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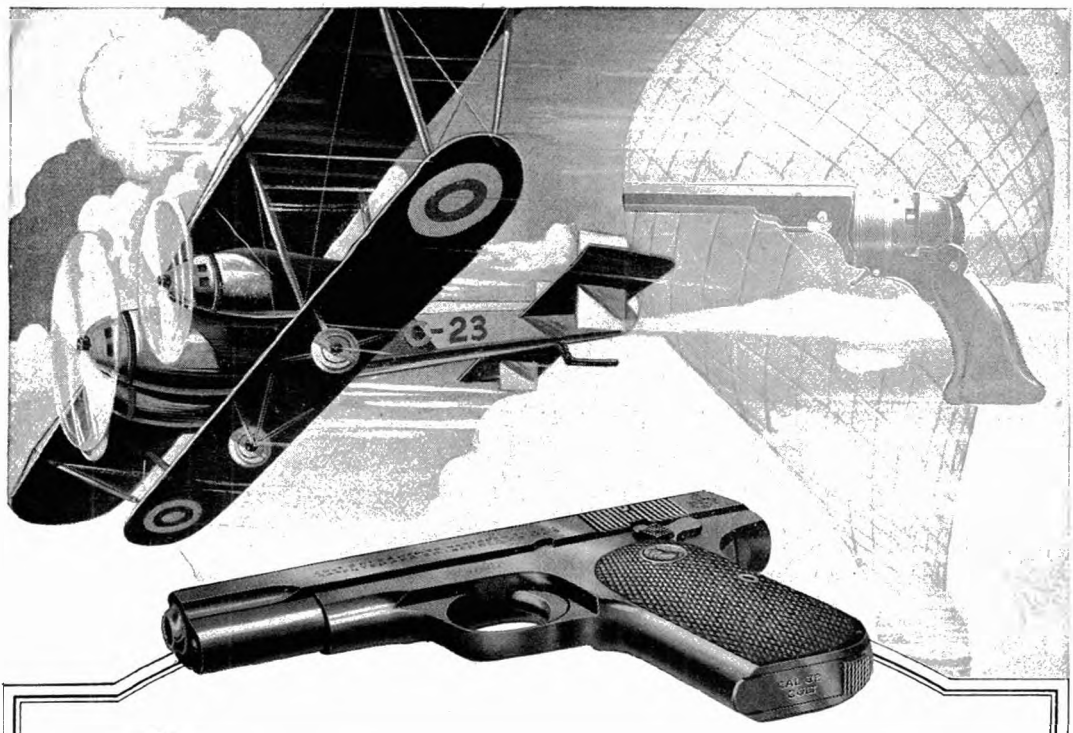

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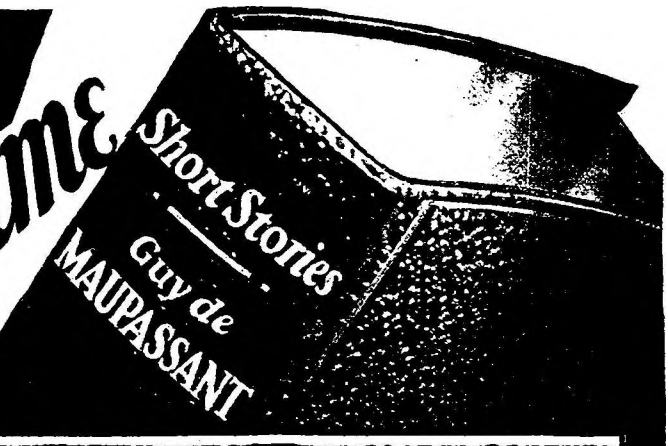

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WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME XXII | SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 1927 | NUMBER 4

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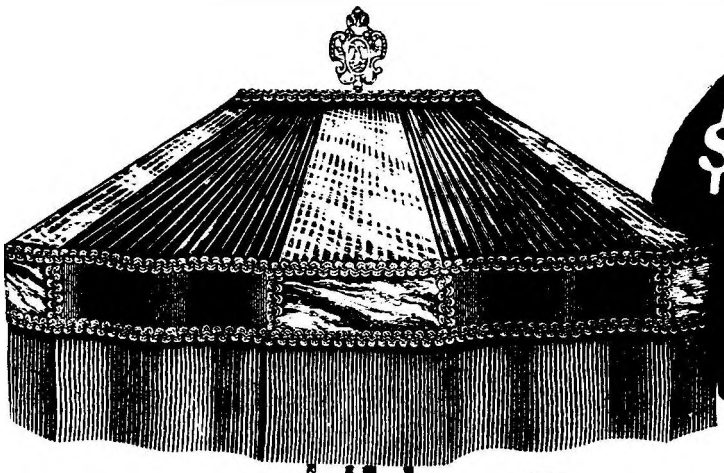

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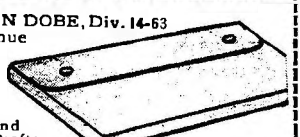

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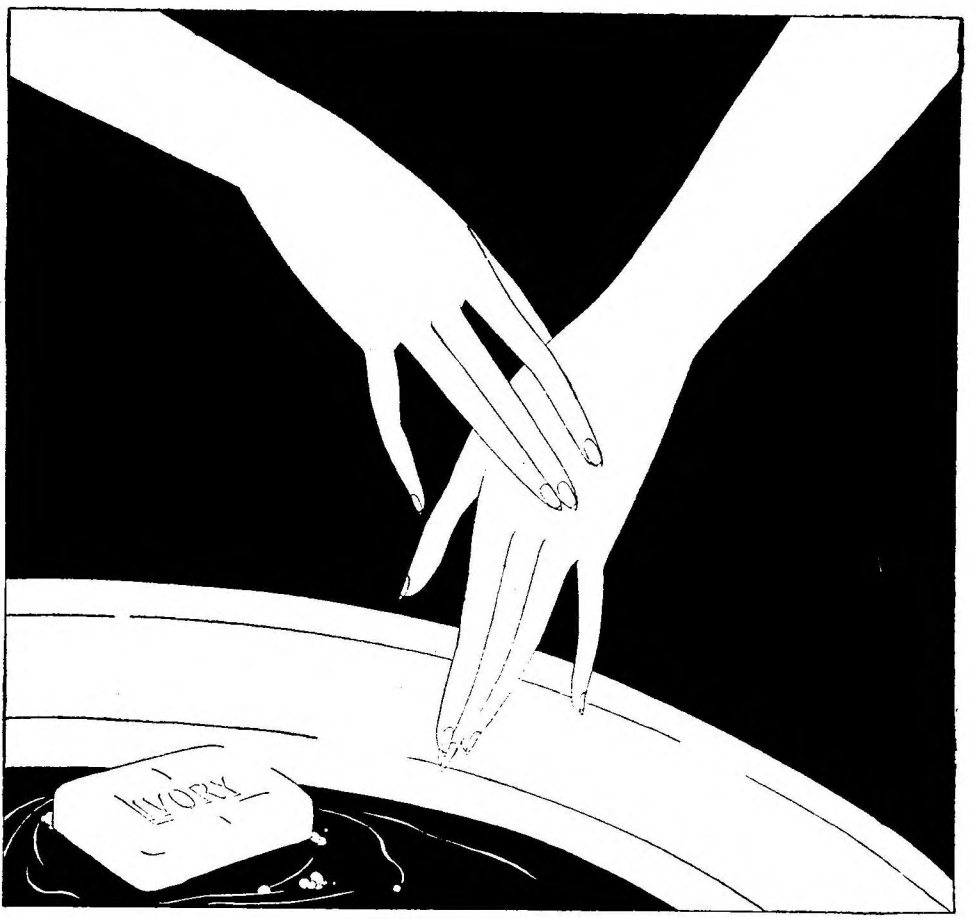

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FLYNN'S WEEKLY

VOLUME XXII SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 1927 NUMBER 4

The man's footprints met the woman's and retraced themselves to the house

THE HOUSE ACROSS THE WAY

By Foxhall Daingerfield

THE WRITING IN BLOOD UPON MY DOOR DID NOT EXPLAIN THE HORRORS, AND THERE WERE WORSE TO COME

CHAPTER I

TOO MANY SURPRISES

IN the first place I live in Winterville. My house is a small one and by the door a modest sign is tacked, "Miss Hester Posey. Sewing," which is only another way of saying I am the village dressmaker.

