FLYNN'S WEEKLY

FEB. 26
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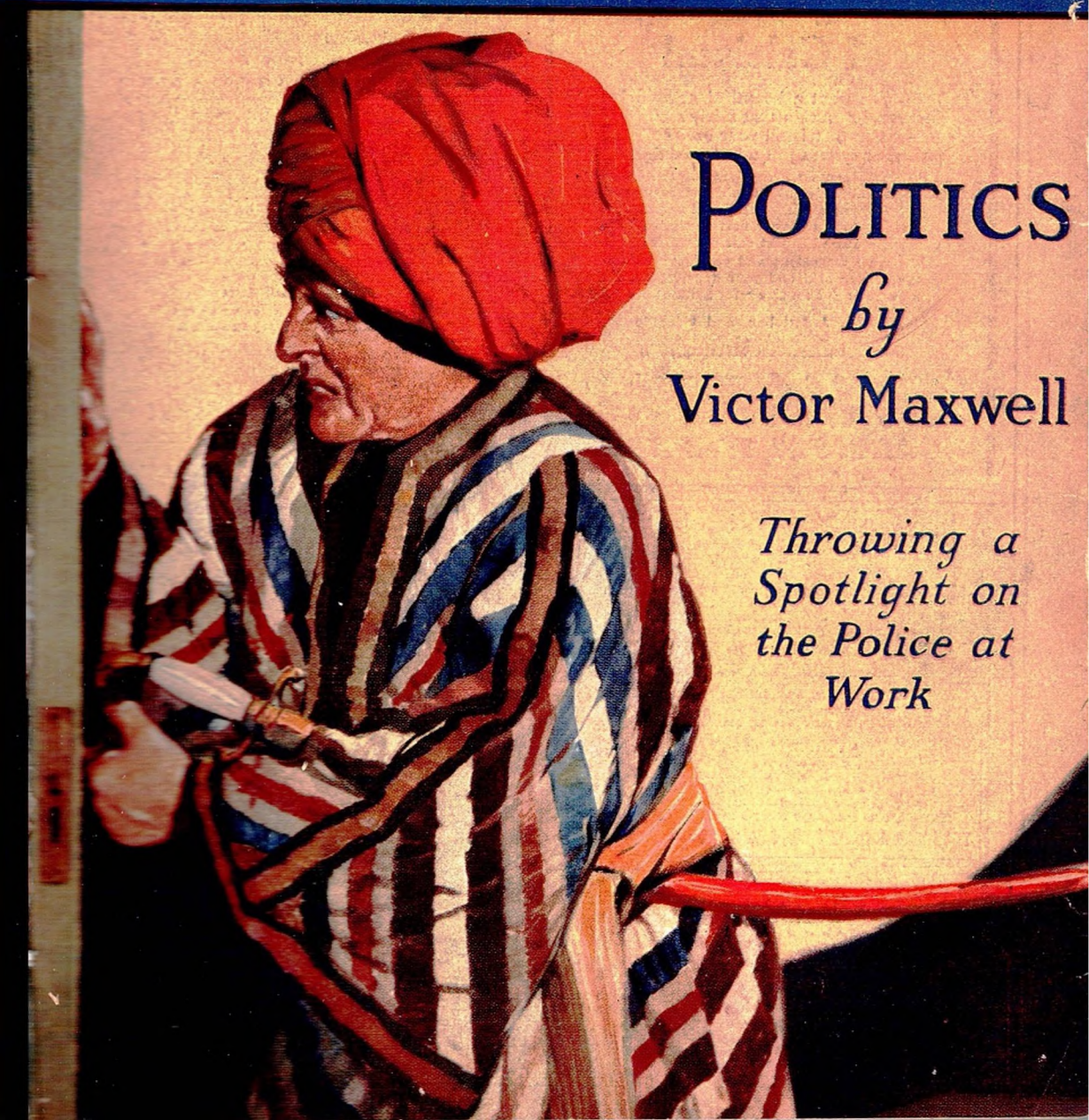


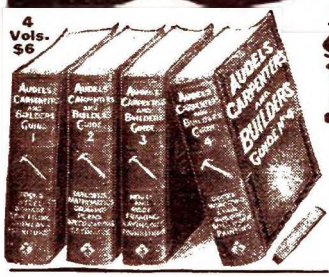
POLITICS

by

Victor Maxwell

Throwing a Spotlight on the Police at Work

BUILDERS TRADE GUIDES



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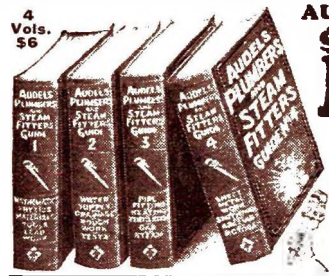

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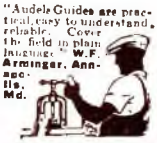

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FLYNN'S WEEKLY

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME XXII | SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1927 | NUMBER 2

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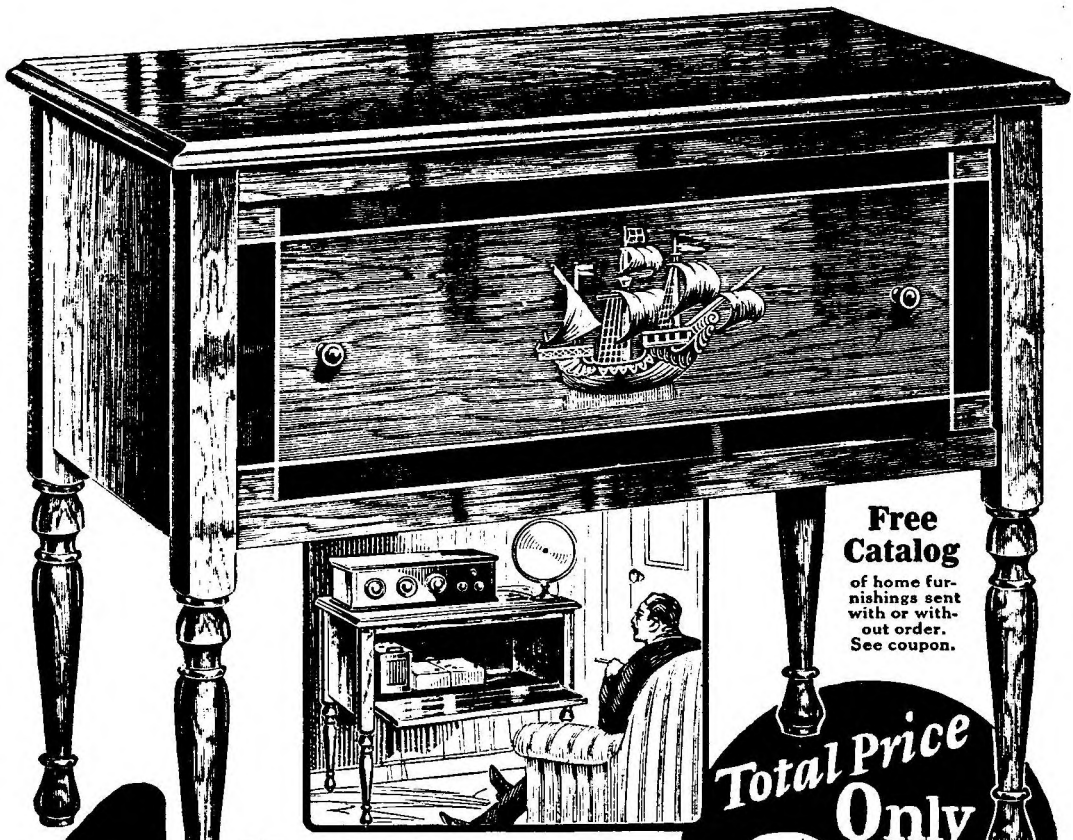

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FLYNN'S WEEKLY

VOLUME XXII SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1927 NUMBER 2

SINCE the first appearance of FLYNN'S WEEKLY *every effort has been made by its publishers to keep the subject matter of the magazine as widely varied as possible. This statement of policy cannot be repeated too often. It has led to really extraordinary results.*

It has gone a long way to make FLYNN'S WEEKLY *popular with a circle of readers who do not naturally turn to detective stories.*

Notice how this program of widely divergent subject matters works out in the case of special articles.

In this issue we close Mr. Gollomb's picturesque story of The Borgias. It is a far cry from this story to the leading article in next week's issue, THE EMPTY CHAIR *by Charles Somerville. Contrasted against The Borgias is a penetrative delving into the notorious Hall-Mills case. Read it and see how inclusive* FLYNN'S WEEKLY *can be.*

Only a few weeks away is the publication of BLOODY WILLIAMSON *by Don H. Thompson, the true inside story of a complete chapter in American history. In general nature it is as far removed from "The Empty Chair" as "The Empty Chair" is from "The Borgias." Yet it is all* FLYNN'S WEEKLY *material.*

Older readers of the magazine will have been wondering why we take so much space to tell you all this. They will argue that such a declaration surely is not necessary for a magazine whose policy has spoken so definitely for itself in the printing of such widely divergent yarns as CARROLL OF CARROLLTON, SMASHING THE BIG MOB, ELUSIVE JACK SHEPPARD, *and* AMERICA'S SUPER-BANDIT.

Probably they are right, but you who are picking up the magazine for the first time will be interested.

William J. Flynn

Riordan had a wrist-lock on a squirming man—

POLITICS

By Victor Maxwell

FLYNN'S ILLUSTRIOUS PAIR, BRADY AND RIORDAN, UNDERTAKE A JOB SO STUPENDOUS THAT THE SERGEANT LOSES HIS OWN IN THE MÊLÉE

CHAPTER I

SEEING AMERICA FIRST

THE door of the inner office at the detective bureau was pushed open and a small, though belligerent man was thrust inside. Close behind him followed "Big" Halloran, his face redder than usual, and his breath still coming rapidly, though evidently more because of choler than unwonted exercise.

"This feller, sergeant," he began abruptly, "hopped off the Overland. I happened to be down at the depot when the train come in, on another matter.

"The minute I lamped him, I asked him what he was doing here, and instead of answering respectable-like, he gives me a lot of lip about me being a flat-foot and he'll have me broke. Then he begins to yell he wants to see the chief. So I brang him in."

The small man spoke right up.

"And I do want to see the chief. I demand it. It's an outrage. I—"

Detective Sergeant Riordan, in charge of the bureau for the first night relief, held up a hand.

"That 'll be about all out of you, Kiefer," he said. "What did you expect would happen? Think we'd get the police band out to serenade you?"

"There," exclaimed Halloran, much pleased. "You made him just as quick as I did, sergeant. And I hadn't yet got to tellin' you who he was. You got a good eye for faces, sergeant, if I do say it."

"Say, look here," interjected the small man. "What's all this stuff about 'Keefe.' That's not my name. This big, blundering

—when Halloran answered his "Come on in"

flatty here called me that, and now you do it. I want to see the chief of police, or a lawyer, or somebody who's got some brains."

Sergeant Riordan reached out and pressed a button on the edge of his desk. To the responding doorman he said:

"Bring me Book Number Twenty-Six—you know, next to the end on the second shelf."

A moment later the doorman returned with one of the ponderous tomes that made up the bureau chief's library—"picture books" the members of the force called them. Riordan placed it on his knees, snapped several pages over, and then turned it around.

"There you are, Kiefer," he said. "Look for yourself. There's your picture, your record, and your finger-prints. Want me to have you printed so you can compare 'em?"

The small man did not look. Some of his belligerency faded.

"Well, supposin' I am," he exclaimed. "You got nothing on me here. Can't I even get off the train in your darned town without being yanked off my feet before all the passengers, like I was a crook? What's the idea?"

"'Like ye was a crook,' that's good—an' you not more'n three months, if that, out o' Auburn," said Halloran.

"What you doing here, Kiefer?" asked Sergeant Riordan.

"I just got off the train."

"What for?"

"'Cause I wanted to go to a hotel to sleep."

"Where are you aiming for after you sleep?"

"I don't know as that's anything to you. You got nothing on me. You can't get away with rough stuff like this, sergeant, and you know it."

Riordan's eyes narrowed. "Do you want to bet I can't? Now you take a reef, young fellow, or I'll put you upstairs. Answer me civil. What you doing out here?"

"I'm goin' to Frisco."

"Where'd you come from?"

"Chi—last."

"Why didn't you take a through train from Chi to Frisco. What'd you stop here for?"

"I don't have to travel on the extra fare limiteds, do I?"

"That's your lookout. There's a lot of through trains between Chi and Frisco that don't come north here. And there's through cars that come in here and go right out again. What you going to do in Frisco?"

" I got a job there."

" What is it?"

" I know—if I tell you, you'll wire down that I'm on my way, and the bulls there will give me the same welcome this flatty give me here. Darn near tore my clothes off, he did."

" What's your job in Frisco?"

" Aw, I'm goin' on the stage."

Without rising from his chair, Riordan reached out an arm and gripped Kiefer's coat in his hands, drawing it close and shaking the small man as a terrier shakes a rat.

" You pull one more funny joke," he said, " and I'll lose my temper. What you going to do in Frisco?"

The small man, let loose, swayed a moment, swallowed two or three times, and shook his head.

" Honest, sergeant," he said, " I'm not tryin' to kid you. I got a job on Fisher time—Waldron and McIntyre, they got a magic act. Waldron used to know me, before—before—well, he used to be a pal of mine in the old days.

" I wrote him when I got out, an' he said if I had money enough to get to the coast he'd put me on in his act. Wants a fellow quick with his hands, he does."

Riordan laughed. " I'll say you got the reputation, Kiefer, of being quick with your hands. Well, supposing all that's so, what'd you come round this way for? Seeing America first, are you?"

" I come around this way, sergeant, so as to get into Frisco quiet. I was goin' from here to Seattle, and down by the boat. They don't watch the coast boats, only for bootleg, you know. And I ain't no bootlegger."

" No, a bootlegger takes a chance," commented Riordan. " You want a sure thing. Well, Kiefer, maybe it's all right. I'll find out. I'm going to wire to Frisco and see if there's any such team as Waldron and McIntyre playing Fisher time.

" If there is, you can go. If there isn't, we'll look into your business a little more closely. Take him upstairs, Halloran, and book him for investigation."

" But, sergeant, you're givin' me a black eye down there."

" Nobody could give you a black eye, Kiefer. But I'm not even going to try. I'm just going to find out if there's such a team as you said.

" I won't tell 'em what a nice package they've got comin'—not if there is a Waldron and McIntyre. You want to stick to that, do you?"

" Sure, I'll stick to it."

" All right. Take him up, Halloran."

The big detective led his prisoner from the office, and none too gently. Riordan regarded the " picture book " for a moment, refreshing his mind on the record of John " Sandy " Kiefer, whose accomplishments were put down in detail—larceny from the person, larceny while trespassing, burglary and assault with intent to rob.

A footnote proclaimed that Sandy Kiefer was one of the smoothest dips and prowls on record; and a long list of convictions and sentences showed that he was an old hand at the game.

Closing the book, Riordan wrote a telegram on one of the yellow blanks that adorned a corner of his desk, and then rang for the doorman to return the book to its place and to dispatch the message.

A moment later, Halloran returned to the office.

" He told the jailer he wanted to see the chief," he remarked laughing. " Gee, that bird's got a crust. You ought to have heard the bawling out he give me at the depot when I flagged him. You'd have thought he was the Prince of Wales or somebody. Just like I didn't know him.

" Why, I made him the minute he stepped off the train. In the second Pullman, he was. I betcha we get a report, by and by, from some of the passengers, that they was touched."

" He have any baggage?"

" Only a suit case. I made him open that. Nothin' in it but his clothes."

" He have a ticket to Frisco?"

" If he did he swallowed it—it wasn't on him."

" Have enough money to get to Frisco?"

" One hundred and twenty bucks, most all in currency."

" Well, I've wired south. If he was trying to put something over on us he's out of luck. You did well to make him."

"Who, me? Say, sergeant, all these old-timers, I make 'em. I know them birds the minute I see 'em. It's only these new guys that make me look two or three times; these college boys we get nowadays. But I'm surprised, sergeant, that you made him so quick."

Riordan laughed. "I know a few of 'em, too, Halloran. He happened to be one."

CHAPTER II

A MATTER OF PIPE-LINES

THE door to the office opened suddenly, and Captain of Detectives Brady came in. There was a deep frown upon his face. Halloran, sensing that he had troubles, saluted and withdrew.

Riordan, surprised to see his chief returning so late in the evening—it was after ten o'clock, and Brady's shift ended at four in the afternoon—looked up inquiringly.

Brady flung himself into his chair, but did not open the desk. Instead, he swung round and faced his aid, still frowning.

"Boy," he exclaimed, "do you believe in fortune tellers?"

"Not so much," answered Riordan.

"Nor me neither," said the captain, reaching into his pocket for a cigar, and biting the end from it savagely. Riordan struck a match and held it forward. The older man smoked vigorously for some minutes, then relaxed from his tense attitude.

"Give me quite a turn, it did," he said. "That fellow told me things that—well, surprising things."

"They usually do, chief, if they're good."

"Boy, I'll say this bird was good. The wife wanted me to go. Some of the women folks she pals with had been, and they coaxed her to go. He give her a lot of apple sauce, but there was some stuff in it that wasn't so far wrong.

"I laughed at her, told her the guy just hinted round till he got a lucky lead and then followed it. She flared up at that and said if I'd go to him, I'd see whether he was just lucky or not. Well, one word led to another, and to-night I went. I tell you, boy, that guy has a pipe somewhere."

Riordan smiled. "He's just a sort of a good dick, chief. That's all. Some of these fortune tellers are pretty good that way. They know people, like you and I do.

"When they see a man—you, for instance, nobody has to tell 'em you're a dick. And nobody'd have to tell 'em you were an officer, either. You got a commanding eye—"

"Rats," interrupted Captain Brady. "The first thing this guy says to me is 'You are a man who stands on somebody else's shoulders. By that I mean you have a high position and are regarded by the populace as a great and clever man; but you have attained your position because a younger and cleverer man is working with you.'

"Anybody see that in my face, boy? He means you, too, of course. First thing he said, mind you: 'You are a man who stands on somebody else's shoulders.' Sounded tough at first, boy; but it's the truth."

Riordan waved a hand and laughed. "Bunk, chief. Bunk. Somebody tipped him off who you were. Somebody who knows you—and me. Told him to string you on that line to knock you off your feet, so you'd tip your hand to him.

"Why, chief, just think how crazy he is—why, it was you who took me off a beat and made a dick out of me. Why, you taught me everything I know."

"That's all right, boy, when there's company around. But not between you and me. I know who has the real brains in this office. I used to be pretty good, and I ain't conceited when I say it, either; but since I taught you all I knew, you went off and took a postgraduate course somewhere, and now you can work a case all around me. You know it, too, boy; so don't try to kid me along."

"Who is this marvel, chief?" asked Riordan, hoping to change the line of conversation.

Brady ignored the question. "And what he told me about you and me isn't all," Brady continued. "He told me how much money I was getting, and how I got it, how many years I'd been on the force, where I was before that, how I passed my

civil service examination—and that's something only darned few people now alive know, for it was a trick we put over at the time.

"He told me who had the mortgage on my home when I was first made a captain, and how I paid it off, and that's another thing no man now living knows. And, boy, the inside stuff on the department he told me—why, the man's inhuman."

"Who'd you say he was?"

"He calls himself 'The Yogi Haran Singh.' Got swell quarters up in the Balmoral Apartments. Come the end of the seance, and he wouldn't take any money, though five dollars is his usual fee, just for a little sitting like this. 'The captain will be interested,' he said. 'That is enough for me.' I'll say I was interested."

"What's he do for more than five dollars?"

"Gives you advice."

Riordan laughed. "I'll say you've been neatly buncoed, chief. Somebody who knows about you has tipped this guy off. Maybe it was your wife. Unintentionally, I mean. You say she's been to see him before. These birds are awful good at getting information."

"I know, boy, I thought of all that. But this bird told me stuff my wife doesn't even suspect. He told me stuff that, as far as I know, only Joe Cardigan and me know; and Joe's been dead pretty nearly two years now.

"No, boy, nobody could have tipped this bird off to all the stuff he unrolled; why, he pretty near knows enough to put me in jail—if the statute of limitations wasn't in good working order."

Riordan shook his head. "Chief, I think you got bats in the belfry. All these fortune tellers are fakes. They all of 'em got pipe-lines. The better they are, the better the pipe-lines, that's all. Did he name names, or just such-and-such a party?"

"He didn't have to name names, boy. I recognized 'em."

"I thought so, chief. That's the way they do. Ramble along hinting at this or that, and watch you. They see you nod your head or a funny look come in your eye, and they know they're on the right path, and they follow it up. Clever ducks, they are."

"I'll say they're clever."

The telephone rang sharply, and Riordan reached for the instrument.

"Sergeant Riordan speaking," he said. "Yes, sir, he is. Hold the line a minute."

He passed the instrument to Brady, holding his hand over the mouthpiece as he did so, and whispering: "It's the old man himself."

Brady took the phone, gave his name, and listened. After some moments he said: "All right, sir," and hung up, handing the instrument back to his aid. He studied the ceiling in silence for quite a little while, smoking thoughtfully.

"You got some guy upstairs for investigation?" he asked finally.

"Yeah—Sandy Kiefer. Halloran picked him off the Overland and brought him in. He give me a song and dance about being on the way to Frisco to join a vaudeville show, and I told him I'd hold him till I found out if he was lying."

"Spring him."

"Huh?"

"You heard me, spring him."

It was Riordan's turn to look thoughtfully at the ceiling. Then he reached for his desk phone.

"Gimme the jail—that you, Wilcox? —this is Riordan, down in the detective bureau. Recognize my voice?—well, you got a guy up there for investigation; John Kiefer —yes—throw him out—yes, spring him —good-by."

"I let you do it, boy," said Brady, "to save your face. The chief, he wanted me to do it. Hot, he is."

"What license has he got to be hot? Kiefer has a record a mile long. This isn't any bum-wise town, where birds like him can float in and lie under cover. Why, Sandy is only out of Auburn for a second conviction on burglary by about three months."

"You got anything on him?"

"Only his record."

"Well, boy, the law says we must presume every man to be innocent till he's proved guilty. Kiefer hasn't done anything here for—it must be sixteen years, at least."

"But I got a right to hold him for investigation."

"If you have any reason to suspect him, you have."

"Well, if a professional dip and prowl like him says he's goin' on the stage in Frisco, and gets off the train here without any ticket to Frisco, what would you do?"

"Just what you did, boy. But Kiefer is in the clear this time, and he knows it, and he's evidently put up a holler; and if it come to suin' the city he might make us sweat a bit.

"He's a smart bozo, is Sandy Kiefer, and while he's a crook, we got nothin' on him yet. As it is now he hasn't got any kick coming. You held him for investigation, and he satisfied somebody higher up, and you turned him out.

"It's up to the old man now. I hope he goes out and prowls the Belmont Grand Hotel and we get him in again in the morning. That's the way I feel. But orders is orders."

"I'd like to know how he got to the old man so quick."

"Some politician lawyer, I'll bet. The mayor is runnin' for reëlection, as you darn well know, and while Sandy Kiefer hasn't got any vote here, he's probably got a bunch of friends. Or some attorney made the old man think he had. And you know what happens to the chief if the mayor isn't reëlected, there's no civil service to save his neck."

"Well, here's one vote the mayor don't get."

"And I know where there's some others he don't get, too, boy; but don't you go advertise the fact. Well, I guess I'll be getting home. The wife will be waitin' up to hear how I got along with the Yogi."

CHAPTER III

"POLITICS"

WITH Brady departed, Sergeant Riordan left his office and went up to the jail on the top floor, where he sought out Wilcox, the night jailer.

"What attorney saw that Kiefer party?" he demanded.

"Nobody, sir."

"Who did see him, then?"

"Nobody, sir. There hasn't been any visitors in here all night."

"What cops have been up here since Halloran brought Kiefer in?"

"None, sir. It's been a quiet night. There's only two drunks in the tank, and no other business till Halloran brought your man in, sir."

"What one of your turnkeys has been out since Kiefer was locked in?"

"None of them, sergeant. I been sitting right here, and the turnkeys are in the dining room, playing cards. I locked Kiefer in myself."

"Did he talk to you?"

"Never said a word, sir. Didn't say nothing when I let him out. Just laughed at me."

Riordan returned to his office, pausing at the outer desk to leave orders for Halloran to be sent in to him next time he reported. Just before twelve, when his shift ended, the big detective lumbered in.

"Your man's sprung, Halloran," said Riordan, watching the sleuth closely.

"Who sprung him?" Halloran's inquiry was belligerent.

"I did. He got in touch with people to vouch for him."

"How'd he get word out? I told the jailer he was to have no visitors."

"That's what I want to know."

Halloran, scowling, considered this. Finally he said:

"He must have had a pal with him. Woman, probably, and she lay back when she seen me grab him."

"Maybe that was it."

"Who was his friends, sergeant, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"The chief called up."

"Election," said Halloran. "That was it. His moll got to some shyster and he got to the chief. We might as well run a bum-wise town, sergeant, till after election. So help me, I hope the mayor don't get a single vote but his own."

"So do I, Halloran. But don't crack that round. We got trouble enough. Say, you know Dave Farrell?"

"His as used to ride cycle races and now

is driving a taxi for the Reliable Company?"

"Yes."

"I'll say I know him. Smooth piece of works."

"Well, listen. To-morrow night, if you happen to see him, tell him to call me up when he's got time for supper and say what chophouse he'll be in. Tell him I want to talk to him and I don't want any audience when we get together. Get me?"

"Sure, sergeant. Anything else?"

"Not to-night, Halloran. You want to impress on Dave that he and I don't want to stage any old-home-town rally when we meet, see?"

"I get you, sergeant. Most likely I'll see him."

Halloran went out, and Riordan, closing his desk, turned out the lights and followed soon after. The detective bureau ran itself, largely, during the second night relief; the late trick sleuths taking turns sitting at the desk.

CHAPTER IV

UPS AND DOWNS

THE next afternoon, as Detective Sergeant Riordan stepped from his roadster in the police garage just before four o'clock, when he was due for duty, one of the motor cycle men stepped up and saluted.

"Chief wants to see you, sergeant," he said. "Told me to watch for you and send you in."

Instead of taking the elevator upstairs, Riordan turned, passed through the passageway to the main lobby, and entered the "old man's" office, saluted and stood rigidly at attention.

The chief looked up, waited until the door had swung to behind the sergeant, and then said:

"Halloran's one of your men, so I'll let you hand him the news. He's to report to Captain Jason for uniform duty."

"May I ask why, sir?"

"Sure. And I'll tell you. Because he arrested, without any cause whatsoever, a traveler who entered the city last night."

"You refer to Sandy Kiefer, sir?"

"I do."

"Well, sir, you'd better hand it to me instead of Halloran, then. I ordered Kiefer's arrest. I'm responsible, not Halloran, sir."

"You ordered it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

"The man's an ex-con—"

"You got anything you want him for? Do you order the arrest of every ex-con who comes to town? Is there anything hanging over Kiefer?"

"I ordered his arrest, sir, and I booked him for investigation."

"And I ordered him sprung as soon as I heard about it. That was persecution, Riordan, and you know it."

"I don't think so, sir."

"Well, it was. And if that's the sort of police work you do, you'd better go back on the street and learn something."

The chief swung at his desk, reached for his telephone, and barked into it:

"Gimme Captain Brady—Brady? This is the chief. You pick another sergeant. I'm putting Riordan on the street."

He banged up the receiver.

"Go upstairs and get your stuff. Report to the captain that loses a sergeant to Brady. Never mind about Halloran. I'll show you who's running this department."

Riordan saluted, turned precisely on his heel, and quietly walked from the office, took the elevator and ascended to the second floor.

Going quietly to his desk he saw a telegram lying upon it. He picked up the yellow envelope and tore it open. The slip inside was addressed to him and came from the San Francisco police. The message read:

> Waldron and McIntyre playing local theater.

He tossed the message to Brady. "That's the outfit Sandy Kiefer said he was going to join. I guess he told the truth."

Brady dashed the message to the floor.

"Sit down and shut up," he rasped. Then he reached for the direct phone, the line of which did not pass through the head-

quarters exchange, and called a number. Presently Riordan heard him say:

"I want to speak to the mayor. This your honor? This is Detective Captain Brady talking— Not so good, thank you, sir. But what I called you about was this, your honor: this old gent you got down here for chief has just ordered Riordan into uniform because he pinched a prime sneak last night for investigation. I want to know if that goes? Yes, sir, John Sandy Kiefer, with a record as long as your arm. Thank you, sir, much obliged, your honor. Good-by."

He slammed the receiver back on the hook, and turned to Riordan:

"Boy, go down and loaf around the lobby. Get in everybody's way. Stay there till you get orders."

"But, chief—"

"Go on, do as I tell you; get out."

Riordan went down to the lobby, to have a curious experience. It was evident that the news of his transfer had already spread, as such news will fly about a police station. Nobody mentioned it to him, but the officers and men looked at him strangely.

Some, who visioned him as being put over them, greeted him with a little too much jovialness; others who were not displeased at his downfall, smiled distantly at him or acted as if they had not seen him.

Some of the lawyers, hanging around for late afternoon cases, winked at him, and one of the reporters very evidently wanted to speak to him, but did not know how to broach the subject.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes he walked about the lobby, and then the door of the chief's office was jerked open and the old man bawled out his name.

He crossed to the little room, closing the door behind him.

"I've changed my mind, Riordan," snapped the chief. "You can keep on the same detail. I guess you were within your rights. But don't do it again. I don't want any man in this department to persecute a crook just because he's been in jail.

"Give 'em all a chance, they may have reformed. If you have anything on a man, go and get him. But don't skulk around down at the depot just on the chance that you can pick up some poor devil who's done his stretch and bring him in. Making arrests like that may fatten up your record, but it doesn't get you anywhere with me."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"As to this man Kiefer, I know he's a bad egg. But we got nothing on him. I understand he's going through the city on the way south, and only stopped here to get a night's rest.

"He's probably on his way by now, pulled out this morning most likely. Forget it. I was a bit hasty, Riordan—the matter was put up to me last night rather differently from the way you've explained it. Just forget it. Report to Captain Brady."

"Yes, sir."

Sergeant Riordan again saluted, swung from the room, and walked out into the lobby. The look on his face telegraphed the news to waiting eyes, and half a dozen officers rushed up and shook his hand, while others slapped his back.

He laughed at them, perhaps a bit triumphantly, and stepped into the elevator. When he reached his own office he found it empty; Captain Brady's desk was closed and his chair was vacant.

He took a deep breath, threw off his coat and hat, and sat down at his own desk, reaching for the day's reports.

After he got things going smoothly he heaved a deep sigh, leaned back in his chair and picked up the evening paper for relaxation. He read the "funnies," skimmed over the news, and then devoted himself to the editorial page; not because he thought much of the editorials, but because he felt that a little steady and allegedly deep reading would help to settle his nerves; for the whirlwind afternoon had required all his self-possession in order to keep a calm exterior.

He knew such things happened in the police department periodically, but he had been fortunate, for several years, in steering a course free from department storms.

Big Halloran came in about six o'clock, saluted in his clumsy fashion, and said:

"The party you were speaking to me about yesterday, sergeant—you know, young Dave Farrell, sir. He'll be eating his

supper at eleven o'clock in Needham's chop-house, down on Sixth Street. He says he'll be up in the gallery in the back of the place, sir. I happened to run acrost him this afternoon."

"Good work, Halloran."

The big detective shifted uneasily a minute, coughed, and then smiled, his mouth expanding in the process to truly terrific proportions.

"I got to thank you for something, I guess, sergeant," he said. "About being put in uniform, I mean."

"Forget it."

"I don't forget them things, sergeant. I've heard all about it. It's all over headquarters, sir. You know blame well it was me got that fellow, and first you knew of it was when I brang him in."

"Well' don't tell the old man. I couldn't let him make a goat out of you. What's more, if you spot him again in town, bring him in to me."

"There's no use your going out of your way, sergeant, to get into trouble."

"I know it, Halloran. But you leave me do the worrying. I don't mean for you to go hunting this Kiefer party, but if you see him on the streets bring him to me."

"Yes, sir. And I thank you for going to the front for me, sir."

"That's all right. When you go out, if young Willis is in the back room, tell him to come in here."

"Yes, sir."

A few moments later Willis came into the office. Riordan motioned him to a chair, reached into a drawer of his desk and drew out a ten dollar bill from the emergency expense account he kept there, and passed it to the detective.

CHAPTER V

OVER THE WIRE

"I GOT a job for you, Willis," he said. "Down in some theater playing Fisher time in Frisco is a team called Waldron and McIntyre. I think they've got a magic act, but I'm not sure.

"After eight o'clock, when they'll be sure to be at the theater, I want you to go up to the Belmont Grand Hotel, get yourself a nice comfortable telephone booth, and put through a call to Frisco and get either Waldron or McIntyre on the line.

"You may have some trouble doing it, and you may have to wait till they get off stage, but I want you to stay with it till you get 'em.

"When you get either Waldron or McIntyre, you tell 'em you're bookkeeper or something in the Reynolds Hotel here—all the actors stop there—and that you want to know if they have a party named John Kiefer who's going to join their act?

"You let on that the Kiefer party is short on his room rent, and that he's told you he had a job coming up with Waldron and McIntyre and you want to know.

"Impress on them that you haven't the slightest idea of holding either Waldron or McIntyre for the bill, see; you're just inquiring so as to be able to decide whether or not to stretch this Kiefer guy's credit some more. Get the idea?"

"Yes, sergeant. You want to find out if Kiefer has a job with the act or if he's a friend of the actors."

"You're a good cop, Willis. You got it the first time. Now get this, too. After you get the information, you slip into the smoking room of the Belmont Grand and wait there for me. You wait until the hotel burns down, if you have to. Buy yourself some cigars, and have a good time.

"But you wait there, no matter how tired you get of waiting, and if anybody from the department comes in and asks you what you're doing loafing around, you tell 'em it's your night off and you're playing a millionaire."

"Yes, sir, I get you. I don't tell anybody but you what I'm doing."

"That's it. Now get on your way."

Riordan kept himself busy with routine affairs after that. There was always plenty to do, even when on the surface it appeared things were dull.

There were the pawnshop reports to scan and check, for instance; and communications from outside departments to answer or file, as well as the books and records of his own work to be kept up.

He was thus cleaning up a great mass of accumulated detail when, shortly after nine, the office door was opened and the mayor entered.

Detective Sergeant Riordan rose and saluted him, and pushed a chair forward. The mayor dropped into it, found a cigar, lighted up, passed another to Riordan, and motioned him to resume his seat.

"How's every little thing, sergeant?" he asked.

"About as usual, your honor."

"Anything special in the line of crime to-night?"

"No, sir; some prowls, a shooting down in the Italian quarter, but nobody dead. Poor marksmanship."

"I hear you had a ruckus with the chief?"

Riordan shook his head.

"Tell me about it."

"It's news to me, sir."

"Some trouble over a prisoner?"

"No trouble, sir. The chief thought I acted a bit hastily, but that was all, sir."

"Going to break you, wasn't he?"

"I didn't hear him mention it, sir."

The mayor laughed. "That's right, stand together. You cops would cut each other's throats among yourselves, but let some outsider butt in, and you're all brothers.

"Well, listen to me; I want to tell you something. I think a great deal of you, you know. I guess you realize that, because I'm paying you that extra twenty-five a month. You'll keep on getting that, sergeant. This little fuss doesn't amount to anything; it was all a misunderstanding. You forget it."

"I've already forgotten it, sir."

"That's good. Now I'll tell you what happened. This man Kiefer is a bad nut, and all that—I know his record as well as you do—but he didn't come here to operate.

"He came here to get some instructions from a friend of mine, who's going to use him as a witness in a case. My friend told me all about it, and I promised that Kiefer would get immunity here; that he wouldn't be bothered, see? My friend was down at the depot to meet him, and he saw the arrest, and naturally he hollers to me.

"I didn't want to tell the chief all about it, so I just told him to see to it that Kiefer got out. I guess the chief was feeling sore about something else, and he took it out on you. Kiefer won't bother you any more, so don't worry. And he won't pull anything here."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, Riordan. I just dropped down to put your mind at rest. As long as I'm mayor nobody's going to bump you off your job here."

"Thank you, sir."

They shook hands, and his honor departed. After he had left Riordan resumed his work, and kept at it without further interruption until half past ten, when he slipped into his street clothes, told the desk man in the outer office he was going to supper, and left headquarters.

He went on foot, and a block away hopped onto a passing street car. Some little distance further on he left the car, walked a block, and took another one, but only rode a short way before he dropped off and again walked, this time across town.

Once he circled a block, to be sure that he was not being followed, and then made directly for Needham's chophouse, where he made his way to the rear and upstairs to the little gallery, in which were two or three tables.

He took a chair at one, and when a waiter came up to take his order told him he wanted to "see the boss." Mr. Needham appeared presently, wearing the white, though somewhat grease-spotted uniform of a cook. He looked closely at Riordan, and then smiled as he recognized his guest.

"Jimmy," said the detective sergeant, "I got a friend coming in presently, and we want to talk. You sort of keep an eye out and don't let any parties come up here in the gallery till we go out. And you might fix us up a couple of tenderloin steaks, with trimmings."

"Yes, sergeant. And your friend—"

"He'll walk right up here. Don't worry about him. Good tenderloin, now, and fried potatoes and some tomatoes, and anything else you think of. I'll blow five dollars."

As Jimmy Needham went downstairs

smiling, a roughly dressed man, with a visored cap and a leather coat, pushed past him on the way up. Riordan rose to greet him, and the two shook hands warmly and looked long into each other's faces.

"Davie, you rascal," said Riordan, "you look just as natural as ever. Why don't you cut out this taxi stuff?"

"Too much fun, Matt. And it's exciting, too. Makes you forget. And there's good money in it, too."

"Sure, for you. You'd make money at anything—people cotton to you, Davie. But you're wasting your time. You ought to be doing something better."

"Maybe I will, soon. I'm feeling more like myself, Matt. What's on your mind?"

"Steak and fried spuds and trimmings. It'll be here pretty soon. Tell me about the taxi business; you must have some blamed funny experiences."

It appeared that Dave Farrell had. He was still telling anecdotes and keeping Riordan laughing when the waiter brought their tenderloins and then tactfully withdrew.

He kept up a string of stories until both had finished eating and were sitting back smoking cigars that Riordan had thoughtfully provided, and sipping their coffee. Then he paused.

"There, that's enough, Matt. Now you tell one. I know you didn't have me up here just to listen to a lot of yarns like I've been spinning. What's on your mind?"

"I got a job for you, Davie."

"Sure, I knew that. I hope it's tough."

"It is, and it isn't. You know the Balmoral Apartments?"

"Sure, who doesn't?"

"There's a fellow there calls himself Yogi Haran Singh."

"Calls himself what?"

"Yogi Haran Singh."

"And what do I do?"

"That's the stuff, Davie. You go up there and slap him on the back and tell him you know he's a fraud, but that you can help him at so much a help.

"You expound to him the stuff that a taxi bandit gets next to, tell him how many sucker customers you can bring him, what information you can slip him, and make a deal with him.

"Sting him plenty—the more you ask and make him pay you, the more he'll value your stuff. And watch your step; don't give him any bum steers. You be a good capper, see?"

"Compound a felony, eh?"

"That's it. Compound it right. If you can think of any good tricks to teach him, pass 'em along."

"I can do 'levitation.'"

"So can I. Teach him that. Make him a real yogi."

"Not with that name, Matt. That would be impossible."

Riordan laughed. "Never mind getting him to change his name. Leave him be foolish about that. What I want is for you to be this bird's brother; get closer to him than a postage stamp."

Farrell laughed whole-heartedly. "You'll make a rogue out of me yet, Matt," he said. "And when I get next to the works, how do I pass it on to you?"

"Young Willis. He'll be at the Belmont Grand, ladies' entrance, every night, about eleven o'clock. I'll point him out to you to-night. Talk to him like you would to me.

"And one other thing, Davie. Here's a picture of a little, short guy with sandy hair and pointed ears, a scar on his Adam's apple, and an anchor tatooed on his right arm when he was a tar in the British Navy, before he deserted.

"You study the picture, and then put it away where none of your friends will ever find it. If you see the little shrimp anywheres, get what you can on him. But don't scare him."

"Matt, you make me feel myself again. I'll sure do that. And thank you for the chance. When do I get a look at this Willis person?"

"Right away now, Davie. Your cab's outside?"

"Parked down the street a short distance—at the corner."

"Well, you drive me to the ladies' entrance of the Belmont Grand. I'll go in and come out with a fellow in a minute. It will be Willis. Willis has only been a dick three years, but he's good and getting better. You'll appreciate him first time you

talk to him. To-night you only get a look at him."

"All right, Matt; let's go."

CHAPTER VI

SOMETHING ON TAP

IN the ornate smoking room of the Belmont Grand, Riordan found Willis, dressed as neatly as any guest of the house and calmly reading a book from the hotel library while he smoked lazily in one of the big leather-upholstered armchairs. Riordan gave him a nod and sat down beside him.

"Put your book up, lad, and come along," he said. "We're going out the ladies' entrance. There'll be a taxi bandit out there I want you to get a good look at. But don't bite him; he's tough."

Willis tapped a bell on a table beside him, gave the book and a quarter tip to the responding bellhop, and strolled from the room with Riordan, a dapper young man going out with a well dressed older one. As they came to the sidewalk a taxi driver solicited them, but they merely looked at him and passed on.

"Have any luck with the telephone?" asked Riordan.

"Eight dollars' worth, sergeant. Finally got Waldron, though. He doesn't know the Kiefer party, he said, and never heard of him. Was sure his partner didn't know him either.

"Said he had no job for anybody, that Waldron and McIntyre was strictly a two-man team, and he was sorry if I'd let myself get stung.

"Besides which he said his act was going south, and not north, and that he'd played here over a month ago. Nice chap, he seemed over the phone, and promised to stay at my hotel next time he played here."

"Well, that's eight dollars' worth to me. The bird I'm curious about, this Kiefer party, must have got hold of an old paper somewhere and noted the name. I figure he was lying."

"The fellow Halloran—"

"Willis, you're a young cop, and I like you. You're learning fast. But you're still a bit too anxious to show how much you know and that you use your ears. Listen, you keep your mouth shut and your ears open—especially about anybody of the name of Kiefer. It's unhealthy right now."

"Yes, sir."

"And another thing, Willis. Every night till further orders I want you to stroll out of the ladies' entrance of the Belmont Grand about eleven o'clock. The ladies' entrance, understand? You just stroll out of it with your mouth shut and your ears open.

"Of course, if you're on some case and you can't make it conveniently, why, miss a night. But pretty near every night I want you to ramble out that door we just passed through at just about eleven o'clock. If anything happens to you, come and tell me about it personal. Get that?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. You've done fine. You can report off—no need of coming back to headquarters. I'll see that you're signed off. Good night."

The next afternoon when Sergeant Riordan showed up to take over affairs of the detective bureau for the first night relief, Captain Brady was still at his desk. The older man, however, made no reference to recent past history, merely nodding to his aid.

Riordan went through his reports and got his work started, and then turned to find his chief still in the room.

"Boy," said Brady, "I've been thinking about that fortune teller guy I was to see—you know the one who got me all stirred up the other day. I think you ought to go have your mind read and your life history told."

"Not me, chief. I've seen the best performers on the stage. These cheap imitations bore me."

"No fooling, boy—I think you ought to give him the once-over."

"Forget it, chief; he's just a fakir."

"I blame well know that, boy. But he's got too much stuff. You go get a sitting."

"Nope."

"Well, I'll send one of the boys up, then. I'm interested."

"What are you interested in?"

"Oh, a lot of things. He knows too much. Besides, there's an ordinance against clairvoyants, unless they're licensed."

"This bird's no clairvoyant. Forget it. Don't you know a yogi is a sort of Hindu priest? You go monkeying with him, and you'll get your fingers burned."

"But I want to know what he's doing. He's planting something. All that swell layout, and buzzing the women. Why, they tell me the society dames are flocking to him like bees to honey."

"Society dames haven't got much to do. Any novelty is a sensation—keeps 'em from getting bored."

"Well, I want to know what this guy's doing. If you won't go up there—"

"If all you want to know is what he's doing, wait a few days. I'll have a report on him."

Brady's eyes opened. "You put somebody on him? Why? What's broke?"

"Nothing, chief. Only, like you, I'm interested."

"Who you got on him? I didn't see any thing in the assignment book."

"I got a fellow working."

"Who?"

"Nobody you know. He was commander of a German battery during the war."

"You got an ex-German soldier under cover here?"

"No—the commander of a battery."

"Stop kidding and talk sense."

"Well, chief, that was what we called him. He was in the Signal Corps, rode a motor-cycle. Before he went over he was a bike racer here in an amateur way. Up at a certain place near the Meuse there was a road ran around the side of a hill in full view of the German lines. Back of the lines was a battery.

"This bird was looking for excitement in the war; he had something he wanted to forget. To tell you the truth, he had a girl back home who didn't think he ought to go to war. He didn't agree with her.

"Every afternoon, just after sunset, he'd hop on his motor-cycle and take a scoot along this road over the hill. The Heinies would see him and flash the word back to the battery, and they'd open up and shell that road. Never hit him. We used to call him the commander of that battery, because he could make 'em fire at will.

"He's still trying to forget the girl, not having any luck at getting killed in the war. So, since he's an old buddy of mine, and still craves excitement, I put him on the yogi. He's tickled pink."

Brady looked serious. "Boy, then you think this yogi isn't right?"

Riordan smiled. "Chief, if a fellow came to you and said he was an Irishman, but that his name was Wilhelm Vondergraff Boompernickel, what would you think?"

"I'd think he was a darned liar."

"Well, this yogi's name has got the same things the matter with it."

"Haran Singh—that sounds Hindu."

"It may sound Hindu, chief, but it don't spell it."

"Well, I'll be gol-swizzled. Boy, I'd never have tumbled to that. All these foreign names are Greek to me. By gosh, boy, that Hindu was right—I'm standing on your shoulders."

"Aw, forget it, chief. You'd have tumbled to it pretty quick when you began to get real interested."

Brady shook his head. "No, boy—it's your stuff. You ought to be the head of this department, and not me. I'm about ready to retire. You give me all you get on this bird, will you?"

"Sure, I'll give you all I get. But I'll bet you right now you get more than I do, or get it first. You've got a big start on me; you've seen him."

"Well, why don't you do like I said? Go see him yourself."

"No, chief. The fewer of us who see this duck, the better off everybody is," interrupted Riordan. "This fellow I've got working on him will be eyes and ears enough for me. And you take a tip from me, and don't encourage any of the boys to go up there; not unless there's a call comes in."

"All right, boy." Brady was quiet for a few minutes, then looked up quickly. "Say, boy, there's something doing. I

know it. You wouldn't have put anybody on this bird if there wasn't. Let me in on it."

"There isn't anything yet, chief. I'm just interested. You see, I know this guy's name is wrong, and I'm pretty sure he isn't a yogi. And he's in a swell layout, and got lots of women customers. Of course he's a grafter. Maybe that's all. But I want to get a good line on him now, while he's fresh, so if anything cracks later I won't have to start cold. That's all."

Captain Brady shook his head and laughed. "Very nice piece, boy, and spoke like you thought I was going to believe it. But I don't. However, have it your way. You'll tell me when you get ready, I know."

The telephone on Brady's desk rang, and he reached for the instrument. Riordan turned to his work, to be interrupted a moment later by his chief, who said:

"Stick round, boy. I'll be back presently. Party wants to see me. There may be something in it."

He brushed his uniform before he left, picked out his dress cap, Riordan noticed, and gave his chin a feel as he passed out of the door. It did not need half as good a sleuth as the detective sergeant was to tell he was going to see a member of the fairer sex.

CHAPTER VII

IN HIGH SOCIETY

RIORDAN had wound up his afternoon routine before Brady returned. He was beginning to feel hungry; he usually went out for a bite around six. But his chief had told him to stay, and he did not want to disappoint him without good cause.

He began to wonder what had happened, and what sort of a case Brady had been summoned upon. Finally he picked up his telephone and asked the operator on the headquarters exchange if he had heard anything special.

"No, sergeant, not a thing. Couple of auto accidents down town—ambulance call on one of them. Fire out on Hemingway Place. Nothing else since I came on."

"Them reporters been calling out from the press room any?"

"No, sergeant, just their regular afternoon calls, and short at that. Evidently they didn't get anything."

"Much obliged."

He hung up, and barely had removed his hand from the instrument when the bell rang. He hastened to answer, and Brady's voice came to him over the wire.

"Don't wait, boy," said the older man. "It didn't amount to anything. I'm going on home."

"All right, chief."

He held the phone while he heard Brady hang up at the other end, and then snapped the hook up and down several times. The station operator cut in.

"Trace that call, quick," snapped Riordan, and sat in his chair holding the phone. He heard various clicks as the operator cut him off the board, and then, sooner than he expected, the police central's voice came to him again:

"It was from Elmwood 4-6-4-6, sergeant. That's all I can get."

"All right. Much obliged."

He hung up, jotted the number down on a pad, and went out to get a snack to eat. At the restaurant, after his meal, he stepped into the telephone booth, called "Information," and asked for the name and address of the patron who held that number. The girl asked him to wait, then presently answered:

"We have that number listed as 484 Forest Avenue: the name is Mrs. Joseph N. Cardigan."

On his way back to headquarters Riordan considered this. Mrs. Cardigan he knew. Twice within the past year he had been called to her house—the first time to investigate a prowl, the second time in connection with a rather curious case of forgery and obtaining money under false pretenses.

Mrs. Cardigan was the widow of one of the city's richest men, who had died a year and a half previously. She was a figure in society and club circles, and besides was a charming and very beautiful woman. She was more generally known as Mrs. Temple-Cardigan.

Her husband had been a stanch friend of Captain Brady's, despite their apparent difference in social station, and he knew Mrs. Cardigan would call his chief first, and quietly, if any trouble arose that should need police attention.

The fact that Brady had been at the house for approximately an hour led him to believe that probably Mrs. Cardigan had experienced at least some unpleasant adventure. Of course it was none of his affair, but still he was curious about it.

Arriving at headquarters, he dropped into the reporters' room before going to his own office. The boys were just starting a game of cards, and laughingly asked him to sit in.

"Too near election," he answered with a laugh. "You know how it is. Any other time I'd be glad to, and would clean you out, too. But not now. I remember some years ago Cap'n Westcott got caught in a poker game with you boys, and the mayor saw a chance to make a grand-stand play and get a few votes, and he broke Westcott and made an awful noise in the papers about it."

"Did he get reëlected?" asked the *Chronicle* man.

"No. That was ten or fifteen years ago. Old Sandstrom, it was. But I'll warrant it got him a few votes, at that."

"Well," opined Morrisey, of the *Statesman*, "this mayor we got now will need to pull a better stunt than that if he wants to get reëlected."

Riordan raised his eyebrows. "Think so?"

"I know it."

"Well, it makes nix aus to me," said Riordan. "I'm still under civil service."

"I'll tell you why," continued Morrisey. "You know the mayor has been angling for indorsements. Got a lot of 'em, but they don't carry much weight. He was after the Civic League, and he didn't get it."

"The Civic League doesn't meet till next Friday," said Riordan.

"I know, but the executive committee met this afternoon. Sadie Richardson, of our staff, was up there. The committee had the matter of indorsements up. They didn't know what to do.

"Then Mrs. Marcia Temple-Cardigan made a talk, and it was all off. You know, she was on that Citizens' Club bunch that tried to have a grand jury investigation pulled last year, but the district attorney stalled them off.

"He was running for reëlection then, and he needed the mayor's support and the votes of the city gang. Well, I guess Mrs. Temple-Cardigan told the committee some of the evidence the old Citizens' Club gathered.

"Anyway, as Sadie Richardson got it, the Civic League didn't indorse the mayor. And you know that means at least twenty thousand votes; all the silk stockings and nabobs of the highbrow gang. And you don't any of you figure, do you, that the mayor can sneeze at twenty thousand votes the way he stands?"

"Oh, I don't know," commented Riordan, moving to the door. "The mayor has not been asleep this last term of his."

He returned to his office to mull over what he had heard. Having more or less Irish blood in his veins, he was interested in politics, even though he left politics severely alone. He had found that the best way to get along in the department.

The evening was uneventful, and midnight was drawing near, when the phone on Riordan's desk tinkled.

He yawned as he reached up for the instrument.

"Yeah," he said. "Riordan speaking."

"This is Captain Fellows, downstairs, sergeant. Just had a report of a shooting out on Forest Avenue. Thought you'd like to know. I've hopped a couple of motorcycle men out."

"Somebody drilled?"

"I don't know yet; all I've got is that Patrolman Wade, relief man on the upper Forest Avenue beat, just called in that he heard two shots. He called from Evergreen and Forest."

"All right. Much obliged. I'll be down."

He put on a heavy pea-jacket, felt of his shoulder holster to be sure his gun was in it, and walked out into the general room of the bureau. Halloran and the desk man were the only two in it.

"You, Halloran, slide down to the

garage and get in my car. I'll be with you pretty quick," he said as he passed to the elevator. When he reached Captain Fellows's office the uniformed officer was speaking into the telephone. He put his hand over the mouthpiece and turned to Riordan.

"It's Wade, just calling in again. He says the chauffeur at the Cardigan place saw somebody running through the yard, and took a couple of shots at him. He's waiting for the motorcycle men."

Riordan nodded and hurried to the garage. Halloran was just climbing into his roadster, and the detective sergeant gave him a boost and piled in after him. In a second he had the engine started, and shot out the doorway, kicking open the siren as the car bumped through the gutterway.

"Thing I like about you, sergeant," shouted Halloran, as the roadster slithered around a corner onto Forest Avenue some ten minutes later and then straightened out under Riordan's firm grip on the wheel, "is that you're such a careful driver. Gosh, you missed that street car by so close I could see the conductor shaking down a fare."

"If I'd seen it, I'd have gone closer yet, and you could have reached in and grabbed the nickel," Riordan shouted back. "One of these nights I suppose I'll tear a coupling off one of them cars—but I never have yet."

One of the motor cycle men was playing the spotlight of his machine over the shrubbery of the Cardigan home as Riordan brought his car to a halt beside him and tumbled out, followed by Halloran.

"What you got?" he snapped.

"Nothing yet, sergeant," the man replied, without turning his head or stopping the sweeping back and forth of his light. "My partner and Wade are in there looking.

"Chauffeur'd just brought Mrs. Cardigan home from a *soirée*, and was taking the car around to the garage in the back, he says, when he saw a man running. He yelled to him to stop, and then took a couple of shots at him. He don't think he hit him."

"Stick around outside, Halloran. Buzz that chauffeur when you get a chance. I'm going in," said Riordan. He walked to the front door and pressed the bell button steadily. Almost immediately the butler opened the heavy portal.

"Tell Mrs. Cardigan it's Sergeant Riordan, and make it snappy, man."

He entered the hallway, and smiled grimly as the butler, plainly offended, walked stiffly away. A moment later, however, the man came back, his face at least wearing a mask of civility.

"Please step into the library, sergeant. Mrs. Cardigan will be down directly."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT WAS MISSING?

RIORDAN whipped off his heavy jacket and cap and handed them to the butler, who evidently was the only one of the servants immediately available, and entered the large library. He had barely found a comfortable armchair when Mrs. Cardigan, stunning in an evening gown, came in.

"I think it's another false alarm, sergeant," she said, holding out her hand. "But I'm tremendously obliged to you just the same. The house doesn't seem a bit disturbed."

"You've looked then?"

"Immediately, sergeant. I'd just gone to my room and rung for Louise to take my things, when I heard the two shots. A second later Louise came in, and said the chauffeur had seen somebody running and had fired at him.

"I threw the girl my coat and made an immediate survey of the windows in the back of the house, but they were all shut on this floor. Those upstairs didn't seem to have been disturbed."

"I compliment you on your presence of mind, Mrs. Cardigan. I know a lot of women who'd have screamed or locked themselves in a room."

She laughed. "I've learned better than that, sergeant. You forget that we had a similar adventure last year, and you told me then that if anything like it ever hap-

pened again, the first thing to do was to ascertain if the house had been entered."

"I remember that, Mrs. Cardigan," said Riordan, laughing, "but I hardly expected you'd recall my words."

"And why not, sergeant? You know Captain Brady and my husband were great friends, and the captain speaks very highly of you. Besides, I have seen some of the things you've accomplished."

Riordan blushed. "You don't think the prowl—I mean the intruder got inside then? Have you looked to see if there was anything missing?"

"No, sergeant. It didn't seem worth while. There's nothing in the house, anyway, but the silverware and some bric-a-brac. You know I don't keep many valuables here. One of the misfortunes of—of having more than you need—is that thieves are apt to pay you too much attention. So I live very simply."

"Your jewels?"

"In the safe in my room. I just looked, when I took off what I wore to-night. I always take them off and put them away the minute I come home, and lock them up. Of course, I trust my maid implicitly—but there is no need of putting temptation in anybody's way, is there?"

"Do you mind if we take a look over the house, ma'am, while the boys outside are combing the grounds?"

"Why, no, sergeant. Come, I'll show you the way."

They left the library and covered the main floor, then at a suggestion from Riordan toured the English basement, later going to the second floor.

The detective sergeant not only examined all the windows and doors for marks, but persuaded Mrs. Cardigan to give more than a passing glance at the contents of the several rooms, and to look over the silverware with particular care. She declared nothing was missing, and Riordan found no sign of even attempted entry.

"Shall we go upstairs to the servants' quarters, sergeant?" she asked, as they returned to the second floor hallway, after completing inspection of her rooms.

"No, ma'am, I think not, thank you," he replied. "But I'd like to go back into your own room and have another look at that balcony outside your windows."

She led the way through the boudoir to the chamber, and opened the French windows that let out on the balcony. Riordan stepped through, and taking out his flash light, turned it on and closely examined the railing of the little porch, and then turned its beam outward toward a beech tree that sent its branches to within four feet of the balcony. Mrs. Cardigan, standing in the window, watched him closely.

"It would be rather a long jump, wouldn't it, sergeant? And the branches of that tree are pretty frail."

He shut off his light and stepped back into the room, closing the windows after him.

"Yes, Mrs. Cardigan, it's a long jump and the branches are pretty frail. You're sure there's nothing missing? Think a minute—isn't there something you've overlooked, some closet or receptacle that you haven't examined?"

"You mean somebody has been in here?" she asked levelly.

"Something brushed the dew over that balcony railing, Mrs. Cardigan. At either end the tiny drops are distinct and undisturbed, but in the center they've been wiped into a smear."

"But the windows were shut when I came into the room."

"I don't doubt it. They catch automatically. Isn't there some place you haven't looked, to see if there might be something missing?"

She frowned in thought for a minute.

"There isn't a thing, sergeant. I have a steamer trunk beneath my bed, but there's nothing in it but some old letters."

Riordan dropped to his knees, put an exploring arm beneath the hanging silken covering, found the end of the trunk, and pulled the sturdy box out, swinging it around as he did so. It was locked.

"Let's have a look, if you don't mind," he said.

Mrs. Cardigan went to the bureau, opened a drawer and took out a bunch of keys. Then, kneeling beside Riordan, she inserted one in the lock and lifted the cover.

The moment the trunk was opened she flushed.

Then her face became normal again, and she methodically picked up and examined the several packets of letters that were lying in confusion in the trunk, which carried no tray.

Finally she raised her eyes to Riordan's.

"Sergeant," she said, "I think you're the most wonderful man in the world."

"What letters are missing?"

"Some from my husband—some he wrote me before we were married. About fifty of them, I should say. I kept all his letters, always. It—it has been a great comfort to me to read them."

Riordan rose to his feet. "I want to go down and have a talk with the boys, Mrs. Cardigan," he said. "Then, a little later, I'd like to see you again. I'll be in the library in about fifteen minutes. And this chauffeur of yours, how'd he come to have a gun?"

"I'll tell you, sergeant. After that last trouble here I asked Captain Brady if he thought I ought, to employ a watchman. He said not, but that he thought my chauffeur ought to be armed. He arranged for the permit, after he was satisfied the chauffeur was thoroughly reliable."

"Oh, yes, I see. That was a good idea. Well, in about fifteen minutes I'll be in the library."

He went downstairs and let himself out the front door. He found Halloran and the motor cycle men beside his car, while the chauffeur and Wade were standing near by. He beckoned the driver of Mrs. Cardigan's car to come to him.

"Tell me what you saw and what you did," he snapped.

"Well, sergeant, I'd just brought Mrs. Cardigan home. After she got in, I turned the car around and drove into the driveway that leads to the garage in back of the house.

"As the headlights flashed down the runway I saw a man dart from that beech tree and start to run. A little man, he was, sergeant, hardly more than a boy. Had a cap pulled down over his head, and a sharp profile. Nobody who belonged around here.

