

EVERY WEEK SEPT. 26, 1925

DETECTIVE

REGISTERED
TRADE MARK

STORY MAGAZINE

The Invisible Woman
by Edward Leonard

15
CENTS





...oves of a Master Crook

...moves of that master crook Black Star, see how he
 ...backmated by the intelligence of a greater mind who
 ...ates his attempts to plunder a great city. Read

"Black Star's Campaign"

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

It's one of the famous cloth-bound books that bears the "CH" brand on their cover and that are on sale to-day for only 75 cents a copy. None of these books are rehased reprints. They are as fresh as a Western wind and they move with the speed of a racing mustang.

Look for the "CH" brand on the next book you buy.

OTHER POPULAR "CH" TITLES

THE BRAND OF SILENCE.....Harrington Strong
 THE SPECTACULAR KID.....Robert J. Horton
 THE TRACKING OF K. K.....Douglas Grey
 UNWELCOME SETTLERS.....James Roberts

QUALITY BILL'S GIRL.....Charles W. Tyler
 THE SCARLET SCOURGE.....Johnston McCulley
 GOLDEN ISLE.....Roland Ashford Phillips
 WHOSE MILLIONS?.....Joseph Montague

75c each



79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
 NEW YORK CITY

75c each

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

E V E R Y W E E K

Vol. LXXVIII Contents for September 26, 1925

No. 3

ONE NOVELETTE

The Invisible Woman *Edward Leonard* 3

TWO SERIALS

The Clew in the Book *Ernest M. Poate* 48
A Three-part Story—Part Three

The House of Folly *Christopher B. Booth* 89
A Three-part Story—Part Two

FIVE SHORT STORIES

In an Open Boat *Roy W. Hinds* 40

The Hand-picked Burglar *Paul Ellsworth Triem* 72

Three Rings *Donald Van Riper* 106

The Mark of Cain *Edgar P. Meynell* 115

The Challenging Foot *Thomas Topham* 127

ONE ARTICLE

Prisons, Past and Present *Edward H. Smith* 82
(Auburn Again, and Its Champion)

MISCELLANEOUS

Police Memorial for Roosevelt . . . 39 Famous Old Gaming House Closed . . 114

Bad Check as Church Contribution . . 47 Escaped Con's Wife Regrets Her Snitch 114

Cripple Routs Bandits 71 Woman Bank Official Jailed . . . 126

Police Whistle Routs Robbers 81 Policeman Mistakes Detective for Crook 126

Chicago's "Ponzi" Goes to Jail 88 Shattuck Bandits All Brought to Justice 139

New Radio Finger-print Code 105 Burglar Specializes in Plumbers . . . 142

Held for Selling Cannabis Indica . . . 142

DEPARTMENTS

Headquarters Chat *The Editor* 140

Missing 143

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50. WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons thus victimized. IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this corporation does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, \$6.00

SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS

In Next Week's Issue

Mr. Chang Turns to Dope

A Novelette

By

A. E. Apple

The clever Oriental matches his wits against
a dope syndicate and discovers
winged wealth.

The Convict's Legacy

Beginning Serial

By

John Jay Chichester

Little did he realize the mishaps he would encounter on the way from the prison doors to the hidden treasure, nevertheless he was honor bound, by a dying man's bidding, to try and overcome them.

Told by Shot

By

Frederick Ames Coates

His problem was to convey a message to his blind master, through a barrage of enemy eyes and ears, ever alert.

And Other Stories :: :: Order Your Copy Now

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXVIII

September 26, 1925

No. 3

WARNING! Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but we feel sorry for the reader who buys an imitation. Do not be deceived; insist upon having the original DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

The Invisible Woman

By Edward Leonard

Author of "The Smugglers," etc.

CHAPTER I.

STAGE MAGIC.

MOVING slowly along past the forlorn benchers in Union Square came "The Invisible Woman." For the moment, at any rate, the name she bore was incongruous, for anybody but the blind beggar, who was tapping the walk with his stick as he groped his way, could see her clearly enough—a small, thin, black-haired woman conveying no suggestion of anything spectral or illusive.

Yet there was something disquieting and forbidding in her appearance, something furtive, menacing. The pale, impassive face was harsh and sharp-featured, the mouth thin-lipped, bitter, and in the cold, steady, gray-green eyes was a look more feline than human.

To the benchers and the passers-by she paid not the slightest attention. Her thoughts seemed to be absorbed completely by the backs of a man and a girl who were walking at a leisurely pace a short distance ahead. They were

a dejected-looking pair, almost as shabby as the human wrecks on the rows of seats.

Presently the man turned and looked back. His face showed a queer mixture of perplexity and resentment as he discovered the woman. "She's still doggin' us," he growled as he resumed his walk. "I wish the sneakin' cat would do her vanishin' stunt an' leave us alone."

"Nobody can tell me Zelda Vorus can do the fade-away act, when she ain't on the stage," said the girl beside him petulantly. "If she could drop outa sight as easy as that from a cop or a dick, then why the trouble of disguisin' herself by dyein' her red hair black and sayin' good-by to the face paint since she come East? I hadta look a coupla times before I really knew her."

The man was a low type. As he spoke his mouth twisted into a savage leer. "Don't yuh be too sure she ain't worked that trick, since she quit doin' it in the theayters," he grumbled. "There's stories told that that's how she pulled off them Chicago jool jobs, without the bulls gettin' wise to her. She jus' made herself inviserble an' got away with the swag without bein' seen."

And as a matter of fact such stories about Zelda Vorus had found ready believers in the credulous underworld. Though it was on the vaudeville circuits that she had become known as The Invisible Woman, her success as a jewel thief had been attributed to the vanishing trick with which she had bewildered theater audiences. It was Tinelli, the magician, who had picked her out of the Chicago slums and taught her the stunt; and Tinelli was a wonder, a worthy successor to Hermann, the Great, and The Marvelous Kellar. But Tinelli died, and that ended the stage career of the woman who had appeared as his partner. Since then she

had made a living in ways hidden and devious.

The close attention she was devoting at this moment to such a pair of down-and-outers as Joe Rusoff and "Blondy" Bauer seemed unaccountable. Apparently the man was even less fitted than the girl to stir the interest of such a clever woman. She could have found a dozen of his kind among the benchers. His round, little eyes were dull and shallow, his square-jawed face heavy and brutal. At police headquarters he would have been recognized at once as "Joe, the Dope," an appellation bestowed upon him not because he was addicted to drugs, but because of his sluggish mind. His companion looked much more intelligent, but the clear sunshine of this late October day was not kind to Blondy Bauer. It betrayed her shabbiness and gave a grotesque look to the paint and powder daubed heavily on her pinched, small-featured face. A bright-green hat concealed her bobbed, flaxen hair except for two locks that protruded in long, sharp points over her cheeks.

"I don't care if she is follerin' us," Blondy grumbled. "I gotta raise some coin somewheres. I'm flat broke. And I'm goin' to try that bunch of suckers over there."

They crossed Fourteenth Street and turned toward a spot where a sidewalk faker had gathered a crowd around him. His rasping voice was rising above the clatter and roar of the street.

"A watch for fifteen cents! Come on, now, before the policeman gets here. Don't miss the only chance ever offered to get a watch for fifteen cents. Stem winder, stem setter—fifteen cents!"

The faker held up one of his bargains, wound it, and pressed it to his ear, presumably to make sure it was going. A few feet away a tall, gawky young man, who looked as if he might be better acquainted with cow pastures

than with crowded places, had already succumbed to temptation. He was examining his purchase ruefully.

"It winds all right, but it don't go," he complained to the bystanders. "It ain't made to go. Them hands is jest painted on. So what did the guy hold it to his ear fur?"

The absorbed attention he devoted to the watch presented the opportunity that Blondy Bauer had been seeking. Deftly she slipped her fingers into his change pocket, extracted a few coins, and hastened furtively away to where Joe the Dope was waiting for her.

"I gyped the hick for forty cents," she whispered. "And I'm so down an' out that even that much looks good to me. If I could on'y lift the leathers I'd be makin' real money, but somehow I ain't got the nerve to try for them no more since they sent me to the Island. That got my goat."

"And that woman's gettin' my goat," growled Rusoff. "She seen you frisk the hick, and she's got an eye on us right now. Come on fast. We gotta shake her. I don't wanta have nothin' t' do with her kind."

Blondy looked perplexed. "What does a classy dame like her wanta be follerin' a coupla bums like us for, anyhow?" she muttered as they hurried on into the East Side. "Is it you she's after, or is it me?"

"It's me, prob'ly," said Rusoff. "Or maybe it's the both of us she wants. I gotta hunch she's after somebody to help her pull a job. That's what she wanted me t' do, once, out in Chicago. But I wouldn't. I knew she was bad luck, an' I told her so. The poor guy that had helped her pull off the last job got croaked with a bullet, while nobody even seen her. She did her vanishin' trick, an' somehow she made a clean get-away with the stuff."

"She made herself invisible?" cried Blondy incredulously.

"She must've. Just like she useter

do on the stage. The guy that was with her got croaked before he had a chance t' even get his hands on the jools. They was caught right in the act. But nobody seen hide nor hair of her, though somebody'd pushed the light button an' it was bright as day. They could hear her movin', but she was invisibler. An' she got away with the swag."

"You poor dope! Such a thing ain't possible," snapped out Blondy. "I heard that story a long time ago, and I tells myself that somebody must 'a' been kiddin'."

"It was possible, all right, in the theaters," Rusoff argued sullenly.

"But not in a jool office. Not anywheres where she didn't have that magician t' help her do the trick."

She cast a backward glance over her shoulder. "She's still follerin' us," she whispered. "She hangs on like a dick."

Almost the next instant Blondy looked back again. "She's gone!" she cried with a gasp. "How'd she do it? On'y a second ago she was out near the edge of the walk, not twenty feet behind us. There wasn't time for her to get anywheres. Am I gettin' woozy—or what?"

"She done her stage trick," declared Joe the Dope in an awed whisper. "Ain't I been tellin' yuh she could do it?"

"Maybe she slipped into a doorway," Blondy muttered doubtfully. "But it's hard t' believe. There wasn't time enough, seems t' me. Move faster, Joe. I wanta get clear away from here. There's somethin' spooky about that woman. She's got me scared."

But presently curiosity tempted Blondy once more, and she discovered that Zelda Vorus had reappeared in plain sight behind them.

"I'm beginnin' to believe," said the girl in a trembling whisper, "that she can do the trick. And she's got my nerves all upset. It ain't natcherul. It ain't human. I'd just as soon have seen

a ghost. I wish I'd never laid eyes on her."

They were moving on now through a crowded avenue, shadowed by an elevated railroad and roaring with passing trains. Presently they turned into a shabby cross street and came, after a moment, to a dilapidated rooming house which numbered Blondy and Joe the Dope among its lodgers. A dismal, forbidding house it was, on the sunless south side of the street, and shadowed from the rear by towering buildings—a house where gas lights flickered in the dim, bare hallways even at midday.

Blondy ran into the place, breathless. "Hurry!" she cried. "She may be folleerin' us still."

They climbed a flight of uncarpeted stairs and came to the girl's room.

"There's somebody comin' up," Rusoff whispered. "D'yuh hear them footsteps? It's her."

Blondy ran into the room, dragging Rusoff after her, and slammed the door.

"If she comes I ain't got the nerve t' see her!" she gasped. "I won't let her in. I've got a feelin' it would mean bad luck for the both of us."

But the sound of the footsteps was coming from the hall now. They were drawing nearer. Vaguely it seemed to the girl as if some grim, unescapable destiny was pursuing them. A knock fell on the door. Rusoff reached for the knob and checked himself, a cloud of uncertainty on his dull face.

"Don't let her in, Joe!" Blondy said in a frightened whisper. "She's dangerous. Lock the door!"

But Joe the Dope hesitated. He had been waiting for an opportunity to better his lot for a long time. Perhaps it had come at last. "She may be bringin' us a chance," he muttered. "And what are we? Just a coupla poor bums, down an' out. It won't do no harm t' hear what she wants us fur."

For a moment Blondy was silent as she struggled against her fears. "May-

be—maybe we gotta let her in!" she gasped out desperately. "We can't be no worse off'n we are now. And she may be bringin' us some kind of a chance. We're broke! We gotta open the door!"

Then she shrank back, trembling, as, admitted by Rusoff, Zelda Vorus stepped into the room. The woman swept her gaze over the girl's shabby figure, and the ghost of a smile twitched the corners of her thin-lipped mouth. "Hard pickings, eh?" she said sharply. "You sure look pretty close to the gutter, both of you. So you've come down to such a measly game as friskin' hicks for coins, eh, Blondy? Just a poor piker! Not even going after the leathers, where the real money lies."

"I never was in your class," Blondy admitted humbly. "And I gotta live. Any kind of a game's better than starvin' t' death."

The woman's thin lips twisted with contempt. "And you've lost your speed, kid," she went on pitilessly. "Pretty clumsy work, that looked to me. If the guy hadn't been such a dumb-bell he'd have got wise to you. Why, kid, where's your brains? Get some class. Go after the big stuff. That's what I've been trailing you two pikers for—to show you how to get after the big stuff. And you sure led me a long chase. I'm cautious about who I'm seen talking with in public, for I don't want these New York bulls to get wise to me. That's why I had to keep dogging you till you got out of the streets."

The dim, musty-smelling little room diverted her attention for a moment, and she turned sharply-observant eyes to the soiled walls, the broken furniture, and the small, grimy window that looked out upon a narrow, sunless court.

"I'd almost be willin' t' risk a term in stir if I could get wise to a job that'd put me on Easy Street," said Blondy as the visitor seated herself in the only

chair in the room. The woman was beginning to seem a little less uncanny, and Blondy's courage was returning. "I'm gettin' desprit."

But the dull-witted man who was now sitting on the edge of the bed, facing Zelda Vorus, seemed suddenly to have absorbed the visitor's thoughts, and for a moment the girl found herself ignored.

"The job I've got in mind would put you on Easy Street all right—both of you," said Zelda after a long silence. "There'd be so much swag that I could let you have a few thousands without missing it. It's a bigger job than either of you pikers ever dreamed about."

"What kind of a job?" demanded Blondy, unable longer to restrain her curiosity, and forgetting her dread of The Invisible Woman. "I'd take a big chance for a few thousand bucks; but, all the same, I'd wanta know what kind of a game I'd be up against."

"You'd be up against a Maiden Lane game, kid," said the woman sharply as her inscrutable gray-green eyes turned from the man to the girl.

Blondy gave a little start. For a moment the announcement seemed to repel her. So The Invisible Woman was after diamonds again! "Down there!" she cried with a catch of her breath. "Why, I wouldn't have a chance of makin' a get-away. I've heard about them Maiden Lane propersitions before, an' they're loaded with dynamite. You can't beat that street. There's a bunch o' bulls down there that's ready to track anybody that tries it clear around the world, and it's a bunch that don't ever forget." -

Zelda Vorus gave a contemptuous sniff. "They're not going to trail me around the world," she declared confidently. "They're not going to know anything about me. I've found a way to fool that bunch, that think they're so clever and that talk so much about the net they've got spread around the

world. And yet, all the same, kid, I wouldn't take a chance of stirring up that Jewelers' Protective Union crowd if I wasn't dead sure this job was going to be safe. They're not nice people to monkey with."

Joe the Dope shifted uneasily on the edge of the bed. "Yeh, but how about me?" he demanded as his low forehead puckered into a troubled frown. "My mug is down at headquarters, and my record and my prints. Do I play safe, too, in this deal, or am I goin' t' be the goat?"

"We're all going to play safe, you bonehead," the woman informed him, with a gesture of impatience. "I wouldn't want you pinched, because you wouldn't know enough to keep your trap shut. Your intentions might be all right, but those bulls would be too clever for you. You'd give me away, even if you didn't mean to."

But the man's little eyes were full of distrust as they glared at The Invisible Woman. Apparently Blondy, too, was troubled by suspicion and fear. She could remember having heard old-timers talking in tones of dread and awe about Maiden Lane as the most dangerous street below the old dead line for people of their kind. And she knew it hadn't changed in that respect.

"You wouldn't be takin' the chances either of us two would," she suggested to her visitor. "Headquarters isn't wise t' yuh. But they know me, all right."

"But, kid, you're going to be on the outside of this job," came the reassuring explanation. "You're not even going to get wise to how it was pulled off. That's how safe you're going to be, so you've got no cause for worry at all."

"And me?" growled out Rusoff. "Am I goin' t' be on the outside of it, too?"

"You're going to be on the inside with a gun," Zelda Vorus told him

sharply. "Where else would a stick-up guy like you expect to be?"

Rusoff scowled. "I ain't forgot what happened to that fella that was workin' with yuh out West," he mumbled.

"So that's what's biting you, eh?" said the woman with a sneer. "Because the luck turned bad on us in that Chicago job you haven't got the nerve to take a chance. You better go out on the streets and mooch. It looks like that's all you're good for—panhandling. If you don't wanta work with me, I guess this old town's full of guys who'd be glad to pick up a few thousand bucks as easy."

A great opportunity seemed to be slipping away, and Blondy decided she didn't want to lose it so quickly. "Neither of us has said yet that we don't wanta work with yuh," she protested. "We're just tryin' t' find out what we're up against. You ain't told us yet how you're goin' t' get them jools."

"I'm going to get 'em just like I got 'em in Chicago—without anybody getting wise to me."

Blondy fastened a wide-eyed stare upon her. "You—you mean you're goin' to do your vanishin' stunt?" she stammered. "Is that how you pulled off that Chicago job? You can do that stage trick in a jool office?"

A faint smile hovered on Zelda Vorus' queer, hard mouth for an instant. "You've guessed it, kid. I can do that trick in a jewel office."

Blondy's eyes grew even wider. "It don't seem possible!" she gasped out.

"You've seen me do it on the stage?"

"Yes, I seen you turn into nothin' but air, as quick as a flash. But you had that magician helpin' yuh with mirrors or somethin'."

"Never mind how he helped me. Tinelli's dead, but I'm not giving his secrets away," the woman said, rising. "This job is going to give those Maiden Lane bimboes the biggest puzzle of their lives, and you two pikers

have got a chance to be in on it. I'll be round to-morrow about this time. Between now and then you can make up your minds whether you want to stay down and out in this bums' roost or have a fat roll that'll make life worth living."

Silence fell when Zelda Vorus had gone. The man and the girl stared at one another dumbly. They were struggling with their fears. For fortune was beckoning to this shabby pair, and they knew they were in the grip of a temptation that was irresistible.

CHAPTER II.

BLONDY PICKS ANOTHER POCKET.

MAIDEN LANE may be called one of the crookedest streets in New York without any reflection on its moral character. It curls like a snake. Looking into its deep, narrow cañon from the Broadway end, the view extends for only one block to where the huge, yellow, stone walls, the gleaming steel doors, and the heavily barred windows of the Federal Reserve Bank look like a prison. At the bank it gives a twist to the south, runs straight for another block, then turns abruptly to the left as it stretches on to the East River. The jewel district has been left far behind by that time. Most of it lies close to Broadway, where the buildings present a strange architectural hodgepodge of the new and the old. Trim skyscrapers tower over time-worn little structures of brown sandstone whose fronts are covered with a black network of fire escapes. The little brown buildings belong to a time when the jewel stocks were kept in safes of knobbed iron that locked with a key. Nowadays the dealers keep their treasures behind manganese steel and time locks. It is a closely guarded street. Even in business hours, when the stocks are out in the working cabinets or on the scales tables, the big offices, where

the protective arrangements are up to date, do not seem to offer much hope to even the cleverest of thieves; and at night none at all. Yet it was one of the most efficiently protected of these offices that Zelda Vorus had proposed to loot.

The noon-hour crowds were moving by in a wind-blown drizzle when Joe Rusoff and Blondy Bauer turned from Broadway into the jewel street. Neither of them had an umbrella, and they were slowly being drenched by the fine, steady rain. But their minds were too deeply absorbed by a much more serious matter to give a thought to the fact that they were cold and wet.

Presently they paused before one of the skyscrapers. Lifting their faces, they stood regarding its lofty height with looks of awe. They had been having another talk with The Invisible Woman, and this was the building she had been telling them about. Up on the top floor, so they had learned from her, fifteen stories above the street, were the diamond offices of Emil Liebmann. But Liebmann's windows were mere dots far up in the gray storm, and his gilt-lettered name on the glass was beyond their vision.

Across the street, standing just inside the shelter offered by a doorway, was a tall, lean, round-shouldered man whose pale-blue eyes were studying the shabby pair from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. In his thin, red hair was a sprinkling of white. His face was long and narrow. His Adam's apple was conspicuous on his scrawny neck. He had spent a good part of a good many years watching the crowds go by in Maiden Lane. That was in his line of work. For this man, known as "Whispering" Wilson because a chronic affection of the throat had almost destroyed his voice, was a noted old-timer in the detective agency of the Jewelers' Protective Union.

It was the fact that the man and the

girl on the other side of the narrow cañon were looking upward that attracted his attention to them. Very likely ten thousand people had passed him that morning, but not until now had he discovered one who was looking up. People look straight ahead in that crowded street. A man might sit there in a second-story window for an hour in plain sight without once being observed from below. But here were these two rain-soaked strollers looking up, which was something so unusual that it stirred Whispering Wilson's curiosity immediately. Steadily his pale eyes remained fastened on the pair, until, after a few moments, they moved on and presently passed out of sight beyond the Nassau Street corner. But, though their faces had registered on his memory, he soon dismissed them from his thoughts. There were a good many other people to watch, a good many other faces to study. A man hunter who devotes himself to specializing in picking the wolves from the sheep in the jewel market seldom finds much time for idle musing in Maiden Lane.

Neither Rusoff nor Blondy had observed Whispering Wilson. If they had, he would have meant no more to them than anybody else in the crowds. Their acquaintance with Maiden Lane having been limited to stories that had come to their ears of its perils, they had never even heard of him, nor he of them. Just now only one person was in their thoughts, and that was Zelda Vorus, whom they had an appointment to meet at the river end of this jewel street in a few minutes. They were quickening their steps to make sure of being there on time.

Their thin clothes were sopping by the time they came to their destination, and a winter chill was in the wind that was sweeping in from the white-capped harbor. To the north the towering gray arches of Brooklyn Bridge

loomed from the driving mist, and nearer by the masts and funnels of coast ships rose above the wet, shining roofs of the piers. For a few moments they thought of seeking shelter; but they were afraid of missing the woman. To miss her might mean the loss of the one chance that had ever come into their lives of getting their hands on a fortune.

"I'm pretty near froze," Blondy whimpered with a shiver. "And she ain't in sight nowheres."

But it was neither the cold nor the wet that was troubling Joe the Dope. There was something about the jewel street they had just passed through that was filling him with dread. Its formidable, thick-walled buildings, the tales he had heard of its dangers, the picture his imagination conjured of its guarded offices, its impregnable safes, its network of alarm wires, gave him a feeling of utter helplessness. How insignificant he had seemed in such a street as that—Joe the Dope, a penniless bum, a clumsy stick-up man, without the nerve or the brains to lift himself from the dregs of the lawless world to which he belonged.

"That street ain't the kind that you an' me oughta be monkeyin' with," he growled out as he glanced into the twisted gorge from which they had emerged. "We're out of our class, way out of our class. How'd she come to pick us two bums fur a job like this? Huh? That's what's got me up in the air."

Frowning savagely he stood peering through the whirling veils of rain as his dull little eyes sought for Zelda Vorus. Nobody was near. They had left the crowds of the jewel district far behind, and the river front was almost deserted.

"We gotta keep our nerve," said Blondy with a determined toss of her head. "The big chance of our lives is comin', maybe. We gotta use our brains."

Time dragged on. Slowly the drizzling downpour soaked through to their skins. And there was no escape from the chilling wind that roared in from the harbor. It sought them out in doorways and around corners, until it seemed to be driving away the little courage that Blondy possessed. Her teeth were chattering and she was a picture of wretchedness.

"Seems like we must 'a' been here nigh half an hour," Rusoff observed at last dejectedly. "I guess she ain't comin'. That yarn of hers sounded too good to be true, anyhow. Somethin' phony about it."

But Blondy was still clinging feebly to hope. "She'll come," she whimpered miserably. "She meant business. And she wanted us bad. I could see that. She ain't the kind of a woman who'd waste time talkin' hot air."

A few minutes later Rusoff became suddenly alert. "It's her!" he exclaimed as he stared with a puzzled scowl at two figures that had just appeared from around the corner. One was undoubtedly Zelda Vorus; the other a man whom they failed to recognize. "Who's the guy that's with her? I thought she was thinkin' of comin' alone."

Both Zelda and her companion were protected from the drizzle by long raincoats. The coat of the man had a wide collar, turned up so it concealed a good part of his face. His soft hat, with a drooping brim, was pulled low over his forehead, and his eyes were screwed up against the rain. What he might look like under ordinary conditions would have been hard to say. Zelda, after the two couples had come together, failed to disclose his identity, though she intimated that he might be sharing with her the secret of Tinelli, the dead magician.

"This is the man who's going to help me pull the vanishing trick," she explained to Rusoff and Blondy. "He

wants to give you two birds the once-over before we make the clean-up."

The man turned his squinting eyes to Rusoff and the girl and studied them sharply. "You two have got to be thinking about the time more than anything else," he said. "Don't forget you've got to be in the building at five thirty sharp—no earlier and no later."

"Sure." Rusoff mumbled with a scowl. "We've been told that already."

"They'll both be there on time, all right," Zelda assured the man in the raincoat confidently. "I've been drilling the importance of that into their heads."

Again her companion turned an appraising look to the rain-soaked Rusoff. He shook his head doubtfully. "He won't do," he grumbled. "Look at him! Look at 'em both! They look like a couple of drowned rats. And this man couldn't get past the door the way he is now. The watchman would get suspicious as soon as he set eyes on him. He'll have to make himself look more respectable before half past five."

"What d'yuh think I am?" growled out Rusoff. "A millionaire? I ain't got no more clo'es than what's on me back. Come across with some mazu-ma if I gotta look like I belonged to Fift' Avenoo."

The man in the raincoat shot a doubtful glance at Zelda; then, after a moment's hesitation, slipped his hand under his coat and brought out a pocket-book.

"I guess you'll have to get him a new outfit, Zelda," he decided ruefully as he passed several yellow bills to her. "Don't get him anything flashy—nothing that would make him noticeable. It don't matter as much about the girl. I guess she'll pass."

Turning to Rusoff, he began to question him to make sure that the instructions already given by Zelda had been thoroughly understood. Zelda was staring off through the rain abstractedly.

A pocket of her unknown companion's long coat was hanging open temptingly, and Blondy, true to her instincts, could not resist the opportunity it offered. Her fingers dipped quickly into the pocket. What they found there puzzled her. A new cork and a coil of fine string! Just in time to escape being observed by Zelda, she tucked them under her wet clothes, not because she wanted them, for they were of no value to her, but because it was too late to return them to the pocket of the raincoat.

"A cork and a piece o' string!" thought Blondy. "Now, what was this guy goin' t' do with a cork and a piece o' string?"

It was a question she asked herself more than once before the day was over. She wondered whether a cork and a piece of string could have anything to do with the magic that Zelda Vorus had inherited from Tinelli.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE FIFTEENTH FLOOR.

IT was a poor day for business in the jewel markets, for, though the drizzle stopped in the middle of the afternoon, not once did the sun peep out through the lowering clouds. The jewel examiners couldn't work satisfactorily by artificial light, and purchasers were scarce. An ideal day for selling, if there was anybody to sell to, but a bad day for buying. It was the kind of a day that was usually chosen by Whispering Wilson to drop in at the offices of his friends among the importers, where he picked up the latest news and gossip of the trade. Some time between four and five o'clock he drifted up to the offices of Emil Liebmann, fifteen stories above the milling crowds in Maiden Lane. Stepping into the importer's little vestibule, he nodded familiarly to a man whose face appeared from behind a barred window. The

man pressed a push button, and there came the click of the spring lock on the door of the main room. After passing through this door Wilson, as he had expected, found Liebmann loafing about the place and growling at the weather. The importer, with a cigar tilted up from a corner of his mouth, stood for a moment staring at his caller sadly.

"Billy, you always come sticking your old red head in here whenever I've got a grouch," he grumbled. "Nothin' but dark days—one right after another—and I've got a lot of new stock to go over."

"You've always got a grouch, Emil," whispered Wilson hoarsely as he sank into a chair. "Last time I was in here you were growlin' about the crooks and tryin' to blame the agency for not catchin' 'em faster. It ain't the agency's fault that the crooks are gettin' rich out of fellas like you. It's because the fellas that get robbed are so darned careless. That salesman who got gyped in Buffalo last week, for instance. He kept his wallet in his room in the hotel, instead of puttin' it in the safe in the office. A fella like that deserves to get stung."

Liebmann rubbed a hand over his close-cropped black hair nervously. "But I ain't careless!" he protested. "And my salesmen ain't careless. I don't hire that kind. And these offices are thief-proof. There ain't any crook that could get in here—not in a thousand years." For a moment he paused, frowning and biting viciously at his cigar. "Yet sometimes I ain't so sure. That case out in Chicago more'n a year ago has had me worried ever since. That fella had offices fixed up just as safe as these, but some crooks got into 'em somehow. And nobody's ever been able to find out how, either."

Whispering Wilson stroked his chin thoughtfully. "There's a queer story told about that Chicago job," he whis-

pered. "I've never been able to figure whether the yarn was just a pipe dream or there really was a woman that——"

"Yeh, I heard that story," Liebmann said, interrupting him. "Me and Jake were talking it over only the other day—about how some Chicago crooks are saying the job was done by a woman who made herself invisible—that she'd learned a disappearing trick from one o' these stage-magic fellas. Say, Jake!"

In answer to the call the importer's head clerk, Jake Markoe, heavy-shouldered, deep-chested, with a very conspicuous wen on the back of his thick neck, came from an adjoining room. His dark eyes glanced at Wilson sharply from behind shell spectacles. A diamond sparkled from a ring on one of his blunt fingers and another adorned his rainbow-hued cravat. A coarse, flashy type of man, though the spectacles had a somewhat subduing effect.

"Jake believes that story," said Liebmann. "He says if that fade-away trick can be done on the stage, it might be worked just the same in a diamond office."

"Sure, I believe it," Markoe admitted. "How else you going to explain that Chicago job? What happened? The bookkeeper's there alone. A stick-up guy comes into the building. The watchman at the street door sees him, gets suspicious, follows him upstairs. The stick-up guy, while holding up the bookkeeper, gets shot by the watchman, who comes into the office at just the right moment. But there was another crook there. The bookkeeper, while he was being held up, heard somebody moving about in the room where the safe stood open. So he and the watchman think they've got the second crook trapped. But there's nobody there; and yet the safe's been robbed. No chance for anybody to get in or get out without being seen. But somebody did get it, made noise enough to be heard pretty plain, and got out

with the loot. How yuh going to explain that?"

Whispering Wilson didn't have any explanation to offer, but he was not ready to accept the story about the invisible woman.

"I guess you've got the wrong dope, Jake," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I've always understood those fade-away tricks on the stage are done with the help of mirrors—with some kind of elaborate apparatus, anyhow. It's nothin' more'n what's called an optical illusion. Nobody but a nut would believe it could be anythin' else. For such a stunt you'd need a lot of cumbersome stage properties, besides people to handle 'em."

"And it wasn't like they do it on the stage, anyhow," Liebmann objected. "Of course, before the trick is done the audience has to see whoever's going to fade away. When that Chicago job was pulled off it was just a noise that was heard from the room where the safe stood. They didn't see anybody at all except the crook that got killed."

"I understand," said Markoe, "that the bookkeeper thought he got a glimpse of a woman in that room, but that, when, a second later, he couldn't see anybody he decided he must have dreamed it."

Whispering Wilson yawned wearily. "Talk sense, Jake," he protested. "What's the use of tryin' to fool yuhself? That story's got yuhr boss all up in the air. He sort o' half believes there was an invisible woman in that office, though he knows that plain, ornery horse sense oughta tell him it ain't possible."

"Horse sense don't help me none when I try to dope out a puzzle like that one," Liebmann grumbled. "I give it up." He glanced at the office clock. "I got a date to meet a fella up in the Bronx, and I guess I better be moving along."

For a few moments Whispering Wil-

son waited for the importer, who had gone into his private room; then he accompanied him down to the street door, where the two parted, Liebmann heading for the subway, while Wilson was held in conversation with Doran, the watchman of the building, whom he knew well.

Before long came closing time for the offices, and clerks and stenographers began to swarm out from the elevators. Among them were all of Liebmann's office force except Markoe. This, as Wilson had learned, was one of the occasions when Markoe had to remain after business hours. Several times a month it was necessary for him to keep the office open after the other employees had left. Sometimes a city salesman would be late in returning. Sometimes the road man would be getting back from his travels on a train that arrived after hours. It was the road man this time that Markoe was waiting for. The safe would have to be kept open for the stock he was bringing back with him. If his train arrived on time the man would be at the office a few minutes after six o'clock.

In the hallway, just inside the street door of the big skyscraper, Wilson and the watchman, being congenial friends, found a good deal to gossip about, and they remained there, chatting together, until the Maiden Lane crowds began to dwindle.

Suddenly Wilson stiffened into alert attention. His pale-blue eyes were fastened on a man and a girl who were coming in from the street. He had a distinct recollection that he had seen them both, only a few hours before. They had been a forlorn, rain-soaked pair then. Now the man had changed his clothes and had a more prosperous look. He was a low type, coarse featured, with dull, sullen little eyes. The girl was a painted blonde. There was something about the manner and appearance of both of them that seemed

to indicate they were out of their natural environment.

"Now, what are those two birds doin' here?" Wilson muttered with a scowl as he watched the pair pass on into one of the elevators.

"Friends of some stenographer upstairs, prob'ly," Doran decided. "There's always a few o' the stenogs workin' late."

"Maybe that's what's brought 'em here," came Wilson's rasping whisper. "But I ain't so sure. I've got a hunch there's somethin' phony about 'em. I noticed 'em outside about noon lookin' up at the winders."

The watchman seemed to be a little puzzled. "They ain't the kind that would be tryin' any tricks in this street," he reasoned. "They're just a couple o' mutts. Only the classy crooks try anythin' down here."

A moment later the elevator—the only one running at that hour—returned from its trip.

"Where'd you leave that pair you took up just now?" Wilson demanded of the conductor.

"The tough guy and the blonde? They got out on fifteen."

"Did they ask yuh anythin'?"

"Didn't say a word, either of 'em. They seemed to know where they was goin' all right."

For fully five minutes more the car remained at the street floor. Then the conductor glanced at his dials. Fifteen was calling, and he started on another trip up the shaft. When he returned, the painted young blonde was with him, but her companion was missing. The girl was moving quickly toward the street when Wilson stopped her.

"Who'd you come here to see?" he asked abruptly.

Blondy Bauer realized at once that this man with the hoarse whisper was dangerous. She was so startled that for a moment her wits deserted her.

"I—I just dropped in for a minute to speak to a lady friend o' mine," she stammered.

The girl's fright was so apparent that Whispering Wilson's curiosity grew rapidly. "What office does your lady friend work in?" he persisted.

There was only one answer that Blondy could give to this question, for she knew of only one name in the building. "In Liebmann's," she said with returning confidence as she decided such an explanation might be plausible enough to free her of the whispering man's unwelcome attentions. At this particular time she would have preferred not to betray the fact that she knew anything about Liebmann's, but she was in desperate haste to get out of the building.

But the man's slow deliberation was maddening. It was impossible to pass on to the door, for he had planted himself squarely in front of her, and plainly he was not yet ready to get out of the way. "What's the lady friend's name?" his bronchial whisper came again. "I know all the folks up in Liebmann's."

Precious moments were slipping by and Blondy Bauer was growing more and more alarmed. "It's none of your business what her name is!" she cried shrilly as she made an effort to slip past to the door. "What right you got blockin' my way an' nosin' into my affairs?"

Wilson glanced at the watchman. "Doran, I've got a hunch that I better go upstairs and see what became of the guy that came in with her," he said. "Yuh hold her here til I get back."

"Lemme go!" screamed Blondy hysterically. "You got no right to hold me here!"

But the watchman had closed the door and was holding it, and Wilson was already in the elevator, which was starting up the shaft.

"Did yuh see the hard-boiled guy when you went back for the girl?" Wilson asked the conductor.

"Ain't seen a sign of him since he got outa the car," the man replied. "Guess she must 'a' left him in one o' the offices."

The fifteenth floor was as quiet as a graveyard. Apparently the halls were deserted. But Wilson knew that at least one of the offices was still occupied—Liebmann's. For a few moments, after leaving the car and touring the halls, he stood hesitating and puzzled. Where could the girl's companion have gone? What could that hard-looking character be doing up here on this floor where the offices were stocked with jewels worth millions of dollars?

A startling answer broke out of the silence—the sound of a shot.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING WOMAN.

OUT of Liebmann's offices, a moment later, came Jake Markoe. He was gripping an automatic pistol.

"The woman!" he cried, as he caught sight of Whispering Wilson. "Where is she? Did you see her?"

"Don't you worry about the woman, Jake," said Wilson. "She ain't goin' to get away. Doran's holdin' her downstairs. Now spill the news quick. What's happened in here?"

Without pausing for an answer, and scarcely noticing the puzzled expression that had come suddenly into the clerk's face, he pushed past him and stepped into the open vestibule of the offices.

An experienced old-timer like Wilson was not easily startled, and he did not even flinch at the ghastly sight that now met his eyes in the vestibule. A man had pitched forward to the floor and was lying silent and rigid. Close to one of his stiff, outstretched hands lay a re-

volver. For a moment Wilson stood staring down at the motionless figure, then, stooping, examined it more critically.

"Dead as a stone," he whispered. "He's the guy that came in with the girl. What's the matter with yuh, Jake? Can't you speak?"

Evidently the clerk was suffering from an attack of nerves. His lips were quivering and his face was a sickly white. "You—you say you've got the woman?" he stammered very excitedly.

"Sure, we've got her," came Wilson's chronic whisper. "I held her up down on the street floor five minutes ago, when she came out of the elevator. What about her? Did she get away with any of the stones?"

"You've got the wrong woman!" cried Markoe.

"Huh?" Whispering Wilson's eyebrows came together in a puzzled frown. "How d'yuh know we've got the wrong woman? She's the one that came in with this bird yuh've just croaked."

"But she wouldn't have had time to get down there before you came up!" the clerk protested, his voice shrill with excitement. "She was in here just before I fired."

Pursing his lips and stroking the back of his head, Wilson stared doubtfully at Markoe for several seconds. "Are yuh dreaming, Jake?" he whispered. "Or is it me that's full o' dope?"

"A black-haired woman with a red hat!" Markoe cried. "I'm telling you she couldn't have got down there that quick. It's impossible."

Wilson gasped out an oath. "A black-haired woman with a red hat!" he explained. "Then there was two women!"

At this moment the watchman entered and turned a wide-eyed stare to the dead man on the floor.

"You didn't let that woman get

away?" Wilson demanded, his whispering shrill with nervous tension.

"The cop on the beat drifted in," Doran explained without turning his gaze from the body. "He's holdin' her downstairs now to give me a chance to come up here and find out what's what. I didn't hear any shot. What's been goin' on here, anyhow?"

"Have you seen any other woman—a woman with black hair and a red hat?" Wilson asked the watchman sharply.

"I have not. Nobody's come down from the buildin' since you came up. You don't mean there was two women in on this job?"

"That's what there was," said Wilson. "You hustle down to the cop and tell him to keep an eye out for a woman with black hair and a red hat. And then we gotta search the buildin'. It don't look like she could have got out." Turning to Markoe, he added, as the watchman hastened away, "Now, Jake, come out of your trance, and tell the story."

With a shrug of his heavy shoulders, the clerk lifted his eyes from the man on the floor. "I heard somebody come into the vestibule," he began, "and I went to the little winder here and looked out through the bars. There was a gun sticking into my face. This guy that's lyin' here had got the drop on me. He ordered me to push the button that springs the lock on the inside door. And, not bein' ready to die, I pushed it."

Markoe paused and gave a bewildered shake of his head. "It's got me guessing," he growled out. "I can't understand it at all. Wilson, nobody can tell me now that there ain't anythin' in that story about an invisible woman."

Wilson waved a hand in a gesture of impatience. "Never mind the pipe dreams, Jake. Go on with what happened."

"As I was sayin'," Markoe resumed, "I was lookin' into the gun, and I

pushed the button. Then I heard footsteps. Somebody was moving into the room where the safe stands. My automatic was within reach of my hands. I always keep it handy just inside the winder. And, considerin' the stick-up guy couldn't see any more'n my face through the bars, I grabbed for it. Pretty soon he turned his face away for half a second, and I got him. Hit him right over the heart somewheres, and he dropped like a stone. Then I ran back till I could see into the room that holds the safe. And for the fraction of a second I saw her—the woman with the red hat."

Pausing, he drew the back of his hand across his perspiring forehead. "For just the fraction of a second!" he murmured. "And then she was gone."

"If she was in here then, she's in here now somewheres," declared Wilson. "I was out in the hall within sight of the door when the shot came. She couldn't have got out without me seein' her."

The next few moments he devoted to a careful scrutiny of Liebmann's three rooms. The woman was certainly gone. There was no possible hiding place in those offices that escaped Wilson's investigation. He turned perplexed eyes to the clerk. "Jake," he whispered, "you don't look like a fella with a vivid imagination, but you didn't see a woman here. You didn't see anybody but the guy you croaked."

"I saw her all right," Markoe insisted stubbornly.

"All right. Then tell me how she got out. She couldn't even have got out of that room without you seein' her, because you were lookin' through the door. There's no other way of gettin' out of it but by the door, and no way out of these offices but through the vestibule. So you must 'a' dreamed you saw her and that you heard those footsteps."

Wilson glanced at the safe. Its pon-

derous door was hanging open, for it would not be time to close it and throw on the time lock until the arrival of the road salesman. "How about it, Jake? Is any of the stuff gone?"

The clerk gave a nervous start as he caught sight of a tiny white parcel lying on the floor almost at his feet. He picked it up, opened it, and poured a brilliant little stream of diamonds into the palm of his hand. "I guess this shows somebody was here," he muttered. "She must have dropped it on her way out."

Quickly he moved to the safe and pulled out two drawers. They were empty. "So I didn't see any woman, eh?" he said sneeringly. "Looka this. She's made a clean-up."

"How much?" asked Wilson, deeply perplexed and looking a little sheepish after throwing so much scorn on the clerk's story.

"You mean, how much was it worth?" said Markoe. "I dunno. Only Liebmann could tell that."

"But you can make a guess at how much of the stuff's gone, can't yuh?" Wilson said persistently.

Once more Markoe wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "My heavens! The whole works, pretty near! The road man's bringing back some stock, but the safe's been stripped clean. Half a million dollars' worth gone, anyhow. Maybe closer to a million."

For perhaps the first time in his life a sense of utter helplessness swept over Whispering Wilson. Here was a puzzle that baffled him completely. He was almost ready to abandon his faith in horse sense and to admit the existence of an invisible woman. He went to the telephone, called up his chief, Mat Hesterberg, at the agency, and gave him the news. Then the watchman returned.

"I ain't seen a sign of that other woman yet," Doran announced. "It's

my opinion there was on'y one woman, the blonde that the cop's got downstairs. What gives yuh the notion there was two of 'em?"

"The safe's been cleaned out!" Wilson whispered irritably. "And Jake says there was a woman in here while the guy with the gun was holding him up."

Doran heaved a long sigh. After turning a bewildered stare, first on Wilson, then on the clerk, he stepped to a window and stood there for a moment, looking down from the dizzy height into the deep cañon of the street. Here and there, in its towering walls, rows of windows were still illuminated, and arc lights flared snow-white in the depths.

"I guess she didn't leave by the window," he remarked with a grin.

"I'd pretty near believe she did," said Markoe, "if there was a ledge out there to give any kind of a foothold. But there ain't. Not even a monkey could climb from one o' them winders to another."

"She's hidin' in the buildin' somewhere," the watchman decided. "In some o' the halls prob'ly, or the stairs. Just before I come back here, I took a notion to look at the door to the roof. It's bolted on the inside, so she ain't up here. Even if she was, it wouldn't do her any good, for there ain't no other roof she could get to without droppin' four stories. Wherever she is, she can't make a get-away nohow. The cop's called up police headquarters, and we'll have plenty of dicks to help us search the buildin' pretty soon."

But Whispering Wilson failed to share the watchman's confidence. He knew perfectly well that nobody had come out of those offices after the firing of the shot, nor even immediately before. With his forehead puckered in thought, he stepped into the vestibule and proceeded to search the clothes of the dead gunman. He found no jewels

—only a little money, less than half a dollar. Evidently the stick-up man had been in desperate need of loot.

Wilson's thoughts turned to the girl downstairs. Could it be possible, he wondered, that she was in possession of Liebmann's vanished treasure? Fully five minutes must have passed between the moment she took the elevator to return to the street and the firing of the shot. It would take a long stretch of imagination to conclude that she had the diamonds. But the girl seemed to be his only hope, and a moment later he was on his way to the elevator.

At the street floor, as he left the car, he caught sight of Liebmann's road man hurrying into the building. Wilson nodded to him but didn't care to waste time telling of what had happened, and the salesman continued on his way to his employer's office in ignorance of the startling discovery he was about to make there.

Standing in a dim corner behind the stairs were the girl and the policeman. Wilson called the man aside. "Has she said anythin'?" he asked.

"Yes, she's said considerable," the officer replied under his breath. "But about all it amounts to is that she can't understand why a lady like her oughter be treated so."

Wilson turned the tail of an eye to the girl and was about to approach her, when the man raised a detaining hand. "Wait a second," he muttered. "A minute ago when she didn't think I had my eyes on her she threw away something."

"Eh?" exclaimed Wilson with a start. For an instant he believed he was about to discover Liebmann's missing diamonds.

"Thinking it might be some evidence," the man continued, "I picked it up. But it wasn't much—nothing but this."

He slipped a hand into his coat and

brought out a cork—a brand-new cork for a bottle.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOTTLE OF TONIC.

WHISPERING WILSON had no more than taken possession of the cork when his chief, Mat Hesterberg, tall, portly, heavy jowled, stepped in from the street, followed a moment later by a man from police headquarters. The headquarters man, whom Wilson recognized as "Sandy" Corey, halted abruptly at some distance from the girl, took a long look at her, and grinned.

"D'you know her, Sandy?" Wilson whispered.

"Sure I know her. She's Blondy Bauer. But you don't mean to tell me she's been in on this kind of a job? It's way out of her class. She's nothing but a bum little dip."

"That ain't the only queer thing you'll find about this case," Wilson muttered huskily. "It's got me way up in the air. If we can't find that other woman I'll be up against it hard unless I can make this one say somethin' more than hot air."

"The other woman!" Corey exclaimed, while Mat Hesterberg stood by, listening solemnly. "So there was two skirts on the job, eh? And the other one got away?"

Wilson shrugged his round shoulders. "She disappeared; but I ain't so sure she got clear away. I've got a hunch she's in the buildin' somewheres, and if she is we'll get her. There's no way she can get out. You better go on up to Liebmann's place, Sandy, and get the dope on how things stand. Then you and the rest of the bunch that'll be here presently can start the hunt through the buildin'. I wanta stay here and see what I can get outa the girl. Guess you better call up the office and get a woman over here, chief,

for this bird has got to be searched. For all I know, she may have the stuff on her."

Hesterberg nodded. "I'll go up and use Liebmann's wire." He and Corey got into the elevator together, and the policeman turned away to the street door.

"Now, Blondy Bauer, you and me are goin' to have a little heart-to-heart talk," Wilson said in a harsh whisper as he stepped over to the girl.

In an effort to soothe her troubled spirits Blondy was chewing gum. During the time that had passed since the shock of being caught, she had managed to get control of herself, and her thinking apparatus, such as it was, was working smoothly. She fastened a resentful stare upon Wilson.

"I'd like to know," she demanded with dignity, "why a lady can't come inter this building without bein' held up by a coupla bums and insulted."

"Yes, I know it ain't no way to treat ladies," Wilson admitted impatiently. "But, leavin' all that aside, Blondy, and gettin' down to tacks—the hard-lookin' bruiser that you came in here with tried to pull some pretty rough stuff with a gun."

Blondy had not yet learned what had happened to Markoe, and she received this announcement with an air of surprise and mortification.

"Yeh?" she exclaimed with a wide-eyed stare. "Why, he must 'a' gone bughouse! But, all the same, d'yuh think I gotta be blamed if one o' my gen'leman friends happens t' be a nut? If that's the way he acts I want nothin' more t' do with him at all."

"That's right," said Wilson. "A lady has to be awful careful, nowadays, who she travels with. But how about the job that's just been pulled off on the top floor? Just after you and your gentleman friend breezed up there, Liebmann's safe was cleaned out. Somebody got away with his stock of

diamonds. What you got to say about that? You know how the job was done, all right, and who got the stuff. Take my advice and come across with the story. It'll go easier with yuh if yuh speak quick."

Blondy had heard that kind of advice on other occasions when she had been in difficulties with the law, and now it failed to impress her in the least. "I know nothin' about it at all!" she snapped out with a toss of her head. "I ain't responsible for anythin' that nut's been doin'. You old, red-headed stiff! You'd have a swell time tryin' to prove that an innocent goil like me, who wasn't up on that floor more'n a coupla minutes anyhow, stole them jools."

"Yuh threw somethin' away a few minutes ago, Blondy, when yuh thought the policeman wasn't watchin' yuh."

The girl gave a very perceptible start. Evidently his shot had hit the mark, and he was more deeply puzzled than ever, for it had seemed absurd to surmise that the cork of a bottle could have any relation to the looting of Liebmann's safe.

"Well, what if I did?" cried Blondy peevishly, after a moment's hesitation. "It wasn't worth nothing."

"It was a cork," came Wilson's whisper. "Big enough for quite a good-sized bottle. Nice and new, too. Never been used. Ladies ain't in the habit of carryin' things like that around with 'em, are they?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say at all," Blondy declared with a jerk of her shoulders and a defiant lift of her chin.

For a moment Whispering Wilson stared at the girl solemnly. A sudden hardness showed in the pale-blue eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. When presently he spoke again his wheezy voice was strained and rasping.

"Young woman, yuh've been actin' up pretty big, and maybe yuh think yuh're goin' to get away with the bluff.

But now I'll tell yuh somethin' that'll jar yuh. Yuh're up against it harder than you think. That bird you blew in here with is lyin' dead on Liebmann's floor."

Under its splashes of paint, Blondy Bauer's face turned white. "Somebody croaked him?" she gasped out.

Wilson nodded. "He's been drilled with a bullet. Now yuh see how safe it is to play crooked tricks in Maiden Lane, Blondy. And I can tell yuh that the thief that got those diamonds is goin' to be caught even if it takes ten years. We fellas down here never lay down on this kind of a job. If yuh've got any sense at all yuh'll come across clean an' tell the whole story."

"I didn't hear no shot. You're kiddin' me. You old liar! You're just tryin' to get my goat, and I ain't fallin' for no bluffs."

"Then I guess I better show yuh the proof," Wilson replied thoughtfully. "Come along. We'll go up and take a look at yuhr friend."

Up in the vestibule of Liebmann's offices, presently, the girl took one horrified look at the body of Joe the Dope, and screamed. With her nerves badly shaken, she turned away from the ghastly sight. Though Whispering Wilson might have talked to her downstairs all night without breaking down her resistance, she was badly frightened now—almost hysterical for a moment.

"She—she got away?" she stammered.

"I guess not," said Wilson. "She's probly around here somewheres. We'll get her."

