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THE NOTE OF TERROR

BY *Adele Luehrmann*



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DETECTIVE STORY

MAGAZINE

EVERY WEEK

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August 28, 1926

No. 3



THE NOTE OF TERROR

By Adele Luehmann
Author of "Reward Refused," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER.

THE letter was at the top of the morning mail, and she took her glasses and looked at the word "Person" in the lower left-hand corner, written somewhat larger than the address.

"Somebody begging," he said to him-

self, and shifted his frown to the silver-handled knife lying ready to his hand, which he never used but which his photographer insisted upon showing his nose at every possible opportunity. He wondered how long it would take for the little fool to notice that he always pushed the thing out of his way; then, yielding to the irritation the sight of the knife

roused in him, he picked it up and dropped it into the wastebasket. His daughter, Claire, had given it to him on his last birthday, his fifty-second. She had made it herself. Making useless articles out of silver was one of her methods of wasting her life. She was twenty-four years old now and ought to be married and settled, and would be if she had sense enough to know the difference between a man and a loafer.

The thought of his daughter was to John Alston an unpleasant reminder of his equally unsatisfactory son, Archer, who was also wasting his life. He had already thrown away several valuable years of it, and, if permitted, would throw away the rest. Fortunately, in his case something could be done. It took money to go to Paris and study art, and he had used up the few thousands left him by his mother, studying in New York. The only danger there was of his getting to Paris lay in the possibility that his sister might lend him her small inheritance to fling after his own. But even if she did, it would not last him more than a couple of years, and he would then have to give up his delusion that he was a genius and go to work. There was no way of managing Claire. Howard Wilson couldn't drag her to the altar. And she couldn't be locked up to prevent her from running away with that good-for-nothing bum, Stevens.

Where she and Archer got their stubbornness from he didn't know. Their mother had been rather obstinate at times, it was true, but she had always given in finally, and had never been sullen about it, as they were. Why the world couldn't they understand what he wished them to do was good, not his? He had enough to make them re But the only result of his effort at, in addition to refusing to do what he wanted, they resented his not encouraging them to do as they liked. Some-

times he thought they hated him. Hated their own father!

Well, they would understand some day—when it was too late, he thought. Having drained what bitter satisfaction there was in so gloomy a certainty, he dismissed the subject for the time being, put on his glasses, and turned his attention to his mail. Laying aside the top letter without a closer inspection than he had already given it, he opened and read the others, then rang for Miss Booker.

Another sullen face! But, thank Heaven, he could get rid of this one, if it didn't change. What did she have to be sullen about? Had she expected him to compliment her on her mistakes? Did she think his office was a young ladies' finishing school? Or imagine that he liked to wait, after ringing for her, while she put fresh paint on her lips? As if she were not homely enough without smearing herself up like a clown!

Miss Booker closed the door behind her carefully, as if afraid of making a noise, and Alston snapped out: "Oh, come on—come on! There's nobody sick in here or asleep." Upon which she propelled herself hurriedly to her chair and sat down, keeping her eyes fastened on her notebook and pencil. Pretending to be afraid of him! But he knew how much she cared about losing her job. That was just how the one before her had looked and acted, and she had left of her own accord, without notice, simply because he had bawled her out when she deserved it! You couldn't say a word to any of them. All they were in offices for was to get money for clothes and to meet men.

Wondering how a girl with knees as Miss Booker were could think enough to display, Alston began to dictate. And it was not until he picked up from the desk the last of the letters to be answered, and found under it the one he had not

opened, that he remembered its existence. Turning back to Miss Booker to continue dictating, he caught her staring at it. The next moment she shot a sidelong glance at him and immediately dropped her eyelids.

It was then, for the first time, that John Alston really looked at the letter. Three things struck him at once. It was on private stationery, the handwriting was apparently feminine, and the word "Personal" was underlined. Adding those intrinsic facts to Miss Booker's furtive and swiftly lowered glance, he reached the annoying conclusion that the letter was under suspicion of being clandestine and from a woman.

For a moment he glared at the girl in front of him, sitting with bent head, unconscious of his angry gaze. But his wrath was impotent; there was nothing he could say. What was even more irritating was the thought that he couldn't tell his wife of the incident, as a joke. A few weeks ago he would have. Now he was afraid of his wife, thinking it not only funny, but ridiculous, that a man of his age should be suspected by his stenographer of carrying on an illicit love affair.

Suppressing his feelings, he dictated the reply to the letter in his hand; then, as Miss Booker rose to go, he motioned to her to sit down again.

"Wait a minute! Here's something I overlooked," he said. He reached for the unread letter, slipped his thumb under the flap, and tore it open, noting with grim pleasure the silly expression of surprise that came over her face.

DEAR SIR: If you want for me to keep mum about that business in July, 1897, meet me on north side of Richland Park with five thousand dollars—

Here his fingers refolded the letter without his conscious volition, and for several seconds he sat staring at blank paper before he dared trust his voice to say, "All right," as he jerked his head toward the door. To get the girl

out of the room, to be alone, was all he considered at that moment. The knowledge that he was giving her fresh grounds for suspicion seemed of no importance, his vexation on that score having been completely swept away by the surge of stronger emotions. When he heard the door click he glanced up at it, then read on:

—Friday midnight. I got a letter you wrote that party, you know who, and will sell for my price and am giving you a good chance to buy it in and save self and family from big disgrace. If you ain't there by midnight sharp will have to do my duty and tell the district attorney what I know.

In the fifty-odd years of his life, Alston had often thought, there had been more than one man's just due of shocks, of the unexpectedly unpleasant. Due to his father's death, there had been an abrupt end to his hopes of going to college and becoming a lawyer, and at seventeen he had become the mainstay of his mother and younger brothers and sisters. Then all the decisive events of his life had occurred as staggering blows from ambush, all his turnings had been around sharp corners. Even his marriage, the first one, had been too sudden for his liking. It had been precipitated by the appearance of a rival on the scene and the fear that, if he did not take what he wanted when he could get it, he might miss it altogether. And his business failure, twelve years ago, from which he had struggled so slowly and painfully back to success, had come like a thunderbolt, a thing entirely unforeseen, due solely to the rascality of a partner he had trusted.

And now that old letter turning up, after nearly thirty years of silence! Never a word in all that time, directly or indirectly, from it, and now blackmail.

"Five thousand dollars—a letter you wrote—big disgrace—the district attorney—" As he reread the letter more slowly those phrases stood out

from it as if underscored, and suddenly with his mental vision he saw the face of the district attorney, Miles Fallon, with an ugly smile on his thin lips. If anybody else had been district attorney, Alston might have gone to him, told him the truth about that old, hidden episode of his youth, and left him to deal quietly and effectively with the black-mailer. But with Fallon such a course was out of the question. Alston could hope for neither decency nor simple justice from that scoundrel. No scruples would prevent Fallon and his gang from making the most of such a wind-fall. It was just the sort of thing they would jump at, and by the time they were through with it black would be white and white, black.

Examining the letter critically, Alston decided that the handwriting, which he now noticed was very unusual and doubtless disguised, was probably not a woman's, as he had supposed at first. Certainly the wording of it was a man's. But who the man was it was not possible even to imagine. No telling into what hands that letter of his might have fallen! The astonishing thing was that it should still be in existence—after almost thirty years.

The possibility that the woman to whom he had written it was involved in this attempt to extort money from him he dismissed at once. Even if she had been capable of such a thing, which he did not believe, she would not have waited until now to prey upon him. Besides, hadn't he assured her, both in the letter and by a messenger, that if she should need more money than he was sending her, she had only to let him know?

And from that day to this he had never had a word of any kind from her, had not known where she was, nor if she were alive. If he had sent his letter through the mail he would have been in doubt all these years that it had ever reached her. And he would have tried,

somehow, to find her and make sure that she was not in want. Now, if he had needed proof that she had received his letter, he had it. She had not only received it, but, unfortunately, she had kept it. Perhaps she had just died, and that was how it had passed into other hands. Whose? Certainly somebody's to whom she had confided the story of how it had come to be written—some cousin or other relative—no guessing who. It wasn't the sort of thing she would have told her husband, if she had married.

It seemed strange that she should have told any one at all, Alston thought, remembering how little given she had been to talking about herself or anything else. He remembered, too, how anxious she had been to hush the whole affair up, and how frightened when told the police would come and question her about her father's death.

With these recollections there flashed into Alston's mind the visual memory of the girl's white face and staring eyes, of her kneeling figure beside her father's body, of himself on the other side, listening for the beating of a heart that would never beat again.

He thought of his children and his young wife, with an inward shudder. Were they to hear that ugly story? Could he bear their knowing it? It seemed to him the humiliation of such a disclosure would be unendurable. And yet to pay blackmail! Which was worse?

At that moment his telephone interrupted his thoughts, reminding him that he had a business appointment at that hour and that the man with whom ~~he~~ had it had probably arrived. Pausing to slip the blackmailing letter and its envelope into an inside pocket of his coat, he took down the receiver. As he did so, his eye fell on the daily calendar at the back of his desk.

Thursday!

There were thirty-six hours yet.

There was some comfort in that fact. Then he said to himself, with a sudden resolution: "I'll look Ned Henderson up and have a talk with him." And the feeling that there was some one he could talk to about his trouble eased the load of it a little.

CHAPTER II.

JESSIE'S RETURN.

TO carry on one's everyday life with a secret fear in the heart is to have one's nerves continually on the rack. And Alston's nerves were not of the sort to stand it. By four o'clock they had been rasped to a point of irritability apparent even to himself, and he decided suddenly to go home, two hours before his usual time. When he got there, he thought, he would say he had a headache and would lie down in his darkened bedroom. It was the only way in which he could be alone, and to be alone uninterruptedly for a few hours was necessary for the hard thinking he needed to do before doing anything else about that letter in his pocket.

If he had thought things out twenty-nine years ago, he reminded himself, instead of acting on impulse, he would not have had this unexpected comeback to deal with. Ned Henderson told him at the time that he was a fool to write to the girl. But he wouldn't listen to reason then. All he thought of was making amends and clearing his conscience.

Just what he said in the letter he no longer remembered. But he remembered the state of mind he was in when he wrote it. He hadn't been able to sleep, except for a few minutes at a time, until after the inquest and the funeral; the reason he had written, instead of going to see Anna, was that he couldn't force himself to go to her house again. It had become a place of horror to him. And for years he avoided it, even after her home had

been torn down and the property turned into building lots. Changed as the whole section now was, he felt sure he could find the place where the old house had stood, the very spot where Jake Borjes' body had lain. That wretched business was something he would never have forgotten, even if no reminder of it had ever come. To this day he could picture the whole affair to himself, as vividly as if it had happened thirty days ago, instead of thirty years.

"I'll look Ned Henderson up this evening and show him the letter," he resolved for the dozenth time. "I'll think things out alone first, then see what he thinks. His advice was good before. Besides, there's no one else I can talk to. Wonder what he's doing now."

Lingering at his desk to sign letters just left by Miss Booker, Alston now sat for a moment with suspended pen. He was startled by the realization that he did not know where Henderson was, nor even recall when he had last seen him. Consulting the telephone book anxiously, he was very much relieved to find that the one intimate friend of his youth was still within reach. And as he jotted down the telephone number and address the frown between his eyes tightened and he thought:

"Is it possible I haven't seen Ned since he came here to talk about that crazy scheme of his? Could he have been offended by what I said? Well—I sent flowers when his wife died. Besides, he is too good-natured to bear a grudge. And what I told him was the truth, as it turned out. The thing was a fizzle. I'd have lost every cent of the money he wanted me to put into it.

"Still——" He suddenly saw his friend's face across his desk, looking old and tired. Ned had gone gray early, and for ten years had looked older than he was. Remembering their last meeting, Alston had a twinge of conscience. He wouldn't have missed

the money Ned had wanted. Anyhow, he needn't have expressed his opinion of the scheme so plainly. He hadn't stopped it, and probably he had hurt Ned's feelings. He could see him now at the door, looking back as he went out.

"Wish I'd looked him up when his wife died. Wish I'd gone to the funeral. He came to my wife's. Still, he won't let it make any difference between us. He's not that sort. And I've got to see him about this. It'll clear my mind to talk it out with somebody, and he's the only one I can talk to. And, another thing, he's the only one that knows the truth—to back me up, if it should come to that."

With a sickening shudder Alston forced his mind back to the letters under his hand. He tried to take in the sense of them before adding his signature, but knew he had not fully done so. Might as well go home, he thought; he was no good for anything else. Nothing had gone right in the office since that letter arrived. It seemed to him he had done nothing all day but find fault with first one then another of his employees. The whole lot of them seemed to be in a conspiracy to try his patience.

With no idea of the unutterable relief that his early departure brought to his staff, he presently started for his home. The trolley took him within two blocks, and before he had walked half the distance he became aware of an automobile standing in front of his house. It was not his own, and his first feeling was simple annoyance at the prospect of having to meet and be civil to visitors, especially as he had rather counted on finding his wife and daughter out. The day was one of the few fair ones they had had since spring set in, and the natural thing would have been for Claire and Jessie to have taken advantage of it.

But of course nothing could break

right for him to-day! He half turned to go down the side street, with a vague intention of walking about until the car had disappeared, but he stopped abruptly as he saw a man come out of his gate.

Kennedy!

Recognition of the tall, lithe figure crossing the sidewalk to the waiting car held Alston motionless for a startled second; then he turned his back on it and hurried out of sight around the corner. He was hardly conscious of his motive for disappearing until he had gone three or four blocks and recovered sufficiently from the shock he had received to think at all.

It was less than a month since he had, quite by accident, discovered that the young physician, who had been attentive to his second wife before her marriage, was hanging around her again. At least, that was what he deduced from seeing her in Kennedy's car one day when he was walking back to his office from another building. If she had only mentioned the incident, and accounted for it in some way, he might not have given it another thought. But not a word had she said on the subject. Kennedy's name had not been mentioned by her that evening, nor since then. And now here was the fellow calling on her! What was he to think?

That she would dare see him in her own home Alston had not supposed possible, considering Claire. But evidently Claire was letting herself be used as a screen—a chaperon. Getting back at him for doing his duty in trying to prevent her from throwing herself away on a good-for-nothing fellow like Will Stevens! And he had been afraid, when he married again, that she might not get on with his wife, only seven years older than herself. Instead of that, she cared more for Jessie now than for him. In fact, she cared so little for him that she was aiding and

abetting her stepmother in carrying on with another man behind his back.

Alston turned and retraced his steps, realizing all of a sudden that he was too well known in the neighborhood to be wandering about in that aimless way. When he reached his house and let himself in, the first face he saw was his daughter's. Hearing him, she had stuck her head out of the living-room door to see who it was, evidently, and was too taken aback by the unusual sight of him in the house at that early hour to be able to speak to him.

She had on a new dress, he observed, and her face was flushed. She looked prettier than he had seen her look for a long time. But it was the color in her cheeks—the guilty blush, he thought—and with a silent frown at her he started upstairs.

"Dad—are you sick?"

Her voice had a startled note in it and sounded rather breathless. He shook his head. "Headache," he snapped.

"Oh, that's too bad. Anything I can——"

"No. I'll lie down. Don't bother me, that's all."

"Oh—I'll——" She was coming up, he saw, and then it struck him that she wouldn't do that if her stepmother were up there.

"Isn't Jessie here?" he asked, stopping involuntarily.

"No; she just went out a minute ago."

"Where to?"

"Why—Mrs. Edmunds—I think she said."

"What for?"

"Oh—I don't—some club business, I suppose."

It was plain, he thought, that Claire was lying. If his wife had gone to the Edmunds' he would have met her. Claire had taken for granted that he had come directly from the trolley. Of course, Jessie had gone for a ride with

Kennedy. If he had waited he would have seen her get into the car.

"Shall I phone for her?"

"No." Alston went on upstairs.

"I'm not sure—just where she said she——"

"That's all right," he cut in. "I don't want her." And he thought: "She's afraid I'll call up the Edmunds' and find out she lied to me."

"She said she wouldn't be long."

That he left unanswered. Inside his own room, he closed the door and turned the key. Then he took off his hat and overcoat, dropped them on a chair, and started across the room to the windows to pull down the shades. Suddenly he stopped halfway, his attention caught by his reflection in the mirror of his dresser.

It gave him an odd sensation, as if he were looking at a stranger. How thick he had grown in the waist, how gray at the temples! How worn and tired he looked—how old! That fellow Kennedy was a full twenty years his junior. No doubt Jessie would have waited for him, if she had had any hope of his mother dying so soon and leaving him free to drop his salaried job and try his luck in private practice. He had ability, no question about that. And no one could have blamed her for preferring a man of her own age.

"Don't suppose she's ever really loved me," he thought, moving on toward the windows. "But she respects me. And at my age that's the big thing—respect. If I lose that I lose everything."

When he had darkened the room he sat down in the large, old-fashioned armchair that had been a part of his home ever since he had had one of his own. At first it had been in the living room, then in the bedroom he and his first wife had shared, and now, in this new house that he had bought for his new wife, where she had her room and he had his, in the modern style.

He had clung to the old chair for no sentimental reasons, but because it was comfortable and he was used to it. But he went to it now from habit rather than for comfort. He had intended to lie down on his bed and think, but he was so unaccustomed to doing that, preoccupied as he was with his fresh worry about his wife, he forgot his previous intention.

"I always give more than I get—always have," he reflected with a rush of bitterness, as he leaned back and closed his eyes. Even his mother had not appreciated the sacrifices he had made for her. Nine of the best years of his life, from seventeen to twenty-six, he had given to her and his brothers and sisters. Plenty of boys in his position would have thought of themselves first. When she died and the rest of the family were old enough to look out for themselves, he was too old to take up his life where he had dropped it. And she had known well enough what he had given up for her. Of all her children he was sure she had cared least for him, who had done most for her. She had felt a great affection for her youngest son, who had done nothing at all.

Were his own children grateful for the advantages he had missed himself but had given them? They accepted everything as a right. All he got in return was disregard of his wishes and advice, lying, and deceit. And did his wife appreciate the difference between the life he had taken her from and what she now had? No! Her idea of what she owed him was to carry on with another man, to alienate his children from him, steal their love for herself. She had refused to use her influence to get them to do as he wanted. She had no right, she said, being only their step-mother. But she thought she had a right to turn them against him, make his daughter her accomplice.

"They'd all of them be glad to see

me humiliated," he thought. And if she chose, his wife could make the scandal a pretext for a divorce. Fallon would see to it that there was a scandal—if nothing worse. He might even try to indict him for the murder of Borjes. No knowing what he and his unscrupulous crowd might frame up. They were the sort who would stop at nothing. They might even get an indictment and try him. Everybody was saying Fallon was stronger than ever since his reelection.

"That's what I'll get for the time and money I threw away trying to give the town a decent administration." Alston winced at his memories of the fall campaign against the mayor and district attorney, both running for reelection. "Chairman Alston of the Citizens' Good Government Committee!" For weeks that had been his title, appearing a dozen times every day in the newspapers. He had been quoted daily; reporters had hung on his words. If there was anybody in town that hadn't heard of him before then, there was no one now who had not.

What a fool to have let himself be dragged into politics. All he had accomplished was to make enemies for himself—enemies who would jump at the chance of revenge. The truth was, he had accepted the chairmanship more for his wife's sake than for his own. He had never believed they could beat Fallon. But he had been flattered by the honor implied in his selection to lead the fight against him. It showed his young wife what his fellow citizens thought of him, not only as a man of ability, but a man with an unassailable record, one against whom nothing could be said, to whom no mud would stick—a pink of perfection.

And she had been proud of him, proud of the complimentary things printed about him, and pleased by the social attentions showered on herself in consequence of his sudden prominence.

What little satisfaction he had got out of the unthankful job was chiefly in her pride in him and in her enjoyment of the excitement of the campaign—no personal satisfaction.

She had got something out of it—trust her for that! It had been her chance to impress herself upon society as a worth-while recruit, and she had made the most of it. In those few weeks she had done more for herself than in the preceding three years of her marriage. It was more, in fact, than he had suspected her of wishing to do in that way. Until her opportunity came, she had not given the slightest hint that she had social ambitions. Too clever for that!

She was clever, no doubt of it. She had brains. Self-made, she called herself, because she had begun at sixteen to earn her own living. Her efficiency and poise were the qualities that had interested him at the beginning of their acquaintance, while she was in the house nursing Archer through typhoid. They had seemed particularly striking in any one so little and unassertive as she. Because she was not noticeable for her looks, he had been surprised by her growing attraction for him. He could not have imagined himself falling in love with a woman who was not distinctly pretty. Yet before he realized what was happening he was over his ears in love, more deeply, it seemed to him, than he had ever been in his life.

And he still was. Whatever it was in her that held him, it was stronger than beauty. It went deeper. He would far rather lose her and keep her respect than keep her without it. And he stood to lose both.

Jerking himself out of his chair, he began moving about, reminding himself that he had not come home to think about her, but about that letter in his pocket. But when he turned his mind to that he found himself casting about

for ways and means of meeting the terms of it. Cash would be expected, of course, and to draw five thousand dollars in cash from the bank would be sure to rouse comment there. He must think up some plausible explanation to give for such an unprecedented action.

The trouble was, he was a poor liar. He could not tell even the harmless lies with which most people keep the machinery of daily intercourse oiled, without doing it so obviously that it would have been better not to do it at all. To sell securities and ask for cash in payment might cause comment, as the town was not large and Alston was well known. There was no one he could get to sell them for him to whom he would not have to give some reason for not doing it himself.

He could think of no one except Ned Henderson. Ned was the answer. Better call him up at once, and now, with Jessie out, would be a good chance.

Opening the door into the hall, he listened and, hearing nothing, closed it again softly, crossed the room to the door into the bath, and passed through to his wife's room, where there was a telephone. When he had given Henderson's number and was waiting for his connection, he glanced about. A familiar dress of his wife's hung over the back of a chair, and a pair of slippers lay under the dressing table, one upside down. The dressing table was in disorder. There were all the signs of hurry. Kennedy must have phoned her he was coming, and she had dressed while he was on the way. She had been very quick.

His eyes went back to the slippers. Of the visible things in the room they were the most personal and intimate, and he sat staring at them until, becoming conscious that time was passing, he began moving the receiver hook up and down for central.

"How about my number?"

"I'm ringing it."

Another wait, then central again spoke: "Your number doesn't answer."

Alston went back to his own room, took off his shoes and coat, and stretched himself on his bed. He wondered in what sort of place Ned Henderson could be living, where there was nobody to answer his phone. Looked as if he were living alone.

Suddenly it struck Alston that Henderson's address seemed familiar to him. Must be the same one to which he had sent flowers when Mrs. Henderson died, he thought. Then he wished again that he had gone to her funeral, or at least had looked Ned up or written to him.

"I ought to have put some money into that fool scheme of his, just out of friendship," he reflected. "Must be because I didn't that he hasn't been around since."

He heard steps tiptoe to the hall door, stop there, and go away again. That was Claire. Jessie hadn't come in yet, and Claire was worried and had come up to find out if he was really lying down—hoping he was asleep, of course.

He had never been farther from sleep in his life, and the time dragged by until at last he caught the sound of the front door closing. In a few minutes there were steps in his wife's room, then the bathroom door was opened quietly. There was a pause, then it closed again. He heard her moving cautiously about, putting her room to rights, no doubt. In a little while she came again to listen at his door, closed it as before, and after a minute or two he heard her going downstairs, pausing at one step as though to listen.

He got up at once, turned on a light, and looked at his watch. Twenty past six! Just the time he usually got home! She had run it pretty close. He washed and went downstairs.

CHAPTER III.

SERENITY.

SHE was standing in the living-room doorway when he reached the lower landing of the stairs, her small, erect figure looking very trim in a dark street dress. Evidently she had not expected him to come down to dinner, or she would have changed into one of the softer, thinner things she wore in the evening. Her head was thrown back as she looked up at him, and the light from behind her fell on the glossy smoothness of her dark hair. To his troubled, irresolute mood her obvious poise and self-possession were a little irritating, giving her, as he was aware from experience, an advantage over him at the very outset.

"Well, dear—how's the head?"

"All right. I had a sleep," he lied, conscious that his tone could not match hers for calm matter-of-factness.

"That's good. Ready for dinner?"

He nodded, and, instead of giving her the kiss she was waiting for, he passed and went directly to the dining room, picking up the evening paper from the hall stand as he strode by it. No sooner had he turned his back on her than he realized he had made a mistake. He should have kissed her. He should have behaved as normally as possible. With that business of the letter on his hands he ought to avoid everything likely to excite him. This affair of hers with Kennedy could wait. She must not be allowed even to suspect that he knew anything about it.

"Sorry I was out when you came home, John. Claire said I'd just left. Martha Edmunds called up about——"

"All right. I didn't want you," he interrupted, then frowned at the harshness of his voice. But he couldn't bear her lying to him. It made him feel as if he should like to tell her straight out that she was lying and have it over. "Dinner ready?" he snapped.

"Yes. I'll ring."

She was behaving naturally enough, why couldn't he, he asked himself crossly, as he sat down at the table and hid his face behind his newspaper. She wouldn't talk to him while he was reading. That was one of the ways in which she was cleverer than most wives—cleverer than his other one, at any rate. For the first time since his marriage he felt a doubt of his good fortune in having such a clever wife. The twenty years' difference in their ages was handicap enough.

It was not until the maid placed his soup in front of him that he lowered his paper and noticed that the table was set for two only.

"Where are the children?" he asked, without looking at her, as he took up his soup spoon.

She did not answer him at once, not, indeed, until he did look up. Her brown eyes had in them an expression of anxiety as she replied with a question of her own:

"Didn't Archer tell you he was going to New York?"

"New York?"

"There's an exhibition of some French artist's pictures he wanted to see. But I thought he would tell you he was going, John."

"Why did you think that?" he came back sharply, annoyed by her distressed look and hesitating tone, as if she were sorry to have to admit that she was in his son's confidence when he was not. "Do they ever show me the slightest consideration—either of them? Where's Claire?"

"She went out to dinner—to the country club. She was going to give it up, because you were not well; but I told her——"

"Who'd she go with? That fellow Stevens, I suppose?"

"No—with a crowd—the Wilkinson girls and some others. They're going to dance and——"

"Stevens isn't even in the party, I suppose?" He supposed the exact contrary, and his tone said as much. But she chose to seem to take his words at their literal value.

"No, he's not. I don't think she's seen him for a long time."

"That's likely," he retorted, and swallowed a spoonful of soup. Then he took up his paper again. Claire had lied for her; now she was returning the service. But he didn't want to listen to any more of their lies.

"Have you finished your soup? Shall I ring?"

He gave a grunt of assent and did not show his face until the roast was brought in and put before him to be carved. Glancing over the top of his glasses at her, he caught her watching him with a faint frown. And before he realized it he was blurting out a question he had meant not to ask:

"How did you go to the Edmunds?"

She looked at him for a moment, as if perplexed. "What do you mean, dear?"

"How did you go? Claire said you'd just left when I got here. Don't see why I didn't meet you. I came past there. Got carried beyond my corner a couple of blocks, and—I walked round that way—to look at that new house that's going up over there."

He knew the lie was a poor one, but if she knew it also she gave no sign of the fact. There was a short pause; then she said calmly:

"I didn't go directly there. Doctor Kennedy took me for a little ride first. He happened to be here when Martha Edmunds called up, and offered to take me over in his car. Then I thought I'd run up to Burton's for some new asparagus for dinner, and we took the long way round to the Edmunds' coming back. The asparagus is very good for the first, isn't it? But don't ask me what I paid for it!"

She actually laughed—as if Ken-

nedey's being in the house when Mrs. Edmunds called up was the most natural thing in the world and needed no explaining. She must have been afraid he had seen her with the fellow, or she wouldn't have mentioned him. Better to let the subject drop! He'd only get himself riled up if he began to talk about the fellow and listened to any more lies of hers.

But she evidently had, for reasons of her own, come to the contrary decision, and he was annoyed when she went on in her serene, matter-of-fact way:

"I wish you had come home a few minutes earlier, when Doctor Kennedy was here. He could have prescribed for you. You haven't been looking well for a week or——"

"I'm perfectly well," he cut in shortly. "And, if I wasn't, I wouldn't let a novice experiment on me."

He had just begun to slice the roast waiting in front of him, and unfortunately some of the vehemence of his emotions escaped through the knife in his hand. The first cut of beef fell with a suddenness that sent a splash of pinkish juice onto the lustrous and immaculate tablecloth.

The mishap did not improve his temper, and only the presence of the maid, waiting beside him to pass his wife's plate, prevented his venting his access of irritation in a still more injurious remark about the obnoxious Kennedy. Apparently his wife did not trust even to the presence of a third person to restrain him, and began to make conversation industriously on the subject of the cost of spring vegetables. But the instant the servant had left them alone again she went back to Kennedy, as if she were determined to let him see that she, at least, was not afraid of the subject.

"By the way, dear," she began brightly, "Doctor Kennedy says your new stenographer is a patient of his.

What's her name? Miss Booker, isn't it?"

Alston looked up sharply at this news. Until that moment he had not thought again of the incident of the morning, which had led to his opening his blackmailing letter in Miss Booker's presence. Now her behavior about the letter and the inference he had drawn from it recurred to him, and he thought, "She'll be telling that fellow I get letters from women." He frowned into the smiling brown eyes across the round table. What was she smiling about?

"John, what in the world do you do to the poor thing? Snap her head off, I suppose?"

"What do you mean?" he growled.

"You must scare her half out of her——"

"Did *he* say I did?"

"John—of course not! He only said she was afraid she wasn't giving satisfaction and worries about losing her job. He thought if I explained to you that she's been ill and is still rather weak and nervous, you might make allowances—until she gets used to your ways."

"Then why did you ask me if I snap at her?"

"Because you snap at *me*, dear. But I know your bark is much worse than your bite, and she doesn't, you see."

"The girl's a fool, Jessie——"

"Oh, John——"

"Wears her dresses so short she shows her knees when she sits down."

To Alston's annoyance his wife laughed. "Don't try to tell me you object to that, dear!" she exclaimed.

He refused to smile. "Smears her lips with red stuff an inch thick," he went on peevishly, glad to have found a target for his irritation.

"Of course she does. They all do. What has that to do with her work, John?"

Alston put down his lifted fork and sat back with a sudden movement of

exasperation. "Good heavens, do we have to talk about her?" he demanded. "Don't you suppose I get enough of her at the office, without having her served up for dinner? Is that what Kennedy came here for? To complain to you about how I mistreat my employees?"

"Oh, John——" She dropped her reproachful gaze to her plate and remained silent, her hands poised idly above her plate, seeming for the first time to realize that her husband was in a seriously unpleasant humor. Then, while he waited, she began to eat again, as if she had satisfactorily answered the question he had asked her, and there was no more to be said on the subject.

"Was it what he came for?" he repeated sharply.

Without raising her eyes she answered: "Of course not. He was just calling on us, and happened to speak of the girl."

"On us?"

"Claire and myself."

Claire and herself! Claire first, of course. How clever she must think herself, if she imagined he would swallow that!

"He drops in occasionally when he's in this part of town. He's in private practice now—I told you that some time ago—and——"

"He's got no practice, so he goes calling, I suppose, to kill time."

"He has a very good practice, considering that he's hardly more than started. But, of course, he isn't busy every minute. Very few doctors are. He's on the staff, now, of the new hospital—that's a big thing for him." She paused, then went on in the same calm, steady voice: "You used to say yourself he had ability and would do well in private practice. You seemed to think very highly of him at that time." "I thought he'd have a good bedside manner."

With that slur, the worst he could

think of offhand, Alston resumed his consumption of roast beef and new asparagus, and there was silence for some time. Once or twice he glanced up, but she was always at the moment looking down, and he saw only that her face was as unruffled as usual. If he chose to make himself disagreeable he might, she seemed to say, but he was not annoying her.

Miserably aware that he had let his tongue run away with him, and had said things he had better not have said, he watched her smooth, well-cared-for hands dispatching daintily the business of feeding her. He remembered with bitterness that they had not been so white and smooth and pink nailed when she had eaten in his house before she became his wife. It was he who had smoothed them. He paid for the idleness and care that made them so pleasing to look at. He had given her leisure and money and freedom from worry. And what thanks had he got for it?

At last she said, as if there had been no discordant interlude:

"Oh, I haven't told you what Mrs. Edmunds wanted, have I?"

He returned a grunt, and she announced in the tone of one telling something certain to give pleasure: "She's asked me to be on her committee for the Woman's Bazaar."

He grunted again. "In society with both feet, aren't you?"

It was a sneer, and he saw her look over at him with a curious expression, which he understood very well. She had expected him to be pleased, for he had been as gratified as she by her social success, not only because it was a tribute to her own charm and brains, but because he had given her the position to begin with that had made the rest possible. It was, so to speak, a joint triumph. His sudden disparagement of it evidently puzzled her.

She was on the point of replying, but

thought better of it and went on with her dinner in silence, leaving him again the satisfaction of the last word. And because he knew she had chosen the better part, and to force her to speak, he let his ill humor rush him headlong to a worse offense.

"I don't see what you can find in common with women who've never been anything but pampered pets all their lives."

It might have been a compliment, but it was not so intended, and he knew from the faint flush that rose in her unrouged cheeks that she had felt the thrust. He had meant to remind her that if she was now on a footing of equality with such envied creatures as the idle rich women who were going to amuse themselves by giving a bazaar for charity, she owed it to him. But, regretting his words the instant they were out, he tried to think of something to say to mitigate them.

"What I meant—a woman with brains enough to earn her own living must find it tomfoolery—all this society business."

She was still looking down at her plate, and seemed to be thinking about what he had just said. The color in her cheeks had not faded, but there was no sign of emotion. The broad forehead, under her dark, sleek hair, showed not the faintest pucker or line of worry.

"It was you who started me, you know, and once I start anything I like to make a success of it," she said simply, and took up her fork, leaving him nothing whatever to say. She had stated her case exactly. She liked to succeed.

And she wouldn't like having anything interfere with her social success, he thought, remembering the letter in his pocket. A sick feeling seized him. He pushed back his chair and stood up.

"I've no appetite," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll go on back to the office.

I've got some work there I have to do this evening. Did Claire take the car?"

She looked at him, half rising; then she said "No" and sank back into her chair. She made no objections, asked no questions. He might have been in the habit of hurrying back to his office from the dinner table. In the humor to be vexed by anything she did or did not do, he turned on his heel and walked out of the room. Upstairs he got his overcoat and hat, and came down again immediately. At the foot of the stairs he hesitated, hardly knowing what he expected, but annoyed that she should be going calmly on with her dinner. Then he went out of the house, slamming the door sharply behind him, and got the car out of the garage. He would stop somewhere and call up Ned Henderson's number, he thought. If he failed again to get him, he would go out to his place and wait there until he appeared—if he had to wait all night.

CHAPTER IV.

NED HENDERSON.

AT the first drug store where he knew he should find a telephone booth he stopped and called Henderson's number. This time an answer came promptly in his friend's own voice. Alston wasted no time on courteous preliminaries, but came to his point immediately.

"Hello, Ned. This is Jack. What are you doing? Got anything on this evening?"

There was a pause, and Henderson's voice repeated "Jack?" on a note of inquiry.

"Jack Alston. Thought you'd know my voice."

"Oh—I wasn't expecting——"

"No, I suppose not," put in Alston quickly. "I want to see you about something, Ned. Busy this evening?"

Another pause, and Alston thought: "He was offended. I must put that

right when I see him." Aloud he said: "I've got to see you as soon as possible, old man, and——"

"What about?" Henderson's tone was noticeably cool.

"Can't explain over the phone. Got to see you. Coming right out. On my way, in fact, in my car. If you're going anywhere I'll take you and we can talk on the way. That suit you?"

"Well—all right—come ahead." The reply was plainly reluctant, but Alston ignored that.

"Be there in ten minutes, at the outside. So long, old man!"

He heard the click of the receiver as Henderson hung it up without replying. "He's sore, all right—no mistake," Alston thought. It occurred to him that he should have prefaced his business with a few polite questions to bridge the long gap of time since he and Ned had last met. "I ought to have asked him how he was," he thought, struck by the belated realization that Henderson's voice had sounded as if he had a bad cold.

However, he did not worry about Henderson's health, nor about his having taken offense at their last meeting. He could fix that, he told himself confidently. Ned was not the sort of friend to go back on you because he was sore about something you'd done or hadn't done.

As he turned his car toward the unfashionable part of the city in which Henderson lived, Alston thought again of his wife, and he reviewed in detail what she had said about that fellow Kennedy. Most women would have said nothing until forced to, but she considered herself clever enough to put him off the track by talking in that casual way about the man. Then he thought:

"Wish I hadn't thrown it up to her that she used to earn her own living. She's worth a dozen of those society women she runs with now. But she

knows I know that. She knows I care more for her than for anything else on earth. She knows I'm crazy about her—that it's just my quick temper makes me say things. Can't help letting off steam when I'm boiling inside. She knows that; so does Ned."

It was in that comforting way that Alston habitually excused himself for indulging his ill humors at the expense of other people's feelings. He had always been uneven tempered, and though he could control himself when he chose to do so, the choice was usually dictated by necessity rather than good will. Unfortunately he had never had this glaring defect in his character made as visible to himself as it was to everybody else. He thought of it, when he happened to think of it at all, as an inherited trait that he was not responsible for. On the rare occasions when he realized it as a fault, he saw it as inherent in his natural honesty of mind. He couldn't lie to people, even to avoid hurting their feelings. That was the way in which he viewed his explosions of temper. He was too honest. He had to say what he thought.

John Alston was honest. Nobody doubted that. He respected himself, and was respected, as a man honorable in all his relations, both business and private. He had stood up to more hard knocks than the average man, and succeeded in spite of many handicaps. He had never failed in his duty, and never would—little thanks as he got for doing it.

"I always give more than I get," he reminded himself with a rush of bitterness toward his wife. "It's the good clothes I've given her and the handsome house for a background that make her so attractive to people. Nobody saw anything in her till I married her."

And she hadn't even said good-by to him when he left the house—just because he had said something she didn't

like. She must have seen that he was worried and half sick. He had eaten next to nothing at dinner.

"The flatterers inherit the earth." That was a generalization he had seen somewhere and appropriated, because it expressed so well his own opinion of things as they were and ought not to be. It came into his head now as a fitting summing up of his own failures to inherit anything but ingratitude.

The house at which he finally halted his car was a one-story cottage of the simplest design, with a small front porch. It was one of a row, all alike, on a dark back street in a run-down neighborhood that he did not recall ever having been in before. It was one of the first extensions of the city proper, planned for working people, before the automobile was invented and working people got rich enough to live where they pleased. He wondered what kind of people were living there now, and with a twinge of conscience he told himself again that he ought to have looked Ned Henderson up when his wife died. He couldn't have been doing much since that fool scheme of his fell through, if he had to live in such a place.

The street was so dark that he had had to stop at the corner, get out, and look at the number on the first house, and then keep count as he went along. Even then he was not sure he had the right house when he stopped again and got out. He could not see the number on it until he had crossed the shallow front yard and was on the porch.

An old-fashioned bell that you yanked made enough racket to rouse the immediate neighbors, and in a few seconds the door opened. He saw his boyhood's friend under a dim gas jet in a narrow, unfurnished hall, without even a floor covering.

"Well, Ned!" It took some effort for Alston to make his tone cheerful. Henderson was looking so old and ill.

His hair, with the light directly above it, appeared almost white.

He coughed and opened the door wider. "Good evening," he said. "Come in." He did not take Alston's extended hand.

"Don't believe I've ever been out here before, Ned; but the address seemed familiar." They were the only words that occurred to Alston, but he wished the next moment that he had said something else. It would have been better, he decided as soon as he was inside the front room, so bare and poor looking, to have made no reference to the place at all. And he added hastily, before Henderson could speak: "How are you, old man?"

"As you see."

Alston hesitated, embarrassed. "Not well? What's the trouble?"

"Oh, a complication, I believe. Quite a rare one, I'm told! The doctor I have takes a scientific interest in my case."

Henderson spoke with an ironical edge to his words. "Take that chair. It's the only comfortable one left," he went on in an even, listless monotone. "I'm getting rid of everything—selling the house. The doctor advises a change of climate. That's the usual formula—when they want you to die somewhere else."

Distressed and at a loss for a suitable reply, Alston took the chair indicated. He kept his hat in his hands, because he saw no place where he could lay it down except the table, which was already overloaded with a collection of odds and ends. He would do something for Ned, he thought, but must be very careful how he went about it. He could see that the poor fellow was sore, sorer than he had supposed possible. He had not even shaken hands. What if he should refuse to help about selling those securities? But he wouldn't. He'd come round presently.

"Who's your doctor, Ned?"

"Oh, a chap that's just starting—no-body you ever heard of."

Henderson sat down on the opposite side of the table, in the one other chair in the room. On the table, surrounded by books, clothing, and household articles, was a one-burner gas lamp, with a green cord dropped from the fixture overhead. It was the only light except for the occasional flare from a coal fire smoldering in the small grate under a low mantel, also serving to its full capacity as a catch-all.

Alston had been somewhat relieved to learn that the stripped condition of the room was not due to sheer poverty, as he had at first assumed. The floor was bare and there were not even shades at the windows, which looked onto the street, to say nothing of curtains. But there were shutters, of the kind attached outside the house, and they were closed, though the windows were open.

"If you find the room chilly, sit nearer the fire." Henderson suggested, misinterpreting Alston's glance at the windows. "I must have the air."

"Aren't you going out? I thought you said——"

"No; you said if I was you'd take me. But I never go out at night. Too done up after my day's work."

"You don't look yourself, Ned," Alston faltered. "What are you doing now?" he added when his sympathetic comment brought no response.

"Insurance."

"Oh, that so?" The situation was becoming more and more embarrassing to Alston, in whose opinion soliciting insurance was hardly above the level of peddling books, although he had heard there were men who made good incomes at it. Ned Henderson was not one of them, at any rate. "Why haven't——"

He checked himself, too honest to go on. He knew without asking why he had not been approached on the sub-

ject of insurance; and if he had not known, the coldness of the eyes that met his at that moment would have told him.

"You said you wanted to see me about something."

"Why, yes, I——" Alston was glad to have the subject changed for him, difficult as he felt it would be now to ask the favor he had come for the purpose of asking. "Anybody else here?" he questioned, glancing at the closed door into the adjoining room.

"No."

"You don't live all alone here—do you?"

"I have for over two years now—since my wife died."

It was a painful reminder to Alston of his long, unfriendly neglect, and the idea came to him that it might be better to pave the way for his own business by an offer of assistance to Henderson beforehand. But no! That would be like making conditions, and he was going to do all he could for Ned, no matter what attitude the poor fellow took toward him. He would do it for the sake of old friendship, regardless of everything else; that should be his only thought.

Hardly knowing how to begin, he brought out the anonymous letter. "Who do you suppose wrote this? I got it this morning. I want you to read it."

Henderson took the letter. "Why?" he asked. "Who's it from?"

"Don't know. It's not signed. It's—blackmail."

"What?" A gleam of interest dawned in Henderson's eyes, and the thought flashed through Alston's mind that he was a fool to have come there for sympathy, that Ned was so sore he'd actually be glad to see him in trouble. Then, realizing that Henderson could have no idea what he was talking about, and must think he had been up to some worse and more recent folly

than that referred to in the letter, he hastened to explain.

"About that old business—of Jake Borjes! You remember, Ned. I told you all about it at the time."

"Borjes?" Henderson's expression was blank.

"Oh, guess you don't remember the name. But there was a girl. They lived on a little farm out beyond where the old gas works were—don't you remember? You took money to her for me and a letter. It was after the inquest over her father's death. She wanted to go out to her mother's people in the West somewhere, and I gave her the money to go. You took it to her for me. Don't you remember? Think hard!"

Recollection worked its way slowly through Henderson's mind to his pale, gaunt face; then it gave way to a puzzled expression. "But—what— How long ago was that? Seems ages."

"It's been nearly thirty years."

"Why, yes—must be—"

"Well, but somebody's got hold of that letter of mine—somebody who knows all about the affair, and—well—read what he says!"

"What letter of yours?" Henderson stared at Alston, frowning. "I don't get what you—what letter are you talking about, Jack?"

"The letter I wrote the girl, that you took to her with the money. You told me I was a fool to write it. Don't you even remember that?"

"Oh, yes! You wrote her you'd marry her as soon as your mother died." Henderson nodded. "Yes, I remember now. I thought you were foolish to promise to marry her. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't, anyhow—as it turned out."

"No, because I never heard from her. I've never had a word in all these years, till that letter came this morning. Just

read what it says, Ned. I don't know just what to do about it."

Henderson leaned down and picked up a pair of spectacles lying on the floor beside his chair with an open newspaper. Evidently he had been reading when interrupted by the doorbell. His spectacles adjusted, he glanced at the address on Alston's letter.

"Queer-looking handwriting!" he commented, as he drew out the single inclosed sheet. "Looks like a woman's to me."

"Letter sounds like a man."

Henderson began to read, and, watching his face, with the lamplight full upon it, Alston was struck by its unhealthy pallor and emaciation. And he wondered suddenly if the remark about being sent away by the doctor to die somewhere else might not have been more than a gruesome joke. Still, he reminded himself, Ned had always been thin and rather unhealthy looking. His eyes were naturally deep set and his features sharp. And he had coughed a good deal, even as a boy, from smoking too much. He had never, in those days, been without both cigarettes and cough lozenges in his pockets.

However, there were no signs of tobacco anywhere in the room—not even the smell of it. He must have given up smoking. Doctor's orders, probably! "I'll make him see a good doctor the first thing," Alston resolved. "These young fellows don't half know their business—any of them."

And he would get his old friend out of that poverty-stricken house, he thought, glancing around the bare and dingy room. The place in itself seemed to him enough to make a man ill. Not that Ned had ever lived really well. Somehow, things had never panned out with him. He had always been going into something new. That must have been his trouble; he had not had the persistence necessary to carry anything through—too easily discouraged. Thirty

years ago the betting would have been all in his favor, and against Alston, as to their relative chances of making a success in life. And now—here they were.

Henderson finished reading the few lines and looked across the table with a slightly perplexed stare. "What about this?" he asked.

"What about it? Why, the fellow's got hold of that old letter of mine; that's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, but what of it?"

"Why"—Alston was taken aback—"he can make things terribly disagreeable for me, considering how Miles Fallon hates me."

"Fallon?"

"He'd jump at a chance to get back at me for fighting his reelection last fall. If anybody else were district attorney now, the situation would be altogether different."

Henderson said nothing for a moment. He had refolded the letter after reading it and slipped it back into the envelope. Now he leaned forward and handed it to Alston silently, an expression of mingled curiosity and astonishment in his sunken eyes. Then, subsiding again in his chair, he said quietly:

"Surely you're not thinking of paying the money, Jack?"

CHAPTER V.

AT TEN FIFTEEN.

NED'S words, tone, look—all were irritating to Alston, who not only was considering paying the money, but had come there chiefly for the purpose of asking help in doing it in the safest way. When he had first conceived his plan of hunting up his old friend it had been with the idea of seeking sympathy in the one quarter to which he could turn for it, for Henderson had been his sole confidant in the Borjes affair. And in the mental confusion caused by the

shock that the first reading of the black-mailer's letter had given him, he had thought of talking the situation over with some one as a means of clarifying his own view of it, not to have another's view thrust upon him.

Now that his course of action was decided upon, he wanted no discussion of it, not of his motives, at least. He had no intention of confiding his domestic troubles to any one. If he chose to pay blackmail, that was his affair. If that old letter to Anna Borjes was worth five thousand dollars to him now, he had a right to buy it back at that price. The money was his, and his reasons for spending it in that way were nobody's business but his own. He did not have to justify his actions to Ned Henderson.

What annoyed him most, and he realized it, was the knowledge that Henderson would expect him to justify himself, because of the high moral stand he had taken thirty years ago about his obligations to Anna Borjes. In writing that letter, promising to marry her as soon as possible, he had obeyed his conscience, not his heart. He had never really loved her, and had never dreamed of marrying her until then, when to do so seemed to him a moral necessity. Ned had called him a fool then, and now he sat there looking as if he didn't know what to think.

He could justify himself easily enough, for that matter. He could say he had to consider his family, his wife and his young, unmarried daughter. Nobody could blame him for going to almost any lengths to protect them from scandal.

But it wouldn't be true. His real motive was to protect himself from loss of dignity and respect, to save himself from the humiliation of having that one serious folly of his life brought to light. If such a crisis had arisen while his first wife was still living, he would not have hesitated to tell her the whole story

and let the blackmailer do his worst. She would have understood. She had known him in his youth. Jessie had not. Neither had his children. None of them could picture him as a hot-blooded boy of twenty-three, chasing a good-looking servant girl and getting into a row about it with her rough-neck immigrant father. They could see him only as middle-aged and unromantic. Such an escapade, resurrected now, could only seem to them disgusting and ridiculous, as if he had just been guilty of it, at fifty-two.