"I yelled to him to stop, and he dodged behind the rose bower. So I leaned out and took a shot at him, and then another. Then I swung the car so the beam from the headlights would flood the garden, and got out and ran over to where he'd been. But there was no sign of him.

"I came back to the car and was straightening it out to run it into the garage, when the officer here came up.

"He and I took a look through the grounds, but we couldn't find anybody. Then the motor cycle men came, and we took a good look. I'm beginning to think I didn't see anybody, that I must have just imagined I did."

Riordan turned to the motor cycle men.

"No footprints?"

"Lot of them, sergeant, but all Wade's and the chauffeur's. They did a good job looking, I'll say."

"What you find, Halloran?"

"Not a thing, sergeant. I went clear through to the next street. There's a little park there. Finest place to make a getaway you'd want. Whoever it was is back down town again now—if he was going that way. Did he get anything?"

"Not a thing, Halloran. Frightened off, I guess, when the chauffeur drove home. Well, you motor cycle men might as well go on in.

"Halloran, get the chauffeur to take you into the kitchen and slip you a bite to eat or something. I'm going back to have another look inside. I'll sound the horn on the car when I'm ready to go back."

The group broke up, and Riordan returned to the front door. When he rang the bell, it was Mrs. Temple-Cardigan herself who opened the door.

CHAPTER IX

THE LOVE LETTERS

"HOW did you know, sergeant," she asked, "that there was some place I hadn't looked—that we hadn't looked, when we went over the house together, the first time?"

"I didn't know it, Mrs. Cardigan. I was just asking you."

"I see—just a sort of a last chance, to be sure I hadn't overlooked anything."

"That was it, ma'am."

"Well, sergeant, I think your methods are very thorough. What do you think of this—of this 'case,' as I suppose you would call it?"

"Does anybody know you had those letters?"

"Oh, yes, several people. My maid, for one. But I'm sure she's all right. She'd been with my sister for years. She came to me when I had to discharge the one I'd had before after that last case you had here—the one about the savings deposit. You remember? Then several of my friends."

"Anything in the letters that you wouldn't want anybody to read?"

She raised her eyebrows and flushed slightly. "They were love letters, sergeant. I don't fancy having anybody read them."

"Of course, Mrs. Cardigan. I appreciate that. But what I mean is, was there anything in them that might be, that could be misconstrued or twisted into a different meaning?"

"You mean could they be used for blackmail, sergeant?"

"Just that."

"I don't think so, sergeant. Anybody reading them would know what they were—love letters. Perhaps there are some ardent passages."

The expression on her face changed suddenly to one of surprise.

"You've just thought of something, Mrs. Cardigan?"

"Yes—it's so queer. A coincidence. But of no importance."

"Tell me what it was."

"No—it's too ridiculous."

"Please tell me."

"It's too silly, sergeant. Really, it is nothing. Well, I'll tell you. The thought just flashed into my mind that this thing was foretold—that is, if you believe in such things.

"The other day Mrs. Berresford asked me to go with her to a fortune teller. Those things don't interest me, but Mrs. Berresford was so anxious I should go that I accompanied her.

"The man told me that I would soon lose something of no intrinsic value, but something I would not part with for a fortune. It struck me as being very silly at the time—it is silly. It just occurred to me."

"Did he say you'd get it back?"

Mrs. Cardigan laughed. "Now that you mention it, sergeant, he did. Said something about my making a great sacrifice to get it back. They always talk in that mysterious way, you know."

Riordan's face was a mask. "I'm something of a fortune teller myself, Mrs. Cardigan," he said. "Suppose I told you that the fortune teller you went to had his residence on Tenth Street."

"Why, sergeant, you're wonderful. He did. In the Balmoral Apartments. He says he's a yogi. How did you know? Oh, I see it all, you've heard of this man who has made such a furor with the things he's told people.

"They say he's really uncanny—but in my case he didn't tell me a thing that was true. Mrs. Berresford was very much disappointed; he told her *everything*."

"And he told you that you were to be robbed?"

She laughed. "But that was just rigamarole, sergeant."

"Mrs. Cardigan, I want you to do me a favor."

"Why, certainly, sergeant. What is it?"

"I want you to report this case to-morrow to Partridge, of the Protective Association. Tell him you want it kept very, very confidential, and impress on him that you particularly don't want the slightest publicity. I'll take care of any bill for services Partridge may send you."

She looked at him in open amazement.

"Why, sergeant! And after all you and Captain Brady have said about Partridge being such a blunderer. I can't believe my ears."

"I want you to tell him," Riordan continued, "that the police were here, and that they found no sign of any entry, and concluded that the prowler had been frightened off.

"Tell him you and I examined the house and found nothing missing. Then, after I'd gone, you happened to think of the

trunk, and looked there, and discovered what had been taken. And that because of the extremely personal aspect of the matter you didn't care to report it to the police. Will you do that for me, Mrs. Cardigan?"

"I'll be glad to, sergeant. But I can't, for the life of me, understand what you're driving at. You don't believe, do you, that Partridge had—that he could recover the letters?"

"You can never tell, Mrs. Cardigan. If blackmail was the intention, these people might go to him. Private detectives get some very queer clients. I take it you want the letters back, don't you?"

"Most certainly."

"Well, then I advise you to report it to Partridge. But don't let him get a hint that I know anything about it, or that I have so advised you.

"If he thinks we are working on the matter, he wouldn't touch any deal for the return of the letters; he'd be afraid of a trap. And I want you to have every chance to get those letters back."

"Then you don't think you can get them?"

"I didn't say anything like that, Mrs. Cardigan. I said I wanted you to have every chance to get them back. Putting the case in Partridge's hands will open up a possible channel to which the police would never have access.

"Of course, you understand, I'll see to it that you don't pay for the return of the letters. If Partridge turns up anything, you'll let me know, and I'll take care of the negotiations."

"Then you think blackmail is intended?"

"Either that or selling the letters back to you for easy money."

"I will see Mr. Partridge in the morning, sergeant. Anything else?"

"Not that I think of now, Mrs. Cardigan. Only don't be surprised at anything that may happen."

"I'm never very much surprised at anything, sergeant. Not any more. I'm very grateful to you for your trouble, and your promptness in getting out here this evening."

"Please don't say anything about it, Mrs. Cardigan. I didn't know what it was when I started. The policeman on the beat reported he'd heard shots. When we hear of shooting in this neighborhood we come right out. That was how I happened to be here. I'm sorry it was your house."

He left her, found his jacket and cap and joining Halloran in his car, drove slowly back down town.

"The nicest woman in town, Halloran," he said. "It's too bad she's rich. If she was just well-to-do, the crooks would leave her alone. You and I are lucky, being poor. We don't get any excitement or troubles."

"You said a lot, sergeant. Still, she's lucky; the guy being frightened off. Must have been a bum prowl—he might have known she'd be coming home around midnight.

"If he'd piped out the plant beforehand, like a good man, he'd have tried the job earlier or later. One of these blanket yeggs, I guess, passing through."

"I don't thing it was even that, Halloran. I think he was a bum, trying to get some food. The kitchen is in the back of the house, you know."

Halloran laughed. "Poor fish, I'll say. He could get a handout at any down town chophouse a lot easier than he could bust into the kitchen of these high-toned folk.

"Whatever he was, prowl or bum, he was a poor worker. Well, we had a run for it, anyway."

CHAPTER X

AFTER MIDNIGHT

IT was the following afternoon, during the brief interval both were in the office when their shifts overlapped, that Sergeant Riordan electrified his chief by saying:

"If it isn't a personal secret, would you mind telling me why Mrs. Temple-Cardigan sent for you yesterday, when you asked me to stick round awhile?"

"How'd you know I was at Mrs. Cardigan's, boy?" asked Brady. "She didn't tell you. I suppose you saw her last night. I see Halloran left a report that you and he had investigated a prowl job out there."

Riordan smiled. "If you think I saw her, what makes you so cocksure she didn't tell me you were there?"

"Because she don't run off at the mouth. How'd you know I was there?"

"I'm a dick, ain't I?"

"Yes, and a darned good one. But I was particular to go in there the back way and come out inside the limousine, sitting low and out of sight. She insisted on having the chauffeur drive me home."

"You got the funniest ideas of covering up, chief. But you haven't answered my question. What'd you go there for?"

Brady hesitated awhile, then said: "Well, you keep it under your hat. I was up there on politics. Mrs. Cardigan's on the executive committee of an organization—"

"Go on, say it, the Women's Civic League," interrupted Riordan. "And they've decided not to indorse the mayor for reëlection. And she sent for you to tell you what they'd decided to do, and to ask you what?"

Brady's mouth dropped open. "Now I know she didn't tell you," he exclaimed. "You tell me who's leaking, boy."

"Why, they had a reporter at the meeting. Sadie Richardson, of the *Statesman*."

Brady looked disgusted. "Humph—and they were trying to keep it quiet. Why, the mayor himself must know."

"You bet he knows. Everybody who's at all interested knows. I heard it yesterday, about the same time you were out at Mrs. Cardigan's. Listen, what I want to know is, what did she ask you?"

"Well, boy, you know so much, I'll tell you. Me and her husband, you know, when he was alive, we played together some, in politics and one thing or another. When he died she kept a finger on two or three irons Joe Cardigan still had in the fire, and on politics she sometimes asks me what I think.

"She told me about this surprise package, and then she asked me how I thought the mayor would take it—if he'd do anything mean and personal. I told her I didn't doubt but that he'd like to, all right, but I said I didn't think he would quite dare, she having so much influence, one way or another. She seemed relieved.

"It seems she's got some business deals on, and she thought perhaps the mayor, through some of his associates, might try to queer 'em."

"Thanks."

"That all you wanted to know?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've been so liberal with you, now you tell me how you found out I was there! I want to know."

"You called me up from there, and I had the call traced back."

"Well, I'll be blowed. You had me scared for a minute. I thought I'd let my foot slip somewhere—say, what made you trace the call back?"

Riordan laughed. "You roused my curiosity. You went out of here in a hurry, after slicking yourself up, and told me to wait. Then you called in and said never mind. I knew you'd gone to see a woman, and I was curious. Just on a chance I traced the call back."

Brady shook his head. "You check on me all the time, boy? If you do I'll fool you some time. I can do it, for all you're so smart."

"It's the first time, chief, I've done that since the day you fell in the river—'member that time? You said you'd be here at a certain time, and when you didn't show I got worried. I haven't done it since till last night. But I'm glad I did."

"Why?"

"Well, it sort of fits in with that prowl job up there later in the evening."

Brady was all attention at once.

"What you mean?"

"Figure it out."

Captain Brady considered for a long time. At last he looked up. "You mean, boy, that you think the mayor meant to do her some kind of dirt? Oh, you're crazy. The mayor's no fool."

"No, but he's got a lot of fool friends."

"By gad, you're right. Boy, I'm going down and get the chief to assign a special man to walk post two blocks back and forth by Mrs. Cardigan's house. I reckon she's entitled to special protection."

"If I was you, chief, I wouldn't do that. No use starting something. If that wasn't a plain fool prowl last night, whoever it

was knows that the chauffeur packs a gun now, and won't be likely to try it again.

"If it was just a bum, chances are he's a long way off now. No use tipping your hand to the chief, who's the mayor's man, that you're worried about the mayor's political foes."

"I guess you're right, boy. But I hate to have that woman bothered, or open to bother. Tell you what I'll do; I'll go see Partridge and ask him as a favor to put one of his watchmen out there. I'll have to swallow my pride to ask a favor of Pat, but this—"

"Pat 'll have a man there without your asking him," said Riordan.

"You mean you've already asked him?"

Riordan shook his head. "No, chief. But last night, I asked her to report the case to Pat. I told her it would be the easiest way to—to fix the thing up."

Brady got up, reached for his hat and coat, and slammed his desk shut. "No need of me being round here, boy. You think of everything I do before I get round to it. That Hindu fakir was wrong after all—I'm not standing on your shoulders—I can't even keep up with you."

"Aw, cut it out, chief. You thought of everything I did, didn't you? And you'd have done it last night if you'd been there? Well, you weren't there. That's all."

"That's a nice way to put it, boy. Good night."

He went out the door without noticing the queer smile on Riordan's face. Had he seen it, he certainly would not have gone home in as satisfied a mood as he did.

Shortly after eleven, Detective Willis entered the office.

"That taxi driver, sergeant," he said, "he says for you to drive out to Dykeman's place to-night when you get off shift."

"That all he said?"

"Yes, sir. Slipped it to me as I came out the ladies' entrance of the Belmont Grand, like you said."

"And what did you do?"

"Nodded my head and kept right on going, sir."

"Good stuff, Willis. Keep it up till I tell you to stop."

Just before midnight, when his shift ended, Sergeant Riordan took off his office uniform and put on a business suit he kept in the locker for needed occasions, and thrusting a small automatic in his hip pocket, went down to the garage and climbed into his car.

About three-quarters of an hour later he drove his roadster under the parking shed at one of the quieter road houses beyond the city limits, and sauntered across the yard toward the front door of the old homestead that had been remodeled to cater to a modern pastime—the eating of chicken dinners and dancing in the wee, small hours.

He paused in front of the entrance to look around, and a well dressed young man came up and slapped him on the back, laughing boisterously, and proclaiming:

"You're just in time, Bill—come round to the side door, we got a party on."

It was Dave Farrell, apparently quite jubilated, though a quick look of inspection showed Riordan that it was assumed.

The two swung round to the side of the tavern, entered a narrow door, ascended a flight of stairs, and at Farrell's lead, passed down a corridor to a door at its end.

The erstwhile taxi driver inserted a key in the lock, swung the heavy portal back, and ushered Riordan into a comfortably furnished living room.

CHAPTER XI

INSIDE DOPE

"MY dug-out, Matt," he said. "You didn't know I lived out here, did you? Not more than half a dozen people know it, either. I used to know Dykeman in the old days, and when I came back I made a deal with him.

"He keeps his mouth shut and I bring him business. Don't be afraid of the walls, I've had 'em made soundproof—told him I wanted to sleep when I was here. Some of the parties they stage downstairs keep going till long after sunrise."

Riordan looked around the room appraisingly, and sat down. Farrell produced a box of cigars and threw himself on a couch.

"Your yogi's a great fraud," he said, laughing.

"You got next to him already?"

"Matt, we're real pals. I went up there the morning after you saw me and breezed in on him while he was eating breakfast. Put it right up to him. Told him I knew he was a fakir and out for the money, and that I could bring him some business if he'd split fair.

"He tried to high-hat me, and I told him what was wrong with his name—that no Hindu of the caste he was making believe he was ever combined a surname ending in 'an' with 'singh.' I gave him a sketch of my Calcutta adventures, told him I'd gone all to hell since my folks died and didn't leave me any estate, and that I was now a taxi-bandit.

"He began to thaw out, but was still suspicious, as if he thought I was a bull. So I told him what he was thinking and disabused him of that idea. Then I picked up one of his eggs that he hadn't cracked yet, and did a few tricks with it that made his eyes pop out. We got along fine.

"And we made this frame: I'm to bring him what business I can, and get twenty-five per cent of what he gets out of it. And I'm to keep my cab in front of the Balmoral Apartments, and when he gets through with a seance with any women who wander in, he'll steer 'em to my bus and I'm to take 'em where they want to go an get an earful of what they say; so he can sting 'em better the next time.

"For that he pays me two dollars an earful. Besides which, any bright ideas I may have or any information I may possess, is his at so much per; the price to be agreed upon after we figure what it's worth.

"I give him some Hindu jargon that may come in handy if he snares a traveler, and he's already asked my advice about a couple of suckers he's got on the string. He seems to be going good with our local 'smart set' and is quite the rage. He's helping the taxi business, and I'm helping him."

"I knew you could do it, lad. And you're helping me a lot. What else do you know?"

Farrell grinned. "It's lots of fun, and I can see where it's going to get funnier. This bird has great expectations, if things go right. Last night he called me just as I was going to check my cab in, and had me drive him out to the mayor's house.

"He was there maybe half an hour, and I waited to drive him home again. He was tickled pink when he came out, and said if the mayor was reëlected that business would be good, real good. I take it he's got something on his honor."

"He only thinks he has," said Riordan. "Besides which, the mayor isn't going to be reëlected. If you've got any loose change, bet it against him."

Farrell sniffed. "I wouldn't bet on an election, Matt, not even on your tip. I've seen too many blow-ups. But I'm just as much obliged. And, anyway, I've got you to thank for putting me in on a funny lark."

Riordan pointed to a photograph that was framed above Farrell's dresser.

"Davie, that's a poor way to forget—keeping her picture up there all the time," he said.

"I know it, Matt. But, you know, I really don't want to forget. I like to dream, Matt. Mornings when I wake up, she's up there, smiling down at me, and I—I can imagine, just for a few minutes, that I'm happy."

Riordan leaned toward his friend. "Davie," he said, "the war's all over. Why don't you go to her, and tell her that you can't get along without her, that it was a mistake for her not to want you to go and fight for your country.

"She probably realizes that now—that she was selfish, then, trying to keep you home, just for herself. Why don't you go to her, lad?"

Farrell turned over on the couch, so his face was next the wall. For a long time he made no answer. Then:

"Matt, I've thought of that. God, Matt, you don't know how I've fought myself not to go. But I'm afraid—afraid she—afraid she's married somebody else."

"You'd have heard, if that had happened, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know, Matt. I kept track of her till last year—through friends. Then she left St. Louis, where she'd been. And

the man who'd been keeping me posted got sick and went to Arizona, and I lost track of him. All I could find out was that she'd gone West somewhere.

"I traced her to Denver, then to Cheyenne, and from there I think she went to Spokane. But I don't know, Matt. Sometimes I've thought I'd get me a taxi-job in Spokane, and look. But I guess I'm better off, trying to forget. She might have married."

"Davie, let me ask Spokane for you. I won't tell the boys there what I want to know for. Just inquire. The different departments are always looking for missing persons especially here in the West.

"Lots of people come West, Davie, and their relatives get out of touch with them. And then the department has to look 'em up. I'll bet you I've got a dozen requests like that in my desk now, from different places. Tell me her name, Davie—you never did—and I'll have Spokane look her up."

The man on the couch shook his head. "No, Matt. You're a good pal to offer that. But suppose you found out she'd married. You wouldn't tell me, Matt, because you'd want to spare me the pain. You'd lie and say you couldn't trace her.

"Or suppose you couldn't trace her, and told me. I'd think you'd found out she was married, and were keeping it back from me. I couldn't stand it, Matt. No, you forget it—I'll live it down, some way."

He rose suddenly from the couch and went over to a washstand in the corner of the room, and dashed a towel soaked in cold water over his face.

"You know, Matt, if I could get some stuff, I'd get drunk," he said.

"Well, you can't get any good stuff any more, lad. Nothing but poison. So get that idea out of your head. This yogi, now, does he do light housekeeping, or go out to dinner, or what?"

"He's got a Negro servant. Pete, he calls him. Pete is cook and chambermaid, and when he's needed, he's also an attendant at the fortune telling. Then there's a little guy looks like a consumptive Turk, only he isn't. He wears an outfit that looks like a Coney Island mystery show.

"He's tough, but he doesn't show it. Little runt, about five foot, maybe less. You can't judge very good, for he wears a big, scarlet turban, that bulges out over his neck and eyes like one of those toadstool domes you see on mosques.

"Besides that he wears a flowing silk dressing sack and silk pants. Got a tin sword stuck in his sash, and pointed slippers. He answers the door, takes the money, and bids 'em adieu. The yogi don't touch any money when customers are around."

"What's he call the little guy?"

"He hasn't called him anything when I've been around. But you can see they understand each other."

"What's the little guy look like?"

"Blue eyes and a consumptive face—that's all you can see. Little hands, too white. Long fingers. I'd hate to play cards with him—looks shifty. The rest of him is all covered up in gaudy silks."

"The yogi go out much?"

"I don't think so. Last night, coming back from the mayor's house, I asked him how he kept fit. He says he exercises on a rowing machine he's got in one of the rooms, takes a bath and a rub every day, and once in awhile a walk. He takes care of himself, you can see that."

"He got a telephone?"

"Sure, every suite in the Balmoral has a phone."

"Switchboard?"

"No, direct. They're listed in the directory: his is Suite 18."

Riordan rose and reached for his hat. "All right, Dave," he said. "You're doing just right and fine. You'd better not come down with me. I can find my way out.

"If you get anything more, send for me, through Willis. You'd better let me have her name, Davie, and let me try to find her for you."

Farrell got up and faced his friend, looking into his eyes. Then he put a hand on Riordan's shoulder.

"Matt, if I let you, will you—will you tell me the truth? No stalling out of pity for me? Give me your word?"

"Davie, I swear—by all we've been

through—I'll tell you the truth. And no matter what it is, lad, it will do you good.

"You're not only wasting a good life this way, but you're hurting yourself. The truth may hurt you, too—but it will heal quicker than this thing you're letting yourself do now."

Farrell dropped his hand, hesitated; turned suddenly and went to his dresser. Jerking open a drawer, he took out a dispatch box, unlocked it, and took out an envelope. Coming back across the room he gave it to Riordan.

"It's a little picture of her, Matt—the one I showed you over there, when we were fighting. Her name's on the back. If—if she's married, the picture will help you locate her. Find her for me, Matt—and for God's sake, tell me the truth."

He moved to the door and opened it. Riordan put the envelope in his breast pocket.

"Davie, if she's anywhere in the Northwest, or on the Coast, we'll find her. I'll let you know. Good night, lad."

He gave his friend a long and strong handclasp, went down the corridor to the stairs, and so out and to the parking shed, where he climbed into his car and drove away. As far as he could judge, his departure had attracted no more notice than did his arrival.

Driving slowly, and carefully thinking over the information his friend had given him, he reached the city, and turned his car toward headquarters. His appearance there, between two and three o'clock, surprised Ellis, the second night relief man.

"Something broke, sergeant?" he asked.

"No, I just been out to a party, and I come down to do a little work till I get sleepy. And if anything does happen, I dont want you to let on I'm in the office."

He walked into the room Captain Brady and he shared, went to his desk, turned on the lamp on its top, and withdrawing the envelope Farrell had given him, took out the photograph.

He happened to withdraw it face up, and the sight of the pretty face, the curling hair and the big, trustful eyes, and the lips set in the slightest *moue*, carried him back to the only other time he had seen the picture—during the war, when he and Dave had sat huddled in the rain at night at a telephone post, and the Signal Corps man had let the beam of a flash light fall on it as Riordan held it under his coat, and said:

"Yes, she said it was for me to chose, her or the war. I tried to make her see I wasn't leaving her, just going out to fight for her and for children we might have after we were married.

"But she said that wasn't true, that there were plenty of other men to fight, and I could stay home with her or else it would be all off. Well, I come over."

Looking at the face again, as it was pictured before him, Riordan couldn't believe she had been that kind of a girl. She didn't look selfish; she didn't look as if she could be cruel, and she looked as if she could reason clearly and love deeply. Davie must have misunderstood.

He turned the photgraph over and looked at the reverse side. Written across it in ink that showed plainly enough, though the mounting bore marks of having been wet and seen hard usage, was:

> To the man who put duty above his heart, from Ethel Gallant Temple.

Riordan pounded his fist on his desk. "Davie *was* wrong," he said out loud. "That ain't a knock, it's a boost."

He reached for some telegraph blanks, and wrote several messages. Then, leaving the photograph lying on his desk, he went to the outer room, pulled the messenger call box, and hung the telegrams on the hook.

He returned to his desk, and sat there for some time, thinking. For nearly an hour he was perfectly motionless, then he heaved a sigh, slammed down the roll top of his desk, and went home.

CHAPTER XII

A MAD DASH

WHEN he came on duty again at four o'clock, Captain Brady was sitting smoking at his desk and showing not the slightest signs of being ready to depart for home.

There were several telegrams spread out

before him, and as Riordan crossed the room he noticed that the photograph he had left in his desk the night before was now reposing on the back of his chief's blotter. He hung up his hat and coat and, walking around Brady, calmly reached in and picked it up.

"Thanks for taking care of that for me, chief," he said. "I went away last night and forgot it."

If there was any hint of another meaning in his words, Brady appeared not to notice it.

"That ain't all you forgot, boy," he said, laughing slightly. "You didn't leave me any notes on this new case that's worrying you, and I got a flock of telegrams here that I don't know what to do with. They came addressed to the department, three of them. Two was to you. I opened them to see if they were urgent.

"Not being able to make head or tail of 'em, and not finding any report from you that would explain 'em, I opened your desk to see if you'd left something on your blotter. Then I saw this picture. What's happened to her?"

Riordan reached for the telegrams, to which Brady had pointed while speaking. Only one of them interested him; it was from Spokane, and said briefly:

> Think you are mistaken. Party left for your city last month. Please notify us if your wire refers to another party of same or similar name.

He looked at Brady. "What you mean," he asked, "when you say 'What's happened to her?' Do you know her?"

"No, I can't say as I do—not socially, if that's what you mean. But if you mean do I know who she is, why yes. Do you mean to say you don't?"

Riordan looked blank, and shook his head.

"No, chief. I wired out for a line on her last night. She's been reported to me as a missing person."

Brady laughed boisterously. "That's good," he said. "Boy, they don't often kid you, but when they do, they do it right. Say, who hung that one on you?"

Riordan went over to his desk and sat down. For a moment he pawed over the reports left for him, and then threw them angrily back in their basket, and swung round in his chair.

"I guess I'm pretty dumb," he said. "After this you needn't worry none about the yogi saying you stood on my shoulders. You speak as if this lady was well known—go on, throw it at me—who is she?"

"Why, she's Mrs Cardigan's niece. Gallant Temple's girl. Mrs. Cardigan, you know, before she was married to Joe Cardigan, was Dover Temple's wife. Gallant was his brother. Dover wasn't so much in the limelight, but Gallant, he was a real sport.

"Used to live back in the Mississippi Valley somewhere; had a string of race horses and batted round the big tracks and race meets with them. His wife died when this girl was young.

"She lived with relatives in St. Louis awhile, and then she went out on her own. Shortly after the war broke out she got a job as yeomanette in the navy. Stuck on some fellow in the army, she was, and wanted to fight with him, and got the nearest thing to a fighting job she could."

"And after the war?" asked Riordan, quietly.

"Looked for the guy, but he never came back. She visits round with relatives now, and in between times plays 'Lady Bountiful' at the different veterans' hospitals, hoping she'll hear something about—"

"You know where she is now?" interrupted Riordan.

"What you-all lit up about, boy?"

"You know where she is?"

"Not just where she is, no. But she's visting Mrs. Cardigan. I know that much."

"Sufferin' cats!"

Brady's face took on a look of wonder. "Say, boy," he exclaimed, "you ain't—you ain't the man she's lookin' for, are you?"

Riordan leaped out of his chair. "Good God, no," he shouted, and, snatching up his cap, ran out of the office, raced down the stairs to the main floor, dashed two or three patrolmen who were in his way to one side, and raced to the garage, where he leaped into his roadster and shot out of the door with his cut-out roaring a warning.

As Captain Brady got up and hurried to

the window to see his aid's big car virtually carrom from the curb across the street as Riordan jerked its wheel around, the door to his office was slammed open and half the detectives in the outer office rushed in, pulling on their coats and slamming on their hats.

They came to a sudden and embarrassed pause in the center of the room as they saw Brady's placid back at the window. As he turned around Lieutenant Gaines, of the uniformed force, ran in.

" 'Smatter, Brady?" he asked, out of breath from his dash upstairs.

Brady smiled and shook his head. " I think Riordan forgot to water the flowers in his front yard, and wants to get home before the sprinkling hours are over," he said. " All you guys beat it out of here, there's nothing doing."

To prove it, he calmly went back to his desk, reached into the second drawer for a cigar, and slowly lighted it, leaning back in his chair and puffing smoke at the ceiling.

When his visitors had left him, laughing among themselves, he picked up the photograph and placed it back on Riordan's desk and pulled the top down. Then he took Riordan's batch of reports over to his own desk, went through them, and himself gave out the night assignments.

Riordan, meanwhile, was shattering traffic laws on his way to the Cardigan residence on Forest Avenue. As he shot into the intersection of Broadway and Summer Street a taxicab came suddenly around the corner.

There was a shrieking of brakes, and both cars bumped and jolted, veering from their courses, and came to a stop side by side, and almost touching, at the farther side of the crossing.

Riordan thrust his head out and bellowed at the taxi driver, and as suddenly stopped. The driver of the other vehicle, who had also started a flood of the sort of oratory typical of such incidents, also suddenly broke off.

" I was hoping I'd run across you, Matt," he said. " Got something to tell you. The party I had up to his honor's house the other night's got a date there to-night. I'm to take him there at eleven."

" Good, start at eleven," snapped Riordan. Then, casting an eye at the two frightened women passengers in the taxi, his manner became gruff again. " Watch where you're drivin'," he growled. " If you didn't have women passengers I'd run you in for that."

He slipped the gears of his machine in mesh and pulled away, finishing his trip at a more moderate pace. Near Mrs. Cardigan's residence he stopped his car on the opposite side of the street, and looked around.

Loafing under a tree and making believe to read a paper, directly across the street from the house where he was going, he saw one of Partridge's men. Laughing to himself, he got out, walked deliberately toward the Cardigan residence, and rang the doorbell.

From the corner of his eye, as he was admitted, he saw the Protective Association agent making a note of his arrival on a pad of paper.

Mrs. Temple-Cardigan was at home, and presently came downstairs to greet him.

" You have some news, sergeant," she asked.

He shook his head. " Not yet, Mrs. Cardigan, But there's another matter—"

She laughed. " You don't mean to say I'm tangled in more trouble, sergeant?"

" I hope not, ma'am. I hope its just the opposite. You'll pardon me if I seem to speak about something that is none of my business, but I want to ask you if your niece, Miss Ethel Gallant Temple, is visiting you now?"

" Oh, dear, has that girl been up to something? Sergeant, she's always getting into the queerest situations. She—"

" She's with you, then?"

" Yes, sergeant. She's been visiting with me for the past month. She's down town just now, but I expect her home most any moment."

" I don't want to see her, ma'am. I mean that the matter I want to know about can be better discussed if she isn't here. I want to ask you, Mrs. Cardigan, frankly, about —about how she feels regarding a young fellow named David Farrell."

Mrs. Cardigan's eyes sparkled. " Do you know where David is, sergeant? If you do I'll swear you're the most wonderful man

that ever was. Why, Ethel has been looking for some trace of him ever since the war.

"They were engaged, you know. There was a misunderstanding—Ethel has never been able to satisfactorily explain it to me—"

"She still cares for him, then, Mrs. Cardigan? She'd like to see him?"

"Sergeant, she's looked everywhere for him. But he disappeared completely after the war. He came back from France, she found out—or somebody using his name came back, and was mustered out. That's all she knows.

"She's been driving herself almost crazy ever since, looking for him. I think she has been through every veterans' hospital and every other place where he might possibly be, or be known, that there is in the country. You don't mean to tell me you know where he is?"

"Don't say anything to her about it, please, ma'am. The shock of seeing him again—"

"Oh, is he ill? The poor man. Do tell me, sergeant?"

Riordan laughed, embarrassed. "I wasn't meaning him, Mrs. Cardigan. I was thinking about Miss Temple"

"Don't worry about her, sergeant. She's a modern girl and can stand shocks like that. Nothing would be better for her."

"Well, don't say anything to her, please—not till you hear from me, ma'am. I got to get him in shape, got to get him fixed for this. He's all right, but—well, ma'am, you leave it to me. There's reasons why they can't rush into each other's arms, not suddenlike, anyway."

"I have great confidence in you, sergeant. I will do as you say. But please act as quickly as you can. When you are ready, no matter what the time of day, let me know."

"Thank you, ma'am, I'll do that. As soon as I can. By the way, I saw one of Partridge's men as I came in—"

"Mr Partridge thought the house had better be guarded."

"Heard anything about the letters yet, ma'am? Any suggestion of an offer?"

"Not a thing, sergeant. But Mr. Partridge is very hopeful."

Riordan laughed "Pat, he's the most hopeful man I know. Well, thank you very much for the information, Mrs. Cardigan. I'll let you know as soon as I can."

She accompanied him to the door, and as he stepped out a young girl came running up the steps Riordan stepped to one side to let her pass, and Mrs. Cardigan spoke up.

"Ethel, I want you to meet Sergeant Riordan—you know, I have been talking to you about him. Sergeant, my niece, Miss Temple. He's been here asking me if there were any developments."

Ethel Temple extended a hand to Riordan, who could not resist giving it some pressure.

"So glad I came home in time to meet you, sergeant," she said. "I've heard the most wonderful things about you from aunty. When you get through with this case, I'm coming down to see you some day; there's something I want—"

"You mustn't delay the sergeant, Ethel," interrupted Mrs. Cardigan. "He's very busy just now. Call me up, sergeant, any time."

She drew the girl inside with her, and Riordan hurried down and to his car, driving slowly away, but noting that Partridge's man was putting down considerable upon his pad.

CHAPTER XIII

NIGHTLY ADVENTURE

BACK at headquarters Captain Brady was waiting.

"Well, boy," he said, "I've done all your work for you. Suppose now you and me go out to supper. And you can tell me what it's all about."

Riordan walked over to his locker, took out his dress uniform and threw it over a chair. Then he calmly began to change his clothes.

"You say you done all my work, chief?" he asked.

"I got all your assignments listed, anyway: and I've been through your reports."

"I might as well lay off, then, what?"

"Well, you could."

" Thanks, chief, I guess I will."

Brady regarded his aid quizzically, but Riordan went on methodically changing his clothes. " Yeah," he said a moment later, " if it's all the same to you, chief, I guess I'll lay off to-night. And I want Halloran to lay off with me. Thanks for the dinner bid, but I ain't hungry. You run out and eat, chief, and I'll stay here till you get back. Then I want out."

" You going to do what you're going to do in that uniform?"

" Uh-huh."

Brady got up and slipped on his coat.

" All right, boy. If you're going out with all that brass and blue on you, you ain't figuring on making any fool plays. I know you got a hen on, and I suspect what case it's about.

" Go to it, play your hunch. I'm willing, as long as you wear that lighthouse. But I'll tell you this, boy: if you tried to slip out in rough clothes, I'd be with you; I know you too well to miss the chance."

" Thanks, chief. When I go out to start a fight, I'll sure take you along. To-night I'm just going out in society."

Brady took another look at the younger man, and then went to dinner. When Riordan had donned his uniform, and pinned his golden star on the breast of his coat, he spent some minutes burnishing up his heavily braided dress cap, and then walked over to Captain Brady's desk and pushed one of the buttons that decorated its edge. To the doorman, who poked in his head, he said:

" If Halloran's out there, I want him. If he isn't there, have him called quick."

" He's outside, sergeant. I'll send him in."

The department's " rough work " sleuth slouched into the office a minute later.

" Gosh, you're getting big," commented Riordan.

" But not soft, not yet, sergeant."

" That's good, Halloran. You and me are going out to-night. Now listen—you want to take a chance of losing your job? A chance of being ' broke,' I mean?"

Halloran leered. " Yuh said we was goin' out? Both of us? How about you bein' ' broke,' too?"

" I got a better chance to be ' broke ' than you have, Halloran, if this thing turns out a bloomer. Chances are I'll get ' broke ' anyway for it."

" Well, if you're willing to take a sure-thing chance like that, I am, too. What do we do, stick up a dance hall, or something like that?"

" Something like that, Halloran. Go out and look your gat over, and stick a sap in your pocket, and then go down and sit in my car. And keep your mouth shut. I'll be down when the captain get's back. He's given us the night off."

Halloran yawned and lumbered from the office. Sergeant Riordan polished his shoes, gave himself a thorough inspection as far as he was able without a mirror, then drew a small satchel from beneath his desk, and going to his locker again produced a suit of coveralls and an old cap. Stuffing these into the satchel, he called the doorman and told him to take it down to the garage and stow it in his car.

When Captain Brady returned he was sitting at his desk, reading the evening paper. Brady looked at him closely, then threw off his coat and took his chair.

" Well, boy, run along and have a good time," he said. " Of course, if you want to tell me—"

" I'll tell you when I get back, chief. And you want to wait, too; it's going to be good. I'm going to take a seance with your yogi friend."

Brady laughed scornfully. " Think he can tell you're a cop, if he looks at your uniform? Well, run along, boy, and have a good time. I'll be here when you get back. What you going to do with Halloran?"

" Use him for a body-guard."

" Huh, that isn't even funny—not from you. Good-by."

Various resorts in the city got a treat during the evening. Detective Sergeant Riordan, resplendent in his dress uniform, visited several of them, accompanied by the well-known but not prepossessing Halloran. Some proprietors were alarmed at first, but as the two detectives seemed entirely on pleasure bent, the alarm soon vanished.

It is true that telephone calls preceded them in the visits, the news of their invasion being flashed ahead from one resort to the next; but as the evening wore on and nothing untoward happened, the habitués and visitors at the places merely shook their heads, wondered what it was all about, and then forgot it.

Just before eleven o'clock the two sleuths left the Cinderella Dancing Pavilion and climbed into Riordan's big roadster. The sergeant drove swiftly down to the wholesale district, ran his machine to the middle of a dark block, and stopping, climbed out just long enough to pull on the coveralls that were in the satchel, and to replace his gleaming cap with the old, dark one.

The dress headpiece he put carefully in the satchel. Then he climbed back and drove rapidly to the block on which the Balmoral Apartments were situated. Pulling in to the curb some two hundred feet from the entrance, he dimmed his lights, but left the engine idling.

"You've sure shown me a nice time so far, sarge," said Halloran. "Got me a lot of soft drinks and plenty to look at. I take it, you been fixin' up an alibi; all them hopheads and shieks and nuts will swear you and me was going round and round all night."

"You got a long head, Halloran, like a horse. From now on you want to use it. Got your gat handy?"

Halloran raised his left arm, to indicate where his shoulder holster nestled against his side. Riordan nodded, and just then a taxi pulled away from the curb in front of the Balmoral Apartments.

Riordan eased his car into gear and followed it, keeping half a block behind, with his lights stilled dimmed. Halfway across the city he trailed it, and then, as it skirted Washington Park, he suddenly turned his headlights on full, stepped on the accelerator, overtook the other vehicle, and crowded it into the curb.

As it stopped he also brought his machine to a halt, turned off his lights, and nudging Halloran, said: "Let's have a look at this guy."

Halloran knew just what to do. With a speed and dexterity surprising for a man of his huge bulk he slipped out the right-hand door of Riordan's machine, jerked open the taxicab door with his left hand, and bulged himself into the vehicle bodily, his right hand extended and firmly thrusting his revolver against the passenger within.

"No foolin'," he said; "sit still."

Riordan, almost equally quick, had jumped from the left-hand door of his car and run round to the driver of the for-hire machine. "Switch your dome light off," he said, "and mind your own business."

Then, as the interior of the cab was plunged into darkness, he squeezed in beside Halloran and quickly and thoroughly frisked the man within the taxi, taking all the letters and papers from his inside coat pocket, his wallet from his hip pocket, a tightly-tied package from one of his pockets, and his watch and fob. Meanwhile his investigations had shown him that the passenger was unarmed.

He backed out of the cab, paused a moment beside the driver to say: "Buddy, if you know what's healthy, you'll take this fare back to where he started from, without stopping. And you'll drive reasonable, too.

"You step on her, or try to stop, and I got a partner behind in another machine who'll be liable to puncture your tires or somethin'." Then he ran around and climbed back to his seat. "Come on, Bill, let's go," he shouted.

Halloran backed out of the taxi and into his place in the detective sergeant's car with seemingly one steady motion, and Riordan let in his gears and shot down the street two blocks, then swung around a corner and switched on his lights.

Turning again at the next corner, and so on around the block, he came back to the street on which he had staged his "hold-up," noted that the taxi had disappeared, and ran back toward the spot where it had been, stopping just across the thoroughfare from the sight of his strange behavior.

There he paused long enough to remove the suit of coveralls that had hidden his uniform, and to get his braided cap from his satchel, replacing it in the bag with the old cap and the coveralls.

He gave Halloran the spoils of his "robbery," telling him to stuff them in his pockets, and then starting the car again, drove rapidly back in the direction from which he had originally come.

Riordan's mind was busy.

"I'm going to stop at the Balmoral Apartments," he said presently. "When we get there you pile out and go down to the corner; there's a call box there. Get young Willis—he'll be reporting in about the time you connect.

"Tell him to hotfoot it up to where you are. Then you and he come running up to Suite Eighteen. If you don't see me in the hallway outside the door will be open. Butt right in. There may, possibly, be something doing."

"You'd better let me go with you, sarge; there may be too much for you to handle. We can call Willis from the apartment," suggested Halloran.

Riordan shook his head.

"You do as I tell you; this is my party. I may be wrong, see; and there's no use of two of us getting in bad at the same time.

"Tell Willis to make it snappy—better tell him to come in a sidecar with one of the motor-cycle men. But tell him to bustle along—make it snappy."

"All right."

They finished the rest of the trip in silence. Two blocks from the Balmoral they passed a taxicab, going in the same direction, but at an unusually sedate gait for a taxicab to be traveling.

Riordan parked directly before the entrance, and Halloran slipped out and continued on foot down to the corner, where Riordan saw him jerk open the door of a police call box and bury his head in its interior.

Then his view was cut off by the taxi, which pulled in ahead of him. As the taxi door opened Riordan stepped from his machine, and was standing on the curb in all the resplendant glory of his dress uniform as the passenger alighted from the car ahead and started for the apartment entrance.

Seeing the detective sergeant—even a blind man would have been aware of that dazzling presence—he turned and came forward.

CHAPTER XIV

A FREE-FOR-ALL

"OFFICER, I've been held up and robbed," he said. "A big car—"

"Better step inside and call the police station, sir," said Riordan. "You want to report those things as quick as you can. You can tell me afterward. Thing to do is to get motor cycle men out to the neighborhood first."

"I see where you're right, officer. Come up to my apartment, and I'll telephone from there."

He led the way quickly inside, stepped into the elevator, followed by the glittering Riordan, and was whisked upward to his floor.

As he walked down the hall toward the door of his suite he reached in his pocket and withdrew his keys, selecting the one for his nightlatch and holding it ready in his hand.

Riordan, walking beside him, suddenly shot out a sinewy paw and snatched it and the rest of the keys.

"Now," he said, in a quiet but meaning tone, "if you're nice I won't muss you up any. Make a fuss and your lights go out."

His companion's face showed stunned amazement for a moment, and then he gasped: "What does this mean? I'm—"

"I told you to be nice," said Riordan. "One more peep out of you and I'll make you nice."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Have it your way," he said. "You're either crazy or I am. Somebody will come in a minute, and then we'll see."

"We're neither of us crazy. And you want to remember this: if anybody but a plainclothes man comes, you want to act like you and me were having a nice sociable talk, or something will happen to you. To make you feel more comfortable, I don't mind telling you that you're pinched."

"What for?"

"Possession of stolen property?"

The man laughed. "That's good. I

haven't anything on me but my clothes and a matchbox, and maybe some small change. I was held up and lost everything but my keys, and you've got them."

"That's all right, we're getting on fine. You continue to use good judgment like that, and we'll have no trouble. Watch your step now; don't try to reach that bell button."

The man, who had begun to lean slightly toward the wall, straightened instantly, and stood eying Riordan.

"I wonder," he said, after a silent pause, "if you're really a cop, or if this is another holdup?"

"You wait a minute and you'll see. In fact you'll see right now."

The elevator stopped at the floor just as Riordan spoke, and the young and dapper Willis stepped into view, followed by the big form of Halloran, and both of them came down the hall. Willis saluted Riordan, but Halloran devoted all his attention to the detective sergeant's companion.

"Snap your cuffs on this bird, Willis, and take him down and plant him in my car. Watch him, he's tricky. If he gets gay hit him with your sap."

There was a dual click, and Willis gave a gentle tug at the man's arm. He laughed and started off down the hall.

Riordan turned to Halloran. "I've got his keys," he said. "Let him pick the latchkey out for me, to save trouble. I'm going in there. Using his key, whoever's inside will think it's him coming back and will be surprised.

"You stay out here till I call you. It's just possible that a darky will come out in a hurry. If he does, let him go by you. But if a little shrimp of a white man comes out, stop him. Get me?"

Halloran nodded his head. Riordan advanced to the door of Suite Eighteen, inserted the latchkey, and walked in. Halloran, waiting, heard the gentle sound of his shoes passing over the polished floor within, and then there was silence, punctuated a moment later by a snarling exclamation, the scraping of a chair, a clatter and the sound of blows being struck.

Then silence again, and a moment later Riordan's voice: "Come on in."

Halloran, following the sound of the words, went down an inside hall to a large room, hung with Oriental draperies and furnished with luxurious chairs and couches, in the center of which Riordan was standing, holding a squirming, undersized man with a wrist lock.

"Take a look through the place and see if you can find the darky," ordered the detective sergeant, paying not the slightest attention to the twistings of his prisoner.

Halloran, after a brief survey, reported that the place appeared to be empty.

"All right, guess the cook's out. See that the door is locked behind you, and follow me and this out."

Riordan picked up the struggling man, gathering him into a wriggling bundle, and strode from the apartment, with Halloran behind.

He did not ring for the elevator, but packed his prisoner downstairs, past a marveling elevator attendant on the ground floor, and out to the sidewalk. There he signaled the waiting motor cycle man, who came forward from the curb.

"Got your cuffs with you? Good, snap 'em on this thing—that's the ticket. Now you can ride back to headquarters; we'll take care of this pair in my car.

"You, Halloran, get in the seat with Willis and the yogi, and hold this bird on your lap. We'll be a bit crowded, but it won't be for long."

After Halloran had climbed in, Riordan deposited his burden in the big man's lap, then crowded Willis and his prisoner over tightly, jamming himself in behind the wheel, and drove away, just as a gathering knot of passers-by was beginning to form and wonder what it was all about.

At headquarters he had all his companions get into the jail elevator in the rear of the garage, and they were whisked upstairs. Riordan himself walked through the swinging doors into the headquarters lobby, and thence up the stairs to the detective bureau on the second floor. To the man at the desk he said:

"Call up Dykeman's place, out on the Old Pike Road. Get hold of Dykeman, personal. Tell him to tell Dave Farrell to come down to my office. If he isn't there,

Farrell I mean, leave word for him to come down as soon as he gets in."

Then he walked on into the private office. Captain Brady was leaning back in his chair, apparently snoozing, but his eyes popped open as Riordan entered the room.

"Have a nice time, boy?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"What'd you do?"

"You'll begin to hear about it pretty soon. Stick round."

He walked to his desk, and taking the telephone said:

"Gimme the jail. Hello? This is Riordan, downstairs. Say, tell Halloran and Willis to let those birds they've got use the telephone all they want to. But, listen, and get this—don't you spring 'em for anybody, see?

"If anybody calls up and wants 'em sprung, you refer 'em to me, no matter if it's the President of the United States. Get that? All right."

He hung up for a moment, then lifted the receiver again and said:

"Gimme central. Elmwood, 4—6—4—6, please — Yes — Elmwood, 4—6—4—6? This is Detective Sergeant Riordan speaking. I'd like to speak to Mrs. Cardigan, please—Yes, I'll hold the line—

"Mrs. Cardigan? This is Sergeant Riordan. I'm sorry to disturb you so late in the evening, but could you come down to the detective bureau? And bring your niece with you— No, I can't promise you anything. Just tell her you don't want to go out alone. Yes, thank you. Good-by."

Captain Brady pulled out his watch, looked at it, snapped the case shut, and put it back in his pocket.

"Nice time o' night to be calling up ladies," he said.

Riordan laughed. "You'd better get into your pretty clothes, chief; we're going to have a real soirée here pretty soon."

Brady asked no questions, he made a dive for his locker, and presently was arrayed in even greater splendor than his chief aid. He had hardly finished buttoning up his uniform coat when the door of the office was thrown violently open and the chief stamped in.

"I thought I told you," he roared, "to leave Kiefer alone. What in time do you mean? Who in hell do you think is runnin' this department?"

Captain Brady looked blankly at the head of the department and then shot a glance at Riordan, who had risen from his chair and stepped over to shut the door.

"Chief," said the detective sergeant, "supposing the mayor isn't reëlected, how'd you like to have some pretty powerful influence go to the front and keep you on your job?"

The chief's choler subsided suddenly. "What you mean?"

"Just that, chief. Now you sit pretty here, and in a very few minutes there'll be some people here who pretty near could dictate to the new mayor who's going to be chief of police.

"If Kiefer is still a prisoner when they get here they'll think you're a fine, upstanding man, and be very much impressed in your favor."

The chief was an old man, at least relatively. And he was old in politics and reasonably old in the police game. He knew no mere sergeant would talk like that except under two conditions: he knew what he was saying, or he was crazy. And Riordan gave not the slightest indication of being crazy.

"You got something on Kiefer?" he asked.

"I think so."

"*Think* so? Good God, suppose this gets to the mayor, and you think wrong?"

"The mayor will likely be here, too."

The chief looked round the room, then suddenly seemed to collapse. Captain Brady kicked a chair forward, and he dropped into it.

"I don't know what to do," he said, looking pleadingly at Riordan.

"Keep your shirt on and wait," said Brady. "That's what I'm doing. I don't know much more about it than you, chief, but I'm betting on the boy here."

The three of them sat silently for some minutes. Captain Brady, to relieve the tension, produced a box of cigars. The chief took one and began to chew on it nervously. Riordan took one and put it in his mouth, but did not light it.

Captain Brady started to lift one from the box, and then, noticing that Riordan had not struck a match, put the box back in his desk. As he did so the doorman thrust in his head.

CHAPTER XV

WORKING OVERTIME

"MRS. CARDIGAN and Miss Temple," he announced.

Riordan rose and went to the door, and ushered in the two women.

"Mrs. Cardigan, this is Chief MacDermott. Chief, you know Mrs. Temple-Cardigan? This is her niece, Miss Temple," he said.

They exchanged greetings, and Mrs. Cardigan introduced her niece to Captain Brady, who found chairs for the two. There was a bit of small talk, and then Sergeant Riordan said:

"Mrs. Cardigan, I was sorry to call you at such a late hour, but I—"

"That was all right, sergeant," she interrupted, "my niece and I had just come home from the theater as you telephoned. You have some news for us?"

"Yes. The chief, here, Mrs. Cardigan, and Captain Brady think they have recovered the property you reported to me as having been stolen from your home. The chief, Mrs. Cardigan, put forth special efforts in this case, even against very powerful political opposition.

"In fact, had it not been for the chief standing firmly, and disobeying positive orders that came from a political source, I doubt if we should have been able to recover the property."

Mrs. Cardigan bent a dazzling smile on the chief, whose face was crimson. He tried to make it appear that Riordan's words had embarrassed him.

"The sergeant, ma'am," he said, "is putting it a little strong, I think, ma'am. We always try to do—"

He was interrupted by the door being thrown violently open again, and the booming voice of the mayor, who started his tirade before he was fairly across the sill:

"You, Riordan, what's this? Didn't I tell you myself the other night to keep your hands off—"

His mouth hung open, and he stood stock still in the center of the room as his eyes took in the tableau presented in the office. Riordan got up and went to the door:

"One of you birds go up to the jail and tell Halloran and Willis to bring those men down," he said, shutting the door again. Then he pushed his own chair forward.

"Sit down, your honor, the prisoners will be here in a moment," he suggested.

The mayor sat down, then rose as if the chair was hot, and bowed to Mrs. Cardigan. "I'm very sorry," he said. "I didn't know there was anybody here."

Mrs. Cardigan nodded her head and smiled, and the mayor sat down again, just as the door once more opened to admit Halloran and Willis, and their two charges.

"Gimme that stuff you got in your pockets, Halloran," said Riordan.

The big detective produced the watch, the wallet, several letters, and the package that Riordan had taken from the passenger in the taxicab.

"This your property?" he asked of Willis's prisoner.

The man looked about the room, taking in the situation, and nodded his head.

"The watch looks like mine, the wallet looks like mine," he said. "If the letters are addressed to Haran Singh or to James Dawson, they're mine."

"And the package?" asked Riordan.

"That isn't mine."

Riordan passed the package to Mrs. Cardigan.

"Would you mind opening that, Mrs. Cardigan, and seeing if it is yours?"

She tore the paper covering, took one look at the contents.

"Sergeant, you're wonderful," she said. "Yes, this is my property."

Riordan got up and walked over to the man calling himself Haran Singh or Dawson, and stuffed the watch, wallet and letters in his pocket.

"How do you suppose the package got in with your stuff," he asked.

The man looked at the mayor, who returned his gaze stonily.

"How'd you come to have that package?" snapped Riordan.

"What do I get out of this?" countered Dawson.

The chief of police suddenly straightened in his chair.

"I'll tell you what you get out of it, Dawson," he said. "You come clean, and chances are you'll get out. You stall, and I'll send you up."

The mayor gulped. "I don't think we need to discuss this matter now," he said. "It must be distasteful to Mrs. Cardigan to see a criminal badgered like this."

"Not at all, Mr. Mayor," spoke up that lady. "In fact it interests me extremely. This package contains my personal property, and I am very anxious to know how it came into this man's possession. More especially as he hinted to me, when I first saw him, that I would lose something and have some difficulty in getting it back."

"Well, if he hinted that, he must be the thief," said the mayor. "Brady, you'd better have him locked up."

The chief of police, who had seen a great light and a golden opportunity, objected.

"That man doesn't leave this office till he comes clean," he said. "There has been a crime committed, and it is the duty of the police to find out who is guilty.

"Very great pressure has been brought to bear, Mr. Mayor, to bring about the release of these two men, and I propose to find out now what's back of all this. You, where'd you get that package?"

Dawson pointed to his fellow prisoner. "This here fellow gave it to me," he said.

"What'd he give it to you for?" demanded Riordan.

"To take to the mayor."

"You're a liar—I never saw you before in my life," roared his honor.

Riordan turned to the small prisoner. "You're John Kiefer, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were arrested a week or so ago by Detective Halloran, and brought in here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're one of the finest sneaks in the business, aren't you?"

"I wouldn't boast about that, sir."

"You've done time—a lot of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who sent you the money to come here?"

"Dawson."

"What did he send for you for?"

"He said he could take care of me."

"Tell you he wanted you to do a job?"

"No, sir, just said he could take care of me. He had me dressed up like a Turk in his fortune-telling place."

"Weren't you afraid of being picked up?"

"No, sir, he said he'd take care of me."

Riordan switched back to Dawson.

"You got a city license to run a fortune-telling place?"

"No, sir."

"Don't you know that it's against the law to operate any kind of a business under an assumed name, without registering that name with the city auditor or Secretary of State? Did you register the name of Haran Singh?"

"No, sir."

"Why didn't you?"

"The mayor said—"

"This man's a liar—lock him up," exclaimed the mayor.

Riordan turned to the city executive.

"Your honor, I've got a taxicab driver who'll swear he took this man to your house, and that he visited you for nearly an hour. He'll swear that he was taking this man to your house again to-night. He'll swear that this man told him you'd promised him protection. Maybe he'll swear to a few other things.

"Mrs. Cardigan, here, was the moving spirit at a meeting of the executive committee of the Civic League that voted not to support you for renomination. You pretty near needed that indorsement.

"The night after this committee voted to turn you down, this man Dawson, posing as a yogi, told Mrs. Cardigan she'd lose something for which she'd go to almost any length to bring about its recovery. Later on her house was prowled by an expert sneak and this package I've just returned to her was stolen.

"Moreover, when one of my men first arrested this sneak Kiefer, you gave orders to the chief here that he be released. The

chief gave one reason for it. Later on you came down here and told me another reason.

"Now your honor will notice that I haven't made any direct charges, and that I haven't asked these men certain questions which might—well, which might be embarassing to you while Mrs. Cardigan is here.

"I haven't neglected to ask those questions through any consideration for you. Now I'll tell you how this thing stacks up with me.

"I'm going to hold Kiefer as a habitual criminal and put him away on his record. Probably the judge will hand him a 'floater.' I'm not going to prefer any charges against Dawson, unless he sticks around town after to-morrow night. And I'm not going to make any wise cracks at you. All that if you say good night to the ladies here and keep your fingers out of this case. I think that will be agreeable to Mrs. Cardigan.

"But if you want to make a fuss and be peevish about this, why, I don't see anything to do but go to the district attorney with the whole thing—and the district attorney will be running for reëlection next year and would just eat up a case like this."

"And I've been payin' you twenty-five dollars a month bonus," snarled the mayor.

Riordan reached into his desk and took out a sheaf of checks.

"Here are the checks, Mr. Mayor. I haven't cashed any of them. I was sort of suspicious about your generosity."

He tossed the slips of paper into the mayor's lap.

"Good," said the chief, "good stuff, Riordan. Mr. Mayor, I want you to understand now that this police department isn't a political machine."

The mayor's hands moved nervously, and his eyes shifted about the circle facing him. Suddenly he got up and moved to the door.

"It's all a lie, it's a dirty political trick," he said. "But I can't prove it."

"I don't think you have to prove it, your honor," Mrs. Cardigan said sweetly. "For my part I'd rather it wouldn't be proved. I'd like to think as well of you as I can."

The mayor snorted, then left, banging the door behind him.

"I'd like to say, Mrs. Cardigan," spoke up Dawson, "that I'm thoroughly sorry for the part I had in this."

"The less you got to say, the better, man," said the chief. "You heard what Riordan said. You got till to-morrow night to pull your freight. Willis, take them cuffs off him, and let him go."

Dawson did not even wait to pay his adieus when once he was liberated, and at a nod from Riordan, Halloran took his little prisoner upstairs. Willis was about to follow him, when the detective sergeant beckoned to him.

"Willis, you go out and see if that taxi driver is waiting in the outer room. If he is, take him down to the drill room. I'll want to speak to him presently."

Willis departed, and Riordan turned to Mrs. Cardigan.

"I didn't relish this job a bit, Mrs. Cardigan," he said. "It was full of dynamite all the time. But the chief here, and Captain Brady, they both urged me to go through with it. Especially the chief, ma'am.

"He told me himself that a policeman's duty was to hunt crooks, no matter how high they might be found, or what the consequences might be. And he had no assurance at the time, ma'am, that he'd be chief after this administration went out. The chief is appointed, you know, ma'am."

Mrs. Cardigan beamed at the head of the department. "I'm sure, chief," she said, "that your stand was very fine. I shall make it a point to have the Civic League suggest to the new mayor, whoever he may be, that you be retained as head of the department. Personally, chief, I am very grateful to you."

MacDermott turned turkey red, and shot a shy glance at Riordan.

"I only done what seemed to be right, ma'am," he said. "Of course, I'd be very much obliged for any word you speak in my behalf."

"Rest assured, chief, that my voice will be heard," she said.

Sergeant Riordan turned to Miss Temple and spoke to her.

"You ever been through the place?" he asked. "Let's you and I leave Mrs. Cardigan and the chief and Captain Brady together for a minute, so they can talk this thing over, and I'll show you round."

The young woman rose with alacrity. "I'd love to see everything," she said. "And while you're showing me, I can ask you about that matter you were too busy to listen to the other day."

Riordan opened the door and led the way outside. In the "back room" he showed her the "picture books," then took her upstairs to the court room, and into the women's quarters of the jail.

"And now," he said, "I'll show you something better. All you've seen so far is the seamy side. I'll take you down to the drill room next, and let you see something that will do your eyes good. After that, if you want to talk to me, you can do so."

They stepped into the elevator and were carried to the ground floor. Riordan led her through swinging doors into the dark, vaulted space of the drill room.

"You stand right here a minute," he said, "till I turn on the lights."

Then he walked back to the switchboard, and flooded the chamber with the glow from the chandeliers. Looking back over his shoulder he saw her look around, dazzled by the glare for a minute, and then her gaze became fixed on the figure of a man, seated at the farther side of the hall.

For just a moment she looked, and then, as the man rose, amazement on his face, she rushed across the floor to his slowly opening arms.

"Davie, oh, Davie!" he heard her cry as he left the chamber.

When he got back to Captain Brady's office, Mrs. Cardigan shot him a glance and he nodded his head. She smiled contentedly. Chief MacDermott thought the smile was for him, and beamed himself.

"Where's the young lady, boy," asked Brady.

"Down in the drill room, there was something she wanted to see. She asked me to have Mrs. Cardigan come down. Chief, will you show Mrs. Cardigan the way down there, on her way out?"

The head of the department rose gallantly. "It will be a pleasure," he said. "and an honor. I guess you're about ready to go now, aren't you, ma'am?"

Mrs. Cardigan rose, shook hands with Brady and Riordan, and followed the chief from the office.

Captain Brady looked long and silently at his aid.

"Boy," he said, at length, "you done a good night's work."

"Thanks, chief."