Blondy shuddered. The safe had been looted; Joe Rusoff was dead; Zelda Vorus had disappeared and yet was "around here somewheres." The girl was convinced that something supernatural had happened.

"She done the vanishin' trick!" she gasped.

"Huh? She done what?" Suddenly Wilson's long, lean body had stiffened as if it had received an electric shock. The story of the vanishing woman of Chicago flashed into his thoughts.

"She was the invisible woman," said Blondy in an awed whisper.

"Well? What else d'yuh know about her? What's her name? Where'd she come from? And how'd she pull off this job and make a get-away?"

But the questions came a moment too late. Blondy was getting control of herself again, and already she realized that she had said too much.

"That's all I know about her," she declared. "I'd heard she could make herself invisible, an' I guess she done it. But, honest—cross my heart!—I don't know nothin' at all about how she pulled the job off. I didn't have nothin' t' do with it. Joe Rusoff, who's lyin' there dead now, asked me to come up to the top floor with him, and then when we got there he left me, sayin' he'd got some business t' tend to; and I got tired of waitin' for him an' took the car down."

Wilson shook his head at her solemnly. He didn't believe Blondy Bauer was as innocent as that. "Yuh're a pretty good little story-teller," he observed. "But you better try again. That one won't do. You know considerable more about this than you better tell. Who told you about the woman who could make herself invisible?"

Blondy stole a timid glance at the body and pointed to it. "Him—Joe Rusoff."

"Rusoff, Joe Rusoff," Wilson whispered with a frown, as if trying to search his memory for a man of that name. He turned to Corey, who was staring at the rigid figure on the floor. "D'yuh know him, Sandy?"

"He's Joe the Dope," the headquarters man answered. "I was surprised enough to find Blondy Bauer in on a job like this; but Joe Rusoff—gosh!

Who'd ever have thought he'd have the nerve to butt into a diamond office in Maiden Lane! He was a stick-up guy, all right, when he had enough courage, which wasn't often, but his work was in dark alleys, where he'd hold up somebody for a few dollars of pocket money. He didn't have brains enough to plan anything like this. Somebody else supplied the gray matter for this clean-up. But why would any classy crook wanta pick such a pair of bums for the job?"

Wilson tried his luck once more with the girl. "What else d'yuh know about the woman?" he demanded. "What's her name?"

Blondy started to speak, caught her breath, and hesitated for a moment. "I don't know her name," she answered presently, with a challenging look into the pale-blue eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. "And I ain't going to say another word. You've got nothin' against me, and I've got sense enough not to talk myself into stir, I guess."

A moment later the woman Hesterberg had sent for appeared. She took Blondy into Liebmann's private room and searched her. When the two came out Wilson was waiting to hear the result. The woman from the detective agency gave a disappointing shake of her head as she stepped over to him.

"Didn't find a thing that means anything," she announced, as she exhibited what she had discovered in Blondy's clothes. An old purse containing a little change, a handkerchief, and a lipstick failed to stir Wilson's interest, but a coil of fine string held his attention for a moment. There must have been fifteen or twenty feet of it. It struck him as something worth thinking about.

"Now what was she goin' to do with that?" he asked himself. "I never knew of a woman carrying a wad of string around in her pocket."

But, failing to figure out any possible connection between the string and the looting of Liebmann's safe, he abandoned the problem for the present. There were a good many other things to consider, and, most pressing of all, there was the search for the woman who had vanished. The hunt for her was extending already through the halls of the building. Police-headquarters men were prying into every possible hiding place. They swept their flash lights over the roof, though the door opening upon it had been bolted on the inside; they investigated every room that still remained unlocked; they poked into dim corners of hallways; they prowled about through basement and cellar. The woman was not found.

Into the vestibule of Liebmann's offices came his stenographer, Tillie Schneider, flushed and breathless. She was only just inside the door when she collided with Jake Markoe.

"I left my——" she gasped out; then her words broke off abruptly, as she caught sight of the body of Joe the Dope. "My lands!" she cried. "Is the feller drunk—or is he——" She looked at the body more closely and shuddered.

For the next few minutes Markoe was busy telling her what had happened. "What brings you up here so late?" he asked, when he had finished the story.

"Why, I was almost home when I found I'd forgotten my bottle of tonic," she explained. "I knew you'd gotta stay late to-night, and I thought there was a chance I could get here before you closed up. The doctor just prescribed it to-day, and told me I'd gotta take that stuff regular and ought to begin right away. I didn't wanta pay for another bottle of it, so I beat it back here quick. I left it on my desk."

Miss Schneider pushed her way

through the door into the next room, paused, a little startled, as she discovered Whispering Wilson and Blondy Bauer there, and then moved quickly on to a corner where her desk stood.

"Well, of all things!" she cried. "Who's been monkeying with my bottle of medicine? Somebody's pulled the wrapper off the bottle, and the cork's gone."

Whispering Wilson stiffened into alert attention. "The cork's gone!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Just looka here!" cried Miss Schneider peevishly. "You can see for yourself that it ain't in the bottle. And some of the stuff's been spilled over that stack of letters on my hook. Gosh! I don't see why any safe robber would wanta lose any time monkeying with my medicine."

For a moment Whispering Wilson looked hard at Blondy Bauer. Then he pulled from one of his pockets the cork she had thrown away. Stepping over to the stenographer's desk, he tried to squeeze the cork into the bottle of tonic. It wouldn't fit. It was a good deal too big.

"What am I goin' ter do now?" wailed Miss Schneider. "I gotta have a cork. I hope the crook that swiped it gets the chair."

But Wilson was no longer heeding her. He was studying the troubled eyes of Blondy Bauer.

"Blondy, I'm beginnin' to get interested in that cork you threw away," he whispered.

"And say!" cried Miss Schneider, who had pulled open a drawer of the desk. "Somebody's been poking into my things inside here, too. Here's the ball of string I kept for tying packages, and instead of being back in the rear of the drawer, where I left it, it's lying out in front on top of all the papers, with about a yard of it hanging loose. Well, of all the nervy crooks!"

The stenographer's ball of string, as

Wilson observed, was red, while the coil that had been found on Blondy was white. Wilson would have felt a little more hopeful if the two strings had matched. Yet, in spite of the fact that they didn't, Miss Schneider's tonic had supplied him with food for deep thought.

CHAPTER VI.

WIDOW'S WEEDS.

BLONDY BAUER was doing some deep thinking herself. Tonic, string, and corks were running through her mind, all mixed up together in bewildering confusion. She was sorry now that she had not chosen an earlier time to throw away the cork she had found in the pocket of the man's raincoat. Quickly she had slipped it into her own clothes then, because there didn't seem to be anything else to do with it. If she had dropped it in the street she might have been detected in the act either by the man or Zelda Vorus. There had been other opportunities for getting rid of it before the time set for entering the building in Maiden Lane; but not until she had fallen into the clutches of Whispering Wilson, and had begun to sense trouble, did she entertain a vague suspicion that a cork might bear some relation to the robbery. At any rate, she had had a feeling that it would be safer to rid herself of anything belonging to the man of mystery who seemed to be so closely identified with the plot. She had forgotten about the coil of string. And, anyway, that didn't seem to be a thing likely to attract as much attention as a cork, if found in her possession.

"Tonic, string, corks," muttered Blondy to herself as she sat chewing her gum while Wilson, Mat Hesterberg, and Corey, the headquarters man, conferred together in an adjoining room of the diamond offices. She was sure Zelda Vorus didn't need a tonic; neither had the man in the raincoat

seemed to be lacking in vitality. Had somebody else been on the job who needed a dose of the stenographer's medicine? Blondy answered "no" to this question. She knew enough about thieves to realize that nobody in the act of looting a Maiden Lane jewel office would waste time to unwrap a bottle merely to sample its contents. Speedily she convinced herself that it was not the medicine, but the cork, that had been coveted by the unknown person who had meddled with the stenographer's bottle. For some mysterious reason there had been pressing need of a cork and also of a piece of string. Blondy chewed gum over this conclusion for a long time, while the voices of the men in the next room came faintly to her ears.

Though Blondy could make nothing of the conversation, it was she herself who was now the subject of it. And Whispering Wilson was mixing her up with the tonic, the corks, and the string.

"Why did the girl throw away the cork she had if it didn't mean anythin'?" Wilson was arguing. "I dunno as I thought much about it till I found the cork was missin' from the stenographer's bottle, but since then I've been doin' some hard guessin'." He turned to Hesterberg. "Corks and string, chief; corks and string. It's beyond me, so far, how they could mean anythin' in a job like this; but they're worth thinkin' about."

Mat Hesterberg's heavy-jowled face clouded in perplexity. After a moment of solemn thought he heaved a deep sigh. "Billy, that old red head of yours sometimes produces an idea," he grumbled. "But just now you're letting your vivid imagination run away with your common sense. Just go on, now, and tell me how a cork or a piece of string could have anything to do with the looting of Liebmann's safe. I'm willing to get busy on any reasonable theory, but

—daw-gone it!—when it comes to pipe dreams I kick."

"It's my opinion," remarked Corey, "that that poor little bum don't know much more about the job than we do. As I said before, she's nothing but a cheap piker. A big job like this is way past her kind. Whoever engineered it had her out on the side lines for some reason or other, but I'd bet my last simoleon she wasn't let in on the know. Some classy mind's been at work here. It took a whole lot more brains than Joe the Dope's or Blondy Bauer's to figure out how to get away with Liebmann's stock."

Hesterberg slipped the tip of an unlighted cigar between his teeth and chewed at it savagely. Clearly he was irritated by the way matters stood. Apparently he couldn't see any light on the problem at all.

"She hasn't got the stones, and she won't admit anything," he growled out. "So we're just as much up in the air as if we hadn't found her. We can't prove anything against her unless she can be made to talk, or we can get hold of somebody else who was in on the job."

"You'll never make that kid talk much, Mat," said Corey. "She's had time enough now to get over her scare and to do some thinking. For her years, she's an old-timer, and she knows enough to keep her trap shut. You didn't get anything out of her worth speaking of, did you, Wilson?"

For a moment Whispering Wilson stroked the back of his long head before replying. "Well, I squeezed somethin' out of her that's set me to pipe dreamin', as the chief would say," he admitted. "But you prob'ly wouldn't be interested, and I guess I better keep it to myself, considerin' the chief's already hinted very strongly that I was dopey."

Hesterberg gave a grunt of protest. "Spill it, Billy," he urged. "I'm al-

ways willing to listen to all kinds of fool talk."

"You've heard the story about the invisible woman out in Chicago, chief?" said Wilson.

Hesterberg looked disgusted. "Some crook with a wild imagination must have started that yarn," he growled out. "What about her? You haven't gone crazy, have you, Billy? You're not going to argue that an invisible woman was in on this job?"

"Oh, I'm not arguin' anythin' at all, chief," Wilson protested. "But Blondy Bauer told me that Liebmann's safe was robbed by an invisible woman. That's all the girl would admit she knew. I ain't given to believin' in things that ain't possible, but you know what Jake Markoe said—how the woman he saw at the safe just seemed to vanish into the air."

"There must be something wrong with Jake's eyesight," Hesterberg grumbled. "That's the only way I can account for his story. Now let's forget the fool talk and keep ourselves inside the possibilities."

For an instant a dry smile hovered on Wilson's long face. "The possibilities, chief?" he whispered. "There ain't any in this case. We're up against the impossible everywhere we turn. Jake Markoe shoots the stick-up guy and runs to where he can see into the room where the safe stands. For a second he sees the woman. She vanishes. I'm outside in the hall, makin' a bee line for the door as fast as I can foot it. She didn't come out. She couldn't come out without me seein' her. So where'd she go? There's a situation that ain't possible, all right. Maybe you'll say Jake was dreamin', chief—that he didn't see any woman at all. But if that's the way you're goin' to argue, then who do you think cleaned out the safe?"

"There are times when I could wish all women were invisible," growled out

Hesterberg, who was an old bachelor and a cynic. "But unfortunately I can't believe there's even one of 'em that's got any inclinations that way. It's against all the instincts of the sex. They're getting more visible every day. Corey, I guess you better take that little bum up to headquarters and lock her up. I don't know what your boss will think about it, but I'd advise turning her loose before long, if she don't talk. It don't look like we'd got much of a case against her; and if we let her go and then keep an eye on her while she's roaming round free, we might learn something. We could find out who she travels with, anyhow, while if we keep her locked up we're not liable to find out a darned thing."

"Now yuh're sayin' somethin', chief," whispered Wilson admiringly.

It turned out that police headquarters agreed with Hesterberg on this point, for Blondy, after spending a night behind the bars, was allowed to go her way.

She went back to her sunless little room. There she took off her hat and a coat that Zelda Vorus had bought for her to conceal her shabby, bedraggled clothes, and sat down to think about her adventure. Her mind refused to shift from tonic, string, and corks. These things started at last a train of thought that even regret for Joe Rusoff, lying dead, was not enough to interrupt for more than a moment. She was sorry for Joe, the poor bonehead, but she had never been sufficiently fond of him to weep many tears over his loss. And the intricate problem presented by the looting of Liebmann's safe and by the vanishing Zelda Vorus was much more alluring to her imagination than were the recollections of her friendship for the gunman. A newspaper she had picked up in the subway informed her that Liebmann figured his loss at three quarters of a million dollars, an awe-inspiring bit of

news that held her spellbound for a long time.

"Gee! What a mint o' money!" she muttered as she swept her eyes around the room and thought of how its wretchedness—the cracked and spotted walls, the broken furniture, the ragged carpet—contrasted with her dreams of such wealth.

And then she began to doubt that she was ever going to see Zelda Vorus again.

"She's got the shiners," she told herself, "and she's skipped out with 'em. I guess I was easy. She worked me for a sucker."

But on second thought she was not so sure that Zelda was not going to reward her. Zelda was a very wise woman—too wise, perhaps, to want to make an enemy of a girl who might betray her. She might find it worth while to devote a few thousand dollars of such a huge haul to keeping on the right side of Blondy. But as the time dragged on and Zelda did not appear the girl's hopes faded. The case of the gunman who had been on the Chicago job with Zelda came into her thoughts. That man had been killed, too; and gradually Blondy formed a suspicion that the woman had known all the time that she was luring Joe Rusoff to his death. A vague idea, which she was unable to define, came to the girl that the killing of the Chicago gunman and of Joe had borne some necessary relation to the vanishing trick.

"She's worked the two of us for suckers!" she cried at last bitterly. "I've got a hunch she knew Joe wasn't goin' to have a chance for his life. There was somethin' about that woman's face, anyhow, that told me we oughta keep away from her. It was the face of a devil."

Before long her thoughts turned once more to the bottle of tonic, the string, and the corks. Blondy Bauer was far from being brilliant or ingenious; but,

just as drops of water can wear away stone, the continual application of her commonplace little mind to this problem at last produced results. Suddenly inspiration came—an inspiration that dazed her for a moment. She jerked herself up from her chair with a wild cry.

"Have I got the nerve for it?" she asked herself after she had paced the floor of the little room for a few moments, pondering the idea that had flashed into her mind. She glanced at the green hat lying on the bed, then at her bedraggled dress, and frowned. "I guess it can't be done," she muttered hopelessly. "I'd hafta have some other clo'es, and I ain't got none. If I on'y had another dress and another hat! Gosh! Just another dress and hat, an' I might be ridin' round with my own limmyseen an' shofer!"

From the hall came a sound of footsteps. They had a familiar sound to Blondy, and quickly she moved to the door and pulled it open. A woman dressed in funereal black was passing by. A short, black veil drooped from the brim of her hat and concealed part of her face. Hat, dress, shoes, even her gloves—all were black. For the woman was Mrs. Grogan, who lived in a room no larger than Blondy's at the end of the hall, and who had been a widow for only a week.

"D'yuh wanta speak with me?" Mrs. Grogan demanded sharply as she caught sight of Blondy staring at her.

Blondy hesitated. "I dunno as it would do me any good," she said after a moment. "I guess you wouldn't wanta listen to what I got on my mind. But I was thinkin' that if I could on'y borror them clo'es o' yours and perhaps get——"

"What!" Mrs. Grogan interrupted fiercely. "Borror my clo'es! Have yuh gone crazy? What would a goil like yuh be doin' in the mournin' rig of a widder? And what would I be doin' "

without 'em? I've got no more. And I ain't goin' around naked for nobody. You go chase yuhself, Blondy Bauer—yuh and yuhr jokes!"

"Looka here, Mrs. Grogan!" cried Blondy. "I ain't jokin'; I'm desprit. I gotta have some other clo'es besides what I'm wearin', and those black ones o' yours would do better than any I could think of. And you could wear mine till I got back. We're about the same size."

Pressing her hands to her hips and poking her face forward, Mrs. Grogan fastened a venomous glare upon Blondy. "Me, a widder no more'n a week, deckin' myself out in a green hat an' a red-an'-yeller dress? No! I've got some respect fur myself, I'm glad to say."

"Come on in here, will yuh?" urged Blondy, opening the door a little wider. "I wanta tell yuh somethin'."

Reluctantly Mrs. Grogan accepted the invitation. After entering the room she sat down in the only chair and watched Blondy suspiciously as the girl closed the door.

"You lend me them clo'es for a coupla hours, and I've got a hunch they'll put me on Easy Street for life," declared Blondy, her voice tense with excitement. "And if I strike the luck I'm hopin' for, I'll make it worth yuhr while, Mrs. Grogan."

"You've got a job on?" whispered the woman, whose husband had been known as a yegg, and who had sometimes followed devious ways herself.

"A big job," was the answer. "It ain't anythin' too sure. Maybe I've got the wrong dope. But if I pull it off I'll give yuh half a dozen di'monds for the use o' them clo'es."

The woman's eyes glistened. "We'll go fifty-fifty," she suggested. "It's worth it—me, a week-old widder, deckin' herself out in green and yeller and red."

"We will not!" snapped out Blondy.

"Yuh've sure got yuhr nerve with yuh. I'm offerin' yuh a hull lot more'n yuhr trouble's worth now. You don't hafta wear my clo'es if yuh don't wanta. There ain't nothin' stoppin' yuh from goin' to bed."

For a few moments Mrs. Grogan considered the proposition in silence. "All right," she decided presently, with a sigh.

Blondy's well-worn shoes were tan, with dirty white uppers. She looked down at them doubtfully. They wouldn't do; neither would her stockings, which were pink. "I gotta have your black stockin's an' shoes," she decided.

"You're welcome to 'em," said Mrs. Grogan, "if they'll fit."

It developed that they did come so near to fitting that Blondy could wear them without much discomfort. The shoes pinched a little, but what did that amount to when a fortune was at stake? She went out to the sink in the hall and scrubbed the paint from her face, a process that made a marked change in her appearance. Little wrinkles now showed around her eyes and mouth, and her cheeks were quite white and hollow.

It would have been hard for even her best friends to recognize as Blondy Bauer the gloomy figure in black that passed out into the street half an hour later. Already daylight was fading. A clear sky showed between the tops of tall tenements. There was a chill in the air, and as a gust of dusty wind swept against her, Blondy shivered. It was a time of year when coats were being worn by all who could afford them.

But Blondy consoled herself with the thought that before the end of another day she might be wearing the finest furs that money could buy. For she was almost sure her persistent little mind had ferreted out a part of the secret of The Vanishing Woman.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOE NAILS.

AT intervals during that day, Whispering Wilson's thoughts also had been turning to Miss Schneider's tonic, string, and cork. But, though his mind was more capable than Blondy Bauer's, he had not had the same opportunity for calm and unbroken meditation. His musings over this phase of the mystery had been interrupted a good many times. Mat Hesterberg, for example, had been pestering him again and again with unwelcome suggestions and urging the necessity of producing quick results. The agency's reputation was at stake. Every jewel market in the country had been stirred by the looting of Liebmann's offices.

"Billy, you can dream about the tonic, the string, and the corks all you want to after we've found the crook that got away with Liebmann's shiners," Hesterberg had growled out. "But until then, forget 'em. They're not going to get you anywhere."

"I can't get 'em out of my head, chief," Wilson had protested. "Those things mean somethin'. You'll see. Got news of the Bauer girl yet?"

"I've had a man on that end of the case ever since she was turned loose this morning," Hesterberg replied. "He trailed her to a beanery, where she got something to eat, and from there to where she lives. She hasn't been out of the house since."

At seven o'clock that evening Wilson called at Liebmann's offices. The importer and Jake Markoe were there, much later than usual, making an inventory of the small amount of stock that remained. One drawer of stones had been overlooked by the looter of the safe. There was also the handful that Markoe had found on the floor. Wilson's husky whisper interrupted Liebmann as he was sitting at a table poring over the jewels.

"Has Miss Schneider found out who monkeyed with her tonic yet?" inquired the visitor.

"You go and jump on yourself," Liebmann returned peevishly. "Ain't I got enough to worry me without thinking about that pesky girl's bottle of tonic? She's been whining round here all day how the crooks spilled it over her papers and stole the cork. I've heard all I wanta about it."

"Emil, what do you know about Miss Schneider?" persisted Wilson. "How long has she been workin' here?"

Liebmann looked up from the jewels with a start. For a silent moment he stared at the pale-blue eyes which, behind their gold-rimmed spectacles, were full of troubled speculation. "Looka here, Billy," he exclaimed, "you're not trying to figure that that girl had anything to do with the crooked work, are yuh?"

"No, I don't think that idea's come to me yet," was the slow reply. "But a jewel crook might find it worth while to make friends with a girl who holds a job like hers. I was wonderin' what kind of a crowd she traveled with. Live with her folks, does she?"

"She does; and she's a nice, respectable girl, too—not one o' the kind a crook would find it easy to make friends with. I'm careful who works for me. Gotta be, in this business. Ain't got anybody on the pay roll that I don't know considerable about. My salesmen have been with me since they were kids; Jake Markoe's been here three years, and Tillie Schneider more'n a year. Nobody in the force that hasn't been here as long as her. You better go get another idea, Billy, instead of poking in here with hints that the poor, innocent stenog may have a crook friend."

After exchanging a few words with Markoe, whom he found busy, worried, and not in a sociable mood, Wilson wandered slowly about Liebmann's rooms

for a few moments, studying them closely, then took his departure and walked with an aimless air along the hall toward the elevator shaft, his head bowed, his brows drawn together in perplexity. When about to press the button for the car, he hesitated.

Then, with sudden decision, he turned away, and presently was climbing the narrow stairs to the roof. The door at the head of the stairs was bolted on the inside, just as Doran, the watchman, had reported he had found it on the preceding evening a few minutes after the killing of Rusoff. He slipped back the bolt, pushed the door open, and stepped outside. The sky was full of stars. Below and around him, a million windows glowed like fiery eyes. The colored lights of piers and ships shone over the dark waters of rivers and bay.

An idea had come to Wilson that perhaps the looter of the safe had managed to find a place of concealment on that roof, in spite of the search that had been made there just after the robbery. He pulled out his flash lamp and swept its prying beam of light in all directions. The roof was covered with sanded tar. Often late into the autumn the tar grew soft with the sun shining on it. Even now, some time after the sun had disappeared, it was not hard enough to be brittle. Here and there he detected faint impressions made by shoes—men's shoes, evidently. But this fact failed to interest him, for several men had been up there on the evening before, searching for the thief. A few moments later, however, he found the print of a smaller shoe.

"A woman!" he muttered. There could be no mistake about it. The clearly defined mark of a slim, pointed heel certainly could not have been made by the shoe of a man.

"Women don't come up on the roof of this kind of a buildin'," he assured himself. "There ain't no laundry to

hang out, and no call for even the office scrubwomen to get up this far, and they don't wear pointed heels, anyhow."

And yet a woman had been there—a woman with high-heeled shoes. It was a discovery that thrilled him. His thoughts were moving rapidly. He felt that he was getting a good deal nearer to the solution of the mystery that had kept him guessing and without a clew for twenty-four hours. The beam of the flash lamp moved on a little farther over the sanded tar, and presently it revealed again the imprint of a woman's shoe. As he bent over it he was convinced that it had been made by the same shoe that had produced the other impression, though it was not quite so clearly defined. A woman's shoes had also left other slight marks close by, but they were so faint that he paid little attention to them, and after he had moved on a few more steps the track disappeared entirely.

Wilson returned to the first footprint he had found, the one most clearly defined, and sank on his knees beside it. His lamp revealed it clearly—an almost perfect print. Even the indentations left by the nails of the heel were distinctly visible.

"Not much to work on," he muttered, "and yet a feller can never tell. All I gotta do now is to find the woman that left this mark and then match her shoe to it."

A grim smile followed this ironic jest as he pulled out a heavy-bladed pocket-knife and proceeded to cut out the whole print. The sand was very thinly sprinkled at this spot and the tar was just soft enough to be cut by the blade and yet to hold the mark of the shoe firmly together after being removed.

Wilson didn't know exactly what he was going to do with the print. Perhaps he couldn't do anything with it. And yet other clews might develop that would lead, some time, to the arrest of a woman in the case, and then he would

be able to compare the print with her shoes. He shook his head rather hopelessly. Even if a woman should be arrested, she might not be wearing the same shoes she had worn at the time of the robbery. And even though he had discovered these prints, the prospect of arresting the looter of the safe did not seem to have become much brighter.

A few minutes later he was in Hesterberg's office, and the chief was examining the print. Though Hesterberg showed a good deal of interest in the find, he did not seem to be very hopeful.

"Well, Billy, where does this get us, anyhow?" he groaned. "Some woman was on the roof, all right, but that's all we know. We don't even know when she was there. This print may be a week old."

"And what would a woman have been doing on that roof a week ago?" Wilson argued. "I'd bet a woman with high-heeled shoes don't get up on that roof once in five years. No, chief, this print means somethin' to us."

"It means we're just as much up in the air as we ever were," grumbled Hesterberg as he chewed the tip of his cigar. "I've heard of a print left by a rubber sole with knobs on it that turned out to be valuable evidence, but the sole that left this one was smooth—a leather sole, probably—no marks to identify it. And, of course, the crook who had left that rubber-sole mark was known. They knew where to find him, so they could match his shoe with the print. But a swell time we're going to have finding this woman."

"Talkin' about identifying marks, chief, just take another look at this print," Wilson said persistently. "Notice the way the marks of the nails run in the heel. They don't make a regular horseshoe figure. On one side there's a little quirk, where the row doubles for half an inch. It not only doubles, but it gives a little twist. Facto-

ries turn out shoes with the rows of nails regular and all of the same pattern. This little quirk was made by a shoe repairer. Those fellers sometimes drive an extra number of nails in the part of the heel they think comes in for the hardest wear. They can tell what part that is from the condition of the heel before they begin the repairing. Now, if I could find that shoe repairer I——"

Hesterberg broke in with a grunt of impatience. "There's only about ten thousand shoe repairers in New York," he remarked testily. "And that shoe may have been repaired in Chicago, or London, or Shanghai, for all we know. Billy, sometimes I tell myself that you're nothing more than a leg man, that you don't use your head at all, and that you just stumble across things because you're such a steady plugger. Footwork instead of headwork. And yet, you daw-gone old cuss, you do produce results."

"Footwork, chief; you're right," Wilson whispered hoarsely. "That's what counts most in this business, anyhow. Sometimes my brains don't move for hours at a stretch. I'm a slow thinker. And, talkin' about footwork, I guess I better be footin' it to the subway with this print."

"Huh?" Hesterberg's wide-eyed stare showed his perplexity.

"Goin' to make a call on Blondy Bauer, chief."

"For what? You know darned well she wasn't on that roof."

"I know she wasn't there at the time Liebmann's shiners were lifted, but she's the only woman in the case so far. So I might as well go an' take a look at her shoes. May be no sense in it, but—a feller can never tell."

Hesterberg sighed deeply. "Suit yourself, Billy. When you can't use your head, use your legs. That's your motto."

Half an hour later Wilson knocked

at the door of Blondy Bauer's room. A long silence followed. Then the door was drawn cautiously open a couple of inches by Blondy, who was wearing a dirty old cotton wrapper. She gave a frightened gasp as she recognized the man outside.

"Thought I'd drop in and have a little talk, Blondy," came Wilson's whisper. "Thought maybe by this time you'd have remembered somethin' more, you could tell me about that job."

"There—there ain't no more to tell," the girl stammered. "You got everythin' I know outa me las' night."

Wilson pushed his way into the room. "We might as well have a little talk, anyhow," he whispered as he studied his surroundings.

Blondy's hat and dress were lying on the bed. She was in her stocking feet. Her shoes were out in the center of the floor.

"Goin' to bed kind of early," Wilson observed. "And what's the matter with yuh, Blondy? Yuh're lookin' kind of white. It's because yuh've scrubbed the paint off; that's it. For a minute I thought yuh must be sick."

"I ain't feelin' any too well," said the girl peevishly. "Yuh're enough to make me feel sick—comin' here at this hour o' the night when I'm gettin' ready for bed. Ain't yuh ever goin' to stop pesterin' me?"

Wilson turned his attention to the shoes. He picked them up and examined them more closely. "Yuh'll soon be needin' a new pair," he observed. "They're wearin' out fast around the uppers."

As he turned them over and inspected the soles of the heels his face clouded. It was plain that it was not going to be necessary for him to take from his coat the print he had found on the roof of the skyscraper. The heels of these shoes were in sad need of repair, and the arrangement of the nails bore no resemblance to the indentations in the

piece of tar. He had not forgotten the tan shoes with shabby white uppers that the girl had been wearing on the preceding evening, and these were evidently the same pair. A feeling of discouragement swept over him. He stared at the girl gloomily.

"Only shoes yuh've got?" he inquired sadly. It seemed like a futile question, for he had already noticed that no other shoes were visible in the small room and that there was no closet in which a pair might be concealed. He realized, too, that a girl apparently in such poor circumstances was not likely to possess an extra pair—not a pair with good heels, anyway, or she wouldn't have been wearing those that were now in his hands.

"Whatcha think I am?" Blondy snapped out. "A millionaire? Look at 'em! Can't yuh see they're the on'y pair I've got? I've pretty near wore the soles off."

"Well, I s'pose I better be gettin' along and let you go to bed," he whispered dejectedly.

But as he was moving to the door he hesitated. There was something about the girl that stirred his curiosity. She was nervous, frightened. She was unable to conceal her agitation. For a moment he stood staring at her thoughtfully. Then he stepped out into the hall, and Blondy, listening at the door, could hear him walking slowly away to the stairs.

After he had passed out into the street, Whispering Wilson stood for several moments in front of the house. Presently he caught sight of a shoemaker's sign a few doors away. It lured him, and a moment later he was standing under it, peering into the little shop. The door was open. The shoemaker was working late. Wilson stepped inside and pulled from his coat the imprint he had cut from the roof. The proprietor of the place glanced at the slab of tar with a puzzled expres-

sion, then noticed that it bore the mark of a shoe.

"Notice the funny way the nail prints run in the heel?" Wilson whispered. "That means it had been repaired, don't it?"

"Sure," said the man as he turned a bewildered stare on his caller. "I drive 'em in that way sometimes myself, after I've noticed where the heels have worn most. I did a job just like that on some heels only a few days ago. Looks to me like that print was made by one of the very heels I fixed. Pretty near always a heel wears away at the outside corner at the back. But those heels were worn off on the inside corners. That's how I remember 'em, for it ain't once in a good many times that heels wear off on that side."

Whispering Wilson's pale-blue eyes suddenly brightened. "Who'd those shoes belong to?" he asked quickly.

The shoemaker scratched his head and searched his memory for a moment. "They belonged to a widow," he answered. "Name's Mrs. Grogan. She buried her husband only two or three days before I fixed her shoes."

Wilson's heart sank. The hopes the shoemaker had roused in him suddenly slipped away. "Where does she live?" he inquired listlessly.

"Only three doors from here, to the east. Two flights up in the rear at the end of the hall. Brownstone house with a rooms-to-rent sign on the outside of it."

Instantly Wilson's spirits revived. It was the house in which Blondy Bauer lived; a strange coincidence indeed, unless it should develop that it was really one of Mrs. Grogan's shoes that had left the imprint on the roof of the building in Maiden Lane. A few moments later he had found Mrs. Grogan in her room. It struck him as a little singular that she seemed to be just as nervous and frightened as Blondy Bauer had been.

"What were you doin' down in Maiden Lane last night, Mrs. Grogan?" he demanded.

"Me?" cried the woman. "I never was in that street in my life. What would the likes of me be doin' there? I ain't stealin' jools, and I ain't got no money to buy 'em."

Wilson's spirits were sagging again. Even less than Blondy Bauer did this woman seem to be of a type likely to be mixed up in such an ingenious job as the looting of Liebmann's safe. "Just another bum," he told himself. "One of the classiest of jobs is pulled off, and I run up against nothin' but pikers. Three quarters of a million dollars' worth of stuff gone, and the trail keeps leadin' to this cheap roost. That job was never planned by bums."

"I'll have to ask yuh to take off yuhr shoes, Mrs. Grogan," whispered Wilson at last. "I wanta look at the heels. If you've got any objections, I'll have to run yuh right down to police headquarters."

Sullenly the woman removed the shoes, and after a moment Wilson assured himself that the heel of one of them had made the impression in his slab of tar. There could be no doubt of it. The peculiar arrangement of the nails of the heel corresponded exactly to the indentations in the imprint.

"Yuh might as well tell me right now," he whispered sharply, "all yuh know about the robbery of Liebmann's diamond office last night. Yuh were up on the roof. Yuh left the print of your shoe there."

The woman was trembling now. There was abject fear in her round little eyes.

"No! No!" she cried hysterically. "I ain't been anywheres near that street. I loaned them shoes to a friend o' mine. It must be her that was there."

Then, broken by gasps and sobs, the story came from her of how she had lent her clothes to Blondy Bauer, and

how the girl had rewarded her with six diamonds.

"She said she had a notion of where some jool swag had been left," explained the woman, "and that she was goin' to find it before the crooks came after it. Looka what she done to my dress. The arms of it's been soaked in water. They're all mussed up, and they're wet even now."

Wilson puckered his forehead as he examined the bedraggled arms of the black dress. Here was another puzzle that for the moment was beyond him.

"I guess I better have another talk with Blondy Bauer," he whispered solemnly.

"You won't find her," said Mrs. Grogan. "She's gone. She said she had a hunch that dicks was watchin' the house and that she was goin' to sneak out the back way and over the fence."

Wilson ran out of the room and through the hall. He went down the stairs to the next floor three steps at a jump, and arrived breathless at Blondy's room. It was empty. As Mrs. Grogan had told him, the girl was gone.

A few seconds later he was at the street floor. A half-grown boy was standing in the dim hallway.

"Yuh seen a girl in a green hat?" gasped out Wilson.

"She just slipped out the back," was the reply, and Wilson made a dash for the rear door. On top of a fence that separated two stone-paved yards was Blondy Bauer. She was on her way to the rear of a tall tenement that faced the next street. As she caught sight of Wilson she dropped down to the other side of the fence. He was over the fence himself a moment later and was pursuing the girl through the hallway of the tenement. He was perhaps fifty feet behind her when she slipped out into the street. A taxicab was passing slowly by, and she ran after it.

Out of the tenement doorway rushed Wilson just in time to see her jumping into the car and to hear her screaming to the driver: "Beat it, bo! Step on the gas an' you get a di'mond as big as a nut!"

Wilson's long legs stretched out in pursuit. But the car was speeding up rapidly, and at the next corner it turned and was out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

USELESS RICHES.

MIDNIGHT came, and a shabby girl without a coat cringed against the cold wind that was sweeping Union Square. She was tired out. For almost two hours she had been walking the streets, and she seemed too weak to fight against the chilling air of the night much longer. But she had no money for shelter, not even enough to buy a cup of coffee. With a long sigh of exhaustion she sank down on one of the benches in the little park. She was waiting for day to break—the day that was going to bring her everything that money could buy. For, hidden under the tawdry dress of this wretched, homeless wanderer, was a package worth somewhere around three quarters of a million dollars.

"I guess I can hold out till day comes," she muttered through her chattering teeth. "To-morrer I'll be rich. To-morrer I'll get myself some swell furs, and a limmyseen and a shofer. My lands! If I can on'y hold out till to-morrer!"

The package under her dress was full of diamonds. For a long time she had searched for a pawnshop, but so late in the night she had been able to find not one that was open. She had offered to sell a two-carat jewel to a taxicab driver for a dollar, and he had jeered at her. "They're nothin' but glass," he had decided.

With a gasp of alarm she started up

as she felt a heavy hand upon her shoulder. A uniformed policeman was staring into her face.

"You got no place to go?" he asked sharply.

"I'm broke," was the sullen reply. "Broke until to-morrer comes."

The alarm had gone out to the police precincts to search for Blondy Bauer, and this girl impressed the officer as corresponding to the description he had tucked away in his mind.

"I guess you better come along with me," he decided.

Blondy Bauer gave another gasp. So this was the end of her dreams! To-morrow would come, and she would be as poor as ever—and not only penniless but a prisoner. "It was too good to come true!" she sobbed. "I was up against a game too big for me. I guess I was made to be nothin' but a piker."

Blondy spent the remainder of the night in a cell. In the morning she found herself confronted once more by the persistent, red-headed, whispering man from Maiden Lane.

"I thought you an' me'd better have another little talk, Blondy," said Wilson. "I thought that maybe, now that you'd had a chance to think things over, you'd feel like tellin' a little more. Too bad yuh didn't make a get-away with all those shiners. They'd have put yuh on Easy Street all right. Where'd yuh find 'em, Blondy?"

Blondy, warm now and refreshed by a breakfast at the expense of the city, was recovering from her depression. "I found 'em by usin' my brains," she answered. "Just by thinkin' about a bottle o' tonic and some string and some corks."

"Huh?" Wilson said, his eyes opening wide. "You doped it out by thinkin' of them things? What was the meanin' of 'em? Where'd yuh find that swag? It wasn't yuh that looted Liebmann's safe. I know that much

for certain. And yuh didn't even know where the swag was till you'd done some thinkin'. That much I'll admit. But if tonic, string, and corks could tell you where the stuff was you've got more brains than I gave yuh credit for."

"I ain't goin' to say no more," Blondy decided. "Talkin' to dicks don't get a goil anywheres except into stir. Last time I was pinched I talked too darn much and got sent to the Island. Since then I'm wise. I keep my trap shut."

"If yuh're as wise as all that yuh oughta have kept your mouth shut when you were with your friend, Mrs. Grogan," retorted Wilson.

The mention of Mrs. Grogan seemed to give the girl a shock. "That cat!" she cried. "Has she been talkin' about me? Yuh don't mean to say she ran down to headquarters and squealed?"

"She didn't come down to headquarters, Blondy, but I found her all right. And she spilled the beans. Told how she loaned you her clothes, and how you gave her half a dozen diamonds. I know where yuh went in those clothes, Blondy. Pretty good disguise they must have been—you, with your paint washed off and the widder's veil hangin' round your face. Easy to get past the feller who was watchin' outside the house and easy to get into the buildin' down in Maiden Lane without bein' recognized. Yuh see, I know where yuh went. And yuh not only went into the buildin', but you went up on the roof. For up there in the tar I found the mark of one of the widder's shoes. And then where'd yuh go? Yuh didn't find those diamonds on the roof."

But the girl had not forgotten yet her decision to keep her mouth shut, and there was no answer to the questions. She was thinking bitterly about Mrs. Grogan. The whole world seemed to be against Blondy. She couldn't even trust her friends. Then Zelda Vorus came into her mind. She hated The In-

visible Woman now. All her troubles had been brought upon her by Zelda Vorus.

"There's one thing I'll tell," she cried out abruptly at last. "It was Zelda Vorus who got me and Joe Rusoff mixed up in that job at Liebmann's. And I guess it was she that planned it. too. If an innocent goil like me has got to be locked up, then get after her an' put her where she belongs. She worked me an' Joe for suckers, an' I gotta hunch she knew she was sendin' Joe to his death."

The woman's name failed to stir any responsive chord in Wilson's memory. "Who is she?" he asked.

"Ever hear the story told out in Chicago about The Invisible Woman?" said Blondy.

"You mean this Zelda Vorus is that woman?" Wilson gasped out, his voice shrill now with the tensivity of his interest.

"That's who she is, The Invisible Woman. She learned the vanishin' stunt from a stage magician she worked for. Me an' Joe useter know her out in Chicago, and when she ran across us on the street a few days ago she said she'd got a job for us—the job at Liebmann's. But she didn't tell us how it was goin' to be pulled off. All she wanted me to do was to go up to the top floor and wait there till Joe went into the di'mond office with his gun, and then I was to come down to the street an' beat it. And that's just what I did, except for beatin' it away. You stopped me from doin' that part of it."

"And where was Zelda Vorus while you were doin' that?"

"I dnnno. In the di'mond office, I s'pose, where she did the vanishin' stunt an' got away with the jools."

"No," declared Whispering Wilson with an emphatic shake of his head. "She couldn't have been in that office. It ain't possible."

"But ain't I tellin' yuh she could make herself invisible?" Blondy persisted. "She could be anywhere without nobody seein' her."

Wilson, however, declined even to discuss such a palpable absurdity. He asked where the mysterious Zelda Vorus was living and where she might be found. But Blondy was unable to answer these questions.

"You ain't told me where you found the swag yet," he whispered presently.

"No, and I ain't goin' to tell." The girl's mood was changing again. She had recalled the fact that she had decided to say nothing at all. "I've been lettin' yuh know about Zelda Vorus because she worked me an' Joe for suckers, but I ain't fergot what talkin' to dicks cost me once, an' I'm goin' t' shut up right now."

This time Blondy kept her promise. Wilson failed to get another word out of her, and presently he abandoned the effort and went hurrying away to find Mat Hesterberg. On his way to the agency his slow-working mind was busy with the new scraps of information that had come to him. So the clues of the tonic, the strings, and the corks had led Blondy to the roof, he mused. And at last she had come back from somewhere with the sleeves of the widow's dress bedraggled and wet. Where could the water have been that she had dipped the sleeves into? he asked himself. On the roof?

"Well, by golly!" he exclaimed suddenly. On the roof—yes, of course. Inspiration had come to him at last—the same inspiration that had flashed into the mind of Blondy Bauer. Corks and strings and water! He believed he knew now where Blondy had found the jewels.

"She beat me to it!" he muttered in self-reproach. "A poor little bum like her thought that out while it had me right up in the air. I guess Mat's right in sayin' I use on'y my legs instead

of my head. I must be solid ivory above the ears."

Promptly he changed his mind about going to Hesterberg to tell of his interview with the girl. Instead he went at once to the roof of the building where Liebmann had his offices. The huge water tank, a necessary equipment of every tall building in the city, was sharply outlined against the clear blue sky.

"Corks and strings and water!" he whispered shrilly. "And there's the water! There in that tank!"

From the top of the tank an iron ladder hung down to the roof. He climbed up to the dizzy height, lifted a door in the tank's roof, and looked inside. Floating on the surface of the black water was a cork. He reached down and grabbed it. As he drew it up he discovered that a long string was attached to it. The string was pink, like the ball in Tillie Schneider's desk. And the cork looked as if it might be just about the right fit for her bottle of tonic.

Wilson was about to slip his find into his coat, when he hesitated. After a moment of deliberation he dropped cork and string back into the water.

It was perfectly clear to him now why the looter of Liebmann's safe had found it necessary to rob Miss Schneider. The thief had needed a cork and string in a hurry. Strange that no provision had been made for such a contingency beforehand. But what about the cork and string in Blondy Bauer's possession?

"Why, that cork and string that Blondy had belonged to the crook that lifted the stones!" he exclaimed. "Belonged to that Zelda Vorus, prob'ly. And Blondy forgot to turn 'em over to her."

Wilson climbed down from the tank with a feeling that before very long he was going to solve the mystery of The Invisible Woman. And he believed the

solution was going to come to him on that roof.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN'S PARTNER.

INSTEAD of returning into the building, Whispering Wilson proceeded to study the roof. Presently he drew his eyebrows together in a puzzled frown, for he had failed to find what he was now looking for. Convinced that in all probability the looter of the safe had not yet dared to return to the tank for the plunder which, fastened to the string, had been cached at the bottom of the water and had remained there until Blondy Bauer discovered it, Wilson was trying to solve the problem of where he could conceal himself. The roof seemed to offer no hiding place that was worth considering. He could hide behind the stair hutch, but he speedily abandoned that idea. It was too uncertain a refuge. He might be discovered there.

Again his eyes turned to the great tank, which, standing on its high iron supports, rose fully thirty feet above the roof. He glanced at his watch. One o'clock. Lunch time. But Whispering Wilson was not thinking about food. He could get along without lunch and without his evening meal, too, if necessary.

"Here is where I live," he muttered, "until the crook comes lookin' for the swag. And it looks like I'd gotta camp up on the flat roof o' that tank."

To almost anybody else the prospect would have been far from agreeable. But Wilson was never quite so thoroughly contented as when hunting big game of the underworld, no matter what hardships he might have to endure. He had made up his mind to lie concealed on the flat roof of the tank until the big game he was now itching to trap should appear. The big game might not come for days. No matter. He could lie on the top of the tank from

the time the building opened in the morning until it closed at night. For the rest of the twenty-four hours he could stretch his limbs somewhere else and get a little sleep and his three meals.

There was only one thought that troubled him now. The looter of the safe might already have returned to the tank and found the plunder gone. But this seemed to him only a small possibility. Blondy Bauer, as he had learned from Mrs. Grogan, must have been there a little after dark on the preceding evening. Very soon after her visit the building had been closed for the night. If the stealer of the jewels had returned already, it was probably some time during the past six hours. There was a bare chance, of course, that the thief had been concealed in the building before closing time. Wilson would have to trust to luck to some extent, as always.

Once more he made the dizzy ascent of the ladder and flattened himself out on the roof of the tank. On that unprotected height the wind was blowing a gale, and the sting of winter was in it. But Wilson's overcoat was fairly heavy for that time of year. He knew he could remain there twelve hours at a stretch if necessary.

With dreadful tedium the afternoon wore on. He did not dare raise himself from his prostrate position, scarcely dared move. For at any moment the big game, as cautious and silent as a hunted deer, might come stealing out from the door at the head of the stairs. He watched the sun go down—a great, shimmering ball casting a golden path across the waters of the harbor as it slipped behind the Jersey hills. Suddenly the golden path was blotted out. Black shadows fell over rivers and bay. The deep street cañons far below him were shrouded in dusk. The lamps of the city burst into flame. Over the dim silhouette of Brooklyn hung a solitary

star. Presently the last light of day faded out, and the sky was spangled with jewels almost as white and sparkling as the gems whose splendor had for a time been drowned in the waters of the tank.

From the top of the stairs came a barely perceptible sound. But Wilson did not dare venture a peep over the edge of the platform where he was lying. He was straining his ears for a repetition of the sound. And after a moment it came again—a slow, cautious step—and then another and another. Some one was drawing nearer and nearer to the ladder.

Then for a few moments Wilson could hear nothing except the faint, far-away roar of the city's streets. He told himself that the big game had paused at the foot of the ladder. Again a feeble sound—it might be the scratching of shoes on iron rungs. With every nerve alert, Whispering Wilson held his breath. A hat appeared above the edge of the platform—then a face came in view.

A name trembled on Wilson's lips—"Jake Markoe!"

It was Markoe, so deeply absorbed that he failed to discover for a moment the sprawled figure scarcely five feet away, black and indistinct in the darkness.

In an instant Wilson's mind grasped the secret of The Invisible Woman. No wonder she had been invisible. It was Markoe himself who had looted the safe, and the woman had never been in Liebmann's office. It was an obvious deduction even at the very second when the head clerk's face came into view.

Markoe raised the door, thrust an arm down into the opening, and a faint illumination came from the interior of the tank. It was a flash lamp exploring the surface of the water. The man strained himself over the edge of the little doorway and with both hands reached in deeper. There was a splash-

ing sound, and the next second out came the cork and the string in Markoe's grasp.

A hideous oath burst from his lips, and Wilson crept nearer—nearer still. Markoe, who had moved a foot or two away from the top of the ladder, and who was now clinging to the wind-swept roof as if dazed, gave a frightened cry and almost lost his balance as the next moment he discovered that he was not alone.

"I've got yuh, Jake!" said Wilson in a shrill whisper, and two big hands, reaching out of the dark, laid firm hold on Markoe's coat.

The clerk was a powerfully built man, and just one chance seemed to remain for him. With a desperate effort he struggled to his feet and threw himself upon his captor. For a moment he seemed to be exerting all his strength to clutch Wilson's scrawny throat. Failing in this, he succeeded in dragging Wilson closer to the open door of the tank.

"So you're tryin' t' shove me in an' drown me, eh, Jake?" Wilson gasped out in a half-breathless whisper.

He found himself pressed even a little closer to the open door. But new strength seemed to come to him with the realization of his danger. With a tremendous effort he tore himself loose from Markoe's grip for an instant and, rising to his knees, swung a quick, left-handed blow at the clerk's face. The man's head flew back as the fist caught him on the jaw, and for a second or two he seemed to be out of the fight. Then, with a savage growl, he threw himself on Wilson once more. Evidently an unskilled fist fighter, he preferred to rely on the power of his gorillalike grip. As his heavy arms closed around his read-headed foe, another blow jolted his head back. It failed to loosen the grip of his arms. Again he was drawing his enemy slowly toward the open door. And again, in

the nick of time, when almost at the edge of the black hole, Wilson, with a frantic effort, managed to save himself.

Markoe, a little too fleshy for such violent work, was beginning to show signs of weakening. His breath was coming in long gasps. In the dim starlight a hideous red streak showed against his white face.

"Better give up, Jake," gasped out Wilson, tearing himself loose; "guess you've had 'bout enough."

Breathless and shaking, Markoe staggered to his feet. "Yes—had enough," he hissed, and drew back. Wilson had also risen now, and for a moment the two men stood silently staring at one another.

"Oughta learn somethin' 'bout fist work, Jake," Wilson whispered. "Yuh're pretty good at the wrestlin', but that ain't what counts most. Yuh got no defense, Jake. Yuh leave yuhself wide open."

Without warning, Markoe, with arms spread out, sprang forward. In that fraction of a second Wilson realized that if he should find those gorilla-like arms wound around himself once more he would not have enough strength left to break their crushing grip. A straight, short-armed jab of his left fist smashed against the clerk's exposed jaw for a third time.

Markoe, wilting under the blow, went staggering backward. The edge of the platform was close behind him. He swayed, fell—

"Jake!" cried Wilson, his shrill whisper rising almost into a scream. "For the love of—"

Markoe went toppling over the edge. Into the dark abyss his body dropped like a stone. It bumped against the front of the skyscraper, swung outward, and turned completely over.

Then Whispering Wilson, trembling, dazed, dizzy, drew back with a shudder from the dangerous edge to which he had crept.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN-KILLER.

A MONTH went by before Zeld Vorus ventured into Maiden Lane. Great jewel markets had a fascination for The Invisible Woman which she could never resist very long.

Slowly she strolled through the narrow cañon, pausing now and then to look up at an importer's gilded sign or into the diamond-decked show window of some retailer. Like Whispering Wilson, she was on a hunt for big game—for men—men, like Jake Markoe, who could be tempted by her wiles into betraying their employers' trust.

During the month that had passed since Markoe's death Wilson had managed to discover a good deal about Zeld Vorus. He had even made a visit to Chicago especially to investigate the history of her life in that city. There he gathered all the facts available about the diamond robbery for which she was rumored to have been to blame, and which had been carried out a year before she turned her attention to Maiden Lane. He learned about her work with Tinelli, the magician. He had even obtained possession of a theatrical photograph showing her in stage costume.

By this time he could understand quite clearly the part she had played in the carrying out of the plot to loot Liebmann's office. Jake Markoe, a sullen, unsociable old bachelor, unprepossessing, unpleasant to look at because of the huge wen on the back of his neck, shunned by most women, had fallen a victim to whatever charms Zeld had been able to exercise upon him.