My three rooms are quite sufficient—more than sufficient with coal fifteen dollars a ton and difficult to get at that, with our one train irregular in its trips down from the main line.

I was thinking of this as I sat by my window late that December afternoon, watching the falling snow and listening to the faint click of sleet against the glass. My nerves were steady then; now they are shattered and I feel the need of a doctor

constantly, which all goes to show that my winter was not a quiet one, and I had been quiet for forty years.

Across the street, through its iron fence, I could see the Robertson house through the snow. The "Rich" Robertsons, we used to call them. On the lawn were two iron deer, their antlers and backs covered with the falling flakes, while on either side of the drive were some iron rabbits now almost invisible in their winter covering.

The lower windows of the house were brightly lighted and I couldn't help wondering. "So," I remember thinking, "it couldn't be a party or I'd have been asked in the day before to help."

The first thing I noticed was Miss Eliza Sharp, a tall, gaunt, unapproachable woman, and Mrs. Robertson's foster sister, walking in her usual determined fashion down the drive. In spite of the snow she held her head erect and I could see the glint of her glances through the veil with which she shrouded her face. She tramped down the deserted street without even so much as glancing my way.

"Perhaps there's company unexpected for supper," I thought, "and they need more rolls for tea. It's like Miss Eliza to go out in the storm for them herself."

I watched her disappear into the dusk with a shiver, and turning my eyes toward the gate saw some one else coming, this time a slight figure, her head bent against the wind. It was Mrs. Robertson herself, and I saw she was coming in. As I rose to stir the fire and set another chair she entered the room.

She was a frail, nondescript little person with large, prominent blue eyes and soft, curling yellow hair. Her foster sister, Miss Eliza, was fifty, and while Mrs. Robertson could not have been more than ten years younger, she didn't look a day over thirty.

She always reminded me of *Mrs. Elvsted* in Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler." She had a startled, inquiring expression and to-night, as always, she looked frightened. Before I could welcome her she fluttered over to the fire.

"Good evening, Hester," she said, out of breath. "I'm so sorry to drop in on you like this when it's snowing and your supper-time and everything, but something unexpected has happened."

I pushed a chair forward eagerly. News is not plentiful in Winterville, and Mrs. Robertson rarely had anything to tell or told it if she had.

"Sit down and dry your feet," I replied. "I'm only too glad to help if I can."

"No," she said nervously, glancing out of the window, "I can't stop now. My daughter, Winifred, arrived this morning and she has had a wire from Robert Moreland, you remember Bob, saying he is coming to-night to remain over the holidays."

Did I remember Bob? Though I was a sewing woman, I had not always been one, and lived in a three-room cottage. Bob came to me when I conducted my school and I loved him dearly. Past twenty now, and the handsomest boy the village had sent out into the world.

"I wish Winifred hadn't—" Mrs. Robertson began fretfully.

I met her glance at this. Winifred was a dear, good child and she had been away at school for the past five winters. Only in summer when I was called in for a fitting or she went dashing in or out of their stone gate in her new runabout, her hair flying in the wind, did I catch a glimpse of her. But she always had a smile for me and I was glad if Bob's coming gave her any happiness. Besides Christmas belongs to the children, so why should Mrs. Robertson object?

"Could you come over this evening, right away," she asked anxiously, "to help with the housekeeping and everything? There's sure to be a party, and oh, dear, so much always happens at Christmas time!"

"Of course," I assented. "I can come over in an hour or less."

I may not have sounded cordial, but I resented her not being glad to see Bob.

"I am so grateful to you, Hester," she said humbly.

Mrs. Robertson is always being humble over something, and I can't see why. She's the richest woman in our village and her husband is the president of the Board of Trade. Not that that's anything, but still—

She began fumbling with her gloves and

trying to draw on her cloak at the same time. It made me nervous so I adjusted the cloak and went with her to the door. Once it was open, of course, she turned and began to talk with the sleet rattling all over the floor.

"It's such a comfort to have you in the house, Hester," she began, looking at me beseechingly from under the brim of her hat.

The icy air was blowing up my ankles so I nodded.

"Have supper with us if you will," she called over her shoulder, as she fluttered along the icy walk, trying not to slip and at the same time draw her veil further over her face.

I went back to my sitting room, which was sewing and fitting and dining room as well, and began my dressing. Lying on the floor before me was a gray cotton glove which Mrs. Robertson had dropped. I thought I would take it over to her when I went to spend the night, then remembering the snow and the possibility that she might not go directly home, I picked up my gray wool shawl and threw it over my head and ran out into the yard.

The street was empty. A clear stretch of snow lay before me down the block, and I glanced across at the stone gate. Just inside I could distinguish two figures standing in the shadow of the trees, talking earnestly. Even in the fading light I could recognize Mrs. Robertson, but her companion had his back to me. I ran across the street, glove in hand, but brought up suddenly at the sound of her voice:

"For God's sake, wait a little time!"

The snow had deadened my footsteps and they hadn't noticed me. I had never heard Mrs. Robertson speak like that. Her companion drew a step nearer and placing one hand on her arm, began to speak earnestly. At that moment I saw his face. It was the Rev. Hezikiah Plit, a stranger who was conducting revival meetings in the village.

And I did not know Mrs. Robertson had ever seen the man! She was an Episcopalian and so was I. We went to the same church and religion had always taken its part in her life, though she didn't go three times a Sunday as did her sister, Miss Eliza, who was nothing short of fanatical.

I retraced my steps to my own door. Once inside I extinguished my lamp, put on my distance glasses, and went to the window.

The electric lights in the street came on just then and I could see them clearly. They still stood in the shadow of the gate.

I was ashamed of spying on a neighbor like this, but when one has been a sewing woman for thirty years—well, only those who have, will know why I stood at the window that night watching those two across the road in the snow.

They were there for fully ten minutes longer, then I saw the Rev. Plit come through the gate and walk rapidly down the street.

Mrs. Robertson stood looking after him, straining her eyes through the dusk, then wrapped her cloak about her and disappeared into the darkness toward the house.

Lighting my lamp, I drew down the shade and began my dressing. As I laid out my brown merino skirt, made full with graduated bands of black, and my black velvet waist with the basque, I thought the whole matter over.

Why had Mrs. Robertson come to me through the storm with a message any of the servants might have brought? Besides, the Robertsons were very good to me, and I was glad to go to them at any time.

What was the meaning of the appeal to the Rev. Plit? For that matter, why should she appeal to him at all? I had seen him several times and he was more like a barnstorming actor than a minister in the first place.

I fell to thinking about the man. I didn't like his face and had not been to his meeting, though as a rule I attend. When some one is moved to give their "experiences" they are apt to include the neighbors.

I recalled the time Moses Goatly, in his effort to find salvation, said he believed that Mr. Robertson and some passing actress—well, Moses was a Presbyterian so the story had held no interest for me.

I experienced a glow of pleasure at the whole thing. I liked anything unusual.

Then and there I would have given the price of a new velvet waist to know the answer Mrs. Robertson made the Rev. Hezikiah Plit that snowy evening when she pleaded, "for God's sake, wait a little time!"

