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Every Week

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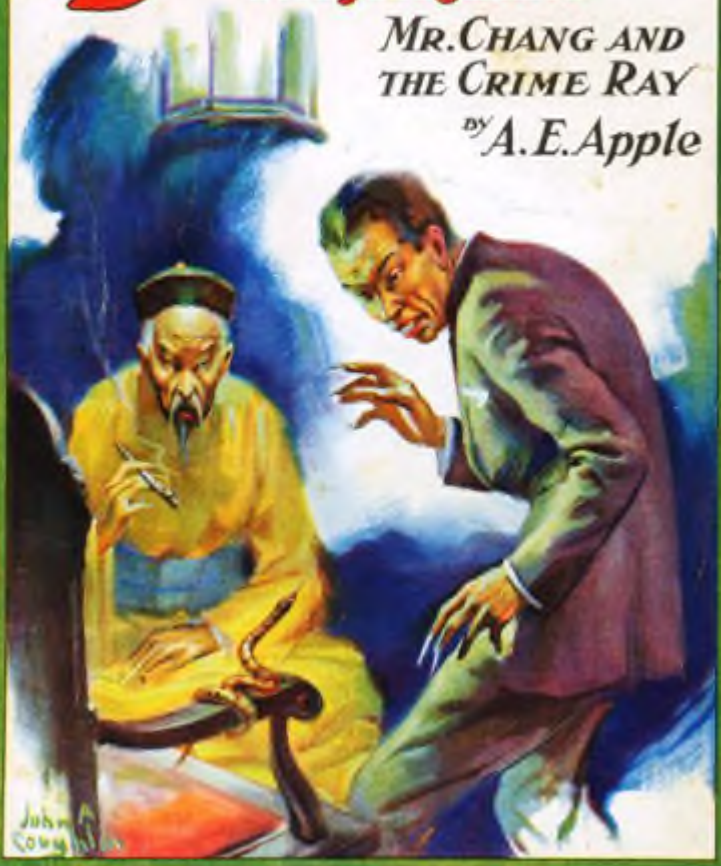

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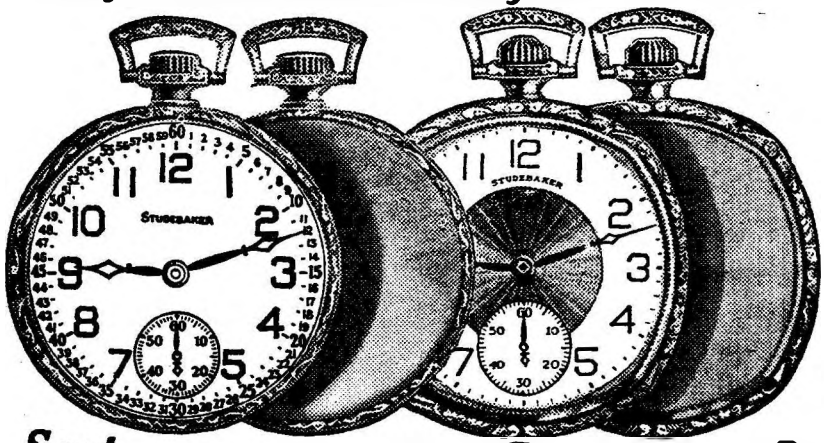

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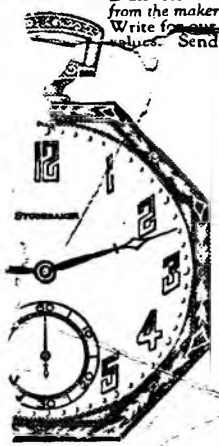

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

E V E R Y W E E K

Vol. XCI Contents for April 9, 1927 No. 5.

ONE NOVELETTE

TWO SERIALS

FOUR SHORT STORIES

ONE ARTICLE

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

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In Next Week's Issue of Detective Story Magazine

Three Lights on a Match

By PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM

Pursued by a relentless hoodoo, the train bandits fled from fright as well as from justice.

Thanks to the Doctor

By DONALD VAN RIPER

A harassed man discovers honesty while crossing a broken bridge.

Behind the Gray Mare

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

The farmer's cabbages weren't all vegetables.

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XCI April 9, 1927 No. 5

POWDERED PROOF

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

Author of "Tragedy Tower," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK BANDIT.

SPRINGING from his roadster before the fashionable Dahlgren Country Club, Ellis Zane dashed up the steps and into the warmly lighted entrance hall. He grasped the stout arm of Arthur Mason who chanced to be nearest to him.

"Art, I've been held up by that Black Bandit!" he cried excitedly. "Held up and robbed of fifty dollars and my diamond studs! Send in the alarm, will you? I'm nervous. Thing happened five minutes ago down by the entrance gates, where they all happen. I wish I

had run over the devil when he stood there before me, but I was afraid he'd shoot!"

The news spread rapidly and a crowd gathered about the excited young man.

The Black Bandit was becoming a menace to be reckoned with in Dahlgren and vicinity. He already had twenty hold-ups to his credit with a haul up into the thousands. The happy hunting ground of this daring highwayman was the winding road that led from fashionable Dahlgren to its even more fashionable country club, set picturesquely upon a hill. The exclusive ones, approaching or returning from the club, with jewels and fat wallets, were never safe from the sharp command of The Black Bandit, and invariably he got away with his loot.

It had somehow crept about that the bandit was a gentleman and not the usual type of stick-up man, illiterate and rough-mannered. No one could say why suspicion had wormed its way into the exclusive circles of the country club, but there were a great many who believed that The Black Bandit was a member. Men looked, for no reason on earth, askance at each other. The highwayman was a menace that should be stamped out, but with which the local police department seemed unable to cope.

Arthur Mason paused beside Stephen Yarrow, the artist, where he lounged in the doorway of the ballroom when dancing had been resumed. His round face was flushed, and he ran a fat finger about his collar.

"Gotta be something done about this bandit stuff," he growled. "This is the second this week. I've had mine, and possibly yours will be next."

Stephen Yarrow, who maintained a rather bohemian cottage the year round in Dahlgren, gave a quick nod of his leonine head.

"I'm armed," he said quietly. "And first look I get at this bird, I shoot. I am quick on the draw. I hope he is as quick, for his sake, for I shall get him if he stops my car."

"Tut, he'll get you," shrugged the fat man. "For gosh sake, don't shoot at him! Then we should have a tragedy in our midst."

"Speaking of tragedy, there is one," said Yarrow dryly. "Have you noticed Nancy Barnes? I wish she wouldn't come to these things!"

Mason nodded. There was no chance that he had missed the slight, interesting figure of the young wife of the steward of the club. Mrs. Barnes was a subject of interest to most of the men who played golf or danced there. It would have been like that with any member of the male sex. She was not such a raving beauty, but she was possessed of something more dangerous than mere looks—that haunting "come hither," a winsome pathos. The beholder, if his mind ran to things like that, had the constant thought of a very unusual rose blooming in a gutter, even though no one could possibly call the Barnes' modest little house on South Street, a gutter. It was, however, always apparent that to Nancy Barnes who lived there with her husband, Andrew Barnes, steward and janitor and general caretaker of the magnificent and exclusive Dahlgren Country Club, it was something worse than that.

"Of course I have noticed Nancy Barnes," said Mason impatiently. "Pathetic about her. She has a soul above her station. Fancy living with that back number, Andy Barnes! Not a spark of life in him, and his wife a flame! Always looking on at what she wants! Hang it, I wish, too, she would stay away from affairs at the club!"

"I am painting her picture," said Yarrow simply.

He was watching the slight figure in the sun-parlor door, noting the waving brown hair, the small heart-shaped face, the sweet, sad mouth, where he knew

a compliment would send unexpected dimples scampering about among suddenly wakened blushes that utterly and delightfully transformed her. A witch of a woman, a siren. And her job as wife of the club's steward, her evident unhappiness, roused the sympathy of the men. That she stood by Barnes increased their admiration, and it was no secret that the ladies of the fashionable club would have shed no tears if the strangely mated Barnes couple had moved.

"I always think of that thing from 'Rose Marie' when I look at her," admitted Mason with a shamed laugh. "That line about, 'There's an angel's breath within your sigh,' and the rest of it, 'There's a little devil in my eye!' You know, idiotic thing. But she's intriguing—very."

Yarrow moved uneasily. He was wondering if Nancy Barnes knew that her distracting little figure and disturbing little face were the cynosures of many masculine eyes. It was quite possible that she did know, if she was possessed of only half of the deep wisdom and cunning that the women gave her credit for, but at any rate, nothing about her hinted at it. She was like a child looking wistfully in at a Christmas window, a child who knew that on that day of days it would go giftless and hungry.

"It makes her so darn miserable to come up here when there is a party on," said Mason.

"I admire her very much," said Yarrow deliberately. "She has read and listened and copied and that makes a hit with me. I can study her, you see, having asked her to sit for this new picture of mine. I am going to pay her a price that will enable her to buy a few of the pretties she wants. She makes all her own clothes. Barnes is tight with her. I fancy you've heard the gossip regarding Nan Barnes and Grant Holcomb?"

Mason started and flushed. His fat face took on a shamed, shocked expression.

"Oh, now, Stephen, there is nothing to that," he protested. "A lot of gossip designed to get the Barnes out of the club. Started by some cat of a woman. Nan can't help it if men send her flowers and candy and fruit. I do, myself, at Christmas. And Holcomb lets her take everything home that is left here, eats and decorations and stuff. He is a rapid sort of chap, indifferent to his wife, but there is nothing to that."

Stephen Yarrow compressed his lips grimly. He had not taken his intent gaze from Mrs. Barnes where she still leaned in the sun-parlor door, rubbing a flower absently back and forth across her sweet, pathetic mouth.

"Arthur, you don't need to do that with me," he said roughly. "I like Grant as well as you do, but he is crazy about Nan. And everybody knows it. I saw them out in the country last week and she was driving his car. Doing it well, too. Gave me a defiant horn, the little devil. The look she shot at me as we passed was no relation to the demure expression she wore when she came for the next sitting. Of course, we never referred to the meeting."

"Grant is a fool," said Mason anxiously. "But all that ails him is his usual defiance of all social laws. His marriage was no love match. Only tragedy can really come of such stuff as that."

"Don't mention tragedy," said Yarrow with sudden sharpness. "There is a regular halo of it around Nancy Barnes' head. It gets my goat when I paint her. Sometimes I wonder if that clod of a husband of hers is really so dumb as he seems, so devoid of any feeling, if he can live so close to a lure like his wife and not feel its spell a little bit."

"Jealous, you mean?" Mason grinned. "Andy? Good Lord!"

"Don't be so sure," said Yarrow gravely. "I don't think anybody is much at reading character, after all. I wonder sometimes, if his brain is the vacuum we all think it is. I wonder if it is that that holds her to him, a butterfly fastened to a lump of mud!"

"If it is what that holds her?" asked Mason impatiently.

"Fear," replied Stephen Yarrow abruptly.

CHAPTER II.

LIGHTS OUT!

EDITH MASON, Arthur's attractive wife, was dancing with Grant Holcomb as Mason turned from Stephen Yarrow and left the artist to his gloomy contemplation of the wistful figure of Nancy Barnes. Edith flung him a gay salute as she drifted past him, and, returning it absently, he glanced at Holcomb's tall, well-groomed figure, at his dark handsome face—too handsome to be the index to a character as fine. Somewhere, when such perfection flaunts itself so brazenly, there must be a flaw.

So far as Arthur Mason could see, as he wormed his stout body through the dancers on his way to the smoking rooms, Holcomb was totally unaware of the slender form in the sun-parlor door. He was chatting in his bright, magnetic fashion with Edith, who was answering him a bit coldly. Edith had little patience with Grant Holcomb and she was a good friend of his wife.

Sauntering through the luxurious rooms of the club, into all of which there penetrated the fascinating syncopation of the jazz orchestra, Mason skirted the swimming pool ere he reached the secluded nook where he longed to hide himself with his pipe. He loathed dancing as only a fat man can loathe any violent exercise. And Edith was a bundle of energy. She would drag him out if she could find him.

There were a few of the younger set in the pool. The vaulted walls resounded with light laughter, with gay calls, with reckless splashing and shrill screams. The kids were having a good time, while the young married set, in the thirties, disported itself in the ballroom. The club was certainly a success. It should not, however, be so darn exclusive. Lots of nice people, perfectly nice people he would like to know, who couldn't get in. All rot. Like Andy Barnes' pretty little wife.

He found his corner—a huge leather chair behind some palms in the smoking room. Now for his pipe. The pipe of peace! With a chuckle he produced it, lighted it, set it between his teeth and leaned back. Edith would dance until the wee hours. She dieted and golfed and agonized to keep her slim figure. But he would live and die in comfort. By golly, there was Ellis Zane, poor chap!

"Any trace of The Black Bandit, Ellis?" called Mason to the tall, slim figure that had hastily entered from the hall, evidently on the way to filch a match box.

"Oh, of course not!" growled young Zane, a wealthy bachelor whose grounds joined the club links, and whose name had more than once been coupled with Nancy Barnes'. "These fool police! I don't mind so much the loss, Art, as I do the infernal audacity of the chap! And never tell me again that he is not a cultured gentleman! He might be one of us! He bowed to me when he permitted me to leave him, and he said as pleasant as a basket of chips, 'Don't trouble to shoot. I'll have you covered, old man. I'm famously quick at hitting my mark.' Money is hard to get, Art, but not if you take it that way!"

"I hope the wicked wretch is not luring you from the straight and nar-

row," said Mason with a fat chuckle, puffing at his pipe.

"Well, it is enough to make a man stop and think, when you see crime walking away with stuff like that right under our noses," said young Zane with a dark look as he swung out of the room.

Into the smoking room slid Andy Barnes, moving along on his soundless shoes, unobtrusive, unnoticeable as a dab of gray paint on a wall, homely as sin, just an upper servant, but her husband!

"Big night, Andy," said Mason lazily.

The steward started, turning upon Mason a pale smile.

"Yes, sir. Busy to-night. That swimming pool will be a big success, especially now that summer is coming on, sir."

Sir! Nancy Barnes' husband saying "sir" to people! Well, dash it, why shouldn't he? And she was not better educated than he was. Still, oh, what really ailed them all about the woman?

"Another hold-up to-night, Andy," he said pleasantly.

"Yes, sir. Right at the club gates. Getting bolder, sir. One of these nights he'll come up here, I reckon, and stick up the whole house. I never saw the beat of the nerve of these bandits. I had an experience a short time ago myself that——"

Mason was not to hear the story just then. Without any warning whatever the lights went out.

There was a muttered exclamation from Barnes, and the sense that the man had hurried away on his noiseless shoes. And then, close to him a little gasp, a choked laugh, sweet, hurried, the unmistakable sound of a kiss! Nobody could fool Arthur Mason about a kiss, even in the dark! He had not always been a fat man! He was sitting there, shaking with hushed chuckles, when Holcomb's voice reached him clearly.

"Nancy, darling, you'll be here? I'll come, no matter how late. You know what you promised!"

Then her voice—that low sweet voice the women were always snipping about, even Edith.

"Grant, I'll come! You know I only live for these meetings! They are all that carry me through such evenings as this! To see you dancing, to always be on the outside—oh, I think sometimes I cannot bear it!"

"Hush!" Holcomb's voice again, tender, chiding, "Not so loud, darling! What the devil happened to the lights all at once?"

"Andy has had trouble with them all day," said Nancy Barnes with a long sigh. "It may be a blown fuse. I must run. He will fix them in a minute. He is smart about such things. You won't forget?"

"Never—never!"

A moment of tense silence, during which Arthur Mason sat upright in his comfortable chair, his pipe clutched in fingers that ached for five minutes afterward, his face a grim white, and then the tension snapped. Although the lights did not come on until a minute or so later, he knew the instant that he was again alone in the darkness.

The devil! Gossip was right then. There was an affair between Nancy Barnes and Grant Holcomb, a decided affair! And they were arranging to meet there at the club that night! She had promised! She only lived for those meetings! The nerve of them meeting at the club! And after Barnes had probably locked it and darkened it for the night! A precious scandal! A fine note! And the bounder had been dancing with his wife, Edith.

The lights flashed on again. And there, looking at him with a vapid grin, was Andy Barnes.

"Fixed them, sir," said the steward

apologetically. "Had trouble with those lights all day. Don't know why."

He was gone, sliding away, arranging this magazine, straightening that chair as he went. Mason stared after him, a queer strangling sensation in his throat.

Where had Barnes been while his wife and Holcomb were there in the darkness, close to him, whispering the promise of their tryst, her alluring mouth on her lover's? Had he heard it all? Was he as stupid as he looked? Had young Ellis Zane returned to the smoking room? Had he really gone far after he got his matches?

What fools to whisper like that in the darkness! A halo of tragedy about her head, Yarrow had said. Gosh!

CHAPTER III.

THE WEE SMALL HOURS.

IT was three o'clock when Arthur Mason drove his pretty, yawning wife out of the club grounds, and worked his expensive coupé past the Holcombs' sedan with a warning horn.

Behind them the handsome clubhouse sprawled upon the rise of green, the social mecca desired by all aspiring young and old couples in Dahlgren and vicinity. Its lights, strong enough now, seemed to wink at Mason as he glanced back. He shivered a bit.

What was Nancy Barnes doing now? Had she gone home, back to her poorly furnished little house on South Street, there to await the jeweled moment when she might slip out again and hasten to her tryst in a spot where she might for once, with all the members asleep, and happily off the scene, wander at will and do as she pleased?

Or was she, in her demure little dark gown with its stiff white collar and cuffs assisting her husband to set things to rights ere they left together, taking the bus that passed the edge of the club grounds every half hour? He could not picture that last. No, she had fled home to make herself pretty for Grant, whom all the evening she had been forced to watch in the arms of women who could never be her friends. Hard luck. Poor Nancy. Holcomb was a cur.

A gasp from Edith.

"For mercy sake! Where are you going? You've come clear around by South Street at this hour! I'm nearly dead for sleep! This is no time for a ride!"

Arthur started and glanced out of the car shamefacedly. Well, could you beat that! He had headed straight as a die for the Barnes' house! There it was, that middle one in the drab row, its upper windows lighted behind dainty white curtains that he fancied, were Nancy's work. Pretty things she must always have, the pretty things of life. Poor girl. He would like to beat up Holcomb. What ought he to do about it?

Edith was leaning from the car.

"That's the Barnes house," she said disgustedly. "I do think it is the limit the way Nancy Barnes hangs around on dance nights and stares wistfully at us all, as though we are doing her an injury! She should be told not to come."

"Oh, come now, Edith," protested Mason weakly.

He did not hear what else his wife said. All the women were down on pretty Nancy Barnes. There was something about her that scared them, put them on the defensive.

The house where she lived with Andy was a two-story brown frame and it was packed closely into the row of others, all exactly like it. Its second-story windows came out over the porch, giving the dwelling a strange toppling appearance, as though at a push from the rear it would fall upon its face.

"Whatever brought me down here?"

grunted Mason, stepping on the gas with unnecessary force. "I must have been asleep! Always did hate this part of town!"

"I believe you came down just to look at Nancy Barnes' house," said Edith with a yawn. "All you men are positive idiots about her. I don't see how Violet Holcomb stands the gossip about Grant and Mrs. Barnes. But I dare say she is used to Grant."

Sleep would not come during the wee small hours that followed the putting away of his car. Mason tossed and turned, growing angrier and angrier as the clock ticked on. What the devil ailed him? What did he care if one of his set chose to meet the wife of the steward of their club in that club after three o'clock? No matter what happened it was certainly nothing to him.

Yet he could not rest. Pictures of Nancy Barnes standing there in the sun-parlor door looking in at the dancers, brushing her provocative lips with a wilted flower, haunted him, rather crazily. He told himself that it was because Violet Holcomb was his wife's best friend that he was so darn upset. But he knew it was not wholly that. He had no special case on Violet, for he did not care for that cold, blonde type of woman. She was the last woman for Grant Holcomb.

Five o'clock. Hang it! It was still as dark as night. The late spring nights had not come. It would be dark for over an hour yet, but he wouldn't get much rest. He had a busy day at the office, too.

If Nancy had gone to meet Holcomb, she was home again now. So was he. He should worry. A fat man couldn't be upset by the sins of his friends in such a wicked, modern day. He would think no more of it and get right to sleep. Sensible thing to do. But in another moment he found himself getting silently into his clothes, fearful of disturbing the pretty occupant of the other twin bed.

Edith, however, was tired. She would sleep until noon. The maid would bring her up chocolate on a tray. Poor Nancy Barnes. In her sordid kitchen frying eggs she hated, serving early breakfast to Andy who probably ate in shirt sleeves, unshaven. Ugh! While Holcomb—Holcomb was of the type who lounges picturesquely in handsome satin robe and slippers. He'd like to beat up Grant Holcomb and he would certainly talk to him! Somebody should. And they'd been boys together, Stephen and Grant and himself. Nobody else to do it.

He got his car out of the garage almost silently. It was not until he was spinning along the still dark roads that he frankly admitted to himself that he simply must know what was going on out at the clubhouse. If he found Nancy Barnes there with Holcomb, he would settle the dangerous nonsense then and there. He would scare the girl with the possibility of that lump of a husband of hers being aware of the affair. Demure as she seemed, and harmless, he could fancy Nancy Barnes' bright laughing defiance if he told her that. Yes, she would have no fear of Andy Barnes, not with her reckless, suffering spirit!

Yet a clod of mud could crush a butterfly! Darn Stephen with his silly speeches.

The country club at last. Looming on the hill, dark as Erebus with no glimmer to indicate that a human being was within miles. Mason swung his car through the gates, skirted the spreading golf course, approached the entrance, and paused before the wide steps.

He felt like a fool. Anybody he knew would give him the laugh, and rightly, too. Suppose some one saw him there? What could he ever say? Would he smirch Nancy Barnes' name,

which was already being bandied about from woman to jealous woman? He would not.

Stepping carefully, flushed with shame, Mason creaked about the long porch, peering in at shrouded French doors, at windows, listening.

Everything was dark, quiet. Arthur Mason was a typical modern business man, fat and good-natured and to the last word practical. Yet a queer prickly sensation crept up his spine as he went about the porch of the country club he knew so well. He had no business there, of course—no business whether Holcomb and Nancy Barnes were in there or not. Yet friendship—hang it, didn't friendship make some claims?

Dawn was faintly tinging the distant hills a dull ghostly gray when he set his hand to the heavy, wide front door. It opened soundlessly beneath his pressure.

He must have courage now. Either the lovers were still in the clubhouse, or they had thoughtlessly—and a tragic thoughtlessness it might be—gone home and left the door unfastened! Left it for Andy Barnes, walking noiselessly on rubber shoes, to find!

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE POOL.

HE was inside. The heavy doors, both of them, had closed silently behind him. Darkness and silence, an atmosphere still faintly redolent of expensive cigar and cigarette smoke, closed in upon him. He felt choked and he ran a fat finger around his collar. If ever a man felt a fool, he did.

There was not a sound anywhere. But off through the darkness seemed to be a dull glow, like a soft light. Toward the swimming pool it was. Mason, his limbs feeling stiff, moved toward it. He knew every foot of the way and so he collided with nothing.

The light was indeed in the swimming pool; one of the round shaded domes in the vaulted ceiling had been turned on. It was not strange that he had not seen it from outside. The swimming pool was in the heart of the building.

Before Mason entered the marble-rimmed apartment that contained the new and expensive pool, he knew that he was alone in the place. That strange extra sense we all possess, told him that. And yet some sort of a horror remained with him. His hair stirred as he doggedly advanced. He had the faint idea that he had wished he was home in bed where any sensible man would have remained, when he reached the rim of the pool, glimmering under the soft light like an oval emerald.

On the broad steps that led down to the water and vanished under it, just beside the rail that had been placed at one side to assist timid swimmers, lay the slender body of Nancy Barnes. She wore a red bathing suit but no cap, and her soft wavy brown hair had fallen back from the heart-shaped face that lay turned up to the lighted dome and Mason's horrified gaze.

Yet it seemed that he had known. It was this that had drawn him from bed, that he had felt the first consciousness of when he heard that kiss in the dark; and it had been the remote presentiment of this that had taken him, absent-mindedly, past the home of Nancy Barnes when he left the country club at three in the morning.

Before he stooped to the body, he knew that she had been murdered. Of course she had, being so young, so instinct with life and spirit, so desirous of living long enough to grasp the beautiful things other women like herself enjoyed! Barnes must have heard, lingering in the dark in the smoking room, those whispered plans for the tryst in the club.

But where was Holcomb? There

was no doubt about Holcomb not having come. He was simply mad about Nancy Barnes. And what was the poor girl doing in her bathing suit?

Kneeling beside the girl, his collar feeling as though it would choke him, and his eyes dim with tears, Arthur Mason made a bungling and rapid examination of her body. Amazement grew upon his round face. There was, so far as he could see, not a mark upon her! A slight burn on the palm of her little right hand was the only sign of any injury.

As Mason got to his feet, breathing hurriedly, a flame of rage swept him. If Holcomb or Barnes had done this thing, he would like to see the man answer for it! But Holcomb or Barnes. Why, Nancy had enough enemies in the town! There was not a woman in the club but would be glad she was out of the way.

He swept his hand over his damp forehead. He would have to go over the place and see whether there was any one in it or not. He knew right well there was not, but he would have to make a thorough job of it. And then the police must be notified. A doctor, too. Suddenly he was brought up with a sickening jolt. *What was he doing there himself?* So far as every one knew, his wife included, he had gone decently home after the dance and to bed. Could he tell the truth that he had overheard Holcomb and Nancy Barnes making a date? Could he say he had taken out his car and come to the club to catch them and warn them and put a stop to the thing before it ended—just as it had? Good heavens, could he ever tell that?

A full moment he stood there, thinking and perspiring, and then he decided that he could. Better to speak the truth at once than become involved in a million unforeseen difficulties. Even then, with his inexperience, Mason realized dimly that this was to be a big case. Holcomb would be involved anyhow. And if the man was innocent, what harm would anything he said do him? But Edith and Violet Holcomb would never forgive him. Well, anyhow, that would have to be decided later.

He knew that he could not go home and to bed and let matters take their course. He would notify the police. The chief of detectives, Ben Horton, was a clever chap. He would get on the thing right away. It was more than likely that Barnes had committed the murder, although wild ideas of The Black Bandit who carried on his operations at the club entrance, would intrude themselves. And Zane—could he have returned to the smoking room in the darkness? Well, he better not think.

Fifteen minutes later he was using the hall telephone to call headquarters. There was no one and nothing suspicious in the clubhouse. He made sure of that. Whoever, bandit or no, had killed the girl, had fled long since, and in a hurry, too.

Mason, after telephoning, sank heavily into a tufted chair and buried his face in his shaking hands. He must pull himself together. Holcomb and he would have a fiendish time. Disgrace and publicity. Suspicion. But at any rate, he could plant a lot on Barnes, the husband. He might embroider a bit on that incident in the dark smoking room. He might say that he felt sure at the time that Barnes had not left the room, that he had been listening.

He turned on the light in the hall and got out his pipe. By the time the police car drew up at the door Mason was quite himself. Nobody in his senses, decided the alert young detective who sprang up the steps, would have suspected the stout clubman's round red face and bulging eyes, of any wrongdoing.

A physician, Doctor Miles, and Chief of Police Brown followed Ben Horton.

Arthur Mason drew a great sigh of relief when the three men briskly entered the aristocratic club. Now, at any rate, the matter was out of his hands. Things now, without his assistance, would have to take their course.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTOR'S DECISION.

AT first the authorities wasted no time on Mr. Mason. They went immediately to the swimming pool and examined the slender body of Nancy Barnes.

"I haven't touched her," offered Mason, who had reluctantly followed. "You can see she has both feet in the water. But I don't see a mark on her and there is no weapon. I looked."

Doctor Miles was skillfully and carefully making his examination, while Horton and the chief moved about the pool, looking at things Mason would never have thought to examine.

After some time Miles looked up and removed his glasses. There was a strange expression on his kindly face.

"It looks as though it must have been heart disease to me," he said hesitantly, "either that or——"

"Or electrocution, eh?" asked Horton snappily. "I noticed that little mark on her hand."

Miles nodded. "That was what I was about to say," he replied gravely. "But only the autopsy can convince me of that. Last week Nancy Barnes came to me for a cold. I listened to her heart then. She was strong and in good health. I cannot believe that she died of heart failure. Also, her being here at this hour and in her bathing suit looks too strange for——"

Horton moved impatiently. His light eyes were flashing with eagerness.

"See here, doc, how can you tell by an autopsy that she was electrocuted?" he cut in.

"Oh, quite easily," replied the physician. If we find that the heart is empty of blood, it will prove that it had stopped in that infinitesimal period of time between the systole and the diastole. To me, that will indicate that this girl was killed by electricity. All criminals who are electrocuted display the same unusual condition. This burn on her hand also looks significant. It was, I should say, made at the time of her death, about four o'clock. I cannot state any more just now."

"Gee, what a case this will be!" said Horton with a delighted grin. "Now, before we ask any questions, Mr. Mason, I am going to work on this smart little electrocution idea! No time like the present."

"I'm going over the club," announced the chief. "I should like you to accompany me, Mr. Mason. I can get your story while we look."

"I've looked all about," muttered Mason. "Did that before I called in you fellows."

"You see," ran on Horton, who was like a dog on a scent, "she could easily have been electrocuted all right. She had her feet in the water. She was in her suit and about to go in, wild as that seems at four in the morning in a deserted clubhouse. The water made a fine ground contact. House voltage has been known to kill instantly. Clever, but I'll get the guy! Some stunt. No weapons, neat as a pin. Painless and quick. She never knew what hit her."

Mason was staring at the detective with his mouth open. He was recalling the sudden darkness that had fallen upon the clubhouse during the dance, when both Barnes and his wife admitted that there had been trouble with the lights during the day. Nancy's remark, whispered to Holcomb in the smoking room, sounded again in his

wretched ears: "Andy will fix the lights in a minute. I must run."

Even if he had to involve Holcomb, surely he could throw strong suspicion on Barnes!

But how on earth could Nancy Barnes have been electrocuted away off from any lights, there on the steps of the swimming pool? It looked absurd. Horton seemed a chap who jumped at conclusions. There he was now, on his knees, eagerly examining the rim of the pool and the rail beside the body.

"Come along," the chief touched his arm. "we'll just go about a bit if you don't mind. Horton is the boy to leave on the job."

With a long breath Mason followed the chief from the room, wishing more heartily than ever that he had stayed at home in bed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHIFFON ROSE.

HAVING explored every corner of the spacious clubhouse, the chief of police sat down in one of the ladies' handsome parlors on the second floor and motioned Mason to a chair opposite. The chief was a huge man with blunt ways. He would crash through a delicate case, Mason decided, like a bull charging into a china shop. It was plain to see that this affair which might possibly bring the élite of Dahlgren into his hands, more than a little confused and bothered him.

"Now, Mr. Mason, if you please, all you know," he said without any preliminaries. "What the devil were you doing here where we find Mrs. Barnes in her bathing suit at near six in the morning? I fancy she didn't wear it during last night's party here. Never mixed with the members, or used the pool. Mighty queer. But go ahead."

Mason went ahead, desperately, but doggedly, from the moment that the smoking room had been plunged into darkness to the awful moment when he found the body of Nancy Barnes beside the pool.

The chief listened with bulging eyes.

"You mean to say you thought *Holcomb* was going to meet her here, at that ungodly hour, after her husband had closed the club?" he gasped. "You heard Grant Holcomb make that date with her?"

Mason nodded, tight lipped.

"I did. That was what brought me up here. But, understand, not for one moment do I think Holcomb is involved in this," said he sternly. "It is Barnes of whose guilt I feel sure. Barnes had had trouble with the lights and understood them, remember that. And she was Barnes' wife."

"Yes, and he cared no more for her than for a wild Zulu," growled the chief. "Take it from me, Barnes is not the type to think out this crime, if Horton is right about the electricity, and he is usually right. A smart chap. Doc Miles is there, too, when it comes to brains. If they say the girl was killed by electricity, why, then she was. No more to it. You may as well be prepared for the worst, for this looks like a high-class crime to me, with brains behind it. Nobody will accuse Barnes of having brains."

"Well, don't go to making any fool mistake!" flared Mason. "Don't try to involve the Holcomb name in this. You'll be sorry. I had to tell what I knew because I blundered out here like an idiot and because I wished you to hear the truth about Barnes. I feel sure he heard what I heard in the smoking room."

The chief with a queer expression put his huge hand into his pocket. In its palm when he held it out to Mason there lay a small blue-chiffon rose of a peculiar shade.

"I found this in a little pool of water down there by the swimming pool," said

the chief. "Do you know what woman wore a dress of this shade last night or a dress that was trimmed with these?"

Mason stared at the rose aghast. He refused to think.

"Man, I don't notice women's clothes!" he blurted. "Anyhow, the folks were all over the place last night."

The chief shook his head.

"Nix. This rose wasn't dropped in that puddle of water while the party was on in here," he said bluntly. "You can see yourself. Only two of the leaves and the stem and the part of the rose that lay in the water, are wet. That rose was dropped there an hour ago, no more, maybe less. I don't know, but I can soon tell by testing. If it had lain in that puddle ever since three when this club was locked up, the whole darn chiffon thing would have been soaked through. See?"

This was detective work of a nature foreign to all the experience of Mr. Mason. He gazed, white lipped, at the chiffon rose. Only one woman ever wore that color that he could remember. He knew from what gown that rose had fallen the night before. He knew because he had looked at her with anxiety and pity. Violet Holcomb!

The chief wrapped the rose in his handkerchief and replaced it in his pocket.

"I see you know where this came from all right," he said with a chuckle, "and you'd better think it over and be entirely frank with us. Now after one or two more questions, we'll just go below and see what Ben has done."

CHAPTER VII.

HORTON'S EXPLANATION.

BACK in the swimming pool it seemed that the energetic young detective, Horton, had wasted no time in getting after his electrocution idea. The metal rail that ran beside the marble steps down to the rim of the water had been loosened and now lay upon the floor. A few pieces of tiling had been taken up, and not far off an old fixture in the wall that had been in use when the new swimming pool had been a billiard room, had been completely torn out.

"Got it!" Horton snapped when Mason and the chief made their appearance. "Slick, but as easy as can be. Took some time and work. This thing was premeditated all right, and planned maybe weeks back. See, the wires have been taken from this old fixture down under the tiling, on the floor there, to the rail by the edge of the steps. I know that because I can see how the tiles have been taken up and very recently replaced, some of them this very night. That is poor work.

"When this guy made a connection with the house circuit on the side that was not grounded, and laid the raw end of the wire against this rail by the steps, wow! Anybody with a hand on that rail stepping down into the water —good night! Him or her made a nice connecting link. Nothing to it. This thing could have all been fixed, like a mine, laid neat, and when the stage was set for the big show, all he had to do was fix the end of his wire and touch it to the rail. You can see for yourselves how it was done. Any chap with the knowledge of electricity this guy had, could work this. And he didn't much care if we found out, I don't think. He must have known that that burn on her hand and the autopsy would show up the stunt."

Mason was listening in horror. Did this sound like the steward, Barnes? It certainly did not. Not any of it. And yet, who else would have had the opportunity to fix the thing?

"But lots of people were in this pool last evening, late," he protested.

"Sure," nodded Horton grimly. "I guess so. And a lot of them near to death. After they'd gone, the bird slid in and fixed his trap. See this stem of the rail? Hollow, ain't it? Easy to run a wire up here, huh? Well, that's what he did. When it was all over he didn't bother to do any more than disconnect, drag back the wire, doctor it up at the old fixture a bit, and replace the few tiles he had had to remove to do so. Clumsy work, but then this bird was so eaten up by hate and so sure that the others would be suspected along with him, that he just crashed ahead to win his goal, the death of Nancy Barnes."

"Not a soul but Barnes himself would have had the time or the opportunity to do a thing like this," said Mason boldly.

"Barnes?" Horton frowned. "Well, maybe, though I don't think he is clever enough for this. Still, you can't tell. Reckon he had a perfect right to be jealous."

"We have made excellent progress," said the chief cheerfully. "And now we'll leave matters here to Doc and you, Ben, while Mr. Mason and I pay a couple of calls. We're going first to the Holcomb house and then we'll drop in on Barnes."

Ben Horton turned from his close inspection of the old fixtures in the wall and his eyes opened wide in slow amazement.

"You are going first to the *Holcombs?*" he repeated.

"That's what I said," replied the chief briefly. "No use making a secret of something the world will know in a few hours. Nancy Barnes had an appointment to meet Grant Holcomb here last night after the club closed."

Horton whistled softly.

"I'll say that drops a bit of caviar in the soup!" he said gravely. "How do you know that, chief?"

"That is what brought Mr. Mason," said the chief. "His knowledge of this tryst."

A grim smile twisted Horton's lips.

"I suppose nobody knows whether Holcomb came or not?" he asked.

"Nobody here," agreed Brown.

"Tough luck if he has no alibi," said Horton briefly.

"Mr. Mason has reason to suspect Barnes," said the chief quietly. "However, we must be getting on. I'll leave my car for Ben, if you don't mind, Mr. Mason, and we'll use yours."

"I trust that nothing will be done hastily," said Doctor Miles. "We have held no autopsy as yet."

"We don't need one," said Horton cheerfully. "I've got the how of this thing all plain as day."

"There is something else," said Mason as he started his car away from the clubhouse. "Stephen Yarrow is painting Mrs. Barnes' picture. We were talking about her last night at the dance while she stood looking so wistfully on at the fun. Among other things, he said that he wondered if it was fear that held her to Barnes. I've been wondering myself, since, just why he said that."

"We'll find out," said the chief. "I am afraid myself, Mr. Mason, that this is not going to be the simple, middle-class affair you thought it would be."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ALIBI.

THERE was no sign of life about the handsome Holcomb house when Mason stopped his car before its imposing door. How could one expect to find Grant or Violet up when they had danced until three in the morning? Arthur Mason shuddered as he ascended the steps beside the burly form of the police chief.

The law knocking at the exclusive doors of palatial Dahlgren residences at that hour of the morning! What

had things come to? And he, respectable member of the aristocratic little community, trotting about with the chief of police, offering testimony that would involve the very cream of their set! Once more he wished he could have remained in his bed! How was he to face Violet and Grant and go home and eventually face Edith?

A sleepy and scandalized butler let them in. He padded away across soft rugs to rouse the master of the house.

Mason and the chief sat stiffly upon the edges of handsome antique chairs. The officer of the law was plainly uncomfortable, but he was there to do his duty. Fine houses and rich furnishings were nothing to him. Crime luxuriated in such spots. He was not going to be squashed by the airs of Dahlgren's upper set. All this Mason read in his rugged face as they heard steps approaching, as the silken curtains at the door were parted and Grant Holcomb, in a Chinese dressing gown —one of the most flagrant Mason had ever seen him wear—and cigarette in his fingers, sauntered into the room.

"What on earth does this mean?" he demanded.

Brown told him in a few blunt sentences. Mason watched the other man's face whiten as he groped for a chair and sat down rather heavily.

"What?" he whispered through stiff lips. "You say Nancy Barnes is dead —murdered? *Dead,* Brown?"

"As she can be," nodded the chief grimly. "In her swimming suit there by the pool. We know you had a date to meet her there after the club closed and we want to hear what you gotta say about it."

"My good man——" began Holcomb with lifted brows.

"Now, look here," cut in Brown harshly, "you can leave out the fixin's and hand me the dinner. Mr. Mason heard you makin' your little date in the dark in the smokin' room."

Holcomb turned slowly and looked at Arthur Mason, who returned his gaze with dumb misery.

"He is right, Grant, I heard you," he said simply. "But in order to tell what I knew and believed regarding Barnes himself, I had to explain about you. You see, it was I who found her. I went out there because I was afraid you were there with her and that Barnes *knew.*"

"Well, no matter what you heard, I did not return to the club after I brought my wife home," snapped Holcomb. "I did not and I had no intention of doing so."

Of course Mason did not believe that last. His ears still rang with the passion of that whispered promise. But Grant was a good actor.

"We will have to be sure of that, Mr. Holcomb," said Brown gently. "This is likely to be a big case. We can't afford to slip up on none of it. And there is something else. Last night Mrs. Holcomb wore a dress trimmed in these, didn't she?"

Again, in the palm of his huge hand, the sodden little chiffon rose! Mason could have screamed like a hysterical woman. Was this horrible business police work? And he had let Grant in for this!

But Holcomb's voice was coming steadily enough. He was quite himself and had lighted the cigarette.

"Yes, she did," he replied flatly. "What of it?"

"A lot," said the chief and replaced the rose. "Can I see her?"

"Not at this hour, certainly not!"

"Now, look here," said the chief testily, "a woman who wore roses like this on her dress was at the club, walking around that swimming pool long after the murder! I've got this flower to prove it. Of course, there may have been other dresses there last night trimmed in roses like these, but they're kinda unusual roses. Color and all."

"Your imputations are absurd," said Holcomb haughtily, "and I advise you to watch your step, chief. As for you, Arthur, you fat old busybody, a licking is too good for you."

"So you won't let me speak to Mrs. Holcomb?" asked Brown grimly.

"Not at this hour in the morning. She will have no objection to seeing you after noon."

"She has no objection now," said a cool voice from the doorway. "What business has the chief with me, Grant?"

All the men came to their feet as Violet Holcomb entered the room, a slight pliant creature in a quilted morning gown of the same color blue as the rose in the chief's pocket. It was a blue that became her ashen hair, her Dresden-china skin, dark brows and delicately pink lips. Violet Holcomb was a woman delicious to look upon, but from whom no one would expect anything at all human. People did not entirely blame her husband for her occasional rebellions against the marital yoke. Edith Mason was the only person who insisted that Mrs. Holcomb was human.

It did not take the police chief long to state his case. He refused to be awed by the exquisite hauteur of the elegant surroundings. He looked with young woman before him and by her more than a little suspicion, Mason saw to his regret, upon Mrs. Holcomb and her handsome husband in his gay Chinese lounging robe.

"Do you mean that you think one of us returned to the country club after the dance?" she asked when he had finished.

"I don't think anything yet," said Brown testily. "But I've got to know. If Mr. Mason here was in that dark smoking room and Barnes, too, who can say who else was there? Maybe you too, madam, heard your husband make this date with Nancy Barnes."

"And then I suppose, I followed him to the club and killed my rival after doing the necessary electrical work," said Mrs. Holcomb coldly, with never a break in her clear voice. "Of course, that would be the matter of a moment, and a thing I would thoroughly understand."

"I never insinuated that you killed the poor girl," said the chief sharply. "But it's likely you lost this rose off your gown, isn't it?"

Violent Holcomb flung an indifferent glance at the chiffon trifle.

"It is likely," she nodded.

Mason regarded her with amazement. Was she in no wise upset at this evidence of her husband's affair with Nancy Barnes? It would seem not. Not a ripple of feeling marred the cold perfection of her fair face.

"Could I see the gown?" persisted the chief, beginning to perspire but holding his ground.

"If you return at some sensible hour. I shall not burn it or lose it before then. It is a gown I have worn several times. Other people will recall it."

"You both swear you did not leave this house last night, or rather, this morning after you returned to it from the clubhouse?" asked Brown, glancing from husband to wife.

"I can," smiled Holcomb. "And I can offer an alibi for my wife, if it is permitted. Our rooms join and I distinctly saw her reading in bed until after four, when I fell asleep."

"I can also answer for Mr. Holcomb," said the wife calmly. "But that is of no value, I fancy."

"It is what lots of folks would say anyhow," nodded the chief.

"Call in Lukes," said Holcomb impatiently. "Possibly he can satisfy the chief. I'm dead tired and I'd like to go back to bed."

While Mrs. Holcomb rang, Holcomb turned to Brown with a grin.

"What has become of this Black

Bandit?" he wanted to know. "Why don't you hang this thing on him, or at least add him to the list of suspects? He was active last night. Held up Ellis Zane. Was right out at the club gates. Can you afford to eliminate him?"

"We don't know who he is," said the chief bluntly.

Mason sat regarding the dapper figure of Holcomb indignantly, thankful that he had not tried to shield the man. That he could look and act like that when Nancy lay dead in the place where they were to have met! It was not human, not normal.

Dan Lukes, the young chauffeur, appeared in the doorway, his freckled face flushed. He seemed nervous. Had news traveled so fast that he knew what he had been summoned for?

The chief started in on him. He plunged forward like the bull in the china shop. Mason would not have used just those methods but he was, of course, no cop. He was, rather, a good bit of a fool!

"You have charge of the Holcombs' machines?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many have they?"

"Two, sir. The big sedan and the sport roadster they both drive."

"You brought them home last night from the country club?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you get here?"

"I don't know rightly, sir. Maybe three thirty. Maybe not that. I drive fast."

"You sleep over the garage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you have known if either of those cars had gone out again?"

"Well, I should say so, sir! That's part of my job. I lock the garage. You bet I would know! And last night I was up very late—I guess until after four—cleaning the roadster. Mr. Holcomb said he wanted to use it this morning early and I had neglected it. I didn't want him to know."

"Hum. And you did not see your master or mistress again after you left them at the front door at three thirty, or not quite that?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"Thanks. You can go."

The chief turned back to Holcomb, but Mason's eyes had lingered on the chauffeur. What had meant the look of relief, of asked-for approval, that had flashed for a bare moment, in his face as he turned from his employer to his employer's wife? His eyes almost asked, "Have I done well?"

Of course it was out of the question for either of the Holcombs to have reached the country club again without a car. And what car save their own would either have used?

Mason attempted no further apologies, no further explanation for his apparent betrayal of his friend and associate. He felt somehow, as he left that luxurious drawing-room with the chief, that all was not quite right there.

CHAPTER IX.

BARNES.

THE chief said nothing as Mason drove to the Barnes house on sordid little South Street. His mouth was twisted in grim lines and he stared straight ahead.

It was broad day now and people were going to work. The sight of them, stirring in a busy practical world, cheered Mason greatly. But never again would Nancy Barnes soil her delicate fingers preparing a breakfast she detested for a man she loathed.

The early morning breeze was playing with the dainty white curtains in the second-floor windows as the car stopped. A feeling of desolate helplessness swept over Mason.

Suppose neither Holcomb nor Barnes

had done this thing? What would it lead to, where would it drag them all?

A butterfly tied to a clump of mud, he kept thinking as he followed the chief across the porch to the front door. No wonder she had beaten her bright wings in anguish against the walls of this drab prison! Nothing could ever be happy or cheerful on South Street.

Barnes came to the door at last in shirt sleeves, his eyes looking as though he had not slept.

"Barnes, we've come to see your wife," announced the chief unexpectedly.

"She is not here. I don't know where she is," replied the man dully.

"What! Why don't you?" the chief set his sharp eyes on the club steward's face.

"She never stayed out like this before," shrugged Barnes, leading the way to the tiny dining room. "I was just going to report it to you. We were not very happy, but she never stayed away all night before."

"She went out again after she came back from the club dance at three o'clock?"

"I don't know. She came home long before I did. She never waits for me. I didn't miss her until this morning when I had to get my own breakfast. She has a room to herself. Fixed up the little sewing room and moved into that. Nancy always wanted what the club ladies have, and she read all the time and danced to the radio and served our meals real highfalutin'. If it amused her I didn't care."

Mason writhed, looking about at the ugly room with its pitiful attempts to look dainty and bright. The earthworm describing the butterfly!

"If she has left me, I guess it is some more of my hard luck," growled Barnes, draining his cold coffee. "Queer things have been happening to me lately. One night last week I was held up coming home from the club and got a bump on the dome that knocked me out for an hour. When I come to I was flat on the golf links with an awful headache. I thought maybe I'd been robbed by this Black Bandit bird, for why else would a man knock out another like that? But I hadn't. I had fifty dollars in my pocket. A lot of rich tips I had just got. I never could get the sense of that hold-up nohow."

"Why didn't you tell us about it?" demanded the harassed chief.

"Oh, what was the use? Nothing happened. You fellows were busy with The Black Bandit who was sticking up swell cars down on the road to the club. You wouldn't have listened to me."

"But have you no idea who hit you?"

"No. He came up behind me and it was dark. I was taking the short cut over the links. But when I come to and stood up, feeling all wabbly, there was something, little bits of it, all hard and crumbly in my hands and my nails, and I saved the bits and kinda wondered about them. They're here if Nancy hasn't thrown them out."

As he turned to the drawer of the buffet, Mason moved impatiently. How could the chief question him about such a silly thing when Nancy lay up at the clubhouse, murdered?

Barnes returned with an envelope. In it there was nothing more alarming or mysterious than several little lumps of some crumbly white stuff. The chief, examining it, returned the envelope to Barnes, who flung it back in the buffet drawer.

"I guess you were hit with the side of a house, Andy," he said, "or a brick. Looks like cement to me, or something like it. But we have more important things to talk about than one of your caddies maybe, fetching you a bump on the bean. Your wife is dead, Andy—murdered in the swimming pool at the

country club. Don't try any of your acting now on us. I think you know darn well where she was all the time."

Barnes slumped into a chair, his face chalk white.

"Nancy is dead, you say?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, and somebody killed her, too," replied the chief grimly. "And how, do you suppose? Why, by a clever little stunt with electricity! You are an adept at that stuff! But you don't have to say anything, Barnes. We are going back to the clubhouse, if Mr. Mason will oblige us."

CHAPTER X.

ON THE PAD.

BUT Mason was destined not to return to the club just yet. As the three men reached the front door it opened with a slam and Ben Horton popped in. His lean, homely face was alive with excitement. He was a person who made Arthur Mason frightfully uncomfortable.

"Just a minute with Barnes, chief," he said breathlessly. "I want to get his finger prints. I found a peach on that rail by the swimming pool—wooden knob, I mean. I'm going after Holcomb's, too. No favorites played in this, and they can't high hat me!"

As the chief seized Barnes' hand and lifted it an exclamation burst from all three men. For the steward's right hand was clumsily bandaged!

"What the devil ails your fingers?" gritted the chief.

"I burned my hand this morning getting my coffee," said Barnes calmly. "Ouch—look out. It's burned bad."

"I bet it is," said Horton grimly as he unwound the bandages. "But it will heal, you fool, and then we can get your prints! Did you think you could scar up your finger tips so that they would be permanently altered? Ain't no such animal."

"I never thought anything," growled Barnes as his crimson fingers with the skin burned from them, came to view, "I just upset the coffeepot. You think I enjoyed it?"

"I bet you did," grinned Horton. "But you don't know much about finger prints. This fixes you in my opinion, Barnes."

"Well, you're a fine lot!" sneered the steward. "Because a man burns his hand——"

"Come along with me," said the chief sharply, seizing Barnes' arm. "Better look about this place a bit, Ben. I want to show Barnes that cute little electrical stunt."

