about her. She sat staring at Clyde in horrified fascination.

"But how—who—who *did* kill her, then?" she asked at last. "If Keefer isn't Mr. X, who is? And why should Mr. Peyton and Flora—oh!" She made a little bewildered gesture. "It's all so strange and confusing!"

"So I found it," said Clyde gravely. "And very terrible. I like this profession of mine. If I didn't, I shouldn't stick to it. There's a thrill in matching wits with clever criminals and winning out—a thrill in the game even if one doesn't win. But when it comes to a case like this, involving people who are respected and looked up to in their community, admired and loved—I confess then I'd rather do cross-word puzzles or make up palindromes for the Sunday supplements, and leave the detective business to somebody else."

"But——"

"Oh, I'll tell you about it," he said. "My part in it goes to show that none of us is as clever as he thinks he is, I believe. None of us is, of course. Flora was too sure, and I was too sure, and X was too sure. The result——"

He gave his little characteristic half shrug.

"I reconstructed the crime, as usual," he went on, after a brief pause, "without, of course, knowing the identity of X. I had various suspicions, one by one, they seemed to bring me up against a blank wall. I talked things over as well as I could with Roger yesterday; but last night, when additional discoveries and developments came, he couldn't listen to me, and I talked to some one else. But I couldn't lay all my cards on the table. I'm going to tell you now, and see if you agree with the conclusion I've reached."

"Go on, go on," begged Mrs. King.

"To begin with, then, X entered Mr. Peyton's room some time after Miss Crawford had left it, probably in the neighborhood of one o'clock. He wouldn't have appeared much earlier, because of the probability of meeting people in the halls. Even so, he took a chance that he might meet some one, but, although he did not court recognition, he had no need to fear it then. He was not premeditating murder. He had come to see Mr. Peyton on a personal matter that admitted of no delay. It was so imperative that he could not wait even until the next day to be settled.

"Peyton, after his scene with Miss Crawford, had retired. When X knocked at his bedroom door, he got up and admitted him, putting on the dress-

ing-gown over his pajamas, but not bothering to replace his false teeth.

"I can only guess at what took place at the interview, but my supposition is that X made certain demands which were promptly refused by Mr. Peyton. High words, and a quarrel ensued. Mr. Peyton, becoming angry, started for the bell to summon a servant to eject X from the room. In an effort to prevent him from summoning assistance, X sprang at him and seized him by the throat.

"X did not mean to do murder. His intent was merely to prevent the old man from calling or ringing for help; but his sudden grip was viciously strong. It crushed the old man's feeble throat; and when it was relaxed, X discovered that instead of merely choking Peyton into silence, so that he could not cry out, he had killed him. The body slumped in a heap onto the floor at his feet.

"Standing there over his victim, X now realized the position in which he had placed himself. He had no desire to pay the penalty for murder, even for manslaughter, and he could hardly plead self-defense, for Peyton was an aged man and unarmed. No one, so far as he knew, had seen him enter. His only hope was to effect his escape unobserved, and in such a manner that no one should be able to discover his identity.

"He therefore marked the window and the screen, took the watch and wallet from the candle table, turned out the lights, and quietly left the room and the house.

"Knowing that the watch was unique and could easily be identified, he dared not keep it, nor try to realize on it; but there was no use in deliberately throwing away a considerable sum of money that could not be identified. As he drove along the road, away from the scene of his crime, he hurled the watch and the empty wallet over the parapet of the culvert, down into the bed of Coombes' Creek, where the bushes are thick and the brambles many. He thought they would be safe there, as no one would be likely to look for them in such a place.

"In his excitement, he did not notice that he had broken one of his cuff links, and that the pieces had fallen from the sleeve of his shirt. When he did discover his loss, he had no idea where to look for it. He had to trust to luck that, if it turned up at all, it would not be in the room of the man he had killed. He could explain its presence anywhere else if he were called upon to do so, which would be extremely unlikely.

"But the next day, he found that he had reckoned without Flora Barnes—Flora, the shrewd, the ambitious, the grasping, willing to sell her silence at a price.

"She managed to make a brief opportunity to speak to him. She had, she told him hurriedly, one half of his cuff link. She told him when and where she had found it. She had told no one else, but she was suspected of being in some way implicated in the murder, and she would be closely questioned. If X did not want suspicion to be turned his way, he would better lose no time in seeing her alone, somewhere in secret.

"He made an appointment to meet her in the grounds after dark. He knew that one half of his cuff link, the golden ball, was much the same as the ball off any other cuff link. It was in my possession, found in the braids of the rug beside the dead body of Horace Peyton. But it would be useless to me or to any one else, unless Flora talked. He did not intend that she should talk.

"She was supposed to meet Morton Keefer and go to the movies with him. Their place of meeting had been arranged, as usual, down the road a little way. Many times she had kept him waiting. She naturally counted on be-

ing able to do it once again with impunity, while she had her interview with X in the garden.

"But Keefer upset her plans by spying on her and attacking Mr. Frederick as he came down the drive on his way to the village to meet me. She then made a second appointment with X. He was to come to her room later, she having safely disposed of Keefer, the disturbing element, by sending him off to wait until she should join him this morning.

"And that," said Clyde, "is where I made my mistake. I was certain that she and X could not possibly have an interview that night. I knew that X had murdered Mr. Peyton, but I couldn't prove it, and Flora wouldn't help me. She was intent on playing her own game. She did not care two straws for Morton Keefer. She was infatuated with X, and she believed she could compel him to come to her terms when he realized that she had him at her mercy.

"While I was serenely confident that he could not go to her, she knew that he could, and she was expecting him. That is why she could afford to laugh at me when I told her to think over her various statements and see if she didn't want to revise some of them this morning. I left her, sure that she could not leave the house and that no one could enter it without being promptly placed under arrest."

"Yet some one did?" Irene asked in a strained voice.

"Yes, some one did. It was about twenty minutes past one o'clock when I heard footsteps in the hall. Some one went into Mr. Frederick's room, stayed a moment, and came out again. I was waiting when he did come out, and went downstairs with him and saw him off the grounds.

"At that time Flora was alive. I then interviewed the groom in his room over the garage, left him at fifteen minutes past two o'clock, and made a brief circuit of the house before I went back up to my own room.

"It was during the time I was out of the house that X kept his rendezvous with Flora in her room. He went there, knowing that she held his life in her hands, that everything depended on her silence—and he was not willing to pay the price of that silence. He went to her determined to get his cuff link away from her, if he had to kill her to do it. He went *prepared* to kill her, if necessary."

"Prepared?"

"He left no finger prints in Mr. Peyton's room, Mrs. King, because he had just gotten out of an automobile and was still wearing his driving gloves. He left no finger prints in Flora's room, because he had carefully put gloves on his hands before she opened the door to him!

"Perhaps he pleaded with her at first to give the cuff link back to him, pointing out that their marriage was impossible and could end only in disaster, But he dared not waste much time, for he knew that very soon I would reënter the house and would probably discover him.

"In his haste to have done with the interview, he probably gave himself away. Flora suspected his good faith. She delivered her ultimatum. Either he would arrange to marry her at once, or, when I returned to question her again in the morning, she would tell me the truth, and he would be arrested, charged with the murder of Horace Peyton. The half of the cuff link in her possession would inevitably convict him if she gave it to me, and told what she knew.

"She meant what she said, and I knew it. There was only one way out for him, then, and he took that way. He killed her, not accidentally, as he had killed Mr. Peyton, but wantonly, cold-bloodedly, to shut her mouth once

and for all. He locked his gloved fingers about her throat, and choked her until she was dead.

"He must have been sure in his own mind that she had hidden the cuff link somewhere about her. He searched her body and failed to find it. Then panic seized him, and the wild disorder of the room shows the frantic, terror-stricken search he made to find that bit of evidence which, if it came into my hands, he knew would mean the end of everything for him. He abandoned the search only after it became plain that to continue it would be to invite discovery.

"Then, it may be, he took heart again. Since he was unable to find the link, perhaps no one could. Perhaps Flora had been bluffing him, after all! Or, if it were actually discovered subsequently, it would be by pure accident, for who but he knew that it had been in Flora's possession, and so could guess where to look for it?

"I confess I didn't, although from the moment I identified the golden ball as part of a twenty-two-karat gold cuff link, I knew that if I could find the other part I should be able to put my hand on the murderer of Horace Peyton. But, the chances were a million to one against such a thing.

"Perhaps, I say, X took heart again, when he failed to find any trace of it on Flora or hidden in her room. She would never tell any one! She, no matter how vindictive or revengeful she may have felt, would give no evidence against him now. He had silenced her tongue forever. He had nothing further to fear from her.

"And yet"—Clyde's voice was slow, curiously impressive—"and yet, it *was* Flora, the girl he had murdered to save his own guilty skin, who did give evidence against him—and gave it to me!"

"Flora? But she was dead when you found her, you said? How could she——"

"Flora, who was dead when I found her. Flora, who had been dead for something like five hours. I couldn't believe it at first. I was almost stunned with amazement. And then, like a flash, the whole thing was clear to me. I knew just what had happened. I could reconstruct the whole thing from the beginning, as I have just told it to you.

"X had been clever—diabolically so—but not quite clever enough. He had silenced her tongue, but he hadn't shut her mouth. And it was in her mouth that I found the other half of the broken link—a gold oval, engraved with five horizontal lines and the letter—'K!'"

The blue-and-gold cushion slipped from Irene King's relaxing fingers to the ground. Mechanically, she stooped to retrieve it, breaking the tense, dramatic silence with the breathless question:

"But the murderer? He's been arrested?"

"No, he hasn't been arrested, but he's being very carefully watched. Except for half an hour this morning, when, against my orders, he was allowed to be without a guard, he's been under surveillance every minute since Flora's dead body was found in her room. Doctor Kenyon is——"

"Oh, I knew it, I knew it!" Irene cried. "When I heard you tell Chief Palmer that he mustn't be allowed to leave the place, I knew you suspected Doctor Kenyon!"

"But I didn't suspect him," Clyde contradicted quietly. "Not even though I knew he was the only person who entered Laurel Inn last night. The K on that cuff link doesn't stand for Kenyon, Mrs. King."

With a deft twist of his fingers, Jimmy Clyde flipped the two pieces of gold onto the table before him, where they fell with a musical chink.

"I could hazard a guess as to what it does stand for—but why speculate when Roger knows? Suppose"—Clyde's

dark eyes suddenly blazed down on the pale-faced man in the reclining chair—"suppose you tell us what that 'K' on your cuff link signifies, Roger?"

"Glad to!" responded Frederick. His voice was perfectly clear and distinct, with scarcely a thread of the croaking hoarseness. "It stands for 'Kismet,' Mr. Clyde—which, being translated, means 'Fate.' Mine was music, represented by the five horizontal lines of the staff, engraved under the letter. Yours is pointing at you, from under this satin thing on my knees. Don't scream, Irene, and don't move. Keep perfectly still where you are, Mr. Clyde. I've got you covered!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE BRINK OF DEATH.

CLYDE did not stir. There was murder in the blue eyes that flamed back into his from the haggard face above the high, swathing gauze bandage—murder, and hate, and a fear that transcended fear and so became the sneering courage of stark desperation. And, where the light silken coverlet was drawn up about the musician's knees, a sharp, narrow ridge was significantly defined.

There was a revolver in the detective's hip pocket, a perfectly good, serviceable revolver, but he dared not make a move toward it. In the fraction of a second that it would take him to whip his hand back and draw the weapon, Frederick would pull the trigger.

Clyde sat quite still on the top of the rustic railing that curved about the outermost rim of the ledge overhanging the ravine, leaning a little forward, his heels hooked over one of the lower rails to preserve his balance.

"So you were shamming hurt, were you?" he said coolly. "You did it very well, but I thought once or twice that croak of yours didn't ring altogether true! While I was trying to get the doctor for you last night, you and Flora fixed it up to meet later. She told you she'd gotten rid of Keefer and the coast would be clear. And then I obligingly did clear it for you when I went out with Kenyon to reconnoiter! Serves me right, I suppose. I ought to have guessed that you'd manage to put something over on me!"

"You're a pretty good guesser, aren't you?" Frederick observed with an ugly sneer. "Altogether too good to suit me. But you missed one guess, Clyde—that I had a gun on me this morning, so the rest won't matter."

Without taking his gaze from the detective's, he drew aside the silk coverlet, revealing his right hand which rested against his thigh just above his knee. His fingers—the long, sinewy, spatulate fingers of the trained pianist—were clamped about the butt of a revolver. The wicked-looking blue-steel barrel, equipped with a Maxim silencer, pointed straight at Jimmy Clyde's breast.

"The rest won't matter," he repeated, "because you're one of those smart young glory hogs! You haven't let anybody else in on what you know, so that you could grab all the credit for solving the mystery of Laurel Inn! Well, you're welcome to it. It's all yours. And you can take it with you! In exactly thirty seconds, Mr. Clyde—and what a pity we can't clock them off on the watch of my late lamented uncle—you're going backwards over that railing. Get me?"

"Oh, I got you the first time!" said Clyde. He had been in a good many tight places in his life, but he could not remember one where he had felt so utterly helpless and impotent. A few hundred yards away was the inn. There were at least three deputies there. If the representative from the county prosecutor's office had not already arrived, he must come almost any minute, and Palmer would soon be back.

Peters and the chauffeur were somewhere about. A shout would bring them, and many other people. And there was Irene King, not a dozen feet from him! What was the matter with her, anyway? Had she fainted, or was she so paralyzed with fear that she couldn't scream for help? He dared not turn to look at her. Some instinct told him that the instant he withdrew his gaze from those flaming, vicious blue eyes would be his last on earth.

"But you're not going to attempt to bump me off with that blunderbuss, are you?" he queried. "No 'sad accident to Mr. Clyde' stuff would get by, you know. You'd have a sweet time explaining how I shot myself through the heart with my own gun!"

"You're not going to be shot through the heart, Clyde, don't worry. And the 'sad accident' will be your losing your balance and falling over backward onto those rocks down in the ravine. The coroner won't look for a bullet hole in a smashed skull."

"Not even if Mrs. King suggests to him that there may be one there?"

"Irene? Oh, she won't split on a pal. You don't have to worry about that, either!"

"Roger!" For the first time the woman spoke, her voice low and vibrating to a strange note. "Roger, are you mad? What are you doing?"

He waved her silent with his left hand, not turning from Clyde.

"It was a pretty good alibi," he said, "but I was afraid it wouldn't hold water if any one got to figuring up just how long it would take that car of mine to make Weldover! She'll do eighty-odd, if you push her, and Tony couldn't swear that I was in the house all the time between twelve and half past two, in spite of the fire."

"You set that yourself, of course? Jumped into your pajamas and then raised the alarm, eh?" Clyde was sparring for time, every muscle tense, keen, narrowed eyes watching hawklike for the slightest wavering or unsteadiness of that blue-steel mouth of death.

"Short circuited my lamp—perfectly easy. I'd have been sitting pretty, too, if it hadn't been for breaking that cursed cuff link, and then that girl! Like a fool, she wouldn't give it up!"

"Tell me," Clyde said, "what was the idea, anyway? I believe I guessed everything but that. Why did you go after the old man? It wasn't because he was annoying Nell and writing her those rotten letters. Just why did you come back to see him that night? I'd like to know. Satisfy my curiosity, won't you? So long as I won't repeat it——"

"Why not? As you say," Frederick laughed harshly, "you won't repeat it! No, it wasn't because he was annoying Nell with the letters, but the letters gave me the idea. I thought they'd be worth a lot of money to him. Those I had would put him in jail in a minute!

"I happened to be pretty short of cash, and I tried to separate him from a few thousand. Told him Nell Crawford was going to have him pinched unless he paid up and got out. He didn't believe me, and he wouldn't come across. He said she'd just been in for a little visit with him, and started to ring the bell to send for her and prove it. But I thought he'd better not. I was willing to take his word for it."

"Ah!" said Clyde softly. "So that's how you knew she'd been there! He told you! I wondered how you found it out, because I couldn't figure when Nell got the chance to tell you! You nearly fooled me, Roger. You played your part very cleverly. Of course, I saw you plant the handkerchief, but I didn't catch on right away to the fact that you knew I was watching you in the mirror afterward and meant that I should see you find it!"

"Oh, you guessed that, too, did you? Clyde, you're too clever by half! If I

hadn't outguessed you about this gun, where should I be now? Well, the thirty seconds must be up—and where'll *you* be in two more, eh?" Again he laughed, that ugly, mocking, mirthless laugh, that cracked suddenly as the bruised muscles of his throat contracted in an involuntary spasm, bringing him up to a sitting position.

And, all at once, there was a flash of blue and gold, a dull, muffled sound, and an oath from Frederick, as the satin cushion, hurled from Irene King's hand, struck him full in the face. The bullet from his revolver snipped through the foliage of a young hemlock, twenty feet to one side, and flattened itself harmlessly against the moss-grown rocks on the farther wall of the ravine.

Almost simultaneously, the detective's own revolver spoke; and Roger Frederick, musician, blackmailer, murderer, fell back lifeless and lay among the gayly colored pillows of the steamer chair.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTERMATH.

MRS. MILTON, brave in her famous square-cut emeralds, would have liked very much to hear the conversation that was going on between the two men sitting together at the other end of the long inn living room; but although she had tried her best, she could not catch a word. She watched them, nevertheless, as she stitched away at her inevitable embroidery, and wondered indignantly how, after all the terrible and evil doings in the house, Doctor Kenyon could look so cheerful.

Kenyon was not aware that the old lady had noticed his mood, but he would not have cared, in any event. Happiness radiated from him, and his face was like an open book for all who saw to read. It had not required any great astuteness on Clyde's part for him to guess what had happened, and he had stretched out his hand with his whimsical, boyish grin and a hearty:

"Congratulations, doctor! I knew it was coming, sooner or later, and I'm certainly mighty glad for both of you!"

Yet, even with the tender thrill of Nell Crawford's voice still ringing in his ears, Kenyon could hardly realize his good fortune.

"And I thought all the time it was Frederick she cared for!" said he. "I'm just an ordinary chap, an impecunious country practitioner! And—Nell says I must have been stupidly blind!"

"You were!" Clyde told him breezily. "I knew better myself, after I'd seen them together twice. She liked him, that was all, and while he was pretending to be in love with her, he was crazy about Irene King."

"'Crazy' is right," nodded the doctor. "Odd that he should turn out to be your friend Palmer's cunning madman, isn't it? Mad as a March hare, he was; yet, Clyde, I knew that fellow well. I've seen him and been with him frequently, off and on, for over a year, and I never saw the slightest sign of abnormality! If anybody had asked me I'd have sworn to it—staked every nickel I've got—that he was as sane as you or I!"

"Mrs. King says he's been acting strangely for some time," Clyde mused. "She didn't like to speak of it to any one, because she thought it must be her imagination. Her husband hadn't noticed anything wrong."

"But, good heaven!" cried Kenyon, "if he hadn't been clean off his head he'd never have explained before a witness just why he killed Peyton and Flora, and how he intended killing you so as to make your death look like an accident!"