He might explain that to Henderson, but not without revealing the basic difficulty of the situation, which was the strained relations existing at the moment between himself and all three members of his family.

No, he wouldn't explain anything. What he did was no concern of Ned Henderson's. So to the latter's question, still hanging in the air between them, he replied bluntly:

"Yes. And what I wanted to see you about was—I'll have to have cash, of course. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind disposing of some securities for me to-morrow morning. I'll get them from the bank the first thing, and—could you meet me somewhere near there? It's the State National, you know. How about a few minutes past ten?"

Henderson, who had dropped his eyes at Alston's emphatic "yes," now sat frowning at the cheap steel spectacles he had taken off and was holding in his hands, without replying. Both his expression and his silence were discouraging, but Alston paid no heed to either. He had realized on his arrival that he need expect no sympathy, but he meant to get the help he wanted, nevertheless. And he asked flatly:

"Well? Will you do that for me, Ned?"

"Oh, yes." Henderson spoke listlessly and as if his willingness could

have been taken for granted. Then he added: "If you've really made up your mind to——"

Alston broke in, ignoring all but the words of assent. "Where will you meet me?"

"Anywhere you say. I don't keep office hours. But——"

"Thanks, old man." Alston wanted no "buts" about it. "Say the Cameron Arcade—by the telephone booths. Know the place?"

"Yes, but Jack, you——"

"At a quarter past ten?" Alston stood up. He was not going just yet; he meant to have a talk with Ned about the latter's health and plans for trying a change of climate, as preliminary to an offer of money. Rising was merely a signal that he was through talking about his own affairs, that the subject of the blackmailing letter was disposed of. The letter was back in his pocket, his coat buttoned over it. As he stood up, he looked about for his hat, automatically, forgetting that he had been holding it on his knees and now had it in his hand.

"Where are you thinking of going, Ned? Out West somewhere or——"

He broke off with a startled jerk of his entire body. In his absent-minded search for his hat, his wandering eyes had come into collision with an unexpected pair of eyes looking in at one of the windows. He also caught a glimpse of a hat. They were gone in an instant, and he was left staring at the space between two slats of the blind where they had been, for the moment too surprised and alarmed to speak or move.

He moved first, making straight for the window.

"What's the matter?" Henderson had apparently seen nothing but Alston's side of the incident.

Without answering him, Alston threw open the blinds and leaned out of the window. There was no one to be seen

now on the small porch, nor in the little front yard, nor anywhere else within his range of vision.

"She must have gone round the house," he whispered, turning.

"Who?" Henderson looked blankly astonished.

"There was somebody at the window—listening." Alston started for the door at the other end of the room. "Can I get through there?" he asked.

"Yes, but wait, Jack. Where are you—what's the——"

"Somebody was peeping in, listening. Must have gone round to the back——"

"Oh, it was just one of the neighbors, I guess. Looked in to see if I were alone." Henderson went to the window, and, reassured for the moment by so plausible an explanation, Alston joined him there. No one was in sight on the dimly lighted street except a man passing rapidly on the opposite side.

"It was a woman," said Alston.

"Oh, I don't think so," Henderson objected mildly. "Unless——"

"It was. It could see her hat."

"One of the children, then, sent over to ask how I was."

"It wasn't a child. Her eyes were on a level with mine."

"Then it was one of the girls in the block, who noticed your car and just peeped in to see who was here."

"She must have heard what we said, with the window wide open," mumbled Alston.

"Oh, no! I'd have seen her if she had been there long. I was facing that way."

"You weren't looking that way."

"Well, if she did hear, she didn't know what we were talking about."

"She may have heard what I said about Fallon. Anyhow, what became of her? Where'd she go?"

"Ran home, I suppose, when you noticed her."

"Could she get through the back way?"

"Not unless she climbed the fence."

"I'm going to look."

"Wait; I'll go. You stay here."

Henderson threw a leg over the window sill. "If she's still back there she'll run round to the front when she hears me coming. You'd better watch here."

In two seconds he had disappeared around the corner of the house. Alston heard his deliberate feet scraping the ground, but that was all. There were no fences dividing the front yard from the ones adjoining it, nor any shrubbery that might have served as a hiding place. And he had certainly reached the window in time to see whoever had been there running away, if she had run anywhere except around the house to the back. Of that he felt sure.

Presently Henderson reappeared on the other side. He did not speak until he was again in the room. "Nobody back there," he said, drawing the blinds together. "She must have skinned over the fence."

"Are the girls around here given to pranks of that sort?" Alston was making no effort to conceal his displeasure at the incident.

"First time it's ever happened to me." Henderson moved to the fire, shivering from the chill night air. "You don't think you were followed here, do you?" he asked.

That possibility had occurred to Alston, but had been dismissed as too improbable for serious consideration. However, there had been no other cars in sight when he got out of his, nor when he rushed to the window. Besides, why should his blackmailer follow him about? But Henderson's question offered another vent for his irritation, and he retorted sharply:

"By a woman? Think that's a woman's letter?"

"The writing——"

"Disguised, of course."

"Yes, but if it isn't from that—what was her name?—the Borjes girl——"

"Anna? She didn't write that letter!"

"Then who do you think did?"

"I don't know," snapped Alston; "but I know she didn't. Why on earth should she, after thirty years? And didn't I tell her in my letter that, if she needed money, to let me know? Why didn't she do so?"

"I don't know what you told her," said Henderson coldly, coming back to the table where Alston was standing watching the windows. "If I knew at the time, I've forgotten. All I can remember is your telling me you'd promised to marry her. But I don't see that that's anything for you to be ashamed of."

"Ashamed of? What do you mean?" Alston stared at Henderson's face, but found nothing there but calm unconcern. "There was nothing in the whole affair for me to be ashamed of," he declared sharply. "It wasn't hushed up on my account. It was on hers—and my mother's."

"That so? I'd forgotten," said Henderson indifferently. "Why don't you sit down? That girl's not coming back." He had resumed his own seat and was again idly fingering his spectacles, as he leaned back in an attitude of weariness.

Alston paid no attention to any of his remarks. "If the truth had come out about old Borjes' death," he went on, "everything else would have come out—about Anna's affair with me, I mean. That was what she was afraid of. And I had to think of my mother. The doctors all said she wasn't likely to live more than a few years and couldn't stand excitement or worry. I must have told Anna that in my letter. I know I wrote her I couldn't marry her until my mother died, because I've always thought that might have been why she never answered—because she didn't

want to wait. I suppose she married somebody else."

"Is that a fact?" Henderson gave Alston a keen glance. "Didn't she ever answer your offer of marriage?"

"No. I told you she didn't at the time."

"Did you? I don't remem——"

"At least, I never got her letter, if she did. And I couldn't write again. I didn't know where she was. You forgot to get her new address for me. Don't you remember that, either?"

Henderson shook his head. "I don't remember anything about the affair except that you told me you'd promised to marry the girl and I thought it was a fool thing to do, and said so. But"—he looked up suddenly at Alston—"if there wasn't anything in the business for you to be ashamed of then, why are you going to pay blackmail on account of it now?"

The question was the very one Alston had wished to avoid, but not until it was asked did he realize that he had headed straight for it when he began to discuss the Borjes affair, instead of talking about Henderson's health, as he had intended. And, put as it was, it had to be answered—somehow—some-time.

"It's Fallon—I told you that at the start," he replied. "If anybody else were district attorney, I could go and have a frank talk with him—man to man. But you know what a dirty dog Fallon is."

Henderson was still looking up with an expression of puzzled inquiry in his tired eyes. "What of it?" he asked. "What can he do?"

"He'll rake up the whole business."

"What if he does?"

"I don't want it raked up, that's all." With this flat statement, meant to be final, Alston looked at his watch. Then he threw a glance about the room. "When are you leaving?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, as soon as I can get away—next week, I hope."

"Where are you going?"

"Haven't quite decided."

"Anything I can do? A—a loan, I mean, or——"

"No, thank you." Henderson got up, and something in his eyes as they met Alston's prevented the latter from pursuing the subject. It was Henderson himself who did so. "I expect to have all the money I need by the time I've cleaned up everything here. It shouldn't take very long."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," stammered Alston, feeling repulsed and uncomfortable in the consciousness that the favor he had asked had been granted, but the one he had offered had been refused. It would have made the whole situation pleasanter for him, he thought, if he could have written out a substantial check for Ned. It would have made amends for his refusal of money at their last meeting, or for whatever it was the poor fellow was still sore about.

However, he could not dispense with his friend's help, so he chose to ignore his manner. "You'll meet me, then, in the morning—ten fifteen sharp—in the Cameron Arcade?"

Henderson's nod was so curt that Alston added anxiously: "Without fail, Ned? I can depend on you?"

Another nod, as indifferent as the first, and Alston felt forced to apologize: "I'm sorry to bother you, Ned, but there's no one else I can ask. You're the only one that knows the truth about that miserable business. I'd have had to explain it all to anybody else, and I can't draw that much cash myself. It would cause comment at the bank, don't you see?"

There was a noticeable pause before Henderson answered, and what he said was so unexpected that Alston was left for a moment staring speechlessly at him. It was as if the ground had sud-

denly opened at their feet, making a bridgeless chasm between them.

"I don't know anything but what you told me—don't overlook that fact, Jack," was what Henderson said.

"Why, what do you mean, Ned?" asked Alston when he had recovered his breath. "I told you the truth!"

"I believe that," came back promptly enough. "Still, it's not quite the same, is it, as if I'd been there when Borjes was killed?"

"You mean——" Alston could not finish his sentence.

"I don't mean anything at all. But you seemed to assume that I knew as much about the affair at the time as you did. And I'm just reminding you that I didn't know anything except what you told me. You told me Borjes' death was an accident, and——"

"It *was* an accident!"

"I believe that, but I don't know it. Do I?"

It was not the cold logic of Henderson's statements so much as the coldness of his glance and of his tone that sent a chill through Alston. Yet at the moment he was not aware of that. He was still too startled by the turn the talk had so suddenly taken to do anything but wonder why Henderson should have given it that turn. If he really believed, as he said he did, that old Borjes' death was caused by an accident, why should he make such a point of his not actually knowing that it was? What about it? What was he driving at?

"No, you don't know," Alston admitted. "But what I told you was exactly what happened. Borjes had a job in winter as night watchman at the gas works; he came home sick that night—about one o'clock it was—and found me there with Anna. He went for me with his fists, but he was twice my age; I couldn't fight him. Anyhow, I wouldn't have. But he wasn't expecting me to dodge him, and the force of

his lunge at me threw him down. He struck himself on the head, right on the temple, against the corner of an old, iron-bound trunk he'd brought over from Europe. He was dead before we could get to him. I'll—I'll never forget it."

Alston stood staring at Henderson for a moment, as that painful memory flashed again across his mind. Then he went on. "Of course, Anna didn't want it known that I'd been there at that time of the night. And I didn't want my mother to know it, either. That was why we decided she'd better just say it was an accident—that he'd come home sick and fallen accidentally. It was true, too, as far as it went. Left my being there out, that was all!"

"I remember now." Henderson nodded. "There was an inquest, because the coroner thought Borjes' head looked as if it had been struck by the butt of a pistol. That was Doctor Menzies. Seen him lately, Jack?"

"No. I didn't know he was living any more. Must be an old man now."

"Oh, no; about seventy. I run into him occasionally. He's one of the examining physicians for the Life Protection Company. A stubborn old imbecile, too! He's as impervious to argument as a setting hen."

Alston said nothing to that, but he had the feeling again that the conversation was being directed to some end. Then Henderson, with an air of judicial detachment said:

"On the whole—now that I've gone into it a little—I guess you're wise not to let that old business be raked up."

Alston felt his face grow warm with a rush of blood. "If you think that's my reason——" He stopped, overcome by a sense of the uselessness of saying anything—even of protesting his innocence of Borjes' death. If he had wanted the situation clearly defined for him, he had his desire. The possibility that Miles Fallon might go so

far as to try to fasten the blame for Borjes' death on him had occurred to him, but only for a moment and only as the extreme limit of what he had to fear. He had not considered that phase of his position in detail. He had not even remembered the feature of the inquest that Henderson had pointed out, or who had been coroner at the time.

Now he saw just where he stood with a new and horrifying distinctness. It had been only the truth that he had been afraid of. But he realized now that something worse than the truth threatened him. It was not necessary for Henderson to add, as he did:

"Between Fallon and old Menzies you'd have a bad time of it, I'm afraid. And only your bare word—unless Anna Borjes could be located——"

"She's dead—at least, I think she must be." As he spoke, Alston seemed to hear again, in the back of his head, Henderson's chilling reminder: "I don't know anything but what you told me." His bare word! Yes, that was what it would come to—his bare word.

"And, of course—if she could be dug up—the fact that she lied before, and would have to admit it——"

Henderson left the rest to Alston's imagination. He had returned to the fire and was standing with his back to it, his pale, emaciated face quite impassive. The glance of his eyes was neither friendly nor hostile, and his tone was that of a lawyer discussing a case in which he personally has no stake.

"Just what did you say in that letter you wrote her, Jack?"

Alston was silent. There was another thing! He didn't know what he had written. He remembered only that he had been in an overwrought state of mind at the time. Henderson went on with his cold-blooded analysis of the situation:

"You must have said something—well, open to misinterpretation."

"I was all upset. I felt responsible for what had happened—morally, I mean. I suppose I said something of the sort in the letter. Anna knew what I meant, but——" Alston broke off, and Henderson finished for him.

"But anybody who didn't know the facts might have got a wrong impression from your words." A pause, then: "And there's another thing that occurs to me, Jack, another thing we mustn't overlook."

"What's that?"

"The question as to why she never answered your letter."

"I don't know why, unless she didn't want to wait to get married till my mother died; preferred to marry somebody else instead of waiting."

Henderson nodded. "That satisfies me, of course, because I know the facts. But I doubt if it would seem like a plausible explanation to anybody else. She was a servant girl, and marrying you would have been a big step up in the world for her. Besides, she must have been in love with you. And you must have told her that the doctors gave your mother only a few years more to live."

"I suppose I did," admitted Alston, when Henderson paused. "I probably said so in the letter."

"Exactly. Then wouldn't it strike the average person as strange that she wasn't willing to wait for you?"

"You mean——" Alston saw very plainly what Henderson was driving at now, but he allowed the latter to put it into words himself.

"I mean that she didn't—that is, it might be thought that she didn't want to marry a man who had killed her father."

Alston made an impatient gesture and put on his hat. "I didn't kill her father, and she knew it, so what's the use of that kind of talk, Ned?"

"It's not a question of what you and she knew, Jack——"

"Yes, it is. I told you I was going to get the letter back. That will settle the whole thing, won't it?"

"Of course, if you're really going to pay the five thousand dollars——"

"Didn't I say I was at the start? Haven't I asked you to meet me to get some bonds to sell? It was you who talked as if I'd be a fool to pay blackmail, not I."

"So I did. You're right," conceded Henderson, with a short laugh. "It did strike me as foolish, before I began to think the thing out. I didn't understand. And it seemed so unlike you. But, of course, you had thought it all out before you came, I suppose. You always do."

"Of course," said Alston, anxious now to get away and walking toward the door. "At ten fifteen then—that's understood?"

Henderson nodded.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUDDEN DEATH.

THEY said good night on the porch, without further mention of Alston's affair, and the latter in half a minute had his car in motion. As he passed the dozen or more of one-story frame houses, he was reminded of the girl who had peeped in at Henderson's window, and hoped again anxiously that she had not been there long enough to have overheard anything. For, somehow, Henderson's explanation had not quite satisfied him. The eyes he had seen had not struck him as those of a young girl—young enough, that is, to "skin" over a back fence. Still, he had had only a glimpse of them before they vanished. All he could say positively about them was that they were dark, had seemed large, and peered from beneath the close brim of a hat that covered their owner's forehead and even her eyebrows. Moreover, they were on a level with his own

—and he was fairly tall, even for a man.

He did not, however, think long about the matter, having too much else to occupy his thoughts. His talk with Henderson had been very different from what he had imagined beforehand it would be. He had expected sympathy and understanding, not cold-blooded dissection. Everything Ned had said was true. He couldn't complain on that score. But it had left him with the feeling that there was not an inch of solid ground under his feet.

Furthermore, he wasn't really sure that, in his own heart, even Ned believed his story of old Borjes' death. Possibly he never had believed it. It was a disturbing discovery to have made about a man he had for so many years thought of as a genuine friend, one to whom he had turned when he was in trouble, the only really intimate friend he had ever had.

"What does he think?" Alston wondered. "That Borjes went for me, and I hit him with the butt of my pistol? He knows I carried one. So did he. We were just at the age for such foolishness. But he can't think I meant to kill the old man, even if he thinks I struck him.

"But what does it matter what he thinks, as long as he's willing to do what I want?" With that thought Alston dismissed Henderson, also, from his mind.

Doctor Menzies, the former coroner, he remembered only in the vaguest way, and if he had not been reminded of it would not have recalled Menzies' attempt to cast doubt on Anna Borjes' account of her father's death. Fortunately, her affair with Alston had not been going on long enough for gossip to have started. The Borjes farm had no near neighbors, except the gas works, and if anybody knew of Alston's going there at night they kept the knowledge to themselves. The coro-

ner's attempt to get into the limelight had fallen flat.

But Menzies was still living. And, as Henderson had said, between him and the district attorney Alston would fare badly—if he allowed his part in Jake Borjes' death to become known. Menzies would be as eager to justify the stand he had taken thirty years ago as Miles Fallon would be to get even with a political enemy.

There could be no possible question about the wisdom of buying back that old letter. Think as much as he liked, that was the conclusion Alston was bound to reach in the end.

Without conscious intention he had taken a roundabout way home, and it suddenly occurred to him that he was not far from Richland Park. He thought that it might not be a bad idea to drive along the north side of it and refresh his memory of the locality. The park was new, and the property bordering it on the north was as yet mostly vacant lots, which were being held at too high prices to sell. He thought he should like to get the lay of the land and figure out just what to do when he and his blackmailer met on the following night.

"I've got to get a good look at that letter he claims to have before I pay over the money," he thought. "It's going to be a final transaction, that's one thing certain."

The neighborhood, when he reached it, was as sparsely built up as he expected. There were very few people to be seen on the streets, for, though still early, the night was too chilly for strolling or sitting on porches. At midnight the north end of the park would be deserted.

As he drove along it, a plan formed in his mind. He would stop his car, the next night, at one of the lamp-posts, get out, and pretend he was having trouble with the car while he waited for his man to recognize and approach

him. That would give a natural look to their conversation, should any one else come along. It also made it possible for him to examine the letter closely in the light before he paid for it. The car would serve as a screen, if one should be needed.

That settled, he drove home. The house was dark when he got there, except for the front-hall light, and he found his wife's and daughter's bedroom doors standing open. Neither was at home. Well, so much the better. He would go to bed at once, and avoid the embarrassment of meeting his wife again until morning.

But, although he tried to keep his thoughts off the subject, he could not help wondering where she had gone. He lay awake until long after she had come in, undressed, and gone to bed without so much as looking into his room to make sure he was there. He was wide awake still, when his daughter tiptoed up the stairs and down the hall past his door. His son had gone to New York, he remembered, without so much as a word to him.

Lying there awake, in the dead stillness of his home, a feeling of loneliness such as he had never known before came over John Alston. Who would care about the trouble he was in, if they knew? Not one soul on earth! If he were to die, no one would mourn. His death would be a relief to his family. They could all go ahead then and do as they liked. Archer would take his third of the property and hurry to Paris. Claire would throw her share and herself away on Will Stevens. And his wife would wait a decent interval and then marry Kennedy. She and Claire would go into black for him, and Archer would wear a band on his sleeve, but in their hearts they would be glad he was dead.

He almost wished he were, or thought he wished it. What good was such a life as his to a man? He loved his

wife and children, lived and worked only for them, thought only of their happiness when he tried to make them do what was right and sensible. Did they imagine he enjoyed living with a family that showed him no affection and no gratitude? He wouldn't wish his worst enemy such a life.

At last he fell asleep. Although it was past midnight then, it was hardly daylight when he suddenly woke up—so suddenly that he imagined for an instant some one had touched him. But he was alone, he saw, when he started up. He must have been dreaming, he thought, and sank back again. It was too early yet to get up. He must try to go to sleep again and not start thinking.

"I'm not going to pay blackmail!"

It was exactly as if a voice inside him had spoken the words. And he knew, as if he had known it always, that they were true. He was not going to pay blackmail. It seemed astonishing to him, in fact, that he should ever have thought of doing such a thing. No wonder Ned Henderson had stared when he told him he meant to pay the money, as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Let the dirty blackmailer do what he likes, and Fallon, too, and old Menzies. I'm not ashamed of that letter. I don't care what I said in it, nor how it may sound to any one else now. I did what I thought was right. And it was right. I'll stand up to it. I'll stand up to the whole business."

The conviction that he would was so profound that he could not have argued about it. All the thinking and talking he had done on the subject amounted to less than a hair's weight in the balance against it. It was not a thing of thought or reason. It was a feeling, and obeying it would not depend on his will or desire. The consequences he still saw as clearly as before, only now they were there to be

accepted, like his fifty-two years and his gray hair. They seemed so unavoidable that he did not even think about them. And presently he fell peacefully asleep.

His wife's touch wakened him ten minutes after his usual time of rising, and he dressed, ate breakfast, and kissed her good-by in a curious state of indifference to the details of living. He even listened abstractedly to her telling of how she had spent her evening discussing with Mrs. Edmunds plans for the charity bazaar.

Shortly after ten o'clock he left his office and walked over to the Cameron Building, to the place of his appointment with Henderson. The latter was already there, and, wasting no words, Alston said:

"I've changed my mind. Sorry I troubled you. Which way do you go?" And he turned to retrace his steps. Behind him he heard a startled echo:

"Changed your mind?"

He turned with a nod, and, seeing that Henderson had not fallen in beside him, he stopped. "I'll not pay a cent to any dirty blackmailer," he said. Then he noticed how much worse Henderson looked by daylight than he had the night before, and he added bluntly:

"See here, Ned. You look awful. Better let me lend you some money, so you can quit work and take care of yourself."

"I told you I don't need any of your money."

"I didn't mean to offend you, old man," Alston stammered, noting again how ill his companion looked. "I just——"

"That's all right," said Henderson in a friendlier tone. "But I have all the money I'll need."

"Well, but I wish you'd see a good doctor, Ned. I'd be glad to—you said your doctor was young, just starting out——"

"He's just starting for himself, but he's not so very young. Moreover, he's had a lot of hospital experience." Henderson walked on as he spoke, and Alston moved along at his side. A sudden suspicion had flashed into his mind.

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"Kennedy."

Alston said nothing.

"He's all right, and he's cheap," said Henderson in a hard, dry tone. "What's the use of paying a big fee to be told you can't live long? Better keep your money for the undertaker."

"Don't talk like that, Ned. Your doctor wouldn't tell you to go away if he—where do you think you'll go?"

"I don't know."

"When do you——"

"Don't know that, either."

"You'll let me——"

"There's nothing you can do, thanks."

"But"—Alston hesitated, then forced himself to go on—"I'd like to know where you go, Ned, in case Fallon should——"

"Oh, I see." Henderson gave a slight laugh. "Thought you were thinking about me. Well, I'll let you know when I leave."

"Thanks." Alston felt very uncomfortable, but he added resolutely: "And don't forget I'll be only too glad to do anything I——"

But Henderson had wheeled without a reply and left him. Turning, Alston looked after the thin, hurrying figure, on which a shabby overcoat hung too loosely. He took a step or two involuntarily, with the intention of overtaking his old friend; but another idea came to him, and he stopped. He would talk to Doctor Kennedy and find out exactly what Ned's physical condition was, and if there was anything he could do.

It was a symptom of Alston's state of mind that morning that the idea of

a meeting with Kennedy roused no unpleasant feeling in him. His conversation with his wife at dinner the evening before, was like something that had happened long ago or to somebody else. He remembered it distinctly, but without the slightest emotion.

And, acting on impulse, he went back to the telephone booths near which he had met Henderson, hunted up Kennedy's number in the directory, and called it. In half a minute he and Kennedy were talking. The conversation was very much to the point. As soon as Alston had said who he was and explained that he was an old friend of Henderson's, Kennedy gave him a frank statement of his patient's condition.

"An outdoor life, without work or worry, might prolong his life for a year or two. That's the best he can hope for." So the physician summed up Henderson's case.

"Can he afford that?" asked Alston.

Doctor Kennedy said he didn't know, but was inclined to doubt it.

"Well, don't mention this talk of ours to him, please."

"I understand, Mr. Alston."

Alston hung up, thinking: "As soon as I'm through with this blackmailing business I'll look after Ned. He's much sorer at me than I ever dreamed he could be. But I'll square things somehow. I'll make him let me help him."

His day was too busy to allow his mind dwelling on either Henderson's troubles or his own. And he was glad, when he got home at six, to hear from his wife that they had an engagement to play bridge at a neighbor's. It was eleven o'clock when they returned home, and by midnight Alston was in bed.

With his mind's eye he saw the north end of Richland Park and the lamp-post at which he had pictured himself meeting his blackmailer. He imagined the man prowling about for a while, waiting for him, and leaving at last,

disappointed. What would be his next move? Would he write again, or go to Fallon at once? The money would certainly be worth more to him, than any satisfaction he might get out of the trouble he could make; the chances were all in favor of his writing again.

Despite this likelihood of a reprieve, Alston slept restlessly, and, all the next morning, every time his telephone rang or his door opened he felt a slight inward shock. To add to this handicap to his work, Miss Booker was absent. No word of any kind came from her. Apparently she had followed in the footsteps of her predecessor, resigned without formalities.

By twelve o'clock Alston's nerves were raw from irritation and suspense. He had reached the point of wishing that whatever was going to happen about that blackmailing letter would happen at once. A few minutes past twelve a voice from the outer office informed him that Doctor Kennedy was calling him on the telephone.

There was a pause, then he heard Kennedy's voice. When he had made sure he had Alston he said:

"Remember our talk yesterday morning?"

"Yes."

"Well, have you heard what's happened?"

"No. Happened? What do you mean?"

"He's dead."

"What! When?" exclaimed Alston.

Kennedy answered in a guarded tone, and still without mentioning Henderson's name: "Must have happened during the night some time—I don't know just when. One of my patients, who lives around the corner from there, called me up and told me. And I thought you would want to know. I'm going there now. Will you come out? There are several things I'd like to consult you about. The body's been taken to the morgue for the autopsy."

"Autopsy!"

"Yes."

"Why?"

A pause, then Kennedy said quietly: "Somebody shot him. They don't know who."

CHAPTER VII.

FALLON'S GRIM SMILE.

ALSTON gave his taxicab driver Henderson's address, then sank into his seat with the feeling that he had very little time for the thinking he ought to do before he reached his destination.

Ned Henderson was dead—shot by some unknown person. The fact hardly registered as a fact on his mind. It seemed preposterous, impossible to believe. What reason could anybody have had for killing such an inoffensive person as Ned Henderson, with nothing to steal and so ill that he could not have lived much longer, anyway. As far as Alston knew, Henderson had never made an enemy in his life. His personality was too negative. In their long friendship Ned had always played second fiddle. He had always played a minor part in the foolish money-making schemes he had gone into. He had never had the initiative to start anything himself, nor the driving power to put anything through after it had been started. The best thing he could have done for himself would have been to stick to his very first job. He might have worked up in the end to a modest success and permanent security. But he hadn't had even staying power, never had stuck long at any job he had ever had. Always wanting to better himself—in a hurry.

And yet he had been such a good friend and so—so lovable. Alston had hesitated for just the word that satisfied his feeling about his dead friend. Lovable! That was the right word, he felt. Everybody had liked Ned. He remembered how fond his mother had

been of him. She had said it was because he had no mother of his own, and she was sorry for him; but Alston remembered coming home sometimes and finding Ned talking to her—or listening, rather. He himself had never had the time or patience to listen long, to her unnecessary chatter about the little things that had happened during the day. He had done enough, he thought, when he gave up going to college and being a lawyer for her sake. That was a bigger sacrifice than Ned would have made for anybody—for all his lovable ways.

His wife had adored him, though he never gave her a decent home at any time in their life together. He had been easy-going and—and lovable. That was the only word for it. Failure and ill health had probably made him bitter in later life, but he was naturally a lovable personality. Women had always taken to him. Strange he had not married again. His wife had been dead long enough.

Who could have killed him? Alston came back to that seemingly unanswerable question, wishing with all his heart that he had not yielded to his impulse the morning before to call up Doctor Kennedy. What he had to decide now, and at once, was how to explain to Kennedy his visit to Henderson on Thursday night. It would not do to keep still about it. That girl who peeped in at the window had seen him, and—

He sat up with a start. Could there be a connection between that incident and the shooting of Henderson? What did he know about the latter's private life? Was it likely, he had gone on since his wife's death without the companionship of some woman? Considering his rather dependent nature, it seemed very unlikely.

Doctor Kennedy had given him no particulars about the shooting, and when he had asked for them had suggested that they meet and have a talk,

implying that there were things to be discussed that could not be divulged over the telephone. What things?

"How am I to explain my sudden interest in Ned, after neglecting him for so long? What reason shall I give for going to see him the night before last? Shall I say I heard he was ill, or ran into him and saw that he was, and— No, if I lie and that blackmailer carries out his threat to go to Fallon with my letter, the lie would tell against me."

It came over Alston with a rush how greatly Henderson's death might complicate his own affairs. For, despite his old friend's unfriendly attitude toward him, he had firmly believed that he could, in the last extremity, count on his support. Besides, there was the question of whether or not he should mention the incident of the woman at the window.

"If only I hadn't called up Kennedy yesterday! What devilish impulse made me do such a thing? Kennedy, too—a man I thought I'd be glad never to have to speak to again as long as I lived. Now I've got to talk this business over with him, be polite to him—just as if I didn't know, or suspect, that he was making love to my wife and calling on her behind my back."

But the mischief was done. No use crying over the milk he had spilled. "I'm in for it," he thought grimly, as his cab turned into the block on which Henderson's little cottage stood. Leaning out of the cab window, he saw that several cars were at the curb in front of the house and that a crowd of people were on the sidewalk, kept at that distance by policemen. Others were on the porches or at the windows of the houses across the street.

"Stop here!" he ordered his driver, told him to wait, and got out. Kennedy had agreed to be on the lookout, but was nowhere in sight. After a momentary hesitation, Alston saw that one of the policemen had evidently rec-

ognized him and was coming to meet him, so he walked on.

"Are you Mr. Alston, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then you're to go right inside, sir. Doctor Kennedy's talking to the district attorney, and said I was to bring you right in. He was waiting outside for you, but Mr. Fallon sent out for him just the minute before you got here. He's just come himself—Mr. Fallon has. You're an old friend of Mr. Henderson's, the doctor says."

Alston looked at the policeman, a gray-haired, quiet-voiced individual with a respectful manner, and nodded. He was in for it, no doubt whatever of that. Kennedy and Fallon both!

They passed through the crowd collected on the sidewalk, crossed the small plot of grass just beginning to turn green, and entered the front door of the cottage. The blinds at the front windows were closed, as they had been on Alston's previous visit, probably to prevent the crowd outside from looking in. The door at the rear of the living room was open, and a shaft of sunlight entered the room through it.

Miles Fallon was the first person in the room that Alston's eyes fell on. The district attorney was in conversation with Kennedy, and it was the latter who was facing the hall door and saw Alston enter. He hurried across to him, his hand out. They clasped hands in silence and with the solemn manner suitable to the occasion. Then Kennedy repeated the explanation Alston had just heard from the policeman, and they moved back together to where the district attorney was waiting.

The latter nodded to Alston pleasantly enough, too much the politician at all times to let his personal feelings appear. He was at least ten years Alston's junior, a thin-faced, wiry man with a sharp lower jaw nearly always in motion, chewing gum when he was not talking. His eyes were conspicu-

ously blue and keen, and gave his face a watchful, alert expression that was habitual. He was carelessly dressed, wore no overcoat, had his hat on and both hands in his trousers pockets. He did not offer to shake hands.

"I've told Mr. Fallon about your calling me up yesterday, Mr. Alston," began Kennedy, "and also what I've said to you about Henderson's physical condition. If the poor fellow had killed himself it wouldn't have been surprising, but—why anybody else should have——"

"What do *you* make of it?" put in Fallon, his eyes on Alston, interrupting Kennedy without an apology.

"Nothing, as yet," answered Alston. "All I know is what you told me over the phone." He had turned to Kennedy, whose good-looking, youthful face wore an expression of deep anxiety. "It happened some time last night, you said?" he asked the physician.

Fallon furnished the details in a concise fashion, characteristic of him. Henderson's body had been discovered shortly before eight o'clock that morning by the milkman. After ringing at the front of the house, and knocking loudly at the back, he had looked into a front window through the blinds and seen the dead man on the floor. Henderson had not paid his milk bill for several weeks, and the milkman had wished to collect that morning, having been promised his money positively two days before.

The police, notified by telephone from a neighboring house, had so far learned nothing that threw light on the identity of the murderer. Nobody had as yet been located, who claimed to have heard the shot or any other sounds in the house either during the evening or the night. Henderson, it appeared, had lived entirely alone, and had very little to do with his neighbors, though on amicable terms with them all. It had been generally understood that he was

making his plans to go away for the benefit of his health, and had sold his house and was disposing of his furniture and other belongings with that end in view. As he had owed bills of several months' standing at the neighborhood grocery and butcher shop, it seemed unlikely that he had been murdered for the sake of money or other valuables. There was no evidence that the house had been broken into. Both doors had been found locked, and all the window blinds closed and latched.

"What's more to the point," said Fallon, "we found money on him. Only a couple of dollars, but men have been murdered for less. Robbery wasn't the motive, I'm convinced of that. And we have plenty of evidence that he was going away—going to-day. The man who bought the house six months ago was to take possession to-day, and a secondhand dealer called this morning to take away the rest of the furniture that's in the house. He said he had agreed to pay eight dollars for what's in here and in the bedroom across the hall. As far as we can find out, the few dollars Henderson had on him was all he had in the world. We've phoned all the banks. He had no account anywhere in town, and hadn't had for several months. He hasn't worked since he came out of the hospital five months ago, either. He was connected with several insurance companies before then, but had done nothing for some time because of his bad health. He must have been living for the last six months on the few hundred dollars the house brought. It was heavily mortgaged."

"Most of that went for hospital expenses," put in Kennedy.

Alston said nothing. The revelations he had just heard, and which he was forced to believe, were so shocking that he was speechless in the face of them. He knew that both Fallon and Kennedy were waiting for some contribu-

tion to the discussion from him, and was grateful when the latter said:

"If he had shot himself, it wouldn't have been strange, but why anybody should have murdered a poor fellow like him, with one foot in the grave, is——"

"There was no weapon found here, you know," said Fallon. He pointed to the floor near the chair in which Henderson had sat during most of his talk with Alston on Thursday night. "That's where the body was lying. You can see the blood. It was dry when the body was found. He had been dead at least five hours, the doctors say. Did you see the body, doctor?"

Kennedy shook his head. "No; it had been taken away when I came."

"Well, Mr. Alston," said Fallon, "what's your opinion—now that you've heard the facts?"

"I don't know what to think," replied Alston. "I can hardly believe he was entirely without money, because I offered him a loan and he refused it. He said he was going away very soon and had all the money he would need."

"When was that?" Fallon came back sharply.

"Yesterday morning. I met him in the Cameron Arcade, about ten o'clock. I was shocked by his appearance. I hadn't seen him for a long time—several years, in fact—and hadn't even heard that he was sick. I was so worried about him that I called up Doctor Kennedy to ask——"

"So the doctor told me," interrupted Fallon. "He said you and Henderson were old friends."

"We were intimate friends when we were boys. But after both of us married we saw less and less of each other."

"You went up, and he went down."

The curt remark was so offensive in tone that Alston could not ignore it. But he forced himself to make as mild a reply as was possible to him under

the circumstances. "I was pretty far down myself, twelve years ago. Having to start from the bottom again at forty, doesn't leave a man much time for anything else."

Fallon let that pass, as though he had not heard it. "And you say you hadn't seen Henderson for several years, when you ran into him yesterday morning in the Cameron Arcade?" he asked.

It was the question Alston had known must come, and he did not hesitate as to his answer. He would answer every question asked him truthfully, or not answer it at all.

"I saw him the evening before that," he said, "Thursday evening. I came here to see him. He told me then he wasn't well and was arranging to go away, but it wasn't till I saw him by daylight the next morning that I realized how sick he really was, and——"

"What time Thursday evening?" Fallon cut in.

"Between eight and nine o'clock."

"How did you come?"

"In my car."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"How long did you stay?"

"For some time. I can't say exactly."

"Who else was here?"

"Nobody."

The district attorney's eyes narrowed. "We happen to know better," he said. "So you may as well tell the truth."

Alston looked at him, then at Kennedy. "What do you mean?" he asked, turning back to Fallon.

"Answer my question, please. Who was here besides yourself?"

"I've answered that question already."

"There was a woman here," retorted Fallon with sharp emphasis. "Who was she?"

Alston hesitated. Had the woman who peeped in at the window been seen coming into the yard by somebody in

the neighborhood? Was that all Fallon knew? Or had she herself been talking?

"I was under the impression that Henderson and I were alone in the house," said Alston. "In fact, he said so. And I did——"

"Wait a minute." Fallon looked annoyed and spoke brusquely. "I just want to remind you that this isn't any time for chivalry. This is a murder case—see? Get that into your head, before you say any more. A man was killed in this house last night, and I'm here to find out who did it. A woman was seen going into the house shortly after a man came in a car. You admit you were the man. All right! Now, who was the woman?"

It was clear now that the woman had not been talking, and that Fallon did not know who she was. Somebody had seen her come into the yard and not go out again, and had taken for granted that she entered the house. The statement that she arrived before him, instead of after, was simply a mistake.

So Alston reasoned swiftly. "I don't know," he answered. "If there was anybody, man or woman, in the house while I was here I didn't know it. And I don't believe there was. I——"

"Look here, I want the truth about this, Alston——"

"I'm not in the habit of lying!" retorted Alston angrily. "That's the second time you've practically accused me of it. If you'll let me finish what I'm trying to tell you, I'll stay here. If not, I'll go on about my business."

He glared at the district attorney, who returned the glare with interest, but held his tongue. Alston knew he was foolish to lose his temper, but to be called a liar by a liar and cheat like Fallon made his blood boil. Speaking as calmly as he could, he went on:

"A woman did come into the yard and onto the porch while I was here.

I caught a glimpse of her at that front window to your left. She was peeping in between the slats of the blinds. When she saw me looking at her, she disappeared. Henderson said she was probably some girl living in the neighborhood, who noticed my car as she was passing and peeped in to see who was here. Whoever told you she came before I did was mistaken. She came while I was here. And she didn't come in."

"What time was that?"

"I don't remember. It was soon after I got here."

"And that was all there was to it, eh? She just looked in and then disappeared when you caught her at it? Where did she disappear to?"

"I don't know. I thought she ran around the house. But Henderson went back to look, and nobody was there. He said she might have skinned over the fence."

"Skinned over the fence, eh?" Fallon repeated the words, as if for some reason they had arrested his attention. "He went and looked for her, did he? And came back and told you she must have skinned over the fence?"

"Yes. There was no other way out of the back yard, he said."

"And how did he come back? Through the house?"

"No; he walked all around it. I was standing at the front window, watching, in case the girl should be hiding and run out when she heard him coming."

"And she didn't, eh?"

"No."

"So you thought she must have skinned over the back fence?" Again Fallon repeated the phrase, as if greatly struck by it.

"That was his suggestion," Alston answered.

"And what happened after that?"

"Nothing. That was all there was to it. The woman came while I was

here, and she didn't come inside the house."

"How do you know who entered the house before you got here?"

"I've told you what happened; take it or leave it!" retorted Alston, and looked at his watch.

Fallon answered smoothly: "I'm not doubting your word, Mr. Alston. I'm only questioning your omniscience."

Alston turned from him impatiently. "I've told you all I know about this business, Fallon. If you want to see me again you know where to find me."

"Just a minute!" Fallon was smiling unpleasantly when Alston looked around at him. "What brought you out here to see Henderson? You haven't told me that."

"No, and I've no intention of telling you," snapped Alston. "It had nothing to do with this investigation."

"Just a social visit, eh?"

"No; it was business—private business." As he answered, Alston tried to read Fallon's eyes. What did the fellow know? It seemed unlikely that he could have received a call already from the blackmailer, considering that this shooting of Henderson must have been occupying his time most of the morning and keeping him away from his office.

"Was your private business a secret, Mr. Alston?"

"Call it what you please," snapped Alston, and strode out of the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW ELEMENT.

HE was stepping into his taxi when he heard Kennedy's voice and turned. The doctor was walking rapidly toward him. An impulse to disregard the younger man's plain desire to speak to him seized Alston, and he yielded to it so far as to sit down in the cab and close the door. It was to Kennedy that he owed the encounter

with Fallon, and he wanted to get away from them both. What help or sympathy could he expect from the man who was in love with his wife?

Why had he been such a fool as to call the fellow up about Henderson? "Impulse," he thought. "That's always been my trouble. I was worried about Ned, and did the first thing that came into my head—called up Kennedy. If I hadn't done that, this run-in with Fallon wouldn't have happened. It won't help me any, either—if the worst comes to the worst."

Kennedy arrived panting. "I've got my car here, Mr. Alston," he said. "I'll drive you home. I——"

"Thanks. I'm going back to the office. Saturday afternoon's no holiday for me." Alston spoke abruptly.

Kennedy came nearer. "I'd like to have a talk with you, Mr. Al——"

"What about?" Alston frowned.

"Why—about several—— I haven't had a chance yet to——" He glanced at the driver, whose head was cocked attentively. "Let me take you to your office. I'd like to explain. I'm sorry I brought you out here. But I thought we'd—— Won't you let me drive you back?"

A refusal was on the tip of Alston's tongue, but, as if to forestall it, Kennedy said quickly: "I haven't had a chance to talk to you alone, and there are several things—I'd like your advice about."

"All right." Alston got out of the taxi, paid the fare, and walked with the physician around the corner to where the latter's car was parked. On the way he vented his feelings in an irritated question:

"What did you bring me out here for? You must know how Fallon hates me for the work I did last fall trying to prevent his reelection."

Kennedy was apologetic. "That never occurred to me, Mr. Alston. And, of course, I had no idea you were

the man who was out here with Henderson Thursday night. And if I'd known Fallon was coming, I might have remembered that you and he——"

"Why didn't you come to my office—if you wanted to talk to me?" demanded Alston, interrupting.

"Why, on account of that girl—Miss Booker."

"Miss Booker?" Alston repeated the name, staring blankly. They had reached the car, and Kennedy did not speak again until they were seated and the car was in motion. Then he gave his companion a glance before he asked:

"Didn't you know she knew Henderson?"

"No," answered Alston, after a pause.

"She told me she was engaged to him."

"Engaged? What do you mean? To be married?"

"That's what *she* said. He never mentioned it. But I thought he might have said something to you about it."

"No."

"She told me when he went to the hospital for his operation. She called me up and gave me her phone numbers—two of them—home and the place where she was working at the time, some insurance company. She asked me to let her know how he came through the operation, and said she was engaged to him. I didn't operate, but I had charge of the case before and after. I met her several times when she came to the hospital to see him. And when she got sick herself, she sent for me. She had pneumonia. She's not cured of it yet; shouldn't really be working, but——"

"She didn't show up this morning," put in Alston. "Didn't phone to explain why or anything. What do you make of that?"

The two exchanged a long glance, and Kennedy shook his head. "I don't

know what to make of it," he said, "but it seems there was a woman in the house while you were there, Mr. Alston."

"Who says so?"

"Several persons saw her. Their stories don't all agree. Fallon didn't tell you what he knew about that. Two people claim to have seen a woman enter Henderson's house before you got there—people living across the street, I think. I don't know the name. But the woman next door to Henderson, Mrs. Bremer, says that she was on her back porch and saw a woman come around the house and go into the back door. She maintains the woman had on a hat but no coat. The other people—the ones who claim to have seen a woman go in the front—say she had on a coat as well as a hat.

"All three agree that she was above medium height and very slender. In fact, the description Mrs. Bremer gives strongly suggests Miss Booker. That was what I wanted to tell you. It looks very much as if whoever it was had arrived before you and then gone around to peep at you through the front window. When you caught her she went around the house and into the back door. I think that was what Fallon was thinking when he sneered at your saying she had skinned over the fence."

"But I'd have recognized Miss Booker——"

"You said you saw only her eyes and the edge of her hat—didn't you? You can't recognize any one from their eyes alone, you know."

Alston tried to recall the impression the eyes had made on him, but had to admit that they might have been Miss Booker's or any other woman's, for all he could say positively. His glimpse had been so brief—a mere flash. But for the shape of the hat brim above the eyes, he would not even have been sure they were a woman's.

"Why Miss Booker should have gone around to peep at you, I don't know," continued Kennedy, "unless, of course, she didn't know who was with Henderson and wanted to find out. Did he know you were coming?"

"Yes; I phoned him a few minutes before."

"Maybe he didn't tell her, or maybe the woman wasn't Miss Booker."

Alston said nothing. He was seeing in imagination Miss Booker seated beside his desk, her eyes fixed on the letter which he had forgotten to open. He recalled her quick dropping of her lids when he caught her. Was it conceivable that she knew something about that letter? Had he entirely misread her?

In the back of Alston's mind an idea stirred, but did not take form as yet, for Kennedy was talking, speaking rapidly and with emphasis.

"Whoever she was, it seems she had never been seen coming there before, nor any other woman, for that matter. And nobody, man or woman, was seen going there or coming away last night; at any rate, so far as is known. Of course, somebody may turn up later who saw some one enter or leave the place—or who heard the shot. But as far as I could find out nobody in the neighborhood saw or heard anything. Mrs. Bremer says Henderson's house was dark the entire evening. She thinks he must have come home after her family had all gone to bed. None of them saw a light in his house. It looks as if he had come home late, and that the shooting took place soon afterward. I understand, that the doctor who examined the body before it was taken away, said death had been instantaneous and had occurred some time after midnight—certainly not before."

"And that's all I could find out," continued Kennedy, when Alston remained silent. "Of course, there are bound to be developments as soon as the afternoon papers are out. But what I wanted

to talk over with you was Miss Booker. What ought we to do about her?"

"Do about her? What do you mean?"

"Oughtn't we to tell Fallon that——"

"I'll tell Fallon nothing!" exclaimed Alston irritably.

Kennedy hesitated, but finally went on: "You see, Mr. Alston, it's bound to come out that she knew Henderson and was engaged to him—if she was. And she'll be questioned. Fallon will discover that they were both patients of mine and that she had told me they were engaged. He'll naturally wonder, won't he, why I didn't tell him about her this morning?"

Alston said nothing, and Kennedy went on: "And won't he wonder why you didn't tell him she was employed in your office?"

"I didn't know she even knew Henderson till *you* told me so just now. You can tell Fallon what you please, but leave me out of it. I shall tell him nothing."

The doctor was silent. They were getting into the heart of the town, and in another minute or two would reach Alston's office building. The latter ended the pause by adding abruptly:

"My business with Henderson, night before last, had nothing in the world to do with Miss Booker or——"

"Oh, I realize that, sir!" Kennedy broke in.

"It was no affair of Fallon's, anyhow."

"I quite agree. You were perfectly right not to——"

"Do as you please, but let me manage my own affairs."

"Why, you misunderstood me, Mr. Alston. I only——"

"All right. Let's drop the subject. You go and tell Fallon anything you like, but don't drag me into it again."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Alston, that I——"

"All right. I understand. But

what's the matter, anyhow? You don't think Miss Booker shot Henderson, do you?"

Kennedy was turning the car into the traffic of Washington Street, and did not reply until the corner was safely rounded and they had fallen into the line of slowly moving vehicles. Watching his quiet face, Alston wondered what he was thinking. And again he bitterly regretted the impulse of the previous morning that had led him to call up Kennedy. Irritated as he was, at finding himself involved in the unpleasant consequences of that impulse, he did not blame the doctor for it, although he did vent his irritation upon him. He blamed himself. What was more, he knew Kennedy was right in what he had just said. Fallon would wonder why he had not been told about Miss Booker's connection with Henderson.

Had she shot him? The girl's thin, sickly face flashed before Alston—her rouged lips and scared eyes and timid way of entering the room. He could not conceive of her as the author of an act requiring decision and courage—even the courage of desperation. He could not imagine her with a loaded pistol in her hand.

"I don't see why anybody should have shot him, Mr. Alston," answered Kennedy finally. "He was such a quiet, kindly sort of man. Nobody could have hated him, it seems to me—no man, that is. But—well, you can't ever predict results where a woman and— and sex are involved."

"Then you do think she——"

"Oh, I don't know! It seems impossible. She's so much younger than he was. What I mean—he was ill and looked much older than he really was."