Hurrying with my dressing I turned to my mirror. I wished to look well should I come to the table with Bob and Winifred that night. Fastening my black velvet basque with unusual care, I pinned a bunch of artificial pansies at the throat to give it color.

Some flappers, from the other end of town, laughed at the basque the other day, and the Smunn girl called: "Got a hot date to-night, Miss Hester?" as I passed.

Her father ran the city dump before he was put in charge of the cemetery, so I snapped: "No, but I should think that mannish haircut would cool your head sufficiently to make you more respectful to your elders!"

Well, I had cause to be thankful for my old-fashioned basque before the winter was through.

At last I was ready. I extinguished my light and placing my front door key in the withered gourd hanging by the porch, started across the street. Picking my way through the snow, ankle deep, I thought over the surprises of the night. Yet before I reached the Robertson house another surprise was in store for me.

The train had whistled some minutes before, and now down the street came a motor, dangerously fast. I drew over to the side of the road to let it pass. It was Bob coming from the station.

He dashed up the drive and with a snort the car stopped before the door. In a moment he was out and the driver had started away. As the car passed me a second time I saw it was not the Robertson's chauffeur, but a man I had never seen before. The car, too, was strange.

I suppose, of course, Bob would have gone inside before I could reach the porch, and what was my surprise then to notice two figures standing close in the shadow of the house.

Pausing where I was to watch, I saw them step into the light. Bob, with his cap off in the snow was looking at Winifred who stood before him with tears on her cheeks and terror trembling in her eyes. She moved nearer the yellow light shining out upon the snow and placed something in his hand. It was a shining pistol.

Bob tried to say something, but with a swift glance up at the window she stopped him. Next he took her into his arms and kissed her.

Instinctively I glanced about the yard to see if we were alone. When I looked back to that square of yellow light, the two had crossed the strip of snow-covered lawn and entered the great hall door.

CHAPTER II

SIX TWOS, INSTEAD

FOR fully a minute I stood there in the snow. In the first place I was too surprised to go into the house, and in the second I wished to compose myself before I did. I thought how much had happened in the hour just passed.

Here, I had known and loved Bob and Winifred since they were children; let them play in my yard and made sugar cookies for them; seen them together for twenty years, yet never until now had I realized they were in love. In love and in danger, from what I had just witnessed.

Perhaps it is as well just here to say why Bob's safety meant so much to me. He is an orphan now. Five years before his father died, and shortly after his mother followed, and I had worked with Dr. Moreland. There was a time, years ago, when Bob's father and I had been engaged.

Yes, I had loved him better than anything else in the world. Then my father and mother died and I was left almost penniless and homeless, had it not been for the aunt who lent the money for my school.

About that time Bob's father went East to college, and when he finished there was another girl in his life. His mother had never wanted him to marry me, and when our money disappeared the thing seemed settled from the start. Those were not the days when the youth of the land took the

law into its own hands and married whom it chose.

Yes, he loved me. I am sure of it, but as I grew poorer and the work grew harder, he grew more brilliant, handsomer, and more a part of the outside world. There was a night—oddly this night of driving snow reminded me of it—a night of moonlight and drifting petals from the crab-apple tree—when I stood as Bob and Winifred had stood a short time ago.

Bob's father had taken me into his arms and kissed me as Bob had kissed Winifred. Ah, well, it is the way of the world, I suppose; and when I heard, years later, that he was married and Bob was born, no one was happier for him than I.

The night the news came to me I had sat at my window watching the falling snow, as I sat an hour ago. Perhaps I had thought, had things been different, that the curly brown head of the new born child might have rested on my arm, and that I— Ah, well, that is the reason I loved Bob as I did, and used to mark him eleven, and sometimes twelve, when ten was perfect.

As I stood there, looking at the empty light on the snow and watching the falling flakes cover the footprints of the children, a gust of wind slammed the shutter across the window and the square of light was cut in half. At the same time a flurry of frozen snow was blown into my face, and I climbed the broad stone steps and rapped with the great brass knocker at the door.

Immediately I stepped into the warmth of the wide front hall. "Thank you, Mary," I said to the colored woman who admitted me.

"My, Miss Hester, you sho' is snowy. Ain't you afear'd o' de rheumatiz to be gallopin' over de country dis a way?"

I looked at her sharply. I can be sharp at times. But I saw she didn't mean to be funny. I always thought no one was entitled to rheumatism until they had passed sixty.

"No," I answered. "I am quite well, and always feel better in winter."

She giggled at this, for the village knew I detested snow and rain like a cat.

"Miss Hester," the woman said, "Miss Margaret say will you come up to her room torectly you got hyr?" She looked down the long hall as she spoke. "She done gone ter git ready for supper."

"Very well, Mary, I will go up at once. Can I be of any help in the dining room, or does she simply want me to see to the housekeeping while Mr. Bob is here?"

"Fer Gawd's sake, Miss Hester! Is Mister Bob done come?" The surprise and pleasure on the open black countenance before me were unmistakable.

"Yes," I said, "he has. Hasn't your mistress told you?"

"Nom," Mary replied, showing every tooth in her head. "But I sho' is glad. 'Tain't like de same place when he's hyr. Mos' tore de plaster offen de wall las' visit."

Chuckling to herself, she hurried down the hall to impart the glad news of Bob's arrival to the lower regions.

I drew my brows together. So Mrs. Robertson had not told the servants there was to be a guest. And usually she ran to them with everything. I don't believe she ever set a room to rights or got out a guest towel in her life. Perhaps I gave a little sniff as I passed down the hall.

The house, to me, was very beautiful. A wide hall extended down the center, while one side was the circular parlor, a library joining it by arched folding doors. Across the hall was the living room, also circular, with bow window. From the outside this window was the base of a tower extending to the roof and finished with gray slate set in red and gray design on the sharply sloping roof. There was also a gilt weather vane and lightning rod.

Then there was a comfortable living and dining room. At the back were the kitchens, pantry, servant's dining room, and stairs. For its period, the house was remarkably simple. Inside it breathed of warmth and comfort. Everywhere was handsome, heavy furniture and hangings bought at the time of Mrs. Robertson's first wedding. She had been married twice, and the place belonged to her.

At the time people had said Mr. Robertson would not have been so attentive had not the courting ground been so attractive. I remember thinking, when I thought of his wife to be and her ways that he would earn

the money, should he ever come into it. My real concern had been what sort of a stepfather he would make for little Winifred. She was five at the time her mother remarried.

Mrs. Robertson's bedroom was the large circular room over the parlor, and I knocked at the door.

"Come in," she called nervously. "Oh, Hester," she chirped as I entered. She had a way of looking up suddenly and chirping without beginning what she had to say.

She was sitting at her desk, writing something in a hurry. Before her lay a pile of note paper torn into bits, and on the floor was half an envelope. Turning to her desk, she reread what she had written, and hastily signed her name and sealed the letter.

"Oh, Hester," she began again. "I am dreadfully sorry to trouble you when you have just come. Are your feet soaking? Have you something warm under your cloak?" and, without waiting for me to reply,

"This letter positively must get off on to-night's mail, and the chauffeur isn't here. He's gone to meet Bob Moreland. Could you, would you mind taking it to the post office and putting a special delivery stamp on it? Here is the money."

"Of course," I said, taking the letter, "but I think the chauffeur—"

But a curious thing happened. Without knowing why, I suddenly decided not to tell her that Bob had already arrived, and that a strange driver and car had brought him. I believe on looking back over the whole matter, at that moment I began to fight for Bob.

She looked relieved. "I shall be so grateful, and if—if you meet—" here she found it difficult to continue—"any one," she added hurriedly, "and they ask where you are going just say, 'On an errand'—Just say that, will you?"