"I should like to stay here with Horton," said Mason then. "If you can drive my car, chief, you are welcome to it."

"I can drive any car made," grunted the chief and departed with his unprotesting companion.

Mason closed the door and turned to the detective who was examining the prints he had just taken at the club.

"Now you don't think a man would do anything as obvious as that, do you?" asked Mason smiling.

"What? Burn his hand bad like that? Sure, an ignorant guy like Barnes. Gosh, he took the skin plumb off! But I'll get him. Sorry this is going to be such a simple case after all."

"Young man," said Mason dryly. "I'd like to see you get on. You're a bright fellow. Don't be so sure of the simple part. That's all."

Horton laughed. "Are you thinking of tangling up The Black Bandit in it maybe, Mr. Mason?" he asked. "That bird is a thorn in my side. Don't seem to be able to land him at all. But Barnes did this, the dirty bum. No wonder that pretty woman kicked against living with him with the refinements and the luxuries of the clubhouse

under her nose all the time! I'm going over her room. Come if you'd like."

Into the little sewing room Nancy Barnes had taken for her own, they strode, pausing for a moment to glance at the dainty day bed, heaped with useless little frilly pillows, the solitary cretonne-covered chair, the sewing table, the sewing machine, the oval mirror hung over the sewing table where lay a few imitation-ivory toilet articles, and over all a sweet faint fragrance.

"Good perfume she used," said Horton, sniffing.

Mason nodded. It was the same kind of perfume Edith had on her dressing table, and in all probability Holcomb had supplied it, as it sold for five dollars an ounce.

Horton was bending over one corner of the sewing table.

"Here is where she used to write, I guess," he nodded, and pointed to pen, cheap pad and paper and bottle of ink. "I don't see any scrap basket, do you? Not a line of writing about anywhere. Hello, this might help out a bit!"

Mason paid no attention to him. He was wondering how the immensity of tragedy that had been Nancy Barnes' young life could have been contained within those dainty narrow walls.

"Look here," said Horton.

Joining him at the table he saw that the detective pointed to the pad of paper. The plain sheet upon it bore deep impressions of words that had been written, probably with a hard-lead pencil, on the sheet that had been torn off.

"Would you think I could get a message from that blank sheet?" asked Horton with a chuckle. "Well, I can. I can tell you in a minute just what was written on the sheet that lay on top of this one. Watch me."

Taking a little packet from his pocket which seemed to contain every article a conjurer could materialize, Horton sprinkled a fine black dust on the sheet and very gently shook it off. To the amazement of Mason, it was apparent that enough of the powder had been retained in the indentations to make it tolerably easy to decipher the message that had been written on the upper sheet. There it was, as he bent above it, staring up at the world.

I have told you so many times that I have no love to give you. If I have given my heart where it has no right to be, it is, after all, all that I have to give. I cannot change. And you have no respect for me if you think I can. I——

There the writing ceased.

"Wow!" said Horton softly, "I wonder who this guy was who thought she could love a couple of 'em at once! Holcomb was the one who had her heart, I figure. But who was this other swell who was making love to her?"

"That's clever work," said Mason slowly, "but why do you think this chap is a swell, as you put it?"

"Because she wouldn't look at any other kind," said Horton. "But this case is too easy. Don't take any brains to solve it. Barnes will get his. That stunt of burning his hands—gosh! A coffeepot sez he. Coffeepot, my eye! He fell smack on a red hot stove top with his right hand all spread out ready, or I'll miss my guess! Yes, sir, he wanted to ruin his finger prints good and all. But he won't do it. That ain't so easy."

Mason was thinking of the blank sheet and the message the dust had brought out upon it. Was the man she had been writing to young Ellis Zane? He was a nice boy and he didn't want to see him mixed up in this, though his infatuation for Nancy Barnes was club talk.

"You feel sure Barnes is guilty," he said absently.

"Sure, he had chance and motive," sneered Horton. "And this burned-hand stuff clinches it. Smack on that

handsome wooden knob on the rail by the swimming pool the criminal left his prints. Yeh. Plain. Only amateurs do that any more. In a professional job we never expect to see them. But some chap in a little private affair, all excited and in a hurry, now and then forgets. And if he ain't the criminal, he is the crime's first cousin! Yeh. No lilies pinned on him, anyhow."

"But Barnes isn't a smart person," protested Mason.

"You can't tell," grinned Horton. "Maybe that vacuum where folks thinks he lives, those wide open spaces where his brains rattle round, is full of deep and silent thoughts. I got no time for these quiet birds."

"I think I'll be going home for some rest," said Mason. He felt stifled there in that little house.

"Sure," assented Horton from the depths of a huge scrap basket in the upper hall. "Golly, it's a crime the way she threw everything far, far away, ain't it? I guess she was afraid of silent friend husband."

Again Mason heard Yarrow's dry voice. "Fear," it said.

"I'll be up at the house if you want me," he said and let himself out into the crisp morning air.

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE'S EMBROIDERIES.

THE autopsy upon Nancy Barnes' body proved that Horton and Doctor Miles had been right. She had evidently been killed by electricity. There was nothing else to that. No use disputing it.

The inquest took place two days after the crime had shocked aristocratic Dahlgren. The exclusive little town was suffering. Whispers of affairs between wealthy clubmen and the pretty wife of the suspected steward brought flocks of reporters to the place, and Dahlgren withdrew behind its handsome curtains, very much disgusted and disgraced.

As for Arthur Mason, his wife had not spoken to him since his early trip to the country club. Polite things like, "Please pass the butter," or "Are you using the coupé to-day?" she did manage, but that was all. And when Edith was angry, the very air crystallized. Violet Holcomb she took to her heart and both women evidently looked upon Mason as a big, fat brute.

In strict privacy, Mason accorded this situation a chuckle or two. But he really moved in deadly fear lest the energetic Horton would discover some new wrinkle that would involve Holcomb seriously. He was now not so sure Andy had arranged that electrical stunt to kill his wife. There was too much that was well thought out, too much refined cruelty about it.

They all attended the inquest. There was no getting out of that. Mason, of course, had let the whole country-club bunch in for that. If the fat fool, according to the husbands, had only stayed in bed where he belonged! With black bandits infesting the roads, what did he want to go prowling about at that hour for, anyhow?

The inquest was held in the old courthouse that had stood in the picturesque square when Dahlgren was younger and not so fashionable. It was an impressive building, with its great tall pillars and its long flight of broad steps. In the park in front of it a magnificent bronze tablet had been recently erected to the memory of the boys who had died in France, and two churches, the public library, and several old mansions hemmed in the square.

Doctor Miles was the coroner, and Mason felt that everything would be done right where Miles officiated. He was a bright man who kept up with the times.

Stephen Yarrow and Ellis Zane, two

well groomed, well set-up figures, were chatting together at the curb beside Zane's car, but Mason avoided them. He had no desire to talk to anybody just then. The country-club bunch was rather down on him.

The courtroom was filled with the frankly curious, the members of the Dahlgren Club grouped about the Holcombs where they sat close to the lawyers' tables, and as Mason entered he glanced about with the queer sensation of keen alien eyes upon him. For a moment he wondered whether The Black Bandit was in the crowd. He refused to consider that he might be in *his* crowd, although that thought had tormented him more than once.

He was called to the stand first, and evading Edith's lightning glances, he told a straightforward story, upon which the crowd hung, shuddering and gasping. He was perspiring and he felt like a worm, but he got through with the thing. He fancied he did that smoking-room scene rather well, sparing Holcomb what he could and stressing the presence of the club steward.

Grant Holcomb was called next and proved a disconcerting and unsatisfactory witness. He had liked Mrs. Barnes, he admitted. He had taken her out now and then in his car and she had learned to drive it. But there had been no love affair between them. He was, he hoped, above that sort of thing.

"Yet Mr. Mason heard you kissing Mrs. Barnes in the dark smoking room and promising to meet her at the club later. Heard a passionate love scene being enacted by you both," said Miles dryly.

"Mr. Mason was mistaken. The man in the smoking room was not I. I never kissed Mrs. Barnes in my life."

At this easy denial Arthur Mason sat upright with an indignant snort. He was oblivious of the two women at his side. How could Holcomb say that? The nerve of him! If he could only be as sure of a few other things as he was certain that Holcomb had been the man in the smoking room that night! Why, she had called him "Grant."

"You never met her at the country club after her husband closed it for the night?" pursued the coroner.

"Certainly not!"

"The night of the crime, after the dance, what did you do?"

"Lukes drove Mrs. Holcomb and myself home. We retired."

"You did not, either of you, leave your home again?"

"No. We were not disturbed until Chief Brown and Art Mason got us out of bed."

"I see. That will do."

And Holcomb, handsome and cool as a cucumber, strolled to his seat. Nobody in the courtroom had believed him, but when it came to a toss up between any member of the aristocratic country club, and white-faced, sullen-eyed Andy Barnes sitting hunched up beside Ben Horton, Barnes would get the worst of it. Mason knew that.

Violet Holcomb was called next, and in the witness chair her pale ashen loveliness caused a murmur to spread through the room. She was like that heroine described by Wilde, "the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver."

Doctor Miles was very gentle with her, and courteous. Even when he held up the gown she had permitted the police to take from her home, and laid the little chiffon rose in the spot from which it had obviously fallen, she merely lifted her perfect chin a bit higher and gave the coroner a faint, amused smile.

"The rose, of course, came from my gown," she admitted composedly. "I dropped it while at the club. That is all I can say."

Although she told the same story as

her husband and gave him the same alibi he gave her, it was plain what was in the minds of the people back in the courtroom. She could have followed Holcomb to his tryst in the darkened country club and could have witnessed the crime, at least, which meant the end of her dangerous rival! She was soon dismissed. There was little else to be done with a haughty young queen who had graciously stooped from her position for a brief moment.

The testimony of Lukes, the young chauffeur, provided a seeming alibi for the Holcombs, but the chief of police sat staring at that chiffon rose and biting his lip. He had never gone very deeply into the intricate game of detection, and never dabbled with its fine points, but he had fooled for hours with that rose and a puddle of water and he had his own ideas upon the matter. He was absolutely sure that Mrs. Holcomb had been at the country club, upon the scene of the crime, a short time before Mason got there.

Yarrow's testimony was interesting. He said briefly that he was painting Mrs. Barnes' picture and that he had liked and admired her. He had never known her well until she sat for him.

"Mr. Yarrow, you made a remark the night of the crime which I should like explained," said Doctor Miles. "You said that you wondered if the thing that held Mrs. Barnes to her husband was fear. What made you say that?"

Yarrow shot Mason a quizzical glance, and the fat man squirmed a bit. It did seem as though he could not keep out of the limelight!

"I had occasion to note several times that she seemed afraid of her husband," replied the artist flatly.

"Tell us about them, please."

"Oh, they are trifles. One night I wanted her to have supper with me and give me a longer sitting, as she had arrived late. The way she refused and said that Andy would be looking for her and there was his dinner to get, told me a lot. She looked and acted scared. One afternoon she was posing when Barnes came to give her a telephone message. Just the way she received him said a lot. I really can't recall just what were the other occurrences, but I got the impression that she feared him. And hers was a bright, defiant nature, too."

"Mr. Yarrow, did you know of any affair between Mr. Holcomb and Mrs. Barnes?"

"I had heard rumors. I am convinced there was nothing to them. A lot of people wanted to get Nancy out of the club, even though Barnes gave good service."

The other members of the club spoke in Holcomb's favor, and Mason drew a breath of disgust. They all knew of the case he had on Nancy Barnes. Why couldn't they be honest?

Not until Doctor Miles called Timmy Ryan, one of the club's caddies, a lanky youth of fifteen who chewed on a huge wad of gum, did Grant Holcomb show any annoyance. During this lad's testimony he flushed and bit his lip. And small wonder!

"You have told us, Tim, that you have seen Mr. Holcomb and Mrs. Barnes at the country club after it was closed at night," prodded the coroner.

"Yes, sir, a couple of times."

"When was the first time?"

"I guess a month ago. I was comin' home from a dance down to Bradleyville and I cut across by the country club. I seen a light in the big room where they have the dances and I went and looked in, thinkin' maybe Andy was there."

"And what did you see?"

"I seen Mrs. Barnes and Mr. Holcomb in there alone dancing. I couldn't hardly believe my eyes, for it was most two o'clock then, but they were dancing all right. The radio was going. And

Nancy could sure dance. They were having lots of fun laughing and talking."

Mason understood a bit then. That was why she had had her bathing suit on when they had found her by the swimming pool at such an unearthly hour. After the members had gone and the club had been closed by her husband, Nancy Barnes had the freedom of it, the dance floor and the swimming pool, and Holcomb—forced to ignore her during the affairs given at the club while she looked wistfully on—met her there and danced and swam with her as he had longed to do earlier in the night! Nancy's own whispered words came back to him: "These meetings are all that carry me through such evenings as this! To see you dancing, to be always on the outside!"

And now Holcomb denied her.

"And when was the second time you saw them, Tim?" asked the coroner.

"About a week ago. I went back to the club because I had forgotten my wallet—left it in an old sweater in the caddy house. It was after one o'clock then. But they weren't dancing this time. They were in the lounge eating sandwiches and drinking out of tall, red glasses. They were laughing and talking and the radio was going then, too. I looked in the window at them and I jumped when I heard a mutter right in front of me and saw there was another man looking in. I was scared, for first I thought it might be this Black Bandit that was holding everybody up, but when I got close I saw it was Andy Barnes and that he was watching them and swearing to himself. Gosh, he was mad!"

A loud murmur rose in the courtroom, which the coroner instantly hushed. Holcomb was on his feet, his handsome face flushed. "That is a lie!" he said clearly. "The boy never saw me at the club with Nancy Barnes! I was never there alone with her!"

But the way Timmy Ryan gaped at the clubman, his mouth open, and his eyes staring, gave him the lie direct. Ryan was dismissed and Kitty Barnes, the suspected man's young sister, was called.

Kitty was no more than twenty and she lived with her stepmother in a town some hundred miles away. She had come to Dahlgren immediately after the crime and had inisisted upon testifying for her brother. A slim young thing, wearing a modish brown coat which she kept wrapping about her with the gesture of the professional mannikin, a smart little brown turban crushed down upon her reddish hair, Kitty Barnes brought an attractive, wholesome note into the tense air of the crowded courtroom. Her nose tilting up and her lashes sweeping down, she took the chair and swore that her brother had desperately loved his wife and that he had always been good to his family and to her.

"He wouldn't have hurt a fly," said Kitty with a sniff, flashing a disgusted glance at the Holcombs. "But Nancy was never happy. She wasn't in my brother's class and she wanted to be in higher walks of life. All that ailed her was, she loved life's embroideries."

The coroner lifted his brows.

"Life's embroideries, Miss Barnes?"

"Sure! Pretty things. Dainty things. Light and laughter and romance and everything that money can get you."

To Mason the girl had put it right. That exactly described Nancy Barnes. He and Yarrow exchanged a glance of understanding.

"Just because you can hang this on my brother, you are going to do it," flared Kitty. "He has no money or social standing. He was just the steward of your swell club! I left my job in a millinery store in Bradleyville to come here and see justice done, and I'm going to see it! Andy would never have

thought up that stunt with the electricity. It isn't like him."

As Miss Kitty stepped down, followed by admiring glances, Barnes was called.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VERDICT.

ANDY BARNES was calm enough when he faced the staring room, but there was a defiant, sullen air about him that was not in his favor. Also, he looked rather unkempt and he had not shaved, while his bandaged hand was soiled, and that added to a generally disheveled appearance. No wonder that many eyes strayed from him to the dapper, handsome clubman, Grant Holcomb, whom rumor had it, the pretty little wife had loved.

Barnes did not wait for Doctor Miles to question him.

"Everybody has got it in for me," he said sullenly, staring about. "Wasn't I even held up a while back and knocked in the head? I'd like to know what that was for. My bad luck started then. But nobody seems to blame anything on The Black Bandit."

"We don't want to hear about your being held up, Andy," said the coroner. "What we are interested in is——"

"Well, that interested me," mumbled Andy. "I had money on me and it wasn't touched."

"That will do." snapped Miles. "Now, Andy, tell us what you did with the wires up at the country club the day before your wife was murdered. And what you did that evening when the lights went out."

"I had a few blown fuses," shrugged the steward. "They'd been blasting down on Stone Road and I guess that did it. I fixed them quick enough. I don't know much about electricity, but it is my job to keep things straight about the club."

"And when the smoking room was left in darkness as you talked with Mr. Mason, what did you do?"

"I went down cellar to fix the fuse."

"You went immediately?"

"Sure I did. There was a party on in the club. That fuse only affected the smoking room and swimming pool, but I fixed it right away."

"You did not hear your wife and Mr. Holcomb come into the smoking room?"

"No, I didn't."

"And when you came back, who was there?"

"Mr. Mason. He was sitting there when I went in after I fixed the lights. He was all alone."

Doctor Miles looked helplessly at Andy. Mason understood his expression. Who could know whether the steward had been there in the darkness or not? Had heard and decided to spring his trap that night? It must have been in readiness for some time. And yet, there was that mythical person, The Black Bandit, to be taken into consideration. Although his outlawry seemed in no way to be connected with the murder at the fashionable club, still, when the identity of the man who had terrorized the community for so long remained in doubt, he could not be overlooked entirely.

"Andy," asked Doctor Miles, "tell us about your burned hand."

"I burned it making coffee the morning I missed Nancy," replied Barnes sullenly.

A murmur ran through the room as he held up his bandaged fingers.

"How did you burn it?"

"I spilled the coffeepot over it. I was nervous, I guess."

"Andy, come across with the truth," said the doctor sternly. "The condition of your fingers was never caused by spilling anything over them. You planted your hand on some red-hot surface. The skin is torn completely off the balls of your thumb and fingers."

"I don't care how my hand is burned," growled the steward. "I told you the way I did it."

"But you don't know that we found the print of your *left* hand, which, you see, you forgot to burn, on the bracket from which the electric wire had been taken to the rail by the swimming pool?" went on the coroner. "You only thought of your *right* hand, Andy, when you spilled that coffee, as you said. What have you to say about these prints being found on the bracket?"

"Nothing," said Barnes sullenly. "I never touched that bracket. I don't know anything about it."

"I have no doubt that when your hand has healed, we shall be able to prove that the prints on the wooden knob beside which your wife was found, are also yours."

"Well, they are not mine and I didn't kill her," growled the steward.

"Where was your wife when you got home the night of the club dance, Andy?"

"I don't know. I didn't miss her until I got up to get breakfast next morning."

"She did not come home from the club with you?"

"She never did."

"You knew of her friendship with Mr. Holcomb?"

"I heard rumors of it."

"You had seen them alone at the club after you had locked it for the night?"

"I never did! Tim Ryan lied!"

But Andy's flushed, angry face told only too plainly that he had been aware of the trysts in the fashionable clubhouse.

"You did not look in at them that night Tim spoke of, when they were eating and drinking in the club lounge?"

"I never looked in at them. I never knew anything about it."

Everybody looked at Andy, the drab, lifeless club steward whom most of them knew so well. Could it be possible that he was keen enough to realize that to admit that he knew of his wife's meetings with Holcomb would add to the suspicion against him.

"How would your wife get into the club after you had locked it, Andy?"

"She would take my key or else use Mr. Holcomb's. He had one."

"I see. Now, Andy, how did you know enough about electricity to fix any trouble that came up in the club along those lines?" asked the coroner.

"Aw, any guy can fix a blown fuse!" shrugged the steward.

"But there were other things. Short circuits, and—er—that."

"Sure. I used to watch the electrical fellow when he come," said Barnes indifferently. "But I never rigged up all that stuff to finish off Nancy. Go hunt for one of her swell friends that she had up in the club, maybe the guy that plays he's The Black Bandit. Don't try to stick it on me. I didn't kill her. A dozen finger prints can't prove that. I didn't want to kill her."

Miles questioned him for a short time, and then Ben Horton gave his testimony. He was followed by the chief of police, who dwelt with no little pride upon his experiment with the chiffon rose, although when he swore that the rose had not been in its puddle of water more than an hour, if that long, according to his tests, Violet Holcomb never flicked her blond lashes. Her pure, cold face remained as motionless as it had been from the beginning of the ordeal.

Andy's manner, however, and the finger prints, the burned hand, coupled with Tim Ryan's evidence, told against him, and he was held for the murder of his young wife.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

NINE TO NINE

By Oscar Schisgall

Author of "Hostile Harbor," etc.

AS she drew her hand away from the child's feverish forehead, she heard the small clock in the kitchen emit nine faint tinkles. A little startled, a little incredulous, she turned to stare through the open door behind her. There stood the square nickel clock, on the ice box; for a moment she had doubted the accuracy of its feeble chime. But now she could see the hands.

Nine o'clock! Actually nine o'clock! So it was more than a day and a half since last she had slept.

The realization dazed Myra. She looked back at her daughter with wide, wondering eyes. A day and a half of nerve-twanging vigilance at the side of this bed—of tense, unrelieved strain! Suddenly she shuddered and pressed her palms to her face; for, in an overwhelming wave, the full knowledge of her exhaustion swept over her. She was tired, utterly tired in body and spirit and almost in hope. If only she could sleep a while—a few short, precious minutes. If only she dared!

Of course, the yearning was futile. With Peggy's fever flaming at a hundred and four, she couldn't consider sleep. She had but to touch the child's forehead to know that. The doctor, too, had implicitly directed her to maintain the watch this night. This night of all nights, he had said, in a tone of grim certainty that rendered his meaning very clear.

Weariness? She jerked herself erect in the chair, while a dogged, stubborn hardness gripped her face. No, she wasn't weary! Her hand sprang forward to linger again on Peggy's hot forehead. Weariness? Impossible!

But in an instant she was sorry that she had touched the child, for the contact roused the sandy head to fitful tossings in the pillow. Peggy's flushed countenance twisted into a grimace of pain, and her scarlet lips began to whimper things. Those same words she had been whimpering and wailing ever since yesterday, with unconscious persistence that plucked cruelly on Myra's quivering nerves.

"I wan' daddy—I wan' daddy!"

Her own lips clamped in a taut, dry slash, Myra leaned forward, whispering in a voice like a caress:

"Yes, Peggy, yes. Daddy's coming, he's coming." But it was a bitter untruth, and the child seemed to guess it, because the petulant whimper continued relentlessly.

"I wan' daddy!"

Minutes later, after a long, sinking moan, it finally subsided.

Myra straightened, drawing a deep breath, while her fingers mechanically brushed back straggling ends of her disheveled hair. She looked about the room. Here, in accordance with the doctor's orders, the gas light was dim—a yellow haze rather than a real glow. But in the kitchen it was quite brilliant, and whenever she had sensed that sleep was slyly creeping upon her, she had hurried into that brighter glare. The change was like a shock that whipped her sagging nerves into new alertness.

Now, after an anxious glance at the angry-red face, she rose and tiptoed across the floor. In the pot on the stove there must be some coffee left. That was it—coffee! She would drink more of it, black and boiling, as she had been doing all through the day.

At the kitchen door, however, she paused, and peered back into the shadowy chamber. Out of Peggy's sleep had come a plaintive murmur:

"Daddy——"

And then, for a while, Myra Willet forgot coffee, forgot her very weariness. Limply she leaned against the door, and an oddly wistful expression stole over her features. She gazed at the bed, gazed and saw nothing. Her thoughts roved away, out of the room, to Peggy's daddy.

Deep within her Myra was wailing for Larry Willet quite as desperately as her daughter. But because she knew that Larry couldn't come, she crushed the cries. That was the difference. She *knew*, and Peggy didn't. Peggy couldn't know such things, naturally; she was too young, and for that her mother felt humbly grateful.

As she leaned there, against the door, she wondered where Larry could be now. Doubtless out of New York, since he wouldn't dare remain in the city as long as the police were mercilessly hunting him. She remembered her last glimpse of him, almost a week ago. It had been four o'clock in the morning, just after the Chester robbery. He had rushed into the house, he had tarried only long enough to gather a few clothes, to kiss her and the child, and to peer fearfully out of the window.

Then he had dashed out. Every day since that time Detective Bulver had been calling here—just calling, in a friendly, inquisitive way. He had learned to ask a few questions about Peggy's condition, while his eyes darted swiftly, darkly, about the rooms.

"Daddy——"

Myra started. Again that whimper from the bed, again that hopeless, endless pleading.

"Daddy's coming, daddy's coming," she whispered, but the whisper died with a little sound like a sob. She trembled as she turned, unsteadily, into the kitchen. Coffee! She needed coffee, black and boiling; she needed it sorely.

In the small mirror to the side of the sink she studied her reflection, while her hands, of their own accord, rinsed the cup. The haggardness of her young face did not surprise her. Hadn't she watched the gradual development of those purplish crescents under her eyes? Hadn't she seen her cheeks assume a colorless flabbiness which became more noticeable every time she looked into the mirror? And her hair, as sandy as Peggy's, well, she hadn't found either the energy or the will to comb it since yesterday. But what did

it matter? Only the mirror saw her here, and the doctor. And neither of them cared.

She stood over the stove until the coffee boiled. When she lifted the pot, her hand shook uncontrollably, so that she splashed the table and the floor. Yet she wasn't disturbed. As soon as she gulped down that steaming, black tonic, she'd feel stronger. Yes, as soon——

Myra stopped, the cup raised half way to her lips, stopped and listened to the hasty knocks at the door.

Instinctively she glanced at the clock. It was almost half past nine. She set down the cup, while a peculiar twist—the merest suggestion of a sneer—hovered over the corners of her mouth. Oh, easily enough could she divine who was calling! Detective Bulver, that prying, perseverent Detective Bulver. He had the habit of knocking at almost any time of day or night, as though he hoped eventually to gain something by surprise. To-day he hadn't yet called. The knock came again.

Quietly Myra crossed the kitchen and cautiously turned the key. Peggy was asleep now. It wouldn't do to risk waking her by the slightest scrape. Noiselessly she opened the door, quite prepared to keep Detective Bulver out in the dark hall.

And then, as though something had sprung at her, she leaped back, her hand clapped over her lips to force down a cry, her eyes wide in unspeakable amazement.

For the man who stepped into the kitchen and quickly closed the door behind him was Larry!

While he snatched off his cap and pulled the collar of his coat open, Myra stood too bewildered to venture a word. Even when his arms crushed her shoulders, when he kissed her, she could say nothing. He left her, still gaping in a mixture of frantic joy and terror, and hurried into the bedchamber.

She heard him throw his heavy coat to a chair; she heard the metallic crunch of the bed as he sat upon it, and almost at the same moment she heard Peggy's voice—not in a whimper now, but in a high-pitched, wild cry:

"Daddy!"

A queer dizziness flowed into Myra Willet's head, so that she had to cover her eyes with her hand. She swayed a little, too, and caught at the back of a chair. Her exhausted brain had reeled under the shock of Larry's appearance, and she had to wait until it regained control of itself.

When at last she did go into the bedroom she imagined her face was as feverish as Peggy's, and surely her eyes blazed as brilliantly, as unnaturally.

Larry had lifted the sandy head in his arms and he sat squeezing it tightly to his chest. In the dim, hazy light, she saw a strange look on his thin face. It might have been anguish, or fear, or even defiant delight. Or perhaps it was all of them, in chaos.

He kissed the small, thin arm that had slipped up around his neck—kissed it again and again, until finally Myra made him stare up by gasping, "They'll get you here, Larry! They'll get you!"

"I don't care," he shot back over the sandy hair. "I don't care what they do now! I had to come!"

"But Larry"—Myra moved forward, one hand at her throat, the other seizing the post of the brass bed—"he comes here every day—Bulver! He might——"

"Let him come," exclaimed Larry, a harshness she had never heard before vibrant in his voice. "I don't care any more! I had to see the kid. Gee, I *had* to see her!"

"You knew?"

Larry nodded.

"I phoned Doctor Pack. He told me."

Once more Myra's eyes grew round in astonishment.

"Phoned Doctor Pack!" she repeated, her tones low and rapid. "But how did you know she was sick? Where were you?"

Before he answered, Larry dropped a reassuring smile upon his daughter's upturned face. Then he looked at Myra.

"I was down in Philly," he said. "Just—well, waiting. But I kept in touch with a couple of the boys, and one of 'em told me about Peg. So I called Doctor Pack, long distance, about six to-night. And he—oh, I got the truth from him, all right!"

"And you came"—she said slowly—"right away——"

"Came? Gee, Myra, gee! d'you think I could stay *away?* With the kid maybe—maybe——"

He didn't finish. Instead, he lowered his slim, dark face into the sandy head pressed to his chest. He began to rock from side to side, slowly, rhythmically, while the thin arm curled more tightly about his neck. Save for the creaking of the bed, the room was silent.

Many minutes sped by while Myra Willet stood watching. Of her husband's danger she was keenly aware, and yet she was glad he had come. Unreasonably, defiantly, proudly glad! At the crisis, he hadn't lacked courage! The sight of them, Larry and Peggy, hugging each other there, while the child drifted back into contented sleep, was ample payment for any risk he had taken.

Myra was tired now, strangely. She didn't think of sleep. All her faculties were fastened on those two, swaying from side to side so gently.

Indeed, she forgot the very peril that hung over them, until suddenly she heard another knock at the door!

At that sound, Myra Willet whirled around, her cheeks white, her eyes ablaze. Upon Larry's senses, too, the knock proved a stunning blow. He placed Peggy's head back upon the pillow and jumped up, a tense, slim figure.

Myra did not stir. Her burning gaze was fixed on the far door, as if to pierce it, as if to stab the man on its other side.

"The closet!" she said tersely. "Get in! He never stays for more than a minute."

Behind her she heard Larry's quick steps and the soft closing of the closet door. But he hadn't thought of his cap and coat. She saw them, now, thrown over a chair, and she gathered them up to cast them, too, into the black oblivion that had already swallowed her husband.

Something in the overcoat's pocket, however, had made her pause—something hard that struck her knee as she walked. She frowned a second, pondering. Then a glint of resolution flashed in her eyes. She lifted the revolver from Larry's pocket and dropped it into her own, at the side of her apron.

A moment later, when the two-room flat offered no visible evidence of the fugitive's presence, she opened the door to confront Detective Bulver.

Yes, there he stood, in the gloom of the hall, his hand promptly rising to draw off his hat. A rather portly man, confident, even amiable. He lowered his round countenance in the hint of a bow, while a questioning smile lurked on his large mouth.

"Good evening, Mrs. Willet!" She noticed that as he spoke his glance darted beyond her, into every corner, sharply, efficiently. "I hope you won't mind my dropping in so late. How's the girl?"

"She's very sick," said Myra, curtly. "Thanks for asking."

Despite herself, her tones held a note of brusque finality which too clearly indicated her wish to be rid of him. She realized it at once. Perhaps Detective Bulver perceived it, also, for he ap-

peared somewhat astonished and aggrieved, like one who has sustained an undeserved rebuff.

"Sorry. I disturbed you so late," he muttered, and again his eyes searched the rooms. "Only—well, I guess I'll have to trouble you a little to-night."

There was a significant determination in Detective Bulver's words that sent tongues of fire licking their way through Myra's cheeks, into her head.

"Trouble me?" she asked.

"I mean, I'd like to come in a few moments."

She did not budge from before the door, but her chin jutted out slightly, lending her tired face a stanch grimness.

"I'm sorry," she replied, "but this is the critical night. Peggy's asleep. I can't take the chance of waking her."

"Oh, I'll be *very* quiet, Mrs. Willet." His aggressive manner, his decisive inflection, his tentative forward step all told Myra that further subterfuge was futile. She frowned at Bulver narrowly and demanded:

"What is it you want?"

"I want your husband," he said crisply.

"Wh-what?"

He pushed across the threshold. All semblance of amiability had vanished now. Detective Bulver loomed before her, big and awesome, the implacable representative of the law.

"No use looking surprised, Mrs. Willet," he snapped. "I saw him run in as I came down the street. He's here!"

To Myra those words had the shocking power of a prison sentence. Involuntarily she fell back a step, gaping. Instinctive cries of denial rushed to her tongue, but before she could utter them, they were strangled; strangled because out of the dimly lit room behind her had burst a high-pitched, feverish wail:

"Daddy! Daddy! Come back—daddy! Don't let go of me, daddy! Da-a-addy, *please!*"

At that delirious scream, Myra Willet turned wildly. Of a sudden the kitchen, the walls, the door, crazily rocked around her exhausted, overtaxed senses. The gas light was a meteor madly whizzing through space. The floor was a heaving ocean.

But, as abruptly as it had reeled, her sleep-starved brain cleared again.

In that dizzy instant, she saw, Detective Bulver had passed her. He was already at the bedroom door, his raised hand leveling a flat automatic into the hazy chamber. Slowly, cautiously, he was advancing, his weapon aimed directly at the closet. His portly bulk filled the doorway. In a moment he would have Larry, on this night of all nights.

"Daddy!" Peggy cried. "Daddy! Come back!"

And then, with a violent start, Myra remembered. She stiffened. Her hand darted down into the apron pocket and emerged with Larry's revolver. In the very center of the kitchen she stood and aimed the muzzle straight at Detective Bulver's broad back. Her extended arm was rigid and competent and determined.

"Don't move!" she said. "Drop your gun!"

In her voice throbbed something which surprised herself as much as Bulver. It was a deep vibrance, guttural, like a rasp. It held a terrible tension that made the detective halt and stare back in amazement.

"Drop your gun!"

If he had at all doubted his danger, one glimpse of Myra's face was sufficient to destroy uncertainty. He had never before seen her like that, nor had any one else. She was a woman transformed — hard, uncompromising, taut in every muscle. Her countenance was stony, her eyes were flames. He knew she would not even hesitate to shoot.

Helplessly Detective Bulver allowed

his averted gun to slip from his grip. It struck the floor loudly.

In Myra's expression there was no change, no hint of triumph. Her arm still outstretched, she moved forward, a creature of unyielding menace. With a swift, imperious turn of her eyes she indicated the chair that had held Larry's coat.

"Sit down!"

Dumbfounded by the suddenness of it all, Bulver sank rather dazedly to the seat. He saw Myra stoop and sweep his own automatic from the floor, so that he sat facing two unwavering muzzles. In the yellow dimness of the chamber she rose in front of him like a pallid apparition, and her low voice came in staccato spurts to lash him, sting him.

"Larry is here," she said. "He's here and he's going to stay here! Understand? Our child is maybe dying. She's been crying for him since yesterday. And he came to her. I won't let her *lose* him now! The only rest she's had in days was the few minutes she lay in his arms. And if that'll make her happy and at ease, she's going to be in his arms all night!"

She paused a moment, her eyes drilling into Bulver. Then she went on firmly:

"You're going to sit there all night, and I'm going to keep you covered every second! I can't let you go because you'll only come back with help. So you're staying here to-night. You're going to sit right where you are and you're going to keep your mouth shut tight, so's Peggy can sleep comfortably in her father's arms. Understand?"

Detective Bulver did not answer. He was gaping at this woman who had suddenly become so rugged, so fierce in her power. And his eyes were wide with a queer sort of awe.

Myra raised her voice sharply.

"It's all right, Larry! You can come out!"

They sat in silence.

Forced, hushed silence it was, that crushed upon the faintly illumined chamber like a tangible weight. The only sound which dared challenge the stillness was the sibilant breathing of Peggy.

Bundled in the blankets, she lay in her father's lap. Her sandy hair fell over his chest, her rapid breaths spurted against his lowered chin. She had thrown one slim arm up around his neck, and there it clung, tightly even in sleep, as though she feared he might again desert her.

Larry sat on the edge of the bed, near the pillows, his own arms encircling the child in a motionless embrace. Of both Bulver and Myra he appeared entirely oblivious. All his faculties were fastened unswervingly on the small, fever-flushed face at which he gazed. Unconsciously his lips imitated the pucker of those at his chest. Sometimes he shook his head a little and sighed.

Detective Bulver remained on the chair. But now he leaned far forward, his big hands clasped between his knees, his shoulders drooping. Deep furrows ran across his forehead as he stared at the fugitive and the child, and his teeth were pressed down upon his lower lip. The gravity of the night marked its lines on him, too.

At the foot of the bed sat Myra, the two revolvers resting on her lap and pointing at the detective. She did not release her clutch on them, but no longer was it a frenzied, trembling hold. Hers was the most trying vigilance, after all, for she had to watch Bulver. She knew she must not relax for an instant, that she must remain alert, poised, ever ready to snatch up the guns. And yet, from time to time, her eyes wandered toward Larry and Peggy. At such moments, their lids would sink wearily, and tears would well in them—gentle tears that blurred

the room and left it swimming, swaying. But always she blinked quickly and jerked her head back toward Bulver. She mustn't succumb.

Out of the kitchen came twelve light tinkles. She counted them, as she had counted them at ten o'clock and at eleven. Midnight!

Peggy stirred, opened her eyes. When she encountered Larry's reassuring smile, she smiled, too. She pressed against him contentedly, drew his head down lower, and slept again.

Another eternity of silence. Endlessly it seemed to drag on, with scarcely a stir from those who were in the hazy room.

Myra's head began to sink, her eyes to close, only to be snapped up, abruptly, to quivering alertness. For a few minutes she would sit with her inflamed eyes wide, regarding Bulver, defying sleep. Then weariness would seep into her once more, like a soothing, conquering drug, and her chin would go down, down——

It was almost two days since she had slept, days that had been centuries of trial and strain. Her nerves were beginning to lose courage and strength in the struggle.

As though the tinkle floated to her from infinite distance. Myra heard it. Heavy lids were drooping. Over her senses, a sweet, magical darkness was stealing, like a shadow. It crept into her brain, lulling her nerves. Pleasantly, comfortably, it settled upon her. She felt herself swaying, swaying, swaying. So restful, this darkness, so wonderful. Swaying, swaying——

Suddenly she heard the slight pur which invariably presaged the clock's tinkle. It roused her, and she snatched up her head in amazement. She blinked, incredulous. Surely, it could not be two o'clock already! Why, it had just chimed.

The tinkles began, and she counted: one, two, three, four!

Four! Four? Good heavens, had she been——

A wave of freezing terror dashed against her, swept her mind into shivering, confused wakefulness. She remembered the revolvers and tried to snatch at them. They were no longer on her lap.

In unutterable fear she looked across the room. Bulver was there, still as she had last seen him. But now he leaned backward, with his hands hidden in the side pockets of his coat. A curious smile hung on his large lips. As she gaped at him, those lips began to stir. His whisper reached her very, very softly.

"*I* have them now."

Shaking, Myra moved to rise. He nodded to her to remain where she was.

"It's all right," he murmured. "You stay right there and sleep if you want to. You don't have to worry. I'm going to wait until morning."

She did not speak. Words refused to come to her tongue. Yet her swollen eyes, as she gaped through the dim haze, shouted a thousand mute queries. Perhaps Detective Bulver understood, for his smile became comforting.

"I see how things are," he said. "There's no use waking the child. Larry and I, we'll be leaving in the morning after the doctor's been here."

That quiet assurance left Myra dazed. She stared toward the pillows, where both Larry and Peggy were lying now, asleep. The slender arms were still wound about Larry's neck, the sandy head rested on his shoulder.

Motionless, Myra eyed them, while the faint ticking of the kitchen clock told of the dragging night, the interminable, critical night. As she looked, sleep came prying into her senses again, so that her lids once more drooped.

She did not resist it now. She could not, for, having tasted the sweet drug once, she willingly yielded herself to it a second time. Down across the foot

of the bed she slumped, her arms stretched out to the wall, her face buried in the blanket. She slept in utter surrender to the inevitable.

From his chair Detective Bulver stared in an odd sort of trance upon this strange little family on the bed. He was the only one in the shadowy room who heard the clock tinkle five and six and seven.

A shrewd and tactful man, Doctor Edmund Pack.

When, shortly after eight o'clock, he sat at Peggy's bedside, while the child's father and a detective joined Myra in watching him, he devoted himself wholly to the small patient. If he was at all surprised by the presence of the men, or curious about it, he evinced no hint of such feeling. He had merely nodded to each; and now, adjusting his glasses over his narrow nose, he placed his fingers on Peggy's pulse.

No one dared speak. The stillness of the chamber was surcharged with tense, palpitant anxiety. Through the window a beam of golden morning sunshine painted a brilliant oblong on the barren floor. But the cheer of that light did not pervade the room; rather, it adhered to the somberness it had known during the night.

Myra leaned against the brass end of the bed, her eyes darting from Peggy to the doctor's long, serious face—darting back and forth, back and forth, as though she did not know to whom to turn for the vital answer. At her side stood Larry, one hand on her shoulder, the other tightly grasping the bedpost. Detective Bulver looked on from the door.

At last, after an age of suspense, Doctor Pack was finished. Thermometer, stethoscope, watch—he put them all away and took off his glasses. Very gravely and deliberately he moved, turning slowly on the chair and fixing his earnest gaze on Myra.

"Mrs. Willet," he said, "I think she'll pull through nicely."

There was an instant of breathless hush. Then Myra gasped—the first joyous sound that room had heard in a week. Her eyes began to shine, to sparkle.

"I'll be frank with you," went on Doctor Pack. "Yesterday I thought her chances were very slim. Very slim. But to-day, well, she has come through the crisis most satisfactorily. Of course she'll need a good deal of rest, sleep, care. But I don't think you need worry about the eventual outcome. Peggy"—he glanced at the child and smiled—"Peggy is going to sleep again, now."

Exactly what she did until the physician departed, Myra didn't know. Her mind was whirling with the kind of unreasoning joy that comes only after hopeless misery. She sat on the edge of the bed and hungrily, fervently kissed each of Peggy's warm hands. She tucked them under cover and drew the blankets snugly up to the small chin. She remained there, crooning things that meant nothing, murmuring sounds that only Peggy had ever been able to understand—mother sounds.

Only after Doctor Pack was gone did she think of Larry.

The thought snapped her up to rigidity. She rose, fearful, to stare at him and at Detective Bulver. Near the door they had been quietly talking, the two men, and now Larry hastily came to her. He whispered:

"Bulver said he'd wait till I put her to sleep. If she sees me go, she may start crying again."

Myra nodded blankly. Joy? Yes, for a minute it had been vouchsafed her. For one blessed, unthinking minute she had been really happy. And now——

They'd give Larry a few years. Oh, there wasn't any use in trying to evade the fact. Robbery. Not the first offense, either. Before their marriage he

had served a term, but for a long, long time he hadn't succumbed to the old weakness. Not until the Chester affair, a week ago. Yes, they'd give him a few years.

She was startled by Detective Bulver's low voice at her ear.

"Mind if I warm up that coffee while he puts her to sleep, Mrs. Willet?"

Again that blank, dazed nod. She did not look at Bulver. Her eyes were fixed upon Larry; Larry bravely grinning at his daughter and softly talking her to sleep, while the detective waited in the kitchen.

The sounds of Bulver's puttering about the stove were disturbing. They stirred Myra, and she quietly closed the kitchen door. Then, from the foot of the bed, she watched and listened; and a hollow, hopeless ache engulfed the joy that had momentarily welled within her.

Soon Larry would be going—for a few years, for years—soon, as soon as Peggy slept.

It seemed scarcely a moment before Peggy dozed off, and yet it was almost a half hour.

His grin fading before a look of haggard helplessness, Larry turned away from the bed. The mask he had worn for Peggy wasn't needed now. Unmoving, he eyed his wife in a way that made speech futile.

After a time, he swallowed audibly. Then, very quietly, he took his coat and cap from the closet. He kissed Myra here, where Bulver wouldn't see. He held her until one of her tears startled him. After that, strangely confused, he whispered something in her ear and pulled the kitchen door open.

He was about to step forward but he halted in the doorway, staring. And Myra stared with him, wide-eyed. For in what they both saw there, in the kitchen, the future assumed, suddenly, new and dazzling vistas. Both realized it, both held their breaths.

Detective Bulver sprawled back in a chair at the table, asleep!

His legs were outstretched, his arms dangled limply, his head was thrown back. On the table in front of him stood an empty coffee cup. The vigil of the night had demanded payment.

Larry Willet looked at his wife, and his eyes danced with the splendor of the opportunity. Chance had been kind, generous!

Myra understood and quickly nodded.

On his toes Larry crossed the kitchen. Without a sound he opened the outer door and passed into the hall. A final kiss he threw back, then the door was closed, and he was gone!

The throbbing in Myra's heart was furious, thunderous. A warm glow shone in her cheeks. As she turned to stare at Bulver, something like triumph lifted her chin, brought vitality into her. Inwardly she wanted to laugh in the sheer joy of their victory.

The feeling ebbed out of her as rapidly as it had come. For she saw that Detective Bulver had opened both his eyes and was gravely regarding her!

She stood dumbstruck, bewildered. Her hand leaped up to her lips. While he slowly rose and picked up his hat from the table, she could say nothing. But comprehension had burst upon her with stunning force. He had been awake!

The idea sprang from her on a little cry. Detective Bulver, moving toward the door, paused to frown at her quite severely.

"Mrs. Willet," he said succinctly, "you get that notion out of your head! As far as you know and saw, I was sound asleep! Is that clear?"

"But——"

"There are no 'buts.' I'd rather be hauled up for falling asleep after a night of watching than for—for deliberately letting a prisoner go. Understand that?"

Not so easily, however, could Myra's

amazement be quelled. As Bulver placed his hand on the knob, she almost ran half way across the kitchen. There, impetuously, she stopped.

"But why?" she insisted, her tones unnaturally high, rapid. "What made you do such a thing?"

Detective Bulver appeared very uneasy and anxious to depart, yet he answered, in hesitant phrases:

"I don't know, exactly. I'm kind of —of womanish, I guess, in some ways. I mean—well, when a man sticks his head in a noose to save his kid—well, *I* don't want to be the one who pulls the noose tight, if you understand what I mean."

She did understand. That was why she stood motionless while Detective Bulver awkwardly put on his hat and opened the door. He muttered something indistinguishable and turned to go out.

But—he didn't go out. Instead, he uttered a low exclamation and stepped backward. His awkwardness changed in an instant to gaping incredulity.

In front of that door stood Larry.

Larry was feebly, wanly smiling as he entered, cap in hand. He looked at his wife, then he looked at Bulver.

"What's the use of fooling each other?" he asked in a weak, empty voice. "I—I did a little thinking out there on the steps."

Bulver stared. "Fooling?" he demanded.

Limply Larry gestured with his cap.

"Sure," he said slowly. "What's the sense of my running away? Where'll I go? What'll I do? Gee, I'd rather take my stretch in jail and know that when it's over I can come home! At least, I'll feel that there'll be a time when I can hold the kid in my arms without being afraid every second."

Bulver tried to exchange a glance of astonishment with Myra, but he found her eyes fastened unswervingly on her husband. They were round eyes, full of wonder and comprehension.

"Come on," said Larry Willet, drawing on his cap. "Might as well go before we wake the kid up again." He looked at Myra. "It won't be so—so very long," he mumbled. "Only a few years, maybe only a year."

She was still standing there in the middle of the kitchen when they had gone, motionless, her gaze fixed on the door. Straight she stood, straight and unblinking. Larry was gone now for a few years. She ought to feel tears in her eyes. She ought to.

But she didn't. She couldn't understand what it was she did feel. A sort of strange, unreasonable gladness! An astounding sense of confidence, of hope, of gratitude! To analyze that sensation was impossible, yet she knew that it all hinged on something Larry had said. He wanted to be able, some day, to hug the child without being afraid.

Dazedly she turned and moved back into the bedroom. Peggy was sleeping easily near the wall. For a while Myra stared down at the child. Then she sank to the bed, sat there, and dully eyed the floor. Her lips, of their own accord, began to formulate strange words.

"Daddy'll be coming, daddy'll be coming—unafraid."

Out in the kitchen the little nickel clock tinkled lightly, merrily, nine times.

MR. CHANG AND THE CRIME RAY

By A. E. Apple

Author of "Mr. Chang Deals in Snow," etc.

CHAPTER I.

STOPPED BY DETECTIVES.

PLUNDER to the amount of thirty-four thousand dollars was in the satchel. This alluring sum was not in the form of cash. However, it consisted of negotiable bonds, which were just as good, in the eyes and minds of potential looters.

The satchel was a small black leather bag. It was old. It was worn. It was scuffed and scratched. In short, nothing could have been more incongruous than using it as a carrier of wealth. Yet such it was. Thirty-four thousand dollars!

That is not a colossal figure in these days when financiers have us bewildered by their blithe and nonchalant mentioning of millions and billions. Nevertheless, thirty-four thousand dollars certainly is not to be sneezed at. A wage slave, toiling for thirty dollars a week, will find on calculation that it is more than he receives in twenty-one years for his treadmill performance.

Then, why was such a fortune incased in so inappropriate a container?

The answer is a simple one. A brand-new satchel might have attracted attention while being carried through city crowds. An old one would be inconspicuous. The chances were that no one would notice it.

Now, the person whose fingers gripped the black bag's handle was in harmony with all this. Ordinarily brokers employ young lads to transport their riches. Their reasons for doing this may vary. In the majority of cases a factor of importance is that youths may be employed cheaply. Afire with the unbounded ambitions and illusions of adolescence, they will work for unfairly low wages, being compensated by the feeling that their missions involve adventure and even romance.

The employers of this particular messenger had evidently taken stock of all such factors. He was young. He had

no uniform. There was nothing about him suggestive of the fact that he was transporting a small fortune. In fact, he did not even have the satchel handcuffed to a wrist in accord with the modern theory that a would-be bandit thereby must perform a surgical operation to obtain the loot, in event lock picking fails.

While this lack of handcuffs showed consideration for the lad, it suggested that possibly his boss was indifferent about protection of the securities, and very much inclined to let the bonding and insurance companies do the worrying.

The boy himself was interesting. More than that, he was exceptional. His hair was fiery red. His gray eyes had a glint peculiar to substances that can scratch glass. The chap's black cap, of course, concealed most of his flaming hair, though it accentuated that part of it which showed beneath. His appearance was striking, not so much by reason of any physical characteristics as the fact that he had personality. This element cannot be defined, for it is intangible. It is like the soft and pleasing glow of the will-o'-the-wisp. Nevertheless, it is vivid. Actors cursed with decidedly mediocre abilities frequently are put across and become popular because they have the vague, attractive factor, personality.

The boy's age was not more than sixteen. From one side pocket of his cheap blue coat protruded a copy of a radio publication. In the other was a detective story magazine. And it was the original, not an imitation.

As the youngster flowed along in the stream of pedestrians through the downtown business districts, he occasionally reached up and touched the collection of mystery stories. This action was an unconscious one. He was utterly unaware of it. Yet it manifested that he did not want to lose the thing; that the detective germ was in his blood. That was natural, especially in view of his line of work.

Ever there was a possibility that he would be held up at the point of a gun and compelled to disgorge his cargo.

Had he been an adult, undoubtedly he would have been highly nervous, since no bodyguard accompanied him—fore, aft or at his side.