"I mean it, boy. While you were out, showing that girl around, both the chief and Mrs. Cardigan allowed you'd made a hit. And I think you've put the old boy in right, too.

"More'n that, I think he'll be a better chief under the new administration than he was under the old one. But I reckon you've lost your drag with the mayor."

"Well, I guess the mayor's done, so it won't make any difference," answered Riordan smiling. "About the worst he can do is put me on the street till the end of the year."

Brady laughed, and shook his head.

"Nope, the mayor's no fool. If he did that he'd get the reporters inquisitive, and I don't think he's looking for any special notoriety just now. It'd be bad for what few votes he's got left. Well, let's go home, we've both been working overtime."

THE END

Twice he stopped and looked back at her

FAMILY LIFE

By Louise Rice

ONLY BY READING THIS STORY CAN ONE FULLY VISUALIZE THE HORROR THAT MAY COME INTO THE LIVES OF ISOLATED RURAL FOLK

A Story of Fact

OUR romanticists and sentimentalists have a great deal to say about family life, and very nice, pretty stuff it is; true, too—in a good many cases.

But the student of crime and of the psychological reactions of complex humanity is well aware that as soon as we go into the strata of human life which lie beneath the levels of what we may rather vaguely term " normal," we strike on the fact that family life either accentuates the evil which is already there or brings out the abnormal evils which might, under different conditions, slip away into oblivion.

Study of the curious and odd family histories of those who have got themselves into print on account of crime, never fails to turn up a tension, an atmosphere of gloom and suspicion and hate which is very characteristic. The story of the family life, when laid bare, seems quite incredible and always sinister.

The curious thing is that such families frequently live along in what seems to their neighbors like a dull routine, and frequently are the least noticed of any family in the section.

The Hart family of Connecticut were characteristic of all this.

Father Hart, a churchgoer, an honest man, though one never known to give away a penny, believed in the statement that to spare the rod was to spoil the child. He won the approval of his neighbors by the

severity with which he dealt with his sons and the sternness with which he repressed the activities of his life.

His father had been cut off the same pattern, but father Hart had not taken so kindly to his own standards when they were applied to him.

It was stated in the countryside where the Harts had had their rocky farms for several generations that only the fact that father and son were of such equal strength that they were locked in a stalemate, had prevented the old man from killing his son; after which the son went to a lawyer, got a bit of land which came to him from the maternal side and thereafter refused to acknowledge by word or deed that he had had a paternal relative.

Part of the Testimony

He was a stern, repressed-looking young man, was father Hart, by the time that he was twenty-eight and ready to marry, and by that time was fairly well to do; for which reason the gossips were all the more surprised that he took for wife a meek young woman who was not well favored of face, although accounted a good worker. She had never had any youth pay her the least attention, for then, as now, the women outnumbered the men in the Connecticut countryside and only those with either riches or good looks had really much chance.

She, therefore, accepted the statement of Hart that she was elected to the proud place of his wife and helpmate with gratified surprise.

Neither surprise nor gratification lasted long after the marriage ceremony.

The very night of the wedding she was required to milk and to carry in the heavy pails, and was forbidden to burn two candles at the nuptial supper table.

Even the unsentimental menfolk of that place and time were rather aghast at this, and their womenfolk were indignant. In a letter which came to light in another generation, when father Hart's idea of family life had borne its fruit, there is recorded this gossip. One lady of the time, writing to her mother, expressed herself as follows:

> They do say that Farmer Hart is one of the most prosperous and thrifty young men of the section, but I, for my part, would rather have my good John, even though a thought improvident as the dear man is, than this dark looking Hart. 'Tis said that he took his wife's clothing and locked it up and gave her only of the coarsest and that he has forbidden her to eat any of the butter which he makes and takes to town. 'Tis said that he gets as high as twenty cents a pound for it, too. (Let us pause for one moment to cast a longing glance toward the "high prices" of our grandfathers' times!) She wished to have some flowers down the front walk which would cost her naught, as the seeds were given to her, but he dug them up and said he would have no time to give to such foolishness and waste.

There were several children. Mrs. Hart soon learned her lesson of fear and her children drew it in with their milk. The house was one to which never a neighbor's friendly feet wended.

Those who ventured to see the lonely woman and the frightened, cowering children were met at the gate by the man who was literally lord and master of the place and asked what business they had there.

To one who replied that, "My business is to see your wife," Hart replied: "She has no business with any one nor any one with her." This reply was part of the testimony, later, in a court proceeding which threw light on the crime which we are about to consider.

His Father's Footsteps

Mrs. Hart lived, as a great many seemingly frail and sad women contrive to do—for many years. She lived to see her children hate their father so that they were seldom seen to smile, even after they got away from the paternal roof.

She lived to see one of her daughters—the prettiest one, married off by her father's iron will to the only man that that father ever made a friend of, a man of a stern, cold-hearted and cruel nature like his own.

She lived to see the ruling passion of every child of hers, rage not only against the father, but against the world as well.

The Hart family, in all its branches, was a scowling, unfriendly, unsmiling, unsociable and contentious one, whose doors were never brightened by the visits of friends.

Edwin followed in the footsteps of his

father and married the same kind of a meek, yielding and timid though hard working woman that his mother had been. She, also, was a plain, unnoticed girl.

By the time that Edwin wanted to marry he had got himself a farm, and by getting his father to take a mortgage on a piece of property, had contrived to work it. It was no favor that the old man did for his son, for he charged ruinous interest.

There was a little money which the mother had had, which was to be divided among the children. Edwin was always nagging her to leave this to him, alone.

Edwin Goes Shooting

This is not a spectacular account, but to really penetrate it we have to estimate the small details, the bits that go to make up the almost unbelievable picture which produced Edwin and made of him, for a brief time, a figure high in the cruel light of notoriety.

We have to remember that these were the days, back in 1870, when the country family was shut off from the rest of the world, even in such an old and settled State as Connecticut, in a way which is impossible now to dwellers in the most remote parts.

The postal service was slow and expensive, there was no such a thing as a telephone or a telegraph for rural districts, there was no motor driven machine, roads were often unrepaired for twenty years at a time, newspapers arrived in the country, often not more than once a month.

Candles were made by hand, lamps were considered expensive, women had no mechanical helps about their work on farms, nor did the men. The country was still in the grip of a rigid Puritanism which forbade a woman or a man to indulge in any social diversions after the very brief mating period was past.

There was no theaters available and no motion pictures and the blessing of the radio was still a miracle far in the future.

Under these conditions family love or family hate made up a world. In the world of the Harts the hate was so strong that it blotted out all else. The whole family and all its connections lived and ate it.

It is doubtful whether they ever conceived of anything which passed outside of the area of thirty miles where their farms were situated and which, at the far end, contained the then little town of Bridgeport, where, in his lifetime, father Hart had forbidden any of his family to go.

Edwin, again following father's footsteps, even though they were the most hated feet in the world to him, forbade his family, in turn, to "go to town."

He first came into cognizance of the law through a dispute over this. His long suffering wife, for some reason not disclosed, decided that, after all the years since her girlhood, she really ought to have a trip to town. Edwin thought otherwise. For once, she insisted.

Edwin took down the family whip, with which all were well acquainted, and started in with the usual technique, but that time he was especially skillful and Mrs. Hart again broke a precedent by running out of the house and starting toward her brother's farm. Edwin pursued with a gun and filled her back and legs with small shot.

Mrs. Hart was bleeding from a dozen small wounds when she arrived at her haven, where she found a little consolation and had her lacerated skin dressed.

Then she went to bed, but was back home early the next morning in time to get breakfast.

Unwise Females

Neighbors could not help but know of this and a report was made to the county seat, but an officer who went to Edwin's to make inquiry found only a small woman who kept her eyes fixed hypnotically on her husband's and who said that there was nothing that she had to complain of; they'd had a little difference of opinion, that was all.

To which Edwin added the statement that he guessed he was master of his own house and what was the officer bothering a man on his own place about, anyway.

These were in the days when a lot of what the papers called "agitated and unwise females" were trying to make the law recognize a fact which has since been humorously stated as "women are really peo-

ple," but they had made little progress, and the officer was well aware of the sentiment in that part of the country, which was especially strong on this matter of a man's being the sole Officer in Charge of Domestic Affairs. So he apologized and went away.

Mrs. Hart was heard to scream shortly afterward and there was quite a commotion also, made up of the shouts of a drunken man and the cries of children and of overturned furniture. Edwin was giving a demonstration of his mastership, after having helped himself liberally from the hard cider which he kept locked in the cellar for his own use.

The Old Homestead

These are sordid details, which might be duplicated in many a sordid family, but they are not set against the background, as they often are, of other times when more amicable relations prevailed.

They are set against a background of a rule of rigid silence imposed by Edwin on his family, who were so unhumanized that when the younger members of it attended sporadically the district school they were rated as "naturals"—i.e. as half-witted. They are set against a paucity of comfort which is unheard of to-day and against a constant atmosphere of hate which crushed down every other topic.

Mrs. Hart stated, under oath, that never, since the first week that she was married, had she ever heard her husband really talk about anything "but the high prices he has to pay for anything he bought and how he hated his father." Conceive of that. Yet in many of the parts of the country to-day these abnormal family conditions exist.

Had Edwin left that constricted part of the world, had he gone away, out to the world which knew nothing of his father, he might have been a heavy-handed, sour man—for the influence of childhood days is great—but he might never have had a grim necktie about his scrawny neck.

Well, in time, after threatening to do it for years and still carrying on the back breaking work of the farm, Edwin's mother died.

She had never yielded to his urgings to leave him all the little money that she had and when her will was read, he found that even his share in it was gone, since she had transferred that to his father, to apply on part of the mortgage interest, which Edwin had never been able to pay off.

The lawyer who read the will was so outraged at the fearful scene that ensued that he fled the house, and declared that he would have nothing more to do with the affairs of the Harts.

For a month father and son could not meet without dreadful quarrels in which they frequently tried to hurt each other, but the old man was strong, even though over seventy, and as full of hate for his son as his son was for him.

The quarrels now centered on Edwin's demands that he should be given the old homestead for his own.

This Hart, Senior, refused to do, and eventually the home was rented out and the father went to live with the husband of his daughter—the one man with whom he was friendly, the silent, cruel, and avaricious Joyce.

Edwin now had extra hate to pour out, and he did. People got to taking the other side of the road when they saw him coming, for even the unimaginative farmer of the region began to be troubled by the little, reddish eyes of the man.

Before His Purpose Came Out

A vivid picture of him is preserved for us in the statement which one of these farmers made later:

"He usta edge along the road sideways, swingin' his big hand like he held something, and when he looked at you his eyes went inwards, some way, so it made you sick to your stommick."

An interested reporter set that down, in 1880. And a more sickeningly descriptive passage I never read.

Mrs. Hart, coming out of her many year old coma, got up courage to go to a clergyman and beg him "to see what he could do with Ed," but the divine was not enthusiastic at the prospect.

Ed seemed to hear of the visit, and at that time so nearly killed his wife that a hardy doctor was induced to go out and

minister to her. After this, for a few days, Edwin was perfectly silent and, what was far more alarming, perfectly sober. Most amazing of all, he ceased to berate his wife.

The startled woman, crawling out of bed, sent one of the younger children off, surreptitiously, to a neighbor, with the statement that " don't be surprised if anything happens to me, and please look out for the children."

However, her fears were wrongly placed, although he gave his wife an awful hour before his true purpose was revealed.

What Edwin Saw

He took off his boots, which were his most cherished possession—having been bought " in town," and therefore costing the magnificent sum of a dollar and a half—and put on the " cowhides," which were merely crudely fashioned foot bags of home-cured leather, home-made, and then got out his " funeral clothes," which was what the one and only " store-bought " suit was usually called in that section at that time, and sat down at the kitchen table.

He looked a long time at his wife, who, hardened as she was to looks, felt something extra about these and went out doors, but was called in again and solemnly handed the boots, with the remark that they would not be needed again.

Then he asked for food. It was not a time for a meal, and, which was the customary thing, his wife told him that there was something to eat in the pantry.

He started toward the pantry, but stopped and stood staring at the wall for a long time and then laughed. Mrs. Hart, for the first time in her life, ran from her husband and refused to be called back.

For the first time in her life, you see, she had heard her husband laugh, and it was by far the worst sound she had ever heard him make, which is saying a good deal.

From a place outside she saw him get a knife which was used for butchering cattle. He looked at it, ran his finger along it, and then whetted it on his rifle. Then he put it inside his shirt and went outdoors.

Mrs. Hart made sure that now that which she had always dimly feared was about to take place, and she was all the more confirmed in this idea because her husband called out to her something in a tone of voice quite amiable.

She ran as fast as she could away from him, and only after he had turned out of the farm gate did she realize that what he had said was:

" Good-by—good-by."

She went slowly back to the fence and started to call after the man who was irresolutely staggering along the road as though he were drunk; but she knew that he had not been so sober for years. Twice he stopped and looked back at her, but eventually he went on.

He went straight to the house of Joyce, his brother-in-law, and sat down on the old-fashioned " stoop."

His father was inside the house, sitting with Joyce. His sister was in the kitchen. Both men were reading the county paper, which had that day made its monthly appearance.

Edwin looked in through the window and saw this. Then he acted.

Brewed by Isolation

He drew the knife from his shirt and tiptoed around to the front door, slipped into the hall and suddenly sprang into the room where his father and brother-in-law sat, and before either one of them knew that he was near he had thrown his left arm around the old man's neck and plunged the knife in the breast, but it struck on a button and was deflected, and, with Edwin still clutching it, was drawn across the left arm of the father, fairly severing that member.

Joyce, with a shout, sprang the full ten feet of the room which separated him from the pair and landed on the murderer's back, grasping the right hand with the knife in it.

Quick as a cat, Edwin shifted the knife to his left hand, and, despite the desperate effort of Joyce to prevent it, thrust the weapon into his father's throat, coolly taking the pains to twist it, so as to tear the wound, although he was being assaulted with fury by Joyce.

By this time Joyce's wife and her half-grown son, attracted by the noise and by

the shouts of the husband and father—who was in deadly danger himself from the wholly silent maniac with whom he battled—ran out and found the pair rolling around on the stoop, Joyce struggling to prevent Edwin from plunging the knife into a new victim.

The son aided his father, and together they at last dragged the fingers, one by one, from the handle of the dripping knife. But just before that Edwin had suddenly stopped fighting and said: "I give up."

He did not seem able to unlock his own grasp of the knife, and after it was taken from him searched his pockets for a handkerchief with which to wipe away the blood from his hands, and not finding it, casually asked Joyce for one.

Joyce replied that all he had was a clean handkerchief and he did not want that to be dirtied!

The son got on a horse and went for help, and Edwin sat down on the porch. Neighbors came to help about the place. They carried bucket after bucket of bloody water past Edwin as he sat there, for the old man had bled profusely before he died, which had happened just after the fight between the murderer and the man Joyce, and while Mrs. Joyce, watching her husband battling for his life from the doorway, had totally ignored her father's possible need.

Neither she nor Joyce showed much excitement, and neither one of them watched the silent figure on the porch, but neighbors, appalled by the crime of a father's murder, threatened to hang the criminal.

Then Edwin spoke.

"Yes, I did it," he said in a gentle voice which he was always to use thereafter, "and if you want to rig a rope up on that maple I'll climb the tree and jump off."

Just then officers of the law came to take him away, and he shut his lips and never opened them again, except to say yes and no in answers to questions as to his food.

The trial was conspicuous for one thing, which is what makes this story of crime important.

Although there was none of the intelligent effort to supply the "background" of the crime, such as is the everyday practice to-day—note the long drawn effort to do this in the Halls-Mill case—there was a dawning comprehension shown that such a crime as this was something more than just an ordinary thing.

The world had not yet got away from the idea that children, whether well treated or not, were the absolute property of the father.

Edwin Hart showed no emotion at all as he lay in jail. His wife and children showed no emotion at all as they continued the work of the farm and the penurious system of living which Edwin had installed.

Joyce and his wife, and even his son, showed no emotion, although when the funeral of the old man took place half the countryside flocked to it.

Mrs. Hart was compelled to give testimony as to all that has been set down here—so was Joyce, and all other various branches of the tribe.

The newspapers commented with astonishment on the fact that hate blazed up between the various members of it, even on the witness stand and even with this awful crime astride of their history.

Mrs. Hart never looked at her husband throughout the trial, but after his conviction she went to see him, and again the papers commented on the strangeness of their behavior. They "sat in silence, holding each other's hands, and at last the woman arose. He did also, and they embraced each other as if they were a pair of wooden puppets. Then she turned away without a backward glance. Edwin sat down again and asked if he could have his supper."

The papers were still more intrigued with the fact that Mrs. Hart went to town for the express purpose of seeing the gallows prepared for her husband. She did not wait for the event, but, after gazing long at the apparatus, remarked, casually: "I would like to see him hanging there now."

This is a typical story of the hate which is brewed by the isolation of a family, the lack of education, and the too close association of all the members of it, with the financial element also having its influence.

Edwin Hart was hanged on May 13, 1880.

"My friend!" he exclaimed. "This is certainly the code"

MR. ECKS

By J. S. Fletcher

WHEN A DEALER IN DIAMONDS IS FOUND PIERCED, AS BY A RAPIER, THE MAGNET OF MYSTERY DRAWS TOGETHER A STRANGE ASSORTMENT

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

TO transact the sale of an extremely valuable diamond, M. Auberge, of Paris, representing a jewelry syndicate composed of Messrs. Spring, Budini, and Delardier, had an appointment with Marcus Hartmore, of London, at Folkestone, an English town on the Channel coast. Before meeting Hartmore, M. Auberge left the hotel on a mysterious engagement and was killed by a rapier through his back. Police Sergeant Daniel Perivale learns that a Folkestone modiste, Mrs. Volstroem, who was with M. Auberge on his way to England, was shown the diamond in the presence of one Mr. Ecks, who, it is later revealed, spent the same night in Folkestone as did Auberge, but dis-

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XXIV

HARK BACK TO PARIS

MONSIEUR DELARDIER almost snatched the visiting card out of Detective Sergeant Perivale's hand.

"Detective Pelabos!" he exclaimed. "I know him—by reputation, that is! As you say, a famous man! Excellent—we shall proceed. By all means, have him to your presence, gentlemen! Pelabos—it is good news!"

The inspector nodded to the policeman, who disappeared and presently reappeared, ushering in a little, fat, rosy-cheeked man who might have been a vendor of cheese or factor of butter, or anything but the astute sleuth-hound that Perivale, who had often heard of him, knew him to be.

Pelabos greeted the three men with the politeness of the French, giving each in turn a keen glance—and Perivale, who was watching him just as keenly, saw that he had no acquaintance with, nor any knowledge of his compatriot, Delardier.

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 12

"You have come to investigate matters at first hand on behalf of your authorities, M. Pelabos?" inquired Perivale in French, after the preliminary introductions and formalities were over. "We are delighted to see you, and to make the acquaintance of a fellow-worker whose fame has preceded him!"

"*Monsieur* flatters me!" replied Pelabos. "We, too, in Paris, have heard of M. Perivale. But," here he glanced at the inspector, "we will speak English—with which powerful language I have the happiness to be well acquainted. M. Delardier, I believe, is also proficient—so I learned from one of your newspapers in which there was some account of a conversation with him."

"Good!" observed Perivale. "You have read our newspaper's accounts of this affair?"

"All that have been supplied to me! A great many—I am accordingly, fairly conversant with the facts, the surface facts. But I should wish to know all that is—well, beneath the surface!"

"Better tell M. Pelabos all that has happened, and all that we've discovered since yesterday morning," suggested the inspector. "He should be fully posted."

"Yes," agreed Perivale. "It is a long story, and there are many details," he continued, turning to the detective, "but I'll endeavor to compress it and to keep to necessary and really important matters. Well, then—"

Pelabos listened in absorbed silence while Perivale told the entire story as it had presented itself to him at the beginning, and had unrolled itself since. He made no remarks, asked no questions, until the narrator had made an end. Then after a brief interval of silent reflection, he spoke:

"This Mrs. Blank, then? Is she a person of probity—one whose word can be relied on?"

"From my observation of her—yes!" replied Perivale. "I am convinced that she is an eminently truthful woman—she is certainly of undoubted respectability, a well known resident of this town. Also, her servants were, in my opinion, women whose word could be trusted."

"I should like to see the sword-stick!" observed Pelabos.

The inspector produced the sword-stick from a cupboard, and Pelabos withdrew the rapier and silently examined it. He replaced it in silence and returned the stick to the inspector, after which, folding his hands on the top of his neatly rolled umbrella, he rested his chin on their knuckles and stared at the carpet.

"What is your opinion, *monsieur?*" asked Perivale, after a silence that threatened to grow tedious. "Your impression?"

Pelabos looked up slowly and smiled—it was the sort of smile with which an indulgent uncle might greet an ingénue who put a question that cannot easily be answered.

"My opinion, *monsieur?*" he said. "Eh, well, then, my opinion is that at present—at present, you understand—there is no clew whatever to the identity of the murderer! And I think, too, that any clew that will present itself will be picked up, not here, but in Paris!"

"I'm beginning to think that myself," remarked the inspector lugubriously. "Hark back—that's what I think. Began before ever M. Auberge came here—in my opinion!"

Pelabos turned on his fellow-countryman.

"According to Mr. Perivale's admirably lucid account," he said, "you, M. Delardier, allowed this extremely valuable diamond to be in M. Auberge's hands for three days, some little time before you actually handed it to him to bring to England?"

"A fortnight before," replied Delardier.

"Why was it handed to him then?"

"That he might inspect it," said Delardier. "The circumstances were these. Myself, my two colleagues, or partners, Mr. Spring and Signor Budini, became possessed of this diamond—we have had similar dealings, chiefly in valuables brought to Paris by refugees who escaped from Russia at

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appeared the next morning. Hartmore, whose sword stick was found hidden near the body, claims to have come upon the body still warm, removed the diamond, and mailed it to himself in London. On opening the package the diamond is found to be paste. M. Delardier is swearing that the real diamond was given Auberge when a Paris detective is announced.

the time of the revolution and who were anxious to realize on their possessions.

"This is a particularly valuable stone—we believe there would be a better chance of selling it to advantage in England than in France. Auberge was recommended to us as a thoroughly honest man, and an expert. Spring had knowledge of him, too; personal knowledge.

"The diamond was in my keeping—I am the active partner in our syndicate—and I intrusted it to Auberge for three days, at his own request. I thought at the time that he wished to show it to others.

"At the end of the three days he returned it to me, and I kept it in my safe until Auberge's departure for Folkestone, when I once more handed it to him, in the presence of my partners, Spring and Budini. In each case, Auberge gave me a written receipt for the stone.

"The first receipt was returned to him when, at the expiration of the three days, he handed the diamond back, the second receipt is in my pocket now."

Pelabos ruminated awhile. Then he rose, buttoning his overcoat.

"I wish to know what Auberge did with that diamond during the three days you speak of!" he remarked. "One must find out! But, in the meantime, I suggest that you show me the place at which Auberge was murdered?"

"We will go down there with you," said Perivale.

Perivale, however, was not to go. As the four men walked out of the police station, a page-boy from the Royal Pavilion Hotel came up to the detective and handing him a note remarked that he was to wait for an answer. Perivale tore open the envelope, and hastily glanced at the half sheet of paper it inclosed:

DEAR MR. PERIVALE:

Can you please come down to the hotel? I have made an important discovery and have not yet said anything to anybody about it.

Yours sincerely,

ADELAIDE SHEPPERSON.

Perivale drew the inspector aside and showed him the message.

"I must go down there at once!" he whispered. "This is a sharp-witted young woman; she wouldn't send for me unless she'd some good news. You go with these two to the Leas. I'll meet you here later."

CHAPTER XXV

ONE PLACE HE DIDN'T LOOK

HE hurried away in the direction of the hotel, and presently walked up to the reception office, to find Miss Shepperson expectantly awaiting him. She gave him a look expressive of a good deal.

"Yes?" said Perivale. "You've found out—what?"

Miss Shepperson leaned across the counter. She was alone in the office, and there was no one about in the inner hall, but she lowered her voice to a whisper:

"I have!" she answered. "And I was never so surprised in my life! I haven't told a soul of it yet—not even the manager. I thought it best to keep it to myself until I'd seen you, and as it seemed highly important, I sent for you at once."

"Good girl!" exclaimed Perivale with heartfelt approval. "I knew you were a brick! And—what is it?"

"Put it down to sheer feminine inquisitiveness that I discovered anything at all!" said Miss Shepperson. "At least, put it down to that as regards one-half, and to mere accident as regards the other.

"Well, it was this way—I happened, about an hour ago, to be walking along the corridor in which there's the bedroom that I let to M. Auberge and that you and your inspector searched so thoroughly, and," she added with a sly twinkle in her eyes, "so very ineffectively! And I suddenly thought I'd like to have a look at it—I really don't know why, unless it was a bit of morbid curiosity.

"The chambermaid of that floor was close by, and I got her to let me in with her key. And I went in and just looked round, and within one minute of my going in I found—something!"

"What—what?" demanded Perivale.

"Wait a minute!" said Miss Shepperson. "My assistant's just coming back—then I'll go up with you. She'll be here in a second."

The assistant was not back in a second nor in sixty, but Miss Shepperson's lips refused to say more until she came. Then she beckoned Perivale to follow her, and led him upstairs to the door of Auberge's room, summoning the chambermaid on her way. She flung the door wide open and motioned the detective across the threshold with something of an air of triumph.

"Now!" she said. "You and the inspector searched every inch of this room, so you told me! You left nothing—not a square inch—that you hadn't been over. You're very clever, Mr. Perivale, but I'll show you something you never even thought of examining! Come, I believe I could beat you at this sort of work!"

"You're reducing me to—I don't know what!" exclaimed Perivale. "I can't think of anything—anything whatever—that I didn't examine with the utmost care! What is it? Where is it?"

Miss Shepperson pointed to the bed.

"You see that bed—" she began.

"Pulled it all to pieces!" interrupted Perivale.

"Perhaps! But you see what a good, solid brass frame it has—real good work! And you observe that at the four corners there are four unusually large brass knobs which screw on the posts? Very well, Mr. Perivale—now unscrew that, the left hand one!"

With a muttered exclamation of astonishment and discomfiture, Perivale seized on the brass knob which Miss Shepperson indicated—to his utter surprise it came clear away in his hand!

"Look inside it!" said Miss Shepperson. "And turn it up!"

Perivale looked inside the hollow of the knob and then inverted it. There dropped from it, on the coverlet of the bed, a small box, the exact counterpart of that which he himself was carrying in his pocket, the box containing the imitation diamond! With another exclamation of amazement he tore off the lid of this new discovery. And there was a loose mass of cotton wool—and nothing else.

"Good Lord!" said Perivale. "And—and you hit on this?"

"Can't say I hit on it," replied Miss Shepperson. "I told you that accident had something to do with the discovery. It came about this way—when I entered this room to look round I just chanced—mere chance, you know—to put my hand on that brass knob. It came away in my fingers, just as it did with you, and, of course, I looked at it to see if the thread of the screw had worn loose. And then I saw what was in the cavity of the knob—that!"

"Empty!" exclaimed Perivale.

"To be sure. What else would it be?"

Perivale looked searchingly at her, then he glanced at the door. It was still wide open and there were a couple of chambermaids in view, busied about the corridor. He dropped his voice.

"What's your theory?" he asked. "You're a clever sort, you know, and you've got one, I can see! Now, what is it?"

"Obvious!" replied Miss Shepperson. "You know that M. Auberge, after I'd shown him to this room, remained in it for some minutes before coming downstairs? You, I remember, were much puzzled as to why he remained here. He didn't unpack his suit case; he didn't even wash his hands. What did he do?

"Why, he looked about him for a likely place in which to hide his diamond while he went out—which, perhaps, shows that he may have known or fancied that he was going where there was danger. And he hit on that brass knob—and slipped that box in there!"

"And—after?" said Perivale.

"After? Why, that's obvious, too!" exclaimed Miss Shepperson. "M. Auberge never came back! But somebody—somebody who knew he was murdered—came, and during the night entered this room. And that somebody found the box in that knob, and took the diamond out of it, and put the box back in the knob—and didn't take the trouble to screw the knob tight in its place!

"For look here," she continued, taking the knob from Perivale's hand. "The screw is not worn—the knob screws right enough. From the time the thief put it back, loosely, until I laid my hand on it, accidentally, that knob had never been touched!"

"I never touched it, certainly!" admitted Perivale. "I confess—I never even thought of those knobs! Stupid idiot that I am—of course, I ought to have remembered that they're hollow. And they're of unusual size, these. Well—well! But a sharp girl like you has formed some further conclusion. Come, now, whom do you suspect of having entered this room and discovered the diamond?"

Miss Shepperson gave him a quick glance.

"Why, the man I suspect of having murdered Auberge!" she answered. "The man who called himself Mr. Ecks!"

CHAPTER XXVI

CONFLICTING PURSUITS

PERIVALE considered Miss Shepperson's suggestion during a moment's silence. Then he nodded his head.

"I shouldn't wonder if you're quite right!" he said. "The worst of it is that if it is really so, the man's got several days' start. Still—look here—come down to your office and write me out a careful and particular description of Ecks. That will be useful—and so will this!"

As he spoke he picked up the brass knob, which he had left lying on the coverlet of the bed, and wrapping it tightly in his handkerchief, put it in his pocket.

"What do you want with that?" inquired Miss Shepperson.

"Finger-prints!" replied Perivale with a smile. "There are yours on it, of course, and mine, but we may get one of the person who found this box in it, and afterward replaced the box. Oh, we've still a chance, thanks to your discovery! And now," he concluded as they went downstairs, "be careful about that description! Put in anything you particularly noticed—you're a very observant young lady, you know!"

"It's a good thing I am then!" replied Miss Shepperson. "For I noticed two little peculiarities about Mr. Ecks, whoever he may be. One was that on his right hand—I noticed it as he signed the register—he has one finger shorter than the others, though I can't remember which finger it was. And the other was that he has a dropped eyelid—the left!"

"Good—good—splendid!" exclaimed Perivale. "Put all that in—we shall find particulars like those immensely useful. A short finger and a dropped eyelid—you're a perfect Godsend!"

Armed with the Godsend's carefully written description of the vanished Mr. Ecks, about whom he was now beginning to entertain very strong suspicions, Perivale hastened back to the police station, and at its entrance encountered the inspector and his two companions, just returning from their visit to the scene of the murder. As soon as they were closeted together in the inspector's room, he told them of the latest development, and produced Miss Shepperson's memorandum, which he handed to the French detective. M. Pelabos studied it carefully.

"This may prove of great value," he remarked at last. "I have an idea—it is, you will understand, a vague idea—that I have met this man—the dropped eyelid suggests something to me. In connection with some fraud or other, years ago—a commercial fraud.

"Probably he is an international crook! The name Ecks, of course, is an example of his humor. He means the letter X—the unknown quantity. Very good, gentlemen—we make progress! But our progress, M. Perivale, will take you and me to Paris.

"And there is something I must have to take with me—something of the most important. Those papers which Auberge deposited at the hotel, which are, I understand, in cipher. They can be obtained?"

"At once!" replied Perivale. "The inspector has got them."

"My opinion is," continued Pelabos, "that at Auberge's office there will be a key to that cipher. We will find it. Auberge's office, as soon as we had the news of his murder, was locked up by us and the door is sealed. We will examine his effects, you and I—and see what we shall see. Now we will consider the trains and boats. You will accompany me, M. Perivale?"

"Certainly!" agreed Perivale. "I know all about the boats across and the trains

on the other side. It is now nearly one o'clock. We can catch the three forty-two boat at Dover, reach Boulogne at five thirty, and be in Paris at nine this evening."

Pelabos raised a finger.

"Softly, my dear confrere!" he said with a smile. "We do not go to Paris all at once! We will go by the boat to Boulogne, certainly, but we will not leave Boulogne immediately. There are little matters to investigate there, is it not so?

"This M. Ecks, for example, he has two very good quality suit cases, I think, when he is at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne? Eh, well, M. Ecks has no suit cases when he arrives at the Royal Pavilion Hotel in this town, Folkestone! So—I think he left them at Boulogne, eh? And—I think he would go back for them! So—we will make a little excursion into the town when we reach Boulogne Harbor."

"I am in your hands, M. Pelabos!" said Perivale. "Whatever you suggest will be attempted."

Pelabos drew out his watch.

"At present," he said, "as it is not yet one o'clock, and as Dover is—very conveniently, only a few miles away—I suggest that it is the hour for your very nice custom of lunch, or perhaps early dinner? I am hungry!"

Perivale took his visitor to the nearest hotel, where, as they lunched, came the inspector, bringing the cipher document, which Pelabos carefully pocketed. There, too, came Delardier, gloomy and distrustful, and still cherishing suspicions of Hartmore.

"Since you go to Paris," said Delardier, "I too, shall return. I must see my colleagues and be there to hear of your discoveries, if you make them. But I am not convinced about this man called Ecks! I think M. Perivale is in danger of forgetting, or has already quite forgotten, something of supreme importance!"

"What is that, *monsieur?*" demanded Perivale.

"Well, this!" replied Delardier. "One must look at all facts, not merely one! You are now, *monsieur*, on the track of this Ecks, disregarding all others. But there is still Hartmore! Ecks passed the night of the murder at the Royal Pavilion Hotel—yes, of a certainty, but so, too, did Hartmore!

"Ecks had a room in close proximity to Auberge's room—yes, but so had Hartmore! I do not see that there is any more reason to suspect Ecks than there is to suspect Hartmore. And I still suspect Hartmore. We do not know that Ecks knew anything about the diamond—"

"Yes!" interrupted Perivale. "Ecks saw it at Boulogne!"

"He had the opportunity of, we will say, glancing at it, across a room, *monsieur*, as it lay in Auberge's hand!" retorted Delardier. "A mere look! But he did not know its value! Hartmore did! And in addition to knowing all about it, Hartmore had as much opportunity as Ecks had of seeking for it in Auberge's bedroom. But pursue your path, *messieurs*—I shall pursue mine!"

He went away, still gloomy and disapproving, and the two detectives said nothing at his going. But the inspector shook his head.

"There's a good deal in what he said just now," he remarked. "After all, Hartmore had as much opportunity of going into Auberge's bedroom as Ecks had! That's how it strikes me, anyhow! Of course, I wouldn't presume to dispute with M. Pelabos!"

"We shall doubtless make many interesting discoveries in Paris," said Pelabos. "It is there the first chapter was written, eh? We return to the first chapter!"

Delardier was on the boat which carried the two detectives across to Boulogne; at Boulogne, Perivale saw him board the express for Paris; he saw, too, that Delardier saw him and made no sign. On their way into the town, he suddenly remembered something and turned to Pelabos with an exclamation of annoyance.

"I am losing my wits!" he said. "I have omitted to procure the address of this syndicate in Paris—I should have obtained it from Delardier!"

Pelabos smiled enigmatically.

"Do not distress yourself, M. Perivale!" he answered dryly. "That can be supplied with no difficulty—when it is necessary. For the present we are investigat-

ing the matter of M. Ecks and his travels. I think we shall hear of him in this town of Boulogne!"

CHAPTER XXVII

END AND BEGINNING

IN this supposition Pelabos proved to be correct. Very little inquiry brought certain facts about M. Ecks to light. On Monday evening, October 23, M. Ecks went away from the Hotel Crystal with two suit cases, in the direction of the harbor station; the man who carried his suit cases said that on leaving the Hotel Crystal M. Ecks said—in the presence of the porter of that hotel—that he was going to the harbor station.

But when they had crossed the bridge, M. Ecks altered his mind and his instructions: he bade the man carry the suit cases to a small hotel on the opposite bank of the harbor. There he dismissed him—the man knew no more. But the proprietor of the small hotel knew more.

M. Ecks engaged a room and superintended the removal of his two suit cases to it. He then put the key of the room in his pocket, explained that he should be out that night, but should return next day, and paid his bill in advance. True enough, next day—to be precise, about four o'clock in the afternoon—M. Ecks did return in a fine automobile. In this his luggage was placed; in this he rode away.

Whence? Ah, that the proprietor did not know—who could tell? Still, perhaps the proprietor knew if the automobile was, for example, a hired one? Of a certainty, yes, that was so; the automobile, a very fine car, was indeed known to the proprietor, it had been hired from a garage in the town. But to which quarter of the globe M. Ecks sped in it—that the proprietor did not, alas, know at all.

But the people at the garage knew. They remembered M. Ecks perfectly—why not? An Englishman—with his pockets stuffed full of money! And like all those English that he must have the best and most powerful car available. And he was driven—where? Where, then, but to Paris? To Paris, of a certainty—where should any English, with pockets full of money go, but Paris? Paris—yes!

"Where there are three million people!" exclaimed Perivale, remembering statistics. "Three millions!"

The proprietor of the garage was sympathetic. *Monsieur's* observation was, doubtless, correct. It was a difficult matter to find one man among three millions of others. But let *monsieur* have courage! The chauffeur—eh? Courage, then!

The chauffeur was at hand, and the chauffeur knew all about it—why not? He remembered the English gentleman and his two elegant suit cases, and the long evening drive to Paris—oh, yes! And where he drove his fare to, also! Oh, yes, truly! His memory was of the most—

"Where, then?" asked Pelabos.

"To the Hotel du Louvre, *monsieur!* Where we arrived as the clocks of Paris were striking midnight."

Pelabos and Perivale went away. The Frenchman was silent, evidently thinking. Perivale was inclined to talk.

"Pretty smooth and easy sailing, so far!" he remarked. "He doesn't seem to have done much, if anything, to conceal his movements."

Pelabos thought awhile in silence before he replied.

"We are undoubtedly dealing with a clever man, *monsieur!*" he said at last. "Those who appear not to conceal are often concealing! But we also will now go to Paris."

But there were no more train to Paris that evening, and it was not until half past four of the following afternoon that the two detectives walked into the hall of the Hotel du Louvre.

There Pelabos began diplomatic inquiries. But there was no need for diplomacy. M. Ecks, English, had come there at midnight, October 24, had stayed the night there, had departed early next morning. So much the reception clerks could tell. But as to the rest—eh, well, perhaps the porter—

The porter concerned, duly found at last, remembered Mr. Ecks—English. Certainly, who, with two pieces, left early—that is to say, before eight o'clock. Oh, yes—he, the

porter, got him a taxicab. Did he the porter, know the number of that cab or its driver? The number, no—there were so many of those numbers. But the driver!—oh, yes. A young fellow whose cab was generally to be found on the adjacent stand. To be discovered, then? But yes—the porter knew him as well as he knew his own brother.

Within an hour the taxicab driver stood before Pelabos and Perivale. He, too, had a good memory. He remembered the Englishman with two pieces whom he drove from the hotel at a quarter to eight on that particular morning—a Wednesday.

"Where did you take him?" demanded Pelabos.

The driver made play with hands and shoulders.

"Eh, well, *monsieur!*" he answered. "His command on entering my cab was to be driven to the Gare de Lyon! We proceed!—but at the corner of the Place de la Bastille—*monsieur* will comprehend, at the corner where the Rue St. Antoine comes to the Place de la Bastille—he stops me.

"He goes no farther; he will be set down there! There is a friend he desires to see. He pays me, he takes his two pieces; he walks away, round the corner, carrying one piece in this, one in the other hand; he disappears. And me, *monsieur*—I return!"

When the taxicab driver had taken himself off, Pelabos looked at Perivale.

"That trail is at an end, my friend," he observed. "Ecks is lost in the ocean of Paris! No matter—we shall find him, yet! Perhaps not in Paris—but somewhere. And meanwhile, we will visit the office of the late M. Auberge."

"There may be something there, no doubt!" said Perivale, gloomily. "But I wish we hadn't got off the track about Ecks! When the Gare de Lyon was mentioned, I was hoping he'd gone off to Monte Carlo—we'd have had a better chance of laying him by the heels there!"

"I have previously remarked that Mr. Ecks is undoubtedly a clever man," said Pelabos. "Being that, he prefers to lose himself in Paris, where, as you said, *monsieur*, there are three millions of people. However, I, Pelabos, have more than once found my man in Paris—and we will find Ecks! But now—Auberge!"

He led the way to Auberge's office, broke the official seals on the door, and, admitting Perivale and himself, proceeded to examine the dead man's desk. Perivale could assist little in that search, and, fortunately for him, it soon came to an end. From an inner drawer of the desk Pelabos suddenly produced and held up a small book.

"My friend!" he exclaimed. "This is certainly the code in which is written that cipher!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPY?—OR TRAITOR?

PERIVALE looked on while Pelabos turned over the pages of the code book. He had no personal experience of cipher; to him the whole thing was as so much Chinese. And he said as much.

"All the same, my friend, this, I am convinced, contains the key to the papers which I brought away from Folkestone," said the Frenchman. "It shall be my task to decode those papers this very evening. You will meet me to-morrow, early—then we shall talk further, in the light of what I shall discover."

"You expect to discover something?" suggested Perivale.

"I expect to discover a great deal!" replied Pelabos. "Put it to yourself, my friend—this man goes from Paris to Folkestone, ostensibly in relation to his diamond-broking business.

"Immediately on his arrival at his hotel at Folkestone he causes to be securely locked up in the safe of the hotel office a packet of papers, which, when subsequently examined by you, prove to be written in cipher. Why this extraordinary precaution?

"My good friend and confrere, M. Perivale, has it not yet struck you that, possibly, Auberge's murder has nothing to do with that diamond—nothing at all—and that these things, these papers here in my hand, written in cipher, have everything to do with it?"

Perivale stared at his questioner.

"I can't say that it has struck me, up to now," he answered. "But now that you suggest it—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Pelabos, as he rose from the dead man's desk and bundled papers and codebook into his pocket. "We shall see—we shall see! Go, then, to your hotel, my dear Perivale, eat, drink, enjoy yourself; at an early hour to-morrow I come to you—with revelations! But—your hotel?"

"I'll go back to that we've just been in," said Perivale. "That's all right. At what time will you come in the morning?"

"At nine o'clock I shall do myself the pleasure to wait on you," replied Pelabos. "Until then—"

He went off in his bustling fashion. Perivale saw him board an omnibus. Perivale himself strolled back to the Hotel du Louvre, secured a room, dined, smoked a cigar over his coffee, and, after a time, went out and visited several of the principal cafés in the hope of seeing somebody or something—Ecks or the syndicate, or—he scarcely knew what.

But he saw nobody and nothing of interest, and, shortly before midnight, he returned to the hotel and went to bed, to dream that he and Pelabos and Miss Shepperson and the inspector were chasing Hartmore and Ecks all over Europe, and that as fast as they came up with their quarry it vanished, and then turned up in another place, only to vanish again as soon as sighted.

And then came morning once more, and at nine o'clock Pelabos, rosy and plump, and with a look that was at once mysterious and important.

Pelabos got Perivale into a corner of the inner lounge, and, when they were settled down, tapped him confidentially in the region of his heart.

"My friend," he said, "I have made a great discovery—and I begin to think that what I indicated to you last night may be correct, namely, that the murder of Auberge on your cliffs at Folkestone had nothing to do with that so very valuable diamond! I say—may be!"

"You have made out those papers?" asked Perivale.

"I have made out—as you call it—the papers. The little book was, as I confidently anticipated, a key to the cipher in which the papers were written. Eh, well, then, here is the result! This Auberge, my friend, was, of course, a man who had dealings in precious stones—no doubt of it!—and in that business appears to have been a thoroughly trustworthy and capable man, of some repute in his calling. But he was also something else!"

"What?" asked Perivale.

"I cannot at present say whether he was a spy or a traitor!" replied Pelabos. "He was certainly one or the other. For what are these papers—or, rather, what is this document which he carried to England with him, carefully written in cipher, and evidently intended for the perusal of either your high-placed police officials or some equally high-placed member of your government?

"It is, my friend, nothing else than an account of the organization, doings, and intentions of a certain secret society which has its center here in Paris, but is of European scope, and is at the moment specially devoting its energies to the spread of disaffection in your own country—England!"

"Good Heavens, is that it!" exclaimed Perivale. "You don't say so!"

"I, Pelabos, say it to you! This is it! And it is plain to me, from my reading of the document, that this is not the first communication of its kind which Auberge had prepared for some person in London—whither he was probably intending to take or send these papers after finishing his business in Folkestone.

"It is quite evident from what is here," continued Pelabos, "that Auberge was very much *au fait* with the secret doings and schemes of these people, whose aim is the total destruction of society as we know it, and who are fervently hoping to bring about a revolution in your country. And I am now wondering if Auberge was one of two things.

"Was he a professional spy, who had cleverly wormed his way into the confidence of these people? Or was he a traitor to the cause, seduced from it by a traitor's pay?

In either case, I think it very likely that he was murdered at Folkestone, not because he was carrying a valuable diamond, but because his treachery, or the fact that he was a spy, had been found out!"

"There is something in it," admitted Perivale.

"There is a great deal in it, my friend! Remember now—Auberge had not been robbed! He had much of value on him—money, ornaments, the like! Nothing had been touched. According to Hartmore, the box containing the imitation diamond was intact in Auberge's pocket when Hartmore found Auberge! Therefore—it was not murder for the sake of robbery!"

"But—you forget the brass knob!" said Perivale. "That cannot be got over. My theory is that the murderer—whom I conceive to be the man we know as Ecks—murdered Auberge on the Leas, possibly discovered that the diamond he had on him was an imitation, put it back in Auberge's pocket, went to the hotel, and had the luck to discover the real diamond! What do you say?"

"That all that is highly problematical," replied Pelabos. "Your theory may be correct. The brass knob affair is decidedly puzzling. But this cipher business is highly significant. It must be inquired into—in secrecy. Leave that to me! As to the pursuits of Ecks—"

Pelabos was interrupted at this point by the appearance of a page boy, who brought Perivale a telegram.

"From the inspector!" exclaimed Perivale as he spread out the message. "Good Heavens!—what's this?"

Return here at once; important information just received which needs your personal attention.

CHAPTER XXIX

INTO HIS THOUGHTS

He turned on his companion inquiringly. Pelabos nodded calmly.

"Precisely!" he said. "In these cases something is always turning up. Well, my friend, the best train of the day leaves the Gare du Nord at twelve o'clock. You will reach Dover at five, and your own town is, I suppose, a matter of a short run in a car. I shall await your news—if it can be communicated—with the deepest interest!"

"And you—meanwhile?" asked Perivale.

"I shall investigate—secretly—the matters arising out of my discovery of this cipher business, and I shall also cause the most minute inquiries to be set afoot with a view of unearthing Mr. Ecks," replied Pelabos. "Oh, I shall not be idle. Courage, my friend—we shall do very well yet!"

Perivale followed the inspector's instructions, and, leaving Paris at midday, was back in Folkestone before six o'clock. On his way across he thought much about the matter of the document which Pelabos had successfully decoded the previous evening.

Supposing that the Frenchman's theory was right, and that the murder of Auberge sprang out of his connection with the secret society indicated? Why, then, all his, Perivale's, labors had so far been in vain—he had been working in the wrong direction!

That Pelabos might be right seemed probable, or, at any rate, possible from an undoubted fact—there was no doubt that Auberge, when he reached Folkestone, had an appointment with somebody *who was not Hartmore.* Was it with some man to whom he was eventually to hand that cipher document—or to meet in connection with the matters set forth in it? Who, anyway, was it that Auberge was to meet?

But all this was put out of Perivale's mind within a moment of entering the inspector's room. The inspector, usually phlegmatic, and often doleful, showed signs of excitement; something, it was very plain to Perivale, had stirred him up. He jumped from his chair as the detective entered, and immediately strode toward a door that communicated with another office.

"I knew what time you'd come in?" he exclaimed. "I looked up the train and the boat! And I've got the man here, waiting for you!"

"The man? What man?" demanded Perivale.

"A Folkestone man, a taxicab driver, who came here first thing this morning

with a most remarkable story!" replied the inspector. "He'd have come before, but he's been ill in bed, and he didn't know much about this murder affair until yesterday. He's got something to tell, I can assure you! But you shall hear it from him." He flung open the door, and looked into the other room. "Come in, Walton!" he said. "Mr. Perivale's arrived."

A man came in who looked as if he had risen from a sick bed to come there; a middle-aged, respectable-looking fellow whom Perivale recognized as having seen about the town in charge of a taxicab. He nodded to the detective and took the chair to which the inspector pointed at the side of his desk.

"Now Walton," said the inspector. "Tell Mr. Perivale the story which you told me this morning—about the strange man who hired your cab on the morning of Tuesday, October 24."

Perivale's ears pricked at that. Tuesday, October 24, was the date of the murder of Auberge. He turned sharply to Walton.

"How do you know that Tuesday, October 24, was the exact date?" he asked.

Walton pointed at the inspector.

"I didn't know, sir!" he answered. "This gentleman here, he fixed that! What I told him was that this here, what I'm to tell you about, was on the morning of the day that that murder took place. I heard of it early in the afternoon, just after I'd got back from where I'd been. He said that 'ud be Tuesday, October 24."

"So it would!" muttered the inspector. "The date's all right. Go on, Walton!"

"Well, sir, it was like this here. My taxicab's my own; I bought it awhile since. And, as a rule, I goes out with it very early of a morning—there's often gentlemen as wants to catch an early train at the Central. Now on that there morning I was out at seven-thirty, and a bit after that, going along the promenade top of the Leas, 'cause I've often picked up an early fare there.

"I saw a gentleman—no baggage or nothing he had, 'cepting an umbrella—come out of one of those small private hotels on the Leas and walk in my direction—"

"Which private hotel?" interrupted Perivale.

"Couldn't say precisely which, sir—there's several of 'em all of a bunch, like. Well, he comes to me and puts up his umbrella. 'How far is it from here to Newhaven?' he says. 'Matter of about sixty mile, sir,' says I. 'How long would it take you to drive there?' he says. 'About three hours—at the outside, sir,' I says. 'You've got petrol?' says he. 'That's all right, sir,' I assure him. 'Well,' he says, 'you can get me there by eleven o'clock.' 'Comfortable, sir!' I says. And without another word, he gets in and off we goes."

"There and then?" said Perivale.

"There and then, sir—straightway. I hadn't had any breakfast—leastways, no more than a cup of tea and a bite o' bread and butter, but, thinks I, I can get that after I've done with him. And I landed him at Newhaven, sir, at ten thirty."

"Where?" asked Perivale.

"London and Paris Hotel, sir—what he told me to take him to."

"That's close to the harbor, isn't it?"

"It is, sir—opposite the landing stage."

"Well—anything else?"

"Nothing, sir! He paid me all right, and give me five shillings for myself, and I see no more of him. Leastways, not after he walks into the hotel?"

"Did he say anything as to where he was going?"

"He did not, sir! But, of course, I had my own ideas. Across to Dieppe by the eleven forty-five boat, sir."

"You're acquainted with the times of sailing from Newhaven to Dieppe?"

"I am, sir—used to live that way myself, one time. Don't vary much, these cross-channel steamers, sir, year in, year out. Though that eleven forty-five, it sometimes leaves fifteen minutes earlier—depends on the tide."

"Well, now, Walton, can you describe this man? Tell us just what he was like—as near as you can."

"Well, sir, what you might call a middle-aged to elderly gentleman; Englishman, of course. Tallish, broadish build, a bit inclined to the stout side, sir. A smart, well-dressed gentleman, sir—dark clothes

black overcoat, bowler hat. One o' those trimmed beards, sir, going a bit gray. Not a gentleman of many words, sir."

Perivale suddenly experienced an illumination. A name shot into his thoughts —Spring!

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRIVATE HOTEL

FOR a minute or two Perivale sat silent, staring at the taxi-cab driver. Then he suddenly rose from his seat, strode across the room and back. The inspector glanced at him, inquiringly.

"You've thought of something?" he suggested. "Something occurred to you?"

"Yes!" replied Perivale. He turned to Walton. "Are you strong enough to walk a bit?" he inquired. "As far as the Leas?"

"Oh, yes, sir—I can manage that," answered Walton. "Legs are all right, sir."

"Come along with me, then," said Perivale. But as he turned to the door another idea struck him, and he looked at various books and papers lying on the inspector's desk. "Got a time-table there?" he asked. "Cross-channel and Paris services? Good! Hand it over!"

He sat down again and began to study the book which the inspector handed him. He had begun to think about certain possibilities which only a study of the time-table could make clear. If the man of whom Walton had just told was really Spring, how had Spring, who was certainly in Paris on Sunday morning, October 22, managed to be in Folkestone on the night of Monday, October 23, back again in Paris next day, and back once more to Folkestone by nine o'clock in the evening of Wednesday, October 25?

It needed little work on the figures before him to prove to Perivale that the thing could be done, and done easily. If Spring left Paris by the twelve o'clock, midday, train on the Monday, he would arrive at Dover at five, and could be at Folkestone by five thirty that afternoon. Leaving Newhaven at eleven forty-five on the Tuesday, he could be in Paris again by the early evening. With Spring's movements on Wednesday, October 25, Perivale was already well acquainted.

He presently threw the time-table back to the inspector, and, motioning Walton to follow, walked up to the promenade on the Leas. He was thinking hard all the time. If the man described by Walton turned out to be Spring, what brought Spring to Folkestone on that particular night? And why, out of all the many hotels in the town, did he select one close to the place at which Auberge's body was found?

That might be a coincidence; again, it might not—there might be some deep design in it which at present Perivale could not fathom. But whatever that design was, Perivale had an impression which was connected with it—the man whom Auberge had mentioned to Mrs. Volstroem as having appointed to meet was, in all probability, Spring. Was that appointment kept?

"Now, Walton," he said, as they reached the middle of the promenade, "which of these places is that out of which your fare came that morning?"

Walton pointed to a group of houses opposite.

"I can't be sure of the exact house, sir," he answered. "There's so many of these small private hotels, and they're all so much alike that it's a bit of a job to say which is which! But I'm sure of this—it was one of those between that lamp-post and the opening of the next street!"

"You're quite sure of that?" asked Perivale.

"Certain, sir! There's where I was with my cab, and it was out of the gate of one of those small hotels that I saw the gentleman come. But which—"

Perivale sent Walton off with an assurance that he'd be rewarded for his information, and crossing the road, began his inquiries at the first of the small hotels which the cabdriver had indicated. The first three yielded nothing—but at the fourth he spotted his man.

The manageress of the hotel, a house capable of accommodating some twelve or fifteen guests, remembered the gentleman very well indeed—a very pleasant, agreeable, quiet gentleman who came in early

one evening, explained that he must stay the night in the town, and went away very early next morning. Name? It was in the visitor's book, of course. There it was, under date October 23—Mr. Charles Winter, London.

Perivale looked long and significantly at that entry. He was memorizing the peculiarities of the handwriting, while at the same time wondering if the handwriting itself was disguised. He turned to find the manageress watching him with equal curiosity.

"Had this gentleman ever stayed in your hotel before, ma'am?" he asked.

"No—quite a stranger," replied the manageress. "No! He explained to me that he had some business close by here at a rather late hour of the evening, and thought he had better stay in the town all night—in fact, he said, he couldn't get away. No, I didn't know him—but a very pleasant, quiet gentleman. Quite the gentleman, you understand!"

"Exactly!" said Perivale gravely. "Now can you tell me anything of his movements? What did he do after his arrival?"

Something in Perivale's tone made the manageress hesitate before replying to these direct questions. She looked at him carefully and inquiringly.

"May I ask who it is I have the pleasure of addressing?" she asked. "We don't usually give information about our guests, and—"

Perivale pulled out his official card, and handed it over. The manageress stared—and gasped.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I—I hope there's nothing wrong? Such a very—"

"You'll remember, ma'am, that something very wrong took place close by here on the night of October 23?" replied Perivale. "You've heard of the murder of the Frenchman, on the Leas?"

The manageress gasped again.

"You don't mean to say that this gentleman had anything to do with that?" she said. "Murder—oh, I can't think—"

"It is a suspicious circumstance, ma'am, that this stranger came here on the evening of the twenty-third, and left at an unusually early hour next morning, and that a murder was committed close by," said Perivale. "However, I may tell you that I am in possession of some information respecting him which is of a still more suspicious nature. You can tell me nothing more about him, than that he stopped here?"

"Nothing but that he dined here, was in and out of the hotel during the evening, paid his bill that night, had coffee sent up to his room at seven o'clock next morning, and left at seven thirty," replied the manageress. "Of course, we don't know where he went!"

"Any more than where he came from!" replied Perivale, with a smile. "Well, ma'am, you'll regard this as private? Perhaps you'll hear more later."

When he turned to go, the manageress suddenly stopped him.

"Now I come to think of it," she said, "there's a young gentleman staying here—has been here several weeks, recuperating after an illness—who was in conversation with Mr. Winter that night he was here. Perhaps he could tell you something? He's in the smoking room now—I'll fetch him, if you like?"

CHAPTER XXXI

WHO AND WHERE

SHE went away as Perivale nodded his assent, and presently returned with a young man whom the detective at once recognized as the original discoverer of Auberge's dead body, and who had been one of the two or three witnesses to give brief and formal evidence at the opening of the inquest.

With him, so far, the detective had never had any conversation on the subject of the murder; he did not know, indeed, that Lawson was still in the town. Remembering what the manageress had just said, he turned to him with eager interest.

"I didn't know you were still here, Mr. Lawson," he remarked when they had been left to themselves. "I fancied you were just a visitor."

"I am—but one of long standing," replied Lawson. "I'm about quite recovered, but I stayed on thinking I should be wanted again when that inquest's reopened.

How are you getting on with the details of the affair?"

"There are some strange complications, Mr. Lawson—very strange indeed. Now I've heard of something that brought me to this hotel, where I've just made some inquiries of the manageress. There was a man stayed here on the night of Auberge's murder, a man calling himself Winter, with whom, the manageress says, you had a bit of talk. Do you remember him?"

"Oh, yes, quite well! I was talking awhile to him in the smoking room, after dinner. An elderly man—at least, getting that way."

"What impression did you form of him?"

"Oh, I don't know—no particular impression! A quiet, reserved, but quite friendly and genial man—typical Englishman, you know—no great talker."

"That's Spring!" thought Perivale. "You'd know him again, I suppose?" he said aloud.

"Oh, yes—I'm sure I would. I remember him perfectly."

"You can't remember anything—anything particular—about him and his short stay here that you could tell me of?" asked the detective.

Lawson reflected for a moment.

"Well, yes, I can," he answered. "I saw him outside the hotel that night in conversation with another man. I'd been out for a walk along the Leas, and got back rather late; half past ten or a quarter to eleven, I should say. I saw this Mr. Winter standing beneath a lamp-post a little way down the terrace, talking to a man whose back was toward me—a tallish, slimly-built man, in, I think, brownish clothes.

"That's all of that—I came in here, and a minute or two afterward I saw Winter come in and go upstairs. And there was another thing. Next morning, when I was going out for my dip—you'll remember that it was on my way to the shore that I found Auberge's body—I saw Winter again. He'd gone out of the hotel just before me and was a little way down the terrace, signaling to a taxicab driver who was coming slowly along. That was the last I saw of him. I say—do you suspect him?"

Perivale shook his head.

"I don't know what to say about that—yet, Mr. Lawson," he answered. "As I said before, there are some very strange complications in this case, and the presence of this man is one of them. However—are you staying here a little longer?"

"Indefinitely—it's doing me good."

"I could count on finding you here for, say, the next week?"

"Certainly—fortnight, for that matter."

Perivale nodded and turned to go, but before he reached the door, turned back.

"Mr. Lawson," he said confidentially, "I take it that you are a young gentleman of means and of leisure. May I conclude that?"

Lawson smiled.

"Well—I suppose I am!" he said. "Yes, that's so."

"And entirely your own master?" suggested Perivale.

"I am certainly that," replied Lawson. "Why, now?"

"For this reason, Mr. Lawson! I may want your help. You wouldn't be backward in helping to bring a particularly brutal—and fiendishly clever—murderer to justice, would you?"

"I wouldn't!" exclaimed Lawson. "Do anything in my power!"

"Well, I may ask you to go with me to Paris," continued Perivale. "You can identify the man we've been talking about—Winter, if that's his real name."

"You suspect it's not, eh?"

"It may be his real name. But it's not the name by which I know a certain man whom I believe to be the man who called himself Winter when staying here. However, identification is the main thing, and that, you say, you feel sure you can do beyond question?"

"I can identify the man we're talking about—that's certain," asserted Lawson. "I don't know why, but I was a bit curious about him, and I observed him closely, even to his clothes. I'll tell you something I noticed—he was a very well dressed man, expensively dressed, but in a quiet, gentlemanly way, and he wore valuable jewelry, though little of it.

"A diamond pin in his cravat, a very good but not obtrusive diamond ring, and

a handsome, solid-looking gold cable chain across his waistcoat. But in queer contrast to this, he had depending from that chain a very strange, odd, what I should call trumpery object—"

"You're a very good observer!" interrupted Perivale admiringly. "And that was—what?"