I nodded. "You needn't be afraid," I said.

Turning to the mirror, I saw her watching me in the glass. She shook down her wavy blond hair and began unfastening her dress to change for supper. I tucked the letter under the front of my basque—it's a habit of mine—and started down the hall to the stair.

As I have said, the plan of the house was simplicity itself. There were three bedrooms on one side and four on the other. The door of one at the head of the stair opened and in it stood Bob, Bob with his coat off and tugging at his tie.

He looked at me for a moment, then, with a shout, caught me by both hands and drew me into the room. In a second I was enveloped in a bearlike hug. I am sure there were tears in my eyes when he let me go.

"It's great to see you, Miss Hester," he said. "How is everything? You look younger every day."

This made me very happy. It argued well for Winifred's happiness. A boy who can tell a faded spinster with a nose still red from the cold that she looks young— I wished I could tell him how he looked. Nothing could have made Bob vain. Full six feet tall, he was, with broad shoulders, and the same curling brown hair I remembered.

"When, when did you arrive?" I asked when I could get my breath.

For the barest moment he hesitated.

"Just now," he said easily. "Gee, its great to see you. I thought you were Miss Eliza. Say, Miss Hester, isn't she the most wonderful girl?"

I looked at him without a trace of mirth in my eyes. "Who?" I said. "Miss Eliza?"

He burst into an explosion of laughter.

"Don't be a cat, Miss Hester. The idea of your making fun of a neighbor. Winifred." His eyes shone.

"Yes," I said, "she is. Has it taken you twenty years to find it out?"

He laughed. "No, not exactly; but Miss Hester when I saw her to-night I couldn't realize she was that beautiful."

"Perhaps she wasn't," I said sharply. I had determined to find out something. "Did you see her blue with the cold or toasting her feet before the fire like a sensible girl on a night like this?"

"Yes," he answered, "and I saw her in the cold."

I didn't want him to think there was

anything unusual in my question, and I came farther into the room. "Bob," I hazarded, "are you comfortable? You know Mrs. Robertson has me over to help with the housekeeping, and I thought you might want an extra blanket, towels, or something."

"No," he laughed. "Don't bother about me." And with a shine in his eyes. "Besides, I have already what I want most in this world."

Of course, he meant Winifred.

In the minute he had been speaking my eyes wandered over the room. On the bureau, under a crumpled handkerchief, hastily thrown there for concealment, was the pistol. I could distinctly see the tip of the barrel. I don't think Bob saw me look at it and I moved away into the hall.

"I'll see you downstairs," I said then. "And, Bob, I don't believe Mrs. Robertson knows you are in the house yet. Perhaps it would be polite to tell her."

Outside it was still snowing and I walked quickly down the drive to the street. Around the electric lights, the snow was swirling like a thousand butterflies and if it hadn't been so cold I should probably have thought it very pretty. But I was not easy in my mind. While mystery stimulated me, I didn't like it when it concerned Bob and Winifred.

It was not far to the post office, but all the way I was thinking of that little scene in the yellow light from the window on the snow; of Bob's being in the house without Mrs. Robertson or the servants knowing. Yet Winifred had told her he was coming, for she had told me.

Then part of the mystery cleared like a flash. Had Winifred wished to see Bob before the family saw him? I thought of the pistol. That was it! But where had she got it, and to whom did it belong? It was too much for me and I walked on a little faster.

I met not a soul on the street, save Miss Eliza walking grimly homeward with a bundle under her arm, her heavily arcticed feet leaving broad tracks behind her.

"Good evening, Hester," she said gruffly.

I had a moment's inclination to stop and tell her I was at their house for a few days. But my recently acquired habit of silence asserted itself and I only said, quite pleasantly:

"Good evening, Miss Eliza. A very snowy night."

When I entered the post office snow was tracked over the floor and the place was cold and empty. Some one had scattered sawdust in a path to the stamp window and I followed it to the brass grating.

"Good evening," I said to the woman behind the grating. Clare Spense, she was, and I had known her for years. "Anything for me?"

She looked over her glasses and shook her head without turning to the mail rack, from force of habit. I never got any mail, still I enjoyed asking. Next I asked for six two-cent stamps.

If I had asked for a special before morning the whole village would have known that I had sent a special delivery letter and to whom it was addressed. Later, when I was licking the stamps into place and writing "Special" across the top, I had reason to be glad of my forethought.

The letter was addressed "Manager Gayety Theater, Trenton," and across the corner "Personal" in shaky handwriting. I slipped the letter into the soiled blue and white canvas mail bag hooked over the back of the slot and left the office.

The bag was closed and locked by nine each night ready for the early train and the mail sorted after it reached the junction. But it was not until the light of the telegraph office across the way caught my eye, that a plan came suddenly into my mind.

Winifred had had a wire from Bob. Was it not possible that Bob had had one from her?

CHAPTER III

MINGLING FOOTPRINTS

PICKING my way across the street I wondered who Mrs. Robertson knew at the Gayety Theater in Trenton. It was unlikely that she knew any one, yet why should there be secrecy attached to her writing to them if she did.

I smiled grimly as I thought how much

Clara Spense was missing. Looking through the dingy window of the one-story building that held the telegraph office which bound Winterville to the outer world, I saw Jimmy Mullen, the operator, with his feet on the top of the drum stove, reading a novel.

In the minutes since I left the post office I had made up my mind and my plan was clear, though just how I was to carry it out was uncertain.

Jimmy had the politeness to rise when I opened the door and, tucking his book under his arm and his chewing gum behind his ear, came forward.

"Evenin' Miss Hester," he said.

"How are you, Jimmy? It's such a dreadful night I stopped in to warm my hands before I go back."

He placed his chair for me and lounged against the wall. "Sure," he said briefly. "What are you doing out on such a night, Miss Hester?"

In the moment I was removing my gloves my plan began to shape itself. "Just an errand. The snow's above my shoe tops, though."

Jimmy looked gloomily at the floor. "Guess I won't get no supper," he said. "It's mor'n a mile to where I live and 'twould take me an hour to get back."

"Do you still run past the cemetery?" I smiled.

Jimmy's house lay on the outskirts of the village, and more than once when he'd been kept after school winter afternoons I'd walk to the top of the hill to stand there until he sped past the gates of the old burying ground. He blushed to the roots of his sandy hair and dug his foot into the ashes around the stove.

"Nom," he said. "I ain't afeard of things since I got my job. Seems like it took all the scare out of me to be working steady."

An idea struck me.

"I tell you what." I said. "I'll stay here and watch the office while you run over to the lunch stand and get a sandwich and some coffee."

He brightened amazingly. Jimmy always did whatever was suggested, and I knew there was little chance of his mentioning my visit to the telegraph office. As a student he had rarely opened his mouth to speak, even when called on.

"Sure you don't mind?" he said, taking his cap from a nail by the counter.

"No," I said, "and don't bolt your supper. It will give you indigestion."

"No danger of that," he grinned. "I ain't got but a quarter. Don't guess there'll be any calls to-night. Snows so deep doubt if the morning train gets through. Hasn't been no word from the junction since five o'clock."

He jerked his shaggy head and I saw him disappear through the snow, turning up his collar as he ran.

I smiled to myself and thought how perfectly things were going for me. I went and looked out of the door, up and down the street. Over behind the counter was the telegraph key on a typewriter table. Behind it, on a letter file, were the sheets of yellow paper on which copies of telegrams were kept.

In a moment I had this down and was hastily turning the leaves with my fingers. Once I glanced over my shoulder as the wind shook the door. I was surprised to find I was trembling. I really believe this was the first dishonest thing I had ever done in my life. Then I found it.

ROBERT MORELAND,
Blank Street, Trenton, N. J.:
Come to-night. They are no longer safe.
W.