He reached Cherry Street. It was one of the chief points of metropolitan congestion. A traffic cop was busy with his whistle in the center. At the corners of a square, surrounding this officer, were four other policemen, holding back the crowd or urging it to cross quickly.

The boy felt some one touch his right shoulder. He turned, tingling with apprehension. But no pistol met his gaze. Instead, he saw that he had been accosted by a smiling, mild-mannered, genial old man.

"Son," said the stranger, in the softly apologetic tone of one who intrudes reluctantly, "I'm a newcomer in town. Can you tell me where the Waid Building is?"

"Sure!" was the prompt response. And then, glibly, "Two blocks ahead, three to your right, sir."

The man nodded understandingly, and he looked as if he were on the verge of expressing gratitude for the simple service. The words, however, did not come to his lips.

At that instant, the traffic cop blew his whistle shrilly. The mob surged ahead, unceremoniously brushing up against the lad and giving him the impression that he was a cork in a whirlpool.

Simultaneously, two other men closed in. One of them gripped the genial stranger by the right wrist. The other grasped the messenger's sleeve and pulled him aside so that he was close to a show window, out of the traffic line. He noticed that the stranger, too, had been brought along.

"My boy," said the strong-armed gentleman who had the messenger in tow, "what have you got in that satchel?"

"Ask me!" was the suspicious retort. "What business is it of yours?"

At that, the man laughed, not satirically, but expressing genuine amusement. "This is what business it is of mine," he said. He caught a coat lapel and drew it back, disclosing a shining badge.

"How do you get that way, picking me up?" the messenger asked. "I'm not running off with this stuff. I'm just lugging it to another broker. Get me?"

Again his gentle captor manifested mirth. "Now, son," he said, "that's all right. We'll take your word for it—for the present, at least. Do you know who you were talking to?"

The boy looked at the stranger who had asked him directions. "That bird?" he queried. "Who's he?"

This time there was no laugh. The detective replied grimly, "He's one of the cleverest bond thieves in the game. When we—trailing him—saw him approach a youngster with a bag of jack, we naturally closed in. I don't know what he aimed to do. But we're going to pick him up on suspicion. You'll come with us as a witness."

"But I've got to get along with my work," the boy protested.

"To heck with your work! We're from headquarters, and what we say goes—and that's that!"

The stranger no longer was suavely amiable. His face had hardened into a sneer. "You are lunkheads, like most dicks!" he declared. "Take me in if you want to. You ain't got nothing on me. This kid, though, is excess baggage. I simply stopped him to inquire directions."

"Tell it to the sergeant!" the leader of the detectives advised. "You know this town like a book."

The bond messenger now was afire with interest. He long had awaited for the thrill of being held up. This experience was not as good, but it made him tingle, just the same.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "This'll be nuts for me—going to the station and maybe getting my name in the papers and all that. 'Clever Youth Helps Capture Desperado!' I bet that's how the papers will headline it! Gosh!"

He paused, gulped for breath, and pointed to a red metal box on a near-by telephone pole. "Go ahead!" he urged. "Ring for the wagon. I've always had the itch to ride in one of them things."

None of them had talked above a low tone. But the out-of-the-routine atmosphere of the occasion had been sensed by some of the passers-by. A crowd was already collecting, pressing forward around them, leaning over so as not to miss a word.

The two detectives frowned their annoyance.

The leader said, "We won't wait to call the car. Come on!" He raised an imperative hand, beckoning to a passing taxi driver. The fellow swung in to the curb.

Ten seconds later the four of them were rolling along through the traffic. The chauffeur had been curtly ordered to proceed to police headquarters. Progress was slow, for the main highways were densely packed with motor cars and pedestrians.

As if chafing at the delay, and aware of his fares' desire for speed, the driver suddenly swung his machine into a side street.

The red-headed lad was oblivious to the route pursued. He sat spellbound, gaping at the two detectives and the third stranger, who had been branded as a notorious crook.

This latter sat sullenly, defiantly, making no comment, refusing even to answer questions.

The most that they could get out of him was a crafty, blunt statement that

he would not talk until he had consulted his mouthpiece.

Never had a boy had a more entrancing experience. Engaged in a perilous calling, and devotee of crime fiction, to boot, he believed that he had, by one of the chance tricks of fate, become a star actor in an adventure, and that he was on the verge of becoming a flash-in-the-pan celebrity.

"We may attract attention," suggested one of the detectives. "Do you think we'd better draw the curtains?"

"No, I don't think it's necessary," his pal replied. And he added, "Our prisoner's side kicks haven't a chance in the world of staging a surprise rescue."

The boy was both relieved and disappointed at this confident assurance. Danger, he realized, was a fine thing to avoid, and yet it had its appeal. He consoled himself with the facts that he would still have a fine tale to tell his cronies, and that—in the arrest of the stranger—he probably had escaped an episode that might have turned out seriously for him.

With a start, he realized that the taxi was traveling through an alley.

"How come?" he asked quickly, pointing out a window.

"Going into headquarters the rear way," he was informed. "The garage is at the back, you know."

The lad did not know. He was puzzled, too, as to why a garage was needed on this particular occasion, the vehicle being a taxicab. Then it occurred to him that the detectives had in mind holding the car for later use. This explanation was plausible, and it satisfied him.

The taxi came to a stop. The driver honked his horn four times. In response to this signal or summons, a wide gate suddenly opened in a tall board fence at the right. At that, the car swerved through the opening.

The gate closed behind them. They stepped out, the boy emerging last. He glanced quickly about, taking stock of his surroundings with youthful swiftness. They were none too promising—a walled inclosure, with old barrels and boxes and straw piled in nondescript heaps about the courtyard.

The thought went through the lad's head that the police certainly were not overly neat about the back end of headquarters. Before he had time for further reflection, he was shoved through a door that opened silently and abruptly.

Now he was in the lead. The others followed him quickly. The door clicked shut. Panic surged through the lad, and for good reason.

He was in a long corridor. Its floor was carpeted thickly so that the heaviest shoe would make little more than a rustle while walking. The walls were lined with black satin. Two lights were visible, casting dim illumination through green globes of a most sickly and ghastly hue. From somewhere near by he heard exotic music—soft beating of tom-toms, and the wailing of weird stringed instruments.

"Chinatown!" the boy exclaimed. "I've been hoaxed."

Chinatown it was, no doubt of that. He would have surmised the truth, even had he been blind. The air was redolent and narcotic with Oriental stenches and fragrances—fried duck fat, dried fish, incense, tea, spiced ginger and Malay tobacco.

A saffron-skinned man with slant eyes had manipulated the door. His garb was crude, yet attractive, consisting of a long crimson blouse hanging down over his trousers instead of being tucked under the belt. His slippers were of felt.

The boy, who had keen wits, observed all this in a few glances. The thing that caught his eye, however, and held his attention frozenly, was a Chinaman who appeared at the far end of the passageway and pattered toward him. It seemed to the lad that the oncomer

was intent only on himself; that the two "detectives" and the suave stranger might as well be absent.

The Chinaman had the expressionless countenance so typical of his race. His black eyes were boringly intense, with fires smoldering in their distant depths. He advanced and took the satchel of securities. The boy wanted to cry out, to shout for police aid, but he was paralyzed with terror.

The Chinaman was the notorious criminal, Mr. Chang.

He found the satchel locked. The boy may have had a key. Mr. Chang did not pause to inquire. From somewhere under the coat of his smartly tailored suit he whipped out a slim and glittering poniard. With it, he ripped open the leather container of what now was plunder.

Into the slit went his long and tapering strangler's fingers. Their nails in the spectral illumination glistened, typical of one who never does an honest day's work.

Out came the bonds. Mr. Chang inspected them, both as to backers and denominations, and did this with the swiftness of a veteran broker.

"Thirty-four thousand dollars!" he announced. "That is not bad at all, considering that all of these securities are negotiable."

Rather carelessly he tucked the papers into a side pocket of his coat, where they bulged impressively. The action conveyed the impression that such wealth was, to him, merely an incident in the day's work.

"What'll we do with the boy?" asked the leader of the two fake detectives.

Mr. Chang contemplated the pale, quaking youngster for a period of about five seconds.

"Don't kill him," he said softly. "Maybe he will be more valuable to me alive than dead. Take him into the back room and summon Doctor Yat to be his nursemaid."

Then he glanced at his Swiss watch.

"The hour is only eleven o'clock of the morning," he said. "You fellows go on out and pick me up another pay roll or bonds carrier. Make it a couple if you can. This graft will be no good after to-day. It will get into the papers, and all messengers will be posted to be alert against kidnaping."

CHAPTER II.

PLUNDER OF A NEW KIND.

TWENTY minutes later, the messenger boy was in a panic of fear. Simultaneously he was experiencing the mesmeric lure of Chinatown atmosphere. So his emotions varied and repeated themselves, like an alternating electric current. One moment he was in agony; the next, he tingled with the charm of the exotic, then back to mental torture, and so on. It was like taking frequently repeated doses of raw quinine, followed by an allaying spoonful of honey.

He was reacting sharply to the experience, for he was a youth. The world to him was an uncracked nut. He had not reached the adult stage when one becomes calloused to joy and trouble.

Anguish—which in its most pronounced form is fear—predominated. So great was his fright, in fact, that his heart might have faltered and stopped had it not been young. That mysterious organ, the engine of life, normally beats more than three and a half million times in a year. It is merely a muscle that clenches and unclenches, pumping blood, and continuing in operation by its ability to rest between pulsations and constantly rebuild its wasted tissue.

The messenger boy was under the custody of Doctor Yat, the aged and half-mummified Malay witch doctor who kept Mr. Chang supplied with venoms and aided him in his iniquitous ventures.

There had been very little talk between the two. Doctor Yat had merely brought the lad to Mr. Chang's headquarters and remained on guard. The room was formidably awe-inspiring, its walls draped with black satin, its furniture of *Ning-po* and *tantarin* wood, illuminated solely by a ghastly glow from a green shade over a lamp that burned peanut oil. That shade was of almost incalculable value, its invisibly jointed segments being choicest jade.

There were no windows. The lone door was of thick steel, such as guard the entrances of high-grade gambling dens.

As the boy sat, visibly quaking, the door opened, in response to the manipulation of a secret spring. Mr. Chang entered as silently as a cheetah.

He spoke a few words in his native tongue to Doctor Yat. His tone was throaty, yet not without melody. It was the typical Chinese singsong that to Caucasian ears sounds like: *"A-hung-yah-tse-cheng-ku!"*

The Malay medicine man nodded. Without answering, he shuffled into the corridor. Mr. Chang closed the door and manipulated its heavy steel bolts. He was now alone with the white boy, and his unwilling visitor felt his flesh creep. Mr. Chang sat down and contemplated him thoughtfully for a fraction of a minute. Then he asked, "Boy, do you snuff snow?"

The lad comprehended the underworld slang. "Cocaine?" he replied. "No, sir, I've never used dope."

The Oriental nodded. "One never can tell, these days," he said. "Now, I perceive that you are uneasy. Pray, discard any apprehension that a bonfire is about to be ignited beneath you. No harm will befall you if you act wisely."

The messenger's breath hissed audibly inward in relief. "Oh, gee! Oh, gee!" he chattered. "I'm scared green."

"Naturally!" said Mr. Chang in his most suave tone. "You are having a new experience, a painful one, and that always disrupts a Caucasian. It is like leaning against a hot stove."

The boy eyed him pleadingly. "Please let me go!" he implored. "I'll keep my mouth shut. I won't turn you up to the cops."

"I hardly think you will. But, as regards your leaving, why rush away? Here in Chinatown I can show you sights such as you have never seen before."

"Yeh?" the boy countered dubiously. "Say, Mister Chinaman, what's the big idea? What you want me to do?"

"It is refreshing to converse with you and study you. Youth has a certain keenness that usually becomes dissipated in maturity. I see that you caught my idea. I told you that no harm will befall you if you act wisely. In plainer terms, I never injure any one that I may turn to account."

The lad's eyes narrowed, and they gleamed with excitement as well as lingering fear.

"You want me to turn into a crook?" he said.

"Surely!" Mr. Chang responded. "You are young. You could be easily guided. You are bright, too. Never was there a dull-witted redhead. In my business, you would be most invaluable as an aid. The thought occurred to me when you were brought here captive to-day. Of course, if you do not care to join my organization——"

He paused, and suggested ruthless violence by a quick snapping of fingers.

The boy swallowed. "You mean—you'd kill me?"

The Chinaman nodded solemnly. "Nothing would be gained by torturing you, my lad," he said languidly. "To feed you to starving rats would be a waste of time and energy. Your demise would be a swift one. Merely a matter of lifting a manhole plate and drowning you in a sewer."

Again he paused. While he medi-

tated, the messenger sat limp and motionless, his heart thudding. Crafty psychologist, Mr. Chang had been sizing up his captive. Mature men could be lured most effectively by money. But this chap, by reason of his youth, probably would respond more readily to the prospect of adventure.

"Think of the sport you'd have!" the Chinaman tempted him. "Why, you'd be the pal of a master crook!"

The boy's eyes glittered. He confided, "Several times I've been on the verge of running off with a satchel of bonds. Once I got as far as the depot. There I turned yellow and came back. I'd help you, sir, but I'm afraid of getting caught. Jail doesn't look good to me."

Mr. Chang manufactured a smile of assurance. "No danger of that," he promised. "I'll protect you."

"All right!" the messenger agreed. "Say, hadn't I better go back to the office and tell my boss a cock-and-bull story about being held up? Then they won't start the cops looking for me."

Mr. Chang refused. "You're going to remain under cover."

"Huh!" the boy grunted disdainfully. "If I stay disappeared, I won't dare show my face in public. The cops will pick me up at first sight."

The Chinaman rolled and lit a wheat-paper cigarette. He exhaled and said, "I do not intend to employ you in this town. Your activities will center in a metropolis many miles away. Of course, the police will be looking for you, but only locally in a general sense. They will not incline to the theory that you may have eloped with the securities. On the contrary, it will be supposed that you have been done away with—murdered for your precious burden."

"Bah!" said the boy. Certainly, he was lacking in respect. However, that was a trait typical of youth.

"I know what I am talking about," the Chinaman assured him. "In fact, I have staged things correspondingly. Paid agents of mine have already reported by phoning from booths, that they saw a red-headed youngster being dragged into a limousine with drawn curtains. The police are easily hoodwinked by my methods. They will, in the vernacular, fall for the story. As for you—well, you will show up in another city. Your fiery hair will be dyed black."

The messenger was gradually losing his fear of his sinister host. His predominant emotion now was one of admiration.

"Gee!" he ejaculated. "How come you pick a boy for an assistant, instead of a man?"

"That is readily answered," Mr. Chang responded. "It is my opinion that, among Caucasians, lads are quicker-witted than adults. Boys in knee pants, of the present generation, took up radio and built sets and stole a march on their elders, who trailed along later. Then, too, I have a certain venture in mind that requires the services of a youth. You fit the bill."

At that, the messenger was quite overwhelmed with adolescent vanity. The flattery touched him deeply. He responded to it by a proud tone of voice, asking in a grandiloquent manner that would have been amusing to a listener, "How are you going to employ my services, sir?"

Mr. Chang gestured, pointing with a finger. "I observed," he said, "that you carry a radio magazine in one side pocket of your coat. Now, that indicates that you have a scientific turn of mind."

"You bet!" the lad cut in enthusiastically. "I'm an orphan, you see, so I haven't any real home to live at. My bed's in a rooming house run by an old widow with false teeth that don't fit. She lets me use a room in the attic as a laboratory. I experiment there a lot, of nights. There isn't a set that comes

out in the last two years that I haven't built. Table hook-ups, of course. I had a super, with seven tubes, but I've gone back to favoring a nonregenerative."

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Chang. "I am not concerned with the details. Now, do you go in for any other form of science?"

The boy nodded vigorously. "I always wanted to be a chemist," he said. "But after the old man died, I had to get out and hustle. Didn't have money to go on with my schooling and become a chemical engineer. Swell field, it is, too—industrial chemistry. Well, sir, I still carry on my bug. Gee, you ought to see my lab. Gosh, she's a pip!"

The Chinaman, getting a line on his forthcoming tool, had no end of patience. "My!" he said convincingly. "I am made quite keen by your talk. Eager to know all about your work, and all that. But right now we have to get down to business, for I intend to send you forth on a venture to-night. Inasmuch as you have a scientific slant, you have, no doubt, heard of the cathode ray?"

The boy whistled between shining, clean teeth.

"You bet, mister!" he rejoined. "A professor out in Chicago or some place recently discovered how to manufacture this here cathode ray in the lab. It's more powerful than the X-ray—farther along the spectrum. Why, alongside it the compound known as mesothorium is weak, and it's twenty times as intense as radium."

Mr. Chang had been listening attentively. He blew several smoke circles aloft and said, "Precisely! You lads of to-day are so intelligent that I am almost beginning to believe that there is hope for the white race. Youths, no doubt, will be the first to popularize aviation in America, thereby duplicating the history of radio. The older generation is obtuse. In a state of auto-hypnosis, adults still believe that the paramount problems are tariff, prices, and how to get good liquor at a low price. The rising generation alone is keen enough to sense that nothing now is important except science."

"Sure!" the boy agreed. "My boss, for instance, is so old-fashioned and out of date that he still has a radio with a regenerative hook-up. Maybe you won't believe that, for he's got so much money that he buys a first mortgage as if it was just a postage stamp."

"I doubt you not," said Mr. Chang. He spoke with a ring of sincerity that completely hoodwinked his companion; and, at that, it may have been genuine. "The adults of to-day are stupid, indeed. They do not realize that the old order has changed, that the alert lads of the oncoming race are as different from them as would be men suddenly descended from Mars. In fact, as I size up the Americans, it amazes me that they do not elect a boy president."

The boy took all this as a matter of course.

"What is your name?" the Chinaman asked.

"Ned."

"All right, Ned, we'll get down to business. I mentioned the cathode ray. It is a mysterious radiation, almost supernatural in its powers. In effect, it accomplishes disintegration. To date, this annihilating ray can be directed effectively for less than a dozen paces. If its range were increased, it would be a weapon of warfare that would enable a few men to overwhelm and subdue the rest of the world."

"I know," the boy said, nodding. "Yes, I know. But I don't see what the cathode ray has to do with crime."

"Nothing at all," said the Chinaman. "I mentioned it as a preliminary to another proposition. A certain scientist has discovered how to make an even more powerful ray, with a range of thirty feet. The thing has not yet been

publicly announced. I learned of it through a tong brother, a diligent and astute young Chinese who, until quite recently, served as the professor's valet."

Again Ned whistled between his teeth. "Boy, oh, boy!" he ejaculated. "Wouldn't a ray like that be a great weapon for the army!"

Mr. Chang nodded. "You are quick-witted," he flattered. "But I do not happen to be a recruiting officer for soldiers. A fine weapon for the army, yes; but think what it would mean in the hands of a looter."

Ned caught the idea in a flash. His gray eyes sparkled.

"Gee!" he said. "Do you intend to direct this ray at a cop or a guy with a big bundle of kale, and turn him into ashes?"

"Exactly!" Mr. Chang answered. "Not only that, but this beam—which I call the Crime Ray—will almost instantly melt the steel door of a vault. It is as close to the universal solvent as man has ever attained."

"I've read about the universal solvent," the boy said. "Medieval alchemists toiled for centuries, seeking it—a fluid that would dissolve everything. Their search was halted only when a peasant asked them what they'd keep it in after they found it."

"And the peasant was supposed to be a simpleton," Mr. Chang replied. "Now, the Crime Ray is generated by a delicate machine so small that I could transport it in a suit case. For instance, I might strap the mechanism to my back and annihilate any one who dared oppose my maraudings. So, at the present time, my supreme goal is to steal the Crime Ray."

"Hot dog!" Ned rejoiced. "And I'm to help you!"

"You are," said Mr. Chang. "The machine is closely guarded. But I have doped out a way by which a boy can turn the trick."

CHAPTER III.

A CHINAMAN'S PLOT.

DOCTOR YAT'S laboratory, in the heart of Chinatown, was housed in the same old wooden building as Mr. Chang's headquarters. It was a most fearsome den to behold.

On numerous shelves were bottles containing the ingredients of Chinese medicines—herbs, dried lizards, pickled snakes, monkey gall and tigers' hearts. These latter were administered to hatchet men embarking on any particularly dangerous venture, the superstition being that courage thereby was heightened.

But his stock of wares was not entirely inanimate. Quite to the contrary. In cages were deadly vipers, desert scorpions with fatal stings, and scores of famished rats eager to fulfill their destiny—the devouring of human prisoners.

Occasionally the rodents were cheated of their meal. This was when Doctor Yat experimented with his surgical kit on captives strapped to a table, mouths packed with cotton to stifle their agonized outcries.

Ned, the messenger boy, on the night following his disappearance, was in this laboratory with the witch doctor and Mr. Chang.

Doctor Yat had been busily working on him. Presently the aged fiend placed a half-emptied bottle of jet-black fluid on a shelf. Then he removed his rubber gloves.

"Give me a mirror," the lad asked excitedly.

"I consider them unlucky," was the response, "so I do not tolerate them in my establishment. Reflected in a looking-glass, a man's right hand becomes his left, and that indicates the presence and activity of devils."

"Our gentle friend," said Mr. Chang to Ned, "has changed your red hair to a beautiful, deep black. As a disguise,

it has been remarkably effective in your case. Be patient, and you will be led to a mirror, after leaving this room."

In Chinese, the archcriminal spoke to his fellow-countryman. "His eyes remain gray. Have you scientists perfected any method of transforming the color?"

"That is a good suggestion, estimable friend," Doctor Yat replied. "Yes, I have such a fluid. There is about one chance in ten of its blinding the subject. However, that is a trifle. I shall try it on the lad."

"I am, as you know," said Mr. Chang, "never averse to your experimenting on a white devil. However, I am going to use this impudent lad in a major crime. For him to be blinded would be inconvenient. You can, though, have him for laboratory purposes when I am ready to discard him."

"Chin-chin!" the boy interrupted. He had gotten quite bold since being made a confederate. "What are you guys singsonging about?"

"A private matter that does not concern you," Mr. Chang informed him smoothly. "And if I were you, I should be very courteous and deferential in addressing the venerable Doctor Yat. He is a genius and temperamental. Do you see those things?"

He paused and pointed to a row of human skulls that reposed on a shelf near the ceiling. They grinned in the most ghastly fashion possible, and they were especially gruesome because their expression of frozen mockery would persist until they disintegrated into dust.

The bond messenger nodded. His face had suddenly gone pallid, and he stared at the skulls as if hypnotized by them.

"Sure, I noticed them," he said tremulously. "They were the first things I lamped when you fetched me in here. I knew that the old gentleman was a doctor, and it's not uncommon to find a skull around the office of a sawbones —excuse me, sir, I meant to say physician—but it struck me as funny that there should be such a big collection."

"Fourteen!" said Mr. Chang placidly. "Those, my boy, are the skulls of foolhardy individuals who have incurred Doctor Yat's displeasure. Therefore, I adjure you to be respectful to the utmost. Yonder kind old witch doctor might not make allowances for your youth. Among the skulls, as you may perceive, are three that in life belonged to young women. The smallest, at the far end, came from the decapitated head of a lad no older than yourself."

Ned's face twitched. He blinked and tore his gaze away from the ghastly exhibit. Then he peered uneasily at his companions; whereupon, his legs trembled at the knees and he shivered perceptibly. Certainly, there was ample reason for such a reaction. The two Chinese were sinister, terrible to contemplate. Their faces were utterly without expression, seemingly petrified save for the alert black eyes. Of the two Doctor Yat was unquestionably the more formidable spectacle. His head was so thin that it suggested a skull over which parchment had been dried taut.

"Yes, sir!" said the boy shakily, humbly. "I won't do it again. And I hope you didn't take any offense, doctor."

There was no reply to this until fully a minute had passed. The Chinese staged the silence so that an indelible impression would register itself on young Ned's brain. He must be kept in awe, in terror of his slant-eyed employers' wrath.

Under their intent scrutiny, the lad showed signs of breaking down. At that moment Mr. Chang bucked him up by saying in a friendly tone, "You have already received instructions as to the course that you are to pursue. To make sure that you have the various

moves clearly in mind, repeat them to me."

"Yes, sir!" answered the ex-redhead. He looked about, saw a small ebony chair, and approached as though to sit down. On sudden thought, he stopped confusedly and suggested, "After you, gentlemen."

"Seat yourself and rest," said Mr. Chang. "It is quite immaterial to us, whether we stand or not. I am pleased, though, that you are learning, acquiring discretion. Go ahead!"

Ned sighed as he sagged to the chair. "At midnight," he recounted, "I am to be smuggled out of town, under a robe in the back seat of a fast automobile. This, to avoid any chance of my being noticed by the cops. They must have my picture, it being in the evening papers, and are on a sharp lookout for me. The car will continue until I have traveled over three hundred miles. Arrived at my destination, I am to call at the home of Professor Farrada, the discoverer of the deadly Crime Ray. To him, I am to present my letter of introduction."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Chang. "And you need have no fear, no apprehension about the letter being suspected as a forgery. An expert prepared it for me. It purports to be from a Professor Samm, until lately of a big Eastern university. The said gentleman died about a week ago, so that Professor Farrada will be unable to check the authorship even if he desires."

The boy nodded. "The two professors were friends of long standing. So you said."

"We are confident of that," said Mr. Chang, "for in the process of widespread alertness, we noticed that they went to the same college together, long ago. And, the school being one of the smaller ones, they must have been acquainted. It is logical to presume that, being in the same line of work, and both having become successful, they have preserved some sort of contact by letter, visits or meeting at educational functions. I am telling you all this as part of your training. The idea is to impress you with the necessity of building up small details into a concrete whole."

Said Ned, "The letter of introduction has been dated back to several days before Professor Samm's death. My delivering it so late might look as if I couldn't be trusted with confidence. I am to explain away this by telling the Crime Ray man that I've been on another job and hadn't been able to quit it before now."

"That's the idea," Mr. Chang approved. "You know enough about radio, in an experimental way, so that you can live up to the letter's declaration that you have been in the business. Now, the letter will appeal to Professor Farrada to give you some kind of work that will develop your natural scientific streak. Much will depend on your alertness and quick thinking when that point arises. The professor may say, with regrets, that he has no opening for you. If so, you must talk him into making an opening. Be willing to do anything —the old start-at-the-bottom-and-work-up idea. If necessary, offer to toil for your bed and board. You simply must get under his roof as a temporary resident. The whole venture hinges on that."

At this, Ned manifested youthful pride. He sighed importantly and squared his shoulders perceptibly. Meantime, the Chinese criminal watched him closely to observe the effect of being admittedly consequential.

"I think you will do," said Mr. Chang. "One factor that rather annoyed me was the tendency of a lad to become vain when intrusted with a power ordinarily assigned to an adult. As I size you up, though, you may swell but not to the bursting point."

Doctor Yat glanced at an ancient

water clock on a shelf, that still was functioning. *"Hey-yee!"* he exclaimed. "I am twenty minutes overdue in taking my gum opium."

He retired behind a screen, and there ensued the squeaking of a lid being pried from a tin.

Mr. Chang continued listening to the boy's recital.

"Fine!" the Chinaman approved, as his young comrade stopped for breath. "You are intelligent far above the average. I predict that you will rise high in my profession if you keep your head. Now, as I told you before, everything hinges on you. In fact, your rôle is so crucially important that I hesitated at intrusting it to a lad in his teens. But Professor Farrada is guarding his discovery closely. He will, most assuredly, be suspicious of all adults who attempt to gain entry to his establishment or confidence. With a boy, however, he is apt to be caught off his guard. That is just why I selected you."

"Oh," the boy rejoined, "I feel sure that he'll fall for me. And, once I get under his roof, the rest will be easy."

Mr. Chang had ignited a wheat-paper cigarette. He puffed thoughtfully. The boy's nostrils dilated as he scented the fragrance of the smoke, for the tobacco had been steeped in rum and given an opium sweat.

"Not as easy as you think," Mr. Chang corrected softly. "I play for one of the great stakes of my career, even though it is not money. Armed with the Crime Ray, I can laugh at my foes. It shall be applied first on the person of Doctor Ling."

The boy was familiar with that name. He had seen it mentioned in newspaper accounts dealing with the tracking of Mr. Chang. Ned was not what is popularly known as a dumb-bell. He had, for some hours, in view of the magnitude of the loot that was at stake, been suspecting that his new employer was the notorious Mr. Chang. Now he felt sure that he sat in the presence of the man who was, perhaps, the worst rogue and villain in all history. Certainly, if cold-bloodedness and inscrutable ruthlessness were the gauge, Mr. Chang held that position. He was a scoundrel and looter and assassin without a single redeeming virtue—devilishness carried to its logical conclusion.

Ned had the youthful thirst for adventure. It was thrilling for him to be in the Chang organization. At the same time, he experienced vast uneasiness. This became horror—apprehension that chilled the verry marrow of his bones—as he watched his companion.

Mr. Chang seemed to have forgotten his presence. The Chinaman stood frozenly, face utterly without expression, eyes contemplating the ceiling as though they were focused on some far-off star.

Ned felt that the room had become cold. He would have sworn that the temperature dropped another ten degrees when Doctor Yat shuffled to view from behind the screen. The dose of gum opium appeared not to have had noticeable effect on the aged man. Stately and sepulchral, his tall, emaciated frame clothed in a clinging black robe, he, too, stood motionless.

The silence got under the boy's skin. "What's in that big urn?" he asked.

"That?" Mr. Chang responded without looking, giving the impression that he was a mind reader. "That contains the remains of a traitor. I turned him over to Doctor Yat, who, after burning out his eyes with hot irons, and tearing out his tongue with pincers, boiled the remains in oil. We Orientals have made torture a fine art. I trust that you will profit by the example and not attempt treachery."

Sweat was streaming down the lad's forehead now, into his eyes. He swallowed with an effort. "No chance!" he

said jerkily. "I'll play square. I'm not bughouse."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LABORATORY OF HORRORS.

PROFESSOR FARRADA, had he been a surgeon, would undoubtedly have been classed as what is known in the profession as an ailment hunter. That is to say, if he operated for appendicitis, his curiosity might run away with him, so that he would continue internal exploration in hope of finding something else wrong, and more seriously so.

Ned, the messenger boy, was not sophisticated enough to size up the professor this way. But, as he sat alone with him, the lad was conscious that his host was so maniacal in his scientific zeal that the humane element in him might soon be endangered.

Ned had arrived only a few minutes before. A rather surly male servant, challenging him at the front door, had softened somewhat at being handed a sealed letter of introduction to the professor. He had, thereupon, escorted the boy to a library and told him to sit down and wait.

The professor had come downstairs from his laboratory clad in his working clothes. These consisted of a white uniform—trousers and coat—along with rubber gloves. He was an impressive character, no doubt of that. Ned reflected, at first sight of him, that Professor Farrada in physique almost resembled Doctor Yat. Certainly, he was gauntly thin. His brain, feverishly active eighteen or more hours out of the twenty-four, consumed too much phosphorus. The result was that he was leanly undernourished, with the quick, rasping voice and the twitching movements of a highly strung semineurotic.

Yet his manner was not unkindly. Once in his presence, a newcomer felt that allowances must be made; that the professor must be pardoned for irritation at intrusion that had interrupted work of vast importance.

His hair was white, and it was too long, typical of a man who resents wasting time in a barber's chair. He had keen gray eyes that pierced Ned through and through. His nose and mouth were so normal that the boy did not notice them. But he did observe, with respect, the very high forehead.

Professor Farrada read the letter. He read it again. Then he seemed to go into a trance, from which he presently emerged with a start. He wagged his head from side to side, as if shaking off water.

"Excuse me, my boy!" he said in an unexpectedly kindly tone. "I got thinking of dear Professor Samm and for a moment quite forgot you. Ah, Samm and I were comrades. One can say no more. You, I perceive from the spirit that dictated the writing of this letter, are his protégé. What of your schooling?"

"Oh, I got along fast enough," said Ned. "Too fast, in fact. I graduated from high school when I was fifteen. Trouble was, I couldn't raise the money to go to college. I wish I could have. You see, sir, I'm nuts on radio, along with any other thing that's scientific."

The professor bobbed his huge, elongated head. "Poor Samm!" he murmured. "I was quite shocked when I read about his death. How odd, to receive this letter written before his demise. It impresses me as a voice from the grave."

He paused and contemplated his young caller. "For dear Samm's sake, I'd love to do whatever I can for you. Then, too, I am always keen to aid young lads to get ahead. That, of course, is the natural attitude of any born educator. I do not know, though, just how I could use you. Certain experiments are in progress under this roof, of importance that will be historic. Necessarily, they must be handled with

utmost caution. Why, I do not even employ a laboratory assistant. The house is carefully guarded. Perhaps you have read it in the newspapers."

"Yes, sir!" said Ned. "You have invented a terrible ray that might make our army supreme and secure against any possible invaders."

"I did not invent it, I discovered it!" said the professor rather fiercely. "Man invents nothing, in the true sense. He merely discovers things that in principle already exist in nature. The stuff is all there, waiting for us to find and apply it, the same as the coal deposits were prepared by nature and hidden away to be dug up later when needed.

"Man does not invent, I repeat. He simply finds. Impress that indelibly on your memory, my lad. We are miners and adapters, not creators. The trowel of the mason—the same to-day in building a skyscraper as when it was used in cementing together the huge blocks of stone that form the pyramids—is but an application of the tail of a beaver plastering mud in a network of twigs and trunks that can, often, dam a river that defies man. The shovel, scooping, is nothing more than an extension of man's cupped hand. So it goes. I find a mysterious ray. The fools who write newspaper articles say that I invented it. I did not. I merely found it."

Ned, with a natural scientific bent, was half hypnotized by this discourse. He worked his chair close to Professor Farada, and asked in a whisper, "Is there any chance of any one overhearing us?"

At that, Farrada looked perplexed. He smiled tolerantly, but fell into his companion's mood of secretiveness.

"No," he answered in a very low tone. "The butler who admitted you is my only servant. I go out for my meals, you see. He is defective of hearing. Perhaps you noticed that you probably had to repeat some of your questions twice when he came to the door."

Ned nodded. "I did, sir."

Professor Farrada, lanky legs crossed as he lounged in his chair, stared at his fingers as he intertwined them. "That is one reason I keep him," he confided. "I have the advantage that he cannot overhear private conversations. I have guards, of course, protecting my laboratory and my precious establishment. But they are out of earshot."

Ned, after all, was only a boy. His earnestness and excitement were amusing to the professor, until the latter grasped the full purport of what he was saying.

"The letter that I handed in to you was a forgery," the lad said. "It's this way, sir. I was a messenger, carrying bonds for a brokerage house. Men stopped me on the street and arrested me on a charge of suspicion, or something like that. They said that a fellow who had just stopped to ask me for directions was a bond thief, and that they'd need me as a witness. Instead of taking me to the police station, sir, they landed me in Chinatown.

"There I met a chink who, after threatening me, made me his tool in a venture he has in mind, to rob you. I think I bunked him pretty foxy. His game was to get me to come here with this forged letter and obtain a job in your establishment. I was to get the lay of the land and the dope on how to run this new discovery of yours—Crime Ray is what he called it—and later arrange to let him into the place to steal it. Do you know, sir, the Chinaman is none other than Mr. Chang!"

Professor Farrada arched his brows. "And who, pray," he asked, "is Mr. Chang?"

At that, Ned gaped. "Surely," he exclaimed in unbelief, "you've read about Mr. Chang!"

"I do not read the crime news, if that is what you mean," the professor replied. "Such reading as I do is lim-

ited to technical journals and volumes. Of course, now and then, I glance over the main headlines. Just who is this Mr. Chang?"

And now the boy was fairly explosive in his eagerness to enlighten.

"Mr. Chang," he explained, "is a master crook. There is a price on his head of two hundred thousand dollars, dead or alive."

Professor Farrada registered surprise. "Few heads are worth that," he said. "Of course, the skull of Pithecanthropus, the Java ape man, would be cheap at that price. But for a living being—why, it is beyond my comprehension."

"Just the same, it's the truth," Ned insisted. "Now, at first, when they held me prisoner, sir, I naturally made a play at seeming to fall in with their plans, just to save my own skin, you see. I thought I'd pretend to be willing to be Mr. Chang's accomplice at anything. Then, once I got out of the clutches of his gang, I'd beat it."

"Beat it?" the professor repeated. "What, pray, does that mean? I am not well posted on slang."

Ned was amazed. "I can hardly believe it," he said. " 'Beat it' means to put an egg in your shoe—slope—take French leave—float—blow—skidoo."

Comprehension, dawning, showed in Professor Farrada's gray eyes. "Oh, yes!" he commented. "You mean that you intended to flee."

"Sure, sir! I'd no idea at all of going crooked with him. In fact, I bunked him by telling him that I'd often been tempted to run off with the bonds I was carrying. The point was, of course, that I wanted to hoodwink him into thinking that I could be corrupted. Don't you see, sir, my life was at stake?"

Professor Farrada nodded. "I suppose it was," he agreed. "Off and on, I have read of such things, but I always figured they were just newspaper talk."

"Not at all, sir! You don't know hard-boiled life like I do," said Ned proudly. It was true. "Now, when I became sure of his identity, the idea popped into my head of pretending to execute his instructions, and lead him into a trap."

Farrada was startled. "You mean that you want me to summon the police and have them lay in waiting to arrest this Mr. Chang when he arrives?"

"If you don't," Ned predicted, "you're going to lose your wonderful discovery that Mr. Chang calls the Crime Ray. He'll turn it loose in the underworld to obtain plunder. It would be an awful weapon in the hands of an outlaw, wouldn't it?"

Professor Farrada, horror-stricken at the thought, shuddered. "Great heavens!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of the possibility of my discovery being utilized in perverted channels. Any conscientious scientist wants his work to be constructive, not destructive. I fancy that the man who invented the revolver intended it for game hunting or for use by the police. Surely, he would have buried his device if he could have clairvoyantly looked into the future and foreseen that the pistol would be used primarily by criminals."

Ned was a boy, but he had the common sense acquired by having had a rough row to hoe. "Without pistols," he said, "crooks would be greatly handicapped. The inventor of a gat certainly aided the underworld, though indirectly."

Professor Farrada groaned. "Unfortunate, but true!" he agreed. "The inventor of a killing device is an accessory before the fact. Here I have gone along, purely in a spirit of scientific zeal, developing my deadly ray. It never occurred to me that I might be benefiting the underworld more than humanity. Alas! what you suggest is only too true. For my discovery to fall into the hands of an outlaw would be

a tragedy to mankind and eternal disgrace to myself in my own conscience."

At that moment, Professor Farrada was an interesting and conflicting contrast in himself. Engrossed in scientific research, he had largely lost the humane instinct as regards individuals. That is, he seldom was concerned with individuals, wherein he was like nature, which cares absolutely nothing for the individual, and will ruthlessly destroy any number of units, however important, if the species benefits. But, though Farrada cared little for individuals, he had the interests of humanity at heart. The thought that he might unintentionally prove to be a generator of evil, was startling, agonizing to him.

"I am appalled!" he said. "What shall we do? This Mr. Chang that you spoke of, must be checkmated. We must summon the police at once."

Ned held up a clenched right hand from which the forefinger projected in admonition to be cautious. "Wait a moment, sir," he said. "I'm only a boy, but there is no reason why I should not try to win the reward that is offered for Mr. Chang's capture. It amounts to two hundred thousand dollars, sir! Gosh! that's a lot of money. Now, if you and I could lay him by the heels, we could divide that reward. It would mean a hundred thousand to each of us, if we split it, sir. And I'm sure that you could profitably use such a sum in laboratory research."

Professor Farrada nodded. "I certainly could," he replied. "Money for financing my experiments is always a problem with me."

Ned was jubilant. "I'll tell you what let's do, then," he proposed. "If we call the police, they'll probably grab the reward. So let's handle the job without them."

Farrada manifested admission of a feeling of futility, by shrugging and snapping his fingers.

"But it can be done, sir!" Ned insisted. "I've been following the career of this Mr. Chang in the newspapers. The accounts say that his foremost enemy is a Doctor Ling, a giant Mongolian detective that has been imported from China by rich Chinese merchants to run Mr. Chang to earth. These law-abiding merchants are determined to deliver Mr. Chang to the gallows because he has, by his crimes, been casting somewhat of a shadow on their race. At least, they look at it that way, according to what the papers say. Now, we can keep the big reward to ourselves if we can get in touch with this Doctor Ling and let him help us do the capturing instead of the police."

Professor Farrada stroked his bushy white hair. He eyed the lad with undisguised respect. "Mercy!" he said. "How on earth have you acquired all this information?"

"By reading the papers, sir, and by keeping my ears open. A boy who has had a street job like myself—carrying bonds or peddling newspapers—hears a lot."

Farrada contemplated his youthful guest, and in his intent, speculative look was frank doubt. "It is easy enough to say," he suggested, "but how would we go about getting in touch with Doctor Ling?"

Ned had a prompt answer. "I think it can be worked easily," he suggested. "You pretend to hire me. To-morrow, send me downtown on an errand. I'll sneak to the headquarters of the local On Leong Tong—the Chinese Merchants' Association. They ought to be able to get a message to Doctor Ling for us. We'll have Doctor Ling plant himself and a gang of helpers in your house here, the night scheduled for the robbery by Mr. Chang."

"Excellent!" Professor Farrada approved after long deliberation. "As a matter of fact, I have no great fear of Mr. Chang, now that I am warned of his approach. I can annihilate him by

turning my deadly ray against his body. And that is what I shall do if we find difficulty taking him alive."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST DEATH.

AS if in ominous echo to Professor Farrada's menacing words, the very house seemed to quiver and shake. The windows rattled.

Ned was terrified at the theatrical effect. He paled, and his lower jaw sagged. A lingering rumbling ensued, of such might that his mood changed to horror and verged on downright panic.

The old professor noticed his reaction, and quickly lifted his right hand, palm extended and stroking the air in a soothing fashion. "Fear not, my boy!" he said kindly. "That was just thunder and a sudden gust of wind. I could have told you to expect it. My barometric readings all day have indicated the approach of a gale."

Ned gasped in relief. "Gosh!" he ejaculated. "I sure was scared. Guess it's a storm, all right. The sky was as black as my dyed head when I came in, and it looked like rain."

Farrada studied him in silence of such duration that the object of his scrutiny squirmed uncomfortably. "You must train yourself," the professor advised, "not to be easily taken off your feet by emotions in my establishment. Some of the things that occur here are bizarre, startling, almost unreal. For, you see, my deadly ray is not the only thing that engrosses my activities. I am doing much experimental work in other fields of research. As a matter of fact, at times I delve into the realms of mysticism."

He paused and laughed in a shrill, unearthly tone. For the space of perhaps ten seconds the kindly look vanished from his face, and his gray eyes had the hard glint of polished agate.

"Jiminy!" Ned thought, as the truth dawned on him. "This old bird has read and studied so much that he's going nutty. Mr. Chang will run into more than he bargains on, when he matches his wits with the professor. I bet Farrada has all kinds of tricks up his sleeve."

Then again, abruptly, his host was amiable, gentle, with the ingenuous innocence of a seriously inquisitive child. "Feel quite at home, son?" he asked.

"I do, sir," Ned assured him. "Say, I'd like to work here all the time. I ought to be a lot of help, too, for my heart would be in my tasks. I'm just bugs about radio and anything else that's scientific."

Farrada was unable to conceal his amusement. "Ah, the impetuous enthusiasm of youth!" he meditated aloud. "What a pity it is that so few men are able to retain it as time brings disillusionment and despair. I, true, am an exception, quite as much afire with zeal as in my college days. Perhaps, after I dispose of the Chinaman, I shall be able to give you permanent employment. There must be some one to carry on my work when disintegration removes me to another plane. Frankly, my boy, I have taken a fancy to you. If you prove to be as diligent and capable as I have reason to expect from my analysis of you, your career can be a beneficial and spectacular one."

Ned nodded. "Yes, sir!" he answered. "I hope so, sir!"

"I do not have many guests," Farrada continued. "While there are thirty rooms in this house, nearly all of them are given over to laboratory purposes. So we have a lack of beds. It will be necessary to house you on the top floor, which is, though, better furnished than most lofts. Come!"

He led the way out into the hall and up the broad stairs. Furnishings were few and scattered, with no pictures or other ornamentation on the walls. They

passed numerous doors as they went along the corridor of the second floor. All of them were locked, apparently. At least, they were closed, and had formidable fastening arrangements.

The acrid stench of chemicals pervaded the place, suggestive of hospitals, crematories, embalming rooms and morgues.

Ned sniffed audibly, made a wry face, and shivered.

"Ha!" commented the observant guide. "You will soon become adapted to our perfumes."

"A man who didn't know the layout of your establishment," Ned ventured, "would have an awful time figuring out what doors to enter."

Farrada chuckled. "The locks would not be easy to pick," he declared. "Not only that, but we are well protected by electric burglar alarms, in addition to our armed guards. Look!"

He veered to a side of the wide hall, grasped what looked like a coat hook, and pulled. Out came a steel grille such as is used around banks. It extended from floor to ceiling. Well oiled and on ball bearings, apparently, it slid forward to the opposite wall. A sharp click followed.

Again the professor chuckled. "I doubt if an elephant could pull that barricade down or break loose its automatic lock!" he said with satisfaction. "I have several of these contrivances concealed at strategic locations. By operating them, I can effectually imprison an intruder. My precautions may seem needlessly elaborate. I assure you, however, that such is not the case. I have secrets under this roof—notably the one that Mr. Chang calls the Crime Ray—and they would be of incalculable value to criminals, as they will later be to peaceful society. Crime Ray! It is not a bad name, though I fancy that Murder Machine would be more appropriate. Turn your back to me and close your eyes."

The lad obeyed. Promptly he heard another clicking. Came a repetition of the smooth sliding of the crisscrossed lattice of heavy steel bars.

"You may look now," said Farrada. And Ned turned. He half gasped in amazement. The grille had vanished. Nothing showed now except a sort of coat hook and an upright strip that matched the woodwork paneling.

"A secret spring!" he said. And, as the professor nodded affirmatively, the boy thrilled at the mysterious, formidable atmosphere of the place.

They went ahead a half dozen paces. Then Farrada stopped and tapped a door. It was finished in a dull walnut, but the impact of his knuckles on it sounded as if the portal were of heavy metal.

"The lone entrance to my main laboratory, and also the lone exit, for within are no windows. Would you care to inspect the place?"

Ned nodded eagerly. Surely, he felt, no boy ever had a more entrancing adventure than the one on which he now was well embarked. It would be a swell story to tell to the fellows.

Farrada pointed to two dials that apparently manipulated the locking mechanism. "Turn your back again!" he ordered. "No one but myself knows the combination."

The lad complied. He heard the twirling of the disks. Then the door opened, and a snapping indicated that electric lights had been turned on.

In a few seconds, they were inside the laboratory. The professor did not close the door. His failure to do so suggested to Ned that their stay was to be a brief one. Either that, or Farrada was absent-minded. As to this latter, Ned had not been in his company long enough to know.

The boy looked eagerly about. His look quickly changed to one of disappointment. Where he had expected to behold impressive machinery, weird

electrical sparks, glass utensils of an expert chemist, and the like, he saw little more than a barren room.

The chamber was large, some fifty feet long by about twenty wide. At the extreme far corner was a device that suggested an enormous camera. It was the size of two wardrobe trunks, piled end on end atop of each other. The whole was shrouded with black cloth, from a slit in which projected a sort of nozzle with a lens glistening in its mouth.

Otherwise, the room held nothing except a cage, which was located quite close to the door—only a few feet from it. Reared on glass legs a foot or so above the concrete floor, this cage was similar to the ones that are mounted on wheels for exhibiting animals in a circus parade. At the moment, the cage was empty.

As Ned stood still, staring at it and at the contrivance in the corner, he sensed their import, and his blood accordingly felt chilled.

Professor Farrada now claimed his attention by an ironical chuckling that was almost fiendish. His eyes were aflame to the extent that they seemed to emit sparks. And he was rubbing his palms together in approval.

"Yonder is the Death Ray!" he announced shrilly. "And the cage is the execution chamber."

"You could put a man in it!" the boy suggested fearsomely. The notion flitted through his brain that his mood would be similar if inspecting a gibbet or electric chair.

Farrada nodded. "There has never been a man inside the cage when the ray was turned against it," he said. "Mr. Chang may occupy it yet—who knows? To date, I have employed only animals."

"Doesn't the ray burn up the cage?" Ned asked.

"It would destroy any ordinary cage like snow tossed on a red-hot stove. But I hold the antidote to my engine of destruction. The cage is constructed of the only material—a compound that will baffle analysis—that is immune to the disintegrating beam."

"I thought the death machine itself was smaller," said Ned. "Mr. Chang expected that he could transport it in a suit case."

"So he could," Farrada agreed. "There are other things behind yonder shroud, including a few animals for experimentation. Perhaps you would like to see a demonstration?"

The boy nodded eagerly. "You bet!" he approved. "Gee!"

"Then go forward and stand behind the mechanism with me. As you value your life, do not yield to any mad impulse to dash forth into the path of the ray."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, sir. I'm not crazy in the head."

"One never can tell," the professor rejoined solemnly. "People experience such urgings most unexpectedly, as when they feel impelled to leap from a cliff or the top of a high building."

He moved aside and stepped into the opening that was formed by the machine being undraped from the rear. *Click!* He turned a switch. Instantly came a soft humming, and in peculiarly shaped glass tubes the boy saw foglike lights of purple and ghastly green.

"The beam is now in operation!" Farrada informed in the tone of a devil worshiper in the presence of Satan. "It is directed through the quartz lens at the front. As yet, I have been unable to make it carry more than thirty feet. That reaches the cage easily. Or, for instance, I could remain hidden here and strike down an enemy entering through the lone door—Mr. Chang!"

He sighed deeply and continued. "By grasping this lever, I swing the ray the same as if it were the cone of illumination from a flash light. Thus!"

He shoved the handle.

And then, by one of the horrible coincidences that fate employs in tragedies, a man unexpectedly stepped into the laboratory through the open doorway.

He walked directly in front of the cage into the path of the ray.

Professor Farrada screamed a warning and tried to shift the ray in time, but he was too late.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXPERT IN TREACHERY.

MR. CHANG, snug in his retreat in Chinatown, watched calmly as Ned toppled from his chair and collapsed in a motionless, twisted heap on the black-and-gold Oriental rug.

"Is he dead?" the criminal inquired languidly.

Doctor Yat did not immediately answer. He knelt to make inspection. Then he shook his head.

"A youth like this, my magnificent friend, has such vitality that he could scarcely be killed with a club," said the aged witch doctor. "The boy has merely fainted from the overexcitement of narrating his tale. In a matter of seconds, he will be restored to consciousness. I shall hasten his return from the black realm of suspended time by administering a sedative."