"He said I needn't worry about her; she wouldn't tell," said Clyde. "Of course, his mental twist might have made him believe that because he was in

love with her, and so would stand by him. That's when she asked him if he were mad—when he said, 'Irene won't split on a pal.' "

"And then she let fly with the cushion, and saved your life!"

"I shouldn't wonder if she did," Clyde conceded. "She'd hardly have done that if she had been a pal of his, would she? No, hardly. Unless——"

"What the dickens do you mean—'unless?' " demanded Kenyon.

Clyde turned an innocent face.

"Why, nothing, of course! I was just speculating that if they had been in this blackmailing scheme together, more or less, she might have decided to let him out because he implicated her in what he told me, and because that was a bum scheme of his to put me out of the way. The coroner might have found the bullet in my skull, I mightn't have smashed up enough on those rocks to conceal the evidence of the shot—although, I grant you, it would have been a nasty tumble!"

"But——"

"Don't you see what I mean? He'd bungled, all the way through. He was a weak reed. She could sacrifice him, and there wouldn't be a jot of evidence against her, because he was mad!

"But, thunder!" he added, with a laugh, "here I'm theorizing on what might have been the case if Frederick had really been sane, and Mrs. King were a clever, unscrupulous crook! Whereas, he was certainly a homicidal maniac, and she's a charming woman, with wealth, beauty, position, a host of powerful friends! Let's talk of something sensible, shall we? Did you leave Miss Crawford all right?"

"Yes. Terribly upset, of course, and shocked, but—how shall I put it?—well, relieved, in spite of everything, that the nightmare's over."

Both men rose to their feet as Irene King appeared in the doorway. She came toward them, fresh, cool and unruffled, smiling that slow, grave smile of hers that lent an added beauty to her lovely face.

"I'm just starting back home, Mr. Clyde," she said, "and I wanted to say good-by to you before I left."

There was an odd, thrilling magnetism in the touch of the slim, bare hand she held out to him. The fingers seemed to curl themselves about his confidingly, almost caressingly, as if loath to draw away again. Yet Clyde was perfectly well aware that they had done nothing of the kind, nor was there more than gracious cordiality in the low music of her voice.

"Oh, not good-by, I hope, Mrs. King!" Her eyes, he decided, were not dark blue, or black, as he had thought. They were that rarest of rare colors: pure, deep violet. "Won't you please make it au revoir?"

"I make it au revoir?" she challenged him gayly. "Surely, the expression of the wish, at least, should come from you! Still, perhaps, who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed!" echoed Clyde very softly.

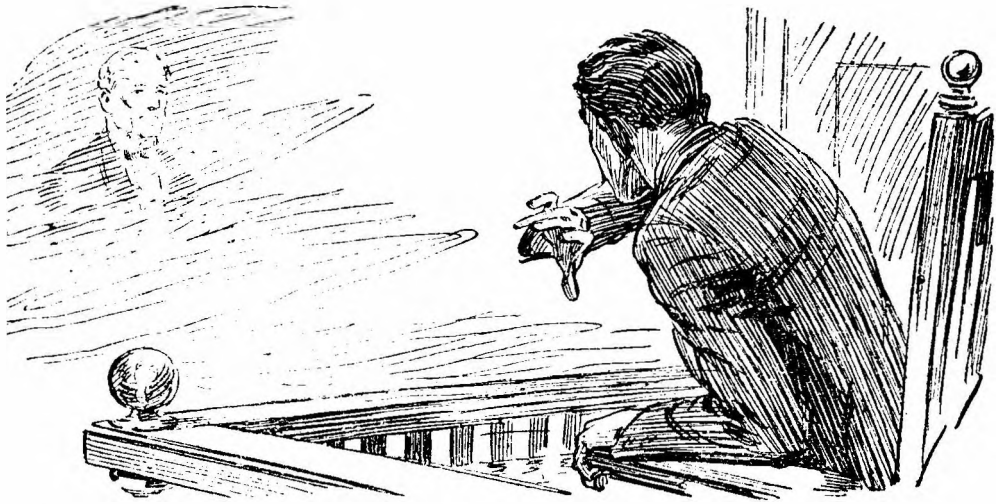
Old Mrs. Milton's sniff was quite audible as she bent to pick up her scissors. There he was again, staring after the woman like a bemused idiot! As if strangers had to come to Laurel Inn, as if Eleanor Crawford had no friends who'd stand by her and see her through! The old lady patted the square-cut emeralds on her breast and sniffed again.

It was true that Clyde had stared after that slender, graceful figure in white. He heard the sniffs, smiled, and turned back to his chair and Kenyon.

"She certainly is easy to look at," he said. And then, with a little sigh: "Yet, I wonder——"

But what it was that he wondered. he did not say.

THE END.



THE RISEN DEAD

By Tip Bliss

Author of "Queer," etc.

"THEY ain't got a thing on you, Phil," Abie Klempner advised his client earnestly. "Not a thing. Remember, it's they that's got to prove you killed old Marley. You don't have to prove nothing—anything. Have a cigar."

Philip Duval reached out a long, well-kept hand that trembled despite his usual iron control.

"Perhaps you'd worry if you were to be tried for first-degree murder," he suggested in a voice that shook a little. "It isn't exactly a very pleasant sensation."

"Sure it ain't," agreed Klempner. "But I wouldn't worry if I had a good lawyer to defend me, like you got. If I do say it myself," he added in a modest afterthought.

Silently Duval agreed. He knew that Klempner, this sleek, oily little man who in private life was so disagreeable as to be offensive, could in the courtroom shed his mannerisms like a pair of gloves and was accounted one of the two or three outstanding criminal lawyers in the State. His clever cross-examination had caused many an earnest would-be truth teller to break down, contradict himself and finally leave the stand with the feeling he was lucky to be merely a witness and not the defendant.

And Klempner in an address to the jury became so impassioned that he could bring tears to the eyes of the most hard-boiled jury. "Get Klempner and get off light," was the word passed around the underworld when one of the crowd encountered trouble with the law.

Not that Philip Duval was a member of the underworld. He was an actor, a good actor, whose openings invariably brought the first-string critics, and whose scrap books were jammed with enconiums. To think of himself as a criminal was abhorrent, almost impossible. Many nights since his arrest he had awakened suddenly with the conviction that it was all a horrible dream, that old Marley was still alive, acting his bits as butler or valet, while

Duval trod the stage the undisputed master of the play.

Then realization would come, the memory of that dreadful evening when old Marley had announced to the assembled company his engagement to Irma Truden, the slim, golden-haired leading woman, to whom Duval, in his vanity, had tacitly supposed himself engaged and whom he intended to marry "some day."

True, Marley had not been so very old, but members of the company had become so accustomed to seeing his athletic, gray-crowned figure moving unobtrusively across the stage that they invariably prefixed his name with the adjective. "Old Marley," they had christened him, and old Marley he had always been in their thoughts.

News of the engagement stunned them all. That Irma Truden, just rising to fame and fortune, should throw herself away on a man who was certainly past his prime and who even in his prime had never been better than a fair actor was unbelievable. But Irma, standing with her hand on Marley's arm, had confirmed the news with a smiling nod, which seemed to indicate that she considered herself to be a fortunate girl.

"Well," most of the players had said to themselves: "I suppose that's love," and had hastened forward with their congratulations. Duval, when the wave of stupor had passed from his mind, had joined them and so perfectly trained was his voice that none had noticed a strange note in it. But later that night, that unforgetable night——

"No, sir," Klempner was saying, "they ain't got a thing on you. How they was crazy enough to pinch you, just because somebody found some letters you'd wrote her a couple years back and figured you might of done it from jealousy beats me. An' why the district attorney didn't get the case thrown out when he saw the grand jury was gonna indict you on no evidence at all, gets by me, too. Course, you and I know why the grand jury indicted. There was a couple pretty lady killers got away scot-free and they had to indict somebody. That's your bad luck."

Klempner pitched his cigar butt out of the window and continued.

"You got a pretty good alibi. We'll go over it again. After the show you went up to your room in the hotel and played bridge with some of the others. Everybody, of course, was talkin' about the engagement and you didn't seem specially cut up about it. Then you said you had a headache and went to bed, but told them to keep on playin' as long as they felt like it.

"So they played a few more hands an' you was sleepin' like a baby when they put out the lights an' left. An' the next noon Marley was found stabbed in bed by his own paper knife. Why, mister, you're just as good as free now. Say, did old Marley have any relatives?"

"I don't know," said Duval idly. "Wait a minute—yes, he did. The time his wife died years ago he introduced some woman as his sister. I think he had a son, too, a third-rate vaudeville actor. He and the old man had a bad fight once and never saw each other after that. Why do you ask?"

"I was just thinking it's funny there ain't been any relatives show up," replied Klempner. "Generally when a guy gets killed the courtroom's sure to be all cluttered up with weeping females."

"Maybe the sister died," said Duval. "She was older than he, I believe. And the son was a pretty wild one, I've heard, and he and the old man never got along well together. I guess it wouldn't break the boy's heart to hear about his father's death. Marley left scarcely anything, so there'd have been

no special incentive for him to have come around."

Klempner meditated. "You're likely right," he said, "but still it's kinda funny. I never saw anything quite like it. Well, don't worry. This case is in the bag."

The day of the trial dawned bright and clear with such an invigorating tang in the autumn air that even Duval felt cheered. Surely, weather like this could bode ill to nobody. As he entered the courtroom with his lawyer and the guards he stepped jauntily, a confident smile on his face.

Even the judge seemed kindly disposed. On one or two occasions while the jurors were being selected he cracked innocuous jokes which were received with polite titters by the attendants and spectators.

And the jurors, too, did not appear of the vengeful type. Some of them, Duval supposed, had seen him on the stage and all he could read in their faces was a sympathy that such an eminent person as himself could be in trouble. Very probably, he reflected, Klempner was right, there was nothing to fear, and the case was in the bag.

The little lawyer was in his element, radiating cheer and friendliness. He was in direct contrast to the rather dour and glum Bjorkman, the prosecutor, who seemed to be antagonizing the talesmen by his probing questions, and created the atmosphere in the courtroom that he very much suspected everybody present of having criminal tendencies and would attend to their cases as soon as he came around to them.

"That case is won," chortled Klempner when he had the opportunity to speak alone to his client during the noon recess. "What I tell you—it's in the bag! This Bjorkman couldn't get a conviction if he packed the box with personal friends. He's only got a drag in politics—never was a lawyer. Gets everybody crabbin' at him right away."

The afternoon session seemed to bear out his prediction. Bjorkman grew more and more sarcastic as the hours progressed and more than one talesman left the box with a scowl on his face. Certainly, whatever the district attorney knew of law, he had much to learn about tact.

Duval allowed his eyes to wander about the courtroom, avoiding, when he could, the face of Irma Truden, who stared fixedly at him, but not in an unfriendly way. She, he believed, thought him innocent. Possibly when this unbelievable horror had passed over and her grief had abated somewhat, there might still be a chance——

His eyes lingered on one face in the audience and a slight frown appeared on his brows. Where had he seen this fellow before? Of whom did he remind him?

It was a comparatively young man, about thirty, Duval supposed, who was sitting half a dozen rows away, near the jury box. He was looking at Duval peculiarly, but this was not to be wondered at, since almost every eye in the courtroom was bent in his direction. Duval figuratively shook himself and looked away. Nerves. He must steady himself.

"Did you notice that chap?" he asked Klempner later. "Brown hair, clean shaven, dark suit, medium young, slim?"

"You'd make a great detective," grinned the lawyer, "giving out descriptions like that. I suppose that applies to half the men in the world. No, I didn't notice him. What about him?"

"Oh, nothing. I just thought he looked familiar."

The next morning when court opened, Duval looked again for the young man and found him without difficulty. He had moved a row nearer and was still staring at the defendant with

that odd fixity. Somehow there seemed a slight change about his face, the lines were a bit deeper, the face older. Duval, an expert himself in facial expressions, was puzzled. The alteration was so intangible as to be almost negligible. Suddenly the explanation came and he almost laughed aloud.

"Young cut-up," he mused. "Been playing poker all night and didn't get any sleep."

Bjorkman had begun putting on his witnesses, but they were unimportant ones and Klempner scarcely took the trouble to cross-examine. He lay lolling back in his seat, eyes half closed and with an amused grin on his face. When the medical examiner testified with much wealth of detail that he had found Marley stabbed to death with "what seemed to be a paper cutter," and the prosecutor had brought out exactly what vital organs were pierced, the witness was at last turned over to counsel for the defense.

"I agree with the learned witness to the last letter," stated Klempner solemnly. "We concede that Mr. Marley is indisputedly dead."

Duval smiled, a few of the jury snickered outright and even Judge Walsh smiled until he suddenly recollected his own dignity and rapped angrily for order.

It was plain that Klempner was making a hit and that Bjorkman, by his tedious insistence upon minor details, was making himself unpopular. If there had been any sentiment against Duval at the start it was gone now.

The hotel proprietor was called. Yes, Mr. Marley was sleeping in Room 410. Yes, it was the room to which he had been assigned. Yes, he had occupied it during the run of the show.

Duval, the hotel keeper continued, occupied Room 468. Could Duval, Bjorkman demanded, have traversed the corridors from 468 to 410 and back without being observed? The witness, after much hesitation, said it would have been possible at an early hour in the morning when the only attendant was the floor clerk whose desk he would not have been obliged to pass.

"I see," remarked Klempner in an audible aside, "that this gentleman is qualifying as an expert in sneaking around hotel corridors early in the morning." Before he could be reprimanded he dismissed the witness with a cordial smile that did much to allay the latter's anger.

June Verne, one of the minor members of the cast, was obviously reluctant to testify and, though she was Bjorkman's own witness, she grew openly hostile to the prosecutor under his domineering tactics. She, it appeared, had been the one who had found ardent letters written by Duval to Miss Truden in unguarded moments several years before.

"And so you stole them and kept them?" coached Bjorkman.

"I didn't steal them," the girl answered furiously, "and if you're going to talk like that, Mr. Bjorkman, I won't say another word. I was playing a small part then and at the same time acting as a sort of maid to Miss Truden. Not that I am a maid, but I had to have the money because my mother out in Ohio——"

"Never mind your relatives," interrupted Bjorkman rudely, while Klempner gave the girl a glance of sympathy.

"Well," went on June Verne, "part of my work was to unpack her trunks and in one of them I found these letters tied around with a string. So I—well, I thought Miss Truden might have overlooked them and they might be something she would want to have called to her attention, so I—I——"

"You read them and put them in your belongings," suggested Bjorkman.

"Well, what if I did?" snapped the girl defiantly. "Everybody in the cast was crazy about Mr. Duval, but he

never gave us hardly a glance, and I was so surprised to find out that he was in love with Miss Truden that I didn't know exactly what I was doing. Yes, I put them away and then forgot all about them until the detectives came around and asked us if we knew of anybody who would be interested in putting Mr. Marley out of the way, so then, before I realized what I was doing, I gave them the letters."

"These letters are hereby placed in evidence," snapped Bjorkman. He stared angrily at Klempner, as if expecting an objection, but Klempner was smiling blandly at the ceiling.

"Oh, put them in evidence," assented the little lawyer for the defense. "My client becomes acquainted with a very beautiful woman and has a little heart affair with her, so several years later he kills the man she is engaged to. Very logical indeed. What a pity it never occurred to me to murder some of my old flames who married other men. Dear, dear, I must remedy my carelessness at once."

"Exhibits A and B," snorted Bjorkman. He glared at Klempner and then proceeded to read the letters, raising his voice to a bull-like roar to emphasize any passages he considered incriminating.

They seemed harmless enough, for even in his early infatuation Duval had been careful as to what words he had put on paper. Actors and actresses were notoriously prominent in domestic-relations courts and breach-of-promise suits, and it was always well to be cautious. But when he came to one paragraph, Bjorkman pounded out his words as if he were clanging a hammer on an anvil.

"'And if any one comes between us, dear,'" he shouted, banging his fist down on the table, "'I shall be tempted to resort to physical violence!'"

"Marvelous!" murmured Klempner admiringly. "Murder will out, love will find a way, and my erudite opponent has the wisdom of a Solomon. Oh, marvelous! I really think we had better plead guilty before he finds my client guilty of the Chicago fire and the Wall Street bombing."

"Your honor," bellowed Bjorkman, "will you order this man to——"

"I'll order a recess," smiled Judge Walsh. "Though I must really caution you, Mr. Klempner, against so many asides."

Mr. Klempner succeeded in looking very apologetic.

The little lawyer was in high spirits when court reconvened, but Duval had the uneasy sense that something was wrong. True, the case against him was pitifully weak and seemed certain to collapse at any moment. Witnesses for the prosecution had failed to prove a thing against him save that he might have felt a certain resentment against any one who might marry Irma Truden.

Yet he could not rid his mind of that vague disquietude. Of Bjorkman he felt no fear. The man was a blundering bully and nothing more. The State's witnesses were faltering, the judge was fair, the jury seemed amiable enough. But something——

The young man who had stared at him continued to bother him for no reason he could name. Duval sat upright in his chair and sought for him in the courtroom. At first his heart gave a bound of relief, for he thought the man had gone, but in another moment he caught sight of him.

The man had edged still closer until now he sat but three rows removed from the table at which Klempner and Duval were seated, and was only a few chairs away from Irma Truden, who continued to sit impassive and dry eyed.

And that face had certainly aged—aged since morning! The lines about the nose and mouth were heavier, the high bridge of the nose was more

sharply defined, even the hair showed a little gray at the temples. It was still the face of the youth of the day before, but at the same time it was the face of—of——

Duval shuddered and slumped sharply in his chair, while Klempner looked at him in surprise and reached over to pat his arm.

"Everything coming along fine," he whispered. "Don't worry. We got 'em sewed up. Jury won't be out ten minutes."

Duval suddenly turned haggard eyes on his attorney.

"That man!" he muttered thickly. "Back there. He—he——"

"What man?" Klempner skewed around in his chair and stared. "Nobody there that I ever saw. Usual trial crowd. Man, buck up!"

Duval himself would have been hard put to set down in words the exact cause of his breakdown. There was a certain haunting resemblance to a face he remembered all too well, yet he had immense faith in his own sanity and knew that he was not going mad. It was just as Klempner said, he told himself, a case of nerves. Worry over this trial had broken him and made him see things where nothing existed.

Having argued himself into a degree of assurance, he listened while Klempner recalled the Verne girl to the stand and cross-examined her with a pleasant friendliness. Had she noticed any evidences of affection existing lately between Miss Truden and Mr. Duval? The girl, won over at once by his manner, readily admitted that she had not.

Had Mr. Duval, Klempner pursued smoothly, ever exhibited traces of jealousy? Bjorkman was on his feet with an objection, but the judge allowed the question, and again the girl replied in the negative. And what, the lawyer inquired, had been Mr. Duval's attitude on the evening the engagement was announced? June Verne hesitated.

"Why," she said, "as far as I noticed, he acted about the same as the rest of us. We were all so surprised to hear Miss Truden was going to marry old—was going to marry Mr. Marley that we didn't know what to do. But I think he came up with the rest of us and congratulated them."

"That's all, then," smiled Klempner.