I stared at the message in wonder. "W," that stood for Winifred. I put the file quickly back upon its nail and resumed my seat by the stove. So Winifred had needed Bob and wired him to come without her mother's knowledge.

"They are no longer safe." Who was no longer safe? Again I remembered the pistol. My mind went round and round in a circle. I recalled Mrs. Robertson and her appeal to the Rev. Hezikiah Plit. What had she meant by that? I was staring at the stove, when Jimmy came in, stamping his feet and shaking the snow from his coat.

"Gee, it's some night. Any calls for me?"

I rose and put on my coat.

"No," I said. "It has been very quiet." And I started to the door. "Thank you, Jimmy, for trusting me to care for your office."

I felt so wicked I couldn't resist that little self-punishment. But at the door Jimmy had a surprise for me.

"Seen the new skirt in town, Miss Hester?" he grinned.

"What skirt?" I demanded.

Vaguely I pictured something in a show window, somewhere.

"Come in on to-night's train, I guess," said Jimmy. "This burg's never seen anything like her. Take a squint an' you'll get good ideas for your dressmaking. She's a red hot mamma."

"Jimmy," I reproved him, "I thought I had trained you better than to speak so of a visiting lady." But I couldn't help, "Who is she?"

"Dunno, but she's sure got style. Seen her wanderin' round in the snow not more'n an hour ago."

I wasn't going to get anything more out of him. Besides, he had recovered the chewing gum from behind his ear. Still, it gave me one thing more to remember.

Strangers in town, and coming at this time, might have a meaning, so I put her into the back of my mind. "Possibly no more than some demonstrator of chin lifting," I thought to myself as I plodded up the street.

In spite of the deepening snow, I had never felt so cheerful, and realized it was because I had something to think about.

I bent my head against the storm and walked faster. Just in front of me was a long frame building belonging to some secret order in the village. Wooden steps led to it from the street, and the windows were long and narrow—covered with transparent paper in design and color. I remembered how I wanted some for my bathroom window.

It was the building rented by Rev. Hezikiah Plit for his revival meetings, and I knew he slept in a room at the back of it. Glancing up, I saw the windows were lighted. I recalled the hour, and thought how early he was getting ready for the evening, then smiled to myself, thinking how scant would be his congregation because of the snow.

Then I saw a closed carriage driving rapidly down the street. It was a livery hack and rarely came out except for weddings or funerals, since automobiles took their place in Winterville. It drove to the door of the meetinghouse, and stopped abruptly in a cloud of snow.

The driver, muffled to the ears in a comforter, got down from the box and a woman alighted. At that moment the door of the meetinghouse opened, and a yellow light shone across the sidewalk. Silhouetted against the light stood Rev. Hezikiah Plit, standing a little back, evidently waiting for her to enter.

The woman was young and pretty, dressed in a smart tan skirt and expensive fur coat. From a small gold bag she drew out a bill and put it into the driver's hand. Jimmy and his "skirt" flashed through my mind. The woman turned and spoke to the driver.

"No," she said in a harsh voice. "I don't want you again. I can find my own way back if necessary."

The light shone full upon her face and, in spite of the snow, I could see the sharply curved red lips and the glowing color on her cheeks. Her complexion was unmistakable. In spite of my dislike for such things the woman was very pretty.

The driver mounted his box and drove off down the street. As I looked again at the Rev. Hezikiah Plit I saw him step back into his "church," open the door for the stranger, and close it after her.

A wave of uncertainty passed over me. Had I misjudged the man? Was he converting a sinner come to him early for guidance? But I put the idea out of my head as absurd. I had never liked the man, in the first place, and, besides, who would think of being saved on such a night.

The street was an unbroken mass of white, save for the sharp lines cut recently by the rubber tires of the carriage. Unconsciously I followed them with my eyes as I walked on. At the gate of the Robertson house I had another surprise that evening.

The wheel marks in the snow had turned

sharply there and stopped. I could see where the horses' hoofs had torn up the snow impatiently during their wait. Beside the walk almost in the driveway were the dainty footprints of a woman.

They had come and gone evidently not long apart, for both marks were fairly clear. At the side of the house was one last surprise. Near the window where I had seen Bob and Winifred the woman's footprints had paused, while from the house, leading to the front steps, were the footprints of a man without his overshoes. They met those of the woman near the window, had stood for a minute or so, and, before the falling snow could hide their presence, had retraced themselves into the house.

CHAPTER IV

THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

WHEN Mary admitted me her face was still radiant with the pleasure of having company in the house.

"Lawd, Mis' Hester. Is you bin out agin in this weather?"

Once more I shook the snow from my bonnet. "Yes," I said, "and I hope it's the last time to-night. Am I late?"

Mary's honest black face fell. "No'm. it's supper dat's late. Car'line come through at the revival las' night an' we all cyant do nothing wid her."

"Come through?" I inquired.

"Yes'um. She got religion. Now dat she seen de 'light' it sho' will tell in her cookin'."

"Wait a minute, Mary," I said. "Where did she find the light, and when?"

She shifted from one foot to the other. "It'us las' night at that new preacher man's r'vival. He sho' kin talk th' insides out ob yo'. Me an' Car'line sat in the back row an' after de light shone on her I got so 'shamed I run out de do'.

"Las' I seen ob her she was bustin up through de aisle like she was bound fer Jerusalem, an' I couldn't stan' it no longer. Look like she'd be shamed to come through fo' all dem white folks. I helt on to her till I felt her wais' tearin', den I let loos' an' run."

I bit my lip. Then, "Did you hear her give any experiences?"

"No'm," she sniffed. "Car'line don' got 'ligion three times an' her 'speriences ain't fit fo' col'lud folks to hear let erlone white folks."

I was shaking with laughter, but Mary was too indignant to notice. An idea struck me. Already the Rev. Hezikiah Plit had mixed himself uncomfortably into the lives of my friends, so I hazarded a shot at random.

"How," I said, "did Caroline happen to start going to the revival?"

Mary showed the whites of her eyes. "Dat's de curious part, Mis' Hester. De spirit muster come in her sleep. Car'line ain't been thinkin' nothin' 'bout 'ligion lately. Dats why her cookin' bin so good. Den one mornin' not more'n a week ago she woke me up 'bout six hollerin' dat de angels had visited her.

"Muster come in er clap o' thunder I said, cos' nothin' 'cept de devil kin wake Car'line up les dey shake her right good. Well, I went in an', sho' nuf, dar scattered all over her piller and lyin' tight in her han' was er lot of dem tracs dey sprinkle roun' fo' dars a revival comin'."

I looked at her in amazement. Her breath had given out and she was panting uncomfortably.

"What did she mean about an angel?"

"I dunno," Mary said, looking nervously down the hall behind her. "She said when she feel de tracs slip in her han' she open her eyes and dar was a figure in shinin' white passin' through de do'. Dat's when she holler fo' me. But yo' can't put no 'pendence in what Car'line says when she's studyin' 'bout 'ligion."

I pondered for a minute. "And was this the only visit she had from the angels?" I asked.

Mary drew closer to me, and she lowered her voice. "Nom. Mis' Hester, hit ain't. Dat's de curious part. Dey come agin las' night. She never wake up dis time, but dar was de tracs scatter'd over her, and de same bunch ob um in her han'."

I looked at Mary steadily and was convinced she was not lying. "Well," I said at last, "what do you make of it?"

She hesitated. "I don't make nothin' ob it, Mis' Hester," she muttered, "les' Car'line put dem tracs dar herse'f. She's open to anything when she sees de light."

"Have you one of those tracts now?" I demanded abruptly.