And then he and the woman had proceeded to capitalize her weird reputation which had floated out on the wings of rumor from Chicago's underworld. The robbery of Liebmann's office was to be arranged so that it could not fail to be attributed to the mysteri-

ous invisible woman. It would be dangerous to create a suspicion that it had been an inside job. That was always the cry that went up when no other explanation could be found of a Maiden Lane mystery. So the ingenious mind of the woman had hit upon a pretty sure way to obviate this peril. Some crook with a police record must be killed on the job. There would be small chance indeed that after such a thing had happened an "insider" would fall under suspicion. So poor Joe the Dope was chosen for the sacrifice.

And to make the affair even more plausible an actual woman must appear in some sort of a relation to the looting. She must figure just enough to be talked about afterward. So Blondy Bauer was chosen to go up with Rusoff to the top floor and then return to the street and make a sure get-away before the alarm was sounded. It would be necessary to have somebody besides just Markoe himself to report afterward that a woman had actually been seen in very evident connection with the robbery plot.

The whole thing had been simple enough to figure out after Wilson's investigations, and Blondy, relenting at last, had aided him by making a few further disclosures.

The woman who was now surveying Maiden Lane with curious glances bore such a striking resemblance to the photograph he possessed of Zeld Vorus and to Blondy's description of that mysterious worker of wonders that his interest was stirred at once as Wilson caught sight of her from one of his favorite posts of observation in a doorway.

In fact, the woman's strange, cold eyes would have been likely to attract and hold the attention of any close observer. They were eyes so cruel, so soulless, that Whispering Wilson, though he had studied many criminal faces, felt an icy shiver run through

his veins. He was convinced that they were the eyes of Zelda Vorus, and he considered Zelda to be the most vicious and heartless criminal who had ever invaded his district.

Close at her heels he followed. Half a block ahead a fat-jowled old fellow whose youthful and conspicuous clothes and jaunty air gave him a grotesque appearance was moving very slowly toward them. Wilson recognized him at once as a bookkeeper for one of the wealthiest diamond-importing firms in the street.

Ten feet away from this fantastic figure the woman stopped. The ogling eyes of the bookkeeper had already discovered her. The slow smile that stole into her face softened for a moment the bitterness of her mouth and the terrible hardness of her hawklike eyes. By some strange magic she had actually become prepossessing and alluring. It was very apparent that the bookkeeper was impressed.

A handkerchief slipped from her fingers and fluttered conspicuously to the sidewalk. The bookkeeper hastened his steps and stooped to pick it up. To his surprise he discovered that Whispering Wilson was half a second ahead of him in performing this courteous act.

"Another victim, eh, Zelda?" Wilson whispered as he placed the handker-

chief in her outstretched hand. "And here I am, buttin' in just in time to save him."

The woman's eyes flashed fiercely.

"Go along about your business, you red-headed old coot!" she cried.

"That's just what I'm goin' to do, Zelda," retorted Wilson. "And you're comin' along, too. We're goin' up to police headquarters together. They've been wantin' yuh powerful bad up there ever since Liebmann's safe was looted."

The capture of Zelda Vorus led eventually to the release of Blondy Bauer. Blondy was an important witness at the woman's trial, and her testimony went far toward producing the jury's verdict of guilty. So a kind-hearted district attorney decided to set the girl at liberty.

And Blondy found life worth living again. She had dreamed of a fortune, and for a few dreary hours she had held a bewildering treasure under her tattered clothes. And now she was going back to poverty—to starvation, perhaps. But she was content. She was free. The worst of her troubles were over. Life lay before her full of a thousand chances. To-morrow she could find the crowd of come-ons around the watch peddler, and she could slip her fingers into the change pocket of some "hick."



POLICE MEMORIAL FOR ROOSEVELT

THE room in old police headquarters at No. 300 Mulberry Street, New York City, where Theodore Roosevelt had his office as president of the police board, has been dedicated as a memorial museum by Commissioner Enright. The refurnishing and rehabilitation of the room was paid for by contributions from members of the department. Four silk standards donated by the captains', lieutenants', sergeants', and patrolmen's associations decorate the corners of the room. An oil portrait of the late president hangs at one end of the room and a bronze plaque at the other. Commenting on Roosevelt's record as a police official, Commissioner Enright pointed out that he had gained a one-third increase in the city's police force of three thousand men, that he had instituted a civil-service system which is still in effect, and that he had started the fight against gambling and organized vice which his successors are still carrying on.

In an Open Boat

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Just One Big Job," etc.

FOR want of an accomplice, the thing had hung quietly, suspended like an evil sword, for more than six months—a mere idea in the mind of Hugh Tenfare. Tenfare was astounded when he reflected on the swift passage of time. It seemed only a month or so ago that the idea had first come, that day he sat fishing in an open boat a mile off Spirehaven. But it had certainly been six months and longer. He hadn't fished at Spirehaven since October, and it was early in May now. He'd be going out there again soon, to put in the long summer days with the Robinsons, and, when the guests became too numerous, to go off in his boat, fishing. He thought he'd go out early in June. The Robinsons had asked him again this year—and he felt that that was one home in which he was really welcome.

There were few houses, in the set into which fate had thrown him, where this was true. Oh, they never said so—but Tenfare knew. He knew, and he hated them all—excepting the Robinsons. They been decent. He felt at first that they pitied him, and he resented that; but he'd changed his mind. They were so decent about it, the elderly, childless Robinsons—and seemed really interested in young Hugh Tenfare, with his sad past. He never thought of himself as an ex-convict when alone with the Robinsons, but somehow, when the guests began to crowd in—the Robinsons liked lots of people around—he felt his position as keenly as though he were still clad in the gray uniform

of prison. He thought that every conversation he couldn't hear was about himself. If only he could come into his fortune, and get away!

But what use to think of that? Old Ellery Whitcomb might hang on a year, two years, five years. None could tell about that old bird. He's been dying for ten years, and he wasn't dead yet. He sat in his wheel chair and hung onto life. He certainly had grit—and why? Why did he hang on to a life that meant nothing but suffering to him? The mind of Hugh Tenfare had asked this question so often and bitterly that he had come to hate even his foster father, old Ellery Whitcomb—to hate him as deeply as though the old man really kept on living merely to keep Tenfare out of the money he had willed to him. The mind of a man like Tenfare is even stranger than his heart.

A man can't think of murder long without doing something toward its accomplishment. At least he can't help noticing a turn of events that seems to make the thing easier. Such a turn had taken place that very morning. It seemed best that old Ellery Whitcomb be put out of the way by violence. Poison would turn suspicion on some member of the household, and there were numerous persons ready, eager even, to point accusing fingers at Hugh Tenfare. Violence—that was the thing, with robbery of some sort as a motive; murder by an outsider, at a time when Tenfare himself was away. Tenfare now had the outsider, one who was apparently equipped with a motive.

That man was none other than Stephen Robinson, the man who had treated Tenfare so hospitably; in whose home he so often had been a guest. Well, there was no stopping Tenfare now, and, utterly incapable of affection and gratitude, he settled upon his elderly friend as the "fall guy" as readily as he might have settled upon a stranger.

Tenfare, overhearing a conversation, knew that Stephen Robinson owed Ellery Whitcomb fifty thousand dollars on his personal note. It had been a transaction between Whitcomb and Robinson with no witnesses. Now, Robinson's motive, of course, would be to get the note. Tenfare would secure that and tear it up, but among Ellery Whitcomb's papers he would leave the canceled check for fifty thousand dollars which had been given to Robinson. It would thus seem that Robinson had overlooked that until too late, and then, remembering it, would hasten to tell of the loan before it could be used against him. If there were added to this a situation in which the murder would be discovered after a visit by Stephen Robinson, the case against the "fall guy" seemed complete. It would all come out too that the Robinsons were in financial difficulties due to bad investments recently, but that they had gone on entertaining as lavishly as ever. A strong circumstantial case against Stephen Robinson.

All this Tenfare had learned that morning by listening in on a conversation between the two old men in the Whitcomb home, where Tenfare lived with his foster father. After Robinson had gone, Tenfare had found both the note and the canceled check. He would destroy the former after the murder and leave the latter where it was sure to be found.

It is true that Tenfare had tried to think of some scheme by which he could lay the crime onto a stranger or some unknown burglar, but he couldn't

make things agree that way. It was necessary to do the job in daylight—and it was hard to make plain burglary fit in with that. And it was so improbable that a burglar would find it necessary to commit murder in this instance. The old man couldn't get out of his chair and he certainly couldn't interfere. All the burglar need do would be to stuff a handkerchief into his mouth and set the desk telephone out of reach. No, there must be a clear motive for silencing the tongue of the old man forever. Stephen Robinson and Hugh Tenfare were the two men most liable to be suspected of having such a motive, so Robinson must be the "fall guy."

Still, the plot might have rested there, had not fate, seemingly, taken a hand. Tenfare was sauntering through Central Park. It was nearly noon, and the sun had emerged brightly from the clouds of a brisk shower. Moisture glistened on the lawns and trees. A beggar whined in Tenfare's ear:

"Say, mister, c'n yuh stake a guy to a feed? I'm——"

There was something oddly familiar in the voice. Tenfare wheeled.

"Sowers," he said; "'Chalky' Sowers."

Chalky Sowers stared too, and rejoined:

"Well, if it ain't—I fergot yer name, pal, but I ain't fergot where I seen you. 'S what I call luck! An' me starvin' too!"

Tenfare looked the man over carefully. He was a disreputable object, but already half an idea had formed in the quick brain of the other man. Chalky could be made to fit in. He was about Tenfare's height, tall, though he slouched too much. But he'd do. He had black hair, like Tenfare's. Dress him in a white-linen shirt and white-duck trousers——

Tenfare had mechanically produced a five-dollar bill.

"I'd like to have a talk with you," he said.

"Say, bo, talk to me ag'in like that, will you?" said Chalky, seizing the proffered bill.

"I mean I'd like to meet you some place—to-night, after dark. I think you'll be able to do something for me. I'll pay you well."

"Name the place."

"Well, right here in the park, say—along this walk." He had an afterthought. "Now don't drink anything. That would spoil everything. After the job's done—well, you can go to Paris for your drinks."

Chalky Sowers winked broadly. He was a wise guy, and he thought he understood. They parted after a few more words, settling the time and exact point of meeting.

And now the thing dominated Hugh Tenfare. All that day he turned it over in his mind, brushing up on his alibi, filling in here, patching up there. It was more than an idea now. It was a plot, on its relentless way to conclusion.

In a darkened room in a house overlooking Central Park an old man sat in a wheel chair, little knowing that his sufferings were approaching the end—that so casual a thing as a beggar's appeal had finally and completely sealed his doom.

Hugh Tenfare met Chalky Sowers that night. Chalky had remained sober. Tenfare had recalled much about him during the day. They had had a casual acquaintance in the prison where Tenfare had served a year after an escapade in forgery. They hadn't belonged to the same lot, for Tenfare wasn't a professional crook and Chalky was. Chalky couldn't have been out very long, as Tenfare recalled his case—not long enough to make a haul and get on his feet. Well, here was Chalky's chance. Chalky had a reputation of being a close-mouthed crook,

and he certainly appeared like a man ready for anything.

They talked of the prison, studying each other furtively. Tenfare made it plain that he had a job to do, and that he needed help. Twenty-five thousand dollars was the price he offered. He intended to pay big money, and thus keep Chalky's friendship. He'd not be stingy with Chalky. Chalky assumed that it was robbery of some sort.

But little by little, as Tenfare's confidence in him grew, he came to know just what was meant. Murder—

Chalky Sowers hemmed and hawed. It was out of his line, a thing like this, but twenty-five thousand dollars!

It was too much for Chalky Sowers, especially after he learned that he wasn't expected to strike a blow. In fact he wouldn't be there at all. That looked better—and as the plot was unfolded, he grew stronger for it. It was a very clever scheme, tight as a drum, and any way Chalky looked at it, he couldn't see how Tenfare could double cross him. Twenty-five thousand in real dollars—

"And that's all I hafta do, eh?" Chalky asked.

"That's all. Sit in an open boat, and fish."

They came to an agreement.

The invalid, Ellery Whitcomb, was having another set-to with his nephew, who was also named Ellery Whitcomb. As usual, they were arguing about the elder man's foster son, Hugh Tenfare.

"I don't want your money, uncle," the younger man was saying. "You know that. I've sworn I won't touch a penny of it—and I mean it. I'm rich in my own name, richer than you are—and getting richer every day. But your money, all of it, shouldn't go to Hugh Tenfare. I tell you, uncle, it will complete his ruin. It's a terrible thing to put so much money into the hands of the bootleggers and gamblers—and

they'll get it as fast as Hugh can hand it over."

"Hugh isn't drinking now," the old man insisted; "hasn't drunk for a couple of months. Only to-day he told me he intended to spend the summer with the Robinsons—and he hardly ever drinks down there, and you know it."

"He isn't drinking now, simply because you've cut down his allowance. He hasn't money enough to drink on. Oh, I could——"

But young Ellery checked himself. He wasn't ready yet to tell all he knew about Hugh Tenfare. He'd have to do it probably, sooner or later—but he couldn't bring himself to it yet. Living the cloistered life of a hopeless invalid, old Ellery Whitcomb hadn't the faintest idea of just what a renegade his foster son was—and, because his heart was wrapped up in that young man, many things had been kept from him. The invalid knew nothing about the year Hugh Tenfare had spent in prison.

It was a strange story—and a gripping story—this old man's devotion to a principle, and an old memory. He and Hugh Tenfare's father had been business partners in the days when they were far from prosperous. The elder Tenfare had died, leaving Hugh an orphan. It was said that Hugh's mother and Ellery Whitcomb had once been sweethearts, but that Hugh's father had won her away. At any rate, Ellery Whitcomb had never married, and certainly he had treated the woman's son as he would treat a son of his own. Much about Hugh had been kept away from Ellery Whitcomb, after illness laid him low, for fear of the shock; and when the forgery escapade turned up, none could bear to go to the old man with the story. Living the life of an invalid, he talked only with friends, and therefore gossip did not reach his ears. He had never learned the truth, but young Ellery

Whitcomb had made up his mind that he'd be told, if he couldn't be induced to alter his will in any other way.

Ellery Whitcomb had made the business what it was. In fact, he had paid with his own money debts left by Hugh Tenfare's father. Hugh had no claim on an interest in the business as an inheritance from his father. His only claim was the affection he had aroused as a small boy in the heart of the old bachelor—an affection which endured. Ellery Whitcomb insisted that Hugh was merely wild—that he would straighten up in time. But others held less optimistic views.

He was the type of man who would win a certain number of friends by sheer bravado. When he wasn't off on a drinking and gambling rampage, he lived a lonely, melancholy life. He was a good-looking chap, despite his cold, sinister expression. Strange to say, his imprisonment had surrounded him with a certain glamour and romance for some, as misfortune will. There were those who thought perhaps his enemies were too hard on him, and, had he been of the right sort, he could have taken his place socially, despite the past. The world is quicker to forgive than he imagined, if a man sets out to do the right thing. But he had no intention of doing the right thing. He clung to his foster father now for one purpose only—the fortune; and he meant to hasten its acquisition.

"Just think how much real good your fortune could do, uncle," young Ellery Whitcomb had continued. "Think of the poor families it would feed—of the struggling young men it would educate. Why not do something like that? A man who has acquired a fortune owes something to the world. His money shouldn't be used where it will do harm, and it will certainly do harm if left to Hugh Tenfare. Give Hugh a start in business, and let him win his own way. That's all he's entitled to, if he's

entitled to that even. But just to hand him half a million dollars— Why, he'll squander it. I hate to see Whitcomb money, the money you worked hard for, go to the bootleggers and gamblers. I'd like to see it go to charity."

Ellery Whitcomb had heard this talk before. He listened to it, however, because he understood that his nephew was sincere, that he was not trying to get the money for himself. But, not knowing Hugh Tenfare as the culprit he was, he clung to his determination. He thought he was doing a fine thing, and he was a stubborn old man.

The nephew did not succeed this time.

Hugh Tenfare, watching the signs and portents as the days slipped by, sensed the fact that young Ellery Whitcomb was working against him as he'd never worked before. He was determined to snatch the fortune away from him, by inducing his foster father to change his will. Young Ellery would tell all very soon now—all his escapades, and the old man would come to know him for what he was. And then he'd change the will—cut him off with a few measly dollars.

Half a million was at stake. It was time to strike.

He'd been working on Chalky Sowers for two weeks and more. He had Chalky planted in a small hotel, and he'd been drilling him in the details of the plot. He had grown certain of him. Despite the fact that he was plentifully supplied with money, Chalky did not drink. Hugh kept close watch of him, and learned that he was not addicted to drugs. Chalky was a nervous individual, but he wouldn't spoil things by getting drunk or plugging himself with dope. Hugh watched these nervous outbreaks. They were mild, flutterings of the hands and twitching of the face, pacing back and forth—but they were not dangerous. Hugh came to know

that this was the first murder plot in which this crook had ever engaged.

Chalky certainly couldn't be trusted to do murder himself. He wasn't the killing kind, that was plain—but he'd do well enough for this. He was forcing himself through it because the reward was large, and he'd stick.

Hugh Tenfare watched for things to shape themselves. It is not difficult to "time" such a crime as this. The life of a man who spends all his time in bed or in a wheel chair is a life of invariable routine. It was only necessary for other things to fit themselves in—and this presently happened.

Tenfare told Chalky Sowers that the next day was the time.

Hugh Tenfare arrived at the Robinson home at Spirehaven about nine o'clock in the morning. He came down from the city in his roadster, and brought a steamer trunk and a traveling bag. They were glad to see him, the Robinsons and their seven or eight guests.

"I'm anxious to fish again," he said to Mrs. Robinson. "I think I'll go out this morning."

"On your very first day here! But I know you like it, and I want you to do what you like. Only I wish you wouldn't stay out there so long, hour after hour, as you did last summer—and the summer before, too. We'd like to see more of you at the house here."

"I like it out there," he said simply; "alone, on the water."

She thought she understood him this time, as she'd understood him before. It was his way of escape, to go off fishing in an open boat, way out, visible from the house but out of earshot. He certainly was a solitary and melancholy young man. Well, let him enjoy himself in his own way.

"Yes," he pursued. "I'll go out this morning, if you don't mind. When I

was down last week, I looked the boat and tackle over around in the cove. Things are just as I left them. I really want to go."

"If you're determined," Mrs. Robinson agreed, "I'll have a lunch put up for you."

"Thank

He mingled with the guests until the lunch was ready. Then he set out. He proceeded exactly as he had proceeded countless times, during the last two years.

He drove away from the house in his roadster, along the shore road toward the Pines, a thick grove half a mile off at the base of a point of land. This point and another formed a cove. On the shore of this cove, above high tide, was an old fisherman's hut which Hugh had fitted up for himself. The week previously he had drawn his boat out of its winter shelter. It was in readiness on the beach. On account of the thick trees he could not drive to the hut, but he did get the car deeply into the grove. There Chalky Sowers was waiting—nervous but determined.

They knew exactly what they had to do, and they pitched in.

The top of the roadster was put up. The glass guards on the windshield were removed. As Hugh Tenfare had driven this car always with the top down, using it only in good weather, its appearance underwent a striking change, as cars do change when the top is put up or down. It was a car of standard make—and there were thousands of them in use. But they went further. They changed the license plates, and they spattered the car with mud. A few minutes in the wind and sun, and the mud would dry to a yellowish hue. The roadster was effectively disguised. Tenfare looked around. Chalky had done as he was told. He had placed four buckets of water in the grove, for a quick washing of the car on its return.

It was now a few minutes after ten. Chalky was clad in white shirt and trousers and the hat which Tenfare wore out in the boat. When Chalky rowed from behind the point and came into view from the house at Spirehaven, every one at Spirehaven—knowing Tenfare's habits and most of them having seen him at this before—would swear that the lone fisherman in the boat, rowing out, was Hugh Tenfare. And they would see the man in the boat, whenever they looked out that way, all through the day—the white-clad figure who sat there silently and fished, and thought. They'd talk about Tenfare too, and remark upon his melancholy and his penchant for solitude. It was nothing new, and the alibi would be sound and tight.

From Chalky Sowers' standpoint, that was an easy way to drag down twenty-five thousand dollars. He had merely to sit all day and fish—and it had turned out that he knew something about salt-water fishing and the management of a rowboat. He'd fish, just as Tenfare had fished countless times, and, along in the afternoon, he'd keep watch of the point. When Tenfare returned and signaled him, Chalky would row to the point and out of sight from Spirehaven. Tenfare would change into his fisherman's togs. They'd tie the boat up. They'd proceed to the grove, wash the car, and restore it to its accustomed character. Chalky Sowers would circle around, clad in other clothes now, to a road along which he could catch a bus. He'd return to the city. Tenfare, dressed as a fisherman and carrying in the roadster whatever fish Chalky had caught, would return to Spirehaven.

They'd ask him questions about his luck, there would be the usual jokes and conversation. But when the body of old Ellery Whitcomb was found murdered, who was there at Spirehaven that wouldn't swear that Hugh Tenfare

had spent the day in an open boat? None. They'd seen him all day long, at close intervals, sitting out there fishing, alone and innocent.

Tenfare saw Chalky Sowers on his way in the boat, headed in the right direction. Then Tenfare returned to the grove and climbed into his car.

His route had already been chosen and gone over, and it was a route which reduced to a minimum his chances of encountering any one who knew him. Of course, he had this chance to run—if any one did see him and recognize him, and he'd be watchful for this, he'd have to give the thing up for that day. He'd have to wait, and to alter this phase of his plans. He'd have to crawl out of it some way. He would commit the murder only if things went favorably on the trip into town. If they went wrong on the way back—well, that was a chance that made him shiver.

He drove over the roundabout route, mile after mile, seeing not a soul he knew in the other cars along the road. He watched ahead, and in his driving mirror he watched behind. He got safely off the open roads and into the thick traffic of the city—and his confidence grew with every turn of the wheels.

He parked the car several blocks from the Whitcomb home. Ah, he had timed things splendidly. After the luncheon guest, Stephen Robinson, had departed, Ellery Whitcomb would be alone in the house except for the aged housekeeper who, unless summoned by the invalid, would be in her room on the top floor at the rear. The butler and the invalid's nurse, man and wife, would have the afternoon off. Ellery Whitcomb would be wheeled into the library from lunch, and Stephen Robinson would follow. The servants would depart. Stephen Robinson would spend some time, an hour perhaps, with his old friend, and then he too would depart.

Things had shaped up nicely. Stephen Robinson, an old business friend of Ellery Whitcomb, went twice a week to have lunch with him. It was a pleasure, for the mind of Ellery Whitcomb was bright, and it was a service too to the lonely invalid. Tenfare had merely waited until one of these luncheon engagements fell on the servants' afternoon out, and he knew what would take place.

The victim would be alone. He was last known to be alive in the company of Stephen Robinson, who owed him fifty thousand dollars on a note which couldn't be found. That's how the talk would run.

Things went smoothly. Hugh Tenfare saw the nurse and the butler leave. He saw Stephen Robinson leave, presumably to return to Spirehaven. Now, if only the housekeeper was upstairs, at the rear, the coast was clear. Tenfare moved swiftly. The houses thereabouts, every one of them, were closed for the summer, with windows boarded. Tenfare let himself in quietly. He reconnoitered with catlike tread. He had lived most of his life in this house and he knew what he was about. The housekeeper was nowhere around. She would make her presence known if she saw him. She was in her upstairs room, resting there, ever in readiness for an appealing summons from the invalid.

Tenfare crept into the library. The old man sat in his wheel chair, in his accustomed place, back to the door. His assailant slid forward, and did his horrible task with his bare hands. There was no outcry.

Tenfare then opened the small wall-safe. He took out Stephen Robinson's note, and he saw that the canceled check was where it would be found in a search of the dead man's papers. He tore the note into bits, and thrust the bits into his side-coat pocket. He'd scatter them along the road.

He let himself out of the house and returned to his car. Then he drove out of the city, toward Spirehaven, using again the roundabout way. Things had gone nicely—and half a million dollars was within his grasp.

Tenfare got safely into the grove at the edge of the Robinson property, and there he discovered that something was amiss. The Robinsons and their guests were on the point, talking excitedly and looking about. Tenfare's eyes searched the sea. The open boat was not in sight. And then Tenfare caught sight of it, drawn up on the beach, but Chalky Sowers had disappeared. Tenfare tried to retreat, but they had seen him in the grove. They ran toward him, waving and shouting happily.

"Strange—strange thing," said Stephen Robinson breathlessly. "Got back from town—had lunch with your uncle, you know—and found everything astir here. Folks were having lunch about one o'clock on the veranda, and watching you out there fishing—they thought it was you, at least. Suddenly they realized that you were drifting in—the other chap, I mean—running toward that reef with the tide. That's funny, they said, as well as you know things out there—and they couldn't believe it. They got to watching the boat—and then that fellow suddenly saw that he was drifting—he'd been facing out to

sea, and hadn't noticed it. He was in a panic, old man. They said they never saw a fellow act so flustered. Dropped his fishing and began to row for all there was in him, but the folks had seen he wasn't you. It was a stir—and some of the boys went out in our boat and fetched him in. We thought he'd done you up, old man—— They turned him over to a State policeman who happened along the shore road, and he's being held somewhere now. But it's great to see you alive and unharmed, Hugh! I must say you do look sick—— Here, boys, take hold of him. He's going to faint."

But Tenfare drew away.

He saw some of the guests sizing up the mud-spattered roadster, and imagined that their whispers had to do with its altered appearance. And they'd discover presently that he'd changed the license plates, too. Oh, it was all up with him. As soon as the body was found——

He started to run for it, but the men intercepted him. He'd either gone crazy or—well, he was a man who should be held until things were explained. The alibi had collapsed. His motive and his crime stood naked. Everything would be plain when the body was found.

A state policeman was walking toward Tenfare, through the grove.



BAD CHECK AS CHURCH CONTRIBUTION

WHEN Mrs. Hazel S. Drew of Brooklyn, New York, attended services at the Christian Science Church recently, she told the usher who passed the contribution plate that she had only one dollar in currency with her, but that if she could get a check cashed, she would make a larger donation. The usher obligingly cashed her check for one hundred dollars, whereupon, she gave ten dollars to the collection. Later, however, the check was returned by the bank unpaid for lack of funds. When Mrs. Drew was arraigned in court on charges of passing worthless checks, it was stated that she had cashed other checks for which there were no funds in the bank. The charge on which she was prosecuted was of issuing a worthless check for sixty-five dollars to Joseph Zambito.

The Clew in the Book

& Ernest M. Poate

Author of "Hung on Wire," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

WE READ BETWEEN THE LINES.

BUT we failed to find Squire Paramore. He was not in his office; he was not at his house. He was away; his housekeeper had no idea when he would return. Orpheus Dallings nodded to me, and turned back toward home.

As we traveled together, I had told him a little of what I guessed, as much as I dared. I was curious to learn how it had affected him. "What are your plans?" I asked.

He turned an impassive face toward me. "I aim for to get an explanation," he declared. "Squire's away f'om home. Good; I reckon I'll go away, too. Soon's I see Mary Lou, an' fix up 'bout the still an' all, I'm aimin' to go travelin' until I meet up with Squire. Yes, sir!"

There was nothing dramatic in the manner of this announcement. His tone was unemotional, matter-of-fact. Yet I shuddered a little. This lean, stooped, wiry, hard-bitten mountaineer would be a stern Nemesis. I was thankful that he was not upon my trail. And I made sure that from this moment he would follow Henry Clay Paramore, and follow him, wherever he went, until he got the "explanation" he desired. And the manner of that explanation would not be pleasing to Paramore!

We parted, and I went back to Raleigh. It was on the way that I first

made certain of being followed. Hitherto, as I have said, I had had reminders—a rifle-bullet or so, an "unmanageable" flivver; but now, I began to have a constant sense of espionage.

I cannot describe the sensation to those who have never been followed. It is a strange and uncomfortable thing, always to feel that unseen eyes are upon one; that wherever one goes, whatever one does, there is a stealthy step at one's heels. I am not an imaginative man, yet it almost wrecked my nerves that I could not turn without finding a strange man at my elbow; that I could not step from a car to a station platform but another man stepped off also; that whenever I went from coach to smoker, another passenger rose and followed. I soon came to recognize my shadows; there were three of them, all shabby and inconspicuous, all with hard, reckless faces. I learned how the muscles of one's back can crawl and cringe when one constantly expects the impact of an assassin's bullet; how, at a following step in the dark, cold pangs can shoot between one's ribs as though the expected knife was already seeking one's heart. Henry Clay Paramore was nowhere to be seen, yet I was convinced that he was close by. There was one drawing-room coach on the train from Asheville, and my shadows visited it several times, singly. Perhaps he was there.

And thus I returned to Raleigh, with

my nerves pretty badly shaken, and went straight to the jail—rather, to the sheriff's house—to visit Althea. The grand jury had met; the case against Althea Cameron had been presented, and they had found probable cause. Althea was indicted for murder.

Though I had expected this, the news shocked me. Weary as I was, after so much traveling, and discouraged with my meager findings, this last blow almost unmanned me. I was ready to weep with grief and rage and fear; and it was Althea who must comfort me and cheer me, when I ought to have been cheering her.

But after a time I regained my self-control, and began to tell her everything that had happened. Perhaps between us, we might clear up what to me alone had been a hopeless muddle of unrelated facts.

And it was so. Merely to arrange my discoveries into an orderly narrative clarified them wonderfully. First, Joseph Dalynge's life was accounted for, up to the age of thirty. A blank of twenty years or so followed, and we knew all about the last forty years of his life.

In 1858 he had disappeared, a ruined and disappointed man, bitter against the law. During the next year, he had been in Memphis, on the Mississippi River. Then we lost track of him; but then the bandit, Cold-water Joe, put in his appearance—a little, soft-spoken man, sheeplike in looks, with a bleating voice; an aristocrat, who drank only water, as had been Joseph Dalynge's habit. Incredible though it seemed, yet Joseph Dalynge had surely been the outlaw, Cold-water Joe. Else, why had he so carefully hidden that clipping?

"It all fits in," I told Althea excitedly. "It explains everything; what became of Dalynge when he left home, how he lived in Raleigh, where his money came from. Don't you see? This bandit saved his loot; it was never recovered,

and he certainly didn't gamble it away or anything like that. I tell you, he buried it! And when Dalynge left Raleigh, every few months, he went to his cache, wherever it was, and took out cash enough to last him until the next trip. That's why he had no securities, no tangible estate outside his house." My heart began to throb, and my face burned with that fever of excitement which the thought of buried treasure can awake in the sedatest mind.

"More than that," said Althea, and her eyes, too, were very bright, "it explains about the little book—why Paramore wants it, why Mr. Dalynge wouldn't sell it, why——"

"Wait till I tell you the rest," I interrupted, and forthwith finished my story. Althea listened closely while I told of my visit to Orpheus Dallings and of the two letters from his great-uncle.

"Did you bring the letters?" she asked.

"Here they are. But, of course, the first one won't do us any good. It's a fake, you see; Paramore stole the original. There's nothing in this thing to help out."

Althea read it very carefully. "I'm not so sure. He hadn't time to make up an entirely new letter; and he probably thought it didn't make much difference, either, since Mr. Dallings can't read. Look: The old gentleman begs his nephew to learn to read. He says, 'Some friend must read you even this letter,' so, of course, he had to be careful what he said. Then he says he is leaving Mr. Dallings all his books. Now, we know he sold all the books but one—and not so very long after writing that. Well, then! Only one book was important—and that was the one he kept. And that was '*Toujours Au Fait*.' See? He says, too, he's going to provide him with the means of self-improvement; and again, 'If you follow my advice, you will profit amazingly.' Why, it couldn't be plainer! Knowing what we know—

that somebody was willing to do murder for that book—why, it's perfectly plain that Mr. Dalynge really said, in his letter, that the secret of his money was in '*Toujours Au Fait*.'

It was amazing, how fast the puzzle was being cleared up. My respect for Professor Jenks and his method rose rapidly. "Of course!" said I. "And in his second letter, the old man made it plainer yet."

Althea nodded. "It was like this," said she wisely. "Mr. Dalynge was very cautious. He knew that somebody besides his nephew would read that first letter, so he probably wrote something like this: 'I have a lot of money hidden away, and when I die you will receive a little book, '*Toujours Au Fait*,' in which I have written directions for finding it.' It wasn't quite as plain as that, maybe; but it was enough so Mr. Paramore understood right away that the book was very valuable. He decided to cheat poor Mr. Dallings; and so he made that excuse, and slipped out and wrote a fake letter which didn't mention the book. And then he planned to go to Raleigh and steal the book. And he did go to Raleigh—and murdered poor old Mr. Dalynge!"

"It's as simple as A B C." said I excitedly. "We can——" Then my face fell. "But—we've gone through that old book, and through it. There's not a word written in it—not one hint of any secret."

"There *must* be!" declared Althea vigorously. "There's got to be! Where is the book, now?"

"Back in New York, in a safe-deposit box."

"Then you must go to New York, just as fast as you can, and get it and bring it here. We'll study it together, and I just *know* we'll find the secret."

Looking into her bright eyes, I prayed that we might. It seemed incredible that any one could suspect this girl of a brutal murder; that her freedom, and

even her life, could depend upon the discovery of directions for unearthing the buried loot of an old brigand.

"Even if we should find anything," I reminded her, "it would only go to show that Paramore might have had a motive; that he might have wanted to steal the old book, and broke into Dalynge's house for that reason, and that Dalynge surprised him, and was killed. But—Paramore has an alibi."

"It's a false alibi, then! Look at this story he's put that man Tallant up to telling, about Mr. Dalynge and me. If he could get one man to lie for him, he could get others."

"You did go downstairs, though."

"Two hours before Mr. Dalynge was killed. And I don't believe Tallant ever saw even that. I believe, if anybody did see me, it was Paramore himself. He was hiding outside, waiting to get in and steal the book."

"You may be right," I admitted, and told her what Dallings had said about Hank Tallant and his mother, Paramore's housekeeper. "So maybe the old woman lied, and Paramore wasn't at home at all."

Althea drew a deep breath. "Everything's going to come out all right; I know it! I can feel it—— Now, Tom, you hurry and get to New York, and bring that book back as fast as ever you can."

I took my leave, and started away. But as I reached the door, she called me back. "Tom—dear! I've just been thinking—— If they were willing to kill old Mr. Dalynge for that book, you won't be safe a minute while you're carrying it. You mustn't——"

I forced a laugh; though in my heart I was very much afraid. "Nonsense, child! Nobody's going to bother me. How could Paramore guess I was going to get the book?"

Despite my careless words, my heart was cold within me. For days, I had been watched and followed constantly;

I had no doubt that some one would be at my heels all the way to New York. Paramore—for I was sure he paid my watchers—would know at once that I had taken something from a safe-deposit box; Paramore would guess what it was; Paramore would not scruple to cut my throat, if he could do it in safety, and thereby obtain the book.

"Nobody'll bother me," I repeated. "I'll be back in three days, sure!" And I fervently hoped that I might!

"You will be careful, won't you?" she begged. And I promised faithfully. And I was careful. All the way to New York, I could feel eyes upon my back. They seemed to bore through me with an actual physical pressure. I was mightily uncomfortable.

I did not buy a pistol, largely because I was no expert shot. Moreover, I was not quite sure of my own ruthlessness. I might flinch at the critical moment, and be unwilling to take a life even to save my own. So I did not buy a revolver; instead, I purchased a very neat, nicely balanced billy, or "life preserver," of braided leather thongs. It was well weighted with lead shot; a flexible, serviceable little club, about fourteen inches long, with a loop to slip over one's wrist.

I tucked this into a convenient pocket, and in the privacy of my own rooms practiced at drawing it rapidly. When I had disposed it properly, and was satisfied that I could bring it into play with due speed, I started for the bank, to withdraw "*Toujours Au Fait*," hoping that the police might not arrest me for carrying concealed weapons.

On the steps of the Trust Company's building I stopped, sure that I saw Paramore's sallow, sinister face peering from the window of a cigar shop opposite. Cursing my own cowardice, I turned about and went straight to the offices of a private detective agency.

I felt like a fool; but I employed a bodyguard, none the less. And then I

went back to the bank, with a six-foot uniformed guard at either elbow, and got the little book from the vault. My attendants looked at the faded, dusty thing with scorn, and at me with contempt. None the less, they attended faithfully to the work for which I had hired them. I marched out of the bank like the paymaster for a large concern, and folks stopped to stare, no doubt certain that I must be carrying diamonds, at least.

The officers were to see me to the Pennsylvania Station, and aboard my train. In a cross street two blocks from our destination, a black touring car swerved suddenly in front of our cab. I fancied that I saw a hand thrust from its tonneau, holding something that gleamed.

I flinched from the expected bullet; and as I flinched, a sharp explosion seemed to confirm my fears. I dropped back in my seat with a cry; and was overwhelmed with shame at the scornful laughter of my guards. Nothing but a blow-out, they told me, obviously contemptuous of my fears. I fancy they thought me a lunatic.

Our cab lurched and skidded, then pulled up at the curb. We clambered out, to find both its rear tires burst. The chauffeur cursed manfully as he pulled carpet tacks from all four tires. "Them hind ones was weak," said he, "but they'd never have blown out like that without help. Not by a darn sight!" He swore viciously once more. "Some guy's been getting funny, throwin' tacks all over the road."

It was true. That hand thrust out from the passing car had held, not a pistol, but a few score carpet tacks. Behind us, the roadway was littered with them, and I saw my two guards exchange a significant look. They seemed less scornful of me.

"Ain't anybody liable to hold you up, is they, Mr. Grainger?" one of them began.

Even as he spoke, and his fellow leaned toward me, a big moving van stopped right in front of us. The rear door of its big closed body swung abruptly open, and a wave of roughly dressed men poured out. Before I could breathe, I was the center of a fierce street fight. Strong hands grappled with me, choked me; other hands tore at my pockets, seeking, I knew, for the book.

I had thrust that into the inner pocket of my coat, and had buttoned the coat tightly over it. Some one cursed in a foreign tongue; garlic-scented breath flooded my face; a hard fist glanced from the side of my head, half stunning me. My two guards were ten feet away, each the center of a separate attack, each fighting manfully. I could get no help from them, and my coat was already torn open. Half-choked, dazed and confused by the sudden unexpectedness of this attack, I struggled weakly for a moment. Then I remembered my weapon.

Some one was twisting my left arm cruelly, but my right hand was free for the moment. I snatched at my pocket, and the braided leather handle of my trusty blackjack fitted lovingly into my palm. The loop slipped about my wrist as though of itself. I was armed.

Hampered as I was by the press about me, I had no room for a full swing. I chopped at the nearest head, a blow with little force behind it, as I thought.

An upflung arm blocked my stroke. With a sense of unreality I heard the dull crack of broken bones, saw that arm drop limp and useless.

As I may have said, I am stockily built, with long, muscular arms, though rather short of stature. My blows had strength behind them; I gave them heartily, being full of anger and fear; and as I struck, I rejoiced that I had armed myself thus, and not with a pistol. After all, this blackjack was clearing my path efficiently—and without bloodshed. I had no wish to kill any one—even a hired footpad.

Bewildered by the hurly-burly about me, I lost all track of time. It was not more than three minutes, I suppose, before police whistles were shrilling on all sides. I could hear policemen hurrying toward the fight, rapping the pavement with their night sticks as they ran.

I did not wait for help; I helped myself as best I could. What heads I could see, those heads I hit—and discovered with fierce joy that I need not strike the same head twice. They seemed to vanish, those bobbing heads, each with its ugly, distorted face glaring at me; up-thrown arms dropped, crippled, as I lashed out at them. Blows were rained upon me from all sides, so that my head sang, and blood trickled down into my eyes, but I kept my feet and struck out until my arm was wearied.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the affray was ended. I stood alone, swaying a little on wide-set feet, my brain swimming dizzily. My ears were full of roaring, through which I heard the sound of running feet, and, in the distance, the furious clang of an approaching patrol wagon.

I felt an odd, acrid pride in that, I remember; this had been a battle fierce enough to bring out the police reserves! Perhaps my bodyguards now would reconsider their contempt of me.

Then I realized, with a queer little shock, that the battle was over, and I was victorious. I wiped blood from my eyes, and looked about. One of my guards was coming toward me, the coat torn from his back, the ruins of a uniform cap crushed over his nose. He staggered as he walked, and his right arm hung limp. The other guard sat stupidly in the gutter, with his back to the curb, on his battered face a look of such blank astonishment that I laughed hysterically.

The last of our recent assailants was running wildly westward; I saw him whip about a corner, to plunge into the arms of an approaching policeman. The

others had vanished, scattering in all directions—all but three.

These three lay very quiet upon the pavement. One of them stirred as I looked at him; but the other two were so still, and so white and ghastly, that a sick fear plucked at my heart. Had I killed them? Was this little club of mine, that swung so blithely in my grip, that seemed almost to strike of itself—was it, in truth, a deadly weapon? It seemed impossible that such light taps from this dainty bludgeon could kill!

My bodyguard came up, eyeing me, I fancied, with a new respect. "You—you sure can handle y'rself!" he said admiringly. "Anybody c'n see it ain't the first time you've swung a life preserver!"

He dragged the ruin of his cap from about his ears, and stared at it ruefully. Then he went to the aid of his comrade, as the patrol-wagon squealed to a stop and policemen boiled out of it and crowded around us, full of brusque, official questions.

The other guard rose unsteadily. He was not seriously hurt, it seemed, only stunned. And, indeed, it was a miracle that none of us three sustained any dangerous wound. Our attackers had used neither knives nor pistols; they had anticipated, I suppose, an easy victory through sheer force of numbers, and had planned to snatch the book and drive away before help could arrive.

But we were saved, and Mistress Carteret's rules of etiquette remained buttoned into my inside pocket. After ten minutes of feverish explanation, I was allowed to go on toward the station and my train. I gave the police my name and address, and promised to return to the city when needed. My guards, I explained, could lodge a complaint as well as I; both had been attacked with me, and could identify our assailants.

So they loaded the three fallen thugs into the wagon, and drove off. One was

half conscious and moaning; but the other two were still so quiet that I was frightened.

"They can't be dead, surely?" I asked the police. "They can't be badly hurt. Why, I didn't have a pistol, or a knife, even. All I hit them with was this." And I showed my life preserver.

The officers laughed uproariously at what they took for a jest. "Was *that* all?" And they explained what I had not known: that a slung shot, or life preserver, or sandbag, or any soft club weighted with sand or lead shot or the like, would fracture a man's skull without breaking the skin. But neither of my assailants was dead, I am glad to say.

One or two handled my blackjack, admiring its balance, and approved it as "one grand little man-killer." And then, recalled to official sternness, they demanded to see my permit for carrying concealed weapons.

Luckily, I had one to show, the superintendent of the detective agency which had supplied my guards having seen to that detail—though I had thought it quite needless. But it stood me in good stead now, and I was finally allowed to go on to the station with my battered bodyguard, just in time for my train south.

The attitude of my convoy had changed remarkably. They took leave of me in my section with visible respect, repeating their declaration that "it was easy enough to see I was an old hand with th' blackjack." And after commending me to the care of the trainmen, and warning them that I carried valuables and might be robbed, they lingered, plainly burning up with curiosity, even after the train began to move off.

Finally the taller plucked up his courage. "Beggin' y'r pardon, Mr. Grainger, an' I know it's none of our business, but—wud ye mind leavin' us look at what's in that book ye're carryin'?"

I laughed at their eagerness. Obvi-

ously they expected to see precious stones—diamonds and rubies, who knows what treasure? And when I unbuttoned my coat and drew out that dusty, shabby, dog's-eared old book, and opened it, their crestfallen, amazed faces were ludicrous.

They stared at the book, at me, at each other, and at the book again. They shook solemn heads, and, "Gosh!" said one, slowly. "Sure, an' there's a plenty lunatics loose that'd oughta be in th' booby hatch!" With that both shook hands with me hastily, and dropped off the moving car.

My trip back to Raleigh was uneventful. No one molested me, though I fancied that I recognized the faces of two or three other passengers, and was certain that eager eyes observed my every movement. By this time, I was accustomed to espionage, and some instinct seemed to warn me when unfriendly eyes were upon me. During the night, the sleeping car was unusually noisy, I thought. I could hear people moving about, passing back and forth in front of my berth, all night long; and twice I thought a hand plucked at my curtains.

But each time I heard the gruff challenge of a trainman in the aisle, and settled back. Evidently the warning of my bodyguards had been effectual, and the conductor had seen to it that I received protection.

Just at dawn, I woke from a troubled dream to see a lean, hairy hand groping through the curtains of my berth. As it touched my pillow, I caught up my blackjack, and rapped its knuckles sharply.

From the aisle without came a muttered oath, a scurry of footsteps. I thrust my head out at once, but the aisle was vacant. The Pullman porter appeared, yawning, a few seconds later, and I hailed him.

"Did anybody come out of this car just now, porter?"

He showed white teeth in an amiable grin. "Yessuh, cap'n. They sure did, suh. W'ite gen'mun, he come out jus' now, a-cussin' an' a-swearin' somepin ter'ble. Holdin' onto one hand, he were, like as if it was lame. Reckon he musta whacked his knuckles or somepin'. Yassuh!"

Without further incident, my train reached Raleigh, and within thirty minutes thereafter I was at the jail, asking for Althea Cameron.

I showed her the book, and together we went through "*Toujours Au Fait*, a Compendium of the Principles of Etiquette," marveling at the odd practices which seemed to have been in vogue at the "First Courts of Europe;" but we found no hint of any secret message from Joseph Dalynge.

"It's no use," I said, at last. "Either we've imagined all this, or else, if there ever was a message, Dalynge erased it. It's no use."

Althea set her square little chin with adorable obstinacy. "Don't talk nonsense! It *is* here. All we've got to do is find it. Show me those two letters again."

I gave her Mr. Dalynge's letter, and the copy Paramore had made of his first communication to his great-nephew, and she read them through again. Then she looked at me, and asked a question.

"Why did the old gentleman write two letters? It meant two chances that somebody else might learn his secret."

"Perhaps he was afraid Dallings would forget," I offered lamely. Then I had an inspiration.

"Of course!" I cried. "Because he hadn't given all the information in the first one. He was playing safe; either of the letters, if some one stole it, would be useless without the other. I'll bet a dollar," I went on, excitedly, "that this book wouldn't do Paramore any good if we gave it to him! All the first letter told him was that the book held the secret; that it told where old Dalynge's

loot was hidden. The second letter tells how to read the secret."

Althea was puzzled. "But it doesn't tell!" she objected.

I took the letter from her. "Listen! He says to learn, not only to read, but 'to read between the lines!' That's the trick."

"But there's nothing between the lines," said Althea, turning the pages of "*Toujours Au Fait*" rather helplessly.

"Dalynge said to study the marked passages," I reminded her. "There's something between the lines; there are marks between the lines!"

She caught fire from my excitement, and presently we two leaned over the book together, so close that her fine black hair mingled with my own mud-brown locks, and I could feel the delicate warmth of her soft cheek. Together we searched for the marked passages, and began to "read between the lines" the message Joseph Dalynge had left.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW TO FIND BURIED TREASURE.

AS I told you, on my first examination of the "Compact Compendium," I found certain marginal comments, such as: "Good. Excellent. Ponder this!" Moreover, in places words had been underlined rather faintly with pencil. Now, with my new idea to guide me, I noticed that these underlined words were most numerous after the notation: "Ponder this." Moreover, these words were not written in the same hand as the other marginal notes; unless I was greatly mistaken, Joseph Dalynge himself had written them. The precise, angular, spidery writing was his, minus the crabbedness and tremor of old age which had marred his script during these last years.

I chose the first passage marked "Ponder this," and found that the first underlined word thereafter was, to say the least, suggestive. "Without properly

trained servants," Mistress Theodora De Courcy Carteret had written, sapiently, "to entertain with due *éclat* is well-nigh impossible. Indeed, a well-trained servant is a *treasure* not easily come by, and too often much underestimated."

Now, of this pompous pronouncement, four words had been carefully underlined. And they were, "treasure—easily come by!"

"How about that?" I asked Althea, swelling with gratified pride. "Am I, or am I not, a clever young person?"

She gave me a glance that set my blood to running faster, and I thought she settled a little closer against my shoulder. I drew a deep breath, and took pencil and paper to set down what I found.

"Detailed Directions for Formal Dinners," was the caption of the next marked paragraph. "Directions" was underlined. Mistress Carteret introduced into her directions an anecdote illustrating the bad manners of the peasantry. "I well recall," she wrote, "a certain entertainment at the Court of Prince Otto of Waldenburg-Gottesberg-Schnellstein, when a rabble of common folk so crowded into the yard that our carriages were blocked, and the coachman forced to lay about them lustily with their long whips." Here, "Court" was underlined, and "yard" and "coachmen."

But it would be too tedious to review for you every passage in Mistress Carteret's book which we had to read through. After half an hour, we had picked out underlined words and framed them into this message:

"Treasure easily come by. Courtyard—coachmen—house—buried—southeast corner."

That seemed to be all. We turned page after page without discovering more pencil marks; but at last, among a series of anecdotes about the rich and great, we learned that a certain eccentric duke had once scandalized his entire

social circle by attending a grand rout "upon his two feet." The last two words were underlined.

"Well," said I, with a deep breath, "I guess we've got it. There's treasure buried in a courtyard, at the southeast corner of the coachman's house. But whether it's two feet from the corner, or buried two feet deep, or what, I can't imagine."

"I think the old gentleman did awfully well to make his message as plain as he did," Althea said in defense, "when you consider the book he chose. We ought to be able to study out the 'two feet,' once we find the place."

"That part's easy. It must be out behind his house. You remember the row of cabins, don't you? The old slave quarters? All we'll have to do is to go to the Dalynge house, and dig at the corner of the coachman's cabin."

"But if his money was hidden so close," objected Althea, "why did Mr. Dalynge go away every time? He used to take a trip every six months, you told me, and come back after several days with more money."

"So nobody would guess where it was hidden, probably. He was a wise old codger. Look how cautious he was about the treasure, and said the secret of finding it was in the little etiquette book; I'll bet it didn't say a word about how to find the message, once you got the book."

Althea sighed deeply. "After all," said she, "how does this help us? Even if we find any treasure—and Mr. Dalynge may have spent all of it, in forty years—why, I'm still in jail, and we aren't one step nearer to finding who murdered that poor old gentleman."

"Oh, yes, we are!" I told her, confidently. "One thing, we've found a motive. We can prove, now, that '*Toujours Au Fait*' was valuable; that an unscrupulous man, knowing its secret, might have been willing to rob Dalynge's house, and even to kill the old man, just

to get hold of it. Beside—the book's no good to us, now; nor to Orpheus Dalynge. We know its secret."

Althea eyed me questioningly. "What then?"

"I don't believe it'll be any good to Paramore, either," I went on. "Not without the key. He could study it as long as I did, without finding out where to hunt for buried treasure."

Still she eyed me with that troubled expression. I came out plainly with my plan.

"Perjured testimony put you in jail; perjured testimony indicted you. We're convinced that Paramore set this fellow Tallant up to it; didn't he send me a note, offering to clear you if I'd give him this book?"

Althea nodded uncertainly. I went on: "Well, then! I'll give him the book! Tell him we've decided to accept his terms, and that we'll turn the book over to him as soon as you're out of jail! And then, while he's puzzling his head trying to find the secret, you and I can slip out to Dalynge's house and dig up the money and leave Paramore flat!"

"But——" she objected. "But, Tom! It wouldn't be fair. It wouldn't be right. It's no better than cheating. We can't act like that, just because he's been dishonest."