Thereupon, he reached inside his long dark robe. Out came a jade bottle, grasped in his talonlike fingers.

"You are really remarkable!" Mr. Chang complimented. "No matter what is desired, you generally are able to produce it from your person, like a magician. Tell me—is it indeed a supernatural ability?"

"It is foresight," Doctor Yat replied. "I merely provide myself with the utensils that may be necessary. The field is a large one, so that at times I carry many things under my robe."

As if to lend truth to this statement, a small snake suddenly glided into view, emerging from his robe as, still kneeling, he uncapped the jade bottle and poured the contents into the boy's mouth.

The serpent made directly for Mr. Chang's chair of *tantarin* wood. Quickly the object of its inquiry rose and stepped aside.

"What is that?" Mr. Chang inquired, pointing to the thing. "Your pet viper?"

"Not yes!" was the response. "By this time, surely, you should be enabled to discriminate between vipers and less-deadly wrigglers. Certainly I have supplied you with sufficient of them. This is a pet, yes, but it is merely a baby constrictor. Fully grown, it will be not more than three feet long." Doctor Yat recouped the serpent.

"*Hey-yee!*" said Mr. Chang, and then surmised, "You really intend to educate it?"

"Such is my insignificant purpose," Doctor Yat explained. "I shall train it, developing in its diminutive brain an obsession for wrapping itself around the most convenient human throat. No doubt, I shall later present it to you as a token of esteem. You would find it invaluable—a time saver in your profession, doing your strangling for you. Ah!"

Ned was wakening. He blinked dazedly at his two Oriental companions; then groaned, gasped for breath, and sat up.

"Take your time," Mr. Chang suggested. "Collect your faculties before attempting to continue your story."

The boy nodded gratefully. Presently he rose, still a bit unsteady, and sat in the chair from which he had fallen, incident to his swoon. Powerful, indeed, must have been the narcotic that had been administered to him by Doctor Yat. Physically he was already quite steadied, yet it was evident that his mind and emotions still were in turmoil. That was revealed by the terrified gleam of his eyes, and further

manifested when he resumed his narrative.

"I fainted, didn't I?" he asked. "Gosh, no wonder! Let's see now—I'd just gotten along to where I was telling you about how the man stepped into the laboratory, directly into the line of the Murder Ray. What happened then was awful. I didn't know anything could be so horrible. I fainted, just like I did a few minutes ago. Oh, my! oh, my! I wouldn't go through the experience again for a wagonload of gold. I still dream about it, and wake up in a cold sweat, thinking I'm going to die and go to hell for the bad things I've done."

Mr. Chang must have been interested. But he displayed no eagerness, no impatience. He sat languidly, smoke curling lazily upward from his cigarette when he was not exhaling it vigorously. His face was an expressionless mask, utterly emotionless, inscrutable.

The boy stopped talking to stare at his employer. Gazing at Mr. Chang's countenance had the effect of putting him together, in other words normalizing him.

"Well," he continued, "it's done and gone, sir, and I guess it's foolish to be upset about it."

"Eggs cannot be unscrambled," Doctor Yat commented, "nor can a dead man be restored to life."

"Yeh, that's so," he agreed. Hastily he added, "I mean, yes, sir! Well, Professor Farrada saw the fellow step into the room and tried to swing his ray aside, but it was too late. The beam caught the intruder head on. He died so fast that he didn't even have time to let out a yell. He just went down like a half-empty sack of flour, and lay there motionless."

Mr. Chang asked, "Did he burst into flames?"

"No, sir," Ned answered. "He just toppled over and nothing else happened. I guess that was what made me take the count. As a messenger, being on the streets several years, I've seen plenty of men killed—five or six of them, at least. Some was hit by street cars, others by autos. One was a window cleaner that lost his balance or his belt busted or something. Another time, too, I saw a dick shoot down a guy he was chasing. Bullet went through his lungs, but they hustled him off in a dead wagon afore I could see him die. To go back to the laboratory—I fainted."

Mr. Chang used thumb and forefinger tips, pressing the lighted end of his cigarette butt to extinguish it instantly.

"What did you see," he asked, "after you revived?"

Ned shuddered. "The professor had shut the door so we wouldn't be disturbed by any one. Guess he wanted time to figure out what to do. When I opened my eyes, I looked across and saw him on his knees by the dead man. He didn't seem at all horrified. That kind of surprised me, for he's such a kindly looking old gent after you know him. Of course, he's a scientist, and maybe they get calloused when they investigate life and death and such. Farrada had a big magnifying glass and was examining the dead man. I got to my feet and he saw me, and told me to come over and have a look."

Mr. Chang leaned forward and spoke slowly. "And now," he instructed, "I want as graphic a description as you can give me, of how the Murder Ray had affected the body."

The boy's eyes widened and he replied in an awed tone, as though wondering if what he had seen had been, after all, only a dream.

"That was the funny thing about it," he said, "yet, of course, it wasn't funny in the sense of being a joke. There wasn't a sign of a burn—on his body or on his clothes."

"Aye-yah!" said Mr. Chang. "Are you sure that the part of his body that

had been touched by the ray hadn't turned to ashes?"

"Nothing like that, sir."

"I am disappointed," Mr. Chang commented. "I had hoped that Professor Farrada's fatal searchlight would turn a victim to ashes as well as kill instantly. It would have been a great pleasure, after applying the beam to Doctor Ling, to turn an electric fan on him and scatter him to the four winds. However, Farrada claims that his ray will melt the steel door of a vault. All in all, enticing!"

He meditated. "What did Farrada do with the body?"

"He sent for the coroner right away. Guess the two of them are old friends, for the verdict was accidental death, as the newspapers said later. Farrada said that the dead man had been one of his guards who, patrolling the house, had come in to see why the lab door had been unlocked and left open. Professor didn't show much remorse yesterday or to-day—not that I could notice, anyhow, when I was around him."

"You've probably been a background character."

Ned was puzzled. "What do you mean by that, sir?"

"That he has not paid much attention to you. Is that the case?"

"It is and it isn't. I'm helping him by doing his lab chores, and see him a lot that way. But I think, too, that he's taken a real shine to me. He sure delights in showing me wonderful machines he has invented and things he can do with chemicals that, he says, no one else ever dreamed of."

"He is exhibiting his powers to gratify his vanity. Do you think he trusts you?"

"Absolutely. I'm confident of that, sir."

"Then you play your game. Get the hang of the house and learn how to put the burglar-alarm system out of commission. Maybe you can even learn the combination that opens the vault door leading to the Murder Machine. Whenever you get an afternoon or evening out, report to me here."

"We have him quite bunked, so far. He has taken the bait—hook, line and sinker," said Ned.

Mr. Chang evidently expected such a report. "You told him just what I outlined to you?"

"I did, sir. I confided to him, the first night when we were talking, that you had schemed to plant me in his house to get the run of things so I could aid you in a raid later. And, carrying out your orders, I suggested to Professor Farrada that we get in touch with Doctor Ling and have him plant some of his men in Farrada's place the night scheduled for the looting."

Mr. Chang commented, "It is a trick that I have employed before—getting my own confederates into the layout in the guise of detectives. Was he agreeable?"

"Yes, sir, and I'm delegated to get in touch with Doctor Ling."

"I was doubtful whether you—being a lad—could persuade him to that effect."

"It was easy, what with my knowing the ins and outs of Chinatown, having been a telegraph messenger before I got the bond-carrying job."

"Have you supposedly gone yet to my enemy tong, on pretext of inviting Doctor Ling to help trap me?"

"Not yet, sir. We had figured on my going yesterday morning, but the weather was too rotten—a regular cloud burst. Then, too, the dead man had to be disposed of, and Professor Farrada was unable to give me much time."

"You had better not execute the pretense. It will be unnecessary. Farrada has not had you shadowed. My own spies picked you up after you left his home to-day, and made sure of that."

Ned was startled at the disclosure

that he was being trailed. It was menacingly suggestive of the fate that awaited him if he failed to carry out Mr. Chang's instructions.

The Chinaman seemed to be reading his mind, for he said in a voice that was harshened to make it indelibly impressive, "You see, I take no chances on being betrayed. As you value your life, do not attempt to speak to any of the police."

Something like an icicle entered the boy's heart.

CHAPTER VII.

PROFESSOR FARRADA'S SCHEME.

NED had not been stabbed. The icy cold that had suddenly pierced his heart was the result of fear. More and more he was realizing how farsighted and cunning was this fish-eyed Oriental who now contemplated him blandly. It was evident that Mr. Chang, veteran of innumerable criminal ventures, overlooked no details. A feeling of infinite helplessness came over the lad.

To be in Mr. Chang's clutches was no pleasant predicament, as many others had learned to their grief. It was, at the moment, small comfort to Ned that he could, secure under Professor Farrada's roof, expose the whole wretched business and trust to the Murder Machine and its crafty owner to protect him. For, in the presence of Mr. Chang, one felt that here was a power supreme.

The atmosphere of the place heightened this hypnotic illusion—weird furniture, ferocious gold-threaded dragons on the wall drapes, illumination coming ghastly green through a jade globe over an oil lamp. Before him was the figure of his employer, frozen in the quietude of a tiger apt to leap at any moment. Near by stood the tall, gaunt figure of Doctor Yat, a veritable skeleton in his black robe.

Chinatown, it was, all right; and not a dream. Even in this sheltered retreat, typical fragrances and odors of the district had penetrated, and through them all he could catch a mustiness, suggestive of underground passages.

Keen psychology was not necessary for an observer to detect the boy's dread and fear, commingled with fascination and admiration. One glance with any pair of good eyes, backed by normal intelligence, would have recognized his frame of mind. The same was written all over his youthful, expressive countenance.

Ned broke an awkward silence by saying, "The black dye isn't coming out of my hair yet. Even wetting doesn't seem to faze it."

"The color is permanent," Doctor Yat informed him, "to the extent that your hair can become red again only by growth."

Mr. Chang was in no mood for a continuation of the interview. He talked for about five minutes, making suggestions as to how the lad could best ascertain the exact layout of Professor Farrada's establishment—of locks, burglar alarms and other essentials for protection. These matters were purely technical, of course.

Finished with them, the austere Chinaman said, "Run along, now. And take your time in lining up this plundering job. The stake is too mighty for premature raiding. For, once I obtain that Murder Machine and the secret of its operation, I shall be immune against my enemies. I believe that you have enough basic intelligence to be a good little boy. Treachery will be impossible. My spies, trailing you, will inform me if you or Farrada or any other of his organization visit Doctor Ling's tong headquarters or the police—or even attempt to get in touch with them by telephone."

Ned's heart leaped at the telephone suggestion. Treachery was indeed in his heart, and growing like a weed. He

had been forced into this conspiracy against his wishes. Ingrained in him was no desire to follow a criminal career, notwithstanding the lies that he had told his slant-eyed master. To be sure, here was his chance for adventure and wealth. On the other hand, if he could aid in the capture of the iniquitous Chinaman, his share of the reward would be fully one hundred thousand dollars.

Thus, tempted in two directions, he had turned toward the course that would appeal most strongly to the average lad. In other words, the idea of being a man-trapping detective predominated over any criminal lure.

In daydreaming moments, these past few days, he had pictured himself made famous by bringing Mr. Chang to justice; thereafter the head of a great detective agency.

There would be, of course, a frightful peril to reckon with, even if Mr. Chang could be laid by the heels and swung into eternity at the end of a stout piece of hemp. This danger was in the fact that Mr. Chang's followers most certainly would do their utmost to avenge their chief's death. Doctor Yat, for instance! Why, the very sight of him—and he presumably was only one of many satellites of the wily Chinese villain—was enough to make Ned's hair stand on end.

Mr. Chang had just suggested a mode of double crossing that had not yet occurred to the boy—namely, the telephone.

And, quite as promptly, Mr. Chang neutralized its possible use by saying, "We have tapped the line running into Professor Farrada's house. Night and day, my agents listen to all telephonic conversations and report to me. Blindfold him, Doctor Yat, and take him out. Give him a thousand dollars first, for pin money."

And so Ned was escorted back to the world of Caucasians. Far out in the suburbs, the bandage was removed from his eyes. He had made the trip in a limousine with drawn curtains. So, as on his initial visit, he knew only that Mr. Chang was in Chinatown. That was far from explicit. The police were reasonably sure of the same fact; but, though they had made innumerable raids, they were unable to locate his retreat.

Arrived home at the Farrada laboratories, Ned at once sought the white-haired professor. Since the accidental execution of the intruder who had run into the path of the fatal ray, they had come to a complete understanding. The boy had told the scientist the absolute truth. They had, accordingly, worked out a scheme. And now Farrada eagerly inquired as to progress made.

"Did you meet Doctor Ling?" he asked.

Ned shook his head glumly. "I didn't even get to the Chinese merchants who could put me in touch with this Ling detective," he reported. "I didn't dare. Mr. Chang is having me trailed constantly. That means, too, that this house is under surveillance night and day."

Professor Farrada frowned. Any annoying obstacle always irritated him intensely. "I'll checkmate Mr. Chang!" he declared grimly. "I'll phone to the police."

"Wires have been tapped," the boy informed him.

Professor Farrada's frown became a scowl. He shook his head defiantly and his strands of long white hair lashed the air like whips.

"Then," he proposed, "there are still two good courses open to us. First of all, on one of my occasional trips downtown, I can step into one of my clubs and phone from there. It is impossible, by any mathematical combination, that Mr. Chang can have tapped the wires of every phone that I might be apt to need."

Ned was dubious. "Look here, sir!" he suggested. "You don't know who this Chinaman's agents are. They may not necessarily all be chinks like himself. Maybe they're white men—even gentlemen who might have the right to follow you into your clubs. If you used a phone booth there, might it not arouse suspicion? One would naturally expect a man such as yourself, a——"

"Recluse?" Professor Farrada prompted.

"Yes, I guess that's the word. A guy that's shut off from the world is apt to do his private phoning at home instead of going downtown. See?"

The scientist nodded. His tone was admiring. "You are an intelligent lad," he complimented. "Well, then, I can take the alternative course. Whenever I go to town, I usually mail some letters. I shall write a note to a trusted friend of mine and have him get in touch with Doctor Ling."

"Maybe your pockets will be picked on the way, and the letter extracted and taken to Mr. Chang."

"I shall guard against that by concealing it within my garments, affixing it with a safety pin so that it will not become lost."

Ned lit a cigarette. "You can get away with it, all right," he agreed. "Of course, it's going to be a slow job that way, carrying on a conversation with Doctor Ling, back and forth with letters. And when it comes to the showdown—the night of the plundering expedition—how you going to smuggle Doctor Ling and his men into the house without arousing Mr. Chang's suspicions and scaring him off?"

Professor Farrada meditated. "True enough!" he admitted. "Still, that is a detail that can be worked out. We'll have time."

Ned loyally offered as sacrifice the future career that he had built up in his dreams. "Why not tie a can to Mr. Chang by using the phone here openly and letting his men listen in and learn that I've betrayed him?"

The boy paused and added limply, "That would switch him off to other activities. Of course, next time I went outdoors, they'd probably catch me and boil me in oil or cut out my heart."

"We shall take no chances on that," the professor assured him gratefully. "You are only a lad in years, and your judgment cannot, of course, be of the best at times. You are apt to be swept off your feet by enthusiasm. But I have taken a fancy to you. I foresee great possibilities that must be developed in your brain and personality. Then, too, the procedure that you suggest would merely postpone the day when Mr. Chang would make a raid. He would come later, no doubt of that, for having once determined to steal my death machine, he will not easily be sidetracked from his intent."

They were talking in Professor Farrada's private office, a retreat snug in effect thought rather coldly furnished.

"Any chance of us being overheard?" Ned asked ominously. He glanced at the closed door.

The professor smiled confidently. "Not the slightest!" was his assurance. "We are absolutely alone in the house. My four guards are all on duty downstairs—and there can be no question of their loyalty."

Nevertheless, as a precaution, the old man rose and tiptoed to the door, abruptly flung it open, and looked up and the hall.

He hesitated a moment, blinking into the gathering gloom. Then he reached for a switch and turned on the lights. The pause might have been of momentous import. But that did not seem to occur to him.

"No one is out in the corridor," he said, turning and closing the door. Resuming his seat on a comfortable chair, lightly upholstered in a plain gray cloth without figure, he continued the dis-

course. "There is another reason why I want to capture this Mr. Chang," he admitted. For a few seconds, an embarrassed, almost childish look showed in his face. "I have, to tell the truth, caught the glamour of the affair. In other words, the detective instinct in me has been aroused, after lying dormant some threescore years since my boyhood."

He stood up again and pressed a switch that filled the room with bright light. For some time he paced the floor, pondering deeply. Meantime, Ned waited with quickened heart, knowing that the professor was hatching a campaign in which the boy, in all probability, would play an important part.

"A tunnel!" Professor Farrada exclaimed suddenly. He looked up, his gray eyes gleaming with triumph over a knotty problem. "I happen to know that the soil roundabout is of deep clay, ideal for running a passageway. As to where Doctor Ling will start the excavating, that is for him to determine, once I have made the suggestion to him by letter. I have no doubt, though, that a brain of his celebrity will have no great difficulty in solving such a detail."

Again Professor Farrada resumed his pacing. He was talking to himself now in an undertone so low that Ned could not isolate more than a confused mutter from what must have been words—thinking aloud. Impressive, indeed, was the brilliant scientist, and with distinct touches of the eccentricity of genius.

"Doctor Ling," he proposed, coming back to his chair, "is, after all, not infallible. That has been demonstrated by his inability to bring Mr. Chang to justice."

"Chang has outwitted him many times," Ned informed in the proud manner of one imparting information that he deems of primary importance.

"So, then," said Professor Farrada, "we must not sit back supinely and leave the work to him. We must proceed on our own initiative, building up safeguards against the dangers of Mr. Chang keeping Doctor Ling off the scene on the fateful night, or, for instance, appearing sooner than expected. Above all, we must be alert lest Mr. Chang worm into our midst and seize the Death Ray. For, once he obtained it, he would have us at his mercy, as he would later have all enemies who might dare, foolishly and futilely, to oppose him."

"The Death Ray!" Ned whispered. "The Murder Machine."

"I have a plan," said Professor Farrada. "In fact, I shall base my operations on it. I shall construct a duplicate machine so that Mr. Chang, in the moment that may be crucial, will not know which mechanism to seize."

CHAPTER VIII.

CHINA'S GREATEST DETECTIVE.

DOCTOR LING, famous Chinese detective, seemed ill at ease, though he was enjoying the comforts of the most magnificently furnished rooms in Chinatown. He spat, as if he had just tasted quinine, held his cigarette aloft and inquired, "What manner of weed is this thing made from?"

The estimable Mr. Ho Lo, importer of *leechee* nuts, was his sole companion. He made response. "You will pardon me, most honorable friend! I should not have tendered to you the vile article, had you not expressed a desire, responsive to a whim, to smoke a cheap American cigarette. The one in question is, of course, composed almost entirely of alfalfa, not tobacco."

Doctor Ling shrugged his massive shoulders. "Then why," he queried, "why do they waste such utilitarian substance on a cigarette when cattle adore it as fodder?"

"That," replied Mr. Ho Lo, "is a mystery typical of the Caucasians.

They lack the fine sense of taste. I learned this first in England, where the cooking is so atrocious that they are compelled to disguise it by appealing to the palate via the intervention of spicy sauces and other condiments. It parallels the use of perfumery, which was invented by people sorely in need of a bath, so that it would be possible for their associates to approach them without experiencing revulsion."

Doctor Ling extinguished his cigarette by rubbing its glowing tip in a bronze receptable. He replaced it with a most fragrant cigar of mandarin quality. "This is better," he commented after a few entranced puffs. "Really, it amazes me, how benumbed the Caucasians are in their senses. Thus, for example, consider Keats, the poet. He covered his tongue and throat, as far as he could reach, with cayenne pepper, that he might better appreciate, as he put it, 'the delicious coolness of claret in all its glory.'"

The Mongolian detective paused. He laughed. And it was a whole-hearted laugh, such as never came from Mr. Chang. For Doctor Ling represented the extreme opposite of Chinese character—honest, amiable, tolerant. He typified the race of China. Mr. Chang was the exception.

"These Caucasians," Doctor Ling commented amusedly, "are of an infantile race. We must make allowances for them—we whose authenticated history dates back twenty-two thousand years, and whose legendary history extends unto three millions of years. The white man may laugh at this truth. But I am sure that his scientists will listen with respect. By virtue of our antiquity and inheritance of experience, we Chinese possess the art or power of concealing all emotions. That comes, inevitably, with time."

Again Doctor Ling meditated. His companion waited placidly for his next words. In fact, he would have sat through all eternity rather than commit the indelicacy of interrupting the discourse.

"No," Doctor Ling continued presently, "the Caucasians have not yet acquired the ability to exert self-restraint. They have, in fact, made little progress in the last century or two. Pitt, son of the great Chatham, enjoyed himself by sitting alone at a candle-lighted table, thoughtfully employed in collecting the wine glasses, piling them one upon the other as high as they could balance, and then, with the fragments of his dessert, pelting them to pieces. We find such things to-day. Americans may have noticed that they never hear or read of a Chinese being arrested for intoxication. We have our feuds among ourselves, but we leave the white people alone as a general rule."

The fat-bodied, smiling-spirited merchant, Mr. Ho Lo, listened respectfully to all this.

Now, the two were in conference relative to a most important quest—namely, the capture of Mr. Chang. Doctor Ling was the famed Mongolian detective who had been imported for this purpose. Mr. Ho Lo was the representative of the group of rich Chinese merchants who had employed Doctor Ling. Both of them were fully aware that the business in hand was of crucial importance. They were, however, approaching it in the roundabout, calm way of Orientals. Weirdly serene was their manner. White men, at a similar meeting, would have been unrestrainedly afire with enthusiasm, would have lost no time in coming directly to the point.

The two Chinese tarried still longer to enjoy small glasses of orange-blossom wine.

"By the way," Doctor Ling said, as though it were an inconsequential afterthought, "it appears that the dragon gods at last are ready to deliver into our hands that vile renegade who has

cast such a slur and cloud on our people at large."

Mr. Ho Lo nodded. "Mr. Chang!" he said. "It is a pity that he is not of coolie origin, but to the contrary, the wayward and disgraceful son of a respectable mandarin."

"What else can we expect?" Doctor Ling reminded his companion. "Mr. Chang has a phenomenally exceptional intellect. That could not be, except by heritage. For, while a super brain may crop out in an inferior family, somewhere among the ancestors will be found a near genius. People should be bred, the same as cattle."

"And, when they run wild, should be tracked and treated as cattle!" said Mr. Ho Lo, with emphasis. "We have passed the stage when Mr. Chang can be accorded any deference. He must be brought to bay and slain like any marauding wild beast."

"Undoubtedly!" Doctor Ling agreed. "Now, in the past I have many times foolishly expressed confidence that I was on the verge of success in the matter of capturing Mr. Chang. On these occasions, he slipped through my fingers. This time, however, I am sure that he will not be able to make his escape."

"Ah!" said Mr. Ho Lo. "Then everything is proceeding in a satisfactory manner?"

Doctor Ling puffed at his cigar. "It is!" he informed his friend. "My negotiations with Professor Farrada have been handicapped and delayed by the fact that, of necessity, we can communicate only by letter. However, we have the situation well in hand. Acting for me, a certain trusted white man rented a house within a hundred and fifty feet of the Farrada establishment. The cellar thereunder is large enough to accommodate the excavated clay. We have run our tunnel."

"Hey-yee!" Mr. Ho Lo exclaimed. "This means that you now have a passage directly into Professor Farrada's house?"

"The same has been accomplished," said Doctor Ling. "We have made two trial trips. The tunnel exit, in Professor Farrada's basement, is masked by an ordinary wooden door, locked, such that an observer would surmise that it led into a fruit room or the like. So quietly did we work, that Farrada's guards are quite unaware of the passage. In his organization the secret is known only to himself and to the boy, Ned."

Mr. Ho Lo wagged his head dubiously. "Lads are fickle, my esteemed comrade," he said. "The young tree sways readily to a sudden wind."

Doctor Ling closed and slowly opened his eyes in agreement with this. But he said earnestly, "I have utmost confidence in this lad, notwithstanding the fact that he entered this game as a subordinate of Mr. Chang. Though I talked with him only once, I feel assured that his ancestors are proud of him, and will be increasingly. Even a Chinese parent could be proud to possess him as a man child, despite his being a white devil, were it not that he lacks humility and proper respect in the presence of his elders."

"That could be corrected," Mr. Ho Lo suggested, "by diligent study of 'The Book of Filial Piety.' So, now, famed trapper of men whose souls have been ousted from their bodies by jungle beasts, what is the plan of campaign?"

Doctor Ling smiled grimly. "We shall spring our snare to-morrow night," he informed his companion. "The stage is set. Mr. Chang, executing his clever hoax, will enter the Farrada place posing as myself. He may come alone, or he may bring aids. We do not know. His arrival is timed to occur at ten o'clock. In the guise of myself, he will pretend to await the coming of Mr. Chang. From then on, affairs will be on the knees of Buddha. Mr. Chang will seize the first oppor-

tunity to steal the Murder Machine. There will be bloodshed, no doubt of that, but I hope to prevent any widespread slaughter. I shall make my appearance at a quarter to ten, fifteen minutes ahead of him. Thus I shall be in waiting to shoot him down the instant he steps into view."

Mr. Ho Lo was intensely pleased. "I am glad," he said fervently, "that you have abandoned hope of taking him alive."

"Long since!" the Mongolian detective said. "It was foolish of me ever to have entertained such a desire. Otherwise, he might be feeding the worms now. Again, perhaps not!"

These latter words were uttered philosophically, almost cynically.

Doctor Ling rose. So did his friend. They were giants, each standing about six feet six. And they had an impressive dignity that matched their stature.

"You are my confidant," said the detective. "My will, disposing of my estate, is in the hands of your father, the venerable mandarin in Tcho-tan, that gorgeous village on the Yellow River."

"Why do you mention this?" Mr. Ho Lo asked earnestly. "Have you an apprehension?"

Doctor Ling hesitated. "One never can tell," he replied. "Last night I had a peculiar dream. Mr. Chang had turned into a cheetah and was devouring me. The priest of the joss house paled when I asked him to divine the meaning."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BUZZARD DESCENDS.

PROFESSOR FARRADA found himself increasingly nervous as the fateful hour approached. He had gone into the adventure eagerly, thrilled at the prospect of playing a leading rôle in the capture of such a notorious criminal as Mr. Chang. At no time had he been unmindful of the attendant dangers. Peril, however, had long since ceased to be a paramount consideration with him. In his years of experimentation, he had braved death many times.

But as the crisis approached, he began to lose his nerve. Restlessly he paced the broad lower corridor of his establishment. All of the electric lights had been turned on, and never had he known illumination to be so comforting. The thought of undergoing the impending ordeal in darkness made him shiver, and he was grateful that there was little possibility of such a development. Barring the blowing of a fuse, he felt, the tragedy was bound to be enacted in bright light.

Tragedy it would be, no doubt of that. A murder would be unavoidable except by some weird intervention of fate. Doctor Ling had calmly told Farrada that he would shoot Mr. Chang on sight—kill him as he would kill a ravaging wolf.

The professor's face was almost as white as his snowy hair. His cheeks twitched, his lips were feverishly dry. He glanced at the near-by grandfather's clock. Ah, how monotonously, how slowly it checked off the passing of seconds into eternity!

The hour was nine. In forty-five minutes, the real Doctor Ling was scheduled to arrive via the tunnel and secrete himself to capture or kill the villain who was due to come a quarter-hour later impersonating him.

Professor Farrada was grateful for the slow passage of time. In fact, he began to wish that the whole affair could be postponed until another night.

There was no reason, he felt as he mentally surveyed the situation, why he should entertain wild fears. Doctor Ling would be on hand to protect him. Within call were the four watchmen who stood guard outside the entrances to the abode of the Murder Machine.

Nevertheless, Professor Farrada felt very much alone. In considerable measure, this was due to his not having any

immediate companion. Ned had been sent to bed, despite his repeated pleas that he be permitted to stay up and witness events. He had retired in a state of utmost disappointment—almost tearfully, in fact.

Now, Farrada was, by reason of his highly strung genius, subject to what is technically known as psychasthenias. That is to say, in his particular form of the malady, he would do a thing and a few minutes later be unconvinced that he had executed the action.

For instance, he would lock a door before retiring, and return possibly three or four times to make sure that he had not manipulated the key the wrong way. Or he would rise twice or thrice from bed and explore the house, fearful lest he had left a cigarette where it might start a fire. Again, he would seal a check ready for the mails and then rip the envelope open to determine whether, in an absent-minded lapse, he had signed the name of some one else that might have flitted through his brain at the moment. There have been cases of forgery due to just such mental aberrations.

Accordingly, in his excitement, Professor Farrada fell victim to one of these strange moods. It had to do with the manner in which he had staged the trap for Mr. Chang. Up in his laboratory, at the left-hand far corner, was the Murder Machine. An exact duplicate of it stood in the right-hand far corner. The similarity was more thorough than merely external appearances.

Entering the room, one saw the two devices. Each consisted of a lense projecting from a shrouded framework.

Thus, Mr. Chang—in event he had to rush his intended plunder—would be uncertain which way to go, which device to seize.

Even if he had time to make close inspection, he would be baffled. For, internally, the curtained cabinets seemed to hold the same mechanisms—copper cylinders, wiring and peculiarly shaped glass tubes.

Professor Farrada had been quite pleased with himself after planting the decoy near the original. He had shifted them back and forth several times, uncertain where to place them.

Bringing psychology into play, he had asked himself, "Which machine would I head for, in an emergency when a gambling choice might mean success or failure in the form of annihilation? Would I turn to the right or to the left? Instinct probably would lead me to the right, drawn by the overdevelopment of one hemisphere of the brain that makes men, lost in forest or desert, universally travel in the same sort of circle. On the other hand, this wily Mr. Chang is reputed to be a wizard at psychology. He might have quick-wittedness enough to go counterwise to his instinct. So, then, probably I should figure that he will swerve to the left, and place the dummy machine in that location."

He had tried it out, had retreated to the hall, then attempted to proceed as he wanted the Chinese criminal to do. Somehow, his rehearsal failed. He went to the fake machine, all right; and then fumed at the thought that he had selected it because he already knew the location of the genuine.

This procedure he had gone through fully a dozen times, moving the machines back and forth, interchanging their positions. Finally he had decided to leave the dummy in the right-hand corner.

But now, a few minutes after nine o'clock, pacing the lower corridor, a fearful thought came to Professor Farrada. It was born of the dread that he might have forgotten which mechanism was which; that he had located the Murder Ray where he had intended to put the false or lure.

Cold sweat came out on his forehead. It trickled down into his eyes. Simultaneously, he was aware of a similar

stream making its way from his armpits and coursing over the sides of his ribs.

"Horrible!" Professor Farrada whispered. "If a crisis comes and I rush to the wrong machine, it may mean that Mr. Chang will succeed in stealing my precious discovery. Worse than that, it may even mean that this night I shall be murdered."

Was this stupidity on his part? Perhaps it was. But many will sympathize with him, mindful of similar experiences of their own. Neurotics, in particular, have moments of panic when they fear that they took the wrong medicine. That was Professor Farrada's predicament, in a sense. He feared that he had done a certain thing, though at the bottom of his heart he realized that he had not done it. The unconscious or subconscious never lies.

Farrada, despite his momentary indecision, was a man of quick initiative. He realized that he must act, and act quickly.

Turning, he almost fled up the stairs to the second floor. From his precipitate speed, a watcher would have surmised that he must have been obsessed with a delusion that Satan himself was after him.

Viewed abstractly, it was most dramatic, that flight of Professor Farrada. Conqueror of mysteries, almost uncanny forces, he had never succeeded in conquering himself. Therein he was human. Farrada, overwrought, was panicky by the time he reached the upper corridor. Pale, gaunt, white-haired, his appearance was almost spectral—a phantom of an intellect wholly mad.

As he ran forward, it comforted him to know that here, too, he was in bright light, that each room that he passed had a securely locked steel door, that near by sliding lattices would respond to a tug and erect intervening barriers both protective to himself and imprisoning to a foe.

He reached the laboratory, wherein reposed the deadly Murder Machine. One click of a switch, the turn of a lever, and annihilating death would sweep like an infernal searchlight.

Professor Farrada's fingers trembled as he manipulated the two dials. Spin to the right; to the left; again to the right—sixty! Ah! Now for the other dial—forty left, thirty right.

Click! And he opened the door.

Within, all was black. It was not a normal blackness, nor even the dark of midnight, but the awesome abyssmalness of oblivion, of extinction, of never-ending night far out among the stars. Professor Farrada shuddered and drew back, despite his familiarity with this place, his own.

His heart was thudding wildly now. Its pulsation was so extreme that his whole body was in a tremor such as precedes an epileptic fit.

By a desperate effort of will power, he rallied himself and, reaching to the left, inside, pressed a switch that turned on the laboratory lights.

And, as he manipulated the switch, a fog seemed to rise and float away from his brain. He realized that his panicky terror had been of more than intangible origin. It dawned then on him, that he had been responding to a psychic urge; that a premonition had visited itself upon him and that he had failed to recognize its purport.

That premonition, telepathic from his subconscious mind, had attempted to warn him of lurking peril.

Peril there was! It was in the laboratory. And it certainly was not unreal.

The very instant that Professor Farrada worked the switch, he noticed a reddish sort of glow. It was small, it was located near the cage in which he incarcerated animals for experimentation with his murderous ray. The glow was about the size of the end of a pencil. It was some five feet or more from

the floor, which would bring it close to the top of the cage.

That thing was no astral light. It was the ignited end of a cigarette.

Simultaneously, as the lights blazed on and revealed the smoker, Professor Farrada was aware of something pungent attacking his nostrils. He was unfamiliar with the scent, save that it was undeniably exotic, narcotic. Professor Farrada, already on the verge of hysteria, stood swaying, staring at the smoker.

The man with the cigarette was a Chinaman. And his cigarette was rolled in wheat paper.

CHAPTER X.

RACING WITH DEATH.

MR. CHANG was the Chinaman. He had arrived on the stage sooner than expected. That was his custom. Writers of platitudes dwell on the advantages of being punctual. Mr. Chang could teach them many—in fact, a whole bagful—of new tricks. Experience had taught him that it pays to keep appointments ahead of time. Thus he secured for himself the advantageous element of surprise attack.

Professor Farrada gaped at the intruder. Then, eyes bulging in disbelief—for he had utmost confidence in his vault dials—he raised a tremulous hand and passed it before his eyes as though to wipe away an offensive illusion.

But the Chinaman did not vanish.

He remained—as calm, as hard and as utterly expressionless as granite.

Not the slightest flicker of emotion showed in his eyes. They were fish eyes, save that in their distant depths were the sparks of smoldering fires.

Languidly he leaned against the animal cage, inhuman except for his graceful poise and his immaculate, sharply creased, smartly tailored suit.

"Heavens!" Professor Farrada exclaimed. "Have I gone mad?"

"Sir," was the throaty, yet velvety response, "you are not having hallucinations, if that is what you mean."

"But you—Mr. Chang! How did you get here? I did not expect you so soon."

"My dear sir!" came the soothing protest, "I am not Mr. Chang. I am Doctor Ling."

This brazen assertion further staggered Farrada. He felt mentally stunned.

Now, the professor was under no delusion that his visitor was the famed Mongolian detective. He knew him to be Mr. Chang. In his mind, there was no doubt of it. Farrada already had held two personal interviews with Doctor Ling, who had come to him through the tunnel. And, though Chinese may look much alike to a Caucasian, the scientist knew Doctor Ling to be a giant, whereas this intruder was of subnormal stature.

In emergency the white man collected his wits quickly. He sensed that the logical game for him to play would be to pretend to be deceived.

"But," he said, sparring for time, "my dear Doctor Ling, you arrive fully a half hour ahead of time."

"That," replied the suave Chinaman, "is the way I work. I entered the stage early, so that Mr. Chang could not defeat me by a similar play."

"But the locks!" Farrada said shakily. "The dials! How did you learn the secret of manipulating them?"

"That is a secret of the business," the Oriental replied.

"How did you relock the vault door after entering? I had to work the dials to get in."

The Chinaman pointed expressively. "The mechanism is exposed plainly on this side," he answered. "I thought it best to lock myself in. It would, obviously, give me the advantage of making a surprise attack on Mr. Chang."

Professor Farrada nodded. He be-

gan to walk backward, bent on fleeing as soon as he reached the door.

"Tarry!" Mr. Chang commanded. "I am enjoying your company quite too much to permit you to desert me. Stick around, old boy! In a few minutes we are going to open a can of sardines and make merry."

And then, though his right arm barely seemed to move, it was holding a pistol. It looked like a cannon to the terrified professor, who had never before been confronted by such a weapon. This one, too, was being wiggled lazily, its muzzle having a most disconcerting tendency to focus on the aged white man.

"Please!" Farrada implored. "Your device makes me nervous."

"Your doubt as to my identity would have a similar effect on me, were it not that I am never nervous."

But obligingly, Mr. Chang shifted his gun. It had effected a most powerful mastery over his companion. From now on, the Chinaman figured, Farrada would literally eat out of his hand, jump through the hoop, or bark when directed.

The professor looked relieved. But perspiration continued to flow copiously down his face.

"How did you get into the house?" he inquired.

"Through the tunnel, of course!"

This was not true. But Farrada did not know. His heart skipped, for mention of the tunnel revealed that Mr. Chang was aware of the conspiracy between the professor and Doctor Ling.

Truth was, in the darkness at the rear of the building a faithful guard had been blackjacked and now was lying gagged and fettered with Malay sailor knots. Having overpowered him, Mr. Chang had taken possession of his keys. Entry thereafter had been easy. Exerting every effort to be silent, he had stealthily made his way up the back stairs.

Professor Farrada was in a fine fix. Soon Doctor Ling would arrive. A battle presumably would ensue, and the scientist feared that he would fall between the mill wheels. That had not been in his original plans. He had expected to admit Doctor Ling and secrete him in the laboratory, and later to escort Mr. Chang, posing as Doctor Ling, to the same place; and let Doctor Ling eliminate the criminal.

But it began to look as if Farrada would have to play the game alone. Surely Mr. Chang would not dawdle.

Mr. Chang had spoken glibly of the tunnel. How did he happen to know about it? Spies! That must be the answer—probably a traitor in Doctor Ling's own organization.

A puzzling factor to Farrada was that he had found Mr. Chang idly leaning against the animal cage instead of inspecting the two hooded machines.

The professor, his brain having a tornado, guessed at a solution. He told himself, "It means that he was barely inside the lab before I entered. He had not had time to examine the Murder Machine and its dummy. The interruption came most inadvertently for him."

Poor, unsophisticated Professor Farrada!

Mr. Chang, as yet, did not know which of the two machines was the original, which the imitation. How to know? He might eliminate Professor Farrada by murder, thereby insuring himself of a period for further inspection before the coming of Doctor Ling. Again, he might so threaten the old man that, to save his life, he would disgorge the truth. A third method would be to obtain the secret from Farrada by trickery.

This latter was the most desirable of the three ways. Mr. Chang must not only learn which machine was real, he must also acquire knowledge about how to run it.

There was, of course, a chance that

his quick wits would master the means of operation as soon as he saw, say, switches and levers. But the element of doubt intruded here. Far better for him, he realized, if Farrada could be induced to serve as instructor.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, there came an interruption that changed the whole course of events. It was as though fate had taken a hand, determined to direct the game alone instead of permitting it to develop as a battle of human wits.

Professor Farrada had left the door open.

And out in the lighted hall, some one was approaching. That the visitor was hostile or, at least, suspicious, was indicated by his quiet walking—so soft, in fact, that Farrada did not hear the portentous sounds.

But Mr. Chang did.

He placed an ivory-hued finger to his lips to command silence. And his actions and manner were such that the scientist realized that if he cried out he would die on the instant.

Mr. Chang's manner still was serene. But his black eyes had burst into flames—menacing, terrifying. Inasmuch as his temperament was without emotion, all this was craftily manufactured for effect on the white man. And certainly he could not have been much more impressive.

The eyes were not alone in threatening. Mr. Chang's pistol was trained directly on Farrada.

Down the hall, the approacher pressed the switch that controlled the electric lights. The sharp click was heard in the laboratory, and then for the first time the professor sensed what was in the making.

The corridor went pitch black, save for the light that streamed through the open doorway from the laboratory.

Meantime Mr. Chang had not stood still. Making no more noise than a panther, he had darted forward, his rubber-bottomed shoes touching the smooth cement floor as lightly as the paws of a cat.

The click in the hall was echoed by a similar one in the room of the Murder Machine. The laboratory was plunged into darkness. Silence ensued.

The man in the corridor—whoever he might be—apparently had paused warily. It was obvious that he had been heard, and that unless he was careful he would fall into a trap.

Mr. Chang had no doubts about the identity of that man. He was confident that the fellow was his supreme enemy, Doctor Ling, arriving ahead of scheduled time.

That had been indicated by his surreptitious approach. Furthermore, a sixth sense warned Mr. Chang of his identity.

If Doctor Ling entered, he would be, no matter how silent, overheard by his fellow countryman who had jungle ears. A flash light probably would blaze from Mr. Chang's left hand, and simultaneously his pistol would roar. The Chinese detective would return the fire. The outcome would be largely one of chance, so swift would be the exchange of bullets.

The hazard, in fact, was too grave to be braved on the spur of the moment. Too much was at stake in the impending encounter.

Above all, Doctor Ling did not know what had already taken place in the laboratory. Mr. Chang apparently had stolen a march on him—else why had the lights gone out? Was Professor Farrada still alive? If he were, presumably he would have called out by this time, demanding the name of the surreptitious prowler in the corridor. Of course, Mr. Chang might be compelling Farrada to silence.

There was the further dread possibility—as Doctor Ling sized up the situation—that Mr. Chang might now be back of the Murder Machine, ready to

cast the deadly ray at him upon entering.

In short Doctor Ling was laboring under the worst of handicaps, at that stage of the situation—ignorance as to what had transpired beyond the vault door.

So he hesitated, awaiting developments, straining his ears to detect sounds of an attempted surprise attack in the dark.

Inside the laboratory, Professor Farrada had become active. His terror still was vast, but it was mitigated by the fact that now he was in darkness. Until illumination were restored, Mr. Chang could not see him as a target.

It was logical to assume that Mr. Chang would not be in any hurry to turn on the lights, inasmuch as thereby he would also become an easy prey to bullets.

Professor Farrada sensed, from what had taken place, that Doctor Ling was out in the corridor. That was a thought comforting to the utmost, for, with a bit of luck, the detective might prove to be a real match for Mr. Chang.

There was, of course, the horrifying possibility that the criminal would close and lock the door, thereby imprisoning himself with the professor. With the door bolted, however, barred would be the only avenue of escape. However, Mr. Chang might figure this worth while, for in the ensuing moments he could safely switch on the lights and force Farrada to show him how to manipulate the Murder Ray.

Once in possession of the deadly beam, Mr. Chang would be formidably armed, could reopen the door and have his Chinese enemy at a terrific disadvantage. And Farrada felt that he probably would be killed after surrendering his secret. The unscrupulous criminal, no doubt, would eliminate him as excess baggage.

The professor knew the terrible properties of his invention. He was old, yes, but in no mood to become a victim.

One fear can become so pronounced that it obliterates another. Accordingly, Farrada determined on a bold play. He would move forward through the darkness, put the Murder Machine into operation, and in the twinkling of an eye annihilate Mr. Chang.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEAM OF DEATH.

PROFESSOR FARRADA, victim of the nervous derangement known as psychasthenia, had come to the laboratory this night highly excited. He had been obsessed with dread that he had forgotten in which respective corners he had placed the Murder Machine and its imitation or decoy.

But now that he was in imminent peril of losing his life, the instinct of self-preservation took charge of him, restoring his confidence and eliminating his wavering doubts.

He had put the dummy machine in the right-hand corner. In the crucial moment, he was confident of that.

So, there in the darkness, only a few feet from the dread Chinaman, Farrada started his fateful journey.

At first, he craftily backed away from his companion's presence. The room was large, and he had ample territory for retreating and dodging.

In the black, he could see nothing, until two faintly phosphorescent spots less than six feet above the floor indicated that Mr. Chang had turned his way and was looking at him with catlike eyes.

The effect was weird, spectral, startling. Professor Farrada's heart skipped, and for a moment he feared that it had beat its last. Then it resumed its pounding.

"Professor!" came a very low whisper. "Where are you? Come close to me."

So that was the game, eh? Mr. Chang intended to use him as a shield —would hold the frail old scientist in front of him so that Doctor Ling's bullets could not enter their intended target without first passing through the white man.

Farrada shivered at the thought, for he knew that this jungle brute could grasp and handle him as readily as if he were a feather pillow. It was with utmost difficulty that Professor Farrada restrained an audible shudder that would have betrayed his location.

It required considerable nerve for him to disobey the command and continue his retreat from the Chinaman. He had the feeling that perhaps those eyes, inasmuch as they were phosphorescent, might be able to see in the dark. Such, in the domain of nature, would not be impossible. It depended on how much Mr. Chang was human, how much like a cat.

Farrada, backing away, kept an arm outstretched behind him. Its exploring fingers encountered the animal cage. And, somehow, a thrill of triumph went tingling through him, as he recalled that Mr. Chang, when first viewed by him, had occupied this place.

The scientist was making his way softly. It was, after all, no difficult job. He was wearing soft felt slippers, and the flooring was of heavy concrete and far more favorable than boards, a loose one of which might creak.

Mr. Chang did not call to him again.

The glowing eyes did not come closer, indicative of pursuit. Instead, after a few seconds, they moved and vanished. This meant that Mr. Chang had turned toward the open door, that his primary concern was with Doctor Ling and the possibility of surreptitious approach.

At that Farrada gloated with joy, and sent silent prayers of thanks to his guardian angels, the gods, or whatever might be aiding him on this fateful occasion.

He wondered what Doctor Ling was doing, presuming that the Mongolian detective was the lurker in the corridor. Wondered, too, what plan of campaign this Mr. Chang had in mind. Ah, well, if the two would only sit pat for a few minutes, Professor Farrada would settle matters for good and all.

He had infinite confidence in his Murder Machine, had Professor Farrada. Long experimentation had taught him that its power was beyond belief—greater, even, than the cathode ray.

Farrada was an old man and weak. But, once he reached his deadly mechanism, all that he asked was an additional three seconds. *Click!* A switch would turn on the current. Then, with a small flash light that he carried in his pocket, he would locate Mr. Chang. Meantime, he would be working the lever that would direct the annihilating beam against the master criminal. He would die, just as an unfortunate victim had, under Ned's eyes, some nights before paid the penalty of arriving at the wrong place at the wrong moment.

Mr. Chang could retaliate, of course, with his pistol. But Professor Farrada had become expert at shifting his ray. He could focus it on a desired point of space with speed and precision that were little short of amazing. In his experimentation, he had mastered this art, fired by the thrill that soldiers of his country might some day correspondingly use it as a supreme defense against an invading enemy.

So he was willing to take a chance, to match his skill against that of Mr. Chang with his pistol. The latter, he had been informed, was almost uncannily adroit and speedy with his guns. Nevertheless, Farrada knew that he had a weapon in his Murder Machine as far superior to firearms as a rifle is to a bow and arrow.

On through the darkness he retreated. He had quitted the animal cage now, but as he left it he smiled grimly at

the executions that had taken place therein. Soon, unless his plans miscarried, Mr. Chang would be victim of the deadly ray as had been the helpless, unfortunate rats and other things that had been used for experiments.

From the animal cage to the Murder Machine, at the far left-hand corner of the laboratory, was a distance of about thirty feet.

Normally he could have attained his goal in ten paces, strode off in a matter of seconds. But now he must, of necessity, make his way with utmost caution. The faintest sound would betray his location. And Mr. Chang, sensing his intent, might checkmate him by a spray of bullets.

The thirty feet were shortened to twenty. The twenty became ten.

Professor Farrada, at home in his surroundings, felt competent to travel backward.

So he went. He wanted to watch the rear, and soon he saw something that compensated him for his watchfulness. In fact, he saw two things.

They were the phosphorescent eyes of his enemy. And as he looked, those greenish orbs began to move.

Mr. Chang was approaching!

His gait was not swift. Far to the contrary, it was quite as stealthily slow as had been Professor Farrada's. This meant that Mr. Chang had surmised his approaching peril, and that he was taking steps to protect himself.

Farrada realized that a race had begun between himself and the Chinese master criminal.

The thought was thrilling, but in an awesome, horrible sort of way. The professor had a start of thirty feet, however, for now he had arrived at the Murder Machine. His fingers, reaching behind him, clutched the shrouding cloth, and thankfulness gushed through him.

He had gone to considerable pains to make the dummy seem like the original. They were alike, save that the real machine had six bulbs instead of the five used in the imitation.

In that sixth bulb, which would glow with ghastly green vapor, was the trick of the device.

Farrada wondered if Mr. Chang had had time to inspect the two machines in the period he had spent in the laboratory prior to the arrival of the inventor. If so, it was doubtful that the Chinaman had mastered the secret. For both of the machines emitted the same sort of ray. That is, the appearance was the same—a ruby-hued light. The only way that Mr. Chang could have actually determined which was which, would have been by experimenting—trying the ray on a subject such as an animal, thereby learning by actual results—resultant death.

Farrada was confident that Mr. Chang had made no such test. In staging the scene for this night's impending tragedy, the professor had removed all of his white rats and other animals. Thus, unless the Chinaman had had sufficient foresight to bring his own subjects, he had been unable to try out the real machine and the dummy against each other.

The two phosphorescent eyes were approaching faster now.

It was as though the Chinaman sensed his peril, and was making the utmost haste compatible with the need for silence and caution.

Professor Farrada smiled in the darkness. It was a smile diabolical in the extreme—the ironical mirth of a man possessed of a superhuman power and about to turn it against an enemy.

At the moment, the scientist was quite mad. Long hovering on the brink of insanity, this tense crisis was hastening him forward. There was a pounding back of his ears, and the pressure of blood in his brain was so pronounced and extreme that he felt that his skull was about to explode like a bombshell.

Ah, well, grant him a few more seconds and he would be indisputable victor, he gratefully assured himself.

"Fate is playing my hand!" he rejoiced to himself. "I don't even need a flash light. I can locate my enemy by his blazing eyes. That is amply sufficient target. I'll just put the ray into operation and swing it across those fiendish eyes."

He was back of the machine now, and his fingers faltered and shook as he reached for the switch.

A demoniacal exultation, the thrill of imminent victory, gushed through him in a hot flood that made his blood feverish.

Click! The switch turned. A smooth, low humming began.

Dim, weird lights played in the peculiarly shaped bulbs. The vapors therein swirled like phantoms.