"Just a minute!" bellowed Bjorkman. "Didn't Duval hang back after the others had offered their congratulations? Wasn't he the last to do it?"

"Oh, heavens!" sighed Klempner audibly.

"I don't know," June Verne defied the prosecutor. "I wasn't there as a stenographer, Mr. Bjorkman, to take down the minutes of the proceeding. I was just an actress and they were all my friends—including Mr. Duval."

Bjorkman's disgruntlement was obvious. "That's all!" he snapped, and then, "Miss Truden, take the stand—please." The "please" was added as an afterthought.

Pale but emotionless, Irma Truden stepped forward and Duval caught his breath as he realized anew her poignant beauty. Never before had she seemed so desirable, not even on that night when the news that she was to marry another man had sent surging forward that long-suppressed craving for her.

Here was loveliness, he argued, that might justify anything, even something so repellent as murder. Surely a lover might be pardoned who in the heat of passion might steal down a corridor in the dead of night, might try a door handle and find it unlocked, might——

Irma's answers to the volley of questions shot at her by Bjorkman convinced Duval that she was not hostile to him, that she had no suspicion that he was guilty of the crime. In a voice low but clear she gave her name and the salient points of her career. Then, with no break in her tone, she made

her replies to the queries more pertinent to the case.

"This man Duval," thundered Bjorkman, "was he in love with you?"

"You have read the letters," answered Irma simply.

"I'm not asking about the letters—now. I'm asking if he was in love with you."

"I suppose he thought he was, at one time."

"And were you in love with him?"

"Possibly I thought I was, at one time. Later I learned I wasn't."

Tediously, persistently, step by step, almost word by word, Bjorkman dragged from Irma the story of that brief romance, thundering forth questions which she answered dispassionately. No, Mr. Duval had never formally proposed marriage to her. He had sought her out after performances, they had supped together, he had been attentive and kind, and on occasions when they had been separated in different companies he had written letters to her, perhaps ten or a dozen in all. Then recently the affair, if an affair it could be described, had imperceptibly cooled. Mr. Duval's courtesy and cordiality had remained unabated, but they met seldom professionally.

Bjorkman was becoming more and more irritated and used little pains at concealing it. His own principal witness—the one who might have fastened definite suspicion of guilt on the prisoner—was failing him and in his disappointment he turned to nagging tactics, while Abie Klempner, never interrupting, beamed whole-hearted sympathy.

All this was extremely distasteful to the fastidious Duval, whose private life he had managed to keep a closed book from the public and almost even from himself. So aloof had he been that dramatic reporters sent to interview him and returned to announce disgustedly to their editors that, "This man Duval don't know what publicity is," and then, to prove their journalistic ability in the face of an unwilling subject, they had deluged him with column after column of laudatory type.

Resolutely tearing his attention from the dragging examination, Duval turned his face toward the window and sought to absorb his mind in the sights and sounds of outdoors—sights and sounds which, he promised himself, he would be enjoying as a free man within a day or two.

Two English sparrows were indulging in an acrimonious debate over a scrap of bread that had been left on the window sill. At frequent intervals the shrill clatter and roar of the elevated broke in upon the quiet of the courtroom, trucks rumbled, street cars clanged, sometimes he could even distinguish voices from the pavements below.

"Get outta tha way, you big stiff! Wanta get kilt?"

"Say, who you think you talkin' to?"

"Move along there," authoritatively, "or I'll run ya both in."

The city was going about its own business, and the familiar sounds reassured the defendant immensely. With six million people taking life in the light of a humdrum existence, surely Philip Duval had no reason to fear that fate was planning to send him crashing into eternity. There were many years ahead of him, years of deferential interviewers, of headlines, of electric lights that spelled out his name to the city's millions, best still, years of life and perhaps years with Irma.

What a fool he had been with his vaunting ambition to think for a moment that he could set her aside to give all his efforts toward carving a niche for himself among the great! And what a fool to think that she would wait without a glance at another man until he should feel ready to come to her in his lordly majesty and announce

that at last the moment had arrived. And why, in his fatuous imbecility, had it never occurred to him to ask her hand and have her bind herself to him with her word?

Again the long-accustomed turmoil and traffic of the streets brought him confidence. A day, two days at the most, would see the end of this nightmare. Then he would go to her, take her hands in his, and, choosing his words as few but Duval knew how to choose them, would reinstate himself with her and regain her love. He turned away from the window and again faced the courtroom.

Irma, apparently without cross-examination, had left the stand and was back in her accustomed chair. Klempner and Bjorkman were standing side by side before the judge, arguing in low tones some technical point. Most of those in the room, the tension relieved for the moment, were whispering subduedly to one another. Several of the reporters had sneaked unobtrusively up the aisle to the corridor for a few puffs at cigarettes.

One reporter, his notes finished, sat idly viewing the handsome, confident face of the defendant, and then started forward in his seat with a gasp of astonishment. For over that face had swept a change startling in its suddenness.

In one instant it changed from the face of the suave, assured man of the world to that of one haunted by a nameless horror. The eyes protruded, staring unbelievingly out into the audience. The skin became livid, and there was a sharp, hissing intake of breath from the sagging mouth. Only in a madhouse could one encounter such a face as Philip Duval betrayed at that moment.

His hands gripped the arm of his chair until the knuckles stood out dead white and his body lurched forward from the seat. Then something seemed to snap in his mind and he sank back inert, only with still bulging eyes and the rapidly rising and falling breast showing that he was still conscious.

In stupefaction the reporter followed the glare of those wild eyes. He saw only Irma Truden, sitting as she had sat on the witness stand, pale and immobile. Nothing in her appearance had changed since the first moment she had entered the courtroom. Her hands were folded in her lap, her eyes on the floor, her face expressing no emotion whatever. She was merely the statue of an exceptionally beautiful girl indulging in a brief mental rest from strain.

"Well, I'll be darned!" thought the reporter to himself. "I certainly will! What got into that fellow all of a sudden? He never looked that way when she was under examination. I don't get it at all."

But the reporter had failed by a matter of inches to follow the direction of those terror-stricken eyes, and if he had followed them he would have been even more puzzled.

For it was not at Irma Truden that Philip Duval looked. What he saw was a man in the adjoining seat, a handsome, unassuming man of middle age, with high-bridged nose, heavy eyebrows under which peered kindly eyes, and firm mouth and chin. The hair was iron gray, but the cheeks had a healthy color, belying advancing age. Scores of persons in the room had glanced at him and had seen merely a well-bred, well-kept individual, ordinarily interested in a rather sensational murder case.

But Philip Duval saw something else. He saw a long, red-carpeted hotel corridor and a door that swung open at a touch. He saw a streak of moonlight that fell upon a bed in which lay a sleeping man. He saw the moonlight gleam up on the blade of a paper knife lying on the table. He saw a

second man tiptoe into the room, a hand reach for the knife. He saw——

That day of the trial ended in an anticlimax of legalities. Klempner made what newspapers, in order to save space, refer to as "the customary motions," that the charge be dismissed on the grounds that the State had failed in making out a case, and so on. Bjorkman grimly opposed.

Judge Walsh, after going through the semblance of heavy thinking, sided with Bjorkman. The case would continue and the defense put forth its evidence. Secretly he agreed wholly with Klempner, and, being a fair man, had he thought there was the slightest possibility of the jury bringing in a verdict of guilty, would have dismissed the charge.

But the judge, although impartial, was also human. His vacation was due in a few days and, if he called an end to this case, he might be assigned to another which would drag along and interfere with his holiday. Winding this affair up would just exhaust the requisite time until he should depart for the mountains. Besides, he rather enjoyed sitting on the bench and looking paternally at Irma.

Klempner, though a bit surprised at the decision, was not disappointed. Continuation would bring further glory to him, and he was certain of the jury. A couple of character witnesses, then those actors who had played bridge, then Duval himself, for the audience would feel cheated if not given a chance to hear the noted actor himself. A perfunctory question or so to each, a fifteen-minute delay while the jury smoked a cigar and arrived at a verdict, then congratulations and the financially substantial gratitude of his client.

So sure was he of the outcome that he did not even bother about a last preparatory conference with his client. Just a slap on the back, a reassuring, "So long, my boy. Put you on the stand to-morrow. Just tell your story," and Klempner was off.

But had he looked deeply into the face of Philip Duval there would most certainly have been a last conference.

The man in the prisoner's chair watched unseeingly the preliminary events of the following day. Fellow actors mounted to the stand, told of his impeccable reputation, the card players recalled the incidents of the game and how they had finally extinguished the lights, leaving Duval sound asleep. Bjorkman stormed in vain. Klempner looked on benevolently. Judge Walsh made plans for the mountains. The jury thought of home-cooked dinners and the theater.

As a final gesture, Klempner arose and called his client to the stand. Almost banteringly he extracted Duval's name, age, profession and the other details with which everybody was thoroughly conversant, and then asked him in his own words to describe the events of the evening on which Mr. Marley was slain.

"Just tell the story as it comes to you, Mr. Duval," he said. "Just as the thing happened. I shall not interrupt."

Duval, with the face and voice of a man in a hypnotic trance, made his reply:

"I was not asleep when the gentlemen who had played cards in my room left," he said in a voice that none of his friends could recognize. "On the contrary, I was wide awake. I rose, pulled down the shades, lit the light and dressed. I even put on my hat and overcoat so that if I were seen I should not be suspected. I opened the door and——"

"One minute, one minute, your honor!" screamed Klempner. "I object! This man is sick—out of his mind——"

"Let him go on," ordered Judge

Walsh. He was looking fascinatedly at Duval.

"I made sure no one was in the corridor. I tiptoed down the hall to Marley's room. I knew it would not be locked as he was always afraid of fires. I opened his door and went in just——"

Klempner was on his feet yelling incomprehensible words; judge, jury and spectators were tense with excitement. Only two persons remained calm—Irma Truden and a middle-aged man who sat beside her.

"There was a paper knife lying on the table," went on the monotonous voice. "Marley was asleep, lying half on his face. I took the paper knife, leaned over his bed and stabbed him. I closed the door. I went back to my room. I washed my hands, undressed and climbed into bed. That is all."

Then the hitherto toneless voice broke forth into a shriek of agony and Philip Duval plunged forward, his finger pointing to a benign man of middle age in the audience.

"But for Heaven's sake, take him away! Take him away! That is Marley—the man I killed!"

A student of psychology might have been interested in looking an hour later into three widely separated rooms in the city.

In a prison cell sat Philip Duval, actor-murderer, his head plunged in his hands, trying to think. But deep in himself he knew that never again would he think as other men think, for he was insane. Insane!

In the office of Abraham Klempner, attorney at law, Mr. Klempner was scarcely closer to sanity than was his client. "Mad! Mad!" he raged, his voice broken with sobs. "But I can get him out—he's crazy! No, I'm damned if I will! Let him rot! The work of a lifetime lost! Abie Klempner a joke!" He threw himself on a couch and his shoulders heaved.

In Irma Truden's apartment were two persons. One, Irma, stood before the window, gazing out. The other, a man, sat before a mirror, his back toward her, busily toweling his face and neck.

"Well, it certainly worked," he observed.

"Yes, it worked," agreed Irma. Her voice was dull.

"I'll say it worked," repeated the man. He turned in his chair toward her, exhibiting a startling countenance. The left side was that of a young fellow of thirty, the right that of one of middle age.

"You know," said the man, resuming operations with the towel, "that idea of yours was one of the biggest ever put across, Irma. I'd played pretty rough with the old dad, but I'm certainly glad I could do something in avenging him. Maybe, wherever he is now, he'll forgive me at last for going in for the impersonation stuff in vaudeville instead of taking up the legitimate. I know I'd always have been a rotten actor.

"And it was a swell idea of changing my appearance little by little each day instead of going in there disguised as dad right away. Broke up his morale, I suppose.

"Yes, Irma, grease paint, powder and a little putty are wonderful inventions. I suppose," he laughed in a little embarrassment, "you might even say that under certain circumstances they're the instruments of Heaven!"

CELEBRATED CRIMINAL WOMEN

SOME GIRLS OF YESTERYEAR

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "The Disbrow Mystery," etc.

IT would be a happy circumstance for human curiosity if we might put our finger on the first criminal woman. But history, literature and legend are alike silent. Beyond all doubt this elusive and fascinating lady must have been the mistress of an outlaw cave in the gray of the paleolithic, a fugitive from the wrath of some clan whose taboos she liked to violate. And surely her daughters have suffered under the hard justices of every land and rule, from Sumer and Egypt to the newest Baltic republic and the darkest African jungle. But her name and those of all who trod her ways for many centuries are lost and irretrievable, so that we must begin our acquaintance with the descendants at a late day in the life of crime.

It is not as though criminals of antiquity were forgotten altogether, for every classical amateur must remember Herostratus, who burned the temple of Diana at Ephesus to gain fame and achieved the end in spite of the Greeks' vow to forget him utterly. Nor are religion and literature silent on the subject of rascality, for we have Mercury acting as the god of thieves, Loki, in the Norse sagas, himself a sad scoundrel and accessory at deicide, not to forget Pluto, the abductor, or Barabbas of the New Testament. Again we have women murderers by the dozen, and ladies of loose lives by the scores. But these do not belong to the type. They are women who are incidentally criminal. The group of interesting females I have set out to treat here are, rather, criminals who incidentally are women.

The Greek and Latin comedies, Petronius' "Satiricon" and the medieval compilation, the "Gesta Romanorum," fairly swarm with men criminals, but nowhere mention any feminine collaborators except such as appear in the car-

mine of the cockatrice. Yet it would be absurd to conclude that the *picara*, the *dame d'industrie*, the woman crook, was nonexistent in antiquity. Men have always committed crimes and women have always helped and emulated them. But criminality had not yet achieved dignity in the days of the classic peoples, and so literature treated the subject lightly, neglecting the ladies all together.

Nor was the sex much better off when roguery rose to articulateness with the German "Liber Vagatorum"—1516—and the Spanish "Lazarillo de Tormes"—1554. Here again were rascals of the boldest and most impudent stripe, but no damsels to match them.

Yet all of fifty years before earliest of these works, a poet in France, who was himself not innocent of thieving or of rotting in prison, had made the first authentic record of the *picara*. We must not overlook the slightly earlier ballads of Robin Hood, who must be regarded as a semihistorical person. In these old songs of the people, appears our first lady rogue, Maid Marian. But the cloud of doubt envelops her. On the other hand, there can be no question of the subworld heroines of Master François Villon.

One of the most notorious of these "molls" of Villon's was Perrette Mauger. She is mentioned in stanzas 139 and 172 of the "Greater Testament of Villon," in the lines:

> As Jehanne and Perrette can attest.

And again:

> If but he knew the dice to throw
> Of Perrette's den I'd make him host.

From the evidence in Villon and the chronicle of John of Troyes, register of the city hall of Paris, an official historian of the times, it is certain that she was the keeper of a thieves' hangout and a fence to boot. John relates that there was a plentiful harvest of wheat in 1460, so that a quarter sold for twenty-four Parisian sols—less than a cent a pound—but that wine was extremely scarce. The year was also noteworthy through the fact that "several poor indigent wretches that were guilty of thieving, sacrilege, housebreaking and other enormous crimes were made an example of." Some were whipped at the end of the cart's tail and others hanged. Perrette suffered a worse fate.

She was tried before Robert Destouteville, the mayor of Paris, for several robberies, for harboring and concealing notorious thieves and housebreakers, and for having sold and disposed of the goods they stole. Being found guilty, she was sentenced to be burned alive. An appeal was taken to the Court of Parliament and, Perrette being not without influence and friends, she got a stay of execution, but her sentence was soon confirmed and she was without further delay put to her dreadful death by Henry Cousin, the famous hangman of Paris.

It is almost a hundred and fifty years later we come upon the type in England in the person of Mary Frith, known as "Moll Cutpurse." She dressed as a man and "was the first woman to smoke," so setting the fashion for modern gentlewomen. She told fortunes, was a fence, and was celebrated in plays and ballads. She had hardly passed to her reward when Britannica Holland succeeded her as a queen of road agents and rebels. Dorothie Phillips, Elizabeth Caldwell, and Marcy Clay follow in rapid order. Mary Maunder, in the middle of the seventeenth century, passed herself off as a German princess, cheated tradesmen, gulled men of prominence and wound up in Newgate. Her father was a Canterbury fiddler. A contemporary of this forger and impostor in skirts was Miss Eleanor Chadwick, a forerunner of the notable Cassie of our own day, of whom more again. Madam Eleanor of the tribe gained notoriety and a term by fleecing gentle-

men and acting as a lure for male swindlers.

But the English woman rogue hardly emerges as a large figure until the dawn of the eighteenth century when Defoe, in "Moll Flanders" and "Roxana" developed the type in fiction, when Richardson, Fielding and Smollett carried on the work, and when the lives of real women rascals began to appear in numerous histories, pamphlets, confessions and the like.

Here we come upon Barbara Spencer, the first woman counterfeiter of whom there are clear details. The lady was indicted at the Old Bailey in 1721 with Alice Hall and Elizabeth Bray. The charge was high treason in the second degree in the falsifying of the king's currency. The Hall and Bray women were released as having been "only the agents" of Barbara Spencer, but the chief had to face the jury.

It was discovered that she had been born about thirty-five years earlier in St. Giles, outside Cripplegate. She had been a wild and disobedient daughter, had run away from home and had conceived a passion for attending the hangings at Tyburn, not far from her home. At one of these *fêtes macabre,* pray note, she met a gang of coiners, for criminals always attended the hangings, and pickpockets did a thriving trade on such crowded and exciting occasions. The coiners took the youthful Barbara to a house in St. Giles Pound, where she was trained in the art of putting down false currency. She practiced this art for a number of years under the guidance of her masters, until she was caught, fined and imprisoned.

Her term in quod, as is always the case, made her worse. She emerged a hardened wretch and started in to do her own counterfeiting, using various younger women to dispose of her bad coins. Among these were Elizabeth Bray and Alice Hall, already mentioned. Apparently, they were caught and turned king's evidence, which explains their easy dismissal. But the flagrant Barbara was found guilty, sentenced to be strangled and burned at the stake. This shocking sentence was carried out on July 5, 1721, under the elms at Tyburn, where the victim had watched men being hanged in her girlhood.

The days of George III bring to light a woman swindler of a persistent and hence modern type in the person of Mrs. Elizabeth Harriott Greeve. The good Messrs. Knapp and Baldwin who have preserved the facts about this lively *picara* in their estimable Newgate Calendar, seem to have been unable to discover the origin of the girl, but she was doubtless of some education and perhaps even of decent family.

Her game was one against which the big American newspapers have been fighting with more or less success for years. She advertised for partners with money to invest and pretended to be able to put persons with a little capital into touch with opportunities. Then as now, evidently, poor fellows who had scraped together some miserable little hoard by dint of privations and denials, dreamed of being able to buy interests in profitable businesses or fat clerkships in return for their poor capital—and there were plenty of swindlers to foster the fatuous notion and relieve them of their little.

The blithe Mrs. Greeve added a note of splendor to this ever-fresh deceit by pretending high connections. One of her dupes was told that she was first cousin to Lord North, the same gentleman who didn't manage the American Revolution so well. Another gudgeon had the solemn assurance that she was a second cousin to the Duke of Grafton. Lady Fitzroy and Lord Guildford were other noble connections whose patronage she boasted.