The stammered explanation did not cover the awkward slip, and Alston winced. As if realizing that he had only made matters worse, instead of better, Kennedy went on hurriedly:

"She certainly seemed devoted to him. And she's highstrung, no doubt about that. What I thought I'd do— only I wanted to consult you about it first. I didn't want to act without your advice, Mr. Alston. And I'll do whatever you say. I'm sorry now I didn't go to your office, instead of asking you to go out there this morning; but I thought she'd be at the office, you see, and——"

"Oh, that's all right." Alston interrupted the apologies impatiently, annoyed now by the younger man's excessive deference. "Do whatever you like. I don't care," he added curtly.

"Well, what I thought I'd better do now was go to see her. After all, she may not even know he's dead. Though it does look queer—her not turning up this morning."

"If she killed him she's probably left town."

"I don't think she had money enough to go far."

"Well, go and look her up, anyhow."

"I'll let you know what I find out. I won't do anything without consulting you first. You can depend on that, sir."

"Oh, do as you like!" snapped Alston. Doctor Kennedy's "sir" that had slipped out now and then, was even more irritating than his overdone show of respect and consideration. Both were unnecessary reminders to Alston of his twenty-years seniority. Whether Kennedy perceived this, or was only silenced by his companion's tone, the result was that he said nothing more until the car had come to a stop and Alston moved to get out. Then he asked:

"Will you be here at your office all afternoon?"

Alston nodded. "Till five, anyhow." He was turning away when a question occurred to him, and he paused.

"By the way, do you know anything about her people? Where does she live?"

"In a boarding house. Her parents

are both dead. I don't think she has any near relations—not here, anyhow. That's what she told me, at least." Kennedy hesitated. "That's why I spoke to Mrs. Alston about her," he added. "I was sorry for her, and she seemed to be worried for fear she wasn't giving satisfaction. I knew, if you understood, you'd make allowances, and——"

"That's all right. My wife told me." Alston turned away again, then looked back to say: "I'll be here till five, if you should want to reach me."

He was walking off without a word of leave taking when Kennedy's voice followed him with a courteous: "Good-by, sir."

"Good-by," Alston snapped, and did not care whether he was heard or not. He did not look back.

The entrance hall of the large building in which his offices were located had a deserted appearance. Only one of the three elevators was running. He looked at his watch and remembered suddenly that he had had no lunch and very little breakfast. He walked down the steps that ran at the back of the elevator shaft to the basement, where there was a restaurant, barber shop, and other suppliers of human necessities.

While he drank a cup of coffee and forced a sandwich down, he made an unsuccessful attempt to bring order into the chaos of his thoughts. The idea that had been stirring at the back of his head, ever since Miss Booker had been injected into his problem began to take form in questions. She was a new element in the situation, and he did not know what to do with her. She seemed to him, with her pasty complexion and red-smearing lips, too unattractive for any man to have fallen in love with, even a man twice her age. And what did poor Ned want to get engaged for—incurably ill as he was?

But apparently some woman had been with him Thursday night, some one who had stolen to a front window

to peep in at him and Alston. Why should Miss Booker have done that? She could have recognized her employer by his voice, and she wouldn't have gone to the window to listen; she could have done that from the dining room and run no risk of being caught.

Still, was it likely there were two women involved? It seemed unlikely enough that there was one. And if Miss Booker had had nothing to do with Henderson's death, why had she not come to work that morning? If she had been as anxious to keep her job as Kennedy said, why had she stayed away and not even sent an excuse?

Besides, why had she been so interested in that blackmailing letter the morning it came? Again and again there flashed across Alston's mind the memory of her behavior in connection with the letter. A dozen questions occurred to him, but half of them seemed to contradict the other half.

When he had finally finished the food for which he had no appetite, he took the elevator to the sixth floor and walked down the empty corridor to his office. His heel taps were the only sounds audible, and they echoed loudly in the silence of the deserted building. Absorbed in his thoughts, he did not hear them. The Saturday-afternoon quiet had always been agreeable to him. He was accustomed to say that he never liked his office except then, when he could have it to himself, without the interruptions and annoyances of other days.

As he turned his key in the lock, he said to himself that he must put out of his mind everything except his work. Thinking about Henderson's death would do no good. On the contrary, it would get him into a state of nerves where he could do no work. And work would steady his nerves and clear his mind. Work had always been the best remedy he knew of for trouble.

He opened his office door, entered it,

and was closing it again when he heard a noise. Turning quickly, he saw Miss Booker. She had been sitting down and had got up when he came in. Now she stood looking at him without speaking.

CHAPTER IX.

A REVELATION.

HOW did you get in?"

The question struck Alston as absurd the instant it was out. But the girl answered it as if she found it perfectly natural. She had come, she said, before the others had gone, and had been waiting for him. She knew he always came back after lunch on Saturdays.

She paused then, and Alston asked: "What do you want?" Again it seemed to him ridiculous for them to be standing there, as if they were merely employer and employee, and as if all he expected to hear was her excuse for not having come to work that morning. She did not reply at once. Her lips opened as though she were going to, but she seemed suddenly to lose her self-control. In fact, she looked as frightened as when she came into his private room to take dictation. And he thought: "She didn't shoot Ned."

"I've—got to tell you something," she finally managed to say. "Mr. Henderson—you know——" She stopped with a catch of her breath.

"Henderson?" he repeated, then waited for her to go on. She was looking somewhat different, and he realized now that it was probably because her lips were their natural color. She might have been the woman at the window, he thought, noting the shape of the hat. But she had not shot Henderson, he felt sure of that. She would never have had the nerve to do it.

"Mr. Edward Henderson," she began. Then, suddenly, she sat down. She looked as if she were too weak to stand any longer. Her flat chest rose with

a sharp breath, as if she were gasping for air. She clutched at the leather hand bag on the desk in front of her, as one about to fall, grasps at the nearest object for support.

Alston still waited. He would hear what she had to say before he said anything. Was she going to tell him that Henderson was dead? It was the only probability that occurred to him.

At last she found the breath to go on. "He told me to—tell you he'd burned that letter, and you—needn't worry about it."

"What letter?" Alston stared at her wide-open, frightened eyes.

"That—you know—the one you wrote that girl." She stopped for breath; then, when he did not speak, she added: "He never gave it to her—when you thought he did. He said you asked her to marry you and—it wouldn't have been a good idea, so he—just didn't give her your letter."

Several explanations of the sudden turning up of that old letter had occurred to Alston, but not this one. Never, in all the thirty years since he had written it and given it to Henderson to deliver for him, had the thought entered his head that it might not have been delivered. Never once, despite the many times he had wondered why he got no answer, had he suspected that it might not have been received. Often as he had talked to Henderson about Anna's not answering, he had never got from him a glimmering of the truth.

"He gave her the money; he told me to tell you he did. And he told her if she needed any more to write to him and he'd tell you. But she never wrote, he said."

Too stunned to speak, Alston continued to stare. She was not looking at him now, but at her hand bag. After a moment she said: "That's all he said to tell you, but I don't want you to think it was him that tried to blackmail you. It was me."

She paused then. Apparently she expected some response to that, for she bowed her head slightly and sat silently waiting. Then she drew in a breath and went on again: "He let me try it just to show me it wasn't any use. And that's why I was out there when you came. He was expecting you to call up about my letter. He said you'd come to see him about it. And he wanted me to hear just what you said. But you talked so low I couldn't hear—from the dining room, where I was, so I went around to the front porch——"

She caught a quivering breath and continued: "Then you saw me, and I had to go back to the dining room again. But I heard you say you'd pay the money. And if you had we could have got married and gone away somewhere. And I could have nursed him and—and maybe—the doctors don't always know——"

She began to cry and felt in her hand bag for her handkerchief. When she found it, she wiped her eyes and stood up. Alston had not spoken.

"I just wanted to tell you," she added, "that it was me that sent you that letter. But you needn't be afraid I'll ever tell anybody about how that girl's father was killed. I promised him I never would, and——"

"Did you *see* that old letter of mine?" Alston demanded, interrupting her. Even yet, he could not believe that Henderson had not delivered it. His faith was too great.

She nodded. "He showed it to me one day after he'd told me about you and that girl. That was since I started working for you. I said something about you one day to him, and he said he used to know you a long time ago. Then one day he got to talking about what good friends you and he used to be, and he told me about that girl and her father and about the letter he'd kept that you'd sent the girl before she went away. He said he'd always thought

he'd tell you some time. That's why he'd kept it. It was me that thought of writing you that letter. I was nearly crazy for money—enough money for us to go away somewhere. I had to talk and talk before he'd let me try writing to you. And then it was just to convince me it wasn't any use. He said from the first you wouldn't pay."

"I'd have given him the money. I did offer him——"

"He said he'd rather die than owe you a cent."

Alston winced, but said nothing. She moved toward the door, as if she had no more to tell him. Yet it was plain from her manner of speaking about Henderson that she knew very well that he was dead.

"I won't be back any more," she said, pausing at the door. "Even if you'd take me back, I wouldn't come. And it's not for the way you've treated me; I don't care about that any more. It's the way you treated him. He was your best friend once, and you treated him like—I don't know what. He said you never thought anybody else had feelings except yourself."

Stung by her plain speech, all the more galling because uttered in so spiritless a tone, Alston retorted sharply as she was turning the doorknob:

"Wait! Where are you going?"

She stared at him without replying. It was impossible to read her expression.

"Don't you know that he's dead?" he asked.

He had surprised her, he could see. There was a pause before she answered:

"Yes, but I didn't know you did. I wasn't going to say anything till—who told *you*?"

"The body was found by the milkman early this morning."

"Oh—then do the police know already?"

"Of course. Who shot him?"

She stared for a moment. "Why, he shot himself!"

"What became of the pistol?"

"Why——" Again she stared, and there was a startled look in her eyes. "I took it away with me last night."

"You mean you were with him when——"

"Yes. It was right after we got back from Richland Park. We——"

"Richland—when? What do you mean? You didn't go out there last night to meet me, did you?"

"Yes. I thought you might come. He said you'd told him you wouldn't, but I wanted to make sure. So we went there. I was the one that was going to meet you and give you the letter and get the money, if you came. He waited for me in the park. Then when you didn't come we went back to his house. He didn't want me to go with him, but he looked so sick I went, anyhow. As soon as we got there he burned your letter in the grate. And then he told me to tell you he'd burned it—after he was dead, he said."

Her thin body was shaken by a sharp tremor, but she went on quite steadily: "I thought he meant—when he died. I didn't realize what he was thinking of. He wanted me to go home, but I wouldn't leave him—sick and all alone in that empty house. I guess that was why he did it then—on my account. He said he didn't want people to get any wrong ideas about me being there with him all night. He thought I'd call somebody right away—as soon as he'd done it. But I didn't." She broke off with another shiver.

"Why not?" Alston asked.

"I wanted the pistol to shoot myself with."

"What?" He gave a start.

She shook her head. "I'm not going to now," she said in a dull, lifeless voice. "I thought I would, after I'd told you what he wanted me to, but I can't—I just can't."

"What are you going to do, now he's dead?"

"I don't know." She turned away. "I've got to go to the police station now. I didn't know they knew he was dead. I didn't think anybody would know till I told. And I had to wait till I could see you alone. I had to do what I'd promised him I would." Another tremor ran through her entire body. Alston said quickly:

"You'd better sit down and wait till you're calm."

"I'm all right," she answered, again turning the knob of the door to go. "I wish I was dead, too, but I can't kill myself. I haven't got the courage."

"I wish you'd——" Alston checked his impulse to offer her help. She would refuse it, he felt sure. He must wait. Later, perhaps, she would let him help her. But she had turned and was waiting for him to complete his sentence. He must say something. He must, he must.

"I wish you'd tell me," he began, "just what he told you about not delivering my letter. Somehow, I can't believe he didn't. What did he say? What reason did he give?"

"I told you the reason—because you said in the letter that you'd marry her, and he didn't think——" She stopped and looked down at her bag.

"He didn't think I'd keep my promise? Is that what he said?"

"No; he said he knew you would keep it—that was the trouble. He didn't think it would be a good thing for her."

"For *her*!"

She was still looking at her bag. "Do you really want me to tell you what he said?" she asked, her face hardening. "He said you'd keep your promise and marry her, but you'd never let her forget, as long as she lived, what a sacrifice you'd made for her sake."

Without looking at him, she opened the door and left him.

CHAPTER X.

THE INNER LIGHT.

IT was after five when Alston left his office to go home. He had done no work. He had talked to no one. He had not even answered his telephone. Nothing whatever had happened during the afternoon—except in his own heart.

For the first time in his life he had seen himself through another's eyes. What he saw was ugly, but for hours he had looked at it steadily—not without shrinking, but steadily. And, when at last he started for his home, it was to put into instant execution the plan that had come into being during those hours of illumination. For it was characteristic of him that any mental change should express itself immediately in action.

No one was in sight when he let himself into the house, and he went upstairs without even stopping to leave his overcoat and hat on the hall rack. At the top of the steps he paused for a moment at sound of his daughter's voice coming from her bedroom. He paused, because he thought his wife was with her, and it was his wife that he wanted to see—to see alone. To his relief the voice that answered was his son's, and he walked on to his wife's room.

She called, "Come in," when he knocked, and he went in. She was sitting down at her dressing table in her rose-colored kimono, brushing her hair.

"Oh, it's you, dear!" She was surprised that he had not come in through the other door, he knew. He knew, too, that she was waiting for him to come and kiss her. But when he had closed the door he took off his hat and stood still where he was.

"Archer's back," he said.

"Yes, he came this morning." She looked at him queerly. "What's the matter, John?"

"I've changed my mind about the children," he said, still without moving.

"I'm going to let him go to Paris. And Claire may marry Will Stevens. And you——" A sudden filling of his throat made it impossible to finish what he intended to say.

"Why, John——" She was getting up to come to him, and to avoid her he turned his back and walked toward the bathroom.

"I've been doing what I thought was for their own good," he went on, making a fresh start, "but I don't want them to——" He stopped again. The words "hate me" that were at his lips would not come, and he substituted for them "to be unhappy."

"But, my dear——"

"I haven't changed my mind about Archer's chances of success as an artist. I don't believe he's got it in him to amount to much in that direction. But I'm going to let him find it out for himself. And Claire may do the same about Stevens. If it turns out that I was right, why, I'll stand by. I won't even remind her that I ever said he was no good. I want them to be happy. And you—you, too——"

"But, John, Claire doesn't want to marry Will Stevens now. She's in love with somebody else. And she's been afraid to tell you. She thinks you're determined to make her marry Howard Wilson."

"What?" Alston frowned. "Who's she in love with now?"

"Doctor Kennedy." She was standing in front of him now, and his expression seemed to puzzle her, for she asked: "What's the matter? You don't disapprove of him, do you?"

He shook his head, finding it impossible to speak.

"I didn't see how you could," she went on, "but Claire wouldn't let me tell you. And about Archer, dear, he's changed his mind, too. He's ready to go into business."

"Into business?" Alston echoed the words blankly. "What do you mean?"

I thought—I thought he'd set his heart——”

“He had. And Claire was willing to give him her money. But when it came to the point of his taking it, he felt as if he couldn't, unless he had some stronger reason for believing in himself than his own feeling. That was why he went to New York. He took his pictures. He got that French artist that's over here to look at them and tell him frankly what he thought his chances were. Well, poor boy, he's taking it splendidly. But, John, don't rub it in! Promise me——”

“I won't,” he said huskily.

“You see, dear, you don't realize how much like you they both are,” his wife

went on in her matter-of-fact way, seemingly unconscious of the emotions he was struggling to suppress, although she was looking into his face as she spoke. “They're emotional and impulsive and they say things they're sorry for the next minute. But they've both got your honesty and courage and the other fine qualities that I've always admired in you, and——”

“Oh, Jessie!” His arms went round her and drew her to him, so that she could not see his face, which was now beyond his control. All his heart, and all that the last few days had taught him, was in the words that broke from him of their own accord: “Love me—love me a little—if you can.”



ROUTS THUGS WITH A BOLOGNA

ONCE upon a time, Bulwer-Lytton wrote a play in which occurred the line: “The pen is mightier than the sword.” It is doubtful whether Mr. Samuel Reustron, who runs a delicatessen store on Third Avenue, in New York, is familiar with the play, but he has a motto of his own which says: “The bologna is mightier than the gun.” The making of Mr. Reustron's motto came about in this way:

One night, a few weeks ago, the delicatessen proprietor was in his store attending to business, when three young men entered. They were armed with revolvers and told Mr. Reustron to throw up his hands. That gentleman did not take the command seriously.

“Aw, quit your kidding, boys,” he said.

Thereupon the three bandits leveled their revolvers, and one of them replied: “We'll show you whether we're kidding or not. Get into the back room and make it snappy!”

Mr. Reustron felt that this was carrying a joke too far, so he quickly picked up a large bologna from the counter and swatted one of the bandits across the face with the improvised weapon. The young gunman howled with pain and dropped his weapon. Mr. Reustron then proceeded to belabor the other two holdup men with the bologna, and they took to flight. The delicatessen proprietor then telephoned the police, notifying them of the attempted holdup. He now holds his trusty bologna in reserve for similar emergencies, for in his estimation, there's no weapon to equal it.



BLIND!

By Donald Van Riper

Author of "Contagious Reform," etc.

IT was a boast of Jim Bradon that he had remarkable eyes. His vision was of that rare type that took in details with photographic accuracy. One thoughtful look at a man's face, especially a crook's face, and Jim Bradon had that man mentally ticketed for future reference. A week, a month, a year, even a span of years made no difference with Bradon. Once having looked a man over with the intention of remembering that man, Bradon never forgot. Along the avenue this faculty of Bradon's was the dread of the crooks and the boast of his friends. Therefore the news of his retirement from the force caused a stir along that blatant, strident thoroughfare, brought joy to crooks and regret to honest men.

His eyes were a slaty blue, deep set beneath the straight lines of thick brows and further shadowed with long lashes that would and often had stirred women to envy. Otherwise his face was commonplace enough if one excepted the

clear, bronzed skin that bespoke clean outdoor living and belied, the truth itself, that he had reached the age of retirement.

His physique was that of a giant, his shoulders so broad that they seemed disproportionate to even his great body, his neck a column of strength, his hard hands brute weapons disguised with flesh. The rule of the avenue fighter is that everything goes, and along the avenue Bradon was a man respected for his might. And now looking just as he had for fifteen years past, Bradon had stepped aside for some younger man. It was unbelievable at first, and many a beady, close-set pair of eyes expressed that disbelief as Bradon idled aimlessly in his first few weeks of unwonted and unwanted freedom.

Foremost among the skeptics was "Babe" Smith. That individual, in spite of the fact that he was on the junior side of thirty, was the hardest man on the avenue. Babe was a paradox for his appearance, like his name,

was the ultimate in deception. Behind that glowing, open-eyed mask of youth he was like a tiger, cruel, fierce, resourceful, hard fighting and, like any screened killer, he was doubly dangerous. His exploits were whispered, hush-voiced legends; there could well have been notches down the smooth grip of Babe's automatic, marks for men, not quite as bad, and certainly not nearly as fast with a gun as was Babe Smith. Time and again he had been hauled up on suspicion, and invariably he had been released. He prospered visibly. The police had their suspicions, their guesses, but still he strutted free along the avenue.

Babe Smith intended to stay free and, in keeping with this attitude, he watched Jim Bradon warily as the days drifted by and Bradon fought to reconcile himself to this strange, wearying, heartbreaking rest. Not until three months had gone did Babe Smith realize the truth, that Bradon really had quit, and, like any old machine used to the routine of service, this unaccustomed rest was breaking him down with fatal rapidity.

There was not the same swing to big Jim Bradon's walk, not the old full resonance in his deep voice, Babe imagined, there was just a shade lacking in the keenness of those slate-blue eyes. No one else seemed to note these things and, as usual, Babe held his own counsel. A keen sense of observation was part of Babe's stock in trade. It had often given him the desired edge in matters of crime and punishment. And so he gave no hint of his deductions, unless it was that he once more assumed his place in the sun or the glare of the avenue at night.

Some one else had noticed those changes, and that some one was Bradon himself. Old age had seemed a mere phantom of the future to Bradon a few months before, yet here it was an intangible foe that left very real signs upon

him. In the privacy of his two rooms where he had lived alone for years, Jim Bradon often stared into the glass and marveled at the inexorable change that had begun. He was getting old. Bradon did the only thing that came naturally to his nature; he fought back. He forced himself to make the effort to live as an integral part of the avenue's life.

Part of this effort brought him in contact with Eddy Maynard. Eddy was a ringman, a two-fisted fighter, after the heart of Bradon. Through Eddy he came to know the girl, "Marg" Gilbert.

So in time Bradon came to be aware of that strange triangle, the girl, the gangster, and the boy the avenue believed was destined to be some day the welterweight champion of the world. Oddly enough Bradon came to know the girl far better than he knew either Babe Smith or Eddy Maynard.

Across the street from his rooms was the "Twenty-four Lunch," so named because the doors were never shut to trade. There from eleven in the morning until eight at night Marg Gilbert sat back of the cash register, a touch of beauty in the commonplace, and a trade builder to boot. She was in the vernacular of the avenue a "change shooter." Also in the language of that street she knew her stuff, knew where she dared risk being pleasant, knew those who rated a smile even if that smile be forced, knew too, most important of all, just how to put any mere man in his place. She was an artist in her line, and, as life was her material, her youth was an ally rather than a handicap.

With two of all the men at whom she had shot change she was not so certain of her line. The difference with Babe Smith had its source perhaps in fear. With Eddy Maynard she could not place a finger on any tangible or intangible reason. She only knew that she liked Eddy better than the rest.

She was surer of one man than of any other. Jim Bradon was the man. She had known who he was when he had been on the force but then his patronage on her shift was rare. Now he was a regular, his noon time arrival as dependable as the smell of cabbage on Thursday. Sometimes over the counter, sometimes pausing on her way to or from work she would talk to him. In this piecemeal fashion he learned about the triangle, and the more he knew the more he feared the results.

One evening, as she had walked down the block at his side, she had summed up their own relationship as she saw it. "You see, Jim, you've seen and known a lot more than I have and so I like to get your slant on things. When it comes to family I'm out of luck. Being on my own so long makes me glad I've got some one at last that I can talk to. Girls don't talk to other girls as free and easy as men think—unmarried girls, that is. And if I should talk personalities with the regular run of men I see, they'd either think I was trying to make 'em or else I was setting things up for a touch. Besides it's your old trade to know things and solve things, and you'd notice anyway how all the rest was—were washouts excepting Eddy and Babe."

Jim sighed. Her reference to Babe seemed so innocuous that for an instant he hesitated. Babe was one of the subjects on which they did not agree. With a conscious effort he drove himself to the task of an oft-repeated warning.

"Babe's no good, Marg. He's like a bad apple. Looks nice, but if you get inside he's rotten."

"He's never been anything but all right with me," she defended. "Of course I've heard a lot of stories, but who hasn't? Why, when you were on duty, you ought to have heard some of the things I heard about you. Some of the lads along here used to say that

you'd jail your best friend. I even heard that you did just that once. So you see I don't pay much attention to things I only hear. Seeing's believing."

Bradon winced. He had jailed his best friend. It had been in the line of duty, unavoidable and necessary, but to outsiders there had been no excuse, no explanation. "That was one thing you heard that was true," he admitted. "I did just that. Some time I may try to explain it to you. I only did what I thought was right."

She glanced up at him. "I'm sorry I said that, Jim. You don't need to explain anything to me. I'll take your word any time."

"Then take it about Babe Smith," he whispered. "Quit even thinking about him. Way down inside you're a little afraid of him, aren't you? Now Eddy——"

"Eddy's different," she finished for him. "Eddy's a good kid."

After he had left her, he perceived that she had in no way taken his word about Babe Smith. Yet from the very briefness of her comment on Eddy he took heart. Eddy was a good kid. In those few words it was possible to find every shade of feeling that a woman may have for a man. Jim Bradon smiled that night as he walked back to his place. Perhaps everything would turn out right after all.

Within a week Bradon learned that this optimistic belief was fatuous indeed. Babe Smith and Eddy Maynard clashed. Perhaps it was because Babe had suddenly perceived that Eddy stood in a fair way to become the idol of all the avenue. It was on the day following Eddy's quick knock-out of "Kid Texas" that Babe began his offensive. He began with talk, spreading the ugly insinuation that the Kid Texas bout had been fixed. In that neighborhood such news traveled fast. The avenue waited to see what Eddy Maynard would say or do.

Mixed up in this situation Bradon could sense the girl. Babe, actuated by a double jealousy, was bent on picking a feud with Eddy. The first overt act was Babe's, and it was done right before Bradon as he sat on the rail of the entrance steps before the house door. That was his accustomed evening post. There from the vantage point of that slight elevation, and with shoulders comfortably against the brick wall he could view the teeming life of the place. A foot or so away was the brilliant window light of "The Gem Dress Shop" lighting the scene as though for Bradon's special benefit.

Babe Smith jostled Eddy Maynard, not once but thrice within a few paces. The third shove was so clearly intentional that it drew a protest.

"What's the idea?"

Babe's round, blue eyes were alight with fire as he seemed for the first time to notice Maynard. "What's it to you?" he demanded and, at the same time, he stepped forward, and Bradon saw the Babe's heel crunch down upon Eddy Maynard's foot. A slow color mantled Eddy's face, but his eyes fastened hard on Babe's look.

"Out the way," said Babe. His voice was raised to a high pitch. Babe was evidently intent on putting on a show, and he wished an audience.

Almost before he realized the fact, Bradon had descended from his perch. Babe was giving Eddy a bad break. A pugilist, if he amounts to anything at all, is the last person in the world to indulge in a brawl. If by any mischance Eddy should be worsted in this threatened encounter, he would be a laughingstock. The most probable immediate result would be that Babe would get a proper beating. This would be nothing to Eddy's credit, would provide Babe with a permanent grudge and, among certain people, would react unfavorably on Eddy's present popularity.

Bradon thrust himself between the

two smaller men like a mastiff moving serenely between two bristling terriers. He addressed himself in a barely audible whisper to Babe Smith.

"Beat it. I saw the whole thing. Get moving."

Babe sneered. "I got a right on the sidewalk."

"So's every one else."

"Besides," scoffed the Babe, "it's none of your business. You're through."

"Move along," was Bradon's impassive rejoinder. The crowd was pressing thickly about them now. Without so much as a glance Bradon addressed Eddy. "Move along, Maynard." As Eddy hesitated, Bradon saw the uniform of the corner traffic man as that individual pushed his way through the crowd. "Get along, Maynard. Here comes Flannery. No use getting pinched." Eddy reluctantly took his way through the crowd, passing a dozen curious questioners without more than a nod and a smile to each.

In five minutes the flurry of interest had passed, but Bradon knew that this was probably just the beginning. Babe Smith's parting shot had been bitter to Bradon.

"Pretty small stuff, Bradon. If you hanker for police work and that's the best you can do, I know there is a job open down to Bamblor's Store for some guy to watch the baby carriages while the skirts go shopping."

Babe had then moved over to the curb, climbed into his car and driven off with a derisive blast of his horn as his farewell.

Afterward Bradon wondered if his interference had been wise. At best he had merely postponed the evil day when Babe through some means or other would force an issue with Eddy Maynard. To-morrow or the next day those two would meet and, if the Babe's ugly disposition lasted, a clash would be certain.

In this belief, however, Bradon was

somewhat mistaken, for "Spike" Nolan who managed Eddy's fistic affairs had booked various out-of-town dates that removed Eddy, temporarily at least, from the activities of the avenue. Word came to Bradon through Marg Gilbert that Eddy was duly grateful for Bradon's help in avoiding an unpleasant scene.

"What do you think of Babe Smith now?" he asked the girl.

"Well, I guess Eddy's able to take care of himself," had been her answer. "So you can't accuse Babe of being a bully. Next time I see him I'll ask him his side of the story."

Bradon never asked her for the Babe's explanation, nor did the girl offer that information. Bradon wrote that down as useless, for Babe no doubt could lie as skillfully as he could transact other worldly vices. Then, too, something else came to occupy more and more of Bradon's attention. His eyes were easily tired and, almost constantly, he was reminded that the fine keen edge of his vision had suddenly and unaccountably been impaired.

They had called him the man with the camera eye, and now he would catch himself looking twice at a passerby. Something had happened, something he could not understand and, with the knowledge, terror stalked Bradon in every waking moment. For the first time in his life Jim Bradon knew what it meant to be afraid.

He told no one, not even the girl, and he was careful to allow no sign in his manner that he was changed. At first he had hoped that this was some temporary ailment but, after a few weeks, he realized the truth. His eyes were no better; in fact, they were steadily growing worse. The experience he had on the night of Eddy Maynard's next fight at the Avenue Sporting Club, sent him at last where fear and pride had formerly barred his path.

Eddy was fighting the star bout that night, his first venture as a real headliner and Bradon went to the show with keen anticipation. The thick, acrid smoke, the glare of the ring lights and the swift action of the preliminaries bothered Bradon's eyes. Once, during the semifinal bout, the whole scene swam before him in a dizzy maze of light-shot shadows. Bradon had sat like a statue, his hands oozing perspiration as he gripped his own knees. For a moment he could have cried aloud and then, as swiftly as it had come, the spell passed.

He saw the main bout, saw the whirlwind finish with lithe arms of Eddy beating down his opponent in the seventh round, but the old thrill of excitement was lacking. That sort of fighting was mere child's play. As he passed out with the crowd he closed his eyes in a momentary test. All about him he could feel the heedless, pushing, body-shoving mass. He could smell the crowd, feel the swarming of his fellows, hear their voices but with his eyes shut he felt that he was in another world. In that brief moment the man who had lived alone first tasted loneliness. He opened his eyes again and sighed with sheer relief. That had been a foretaste of agony that he now dreaded. It would be dreadful. He, who had been so proud of his eyes, he of all people to know the horror of sightlessness.

The next morning, with the sun so bright, he fairly goaded himself into going to the doctor. It seemed so impossible, so utterly fantastic and yet he knew that, no matter what the truth was, he must know it.

The doctor said little, after he had questioned Bradon. He had purposefully gone to a stranger, because some strange-clinging pride made him reluctant to admit even a breath of his fears to any one he knew. The doctor gave him no real satisfaction. A great many long

and involved explanations that really did more to confuse him than otherwise, a card to an oculist's shop, advice to rest his eyes and to be sure and return at the end of two weeks constituted the whole result. The one big question quivered on Bradon's lips but, at the vital moment, his nerve failed him and it remained unspoken.

Was he going to go blind? He carried that question away with him, still unvoiced. Again and again he asked that question, but only within his own mind. If he only knew! How miserable he might be if he knew. A man might as well be dead as—blind! If he only knew the truth! Why hadn't the doctor told him the truth? Kindness? Pity?

The two weeks dragged along. Bradon stayed close to his two rooms save when he must go out to eat or to get food that he prepared for himself. The glasses he wore with a shamefaced air as guiltily as a boy caught cheating. Marg Gilmore had been the only one he had not imagined as smiling at first sight of those glasses. Hers had been a thoughtful, frowning look of appraisal.

"They look good on you, Jim," she had said. "Sorta give you a dignified look."

Jim would gladly have dispensed with the dignity if at the same time he could have discarded those glasses. They were miserable, unnatural affairs. His eyes hurt with open rebellion at the task of readjustment. After all the glasses were a minor matter. Always he came back to that same old insistent question. Was he going blind?

The evening before he was to go back to the doctor, something happened that drove the all-important question from his mind. Along the avenue the news spread like wildfire that Eddy Maynard and Babe Smith had clashed. Eddy had temporized, quibbled, evaded the issue but, at last, Babe had achieved his end. Blows had been exchanged and Babe,

as was to be expected, had come off a very poor second in the affair. The consensus of opinion was, since Eddy had counted ten times the proverbial ten, that Babe had got his just deserts and deserved no sympathy.

Bradon made a shrewd guess that all Babe wanted in this matter was an excuse for hatred toward his rival. Hard on the heels of the first rumors came others. Babe had promised to even the score. Bradon shook his head wearily. There was a sinister mortality, mysterious, violent and unavenged among the crooks who had incurred Babe's enmity in the past. No one could ever get anything on Babe. Always there was a previously planned question-proof alibi. Bradon wondered if the innocent-appearing Babe Smith, had not concocted a police-defying alibi for the day or the night when he would even accounts with Eddy Maynard.

This was once when Babe would have to step outside his usual field. His supposed victims in the past had all been of the unmourned class of crooks. Nevertheless, he had gone uncaught and unpunished. The future had an ominous aspect for Eddy Maynard.

If only he felt as he had a few months ago when he had first quit the force! If his eyes were right once more! Bradon pushed aside these wistful thoughts over and over again, only to find that they refused to stay in the background of his mind. The decision to take an active part in that triangle of the girl, the fighter and the crook finally came to him with overwhelming force.

To shadow Babe would be a futile effort. Even in his prime that task would have been tough. Now, Bradon feared it would be impossible. Babe had evaded skillful shadows before, ditched his man just at the right moment, and proceeded with his own devices unhampered. He dismissed the idea without much further thought.

So it came about that Bradon picked up Eddy Maynard's trail. Against the innocent and unsuspecting Eddy he need employ very little ingenuity. He was favored by the fact that Eddy's movements were for the next week or two somewhat limited. Eddy's next bout was but three weeks ahead, and his days were spent in the training quarters where "Spike" Nolan handled his string of battlers. Eddy, unlike Babe Smith, had no car of his own into which he could climb unexpectedly and elude Bradon. Bradon clung to this task, became a more ardent training-quarters' fan than he had ever been in the past, and between times watched for Babe Smith's return.

Babe had vanished from his old haunts. Guarded inquiry, even open quizzing of the girl produced no real knowledge of his whereabouts. From the girl he did learn something that explained a great deal of the recent trouble.

"Guess Babe's a little sore," she had told Bradon. "I kinda gave him a hint that I might marry Eddy some day. I only said I might, but he didn't like it."

That same day Bradon went back to the doctor. The latter shook his head doubtfully after his examination of Bradon's eyes. "You haven't been resting them," he observed. "What have you been doing? Reading? Movies?"

"Nothing," answered Bradon. "Just walking around. Haven't read hardly a line. Haven't been to a movie once."

The doctor frowned. "You've been concentrating on something pretty hard. The eye-strain effect is worse than ever. I'll give you another week. Here's a prescription and a dropper. Just put a drop in the corner of each eye every morning."

Bradon nodded and eyed the bottle nervously. So his eyes were worse. And he had almost thought they were a bit better. "Anything else?" he asked.

The doctor nodded. "Yes, you must ease up on your eyes. Don't use them so much. Spare them all you can. And here's another bottle. Notice it has a red string tied around the neck. I want you to put just one drop of that in each eye the night before you come back to me. You're to come back in another week. That'll be the fifteenth."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," answered the doctor. "Only be sure that you use that bottle with the red string on it just once and then only on the night before you come back here. That'll be the night of the fourteenth."

The night of the fourteenth! That was the date of Eddy's next bout.

"The fourteenth, doctor?"

The doctor nodded. "The fourteenth! Better put two drops in each eye and then turn into bed."

"Any special time?"

"The earlier in the evening the better. Nine o'clock say." This was the verdict. It never occurred to Bradon to question.

He wouldn't mention the bout to the doctor. That sort of entertainment might come under the head of eye strain.

Through the ensuing week he continued to play the guardian angel over Eddy Maynard. In this he was successful but in spite of that fact he was miserable. Babe had come back to the avenue to stalk his insolently innocent way across Bradon's path. Coincidental with Babe's return, there was a new bit of gossip afloat in the street. This sourceless yarn concerned Bradon and cut him deeply. The story was persistent, so strong that it even carried back to Bradon himself. They said he was losing his sight. Somehow some one had discovered the truth about his careful visits to the doctor and the optical shop.

One thing consoled him. His eyes were no worse. It might be false

hope, but he almost imagined that he could see a bit better. His only confidant was the girl and into her youthful ears he poured his mixed hopes and fears.

It was the day before the fight that she told him a big piece of news on her own account. Across the top of the cash register she regarded him with a gay smile. "I've decided, Jim. Me and Eddy are going to be married."

Bradon had been floundering with his congratulations when he noticed that Babe stood at his side, waiting with money and punched meal check in hand. For the first time in his life Bradon saw Babe unmasked. The wide eyes had narrowed, the cherubic lips had tightened, and even the glow of color in Babe's cheeks had drained to a deadly white in which tiny lines showed through.

The girl took the check and the bill, slid back the change, and, without so much as a glance at Babe, smiled, a forced smile it was, up into Jim Bradon's face. She had done this with breathless rapidity, the very manner being the rebuke direct.

"Still sore," whispered Babe. His voice was altered, as expressionless and flat as a mechanical record of a voice. "Still sore, eh?"

Marg Gilbert turned on him without warning. "I told you I was through. No one can lie about Eddy and try and make trouble for him and get by with me. And when you started that hot air about Jim here you closed the debate."

"You think it's closed," sneered Babe. He walked on toward the door. There he paused and addressed himself to Bradon. "Shadow him all you want, Bradon. It won't do a bit of good."

This was a challenge, no more nor less, but Bradon did not deign an answer. Action was the sphere in which Jim Bradon could best deal with Babe Smith.

However, he did pause long enough

after Babe was gone to warn the girl. "He's dangerous, Marg. Tell Eddy to watch out for himself. I've never heard of the Babe acting like that. Why, he's crazy wild."

From that time on until Eddy climbed through the ropes for the final bout on the night of the fourteenth, Jim Bradon lived, ate, slept within range of Eddy Maynard. That last half hour had been agony, for his eyes had gone bad again. Still, when the bell rang to silence the throng for the announcer's voice, Bradon was just back of Eddy Maynard's corner. Bradon's hand was on the service revolver in his pocket. He had seen Babe Smith go in.

He did not hear the announcements. Suddenly the pain in his eyes became terrific. Shooting, burning lights streaked across his eyes. Then slowly like a monstrous shadow the scene faded into the darkness. Jim Bradon started erect. Then he sank back again into his place. He drew a rebuke from the man in the next seat.

"Get off my lap, Jim. What's the matter—you getting dopey?"

He tried to bluff it through. Tried to sit there with his face toward the sounds of struggle. It was no use. He turned to the man in the next seat and whispered a few words.

Even with a guiding hand at his elbow he stumbled as he walked up the aisle. He could not see. He could not see. Just darkness!

So Eddy's brilliant victory was dwarfed beneath another story after the fight. Jim Bradon was blind. Babe did not smile. Even he dared not do that, but he did take a malicious delight in recalling to all who would listen that he had foretold the event.

Along the avenue news of that sort travels faster than a man can run. Jim had not been alone in the darkness of his lighted room for more than half an hour before the girl had come to him.

"I'll send right away for that doctor, Jim. It must have been those drops. Maybe they would act like this. Your eyes look all right. Just kinda big in the pupils. You see I'll send for him, and he'll straighten you out."

Jim smiled sadly as she rattled along. He knew why she talked so fast; she was afraid to be silent, afraid to even think the worst. And yet he caught at her repeated words. There might be something in that drop business. Tonight at nine he had followed the doctor's orders and placed two drops in each eye. Two drops from the tiny bottle with the red string about the neck! Perhaps if he had followed the doctor's orders to the letter and gone to bed, this would not have happened. Come to think of it, he had been all right until he had faced the glare of the ring lights.

When the doctor came, Jim Bradon asked the question he had choked over on his visits to the office. "Am I going to be blind?"

The doctor's voice echoed his with a peculiar note of horrified humor. "Blind! I should say not! I could have told you that the first time you came to see me. I never even thought of blindness. Why didn't you ask me? Have you been worrying all this time?"

"But I can't see," cried Bradon. "I can't see."

"The drops—belladonna! And you didn't go right to bed. Miss Gilbert here told me you had been to the fight. Looking right into the flood lights, I suppose!"

"What's the matter with my eyes."

"Eye strain first! Nervous self-hypnotism second! Right now you have over-dilated pupils due to bright lights and belladonna."

Bradon felt the girl's hand pressed against his cheek. Her firm capable fingers were soothing; they almost seemed to caress his weathered face. "Oh, Jim," she whispered, "isn't it

great? Wait'll I tell them all. Wait'll I tell them that you're not——"

She stumbled over the word of terror and, in that hushed moment, another type of vision came to Bradon. The idea flashed into his mind full grown.

"We're not going to tell any one just yet, Marg. You and the doctor and I will just let them go on thinking the way they do now."

"But why?" she asked.

For the first time Bradon deliberately ignored the girl. "How long, doctor, before I'll be able to see right again?"

"To-morrow night at the latest! But as long as possible you should avoid overtaxing your eyes. And quit brooding! It is the hypnotic effect that really has caused more trouble than anything else. Why, men have gone sightless for weeks just under a morbid nervous stress. Just take my word for it, you'll be all right again."

The next day Jim knew that he had wakened from a nightmare of his own creation. That night his eyes were sound but, save the girl and the doctor, no one else knew the truth. They all thought that he was blind. After dark he descended to his accustomed place and, seated on the rail beside the house door, he watched the avenue once more. Before his eyes were tinted glasses and, through them, he watched the reactions of the mob to his brooding presence. Some lingered. Some few spoke with voices unnaturally loud. Some passed with averted faces. To them he was blind.

Thus he sat there night after night, the blind man who watched. Now he had a stick, mere apparatus for the part he played, but convincing nevertheless. At times he saw Babe; indeed, whenever Babe passed he always spoke. Always, too, Bradon asked who it was. Babe would answer in that deceptive voice of his. Bradon had the advantage here for he saw the leering, gloating look that Babe had as he spoke his easy

words. Bradon knew every line, every move, every gesture of the Babe by now. He knew Babe as he had never known his foe before.

Eddy Maynard had gone away for a few days' rest. When he came back, Bradon wanted to be sure where Babe Smith was located. Babe's whole attitude was that of the waiting killer. He would get Eddy.

On the sixth night of this ceaseless vigil, Bradon saw Babe again coming up the street. He quivered as he realized that this was Babe Smith, the killer, that to-night was the night when Babe would strike. It was late, even the avenue's activity had lulled. Along the block the bright lights showed empty sidewalks. In the distance were a few stray pedestrians. Babe advanced on soft-soled shoes. All set for the getaway, reflected Bradon. From behind the protecting lenses he eyed Babe as he glided past.

To-night there was a bulge at Babe's side pocket, a telltale bump that Bradon had never noted there before. Then, too, Babe, for the first time, passed the supposed blind man without a word. A sidelong glance, and a careless glance at that, was all he accorded Bradon.

"Thinks I'm out of it," thought Bradon. "Thinks I'm through."

The years fell away from Jim's shoulders as he slipped down from his perch. Ten paces behind Babe he went, and he more than matched the quiet progress of the man ahead. This was the business that he knew best. With the advantage of Babe's erroneous belief about his sight, he might do what no one on the force had ever been able to accomplish. To-night he was after the gun that had produced that suspicious bulge in Babe's pocket.

Then he saw Eddy Maynard coming down the street, still half a block distant. Had Babe figured this out? How had Babe Smith known that Eddy had returned to the avenue? Bradon hugged

closer to the building. Ahead was the dark spot, the entrance to Carter's Alley, a little, short-lived street that cut a narrow runway through the block.

Babe vanished in the alley's entrance. Bradon like another shadow slid along the darkened store front of a second-hand bookshop. Down the block came Eddy Maynard, whistling softly, with not the least suspicion that two men were playing a game of life and death and that he was the one man they watched.

Bradon watched the vague shadow not three feet away. Eddy was walking briskly. The shadow moved slightly. Bradon raised the stick. He knew what Babe was doing now. The moving shadow was the automatic. Just the faintest glint of metal came to Bradon's sight. He smashed out and down with the stick. First came the impact of his blow and, with it, the explosion of the gun. Bradon gave one flying leap, and his big foot descended on the automatic even as it bounced to the ground.

Out dove Babe with clutching fingers. As he realized the truth he checked himself but he was too late. Bradon's fist shot, and a sound like a heavy club hard swung, sounded through the empty alley.

Eddy Maynard approached somewhat warily. "That's not you, Bradon."

"None other," replied Bradon.

"But they told me you were——"

"I'm not," said Bradon. "Hold that rat, Eddy." He indicated the prostrate Babe Smith. "This time we got him. Your girl's mind is going to be a lot easier after to-night."

He stooped and gingerly picked up the fallen automatic. "Might as well preserve the finger prints." He turned to Babe who was moaning feebly in Eddy's grasp. "Heard that knocking of nightsticks, eh, Babe? Some of the boys'll be here any minute, now. You'll probably get a hanging out of this gat."

"What do you mean—hanging?"

whimpered Babe Smith. "No one's croaked."

"I mean," said Bradon, "that if this gat is the one that sent out certain bullets that are waiting down in headquarters, you'll swing for it. And I've got a blame good hunch that an expert will pin more than one job to your gat,

You're pinched, Babe. You know all the rest. You'd better keep a shut head, anyway."

"Blind," murmured Babe Smith. "Blind!"

Bradon shivered as he heard the word. Then he smiled. Everything had come out right after all.



A FRENCH PICKPOCKET SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

HIGHER education for women has now attained such a vogue and embraces such a wide variety of subjects as preparation for the various professions that the announcement of an unusual course of study rarely causes any surprise. However, in Bicetre, a suburb of Paris, France, a unique school has been discovered that quite surpasses anything that the regular educational institutions have to offer. This is the school for girl pickpockets conducted by a Belgian woman, who is said to combine the various clever qualities of Fagin and the Artful Dodger, as described in Charles Dickens' novel, "Oliver Twist." The school was brought to the knowledge of the police through the arrest of two of the "pupils," who were caught picking the pockets of shoppers in the Rue Mouffetard. On being taken by the police, they admitted that they had been initiated into the mysteries of "lifting leathers" and other phases of the light-fingered art by their Belgian mentor, and they revealed the whereabouts of the school. They stated that students of this odd institution of learning were assigned regular beats according to their skill and that their instructress made frequent tours of inspection over the ground that they covered, so as to make sure that they were keeping busy and working to the best advantage.



GERMAN CRIMINAL'S NOVEL PLAN OF SENDING MESSAGE

A NOVEL method of sending a message to his confederates on the outside was recently revealed to the German police authorities in the case of Fritz Gabriel, said to be the "master mind" of a gang of safe crackers. Several months ago, Gabriel, then in prison, was visited by his wife, and, at parting, was permitted to kiss her through the bars of his cell. In anticipation of her visit, Gabriel had prepared a piece of parchment with some instructions addressed to his confederates written on it. This he held in his mouth while interviewing his wife, and when he came to kiss her, he transferred it to her mouth. As a result of getting these written instructions to his friends, Gabriel succeeded in escaping from the Ploetzensee prison where he was confined. Later, however, he was taken into custody and his method of escape was made known to the police, when he and his gang blew open a bank vault and robbed it of 150,000 marks.



THE SLEEPING COP

By Isabel Ostrander and Christopher B. Booth

Author of
"The Tiger Lily," etc.

Author of
"The Clew of the Crooked Q," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

RELEASED after serving ten years in Dorton prison, where he was railroaded by Thomas J. Braddigan, powerful political boss, Dan Morrison is afraid to face his family, feeling that his wife and daughter, Judith, whom he has not seen since she was ten, will be ashamed of him.

He is not aware that his daughter is a trained nurse in Braddigan's home, taking care of the latter's wife, who is suffering from a mental malady. The girl is planning to get sufficient concrete evidence of the big boss' shady dealings to send him to prison. When she learns that he is really The Consolidated Milk Companies, an unscrupulous firm, she tells John Lang, the only political enemy Braddigan fears. The latter is to have one of his henchmen break into Braddigan's safe; she will aid the man to enter the house. The safe is of a strange make, devised by the original owner of the Braddigan mansion—who had collected jewels.

Braddigan has recently moved into this house in "Millionaire's Row," two blocks of fine homes facing the river. The beat is patrolled by young Larry Moore, who is interested in Edna Flemming, as Judith is known in the Braddigan household. At midnight, the young officer drinks the coffee that Judith kindly leaves for him on the window sill. Five minutes later he is overpowered by sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE THE COP SLEPT.

THE sleeping chamber which Thomas J. Braddigan had selected for his own occupancy was a kingly room, unusually spacious and in keeping with the other furnishings of the fine house. There was an enormous bed with carved posts, the covers tossed back in a disordered tumble as though some one had leaped suddenly from between the satiny linen sheets.

Beside this four-poster was a massive table and other impressive furnishings. Upon this table were an electric lamp, a telephone, a note pad, a cigar humidor, an ash tray, and a clock. The ash tray held a half-smoked cigar, tilted over on the table at such an angle that it had scorched the wood and raised the varnish in a red blister. Quite evidently it had been put aside with careless haste.

The light glowed with a soft, shaded radiance that fell across the two dented pillows, arranged in such a position as to make it clear that Mr. Braddigan had

been sitting up in bed. Two newspapers, half concealed by the tossed back covers, completed the picture. He had been smoking a cigar as he read. The light, also, illuminated the dial of the clock, the faint ticking of which was the only sound within the room. It was twenty minutes past one.