I thought it a bit overscrupulous; yet I could not but admire such pellucid honesty of thought. "We're not cheating him," I argued. "The message is there, if he can find it. He'll be as well off as if we'd given him the book when he first wanted it. Beside——"

But there I checked myself. It was in my mind that, as soon as Mr. Paramore obtained the etiquette book, he would call off his watchers. It would no longer be necessary, in his opinion, to dog my footsteps—and I could abstract the treasure safely. While Paramore's men clung to my heels, I would have no chance to dig up the loot. Sud-

denly I realized that the man's motive in having me watched so closely was double: to capture the book, and, in case I discovered its secret, to rob me of the treasure as soon as I should find it. But I did not wish to frighten Althea by telling her of my experiences.

"It would serve him right, anyhow," I went on. "And the first, and most important thing, is to get you out of here. Afterward, I've got a plan for hooking Mr. Henry Clay Paramore."

Althea yielded with some reluctance. "It seems so sordid," she objected. "I haven't done anything to be ashamed of; I ought to be cleared—vindicated! It's a terrible thing"—and her eyes filled with tears—"to be locked up in jail, charged with murder. And to think of getting out, not because I'm innocent, but because of a bargain with a—a creature like that Paramore man! I—it makes me sick!"

All of which was perfectly true; yet, as I had said, the important thing was to get her out of jail, by whatever means. Later, I assured her, she should be vindicated fully, and the actual murderer punished—though I was rather hazy in my own mind as to how this could be managed.

But I started out, determined to strike up a bargain with Paramore: the book, "*Toujours Au Fait*" in exchange for Althea's freedom. And, as luck would have it, I ran into the man himself, on Fayetteville Street.

He was striding along toward the capitol, head down, black slouch hat pulled low over his eyes, the full skirts of his double-breasted frock coat flapping in the breeze. I noticed with a thrill of pleasure that his left hand was bandaged. It had been Paramore himself, then, whose hairy hand had groped into my Pullman berth; whose knuckles I had rapped so smartly. I grinned broadly as I hailed him.

The man stopped short, his sallow, hawk's face rather pale, and gave me

an ugly look, between menace and fear. Perhaps he expected me to attack him: or to demand his arrest.

"Paramore," I began bluntly, "I've decided to accept your terms. As soon as Miss Cameron is cleared, I'll give you that book."

He eyed me suspiciously, obviously puzzled by my offer. "What makes you think I want it?"

"You offered a thousand dollars for it," I reminded him. "I supposed it must be worth something; but I've had half a dozen experts on old books look it over, and they all say it's worthless."

Paramore scowled, to hide a sneering grin. Plainly, he thought I had failed to discover the book's secret. "You've taken the note out of it, I suppose?"

I looked as blank as I could. "Note? There wasn't any note in it. Not a scratch of the pen, except a few marginal comments, like 'Excellent' and 'How true,' and some scribbling I couldn't understand. What do you want of it, anyhow?"

I bore his keen scrutiny as stoically as I could. At last he nodded, apparently satisfied that I had been baffled, and did not dream of the real value of "*Toujours Au Fait*." "I offered you a thousand—or Miss Cameron, rather—in New York," he pointed out. "But that was more than a month ago."

"I'll give it to you," said I shrugging. "I don't want any money. Only see that she's turned loose."

"How can I do that? You must be crazy."

"Keep up the game, if you want to," said I, sneering. "Play innocent. But you know, and I know, who had Miss Cameron arrested, and who arranged the perjured testimony that caused her indictment!"

We had been walking on, side by side. Now we stood in the capitol grounds, near the captured cannon that points down Fayetteville Street. Mr. Paramore glanced cautiously about; we were

alone, in the open, out of earshot of any one. It was an ideal place for the exchange of secrets; though we stood in such a public place, we were isolated securely from all possible listeners, and none could approach without being seen.

Paramore's expression changed abruptly. He leered with cynical boldness; his conscienceless soul seemed to peep from his black eyes. "My word's as good as yours," he declared. "Yes, then! I put Althea Cameron into jail, and I can easily get her out—if I choose!"

"Well, get her out, then. That is, if you still want that book."

"Where is it?"

"At the sheriff's office, in his safe. You know it; you tried hard enough to keep me from bringing it down!" I could not resist a glance at his bandaged hand.

His eyes followed my glance, and he scowled bitterly. "I owe you one for that, young fellow! And I'll pay in full—some day. Well, get the book and give it to me, and I'll see what I can do."

"Not at all! I wouldn't trust you one inch, not with both eyes on you, Paramore. When Miss Cameron is free, you can have it."

But Paramore shook his head and set his lips stubbornly. "You're trying to crook me," he declared. "I can feel it. You'll find it isn't healthy, if you play any games on me."

The sinister glance which accompanied that threat rather daunted me, I must admit. Yet I answered him boldly enough. "Before we're through with this affair, you're going to get paid off for the games you've played already! As for the book—you'll have to trust me."

But he would not; and for a moment I feared we had come to an impasse. I dared not trust him. Then I had an idea.

"How about Hutchinson?" I said

naming the bank president. "Is he honest?"

Paramore nodded. "His word is good."

"I'll turn the book over to him at once, and tell him to give it to the person who first asks for it, by name, after Miss Cameron is discharged."

He pondered that a while, and I could see that he didn't like it. But at last he nodded and said, "Good enough. I'll meet you at the bank."

I brought "*Toujours Au Fait*" from the sheriff's office to the bank; it was but a step, and on a public street in broad daylight, so that I did not much fear attack. None the less, I moved fast. Paramore stood in the bank's lobby, and presently he and I entered the president's office together. I held the little, musty volume up for him to examine; but I would not let him touch it.

Paramore nodded. "I have just learned of a gross miscarriage of justice, Mr. Hutchinson," he explained; and I waited, wondering how he would manage it. "In short, I am able, fortunately, to establish Miss Cameron's innocence of the crime with which she has been charged—that is, Joseph Dalyngé's murder. Mr. Grainger, here, and I, are about to take the necessary steps to free her. We wish to ask a small favor of you."

He paused, and coughed impressively. "This little book, sir; though it looks sorry enough, is of considerable value from the standpoint of a bibliophile. The owner has been offered a thousand dollars for it, in fact." He turned to me for corroboration; and I nodded. That much was true.

"As it happens, Mr. Joseph Dalyngé, who owned the book, reserved it when he sold his library to Miss Cameron; but by some error it was shipped north with the other volumes. Miss Cameron, discovering this, very honorably notified me, as attorney for Orpheus

Dallings, the heir-at-law. She wishes to deliver the book to me for Mr. Dallings; and to do so in person, in order that no question may be raised, later."

He paused again, and I smothered a grin. A very plausible person, this Paramore. How beautifully simple he made it seem!

"Therefore, Mr. Hutchinson, we will ask you to hold this volume until I return, with Miss Cameron, when she shall have been discharged from custody. She can then formally deliver it to me, in your presence. She wishes this," he finished, "because the unjust charge which brought her back to Raleigh has made her oversensitive, and she desires to be certain that no one can raise any question about the ownership of this valuable book, or her course of action regarding it."

It was plausible enough; a sensitive young girl might well have acted so in the circumstances—if the book had been valuable. But I added a word to clinch matters.

"You understand, Mr. Hutchinson, that the book is in no circumstances to be delivered to Mr. Paramore except by Miss Cameron, after her discharge." I was determined that he should not get his prize without earning it.

Paramore favored me with a black scowl; whether because I had spoiled some deep-laid scheme, or because he feared Hutchinson might be suspicious, I did not know. Then he bowed and went out, and I followed him.

"Now, come across!" I demanded when we reached the street.

Without speaking, he led the way back to the capitol. When we stood by the cannon once more, and he had satisfied himself that no one could hear, Paramore leaned toward me and spoke softly.

"Make Tallant identify the house where he says he really saw all that," he said.

I stared stupidly. "You mean——"

It seemed incredible. "But—he described it so well, and——"

Comprehension came slowly, even in the face of his cool, cynical amusement. And with it came a sort of admiration. The fellow was such an adroit villain: such a complete scoundrel! He always left a loophole; he seemed always to be able to withdraw from an impossible position without losing face. I despaired of ever being able to fix any guilt upon him.

Seeing that I understood, he laughed shortly and strolled away, quite unperturbed. I started straight toward the office of the solicitor. I must get Althea out of jail at once; then we could dig up the treasure together, before Paramore set his watchers upon me again.

One thing troubled me a little. I feared that Orpheus Dallings might suspect me of double-dealing, if we retrieved his great-uncle's loot without first consulting him. But there was no time to get back to High Valley and Little Devil Branch; if we were to collect the treasure without interference from Paramore, it must be done at once. I made certain that, clever though he was, the lawyer could never read the meaning of those faint pencil lines without guidance. After examining the book carefully, he would conclude that I had torn out Dalynge's message—and before that happened, I must have the treasure safe, where he could not rob me of it.

But even while I told myself these things, I ran squarely into the man I wanted. Orpheus Dallings brushed against me, and would have passed on. His hat was pulled low over his forehead; his deep-set eyes were fixed upon the departing figure of Henry Clay Paramore.

I must look twice before I recognized him. Instead of the blue jeans, "hickory" shirt and leather boots he had worn at home, Dallings was clad in a form-

fitting suit of shepherd's plaid, obviously ready-made, and not too well shaped. Below and in front of his left shoulder was an awkward bulge which, as he brushed against me, felt hard and knobby. I made sure he was carrying a pistol in a shoulder holster.

On his head was a gray felt hat of the shape made popular by the Prince of Wales, and beneath its turndown brim Orpheus Dallings' cold gray eyes stared fixedly after Henry Clay Paramore. To meet him thus, so far from home, so greatly changed in dress, so obviously upon Paramore's trail, gave me an odd qualm. I wondered how many miles he had tracked his quarry; how long he had patiently waited, and would wait, to have that "explanation" he sought. I thanked Heaven that Dallings was not following me. Paramore would need all of his adroitness, all his evasive skill, to escape from this Nemesis.

"Does Paramore know you're after him?" I asked, impulsively. It was my first thought.

Dallings glanced at me somberly. Then his eyes returned to the lawyer's flapping coat tails, about to disappear around a corner. He made no attempt to deny his purpose. "Not yet," he answered, grimly. "He's a-goin' to find out, after a while!"

He moved on, not hurriedly, but with quiet swiftness. Obviously he did not intend to lose sight of his victim. I was forced to walk beside him, almost running, while I explained matters briefly.

"Your great-uncle had money," I told him rapidly. "I don't know how much. It's hidden—buried. I'm quite sure of that—and I know where. There was a message in that old book—the one Mr. Dalynge kept for you; the one Paramore murdered him to get. Haven't time to explain it all"—I was panting from the pace he set—"but I hope to dig the treasure up to-night, if I can. Where can you meet us, to go after it?"

Dallings made an impatient gesture. "Nev' mind. You best turn off here. I don't want that Paramore should see us together. You-all go ahead; dig it up. Me, I got other bus'ness. You-all c'n give me a reckonin' later." And thus, brushing the matter aside as of no importance, he moved inexorably on, after his unconscious victim.

Deserted thus, I stood and stared for a moment, then burst into laughter. If Paramore suspected me, surely Dallings trusted me fully! Then I put the whole matter out of my mind, I must engineer Althea Cameron's freedom; together, we must dig up the treasure and put it safely away; and then, I could devote my whole attention to solving the mystery of Dalynge's murder. Althea could be completely vindicated only by the conviction of the old man's real slayer. And I had a plan to that end.

I found the State solicitor in his office. He listened to me courteously, but with obvious disbelief. It was not possible, he protested, that the man Tallant could be mistaken; his story had been too precise. What reason had I for my suspicions?

That I could not tell him. At least, I would not. Until I could offer more proof, I felt that it would do more harm than good to attack Paramore, or to explain the devious conspiracy he had engineered. I could only urge that Tallant be questioned once more.

The solicitor yielded at last. Tallant had been detained as a material witness. His home was outside the State, and the authorities had refused to allow him his liberty until after Althea's trial. So, presently, the prosecutor came with me to the Wake County jail to visit him.

There, Tallant obeyed, I suppose, the instructions Paramore had conveyed to him. He was a lowbrowed, shaggy, shifty-eyed man of thirty odd, with a sullen, hangdog air about him. The house where he had seen all that? Yes,

of course he could identify it. He repeated the description he had already given, before the grand jury; but when we took him in an auto to the Dalynge place, he shook his head. No, that wasn't it. Naw, siree! Not a bit like it. He'd show us. And, following his directions, we drove through the streets, east and south, then north a block or two; and Tallant pointed out another big, square, brick house, vine-covered, and not unlike the Dalynge mansion, in a general way.

"Yonder's the place, Squire," declared Tallant.

The solicitor gave him a sharp look. "Are you sure? Remember, you described the Dalynge place exactly; and this isn't very much like it. Why, there's not another house in Raleigh with a glass-covered conservatory in just the place you told about! Where's there any conservatory here?"

Grinning boldly enough, the fellow pointed out a glassed-in porch, or sun parlor. The solicitor shook his head.

"Glass roofed, you said!"

"Glass-covered," corrected Tallant. "Anyways, this here's th' place I done peeked into, that night, see? I c'n plumb swear to it. Yessir!"

"How would you like about ten years in State prison, for perjury?" demanded the angry prosecutor. "You're fixing for trouble, my man!"

Tallant tried to laugh, but his shifty eyes wavered and fell, and his brazen impudence changed to alarm. "Aw-w," he muttered, sullenly, "you ain't got nothin' on me! Cain't you-all remember I was plumb drunk? I never did see the house only oncet, an' at night, an' when I was plumb drunk, mister. I'm tellin' yuh the truth, honest! Bein' in a strange town, an' drunk, an' all like that, I——"

"I reckon you are telling the truth—this time!" the official said grimly. "Better for you if you'd done it first off, too." He ordered the chauffeur to

drive us back to the jail, and turned to me apologetically. "I reckon that settles it, sir. I never did believe, really, that a young lady like Miss Cameron could have done—that. But, with this fellow's testimony, and all, what else could I do?"

I assured him that neither Althea nor I blamed him in any way. "There's a whole lot back of this," I added, "that I can't explain yet. But I hope it will all be made clear before long, now, and you'll have a defendant worth prosecuting. Meanwhile, if I might advise, I'd keep this man Tallant in jail."

"I see myself turning him loose!" he declared bitterly. "He'll have some mighty tall explaining to do first."

And so, by arrangement with a judge of the superior court, the case of the State against Althea Cameron was "nol-prossed," as lawyers say, and she was discharged upon her own recognizance. The authorities moved so briskly that within three hours from the time Paramore left me at the capitol, Althea was walking down the steps of the county jail beside me, a free woman. The sheriff and his wife bade her a cordial farewell, and she assured them that it had been almost a pleasure to be imprisoned as she had been. Indeed, in justice to the town, I must say that, if ever I have to be jailed for murder, I hope it may be in Raleigh. Throughout, every official treated us with perfect courtesy.

As we descended the steps, I saw Henry Clay Paramore. He came toward us, grinning hardily. "Let me be the first to congratulate you," he said, but Althea turned her back.

"Must I notice that—creature?" she asked me.

"Not for long. But we'll have to keep our bargain, dear." And I led her to the bank, just about to close, and saw her deliver the book, "*Toujours Au Fait*" to Paramore.

He almost snatched it from her hand,

and turned and hurried away, hugging the dusty volume to his breast as though he feared we might snatch it from him. I watched him go, and smiled to myself.

"He's likely to be disappointed," I murmured. "Though I almost wish I'd erased those pencil marks. He's so infernally clever!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE THAN A MILLION.

IT was three o'clock. I took Althea to a hotel, got her a room and had her baggage brought from the jail. Then I went out by myself for a walk, to learn whether or not I was free.

Up to the moment I had delivered the book, "*Toujours Au Fait*" to Mr. Hutchinson, I had been conscious of constant espionage. But I hoped, now that Paramore had what he wanted, he might leave me alone. Surely he would not think it worth while to have me watched any longer. He must know that I had not yet found the treasure; he must believe—or so I hoped—that I did not know of its existence. So I looked for a few hours of freedom—at least, until Paramore decided that the book contained no directions.

I took an auto and drove about for a while, then caught a street car and rode to the end of the line, always watching lest I be followed. After two hours of wandering about, with my eyes very busy, I concluded that no one was following me. To-night, then, I decided, before Paramore put his shadowers upon my track again, Althea and I would recover Dalynge's treasure. It would be perfectly safe. None but Paramore had any reason to follow us; and Paramore had given it up, for the time being.

I went back to Althea's hotel and sent up my name. Presently she came down to the lobby, her big blue eyes pink-bordered, her manner subdued. "It's silly to cry," she admitted. "But

it's almost as bad as being in jail. Everybody stares at me. They know I've been let out of prison; but they don't know I'm innocent. And they seem to think I'm g-guilty—all of them!"

"Never mind, honey." I said patting her hand. "If my plans work out, they will know it before long. We'll prove it to them!" For by now I had a very pretty scheme in mind to make Paramore convict himself. "You wait and see. In the meantime, we'll slip out to-night, about ten o'clock, just you and I, and collect Joseph Dalynge's buried treasure!"

She demurred. "Not alone, Tom! I'm afraid. Suppose that awful Paramore should follow you, after all? Suppose some stray loafer was watching? Suppose somebody should hold us up, and get the treasure—if there is any? How could you ever explain to Mr. Dallings?"

Though I hated to take any one into our confidence, there seemed reason in these objections, and especially the last one. So finally I agreed to ask the detective, Breckinridge, to accompany us.

"It isn't as though this were really treasure-trove," argued Althea. "Old Mr. Dalynge had a right to bury his money, if he chose; and he willed it to his great-nephew, and Mr. Dallings has asked us to get it for him. We needn't tell anybody that it was stolen money to begin with. In fact we don't really *know* that it was."

So at dusk I called upon Mr. Breckinridge, and explained to him simply that I had learned that old Joseph Dalynge had buried some money in his back yard, and that his heir-at-law had asked me to dig it up for him. Would he accompany me, please, and act as witness, so that there might be no question as to what was found? His presence, also, would be a protection.

He agreed willingly and at ten o'clock, or thereabouts, met Althea and me in

the lobby of the Yarborough Hotel. We started at once for the Dalyngé place, in Mr. Breckinridge's own car.

Arriving there, the detective parked his car across the street where it would not call attention to our whereabouts. Then the three of us made our way along the grass-grown drive which led past the old brick mansion to the slave quarters behind it. It was a pitch-dark night; we were grateful for the electric flash Breckinridge produced. He led the way, Althea followed, and I brought up the rear, carrying pick and shovel, and stumbling along blindly. I could have touched Althea's shoulder, I was so close behind her; yet her dark dress and black hair were quite invisible. All I could see of her was a faint, light blur, that was the nape of her bare neck.

Now we were in a sort of rough quadrangle, behind the big house, whose sides were marked by rows of little cabins, and two or three larger buildings, barn, carriage house, and the like. Seeing all these, by the fitful gleam of the flash light, I stopped with an exclamation of dismay.

"I had no idea there were so many cabins! How can we ever pick out the coachman's house? I ought to have thought of that."

"Don't you fret," Breckinridge comforted me. "I been living hereabouts right smart of a while. Years back, Mr. Dalyngé used to carry more style than he did lately; kept carriage horses, and saddlers, and all that. Here's where his coachman used to live—in this one."

He led us to a cabin which marked one of the corners of the quadrangle; a log house, evidently very old, but more pretentious than its neighbors. It was double, with a covered runway between the two parts; and it stood close to the stable, which was a much larger building.

I stared about, trying to fix the points of the compass, but it was black dark.

There were no stars in the cloudy sky, and our wanderings through the night, following the curves of an unseen driveway, had turned me around.

"We'd have been helpless without you, Mr. Breckinridge." I spoke into space; though he was so close that I could hear his breathing, I could not see the detective at all. "Which way is south, do you know?"

Breckinridge switched on his light, which he had turned off after playing it upon the coachman's house and the adjoining stable. "Let me see, now. The street's back that a way, and— Why, sir, I reckon that'll be south, just about." The slender beam of light swung until it pointed at the stable.

I groped for the corner of the coachman's house. "This is the southeast corner, then. But—but 'two feet' would take us under the stable! The buildings can't be more than eighteen inches apart."

"Maybe you'd better tell me a little more," said Breckinridge. His tone betrayed an increasing interest. Indeed, the most phlegmatic person might be pardoned a mild excitement while taking part in a treasure hunt in the dead of night. "Where are you supposed to dig? And what-all for?"

"At the southeast corner of the coachman's house," said I. "Two feet; I suppose it must mean two feet away—or maybe it's two feet deep. The directions weren't very clear."

Breckinridge turned his light upon the close-packed earth between house and stable. "No signs of digging there. Besides, if it means two feet *away*, it would take us plumb under the foundations of the stable. And that can't be right, because they're made of stone. H'm! Nor two feet *deep*, either, from the looks. What did you say you're looking for?"

"Why—we don't know, exactly. For old Mr. Dalyngé's money—whatever he had. They didn't find much of any-

thing after he died, you know. We think his fortune—if he had any—is buried here.”

“Old gentleman lived mighty well,” Breckinridge said thoughtfully. “Reckon he must have had a-plenty. Dug it up out of here, somewhere, when he used to make a deposit in the bank, every six months or so; that what you think?”

“We’re almost sure,” I began. “We found——”

“Well, then!” interrupted the detective. “It isn’t here. Look!” He turned his flash light on the earth once more, and pointed out a huge burdock whose tough, thick roots evidently spread through all the bit of ground at the house-corner. “He fetched in his last bit of money to the bank just a little while before he was killed. That dock sure didn’t grow that size since then!”

It was true. This bit of ground had not been dug up within eight months, at the least, or the burdock could never have attained such a size. I sighed disconsolately, there in the dark.

“But, if it isn’t here, where can it be? This is the southeast corner of the coachman’s house, and——”

“It’s a double house!” cried Althea, excitedly. “It’s double, isn’t it? So it’s got *two* southeast corners!”

“Of course! Working out his message as he had to, using what words he could find in the book, the old man couldn’t explain any more clearly. He put in that about two feet, I suppose, to show Dallings that he meant the other corner—because it couldn’t be two feet from this one.” I started to fumble along the wall of the log house.

“It’s a whole lot likelier place, too,” the detective said, “to hide anything, there in that covered runway. Wouldn’t be near as noticeable.”

We reached the space between the two parts of the house. As was common in the building of log houses of any size, the coachman’s cabin was built

in two square rooms some six or eight feet apart, with a sort of open shed between—nothing but a light roof and a rough plank floor. There, no doubt, the women of the house had cooked and washed and worked during the hot months. The porch—if one could call it that—was somewhat narrower than the rest, so that at the southeast corner of the northern half of the house there was a small jog. Breckinridge turned his light there; it was almost exactly two feet from corner to edge of the porch floor.

“Reckon we’ve struck it now,” said he, and there was a thrill in his voice. The beam of light quivered as he pointed it at the ground.

I kicked aside a few of the weeds that grow so fast in that warm climate, and, sure enough, the ground just beneath the edge of that rough floor seemed to have been disturbed. Here was an ideal spot for concealment; no one, even seeing that the place was dug up, would have dreamed it meant anything save an effort to bank earth up to the edge of the floor to keep the wind out.

“We’ll try it, anyhow,” I said, and my mouth was dry as I spoke, and my heart beat furiously. It is strange, how the lure of buried treasure can stir one’s imagination.

Yet I did not entirely forget precautions. “I think we’d better be quite certain there’s no one around,” said I. “Somebody might have seen that light—and we don’t want to be interrupted.”

“No fear of that,” the detective replied. “There isn’t a house within ear-shot. These are mighty big grounds, you see, and the cabins all around would cut off the light.”

None the less, I made a circuit of the place, groping and stumbling through the dark, pausing to listen and to strain my eyes uselessly. At last I found my way back to where Althea and Breckinridge waited. “Couldn’t

see or hear a thing," I reported, "though there might be an army around, for all I could tell. It's dark as your pocket."

"Pshaw! There's nobody within half a mile," declared Breckinridge, comfortably. He had not been watched, and followed, and spied upon, until his nerves were jumpy. "And if there was, nobody'd bother us. Go ahead; dig, and see what you find."

Thus adjured, I dug. The soft earth needed no pick; with the shovel, and then with my hands, I scraped the dirt back until I had made a hole perhaps six inches deep.

"A little more to the left," advised Breckinridge, holding the light for me. "You're out of the line of the——"

My clawing fingers struck something hard and smooth. "No, I'm not," I cried, exultantly. "I've got it!"

Pawing furiously, like a terror at a rabbit hole, I scraped away the earth until I had uncovered a small, cylindrical object; an ordinary tin can. I picked it up and brushed off the dirt, then fumbled about the hole very carefully. But I found nothing more. This was the extent of the cache.

"That's all," I reported. "Hold the light until I open it."

It was one of those cans which are used for packing tea and coffee; it had an air-tight cover which could be removed and replaced. Now, cleaning it off as best I might, I struggled with the rusted lid until it loosened in my fingers and came away.

I peeped into the inside of the can. It held nothing but a small, flat key and a folded paper or two. My heart seemed to drop. I felt sick.

"Somebody's beaten us to it—or else the old gentleman used it all up before he was killed. There's nothing here but——"

As I spoke, I had been opening the folded letter. From it fell another paper; a small, sealed envelope, addressed to a great New York City bank.

I began to read the unsealed paper—and burst into an exultant shout.

"Why, the old fox! Buried treasure up to date, sure enough. Althea, if that man Dallings keeps his word, we're rich—rich—rich! Half of this means a fortune. Why, a tenth of it would run into big money! More than a million dollars, Althea; more than a million, Breckinridge! You hear?"

"I hear," answered the officer, rather dryly. After all, it wasn't his million.

"Yes, and I hear, too!" came another voice—a gruff, menacing voice that issued from the utter blackness of the log house.

I started so violently that the can dropped from my hands; and Althea screamed, and the detective turned the beam of his flash light toward the unseen speaker, feeling mechanically for his pistol.

A beam of light leaped from the dark into our faces, blinding us with its glare. "Drop that lamp, you!" ordered the voice, harshly. "And stick your hands up, all of you. High! Quick! I've got you covered, and I'd rather shoot than not."

There was nothing else to do. Obediently, Breckinridge dropped his flash light, and it rolled under the edge of the porch where its rays shone upon the empty tin can, and the letter and key beside it—the key to a safe-deposit box in a New York City bank, that held more than a million dollars of Coldwater Joe's loot. Breckinridge held up his hands; Althea and I followed suit; and there we three stood, all in a row, stupidly blinking at the blinding light which shone into our faces.

We must have looked ridiculous, I suppose. At any rate, an ugly laugh rang out of the blackness behind that searchlight. "Ha-ha! Ha-ha! You look like the fools you are—all of you. Don't move, now; hold still as death—or you'll be dead!"

There was a brief, breathless pause.

Then the harsh voice began again, and I recognized it—though I had not doubted for an instant that it was Henry Clay Paramore, there in the cabin.

"You must have thought I was mighty simple, Grainger," said he, sneeringly. "I suppose you figured I'd quit watching you, when you gave me that book. I might, at that, if you hadn't cheated."

His tone was full of righteous indignation, so that, in spite of our desperate straits I was forced to laugh. To hear Paramore, of all men, discourse upon honesty!

"Laugh, if you like. I'll give you something to laugh at, directly. If you'd been honest—if you hadn't tried to cheat me—you'd have a good chance of living until morning. As it is——" And he broke off significantly.

Breckinridge forced a laugh. "You can't bluff us like that, whoever you are," he scoffed. "You don't dare touch us."

Paramore ignored this. "You tore old Dalynge's directions out of that book," he accused. "You thought I was fool enough to be satisfied, and to quit watching, while you stole the money and sneaked off." He laughed shortly. "I was onto you all along. You haven't made a move that I haven't seen—even to hiring this fool dick to go along with you."

"I gave you the book exactly as I found it," I told him. "The message is there. You didn't have sense enough to read it, that's all."

"I had sense enough to use you for my cat's-paw, though. I had sense enough to——"

"Oh, stop bragging," I said yawning ostentatiously, though my mouth was dry with fear, and my knees shook under me. "Take the stuff, if you want it, and let us go. You daren't try to collect, anyhow."

"Who's to hinder? Orph Dallings? I can fool him again, just as easy as I did the first time—in spite of all the

lies I suppose you told him about me when you went to High Valley."

"If Dallings doesn't stop you, I will!" I told him boldly.

But Paramore only laughed; such a chill, ominous laugh that I shuddered. "Oh, no, you won't! Neither you, nor your lady friend, nor this solemn ass, Breckinridge. I'm glad you brought him, really. It will make it look more plausible."

"I know that voice!" cried the detective, with an oath. "You're Paramore—Hank Paramore! Needn't try to deny it."

"I don't deny it," Paramore said chuckling. He moved toward us until his dark, sinister face showed dimly in the reflected light of the electric searchlight he still pointed toward us. "Why should I? The knowledge won't do you any good, ten minutes from now."

Althea spoke for the first time, her voice faintly tremulous. "You don't mean—you wouldn't——"

"Wouldn't I?" asked Paramore callously. "I know it's a pity to snuff out a pretty young lady. No gentleman would do it; is that what you mean? In short, it's a blackguardly act." He laughed a raucous laugh, that made me realize that the man was insane. He must be! His inhuman cleverness, his callousness, the fits of senseless fury that had destroyed all those books—these were not the traits of a normal man.

"But I've got to," he went on in a brusque, businesslike fashion. "I've got to kill you—all three of you. Can't you see that I must?" He seemed to be justifying himself to us; his tone begged us to be reasonable, and consent to our impending slaughter. "How could I get hold of this money, with you three alive? If I killed old Joe Dalynge, just on the chance of finding his loot, do you think I'll stick at killing you three, now that I've got my very hands on a million dollars?"

There was a brief, awful hush. I stared Death between the eyes, and found his face unpleasant to look upon. I felt very helpless. Paramore was fully ten feet away; I could see the muzzle of his big pistol, and it was pointed straight at Althea. With fiendish prescience, he had made her his first target, knowing that Breckinridge and I, standing on either side of her, would hesitate to attack him when it meant her death, though we might either of us have chanced a bullet ourselves. Beyond doubt, the man was mad.

"You murdered Mr. Dalynge, then?" spoke up Althea boldly. "You admit that?"

"Why, yes, ma'am," replied Paramore civilly enough. "I admit it, since none of you will have a chance to tell anybody. I'll confess, if it pleases you to know the facts. They would exonerate you fully; but, unfortunately, nobody else will ever learn them. Yes; I got the letter Dalynge sent to Orph Dallings. The illiterate fool asked me to read it to him. Old Joe wrote that he had a lot of money hidden away, and that directions for finding it were in an old book of his called, 'A Compendium of the Principles of Etiquette.' So I went to Dalynge's house that night to get the book. The old man heard me, and got up and caught me. He called me by name; and so, of course, I had to kill him. I did it quietly, with a knife. He cut me on the left hand, though. He was a tough little old rooster, for all he looked as mild as any sheep. And then, after all that mess and bother, I couldn't find the book. You'd swiped it. You cheated me out of it, after all my work. You can't bame me for being sore, can you, now? Look at all the trouble you've made me, you two; burglarizing that secondhand shop, hiring a gang of thugs, paying detectives to shadow you, Grainger—why, it's been scandalous! But it's all

over now," he finished comfortably. "And I don't mind forgiving you—so long as I get the million, after all!"

With that, he gave such a mirthless smile as might have shown upon the face of Satan himself.

"Sorry to hurry you," he said, "but time presses. Better say your prayers, if you've any to say. Now, which chooses to go first? You see," he said in explanation, "after it's over, I'll arrange your bodies so as to make it appear that you found the loot and went to fighting over it. It will look as if Breckinridge shot you two, and Grainger, here, finished him before he himself cashed in. All because you couldn't agree on the division of stolen money. Clever, what? I tell you, I'm pretty good. In short, a brilliant man! Now, then, which goes first? Shall I take the young lady?"

The flash light in his bandaged left hand still threw its merciless beam full into our faces. Fascinated, I saw Paramore's right hand come up; his big pistol pointed to the sky. Slowly, slowly, its muzzle descended until it pointed straight at Althea's breast. I seemed bound by a paralysis of horror.

This thing could not be! At least, I could die fighting. My muscles tightened, almost involuntarily; I crouched, to launch myself at the man's throat.

"I'll count three," said Paramore, prolonging the agony of that moment with obvious pleasure. "One, two, thr——"

"Wait a minute," advised a cool, unemotional voice from the shadows.

CHAPTER XIV.

"ONCET IS ENOUGH."

THE beam of light which Paramore had held so steadily upon us until now, leaped violently upward, and swung to the left as its holder turned. Pistol again upraised, Paramore hesitated, helpless between two dangers.

He dared not give us his back while he faced this newcomer, lest Breckinridge and I leap upon him from the darkness; and if he faced us, his back was unprotected.

Realizing his predicament, the wretched man began to sob. He chattered incoherently, as a furious ape might chatter, and with his trembling the beam of light from his flash light leaped grotesquely about. It came to me suddenly that Paramore's nerves, after all, were not under so much control as I had thought; that his delay, his theatrical display of callousness, had been his method of bolstering a weakened determination; of screwing his courage to the sticking point. To stab a man, albeit a very old man, in hot blood, while he attacks one with a knife, is one thing: to shoot down three unoffending persons—and one of them a young and pretty woman—in cold blood, is quite another. Perhaps Henry Clay Paramore was not quite as ruthless, as inhuman, as he would have had us believe.

All this flashed through my brain so swiftly that I was still in mid-leap while I decided that our enemy had lost his nerve. Althea had covered her face; beyond her, I felt, rather than saw, that Breckinridge was in the act of drawing his pistol.

Then Paramore decided. His moment of panic was over; and the man must have owned bravery of a sort. At least, he turned his back upon the unknown peril suggested by that voice from the shadows. He whirled upon us, his victims, and his light caught us in mid-leap, and froze us like the sight of the Gorgon's head. With that light in our faces, to attack Paramore was worse than suicidal, for his pistol once more pointed full at Althea Cameron's cowering form.

"I'll finish it," he rasped, his voice harsh and strained, like nothing human. "I'll finish it, in spite of hell itself!"

Dimly I saw his ghastly, distorted face; dimly I saw his finger tighten upon the trigger. To leap now would only hasten Althea's doom; but I resolved that if the man really did shoot, I would pull him down even while the bullet sped. I would kill him with hands and teeth; with a bullet through heart or brain, I should still find strength to abolish this demon.

A well-aimed missile hurtled from the shadows and struck Paramore's pistol, so that it leaped in his hand, exploding harmlessly. The man dropped his flash light, and it rolled across the rough floor on which he stood, until its rays shone full upon the object which had saved Althea's life. It was an old leather boot. I laughed hysterically; it seemed such an anticlimax.

Then the same unemotional voice spoke once more. "Face around here, Squire! You done falsified me oncet; but le' me tell you, oncet is enough, if I be as big a lummox as you jus' claimed. Oncet is enough; you hear me?"

Paramore stooped, snatched at his lamp, and in the same movement straightened, whirled and fired his revolver wildly at the voice which spoke from darkness.

Two pistol shots rang out, almost together; the sharp crack of smokeless powder from Paramore's gun was followed by a heavier, louder, more threatening echo as Orpheus Dalling's huge .45 roared and spat flame from the rear of the coachman's house.

Paramore cried out; a shrill scream that ended in a gurgling, choking noise. The flash lamp fell from the nerveless fingers, and the darkness blotted him out. We heard the sound of this fall; then came deathly silence and pitch blackness. My blinded eyes saw nothing. The darkness was a wall before me that seemed pressing against me, thrusting me down. I could hear Breckinridge's harsh breathing, but

from the injured man I heard nothing at all.

Then Althea broke out crying, and groped for me, and hid her face on my shoulder. Muttering oaths that spoke eloquently of shaken nerves, Breckinridge dropped to hands and knees. I could hear him fumbling about, groping after his fallen flash light. Presently I heard another person moving about in the dark. A stealthy footstep sounded on the porch floor, as though some one were leaning over the fallen Paramore.

It reminded me that our deliverer was near by. "You saved our lives, Mr. Dal—" I began to say nervously.

"Hesssh!" came his sharp command. "Needn't to name no names, stranger. If I done kilt Squire, here, w'y, I ain't a-honin' an' a-hankerin' for to be jailed. I reckon likely folks'd call it self-defense; but, anyways, I'm plumb set agin' lawin' f'om now on. Yassir!"

"But—but, won't you—" I protested feebly.

"No, I won't!" he answered from the darkness. "An', say! Tell that there sheriff 'at's with you to turn his lamp t'other way!"

There followed two swift steps, the sound of a man leaping from the other side of that covered runway, and then silence. Orpheus Dallings—for I had recognized his voice beyond a doubt—had vanished as silently as he had come. His purpose was achieved; he had had his explanation; and he was, no doubt, already on his way back to Little Devil Branch and the care of his still.

Breckinridge had found a lamp, and now he turned it upon the fallen man who lay so quietly on that rough-boarded floor. We three came close, and stood over Henry Clay Paramore, looking down upon him.

A blackened hole, faintly powder-scorched, in the left side of his coat spoke mutely of the accuracy of Dallings' aim. It was exactly over the heart. As we watched, the man's pallid

face changed; his heavy brows drew together painfully, the black eyes opened, and he looked up at us. All the evil had vanished from his face; now it was placid and peaceful as a child's. He even smiled faintly.

"Got me, didn't he?" he whispered with an effort. "I'm done for. And you get the loot, after all!" He sighed, and an expression of faint regret passed over his quiet face, and was gone.

"Perhaps it's just as well. I don't believe I could have—shot her—after—all." The tired eyes closed once more.

Breckinridge tapped his shoulder gently enough. "Paramore!" he called, still the policeman. "You killed old Dalynge, didn't you? You said so!"

The wounded man smiled very faintly. "Efficient officer!" he muttered with gentle irony. "Hasn't forgotten his duty. Yes, yes, of course I did. Get me—witnesses. Sign—antemortem statement, if you like."

His eyes fluttered shut again, and he lay still, breathing slowly and with difficulty. A crimson froth came on his lips, and once he coughed, and moaned weakly.

I ran for help, and Breckinridge hurried to get his car and bring it closer. I found a neighbor who had tarried at his radio, and brought him back, coatless and excited, bubbling with questions. He had heard the pistol shots, but very faintly; he had thought them back firings from some passing motor car.

With his help, we loaded Paramore into the car, and drove him to Rex Hospital, his head pillowed in the lap of the girl he would have slain. He did not move or speak, but he still breathed painfully. And in the hospital, undressed and lying upon a clean white bed while a surgeon leaned over him to examine his injury, the dying man roused himself and spoke once more.

"Write—confession," he ordered.

"Clear—girl's name. Exonerate her—least I—can do—now."

Breckinridge brought pencil and paper and wrote swiftly: a brief statement of the facts as Paramore's whispered admissions brought them out. How he had learned, from Dalynge's letter, of the secret hidden in that old book, "*Toujours Au Fait*," how he had resolved to steal it; had arranged an alibi in advance, with his housekeeper's aid; had come secretly to Raleigh. He had stood outside the Dalynge house while its inmates retired; had seen Althea rise at midnight, light her candle and come downstairs—with a brief moment of fear lest she might steal the book he wanted—and return to her room carrying a magazine. On this foundation, he had afterward built up a story for Tallant, and so caused Althea's arrest and indictment. Finally, about two o'clock, he had entered, and had searched for the book without success. Dalynge heard him, rose and attacked him with a knife, actually cut his left hand; but he had stabbed the old man to death. Then he was forced to leave the house, empty-handed. "Afterward," he went on painfully, "knew book must have been shipped—New York. Tried—buy it—steal it—hold Grainger up and rob him—but——"

The difficult, broken murmur faded away; Paramore's lips continued to move silently for a space. Then his eyelids fluttered down, his jaw dropped, he ceased to breathe. The surgeon drew the sheet over his head.

"All over," said he quietly. "Marvelous, that he should have lived so long, with that hole in his heart!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SAFE-DEPOSIT BOX.

SO ends my tale. You can see for yourselves how little "detective genius," and how much blind, uninspired stubbornness and plodding—with

not a little of pure luck—went into the solution of the Dalynge murder mystery. And if you protest that it was no mystery, after all; that it was obvious throughout that Paramore was guilty—why, let me ask you how you would have proved it against an unshaken alibi? Or even how you would have guessed his guilt, knowing no more than I did at the beginning of the affair.

Nothing remains to be told except about the loot of Cold-water Joe. As I have already said, the cache contained nothing but a key, and some papers, of which one was a note to Orpheus Dallings, and the other a written authority, properly made out and witnessed, giving the bearer entry to box No. A-1743 in the safe-deposit vaults of a New York bank. That was irony; that I should have the little book which held the secret in a safe-deposit box within ten feet of the hoard to which it directed me!

I went first to High Valley, and out Little Devil Branch, to see Orpheus Dallings. Though he demurred at first, I finally persuaded him to accompany us to New York and witness the opening of the box. As to the killing of Paramore, I might say that the coroner's jury decided that he had come to his death at the hands of persons unknown. Neither Breckinridge, nor Althea, nor I, could swear that we had seen his slayer at all; and no one asked me if I could identify his voice. But if Dallings had come forward, he would have received a vote of thanks, instead of censure. He had not shot the lawyer in self-defense—a sufficient excuse; but he had shot in defense of Althea Cameron, whose life was menaced, and the community, enraged by that brutality, would have carried Paramore's slayer on their shoulders in triumph, if they could. Yet, knowing all this, Dallings would not admit that he had been in Raleigh at all. "I done had my satisfy of lawin', long since," he declared.

"But—from the way you tell it—I reckon that feller hid back yonder mouta had a mighty anxious time, for fear Squire'd shoot the pore lile lady afore he c'd plug him." And he grinned knowingly.

We went to New York, then; we three—Althea, Dallings, and I. Half of Raleigh was at the station to see us off. They cheered us heartily. You would have thought that Miss Cameron had come from a great social triumph, instead of from the Wake County jail.

At the New York bank, we had no difficulty. We presented our authority, and a duly certified copy of Joseph Dalynge's will, and in a few minutes opened the safe-deposit box in one of those booths provided for the clipping of coupons.

Cold-water Joe had been a canny bandit, without doubt. His loot was all converted into standard securities, and their total value was considerably over a million dollars, as his note had said. Through forty years, he had lived simply, and reinvested his income until his fortune must have doubled itself. Why he acted thus, I cannot say; perhaps the habit of secrecy was so ingrained, after his long outlawry, that he could not break it. Perhaps he feared old associates, or their kinsfolk, and so preferred to hide his wealth. Now he is dead, none can explain his

conduct; but, whatever the reason, these were the facts.

Orpheus Dallings was unimpressed by all this wealth. At first he refused even to take half. "Shucks, I never would 'a' gotten a cent," he declared. "Mout g'ime a good piece; a thousan' dollars, mobbe, if they's a-plenty. I'd like for to have enough to keep me in eatin', tobacco, an' some pretties for the kids, an' a silk dress for Mary Lou, an' like that." Even when I insisted upon his taking half—for he became angry when we suggested anything more—he refused, unless I would consent to invest it, and care for it, and send him the income as he asked.

So we consented—Althea and I. There was plenty for us all. We were not so used to wealth but that a million dollars looked very big indeed. And so it was settled, and I became a substantial citizen, and Althea Cameron married a rich husband. It was all in the newspapers.

But an active man cannot spend all his time in looking after a million dollars conservatively invested in long-time securities. I chafed in idleness, and began again to look about me for an occupation. And so, inspired by my first success—unearned though it was—I decided to become a detective.

If I prove a dismal failure, nobody can say I didn't give fair warning.

THE END.

CRIPPLE ROUTS BANDITS

HOW the crippled cashier of a taxicab garage in Philadelphia fought off four bandits who were trying to get away with a cash box containing seven thousand dollars furnishes another instance of the fact that heroism is not always allied with great physical strength. The cashier, Harry Rems, fifty-two years old, on being confronted by four masked men in the garage, threw the cash box over a partition and then attacked the bandits, stripping the mask from the face of one of them. His onslaught was so furious that the bandits took to their heels, without getting any of the loot on which they had designs. A dozen taxi drivers attempted to block the flight of the would-be robbers, but were compelled to take refuge from the bullets fired by the escaping quartet.

The Hand-picked Burglar

by Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "The Wrong Arm of the Law," etc.

THERE had been the usual run of visitors that day, and the guard appointed to show them through the place went about his work in a preoccupied manner. He was a family man himself, with a predilection for writing poetry. Why any human being with two legs, and therefore with a potential means of locomotion, should voluntarily tarry in this neighborhood of concrete and steel was one of the mysteries of life, as far as the guard was concerned. Because of this attitude of mind, the duty of showing visitors about the prison seemed to him little short of an insult.

It was not until his little party had crossed the cement-paved yard and were headed along a grim corridor flanked with cells that he suddenly began to take an interest in life. This change was occasioned by the behavior of one of the sight-seers—a keen-eyed man with a crooked mouth.

Some one had asked about a prisoner working on a "piano" in the jute mill.

"Why, that lad is what you might call one of our regular ones," the guard explained. "He's been in a couple of times before, and he's pretty sure to be back. He's a burglar by profession—a good one, too, although he can't keep out of trouble. Of course he probably means to go straight when he gets out this time, but he won't!"

"Does he get out soon?"

"Next week—been a model prisoner, knew the ropes, and got considerable time off for good behavior!"

And it was at this moment, the guard recalled, that the man with the crooked mouth had looked keenly at the jute spinner. There was purpose in that look, or he was badly mistaken. He instantly became alert. There were so many things one had to watch these sight-seers for; dope and hack saw blades, among others. The visitor with the crooked mouth looked shifty, although he was obviously well-to-do. He impressed the guard as being the kind of plant that ought to grow in this sort of garden—concrete and steel flower beds, with steel-barred windows and doors for trellises; but he didn't have the real prison manner about him, either.

"I'll just keep an eye on you, my bucko!" he promised himself. "Is your lay dope, or is it saws? Or is it something still deeper? You look a clever one—a deuced clever one! Perhaps you're one of the sort who ought to be inside permanently, but who never gets there. I'll watch you!"

But if the stranger's intentions were not entirely above suspicion, they must certainly have been *very* deep. In spite of his utmost vigilance, the prison guard was unable to catch him at anything out of the way. Apparently by accident, but really with a view to testing a

theory half-formed in his puzzled brain. he led the visitors back through the jute mill. This time he watched the man with the crooked mouth. Was he particularly interested in the burglar who was going out next week? If so, he hid his interest with consummate skill. Not only did he not look at the man at the loom this time, but he kept his face so turned that the convict would be unable to see it. This he did so naturally and easily, however, that the guard could not be sure it had any significance.

"I guess you aren't really so foxy as you look!" the man in uniform concluded, as he piloted his flock back to the office of the captain and took leave of them. "You're like the rest—just came to gape! Well, if I ever get out of this dump, you won't catch *me* doing any sight-seeing here!"

The prisoner who was going out drew his prison suit and his five dollars of State money, the following Wednesday, and eventually arrived at the little station nearest the prison. There were several other prospective passengers waiting for the train, but he gave none of them more than a cursory glance. He had troubles enough without bothering about strangers. There had been a time when he scrutinized every one he met, after leaving the prison gates, fearing to find a detective waiting to trail him back to the world of living men. He knew better than that, now. He wasn't so important a character in crookdom that they would send a body-guard to meet him. One brief look around convinced him that he knew none of the stragglers on the platform.

The train came, and he climbed aboard. He went into the smoker, sat down near the back of the car, and moodily contemplated the landscape flying past his window. At last it had come—the moment when he must decide on his future course of conduct. Should he plunge again? The warden

had not bothered to advise him to go straight, this time, but had merely asked him how his shoddy prison suit fitted.

"They must have your measurements in the tailor shop!" he had added with a grim smile. "Good-by, Pitman!"

Whether they had his measurements in the tailor shop or not, they had them in the prison office: Bertillon measurements, finger prints, *modus operandi* record, and all. Every police department in the country had them. He was a marked man.

"I *got* to go straight!" he told himself bitterly. "The minute I start prowling, they'll jug me. I got——"

He paused abruptly and looked up, feeling for his ticket. Then he remembered that he had already given it to the conductor, and at the same time he realized that the tall, keen-eyed man with the crooked mouth who stood smiling down at him was not one of the train crew.

"Move over, buddy!" the stranger said, speaking from the corner of his lips. "Much obliged. You've been inside, I see!"

Jeffrey Pitman had moved over mechanically, but now he flushed and turned his scowling face upon his uninvited sea mate.

"Maybe that's some more of your business!" he growled. "What of it?"

The stranger fished out two cigars, one of which he handed to Pitman.

"Nerves on edge. Try that Havana!" he counseled. "I know how it feels. You've been looking forward to this day for a long time, but now that it's here you're as edgy as a sick man. Ah, it's been many a year since I stepped out into a cold world, with a gunny-sack suit on my back and five measly dollars in my pocket. Many a year!"

"You mean to say you did time, once?" Pitman demanded, his suspicious glance resting fully now on his visitor's face. It *was* a crooked face, but something the "big house" stamps on the hu-

man countenance—a furtiveness akin to fear—was lacking.

"Not once, but several times. In those days I was a small timer, like you. Afterward I went straight—technically. I had brains. Not every crook can learn to make more money by keeping within the law than by going outside it!"

Jeffrey Pitman was beginning to soften. The cigar was mellow, full bodied, and the first smoke of the kind he had had for a long time. What could this man's game be? Perhaps it would become evident presently.

But it didn't. The released convict smoked his cigar to the end and regretfully threw the stub out the window. The man with the crooked mouth had talked in a desultory fashion about various matters of mutual interest. They fell silent, and remained so for half an hour. Then the stranger stood up. He dipped carelessly into his vest pocket, fished out a slip of green paper, and handed it to Pitman.

"Just a token of sympathy from an old-timer!" he said. "It'll help you a bit—and you'll need it if you're really going to go straight."

Left to himself, Pitman stared long and silently at the twenty-dollar bill the other had given him. That was what he called generosity—and the fellow hadn't even waited to be thanked! Just walked off, and now had disappeared into the Pullman! Twenty dollars. That would keep him until he could get a start at some honest work.

His fight began when he landed in the city railroad station. The policeman on duty there eyed him narrowly. At the next corner another policeman turned to stare, his face coldly suspicious. These men didn't know him personally, as far as he could remember, but they knew the *genus* to which he belonged. And they had no faith in the intention or ability of any convict to go straight. Well, thanks to the

twenty-dollar bill tucked inside his hat brim, he would show them.

He found lodgings in a cheap hotel below the dead line, and next day started out to rustle a job. There are times, however, when the easy declaration of the well-to-do that "a man can always find honest work if he wants it" is not so simple to demonstrate. Ten thousand men were seeking work that winter, and the majority of them were honest. That complicated the task confronting Jeffrey Pitman; for with all these men of unimpeachable past going from office to office, down in the "slave market," he found himself thrust aside before he could make a beginning. Sometimes he was told that when work opened up in the spring, a place might be found for him. But by spring—

There was another thing that made him vaguely uneasy. He was not an imaginative man, but at times he had the feeling of being shadowed. He had first had it the evening he landed in the city, and had thought that the policeman on duty in the station might have tipped him off to a plain-clothes cop. But if that was the case, the dick must be an unusually clever shadower. Pitman tried all the tricks he knew for throwing a shadow off his trail or making him reveal himself. In spite of these efforts, his fear remained only a hunch, a feeling. At the time, he had ascribed it to shaky nerves.