"A sort of cheap brass medallion," replied Lawson. "The sort of thing—well, at first I thought it was a religious medal, or badge, something of that sort. But on looking closer, I saw that it was a plain oval-shaped piece of brass and not overgood brass at that—on which was the figure of a sword, or dagger, upright. I took it, then, to be either the insignia of some society, or guild, or a mascot to which its wearer probably attached some superstitious value."

"Good!" said Perivale. "A recollection like that may be of no end of use! Well, Mr. Lawson, I'm immensely obliged to you. And I may take it that if I ask you to go to Paris with me—"

"I'll go!" answered Lawson readily. "Depend on me!"

"At a moment's notice?" suggested Perivale.

Lawson laughed.

"Say an hour's," he replied.

Perivale laughed, too, and went off. He was more and more convinced that the man who had called himself Winter was Spring, and that his presence at that small hotel had some relation to the murder of Auberge. But what of the man to whom Lawson had seen Spring talking under the lamp-post near the hotel?

Who was he? Not Auberge, for Auberge was a shortish, stoutish man—besides, at that time, Auberge, according to the medical evidence, was already lying dead on the path below the Leas. A tallish, slimmish man in a brownish suit—who?

Late as it was by that time, Perivale turned in at the police station. There at his desk, still busy, was the inspector. He lifted a gloomy face to the detective, and picking up a newspaper that lay close by, silently pointed to a staring headline that ran across the top of three columns of heavily leaded type. And Perivale with a gasp of astonishment mingled with dismay, looked and read:

WHO AND WHERE IS MR. ECKS?

CHAPTER XXXII

WHO IS THIS MAN?

BEFORE Perivale could speak, the inspector spoke grumblingly.

"That's a nice thing!" he growled. "Newspaper stunt they'll call it, of course! But it cuts the ground clear away from under your feet, Perivale! What you wanted was to keep things dark about that chap, I suppose—so as to get on his track, unknown to him. Well, there's everything about him in that stuff—and he'll see it, for it 'll be translated into the Continental papers. And as to being widespread here—Lord, you see which paper that is?"

Perivale glanced at the top of the offending page, and saw that the newspaper was a principal London evening journal of enormous circulation. And, judging from a mere look at the article beneath the big heading, as the inspector had just remarked, it had, somehow, got everything.

"I wonder who's done this?" he said musingly. "Can't be that chap who runs the local paper—I gave him plenty of warning over the other thing! Must be some reporter they sent down here specially. But where and how did he get his information? I charged the hotel people to keep everything about Ecks strictly to themselves!"

The inspector's face became more lugubrious than ever, and he wagged his head with a knowing expression.

"Ah!" he said. "You can charge some people as much as you like, but they've got tongues, and tongues, my boy, won't be kept quiet! Whoever he was who wrote that stuff, he got it out of one of the hotel staff—squared his informant, of course! Those newspapers, I'm told, will spend any amount of money in order to get what they call exclusive information."

Perivale made no answer just then. He was reading the article. It certainly gave

the show away, clean away, he said to himself, as regarded the mysterious man who had called himself Mr. Ecks, of London.

The entire history of Mr. Ecks's appearance at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, and his disappearance from it, was given with full attention to detail; all particulars were narrated, from the moment of his arrival until his departure to Dover in a taxicab chartered at the corner.

And there were speculations, of course, as to whether Ecks had any connection with the murder of Auberge, and as to who he was, and where he might be now, and added to these were certain somewhat caustic reflections on the proceedings of the police, who, in the opinion of the writer, had done little to trace the movements of this man of mystery.

"Well, they certainly got exclusive information here!" he remarked, throwing the paper aside. "Just as certainly, Ecks will see it—the thing's sure to be translated, as you say. It 'll spoil our chances of getting hold of him, and the chances of the people across there. Can't be helped, however. And Ecks mayn't be the man at all—though I believe he is! I'll have to go back there in the morning."

"To Paris?" said the inspector. "On account of Ecks, or because of this new information?"

"Both!" replied Perivale. "Especially the last." He went on to summarize what he had heard at the private hotel and particularly from Lawson. "I must know what Spring was doing here," he concluded. "That is, if Spring was the man who called himself Winter. And I'm convinced he was!"

"Queer business!" mused the inspector. "What on earth should he come here for that night—just for the night—hurry back to Paris next morning, and come over here again next day? Can't have been Spring!"

"I feel absolutely sure it was, though," said Perivale. "I'm going to make certain about it, anyhow. I shall find out!"

"How?" asked the inspector. "I mean—beyond doubt?"

"This young Lawson will go with me," replied Perivale. "I shall find him the opportunity of seeing Spring, and if Spring is the man who called himself Winter, Lawson will know him at once!"

The inspector nodded, and picking up a pen began to draw figures on his blotting-pad. After a time he looked speculatively at Perivale and spoke slowly:

"Um!" he said. "Now, I wonder if Spring had any connection with Ecks? What do you say?"

Perivale picked up his hat and stick and strode to the door.

"I'll go home and sleep on that!" he answered. "All I can say is—possibly!"

He went home and slept—and next morning, by nine o'clock, was in the hall of the little private hotel, asking for Lawson.

"This is giving you two hours' notice instead of one!" he said, when Lawson came to him. "Will you go with me by the eleven o'clock boat?"

Lawson smiled and pointed to a traveling bag which stood, strapped and labeled, on a stand close by.

"I knew you'd come!" he answered. "I'm all ready for you."

"Then we'll walk along now," said Perivale. "I want to call in at headquarters on my way down to the harbor—I haven't been there this morning, and I'd better have a word or two with the inspector before we leave."

Lawson picked up his bag and a light overcoat, and the two went off, Perivale, as they walked along, telling his companion the story of last night's newspaper article. Lawson listened with deep interest.

"That gives me an idea!" he said, at the end of the detective's summary. "I told you that I saw Winter talking to a tallish, slimmish man beneath a lamp-post near my hotel. Now—what if that man was Ecks?"

"It's possible," replied Perivale. "What time did you say it was that you saw them up there?"

"I said between half past ten and a quarter to eleven," answered Lawson. "I can't be certain—to ten minutes. It may have been twenty-five to eleven, or twenty to eleven. It was certainly not later than a quarter to."

"And you said that Winter came in to your hotel immediately after you'd seen these two talking?"

"Yes—immediately after."

"Well," observed Perivale, "that fits in very conveniently with what we know of Ecks's movements. Ecks presented himself at the Royal Pavilion Hotel just about eleven o'clock—a minute or two before or after. He could easily walk from where you saw those two men—supposing him to have been the tallish man—in twelve minutes. It may have been Ecks—which makes things all the more interesting!"

"Ecks is, of course, an assumed name?" suggested Lawson.

"I wish to Heaven I knew who Ecks really is!" exclaimed Perivale. "Ecks—X—the unknown quantity! Of course, he may be a quite harmless, inoffensive person! And he may be some damnably clever criminal! Who knows?"

But in the inspector's room, when Perivale and his volunteer aid-de-camp entered it, there was a man who knew—or thought he knew. He was a shrewd-faced, keen-eyed elderly man who sat by the inspector's desk, talking quietly, and the first thing that Perivale noticed about him was that he held in his hand a copy of the evening paper containing the stunt article. He immediately guessed what this man might be, and a moment later had his surmise confirmed.

"This is Detective Sergeant Cripstone, from the Yard," said the inspector, after Perivale had introduced Lawson. "He's come down specially to see us about that article in last night's paper. He thinks he knows the man described as Ecks."

Perivale turned on his fellow-detective with an appreciative look.

"Nothing would rejoice me more than to find that you do!" he exclaimed. "Who is Ecks?"

The stranger smiled, at the same time shaking his head.

"Ah!" he replied, wagging a forefinger at the inspector. "Our friend here isn't quite correct in reporting me! I didn't say I think I know—I said I think it possible that I might know.

"Who is he? Well, after reading this article, I think he may be a very clever, tricky chap who's worked in company with various crooks in London, New York, Paris, Vienna, and the Riviera, chiefly in connection with jewel frauds or robberies, and who has been singularly fortunate so far in escaping from justice.

"Still, he has been through our hands in London, just once, some years ago, and he can be identified—if he's the man I mean, his left forearm is elaborately tattoed, and, of course, we have his finger-prints."

"What about the brass knob I sent up to be photographed and examined?" asked Perivale. "You know of it, I suppose?"

"Yes—no good! It's covered with finger and thumb marks—all mingled and overlapping. But the tattoo marks should be enough."

"Yes—if we can catch him!" said Perivale, with a grim smile. "If! However—what's his name?"

"Name? He's a different name in every place he operates in! We knew him as McEwen—James Alexander McEwen. I've brought a photograph of him taken at the time I spoke of; see if you know anything of him. Of course, it's seven years since that was taken."

Perivale seized eagerly on the photograph. It represented a somewhat long-faced, hollow-eyed man who wore side whiskers and had rather prominent ears, and was generally extremely commonplace.

"I never saw Ecks when he was here," he said. "But there are people at the hotel who did. We'd better call in there—it's on my way to the boat."

"Well," said Cripstone, "my instructions are, after seeing you, to go over to France if necessary, for the purpose of identifying this man if the Parisian authorities get hold of him. So I may as well accompany you now. I dare say I shall be of service over there."

CHAPTER XXXIII

FIFTY THOUSAND POUNDS

"YOU'LL be of the very greatest use if, in the event of Ecks being caught, you can identify him as the man you're thinking of," replied Perivale. "Oh, yes, we'll be glad of your company, Cripstone! But now, let's get along

and show that photograph at the Royal Pavilion."

The three men walked down to the harbor, and turning into the hotel sought the office, where Miss Adelaide Shepperson was already deep in her morning's task of bookkeeping and correspondence.

"That young lady's been as good as half a dozen assistants to me!" whispered Perivale to the Scotland Yard man. "Awfully cute, clever girl—knows how to keep eyes and ears open. Good morning, Miss Shepperson!" he continued aloud.

"May we have a word with you? Same old business," he went on, as the reception clerk came to the desk. "We want you to look at something—this! Now, do you recognize it as the photograph of anybody you've ever seen?"

Miss Shepperson took the photograph and after inspecting it steadily, shook her head.

"No!" she replied. "I don't!"

"Quite sure?" asked Perivale. He bent nearer. "Think, now! Is it—the man who called himself Ecks?"

"That's suggesting it to her!" murmured Cripstone. "I'd rather—"

But Miss Shepperson shook her head again.

"No!" she repeated. "I shouldn't recognize Ecks in that—as he is now, anyway. But—this may be a portrait of him as he was some years ago. It's the same type of face, but if it is Ecks, he doesn't wear side-whiskers now, and then, of course, the tinted spectacles that he was wearing when he was here make a difference.

"You're wanting to identify him, I suppose?" she went on, glancing at Perivale's companions. "Well, Mr. Perivale, don't you remember the physical deformity that I told you I'd noticed when Ecks signed the hotel register? Wouldn't that be helpful?"

"Yes, yes!" agreed Perivale. "We'll make use of that. Well—you do think that this might be Ecks as he was seven years ago?"

"It might," said Miss Shepperson. "Ecks certainly had large ears."

Perivale said good-by, and drew his companions away toward the hotel entrance. In the hall he stopped suddenly, confronting the porter who had once given him some information about Ecks. Drawing him aside, he showed him the photograph and asked if he recognized it.

But the porter didn't.

"Does it remind you of that gentleman who left here so very early one morning—the one I asked you about?" suggested Perivale. "Look again!"

"Mr. Ecks, sir? Well—no, can't say as it does. Same longish face, though—and perhaps a little something about the ears. But Mr. Ecks, sir—he'd a brown mole on his left cheek bone, sir—very noticeable!"

"That's something, anyway!" said Perivale as he and his companions walked off to the boat. "A brown mole on the left cheek bone! Miss Shepperson didn't notice that, I'm sorry to say. Perhaps she didn't see it. Well—we've various things to go on, Cripstone, when we arrive in Paris."

Pelabos was at the Gare du Nord when the express steamed in at a quarter past six that evening. His face was unusually grave as he greeted Perivale, his manner was solemn. Introduced to Perivale's companions, he invited them and Perivale to dine with him forthwith and would take no denial; he marshaled them to a taxicab and conducted them to his favorite restaurant in the Rue de Capucines, where he bespoke a table for four. But before the party sat down, Pelabos contrived to draw Perivale aside and to whisper in his ear.

"My friend!" he said. "I have news of the most remarkable, the most astounding, to impart to you! At the time of his murder, Auberge had in his pocket a sum of fifty thousand pounds in Bank of England notes!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

ANOTHER TRAITOR

PERIVALE turned on the Frenchman with a stare of astonishment that quickly changed to an incredulous smile.

"Fifty thousand pounds — English money!" he exclaimed. "Impossible, M. Pelabos. To carry such a sum—"

"My friend!" interrupted Pelabos, laying a hand on Perivale's arm, "I assure you that what I say is the truth! I know, for what you call the fact, that Auberge carried with him from Paris to Folkestone, and had, in his inner breast pocket, in a certain morocco leather wallet, fifty of your Bank of England notes of the value of one thousand pounds each in English money! My friend—there is no doubt of it!"

"But why—for what purpose?" demanded Perivale. "Why should any man be so foolish, so indiscreet, as to carry all that money on him?"

Pelabos shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. Turning, he glanced at Cripstone and Lawson, who, already seated at table, were talking together.

"Ah!" he smiled. "That is what I have to talk to you about, and a very remarkable story it is! But these friends of yours—are they to be trusted? Are they assisting you? Will it be in order to tell the story to them as well as to yourself?"

"They are to be trusted absolutely!" replied Perivale. "The elder man is a well known detective from New Scotland Yard, the other is a young English gentleman who has come over at my particular desire to assist in identifying a certain man whom I want to find. And I have much to tell you on that point—you have a story, and so have I, and perhaps, mine is equally remarkable."

Pelabos waved him to the table.

"Let us dine!" he said. "We will tell our stories over our coffee—later. For the present—"

He began to devote himself to his guests with characteristic French politeness; Cripstone and Lawson began to consider M. Pelabos a most charming man. So, too, did Perivale, but Perivale became unusually quiet and thoughtful.

Did he—but all that, Perivale recognized, would be but idle speculation; he must wait for the story promised by Pelabos, who, napkin tucked under his chin, was placidly eating, and beaming approval on his guests as they ate.

The coffee and liquors came at last, and the cigars and cigarettes; and Pelabos, bending confidentially over the table, began his story, prefacing it by an explanation or two for the benefit of Cripstone and Lawson.

"You must know, gentlemen," he said, "you who are not acquainted with all the details of this matter, that before the late M. Auberge walked out of the Royal Pavilion Hotel at Folkestone, about nine o'clock on the evening of Monday, October 23, to keep an appointment with some person whose identity, alas, we have not yet been able to establish, he deposited in the hotel office an envelope containing papers which, when examined, proved to be written in cipher.

"Those papers were ultimately brought to Paris by myself, and I, in company with M. Perivale, found, at Auberge's office, a key to the cipher which enabled me to make it out. I discovered then, gentlemen, that the murdered man was either a spy or a traitor—now I know, from later evidence, that he was both!

"I learned from these papers that Auberge was in possession of the doings and designs of a certain secret society, whose present headquarters are here in Paris; the object of that society is to bring about revolution in the various European countries.

"I say Auberge was a spy—for these papers, gentlemen, formed a confidential report to some high-placed person in England; a report exposing all the doings of the society. Auberge had evidently joined it and had become a trusted member, not because he approved its projects, but in order to get at its secret working. And he was also a traitor because of a discovery which I made but yesterday!"

Pelabos paused at that, and, knocking the loose ash from his cigar, smoked meditatively for a moment or two before continuing.

"Yes, gentlemen, a traitor!" he went on suddenly. "And this discovery? Yesterday there came to me, in secret, knowing where I was to be found, two men who were in the most obvious distress and anxiety of mind. They confessed to me that their agitation was of the most painful. They besought my help, my counsel; they implored me to respect their confidence.

"I desired to know the reason of their

visit. They told me that they were aware that I, Pelabos, had a share in the investigation of the mysterious murder of M. Louis Auberge at Folkestone. I was instantly alert—I demanded to know what they knew of that?

"Then, gentlemen, once more imploring my confidence, they informed me that they were, respectively, the treasurer and the secretary of a certain society—ah gentlemen, I immediately suspected, I knew, what society—of which Auberge was a trusted member.

"I asked them what society that might be. They implored me, tears in their eyes, not to press this question upon them, nor, at that juncture, to seek to know more than that it was a society. I was sympathetic to them, tender even!

"'Well, gentlemen,' said I, 'a society, then—it may be for the amelioration of the condition of lost dogs, or for providing coal miners with white cambric hankerchiefs—but still, a society!' You perceive, gentlemen, my object in not pressing them for particulars? It was to acquire information! And I acquired it, I, Pelabos."

"Every one knows M. Pelabos to be a past master in the arts of his great profession," murmured Perivale gallantly. "Continue, my friend!"

Pelabos lifted his liquor glass and bowed to his guests.

"M. Perivale honors me too greatly!" he said. "I am but a humble apprentice—even yet! Still—I am not without that quality which you English so justly admire—the common sense! And in these cases it is wise, politic, not to ask too much—besides, gentlemen, I already knew what society these men talked of! Well, I continue. I repeat—I acquired this information. And what was it? Ah!"

Pelabos made a dramatic pause, and, after glancing from one listener to another, bent across the table and sank his voice still lower.

"This society, gentlemen, is rich—in possession of vast sums, accumulated from various parts of Europe for the purposes of propaganda. Now it was desirable, in the interests of the society, to lodge a considerable sum in London, in one of the London banks. Auberge was intrusted with the matter.

"The affair, of course, was to be managed in a secret way: the money, fifty thousand pounds English, was to be deposited by Auberge in a London bank in the names of the men who came to see me—when I say names, I mean the names by which they saw fit to call themselves, for they probably have several—Auberge, as a reputable man, was to furnish any necessary reference.

"Discussion arose between these men and Auberge as to the way in which the money should be taken to London; for certain reasons, and necessary to be explained to me, it was decided that Auberge should carry it in the form of Bank of England notes.

"Fifty of these notes, of the value of one thousand pounds each, were procured, and these were handed to Auberge, inclosed in a black morocco leather wallet, by my two visitors, the evening before his departure for Folkestone. According to their account, Auberge told them that he should spend one night in Folkestone and go to London on the following day—in London he was to deposit the money as arranged."

Pelabos threw away the end of his cigar and took another from his case. He shook his head as he reached for a match from the box that Lawson held out to him.

"Well, gentlemen!" he continued. "Such was the story! These men heard of the murder—they became a prey to the most awful anxiety as to the safety of the money! They knew that as Auberge had been murdered on the very night of his arrival at Folkestone, he must have had the money on him when attacked.

"Indeed, they began to fear that by some means or other the fact that he was carrying this money had become known to some person, and that Auberge had been followed and assassinated for the sake of the money! Now, that idea occurred also to me—naturally!

"I begged of them to tell me if others of their society knew of this transaction—knew that the fifty thousand pounds had been intrusted to Auberge? They admitted it—it was known to a sort of inner

cabinet, a committee within a committee. I asked how many men composed that inner circle?—they said five, excluding themselves.

"But they hastened to assure me that all five were men of the highest probity: staunch adherents of the cause to which the society is consecrated, beyond suspicion. I made no answer to that!—but I drew my own conclusions. Gentlemen—in that society there is yet another traitor, and it is he who murdered Auberge! Who in the world is he?"

CHAPTER XXXV

LOOK AROUND

PELABOS finished with a superb gesture, and then, folding his arms across his chest with equal dramatic effect, stared fixedly at Perivale, who faced him. There was a moment's silence, he spoke again.

"Yes!" he said. "I demand—who is he?"

Perivale shook his head.

"Stiff question!" he exclaimed. "But that's an awfully interesting story! Possibly, the one I have to tell you has something to do with it. But before I tell it, I want you to hear my confrere, Detective Sergeant Cripstone, on the matter of the man who, at the hotel in Folkestone, called himself Ecks."

Pelabos threw out his hands.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I, too, was going to speak of Ecks! For, gentlemen, it will not yet be within your knowledge that there has been printed in our papers to-day a translation of a most indiscreet article about Ecks which appeared in one of your London evening journals yesterday. It is most unfortunate—Ecks, if he is hiding here in Paris, as he probably is, will read that article, and will, of course, be still more on his guard. A grave indiscretion on the part of your press!"

"We agree with you," said Perivale. "It is a most unfortunate thing. But Cripstone here has something to tell you, and a photograph to show you. Let him tell his story!"

Pelabos listened carefully to the Scotland Yard man, and looked long and searchingly at the photograph. But, like Miss Shepperson and the porter, he shook his head soberly.

"No!" he said. "I have no knowledge of the man you mean. You say he has been concerned in frauds, chiefly relating to jewels, here in Paris?"

"Suspected of having been," corrected Cripstone.

"Ah!—suspected!—that is a different matter!" said Pelabos. "No, I do not know him, or of him, nor can I think of who he may be. But courage—we have a basis to build upon! He has a brown mole on his left cheek bone; a physical deformity of a hand; his left forearm is elaborately tattoed—"

"If he's the man I'm thinking of," interjected Cripstone. "But he possibly mayn't be!"

"And yet he may!" retorted Pelabos sagely. "Ah, we shall catch M. Ecks yet! I have spread my net for him! But," he went on, bending to Perivale, "your story, my friend—it may, you say, relate to that which I have just told?"

"We shall eventually find, I think, that it does," said Perivale. "But first I want to ask you certain questions. Since I left you yesterday, have you improved your knowledge of the three men forming the syndicate that employed Auberge to negotiate the sale of the diamond?"

"I have!" replied Pelabos. "I devoted myself to that task immediately after I had experienced the sorrow—fortunately brief—of regretting your departure. Oh, yes, my friend, I know all about those three gentlemen!"

"Well?" said Perivale. "And what of them? To begin with—Delardier?"

Pelabos spread his fingers.

"A thoroughly honest man!" he said. "Of excellent reputation—well known—well spoken of. Financially—sound! Commercially—he is a commission agent—evidently successful. Oh, yes, he is a good child, Delardier! What you call—all right!"

"Budini?"

"We know nothing against him. There

is nothing against him. He has lived here in Paris many years; nothing has ever been reported to his discredit. He, too, is a sort of commission agent. According to my report, also an honest man."

"Well," continued Perivale, giving Lawson a kick under the table. "Spring?"

"Against him, too, we know nothing," replied Pelabos. "He is an Englishman, of private fortune, who, like Budini, has lived in Paris for some years. But he, unlike the other two, his partners in this syndicate, is not concerned in any business—that is, no regular business—he has, I repeat, money. He occupies a superior apartment in the Rue de Montaigne; he is a frequenter of the cafés, a boulevardier. As I say, there is nothing at all against him."

Perivale relapsed into momentary silence. He had told Cripstone the story of the man calling himself Winter; Lawson knew it already. He suddenly bent across the table to Pelabos.

"Have you seen any one of these three since yesterday?" he asked.

"Delardier! I saw him last night, at a café which he frequents," replied Pelabos after a moment's pause.

"Did you tell him what you have told us?—about the society and the fifty thousand pounds?"

"I did, my friend! Delardier is an honest man. But, as he said, what is that to him and his fellow-partners in this matter? They want their property—the diamond!"

"What I have to say to you," remarked Perivale, "I should like to say to Delardier, in your presence. Let us seek him at this café. Our friends here will excuse us—we shall meet later at our hotel," he went on, turning to Cripstone and Lawson. "In the meantime—"

"I shall take a look round," said Cripstone. "I might see Ecks!"

"I, too, shall knock round a bit," said Lawson importantly. "I may see—a certain man!"

Perivale nodded and turned to Pelabos.

"At your service, *monsieur*," he said. "Take me to Delardier."

"*Monsieur*, my distinguished confrere!" replied Pelabos. "We will seek him at *Le Chien Jaune!*"

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT THE YELLOW DOG

PERIVALE followed his guide to a short and narrow street which lay between the Boulevard Haussman and the Boulevard des Capucines, a street that had little to characterize it beyond a certain quietness and somberness. Halfway along it, he suddenly caught sight of a sign which was painted, evidently by some artist of the impressionist school, a yellow dog.

"Anything notable about this place?" he inquired.

"Nothing, my friend, except one thing, which is in itself of more than considerable note to some people," replied Pelabos. "It is remarkable for its exquisite preparation of simple meals. Its omelettes are a dream—its cutlets perfectly cooked—its sauces of a quality that would tickle the most jaded palate—its wines the result of careful thought, experience, knowledge.

"And for that reason it has its clientele of discerning patrons, men who do not care, you understand, to eat and drink grossly, but are something of epicures in simplicity. Of these, our friend Delardier is one—he has his corner, and in it at this hour we shall find him, with his coffee in front of him, his cigar in his lips, his newspaper in his hand. It is his custom."

Delardier was in his corner, as Pelabos had predicted. He had a newspaper in his hand, and when he had solemnly greeted the Englishman and politely waved his visitors to seats at his table, he pointed to it with a shake of the head that denoted misgiving and disapproval. Pelabos anticipated whatever he was going to say.

"You are reading the translation of the article about Ecks that appeared in the London journal of last night?" he observed. "And doubtless with dismay?"

Delardier spread his hands.

"It is a catastrophe!" he said. "It will appear in every principal paper in France! Ecks will read it, Ecks will take his precau-

tions accordingly. It was difficult to trace Ecks before; now it will be something of an impossibility. Your press, M. Perivale—ah, I shall not wound your feelings as an Englishman by saying what I think of this indiscretion!"

"You couldn't posibly say more than I feel about it, M. Delardier," said Perivale. "It's about the most foolish thing I ever knew of, and you may be assured that it wasn't done with my approval, nor with that of our police authorities. It's just a newspaper stunt—and it's done, worse luck! Still, after all, it may do some good."

"How so, then?" asked Delardier.

"It will draw the attention of an enormous number of people to Ecks," said Perivale. "That's not a bad description of him that's given there—even to his clothes."

"Clothes! He can change those! And if he is the clever man I take him to be, he will know not only something about disguise, but about means of carrying himself to some place where neither your police, M. Perivale, nor ours will be able to lay hands on him! And," concluded Delardier, mournfully, "with him will go—the diamond!"

Perivale glanced at Pelabos. And Pelabos nodded at Perivale, as if to give him a lead in whatever conversation was to ensue.

"M. Delardier," said Perivale, "I wish to ask you a plain question. What do you now think, in view of certain information which our friend here tells me he has given you in relation to certain moneys carried by Auberge on behalf of a society to which he seems to have belonged? A vast sum of money! And—a diamond of great value! Both missing! Where are they—in your present opinion, *monsieur*, now that you know additional facts?"

Delardier leaned back in his seat, smoked meditatively, sipped his coffee meditatively, and kept silence for a couple of minutes. Eventually, he leaned forward, tapping the surface of the table.

"My opinion, *monsieur*, is this!" he said with emphasis. "There are two men who know where the money is and where the diamond is! Know—because both money and diamond are in their possession or have been placed by them where they can lay hands on both at a convenient moment. Two men!"

"And they are—" asked Perivale.

Delardier tapped the table again.

"One, Ecks!" he replied. "The other—Hartmore!"

Perivale started. He had given up all theories relating to Hartmore.

"You still think that Hartmore was implicated?" he asked.

"I still think Hartmore is guilty!" replied Delardier. "Yes!"

"Do you think he was in league with Ecks?"

"I do. Put to yourself, my friend, all the circumstances—the circumstances, at any rate, as they present themselves to me. Is it by mere coincidence, by sheer accident, that these two men, Hartmore and Ecks, appear at the same hotel on the same night that Auberge, with our diamond and a roll of Bank of England notes worth fifty thousand pounds in his pockets, comes there? No—no—it is an affair of arrangement! *Monsieur*, I know some of your English expressions—it is a put-up job!"

It was evident that Delardier was fixed in his opinion, and for the moment Perivale made no answer.

"M. Delardier," he said at length, "I want to ask you a particularly delicate question—you will forgive me if it seems to be verging on the offensive, it is not meant to be. It is just this—have you entire confidence in the good faith of your two partners in this business?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

WITH MORNING COMES TRAGEDY

DELARDIER looked his surprise.

"I will not be offended, *monsieur*!" he said. "After all, it is your business! My partners? Spring? Budini? In both, certainly!"

"They are men of whom you have a good opinion?"

"I have no reason to entertain any other, *monsieur*. Oh, yes, the highest opinion!"

"Well, M. Delardier, I shall be obliged to tell you something. But, first, certain questions. It was in the presence of Spring and Budini that you handed the diamond to Auberge? Very well—when was that?"

"On the morning of Sunday, October 22."

"On which day, immediately after he had received the diamond, Auberge left for Boulogne and Folkestone? On the following Wednesday, having heard the news from Folkestone, you, Spring and Budini left Paris and traveled to England—is it not so?"

"Precisely! We left Paris by the four o'clock train and arrived at Folkestone a little before nine o'clock that evening."

"That, I suppose, was the result of a consultation between the three of you, after hearing the news about Auberge? Now, where and at what time on that Wednesday did you hold that consultation?"

"Where? At my office! What time? Noon!"

"The noon of Wednesday, October 25. Now, M. Delardier, please let your recollection go back to the three preceding days! Between the hour on Sunday morning, the twenty-second, on which you handed the diamond to Auberge in Spring's presence, and noon on Wednesday, the twenty-fifth, *did you ever see Spring?*"

Perivale spoke the last five words with such concentration and emphasis of tone that Delardier started in his seat. His face paled.

"Did I—" he began. "Did—what does this mean?" he gasped. "See—"

"You know whether you did or did not!" said Perivale. "Think!"

"No!" replied Delardier. "No, then, I did not! From the moment of Auberge's departure on Sunday until our meeting on Wednesday, I neither saw Spring nor Budini. We had no occasion for any meeting. But, *monsieur*—why this question?"

Perivale bent closer across the table, lowering his voice.

"*Monsieur*—I am going to tell you what I have already told Pelabos here! I have the strongest reasons for suspecting that Spring was in Folkestone on the evening and night of the murder of Auberge, and that he knows something of the truth about it!"

Delardier gasped again. His cigar had gone out. For a second he sat staring at it, as if scarcely comprehending what it was. Suddenly he threw it aside, and, collecting himself, smiled—incredulously.

"Impossible — *monsieur!* Spring in Folkestone, the night of Auberge's murder? No—no—you have—eh, what is your expression?—you have got hold of the wrong end of the stick!"

"I think not!" said Perivale confidently. "We shall see! My present information, *monsieur,* leads me to believe that Spring traveled from Paris to Folkestone on Monday, October 23, spent Monday evening and night at a small private hotel within a hundred yards of the scene of Auberge's murder, left that hotel at an unusually early hour on the following morning, Tuesday, October 24, and, traveling by way of Newhaven and Dieppe, was back in Paris in the evening. But I will give you the details, and describe the man."

It was very plain to both detectives that Delardier was already greatly concerned. He had become very pale at the first mention of suspicion in connection with Spring, and now, as Perivale quietly marshaled and presented his facts, his face began to betray his emotion. And as Perivale finished, he suddenly burst into speech, more or less broken.

"*Messieurs!*" he exclaimed haltingly. "I—oh, *messieurs,* if this is so, I—ah, then I am ruined! Yet it cannot be—no, I cannot believe it! Spring, he is the English gentleman! Ah—I begin to fear—I begin to dread—oh, *messieurs,* I do not know what I am to think of this! It is—"

"What do you mean by saying that if this is true you will be ruined?" asked Perivale.

"I mean this, *monsieur!* That diamond—now lost!—was, it is true, purchased by Spring, Budini, and myself from a Russian of exceeding high rank, in whose family it had remained since the time of the great Catherine—I believe she gave it to one of her favorites, an ancestor of the exalted personage from whom we bought it. Certainly it has a history.

"But the amount of the purchase price! Ah, the greater portion of it was found by me. Perhaps it is no good now to avoid particulars—the amount we paid to the Russian, *messieurs*, was ten thousand pounds, English money.

"But of that ten thousand, I, Delardier, provided six! Spring and Budini provided but two thousand each. And—I cannot afford to lose my money, my six thousand pounds. It was my hope to make a great profit! I estimated the diamond to be worth—ah, well, we confidently expected to get at least twenty-five thousand English pounds for it! And now—"

He paused to wipe away a furtive tear, and then, turning to Perivale, gazed at him with pathetic anxiety.

"You believe this about Spring?" he asked. "And you think that he was in league with the man who called himself Ecks? Ah, if that is so—"

"M. Delardier," interrupted Pelabos. "Do you know where Spring is to be found? You know his address?"

"I know his address. But he is not to be found there at this hour—he is, yes, what they call a night bird—he keeps late hours. Still, I know of places where he can be seen. And I must see him—to-night. The suspense is too painful. *Messieurs*, do not ask to accompany me! I will control myself—I will be diplomatic—secret—cunning! But—I will find out the truth! And to-morrow—"

"You will report to us if this is true—that Spring was in Folkestone at the time detailed to you?" asked Pelabos. "You know where to find me, M. Delardier?"

"I know where to find you, *monsieur*—oh, yes!—and I will not fail to report to you what I discover! Discover the truth I must! Ah, do not fear, *messieurs*—I will be as discreet, as secret, as you could wish. And if I have been deceived, tricked—ah, you shall see of what I am capable!"

He made his adieu and went away. Pelabos glanced at Perivale. Perivale shook his head.

"He will get nothing out of Spring!" he said. "We ought to have followed him!"

"No!" replied Pelabos. "It is better that we leave him to approach Spring—in the first instance. He is a man of his word, Delardier—he will tell us to-morrow where Spring is to be found; then you can take your young English friend to see him. If he positively identifies him as the man of whom we have been talking, the mysterious Mr. Winter—"

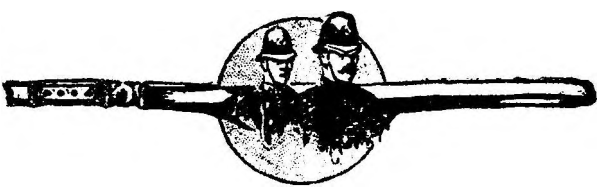
"Yes, and I've no doubt he will—when he sees Mr. Winter!" interrupted Perivale. "But—" he paused, and became silent. "I'm not sure we've done right," he said at last. "I'm uneasy about it. We ought to have kept an eye on Delardier. If Spring gets an idea—"

"No!" replied Pelabos. "Delardier will be discreet!"

Perivale said no more. But he had a premonition of coming evil, and he was not surprised when, at seven o'clock next morning, Pelabos was brought to his room.

"My friend!" announced Pelabos. "You were right, and I was wrong last night! We ought to have followed Delardier. There is a terrible tragedy! Delardier has been murdered!"

TO BE CONCLUDED



He carried a bulky object in his arms, blanket-wrapped

THE STEAMBOAT KILLER

By Edward Parrish Ware

AS THE CLIPPER STOLE AWAY IN THE DARKNESS, THE LONE RANGER HEADED AT ONCE UP THE BANK OF THE RIVER

DAVE MEEKER, pilot of the Antelope, felt his way cautiously into the passage at the head of Two Mile Shoals, eyes steadily on the beacon, crossing light Number One, which glowed like a huge red eye in the darkness.

For a distance of two miles his course would lie in a narrow channel which wound like a slender thread through the thin water of the shoals, and that red light marked the beginning of the dangerous crossing.

A year before, Meeker would not have piloted his boat across the treacherous two miles. At Willow Point, just above the beginning of the passage, a rapids pilot would have come aboard, taken the wheel, and made the run.

Several such pilots were stationed at the Point, and for the sole purpose of taking steamboats over Two Mile. Needless to say, they were specialists in their line.

But the United States Government undertook to chart Two Mile, that job being a part of proposed reclamation work on the lower Mississippi.

Light Number One, established on the west shore of the river, enabled regular pilots to calculate a course which would take them safely to the first turning of the channel; at the first turning a buoy-light indicated a change of course; farther along, other buoy-lights marked other changes. To a pilot who understood the meaning of those lights, the passage was difficult, but not particularly dangerous.

There had been accidents in that crossing, since the charting, however, and two were of recent occurrence. Dick Converse, old-time pilot, had killed his boat, the Black Hawk, on a bar in the first course of the channel, only two weeks before.

Lem Davis, another first-class man, had broken the Belle of Memphis, three weeks before, on that same shoals. Both declared

that they had followed the light on shore, steering according to its position, yet had come to grief. No lives were lost in either of the wrecks, but both boats had gone to pieces.

This night, Dave Meeker had charge of one of the finest passenger packets in the trade, a Lower River Navigation boat. Two hundred persons, most of them asleep in their staterooms, were his charges. He felt the responsibility.

Meeker was one of the youngest pilots on the lower river, but was considered one of the best. During the three years that had elapsed since he acquired his license, he had not had a single serious mishap.

Some of the old-timers claimed it was luck. Dave Meeker knew that his success was the result of care, and a thorough knowledge of the Mississippi.

He entered the narrow channel, beset on both sides by sand bars over which boiled thin sheets of white water. In that channel lay safety; on both sides lurked certain disaster.

No light showed in the pilot-house, and only the chug-chug of the twin engines, and the splashing of the wheels, disturbed the silence of the black river. Meeker, having run half the first turning, shot his glance ahead in search of the buoy-light upon which he depended to guide him into the second passage.

"Queer," he thought. "Ought to have picked up that light three or four minutes ago. No sign of it."

Unconsciously, but in strict keeping with his training, he reached for the signal-rope in order to send a "slow" order to the engineer. When he did so he cast a glance back over the course he had just run, seeking Light Number One on shore.

For one short instant his eyes held on that light, then he seized the signal-rope and rang an imperative order to reverse engines.

"It can't be possible!" he cried. "It just can't be—but Light Number One—"

C-r-r-r-a-a-a-s-s-s-h-h-h-h!

Meeker, steadied by his grasp on the wheel, was nevertheless hurled against the front wall of the pilot-house, as the big boat came to a shuddering, quivering stop. Recovering, he leaped to the signal-rope and jerked it madly, shouting down his tube at the same time:

"Roberts, in God's name, reverse her quick! We're aground, Rob—"

There was a roar of escaping steam, and the Antelope appeared to rise from the bar which held her bow in deep sand. For one brief instant it seemed that she was about to sheer off. Then came a terrific report, sounding like a cannon exploding. Pandemonium reigned in the engine room—and Meeker, with a sob that was half protest, half prayer, knew that his last hope was gone.

Under excessive pressure, the drive-shafts of the twin engines had snapped like pipe-stems!

Dave Meeker, careful pilot, safe man, had killed his boat on Two Mile Shoals!

II

AT gray dawn, while a fierce gale blew over the river, United States Patrol Boat, the Clipper, with Inspector Jack Calhoun commanding, picked a cautious way upstream through Two Mile Shoals. The little boat had very definite business in those waters, and Willow Point was her immediate objective.

"Boat aground!"

The voice of the deck-watch broke the early morning slumber of the inspector and brought him hurrying to the fore-deck.

"There!" said Ranger Manning, pointing off the port side. "She's a big packet, and has listed badly to starboard! Take my glass!"

Calhoun trained the glass on the packet, looked steadily at it for a moment, then leaped to the speaking-tube and gave sharp orders to Tom Murdock in the pilot-house.

"Wreck on your port bow! Run as close as you can!" he directed. "There are people still aboard, and she looks like she might break up any minute!"

Then he turned to the watch.

"Rout out all hands!" he snapped. "Stand by to launch the lifeboats—and look sharp! In this gale anything might happen!"

With wholly justifiable daring, Murdock signaled for more steam and ran up the

narrow channel at a speed which would have terrified the average boat-crew. The men aboard the Clipper, however, went calmly and methodically about the business of executing their commander's orders.

Half and hour after sighting the wreck, Calhoun and two lifeboat crews stood upon the slanting lower deck of the Antelope, and the work of taking off passengers began.

"We lost two of our small boats," Andrews, skipper of the wrecked craft, explained. "A third set off with a load, but—"

His voice faltered, and he looked off across the storm-tossed water.

Calhoun glanced at the white, horror-stricken faces of the shivering passengers who lined the decks—and he had no need of asking what fate had overtaken that boat.

Crouched against the port wall of the texas, face white and miserable, was Dave Meeker—the pilot who had killed his boat. Cal gave him a sharp glance, then turned away. He had met Meeker on several occasions, and a throb of pity for him pulsed in his heart.

Two more small boats now came from the Clipper, reached the Antelope's side safely, and the work of rescuing passengers went on.

"What chance for holding together?" the inspector queried, turning to Andrews.

"She's taking in water," the skipper replied in an undertone. "Breaking in two pretty fast! Still, if this storm doesn't swamp any more of our boats, we ought to get clear in time!"

Cal glanced at the passengers again. For persons in a desperate situation, they were behaving well. He wondered at it, and asked Andrews how he had found it possible to keep them in order.

"Mr. Benson, first mate, assisted by two of the clerks, had to take harsh measures to accomplish it," he replied. "Shot down two of the crew, and one pasesnger—then the rest came to their senses."

A slight shudder ran through the inspector's body. He did not envy those rivermen the terrible task which had confronted them on that tragic morning. But that grim necessity had driven them, he doubted not. He turned to give an order to one of his men, and then, for the first time since coming aboard, his glance rested upon Franklin Bruffy.

Franklin Bruffy, president and heavy stockholder in the Lower River Navigation Company, which owned the Antelope as well as the other two boats that had died on the shoals, had been aboard the Antelope when she struck.

From the grim expression of Bruffy's face, Calhoun knew that he was holding himself in restraint, and he could imagine the explosion which would occur immediately all hands were safe ashore.

"Poor Meeker!" he said to himself. "This means the end of his career as a pilot! He'll be kicked out, and the black mark against him will be so deadly black he'll never find another berth. I wonder, now, just how badly at fault he was?"

Another glance at the grim, hard face of Bruffy, with its gray eyes resembling chunks of ice, and he was strongly convinced that even though the pilot had not been wholly responsible for the wreck, he would be treated just as harshly as though he had deliberately killed his boat. No hope for the pilot, that was certain.

The first of the boats had reached shore, and now were seen returning, accompanied by other craft which were hastening out to the bar. The arrival of the rescue boats had been the first intimation the citizens of Willow Point had had of the wrecking of the Antelope.

From then on the removal of passengers and crew went forward without a hitch. The storm abated somewhat, and aided by that circumstance the wreck was presently left without even so much as a deck-watch.

For the Antelope, finest of the navigation company's boats, was doomed. Of that all were certain.

III

MAJOR ROBERT DOWNEY, United States Engineer Corps, stood on the levee before the village of Willow Point scowling darkly upon the crowd of citizens who, like himself, awaited the final boatloads of passengers from the Antelope. The population of the town num-

bered about one thousand persons, and practically all were present.

"Another wreck due to the damned engineers!" Joe Leatherwood, formerly a rapids pilot, said in a tone loud enough for Downey to hear. "They beat a lot of us fellers out of our jobs, pertendin' their lights on the shoals, and one thing another, can git boats through safer and better than we can, and what happens? I'll tell you! They are proved to be liars! That's what happens!"

Major Downey heard, but made no comment. What Leatherwood, bitter because the reclamation of the shoals had cost him his job, had said, was only a part of the adverse comments upon the skill of the engineers going the rounds that morning.

Practically every man in Willow Point was opposed to the government's work on the river. Downey was particularly objectionable to them because he had charge of the improvements. His position in Willow Point was as isolated, insofar as association with the citizens was concerned, as though he were a leper.

"Tell 'em about it, Joe!" squawked weazened old Buck Bender, once a pilot on the Mississippi, now retired, and living only to knock the reclamation work. "Who done told them air West P'inters they knowed th' Big River? Who done told 'em, I axes? If they does know it, then, says I, I don't know a boathook from a capstan-bar!"

A laugh went up—albeit, a grim laugh. Then some one shouted and pointed toward the river. The final boats were coming in. Presently they landed, and, a short distance behind them, the little Clipper crawled slowly toward shore.

The sight of the Clipper caused Major Downey's face to clear, and a smothered sigh of relief escaped him. He was so engrossed in watching the little steamer's approach that he had to be recalled, by Captain Loring, an assistant, to a situation then developing on shore.

"Bruffy demands an immediate investigation, sir," the aid reported. "He's in high anger, and will no doubt demand that somebody be thrown to the lions. The Antelope was his pet boat—and, moreover, its loss was a double calamity: it put his own precious life in danger!"

Downey nodded, and turned to meet the fiery glare of the navigation company official.

"Well, Downey," Bruffy grated, "this is a pretty kettle of fish! I've lost three boats within three weeks—and I demand—"

"Hold!" snapped Downey. "You are not in position to demand anything! And remember, I have a title—that of major!"

The officer knew that he was fighting with his back to a wall—the backs of the engineers, in fine—and he meant to give a mighty good account of himself.

Bruffy glared, then broke into speech again: "Well, *Major* Downey," he demanded sarcastically, "when does the investigation begin?"

Downey's glance ranged toward the Clipper's gangplank down which a tall, sandy-haired chap was walking. He was clothed in the uniform of the United States Rangers, whose particular charge was the Sunken Land district of northern Arkansas and the stretch of river which washed the shores of that commonwealth.

"The investigation, Mr. Bruffy," the officer retorted icily, "will begin just as soon as Inspector of Rangers Jack Calhoun sees fit to begin it! Not only shall the Antelope disaster be looked into, but the wrecking of the Belle and the Hawk as well! And," he went on, "I promise that the job will be thoroughly done!"

Bruffy turned quickly and stared hard at the ranger, scowled, wheeled on Downey and asked:

"Inspector Calhoun? What has he got to do with this matter?"

"There have been three wrecks on the shoals within the past three weeks," Downey replied. "In each case, the engineers who charted the passage have been blamed, bitterly criticized. Some time ago, directly after the Hawk came to grief to be exact, I requested my chief to order a thorough investigation. Inspector Calhoun, and the Clipper, is the answer."

Downey ceased speaking, and Bruffy eyed him coldly, then said:

"Was mine one of the voices raised in accusation of you, major?"

"I do not recall having heard you express yourself in the matter," was the reply.

Bruffy laughed grimly. "I expressed myself nevertheless," he stated. "My actions did that. I immediately discharged the pilots of the Belle and the Hawk—for carelessness. I blamed them, and them only. Now," he went on, eyes searching the crowd and singling out the miserable Meeker, "I am going to fire Meeker for the same cause, that of carelessness—"

Dave Meeker straightened, came to life. "You can spare yourself that trouble, Bruffy!" he exclaimed. "When the Antelope struck I quit—not only as your employee, but as a Mississippi River pilot. Never again, until I can prove beyond doubt that my boat was not wrecked through any carelessness of mine, shall I lay hand to wheel!"

A sneering laugh came from Bruffy's lips. "Going to try to alibi, are you?" he demanded. "The course of all weaklings, all cowards—"

Just what more Bruffy meant to say cannot be told. For, with teeth bared, snarling like an angry beast, Meeker leaped forward, struck once with a mighty arm, and stretched the president of the Lower River Navigation Company on the ground.

IV

WHEN Bruffy fell, an angry roar went up from the crowd on the levee, drowning completely the wails of grief on the part of those who had lost loved ones when the Antelope's lifeboat went down. It seemed that the citizens of Willow Point only awaited a spark to set their smoldering resentment into flaming action.

"We've had enough of th' damned engineers!" shouted Leatherwood. "Come on, men!"

"Rangers!"

The command came from Calhoun, and it carried high above the storm. Almost instantly there appeared half a dozen brown-clad men, and those men swiftly formed a circle about Downey, Bruffy—the latter now getting unsteadily to his feet—and Meeker.

Six tall, steady-eyed, cool men, each with a heavy service revolver in his hand, had a quieting effect on the mob, which ceased surging forward, then grew silent.

"Men," said Jack Calhoun, stepping toward them and speaking in a voice which all could hear, "I have no desire to cause injury to any of you, but at the first sign of hostility on your part my men will shoot—and shoot to kill. Go about your business. Scatter.

"Any group of more than half a dozen men found on the street from now until after the investigation is over will be taken in charge. There shall be no mob violence here. Scatter—and do it now!"

Sullenly, muttering hot and angry words, the mob departed, and Calhoun turned to the engineer.

"Lead the way to your office, major," he requested. "The officers of the Antelope and Mr. Bruffy will accompany us."

Five minutes later Jack Calhoun began investigating a case which was to develop some very remarkable, even unique, features. A case which, in point of fact, rivaled in downright villainy anything which had yet come to his notice since entering upon his duties in the Sunken Lands.

"First," the inspector began, "I shall ask Major Downey as to the condition of Light Number One last night, and on the nights when the Hawk and the Belle went down."

"It was in excellent condition on the first two occasions," Downey stated. "The tender lighted it just before sundown, and it was burning clearly the following morning, after each wreck. Inspection shows that it was in good trim this morning."

"How is that light constructed?" was the next question.

"It is set on a frame, and the frame firmly fixed upon a base of rock masonry. Neither storm nor waves can shake or disturb it. The light proper is so inclosed and shielded as to be impervious to rain or wind."

"In your opinion, a pilot who steers according to that beacon," Cal went on, "should be able to run the channel in absolute safety?"

"Such is my unqualified opinion."

Calhoun considered for a moment, then called Meeker.

"Take a seat Meeker," he invited kindly. "You are pretty well tuckered out. Now," he went on when the pilot had dropped upon a chair, "answer one question before you tell your story. Was Light Number One burning when you entered the channel last night?"

"It was," came the unhesitating reply.

A stir among those present testified to the surprise the admission caused. Bruffy seemed on the point of speaking, but a glance from Calhoun caused him to refrain.

"Major," the inspector turned to the officer, "what was the testimony of Converse and Davis relative to the question just asked Meeker?"

"That the light was burning, and that they steered by it."

Cal nodded. "Now, Meeker, tell your story," he ordered.

"I approached the shoals," the pilot related, "picked up Light Number One, steered for the channel—and missed it. That, sir, is all, save that I did all in my power to get the Antelope off the bar after she struck."

Calhoun's gray eyes sought the face of the pilot, scanned it closely, then, without expressing anything of what his conclusion was, shifted to Bruffy, thence to Andrews. It seemed that he sought to determine the reactions of those in the room relative to the proceeding so far.

"What is it that you are keeping back?" he demanded, leaning over the desk and fixing his steady glance upon the pilot.

Again the gathering was treated to a surprise.

"Something that I refuse to mention to any man, save to you!"

Bruffy was on his feet in an instant, his face red with anger. "Demand an answer from him!" he shouted. "This investigation—"

"Will go forward just—as—I—order—it!" Calhoun's voice had suddenly hardened, and his narrow-lidded eyes and emphatic words testified to the tenseness of the situation—a tenseness felt by all.

Bruffy subsided, and Calhoun continued his questions—directing them this time to the president of the navigation company.

"How much insurance was carried by the Belle and the Hawk?"

"Twenty thousand dollars each," was the immediate answer.

"How much have you on the Antelope?"

"Forty thousand."

"Why the difference?"

"The Belle and the Hawk were old boats," Bruffy explained. "The Antelope was practically new, and much larger."

"Any trouble about collecting the insurance on the first two?"

"None."

Captain Andrews and the officers of the Antelope could add nothing to Meeker's story. The deck-watch, when questioned, sheepishly admitted he had been asleep when the boat struck. No person, it appeared could be found who could substantiate the pilot's declaration.

"Now," said Cal, after an hour's exhaustive questioning, "I shall ask all of you to retire, save Meeker."

"On second thought," he reconsidered, "I'll ask Major Downey to remain for a few minutes."

When the rest of the party had filed out of the room he turned to the officer.

"How many former rapids pilots reside in or near the village?" he queried.

"Four. Joe Leatherwood, whom you saw this morning, trying to incite the mob against the Reclamation Service, is perhaps the most vindictive of all. The others, however, are bitter. Mace Crawford, Con Daly, Abe Conklin are the others."

"All live in the town?"

"Yes."

"That is all, major."

"Now, Meeker," said Cal, after the officer had gone, "what have you to say?"

"Inspector," the pilot began, after a slight hesitation, "what I am about to say was withheld from the others because it is beyond belief. My position is bad enough, and I didn't want to make it worse by disclosing something that is, while absolutely true, astounding."

"All right. Let's have it," Cal ordered.

"When I entered the channel," Meeker

replied, his voice grave, "Light Number One was burning steadily and clearly, just as usual. I ran half the course, couldn't find the second light, the one on the floater, and cast a glance back to get my bearings on Number One.

"Believe it or not, inspector, but when my eyes picked up Number One it was wavering, *staggering as though it had been shaken by a strong wind!*"

V

CALHOUN made no comment. His keen eyes bored steadily into those of the man before him—and that man's held level with his, as steady, clear and unshakable as the inspector's own.

"You heard Major Downey's description of Number One's construction," Cal said finally. "You heard him say that it cannot be disturbed by wind—that it is absolutely immovable. Yes, Meeker, what you say is indeed astounding—although, mark you, I do not say it is unbelievable."

"I indorse every word Major Downey said about the light," Meeker declared. "Nothing short of an earthquake could shake it!"

"And there was no earthquake at the time," Cal mused. "Surely, Meeker, you did well to withhold that statement. For how long a period did the light seem to stagger?"

"An instant only," was the reply.

"What then?"

"It became as steady as a rock. I reached for the signal-rope, and the next second we were on the bar."

"Did you again observe Light Number One?"

"I did. After the first shock, due to the certain knowledge that we were lost, I again looked shoreward—*and the light was as steady as I had ever seen it!*"

Cal's homely face, grave before, now became doubly so. For fully two minutes he did not speak. Then:

"Meeker," he said, "were you in the same position when you looked that final time at Number One as you were when you saw it just before you struck?"

Meeker considered the question, then answered. "No, not exactly," he replied. "The Antelope listed almost immediately, and her bow slewed about. That would leave the light still on my port, but not as directly so as at the moment of going aground."

Cal nodded slowly, then summoned the others into the room.

"I am through for the present," he told them. "It may be, however, that I shall wish to question some of you further—"

Before he could finish, the outer door of the office swung open with a bang, and in the apperture appeared a man of such strange and wild appearance as to startle all the company.

He was a big man, clothed in garments such as might have been salvaged from the cast-offs of a vagabond. Dirty beyond description, his face was framed in a huge, long beard. Hair, once dead black, now heavy with strands of gray, lay in great disorder on his bare head and straggled down below his collar. In deep caverns above red and bloated cheeks gleamed eyes which resembled huge black agates—agates with flames behind them.

"Bascomb!"

Cal turned swiftly, trying to locate the man who had been startled into exclaiming the name. He could not determine who among those present had done so, nor could he place the voice. An instant, and his attention was recalled to the man in the doorway.

"A dead man!" the apparition shouted, waving his arms wildly. "Dead woman, and a dead baby, too—a little dead baby! They washed up from th' river! I'm goin' to tell! I'm goin' to tell! You, Downey, damn you, why did you put th' lights on Two Mile Shoal? You done it! You killed them folks—that little baby! But there's others! Lots of others! You hear me? I'm Bascomb—"

A figure loomed suddenly back of the weird being, seized him by a shoulder and dragged him from the sill. It was the village marshal.

"Don't pay no attention to poor old Bascomb!" he called to those inside. "He's drunk, an' cracked. Some of th'

bodies from th' Antelope's boat washed ashore close to his shack, an' he's blamin' th' major fer it. I'll take him home."

"Wait!"

Calhoun voiced the command, and was on his feet instantly. He started toward the door, and Bascomb, hearing his voice, wheeled around.

Then, with a wild shriek, the moment his eyes rested upon Calhoun, he broke from the marshal's grasp and ran with the speed of a deer toward a patch of not far distant timber. Reaching its cover, he disappeared without a backward look.

Calhoun did not pursue. Instead, he turned quietly to the men in the room.

"Who is that man?" he asked at large.

"Tobe Bascomb," Bruffy answered. "Used to be a pilot on the river, but drink got him. I think he is insane, and I believe every one hereabouts regards him so."

"Ever in your employ?"

Bruffy nodded. "Had his last berth with us. Had to let him go. He drank continually."

"He lives close to the river, you say?" Cal interrogated the flabbergasted marshal. "How close?"

"Jist back of th' levee, in th' sand hills, 'bout half a mile below Light Number One."

Cal stared toward the point where Bascomb had disappeared, but was looking at nothing in particular. Then, after a moment or two, he turned to the waiting party.

"So far as this inquiry is concerned," he told them, a note amounting almost to disgust in his voice, "I am through. If prosecuted farther, it is a job for the engineers, boat owners and pilots. The Rangers concern themselves only with criminal investigations.

"The evidence points unmistakably to the fact that Light Number One was burning clearly upon the occasion of each wreck. If that be true, and it undoubtedly is, then the accidents may be viewed from one of three angles:

"First: The pilots were careless. Second: The engineers are at fault in their calculations about the light. Third: Both the pilots and the engineers have contributed, all unintentionally, of course, to the disaster.

"So, viewing matters as I do, there is nothing further for me to do here. Good day, gentlemen."

With ears deaf to the many protests which went up immediately, Calhoun strode off to the levee and boarded the Clipper, where he was met by Murdock.

"Well, Cal," the big ranger asked, "what did you make of it? Accident?"

"No," came the surprising answer. "I've got a very preposterous notion, Tom—yet it will not down. There is, if I am not mistaken, a most unusual crook lurking somewhere along the river in the vicinity of Two Mile Shoals. A crook who, for want of a better designation, we shall call—let me see! Ah, yes—we shall call him a steamboat killer!"

VI

THE Clipper lost no time departing from Willow Point, and while it took its way back downriver, Calhoun conferred with Murdock in the cabin.

"First, let us consider Bruffy. In this year 1890, the railroads have rung the bell for the steamboats. Soon there will be very little traffic on the rivers—and that means a lot of steamboats are going to be just so much junk. Big boats, such as the Antelope, newly built and suited to passenger traffic, will doubtless continue to make profits for their owners. As excursion boats, they will be valuable.

"The Belle and the Hawk were old boats. Even if purchasers could be found for such craft, they would not bring nearly so much as they are insured for. Bruffy might be engineering the wrecking of the boats, getting rid of the old tubs in order to realize through the insurance companies."

Cal paused, eying the face of his aid keenly.

"Won't hold water!" Murdock declared. "Why, Cal, the Antelope was a first-class boat, and worth more than her insurance. It would have been folly for Bruffy to have her destroyed. Then, to clinch the matter, would not he be a nice fool to order the boat wrecked while he was aboard her?"

Cal nodded. "What you say does seem to dispose of Bruffy. That is exactly what I am trying to do—eliminate. Having eliminated Bruffy, let us take Downey. We shall finish with him shortly.

"He would have nothing to gain in casting discredit upon his own work on the Shoals, and the same may safely be said of his assistants. Those chaps are proud of their work—jealous of its good name. We shall dismiss the engineers.

"Now, the pilots. Had one man killed all three boats, I'm inclined to think he'd be under lock and key right now. But such was not the case. I can see no good cause for suspecting Converse, Davis and Meeker. How could they profit?

"They have lost not only their berths with the Lower River Company, but are dead on the rivers as well. No one would hire them with such records against them. Cross the regular pilots off."

Cal paused, eyes on the ceiling, immersed in thought. Then: "The most obvious suspects are the rapids pilots. There are our real possibilities. Probabilities, I will say. The charting of the river took their jobs away, and it is not an easy matter for a rapids pilot to get a berth running regularly on the river.

"That is because they, for the most part, have been piloting rapids only, and for a long period; the Mississippi is constantly changing, and they would have to learn the stream over again. They are practically done as pilots.

"But if they could succeed in showing up the shoals in a bad light, make it appear that the charting is dangerously impractical, there is no doubt that they would be restored to their jobs. That is one angle.

"Another is revenge. It is not unlikely that one or more of the discharged rapids pilots would hate those charted shoals, and the men who charted them. To get back at those who deprived them of their jobs, would, from their viewpoint, be a very natural thing."

Murdock nodded agreement, then asked: "How, though, would it be possible for them to cause those wrecks? Any notion as to that?"

"Only the vaguest," Cal replied. "That is why it is going to be necessary to permit this steamboat killer to attempt another wreck. That was in my mind when I informed Bruffy and the others, in the hearing of a good many persons, that I was done with the case.

"Needless to say, I am far from done. This time the wrecker killed not only a boat, but human beings as well. He must pay.

"There is one other suspect," he went on presently. "A drunken chap named Bascomb, who lives in a shack not far from the light. He might have a grievance against Bruffy, who discharged him as pilot.

"In fact, there is good reason to think that whoever is doing the wrecking has a grievance against the Lower River people. Had you considered this:

"All the boats wrecked on Two Mile have been Lower River craft?"