For several years Mrs. Greeve carried on a lucrative business in this kind of cheating and lived on the fat of the

land, with plenty of money and fine raiment. Suckers, then as now, shrank from revealing their abasement and confessing what fools they had been. But everything has an end, and some things have sad ones.

On November 3, 1773, Mrs. Greeve was brought to the bar of the public office in Bow Street and charged with several high crimes. At her trial various victims appeared. William Kidwell, a coach carver, said she had done him out of thirty-six pounds or about one hundred and seventy-five dollars. The coach-carving business had been in the doldrums, he testified, and he had accordingly advertised for a clerkship, offering to pay over his small savings. The accused lady had answered, introducing herself as "the Honorable Elizabeth Harriott Greeve." Kidwell had believed her when she said she would get him a clerkship in the Victualing Office and handed over his savings. They seem absurdly small to the modern eye, but thirty-six pounds would buy a good deal in that day. That was the last seen of the honorable lady by the coach carver till he confronted her at Bow Street.

Various other ladies and gentlemen appeared and told of little transactions in which Mrs. Greeve, posing as a lady of high degree, had stripped them of sums varying from fifty to three hundred pounds. Finally, Mrs. Greeve's assistant, a fellow who wore the fitting name of Francis Crook, turned against her and she was quickly found guilty and sentenced to Virginia. It was then discovered that she had been sent to the colony only two years before, so the term of her exile was lengthened.

There is no further mention of her in the courts and her historians comment that she, no doubt, remained permanently in America. Past all doubt, she married, became respectable and helped to found one of those first families of which we hear so much.

The end of the eighteenth century brings us to the celebrated case of a pretty and charming Dorothy Cole, a moll of the true type, the sweetheart and collaborator of a notorious swindler. Dorothy was the daughter of a generally known woman who was landlady of the Magpie Inn on Hounslow Heath. There she chanced to meet Edward William Roberts, a gifted young lawyer who was cursed with good looks, a glib tongue and excellent address. Roberts uttered the usual "come live with me and be my love," and Dorothy followed. They established themselves in handsome lodgings or in fine houses and proceeded to trim tradesmen right and left, fitting their houses with the most expensive goods on credit, only to sell off the furnishings as quickly as possible and decamp to another part of London or the provinces.

Dorothy, meantime, had written a novel which, from the style, seems to have been liberally edited by Roberts. She was soon popular with the kind of high-born literary amateurs who like to patronize the young authors of flattering and inoffensive fiction. Lady Haggerston and Lady Louisa Manners called on her and supplied her with money and recommendations. A second novel was projected, to be called "The Mysterious Mother." The noble ladies lent their names to the venture as subscribers, and pretty Dorothy went about from one great house to another, collecting subscriptions and patronage in cash. With the names of so many magnificos on the dedication page of her dummy, she was able to procure an astonishing number of cash advance subscriptions to a book that had not been and never was to be written.

Such little tricks and games continued for many years, until 1810, when two cheated tradesmen went to court and had Dorothy Cole, Roberts and a lieutenant named Brown indicted. Dorothy died while the proceedings

were pending, but the two men were sentenced to a year's imprisonment and the pillory. The latter sentence was carried out at Charing Cross, now in the heart of London, in July, 1810. The mob pelted the unfortunate men with rotten eggs "and all manner of filth that could be suddenly collected until they bore little resemblance to human beings and were taken out half suffocated."

All these were celebrated bad women in their day, elsewise the records would not be so full of them or their memory still green at this distance. Yet they are in every sense minor luminaries in contrast with a little North of Ireland girl who passed from this life in the spring of 1740. Her name was Mary Young and she was born not far from Belfast about 1710, the date being uncertain. Her family name she did not celebrate and it is only by chance that it survives, but the title by which she was known to the subworld of her day became one of the most famous of all criminal appellations—"Jenny Diver."

It is perhaps not necessary to explain to readers that a "diver" is a pickpocket and that this was the cant term for the long-fingered gentry of both sexes for centuries before our more modern word, "dip," came into circulation. The term was in use long before the birth of Mary Young and long after her death. Indeed, in her day any male purse lifter might be called Jack Diver and any female Jenny of the same brood. But Mary Young made the term endure. She was the most remarkable of all the divers, and much that is still in the practice of dips derives from her.

The parents of Mary Young, who were poor and unknown, died while she was an infant, so she had no recollection of them. She was a charity child until at the age of ten she was taken into the family of an aged lady. In the house of her mistress, where she ranked as a superior servant, she was taught reading, writing, manners and needlework. Thus she was extraordinarily accomplished for her class and time and pleasant to look upon, besides. These circumstances led to the girl's first adventure.

The servant of a gentleman on an adjoining estate made love to Mary Young before she was sixteen years old and persuaded her to elope with him to England. She had long yearned to go to London to make her fortune and needed little persuading. Some even say that it was she who proposed the flight to England after her mistress had forbidden marriage with the wooer. Be that as it may, the varlet stole eighty guineas and a gold watch, took Mary aboard a boat, and proceeded to Liverpool. There the girl was taken ill and the farther journey had to be delayed, a circumstance which led to the arrest of the young man. He admitted his guilt, exonerated Mary Young and went back to face the court. He was found guilty and condemned to death, which sentence was later softened to transportation.

Meantime, Mary Young had arrived in London, aided on her way with part of the stolen money. She lodged in the house of a countrywoman named Anne Murphy in Long Acre, and tried to make a living by her needle, at which she failed. The Murphy woman proposed to introduce the girl to an easier and surer method of earning money and, having first vowed Mary to fidelity, she took her to a "club" in St. Giles, the favorite haunt of rascals in those days, and introduced her to divers of high and low degree. Mary was taken in hand, taught the art of rifling pockets and purses, and turned loose upon the town of London. She had become Jenny Diver.

One of her first exploits was typical. She mingled with a crowd before a church where a popular minister was to preach, and seeing a brilliantly dressed

young gentleman alighting, she edged near and beheld a diamond ring on his finger. Immediately she pretended to be in distress and the gallant helped her to hold her footing. She clung to him and adroitly slipped the ring from his finger without rousing his suspicion. He forced his way to the entrance, found that there was no room for him and started to leave when he discovered his loss. He suspected the woman he had helped, but she was then already out of reach and the ring on its way to a fence in the hands of a confederate.

She seems to have had a love for trimming the religious, for we next find her with a pair of artificial arms and hands, which showed from under her voluminous cape, leaving her natural members free to operate. With one of her gang acting as footman and the other preceding her to procure a seat among the gentry in the congregation, she proceeded to a wealthy church in a sedan chair, found a place between two rich old women and folded her artificial hands, which were gloved, devoutly in her lap. So placed, she quickly relieved each of the elderly gentlewomen of a gold watch and passed her loot to a third confederate, who sat in the next pew. One of the robbed ladies suspected the woman who had sat beside her, but the other said she could swear the suspect's hands had never been out of her lap. Jenny, of course, was not present when this colloquy took place.

Instead, she had gone to the hangout, changed her dress and repaired to another fashionable church, where she stripped a large, apoplectic and dozing gentleman of his watch while the preacher was lambasting the devil with choice violence.

A few such exploits made this young and attractive woman the active head of her gang. Her facility for inventing variants of her trick, her innocent-looking face, her ability to act the lady, and her educational advantages all made her a natural queen over the underworld about her.

One of the next exploits of the woman mark her as the originator of a dodge that is still sometimes used by pickpockets and was made famous fifteen or twenty years ago by the notorious Fainting Bertha, who haunted the railroad trains of this country and stripped sympathetic men who leaned over her after she had fallen in a simulated faint. It may be the dodge was known before Jenny Diver's day. If so I can find no record of it.

On a day when the king was going to the House of Lords, Jenny repaired to the region of St. James Park with her "footman" and mingled with the crowd between the Park and Spring Gardens. When she found herself among a group of expensively dressed men and women she slipped down, pretending to faint. Many immediately rushed toward her and tried to assist her to her feet. She, however, recovered sufficiently to say that she was in great pain and wished to remain lying for a few minutes. Others crowded about her out of sympathy, offering aid and advice. Meantime, while the crush of curious gulls increased, she had the satisfaction of watching her footman and another accomplice go through the crowd with excellent results. Two diamond girdle buckles, a gold watch, a gold snuffbox and two purses were taken. There was the equivalent of two hundred dollars in cash and much more in jewelry.

A little later, Jenny Diver worked the fainting trick in an altered form. Going with her footman to Burr Street, Wapping, she again pretended to faint in the street before a fine house. Her footman accomplice ran to the door and asked whether his mistress, who was in great distress, might not be brought into the house and permitted to rest for a time until she could recover. Such requests were not refused by decent people in those days, and Jenny Diver

was carried into the drawing-room. While the mistress of the house and her maid ran for medicaments, Jenny opened a drawer and stole sixty guineas. While the generous woman was holding the smelling salts to her nostrils, Jenny pretended to writhe in anguish and picked her benefactor's pocket of a small sum. And the footman, having been ordered to the kitchen, stole the silver of the establishment—that is, "as much as he could secrete and bear away."

Now Jenny revived from her affliction, thanked the good woman, the wife of a rich merchant, in the most courtly way, begged the lady to call upon her at a fictitious address and bowed her way out, being driven off in a hackney coach, which the footman had been sent to summon.

It was now considered advisable to quit London for a time and "work" the county fairs in the provinces. At one of these she lured to her rooms the servant of a country merchant who had been sent to an inn with a large amount of cash, under the pretense that his master wished him to await his coming there. The poor yokel was flattered, got to drink, and was soon rendered drunk. When he awoke he was without his employers' cash, and Jenny Diver was elsewhere.

When she returned to London, Jenny Diver decided to change her base of operations and devote her attention to the fashionable crowds in and about the theaters. Accordingly, she hired lodgings near Covent Garden, dressed herself with great magnificence and attended many important performances at which the rich and the careless were certain to be present. She did a thriving business throughout a season.

About this time she forced upon the members of her gang a policy which marks her as an intelligent leader of rascals, far above the mentality of the usual pickpocket. She decreed that one tenth of all the money and the proceeds of other loot procured by her or the other members of the gang should be set aside in a permanent fund, which was not to be touched save in cases of great misfortune. It was to be employed for the benefit of members of the gang who became ill or old and unable to "work," for the relief of members in dire need, and to employ lawyers and otherwise assist the brothers and sisters who might run afoul of the law. In other words, some two hundred years ago, she anticipated our modern upper-class crooks by providing "fall money," for lawyers, fixers and all the brood.

But another and overbold job of picking pockets brought the grand queen of the divers to grief. She was locked up in Newgate and held there four months pending trial. While incarcerated she used her money to buy stolen goods from others—such were the London prisons of the time—and did a thriving business at disposing. Eventually she was convicted and sentenced to transportation. When she was put aboard the convict ship she carried with her money, trunks and general merchandise, "more than enough to load a large wagon." She had the respect of all on board and, to quote the Newgate Calender once more, "On her arrival in Virginia she disposed of her goods and for some time lived in great splendor and elegance."

But life in a colony of pioneers was too slow and tedious for a girl of Jenny's volatile temperament, and she was soon yearning for those fatal lights o' London that had drawn her from her Irish sod to a thief's destiny and such fulgurous fame as is hers to this day. Accordingly, she made eyes at a prosperous young man who was about to return to England, and soon ensnared him, with the result that he took passage for her and so conveyed her to Gravesend. While the ship lay there, Jenny went through the purse and

pockets of her lover and benefactor, took what she could use and made an excuse of feeling ill and wishing to go ashore. Naturally, that was the last meeting of the fond pair.

Jenny remained in the provinces for a time, but before the end of a year she was back in London and at her old practices. She had preference for the theater, the Royal Exchange, London Bridge and other populous regions. At last she was again caught picking a man's pocket at the Bridge and called for trial. Her previous conviction was not cited against her because of an oversight or poor record keeping, and she was, accordingly, again sentenced to be transported. This time she was in America even more briefly than before, returning to London at the end of a year.

But something had happened to Jenny's skill or to the London people meantime. She found the going very hard and finally was caught in a bold, even desperate, attempt. A male confederate took the hand of a woman pedestrian to assist her over some planks on the street between Sherborne Lane and Walbrook. He squeezed the poor lady's fingrs so hard that she cried out in pain. Jenny Diver seized the moment to pick the woman's pocket of the absurd sum of thirteen shillings and a penny. Before she could get away the victim had caught her by the dress and she was mastered by a crowd. The next day Jenny was examined by the lord mayor and sent back to Newgate for trial.

This strange criminal woman was tried at the Old Bailey on the charge of "privately stealing," found guilty, confronted as an old offender and sentenced to death. She took the word of doom serenely and soon began to exhibit the signs of piety and regret. She was visited by chaplains daily and spent a great deal of time at her devotions.

The day before that set for her execution, she sent for a woman in whose charge she had left her three-year-old daughter. To this woman and the chaplain she confided the "name of one who would pay for the infant's support." Begging the nurse to instruct the little girl and keep her afar from evil influences, Jenny Diver confessed her guilt and the details of her life.

The next morning she was taken to Tyburn in a mourning coach, attended by a clergyman. Before the gibbet she spent a long time in prayer, told the assembled crowd of her life and repentance, exhorted all to live honestly, and called for the rope and cap. A minute later the drop had fallen and Jenny Diver was on her way to another state. It was the eighteenth of March, 1740. She was buried in St. Pancras Churchyard where her headstone still stands.

Perhaps the only moral to be drawn from the case of this celebrated and extraordinary woman rogue has to do with the futility of severe punishments. Those who cry out for stern laws and cruel treatment as preventives of crime are asked to note that the certainty of swinging at the end of a rope one fine day did not deter men—nor even those of the less bold and violent sex—from persisting in such poorly paid crimes as purse diving and rifling pockets.

MORE THAN HE COULD CHEW

By John Baer

Author of "The Yeggs Meet the 'Mike,'" etc.

THEY accused Charley Ney of everything under the sun, but they never said he was inconsistent. He could be mean, cruel, tricky, fiendish, but through all of the episodes of his hectic if brief career there ran one quality which was characteristic of him. Perhaps the best single word with which to describe it is noise. His friends, and enemies, discussing his achievements frequently said, "Yeh, that sounds just like him," thus putting it more accurately than they thought, for there was indeed plenty of sound to the things he did.

He ate noisily, drank noisily and roared when he spoke; he dressed loudly; and he snored, making a racket even in his sleep. Nor were his criminal exploits deficient in this respect. He was in his element in free-for-all brawls featured by screams and shouts and cracking heads and crashing chairs. Gun fights amused him: the sudden barking of automatics, the clatter of broken windows, the frightened cries of passers-by were music to his ears. Blowing open safes was a hobby with him; he scorned the use of pillows or blankets or other sound deadeners, and did his work in his own magnificent way. Twice he wrecked not only the safe he was cracking, but also the room in which it stood, and on one other occasion he rocked the whole block.

But loud as his actions were, he did not permit them to speak for themselves. Charley told the world. He did things and bragged about them. Sometimes he bragged first and about matters which seemed impossible—and then he went ahead and did that which couldn't be done. He bragged before, during and after. In the end, he bragged his head off. We don't mean that as a colloquialism. We mean it literally.

The climax was grandiose. Charley banged out of life even as he had banged through it. When Charley cashed in they had to call not only the cops but also the fire department.

Big words, these; it would appear as though we were becoming a bit noisy on our own account. Well, then, after you know the whole story, come back to this beginning and check us up. We don't think you'll find an exaggeration. Charley is the kind of fellow who makes good or busts, or who makes good and busts.

He was more commonly known as "Bosco Charley." They had called him "Blabbermouth" until one day he broke a bottle over the head of an old friend who addressed him by this nickname during a casual conversation. He approved of Bosco, of course, for he considered himself a worthy successor to the famous chap who ate 'em alive. Like most men who run wild, Charley got away with it for a while. He finally did a killing so raw as to make his other homicides appear tame in comparison. He got away with that, too, or so it seemed.

Willy Reiger was the victim, a lad of good family who had become mixed up with a bad crowd. In many respects Willy was a likable fellow, but he possessed an uncontrollable temper, and this led to his undoing.

The trouble began in Benny Peplaw's room, while Charley was busting a crap game. Willy was almost broke when he discovered that the Bosco boy had rung in a pair of loaded dice.

There was a hot argument which ended when Charley struck Willy without warning and knocked him down. Now Bosco had it on the other in weight, reach and height, but Willy Reiger was not lacking in gumption, and so when he got up, he waded into the man-eater. He gave as good as he got, too, because he was speedier and cleverer. To gain the advantage, the Bosco resorted to the simple expedient of fouling. He brought his knee up sharply while in a clinch, and so sent the Reiger lad reeling back, doubled up in pain.

One of the other players chose this particular moment to open the door and look out to see if the fight had attracted the attention of the other occupants of the house. Charley's next blow sent Reiger through the open door into the hall, where he toppled to the floor.

That should have settled it. The fight was over; Willy Reiger lay still and did not even moan. But it was the Bosco's nature to put a theatrical finish to his work.

"And now," he growled, "I'm goin' to pitch this idiot outa here."

Despite the protests of the others, he picked up the unconscious Reiger and hurled him down the stairs. The verdict of the examining physician was that William Reiger had died as the result of having his neck broken.

Augie Wentz beat it, giving the police no chance to question him. The other three witnesses were Bosco Charley Ney, Benny Peplaw and George Brock. Peplaw told the story and Ney and Brock swore to it.

"Charley Ney, Brock and Willy Reiger came to my room to have a chat with me," said Benny Peplaw. "After a while, Willy Reiger and Brock got up to go and when they were in the hall, I went to the door to call something after Willy. I saw that Willy Reiger was just at the head of the stairs, and I said, 'Hey, Willy, you're going to the dance in Okane's hall to-morrow night, aren't you?' And Willy turned and said, sure he was going. And then, before he turned around again, he took a forward step and the first thing you know he was rolling down the stairs, with Brock running after him. Charley Ney was in my room when this happened, but he heard the noise and came out and the two of us ran down and then Brock said, 'Somebody better get a doctor,' so I telephoned for an ambulance, but when the doctor come he said Willy had broke his neck and was dead."

The examining physician, after the

autopsy, stated in his report that there were bruises on William Reiger's face and body, but that they could be explained by the fall down the stairway.

Thus the case hung two weeks later when Norman Dike became involved in it. Dike explained his interest in the tragedy to the district attorney whom he visited in order to exchange informal opinions.

"The fault," admitted Dike, "is as much mine as any one else's. I am Willy Reiger's half brother. When I was ten years old, my widowed mother married again, but I kept the name of Dike in accordance with a wish expressed in my father's will.