Suddenly the muffled ringing of the telephone bell, ringing in that hurried, insistent, and persistent tempo which telephone operators always seem to employ at such an hour of the night. For almost a full minute the subdued clatter continued and then abruptly ceased. No one entered the room to answer the summons.

This bedroom telephone of Braddigan's was a private wire, unconnected in any way with other parts of the house, for Braddigan was a cautious man and an extension always means the chance of some one "listening in." Another of these strictly private phones was located in what served as his office. Neither of them was listed in the directory, and the numbers were known only to Gus Flettinger, Braddigan's secretary.

The ringing set up again, and, as it continued, became almost frenzied. One could well imagine a harassed switchboard girl being goaded into a state of nervous prostration by the unremitting command of:

"Ring 'em again, operator; ring 'em again, I tell ya!"

For a full five minutes it kept up and finally ceased in a series of jangling spasms as though from exhaustion. Silence again claimed the house. But Gus Flettinger, for it could be none other than he, was not to be put off so easily. He had to have the big boss' answer to a matter of considerable importance.

Again the stillness was broken, by the ringing of other bells, this time unmuffled and sounding with a sharp, penetrating clearness, one on each

floor and all pulsated by the same flow of electric current. This would be a call on the telephone line used by the entire household. There was an extension on the top story of the house, occupied exclusively by the servants, and it was located in the hall, outside the room occupied by the Braddigan butler.

Hawkes had not been, prior to his employment with Thomas J. Braddigan, a butler, although the character of his training had been such as to fit him for such a position. He had been the head waiter at a restaurant since padlocked by Federal edict. For a number of years Hawkes had personally taken the big boss' orders for food and drink, always with the awed expression of a hero worshiper. Perhaps knowing that he could command from Hawkes a truly servile respect that might be lacking in a regular butler, employed through the usual channels, was what influenced Braddigan's selection. Quite possibly, also, the fellow's closeness of mouth, amounting to inarticulation, had something to do with the choice.

Normally a sound sleeper, Hawkes, being in possession of the keys to the Braddigan cellarette, had helped himself to a generous nightcap before turning in. The ringing of the telephone bell on the wall outside his door penetrated his consciousness only after some time. When he had sat up in bed, muttering grumbly, the clamor had ceased for a moment. But before he could lie down again, the clatter repeated itself. No, it most certainly wasn't a dream. He tossed back the covers and slid his feet to the floor.

Groping for the light, he barked his shin against a chair and swore thickly, but it had the effect of driving the fog of sleep from his brain and rendering him completely awake. Finding the electric-light switch, he snapped on the button and made his way out into the hall.

"If it's one of them newspaper repor-

ters," he muttered, "they'll get one fine bawlin' out."

Newspapermen frequently had called at such outrageous hours.

"Hello," he answered gruffly, taking down the receiver.

The next moment he recognized the voice of Gus Flettinger, sharp-edged with irritation.

"What's the matter up there?" Gus demanded in a shrill shouting. "Where's the big boss?"

"In bed, I suppose, Mr. Flettinger. He said good night to me about midnight and went to his room. What time is it now—nearly morning, ain't it?"

"About half past one," snapped back Gus Flettinger. "Been buzzing the private wire in the old man's bedroom since a quarter after. No answer. Gotta talk to 'im right away, Hawkes. You go downstairs——"

"Yes, sir," responded Hawkes before the other had finished. "Will you hold the wire, Mr. Flettinger?"

"Darn right I will! Get a move on you, Hawkes. There's something queer about this. Can't understand it. The old man usually answers on the first tap of the bell. Light sleeper. Phone's right by the bed." Unquestionably Flettinger was worried. "Hurry!" he shouted. "In Heaven's name, man, hurry!"

Despite this urgent plea, however, Hawkes did not descend from the third floor to the second until he had slipped back into his own room and girded himself with a dressing gown, startlingly red in color. Since it had been one of the big boss' cast-offs, it enfolded him like an overlarge sack—and Hawkes himself was by no means sparing of stature.

A rather slow-witted fellow, he was halfway down the stairs before it occurred to him that there might be something seriously wrong. This belated thought quickened his feet into a clumsy

run. With this sudden burst of speed one of his slippers was flung off, clattering noisily down the stairs. What a terrific racket such a small thing makes in a silent, sleeping house!

He found the door of Braddigan's bedroom open, and that in itself was unusual. The light, he saw, burned within. Nearing the threshold, he cleared his throat and called out his master's name. There was no response. He reached out his hand and brought his knuckles against the panel in a sharp knock.

"Mr. Braddigan, sir," he called a second time.

When there still was no answer he took a step forward and peered within, saw the empty bed and then glanced expectantly toward the half-open door of the bath. Hawkes caught his breath and listened. But there was no sound other than the faint ticking of the clock on the bedside table.

"Now where can he be?" muttered the butler, pressing farther into the room which little more than one glance was needed to show him that it was untenanted.

He crept half fearfully across the floor and looked into the bath with its marble-paneled walls extending entirely to the ceiling. It was empty:

Hawkes stood for a helpless moment or two, groping for an explanation. If Braddigan were awake and up, it was only the more strange that he had not heard and answered Gus Flettinger's insistent ringing. Yes, this was very strange—and disturbing. He withdrew from the sleeping chamber and went back into the hall. The second-floor telephone extension was at the top of the stairs. As was to be expected, Flettinger was holding the wire with mounting impatience.

"I—I can't find him, Mr. Flettinger," Hawkes said with a gulp. "The bed's been slept in, but he's not there now. The light is burning; I have called him,

but"—a sudden inspiration—"maybe he's in the office."

"No!" cried the other. "There's another private phone in there, and I've tried that."

"It *might* be out of order, sir. That often happens to telephones. I can't think of any other place——"

"Go hammer on the door and see if he answers," broke in Flettinger. "He wouldn't have gone out; he was expecting me to call, something very important."

"Do—do you think anything's happened to him, sir?" asked the butler. "He might——"

"This is no time for talking. Do what I tell you."

The receiver dropped from Hawkes' fingers and swung to and fro at the length of its cord, as the man wheeled about. Breathing heavily with a mounting excitement, he went down to the first floor and came before the outer door which led into "the office." It was closed, locked as usual.

The butler seized the knob of the door with both hands and shook it violently but impotently. He began hammering on the panel with the heel of his fist. The thunder of this pounding echoed loudly through the house. This bringing no response, Hawkes pressed his ear hard against the door. Did he hear some faint, indistinguishable sound, or was it but his fancy? He couldn't be sure.

He rushed back to the telephone.

"It's locked, Mr. Flettinger!" he cried. "There's no answer, but I thought I heard——" He groped for the words which would describe just what he meant.

"Heard—what?" screamed back Gus Flettinger.

"I—I ain't so sure what it was; maybe it wasn't anything, but it seemed to be kind of a mumblin' sound like a man talkin' low and careful."

"Impossible! If the big boss was in

there, he'd answer you. I don't think you could hear the sound of a voice through those doors, anyhow. One of 'em's three inches thick. You haven't got—no, of course, you haven't got a key, but I have."

"I—I think you ought to come——" Hawkes began shakily.

"Quick as my car can make it. Keep your head, Hawkes, and look through the rest of the house. Look—oh, look everywhere!"

As the butler turned away from the telephone he heard some one moving at the head of the stairs. He turned quickly and saw the pretty young nurse leaning down. He could barely distinguish her face.

"What's the matter, Hawkes?" she demanded, her voice very low. "All this shouting and hammering at such a time of night."

"It's Mr. Braddigan, miss. He—he's missing."

"Missing? Why, what can you mean—missing?"

"I mean he can't be found, miss. Mr. Flettinger was trying to get in touch with him. He's disappeared from the bedroom, and we—we can't understand it. I've just tried the office."

"He's not there, either, Hawkes?" There was no particular quality noticeable in her voice.

"I ain't got no key to the doors, miss, but, pound as I did, there wasn't no answer. I'm afraid something's happened, for it ain't natural——"

The butler's words came to an abrupt pause as he remembered that he should be making a search of the house instead of standing here talking. Telling her as much he began switching on all the lights as he started his fearful hunt.

At the time of telephoning, Gus Flettinger had been many blocks away, but streets free of impeding traffic at this hour of the morning gave his car a clear road, and he went tearing toward Riverview Terrace at a gasping clip.

Exactly eighteen minutes later he jammed on the brakes in front of No. 7, leaped from behind the steering wheel, and went running up the steps of the Braddigan mansion.

Gus Flettinger was a slight, wiry man, still in his thirties, but he had been running errands for the politicians since he was eighteen. His training in ways that were sly and often devious had chiseled cunning lines at the corners of his cold, evasive eyes. One of his characteristics was that his lids narrowed to mere slits when he talked. They said of Gus Flettinger that he was about the best little fixer who ever helped frame a crooked deal.

In response to his ringing of the bell, there appeared a bulky shadow against the glass of the entrance door; there sounded the click of a key in its lock and the rattle of a safety chain being unfastened. The door opened, and Hawkes' face, pale and twitching, was at the opening.

"I've looked everywhere, sir," he blurted out. "There's nowhere he can be. I've been inside all the rooms, opened up all the closets, and nowhere——"

"Then it's the office," Flettinger broke in grimly as he closed the door behind his own entrance and reached to his pocket for a little leather case of keys as he brushed hurriedly past the butler. "This looks bad, Hawkes; it looks mighty bad."

"Something's happened to the big boss." The other gulped. "There's no doubt of that now. If he's in the office, the only reason he doesn't answer is because he *can't* answer."

"Yes," Flettinger answered tersely and strode on with the butler lumbering along behind him, the oversize red dressing gown flapping grotesquely about his legs.

They reached the first of the two doors barring their way into the office. Flettinger's hand was none too steady

as he inserted the proper key in the lock and twisted it with a clicking sound. The heavy wood panel swung back before them. The second door was already standing open and gave them a partial view into the big chamber. An electric lamp with an emerald shade burned upon the desk, but its rays, diffused directly downward, left most of the room indistinct with uncertain shadows.

A choking, terrified gurgle rose in Hawkes' throat, and he clutched at Flettinger's arm.

"W-what's that, sir?" he chattered in a strangled whisper. "It—it sounded—like a groan."

Unquestionably it was, a thick, toneless moaning, not so much of pain as like the sound of one who moans in his sleep. This, no doubt, was what had reached Hawkes' ear when he had pressed his head close to the outer door and thought a voice was speaking in a guarded undertone.

Gus Flettinger leaped forward after the barest instant of hesitation, flung out his arm toward the wall, knowing exactly the spot where his hand would come in contact with the light switch. The button clicked, and a white dome which swung down from the ceiling burst into a flood of illumination, making the room light as day.

The massive desk hid from view the awful thing that was to meet their eyes a moment later. All they could see, in this first glimpse, was a hand, a huge, beefy hand with a three-carat diamond ring scintillating from the third blunt finger. It lay there, white and motionless, against the crimson background of a bright-colored Oriental rug, one of the numerous rugs which were thrown across the highly waxed surface of the parquet floor.

Flettinger took another stride forward. Prepared as he was for a shock, he stopped with the suddenness of a collision, recoiled in horror, while a

hoarse cry escaped him. Even for a man whose nerves are tempered to unusual hardness, it was not a pleasant thing to see. Braddigan's great bulk, clad in silk pajamas, was stretched behind the desk, both arms outflung wide. His wide, bulging chest rose and fell in irregular, jerky convulsions, and with each expelling breath there came that moaning from his open sagging mouth. Across his left cheek trickled a sluggish flood of crimson, moving in a thick, ghastly stream beneath his lobeless ear and along his massive neck.

Hawkes crept forward behind the other man and stared across the latter's shoulder.

"He's hurt, Mr. Flettinger; the master has hurt himself—bad. Perhaps he fell."

"Shut up!" muttered Gus Flettinger, on his knees, peering at Braddigan.

An instant later Flettinger was on his feet, reaching across the desk for the telephone.

"I'm using this wire to call a doctor and an ambulance," he said, thickly. "You go call the police."

Hawkes gasped. "The—the police?" he repeated in a stammering whisper. "Why—why should we call the police?"

"The big boss has got a bullet through his brain, and he's dying!" shouted Flettinger. "This is murder, Hawkes. Don't stand there like a fool. Do what I tell you; call the cops!" And then he was frantically thumbing the receiver hook for the operator.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CASE ON HIS BEAT.

MORE than an hour had passed since young Patrolman Moore, surrendering to a mysteriously overpowering drowsiness, had lowered himself to the stoop in front of No. 2 Riverview Terrace. Slumped forward in an uncomfortable-looking position, he had slumbered heavily without so much as a stir

of his stalwart body. Even the ringing of a bell, at the other end of his short beat two blocks distant, did not penetrate his consciousness.

This ringing came from a police patrol box which ran a direct telephone line to the precinct station. Some minutes had gone by since the time Larry should have called up to report, as each patrolman on duty is required to do. At the station switchboard, Sergeant Costner, who had taken quite a personal liking to young Moore, was making all possible effort to get in touch with the lad before leaving a blank space after his name. When an officer fails to report at the appointed time it means either trouble on post or a serious dereliction of duty. Costner knew Moore's street, knew its loneliness, and the temptation to take a moment's refuge from the knife edge of the wind sweeping down the river. Sometimes a man, when he is very tired and nothing is happening to keep his senses alert, will relax and, before he realizes it, close his eyes. Once Sergeant Costner had gone to sleep on post himself.

The bell ceased ringing. There was a limit to the old sergeant's protection. He had no choice when the summons brought no response but to report the matter to the lieutenant.

The platoon sergeant no longer made his rounds on foot in this district. A police flivver with a patrolman as chauffeur proceeds rapidly from street to street, checking up his men and keeping a sharp eye for anything amiss.

Sergeant Dayton, in command of No. 4 platoon, quickly received word that Patrolman Moore had failed to "ring in." The flivver runabout swept swiftly toward Riverview Terrace.

"This likely means trouble," Sergeant Dayton growled to the patrolman at the wheel. "Moore is an up-and-coming youngster and takes his job darn seriously. It wouldn't be like him to be sneakin' himself a snooze down some of

them basement steps. I won't be a lot surprised if we find 'im with a black-jack laid across his head."

And as the little car turned into the short length of Riverview Terrace, the sergeant unbuttoned his overcoat, drew his service revolver from its holster, and held it in his hand for instant action.

The head lamps shot a white glare ahead. The officer at the wheel trod hard upon the brake pedal, for he had seen, but a few feet in front of them, the uniform cap on the sagging head of Patrolman Moore.

"There he is, sergeant."

This remark was unnecessary. Sergeant Dayton had seen the sleeping cop at the same time, and a quick, stern anger purpled his cheeks and glinted in his eyes. Bellowing an oath which expressed his disgust and official indignation, he leaped down from the department flivver which had screeched to a halt alongside the curb. His foot came in contact with Moore's fallen nightstick; he picked it up and, with unkindly force, jabbed it forward into the pit of Larry's stomach.

Larry grunted, and his shoulders went up with a jerk in subconscious reaction. Then, as he muttered thickly, his body sagged down again. The thrust had not awakened him.

"Drunk!" exclaimed Sergeant Dayton, and prodded the patrolman again, this time with unrestrained viciousness. There was about the same result.

"Give 'im one across the soles," suggested the other officer who had joined his sergeant on the sidewalk; "that always brings 'em around."

"All right," agreed the other, "lift up his foot."

A moment later the nightstick swished wickedly and smacked against the sole of Larry's boot with a resounding whack. Half a dozen times this harsh treatment was administered before the sleeping young cop, with such

a sensation as though he were treading on red-hot embers with his naked feet, leaped up with a roar, instinctively defensive, both fists doubled belligerently.

His brain was not fully cleared. Like a man looking through a swimming sea of fog he saw his superior officer. Hastily unclenching his hand he brought it up to the visor of his cap in a hurried, clumsy salute. At the same time a shiver of dread trickled down his spine. He had been found by his sergeant asleep on post!

"Drunk, eh?" cried Dayton. "You sure picked a public place to sleep off your jag! You'll likely be pitched off the force for this, Moore."

"No, sergeant, you're wrong about that; I haven't been drinking, and I don't understand how it happened that I——"

"Don't lie to me!" snapped the sergeant. "You're so drunk now you can hardly articulate." Larry's words had sounded thick. "Go to the station house and turn in your shield to the lieutenant." He turned to the other patrolman. "This beat's got to be covered; if anything happened on *this* street with Tom Braddigan living up there at No. 7——"

"On the level, sergeant, I'm sober, cold sober!" Larry Moore broke in earnestly and his voice was more nearly normal now. "I never touch the stuff."

The second patrolman took a step closer, put his face close to Larry's, and sniffed suspiciously.

"He hasn't got the smell of it on 'im, sergeant, and a man to be soused as I thought he was would be a walkin' distillery. Not a whiff—as you can tell for yourself."

"Good heavens, don't tell me a *sober* man would be sleepin' sound as he was!" Dayton exclaimed skeptically.

But he sniffed a bit for himself and had to admit that he could detect no odor of liquor. While this might alter the sergeant's command about Larry

getting off the beat straightway and turning in his shield it did not noticeably soothe his anger. Being asleep on post, particularly when it happens in a street where resides the most powerful man in the city administration, is an official crime that calls for stern punishment. But before the issue could be carried any further an excited man appeared on the stoop of No. 7, five houses below, bellowing at the top of his capable voice.

"Police! Police!"

Hawkes had misunderstood Flettinger's instructions. Instead of going to the telephone and calling police headquarters, as the other had intended, the butler had rushed out the entrance door to summon the officer he knew would be on duty not far distant.

Sergeant Dayton spun half around at the shout. The instant that he identified the call as coming from the home of Thomas J. Braddigan he was off on a heavy-footed sprint with Larry Moore and the other patrolman flanking him, one on either side.

"What's the matter here?" cried Dayton, panting.

Hawkes stood there, a ludicrous figure in the red dressing gown. Confronted by the three men in uniform he seemed to lose the power of speech entirely, as he stood there gulping and making clucking noises in his throat.

"Come on, now," urged the sergeant, "tell us what's the matter. Is it burglars?"

"It's Mr. Braddigan. He—he's dying, Mr. Flettinger says; shot—shot through the head. Murder; that's what Mr. Flettinger says it is, murder!" And Hawkes gave a violent shudder.

For a moment the police officers were also bereft of speech. Larry Moore was the most stunned of the three. Asleep on post while Thomas J. Braddigan was being done to death five doors away! He felt himself almost an accessory to the crime. Being asleep on

post was serious enough, but the circumstances made it an offense for which he could little hope for leniency.

Sergeant Dayton was the first of the official trio to regain the use of his voice. At least for a moment he forgot that Patrolman Moore had been ordered back to the station house.

"One of you come inside with me," he commanded with more excitement than a veteran of his long service usually displayed.

"Yes, sergeant," Larry responded quickly, rushing up the steps before the other patrolman could get past him.

Just why Larry was so anxious to be the one who accompanied his superior within the house he didn't stop to analyze.

"And you, Ordway, stand guard out here in front," ordered Dayton. Patrolman Ordway murmured a prompt, "Yes, sir," looking his disappointment.

An instant later Larry and his sergeant were inside the house, at Hawkes' heels as the latter conducted them swiftly to the room with the double door. Gus Flettinger, standing at one end of the big desk, put down the telephone, and turned a gray, twitching face toward them. Sergeant Dayton he knew by sight and by name.

"How did *you* get here so quickly, sergeant?"

"Happened to be at the corner when that fellow"—jerking his head in Hawkes' direction—"came rushing out calling——"

"Oh!" broke in Flettinger and gave the butler a glare. "You damned idiot, Hawkes, I wanted you to call headquarters, not go yelling through the streets."

"You—you said for me to call the police."

"Shut up!" Flettinger cried, as he picked up the telephone again.

In another instance, no doubt, the police sergeant would have taken an

aggressive step forward and informed the other that *he* would take charge. But Gus Flettinger wore the reflected glory of being Thomas J. Braddigan's secretary; consequently he only changed his position so that he would have an unobstructed view of the outstretched, still breathing body on the other side of the desk. He stared with a greater degree of horror than would ordinarily have affected him. There seemed something unreal about it all—that such a thing as this could have happened to the mighty Braddigan!

Flettinger being connected with headquarters and the detective bureau, he soon had on the wire an inspector whom he called by first name. In crisp, jerky sentences he was telling what had happened. No need for him to suggest that the best man on the homicide squad be assigned to the case; that would be done as a matter of course.

Larry Moore stood uneasily, wondering why his hands should feel so strangely empty and helpless. Then he realized that it was because his nightstick was missing. Sergeant Dayton still had it, swinging it nervously back and forth beside his legs.

"Shouldn't we do something, Flettinger?" the latter suggested huskily. "It doesn't seem right, us standing here, leaving the big boss to lie there on the floor like this. He's still breathing."

"Breathing his last, I'm afraid," Gus Flettinger responded. "It's getting slower and slower, seems to me. No, there's nothing we can do other than what I've already done—called an ambulance. There's a bullet in his brain. The wonder of it is that he is alive at all. I'm afraid to move him; that's a job best left to the doctors. There may be a chance, the smallest of chances, that he can be got to the hospital in time——" He broke off the words abruptly, his head jerking forward in an attitude of tense listening.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Faint and

distant but drawing nearer came the reverberation of a gong which almost any one can instantly identify. It was the ambulance racing toward Riverview Terrace at a mad speed which even ambulances seldom achieve. The name of Thomas J. Braddigan had been enough to make the driver press the throttle button flat to the floor.

During the next few minutes everything was breathless confusion. A doctor—not a hospital interne, but the chief surgeon of staff—his face first ruddy from the whip of the wind during his wild ride, then suddenly pale with the gravity of the situation, did what little he could by way of applying a dressing to the wound, issuing crisp orders to the men with the stretcher bearers. Haste, everything was haste; the life of the big boss hung in the balance, swung from the slender thread of perhaps precious seconds.

No one paid any attention to the young patrolman. He was called forward when two men were not enough to lift the great bulk of Braddigan or to carry the stretcher, now covered with a white sheet like the shroud of death, into the open rear of the ambulance. The doors slammed; the motor roared, leaped forward; the bell clanged hysterically, and with a speed that gave one the sensation of magic, the hospital car careened sharply around the corner and vanished.

Larry Moore looked about rather dazedly, wondering what had become of his sergeant. Then he realized that he had seen Dayton swung aboard the ambulance as it had plunged into motion. There was nothing strange about that; the sergeant proposed to be on hand at the hospital if Braddigan recovered consciousness and was able to make a statement. Whatever was to be done here at No. 7 would be taken care of by plain-clothes men from headquarters. They would be here in double quick time.

Gus Flettinger had not gone with the ambulance, and now he was turning back into the house. Larry Moore swung around uncertainly and found himself facing Patrolman Ordway.

"I've never been up against a case like this," he said. "It happened on my beat, and what had I better do now—go inside until the fellows from headquarters get here and take charge?"

Patrolman Ordway answered with a crooked smile, half sympathy, half derision.

"Yes, you hard-luck son of a gun, it sure happened on your beat—with you sound asleep four or five houses away. I'd say that it won't make much difference what you do after that, one way or the other. Tough luck, Moore, but I guess I don't have to tell you—you're through."

"No, you don't have to tell me that, Ordway," Larry agreed heavily. "I was asleep on post, and it's the skids for me, all right." Then his shoulders squared, and his head went up. "But it's my beat, and I'm a copper until they take this shield off my coat."

With that he dashed up the stoop, reaching the top step just in time to prevent Gus Flettinger slamming the door shut against him.

CHAPTER X.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

IN so far as Flettinger was concerned, the young patrolman was a complete cipher. The latter found himself ignored as though he did not exist. Not that it mattered particularly; he was merely standing guard until the sleuths from headquarters should arrive. Flettinger, without a word, disappeared into the room where the tragedy had taken place, and Larry Moore remained outside in the hall, his back straightened stiffly against the wall.

It was strange, he thought, that Sergeant Dayton had asked Flettinger no

questions whatever, should have gone away so abruptly without even inquiring the name of the possible murderer. Perhaps the sergeant, veteran though he was, had lost his head; perhaps it was partly that he stood somewhat in awe of Braddigan's trusted lieutenant. It seemed to Larry that the proper thing to have done was to have got a more comprehensive grasp of the full situation before rushing off like that. Of course, Larry told himself, there had been so much confusion with the arrival of the ambulance that Dayton and Flettinger might have exchanged words which had not reached his ears.

Who *had* shot Braddigan? The man would have plenty of enemies. In politics even a man's enemies sometimes masquerade as his friends. The young patrolman thought of the two cars that had stopped at No. 7. He wondered—but what was the use forming theories without facts? It was a job for the plain-clothes men. That was obvious.

Some one was slipping down the stairs, so quietly that Larry did not hear the footsteps until, glancing up, he saw the girl in her white nurse's uniform descending toward him. Her face was pale, ghastly so, and at sight of Larry she paused, her hand fluttering across her throat.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, her voice scarcely more than a whisper. "It—it's you!"

She looked badly frightened. And why wouldn't she with a murder happening in the house?

"It's a terrible deed's been done here to-night, Miss Flemming," he responded.

"Then—then he's dead," she faltered. "Mr. Braddigan is dead?"

"He was still alive when we put him into the ambulance, but the doctor didn't seem to think there was much chance for the poor man. With a bullet through his brain—well, miss, I'd think

Mr. Braddigan's chances were less than one in a thousand."

"Y-yes," the girl answered with a catch in her voice and a shudder convulsing her shoulders, "I suppose he'll die. It's awful! Oh, how awful it is!" She gave the young patrolman a cautious glance and looked away hastily. "Have you—the police—any idea how it could have happened, who did it?"

Larry Moore shook his head slowly.

"Not that I can say, Miss Flemming," he answered. "You see, I'm only the cop on the beat. Mr. Flettinger has telephoned for plain-clothes men from the detective bureau. They don't want me sticking *my* finger in."

"Oh, yes, I see, but I thought perhaps you might have found something that would have given you a—a clew, don't they call it?" The inflection of the words made them a question, and again Larry moved his head negatively.

"Have you got any idea how it happened, Miss Flemming?" he inquired, not seriously thinking that she did.

Had he been looking at her hands he would have seen her fingers tighten their grip about the stairway railing until the knuckles stood out white and rigid. The expression of her face, however, scarcely altered.

"No!" she exclaimed. "No!"

"Did you hear the shot fired?"

He was not deliberately cross-examining her, just blundering along to keep the conversation going. And, under the circumstances, what else could they talk about?

The girl caught her breath in a barely audible sound; again that hasty, quickly averted glance toward him.

"One wouldn't have necessarily heard it—even if one had been awake," she answered him hurriedly. "You see, Patrolman Moore, the room there, Mr. Braddigan's office, is shut off from the rest of the house by two doors and a little hallway of its own. You must have noticed how heavy the doors are,

and so——" She broke off abruptly as the doorbell rang in a series of imperative janglings. While she had been talking, a motor car swept into River-view Terrace and dashed up in front of No. 7. Two men leaped out and ran toward the entrance. Police officers both; one would have known that at a glance.

"That's probably the detectives from headquarters," said Larry.

The girl turned and began moving back up the stairs. "I must be getting back to Mrs. Braddigan," she said. "She's unusually restless to-night. She doesn't know yet what happened but she's heard all the commotion and knows something must be wrong. I—I only came down for a moment; I wanted to know"—another of those tremulous vibrations in her voice—"how bad it was."

Being within a few strides of the entrance door, Larry took it upon himself to answer the ring. But, before the two plain-clothes men—one of them was Inspector Quinn, who directed the homicide division—were across the threshold, Gus Flettinger appeared, calling the inspector by given name.

"This way, Charley," he said, grimly; "the quicker we get down to cases the better."

Inspector Quinn had one of those rugged faces that might have been carved out of granite, cold and expressionless. His eyes were a peculiar shade of gray; they, too, were cold.

"The big boss? Dead?" His voice was hard, metallic and possessed scarcely any inflection.

"Haven't heard from the hospital; there hasn't been time—yet." Flettinger was leading the pair from headquarters to the big room where the mighty Braddigan had met—was it to be death?

"There's not much hope for him, Charley. With a bullet through his left eye, straight into his brain, I don't un-

derstand how he could have been alive when we found him. The Braddigan luck may save him, but I doubt it."

Larry Moore trailed along behind at a discreet and unobtrusive distance, hoping they would not close the doors and shut themselves in. His own ambition for advancement in the department leaned toward the detective bureau; and to watch the inspector himself proceed with a case of this magnitude should be a liberal education. For the moment he had forgotten that the next day might find him off the force entirely.

They did not close the doors, and Larry stationed himself in the compact vestibule, determined to miss no word of what might be said.

"Who did it?" That was Quinn's first question, asked as unemotionally as though he had been asking for the time of day. "Who did the croak, Gus? Do you know?"

Gus Flettinger was now sitting at the desk, in Big Tom Braddigan's great chair. His reply was to reach for the telegram which had come, two days previous, from the deputy warden at Dorton prison.

"This is the answer. Read it for yourself, Charley, and I think you'll say this gives us the low-down."

Inspector Quinn read the telegram.

Morrison released this morning in dangerous frame of mind. Advise caution.

"Yes, it looks that way, Gus," he agreed. "Morrison?"

"You ought to remember Dan Morrison, Charley."

"Dan Morrison, huh? Yeah; sure I remember now. It was young Dan Morrison who made the mistake of going after the big boss down in Tom's own ward. He was sent up for manslaughter, and more than one man had the opinion that he was framed."

Gus Flettinger dismissed the suggestion with a shrug. He had, as a matter of fact, a hand in arranging that neat

little conspiracy to remove Dan Morrison as a political contender.

Inspector Quinn passed the telegram to the detective sergeant.

"Have headquarters send out a g. p. o., for Dan Morrison," he ordered. "G. p. o." meant general pick-up order. "They'll find his description on file—but—hum—Dorton, eh? He'll be a lot changed after ten years up there, so you'd better send a wire to this deputy warden and have 'im let you know what Morrison looks like *now*. The address of Morrison's family, too. Hop to it, Sergeant Tinsley."

He again turned his eyes to Flettinger. Had Gus Flettinger been a stranger to him, Quinn would have perhaps been suspicious of the way the other persistently refused to meet another's gaze. But knowing Gus, he thought nothing of it.

"Let's have it, Gus, all you know."

"And that's darned little, Charley. The boss got back from Albany late this afternoon; he'd been up there several days looking after some measures he wanted passed. I had some things to look after myself here in town and I missed him. Had him on the phone a couple of times earlier in the evening.

"Know he had two appointments; one with George Lansing and another with Bill Masters. The last time I talked with him was about ten thirty. Masters was with him then.

"Didn't finish what I was doing until one o'clock. Called him on the private wire in his bedroom. No answer. This phone here"—Flettinger tapped his fingers against the mouth of the transmitter—"is another private line. No answer on that either. Then I rung up the regular number. Got hold of Hawkes; he's the butler, y'know."

Inspector Quinn didn't know but he inclined his head absently.

"Hawkes came down from the third floor to the second, found the big boss had been in bed. You'll probably take

a look for yourself, Charley, and you'll see that he was reading and smoking a cigar. I guess he was staying awake for my call. It was pretty important, y'know.

"Hawkes couldn't get into this room, it being locked and he not having a key, so——"

"Locked, did you say, Gus?" broke in Inspector Quinn, looking at him with keen eyes.

"Oh, that doesn't mean anything, Charley. Both of those doors have spring locks. Key's used only to get in. The old man had a key, and I've got one—nobody else. But, y'see, either door would lock itself automatically. The murderer simply shut the door behind him—the first door. The inside one was open."

"What else, Gus?"

"I got here at once in my car, for I was riding the hunch something serious had happened. Hawkes had searched the house; the big boss *had* to be in this room. I unlocked the door. The light on the desk was burning, and the boss was lying here on the floor—and that's all I can tell you, Charley." He drew a deep breath, adding tensely, positively, "There can be no doubt about the answer—Dan Morrison came out of Dorton day before yesterday to get his revenge; he got it."

CHAPTER XI.

EVIDENCE.

QUINN'S face remained impassive, his eyes fixed upon one of the Greek statues occupying its position within the marble embrasure in one of the corners of the room.

"If the lady could talk now——" began the inspector.

Gus Flettinger's head jerked up.

"Lady?" he exclaimed blankly. "What lady?" His gaze followed the direction of the other man's stare, and he smiled but without much mirth.

"Braddigan saw the telegram from Dorton warning him against Morrison?"

"Yes, I left it on the desk with a note of my own attached to it. I had a feeling Morrison would mean real business."

"In that case, Gus," Quinn argued tonelessly, "the big boss wouldn't have let Morrison into the house."

"Certainly not!"

"If Morrison did the croak he had to get inside. How?"

"Finding that out is *your* job, Charley. I'd be only guessing."

"Somebody had to let 'im in, or he broke in," said Quinn. "As you say, that's my job. There's something else: Braddigan had gone to bed. Why did he get up and come downstairs?"

Flettinger debated this query for a moment.

"Being still awake," he suggested after this pause, "maybe he heard Morrison breaking in. Come to think about it, Charley, he didn't have his dressing gown over his pajamas, and that makes it look to me as if he rushed down in the devil of a hurry. But still—just why should he have come into the office?"

The inspector produced a pad of paper and a pencil from his pocket. "The big boss had other enemies, plenty of 'em," he said in that unemotional voice of his. "I'm not saying Dan Morrison didn't croak 'im, mind you, but there's been many a mistake made taking too much for granted, and I'm taking nothing for granted."

Larry Moore, listening intently, put down the mental note: "Never take anything for granted." This in itself was a good lesson for a man who aspired to be a detective.

"The butler's name is Hawkes," went on Quinn, writing it down. "What do you know about him, Gus?"

Flettinger moved his hand in a gesture of quick, nervous impatience.

"If you want to waste good time,

Charley, that's your business. To consider Hawkes is just a waste of good time. Used to be a waiter; the boss liked him, made a butler out of him. Hawkes worshiped the rugs that the old man walked on. Scratch him off your list."

"Who else lives in the house?" the inspector continued, unperturbed.

"Servants, of course; two besides Hawkes. Cook and chambermaid. And Mrs. Braddigan's nurse; I was forgetting her."

"Nurse, huh? Is Mrs. Braddigan sick?"

Gus Flettinger tapped his finger to his forehead.

"You mean—crazy?"

"Well, not what you'd call outright crazy. Charley. Depressed, morbid. Broods; sometimes doesn't speak a word for days."

Quinn's pencil moved; he was putting down the name of Mrs. Braddigan. "Did she ever display antagonism toward her husband?"

Flettinger protested sharply, but the inspector insisted his question be answered.

"I want all the facts, Gus, all of 'em."

"It's never entered anybody's head that Mrs. Braddigan was dangerous. As far as her ever showing any open dislike for the boss, no. She just didn't speak to him, not even to answer a direct question. Turned her head away when he came into the room, but as for suggesting she might have shot him——"

"Ever mistreat her, Gus?" Quinn broke in.

"Now see here, Charley, why must we talk about those things? The old man is dying, perhaps dead by this time, and it's not very considerate——"

"Don't be so finicky," the inspector broke in coldly. "Both of us know that the big boss was one hard guy; we know that he was an ugly man to deal with when he was drunk. Oh, I

suppose he tamed down some when he'd climbed up, but back in the old days he was an ugly one to meet. I used to be a captain in Braddigan's home district. Always tangled up with some woman, and when he got tired of seeing the same face he'd give 'em a wallop in the jaw. Maybe Mrs. Braddigan felt his fists more than once, eh?"

"Nothing like that did I ever see, Charley. Anyhow, no matter what he might have done to her, she'd never——"

"Ever see a gun around the house here, Gus?"

As he asked that, Quinn leaned forward and scooped something up in his hand with a movement of such swiftness that it was impossible to determine what it was that he now held in his closed fingers.

"N-no, I can't say that I ever did," Flettinger answered slowly.

At this moment Detective Sergeant Tinsley came back into the room, brushing past Larry Moore as though the latter had been invisible. It made Larry seem very unimportant indeed, but he was determined to stick around so long as no one objected.

The inspector was giving the detective instructions, telling him to examine the doors and windows to find out if there was any evidence of forcible entry. While Tinsley was being given these orders he was standing upon one of the room's several Oriental rugs, this one spread directly in front of the fireplace. Absently Larry noticed something about that rug; there was a dull streak running through the center of it for a length of some eight or ten inches at most.

When the detective sergeant departed, Quinn turned back to Flettinger. "What do you want to lie about that gun for, Gus? I happen to know the boss had one."

"Aw, I only wanted to steer you off these blind leads you're trying to fol-

low, Charley. Yes, the old man's got a gun, an automatic; it was——"

"Yeh, I know; it was me gave it to him—out of the property room at headquarters."

Flettinger grinned faintly, rather sheepishly and reached for one of the drawers of the desk.

"He always kept it——" His voice jolted to a sudden, apparently stunned halt.

"Missing, eh, Gus?" grunted the inspector. "I'm not much surprised it is, because—take a look at this."

He opened his fingers, revealing a small cylinder of glinting brass. It was an exploded gun cartridge.

"An automatic ejects its shells as it fires, Gus, and this shell is .38 caliber. It was a .38 automatic I gave the big boss."

"Where—where did you find that? Was that what you picked up from the floor just now?"

Quinn inclined his head. "Yes, and I suppose the reason you missed seeing it is that it was half buried in the fringe of this rug. Significant little find, don't you think? Makes it look as though the big boss was shot with his own gun, wouldn't you say?"

"But," Flettinger argued explosively, "why should you suspect Mrs. Braddigan? There was no way she could have got *her* hands on it, if that's what you're driving at. I never saw her inside this room, and as I've told you before, both doors are always kept locked. The boss was always careful about that, mighty careful; naturally he didn't want anybody snooping around, trying to find out things."

He paused for a moment, his forehead screwed into a frown, and then:

"By Jove, Charley, the automatic being gone from the drawer doesn't upset my contention that Morrison did the shooting. Not a bit of it. Now, listen! The old man, y'see, was awake upstairs, waiting for my phone call. He

heard somebody—Morrison, of course—prowling through the house. The first thing he thought of the gun; he had to get it out of the desk. He made tracks for the office here, Morrison followed him in, beat the old man to it——"

"Huh!" grunted Quinn. "It would take a pretty husky bird to get a gat away from Braddigan, and I've never seen one of them kind turned out of Dorton. Morrison wouldn't have had to take Braddigan's gun; he'd have brought along his own. That doesn't score with me, Gus." He took a cigar out of his pocket, rolled it from one side of his mouth to the other. "See anything of the key?"

"Key?"

"Sure; the key to those doors. It's not in the lock, and I haven't seen it anywhere around on the floor where it might have been dropped."

"Oh, that!" Flettinger's hand came out of his pocket with a ring of keys. "Here they are, Charley; I'd forgotten picking them up."

Inspector Quinn was disappointed in forming a theory that some one else, possessed of means to enter the room, had been surprised by Braddigan, as the intruder was perhaps searching his desk; the latter, being at the drawers, would have been within easy reach of the automatic. In such an imaginary case as that it would not have been a professional prowler or yet any one employed by political enemies, for such a man would have carried a gun of his own; nor would he have had a key. Yes, this nebulous theory was by the board, and yet it was thinking along this line, doubtless, which made Quinn suggest:

"If anybody were snooping in this room, Gus, it's a pretty remote possibility that Braddigan, being in bed upstairs, would have heard 'em."

"Yes, that's so," Flettinger admitted, "unless——"

Quinn grunted a disgusted oath. "What makes you so tight mouthed with me, Gus? Have I got to pry every word out of you? Unless—what?"

"Aw, I don't mean to hold out anything on you, Charley; just doesn't seem any sense going into all these unnecessary details when it's dead open-and-shut that Dan Morrison did the shooting. What I was going to say is this: The only thing that could have notified the boss there was somebody tampering with things in this room is a little alarm system that rings a bell up in his bedroom if any one tampers with the safe."

"Safe, eh?" grunted the inspector, turning his head in a swift stare about the room. "Where is it?"

Gus Flettinger smiled faintly. "You'd look a week and never find it, Charley. If time weren't so important, I'd let you entertain yourself searching. It wasn't the big boss' idea; that crazy nut, Vreeland, who built the house, concocted the idea—always had a lot of valuable rubies, collected 'em.

"Wait, I'll show you." He got to his feet, crossed the room to the fireplace. "This looks like the real thing, huh? One chilly evening the old man decided to build a fire, found there was no flue, and that's how *we* discovered it."

A swift manipulation of his fingers, the mantel swung back easily and noiselessly.

"Open only this far," Flettinger explained. "the bell in the bedroom upstairs does not ring, but push it back wide enough to get at the safe——"

"Give us a look, Gus," Quinn broke in quickly. "Has the safe been tampered with?"

"No," Flettinger answered, as the metal door of the old-fashioned strong box, mortared into place by the bricks of what would have otherwise been the chimney, came into view.

Larry Moore gasped audibly at this

surprise, as he stared at the ingenious device. His amazement subsiding, he noticed that Flettinger was standing directly over the dull streak in the rug. A little odd, perhaps, that his eyes should fix so persistently on that. He cleared his throat, thinking to call the inspector's attention to it, but the words didn't come. Quinn might only resent his butting in. If the streak were of any importance a seasoned veteran like Inspector Quinn would have taken notice of it.

The telephone rang, the instrument on the desk which was an extension of the public number. Flettinger spun around on his heel to answer the call.

"Probably the hospital," he said, tensely; "Sergeant Dayton was to call me the moment there was news. I'm afraid——" The receiver clicked off its hook. "Hello," he answered, hurriedly. "Yes, Flettinger speaking."

A moment of silence with no sound in the room other than the metallic vibrations that crackled with the spoken words unintelligible to any ear but Flettinger's. The others did not need to hear, for they knew from the expression of his face, the grim tightening of his lips, the message that was coming over the wire.

The political reign of Thomas J. Braddigan had come to an end; the big boss was dead.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING IS DEAD.

MEN like Thomas J. Braddigan command fear and respect through the power that has come into their hands; but they are not loved. There was gravity, but nothing of grief, in even the face of Gus Flettinger, who had been associated with the politician for so many years.

"So he's dead?" repeated Inspector Quinn.

"Yes, Charley, he's dead—died while

the doctors were operating. I expected it, but still I find it hard to make myself believe it. The organization will go into other hands, probably split up into factions, and I shouldn't be surprised if John Lang is the man at the reins."

Quinn mouthed his cigar thoughtfully.

"And that's another line to feed on," he grunted; "I wouldn't put it past Lang to have had a hand in this."

Before Flettinger could make a response to that suggestion Detective Sergeant Tinsley appeared in the doorway.

"I've examined all the doors and windows, inspector," he reported. "Everything's tight as a drum. If it was Morrison, somebody hadda let him in."

Quinn, with his hands rammed deep into his pockets, swung back and forth across the room. The immobility of his stony countenance was destroyed by a deep frown. Once he paused in front of the fake fireplace and stared at the unmarred surface of the safe's metal door. Still he took no cognizance of the dull streak across the rug and Larry Moore felt that it could surely be of no consequence. Quinn belonged to that school who studied motives and had very little faith in those small, inarticulate witnesses called clues of which we hear so much.

"What's become of the butler?" the inspector demanded abruptly. "I want to ask him a few questions."

Patrolman Moore lifted his hand to the visor of his cap in a snappy salute and cleared his throat.

"I think he went upstairs after the ambulance left, sir; I heard him say something about getting dressed."

"Get him down here, officer," Quinn ordered brusquely but, as Larry turned to obey, raised his hand in a detaining gesture. "Wait a moment, officer. You're the patrolman on this beat, I suppose."

"Yes, inspector."

"How long is your patrol?"

"Only Riverview Terrace, sir, and that's two blocks."

"See anybody leave or enter this house to-night?" Quinn snapped.

The young patrolman's face turned a beet red, but he did not deem it wise to confess to the inspector that, asleep on post, a regiment might have trooped in and out of No. 7 without his being any the wiser. His job hung from a slender-enough thread, without having the higher-ups down on him.

"Two men, sir. One of them arrived in a taxicab some minutes past nine o'clock and left within, I should say, half an hour. Another came a little later. It was, as I remember, past eleven when he drove away."

"George Lansing and Bill Masters, Charley," explained Gus Flettinger.

"See anybody who looked like a convict just let out?"

"No, sir," Larry replied. It did not occur to him until much later that the shambling man might answer this description. When he did think of it, he had matters to occupy his mind that seemed of much greater importance. Besides which, if there was no evidence that the house had been forcibly entered, how could the fellow have gotten in?

"That's all then, officer. Go fetch the butler."

Larry, however, was saved the trip to the third floor by Hawkes' appearance on the stairs, now fully dressed. The latter was brought into the room and at once became the target of Inspector Quinn's questions, covering many points but resulting in nothing of any great importance.

There had been but two callers, Lansing, the up-State politician, and Mr. Masters, the lawyer. Hawkes had admitted both of them to the house, but Mr. Braddigan had accompanied each of them to the door upon their departure.

The butler was sure that the door had been made fast for the night; he was

always careful about that and remembered that it had been necessary to remove the safety chain upon admitting Mr. Flettinger.

After Masters had left, said Hawkes, Braddigan had retraced his steps to the office, had snapped out the lights, and closed the doors, announcing he intended going to bed. That had been about twelve and, of course, this established that the fatal shooting had taken place somewhere between midnight and a little past one. The butler himself had gone to the third floor shortly thereafter, had fallen asleep immediately, had heard no shot fired, and his first knowledge that there was anything wrong was when Mr. Flettinger had awakened him by calling on the phone.

Questioned about the relations between Mrs. Braddigan and her husband, Hawkes suppressed a considerable degree of indignation. To him "the king could do no wrong," and the man was totally blind to whatever faults Braddigan may have possessed, domestic or otherwise.

At length Inspector Quinn waved Hawkes aside as a witness from whom nothing more was to be learned.

"Now, Gus," he said, turning to Flettinger, "I want to go upstairs myself and see what's to be found out from a little talk with the widow."

The face of Hawkes, already ashen pale, became ghastly as his features twitched into an expression of horror.

"Widow? Is—is Mr. Braddigan dead?" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "It can't be; it can't!"

His voice choked and his eyes streamed with tears, the only true mourner, perhaps, to grieve at the passing of the big boss.

As was his place, Larry Moore moved respectfully aside to permit the exit of his superior officer. A moment later he and the butler were alone in this chamber of tragedy. The young patrolman hesitated a moment, then took a

step across the floor, dropped down on one knee at the rug spread before the dummy fireplace, and ran his fingers across the streak which, for some inexplicable reason, had so persistently intrigued his curiosity.

Loose nap of the rug, not soft and velvety like the body of it, but crisp and so brittle that it fell apart between the pressure of his fingers, clung lightly to his hand.

"Burned!" he said under his breath. "This is a burned spot, surest thing!" He confirmed this explanation of it by lowering himself until his nose was within an inch or so of the floor. Yes, that was a scorched odor that he smelled, such an odor that can belong only to wool that has been touched by fire, and so pungent as to leave no doubt that the burning had been recent.

What did it mean? How had it happened? Did it have anything to do with the murder? His brow knitted over the problem as he slowly got to his feet again. Here was something, an important something, he hoped, that Inspector Quinn had overlooked. The thing he should have done, no doubt, was to call Quinn's attention to it immediately, but an idea, no more than an ambitious fancy mayhap, had leaped into his mind.

He'd heard police-department legends about baffling crimes solved by some apparently insignificant trifle. And so, until he had considered the matter more fully, struggling for some logical explanation, he decided to keep his own counsel. This might be the chance to save his shield!

When Larry, some two minutes behind the others, reached the second floor of the house, Quinn, Tinsley, and Gus Flettinger were just being admitted to the room occupied by Mrs. Braddigan. The girl in the nursing uniform had let them in, and, about to close the door, she saw the young patrolman coming along the hall. He was scowling heavily

as he cudged his wits to answer himself the question: What had burned that streak on the rug?

His face looked grim, and she darted him a quick, fearful stare. The next instant she mastered this emotion and took a quick step toward him, no doubt greatly relieved that his frown cleared and that the look he gave her was one of nothing but friendliness.

"Have—have they found out anything, Patrolman Moore?" she whispered tensely.

He missed the note of anxiety underlying the words, although it did register upon his subconscious mind to impress itself upon him later, along with other belated realizations which were to make him feel very stupid indeed.

"Nothing for sure, Miss Flemming," Larry answered her, for there would not be the time for details. Inspector Quinn would not relish delays.

"Oh, I see; nothing for certain!" she repeated after him. "Then——"

Her lips started to frame another question, but Gus Flettinger, from within the room, spoke her name, and she turned away in nervous haste. The young patrolman followed her across the threshold.