At the same time, a ruby-hued beam shot forth from the lens at the front of the machine.

Certainly, Mr. Chang could see that beam, though the shrouding drapery of the mechanism shut him off from view of the spectral illuminations in the tubes.

A snapping, as of a long spark from a static machine, fractured the stillness now, and the air instantly became redolent with something like ozone. This was incidental to disintegration of the atmosphere itself, a side issue of the operation of the satanic force that Professor Farrada had released.

The scientist was peering around the edge of the curtains now, looking uncannily in the direction of his intended victim.

He could still see the phosphorescent eyes of Mr. Chang. The ray at that instant was several feet to the Chinaman's left, focused against the death cage.

Professor Farrada could shift that ray quickly. All that he had to do was manipulate a lever. He grasped the slender, nickel-plated handle and pulled it. At that instant, the ominous, catlike eyes vanished. Professor Farrada, crazed with eagerness to make his kill, cursed aloud.

His oath was a vicious one, the expression of a maddened man who fears that he is about to be cheated of his prey.

Had Mr. Chang merely closed his eyelids, sensing that his glowing orbs were betraying him? Or had he turned his back in flight, or dropped to the floor, out of immediate range of the deadly ray?

Whichever had happened, it could not save him, Professor Farrada thought. It meant delay, but only for the few seconds necessary until the exploring beam picked up the fugitive.

And then came the climax.

It was a jubilant moment to the scientist—and equally horrible. Never before had he intentionally turned his fatal device against a living person.

Overwrought by the tense situation and by the emotional outbursts that had preceded it, the professor had gone quite out of his head. He shouted, and the cry was maniacal. Doctor Ling, out in the corridor, comprehended what was taking place, and even his Oriental serenity was startled. All very fine, to have Mr. Chang destroyed! Yes! But such an end was atrocious, no doubt of that. Then, too, from Professor Farrada's tone, the old man had gone mad and it would be a difficult matter to get him under control after the execution.

Guided by the lever in Farrada's hand, the ruby-hued ray flashed to one side.

He did not have to lower its range. The thing suddenly illumined the head of Mr. Chang, eyes closed. At that instant, the eyes opened. And Professor Farrada stayed the course of his Death Ray so that the light shone into the very eyes of the Chinese criminal.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FATE OF MR. CHANG.

MR. CHANG was an admirable target for the death ray from the Murder Machine. It caught him when he was some ten feet away, moving forward as though to overtake and checkmate the maddened professor.

Nevertheless, he did not immediately topple, lifeless, to the concrete floor. Instead, he stood his ground, baring his teeth in a mirthless smile. They were glistening teeth, shining like the fangs of a hound.

His eyes, with the ruby ray shining into them, were terrible to behold. They were inhuman, unearthly.

Professor Farrada stared in amazement.

"My heavens!" he cried. "You're a fiend, immune to natural laws."

And then the scientist was briefly aware of an explosion in his brain—the bursting of a blood vessel—and he went unconscious.

He fell heavily, victim of apoplexy, gone forever from this world wherein he had conquered an infernal force. Falling into a bottomless pit, he felt that the earth already was millions of miles and millions of years away; that he was plunging into eternity where he would be isolated by himself for æons.

Such were his sensations in dying. His body felt light; his being disintegrated yet compact; and so he vanished from this world as a living man.

Mr. Chang had emerged alive. His escape from death had not been due to any supernatural powers. On the contrary, he had preserved his life by a cunning bit of craftiness and applied psychology, as will be understood shortly.

Mr. Chang's movements earlier in the night were almost mathematical in their one-two-three sequence. They were so machinelike that they indicated vast foresight and premeditation.

After blackjacking, gagging and fettering the watchman at the rear door, the Chinaman deprived him of his keys and thereby gained easy access to the house. He made his ascent to the second floor by using the servants' stairs, which led up from the kitchen.

He found the upper corridor deserted.

First of all, he made certain provisions for flight. Then he went to the laboratory. The hall was brightly lighted, so that he did not need to use his pocket flash light. The formidably locked portal was no barrier at all to him. He proceeded to manipulate the dials with as much familiarity as would have been manifested by Professor Farrada.

How had he gotten the combination? The answer was simple. Mr. Chang's raid on the Murder Machine had been planned for months. A Chinese valet, tong brother of Mr. Chang, had been planted in the Farrada establishment. Later he had been discharged. But by that time his mission had been accomplished. By stealthy spying and by personal experiments with the dials, he had mastered the combination. Delivering it to his master, Mr. Chang, he had been paid five thousand dollars, along with much gum opium as a bonus for faithful services.

Thus Mr. Chang readily got into the laboratory. His first act was to close the steel door and shoot the bolts by working the exposed mechanism inside. Then, as long as he worked silently, any one chancing to pass the door would not suspect that a prowler was within.

The laboratory was in darkness. He did not switch on the electric lights, for a betraying slit of brightness might show along the crack above the threshold. For the same reason, he used his flash light sparingly.

Mr. Chang had never been in this place before, but already he knew a lot about it. Yonder were two machines, almost identical in appearance. He had

expected to find them, having been tipped off by a Chang spy who was a traitor in Doctor Ling's detective organization.

This spy had also been able to inform him that one of the mechanisms was a harmless dummy, though it also sent forth a ruby-hued ray when the current was turned on.

As to which of the machines was imitation, which the deadly original, the spy had been unable to learn. The problem was up to Mr. Chang. And he had, in a roundabout way, already solved it.

First of all, he inspected the twin devices. They were bewilderingly alike. He had thought of trying them, in turn, and for this purpose had brought a white rat in a side pocket of his coat.

But he did not conduct the tests. To have done so would have been highly hazardous. While Mr. Chang was utterly fearless, he was not a rash fool. Instead of taking a dangerous chance, he gained his end by a crafty ruse.

He said to himself, "My game is to let Professor Farrada show me which is the real Murder Machine. If I am unable to induce or compel him to disgorge his secret speedily, there will still be an avenue of success. I shall permit him to rush to the machine in hope of turning its fatal ray on me. Now, naturally, he will run to the machine which he thinks is the real one. Presto!"

Mr. Chang picked up the machines and reversed their positions.

Thereby he made it virtually certain that Professor Farrada would run, unknowingly, to the harmless dummy.

The transfer was easy. The machines were not heavy, though the bulk of their shrouding hoods made them awkward to handle. Each machine had been connected to the lighting circuit by means of cords attached to baseboard plugs. He completed his work by making connections anew.

This done, his game was one of patient waiting. He took up his position near the animal cage which, since the tragedy that had killed a Farrada guard accidentally, had been moved away from the door to a position halfway across the wide laboratory.

Who, he wondered, would be first to enter this abode of death? It might be Doctor Ling, admitted by Farrada so that the detective could station himself in ambush. Or it might be the professor himself. They might come together.

Mr. Chang inclined to the belief that Farrada would come alone. As the minutes passed, the Chinaman felt increasingly sure of this. Keen student of human nature, he reasoned that—as the crucial hour approached—the scientist would be unable to resist a natural urge. He would crave to make a last-minute visit to the laboratory for a check-up, to make sure that everything was ready to the last detail for the grand performance.

If Doctor Ling came alone or with Farrada, Mr. Chang probably would shoot the detective and then, under threat of death, compel Farrada to tell him which was the genuine Murder Machine.

However, the situation could not be foreseen with accuracy. Mr. Chang would have to handle it on the spur of the moment. He waited, smoking cigarettes.

Hark! He heard the twirling of the vault dials, heralding the intrusion of some one. The door opened. In came Professor Farrada—alone, as Mr. Chang had rather expected.

Ensuing events have already been narrated.

In the crisis, Professor Farrada had rushed to the dummy apparatus, being unaware that the machines had been shifted. He had left the real Murder Machine in the left-hand corner. Had he paused to make examination when the imitation device flashed into opera-

tion, he would have observed, by counting the bulbs, that the wily Chinaman had tricked him. For the dummy contained one less tube than the terrible death-dealing kit. Otherwise the two devices were almost identical.

With Mr. Chang approaching him, seconds were vital. There was no time to pause and inspect.

Accordingly, the ruby-hued ray that shot out from the lens was utterly ineffectual against the Chinese criminal. It was no more powerful than a colored searchlight.

That was why Mr. Chang stood his ground so boldly and permitted the professor to flash the beam on him. He was like a man standing fearlessly before a pistol in the hands of an enemy, defying him to shoot, confident of the weapon's harmlessness by reason of having surreptitiously removed its cartridges.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUPER-CROOK VERSUS SUPER-DETECTIVE.

MR. CHANG had escaped death at the hands of Professor Farrada. To get out of the house with the real Murder Machine, even though armed with its terrific power, was to be another matter, perhaps more difficult. For Doctor Ling waited somewhere in the darkness of the corridor, barring the only exit from the laboratory.

Mr. Chang was conversant with the tactics of his supreme foe. It was a safe bet that the Mongolian detective was not working alone this night. There would be a cordon of vigilant guards to elude before making a getaway.

The master criminal wanted to eliminate Doctor Ling, but that little matter could come later. At the moment, the foremost problem was to make off with the Murder Machine, which was plunder greater than the Koh-i-noor diamond, in the eyes of Mr. Chang. He was determined to escape.

And Doctor Ling was equally determined to capture him.

Doctor Ling, hearing Farrada's shrieks, realized what was taking place in the laboratory. He knew that the cries came from a white man. No Chinaman would scream that way—Mr. Chang least of all. The Oriental can endure, without vocally expressing his agony, tortures that would drive a white man into hysterical frenzy. Easterners lack the highly strung nervous organization of the Caucasians.

From his hiding place in the hall, Doctor Ling saw the ruby ray. But it cast only a faint illumination. As it dimly lighted the face of the advancing Mr. Chang, the criminal's back was turned so that Doctor Ling could not see whether it was shining on his quarry or on Professor Farrada.

His conjecture was that Mr. Chang was back of the Murder Machine, directing the deadly beam against its inventor. Farrada's quickly resultant screams tended to confirm this surmise.

And Doctor Ling was in no hurry to intrude. He was fully aware of the horrible powers of that ruby ray, and had profound respect for it.

The Mongolian detective now had a tremendous problem on his hands. For, armed with the death ray, Mr. Chang would be almost invincible.

Doctor Ling's main problem was to make the Murder Machine temporarily ineffective. There was one sure way of doing this. Professor Farrada, in explaining the workings of the device, had told him that it derived its power not from portable batteries but from the ordinary electric lighting circuit.

Now, this meant that Mr. Chang could not use the machine unless it were plugged into a socket. In leaving the laboratory with the mechanism, he must disconnect the cord that supplied the current. Thereafter, the Murder Machine would not function until plugged into another socket.

"But," Doctor Ling thought, "my crafty opponent probably has provided himself with a cord several hundred feet long, coiled so that he can unwind it as he advances. Thus he will be enabled to proceed downstairs to the very exits of the establishment, with the fatal ray ready on the instant to annihilate his enemies."

As Doctor Ling viewed the matter, only one course of procedure was open to him. He must make his way back to the cellar and throw the master switch that would cut off the power throughout the house. That accomplished, the Murder Machine would hold no horrors.

So the detective turned and hurried away. In his precipitate haste, he was unable to maintain silence. His footsteps swished and rustled.

In the laboratory, Mr. Chang heard these sounds. And he went into action.

Arrived in the lower hall, which now was dimly lighted, Doctor Ling beckoned to a dozen tall Mongolians who were spread out at strategic points. They approached him swiftly and listened to his whispered orders.

"Up the stairs!" he commanded, after quickly outlining the situation. "Station yourselves at its head. If a red ray shines, shoot for your lives. As soon as I turn off the house current, we shall rush him."

Cellarward Doctor Ling ran, while his helpers ascended the steps. Aware of the horrible powers of the Murder Machine, they shrank back into the darkness, pistols held alertly, ready to fire a fusillade.

Seconds ticked away. One minute passed, then two, and three. In the middle of this period, the lights of the lower hall went out, and the entire house was plunged into abysmal darkness.

A soft, hurried shuffling indicated the approach of the returning Doctor Ling. He led his men forward. They dared not risk a light. For, though the Murder Machine could not now be operated, Mr. Chang was an able pistol shot. At the door of the laboratory, Doctor Ling used exploring fingers and found it closed and locked since his departure.

The detective rapped on the panel. "Mr. Chang!" he called. "Will you surrender, or shall we camp here until thirst and starvation bring you cringing to your knees? As you surely know, there is no other possible escape from your prison."

To this, there was no answer—not even the customary mocking laugh or the polite, languid retort.

Doctor Ling frowned. "We are not afraid of bullets," he whispered to his aids. "Some of us are going to die in the next few seconds, but Mr. Chang will accompany us into the hereafter. The world will be rid of him, and the price will be well worth while."

Now, intrusting his fate to Doctor Ling, Professor Farrada had given him the combination for manipulating the two dials of the vault door.

The detective did not hesitate. He worked the lock, swung the door open, and courageously led his comrades inside. Quickly his flash light swept the long room.

An exclamation of dismay flew from his lips. Mr. Chang had vanished. So had the real Murder Machine.

Doctor Ling was not the sort to hesitate and weep over spilled milk. He thrust his subordinates aside, darted into the hall and shot his light throughout its expanse. Meantime, his men, sufficiently quick-witted not to need orders in an emergency like this, had spread out on the run and were trying the knobs of the various doors along the two sides of the corridors.

All the doors were locked.

"He has vanished!" lamented an aid named Dar. "Mr. Chang employs sorcery. He is the devil himself."

"Not yes!" Doctor Ling said. "What has happened is obvious. In the short time between my retreat to the cellar and the arrival upstairs of you gentlemen, Mr. Chang quitted the laboratory, softly closed the door and spun the dials to shoot the bolts. Then he unlocked one of these other doors, entered and locked it behind him. But—which door? There are many."

"You are right, honorable master!" called one of the three assistants who had remained on guard at the head of the two stairways. "He did not pass us."

"Confucius!" Doctor Ling murmured. "Which room shall we search first? Ah!"

The shattering of glass interrupted him. It sounded from the east, but still they could not tell from which room.

"The guards will hear that!" Doctor Ling cried hopefully. "They may head him off as he escapes to the ground."

Doctor Ling issued instructions in Chinese so fast that he fairly barked. He split his party in two, leaving half of them upstairs in event Mr. Chang were attempting a ruse and might emerge into the corridor.

Then, at top speed, the giant detective led the others down the steps and out into the night.

They found the guards dead—murdered by Mr. Chang's hatchet men who had lurked in the shadows.

But they did not find Mr. Chang.

Once more he had escaped—armed with a deadly device that would give him fiendish powers as Satan's personal representative in this world of laws and outlaws.

FRAUDULENT ASSOCIATIONS ACTIVE

A TYPE of fraud that has been practiced with great advantage and profit lately is one that professes to sell membership in an association to business firms. Two concerns operating this game in Brooklyn are reported to have cleared three hundred thousand dollars in a single year.

The association which the victim of this scheme is asked to join is represented to him as a highly influential one. By means of this affiliation with it, he can obtain many advantages which are not to be had by joining ordinary, legitimate commercial organizations. He can, for instance, obtain exemption from jury duty, immunity from punishment for violations of the traffic rules, freedom from inspection of his factory by municipal inspectors, and various helps in transacting business with government bureaus. Free advice about insurance, accounting, mortgages, and other financial matters is also offered as one of the advantages of membership in these fraudulent associations.

The organization which the victim joins cannot, of course, procure for him the promised favors and political pull. Nevertheless, its representative will collect various sums for advertising space in a journal which the association always seems to have in preparation. That a great many business firms must fall for these sharpers is shown by the large takings above reported.

One of the most brazen representations made by an association of this type was the issuance of a card to the subscriber. This card, when presented to a policeman, was guaranteed to save the "member" from annoyance or arrest for traffic violations.

THE GOLDEN BALL

By Lilian Bennet-Thompson and George Hubbard

Authors of "The Beak of Death," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

AFTER the murder of Horace Peyton, the police immediately conclude that the motive was robbery, for his watch and some money are missing. But Jimmy Clyde, a detective who is staying at Laurel Inn where the tragedy occurs, thinks differently, for he knows that Peyton has been bothering Nell Crawford, the owner of the inn, and that Roger Frederick—Peyton's pianist nephew who is in love with her—is annoyed over it. Peyton, however, seems precluded, for on the night of the crime he was away. There is also the inn gardener, Morton Keefer, in love with Flora Baines, the housemaid who discovered the body. Convinced that the stories Flora and Nell relate are false, and annoyed by the clumsy methods of the local police, he determines to take the case. Nell is alarmed at his decision.

When Frederick returns to the inn, Clyde takes him to the murdered man's rooms. There he tries to conceal a handkerchief bearing Nell's initials. Clyde gets it from him, and later confronts Nell with it. Unexpectedly she breaks down, admitting she killed Peyton. She had gone to his room to beg him to leave. A struggle followed, and she shoved him away. When he was found dead she believed that she had killed him. But Clyde, from various pieces of evidence he put together, knew that some one who had come later was the real murderer of Peyton. Just who, he felt, could be detected with a small ball of gold he had found near the dead man.

Later he encounters Morton Keefer, who has in his possession the platinum watch belonging to Peyton. Some boys had found it outside of town. It is stopped, but it indicates the time that it was thrown away, and puts another point in favor of Nell's innocence. At Doctor Kenyon's, Clyde learns that Peyton was choked by very powerful hands. Discussing the affair, they decide that the ball of gold could be part of a cuff link.

Returning to the inn, Clyde is startled by a struggle in the bushes. He finds Roger Frederick, his throat badly bruised, on the point of collapse. Kenyon treats him, and says he will recover.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLYDE INTERVIEWS FLORA.

THE servants' quarters were in a separate wing of the house, built on back of the kitchen and accessible from it by a short passageway opening into a commodious living room, which all shared in common, although the sleeping rooms for the men were built over the garage. Mrs. Haley, the cook, kept a sharp but kindly eye on the girls, whom she mothered and conscientiously spoiled when they conducted themselves as she thought they should, or berated them unmercifully when their behavior was not to her liking.

Flora was evidently not in her good graces. Her manner was starchily prim, and there was a tight little line of compression about her mouth when Clyde presented himself and asked for the girl.

"She's in her room, Mr. Clyde, where I've seen to it that she stayed ever since Miss Crawford told me that you wanted to speak to her. And it's the first time she's been there at ten o'clock of a night this month and more! It's gad, gad, gad; what with this one and that, and putting every single cent she earns on her back. Miss Crawford's too easy with her, that's what's the matter, and she'll do as she pleases. If the say was mine——" She left it to Clyde to imagine just what would happen in that case. "I'll send her in to you, Mr. Clyde."

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Haley, I'll go to her," the detective returned. "I have Miss Crawford's permission, and this room is a little too public."

"If you've Miss Crawford's permission, it's not for me to mind, sir." Her expression, nevertheless, was one of acute disapproval. She knew Clyde, of course, only as a guest of the inn. "But I hope you'll not be very long. It's been a hard day for all of us."

She rapped loudly with her knuckles on a door opening from the hallway to the right of the sitting room. Without waiting for a response, she sailed majestically down to the end of the corridor, where, Cylde noticed, she left her own door ajar. Clearly, she did not intend to retire until he should have taken his departure.

Flora, dressed in a dainty frock of pale-pink crêpe de Chine, a necklace of pearl beads about her neck, and her curly bobbed hair carefully arranged, was sitting in a low rocking chair, her hands clasped in her lap. She looked as if she might have been idling for an indefinite time, but Clyde suspected that she had not occupied the chair very long. A streak of dust near the elbow of one bare forearm, and the edge of a more or less dilapidated suit case, imperfectly concealed under the bed valance, indicated otherwise.

If she were at all nervous or fearful, she did not show it, and she met Clyde's question with a little toss of her head. "No, I don't, sir! I don't know anything about him, and not givin' you a short answer, I don't want to, neither!"

"But you've seen him since dinner," Clyde insisted. "You were out in the grounds with him as late as nine o'clock to-night, Flora."

"Excuse *me*, but I wasn't no such a thing! I haven't stepped my foot out of this house since I come into it before dinner—before seven—to change my dress. Most of the time, except just when I answered Susie's bell for her and met you bringin' Mr. Frederick in through the kitchen door as I was comin' downstairs again, I been right here in my room, and nowheres else at all."

"And you haven't seen Keefer or spoken to him since dinner time?"

"I have not!"

"And you don't know where he is?"

"I said I didn't, Mr. Clyde. And"—she tossed her head again—"I don't intend to speak to him the next time I *do* see him. Maybe that'll learn him how to treat a lady."

"What's he done?" Clyde wanted to know.

"Done? He's done plenty! But, I say, Mr. Clyde, you better open that door there. Mrs. Haley, she won't stand for nobody talkin' to us girls in our rooms, most particular, any of the gentlemen guests in the house."

"Mrs. Haley's in her own room," Clyde returned briefly. "She knows I wanted to see Keefer and came to ask you about him. What did you say he'd done to make you angry?"

"Why, he's gone off somewheres in the car; that's what he's done, an' forgot to come back, when he promised to

take me down to the pitchers!" Her eyes were snapping; she tapped the tip of one high-heeled suède pump on the floor. "Nor it isn't the first time, neither! He's got a notion that just because he's big and masterful, and draws good pay here, he can get away with anything.

"I told him last time he broke a date with me, I'd ditch him proper if he done it again. I don't have to stand for no such capers from no man, and that's a fact, Mr. Clyde. I guess there's plenty'd be willin' and tickled to death to take me out! Who's he think he is, anyway, keepin' me waitin' here all evenin', all dressed up and no place to go?"

Her indignation was almost convincing, but not quite. Clyde waved her silent, as, with a rising voice, she would have continued to air her grievance against the missing man.

"Flora," he said, "if I hadn't caught you in a lie this morning, I'd be more inclined to believe you now. As it is, I don't. Keefer is wanted. He isn't home. You know where he is. I happen to know that you did see him after you came in at dinner time, and you were with him outside the house." He really knew nothing of the kind, but he strongly suspected it; and he hoped that the bold assertion would cause the girl to exhibit some sign of hesitancy or weakness that would give him an advantage in questioning her.

She was not to be tripped, however. She met his eyes defiantly.

"Then you know what ain't so," she retorted promptly. "But it's all one to me, I don't mind tellin' you, whether you believe me or not. I might ask you, Mr. Clyde, what right you got to come in here and ask me questions, anyways, and tellin' me I lie? You're one of Miss Crawford's boarders; yes, and we all got orders to be civil and polite, no matter what. But orders or no orders, I ain't goin' to stand for no man tellin' me I lie! You can just bet I ain't!"

She stood up, motioning toward the door.

"An' this is my room, too. You can kindly take yourself out of it. Mr. Clyde, and do it now!"

Clyde bowed.

"I'm sorry I can't apologize," he said quietly. "A lie is a lie, you know, and it's especially vicious when it's told to a police officer investigating a murder. The person who tells it forfeits the right to be virtuously indignant when accused of falsehood, just as the person who listens at a keyhole of a door is entitled to less than ordinarily courteous treatment when detected in eavesdropping. Do I make myself quite clear, Flora?"

Her eyes did not waver, but Clyde thought that the high color in her cheeks had faded a little.

"There's a lot of big words," she said contemptuously. "Maybe they mean something, and maybe they don't!" Her head went back, her upper lip curled in a scornful sneer that showed the shiny, gold-capped tooth on one side of her mouth, and the vacant space on the other. For once, at least, she had forgotten that pert, saucy, one-sided smile, so carefully studied for effect. "But if you're tryin' to tell me I said somethin' to Charley Palmer that wasn't true, or that I been listenin' at doors, it's you that's doin' the lyin', and not me!

"Now, there's my door, Mr. Clyde, where it's been right along, and I'll thank you to walk out of it and leave me get some sleep. I can't lie abed till all hours of the mornin', like some folks. I gotta work for my livin'!"

Clyde bowed again.

"I'll say good night, then, Flora, and leave you to—think over what I've said. I'd like to add, though, that in this State, any one who knowingly shields a murderer, helps him to escape, or destroys or conceals evidence of any sort against him, is, in the eyes of the

law, equally guilty with the criminal. We call it being an accessory to the crime.

"Just think that over, too, and in the morning perhaps you may feel like revising some of your statements. Who knows? You may even be willing to tell where Morton Keefer went in his car to-night, and when, and why!" At the door he turned, his hand on the knob.

"Oh, by the way," he added casually, "I nearly forgot to tell you that half a dozen deputies are watching the house and grounds. They're watching very carefully, Flora. And they have explicit orders from Chief Palmer to arrest any one—any one, mind you—who attempts to enter or leave the house. All the guests are at home, and all the servants, with the exception of your fiancé.

"So"—he smiled—"I shouldn't advise you to go out, either by the door or through that very convenient little window over there, with the lilac bushes close to it. I know it overlooks the gardens, and it wouldn't be very difficult to slip through it and get away, except that there are two men out there, watching. They've got good eyes and good ears, Flora, and your eyes wouldn't do you a bit of good with 'em.

"Good night. In the morning, you and I will have another talk, after you've had time to think. You'll remember what I've told you, of course. Good night!"

She made no reply. She only stared at him with a sort of cool, defiant insolence that puzzled him the more because, behind it, he could almost have sworn that she was laughing at him!

CHAPTER XIX.

TENSE SILENCE.

IT was that veiled laughter, that subtly derisive attitude of hers, which Clyde sensed, rather than saw, that bothered him more than anything else. Slouched down in his easy-chair, an unlighted cigarette between his fingers, he admitted to himself that he was disturbed by it.

Convinced as he was, and had been from the first, that Flora knew more than she cared to tell, he could not seem to reconcile her palpable uneasiness of the morning, her agitation when Roger Frederick had staggered into the kitchen a couple of hours earlier, with the almost brazen assurance that she had manifested during his talk with her.

Something had happened to restore her confidence. If she were at all nervous, she hid it admirably. Certainly she was no longer afraid. Her very insolence toward him, a guest of the house, questioning her, as she must have known, with the sanction of her mistress, proved how sure she was of herself and her ground.

Yet Clyde was as positive that she was in some inexplicable way connected with the mystery surrounding the death of Horace Peyton, as he was that she had lied when, looking him straight in the eyes, she had denied all knowledge of Morton Keefer's whereabouts.

She had stood so close to the body of the dead man that her heel had left its imprint in the soft, yielding satin of the quilt that touched his flowing gown. She had listened at the door of Nell Crawford's room, after telling Susie that she was in a great hurry to get to the village and had not a moment to spare.

Whether or not she had actually gone shopping downtown after her precipitate flight from the east wing, Clyde had been unable to find out. All the stores were closed and it would be several hours before he could make inquiries among the merchants to ascertain whether she had patronized them. But she had not been in her own room, or in any other part of the maids' quarters during the latter part of the afternoon. She might, of course, have hidden some-

where in the grounds or in the inn itself, and then slipped back to her own room during the servants' dinner hour, for she had not appeared at their table, nor had any of them seen her about the place before dark.

The pink crêpe de Chine was not the dress which she had worn during the afternoon. Clyde remembered the striped silk in which she had appeared to summon Roger Frederick at the behest of Mrs. King. There was a festive air about the crêpe de Chine—unusually festive, even for Flora. Had she really expected to go to the movies? Or——

Clyde nodded quietly to himself, as another bit of his puzzle slipped into place.

Then, a few minutes after Mrs. Milton's attack of hysteria, when Nell Crawford had rung the bell for Susan, Flora had volunteered to answer it—a bit of entirely uncharacteristic kindness which Susan herself declared had nearly floored her. Susan couldn't understand or explain it, but Clyde thought he could. Flora wanted to know at first hand what had occasioned the old lady's seizure!

Curiosity, of course, prompted by the same motive that had led her to listen at Nell Crawford's door during the afternoon.

"Spying, and ducking out of my way," murmured the detective. "Keeping out of sight of everybody, because she knew I wanted to see her. She didn't want to see me this afternoon. She was afraid to. This evening, she still didn't want to see me, but she wasn't a bit afraid. Her mind was all made up. She knew exactly what she was going to do, and she was satisfied that she'd be able to go through with it.

"Now, what passed between her and Keefer when she talked to him—for talk to him she did—to give her this new stock of confidence?

"She doesn't intend to stay here. She's been pulling things out of drawers and closets, and her bag's packed or all ready to pack. And Keefer, with his car, has disappeared. She knows where he went. Promised to join him, probably, before morning.

"Well"—the detective reached for the matches—"she won't go anywhere to-night, that's one sure thing. If she puts that plump little foot of hers out of doors, she'll find herself under arrest. And to-morrow—— But it's a muddle, all right. I wish Dick Meredith were here. Somehow, Kenyon's not an altogether satisfactory substitute. Not worth a hoot, really. Well, I guess I'll have to figure the rest out all by my wild lone. If I could just be sure where she went when she beat it out of my way this afternoon! Well, she won't go anywhere to-night; I'll guarantee that."

He was so sure he would have staked his professional reputation on it. And so would Chief of Police Palmer, although that gentleman's reputation would have amounted to no great loss. Yet both of them were mistaken.

The square travelers' clock on the dresser ticked off the minutes that grew into hours, the air of the room grew hazy with smoke, and the little pile of cigarette ends in the tray at Clyde's elbow steadily increased. One by one, the subdued, familiar sounds of the house ceased, until all was quiet, hushed in the stillness of sleep.

But to Clyde, still sitting awake in his chair, there was nothing peaceful about the silence. There was in it something restless, uneasy, breathless, like the ominous stillness before a storm. Yet the clouds had broken, and a gibbous moon, sailing high through the flying wrack, sent scudding patches of light and shadow across the windows of the room, where a lace of leaves swayed blackly across the floor one moment, and vanished the next.

His head bent, his eyes brooding straight before him, Jimmy Clyde

worked with the pieces in his puzzle, choosing, selecting, rejecting, fitting one now and then into the growing picture. A little heap of them remained—pieces with odd, ugly corners.

To an observer, Clyde would have appeared wholly insensible to anything but his own thoughts, absorbed, lost in meditation. Yet he heard the whirring hum of every motor car that passed along the highway, every muttered exchange of speech between the deputies on duty outside was known to him, even though he would not hear the actual words. Not the snapping of a twig, nor the crunch of gravel as they paced their steady patrol escaped his attention. Within the house there was no sound.

Laurel Inn was well guarded. Chief Palmer had seen to that, without Clyde's having to suggest it.

"We've a madman to deal with, Mr. Clyde!" had been his first words, after the detective had revealed his identity. "A maniac, sir! I suspected it this morning, and now I'm sure of it. But we'll have him before he does any more damage here. I've sent out a general alarm through the county, and every road and railway station will be watched. He can't get away, and he can't hide for long. Chances are, he's still lurking somewhere about the neighborhood, but he's not in these grounds now. We've gone over them with a fine-tooth comb, and if he tries to sneak back, he'll be nabbed."

It was at Clyde's instigation, however, that he had issued orders to his men to arrest anybody, no matter who, attempting either to enter or leave the inn during the night; and two of the deputies had been directed to give special attention to the garage and the rear of the house, where the servants' wing was screened with tall lilac bushes that grew close to the sides of the building.

A pale-winged lunar moth fluttered impotently against the screen back of Clyde's chair, beating out a low, musical syncopation against the metal mesh. There was not a breath of wind stirring; not a leaf rustled, not a branch swayed. If everything had not been so still, perhaps Clyde might not have detected the sound that, all at once, brought him to his feet and sent him noiselessly across the room to the door—the sound of light, cautious footfalls in the corridor.

So faint they were, so guarded, that at first he was not sure that he had heard them at all. He snapped off the light at the switch, so that he stood invisible against a background of darkness, as he peered out into the corridor. It was lighted and empty. But there came to his alertly listening ears a sound softly murmurous, almost inaudible, that he knew for the gentle closing of a door. Then, a slight click, as the latch fell into place.

The sounds had come from his right, toward the stairway. Some one had, but an instant before, been moving through the hall—some one who had taken the utmost care to step quietly. And, whoever it was, had gone into Roger Frederick's room!

CHAPTER XX.

A VISITOR IN THE NIGHT.

SHADOWLIKE, Clyde darted toward the curtained embrasure of a window that commanded an unobstructed view of the stairway and of the east and west corridors as well. It was not more than five or six feet from the door of Roger Frederick's bedroom. And, shadowlike, he stood there, motionless as the solid wall behind him, for perhaps two minutes.

Then, as silently as it had closed, the door opened again, and a man tiptoed out. To right and to left he looked, reached for the knob, pulled the door shut once more, and, turning to go toward the stairs, started back with a

stifled oath as he came face to face with Clyde.

"Well, what's afoot?" drawled the detective. "You look a bit upset, doctor."

Kenyon, mopping his damp forehead with his handkerchief, did not answer for a moment.

"Upset?" he ejaculated. "I should think I was upset! You gave me a start, Clyde; scared me out of a year's growth, materializing out of thin air that way! I glanced around when I came out into the hall, and I'll swear no one was in sight. Where did you come from, anyway?" He was still visibly shaken, as he returned his handkerchief to his pocket.

"From my own room, of course. I thought I heard some one moving around, and I came out to see who it was. How's your patient?"

"Sound asleep." Kenyon glanced along the hall to the closed door of Clyde's room, at least thirty feet away; but if he wondered how the detective had contrived to cover the distance, while he himself was merely turning his head, he made no comment. "You see, I was a bit uneasy about him. If my treatment hadn't stopped the swelling, he might have had trouble in breathing; and I wanted to be sure that compress was doing its work—take no chances of any unfortunate complications."

"Oh, yes," said Clyde. "I understand. But you say you left him O. K.?"

"Sleeping like a baby, I'm glad to say. I didn't wake him, because the quieter he keeps, and the more rest he gets, the better. When I moistened the compress, he just opened his eyes on a slit, and then went right off again. He'll do, now; breathing much easier." Kenyon yawned. "Well, I'll be off; it must be close to one o'clock."

Clyde glanced at his watch.

"It's nearly half past." He accompanied the doctor downstairs and out onto the veranda. "Where's your car?" he asked. "Surely you didn't walk all the way out from town at this hour?"

"I should say not!" laughed Kenyon. "Left the car down at the foot of the drive, so as not to rattle up here and wake everybody in the place. It sounds like a boiler factory, that old rattletrap of mine does, and the folks might have thought a whole bunch of bandits were coming up in an armored car or a caterpillar tank! Anything new? Found out anything you didn't know before?"

"No."

"Well, good night. I'll be in again the first thing in the morning."

Clyde waited until he heard the thrumming of the motor as Kenyon started his car at the foot of the drive. Then, very deliberately, he descended the porch steps and walked out to the spreading hydrangea bush, behind which was stationed the deputy who had been set to guard the front of the house. He spoke in a deprecating, conciliatory tone which those who knew him would have recognized as indicative of trouble ahead for somebody.

"I understand that nobody is allowed to enter or leave the inn grounds tonight?" he said.

The deputy nodded. He was a tall, lean, hatchet-faced young man, a round bulge in one of his cheeks suggesting that he might be suffering from an ulcerated tooth.

"That's right, sir. Orders from the chief. I'm sorry, but if you want to go anywhere you'll have to get his say-so first. I know you're workin' with Mr. Palmer some way, but orders is orders. So if you do want to go anywhere, Mr. Clyde——"

"Oh, I don't want to go anywhere, thank you," said Clyde. "I merely wanted to find out if you had understood Chief Palmer correctly, before asking you by what authority you disobeyed him."

The deputy stared at him.

"Me? Disobey Charley Palmer? Say, are you crazy?"

"I thought not," returned Clyde gently. "But apparently, I must be, if no one came out of the house with me just now, and walked down the drive. You saw no one?"

"I saw Doc Kenyon, of course, and you saw him, too. Why, wasn't you just talkin' to him? But I certainly didn't see anybody else. There hasn't *been* anybody else, come in or gone out, since I've stood here. D'ye mean——"

"I mean," Clyde said, still in the same deprecatory way, "that I understood you were to allow no one—no one at all—either to come in or go out. That was what I understood, young man. And," he continued, a ring of steel creeping into his voice, "you permitted the doctor to do both. Is that how you follow instructions? Why didn't you do as you were told, and arrest him?"

"Arrest the doc? Why, say, now, I cal'late you *must* be crazy!" With the accuracy of long practice, the deputy aimed a stream of tobacco juice at a small toad squatting at the roots of the hydrangea bush. "What would I be arrestin' Doc Kenyon for, eh? I'd look nice, wouldn't I, pinchin' him, when he come here to see somebody sick! He wasn't no stranger to me; why, I know him almost as well as I know my own brother!"

"I see," said Clyde, with dangerous smoothness. "You've lived in Abbotts' Hollow quite a while?"

"All my life!" he replied promptly. "And a durned nice little town she is, too. Just you show me a better, if you can. Good schools, good stores, good roads, square, decent folks, pretty nearly every last one of 'em——"

"You're pretty well acquainted with the people in the town, are you?"

"Should say I was! Know durned near everybody. And let me tell you, Mr. Clyde——"

"Do you know Peters, the groom employed here at Laurel Inn?"

"Certainly. Him and me was raised together, you might say. Lived next door for years. Nice feller, Peter is, and mighty smart with hosses."

"And you know Keefer, the gardener?"

"O' course! Known him fer years, too. Queer cuss, but I don't believe——"

"As well, perhaps, as you know your own brother?"

"Why——"

"Or Doctor Kenyon? Or the balance of the male population of the town, perhaps?"

The hatchet-faced deputy was beginning dimly to suspect that the young man with the smooth, dark hair and the penetrating eyes might not have strolled out to his post with the sole idea of making desultory conversation. The deputy had heard of Jimmy Clyde; he admired him in the same way and with much the same impersonality that he admired various famous detectives of fiction and romance.

But it was one thing to read a newspaper account of a clever bit of work done by Clyde, thereupon pronouncing him a mighty smart feller, and quite another to have this same smart feller imply that he, the deputy, had disobeyed the orders of the Abbotts' Hollow chief of police, or been negligent in the discharge of his sworn duty.

"In other words," Clyde was continuing, "you'd feel yourself justified in letting Peters or Keefer or your brother or any other individual with whom you happened to be well acquainted, go in and out of the place here to-night as his fancy dictated, with no regard whatever for the explicit orders you received? You consider yourself as above such small trifles as doing what your superior tells you, and not using your own judgment in preference to his?"

"But it was Doc Kenyon!" the deputy

protested angrily. "I ain't let nobody get past here, only the doc. Nobody's tried. The doc, he came to see a patient he had here in the house. He walks up the drive and tells me so. He's got somebody sick here. And I thought——"

"You weren't stationed here to think, but to do exactly as you were told!" Clyde snapped him up crisply. "You weren't given a list of exceptions; you were ordered to arrest any one attempting to enter or leave the inn, and any one included the President of the United States and the local dog catcher! I was present when Chief Palmer issued that order. And if the rest of the lot of you have obeyed it to suit yourselves, and interpreted it with the same liberality that you've used, the place may be as full of people as the Polo Grounds during a world's series game! It's evident that you can't be trusted. I'll have to take a look around myself!"

He turned on his heel and strode off, leaving the deputy sputtering with wrath and indignation, to which the toad under the hydrangea bush fell an innocent victim.

As a matter of fact, Clyde was not at all apprehensive lest any one else should have been allowed to pass through the cordon of guards, but he felt that the hatchet-faced "orders-is-orders" young man needed a mild lesson. Having administered it, he started around the corner of the house, exchanging now and then a low word with one or other of the shadowy forms that stepped silently out to confront him as he passed.

It was with a slight quickening of his pulses that he observed a light shining through one of the windows over the garage. That window was, he knew, in the room occupied by Morton Keefer and the groom, Peters.

He mounted the stairs and knocked on the door, from under which a thin thread of yellow radiance showed. There was no answer, and he knocked again, a little louder. Still no answer; but, as he stood there in the narrow passage, there came to his ears an unexpected sound. He listened, and it came again, low, muffled—the sound of some one faintly moaning.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEHIND LOCKED DOORS.

WITHOUT more ado, Clyde pushed open the door. The room was large and comfortably furnished, with two beds. On one of them a man lay stretched at full length, face downward on the pillow, his arms locked above his head. As Clyde sprang to the bedside, the man rolled over and sat up, rubbing his eyes confusedly and gaping.

"Oh, it's you, sir! I didn't know at first. I must 'a' dropped off to sleep with the light burnin'."

"It wasn't lighted two hours ago," said Clyde. "I walked around here and looked, and there was no sign of a light anywhere here."

"No, sir. I turned it on about midnight, I guess. Must've ate something that disagreed with me, and it give me indigestion somethin' awful. The pain woke me up, and I took a dose of bakin' soda and laid down again, not thinkin' I'd go off to sleep. When you come in, I was dreamin' about"—he scratched his head, as if to stir up his ideas—"blest if I can remember now what I was dreamin' about, but I know I was bein' hurt somethin' fearful."

"You must have been," Clyde agreed dryly, "judging from the noise you made. Keefer hasn't returned yet?"

"No, sir. I'm sure of it this time, Mr. Clyde, bein' restless with this stomach ache. But he'll come. He'll be back pretty quick. Couldn't keep him away, with Flora here, I'll tell the world!"

Himself an ardent admirer of that provocative and flirtatious young per-

son, who merely looked disdainfully down her pert, powdered nose at him, Peters cherished a grudge against Keefer for monopolizing her. He was an undersized, sandy-haired little man, with pale eyes and lashes, a weak chin, and an exaggerated sense of self-importance.

Although he was perfectly willing and even anxious to tell all he knew about the big gardener, the total of his knowledge did not amount to much. Of most of it Clyde was already in possession. Keefer was jealous of Flora, and had threatened to smash the chauffeur, who, on one occasion, had kindly offered to accompany her on an evening walk to the village. More than one dark threat he had made against the person of Peters himself.

"He won't let anybody so much as *look* at her!" the groom declared, "and, what's worse, he raises Cain if she as much as looks at anybody else. Wants her all to hisself, and him with a face like a fried egg! Suppose he does get himself all slicked up like a new horse collar every time he takes her out ridin', or to the pitchers or anywheres, he can't change his *face,* can he? But he must think he's this here Pollo Belle de Vere or somebody! Wouldn't it jar you, Mr. Clyde? Wouldn't you think she'd get so sick of lookin' at his ugly mug she'd be glad to ride in the back seat? Gee, if I was her, I'd fix it so's a hoss would kick him in the jaw. 'Twould make him look different, anyways!

"Why, Mr. Clyde, sir"—in his pleasure at having found a sympathetic ear into which to pour his grievance, the little groom waved his arms above his tousled head and sputtered excitedly—"why, Mr. Clyde, sir, it upset me to see her run right up to him to-night and hang over him while he was crankin' his car, like she really didn't *mind* his looks! An' him huggin' her, with his big, dirty paws round her waist, like a nasty gorilla! Oh, gee!"

"Maybe what you saw and not something you ate was the cause of your indigestion," Clyde observed, with a grin. "When was this? After dinner?"

"Mebbe you're right, sir. I shouldn't wonder a bit," Peters returned gloomily. "Yes, right after dinner, it was. Flora wasn't to the table, but Mort was. And, afterward, I come up here, and I heard him downstairs, gettin' his car out. He'd been sayin' she'd got a new dress and wanted to go down to the movies to show it. She had it on—some kind of a pink, pretty thing, when she run out to him by the garage.

"'You look good enough to eat,' he says to her, Mr. Clyde. And she comes right back: 'Want a bite?' says she. And then he cranks up the car, and she hangs onto his arm, and he hugs her, and they starts whisperin'. I couldn't hear them then, no matter how I tried. Then she says somethin' about them bein' a winnin' pair, and how the two of 'em could beat any game goin', all dressed up like they was."

"Keefer was dressed up, too?"

"Yeh. Had a new hat on, and his shoes all shined up, and a hard-boiled shirt and everything, like he was goin' to a weddin'. And then he says, 'Well, don't be late, Flora!' Then off he goes in the car. And he hasn't come back."

"And where did Flora go?"

"I dunno. That is, I dunno where she went after it got dark. I seen her run back into the house when Mort drives off, but 'twas stormy lookin' out, you remember, Mr. Clyde, and, besides, I wasn't watchin' to see her go out to meet him. She told Susie she waited in her room for him to come back after her, and he never showed up, and she was mad. Should think she would be. Gee, I'd 'a' taken her to the movies, or anywheres else she wanted to go. And I wouldn't 'a' drove off somewheres and left her wait all evenin', neither. But Keefer's so cussed strong and handy with his mitts that a decent,

peaceful feller has to watch his step, or he'll get his neck cracked, like that poor old Mr. Peyton last night.

"I—I say, Mr. Clyde!" With furtive, narrowed eyes and his voice cautiously lowered, the groom leaned forward confidentially. "It ain't on account o' that you're so keen on knowin' where Keefer is, eh?"

Clyde turned to the door.

"No wonder you moan in your sleep, if you have dreams like that, Peters!" he said evasively. "What's that clock got—ten minutes past two? High time I was in bed! Good night."

But he did not at once go to his room. After a word or two with the deputy who was patrolling the garden, he walked around the back of the house, watching, listening. Everything was dark and quiet. Not a glimmer of light penetrated the fringe of lilac bushes screening the windows of the servants' quarters. Those of the maids' bedrooms were shadowy dark rectangles cut in the nebulous white blur that was the house. The only sounds were the sibilant murmur of the leaves and the swish of the grass under his own light footfalls.

The moonlight was growing brighter, now less fitful as the sky cleared of clouds. His shadow, solemn and squat, moved with him as he circled the whole building. At last, reëntering the front door, he nodded briefly to the deputy who still watched from behind the hydrangea bush.

Outside Roger Frederick's room, he paused a moment to listen before going in. The shaded lamp was burning beside the young musician's bed, as Kenyon had left it earlier in the evening. By its rays, he could distinguish the pale, handsome face on the pillow, the closed eyes, the white bandage swathing the neck. The injured man's breathing seemed easier, more regular.

Closing the door soundlessly, so as not to awaken him, Clyde went on to his own room. But he did not go to bed. He merely threw off his coat, stretched himself out comfortably in the big armchair, and, presently, slept.

He was awakened just before seven by Nell Crawford rapping at his door. She wore a kimono over her night attire; her bare feet were thrust into quilted satin slippers. Under her eyes were dark circles, telling of worry and sleeplessness, and her voice broke raggedly as she tried to speak to him.

"Mr. Clyde, we can't rouse Flora. Her door's locked on the inside. I've knocked and knocked. She doesn't answer. Will you come? Please? I'm afraid!"

Filled with a sickening sense of fresh disaster, Clyde followed her down through the kitchen, where Mrs. Haley and the terrified girls huddled in a little group close together, and along the passage that led to the maids' quarters.

His mind was full of one dreadful question, the real answer to which seemed almost too terrible to be true. Yet, if it were true——

Almost, Jimmy Clyde shrank from facing it. He, too, was afraid of what, despite all precautions, might be found behind the closed and locked door of Flora Barnes' room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LINK INTACT.

THE door was of oak, solid and substantially built. Clyde set his shoulder against it, but the stout spring lock held.

"We'll have to force it—break it off the hinges," he said. "That's the idea," he approved as Peters ran in carrying a crowbar. "Here, quick!"

Jamming the blade of the implement between the bottom of the door and the sill, he threw his weight on the handle. The door creaked, but did not give.

"Take hold here, Peters," he ordered. "Jam it further in first—so. Now,

when I count three, bear down as hard as you can. One—two—three!"

There came a dull report of cracking metal, the splintering crash of wood, and the door burst open, sagging from its twisted hinges, the lock completely wrenched apart. The heavy scent of lilac swept out into the passageway; and, with it, another odor, thick, unpleasant, nauseating.

"Stand away, everybody!" commanded the detective sharply. "Let no one come in! Miss Crawford, please send for Doctor Kenyon and Chief Palmer at once."

"Mr. Clyde, is she——"

"She is dead, yes," said Jimmy Clyde gravely, and turned to drag the broken door back into place, blocking up the aperture as well as he could. Inured as he was to scenes of crime and violence, the sight that met his eyes there in Flora Barnes' bedroom horrified and sickened him. It confirmed his worst fears.

Flora, still wearing the pink crêpe de Chine dress, was sprawled back in the rocking chair, her arms dangling one on either side, her head lolling horribly over one shoulder. Her eyes, wide and fixed, bulged out from the ghastly purplish distortion of her face. Her mouth was half open, the lips drawn apart in an expression of terror and agony unutterable.

It was to be a long time before Jimmy Clyde could pass a lilac bush in bloom without there flashing before him a mental picture of that room, with every detail clear and distinct as in a photograph. The white-enameled bed, the mattress rolled up askew, the pillows ripped from their cases and flung on top of the heaped-up sheets and blankets; jars and boxes and tubes, rouge and creams and powders, jumbled together on the dresser top; the drawers pulled out, their contents spilling over onto the floor; the closet door ajar, and dresses, hats, wraps, shoes, dumped all together. A suit case, open, empty, the lining half torn out, tossed on a pile of lacy lingerie and silk; a new and shiny traveling bag hanging upside down on the leg of an overturned chair.

It was a scene of confusion and disorder indescribable. And, in the midst of it, the dreadful thing in the rocking-chair.

The windows were both closed, the shades drawn down. There was no key in the door, but one lay on the corner of the dresser-top, filmed with powder that had spilled from an open vanity case, beside a little heap of shoddy jewelry, including an imitation-pearl pendant, three or four strings of colored beads, a ring set with two white sapphires, a silver bar pin, three or four odd lingerie clasps.

Clyde did not touch them. He did not touch anything in that chaotic room. Only he raised one of the lowered window shades, and studied intently the smudgy black marks of fingers that appeared on the outside of the frame, a little below the level of his own head.

His fingers rested briefly on the left wrist of the dead girl. The muscles were still flexible. It seemed to him that the skin was almost warm to the touch. There were dried crimson stains under the nails of the fore and middle fingers.

Standing there beside her, the fixed, up-rolled eyes appeared to be staring directly at him. Reproachfully, he fancied, that he had not prevented this horror from overtaking her, even though she herself had done everything possible to bring it about. He remembered how those same eyes had met his, coolly, defiantly, but a few hours before, with a veiled laugh in them; how the full upper lip had curled in a scornful sneer that showed the gleaming, gold-capped tooth on one side, and the vacant space on the other.

The lip was curled up now, but in the agony of death, not in scorn or defi-

ance. It still showed the gold-capped tooth—*it showed two gold-capped teeth!*

Clyde's heart seemed to turn over with a great, quivering throb, and then to race into a hard, pounding rhythm. He bent forward and with thumb and forefinger carefully drew the second piece of gold from the place where it was loosely wedged between the canine and the second bicuspid.

It lay in his palm, a thick oval of heavy yellow metal, gleaming dully in the morning light. From its slightly flattened under side, extended a round, slender, curving rod, perhaps half an inch long.