"I was always fond of Willy; he was a good kid, a pleasant lad, and in many respects a likable young man. He was hot-headed and at times stubborn—understand me right—I'm not trying to paint him an angel. What I am regretting is that I was not more patient with him. You see, after Willy's father died, it was up to me to run the family. I took care of the financial end of it pretty well—I am the vice president of a company manufacturing kitchen utensils and have a healthy income. But I frequently let Willy's temper rile me. Mother wasn't strong enough to hold him and I was too quick-tempered myself to reason with him. I have been away on a six-month trip to the Middle West, interesting jobbers in our line. During that time Willy went completely bad, and it seems he didn't last long at it. But in spite of everything, he deserves a square deal. If he was murdered——"

The district attorney held up a hand. "The evidence of eyewitnesses is to the fact——"

"Yes, yes, I know that," interrupted Dike. "I'm referring to the whispers. I've had private detectives on this thing."

"And they have heard neighborhood whispers and gossip to the effect that Bosco Charley Ney killed William Reiger by hurling him down the stairs. Augie Wentz was on the scene, too—he had a grudge against Bosco Charley and he started the whispers before doing his disappearing stunt."

"Well?" asked Dike.

"Well," answered the district attorney, "suppose we find Wentz. What of it? On the witness stand he will be out-talked three to one. The police have tried their best to trip up Brock, Peplaw and Charley Ney and to sweat the truth out of them, but they stick to their yarn. And the medical testimony, while it does not altogether prove their story, does not contradict it, either. Frankly, Mr. Dike, do you believe we have a good case against this Bosco Charley."

"I believe the case as it stands is hopeless," replied Dike promptly. "And I have also been so advised by my own detectives. Now let me ask you a frank question. Do you believe the whispers?"

The district attorney spoke without hesitation: "I can't say that Ney killed your brother or that the whispers are supported by sound evidence, but I will say emphatically that this story they tell about Bosco Charley is completely in keeping with his character."

"Thank you," said Norman Dike.

One month later, Mr. Massinger, director of the neighborhood social centre told Dike the same thing, almost using the district attorney's exact words. "And if I were you," added Massinger, "I would drop at once the idea of going after Charley privately."

"But it would be entirely safe," protested Dike. "He has never seen me and doesn't know me from Adam."

"Murder," said Massinger, "is murder."

"But I didn't say I'd murder him. I said I'd make him pay."

"Same thing. Besides, you'd be out of your class."

"The term they use in this neighborhood," cut in Dike, "is to 'get' a fellow. I am no imbecile. I know I can't get this Bosco by beating him up. It is my intention to use my head, not my fists or a gun. I have not as yet met Charley personally, but I have had so many reports on him that I feel that I understand his character perfectly. I'm going to drive at his greatest weakness. I know his type; I'm sure I can get him. It can be done by the simple process of coaxing the bragging fool into getting himself."

It was not difficult for Norman Dike to meet Bosco Charley and get on speaking terms with him. Dike went into Sicondo's pool room and during a lull in the general conversation, offered in a loud voice to take on anybody in the place for a ten-dollar side bet.

Charley stepped toward him and roared, "Grab a cue and kiss your money good-by. Let a feller what can shoot pool show you how."

Bosco Charley won the bet but Dike's game was good enough to win his opponent's respect. They played on subsequent evenings and Dike found that in order to become chatty with the Bosco it was necessary merely to brag. This invariably started Bosco bragging too, and since Dike was a good listener, the two got along famously.

To guard against even the possibility of suspicion, Dike had taken a room in the neighborhood and let it be known that he lived by his wits. While never becoming definite on this subject, he tossed off the impression that his specialty was picking pockets. He met many of the neighborhood characters, but of course he concentrated on Charley Ney.

He kept careful note of all facts which seemed pertinent or helpful to him in his mission. His interest extended even to Charley's customs, habits and personal characteristics and peculiarities. In regard to the latter, it amused him to learn that the Bosco had an equal fondness for hard drink and hard candy. Bosco Charley could apparently drink and survive anything it was possible to brew or distill. And he ate hard candy literally by the pound—taffy, penny jaw-breakers, rock candy—anything at all so long as it was hard. It was an even bet among the boys that when you met the Bosco he would be noisily crunching something hard and sweet between his teeth.

But after all, none of the Bosco's characteristics was more outstanding than his braggadocio. And he was happiest when he could couple his words with action. When he was challenged to make good his recklessness beggared description.

Dike almost succumbed to a heart attack on one of the occasions on which the Bosco put his insanity on exhibition. The incident occurred in Sicondo's pool room, which was on the second story of a ramshackle building on a water-front street. This parlor was no modern emporium; there were no fancy trimmings or furniture. Besides the tables, the room held only two wooden benches, a few straight-backed chairs and a pot-bellied stove to furnish heat.

It was January; when Dike came in at about ten o'clock, the lid of the stove was red. Bosco Charley did not show up until shortly after midnight, and he was raving mad when he appeared.

"Went out to crack a box," growled Charley, "but I had a bum steer and when I get there what do I find but every room in the place lit up and a party goin' on. I know when that guy throws a party he has dicks there to protect his guests. Crackin' a crib while dicks is watchin' is one of the few things I ain't tried yet. Dang shame, because I'm loaded with N. G. and achin' to listen to some noise."

"You got the nitroglycerin on you?" asked Dike.

"Yeh, sure." Bosco took a glass

bottle filled with a colorless liquid out of his pocket and set it on a pool table.

"Hey, you," cried Sicondo instantly. "Watch out with that stuff. I don't want this place blown up."

"How do you get that way!" roared Bosco. "Tellin' me to watch out! Say, you got a nerve. You think I'm a amachoor? I handled more of this——"

"I know, I know," broke in Sicondo, "but accidents will happen to the best experts. If a lighted match——"

"The bottle's corked, ain't it?" demanded Bosco. "Besides, that's how much you know about it—a lighted match won't hurt it none."

There were now just ten men in the place. All of them had listened alertly to the conversation. Little Eddy Coyle, a shoplifter, spoke up nervously:

"If a lit match touched that stuff we'd all be blown to heaven."

"Of course," added Sicondo.

"Wanna bet?" asked Bosco.

"You get out of here quick!" cried Sicondo. "Are you crazy? Hey, listen, for the lova Mike! Bosco, don't——"

Bosco Charlie was calmly pouring some of the contents of the bottle into an empty ash tray.

"Your last chance," said Bosco. "Put up your money or shut up. Twenty-five dollars I can stick a lit match in it. Who's bettin'?"

And thereupon the Bosco casually struck a match. Several of the onlookers, including Dike, edged toward the door.

Sicondo pleaded: "Please—please—man alive, don't——"

"Pikers!" sneered Charley. "Nobody takes my bet, eh? All right."

And then Bosco Charley Ney thrust the flaming end of the match into the liquid in the ash tray. Sicondo screamed and threw himself upon the floor. Eddy Coyle toppled over in a faint.

The flame went out; that was all.

The Bosco laughed loudly and long. "Babies, cowards, nitwits! Let a fellow who knows his business show you something. Here—looka this."

He struck another match. He held the flame carefully near the top of the liquid. This time he got a result—a quiet, smoky flame. Of the ten men who had been present, there were now only six left, and all of these were at the other end of the room.

"And now," grinned Bosco, "I'm going to pour the rest of this stuff from the ash tray into the stove!"

At that the room cleared as if by magic, Sicondo pulling Coyle out by the legs. From the far end of the hall, Dike and one other tarried a moment to see Bosco lift the stove lid.

The six were in the hall on the lower floor when Charley appeared at the head of the stairs and called down: "C'me on up, scarecrows! It's all over. C'me on, the ash tray's empty—see?"

Nevertheless several minutes passed before the others filed up the stairs, all of them but Coyle. He filed out, and home and to bed.

"Is anybody got anything to say?" asked Charley.

There was a long pause. Then Sicondo ventured:

"You were just kidding us, Bosco. Fooled us that time all right, all right. The stuff ain't nitroglycerin at all. Some little joker you are, ain't you?"

Charley's eyes narrowed. "So I'm bluffing am I?" He tossed a roll of bills on a table. "Who wants to make some easy money? Here it is. Just grab it and run. When you get down on the street, run like blazes, because I'll throw the bottle with the rest of the stuff after you, so that it will hit you or the sidewalk near you. Now whoever thinks this stuff ain't nitroglycerin, just grab the money and run. Go ahead somebody—anybody. If you get away alive with the money it's yourn."

This time the silence was profound.

"You guys gimme a pain," growled Bosco. He strode to a window, opened

it and looked up and down the deserted street. "Well, I was going to make an explosion to-night anyhow, so here goes." And with this he hurled the glass bottle out of the window. Before the terrific crash which followed had died, Charley yelled:

"Just a little louder and it woulda sounded like a war! Cheese it now, let's beat it, everybody!"

The police investigation arrived nowhere. The nearest officer had been five blocks away at the time of the explosion. Every one within a few blocks' radius had heard the noise; no one had seen how it happened. Bosco had thrown the bottle slantwise so that it did not explode in front of the pool room window. The police had no reason to believe, or suspect, that the trouble had been caused by some one in Sicondo's place.

A rather large hole had been torn in the pavement and a few windows had been broken. A department expert gave it as his opinion that the explosive was either nitroglycerin or dynamite. But nobody could think of a sensible reason why the charge should have been set off at all. There was, of course, no sensible reason. And so the very inanity of the act balked the efforts to solve the mystery.

Two weeks elapsed before Dike broached Bosco on the subject of explosives.

"Listen, Charley, I've been reading up on N. G. and I think I can handle it. There's no money in my line, and I'd like to try cracking safes. But where do I get the stuff? Where do you get it?"

"From a juicelegger," Bosco told him.

"A which?"

"A juicelegger—a guy who makes the stuff and bootlegs it among crib workers. See?"

"Do you have to go to him for it?"

"No—I wouldn't have the stuff on me while I'm on the street except when I go to and from work. This guy delivers it to me. We do it like this: I give him my order and pay him. Then I tell him at what time during the following day I'll be out. While I'm out, he comes to my room and puts a bottle full of the stuff—like you saw in the pool room—on my table. See? I ain't there when it's delivered, so the cops can't catch me accepting it."

"Good idea. But how does he get in your room?"

"Walks in. I always leave the door open in the daytime. You been in my place—a kind of boarding house with over twenty rooms. People coming and going all the time; no way of keeping track of them. If the police found the stuff on me I could just say it was a plant, and the landlord would back me up by saying that a lot of fellows had passed in and out and any one of them could have put the bottle in my room to frame me. And then I would say I didn't know what was in the bottle and I had never seen no N. G. before."

"Got yourself covered nicely," commented Dike. "But ain't it dangerous for your juicelegger to stand the stuff on your table instead of hiding it some——"

"Listen, fella, if you ever monkey with N. G. there's one thing you always want to remember. Always keep the stuff in plain sight. If you stick it away in some drawer where you can't see it, you might forget about it and knock against it, or the thing it's in, accidentally. But if you got it where you can look it in the eye, you'll always have it on your mind and there won't be no accidents."

"That's right, too," admitted Dike. "Well, when I make up my mind definitely, I'll let you get some of it for me."

"Glad to help you out," offered Bosco.

About a week later, on a bitter-cold evening, they met again. From Bosco's somewhat unsteady gait, it was apparent

that he had been drinking, and as usual he was again crunching something hard between his teeth.

"Say," said Bosco, "C'me on up my place. That fella I told you about was up my place this afternoon while I was out. Let's see if he left the stuff there."

"Sure, I'll trot up with you," accepted Dike. "What are you eating again—candy?"

"Rock candy—want a hunk?"

"Ugh!" groaned Dike.

"'Sgood stuff," Bosco assured him. "White rock candy. Hunk o' candy and shot o' hooch—jush like rock 'n' rye. 'Sgood for a cold, 'sgood for measles or anything you got."

"Thank you—not for me."

As soon as they entered Bosco's room, Dike saw the glass bottle on the centre of the table standing against the left wall. But to his surprise he noticed that the bottle had burst.

Bosco paid no attention to it. He busied himself taking off his overcoat and hanging it in a closet. He merely waved toward the table and mumbled:

"There you are. Prompt delivery, ain't it?"

"Yes, siree, your juicelegger is there with the goods. Say listen—what's the matter with this joint? Don't they furnish heat? This is one of the coldest nights this winter, and it's almost as cold in here as outside."

"Been—been havin' a li'l' trouble." Bosco settled himself heavily in a chair near the table. He did not, however, face the table; his right side was toward it. "The fool boiler went on the blink four days ago. Dumb plumber wasted a lotta time tryin' to fix it and then said it couldn't be done. The landlord'll have to get a new boiler. Won't have no heat for another day or two. Ain't afraid of a little cold, are you?"

With this, Bosco took a paper bag out of his pocket and put it on the table. He fumbled in the bag for several moments, and then, becoming impatient, he ripped it open and dumped out its contents.

"Is that the rock candy?" asked Dike.

"Yeh, let's eat it up—eat it all up." Then suddenly. "Say, where's that bottle? There was a bottle on——"

"Got it in my hand," cut in Dike. "I'll put it over here on the mantelpiece. You're kind of unsteady—might knock against——"

"Aw, that's all right. I'm careful fellow that way. C'me on, let's eat up this stuff and kill this pint bottle of——"

"We couldn't eat all of that candy in a week," laughed Dike.

"Rats. Could eat it all me'self."

"All that candy?"

"All of it—'bout a pound and a half left."

"Bologny!"

"What's bologny?"

"One fellow couldn't eat all that stuff—what I mean is, not at one clip. Course, if he took a couple of days he——"

"Eat it in twenty minutes," offered Bosco.

"Bologny!" repeated Dike.

Bosco's eyes narrowed. "Are you calling me a liar?"

"Not a liar. Just a bluffer."

"Then call me!" Bosco put several bills on the table. "There's fifty dollars says I can eat this candy in twenty minutes."

"I'll take you on that," said Dike promptly. "I'll give you an even break for your money. Make it an hour. If you swallowed this hard stuff whole, it would make you sick for a month. You'll have to bite it up into little bits first and that takes time. One hour. And I won't sit here and watch you, either. I'm going up to Sicondo's place where it's warm. I know you're honest and won't throw the candy out of the window or anything like that."

"Say, who you talking to—what——"

"I said you were honest. I'll take

your word for it. I'll be back in an hour. If you haven't eaten the candy —all of it—you lose."

"Kiss your money good-by!" roared Charley. "Bosco eats 'em alive and he goin' to do his stuff." Going down the stairs, Dike heard Bosco laughing: "'Magine! Calling me a bluffer! Ha! Thass a good one. I'll show him!"

Norman Dike did not go to Sicondo's pool room. He went to his own home. In his library he took a book from a shelf and began reading:

> Nitroglycerin freezes at 34.04 degrees Fahrenheit. Like water, it expands in freezing, and may thus burst the vessel containing it. When it freezes it changes into whitish crystals, and when it is solid it is much more liable to explosion by simple percussion than when it is liquid. Nitroglycerin is a heavy, colorless oil, which, like the glycerin from which it is derived, tastes sweet.

Dike laid aside the book. His thoughts wandered back to Charley's room. Some of the whitish crystals which had burst from bottle, still lay on the table when Bosco dumped the rock candy from the bag. Dike had removed the broken bottle—hut he had left some of the frozen nitroglycerin—and pieces of the rock candy had rolled near it. The rock candy also resembled a whitish crystal. Charley was just enough "under" not to tell them apart. And the nitroglycerin would taste sweet when Charley put it into his mouth. It would be all rock candy to Bosco Charley until he used his teeth on a frozen nitro-glycerine crystal.

Of course, Charlie would try to eat everything on the table.

The police found neither rock candy nor nitroglycerin. Dike had set the bottle with the remainder of the stuff so close to the edge of the mantelpiece that the jar of Charley's falling body and the toppling chair had sent it crashing to the floor, where it also exploded. The strange affair remained a mystery to every one, including Mr. Massinger, the director of the community center.

On hearing of the tragedy, Massinger reflected: "Dike said that the way to get a fellow like Charley Ney was to coax him into getting himself. But of course Dike had nothing to do with this, for it is manifestly impossible that even a fool and a braggart could be coaxed to take himself off in this absurd manner."

A DANCING BURGLAR

A CURIOUS variation of the Jekyll-Hyde personality was recently revealed in Paris, in the case of a popular acrobatic dancer appearing for a number of years past in the music halls of the French metropolis. After leading a double life for all these years, it has finally been discovered that this man was the leader of a band of burglars in the hours when his theatrical duties did not require his attention.

He was found to have under his command a number of spies or secret agents who would keep him posted as to the movements of the police, while other emissaries would search out homes where valuables were to be had for the taking without too much risk. The dancing burglar's part in the game consisted of using his acrobatic ability in climbing drain pipes, scaling walls, porches, and other difficult places, to gain entry to the homes that were to be robbed.

On effecting an entrance, he would admit his confederates and they would ransack the place. In three months, the dancing burglar is said to have committed thirty crimes of housebreaking, and his loot is believed to run into millions. His gang owned a furnace for melting down the gold and silver that they stole, thus rendering it impossible of identification.

BROKEN WORDS

By Alan Macdonald

Author of "Three Fingers of Fate," etc.

TALL, lean and dark, with curiously glittering, uneasy blue eyes—eyes that now and again opened wide and stared at you with an uncanny suggestion of mists of vague insanity suddenly beclouding the keen mind behind them—"Calorthan, the Preacher," as his brother one day derisively dubbed him, came to the open door of his kinsman's room and paused. He had approached silently, as always, and now he stood peering through the slit, surveying the frowzy, cheap little room, with its nondescript chairs and ancient furniture, its unmade, tumbled bed, its collection of cough sirups, salves and other patent medicines, old razor blades and crumpled tobacco coupons on the bureau top.

But it was not the room that interested him. He had seen that disordered retreat often enough, for, like his own, it led off the sitting room that completed their "suite," as the optimistic landlady called it—the boarding-house shelter where their lack of funds had kept the pair now for some years. Calorthan's brother stood by the table, a younger, slighter edition of himself, though with hair nearer chestnut than coal black, and, normally, a kind, rather appealing gray eye. Beggars were forever stopping Dorfman, the brother; children smiled at him, and dogs were always coming to his heels and sitting down. He looked intelligent enough, even above the average, but he had, for some strange reason, the air of one who is lost, and hates to admit it. The world and its ways had ever been a mystery to him. That much was plain on sight.

Now, as Calorthan perceived at once, "the boy"—he always called Dorfman that, though the latter was only two years his junior—was undergoing another of his more-or-less frequent spells of rage. Dorfman was, he saw, savagely shoving cartridges into a bright new revolver, taking them from a box on the table. Calorthan's

black-lashed lids narrowed, the long white fingers gripped the door sash until the nails turned red. The dark brows knitted, and the eavesdropper's breathing became like a rapidly working bellows. Dorfman was muttering threats, softly, bitterly, to himself. For an instant, Calorthan trembled. What on earth did the emotional boy intend to do?

Calorthan had a disquieting, rather guilty idea the revolver bullets might even be intended for him, since, in a way, there would be sound, if wicked, motive for this; just as, curiously enough, he himself had often thought there was good reason why, could it be done without discovery, he should make away with Dorfman! There was, in either case, their father's will, the cause of all their trouble, which left them, share and share alike, his estate of about three hundred thousand dollars, the money to be paid on Calorthan's thirty-first birthday, which was still a year away. Unless, of course, one died in the meantime, in which case it was provided that the survivor should receive everything.