Mrs. Braddigan was in bed, propped into a semi-reclining position by pillows beneath her scrawny shoulders. She displayed no resentment, not even interest, that all these men should invade her privacy at such an informal hour as this. Her eyes were dull, set, devoid of all expression. Her fleshless hands lay inertly across the bed's counterpane.

"You see how useless it is," Flettinger whispered in Quinn's ear. "All this is a waste of time. She's always like that—as you see her now."

Quite likely the inspector knew Flettinger was right, but that did not alter his determination to have a try at a few questions, whether they bore fruit or not. He moved two paces toward the bed.

"Did you know your husband is dead, Mrs. Braddigan?"

Surely he could not have launched his examination more startlingly, but he might as well have spoken to one of those Greek statues downstairs in the tragedy room for all the response it brought. There was not so much as the quiver of a lid across the woman's fixed, staring eyes, not even a tremor of those white, motionless hands. An almost imperceptible twitching at the corners of her mouth perhaps, but that was all.

"Don't you understand what I'm saying, Mrs. Braddigan? Your husband is dead; he has been shot." There was still no response, not even a noticeable reflex. Baffled, Quinn swung around toward the nurse.

"Is this the first knowledge she's had of the tragedy?" he demanded.

"Yes, I think so," she answered in a hushed undertone.

"Doesn't she realize what I've told her?"

"Her ears hear, but nothing seems to make much of an impression on her brain. You could have talked to her for a full hour, and she might not answer you a syllable."

"The death of her husband doesn't seem to affect her in the least—not a vestige of emotion."

"All her emotions, I think, are dead."

"She always like this?"

"Nearly always like this, yes."

Inspector Quinn stepped back from the bed and crooked his finger in a sign that he wanted her to come closer to him.

"Did you hear a pistol shot?"

"No!" exclaimed the Judith Morrison who was known in the Braddigan household as Edna Flemming. Her reply was instant and emphatic.

"Were you asleep between twelve and one?" went on the inspector's cross-examination in a low voice.

For the barest instant the girl hesi-

tated before inclining her head and murmuring: "Yes."

"Where do you sleep?"

Judith indicated the connecting room. "In there," she told him. "I am in constant attendance except when I am relieved for a few hours at a time by another nurse who is kind enough. But that's only been one afternoon when that has happened."

"Could Mrs. Braddigan have left the room while you were asleep without it awakening you?"

The girl looked up quickly, staring at Quinn for one puzzled, bewildered moment as she tried to grasp what suspicion lay behind that question. Then she understood.

"You—you don't think——" she began in a gasping, startled whisper.

"Never you mind now what I think, young woman; just answer my questions and don't bother your head about anything else."

"Oh, no!" Judith told him earnestly. "What you're suggesting would have been impossible, utterly impossible." She drew a deep breath. "You see, I always locked the door into the hall and I also remove the key—as a matter of precaution."

"Precaution against what? Mrs. Braddigan has periods of violence, eh?" As he allowed his voice to rise in its pitch so that the words must reach the ears of the woman in the bed, his eyes were fixed upon her gaunt, tragically blank face for any sign that she was listening. There was no sign that this, a broad hint that she was under suspicion, registered the slightest impression.

"No," Judith responded, "she has never been violent. Docile as a child, in fact, but with mental cases——"

"Melancholia runs to suicide sometimes, eh?"

"Y-yes, that happens sometimes, but there was never any indication——"

"Think carefully," Quinn broke in;

"you're sure you did lock the door tonight?"

It may have occurred to him that the shooting could have resulted from a frustrated attempt at self-destruction, that Mrs. Braddigan had got possession of her husband's automatic and that he had attempted to disarm her. And it was a remote possibility, needing, before any such theory could be seriously accepted, an explanation of several details. Yet such things *had* happened, and Quinn was unable to accept the guilt of Dan Morrison until he should have discovered how the released convict had gained entrance to the house.

"I am sure, absolutely sure that the door of this room was locked," Judith replied with a firmness that was not to be shaken. "I had to use the key before I let myself out into the hall when I heard all the commotion—Hawkes shouting at the top of his voice."

There were other questions and Judith now was finding it less effort to answer them. None of them knew what an ordeal it was or what a relief she felt when the inspector gave a brief gesture of finality and turned toward the hall with an abruptness that was rather startling.

"All right, Gus," he grunted to Flettinger; "we might as well go back downstairs. I want to have another look about the room where it happened."

When they were gone, Larry with a parting glance in which there was nothing but the most friendly regard—possibly a little more than just that—Judith stared after him as she slowly closed the door.

"He doesn't suspect!" she exclaimed under her breath; "he doesn't suspect *anything!* What a lucky thing it is for me that he's stupid!"

As she closed the door and turned the key in its lock, a violent reaction swept over her. She felt suddenly weak and dizzy, and her knees threatened to col-

lapse beneath her weight as she made her way unsteadily across the room, dropping limply into the nearest chair.

She did not understand now how she had been able to stand before the police inspector, thinking so quickly, almost calmly, answering all those questions without finding herself in a fatal tangle of confusion. It had been desperation, of course; nothing but desperation could have carried her through—that and luck. One word from the young patrolman, she knew, would have hopelessly enmeshed her.

Judith's head went down across her hands, elbows resting on the chair-arm and she burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing.

The woman in the bed, at the sound of the girl's weeping, turned her pale, stark face against the even whiter background of the pillows. Her lips moved; strange words, amazing words to come from the widow of a murdered man.

"It's all right, child," she was saying in a toneless whisper; "the police will never know. They will never know—from me."

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



RIVER PIRATES INFEST POTOMAC

WHILE New York Harbor has been famous from the earliest days of the city's history as the abode of swarms of river and harbor pirates who prey on shipping, it is not the only place along the Atlantic coast where these gentry ply their trade. Of late the Potomac River has been infested by water thieves who have given the District of Columbia police considerable trouble. These criminals have preyed on private yachts lying at anchor in the river and also on residences along the water front. They live in shacks built in the swampy flats bordering the river, and usually keep under cover by day, spotting likely craft and homes to plunder, and sallying forth at night to put their plans into execution.

Their preference is for vessels that are not occupied by their owners and have only a drowsy watchman in charge. If the latter should prove wakeful, it is customary to lull him to sleep with a blackjack. They also have looted many summer residences where window catches were inadequate.

In order to combat the activities of these river pirates, four patrol boats have been placed in service. During the day, the police go into the shallow estuaries of the river and seek the pirates out in their lairs, using flat-bottomed skiffs or making their way afoot. At night, the police boats travel up and down the river, using powerful searchlights to locate prowlers. Several captures have been made in this way, and as a rule, the pirates have submitted without offering resistance.



TRAPPINGS IN DARKNESS

By Laurence Sterne

Author of "A Reasonable Doubt," etc.

THE brokerage firm of Destin & Destin long had been one of the most highly respected among the smaller houses in that money-mad lower-Manhattan community known as Wall Street. Its customers were a loyal band. When they lost, as most of them did sooner or later, they could never blame the house for their troubles.

"This is a conservative commission house," Joe Destin was fond of saying. "Our friends may pay for their own mistakes of judgment, but never for mistake of ours. We have a rigid rule against speculation in behalf of the firm or its partners."

He made that speech, or one similar to it, at least once each day, sometimes more; and very likely he meant every word of it, for it was good business, when you stop to think of it.

To find a sanely conservative mind in such a man was a bit confusing to new acquaintances, for people are prone to judge by surface appearances,

thereby having only themselves to blame for going wrong. Joe Destin didn't look his part. He was the kind of man one might expect to find cracking innumerable jokes for strangers in a Pullman smoking room. He was fat, bald, jovial; given to wearing gayly checked suits and to sporting a huge diamond in his vivid cravats. His face was puckered in a fixed smile, and he slapped people on the back and shouted: "Well, what's the good word?"

But it was upon Joe Destin's shrewd brain and broad shoulders that the success of the firm had rested. Appearances are, indeed, deceptive. Take William Destin, now, his cousin and partner. Nobody, by the way, ever called this fellow "Bill" Destin. He was not that sort. He was a stiff, silent, solemn, thin-faced man of frigidly reserved manner, dressed habitually and penuriously, in rusty black. No miserly stage banker, ready to foreclose the mortgage on the heroine's old homestead, ever looked his part as did Wil-

liam Destin. One could imagine his most abandoned pleasure consisted in figuring compound interest.

Yes, appearances are deceptive. For months William Destin had been speculating secretly and disastrously. With his jovial partner safely absent, he was now completing the step which would smash the firm and give the financial district one of the darkest scandals in its long history.

It had been a blazingly hot July day, and men and markets moved listlessly. The tickers had ceased their lazy chatter two hours previously. Customers, customers' men and hangers-on had departed. Clerks and bookkeepers, last to finish, strolled out, one by one.

"Anything more, Mr. Destin?" asked his secretary.

"No," he grunted.

Little Cohen, the office manager, waited patiently.

"I'll close up, Cohen," said Destin. "You run along."

Alone, he stared from a window at the blue waters of the harbor and reviewed the situation in which he found himself. His folly had brought the house to the point of inevitable revelation—and bankruptcy. The thing had started because of his craving for money. He had never been a wealthy man. His cousin owned the lion's share of the firm, while he had only a twenty-per-cent interest. Accordingly, he reached for sudden riches—and found disaster. There was no longer any turning back. He must continue in the path he had chosen.

"I'm at the edge of an abyss," he mused, "and there's nothing to do except take the jump myself and make it a good one."

It was a waste of time, that thought. His mind had been made up for some time and all plans were now perfected. Taking advantage of the midsummer dullness of the market, Joe Destin had gone to Europe for six weeks, leaving

his partner with full charge and free rein.

During this period William Destin had converted the firm's capital securities into cash and also had dipped into customers' accounts as deeply as he felt he could go without immediately arousing suspicion. A score or more of inactive accounts yielded a rich harvest. He had bought unregistered bonds and had drawn as much cash as he safely could.

He was now in a position to lay his hands immediately upon exactly one hundred and ninety-six thousand dollars in cash and negotiable bonds. That was what he intended to do. Then he expected to step upon a train at the Grand Central Terminal and disappear.

He was certain he could do so, for there were no ties to hold him. For years he had lived a bachelor's existence in an uptown hotel. He had only to run away from New York, lose his old identity under whatever reasonable disguise he could arrange, and start anew.

This particular day had been chosen because Joe Destin was due back the following morning. A cablegram from London had settled the matter a week previously. "Arriving Platania Friday," it informed him.

William Destin had consulted a railroad time table and had bought his ticket.

At six o'clock Destin sat down at his desk and scrawled a note for his cousin.

I have played a losing game and am at the end of my rope. Check up the firm's condition and you will get what I mean. I lost most of what's missing and am taking the rest with me. The blame is all mine. I'm in so deep that I might as well go the rest of the way. Good-by.

He signed it, blotted it carefully and shoved it under a paper weight on his cousin's desk. Then he lifted a suit case from the corner, behind the door, and walked through the cashier's cage to the vault. Ten minutes later he

snapped off the office lights, locked the outer door, and signaled an elevator.

Joe Destin reached the office at noon the next day, shook hands all around, and boomed: "Well, boys, what's the good word?" Noting the absence of his partner, he inquired, "Where's William?"

"He hasn't been in to-day," replied Cohen. "I thought maybe he had gone down to meet the boat."

Half an hour later Destin found the note upon his desk. He read it through twice, as if uncertain of his eyes. Then he dropped heavily into the swivel chair and mopped his florid face.

"Cohen!" he roared.

The office manager came on the run. Destin handed him the startling message and with trembling hand picked up the desk telephone. "Get me Mason & Rogers," he commanded the operator sharply.

Cohen's eyes opened wide as he read the note. His brows lifted in dismayed interrogation.

"Don't ask me anything!" Destin snapped. "You know as much as I do. Now, listen. Keep your mouth shut until I tell you otherwise. Jump into the vault and check our securities immediately. Never mind details or loose ends. Find out whether we're broke. See what our bank balance is. Make it snappy!"

The broker turned impatiently to the telephone again, awaiting completion of his call.

"Hello, hello! Mason & Rogers? Mr. Rogers—tell him Joe Destin—Rogers? Say, jump right over here as fast as you can! We're in a devil of a mess! Can you come immediately? Good."

Rogers was the firm's attorney. He arrived ten minutes later. Destin, who had been nervously drumming upon the arms of his chair, sprang to his feet, thrust the note into the lawyer's hand and said:

"Read this and be prepared for a shock!"

Like a caged beast, the broker began pacing back and forth in the small room.

"Well, I'll be blistered!" the attorney ejaculated, whistling in amazement. "Why, he was the last man in the world I'd—say, who would've believed William Destin——"

"Nobody!" the broker cut in impatiently. "But he did. What I want you to tell me is what the devil can I do?"

"How hard are you hit?"

"I don't know yet, but I certainly expect the worst after receiving this sweet notice."

"No use trying to lay plans until you find where you stand."

They were not long in finding out. Cohen brought the bad news. His face was long.

"Looks pretty bad," he announced.

"We know that!" snapped Destin. "What I want from you is *how* bad."

"Well, of course, I haven't had time to make a thorough check but——"

"An estimate, man! An estimate!"

"At least five hundred thousand dollars short," said Cohen.

Destin groaned, sat down weakly and reached for his handkerchief.

"Are you sure?" the lawyer asked.

"I'm sure it's that much, yes, sir. I'm not sure how much more it might be!"

"Could you raise five hundred thousand dollars?" Rogers asked Destin.

"Just as easily as I can flap my arms and fly across the North River!"

"Then you're sunk. All we can do is to hurry into court this afternoon with a bankruptcy petition. The news will get around fast enough. I suppose you want to call in the police. It's a criminal case, as well as civil, of course. Plain matter of grand larceny."

"First I want to check those figures myself," Destin said, pulling himself together with an obvious effort.

With Cohen and several bookkeepers he spent an hour in the vault and with the ledgers. It was no use. The office manager's estimate of the shortage had been low. Destin figured it, roughly, at eight hundred thousand dollars!

Papers in bankruptcy, signed by three employees who claimed wages due, were filed immediately. A bored Federal judge in due process appointed a favored lawyer as receiver—one Ephraim Smith, a character worthy of study.

Late in the afternoon he arrived to take charge of the firm of Destin & Destin. He presented himself with polite humility, being old enough and gentle enough to wear his cloak of authority with becoming lightness.

"Let's hope for the best," he chirped cheerfully.

Destin, whose initial excitement had been replaced by a wordless despair as the weight of the blow emphasized itself, gazed at him in disgust, refusing to reply to so asinine a remark. Hope for the best, indeed! The receiver, he reflected bitterly, had nothing to worry about. The lawyers always got their bit in such cases!

But Ephraim Smith, obviously, was an unusual lawyer, at least unusual for New York City. He must have sailed serenely through whatever storms a full and active life of legal practice had blown up. His hair was a venerable white, as it was entitled to be, since he was seventy years of age; but his face was childishly smooth and his cheeks firm and ruddy. It was a gentle, sweet face, a face you might expect to belong to some kindly philosopher who has found satisfaction with life in a solitude far from great cities.

Perhaps the secret was that he had learned to live in peace despite the turmoil which beats a nerve-racking tattoo upon the skulls of most urban dwellers; or perhaps it was merely that Ephraim Smith was old and no longer

worried by ambitions or restless desires for vague goals always far ahead.

It was difficult to think of him as an attorney as he began the complicated task of taking over the wrecked firm, with its maze of claims and counter-claims, its four million dollars of liabilities, its three million two hundred thousand dollars of assorted assets. He went about it as simply and methodically as an aged carpenter would put together a chicken coop, piece by piece, nail by nail.

Destin answered his questions with a listless patience, gave him a more complete estimate of the shortage, passed over the note which the absconding partner had left behind him. The old man adjusted silver-rimmed spectacles and read this slowly, aloud. Then he read it again, to himself, studied it carefully, and reread it for the third time.

"Too bad," he murmured regretfully. "Too bad! A man is not himself when the gambling fever grips him. I suppose you're going to make a formal complaint to the police?"

"You bet I am! I'd like to put that thieving scoundrel behind the bars for life!"

"I wouldn't," remarked Ephraim Smith, mildly. "I sort of doubt whether severe punishment does anybody much good; but, of course, we've got to try to catch him. He's got some of this firm's property in his possession, and that's where I come in. I'd certainly like to get it back."

"Wouldn't make any difference to me. I'd still be wiped out."

"What property do you own outside of this firm?"

"I have my house up in Westchester. It cost me forty thousand dollars."

"You realize, of course, that that must be assigned to the bankrupt estate?"

"I do."

"You have nothing else?"

"Every other cent was in my eighty-per-cent interest in the capital of this firm. That amounted to two hundred and sixty thousand dollars. I've lost a darn sight more than any customer!"

"Too bad," sympathized the old man. "Too bad."

He asked Destin and a dozen employes, including Cohen, to come down next morning, as if nothing had happened, and to remain and give their assistance until further notice, the employees to be paid, of course, as part of the expense of receivership. Then he dictated a brief statement for the newspaper reporters he knew to be waiting outside.

Meanwhile Destin had telephoned the police station and a lieutenant of detectives and two plain-clothes men had arrived. They closeted themselves with the broker, took possession of the tell-tale note and asked a thousand or more questions, some silly, some profound. Late in the evening Joe Destin slunk wearily home to inform his family that their world had come tumbling down about them.

It was a mournfully changed office which he entered next day. The skeleton crew of employees moved softly, as at a funeral. The quotation tickers had been ripped out and removed. No quotation boys hopped out, slipping paste-board markers into place on the big board. No customers lounged in the chairs to swap their gossip of the market place. Joe Destin surveyed the desolation ruefully.

"Cheer up," Receiver Smith advised. "Worrying can't do any good."

"You'd worry if you didn't know where your family's food was coming from!" snapped Destin.

"Bad as all that?"

"That's my condition."

"What do you figure on doing?"

"Landing a job with some brokerage house, if I can. This is the only business I know anything about."

"Well, now, maybe I can say a word for you. Know Eddie Masterson?"

"Know his firm."

"He ought to be able to use you as a customers' man. I'll give you a letter to him. No, wait; I'll telephone him."

"Mighty nice of you, Mr. Smith. I suppose there's no word from the police?"

"No. I just had Lieutenant McNider on the phone. Sure would like to catch that scamp. Mr. Cohen and I figure he took around two hundred thousand with him."

"I've got a gloomy hunch we might as well kiss it good-by," said Joe Destin. "That boy seems to be good at making away with other people's money."

This observation would have seemed fully justified to any one who could have followed the course steered by William Destin since fleeing from New York with his suit case of stolen wealth. He had gone to Chicago, purchased new clothing far less subdued than it had been his custom to wear, and had settled down in the new Sheffield Hotel, an establishment so large that the doings of guests were never noticed so long as they paid their bills and observed the more obvious proprieties of life.

In three respects the thief disguised himself simply, but effectively. He wore a high-crowned derby hat, for no headgear so quickly changes a man's appearance. Being unfortunate enough to possess false teeth, he made excellent use of the infirmity, removing the plates whenever he left his room. This added fifteen years to the lower part of his face. Finally, he allowed his whiskers to grow. After three weeks of freedom he felt reasonably safe.

Joe Destin in the meantime had gone to work with the firm of Edward L. Masterson & Company, one of the oldest Wall Street houses. After business hours he dropped in almost every after-

noon at his old quarters to give such assistance as he could to Receiver Smith and to keep in touch with the latest developments of the case. Much of his former jovial assurance had returned. He was curious regarding the progress of the receivership proceedings, but no longer worried.

"I see you haven't caught Cousin William yet," he greeted the old receiver one afternoon. It had become a standing bit of levity with him.

"No," drawled Ephraim Smith. "I'm sort of losing hope in the police. I reckon you'd laugh at me if I told you what I did last night."

"What?"

"I went to one of these East Indian fortune tellers and asked where your cousin was hiding out," the old man confessed shamefacedly. "I don't blame you for smiling. I never took any stock in that sort of thing before, but my niece is strong on spiritualism and such mystic things and she swore this fellow told her where she had lost a ring; so I finally let her persuade me to go to him. Fellow by the name of Ahmed Bey in Fifty-sixth Street. Interesting chap."

"I bet he helped you a lot!"

"Not much, but I must admit he shook me a little. It wasn't so much what he told me as the way he said it. It's hard for a man my age to change his beliefs but I'll declare this chap impressed me as genuine."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he said something about working in a 'fog' that wouldn't lift because the spirits weren't cooperating, and complained he had difficulty recognizing a stranger."

"Sounds like bunk."

"Maybe so, but he explained after coming out of the trance that he'd like to try it again with the help of some one who knew William Destin well. He said the fact that I never had seen the man held him back unconsciously."

"He wants to get a second fee," Destin remarked scornfully.

"Probably so, but I'd like to settle the thing just for my own satisfaction. I sort of hate to believe there can be anything in the powers he claims. I've told you about it because I wanted to ask you as a favor to me to go there with me this evening."

"If you put it that way, I naturally won't refuse. I'm at your convenience."

Destin had difficulty keeping his face straight. "The old fool!" he thought.

He had dinner with the old man and at 8 o'clock accompanied him uptown to a brownstone dwelling in Fifty-sixth Street. The place looked entirely ordinary from the outside. The inside, however, was a little portion of the Orient. Marvelously soft rugs silenced their footsteps and exquisite hangings adorned the dimly lighted walls. A turbaned Indian servant ushered them in.

"The master is prepared and waiting," he announced, leading them through a dark corridor to a room at the rear of the house.

This chamber was completely curtained on four sides with heavy black velvet, and these trappings in the darkness made it impossible to judge the dimensions of the room.

To Destin it seemed as if he had suddenly stepped into an immense, silent void, a blackness without outside borders. At its center, resting upon a black-shrouded support so that it appeared suspended in air, was a large crystal ball which exuded a pale light. This soft glow was just sufficient to reveal the white turban and delicate brown face of the Indian fakir. Like the crystal, the head gave the strange impression of being suspended in air. For a black robe hid the man's body up to his chin, even concealing his hands.

"Very theatrical," Destin thought.

Yet the atmosphere impressed him

against his will. The fakir's face, for all its delicate molding, defied scoffing because of its overpowering personal dignity.

"I am familiar with your wishes, gentlemen," said Ahmed Bey in softly modulated, perfect English. "I shall try to help you. If you have doubts, I ask that you give them free play after you leave. For the present it is necessary that you cooperate. Your minds must not oppose me. Mr. Destin must think of his cousin in utmost concentration. Do not speak."

The lips became composed, and the great brown eyes closed. Minute after minute the two callers stared at that immobile face. After a seemingly endless wait the facial muscles suddenly twitched as if in strain and the eyes opened, fastening themselves with fanatical concentration upon the center of the crystal ball. The light from this immediately grew brighter.

"The cloud is lifting now," the fakir's hypnotic voice droned, "but the man I seek is at a great distance and is moving along a street in a crowd. It is hard to single him out. I think he is walking rapidly. Yes, he is almost running. He is afraid. His plans are going wrong. Some new trouble has come upon him. He is desperate. He knows the police are closing in upon him. He is hurrying to a railroad station and will flee at once to another city. Wait! Wait! Something important is on his mind. He is going to communicate with his cousin."

The droning voice suddenly ceased, and the light grew dim. The man's face relaxed to its natural soft lines.

"That is all, gentlemen. It is not entirely clear, but we are making progress. Perhaps next time I could do better."

The lights and blaring noises of the street erased from Destin's mind the involuntary awe he had felt. As they strolled toward Fifth Avenue he as-

sured himself that Ahmed Bey's performance had been an absurd piece of hocus-pocus.

"Come again!" he gibed. "That's the tip-off on all these guys."

"Guess you're right," agreed Ephraim Smith, "but the fellow did commit himself to one definite statement. He said our man would communicate with you. If he doesn't, Ahmed Bey will get no more of my money. If he does, I reckon I'll be scared to go out after dark from now on!"

"That must have been a slip on his part, or a shot in the dark. His stuff is the bunk, I tell you."

Nevertheless, at ten o'clock next morning a girl at the Masterson offices sweetly chirped, "Letter for you, Mr. Destin." Destin took it, and turned it over curiously. There was no mistaking that heavy, back-hand scrawl! His eyes popped open wide and a surge of supernatural fear gripped him. The letter was from William Destin!

I read in the paper that you got a job with Masterson. This is to inform you that I'll be needing financial assistance, as I seem to be a fool for hard luck. Was held up and robbed of all the stuff I took. Furthermore, the police have been close behind me and have kept me on the move. I'm heading farther West. Will notify you where you can reach me as soon as I know myself. If you want to get the Destin family into a still bigger pack of trouble, just try to turn me up to the cops. You know what I mean!

Destin's hands trembled and his florid face turned a sickly white. The letter was postmarked Detroit. It had been mailed hours before Ahmed Bey's prediction! He wondered if there could be any trick about it. In one of the newspaper stories regarding the failure, he remembered, there had been a line to the effect that "Joseph Destin, whose personal fortune was wiped out in the crash, has become an employee of Edward L. Masterson & Co." He compared the letter's handwriting with that of a note he had received from his

cousin in Europe six weeks previously. There could be no doubt about it! The thing was genuine.

Destin went through his work in a daze. Like many business men, he had always been intelligent and shrewd in the practical affairs of life, but without educational culture and entirely lacking in intellectual curiosity regarding things beyond his immediate understanding. The miracles of religion he accepted without thought. Until this day, however, he had been a sneering disbeliever in the possibility of more earthly miracles or occult manifestations.

Here was something that all training and previous belief warned him to doubt, but practical men are those most easily converted when proof consists of personal experience. He couldn't reject what he saw.

"Maybe it was a coincidence," he mused, "but I'll sure find out by trying Ahmed Bey again."

He went to an outside booth, telephoned the fakir's house and made an appointment. For reasons of his own, he determined to say nothing to Ephraim Smith.

The receiver telephoned him in the afternoon regarding a tangle in one of the largest accounts of the bankrupt firm.

"By the way," he added, half jokingly, "I suppose you didn't get the communication our friend referred to?"

"No," said Destin.

"I'm kind of relieved," the old man laughed, "and also ashamed that I let that humbug's jargon get on my nerves. Deep down in my heart I knew he was a fake."

"I told you it was the bunk. Believe me, old Ahmed would starve if he impressed everybody as little as he did me!"

Nevertheless Joe Destin presented himself again at the strange establishment in Fifty-sixth Street that very

evening, and as he greeted the Hindu, his expression was no longer one of curiosity but rather of respect mingled with a timorous awe.

"You desire further news of your cousin?" the Brahman asked.

"I do. All you can tell me."

"First, I want to explain to you, sir, that my powers are not supernatural in the exact sense of the word, but rest on certain mental and physical capabilities developed through long and rigorous training. For centuries this gift has been handed down by chosen philosophers and seers of my sect. Mythology traces it back to Vishnu and Siva, and through them to Brahma, Supreme Creator of All Things. I prefer, however, that you think of it as a natural power. It is natural to the extent that your full and frank coöperation is essential."

"You want me to concentrate my mind on William Destin?"

"It goes deeper than that. Your mind must be in tune, so to speak, with mine. There must be absolute cerebral harmony. Mental opposition, conscious or unconscious, will defeat me. Such opposition develops from two chief sources: first, disbelief in my power; second, deceit. Pardon me for using that last word, but it is only fair to warn that you will only waste time if you seek to use me without taking me into your full confidence. I must know everything that you know about this missing man. It is unnecessary to say that you can speak frankly in the privacy of this room."

"I'm sure Mr. Smith told you everything of importance. I don't know anything that should be added."

"Very well. We will proceed."

The Brahman's features softened into a composure resembling deep sleep, while Destin, with nerves on edge, awaited the trance and such strange message as it would yield. He had no way of following the time in

the dark chamber, but it seemed fully half an hour before Ahmed Bey moved; and after this almost intolerable wait Destin started convulsively at the first strained word.

"The cloud is moving smoke, and William Destin is unable to find sleep. It is a train. The smoke makes it difficult to see. Dimly I see a traveler reclining restlessly. He faces a crisis and is in great fear—he is harried by pursuers. Wealth has been stripped from him. He is thinking further flight is not worth while. He considers giving up, confessing everything and begging mercy. The smoke has suddenly become very dark and heavy; it is swirling around my head. I cannot see well—I am working against opposition. Something is going to happen—I can't see how soon. It is fading—fading—fading——"

Ahmed Bey gasped, and his fixed, vacant eyes closed relaxingly, then opened, again normal. The trance was over.

"It is useless to go further," the Hindu remarked calmly. "Your mind clashes with mine. All I can tell you is that some development, vital to you, is now pending. I can't get it clearly enough to advise you what to do. It is evident that you have not been frank with me."

Although the black room was distinctly cool, Destin felt the perspiration trickle from his brow. Guilty knowledge and fear of the unknown gripped him; and he felt an overpowering urge to yield before that magnetic, almost hypnotic, voice and to beg further aid. His innate shrewdness not only failed to restrain him, but even moved him to give in. After all, he thought, he was alone with Ahmed Bey, and the Indian's word would be no better than his, if as good.

"Please try again!" he begged. "I'll come clean with you."

"It is a very great physical ordeal. I

dislike to go through it again without a night's sleep."

"I'll pay you well," Destin urged frantically.

"I will aid you if you tell me the truth."

"Well," Destin murmured, "you see the truth is that I'm pretty deeply involved myself and have to watch my step."

"Ah! I see. In other words, if your cousin surrenders himself and confesses you will most certainly be implicated."

"Yes, although the fault was not mine."

"But you and William Destin are jointly guilty of this crime?"

"Legally, I suppose you might say so," Destin quibbled.

His admissions, spoken aloud, suddenly terrified him, and he wished despairingly that the words could be recalled. It was too late. Ahmed Bey laughed triumphantly, and the room was instantly flooded with light! The curtains parted and out stepped Ephraim Smith, Lieutenant McNider, and a police stenographer!

"Let's go ahead and finish the story," the old man suggested. "Anything more you want to tell us, Mr. Destin?"

Destin, as if frozen by surprise and fear, neither moved nor uttered a word.

"Perhaps I can help you decide," Ephraim Smith continued. "It's this way: We can send you to jail for a good many years. That fact interests you a great deal more than it does me. Indeed, I don't care. But I do care about seeing that your creditors get what is coming to them. I will use my influence with the district attorney in your behalf, if you tell us everything and if you make restitution. I'm going to give you five minutes to decide. Think hard!"

Destin had already started to think hard and did not require five minutes to reach a decision. Recognizing that he was trapped, he determined instantly

to squeal, hoping he could profit at the expense of his cousin.

"I took two hundred thousand dollars," he confessed in a shaking voice. "It 's hidden in a safety-deposit box. I'll turn it back to you in the——"

"You and William Destin deliberately planned the looting of your own firm?"

"No. It wasn't like that. It was all William's fault at the beginning. He began to speculate for himself, lost a little money, dipped into the funds of the house, lost a little more, and then went crazy. You know how the money can melt away down there! Well, he had almost wiped out our own three hundred thousand dollars of capital before I got wise to him.

"Now I make a little play in the market myself once in a while, although for business reasons I always kept it quiet, but I never lost my head or put the firm in danger. I was lucky until this thing came along. We were virtually insolvent and had no way of raising more capital. We talked it over, and I decided to make a desperate gamble for big stakes. Maybe you remember the day when the Black Motors pool crashed? Well, I lost close to one hundred thousand dollars in four hours. One hundred thousand dollars!

"That settled our hash. It was only a question of time before the smash came. I always thought of myself as an honest man, but had never bucked up against a temptation like that. I had always lived well, and there was my family facing poverty. It seemed——"

"I understand all that. Go ahead."

"Well, we were wiped out personally; had lost real money. But creditors would get over ninety cents on the dollar, and most of the fools would have lost their money anyway, so we figured we'd let them bear a little more of the burden and each of us would get a stake on which to start over again.

"It was William's fault, and he was single, so we arranged it to look as if

I had no part in it. That's why I went to Europe. It was all planned then and I knew just what he was going to do."

"You knew where he went?"

"We agreed he was to hide out at the Hotel Sheffield in Chicago under the name 'Edwin Duncan,' and I was to keep in touch with the police and warn him in case of emergency."

"Did you communicate with him?"

"No. There wasn't any reason to take the chance until I got his letter from Detroit. Then it was too late. I didn't know where he was going."

Ephraim Smith drew Lieutenant McNider aside. "You'd better wire the Chicago police to grab 'Edwin Duncan,'" he whispered.

This was done, and upon the following morning Lieutenant McNider received a telegram informing him that William Destin had been arrested at the Hotel Sheffield and was being held for extradition as a fugitive from justice. The lieutenant, determining to get at the bottom of the mystery, sought out Receiver Smith.

"Relieve a fellow's curiosity," he begged, "and tell me the rest of this. How did you do it? What put you wise?"

"Nothing put me wise," the old man drawled, "but when you're as old as I, you won't jump to conclusions about anything. We old bucks work slowly but don't slight the job. It seemed to me that in a decently managed brokerage house one partner couldn't juggle large sums over a period of months without the other partner having some inkling of the truth. It might be possible, but I wanted to make sure. It sounded strange to me.

"Then, too, William Destin's note put a bug in my ear. You recall the sentence in which he said, 'The blame is all mine?' Well, everybody knew that, so it seemed an unnecessary thing to say. However, he was not a man given to making unnecessary remarks,

and that made me think there might have been a purpose in it.

"The way to make sure was to trap Joseph Destin in a significant lie. I had quite a time working out a plan, but finally got an inspiration when a niece of mine was innocently telling me about this Ahmed Bey. The old fraud was entirely willing to be hired."

"It was certainly an elaborate plan," McNider commented. "It's a wonder something didn't go wrong."

"Not at all, because the only thing I actually planned was to find out whether Joseph Destin was on the square with me. The rest of it worked itself out. When Destin made the appointment last evening Ahmed Bey tipped me off, and I hastily arranged to be present with you. I instructed the Hindu to try to draw him out. The result was so good that I was almost as surprised as you!"

"There's just one other thing. How about the letter from Detroit?"

"Did you ever hear of 'Mike, the Penman?'"

"The best forger of this generation.

He went up the river a couple of years ago."

"And I went up the river after him. With the aid of a friendly warden and a hundred-dollar bill, I induced friend Mike to copy William Destin's handwriting from the original note, which I had borrowed from the district attorney's office. I sent the fake letter to an acquaintance in Detroit and had him mail it."

"But if our man had gone to Texas, wouldn't Destin have suspected a letter from Detroit?"

"I admit it was a piece of luck that William Destin happened to be in the Middle West, but I don't think it would have made much difference. The phony letter explained that the police had kept him on the jump. Furthermore, a scared man can't think clearly, and that handwriting would have deceived an expert."

"My hat's off to you! You're a darn good detective!"

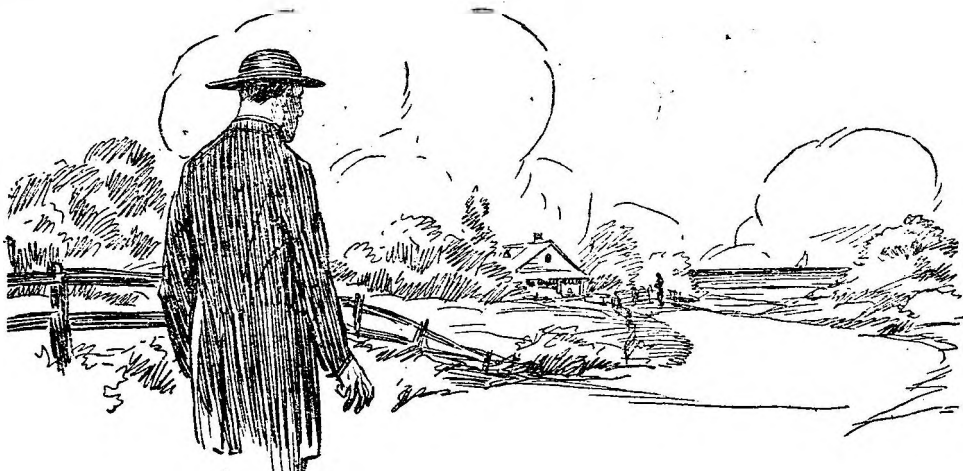
"I'm a good receiver in bankruptcy," corrected Ephraim Smith.

A SENSATIONAL PRISON BREAK

THE New Jersey State prison at Trenton was the scene recently of a sensational escape by two long-term convicts. The pair sawed their way out of their cell early in the morning and climbed down four cell tiers to the floor of the prison. Then they crept past the guard's desk, cut through a thick steel bar on an outside window, and scaled the wall with the aid of a hand-braided cloth rope. Although there was an armed tower guard less than two hundred feet away, they got to the street unobserved and made good their escape.

At five minutes past three in the morning, their escape was discovered, and warnings were at once broadcast throughout New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. Bloodhounds were called into requisition and they trailed the fugitives to a vacant house on Furman Street, but lost the scent there. It is supposed that the escaping convicts went to this house on making their get-away from the penitentiary, and that they were met there by friends and taken away in an automobile.

The prisoners who made the successful break were Frank Lombardo, who was serving from twenty to thirty years for robbery, and Sigmund Rutkowitz, doing a thirty-to-forty-five-year stretch for a similar offense. The prison guards whom the convicts passed in making their escape were suspended as a result of the exploit.



LIGHT-FINGERED LADIES

By Armstrong Livingston

Author of "Trusty Katie," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ALINE CHARTERIS is being mysteriously blackmailed for the return of letters which she wrote at boarding school to a Doctor Carlton.

She summons the services of the detective, Peter Creighton. After Peter questions her, he finds out the following:

That at the time of the episode, Carlton left for California, and soon afterward she got word that he was dead.

That she is forced to give the possessor of the letters lucrative leads to her friends' valuables. If she refused to do so, John Annis, her fiancé, would be shown the letters.

She has already given two leads for which she has received two of her letters.

After getting all the information, Creighton visits Laurence Verney, whose amulet has been stolen by the blackmailer.

At Professor Verney's house, Creighton hears the butler's story of the theft. Moreover, he finds a copper-colored hairpin, and decides that the thief was a red-haired woman. He also has her finger prints.

Upon speaking to McGillicuddy, another detective, Creighton discovers that he also has a case of blackmail in which the blackmailer returns one letter at a time.

The professor suspects Aline as an accomplice, and when she visits him, his suspicions are strengthened.

Kitty Doyle, one of Creighton's operatives, follows Julie Lavergne, Aline's maid. The maid's destination is a certain bench in Central Park. Here she is joined by a girl with red hair. The latter gives Julie money. When they part, and Kitty decides to follow the red-haired girl, she finds that she has lost her.

Rose and Jimmy Horton, Creighton's assistants, report that Carlton is alive and is expected to be in New York.

CHAPTER X.

COMPETITOR KELLY.

NOTHING in the world could have been more pleasing to Jimmy Horton than the news of his assignment, which he received from Rose. He grinned cheerfully at her earnest exhortation to take care of himself no matter what else he

did, and departed from the office for his home in Brooklyn with spirits attuned to the beautiful weather.

He had elected to pursue his initial researches in his flivver, and by noon-time he was speeding along a well-metalled road en route to Berwick, his heart singing as contentedly as the engine of his car. Here was the attractive side of detective work—a swift

spin in a good car over a perfect road, with a warm sun on his back and a cool breeze in his face, and a fair chance to distinguish himself at the end of the journey. What more could a man ask?

Before he had reached the peaceful little town that was his destination he had pretty thoroughly mapped out his campaign—subject, of course, to such alterations as might be forced on him by circumstances beyond his control. He was a bit nervous about one feature of his program, involving as it did a distinct fracture of the laws of the sovereign State of New York, and he rather wished that Creighton hadn't stipulated keeping out of jail. Well—something must always be left to Providence!

Berwick lay well in the direction of the north shore, nestling cosily enough in a broad swale between two low hills. The highway Jimmy was following went over the crest of the first, swooped down through the village, rose again, and passed out of sight beyond the top of the second hill. Jimmy checked his car at a point whence he could briefly reconnoiter the scene of his immediate adventures.

It had been brilliant moonlight the night before when he and Rose had conducted their exploratory expedition, and he had no difficulty now in recognizing the points that held the highest interest for him. There was the drug store whose proprietor had proved such a mine of information; there was the shingled cottage, on the hither edge of the town, that belonged to Carlton; there was the trim little railroad station, the starting point of his present investigations.

It had occurred to Jimmy that since Carlton was coming to New York broke it would not be likely that he either had a car or could hire one. Gentlemen of limited financial resources use railroads, when they don't walk, and Jimmy thought a visit to the station was now

in order. He released his brakes and drove slowly on.

The Carlton cottage, as he passed it, did not seem to have changed since he last saw it by moonlight. The shutters were still closed tight, its atmosphere of unoccupied calm still undisturbed. It was high time that Carlton did something with his property, thought Horton, for the gate that gave entrance from the sidewalk was swinging by one rusty hinge. The piazza sagged ominously in the center, shingles were missing from the roof and the fanlight over the front door had been shattered by an accurate stone or snowball.

Not a soul was visible in the station, but Jimmy traced a gentle clicking noise to its source. On the other side of the building, within earshot of his telegraph, a portly, middle-aged man with a green eye shade, blue trousers, and shirt sleeves was industriously practicing putting on a small patch of lawn. He looked up as Jimmy appeared, though he managed to keep a pleased eye on the last ball he had tapped until it had trickled across the grass and *plinked* into a sunken tomato can.

"Hello! Something I can do?"

"Nothing important," replied Jimmy. "Don't interrupt your putting; a man needs all the practice he can get at this time of year. I just came in to ask you if you could direct me to Doctor Carlton's house—Doctor George Carlton."

"Sure thing. Drive two blocks to the main road, then turn right for three. It's a corner house with a shingle roof painted red—or it used to be painted, anyhow." The golfing gentleman had retrieved six balls from the cup, as he spoke, and placed them neatly along the edge of the improvised green. "Funny you should ask for him."

"Huh? Why's that?"

"'Cause you're the second this mornin'—and Carlton only got back to-day."

"Oh." Jimmy's heart gave a little jump of joy. The hunch that had prompted him to come here had been a good one! "He's been away, then?"

"Carlton? Sure—going on three years." *Plink!* "Play golf?"

"Just learning," admitted Jimmy. "Got back this morning, eh?"

"Yup." *Plink!* "If you're lookin' for him, though, you're out of luck; he went back to New York on the noon train." *Plink!*

"Pshaw!" Jimmy's heart plinked in common with the golf ball. Carlton might return, doubtless would, but for the minute he had missed him. "Well, I'll slip around and stick my card under the door anyway."

"Uh-huh." *Plink!*

"Who else was asking for him—any one you knew?"

"Nope. Never saw him before." *Plink!* "Tall, sandy-complexioned chap."

"Oh! Well, thank you. Good day!"

"Good——" The station agent never finished the sentence; his sixth ball had merely rimmed the cup, and he himself was lost in that fourth dimension whither golfers seem to go when they miss a putt.

Jimmy drove slowly back from the station, but before he reached the main road again he parked his car and continued his way on foot. He proposed to visit Doctor Carlton's house, even if the doctor weren't there, and an empty car sitting too long before an empty house might attract undue attention.

He had learned from Creighton the uselessness of bewailing spilled milk, and he wasted no time now in regretting the temporary check he had received. It was annoying, certainly, but it was no one's fault and it couldn't be helped. He would proceed as he had planned and trust for better fortune to reward his efforts.

He sauntered slowly along the main road until he reached his goal. Then

he pushed open the damaged gate—noting with satisfaction that its one rusty hinge shrieked loudly—stepped inside and shut it behind him. He strolled up the grass-grown path with an air of perfect assurance, but mindful of the fact that an apparently empty house sometimes isn't. He patted the side pocket of his coat to make sure that he had his old-time ally with him—a package of Poulter's Perfect Powder for Pernicious Pests. With that valuable domestic article to serve at once as an introduction and an alibi, Jimmy would have rapped at the gates of Buckingham Palace and demanded audience of the Queen of England.

He strode on to the shaky porch and pressed the button beside the door. Presently he pushed it again, and as his attentive ear heard no ring, concluded it must be out of order. He abandoned the bell and knocked on the wooden door with his knuckles, but only a hollow echo from within the house answered his summons, reverberating eerily.

Jimmy glanced about the surrounding country. No one was to be seen, and the only two houses from which he could be observed were to all appearances deserted. He used his body as a shield for what he was about to do, and cautiously tried the handle of the door.

Locked! Bolted, too, from the way the door resisted the pressure he applied with his knee. Carlton, then, must have left by another door—one in the rear, probably.

A narrow path skirted the building, and Jimmy knew from previous observation that the rear of the house was hidden from public view by a hedge of tall lilac bushes. That was indubitably the better spot for an amateur burglar, and Jimmy forthwith hopped off the porch and went there. He risked being seen for just the few seconds he was on the path, and if any one chanced to notice him and came butting in—well,

nothing ventured nothing gained, and he would trust to finding a ready lie to account for his suspicious actions.

Once at the rear door, he waited quite five minutes on the chance that some such inquisitive interloper might put in an appearance. None did, and Jimmy tried the door.

It opened to his touch. That gave him pause, for it was not to be expected that an empty country house should be left unlocked—and a careful burglar shies at the unexpected until he has satisfied himself that it presages no calamity for him.

Examination showed that the outer woodwork of the door had been deeply scarred, and the lock forced. Horton nodded his head after a bit of thinking, believing that he had guessed the truth.

"Jimmied," he mused. "Carlton lost his key some time during the past three years, and when he came here this morning he had to break into his own house." A happy thought came corollary to this. "By gosh, that means he's surely coming back—he'd never go off and leave the house unlocked indefinitely!"

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him, careful to leave it as he found it. Then he looked about and discovered himself in the kitchen, facing a passage that led to the main part of the house.

His own light footsteps were the only sound that broke the silence as he advanced along the passage and made his way into a dining room. This was completely furnished, as was a living room that opened off it, and but for the heavy coat of dust that lay upon everything the room might have been in use up to that very hour. That dust would have been embarrassing in the extreme for young Mr. Horton if it had been his desire to search the house thoroughly without leaving any trace of his presence, but he could not see the necessity for doing so. It was highly im-

probable that Carlton had left anything either valuable or incriminating in an unoccupied house for three years, and if he had, he had presumably removed it that morning to safer quarters. If he came upon a desk with papers, Jimmy would give them a cursory examination; it was there he might best hope to find some clew to the doctor's habits, friends, business and—crimes! But apart from that it was simply his intention to lie low until Carlton reappeared, when he would "shadow" him for the rest of his life if need be until the trail led to the more active members of the blackmailing gang.

In a small front room that had evidently been used as an office he came upon just such a desk as he was looking for—and came there second to some one else, judging by the confused litter of papers that lay on its surface. Somebody, doubtless the doctor himself, had wanted something in a hurry, and had scattered letters, bills, receipts and other documents helter-skelter in his search. Jimmy regarded the mess glumly for an instant, then sat down in front of the desk and proceeded methodically to go through the disordered papers. He had just enough light to do this comfortably, for two slats were missing from a near-by shutter and through the gap came a brilliant ray of sunshine in which the dust motes danced.

Jimmy sat with his back to the single door of the room, a tactical error for which he should have been shot at sunrise, as he afterward confessed to Rose. The air in the office was stale and warm and heavy, and the task on which he was engaged none too interesting. Except for the rustle of the papers beneath his fingers, the silence of the grave brooded over the house. Jimmy had been out very late the night before, and soon the natural result of all these circumstances began to make itself felt. His head nodded, and twice he caught

himself and rubbed his eyes; a third time it happened, but on this occasion he was saved from slumber after a fashion that left him very wide awake indeed.

He had heard no sound, and the pressure of something hard and cold against the nape of his neck gave him the shock of his young life. A frigid voice spoke crisply from behind him.

"Doctor Carlton, I believe? Put 'em up, doc—right up!"

Clearly a case of mistaken identity, but the nasty emphasis on the last word of the command suggested that it was a moment for obedience, not argument. Jimmy raised his hands, and in a somewhat nervous and deprecatory way pivoted his body on the chair until he was facing his assailant. Then he spoke, coolly enough.

"I'm not Doctor Carlton; I think I ought to tell you that before you start the massacre."

Easily the most prominent thing in sight when Jimmy turned was the business end of an automatic pointed straight at his head; it was only by an effort that he took his eyes from that fascinating object and shifted them to the tall, sandy-complexioned young man who held it. He assumed correctly that this was the other chap who had been making inquiries at the railroad station.

"If you're really on shooting terms with the doctor," went on Jimmy slowly, "I think I ought to warn you that he's liable to appear in that doorway any minute and cover us both."

To his immense relief the stranger stepped back a pace and allowed the hand that held the gun to drop to his side. An expression of deep disappointment appeared on his reddish, smooth-shaven face.

"No, you're not Carlton." He scrutinized Horton's ugly, if attractive face. "In fact, by George, I recognize you! Aren't you working for a private detective named Creighton?"

"Correct; but you have the advantage of me."