But the sensation of being shadowed recurred at intervals, and Pitman was never quite able to persuade himself it was all due to imagination. He stuck doggedly to his job hunting. There is an old fable about a horse that climbed a tree, because he *had* to. The released convict had heard that tale, and had been vaguely strengthened by it; but now he began to realize that if there was anything in it, the tree-climbing horse must have been a different sort of animal than he. With the streets below the dead line crowded with men

better fitted to get and hold a job than he had ever been, his task was helpless from the beginning.

The day came when he broke his last dollar. Bitter and discouraged, he turned from the cheap lunch counter where he had bought the meagerest of meals and headed uptown. His mind steadied presently to the sordid problem facing him. He wished poignantly that he had made up his mind from the beginning to go back into his old line. Even a house prowler needs capital, and the money with which he had arrived in the city would have helped a little.

Pitman walked far out into the suburbs. He had forgotten all about that old notion of being shadowed, for now he was facing certain danger. He didn't know where or how to begin. Since leaving the "big house," he had carefully avoided the company of his old companions. He had no gossip of local criminal conditions and activities to help him; no money; no time. He must get into something *to-night!*

It was at this pregnant moment that, cutting across a small park, Jeffrey Pitman came face to face with the man with the crooked mouth.

Both men stopped. Pitman did so through sheer paralysis of muscular action, induced by surprise. The man facing him seemed to be similarly affected.

"Ah, my friend," said he, after a moment's inspection of the ex-convict's face, "it is indeed you. And how is the world using you? I hope you've had luck in that matter of finding safe—and 'honest'—work?"

Pitman shook his head.

"There isn't a job to be had for love or money!" he declared bitterly. "I've worn out my shoes walking and looking!"

The man with the crooked mouth eyed him reflectively. Producing two cigars, he handed one to Pitman and lighted the other himself.

"Sit down!" he commanded pointing to a bench. "I was thinking of you, the other evening, in connection with a little professional matter. I'm sorry I can't suggest anything that will help you in your very worthy purpose to go straight——"

"Forget that, boss." Jeffrey Pitman interrupted sullenly. "Folks don't want an 'ex-con' to go straight!"

His companion nodded. He was looking cautiously about, as if to assure himself there were no listeners near.

"It was in the house of a person I visit occasionally," he explained in a low voice. "A wealthy person, who is fool enough to keep a lot of money in a wall safe in his library. You know they will do it. I've known that this person I speak of, was in the habit of doing that sort of thing, but until he opened the safe the other night and took out a packet of currency with at least ten thousand dollars in it, I hadn't realized what a fool he was."

Jeffrey Pitman was listening with frowning attention.

"You could tip off the lay of the house to me," he growled. "But some of those wall safes aren't so easy to crack!"

The man at the other end of the bench smiled faintly.

"You could get into this one with a wrecking bar, I think," said he. "But it won't be necessary. *I saw him unlock the safe, let me remind you!* Here is the combination—I wrote it down. I was almost persuaded to go in there some night and take that roll myself. It seemed a crying waste of good material to let the job go by."

Pitman studied his companion's face. Was the stranger setting a trap for him? The whole thing was unusual. But of course, if he were really an ex-con——

"Where did you do time?" he demanded.

"Animosa, Iowa! First-degree burglary!"

If the fellow was lying, he was clever enough to do it artistically. The majority of boasters who claimed to have done time—and Jeffrey Pitman met them oftener than one not acquainted with the strange depravities of criminal nature would imagine—named either Sing Sing or Joliet as their place of incarceration. That was because those two particular prisons were so well known. The man with the crooked mouth, however, had been satisfied with a more obscure institution.

"It's a darned funny proposition, for you to be telling me about this, boss!" Pitman said slowly, with a shake of his head. "Might be a plant——"

"What for? Do I look like a stool pigeon?"

The prowler hadn't thought of that, and the idea made him grin.

"That's so, too! What would a man that's come into easy money, as you sure have, be bothering to frame an unlucky devil like me for? And there's another thing about it. I'm on my uppers already, and I can't be no worse off! I'd rather be back inside the walls than walk the streets another day looking for work. I'll take a chance—just tell me how this job can be handled!"

The man with the crooked mouth smiled faintly as he strode away from the park after his interview with Jeffrey Pitman. He had figured carefully about how long that twenty dollars he had given Pitman would last. He knew that the ex-con wouldn't be able to find work—unemployment was notorious this winter, and honest men who had worked at trades and seasonal occupations all their lives were "drifting" from one city to another. It hadn't been very hard to figure out just about when Pitman's darkest hour would come. A little skillful shadowing—which came so easy that he was

strengthened in his contempt for the police, who often bungled the job, according to what he had read—had confirmed his calculation.

"Good seed and good soil!" he muttered as he emerged into a business thoroughfare and hailed a taxicab.

Five minutes later he was seated in the lounge of his favorite club, where he spent the remainder of the afternoon and the evening. Apparently engrossed in a book, but in reality keenly aware of the comings and goings of the other club members, he sat waiting. Soon after ten, an old man with flowing white beard and shy, boyish eyes, entered. Old Anthony Thomas, the collector—the man with the crooked mouth repressed a smile of triumph. He had planned everything perfectly. To one not in on his secret, the way in which a moment later he glanced casually around, let his eyes linger on the face of the old connoisseur, and then suddenly and apparently impulsively spoke, would have seemed too natural for acting.

"Ah, Mr. Thomas, I was thinking of you this afternoon," he declared. "How is the collection coming?"

Anthony Thomas bowed with grave courtesy, a hint of reserve in his manner.

"As well as could be expected, Mr. Carrol," said he. "As a collector, you realize that Rome was not built in a day!"

"No question of that. But probably on some days more was done toward building the Eternal City than on others. For instance, to-day—but the news is too good to keep! What would you say if I told you I have now in my possession a miniature of Marie Antoinette, one which bears every evidence of being done from life—by a master miniaturist."

Anthony Thomas turned red, and then he turned white. His hand fumbled about the corners of the white

beard that covered his kindly old face. He sat down abruptly, and continued to stare at John Carrol.

"You—why, I have been negotiating for just such a miniature myself!" he stammered. "Pray, sir, would it seem inquisitive if I asked from whom you bought it?"

"I bought it from a family by the name of Martineau whose ancestors were émigrés during the revolution."

Anthony Thomas took out his handkerchief and wiped the mist from his glasses. Bitterness was in his old face.

"Ah," he said, "you paid them the price they asked! It was too much, sir! As a collector——"

"Not too much, considering that the miniature is unique. And the coloring—but doubtless you have examined it closely?"

"I have not. I found these Martineaus hard and suspicious people to deal with."

Carrol stood up.

"Come out to my place and examine it!" he said impulsively. "Examine it as closely as you will, and give me your honest opinion. There is not an expert in America in whom I have greater confidence!"

It was a few minutes past eleven, John Carrol saw as he unobtrusively consulted his watch, by the time the cab conveying himself and the old collector drew up in front of his residence. Pitman, the ex-convict, would be through and gone by now. He would have found the safe empty, but he would have left traces of his presence—that was the thing Carrol was after.

"I'll have my man drive you home after you've inspected the Marie Antoinette miniature," he told Anthony Thomas as he dismissed the taxicab. "Right this way! Let me take your things! Ah, my fingers are tingling with excitement! I want your opinion—but I am not afraid. You shall con-

firm my judgment! You are bound to!"

Their footsteps, as they passed along the hall toward the library, were muffled in the thick pile of the rug. Before them the panels of a door glimmered dimly. The master of the house opened it. They were across the threshold——

For a long moment John Carrol's heart stood still; for, as he took that first step into the quiet library, he saw the silhouette of a crouching figure before the wall safe. There was a disk of white light—that was a flash light playing on the inner door of the little strong box. Dolt—idiot—rage welled up and nearly choked him. *Still here and——*

In a flash he saw how he could turn this misadventure to his own advantage. He carried a revolver. Now he whipped out this weapon and fired. The crash of broken glass from the sideboard told him that his shot had gone wild, as he had intended it to. He didn't want actually to hit Pitman; too much chance of the crook's living at least long enough to tell his story. But the pistol shot had been another realistic detail in the mosaic of crime Carrol had created.

The story Old Anthony Thomas told the police was so convincing that John Carrol found himself almost believing it. Thomas told of reaching the house. He described the moment in the library.

"It was all over so quickly that I have but the haziest impression of what happened," he explained with boyish eagerness. "I remember seeing a disk of light, low down on the wall opposite the door. I could just make out that some one was kneeling there. Then Mr. Carrol had drawn his revolver and fired. I heard the rush of feet—the robber was gone. But alas! He took with him my friend's priceless collection——"

"What do you mean—priceless?" the

sergeant of detectives in charge of the investigation interrupted. "Worth a lot of money, I expect!"

"It was insured for seventy-five thousand dollars," Carrol replied. "But that did not represent more than three quarters of the value. Ah——"

The man who unobtrusively entered the room at this moment would have passed unnoticed in any crowd. He was of average height, weight, and coloring. He wore average clothing, and had an average face. His card, when he handed it to the master of the house, bore an average name:

"Thomas Smith, Special Investigator, Coast Indemnity Company."

He nodded to the two detectives, and turned respectfully to Carrol.

"The company sent me out to help find your pictures," he explained. "It *was* pictures, wasn't it?"

John Carrol maneuvered old Anthony Thomas into action again. The old connoisseur's honesty and earnestness were contagious. Carrol began to marvel at his own astuteness in picking such a witness.

The two detectives from headquarters, after listening a second time to the story of the crime, began an investigation of the premises. Thomas Smith trailed along, neither asking questions nor making suggestions. The plain-clothes men seemed to take this as a matter of course. They found the rear window, through which the prowler had entered. Then they very anxiously turned their attention to the wall safe.

"Either this bozo got inside information, or he opened the box by listening in!" the sergeant commented gruffly. He looked up at Carrol. "How about it, commander? You got any servants that know the combination to this 'pill box?'"

"No. I have a Japanese girl who comes in mornings, and my chauffeur, who lives over the garage. I doubt if

he has ever been in the house farther than the kitchen."

"And he couldn't have got this combination from you?"

"Not unless he's a mind reader!"

The man from headquarters nodded to his companion, ignoring Smith.

"Looks like Blinky Snell or Tom McMullen—we'll look 'em up and see if they're out of hoosegow. Might go through the *modus operandi* file, but I know for sure there ain't more than four prowlers in the country that could have got into this peter without blowing it, or using a torch. There's just one other important point, Mr. Carrol. Who would be apt to buy this collection of yours?"

Anthony Thomas broke in with a mournful shake of his head.

"That's just the trouble—the men who would buy it, and there are plenty of them, would do it secretly. The Marie Antoinette miniature and all the others will simply disappear!"

"Well, that doesn't give us much of a chance. If this bozo had taken something he'd be apt to mine through one of the regular dealers—something like plate or jewelry—we could get at it from that end. But we'll do what we can. Come on, Dennis! Coming with us. Mr. Smith?"

Undoubtedly the police were doing what they could, Carrol realized, during the days that followed. He was called up at all hours to answer questions. He was taken to police headquarters to talk with various officials. A garbled story of the crime came out in the newspapers, and a man from one of the collectors' journals came round and borrowed a photograph, to be used in connection with a write-up of the robbery.

The sergeant who had investigated, that first night, was replaced by an inspector; and Thomas Smith, the average man, disappeared as completely as if

he had been thrown into the bay with the proverbial millstone about his neck. He never even made a splash. The insurance people notified Carrol that they were claiming the optional sixty-day respite in paying his claim, in the hope of locating the miniature. Carrol laughed his crooked laugh. He didn't blame them for deferring the evil moment as long as possible—seventy-five thousand dollars was a lot of money!

Weeks lengthened into a month. The affair was forgotten by every one except those immediately concerned. Carrol sat in his cozy library late one night, thinking over various matters. Eventually he arose with a yawn and betook himself to his sleeping quarters on the second floor. Here he locked the door, pulled down the curtains, and proceeded to open the secret compartment he had built into the floor under his bureau. From it he took one of the trays of miniatures. He carried the tray across to his bed and placed it on the counterpane. Then he seated himself beside it and stared avidly down at the tiny, brilliant things; miniatures done on silver and on gold; ivory miniatures; jewel-set miniatures—all in the mellow coloring and exquisite technique of the old masters. The faces of lovely women and of innocent children, long since dead and gone, looked confidently up at the man seated on the edge of the bed. Thanks to his clever crime, at the expense of the insurance company, these miniatures would cost him next to nothing—he could enjoy all this beauty the rest of his life for the price of a custom-built motor car.

He turned abruptly, the pupils of his evil eyes widening like those of a bird of prey. From somewhere beyond the locked door had come a sound—a foot-step? Carrol was not an imaginative man. He was not expecting to be disturbed. There *had* been a sound, or he would not have thought he heard it.

It came again! Some one walking

stealthily in the hall below! Swiftly but noiselessly he replaced the tray of miniatures and crossed to the door. Switching off the lights, he slid back the bolt and stepped into the hall. The pistol in his right hand was as steady as rock.

The house was silent; but presently, as he began to work his way toward the head of the stairs, there came to him a squeaking sound which he recognized as the opening of the top drawer of the sideboard. Turning soundlessly, he retraced his steps to the back of the hall and made his way down the service stairs to the kitchen. A moment later, pistol in hand, he had turned on the dining room lights.

“Stand still!” he said ominously to the masked intruder who stood, apparently paralyzed, regarding him through the slits of a black mask. “Move forward—slowly—now face the wall—if you move while I’m phoning the police, I’ll shoot!”

Having called the police, John Carrol sat down and lighted a cigar. A smile of cruel enjoyment played round his crooked mouth. Criminals and police were alike. It seemed they were only stupid bunglers at everything they undertook.

A siren sounded down the street and then in front of the house. Carrol crossed to the door and threw it open. He nodded brusquely to the two plainclothes men on the porch, then frowned. Thomas Smith was stationed unobtrusively behind them!

“Just happened to be down at the station when your kick came in,” the insurance detective explained. “I’ve been kind of looking around for those miniatures of yours—hello! So you captured a prowler?”

There was a subtle difference in the manner of this fellow, the master of the house realized with a twinge of uneasiness. He glanced suspiciously at the two men from the police station. They

were looking at Smith, apparently expecting him to take the lead.

He did so. Turning to the masked figure near the wall, he spoke.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" he demanded.

"Considerable, boss! I found them miniatures—I drilled a peep hole through the lower panel of his bedroom door and watched him while he took them out. Hid in a cupboard in the floor——"

Carrol felt himself turning sick and faint. Instinctively he raised the hand in which he still held the pistol. It was seized by one of the detectives. He was disarmed.

"None of that!" the officer growled. "Just *you* stand still!"

John Carrol steadied himself by a tremendous effort of will. This was war, he realized. In some way, they had tricked him.

"What sort of horseplay do you call this?" he asked. "I caught this fellow robbing my house——"

The burglar turned toward him. Deliberately he removed his mask, and disclosed the grimly smiling countenance of Jeffrey Pitman.

"I wasn't robbing it, boss!" he said with ironic composure. "Just looking around!"

"Do you mean to stand there and let this burglar—caught in the act—lie his way out?" the man with the crooked mouth demanded, turning upon the two detectives. "Officers of the law, aiding and abetting criminals——"

Thomas Smith shook his head.

"There's no use!" said he. "You're a clever one, and we all admit it, but you were just a bit *too* clever this time. It was good stuff to get a regular prowler to break in. That had me guessing for a few minutes. And this loot of yours being the sort that couldn't be traced through the fences—that gave you what you might call an unfair advantage in this little game of wits. That put me

on my mettle. I made up my mind that fair or unfair, I'd take you to a trimming. But it was the old chap—Anthony Thomas, was his name—that made me mortal sure there was something addled in Denmark. He was altogether too good to be true, with his Santa Claus whiskers! He simply couldn't have happened. If he'd had a wicked eye, now, or one of those naughty-looking little twisted mustaches—but he didn't!

"I looked around. There weren't any clews. I could see that a real professional had pulled the trick. But I was on the inside, by this time, looking out. I knew that you were the one who had engineered it. So I took a few days off and looked you up. No, you weren't a crook, and you never had been—that is, not a recognized professional! That meant that you must have got a real crook to handle the technical end for you. How would you find such a person, I asked myself? It looked like that was one end of the thread, and it always helps to get hold of an end. I figured that the only way you could get hold of a professional crook was to go some place where they were *all* that kind. So I sent a young fellow around for a photograph of you——"

John Carrol uttered an oath. Thomas Smith grinned.

"Sure, it was one of my young men that came here, posing as a reporter from the collector's journal. I took that photograph you were so kind as to give me down to the city prison. No, the turnkeys hadn't ever seen any one that looked like you. I got on the train and went up to the penitentiary. In the office of the captain of the guard I found a man that remembered you. He'd noticed you particularly. Had you been interested in any of the prisoners? Why, yes, you had. You'd taken an especially good look at a lad working at one of the pianos, in the jute mill. And that prisoner had gone

out the week following your visit. You knew that he would!

"So I came back to town, and had the sergeant here look around for a certain man whose description, photograph, et cetera, they had at headquarters. When he was picked up—dead broke and about ready to hop into the bay—I had a talk with him. I told him about what had happened to him, for I had it pretty nearly all figured out by that time. He told me the few little things I hadn't discovered. Then I made him a proposition. I needed a man on my staff, who had done time. I wanted one who had stayed with the crook game right up to the red end, so's he wouldn't want to go back into it. His first assignment was to come up here to-night——"

"You idiot!" Carrol cried malevolently. "You admit sending this crook to break into my house——"

"Under cover of a search warrant, Mr. John Carrol!" Smith interrupted placidly. "Never you fret about me—I'm not really feeble-minded. That's just what you might call a surface appearance. Here's the warrant, if you'd like to look at it——"

The man with the crooked mouth knew that he was beaten. He turned to the two detectives from headquarters.

"You want anything with me?" he demanded.

"We have a warrant for your arrest," the leader of the pair said. "On the charge of attempted fraud, and other things. Sworn out by Mr. Smith, here——"

"And backed by the company," Smith concluded. "Yes, sir, and I'm afraid they're going to act real nasty about this business, before they're through with it!"



POLICE WHISTLE ROUTS ROBBERS

WHEN five young men strode into the Aristocrat, a five-story building on St. Mark's Place, New York City, at ten thirty o'clock one night recently, they aroused no suspicion, but were taken for guests at a wedding reception on the second floor, or for members of the Service Credit Corporation, which was holding an executive meeting on the third floor.

As a matter of fact, they did attend the society's meeting, but not in the capacity of members. When they reached the meeting room, they found the president, the treasurer, the secretary and five other members engaged in counting about thirty-five hundred dollars just received in dues. Two of the visitors took places at the door, and three went inside, two of them donning masks. At the same time, all five drew revolvers. The eight directors promptly threw up their hands. The gunmen snatched up the currency and checks lying on the table. Then they ordered the directors into the outer office, where about twenty-five subscribers to the society were waiting. It was evidently their intention to go through the pockets of the whole crowd, but——

Just then some one blew a police whistle—blew it hard and loud and long. No one knows just who did blow the whistle. The fact remains that it was blown, and that its blast broke up the holdup party. The five robbers became panic-stricken and took to flight. The wedding guests began to pour downstairs, aroused by the whistle's shrill blast. The holdup men made a swift dash for their waiting auto, leaving a trail of checks and currency in their wake. They just about made it and succeeded in distancing pursuit, but the nameless hero who had the nerve to blow the police whistle saved a number of pocketbooks from being gouged of their contents that night.

Prisons, Past and Present

Auburn Again, and its Champion

by Edward H. Smith

Author of "Sing Sing, First Phase," etc.

FOR all its faults and cruelties, as much as despite of them, the Auburn system became the dominant American method of penal administration. The fact that Europe adopted the opposed system of separate confinement makes this all the more remarkable, for we have seen with what fidelity our early prisons were modeled upon those of the older countries. Again, the so-called Pennsylvania system was at least as successful as that employed at Auburn, and no more cruel, if we are still to believe that such considerations had any weight. Why, then, did this method prevail?

The answer is to be found in those six northeasternmost of our States and their spiritual domination of the country during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. What has been called the New England conscience was behind the Auburn system in the shape of a single enthusiast, in whom the whole spirit of his place and people was distilled.

The name of this American John Howard, this gladiator of merciless mercy, was Louis Dwight—the Reverend Louis Dwight. I think he will not soon be bronzed in the Hall of Fame,

for his work was done entirely among the miserables, yet he deserves some sort of high enshrinement. His glory is that he pitied and strove; his abasement that he understood too little—the abasement of all men.

O. F. Lewis records that Dwight was born of "good New England stock" in 1793 and that he was of stern Puritan morals. Dwight attended an Eastern college and was there injured by inhaling chlorine gas in a laboratory experiment, with the result that he could never become a pulpit orator. Nevertheless, having the churchly mind, he proceeded and became a minister, and worked first for the American Bible Society and then for the American Educational Society. In 1824 his health became so impaired that he was advised to spend his time entirely in the open. Not content to be an idler, Dwight conceived the idea of taking long rides on horseback through the country, delivering Bibles to the prisoners in various lockups.

What he saw on these visits so horrified and impressed him that he turned at once from all other pursuits and devoted his life—with what terrible and restless passion!—to the cause of men immured. Lewis records that Dwight's

first service as a missionary among the immured was "to comfort by prayer and counsel" a woman in the New Haven jail who was condemned to die. He visited the Bridewell in New York City and shrank away in loathing and moral indignation. He went on through the South Atlantic States, visiting prisons and jails by the score, and everywhere coming upon conditions unbelievably barbarous and foul.

In the following year he returned to his native Boston and there founded the famous Boston Prison Discipline Society, making himself secretary and moving spirit of the same. That was the beginning of a great campaign which meant, in the end, the imposition not merely of the Auburn system of penal administration, but of the New England idea upon the whole of American penology.

Dwight, it is true enough, knew nothing of the subject in which he taught so assiduously. Whether he ever made any but sentimental or indignant observations or studies of any phase of prison life or of criminology seems open to the gravest question. But the man had convictions; he went ahead and did things—some of them good, some of them bad, but all well intentioned.

Here is a statement issued after his return from his first tour of prison inspection, which displays his state of mind:

There is but one sufficient excuse for Christians suffering such evils to exist in prisons in this country, and that is that they are not acquainted with the real state of things. When I shall bring before the Church of Christ a statement of what my eyes have seen, there will be a united and powerful effort to alleviate the miseries of prisons. I only know that these prisoners are the most miserable and degraded of the human race, and that no one in the country is doing anything for their relief.

The young enthusiast was a bit optimistic, as we know without much

thought, for Christians suffered the same sort of thing to go on for many another decade, and Christians still suffer the like. But this detracts nothing from the enthusiasm of the man, and the years until his death, in 1854, are a sufficient proof of his energy and zeal.

With the authority of the Prison Discipline Society behind him, with its list of distinguished and influential members, Dwight went up and down the country campaigning for better conditions in the prisons. His strong point was the immorality of jails in his day—a condition, to judge by all the records, which would have offended even a less sensitive person than he was. Dwight was early converted to the Auburn system. He believed that men should be kept separate at night and allowed to work in company by day, though in strict silence. His reason for this preference was, I am sure, merely a humane one. He thought it less cruel than solitary confinement. A little later he was able to show, by many arguments and some statistics, that the Auburn system worked better. He had the disasters of Pennsylvania on his side.

The man was indefatigable. In spite of failing health and weakened lungs, he was all about the country for nearly thirty years, addressing meetings, pleading with legislative committees, wrangling with governors, fighting with wardens, aiding prisoners, combating his enemies, and ever putting forward the banner of the Auburn system, whose faults he could not and would not see. The prisons we have to-day are at root Louis Dwight prisons, much though we may shrink from the thought.

It is worth while to catch a glimpse of the character of this mighty, if obscure, man, if we want to understand what kind of thinking and reasoning underlies our penal system.

His friends naturally described him as kind, frank, enthusiastic, and pos-

sessed of strong opinions, all of which is readily credible. His enemies, on the other hand, pointed out that he had no sense of truth or untruth, that the famous annual reports of the Boston Prison Discipline Society, which he practically wrote in full, contain the most obvious misstatements of the opponents' cause and many gross distortions of the facts. In other words, the man knew he was right, and contrary facts did not bother or dissuade him!

That Dwight was a supreme egotist we can have no doubt. Once he wrote his wife:

Let us hope that your self-denial in giving me up, to continue my efforts in that which it is bidden me to do, may result in the salvation of those who otherwise would die in their sins.

Again he wrote in a similar strain to a friend:

I am grateful to you for your willingness to give me up to the cause of the suffering and the miserably guilty portion of our race.

We find, also, that he delighted in sermonizing the insane, and that almost the last act of his long life was a sermon preached to the insane of a Boston institution.

On the other hand, Dwight worked night and day to have the obviously mad taken out of the prisons and housed in separate and more humane institutions. In that sense he is one of the fathers of our insane-asylum system, and in this field he probably did the greatest of his many services to the country. My readers will recall that in the early times madmen and criminals were confined in the same institution, as at the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, and that lunatics sometimes were penned in the same cell with convicts. As a matter of current irony, we still lock many madmen and neurotics up as criminals, but that is getting beyond the present question.

Louis Dwight had to be called to task by Senator Charles Sumner, himself a

member of the Prison Discipline Society, for inaccuracy and concealment of facts. He was again and again shown to be devious-minded, to say the least. He went about like a strutting martyr and man of impeccable justice. He rode down all who opposed him, with dire warnings and scriptural blasts. But, for all his faults, he did his work manfully and well.

What that work was, we have yet to see, though a glimpse of the Auburn system in action was caught in the preceding article, in which the early days of Sing Sing were discussed. We must now go back and see what has been happening in the old prison where Dwight's favorite method of discipline was first tried in America.

When Warden Lynds was sent away from Auburn to build Sing Sing, a man of a very different type, a gentleman named Goodell, was appointed in his place. Goodell entered the prison with the idea in mind that convicts could be better handled by means of humanity and gentleness. He commanded the whippings and sluggings of the Lynds régime to be stopped. He let the convicts know that they were not to be handled like beasts, but he still continued the rule of silence, which was one of the two cardinal tenets of the Auburn system. This was one mistake. A still greater one lay in the fact that Goodell had no comprehensive system worked out, no method of rewards or remission of severities, no such thing as we now call the honor system. But perhaps the greatest obstacle of all in the path of this well-meaning warden was the fact that both his keepers and his convicts were wholly unprepared for any such revolutionary move. Only a generation before, ears had been cropped, noses snipped, arms, backs, and foreheads branded, and unfortunates stuck into the pillory or hanged for any of a dozen offenses. Such punishments were still being used in some

of the backward States. Only the day before Goodell came, the lash had been whining across the backs of half a hundred men, while others hung chained to gratings or were striped with the cat. It was, then, no wonder that abased men, used to such treatments, should interpret the kindness and gentleness of the new warden as weakness and folly. The hunted beast cannot turn in an instant to the petting hand.

The result was, to be sure, miserable. There were six violent attacks on keepers, stabbings, fights, mutinies, and a general breakdown of the discipline. At the height of the trouble Goodell was taken fatally ill and another man, more of the Lynds stripe, had to be put in charge. Thus the famous warden Gershom Powers assumed command at Auburn in 1827. He went back immediately to the tried-and-true methods of Lynds, restored order, "put the fear of God" into the convicts, and began a noteworthy career, to the public plaudits.

But we cannot dismiss Goodell so easily. In the first place, we must note that he was the first man in America who had attempted to employ anything but force and fear for the control of imprisoned men. For that he shall some day have the laurel. But it was the rebound from the Goodell experiment that made prison history. His failure at Auburn, and the many troubles, assaults, fights, and outbreaks, were everywhere noised about. The reactionaries and tax savers stirred up their usual row and the whole State became agitated against any more of this "felon pampering." The Goodell failure thus came to be a weapon against every attempt to soften or rationalize prison discipline. It was used for fifty years, supported by other failures of such abortive attempts. It is still in the minds of the many, though the very name of Goodell is forgotten to all but the historian.

Gershom Powers made no such mistakes. He set himself up as a stern and rather distant king, who ruled the prison by force. He did not see the convicts except on his official rounds. He did not permit them to communicate with him. He deputed all powers to his inferiors, who dealt with the men as they liked and as they had under Lynds.

Yet Powers was a good deal more than a disciplinarian. As a matter of fact, he seems to have had some dim comprehension of the relationship of the social problem to crime, and he made certain investigations and researches which sound distinctly modern. Powers continued his predecessor's habit of a farewell talk between the warden himself and any discharged prisoner. He did away with the bullying at the time of entrance, or he delegated this unpleasant office to some one else. He personally talked to the prisoner only on his discharge. Then Powers was in the habit of calling the men into his office, seating them before him, assuring them that there was no further obstacle to their release, and trying to get their confidence.

The warden records in his writings that he attempted, on such occasions, to find out something about the history of the man, of the facts surrounding his case, of the mitigating circumstances, if any, of the prisoner's antecedents, education, connections, and the like. In this way the warden was anticipating the social worker of to-day. He dismissed his man with a short lecture and some good advice, to be sure, but his main plan was to find out something about the "patient" and even to keep track of him afterward.

Perhaps his interest here was merely to prove that Auburn, under his administration, was a reformatory place, or to discover, for his own satisfaction, how much reformatory value his methods had. At any rate, after prisoners

had been released, Powers took the trouble to write to friends, relatives, postmasters, district attorneys, mayors, and many others, to ask after the condition of his released charges. In his report for 1828 he states that one hundred and sixty prisoners were released in the preceding year, and that he has checked up on all, in so far as possible. One hundred and twelve, he says, were reported to be steady and industrious after their prison experience. I fear the warden was lightly convinced! Twelve were somewhat reformed. Two were not much improved. Four had vanished. Two were deranged. Twenty, however, refused to yield any decent report and were set down as very bad.

In this following up of the man after his discharge we have the seeds of the parole and probation systems, which play so great a part in the handling of criminals to-day. Evidently Powers had a sight of something to come.

Another thing this warden was able to do at Auburn was to create a financial success. It had long been the claim of the proponents of the Auburn system that it alone could render the convict self-supporting. Such work as could be done by a man alone in his cell, as at the Eastern Penitentiary, could never earn the cost of feeding, clothing, guarding, and attending. And this claim was just enough. But if men worked silently in association they could do much better. That was the claim, and Warden Powers almost made it good. In 1828 he came within one thousand dollars of meeting the total expenses of Auburn, which were above thirty-five thousand dollars. He hailed his own achievement by saying that never in the fondest dreams of prison men had anything so fine been anticipated, and he predicted that never again would the State have to appropriate a cent for the support of the prison unless there were some unfore-

seen calamity. Here the good warden was not so fortunate a guesser. Auburn was to cost plenty in the days to come, as were all other prisons.

It is, then, no wonder that the Reverend Doctor Dwight and his society were enthusiastic about the Auburn system. On the face of the returns, it did all that could possibly be expected of a penitentiary disciplinary method. It seemed to reform eighty per cent of the men, which, had it been true, must have stood as an incomparable achievement. It seemed a less harsh discipline than solitary confinement, even in a large cell with work to do and, as later on, with books to read. And, marvel of marvels, it paid for itself. It made the convict a nondependent member of society. It took the undesirables of society, penned them safely behind high walls, where they could do the least harm, kept them from contaminating one another, and still forced them to pay their way through the world. Ah, dream too bright to last!

The Reverend Doctor Louis Dwight could not, of course, leave Auburn strictly alone, even under the care of such a sterling character as Warden Powers. There was always room for improvement, so Mr. Dwight introduced, in 1827, the first regularly paid prison chaplain to serve in this country. Before that date there had been a Sunday school, and several teachers from the village of Auburn had been allowed to come to the prison and teach the convicts their Bible lessons. But they were strictly enjoined not to tell the convicts anything of what was going on in the outside world, not to communicate to them any information, and not to bear any intelligence from the prisoners to the world without. Such restrictions must have been a pretty heavy chain upon some of the sympathetic teachers, and perhaps Dwight saw this. At any rate, he got his Prison Discipline Society to put up the

money for salary, and a chaplain was shortly installed in Auburn.

Indeed, I read this touching paragraph from a report of Samuel Hopkins, one of the perennial prison commissioners and investigators of those days, whose brush with Warden Lynds at Sing Sing was recorded in the most recent article of this series:

Many at Auburn prison are often moved to tears under the preaching of an eloquent and able minister there. I have also heard them sobbing in great numbers at a few words spoken to them in public by Mr. Powers, in which he alluded to the situation and feelings of their friends. We must avoid extremes in judging them. They are not the innocent victims of unjust laws; but neither are they all demons. They are men, though greatly fallen.

Dwight and New England impressed themselves on Auburn and, through Auburn, on nearly all other prisons in another way. They installed the typical blue Sunday, then common to all men in the Northeastern States—the kind of Sunday for the breaking of which a boy was shot by an officer in one of our backward Atlantic Coast communities a year or two ago.

All day long, on Sundays, the Auburn convicts of those days sat in their cells, with no amusements of any kind and with no books to read unless they liked the Bible. No exercise was permitted. No letters could be written, for this privilege was one to be granted much later. No visitors, either personal or general, were allowed. The one blessed relief was the Sunday school, and to this the prisoners thronged, not because they wanted either religion or schooling, but because it took them out of their tiny cages, gave them a chance to see human faces, and hear the human voice, even though they might not speak themselves.

But the reading of the Bible and the listening to moral strictures required some elementary knowledge of words, of reading and writing. So it happened that the zeal of Doctor Dwight

and his society brought the first prison school to Auburn in the same year, 1827. The convicts were taught to read, write, and do figuring. This was a direct slap in the face to Elam Lynds, at this time the czar and warden of Sing Sing, who had contended, a few years earlier, that the State should not feel itself obligated to teach the convict and thus create a class of educated or intellectual criminals!

Warden Powers and Doctor Dwight, who was often at Auburn, found that more than three fourths of the prisoners could barely read and write, that many were totally illiterate, and that only a few were decently educated—in the prison sense. So the school began to operate and things began to happen in their slow and casual way. At least a beginning had been made.

From all this the reader will surely get the impression that Auburn prison was next to a paradise under Warden Powers, that the system practiced there was proving a success, if not a triumph. And such a conclusion would be relatively correct, were it not necessary to peep under the surface.

Two ghosts were rising at Auburn—punishment and labor. These are the uneasy spirits that have stalked across the churchyard of prison history at many uncomfortable moments in every decade. They were shortly to make a vivid appearance and drive many advocates of the Auburn system into fresh localities and positions.

Those who have followed these articles have already seen, from the administration of Warden Lynds, both at Auburn and Sing Sing, that the concomitant of the Auburn system was brutal beating and other corporal punishments. The discipline of strict silence could only be imposed with the iron hand and the steel-shod knout.

As early as 1824, there had been an investigation of the alleged cruelties inflicted on the Auburn convicts by the

indomitable Warden Lynds. The commissioners, headed by the ubiquitous Samuel Hopkins, reported that there was nothing wrong, and that the warden had done no more nor less than his duty. We may recall that Hopkins thought the opposite of Lynds later, at Sing Sing.

In 1828, under Warden Powers, fantastic tales of brutalities and sufferings in Auburn began to be rumored again. Discharged guards, workmen, and nurses told about Auburn, strange stories of the brutal beating of insane convicts, of the assaults of insane prisoners on others, and of a woman who died as a result of blows. This last incident, which was undeniable, brought about a second investigation. Once more we encounter the engaging, plausible, and inevitable Samuel Hopkins and his inseparable companions. Mr. Allen and Mr. Tibbits. These two adjourned to Auburn and took testimony. That of convicts was inadmissible, according to their special ruling, so they heard no one except the warden, his underlings, and a few discharged men, discredited as having a grievance.

The commissioners solemnly reported that all was well at Auburn; that the system of corporal punishments was necessary to the enforcement of discipline; that the idea of giving a convict a right to a hearing before he might be flogged would break up the whole system and swamp the warden with judicial duties; that the idea of rewarding the convicts for good behavior, an idea arising out of Goodell's experiment, was inadmissible since the men

were there to be punished, not to be tempted to good behavior. The commissioners also contrasted the excellent record of the prison under Wardens Lynds and Powers with the miserable failure of Goodell.

Let Mr. Hopkins and his friends report ever so eloquently and persuasively, let them make ever so many comparisons and deductions, the fact would not fade out that the very same cruelties were being practiced inside the prisons that had caused the public revolt at the old corporal-punishment methods. What was the good of abolishing the whipping post and other cruelties and building prisons at enormous cost, if those barbarities were to go on just the same?

I shall not go into the punishments in detail here, since I expect to devote a special article to them in the very near future. It is enough to say that these inflictions were one of the two main forces which destroyed the Auburn system through the public rage which rose against them.

I have already said that the other destroying spirit was labor. The question of the competition of convicts with free mechanics is one that was, as we have seen, first raised at Old Newgate Prison, New York, afterward Greenwich Prison. It came much more formidably to the fore in the days of Warden Powers at Auburn, and it was destined in a little while to make his self-supporting prison a mockery. This matter, too, must be treated in full in a separate article, for it has many quirks and turns and curious windings.

CHICAGO'S "PONZI" GOES TO JAIL

THE press of Chicago referred to Raymond J. Bischoff as the Ponzi of that city, owing to the similarity of his operations to those of the latter gentleman. Bischoff was recently convicted of swindling hundreds of poor people in stock manipulation and promotional schemes and was sentenced to from one to ten years in prison. Most of his victims were in the Stock Yards district of Chicago.

The House of Folly

by
Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Sealed Murder," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

SEEKING a quiet location for the writing of his novel, Hutton Powell, New York author, takes a cottage in the Berkshires, bringing with him his wife, Virginia, who is very plain and two years his senior, and his secretary, Miss Allenby, dubbed by her employer "The Qgre." When the latter becomes ill, Powell secures as a substitute Rhoda Randolph, pretty village stenographer.

Emma Hunt, Rhoda's married sister, with whom she lives, is highly elated over the prospect of a successful marriage for Rhoda with Sam Cotter, lame son of the well-to-do hardware dealer. Rhoda, however, is infatuated with Powell, a fact which his wife realizes, though he himself does not. In an outburst of jealousy Virginia tells her husband that she would kill any one who took him away from her. That afternoon she drives over to visit Miss Allenby.

An innocent remark of Powell's that his wife could not return until past midnight Rhoda misinterprets as an invitation to return to the cottage when he is alone.

On her way home from work Rhoda meets Henry Leddington, proprietor of the garage, coming out of his home, "Leddington's Folly." As they walk on together Mrs. Garet Tanner, who had broken her engagement to Henry to marry money, passes them in her car.

That evening Rhoda refuses to go with Sam Cotter to the home-talent play. The Hunts have already gone. Sam, in a frenzy at her refusal, accuses her of interest in Powell, and threatens to kill her and himself. He goes away and she starts for the author's cottage, not noticing that he is following her.

Powell, alone in his study, is startled when Rhoda rushes in, terror-stricken, and faints in his arms. Unable to revive her, he carries her to the divan in the living room and goes out to call a doctor. He returns to find Rhoda's body lying on the floor, and his wife standing near by, holding a revolver. He decides to take the blame. He wipes the butt of the revolver to remove all finger prints but his own, and tells Virginia to say that he and his stenographer were acting a part in the story when he accidentally shot her. There is no time for further talk as Doctor Robbins arrives.

CHAPTER IV.

MUCH TO FEAR.



BRISK, friendly man of fifty or thereabouts, Doctor Robbins stepped into the living room of the cottage, carrying his physician's kit, and the light was such that he did not immediately get a square look at Hutton Powell's face.

"Received your message at the opera house, Mr. Powell," he began genially. "No, don't apologize for having called me. These home-talent affairs are pretty terrible and I was glad enough to get away. You are a writer, I understand; in fact, my wife is quite a fan

for your books. She's got every one you've written. We were discussing you at supper this evening—dinner, you city people call it. My wife was saying—"

"A terrible thing has happened here, Doctor Robbins!" Powell broke in. "You have come too late; she—I suppose she was already dead while I was asking the telephone operator to send for you. She—"

"Dead?" exclaimed the doctor. "You mean that your wife—"

"No, not my wife. A village girl, Rhoda Randolph by name, who has been doing my typing since the illness of my regular secretary. I shot her—and she is dead."

"What's this you're saying, Powell? You—shot her?"

"Accidentally," the novelist answered hollowly. "We were trying to make a point in my story realistic; I hardly realize how it happened, but——"

"All that must wait," Doctor Robbins interrupted. "It is possible you are mistaken about death having taken place. Where is she?"

"This way, doctor; in my study." Hutton Powell led the way down the brief hall and into his workroom. Virginia was still crumpled over in a chair, her shoulders shaking with dry, muffled sobs. "You had best go to your room, my dear," he told her gently. "I shall call you if you are wanted." She complied without speaking and the physician dropped to his knees beside the still form of Rhoda Randolph.

"There is no doubt, doctor, of—of death having taken place?"

"She is quite dead," Doctor Robbins replied, and it seemed to the other man that his voice was hard and brittle. "Death was practically instantaneous. She may have lived a minute or two, but not long. One of the Randolph girls; I have attended her sister several times. Doing your stenographic work, you say?"

There was a grimness in the set of the physician's mouth that flashed a warning to Hutton Powell.

"As I think I told you a moment ago, I employed Miss Randolph when my regular secretary, a Miss Allenby, was taken ill with appendicitis. I can't make it clear to you how this awful thing happened unless I tell you how I do my work. I dictate to a stenographer; pecking at a typewriter as I compose hampers me. I'm all about the room; when one of the characters in my story hammers his fist on the table, so do I; when he shouts, I shout. In other words, doctor, it all becomes very real to me. I want to make that clear first."

The physician's eyes were fixed upon

the other man with a slightly narrowed gaze which Powell felt was skepticism and suspicion.

"It was the usual program," the latter plunged on, trying to conceal how carefully he was picking his words, "for Miss Randolph to take dictation during the morning and do her transcribing at home in the afternoons, bringing back the typed manuscript to me the following morning. This morning, however, she had omitted a page and I think I must have given her the idea that there was more rush about getting it to me than there really was. Anyhow, she brought it to me this evening.

"During the afternoon, doctor, I had evolved a new situation in the novel, a touch of melodrama if you will, but I rather like the notion of having the young woman in the book attempt to shoot herself. I was talking it over with Miss Randolph, for she had taken a keen interest in the progress of the story, and to illustrate, I got the revolver—that revolver on the table, which belongs to me.

"Heaven only knows how it *did* happen but she was going through the pantomime of attempting to shoot herself and I trying to disarm her. Whether it was her finger or mine upon the trigger I can not positively say. All I can tell you is that the gun was fired, that Miss Randolph screamed. I caught her in my arms, lowered her where you see her now. No doubt I will have to be held, technically, until after the inquest, accident or not; I am prepared to accept that."

"It's probably as well that you are," responded Doctor Robbins with a grave nod of his head.

"Good heavens, doctor! Don't say you have any doubts that it *was* an accident!"

"I am a physician, Mr. Powell, not a police officer."

"But you intimate——"

"Oh, but you are mistaken about that,

sir; I merely agree with you that the customary procedure would be—well, precisely what you yourself have suggested."

"So help me, Doctor Robbins, I have told you the entire truth of how it happened!"

The physician took a quick turn about the room.

"Yes, perhaps you have," he said after a pause. "My wife tells me that you write with tremendous realism, that your characters seem fairly to leap from out of the printed page and to go striding about—as you say you do when you dictate. But you are wasting your time trying to convince me. My advice to you is——"

"Yes?"

"For you to go directly to the district attorney and tell him your story. There is a local constable, of course, but he's not of the type you would call open-minded and it's the district attorney who counts anyhow. Yes, Mr. Powell, if I were you I should get into my car and drive to Howland's house—that is the district attorney's name, George Howland. This isn't the county seat but this is George's home and that's where you'll find him."

"Unless he's at the opera house as everybody in the whole town seems to be," muttered Hutton Powell.

"No, you'll find him at home; he sprained his ankle a couple of days ago and can't get out."

"You mean that I am to go—unaccompanied?"

"Who's to stop you? I haven't the authority, nor have I the personal inclination. There's not, I think, much danger of you trying to run away."

"All right, I'll go to the district attorney." He gestured to the dead girl on the floor. "What about—er?"

"The body will be removed as soon as the coroner views it, and if you will bring me a sheet——"

Powell turned from the room, and

out in the little hallway, crouched against the wall in the darkness, he was startled to encounter his wife. He knew she had been listening.

"Hutton!" she whispered. "I—I was so dazed, so stricken by the horror of it all, I have been unable to think. Now that I'm beginning to have my normal senses again, I begin to realize that you——"

"Quiet!" he warned her in a tense, cautious undertone. "I'm going to the district attorney and tell my story. If the doctor tries to question you while I'm gone—stick to my story. You heard what I told him? Stick to that—word for word."

"Hutton, we must talk this over; we *must*—before you've gone too far. I must know——" Her voice was rising hysterically and he clapped his palm across her mouth.

"Sh!" he warned her again, and, before she could speak again, loosened the frantic grip of her fingers and rushed to the linen closet for the sheet which was to be Rhoda Randolph's temporary shroud.

A few minutes later he was in the car, having asked Doctor Robbins for directions, and was on his way to the district attorney. It was only a few minutes after ten o'clock when he reached his destination, a somber, old-fashioned, and unpretentious house screened from the street by giant elms. At first he thought the household had retired, but, as he cut swiftly across the lawn, he saw a light burning in one of the front rooms.

He blinked, half-blinded, as the door was opened in response to his ring, and he could not clearly make out the features of the man who admitted him.

"You are the district attorney?" he blurted out, some of his earlier calm deserting him. "My name is Powell, and I have come to make a statement——"

"No, I'm a visitor. George has a

game ankle and I'm letting you in for him. This way."

The house, somehow, had given Hutton Powell a false preconception of the district attorney; he had expected to find a stern old man, a veteran of many legal battles, with a heritage of New England sternness ground deep into his face, and he was, therefore, not a little surprised to see a chap about his own age, perhaps younger than himself.

"You will pardon me for not getting up," the latter said, tapping the tip of a walking stick against a bandaged foot that rested upon a cushion in a low chair drawn opposite him. "I have, you see, a sprained ankle. As my friend, Penny, let you in, I heard you say that your name is Powell, and I take it that you are none other than Hutton Powell, the writer. I had heard you were a temporary resident among us."

The tone was pleasant but Powell knew he was being subjected to a searching scrutiny; he knew, too, that here was a man whom it was not easy to hoodwink. He found it difficult to meet the other's level, probing gaze.

"Yes, Mr. Howland, I am Powell, the writer; I am here at Doctor Robbins' suggestion. I have come to make a statement to you. I have accidentally shot the young woman who has been doing my typing. She is dead."

The young district attorney leaned forward, his body giving a jerk of shocked surprise.

"What's this?" he demanded, as if he had not understood clearly, although, of course, he had, and Powell knew there was no need for him to repeat.

"I should like to make a statement as to how it happened," he said, his voice unsteady. "The girl—perhaps you know her—lives in the village. I employed her when my regular secretary became ill. Randolph; Rhoda Randolph.

"Yes, I know Rhoda, the district attorney said nodding gravely; "she was

employed by a lawyer at our county seat last winter." His tone became crisp. "You may proceed with your statement of the circumstances, Mr. Powell.

The man whom Howland had spoken of as "Penny" seated himself at the side of the room and Hutton Powell gave him scant attention at the moment, speaking directly to the county prosecutor as he began to repeat, detail for detail, the version that he had recited to Doctor Robbins. He added very little. His effort to determine from the expression of Howland's face how the latter was accepting the account was frustrated by the lawyer's hand shading his features.

"There is no more I can tell you," Powell concluded with a lift of his shoulders; "I place myself completely in your hands, Mr. District Attorney."

Howland tapped his cane meditatively against the floor; for a moment or two he did not speak.

"You are a man of standing, Mr. Powell," he said slowly, "and you are entitled to the benefit of the doubt. I may say to you quite candidly I can think of no motive on your part which could have made this tragedy other than an accident, but, of course, you must realize that there will have to be an investigation."

"Yes, I understand that," Hutton Powell nodded with an inward sigh of relief; as he had hoped, he had given his manufactured account of the shooting a convincing plausibility. "I ask no special favors, but, naturally, if I can avoid spending a night in jail——"

"Oh, I hardly think it will come to that," broke in the young district attorney with a tight-lipped smile and turned his head toward the man who sat quietly in the shadows.

"Since I am incapacitated, Penny," he said, "perhaps I can prevail upon you to work while you're loafing. This is more in your line than mine anyhow." Then

he said, turning to Powell, "Perhaps I neglected a formal introduction; this is Horace Penny, an old classmate of mine, who deserted law school for—can you believe it?—the police force!" He chuckled faintly. "I'll wager Boston is the only metropolitan force in the country that can boast of a copper named Horace.

"Penny specializes in homicide, and at present he's on his vacation. Any report he makes to me in this matter of yours I shall accept as final. Accept the case, Horace?"

Hutton Powell felt as if a cold finger was tracing itself along his spine. Here was something he had not bargained for—a trained detective! And when Horace Penny arose from his inconspicuous place within the shadows, bringing his face full into the light, he felt still further apprehension.

No man but an utter fool would have discounted Horace Penny, although in twenty guesses one would not have placed his vocation as that of a policeman—the lawyer he had started out to be, perhaps, a business executive, a broker—hardly a sergeant of detectives. Powell sincerely hoped that he was concealing his uneasiness as he was so desperately trying to do.

"Why, yes, George," Horace Penny said in a voice which told nothing more than that he was at all times a gentleman, "I will take the case, and I suggest that Mr. Powell and I return immediately to the scene of the awful tragedy."

"There are people," remarked the district attorney, "who have a notion that a detective is interested only in finding people guilty, but I can assure you Penny doesn't belong to that school. An innocent man, no matter what sort of a case there is against him, has nothing to fear from Horace Penny."

Hutton Powell thought differently about that; he was innocent but he had a great deal to fear.

CHAPTER V.

"A SPLENDID LIE."

ON the way back in Powell's car, the Boston detective chatted amiably on a variety of subjects, none of which touched the death of Rhoda Randolph. Not once did he mention the tragedy; this puzzled Powell a good deal, and because he could not understand this method, it disturbed him. He would have much preferred that Horace Penny should cross-question him according to the generally accepted police formula.

Presently they came to the cottage at the end of the lane. Doctor Robbins' car was still there, which was to be expected. Powell braced himself for a renewed ordeal and led the way around the side of the house so that they might step directly into the study.

"This is the room where I do my writing," he explained; "it was here that it happened." Then he opened the door.

Horace Penny, it appeared, had a speaking acquaintance with the village physician, for they spoke formally, speaking each other's names.

"It occurred to me that George might send you in his place," observed the doctor. He moved his hand toward the floor. "I thought it best not to change the position of the body," he added. "I have only covered her with a sheet."

The Boston detective let his gaze rove about the room for a moment and then his eyes came to a rest upon the novelist.

"I shall not subject you to the unpleasantness of being a witness to this necessary examination of mine, Mr. Powell," he said quietly. "If you will step out of the room for a moment or two. No, I don't include you, Doctor Robbins; I should like you to remain."

Hutton Powell thought he knew the purpose of that; the detective wanted a chance to discuss the situation with the physician. He would have preferred to remain so that he might be forewarned of any unfavorable develop-

ment, but he had, of course, no choice but to retire.

When the door closed, shutting Powell into the hallway, Horace Penny lifted back the sheet, folded it neatly and placed it across the back of a chair; then he dropped to one knee beside the dead girl.

"An uncommonly handsome young woman," he observed. "Quite young, isn't she?"

"Nineteen, perhaps twenty," nodded the doctor and withheld further comment until the Boston headquarters man should have an opportunity to form his own conclusions.