Murdock whistled. "That is a point!" he applauded.

Then Calhoun threw cold water on his aid's enthusiasm. "On the other hand," he said, "the killer may have selected his victims with a view to causing it to appear that it was the work of vengeance against one certain company—thus furnishing a lead which would point directly to some known enemy of Bruffy's. Do you see that?"

Murdock nodded. "Yeah. Plain enough. Looks to me like we are up against something of a tangle. What do you think about it?"

"We are," Cal agreed. "But we are going to tackle it at once. It will be strange if we do not find at least one end of the snarl down there by Light Number One. It's a one-man job, Tom, and I'm going ashore a few miles from here, after dark has fallen.

"You will drop downriver to Link's Ferry, and remain there. Keep away from the Shoals district, and let it be known that the Clipper is laid up for repairs—damage the boat a bit, if necessary to be absolutely convincing."

"Got you!"

That night Calhoun, carrying a pack and rifle, was put ashore at an isolated spot

about three miles below Light Number One, the Clipper stole away in the darkness—and the lone ranger headed at once up the bank of the river.

VII

CALHOUN did not deceive himself as to the character of the task before him. He knew that he must play a waiting game—a tedious, lonely game of hide and seek.

It was extremely unlikely that another boat would be molested at once, since to do that would be very hazardous, so close on the time of the killing of the Antelope. He was, however, prepared to wait, confident that, sooner or later, he would trap his man, or men.

The character of the land over which he was making his way was a lonely stretch of almost barren sand-hills, the only growth upon them being clumps of willows and sprouts.

There was moonlight enough to enable him to travel without difficulty, and in the course of an hour he stood on top of a sand-hill and looked long at Light Number One, a gleaming, red eye in the distance.

"I'm glad Downey is so confident that the river pilots are solely responsible for the disasters," he thought, as he proceeded cautiously onward, a wary eye out for Bascomb's shack.

"Otherwise he would be sure to have the light watched—and that would spoil my plans. He is so strong in the belief, though, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with Number One, he would think it nonsense to establish a guard there. For which, major, permit me to express my gratitude."

Presently a dark bulk loomed on the yellow sands, a hundred yards away, and he made out the lines of a low, one-room cabin. It was built of boards salvaged from the river, he noted when, creeping closer and keeping concealed in the willow clumps, he made a minute inspection of the outside of the place.

No light showed, and it was not Cal's present intention to explore inside the cabin. Owing to the circumstance that several bodies of the Antelope's victims had been found near by, it might be possible there would be people searching the dunes in the vicinity. He would know in the morning whether Bascomb was in the hut, and that would be time enough.

He was about to drop back to a more secluded spot among the dunes, when the sound of boots crunching sand attracted his attention, and from the north, scouting from bush to bush, came a man.

The light was not sufficient for the inspector to see him clearly, but the skulker's lack of bulk made it clear that he was not Bascomb. Almost instantly he reached the door of the shack, and disappeared inside.

Cal waited, debating the advisability of creeping up and spying through a window, and was surprised to see the prowler reappear almost immediately.

He carried a bulky object in his arms, blanket wrapped, and made off swiftly into the willows back of the shack.

Cal was on his trail at once, but half an hour's scouting among the dunes failed to disclose another glimpse of the prowler. He then made his way back to the shack, opened the door and entered.

The place was one of extreme squalor, the sand which formed the floor being packed hard and offensively dirty. A few home-made articles of furniture, a dilapidated cookstove and a few wooden boxes alone were visible. A touseled bunk proved to be empty.

Cal laid a hand on the stove. "Cold," he remarked. "Bascomb has evidently been absent for some time. Now," he went on, eyes roving about the room, "I wonder what could have been in so poor a place, to attract a thief?"

A large packing case in a shadowed corner drew his attention; taking up the oil lamp which he had lighted, Cal crossed to it. Save for a few odds and ends of fishing-tackle, it was empty. Then traces of fresh sand caught his eye, and he moved the box aside.

A deep, square hole was disclosed.

"Empty!" Cal exclaimed, casting the rays of the light downward. "But it's a certainty that it was not so an hour ago!

What was hidden here, the thief now has! I'm betting strong on that!"

Having exhausted the possibilities of the shack, the inspector withdrew to a point south of the place, where he had left his rifle and pack, his intention being to find a spot some distance farther away where he might make camp and sleep undisturbed until dawn.

"Bascomb must be found," he reflected, stooping over his pack on the sand. "He knows something—probably all. Would have told it, too, if that marshal had not come up when he did and scared him away. Bascomb is one key, at least, to the situation—"

A growl, like that of an angry dog, the sudden impact of a heavy body launched against him, and Calhoun crashed down, a pair of powerful arms gripping him, his body crushed into the sand by that of his assailant.

But Calhoun was a big man, too, and a well trained one to boot. He lay for an instant, somewhat dazed by the suddenness of the attack, then bunched his muscles for a fight.

Thrusting one arm upward, he got a grip on his assailant's throat, turned with a lithe twist of his body, and an instant later he was free.

Free—and looking into the gleaming eyes of Bascomb!

The big fisherman launched himself toward Cal, was met by a clean blow to the chin which dropped him on the sand, and, before the ranger could pile on top of him and pinion his arms, Bascomb had rolled into a clump of brush close at hand, leaped to his feet, and gone crashing away to the west.

Cal did not pursue. To attempt to overtake the fleeing man would have been a waste of time, since the dunes were numerous, and the growth thick. Instead, the ranger retrieved his pack and rifle, dropped back into the dunes a matter of a mile, and made camp.

"Yes," he assured himself, just before falling asleep under his blanket, "Bascomb is the key! Decidedly, he must be caught—and that without loss of time. I think, when morning comes, I can follow his trail across the sand, and if I can—well, he won't get away a second time!"

VIII

"DID Light Number One actually stagger, as Meeker put it, or did the pilot's eyes play him a trick?"

That question had been in Calhoun's mind since the moment Dave Meeker made the astounding statement, and it was in his mind strongly when, at dawn the following morning, he crouched above a tiny cooking fire and prepared breakfast.

On that point the whole case rested. Downey had said the light was immovable, as was the frame upon which it was fixed. Meeker asserted that it had moved.

If Downey was right, then Cal was on a wild-goose chase. If Meeker was stating the truth, it was anything but a wild-goose chase.

How, though, could the mere wavering of the light cause a pilot to steer out of his course and send his boat aground? How could any one cause the light to waver?

Those questions troubled the mind of the ranger, almost to the point of depriving him of his appetite for breakfast. After he had eaten, hidden his pack and scattered the fire, he set out for the place where Bascomb had made his attack, picked up the trail and followed it across the dunes to the west.

He trailed with extreme caution, keeping a gun ready for instant action, and an hour after striking out found himself circling south and east toward the river. At length he stood on the shore, and there the trail ended. Bascomb had taken to the water in a boat.

Having come to what was in effect a blank wall in the matter of the wild fisherman, the inspector retraced his way to a point back of the old shack where the prowler of the night before had disappeared, taking care not to expose himself in the open places, and picked up the latter's trail.

This he followed easily in the sand for better than an hour, then lost it in high ground back of the dunes; there the soil was rocky, and all traces vanished.

The rest of the day was spent in scout-

ing among the sand-hills, in an effort to locate a camp, or something tangible pointing to a hangout used by the steamboat killer.

For, the more Cal considered the case, the harder became his conviction that such a criminal was haunting the vicinity. Possibly Bascomb; possibly the thief who entered the fisherman's shack.

Nothing developed, and that night he lay in a clump of bushes within view of Light Number One, keeping vigil until dawn. Thereafter he slept until late afternoon, and again took to scouting among the hills.

So passed five days, Calhoun scouting part of the days, and spending the nights with Light Number One under his eyes. Many boats passed up and down the river, but no accidents occurred. During that time he saw no one, of a suspicious character, anywhere in the dunes.

Just at dusk on the evening of the sixth day, the inspector was far out on the western side of the sandy stretch. He had changed the location of his day-camp, and was making for his hideout near Light Number One.

Presently he scented wood-smoke, and after half an hour's scouting came to the top of a dune and looked down upon a man who crouched over a fire, cooking, but could not see his features.

Cal dropped back, circled the dune, and crawled to the top of the one on the opposite side. He was perhaps half an hour in making the circle, and when he again peered down into the little valley, the fire was there—but the man was gone.

Making sure of that fact, Calhoun started again for the light. He could not afford to leave it for long at night, for Number One was now his only hope of trapping his man.

He had progressed two miles and was within a few hundred yards of the rear of Bascomb's shack when the night-time stillness of the dunes was broken by a pistol-shot.

His keen sense of location informed the ranger that the report must have come from a point very near the cabin, and he sprinted for it.

Halfway there, he caught another sound; this time it came from far up the river. A steamboat's whistle.

"That will be the War Eagle!" he exclaimed, having a very good working knowledge of the boats running that stretch of water. "Let me see—yes, she's a Lower River boat!"

By then he was close to Bascomb's place, and in another instant had entered. A strong smell of burned powder greeted him, and a deep groan came from the darkness. He struck a light, and bent over a huddle of rags on the ground.

It was Bascomb, lying there! Bascomb, whose life-blood was streaming from a bullet wound just above the heart!

The ranger raised the unconscious man and attempted to revive him, then laid him back on the ground. It was a waste of time.

The fisherman died a moment later—and whatever his secret was, he carried it still.

Again the War Eagle's whistle sounded, and much closer. Cal dashed outside, noted that a strong wind had sprung up and clouds were scudding across the sky, then ran with all speed toward Light Number One, gleaming redly half a mile away.

The War Eagle's whistle was sounding her approach to the entrance of the shoals, and Cal stopped suddenly, his breath coming hissingly through his lips.

For, strange as it may seem, Light Number One, gleaming so steadily and redly a moment before, had been blotted out!

Only for an instant did utter darkness prevail on the levee, and Cal gained the top just in time to see the light spring into being again—but with this difference:

This time Number One was blazing two hundred yards farther up the shore!

The lights of the War Eagle were faintly visible when the racing ranger saw the light-stand of Number One looming suddenly before him, and caught a dim movement almost beside him.

The next instant his clubbed gun lashed out, fell with crushing force, and the dimly seen form crumpled to the ground.

Leaping to the framework of the stand, Cal caught the edge of a blanket in his hand, jerked hard, and the spot was suddenly flooded with red light.

The real Number One now stood boldly revealed—and in the light Cal recognized the face of the man he had struck down.

It was Bruffy!

But the ranger paid no attention to him. He was away up the levee like the wind—toward that false light which blazed there, and which, should the War Eagle's pilot lay his course by it, would send the craft to its doom.

A hundred feet away from the second light, Calhoun dropped to his knees, swung his rifle off his back, took aim and fired. The light wavered. Cal fired again, and this time the light went down with a crash.

He leaped to his feet and made for the spot, and a blaze from a gun near the ground informed him that he had only winged his man. Again and again bullets sang around the ranger, then a slug from Cal's gun found its mark.

When he reached the spot where the dead man lay, he struck a match and looked down upon the face of Joe Leatherwood, the rapids pilot—just at the moment the War Eagle nosed her way safely by!

IX

UP to the time of the killing of the Antelope, Leatherwood and Bascomb had engineered the switching of the lights—employed to do so by Bruffy. The latter, who owned practically all the stock of the Lower River Navigation Company, pocketed most of the insurance received on the boats destroyed.

It was he whom Cal saw beside the fire that night, waiting until time to repair to the light and do his nefarious work. Bruffy, for good and sufficient reasons, had elected to work with Leatherwood until the few remaining boats slated to go were destroyed.

Bascomb had broken, and the boat owner was unwilling to employ the services of another. There was too much risk.

The second light, a duplicate of the original, had been kept in the hole in the floor of Bascomb's hut, but after the fisherman lost his nerve over finding the drowned bodies, it was taken away by the ex-pilot. It was resolved, also, to slay ex-pilot Bascomb.

The latter was wily, however, and did not return to his shack until the night of his death. Very likely he became more than usually intoxicated, and lost his sense of caution. He was shot down by Bruffy.

The steamboat owner, who died that night as a result of Calhoun's blow, confessed all.

As to the killing of the Antelope, that was, of course, a mistake. The Gipsy had been slated to go, she being an old tub and well insured. But the Gipsy became disabled before she reached the shoals, and the Antelope was running very close on the older boat's time—hence the mishap.

"Had Leatherwood been handling the false light the night the Antelope went down," Calhoun remarked to Murdock, in reviewing the case, "instead of remaining to cover the real one at the appointed time, doubtless it would not have wavered—staggered, as Meeker put it.

"But Bascomb held it on that occasion—and Bascomb was unsteady from drink.

"The light wavered—and I knew it could not do so without the aid of a human agency. That was the only clew. Bruffy was well covered up, owing to the fact that everybody thought the engineers were to blame for the mishaps, and no one would think of accusing him.

"And all for sake of the insurance!" he finished, as the Clipper cast off. "I had that hunch, at first, but the sinking of the Antelope threw me off the scent. I never once thought it might have been an accident.

"Well, it's been a very good job, Tom. We've vindicated Downey and his work, restored three river pilots to good standing—and sent a pair of crooks to their reward. I guess," he yawned, "I've earned a good, long sleep!"

And Jack Calhoun was soon snoring in his bunk.

There will be a new Calhoun story soon

She fired two shots at the retreating assassins

THE FEUD

By Don H. Thompson

THE TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DARING STAND OF TWO NOTORIOUS CATTLE RUSTLERS OF THE LONE STAR STATE

A Story of Fact

IN Texas, Tom Ross was known as the best shot in the State, was usually described as its most dangerous citizen, and was privately regarded as its most accomplished cow thief. He had plenty of friends, of a kind, and more than his share of genuine enemies.

His ranch, twenty-five miles west of Seminole, was the hangout of many a man wanted by the law, a place which wary riders of the range took care to avoid.

Tom Ross enjoyed his reputation. A huge, rugged, square-built man, he looked all of Texas in the eye and said:

"What are you going to do about it?"

As he said it he had his hand on the butt of his automatic pistol, and since the rancher was known to be mighty quick on the draw, nobody cared to try conclusions with him.

For many years Tom Ross went unmolested. His shady friends frequented his ranch in safety. Herds of cattle, wearing assorted brands, were driven into his corrals, emerged with new brands, and were hustled away to market. Ross waxed prosperous at the expense of his neighbors.

Then, in the spring of 1922, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association, which had been organized years before for the purpose of running down cow thieves, took a hand in the game. E. B.

Spiller, general manager of the organization, assigned Horace L. Roberson and W. D. Allison to inquire into Ross's activities.

Roberson and Allison were the pick of the Southwestern rangers. They were expert shots, knew cattle, and their courage was unquestioned. Roberson, a lean six-footer, was a handsome, smiling gentleman. He had been a plainsman and a peace officer most of his life. During his career he had been tried three times for murder.

"I'll Be Ready"

Allison, who was formerly sheriff of Midland County, always got his man. In twelve years he had never failed to bring in any malefactor he started after.

"This is one fellow Allison will never get," said the old timers. And they were partly right.

Allison and Roberson mulled around the border country for several weeks before they found anything that looked like a hot trail to Tom Ross. Then Allison was informed that a huge herd of cattle was being driven from near Brownfield, Texas, to a ranch on the edge of Garden City.

Thither went Allison and Roberson and they tagged the herd for several days, finally riding up to it and making an inspection. They found cattle that had been stolen from a dozen Texas ranches.

Of course, the men in charge were not the real thieves, so the two rangers began to get busy trying to uncover the men higher up. One of these, Milt Goode, a rancher, was arrested and held as a cattle thief.

Roberson then found evidence that some of the cattle had been taken to the Ross ranch, so he undertook the dangerous job of having a look. He rode up to the rancher's house, dismounted, and was met by Ross on the front porch.

"I'm Roberson, cattle inspector," said the visitor, "and I want to look at your herd."

"I'm Ross," drawled the most dangerous man in Texas, "and I reckon you'll leave my herd alone."

Roberson laughed, strode into Ross's corral, and began inspecting his cattle Ross did not draw his weapon. He just stood watching while the big ranger's keen eyes took in every brand in sight.

"You've got some stolen cattle here, Ross," said Robertson. "I am going to apply for a warrant against you."

Tom Ross squinted at the sun.

"If you do," he said quietly, "it will be the last application of that kind that you will make for some time."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said."

The two men faced, eyes glinted, hands were tense above the butts of their weapons.

"I'll take a chance," said Roberson, swung into his saddle and rode away.

The next day a warrant was issued for Tom Ross, charging him with the theft of cattle. The feud was on. The old rancher swore that the warrant would never be served, and vowed that he would kill Horace Roberson and his partner Allison on sight.

Roberson laughed when told of the threats.

"Let him come," said the plainsman. "I'll be ready."

But he was far from ready on the evening of Easter Sunday, 1923, as he sat in the little lobby of the Gaines Hotel in Seminole, talking to Allison and six other men.

The Best They Could

He was leaning back in his chair, taking his ease, and Allison was also resting comfortably, with no suspicion that sudden death in the form of Tom Ross and a desperate henchman was, at that moment, driving up to the front door.

The entrance of Tom Ross to the hotel lobby was as soft-footed as that of a tiger. With an automatic rifle in his hand, he glided in, took careful aim at Roberson and shot him dead.

The thief hunter had no sooner fallen to the floor when the man behind Ross fired at Allison and the former sheriff toppled off his chair. He died a few moments later.

The six Texans, including Sheriff Frank L. Britton, dashed from the room. The sheriff was gunless, and he hit for home to get his six-shooter before trying to do anything with a man like Ross.

The old rancher sidled over to where Roberson lay and pumped several more bullets into his body, then he and his companion began to back out of the room.

It was at this moment that a woman appeared on the stair landing and uttered a shriek. It was Mrs. Horace Roberson, a comely Texas matron, who might have been expected to faint upon seeing her husband lying in his own blood.

She did not faint. Not Martha Roberson. She had long since learned self-reliance.

Now she leaped down the stairs into the lobby, whisked an automatic pistol from the hip pocket of her late husband, ran to the screen door, and fired two shots at the retreating assassins.

One missile struck Tom Ross in the abdomen and the other buried itself in his confederate's left hand. Pretty good shooting for a lady in the dark.

Mrs. Roberson then returned to the lobby and was examining the bodies when Sheriff Britton arrived with his weapon and an urge to arrest somebody.

There was no one to arrest by this time, but it was not long before the sheriff knew the identities of the murderers and was taking steps to apprehend them.

Late that night the sheriff got a telephone call. Tom Ross was the caller.

"I guess we'll come in," said the rancher.

"I'll come and get you," countered Britton.

"No," said Ross. "You might bring a crowd, and there would be more shooting."

It was finally agreed that a neighbor would drive Ross and his accomplice to the sheriff's office, which he did. The accomplice turned out to be Milt Goode, the rancher whose undoing as a cattle rustler had been brought about by Roberson and Allison,

The wounds of Ross and Goode were superficial. They talked and laughed after admitting to Britton that they had killed the cattle inspectors.

"We had to do it," said Ross. "They had threatened to kill us."

And this was the defense which the two made when they came to trial charged with the murder of Roberson and Allison.

They pleaded self-defense, and some of the best lawyers in Texas made the plea, but in vain. Ross was convicted and given a sentence of thirty-five years in prison. Goode, held to be the tool of Ross, got twenty-six years.

A juror walked over to Ross when the trial was over.

"We did the best we could for you, Tom," said he.

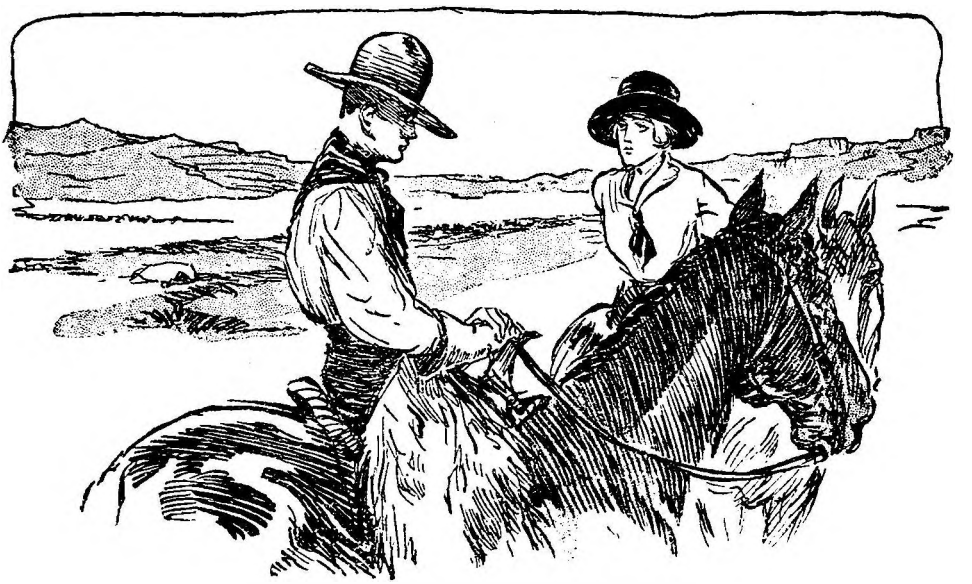
Ross laughed heartily.

"Sure you did, son," he replied. "You had to do your duty."

Mrs. Roberson was satisfied with the verdict.

"But it was too bad that I did not have a larger pistol that night," she reflected. "I could have killed them both easily."

Thus ended the last of the great Texas cattle feuds.



"I am going to ask you for a promise," she said

THE STREAK PAYS OFF

By Robert H. Rohde

OBLIVIOUS TO STARES, AND IN A SERIOUS MOOD, THE STREAK RODE SWIFTLY OUT OF PLATEAU INTO THE ROLLING SOUTHWEST

INSIDE the walls, and outside, too, the gray warden of Plateau Prison had gained, inevitably, the reputation of being "as hard as his name." His name was Flint, and the obvious in his case had the merit of truth.

Thirty years in the job had robbed him of that fine faith in the redemptive qualities of *genus homo* which young wardens so often have in these days. He was an austere host, and a stern disciplinarian. Habitually he met arriving guests with a frown, and with doubt saw them go forth.

He indulged in no hand-shaking, had no elaborate formula of farewell, but rather ran through the routine of discharge with a cursoriness plainly bespeaking the thought, "We'll meet soon again!"

You may know, then, that Flint's behavior on that afternoon of No. 612's departure was utterly without precedent.

No. 612, some time "The Streak," some time—but remotely—Rosswell Edward Kane, owner and puncher of beef cattle, had served three years of a ten-year term imposed for complicity in the raiding of the First National at Hodge City. He had been in every way a model prisoner.

So far as his record in Plateau "pen" went, he was worthy of the parole just arrived from the State Capital. But model prisoners, as such, aroused small enthusiasm in the warden: he was schooled in hard-bitten methods for making models of all.

There had been something stronger than mere docility to recommend No. 612, certainly, for at the parting Flint gripped his hand.

"I've watched you—and liked the way you took your medicine," he said. "I guess they had a right to send you here; but I'm glad, just the same, that the parole board has called quits.

"You're young. You've got the best part of your life ahead of you. There's time enough left so that you can make anything out of yourself you're a mind to. I hope you don't come back."

Kane shook his head.

"I won't," said he. "That's a promise, warden."

"That's it. Settle down."

"My program," said Kane. "Settling down is next to the first thing on it. Before that there's something I've got to—settle up. It's a private matter. But don't worry, warden, over me getting into any more jams.

"I've been a fool, and I've paid for being one. Whatever I do from now on, I'm with the law, and the law's with me."

He ripped open the well-stuffed envelope which Flint had handed to him.

"You'll find it all there," remarked the warden. "It's the money you had on you when you rode into Buckhorn and said 'Howdy' to the sheriff. Six hundred dollars is a good stake if you'll use it right—a lot more than most of the boys carry off out of here with them."

Kane smiled faintly.

"Maybe you'd be surprised," he said, "if I told you I had better than six thousand to draw on, and all my own. It's lying in the bank at Hodge City." He flushed. "Not the First National. I mean the State bank—Burton's bank."

"No, I'm not surprised," said the warden slowly. "I—wondered. That's all. You should have been putting money by, with the pay you were getting.

"I never could figure out how you got mixed up in that First National business unless it was like you said—the McCotter outfit spiked drinks on you, and got you clean off balance. Barring the stories that sprung up while you were hiding in the hills, which were all wind, your record's clean."

"But my conscience isn't—not quite," said Kane. "I feel different about the gentleman's profession of gambling than I did when I came up to you. I'm through with it, warden. And as for the money in Hodge City, it's gambling money, and it's got to be washed before I touch a finger to it.

"I'm going to let it stay where it is until the right time comes to use it. There'll be a mighty good use for it when I come to draw it out; and if I don't see such a use for it, then it stays where it is forever."

Flint had walked with him to the door.

"You talk as if you weren't going back to Hodge," he said.

"I'm not," Kane told him. "From the minute I pass through the gate yonder, The Streak is dead and buried. It's going to be my business to keep him that'a'way. I'm going back home, and that's the opposite way to Hodge City. Then I'm going to make a new start on a clean slate—that is, after this little private matter of mine has been 'tended to."

To Kane "home" was Cervesa, a tiny cowtown in the sand-blown country back of Eagle Pass. The rails of the Texas Intercoastal would have carried him over all but a scant thirty of the more than three hundred miles between Cervesa and Plateau, but he elected to make the journey in another fashion.

Outside the walls, he indulged in an orgy of spending that decimated his capital in cash. He bought an outfit of the sort that poker-impoverished cowmen dream about—the hairiest of "hair pants," a spectacular shirt, a half dozen neckerchiefs yet more brilliant, riding boots high of heel and gracefully slender of toe, silver spurs, a poncho, an Indian blanket, a gun-belt carrying as its major appurtenance as pretty a revolver as ever the Messrs. Who Make Them had produced.

Also he invested in a silver-mounted saddle and a likely, long-limbed sorrel. He bought casually, grandly; and, oblivious to stares, rode swiftly out of Plateau into the rolling southwest.

Hours had passed before, like Lot's wife, he succumbed to the temptation to look back. The broad stack that marked his late residence by then was a slim needle stitching the blue hem of horizon.

To the shopkeeper in Plateau the most amazing of Kane's purchases had been the many boxes of cartridges that he demanded. He had ridden forth with his saddlebags lead-laden. Here, in the open country, he proceeded to lighten them.

A score of times he loaded and emptied the new gun. He raised dust under the heels of scooting prairie dogs, yet never scotched them; denuded cactus clumps methodically of their spikes; espied a distant and disreputable tin can, and sent it rolling wildly off under the impulse of a succession of precisely placed bullets.

"By Jimmy, I'm as good as ever!" he exulted as the can went tumbling on its way. "That's *you* out there, Montford! Divide the breeze, daggone you—scuttle! You've got to be fast, old timer. It's The Streak you've got to beat out—now!"

A savage joy pounded in Kane's heart as he urged the sorrel onward. Every step was bringing him closer to the moment he'd been looking ahead to, for—could it be eight years?

God, it was! Eight mortal years it had been since he'd ridden out of Cervesa—started out to "get a reputation," to prepare himself for the showdown that must come between him and Sid Montford before he could call himself, in his heart, a man.

Eight years, and the memory of that ignominious departure smarted yet. He sought, as so often he had, to salve the sting with an ointment of extenuation. He'd been no more than a kid then—barely nineteen. Montford had been a man, and a bad one, a noted and wicked performer with his gun.

And Montford had been as wily as wicked. He'd shot it out with a dozen men—killed three of them cold—and never a voice had risen to deny his plea of self-defense.

Maybe that had been because big Sid was always careful in choosing his time. And, again, maybe the fear which he inspired had something to do with it.

If there were consolation in that, Ross Kane hadn't been the only one around Cervesa who stood in awe of Montford. In his presence all men trod warily—all, that is, after old Kent Kane had died.

Kane's father had been possessed of a pair of eyes that, ordinarily warm, had been quick to congeal when his rights were invaded. Montford, perhaps, had read a warning in them.

At any rate, the boundary dispute had never got out of hand while Kent Kane lived. It hadn't been until he was safely underground that Sid had threatened to make his claim to a good three-quarters of the Loop-K's best range a "man to man" issue.

Ross Kane had argued then that the instinct which led him to clear out was good, hard, sound sense. But even as he rode away a condemning inner voice had risen to assure him, tauntingly, that it was nothing other than sheer, old-fashioned funk.

But the voice had not been strong enough to cause Kane to turn back. To go on, to learn to hold his place among men, to fit himself thus to meet Montford on something like equal terms, still seemed the better way.

II

THE old hurt seemed in no way assuaged when Kane hobbled the sorrel by a water hole, feasted magnificently on tinned chicken and preserved apricots and tea, and rolled up in his blanket.

Before he slept, a panorama of the last years slipped before him, in the manner of the lantern views accompanying a travel lecture he had once heard in the Pass.

There'd been that first six months as a puncher with the Crooked L outfit; the unmerciful hazing that followed his brief announcement—"If you've got to have a name for me, call me The Streak!"

On the Crooked L they had taken that as a youngster's boasting, a sign that the newcomer must be taken down a peg before he'd fit.

How could they tell from that tight quality of his voice, which sounded so much like a note of bravado, that he spoke in bitterness, in wretched self-abasement—that the kind of streak of his allusion was a flaming, shameful yellow one.

But they were never to know the truth

of it. The fight with Con Nevin, the burly and surly straw-boss, had been his accolade.

That was a fist fight, bare-knuckled and berserk; and Ross Kane, his nose broken, his face raw from the rippings with Nevin's heavy ring, had stayed with his man until the straw-boss roared "Enough!"

After that The Streak was enough for the Crooked L. They questioned neither its accuracy nor its derivation.

Kane had begun his pistol practice while riding herd, and whatever his target, he saw always the implacable leering face of Sid Montford behind it. He had a good eye naturally, and a naturally steady hand, and he spent for nothing more cheerfully than for ammunition.

To him, too, as time passed and his increasing skill became a marvel to himself, The Streak began to have another meaning. If only he could be as quick on the draw in battle as in practice, as deadly in placement—

A chance—a necessity—for the test came soon after he had gone down to Hodge City. He hadn't intended to stay there longer than would be required to scatter the accumulated earnings of three solid months on the range.

But the money wouldn't scatter. In Oklahoma Kerry's place, cards and dice and wheel had all turned to his advantage. If he lost once, he won twice. His pockets, after days, were stuffed with bills and gold, and feverishly intent on running his luck either into the ground or the sky, he would not go back to the Crooked L with the crowd.

"Can't you see I'm a gamblin' jack?" he demanded. "You men go back to the bossies. Me? I'm plumb loco!"

After then, after they'd gone, leaving their lamb on his own, the distressed gentleman who called himself Oklahoma Kerry had moved to the protection of his enterprise from the onslaughts of the vandal kid.

He had insinuated, publicly, that no man's luck could ever hold so long unless there was something not recognized by Mr. Hoyle behind it; had followed that by briskly announcing that his very strictest rule barred players under suspicion of unethical practices from his games.

Which, of course, whether one liked it or no, was a pistol matter. Kerry drew, and in the same split second went down, his gun hand shattered.

"They call that kid The Streak," one enthusiast thereupon confided to another. "Say, ain't he? You know it ain't habitual with Oklahoma to get hisself sprinkled."

Now, luck in gambling customarily calls for more gambling; and, even so, success in gunplay brings on more gunplay in its wake.

The Streak punched no more cows. Well-staked, he traveled and he gambled. His fame as the conqueror of the redoubtable Oklahoma Kerry went before him; and now and again in his rovings, gentlemen accomplished at arms and jealous of their reputations as a matter of course did him battle. And The Streak, schooled now to fire, uniformly polished them off.

When, after a couple of years, he settled down as a banker of hazards in the identical establishment in Hodge City where his career had begun, he still had not a killing on his score.

His specialty had been the crippling of pistol hands; but nevertheless his name was known far beyond his own small bailiwick as that of a ruthless killer. For so, when they come to accounting at second and third and fourth hands, do notorieties expand.

III

OOKING back, as he tossed sleepless in the blanket, gulping in the keen fresh air so long denied to him, Kane could not reproach himself for any single episode of his gambling life.

It was that life as a whole—the memory of the thousands of dollars that had come to him without expenditure of honorable effort—that now rankled. He'd had a long time to think it over.

As an itinerant of fortune, he had played the games square, bucked the percentages without any attempt ever to bring them by craft to his own side of the table.

As a banker of wheels, and faro and chuck-a-luck, he had seen to it that his apparatus, his cards, his dice, his helpers,

were above suspicion. He had played percentage, and percentage only.

If men had whispered that he was The Streak because cards came like greased lightning from strange places when he dealt them, that was only because some who gamble do not lose as blithely as others. Standing backhand abuse was part of the business.

When finally he dropped off to sleep under the dim stars, it was with that puzzle of catastrophe in his mind. How the devil he'd come to ride off with those plunging, swashbuckling strangers he'd never known.

They were a quartette, and he'd never seen a man of them before. They'd given him a wide-open play, grinning over their losses. That had warmed him to them.

When they insisted that the "house" drink with them, he couldn't well refuse. That, although by preference he was most moderate in his use of alcohol, was part of the business, too.

Probably if he'd been accustomed to drinking heavily he wouldn't have lost his head. But, playing the good fellow, he did lose it. Everything had gone blank.

He vaguely remembered, as he might remember an incident in a dream, having ridden out with the good losers—firing his pistol into the air—raising Ned.

It had seemed just high-jinks to him, a splendid midnight lark. He had sobered at seeing the doors of the First National open, smashed. People were rushing into the street. Kane had seen Foley, the marshal; heard him yell:

"That's the Furness gang. And look! The Streak's in with 'em, by God!"

Then the unreasoning impulse to flight; the race for the hills with lead whistling about him; the long hiding out. What a nightmare! Who could think back to it and sleep?

A long year it had been in the hills, a skulking year. And while the months dragged, every crime committed in a dozen counties had been laid at the door of the fugitive Streak.

The newspapers through the length and breadth of Texas had been filled with lurid chronicles of The Streak's illicit exploits; and he, hiding, had never known.

When he did find out, it was more than he could stomach. Kane had come down out of the friendly hills and surrendered.

"I was in on the First National thing, I reckon," he had told sheriff and prosecutor and judge in turn, "but nothing else. If you want to try me for that, I'll say 'Guilty' in advance."

They'd believed him; indeed had information of their own which had been kept dark, so that the newspaper halloo over The Streak might continue and the men they wanted walk less warily.

And so, on his plea, he'd been sent off to Plateau with the promise that the ten-year sentence would, in due course, be shortened.

Now he was out. The long wait was over. He was on his way to confront the man who was at the root of his misfortune—the man but for whom he would have had no "past." The thought eventually comforted him. He dozed off.

IV

PERHAPS, considering the sanguine nature of the private business he intended to transact with Sid Montford, The Streak did not precisely keep his promise of "dying" at the prison gate. For to match himself with Montford, Roswell Edward Kane must still have possession of certain Streakish attributes.

Where The Streak did die was at a crossroads seven miles outside Cervesa. A girl sat there on a piebald mare. She might have been waiting for some one.

From a distance of a hundred yards, Kane recognized Sarah Blaisdell. Her hair had been in braids when last he saw her, and now the curls peeping under her Stetson were bobbed; but Kane told himself he would have known her anywhere.

She knew him, too.

"Ross!" she cried. "I thought you'd forgotten—your home!"

Kane swept the dust with his new sombrero, in such a wide gesture of gallantry as stay-at-homes seldom come in a way of acquiring.

"Sally! I swear you've kept the clock-hands standing still. I've got old, Sally;

I'm beginning to look for signs of rheumatiz. But you—golly!"

The girl's blue eyes for a moment were wistful.

"You're talking, Ross," she said. "I'm teaching school, and I guess I've got to be a professional old maid. People must think so. I haven't been asked to a dance this whole year."

She silenced his eager interruption. "You can't give me flattery when—there's so much else. Do you know how long it's been? Eight years, Ross—and never a word!"

Kane's lean face clouded.

"Have you forgotten, Sally—how I went?" he asked.

"I haven't forgotten," said the girl, "that it was without a good-by."

He shuffled in the stirrups under her reproach.

"I guess you know why," he said. "People must have talked."

She nodded slowly.

"They did, Ross—and so did I. They said you were scared of Sid Montford. What if you were? A man who sees death straight ahead of him, and hasn't any good reason to keep on, isn't brave just because he refuses to turn aside. He's—crazy.

"'Most everybody around has come to think as I do now. You did what was sensible, right. But you shouldn't have left us as you did."

"I couldn't bear to see anybody," Kane said. "And I always intended to come back. You'd have seen me—well, a couple of years ago, anyhow—if it hadn't been simply impossible to break away from where I was."

She asked a canny woman's question, point blank:

"What you been working at, Ross?"

"This and that," Kane replied diffidently. "I'm about where I started, except for experience."

"You're going away again, are you?"

"Don't aim to, Sally. If everything turns out satisfactory with Montford, I sort of figure on settling down."

She caught his eyes—and her breath.

"Ross! You're not going to have trouble with him?"

"Maybe," observed Kane diplomatically, "I won't be able to keep out of it. You see, what I had in mind was getting the Loop-K started up again, and I can't get along with less range and water than Pop had. If Montford's on Kane range I'm certainly going to have to ask him to get off."

A relieved sigh escaped the girl in the Stetson.

"That old dispute's all been settled," she said. "Didn't you know?"

"Settled?" echoed Kane, staring. "And how?"

"Why, your brother. He came back from Dibble, where you sent him—let's see, it was three years or more ago."

Kane paled.

"Little Bill! Dag-gone him, I made him promise he wouldn't come near the Loop-K until I went to Dibble and fetched him. And he's got mixed up with Montford?"

"They're—getting along," said the girl. "I think Bill's renting the range that Sid claimed. Your uncle in Dibble died—left some money, I think. Bill married soon afterward, and came to the Loop-K. He's got an adorable youngster. The little fellow looks, I've often thought—like *you* must have at his age."

Kane's toes wriggled in the new boots.

"Shucks! You don't need to tell me I've been that clear in your mind, Sally? So I'm an uncle, and the Loop-K is operating, and that wolf Montford is taking rent off of Bill—leasing off proper Kane land to the Kanes? Some of the news is hard to digest. I reckon I'll have to see Sid."

The sorrel started forward at a light touch of the spurs, but the piebald mare moved across his path.

"Don't go—that way!" she begged. "Do you remember that once upon a time you asked me for a promise, Ross?"

He gulped.

"Sort of. You just laughed. Said we were kids. Yes, I reckon I remember."

The girl leaned forward in her saddle.

"I wouldn't have spoken of that, Ross," she said, "excepting that I'm going to ask you for a promise now. I won't let you pass until you've given it; you'll have to ride over me. Ross, I want your word that

you won't go picking up old quarrels with Sid Montford.

"If Bill has made an agreement with him, let it stand. Go to law, if you know you're in the right. But don't"—she was looking at the not inconspicuous revolver—"don't go to your gun."

It was something in her gray eyes, perhaps, that laid The Streak to rest. Kane looked long into them, eagerly read the vision in their depths.

"I wish I hadn't met you, Sally," he burst out, and then, in the same breath he contradicted himself. "No, I don't! By Jiminy, I don't! You're sure setting me off my track—but, girl, you win."

"You won't—start anything?"

The Streak, requiescating, studied the gray eyes again.

"I won't, Sally," he said. "Not as long as my name keeps on being Rosswell Edward Kane."

V

SO it came about that Kane, instead of going to the Montford ranch as an avenger, went as a mere and prodigal uncle to the old Loop-K. He fitted there. Sarah Blaisdell had been right. The new kid was the image of a babyhood picture of himself, ringlets and all.

Bill's wife was exactly the right sort, and surely the world had never held a better, truer brother than little old Bill.

"Here's home, Ross," he said, "and you're a heap welcomer than any flower I ever saw poke up in May." He pointed to the infant Kane, tumbling in the yard. "Just as welcome as *him*, Ross! I've been the steward of your half of the Loop-K, and if I haven't got a bankful of cash to turn over, it ain't because I've been lying down. I s'pose you been enough among cattle at the other end of the State to know what the last couple of years have been."

And to that, Ross Kane said soberly:

"Yes; I've been among cattle, Bill. I know. You mean the ranch isn't paying?"

"Not quite keeping even. But if this year turns out as good as it looks now, we'll come through fine. Heard about my deal with Montford, did you? Well, I went into it because this isn't hardly the time for ranchers to be squabbling among themselves.

"I can take Sid to court later, but right now we've got a common enemy to face. 'Most every ranch in the valley has a mortgage in the Cervesa bank, and Montford's stuck with one as well as us and a lot of others. Mortgages ain't anything to be scared of, I know. They weren't when Cunningham had the bank, anyway.

"But eastern capital's in control now, it seems like, and we hear that the syndicate which gobbled up the bank is all for gobbling up the range—foreclosing, if they get the chance, and putting the whole blamed valley into one big cattle-raising corporation.

"That's what we're up against, and we've got to pull together."

To that Kane replied, shortly:

"I don't like the Montford deal, Bill, but I'll pull, too."

It was inevitable that Ross Kane and Montford, as neighbors, should meet. Ross, recognizing that, neither sought nor avoided the meeting. He was riding line on the fourth day after his return, when he came upon the grim-visaged Montford.

Kane trotted past without a nod; and Montford, turning in his saddle and squinting, called after him:

"Hey! What's the rush, neighbor?"

Ross wheeled his pony and cantered back.

"Talking to me?"

Montford burst into a grating laugh.

"Danged if it isn't an old friend of mine. The Yellow Kid himself—growed up to be a man!"

Kane met his eyes steadily.

"I hope," he said, and his voice was low, "I hope it's my color of skin you're referring to. I reckon I am tanned up."

Montford shrugged a bovine shoulder.

"Maybe I shouldn't have called you," he said. "I ought to be used to seeing you in a hurry when I'm around."

Kane's thoughtful gaze had not wavered.

"The habit of being in a hurry, Montford," he said, "is good practice for—things a man had best be in a hurry about. Have you ever thought of that?"

Montford saw something baffling, chal-

lenging, in the boring blue eyes. He couldn't exactly identify the light behind them. It puzzled him; and, puzzling, he had no retort. Without speaking another word, but merely grunting, he rode on.

Ross Kane wasn't as he remembered him. He'd bear thinking over. Then—well, one dealt with different men in different ways.

They met a half dozen times after that, over a period of weeks, and always Montford found the new Ross Kane imperturbable under his raillery. There was an aura of adequacy about Kane, something in the alert angle at which he held his arms, something like a danger signal in his easy gaze.

Montford found himself clipping his speech many a time short of the fighting word. Kane needed more sizing up. It didn't pay a man to walk heavy-footed into possible surprises. Better to know all the other fellow has before turning loose on him.

It was after one of these indecisive interchanges with Montford that Kane rode back to the Loop-K ranch-house to find his erstwhile little brother staring dismally at a balance sheet topped by a telegram.

"You look like a Philadelphy Sunday," Ross accused. "What's down?"

"My tail. Everything. We're licked, Ross. The order for the stock we were to ship on Wednesday is canceled. The market's gone to hell."

"Well, won't it come back?"

"Maybe it will. But it won't make any difference to us if it does, Ross. We won't have any stock to sell a month from now. Along with the rest of the jolly news I've had word from the bank that we've got to settle the mortgage on the first—the whole screw.

"Where are we going to get four thousand dollars unless we turn to and loot the bank itself? By God, I've half a mind, Ross, to put a handkerchief up over my face and—"

Ross Kane dropped a hand on his brother's shoulder, gripped it tight.

"Steady, Bill!" he counseled. "Don't talk wild. We're not as close to the poorhouse as you think."

Bill passed over his balance sheet.

"Show me!" he invited.

Ross shook his head.

"The answer isn't there, sonny," he replied. "It's in another bank I know about. We Kanes hold our heads up, Bill. We don't steal—and it's plumb Kane luck that we don't have to."

"What other bank?" Bill asked dully.

"A bank you don't know anything about. I didn't come home broke, Bill. I've got a kind of nest-egg—money I'd made up my mind not to touch unless it was for a purpose nobody could say wasn't good.

"I was sort of aiming to use it for a house and furnishings. You know, me and Sally Blaisdell have been talking quite a little—"

The younger brother raised his head.

"Sally's the girl!" he cried. "And she's said 'yes?' By jings, that's fine! But you needn't think I'd ever let that kind of money go for plain onery business. Not on your life!"

Ross plumped himself into a chair.

"Now, you listen, Bill," he said. "I've got six thousand dollars and more tucked away. Sally and I can wait for the home. I'm going to sink every dollar of that money into the Loop-K.

"The ranch can pay me out of profits when times are better. It's a straight loan to the firm, Bill. We'll square the mortgage and tell this here syndicate you've spoken of to go to the devil."

But Bill's eyes remained obstinate.

"Ross," he said, "I think I'd a lot sooner trot down to Cervesa and stick up the bank. I mean it!"

VI

BILL Kane said that; said he meant it, and said it as if he did mean it. And then, only a couple of days afterward, while the remark still gnawed worrisomely in the back of Ross Kane's head, some one did trot into Cervesa and very efficiently stick up the old Cunningham bank.

It was a daylight job, done in mid afternoon, and accomplished so efficiently that the lone bandit who had shoved his gun

into the teller's face was out of town before the alarm had spread.

Except for a clamorous bandanna found lying in the road over which the horseman had sped, the get-away would have been clean. But the bandanna was very much like one that young Bill Kane had been sporting, and not only was Kane in debt to the bank and in dire straits with the Loop-K, but he had been overheard to talk recklessly about the rights of debtors as opposed to the rights of capital.

A posse rode out to the Loop-K and got Bill; and Ross Kane, coming in from the range a couple of hours afterward, found a kid and a woman in tears. He galloped at breakneck speed into Cervesa, and at the jail demanded admittance to the cell in which they'd put Bill.

"Bill, you four-horned fool!" he cried. "Didn't I tell you I'd raise the wind? What the hell did you want to go and pull a stunt like this for?"

Brother Bill raised a pair of reddened eyes.

"So *you're* another one of them?" he asked evenly. "You think I did it, too? A devil of a brother you are, Ross! Don't talk to me any more. Get out."

Ross stared.

"Listen, Bill," he said: "you're not talking to the sheriff. I'm here to do what I can. If you want out—by Jiminy, I'll shoot you out. It don't make any difference to me, Bill, whether you did it, or whether you didn't.

"I don't care what the case against you is. I'm your big brother, sonny, and I'll sure walk through Hades for you."

Bill's hands were over his ears.

"I won't listen," he said. "I meant what I said. Get out!"

Soberly, Ross Kane went. There was only one explanation of Bill's attitude. For an instant, hope had flamed in his "big brother's" heart; but the renunciation was conclusive. Bill was denying himself the comfort of his own flesh and blood because —because he'd done it.

And there, out on the Loop-K, rocking in each other's arms, were the woman and the child.

Outside the jail a crowd, attracted by the news of the visit of the prisoner's kin, had gathered. Ross Kane saw Sally Blaisdell's face on the outskirts, drawn and anxious. Sid Montford's face was nearer. It wore an evil, malicious grin.

"Me leaving the door unlocked nights all these years—and what I got for neighbors!" Montford jeered.

On the jail steps occurred a miracle of metamorphosis. Rosswell Edward Kane had become, in a twinkling, The Streak of old. He was looking at the baiter out of The Streak's narrowed, icy eyes.

"I wonder, Montford," he said, crooning the words, "if I heard you right. No, you don't need to repeat them. If what you said was intended for what it sounded like to me, you can signify by reaching for your gun. I'll give you that chance. Quick! Show me!"

Some in the crowd began to scatter. Some stood rooted.

Very slowly, very steadily, Sid Montford's hand was creeping toward the holster at his thigh while his eyes held Kane's in a glare. And Kane's hands were at his side. Tense there. He seemed to have lost the power to move.

Montford's voice rose, barbed with scorn:

"I guess you heard me right—you yellow pup!"

A shot put a period to the sentence—one single shot. The crowd surged forward.

"He's killed Ross Kane!" some one shouted from the background. "It was murder."

Some one closer in raised amazed denial:

"No; it's Sid that's down! Plugged square through the heart with his own gun in his hand!"

Kane's gun had gone back into its holster. Ross stood, unscathed and calm, at the foot of the jail steps. Only by his pallor could it have been known that he had passed a crisis; but the pallor was less born of conflict than decision.

He was staring at the men who were carrying Montford into the doctor's office across the street, but what he really saw was a woman and a baby. Gaines, the sheriff, stood before him, and to Gaines Ross Kane addressed himself:

"Sheriff," said he, "now that *that's* done with I've got something to orate that you ought to hear. You've got my brother wrong. If you want the man that robbed the bank, here he is talking to you—telling you about it. Bill's where he is because he didn't want to squeal on me."

Kane's eyes had gone fleetingly to a certain set, white face in the crowd. Resolutely, he wrenched them away.

"That bandanna they found was mine," he continued. "I brought a half dozen of them back to the Loop-K, and I gave a couple to Bill. That's how come he's been seen wearing one. They're all the identical same pattern."

Gaines was looking at the speaker with overt incredulity.

"Ross Kane," he said, "it don't go down. The man that stuck up the bank was a broader build than you—Bill's build. You don't need to say any more. We've got the right man."

Ross glanced again toward the girl. A dry sob arose in his throat. He fought it down.

The kid and the weeping woman obsessed him, too. The tears had to be stopped. Sally and he—well, they could cry it out alone. He spoke loudly, so that all might hear:

"Sheriff," he said, "you've made a mistake. I'm sorry now for what I did, maybe—but just the same I did it. That's been my record all the way back, doing things and being sorry.

"Do you know where I came from before I hit Cervesa this last time? From Plateau Prison—that's where. I had a ten-year stretch there—served three of it and they let me go. Thought I was cured, I guess.

"The stretch? That was for a little thing. One single bank robbery—in Hodge City. But maybe you'd be more interested if I told you what I was called around Hodge—around this whole expansive State. Did you ever hear of The Streak, Sheriff Gaines? Well—that's me!"

"The—Streak?" stammered Gaines. "Why, Ross Kane—"

"On a stack of Bibles," said Kane. "I'm The Streak and The Streak is me, so help me. I'd have got away with this job, too. But my brother—well, it's too strong. I can't go for it." He held out his hands, wrists together. "You won't need the cuffs, but you can use 'em if you want."

Across the street a window opened. A voice shouted down:

"Gaines! Gaines!"

In the window some one was excitedly waving a paper.

"Gaines! Look here. Look what we found on Montford! He's the one stuck up the bank! Was keepin' his own mortgage for a souvayneer!"

On his way out of Cervesa that night, Ross Kane paused at Sally Blaisdell's gate to make a briefer speech than that of the afternoon.

"Good-by," he said.

The girl with the gray eyes put a detaining hand on his arm.

"Ross," she said, "I don't believe that what you said at the jail was true—not a word of it."

Kane gulped.

"It was, Sally," he said miserably. "And I'm goin'."

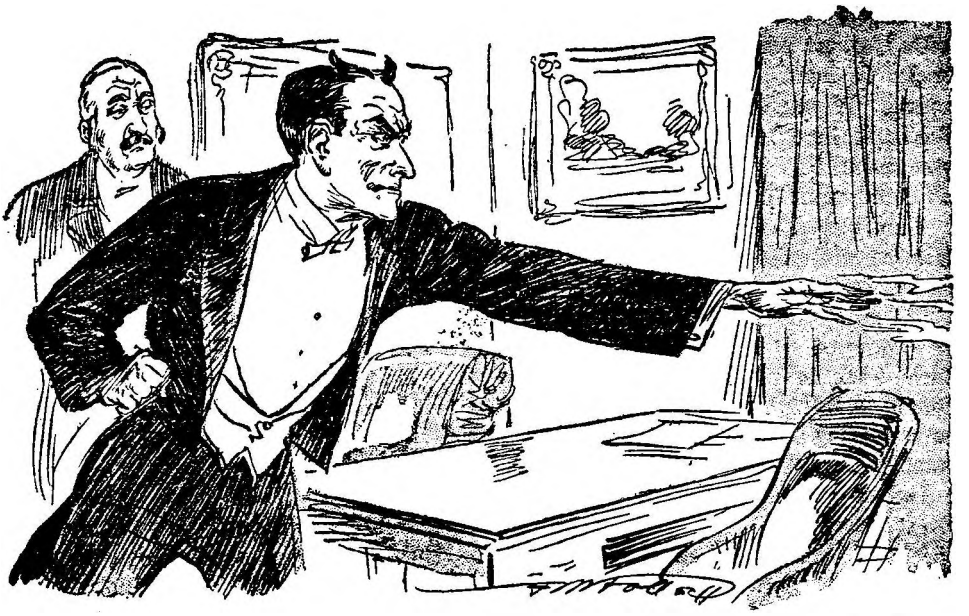
"What," she asked softly, "if I don't want you to?"

"You'd never feel the same, Sally—knowing it was true."

Her hand closed tighter.

"Ross Kane, if it *was* true I'd only have the greater pride in you," she said. "No matter what you've done, no matter what you've been, this afternoon wipes the slate, I think, in God's eyes. I know, my dear, in mine."

Over the gate, she kissed him; and The Streak died again there—forever.



The hypnotist shot forth his left hand, and an—

THE HAND OF HORROR

By Owen Fox Jerome

"WE DIDN'T JUST STUMBLE ONTO THIS GHASTLY AFFAIR," REMARKED MARTIN. "WE WERE SENT HERE FOR A STRANGE REASON"

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

THE star reporter of the Washington *Times-Journal,* Fred Martin, is sent to interview the South American celebrity, Professor Debara at his apartment in Kensington Mansions. Accompanied by a *Times-Journal* photographer, Tracy by name, Martin calls at Kensington Mansions, but instead of finding the professor, to his horror, he discovers a young woman who has been murdered by the breaking of her neck. She is the wife of the diplomat, Palmer Hollisworth. Martin had stumbled upon this tragedy through a misunderstanding of Professor Debara's address, which was Kingsley Mansions instead of Kensington Mansions. But apparently some one had a hand in the misunderstanding.

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME "COCK-EYED" LUCK!

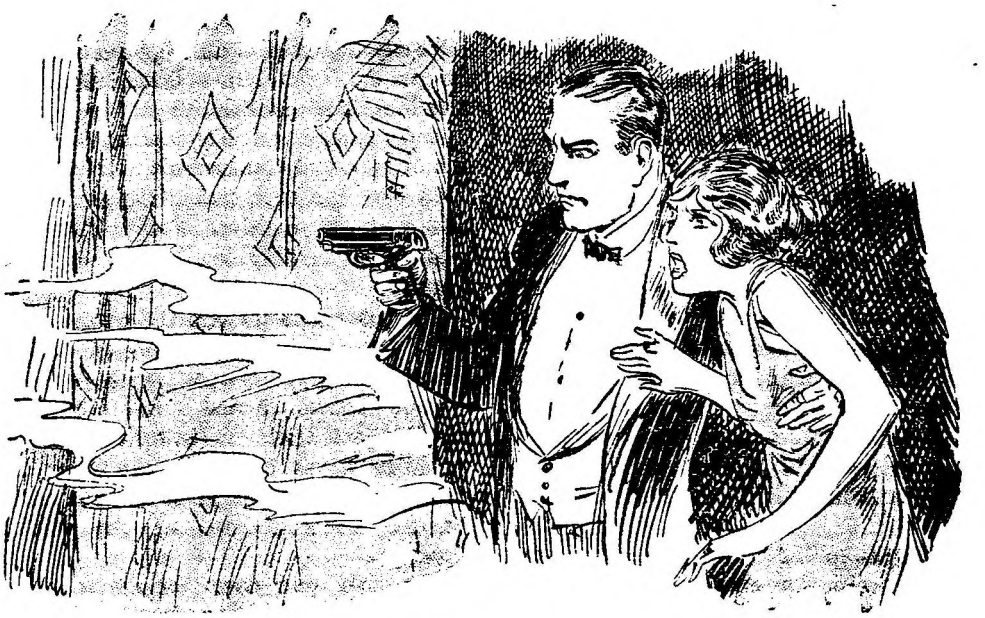
"PALMER HOLLISWORTH!" echoed Martin, his voice trembling in his nervous excitement. "A modern changeling. We're up against something terribly out of the ordinary, Clif."

Clifton nodded dumbly. He was beyond coherent speech. Footsteps in the corridor and an authoritative rapping on the door broke the silence. Necessity brought them to their senses.

"Sit down on the bed!" Martin commanded Hollisworth in a sharp whisper. "Hide that brief case and that wrapping paper, Clif."

Pocketing the revolver, he stepped to the door and opened it. Without stood the

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 5



—invisible wave of magnetic influence engulfed them

second mate of the Sustanis and a steward. The officer eyed him sharply and made as if to step into the room.

"I beg pardon," said Martin in a calm voice. "This stateroom is occupied."

"I trust the occupants are all alive," said the mate tersely. "One side, please."

"Just what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

The officer became a trifle milder in demeanor.

"There was a shot fired in this part of the vessel," he explained. "Was it fired in here?"

"No one has been shot in this room," evaded Martin, shaking his head in perplexity. "Mr. Pointell, Mr. Clifton and I were so engaged in our conversation that we heard nothing out of the ordinary from any of the other staterooms hereabouts."

He stepped aside and indicated the two men beside the bed. Clifton, in a touch of genius, had thrust a package of cigarettes into Hollisworth's lax fingers and was holding a match preparatory to lighting the little roll of tobacco between his own lips. He held that pose, his head cocked inquiringly toward the door.

"What's up, Fred?" he inquired casually.

Hollisworth was in a complete daze. He sat perfectly still and said nothing. The tableau was so perfect and disarming that the mate's suspicions melted away.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," he said as he half turned to go. "Doubtless it was one of the other—" He broke off and sniffed the air quickly.

"What th' hell?" he growled, entering the room swiftly and beckoning the steward to follow. "I smell gunpowder. What's going on in here? Speak up, one of you birds."

Martin shrugged in resignation.

"Keep your shirt on, Mr. Mate," he

Philip MacCray, well known Chicago detective, who has been summoned by Mrs. Hollisworth, learns that his client has been murdered. He assumes the responsibility of investigation and enlists the aid of Reporter Martin. They learn that the finger-prints about the room in which Mrs. Hollisworth was killed are those of her missing husband. But it is apparent that the chair with which the deed was done was wielded by a left-handed man, and Hollisworth is not left-handed.

Martin and Detective MacCray continue the hunt for Hollisworth, but a week drags by and still they have found no trace of him. In a traffic accident Martin meets Professor Debara's daughter, Celia, and the two become good friends. Then when Martin boards a Florida-bound steamer with a reporter friend he suddenly comes upon the missing Hollisworth, who apparently has been suffering from some strange mental lapse.

said. "Nothing has happened except one shot was accidentally fired. No one was hurt."

"This stateroom belongs to Mr. Pointell only, sir," the steward informed the mate. "I do not place these two other men."

"You'll place us in a minute, my friend," snapped Martin. "And it will be a long time before you forget us. We are Clifton and Martin of the *Times-Journal*. And this is Mr. Palmer Hollisworth, the man who has been missing for a week since the murder of his wife."

Before the ship's officer could more than blink his eyes at this overwhelming information Palmer Hollisworth started to his feet.

His eyes rolling wildly, his entire body atremble with an emotion that no man present could have successfully analyzed, he flung up his arms in a gesture of horror.

"Where—where am I?" he articulated.

"In your stateroom aboard the Sustanis under the name of Pointell," supplied Martin cripsly.

"Wh—what day is this?"

"Saturday, January the thirty-first!"

The diplomat stared from one man to the other, as if looking for a denial of this statement. Then, reading confirmation in every face, he shuddered convulsively. His face depicted the depths of despair and agony to such an extent that it was pain to gaze upon him.

"January the twenty-fourth!" he uttered. "A week ago! Ah! Ah—" he screamed in mortal terror. It was a scream so awful in its texture that the others shrank back aghast. "Lillian! Lillian! Lillian!" he sobbed. "My God! I am indeed a lost soul!"

Before the others could move to intercept him he flung open the cabin door leading to the outer deck and rushed straight for the rail. Bunched for a instant in the doorway, the others were tardy by two or three seconds.

Without the slightest hesitation the mad diplomat flung himself out into the icy waters of the Potomac, narrowly missing the railing of the main deck, while Fred Martin clutched at empty space behind him.

"Stop the ship!" the reporter cried at the mate. "Put out a boat! We must save him at all hazards."

And, tearing off his topcoat and the lighter garment underneath, he dropped them onto the deck and plunged over the side after the fugitive. Easily enough to relate, but terribly hard to effect that rescue.