"Oh, we never met. I happened to be in court one afternoon when you were giving testimony at a murder trial—the Rossiter case, wasn't it?"

"I see. But will you tell me, please, who you are and why you are gunning for Carlton?"

He of the sandy complexion hesitated briefly, then seemed to come to an abrupt decision. He drew a flat, leather card case from his pocket, opened it, and held it out for Jimmy's inspection. One side of the case held his photograph, the other a printed card informing the world that the gentleman depicted was Richard Kelly, employed in the investigation department of the Jewel Insurance Company.

"Oh-ho!" muttered Jimmy thoughtfully. "I guess I can put two and two together and make four. Are your crowd interested in the theft of a certain pearl necklace?"

"Deeply interested," admitted Mr. Kelly, for some reason looking gloomier than ever. "So you know about that, do you? I needn't ask, then, if that's what you're after."

"Wrong, Kelly! I wouldn't hesitate to grab that necklace if it came my way, but I'm after Carlton on another count."

"Oh, are you?" Kelly seemed unconvinced. "What?"

"Can't tell you—private matter."

"H'mph!" There was sorrow and skepticism in that sniff. Kelly was clearly of the tribe of Doubting Thomas. He scratched his chin raspingly with his free hand, and added hopefully, "Maybe we can team up."

"Help each other? I'm willing! We both want Carlton—and if we run him to earth together I'll promise to waive on the necklace. Is that fair enough?"

"Uh-huh! I guess so."

"Do you figure on arresting him if you catch him?"

"Er—no. My instructions are merely to recover the pearls, if possible. Are you packing handcuffs yourself?"

"Nope. I'm out to recover something else—quietly."

Jimmy grinned as he spoke, and Kelly's gloom lightened a trifle.

"Secretive pair, aren't we?" he commented. "Anyway, Horton—that's your name, isn't it?—our common object is to catch Carlton. What dope have you on our chances?"

"I think they're good." Jimmy rapidly retailed the information he had gleaned that morning, and explained his reasons for thinking that Carlton must eventually return to Berwick. "I've figured on waiting here like a cat at a mouse hole."

Kelly nodded understandingly.

"Say, you were ahead of me at the station; what have you been doing since?"

"Asking questions around town, and keeping an eye on incoming trains. Didn't notice you getting off."

"I flivvered from Brooklyn."

"Hope you didn't leave your car outside." A speculative gleam appeared in Mr. Kelly's blue eye. "There's none there now."

"No, I parked it three blocks down, around the corner. By the way, how did your people connect Carlton with the loss of that necklace?"

"We stood a loss on an emerald pendant a year ago; Carlton was East then for a trip. We couldn't prove anything, but we've been watching him ever since. The emerald was recovered from a fence, but he either couldn't or wouldn't identify Carlton when we arranged to confront them in the lobby of Carlton's hotel. We got our money back with the pendant, of course, so we rather dropped the matter without actually losing sight of Carlton. The fact that he was East when the pearls were lifted, and in Chicago when a string answering their description was

offered to a jeweler there, stirred up our interest in him again. The pearl deal fell through, and we hope he still has the necklace."

"Did he offer the pearls himself in Chicago?"

"Nope. Too foxy for that. There's a gang of them, evidently, and if I can't shake the loot out of Carlton I hope to find out through him where their headquarters is."

"How?"

Mr. Kelly shrugged his shoulders, which were broad and powerful. He seemed to intimate that there were some things better left to the imagination. Then he slipped the automatic in his pocket.

"Glad we're going to work together, Horton," he announced. "I expect you're going to help me a lot. I'll come back here presently, and then we'll keep watch and watch until our man turns up. Might not be a bad idea if I brought back some provisions."

"Where are you going? It's risky to keep slipping in and out."

"I want to call up my office. It's worth the risk, Horton; I think they may have later news of Carlton. Like some sandwiches?"

"A dozen or so will do! Say, do me a favor; call up Creighton's office while you're about it and tell him what I'm doing."

"Sure." Kelly waved his hand. "Mustn't waste time. Ta-ta!"

He strode off swiftly; for a large man he walked lightly, and his rubber-soled shoes made no sound on the wooden floors. He left the house by the rear door, made his way by the path to the front gate, and stood there a moment while he calmly lighted a cigarette. He was quite of the opinion that the best way to avoid suspicion was to act in a perfectly natural manner. His lips moved silently as he called on his memory for something Jimmy had said.

"Three blocks down, around the corner. That's it."

He departed in that direction. As he went, he drew an envelope from his pocket and read the brief message written on the single sheet of note paper it contained. "Sound View Cottage. Inlet, Long Island. Wednesday evening."

A most intriguing message. It said little, but to a thoughtful man like Mr. Kelly it intimated much. He had abstracted it from Carlton's letter box, wherein the mail man had deposited it while Jimmy was going over less important letters in the house, and having read it, he had not troubled to put it back. So long as he got to Inlet himself, it was a matter of perfect indifference to him whether the doctor ever did or not.

He was acting on the assumption that Carlton would not have come to New York broke—he had to thank Jimmy for that tip—if he had had a fifty-thousand-dollar necklace in his possession. If he didn't have it, then some one else had. Was that some one else going to be at Sound View Cottage that evening? Mr. Kelly inclined to that belief.

He replaced the envelope in his pocket. Arrived at a point three blocks down and around the corner, he inspected the car which stood there and found it good. He jumped in lightly, seated himself at the wheel and touched the starter; the engine broke into responsive music. Mr. Kelly smiled approval.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Horton," he murmured, "you're going to help me *quite* a lot!"

CHAPTER XI.

MADEMOISELLE.

ONE—two—three—four—five—six; turn; one—two—three—four—five—six; turn; one—two—three, et cetera. Thus the professor paced to and fro

the length of the rug before his desk and back again. It was now two thirty in the afternoon of the day following his interview with Aline, and the professor had been patrolling that same beat since shortly after breakfast, with only a brief interval for lunch. That he was not exhausted, but still fresh as the proverbial daisy, was convincing testimony to the unimpaired vitality of his slender body.

He had awakened that morning with the consoling belief that the day would certainly see either the return of his precious amulet or the opening of negotiations to that end. In his own heart and mind he had given his youthful cousin an honest, impartial trial, and the verdict brought in by his common sense was still "Guilty!" The more he thought over the circumstances of the theft the more certain he was that Aline had had one of her dainty fingers in the pie.

In that case he had made his offer to deal with the thieves in exactly the right quarter, and his impatience waxed as the hours went by and they showed no sign of responding. Blast 'em! He didn't let grass—or the nap of a Persian rug—grow beneath his feet! Why should they? Dod-rotted descendants of defective dumb-bells. The professor's hands clasped behind him as he walked, slapped each other restlessly.

One—two—three—four—five—six; turn—

At quarter to three the front doorbell rang, and the quick ear of the professor caught the sound. He was waiting at the door of his library when the house boy presented a tray bearing a card.

"A young lady calling, sir."

"Who is she? What's her name?"

"Miss—Miss"—the boy made an honest effort—"Doo-pooey!"

The professor snatched at the card.

"Miss Dupuy, idiot. Show her up!" A gleam of triumph shot from his eyes

as the servant vanished. "Miss Corinne Dupuy, eh?" he muttered. "Detectives be blowed—leave it to me to get action!"

The satisfaction died swiftly from his face, however, and he was grim enough when a vision in blue appeared in the doorway. He stood in the center of the room, his legs apart, his arms akimbo, and glared frigidly at his caller.

"Miss Dupuy? Come in, please, and shut the door!"

She came in. She was dressed exactly as she had been the day before in the park, and if her clothes didn't shout "Paris" at the professor they still impressed him no less than they had Kitty Doyle. Before he quite realized what he was doing he had crossed the room and shut the door himself.

"You are Professor Verney?" Her voice, faintly tinged with a French accent, was soft and pleasant to the ear. She regarded him frankly from long-lashed violet eyes. "Such a famous savant—I never dreamed to find so young a man! I am charmed to meet you, m'sieu."

"H'mph! Sit down!"

Miss Dupuy did not sit down. She crossed the room instead and stood with her back to him, gazing at a varied collection of objects of art that ranked his library with a wing of the Metropolitan. She drew a little breath of appreciation.

"You have such beautiful things, m'sieu, and so many. I noticed them the other day—though I could not stop to look."

"Yes, that was too bad. We were sorry you couldn't stay longer—say until the police could get here!"

If she heard that, she chose to ignore it. With a soft cry she darted, bird-like, a few paces to one side.

"This—over the mantel! A Corot—surely it is a Corot!"

"Yes, it is."

"Ah, but it is exquisite! It is a tiny bit of my France! How I wish that were mine!"

"I trust you're not thinking of taking it with you."

She faced him quickly, threw back her head, and the room was filled deliciously with the music of her laughter; he noted the ripple of her throat muscles beneath the smooth, white skin.

"You are most amusing, m'sieu!"

"Indeed? I have no desire to be. I wish you would sit down."

She obeyed this time. She sank gracefully into a deep armchair, and when she crossed her slim legs it was only at the ankle. She smiled bewitchingly at a young-old gentleman who was finding it increasingly difficult to remain grim.

"*Hélas*—yes; we have business to discuss—and in this great country art must always wait on business. Is it not so?"

"In this case—most decidedly! Have you brought my amulet?"

"Gracious, *no!* Do you think me mad? Bring it here, to have you call the police and take it from me! *Tiens!*"

The professor's back became like unto a ramrod. He glared at her.

"Must you add insult to injury, mademoiselle? You received my message, did you not? I keep my word—even to a thief!"

"Pardon?" There was astonishment in her wide-open eyes. "I received no message, m'sieu; how could I? I do not understand!"

He was completely taken aback.

"But assuredly I sent you one, or thought I did," he muttered, perplexed. "If you got none, how dared you come here to-day like this? How did you know I wouldn't call the police and—send you away?"

She gave the tiniest shrug of her shoulders.

"You might revenge yourself on me,

which wouldn't really do you much good, and you would certainly never see your amulet again—which I think would be very bad."

The professor did not care to admit just how bad it would be. He saw the force of her position. There crossed his mind a fearsome vision of Broun appearing at the Museum of Antiquities Saturday morning to learn that one of the most interesting archeological specimens in the world had been—er—abstracted and lost by a trusted member of the staff. His brow grew damp in proportion as his mouth went dry.

"My suggestion," he said, clearing his throat, "was five thousand cash and no questions asked. A very fair offer, mademoiselle, if you reflect that there is no other market in which you could dispose of it. You would do very well to accept."

"My instructions were to demand ten thousand." She dropped her eyes and appeared to be admiring her silk ankles. "As for other markets—has m'sieu considered that the Museum of Antiquities might be persuaded to redeem its trinket?"

The professor rallied with difficulty.

"I won't conceal from you, young lady, that I am very desirous of recovering my property. However, there is a limit to what I'm prepared to pay. I will split the difference with you and make it seventy-five hundred." Despite her lowered gaze, he discerned a flash of satisfaction in the blue eyes. It emboldened him to firmness. "That is my best offer; you will waste your time and mine if you argue the matter further."

"Seventy-five hundred—in fifty-dollar bills, m'sieu?"

"As you please."

"Safe conduct for me before and after the exchange?"

"That is already in the bond, mademoiselle."

"*Alors*—it is a bargain!"

"A bad one for me," said her victim, crossly.

"Shall we say to-morrow afternoon at three—just inside the entrance to Central Park at Seventh Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street?"

"Wait!" The professor had suddenly recalled the existence of Peter Creighton, who had been so optimistic over the chances of recovering the amulet before Saturday. Seventy-five hundred was seventy-five hundred; why not give the detective a chance to make good? Verney ruffled his hair nervously and elected to risk it. "I'll have to sell some securities to make up that cash amount." Fortunately that was true, and he did not have to blush! "Let us say the day after to-morrow—Friday. That would suit me much better!"

"As you wish, m'sieu," murmured the girl unconcernedly. Her eyes were resting longingly on the Corot, as though she felt that art might now have its innings. "Can I look at some of your things, before I go?"

"Oh, help yourself, help yourself!" said her host, ironically.

In all his varied experience it had never yet befallen him to play cicerone among his treasures to a charming young woman whom he knew to be a thief. The situation was piquant. It would make a good story some day—if only things turned out so that he might tell it!

They drifted slowly about the room, the professor expatiating mechanically on the beauties of the objects they examined while surreptitiously studying his companion. She presented an enigma to his scientific mind. Also, it gradually dawned on him that occasionally his explanations of the various pieces were cut short, not by her lack of interest, but by her evident prior comprehension of their values.

"Where did you learn about these things?" he demanded, finally.

"Ah, m'sieu, that has to do with my past!"

"Then your past does not march with your present, mademoiselle." He added abruptly, "I have been examining your face, and——"

"I am told it is quite a good one, m'sieu!"

"I agree. It is a good face in the sense that it is not a bad one. You have none of the physiognomic traits of a thief."

"Ah—thief—thief—thief! But you are fond of that word, m'sieu! However, your science is not necessarily wrong; I assure you, I am a thief by choice, not by instinct or heredity!"

"By choice? Will you tell me why you have chosen so despicable a career?"

Her face hardened. "I am not a specimen to be put beneath your glass, m'sieu."

"I asked as a friend, not a criminologist."

"*Eh, bien*, there is no reason why I shouldn't tell you. Make what you please of it. It was the war, m'sieu, and what came out of the war. When I was fifteen, we were in comfortable circumstances—my father, my mother, my brother and I. My brother was killed the day the armistice was signed, and the shock of that killed my mother. My father saw all his little investments wiped out. He was a savant, m'sieu, like yourself, and he did not know how to recoup his losses. We grew poorer and poorer, until the day came when we were starving. At length it was finished for him—he lies now in the potter's field of Paris.

"Then came to me the only friend I have—except one. He was a young Englishman, a student at the Sorbonne who had known my brother. He, too, had suffered from the war, and he had made up his mind quite calmly to be revenged upon society. He told me his plans, and when he showed me how

easily I could help him if I chose, well, I agreed. We came here to America, where neither of us was known, and—*voilà tout!* Only, make no mistake about me, m'sieu, I knew what I was doing and I have had no regrets."

"H'mph! This man—is he your lover?"

She had been slightly turned away from him; now she faced him swiftly, crimson flaming in her cheeks, blue lightnings flashing from her angry eyes.

"*No!* He is not! How dare you ask me such a thing? But that is your type of mind—*hein?* You are like all the rest—the filthy Pharisees who think because a woman is bad in one thing she must be bad in everything! *Pah!*" She stamped a foot at him. "I despise you!"

He survived that squall intact.

"Tut, tut, my child. I merely asked for information, with a perfectly logical reason for desiring it. No one can help a woman in love, but if she is not in love—*eh?* What then?"

"Help her?" Sheer puzzlement went far to subduing her anger. "Is it possible—you are suggesting that *you* might help *me?*"

"Why not? I am an impulsive man, mademoiselle, and often I act on my impulses—sometimes wisely, sometimes not. Perhaps I am making a mistake now. Even then it is not a discreditable one—the desire of an old fool to help a—*young* fool, shall we say?"

"But you cannot help me, m'sieu."

"I can try. I can ask you to figure your position for yourself. You are not naturally a criminal; I'll swear to that by the gods. Give up this childish nonsense about revenging yourself on society. *You can't get away with it!* Give it up, like a sensible girl!"

"And starve? *Merci*, m'sieu!"

"No, *work!* Look here." He waved a hand about him. "This is one room in a large house that is packed from

top to bottom with curios and antiques, some valuable, some rubbish. They need classifying, cataloguing, arranging—just the sort of task that you would love. You are competent to do the work, under my guidance at first. You would receive a small salary, and this home would be your own. Well?"

She drew a long breath as he ended on that questioning note. She had not taken her eyes from him as he spoke, and she continued to regard him almost wistfully. Finally she gave a soft little sigh.

"You are very kind, m'sieu. I won't deny that you tempt me. But there is something in my heart that compels me to say no. It's another foolish quality from which women suffer besides love—loyalty. The young man of whom I spoke—my Englishman—he has been very good to me and he still needs me. He is the only friend I have except my old nurse with whom I bank my earnings; until he fails me, I shall not fail him, m'sieu!"

"Moultng Moses! What paltry piffle!"

She shrank back from that explosion until she realized that no personal violence was intended. Then she gurgled softly in amusement. As the last liquid note died away she glanced toward the mantel at the clock. It was nearly four.

"I must go, m'sieu." The wistful expression was back in her eyes. Slowly, hesitantly, she drew off the gray suède gauntlet from her right hand. "You have been very kind; what can I say but thank you? And will you permit a thief to take your hand?"

He took her slender hand in one of his nervous brown ones, and almost instantly a change came over his bearing. His clasp tightened, his head bent as he raised her hand until, with her European training, she half supposed he intended to press his lips to her

fingers. Instead, he spoke in accents of repressed excitement.

"That is a curious ring you wear, mademoiselle!"

"Ah, yes." She held it up for him to see. "Naturally, you are interested in that; it is very, very old. Egyptian—of the Eighteenth Dynasty!"

"Yes—yes—so I see. You got it—where? Some bazaar, perhaps?"

"No, m'sieu; I took it from my father's finger as he lay in death."

"Your father's finger!" He released her hand and passed his own through his tousled fluffy hair. "One minute, mademoiselle, while I try to think. Yes, it comes back to me slowly. That young Frenchman with whom I was associated for a few months in Cairo—a brilliant archeologist! We would certainly have become fast friends if our paths had not led us far apart. As it was, when the day's work was ended we would sit on the roof of our villa, beneath the silver stars, and we would talk like lonely men of home. Yes, I remember now. He would twist and twist that ring upon his finger, and his speech was always of his wife and children—especially of his little three-year-old daughter, Corinne!"

He stepped close to her, searching her face that was white now to the lips.

"I'm not looking for criminal traits this time, but for a resemblance. And I find it! You are that little Corinne, and your father was Armand Devilliers." There was a note of dismay in his voice. "You—Devilliers' daughter!"

"Ah!" It was a sob. "You have discovered the secret I thought would die with me. How should I guess that here in America one would see this ring who knew it? Fate! It is fate!"

"A kindly fate, then; after this you must accept my offer."

"No, no!"

He was too wise to press her in this rebellious mood.

"Very well, then; but at least, if you get into trouble you will not hesitate to come to an old friend of your father."

"No, no!" In her blue eyes came panic. "You will not see me again. Some one else shall meet you Friday in the park. As for me, if you are really a friend of my father's, you will forget me. Adieu!"

Before he had fully grasped her intention she had flashed to the door of the library, flung it open and gained the hall. She was halfway down the stairs before he reached their head.

"Corinné!" he cried. "Come back!"

The slam of the front door was his only answer.

He went slowly back to his library, dejected in no small degree. First, Aline, and now this extraordinary discovery of Devilliers' daughter in the person of a thief—both growing out of the rape of his amulet! If that charm had brought fortune to Cuanha, it had apparently exhausted its virtue then.

Suddenly he started violently, stung by a sense of his own remissness. There he was, standing like a fossilized fool when he should have been arranging to have the girl followed.

He tore madly into the hall, shouting for Pelter. At the head of the stairs his career was rudely cut short by a terrific impact as he collided with an ascending body.

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon!" The house boy was apologetic between his gasps. "Pelter, sir? He went out a little while ago. He told me to bring you this note when you were free, sir."

"Gimme it!"

He snatched the sealed envelope and tore it open; eagerly his eyes raced along the neatly written lines.

When I recognized her through the iron grille I instructed the boy, Charles, to admit her. Not being able to communicate with you privately, I am taking the liberty of acting on my own initiative. I will station

myself outside the house, and when she leaves I will follow her. At the earliest possible moment I shall report to you anything of importance that I may be fortunate enough to discover. I trust this course of action will meet with your approval. Obediently yours,

PELTER.

The professor sighed happily. He read the note again and then, an opportunist always, used the missive as a fan upon his heated brow.

CHAPTER XII.

KELLY'S COUP.

THE old gentleman's been giving her 'what for,' decided Mr. Pelter. Such was the conclusion he reached from a glance at Corinne's face as she passed him on Fifty-seventh Street, much too close for his comfort if the truth were known. She had shot out of the house and sped up the block so swiftly that she had come upon him by surprise.

"Rattled," opined Pelter, settling to his self-imposed task of pursuit. "I'll bet she smarts all over; he's quick with his tongue when he lets himself go. She looked as if she didn't know whether she was walking on her hands or her feet. All confused and upset, you know."

His observation was shrewd, and correct enough, even if it was based on inaccurate premises. The pretty girl in the blue costume had certainly shown every evidence of extreme agitation; she did not merely hold her blue silk bag, she clutched it; her pace was not only hurried, but her step was uncertain—and that, the butler knew from his glimpse of her face, was because her eyes were suffused with unshed tears. From his intimate knowledge of his master, it was not surprising that he mistakenly supposed the professor had been giving her "what for;" probably his own agitation would have outdone the girl's could he have known that Verney had seriously

offered a refuge in his own home to the "hussy in pants."

"Glad she *is* upset," mused Pelter. "She's that much less likely to be on her guard—not," he added contentedly, "that I think she'd recognize me in this disguise."

He pondered the mysterious way in which the most insignificant objects will sometimes turn out in the future destined to play important rôles in this queer drama we call life. A man might decide one morning to drop in at the cutler's and buy a new carving knife, nor dream that on the morrow, maddened by the discovery of his wife's infidelity, he would plunge that bright blade into her back. Then again, while walking along the avenue, he might heedlessly drop on the pavement the skin of the banana he was eating, never guessing that he was destined to retrace his steps within ten minutes and furnish a lot of innocent amusement to the six small boys on the corner.

So it was with Pelter's disguise. Three weeks before he had attended the fancy-dress ball given by the exclusive club of which he was a member, and he had made the most of his peculiar facial charm by going in the garb of a clergyman. How little he had suspected then that the next time he donned that clerical costume it would be for the purpose of avoiding recognition by a bobbed-haired bandit!

At the corner of Seventh Avenue she hailed a taxi and drove off. Mr. Pelter, student of detective literature, was not baffled. He hailed another, and pointed to the receding vehicle.

"Follow that cab," he commanded, tersely.

"What, the one that pretty girl got in?" The driver rolled a sardonic eye over Mr. Pelter's disguise and gave an excellent imitation of a man who is shocked and pained. "Very good, sir; I'll see that she doesn't lose you!"

Before Mr. Pelter could think of a

reply possible to the preface his cab had started with a violent jerk that nearly dislocated his neck. Thereafter the inequalities of Seventh Avenue, mixed with the lively fear that he might lose his quarry, left him no leisure for mere banter. At Forty-second Street his heart stood still when the girl's taxi rushed merrily on while his own was trapped by the latitudinal traffic, but they caught her again two block-signals later. The second cab was on the spare tire of the first as they finally shot down the incline to the Long Island Division of the Pennsylvania Station. Mr. Pelter sprang nimbly from his taxi, handed the driver an honorarium that went far to reinstate the clergy in his good opinion, and pursued the graceful blue figure to the waiting room.

A journey somewhere by train had not entered into his calculations, but he was game, and fortunately well-heeled financially. When he had first conceived the idea of shadowing Corinne he had hastened to his room and changed his garments with the utmost rapidity, ignorant of how long she might linger in the professor's library, and he had not paused to shift any of the contents of his pockets. The money itself was a bit of a miracle, for it was only at the last moment that a small collection of silver and bills on his bureau had caught his eye and reminded him that not even a bishop can get far without cash.

He was concerned now lest she have a commutation ticket, or a return to some destination. That would make things more difficult, unless he could catch a glimpse of it as she showed it to the man at the gate. To his great relief, however, she walked briskly to a window and bought her transportation; he was near enough to catch the words when she demanded a return for Inlet.

Inlet? Numbered among the several

subjects with which Pelter was unfamiliar, Long Island ranked high.

The station was crowded with commuters hurrying home early to avoid *the* crowd. Pelter easily lost himself in the mob while he watched Corinne pass through the gate to her train. A glance at the indicator over the grille told him he had four minutes until the time of departure—welcome tidings.

He would have liked to telephone the professor, but did not have the courage to risk that expenditure of time. Moreover, the spirit of the chase was quickening in his blood, and he could not be sure that his master might not, for some reason, call him peremptorily to heel; that would be a miserable ending to a high adventure. He hastened past the telephone booths. He snatched a time-table from a rack, and from a well-stocked bookstand he secured a map of Long Island and a current copy of a church periodical. That was a neat touch, he thought; as he strode with dignified haste to the train he flaunted the periodical as a tourist proudly exhibits his first passport.

He boarded the rear car and made his way through the train until he glimpsed the girl in blue, then settled himself comfortably in a seat some way behind her. He put his magazine down beside him, and as the train rolled off he devoted all his attention to the time-table and the map.

He learned from one glance at the map—which was a road map designed for automobilists—whence the town to which he was going derived its name. It was located on a little nub of land that projected into the Sound, and from the northern corner of the point a narrow bay made a deep indention in the coast line. From the tininess of the dot that marked its site, Pelter rightly inferred that it could be no more than a village; to think of it as a town would be to flatter it.

With a thrill such as his placid ner-

vous system seldom reacted to, he heard the two magic syllables barked out by the brakeman. The girl in blue proceeded leisurely to the forward exit, while he went more quickly to the rear steps of the car. By the time she had descended to the platform he was safely out of sight in the waiting room of the station, watching her discreetly through a window.

The railroad ran along the extreme eastern edge of the small settlement; looking due west, Pelter could see straight along the main street until his gaze reached the blue waters of the Sound beyond, dotted prettily with the white sails of pleasure craft. It was a refreshing view on an afternoon that was growing unduly sultry for the season of the year, and Pelter would not have been sorry if the chase had led him closer to the sparkling water. But the girl turned sharply to the right and took a dusty road that he knew must lead in the direction of the inlet.

She had evidently got the best of the agitation that had made everything she did in New York seem so hurried and nervous. She walked slowly, now, if steadily, and her head was slightly bowed as though she were deep in thought. The road she was on ran straight for several hundred yards, so that Pelter could keep her in sight for several minutes before he left the shelter of the station; he finally did so as she drew near a bend in the road beyond which she must vanish from his view.

So far so good! Pelter, taking up the trail, reflected that the gods had been kind to him, and piously trusted they would continue their favors.

Once around the bend, more water came in sight; through a thin belt of cedars that fringed the shore he could discern a shimmer that he knew must be the inlet, but before he could notice any more topographical features his attention was sharply recalled to the girl.

She had left the highway and turned through a gate on her right, entering a property that at first glance appeared to be an abandoned farm. As he quickened his pace and drew nearer, however, he saw that it was rather more interesting than that. It was a very pretty piece of land about three hundred yards deep lying between the inlet and the highway, and back toward the water was a low, rambling house of whitewashed stone. Pelter guessed that it must date quite far back for this country—even farther back than the Revolution.

Now he must use his wits. He knew that the surest way to attract the attention and arouse the suspicion of people who are being followed is to stop when they stop, and go on as they go on. He would not make that mistake. So he walked past the gate and straight along the road, pondering what he should do next and carefully looking in any direction but one.

Had he run his fox to earth? This was a fact to be determined before he could definitely pronounce his expedition a success. But how to determine it? Suppose the young lady were merely paying a casual call at this venerable white house? His afternoon would score a humiliating zero in achievement if he returned to the professor with merely an address to which she might never return.

"Thoroughness—that's the thing," said Mr. Pelter to himself. "If a man isn't thorough, he's through!"

This admirable aphorism escaped him just as he came abreast of the farther boundary of the property, where a low stone wall divided it from the neighboring estate—and here he found inspiration.

From the stone wall the ground rose sharply, forming a low hill surmounted by a two-story rusty-red frame cottage. The brief survey that he vouchsafed to this building led him to believe that

it was unoccupied. It was somebody's summer home, perhaps, and the family hadn't yet moved down from the city. What really interested him most, however, was the reflection that if he entered these grounds and climbed a little way up the hill he could ensconce himself comfortably in a rather dilapidated, winter-worn arbor that commanded a bird's-eye view of the vicinage. From that vantage point he could see who came and went from the low white house, he could determine the length of the girl's stay, and he could follow her again if she left.

To think was to act. In two minutes he had gained the arbor, and was peering through its lattice. The fact that he was trespassing concerned him not at all; what caretaker would proceed harshly against a simple clergyman seeking rest while taking a walk in the country?

His very first observation through the lattice brought him intelligence that was no less gratifying than it was unexpected. He had not dared to hope that he could easily discover whether or not this was the girl's home, yet so it befell.

She was standing just outside the front door, reading a note that she had taken from a letter box whose lid was still raised. Pelter unhesitatingly concluded that this was where she lived, since she received mail there, and he spared a moment from his exultant self-gratulation to thank the gods whose aid he had recently invoked.

"My word, but that was luck!" he murmured.

He saw her go into the house, and patiently settled to watch.

There is nothing more tedious in detective work than doing just that. So Pelter discovered after twenty minutes' vigil. It was stuffy in the arbor, for if the sun was sinking rapidly as the day waned, the humidity was increasing with every passing moment.

Some early mosquitoes browsed richly on the strip of pink between his back hair and the top of his clerical collar. His ministerial garb was oppressively clinging and hot—so hot that if he had been a little cooler he might have imagined himself in a Turkish bath.

"And detectives get ten dollars a day for this sort of thing," said Mr. Pelter. "An underpaid profession, in my opinion!"

With the increasing irritation due to discomfort came a vivid sense of rebellion against this period of enforced inactivity. Prior to now he had felt that he was accomplishing something with each instant of activity, but to sit here indefinitely, merely a lump of nourishment for mosquitoes that hadn't eaten in weeks— *Slap!* went his large hand against the back of his neck. *Slap!* *Slap!* *Slap!*

He rose with an air of decision, and his slappings were shifted to such portions of his attire as had come in contact with the dusty arbor.

He had done what he had started out to do—and perhaps more than might have been expected from a butler playing detective; he could go home right now, and be sure of receiving well-deserved praise. But actually the consideration that brought him so abruptly to his feet was the thought that, instead of sitting there on a hill, he might be vastly better employed in sending word to New York of what he had learned. Time is always valuable in such matters; now the idea had come to him, he would take the old gentleman by the forelock and telephone his news from the station.

He descended the hill to the highway and went briskly back along the way he had come. He was passing the gate through which the girl had gone. From the corner of his eye he saw the name "Sound View Cottage" neatly stenciled across the top board, and there came to him a second inspiration.

It checked his pace, but it quickened his heartbeats as he contemplated certain fascinating possibilities that might eventuate.

"She'd never know me in this rig," he whispered plausibly to his doubts. "Never in a hundred years! I'll just stroll up naturally and ask for a glass of water—or better, a glass of milk and permission to sit down a minute while I drink it. That would give me a chance to get inside and look around. My word! Suppose the old boy's amulet was somewhere in sight, I could pouch it and go back a blooming hero! Isn't that so?"

The prospect was too tempting to be rejected. Mr. Pelter was an impetuous man when not sedately butting.

He went back, opened the gate, and stepped through. Boldly he walked up the path to the house; on the chance that some one might be observing him from a window, he halted once to remove his hat and draw his hand across his brow, looking around him as he did so after the fashion of a stranger admiring a view. It might disarm suspicion.

There was no bell, so he knocked firmly, yet decorously, as became a gentleman of the cloth. He permitted a full minute to elapse before he repeated his summons. Still no one came to the door.

"Queer! She's in, all right, because I'd jolly well have seen her if she'd gone out." His view from the arbor had included the rear approaches to the house no less than the front. "Try again!"

He did. No one appeared.

"Maybe she's in back," he reflected. "No reason why I shouldn't go and see. Blimey, since I've started thinking of water and milk I could do with a drink!"

His knuckled assault at the back door was more persistent, but equally unproductive of result. Could she pos-

sibly have been taken ill? Or was she just lying low?

At this point in his cogitations he observed that the frame door was slightly ajar. He gave it a tentative little push, and it yielded an inch or two. He gave it another little push—and a third! Obliging, the door swung back quite as though inviting him to enter.

He stepped across the sill, then prudently halted. He raised a rich and unctuous voice.

"I beg your pardon," he called. "Is anybody at home?"

There was no response. Glancing about him, he was somewhat staggered to observe that this room—the kitchen, evidently—was devoid of all furnishing. There was not a bit of it, nor was there anything on the shelves that lined the walls.

"This beats the Dutch," said Mr. Pelter.

Again he sent his voice rolling smoothly through the house, and again silence succeeded to those perfect modulations.

"It even beats me," said Mr. Pelter.

Very cautiously he set himself to a tour of exploration designed to clear up the mystery. Where was that girl? A creepy idea occurred to him that she might be waiting for him in ambush with that same revolver with which she had prodded certain sensitive portions of his anatomy the preceding Sunday. Heroically, he put the thought from him and pursued his investigations with fervor.

The rest of the house, a one-story affair, was also unfurnished. There was nothing, even, to indicate that any one ever entered it. Pelter was completely puzzled. Alert for any suspicious sound or sight, he had made a complete tour of the ground floor within twenty minutes, and had discovered absolutely nothing. An empty house, pure and simple! Then a new

thought struck him—was there a cellar?

He hunted about until he discovered in the kitchen a door that he had missed. It opened to reveal a flight of wooden steps descending to a cool, airy cellar. The draft that came up them was grateful to a brow overheated from excessive cerebration, yet Mr. Pelter was strangely reluctant to descend and enjoy the lower coolness. Since she wasn't anywhere else, she must certainly be down in that cellar. There was no alternative.

Ready to spring erect at the least alarm, he dropped on his hands and knees and craned his neck downward, so that he looked from the rear very much like a large turtle stretching its neck for a leaf of lettuce. He cared nothing for appearances, however, as long as the maneuver enabled him to see what was in the cellar while exposing a minimum portion of himself to attack therefrom.

There was nothing in the cellar—not even a furnace. He could see every inch of the place, and what he saw consisted of four bare walls and a cement floor. Amazed, Mr. Pelter remained in an attitude of prayer.

"I know she came into this house," he told himself, bewildered. "I wasn't dreaming. I *saw* her. Am I going crazy—and *seeing* things?"

He might really have come to that embarrassing conclusion if he had not just then glanced directly down at the stairs themselves. What he discerned on the topmost tread, within six inches of his nose, was as exciting as Friday's footprint to Crusoe. There it lay—a tiny, fresh lump of mud!

That dissipated his concern for his mental condition even if it cast no light on the girl's disappearance. She had certainly been there, for the mud was delightfully fresh still, and an amateur detective was comforted!

Thankful for this find, Mr. Pelter

decided to call it a day. He had been lucky, wonderfully lucky, but there is such a thing as crowding your luck too far. He rose to his feet and stood there a moment, dusting his hands and the knees of his trousers.

It was then a frigid voice spoke crisply behind him.

"Hands up, please! Put 'em right up!"

Mr. Pelter obeyed—so earnestly in-

deed that his finger tips scraped unpleasantly against the low ceiling. At the same time he twisted his neck to gain a view of his captor.

Easily the most prominent thing in sight was the business end of an automatic pointed straight at his head; it was only by an effort that he took his eyes from that compelling object and shifted them to the tall, sandy-complexioned young man who held it.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



NEW DRUG LAW AIDS POLICE

WITH the going into effect of the Gibbs amendment to the vagrancy act in New York State, on September 1st of this year, the police are given an aid in coping with the most desperate type of criminal, namely the drug addict. Prior to this amendment taking effect, the drug addicts could be sentenced to take the cure only at their own request. Magistrates would not commit them for this purpose against their will. Under the new law, a drug addict can be obliged to take the cure, whether he wishes it or not.

According to police calculations, ninety per cent of New York's really dangerous and violent criminals nerve themselves to their desperate acts by the use of drugs. By depriving the underworld of its "nerve tonic" for deeds of violence, the police hope to give crime a more effective setback than they have hitherto been able to administer.

Under the new law, if the police know of a criminal who is a drug addict, they can arrest him for vagrancy and hold him for several hours. During that time, his craving for his favorite drug will probably assert itself and he will ask for a "shot." They can then have him committed for the cure, and the chances are that, when this is effected, he will lack the desire and the necessary nerve for the criminal exploits in which he previously indulged.

The police department intends under the new law to make systematic round-ups of criminals known to be drug addicts, and in this way, it is hoped to rid the city of its most dangerous criminal element. In order to accommodate those taking the cure, two hundred extra beds have been placed in the narcotic section of the Ward's Island Workhouse infirmary.

During the first six months of this year, the Narcotic Bureau of the police department arrested 328 persons suspected of selling drugs, 541 for possession of drugs, and 210 as users of drugs.

Under the Gibbs amendment, any one who "uses or possesses unlawfully opium, coco leaves or other salts, derivatives, or preparations thereof" is considered as a vagrant, and such a person may be committed to a correctional institution for care and treatment for a period of one year.



BANDIT QUEENS ARE TRUMPS

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Ring-wronged," etc.

WOULD you or wouldn't you put up the dough to set your missus up in the millinery business, provided she was pestering the life out of you?" "Banty" Lovell asked. His intent stare at absolutely nothing on the wall opposite him showed how puzzled he was.

"No, sir," exclaimed "Chippy" Emerson. He had been married ten years and the intricacies and nuances of the cocubial state were no longer as puzzling to him as they were to Banty, a bridegroom of less than a year. "Woman's place is in the home—and don't you forget it."

"But——" began Banty, beginning to argue as all novice husbands do when they suspect that an older hand is about to counsel them to be firm with the little woman. He paused and gulped.

"But what?" demanded Chippy, taking a revolver and a blackjack off his hips and laying them on a table so he might snuggle more comfortably down

into his chair. It looked as though he had a lot of arguing to do with his pal.

"Well, it's this way, Chippy; my little bride says—and I don't know but what she's half right——"

"Wives are always half right," Chippy interrupted, accentuating the word 'half,' "and husbands are always all wrong."

"Anyway, the little bride says a husband owes it to his wife to provide for her future. She said what if you and me get pinched some night when we're sticking up a cigar store and get a couple of years of free meals and board at the expense of the State? Where will she be at? How would she support herself until I got out of the stir?"

Chippy thrust his tongue into his cheek and smiled indulgently, contemptuously at such naïveté. "Listen, Banty," he counseled patiently, "you got to put your foot down and then nail it to the floor. Tell her, nothing doing. Impress upon her a woman's

place is in the home. Enlighten her that women have no head for money matters and business and to save your dough for you, not throw it into the gutter through the doors of no millinery shop. Tell her that."

"Yeah, but Florence ain't selfish about it, Chippy. She said what if I got shot or crippled or sick for a long time? She could support me with her millinery store, she told me. The kid's got a big heart."

"The bigger your heart is the less likely you'll get along well in business, Banty. Now, take it from an old married man that all wives get these notions from time to time that they want to be a big help to their husbands. And take it also from an old married man that most of the time they get everything gummed up. Ha, ha!" Chippy's laugh was sour. "You're a typical husband, all right."

"You wouldn't talk so wise if your wife had made a speech about wanting to help you along," Banty replied sulkily.

"If my wife made me such a speech," Chippy echoed. "Josie did make me such a speech, my boy. In fact, she's been making that speech every now and again since we been married."

"And you tell her nothing doing and make it stick?" Banty Lovell was incredulous.

Chippy Emerson tugged at his collar and squirmed sheepishly. "No," he admitted slowly. "Or, yes—sort of. That is, I kept putting my foot down all the time for ten years, but this last time she made her spiel I gave in to her. Ow! That's why I'm telling you not to make the same mistake as I done."

Banty fought down his inclination to grin. "When was all this?" he asked soberly.

"Well now, this is between me and you, Banty, see? Not a word to any of the boys."

"Telling me your secrets is the same as coughing them into a padlock."

"It happened while you and Flo were on your honeymoon," Chippy confessed. "Josie and I were sitting by the reading light one night. I was going over the bills and household expenses and tearing out fists full of hair wondering where I was going to get all the dough to pay them without touching our savings account. Josie's a grand housekeeper and all that, but creditors have got a habit of sending bills to good housekeepers as well as bad.

"Josie was reading in the evening newspaper something about that bob-haired bandit that used to go around New York with her husband, she wearing a blond wig and helping the old man stick up places. 'I certainly got to raise a lot of dough all of a sudden,' I remarked to her. 'I'll help you,' Josie said.

"You don't mean——"

"That's just what I do mean. Josie wanted to turn gun moll. Women have the darnedest ideas about what's romantic. The more I kept telling her nothing doing, the more hopped up she got about the notion. 'I want to be a help to you,' she said. 'You can be a bigger help to me by sewing on that third bottom button that came off the vest of my gray suit and which I been reminding you about for going on three weeks,' I told her. But she didn't like the idea.

"With that she started to boo-hoo and she cried enough brine to salt a barrel of pork. 'That's right,' Josie yowled to me. 'Make me stay at home all the time and do the household drudgery while you go out and have a good time.' Imagine, Banty; you and me go out and take chances of having some copper shoot our hide full of nickel-jacketed bullets, and that's what she calls a good time."

"I'm glad to find out we've been en-

joying ourselves, Chippy," said Mr. Lovell dryly.

"What if we both get caught and they send us up for a couple of years?" I asked Josie. "I promised to stick by you for better or for worse and, if necessary, go to the ends of the earth with you when I married you," Josie said dramatically, like we were a couple of actors at a Wednesday matinée.

"I kept telling her to leave man's work alone and concentrate on being a good housekeeper. 'I am a good housekeeper,' Josie said and I couldn't hand her no argument on that, because she is. The butcher never unloads any leather roasts on her and, if the grocer wants ten cents a cake for soap, Josie always knows where she can get it three bars for a quarter. Whatever Josie buys, she insists on quality and she gets it.

"Anyway, where I had been winning arguments like this one for ten years, I lost this one. We battled and argued all night, but the next morning I was whipped and had to promise I'd take her out on a job with me in a few days.

"I kept pretty busy for a while, gunning out a few joints till I had four hundred and thirty-two dollars—just enough to meet all them bills that were due. The old pocketbook was fatter than it had been for some time. I was hoping she had got over her notion about wanting to be what the newspapers call a 'picturesque girl bandit.'"

"And she never?" asked Banty, shaking his head negatively. Even though he had been a bridegroom of less than a year he had begun to realize how seldom wives get over notions.

"How well you know!" Chippy Emerson exclaimed. "One morning right after breakfast she showed me a snappy blond wig. 'Ye gods!' I yelled. 'Did you go to some costumer and wig maker and buy that?' I asked. 'Don't you know that as soon as the word gets

around that a blond lady gun has appeared the wig maker will remember selling you this and tell the dicks?"

"Josie handed me a laugh that would just fit a horse nicely. She asked me if I thought she was hopelessly dumb. That wig was the same one she had wore four years before in a tableau—that's a sort of a show, Banty—that she had took part in down at the community center. She put it on and you never saw such a complete change in a woman. I'd 'a' never known her if we did a ten-year stretch together in the same cell. And I want to say for Josie, Banty, that she makes just as good-looking a blonde as a brunette.

"All right, all right," I said to her, throwing up my hands. "You win. This is your party. What are we going to stick up—a bank or a police station?"

"Josie said she wanted to rumble a stylish little women's shop called 'The Mayfair' over in Pottstown, across the State line. 'That's a wise move for one good reason,' I told her. 'If we get pinched, we'll have the comfort of knowing we're pinched in a State which has a more modern and comfortable penitentiary than this State has.'"

"Was that why she wanted to cross the line?" Banty inquired gullibly.

"No, no! Josie figured that inasmuch as it was only a three quarters of an hour ride on the interurban electric trolley, why it was better to work Pottstown, where the dame who owned The Mayfair wouldn't be meeting us on the street every day after we swept out her trap. Besides, Knoxburg and Madison are right near Pottstown and they're junctions where the cars run to a dozen east-side towns."

"Oh, so you could lose your trail behind you, hey Chippy? Not such a bad idea!"

"Exactly! Now, Banty; how long does it take you and me to stick up an average store, empty the cash drawer, and get off in a cloud of dust?"

"Why, not more than a couple of minutes, I guess."

"Sure it doesn't. Wait till you hear! First Josie had to pick out a revolver. It took us a half an hour to buy that heater. Josie couldn't make up her mind whether she wanted one with a pearl handle or one made out of blue steel. 'Blue,' she said, 'is my favorite color—and yet this pearl-handled affair is awfully neat.' Then Josie wanted to know from the store fellow if both gats would wear well, if they was guaranteed and all like that.

"I guess I'll take the pearl-handled gun,' she finally told the store man. 'It will match my pearl toilet set in my bedroom. You see—and here she smiled sweetly at the store guy—I want this weapon to keep under my pillow for burglars.'"

"Kind of a fox, ain't she?" Banty commented admiringly.

"In a way, yes. Well, one afternoon we trolleyed over to Pottstown, and I swiped an automobile there temporarily so we could make a quick run out of the neighborhood after holding up The Mayfair and catch us an electric back to the city. 'When we get to The Mayfair,' I said to Josie. 'I'll stand off the dame who runs it and anybody else that happens to be there and you gather up the dough.'

"No,' Josie said. 'After we've got them stopped. I'll stand them off and you get the dough. I think I'll get a bigger kick out of training a gat on those dames.' Josie had her way in the end. It was decided when we would get to The Mayfair, I was to stay in the car while Josie went inside. If the place was crowded, she would come out like she wanted a word with me. If she didn't come out, that would mean the place was right, and I would stroll in like I wanted to see how she was getting along and then we would pull off the crossroads work.

"Well, Banty, we drove up in front

of this notions store. 'Are you all set?' I asked Josie. 'Yes,' she told me, making sure her pearl-handled rod was ready in her hand bag. 'Then go ahead,' I said. Josie started to get out of the car. Then she stopped. 'Are you sure this wig is set just right, dear?' she asked. 'You look beautiful,' I told her nervously.

"Switch that driving mirror around this way and let me have a peek into it,' she asked me next. Josie looked at herself particularlike, smoothed out her eyebrows and powdered her chin and nose. 'Say! Get on,' I told her. 'You're making me nervous. Cops'll be around looking for this car in a few minutes.'"

"Gee! She was certainly cool!" Banty observed.

"Yeah," Chippy snorted. "Josie was cool and I was cold—as cold as ice. I can't stand such fiddling around. Anyways, Josie went inside and, when she never came out soon again, I went in after her.

"The lay was perfect. The ritzy-looking dame who ran the shop was alone with Josie, showing Josie some silk stockings. I got out my gun and so did Josie and I said to The Mayfair lady, 'Lady, I'm sorry to be such a bother to you, but we're going to stick you up.' The dame hesitated, thinking she was seeing things. 'Come, come, madame; put up your hands,' Josie told her, nudging her with the pearl-handled gat. The dame got her dukes up, but she was speechless.

"Now, dear,' Josie said to me, looking past The Mayfair woman into a mirror at the blond wig, 'see what you can find in the cash drawer.' I went up to a writing desk in the front of the shop, where this dame transacted all her business, and in the drawer what do you think I found?"

"I don't know, Chippy."

"Seven hundred and ninety-two dollars. I picked up all them nicely ar-

ranged bills—three hundreds, five fifties, six twenties and some smaller ones.—and slapped them into my side pocket together with the four hundred and thirty-two dollars I had collected to pay our bills with.

"Just then an oldish lady and two young girls, her daughters, came in. I threw my gun on them, nearly gave them hysteria and lined them up near to where The Mayfair woman was standing with her hands up. I went through these three women's purses, but all they had among them was forty-seven cents. 'What did you expect to buy with this?' I asked, thinking they were holding out on me."

"It was an expensive shop, too, wasn't it?" Banty asked.

"Absolutely the cake and the pie. 'Madame has a charge account,' The Mayfair dame explained to me haughtily. Here I glanced at Josie and nearly fell dead. She had let her gun sag down and was looking at a pair of gloves that were lying on the counter in front of her. 'Aren't these Size Four?' Josie asked the dame who owned the place. The dame said they were. 'I've tried everywhere to get Size Four in this style,' Josie said to the dame, 'but couldn't.'

"'Where did you try?' the dame asked foxily. I was going to yell at Josie to shut up, thinking she would mention a couple of stores in this city and give the tip off on where we was from. Before I could open my chops. Josie told the dame, 'All over Chicago.'"

"Say, your wife is smart," Banty interrupted.

"Yeah? Wait till you hear! Just wait till you hear, Banty. 'Come on, kid.' I said to Josie, 'we got to beat it.' But we couldn't beat it, Banty, because just then another woman customer heeled in. She was certainly a snappy-looking little thing, dressed in the height of style, Josie later on told me.

She never got scared or hysterical or nothing when I stuck her up and lined her up with the four other women. As a matter of fact, she seemed to be enjoying the novelty. You know, Banty, how some women are—they don't care what happens, just so it makes something interesting to tell at their next bridge party."

"'Ooooo!' said this blonde—she was a blonde, Banty—'A holdup. Goody!' I looked at her a second time, wondering if she was batty. 'What do you mean? Goody!' I asked her. 'It's thrilling—and besides, I haven't much to lose,'"

"She had a charge account, too, hey Chippy?" Banty asked.