Mary began to fumble beneath her snowy apron in the pocket of her black calico dress. "Yas'um," she admitted, "les' I's crumpled it settin' so much. Nom, hyr 'tis." She drew from her pocket a small printed pamphlet with a large yellow cross with rays of light extending from it and handed it to me.

"Mary," I counseled, "I wouldn't say anything of this to the family. It's just Caroline's imagination, and would only disturb them if they thought the cooking wouldn't be good during Mr. Bob's visit."

She seemed comforted. "Hit'll be good fo' him ef I has to whirl in an take er han' myse'f," she muttered as she hurried away.

On my way upstairs I looked at the tract. It was common and sensational, a burlesque on religion. Flaming promises of eternal damnation should the reader fail to give liberally of this world's goods to the disciple who placed the light and truth before them. I put the thing away and made myself ready for the table.

Winifred and her mother were in the drawing-room when I entered, and the former came over to me at once. She was charming in her soft yellow dinner dress, and there was a lovely color in her cheeks. Winifred is a pretty girl at all times, but to-night she was radiant.

"Dear Miss Hester," she said, "it's so good to see you." Then, "And did you know Bob was here, too?"

While she kissed me Mrs. Robertson raised her eyebrows questioningly to me, and I gave a brief nod. Mrs. Robertson is always "telegraphing" something to some one with her eyes, and it irritated me. I had always done as she asked, so why should she "telegraph" to know if her letter had been posted. Poor frightened little woman.

I told Winifred how nice it was to have her at home again, and how glad I was Bob was home for Christmas, and her lovely color deepened.

At that moment Mr. Robertson entered the room. I have always thought "smug" is the best description of him, and to-night it fitted him perfectly. He had brown hair, thin and brushed closely to his head, gray eyes, rather disconcerting in their steadiness when he chose to fix them upon one.

No one would have trusted him, that is I never had, yet he was far from being unattractive. Save for being a little too stout, he was rather a handsome man. To-night he wore his dinner coat, an unusual thing for our town, and I was glad of my black velvet.

But his first action swept all thought of my dress from my mind. On entering the room he went directly to the register and carefully warmed his feet. As he stood there I recalled the footprints outside in the snow.

"Where's Bob?" he asked, his puffy face showing real interest. Perhaps in his household of women even a youngster like Bob was a welcome diversion.

No sooner had he spoken than Bob entered. Mr. Robertson went over to greet him, and after Bob had spoken to us all he crossed over to the register and warmed his feet as Mr. Robertson had done.

So snap went another thread. For the moment I was intensely irritated with myself. Hadn't two men the right to warm their feet without an inquisitive old sewing woman thinking it had a meaning which might wreck a home. Which all goes to show, as I have since contended, that one may be very near the truth and then miss it altogether.

Miss Eliza came in as supper was announced, and we all went into the dining room. In spite of Mary's predictions, the meal was excellent. Bob talked a great deal to the family, but looked at Winifred who, if I am not mistaken, was fully aware of the fact.

If the family found Bob's presence unpleasant, they disguised the fact perfectly. He drew them all into his cheerful conversation, and once actually wrung a nervous little laugh from Mrs. Robertson. And once, when he spoke with intelligence of having visited the new cathedral at Wash-

ington, even grim Miss Eliza pricked up her ears and asked how deep the crpyt was.

I have been particular as to the movements of the family that night. It had significance enough later on. After supper we went into the library and had coffee there. The fire burned brightly, and for two hours we sat in its comfortable warmth. Outside the bitter wind raged, and the snow was blown in gusts against the windows. It was the sort of night which gives one a sense of security, warmth, and well-being.

A little after nine Miss Eliza excused herself and went to her room, explaining she had some letters to write. Shortly afterward Mrs. Robertson followed. Twice as we sat around the fire enjoying the candy Bob had brought Winifred, Mr. Robertson went to the window to look at the thermometer and I couldn't help wondering.

Once he said: "Sixteen above and falling fast." This led Bob to enlarge upon the trials of his trip from the junction and how fortunate he was to get through at all. At ten o'clock we went to bed.

On the way upstairs I tapped at Mrs. Robertson's door to ask if I could do anything about closing the house for the night. She thanked me and said that her husband would attend to it. Miss Eliza slept on the third floor at the head of the stairs, two doors from mine.

As I passed I saw she was still at her writing, so after a brief good night passed on down the hall to my room. Bob and Winifred had lingered behind to say good night and I was pleased to note by the little clock I carry when I go visiting, that it was past eleven when they came up the stairs to their rooms on the second floor.

So at last the house settled into quiet for the night. After the children came up I put out my light and went to the window to raise the sash for fresh air. Outside the storm still raged. Faintly, through the driving snow, I could see the swaying pine trees and hear the rattle of the frozen snow upon the window. As my eyes accustomed themselves to the light of the yard I fancied, through the driving storm I could discern a figure near the gate. For some moments I looked, but it neither made a sign nor moved, so I thrust the fancy from me and crept into bed.

"If you catch your death spying out of other people's windows at your own nightmares it's no more than you deserve," I remember thinking as I fell asleep.

This was well after eleven.

At three o'clock I was awakened by a pistol shot. The sound echoed through the house like the crash of doom. I was too paralyzed to move, then I heard a scream and a falling body and a second shot, more muffled than the first. Springing out of bed, I groped for the light, but the room was strange and it took perhaps ten seconds to find it.

I heard the sound of running feet. Throwing on my wrapper and bedroom slippers, I snatched a candle from the dressing table and lighted it. At the door, I did not have strength to turn the knob. Then pressing my teeth together I gathered my wrapper about me and ran out into the hall.

CHAPTER V

THE DISAPPEARING BULLET HOLE

HE darkness of the hall stretched before me, my shaking candle throwing wavering shadows across the blackness. Gathering my strength, I started to the head of the stairs. As I passed Miss Eliza's door I turned the knob and found it locked. I struck upon the paneling with my hand and heard a movement from within.

"Miss Eliza! Miss Eliza!" I called. "Come quickly. Something has happened!"

I heard her spring out of bed and without waiting for her to answer or open the door I ran down the stairs. The candle flickered in my hand and I could not remember where the electric switch was. At Bob's door I tried the knob.

It opened at once, and I saw him, sound asleep, his window wide open and only the top of his towsled head visible above the blanket. The draft from the window almost extinguished my candle, but I managed to get to the bed and shake him by the shoulder.

"Bob! Bob!" I called. "Come quickly! Some one has been shot!"

He raised his head and his eyes opened wide. "What? What?" he said bewildered. "What is the matter, Miss Hester?"

"Didn't you hear a shot? Come as quickly as you can."

While he was flinging on his bath robe I looked about me. My eyes fastened on the bureau. Hair brushes and neckties were scattered about, but the pistol I had seen earlier in the evening was not there. He ran out into the hall with me, in his bare feet.

"Find the switch and turn on the light," I ordered as I ran to Winifred's room, which was two doors down the corridor and across from the room in which Mrs. Robertson slept. For some reason I felt that our search must end at her mother's door.

I have never known why, but I felt certain the shot had come from within her room. As I reached Winifred's door it was flung open. The lights were on and she stood, ghastly white, in her dressing gown swaying as though she would fall.

"Miss Hester!" she cried, flinging her arms about me. "Bob? Is he—all right?"

I shook her. "Yes," I said sharply, "but some one has been shot. Come with me."

At that instant Bob found the switch and the hall was flooded with light.

"There!" Winifred gasped, pointing to her mother's door. "In there!"

Together we crossed the hall and flung it open. The smell of powder in the room was stifling. Winifred reeled and shrank against the door. I held the candle aloft and Bob groped along the wall for the light. In a moment he found it and snapped it on.