The icy waters bit into the young man's flesh with the chilling grip of winter. Hampered by the clothes he had not had time to discard, carried a full fifty yards past the spot where Hollisworth had leaped before he struck the water, the bitter cold clutching at his vitals, he struck out lustily for the bobbing head of the suicidal diplomat.

The man went down for the fourth or fifth time just as Martin reached him. With a sinking realization that the man would not come up again, already winded by his rapid swimming, he took a quick breath and dived.

It was luck or Providence as much as skill that was responsible for the clutching of that drifting body. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Hollisworth was unconscious. He could not fight against being rescued, but was he past the aid of the pulmotor?

Martin's lungs were in a state of collapse when he finally fought his way to the surface with his burden. Here, except for the terrible cold, he got relief and paddling along on his back with the head of the unconscious man against his chest he awaited help.

The mate had acted promptly enough. The engines of the Sustanis had been stopped and a boat lowered to aid the swimmer. The little craft came alongside, and strong hands relieved Martin of his burden.

He himself was helped into the boat, and he lay shivering in the stern as they rowed back to the steamer, whose engines were now churning the water in reverse.

There was a pulmotor aboard the Sustanis and a ship's surgeon. Had it not been for this excellent combination Palmer Hollisworth would never have regained consciousness. As it was, the spark of life was nearly extinct.

While Martin changed into garments furnished him by the first mate, Clifton was not idle. Alexandria, a few minutes downstream, was wirelessed to have an ambulance and a physician at the wharf in readiness for a speedy trip back to Washington.

The Emergency Hospital on New York Avenue was wirelessed for a room and a consulting doctor, while police headquarters were wirelessed to find Detective MacCray immediately and send him to the hospital.

Thanks to the steward, the news of Hollisworth's identity was all over the ship. But all this was left behind at Alexandria. A policeman was waiting with the ambulance when, with the precious portfolio and Hollisworth's suit case, they disembarked.

The doctor with the ambulance shook his head dubiously at his patient's condition.

"I doubt if he lives until we reach Washington," he said. "This is but the merest shell of a man. That attempt to drown himself just about finished him."

The ship's surgeon had given the same verdict.

"Doctor," said Martin, pugnaciously, "this man must live to talk. Shoot him with hypodermics every five minutes if necessary to keep him from dying. It's less than ten miles from here to the hospital where they are awaiting this patient. Until we get there it's up to you."

The driver made the trip in splendid time. In less than thirty minutes Palmer Hollisworth lay under the administrations of a surgeon in the Emergency Hospital.

In the hallway, while they awaited his return to consciousness, Martin related to MacCray and Sergeant Clausen the details of the discovery. Detective Perry was also present.

CHAPTER XXXII

AWAITING THE KNELL

"I NEVER heard of such cock-eyed luck in my life," Detective Perry commented in tones of mingled envy and disgust.

Clifton turned on him swiftly.

"Call it luck if you want to, you flat-headed bull," he jerked out angrily. "I know better; I was there. Fred Martin has the courage to back up his hunches. He backs up all the luck he has with some mighty clear thinking and quick action."

Sergeant Clausen motioned toward the stairway.

"Outside with the argument, boys," he said. "This is a hospital."

They dropped the discussion at once. The doctor came out of the room and conferred with the sergeant.

"The patient has returned to consciousness and is burning up with a high fever. He is delirious. It is impossible to see him under any circumstances, and I cannot tell when you may see him."

"Aw, say," protested Perry quickly, "Is he going to die?"

"I cannot say. Undoubtedly he would if I let you exhaust him with questions during his lucid moments."

"Give us your exact opinion, doctor," said MacCray quietly. "It will go no farther, I promise you."

The surgeon glanced at the fastidious little man queerly.

"The patient," he said deliberately, "is going into pneumonia if I am anything of a diagnostician. His nervous system is exhausted, and he appears to me to have gone under a terrible shock or strain."

"You don't know who your patient is?"

"No, sir. That makes no difference to me."

"Perhaps not. Nevertheless, I shall tell you. It is Palmer Hollisworth."

The surgeon merely raised his eyebrows. Then he nodded briefly.

"That would account for his symptoms of shock or great strain," he said quietly. "Perhaps I can tell you something more definite in the morning. If pneumonia develops quickly enough so that I can type it to-night I will give him serum before morning."

MacCray called Clausen off to one side. In a few moments they came back to the quiet-voiced group.

"Doctor," said Clausen to the unyielding surgeon, "we asked for you in the hopes that you can save the patient's life. We are not going to attempt to interfere with

your treatment and orders. But this is a most urgent case.

"In the event that Hollisworth takes a turn for the worse and dies before we could get here, we would lose priceless information. On the other hand, we do not want to bolster up the patient so as to pump him and then let him die. Do you see our predicament? This, then, is my request:

"I will detail two men to stay here until they can see Hollisworth if it takes until morning. Give an order that chairs be placed in the corridor by this door. They will not disturb you nor attempt to crash the gate. On the other hand, you are to call them in at the very first moment. Is it an agreement?"

"Which two men?" demanded the surgeon keenly.

"Detective MacCray, who is specially detailed to this case, and Fred Martin, his assistant and the man who rescued the patient from drowning."

The famous physician glanced at the two men shrewdly. He nodded shortly. "It's an agreement."

MacCray handed the brief case filled with sixty-seven thousand dollars in stolen securities to Sergeant Clausen.

"Lock this up at headquarters," he requested quietly. "And don't move a hand further in the case until I see you. If you do I'll not answer for the result."

"In other words, you mean not to let Perry gum the works?" smiled Clausen in understanding.

MacCray nodded. "Perry's a good policeman, and I've an idea he will be of great service later on."

Left at the hospital, the detective and the reporter settled down for a long vigil. They relieved each other for supper and for a few minutes out in the open air every hour or so as the night wore on.

Not for a moment were both of them away from the door of the sick room. The physician in charge of the case, Dr. Richzig, did not remain constantly in the room. A special nurse was detailed for this purpose, while the surgeon made hourly visits.

He reported his observations frankly to the two men out in the corridor. The fever was steadily advancing, the condition of the patient worse. It was the most peculiar case of his wide experience. The progress of the disease was the most rapid he had ever seen.

As the night advanced he offered the puzzled opinion that the patient was dying of sheer terror as much as pneumonia. He could hold out no hopes of a recovery; even a return to sane consciousness was problematical. He would do his best. That was all.

While they fidgeted in their chairs outside that door in the dimly lighted corridor MacCray and Martin went over and over the latest developments in low tones.

While the fever of the patient mounted to a degree not commensurate with human endurance the mental state of the two men on the other side of the door reached a height of emotion that equaled it in intensity.

"This makes the second time that you have run into the weird and unnatural in this Hollisworth affair," MacCray pondered after he had learned the most minute details that the other could give him on the apprehension and capture of the missing diplomat.

"First, that black and gold chair in the boudoir with its depressing psychical effect. And now, this Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde personality of Hollisworth."

"You don't doubt me?" said Martin quickly. "It couldn't have been an hallucination on my part because Clifton experienced it, too."

"Certainly it was no hallucination," agreed the detective grimly. "He was leaving the city without interference, wasn't he? Hollisworth would never have reached the dock as Hollisworth."

"If that was a new kind of—of psychic disguise—"

"Civilization would collapse," concluded MacCray crisply. "The law could not stand against phenomena of this nature. Criminals would run wild; the world would be a madhouse. However, I decry such a thing as supernatural phenomena. Occultism and mysticism is as much bunk as astrology.

"Understand, I do not refuse to admit the existence of psychic phenomena, but

all these things have a natural explanation —they work according to fixed laws the same as mathematics.

"When the human race is older and wiser and more spiritually inclined there will be more of these unknown higher laws understood. Heaven knows I wish I could have the opportunity of running against the *outré* element in this case that you have had."

"What do you make of the puzzle? It sounds so prosaic to tell of it. It is impossible to describe the feeling which gripped me."

"I must refuse to form an opinion until I have learned more. If Hollisworth only lives to talk!"

A murky gray light was lightening the windows and stealing like a thief down the corridors of the hospital when the moaning of Palmer Hollisworth ceased.

With the coming of dawn his fever broke and his temperature dropped several degrees below normal. He lay in a comatose state which spoke volumes to his nurse. Dr. Richzig was summoned at once.

The surgeon had remained on duty in the house of pain all night. He put in his appearance hurriedly. Martin's eyes met those of the detective significantly. They were on their feet when the nurse came out.

"The patient is dying," were the soft words. "There is no hope. You may go into the room."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A LAST TESTAMENT

WITHOUT speaking MacCray led the way to the bedside of Palmer Hollisworth. The physician was preparing a hypodermic injection as they entered. This he shot into the arm of the dying man as they approached the bed.

"The third stimulant," he informed them tersely, his strong, capable fingers working rapidly. "I'm afraid he is gone."

"Is there no drastic means of reviving him?" demanded MacCray swiftly.

"I have sent for a saline solution to inject into the veins," said Richzig. "If anything will revive him that should."

"But not if the heart is on the verge of stopping," said the detective decisively as he placed an ear against Hollisworth's chest. "When you inject that salt solution, Dr. Richzig, if it does not work in less than sixty seconds I demand that you make a strychnine or adrenalin injection directly into the muscle of the heart. I leave it to you to choose the best possible stimulant."

"You seem to know something of medicine," murmured the surgeon as the nurse returned with the saline solution.

"But nothing comparable to your knowledge, sir. The solution of a great mystery rests in your hands."

Unquestionably MacCray knew how to handle people. The famous surgeon, who needed no flattery from a detective to increase his self-esteem, worked like mad.

In the course of eleven minutes the eyelids of the unconscious man fluttered, his sobbing breath became more apparent, and his imperceptible pulse grew momentarily stronger under the doctor's anxious fingers.

Slowly the eyes opened, and a perfectly sane man looked up into the grim yet kind face of the detective. Almost at once a wild look began to form in those orbs which once had been the eyes of a brilliant being.

"Easy, Palmer Hollisworth," said MacCray in a level, commanding voice. "You are safe here among friends, and you are dying. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," came in a whisper so faint that the nurse at the foot of the bed could not hear it.

"Nothing can harm you now," went on the detective. "You are past the power of any living soul to hurt you. Do you know me? I am Philip MacCray. You last saw me in the president's room of the Chicago National Trust Company. Do you remember?"

"Yes," again came that choked whisper.

"I came too late to prevent the murder of your wife. I am sorry. I tried to save you from disaster. Will you answer my questions now?"

"Yes, if my strength lasts."

"Can you keep him up by stimulants for this talk, doctor?" MacCray demanded of the surgeon.

"I can try," nodded Richzig.

"Dismiss the nurse if possible. This is a private conference."

Richzig nodded to the nurse and glanced toward the door. After the four men were alone in the death chamber MacCray addressed the stricken man.

"Mr. Hollisworth, what became of your fortune?" he interrogated.

"I turned it over to a demon."

"Was that your intention with your wife's estate?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I could not help it."

"Blackmail?"

"Oh, God, if only that!"

"Explain yourself."

"It is a long story that would take hours to tell. Briefly, I had a nervous breakdown two years ago in Brazil. I selected a physician at random, a man who had quite some repute as a healer with hypnotic suggestion. Voluntarily I placed myself in his power.

"He did cure me of my condition only to enslave my mind in bondage. He is a demon! God, if I'd only known! I cannot picture the months of agony I endured while I smiled upon the world and tried to care for affairs of my office, when I knew not what moment that fiend would break in on my thoughts and compel me to go to him.

"I finally had to leave Brazil. I fled to escape him. But flight was vain. He knew everything about me. He was already in this country when I came home. I sacrificed my entire fortune to be rid of him.

"He promised to release his hold over me. But he lied. After he got my estate he demanded my wife's. When I refused to accede to this, he compelled me against my will.

"My will! I had no will. I was but a tool in the hands of a devil."

The speaker paused from exhaustion.

"You were not under hypnotic control in Chicago when I saw you," pointed out the detective crisply.

"Hypnotic suggestion," sighed Hollisworth. "He had but to look at me to send me into a trance. With each hypnosis his power ascended. All the way to Chicago I fought against that command, but I was powerless to disobey."

"The patient is sinking," cut in Richzig in a matter-of-fact tone. "No time to discuss hypnotism."

"Go on with your story," MacCray directed the dying man. "Leave out nothing. I'll not interrupt."

"When you let me go," whispered Hollisworth, "I came back to Washington to do just what you said. I told my wife everything. She had known of the doctor's treatments in Brazil, but she had known nothing of the terrible hold the man had over me.

"God bless her! She wanted to give up her inheritance right away for my sake. But I wouldn't think of it. Somehow, your interference had broken the fiend's control over me. I heard nothing from him during the two days we discussed the matter. My mind was tortured with doubts. We exhausted every possible suggestion.

"Lillian even wanted to go to that demon on her knees and beg for my freedom from his mental dominance. I knew that such a course was futile. What if he might succeed in getting her into his clutches?

"The third day we had reached no decision. We were both frantic, but Lillian was the calmer of the two. It was the day of the eclipse. We were in the boudoir, talking as she dressed.

"I thought of going to kill my Nemesis, but I knew that I would be powerless the instant I met his glance. But time was pressing. At any hour he was liable to confront me and plunge me into any sort of crime to ruin me since the attempt to get my wife's estate had failed.

"I was sitting in that—that black chair," he shuddered throughout his length and groaned aloud. "I got up and paced the floor. I approached the windows just as the eclipse began. In our anxiety we had forgotten about that. I switched on the light over the mirror for her. And then I kissed her. She embraced me hungrily, yearningly.

"'My poor, poor boy,' she said, the tears dimming her eyes. 'I shall see the secret

service and the police department and lay the whole case before them. That is our last resort, but they will know what to do.'

"I protested on her account, but she had reached a decision. Public disgrace, resignation from the diplomatic service—nothing mattered to her save my liberty and mental freedom. 'I shall call them right now and make an appointment to see them,' she cried resolutely.

"She arose and started toward the telephone which was in another room. I no longer protested. A great hope sprang up in my bosom. Perhaps she was right. God bless my stanch little wife!"

The whispering voice ceased and Hollisworth moaned in horror and closed his eyes.

"Go on," commanded MacCray in a hard voice that seemed to lunge against the dying man's mind to tear the rest of his story from him.

"She walked toward the door. As she passed that chair—oh, I cannot go on. What I saw could not have happened. I was the victim of an illusion. I—I—oh, my God! Lillian! Lillian!"

"What took place?" demanded MacCray in a terrible voice, his gray eyes blazing into the darker orbs of the diplomat. "Tell me what you saw."

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN THE REALM OF THE UNEARTHLY

THE dying man half raised from his pillow. His eyes took on a wild expression. He clutched the detective's wrist with a clawlike grip.

"As she passed that chair," he gasped in an awful whisper, "the thing drew back and sprang into the air behind her. It hung poised for a brief second while I stared in amazed horror.

"I attempted to cry out in fear, but it was too late. With the darting of a snake's tongue the chair crashed forward against her neck and flung her against the wall by the door. Before my terrified eyes it settled back to the floor.

"*But nobody had been touching that chair!* There was not another soul in the apartment!"

The diplomat shuddered again and fell back upon his pillow. His pulse skipped a beat under the surgeon's fingers and then fluttered erratically.

Without a bit of lost motion Richzig started to make another deft injection. There was utter silence as they watched with bated breath to see if the patient would revive.

After a moment the man did so.

"Lillian!" he murmured in tones of anguish. "My dear wife! Oh, God, it was horrible!"

"What did you do?" sharply asked MacCray.

Hollisworth looked up as if in surprise to see the detective above him.

"Do? I don't know. How long I stood there I cannot remember. All I could see was the form of my wife stretched lifeless on the floor. I would have attacked that demoniac chair and smashed it, but I was afraid—I was afraid.

"In some terrible manner that arch-fiend had struck to prevent Lillian from laying my case before the police. I finally rushed madly from the room on my way to see the man who was responsible for this tragedy. To make sure he was where I could find him I grasped the phone to call him.

"And—and—that is the last thing I can remember until I found myself in a stateroom on board a vessel bound for God only knows where.

"There were two men with me. They told me it was a week later. I knew I had lost my mind. I tried to drown—drown—"

"Yes, I know," snapped MacCray sharply. "But who was this doctor in Brazil? Who is this man you speak of, and what is his address?"

"The demon? Dr. Dax is his name. I don't know where he lives. He always had me call him at—at—"

The weak whisper ceased, and Palmer Hollisworth relapsed into unconsciousness. The eyes of the detective met the eyes of the great surgeon across the bed. The latter compressed his lips and nodded his head.

"Well?" queried the detective.

"Well," replied the surgeon in a solemn voice as he arose and led the way toward the foot of the bed, "if you can swallow

that story and believe it you are the greatest detective I have ever met."

"Why do you say that?" demanded MacCray sharply, following the doctor.

"Because it has the elements of truth in it."

"You mean to say that you would accept the statement that an inanimate piece of furniture could, and did, of its own volition, leap up into the air and kill a human being?"

"Not necessarily that, sir. Hollisworth's account is partly fantastic. He was a hypnotic subject. You understand what happened when he went to the phone, I presume? He got in touch with his control—and this Dr. Dax hypnotized him by voice alone.

"He has been in a hypnotic state until brought violently out of it yesterday afternoon. That blow on the head which knocked him out was doubtless responsible. As for the chair, I do not pretend to explain it.

"Perhaps Dax was present and committed the murder, later hypnotizing Hollisworth and putting the story into his head that he has just related. Perhaps he committed the murder himself under hypnotic control."

"On the contrary," said MacCray calmly, "the story Hollisworth told corresponds exactly with the known facts. I'm not going to make any statements about that chair business myself, but you challenged my powers of imagination and credulity a moment ago. Let me tell you something to ponder over.

"That chair was used to commit the murder, and there were no finger-prints on it. Palmer Hollisworth and his wife were alone in their apartment, and neither of them wore gloves."

Martin took no part in this conversation, amazing though the subject was. He remained beside the bed and stared down at the diplomat's features. Where had Dr. Dax told him to call?

"Mr. Hollisworth, Mr. Hollisworth," the reporter cried earnestly, gripping the man's shoulder. "Where were you to call Dr. Dax? As surely as you hope for justice, answer me. Where was Dr. Dax?"

"Too late, my boy," murmured Dr. Richzig pityingly. "The man is dead."

The surgeon and the detective resumed their pathognomonic discussion.

"You refer to a work on psychopathology. Hypnotic suggestion carried to surprising degree."

"Needn't defend the psychic to me. Compilation of authentic records by French astronomer. Case in mind which corresponds to this most nearly was—"

The reporter ignored all this. The dying man had given them a priceless clew in the name of the master criminal—Dr. Dax. But where to find him? It was just as hopeless as it had been before the apprehension of Hollisworth.

How could MacCray take this last disappointment so calmly? For the nonce Martin had forgotten that there was another lead to the mysterious Dr. Dax.

"Hollisworth!" he exclaimed earnestly, pouring his very soul into his plea. "In the name of God, where did you call this Dr. Dax?"

The lips of the man already pronounced dead parted ever so faintly.

In a whisper so faint that it could easily have been imagined, a sound that was more an intuitive feeling than a sound, there was a response:

"Doc—Dax—at—Palace Nocturne—"

That was all. When he looked sharply at the man's face he saw that it had already begun to set in the death mask. Had that answer been naught but a mockery, a figment of his own imagination?

Yet, why should he have thought of such a place as the Palace Nocturne? He wondered if his ears had deceived him. And while he wondered, the wings of the death angel fluttered through this house of pain.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PATRON OF THE ARTS

UNDAY to Andrew Peterman was a day of relaxation. The daily strain of pursuing the vocation of a successful broker—and Mr. Peterman did not slight his legitimate business—and then the nightly strain of handling the

problems of Carl Monte consumed all the energy one human frame could generate.

The successful assumption of two distinct personalities—and what double life is permanently successful?—was very exacting. No one realized this more clearly than the artistically inclined bond broker.

Thus, Sunday was a day when he was neither broker nor gambler. He was a gentleman of leisure, an elderly philanthropist who gazed upon the world with a level eye and a kindly mien.

A late breakfast, a stroller through the parks in good weather, an omnivorous reader on bad days, a six o'clock diner at one of the choicest restaurants or hotels of the city, a frequenter of the theater, or a caller on friends in the evening—this was Mr. Andrew Peterman on Sunday.

It must have been nearer twelve o'clock than ten this morning when he finished with the lovely breakfast sent up to his apartment from the first-class grill down below, and leaned back with a sigh of enjoyment.

He was a *gourmet* in the study of viands just as he was a connoisseur in the matter of art. Sunday was the day the real soul of the man found expression.

Rising from the table, he gave a gentle tug at the narrow strip of Persian tapestry which constituted his bell cord. Instantly his *valet de chambre* entered with a bundle of papers under his arm.

This latter, who was also the philanthropist's chauffeur and sole intimate, escorted his master to the Sybaritic living room and placed the newspapers on a taboret beside a comfortable easy-chair. He adjusted the cushions deftly, and withdrew silently to the rear of the apartment.

Mr. Peterman settled himself for an hour with the news of the day. Fully dressed, except that he wore house slippers and a Chinese dressing gown, he was ready for what the day might bring forth to a harmless gentleman on the sunny side of life.

He selected a cigar from the ornate humidor at his elbow. Carefully he clipped the end from this aromatic roll of tobacco that cost him thirty dollars per hundred—by the hundred. He was just holding a brazier to the tip when there came the muffled ringing of the doorbell.

He frowned disapprovingly as the silent-footed valet passed through the room on his way to the entrance hall. In a moment the man was back with a calling card on a tiny silver tray. Mr. Peterman accepted the card distastefully.

He glanced at it, and the frown on his face lifted instantly, changing into one of sunshine's children. It was a plain card, which bore but one word written in ink and prisoned by quotation marks. "Damon."

"Show Mr. Phillips in at once," he directed his man, himself rising and placing a chair for his visitor.

The neatly scoured and jauntily attired figure of Detective MacCray appeared in the doorway. MacCray had improved the hours since dawn in a more or less personal manner. While he occupied himself in the pursuit of cleanliness his mind functioned with greater ease and lucidity.

At this moment he was physically and mentally the most completely scoured and tubbed individual in the District of Columbia.

"Ah, my dear Damon," exclaimed Peterman, going forward to greet him. "This is an unexpected pleasure. I had begun to despair of ever getting you to come to my home."

MacCray grinned as he let the valet relieve him of derby and topcoat. His gloves he removed with care and placed them in his breast pocket. Then he clasped hands with his host.

Peterman noted with approval the well-kept nails of his new friend. From these his eyes traveled down the trim form in double-breasted suit of dark gray to the elegantly shod feet.

"I fear, Damon, that you are somewhat of a dandy," he smiled.

"Admitted, sir. You do not seem averse to little fopperies of dress yourself."

"I am not. We are kindred souls, my friend. Do you realize that this is but the fourth time we have met since the little affair of the Union Station? I trust that the business which has prevented you from enjoying my hospitality has been concluded. At least, don't let it intervene to-day. You treated me rather shabbily last Sunday.

"To-day you must dine with me. Let

me see—where can I take you? Would you like to visit the National Museum this afternoon? It is down along the Mall—in the Smithsonian grounds."

"Instead, suppose we remain here for a time and deepen our acquaintance?"

"Agreed," said Peterman, indicating the chair he had drawn up beside the taboret containing humidor and charcoal brazier. "Let me recommend my cigars, Damon. I do not mean to seem boastful."

MacCray seated himself and accepted a *perfecto*. He smelled of it delicately. Then he slipped it between his teeth and back along one side of his jaw with an anticipatory grin.

"My nastiest habit," he explained. "No light, thanks. I chew my cigars; I do not smoke."

"Tobacco is to be enjoyed as one enjoys it," agreed Peterman as he lifted the brazier to his own cigar. "How about a little shaker of something? My man, Glepen, is one of the best mixers in America. It is a little early for me, as I have just finished breakfast, but you—"

"Never alone," declined MacCray, smiling.

"Then I will drink," decided Peterman promptly. "Glepen, a shaker of Martini cocktails."

Unquestionably Glepen was every bit the artist his master had proclaimed him. He was a genius in what was rapidly becoming a lost art, an art never found in olden days in the corner saloon, but in exclusive clubs and other resorts of the epicure.

Nearly an hour passed, the third shaker—this time, a Manhattan—had been turned bottom upward, the second cigar had become a wraith of nicotine, a genuine friendship had been warmly cemented, and conversation had reached that ripe stage of confidences.

"Do you know, my friend," the genial host waxed mellow as old wine, "you have never asked me the details of that unfortunate little matter which led to our acquaintance."

"No," agreed MacCray quietly. "I have not. One gentleman cannot interrogate another over the ethics of a simple favor."

"True, true," mused his host. "But I owe you an explanation. The few hours we have thus far spent in company have been devoted to a limited tour of Washington. I will explain."

"As you will," remarked the detective, carelessly.

"The worthy Sergeant Clausen did arrest the wrong men that night," chuckled Peterman in reminiscence. "However, he went to the depot particularly to arrest me. The reason? I have no proof of my suspicions, but I have an idea my private wire had been tapped.

"Why, you might ask? For this simple reason, Damon. I have given too freely to art institutions. The police are interested in my source of income."

"I see," murmured MacCray politely, toying with his goblet.

"Is giving a crime?" inquired Peterman gently.

"Not if one has it to give," responded MacCray thoughtfully.

"I have given all," smiled the other. "And I may say that I am the happiest man in the world to-day."

"I believe you," MacCray answered, daintily fishing the strip of lemon peel from his glass and placing it between his lips.

"Art is the crowning glory of civilization," philosophized his host, eyes shining with fervor. "There is nothing so beautiful as—the beautiful. 'Beauty is the creator of the universe.'"

His hand caressed the exquisitely molded figure of a woman which served as a handle for the brazier.

"There are many forms of beauty," murmured MacCray, carefully clipping the sodden end from his cigar and wiping his shears on a handkerchief. He stared at the brown stain on the square of cambric in distaste.

"Of all the arts which follow the nine muses, sir, out of your lifetime of study and experience, what do you consider the most beautiful?"

The eyes of Andrew Peterman traveled from the bit of brass under his fingers to the face of the speaker and then toward a statuette on a pedestal at one side of the handsome room. The statuette was a

replica in miniature of the Greek Slave, by Hiram Powers.

"If you are asking me to choose between all the arts, I cannot," he made answer slowly. "But if you ask me to name the most marvelous object of beauty given to mankind, I can do so."

"And that is?"

"A beautiful woman," replied Peterman firmly.

The light in MacCray's eyes suddenly sharpened. The opening he had awaited with the patience of a patriarch was before him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A GRIM VISION

QUITE agree with you, Mr. Peterman," he said honestly. "And if that beautiful woman has intellect and culture, too?"

"The delight of the gods!" exclaimed the patron of the arts. "Human ecstasy could not be greater."

"Did you know Mrs. Palmer Hollisworth?" inquired MacCray, twisting the topic into a divergent channel.

"Not personally," Andrew Peterman reflected. "I knew of her."

"I suppose you read the account of her death?"

Peterman shuddered.

"I did," he admitted, genuine tears of pity coming to his eyes. "An atrocious murder, wasn't it?"

"Lillian Hollisworth was such a woman as we have described."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the connoisseur, his face saddened. "It was the wanton destruction of a precious flower."

"The time has come for me to tell you a little story," said MacCray.

He leaned forward in his chair and took the bundle of newspapers onto his lap. Swiftly he ran through them, searching for the latest edition of the *Times-Journal*. Finding it, he folded the front page of the news section so that a certain portion was uppermost.

"There is an aftermath to the story of the Hollisworth affair," he said. "I cannot call it an epilogue because it is not the end. All the papers carry an account of the capture of Palmer Hollisworth, but the *Times-Journal* contains the most authentic account. Read this."

Wonderingly the broker did so. It was a graphic account of the apprehension of the missing diplomat by Martin and Clifton of the newspaper staff.

Although Fred Martin had written the story, it was a modest account of his actions in the exploit. There was no hint of the weird transformation in the stateroom of the Sustanis. The article concluded:

> Although rushed at once by ambulance to the emergency hospital on New York Avenue and placed under the care of Dr. Otto Richzig, Mr. Hollisworth passed into double pneumonia without rousing from his coma. The shock of the icy plunge and the intake of water to his delicate lungs was too much for his constitution. Without recovering consciousness he died at an early hour this morning.
>
> If he was guilty of the murder of his wife he was not granted the opportunity of making a confession. The police are balked by this unfortunate impasse.
>
> There was nothing on the diplomat's person of importance and nothing of the nature of a clew in his effects except the possession of a receipt for a package he had placed in care of the purser of the Sustanis. The authorities are investigating.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Peterman with a sigh. "I wonder why he did it."

"Now for my story," MacCray said quietly. "It is not always best for the papers to print all the facts. As a matter of fact, Hollisworth did recover consciousness. And he made an amazing confession."

The detective proceeded to give the attentive broker the true story of the case, including the Chicago history.

"Now, what do you think of such a yarn as that?" he inquired at the conclusion.

Andrew Peterman considered the matter thoughtfully.

"An unbelievable story!" he uttered. "Strange! Strange! And yet there are many strange things in this prosaic old world of ours."

"You are inclined to doubt?"

Peterman raised a protesting hand.

"Not I," he said. "How can I doubt or believe when I know nothing of hypnotism. I am inclined to be skeptical about that chair episode."

"I shall never take issue with any one on that," MacCray remarked. "It is quite possible that Hollisworth wielded that murderous weapon while *en rapport* with his control, and then, following instructions, wiped the back of the chair free of finger-prints."

"You don't believe that, however?"

"I don't know," confessed MacCray.

"Yet you do not seem to regard Hollisworth as the murderer."

"Most certainly not! Do you?"

"No," admitted Peterman slowly. "No, the man who controlled him was the real murderer, regardless of how that chair struck the blow. That is, if long distance hypnotism is practical."

"Hypnotism is an advancing science," MacCray disserted. "There are different degrees of hypnosis. Self-suggestion is a form of hypnosis which can be practiced by an individual.

"Under the control of a master operator a subject is put into a state resembling sleep or somnambulism. In such a condition there is a tendency to general anæsthesia; to a marked susceptibility to vasomotor changes, as in the functioning of organs; and in the extreme suggestibility, rendering the person in the hypnotic state amenable *not only to suggestions affecting volitional activities,* but to such vasomotor changes as the raising of blisters or such functioning as the induction of lactation.

"Various diseases are now successfully treated by hypnosis. In Germany a very close record of this work has been kept. The results have been gratifying. Sane and proper use of the power of hypnotism is a great benefit to mankind.

"There is, however, another phase of the matter to consider. Should a man with such power— Am I boring you?"

"Not at all," said Peterman, interestedly. "Pray, continue."

"Should a man possessing this power in great degree choose to use it for evil, consider the awful deeds he could, with impunity, commit. With each succeeding state of hypnosis his power over a subject grows stronger.

"If the practice is continued the patient is completely submerged in the personality of his control. Can you grasp that point? Hypnotic subjects who are used by hypnotists constantly for exhibition gradually become mentally dormant. Their own mentality is absorbed or blotted out by the constant control.

"Physically, they become so inert as to remain in a stupid or semicomatose state, sleeping their lives away. Like the husk of a fly they dangle in the web of their master, having been sucked dry of their own personality.

"It was in a somnambulistic state of this sort that Palmer Hollisworth was found. He was completely under the control of his master during the time he was missing. Distance between a hypnotist and a perfectly subordinated subject means nothing. Tests of all kinds have been made. You can learn all of this by a study of the subject.

"But the art of hypnosis is in its infancy, just as are many other of our arts. Suppose a man should suddenly appear who has gone beyond our present knowledge of the subject?

"Such a person, having far more insight and knowledge, would be a dangerous man, would he not? And if he chose to exert his power for evil, can you see the result?"

Peterman shuddered.

"Let us speak of more pleasant things," he said. "Surely this unknown man possesses no supernormal powers."

"He seems to do just that," said MacCray gravely.

"How do you come to know so much about this case?" inquired the broker in tardy curiosity.

"Because I am the man who followed Hollisworth from Chicago."

Peterman blinked his eyes. That was all. But he was now on his guard.

"And why, my friend, have you told this unusual story to me?" He smiled a steely little smile.

"Why? Because, just as he died, Palmer Hollisworth gasped out the name of the man who owned his soul."

"Yes? And why would I be interested?"

"Because the man's name is—Dr. Dax."

Having made this *dénouement*, MacCray leaned back in his chair and stared at the philanthropist's face.

The older man did not quiver a muscle. His only response to this stunning announcement was to pick up his little tumbler and drain the contents at a single gulp.

He placed the glass on the taboret quite steadily. Then he met the gaze of the detective levelly. There was silence for a long moment.

"Is that all?" he finally inquired softly.

"Almost," nodded MacCray. "That package which the *Times-Journal* says is still in the possession of the steamship company is really down at police headquarters, and is nothing more nor less than the sixty-seven thousand dollars' worth of securities lost by the Milner corporation."

"I see," murmured Peterman politely. And, after a long space: "I see," he repeated slowly.

"What do you see, Mr. Peterman?"

"I see," answered the broker meditatively, "the doors of the penitentiary."

CHAPTER XXXVII

OUT OF THE BLACKNESS

MacCRAY waited. But the other did not speak again. He had fallen into a profound reverie. At last the detective broke the silence.

"There are other things to see, sir," he observed.

Andrew Peterman looked at him questioningly.

"For instance?"

"That Lillian Hollisworth was a talented, beautiful woman."

Peterman shuddered. He tapped a little bell and rose to his feet. Glepen entered with noiseless tread.

"My shoes, Glepen," said his master. "My coat and hat."

MacCray looked up with sleepy eyes.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"With you. The little play is ended."

MacCray smiled. Lazily he helped himself to another cigar.

"Sit down," he said. "Mad philanthropist you may be, but the accomplice of a murderer? Never! You are not even a good criminal, Andrew Peterman. You are not cast in the proper mold. And God knows I've typed thousands of them."

The patron of the arts looked down at the figure of the detective curiously.

"You mean to tell me that you have deliberately told me this story, knowing that I know Dr. Dax—doubtless knowing about many of my financial—er—transactions, believing me innocent of crime?"

"Of the sort of crime we are discussing, yes. I have told you a detailed account of the truth. Do you think that I would have been so foolish as to tell you this unless I was sure of my man?"

"I—I fear that I fail to follow your logic."

"May I speak frankly?"

"Of a certainty."

"Then, Andrew Peterman, I fear that you are a dupe. You are an unsuspecting tool in the hands of a master craftsman. You are no more guilty of vicious criminality than a baby, but you are on the highway to destruction. I hope, and think, I can save you."

The broker reseated himself slowly.

"Do you mind telling me who you really are?" he inquired. "I must ask you to overlook my unpardonable curiosity."

"Certainly. My name is Philip MacCray."

"MacCray—and you said you were from Chicago," mused the other. "MacCray. I know that name. Ah, yes. I have it—the Art Vandal! You are the detective who cleared up that case. The man who made a hobby of stealing art treasures! What an amazing fellow he must have been."

"Very unusual, but no more so than yourself. To-day he is one of Chicago's best surgeons. Do you grasp the point?"

"What would you have me do?"

"Isn't it customary among friends for gentlemen to—exchange stories? I have related a tale."

"Quite so," nodded Peterman brightly. Then he bit his lip in remembrance, and his eyes became moist. "I shall tell you a little story. Damon—er—MacCray.

"It is no less strange than the yarn you have spun for me, but it is hardly so tragic. I do not like tragedies—I never cared for the dramas of ancient Greece. Another shaker, Glepen. And stronger this time."

While MacCray listened, Peterman told his story. He began with his first meeting with the man he knew as Dr. Dax, and finished with the most recent crime—the substitution of bonds in the United States Treasury. The detective settled back in his chair and crossed his legs.

Placing his elbows on the arms of his chair, he rested the tips of his fingers together and closed his eyes. For more than an hour he listened to the flow of words without a single interruption.

The broker interrupted himself when his man brought in the frosted cocktail shaker. MacCray declined further refreshment. He asked one question while his host imbibed.

"Your man, Glepen," he said. "Do you trust him?"

"Utterly. He has been with me for years."

The tale was resumed and finished.

"And that is the story of Andrew Peterman and his *alter ego*—Carl Monte. Since my association with Dr. Dax I have gained something like a half million dollars which I have given away for the furtherance of art.

"I know nothing about this—this madman I have been associating with. Complacent fool that I have been, I did not even care who he was or what else he did as long as our mutual relations continued profitable and I was able to donate money to art.

"I had not dreamed that there was any connection between Dr. Dax and this unfortunate Hollisworth case until to-day. The Milner securities, as I told you, went back to Dax when I could not dispose of them through my regular channels. He must have been holding them all this time.

"Possibly he sent Hollisworth elsewhere to dispose of them. I cannot understand the confusing affair at all. It is too vast a canvas for me. It is inexplicable why Dax was not satisfied with the fortune of Palmer Hollisworth. The man must be money mad!"

"Or worse," added MacCray, stirring and sitting up. "What else?"

"That is all. When Dr. Dax knows so much about me, for me to know so little about him doesn't sound plausible. I quite understand that my story is ridiculous, but I did not know even where the man came from until you told me he is a Brazilian.

"All I can do is to take you to the Palace Nocturne, where you can lie in wait for him. Summon your men. I am at your disposal."

To his great surprise, the detective shook his head and smiled slightly.

"You are thinking too far ahead of me," said MacCray. "I haven't the slightest intention of arresting Dr. Dax."

"You haven't? Why not?"

"Because I am after him for murder! The only witness against him is dead. What good would it do to arrest him? I must wait until I have collected more substantial proof than my own conviction."

Peterman sighed slowly. "I see. Then it is only me you want now?"

"Neither do I want you, my dear fellow. I don't want to see the inside of the Palace Nocturne even. While you think the story you have told me is meager in detail, it is exactly the sort of tale I expected to hear. And you have done that which I hoped you could do."

"What is that?"

"You have put me directly on the trail of the phantom I have been pursuing. You think it necesary to lie in ambush at your casino to grab him on one of his uncertain visits? Listen to this:

"There is the private wire in your office which can be tapped again. Whenever Dax calls you again the point of origination for that call can be traced. If he calls from different places, we shall eventually draw the right one. You have twice been to see him at different houses. Both places will be investigated. He must have left a trail.

"And then there is the matter of shadowing the man who daily carries the dictaphone records to him from the Palace Nocturne. And last, but not least, you will be watched ever minute from now on.

"If all the other methods fail, we will eventually trace him when he comes into

contact with you. The man has a base of some sort, and we will find it. After that —who knows? We shall see."

"In the meantime, what do you want me to do?"

"Go right along about your business. Act as though nothing has happened. If you should be arrested, it would merely put this Dax on his guard. If you act suspicious there will be the same result.

"Thus, by carrying on naturally, even to the extent of having further crooked dealings with the man, you can help me. Will you do it?"

Andrew Peterman bowed his head on his hands. His shoulders quivered convulsively. MacCray saw a tear drop from between his fingers to the rug at his feet. There was a long silence. The detective broke it softly:

"And that is your way of atonement, my friend. You will be working with the law instead of against it. He is a wise man who sees the error of his ways while there is yet time."

"Yet time?" whispered Peterman without looking up. "It is too late for me."

"Greater criminals than you have been pardoned."

"A pardon wouldn't restore a broken flower," uttered the broker huskily.

MacCray's face became gentle to a surprising degree. "No, it would not. But you are not guilty of cutting down the blossom. Will you help the gardener protect other parts of his garden?"

The sorrowing man finally uncovered his face and looked up. His countenance was that of an old and tired little man.

"After all," he murmured wistfully, "the highest art in the world is the perfection of one's soul. I have learned a great lesson this day. You can rely on me, sir, just as fully as Damon relied on the integrity of his friend in ancient Syracuse."

"It is only fair to warn you that our way may be beset with dangers that beggar the imagination. If this Dr. Dax suspects you—as he seems to have done Lillian Hollisworth—an unpleasant death may be the mildest horror you can expect."

Andrew Peterman smiled bitterly. He squared his shoulders resolutely.

"If necessary," said he quietly, "I will lay down my life gladly."

And MacCray clasped his hand warmly. In his own way the detective was also a man with the soul of an artist.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PALACE NOCTURNE

IT was a beautiful mansion just across the Maryland line, a sedate structure of colonial architecture crowning an eminence in the midst of a cultivated meadow of some twenty acres in extent.

Shielded but not hidden by the surrounding trees, shrubbery, and high stone wall around the foot of the knoll, the Palace Nocturne presented to the eye the placid appearance of a dignified justice slumbering peacefully upon his bench.

And a more apt comparison could not describe this spot where prominent men foregathered in hours of relaxation which, while not necessarily dangerous, could hardly be called innocent.

For, in truth, justice slumbered, the gavel of authority dangling loosely from a lax hand, while men and women gambled and diced with unusual abandon.

It would be a rank injustice to Mr. Carl Monte—who had derived his name from the famous casino in Monaco—to state that the Palace Nocturne was a house of crime. It was not. It was merely a gambling house *de luxe*.

Until Sunday afternoon Mr. Carl Monte had not known that over this elegant palace of laughter and profit the hand of horror had already cast its shadow, had already caressed it softly with deadly fingertips, curling its ghastly tentacles ecstatically about the structure.

Entrance to this shrine of Fortuna, while difficult, was not impossible. There was the matter of being well vouched for by a patron of good standing; perhaps it was not impossible to bribe a servant at the back door; doubtless one could boldly crash the gates if the method was unique and the crasher possessed plenty of nerve.

It was not necessary for Fred Martin

to consider any of these methods. He already possessed a guest card made out in the name of Frederick W. Martin. Needless to say, this card was not dog-eared from use.

The Palace Nocturne was not for such as Fred Martin. Financially he could not have stood the pace. The manner of its coming into his possession was very simple.

Perhaps a year or fourteen months previous there had been the matter of an unpleasant news story which concerned one Jennings Carlyle. Martin had killed the yarn, had suppressed the publicity. Mr. Carlyle was the manager of the Palace Nocturne. In return for this kindness he had reciprocated with the favor within his power.

With the understanding that nothing seen or heard at the Palace Nocturne would ever reach a newspaper column, Martin became the recipient of a pass which entitled him to all the privileges of the casino.

Twice, for the novelty and curiosity of the thing, he had gone to the Palace Nocturne. That was the extent of his dissipation. Lack of funds for such amusement, the fear that he would inadvertently use knowledge he gained here, combined to keep him away. He was sorry now that he knew so little about the place.

The address he fancied Palmer Hollisworth to have given he did mention to MacCray as they left the hospital. He feared that he might have been mistaken. It would not hurt to run out to the gambling house and look the place over, especially as he could do so without suspicion attaching to him.

To-morrow would be time enough to tell MacCray of the matter. Perhaps he would have something worth while to tell the detective.

Thus, he wrote that rather inaccurate account for the Sunday pages of the *Times-Journal* in accordance with MacCray's wishes and thereby saved his job as far as the city editor was concerned.

With the Hollisworth story leaping back to the front page, he was in no danger of being pulled off the case.

At precisely nine o'clock Sunday night he paid off his taxi driver at the gate of the Palace Nocturne—public conveyances were not permitted to enter the grounds—and made his way up to the house, passing the gateman with ease because of his card of admittance.

In his neatly fitting tuxedo, black felt hat, and stylish topcoat he looked more like an *attaché* to some legation of importance rather than an amateur detective. That is, if one overlooked the wicked automatic in his pocket.

He crossed the wide Colonial porch and raised the knocker. Letting it fall, he stood back and fumbled for a cigarette. The great house was dark and lifeless, viewed from without. He could hardly see when the massive door swung open on the darkened porch because of the inky blackness of the hallway beyond. However, the flare of his match glowing against his features as he lighted his roll of tobacco dimly showed him the form of a man watching him.

"Mr. Martin?"

"The same," he answered calmly.

"Enter," said the other.

He stepped in without the slightest hesitation. Behind him, as he waited, he could hear the bolting and barring of the door.

Then a soft click, and a glow of light from overhead suffused the lofty hall. The heretofore unseen man came forward to relieve him of his coat and hat. Martin knew who this was. He had met him twice before.

The stooping man of vast stature, stooped with the weight of many years on his shoulders, was known as "Spottem" Hawkins. He was attired in the dark green livery of the Palace Nocturne.

Hawkins was a retired crook, retired because he was old and because he could earn more as a doorman at the Palace Nocturne than he could in the more uncertain lines of endeavor compatible with his talents.

For Spottem Hawkins was a man with an eagle eye and a marvelous memory. He never forgot a face. Not all of the camera-eyed men were in the police departments.

"Pardon me, sir," went on Hawkins smoothly. "You visit us so seldom, Mr. Martin. May I have your card to check your standing?"

The reporter drew forth his billfold and handed over the handsomely engraved card. He waited in no particular perturbation while the doorman stepped into the room just to the left of the entrance.

He knew that in the office the records of every habitué of this house were kept. In the event that a patron became undesirable from any cause whatsoever his card was withdrawn.

The manager of the establishment himself followed Hawkins back into the hall.

"Hello, Martin," he greeted pleasantly. "Haven't seen you for months. Where are you keeping yourself?"

"At work," smiled the reporter, shaking hands. "This is no place for a poor man."

Carlyle laughed as he handed back the card of admittance. "I know it. Why have you honored us to-night? Anything on your mind?"

"Nothing much. Just thought I'd drop in and look around before Congress adjourns. You're pretty quiet after that, aren't you?"

"Quiter," admitted Carlyle, "but not lifeless. Don't form the opinion that our clientele is composed of nothing but Congressmen. In fact, few members of Congress come here as a rule."

"But those few!" remarked Martin. "A raid here would make an awful stink, wouldn't it?"

"A raid without due warning would throw about three commissioners out of a job," replied the manager significantly. "This is no cheap gambling joint; it is a house of gentlemen."

"I suppose that goes for the Maryland State Police, too?"

"It does. Carl Monte is very thorough."

"I've never met the owner of this place," said Martin carelessly.

"You probably never will."

"Doesn't he come here? You know him, of course?"

"Not as well as you might think, and certainly not well enough to introduce anybody to him. When he comes here he mingles very quietly with his guests. But, come! You are wasting time here when you can be enjoying yourself upstairs. Here! I'll fix you up for the evening."

And the manager pinned a tiny artificial dahlia to the satin facing of his tuxedo.

"What's the idea of the decoration?" he wanted to know.

"That makes you an employee for the evening," responded Carlyle. "Play any of the house games you wish with impunity, but if you dare walk away from here with more than a thousand dollars there's liable to be a wreath of lilies hanging on your doorknob by to-morrow night."

This was an unexpected stroke of good fortune. He now had the run of the entire house. He could come and go as he pleased, and without question.

His heart warmed doubly toward this man who thus admitted his obligation by allowing him the privilege of picking up a thousand dollars at no personal risk.

"Carlyle, you're a prince!" he exclaimed. "I promise you that I won't walk off with a penny that I haven't brought here with me."

The manager smiled and slapped him on the shoulder as he urged him toward the magnificent staircase.

"Don't be a fool, Martin," he counseled. "Enjoy yourself. And, by the way, don't trouble to return the dahlia."

CHAPTER XXXIX

BEHIND THE PORTIÈRES

HOUGHTFULLY Martin ascended the stairs and passed into the main salon. He halted just across the threshold to gaze at the colorful scene before his eyes.

Two roulette tables occupied the center of the floor, both of them in operation. Along the walls of the large and elegantly furnished room were faro tables and poker tables, bridge tables, dice, *baccarat*—anything one's taste demanded.

At one side were two white-haired gentlemen in evening dress playing a game of dominoes for a dollar a point. Lights, velvet and brocade draperies, mirrors, beautiful women—perfume—laughter—warmth—wine.

Martin shook off the attraction these things held for him and moved on. He was

not here to play. Threading his way through groups of men and women, some of them members of élite society, some of them from foreign capitals of the world, many of them strangers to him—and any of them possible associates or puppets of the unknown Dr. Dax—he entered the adjoining room.

This chamber had the most perfectly equipped buffet nearer than Cuba. Not being a prohibition officer, Martin closed his eyes to the law and drank a mild concoction.

He had an idea he might wish for something stronger before the evening was over if his luck at encountering the *outré* ran true to form.

For an hour or more he wandered over the establishment, opening doors, peering into sheltered alcoves, investigating dark hallways, shrewdly studying the various people he met.

His dahlia was his passport, his emblem of authority to move about as he saw fit. Unquestioned and unhalted by any of the quiet attendants in green livery, he explored regions heretofore barred to him as a casual guest. Unwittingly Carlyle had conferred a greater favor than he knew.

The second floor of the building was the heart of the casino. Here, except for the hallway along one side, the entire space was given over to the main salon, a few semiprivate gambling rooms, and the elaborate grill—not to mention the chamber containing the paraphernalia violating the Eighteenth Amendment.

The third and top floor was divided into small but luxurious suites of rooms for the accommodation of ladies and gentlemen who had looked too long on the wine when it was red, or who were disposed to remain at the casino for several days at a time.

But there was no indication that the Palace Nocturne was the resort of a desperate criminal. Neither was the place wickedly sinful. It was a wonderful gambling casino. That was all.

Once gaining admittance to the place, there was nothing secret or suspicious about the house. It was frankly just what it pretended to be—a temple of fortune.

True, there was the first floor still to be considered. But the first floor was given over to quarters for the servants and attendants who lived at the house, the two front rooms being reserved as office and cloak room respectively. It was not probable that there was anything to be learned down there.

There was also the greater risk involved in stumbling around in that darkened area set aside for the use of menials. However, there remained the possibility of questioning Carlyle more closely. The manager was not a bad sort, certainly no vicious criminal.

If approached in the right way he might be able to vouchsafe some information.

Considerably chagrined at his wild-goose chase and glad he had not mentioned the matter to MacCray, he abandoned his explorations and started toward the first floor.

Had he had nothing on his mind he would have enjoyed staying here for the evening. Too, a thousand dollars were not picked up every day.

But other interests claimed him. Mr. Carlyle had wasted his dahlia, and Mr. Martin was passing up a rare opportunity.

He descended the heavily carpeted stairs from the third floor to the second. Silently he turned from the steps to pass through the main salon. But, as he passed the mouth of an alcove, the sound of voices arrested him.

He glanced into the cozy nook, and came to a complete stop. Seated on a divan under the soft glow of a pedestal lamp, a man bending solicitously over her with his back to Martin, was a woman the reporter would have recognized in a million.

Even as he halted there, one hand clutching at the elegant hangings masking the doorway, the man sought to embrace the woman. So this was the man of her dreams! An unreasoning madness assailed Martin.

He tugged so harshly at the portière that the rod creaked under his weight. The pair at the divan started up in alarm.

The man whirled quickly, and Martin recognized him. It was Cavassier of the Brazilian Embassy. Cavassier the sleek, handsome South American!

Instant suspicion of the man flared up

in the reporter's mind. What was the fellow doing here in the house where he was seeking the infamous Dr. Dax?

"Señor Martin!" exclaimed the woman, her dark eyes wide with surprise.

"What are you doing here, Celia Debara?" he demanded in a hard voice. "This is no place for a woman like you."

Cavassier scowled at the tone.

"What are you doing here, Meester Martine?" he said uglily. "Vamose! Get! You intrude."

Martin was in an ugly temper. Half mad with an insane jealousy which he would not admit as such, he stepped into the alcove and jerked the draperies together behind him.

"You shut up!" he snapped. "What are you doing here, Miss Debara?"

She did not resent his tone. Oddly enough she seemed glad to see him.

"My father and I came here with Señor Cavassier," she replied.

"Why?"

"None of your bueesness, *señor!*" cut in Cavassier, raising his voice purposely to attract attention.

The curtain rings of the door clicked behind Martin, and he turned. A liveried attendant stood there.

"Put thees man out!" cried Cavassier angrily, indicating the reporter.

The attendant took one step forward to inquire into the difficulty. His eyes fell upon the little dahlia on Martin's coat, and he stopped. He looked at the reporter questioningly.

"On your way!" said Martin crisply. "I'll attend to this matter."

Without a word the man in green uniform withdrew swiftly.

"What is the meaning of thees?" demanded the Brazilian *attaché*.

"It means that I am of greater importance here than you," rejoined Martin curtly.

The other turned mockingly to Celia Debara.

"You hear, *señorita*? Thees man is employee at thees place."

"That will be enough out of you," warned Martin savagely. "You lied to me the other day about a certain telephone call. You said you knew nothing about it. You're going to tell me the truth—and you're going to do it now."

"I shall go for help," announced Cavassier, starting for the doorway.

Martin jerked his hand from his pocket and jammed his automatic into the man's ribs.

"Get back and sit down!" he commanded. "If you make a noise I'll make a sieve out of you."

The Brazilian was not a coward. Instantly he grappled with Martin and sought to wrest free the pistol. Martin jerked his hand away and struck the struggling *attaché* heavily along the jaw with the flat of his gun.

"Have it then," he grunted. "You asked for it."

Cavassier reeled backward and collapsed to the rug with a stifled groan. The victor grasped him by the collar and dragged him to a semiupright position against the divan. Without a sound, the woman watched the little tableau.

CHAPTER XL

IN THE OFFICE

"NOW then, *señorita*," went on Martin, "where is your father?"

"I don't know, Señor Martin," she answered swiftly. "He left me with Señor Cavassier while he consulted with some one.

"I was curious to see this place. But I am glad you have come. Alexis brought me here—to talk. Have you hurt him badly?"

"No," said Martin, rather shortly. "But I'm going to if he doesn't do some talking for me. Here, you! Give me the straight facts about that telephone business. You are the man who called the *Times-Journal* about that interview with Debara, aren't you?"

Nursing a bruised jaw, Cavassier looked up sullenly and refused to answer. Martin drew back his hand as if to strike again. The other flinched.

"Don't be so melodramatic, *señor*," he said uneasily. "I will talk. Yes, I called

your paper because I was asked to do so by a man here. I was here at that hour."

"Who was the man?"

"I know not, *señor.*"

"And you made a telephone call for a man you didn't know? A call that would likely get you into trouble?" Martin laughed shortly. "Come again, Cavassier. That's too thin."

"But it is the truth, *señor.* I did it for —for one hundred dollars."

This might be more within reason. Martin chose a different tack.

"If this is true, why did you lie to me the other day?"

"Because, *señor,* the Sunday's paper told of your deescovery at Kensington Mansions. Me, I did not want to be involved in a murder affair."

"What brings you here to-night?"

"I brought señorita Debara and her father here in the effort to find out why the *señor's* name was to be used. But we cannot find the man. I knew him not. He was a stranger to me."

"Is this the truth?" Martin demanded sharply of the silent girl.

"Yes, *señor,*" she murmured.

"Then, what are you doing in this alcove? Why aren't you hunting this man?"

"I could not find him, *señor.* Nobody recognized the description. The *señorita* and I were waiting while Professor Debara makes queries of the management."

"Describe the man to me."

"I cannot, *señor.* It was in such a spot as thees that I met him. He is a Brazilian with one sinister air. I did not see his features plainly, *señor.* As God is my witness, *señor,* I tell you the truth."

Martin turned back toward the girl.

"What is this man to you?" he demanded almost fiercely. "Is he your lover?"

Celia Debara's eyes looked startled at the bluntness of this question. She gasped audibly, and then a lovely tide of crimson swept up from her bare shoulders to her face.

"You—you dare to ask such a question, *señor?*" she murmured.

"I do," he grated harshly, the unanalyzed fury in his heart spurring him on to be as cruel as he could. "If your answer is yes, I will apologize for my intrusion and leave you."

She studied him with grave eyes. The man seated on the floor at her feet was forgotten as Martin thrilled under her gaze. Then she spoke.

"And if my answer is no, *señor?*" she inquired softly.

A sort of vertigo of gladness made the man dizzy for a moment. He shook off this feeling with a great effort. He bowed low.

"Then I shall request permission to see you home," he said. "The Palace Nocturne is not the setting for *you.*"

"I think I will go with you, Señor Martin," she answered calmly. "I have seen enough of this place."

She held out her hand, and he assisted her to arise.

"As for you," he hurled at the crestfallen *attaché,* who was scrambling to his feet in hasty protest, "you should have known better than to bring Miss Debara to this place, even though she did want to come. Go find Professor Debara and tell him that I have taken his daughter home."

Drawing her slim little hand through his arm and pocketing his automatic, Martin escorted her quickly across the main salon. She was almost breathless as they descended the stairs.

"And why is Señor Martin to be seen here if this is not the right sort of place for a lady?" she gasped out, flashing a swift glance up at him.

The half-mocking query recalled to mind the mission he had forgotten. He looked down into her laughing face and answered her soberly.

"I, too, am here to seek the instigator of that telephone call. And if Cavassier has not lied again I am now sure that the man is to be found here."

"I am sure Alexis has not lied," she remarked.

"You call him by his Christian name?"

"Surely. Why not? I have known him for many years."

"I don't like it," he growled. "He was making love to you."

She flashed him an inscrutable look from

under lowered lashes. Oddly, she made no comment on this peculiar remark. Instead:

"Since you are here on important business, *señor*, I must refuse to allow you to take me home."

Martin stopped short on the stairs.

"Do you think I will leave you unattended, or send you back to the company of that sleek South American skunk, who makes telephone calls for strangers who have money?" he demanded fiercely.

She lowered her head to hide the light in her eyes. Then:

"I can go with you, *señor*, wherever you go," she said demurely.

Martin reflected.

"All right," he nodded. "I was on my way to see the manager when I found you. We will go and interview Carlyle. If he can, or will, tell me nothing, I shall be ready to leave this place. Maybe your father will show up while we are talking."

"Which I hope he doesn't," he added to himself as he escorted her into the office.

The vast doorman was not at his post as they passed through the lower hall. The light being on and the front door barred, it was obvious that Hawkins was not out on the veranda admitting a late guest.

Neither was the man in the office. In fact, this latter place was also deserted. They halted in surprise.

The business office of the Palace Nocturne was a plainly furnished room. There was a steel desk with a telephone on it, half a dozen chairs, and a picture or two on the walls.

The rear wall and the one at the far side of the room were lined with great steel cabinets, which stood shoulder to shoulder without a break, reaching up the walls to a height of seven or eight feet.

There were two large windows on the front side of the chamber which were covered with massive iron shutters at night. Except for the door through which they had entered there was no other apparent opening.

"What do we do now, Señor Fred?" his companion asked.

Martin took his eyes from her enticing figure. When he looked at this woman he could not concentrate on the matter at hand. No woman had ever affected him in this amazing fashion before.

He was almost angry with her because of it.

As he stared along the vast row of filing cabinets an idea occurred to him.

If the record of every habitué of this house was kept in these cabinets, might he not find something about this Dr. Dax from the same source? It was worth considering.

"Listen," he murmured rapidly, "these big cabinets along the wall are used to keep records of everybody who comes here habitually. It is possible that I may find a file card about this man we are hunting for. You keep watch at the door for the approach of any one, and I'll see what I can find."

She nodded in quick understanding. Martin started swiftly along the cases, searching for the letters "Da" on the cards in the holders on the front of each cabinet.

He found what he sought near the opposite corner of the room. Sliding open the proper drawer as noiselessly as possible, he flipped through the indexed cards rapidly.

To his intense delight, he found a card bearing the name "Dax."

His faint exultant exclamation as he drew forth the card brought Celia Debara quickly to his side, forgetful of her duty at the door. Over his shoulder she read with him the data on the large sheet. It was a grievous disappointment. In the hand printing of Jennings Carlyle was this:

"Dr. Dax—?"

CHAPTER XLI

WHAT TO DO!

A CLICKING sound made them both start guiltily. They looked around quickly. To their unbounded surprise three of the great filing cases were swinging out of line from the rear wall in a perfect arc toward the spot where they were standing. Frightened, the girl pressed close to his side. It was a pleasurable feeling.

The man slipped the card back into the drawer of the cabinet he had opened without attempting to put it in the proper order,

He thrust the drawer part way shut and gripped the gun in his pocket.

The three cases continued to swing out until at right angles to their companions and not twelve inches from the two human beings. The sound of voices fell upon their ears, voices which Martin recognized as those of Carlyle and Hawkins.

The unseen men entered the office from that recess behind the cases and, unaware of the pair of culprits shielded by the disarranged cases, walked toward the door leading to the hallway.

"That's that, Hawkins," Carlyle was saying. "When this man arrives—I name no names—you show him into the office immediately. Dr. Dax said that they would arrive almost simultaneously."

"I don't like the looks of things, Mr. Carlyle," grumbled the doorman. "Why should the vice—"

"Hush!" the manager cut him off sharply. "No names, you fool! If Mr. Monte permits these things we cannot say anything."

"All right," grunted Hawkins sourly. "But, anyway, I don't like the looks of this Dr. Dax. He gives me the willies. I'm glad he doesn't come here often. The idea of fitting up a private room for him to use!