"Heart wound, Robbins?"

"One of the main arteries leading from the heart," the physician answered. "She died almost instantly—a few minutes at most. Powell, it seems, rushed to the telephone immediately—there is no phone in the house—and I was called away from the opera house. It was too late for me to do anything."

"The gun was fired at close range," murmured Horace Penny; "very close. The muzzle was pressed against her body, probably, when the explosion occurred. The direction of the bullet, doctor—was it physically possible for the shooting to have happened as Powell has described it?"

"Yes, that part of it fits, all right; she might have fired the shot herself for all of that, but—good heavens, man, haven't you noticed her arm?" He pointed to Rhoda Randolph's wrist which bore a bruised spot and two deep, angry scratches as if the skin had been raked by a sharp dig of finger nails."

"Yes, I had noticed that—also that her waist is torn," Penny answered quietly.

"That's proof enough for me," Doctor Robbins said bluntly. "Powell's story is a trumped-up yarn."

"I suspected as much myself even when I heard him making his statement to George Howland. George, I think,

believed him, but I've heard too many manufactured tales not to recognize the brand of one. What I want is proof, however. Just thinking a man a liar doesn't prove him one, and coroner's juries are not always so expert at judging the truth. We've got to find more than we have so far; there were no witnesses, you see—except Mrs. Powell. And, to be sure, she'll back up his story."

"Yes, she does," nodded the physician. "I've been talking to her. She takes refuge behind a pretense of confusion and sticks to generalities."

"Generalities are always safer," said Horace Penny with a tight-lipped smile. "Details are what tangle up a witness, and the guilty mind usually makes a frantic effort to pile on the details. Just what did she say?"

"Well, to begin with, Penny, I asked her why she made no effort whatever to stop the bleeding from the girl's wound, which is what any person with a grain of sense would have done—instinctively. She answered that by saying she was so stunned by it all that she was powerless to move, or even to think. And, by the time she could recover from her paralysis of horror, the girl was dead.

"Her husband, she says, had gone immediately to call a doctor."

"What she says could be possible," said the Boston detective. "What about the shooting; what is her version of that?"

"She declares that she was in the sitting room with the doors open so that she was able to hear her husband and the Randolph girl discussing some matter of the book Powell was writing. Powell, she says, was very earnest, as he always is when working out a point in a story. He came into the living room, so she says, and got the revolver out of the table drawer."

The doctor paused and picked up the straight-stemmed brier pipe from the novelist's desk.

"Why wouldn't this have done?" he barked out. "Why couldn't he have used this as a dummy weapon to illustrate his point?"

"It would," Penny murmured; "it certainly would have done quite as well, but, you see, Powell insists that he is tremendously a realist."

"Mrs. Powell," Doctor Robbins proceeded, "adds very little to that. It happened, she says, very quickly. The shot came, the girl screamed, and then—confusion."

"Your theory is——?" Penny said encouraging the other.

"I haven't any theory other than that Powell is lying and that the shooting was *not* an accident."

"And what motive can you suggest that Powell might have had to shoot her—deliberately?" the Boston detective inquired. Robbins tossed up his hands in a helpless gesture.

"You've got me there."

"We shan't make much headway, doctor, until we have dug up a motive. Without that, if Powell sticks to his story, which he undoubtedly will until we can dynamite it with facts, and if his wife supports his version, there's not much chance of getting to the bottom of it."

"Well, it seems to me that those bruises, those scratches on the girl's arm——"

"You forget, Robbins, that we are dealing with a man whose business is fiction. Powell has a trained imagination; he would probably come right back at us with the answer that in this play acting struggle for the revolver he was more realistic than he had intended."

"That's rot and you know it," the doctor said with a grunt.

"It's next to the impossible to prove murder without a motive, and you have already admitted that you can conceive no reason why Powell should want to kill the girl."

"Can you?" countered the other.

Horace Penny ignored that. Picking up the revolver from the table he examined it minutely for a moment beneath the rays of the lamp and then, rather idly at first, began to shuffle through the pages of the novelist's manuscript, but as his eyes scanned the lines, they seemed to gain his interest.

"I am leaving now," he said abruptly, turning toward the physician. He took a step toward the door which led directly out-of-doors. "You may tell Powell I have borrowed the use of his car for an hour or so. I won't see him as I go out. From here I go to Howland and I'll see to it that he arranges with the undertaker for the removal of the body after the coroner views it. I'll ask you to stay until the undertaker comes."

"What!" exclaimed Doctor Robbins. "You're going—without questioning Mrs. Powell?"

"What's the use of questioning her when I know beforehand precisely what she will tell me?" the detective replied. "I make it a rule never to go gunning unless I have ammunition. You bag nothing and sometimes you manage only to frighten the game out of reach." The door closed quietly behind him, and he was gone.

"These detectives," grumbled the physician, "feel it's a part of their jobs to wrap themselves in mystery. Maybe it's a way they have to conceal how little they know."

Less than five minutes later Horace Penny was back with his friend, the district attorney.

"Quite a complicated case, George," he announced as he dropped into a chair and lighted a cigarette; "I discovered a fresh one just a moment ago as I got out of Powell's car."

"Good Lord, Horace, you don't mean you have any doubts——?"

"A whole flock of doubts, my dear George. How long has it been since you've had a rain in this vicinity?"

"Rain?" said George Howland.

"Rain? What's a rain got to do with——"

"Likely a good deal to do with it," the detective said. "Three weeks or better, eh? The roads are dry as a bone from what I've seen of 'em, but the fact remains, George, that there's a good deal of fresh mud on Powell's car. I'm naturally a good deal interested in knowing how it got there."

"Confound it, Horace, what the devil are you driving at anyhow?"

"I mean Powell's car took a trip along some stretch of road where there was mud and that the trip was taken to-night. Not this afternoon, George; the stuff wasn't dry enough for that. Does it now begin to have any more significance?"

"Yes," the district attorney responded after a pause. "That means you're thinking Powell was lying about having been home all evening. He went somewhere in the car and he didn't want us to know about it? You've got me all befuddled, old man." He tapped his cane in a brisk tattoo on the floor. "There's only one place I can think of where there might be mud and that's a detour out at Ogdenville where the State road is being repaired. The detour goes through some lowland and there's a small stream cuts through at that point—just a trickle at this time of the year."

"That seems to fit it," murmured Penny. "How far would it be from here?"

"A good fifteen miles; eighteen would probably hit it closer. On the road to Holyoke."

"Ah!" murmured the detective, an animated gleam in his eyes. "That rather fits, doesn't it?"

"What does it fit with, pray tell me?" the other demanded with a touch of impatience.

"My dear George, what a short memory you have! Evidently you have forgotten Powell mentioning to us that his

regular secretary was taken to the Holyoke hospital for an operation."

"So I had," grunted the district attorney. "Maybe I'm unusually thick, or you're unusually quick-witted, but what's all this got to do with the shooting of that girl? You're intimating, aren't you, it wasn't an accidental matter?"

"Well, I certainly doubt it."

"Good heavens, man! You mean that you think Hutton Powell shot her—deliberately? Why——?"

"I know what you're going to say—why should he have done it? I'm not sure he did; I'm not *sure* of anything. All I know is that when Powell came here with his story it didn't have the ring of truth. Right off I was skeptical. Even Doctor Robbins was skeptical."

"And you found——?"

"Not a shred of real proof, George, but several things that, to say the least, are interesting. To begin with there was a bruised spot and finger nail scratches on the girl's arm. Her's is the sort of flesh that bruises easily. Her waist was torn; her hair was tumbled down. Granted, let us say, that this alleged make-believe struggle for a real gun was more violent than Powell intended it should be. If one can believe the main of Powell's story, then it's not so difficult to swallow the bruise and the scratches along with it."

"It was entirely conceivable to me that the shooting might have occurred as Powell described; those literary fellows aren't like the rest of us. They live in a land of make-believe."

"Not the slightest effort," went on Horace Penny, "had been made to stop the flow of blood from the girl's wound before she breathed her last, and yet her face had been soaked with water until there wasn't a grain of powder left other than on her nose. I say soaked off because her hair was damp and the neck of her dress was wet."

"All this is beyond me," sighed the district attorney.

"And *that* part of it is beyond me!" admitted the detective. "Oh, I warned you I had no proof—what you lawyers call proof. Even as clues they are not very illuminating, but there is just one point more and that, it seems to me, may have some possible significance."

"Let's have it, Horace," the other urged complainingly; "you are very slow getting to the point of things."

"There was a manuscript on Powell's desk, the book he's writing, and I glanced through it, trying to find if the action of the story fitted in with this situation he tells us he was going to put into it—the girl in the book trying to shoot herself, you know.

"And I discovered," Penny's voice softened meaningly, "that the girl in the story bears a most startling resemblance to Rhoda Randolph, a very lifelike portrayal and a highly complimentary one. I make myself clear?"

"If you're hinting that Powell was in love with the girl, yes. But, confound it, if he had got fond of her so much less the reason for him to have shot her."

"I haven't for a moment thought he did," Horace Penny answered quietly. "That elaborated yarn he told us was what might be called 'a splendid lie,' but, like all lies, stupid. I suspected it from the first. Just why?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I lay no claim to being a mind reader, merely a specialist in dissecting lies. Perhaps it was just the shade of emphasis he gave to the words when he tried so particularly to impress upon you that his wife was in the next room all during the evening—and when the shot was fired.

"That mud on the car—doesn't that give you the same picture it does me? Who was driving it? Not Hutton Powell. Then who else but Hutton Powell's wife? She had been absent, over to Holyoke more than likely, and

she returned, let us say, sooner than she was expected, surprising a situation which drove her into a frenzy. Jealousy is the most violent of all the human passions."

The district attorney's cane tapped rapidly against the floor as he stared in front of him, his gaze apparently intent upon his bandaged ankle.

"Horace," he said in a tone that was both admiring and doubtful, "I'm a bit undecided if you're a great detective or a man with a runaway imagination. You sleuthing fellows, I fancy, rather have a weakness for making mysteries where there are none."

With a friendly grin, Horace Penny got to his feet and took his hat from the table where he had tossed it a few minutes earlier.

"Write your own ticket on that, my dear George," he chuckled. "Now tell me how I'm to find the house where Rhoda Randolph lived. Perhaps I'll find she kept a diary; so many foolish young creatures do."

CHAPTER VI.

COMPLICATIONS A BIT THICK.

ALMOST an hour had passed since Emma Hunt, Rhoda's sister, had returned home with Oscar and the children. For a time she could talk or think of nothing else but the part Lavinia had taken in the home-talent play, a minor part to be sure, and yet it seemed to the proud mother that the success of the entire entertainment rested entirely upon her small daughter.

"Wasn't she jest too wonderful fer anything!" she exclaimed for almost the hundredth time. "Oh, Oscar, wouldn't it be grand if she turned out to be an actress, a real actress?"

Oscar Hunt had long since discovered that prompt agreement with Emma was the surest guarantee against unpleasant conflict, but this remark stirred him to protest.

"No child of mine is goin' to be a actress," he mumbled. "Bein' a actress—well, it ain't considered quite respectable."

"Why ain't it?" said Emma bristling.

"Because it ain't," answered Oscar, rather wishing that he had kept his opinions to himself, and then, he added hastily, "My Gosh, Em, it's midnight and Rhody ain't home yet."

This successfully diverted the issue. Emma, blinking at the clock which had been her reward for saving soap wrappers for two years, realized the lateness of the hour. In a village like this the limits of a beau's "after-theater" lavishness is treating his girl to a soda at the drug store, and certainly it was peculiar that Rhoda and Sam Cotter had not returned. The married sister had a feeling of uneasiness.

"Did you see 'em at the opery house, Oscar? I was so excited over Lavinia and the play——"

"No, I didn't," Oscar Hunt answered, "but that ain't no sign they weren't there. The place was packed and, fer that matter, maybe Rhody beat us home."

This seemed unlikely, but Emma acted upon the suggestion and went up the steep, inclosed stairs to the second floor, calling her sister's name. A moment later she came rushing down again, her face white and eyes bulging with a nameless terror.

"Oscar!" she screamed. "She—she ain't there, and—and she didn't go to the show with Sam. There's her best dress which I seen her have on when I left. She's done it. Oscar; she's gone and done it!"

"Done what, Em?"

"Broke it off with Sam Cotter!" wailed Emma. "But where is the girl? Answer me, Oscar Hunt, where is she?" Which, it must be admitted, was a rather unreasonable question. Before Oscar could remind his wife that he could know no more about that than she, an

automobile stopped in front of the house.

Sam Cotter's father owned a car and sometimes Sam drove it; perhaps this would explain Rhoda's absence. Emma rushed to the window and drew back the edge of the blind, peering out. It was dark but she could see the outline of the machine, which was a roadster. No, it was not the Cotter automobile, and there was further ground for apprehension in a car stopping at the humble Hunt house, particularly at this hour of the night. The woman caught her breath.

"Go to the door, Oscar; go to the door—quick! Something's wrong with Rhoda. I know there is; I know it!"

Thus it was that as Horace Penny stepped onto the shallow porch of the shabby, forlorn cottage "north of the tracks," the door opened in front of him as his hand raised to rap his knuckles against the panel. Oscar Hunt, his head bent forward on his thin neck, squinted across the threshold.

"What's wanted?" he asked with a nervous quickness, trying to place the stranger.

"May I come in?" the Boston detective said quietly, his eyes turning toward Emma, who now stood behind her husband. "You are Miss Rhoda Randolph's sister?"

"I knew it!" cried the woman, her voice rising to almost a shriek. "I knowcd it was about Rhoda! What's happened to the child?"

"She is dead," Horace Penny answered gently. It seemed brutally blunt, but, after all, there is scarcely any way that a blow like this can be lightened. Emma Hunt staggered back as if he had struck her, her body colliding so violently with the wall behind her that the whole house seemed to vibrate and a crayon copy of her father's photograph trembled from the cord by which it was suspended.

"Dead!" she screamed. "My sweet

little Rhoda is dead. Oh, she's dead!" She toppled heavily into a chair, rocking herself wildly to and fro. Oscar Hunt stood for a moment, his mouth gaping open, each hand gripped about either streamer of his four-in-hand tie which trailed down across his shirt front; it was he who spoke.

"How—how was she killed?" he gulped. "Was—was it in Sam's car?"

"I am sorry that I must tell you she was shot," Penny responded; "her death was caused by a revolver. She——"

"Sam done it!" cried Emma. "Sam done it because she wasn't going to marry him. The murderer, the murderer!" Again sobbing overwhelmed her.

Horace Penny's interest quickened, for here was a development he had not expected. Seeing that the man was calm but dazed, he turned to Oscar.

"I am representing the district attorney," he explained; "Mr. Howland is confined to his home with an injury and he has asked me to handle the investigation of Rhoda's death—murder is the unpleasant word for it. Who is—Sam?"

"W-why, Sam Cotter," stammered Oscar; he couldn't understand how it was possible for any one not to know who Sam Cotter was. The Cotters had been one of the leading families in the village for three or four generations, and then he remembered that this tall, crisp man was a stranger.

"Sam was Rhody's fancy," he added, and there he paused; it was Emma who did the talking for the Hunt family, and Emma was fighting to control her grief sufficiently for words, trying to speak. Between gulping sobs, she told Horace Penny of her sister's engagement to the son of the local hardware dealer, what a fine chance it had been for Rhoda to better her lot in the world, and then how, that afternoon, out of a clear sky, Rhoda had intimated she wasn't going to marry Sam Cotter after all.

Brokenly but volubly the account went on; how Rhoda had been dressing for the show at the opera house that evening, everything apparently all right; Sam had tickets and was to call for her. Emma knew no more than that, but her imagination supplied a great deal more; bitterly she accused Sam Cotter of the shooting, wailingly demanding that he be hanged for his awful crime.

Horace Penny listened without interruption, gleaning what vital facts there might be from the woman's torrent of words, and this turn of things certainly did add fresh complication to what, five minutes ago, had seemed a more or less simple case.

"Where—where is she?" demanded the bereaved sister. "Where have you took—the body?"

"To the undertaker's, Mrs. Hunt," the detective answered. "Now, if you please, let me ask you some questions. Naturally the person who shot Rhoda must be punished, and you want to see justice done. There is no actual proof against any one. It will help matters along if you give honest answers to what I ask you."

"Sam Cotter done it!" she said shrilly. "He killed the poor, sweet lamb. Didn't nobody see it done? Ain't there no witnesses?"

The detective spared her the shock of being told that Rhoda's death had occurred in the Powell cottage, for she was hysterical enough as it was and this imputation of scandal would, more than likely, put her in such a state as to make intelligent questioning impossible.

"Witnesses or not, Sam Cotter done it; I know he done it because she wasn't goin' to marry him. Sam Cotter's got to pay fer this."

"It's my job to see that the guilty do pay and the quickest way for me to go about it is to get all my facts straight. Rhoda, you tell me, was getting dressed when you left the house. Sam and she were going to the home-talent play."

"That's right," Emma said with a sob. "The poor darlin' had changed her dress, and she said—she promised me she wouldn't have no fallin' out with Sam. I guess she knowed I'd argue with her over it; Sam *did* seem like such a good catch, his pa ownin' the hardware store and bein' rich, but——"

"She mentioned nothing about going back to Mr. Powell's house?" This was the first time the name of the novelist had been mentioned. Emma looked genuinely bewildered as she shook her head in an emphatic negative.

"Oh, no, sir! Why should she be goin' back to Mr. Powell's house? Her work there was always finished 'long about noon. You see, she took down what he said in shorthand, brought her notebook home and copied it all down on the typewriter—right here in the house. She *never* went to Mr. Powell's place except in the mornin's."

This statement was so obviously sincere that Horace Penny immediately dismissed from his mind any hope that the dead girl's sister might be able to tell him of the love affair which he suspected had existed between the writer and the pretty stenographer. And, after all, that was natural; since Powell had a wife, Rhoda would be reluctant in confessing an affair with her employer, but Penny could draw his own conclusions, and which he swiftly did. It was highly significant that the slain girl had been apparently satisfied with her engagement to Sam Cotter until very recently.

With that keen and almost uncanny faculty that he had of taking a few fragments of facts and weaving them into a completed pattern of happenings, Horace Penny had formed a mental picture remarkably close to the true one. He reasoned Rhoda had entertained no real intention of going to the opera house with Sam Cotter; her getting dressed for it had been but a pretense to avoid the questioning of her sister. Her plan

was to visit Hutton Powell during the absence of the novelist's wife, such an opportunity for a tryst as might not soon again be offered. How she had managed to appease Cotter was a matter of which the detective could only speculate—and perhaps she had not appeased him, had, instead, merely fired his suspicion.

Yes, Sam Cotter began to have serious consideration as a suspect, only there were obstacles in the way of this theory. Why should Hutton Powell be so eager to shield Cotter? An anxiety to hush the voice of scandal possibly, but there was the identity of the gun—a weapon which Powell had admitted to be his own. There was, to be sure, a possibility that the novelist had lied about that, too.

Cotter, as the son of a hardware dealer, would find possession of a revolver a simple matter, but the gun hadn't looked like a new one. There had been, Penny remembered, rust along the sides of the barrel.

"The complications," the Boston sleuth observed under his breath, "are getting a bit thick." Aloud he said, "I should like your permission to examine the room which Miss Rhoda occupied."

"What's the sense of that?" demanded Emma Hunt. "Didn't nothin' happen in this house?"

"It's a little difficult to explain," Horace Penny replied, "but I think it would be wise if I had a look at her room."

"He's a detective and most likely knows his business, Em," advised Oscar. "Better let him have his own way."

"It ain't that I'm objectin'," Emma said hastily. "There's nothin' I'd stop at to see Sam Cotter pay the death penalty. My dear, sweet, darlin' sister. Dead! Murdered!" She broke into a renewed outburst of weeping.

"Rhody's room is upstairs," said Oscar. "I'll show you." Emma followed the two men up the steep, nar-

row stairs, sobbing noisily. She had turned on the electric light a few minutes earlier when she had discovered the absence of Rhoda and the presence of her "best dress"—those two circumstances which had so disturbed her—and the incandescent bulb was burning from the length of its cord, arranged so that it hung directly over the dead girl's typewriter within the dormer window.

Horace Penny would have much preferred to have done his investigating without two pairs of eyes watching him, but he knew the woman particularly would resent any suggestion of this sort, so he permitted them to remain. His interest was centered upon the table which supported the typewriter. There was a half-finished page in the machine and a dozen or so pages more that she had completed, placed in a neat pile with a glass weight to hold them down. Nothing very illuminating, the detective had to admit.

"What did Rhoda think of Hutton Powell as a novelist?" Penny inquired casually. "She must have found it highly interesting, doing this sort of work."

"Yes, so she did—at first," Emma Hunt answered, "but I guess it kind of wore off. She used to talk about it a good deal, but, I have noticed, not so much lately."

"Do you know if your sister kept a diary?"

"A what?"

"Some sort of a little book she wrote things down in—her private thoughts. A great many girls do keep diaries; I was hoping that she kept one, that we might be able to find it and that it would tell us something intimate of herself." He paused an instant and then added, not with total frankness, "Rhoda does not seem to have been a very confiding nature; perhaps she's had quarrels with Sam Cotter that she never mentioned. If we could find that he

had threatened her, it would be a valuable clew."

Emma shook her head dubiously.

"I never heard tell of her havin' no diary," she said, "but I guess it wouldn't do no harm to look."

Horace Penny, perhaps, had a weakness for diaries ever since the finding of one belonging to the murder victim had solved the famous Hutchinson case in Boston three years previous. A few scrawled words from a dead woman's hand had sent Hutchinson to the chair.

Under the detective's guidance, Rhoda Randolph's effects were examined but neither the hoped-for diary nor anything else of import was brought to light, and Horace Penny knew that he had gathered all the information he might hope to find here.

"If I were you, Mrs. Hunt," he said to Emma, "I should say nothing to any one at present, particularly about our suspicions of Sam Cotter. It will be better for me to work quietly until I have got more proof."

"Suspicious!" the woman cried hysterically. "When a body *knows* anything it's some more'n jest suspicion, but I'll do what you say. I—I'll hold my tongue."

This was a more reasonable attitude than Penny had expected and it was with considerable relief that he left the shabby little house of sorrow, got into the Powell roadster and drove back toward the middle of the village. He was debating who should receive his first call, the Powells or Sam Cotter.

Something was incomplete, but what was it? It bothered him, this elusive something that he couldn't quite put his finger on. And then he got it, a small thing to be sure, but a good detective looks well for the trifles.

"Her book of stenographic notes!" he murmured, deeply annoyed that his eye for photographic detail had seemingly failed him. He could not recall having seen it at the Powell cottage, neither

could he remember having noticed it in the bedroom where she did her typing. She might, he reasoned, again with that uncanny faculty of his, have taken it with her as an alibi for her visit to the novelist's home, but, in that case, why hadn't he seen it in Powell's study?

CHAPTER VII.

A TRAGIC LIFE.

AS Horace Penny had expected, the district attorney was still up, waiting for him, eager to hear any report that he might have to make. The detective dropped into a chair opposite his friend.

"More complications, George," he announced; "I've accumulated a second suspect."

"The devil you have!" George Howland exclaimed, but he didn't make light of it, instead he leaned forward tensely. "You mean, Horace, that there's now some doubt in your mind that either Powell or his wife are responsible—?"

"Oh, I can't say that I'm completely carried away by this new lead I've dug up—had thrown at me would be putting it more exactly. Do you know Sam Cotter?"

"You mean—young Sam Cotter?" the district attorney's voice was sharp with protest. "Now, come, old man, I think this is going a bit too far!"

"Sam Cotter was going to marry Rhoda Randolph. Didn't know that, I take it?"

"No, I didn't," Howland retorted shortly. "I've spent most of my time over at the county seat for the past two years and—oh, what difference does it make? What you hint at is so utterly preposterous—"

"The girl's sister thinks Sam Cotter did it," answered Penny, staring closely at his friend. For some reason George seemed to be more upset than was called for—indignant, even angry.

"Perhaps I've stepped on the toes

of a family friendship—isn't that it, George?"

"A little more than that, Horace. Sam Cotter happens to be my nephew; his mother was my father's sister."

Penny's lips puckered into a faint whistle of surprise.

"But I shan't let it disturb me in the least," the district attorney said with an uneasiness that he was trying to conceal. "The thing you suggest is so fantastic, so absurd—well, I don't believe Sam was engaged to the girl. She doesn't belong on our side of town; you understand what I mean."

"It wouldn't be the first time a young fellow's fancy had crossed the railroad tracks," Horace Penny returned dryly. "Mind you, old chap, I'm not saying your nephew shot her, there's not a shred of evidence against him, but you might as well hear what it's all about." Swiftly he recounted the basis of Emma Hunt's suspicion after which George Howland gave a gesture of relief.

"So that's all!" he exclaimed. "I hope you're not wasting your time running down such stuff as that."

"Now see here, George, by this time to-morrow the whole town's going to know that Rhoda Randolph's sister is accusing Sam Cotter. If for no other purpose than putting your nephew in the clear, he's got to be given a chance to tell what passed between him and Rhoda this evening and to explain what he did immediately after leaving the girl's house."

"Yes, I suppose you're right about that," the district attorney agreed after a moment's thoughtful pause. "Sam can't possibly be guilty of this shooting. It happened in Powell's cottage and, if it wasn't an accident, then Powell is shielding his wife as you have suggested."

Horace Penny got up from his chair.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "perhaps you could manage the discomfort of accompanying me to the Cotter

house. I can help you in and out of the car."

"Couldn't it wait until morning?" Howland parried.

"I'd prefer not, George; I'm a great hand to get things over with, particularly unpleasant things. And I want to have another talk with Hutton Powell as quickly as is possible; the way things are now I'd like to hear Sam Cotter's statement first."

"All right, I'll go," said the district attorney. "See if you can find my hat, Horace. The folks will be sound asleep, but there's no helping that."

Horace Penny supported Howland, who winced with the pain of his throbbing ankle, out to the car, and then they were on their way to the Cotter house which was but a matter of some five blocks distant.

"About how old is your nephew, George?" the detective inquired. "I gathered that he is little more than a youngster."

"Not much past his majority," Howland answered. "Poor kid, he's had a sad time of it."

"In what way?"

"Sam came into the world a cripple—deformity of one limb. His mother, my aunt, died when he was a little shaver and old Simon Cotter is a hard-crusted man; a good deal of sympathy underneath but it seldom appears on the surface."

Penny might have observed that mental abnormality usually accompanies physical deformity, but he kept his thoughts to himself; he would form no theories until he had heard Sam Cotter's story. A moment later the car halted before the home of the village hardware dealer, a big, gaunt house, built for endurance rather than for beauty.

All the windows were dark. Horace Penny helped Howland from the machine and through the arched gateway, up the brick-paved path. Their feet

and the tap-tap of the lawyer's cane upon which he had to lean heavily, clattered through the stillness.

There was no bell at the door; instead, an old brass knocker, black with tarnish, which had once adorned an inn that one of the Cotter ancestors had kept in England. The metallic thud echoed through the quiet night.

"Simon will be in a fine peeve," grunted the district attorney. "His temper is none too good at best." This prediction was speedily confirmed when a shutter was banged noisily open, a head thrust from out of a window in the second story, and a grating voice demanded irascibly what all this racket was about.

"This is George Howland, Simon. Sorry to rout you out of bed at this hour, but I've got to see you at once on an important matter. Will you come down?"

Accompanied by a good deal of grumbling, Simon Cotter said he would. The shutter slammed shut and the district attorney turned to Penny.

"Whatever else you do, Horace," he cautioned, "don't intimate that you think Sam shot her. Simon's got a fiendish temper when he is aroused. He'd probably order both of us out of the house."

"You may trust me to be diplomatic," said the detective.

They could hear Simon Cotter coming down the stairs within. A light was turned on, a bolt scraped in its hasp and the door opened, revealing the village hardware dealer, a tall, spare man with an almost hairless pate, a time-bitten face, a pair of skinny legs protruding from below a nightshirt which was inadequately concealed by a frayed bath robe.

"A fine business you're in, George," he snapped out. "Gettin' an old man out of bed in the dead o' night like this. Well, spit it out! What's the matter?"

"You know a girl who lives across the tracks—Rhoda Randolph?"

Simon Cotter's eyes narrowed and an angry flush spread over his leathery cheeks.

"Yes, I know who she is," he said tartly. "But what's she got to do with me?" A hot gleam of suspicion, and then he added, "Is she tryin' to make trouble for my son?"

"She's dead, Simon," said Howland. "The girl's sister says that Rhoda and Sam were engaged, and——" He began to flounder a little, concerned with the best way of getting around to the real object of this visit without making it appear that Sam was wanted to explain certain things.

"This is goin' to be kind o' hard on Sam," the boy's father said slowly. "He was plumb off his head about that girl. I allow he *had* got himself engaged to her. Done my best to break it off, but no amount o' talkin' done any good. I guess we won't tell him to-night—if that's what you come for. It'll keep 'til daylight. Some sudden, wasn't it—her dyin', I mean."

"She was shot, Simon; she was shot with a revolver," the district attorney said uneasily.

Cotter's face blanched, a light of fear shone in his eyes and his lips trembled.

"Great heavens, George!" he burst out hoarsely. "You ain't meanin' that my Sam——?"

"There is no such thought in my mind, Simon," Howland answered. "She was killed in the cottage of the man she was doing work for—a chap who writes books. The circumstances make it practically certain that Sam could have had nothing to do with it, but we suspect there was an affair between the girl and her employer, and Sam——"

"I had a feelin' she weren't no good," Simon Cotter broke in grimly.

"And Sam, we hope," the district attorney continued, "will be able to furnish us with some information that will help us solve the case. Powell, the

writer, tries to tell us it was an accident, but we strongly suspect that Powell and the girl were alone in the cottage during Mrs. Powell's absence; that Mrs. Powell returned home sooner than was expected and that she shot the girl in a jealous frenzy."

"What good is talkin' to Sam goin' to do?" Cotter demanded.

"Sam had a date to take the girl to the play, but she broke it to visit Powell—at least that's the way it looks. I think we'd better talk to him, Simon, and the quicker the better."

"It's goin' to be hard on the boy," the father said slowly. "But he's got to know and maybe you're right—the sooner the better. Might as well go up to his room, George; he takes off that leg brace at nights and if he tried to come down the steps in a hurry without it——" He drew the frayed bath robe tightly about his middle and turned toward the stairs.

"Who's the feller with you, George?" he asked over his shoulder.

"A friend of my law school days, Simon; Mr. Penny is now a detective with the police department in Boston. I've got a sprained ankle as you see—give me a hand, Horace."

The three men went up the steps to the second floor and around a turn in the hall to a door at the end. Simon Cotter tried the knob but it was unyielding; the door was locked from within. The father's bony hand raised slowly as if the rap of his knuckles on the panel was like dealing a physical blow to his son, and then his fist struck the wood in a sharp rap which echoed loudly through the quiet house.

"Sam!" he called. "Sam!" There was no response, and he hammered on the door again.

"The boy certainly is a sound sleeper," observed George Howland with a faint smile, but Simon Cotter shook his head slowly and, as he turned his face toward the other two men, there

was an anxious, bewildered expression in his features.

"But Sam ain't a sound sleeper, George," he answered slowly. "And it ain't like him to have the door locked this way. I—I don't know what to make of it." Again his fists, both of them this time, smote the barred door which, none too solid, quivered beneath the blows like a thing alive.

Horace Penny spoke for the first time since he had come into the house.

"Let me have a try at it," he said in a crisp, tense tone, but he wasted no time in either calling or pounding, for he was pretty sure what awaited them on the other side of that door. Slowly, reluctantly, the same thought was finding a place in the mind of the district attorney.

"Great heavens, old man," he whispered in Horace's ear, "do you think it's possible that Sam——?"

"No!" protested Simon Cotter in a quavering whisper as his lips quivered.

The detective flung his shoulder against the door, the lock snapped and the open threshold yawned in front of them. Simon Cotter closed his eyes, lifted his head toward the ceiling and his lips moved in a silent prayer that he might be spared what he had feared had come to pass.

There was a light burning directly over the bed, a shaded light which had

been arranged for reading, and the rays flooded downward across a mound of bed covering which entirely concealed the form, lumped into the vague outline of a human body. Not so much as the hair of the head was visible.

"Sam!" cried the father in piteous entreaty. "Why don't you answer me?" He was trying not to believe what he must believe. Brushing aside George Howland, who sought to hold him back, the old fellow plunged toward the bed, caught the edge of the coverlets between trembling fingers and slowly drew it back. For one brief, horror-stricken moment he stared down at the huddled body bared to his gaze, and then, a thick, anguished groan tearing from out of his throat, he staggered back into Howland's steadying arms.

"My son, my son!"

It had taken this to plumb the depth of Simon Cotter's love for his boy.

Sam lay upon his side, his withered limb doubled against his stomach, one hand clutched about the short barrel of a .22 caliber target rifle, the muzzle of it in his mouth. The pillow upon which his head rested was dyed with a splotch of crimson.

Born into the world without an equal chance, doomed always to misunderstand and to be misunderstood, he had finished a tragic life with a tragic death. The boy was dead.

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

NEW RADIO FINGER-PRINT CODE

A NEW code for transmitting finger prints by means of radio has recently been devised by Superintendent Charles Collins of the Finger-print Bureau of Scotland Yard. The first use of this new system was made a little while ago when a man arrested in London presented an alibi which did not satisfy the Yard officials, although their records did not indicate that he was an old offender. They therefore sent his finger prints by the new radio code to New York, where the police files showed that he was a well-known criminal. In establishing the identity of the prisoner, approximately sixty letters and figures were used in the Scotland Yard code system.

Three Rings

by Donald Van Riper

Author of "Done by a Fish," etc.



WHEN do we drift?"

It was Burley Meek who asked the question that had been troubling Eddie Bronson ever since they had dropped off the freight that afternoon. Eddie lay sprawled out, elbows on the ground, chin in his cupped hands and stared at the two men squatted close up to the deep red glow of the low fire. Eddie was well back from the light, deep in the shadow of some scrubby brush oak, his face and hands a mere blur in the shadows.

"We don't—just yet," was the answer. Eddie, watching closely, noted the swift movements of Fanning's lips, the keen glint of Fanning's close-set eyes, as he spoke. Here was decision and unconsciously Eddie tensed as he waited developments.

The two men at the fire were in sharp contrast to each other. Meek was a hulking giant of a man, deep-voiced, slow in movement and thought, a ponderous blunderer only useful under the smooth guidance of Fanning. On the other hand, Fanning was slight, nervous, suggesting energy rather than power, speaking as fast as thought, and thinking faster than most.

Fanning's voice again crackled in the silence of the woods. "What's the rush, Burley? I've got a job here that will put us all on Easy Street. What do you suppose we jumped off that bone-shaker freight train for? Exercise? Not much. I've got a tip on the bank here that's worth a few thousand dol-

lars, and you want to move. What's eating you?"

"Me?" mumbled Burley. "Nothing—only that tunnel we went through this morning got me thinking——"

"And after thinking all day," snapped out Fanning, "what did you decide?"

"Nothing much. I just felt kinda homesick."

"Tunnel! Homesick!" hooted Fanning. "A fine combination."

"Reminded me of the subway," explained Burley. "Just think for three whole minutes we was riding and didn't have to look at a lot of fool scenery."

"Forget it!" snapped out Fanning. "To-morrow night you and Eddie are going to look at the inside of a bank. This is the place I told you about, where there's a big pay roll in the bank every other Friday night."

"And to-day's Thursday," sighed Burley. "That makes to-morrow Friday."

Fanning laughed aloud and glanced over toward Eddie Bronson. "How's that for brain work, kid? Did you hear Burley explain why Friday is Friday?"

"'Cause it ain't Thursday," grumbled Burley. "And it ain't Saturday."

"How's that?" asked Fanning again addressing Eddie. "Pretty smart, eh?"

Eddie did not answer, did not even yield the least answering smile. He had an idea that mirth would be stale on his lips to-night. He had half suspected, half feared some sort of plan lay behind Fanning's orders to hop off the train that afternoon. Until a few

minutes ago, he had clung to a forlorn hope that this was a mere pause in their journey, that in the morning they would move on again. Fanning's announcement about the little bank in the valley had set Eddie's temples to pounding beneath the touch of his finger tips.

Seeing that the younger man was not going to talk, Fanning returned to badgering the helpless Burley. For his part, Eddie Bronson lay there hearing things that the other could not hear, staring at the trees that reached aloft to the darkening sky, scenting familiar odors that did not even exist for such as Burley and Fanning. He realized now what had come through Burley's mind after they had ridden through the tunnel. All around him were things he had lost; the very air was pregnant with memories. Among these same trees he had played as a boy; everything here was—like Burley's tunnel—a reminder of the past, a summons to the future.

To Fanning and Burley the town of Bedford was just another hick burg, and the Bedford bank another place to be looted. To Eddie Bronson this place was home; here lived people he had known; his own name was tangled in the traditions of the place. He recalled with a start that his father had been one of the organizers of the bank.

His father was dead; all the Bronsons were dead. It was significant that he no longer counted himself as one of them. The Bronsons were gone, and the village of Bedford knew them no more; the name was simply a memory there.

That was the thing that troubled Eddie. Here the name was good, as clean and open as a furrow in a sunlit field. Yet he lurked here, a failure, worse than a failure—an outlaw, and listened calmly as Fanning talked of robbing the bank.

Burley's voice, risen in anger, crashed into his consciousness. "You can cut

that out," roared out Burley. "Kid me by the hour and then start giving orders."

"What about it?" asked Fanning, his eyes steely behind the suave question, "I can give you a stretch in jail just by one word to the police in Chicago. I guess I've a right to give orders."

Eddie glanced over at Burley. The big man's features were easily read—there was no mask there; and as he looked, he caught a fleeting glimpse of red hatred in Burley Meek's eyes and saw the jaw clamped hard. In that instant, as if charged by his nearness to that elemental instinct in Burley, Eddie despised Fanning.

He had seen Fanning pull many jobs, had felt a grudging admiration for the man's cleverness, had known chill fear of his cruelty, had always realized that some day he and Fanning would come to grips. It was a hard-driven fact that stung Eddie Bronson now. The actual struggle was at hand. For the first time he would have to refuse Fanning's bidding.

Burley's flare vanished as Fanning leaned forward and stared at him. "I'm giving the orders," Fanning snapped out. "You do as I say."

"Go on," muttered Burley and a smile that was clearly forced showed on his face.

"Well—you and Eddie can do this easy. It's an old-fashioned bank, and you can pull the job in the old-fashioned way. There's a one-man police force. The bank building isn't any stronger than a barn, and what they call the vault will be as easy to open as a bird cage."

"What about the neighbors?" broke in Burley. "Sometimes soup makes a little rumpus."

"Neighbors—say, there isn't a house within a hundred feet or more—just a row of stores and a church and an old stable. I'll see that you aren't interrupted. I looked it over while you and Eddie were brewing the Java. I

figure you could rip through the wall from the grocery and not even touch a door on the bank. Why, you and Eddie could——”

“Count me out!”

If Eddie had tossed a stick of dynamite at Fanning's feet, the latter could not have been more startled.

“What? What did you say?”

“I said to count me out,” answered Eddie. “And don't try to force me—I'm not like Burley. I'd call your bluff.”

Fanning's lips compressed at that, and his eyes narrowed as he watched Eddie half roll, half raise himself to a sitting position.

“What do you mean, call my bluff?” demanded Fanning.

“I mean that all you've got on me are jobs that you were in on yourself!”

Fanning's eyes blinked wide at this, as though Eddie Bronson had slapped him full in the face.

“No use being nasty,” he sputtered. “You're jumping at ideas.”

“I'm beating you to the jump,” answered Eddie. “I told you to count me out.”

“And you're going to lay down on us?” gasped out Fanning. “I never gave you a wrong steer; tell me if it ain't so.”

“You never gave me a right one,” Eddie marveled at the flat finality of his voice, was startled too as he realized the real truth of his words.

“What? What about Ludington? What about the Jahson job? What about the three grand we cleaned up just——”

“Yes,” cut in Eddie. “And a dozen more jobs too. I'll admit you've been smart enough to keep us from getting nabbed.”

“Well then?” In the question was a hint of relief. Fanning thought Bronson was weakening.

“But what I want to know,” said Bronson, “is what we get out of

it. We're all broke. We're either risking our necks or we're stony broke.”

“If you felt that way why didn't you say so before?” Fanning said calmly now, trying to use what he considered diplomacy. “Here we are—me and Burley and you—three side kicks—and I've just looked over the ground, and I've got a live tip, and then you say you're through.”

“I couldn't tell you before,” answered Eddie. “Because I didn't know I was through. It's something I can't explain to you.”

“Something like Burley getting homesick, I suppose,” sneered Fanning. “I suppose that tunnel got you too.”

Burley Meek broke into the talk without warning. “Come on, Eddie—no use crabbing the party. We'll pull this job to-morrow night and we'll show——”

“Shut up!” shouted Fanning. “Who asked you to talk? I'll handle him. You keep your oar out.”

Burley relapsed into a dull, smiling silence. Eddie knew, however, that now that he had spoken he must stick to his decision.

Over and over Fanning presented the same arguments, the same line of flattery, the same talk in different guise. Finally Eddie rose to his feet.

“You could talk along that line all night and all day to-morrow, and I'd still stay off this job. Count me out of this, and I'll—I'll—do three tricks for nothing. I know the game well enough, and I don't want you two to think I'm throwing you down, but I'm not in on this. I'll do three turns, and you two can split fifty-fifty, but don't——”

“For the love of Pete!” shrilled Fanning. “Why not work this? There's from three to five grand apiece here. Fifteen thousand dollars in that vault, and you stand around talking about next time.”

“Don't let us down,” whined Burley. “Boy! With five thousand smackers I

could burn the city. Don't let us down, Eddie."

"There won't be a chance for a slip. It'll be safe," interrupted Fanning.

"But——"

"Wait a minute," said Fanning. "I've got a scheme that'll work. All you and Burley——"

Eddie, fearful of his strength, waited no longer. He wheeled abruptly and started to push his way through the brush.

"Hey!" Burley yelled aloud with astonishment.

"Shut up!" hissed Fanning. "Do you want some one to drop in on us?"

That was all Eddie Bronson heard, for, once beyond the last glow of the fire, he broke into a run. All he wanted to do was to get free and think. He ran on and on, unmindful of the stinging branches, stumbling at times, but never stopping. He must get away from Burley and Fanning and the lulling red fire.

He was afraid, fearful that Fanning's sheer persistence would win, that he could not face them both down. Even as he ran, he recalled how Burley had taken a knife thrust for him one night. Here in the jumbled dark, he could still vision up the picture of that leaping blade and the way Burley's big shoulder had taken the thrust.

That was like Burley—too slow to grab the swinging arm, too dull to call a warning, and yet loyal to the core doing the next best thing. The knife had messed Burley up. It might have killed Eddie Bronson. His pace had slackened now, but, as he remembered Fanning, he plunged ahead again.

Fanning was like a rat, scheming, patient, willing to gnaw and gnaw against another's will, in the belief that at last he would gain his end. But Fanning wasn't all rat either. He remembered the night that Fanning had come back after a get-away well begun and risked everything to help Eddie get free.

That was the time he had smashed his ankle in an open air shaft. Fanning had seen too that Eddie's broken bones were well healed.

They weren't all bad. Burley, indeed, was more stupid than anything else. It was Fanning who was the evil genius. It was the thought of Fanning that had kept him running now. If Fanning should guess the truth, should find out the real cause of his quitting, there was no telling what might happen. There was only one certainty in the whole business—Fanning would stop at nothing to force him to work to-morrow night.

Bronson ran until he could run no more. He had almost reached the ridge road when he sank wearily to the ground. If only for a minute he had escaped. At least, if he stayed here, he could fight it out fair and square.

Still it was not long before he rose again and covered the last few yards to the road. Once there he faced down grade toward the little town. He felt that he could judge better if he saw some of the places he had known.

At the curve, where the ridge road begins the last long dip to the valley floor, he paused. Far below was the village, the windows yellow with light in that depth of shadows beneath the stars. At the left he could see the white blurs of Guthrie's and Palmer's and Kelsey's houses as they rimmed the hill-top and caught the light of the sky. A little below Palmer's place was the house where Eddie had been born, the scene of his childhood and early youth. From there, within a week of his father's death, he had run away.

He tried now to force his gaze to the right toward the wooded slope and beyond to the line of the railroad. Down by the south-swamp culvert were Burley and Fanning. He tried to look that way and failed. His eyes returned to the slope below Palmer's house.

It was hours before Eddie carried

his search much farther. He had seen most of the lights blink out. Of those that were left he knew four. The three bright lights were along the store block; the end one, just opposite the church; the middle one, in front of the bank; and the near one, just in front of the grocery store. The light down beyond these was at Wolfington's—they kept a light burning all night. There was one light he did not understand. It was showing where his father's house had stood.

Some newcomer had the house, perhaps. Or some old village family had moved up here to the hill. It might be—

As if realizing the futility of guessing, he started forward. Almost unconsciously he turned off at the old path across the stone pasture.

At the last fence he stopped, checked by the knowledge that his kind were not welcome here. The light he saw now came from the kitchen. Perhaps that meant that some one was sick.

From where he halted he could see the stove and part of the table. For some time he waited, to be rewarded at last by the brief picture of a girl standing there cooking something on the stove. He could not see her face but something in her appearance stirred his memory.

A little later, when the house was in darkness, Eddie Bronson turned and retraced his steps across the stone pasture to the ridge road. The sight of that girl had wrought a subtle change in him. All he had noted was the ruddy cast of her hair, the smooth supple line of her neck, the homy blue-and-white checkered dress; and yet it was as if some one had stepped for a fleeting moment from the past, almost as if the last six years had dropped away. He felt, as he turned away, that here at least was a clean remembrance that he could carry away with him.

Jean Palmer was in the old Bronson

house. No matter how or why, the idea brought up the thoughts he had had as a lad. From mud-pie days to the time of beau nights, they had always said that some day they would be married. He wondered if she even remembered him, as she moved about in that house.

No doubt she had married. It might be that she now lived in the old Bronson house. There were a husband and children perhaps. Maybe she had married Harry Guthrie. He tried the name softly to himself—Jean Guthrie.

There were hundreds of things he could recollect, and it was easier to do so than to guess at the unknown present. Hundreds of things lay associated with her, but curiously enough his thoughts were queer, unconnected ideas: Her hair braided into a long pigtail when they had walked down the road to school; the day she had dared him to jump from the peak of the barn, and he had done so at the cost of a broken arm; the time that she had gone beyond his means at the Sunday School picnic; the day they had been walking through the woods and had found the dead stranger crumpled in the brush.

That last had seemed so terrible to them. Now! Eddie Bronson smiled grimly in the dark. Some day he might be found like that, a bedraggled stranger destined to an unmarked grave. How they had shuddered, two children for the first time at grips with tragedy. Eddie shivered. Whatever had made him think of that?

One thing he knew—he was not going back to Burley and Fanning tonight. He'd stow himself away in the old wood-lot shanty of Palmer's. It might be that, by morning, he could reach a decision.

He did sleep that night in the old shanty down in the corner of Palmer's wood lot, slept indeed with astonishing soundness, and only wakened when the sun, already high, beamed through the

shattered window in the east side of the shack. His had been a dreamless, easy sleep, so that he wakened much as he would have wakened ten years before. He stared lazily at the sun-shot walls for one flashing moment, taken back to the days when he and "Tubby" Kelsey, "Red" Benedict, and the rest had camped out in the wood lot. He stretched his arms aloft in one wakening yawn and the sight of his worn coat sleeve brought him out of dreams to the brutal hardness of facts.

It was morning, Friday morning, and to-night he and Burley and Fanning were going to loot the bank.

On a wild impulse he went back the way he had come, only, when he reached the road, he stayed down in the shallow ditch and walked with averted head. Just opposite the old house he paused a moment, fighting against an intangible force that bade him to turn in the stone pasture path. At length he looked full at the house and stood there gazing at its unchanged beauty. He seemed rooted, unable to move, caught in the whirlpool of his own indecision.

He saw a shade lifted and dropped again. Then, after a moment, the kitchen door swung wide. He glimpsed the wholesome freshness of her face, the trim blue and white dress, and yet he did not, could not move. Across that rock-strewn field her glance seemed to dart to him. Then with a half-hearted gesture she waved. Eddie moved now but belated effort betrayed him. Something of his gait must have remained in her memory. He heard her call his name.

"Eddie! Eddie Bronson!"

Stiff and unheeding as a deaf-mute, he marched on, forcing his feet to each step, trudging stolidly up the road.

At last he reached the sheltering bend and once shielded by the trees he broke into a run. He was going back to Fanning and Burley, driven by the ring of recognition in the girl's voice. There

had been a touch of something else in that call—surprise, amazement, a pleasant reminder that Eddie Bronson had not always been as he was now.

Long before he reached their hang-out by the culvert, he had decided. He could not come back home just yet. He must come back with at least the appearance of being decent. Just as surely he could take no part in the robbing of the bank. He would tell Fanning so.

He had to wait at the culvert for Fanning and Burley. Fanning came alone within a few minutes as though he had followed his path through the woods.

"Going through with it?" was Fanning's greeting.

"No!"

"Yes, you are," came the snarling response. "I kept tabs on you last night, and I watched you after you left the shack this morning. I know what's eating you."

"What?"

"This is where you come from," was the flat, convincing statement. Fanning faced Eddie squarely now. "And if ever you want to come back, you'll take my orders to-night."

Eddie ran his tongue through his dry lips. Fanning had seen and heard the girl just now. The rat had kept gnawing till he had won his way. For one scorching moment he quivered with the impulse to drive his fist in Fanning's face.

"That girl that called to you just now——" began Fanning.

"Shut up," cried Eddie. "I'll——"

"You'll do nothing," whispered Fanning. "If you cross me, I'll let the home folks know just what sort of a bloke Eddie Bronson turned out to be. You were ashamed to face that girl just now. When I get through with you, you'd never dare show your face here again."

Eddie saw the truculent thrust of

Fanning's lean jaw, saw too the chilling sureness of Fanning's eyes, and seeing he knew that he was beaten. Forced though it was, the knowledge brought relief. At least he would not sell out Burley Meek. Fanning no longer mattered. Briefly he told him so.

When he had finished Fanning laughed harshly.

"All right—after to-night, we're through. And seeing how it cuts you, I'll not risk telling you too much. I'm going now. Burley will meet you here to-night at nine o'clock. After you and Burley finish at the bank, he'll bring you to me. We'll split. Then it's every man for himself after the get-away."

Abruptly Fanning turned away. Only after he had taken several paces did he call back.

"Nine o'clock—right here. You meet Burley. Understand?"

Eddie choked out his assent. Dully he realized that he had helped Fanning to obtain the upper hand. Why had he blundered into the trap? Why, when the girl had called to him, had he not turned and gone to her? Her voice calling his name seemed suddenly the symbol of everything he wanted to regain, and yet he had walked on up that road into Fanning's grip. Now he was caught. There was nothing to do but go through with it.

At nine o'clock he met Burley, and, as they heard the clock on the church striking ten, they started out with Burley in the lead.

"Good you came back," mumbled Burley. "I couldn't work it alone. Fanning said you'd go through with it."

Eddie did not answer. He had said as little as possible before, and he saw no reason to talk now.

He wondered where Fanning was and what he was doing, but he did not ask. In this venture he was nothing more than a tool, a voiceless prop for Burley. and, when the time came, the skilled worker at blasting open the vault.

They approached the village at a snail's pace, so that it was half past ten when Burley forced open the window of the store which was next the bank.

"Now for the wall," whispered Burley as he slid inside.