Clyde's hand was not altogether steady as he reached into his breast pocket and fumbled for the tissue paper packet in which he had wrapped the round golden ball, picked up from the rug on the floor of Horace Peyton's bedroom; but he betrayed no other sign of excitement or triumph.

Half crouching, he spread the tissue paper open on his knee. He turned the golden ball around, so that the slight indentation was uppermost. Then, with the utmost care, he lifted the oval piece of gold he had taken from the dead girl's mouth, and applied the end of the curved rod or shank to the depression in the ball. It fitted exactly. And together the two pieces formed a complete unit: a man's cuff link of fine gold, engraved with a curious symbol in the shape of five horizontal lines, across which was carved the single letter "K."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHIEF'S NEW THEORY.

OF all those concerned, intimately or otherwise, in the mysterious crimes at Laurel Inn, the man who had been so loudly certain that "You can't keep a murder quiet," seemed to be the most anxious to prevent the death of Flora Barnes from becoming a matter of public knowledge. When it was simply a question of a sporadic crime, committed under circumstances that gave his envious little soul gratification, he had shown small tact and less consideration for Nell Crawford, who was, indirectly, its victim.

But quite another matter was that of his own efficiency, and of the adequacy of the precautions taken to guard Laurel Inn after the assault on Roger Frederick. Flora's death reflected unpleasantly on him, and, therefore, strict secrecy must be maintained with regard to it, until he could establish that by no possibility could he have been at fault.

Indeed, Chief Palmer was amazed, puzzled, and thoroughly angry. The second crime, following within twenty-four hours of the first, and bearing the obvious marks of having been committed by the same person, was bad enough, from his point of view; that Flora should have been strangled to death and her room ransacked, when every door was carefully guarded; and deputies, personally selected by the chief for their courage and dependability, had been posted at all other strategic points, was appalling.

Inwardly furious though Palmer was, however, he did not storm. Instead, he closely questioned every member of his domestic staff, and issued iron-clad orders, reënforced with threats of summary punishment if they were disobeyed, that Flora's name was not to be mentioned to any one. If inquiries were made regarding her whereabouts, the reply was to be that she was "off duty."

"There's been too much talk around here already," the chief declared, when, at his summons, Clyde joined him and the doctor in a private room of the inn. "Entirely too much talk! Information has leaked out all over this place, like coffee through a strainer, and the result is that this cunning madman was able to creep in through that girl's window last night, in spite of every precaution I could take, and then climb out again.

"He knew where the guards were posted; knew he was wanted. He knew everything. Everybody in town knows everything there is to know! Instead of keeping the thing perfectly quiet——"

"You can't keep murder quiet, chief," Clyde said slyly. "There was bound to be talk."

"Well, there'll be no more, until he's behind the bars where he'll do no further killing! We've found the place where he had his car parked last night. He'd run it in off the road between here and the village—a couple of hundred yards below the culvert—and left it there hidden in a clump of birches. My theory is that he sneaked back through the ravine, climbed up somewhere, and hid himself in the garden where he could watch my men on patrol.

"Then, when he saw the coast was clear for a minute, he slipped up among the lilac bushes and got in the window. While he was doing it, he left finger prints that will convince any jury!"

"I've seen 'em," said Clyde.

"And you knew at once who made them, of course!"

"I shouldn't like to say that I knew, Mr. Palmer; but I will say that I was convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that they were Morton Keefer's."

The chief snorted.

"Should think you might be! As long as he was obliging enough to have black grease on his hands, he couldn't have left plainer evidence if he'd made special preparations to do it. Morton Keefer's our man, and we'll have him before the sun sets to-night. The county isn't big enough for him to hide in!"

And, indeed, there was no question whatever about the identity of the man who had stood behind the screen of lilac bushes outside Flora Barnes' window, and left the marks of greasy black fingers on either side of the casing. Clyde had examined the marks under the microscope, had measured and traced the faint footmarks in the earth.

Just inside the casing, one on either side, were the thumb-prints, broad, flat, almost half again as large as those of an ordinary man. Dark smudges showed where the palms had pressed, and on the outside, plain as if stamped in India ink, the prints of four enormous fingers.

The distance from the ground indicated that they could not possibly have been made by any one who stood under six feet and some odd inches. In order to grasp the casing at such a height, whoever had made the marks must have been unusually tall and possessed, as well, of extraordinarily long arms.

Neither finger prints nor footmarks had been there the previous day. The chauffeur, not being busy during the afternoon, had volunteered to help Keefer rake some of the flower beds, and he was positive that, had such footprints been under the lilac bushes, his activities with the rake would have obliterated them. And Susie, early in the afternoon, when Flora was dressing to go downtown on the shopping expedition, had been in her room, standing by the window. She swore that no such finger prints had disfigured the white casing then; and her conviction was based on the fact that she had leaned out to speak to the chauffeur, busy a dozen feet away, and he had mentioned the marks of the knife or jimmy on the window of Horace Peyton's room, upstairs in the east wing. That had led both of them to glance at the woodwork of the window through which Susie was speaking.

"I had a suspicion of Keefer in my mind from the very first," declared the chief, with more *empressement* than truth. "His upper story's never been very well furnished. Everybody knew that. A man of his size and strength pottering around all his life with silly little seeds and plants and that sort of

woman's nonsense! That'd never get him anywhere."

"It got Luther Burbank somewhere," remarked Kenyon. "And I might mention other people who——"

"I'm talking about Morton Keefer, doctor, asking your pardon, and not Burbank, or any other people. For the matter of that, I guess Burbank was a crank, too, or he'd have looked up a man's job and done it!

"Anyway, as I said, I suspected Keefer from the first. He was just plain dippy about that girl Flora, and looked like a thundercloud if she as much as passed the time of day with any other man. And she used to keep him on the anxious seat, too—liked to see him squirm, I guess. She'd go out of her way to give an eye to some fellow down at the movie house, just to get Keefer into a rage.

"But nobody wanted to be beat up. They knew how he felt about her, and so the boys in town here weren't what you'd call responsive. Old Peyton was, though. Plenty of folks have seen 'em downtown together. Just last week he treated her to a big box of candy in the drug store, and Keefer couldn't have helped getting to know of it. Peyton had money, and Keefer hadn't. That was the long and the short of it—money!"

"The old, old story, eh?" murmured the doctor. "A pretty girl, liking pretty things. Discontented, bored, sore because her lover wouldn't let her enjoy the admiration she craved. Wealthy old man comes along. She makes eyes at him—Flora always made eyes at every one—and he gets interested. He's quite willing to meet her more than halfway."

"Exactly!" put in Palmer, who wanted to do the talking. "You've said it, doc. Jealousy! A man who's crazy with jealousy won't stop at anything. Keefer didn't. He suspected that there was something between Flora and old Peyton, and he made up his mind to stop it." He turned to Clyde.

"You've expressed it as your opinion, Mr. Clyde, that Peyton's murder was done by some one in the house here, and that Flora knew something about it. Well——"

"When did I so express myself, Mr. Palmer?" Clyde wanted to know. "I don't recall saying anything of the sort to you."

"Why, you told the doctor, didn't you? I'm not prepared to say that you were altogether correct; but, anyway, whether you were or not, Keefer was in a position to get into the house without any one being the wiser. Flora would have let him in. He was with her all the previous evening."

Kenyon rose suddenly.

"If you'll excuse me a minute," he said, "there's a matter I want to attend to. I'll be right back."

During his brief absence, Palmer went on, building up the case against Keefer, Clyde nodding from time to time as a point was brought out. Kenyon was gone not more than ten minutes. When he returned:

"As I was just telling Mr. Clyde, here," the chief said, "Keefer had the motive and the opportunity. Also, he needed money. He hadn't much, and he wanted to marry Flora and take her away with him as soon as he could. He had to have cash for that. He thought he was pretty smart when he sent those two Noonan boys to hunt for hellgramites in Coombes' Creek. He knew they'd come across the watch and the empty wallet, and so bolster up the idea that the job had been done by some one who didn't know that the watch was platinum. Keefer did know it. But he wouldn't have dared try to realize on the thing, because it could be so easily traced."

"That's right," nodded Kenyon. "I believe you're absolutely right, chief."

"Of course I am! Well, having dis-

posed of the old man, Keefer attacks Frederick——"

"Why?" asked Clyde. "Are you, by any chance, contending that Mr. Frederick also had been responsive?"

"I don't know whether he was or not," returned Palmer impatiently. "But it doesn't matter, anyhow. The same man committed all three crimes, and we know that Keefer killed the girl. The finger prints prove that, to say nothing of his sneaking off and hiding himself. No honest man, no man with a clear conscience, goes into hiding the way Keefer did last night. He was guilty, and he beat it, that's all."

"Speaking of finger prints," said Clyde, "did it strike you as odd that there were none to be found in Flora's room or on her belongings? Considering the amount of grease Keefer smeared on the window frame, shouldn't you think he must have left marks of it on the window itself when he opened it, or inside the room somewhere? Especially as he seems to have handled everything in the place?"

The chief smiled.

"Well, well, now, Mr. Clyde!" said he. "I'm surprised at you. There's one thing you seem to have overlooked altogether, and it's a most important thing. I'm surprised that a gentleman of your professional reputation should have failed to remark it." He leaned back in his chair, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and regarded Clyde with considerable condescension.

"That one thing," he said, "is that, while every room in the maids' quarters was occupied, and Mrs. Haley herself is a light sleeper, not a soul heard any unusual noise going on in Flora's room. Susie didn't, and she's right next to it. I've questioned her and everybody else, minutely, and if there had been any racket to speak of, some one must have heard it; Susie couldn't have helped hearing it.

"Now, what does that prove? Why, that there wasn't any noise to hear, of course! And *that* proves that Flora didn't raise any objection to Keefer's coming into her room! You mentioned that there weren't any finger prints on the window itself. Why? Because, when Keefer turned up outside, *she* opened it and let him in!"

"Very, very plausible," murmured Kenyon. "She would, of course. They were mixed up in this Peyton affair together, and she would naturally do all she could to help Keefer. I say, Clyde, Keefer put down the rug in Peyton's room, didn't he? And he's been wearing what the groom calls hard-boiled shirts every evening lately! What was to prevent him from dropping——"

"Nothing whatever," Clyde interposed. "We'll go into that later, if you please, Kenyon. You were saying, Mr. Palmer, that Keefer——"

"Keefer was let into the room by Flora, of course!" The chief was a little annoyed by Kenyon's interruption. "That's as plain as anybody's nose, ain't it? She probably knew that I suspected him of having something to do with Peyton's death, and that he was being shadowed. She's fond of Keefer, as well as afraid of him. She didn't want to have him arrested and convicted of murder, and be charged herself with being an accessory. Remember how she asked me yesterday morning if she'd have to go down to the jail, and then corrected herself and made it 'court,' eh, Mr. Clyde?"

Clyde nodded.

"I remember," he said.

"And also swore she hadn't been near Peyton's body, and you found the print of her heel in the quilt? I wish you'd called that to my attention, then, sir. It might have saved a great deal of trouble. But I suppose you weren't sure it was a heel print, eh? Well, never mind.

"What I was going to say was this

Flora wanted to get away from here before she got mixed up in the murder business. She and Keefer had decided to meet last night, and make their plans. She bought a new bag and a lot of clothes in the village yesterday—underwear and that sort of thing, pretty expensive for a poor girl.

"She came back, changed her dress, and was all ready to meet Keefer. He was late—probably had trouble with that rattletrap car of his—and while she's waiting for him to show up, along comes Mr. Frederick, on his way downtown to meet you, Mr. Clyde. She spoke to him——"

"Frederick claims," interjected the doctor, "that he saw nobody at all after he left the house. He was going down the driveway, and somebody jumped on him from the clump of rhododendrons. Still, he might have said that, so that he wouldn't be connected up with the affair in any way. Don't you think so, Clyde? He'd had enough unpleasant publicity by reason of his relationship to Peyton, and he wouldn't care to have it known that he'd been assaulted by a jealous lover—wouldn't look well for him."

The chief quickly waved Kenyon to be silent.

"I dunno as it makes any difference whether Frederick spoke to the girl or not, anyway," he said. "It was enough for her to be out there somewhere, and him headed in her general direction, for Keefer to get the notion into his crazy head that they were planning to meet, wasn't it? A man in his state of mind isn't going to bring up any fine points of reason. He was looking for Flora, and he met Frederick—or saw him coming. That was enough. He goes completely off his head with insane jealousy, and the assault follows.

"Flora runs back to the house, slips into her own room. Keefer bolts and hides down in the ravine somewhere. He knows every foot of it, and could get around about as well in the dark as he could in the daytime. We'll find out when we catch him just where he did hide when we were looking for him. Later, he slips back to her window, and she lets him in. He's all dirt and grease, and she makes him wash up. There's running water in her room, if you noticed, Mr. Clyde?"

"Yes, I noticed it."

"You agree with me, don't you, that Keefer assaulted Mr. Frederick in the driveway, and then ran off when you arrived on the scene?"

Clyde's shoulder went up in that little half shrug.

"I dislike saying I know things, Mr. Palmer, until I'm sure that I do. However, the idea seems perfectly reasonable, and I'll even go so far as to say that I believe you are correct in the assumption that he did."

"Thanks!" said the chief, with heavy sarcasm. "I don't have to be as careful as all that, I'm glad to say! Well, by the time Keefer's gotten into Flora's room, he's calmed down a little. He knows he's gotten himself in dutch with the assault on Mr. Frederick. He's afraid it will draw suspicion toward him about the Peyton affair. So he's pretty quiet and subdued. All he wants, now, is to get away clear, and take Flora with him.

"She's willing, and they start to pack her things. That accounts for everything being all upset in the room. I've discovered that she went to the bank yesterday afternoon, just before closing time, and drew out all her savings. She bought the new bag and a lot of stuff for her trousseau later.

"Now, then, while they're in her room together, packing up, keeping as quiet as they can so that nobody'll hear what they're doing, something turns up among the things, or Flora passes a remark that starts Keeffer off again. One word leads to another. Flora twits him, eggs him on——"

"She'd a perfect genius for deviling the poor chap," interjected Kenyon.

"And the first thing she knows, she doesn't know anything. He's got her by the throat. She struggles, of course, but it doesn't do her any good. He handles her as if she'd been a baby in arms."

"One thing, chief. How do you account for the fact that there wasn't any noise? If they'd had a quarrel, and Keefer grabbed her, and she struggled, there'd have been noise enough to wake everybody in the whole place, wouldn't there?"

"Not if her feet couldn't touch the floor!" declared Palmer triumphantly. "They'd naturally both be careful about raising their voices at first. Then, when she *couldn't* raise her voice, when all she could do was to kick and claw the air, she couldn't make a sound that anybody'd be able to hear. He just lifted her off her feet with one hand, like she was a weed that he was pulling up, and squashed the life out of her. Didn't he, doctor? Didn't he just choke her to death and chuck her body down in that chair where she was found?"

Kenyon frowned a little.

"He might have, yes—surely he might have. Her throat had been seized in a tremendously powerful grip. As in the case of Mr. Peyton, the hyoid is broken. Actually, Flora's was splintered, I think. The sharp end of it has been driven right through the carotid sheath and into the jugular vein. Death actually resulted from strangulation, as nearly as I can determine—which would bear out your theory, chief—for her breathing was completely shut off; but she must have died in any event from the internal hemorrhage. The hæmatoid——"

" 'Bliged to you if you'll use English, doctor!" snapped Palmer. "I'm not a fancy linguist, even if Mr. Clyde here knows all your long names!"

"The swelling on the side of her neck, then," the doctor translated. "It was comparatively small, but the tissues of the head and neck were clotted. But, in my opinion, she was dead, smothered, when the grip on her throat was relaxed."

"She was dead because of a deliberate intention that she should die by strangulation, then?" asked Clyde. He was bending forward, as if to lose no slightest inflexion of Kenyon's voice, no fleeting expression of his face. "And, when you examined the body, she had been dead about how long?"

"Between five and six hours. Not more, certainly—possibly a trifle less. To your other question, probably yes. She was, I should say, perfectly helpless in that grip. It was one of no ordinary strength. With Keefer's enormous hands at her throat, she couldn't cry out——"

"And she couldn't talk, either!" said Clyde. He rose. "But I can, fortunately, and I want to speak to Miss Crawford, if you gentlemen will excuse me."

"Not this morning!" said Kenyon promptly. "I've ordered her to bed. She's gone through enough these past two days to make her a nervous wreck, and she's not to be disturbed on any account. Perhaps later in the day, Clyde. Mrs. King has called, too, but I was obliged to insist that she wait, if she wanted to see Miss Crawford at all."

"Mrs. King?" Clyde's face lighted up. "Did she stay? I'd like to see her. Where is she now, do you know?"

"Out on the hemlock terrace, with Roger Frederick, I believe."

"With Frederick? I thought——"

"He was so much better this morning, that I thought fresh air and quiet would do more for him than lying upstairs in bed. I saw him when I went up a short time ago, and he was anxious to get dressed. I had a steamer chair moved out under the trees for him, and then,

when Mrs. King came, Peters and I helped him outdoors."

"He's a very fortunate young man, Mr. Frederick is," said Palmer. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Clyde's timely appearance last night, there might have been three murders instead of two. And"—turning to Clyde—"if you'd only had an impulse to come downstairs later, in the same timely fashion, about half past one or two o'clock, this second tragedy——"

"Yes, quite true," nodded Clyde, inscrutable eyes on Kenyon's face. "If only I had thought to go down between one and three some time—but I naturally thought the place impregnable, chief, after the orders you issued, and the way your men were stationed, it didn't seem possible to me that any one at all could get into Laurel Inn.

"By the way," he turned to say casually, "if I *had* happened down here, and my appearance had frightened off Flora's assailant, as it frightened off Roger Frederick's, do you suppose she would have explained to me why she and Keefer, when they were packing up for their elopement, thought that they could pack two large feather pillows and a hair mattress in a traveling bag?"

Then he was gone, walking briskly across the kitchen and out of the back door, whistling softly to himself.

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

FORMIDABLE PET PROVES BURGLAR'S ALLY

AS a rule, when one keeps a pet of ferocious nature and appearance, it serves as a menace to gentlemen of the burglarious profession who may have designs on the pet keeper's valuables. This did not, however, prove to be the case with a lady residing in Paterson, New Jersey, who kept an ocelot as a pet.

For the benefit of those not overfamiliar with natural history, zoölogy, and kindred subjects, it may be well to mention here that the ocelot is an animal of the cat species, somewhat akin to the panther. It is found all through the southern part of North America, from Texas downward, and in South America, as far as Patagonia. It is yellow or gray in color, with black markings. A nice little pet for a lady to keep in her home, and one calculated to strike terror into the hearts of intruders!

One night a few weeks ago, a daring burglar entered the home of the owner of the ocelot during her absence, and stole clothing worth one hundred dollars. In order to cover his escape, he released the pet from the cage in which it was confined, permitting it to wander about the house.

When the lady of the house returned, a little after midnight, she found the ocelot padding about and displaying signs of hostility, so that she was afraid to enter. She telephoned for the police, and two detectives were sent. They drove the ocelot into a bedroom and locked it in for the night, but in the morning the woman telephoned the police again to say that her pet had apparently gone mad. A detective then went to the house, broke a hole in the door of the room in which the animal was imprisoned, and shot it dead. All of which goes to show that a formidable pet is not always a safeguard against burglars.

AFRAID TO TELL

By Zoe McKenzie Smith

THE lean-to woodshed sprawled like a loafer against the sunny side of the house. Within, the little old man sawed and planed and hammered, forcing himself to irreverent confusion when every blow of the hammer rang with guilt and the saw screamed its concern. Yet when he paused to make measurements with trembling accuracy, the silence crowded about him menacingly. Now and then he gave a sigh, a gasp of pitiful despair, and wrung his hands.

The rough outside box was done and practically waterproof. The other box he was laboring over with painful exactitude. Smooth and tight, it was the best effort of a good workman. Lined with a blanket it would have to do. But he let out his breath in a great shudder of regret.

Through the half-open door, he caught the approaching sound of loose, jangling parts and the gasping of a brave old engine. The mail man! The little old man's hands clung together as in desperate fear, the fingers writhing helplessly. Oscar! He had forgotten Oscar. Why hadn't he thought up something for Oscar? Oscar was so curious! He carried more news by word of mouth than ever he delivered sealed and addressed. Newsy bits stuck to him like burs to a sheep's back. The car stopped. Suppose Oscar came in to see why no one came out to gab a little? Suppose Oscar even came to the door! He mustn't come to the door, or see inside the shed! Everything must seem as usual. Cold and strangely stiff, the little old man went to stand in the crack of the door.

"Mornin', 'Chass!'" hailed the mail carrier heartily. "Doin' a little carpenter work?"

"Yeah," assented the one called Chass. He was really Charles Fenton. "Flume rotted." And he made a mental note to make and set out on careless view in the yard, a few feet of new flume.

Oscar lifted his ugly, mole-laden nose and sniffed ostentatiously, as if keening for a whiff of some elusive fragrance. "Thought likely I'd smell a kind

of dark-meated old rooster boiling for your dinner," he insinuated, leering knowingly over the side of the car. "Jim Crosby said he heard a shot over here this mornin'. Don't know as I blame you fellers for eatin' a pheasant now and then. Who feeds 'em?" He waited cunningly.

Chass pressed his palm hard on the splintery door. He ignored Oscar's baiting, and explained tersely, "Cat. Yellow cat. Sucks eggs." He wondered for a cold moment if there was such a cat and whether he should be confronted with it later. He must not overlook anything, however slight. "Never hit the darned thing!" he added and spat into the grass. "Any mail?"

"Letter from Charley's sister in Nebrasky. The postmark's kind of blurred. I couldn't see what town it is from."

The mail carrier squinted an inquisitive eye. "Where's Charley?"

Where's Charley? To Charley Highfield's little old hired man stopping the crack of the shed door, the question hung in telling silence. He licked his stiff lips and made a desperate effort. Words came. Some hidden impulse laid the words to his tongue, decided for him. "On his way, I reckon," he said with a sudden accession of courage. "Didn't you hear he'd gone to Nebrasky to visit? His folks live there and his sister's pretty poorly."

"Gone to Nebrasky, eh?" Oscar started on hurriedly, rolling the morsel of news under an appreciative tongue. People knew Charley Highfield. Already Oscar could hear himself asking men in the fields along the road, women waiting at the mail boxes, "Hear about Charley Highfield goin' away?" As he retold it he could add a zestful detail here and there to make it more interesting.

When Oscar had gone up and over a slight rise some distance down the paved road, the little old man took up his tools again. A dry, tortured sob broke from his thin lips. "Good Heaven!" he cried in the terrible misery of his heart. It was as much as he dared. How could he pray?

When the two boxes were completed, Chass Fenton knocked together a length of flume, and mended another length that carried water to the kitchen garden. He lingered over it. But he could not fool himself. The other task waited grimly. He threw a piece of canvas across the end of one box and an old linen duster over the middle of the other in order that their significant length might not strike a casual eye. Not that he expected any one to peer in, but he must be prepared for any contingency. Leaving the shed door ajar as usual. he entered the kitchen, removed his hat with a shaking hand, and after washing hastily, forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls of the cold food in the cupboard. He must keep up his strength. But he stood with his back to the bedroom door.

He came to the dread task at last. He brought down Charley's best dark-serge suit from the attic, brushed it carefully, laid it ready to his hand. Gathering himself desperately together he did his mournful duty.

It seemed the day would never end, the darkness slip kindly down upon the valley. There was so much to be done and nothing more he dared to do while people passed on the side road close to the house, and streamed continually along the pavement in front. This paved highway, however, was not close. Ten acres or more of alfalfa stretched between the house and the State road, for the house was set about halfway up the twenty acres and near the eastern boundary of the farm. Behind the dwelling and higher on the hillside were several acres of apples rising proudly above the frost line. In the space between orchard and house were the barn and sheds in good repair, a garden, and

land that was planted to corn and potatoes. The corn had grown to a height of ten feet and was turning pale with the effort of holding its golden burden. The potato field lay drab and dead looking, giving no hint of the wealth to be mined there. Chass could not bear to look toward the corn.

Pretending to examine flume and ditch—although the water would be turned off in October—Chass followed along the side fence to the paved road and then, with his heart fluttering like a frightened thing in his chest, lest any one seeing him suspect the secret of his errand, he strode across the alfalfa undulating under his feet with its shallow ditches. Stooping where it seemed to him the stand was richer and greener and the sunshine brighter, he marked off with small stakes he brought in a pocket, a rectangle. This would expedite the night work.

As soon as darkness fell, Chass left the lamp burning in the kitchen where he and Charley had been accustomed to sit, and hurried to his labors. Even with soil not wholly dry, it was a job for several husky fellows, not a little old man like Chass. First, he cut the tangled roots of alfalfa, which was an old stand, working with exquisite care to remove squares of sod. When these, ragged edged, had been laid by, he began the digging. With puny hands and frail arms, the pile of dirt on the old canvas grew slowly. The moon hung amid a froth of clouds like a thin, cool slice of silver melon. In her pale glow the man worked with desperate determination. By morning he had made three panting journeys from the house to that chosen spot in the field. had somehow accomplished his incredible task. The turf lay smooth. He would water it slightly by night that the wounded roots might heal. White and trembling with exhaustion, he climbed to the attic and slept on a cot with a straw-filled tick. He would not, under any circumstances, use that downstairs bedroom.

Days slipped by, days with furtive mornings creeping across the fields; days with sinister noons; days with taunting, peering sunsets; and nights brooding menace for the morrow. Chass was glad that in the exchange of work customary in the neighborhood, he had to spend the greater part of each day, eat his noon meal and sometimes his supper, with one or another of his neighbors. Days were shortening considerably, too. In his time at home, he tugged at weeds, toiled fussily at the place, wearied himself to a shaking fatigue, and yet found no peace. But he finally began to feel a certain security.

One morning toward the middle of September, a bell pealed out a clear, innocent call. The little old man preparing for the inrush of helpers to harvest apples, corn and spuds, lifted his head to listen. The school bell. It meant nothing to him, he would have said. Yet only a week or two later, on a golden day in October, there was a rap on the door of the big kitchen, where Chass, having come in on some errand, happened to be. The little house was only a long box with a part of its space partitioned off for a bedroom, where formerly the two men had slept, but which was now closed and unused, Chass having brought out his narrow bed to the west end of the kitchen.

Rude stairs led to an unfinished loft for storing. When he heard the knock, Chass, in spite of himself, gave a start, probed sharply into the room's every corner, before his hand grasped the white egglike knob. He expected to see some fellow farmer come to ask concerning the morrow's work, and found instead a girl! And very pretty and sweet, too, she looked to his kind old gaze. Dressed in brown like her eyes, a scarf of gay colors mingled flung across her shoulders, her bobbed hair

uncovered, she stood radiantly in the warm afternoon sunlight.

A winning smile met the astonished regard of the old man. Her eyes were not large, but deep and very bright. She looked as fragrant as a rose. "Can you tell me," she asked, "where Charley Highfield is?"

Horror crept over him like a kind of paralysis. He could not answer. He must answer! What would she think if he did not answer?

She waited politely and then continued, "This is his place, isn't it? I was sure it was. I recognized it from the description given me, and then I saw his name on the mail box. They told me in town that he went to Nebraska to see us, but you know, he must have got there after—after mother died and I had started west. We may have passed each other on the way. Hasn't he returned yet? Or have you heard from him lately?"

Chass gave a nervous cough and shook his head. "Not much of a hand to write," he said, "and neither am I. I didn't know the name of the town where his folks lived."

"Why, he hasn't any folks in the world but mother and me. I mean he hasn't any folks but me, now. I'm his niece, June Rose. Miss Rose, teacher of the first grade! I came out here to Desert Bridge to be near Uncle Charley, my only relative. It's terrible when people don't write, and get muddled up like this, isn't it? Have you any idea how long he intended to stay in Nebraska?"

He let his breath out nervously so that it whistled through his teeth. "Indefinite, I guess, about it."

June Rose turned reluctantly away. "I suppose you'll look for him when you see him coming!" she hazarded in brave playfulness. "If you don't mind I'll walk out now and then to see if you've got word of his return. Even if you haven't any news," she finished wistfully, "I enjoy the walk and looking at my uncle's farm."

She was as good as her word, too. Especially on Friday afternoons she came. He would be greeted by a clear, friendly hail and look up to see her running lightly up the side road from the paved highway, her face happily expectant. It caused him actual pain to wipe out that joyous eagerness, watch her turn on suddenly laggard feet to the lonesome way back to town. And then after several solitary walks like that first one, she acquired a companion. Two straight young figures came striding up the side road.

"Mr. Fenton," June Rose called to him, "I've brought an example of higher intelligence to test out. He's panting, but he claims he's not. Mr. Parke, principal of the school—Mr. Fenton, my Uncle Charley's right-hand man!" she introduced them. "Not a peep out of Uncle Charley yet? Oh my! I tell myself every time I shall not expect anything but disappointment, but"—her lips curved in a sorry smile—"I always do. You know, Uncle Charley was the heroic figure of my childhood. I saw him just once, but he came bearing gifts. You know what magic small things are to a child! He had a wonderful soft pink salmon on a rubber string that he let me find in his pocket. There were chocolate cigars and pipes, big sticks of striped candy, and oranges. Oranges! They weren't such a common fruit then. And a bee-yut-iful necklace of bright-red beads!"

June Rose shut her eyes very tightly, then flicked her lashes very fast as if she were shooing away the tears. She looked into the keen gray eyes of the sturdy, brown, broad-shouldered young man, and into the tired, tear-washed eyes of the old, and smiled apologetically for arousing their sympathy.

"You see," she said, "I could but worship him!" She paused for a moment and then went on. "And this last

year when mother got afraid her lungs were affected—you know—we decided to change climate. She had me apply for a place in the school here at Desert Bridge where Uncle Charley's home is, I was elected all right, but things don't always come out as we plan, do they?"

Her eyes glimmered with tears under her gallant smile and she bit her lip to steady it before she continued. "After she—died—I had to come by myself. She wanted me to. She died happier knowing I'd not be quite alone in the world. I've written to Uncle Charley since I got here, sent several letters to towns I thought he might visit. We'll see one of these days, I suppose, when he makes his reappearance, how good an excuse he had for not writing!"

The young couple started away as if by mutual consent. June Rose called over her shoulder in a little way she had, "I love to come out anyhow, I always feel nearer Uncle Charley out here!"

As they passed the field of alfalfa, Chass saw them stop and talk together, looking over into the field. Of course, it did not show! But the little old man felt the cold sweat of apprehension.

Nelson Parke was saying, "Best little farm around here, isn't it? This Fenton your uncle's hired man? He's some farmer all right. Look at the fence corners, the whole twenty acres for that matter. Neat as an old maid's dresser!"

After some time June Rose's letters all came back—"Uncalled for." "Unable to locate party."

When May came and summery weather, school closed. June Rose went to the coast to attend summer school, leaving word with Chass Fenton to drop her a card at once if he should so much as hear from her Uncle Charley. Of course he'd be home when next she came out that road! Harvest wages attracted the good muscle of Nelson Parke.

But excepting letters in the large careful writing of adoring small pupils, there was no word from the place—the only place June Rose called home—through the months of vacation.

Returning in August she thought to inquire at the post office if her uncle's address had been left there for forwarding mail. It had not.

"Is Uncle Charley back yet, do you know?"

The postmaster shook his head. "Haven't seen anything of him," he replied. "Making quite a stay, I guess."

Again this year every one noticed how interested the young principal was in the first graders. He certainly watched their development! Not only that, but he gave their teacher so much outside help. Every Friday afternoon, rain or shine, those two could be seen walking out the paved road toward the Highfield place. Crazy to be together, that's what. Pretending with glowing cheeks that they liked the rain. The idea! Well, the people round there knew human nature better than that.

"Wait till they're married," one cynical lady admonished an interested group behind her lace curtains. "Then we'll see how much walking in the rain they do! I bet they won't even come to church if it rains! The time'll come likely when they won't even come if it just looks like rain!"

It was admittedly more than a love of the cool rain on their faces, though it rained so seldom, that lured the young things out. If there was love for each other in their hearts, however, no word of it had been spoken. A look of tenderness now and then surprised and captured by an unexpected glance, and stored up to dream about. Willing feet, wistful hands, little ways! Little ways of love there were, even if the walks were for exercise and information.

Sometimes June Rose stole into that poor man-kitchen, and blossoming in pink gingham, became a rose indeed. Humming happily she'd stir and beat,

and peel and bake and fry, while a lock of bright hair curled on her white forehead and her cheeks bloomed. Nelson, having a care for the faithful little old hired man, took to overalls and did heavy lifting, helping so much that June called him the hired man of the hired man. Chass wanted to pay him, but how could he? Only out of his own modest wages. Nelson put the matter off laughingly, "Wait till the boss comes back. I'll keep my time and take pay if he offers it."

"By George, Chass," exclaimed Nelson one Friday evening, "you know this farming has got me! I'd like to have a place like this for my own."

Chass smiled a little. He had his own funny old reasons for smiling.

"No, honest, now, Chass, I mean it. I've been figuring rather dubiously on my future. Take teaching. I like it. I mean it to be my job. But have you ever considered, Chass, the pitiful plight of the old teacher? Folks watch his hair thin, his wrinkles come, and begin to whisper of new blood, modern ways. Let the old fogy go! And out he goes. And to what? Seldom does a teacher save any respectable sum. How can he when he has to go to school most of the summers and has no income a fourth of the year?

"Now Nelson Parke is going to prepare for that sad but inevitable time. I shall save for a first payment on a small farm. I'll live on it so long as I have a school within a reasonable distance. With a man like you on it I'd get along all O. K. Yes, sir! That is, if you——"

Then as he happened to glance toward the house he caught the inviting flutter of a pink apron. "Supper's ready, Chass! And so am I! Shake a leg, Chass!"

June Rose handed out the empty pail. "Will you get me a bucket of fresh water, Nels?" And when he had gone June turned to Chass. "I haven't told Nels but I"—she paused and swallowed —"I'm afraid something has happened to Uncle Charley! When I deposited my warrant the other day, I spoke to the banker. I told him about the case. He said Uncle Charley never drew out any money when he left and hasn't cashed a check since he's been gone. Usually Uncle Charley doesn't have much ahead, he said, but I gathered that all you have put in from the sale of the crops is untouched. Doesn't that seem queer to you?"

Old Chass was very quiet as they washed for supper, taking turns at the tin pan on the bench, but guided by the ray of light vouchsafed him while Nels had made his little confidence, his mind leaped eagerly at a solving of the problem.

"Nels," he suggested as he laid a lump of butter inside a hot biscuit and waited for it to melt, "why don't you and Miss June here run this place if you want to farm? I'd like to see you two on it. I could find me a job somewheres else."

It was one of those embarrassing moments. Both of the young people were crimson with the effort to say just the right thing, or something, or anything! It was June who turned the matter laughingly aside. "But, Mr. Chass Fenton, if you please, I never said I wanted to farm!"

Then she added pleasantly, "Not that I do not dream of a fairy acre somewhere to which I can retire and live in simple dignity some time on the interest of the fortune I shall have accumulated! I've heard it said that most professional people plan to run a chicken ranch. I suppose it would not be much of a change for me. Just from one little brood to another!" Her eyes, half defiant, pleaded with the two men prettily over the edge of her glass.

Before the homeward walk, Nels left June to finish tidying up, and followed Chass about the chores. "Say, Chass, what kind of a spiel was that you were

giving us at supper? June and I are just friends. I'm poor. Paid my way through college, got my master's degree, but a fellow ought to have more ahead than I have before he goes to thinking of a girl—too hard! How could I buy this farm, even on a shoe string? How could I even rent it? That is, until Charley Highfield comes back?"

Old Chass whistled through his teeth as a sibilant aid to thought. "Of course, I 'sposed things was all fixed up between you two. Guess a little teasing won't hurt you, though. Miss June, you know, as her uncle's natural heir, could feel right at home here. Now me, I ain't got any rights. I can't lease or sell, but if you was this young lady's husband as I presumed you was headin' for, I'd feel obliged to you folks to take charge. But of course if you're not courtin' her, I'm sorry I spoke."

Nels was glad of the dusk. "I—I suppose I have been doing that very thing. I—I—it isn't lack of—of feeling that holds me back. She's the flower of womanhood as far as I'm concerned. She needs a home and some one to look out for her. If that uncle of hers would—— Chass, do you honestly think Charley Highfield'll ever turn up?"

Chass shrunk within himself as the cool fall air stirred about him. He sighed and whistled gently through his teeth.

Nels thrust his brown hand through strong coarse hair, black as a crow's wing. "I don't want you to tell June so, but this long, quiet visit is beginning to look a bit queer to me. It's too darned quiet! While I was at the express office getting some books I'd ordered, I asked the station agent—I thought it was an inspiration—what town in Nebraska Highfield bought his ticket for. And he declared, and so did the fellow who takes the other trick, that they never sold him a ticket last fall!"

Old Chass walked the floor that night from one end of the kitchen to the other, and when he finally went to bed he groaned and sighed in his sleep.

It was a fall that will never be forgotten. Not a fall, but a summer that would not go. Autumn colors. The woodbine hanging its scarlet drapery from the eaves, the poplars turning to gold, the hills only a few miles away standing like royal sentinels clothed in purple Autumn fragrance. The winey smell of grapes in the morning, the pungency of burning leaf heaps in the yards, the luscious breath of rosy apples, the wholesome sweetness of late loads of hay! November putting on the soft airs of September! Even December, until the twelfth of the month, when without warning, the thermometer dropped below zero.

Trees whose sap, cuddled in the warmth, had been encouraged to run, now froze to death. Trees, hardy in themselves, lost their crops. The alfalfa on many farms was killed. The unprecedented freezing of the alfalfa has to do with this story. Never in the memory of any old-timer had the hay been killed out. But if it had not happened this one time, there would have been no tale to tell. That mystery cleared up another mystery, but such an occurrence could have taken place only in an irrigated country. It was a miracle likely enough.

The field that had stretched so smooth and green from the little Highfield house made a spotted appearance in the spring. It would have to be resowed. Chass sighed for more reasons than one. Evenings Nelson Parke rode a wheel out after school. Saturdays he worked all day. The roots were tangled together into a thick turf. He insisted on plowing, though the weak old hand of Chass tried to dissuade him. When all the old growth

had been buried in the soil to rot richly there, the field was harrowed, rolled, smoothed down till it was as velvet looking as a maiden's cheek.

On a Saturday in March they flooded the field, soaking it up ready for the seed. It was not a nice job. Cold and wet and muddy, the two men watched the water. Now and then they waded out to smooth down some irregularity. On one of these little excursions it was that Nelson noticed right at his feet a slow sinking of the land under the weight of the water. The sunken place became a sharply defined rectangle. Peculiar!

His mouth quirked in a half smile over the strangeness of it, and then, just as he turned to go about his work again, his glance was caught and held by a froth on the face of the still water. Bubbles came softly to the surface and broke gently, leaving a white scum where they had been. Nelson watched and suddenly realized, startled, after a few moments of idle scrutiny, that the whitish residue left by the bubbles formed a design. A man! It was the shape of a man! A tall, thin man lay at rest there, arms folded on his bosom. Only for an instant was he revealed there—a figure drawn with Heaven's chalk on the dark surface of the water—then the resemblance grew vague and was lost. Nelson, awed, looked up to meet the wide, terror-filled eyes of old Chass.

"It was a man!" said Nels in a low, wondering tone. "I—I——"

And then he asked, he knew not why, "How tall was Charley Highfield?"

Old Chass did not answer. He cowered there and wrung his withered hands and sobbed aloud. Tears came in a grateful gush over the broken barriers of his fear-frozen soul.

"I didn't mean to!" he wept finally, "I didn't mean to!"

Nelson stared at Chass, aghast, unbelieving. "You certainly don't mean you killed Charley Highfield? Why, you——"

"I didn't mean to, I say. I didn't mean to!"

"And you knew where he was all the time!"

"I wanted to tell you, but I couldn't. Nels. That's why I wanted you to fix it so's the farm would be Miss June's. I—I couldn't just go off and leave it and I couldn't get rid of it. I banked what profits they was——"

"In a dead man's name!"

"What else could I do when I'd got myself into such a mess? I've suffered hell for it, Nels. I've suffered hell for it!" The old man wiped his ghastly face of its sweat and tears.

"If you didn't want the farm how did you happen to kill him? What motive had you? A quarrel?" Nels asked.

"I told you I didn't mean to! I saw something brown in the cornfield and I thought it was a pheasant and I shot quick, just like he told me to. The season wasn't open yet, but if us farmers waited till then, the city dudes'd rush out and get all the birds right off our own places, that we've fed and sheltered. That's how we figured then. But we hadn't killed any, hardly. He said I waited so long to pull the trigger that the bird wasn't even near enough to hear the shot when I finally fired.

"That—that morning some birds was in the cornfield and he gave me the gun and told me to watch, and as soon as he drove one out, to shoot—shoot as soon as I saw the flutter of a wing. It wasn't hardly light yet. I done what he said. Of course, I never knew why he come out of the corn himself. He never spoke again. I buried him best I could in his good suit and a Bible in his hands crossed like you saw. You saw him raise up to tell on me!"

"Oh, there's a natural explanation of that apparition on the water, Chass. Just chemistry. I'll explain it to you some time. But what I can't understand

is why you didn't go for help? Why did you try to keep it secret?"

The old hands twisted piteously. "It seemed best to me then. Afterwards I —well, it seemed like nothing they could've done to me would've been any worse'n what I been through. But that morning it seemed like I couldn't stand any more, gettin' up before folks and tryin' to make them sharp lawyers believe it was an accident after I'd had to admit I'd been breakin' one law already. It wouldn't brought Charley back, and he'd hated it as much as I would to have everybody know we was shootin' pheasants.

"It's easy enough to say what you'd have done! Seemed like I couldn't do no different. I didn't have no friends nor money." He hesitated, trembling before Nelson's earnest gaze. "I s'pose now I got to—I s'pose you want me to —I s'pose I got to——"

Nels nodded, understanding. "Yes, Chass, you must. We must. Everything regular."

Out of respect for the solemnity of their errand the two men washed and made themselves neat. Chass put on the suit wrinkled from long hanging on a nail in the attic. As they started toward the gate, they caught the flutter of femininity. June Rose was coming up the side road. Pausing on tiptoe she peered at them over the gate that was already green with vines. Something significant in their postures, their pallor, assailed her sensitiveness.

"Oh," she cried brightly, beginning to run, "have you heard from Uncle Charley?"

The men were silent. They glanced at each other and away. They could not meet her happy, eager face, either. Old Chass shook his head from side to side, and wrung his hands.

"Tell her," he urged hoarsely, "tell her!" He went and stood just outside the gate, and blew his nose, and waited, very miserably huddled within his clothes.

June's eyes grew big and frightened. Nelson took her hand, and holding it protectingly between both his own, felt her cease troubling and rest content beneath his touch. Then, as gently as he could, he told her of the strange reappearance of Uncle Charley that morning, and of the tragic folly of that other morning and night a year and a half before.

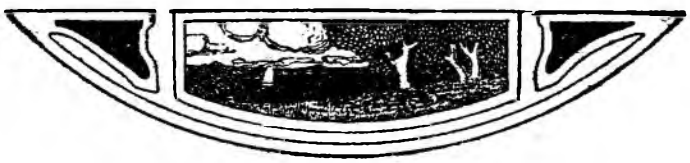
June held back her astonishment as best she could, listening without interruption except little sighs and moans of regret and pity. "Poor Uncle Charley," she whispered. Catching sight of the stooped, small figure at the gate, she added, "And poor Chass! Oh, Nels, I'm more sorry for Chass! Uncle Charley didn't suffer, but Chass must have suffered awfully!" Her sweet face quivered. "And me—I have no uncle, or—or any relative on earth. No home anywhere!"

"This farm will be yours, June. Won't this be a home?"

"But I can't farm. I——"

She looked off toward the hills so that he might not see her tears.

She felt his strong hands shake. "I know a man," he began, and then cleared his throat. "I know a man you can get to farm it. Be related to you by marriage," he said, and watched for her shining head to lift; watched, scarcely breathing.



METROPOLITAN SENSATIONS

THE DISBROW MYSTERY

By Edward H. Smith
Author of "A Brace of Bankers," etc.

ON the morning of June 14th, in the year 1902, the bodies of a pretty girl and a stalwart young man were taken from the waters of Tiana Bay, on the distant south shore of Long Island not far from the now-fashionable Southamptons. The summer sea had made of them horrible, inflated caricatures of humanity, yet they were immediately recognized as having been Sarah Lawrence and Clarence T. Foster, residents of the little town of Good Ground, whence they had been missing for five days.

Ordinarily there could have been nothing strange or touched with the least element of mystery about such a happening, for scores are taken every summer by the waters which surround the city of New York and its tributary suburbs. But these two had lost their lives in a comparatively shallow part of Tiana—sometimes called Shinnecock—Bay, and Foster had been known as the most expert boatman of the section, thoroughly versed in all the reefs and currents of the bay, and an exceptionally strong swimmer. Worse still, a wealthy young man and gay blade who was known to have been the last person to see the couple alive was missing and could not be found anywhere.

Out of these rather vague elements arose one of the most celebrated criminal puzzles of this century's first lustrum—the Disbrow case.

The girl who had died, by drowning or some unexplained violence, was the seventeen-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John L. Lawrence, summer residents of Good Ground, whose permanent home was in Riverhead. The father was a prosperous salaried employee of the Guarantee Trust Co., and the mother was related to a family of actors then widely known. Their eldest daughter, Sarah, was a pretty, brown-haired, indulged child who was affectionately called "Dimple," "Dimpie," and "Dimp" by her mother, and

so known up and down the beach about the little summer colony.

Foster, who had died with her, was a boatman of the vicinity, twenty-two years old, married, rather shiftless, and inclined to live along the line of least resistance; but good looking, athletic, born to the water, and highly popular.

The third member of the triangle, and the most interesting, was Louis A. Disbrow, whose name must be familiar enough. He was twenty-five at the time. His father was Thomas A. Disbrow of Richmond Hill, Long Island, a retired and wealthy fertilizer manufacturer, who lived in a charming and rather pretentious house at Richmond Hill with his wife and three sons. Not only was Disbrow a rich man, but his wife was the daughter of one of the Washington Heights capitalists of the day, Hosea Ballou Perkins, who had made a fortune in the old Bowery, retired in late middle life, begun the study of languages, and become a public speaker. He was active in Tammany Hall and liked to be called "the silver-tongued orator of Washington Heights"—an innocent vanity.

Young Louis Disbrow had been a wild youth and caused his father many wounds and worries. At twenty, when the family was making plans to send him to Yale, he had run away and married the fifteen-year-old daughter of William Everitt, who kept the livery stable at Jamaica and later became chief clerk of the building department in that settlement. The elder Disbrow had been bitterly disappointed at his son's marriage with Jessie Everitt, and had never quite forgiven the young man, though two years were enough to bring the romance to earth. The seventeen-year-old wife had gone back to her parents and young Disbrow to his father's house, where, apparently, he was not too joyfully received.

For the next three years he had alternately worked for his brothers, who were trying to manufacture electric automobiles at Richmond Hill, for his father as a clerk, and sometimes at hotel clerking. He was a good amateur bicycle racer, that having been the day of wheelmen, and he excelled at other sports, though he was rather a slender youth, without the bulk and power for heavier athletics.

Some of the closer peccadilloes of the young man came to airing in the course of the investigation and newspaper hullaballoo that rose in the wake of the deaths in Tiana Bay. He was given to drink and he was a persistent gallant, or so the gossips and the press would have it, albeit one finds some difficulty in taking seriously such charges leveled at a man of his unripe years.

It was clear that young Disbrow had been paying too constant and ardent attention to Dimple Lawrence. He had kept her out late at night several times. Supposedly he had taught her to drink. For these and other suspected offenses the young man had been told to desist from his wooing, and he had written Mrs. Lawrence a passionate and inchoate letter, protesting the purity of his love for Dimple and the uprightness of his conduct.

As it turned out, the young lady, in spite of her youth, seems to have had a will and some weaknesses of her own. For one thing, she had disappeared from home only three weeks before her death and later been found in the home of an aunt on Manhattan. Disbrow was charged with having been with her.

These, then, were the characters of the drama.

As soon the bodies had been found the New York newspapers, having been informed by their shore correspondents that there must be something sinister afoot, sent their reporters flocking down to Good Ground, where they quickly developed this story:

On the afternoon of June 9th Disbrow, who had been living for some weeks in the Turnell House at Good Ground, had called on Mrs. Lawrence, at another near-by hotel where she was living, and asked if he might take Dimple driving that night. The mother had consented, with the understanding that Mr. Pearsall and his daughter were to go along as chaperons. Disbrow had called for the girl and driven off with her in a single-seated buggy. On the road the couple had picked up young Foster. Several hours earlier Foster had sent word to Steward Rogers at the Hampton Pines Club, a few miles away, saying that "the three of us will be over for supper." Dinner was a word then not much used outside the city. The Pearsalls, to be sure, were not taken along.

Disbrow, Foster, and Dimple arrived at the club at eight o'clock and had dinner together in great good spirits. The club steward first said they had not had drinks there, which was obviously a statement made to shield the club from a charge of license-law violation. Later he said they had drunk from a flask, and finally he told that Foster had gone down to the sideboard for cigars and that later a flask of whisky was found missing from the buffet. In short, the three had dinner and drink at the club and spent a happy and unclouded evening. They left the table a little after eleven o'clock, got into the buggy, and drove away.

The Hampton Pines Club lies about four miles—thirty to forty minutes' easy driving distance—from the Turnell House and the near-by Ocean View Hotel. The former was Disbrow's lodging and the latter that of Dimple and her mother. Yet it was not until one forty-five o'clock the next morning that the recreant trio made their appearance. Apparently they had stopped for two hours at some other place where liquor could be had. At any rate, when Mrs. Lawrence, who had been anxiously waiting up for her daughter, stepped into the road with a lantern and called, "Dimple, Dimple!" to the buggy with its three occupants, the driver lashed the horse and drove by her so furiously that she had to jump for her life. The mother did not follow, but went worriedly to bed.

About half an hour later, or at two fifteen in the morning, Miss Anna K. Pearsall, the girl whom Disbrow was to have taken along as a chaperon, was awakened at the Turnell House by loud talking in the rooms across the hall, occupied by Disbrow. She swore afterward that she recognized the voices of Foster, Disbrow, and Dimple Lawrence. The men were quarreling about the girl, and Disbrow was heard to say that he wouldn't stand for something or other concerning Dimple. Foster went out but returned, and then all three left the hotel and were heard for a minute or two on the beach, Dimple asking whether, if they got a boat, Disbrow would come along. The answer was "yes," and so the trio drifted off into the night.