"That's what I thought and I asked The Mayfair dame. 'No,' The Mayfair dame told me, 'madame is a newcomer to my maison.' So I took the blonde's handbag and found eighty-three bucks in it. 'Trying to out-fox me, eh?' I told the blonde. 'Didn't have much to lose, eh?' She smiled at me and remarked, 'Why, that's not much, is it now?' Right there I came to the conclusion that this gal was very uptown. I guess she carried eighty-three dollars around to give to waiters, taxi pilots, blind men and cripples. Some little spender, I'll say."

"Yeah. Chippy! she was a society moll all right."

"You're all wrong. Wait till you hear."

"But she should have been good for some jewelry. You never overlooked that, did you?"

"All she was wearing in the way of jewelry was one ring. I looked it over and saw that it wasn't expensive. It had a bloodstone set into it and the stone was just a little loose, besides. So I let her keep that, but took her dough and stood her up with the other dames.

"'Come on now, dear,' I told Josie. 'We got to drill out of here right now, kid.' She never answered me and I

gave a quick look over my shoulder to see what she was doing."

"She hadn't lost her nerve, I hope."

"Josie lose her nerve, Banty? Ha! That's good. No; she was examining them gloves, Size Four, again. 'Just a minute, honey,' Josie said. 'I think I'll have to take these gloves.' She turned to The Mayfair dame. 'Will these wear well? Will they stand frequent cleaning?' she asked. I told you, Banty, that nobody puts nothing over on Josie. Josie sees that she gets her money's worth all the time.

"The Mayfair dame for a moment forgot that this was a stick-up and made a few cracks like, 'I can recommend these highly,' to Josie, just like she did when she was trying to make a sale. 'Then put 'hem in a box for me, please,' Josie told her. The Mayfair woman started to wrap them.

"'I want a few other things, too,' Josie said. 'You have such attractive things in your shop. These stockings—they're my size. Please put them in a box for me, too.'"

"Say!" Banty remarked with a whistle. "You two was taking chances."

"We was taking chances? You mean she was. 'Hey, Josie!' I yelled. 'We can't bother with no packages to-day. Come on, come on! Let's be moving.' Josie looked at me a little hard and said, 'Now, dear!' in that way that a woman uses when she means, 'Aw, shut your mouth.'

"'But, honey,' I said, 'we got——' 'Dear!' Josie hurled at me, threatening to use up the last of her patience.

"'Those are excellent hose you picked out,' the snappy-looking blonde piped up with. 'I've worn them for two years and have found them the best that ever came my way.' I could have shot her! 'You don't say,' Josie answered. 'Then I had better take five more pairs.'

"Well, Banty, I moved over to Josie and started to complain under my

breath. Josie winked one eye. 'These are wonderful bargains, dear. I'd have to pay twice as much nearly at the most reasonable store in the city. They can do it in these suburban towns where rent is not so high.'"

"How long had you been in The Mayfair dump by this time, Chip?"

"A half an hour, Banty. A half an hour! Josie picked out a tooled under-arm bag and had that wrapped up. Then she got a pair of bedroom slippers, an imported chemise, a parasol, a box of handkerchiefs, a string of white coral beads, some garters with her initial in rhinestones on them from Paris, a little apron to send to her sister in Dayton, Ohio, on her sister's birthday, some shoe buckles and a half a dozen of these round things that you put on tables to set dishes on. 'There!' she said. 'That's all.' I began to breathe easier again.

"But it was a false alarm. Banty. 'Oh, I forgot,' Josie remembered. 'I wanted that little breakfast set to send to my sister's baby. Isn't it precious, dear? Look at the little geese chasing the little June bugs all around the edge of that oatmeal bowl.'

"'If you don't get going right away,' I told Josie, 'there'll be a lot of big coppers chasing you and me into the hoosegow.' Josie looked hurt. 'You men never appreciate it when your wives try to save money,' she complained to me. 'Why, this shop has things of a quality that I never could get in town for these prices, I tell you.'"

"Aren't women the limit?" asked the bridegroom of a year.

"Certainly are," Chippy agreed with Banty. "Finally Josie got all her packages collected and they made a pile like Pike's Peak. 'Will you pay the lady, dear?' Josie asked me out of force of habit, meanwhile gawking at showcases to see if she had missed anything. And me, absent-minded from nervousness

and all, I get out all the money—my own four hundred and thirty-two dollars, The Mayfair dame's nine hundred and seventy-two dollars and the blonde's eighty-three dollars. I never took those forty-seven cents off the oldish woman and her daughters.

"Then, remembering that I had gone to this shop to take money away from the joint, not leave it there, I stuffed my roll back into my pocket. Josie was still staring goofily around."

"You're making me nervous," Banty protested, mopping his damp forehead. "Come on; tell me how the cops came in and how you got away from them."

"The cops didn't show, Banty. Josie at last said she was ready to go. 'You'll carry my packages for me, of course,' she said. 'But you watch this time what you're doing with that gun,' I warned her.

"I began piling these packages one on top of the other in my arms, thinking how lucky I was that Josie hadn't wanted to hold up a theater, where she might get the idea she wanted to see how the third act ended before we could leave. Three times, Banty, I piled that mountain of packages in my arms and three times half of them went on the floor, just like it happens to comedians carrying their wives' bundles in the film comedies.

"'It takes a woman to pack things neatly,' Josie declared. Then she turned to the nearest one of them five women, which was the snappy-looking little blonde, and says to her, 'Will you be good enough, my dear, to straighten those bundles out for my husband? He's all thumbs. But mind you don't do any tricks, my dear, because I'll have to shoot you if you do.'

"I felt real grateful to the blonde, Banty. She arranged everything nice and neat so I could carry it all. Then I beat it out to the car, chucked the stuff inside, spun the engine and Josie walked out backwards, keeping her gat

trained on them women. We made a very clean get-away."

"Whew!" Banty Lovell sighed with relief. "I thought sure you were going to tell me you had to stand for a pinch."

"You ain't heard a thing; wait till you hear!" Chippy Emerson exclaimed. "We drove over to Madison and there I ditched the car and gathered up all of Josie's packages again. We climbed on an interurban car, Josie paying the fare out of the chicken feed in her hand bag.

"Banty, I want to tell you that it wasn't till we got safe at home and locked the door behind us that I felt easy again. Josie started right in to cackle and crow. 'See!' she said to me. 'What did I tell you? And you claimed I couldn't do it. How much profit did we make out of the trip?'

"'Wait till I see,' said I, reaching for the roll. Banty, I never fainted in my life, but if ever I felt like it, it was when I stuck my hand into my coat pocket for the dough."

"You mean——"

"Yeah! It wasn't there. All there was in my pocket was a little bloodstone that had fell out of a ring."

Banty was puzzled. "Bloodstone?" he gasped. "Ring?"

Chippy grew impatient. "Certainly, you dumb-bell. That snappy-looking blonde I told you about—I said the only jewelry she had was a cheap ring with a loose bloodstone in it. And I told you Josie asked her to help me with all them bundles. Well, she helped me!

"And she certainly helped herself to my coin."

"But why should a society dame——"

"Aw, society dame your neck!" Chippy snapped. "Didn't I tell you that The Mayfair dame said the blonde was a stranger there when I thought maybe she had a charge account because of her saying she wouldn't lose much? Well, that blonde was a dressed-up pickpocket. She just must have breezed in to make some trifling little buy and when she

saw me unfurl all that money and stuff it back into my coat pocket, she knew just where to reach when she arranged them bundles in my arms. No wonder she said, 'Good-by!' And it's no wonder she laughed just as I lit out and called after me, 'I certainly enjoyed your holdup. It was thrilling.'"

"How did Josie take it, Chippy?"

"Josie? Josie just looked surprised. Then she began opening her bundles. 'Anyway, honey,' she told me, 'I got some wonderful things over at The Mayfair that I couldn't have bought here for that money.' Imagine, Banty; just imagine! We paid over fourteen hundred dollars, not including trolley fare, for that junk she bought and she said it was a bargain. I tell you, Banty, women have no eye for business. Their place is in the home. And you tell Flo that, too."

"I will!" said Banty firmly, thrusting out his chin. "And right now, too."

Banty went home, but as he put his key in the lock he thought perhaps it was as well to postpone deliverance of his ultimatum until to-morrow. He had been married only a year, you know.

On the following day he decided to postpone it until the next evening.

Banty was saved the bother of any further postponements when Flo told him on that evening that she not only had picked out a site for her millinery shop, but had paid the first month's rent and signed a year's lease.

"Banty Lovell was telling me," Chippy Emerson began to tell Josie when he got home, "that his missus is nutty about opening a millinery shop and I said to him——"

"Yes," Josie answered. "And I'm going into partnership with her."

"What!" screeched Chippy. "Where are you going to get the dough?"

"Why, from you, of course."

"I should say not, you won't. Why, you ought to know by now that——"

"Now, dear!" Josie said with great patience.

Chippy sighed sadly. Whenever Josie said, "Now dear!" he suspected in advance that he was going to lose the argument.

After hours of arguing, Chippy confirmed his suspicions.

"If you don't help me to get started in the millinery business," Josie said, "you've got to take me out on holdups. I'm tired of sticking around the house doing all the drudgery."

"Me take you out on more stick ups!" Chippy exclaimed. "I should say not!"

"Then you'll have to——"

"Yeah, I know. Then I'll have to put up the dough for your partnership. All right. Only, do me one favor, Josie."

"What is it?"

"Don't tell Flo and above all don't tell Banty I gave you the dough. Get them to believe that you played the stock market with some of your savings and you won a lot of jack. Tell them you're putting it into the store and I got sore and said I washed my hands of the whole business, and you'd never get a cent out of me. Will you do that?"

"All right," Josie replied. "I know what you've been doing. Banty has been complaining to you and you've been telling him to put his foot down. Now you're afraid he'll find out that you put your foot down and then fell over the foot, aren't you?"

"Well," Chippy temporized, "I sort of—— Aw, well!"

"You're a typical husband," Josie said. "Anyway, I don't think I was cut out to be a lady bandit."

"What!" shouted Chippy. "You hold me up for a couple of thousand, and then you ain't a bandit? Josie, you're the queen of the lady bandits."



BLACK FAME

(AN ADVENTURESS IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA)

By Charles Kingston

Author of "A Sailor's Crime," etc.

WHEN Mary Fox was a little girl her greatest delight was to wander over the estate in Devonshire belonging to the nobleman who employed her father as one of his gardeners. Moreover, until she was old enough to know better, the child was under the impression that the lawns and magnificent fruit, flower and vegetable gardens were the property of her parents. It was a shock to her, therefore, when it dawned on her that she was not a young lady of the Hall, but simply a workman's daughter, and destined to earn her own living.

The child was as intelligent as she was pretty, and at the local school she gained quite a reputation for her cleverness. But Mary, who seemed to grow prettier and taller every day, thought nothing of her scholastic triumphs. She wanted to be a lady with plenty of money.

The week that witnessed Mary's last day at school coincided with an unexpected offer from the vicar's wife to take the girl into her service. Mrs. Fox was delighted. It was the one situation she wanted for her clever and beautiful daughter, for she was afraid that the young men of the village by their flattering attentions would turn the girl's head. Now she felt easier in her mind because she believed that the clergyman would have a steadying influence on her.

Mary did not seem enthusiastic about the prospect of becoming a housemaid, but she offered no objection, and she was soon one of the four servants at the vicarage. For a long time she gave satisfaction, and the only criticism her mother gave utterance to during that time was that Mary seemed to be spending all her wages on clothes. This her parent deplored.

"You'd better save a little, dear," she

said gently, when she was kissing the girl good-by one Sunday night.

"Don't worry about me, mother," she answered cheerfully, "I'm going to make my fortune. Ta-ta."

Mrs. Fox watched her from the window, and when her husband joined her, she remarked that Mary at a distance might pass for Lady Doreen or Lady Eva. She had their carriage and their figure, and Mary was just as quietly and effectively dressed.

"Ay, that lass is good at copying," said John Fox, with a grin. "I've noticed for years how she's imitated the young ladies."

Nothing more was said on the subject until at eleven the next morning the vicar's wife came to inquire where Mary was, and then there was a sensation and many tears and fears. Her father, a practical man, went to the railway station and ascertained that Mary had left for London by the nine o'clock train that morning. And that was all they heard of her for ten years. She disappeared completely.

Her visit to her parents' cottage had been in the nature of a farewell, although she had not disclosed her determination to leave the Devonshire village and seek her fortune. But for months she had been preparing for her departure. She had merely bided her time until she had scraped together a few pounds before vanishing. Since visitors to the vicarage had been frequent, and tips plentiful, Mary had nearly nine pounds in her purse when she walked out of the railway station in London.

The girl of less than nineteen had never been in London before, but she was perfectly happy and was not at all nervous. It pleased her immensely that she should be stared at as she walked slowly toward the West End looking for a suitable hotel. She knew that she was pretty and that there was nothing cheap about her appearance either, and

she believed that she had the brains and the courage to pose successfully as an aristocrat.

After considerable trouble she discovered a small hotel off Bond Street, which she considered suitable for her purpose. She registered as "Lady Mary Primrose," and in that moment she had complete proof that one of the most common human failings is snobbery.

The instant she pronounced the aristocratic name the demeanor of the clerk changed, and she became almost embarrassingly subservient. The hotel servants within hearing also galvanized into life, and they advanced simultaneously, all anxious to serve her ladyship.

"I expect my maid to-night," said Mary languidly. "If my father should call when I am out please tell him I'm dining at Lady Wilson's. I hardly expect he will return to London before to-morrow night though, as our house in Berkeley Square is in the hands of the decorators."

Mary stayed only two days at the hotel, but she enjoyed every moment. It was bliss to hear her name reverently pronounced whenever she appeared in any of the public rooms. Moreover, when the servants addressed her as "my lady" and the other guests immediately turned to stare at her she felt that she was, indeed, in society and a personage.

She behaved with a discretion and a cleverness that almost amounted to genius, considering she was not nineteen. Many girls of her temperament and character would have spoiled everything by being precipitate. Mary Fox did nothing of the kind. When her bill was presented to her she paid it, although it left her with less than a pound; when a cab was ordered at her request and she stepped into it she told the driver to take her to "38 Berkeley Square." On the way, however, she changed her mind, and she left the

vehicle outside a shop in Oxford Street. As her luggage did not extend beyond a suit case she carried it herself.

The following Saturday she called at the hotel "to inquire about rooms on behalf of her friend, the Countess of Suffolk," and when she had taken particulars of suites and prices she went to the lounge, where tea was served to her.

There were only three other persons there, and they were obviously father, mother and daughter, the latter being about twenty. Now it happened that they were rich and ambitious and passionately devoted to the aristocracy, and having already heard that a famous peer's daughter was in the hotel they became eager to make her acquaintance. An opportunity seemed to present itself when Mary "accidentally" knocked over a plate of cakes. Mr. O—— hastened to recover them for her.

"How kind you are!" she exclaimed prettily. "but I fear that they are all spoiled."

"Then have some of ours," said the retired merchant promptly.

Mary's eyes sparkled.

"We'll join forces," she said, rising and taking the vacant chair next to Mrs. O——

In less than ten minutes they were chattering like old friends, and inside an hour Mary knew that Mr. O—— had made an enormous fortune as a merchant. She learned that his daughter, Ivy, who had been educated regardless of expense, was destined by them to shine in society and marry into the peerage.

"All she requires is an introduction to the right people," Mrs. O—— confided in "Lady Mary Primrose." "And we're in London looking for a titled chaperon for her. We're willing to pay five thousand pounds for the services of a lady who will take her about with her."

This was spoken in an undertone, but as Ivy was at the far end of the room

looking at some illustrated papers, the precaution was unnecessary.

Mary Fox, the gardener's daughter, smiled.

"My dear," she said in a patronizing manner, "I've taken such a liking to your girl that I'll chaperon her for nothing."

It was always a safe card to play when one wanted money—to pretend that it is the last and least important consideration—and on this occasion it was not a failure.

"But we couldn't hear of it!" exclaimed the gratified woman, while her husband simmered with pleasure and satisfaction.

"Ivy has charms and will make friends anywhere," said Mary, with another glance in the direction of the girl. "I hope you won't feel offended if I suggest that you let me advise her how to dress. Place a thousand pounds at my disposal to deal with dressmakers and milliners, and I'll turn her out as perfect as a queen."

The mother and father were enchanted. "Lady Mary's" refusal of any money for herself removed their doubts, if ever they had any.

The next morning Mary met the parents at the hotel for another discussion. Ivy's father, having already been to the bank, was in a position to give the impostor the thousand pounds in notes. Mary thereupon explained her plans. In her most condescending manner she said she would not see them again for a week. In the meantime she would have a suite of rooms at the mansion in Berkeley Square prepared for the reception of Miss Ivy, who was to make her début at a dinner party to be given by "Lady Mary's" aunt, the Duchess of Montrose, in a fortnight's time.

"I must prepare the way for Ivy's reception into society," said "Lady Mary," and she looked so pretty and so guileless that it was impossible to suspect her.

A few moments later Mary drove from the hotel to the Cunard offices in Pall Mall and booked her passage to America by the boat leaving Liverpool on the Saturday morning.

The voyage was a success for her, now "Lady Olive Stanhope." Mary learned how to play cards for high stakes, and how to wheedle money out of one or more of her rich acquaintances whenever she lost more than she could pay.

"My father, the Earl of Harrington, will thank you himself when he comes to New York at the end of the year," she said, to a millionaire, who felt repaid for his loan of three hundred pounds by the prospect of entertaining such a great nobleman. He pressed "Lady Olive" to honor him and his wife with her society at his country house outside New York, but she excused herself with the plea that she was already overwhelmed with engagements. Her only reason, however, was that she had already accepted a similar invitation from another wealthy passenger, who, she had discovered, had an only son. And Mary was determined to marry a millionaire.

She was still posing as "Lady Olive Stanhope" when she was a fortnight later staying as an honored guest with the parents of the youth. They were on the point of announcing the engagement of their only son to the "youngest daughter of the Right. Hon. the Earl of Harrington," when, unfortunately for Mary Fox, a gentleman called at the house who happened to be a cousin of the earl. He immediately denounced the adventuress, but the millionaire would not prosecute her. He had no liking for ridicule.

Mary, who quickly recovered from her disappointment, now made a regular tour of the United States, and in every town she visited she managed to obtain money and hospitality for nothing. She had a large sum on her when she re-

turned to England. Having found some kindred spirits in the West End of London, she had a merry time for two years. Then, unfortunately, she was convicted at the Old Bailey for obtaining credit at a hotel by fraud, and sent to Aylesbury Prison for eighteen months.

This was her first misadventure, but by no means her last. On her release she swindled an elderly gentleman out of five hundred pounds after having promised to marry him. With the plunder she set sail for America again, knowing from experience that the cute Yankees are not the most difficult people in the world to fool.

The most remarkable fact about Mary Fox is that she worked entirely on her own. When she employed a maid the girl was not in her confidence, and was, indeed, a believer in the aristocratic origin of her mistress. Mary would not trust any one except herself, and to this she owed most of her successes in her numerous campaigns of fraud.

A year following her second voyage to America she found herself almost penniless in Montreal, and she had by now used up so many names in the peerage that she was hard put to it to think of a new one. She was pondering on the subject in the street when a middle-aged lady, guessing that the girl was a stranger to the city, asked if she could be of any use.

"I only want to be recommended to a good hotel," answered Mary, with a smile of thanks. "My father was to have joined me this morning but he was detained by pressure of business at the British Embassy in Washington."

The astonishment of the good-natured lady was evident.

"Perhaps, I had better introduce myself," murmured Mary gravely. "I am Lady Cynthia Lambert, and my father is the Earl of Dorking."

The name acted like magic, and Mrs.

James insisted on her ladyship accompanying her home. That night Mary dined at one of the finest private houses in Montreal, and was petted and made much of by her host and hostess. Most important of all in the girl's opinion, she attracted the favorable attention of the son of the house. With all the evidence of wealth around her, Mary determined to marry the youngster, and she acted so cleverly that a month later he and Mary were engaged to be married.

To celebrate the formal announcement of the engagement, Mrs. James gave a dinner party, and Mary's beauty and vivacity gained for her the whole-hearted admiration of those present. She wore a diamond necklace, which the lad's father had presented to her, and the finest modiste in the city had supplied her dainty gown. The party was a remarkable event in Mary's life, and when it was over and the guests had departed she entered the drawing-room, hoping it would be empty.

To her surprise Mr. James was there, and she started and went pale when she observed that he held in his hands a copy of "Debrett." Before she could utter a word he spoke.

"How do you account for the fact that there is no Earl of Dorking in the British peerage?" he asked, in a tone full of suspicion and hostility.

For a moment or two Mary Fox stood as if frozen, and it seemed that she must confess to being an impostor. But suddenly the girl requested to be allowed to examine the book herself.

"Certainly," said her host curtly.

She held it in her hands for less than five seconds, and then she contemptuously dropped it on the table.

"I thought so!" she exclaimed angrily. "The book is out of date. Why, it's six years old."

"Well, what's that got to do with it?" Mr. James demanded.

"A great deal, Mr. James," she re-

plied coolly. "My father was not raised to the peerage until three years ago."

With her head erect she walked out of the room.

But Mary was too clever to rely entirely on her temporary triumph. She knew that Mr. James was no fool, and she guessed that the very next day he would secure an up-to-date book. Accordingly she at once dressed herself for a journey, and packed all her jewelry and as much of her clothes as she could get in a bag which she could carry herself. Then, while the house was enveloped in darkness and silence, she crept noiselessly out of it, and caught an early morning train for Toronto.

When her flight was discovered, an active search was made for her, for she had with her several thousand pounds' worth of jewelry which Mr. James claimed to be his, as it had been obtained by false pretenses. But Mary, now an expert in the art of disguise and camouflage, successfully evaded arrest by getting employment in a jam factory in Toronto, where, of course, no one thought of seeking her. She remained there a couple of months, and then she made her way to South America. Here she found many more victims, and her plans were greatly aided by the fact that she could pose as a lady of means because of her collection of jewelry.

She did not leave South America, however, without tasting jail life, though the week she spent in prison had nothing to do with her frauds. Two hot-headed Spanish Americans had fallen madly in love with "her ladyship," and, meeting in her presence one night, had murderously assaulted one another. When one of them died, the survivor and Mary were arrested, and it was only the active intervention of the British consul that secured her release.

Terrified, and with her health undermined, the girl fled from South

America to Europe. It was only when she had been in London again for several months that she regained her health and good spirits.

Strange as it may appear, she succeeded in passing for an earl's daughter in London and the provinces, although it might have been supposed that her fraudulent impersonation would not have deceived any one in a country where books of reference dealing with the peerage are so numerous. Mary, under the name of "Lady Beryl Mackenzie," became engaged to a wealthy young man in Birmingham, and she would have married him, too, but for an accident the day before. The "accident" was her recognition in Corporation Street, Birmingham, by a detective who had once arrested her. He had nothing against her now, but he followed her to the big house in Edgbaston, where she was staying. When he learned that it was owned by the father of the gentleman to whom "Lady Beryl Mackenzie" was engaged, the officer thought it his duty to seek an interview with the old man and warn him of her identity.

There was a stormy scene that evening, in which Mary Fox used the weapon of her tears, but she was banished, and she went back to London, where, undismayed, she planned her biggest fraud.

Calling herself "Lady Helen Venables," she rented a furnished house in the neighborhood of Portland Place. Then gathering around her girls of her own type, she invited them to assist her to run a bogus "society" matrimonial agency. The real object of this precious "agency" was blackmail. Out of one elderly man who was living apart from his wife, and who was induced to go through a register office ceremony with one of "Lady Helen's" pals, she extracted eight thousand pounds. She would have obtained a great deal more if her victim had not died suddenly.

The doctor declared the cause of death was heart failure, but Mary must have known that it was mainly due to terror inspired by her threat.

In the years that followed Mary was convicted six times, and once she served a sentence of penal servitude for a gross fraud. However, nothing could make her realize that honesty was the best policy. Although she was again and again helped by charitable societies, she always drifted back into a life of crime.

Right to the end of her life she had a passion for pretending to belong to the aristocracy. She derived more satisfaction from hearing herself addressed as "your ladyship" than from her financial coups, however profitable. But she only wanted money to live up to the titles she bestowed upon herself, and it needed large sums to travel about in style with a lady's maid and stay at the best hotels. Whenever she was in funds she visited the provinces and the continent, and she thoroughly enjoyed her trips abroad because there was no one to deny her rank, and she was flattered and deferred to everywhere.

She was living in a Paris hotel a few years ago when a gentleman called early one morning to see her.

"Her ladyship has not risen yet," said the manager, who was obviously proud of the patronage of the "great English lady."

"I must see her," remarked the stranger abruptly. "Here is my card."

The manager read "Chief Inspector John Sexton, New Scotland Yard."

"A detective, monsieur!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, and that's why I'm here," said Sexton, who spoke French perfectly. "I have all the necessary papers to secure her extradition. She is an ex-domestic servant who has swindled hundreds of persons."

The manager, indignant that his defence should have been obtained by

false pretenses, sent a maid to knock on madame's door. The girl returned in a few minutes with a scared face.

"Her ladyship is dead," she stammered.

Mary Fox had passed away in her

sleep, and the doctor's verdict was fatty degeneration of the heart.

Chief Inspector Sexton returned to London without his prisoner, and Mary Fox lies in a pauper's grave in a Paris cemetery.



VIOLIN BURGLARS BUSY

FOR some weeks past, musicians playing along Broadway, New York, in various restaurants, night clubs, moving picture theaters, and other amusement resorts have been the victims of a gang of thieves who have been breaking into the lockers where they keep their violins and other valuable musical instruments.

For some time there was no trace of these violin burglars, but finally a dealer in musical instruments on St. Mark's Place identified a violin that had been offered to him for seventy-five dollars as the same instrument that he had sold for five hundred dollars to Eddie Elkins, a well-known Broadway entertainer. The dealer summoned a policeman and had the young man who offered the violin for sale placed under arrest. When the police searched him, they found about a hundred pawn tickets calling for musical instruments in his pockets. With this arrest as a starting point, the authorities hope to get at other members of this violin burglar gang and put a stop to their activities.



TUNNEL FROM SUBWAY EXCAVATION TO LOOT SAFE

IT has often been remarked that if thieves would employ the same skill and ingenuity in legitimate business that they devote to crime, they would make more money in the long run. An instance of quick thinking in taking advantage of an unusually favorable situation was revealed in a recent safe burglary, which netted only fifteen hundred dollars.

There is at present in course of construction in New York City, the new Eighth Avenue subway, and an observant yegg noticed that it would be an easy matter to make a tunnel from the subway cut near Fifty-fourth Street to the cellar door of the Modern Cobblers' Inc., on Eighth Avenue. One night, the yeggs got together, tunneled through the wall to the cellar door, chiseled their way through the door, and then got into the shop. There they ripped open a small iron safe and took away fifteen hundred dollars in cash as their loot. The subway excavation at this point is close to the line of the curb, so that the yeggs had little tunneling to do.



EVERY WORD THE TRUTH

By Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "The Wrong Side of the Moon," etc.

A STRONGLY built middle-aged man with only a fringe of fine down to hide the otherwise glaring convexity of his bald head climbed from the Opal City stage and stood for a moment looking disapprovingly around at all that was visible of Camp Fourteen. A railroad construction camp is a disorderly looking place at best, and this one was no exception to the rule. Great piles and heaps of the raw materials of railroads loomed like miniature mountains. A machine called a "bulldozer" was running up and down the nascent roadbed, leveling with its huge steel wings—wings which gave it the appearance of a gigantic bat—the recently deposited gravel. Somewhere in the distance a steam shovel was chattering. And all about the newcomer were men—little, brown-faced, active men. They swarmed ceaselessly over everything with their picks and shovels, very much like highly educated ants.

The man with the bald head took in

these details with one lingering glance. He was a city man, on the face of things—in fact, he might have been a well-to-do professional gentleman or even a moderately prosperous bootlegger. There was a hint of secretiveness about his thin-lipped mouth and his eyes were hard and self-confident. He turned presently toward an elderly individual in overalls and tattered hickory shirt who had stood silently and placidly regarding him.

"I'm looking for a person named—ah, 'Rattler' McShane," the newcomer said. "He's foreman or general superintendent or whatever it is they call him of this camp."

"You moight as well call him the boss," the older man replied. "I'm McShane. What'll ye have?"

The city man examined Rattler McShane with depreciating interest.

"Oh?" he commented. "Well, Mr. McShane, I want a few words in private with you—though where we're to have them in this bedlam of a place is

a mystery hidden from my understanding!"

The boss of Camp Fourteen straightened forward from the wall of sacked concrete against which he had been leaning, thus revealing himself to be a tall and powerfully built old fellow with a prominent Adam's apple. His faded eyes might have been blue or gray or even green to begin with, but years of exposure to the desert sun seemed to have reduced them to a neutral color.

He gestured with one big hand.

"'Tis aisy, Mr.— I don't think I got your name?"

"Probably not. I didn't mention it. Pray lead us to this private spot you refer to and I'll introduce myself and my business."

So with a nod Rattler McShane turned and led the way through a scattering of Mexican laborers, who glanced softly up at the two passers-by with dark, sad eyes. The camp boss struck across a no-man's-land given over to heavy machinery, temporarily out of use; and presently approached a box car with open side doors, and windows cut in each end. It stood by itself.

McShane led the way up a cleated plank, and his guest followed.

The car was in reality the dwelling place of Rattler McShane. There was a neat iron bed in one end—in place of the usual built-in bunk, and a reading table with a shaded metal lamp. On shelves at the windows were pots of geraniums, whose vivid scarlet blossoms lent a touch of color to the otherwise dark-hued interior. The floor had been swept and sprinkled and now radiated welcome coolness. It presented a welcome contrast to the out-of-doors.

McShane's visitor pulled off the hat which he had donned as a protection against the fierce white sunlight, and mopped his head. His eyes rested discontentedly on those of his host.

"Right ye are," the camp boss agreed. "'Tis hot—but wait till July!"

"I have no intention of doing anything of the kind. My name is Barron, my friend, and I'm the head of the Barron Detective Agency. I've come here to arrest a bank swindler and murderer named Willis; 'Slippery' Jim Willis, alias 'Mexican Jim' and half a dozen other things."

"Oh, deary me!" Rattler McShane commented. "Robbed the poor banks, did he? Whin I was a young fellow I put all me hard-earned money in a bank and it wint bust. The president took a trip to Europe and the board of directors took to wearing silk hats. I'm not worrying about banks, colonel. They can look out for themselves!"

The old man spoke with unexpected energy and precision. Ralph Barron stared with kindling anger at him.

"So? Well, the law says that bank robbers must go to prison—and that murderers must go to the gallows. This man Willis was a clever one. He worked through third parties except for his last job, and then he cashed a forged check with forged indorsements in a small town bank one noon when the cashier was alone—and shot the cashier through the heart. He became suspicious, I suppose, and meant to leave behind no one who could identify him. He succeeded. Here is the hand-bill got out by the bankers' association and you can see for yourself how meager is the description of the wanted man."

With a hint of contempt in the motion, the detective drew from an inner pocket a folded paper and tossed it across to his companion. Rattler McShane's fingers closed upon it; and in the same moment without warning he had whirled toward the car door, his hand swung first back and then forward with a movement indescribably swift and sure. There was a flash and a bang, and the city man leaped from his chair.

"Rattler!" McShane explained laconically. "Clipped off his head. Can't bear 'em—the ugly, murdering devils!"

Ralph Barron stared with a sort of fascination at the writhing and headless serpent on the sand outside the car; then with a sigh of relief he again indicated the hand-bill he had given Rattler McShane.

"That description might apply to three men out of five," said he. "And it is the best we have been able to get. We——"

The old marksman had taken down a wooden cleaning rod and some oiled rags from a shelf over his car door and was cleaning the revolver. Now he glanced up from this occupation and asked a crisp question.

"How come you looking for this *hombre* in Camp Fourteen?"

"I picked up a tip from a woman arrested in connection with another crime that Willis was here. He had jilted her and she was after his scalp. I believe she gave me straight information. Slippery Jim has lived much of his life in Mexico and Central America. He speaks all the dialects like a native and knows the customs of the people. After he killed this unfortunate young man he headed out here, got work, and was absorbed like water by a piece of blotting paper!"

The camp boss shook his head. His eyes seemed to have a little more color in them and his lips were compressed. A stern expression overspread his face.

"Arrah, arrah—murder!" he murmured. "To steal the breath out of a man's nostrils—but water ain't sucked up so you can't see it, colonel. They must be some way——"

"If I hadn't thought so I wouldn't be here. But I've come to you for information, not advice. I was told you knew all these men, knew all about them."

Barron waved his hand vaguely toward the open door and toward the five hundred dark-faced railroad laborers beyond it. Old McShane shook his head without looking up from his task.

"Their own mothers wouldn't know them, belike," said he. "What with signing on and signing off, and all looking much alike, and there being so many of thim—'tis not possible to kape very close track. I——"

But at this point the old man suddenly shot erect again and, with that indescribably swift and sure movement of his, threw up the revolver which at last he had cleaned to his satisfaction and again loaded—and fired. There was an expression of almost fanatical hatred on his face as he stood looking silently down at the second victim of his deadly shooting—another rattler.

"Murdering devils!" he murmured. "A whirr and a flash and they have ye—no more sunlight, no more white-hot stars at night, no more plisant breeze! Death and the cold grave! Arrah, arrah, but I wish you well, colonel. This lad ye are after is much like a snake, I'm thinking. Robbing the bank is one thing, but stealing the breath out of a man's nostrils is another. If I can help ye, call on me!"

And after that old McShane sat back and watched and listened. He saw the detective from the city from time to time; saw him busy after his own fashion, quiet, observant, unobtrusive. Ralph Barron had a certain sort of irascible patience. With compressed lips and sour eye he made his way about, day after day, trying to pick up a whisper of gossip that would lead him to his man. But the camp seemed silent on the subject.

There was money in it if he succeeded. Rattler McShane occasionally unfolded the hand-bill the detective had given him. He let his faded eyes rest on the statement, almost meaningless to him, that the bankers' association would pay ten thousand dollars for the apprehension of Willis, thief and murderer.

Ten thousand dollars? He shook his head ponderingly—just words. But when he thought of part of the wanted

man's crime his pupils dilated and his nostrils contracted.

Murder! Old McShane's face hardened. Although he had never seen either of the participants in this grim tragedy, his Celtic soul projected it for him on the curtain of his imagination. The cry of protest—the snarl of rage—and the crack of smokeless powder! Death, and the mysterious hush of the grave!

A smoldering light came into his old eyes, and he continued to watch Barron hopefully.

But the city man was getting nowhere. He had come here without any great hope of success, probably, and, in spite of all he could do, the killer evaded him. One lithe, brown man among five hundred outwardly very like him—the task was hopeless. Slippery Jim had chosen his hiding place well. He had but to sit tight, ply his pick and shovel with the slow rhythm of his fellow-laborers—and he was as invisible as the Angel of Death whose emissary he had once been.

A time came when Barron began to sag under the merciless heat of the desert hills and under the hopelessness of his task. He somberly announced his intention of returning to civilization. He was baffled.

Rattler McShane stared.

"Sure, you won't be after quitting your job, colonel?" he pleaded. "Think of this devil going free—with blood on his hands! 'Tis against nature!"

"That's not my fault," Barron said. "I've tried to find him. Slippery Jim knew what he was doing when he came here. It was the murder did it—the fear of the rope. And he'll go free. He baffles even me!"

Rattler McShane overlooked the egotism in this last statement. His glance had hardened.

"Murder! To shove a man out into the dark and the cold whin everything

is so beautiful and fine in this world! Belike this man he kilt was young?"

"In the twenties—but what has that got to do with it?"

McShane didn't answer. He had taken out his old pipe and absently was stoking it, prodding the tobacco lightly down with one thick forefinger.

"The dark and the cold!" he said again to himself.

And that was the angle of the case that stuck in his mind after Barron, the city detective, had journeyed back to his office and had left Camp Fourteen as he had found it. The hot serenity of the desert had not been so much as stirred by his coming or his going. But in the heart of old Rattler McShane a turbulent anger sprang up and grew to immense proportions.

Rattler had seen men go down into the somber silence of the grave. He had seen them struck down in their prime as by a great, invisible blade. And always he felt the poignant mystery of it, the inscrutability of that Dark Angel whose wing-beats he sometimes fancied he could hear in the warm darkness of the desert night. Always he sensed the bitter inevitability of that full stop at the end of life's brief sentence. These half-formed and mysterious thoughts about death had power over old McShane. He was a lover of life. Years had never dulled his sense of its infinite value. And the thought of a man in his youth and his prime being shoved roughly out into that unwelcome night which must come only too soon at best brought a dull glow into his faded eyes and an ominous compression about the corners of his mouth.

Another idea came to him, momentarily deflecting him from the purpose which was forming in his mind. Perhaps the thing had been misrepresented. Perhaps this forger, Willis, was not so bad as he was painted. Commercial crimes made but scant impression on the old construction man. He valued

money so little that the mention of the ten-thousand-dollar reward had made little impression upon him. Now he dismissed all thought of the money with an impatient shrug. But, what if Willis should really be innocent of blood guiltiness in his heart—if he should have shot in sudden terror for his own life?

"Sure, time will tell!" he said to himself. "But first I must be afther catching him. Arrah—arrah—'twill be no easy job. And him as like the rest of the little brown b'ys, the Pedros and the Miguels, as one spike is like another! This wise burrud from the city couldn't find him. He didn't aven know what he looked like. Let us see. Let us see."

The old man drew out the reward notice which Barron had contemptuously tossed him that first morning and began to study it. He drew his chair over beside the open door of the clean, tranquil car, with its swept and sprinkled floor. Presently he had become absorbed in so deep a brown study that the clank of picks on rock and gravel and the roar of the bulldozer from up the cut struck unheeded on his ears.

He was looking away now, his eyes vague, his lips occasionally moving soundlessly.

He stood up after a time and went down the cleated plank to the ground. Without a glance at the little brown-faced men about him he headed for the cook shack.

James Willis, alias Mexican Jim, alias Slippery Jim Wilson, had settled into the routine of the construction camp with a stoical disregard for its rigors and discomforts which in a better cause would have been heroic. Slippery Jim knew many tricks like this. His long residence south of the Rio Grande had so fully acquainted him with the language and the customs of these brown men he was now working among that

he had no difficulty in passing for one of them, as far as the outside world was concerned. The numerous Joses and Miguels knew him for an outsider, but it was no concern of theirs and they didn't meddle with it. Willis lived much by himself and that suited him very well.

He was unaware of the advent of Barron, and that astute gentleman's investigation passed without leaving a ripple as far as Slippery Jim was concerned. And the murderer had even begun to forget that wanton killing which for the first time in his career had brought him into the shadow of the gibbet. The chilling fear which had almost constantly been with him during the first weeks after his crime was fading, and he began to tell himself that he was safe.

"They'd have landed me for taking their money—if they could! My killing this simpleton behind the wicket can't make them any keener than they were. But if I should be caught——"

That was the ominous thing. Formerly, if he had been caught, the worst he would have faced would have been a stiff sentence in prison; but now they could claim his life for that other life he had stolen. Fear rose and fell, rose and fell within him.

And then came a time when he began to forget. He looked forward with definite assurance to leaving Camp Fourteen and again mingling with the gay life of cities.

This mood of kindling confidence received a rude jolt one evening when Slippery Jim had finished his day's work and was passing the cook shack toward the roughly built dining hall where the men congregated three times a day. He was tired and grimed with perspiration and dust, and was eager only for his turn at the wash-trough. But suddenly he stopped, his eyes caught and held by something nailed to the wall of the cook shack, just beside the door. Slippery

Jim had seen that hateful printed thing once before: just prior to his fleeing from the city.

No one can predict the effect of a sudden blow like this. The bravest man will turn coward sometimes if he is unexpectedly jarred out of a reverie by a great danger. Slippery Jim had felt so sure that he had left all pursuit far behind that he had come to think himself secure; and now suddenly in this camp in the desert he saw this blaring statement that he was wanted for murder. With his lips parted, his eyes wide, he stood staring at the thing. He took a faltering step toward it and stood with braced feet.

Yes, beyond the shadow of a doubt this was just what in that first jarring second he had taken it for—a description of his crime; and what purported to be a description of himself.

He mastered his mood presently and strode on to where a crowd of his fellow laborers were waiting their turn at the wash-trough. Beyond the cook shack he saw the dining hall and the string of bunk cars in which the men slept. Old Rattler McShane's little cabin on wheels stood detached from the rest and, this evening, the old man sat in his doorway, tranquilly smoking, Slippery Jim glanced mechanically at him. Then he was again going over and over in his mind this startling development of his affairs. What should he do next?

Whence had come this notice? Who had fastened it there? Were the police here—disguised, perhaps watching him now, ready to pounce at any moment? But somehow he didn't believe that, and couldn't. Slippery Jim had always had a sort of sixth sense for the presence of detectives and official thief catchers.

One thing he realized: He must be on his guard every second now. And he must betray no interest in that handbill tacked beside the door. He stuck to this point in the days that followed.

Often Jim Willis saw his Mexican companions standing singly or in groups spelling out the words of the strange document. He took these details in from the corners of his eyes, but never again looked directly at the hateful thing. Occasionally he glanced mechanically in the direction of old McShane's car and saw without really looking, that the boss was sitting there, smoking.

It was a day or two later that Willis, the murderer, looked up from his work to see old Rattler McShane leaning against a pile of construction material close at hand, eying him with obvious interest. The old man nodded, took out his pipe and filled it. He applied a match presently and stood there smoking, watching Slippery Jim Willis as he the boss was sitting there, smoking quite as usual.

There was something disorganizing and ominous in this steady regard. The pseudo-laborer tried to move as mechanically as he had been moving before he discovered it, but a stiffness and jerkiness had come into his muscles that he couldn't control. He found his face and neck growing hot, and was conscious of a thrill of rage quivering through his nerves:

That noon he made a point of passing close to the cook shack. He was drawn with a curiosity which he could not entirely defy, but as he came within sight of the door he perceived that the reward notice was no longer there. Involuntarily he stopped, staring to assure himself his eyes were not fooling him. Then he hurried on, his heart beginning to pound: old McShane was looking steadily at him from the farther corner of the shack. The old man had got round behind there somehow. Slippery Jim tried to tell himself that it had just happened that way.

He stubbornly reasoned it out. Old McShane could know nothing. He was an ignorant old fool who probably didn't know that Julius Cæsar had been mur-

dered, to say nothing of the killing of an obscure bank clerk in a little country town.

McShane was watching him, however. By the end of a week Slippery Jim could no longer pretend not to know it. As a matter of fact the old man made no attempt to hide his steady surveillance. Half a dozen times during the day Willis would glance apprehensively up to find old Rattler near him, studying him through those faded, tranquil eyes. Eventually the thing so got on the murderer's nerves that he resolved to quit his job. The fact that he had not been arrested reassured him in a measure, and also he reminded himself that there could be no proof; the only witness of the crime was dead. He was safe.

But that reasoning had never really carried conviction, and now he knew that he must depart—or go crazy. His nerves were quivering and he was unable to sleep.

So he took his pay that Saturday night and went to his quarters with the hidden purpose of shaking the dust of Camp Fourteen off his shoes. He ate supper as usual, and went back to the bunk car where he was quartered. He had little of value here. He waited till his companions were busy at a card game and three minutes later had slipped from the car and was making his way along the newly constructed road bed, with the desert night settling silently down around him.

Jim Willis walked steadily till the gray light of dawn warned him that day was at hand. He had reached a small, dry creek bed spanned by a newly built steel bridge. The murderer made his way down at the side and into a little cañon the winter floods had carved for themselves. There was a fringe of willows on each side of him as he went forward, and after a time he came to a pool of stagnant water covered over

with green scum. Here he camped for a much-needed rest.

Slippery Jim was soon asleep in the shade of the willows. The sun crept higher and beat down into the little valley, which became as hot as an oven. Hour after hour he slept on, with the trilling of cicadas about him and, occasionally, a great black buzzard sweeping soundlessly across his meager little patch of sky.

Then the sun was descending, and the man in the shade of the willows began to stir.

He sat up presently and rubbed his eyes. He gasped and looked about him. With a sudden snarling intake he sucked in a lungful of the tepid desert air. His shoulders tensed and he straightened to his feet.

For there, not twenty paces from him, seated tranquilly on a rock, was the figure of an old man; an old man smoking a blackened brier pipe, watching through his faded eyes the swift motions of the awakened murderer.

With a sobbing oath Jim Willis reached under his loose khaki coat, and gripped the handle of his pistol. It was out, swinging round in a short circle toward the white disk of his pursuer's face. Slippery Jim picked up the sights as he swung the gun around into position for firing.

There was a snapping explosion, and he felt the pistol torn from his grasp, felt his clutching fingers go numb and lifeless. He cried out, staggered forward and then back. In abject terror he sagged to his knees. His gun had been shot out of his hand, and now the old man who had achieved this feat of marksmanship was regarding him unwinkingly over his own revolver.

"Get up! I ain't going to shoot you if I don't have to!" Rattler McShane said. "Turn to the left—straight ahead—march!"

Too dazed to think, Slippery Jim

obeyed. He marched stiffly up the little cañon with the crunching steps of his captor coming on behind.

An hour later they reached a cabin on the edge of another water hole. Willows grew closely about it. Obviously it had once been the headquarters of some pocket hunter.

Rattler McShane herded his prisoner into this miserable little shack and stood in the doorway, studying him.

"A varmint! I had my doubts till I tried you out and found you'd strike as swift and nasty as any sidewinder!" the old man commented. "Without I had been sure of that it would have bothered me some to hand you over to the law. Well, you sprung your rattle, sure enough. I'm going to camp outside here and, if you're tired of living, just stick your head out!"

"What do you mean to do with me, you old fool?" Willis asked. "And what's all this mysterious talk of yours? Who do you think I am?"

McShane nodded.

"I reckoned you'd try that dodge," he mumbled. "Well, go ahead."

In a sudden flashing tableau the murderer comprehended his captor's plan. McShane hadn't asked him to confess. He was going to keep him here till he was ready to talk without urging.

Keep him here? Without food or drink? Slippery Jim was inured to desert heat and to the hardships that went with it, but he knew that not even the desert creatures could live long without some sort of food and moisture. And he himself had not eaten since the previous evening. He had figured on making a forced march to the nearest supply point, which would have been arduous enough without this. He was in a bad fix.

Slippery Jim's mind steadied after a time. He sat down on the adobe floor and began to think. Outside the hut he could hear old Rattler moving deliber-

ately about, could catch from time to time the aroma of his tobacco. And then again the old man stood in the doorway, inspecting his prisoner with grim interest.

"I been killing snakes for twenty year," McShane commented, partly to himself and partly to Jim Willis. "Can't abide 'em. Nothing that brings death to quiet folks, minding their own business—shove 'em out in the dark when all the earth is so pretty and interesting. I couldn't have bore to think of handing you over to the hangman if I hadn't tried you out and found you was just like them other snakes—ready to strike, hungry to kill! You thought you had the drop on me, young fellow. But I ain't been shootin' snakes' heads off all these years for nothing!"

"Listen, old man!" the captive exclaimed. "Let me out of here—let me go free, and I'll pay you more than the law will! I'll give you everything I've got and work for more! I'll——"

"Shut up!" commanded Rattler McShane. "I ain't after the blood money and I won't take it. What's ten thousand dollars to me? I couldn't tote that much. I'll give it to some hospital or something. I didn't catch ye for the money!"

Slippery Jim tried another tack.

"Catch me? What proof do you think you have?"

Old McShane regarded him for another silent moment and then turned on his heel. Slippery Jim clenched his trembling hands. There was an eloquence in that silent withdrawal more terrible than any denunciation could have been.

"The old maniac will have my life if I don't outthink him!" he whispered. "One way or the other—but there is always a way out. Let me think!"

He sank again to the adobe floor and crouched there, staring into the dusk. Eventually he called to the old man.

"You win! I'll write out a confession and sign it! But I have no writing material."

"I should have thunk a man in your line would allays carry that sort of thing," Rattler McShane commented as he came back into the doorway. "I can fix you up, all right. Here you be and you can set close to the door till you write."

He handed his captive a sheet of paper and a pencil. Willis crouched with a flat stone for a desk and, after a time, wrote rapidly.

Old man McShane accepted that paper when it was at last handed him, folded it and put it into a side pocket without reading a word. He took from another pocket a coil of leather thongs and gestured peremptorily to Willis to turn round.

"Both wrists behint you!" Rattler snapped. "Move fast, young fellow! You're going to get hungry enough afore I get back anyhow!"

"Get back?" cried Slippery Jim, whirling as if he had been balanced on a pivot. "Where are you going?"

Mr. McShane regarded him with a grim smile. His stern expression was awe-inspiring.