"What business has Senator Billings, Major-General Rutledge, and Rear-Admiral Roberts got with him? They come here to enjoy themselves. Why do they come down to this—"

"It's a good thing for you that I control the dictograph records," Carlyle laughed ominously. "You talk too much, Hawkins. And talk leads one to an early grave. Let me give you some good advice—"

The voices died away into an indistinct murmur as both men passed out into the hall. Martin and Celia looked at each other in amazement. The man placed a finger on his lips and peered out around the filing cabinets. No one was in sight.

"I believe I'd like to see where they came from," he whispered. "Are you game?"

"You mean will I go along, *señor*?" She gave him her hand. "Lead on, my friend."

They tiptoed quickly around the three filing cabinets and found themselves staring into a peculiar room. The matter of the swinging filing cases was easily understood. They had merely been fastened to the door which they hid when closed.

The room before them was no secret chamber; it was the room which should have been behind the office. Still clasping that trusting little hand, Martin stepped into the room, moving out of line with the door.

"Damned if I didn't leave this door open fooling with Hawkins. Careless, careless!"

It was Carlyle returning to the office. Swiftly Martin pressed the girl against the wall behind him and flattened himself also against it, automatic in one firm hand.

Fortunately because of the fittings of the chamber and the arrangement of light Carlyle suspected nothing, and merely closed the door. The lock clicked into position, and they were alone in the room of the man who excited the annoyance of the not easily annoyed Mr. Hawkins.

The reporter's thoughts raced as he took in the details of the chamber. It was not a large room. Its peculiarity lay in the draperies of dead black which hung from the ceiling and completely encircled the walls except for the one opening left for the door.

There was a flat-topped desk in the middle of the somberly draped room with a chair on each side of it. On the desk stood a lamp with a reflector, bent so that the rays of light were shed only on the desk and a small circle of carpet about it. An ominous chamber with a gloomy, funereal air. Queer room in a house devoted to pleasure.

Celia Debara shivered.

"I do not like this room," she said in a low voice.

"Neither do I," admitted Martin in the same low tone. "Don't talk above a whisper. There are dictaphones here, according to Carlyle. Come, we will see if there is another way out."

They circled the walls, feeling through the loosely hanging draperies for a break in the wall which would indicate a masked exit.

But they found nothing until they reached the side of the room which should

have contained windows if anything. Here the girl's quick fingers encountered what felt like a door casing.

"I feel a door, do I not?" she whispered.

In the gloom which hugged the walls of the room Martin found a break in the black hangings where the curtains overlapped. He thrust them aside as he felt for the door.

Quick to perceive his need, his companion gathered back the draperies on one side so that the dim light reflected from the circle around the desk could reach the wall.

There before them was a door which led —where? There were bolts near top and bottom, bolts which had been drawn. The massive lock, a mortised lock, above the handle had been opened. This, then, was the reason for Hawkins to have been summoned into this room by the manager.

The official doorman carried keys to all the exits. He had come in to unlock this door. This argued that the masked door led to the open air.

Hence, before them lay a way out of this somber chamber. Behind them lay a great deal of explaining if they attempted to pass through the office. To remain where they were meant discovery and danger. To go meant the loss of an opportunity to see and hear the sinister man who was known as Dr. Dax.

To leave while there was yet time, or to remain and hide behind the obscuring curtains. What to do?

Before either of them could speak the latch clicked and stirred as it was pressed by a hand on the other side of the door. It was too late to do anything.

CHAPTER XLII

UNDER THEIR GAZE

WITH the stirring of that door handle came the swift realization that they were trapped. A choice of alternatives was not allowed them. Almost before he thought Martin grasped the arm of the girl and pulled her quickly toward the corner of the room.

She followed unresistingly, releasing the draperies which fell back to mask the opening door. Between the heavy curtains and the wall they pressed flat against the latter, scarcely daring to breathe in the darkness which enveloped them.

A draft of crisp air from outdoors swept them, and they knew that the unseen arrival stood within five feet of them and on the same side of the curtains. If he struck a light or used a flash lamp—

But no, he merely shot the bolts on the door in the darkness and then stepped through the division in the draperies. Unaware of the presence of intruders, the newcomer had barred himself in the room with them.

The man and the woman dared not move for fear the swaying curtains would reveal their presence. Martin could feel his companion trembling slightly under the excitement. He himself felt the same nervous tension.

Was it the element of peril or some other sense that changed the very atmosphere of the chamber? From a merely somber room it had become a place of indescribable danger, of inimical air. Crouching in a blind corner in Stygian blackness, this feeling was greatly enhanced. But they dared not move.

It seemed an interminable time before there was another sound from the unseen man who had entered the room. Then they heard him calmly seating himself at the desk. There was the faint scraping of a chair and then the rustling of papers as he read something.

Martin could stand the suspense no longer. Gripping his gun in a businesslike fashion, he edged inch by inch toward the aperture in the draperies.

Every time he felt the hangings swaying a trifle at his passage he flattened himself against the wall and froze in that position with bated breath. But nothing happened, and he finally reached the spot before the door.

Cautiously he parted the draperies and peered through. He could have sighed aloud with relief. The man in the room sat at the desk with his back toward Martin. He was going over some papers, the light before him shining on his glossy black hair.

The reporter could not see his face, but there was a sinister appearance about the body. It was reptilian in a way, deadly fascinating, devilish.

"The bolts, Señor Fred," a soft voice whispered in his ear, the fragrant breath stirring delightfully against his cheek. "Should we not unbolt the door?"

Celia had followed him.

He turned to answer her and his nose brushed against her hair. He caught his breath as a wave of tenderness swept over him.

"I think they work easily," he breathed. "You try to slide them back without making a noise, Celia, and I will cover him with my gun."

He could tell that she was carefully feeling for the upper bolt. He trained his automatic on the back of the man at the desk. Fascinated, he stared curiously at the elegant figure. Without being told, he knew this was the man called Dr. Dax—a superhypnotist.

It could not have been thirty seconds before he observed the man start and raise his head from the papers on the desk before him. Slowly the seated man turned his head questioningly.

Martin knew of the psychic influence the gaze of a person often had on the back of another's head, and he realized immediately that this strange being had felt his gaze and sensed the presence of something beside his own personality in the chamber.

Martin dared not take his eyes from the man and drop back to a blind and helpless position behind the draperies. He must be able to watch what was going on. Grimly pressing his lips together, he slipped the safety catch on his gun.

He could see the profile of the man now, but he could tell nothing of the features because the desk lamp was on the other side of the man. All that he could see was a silhouette. It was a most commanding sight.

Long head, powerful features, graceful bearing of a Satan—a black outline against the light. And on the desk, one of them in plain view under the lamp, his hands. Long and slender, indescribably graceful, and so white as to reflect the glare of the light. Worst of all, there was no alarm or uneasiness in the bearing of Dr. Dax.

And then came a welcome interruption. The door leading to the office clicked warningly. It opened slowly, and Dax turned his head to observe who entered. Martin stared with him.

He was so surprised that he nearly dropped his gun. The newcomer was none other than Jonathan Rookes, vice-president of the United States.

The man's first words riveted the attention of both Martin and Dr. Dax. He hardly waited until the door behind him closed before he burst out:

"Oh, God, have you no mercy, sir? Why have you sent for me again?"

Dr. Dax rose to his feet.

"I wished to see you, sir," he answered in a soothing voice. "Am I not your physician?"

"But why not come to my home? Why do you prey on my mind like this? This is the second time you have called me here. It means ruin for me to be seen here. If you won't come to my house, why don't you see me at your office?"

"I have no office, Mr. Rookes. Did not Senator Billings tell you that I am no longer in active practice?"

"Yes, yes. But what do you want of me?"

"Sit down."

"I cannot stay. I must go."

"Sit down!" commanded the doctor again, this time his deep, resonant voice so compelling that Martin felt the inclination to squat to the floor himself.

Rookes dropped heavily into the chair opposite Dax and facing the reporter. However, the man was in no condition to observe the eye and the gun peeping out of the shadows. Dax leaned forward and stared intently at the vice-president.

"I asked you to sit down, Mr. Rookes," he said in a coaxing, lulling voice, "because I wish to inquire about your health. Have you been troubled with your neuralgia since I have been treating you?"

"Not since the day Senator Billings first took me to see you," admitted Rookes reluctantly. "I think you have effected a cure, Dr. Dax.

"I—I don't believe I will trouble you any longer for your treatments. If you will just present me with a statement for your services—"

"You are quite right, sir," agreed Dax smoothly. "You need no more treatment. I shall give you just a light one to-night. After this it will not be necessary to continue the hypnotic suggestion. Calm yourself and make your mind receptive."

"But I don't want any more treatments at all, doctor," protested the government official anxiously. "I—I—"

"One more," said Dax firmly. "Come, it will take but a few minutes."

To the watching reporter's horror the vice-president succumbed and relaxed in his seat, fixing his eyes obediently on the glittering orbs of the hypnotist.

Remembering the fate of Palmer Hollisworth, Martin wanted to cry out a warning, but his voice died in his throat.

"The bolts are drawn, *señor*," Celia breathed in his ear, grasping his forearm tightly. "The way is open to flee. What is taking place in the room?"

For his life Martin could not have answered. She, observing his set stare and the expression of loathing on his face, pulled the curtain farther aside so that she, too, could see. She stiffened at the sight.

"You are asleep, Mr. Rookes," the voice of Dr. Dax stated positively, his very tone inducing drowsiness. "You are drifting, drifting, drifting into pleasant slumber. Your mind is tranquil and at rest and your various fears are dissipated. You sleep!"

CHAPTER XLIII

THE ARCH-FIEND

UNDER the watchers' gaze the eyes of Jonathan Rookes became set and glassy. His body became perfectly rigid. It was amazing to observe the perfect control over him Dax exerted with voice and eye alone.

Only after Martin could see that the man had slipped completely from consciousness did the hypnotist reach forth and make any passes with those graceful, magnetic fingers of white.

Now he caressed the subject's brow with a series of stroking motions, his pale hands flashing in the lamplight in a manner that was intensely fascinating to the couple at the unbarred door. With a start Martin realized that he was left-handed.

"I am afraid," whispered the girl, shivering in distress.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Martin placed a strong arm about her bare shoulders and drew her close to him protectingly, never taking his eyes off the strange scene at the desk.

"You are now in a receptive state," the voice of the hypnotist went on deliberately, assuming deeper significance—being surcharged with power to the extent that the spellbound watchers felt an electrical thrill. "You are submerged beneath the power of my will. I am your master. Do you understand? I am your master. Now, answer me. Who am I?"

"Dr. Dax, my master," answered the hollow tones of the subject.

"Your master," repeated Dax with calm authority. "Henceforth, you will seek my counsel willingly. When next I summon you to me you will answer the call without resistance. You will hear and obey without question the voice of your master. Do you understand?"

"I understand," was the mechanical reply.

"Henceforth, it will now be possible for you to pass into a state of hypnosis at a mental command from me. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good. We will try it. Awake!"

The form of Rookes shuddered slightly and relaxed in the chair. He heaved a deep and tremulous sigh. Dazedly he opened his eyes, which he had closed, and looked around.

"You are perfectly cured, Mr. Rookes," announced Dr. Dax camly. "I will not find it necessary to continue the treatments."

He turned to one side and opened a drawer in the desk. Rookes rose to his feet with an expression of relief.

"I can never thank you enough for what you have done," he said in his own alert

manner. "If you will tell me how much I owe you—"

"You will receive a bill through the mail, sir. As I am very busy, let me bid you good night."

"Good night, sir," responded Rookes, offering his hand.

The hypnotist did not take the proffered fingers. Instead, he merely fixed his black eyes on the vice-president's face. Rookes started, turned deathly pale, and opened his mouth to cry out.

Then, before the horrified gaze of the secret audience, he became perfectly rigid. His eyes glittered and became set, his facial muscles changed and his expression went blank. Dr. Dax had succeeded in sending him into a state of hypnosis by mental suggestion.

Celia Debara cried out in horror at the sight. Instantly, like a jungle cat, Dr. Dax leaped to his feet and whirled about, his chair banging to the floor. The form of Jonathan Rookes remained in its cataleptic state. Martin's arm tightened about the girl too late to stop that cry.

Without speaking a word, the hypnotist shot forth his left hand in their direction. Actual sparks seemed to leap out from his fingertips. An invisible wave of magnetic influence engulfed the surprised pair. Martin experienced an insane desire to step out from behind the draperies and approach that sinister figure.

The girl uttered a choking cry and collapsed in the reporter's arm. Handicapped in every way, Martin fought with all of his mind against that powerful suggestion. Perhaps the knowledge that he must take this woman out of danger helped him to resist that awful inclination.

The charmer must have felt that his power was not sufficient for he uttered a sharp exclamation and started swiftly toward them. It felt to Martin like succeeding waves of hot wind beating against his bared brain.

With a hoarse cry, he pressed the trigger of his gun. The automatic spouted red flame once, twice, thrice. The light went out at the second shot, leaving no target to be seen to shoot at.

TO BE CONTINUED

A FEW weeks ago you were asked if there were any particular murder cases that you would like to see in FLYNN'S WEEKLY. Already enough readers have registered their desires to keep the magazine full for months if we can get the details of all mysteries requested.

Here are a few picked at random from a day's mail, illustrating how diversified are your requests.

The Katie Dugan Murder, Wilmington, Delaware, about 1900.

The Dr. Feist Case, Nashville, Tennessee.

The Harry Hayward Murder, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Tascot Mystery, Chicago, Illinois, about 1895.

The Jennie Cramer Murder, New Haven, Connecticut.

The Will Purvis Case, Marion County, Mississippi.

The Clare Stone Case, Baltimore, Maryland.

It is impossible at this date to tell you how many of these will ever see publication here. However, all are being investigated. And if only one out of every ten requests were available, you would still find plenty of good reading.

William J. Flynn

"I have been poisoned!"

THE BORGIAS

By Joseph Gollomb

THE STORY OF A DYNASTY OF CRIME, UNEQUALED IN DEMONIC INGENUITY, WHOSE TENTACLES OF EVIL EXTENDED OVER ALL EUROPE

A Story of Fact

CESARE BORGIA resumed the "conference" with the representatives of the Italian states' allies in his own way and in his own good time. Briefly I will say that the four leaders of the alliance that had been taken to the dungeon were one by one strangled.

Meanwhile in Rome Pope Alexander VI, his father, was waiting for news from Cesare. A messenger killed two horses with exhaustion in his speed in getting to Rome. Alexander was the first to hear what happened at the conference at Fano.

So powerful was the house of Orsini that up to then the Borgias had pretended to find it profitable to keep peace with them. As proof of his desire for friendliness with the great house Alexander had made a cardinal of Guido Orsini. Cardinal Orsini may have known what his kinsman was up to in Fano, and what he was hoping to do to Cesare. He did not as yet know, of course what Cesare had done to his kinsman.

On the morning of the arrival of the messenger Cardinal Orsini received a cordial message from the Pope inviting him to come to the Vatican for a conference on a promotion the Pope was contemplating for the cardinal.

He entered the hall where the Pope was supposed to be awaiting him. But instead of the Pope armed men were there. The cardinal was seized and rushed off to the

This feature began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for January 29

dreaded Castle of San Angelo, that place of destiny for Borgia enemies.

At the same time all the wealth in the Castle of Monte-Giargiano that belonged to the Orsini and the castle itself were calmly taken over by Alexander. The thoroughness with which the Borgias carried out such annexations will be seen in this instance.

The Pope himself went over the cardinal's account books. Two items showed there not accounted for in the inventory of the wealth seized. One item showed that three months prior the cardinal had bought a magnificent pearl for fifteen hundred Roman crowns. But where was the pearl?

Then there was an entry of two thousand ducats loaned to some one by the cardinal. But the person who owed this money was not named.

Alexander had the governor of the prison ask Cardinal Orsini where was the pearl and who owed the two thousand ducats.

Orsini knew well that he had nothing to hope for by obliging the Pope in answering these questions. So he bade Alexander find out the answers himself as best he could.

Poison in His Food

Food for Orsini had been sent by his mother. Alexander now ordered that no more food be allowed the prisoner until he answered the Pope's questions.

Orsini himself would perhaps have taken up the challenge and chosen to die by starvation, since die he must at the hands of the Borgias.

But others could not endure the ordeal imposed on the doomed man. In two days Orsini's mother sent two thousand ducats to the Vatican. It was she who was the debtor.

The following day a woman dressed as a man was ushered into Alexander's bedroom. She was Orsini's mistress. And into Alexander's hand she placed the magnificent missing pearl.

Alexander looked with more interest at the mistress than at the pearl. In fact, he allowed her to keep it—for a consideration.

And Cardinal Orsini was allowed to eat again.

But two days later he died of poison in his food.

For Borgia Revenue

Fifteen fortresses and thirty cities Cesare had captured or won by intrigue in five short years. All about Rome they were, these conquests of his. A dozen dukedoms were comprised therein. Many a kingdom was smaller than his holdings, many a king had less power than he. Romagna, the territory he had conquered, needed only to be called a kingdom to win recognition as such. And its overlord, Cesare, was ready to exchange his ducal coronet for a royal crown.

He came to Rome to see the Pope about it.

Alexander was not unprepared for the proposal, as we may well believe. Like practical men father and son sat down to figure. As king Cesare would need still more wealth than even the Borgias had. Again, therefore, Alexander set about to tap a fresh flow of gold into the Borgia coffers.

His scheme was not new: in one way or another he had used it before. Only that, accustomed now to success, Alexander planned more boldly and went about the execution of his plan even more vigorously than before.

He had filled many a high office of the church with those who had paid high prices for the privileges and the holdings that went with such appointments. Now he proposed to promote nine of these creatures of his and make them cardinals.

It was a well rounded scheme. In the first place all the holdings of the nine to be promoted would revert back to the Pope since the posts themselves would be rendered vacant. These holdings the Pope would sell and thus make item number one in his new and best laid scheme for Borgia revenue.

Item two: Each of the men to be made cardinal—and with a cardinal's hat went churches and treasure—would pay amply for the office. Nine such purchases would make item number two also a considerable addition to Borgia treasure.

Item three would be the combined hold-

ings that went with the nine cardinalships. For under the law so energetically brought into practice by Alexander himself, a cardinal was not permitted to make a will. When he died all his possessions reverted to the Pope.

And as the little secret laboratory in which Borgia poison was manufactured was at the peak of its productive power, Alexander needed only to make use of its products to inherit at his convenience the wealth he loaned to the nine cardinals for a consideration; though, of course, the purchasers didn't know that they were merely renting their proud holdings.

The Cardinal's Banquet

The men selected for promotion paid their purchase price in each case without haggling. Whereupon nine new cardinals were then created. They were Giovanni Castellar Valentino, Archbishop of Trani; Francesco Remolino, ambassador of the King of Aragon; Francesco Soderini, Bishop of Volterra; Melchior Copis, Bishop of Brissina; Nicholas Fiesque, Bishop of Frejus; Francesco di Sprate, Bishop of Leone; Adriano Castellense, clerk of the chamber, treasurer general, and secretary of apostolic letters; Francesco Loris, Bishop of Elva, Patriarch of Constantinople, and secretary to the Pope; and Giacomo Casanova, prothonotary, and private chamberlain to His Holiness.

Items one and two therefore poured their flood of gold into the chest of the Borgias. And with characteristic vigor Alexander and Cesare went on to item three.

Three of the new cardinals, Casanova, Melchior Copis, and Adriano Castellense were nominated by the Borgias to be the first to return to the Pope—without their knowledge, of course—the offices and the wealth they had so recently bought.

The Borgias had a rich sense of the dramatic. Since three cardinals were to be ushered out of this life by the favorite method of the Borgias, father and son decided on a banquet as the fittest setting for the act.

Then, too, with an irony not devoid of power to thrill, Alexander chose as the scene of the banquet the villa of one of his intended victims, Cardinal Castellense. What enhances such a thrill in contemplation is that in addition to the irony there was a touch of the practical in the arrangement. When the cardinal should die of poison, the fact that it was at his own festal board that he met his death would help divert suspicion from the Borgias.

We will want to be present at this projected drama.

For there will be developments so unexpected and so melodramatic that they will stand out as purple patches even in the colorful story of the Borgias.

The morning of the day appointed for the banquet is the 2nd of August. The oppressive heat of Rome in midsummer is on us. The villa of Cardinal Castellense is but a short walk from the Vatican, and Alexander, though in his seventy-second year, has still the powerful Borgia vitality and decides to walk from the Vatican to the villa.

He sets out on foot leaning on Cesare's arm and accompanied by Cardinal Caraffa, his personal attendant. The three walk slowly, quietly chatting. The robes of the Pope and of the cardinal and the ducal splendor of Cesare's costume make of the group a brilliant cluster of color as they slowly make their way up the road that slopes up to the cardinal's villa.

Two Bottles of Wine

Cesare asks: "I have never been to the Villa Castellense. Have we much farther to go?"

The question is asked purely for its effect on Cardinal Caraffa. Alexander used the cardinal as his personal attendant chiefly because the man was so innocent and had such implicit faith in the Pope.

As a matter of fact, Cesare had paid a secret visit to the villa that very morning. He was accompanied by the Pope's butler. As the Pope was graciously giving the banquet to his newly created cardinals, the household of Castellense found nothing to remark in the fact that the Pope's butler should come there to prepare beforehand for the Pope's personal comfort.

What they would have remarked, however—had they seen it—was Cesare's

stealthy entrance into the villa soon after the butler arrived. His costume was that of a domestic servant bringing several articles to be used by the Pope at the banquet.

Among the things he handed to the Pope's butler were two bottles of wine.

They were incrusted with the dust of a century of mellowing in some wine vault. The butler took the bottles and placed them on a buffet near the head of the banquet table.

Cesare slipped away.

The Pope's butler called the servants of the cardinal's household.

"Look at these two bottles of wine," he said. "They are for the use exclusively of His Holiness. Under no circumstances are any of you to touch it."

The servants took careful note.

The butler then helped the cardinal's cook to prepare the banquet. Suddenly the butler exclaimed: "I should have remembered! The most magnificent carp I ever saw was sent to His Holiness this morning by a devout fisherman. It will make an excellent addition to the feast. I will hurry back to the Vatican and bring it."

The Body in the Coffin

So that as we watch Alexander, Cesare, and Cardinal Caraffa slowly making their way to the villa, we see the Pope's butler leaving it to go to the Vatican.

The three men have almost reached the top of their climb, when the Pope in the increasing difficulty he finds in breathing on such a hot day puts his hand on his breast. His fingers miss something he is not only accustomed to wear, but under no circumstances does he ever omit of his own accord the article he is now without.

It is a gold chain to which is attached a locket containing a consecrated wafer. Long ago an astrologer had prophesied that so long as Alexander wore that locket about his neck neither steel nor poison would come to do him harm. A Borgia feels the need of a talisman and Alexander orders Cardinal Caraffa to go back to the Vatican and fetch the chain and locket.

The Cardinal hurries back to the Pope's chambers and enters his bedroom. The windows are curtained against the glare of the sun and the chamber is almost in darkness. The moment his eyes become accustomed to the dark the cardinal utters a loud cry of terror.

There in the center of the room he sees, mounted on trestles, a coffin. At each corner burns a lighted torch. And in the coffin lies Alexander VI.

The cardinal frantically makes the sign of the cross and calls upon God and the saints.

Instantly the scene vanishes. Perhaps the sun and the heat of the day were responsible for the hallucination. But it takes the cardinal—who is later to become Pope Paul IV—a full quarter of an hour to recover composure. He finds the locket and sets out again for the Villa Castellense.

A Careless Under-butler

Meanwhile we see the Pope and Cesare arrive at the garden of the villa. Both are hot and thirsty. The cardinal host is concerned for their comfort and asks what he can do for him.

"You can have my servants bring me a goblet of wine," says Alexander.

The Pope's butler should have been at hand to receive this order. But as he has gone back to the Vatican it is the under-butler who takes the order. This servant of the Pope's is not in the confidence of the Borgias as the head butler is. This one is only a servant.

Furthermore, he did not even know of the two bottles of wine which Cesare had brought earlier in the day. He hurries into the villa and asks the cardinal's head butler for some wine for His Holiness.

The cardinal's servant bethinks himself.

"My master has some rare wines," he says, "but I do not know His Holiness's preferences, and I should be afraid to make a mistake in giving him the wrong kind of wine. But I have a suggestion. Your head butler has brought here two bottles of the Pope's own wine which we were instructed not to touch, as it is exclusively for His Holiness. They are on the sideboard in the banquet hall."

Just as he says this another servant comes hurrying up from the garden.

"The Duke of Valentinois also wishes wine," he tells the Pope's under-butler.

"So fetch him a goblet of the same wine you bring the Pope."

The Pope's under-butler goes into the banquet chamber and sees the time-crusted bottles of wine. He recognizes the seal of the Borgias. Carefully he takes up one of the bottles and breaks the seal that tops the cork.

He is not very observant, this under-butler. Otherwise he might have thought it peculiar that while the cellar crust on the bottle seemed to indicate undisturbed repose for a great many years, the wax of the seal is fairly bright and new.

In Their Death Throes

He pours out some of the contents of the bottle into two beautiful gold goblets. Then, recorking the bottle, he picks up the goblets and walks carefully out to the garden, so carefully that although the wine is almost at the brim neither of the cups lose a drop.

He hands the first goblet to the Pope, the second to his son.

The two drink.

The heat had been intense and they are thirsty. The wine is perhaps the rarest in the Vatican cellars. Father and son drain the goblets to the dregs.

The servant takes back the empty goblets and retires.

Alexander sits down on a marble bench in the breezy shadow of an ancient olive tree. Cesare leans back comfortably in a chair also of marble that had been fashioned in ancient Rome when his namesake ruled the world. Father, son, and a group of the cardinal guests chat pleasantly.

Gradually, however, the Pope's chat loses vivacity. He becomes abstracted. Then his face shows signs of distress.

"What is it, your Holiness?" the host asks anxiously.

Alexander does not answer. But now the whole company is on their feet. For the look in his face tells of physical distress.

A cry breaks from his lips, a cry of pain and fear.

"I have been poisoned!"

A horrified chorus echoes his cry.

And now Cesare Borgia roars: "I, too, have been poisoned!"

He is, of course, younger and stronger than his father, and it has taken the poison a longer time to make itself felt. But now Cesare has risen to his feet. Pain, vast and unfamiliar, is in him.

Now both he and the Pope are writhing in agony. As for the onlookers, they are horrified. Before their eyes the spiritual head of the Church of Rome and the temporal chief of Romagna are, perhaps, in their death throes.

Aside from any direct consequences to every one present at that scene the death of both or either of these men will shake Europe to its foundations

The two stricken men are placed in litters and hurried to the Vatican. The Pope is taken to his bedroom, and Cesare to his own wing of the great palace. A small army of physicians clusters about each man, and every remedy known is tried.

"Mercy, Have Mercy!"

A violent fever is burning up the Pope. Powerful emetics are given him; but they only make things worse. Now he threshes about in convulsions. It is an appalling sight. This man, still clad in the garb of the head of a great church, is writhing as if he were suffering the agonies of the damned.

The surgeons bleed him with the hope of abating some of the fever. The convulsions become somewhat less violent. But they leave the harrowed mind free to attend to still greater torment. Where before it was the body that was racked, now Alexander finds himself deeper in inferno.

The onlookers, aghast and helpless, see those Borgia eyes which they had never beheld except in domination, now roll in terror as wild as that of any ghost-afflicted savage. They are seeing things, those eyes, which even the doctors must shudder at, even though to their eyes the horrors are invisible.

And Alexander's lips, now swollen and purple, give some clew as to what haunts him.

All about the man on the rack circle the men and the women whom the Borgias had, in their time, racked and broken, plundered and poisoned, tortured and murdered. They

have come to life now, this private hell he has peopled, and now it is they who are the torturers.

Alexander babbles denials of his guilt. He shrieks confessions. He pleads for mercy. He offers bribes. He threatens, and in the next tormented breath retracts his threats and cries:

"Mercy, have mercy!"

But there is no mercy; not until the last agonized breath dies with a rattle in his throat. That happens exactly a week after the agony set in.

Then comes a sort of peace. The quiet of death is there, of course. But the contorted features, limbs and body make even death seem but the continuance of torment.

Inside the Vatican Gates

Meanwhile, in his wing of the Vatican, Cesare, too, was going through a hell of pain. But here we have no seventy-two year old man. Cesare is a fighter, and his body has the strength of that bull which stands as symbol on the family crest. The poison is a violent intruder made with the best of Borgia talent. But Cesare is fighting it.

It may be interesting at this point to quote a contemporary who describes the way the Borgias manufactured the poison now at work in Cesare:

"They forced a boar to swallow a strong dose of arsenic; just as the poison was beginning to work they hung him up by his feet; convulsions soon ensued, and a poisonous froth flowed freely from his mouth. It was this froth, collected in a silver platter and hermetically sealed in a flask, that constituted the liquid poison."

And it is this poison, meant for others, that Cesare is now fighting in a battle of life and death.

Cesare is a fighter, as I have said. And a fighter has to watch the enemy on all sides. Stricken though Cesare is, he knows that the enemy within his body is not more deadly than the many enemies outside; men that must be creeping up on him and his father, knives in hand, deep thirst in their hearts.

So long as the lions still breathe the jackals and jungle foes will not dare strike. But only so long as both lions live will this respite last. For the moment the Pope should die the pack outside the Vatican gate will hear of it.

So Cesare, from his bed of torture, orders his faithful Michelletto to barricade the Vatican gates.

Michelletto does so, and even as he and his men shoot home the bars that make of the Vatican a fortress they hear the growl of mobs, the clatter of horses' hoofs as couriers tear along from one Orsini to another, from Sforzas to Colonnas, from the Vitellis to the Appiani, from Baglione to Guido of Ubaldo, from Rovere to Caracciolo—all rabid for the blood of the Borgias.

The enemy outside barred out for the time, Cesare turns to fight again the poison within him. Although the poison seems, as yet, incapable of killing the man, it seems to be the agency whereby is repaid to Cesare every pang and torture, every drop of the sweat of agony he had brought to others.

The doctors are unable to help him. Cesare remembers a remedy he once heard of; it was said to have saved the life of King Ladislas of Naples once similarly stricken. Cesare orders the same treatment. It is a grotesque and rather revolting business. Let me quote:

The Pope's Private Papers

"Four upright oaken posts were firmly attached to the floor of his room. Every day a bull was brought in and thrown over on his back, and his legs were made fast to the posts. Then an incision a foot and a half long was made in his belly, through which the intestines were taken out and Cesare crawled into the still living receptacle and bathed himself in the animal's blood. When the bull was dead he crawled out again and was rolled in blankets soaked in boiling water; and the profuse perspiration thus induced almost always relieved him."

His struggle against death is still at its height when Michelletto entered the room from a visit to the Pope. Cesare, his eyes bloodshot and violent, catches his friend's expression. For the instant he forgets even his agony.

"Dead?"

"Yes!"

Cesare tries to rise to his feet, but falls back. Flesh is not equal to the effort. "Don't—let—news get out!" He makes another effort to rise. "And bring here—the Pope's papers—treasure!"

Michelletto seeks out Cardinal Casanova, who has charge of the Pope's effects.

"The Duke of Valentinois wishes the Pope's private papers and chests," he tells him curtly.

The cardinal feels that in an hour like this any man may make a bid for mastery.

"I am in charge of them, and in my charge they shall remain!" he says sternly.

Michelletto drops his hand to his girdle, and in an instant the cardinal feels a steel blade at his throat. "Let me have them!"

To Kiss the Hand

The cardinal lets him have them. The Pope's papers; two chests filled with gold to the value of nine hundred thousand Roman crowns; several boxes brimming over with precious jewels; other boxes crammed with priceless gold relics, many of the latter the property, not of any Pope, but of the church itself, all these are brought in and piled up in Cesare's sick room.

Only then does Cesare permit the news of the death of the Pope to go out into the waiting city, and thence over a Europe agonized with suspense.

At the same time Cesare sends this message to the ring of enemies waiting outside the Vatican gates:

"When I have recovered my strength I shall leave the Vatican with my retinue and my possessions. I shall leave it to the man whose right it will be to govern in the Vatican. But I shall leave it on my terms. I am to be allowed to pass out of Rome with my troops and my possessions unmolested.

"Otherwise there will be nothing left of the Vatican—no two stones atop one another. For know you, that the cellars of the Vatican have been mined by me. Vast stores of gunpowder are there. Their location is known only to me and those whom I have put in charge of the mine."

The enemies of the Borgias dare not doubt Cesare's threat. It may be a lie; and it may be the truth.

They send Cesare word that they will let him leave the Vatican unmolested.

Cesare then turns his full attention on the fight within his body. And slowly his will and the robust animal in him fight the bony clutch of death, then shake it off.

Cesare rises once more, surrounded, but himself again ready for his enemies.

Meanwhile they are proceeding with the obsequies of the Pope. Only those who, by compulsion or out of fear, have to go through the show of respect for the dead Pontiff attend. And there are but few who are still afraid of Alexander VI.

Everybody else, now that this Borgia is but contaminated clay, is glad of the opportunity, so to say, to stamp upon it. The body lies abandoned for hours in the chamber of death. It is indeed a hideous sight, with its face black and bloated.

After services at St. Peter's—services attended by comparatively few—the public is permitted to kiss the hand on which shines the fisherman's ring. With any other Pope multitudes would have craved the privilege.

Not a soul avails himself of this.

A Fitting Epitaph

The body is then put into the casket hurriedly prepared for it. The casket is found to be too short. The dead man's legs are forced into position by workmen. Then others have to sit on the lid of the coffin to screw it into place.

And as they do so the workmen crack ribald jokes.

He is interred in a wretched tomb at the left of the high altar of St. Peter's. A tombstone is erected waiting for the carver's chisel.

But the next morning finds an epitaph chiseled there by some one who had stolen in during the night:

Vendit Alexander claves, altaria, Christum; emerat ille prius, vendere jure potest.

A fitting epitaph indeed: "Alexander sold the keys, the altar, and Christ himself: it was right that he should sell them, however, as he bought them in the first place."

Throughout the territory conquered by

Cesare there is a turmoil of recapture. Sforza retakes Pesaro. Baglione recaptures Perouse. Rovere retakes Sinigagalia. The Vitelli seize again Citti di Castello. The Appiani take Piombino. And the Orsini drive out with swords and fire every Borgia soldier in Monte-Giordano and their other domains.

Then the victorious armies converged on Rome.

What prompted the enemies of Cesare to promise to let him leave Rome with his forces was their jealousy and suspicion of each other. There was good fishing to be had in the troubled waters at the Vatican.

Cesare Shows Claws

A Pope was to be elected and the man whose creature the Pope was would be powerful indeed. Most of the cardinals had bought their red hats from Alexander VI. Of such men it could be expected that what they had bought they would be willing to sell. And a scramble ensued among the Orsini and the Colonna and other powerful groups to buy the papacy.

Then it developed that the Borgia lion still had strength in his sinews. Twelve of the cardinals for reasons of their own welfare agreed to act and vote as one; then they offered their strength to Cesare to sell it to best advantage for himself and for them.

Cesare chose to cast his influence in behalf of Francesco Piccolomini, Cardinal of Sienna, one of his father's creatures. Thus was elected Pope Pius III.

Meanwhile Cesare left the Vatican to march out of Rome. He still had to be carried and Rome saw the man who had once struck off the head of a bull with a single stroke of his two-handled sword now being borne through the same square on a bed shaded by a scarlet canopy and carried by twelve of his halberdiers.

But his naked sword was by his side, and his war-horse, with black velvet trappings on which his arms were embroidered, was led by a page alongside of the bed. This was noticed to the enemy that in case of attack Cesare was ready to leap into the saddle with his sword.

And Cesare was not alone. Eighteen cannon, a hundred chariots, and four hundred foot soldiers were his escort.

Yes, the Borgia lion still had claws left, though much of the strength had gone out of his sinews.

The Orsini, however, the proud line the Borgias had humbled in the dust, the family the Borgias had decimated by poison and the knife—the Orsini were raging like a pack of hungry wolves.

Outside of Rome they waited for him with an army, Fabio Orsini at its head. Until the advent of the Borgias Fabio was far removed from being the head of the Orsini family. He was a third cousin of the cardinal poisoned by Alexander VI. But so many heads of the Orsini family did the Borgias successively and successfully remove, that Fabio found himself leading the family fortunes.

Those fortunes, too, had been largely depleted by the Borgias. But for every blow the Borgias dealt them, hate in the hearts of the Orsini took deeper root. And now that one of the Borgia chiefs was dead and the other robbed of much of his strength, the Orsini pack was lying in wait.

Outside of Rome and just ahead of them Cesare's foot guards saw an armed force, a force half again as strong as Cesare's. The colors were those of the Orsini.

The Borgia Bugle Blows

Orsini hatred would not stop at victory. There would be no taking of prisoners. No terms of capitulation. Butchery to the last and lowliest soldier who wore the Borgia uniform if the Orsini won.

And splendid fighter though Cesare was he did not see how with the odds against him and with no chance to employ wile he could possibly win.

He was out of his litter and on his war-horse. His great sword was in his hand. Fabio Orsini at the head of his troops drew in his breath sharply as a ravenous man at his first glimpse of food.

Cesare seemed about to give the word to charge. His cannon wheeled. His chariots turned and deployed. His infantry were on their toes.

Orsini, ravenous though he was for Borgia blood, kept his head cool in a way the

Borgias would have admired. He was willing to bide his time since it was only a matter of an hour or two at most. Let Cesare make the first charge. Orsini would wait until the Borgia troops made close targets for his bowmen and fusileers.

Fabio meant to let Cesare spend part of his force in the charge. Another part would go down in the fiery barrage he would let loose. Then with the wind knocked out of them Cesare's troops would be just so many sheep at the mercy of an army of butchers.

Yes, the Borgia bugle sounds the advance. Orsini gives the order for the appropriate meeting of the charge.

Like the Proverbial Fiend

Then Fabio grows confused. For instead of advancing at the signal from the bugle the whole Borgia force suddenly wheels about and rolls rapidly off back to Rome.

The Borgia lion has turned fox for the moment.

By the time the Orsini pack recovers from its astonishment and takes up the pursuit the fox has taken on momentum. Then starts the race, or rather the chase. Now, however, the odds that had been in favor of the Orsini, the larger force, had turned against them. Lighter bodies move faster.

Back through Rome in the direction of the Vatican Cesare retreats with his troops. But the Orsini had not put all their eggs in one basket; not all their armed forces were in the chase behind the Borgias; nor were the Orsini by far the only enemies of the Borgias.

As the Borgia troops retreated through the streets, full of hope that they will reach the Vatican without the loss of a man, suddenly from every street there bursts out into their line of march an attack that must have looked like the spurting of a flood through breaking dikes.

Cavalry firing guns. Cavalry slashing with swords. Bowmen letting fly from windows. And raging foot soldiers thrusting and hacking with long halberds.

The streets of Rome become filled with the clangor of battle, strewn with writhing bodies, and running with blood.

Cesare on his horse with his sword flailing, thrusting, parrying, hacking, fights like the hero of some legendary ballad. Fiend at heart he fights like the proverbial fiend.

And for reward fate lets him cut his way to the gates of the Vatican himself, caked with blood and dust from head to foot, his sword blade half its length.

And his military force is hacked to pieces.

But he does gain the gates of the Vatican. Those on guard there know who had made their master Pope; and they open the gates and close them just in time to admit Cesare and bar out his pursuers.

Bloody and dust-covered as he is Cesare hurries to the Pope's apartments and bursts in upon him.

He finds the Pope in bed writhing.

It will be remembered that up to the coming of the Borgias it was held that: "No Pope could reign a week without the Orsini and the Colonnas."

This Pope is a creation of the Borgias and, therefore, objectionable to the Orsini. Pius III knew that and guarded himself, or tried to against the Orsini. He ate and drank nothing but what was prepared for him by his own faithful servants. His bodyguard admitted no unknown person within knife-thrust of his body.

From the Death Bed

But he did not know that an obscure helper to one of his doctors had but recently secured his position without much scrutiny on the part of those who hired him.

The Pope was chronically troubled with inflammation in one of his legs. A plaster was usually applied. A plaster was this time applied. Pius III should have known how resourceful Renaissance Italy was in ways of administering poisons. Apparently he did not know.

So we behold him in his death throes when Cesare bursts in upon him.

The tide of fortune, which had so long run strongly with the Borgias, seems to have turned against them with a vengeance. Here was the Pope on whom Cesare had counted for prolonged protection, dying.

What little he could do for the man who made him Pope for the pathetically brief span of mere days Pius III did for Cesare. Dying though he was he rose from his bed.

On his order the governor of the Castle of San Angelo was called. He was instructed to give Cesare shelter there and protect him to the last extremity. Into Cesare's hand Pius III himself put the key to the passage leading from the Vatican to the fortress prison.

Then the Pope fell back on his bed in a swoon.

Cesare in his underground chamber in San Angelo, worn out, yet not daring to go to sleep, sat by the light of a single candle wondering how the Pope was faring, wondering what the next hour would bring.

Cesare's Conditions

He still clung to the hilt of his broken sword. It was a mere gesture. If the enemy came not a hundred swords nor a thousand would save Cesare. The best he could do would be to take some lowly soldier of the enemy or two or four with him to death. It is a bitter thought for a man who but yesterday was planning to make himself king in a continent over which his father was the spiritual ruler.

Then Cesare hears the door of his cell softly opened.

The candle is on a little table in the center of the cell. Cesare backs into the shadows, his half sword well gripped.

Into the candlelight a man comes slowly forward. It is Cardinal Giulio della Rovere, one of Cesare's enemies.

He is not armed, but Cesare knows there is an army at the man's call. He knows, too, the cardinal, though unarmed, has the strength of a bull, the courage of a lion, and the stealth and swiftness of a cat.

"What do you want?" Cesare growls.

The cardinal has stopped full in the candlelight and Cesare can see his face. It is what the cardinal intends.

"The Pope is dead!" Della Rovere says.

Cesare feels the blow. But like a warrior he does not let the fact show.

"What is that to me?" Cesare demands. The cardinal peers through the candlelight and tries to see Cesare's face.

"That depends," the cardinal says slowly, "on how reasonable you are."

And accustomed though Cesare had been to the giddy whirligig of fortune he grows almost dizzy with the unexpectedness of what the cardinal is saying.

Della Rovere wants to be Pope. Twelve cardinals are still faithful to Cesare Borgia; or what is perhaps a truer statement of the case, they feel that interest binds them together and to Cesare. And Cardinal della Rovere has come to buy Cesare's twelve cardinals.

Not long does Cesare permit surprise to master him. He lays down his conditions. What manner of spirit the man has can be seen from the insolence of his demands.

Immediately upon his election Della Rovere is to help Cesare recover all his former conquests in Romagna that have been devoured by the enemy pack. Then Cesare is to continue to be Gonfalon of the Church, generalissimo of the forces at the disposal of the Pope. And, final condition, Francesco della Rovere, the cardinal's beloved nephew, is to marry one of Cesare's illegitimate daughters.

The Wind Has Changed

The cardinal accepts.

The next day at the cardinal's motion the Sacred College of Cardinals convened to elect the new Pope, orders the Orsini to leave Rome for the period of the conclave.

And a few days later Giulio della Rovere is chosen Pope and takes the name of Julius II.

Almost his first act is to invite Cesare to take up residence at his former apartment at the Vatican. Cesare leaves the fortress of San Angelo, resumes his raiment of splendor and feels the sun of the Borgias issuing again from the clouds of the passing storm.

Another few weeks, he promises himself, after a breathing spell, the Orsini shall again feel a Borgia at their throats. And a profound thrill runs through his veins as with a deep intake of his breath he tastes the sweetness of that blood-letting soon to come.

Fortune often spoils a man on whom she has smiled so protractedly. But no wise man will indefinitely trust that smile. Even in his luxurious apartment in the Vatican, clad again in the panoply of power Cesare heard the ravening voice of his enemies,

wolf packs united by lust in common for his blood.

Cesare got his breathing spell in which to prepare. Not, however, for a reconquest of Romagna. The wind had changed. Instead he found it wiser to disguise himself and slip out of Rome. Alone and unnoticed he made his way to the little port of Ostia, expecting there to set sail for Spezia.

Possibilities of Escape

At Spezia his faithful Michelletto—from whom he had become separated in the fight in Rome—would be waiting for him with one hundred men and lances; the nucleus for a new army and a new thrust for power.

At Ostia the galley is about to cast loose for the voyage. Cesare in his cabin murmurs a prayer of thanks. The thanks are premature. A squad of horsemen dash up to the ship. They board. They tramp into Cesare's cabin, swords drawn.

And for the first time in his life Cesare learns what it is to be a prisoner within stone walls and peer out through bars of iron. He has been arrested in the name of the Pope.

For two long years prison—various prisons—are his home.

Why in those two years did no Orsini get to him with poison, with steel or with the hands of the strangler? A reader of the Renaissance rather expects such a fate for him who in the past had so generously dealt out death to others.

The answer is that even a fallen Borgia made a valuable pawn. And his enemies—now that the Borgias were down—were too divided in councils, too jealous and suspicious of each other to cast away the manifold possibilities that would go with the possession of the Borgia prisoner.

Meanwhile Michelletto patiently waits for his chief to regain his liberty. Nor does he only wait. He can no more live without plotting than without breathing.

At the end of two years Cesare finds himself in the Castle of Medina del Campo—in Spain, whose king is now to be counted among Cesare's enemies.

Cesare has lost much of his hope; but not his courage.

He had not heard from Michelletto for more than a year. Realist that he was, Cesare knows that there is not another friend on whom he can count for aid in escape.

The governor of the prison, Don Manuel, a veteran of several wars in which Cesare was the leader of the enemy, treats him with respect, and even a certain amount of cordiality. Daily he invites Cesare into his room and treats him to wine and a respite from his status as a prisoner.

Often Cesare has contemplated what possibilities for escape this privilege might hold. Often his eyes go longingly wandering to the key that hangs from the governor's girdle, the key that opens the outermost gate of the prison. But always in the room with them stand half a dozen men with halberds.

One morning Cesare rises after a bad night in which all the hopelessness of the situation has ridden him in nightmare. For a man like Cesare imprisonment is worse than a battle against odds, harder to endure.

His breakfast is brought, or, rather, it is his day's allotment of food, a loaf of bread and a jug of water. Cesare has no appetite. The dark bulky loaf offers no promise of the pleasures of the table to one who in his time had feasted.

The Contents of the Loaf

Finally, however, he takes up the loaf to break it. It seems to weigh especially heavy to-day.

To his surprise, the loaf breaks too easily. And imbedded in the dough he sees strange objects.

One is a short iron file.

Another is a small bottle of ruby colored liquid, so small it can be concealed in the palm of one's hand.

Wrapped around the little file was a note. It was from Michelletto.

Cesare eats the loaf and hides its contents.

That afternoon Cesare is invited to the governor's room as usual. For the first time Cesare becomes almost communicative. For the past year the governor had been trying to satisfy his curiosity as to the inside workings of some of the many changes

in the fortunes of lordly houses in which Cesare, at the height of his power, had played the principal part. Up to this afternoon Cesare had maintained a silence courteous but unyielding.

To-day, however, the goblet of wine seemed to be of unusual potency. Cesare's tongue becomes loosened. He pays the governor flattering tributes. Several times he is on the point of revealing this or that bit of history for which the governor has been so persistently maneuvering. He rises finally to leave the governor and return to his cell.

The Key to the Outer Doors

So potent seems the wine that at the threshold Cesare actually stumbles. He rises with the greatest of difficulty and with pain. At least he seems in pain. He says he has hurt his leg. He can scarcely support himself. He is helped back to his cell by two soldiers. He is confined to his bed there.

The next day the governor, eager to hear more from Cesare, comes to visit him with his guards, and brings two goblets and a generous bottle of wine. Cesare expands with friendliness as the governor pours out the port.

He leans forward and says in a low tone: "Yesterday I was about to tell you about my brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, and of other interesting matters. But your excellence will appreciate my reserve in the presence of your soldiers. There are things I would be glad to speak of to ears as discreet as yours. But yours alone may hear my story."

The governor knows Cesare is unarmed. Between them there has been only cordiality. He sees no harm in telling the guard to go outside of the cell. He orders his soldiers to withdraw.

The wine is poured. Cesare laughingly points to the single small window of his cell, with its thick iron bars and its meager dole of daylight. "Look, your excellency!" he says. "Look at those three bars against that field of gray cloud. Look well, for it might well serve as the design for the coat-of-arms of him whose story I am about to tell you. Even that spider's web between the bars may help the meaning of the symbol."

The governor looks. And as Cesare proceeds to make of that window a clever symbol of what he was telling of the King of Navarre, the governor continues to look. He does not see, therefore, Cesare's hand quickly pass over his goblet.

Cesare's story proves absorbing indeed. But the governor cannot understand why, although with all his heart he wants to hear what Cesare is saying, his eyes persist in closing and drowsiness should overwhelm him.

Soon Cesare loses his audience. The governor is asleep. Cesare does not seem to feel hurt.

He reaches over and from under the governor's cloak pulls the key to the outer doors of the prison. He hides the key in his bedding.

After half an hour, during which the governor snores, Cesare goes to the door and calls for the guard.

"His excellence has enjoyed exceedingly the wine he was good enough to bring me," he says, with that smile of good fellowship which he could so well assume. "But he has apparently grown tired of my company or has been put to sleep by my talk."

At the End of His Rope

The guard grins at Cesare and respectfully carries the governor off to his bed.

All that afternoon and evening and half the night Cesare, like some rat with teeth of steel, gnaws away at the bars with his file.

Night is still on when the second of the bars is sawed through at one end. Cesare grasps the iron and, bracing his feet against the wall, slowly twists that bar out of the window with that superb strength of his.

The weather is in his favor, a dirty night sky and intermittent rain. Now Cesare is tearing his bedding to strips. How long a rope he will need he can only guess at. He does not know within twenty feet how much of a drop it will be from the end of his rope to the bottom of the moat which surrounds the central dungeon of which his cell is a part. But he has to do the best he can with mere guesses.

He ties one end of his rope to the bar,

maneuvers his body out of the window, and, thankful for the murkiness of the night, lets himself down along the rope.

The rain soaks him to the skin. The dank breath of the moat comes up to him. But now he has reached the bottom of his rope, his body swings a little clear of the prison wall, and how far he will have to fall he does not know.

But, of course, there is no turning back, and Cesare, breathing a prayer to the god of chance, lets go. He falls through the night, strikes against some granite jut and heavily crashes to the stone flags of the prison yard.

What Destiny Held in Store

The jut of granite has flung him clear of the moat. Cesare's breath has been knocked out of him, and he feels as if he had broken bones.

But he hears heavily shod feet coming in his direction. Undoubtedly his fall, half heard by some sentry, is bringing men in his direction. Yes, the light of a swinging lantern shows three sentries approaching, swords clanking, the butts of halberds showing.

Should he make a dash for the gate of the prison and trust to blind chance to reach it ahead of the sentries, thrust the governor's key into the lock, open it and flee unhurt?

He decided to chance it. He gropes in his girdle for the key where he has hung it.

The girdle had broken in the fall, and the key is somewhere on the dark flags.

Cesare has no time to look for it, forced as he would be to grope. For the sentries are only a few yards away.

One of his feet feels the edge of the moat. Backward, like a crab, Cesare crawls until his body is hung along the sloping, slimy wall of the ditch, with only the grasp of his fingers on the top of the bank to sustain him.

The sentries come up. They look about to see what had caused the sound of the heavy fall. They decide they were mistaken in thinking they had heard something, and move off.

Cesare's prayer to the god of chance seems to have been heard. Not only did their lantern fail to reveal the man clinging to the side of the moat, but it has even served Cesare.

For, by its light he had caught a glimpse of the key where it had fallen into a shallow puddle.

Cesare crawls out of the ditch; gropes for and finds his key; steals to the gate and unlocks it—

Inscrutable seems destiny. Who can forecast it?

Cesare himself, were he asked to make a guess when he dangled in the dark at the end of his rope, as to what sort of picture he would make three months hence, would not have dared dream what reality had in store for him.

But we behold him only three months later once more mounted on a horse, a black Arab with the blood of equine royalty in its veins. Man and horse are arrayed in the trappings of royalty. A great sword of Toledo steel and gold, silver, and jewel-crusted hilt hangs at Cesare's belt.

At the Side of the King

By his side rides Michelletto, his uniform that of one high in command. He is the right hand indeed to the general himself, Cesare.

On the other side of Cesare rides King Jean d'Albert of Navarre. It will be remembered that Cesare was married to a princess of Navarre. King Jean is her brother.

All about them are arrayed regiments of cavalry, and regiments of food guards, cannon and archers.

Across the plain and at the edge of a dense forest another army is stationed. It is the army of vassal of the King of Navarre, who has revolted from his rule and raised his sword against his king. The battle about to break will be the second clash between the two armies. The first took place the day before. King Jean, who thought himself endowed with military genius, had kept Cesare as a subordinate.

The enemy all but wiped his army out. Only nightfall and the brilliant maneuver which Cesare had carried out without consulting the king saved them from annihilation; indeed saved enough of a force to make Cesare wish for a return fight on the

following day. Through the night wisdom has come to the king. He sees now that in Cesare he has a captain into whose hands he should give over supreme command of the army and of the battle.

He acts accordingly. On the morning when we again behold Cesare, therefore, it is he and not the King of Navarre who is in command.

Deadlocked

That face of his, on which so many lusts and triumphs have played, perhaps never showed such insolence. He treasures now every day of his two year sojourn in prison, now that the sun is again full in his face and lights up serried ranks of armed men, thousands of them, waiting for his word. Neither poison, nor the death of Alexander VI, the ravening pack of the Orsini and their allies, nor the death of Pius III; not the two years of dungeon have been able to quench Cesare's star, even after he had himself ceased to hope.

Why should he not now feel insolent with hope? Before him is an enemy only slightly superior in numbers and commanded by, apparently, mediocre military talent. Cesare knows he can and will outgeneral and outfight the rebel.

Then, with the kingdom of Navarre and its alliances to back him with military power, what should keep Cesare from resuming the triumphant sweep of his conquest, which only a wretched accident—the accident of the poisoning at villa Castellense—had interrupted?

His lips part in a wolfish smile of anticipation, Cesare utters a command. Forty cannon echo it with a roar. The enemy's cannon thundered a reply. Waves of cavalry sweep down into the plain.

The cavalry of the enemy surge forward, and where the two bodies meet there breaks a bloody surf of fighting.

Regiments of footmen, regiments of archers, charge and deploy, and charge again to Cesare's order.

But the enemy are not the sheep Cesare, in his insolence, has thought them. They give as good as they get. Perhaps the intelligence of their high command is not so mediocre after all.

All the morning and part of the afternoon Cesare, from his hilltop, watches the see-saw of battle. Some of the insolence in his smile has gone. But there is enough left of his now indomitable faith in his destiny. And he has been restless in his rôle of mere general.

The soldier in him, the duellist, the man of prodigious muscle, the beheader of bulls, is restless after his years of prison and in sight of men in a death grapple. He has been watching for a crucial moment in the battle. He has retained a hundred mounted lancers, the fighting flower of the army, kept them at his side.

Now he sees the grapple on the plain so tightly locked, so evenly balanced that a decisive blow added to either side must tip the scale one way or the other. Which way shall it be?

In His Own Blood

With a shrill cry, Cesare, straining up in his stirrups, whips out his over-sized sword, digs the spurs into his Arab's flanks and streams off downhill into the thick of the fight.

His hundred lancers catch his fever and thunder at the very heels of his flying horse.

Now his charge roars up to the enemy cavalry, and in a few seconds they should clash. But, to Cesare's astonishment, to the delight of his followers, the enemy wheel about on their horses and break toward the edge of the black forest, whence the enemy had issued so confidently that morning.

With them the archers and the foot guards of the enemy turn, too, and flee to the forest.

Swept on by the momentum of his charge and the intoxication of triumph, Cesare and his horsemen strain at the very flanks of the retreating cavalry, hot for their blood.

Now both enemy and pursuers are plunged in the shadow at the edge of the woods. Cesare cannot stop either his horse or his horsemen, even if he wanted to do so. They have been swept up on the wings of destiny.

For, with nightmarish suddenness, the fleeing enemy, to the last man, whirls about

on hoof and heel and charges back on the pursuer.

And from the forest there burst forth fresh bodies of horsemen and men on foot, archers and artillery.

In a twinkling the headlong drive of the pursuers is shattered, and it is the pursued who take up the intoxication of slaughter.

Cesare's followers, those who have not been cut down, seeing that destiny had betrayed the man to whose star they had hitched their hopes and lives, break and flagrantly flee.

Cesare does not flee. There is neither time nor has he the inclination to follow the rout. There flashes through him a rage at himself that he should have been so easily tricked, a hatred of the face of destiny that had so treacherously intoxicated him with its smile.

Then a swirl of horsemen and enemy on foot inclosed him. With one hand grasping his horse's reins Cesare, with his last fierce lust, slashes and hacks away at the whirlpool of flesh about him.

For several priceless moments Cesare drinks as deeply as ever in his life the draught of bestial satisfaction.

Then his horse is cut down from under him. A shower of arrows bite into his body and through. A bristle of lances make a veritable pincushion of his body. And a halberd squarely cleaves his skull in two.

Cesare's star, lately so fair, is quenched at last in his own blood.

And at the head of a thundering charge of reënforcements, destined to win the battle for the King of Navarre, comes Michelletto—too late to help his master, Cesare.

In the heat of dealing the blow that crushed the enemy, Michelletto has no time to look for Cesare. But when the tumult is over he does not see his commander-in-chief. Night has fallen. With four torch bearers carrying great flaming pine knots they search the battle-field. Where Cesare was last seen plying his sword they find five bodies—four of the enemy, fully clad.

The fifth has been stripped by some prowling thief of all the splendor with which the Borgias clad themselves for victory and jubilee.

And what of Lucrezia?

When her brother and her father murdered off the husband she loved something seemed to plough her heart. Something tore up the tangle of poisonous weeds, and with the suffering that followed came new growth. She married the Duke of Ferrara, lived many uneventful years as a wife and mother, and died extolled as a good queen and woman.

THE END

He grasped her hand roughly and held it, so that—

HEROES OF SCIENCE

By Allen Saunders

"THE SIGNED REPLY," HE SAID, "TELLS WHAT THE MENACE WAS AND INDICATES BOTH THE KILLER AND THE MANNER OF DEALING DEATH"

MISS FLORENCE FLAXTON paused at the top of the bare stairway and scratched the back of her hand meditatively. She had never formed the habit of entering her roomers' quarters uninvited—while they were there, at any rate.

Of course, a body had to go in occasionally to do up the room, but she always managed that while they were gone. But Gideon Quick was an exceedingly hard person to standardize.

In the two years that he had spent under her roof Miss Flaxton had never known him to be out at the same hour two days in succession. So that made things much more difficult.

This day she had waited just as long as her heavy schedule of cleaning would allow her, and now she had ascended the stairs with a firm resolve to clean the old roomer's abode even if she had to knock down some of his precious scientific apparatus in the doing.

The idea! Messing around with a lot of little glass tubes and bottles for two straight days without getting out of the stinking, stuffy room for as much as a half hour.

Miss Flaxton leaned over and listened at the closed door, brushing her sparse, mouse-colored locks away from her ear as she did so. Not the faintest sound came from beyond the panels, but an overwhelming, acrid odor of chemicals smote her nostrils and forced her to straighten her bony figure hastily and draw away.

She shuddered and made a wry face. Faugh! How could any human live in such an atmosphere? It was tainting her whole establishment, too. Only last evening the man in the east corner room had complained that the fumes were giving him a cold in his head.

Suddenly Miss Flaxton made a decision. Chin up, she rapped sharply on the thin

—the light brought out every ridge and blemish

wood of the door. Her staccato drumming echoed in the narrow hall, but no answering growl came from within.

After further fruitless knocking she called, her voice shrill and impatient: " Mr. Quick! Pay attention! I'm coming in to clean up that room!"

She waited a moment to make sure that there had been no response, then turned the knob of the door, which yielded easily under pressure, and flounced in.

The shades were drawn, a habit to which her roomer's two-year stay had accustomed her, and for a time her peering eyes failed to distinguish any objects in the gloom of the stench-filled room.

Then, little by little, the highlights on a collection of test-tubes and beakers picked themselves out in the shadows. Pieces of furniture took shape and, as her vision adjusted itself, she made out the figure of the old scientist, sprawled in uncouth grossness across an old sofa at one side of the room.

Such a man! To work himself into a stupor, then to sleep for two or three days at a time! He had done this before and Miss Flaxton was little surprised to find him in this exhausted state.