At last, Calorthan got himself together, gulped and rushing suddenly into the room, gripped the gun and forced his brother's hands down upon the table.

"Dorfie," he cried breathlessly, "what are you doing? Why are you loading that thing? Have you gone mad?"

It was a peculiar comment upon the nervous condition of the two brothers that Calorthan should take such a tragic view of the matter. After all, Dorfman might have been loading the weapon for some quite harmless, rational reason, such as having it ready against thieves; but the strange Calorthan saw only murder or suicide, or perhaps both, behind the act. Yet the way Dorfman turned on his brother was, perhaps, still more peculiar. Dorfman's usually mild blue eyes looked wild, too, and as he burst into explanation, they filled with hot tears.

"I can't stand it any longer, and I won't," he blurted. "Let go the gun, d'ye hear! I've written old Millman letter after letter, begging, pleading for money. Oh, I've even threatened his life. This morning I had a letter from him—a mealy-mouthed, preachy thing—saying he'd see me at his home at eight o'clock to-night. I'll see him all right. I'm going up to have it out with him, once and for all."

"Dorfie, you're crazy. Plain crazy!"

"Give me the gun—give it to me!" cried Dorfman, and they struggled, then stopped for breath. "There's no good reason why he can't loan us money against the day our property is to be made over to us," sobbed Dorfman. "I could kill him, keeping us here in poverty while our youth slips away, till we're too old to enjoy money, anyway. Let go that gun, let go!"

The boy made a last savage effort to get control of his revolver, but the elder brother was also the stronger. They lunged and swung each other about, breathing like embattled animals. The table toppled over, the lamp and the box of cartridges crashed to the floor. Calorthan, finally, leaped clear with the gun in hand. Roughly, then, he threw Dorfman into a chair, and stood over him.

"Fool!" said Calorthan. "The will expressly forbade Millman, the executor, from giving us money before the time for payment. You yourself remember the way it goes. 'I desire that my boys make their own early way, learn the world, before coming into their money, for I know they are emotional and violent tempered, like their mother, and will not learn how to use money well at an early age. Therefore I——"

"And you know Millman, the righteous. Besides, we've only a year to

wait. Ten to one, if you go up there, you'll lose your temper and shoot Millman, and hang. Then what?"

Dorfman sat there, a pitiable figure, rubbing his hands between his knees.

"Ah, but I want the money," he said obstinately, impatiently. "I want it now. Here I am, heir to a fortune, and for just a living have to sell cigarettes over a counter day after day. Past the stand go young bloods, and gay, pretty girls into the hotel. They come out to ride in taxis, and kiss one another. They dance, and dine, and live—live! Oh, sometimes, I think father must have been kin to the devil to keep us waiting so. If it wasn't for the money, I might be able to get somewhere working, be ambitious and successful, but I keep dreaming about the time when I'll be rich. Why worry about to-day? Oh, it's all right to say I shouldn't, but I can't help it. I just can't. The whole thing's been hell."

Calorthan spread his hands, in one of which was the loaded revolver. The boy looked down at the floor. Calorthan watched him narrowly, even wickedly.

"But what can you do?" he asked with suspicious gentleness, his lips thinned, his eyes cold, and calculating.

Dorfman sprang to his feet.

"Do?" he shouted. "Oh, I'll show you what I'll do. I'll go up there tonight and see that old beast, and if he doesn't come through, I'll make a sieve of him."

He flung himself back and forth across the room.

"Oh, don't preach, Cal, don't," he rushed on. "I've had enough. Another year of this, and I'll go mad. Maybe I'm mad now. I don't know, but things have got to be changed. Cal"—and here his voice fell almost to a whisper—"let's go up together. Let's get what belongs to us. Old Millman has that collection of gems!"

Calorthan's strange eyes widened, glittering, yet vaguely misty and wild looking, and fastened upon the younger's flushed face under its tousled, dark thatch of hair. Swiftly, he pushed his brother away, turning to the window, and his face grew pale as death. Yet it was clear he was thinking of something different from Dorfman's sudden proposal—some terrifying plan of his own.

"No, no," he stammered, as he always did when greatly excited. "I—I—I could-could-couldn't. I—I—I have-haven't the courage. Boy, what are-are you say-saying?"

Calorthan leaned on the table, and looking at his brother with his strange eyes, carefully laid down the gun. He trembled like a leaf in the breeze, and as he protested further his voice grew hoarse and strident, his words even more broken. Somehow, ever since boyhood, he had been so afflicted. Excitement, any crisis seemed to rob him of control of speech. But little by little he calmed himself. His gaze fell to the floor.

"Whatever you do," he said loudly, "don't ever shoot Millman. Go and talk with him, if you must, but guard against violence and murder, whatever else you do. D'ye hear?"

The younger man was pacing the floor, flinging himself about like a man under a net, twisting his hands, biting his lips.

"Oh, don't you start a sermon," he sputtered. "I wasn't born yesterday. "I'm not going to hang, mind that."

Calorthan righted the table, picked up the lamp, and gathered the cartridges, which had scattered on the floor. Surreptitiously, when Dorfman's back was turned, he slipped six of the cartridges into his pocket. He took a last look at Dorfman, who had stopped to peer out the grimy single window, and was standing there in a brown study. It was a look suddenly full of contempt and cunning, and

tipped with speculation. Plainly, it said, "No, my young buck, you'll never hang; trust me for that!" And so Calorthan went out, for some mysterious reason he himself could not have fathomed, on tiptoe.

Inside his own room, which was even more disordered than Dorfman's, Calorthan sat quite still and pale, his blue eyes vague with dreams or schemes. Absent-mindedly, he rubbed with the toe of his slim black shoe one of the six or seven spots where carelessly thrown cigarette stubs had burned the nap from the flowered, old Brussels carpet. At last, he arose, soundlessly lifting his long, angular body from his chair, crossed the room and locked the door, being careful to turn the key so slowly that the lock made no noise. From his shirts in the bureau drawer, then, he drew a revolver of the same caliber as that Dorfman had had, and going back to his chair, he sat down again. With a grim smile he stuck into the weapon, one by one, the cartridges he had taken from his brother's room, and dropped the gun in his coat pocket.

Presently, he laid his head back on the chair and closed his eyes. Only when he heard his brother's door slam sharply and caught the sound of his quick step as he went down the hall toward the front door, did he sit up again, tense, his fingers drumming apprehensively on the table. The sounds dying out, he lay back to wait, keeping himself very still, all the more so because in spite of himself his pulse would creep up into high speed, and his skin prickle under the goad of the things he was planning.

For Calorthan was really more unhappy than his brother. He was, as they say, up to his neck in trouble, and he knew not which way to turn. The startling truth was that all his share of his father's estate had been spent—spent or gambled away. Where Dorfman had watched the current of romantic, costly living from behind the cigar stand, Calorthan, by far the subtler and cleverer of the two, had found means to swim in the current himself.

Older, more impressive, and when he chose quite suave and convincing, he had found little trouble in getting loans from banks on notes against his inheritance. This had all been quite regular. The banks had investigated, found the money was actually in trust, and had given Calorthan, altogether, some fifty thousand dollars in the last five years. And Calorthan had gambled it away; and then gamblers, little side-street money lenders had taken more of his notes, and he had likewise stretched his credit to the limit, and when protests and demands for payments came, had ended by giving notes here, too. And now, unless he chose to think he could deny the gamblers' demands on his I O Us, his principal was practically gone.

Sitting there now, thinking a little contemptuously in the fringe of his mind about his simpler brother, whom he fully expected to visit the Millman home in the fashionable suburb of Charleston that night, Calorthan could not but admire the skill with which he had kept all his squanderings from Dorfman. *That* had been almost as clever as the infinite, petty schemes whereby he had continually gotten money. How he had gone on living, apparently, only in the boarding-house suite, and pretending to be penniless, too! How he had at the same time maintained a cozier retreat uptown!

Time after time he had preached patience to the younger son, when the latter came home from work. Then he had gone, having his own fling, while the boy sold cigars and ate his heart out! And Dorfman still thought that Calorthan moped about the boarding house all day, and eked out his ex-

istence by being night cashier in a restaurant! Calorthan chuckled.

Now, all this might seem too clever, unnecessarily clever, on first thought, but only to one who did not know Calorthan. For, even from the first, Calorthan had counted on *having* Dorfman's money when his own was gone. Scheming, secretive, selfish, hypocritical, like his mother had been, this idea had come to his mind quite simply and naturally. Curiously, between the relations of Calorthan and Dorfman, and of their late father and mother, there had been an odd parallel.

The father had been a hard-driving, quick-tempered, masterful man—direct in his way, and like Dorfman in one respect, that he usually did what he said he'd do. The mother had been self-centered, and insanely jealous and selfish. She had taken all she could get from her fortune-making mate, by schemes and stratagems, by pretending a love, sometimes, that it was impossible for one so cold as she ever to feel—and had taken it all as her right and due! The two had led a cat-and-dog life. Perhaps this was why the two boys were what they were, especially Calorthan—mentally and emotionally unstable, possibly even a little insane.

The room had gotten quite dark when Calorthan, who had been sitting still as a statue, stirred himself. Into his long frame, it seemed, had crept a catlike impulse, for in the dusk he arose easily and soundlessly, and tiptoed across the room to the big, old-fashioned clothespress, out of which he took his greatcoat and put it on. He drew his muffler from the hook and thoughtfully wound it about his long, thin neck, and then, with an abstracted air, went over to the bureau. There he extracted a black-silk handkerchief from a drawer and hastily thrust it into his pocket. In the same pocket he thrust the revolver he had loaded that afternoon. He put on his hat, turned up his collar and thus belatedly followed the impetuous Dorfman down the hall to the street.

Calorthan made his way to a garage some blocks away, which he often patronized, a garage where they rented automobiles with or without chauffeurs. Calorthan had no difficulty getting a car and as he drove away, toward the Millman home in the suburb of Charleston, he muttered hatefully to himself:

"Fool," he grumbled, thinking of his brother. "He certainly took the trolley, because he wouldn't have money enough, or sense, for that matter, to rent a car. It'll take him three hours to my one, the way that old trolley line runs. What would he do with money, anyway? Everybody would take it away from him! He'd be lost with it."

Far out along the deserted road, he opened the cutout of his car as the automobile raced along, so that the machine made a noise like the rattle of rifle fire. In the midst of this he fired the revolver twice, a cruel smile twisting his elongated, white face. He had an idea he might need the blank cartridges to put in Dorfman's gun, to account for bullets he might, before the night was over, have to fire from his own. After all, he thought, it would be simple and easy, this plan of his, and it was the only way. His father and Bryant Millman had been the closest friends, and often in earlier days, Calorthan had played in the old Millman home with the Millman children. Yes, he knew the place like a book. He knew just how he would get in—and out! He knew just where he would be standing, about eight o'clock, there behind the curtain in front of a certain deep French window.

Little thrills of rising excitement, of fear, perhaps, began to run along his nerves. Even in his big driving gloves, under which he had donned kid gloves,

for purposes of the night, his hands grew cold and tremulous. He fought against the nervousness.

"After all," he muttered savagely, Dorfman is a helpless, uncertain fool, and I must have money. It is plain: I must choose between my brother and myself, for if he lives I can't have his money, and if I don't get the money—why, I can't live. What else is there to do? Once he is out of the way I can go on, I can keep my rooms uptown, and satisfy my friends. The money will be mine a year hence, I can say. Why didn't I think of this way out before? I could have egged him into it. Still, this is best, no one will ever know. They'll think—murder, murder and suicide."

Suddenly, as he whispered, he found himself stuttering with excitement, and lapsed into chagrined, angry silence. Was he never to be free of this weakness? But his thoughts ran on and on, like the car, through darkness.

Long, velvet curtains hung before the deep recesses in which were the tall French windows of the old Millman drawing-room. On cold nights when the wind was up, invariably the servants pulled the curtains across the closetlike window apertures to keep out the frosty breeze. To-night the wind howled and whistled about the ancient home, now and again the heavy blue curtains moved.

Near the particular curtain that hung before the first window to the right of the wide fireplace, in the spacious, shadowy old room, shortly after eight o'clock that evening, stood the agitated young Dorfman. Had he reached his left hand sidewise he could have touched this curtain, which now and again stirred uneasily, as if by the wind. In a wheel chair before the cheerfully blazing fireplace, sat Millman, a man who had grown old splendidly, and whose years in the money market had been full of honor as well as profit.

The old man looked now just what he had been all his life, kindly, tolerant, but unswerving in any duty that might fall to his lot, true to friend and foe. He had a large, domed bald head, and the high intelligent forehead was creased by regular, fine little lines of thought. His somewhat rheumy eyes now bent broodingly, sympathetically on the unhappy boy before him. His wrinkled, veined hands were still on the plaid blanket that covered his withered, trembling knees. His old head moved ever so slightly to and fro, as if he could not stop it, despite the steadiness of his fine old eyes.

"All this pother about money," he quavered finally, with the air natural to a man who knows he is soon going where money can never go. "My boy, money is nothing. You have deluded yourself into a fever of desire. Love and work, those are the real things. They are happiness. They cost nothing."

"Once for all," Dorfman broke in, his voice sharp and vibrant with ill-suppressed rage, "once for all, will you give me part of my rightful inheritance? Oh, just five thousand dollars until the day I get the rest. For the last time, will you, or no?"

"My dear boy, I can't. The terms of the will——"

"You can loan it to me, and, by heaven, you will, or——"

"No, that would defeat your father's purpose," interrupted the man in his turn. "Don't you see, by the very act of coming here and threatening me, of coming here to this house where you played as a boy, of coming to me, your father's best friend, in this ugly manner, you prove you cannot take care of money, or even handle yourself? You are as your poor father feared, like your mother. You must control yourself."

"Never mind my mother. It's the money we're talking about!"

"Yes, yes, but hear me out," pleaded the old man. "Your letters disturbed me. They showed a dangerous state of mind. That's why I let you come here to-night. I wanted to talk to you, to show you the truth. Why, just think, I had to send the girls away—the girls you played with as a little boy—lest there be some such stormy scene as this. Don't you see, you must master yourself first? That was what your father wanted. You loved your father, didn't you? Tell me."

Young Dorfman, his jaw thrust out in the determined, ruthless manner that was one of his inheritances from that same father—a father who became steel and fire in face of any opposition—advanced a step without a word. Slowly he drew the revolver into sight. His face was a red gargoyle of rage. Old Millman uttered a thin cry, but Dorfman cut it short.

"Scream and I shoot," he promised. "Now, you listen to reason! You all preach and preach at me, and I've had enough. I don't care what you or any one else says, that money is mine and I want it. Either you sign me a check for five thousand dollars with that pen and ink at your elbow, and see that I get it cashed, or we both die. Maybe I'm crazy, maybe no. But you'll do just as I say, or—will you sign that check?"

"My boy, my boy, I won't—so help me!"

The boy gave vent to a hoarse, animal cry. His arms shot out like knives, and the revolver swept into place. The gun barked once, twice, and old Millman leaped, then slumped down in his chair, gasping, looking infinitely old and tired. A little red spot widened on his white shirt front. Dorfman stared as though hypnotized, for all the world like a person suddenly awakened and looking round about without quite comprehending where he was, or what he had been doing.

The weapon slipped from his nerveless fingers, and he swayed there, his eyes held to his victim in horror. "Good Heaven, Mr. Millman——" he muttered, but the sentence was never finished.

From behind the curtain at his left hand slid Calorthan, like some ghostly shadow. He thrust his own revolver almost directly against the boy's left ear, and before the youth could wrench his attention from the dying Millman, Calorthan fired.

It was all done in an instant. Dorfman slumped to the floor, and Calorthan, pale and ghostly, moving swiftly, his wary eye roving the doors, rolled him over. He kicked the boy's own revolver against his right hand. Then, he stepped back to the curtain, hearing already the noise of the servants running in the upstairs rooms of the old homestead. His long white hand was just parting the curtains, when he heard a voice. He started, stared, and quivering tensely, his eyes glittering above the black-silk handkerchief that covered the lower part of his face, turned swiftly, ready again to fire if necessary. But there was no one in sight save his dead brother and the dying Millman.

"Murderer," repeated the voice. "You'll pay for this. You, too, will die. Only you are young."

Calorthan seemed for the moment too upset to carry out his intended immediate flight. Then, he saw old Millman stir, and knew the ancient was still alive. He was relieved. He had no fear those dying eyes would recognize him through his black-silk mask. He had, curiously and quite naturally in one so strange and unaccountable by nature, even an impulse toward humor.

"Nev-nev-never you mu-mu-mind," he said, stuttering in spite of himself. "Yu-you'll be yo-you-young again,

when—when yo-you get to hea-heaven."

There was a step on the stairs. Calorthan stepped between the heavy curtains, and they closed behind him. He slipped out the French window, which, earlier, he had had no trouble in silently prizing open, and dropped to the ground. Under cover of darkness, and the brush, he soon reached his car and was gone.

"Murder and suicide," he kept telling himself all the way home, "murder and suicide—that's what they'll say. Good old Dorfie fired twice, and one shot went wild. They'll think *that* shot was the one he put in his own skull, when they find two exploded cartridges in his gun. Easy, murder and suicide!"

Calorthan sat sipping a drink in a speakeasy, a disreputable hole of a place under the shadow of a great bridge. Somehow, he knew he ought to go to his old boarding house to be there when news of the killings came, but he could not quite bring himself to go there. This old haunt of his, on occasion, was just around the corner. It was as near as he had been able to come to his slain brother's room. Was he sorry, was he haunted by remorse? He told himself no, again and again, no. True, he might have let the State hang Dorfie, but the State wouldn't have done the job until after a trial, in which much of Dorfie's property to come might have been involved by lawyers. No, the thing had to be done!

"I arrest you for murder, young man. Stand up. And don't make any false moves. You're covered, d'ye hear? Lively now!"

Calorthan's jaw fell. What the—— There must be some mistake. Why, they could know! Good heavens! A terrible fear gripped him. He must be calm now, must assert his surprise and innocence, mustn't let excitement master him. But his pulse leaped as he looked at the big detective—he knew the man was a detective—who stood looking down at him, revolver in hand. His pulse leaped, and his head throbbed and pounded with pressure of his fears. Above all, he mustn't stutter, but he must talk, he thought, at once.

"I—I—I you-you mu-must be mu-mu-mistaken," he heard himself saying, his horror steadily increasing. "I hav-haven't mu-mu-murdered any-any-body."

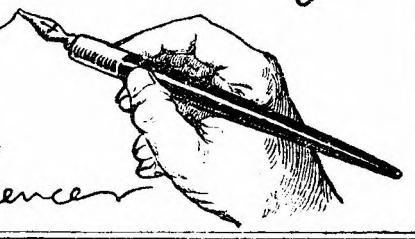
"So you do break your words up, hey?" said the detctive. "Well, you're my man, all right."

He thrust a bit of white paper in front of Calorthan, and the murderer read, with staring eyes: "A tall, thin man who stuttered."