As Burley disappeared within, Eddie fought down the last impulse to flee. It was no use. He had to go through with it now. Fanning would live up to his word, would make his name a byword in the village.

Inside he wondered at the inactivity of Burley.

"Let's get at it," he breathed.

"Fanning said to wait," came the gruff answer from the darkness. "He said to wait until——"

"Until what?" demanded Eddie. "We got to get through that wall to the bank and do it quick."

"Fanning said to wait," rumbled Burley.

They waited over the seemingly dragging minutes until the church clock boomed eleven in the street outside.

"Well," said Burley, "let's start. Easy does it."

Eddie turned to grope for the bars they had carried. With them they could rip their way through the flimsy wall in short order. He paused as he saw the pale pink that tinged the window. Transfixed, he stared at the color against the glass.

"What's that?" he gasped out.

Before Burley could speak his question was answered. The first clamoring note of the iron fire signal came, through the silence. Another! Eddie could picture some wide-eyed farmer banging the hammer against the iron ring. Another!

"Ring three!" echoed Eddie. "Down by Torence's mill." He was at the side window now peering out, unmindful of the growing light in the sky. It looked like the mill.

Again the clanging summons of the

bell. This time Eddie sprang for the window they had forced.

"Hey!" called Burley. "What the dickens——"

"It's Torence's mill," snapped out Eddie. "A fire!"

"Course it's a fire," growled Burley and his hands gripped Eddie.

The action was ill-timed. Eddie spun and twisted and was out through the sash.

"Come back," said Burley. "Fanning did it to cover us."

"I'm through with Fanning and you too!" called Eddie and ran.

The Torence mill was the one big thing in the village, the source of money, a creation of a benevolent despotism that was part of the village's life. The bell calling again made Eddie leap into full speed. As he ran, he yelled the dread call of all country places.

"Fire! Fire!"

He was part of it all again. The mill was burning. The alarm was calling every one who could come, every one who cared to help, and Eddie did care.

He had heard of this sort of thing, setting a fire to get every one away while a bank was looted. That was why Fanning had kept him in the dark. He stopped a moment to pound on Wolfington's door.

Eddie arrived to find himself unheeded, just one of a growing crowd. The Torence mill was fairly started for destruction. Only the most desperate work could save it. Eddie dropped into place in a bucket line. One connecting link in a line of battle. Swiftly the leaders dropped back gasping. Eddie had the front place. He clung to it, as though the racking torture of smoke and heat could sweat and sear out the past. At last he too fell back, and another took his place.

As he staggered away, his eyes stinging with smoke, some one spoke to him.

"Eddie!"

"Jean!"

"It was you I saw this morning," she said. "You've come back?"

He nodded.

"I'm glad," she said and smiled at him.

He went back to help with the memory of her smile. Others spoke to him now, as he went forward to take his place in the line again.

By some desperate miracle they checked the fire. It sputtered at last rather than roared. The hand pumps and the buckets had really won at last.

Eddie did not wait. He was off again, headed for the railroad tracks. Down by the culvert, the freights slowed for the grade over the ridge. He would hook on and go. Fanning would queer him now in the village.

Down by the culvert he crouched low in the ditch and waited.

Then he dropped flat at the sound of some one breaking through the brush. He heard voices. With a start he recognized Fanning.

"The fool—I'll let them know what he is."

Then as they stumbled on to the culvert within ten feet of him, he heard Burley's answer.

"And get yourself up for arson. You lay off him anyway. He wanted to come back, and now he's got a good start."

"Shut up!" said Fanning shrilly.

"I won't—but you will."

He saw Burley's great bulk fling itself at Fanning. Before he could move, he saw the swift lurch of the knife. Burley's fist beat Fanning's blade. With a gasp the lighter man went down. Burley was on him.

"You and me is through," whispered Burley. "And lay off the kid—or I'll get you."

Fanning struggled, only to yield at last.

"Lay off?" insisted Burley.

"Yes," gasped out Fanning.

And Eddie, listening, knew that he was to have his chance after all. Fanning's promise would hold.

Soon after the night freight rolled away with Burley and Fanning, Eddie

rose and headed through the woods toward home. He would talk to Jean Palmer. She could give him good advice. To her at least he would tell the whole truth. He knew that she would understand and help.

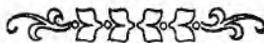


FAMOUS OLD GAMING HOUSE CLOSED

THE brownstone building at 156 West Forty-fourth Street, New York City, was recently sold by its owner, "Honest John" Kelly. For thirty years Honest John operated a gambling house at this address, until he finally was closed up by Police Commissioner Waldo in 1912. This house was one of the landmarks of New York's notorious "Tenderloin" district. As the scene of big card and dice games in the old days, Honest John's resort, known as "The Manister Club," was a rival of the better known Canfield's. The roulette wheel and the faro layout flourished, and millions changed hands in the course of a week. It is said that the average nightly "business" of the place was something like \$150,000, of which sum, the house received a generous percentage.

In the old days the brownstone dwelling was a fortress. Back of the heavy wooden door at the street entrance was another equally strong, and at the head of the first flight of stairs was a steel door. It was this door that stopped the police from raiding the establishment, but when Waldo became police commissioner, he made so many raids that Kelly became discouraged. Honest John, according to current reports, is now operating a club at Nassau, Bahamas, where such things as police raids, Volstead Acts, and antigaming laws do not disturb his equilibrium.

The famous old brownstone gambling house on West Forty-fourth Street is now in process of demolition to make way for a theater and office building.



ESCAPED CON'S WIFE REGRETS HER SNITCH

IN 1915 Lewis Bascom was convicted of forgery in Cleveland, Ohio, and sentenced to a term of fifteen years in the State prison at Columbus. A year later, he was made a trusty, and shortly after that added dignity, he walked away and was heard from no more at the jail.

He went to Detroit, Michigan, and set to work as a painter and decorator. He did well—so well, in fact, that he found himself in a position to marry a pleasing young widow. Before marrying, Bascom told his wife-to-be of his past, and she promised to be loyal to him, no matter what happened.

The marriage seemed to be a success, and four children—all girls—were born to the couple. Bascom worked steadily and provided well for his family. After a time, however, he began to seek recreation and relaxation in one of the numerous "blind pigs" with which Detroit is studded, and this annoyed his wife. It annoyed her so much that she went to the police and told them that her husband was an escaped convict.

As a result of her "snitch"—as the underworld would call it—Bascom is back in his prison cell, serving out the remaining fourteen years of his sentence, and his wife is wondering how she is going to provide for herself and her four children. She rather regrets her hasty action in revealing her husband's secret.

The Mark of Cain

by Edgar P. Meynell

THERE had been a tumult of words; after that, a shrill, quavering cry, ending abruptly in a groan. The swarthy, broad-shouldered man, standing stiffly erect near the door, held his breath and listened. Had any of the sleeping tenants of this strange apartment house heard the disturbance?

Apparently none had heard, for the brooding silence of the night was now unbroken. He sighed and wiped his glistening face. Slowly and unwillingly, his eyes traveled downward and rested on the sprawling figure lying prone upon the floor. It had come at last—the catastrophe which every crook dreads. From this moment forward, the mark of Cain was upon his brow—invisible to every one except himself, perhaps, but likely at any moment to blaze out in all its murderous significance. His life was forfeit.

But at this thought, he began to pull himself together. It needn't come to that. Many murderers went uncaught, and this crime of his had peculiar features making for his safety. He must take precautions, of course. First, the weapon. He glanced at it—a tapering, hardwood cane with a copper core. The man lying there before him had carried it until the moment of that final, swift conflict. It must not be left behind—any clew might lead a little way in the right direction. He would take the cane with him, presently, when he departed.

But there were other details to attend to first. He had already emptied the stranger's pockets. Now his eyes

rested for a moment on a crimson stain upon the floor, beside the down-turned face. Walking noiselessly across to the kitchenette, he found a tea towel, moistened it at the sink, and returned with it. Carefully he wiped up the telltale smear, then approached the fireplace and thrust the wadded cloth far back under the grate with the aid of the cane.

There was a hint of reluctance in his face as he turned again toward the body. There must be no trusting to luck—he must do everything he could to confuse the trail. Of course there was hardly a chance that his presence here to-night could be traced, for the apartment was not his, and the legitimate tenant had never seen him, in all probability. It had been a stroke of inspiration amounting almost to genius, his bringing his victim here. If he hadn't happened to overhear the dapper little man, with the artist's color box and the neatly waxed mustache, talking to another man about the vacation on the seashore he was embarking upon; and if he hadn't happened a few minutes later to pick up the tagged apartment house key the artist had dropped—

However, he had done both of those things and subsequently had come here with his victim. For another long moment, his sinister eyes lingered on the furnishings of the room. Then he drew a sighing breath, looked down with a compression of his crooked lips, and the next instant had stooped and had taken into his massive arms the limp figure which both fascinated and repelled him. In spite of his great strength, he had to

shift the yielding thing about to get a firmer grip upon it. Turning, he approached the outer door and snapped out the lights.

The door opened silently, and for a time the swarthy intruder stood listening. Not a sound came to him from the sleeping city, or from the apartment building in which he stood. Opening the door farther, he stepped into the hall. A glance had showed him that it was empty, and that the automatic elevator was standing at the first-floor landing. Approaching it with noiseless and easy strides, he opened the outer and the inner doors; deposited his gruesome burden on the floor; and reclosed the cage. Next moment he had reached in through the lattice work of the door and with his victim's cane had pressed the sixth floor button and kept pressing it for fully a second.

A sound escaped his compressed lips. He had been looking into the car as it started upward, and he would have sworn he saw one of those slender hands move—or was it imagination? Perhaps the body had settled, under the pull of gravity! Surely there could be no mistake—

The car was humming softly upward. Should he press the button and recall it? Ought he to make sure? Suppose the fellow should not be dead—suppose he should regain consciousness long enough to tell his story?

The elevator came to a jangling stop, six stories up. For an instant the dark-faced man stood with his thumb hovering over the button. Then he leaped back and turned his ashen face upward, as if he could see through the intervening floors. There had come suddenly to him the metallic jangling of the outer door of the elevator. He had heard no one in the upper hall, but now in a moment his blood was like ice water in his veins. He staggered a step farther back, his lips parted, his eyes those of a wild beast at bay. The inner door

was being drawn back. Some one must be about to descend to the first floor.

His eyes blazed, and the skin about his mouth and nostrils drew tense. He turned and bounded along the hall toward the street door. There was not a moment to be lost, for the body of his victim would be discovered, inevitably and instantly. The police would be summoned.

Strangely enough, this realization steadied his nerves and quickened his mental reactions. The police would come—but that would take time; probably a quarter of an hour. Before then, he would be far away—would be in some obscure rooming house, where his presence would attract no attention.

He knew the city. After all, there was nothing to connect him with this affair.

Unless his victim should not be dead? Little enough chance of that, but it would make no difference, in any case, he decided. The young fellow probably could not even describe him accurately—people were like that; and their meeting had been a matter of chance. They had been strangers until they met on the train, that morning.

A sudden chill came over the man hurrying through the night. His shoulders shook and his teeth chattered; merely the reaction from the strenuous events of the last hour, he realized. Again he felt the tingle of his fingers as he struck wickedly downward with the loaded cane—and again he shook in the grip of that old haunting fear.

At last it had come, the thing he had foreseen through all these years of easy success. And the mark of Cain—instantly his trembling hands went up to his forehead, as if he expected to find it deeply branded there.

Tom Neville climbed wearily out of bed, donned a dressing gown, and seated himself beside his open front window. From his sixth-floor apartment the city

showed as an intricate pattern of pin-point lights, against a background blue-black. And it was all so still. As he lighted a cigarette and sat back in his chair, Neville realized that it was this somber silence of the sleeping city that kept him awake, hour after hour, night after night. The moment the milk wagons began to rattle down the street under his window, he would be able to fall asleep. He had been that way from childhood. The silence of the city at night oppressed him and weighed down his soul. It was like the hush of some crouching thing.

Nervously he laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and picked up a magazine from the table beside his chair. The cover design was his own work, and now idly he glanced at the vacuously pretty face of the model. Next moment, however, the magazine fell from his trembling fingers. From somewhere behind and below there had come to him the sound of a voice, high-pitched and protesting. It rose into a chatter of fear and entreaty; rose again into a shrill, nerve-crashing scream; and in the same instant died away. During the half dozen seconds the sound lasted, Neville had received two distinct impressions. One was that the words the man below had chattered had been in some foreign tongue, probably Spanish or Italian. The other was that this disturber of the early-morning silence had been in deadly fear of something—and that something had materialized, to shut off his cry for help.

The young man stationed beside the sixth-floor window sat for another moment staring into the darkness. It had become articulate at last, and its voice was as evil and as sinister as he would have expected. But next instant he shook off his superstitious fancy. That had been no disembodied spirit, no principle of evil, the thing that had screamed out that frantic appeal. What ought he to do? Never an executive sort of per-

son, Tom Neville now sat for a space of seconds staring toward the open door of his kitchenette. He was satisfied that the sound had come to him from that direction—probably up the light wall from some lower floor. That gave him an idea, and he stood up presently and walked toward the rear window. He reached it and stood for a moment hesitating.

Shaking off his fear, he gently shoved the window farther up and thrust his head into the shaft. It was dark save for one dimly lighted window on the first floor. That would be in the apartment of Jacob Fortier, the marine painter, Neville decided. And Fortier was the last man in the world to be mixed up with anything out of the way. As he stood irresolute, however, the light suddenly went out.

He drew back into the room and stood listening. No other sound came to him now. Brooding quiet—the evil quiet of the city in the small hours of darkness, when men were dying—

He must at all cost throw off that morbid idea. Turning into his bedroom, he quickly dressed. Then he left his apartment and went along the hall toward the elevator shaft. He would go downstairs and find out—would satisfy himself that the whole thing was a creation of his overwrought imagination. The hall was as silent as if the apartment building were a vault in some cemetery, and its inhabitants were all sleeping their last sleep. That was according to unvarying formula—they were all orderly people, early to bed—

But here his feverish speculations were cut short by something that wasn't according to formula. He had walked soundlessly along the sixth-floor corridor and was close to the shaft of the elevator when he heard the car coming up. That was strange—it must be a little after two.

He checked his guesses and waited. Up it came. Surely it would stop at

the fourth or fifth floor, for here on the sixth no one lived but himself. But the car droned its leisurely way up and up, and presently he saw its gilded roof and the grilled work of the upper half. Who could be coming?

With a muffled cry of fear and incredulity, the young man staggered back. *There was no one in the car—but he had not pressed the button that would summon it!* For a single instant the impression came to him again that the whole affair was the work of disembodied principles of evil—the brooding, malevolent spirit of the night. Then he mastered himself, stepped forward, and drew open first the outer and then the inner doors of the elevator. He saw that there was some one on the floor, doubtless some drunken person who had started the car up and then had collapsed; but when he stooped and sought to turn the averted face into the light, he felt a sticky smear.

The next few minutes passed with nightmare confusion and rapidity. He was vaguely conscious of having raced back to his own apartment. He was at the phone, talking excitedly with some one—the police. He hung up, his heart pounding. The house phone was in the hall outside his door. Running to it, he called the manager of the building and told him in half a dozen quavering words what had happened.

The limp figure in the elevator seemed not to have moved, when he was again looking down at it. By the dim light that filtered into the car, he could make out that the fellow was slender and roughly dressed, and that his dark, disordered hair was thick and untrimmed. From somewhere below came a sound of rattling at the door of the shaft. The manager, probably, trying to remind him that the car was tied up. Neville called down to him to use the stairs, and presently saw him appear, hastily dressed and prepared for expostulation.

But the words of protest died on the

manager's lips, when he joined Tom Neville in the open doorway of the elevator and stood looking down. Together they managed to get the stranger—for he was a stranger, the manager declared after one glance into the pallid face—out into the hall.

Five minutes later a peremptory pounding came to them from the lower corridor. The police had arrived.

The first thing Inspector Jacobs, of the homicide squad, did, was to examine the silent figure lying in the sixth-floor corridor. He laid his hand on chest and wrist, staring meantime about the hall. His lips drew together, and he turned to his companion.

"Call the hospital, Jim," he commanded. "This lad isn't dead, although he's close to it. Now, gentlemen, let's hear what kind of celebration you've been having here!"

The headquarters detective listened silently to Neville's account of the voice that had come to him from the night, and to the story of the mysterious ascent of the elevator. Once or twice he fixed his penetrating gray eyes on the face of the younger man, as if appraising his truthfulness and reliability.

"Sounded like he was talking some foreign lingo, did it? He looks like a foreigner—Italian, most likely. Now, let's see about his pockets!"

There was nothing in the stranger's pockets, however. Inspector Jacobs examined them with swift thoroughness. Afterward he straightened to his feet and again glanced at Neville.

"You say there was a light on, downstairs, when you looked out your window? Which room was it in?"

"It seemed to come from Mr. Fortier's apartment."

The building manager uttered a vigorous protest.

"You must have been mistaken—Mr. Fortier's place is empty. He left this morning for the seashore!"

"I'm sure the light was in his kitch-

enette window. It went out while I was looking down at it!"

"It couldn't——" the manager began.

But Inspector Jacobs cut the argument short with a curt nod.

"We'll go down and have a look around," said he. "Jim, you stay here till the stretcher crew comes—tell doc where I am, if I haven't come back!"

He stepped into the car, waited for Neville and the manager to follow him, and close the two doors. As he pressed the button, his alert eyes studied the layout of the car.

"Sounded to you like the elevator came all the way up from the first floor?" he demanded, turning to Neville. The latter nodded. "Who else is on that floor?" Jacobs asked, turning upon the third member of the party.

"There are just four apartments—Mr. Fortier's, which is empty, Miss Granger's, Miss Scott's, and mine!"

"Miss Scott or Miss Granger likely to have done this trick?"

Both Neville and his landlord exclaimed in horror at the idea.

"And you didn't do it, I suppose? Then it looks like Fortier's apartment is our best bet!"

The manager compressed his lips, but said nothing more. The car stopped and they stepped across to the apartment door. He unlocked it, reached inside, and turned on the lights.

The room thus revealed was as silent and as destitute of any evidence of life as if it had been discovered in some long lost and buried city. There was upon it the same air of quiet, of brooding recollection. Inspector Jacobs motioned his two companions to stand where they were, and for a time he himself stood beside them, staring into the apartment. Then his keen eyes focused themselves upon a spot on the polished floor perhaps ten feet from where they were stationed.

"You say this man, Fortier, left this morning?"

"Yes. I saw him go——"

"When was this place of his last cleaned up?"

"I had the janitor in after Mr. Fortier had gone. He asked me to have that done."

"Did the janitor scrub the floor?"

"No—he used the vacuum cleaner!"

"Ah—then just stand where you are!"

Jacobs strode into the room and half-way across it, Dropping to one knee, he laid the tips of his long, sensitive fingers upon a glistening spot on the floor.

"Moist," he commented, half aloud.

"It couldn't have been your man, in any case, because it would have dried hours ago. Now, let's see what sort of mind reader I am!"

He stood up and looked broodingly around the apartment. Tom Neville and the building manager stared at him in fascination. There was a precision and a confidence in the bearing of this tall, strongly built man from headquarters that impressed both of them, in spite of themselves.

Presently Inspector Jacobs nodded, crossed to the empty fireplace, and picked up the poker. With it he raked first among the ashes and then prodded under the grate. His eyes flashed, and he fished out something—a wadded cloth, which he unfolded and held spread out before him.

"Wet—and stained!" he commented. "This bird is running true to form. That's one thing a murderer can't get into his head; that his mind is the same sort of mind every other murderer has, and that it will induce him to go through about the same set of motions. Now, landlord, tell about this man, Fortier!"

"Mr. Fortier is internationally known as a marine painter. Fifty, or close to it—unmarried—a careful, clean-living man who would have no more to do with this sort of thing than I would!"

"Ah, you think so? Well, when

you've been in the detective business as long as I have, you'll begin to realize that you never know who'll do what. You say he started for the seashore this morning? Where?"

"Eagle Bay—that's where his mail was to be addressed."

"I expect a chap like him would put up at Cliff House? Sure, I thought so. Well, we'll soon check up on him. If he went through with that program, he wasn't in the city to-night. All right, gentlemen—I think that's the ambulance in the street. We'll go up and see our man off."

A physician had come with the ambulance crew—a young fellow with a bored air and a flaxen mustache. He made a swift, expert examination of the mysterious stranger, and pronounced him rather more dead than alive. While this was going forward, Inspector Jacobs took the opportunity of again examining the injured man's pockets.

Next moment he had straightened to his feet, staring down into the palm of his half-closed hand. In it lay a tiny something which he had picked from the lining of the pocket. It looked like a diminutive but exactly cut crescent of salmon-colored pasteboard—a bit of heavy paper, perhaps, a sixteenth of an inch across at its widest part. The man from headquarters stared intently at it, his long, prehensile, upper lip writhing as if for a purchase on this diminutive detail of the baffling case. A new expression had come into his penetrating eyes—an expression of excitement.

During the next eight hours, Inspector Jacobs and his partner completed the routine part of their assignment. They checked up on the whereabouts of Fortier, the marine painter. He was safely ensconced at the Cliff House, on Eagle Bay. Only one thing was disturbing him. He had left the key to his apartment in his front door. Would Mr. Meserve, the manager, kindly remove it for him?

"That's Fortier all over again for you!" the manager lamented. "He's lost close to a dozen keys since he came here. Heaven only knows what he does with them!"

"Then he didn't leave this one in his door?" Jacobs asked, his head twisted to one side.

"Certainly not. He always thinks he's left them there."

"Never mind the past—are you sure the key wasn't left here, this time?"

"Of course, I am! I entered his apartment five minutes after he left. He has a habit of leaving the water running, or the gas burning. There was no key in the lock when I came!"

"Did this key have any sort of identifying mark on it?"

Meserve, the landlord, took from his pocket a key with a brass tag fastened to it by two brass links.

"It was like this—the tag had the name of the building and the number of the room. All our keys are labeled!"

Inspector Jacobs nodded. The lines about his mouth had tightened. He had just called at the hospital, where he had been permitted for a few minutes to stand looking down into the colorless face of the victim of the midnight adventure. There was something utterly baffling in the masklike quiet of that waxen face. To pry out of his obscurity the man who had struck the murderous blow, Inspector Jacobs had just three tiny levers: a bit of tinted cardboard the size of the end of a match; the absence of a key, bearing a brass label; and—an expert knowledge of the intricacies of the criminal mind.

From his place of hiding, the swarthy, muscular man whom they were all seeking followed as well as he could the progress of the case. On the evening following the crime, the papers carried brief stories on the front page. He learned from these that his victim had not been dead or even actually dying,

as he had imagined, when he deposited the limp body in the elevator and sent it up to the sixth floor. And he was not dead when the paper went to press, although his life hung by a gossamer thread that might snap at any moment. He had not regained consciousness, according to the papers.

The somber face of the criminal knitted itself into a pondering frown as he considered this last detail. Was it true, or were the police trying to play a trick on him? Perhaps the fellow *was* dead, after all. Or, if alive, he might have made a deathbed statement—not that that would make much difference.

The morning papers carried fuller stories of the crime, and also had photographs of the victim. These were labeled: "Do You Know This Man?" According to the text, the mysterious victim of the midnight assault still lived, hovering between life and death, unable to give the police the faintest clew to his own identity or to that of the man who had tried to murder him. The photograph, which had evidently been taken in the hospital, held the crook's attention for a moment. With its sagging lids and expressionless mouth, it might have been the picture of a dead person.

Sitting in the small park where he had gone for a little fresh air and sunshine, the dark-faced man studied the newspaper accounts with fierce intentness, and afterward sat brooding. There was nothing to connect him with the crime. He and his humble companion had not been seen as they left the railroad station, late the night of the tragedy. They had not been seen entering the apartment building, for the side street on which it opened was deserted at the time. He had not been seen leaving it. He was safe—but as the word formed itself in his mind, he felt a wave of icy fear going over him. His massive shoulders hunched themselves, and his hands shook. He felt no qualms

of regret, but a picture of the hangman's noose had suddenly flashed before his eyes. If his victim died—or was he dead?

He stood up restlessly and started for his room. The little park seemed lined with watching, accusing eyes.

Next morning he purchased both early papers. Seating himself on a bench in the park, he scanned the first page hastily in search of the news story he was interested in. It was not there, and he turned to the inner pages. Presently he threw the first paper down, with a trembling oath, and picked up the other. But there was no story in it, either. He went through both, carefully, a second time. There was not so much as a paragraph concerning the condition of the mysterious patient.

The man sitting there on the bench frowned darkly and considered this strange omission. Did it mean that his victim was dead? Hardly—that would be news. But perhaps he was much better. That didn't work out, either, for in that case he would probably be able to make a statement, which also would have been news.

With the papers strewn about his feet, the criminal stood hastily up. Perhaps that was what had happened. The police might even now have the story in their possession! But after all, that would make little difference. They would be dealing with an ignorant immigrant, a peasant boy—a secretive, inarticulate creature who would be unable to state clearly even the meagerest details.

This line of reasoning, however convincing, brought no sense of security. Why was there no story in the papers? The fact assumed a sinister and ominous importance. He tried to dismiss it from his mind, but that was impossible. The harder he fought against it, the deeper it sank into the fiber of his soul. He began to shake; his strong hands knotted, his jaws clenched to keep his teeth

from chattering. He looked suspiciously around, but there was no one near.

Suddenly he made up his mind. He must find out whether his enemy—for so he had begun to regard the victim of his murderous assault—was still alive. If he was, it would be feasible to leave the city quietly and go to some distant part of the country. But if he were dead—again the image of the hangman's noose formed itself with vivid insistence before him.

There was only one way for him to find out what he wanted to know: he must telephone the hospital. Of course, the call might be traced. He would use a public pay station. With this purpose in mind, he walked down the street to a corner drug store. The place was full of customers, he saw, so that none of the clerks would have leisure to notice him. Quickly he entered one of the booths and hunted up the number he wanted. A moment later he heard the clear, calm voice of the switchboard girl at the other end.

"City hospital!"

"Yes, ma'am. I want to find out about a patient—the one the newspapers have been telling about, that got hurt the other night. Is he still alive?"

"Who is speaking, please?"

"What do you want to know my name for? I'm just asking because I was interested——"

"Just a minute!"

But he had heard enough. She was trying to hold him there till the police could be notified, the call traced—he hung up abruptly and left the booth and the store. A keen glance round showed him that no one was interested in his departure. The attempt had been profitless, but safe.

On the sidewalk, he hesitated, then turned toward his rooming house. He wanted to be alone.

The day passed slowly, and with the coming of the softer light of late afternoon the crook left his hiding place and

went down into the street. He bought all the evening papers, carried them to his favorite bench in the little park, and settled himself to read. He almost feared to begin his search, but suddenly another idea came to him. He found the columns devoted to vital statistics and went through the notices of deaths. There was none that could refer to the man he was interested in. Thus fortified, he turned back to the news columns and went carefully through them. But there was no reference to the crime in the apartment house.

Gradually the papers fell from the criminal's slack hands, and he sat staring into space. He was trying to put himself into the place of the men who probably even at this moment were looking for him. What would they do—what could they do? Given the problem of finding an unknown individual from among five hundred thousand, how could they proceed? Even if the victim had for a few minutes roused himself from that sleep so closely resembling death, and had given the few meager details he could furnish, how would that help?

Mechanically the man on the park bench looked up, his forehead knitted and pondering. Some one was passing along a gravel path close to him: a tall, strongly built fellow, whose long legs moved with the swift precision of scissor blades. He was going toward one of the exits from the park, his face turned straight ahead—and yet the criminal had an uncomfortable sensation of having been stared at. No matter. The stranger was going on about his business.

The crook stood up presently and turned toward his rooming house. He was too restless to sit here. Perhaps he could get to sleep early and so forget. A swift glance showed him that the part of the park in which he had been sitting was deserted, and that no one, apparently, was interested in his

departure. He strode out into a side street and along it, pondering the problem of those stories that were not in the papers. If he could only be certain——

He had reached the dark entryway leading up to his second floor room, but before turning into it he glanced casually across the street. A tall, strongly built man was walking slowly along there, his face averted, as if he were looking into the store windows; the same man, the criminal realized, that he had seen leaving the park. How had he come here?

Startled and alarmed, the crook hurried upstairs and let himself into his room. He crossed to his window and looked down into the street. It was empty. The stranger, whoever he was, seemed to have disappeared into thin air. Perhaps he lived across there, somewhere—in fact, he must; for he could hardly have reached the corner and turned into the side street. Yes, that must be it. A pallid, wolfish grin twitched up the corners of the crook's mouth. A chill ran over him. His nerves were on edge—he must sleep, and forget. Dropping upon his bed, fully dressed, he set his resolute will upon dismissing the whole turbid affair from his mind till morning.

Sounds of the night came to him—newsboys crying snatches of headlines and trolley cars jangling and clanging by in the next block. He forced his lids down, forced himself to relax and to go through the first motion of sleep. The room was warm and poorly ventilated. His head ached a little, but gradually he was falling into a condition of torpid confusion. He was going to sleep——

He sat up with a galvanic tensing of the muscles of his entire body. Some one was at his door—he had caught the gentle clicking of finger nails against the panel. After that, silence; and then—he would have sworn to it—the heavy

breathing of some one who was trying to look through the keyhole! With a snarling oath, the man on the bed sprang up, jerked out the revolver he carried under his left armpit, and in two bounds was across the room. He fumbled at the bolt, which stuck a trifle; then slid it back and threw open the door. Gun in hand, he stared out.

The hall was dark and apparently deserted. He ran along it to the head of the stairs. No one in sight here, either.

"Who's down there?" he shouted, his voice strained and quivering.

From the somber pit of the stairway, there came no reply. He turned back to his room. A fit of shivering was upon him as he closed the door and stood staring about. Had he imagined those sounds—the tapping, and the heavy breathing? He couldn't believe that. He could still recall them, objective, convincing, undeniable. In a panic of fear now, he quickly gathered up his few belongings and dumped them into his traveling bag. His rent was paid to the end of the week, but he would tarry in this house of evil sounds not a moment longer. He would leave the place—would leave the city.

In the lower hall he met an old woman—the one to whom he had paid his rent a few days before.

"Was there some one up on the second floor a few minutes ago?" he demanded.

She shook her head slowly, her small, stupid eyes resting unemotionally on his.

"I guess not—unless it was one of the other roomers. You going away?"

"Yes, for a day or two. I'll be back."

Just as well throw a little dust in her eyes, he reflected as he strode along the street. His nerves were shaken, and that was the truth. He ought to have left the city at once, that very night of the crime—but if he could only be sure of the condition of the man he had

struck down! Alive, he was a menace; and dead——

A shiver that was like a chill gripped and shook the hurrying fugitive. Dead, he was more of a menace. He must know!

The railroad station was before him, presently. He entered by a side door and crossed to the ticket counter. He had made up his mind to buy transportation south—perhaps eventually he would go down to Mexico.

With his ticket in his hand, he stood for a moment hesitating. One thing he must know. He would try the hospital again—or wait, he would phone one of the newspapers. They were in the habit of answering all manner of questions centering around the news of the day.

Crossing to the row of phone booths, he entered one and quickly found the number he wanted. A crisp voice came to him over the wire. He asked his question.

This time there was no delay and no subterfuge.

"The man who was assaulted the other night? He died this afternoon!"

Mechanically the criminal hung up. He stooped for his bag, then turned and stumbled from the booth. His body had broken into an icy perspiration. He set the bag down at his feet, drew out a silk handkerchief, and mopped his forehead.

"Dead!" he mumbled, his numb lips almost refusing to articulate the word.

A voice sounded at his shoulder.

"You seem done up, brother. No bad news, I hope?"

A strong hand gripped his right coat sleeve, close to the cuff. He whirled and tried to jerk himself free. He knew that trick. In one tumultuous moment he saw the face of the man who had come up behind him—a long, sagacious face; and the long, strong body below it.

"Take your hands off!" he shouted, striving with all the strength of his

powerful body to release his right hand. The fabric ripped, and he thrust his hand under his coat. He felt the smooth, hard, reassuring protuberance of his revolver butt. It was out——

The two were locked together. The tall stranger, he of the park and of the side street, had his arms about the crook, pinioning him. They rocked to and fro for a moment, then went to the floor. The revolver was knocked loose, and the detective's grip was broken.

The dark-faced criminal, who had gone down underneath, threw up one of his freed hands and caught his assailant by the throat. With one powerful jerk, he threw him over sidewise; hauled himself out from underneath, and raised his other fist to strike. His breath seemed to burn his nostrils. He was kneeling beside his enemy.

But in the same instant, something crashed down upon his head. He felt himself going limp and dizzy. A voice from behind spoke crisply:

"Just a moment, inspector—I've got his gat! There's one," he said, and something cold and hard circled the crook's right wrist—"and there's the other!"

He was unceremoniously jerked backward, like a sack of potatoes. With the handcuffs on his wrists, he lay staring murderously up at the little group of men who stood above him. Three of them were uniformed patrolmen. The fourth, who was sweating and breathing hard, was the long-legged man he had seen striding past, earlier in the evening.

"Well, Buesepi," the latter said, "it was neck and neck—you're some wrestler! Sorry I couldn't give you a sporting chance, but this wasn't a sporting proposition!"

Buesepi, handcuffed and still dizzy from the blow with the night stick, glared through bloodshot eyes at his captor.

"You got nothing on me!" he cried. "I sue for false arrest——"

"So? Well, don't let anything I say interfere with your plans. But as to not having anything on you—listen. Here's what you did. On the morning of this little party you and me know about, you took the train and rode down to Valley Junction. You were working at your old trade, but suckers were scarce that morning. You didn't run across any one you could sell the city hall to, or talk into buying a machine that would turn out brand-new-twenty-dollar bills. You did listen in on a conversation in the smoking room of the Pullman, however—one gent telling another about a vacation he was going to take. Afterward you saw this gent, who was going vacationing, drop a key. The key had a brass tag on it, that gave the name of his apartment house. You picked it up, perhaps thinking you might pay his quarters a visit and see if he had anything in the way of portable property that you could use. But you got off at the junction, without having struck anything really good, and headed as quickly as possible back for the city!"

Bueseppi's evil face was expressionless, his congested eyes partly hidden by their drooping lids. The long-legged man regarded him for a moment, then nodded briskly and resumed.

"On the train back to the city, your luck changed. You spotted a young countryman of yours, and it didn't take you long to discover that he was as green as they grow. So you made yourself acquainted and gave him your old story. You were a special agent, appointed by his government—and yours—to see that he wasn't defrauded in this land of gold bricks and gunmen. Were his papers in good shape? They were—he showed them to you. But he didn't show you the money he had with him—you were too slick to ask about that. You just figured it out for yourself.

By the time you got out here in the city, you had him so he would eat out of your hand. You took him to the apartment of the man whose house key you had picked up. You asked to see the money he had with him——"

Bueseppi's crooked lips drew back into a snarl.

"They lied to me—he didn't die! He told you all this stuff—these lies——"

Slowly the long-legged man shook his head.

"Your countryman didn't tell me anything, brother! He's still lying up there at the hospital, with his face toward the ceiling and his mind no one knows where. The docs say he'll come out of it in time. But it'll be across the bay for you, Bueseppi—not the gallows, but a good stiff stretch——"

"Liar!" cried the prisoner, froth gathering about his lips. "Liar! He tell you everything—everything like it happen——"

"Wrong! He hasn't opened his lips. But I knew the sort of job I was up against, and I knew there were just about a dozen men in this part of the world that would handle it like you did. My trick was to pick out the one of the dozen that was guilty. But how was I to do that, with the only good witness out of his senses? Ah, Bueseppi, you're a clever man, and you mopped up the blood from the floor, and sent this poor devil upstairs in the elevator—you mixed things up nicely, and you did away with most of the evidence. You emptied his pockets and took his papers, as well as the money you were after. But you overlooked—this!"

From his purse Inspector Jacobs fished a minute fragment of tinted pasteboard; a tiny thing, crescent-shaped and perhaps a sixteenth of an inch from horn to horn.

"This was in the young fellow's side pocket, my friend; and when I saw it, I knew that your patron saint had

turned you down. It isn't the first time in my experience a case has turned on the fragment of tinted paper clipped from a railroad ticket by a conductor's punch. It took me some time to run down the man whose punch produces crescents just like this. The texture and tint of the thing told us part of the rest. And when I showed this railroad lad a bunch of photographs of confidence men, from our little collection at headquarters, he recognized you. He even remembered the young fellow you'd scraped acquaintance with on the train.

"The rest was easy. I had the papers shut off, on the chance that you'd be anxious and phone. When you were good enough to do so, you showed me what quarter of town to look in—of course we had the call traced to the drug store. But I'd have landed you in any case, Bueseppi, for I knew what you

looked like and so did fifty of my men, scattered over the city on special assignment.

"Looking for you in that little park, a while ago, was an idea of my own. I've noticed that men that are wanted at headquarters are often crafty enough to head for the suburbs. But they never get over their habit of sitting in the nearest public square, for a bit of sunshine and fresh air. I expect I've picked up twenty of them in just such places. I didn't grab you there, because I wanted to give you a little more rope; and I wanted you to get the jolt I'd arranged with the hospital and all the newspapers to give you, in case you called up. There weren't apt to be any inquirers except you, and I had a notion I'd like to even things for the way you mixed up this case. From the looks of your face when you came out of the booth, just now, I guess we're square!"

WOMAN BANK OFFICIAL JAILED

FOR the first time in a century, the Kingston Trust Company, of Kingston, Rhode Island, failed to open its doors for business one morning a few weeks ago, as a result of speculation with one hundred and ten thousand dollars of the bank's funds, Miss Maude E. Tefft, treasurer and secretary of the institution being the person accused of mishandling the moneys intrusted to her. After her arraignment on a charge of embezzlement, Miss Tefft was committed to the South County Jail in default of twenty thousand dollars bail. Of the one hundred and ten thousand dollars, sixty thousand is believed to have been put into a speculative stock scheme and the other fifty thousand to have been given to a Kingston man on a note without collateral.

POLICEMAN MISTAKES DETECTIVE FOR CROOK

WHEN William Powell, a special policeman of Rochelle Park, New Jersey, alighted from the midnight train at one o'clock in the morning, he noticed a man whose actions struck him as suspicious. He hurried home for his revolver and then returned to the railroad depot. The suspicious stranger was just turning a corner when the policeman arrived, and Powell gave chase. Notwithstanding a command to "Throw 'em up!" the stranger continued his flight and Powell fired three shots after him. This brought the fugitive to a halt, and he stated that he was a special detective employed by the railroad. He had thought Powell was a holdup man and as he had left his gun in the depot, he was afraid of being robbed of his week's pay. When the situation was explained, policeman and detective had a good laugh at the joke, shook hands, and went their respective ways.

The Challenging Foot

by
Thomas Topham

Author of "'Croaky' and the Dog," etc.

WHAT'S your name?" Captain of Detectives William Melvin shot the question briskly and looked from under beetling eyebrows at the youth before him.

"Sam Hillyer."

The prisoner squirmed uneasily under the officer's gaze.

"That the only name you have?"

The youth was silent, his gaze on the floor.

"He's known as 'Lonely Sam,'" spoke up Detective Sergeant Oscar Swanson from his chair close beside Captain Melvin.

"Lonely Sam, eh?" said the captain. "Yes, I've had a report or two on you. Funny name. Where'd you get it, anyway?"

The prisoner blinked his eyes but said nothing.

"I'll tell you where he got it," volunteered Detective Sergeant Swanson. "He's such a dirty little crook none of the gungs would stand for 'im, so he prowls around by himself. He's a lone wolf, only he ain't a wolf, so they jest call him Lonely Sam. Sneak thief an' purse snatcher, that's him."

Lonely Sam gulped at this frank exposition of his reputation.

"I—I work—sometimes," he said timidly. "I'm a swell auto mechanic, only some cop always turns up an' queers me when I git me a job."

"Because he generally swipes all the tools left lying around loose," said Swanson.

"Well, that's not the question now," said the captain brusquely. "Sam, how about those rings you stole from that purse in an automobile?"

"I didn't git no rings," mumbled Lonely Sam unconvincingly. His whole attitude proclaimed his guilt.

Patiently Captain Melvin asked the same question ten times. Ten times Lonely Sam mumbled his answer without variation.

"All right, Oscar, give it to him."

Captain Melvin nodded his head as he spoke and Oscar Swanson raised his huge bulk from the chair. The detective reached forth a large, hairy hand and grasped the undersized, shrinking prisoner by the back of the neck. Lonely Sam squirmed, but the officer cupped his other hand under his victim's chin and held him almost suspended in the air.

The eyes of the prisoner bulged in mortal terror.

"Now, you dirty little rat," said Detective Swanson, his red, fierce face peering into that of the youth, "do I crack your mug wide open or will yeh talk, huh?" He shook the prisoner by the head, released the neck hold and flourished a large and hard fist in front of Lonely Sam's nose.

"I'll tell, so help me, I'll tell," gurgled Lonely Sam. "Lemme loose an' I'll talk."

"Atta boy," said Captain Melvin genially. "Let him loose, Oscar. He's going to be good."

Detective Sergeant Swanson pushed the hand cupped under Lonely Sam's chin upward, raising Sam to his tiptoes by that process, and then let loose, the object being to jar the victim's teeth and perhaps make him bite his tongue. It was an old and favorite trick of his, but Detective Swanson had no chance whatever to observe its success or failure.

The detective suddenly staggered backward bellowing with pain, and grasping his right foot in both hands, he leaned against the wall for support. Tears of pain stood in his eyes and he gasped for breath.

Lonely Sam picked himself up from the floor where he had fallen when Detective Swanson had dropped him. He looked in horror at the big officer and cringed. Terrific curses were pouring forth.

"You stepped on his bunion," said Captain of Detectives Melvin callously. "It's his only weak spot. He'll be all right in a minute."

"An' he'll kill me," quavered Lonely Sam, looking longingly at the closed door. "Couldn't you shoot me back to the tank?"

"Oh, no," said Captain Melvin. "You didn't mean to do it. Of course he won't feel particularly amiable about it. The last fellow who did it got a bust in the jaw—wasn't really hurt so very much."

With grunts and groans and much cursing, Detective Sergeant Swanson revived as the pain in his mistreated bunion began to subside. From his position against the wall he glowered threateningly at Lonely Sam.

"Honest, I didn't mean to do it," said

Lonely Sam humbly. "'Twas my heel ketched you as I come down. Honest, I wouldn't hurt a guy like that for nothin'."

The officer limped over and gave Lonely Sam a half-hearted cuff, for the foot still pained him and he did not feel capable of great exertions.

"For a little runt you step too hard," growled the detective. "Look where you're walkin' after this."

"Sure I will," promised Lonely Sam meekly.

"All right, we'll get down to business," said Captain Melvin briskly. "Sit down, Oscar, and rest your foot. Now, Sam, you come clean and you'll get off pretty easy. If you give up the stuff you ought to get off with about three months for petty larceny, and the road gang's not so bad. Really a nice little vacation out at the camp and I'll recommend that they send you there. Now, where did you leave those two rings you sneaked out of that purse?"

"Up in my room," confessed Lonely Sam.

"And where's that?"

Lonely Sam looked vaguely around the office and thoughtfully knitted his brows.

"Darned if I know," he said finally. "It's some place up on Second Street—a roomin' house. Moved out long ago an' I forget clean the name of the place, but I kin find it."

Detective Sergeant Oscar Swanson swore roundly.

"Lemme at him ag'in, Billy," he begged, starting up from his chair. "I'll make him remember."

Lonely Sam almost collapsed from fear. He knew Oscar Swanson's reputation, every man and woman of the underworld knew it. His thin shoulders shook, his ferretlike face grew tense and white, his hands clenched and unclenched in his agony of apprehension.

"I—I clean forgot," he chattered, "but I kin go there."

The captain waved Swanson back to his chair.

"No, Oscar, no unnecessary rough stuff," he said virtuously. "I rather think the kid is telling the truth. It isn't far up to that district and you can just walk Sam up there. He might have something else stowed away in that room of his."

"Send somebody else," pleaded Swanson. "My bunion's hurtin' fierce."

"Aw, forget it," said the captain. "It ain't a long walk and you started on this case. Clean it up. Take your time going up and you can put in most of the afternoon."

"All right," agreed Swanson. He got painfully to his feet and, limping across the room, glared down at Lonely Sam.

"Look here, bo," growled Swanson, thrusting his pugnacious jaw out at his prisoner, "you an' me are goin' to git along fine if you git me right. We're goin' down the street peaceable, you an' me, if you want to, but remember I ain't doin' no runnin', not with this bunion. I'll treat you O. K. but jest remember if you have a sudden hankerin' to duck that my gun does my runnin' for me, an' it travels plenty fast to ketch you. Get it?"

"Sure do," declared Lonely Sam with a quaver in his voice. "I ain't goin' to do no runnin', an' honest, I'm just mighty sorry about steppin' on that bunion."

Swanson grasped the arm of his prisoner, and with a hitch at his belt so that Lonely Sam could see his large revolver, started out the door.

The huge detective dropped his grasp of Lonely Sam as they passed out the doors of Central Station, and lighted a cigar while Sam stood by meekly. Then with his prisoner by his side Swanson walked toward Second Street and the lost boarding house of the young sneak

thief. They progressed a block in silence, crossed the street through a swirl of traffic and began their second block.

"How far is it?" asked Swanson gruffly.

"About two blocks more," said Lonely Sam. "Straight this way."

The crowds of pedestrians grew thicker. Lonely Sam found it hard to push through and keep up with his captor. Swanson shoved his big bulk slightly in advance to make a road, and reaching back, grasped his prisoner by the arm to hurry him. The jerk brought Lonely Sam stumbling along, and one awkward foot flopped with crushing force on the already tender bunion of Detective Sergeant Swanson.

A bellow resounded which halted the traffic like a siren whistle, and with his foot in his hands the detective backed against the wall of a building.

With a deadly fear clutching at his heart Lonely Sam saw what he had done. He knew that when the big, brutal officer recovered his breath and could move, he would be beaten into a pulp. Better a bullet in the back than that. Lonely Sam turned and darted like a frightened rabbit into the crowds about him, dodged and twisted and ran, expecting each moment to feel the thud of a bullet tearing into his body. But no bullet followed.

The sneak thief ran a block, climbed on a street car, rode a block and alighted when the conductor began to get fussy about his fare. He walked leisurely into another street and then dived into a hallway. His stay in the house he had entered was brief, for he feared betrayal at the hands of some police informant who might possibly know his place of lodging.

Hastily Lonely Sam got together a few articles of cheap loot, including the two rings for which he had been arrested. He drew a few crumpled bills from a hiding place in the wainscoting,

you've been in the detective business as long as I have, you'll begin to realize that you never know who'll do what. You say he started for the seashore this morning? Where?"

"Eagle Bay—that's where his mail was to be addressed."

"I expect a chap like him would put up at Cliff House? Sure, I thought so. Well, we'll soon check up on him. If he went through with that program, he wasn't in the city to-night. All right, gentlemen—I think that's the ambulance in the street. We'll go up and see our man off."

A physician had come with the ambulance crew—a young fellow with a bored air and a flaxen mustache. He made a swift, expert examination of the mysterious stranger, and pronounced him rather more dead than alive. While this was going forward, Inspector Jacobs took the opportunity of again examining the injured man's pockets.

Next moment he had straightened to his feet, staring down into the palm of his half-closed hand. In it lay a tiny something which he had picked from the lining of the pocket. It looked like a diminutive but exactly cut crescent of salmon-colored pasteboard—a bit of heavy paper, perhaps, a sixteenth of an inch across at its widest part. The man from headquarters stared intently at it, his long, prehensile, upper lip writhing as if for a purchase on this diminutive detail of the baffling case. A new expression had come into his penetrating eyes—an expression of excitement.

During the next eight hours, Inspector Jacobs and his partner completed the routine part of their assignment. They checked up on the whereabouts of Fortier, the marine painter. He was safely ensconced at the Cliff House, on Eagle Bay. Only one thing was disturbing him. He had left the key to his apartment in his front door. Would Mr. Meserve, the manager, kindly remove it for him?

"That's Fortier all over again for you!" the manager lamented. "He's lost close to a dozen keys since he came here. Heaven only knows what he does with them!"

"Then he didn't leave this one in his door?" Jacobs asked, his head twisted to one side.

"Certainly not. He always thinks he's left them there."

"Never mind the past—are you sure the key wasn't left here, this time?"

"Of course, I am! I entered his apartment five minutes after he left. He has a habit of leaving the water running, or the gas burning. There was no key in the lock when I came!"

"Did this key have any sort of identifying mark on it?"

Meserve, the landlord, took from his pocket a key with a brass tag fastened to it by two brass links.

"It was like this—the tag had the name of the building and the number of the room. All our keys are labeled!"

Inspector Jacobs nodded. The lines about his mouth had tightened. He had just called at the hospital, where he had been permitted for a few minutes to stand looking down into the colorless face of the victim of the midnight adventure. There was something utterly baffling in the masklike quiet of that waxen face. To pry out of his obscurity the man who had struck the murderous blow, Inspector Jacobs had just three tiny levers: a bit of tinted cardboard the size of the end of a match; the absence of a key, bearing a brass label; and—an expert knowledge of the intricacies of the criminal mind.

From his place of hiding, the swarthy, muscular man whom they were all seeking followed as well as he could the progress of the case. On the evening following the crime, the papers carried brief stories on the front page. He learned from these that his victim had not been dead or even actually dying,

smiled with satisfaction. His fence would give him fifty cents for that. He removed the shirt and then stared long at what lay underneath, stared with eyes that opened and opened until they almost popped out.

In neat rows lay bundle after bundle of currency, each bundle carefully bound with paper strips exactly like those in a bank. It was more money than Lonely Sam had ever seen together at once.

"Bank robber, 'at's what he was," whispered Lonely Sam. "Oh, boy, how very sorry and repentant he must feel this mornin'."

But sorrow for a bereaved bank robber soon gave way to a delirium of joy at his own good fortune. Sam pawed over the currency, discovered that every bundle was composed of twenty-dollar notes, enough there to start a bank, enough to keep him in luxury for years. Or, he could go away, start for himself the garage he had always wanted, become a respectable and honored citizen. Yes, he decided, he would buy himself a garage.

Lonely Sam removed a package of bills, tore off the paper binding and stuffed them in his pocket. He closed the suit case and shoved it under the bed, carefully locked the door and left the house. Once outside he hastened back in a panic and looked under the bed, took out the suit case and started away with it. However, it would never do to carry the suit case through the streets, so he returned and shoved it back beneath the bed. He would go down and buy himself a cheap wicker suit case that no officer would recognize, if, perchance, the large man should have been an honest man and had reported his loss.

Out in the sunlight Lonely Sam recovered his assurance and told himself that no one would bother his precious hoard in the short time he intended to be gone. He stopped at a cigar stand

and laid a twenty-dollar bill casually on the counter.

"Gimme a fistful of good cigars," ordered Sam.

The cigar man handed out a box and looked at the bill.

"Little short of change," said the cigar man. "Watch the stand a minute while I duck into the barber shop an' see if they can crack her."

Lonely Sam stood by good-naturedly while the cigar man hurried away. Sam surveyed the cigar stand in an expansive mood. He might come back and buy it, he thought, as an investment. Probably a couple of bundles of his money would do the trick. The wealthy young thief lighted one of the cigars. A prospective customer came up and Sam told him the cigar man would be back in a few minutes.

Ten minutes went by. Lonely Sam peeked into the barber shop. He began to suspect that the cigar man might be a thief, probably a clerk who had made off with his money. He turned around and looked up into the face of a policeman. The cigar man hovered in the rear.