Somewhat embarrassed, she had started hesitantly across to arouse the sleeper, when the shade on a west window swayed gently back and a flood of late afternoon sunlight bathed the reclining figure.

In one fleeting glance Miss Flaxton took in the grotesquely twisted body, lying arms outstretched and open hands turned up—the wide-open, staring eyes—the features set, with lines of intense pain showing back of the grizzled beard.

She opened her mouth to scream, but the hand of horror clutched her throat in a nightmare grip and with a sigh she crumpled apologetically to the floor.

II

FREDERIC SHEA sat on a bench in the news room of the *Daily Journal* and thumbed a copy of Zippy Stories which he had found there, left by some previous occupant. Frederic did not care for literature of the Zippy variety, but one must do something to pass the time when assignments are few.

It was with considerable relief, therefore, that he saw approaching him the touseled hair and maculate suit of Kelly, the city editor. The latter was carrying, he noted, a slip of typed paper and moved with an even more frenzied haste than usual.

" Here," he barked as he neared the reporter's side, " here's a tip on a good human interest feature that just came through the City News tube. Something about an old nut being killed by gas fumes in his own laboratory.

"Might have been a great scientist at one time, see? Go get a look at the layout and fix up a story for the noon edition. Play up the 'heroes of science' idea."

Shea took the slip, glanced at it hurriedly to get the address and seized a sheaf of copy paper. The city editor was walking away by this time, but turned to call back over his shoulder: "And, Shea—get hold of a good picture somehow."

As he stepped on the rickety, old elevator the young reporter slumped dejectedly. There it was again! Get a picture! He was sick and tired of picture chasing.

His four-year course in journalism at the State University had contained nothing about the necessity of bargaining with servants and pilfering family possessions, all that the news might be illuminated for those too illiterate to garner an idea in print.

The elevator jerked to a stop at the main floor and Shea strode out through the entry door and sought a Halstead Street car, upon which he continued his disgruntled musings.

Four months ago he had stepped with elation into an opening on the *Journal's* reportorial staff, his head full of the glamor of the work and life that would be his—a life that would combine the joy of self-expression with an opportunity to enact in real life the adventures of the great mystery solvers of the past, Holmes, Dupin and the others, who had been in a measure his heroes since he was old enough to lie on his back in a cave under the warm-house, smoking sticks of rattan and devouring forbidden literature in lurid paper covers.

And what had he found? Instead of hair-raising accounts of daring crimes and dark mysteries he had been detailed to write of aldermen's sack races, of milch goats at the county farm, of grandmothers who could turn cart-wheels! And ever there was that admonition, "Get a picture! Get it by fair means or foul, but get it!" What a life!

The present story did, however, appear to have colorful possibilities. Shea fished from his coat pocket the crumpled bit of paper bearing the multigraphed press bulletin and read as the car bumped on:

> Gideon Quick, sixty-two, a roomer at the home of Miss Florence Flaxton, 1236 West Wayne Avenue, was found dead in his room at half past five Tuesday afternoon. He was by profession a chemist and it is thought that his death was caused by fumes from a liquid found boiling over an alcohol burner beside his reading chair. Assistant Coroner Walsh indicated that death may, however, have followed an epileptic attack. The deceased had no known relatives.

Not extremely exciting, to be sure, but it might have been worse. The car was rattling through a district now which had aways appealed to Shea. Just on the edge of glamorous gangland, this portion of the city had managed to retain a quondam respectability, besmirched only occasionally when some dark underworld plot, spreading like an oozing pool of blood, seeped across the imaginary border between the two districts.

The dirty-faced grocery on the corner carried a number within ten of that listed as the residence of the deceased martyr to science, so Shea signaled to the motorman and swung off on the oily, mud-covered pavement.

Across the street was an ancient, three-story residence with the desired number in cracked, porcelain figures above the door. The building had a basement apartment with an entrance below the tiny porch; the windows of the entire front were draped in tattered and age-yellowed lace curtains, and in one window was a faded card bearing the legend, "Furnished Rooms," with a penciled inscription below, "Gentlemen Preferred."

Shea grinned at the resemblance of the notation to the title of a certain popular novel and rang the old bell-knocker.

His ring was eventually answered by a tall, gaunt female whose drawn face and dark-circled eyes told vividly of her intimate relation to the shabby little tragedy. Without waiting for him to speak she launched into a whining tirade:

"You need't tell me who y'are; you're another one of them sneakin', pryin' reporters, and I want to tell you right now that you can't be in my house, nor have any pictures, nor take any.

"It's bad enough havin' some one meet his Maker right in a body's front room without bein' run to death by a lot of

young simpletons with no sense of decency or anything else!" And she paused for breath.

Shea was prepared for such an emergency. He turned back a lapel of his coat and flashed a spot of bright metal. Police stars had long since been supplanted by printed pass cards, signed by the reporter's city editor, but there were certain little shops in which they could still be bought and their effectiveness made them popular among the younger members of the fourth estate.

The woman's attitude changed at once. To her a star meant authority and she hastened to make amends for her cold reception. "I didn't think about you being an officer, sir. I hope you'll not hold that ag'in' me." She stepped back as Shea, taking advantage of his momentary supremacy, walked into the dingy hall.

The reporter glanced about with hastily assumed dignity. "I'll have to see the body," he stated, "I suppose it is in the room?"

"No, sir," replied the woman, "the coroner's men had it removed to the Rosenbaum Undertaking Parlors on the next cross street down, but you can see his room. There's nothing been touched."

Miss Flaxton, followed by the reporter, climbed the stairs wearily. They entered the dismal little bedroom where the landlady had, in deference to some hazy notion of appropriateness, left the shades closely drawn.

With the air of one in authority Shea stepped to the window and raised the tattered blinds. In the steely light he noted rapidly the pitiful contents of the place: a disheveled bed, an easy-chair with dirty upholstering, a small, low, round table heaped with books on esoteric subjects, a secretary desk, a lumpy sofa, and, crippling along the wall next to the west window, a decrepit, wooden table, completely covered with pieces of glass and metal apparatus, cracked and dirt-crusted, of the sort that one might find in the back room of an indolent pharmacist's shop.

Shea stood a moment taking in these wretched surroundings then drew out his note paper and began tabulating bits of color that might be woven into his "human interest feature."

His glance alighted again on the low reading table and he paused to note more carefully the strange assortment of objects that cluttered its surface. The books ranged from a massive tome containing the proceedings of the British Physical Society for 1899 to a worn and dog-eared treatise on the stellar system.

Sheets of note paper, bearing strange, cabalistic figures, mingled with the books. A tiny alcohol lamp—evidently the one mentioned in the press bureau's report—stood extinguished under a beaker of amber fluid. And teetering precariously on the edge of one of the books was a partially eaten half of a grapefruit with a sticky spoon thrust into the remaining pulp.

III

MISS FLAXTON, who had been following with curious eyes the reporter's survey of the room, saw his interest in the last object and put in a word of explanation:

"Poor Mr. Quick! He just about lived on that stuff. I guess maybe he thought grapefruits was healthy; anyhow, he bought them by the dozen. There's two of the things in the drawer of that desk over there." She broke off suddenly with the embarrassed air of having talked out of turn.

She stepped to the piece of furniture indicated and opened the single deep drawer. There, in a moldy jumble of bread crusts, milk bottles and paper sacks were, sure enough, two untouched fruits.

He closed the drawer of the dead man's humble larder and, moved by a sudden impulse, opened the upper compartment of the desk. He heard, as he did so, a half audible gasp from the watching spinster.

As the door dropped down there slid out a small avalanche of papers—letters, notes, merchants' bills and whatnot.

The reporter was standing aghast in the midst of this deluge when the door opened behind him. Both persons in the room turned and confronted the newcomer who stood framed in the doorway.

Shea started as he surveyed the strange figure—a gnomlike little man with a large bald head set closely on broad shoulders, long arms dangling from a torso that reminded one, somehow, of a pouter pigeon, thin little legs that ended in a pair of thick, stubby feet. The visitor bobbed his head and squinted through his thick lenses.

"I came up without ringing as usual," he explained. "You see, Gideon had some of my books—old and valuable they are—and I thought I'd get them before they were destroyed"

He stood a moment, blinking under the steady gaze of the others, then broke the silence to add: "We had such good times together, he and I, that I felt I wanted to—"

He stopped short and his features darkened. Pointing a finger at Shea, who was still standing by the secretary, he shrilled: "What are you doing—tampering with his papers? His life's only wealth he kept in those drawers and you would despoil him even now of that!"

Shea wheeled to the desk and realized at once that the contents *had* been tampered with. The pigeonholes were empty! The two tiny drawers had been rifled, their contents dumped on the pile of papers. The lock of one had been splintered out of the wood. He turned and shot a look of inquiry at the landlady. She was pale and trembling, her quivering lip a confession of guilt.

The tableau lasted but a second. The tense silence was viciously shattered by the clamorous summons of the doorbell. Miss Flaxton, obviously relieved at the opportunity to escape the accusing eyes of the two men, pushed past the glaring dwarf and fled down the stairs, her heels clattering loudly as she rushed to the door.

She returned immediately, preceded by a florid, red-mustached individual whose thick shoulder muscles and biceps bulged under his blue serge coat.

He pushed the little bespectacled man into the room as he entered and surveyed the scene with an all-encompassing glance which came at last to rest on the figure of Shea, posed motionless before the littered desk.

"What's going on here? Who are you? One of those infernal newspaper men, I s'pose?" Shea nodded, and saw Miss Flaxton stiffen angrily as she realized that she had been duped.

"I was just getting the low-down on this accident, captain," he offered apologetically. His authoritative career was ended, he was well aware, for in the person of this keen-eyed, capable man he had recognized McCann, of the city detective bureau.

"Accident, hell!" McCann's voice was like the explosion of a bomb. "A pretty mess that patrolman made of his report! The old boy that lived here was murdered! The coroner found strong traces of an alkaloidal poison in his post mortem examination!"

At the word, "murdered," Miss Flaxton sucked in her breath audibly and the red flush of embarrassment which had mantled her cheeks gave way to pallor. The goggled stranger stood with his huge head bobbing like a toy donkey's and said nothing.

His air was that of one who has learned that the expected has happened. Shea, quick to realize both his awkward position and the good news story upon which he had stumbled, was the first to speak.

"I'm from the *Journal*, sir, and if I can be of any assistance in working this thing out I'll be mighty glad to help."

"Humph!" McCann's snort was eloquent. "You'll be just about as useful as a one-eyed button. I've seen your kind of student sleuth before. You'll look through your lecture notes for about ten minutes then tell me the answer. No, thanks. I'll manage somehow to worry along without you."

He turned to the trembling spinster.

"You're the landlady here, I s'pose?"

"Y-yes," came the faltering reply.

"You found the body?"

"Yes, sir. I was going in to sweep the room, and there it was on the sofa. I'd no idea that—"

"You told Officer Flaherty that you fainted, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And when you came to you hurried down at once to get the police by telephone?"

"Yes, sir. And when they came they notified the coroner's men."

"And no one else has visited the room?"

"No, sir. Not till he came this morning," pointing to Shea.

"Was anything changed or disturbed in the room, either while they were here or afterward?"

The spinster blurted out her reply with what struck Shea as being a particularly defiant air. "They moved him and fooled around with that little lamp, and beyond that there wasn't a thing touched—at least to my knowledge. Of course, with a gang of strange men moving about, a body can't be answerable for all they may or may not do!"

Shea was about to suggest that he had reason to doubt the accuracy of the landlady's statement when the little old man with the thick goggles cut in: "May I suggest, sir, that some things *have* been tampered with! When I entered I found this journalist and Miss Flaxton together in the room, and the young man was evidently in the act of rifling the contents of that secretary."

There was a cool precision about his words that stung Shea to a quick defense. "I'll swear before any jury and on any oath," he asserted, "that I have touched nothing in this room. I had only opened the door of the secretary when the papers all slid out and I realized that some one had looted it."

IV

"MR. QUICK kept his money in ten dollar bills in one of the small drawers," continued the inexorable voice of the old man. "He often feared robbery—by some one in the house—and he kept the face of the drawer waxed to receive finger-prints readily. Suppose you examine the fingers of those present and compare them with the prints that you find on that bit of splintered veneering."

McCann was not a person who accepted dictation as a rule, but the casual suggestions of the quiet little man undoubtedly piqued his interest. He strode over to the desk, picked up the bit of polished wood, and, seizing one of Shea's hands, he led him toward the window.

After a moment's careful scrutiny he dropped the reporter's arm and turned toward Miss Flaxton. The latter had been watching his every movement with fear-filled eyes, her lips compressed and her whole attitude that of nervous excitement. When the detective sought her hand she slipped past him to the door with a cry:

"You shan't! You've no right to be making such hints!"

McCann leaped to her side and thrust her to the window. Roughly he grasped her hand and held it so that the bright light brought out every tiny ridge and blemish on her work-roughened fingers.

Like a captive sparrow, she struggled and jerked to free herself from his vise-strong grip. Finally he ceased his unhurried peering and raised his head. "You are to come with me," he said shortly. "You may be my guest at the inquest to-morrow afternoon." He turned on the old man:

"Who are you?"

"I am Dr. Millingfloss, sir, a student of science like the deceased, and one of his friends—the only one, I fear, who is left to mourn his passing."

"What are you doing here this morning?"

"My usual habit was to visit Gideon near midday; habit turned my footsteps hither. Moreover, he had recently borrowed some old and valuable books from me and, hearing this morning of his death, I thought it best to get them in my possession lest some harm befall them in the confusion that seems likely to result from the tragic manner of his going."

The doctor stooped to pick up a worn, yellow-paged volume bound in scarred brown pigskin and bearing the title: "A Metaphysical Basis for God's Control of Nature's Laws."

The book lay open on the floor, face down, with some of the pages doubled under, as if it had been dropped by some one seated in the moth-eaten armchair. Evidently this was the book that Gideon Quick had been reading when he received his grim caller.

As the old man's fingers touched the

cover the detective galzanized into action and thrust him aside. "Don't touch that!" he growled. "I want this room left just like it was when the occupant was killed."

"But what makes you think he was murdered?" Shea broke in. "Isn't there just as good a chance that he committed suicide?"

McCann honored him with a lengthy reply. "Don't be an idiot, son, even if you are a reporter! Can't you see that a man isn't goin' to take a sudden notion to commit suicide when he's right in the middle of an experiment, is eating a meal and reading a book?

"Just look at that glass of stuff with the burner under it. That was going full blast when the police came in. The stuff was analyzed up at headquarters and they found it to be nothing but red-eye whisky.

"There's where the old boy's income came from—checking up on bootleg licker for a bunch of rich clients. But there wasn't a trace of poison in the stuff, nor in the junk on his work bench, nor in the juice they squeezed out of the grapefruit that he was half through eating. Yet he died from a dose of a powerful poison.

"Who gave it to him and how did he take it? There's your mystery, if that's what you're after."

Shea felt a chill of excitement run up his spine. Here are last was something that he could set his teeth in! He thrust his copy paper into his pocket and edged toward the door. "I'm going out to phone this into the office," he said. "When and where will the inquest be held?"

"At nine to-morrow morning, in the Rosenbaum Undertaking Parlors. And don't forget that you're to appear as a witness.

"You folks," and the detective nodded toward Miss Flaxton and Dr. Millingfloss, "are going to come with me to headquarters. I've a lot more questions that I want to ask you both. We'll go as soon as I can get a man here to take charge of the house.

"Now go look in a book, Scoop, and get the answer!"

Shea heard the last words as he started down the stairs. When he reached the street he looked about for a drug store and located one of the ubiquitous signs on a near-by corner.

He stepped across, bought a slug and gave the operator the *Journal* number. "Give me the city desk," he shot at the exchange operator when he had received his connection.

His conversation with Kelly was a model of brevity. That individual's news sense naturally perceived at once the value of this latest turn in the story, and after a few sharp questions he switched the call over to a rewrite man, to whom Shea found himself spelling out the names of the principals and summarizing carefully his newly acquired information.

He had finished relating his story when Bates, the rewrite man, called: "Wait a minute before you hang up; Mr. Kelly wants to speak to you again." And in a moment Shea was again listening to the biting voice of the city editor.

"Hello, Shea! Listen; did you get a picture of this man, Quick?"

Shea admitted that he had not.

"Now, see here—we want that photo and not an excuse, so don't come in without it!"

"But," protested the reporter, "there's a cop watching the place and there's no chance that he'll let me stir around in the stuff in that room!"

"What the hell's wrong with the back door? Houses have back doors, don't they? And if it's locked, you've got a shoulder, ain't you?" And the receiver clicked.

Shea turned disconsolately from the phone booth. So, he was still a picture boy, was he? The most important thing in the world to that grubby-faced little Irishman seemed to be getting something into his confounded sheet besides type! And, with his spirits considerably dampened, Shea trudged back across the street to the house of mystery.

Through the dirt-streaked windows he could see a blue-coated figure sauntering about the living room. He had observed that the door of that room opened at the foot of the stairs. No chance now to slip

unobserved up those stairs. The house had evidently no back stairway, as the fatal room was situated on a narrow landing with scarcely room for two persons to stand.

Three rooms, besides the bath, opened off this landing. One was the room occupied by the late Gideon Quick. Of the others one room appeared to give on the back yard and the other matched the room of Quick, facing the street and side yard.

If one could gain entrance to the back room he might slip across the landing without being seen or heard by the watching officer below. With this half-formed plan in mind the reporter ducked through a tunnel-like areaway and emerged in the littered back yard.

V

FTER a brief survey of the rear elevation of the house he pushed an ancient barrel against the building, stepped from that to a fairly secure footing upon a light-meter case, and found his chin on a level with the sill of the one back window. Half fearing to find the room occupied he swung himself upward and peeped in.

A quick glance showed that the person who called the drab spot home was unquestionably absent, and would probably not return till evening, there being no signs of daytime occupancy.

Shea lowered himself to regain strength for the effort, then, with a prayer that his prowling might go unnoticed by any neighbors who might be looking out of their kitchen windows, he struggled to a secure position on the window sill. The window was, by good fortune, unlatched, and he was inside the room in a trice.

There was no attraction to linger in the room in which he found himself. To be caught there would make embarrassing explanations necessary. A shoe hook negotiated the lock. He pushed the door open cautiously, listened for sounds of the patrolman below, then tiptoed across the narrow landing.

In the room of death things looked as he had left them a half hour before. He removed his shoes, and, with a strong inward feeling of revulsion at being forced to commit a burglary in order to satisfy his superiors, he began a thorough search of the premises.

As a natural starting point Shea turned his attention, first, to the secretary which, with its hopeless confusion of papers, looked as if it might easily supply him with the object of his quest. He was not long in finding something interesting, but it was not a picture.

It was a thick loose-leaf notebook of the type frequently used to contain laboratory notations and was filled with sheets of paper traced in a fine, scientific hand. The first pages seemed to carry only a list of addresses, each followed by certain dates and jottings: "August 12, two qts. o. k. September 1, one case sc. w. paid traces of f. oil." Here was juicy material to add to the story. A liquor analyst's record beyond doubt.

Elated, Shea turned to the middle of the book to see what other vivid bits might be discovered. Here he found himself in the middle of a personal diary, the entries in which at first puzzled him, then intrigued him, then—as he read further—amazed him.

As he leafed through the recently dated pages a sheet of folded foolscap fell out. It was a letter, addressed to Gideon Quick in a stiff, old-fashioned hand. Its message added one more link to the rapidly tightening chain of evidence upon which the reporter had so luckily stumbled.

The motive for the bizarre crime was now palpably clear. The guilty person was all but named in the material that Shea held in his hands. All that remained was to find the manner in which the act was committed and the story was ready for divulgence.

Trembling like a bride, Shea sat down in the old armchair to compose his thoughts and to plan further investigation in the room. As he mulled over the scene that had taken place there such a short time before he cringed within himself at the sarcastic admonition of the detective—that sneering suggestion that he might *read* somewhere a solution for the problem.

Suddenly, as he stared at the floor, he had a flash of intuition that amounted almost to second sight. The answer to his question as to the manner of commission came to him as clearly as the sum of two plus two.

A few hours' work in the laboratory of one of his friends—a chemist for the State Highway Commission—would clinch his last link. He stooped and gingerly seized an object on the floor, wrapped it with the diary in a flat package, and gathering up his shoes he sped across the landing, through the rear room, and climbed to the ground.

His shoes he flung down to facilitate climbing, but the precious package he hugged tightly to his breast. Having donned his shoes again he sought a car without even taking the time to report to the office that he was quitting for the day.

VI

HE inquest at Rosenbaum's Undertaking Parlors had already started when Shea, sleepy-eyed and smelling of chemicals, slipped into a seat in the rear of the drab little chapel which was serving as a meeting-place for the coroner's men and those persons who were presumed to know something about the mysterious demise of Gideon Quick.

Miss Flaxton had been testifying. Shea heard her cry out as he entered: "I tell you, I don't know any more about it than I've told you!"

Inspector McCann faced her, cold and impassive. "Miss Flaxton," he stated evenly, "you are putting yourself in a very suspicious light. This piece of paneling from the desk bears finger-prints that are undoubtedly yours. Let's have the truth."

The spinster hesitated during a long and painful period of silence, then tearfully confessed: "I did break open the drawer. I might have knowed that you'd find it out.

"But Mr. Quick has owed me his rent for four weeks back now, although I just felt sure all along that he had the money to pay it. When I came to and found myself in his room I just couldn't help getting that money before any one came.

"He had less than enough to pay me. I didn't take nothing that wasn't mine by rights. I didn't want to wait and see what money he had go out of the house for funeral expenses and things that the county would have to pay for mostly anyhow!" She ended her story sobbing hysterically.

It was evident that the assembled officers. reporters and curious onlookers were convinced in their own minds that the guilty person had been found. If this gaunt wraith of a woman had sensibilities so blunted by parsimony that she would commit what amounted to robbery in the room with a corpse, murder would certainly not be a thing that she would shun.

Accusing eyes turned toward her. A menacing whisper ran over the room. The woman sat tensely erect, her eyes staring unseeingly at the window, her fingers writhing on her bony knees.

The coroner and McCann were making ready to press their questioning further when Shea rose from his seat. "If I may testify at this time," he explained, "I think I can report something that will be of importance." Without waiting for a reply, he walked to the front of the room and placed on the table the flat package which he was carrying.

McCann recognized the reporter and frowned at the interruption. There was something in Shea's eager manner, however, which was promising, and the detective arranged to take his testimony. Shea plunged at once into his story.

"I was forced to return yesterday to the room of Gideon Quick," he began, with a sidelong glance at McCann to see the effect of his confession of burglary. There was only attentive interest in the detective's face, and he went on with his narrative.

"In my examination of the desk in that room I discovered a diary written by the deceased. It contains ample evidence of the dead man's means of livelihood, but, what is more important, it details an account of a strange physical experiment which Gideon Quick successfully performed and which was the indirect cause of his death.

"I took this book home with me, after having dipped into it sufficiently to recog-

nize its importance, and I want to read to this body a few significant excerpts."

The coroner and McCann nodded affirmatively, and Shea unwrapped his package to draw out the loose-leaf notebook. Opening it at one of a number of turned down pages, he read slowly:

"August 25.—Triumph at last! Let dolts and sluggards who have mocked me beware! I have found the means of combating the Creator Himself! Let God Build as He will—I can destroy! To-morrow I shall call Dr. Millingfloss in to see a convincing demonstration.

"August 26.—Dr. M. arrived toward noon, as usual. I reviewed for him my theory of the neutralization of electrons, explaining again that all earthly matter is made up of infinitesimal bits called electrons, and that these, being held together by mere electrical or magnetic attraction, might be physically disassociated were a neutralizing agent introduced.

"But these particles are invisible to even the most infinitely powerful microscope; therefore, their separation would be attended by the complete disappearance of the body which they formerly composed.

"Dr. M. professed interest, but scoffed at the possibility of such a reaction. I set up then an especially insulated glass bell jar—the secret of whose contents I shall for the present keep in my own brain—and under the jar I placed a live kitten.

"Having exhausted the air under the jar I introduced a current of the type which my fifteen years of calculations had only yesterday proved to me to be adequate. No sound issued from the jar, but at the end of exactly twenty-eight seconds I shut off the current, admitted a draft of air into the jar, then smashed it with a blow from a retort clamp. *The animal was gone!*

"Dr. M. seemed greatly perturbed by the results I had achieved. He left the room pale and trembling without having spoken a word during the whole experiment."

The reader paused here and leafed through the book. A few pages farther on he paused and read another excerpt:

"August 29.—I have been awaiting the return of my friend, M., to repeat the great test in his presence. He has avoided my rooms since Thursday. To-day I caught a glimpse of him as he entered the little church where he goes regularly to commune. He saw me and averted his gaze as he mounted the steps. Poor fool!

"What manifestation of divine power can he find in that building that I cannot duplicate—and frustrate? But, friend or enemy, no one can long treat me with indifference, distrust, or scorn. If he stays away many days longer I shall send him an invitation that cannot fail to bring him groveling!"

Shea paused and extracted from between the leaves of the notebook a sheet of foolscap. As he unfolded it he faced the gathering. "It is evident," he said, "that the threatened message was sent and received. The signed reply, which I hold in my hand, tells what that menace was, and indicates both the killer and his manner of dealing death. You will understand when you hear this."

"My dear Friend that was: For days I have brooded over the fearful secret that you seem to possess. I cannot help admiring the mental processes that enabled you to discover this thing, but more and more am I convinced that the Evil One and not God led you to your triumph. You beg that I assist at another of your devilish rites, but I shall never do so. I very much doubt whether you will ever tamper again with God's laws. You vaunt your superiority to the Universal Arbiter, and threaten to turn loose your hellish power to wreck without restriction this planet. Monster!

"You shall not! I am sending you my answer in the form of a cherished volume of philosophy. I insist that you peruse carefully the third and fourth chapters of this noble work. You shall then understand what I mean when I say that your very erudition shall be your ruin.

"With the fervent prayer that the Great Judge may have mercy on your soul, I remain, YOUR SORROWING FRIEND.

Shea folded the paper slowly as he turned toward the corner of the still room where the little scientist sat quietly listening, stroking his chin with a long simian hand. The reporter's voice was controlled with difficulty now as he reached his deliberately planned climax.

"Dr. Millingfloss," he announced, "your plot was as fantastic as it was diabolical in its certainty, and the instrument which you employed was one that only a savant could have conceived.

"I have here on the table an ancient volume entitled, 'A Metaphysical Basis for God's Control of Nature's Laws,' which you, by your own confession, recently lent to your deceased friend. I picked it up

from the floor where he dropped it when he was seized by the tetanic convulsions which preceded his death.

" You had made certain that he would read definite portions of this work. With infinite patience you waxed the corners of the designated pages so that they stuck together ever so slightly. You knew that the reader would, as scholars do, instinctively moisten his finger-tips to turn the stubborn leaves, and the borders of those pages you had cunningly painted with a solution of strychnine dissolved in chloroform.

" The unfortunate victim easily obtained a lethal dose of the deadly poison as his moistened finger-tips were placed, time after time, on his lips. You felt safe in employing strychnine, knowing that the unmistakably bitter taste would pass unnoticed if the victim were eating unsweetened grape-fruit pulp, as was his habit, while he read.

" You doubtlessly expected the coroner's verdict to be death by *delirium tremens* or epileptic attack, as has frequently happened in cases of strychnine poisoning. With this evidence I therefore accuse you of the death of Gideon Quick."

If Shea, or any one else in the room, expected a dramatic reaction on the part of Dr. Millingfloss he was disappointed. That strange individual sat with unchanging expression during the entire recital of facts, and at the conclusion of the account he rose deliberately to his feet.

" Young man," he said in a modulated tone of unconcern, " your hypothesis has the crowning virtue of accuracy. I presume that society will repay its debt to me by exacting the maximum penalty. But I shall pass to a martyr's end with the realization that the world is rid of this fiend, who might—with a gesture—have reduced it to cosmic dust.

" Besides, we were both old men, whose day was past. Gentlemen of the law, I am at your disposal."

And he made a courteous bow to the officers seated behind the table.

As the old man, cynically smiling, was escorted from the chapel McCann turned to the reporter, who was flushed with a triumph that had something extremely bitter in it. " I'll hand it to you, kid," he declared. " That was good work—for a newsmonger. But where in the name of sense did you get the lead on this wild idea?"

Shea grinned. " I followed your instructions; I looked in a book."

HINDU DECAPITATORS

BEHEADING, remarks Surgeon Major Norman Chevers, author of a " Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India," was common among both Hindus and Mohammedans.

Whenever the tyrant Muzuffer Shah made prisoners of rebels, he took pleasure in decapitating them with his own hands.

Moorshud Cooly Khan, after defeating Rasheed Khan, near Moorshedabad, gave command that a pyramid should be erected on the Delhi Road, with niches to contain the heads of the enemy, as a monument of his victory.

Charles Bedford wrote of a Kole who, thinking that six old women had bewitched him, placed them in a line and cut all their heads off, except the head of the sixth victim. Objecting to the ordeal, she ran away.

A case was tried at Agra—*vid.* Chevers—that illustrated the deadly certainty with which natives accustomed to the use of the tulwar — scimitar — slay by decapitation. Rambuksh, a sepoy, having gone with three comrades to witness the religious ceremonies at Gobardhun, suddenly, and as far as could be ascertained, without any provocation, drew his sword, and, attacking one of his comrades, severed his head from his body, and immediately decapitated three harmless women before he was arrested.

His companions declared that they had known him five or six years; that he was a quiet, inoffensive man, and was not intoxicated at the time of committing this act; nor was he suspected of being insane.

"Sorry, old dear, 'aven't yer dropped somethink?"

THE MURDER CLUB

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

"HAPPY ARE THOSE WITHOUT FEAR," THOUGHT DETECTIVE CROOK, "WHETHER THEY ARE HUMAN BEINGS OR POOR, HUNTED VERMIN!"

DETECTIVE CROOK generally met his clients face to face, but he chose to meet Bob Sweeting behind the latter's back, and Bob's first intimation that the interview had commenced was a voice in his rear observing:

"Good evening, Bob. Don't be alarmed when you turn round. It won't go off unless there's trouble."

Bob Sweeting swung round, and his jaw dropped a little. He was never particularly prepossessing. His eyes were rather too close together, and his nose had not followed the shape designed for him by nature; but perhaps he had never looked less prepossessing than at this moment, with a pale moon shining on his sallow face, and his features twitching with guilty fear.

Yet, thought the detective, the ugly sight was not without its pathos.

"You see, Bob," said Crook, "I know just a little about you, and what I know isn't too healthy. I know that you've done seven years for housebreaking, and that you've also been in prison for larceny. I know that you've got a grudge against the world. And I know that appointments fixed for the night-time, in such a lonely wood as this, *may* end in nasty accidents. So, you see, if there's to be a nasty accident, I don't want it to happen to *me*, Bob!"

"Ah, you always was cute, you was," replied Bob Sweeting. "But yer made a bloomer this trip."

He forced a grin to his lips, then glanced about him furtively.

"No, I haven't," answered Crook. "I'm

keeping an open mind, that's all. What's your trouble?"

The grin had disappeared. Now it appeared again, but it was not a grin to make one laugh.

"Wot's me trouble?" said Bob Sweeting. "I gotter kill a Cabinet Minister—that's orl."

"Really, Bob? And which Cabinet Minister is to be honored by your knife or bullet?"

"Well, you're a cool un, ain't yer? *You* orter've been picked fer this job, 'stead o' me—"

"Oh, you were picked for the job?" interposed Crook, looking at his odd client with renewed interest. "Who picked you?"

Bob Sweeting considered this question for a moment, and hedged.

"One at a time, guv'nor! Yer was arskin' abart the Cabinet Minister. It's Mr. Downes."

"I see," observed the detective reflectively. "Mr. Downs, who moved to Westminster from Scotland Yard, and who would be likely to be in the bad books of such people as you. Well, thank you, Bob. I will see that Mr. Downes has adequate police protection. And, now, once more—who picked you for the job of killing Mr. Downes? And why are you chucking up the sponge—"

"Yus, that's right," nodded Bob. "I'm chuckin' up the bloomin' sponge—so yer needn't 'ang onter yer little gun no more."

"Possibly I needn't, Bob, but I will. Are you getting cold feet?"

"Right agin. Nerve's gorn."

"That's not like you."

"P'r'aps it ain't. But—" He grinned again defiantly at the absurdity of his next words. "I gotter gall." He noticed that the detective assumed no grin, so he relinquished his own. "Mikes yer feel dif-'rent," he muttered.

"Yes—makes you want to go on living," nodded Crook. "You didn't mind much before, eh? That's the cause of half the crime in the world, I believe, Bob—not minding. But now you *do* mind. Well, that's a good sign. I'll help you, if I can—"

"Yer will?" exclaimed Bob eagerly, an unusual look coming into his eyes; then, all at once, he frowned, and added, almost gruffly: "'Owjer know I'm playin' stright?"

"Perhaps you're not playing straight," replied the detective, "but now I'm willing to risk it." And he slipped his revolver back into his pocket.

"Yus, I'm playin' stright," muttered Bob.

"I believe it. And that makes me all the more curious to know why you don't do the obvious thing—decide *not* to kill Mr. Downes?"

"'Cos, if I don't kill 'im, some 'un 'll kill me," replied Bob Sweeting. "Now yer've got it."

"Not quite. You mean the person who 'picked' you to kill Mr. Downes?"

"There's more'n one!"

"Oh, it's a family affair. Wouldn't one of the other members oblige?"

"No fear! My nime was on the bit o' paiper, and I gotter do it."

"A Murder Club!"

"Yus."

"Why did you join it? You've kept clear of that sort of thing so far."

"I know I 'ave, guv'nor. I dunno 'ow I jined. Got inter it some'ow, arter I come aht—didn't know wot it was all abart, swipe me, I didn't—and then I got me nime picked. Bet it was a put up job," he added savagely. "But I 'ad ter stand by it, and I got a week ter do it in."

"You ought to have backed out—faced them bravely."

"Wot yer orter do ain't wot yer does do! Any'ow, I told 'em I'd chuck it, but it didn't work. It's gotter be Mr. Downes or yours truly, and becos' I mide a fuss and keeps on puttin' it orf, they're markin' me, blarst 'em, and they've given me seven more days. So I sends for you, and that's orl there is abart it. I reckons *I* wants a bit o' police prerteckshun, sime as Mr. Downes!"

Detective Crook was silent for a few moments. Instinctively, his eyes wandered away from his client, and dwelt on the trees and bushes that surrounded their little clearing, encircling the spot with softly-moving silver and black. Bob Sweeting moved from one foot to the other uncomfortably.

"You're in a pretty bad mess, Bob," said Crook. "Who are these people?"

"Wot people?" asked Bob, obtuse to gain time.

"The fellow-members of your little Murder Club?"

Bob hesitated, then shook his head.

"No, I ain't tellin' yer," he answered. "Yer'll 'ave ter work without that."

"Why won't you tell me?"

Bob was silent.

"You've only to let me know their headquarters, or who they are, and I can solve your troubles very simply."

"Yer mean—cop 'em?"

"That's the idea."

But again Bob shook his head.

"Carn't do that, guv'nor," he said, rather huskily. "They'd git me some'ow, if I did—and—p'r'aps I'd deserve it!"

"Well, I like to work with a client who's got a conscience," said Crook, smiling slightly, "even though, in this case, it's handicapping me. Tell me, Bob—if I get you out of your mess, what will you do?"

"Gawd knows!" admitted Bob. "We'd like ter git ter Orstralia, fer a fresh start. *She's* sick o' quod, like me."

"How would you get to Australia? Have you any money?"

"'Bout five-an'-ninepence," grinned Bob. "Couldn't ezackly go fust-class."

"No," agreed Crook. "But perhaps, if you weren't quite so fastidious—you could borrow the passage money, eh?" Bob looked at him sharply, and with a tinge of surprise, but Crook shook his head. "No, I didn't mean that way, Bob."

"Wot did yer mean then?" asked Bob.

"Well, some one—who was once down on his luck himself—might lend it to you. However, that's for the future. At the moment, you've got to commit a murder. When can I see you again, and where?"

Bob did not answer for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was rather husky.

"Goin' ter be tricky, our next meetin'," he said. "I mightn't git another charnce; they're watchin' me so close."

"That's awkward," murmured Crook. "We'll have to outwit them somehow. I suppose you're permitted to meet your girl without arousing suspicion?"

"Yus. I meets 'er reg'ler."

"And is *she* watched, when she's not with you?"

"Not as I knows of."

"Very well, then. Tell her to drop me a card where I can meet her—say, some time the day after to-morrow. Then she can pass on to you what I tell her."

"By gum, that's a blinkin' idea!" exclaimed Bob, his face brightening. "That's the way to do 'em! But—'ave yer got a plan?"

"A vague one, Bob, but I'm not sure yet how it will work. No—don't let her write. Let her telephone. My number's in the book. What's her name?"

"Sally. Sally Cooper."

"What! 'Our Sally'?"

"That's right. She come out a week arter I did."

"Well, you're a lucky chap, Bob! I always thought Sally had a spark of good in her. So you're going to run on the level together! I wish you both luck—and, Bob, you can count on that passage money."

Bob put out his hand, but suddenly snatched it away again and, turning, walked rapidly away. Something had snapped in the bushes, and Bob's nerves were not in good order. The detective looked after him, and then, turning also, sauntered leisurely toward the bushes. The bright eyes of a fox glinted up at him, and then vanished.

II

"HAPPY are those without fear," thought the detective, "whether they are human beings or poor, hunted vermin!"

He left the lonely wood—the wood haunted by terror beneath its silver ironic beauty—and made his way back to the station at which he had alighted an hour earlier. A late train carried him back to London.

He spent most of the night in his quiet little house in Hampstead, thinking of Bob Sweeting and the tragic tangle he had drifted into: and while he was thinking, Mr. Gilbert Downes, M. P., was sleeping comfortably in his bed. Mr. Downes would

not have slept quite so comfortably had he known that a homicidal society had given him seven more days to live.

Next morning, just as the detective was sitting down to breakfast, the telephone bell rang.

"Is that Mr. Crook?" asked a rather faint, feminine voice from the other end; and, receiving the assurance that it was Mr. Crook, continued: "It's S. C. speaking."

"Good morning, S. C." answered Crook. "and congratulations on your punctuality and your caution. Unless you have anything special to say, just name the time and the place—that will be sufficient."

After a moment's pause came the response:

"One fifteen—to-morrow afternoon—'Ammersmith Bridge."

"I'll be there, S. C.," said Crook, and replaced the receiver.

He ate his breakfast leisurely. He had a busy day before him, and he regarded a good breakfast as the best foundation. At nine, he rang up Mr. Downes's house, and spoke to Mr. Downes's private secretary.

"I am Detective X. Crook," said the detective. "Can I see Mr. Downes some time this morning?"

"I'm sorry, but he hasn't a moment," replied the secretary. "Is the matter important?"

"If it were not, I should not want to see him," replied the detective rather dryly.

"Well, to-day and to-morrow are impossible. He's busy on the new Crimes Act, you know. How about one day next week? Will that do?"

"It will not do," answered Crook. "Mr. Downes may be dead next week."

"Oh, of course. But that is hardly possible."

"It is more than possible."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Granted, provided you don't waste any more of my time. Tell Mr. Downes that no business he has in hand is more vital to him than the business I wish to see him about, and ask for an appointment before lunch."

There was a pause. Then came the secretary's voice:

"Detective Crook, I think you said?"

"Detective X. Crook."

"Hold the line a minute." Crook held the line two minutes. Then the secretary's voice sounded again: "If you can come round now, Mr. Downes will see you before he begins his work."

"Good," said the detective. "I'll be with him in half an hour."

Mr. Downes, M. P., received his early visitor in a rather gorgeous dressing-gown, above the purple of which his gray hair looked distinctly impressive.

Mr. Downes was a useful man at his job—and, incidentally, he knew that Detective X. Crook was a useful man at his—but he could not rest entirely on his merit. Like the majority of big men, he was not proof against the pleasure of appearing impressive.

"Well, Crook!" he greeted the detective affably. "My secretary tells me I may be dead in a week. Have you come to try and lengthen the period?"

"I have, sir," answered Crook, smiling. "But I shall require your assistance."

"My assistance is hardly likely to be withheld in such a worthy cause, provided you convince me that it is really necessary."

"It's very necessary," Crook assured him. "Have you had any threatening letters lately, sir?"

"I'm always receiving threatening letters," complained the cabinet minister, with a humorous twinkle. "In fact, I've received so many in my time—the criminal classes are not very fond of me, you know—that I pay less attention to them than I do to tailors' bills."

"Have you had any during the past few days?"

"One."

"May I see it?"

"If you call at Scotland Yard. But perhaps I can save you the trouble—it wasn't a long document. It was an ordinary postcard, posted at York, and it said: 'Look Out.' The letters were printed, and it was initialed T. M. C."

Detective Crook smiled.

"I can tell you what those initials stand for," he said "'The Murder Club.'"

"Really?" exclaimed Mr. Downes, interested. "You know, it is a constant marvel to me, with all my experience, how almost childishly simple even the most hardened criminals can be! 'T. M. C.'—'The Murder Club'—sounds like a child's game. Who but a child would include 'T' in the initials?"

"The criminal mentality is an arrested mentality," responded Crook. "The same immature note is struck in the very fact and wording of this warning."

Mr. Downes nodded. "And now what do you want me to do about it?"

"I want you to go down to your little shooting hut in the Essex marshes," replied Crook, "and be murdered."

Mr. Downes laughed outright.

"I'd really be delighted," he cried, "only I don't think I can spare time to be murdered this week-end! Can't you suggest some alternative plan?"

But Crook had fixed on his plan, and as he unfolded it, the cabinet minister had to admit that it was a good one. In fact, he even suggested, at the conclusion of the interview, that the detective possessed qualities which would be useful at Westminster, which is the greatest field of all for the tactician and the strategist. Mr. Downes sighed a little, however, as he shook hands.

"Hitherto," he said, shaking his head lugubriously, "I have gone to the marshes to shoot wildfowl—I never dreamed that I should ever go there to be shot myself!" He made a grimace. "It's a nasty, lonely spot!"

It was a very nasty, lonely spot. That, at least, was the opinion of a certain ragamuffin who, alighting a few hours later at Creekminster, wended his way to the eastern outskirts of the little town and entered the muddy, marshy district beyond.

After leaving the last straggling cottages, he walked into No Man's Land, and what profit he expected to reap there it would have been difficult to guess. But no one was by to offer conjectures, and for half an hour the ragamuffin slouched along without meeting a soul or any indication of human presence.

Presently he left the narrow lane which he had been traversing for a still smaller one that straggled off to the right across a little plank bridge. Here the marshes grew thicker, the ground soggier, and the moist flatness more depressing.

A sudden flap and flutter rose from some reeds, and a couple of awkward shapes reared skyward, swooping heavily out of sight. "This is our ground, not yours," was their message. "What are you doing here?"

But if the ragamuffin read the message, he ignored it. He continued on his way until, at last, a little clearing opened out, and a small, low hut came into view. The ragamuffin paused before the hut, and looked about him.

For the best part of an hour he hung around the spot, examining the ground, the approaches, and the hut itself. Then he returned by the way he had come, and, reaching Creekminster, caught the next train back to Liverpool Street station. At Liverpool Street, he bought an evening paper, and seemed interested in a short paragraph at the foot of a column. The paragraph ran:

> Mr. Grahame Downes, despite pressure of work, contemplates spending the week-end duck-shooting at Fleetwick, Creekminster. Mr. Downes is one of the best shots in the kingdom, and owns some property on the Essex marshes, which he is fond of visiting when he wishes to forget his parliamentary worries for a day or two. He stated the other day that duck-shooting meant as much to him as a certain pipe meant to the premier.

III

ON the following day, at a quarter past one, our tramp was again seen on Hammersmith Bridge. He had been leaning over the parapet aimlessly for several minutes, but now he shifted his position, and shuffled up against a common, pale-faced woman who was walking slowly along.

"Now, then!" said the woman sharply. "Can't you look where yer goin'?"

"Sorry, old dear," winked the ragamuffin, without the least sign of contrition, "but 'aven't yer dropped somethink?"

And he held out two tickets for the S. S.

Socrates, which was bound from Tilbury on the following morning for Australia.

The woman gasped.

"Let's 'ave a look at the river," proceeded the ragamuffin, moving toward the parapet. "I got somethink ter tell yer."

She obeyed, and she gasped still more when she had heard what the tramp had to tell.

They chatted, this odd pair, till twenty minutes to two; and when at last the tramp shuffled off, the woman's heart was beating rather wildly, and an unaccustomed touch of color had made its appearance on her pale cheeks.

Two of Mr. Downes's allotted seven days had passed, and nothing fresh occurred to interest us until three more had gone by. But on the afternoon of the sixth day—Saturday—certain events occurred in the vicinity of Fleetwick, near Creekminster, that must be recorded.

Toward five o'clock, a shabby figure again made its way to the lonely little shooting hut owned by Mr. Grahame Downes, M. P. It was not our ragamuffin this time, however, but our older friend, Bob Sweeting.

He walked stealthily, and with anxious, halting steps. At the little wooden bridge, he paused, peered round, and took a revolver from his pocket. Examining it carefully, he replaced it in his pocket, keeping also in his pocket the hand that replaced it, and then turned to the right over the bridge into the marshy wilderness.

Presently the cottage came into view. A thin line of smoke issued from its sole chimney. Bob stopped and gulped.

"Lummy!" he muttered. "S'pose it's gotter be done!"

He took a deep breath, and, a minute later, was crossing the patch of open stubble that led to the cottage porch.

Now he brought out his revolver, and gripped it tight. He gained the porch. The door was slightly ajar.

"Gawd!" murmured Bob. "'Ere's fer it!"

And, pushing the door gently open, he suddenly presented his pistol and fired.

A hoarse shout came from within as Bob turned and ran. There was a sound of a falling body, a body falling close to the door, and a hand shot out, clawing at the cold stone floor of the porch. Then it was withdrawn, the groan was repeated, and all was silence.

For some minutes, nothing further happened. Bob had disappeared, and the silence was only broken by a slight stirring among the rushes. Then the rushes parted, and two bright eyes peered out; and, as they did so, the ragamuffin who had visited the spot some days earlier, and who had subsequently spoken with a pale-faced woman on Hammersmith Bridge, came stumbling round the cottage, muttering and chattering to himself.

"Wot was it?" he gasped.

The individual among the rushes withdrew swiftly. If the ragamuffin saw him, he made no sign, for his eyes were wild and staring. He stood, hesitating, and then suddenly swerved toward the porch.

As he drew nearer, his steps grew slower, and once it seemed as though his courage would fail him. But he kept on, reached the porch, and peered inside.

"Gawd!" he shrieked suddenly. "'E's dead!"

The individual in the reeds heard him, and sped away. The ragamuffin lumbered after him.

IV

"WELL?" asked Mr. Grahame Downes, M. P., that evening, when Detective Crook called upon him at his London residence.

"You are dead," replied Crook, smiling. "Bob Sweeting shot you only a few hours ago."

"And where is my murderer now?"

"Heading for Tilbury."

"I see," nodded the cabinet minister. "Well—go on."

"There's not very much more to tell, sir," answered Crook. "As soon as Bob fired—"

"At nothing?"

"No. I'm afraid he hit a picture. But it was a very bad picture. As soon as he fired, I cried out, and emerging from my security fell forward, while Bob fled in the

approved manner. I stretched my hand outside the porch, as I fell, and I believe the hand was seen. But that was not sufficiently sure for my purposes. So, when I had withdrawn my hand, and given another groan—"

"My death groan, this time?"

"Yes—I still feel the strain of it. After that, I transformed myself back into a tramp who has been quite useful to me during the past few days, and crept round the cottage from the back."

"By Jove, Crook! You're a true genius! The tramp, I take it, was attracted by the sound of the shot?"

"That was the idea, sir. He entered the cottage, saw the supposed body, shrieked, and fled. And he has every reason to believe that his sole witness fled also."

"Ah—that sole witness, now," exclaimed Mr. Downes eagerly. "Did you get a sight of him?"

"I did, sir. It's Jelks—"

"Jelks!" cried Mr. Downes. "I always said that fellow ought to be in Broadmoor."

"But surely, sir," said Crook, smiling slightly, "it is no less sane to desire the death of an M. P. than of any other mortal?"

Mr. Downes grinned. He was quite human.

"*Touché*," he admitted. "Well, anyhow, I'll have our friend Jelks in jail before midnight—"

"*To-morrow* midnight," corrected Crook quickly. "It was my stipulation. Before it is too definitely known, in certain quarters, that you are not dead, I would like Bob Sweeting to have his chance of getting out of the country. He never tried to kill you, you know. And then, sir, if you give me another twenty-four hours, I expect Jelks will lead us to some other members of his Murder Club."

"Yes, yes, of course! You're right there, Crook," responded Mr. Downes emphatically. "I would never have needed your correction if I had still been at Scotland Yard, instead of rusting in Westminster! You're right. Make your own arrangements. But—you think it wise to let Bob go?" He shook his head doubtfully. "You've a soft heart, Crook."

"No, I don't think so, sir," answered the detective. "But I'm doing my best to make good myself—and I can't turn my back on others who are trying also, can I?"

"Right again, Crook," said the M. P., shaking his hand cordially. "Right again!"

Detective X. Crook will reappear next week!

The printer was working, and the engraver was at his table when—

THE LAWYER'S BOOMERANG

By Colonel H C. Whitley
Former Chief United States Secret Service

HIS TRAGIC VOICE, HIS LONG GRAY LOCKS, AND TEARFUL EYES HAD AN ASTONISHING EFFECT—BUT YOU'D NEVER GUESS IT IN A LIFETIME

A Story of Fact

IT not infrequently happens that the trials of criminals develop unexpected scenes of interest that would make the finest of dramatic situations.

This instance deals with counterfeiters, a most difficult class of criminals to detect and convict.

The peculiar nature of the crime, the result of yielding to temptation to acquire sudden and easy wealth, is a fatal fascination that ofttimes lays hold of persons possessed of wonderful ingenuity in devising methods to escape punishment.

Almost at the beginning of our great Civil War, gold and silver went out of circulation and a vast volume of unfamiliar paper currency was thrust suddenly upon the country.

Every note issued by the Government was followed so closely by the counterfeits that the most expert money changers were often unable to tell the good from the bad. In some instances the counterfeit fractional currency was almost, if not quite, equal to the genuine.

The Stanton head fifty cent issue was so cleverly imitated that the counterfeit passed current for a long time before its base nature was discovered.

Circulating principally among the poorer classes, it was doing incalculable damage and I was making a great effort to

—the detectives crowded the door open and pounced into the room

reach its source, with little or no success up to the time a chance discovery was made.

One day a detective walking leisurely along the sidewalk of an unfrequented street in New York City suddenly found himself face to face with Peter Delinsky, a skilled counterfeiter who had been released from the Albany Penitentiary about a year before.

Delinsky had been caught by me in the act of printing a counterfeit two dollar bill on the National Kinderhook Bank. He gave some valuable information and his sentence had been cut down to three years.

When the detective met him he had on a new suit of fashionable cut. Wearing yellow kid gloves, and carrying a nobby gold-headed cane, he was cutting quite a swell for an ex-convict. The detective was both curious and suspicious.

Where on earth did old Delinsky get that expensive outfit? He was unable to guess. He knew the old man was broke when he got out of the penitentiary, as he had, when released, called at the Secret Service branch office and taken up a subscription; besides, the old counterfeiter had never been known to engage in any legitimate work.

For this reason the detective was quite sure he was doing something crooked, so he just "pulled" the old fellow and escorted him to the office of the Secret Service Division on Bleecker Street. The Government officers in that day rarely took out warrants for the arrest of counterfeiters.

The detective in this case was well posted regarding old Delinsky, and it was only necessary to acquaint him with the fact that the chief was anxious to see him on important business.

When brought to my office he was badly frightened. I took him into a private room where I accused and questioned him, but he stoutly denied that he was engaged in counterfeiting.

"Then what are you doing, and where did you get these fine clothes you are wearing?" I inquired.

The old fellow was unable to answer this question satisfactorily. Taking advantage of his hesitating manner, I pressed him more closely and threatened to send him back to the penitentiary.

He was a Russian and not altogether familiar with the laws of this country. Hence I was able to frighten him.

He held out for a long time but finally admitted that he was at work printing the

fifty cent Stanton head for a fellow countryman, who, he said, was an engraver. The old printer had been detained at my office two days before he made his confession.

The Russian engraver by whom he was employed became suspicious and threw the hand press upon which the counterfeit notes were being printed into the East River.

Delinsky was not aware of this when I released him upon his promise to carry out my instructions and enable the Government detectives to seize the counterfeit plates and capture the engraver.

When the Raid Was Made

When Delinsky returned to the room where the counterfeiting had been done he found the place empty. When he met the Russian engraver he learned the particulars of what had happened, and accounted for his absence by explaining that he had been on a visit with some friends.

The engraver was not altogether satisfied with the excuse, but he was willing to compromise the matter if Delinsky would buy another press to take the place of the one that had been destroyed.

When Delinsky reported the situation to me I sent a detective out to buy a small plate printing press. He employed a wagon and took the press to the room where the printing was to be done.

When Delinsky was again ready to begin work the engraver, as is usual in such cases, brought only the face of the plate. When a certain number of pieces were worked off on this, the engraver was expected to bring the plate for printing the back and take away the face plate.

Counterfeiters are always more or less suspicious of one another and have good reason to be. Nearly all of them are treacherous and liable to sell out to the detectives at any time.

I was anxious to secure the counterfeit plates and I did not think it wise to arrest the engraver until I could catch him with the plates complete. I told Delinsky to accidentally mar the face plate. He did this.

When the engraver came to inspect the prints he saw the defect and it was agreed between him and the printer that he would go to his home and bring the back plate which Delinsky could be printing from while he himself was touching up the defect on the face.

The news of this move was at once brought to me and three trusty officers were dispatched to watch the house where the printing was being done. Delinsky had furnished a plan of the house, the hall and the stairway leading to the room. Everything necessary was known to the detectives.

At what was thought to be the opportune moment the raid was made. One of the detectives gained access through a basement window. He pulled off his boots, slipped softly up the stairs and unbarred the street door.

The other officers, shod with gum shoes, now made their way carefully to the room occupied by the counterfeiters. The screws of the lock had been loosened by Delinsky and the door was easily crowded open.

The printer was working away busily and the engraver was seated at a table with the counterfeit face plate before him. The graver with which he was tracing the lines was in his hand.

Old Peter Delinsky

When the detectives suddenly pounced into the room the Russian engraver came very near falling off his chair in his astonishment, but he was an old hand at the business and soon became cool and collected.

He could speak English fluently and the work that he was engaged in was proof of his ability as a fine engraver.

He had left his own country several years before and had come to the United States to engage in his profession. He had not been entirely free from suspicion in his native home.

Suspicious circumstances are dangerous over there and he was compelled to flee to a country where he was unknown and where the laws are less severely administered.

The Stanton head plate engraved by him tested the judgment of skilled experts beyond any similar issue that had been put out by the counterfeiters. The plate was a masterpiece.

Old Peter Delinsky was well known among the counterfeiters as a plate printer. When first approached by the Russian engraver he declined the offer made and said he had once been in difficulty in a similar job and did not care to risk his liberty the second time. This made the engraver more anxious to secure his services.

Not a Shadow of a Chance

As a general thing it is difficult for persons who have served terms in the penitentiary to secure employment in legitimate lines, hence they more readily engage in crooked work.

Counterfeiters are ingenious in laying plans to prevent discovery. Every conceivable artifice is resorted to by detectives to capture them and get possession of the counterfeit plates.

The engraver in this case was a clever man at his business. For this reason it it was necessary to employ a plot seemingly on the verge of an unlawful transaction to trap him.

When he was brought to my office he was wise enough to realize that the chances for his escape were very small. When questioned he confessed everything and promised to plead guilty.

When his case came up in the United States Court ex-Judge Stuart was his counsel. He was a criminal lawyer of considerable ability, about seventy-five years of age. He had been practicing law in New York City for many years and was the trusted friend and adviser of many of the most notorious criminals of that day.

Tall, raw-boned, solemn faced and deeply sentimental, he could shed crocodile tears copiously while making a plea for his client. I have often been filled with wonderment at the effect produced upon the minds of the jurors by this great actor.

His tragic voice, his long gray locks, and tearful eyes had an astonishing effect and frequently brought tears even to the eyes of the judge, and the stony-hearted lawyers engaged in the prosecution were sometimes seen to turn their heads during the dramatic scenes enacted by the old hypocrite, while engaged in defending his client.

The evidence introduced in the Russian engraver's case was so strong and overwhelming that anything like a successful defense upon legal grounds appeared quite impossible.

Stuart had been at my office and made an effort to secure the Russian's release on his promise to assist in capturing other counterfeiters. But I turned the proposition down and his counsel had said that his client would plead guilty and throw himself upon the mercy of the court.

When the case was brought to trial Judge Stuart informed me that his client had changed his mind and had concluded to stand trial. He said the Russian had disregarded his advice and he did not think there was any chance of saving him.

When the case was called and the jury was organized, I saw they were a choice selection of philanthropists.

The testimony produced at the trial was more than sufficient to convict; there did not seem to be even a shadow of a chance for the prisoner's acquittal.

Paid to His Lawyer

There was no dispute about the guilt of the prisoner. His attorney did not introduce any witnesses and the Government attorney seemed to think he had everything his own way.

When Judge Stuart's turn came to speak, he arose. His face wore an expression of great solemnity as he mildly said he had been retained to say a few words in behalf of the unfortunate man on trial.

"The prisoner is a stranger in a strange land," he began. "He cannot understand nor speak a word of English. He is wholly unacquainted with the laws of this country. It is true he performed the act charged against him.

"But he is guilty of no crime, because he was led to believe by that old counterfeiter Delinsky that the work he was doing was for the Government. He did not know that the plate was a counterfeit. He is

the innocent victim of a plot planned and carried out by the United States Government detectives."

Shaking his finger as he pointed toward the detectives, he declared in a tragic voice that they could not deny the charge he made.

He said the chief had acknowledged furnishing the money for the purpose of buying the printing press, the paper and the ink upon which the counterfeit currency was printed.

The jury appeared dazed. While the charge against the Russian was not for printing counterfeit currency, but for engraving plates for that purpose, the muddled jury did not seem to understand the difference.

The old lawyer saw that he had made a point and he now rested his strangely fascinating eyes upon the jurymen. Raising his long arms above his head he roared with a deep voice resembling distant thunder.

"My God! Gentlemen of the jury, is this poor, ignorant man to be deprived of his liberty upon the unsupported testimony of these hirelings?"

Then he again shook his long bony forefinger and pointed toward the detectives. Turning partly around he placed his hand tenderly upon the head of the Russian and bade him arise and stand where twelve honest men could look him in the face.

Stuart declared he had been employed by the broken-hearted wife of the poor man to say a few words in his behalf.

"For this service I have received no fee, and I would not accept one," he went on. "This poor man could not tell his own story. For the first time in his life he has been arrested. He does not know a good piece of money from a bad one. He has a wife and family to support."

At this moment a poorly clad woman with tears running down her cheeks stepped forward. Four half-frightened children were hanging to her skirts. The old lawyer took the woman by the hand and turned her to the jury as he said:

"This is the wife and children of the unfortunate prisoner. May God help them. If their father is convicted these children will be left to starve and the wife will be compelled to endure the sneers of all who know her.

"These cunning detectives have pursued this innocent man to the verge of destruction and it rests with you gentlemen of the jury to save him."

When the old lawyer sat down several of the jurors had their handkerchiefs in their hand and were wiping away their tears. There was silence in the court room when the Government attorney arose.

He blinked a little as he briefly reviewed the evidence. The judge made his charge and the jury retired temporarily to a side room.

After deliberating about five minutes they came back and rendered a verdict of acquittal. The Government attorney and detectives were astounded. As soon as the prisoner was discharged he threw his arms around his attorney and kissed him on the cheek.

He then shook hands with each of the jurymen, and had they permitted it he would have kissed them. He next embraced his wife and kissed her, and taking up one of the children in his arms the family went out of the court room.

Several days after the trial Judge Stuart came to my office. He was considerably excited when he told me that it had been discovered that the wife and children brought into court as the family of the Russian engraver were not his at all. They were the family of another Russian and had been borrowed for the occasion. The judge put his hand into the inner pocket of his vest and drew out a roll of bills.

"Here," said he, "is the stuff that damned scoundrel paid me for defending him." I saw at a glance that the stuff pulled out by the judge consisted of counterfeit bills on the National Shoe and Leather Bank, and I learned that the old lawyer came very near being arrested for passing some of this bogus money.

He said he wanted me to catch the rascal and give him fifteen years in the penitentiary.

It was too late—the Russian had fled to Canada.

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