"Old Millman wrote that note just before he died, when he could no longer talk or see, I guess," said the detective. "And his son, who rushed up from Boston, thought of you. Said he used to play with you, and that whenever you got frightened or het up you stuttered. Funny, wasn't it, how you talked broken like that when I sang out about your being arrested, now, wasn't it?"

But Calorthan was in no mood to be amused.

What Handwriting Reveals



Conducted By Shirley Spencer

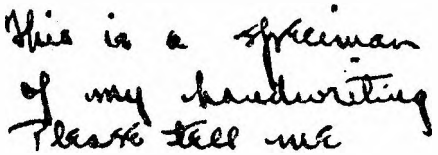
If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned to Shirley Spencer, in care of this magazine, and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. Shirley Spencer will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Also, coupon—see below—must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read. If possible, write with black ink.

All communications will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in the department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Every care will be taken to return specimens of handwriting, but it is to be understood that Miss Spencer cannot be responsible for them.

HARVEY B.: Yes, I do think that you can write. You have the artistic temperament and fine literary taste. However, you need to concentrate more and to improve your technique. You seem a little young and inexperienced but you have all the qualites that make a fine combination for a writer.



This is a specimen of my handwriting Please tell me

Those large "e's" that sort of look down on the other letters indicate a certain kind of pride. In your case they tell me that you have a quiet dignity and confidence which is not always apparent in your manner, but people find out about it if they try to tread on your toes!

You have not an aggressive manner and so people are sometimes fooled into thinking you will not defend yourself, but your pride asserts itself at unexpected moments and they find that they were mistaken.

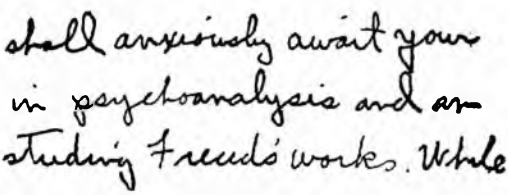
There are culture and refinement expressed in your script. One can see that you have fine taste and that you respond especially to color and to music.

The upward slant to the "T" bar tells me that you have ideals and are aspiring to higher things, though the pressure of your pen is that of a materialistic person. By all means continue with your writing and don't become discouraged if at first you fail to sell your stories. Rome was not built in a day, remember.

D. K., Wisconsin: You have selected a good subject when you turned to psy-

chology and psychoanalysis, for in these you will find an excellent field in which to develop your type of mind, which is analytical, deductive, and logical. You have turned naturally to the thing that interests you most and you ought to make very good progress. Your ability lies in this direction.

I want to warn you, however, not to become merely a theorist and so become narrow in your views. Do not hold any set rules, and do not be influenced too much by this or that writer, who may be quite dogmatic and blind in some respects. I would advise you to cultivate the higher intuition of the real psychic, and function on the spiritual as well as the intellectual plane.



Your writing shows that you are very earnest and sincere, and that you have good powers of concentration. The last is needed in scientific work.

Have you thought of the literary field as one you might try? You ought to write feature articles or do journalistic reporting. You have talent for this type of work.

It is evident that you express yourself more readily in writing than in speaking. There is some reserve shown —a rather cold and indifferent attitude, some might find it. I am sure that you are interested in people, but as studies rather than being drawn to them emotionally. You are not highly emotional or ardent. You give a confidence slowly and do not form many intimacies.

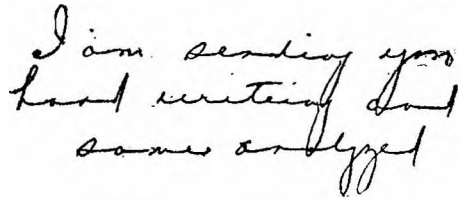
You naturally prefer simplicity and a free natural life to any unnecessary display or ostentation. You have no great social ambitions and are not seemingly interested in mere material success or "big business."

Though you can be tactful, you do not gloss over the truth and are critical and exacting at times. Your analytical mind is always guiding you, and if you develop this quality intelligently you ought to become very keen and quick to grasp the intricacies of the science you have taken up.

J. S., Illinois: A very pleasant personality is expressed in your script. I am sure that you are well liked by your associates. Besides your agreeable disposition you have executive ability, and have acquired a certain efficiency that will make you valuable in commercial lines.

I see that you are very ambitious and that you have set your standard unusually high. You have a good deal of pride—not so much personal pride, though you have plenty of that—but pride in achievement. There is dignity, too, expressed, and a desire to make a favorable impression.

The rhythm and the loops in your script show that you have an interest in physical culture, beauty culture, and that you probably dance very well, or ought to be interested in physical activity along artistic lines.

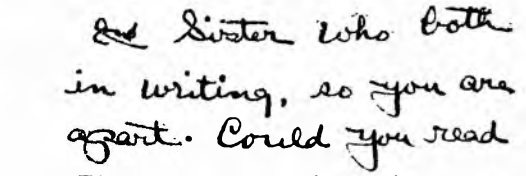


Though you have evidently had some commercial training and have adapted yourself very well to the general routine and system of it, you have not wholly submerged your personality as so many do.

JEAN, Kentucky: Your writing is very far from being of that standardized type. That straight up-and-down writing shows that you are not very

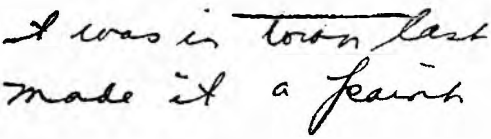
demonstrative in your affections, and that you have self-control and common sense. The pressure of your pen shows that you are capable of deep feeling, but that you are somewhat cold and inclined to be self-centered.

Some of your formations show originality of a constructive nature. Especially have you rather an odd sense of humor, but a strong one nevertheless. You have a lot of personal pride and do not like to be criticized.



There is a contradiction in the matter of your will power. For the most part your will is strong, but there are times when you hesitate and draw back within yourself into a sort of reserve or shell, and so do not seize the opportunities at hand. You ought to be able to overcome this tendency with a little thought.

W. O., New York City: The long "t" bars do show that you have a strong will, but your "t" bars aren't always long—showing that you are apt to be enthusiastic and dash into a thing with a good deal of spirit, but that you haven't the endurance to hold out under trying conditions.



You are impulsive and apt to let your feelings run away with you at times. Try to keep a better balance. You dash in with a war whoop, and slink out with a sigh!

You have such an active mind that you become restless if tied down to details too much, though on the whole I must congratulate you on your adaptation to a commercial world with your temperament.

Handwriting Coupon

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name .....

Address .....

TELEPATHY PREVENTS A BURGLARY

SOME people call it telepathy, others "sixth sense," and others a hunch, but whatever it is, it produces a feeling of immense satisfaction if it works out all right, and just makes its owner look foolish if it doesn't. The following incident is a case in point:

A few weeks ago, Mr. Joseph Silverman, proprietor of a dry-goods emporium on Columbus Avenue, New York, awoke at an early morning hour with the uncomfortable feeling, hunch, telepathic message—or call it what you will—that he had not switched on the burglar alarm when closing his store the previous evening. In spite of the untimely hour, he dressed and visited his place of business.

When he opened the door of the store, he heard sounds at the rear. He summoned a policeman and went around to investigate. There he found a man apparently engaged in removing his rear wall brick by brick with a crow bar. The trespasser had already achieved a hole of some magnitude, and if left undisturbed, would probably have cleaned out everything of value in the place. He was given a chance to tell it to the judge. His record showed that he had been released from Sing Sing three months prior to his latest arrest.

Under the Lamp

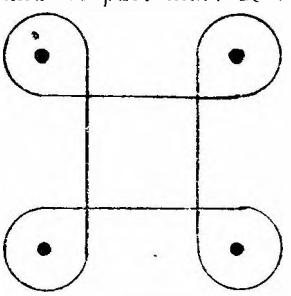
By Prosper Buranelli

This department is conducted by Prosper Buranelli for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us and Mr. Buranelli will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it?

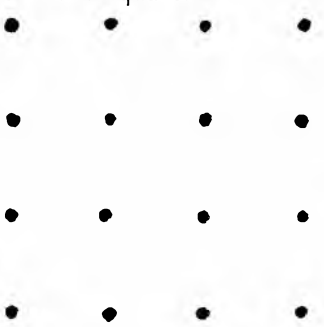
Answers to this week's problems will be printed in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Prosper Buranelli, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

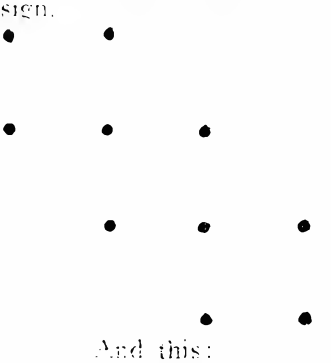
A LADY from Detroit, Mrs. H. A. Schwarts, contributes a set of tricky line problems. Take four dots, draw a line so that each dot is inclosed in a loop. The line must be continuous and no part must be retraced.



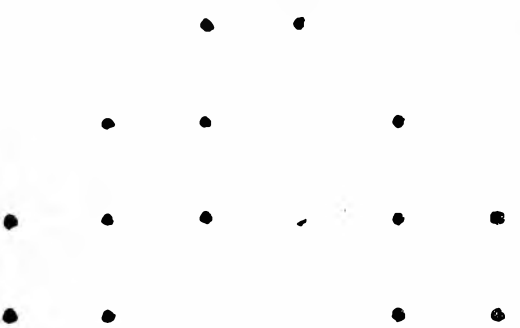
That was very simple, but increase the number of dots. Take sixteen dots arranged in a square.



Do the same with them. Then take this design.



And this:



Take the big one at top of the page. Line problems are very attractive, I think. Don't you? Anything that involves using a pencil seems to have a fascination.

Our cryptograms this week are a trifle more difficult than usual, that is in accordance with the general demand of our cryptographers, who have been calling for harder ones.

Doctor K. Daman of Woodstock, Nebraska, sends a communication for a contributor whose cipher has already appeared.

AO SOTPIURE DWRMPO MPOAWIZ: EWHO QWUP KJD FWWU. "SOWA" FWZ ZKTDZPU XHZ WZGPOD GJMP UWIP TZ JRDW. DPJDWID QWAYRTAPIZD SOWA EWHOF ZOHRE.

Mr. C. R. Craine, who signs himself "BEGINNER," sends one in as a bit of revenge. It is so tough that I only include it for the benefit of our hardest boiled cryptographers.

RGNKAKOV UHPWKDAGVH WHHBKOVAS WYZCAE IHRZBH GIHRHEGPS; EHAHLKOV GLPZRKZCW RZAAZRGLKZO.

Last week's answers:

ANAGRAM:
THE BOARDING HOUSE.

CRYPTOGRAMS:

PLEASE SEND US SOME CHECKER PROBLEMS ALONG WITH YOUR CIPHERS. THEY WILL BE INTERESTING.

The familiar LL and TH in WILL, WITH and THEY were significant. Then observe the fall of the Es. Whenever you see a letter so commonly occurring at the end or near the end of words or near the beginning, E is the best guess.

WHY DON'T CONTRIBUTORS CONCOCT MORE BAFFLING BRAIN BREAKERS?

With O as the second letter so often, it can be spotted as a vowel. Two words begin with a common prefix of three letters. If you tried to work the fourth word with various three-letter prefixes, with a vowel in the middle, as this one has, you would soon have found that CON was the only possibility.

THE HELPING HANDS DEPARTMENT

Conducted by Nancy Carter

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE deals both in its articles and fiction with various forms of crime, and the dangers and difficulties to which they lead. Perhaps that is why so many people write the editor for help and advice in solving individual problems. His many duties make it impossible for him to give these letters the personal attention he would like, so he has called upon Mrs. Nancy Carter to lend a helping hand. Mrs. Carter is one helping hand. We need many others. We need yours. The fact that you might be a transgressor will not bar you; it may help you to prevent another from following the dangerous trail which leads to a precipice. Do not hesitate to write fully; your real name and address will not appear in the magazine.

TORMENTED, whose wife left home when his mother came to live with them, is proffered some more advice, the gist of which is "stick to your mother."

"Don't you think Tormented owes more to his mother than to his wife?" asks one reader. "I don't think it is very nice to advise him to put his mother in a boarding house. I am married, and if my wife acted as his did I would not consider her worthy of the name. Tormented, remember that you can always get a wife, but you can't always get a mother."

Does one really owe more to his mother than to his wife, and can one always get a wife? These are questions to reflect upon. How do our Helping Hands feel upon the subject?

Similar advice is given by another male reader who says, "Stay with your mother and let the wife go. If you were out of work who would help you? Your wife would have you arrested for nonsupport, while mother would do the best she could for you until you got work, and the best she could do would be a lot."

I can't let this statement pass unchallenged. The average wife, I believe, will loyally stand by and do her best for her husband, in or out of work, just as his mother would. I think it is the exceptional wife who would have a husband who is attempting to do his part and fulfill his obligations arrested for nonsupport.

And here is another letter resulting from Tormented's call for help.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: I have read Tormented's letter. It would make me very happy if some one would loan me his little mother. Long ago mine slipped away. Just now death has robbed me of an aunt, and we are so lonely without her. I have a business in a small town; in the home are pets, radio, everything conducive to pleasantness. Will give references if you find one who would consider my offer. MISS N. A. S.

Miss N. A. S. can be reached through the Helping Hands.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: Through a friend I became interested in a man serving a term in one of our prisons. I tried to write helpful letters to him and sent him books to read. We have corresponded for some time now, and from the wish to aid him I have become genuinely interested in him and his future. He landed in the penitentiary more through being weak than really malicious, and his offense was not a very serious one.

Mrs. Carter, this young man's term is almost completed, and he has asked me to marry him when he comes out. I have given the matter a great deal of thought. When I began to write him, the possibility of our ever meeting personally never occurred to me. I don't know whether I would be fair either to him or myself or my family if I did marry him. Perhaps I ought not even to agree to see him. We have many things in common and are quite congenial mentally. I

feel pretty sure that if we did meet we would be mutually drawn to each other.

My family—naturally, I suppose—are horrified at the thought of my receiving this man in our home, much less marrying him. Frankly, I don't know just what to do.

PERPLEXED.

There are those who think one who has served a prison term has no right to marry. Personally, I believe there are some who have no right to do so, but others who have. The nature of the crime or offense for which one was incarcerated, the nature of the man himself, and his attitude upon leaving prison, must be considered. You say the man of whom you speak, Perplexed, is more weak than malicious. Weakness, the inability to resist undermining influences, can be about as difficult to deal with as maliciousness. If you are really so much interested in this man that you feel you cannot give him up, if you feel you can be of great help to him in making a new start, why not continue just on a friendly basis with him until you see how things are going. Not until he proves that he can go straight should you consider marrying him.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: How can I get in touch with a young who is determined to remain hidden? My daughter became acquainted and fell in love with this man at a school dance in the North. They were in love with each other for years, but my daughter feared to marry him because he was a born wanderer. In a foolish moment he married another girl, the result of which was that both repented and agreed to separate before they had been married a month. My daughter forgave him, he came to see her again, and she was to wait until he became divorced. Well, he wrote a letter or two, then again disappeared and no word.

It breaks my heart to see all the chances which she turns away because she can't forget him. I have tried to get in touch with him, but all my letters are returned. If he would only write her that he doesn't care longer it would perhaps make her forget him. If we could only find out why he acts so and induce him either definitely to tell her good-by or return to her! He has nothing in a financial way, but the two are so well suited having never quarreled or had an unkind word. Perhaps he will see this and write us, for we all love him. NORFOLK.

It's a question as to whether this young man's silence does not indicate that he has ceased to feel as he did toward your daughter. The straightforward thing would have been, of course, for him to write and state frankly that he had had a change of heart. However, his silence is very significant, and it seems to me, especially since she has suffered a previous disappointment at his hands, the wisest thing would be for your daughter to try to forget him.

Who feels competent to advise A Worried Man as to the wisdom of wife beating?

DEAR HELPING HANDS: I am a young married man and my wife is just eighteen. Ever since our honeymoon she has had nagging sprees, keeping it up until she boils over and then gets ill. During these spells nothing I do or don't do suits her. She just keeps at me about one thing and another until I'm desperate. About a month ago she drove me from room to room with tirade and abuse. She was the worse this time I have ever seen her, and finally I got my hat and tried to leave the house to let her cool off.

This seemed to make her plumb crazy and she flew at me and said she'd kill herself if I went out. I tried to tell her I couldn't stand any more nagging for an hour or two, anyway, and was going to take the air. She came at me and scratched me down one side of my face with her finger nails, making my cheek bleed. I lost my patience completely, grabbed her and spanked her.

I had no intention of doing such a thing, and afterward didn't know whether I had done right or not. She cried for some time, but later brightened up, and this time she didn't have her usual sick spell following her tirades, but told me she was sorry. Everything was fine until a few days ago, when she began to show signs of slipping back into her old ways again. I don't know what to do. I always thought it was wrong for a man to hit a woman. But don't you think maybe some of them need a good spanking, like a kid, sometimes?

A WORRIED MAN.

If you seek counsel, or have counsel to give, write to the Helping Hands.

Headquarters Chat

HERE is a man, Bud Webber of Denver, Colorado, who has a real complaint. Bud writes us as follows:

"DEAR SIR: I'm not much on correspondence, but I been a-tellin' my ole woman that I just got to write you 'bout a matter that has bothered me for quite some time. You see, it's this way: I have been a reader of your DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for nigh on to six years, and I figure I have invested about forty-six dollars. That may be a little too much or too little as I'm not as good at figgers as I am with a pick an' shovel. Well, as I was a-tellin' my ole woman, I'm gettin' tired of not bein' worth a cuss every Tuesday, 'count of settin' up all night every Monday a-readin' your magazine.

"Now what I want is for you to make this here DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE so it will git to this drug store on Saturdays instead of Mondays, so I can buy it and read it on Sunday while I'm not a-working with the pick and shovel. Will you do this for me? I know it won't inconvenience you none. More'n likely the magazine gets here on Sunday, and this drug store man don't open until Monday. So you won't have to go to your post office, but one day sooner, to help me be in good shape on Tuesday.

"I have a good detective story in my mind, and some day when I am laid off for a week I am goin' to write it out and send it to you. If you don't want to pay me for it, I will write it just the same. I know a lot o' fellers will agree with me that you ought to make the magazine come out one day sooner, so we won't have to help the ole woman all day Sunday but kin read 'bout them tight places your friends get into."

We repeat, we think that Bud has a real complaint, and no sooner did we get his letter than we went right straight to the circulation department and we said, "see, here is a letter from Bud Webber, a real cracking good customer of ours, who lives in Denver, Colorado. He's a man who has gone and blown in forty-six dollars on DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and who—may Heaven give him strength and health—will spend many times forty-six dollars on it."

What particularly touches us in Bud's letter is this: "I know a lot of fellows will agree with me that you ought to make it come out a day sooner so we won't have to help the ole woman all day Sunday, but can read about the tight places your friends get into."

To think of a hard-working man like Bud, slaving all week in an office, shop, or trench, or wherever it is that Bud does his stuff, and then, just because that blame store does not keep open on Sunday, he has to help the "ole woman" all day Sunday and can't lie off with his pipe filled with a fine grade of sawdust and molasses, and enjoy his favorite magazine. We assure Bud, and we assure a lot of other fellows who are in Bud's sad plight, that if there is any bend in the circulation department, we will make them bend to the task of making it possible for Bud and the other fellows to get DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE on Saturday.