The room was empty. A blue cloud of smoke hung in the air and the odor of burned powder was strong. In that instant, one unusual thing was photographed upon my mind. The place was in order and the bed had not been slept in.

But by the window, overlooking the yard, a desk chair had been drawn close and a crumpled handkerchief lay on the floor. Yet the oddest thing of all was that along the farther side of the bed lay a bolster, while a silken comforter from the couch by the window had been tucked in around the lower part.

Bob was the first to move. "Come downstairs," he called as he passed.

The black well of the staircase loomed up to meet us. He pressed the electric switch and halfway down the stairs we paused. At the farther end of the hall, huddled against the front door, lay Mrs. Robertson. Her back was toward us; her hair was streaming over her shoulders. She wore the same gown she had at dinner. I heard Miss Eliza in the hall above.

"Hester!" she called. "What has happened?"

In a moment Bob had Mrs. Robertson in his arms and carried her to the sofa, and I was on my knees at her side.

"Stand back, children," I ordered, "and let me look."

I tore open the front of her dress and looked for a wound. She was breathing fitfully and entirely uninjured.

At this moment Miss Eliza came wavering down the stair. Her face was ghastly. She ran over to where we were and stood staring down at her sister.

"Tell me," she gasped. "Is she dead?"

"No," I snapped in relief. "She is not. Go and bring some water—whisky if you can find some!"

The children rushed for the dining room and at the door collided with Mary and Caroline, the cook, clad only in their nightgowns, their eyes bulging with terror. At the sight of their unconscious mistress they burst into frantic weeping.

"Be still!" I commanded. "She is not hurt, and you will frighten her with your noise when she is conscious."

The two women subsided into sniffling silence against the wall at the foot of the staircase.

Winifred appeared with the water, and her mother began to revive. Her eyelids fluttered, and she raised one shaking hand to her head.

"William," she gasped.

Her consciousness returned, and she took in the anxious faces bending over her. Bob spoke.

"Where is Mr. Robertson?"

There was a movement from the servants at the foot of the stair. Mary came over to where I stood.

"He's out yonder. Comin' in de back do' now."

Mrs. Robertson struggled to a sitting position on the couch. "William," she said again. "Is he all right?"

Mr. Robertson answered the question in person. He came down the hall, his face white and his usually sleepy eyes wide with excitement. He was fully dressed, as he had been at dinner, and I noticed his feet were covered with snow.

Mrs. Robertson held out her arms to him, and he dropped on his knees at her side.

"William was working. I—I lay down on the couch in my dress and fell asleep. He thought he heard some one at the door and went down to see. I followed him and stood listening. He didn't turn on the light. The hall was dark. He went outside and then I heard the shot. I thought —I thought he was—killed."

We looked at each other in amazement. She fainted away again, her head falling limply on her husband's shoulder.

"Get some whisky or ammonia," I commanded, and remembered I had a bottle of the latter in my room, rose and started up the stair.

"There's a flask in my room," Bob called after me.

Halfway to my bedroom I stepped on something that gave way under my foot with a slippery feeling. I looked down and saw a small object. I had not time to examine it and, without knowing why, picked it up and slipped it into my pocket. I secured the ammonia, and remembered that my hand seemed to stick to the bottle.

On the way downstairs I hurried into Bob's room and began to search for the flask. It was standing on the bureau. Picking it up to see if it was surely whisky, my eyes fastened on something which made me catch my breath. It was the pistol Winifred gave him, lying under the crumpled handkerchief as I had seen it when I first came into the house.

I could have sworn it was not there five minutes ago. But whatever stupid things I may have done later on, and how much I may have missed right under my nose, I did one thing at that moment of which I shall be proud ever after. I picked up the pistol and sniffed at the barrel. It smelled strongly of fresh burned powder.

Halfway down I met Bob coming up two steps at a time.

"Mr. Robertson and I are going to search the outside of the house. She's all right now."

He dashed past me, and when I reached the lower hall I saw Mrs. Robertson sitting on the sofa, with Winifred at her side. Her husband had gone out into the yard through the front door. As Bob ran past me he called, "Better telephone for a doctor or something."

Winifred rose and went to the phone, only to find the wires were down from the storm and could get no answer. As she came back her mother held out a shaking hand to her. "I'm all right now. Don't, don't tell any one." She shivered back against the sofa and closed her eyes.

Well that is what happened at three o'clock that morning. One of the hired men was sent for the sheriff, and, with Bob and Mr. Robertson, they searched the grounds. Later, as it began to grow light, the maids went out, and finally one or two railroad hands on their way to work, attracted by the lighted house and searching figures in the yard, joined them.

If I had only gone first with them into the yard! By the time the cold winter dawn began to steal over the trees the snow, which might have told so much, was a trampled morass. A herd of cattle might have been driven around the house for all it told.

I sent the servants to dress, and got Mrs. Robertson to bed in her husband's room, which joined hers. I told the maids to make some coffee, and brought her some. We all felt better after that. Finally the search was abandoned outside, and Bob and Mr. Robertson joined us. They were both full of theories, but Mr. Robertson's seemed the most probable.

An intruder had entered the house, and he and his wife had gone down to investigate. The burglar had entered Mrs. Robertson's bedroom, then, hearing them

below, had fired the pistol shot and had bolted down the stairs, escaping by the back door, which fastened only with an old-fashioned bolt.

It was possible, but there were several things that it did not explain. Why should a burglar fire a pistol when his last wish was detection? True it might, for the moment, frighten away the household, and a thief might do so fool a thing as that, but I had my doubts. Besides, it did not explain the bolster laid at the side of Mrs. Robertson's bed and the comforter thrown over the lower part.

Mrs. Robertson was asleep, and old Caroline, to whom she was devoted, was mounting guard by the door. I went, for the first time alone, into Mrs. Robertson's bedroom. Save for a general inspection by the entire house, led by the sheriff, who, as Bob remarked, couldn't detect a barrel of asafetida in the cellar, the room was as when I entered it at three that morning.

Looking about me, I wondered if they had noticed the smell of powder, as I had, when it was nowhere else in the house. It was broad daylight now and I closed the door, and, drawing a chair against it, sat down and looked about the room.

Finally I saw, or thought I did, what I had expected to find. Above the bed, two feet from the floor, was a small dark hole the size of a pencil. I prodded it with a hairpin. The result was absolute nihil. Apparently it extended far into the plastering. It was the missing bullet hole.

Shortly after I went downstairs to order breakfast. Mary was alone in the kitchen, as Caroline was still sitting by her sleeping mistress. After I had given my orders Mary went to the door and looked into the hall.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"I was just lookin' to make sure dat shurruf had gone."

I remembered their dread of the law.

"Mis' Hester," she said, "I dunno ef I ought to have spoke befo', but hyr's somethin' I picked up in de yard soon as it was light. I never remember seein' it befo', but dar's one thing certain, if it belongs to some ob we all, we'd never git it back from de shurruf."

She drew from under her apron a fine gold mesh bag. The clasp was bent and would not shut when pressed together. I went to the window and examined it. The workmanship was beautiful. I glanced at Mary, who stood, her hands on her hips, staring at me wide-eyed with interest. On the corner of the bag, set in tiny diamonds, was the initial "W." I slipped the bag into my pocket, cautioning Mary not to mention it to any one, and went upstairs.

Did Winifred own such a bag? But it had been found in the yard before she set foot off the porch. She had not left her mother until after six!

But I was to have another jolt before we got our breakfast that day. After making myself neat and putting the mesh bag carefully away, I went down to breakfast. On my way I stopped to look at the tiny hole in the wall over Mrs. Robertson's bed. I had on my glasses too, but, look and look as I would, the bullet hole had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOLD MESH BAG

NEVER had the sun risen more beautifully than the morning after the mysterious shot was fired. The storm of the night before had blown itself out, and on the sharply drifted snow the morning sun shone brilliantly. It was very cold. A bitter wind blew from the north, and gusts of powdered frost were driven down the empty street before it.