Edward Turnell, owner of the beach hotel bearing his name, related that he had heard none of this, though he had been awake until three o'clock in the morning, sitting in the kitchen at the rear of the hotel with a shotgun, waiting to kill an animal that had been raiding his chicken coops. At three o'clock he had found the horse and buggy hitched to the stable, and the next day he discovered that some one had slipped into one of the vacant rooms of the hotel in the course of the night and used it, leaving beer bottles and a state of confusion. Turnell immediately suspected Disbrow, for that young man had the reputation of being at the bottom of all sorts of pranks and deviltries. He went at once to Disbrow's rooms to upbraid him.

Turnell found Disbrow dressing, and

later discovered that the young man had come in not more than an hour earlier, between seven and seven thirty o'clock.

"What kind of a place do you think I'm running?" demanded the host, at the same time asking Disbrow to leave.

The young man protested that he had done nothing wrong, that it was not he who had disturbed the vacant room, that he had not brought Dimple into the hotel. Finally, being forced, he admitted that she had been in the room for half an hour or more with Foster, and that he had reproved Foster for such conduct. Nevertheless, he was ordered to leave the hotel, and a few hours later he had packed his bags and gone.

It is breaking the chronology of the case to interject the information here, but the reader will be more clearly informed if he notes that Disbrow's clothing was not wet when he was seen to enter the hotel, that some clothing which he left behind was not wet, nor damp, nor so out of crease that it might have been wet and then dried. Even the soles of his shoes were not moist. This has an important later bearing.

As the day wore on, Mrs. Lawrence began to hunt for her girl. She wasn't frenzied at first, for the young lady had vanished before. But when the second day rolled around without word from either the girl or the missing Foster, Mrs. Lawrence began to say that the child must be dead. Late that afternoon she received a telegram which had been filed at Eastport, saying:

> Your daughter and Foster are together and I am going to find her if she is alive.
>
> Louis Disbrow.

That was the last heard directly from the youth. The same day he stopped at Jamaica to visit his wife, whom he told that he was going away and never coming back, but this was not discovered until later.

At half past five on the morning of June 14th a life saver attached to the near-by station saw a body floating in Tiana Bay and put out in a boat. He was shocked to recognize Clarence Foster. The body was towed ashore and Coroner John Nugent summoned from Riverhead. Doctor Nugent—he was a physician—arrived at nine o'clock, inspected the body, and gave permission to have it buried, which was done the same afternoon, in the little cemetery of Good Ground, in the shadow of the village hall.

Doctor Nugent had hardly returned to Riverhead when Willis Wells, the Good Ground liveryman from whom the horse and buggy had been rented by Foster and Disbrow, saw another body floating off shore and brought in the remains of Dimple Lawrence. Coroner Nugent returned, viewed the body in turn, said that death had undoubtedly been due to drowning, and gave permission for burial, which was accomplished the following day at Riverhead.

But now the uncertainty began. Two large New York dailies had dispatched to the scene avid young reporters who were, according to the fashion of that day, murder sleuths. It was the tradition of the time, for reporters had been earning fame and better salaries by hunting out the facts in the Buchanan, Molineux, Guldensuppe, Carlisle Harris, and other New York murder cases, and at that very moment newspaper lads were leading the hunt for Harry Tracy in the Northwest.

The reporters were not at all satisfied with Coroner Nugent's examinations and conclusions. They had noted that there was a cut or scratch over Foster's right eye, that there had been smears of red on his face, and that he seemed to have been bleeding from the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. Dimple Lawrence, too, had some similar traces upon her face, and her neck had

looked as though it might have been bruised by choking fingers. The newspapers launched their attack the next morning, which was a Sunday, with articles covering half a page and pictures in numbers.

Their charges were not direct, but the inferences were plain and their demand forthright. Disbrow had been the last person to see Dimple and Foster alive. He had been heard quarreling with Foster as late as two thirty on the fatal morning. He had agreed to go into the boat with them. The idea that Foster would have taken out an unseaworthy boat or been drowned in less than seven feet of water in his home bay was preposterous. Why had Disbrow fled? Where was he? Let him come forward and explain.

It was now disclosed that on the morning of June 10th, after the disappearance of Dimple and Foster, a small dinghy, or two-oared boat, of the kind often carried in the wake of a motor cruiser, was missing from its moorings in front of the Turnell House. The boy who had been in the habit of using it every morning had found it some hours later on the other shore of the bay, perhaps a mile distant. It had evidently been used and let drift, to be cast up on the far shore, wind and tide having been in that direction.

The obvious thing to conclude was that Foster and Dimple had embarked in this frail little craft and fallen out. The newspaper gentlemen and some others, notably the relatives of Foster, would have none of this. They made tests to show that two persons could not ride in the little boat without sinking it, for it had a bad leak near the gunwales and would have shipped water rapidly if heavily laden.

It was, therefore, obvious that a larger and more seaworthy boat, with two sets of oars, had been used to the excursion on the bay in the dark of that early summer morning. Fred Squire, owner of the larger boat, which also had been tied up not far from the Turnell House, appeared and said his boat apparently had been moved in the night. According to his recollection, it was a full hundred yards from the spot where he had drawn it up on the sand.

The newspapers gloated over this new bit of information, for it made a clear theory for them. Disbrow had set out with Dimple and Foster in the larger boat. Once out on the water, he had struck Foster down with an oar, causing a skull fracture, which accounted for the bleeding from all the head orifices. He had also choked Dimple and thrown her into the bay. Then he had brought the big boat back, drawn it up on the sand, and set the little boat afloat as a blind. That was why he had fled.

There were two strains of weakness in all this, one of which the press recognized. The facts that Clarence Foster was, though only twenty-two, a very heavy drinker and that whisky and beer had manifestly figured in all the proceedings of the night before his death were clearly enough set forth, but the reporters seemed to think that, even drunk, Foster would have been above such an accident. Indeed, at the subsequent trial some experts testified that if the man had been drunk a fall into the water would have revived and sobered him. This is the kind of expertizing that makes men of experience smile. Obviously, hundreds of men have fallen into the water when drunk and been drowned, some of them excellent swimmers. One has but to look up the records or consult a good memory. Everything depends, of course, on the stage of drunkenness—and there never was any testimony on this point as regards Foster.

The second weakness was the matter of motive. Granting that Foster and

Disbrow had quarreled over Dimple and that Disbrow might have struck Foster with an oar, why should he have choked Dimple, with whom he was obviously and admittedly infatuated? Again, Disbrow had broken his shoulder blade in a bicycle accident some time earlier, and had taken his arm out of the cast only two weeks before going to Good Ground, so that he was not yet wholly mended. He was an indifferent swimmer. He was not an expert on the water. He was much smaller and weaker than Foster. Would he have chosen a boat on a bay as a place for attacking his rival? Barring the possibility of a sudden access of drunken fury, this whole scheme of the supposed crime was untenable.

Suddenly, however, the reporters came upon dramatic support for their hypothesis. Disbrow, when he was told to leave the Turnell House, evidently had started westward in a more or less rambling and undecided fashion. The second night found him in Eastport at a rooming house, where he shared a bed with one William Walton, a house painter. He had bought Walton a number of drinks in the course of the evening and promised to buy him a ticket to Quogue, where the painter expected to find work. The next morning, Disbrow had gone to the Long Island Railroad station with Walton, filed the telegram to Mrs. Lawrence, bought Walton his ticket, and so said good-by.

The reporters, now hunting furiously for Disbrow, soon found Walton, who did a tale unfold. In the night at the rooming house, Walton had been wakened when Disbrow, who had been sleeping on the inside of the bed, crawled over him, went to the window, took out his pipe, and began to smoke nervously. Walton had asked what was the matter, and Disbrow had said he could not sleep. They fell to talking and Disbrow grew confidential. This was before the bodies had been found or any alarm been given.

Disbrow had said, according to Walton, that he was heartbroken, that he did not know what to do, for Foster had stolen his girl. She had said she loved Foster. They had fought on the beach near the Turnell House, but Foster had been too much for him. He had thrown Disbrow upon the sand and choked him.

This, said the newspaper men, made the motive clear and convincing—jealousy and rage over being beaten.

The hunt for Disbrow grew hot. Detectives and reporters fairly swarmed over Long Island. They quizzed the youth's father, who pretended to know nothing. They discovered, after a time, that the young man had dropped in on his parted wife and that he had last been noted at the Long Island Railroad station at Richmond Hill on the morning of June 14th, just as the bodies were being recovered. But now no trace could be found. The theory soon sprang into some minds that Disbrow had fled on a steamer, and to this notion the young man's father added material by saying his son had spoken of going abroad. Outgoing steamers were watched and foreign ports notified to be on the lookout for the supposed fugitive.

In answer to all the excitement, District Attorney Livingston Smith of Suffolk County suddenly decided to displace the coroner and take charge of the case. He arrived in Good Ground on the morning of the 18th and immediately ordered the body of Foster to be disinterred. Doctor J. H. Benjamin of Riverhead performed the autopsy and examined the wounds and the bleeding, or supposed bleeding. He found a moderately large quantity of water in the lungs and gave it as his opinion that death had been due to drowning.

Public curiosity had, however, been

so stirred that no one was satisfied with the doctor's decision, and so the cry for Disbrow continued. Mr. Smith determined to go to court with such witnesses as presented themselves and ask for a warrant. While he was preparing to take this action, gossip continued its morbid work. It transpired that Disbrow, whatever his connection with the deaths of the couple, had liberally besprinkled the merchants, liverymen, and hotel keepers near Good Ground with bad checks, and there seemed a chance that a criminal charge would be brought on this score.

The discovery that the thoughtless and bibulous young man had not been scrupulously honest added to the general mistrust, and caused the demand for his production to swell even more. At this juncture Attorney Rowland Miles, who bore the reputation of the shrewdest criminal lawyer in Suffolk County, appeared on the scene, paid all the checks that had been issued by young Disbrow, and announced that he had taken this course to avoid any confusion of the issues. If Louis Disbrow were to be charged with murder he would appear and answer, but he wanted to be sure that there would not be an alternative charge of forgery or larceny. Asked where the missing youth was, Mr. Miles answered that he didn't know himself, exactly, but that Disbrow would appear when wanted. He also gave this assurance to District Attorney Smith.

Still Disbrow did not show his face, and on June 27th Mr. Smith procured a warrant charging homicide from Judge Edward H. Foster, who was not, however, a relative of the dead man. The result was that Attorney Miles notified the district attorney and Sheriff Wells that he would surrender Disbrow on the morning of July 1st. Instead, the attorney stole a march on the hungry reporters and the morbid crowds by arriving at the jail in Riverhead unexpectedly on the afternoon of June 30th and placing Disbrow in jail.

Those who like pictures from the rememberable past will be interested in some descriptives which appeared in the *World* the day after the surrender, a reporter for that newspaper having somehow managed to be present when Disbrow got off the Long Island train in charge of Miles and James Lynch, the family attorney.

The young man wore a black sack suit with wide shoulders. His trousers were tight and of steel-gray cloth with a distinct diagonal stripe. His shoes were of patent leather and buttoned. He wore a flat, broad-brimmed, black sailor hat. Also, he had a black string tie fastened with a silver clasp. The reporter could not help commenting that Disbrow smoked cigarettes, nor could he resist the probably fanciful touch that Disbrow had been very worried until the sheriff had permitted him to have the "coffin nails" in his cell.

On July 2nd, Disbrow was called before Judge Foster for a preliminary hearing. The story, as I have told it, was unfolded by District Attorney Smith. Miss Pearsall told of the quarrel and angry words early in the morning. Reporters and others told of the cut on Foster's forehead and the blood coming from his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Walton recounted the story of the fight on the beach as told to him by Disbrow himself. Several witnesses asserted that the little dinghy could not have been used to carry two persons out into the bay, and it was testified that the larger rowboat, or "sharpie," had been moved in the night.

On July 10th, after various delays and adjournments, Louis Disbrow was held for the grand jury and sent back to jail. While he was waiting there for his trial several interesting things, not all unpleasant, happened to him. On July 28th his wife, taking advan-

tage of the situation, applied for and procured an annulment of her marriage on the ground that she had not been of lawful age when the wedding was performed. A little later old Hosea B. Perkins died and left each of his grandsons fifty thousand dollars, Louis Disbrow as well as his brothers. Finally, on September 24th, an indictment for murder was handed up by the grand jurors, and on the 12th of January in the following year Disbrow was called before Justice Maddox in the supreme court to answer for his life.

Very little that was new was presented at the trial. A few physicians testified for the State that they did not believe the cuts and scratches on Foster's face could have been inflicted after death, and that drowning did not seem to them a satisfactory explanation. Miss Pearsall had gone to New Jersey and would not answer a subpœna, so that her story of the quarrel in the early morning had to be read by Justice Maddox from the minutes of the preliminary hearing. The testimony as to the moving of the sharpie was introduced and dwelt upon at length. Walton repeated his story of Disbrow's relations.

On the other hand, all the other testimony was markedly in favor of the young defendant. The owner of the little dinghy said that the leaks in it could not have been seen at night and that Foster might well enough, especially if drunk, have put out in it and not discovered its bad condition until beyond his depth. The owner of the sharpie said he could not be too certain his boat had been moved. He thought it had been, but any one might have done it. The State had contended that the oarlocks of the little dinghy had been tied under the seat and not untied. Hence the boat was set adrift and not used. But the boy who habitually used the little boat swore that the oarlocks were tied on so long a string that they could have been used without untying, for he had often done the trick himself. The coroner swore that he considered death in both cases due to drowning. So did Doctor Benjamin and some others.

Attorney Miles told the jury that a hickory snag had been pulled up from the bay at the point where the drownings had probably happened, and that the bottom was full of sharp stones and shells. His point was that Dimple had probably tried to change places in the little boat and fallen out. Foster had then drunkenly tried to dive after her and had perhaps hit the gunwale of the boat, a snag, or a stone. Either that or he had been too far gone with liquor and drowned, his cuts and scratches being due to subsequent dragging about on the bottom.

On the third day of the trial the apex of excitement was reached, for the rumor had got about that Louis Disbrow was to take the stand and clear up the mystery. The courtroom was, consequently, filled to the doors, and crowds waited outside. But all were disappointed. When Attorney Miles had introduced his last witness in rebuttal he calmly announced, "The defense rests." And so the arguments began. The case went to the jury at four five o'clock on the afternoon of January 16th. Forty minutes later, after one ballot, Disbrow was acquitted.

The freed man's father immediately invited many of the witnesses and some of the jurors across the street to the little hotel where he had been living throughout the trial, and there a festive supper was served. While the others were eating, Louis Disbrow and his brother walked up the street a few hundred yards and visited the grave of Dimple Lawrence, whose life and death had been the spring of all this mystery, peril, and sorrow.

After the trial the Disbrows con-

tinued their policy of complete silence. Not a word of explanation was ever offered by the young man, his parents, or their attorneys. And from this suggestive reticence rose the cloud of mystery that veiled and veils the whole affair. The newspapers and the public wanted to know why, if Disbrow had nothing to hide, he had never cleared the puzzle, never been permitted to say a word. Had his conscience been clear, it was contended, he would not have fled, and his parents would not have thought it necessary to hide him with Attorney Lynch—which seems to have been what was done.

The feeling is pretty well summed up in this comment from the New York *World* of January 17, 1903:

> The verdict was in no sense a surprise. The case against Disbrow has been weak. The defense has not been strong. It has been a case that seemed methodical purely. The prisoner earned his liberty by virtue of that provision of the law which gives the benefit of a reasonable doubt to the accused.

Louis Disbrow was soon riding in bicycle races on Long Island and proceeding with his life where he had left off to face a jury on the most grave of charges. He was an indifferent success on the wheel, but a few years later he changed over and took up automobile racing. In this field his daring spirit and love of danger won him great renown, many of the records of a few years gone by having been established and held by him. In time he was remembered only as the motor speed marvel, and the celebrated mystery of his youth forgotten by all but the retentive few.

CONVICT'S WEALTH USELESS

ONE of life's strange ironies was brought to light recently when attention was drawn to the case of Alphonse J. Stephani, a life convict in the State Hospital at Dannemora Prison, in New York State.

Stephani was convicted of murdering Clinton G. Reynolds in his Wall Street office, in 1891, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Reynolds was a lawyer who had been engaged to administer the estate of Stephani's father, a Philadelphia wine merchant, and the killing resulted from a quarrel over the disposition of the estate. In 1902, Stephani's mother died, and her son, then already eleven years in prison, inherited $100,134. This sum was increased automatically by the workings of compound interest until the convict's fortune is now reported as $184,182.

Stephani served his sentence in Sing Sing until 1903. He was then declared insane and was removed to Dannemora. As an insane convict, he has no right to the use of his money other than fifty dollars a month, nor does he know of the extent of the wealth that is accumulating to no purpose in his name. He is as one legally dead, and none of the money is used. It just accumulates under the supervision of a trust company. What will eventually become of the money is a matter for surmise. It is just another of those instances where wealth carries no blessings, but is rather an incumbrance.

WHERE HE AIMED

By Donald Van Riper

Author of "Cash Business," etc.

THERE are few lulls in the noisy life of the Avenue. It is a complex jumble of shops and tenements, lofts and flats, factories and homes. A man could live and have his being without once leaving that thoroughfare. The Avenue is, in a sense, a world sufficient unto itself. A strange sort of a world, and strangest of all in the rare and uncanny silences of the early morning hours.

"Bud" Rankin knew the Avenue, not only its glittering surface but the slimiest depths as well. Midway between those two levels was Bud. He had been a crook. He was now the night man at the Center Garage. He hoped to climb a great deal higher than that. It was a girl that had started him on this groping, upward course.

"Spike" Hallock had opposed this defection of one of his most promising gangsters. Bud's own brother had argued with him time and again about the foolishness of actually working for a living. However, Bud Rankin by that time had the image of the girl too firmly in his mind, and the thought of her too deeply fixed in his heart to permit even threats to deter him. He had definitely told them he was going straight. It had been hard enough to make that decision, and he was not long in discovering that the real process of going straight was even harder than he had ever imagined.

It had actually been a long uphill haul to gain this place as night man in the Center Garage. Night man in a second-rate garage, and yet he had fairly pleaded for the chance. A year before he would have laughed at the idea, but then he had not yet fallen for the girl.

The trouble was that he had always known Jean Westley. He had pretty well taken her for granted. They had even played together as children along the Avenue. Not until he noticed other men paying attention to her did he realize that he had always wanted

her for himself. The turning point for Bud Rankin had been reached when he noted that Spike Hallock was displaying more than a casual interest in Jean Westley.

He had resented that new interest of Spike's. Why, Hallock was not worthy of her most careless glance! It was then that, clear as daylight, he saw the truth. He was but a few shabby shades better than Hallock himself.

So here he was the night man in the Center Garage. His washing and cleaning were done, and now, perched high on the seat of a truck, he was dozing lightly.

He came wide awake with a start. There was not a sound. Over the Avenue there was an interval of calm. With his intimate knowledge of the street there was a hushed and brooding quality to the silence. He peered at his watch. Quarter past three. Even the late birds were asleep by now. It was a bit too early for the rumbling milk trucks to be abroad. It gave him a weird sensation whenever the pulse of the Avenue skipped a beat like that. Small wonder that he had wakened wide.

Then it happened. He heard shots, three swift reports crackling through the night. There followed the sound, the inevitable sound, of running feet. The racing steps drew nearer, almost reached the garage, and then Bud Rankin could hear the fleeing man outside as he sprinted through the alley just beyond the wall toward his back. It was a blind alley, but there were ways out for a man who knew them.

Bud Rankin did not move. He had no intention of moving until he heard the third note of the action outside. There was a fleeting repetition of that first silence before the shrill call of a police whistle came from down the street. Then came answering calls and the pounding of heavy-footed patrolmen running.

By the time Bud came out on the street there were windows opened wide all along the block. With varying degrees of caution and modesty the Avenue was looking forth to see what new tragedy had occurred.

He slid the big street door shut just as Officer Jimmy Gormer came puffing up.

"Hear anything?" panted Gormer. "See anything?"

Bud thought of his brother. That running man might have been Charley Rankin. He slowly shook his head. "I was sleeping, Jimmy. First thing I heard was some one running right past here and on up the street. Something woke me with a start."

"Shooting," said Gormer. He looked back up the block whence he had come. He faced about and called to a second bluecoat: "Up this way, Ed."

Bud smiled as he saw them march past the alley's mouth. He stared down the street in the opposite direction. There were other policemen clustered there as the nucleus of a fast-growing crowd. One of these uniformed men came rushing past in pursuit of Gormer as Bud started down the street.

This cop gave Bud a curious sidelong glance as he ran. Bud quickened his pace.

As he approached the group some of the people fell back. These regarded him strangely. Beyond he saw two patrolmen kneeling over a dark shape upon the walk.

Something in the look of these people, something in the shielding attitude of those two policemen sent him a hint of warning. He sprang forward and as he did so he realized the truth. It was his brother that was sprawled out there in that welter of crimson. Bud felt as if some one had smashed him hard in the pit of his stomach. It was his brother. Some one had gotten Charley Rankin.

Charley Rankin's hand was brushing in quick, fierce strokes across his forehead. His lips were compressed and white. Until Bud appeared his eyes had regarded the officers with a sullen, sick look. Now there was a gleam, a last brave show of the doomed man. The sweat-wet hand stopped pawing at the pain-racked head. It moved in a sideways motion. Bud Rankin kneeling there did not for a moment understand. He was too much stunned to think.

Then as Charley Rankin's shaking hand repeated that motion, one of the crouching officers spoke: "He's trying to tell us he wants to speak to you, Bud."

"Go ahead," whispered Bud.

The white lips shut even harder until the mouth was like an etched line across Charley Rankin's face.

Bud looked at the bluecoats. "It's something he wants to tell me alone."

The officers drew back a pace or so. Again that hand moved in that waving motion.

"A little farther," pleaded Bud. They stepped back again. There was no use doing otherwise. If they remained Charley Rankin would die with locked lips.

The lips moved with a tremendous, struggling effort. The sound that issued forth was scarce a breath against Bud's straining ears. He was close against his brother so that only he could hear that whispering, and only he could see the hard-wrought movement of the lips. He heard and saw the message, "Spike!" Then with an effort the other words came forth. "Get him or he gets you, Bud——"

That was all. Bud needed no doctor to tell him that Charley Rankin would never rally to fnish that message. He looked up at the officers again.

"What did he say?"

Bud heard the question. He heard too the clanging of an oncoming ambulance. Poor Charley. Like all the rest he had played the string too far.

"What did he say?"

Bud stared at the police sergeant. Impulse and reason clashed. Impulse told him to call Spike's name and send these men on the inexorable pursuit. That was the cry for vengeance. But his mind warned him in time. His brother had not wanted the police to know. Then, too, there was his own past. If he set the police on Spike it was as certain as the sunrise that Spike would tell enough to see that Bud Rankin went over the road. There were henchmen of Spike's who would come forward at a word from their chief and see that Bud Rankin went to stir.

Out of the whirlwind of his thoughts he wrenched an answer. "I couldn't make out what he said. His lips barely moved. He tried to tell me something, but I couldn't make it out."

Affairs moved now at the crazy pace of a nightmare. The ambulance had arrived. Bud saw a young doctor shoulder his way through the crowd. The police sergeant spoke again.

"Better tell us what you know," he advised. "Your own record's none too good. Better tell us what he said."

Fierce laughter forced its way past Bud's lips. Then the mockery of mirth died swiftly. He heard the young doctor's voice. "He's dead."

Bud heard and groaned. He turned away and brushed by the police. All he wanted now was to get away. He headed back toward the garage. No one followed, but he knew that their eyes were upon him.

His brother was dead, and, according to his brother's code, it was his place to exact vengeance. Then, too, there had been that whispered warning. There had been no mistaking Charley's meaning. From now on he must watch Spike Hallock. Live and let live? Kill or be killed!

Hours later he waited in front of

the garage. There was only one sure thing in all his trouble—the girl. Jean Westley. He would not dare even to hint at the truth to her. It would be enough if he could be with her. She would come walking by in a little while bound for work.

Always of late he had met her and strolled along home with her at night when she quit work. Once or twice recently he had waited long after he was relieved from duty and marched down the Avenue with the morning crowd of workers.

He waited, wondering whether she would expect him. He wondered, too, whether she would want to see him when all the Avenue was buzzing with the night's tragedy. He wondered what she would say or do when she spied him waiting there.

He might have known that she would have smiled. Not a gay, carefree smile but a studied, steady expression that said more than dozens of words could have done. She caught hold of his arm. For blocks they walked in silence. On his arm was the constant, assuring touch of her fingers.

Before he left her she spoke. "Tonight. You meet me here. I've something I want to tell you."

He said nothing. There was nothing he could think to say. He was still frozen with the shock of what had happened. Something she wanted to tell him? He knew by the swift, hushed manner of her that she wanted to talk about the shooting. He nodded and turned stumbling away.

That night she told him. Two days before, Charley Rankin had sought Jean out. He had told her just what sort of a man this Spike Hallock really was. "He warned me," said Jean; "told me Spike was no good. Told me that it wasn't just talk, all this about Spike being a bad actor. Of course I asked why he told me."

Bud nodded. He thought he saw now why Charley Rankin had been shot to death by Spike Hallock.

The girl looked up at Bud as they paused for a spurt of the Avenue's traffic. "He gave me a queer answer. Said that you were a good kid. Said that it wasn't right for no one to warn me about Spike. Said you wouldn't warn me. Wouldn't you? Why?"

Bud shook his head. She was such a little thing. He cursed his own stupidity in never having given her a hint of his past. What a fool he had been. He might have known that he would have to tell her some day.

Now she knew. At least she could make a fairly good guess. The man who had warned her about Spike Hallock had been shot to death. The dead man had told her that Bud's lips were sealed. She was no fool. She must know now that the two Rankins and Hallock were birds of a feather.

He shook himself angrily together at that. Not quite of the same stripe. He had been a crook, but he had not approached the killer stage. Strong-arm stuff was not to his liking.

He wheeled her suddenly aside and up into a quiet side street. Here in the shadow of a warehouse door he quickly told her the whispered, halting truth.

He came at last to a slow and bitter conclusion. "So you see, I've done things that I could be sent to prison for. I had been working for Hallock. So was Charley. This thing that—that—happened last night. Oh, don't you see how it worked out? Spike found out some way that Charley had talked to you, so he got him for it. It's a rotten piece of business. I didn't see it this morning, but I see it now. I haven't the right to even walk with you on the street. Only Jean, please believe me, I'm not a gunman. I never packed a gat on any job I ever worked on. I don't know any more about a gun than you do. Just

believe I'm not that kind and I'll never bother you again."

For answer she placed her arm within his again. "I'm not worrying about your past. And I'm not ashamed to walk with you. Only—only——"

She paused and across her face there crept a look of horror. "Oh, Bud, he'll kill you, too. He'll come with a gun, and you won't have a chance. Bud, you must do something."

He must do something! Long after he had left her and trudged back to work at the Center Garage the words came again and again to his mind. Do something? He had as much chance against Spike Hallock as a rabbit in a walled field against a man with a shotgun.

During the course of the day he had learned more about the killing. His brother had been shot from the front. Charley Rankin was quick with a gat, but the police had found his unexploded weapon beside him. What chance had a novice against that speed of fire?

The police had no clews or leads. True to his instincts, however, Spike Hallock had vanished. Bud knew this from the lips of "Runt" Breck. Runt was one of the few in the old crowd that would dare give the deserter information. Runt had assured him that Spike would be gone for weeks or months. "He knows his oats," concluded Runt Breck. "He won't show up again for a while."

Here at least was respite. Back at work that night Bud Rankin wondered what use he could make of this period of grace. One fact rose relentlessly to be faced. When Spike Hallock came gunning again, he would come to get Bud Rankin.

Outside of the law himself, Bud had no recourse to the law. He had once entered Spike Hallock's mob, and now it seemed that he was bound, forever helpless while Spike survived.

Back of it all was the fact Spike, conceited to the core, had the idea that he need but finish off any presumptuous rival for the favor of Jean Westley, and that he would then have the field to himself. In his mob world he would pass it off as vengeance against a quitter.

That first night after the killing Bud received a message from the police. It was still early in the evening when a motor-cycle man rode into the garage. Bud thrust his head out of the office as the roar of the motor filled the storage floor. At sight of the officer he grunted with disgust. What did they want now?

"You're Rankin, aren't you?" The officer still astride the noisy machine eyed Bud with a glance tinged with suspicion.

Bud nodded.

"Chief wants you to call at headquarters to-morrow morning. He wants to know what your brother whispered to you."

Bud shrugged his shoulders. "If I knew that myself I'd be glad to tell him."

The motor-cycle man turned the throttle. The engine roared into rapid explosions. Bud watched him go. In the roar of that motor he had conceived an idea.

The police chief on the morrow learned nothing from Bud. On the other hand, Bud had learned something in that very brief flash of thought when that motor cycle had roared its loudest.

A day or so later he appeared in the afternoon trundling a battered wreck of a motor cycle through the doors of the Center Garage. As he entered he met his boss.

"Mr. Daley," began Bud, "I was wondering if you would let me fix this up out in that shed at the back. I bought it cheap. Thought I'd try to get it in shape."

The boss nodded. "Go to it. Only work on your time, not mine."

Bud grinned. "Fine chance of my working at night. Why, the racket this thing makes would keep the whole Avenue awake. I'd get more brickbats than a yowling cat out there in back."

Daley looked at him curiously. "What do you know about a motor cycle? You're no mechanic."

"Well, I might as well learn," said Bud. "I don't want to stay a night man, washing cars all my life."

The promised racket did not materialize that afternoon. Bud, however, did some sweating. He did not take long to realize how little he did know about a motor cycle. However, he was back at it again the next afternoon. He blundered through with some expert advice from Daley's foreman until he actually had the engine firing.

Thus for several afternoons he did not meet the girl. When he finally did so, he was in better spirits than he had been since the night of the shooting.

"Do you know," he said, "I have a hunch I might make some sort of a mechanic yet. I've tuned up that motor cycle until she just hums. I've got her jacked up and she has so much power it almost knocks the jacks from under her."

"Whatever started you on motor cycles?" asked the girl.

"Sort of planning for the future," said Bud. "I'll be a mechanic—first class—some day."

"That'll be great, Bud."

"I'll tell the world it will."

Long after he had left her he shivered as he thought of the double meaning back of his answer. Planning for the future! What would she have said if she could have read his words aright? What would she have said if she could have seen within his mind? His real purpose was to gain the ability to kill.

As night man in the Center Garage he was privileged to have a gun in his possession. Until these last few days that gun had lain in the office cabinet. It was a .32-caliber revolver, a shiny, showy weapon selected by the boss. Since the first time that he had set the motor cycle in action he had been carrying the gun.

The first revolver practice Bud Rankin had ever taken was in the rear shed back of the garage. Right in the midst of the Avenue's life, right in broad daylight, he had started a course of training. Under the roaring protection of the motor he could shoot to his heart's content.

Against one end of the shed he had placed a sheathing of heavy planks. Back of these planks was a barricade of dirt-filled bags. The bullets were absolutely confined and the noise of the shooting thoroughly masked.

He soon picked up the knack of balance. His eye was naturally good and his nerves were steady. He had put in ten long sessions at this work when Daley inadvertently spoiled things.

"Say, Rankin, I have a customer for that motor cycle, I think. I told him you'd be here this afternoon."

Whether he would or not, the fact remained that Bud had a customer for the revamped machine. And when this buyer offered him cash that amounted to a profit of fifty dollars, Bud accepted the offer in wide-eyed disbelief.

He met Jean Westley that night with the air of a man who has just discovered a gold mine. "Money," he crowed. "Real, honest-to-Pete money. I figured it all out. I made a profit of fifty-one dollars out of a piece of junk."

Her round eyes fixed on him with approval. "What are you going to do now?"

"Now?" Bud chuckled. "I'm going to get me another broken-down motor cycle. You ought to hear Daley roar when he heard I'd sold that machine. You would have thought I'd done something wonderful."

He did get another machine; a better one this time, and after several days' work he made a quick sale. Thereupon he invested in still another battered veteran of speed. There was a kick in this for Bud. For the first time in his life he was doing something constructive on his own initiative.

There was the revolver practice, too. At first he had been content occasionally to hit a chosen plank at half the length of the shed. Now he was able to send bullet after bullet into an area scarcely bigger than a man's hand. This, too, he was doing at the full length of the shed.

He wondered just what certain acquaintances of his would say if they could see him shoot like that. Bud Rankin, the boy who wouldn't pack a gat, standing off like that and placing lead on lead. He often thought of Spike Hallock, and when he did there was a strained look on his features as he squared off and drilled the bullets home. He blessed the moment that had brought the motor-cycle cop to the garage that night.

This was his secret. No one knew about that part of his activities in the old shed back of the Center Garage. Certainly he did not give any one a hint of this growing ability of his. When Spike did come back Bud Rankin intended to have the great advantage of surprise on his side. The killer would probably be as careless in shooting up Bud Rankin as he would be in killing a defenseless dog. Bud had more than a good eye and steady nerve now. He had more, too, than the knack of balance. He knew more than just the simple mechanics of drawing down on the mark and the proper timing of his shot. He had acquired the one thing without which no man can ever be a marksman. He had confidence that where he aimed his bullet would certainly strike.

Bud Rankin, the gunless crook—Bud Rankin, dead shot! He was ready now for the return of Spike Hallock.

Two, three, four months passed and still Spike did not come back. Bud had the faintest hope now that perhaps Spike had left the Avenue for good and all. Nevertheless, he kept on with his target work. The feel of that gun was as familiar to his hand as a wrench. It was almost a natural movement for his hand to whip that gun out and fire.

Daley offered him now a regular arrangement. "I'll open a special motor-cycle service. You work days at that."

"Not yet," answered Bud. And in spite of all the boss' urging he would not yield. Back of this was some very sound logic. In the garage at night he was on familiar ground. There was only one entrance at night. And when Spike Hallock did come gunning he would come in the dark. As long as Bud kept that night job he was making Spike come into his own territory.

Still, he and the girl celebrated the offer. He explained his refusal, explained everything but his own ability to kill. If it came to killing it would be self-defense. Why worry her now with what might never come to pass?

He was putting more and more of his off hours into learning his trade now. There was a sure understanding between Bud and his girl. If only the cloud of Spike Hallock would pass, they could get married. It was a very real cloud upon their happiness, threatening death and the revival of all his past. In Spike's hands lay his liberty.

"Sometimes," said the girl, "I almost wish you could shoot a gun. A man like that deserves to die."

"It's too bad you ever knew him," sighed Bud.

"It was too bad I didn't know what he really was," answered the girl. "But he was always so nice and polite, and he really acted like a gentleman."

"He had to with you."

"Oh, if I'd never met him he

wouldn't be after you. Sometimes I think if we were married he wouldn't bother us."

"You don't know Spike," answered Bud. "He kills as easily as the average man swears. If he can't have you he'll get the man who does. Unless the man gets him——"

"But if you get him," cried the girl, "the police will get you. Oh, it's hopeless—hopeless!"

Bud could not say much to that. It did seem hopeless. Here he was doing better than he had ever dared to hope. Ahead was opportunity. Jean was ready and willing to marry him. And the shadow of Spike Hallock marred it all.

With a feeling almost akin to relief But Rankin heard the warning from Runt Breck on the next night. It was twelve o'clock, and though the Avenue was still abroad, Bud was about to latch the door shut. All the cars were in, and with that big front door latched the garage was a fairly secure fortress.

Runt slid out of the crowd and addressed himself to Bud: "Listen, Bud. Spike Hallock is back on the Avenue. I heard him make a crack that you'd be sorry that you ever mashed that Westley skirt. You better be watching your step."

In that instant Bud Rankin felt a savage sort of joy. Here was the show-down. Here was certainty. Grim though it was, it was preferable to the miserable shadows of doubt. Then looking directly over the Runt's head he saw Spike Hallock just across the street.

Spike was alone. He was standing there perfectly motionless, unmindful of all the passers-by and with his whole attention concentrated on Runt Breck and Bud.

"Don't look," whispered Bud. "But Spike is across the street now."

Runt groaned. "That's next door to a death warrant for me. He'll think I tipped you off, no matter what I say."

There was real fear in Runt's face and his voice shook nervously as he spoke.

"Wait here till he goes," advised Bud. "Then get out of sight and stay out until he forgets it."

"He doesn't forget," quavered Runt.

Runt was afraid. Tough little gunfighter that he was, a mere glance from Spike Hallock made him afraid. Bud looked at the little fellow and then marveled at his own steadiness.

Runt Breck waited. A full hour passed with still no sign of Spike's return. One o'clock. The character of the night crowd was changed. Those abroad now were conspicuous for extremes of action. The day workers were hurrying home. The night prowlers were strolling home in irregular courses that took them from one bootleg place to the next. The stores were closed now. Right here at the garage the light of the gasoline pump was alone in the shadows. It reached as far as the sinister gloom of the alley's mouth.

Another slow and dragging hour. Runt braced himself at last. "I can see for two blocks. Ain't a soul in sight."

He slid out and Bud latched the big doors again. Two o'clock. Outside was the dull hush that always made Bud's hair tingle at the roots, yet Runt had taken that moment to leave. It was so quiet out there that even through the big doors he could hear the soft, careful retreat of Runt Breck's feet. Then silence.

For two full minutes by the hands of his watch he waited and strained his ears for a break in that ominous quietude.

It came. The spat, spat, spat of guns. Two different guns. There followed the sound of running feet. Breck? No. Spike? Out of memory he caught the sounds from the night

of Charley Rankin's death. It was Spike!

He was running for the alley, the old get-away. Bud sprang toward the back of the garage and the one window that opened on the alley. Even as he did so he heard the unmistakable roar of a regulation police gun. The runner paused and then outside came the sound of two guns again.

Bud was out of the window now and crouched down behind a steel drum of grease. The police whistles were blowing in full cry. Into the alley's mouth backed a man. It was Spike, firing shot for shot even in flight. He halted now in the shadows halfway down the alley. He was waiting for the nearest cop to show himself against the light from that gasoline pump.

Spike himself was outlined against that light for Bud. He stood there with gun up. What a mark! One bullet would do it. One bullet and the police would thank Bud Rankin.

Then he thought of Jean. She didn't want a killer. If there was any other way he must take it.

Then he quit thinking and aimed. Outside a police gun sounded. Spike shot twice. Again a police gun. Again Spike's gun was up, ready to drop to the mark.

Bud's finger closed on the trigger. He stared as Spike's gun spun out of his hand. Just at that instant a policeman loomed in the alley's mouth and fired point-blank into Spike.

A minute or so later a startled-looking night man came out of the Center Garage.

"What's the row out here?" demanded Bud Rankin.

"Row!" said a police sergeant. "Row enough. Spike Hallock killed off Runt Breck and we just finished Spike."

"Dead?"

"Both of them."

"Say, sergeant," hailed one of the men. "One of us must have shot the gun right out of his hand. You can see where the bullet hit high up on the butt."

"Some shot!" exclaimed the sergeant as he turned away from Bud Rankin. "Regular dead shot."

Bud nodded in silent self-approval. Not for nothing had he spent hour after hour putting bullets into a space scarcely bigger than a man's hand. Then came realization. He was free. Spike was dead. He grinned.

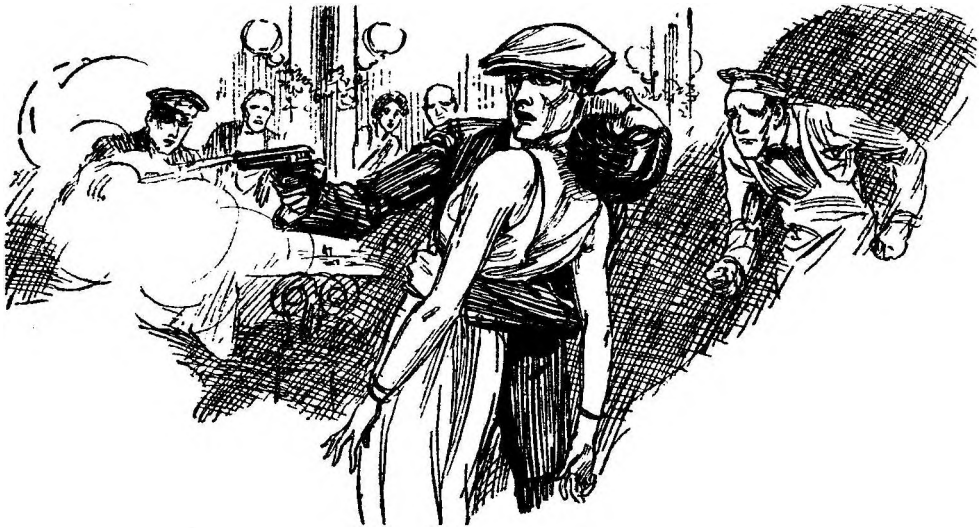
To-morrow he would tell Daley that he would rather work at day. Beginning——

Bud smiled. He and Jean could be married to-morrow. They ought to take a whole week for a honeymoon. He'd rig up a side car on that new motor cycle out in the shed.

NEW GAS PROTECTS SAFES

A NEW gas, designed to make the way of the safe cracker even more difficult than it is at present, has recently been announced by a manufacturer of Fort Worth, Texas. It was demonstrated before a group of business men in that city, and its inventors claim that it is an effective and certain protection for the contents of safes.

The device consists of a gas container concealed inside the safe. This container emits fumes of a powerful gas whenever it is tampered with in an illegitimate manner. The gas, it is claimed, will not explode or ignite, nor will it injure papers or writing, or other things that may be inside the safe. It will, however, drive away the safe breaker by its powerful fumes, and its effects will be noticeable in the surrounding atmosphere for from twelve to eighteen hours.



THE YEGGS MEET THE "MIKE"

By John Baer

Author of "Switched Loot," etc.

THERE were six of them in on this job, and their names were: "Slugger" West, "Lala" Lentelli, Toland, the "Tickler," "Nicnax" Nowack, "Kid" Kruger, and "Hoofer" Bannard. Our purpose would be served just as well if one name were substituted for all six, or if each man were given merely a number. No special effort need to be made to remember any of the names in connection with any particular character. In the first place, all of the names were aliases, and in the second place, none of the men were sufficiently individualized to deserve special mention. They were just a gang, that's all, with no marked personal traits except the one which held them together. That was a greedy desire for easy money.

It was Hoofer Bannard who started the trouble. The Hoofer, a shiny-faced fellow with a thin nose, prominent upper teeth and a receding jaw, imagined himself a sort of composite of several of the handsomer film stars. This egotism was fed by many of the members of the opposite sex who graced the dance halls in which Bannard was wont to exercise his terpsichorean talents, until it exceeded all reasonable bounds.

The Hoofer assumed the rôle of sheik on every possible occasion, and it must be admitted that he enjoyed more than fair success as long as he remained in his own element. But the fish met with disaster the first time he strayed out beyond his depth. The eagerness for new and more glittering worlds to conquer, led him one night into the Club Diadem, a cabaret on Fifty-first Street, where a brave show at proper decorum was made, and where ladies and gentlemen were supposed to take their amusement like ladies and gentlemen.

Bannard hired the required evening suit, but he forgot to fit himself out with new manners. On the dance floor

he tried to inflict a strangle hold of his own invention upon one of the hostesses. This led to an argument first with the manager, who kept his temper and spoke with studied politeness, and then with the bouncer, who was neither temperate nor polite.

The bouncer answered Bannard's first flip of obscenity with a blow to the mouth, and then, unaware of, or perhaps indifferent to the fact that Bannard toted a gat, he hustled the Hoofer out of the hall and impelled him down the top flight of stairs. There were three other flights, down which Bannard had to walk.

"I'll get even for this!" the Hoofer cried back over his shoulder. What he meant, of course, was that he and his gang would get even. The Hoofer bore private grudges, but he did not avenge them privately. He took his wrongs and injuries to the mob, which always came to his assistance willingly enough. Such affairs usually ended by the single enemy being beaten up, but sometimes there was a knifing, and twice there had been killings.

The matter of fixing the bouncer was debated at some length, for his offense was considered heinous indeed, and it was a problem to decide upon a punishment sufficiently terrible. He had damaged two of Bannard's teeth and had rent the rear of the hired dress suit; but more than that, he had wounded the Hoofer's pride. He had interfered with the sheik while the sheik was doing his stuff. This was *lese majesty,* deserving the dires consequences.

No revenge the gang could suggest met with Bannard's approval. His fury was so great that not even murder would appease it. He sat down finally to reason the matter out himself, and he hit upon a solution which satisfied his idea of revenge and poetic justice.

"Listen, you bozos," he told the mob, "let's do this thing up right. No sense just knockin' the daylight outa that bouncer. He on'y carried out the manager's orders. What we want to do is get even all around, see? Of course, we'll have to knock that sap for a row of ash cans, too, but I know a way we can queer that whole tony bunch."

"How?" asked Lala Lentelli.

"We can stick up the joint!"

This suggestion was greeted with "Oh!" and "Ah!" and "Sure, why not?" and "It's a great idea!"

"It's been done before," Bannard explained. "'Stuffy' Sherrer's gang pulled a holdup on'y last week and got away with it, and we're as smart as his bunch o' bums. There'd be a lot in it, too. The gents that go there are filthy with coin and the dames are so loaded with jools they can't walk straight. There'll be a nice penny in the cash register any night in the week."

"Me, I'm for it," offered Nicnax Nowack. "We ought to clean up the whole swell-headed bunch for sockin' you like that."

"'S what I say," agreed the Hoofer. "And while we're about it, I'll remember that bouncer and the manager—and I won't forget the dame which tried to high hat me."

They were for it, all of them, but despite their eagerness, they did not rush into the matter headlong. Fully two weeks were spent in learning the details of the lay. The Club Diadem received a fine combing which was systematic and thorough. All of the mob, except Bannard, paid at least one visit to the club. They had no trouble getting in. The Diadem made no pretense at exclusiveness. Its doorman had no other duty than to inforce the regulation with respect to evening clothes, which were accepted as *prima facie* evidence of gentility.

The Bannard mob left nothing to chance, nor even to memory. They

made careful note of the arrangement of the exits and rooms, the number of employees, the names of such guests as they could learn, and the hours at which the greatest and least number of guests was customarily present.

They covered the club not only from the inside, but also from the outside. They paid especial attention to a feature which is sometimes entirely overlooked in the planning of crimes of this type—namely, the question as to how far sounds emanating in the club rooms could be heard outside the premises.

In this latter respect the gang gathered evidence entirely reassuring. The Diadem occupied the fourth floor of what had once been an apartment house. The structure was of brick. On the bottom floor there was now an art-and-novelty shop which closed promptly at six every evening, and the two middle floors were given over to business offices which were deserted even earlier. Guests entered the building through a hall from which an elevator carried them up to the cabaret. The kitchen and bar of the Diadem were to the front of the building, then came the supper room, and to the very rear, the dance hall.

Back of the Diadem there was no building nearer than half a block. The building to the left was entirely vacant, undergoing a complete remodeling. To the right there was merely a large and deep hole into which the foundation for a new theater was being set. The only possible danger came from sounds which might be heard on the street on which the Diadem fronted.

This matter was not left to conjecture. Members of the gang passed the building frequently and loitered near it often. The knowledge gained from these investigations was highly satisfying. To all practical purposes, the rooms of the Diadem were as good as sound proof. Of its ordinary din, such as the playing of its band, the chatter of its guests and the clatter of the dishes in the kitchen, nothing at all could be heard from the street. Indeed, on one occasion—so Lentelli, who was in the place, testified—the entire audience, numbering almost sixty, had broken into song, of which Nicnax Nowack, standing at the main entrance on the street, heard only the faintest murmur.

Most persons do not, chiefly because they cannot, scream very loudly when they are suddenly frightened. At any rate, there was little likelihood that screams of such tremendous volume would be raised that they would attract the attention of street passers-by. A shot, or even several shots, might fail to bring help.

It looked safe if ever a job looked safe.

"All we need," remarked Bannard, "is a stiff upper lip and a bold front. The rest will be easy as snitching coins from a blind man's cup."

It was decided to pull the racket between midnight and one a. m. of a Thursday morning. About seventy-five guests were expected to be present at that time. After an agreement was reached as to just what part each gangster was to play, the mob was ready.

Kid Kruger drove them to the place in a rented closed car. Lentelli peered into the hall, and, finding it empty, entered with the others. The five stepped into the elevator, which had no sooner started when Slugger West struck down the operator from behind with a blackjack. Hoofer Bannard seized the lever and stopped the elevator on the second floor.

The body of the unconscious elevator operator was dragged out and Slugger West bound the man securely with a rope. Bannard, Lentelli, Toland and Nowack went to the fourth floor in the car.

At the entrance to the supper room, the doorman asked politely: "Are you in evening dress, gentlemen?"

Lentelli, who was first in line, answered, "Sure. Look." He unbuttoned his overcoat, disclosing that he was wearing a blue-serge business suit. As the doorman started to voice his regrets and explain the regulations, Toland stuck an automatic against his chest.

"Put 'em up, brother, and keep 'em up! No noise now, or we'll quiet you for keeps. Just a minute—the boys will require only a moment to dress up for the occasion."

The dressing up consisted merely of slipping on masks. Thereupon the doorman was prodded into the supper room. Between this room and the dance hall there was no door, but merely a wide arch.

Hoofer Bannard brayed a gruff command which was easily audible above the strains of the jazz band.

"Stand up, everybody! No screaming, no yelling! The first one peeps, gets hurt! Hustle back into the dance hall, every one of you, and make it snappy!"

Naturally, all of the forty-odd diners did not respond in the same manner. Most of them rose hastily, some tried to scramble under tables, a few women uttered stifled cries. One man laughed and yelled: "Quit your kidding!" Toland felled him with a blow on the jaw, and after that every one took the holdup seriously.

As Toland an Bannard forced the diners into the dance hall, Lentelli and Nowack ran into the kitchen, covered the chefs and barkeeps, and then drove them after the others upon the dance floor.

In the dance hall it required several minutes for the four gunmen to subdue the confusion which for a few brief moments bordered on panic. Twenty or so couples had been dancing, and when the patrons from the dining room came tumbling into them in various stages of fright, screams broke out all over the dance floor. Lentelli, Bannard and Toland had their hands full preventing a riot, but they finally got all the patrons and employees lined around the walls, some of them standing, others sitting slumped in chairs, and a few, unconscious from shock, on the floor.

Nicnax Nowack had attended to the musicians. He leaped upon the platform and thrust his automatic against the left side of the leader of the orchestra. This leader had twice wavered between hysteria and a reluctance to accept what was happening before his eyes at its face value. He had twice stopped his dozen players and then waved them furiously into action again.