Of course we don't want to get in bad with Bud's "ole woman" or with all the "ole women" as belongs to a lot of other fellows. We are for women first, last, and always. Just the same,

a man is entitled to his physical rest and mental diversion, if for no other reason than that it prepares him to earn more money during the coming week.

Roy Hinds, get busy. Here is L. Levy whose only complaint is that he doesn't see more of Simon Trapp, and please note that L. Levy has already spent more than forty-six dollars, because he has been reading us and you for more than six years. L. Levy gives no address. This is what he says:

"Dear Editor: I am very much interested in your Headquarters Chat, and think every reader of your magazine should be also. It gives you an idea what other readers think, and shows that every reader has his favorite authors and his own ideas of good and poor stories.

"I have been reading Detective Story Magazine for seven or eight years, probably longer, and have read a good many mystery magazines of other publishers, but I have cut them all out except yours, as I personally believe that you have no competition.

"I read every story in your magazine every week, and like them all very much. Of course, some are more thrilling than others, but it is this variety that makes me enjoy the magazine so much more. The only criticism I have to make is that I see no more of Simon Trapp stories. Here's to long life and a larger circulation for Detective Story Magazine."

Nothing but kind words from Miss Irma Mayo of Fresno, California, to authors spoken of. This letter will surely make their hearts palpitate.

"Dear Editor: I have been reading Detective Story Magazine for a number of years and think it the only interesting magazine on the market. All the authors are good, but I especially like the stories of McCulley, Adele Luehrmann, Herman Landon and Christopher Booth.

"I'm all burnt up. Just read William Knowles letter in Headquarters Chat. He sure hates himself. Thinks he will be a famous writer some day. In my estimation a knocker of that type never gets very far. I want to say to Dawson, Poate and Triem: "Keep up the good work."

"Some one is always fussing about Apple's Mr. Chang stories. They are all interesting. I cannot understand why some people notice every little detail in a story.

"I would love to have a Herman Landon serial soon, and I think a Thubway Tham story in every issue would be great.

"Much success to the magazine and all the authors."

Well, we're glad to hear that our efforts, and the efforts of so many of our authors, meet with the approval of Miss Mayo. Ye old editor, like the rest of you, is glad of a little encouragement now and then. Many thanks, Miss Mayo.

AGED PRISON GUARD DIES

FOR the past twenty years, John Hamm served as a prison guard at San Quentin penitentiary, in California, although of an age when most men retire from active employment. Hamm died a few weeks ago at the age of eighty, keeping at work right up to the time of his last illness.

Several years ago, the aged prison guard was stabbed in the neck by a convict during a prison break. The wound at first was thought to be fatal, but although he survived it, it had a permanent effect on his health. Hamm was a native of England, and is survived by a son and a daughter.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found."

It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

HART, PAUL E.—Last heard from in New Orleans, in 1925. Please send information to Frank Harty, Box 673, Carrier Mills, Illinois.

McCLOSKEY, WILLIAM.—Was stationed at Washington Barracks during the Spanish-American War. Please write to your friend, William L. Donaison, 2727 Sullivant Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

HILL, CATHERINE, or **KATHERINE.**—She was living at 51 Dudley Avenue, Ocean Park, California, in June, 1913. Please write to A. Silberberg, Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia.

JONATHAN HOTEL.—Jack Morrison and Bill Johnson, kindly write or wire "78" Bob Jones, Box 153, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

NORMAN, BARNEY.—Twenty-five years old, tall, slender, and fair complexion. Came from Norway six years ago, and talks with a slight accent. Was last heard from in Oregon. Please forgive me for that letter. I didn't mean all I said. Write to Dorothy, Box 433, Caldwell, Idaho.

LLOYD, G. H.—Last seen in Tampa, Florida, in De Soto Park Tourist Camp, two or three years ago. Lost a leg in France. Traveled a good deal by automobile. His friend would like to hear from him. John Arthur Niles, H. 5, Box 498, Coconut Grove, Florida.

McLEOD, ALLEN.—Last heard of in Los Angeles, California, in 1924. His brother would like to hear from him. Private John H. McLeod, U. S. Army, Philippine Islands.

BECKY, JAMES.—About seventy years old. Lived in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, at one time. Spent a great deal of his time locating and surveying timber lands. Please notify Walter Wyman, Intervale, Maine.

JOE "6306."—If you care to hear from me and have not forgotten, write to me. I am wearing the cross and have not forgotten. E. B. E., care of this magazine.

ARSENAULT, RAYMOND.—Is nicknamed "Tum." Medium height, twenty-seven years old. May be in Cleveland, Ohio, or in New York City. Write to Robert Landry, 4 Pond Street, Newton, Massachusetts.

BROWNE, GERTRUDE SPRAGUE.—Last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri. Write to Dorothy Kilroy at 815 Buchanan Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

DAY, JAMES M.—Forty-four years of age, six feet tall, light complexion, and heavy build. Last heard of at Paral, Guatemala, Central America. Send all information to Augustus M. Day, 1 Jackson Avenue, New York City.

LOWELL, GLENN.—My letter came back. All is forgiven. Please come home at once. E. P. E., Box 637, Grants Pass, Oregon.

STONE, CLYDE.—Left home March 12, 1923. Twenty years old, five feet nine inches tall, one hundred and sixty pounds in weight, light-brown hair and blue eyes. Please write to Mrs. L. S. Stone, Box 115, Jena, Louisiana.

MUND.—Would like to get in touch with Thomas, Willie, Edward, Henry, Annie, and Mary Mund. Mary is supposed to have married a man by the name of Henderson, and later to have left him. Their mother married twice, first to John Mund, then to Axel Clausen. Her maiden name was Neubeck. They were in Canada, intending to come to United States. Write to Jacob L. Welsch, Box 2, Tolley, North Dakota.

CHURCH, FRED.—Was last seen, September 29, 1926, in Waterbury, Vermont. His home address was 62 North Main Street, Waterbury, Vermont. Write to W. T. K., care of this magazine.

DREIOR, LEO C.—Please write to me as soon as you see this. Mrs. Hattie Loffer, Harrold, South Dakota.

ROUNDS, GLENN.—Last heard from in Birmingham, Alabama. Twenty-four years old, dark hair, and light eyes. His wife is heartbroken and wants him to come back. Mrs. Myrtle Rounds, 427 Upton Avenue, Battle Creek, Michigan.

NOTICE.—Write to me as soon as you see this. Andrew Lamb, 357 Roseberry Street, St. James, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

CHURCH, RAY.—Last heard from in Pueblo, Colorado. You still have a loving mother and sister waiting to hear from you. Please write to us or come home. Delma's address is 910 North Collins Street, Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Frankie Church Pierce, 501 Ethel Street, Picher, Oklahoma.

ALSMAN, ESTELLE.—Twenty-two years old, blond hair, brown eyes, one hundred and sixty-five pounds in weight, five feet ten inches tall. Write to P. C. Alsman, Brookville, Indiana.

FISHER, DAVID.—Fifty years old, six feet tall, blue eyes. Left Pennsylvania about twenty-five years ago to go to Texas. Write to Mrs. W. H. McCleary, 151 Broad Street, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from Fred McDaniel, Hershall Wooton, Robert Griffin, or any of the old gang who were in Ambulance Company No. 4, A. E. F., in Siberia from November 11, 1919, to March, 1920. Write to Napoleon Aulds, Ruston, Louisiana.

TEMPLE and MOTHER.—How can I send Temple a new outfit for his birthday? Also presents to any one who has been kind to him? Send Temple's insurance policy and I'll try to fix it up. O. H. Todnem, 2623 Maere Street, Los Angeles, California.

DEMELIA.—Please come home. Everything is forgiven now. Dad wishes to see you. You were last heard from and seen in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the American Legion convention in October. Thelma V. Streett, care of this magazine.

TIPTON.—Some time ago I saw an inquiry regarding the Tipton family. If the writer will state the purpose of this inquiry I shall be glad to furnish him with some interesting information. Wandeyene Deuth, Westport, Connecticut.

HARRA, LEON FRANK.—Blue eyes, blond hair, nearly six feet tall, very quiet disposition. Disappeared from Wilmington, Delaware, July 11, 1926. Please write to Mrs. Leon F. Harra, 109 East Street, Delmar, Delaware.

HARRUP, or **McMAHN, ANNA.**—Last heard from at 15509 Lake Shore Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio. Her mother is alone and ill and would like to get in touch with her. Mrs. Alice G. James, 1461½ West Thirty-seventh Place, Los Angeles, California.

CLARENCE.—Please write to me at once at home. M. M. S.

KANE, THOMAS EDWARD.—Was on the U. S. S. "Edsall" in Turkey. Later a chauffeur in New York City and in Port Jefferson, Long Island. Write to F. S. Hill.

LYONS, or **COLE, GERTRUDE.**—Was a waitress at 213 Sixth Avenue, and lived on East Sixty-sixth Street. Write to F. S. Hill.

MOORE, W. T.—Please write to me at once. Homer Jones, Yukon, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from R. E. Lee, Charlie Watkins, Al Ingram, Joe Davis, Luke McDonald, Johnnie Gregory. I worked with them on the G. H. and S. A. division of the Southern Pacific in 1916, doing bridge work. Bob Saylor, 123 St. John Avenue, South Jacksonville, Florida.

STACK, MR. or **MRS.**—Last heard of in Wilmington, Delaware. Write to J. O. Wheeler, 57 Kiln Street, Lufkin, Texas.

J. L. P.—Worried over your silence. Have not heard from you since you sent the card from Denver, saying you were ill. Pensea.

PARKERTON, HENRY.—Last heard from at 925 State Street, Perth Amboy, New Jersey. His mother is ill. Mrs. Margaret Parkerton, 107 Brown Avenue, Stamford, Connecticut.

KERLEY, WALTER.—A native of Mt. Sterling, Illinois. Was in the U. S. navy in 1920. Left U. S. S. "Hancock" at San Francisco, California, in 1921. Twenty-nine years old, six feet tall, and weighs about one hundred and ninety pounds. Write to his brother, Warren Kerley, 1120 Center Street, Chicago, Illinois.

MARTIN, EDWIN J.—Short, with blue eyes. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington. Served some time in the army. Write to Miss Ethel Tanway, 837 Chicago Street, Seattle, Washington.

KEHOUGH, or KEHOE, CHARLES H.—Thirty-seven years old, five feet ten inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Coal miner, and belonged to the United Mine Workers of America. Worked as a coal miner in Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri. Last heard of in 1911. Write to Catherine Raymond, Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada.

CORMACK, Mrs. ELSIE.—If you insert your address in this column, I will get in touch with you. Am leaving at 11.30 for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Lee.

BILLIE.—Please write to me and send me your address. Anne K., care of this magazine.

CROSS, DANIEL.—Born January 27, 1791, in Fishersfield, New London County, New Hampshire. Was an orphan boy raised by two red-haired maiden aunts. Later became a Methodist minister. Married Mercy Fish some time in 1816. Father of twelve children. Write to Dorothy Crosse, 513 North Page Street, Stoughton, Wisconsin.

FISH, MERCY.—Born April 19, 1795, in Swago, Dutchess County, New York. Married Daniel Cross some time in 1816. Write to Dorothy Crosse, 513 North Page Street, Stoughton, Wisconsin.

WASHBUR, ORIN.—Born in Pennsylvania or New York about 1821. Married Rasina Snyder October 14, 1843. Write to Dorothy Crosse, 513 North Page Street, Stoughton, Wisconsin.

SNYDER, WILLIAM.—Born in Windon, Green County, New York, March 24, 1800. Married Fanny Moore of Sardina, New York, January 5, 1824. Write to Dorothy Crosse, 513 North Page Street, Stoughton, Wisconsin.

ELLINGWOOD, FRANCIS L.—Last heard of in Montreal, Canada. Please write to your son, J., care of this magazine.

STEVENS, FRANK.—Last heard of in Santa Ynez, California, in April, 1923. Five feet five inches tall, blue eyes, red hair, and weighs one hundred and ten pounds. Write to C. E. Stevens, 691 Hoffman Street, Hammond, Indiana.

PAUL.—Won't you forgive me? Am heartbroken. I love you and want you. Maisie.

DEES, RUTH or MYRTLE and MARY.—Any one knowing their present address kindly write to C. C. Stockham, Ash Grove, Missouri.

FATHER.—Kate Ruhl was my mother. Have found her. Are you in San Jose? Please write to your son. O. R.

SCHUELER, HENRY.—Oldest son of George Schueler. Lived east of San Antonio. His sister would like to get in touch with him. Mrs. Ada B. Burnett, Dunlay, Texas.

BOHAC, CHARLES.—Last heard of in Washington, D. C., two years ago. Served with the marines in Haiti, also as mail guard. Write to F. M. Bohac, 2541 Keelor Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

EDDIE.—Why don't you let me know where you are? Please come home or write at once. Have important news. Your baby boy needs you. Am still at home, but don't be afraid to come to me, for all will be forgiven. Adda V. A., R. D. 2, Box 96.

YERIAN, ALLEN BENJAMIN.—Was a printer in Chillicothe, Ohio, in 1917. Later served in the army as mounted M. P. in an Eastern camp. Thirty years of age, five feet five inches tall, dark-red hair, brown eyes, and weighs one hundred and thirty-six pounds. Write to Mrs. W. H. Dunlap, 858 Park Avenue, Springfield, Ohio.

HUTTON, CHARLES.—Forty-eight years old, five feet seven inches tall. Last seen in Kentucky. Good news for you. Write to J., care of this magazine.

GLANDON, HUGH L.—Twenty-nine years old, auburn hair, dark eyes. Very tall. Last seen in Kentucky in 1915. Write to J., care of this magazine.

McGILL, HARRY I. V.—Twenty-five years old, and was born in Bay City, Michigan. His mother's name was Vinnie. Was last heard of in Florida by his uncle, Roland Joslin, about sixteen years ago. Write to L. R. Joslin, R. F. D. 1, Box 279, San Bernardino, California.

HAARA, LEON FRANK.—Blue eyes, blond hair, nearly six feet tall, very quiet disposition. Disappeared from Wilmington, Delaware, July 11, 1926. Please write to Mrs. Leon F. Haara, 109 East Street, Delmar, Delaware.

BANDY, CARROL LESLIE.—Last heard of at Roslyn Hotel, Los Angeles, California, in 1925. Please write to George Veach, 201 St. Louis Road, Wood River, Illinois.

MORGAN, FELIX.—Left home when he was seventeen years old, and has been gone for twenty years. Blue eyes, light hair, fair complexion. Information will be appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Elma Morgan, R. 1, Hazlehurst, Mississippi.

CREWES, JAMES.—Blond, forty-nine years old. Write to J., care of this magazine.

GEROW, PARKER.—Originally of Presque Isle, Maine. Have not heard from you for a long time. Saw Bill Yule and worked with him. He said he saw you about four years ago in Boston. Are you living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and are you married? I often think of the good times we had together on your father's farm. Henry McKenzie, Deputy Collector of Customs, R. F. D. 1, Bridgewater, Maine.

GALLOWAY, RAYMOND.—Left South Carolina in June, 1925, for Des Moines, Iowa. Joined the navy. Five feet eight inches tall, blue eyes, light hair and complexion. Write to Bill, care of this magazine.

JACKSON, OVET or UVET.—Left Johnsonville, Ohio, in 1878, with his parents, Lyam and Esther Jackson, for White Bluffs, Tennessee. Last heard from about thirty-eight years ago. His cousin would like to hear from him. Mrs. Addie Huntes Williams, Box AA, Oceanside, California.

MAYER, HARRY L.—Write again at once, as I have important news for you. E. M. M.

DeCHANT, JOHN.—In Canton, Ohio, in 1921. Age, twenty-seven years. Information will be appreciated by Leo DeChant, General Delivery, Flat Rock, Michigan.

SMITH, GEORGE IRVING.—Would like to hear from you. Have a warning for you. S.

TRAW, J. D.—Please write to your old pal, R. J. Meacham, Box F, Bourger, Texas.

PENDERGRAFT, PEARL and BUDDIE.—Last heard of in Oklahoma. Your cousins have good news for you. Miss Ruth Pendergraft, 403 East Lincoln Street, Blackwell, Oklahoma.

PENDERGRAFT, JASPER, PRESTON, and VAUN.—Your cousins would like to hear from you. Ruth Pendergraft, 403 East Lincoln Street, Blackwell, Oklahoma.

DAVIS, C. A. and MADELINE.—They have three children, Lelia, Lawrence, and Bernice. Last heard of in Oregon City, Oregon. Please write to Mrs. Myrtle Williams, Box 505, Perryton, Texas.

SMITH, CLAIRE.—Last heard of in Monesson, Pennsylvania. Write to Ralph Smock, 130 Penn Avenue, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

PEATERSON, NELLY.—Please write to your old friend, Ralph Smock, 130 Penn Avenue, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

THOMPSON, THOMAS G.—Five feet five inches tall, brown hair and eyes, scar in forehead. Last heard from in 1919. His mother, whose former name was Lindsey, would like to hear from him. Mrs. M. C. Bandurant, 506 West Wade Street, Elrena, Oklahoma.

BRADY, WILLIAM E.—Five feet seven inches tall, one hundred and thirty-five pounds, fifty-three years old. May have married again. My brother, James, and I were separated from him soon after my mother's death. Write to Harry Elmer Brady, Box 45, Galvin, Washington.

HOLLAND, F. U.—Was employed by the A. & P. Co. at 2616 East Thirty-first Street, Kansas City, Missouri, from June 1, 1925, to February 7, 1926. Later he was supposed to have gone to Kansas. Write to "Sunshine California," care of this magazine.

STORMONT, RAY.—Left Seattle, Washington, for Japan about a year ago. Father is anxious to hear from you. A. B. Stormont, 232 Lincoln Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio.

LITTRELL, WILLIAM.—Was in Pittsburg, Kansas, twelve or fourteen years ago. Was mother's only brother. Over fifty years of age. Mrs. Myrtle Smith Jackson, Savage, Minnesota.

DEVEREAUX, FRANCES.—Please come back to your brother and sister-in-law. Everything will be forgiven. Write to us and let us know how things are. Mrs. Devereaux, 1734 Willow Avenue, Weehawken, New Jersey.

HICKEY, MARTIN and MARGARET.—Left Barracura, Ireland, for the U. S. A. about forty years ago. Their father's name was Robert and mother's Annie. Information is sought by their brother, Patrick Hickey, 25 Corporation Road, Newport, Monmouthshire, England.

ROSS, MAE C.—Born in Iowa, in 1906. Have not seen mother since infancy. Write to Mae Ross, care of this magazine.

ROSS, DAVID.—Formerly of Kentucky, but last heard of at Honey Grove, Texas, about sixteen years ago. Write to Albert Cox, Box 177, Universal, Pennsylvania.

RHODES.—Would like to hear from John Rhodes' or Jessie Lynn's families. Lived around Honey Grove, Texas, about fifteen years ago. Albert Cox, Box 177, Universal, Pennsylvania.

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