"Going? Why, I'm going to the nearest telegraph station and wire this stuff into the city. Any one can confess to anything. But if this confession you've wrote out don't tell just how you done this thing—so that a jury can see you done it by the way you wrote it out and by the things no one else but you could know——"

James Willis, alias Mexican Jim, alias half a dozen other euphonious things that hinted colorfully of his evil past, sprang with a yell of rage upon his captor. The old man thrust a rough hand up till his iron fingers closed over Slippery Jim's windpipe. He twisted his antagonist back and forced him to the floor.

"I was a smith for many a year, young fellow!" he explained as he held the murderer down and regarded him with a hint of compassionate pity in his faded old eyes.

"I could twist horseshoe iron in them days, and I still got quite a grip. Lay still, will you?"

Slippery Jim did. He wanted to still the pounding of his heart and the hissing of his racing fears and thoughts. But when they did slow down to a saner rhythm, he could discover no way out. He was caught, and he realized that this ignorant old construction camp boss had outtricked him; had forced him to betray himself.

Rattler confirmed this suspicion, when James Willis snarled at him.

"Sure, I was watching the cook shack. You was hit of a heap when you saw that notice and afterwards you wouldn't look at it. The rest of the boys—all the Meeguels and Joses and the rest—wasn't interested the first time they see it because it was close to supper time and they was hungry. But arterward *they* come back, time and again.

"And then thar was the way you acted when I stood around and watched you work. The rest of 'em was tickled to have my company, but not you. No, Mr. Willis, I guess there ain't nothing for it but you got to come through. I know I ain't mistaken and I'm willing to keep you here as long as I got to.

"You know how long a sidewinder can live in the sun? Abouten ten minutes—and he's born in the desert. You mought hold out another day or two, or you moughtn't. You can try if you like!"

Broken and mastered, Slippery Jim stretched out his hand for pencil and paper. Slowly thereafter he wrote out his confession.

He told himself that he stood a fighting chance with the law, but that, if he held out against this old man of the

desert, he would certainly be brought to his death. And besides that he felt the longing for confession which comes at times to every man who has committed a murder.

"You've got me!" he exclaimed as he

handed Rattler McShane the paper. "That's the truth of it, every word!"

"Sure," agreed the old man. "I watched your face while you was writing it. All right, Mr. Willis, I reckon you and me'll start for the city."



CASHIER'S QUICK WIT SAVES \$11,000

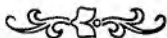
A GANG of seven youthful bandits recently staged a daring pay-roll holdup at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City, getting away with ten thousand dollars in cash. Only for the quick thinking of Joseph W. Hudson, the cashier of the hospital, the bandits would have secured eleven thousand dollars more.

Right in the face of the bandits' automatics, Hudson swept all the pay-roll envelopes on the desk before him to the floor, where they fell behind a mail sack and remained there unnoticed. These envelopes contained the eleven thousand dollars, which otherwise would have formed part of the robbers' loot.

The robbery had been carefully planned and was executed with precision and dispatch, taking up scarcely three minutes' time. Six of the bandits entered the hospital, the seventh man remaining in the sedan outside, with its engine running. Two of those who went inside stood guard in the corridor, while the remaining four raided the office cage. Three approached the cage by a door, while a fourth vaulted over at the rear.

Hudson took a desperate chance in making his instinctive sweep of the hand to throw the envelopes containing the eleven thousand dollars to the floor, but his act accomplished its purpose of saving part of the money.

When they had secured the ten thousand, the bandits made a swift get-away to their waiting sedan, which at once sped away, but was later found abandoned together with the empty pay-roll box a few blocks away from the hospital.



"BARGAIN RUSH" TO SING SING

ONE result of newly enacted legislation in New York State prolonging the minimum terms of prisoners was to cause an unprecedented rush of prisoners to Sing Sing and other State prisons prior to July 1st. Old-timers who wanted to get the advantage of the old laws pleaded guilty in batches so as to get into the pen before the new laws should take effect. On one day, twelve men were sent to Sing Sing, and of these, eight had pleaded guilty. The new laws also make parole more difficult of attainment, and the result of this legislation will be to make a more permanent prison population for the State. At the present writing, this population is estimated to be 7,500.

Work is being rushed on new cell blocks at Sing Sing so as to accommodate this increasing number of inmates. The normal capacity of the prison, without the additions, is 1,569, but this has already been exceeded, and the institution is overcrowded. A number of prisoners, however, are in course of being transferred to Great Meadow and Auburn.



METROPOLITAN SENSATIONS

THE LAST OF THE SLAVERS

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "Howe and Hummel," etc:

IN the dusk of the evening of August 8, 1860, the United States man-of-war *Michigan*, doing patrol duty off the mouth of the Congo, sent a shot across the bows of the clipper *Erie*, about fifty miles off the coast, opposite Kabinda. The merchantman quickly hove to, having previously tried to outfoot her pursuer. A few minutes later she was boarded by a party of bluejackets, who found what they had expected, a cargo of slaves below decks.

The captain was put in irons, along with his chief officers; a prize crew was put aboard, and the *Erie* started for Monrovia. On the way a number of the terrified blacks, eight hundred and ninety-three of whom were huddled in the small hold with not so much spare room as is given the bullock in a cattle car, gave up the fight and died. The rest were turned over to the American slave agent in Liberia, and

the *Erie* set out for New York. A few weeks later she arrived, a battered and ill-looking tramp, to be welcomed by the United States marshal, who then and there read to Captain Nathaniel Gordon, captive commander of the *Erie*, a Federal warrant charging him with piracy.

Thus originated surely the most spectacular slaving case ever tried in the courts of this country. To comprehend the full drama requires a brief expedition into the history of slavery or, perhaps better, its abolition. There was, of course, a fierce agitation against slave holding going on in this country—culminating in the spring of the following year in the war that terminated the system. But this has only a later and catastrophic bearing. What affected Captain Gordon most gravely in the beginning must be looked at from another angle.

England, of course, had been bit-

terly opposed to slavery long before the United States and before any other major nation. For hundreds of years—thousands actually—bands of slavers belonging to more advanced races had been in the habit of descending on the African coasts and carrying off the unhappy blackamoor to serve in the fields and houses of their masters.

The practice was common in oldest Egypt at least four thousand years before the Galilean era, and it persisted in every nation of later flowering.

After the discovery of the Americas a considerable trade in slaves was set up, the victims being mostly seized from the rivers of Senegal and the Gold Coast. After the explorations of 1816 the Congo negro also became an active commodity. But it was just at this time that England's opposition reached the climax.

The reasons for British opposition, and especially for its crystallization at this time, are the same that really actuated the North in this country some decades later. Negro slaves could not be used in England for a variety of reasons, such as climate, lack of uses for unskilled labor and public sentiment. A like situation prevailed in the major British colonies, Canada and Australia, for instance; while in India there was neither room nor use for more blacks than were already present and had been from old times.

Some of the other colonial empires, especially Spain and Portugal, found the blacks very profitable, as did our Southern States. It is obvious, of course, that there was no competing with slave labor on the part of free mechanics, even under such harrowing conditions as prevailed in England at the dawn of the Nineteenth Century.

So England wanted slaves done away with—in the interest of her business men, farmers, manufacturers, and the new class of industrialists, who were just trying their weak wings as the re-

sult of various mechanical inventions. No doubt some of the British agitation arose from the throats of honest reformers, just as in this country. Yet the historian who is impartial cannot but wonder at the strange fact that these agitations always arise and gain momentum when there is a good, sound financial, and hence selfish, need of the projected improvement.

In the treaty of 1815, after the fall of Napoleon, the victorious powers came to certain agreements among themselves concerning the slave trade. In 1817 Lord Castlereagh summoned the ministers again and reminded them that things had got worse and not better. Earlier in the year he had got Portugal and Spain to agree in a dodging way to abolish the trade south of the equator soon. But conditions had grown beastly.

The big, hulking slave ships, which were built to accommodate and care for human beings, had all retired. In their place had come into use types of fleet ships, mostly of the clipper type, which were designed to outstrip the British cruisers. It had become the custom to jam their narrow holds with hordes of poor black men, who suffered intensely and often died in the course of the voyages. Steps to suppress this bootlegging of blacks must be taken, said Castlereagh. One of the troubles of the situation, not unrelated to the three-mile-limit knot we have to-day, was the matter of search. Would France, Spain, Prussia, and America permit England to search their merchant vessels in time of peace?

The first overtures to this country show what the feeling was. Castlereagh approached the American minister in 1818 and gave him the draft of some proposed agreements. But the War of 1812-14 was just over; burned Washington was being rebuilt, and any president who had dared to propose letting the British search our ships

would have committed political suicide. So nothing came of it.

But Castlereagh was a persistent person. In 1819 he renewed his urgings upon President Monroe, proposing that the right of search be given to certain vessels of both countries which had special instructions, thus making the business reciprocal. President Monroe failed to get favorable legislative action on this phase of the problem until 1821. Meantime, however, three local laws had been passed which bear on the Gordon case. One provided that any one caught smuggling negroes into this country must prove that he was not violating the law, thus throwing the burden of proof on the slaver. The second gave the president certain powers, by which he might hope to curb the slave trade; and the third declared that any citizen of the United States convicted of engaging in slaving was to be held a pirate and punished by death.

Our Southern States smiled at such statutes. Indeed, there was even some energetic support of the measures from Dixie. There were already sufficient slaves in the South to handle things, and their progeny would serve for the future. It was even a good thing to stop the importation. If a shortage of blacks resulted, those who owned any Africans would profit through higher prices. Those who didn't feel this way about it mocked at the possibility of enforcing such a law.

The United States, most energetically supported by Great Britain, struggled with the slave bootleggers for all of forty years and a little more; passed such stringent laws as the last one just mentioned; put the navy and parts of the army to work on the problem—and then didn't succeed without a Civil War.

The slave traders transferred their headquarters to Cuba and other West Indian islands, sailed under the Span-

ish or Portuguese flags, crept stealthily up the various African rivers where their slave factors were waiting for the ships, loaded the bellies of their clippers full of poor human cattle, and then slipped out to sea again in the mists of some evening or dawn. Some of these slave clippers were even sufficiently armed to give battle to and beat off British cruisers and American sloops of war.

So the struggle went on for forty years. Every little while a ship would slink into Charleston or Savannah or Pensacola or New Orleans with a consignment of black men. They'd get by the warships and the forts somehow, and if the captain or the slave dealer happened to be arrested by some inexperienced government officer, there was little chance of getting a jury to convict him.

And that was the situation when the year 1860 dawned. It never occurred to the lean and sallow little captain, Nathaniel Gordon, as he stood on the wharf in Havana and saw his men putting the final touches to his clipper and loading the final barrels of rum into her hold that anything serious could happen to him. It was true that a few ships had been seized, but that was the owners' lookout. A few captains had been locked up for short spells. Well, nothing wagered nothing gained, Gordon philosophized.

So Gordon put to sea and nosed toward the mouth of the great Congo. He was a New Englander, a descendant of the New Bedford slavers who originated the idea of trading rum for African captives. He had been at sea since his twelfth year, cabin boy, deck hand, third mate, what not? Now, at only twenty-eight, he was captain of a fine swift ship with a dozen good, long guns mounted on her deck, and a heavy cargo of food and firewater below deck, for the little adventure out there.

Captain Gordon reached Banana, at the mouth of the Congo, some time in June and soon sailed up the broad reaches of that vast estuary to the appointed place. The chief was waiting with his captives, chained two by two, cowering in long sheds with thatched roofs, suffering with that terrible resignation which only the simple and the savage can exhibit. The rum was unloaded; the water tanks were replenished; the final bits of bargaining concluded; the ship cleaned, and the miserable Congo blacks driven aboard.

That done, the *Erie* dropped down the river and plunged her anchor about seven miles from the mouth. That was on the seventh of August. The same evening she cleared, gained the open sea without mishap, and ran slowly all the night and the following day, before light winds that impeded her progress but had the advantage of not lifting the mists. Toward sunset of the eighth, however, the breeze freshened; the *Erie* picked up her feet and stood out due west, to get past the cordon of cruisers as directly as possible.

Luck was against the evil ship, for hardly had her own sails filled hard when the lookout sighted the low, white *Michigan*, flying at her from an angle like a gull. The *Erie* changed her course and tried to run for it. It was too late. The *Michigan* fairly pounced upon her and brought her to her deserts. What might have happened on the long voyage across the Atlantic to Cuba, and farther, may be judged from the fact that eighteen of the intended slaves died from suffocation and heat before the *Erie* could be got into Monrovia, a comparatively short trip.

One does not hear of the men who do these things being hanged or sent to prison, save in the rarest instances. The public conscience is not yet in that phase. The point I am trying to make

is—that Captain Gordon's crime assumes its shape and color of enormity only because of the change of attitude toward slavery since his day. But he ought to have been judged according to the sentiments of his day.

Upon the captives' arrival at New York, Marshal Isaiah Rynders took Captain Gordon and a few of his officers to the old Eldridge Street jail. There the accused slavers were accorded every liberty and favor. Their meals were brought to them, with cigars and choice edibles. They slept on their own bedding, wore their own clothes, and came and went almost as they liked. Twice a week Captain Gordon went home and spent the night in the bosom of his family.

Like many another proud man, Captain Gordon failed to see the towering figure of Abraham Lincoln looming in the western sky. He failed to consider that the Buchanan administration was drawing to a close.

The awakening came the following March when Marshal Rynders went out with the Buchanan ebb, and Robert Murray came in with the Republican flow. Marshal Murray heard of the comfortable goings-on at Eldridge Street. He inspected the old jail and decided that the pirates would have to be put into a safer place, the Tombs—no less. It was the first time Captain Gordon had heard himself referred to by such an abominable title—except, of course, in the warrant, which didn't count. The new marshal sternly reminded the man that he stood charged with a capital crime.

"What—shippin' negroes?"

It was to laugh still—though the Tombs was not so comfortable and the captain did miss those evenings at home.

A month later Captain Gordon began to worry in earnest, however, for he was ordered to trial. The evidence was clear and exact. There were no

technical points that interfered. Unquestionably, Gordon had been taken from a ship bound for Cuba from Africa with slaves. He was undeniably the captain of that vessel, and there was not the least doubt that this act constituted piracy under the law of May 15, 1820. In spite of all, the jury would not reach an agreement, and Gordon was ordered back to the Tombs to await another hearing.

The slaver lay in the Tombs, not in any deep discomfort, until the sixth of November and then went back to court to be tried again, confident in the extreme.

The same facts were adduced; the same witnesses heard. In other words, the evidence was incontrovertible. Gordon's sole defense was that he was not properly an American citizen and thus not subject to the law. While his parents had been Americans, he had actually been born aboard a ship flying the British flag in a British harbor. He was thus a British subject and could not be made to answer to the American courts. The judges overruled this, and the case went to the jury, who brought in a verdict of "guilty as charged."

Something had happened in six months. There had been the defeats at Bull Run and Wilson's Creek. There was the growing seriousness of the enlistment business, and the war emotion had made inroads.

Gordon appealed, was denied a new trial, and was sentenced by Judge Shipman in a denunciatory speech, some part of which will be of interest:

"Do not attempt to hide its—the crime's—enormity from yourself; think of the cruelty and wickedness of seizing nearly a thousand human beings, who never did you any harm, and thrusting them between the decks of a small ship, beneath a burning tropical sun, to die of disease or suffocation, or be transported to distant lands and con-

signed, they and their posterity, to a fate more cruel than death. Think of the sufferings of the unhappy beings whom you had crowded on the *Erie*, of their helpless agony and terror as you took them from their native land, and especially think of those who perished under the weight of their miseries on the passage from the place of your capture to Monrovia."

The point here is that none of the negroes had died or been stricken ill at the time the *Erie* fell into the hands of the *Michigan* and Gordon was put into the coop. The eighteen who perished did so while the prize crew was in charge. It was thought necessary in those days to take slaves to Liberia or at least to some place where there was an American slave agent, for the reason that, if the human cargoes were taken and set at liberty at the nearest point to the scene of their capture, they might only fall back into the hands of slavers or perish in an unfamiliar territory.

Perhaps this was correct reasoning, but the fact remains that the *Erie* might have put about, regained the mouth of the Congo in a day and a night, freed the slaves, and thus restored them to something like their native heath without casualties. The other method involved a run of about two thousand miles up the African coast, a journey hardly to be made in a shorter time than twenty days. It was in the course of this terrible trip that the eighteen died. Thus the learned judge was berating the prisoner for homicides happening while he lay bound and fettered. It is true, eighteen and a good many more probably would have succumbed on the way across the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the jurist put himself in the position of scoring the convicted man for something he might or probably would have done or caused to happen.

Judge Shipman proceeded:

"Remember that you showed mercy.

to none—carrying off, as you did, not only those of your own sex, but women and helpless children. Do not flatter yourself that, because they belonged to a different race from yourself, your guilt is thereby lessened—rather fear that it is increased.”

Thus, for the first time, a Federal judge proclaimed the doctrine of racial equality, anent which some skeptical people still have their sad doubts.

At any rate, Gordon was to swing on Friday, February 7th, between the hours of noon and three.

Gordon's friends were stunned. They could not quite believe it. True, he had done the thing; nobody could venture to dispute it. And the law did provide death as the penalty. Still, the law had been a dead letter for forty years. It was as though, to-day, some actor in Boston were suddenly dragged away to the city jail, under an old Puritan statute forbidding theatrical performance, and finally hanged when it was found that acting on the stage was one of the deadly crimes under the dispensation of 1660.

Nor did the people of the day fail to recognize the point. There were a good many sayings and witticisms. "Poor Gordon!" ran one. "The election went against him." Another blade remarked: "Gordon's Southern friends should have delayed that Fort Sumter business till after the trial." Never was a man so strangely and cruelly caught on the sudden change of public and official attitude.

Still it was believed that the sentence would not be carried out. President Lincoln, for all that he was known to be passionately opposed to slavery, was a kindly and understanding soul. He would either pardon or commute Gordon.

A few days before Gordon was to swing, his wife and mother hurried off to Washington to see the president. They encountered the same ironic play

of chance or fate that had struck the captain before. Lincoln's little son had died that day, and the president was mourning with his family. There was not an official in Washington who would disturb him at such a time, and it was the eleventh hour. The Gordon women had to turn forlornly back. The best they could hope for was to see the prisoner before he was led out to die.

This they did on Thursday afternoon of February 20th—a two weeks' respite having extended Gordon's life so far—remaining with the doomed man until they were at last asked to depart by the warden, long after the usual hour. Marshal Murray called on Gordon at about eight o'clock, talked over things with him and finally said the hanging would take place at about two o'clock. Then he left the slaver alone, and Gordon spent hours in writing letters, turning out more than a dozen, including one to his little son, to be opened when arriving at manhood. What these missives contained might be worth knowing, but I have been unable to run any of them down.

His letters finished, Captain Gordon sat down to smoke some cigars his women relatives had brought him earlier in the day. Not until half past one o'clock did he lower his light and go to bed. The strange and affrighting prison drone descended on the Tombs. A condemned man was sleeping his last earthly slumber.

Suddenly, at three o'clock, the prison was awakened by a violent struggling and convulsing in Gordon's cell. The keepers came running, tore open the door, looked in vain for the rope or cloth with which the man might be strangling himself and quickly concluded he had taken poison. Physicians were summoned, and they set to work on the dying man to perform that ironic service of keeping a prisoner alive who had actually saved the State

the work of killing him. For hours it looked as though Gordon would cheat the noose, but at eight o'clock in the morning he rallied, after having his stomach pumped out and being liberally plied with brandy.

Marshal Murray, learning from the doctors that there was still danger of collapse, decided to perform the hanging at twelve o'clock instead of two, as agreed with the prisoner. He sent out notices and made all haste with his preparations. Meantime the keepers were bringing ever fresh doses of brandy, and the doctors were plying Gordon with it in quantities. He had taken strychnine, which had been smuggled to him, probably by his wife in one of the cigars.

The brandy finally did the trick, for at twelve o'clock Gordon was still alive, but extremely weak and quite drunk. He was ordered to make ready and those in charge of him got him dressed.

The government had decided to give no more open-air hanging carnivals in New York. Instead, the thing was now to be done in the Tombs yard, the

same old gibbet or hanging machine being used.

While Gordon was being prepared, things were going on in the jail yard.

A company of marines arrived and was drawn up about the gallows in a hollow square. At the farther end stood a brass band playing a funeral march, while the marines loaded their muskets, fixed their bayonets, and stood at "present arms."

Gordon was carried from his cell into the yard and up under the gibbet's crossbeam. It was obvious that he was practically unconscious, for when one of his carriers released him for a moment to adjust the rope, he fell to the ground. But they picked him up, put on the cap, began chanting the prayers, and gave the signal. The marshal stepped forward, raised his hatchet, and chopped the rope. Down shot the cruel weight, and up shot the terrible little pirate and slaver. He was dead in a few moments.

It took the same forces that determined the Civil War to make an end of Nathaniel Gordon.



PRISON AND DEPORTATION FOR SWINDLER OF WOMAN

ONE easy way to get money is to make love to a confiding woman and then borrow from her and never pay back. However, there is sometimes a come-back.

The recent sentencing of Allan J. Stone, in the Court of General Sessions in New York City, is a case in point. Stone pleaded guilty to grand larceny in the second degree in obtaining \$3,500 from a lady by representing that he was a physician and single and had matrimonial intentions toward her; whereas in point of fact, he was already married and was not a medical man anyhow. After he became engaged to her, he borrowed the sum of money mentioned.

Later, with the proverbial fury of a woman scorned, the young lady got after him and caused his arrest, with the result that on his plea of guilty, he was sentenced to fourteen months in the penitentiary, to be followed by deportation to England, of which country he is a citizen.

Headquarters Chat

IT certainly is delightful that you readers become so attached to the criminals, mild or venomous, found in the intriguing pages of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE; some of you even want them to pay your home town a visit! Is it just because you love them so or is it, perchance, that you would like to worm yourselves into their good graces, and sick them onto some enemy? It cannot be for the latter reason; it must be just because you love them so.

Here comes a plea for such a visit. L. D. Bray words the invitation. Spartanburg, South Carolina, Mr. Bray suggests, would extend a hearty welcome. We wonder if the chief of police, and the other inhabitants of that lovely city in the South, feel the same way about it. The chosen criminal guest is none other than lipping Thubway Tham.

Here you are, Tham; look this invite over. Then make up your mind as to looking over the town—and, no doubt, later exploring the pockets of some of Spartanburg's most substantial citizens.

"DEAR EDITOR," writes Mr. Bray, "having been a constant reader of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for the past eight years, I am taking the liberty of dropping you a few lines while stopping over in your great city for several hours. Have been traveling around in the subways all afternoon, but as yet I haven't had the pleasure of meeting my good friend, Thubway Tham. No doubt the little rascal is stepping out with Craddock this afternoon. Wish I had the time to spare to drop around and see Simon Trapp, at his Broome Street establishment, but suppose I'll have to postpone this till my next trip to New York.

"What's the matter with Chris Booth of late? We must have more Clackworthy stories. Please tell Thubway Tham for me that if he ever gets enough of the subways, why, I'll be glad to have him pay me a visit at Spartanburg, South Carolina. I think a change of environment would do the little fellow good. Tell McCulley to send Tham South for a few weeks; money is plentiful down in Dixie, and Tham should be able to gather in enough to last him for some time to come. Craddock needs a vacation, but I hope McCulley will send him elsewhere, if he lets Tham come South for a few weeks."

Good old Chang to the front again; other favorites mentioned below by Joyce Campbell, New York City:

"DEAR EDITOR: Words are inadequate to express my admiration for Mr. Chang. He, however, would surely not waste a thought on a mere Caucasian like me, so I must worship at a distance.

"None, in my estimation, can hold a candle to Mr. Chang but my other favorites are: Maxwell Sanderson, The Benevolent Picaroon, Thubway Tham, The Avenging Twins, Simon Trapp, Mother Hansen, and Big-nose Charley. As a matter of fact I like DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE from front to back—even the ads.

"The people who send in petty criticisms are silly to do so. Small mistakes do not detract from the value of the story, and the criticisms make the authors, to say the least, uncomfortable. The only possible way in which you could improve the magazine would be to issue it twice a week with a Mr. Chang story in every issue."

Some praise for the artists here:

"DEAR EDITOR: I have been a silent but interested reader of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for the past eight years, in fact, ever since I was eleven years old. I would like to express my appreciation of the entertainment and enjoyment I have had during that period, and hope to have in the future.

'Headquarters Chat is the first thing I turn to when I receive my copy of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE; next I read the page telling what is in store for the following week.

"Of course, I enjoy Landon, McCulley, Small, Chichester, and the other favorites, but I don't see many of your

readers praising Roland Krebs or Thomas Topham. The latter's Cricket Jones stories are especially good. Krebs' yarns are to be commented upon because of their humorous nature, depicting that all is not tragedy in the life of a crook. Let us have more from both of these writers.

"I would also like to praise your cover artist, John Coughlin. Lately I have noticed that the stories themselves are illustrated, and I also have praise for this.

"All in all I haven't a single kick to make and I believe DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE gets better with each issue.

"Yours sincerely,

"A PHILADELPHIA READER."

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF DETECTIVE
STORY MAGAZINE

**THE CRIMSON CLOWN'S
COMPETITORS**

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Four persons—The Crimson Clown, an imitator of The Crimson Clown, an out-and-out crook, and a detective, among a host of others, attend a fashionable garden party. The result is profitable to one, disconcerting to the others, and most entertaining to the readers.

PERFUME OF ARABY

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Graceful in manner, ardent in his love-making, Emir Mahrat suddenly becomes a cringing, crawling creature, and all because of the odor of crushed poppies and roses.

THE SIREN OF THE FORCE

By THOMAS TOPHAM

Perhaps you've been following with breathless fascination the thrilling tale of The Sleeping Cop. Here's a story that will take your breath in quite another fashion. Allow us to introduce Mr. Topham's newest creation—a singing cop.

And Other Stories

Order Your Copy Now

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

When it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

SARGENTS, BEN.—Had three children, Ida, Viola, and Virgil. Last seen at Dickens, Texas, about fifteen years ago. Write to your old pals, Abe Stuard and Bud Bengo, Route 3, Box 77, Lindsay, Oklahoma.

GIDEON, JAMES.—Over six feet tall. Last heard of about thirty-five years ago at Bismarck, North Dakota. Would be sixty years of age. Would appreciate any information concerning him. Mrs. Fay R. Bartley, Box 110, Whitehall, Montana.

SEAMAND, LEOTA.—Left Lawrence, Kansas, with Etta Low, in 1911 or 1912, for Canada. An old family friend would appreciate any news from her. Mrs. Floyd Quinn, 1014 South Oak Street, Casper, Wyoming.

STIGALL, SAM and OLIVER J.—Father and half brother. Everything is forgiven. Please write to me, Mrs. Florence Bjodstrup, 306 Twelfth Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

HALE, Mrs. GLEN.—Please write to your old pal, Mrs. Carrie Peterson, 2344 Sloat Way, Sacramento, California.

GARFIELD, Mrs. MINA MAY.—Our letters to you at Alberta, Canada, came back. Write to your father, Dexter Brown, Oak Creek, Colorado.

McARDLE, JOHN.—Short, light weight, around fifty years of age. Lived in Florida in 1917. Worth your while to communicate with me. George Richards, 3507 Tampa Street, Tampa, Florida.

HOGUE, DEWEY.—Received all packages and letters. Write to me. All your people are O. K. My mother died in May. Esther.

WALTERS, RUBE C.—Last heard of at Omaha, Nebraska, two years ago. Any information would be greatly appreciated by his sister, Beulah Presha, 1107 North Main Avenue, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

GREEN, DAVID H.—Left his family in Indiana about fifty years ago. Had four children, Joseph, Harrison, William, and Barbara Ellen, who wish to hear from him. Had red hair. Any information will be appreciated by his granddaughter, Mrs. Henry Anderson, R. R. 8, Anderson, Indiana.

MEEK, J. H.—Your cousin would like to hear from you. Have something important I want to ask you. Mrs. Grace Hayward, 141 East Fourth Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

STONE, ROBERT EDWARD.—Any one knowing his address please write to M., care of this magazine.

MONAHAN, JOHN.—Formerly of Dunkirk, Indiana. I have good news for him. Please write to M., care of this magazine.

FRUITT, RICHARD.—Eighteen years old. Left Fort Smith in 1925. Please write to his mother, Mrs. N. W. Dort, Route 1, Box 91, Muskell, Oklahoma.

PARKER, HARRY R.—Was formerly of Medford, Oregon. Believed to be in Nevada. Has not been heard from for ten years. Your son, who is eleven years old, needs your help. Please write to your wife, Mrs. Sylvia B. Parker, Box 415, Aberdeen, Washington.

DAVIS, VENA C.—Daughter of John C. and Ruth. Would like to hear from her or any of her relations. Her sister, Mrs. Henry Bryan, 316 East Starke Street, Rockville, Indiana.

SHEPHERD, Mr. and Mrs. B. F.—Or any of their four children please communicate with Mrs. Shepherd's brother. They were last heard of in Oroville, California, April, 1925. Robert W. Milligan, 1065 West Seventh Street, Oakland, California.

McLEMORE, VIRGIL R.—Medium height and weight, blue eyes, dark-brown, curly hair. Married in Groesbeck, Texas, in 1922. Have important news. Write to M. B. Clement, 723 West Commerce Street, San Antonio, Texas.

HANSON, GUSTAV.—Last heard of near Virginia, Minnesota. Any information will be appreciated by his sister Julia, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, GEORGE.—Please write to your brother's family at Rice Lake, Wisconsin. J. J.

SLIFER, THOMAS.—Last known of at Springfield, Illinois. His daughter would like to hear from him. Luella Slifer, 1224 Liberty Street, Racine, Wisconsin.

DAVIS, LEONARD.—Born November 9, 1898. Six feet tall, weighs over two hundred pounds, has fair, curly hair and deep-set blue eyes. Slightly scarred about the face, neck, and ears from a gas explosion. Was an oil-well driller by profession. Last heard of at Tonkawa, Oklahoma, March, 1923. Address Box 323, Amberst, Texas.

"PAT."—Formerly of San Antonio and Mexia. Address Box 322, Amberst, Texas.

JANE B.—Please write to me at the old address. Frank.

WYKOFF, DOROTHY.—About twelve years of age. Last heard of at San Juan, California. Please write to Isabel Brown, care of this magazine.

HENRY, EDGAR.—Please write to your brother, Edward T. Sullivan, Box 32, Dunedin, Florida.

SMITH, ARTHUR and LEE.—Adopted. The last time I saw them was at Mancelona, Michigan. They do not know they have a brother. Would appreciate any news of them. Thomas M. Wheeler, Eleventh Medical Regiment, Thirty-first Hospital Company, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

SLATTERY, THOMAS, or HARRY VERNER.—Native of New Orleans. Please write to E. L. S., care of this magazine.

HARTER, A. A.—Was in the Ninth Remount Squadron at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, from October, 1919, to September, 1920. Twenty years old, five feet six inches tall. Please write to an old pal, Harry, care of this magazine.

PARCE, FREMONT A.—Last heard from five years ago at Elgin, Oregon. Believed to have owned some property near Bend, Oregon. Any information at all will be appreciated by his only remaining son, Ralph Russell Parce, 624 South Third Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

MONAGHAN, JOHN.—Left Butte City, Montana, for Kansas City in 1880 and has not been heard from since. Any one who can tell what has become of him will do a great favor by writing to his son, John Henderson Monaghan, care of this magazine.

HORWATH, PAULINE or LEONA.—Nineteen years of age when she left home, which was nine years ago. Her brother would like to locate her. Joseph Horwath, care of George Schlenbecker, 2416 Greenview Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

PARKER, A. L.—Please write immediately to your old friend, "Navajo Bill," as I have an interesting message for you. Address W. B. H., Box 3, Del Paso Heights, California.

SILVA, ANTONIO G.—Served as a soldier in Panama, completing his term in September, 1923. Please get in touch with your father, Miss Constance Silva, 1775 Monroe Street, Santa Clara, California.

BLASS, LEON P.—Please write to your old pal, Mabel Clark, Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

STOKER, WILLIAM WAYNE.—Any one knowing the whereabouts of this boy please inform his sister, Mrs. Earl Stonehocker, Box 261, Milford, Utah.

LEWIS, CHARLES EDWARD.—Short, heavy-set, blue eyes. Had brown hair. About sixty years of age. Was in Lufkin, Texas, in 1900. Blacksmith by trade. Please write to Peter C. Landric, Browning, Montana.

BUDDY.—Write or come home. Verna and I want you and need you. Betty, Tourist Hotel, Fresno, California.

WALTON, WILLIAM.—About seventy-six years old. Visited me here two years ago, and then went to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From there he went West, and I have been unable to locate him. Please write to Mrs. Lillie Bogenrief, 702 Royal Avenue, Rockford, Illinois.

HANSEN, LUIS.—Norwegian by birth. Left La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1890. Last heard of at Great Falls, Montana, the following year. His son would like to hear from him. Alfred L. Hansen, Lock Box 425, Winslow, Arizona.

DEVAN, WILLIAM H.—Formerly of Tonquin, Oregon. A business partner in an insentation. Please let me hear from you at once. Circumstances did not allow me to communicate with you or your daughter, Mrs. Rodgers, until now. James McClincy, 1753 East Eleventh Street, Portland, Oregon.

APPEL, MATT J.—Medium height, brown hair, bald, blue eyes. His wife is anxious for some news of him. Mrs. Anna M. Appel, R. F. D. 2, Elmwood, Wisconsin.

WELCH, MARY, MAGGIE, and NELLIE.—Ages from forty-five to fifty-five years. Last heard of at Maysville, Missouri. A long-lost sister would like to hear from them. Mrs. Bridget Labey, 402 Cumming Street, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

TEX.—Daddy, please give me a helping hand for little Billy Buckner and Redbird. There will be no danger. Write to me at Nannie Woods', 104 Breckenridge, Camden, Arkansas.

NORMAN.—Send address, as I would like to write to you. Tots.

BRONSON, CHARLIE A.—Your daughter would like to hear from you. Mona Martin, 303 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

MILLER, ELIZABETH STILTZ.—Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Would like to hear from her. Mona Martin, 303 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

MICHAEL or HOUSTON, JAMES, CHARLES, and EARL.—Last heard of at St. Joseph, Missouri. Please send any information to their aunt, Ivan Christian, Tranquille, B. C., Canada.

DUNCAN, WILLIAM.—Age nineteen. Last seen at Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Please write to your old friend, Ed Copley, 2430 Curtis Street, Berkeley, California.

VERNER or CAVENAUGH, CECIL.—Of London, Ontario, Canada. Last heard of at San Francisco, California, in 1923. Write to your old friend of Manila, Ericso, and Nagasaki. Herb C., care of this magazine.

WARNER, FRANK.—Last heard of at Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Please notify Edward P. Warner, Polytechnic, Montana.

MORRISON, FRANCIS.—I would like to hear from you. Please send your address. Florence, care of this magazine.

WOMACK, BEATRIX, or LULA and JAMES MADISON.—Born in 1888 and 1874. Beatrice is small, brown eyes, and had brown hair. James is tall, dark, and olive skin. Their mother, who is seventy years old, is in need of love and a home. Address Mrs. C. W. Chase, 653½ Third Street, San Bernardino, California.

CHENAULT, GEORGE B.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. G. F. Michael, Box 861, Sanford, Florida.

MUELLER, ERNA.—Of Brooklyn, New York. Your friend, who knew you in Harbin and Vladivostok, in 1918 and 1919, to whom you wrote some time ago, has lost your address. A. S. H., care of this magazine.

FREEMAN, SYRETHA.—Native of P. E. I. Last heard of at Woburn, Massachusetts, twenty-eight years ago. Had one child, an adopted boy, who would be in his early thirties now. The Talbots would like to hear from you. Address Mrs. W. H. Carr, 659 Moody Street, Waltham, Massachusetts.

HAMILTON, PARKS.—Please write to your mother, Mrs. F. M. Hamilton, 435 East Adams Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

BRECKLIN, BILL.—I want you to come home. We know about your Louabe and have fixed everything all right. I will grize myself sick if you don't come. Love, Minnie.

BÉCVAR, ED.—Please communicate with your old pal, John Conway, 415 East Seventy-fifth Street, New York City.

J. H. P.—Jimmie, please write to me. Gloria.

O'HARA, JOHN.—Left home June 20, 1920. He is a Spanish-American War veteran. Age fifty-one years, blue eyes, gray hair. Address Mrs. John O'Hara, 37 Magnolia Street, Newark, New Jersey.

SKLEPIK, VINCENT.—Age thirty-one. Left arm off. Last heard from in Florida. Please write to Max Skleplik, 4 M. C., Camp Galliard, Canal Zone.

KARR or LONTS, L. E.—Please write to your two Alabama friends whom you met near Winfield one Sunday afternoon. Shall never forget you. Mattie Hollis and Gertie Denton, Route 1, Guin, Alabama.

WILKINSON, Mrs. FRANK, and ANNIE LEE.—Mother and daughter. Last heard from at New Orleans, Louisiana. Please write to your old pal "Billy." I have lots of news for you. Louise, care of this magazine.

McLELLAND, A. E.—Am still where you left me. Please come back. Things won't be the same as they were. Let me hear from you. I won't give you any trouble. Your wife, F. P., care of Buck.

BUNELL, EZRA.—When last heard from lived near Indianapolis, Indiana. Any information would be gladly received by his cousin, Mrs. Mattie Brooks, 1907 Randolph Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

LARUE, VERDELL.—I would like to hear from you. Tom, care of this magazine.

KNOWLTON, Mrs. ALICE K.—Married at Rossville, Illinois, in 1872. When last heard from lived at Trenton, Missouri, and Pleasanton, Kansas, at which time she had two boys, Eads and Clifford. Please write to Arthur L. Dickens, Motor Route B, Eugene, Oregon.

JOHNSTON, RAYMOND WALTER.—Formerly of Valley Junction, Wisconsin. Last heard from at Sprague, Washington. I still love you and want to hear from you. Your father is just alive in Chetek, Wisconsin. Agnes, care of this magazine.

OSGOOD, OLIE F.—Father and mother are in needy circumstances. Please return home or write at once. They are trying to locate you. Their address is 440 Main Street, Haverhill, Massachusetts. Bertha.

Fry JOHN W.—Age twenty-one. Have not heard from him since he left in February, 1925. Please write or come home. I am alone now and have no place to stay. Your mother, Mrs. Louisa A. Fry, Walula, Washington.

BAKER, HARRY T.—I still love you and long to see you once more. Please write and let me know how you are. Mrs. Julia Baker, 1408 Fourth Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

CALLETT, WILLIAM S.—Age twenty-three, light hair, and weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from at Baltimore, Maryland. Write to your brother, Paul Callett, Emory Gap, Tennessee.

IVERSON, H. A.—Married. Has two children. Wife's name is Violet. Write to E. A. H., care of this magazine.

JORDAN, JOHN W.—Had "Co. A. 118 M. G. Bat." with crossed sabers, tattooed on left forearm. Black hair, brown eyes, over six feet tall, thirty-three years of age. Last heard of at Perry, Georgia, in 1920. The cause for which you went away has long since been removed. Please write to mother. Address Curtis Jordan, Route 1, Perry, Georgia.

BOCKELMAN, ALECK.—Over six feet tall, blond, curly hair, blue eyes. Last seen at San Antonio, Texas, in 1920. Please write to an old friend, Irma Greis, 5532 Indiana Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

PROUDFOOT or HARRINGTON, ANN or MARY.—Canadian or English birth. Rather slight build, short, dark complexion, black, curly hair, and blue eyes. Would be around forty-five or fifty years old. She and her husband were on the stage in a trapeze performance. An only sister, who was adopted when a baby, would like to find some trace of her. Mrs. M. Smith, care of this magazine.

HOLDING, WILBUR, and Mr. and Mrs. GEORGE ROBINSON.—Last heard of at Dallas, Texas. Have news for you. Please write to Toots, care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, GEORGE H.—Last heard of at McCanna, North Dakota, May 29, 1925. Any information will be appreciated. George H. Davies, Box 394, Spooner, Wisconsin.

HULL, JOE.—Have not seen him for ten years. Any information about him will be appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Cora B. Hull, Springport, Michigan.

DICK W.—Will you please drop me a line? I am the same pal to you as ever. Laura Wheeler, 725 West One Hundred and Seventy-fifth Street, New York City.

MURPHY, JEROME R.—Please write to me if you don't want to come home, as I am very anxious about you. Helen.

MILLER, ORVIS ROBERT.—Left Wenatchee, ton, October, 1925. Please write to your sick Emie Miller, Quessnell, B. C., Canada.

MEMBERS.—Of the Third United "Kinky" Louis, Husted, Vayo, and any of the old P to Charles Benson, 65 East ton, Brooklyn, New York.

MISSING DEPARTMENT

ROONEY, J.—Advertised for me two years ago. All letters sent to Springfield, Massachusetts, have been returned. I want to get in touch with you. With love, Helen Johnson, care of this magazine.

HASTINGS, MARY JANE.—Would like to hear from my relatives, who are in St. Catherine's, Canada, and Erie, Pennsylvania. Address Mrs. Mary Jane Carrick, 2413 Clarendon Avenue, R. R. 13, Jeffersontown, Kentucky.

HICKS, FRANCIS.—Was placed in St. Vincent's Infant Asylum, at Baltimore, Maryland, April 27, 1895, at the age of five months. When called for by friends a few weeks later, he had been given away by mistake, and no trace of him could be found. He had very black eyes, black, curly hair, and dark complexion. Address Mother, care of this magazine.

DAUGHERTY, WILLIAM AND SARAH.—Last heard of twenty years ago at 1430 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please communicate with your aunt, Mrs. Anna Maguire Kervan, Kirie, Idaho.

CHARLIE.—Have had no word from you. Do you want J. to have H.? If not, come at once. We miss you very much. Mother.

LANGDON, WILLARD RALPH.—Last heard of at Des Moines, Iowa. Their half sister would like to hear from him or his children. Address Mrs. C. W. Merkle, R. F. D. 2, Filer, Idaho.

BECKWITH, DONALD ALLISON.—Born in Santa Rita, California, April 3, 1891. Medium height, light-brown eyes and hair, ruddy complexion. Discharged at Camp Fremont, California, March 31, 1919. His mother is dead and his sister would like to get in touch with him. Mrs. Dora B. Badger, Blaine, Oregon.

WEBBER, EMILE.—Missing for two years. Medium height; age twenty-three, blue eyes, light complexion, and dark hair. Information will be more than appreciated by his brother, Billie Webber, U. S. S. "Lark" 21, care of Postmaster, New York City.

CALVERT, GEORGE FRED.—Last heard of in West Virginia, about ten years ago. Was born in Roanoke, Virginia, fifty years ago. His daughter would like to hear from him. Mrs. Ethel Weaver, 11730 Edite Street, Detroit, Michigan.

ADRIAN.—Must hear from you. Don't be afraid. Don't let me down here all alone, so it would be greatly appreciated. John A. Maasey, General Delivery, San Antonio, Texas.

MASSEY, OBREY.—Please let me hear from you. I am down here all alone, so it would be greatly appreciated. John A. Maasey, General Delivery, San Antonio, Texas.

BILL.—Would like to hear from you. Your brother, 1306 West Tenth Street, Michigan City, Indiana.

TRUMPALLA or CLANCY, MART.—Last heard of at Redding and Redlands, California, three years ago. Your brother is anxious to get in touch with you. Walter Trumpalla, 1223 O'Connor Avenue, La Salle, Illinois.

MELLON, Mrs. CHARLES, and Mrs. JOHN F. FINK.—Mother and sister. Last seen at Columbus, Ohio, December 22, 1923. Would like to have news of your whereabouts. Harry C. Clark, Box 14223, Repease, California.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from Jack Benton, of Birmingham, Alabama; L. L. Cook, of Fordyce, Arkansas; Jeff D. and Mrs. Ed Hust, of Rector, Arkansas and New Mexico, and Will Davis, of Kentucky. Address Mrs. C. C. Davis, Route 1, Linden, Texas.

PETY, GEORGE.—Left Homestead, Illinois, ten years ago. Last heard from at Elmstead, Pennsylvania. Any news will be gladly received by his friend, Mary Kocanik, 293 Tyler Street, Gary, Indiana.

J. P. L.—Why don't you come back or write? Have looked for you for six years. M. M., care of this magazine.

LADDIE, GEORGE ALBERT and IRENE.—Taken from the Washington Children's Industrial Home at Tacoma, Washington. Write to Box 1264, Cosmopolis, Washington.

HUYCK, PERRY L.—Last heard of at Union, New York. Please write to me for friendship's sake. I want to hear from you so much. Helen Bryant, 60 Northwest Eighth Street, Miami, Florida.

WINE.—Last heard from at Sacramento, me. Brownie, 202 Park Street, Portland, Oregon.

WINE.—Born in Brooklyn, New York. Have very important news. Write to me. Care of this magazine.

POWERS, MAT.—About seventy-five years of age. Face pitted from smallpox. Left Montross, Iowa, in 1900. Believed to be in Tennessee, running a fish market. Please communicate with your nephew, William Cameron, 112 Avenue C, Fort Madison, Iowa.

RINKEN, GEORGE W.—Light hair, blue eyes, about forty-nine years of age. Have been so lonely, would love to hear from you. Your sister, Nellie Rinken Whitfield, 902 West Fifth Street, Waterloo, Iowa.

MORGAN, BILL and "BILLIE."—D. and I quit. Please write to me at Lagrange. "Billie" Mc.

MOODY, EDDIE A.—Last heard from at Fairbanks, Alaska. Please write to Mrs. Milley Kanley, 803 Fifteenth Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

RHEA.—Please let me hear from you. Have returned to the States. F. M. D.

WOODRUFF, MRS. RUTH.—Your sister and brother are very anxious to communicate with you. Florence and Roy Heffner, 109 West 101st Street, New York City, New York.

BOWLES, JOHN DAVID.—Was at San Jose, California, in 1915-16. Was foreman for a sugar corporation in the Hawaiian Islands in 1896. His son is anxious to get in touch with him. Melvin V. Bowles, Box 1300-8, Repease, California.

PIERCE, R. D.—Please write to your old dad and Carrie. Everything will be all right. Mrs. R. C. Peterson, 2344 Sloat Way, Sacramento, California.

STEFFEE, WALTER.—Your parents wish you to come home or write to them. Everything is all right and you are forgiven. F. E. Steffee, 1127 Victory Street, Akron, Ohio.

MAC.—Cannot believe you have forgotten me. Am so worried about you. Please, for my sake, write. C.

L. B. O.—I want my freedom, nothing else. Send address, please; they there will be no publicity, and it will be best for both of us. Best of luck. S. O.

NASON, EARL.—Six feet tall, ruddy complexion, black hair, gray eyes. Ex-soldier of the World War. Afflicted with wandering spells. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to his care, care of this magazine.

ARMSTRONG, MRS. F. M.—Formerly of Pittsfield and Lee, Massachusetts. Last heard from in South Dakota. Please write to Clifford R. Armstrong, 443 Gale Avenue, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

ANDREW, FRED.—Sixteen years old, large for age. Everything is all right. Have news for you. Write to your old pal at once. Clifford R. Armstrong, 443 Gale Avenue, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

G. H. D.—We will be delighted to hear from you. M. J. D., formerly of Eagleville, Pennsylvania.

OSBORNE, JACK.—Last seen in St. Louis, Missouri. Was a miner at Joplin, Missouri, at one time. A legacy from your sister is due you. Please write to Fred Williams, care of this magazine.

HOUSTON, EDITH ROSS.—Tall, black hair and eyes, about thirty-eight years old. I have news for you. Please write. Irene, Box 62, Udell, Iowa.

GARSDIE, JAMES, "BILL" MATHEWS, TOMMY WALDRIP, FRED KINKLER, CHARLES REDICK.—And any of the band and orchestra boys who traveled with the Emma Warren Company, out West, please let me hear from you. Captain Harry DeLong, General Delivery, Somerville, New Jersey.

STEVENS, MABEL.—If you want to, would like to have you join me as quickly as possible. Have tried to locate you before. Address Mrs. J. M.

THOMPSON, CHARLES.—Please write to me, Jack Waldo, care of Billboard Publishing Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

W. F. G.—Terribly lonesome. Please write as often as you can. M. M.

MILLER, PATTON.—Colored, short, small build. Last seen in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1907. Please write to your daughter; I need you. Gertrude Miller, Box 21, Sophia, West Virginia.

CHRISTIAN, WILLIAM.—Colored. Last seen in Halifax, Virginia, seventeen years ago. Scar on one cheek. Please write to your niece, Gertrude Tugmon, Box 21, Sophia, West Virginia.

TIPTON.—Want to hear from any person of that name. Immigrants supposed to have settled in Baltimore, Maryland, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Descendants moved to Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri. Address Charles J. Tipton, Box 133, Helena, Montana.