"It's no joke, fellers!" cried Nowack at the top of his voice. "This is a stick-up, and the bird who don't believe it had better not start an argument about it. Jest keep right on playin'—the noise will drown the music some of these dames are spilling—'at's it—play as loud as you can. You fat guy there with the horn, a li'le more wind. Now play another verse of the same——"

A hoarse cry of warning interrupted him. A waiter had recklessly broken from his place in line and seized a chair, which he now swung over Nowack's head. The orchestra platform was directly inside the arch to the supper room, and it had apparead to the waiter that he would have an excellent chance of escaping to summon help if he only could get past Nowack.

But the latter, warned by Toland's cry, ducked just in time to take the blow on his back instead of on his head. Thereupon he wheeled about and fired point-blank, dropping the waiter groaning to the floor with a bullet in his right shoulder. Now there were more screams, and more precious min-

utes were lost bringing order into the chaos again.

"Go on, you birds, keep on playing," Nowack hollered at the musicians. And then, "Hey, Hoofer, what'll it be?"

"Make 'em play 'My Lucky Day,'" cried Bannard. "That's the right song for this occasion. This is our lucky day, ain't it?"

"Righto! Lucky day it is. You heard, fellers. Strike up the band!"

As the orchestra began the request number, Tickler Toland yanked a table into the center of the dance floor and put a small flour bag upon it. Bannard bawled:

"We start at this end of the line. Step up one by one. Make it quick, but don't crowd. The lady or gent what tries to hold out on us will get the same dose like that waiter."

From this point on the events moved smoothly. Nowack kept the orchestra playing, as the guests and employees came forward to be plundered of their money and jewelry. All the takings were thrust into the bag by Toland. During these proceedings, which lasted seven minutes by the dance-hall clock, Slugger West brought in two more victims.

The Slugger, as will be remembered, had tallied on the second floor to bind and gag the elevator operator. Thereupon the Slugger had run up the stairs to the fourth floor, where the other crooks had abandoned the car. West ran the car down to the ground floor, and from then on he assumed the dual rôle of elevator operator and lookout. He had left his overcoat in the automobile in which Kid Kruger was waiting on the other side of the street, a short distance down the block. Since the elevator operator wore no uniform, the Slugger could safely take over his job. As can be seen, everything had been plotted perfectly.

When Slugger West heard the shot which Nowack fired, he hastened to the door and peered up and down the street to find it deserted. When, a few minutes later, a young couple arrived, the Slugger took them up in the elevator, escorted them into the supper room, and then drove them at the point of his gun, into the dance hall. It was all so easy—ridiculously easy.

Slugger West put his partners at ease before going down again. "What was the shootin' about? Ah! I see. Well, no harm done—not a soul on the block. But muffle the cannons if possible, and speed this play up. I don't like to work overtime without no extra pay."

"You're gettin' extra pay," Toland told him. "Them two you fetched up look like they can make the pot bigger. Every little bit helps."

After all those present, including the musicians, had contributed to the loot, ordinary good horse sense called for an immediate get-away. But Hoofer Bannard still had his private grudge to settle, and in this bitter and cowardly by-play, his partners were all too willing to help him.

Lala Lentelli walked up to the bouncer—the man who had started the trouble by kicking Bannard out of the Diadem. Lentelli poked his gun into the man's ribs and prodded him into the center of the dance floor. The man's arms were raised and he was thoroughly helpless. Hoofer Bannard stepped up behind him and crashed the butt of his gun down on the man's head, dropping him like a log.

The manager of the Diadem escaped with a warning.

"You spoke polite to me, feller," said Bannard, "otherwise I'd bat you one, too. Jussa same you let this be a lesson to you to mind your own business when a customer is doin' his stuff on your floor."

But the end was not yet. Hoofer Bannard had still another feature to add to the program. This final gesture

was to be his most magnificent one. This bit of spite tickled his vanity most. He flattered himself that only a genius could have thought of it.

He stepped up to one of the young women in the line—a slight brunette of fragile loveliness with dark eyes and long lashes. She was the hostess who had resented his advances and strong-arm tactics and so precipitated the quarrel which had ended with his ejection.

The Hoofer seized her wrists and dragged her, half fainting, upon the dance floor.

"You fellers over there play 'When the Red, Red Robbin Comes Bob-bob-bobbin' Along,'" he cried. "That's the song you were playing when this dame got fussy and put on airs with me. Lettergo!"

But his amusement was cut short with startling suddenness. The band had not yet begun to play. He said to the girl: "Here's where I learn you a couple of fancy steps." Then all at once the clatter of many feet came from the supper room. There seemed to be a veritable stampede of shouting men—men with and without uniforms, men brandishing clubs and guns.

"Stand still, everybody!" roared a terrifying voice. "Drop your weapons and keep up your hands!"

The nervous fingers of Tickler Toland twitched on his trigger. He fired a shot into the advancing crowd. Lala Lentelli dropped like an empty sack to the floor and covered his face with his hands. Nicnax Nowack, the craftiest of the lot, let his gun slip out of his hands, pulled off his mask and then tried to walk nonchalantly into the crowd. But the saxophone player, whose patience had long since reached its limit, and whose fury lacked only the proper opportunity to express itself, brought Nowack to an abrupt halt by crashing his instrument down on the yegg's head.

Hoofer Bannard met the emergency with characteristic courage and boldness. He swung the body of the now unconscious girl around, held it up as a shield in front of him and leveled his gun at the foremost of the invaders—a huge, ruddy-faced policeman.

"Get back!" yelled Bannard, "or I'll shoot!"

But he reckoned without his enemies to the rear. One of them, a raw-boned Norwegian, employed in the Diadem as a cook, stole up close to Bannard and cuffed him on the side of the head with such telling effect that his ears rang, his teeth rattled and his vision grew momentarily dim.

Then many hard objects came into violent contact with different parts of his anatomy and he found himself going down under a heavy load. Most of this load consisted of the ruddy-faced policeman, who had run himself out of breath and who settled upon Bannard's neck for a brief rest.

Nowack had been rendered entirely complaisant by the saxophone, and neither Toland nor Lentelli offered further resistance.

All of the determination, and almost all of the physical strength of the arresting officers was used up before the prisoners were hustled through the infuriated victims down to the street and into the patrol wagon. The four gangsters found that Slugger West and Kid Kruger had already preceded them.

This sudden arrival of the authorities naturally puzzled the prisoners. Almost equally mysterious was the fact that the entire block was crowded with milling men and women. This crowd set up a tremendous din, hooting and jeering the captives, and it followed the slowly moving patrol wagon to the police station five blocks away.

At the station, in front of the captain's desk, Nowack turned on Hoofer Bannard, and blurted: "It's your fault! If you hadn't wasted precious time

beaning that bouncer and getting flippy with that girl——"

"Dry up!" growled Hoofer Bannard. "My fault, eh? What about West? He was supposed to be a lookout, wasn't he? Where was he lookin' when all those cops——"

"Give the cops a little credit for having ordinary intelligence," interrupted the lieutenant who had led the raiding party. "When we got the alarm we lit out for the Diadem with a bus load of men. Naturally we assumed there would be a lookout. So we sent half of our men around the back way first. This detachment slipped through an alley and climbed a back fence before reaching the fire escape running down the rear of the Diadem building. This fire escape leads up to a hall window on the fourth floor—that is, one end of the platform does.

"The rest of us gave these fellows just enough time to get up the fire escape, then we swooped around to the front. Two of my men hopped off to question Kruger in the car and when he tried to step on the gas they nailed him. When we went into the Diadem building, West shot up in the elevator to warn you, but he stepped right into the hands of the detectives who had gone up the fire escape. They got him as he stepped out of the elevator on the fourth floor. Then they went in and got the rest of you."

"Listen," said Bannard, "who sent in the alarm? Tell me that."

"You sent in the alarm yourselves," the captain answered.

"Know any more jokes?" asked Bannard. "That shot wasn't heard outside, and neither were them screams."

"As a matter of fact," smiled the captain, "that shot, the screams, and most of your bawling was heard all over the United States and probably in some foreign countries, too. Explain that to him, Mr. Avery."

Mr. Avery, the manager of the Diadem cleared his throat. "Our musical program was being broadcast by radio. If you had come in one minute later, you would have heard our orchestra leader step up to the 'mike'—the microphone—and announce the next selection!"

"That—that—funny thing on the platform?" stammered Nowack. "That—that's a mike?"

"Yes. You have never seen one before, so you did not recognize it for what it is. The rest of the paraphernalia is back of the musicians, pretty well hidden. You stood right on top of the mike when you yelled it was a real holdup and not a fake."

Bannard turned on his partners. "How come you fellows didn't learn about this when you looked the place over?"

"We started broadcasting only two nights ago," offered the manager.

"I was up there last night up to midnight," put in West, "and I didn't hear the orchestra leader do any announcing."

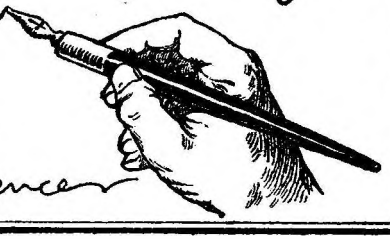
"We broadcast one half hour—from twelve fifteen to twelve forty-five."

After a pause the captain said: "The director of WXN, the station which broadcast the program, told me that during the first five minutes of the holdup his studio received twenty telephone calls from different parts of this city and one from Newark. Five calls were made directly to police headquarters from radio fans. Officer O'Ramey," he nodded toward the ruddy-faced policeman, "who lives just around the corner from here, was listening in, in his home. He came to this station on the run, all ready for action. Boys, you certainly told it to the world!"

Bannard groaned. "Can you imagine—pullin' a stickup and lettin' the wide world listen in on everything that's going on!"

What Handwriting Reveals

Conducted By Shirley Spencer



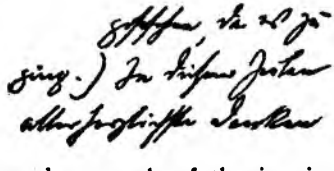
If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the position in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned to Shirley Spencer, in care of this magazine, and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. Shirley Spencer will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Also, coupon—see below—must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read. If possible, write with black ink.

All communications will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in the department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Every care will be taken to return specimens of handwriting, but it is to be understood that Miss Spencer cannot be responsible for them.

Q., PENNSYLVANIA: There is culture and a very high type of intellect apparent in the German script which you have sent me to analyze. The life work of this man should be along scholastic or scientific lines. As his profession is architecture, he is most certainly well adapted to the scientific and technical side of it. His writing does



not reveal so much of the inspirational and idealistic which would make his expression in this art more individual, but I can see that he would be very exact and skillful. In small details and calculations he is always correct. He is very ambitious and earnest, devoted to his art, and should have a brilliant future.

This man is not reckless with money. He is willing to work very hard and to make money. He is not a rash person and is inclined to proceed cautiously and will to a certain extent look after his own interests.

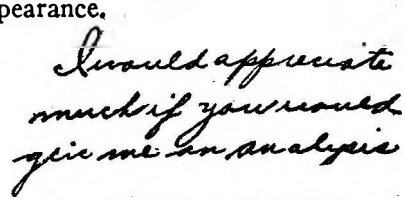
He is sensitive, impressionable and subject to nervous reactions. Quiet and restful surroundings would be best for him, and he needs people who are thoroughly congenial. He considers his own comfort first, and is apt to be upset and irritable when things disturb him. Being critical, he is rather fault finding, yet there is much charm of personality and a magnetic quality in him that others respond to.

I see that he has an intense love of

beauty, and he is sometimes quite demonstrative in the expression of his feelings and then again a mood of reserve and reticence will hold him back, making him appear indifferent. He is really quite emotional, however, and but for his self-control and strength of mind he would be rather sensuous and apt to be given to excesses.

E. CONNOR: That upward slant to your writing tells me that you are optimistic—that you are really somewhat visionary at times and find it hard to abide by the really practical world you have adjusted yourself to with considerable success. You seem to have had a more or less practical education, and you have achieved a certain efficiency in attention to detail and the following of routine.

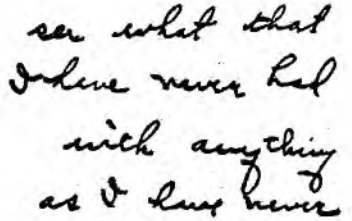
You have, however, an artistic appreciation that keeps you from giving yourself over entirely to the matter-of-fact world. While I cannot see that you have any creative talent, yet you have a good sense of rhythm and an eye for color. There is an appreciation of harmony and decidedly good taste expressed in your "L" and "F." I am sure that you enjoy wearing fine clothes and are very careful of your personal appearance.



Your disposition is harmonious and mild. You are easy to get along with and you love peace and quiet, disliking very much any noise, confusion or disorderliness. Having a pleasant personality, you do not find it hard to make and keep friends. You are normally affectionate, though not deeply emotional or temperamental, having adapted yourself to conditions and to people without much friction.

Though quite proud and independent, you adhere pretty much to the conventions, and never go to extremes in any way.

F. D., UTAH: There is a good deal of nervousness expressed in your script. Have you been under some physical strain lately, or are you worrying? You need to rest and give your nerves a chance to quiet down a little. Just now you are restless and uncertain in your moods, and your disposition is not as good as it is normally. —There is some irritation that is bothering you at present.



I don't think that you would be interested in commercial work for you would not like the routine and system. It would tie you down too much. You have an active mind and are restless unless you are thoroughly occupied with something interesting.

Your will needs strengthening a little. Try to cultivate a stronger and more forceful will, and keep a guiding hand on your emotions. Don't let them influence you too much, for you lose your poise this way.

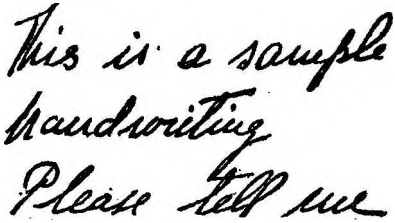
Your "R" shows that you have artistic appreciation and good taste. You ought to be able to do things of an artistic nature with your hands.

Be sure to get plenty of rest and keep quiet. Relax and build up your strength!

ALICE, SOUTH CAROLINA: You wish me to be frank, which means that you would rather I stress your faults than your virtues, doesn't it? Well, you have a strong will and lots of enthusi-

asm, but there is not always the practical guidance behind it. You are very impulsive and apt to rush into things without serious thought or consideration.

Being quite fond of pleasure, you are easily distracted from serious work, and are likely to lose interest in a thing and drop it without accomplishing anything. This lack of concentration will hinder you from making the most of yourself.

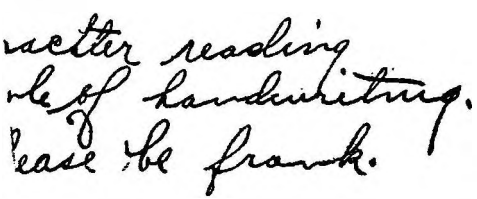


There is energy and a certain dash expressed in your script which shows that you are active and interested in all physical activities. You would be unhappy tied to routine or in a sedentary occupation. You have imagination and a sense of humor, and are quite adaptable, but your moods are uncertain.

To be constructive, I suggest that you concentrate your mind on your work more, and try to use judgment and discipline yourself. There is a great deal to you—I'll let your friends tell you how companionable and full of fun you are! But your love of pleasure keeps you from pinning yourself down to practical things.

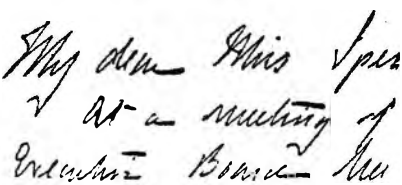
OLGA B.: Yes, my dear, you have dramatic talent, and I am sure that you would succeed on the stage, providing you can get the right connections. This is not easy, as you probably know, and unless you are financially prepared to go through long waits and disappointments, I would not advise you to try just now to get into the theatrical world. At the best it is a very hard and discouraging business.

The tiny hooks on the terminals of your "T" bars show that you have tenacity and once you have made up your mind you will hold out to the last breath.



You have personality and charm and are bound to be liked for your gayety. You are spontaneous and quick to respond to people. Wherever you are your mood is infectious and people quickly respond to your irrepressible lightheartedness.

Temper is very clearly indicated in handwriting, and in the specimen below the writer is betrayed by the telltale shading of the horizontal strokes. There's, however, a fineness of the nature and extremely good taste and cul-



ture expressed there, too, so that we know this woman would not give vent to her temper in the way that a less controlled and educated person might. She might not fly into a fit of rage and break the furniture, but she could make very sarcastic remarks that would sting like a lash!

Handwriting Coupon

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name .....

Address .....

THE HELPING HANDS DEPARTMENT

Conducted by Nancy Carter

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE deals both in its articles and fiction with various forms of crime, and the dangers and difficulties to which they lead. Perhaps that is why so many people write the editor for help and advice in solving individual problems. His many duties make it impossible for him to give these letters the personal attention he would like, so he has called upon Mrs. Nancy Carter to lend a helping hand. Mrs. Carter is one helping hand. We need many others. We need yours. The fact that you might be a transgressor will not bar you; it may help you to prevent another from following the dangerous trail which leads to a precipice. Do not hesitate to write fully; your real name and address will not appear in the magazine.

ONE who, like me, is serving a prison term, wrote that he had landed where he was from being nagged all the time. Well, I want to say for the benefit of some who may have the same failing, so that they can correct it in time, that failure to make decisions, lack of determination, of confidence in myself, was my undoing. If you're inclined to go to others for advice instead of relying upon your own discretion, if you weakly put off deciding about things until some one decides for you, get a grip on yourself. Say you ask some one for advice. It is very probable that he'll tell you to do something he'd never think of doing himself under the circumstances. Learn to rely upon yourself if you want to avoid pitfalls, because ten to one you know better what you should do than the one you're asking." So one who is known by number and not by name advises us.

And it's true that self-reliance, ability to decide and to act upon one's decision will certainly save one many a false step. We often seek and act upon advice that is not nearly so good as our own judgment.

If Baby C.'s husband reads her letter I'm sure he'll return to her.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: I am writing this letter for two purposes: First, that my husband may see it; second, that other men who have done something similar may read and return to their homes.

My husband—he is a traveling man—and I have been married three years and have a baby son seven months old. When Junior was twelve weeks old my husband became angry over a letter I wrote him, and stopped writing to me or sending me money. I had written him under great stress after I had just received the news that he was unfaithful. Instead of writing the facts I had heard I said things which I did not mean about his not supporting me.

Now he has disappeared. I have written everywhere I know of and can find no trace of him. No matter what he has done, I love him. I need him, too, as I am soon to become a mother again. I am sure if he knew I wanted him he would come back, but he has stayed away so long without providing for his family that he dreads to return, not knowing what my attitude may be. Not a word of complaint will be spoken to him, however, and if he lacks funds to get here they will be sent.

To you other husbands who have left wives and babies I want to advise to go home before it is too late.

I have written and broadcasted and used every means within my power. I can't employ any that would cost money. I can only hope that my husband will read this and come home to us. BABY C.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: I sympathize with Don D., who is called a black sheep because of his wanderlust. It is the same with me, though I am a girl. Since I was seventeen I have wandered all over the States. I do not agree with you about one being selfish

when one wanders. Don D. could not settle if he wanted to. I know. I have tried to since my marriage, and I get sick if I attempt to stay put when the wanderlust comes over me. One should never condemn a person for being a wanderer if he lives honestly, does not beg or steal, but works as he goes.

But Don D. should never marry unless he gets a girl with the same fever. Thanks to Dame Fortune, I have a husband who likes to hike, too, and has three trades to work at, so we do not suffer because of the itch in my feet.

Good luck to the Helping Hands Department. May it always prove as good to folks as the rest of the magazine is entertaining.

GEORGIA CRACKER.

You used good judgment in marrying one who also likes to wander. I hope Don D. will be as wise, for a union between a home lover and a rover, I fear, would not be a very happy one.

A message to Black Sheep, whose letter appeared in the department some weeks ago.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: Just a word to Black Sheep. I, too, have had my reputation torn to shreds by gossips. Unlike you, I have had no mother to confide in, as she died when I was a baby. Black Sheep, do not mind the gossip and sneers. Hold your head up and have faith in yourself, as that is the keynote to traveling the happy road of freedom. I was once in much the same position as you, but I did not listen to good advice, and gossip drove me on the downward path.

MAY.

DEAR HELPING HANDS: I was engaged for several years to a man who was a cashier in a bank in our town. Just a short time before we were married he was arrested and sent to prison for appropriating funds from the bank. It was wholly unexpected to me and to every one else, and a great shock, of course.

There is another man here who has been interested in me, too, and now he has been begging me to try and forget the man I was to marry. My family are doing all in their power to persuade me to accept this other. But somehow I can't feel right about doing such a thing. It seems pretty mean for me to cast off Jerry now when all the world is against him. He has a long term to serve, though, and has sent me word that he doesn't expect anything from me.

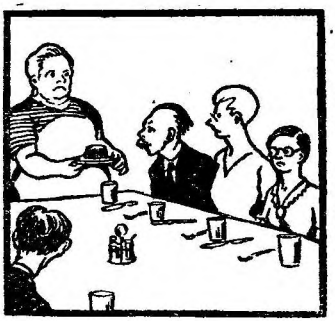
But I know it was the desire to give me things he couldn't afford on his salary that caused him to take the money. He is an orphan, and if I desert him he will have nothing to sustain him through the years in that grim prison, nothing to live for. Yet I'm not sure that I have the courage to go on working through his long term and then face the world as the wife of a convict. Would this be fair to my family They say it wouldn't.

STELLA.

I would be guided in my decision by the measure of my love for Jerry and not by my family's suggestions or demands. If you care enough for him so that you can wait willingly, and then face valiantly the fighting years ahead after his release, then the sacrifice you make will be worth while and you will be able really to help him. If you feel that the burden will be one to which you are unequal, or that your position will be a degrading one, then in fairness to yourself and to Jerry you ought to give up all thought of waiting for him. As for being fair to your family, you and Jerry could go far away, where your lives did not touch theirs. Let your own heart and your instinctive knowledge of what is right or wrong for you to do guide you, Stella, and you won't be far wrong.

If you seek counsel, or have counsel to give, write to the Helping Hands.

Under the Lamp



By *Prosper Buranelli*

This Abode o' Hunger

This department is conducted by Prosper Buranelli for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us and Mr. Buranelli will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it?

Answers to this week's problems will be printed in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Prosper Buranelli, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

THE author of the above is Kosciusko McGinty. Maybe it hits upon an experience I once had. Anyway, I'm giving it to you. There it is at the top of this page. Rearrange the letters to form a phrase appropriate both to the anagram and to the picture that accompanies it. Kosciusko's masterpiece is listed among the best anagrams in the Key to Puzzledom, the handbook of the National Puzzlers' League.

Primrose, our star contributor, whose right name, by the way, is John Q. Boyer, sends in a real oddity. It is a palindromic diamond. It is a little too abstruse to be given as a puzzle, so here it is in its own fair form.

M
R A R
S O L O S
R O T A T O R
M A L A Y A L A M
R O T A T O R
S O L O S
R A R
M

It reads across and down and also backward. All the words are real words, but several are a trifle recondite. That is the trouble with the many kinds of very difficult puzzles. The kinds of words used get into metaphysical realms. Take this one, which Primrose also presents.

S H A H S
H A L A H
A L U L A
H A L A H
S H A H S

J. L. Watson of Nevada. Missouri, has a suggestion. He presents it in cryptographic form. Figure it out and see what you think about it, you demon contributors.

ABCDES ECFG HE EIJC KLCK-MCN ANIOBCJE DBIFP QRSL TI-HN KRALCNE SLCT QRBB OC RFSCNCESRFP.

From P. L. James of Detroit.

ABC EFGH IFGHJKLMHFJN IF-

GIFIH OFJP LQRRZ-GKS LJQKG

LJPQTPJN?

Mr. James' query is something for our cryptographers to think about. I'll bet they can do it if they try, although there's a lot of art in it.

Last week's answers.

PALINDROMES

NOT RATS, MADAM, START ON.

DIAMOND LIGHT, ODO, DOTH GILD NO MAID.

CRYPTOGRAMS

LETTERS "TH" HELP VERY MUCH IN SOLVING CIPHERS. THEY ARE USED TOGETHER MORE THAN ANY OTHER TWO, ESPECIALLY AT THE BEGINNING OF WORDS.

I guessed the familiar ALLY ending and also the familiar ETTE combination.

READERS OF THIS DEPARTMENT WILL BURN MUCH MIDNIGHT OIL DECIPHERING THIS ONE.

Not so much, at that. The LL was easily guessed. The OIL bothered me for a moment. I took the O for A and put down AIL. The I was correct, however, and the correct workout soon evolved itself.

"THE EEL'S" LUCK ENDS

THE underworld is generally apt in its nicknames. It has a sort of genius for hanging suitable monikers on its members. His title of "The Eel" was made to order for Henry Lucasik, a holdup man whose specialty for a long time was escaping from custody by swimming the dangerous waters of New York's East River. Another of his nicknames was "Lucky," owing to the fact that he had managed on various occasions to escape conviction because witnesses who had identified him before the Grand Jury had not appeared later at his trial, or had suffered lapses of memory.

The Eel is said to have been the brains of the McKenna gang, a band of six men who carried out a series of carefully planned robberies covering a period of several months. Their method was to have a "tip-off man" obtain employment in the place to be raided, so as to give them the layout of the premises.

The leader of this gang, Mike McKenna, was killed in an attempt to break out of the Tombs prison on November 3, 1926.

The luck of The Eel finally came to an end in January of this year, when a woman restaurant cashier, whom he had forced to open the safe and hand over eight thousand dollars, identified him, as did also another member of the gang who was brought from Sing Sing to testify. The exploits of the McKenna gang are said to rival the most sensational detective fiction, and in the course of the evidence, Lucasik, alias The Eel, was referred to as the "brains" of the crowd.

Unless The Eel can manage to effect another of the escapes for which he is famous, he is not likely to be in a position to prey on the public for a good many years.

Headquarters Chat

TAKING his tried and trusty pen in hand, J. J. Jolkaus, 1603 Keyworth Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland, writes:

"DEAR EDITOR: I have been reading DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for the past three months, and I must say there is not another one like it. Now a word of praise for the authors. I have just finished in this week's issue a four-part story entitled 'Tragedy Tower,' by Madeleine Sharps Buchanan, and I think she is the best writer in the country. Let us hear some more from her. So much for that.

"What happened to the Crimson Clown? Have they nabbed him yet? Please let us hear from him very soon."

We are pleased, Mr. Jolkaus, and we know that Madeleine Sharps Buchanan will quite naturally be more pleased to learn that you think she is the "best writer in the country." Madeleine Sharps Buchanan is at work on another story now, and she tells us, with all due modesty, of course, that she feels as sure as she can feel under the circumstances, that her latest effort will surpass "Tragedy Tower" in interest. You ask what has happened to the Crimson Clown? You will find him at his very best in the April 23d issue of this magazine; and if McCulley is to be believed, and we have never had cause to doubt that gifted author's word, there are more Crimson Clowns to come, —many of them.

Some time ago Mrs. Tama Benali wrote us a very interesting letter. Now she has exceeded herself. Certainly, no editor's heart could help throbbing with gratitude, pride and admiration at learning that he has among his readers such an admirer and booster for his magazine as Mrs. Tama Benali. Read what she says, and please, as many of you as possible, do as she has done. Just think, if you all did as she has done, the circulation would be tripled. Then the editor could have pie three times a week instead of once.

"DEAR EDITOR: Do you remember the time before when I wrote to you? I could hardly speak nor spell your English. But now I have much improved. I want to ask you to keep on printing Nick Carter stories. Please do.

"I had a funny experience the other day. I was invited to a dinner given for a returned missionary from China. Well, on the way there I saw that DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE was out, so, never thinking about it, I bought one and took it with me. When I got there people were nice, but the hostess, a haughty aristocrat, just gave me one look with that DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE under my arm, and said: 'What a horrid taste in literature.'

"After that the rest of the people were strangely cold, and I think perhaps the missionary noticed it, for he came and talked to me and took me in to dinner. Consequently he noticed my magazine. I was telling him enthusiastically about it, and about Nick Carter, and he said: 'Nick Carter? Why, child, I read those stories when I was a lad.' I laughed and he read the story then and there, and the hostess,

noticing it, asked him to let her read it. She did, and now all three of us are the best of friends. I told them I was going to write to you about it, and they both said: 'Do, and tell the editor to keep up Nick Carter and Mr. Chang and all the rest.' The lady said that she waits as anxious for her copy now, as she used to wait for a check. They are both regular readers now, and it was brought about so strangely that I couldn't resist telling you. Your magazine is growing better and better, and I am liking America more and more."

A very understanding man is B. T. Johnson, Box 75 L, R. F. D. 10, Sparrow Point, Maryland. Experience, the great teacher—the only teacher, some people think—has taught Mr. Johnson that most difficult lesson of all, that tastes differ. Read how an experience in his own family has taught Mr. Johnson this.

"Dear Editor: I have been a reader of Detective Story Magazine for over eight or nine years, and have often thought of writing to the Chat. I am an ex-circus man, and until now have always been on the move. I have bought Detective Story Magazine and carried it all over the country, and many of my friends in the outdoor amusement field read it also.

"I think 'The Ringer' was the best you have had in a long while; Wallace is all right. Small is great, too. Let us have more of Maxwell Sanderson. The Picaroon would be great if Captain Summer didn't get him into such impossible situations and let him escape. I don't agree with William Knowles in his criticism of Doctor Poate. I enjoy his medical discourses very much. Let us have more of him.

"Now for Mr. Chang: I always save the Chang stories until I have no other reading matter at hand, but my dad, who is sixty-five, reads them and likes them very much. So you see that even in our small family what one dislikes the others like. Just keep the magazine the way you have heretofore, and you are assured at least two readers in this neck of the woods."

Now come some comments from other honorary editors.

"Dear Editor: I have read your magazine for the last seven years, and it beats them all. The stories I like best are Mr. Clackworthy, Thubway Tham, Mr. Chang, The Crimson Clown, The Avenging Twins. I also like the special articles, the stories about Maxwell Sanderson, and the stories about Doctor Pelton by Ernest Poate. I would like to see some more Thunderbolt stories and stories of railroading."

"Dear Editor: I have been a reader and booster of Detective Story Magazine for four years, but I have never before written a letter to the Headquarters Chat. The object of this note is to express my preference for certain of the stories I find in your magazine. The stories by Ernest M. Poate I consider far superior to any of the others. E. A. Apple's series ranks next, Thubway Tham stories next, then Chichester's serials, then the Doctor Quartz series. Many others are worthy of mention, too. Please do not print any more of these morbid, tragic tales of gruesome murder.

"Hart E. Huttig, Jr.

"1230 Genoa Street,

"Coral Gables, Florida."

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

SUTTON, STANLEY.—Come home at once. Daddy has had a very bad accident. We need you. Come to B. W. Have moved. Mother.

HAARA, LEON FRANK.—Blue eyes, blond hair, nearly six feet tall, very quiet disposition. Disappeared from Wilmington, Delaware, July 11, 1926. Please write to Mrs. Leon F. Haara, 108 East Street, Delmar, Delaware.

BARGER, ROSIE.—Five feet four inches tall, eighteen years old, one hundred and twenty pounds in weight. Last seen in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1922. Write to K. C. Bruns, 37 M. T. C., Driv. Train, Corozal, Canal Zone.

BRUNS, JOSEPH J.—Last seen in Detroit, Michigan, in 1923. Five feet eleven inches in height, one hundred and seventy pounds in weight, about forty-five years old. Write to K. C. Bruns, 37 M. T. C., Driv. Train, Corozal, Canal Zone.

GOW, Mrs. JAMES.—Formerly of St. Joseph, Missouri. Worked in Pennsylvania during the World War. Was with the L. C. Smith Typewriter Company. Write to Mrs. J. W. Paul, 28 Hobart Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey.

ATTENTION.—I would like to meet the man whom I met on the train while going to see my grandmother in North Carolina. He got off at Hot Springs, North Carolina. Please write to G. P., care of this magazine.

MYERS, Mrs. MAY.—Last seen working in Tampa, Florida. Weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Please notify Curtis E. Brown, R. 1, Box 22, Kissimmee, Florida.

McDONALD, Mrs. ESTER.—She lived at 619 North 45th Street, Omaha, Nebraska. Left her husband and four boys. Her youngest son would like to hear from her. Rollo McDonald, 910 Castro Street, care of Jim Rutledge, Oakland, California.

WALLACE.—I would like to get in touch with some of my father's relatives. My grandfather's mother married again, and my grandfather took his stepfather's name, which was Andrews. His own name was William Henry Rural Wallace. Write to Mrs. Etta Pipkin, 2210½ Central Avenue, Kearney, Nebraska.

MOORE, BETTY and BOLAND.—Last heard from in Long Beach, California. Mrs. Etta Pipkin, 2210½ Central Avenue, Kearney, Nebraska.

DARLINGS, FRANCIS BRUCE.—Please communicate with Mrs. Etta Pipkin, 2210½ Central Avenue, Kearney, Nebraska.

PANDER.—We would like to find our parents. There are three of us girls, Jessie, Mary, and Hilda. We were placed in the Pittsburgh Allegheny Home. The superintendent's name was Henry F. Thompson. Any one having any information kindly write to Mrs. Arthur Fors, 18 Garfield Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

WATKINS, HENRY GROVER.—Left Los Angeles, California. An ex-service man, gassed in the war. Brown eyes and hair, thirty-nine years old, six feet one inch tall, one hundred and seventy-eight pounds in weight. His wife is ill and heartbroken. Please write to G., 1054 Thompson Avenue, Glendale, California.

HUDDEE, HERMAN.—Please write to your mother and father. Mrs. Huddee.

MOORE, TEDDY.—Please communicate with me. I am worried over your absence. Mrs. Ben Moore, 921 North Washington, Mexico, Missouri.

RANNALS, RISHIA.—She was in Johnson County, Arkansas, in 1920. Five feet tall, thirty-nine years old, brown hair and eyes. Her father died in 1921 and estate is to be divided. J. T. Rannals, R. 3, Olustee, Oklahoma.

McMURRAY and MORRIS.—I would like to hear from George Fred, Tom, Charlie McMurray and Mrs. Rose Morris. Please write to William McMurray, General Delivery, Whitefish, Montana.

HARE, JAMES A.—Left Jerome, Arizona, for mines in Death Valley. Notify Pete, care of this magazine.

JIMMIE.—I still love you. Did not receive other letter. Babies are fine. Send me your address. Catherine.

W. W. L.—Please write to mother, who is heartbroken over your absence. She is now with Ed. Dorothy, care of this magazine.

DUNK.—Am at Aunt Eliza's, 625 Homer Street. Don't think of the past. You are on road traveling. Write soon. D.

ROBERT, T. L.—Write to mother. We are all well and very anxious to see you. Send address. Mother Lilley.

LEHMAN, PAUL.—Last seen in Chicago, Illinois. Five feet nine inches tall, one hundred and ninety pounds. Please notify his son. Dick Lehman, 422 Filmore Street, Caldwell, Idaho.

S. I. M.—The children and I would like to hear from you, as we need you. Please write to us. F. M., care of this magazine.

BEAHRINGER, HENRY and CARRIE.—Last heard of in East St. Louis, Illinois. Their sister-in-law, Mrs. W. M. E. Phillips, and two nieces, Edna and Glenna, would like to hear from them. Mrs. William E. Phillips, Marshouse, Missouri.

DELEMERE.—Your mother wishes your address, so that she may write you. Uncle Charlie.

SATAN and DADDY.—Please come back to us. Baby and I need you, as we have no money or place to go to. I did not realize what I did, but am sure that everything will be O. K. I have learned a lesson. Your Pussums and Sugar, General-Delivery, Ninth and Market Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

CARSTENS, HAROLD O.—Missing since 1919, when he was sixteen years old. Five feet seven inches tall, blue eyes, brown hair. Slight limp in right foot. Did not receive message sent through Jack D. till year later. Mother.

TEJAS.—Please let E. J. C. hear from you at the same address. A.

MONTOOTH, MRS. MABEL, or NORTON, MR. and MRS. J.—Lost track of while traveling in California, September, 1925. Lee, 219 Sixteenth Street, Richmond, California.

PAINE, WILLIAM SHUMWAY.—My mother was Rebecca Shumway, born in Maine. My father was Samuel Stinson Paine, also born in Maine. My father was chaplain in Minnesota cavalry at Fort Snelling during the Civil War. He had a general store at Fargo, North Dakota, in 1895, when I was born. In 1907 my folks left Anoka, Minnesota, for Seattle, Washington. I would like to hear from friends and relatives. William Shumway Paine, State Hospital, T. B. Ward, Salem, Oregon.

SHOEMAKER, ALBERT.—Formerly of Columbia City, Indiana. Was last heard of in a lumber camp in southeast Texas. His mother died, and he has money coming to him. Mrs. Etta Purse, 421 West Artesia Boulevard, Bellflower, California.

GROVER, EDWARD, of Newton, New Jersey. My brother and I were placed in the New Jersey State Children's Home about 1899 or 1900. I would like to hear from my father's people. Mrs. A. Garrison, Green Creek, New Jersey.

HAGAN, WILLIAM A.—Gray hair, blue eyes, six feet tall. Has always been in the lumber business. His father is ill and is asking for him. Please write to Jean Hogan, 316 South Fifth Street, Marquette, Michigan.

J. C. W.—Please write, as everything is O. K. Sis.

WARD, JAMES.—Last seen August 3, 1926, in Kansas City, Kansas. If you love us, come back. Will forgive everything. Vergie Ward, care of this magazine.

RILEY, J. H.—Everything is O. K. at the old home, as the people have settled their differences. No case in court, as all is now peaceful. Write at once to the old address or come home, as your father needs you. He has been ill since December. The Bond.

ROBERTS, MR.—Your friend would like to hear from you. Remember the little girl you met when you boarded at Mrs. Mars? G. E. Burney, Box 548, Norphlet, Arkansas.

CAUL, WILL, ED., and ALICE.—Born in Carbondale, Kansas. Lost track of them forty years ago in Seattle, Washington. Parents separated. The mother took three children, leaving one child, Fred, with his father in Seattle, Washington. Would appreciate information concerning their present whereabouts. Fred Caul, 1127 East Main Street, Puyallup, Washington.

SMITH, FLOYD ROY.—Twenty-nine years old, five feet eleven, auburn hair and gray-blue eyes. Known as "Red." Was last seen in Seattle, Washington. Arthur Smith, care of this magazine.

GOULD, RAY.—Was on the U. S. S. "Marblehead" seven years ago. Write to Miss Leona Stout, 1437 Missouri Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

RICHARD, J. W.—Served for five years in the army, and was discharged in Washington. Went to Arizona, married, and then moved to California. Has black hair and weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. J. L. Richard, Frogville, Oklahoma.

THOMPSON, M. O.—Left his home near Fort Mill, South Carolina, in January, 1912. Was last heard from in May, 1912, at Savannah, Georgia. Was boarding with and working for a well driller. Five feet seven inches in height, one hundred and fifty pounds, black hair and eyes, thirty-five years old, and eyes slightly crossed. Please write to Mrs. J. L. Thompson, 1404 North Davidson Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

BARGAR, ROY and RICHARD.—Last heard of in Washington, and was then working for the S. P. Railroad. Write to K. S. Bargar, Brownsville, Oregon.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any one who served in Battery F, Thirteenth F. A., Fourth Division, in France during the World War. Russell Phillips, St. Charles, Iowa.

STAUSBERY, FRANK C.—Born in Coatsburg, Illinois, thirty-nine years ago. Last letter received twenty-three years ago from Fort McKenzie. His sister would like to hear from him. Emma L. Stausbery, R. 2, Merced, California.

HARRISON, LOUISE.—Last heard from her in Greenwood, South Carolina, December 14, 1926. She was traveling with her daughter, Lenora. Write to Mrs. James V. Keily, 630 Morton Avenue, Chester, Pennsylvania.

CUMMINS, ARCHIE.—Also known as Arthur Allerton. Fifty years old. Was supposed to be starting for Australia two years ago. Would like to hear from the soldier friends who knew him. Write to Mrs. E. A. Wilcox, R. R. 1, Morley, Michigan.

RAINBOLDT, WILLIAM.—Was in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1911. Notify Bessie May Rainboldt, care of Mrs. A. Javil, 908 Christian Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

BITTNER, EDWARD.—Under observation during July, 1919, at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, Open Air Ward F. Heard of your supposed death. Just received your last letter with two pictures. Write to your pal, Reddie. Margaret, care of this magazine.

BOZANT, SAM.—Last heard of in Florence, Arizona. Kindly write to his father, Jacob Bozant, General Delivery, Redcliff, Alberta, Canada.

LEGGAN, GEORGE EDWARD.—Was sixteen years old when he left home. Mother is a Yankee and father an Indian. Dark hair and eyes, five feet five inches in height, and a scar on his upper lip. Write to Cornelia Leggan, Box 127, Broad Brook, Connecticut.

CARTER, MRS. ANNA, of Springfield, Massachusetts. Was last heard of in Hartford, Connecticut, on Labor Day, or in New Haven, Connecticut, on Labor Day week. Write to R. F., care of this magazine.

BLY, MAURICE M.—Please let us know where you are. We will not try to bring you back if you are satisfied. Mother is lonesome. Nettie C. Bly, R. 1, Berlin, New York.

HODGE, C. B. or **"RED."**—Formerly of Jacksonville and West Palm Beach, Florida. He is either in New Orleans or St. Petersburg, Florida, or in Cuba. Thirty-seven years old, red hair, blue eyes. Communicate with Anne Matthews, 333 Eighty-sixth Street, care of Schwabe, Brooklyn, New York.

HENSON, WALTER.—Won't you help us? I love you and always will. Baby is well. Don't dodge the law, as no one will bother you. Edith.

ELDRIDGE, GEORGE S.—Last heard from at Schofield Barracks, Honolulu. Please write to Ruth Bryan, now Mrs. R. C. Perry, General Delivery, Livermore, California.

O'BRIEN, JOHN.—Sixty years old, six feet tall, one hundred and fifty pounds in weight. Last heard of at Forsyth, Montana, in September, 1925. His sister would like to hear from him. Mary Ellen Harvey, 1722 Wilson Avenue, Butte, Montana.

DE JULIO, LEO.—Twenty-seven years old, black hair, brown eyes, of medium height. Left Pueblo, Colorado, in November, 1919, supposedly headed for Massachusetts. May be boxing for a livelihood. Boxed throughout the West under the name of "Young Diamond." Father-in-law died recently, making him and wife heir to ranch. His wife has seen the folly of her ways and is willing to do more than her share to get along. Can sell ranch and will go to him if he will write. Notify W. A. Mott, care of this magazine.

CUTTER, BERTHA.—Last heard from at New Boston, New Hampshire. Last seen in Boston, Massachusetts. Write Kathryn Norman, care of this magazine.

ENDERS, LOUIS RAYMOND.—Native of New York City. Last address, in 1918, was Barracks 122, Room 20, Magnolia, Maryland. Any one knowing his present address kindly write to Samuel Falk, attorney at law, 165 Broadway, New York City.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from some of my comrades who were with me in Company H, Fifty-first U. S. Infantry overseas, or those who were with me on recruiting service in Springfield, Illinois. Alfred Donzelli, 1667 Cornelia Street, Ridgewood, Long Island, New York.

STEVENS, JAMES BENJAMIN.—Five feet seven inches tall, one hundred and thirty pounds in weight, twenty years old, dark complexion. Last heard of from Standard, California, but had thought of going to Australia. His mother and sister, Marjorie, are alone, and would like to hear from him. Mrs. Louise Stevens, 1027 Gerrard Street, East, Toronto, Canada.

KUBICK, ANTHONY V.—Last heard of in 1918. Twenty-six years of age. Has initials A. V. K. tattooed on his left arm. His brother would like to hear from him. Frank C. Kubick, V. S. M. C., Headquarters Company, Fifth Regiment, Quantico, Virginia.

CARTER, STEPHEN.—Who came from Walsal, England, in the fall of 1883 to White Hall, Michigan. Stephen and his brother, Arthur, started for Washington in 1894, but Arthur turned back, and Stephen has never been heard of. Send all news to Mrs. Anna Shelters, Libby, Montana.

LEE, EARL B. and **ARUTH R.**—Your father, Will E. Lee, is still alive and wishes to get in touch with you. Notify Palmer Lee, 507 Fuller Street, Corona, California.

EBERT, JOHN HAROLD.—Sixteen years of age, and last heard of at Borger, Texas. Any information will be appreciated by parents, Mrs. Ina M. Ebert, 330 South Roena Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

PELTON, HENRY and **MARY ELLEN.**—They lived in Marion County, Iowa, in 1868. They left four heirs, Charles, John, Eva, and Martha. Any information concerning any of them will be appreciated by H. R. Pelton, Delta, Ohio.

FISCHER, FRED.—Please write to your old friend. I had a letter from your mother in 1917. Raymond F. Miller, R. D. 3, Marietta, Ohio.

CONSTINE, MABEL and **FRANCIS.**—Mabel is twenty years old, has dark-brown hair. Francis is seventeen years of age and has light hair. Taken from orphans' home in Ogdensburg, New York, in 1915, and sent to Children's Aid Society, New York City. Later they were placed out with families. Mabel is now married, and Francis engaged. Their grandmother died, leaving them something of value. Write to Mrs. Sadie Constine, 128 Polk Street, Watertown, New York.

PERRY, MILDRED, of Buffalo, New York. If you still care, please write home. Many changes since you left. All anxious about you. Mrs. Charles Perry, 94 Warwick Avenue, Buffalo, New York.

NICOLL, LEO ASHLEY.—When last heard from was on receiving ship, U. S. S. "Southerly," at Boston navy yard. His home is in Galveston, Texas. Write to L. A. Williamson, Fire Department No. 1, Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

JOE C.—Am well. Everything is O. K. Please write. Frank.

SMITH, GEORGE W.—Dark hair, brown eyes, and worked for Donald Jeffrey on railroad construction. Five years ago he was at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His address or any information regarding him will be appreciated by his anxious sister, May. Mrs. Paul Waddington, care of Clayton Daywitt, R. R. 1, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

LeROY, WILLIAM H.—May go under the name of Harold L. Quance. Five feet three inches tall, dark eyes and complexion, twenty-nine years old. Served with the A. E. F. during the World War. His mother is worried over his absence. Write to Mrs. John Paterson, 357 West Second Street, Elmira, New York.

ROBERTSON, MRS. ANNA, and **FANNIN, MRS. MARY.**—Anna lived in Denver, Colorado, and Mary in Billings, Montana. Write to Mrs. Elizabeth Petica, 12634 Superior Avenue, East Cleveland, Ohio.

60 Days Ago They Called Me "BALDY"

Now my friends are amazed. They all ask me how I was able to grow new hair in such a short time.

BOB MILLER and I had both been getting bald for years. We had tried almost every hair restorer on the market. But we might as well have used brass polish.

One day Bob left town—a business trip. Weeks passed. I began to wonder if I'd ever see him again.

One afternoon at the office I heard a familiar voice—"Hello, Baldy," it said. I glanced up, annoyed. There stood Bob.

"For Pete's sake!" I exclaimed, "where have you been keeping yourself?"

We shook hands. "Take off your hat," I suggested sarcastically. "Let me gaze on that 'luxuriant hair' of yours. I haven't seen it for weeks."

"Luxuriant hair is right," he retorted. "I've got the finest growth of hair you ever saw!"

I laughed out loud! "Know any more jokes?" I said.

Bob stepped back and swept off his hat. I couldn't believe my eyes. The top of his head, once almost bare, was covered with a brand new growth of real, honest to goodness hair!

A New Way to Grow Hair

That night I went to Bob's house to try his new hair-growing treatment. He sat me in a chair and placed a strange apparatus on my head and turned on the electricity. The treatment lasted 15 minutes. At the end of the treatment I rubbed the top of my head. "Well, Bob," I chuckled, "I don't feel any new hair."

"Of course you don't," Bob came back. "But just you wait a while."

On my way home I read a booklet which Bob had given me. It described a new method of growing hair—discovered by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It was the only treatment I ever heard of that got right down to the *roots* of the hair and awakened them to new activity. Bob was proof. I decided to send for the treatment immediately.

I Get the Surprise of My Life

Every night I spent 15 minutes taking the treatment. The first two or three days nothing happened. But I could feel my scalp beginning to tingle with new life—new vigor. Then one day when I looked in the mirror I got the thrill of a lifetime. All over my head a fine, downy fuzz was beginning to appear. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot on my head. And after 60 days my worries about baldness were ended. I had gained an entirely new growth of healthy hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most cases of loss of hair the hair roots are not dead, but merely *dormant*—temporarily asleep. To make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. You must nourish the *roots*. And it's exactly the same with the hair.

This new treatment, which Merke perfected after 17 years' experience in treating baldness, is the first and only practical method of getting right down to the hair roots and nourishing them.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as $500 for the results secured through personal treatments. Yet now these very same results may be secured in any home in which there is electricity—*at a cost of only a few cents a day.*

Merke frankly admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that no matter how thin your hair may be, he invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails to grow hair then your money is instantly refunded. And you are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that great numbers of people are securing with the Merke Treatment. "The New Way to Make Hair Grow" is a 34 page book which explains the Merke Treatment in detail. It will be sent you entirely free if you simply mail the coupon below.

This little book tells all about the amazing new treatment, shows what it has done for countless others, and contains valuable information about the hair and scalp. Remember, this book is yours free—to keep. And if you decide to take the treatment you can do so without risking a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 425, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Allied Merke Institute, Inc.
Dept. 425, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Please send me, without cost or obligation, in a plain wrapper, a copy of your book, "The New Way to Make Hair Grow."

Name .....
(State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

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Velour Bed-Davenport Suite

Davenport Quickly Converted into a Full-size Double Bed.

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This Fine Floor Lamp With Order

Gorgeous lamp 63 in. high. Pedestal finished in dull antique gold and gold stippling (hammered effect) with ebony black bands. The 6 panel shade is shirred blue georgette over rose sateen. Regular $15 value.

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ALL FOR ONLY $1 DOWN

New, brand new . . . this 3-piece Velour Bed Davenport Suite of costly design *below regular factory cost!* An astounding offer! And with it we *give* you, at no extra charge, this stunning floor lamp of very latest style.

30 Days FREE Trial

Never has the good, old-fashioned American dollar bought so much in fine furniture. This suite alone would cost you $90 anywhere else. The only reason we offer you this suite actually below factory cost is because we took over the entire output of a manufacturer in urgent need of cash. You know the increasing popularity of velour living room furniture. This one is not only an exquisitely beautiful suite for the living room, but a full-size comfortable double bed is embodied in the davenport, which is concealed and out of way when not in use. A living room and bed room suite combined. Just like having another room. Just send $1 with order today. You can have them on 30 days FREE trial. You are sole judge of the value. If you do not believe this the greatest bargain ever, return suite and lamp and we will refund your $1 and transportation charges both ways.

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