"That's him," said the cigar man, pointing at Lonely Sam.

"You're under arrest," said the policeman. "Got a gun?"

"Nix," said Sam, and then he blustered: "What're you pinchin' me for?"

"I knew it was phony the second I lamped it," declared the cigar man proudly. "I suppose I'm out that cigar he's smokin'."

"Got any more?" asked the officer.

"Any more what? Cigars?" demanded Lonely Sam.

"Any more of the queer you've been shovin'?" asked the officer.

A great light broke on Lonely Sam. "Holy smoke," he exclaimed. "Was that a bum twenty I shoved?"

The cigar man laughed rudely.

The officer reached in Sam's hip

pocket where a bulge showed and drew out a package of bills. His eyes protruded.

Sam wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Looks to me like we got a wholesale counterfeiter here," said the officer. He addressed the cigar man:

"Here, I can't leave this bird. You go phone to the police station, get the detective bureau, an' tell 'em to send out a coupla dicks. They'll want to hunt up his outfit."

Within a half hour Lonely Sam landed back at Central Station and was marched in to see his old friend, Captain William Melvin.

"Well, well," Captain Melvin greeted him. "Lonely Sam, on my soul. And out shoving the queer this time. Who would have thought it! The U. S. marshal will be happy to meet you. You were in small-time trouble before, when you got so fresh and stamped on Swanson's bunion. That meant a little stretch in jail. This means a federal pen imprisonment for just about five years."

"I ain't guilty," mumbled Lonely Sam, beginning to tremble. "I pinched that roll off'n a guy at the depot. A big, fat guy."

Captain Melvin laughed.

"You mean he hired you to shove that roll," he said. "Got any more?"

Lonely Sam began to think. If they gave him five years for one bundle of twenty-dollar notes, they would give him about five hundred years if they found he had possession of that suit case full of notes.

"No more," said Lonely Sam, thinking bitterly of the suit case jammed to bursting with such handsome-looking money, even if it was bad.

Thereafter they got nothing more out of Lonely Sam. He refused, even under Swanson's threats, to give any description of the "big, fat man" beyond

the fact that he was big and fat. The suit case full of counterfeit money reposed under the bed until the landlady opened it and tried to pass a twenty-dollar bill. She succeeded, tried again, but at the third one she ran into a suspecting shopkeeper and found her way to jail.

Amidst tears the landlady told her story and promptly identified Lonely Sam as the roomer who had left the money there, whereupon she was released on her promise to testify against Lonely Sam, and the police took possession of the suit case which was full of money.

Things began to look decidedly bad for Lonely Sam.

United States secret operatives are smart men, usually. Captain Melvin had called them promptly when Lonely Sam had been arrested. They took over the case and left Sam to board at the jail until his preliminary hearing while they worked with the police in developing further clues.

First, they knew that Lonely Sam was not the counterfeiter; second, they knew that "Slicker" Dan McGuffey had made the notes, but Dan McGuffey was not "a big, fat man" such as Lonely Sam had described. Conclusion: A big, fat man had been employed as the middleman to pass the notes and Lonely Sam probably was telling the truth about stealing the bills.

However, if they couldn't catch Slicker Dan McGuffey or the "big, fat man" they at least had Lonely Sam, who was guilty on the face of it of possessing a huge store of counterfeit money and trying to pass at least one note. Lonely Sam was ordered before a United States commissioner to start him on his way to a federal penitentiary.

Captain Melvin called in his right-hand man.

"Oscar," instructed the captain, "you know Lonely Sam Hillyer. He's a U. S. prisoner and they want him up

at two this afternoon. The U. S. marshal just phoned he's short of men and asked me if I could send a man with him over to the federal building. Then they'll take him to the county jail from there and we'll be rid of him. Keep him handcuffed till you get him in the courtroom. The U. S. marshal already has the evidence."

Detective Sergeant Swanson had no trouble with Lonely Sam on the short trip to the federal building. An official police automobile set them down and they proceeded inside.

Lonely Sam was awed by the proceedings. Hitherto his court experiences had been confined to the justices of the peace, where more or less informality reigned. Officers and lawyers were grouped around a long table and they seemed to take the affair seriously.

Swanson indicated a chair for his prisoner, unlocked the handcuffs and sat down beside him.

The suit case full of counterfeit money was set on the table and the evidence, bundle after bundle of crisp notes, exposed to view. Lawyers, court officers and newspaper reporters crowded forward to really examine the bogus fortune.

"Gentlemen, please be seated," said the commissioner, and the crowd pushed away. A florid and heavy United States deputy marshal stepped back and almost leaped forward on the table as a roar resounded behind him.

"Git off'n my foot," bellowed Detective Sergeant Oscar Swanson, forgetting the formality due a court, and roared again with pain. "My gosh, you've squashed my union flat."

Confusion followed, with the court trying to be heard through Swanson's moans and curses and the loud apology of the marshal. When order was restored and they were ready to proceed with the hearing, the prisoner was absent.

Lonely Sam had not found his escape a difficult matter, in fact it was absurdly easy. At the height of the excitement he had merely slipped out of his chair, and finding that he was unobserved, had sidled out the door near at hand and had skipped lightly down a broad marble stairway.

Hatless but happy, Lonely Sam made his way along the streets straight toward the edge of the city. He loitered in a park until evening came, then took up a position close to a motion picture theater and watched automobiles arrive. His patient vigil became wearisome. Many automobiles drove up and people got out, but the drivers were careful to take their ignition keys with them. Some even locked the machines. But at last he was rewarded. A small car drove up and a man jumped out. He hesitated a moment, then stepped across the walk and entered the theater. And Lonely Sam saw with elation that he had left his key in the lock.

Two minutes after the man entered the theater, Lonely Sam drove off. He had two problems before him. One was the matter of a hat, the other was money, for he had left the courtroom penniless. However, an outlying gasoline station loomed up. With a wrench from the automobile grasped like a revolver Lonely Sam easily induced the gasoline station attendant to part with nineteen dollars and twenty cents, which relieved his pressing financial difficulties. The cap that he confiscated was a little large and not very becoming, but Sam donned it.

With railroad fare in his pocket, Lonely Sam saw clear sailing ahead. A clock in an outlying jewelry store told him that it was almost midnight. He sailed away for downtown, driving cautiously, for it is axiomatic with the underworld that automobile accidents are deadly traps and bring about many an unexpected arrest.

A block from the railroad station

Lonely Sam parked his stolen automobile neatly beside the curbing and abandoned it. He skulked along toward the station, had almost gained the huge doors when a large man in plain clothes walked up beside him. Sam looked up hopelessly at the big man, knowing that his arrest was to follow, and that the big man was merely playing with him now.

"Going away?" asked the large man pleasantly.

"Quit yer kiddin'," said Sam, stopping short. "What you want?"

"Chief wants to see you," replied the large man, using the accepted formula, and ran a hand expertly around Lonely Sam to see if he had any concealed weapons. "What'd you do with your gun?"

"Never had a gun," said Lonely Sam sullenly.

A quarter of an hour later Lonely Sam was ushered into the familiar confines of Central Station and a sarcastic turnkey shoved him back into his old quarters in "tank three."

"Wait till Oscar Swanson gits at yuh," said the turnkey cheerfully, for the news of Lonely Sam's escape had percolated down to the depths of the prison. "This jail house won't be no protection to yuh."

Lonely Sam shivered. An old jail acquaintance opened a sleepy eye and greeted him.

"Here, Sam," said his jail friend, "take one of these blankets. There wasn't nobody to use it so I glommed it. The dope went round that you'd kissed 'em good-by for sure. What's up now?"

"I'm in bad," said Lonely Sam, accepting the blanket. "They still got that phony coin charge on me an' now I guess I'll be stuck for borrowin' a guy's joycart."

"Is 'at so?" said his friend, sitting up in his bunk and rubbing his eyes. "You're sure a quick worker, but the

bulls is gittin' pretty fast theirselves. Gittin' so crime don't pay no more. Too many dicks an' bulls slitherin' around. How this country gets the coin to pay all them law hounds gits me!"

"Yeah," agreed Sam disgustedly. "Next time I git in the clear I'm goin' to work. I'm a swell auto mechanic if I do say it. I kin plug out fifty a week easy in a garage. Yeah, I guess I'll go to work."

With this resolution in mind, Lonely Sam wrapped himself in his blanket and as the gray mists of morning were slanting into the jail windows, he buried himself in a bunk and went to sleep.

Still sleepy, Lonely Sam was aroused from his bunk a few hours later and ushered ceremoniously out of his tank and into the office of his old acquaintance, Captain of Detectives William Melvin. The prisoner felt distinctly uneasy as he looked at the captain. Melvin appeared stern and forbidding.

"Well, Sam," the captain greeted him, "what you got to say for yourself?"

"I pinched the auto," replied Sam dispiritedly. "I own up. An' I robbed a gas station. Crime don't pay no more."

"Especially murder," said Captain Melvin suddenly.

"What?" blurted out Lonely Sam, his heart jumping.

"That's what I said, murder," repeated Captain Melvin. "They have a habit of swinging birds who bump off folks, especially women."

Lonely Sam slumped into a chair.

"I ain't murdered nobody," he mumbled. "You ain't talkin' sense. You're tryin' to scare me. You're—you're surely givin' me the third degree."

"You poor, silly fool," said the captain scornfully. "You left a trail as broad as the street. Come clean, Sam. We've got you dead to rights. You might get off with life by confessing.

The Challenging Foot

I'm not saying you will, but you might. It's your only hope."

"I ain't murdered nobody," shouted Lonely Sam, coming to life with the full realization that the captain was talking seriously. "Where'd you git that murderin' stuff?"

"Sh-h-h," cautioned the captain. "Don't lose your head, Sam. They can hear you out on the street. Sam, what on earth made you go back to that rooming house and shoot that landlady? She hadn't done anything to you, only found the suit case full of counterfeit money you left there. She wouldn't have been a very hard witness against you. I think you're crazy to get away and then go right over there and pull that job. It's a plain case of revenge, but I didn't think you were that kind."

Lonely Sam went to pieces. Incoherently he told of his night's operations, of his theft of the car, his gasoline station robbery, his plan to leave the city. Captain Melvin heard him tell his plans patiently.

"But, Sam, you got away at two o'clock in the afternoon," said the captain. "At eight o'clock the woman was killed, called to the door and shot down. You were caught trying to leave town. You are the only person who would have any reason to kill that woman."

Even Lonely Sam could see the logic of this reasoning, but he grasped at a lonely straw.

"How about the big guy I stole the suit case from?" he asked.

"The big, fat man?" asked Melvin. "Why, what object would he have?"

"I don't know," mumbled Lonely Sam.

"You never did describe that man," Captain Melvin reminded him.

"Oh, I'll describe him," said Sam desperately. "He was big an' fat——"

"Yes, yes, we know that."

"An' he had a crook nose an' a mustache, gray, an' he wore a red tie an' a

cap an' a diamond ring on the hand he carried the suit case in. That's all."

Captain Melvin sat silent for a few minutes thinking. Then he sent for a turnkey and ordered Lonely Sam back to his cell.

Back to his tank marched Lonely Sam. He sat down on his bunk, buried his head in his hands and thought over the events of several days. Oh, how he wished he had never heard of Oscar Swanson's bunion! From petty thief to counterfeiter to murderer. His upward climb in the scale of crime had been rapid and disastrous. Underworld tales of executed men came to his mind.

Lonely Sam broke down and wept.

While Lonely Sam was weeping, Captain of Detectives William Melvin was thinking. Long ago he had discovered that whenever he had any hard thinking to do, the advice and counsel of Detective Sergeant Oscar Swanson assisted him greatly. Despite his tendency toward brutality and his bunion, Swanson was a detective of parts. Melvin called him in.

"Oscar," said the captain, "how's the bunion and what do you think of this Lonely Sam murder?"

"Bunion's better," replied Swanson. "So far's Sam's concerned it looks bad for him, but he ain't the murderin' kind. That little devil was actually sorry when he stomped my bunion. Them kind don't murder. However, the evidence all points pretty much to him. He mighta got hold of some hooch or dope an' got sore at that roomin' house landlady. Want me to really make him confess?"

"No," said Melvin. "Listen, Oscar. Sam described that big, fat man for me, the one he said he stole the bum money from. He had a crooked nose, his mustache is gray, he wore a red tie——"

"An' sported a diamond ring on the third finger of his right hand," finished Detective Swanson. "That's 'Crook

Nose' Jim Hibbs an' no other you're describin'. The plot, she gits thicker. Crook Nose is about due for a bust out in some way, an' he might have hooked up with Slicker Dan McGuffey to help him git rid of some bad money."

"Suppose you could bring Jim Hibbs in quietly for me to talk to?" asked Melvin.

"About as quietly as a cyclone hittin' a tin pan factory," said Swanson. "That guy's mean. We got to be sure he's the man, an' it's got to be a regular pinch, or we lose the whole case an' it all falls back on Lonely Sam. I'm satisfied Crook Nose has pulled off a coupla killings an' got away with 'em, just laughed at us. I'll go down an' git him if you want me an' I ain't afraid to, but you ought to have more dope."

"What's Hibbs been doing recently?" asked the captain.

"Outside lookout for Bert the Barber's Fillmer Avenue gamblin' club," replied Swanson promptly. "That's where he probably got in with Slicker Dan, if he did. Jim generally loafes down on the sidewalk close to the stairway lookin' over the folks who go up, an' he's probably there right now."

"All right, I got a plan," decided the captain. "If we can't bring him in, the thing to do is have Lonely Sam get a view of Crook Nose. If he says he's the guy that had the suit case, then Crook Nose is the murderer, though I don't know why. You go get Lonely Sam. Take an auto with a driver and I'll send along another detective. Keep Lonely Sam handcuffed and you cruise around on Fillmer Avenue. If Crook Nose Jim is there you let Sam get a good look at him, and if Sam says he's the bird you grab him without any more ceremony. Someway I think that Sam's tellin' only part of the truth, anyway."

"Shoot a squad down to raid Bert's joint if we grab Hibbs," advised Swan-

son, "an' you might pick up Slicker Dan."

Lonely Sam was still weeping miserably over his fate when Detective Swanson entered his cell and grabbed him by the back of the neck.

"Come on out, you blubberin' murderer," ordered Swanson. "You will tromp folks' bunions, will yuh? Well, I'm goin' up to watch 'em slip the noose on you, an' the last thing you'll see will be me a-laughin'."

Lonely Sam slouched back to the captain of detectives' office under the guidance of his archenemy. The automobile was waiting. Handcuffed, he crouched in the back seat, with the grim Oscar Swanson on one side, and another burly detective on the other. They were taking no chances right now of Sam's escape.

"I'm—I'm goin' to quit this game when I git outa this mess," chattered Lonely Sam nervously as the automobile drove off. "I'm cured. Git me a job an' stick to—"

"You'll git cured with a rope," said Swanson with a cuff. "Shut up."

The car threaded through the traffic, reached the sordid thoroughfare of Fillmer Avenue where the underworld held sway.

"Keep your eye peeled," whispered Swanson to Lonely Sam. "If you see that guy you stole the suit case from, gimme a nudge. It's your only chance to prove your story, an' if you don't find him you swing."

They passed Bert the Barber's club but there was no nudge. Swanson directed the driver to circle the block. The car swung back into Fillmer Avenue.

"There he is," said Lonely Sam, nudging Swanson. "He ain't got on his cap, but that's him an' his crook nose, walkin' there by the winder."

"That's Crook Nose Jim Hibbs all right," whispered Swanson.

The man stopped at a stairway and

slouched against the doorway. Swanson leaned over and touched his driver.

"Steer into the curb an' stop in front of that bird by the stairway, next the hock shop," he directed. He turned to Sam.

"You're sure?" he asked. "Don't make no mistake."

"Swear it," said Lonely Sam nervously. "Same guy."

Swanson opened the automobile door and stepped to the sidewalk, leaving Lonely Sam in custody of his companion officer. Jim Hibbs flashed the detective a glance and his hand dropped casually to his coat pocket.

"Chief wants to see you, Jim," said Swanson carelessly.

"Yeah he does," said Hibbs derisively. "What is this, a pinch?"

"Come along," ordered Swanson gruffly and moved forward. He made the mistake of not covering his prospective prisoner with his revolver.

Crook Nose Jim Hibbs' hand leaped to his automatic and death stared the officer in the face, but Hibbs hesitated for the fraction of a second. In that fraction something catapulted from the automobile across the sidewalk and struck the gunman in the stomach. Crook Nose Jim Hibbs sat down suddenly on the sidewalk, gasping for breath, his pistol flying from his hand. Lonely Sam, unable to catch himself because of his handcuffs, rolled over on the walk, half-dazed from the thud of his head against Hibbs' body, and Oscar Swanson, quickly jumping forward, stumbled over him and sprawled headlong.

The detective who had been left in the automobile leaped out and drew a revolver. Hibbs was back on his feet and the detective was too slow. Hibbs bowled him over and jumped for his pistol lying on the sidewalk. As he stooped Lonely Sam hopped up and brought his manacled wrists down over

the gunman's head, again and again, until Swanson and the other detective rushed to him and pulled him away from the unconscious man.

The fight had been so sudden and furious that the driver of the automobile had been unable to get into it. He assisted Swanson and the detective in manacled the crooked nosed man and the prisoner was loaded in the back of the machine.

Crook Nose Jim Hibbs struggled back to consciousness. He looked defiantly at Swanson.

"I guess I swing, but she had it comin'," said Hibbs.

"Who?"

"That dame I croaked," said Hibbs. "I had to do it."

"So you actually done it?" said Swanson. "Lonely Sam thought that you did it."

Detective Swanson turned from the automobile and faced the crowd of curious spectators that had been attracted by the battle. His lowering looks drove them back in a wide circle. He swept his eyes around. Standing toward the rear of the automobile he beheld Lonely Sam, tears streaming down his grimy face while he held his arms straight out in front of him. Blood was dripping from his manacled wrists where the handcuffs had cut into the flesh when he had pounded Crook Nose Jim Hibbs' head.

Swanson stepped over to the small figure.

"'Smatter, Sam?" he asked, his voice for once in his hard career betraying a tinge of sympathy.

"They hurt fierce," sobbed Lonely Sam, his thin shoulders heaving. "Hit-tin' that guy with these bracelets cut me all up. But, anyway, I don't swing."

"That's too bad," said Swanson, reaching for his keys to unlock the handcuffs. "That's sure too bad. You saved my life twice, Sam, an' I sure appreciate it."

Swanson bent over the small figure. After all, Lonely Sam was only a boy, a castaway on the ocean of life, not vicious, but merely weak. The detective unlocked the handcuffs and stuffed them in his pocket. Sam wiped his eyes with his knuckles.

Swanson turned and bestowed a glare at some curious spectators who were coming too close.

"Back up, you boobs, or I'll mop up the sidewalk," he said harshly. "He leaned over Sam again.

"Sam," said Swanson in a half-whisper, "I got an awful sore bunion." He waggled a foot, planted it on the pavement directly in front of Lonely Sam.

"Ouch!"

The cry roared out through the street and as it did the small figure of Lonely Sam darted away. Detective Sergeant Oscar Swanson staggered and hopped to the automobile, leaned against it and grasped one foot in both hands. The crowd roared with glee.

"What's the matter, Oscar, did he git your bunion?" asked the chauffeur solicitously.

Detective Swanson cursed uproariously and rubbed his foot. He glared at Lonely Sam.

"Yuh, he got her good," he said and straightened up. "Anyway, we got the right man an' I hope Lonely Sam keeps goin'. I never want to see his ugly mug again. He ain't done nothin' but tromp on my bunion for a week."

Crook Nose Jim Hibbs made his confession.

"Yeah, I dropped the lady," he told Captain of Detectives William Melvin. "After you guys pinched her an' let her loose I read about it in the papers. I went over to see her because I was afraid she had some things out of the grip that might stick me. She did have, shirts with laundry marks on 'em that

she'd aimed to keep. She wouldn't give 'em up. Then she gits gay an' grabs me an' hollers 'police,' so I had to let her have it. Didn't mean to bump her off."

Detective Sergeant Swanson limped out of the office with Crook Nose Jim Hibbs, leaving Captain Melvin with the detective who had accompanied the successful expedition. The detective looked quizzically at the captain.

"Say," said the detective, "you know Oscar Swanson's bunion?"

"I'll say I do," replied Captain Melvin. "I haven't heard anything but bunion for a week. Oscar's a swell detective, but he's done for on active work till he gets that bunion cured. He gets an office assignment where he can keep that bunion of his under a desk. Every crook in town would be taking a whack at it now. Of course I don't care about that little rat Lonely Sam getting away. Fact is, I'm glad he's gone. We can pick him up any time we want him, but so long's he stays out of trouble we'll wink our eyes. Some day I'm going to get him a job and see if he won't straighten out."

"Funny about that little bum suddenly gettin' up his spunk and lammin' that crook," said the detective. "He saved Oscar's life that time, and then he up and puts Hibbs out of business with his handcuffs when Hibbs was grabbing for his gun. Fought around there like a wildcat."

"That isn't all," said Captain Melvin. "Just after you folks got Hibbs, our squad raids Bert the Barber's, and we get Slicker Dan McGuffey sure enough, and he's one big counterfeiter. Lonely Sam sure brought Crook Nose Jim Hibbs into our hands, as dirty a murderer as ever pulled a trigger."

The detective pondered for a full moment.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I wanted to ask you, which foot is Oscar's bunion on?"

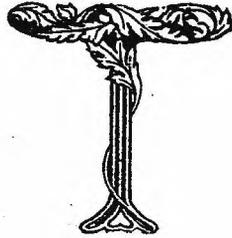
"On the right one," promptly replied Captain Melvin. "You can see it sticking out."

"Funny," said the detective. "I always thought so, too, but it ain't. It's on the left. I saw Lonely Sam when he stepped point-blank on Oscar's left

foot and so help me, Oscar roared and yelled he'd got his bunion. And he couldn't have stepped very hard because Oscar got over it sudden."

"Funny," said Captain of Detectives William Melvin.

"Yeah, 'tis funny," said the detective.



SHATTUCK BANDITS ALL BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

ONE of the most famous robberies in recent years—that of the residence of Albert R. Shattuck, at 19 Washington Square, North, New York City—has recently been brought to a successful issue, from Mr. Shattuck's viewpoint. The robbery took place three years ago, and at that time, Mr. Shattuck vowed that he would bring to justice every member of the gang taking part in the looting of his home. He has now been enabled to keep his word, for the last of the four robbers, Paul Camilleri, was recently convicted in the Court of General Sessions, in New York City.

The Shattuck case had many sensational features. The robbery was planned by Mouray, the butler of the household. On April 22, 1922, Mrs. Shattuck, on returning from church, was seized in her room by bandits, who demanded "money and diamonds." On her refusing to give them anything, they took her to the wine cellar and locked her in with Mr. Shattuck and nine servants. The party in the cellar were almost suffocated by the foul air and might have succumbed only for Mr. Shattuck's vigorous work at the lock of the cellar with his penknife. His efforts finally succeeded in releasing the prisoners.

The master mind of the robbery, Gabriel Alphonse Mouray, a notorious French criminal, was caught in France after a pistol battle and was sentenced to the guillotine for his crime. The French law provides that a robbery that endangers the lives of the victims may be so punished. At the request of Mr. Shattuck, however, Mouray's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

The other two bandits were Moise Bagnoli and Horace Crucciani. They are now serving terms of from forty to sixty years. Camilleri, who has just been convicted, also escaped to France. After being captured, he escaped, was recaptured, went on a hunger strike, and was finally extradited to the United States. He was known to his associates as "The Little Jockey." It was he who held the pistol to Mrs. Shattuck's heart before she was locked in the cellar. His conviction marks the fulfillment of Mr. Shattuck's vow to bring to justice all the criminals participating in the looting of his house to the tune of ninety thousand dollars and endangering the lives of himself and his wife and servants.

Headquarters Chat

A MAN in Toledo, Ohio, A. M. Dokton, 132 Esther Street, says there is one thing about DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE he does *not* like. "I do not like," writes Mr. Dokton, "stories that deal with English police officials, Scotland Yard men. I *hate* reading such titles as 'Sir,' 'Lord,' et cetera. Also, I hate to have characters say, 'Jolly well, old top.' That may be all right in England, good stuff for English magazines, but we are Americans, and we want American magazines to have only American characters in them. No English authors can compare with our American authors. So please cut out English stories."

There is no getting past it, those Chang stories, by A. E. Apple, are most certainly popular. Why, even husbands and wives agree as to their merits. Kindly read these letters:

"DEAR EDITOR: Husband and I have been reading your magazine for several years, and we enjoy it to the utmost. We like A. E. Apple's Chang stories immensely, and I think 'Mr. Chang, Hangman,' was one of the best ever written. Mr. Smith's poison articles are very interesting indeed. I want to congratulate DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE on the issue of June 13th. It was a dandy, containing two most original novelettes, 'Velvet Fingers,' and 'The Theft of Life and Death.' These two tales were both so different from the usual run. Then this edition also saw the beginning of a good serial by John Jay Chichester and four good short stories. We like the work of Johnston McCulley, Roy W. Hinds,

Edward Smith, John Jay Chichester, A. E. Apple, Madeleine Sharps Buchanan, Adele Luehrmann, and Louis Tracy. 'The Ringer' was a great serial. Also 'Maid of Mystery.' I will refrain from any knocks, as we like most everything in your magazine, and if there are a few things we don't care for, we realize there are people somewhere who enjoy them, and so we content ourselves with boosting the ones we like. We never miss reading the Chat, as we like to know what other readers think, and we pounce on your own brief comments every week.

"Sincerely yours,

"MR. AND MRS. E. H.

"Newark, New Jersey."

"DEAR EDITOR: I just finished another Mr. Chang story by A. E. Apple, and I want to say this much for Mr. Apple, that my wife and myself think that he is in a class by himself. I read all your stories and like them very much. Sometimes we get one that's not so good, but the other stories make up for it.

"I just read the comments of some one who doesn't like the Chang stories. How can any one who reads the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and likes some of the stories, not like the Chang stories? It is beyond me. Give me Chang all the time, or at least most of the time. I consider the stories by A. E. Apple to be among the best stories DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE has ever had, and Mr. Apple is considered by me as on big time, while the others are just getting by.

"Here's luck to Mr. Apple and Mr.

Chang and to DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE with more Chang stories.

"WILLIAM ARNOLD.

"1821 University Ave.,
"New York City."

Now, just as we thought, earlier in the Chat, we had it all settled that the Chang stories "are most certainly popular," along comes a man, J. D. La-Blanc, of Montreal, Canada, who says he does not like the Chang stories, and sure does rip Apple up and down the back. And there is one thing that's simply got to be settled, and that's the extent of Montreal's Chinatown. We have not been in Montreal in years, and when we were there, we did not happen to drift down into that most interesting city's Chinese district. We'll have to strike the publishers of this magazine for the price of a nice round trip to Montreal, with enough money on the side to "do" what Chinatown there is good and proper. Well, look out, Apple, and Adele Luehrmann, too, for here he goes:

"DEAR EDITOR: I have been reading the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for about nine years and on the whole enjoy it very much. It is a clean magazine with a good line of healthy stories. I get bored to death with Adele Luehrmann's long-drawn-out drivels and I wish you could cut down the long-winded nonsense about Mr. Chang. Apropos of another correspondent's remarks, may I say that there is no such Chinatown as he describes in Montreal. The chinks gamble there, and they smoke opium, and I dare say peddle drugs a bit, but they are not the lurid and exciting murder crowd that the Chang stories depict. On another point or two the author is woozy. First, the French criminal law of the codes never was law in the Province of Quebec which is governed by the same Canadian statute as the rest of Canada. This statute was passed about 1891 to codify the criminal

law of England, and English law was introduced here when Canada was conquered in 1763.

"Second point: Scotland Yard detectives do not operate in Canada, and the Canadian police do not do ordinary police duty to the north of Lake Ontario. The Canadian police attend to certain specified duties in the eastern and central provinces and police the North Country. I do not know about the West. They are the successors to the now defunct Northwest Mounted Police to which Mr. Apple refers. In Ontario and Quebec, the Municipal and the Provincial police look after the order of the community and the Federal or Royal Canadian only attend to a few matters.

"Mr. Apple is quite too smart for his pants as they used to say in the West, and I for one am heartily sick of Mr. Chang.

"I look forward eagerly for Big-nose Charley and the stories of Holden and the Mountain division. I also like Thubway Tham and Ma Hansen. The two best stories you have ever published were a voodoo yarn that ran for six weeks during 1917 or 1918 and 'The Amateur Detectives,' recently completed. That was the best of all."

Well, here's one reader, James Swift, Vancouver, B. C., who would like to have us come out oftener:

"DEAR EDITOR: I have been a reader of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for six years, and I think it is about time that I put in my thanks for a good many hours of enjoyment. I do not think I have passed up one story in all that time. I even go so far as to read the 'Agony Column.'

"In your June 27th number in the Headquarters Chat, Mr. Johnson asks for the magazine twice a week, and you asked what the readers thought of it. Well, I for one think they cannot come too often. I have a half-hour ride on

the street car morning and evening, and I have finished the magazine by Friday, so shoot 'em along as fast as you like.

"My favorites are The Gray Phantom, The Picaroon, Maxwell Sanderson, Thubway Tham, Simon Trapp, the much-talked-of Mr. Chang, and The Avenging Twins. Oh! what's the use; I like the whole lot of them. I sure would like to know what has become of The

Avenging Twins. The stories were so good that sometimes I think the author must have exhausted his think box.

"Here's hoping for a twice-a-week."

That's a good letter to stop on. It will make the authors happy, for it's a hint for us to get busy and buy a whale of a wad of "copy." So, to work on the "To-be-considered MS box!"



BURGLAR SPECIALIZES IN PLUMBERS

MMORRIS MARCUS, who lives on the upper East Side of New York City, has a peculiar hatred for plumbers, and that is why he is a burglar. The police call him "the plumbers' burglar," and have arrested him nine times for looting plumbers' shops. His last offense was the attempted burglary of the Goldberg Plumbing Supply Company, on East Ninety-seventh Street. He was arrested in the act of loading the contents of this shop onto a pushcart in the absence of the proprietor.

Patrolman Link, who made the arrest, asked Marcus why he wasted his time stealing such stuff as lead pipe, elbows and joints.

"That's a fact," Marcus admitted. "The darn junk ain't worth the trouble of carting away, but I hate plumbers!"

The records of the police show that Marcus was arrested twice in 1907, once in 1908, twice in 1910, and once in 1912, 1914, and 1915 for burglarious raids on plumbing establishments. In further explanation of his peculiarity, Marcus said:

"Twenty years ago I was a peaceful, law-abiding citizen. Then one day a plumber did a dittle job for me—repaired a leak in the bathroom. When I saw his bill, my whole outlook changed. If a plumber can rob me and get away with it, I can rob him, I said. I've been doing it ever since."



HELD FOR SELLING CANNABIS INDICA

AMEXICAN seaman named Joseph Joesezpardo was arrested in New York a few weeks ago on a charge of selling a habit-forming drug that is rarely found in the United States. Detective John Detrizzo of the narcotic squad testified that the sailor had sold him four cigarettes containing *Cannabis Indica*, or Indian hemp. This is a drug that has been known and used in India for centuries. It gives the person who takes it a sense of exhilaration or pleasurable intoxication and produces a peculiar effect of prolongation of time, so that he does not know how long he has been under the influence of the drug. Another effect is a sense of double consciousness and loss of power, especially in the lower extremities.

In view of the dangerous character of the drug, the sailor was held in ten thousand dollars bail.

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE 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 unworkable.

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," or offers, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

BRICK, GEORGE, was last heard of at North Antler, Sask., in the fall of 1922. If any one knows of his present whereabouts please communicate with his sister, Nora Brick, Manitou, Man., Can.

NEILAS, WM.—He is about five feet eight inches tall, has black hair and brown eyes, and a fair complexion. He was last heard from in Huntington, Quebec. His sister has been trying to find him for several years. Write to Rose Sheffield, Rochester, N. Y.

ATTENTION.—I am anxious to get in touch with the children of Katharine Powell Clay, deceased. It is thought they were in a home in England in 1916, but no definite word has been received since that time. If any one knows them, or knows of them, please write to Mrs. Dorothy James, 156 Cortlandt St., Tarrytown, N. Y.

COHEN, ISIDORE.—It is important that you get in touch with me at once. Mike Cohen, Box 381, New Orleans, La.

FLYNN, ELLA BROOKER, has been missing from her home in Buffalo, N. Y., since 1925. She is twenty-four years old, five feet five inches tall, weighs one hundred and fourteen pounds, and has dark-brown hair and blue eyes. Any one who can tell me of her whereabouts please write to Wm. J. Flynn, care of Lake Carriers Assn., Cleveland, Ohio.

MALMSTROM, ELLEN or JULIUS.—Mother has had a stroke and is almost helpless. Please write to her immediately.

DANLY, EDWARD, was last heard from in Milwaukee, Wis. His father died and his mother is very lonely. His sister would like him to write to her. Doris Danly Cottonell, 50 Sandown Cott., Middle Hill, Englefield Green, England.

FIN.—We had nothing to do with the trouble you had after you left, and are very anxious for you to come back or write to M. and T., care of this magazine.

HARDESTY, CURTIS, was last heard from in Palo Alto, Calif. He is about thirty-eight years old, six feet one in height, and has blue eyes, brown hair, and a fair complexion. He was born near Catlin, Ind., and has served in the U. S. marines at Annapolis, Md. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to his sister, Mrs. C. R. Murray, 597 Cass St., Milwaukee, Wis.

WHENTHWORTH, ALBERT E.—He is about fifty-five years old, has a dark complexion, and is of heavy build. His daughter, Agnes, would like him to write to her at her grandfather's old address.

MERRELL, Mrs. MARY.—She and her daughters were last heard of about ten years ago in Okla. If any of her family sees this advertisement please write to her niece, Mrs. Annie Ervin Miles, McKinney, Tex.

DOWNS, LAWRENCE, JIM, and NINA.—I have been trying in vain to find you since mother's death. Please write to your step-sister, Ruth Patterson, Charleston, Wash.

EDWARD.—You have my sincere affection and trust. Please write me care of this magazine, before it is too late. Mary.

SWAIN, BERT, whose home was in Toledo, Ohio, was last heard of in New York City, in 1918. Raymond wants to hear from you. Write Jack Vaughn, care of this magazine.

MARTMAN, ERNEST or ED.—He was last heard of when he worked for the Crystal Peak Gem Co., and is thought to be in Leadville or Cripple Creek, Col. He is six feet tall, fifty-two years old, has black hair, blue laughing eyes, and dark heavy eyebrows. His shoulders are slightly rounded. His daughter is very anxious to hear from him, and will appreciate any mail sent to Olive Martman Anderson, care of this magazine.

COWAN, BENJAMIN, left his home in New York City in 1899 to go to the Klondike when the great gold fever hit New York. He is about fifty-eight years old, and was married to a girl in East Orange, N. J. Any word from or about him would bring much joy to his aged mother. Please write to Harry Cohen, 514 Henry St., Utica, N. Y.

PRINCE, PHILIP JOHN or JACK.—He is thirty-four years old, about five feet seven inches tall, dark, and has a scar across his throat. He was heard from at Hoople, N. D., in 1920, and is thought to have gone to Regina, Can., later. Any information regarding his present whereabouts will be appreciated by his sister, H. A. Prince, 124 Brackett St., Portland, Me.

BERTZ, EMMA and LUDWIG.—Have not heard from you for several years. Please write to your brother, Charles F. Bertz, Box 131, Leola, S. D.

BETTY.—I'm lonesome for you and promise to make you happy if you will come to me. Please write to Jack, care of this magazine.

YATES, JAMES.—Your sister is anxious to hear from you. Please write to Margaret Yates Bessie, Portland, Ore.

SHANAHAN, WM. HENRY, was last seen at Bemidji, Minn. He is five feet six inches tall, has dark hair and dark eyes, and is twenty-eight years old. His mother is anxious to hear from him. Please write to Mrs. Clara Shanahan, 100 Washington St., Vancouver, Wash.

CAMERON, BRUCE, who worked on the river dams in Ohio, has news awaiting him at a friend's. He is five feet ten inches tall, weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds, is forty-eight years old, and has poor teeth, the front ones being gone. He is thought to have gone back to the neighborhood of the dams in Ohio. Please send any information about him to James W. Smith, Box 29, Des Arc, Mo.

STONEY.—I need you. Please write to me at home. Curlee.

THOMPSON or THOMSON, ANDREW and ELIZABETH, who once lived in Hartford, Conn., and had two boys in the home at Warehouse Point in 1891, are being looked for by a relative. Andrew was a welder and traveled West from Boston. Any one knowing anything about the family please write to A. Thompson, 42 Harford Ave., New Britain, Conn.

TENBROOKS, WM. W.—He left Penn. twenty-seven years ago and is now about forty-five years old; was last heard of in Calif. His daughter is anxious for news of him. Mrs. H. C. Booth, W. Pearl St., Wellsville, N. Y.

A. T. McD.—Will accept proposition. Please write immediately. Mrs. Annie McDowall, 421 Cherry St., Florence, Ala.

BROOKS or SIMMONS (given names unknown).—Both were from Mississippi and were at Leavenworth, Kan., in 1918. An old friend would like to hear from them. Deck Smith, Box 190, Kentwood, La.

CLARK, R. P., was last heard of at Dodge City, Kan. His brother Harry would appreciate some word from or about him. 20 Notre Dame Ave., E., Winipeg, Can.

KENNEDY, Miss LAVONNE, who lived in Indianapolis, Ind., in 1918-19, please write to J. D. Gibson, Box 825, Balboa, C. Z., Panama.

MANNRAU, CARL, whose home is in Wisconsin, was last heard of in Ranger, Tex., in 1920. He has black hair, black eyes, and stubby teeth. Any one knowing his present address please write to M. S. McIntyre, care of this magazine.

DILL.—Memories of last summer! Would like to see or hear from you again. "Chick."

ALLRED, J. H.—Was last heard from in Douthat, Okla. If any of his present acquaintances see this please ask him to write his friend, Mrs. A. S., of Hannibal, Mo.

RYAN, LAWRENCE HENRY.—He is about fifty-three years old. He has a sister Miss Annie Ryan, and brothers Ed and Tom. The three men are all railroaders. Any information will be appreciated by M. E. R., care of this magazine.

WHITMAN, JOE, was last heard of in Houston, Tex., in 1922. He is thirty-eight years old, five feet six inches tall, and has dark hair and dark eyes. His parents need his help. Any one knowing him please write to his niece, Miss Paulina Streaty, Grand Saline, Tex.

WARD, WENONA M.—She is thought to be in the neighborhood of San Diego, Calif., and is twenty-two years old. Please send any information about her to H. B. Arms, Box 402, Norwalk, Calif.

BALDWIN, "SHORTY."—Here some news about Dot! Please write to your old buddy at San Bernardino. Bill.

FLETCHER, KITTY and **FRANK**, were born in London, England, and were last heard of in New York City in 1918. Any one knowing anything about them please write to their daughter, Mrs. J. Fred Melton, 454 Beach St., Welton, W. Va.

JOHNSON, MAURICE, was in Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1919. He is of Swedish birth. Please send any news of him to H. K., care of this magazine.

HAMMER, DOROTHY and **MARGARET**, twelve and fourteen, who were put in a home in Richmond, Va., in 1919, are now being sought by their brother, Julian E. Hammer, 2931 W. Marshall St., Richmond, Va.

LONGUERAN, ZEAB.—He left Mora, N. M., with me several years ago, and is now thought to be in California. A boyhood chum, who is now a cripple, would like some word from or about him. Saferino D. Martin, 1115 Rialto Ave., San Bernardino, Calif.

ORTH, CHARLES B.—Please write. Am anxious to know if you are well. All letters will be treated confidentially. "Gill."

CHADWELL, FRANK or GEORGE.—The sweetheart you left behind in Webb City, Mo., still cares for you and is anxious for you to write her. Sophia Capps, 719 S. Front St., Bawling, Wyo.

KELLY, P. E.—Your relatives are anxious to find you. Please write to E. J. Kelly, 92 Harvard St., Charlestown, Mass.

MILLER, ED. L.—Was born in Selina, Kan., in 1885, and was last heard from while he was working for the Missouri Valley Bridge Co. between 1890 and 1892. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write his old friend, John Dooley, 427 Cherokee St., Leavenworth, Kan.

ATTENTION.—Any one knowing of a World War veteran with right arm off, right eye out or sunk in, and last two fingers of left hand, please write to Box 456, Perryton, Tex.

HEILBRON, J. R.—It is important that I hear from you at once. Write Dorothy, care of this magazine.

GIBBS, JOHN S. M.—Mother seriously ill. Please come home immediately.

STEELE, Mr. and Mrs. VERNON, were living in Kent, Wash., when last heard of. Any news of them would be appreciated by son of Mr. Steele, Jesse Leon Leach, 1607 Wabash Ave., Spokane, Wash.

McROBERT, J. E., was last heard from at Mina, Nev., in November, 1923. He is now forty-eight years old. His mother, Mrs. Mary Stuart, will appreciate any information about him. Box 214, Parma, Idaho.

EISENBARTT, JOHN.—Please write to your folks at home. The new address is 2211 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

TRUDEAU, THOMPSON or McKAY, CLEO, when last heard from was living with her father in Chicago. She has light, wavy hair, blue eyes, pleasant disposition, doesn't weigh over one hundred and ten pounds, and is twenty-two years old. Her aunt, Mrs. Minnie Bertrand, is very anxious to get in touch with her, and will appreciate any information sent to her at West River St., Mokenca, Ill.

WATTS, ROBERT, TERRY, and CHARLIE, left Booneville, Ark., in April, 1925, for Ft. Smith, Ark., to hunt work, but have never been heard from since. Charlie's mother needs him and is badly distressed over his absence. If any one seeing this notice knows of their present whereabouts they will confer a favor upon her by writing to Mrs. Lillie Watts, Booneville, Ark.

ATTENTION.—My father, Wm. Franklin Stewart, came from Daniel Boone, Ky., where he left his mother, sisters, and brothers, but he has not heard from them since. His mother is said to have married once or twice again, also his sister Sara. I will be grateful to any one who can give me any information about the family. Mrs. Margaret Stewart Woodward, White's Creek, Tenn.

SNYDER, GEORGE.—Please write to your father and mother. They are worried about you. Mrs. Homer Snyder, 752 Franklin St., S. E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

DODSON, EDWARD.—We have heard nothing from or about him since he worked for the Commercial Mining Co. at Las Vegas, N. M., in 1924. His wife is very much worried. She has written many letters, but received no replies. Please write to his daughter, Mrs. Mary Tyler, Stim, Calif.

ELEANOR OF FRISCO.—Am in dire need of your assistance. Please write and I will atone for my wrong of July, 1923. Pvt. Ralph D. Trissell, Motor Transport Co. No. 5, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Tex.

MARIE.—I have never forgotten you, and if you will send your address to Mrs. Cecil Hanson, R. F. D. 2, Box 132, Hopkins, Minn., I will write you more fully. Jim.

FRANK V. A.—Can't stand this separation much longer. Will be at 601 for a short time. Mail waiting for you at Gen. Del. and William's Hotel, Milwaukee. Please write to Elsie.

WELCH, "DAB."—Sis has very important news for you. Please write and send your address. E. T.

CLAYCONE, HAROLD HUNTER, left his home in Owensboro, Ky., on March 27, 1924. His mother would be extremely grateful for any word from or about him. J. A. Claycomb, 215 Creek Ave., Bartlesville, Okla.

BURKE, BUD.—Your mother is sick and grieving for you. Please write. If you are in need, she'll help you. Howard Svita, 16 27th Ave., S. E., Minneapolis, Minn.

BARRINGTON, RALPH.—Please return to your wife and everything will be forgiven. My sister has been ill and is in the hospital. Rita.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the men who were members of the old 21st Ballloon Co. from 1919 to 1922. W. B. Browne, 741 Stamford Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

BUSH, CECIL.—We have good news for you, and we all miss you. Please come home. Heloia.

CLIFTON, WALTER.—Last heard of in Centerville, Iowa, about a year ago. Is about forty-five years old. His sister would appreciate any information about him. Mrs. O. E. Jones, Rt. A, Box 65, Issaquah, Wash.

ARROWSMITH, MARK, disappeared from his home on May 25th and no word has been received since. If any of his present acquaintances see this notice please ask him to write or return home, as his wife has been ill since he left, and the children miss him. Mrs. Mark Arrowsmith, Taylorsville, Ala.

W. H. W. (DABDY).—Your silence worries me. Please write to my home, addressing letter by my maiden name. Baba.

WIZE, CALVIN, thirty years old, over five feet tall, fair complexion, blue eyes, left his home June 2, 1925, and has not been heard from since. Any one knowing of his present whereabouts please advise his wife, at 107 2d St., Gaffney, S. C.

BOYLE, HARRY, formerly of Pennsylvania.—Please write to your lonely friend, Margaret W.

TARMER, W. LEE.—Your wife is not able to work any longer and needs you. Please write her at Box 58, Bushnell, Fla.

FINESTEIN, CLAIRE.—Your silence makes me very sad. Please let me know what the misunderstanding was caused by, and I will gladly apologize for any wrong on my part. Green.

ESGER, JOHANN FREDERICK, was last seen in Alliance, Ohio, in 1893. He is a native of Switzerland, and is about fifty-four years old. His stepbrother, Jacob Kunz, would like to hear from him. Write to P. O. Box 590, Evanston, Wyo.

FRANZEN, GERTRUDE.—I have some interesting and beneficial news for you. Please write to Perry D. Long, 8145 Radcliffe Ave., Detroit, Mich.

MAHONEY, LEO THOMAS, was adopted by a family, through an orphan's home at Sioux Falls, S. D., in 1911, and his sisters and brothers have tried in vain to find him since. He is now twenty-three years old. Any one knowing his present address please write to his sister, Mrs. Millie Tholander, R. R. 1, Drakeville, Iowa.

MILTON, W. B.—Please write, Bill, and tell me what to do. Grace Kallas, Gen. Del., Birmingham, Ala.

CLICK, ROY, was in the Army and Navy Hospital at Hot Springs, Ark., in 1917. An old friend, Pansy Eulen, is anxious to know his present address. Any one who can enlighten her please write care of Gen. Del., Bollivar, N. Y.

DIELH, GUY C.—We don't understand why you left us. We all love you and want to do the right thing by you. I am living at an orphan's home with the children and we all need you. Please write V. A. D., care of this magazine.

CALABRESE, ANTHONY THOMAS, disappeared while on a business trip to Chicago, five years ago. He was of medium height, weighed one hundred and eighty-six pounds, was smooth shaven, had gray eyes, light-brown hair, and very fair complexion. He had spells of epilepsy, and may have had a lapse of memory. If any one knows of his present whereabouts please advise his wife, Mrs. Josie Calabrese, 601 E. Swan Ave., Webster Groves, Mo.

MCCORMACK, JOHN; KAIGER, ANDREW.—I would like to get in touch with any descendants of either of these men. The last heard of lived in the Sequatchie Valley, Tenn., just before the Civil War. Write to Buret James, R. R. 1, Spark's Hill, Ill.

BURNES, Mrs. and Mr. EDWARD, who were last heard of in Detroit, Mich., are being looked for by a friend, I. Blodgett, Ft. Washington, Md.



1 → 30 Days' FREE Trial

\$

WITH ORDER
Brings 58 Beautiful Useful Pieces
A Complete Service for 8 People

THE refined beauty that is ever-enduring—the dainty simplicity that is true art—the excellence of quality that brings pride in possession—these are the outstanding attractions of this, my newest dinnerware offering. Because of its graceful design and its refined coloring, because it is exactly right for every occasion, formal or informal, I have called

this dinner service "The Patrician." Every one of these 58 pieces is made of good quality semi-porcelain. Every piece is beautiful, even-toned, lustrous white, decorated with a wide, artistically designed floral band in rich gold, and with gold stripes on all handles. Can you imagine a more desirable, a more attractive dinner service? This complete service for 8 people will be sent on 30 Days' Trial.

\$

If you are not Convinced that you Save \$5.00 you may Return The Set

THE Shape of the Covered Vegetable Dish, the Cake Plate, the Butter Dish, the Cream Pitcher and the Sugar Bowl is Strikingly Graceful and Unusual. These are pieces of

30 DAYS' FREE TRIAL: Send for the 58 Pieces Now, Today, at my risk. Use them as if they were your own, for 30 Days. If you are not convinced that you save \$5, if you are not satisfied with quality, price, or terms, return the set. I will refund your first payment and all transportation costs. The trial will not cost you a penny.

MONTHLY

Outstanding Character and Beauty. No picture can do them justice. You must see the actual pieces. From the friendly cup of tea with a guest or two, to a big, important dinner, the Patrician Dinner Set is both appropriate and ample.

These 58 Pieces, a Complete Service for 8 People

8—9 in. Dinner Plates; 8 Cups; 8 Saucers; 8—8 in. Soup Plates; 8—7 in. Pie or Lunch Plates; 8—5 in. Fruit or Dessert Dishes; 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces); 1—9 in. Open Vegetable Dish; 1 Cream Pitcher; 1 Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces); 1—13½ in. Platter; 1—10 in. Fluted Cake Plate; 1 Gravy or Sauce Boat; 1—8 in. Fancy Butter Dish. Order No. TA2997. Introductory Sale Price \$14.95. Terms: \$1 with order, \$1 monthly.

■ **SPEAR & CO., Dept. S-701, Pittsburgh, Pa.**

- Send me at once the 58 Piece Dinner Set, as described above. Enclosed is \$1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you \$1.00 monthly. Order No. TA2997. Price \$14.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Please print or write name and address plainly.

Name..... Occupation.....

R. F. D., Box or Street and No.....

Post Office..... State.....

If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in line below

Send Shipment to.....

FREE If you want Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put X here

and write your name and address plainly on above lines.

How to Realize Your DREAM HOME

YOU can have NOW the Home Beautiful that will be one of the finest in your neighborhood. All you have to do is to take advantage of my Remarkably Easy Terms. Send for my Big Free Book Today. It shows Thousands of Bargains in Furniture, Furnishings, and Everything for the home. Remember, you don't take a single chance when you deal with Spear. My prices are the Lowest, My Terms the Easiest; I give the Longest Time to Pay, and our business relations will be Strictly Confidential. Be sure to send for my FREE Catalog Now. **NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.**



© 1925, Spear & Co.

→ **Spear & Co.** ← Dept. S-701
Pittsburgh, Pa.
Home Furnishers for the People of America



*Thin..crispy..sugar shells "stuffed"
with pure..luscious fruit-jams..
..nuts and Marmalades!.....*

THE first taste convinces—Diana "Stuffed" Confections are purity itself! The children can eat their fill without fear. Long ago, we originated Diana "Stuffed" Confections to meet all summer conditions. These crispy sugar shells are thin as paper, "stuffed" with imported nuts and fruit-jams and marmalades, made in our own plant. All 1200 Bunte Candies measure up to the Bunte Golden Quality Creed. Good stores everywhere carry Diana "Stuffed" Confections in 2½, 4, 9 or 16 ounce air-tight jars and 2, 3 and 5 pound air-tight tidy tins. Each package contains 21 varieties. Keep some on hand at home always. In buying, say "Bunte"—that insures Golden Quality and the genuine.

BUNTE BROTHERS, Est. 1876, *World-Famous Candies*, Chicago

DIANA "STUFFED" Confections

In Glass Jars
4½ oz. 30c; 9 oz. 50c; 16 oz. 75c



In Air-Tight Tins
2 lbs. \$1.25; 3 lbs. \$1.80; 5 lbs. \$2.50

Slightly higher prices west of Rockies and far South