News of the occurrence spread rapidly, and by eight o'clock neighbors began to arrive with offers of assistance and all sorts of theories regarding the disturbance.

The editor from the *Weekly Examiner* came in great haste for a scoop for his paper. Poor boy, he was as much excited in getting that story as though there were twenty rival papers in the village.

After breakfast I went into the kitchen on the pretense of giving some orders regarding lunch. Mrs. Robertson felt too badly to come down, and Miss Eliza had never looked after things at home.

I found old Caroline sitting behind the

stove with her apron over her head. Mary was washing the breakfast things, with an occasional contemptuous glance at her companion. Caroline did not notice my entrance, and Mary, taking her hands out of the soapy water, beckoned me into the pantry.

"Hush! Hush! Don't say nothin,' Mis' Hester. Car'line's mo'nin'."

I am sure I looked annoyed. "What, again?" I snapped.

I was tired of the foolishness, and wished the household to fall into normal lines as soon as possible. But Mary was deeply moved.

"'Tain't so much 'ligion dis time, Mis' Hester," she said. "Car'line's done had a token an' 'tain't natural not to take no notice of it."

"What are you talking about, Mary?" I said sharply. Then, remembering the tracts, "Has she had another visit from the angel?"

"No'm," Mary sighed. "Hit's wus dan a angel. Las' night, after me and her come runnin' down dem stairs and come through de dinin' room, ef dar wasn't a bird circlin' 'roun' our haids. An' sho' nuf dis mornin' dar it was hangin' 'gainst de picture rail, an' when we tried ter git hit down wid er broom, bless Gawd if hit didn't fall to the flo' plum daid!"

Her breath gave out and she stood rolling her big brown eyes, their whites showing in her terror.

"Well, what of it? Some poor little sparrow blown down the chimney and half frozen. Probably you scared it to death when you came to ring through the room."

But Mary refused to be convinced.

"Dar's goin' ter be a deaf. Dar's goin' ter be a deaf sho's you's a foot high, Mis' Hester. Hits a sign, an' Car'line done 'ferd she back slid an ain't in de light. Dat's how come she's mo'nin'."

"Mary," I said firmly, "we shall all be mo'nin', as you put it, unless Caroline forgets her fancies and does her work properly. Tell her so, will you. Also that there is nothing to be afraid of."

"Yes'um," said Mary, after a few moments' thought. "But hit 'd come mo' natur'l ter hyr if you said it yo'se'f. She ain't ter be reasoned wif jes now. When we all got up from restin' 'while ago, bless Gawd ef both de cheers didn't keep on rockin' of dey selves. Carn't nobody gives yo' no plainer sign dan dat."

It was useless to argue with her, so, after some instructions about the housekeeping, I broached the real reason for my visit.

"Mary, do you recall if you ever saw Miss Winifred carry the gold bag you picked up in the snow this morning? If it is hers, I wish to have it mended. She would be sorry to have so handsome a thing broken like that."

"No'm," she said at last. "Ah can an' I can't say I'z seen her use it. Seems like she mos' gennelly carries son'thin' nuther in her han' when she goes out, but I disremembers whether hit's a gol' bag er not."

I saw I was not getting anywhere, and I tried another tack.

"Well, remember, you are not to say a word about finding the bag, and I will have it mended."

She nodded.

"I have decided to take your advice about talking to Caroline, so while I speak to her, I want you to go into your mistress's room and bring me the waste-paper basket from beside her desk. I wish to find an address I may have thrown there, and if she is still asleep you are less likely to waken her than I."

Mary drew a breath of relief. Evidently she was glad of any reason for leaving the kitchen and Caroline's forebodings.

"Yes'um," she said, wiping her hands on her apron. "I'll be back torrectly."

"And Mary," I called after her, "you are not to mention this to any one. I am anxious not to disturb Mrs. Robertson."

When she left me I went into the kitchen and approached Caroline, who sat rocking herself back and forth behind the stove. She was in a highly nervous state, in fact almost a frenzy of fear that her fancied backsliding would bring misfortune on the house.

However, by the time Mary appeared with the waste-paper basket she was sufficiently recovered to share in the dish-washing. So, taking the basket from Mary, I went into the dining room.

There were several pieces of torn letter paper, so smeared and blotted as to be useless, but at last I came upon the torn envelope which had lain beside Mrs. Robertson's desk the evening before. It was torn in half directly across the middle.

On it was written, "Miss Follie W," and on the line below, "The Ga"—and that was all. Search as I would the remaining half was not to be found. The deduction from it was simple.

She had first written to Miss Follie W, whoever that might be, and later had decided not to send the letter. The letters—The Ga—puzzled me for a time, then were perfectly clear. They were the first part of "The Gayety"—probably theater.

Just as the letter which I had mailed had been addressed. Though why she changed her mind and wrote to the manager of the Gayety Theater instead of Miss Follie W—was more than I could fathom. However, as I have found out since, one thought, if followed to its origin, is apt to bring one to another.

And with this in mind I decided then and there that possibly Clara Spense, down at the post office, could help me, that is, if I could keep her from finding out too much. Putting the scraps into the dining room fire, I gave the basket to Mary and went upstairs for my hat and cloak.

Mrs Robertson was still asleep. Mr. Robertson had gone down town surrounded by friends anxious to hear all there was to hear of the mysterious shot. Mr. Robertson went to business, that is, he kept offices for appearances, but I often thought how little there would be in the family larder if his income were depended upon.

As I passed through the lower hall Bob and Winifred were sitting on either side of the library fire, and she was very white. Something of my usual appearance had returned, so I stopped.

"Well," I said, "what do you think of it all?"

Neither of them looked at me.

"As long as I am kept in the dark," Winifred said evenly, "I can't see that it makes much difference what I think?"

She looked coldly at Bob, and I knew they had quarreled.

I had intended asking Winifred point-blank if she had lost a gold bag in the yard, and, if so, how she happened to be there. Also I wanted a chance to find out from Bob why Winifred had given him a pistol, and why it happened to smell of smoke after the shot was fired in the dead of night.

"Oh, come on, Win, you're behaving like a goose," Bob broke in.

But Winifred refused to unbend.

"It's only that we disagree in our theories about last night, Miss Hester," he finished, with an appealing glance at me.

"And what are your theories?" I asked crisply. I couldn't help it, after an opening like that.

"Surely you don't believe my father's explanation. I mean, accept it as probable?" This from Winifred with a deadly look, a look I did not like from a girl in love.

"But why not?" I began. Anything was better than the crossed swords before me. "Possibly a burglar did—"

But Bob broke in impatiently. "Perhaps he did and perhaps he didn't. Never having been a burglar, I can't say how one would behave."

But Winifred refused to smile.

"If Win had a little less imagination—" but he did not finish.

In a flash she had sprung to her feet and faced him with blazing eyes. "Imagination, is it?" she said, her voice thin as the blade of a knife. "Imagination, bosh! If you ask me who fired that shot I think—I think you did it yourself!" She fled from the room, the door banging after her.

Bob broke into a low laugh. "Poor Win," he said, "her nerves are all unstrung. I'll get her all right after awhile."

In spite of his assumption of carelessness, Bob strolled over to the window, his brows drawn and troubled.

"I might as well tell you, Miss Hester—it's jealousy," he gave a short laugh. "Wish she knew how little cause there is. I love her better than anything else in the world."

I went over to him and placed my hand upon his shoulder. "Never mind," I said. "You needn't tell me now or ever, unless you want to. But there is one thing I do want to ask you, and I want your promise

to keep my little secret. Did you ever give Winifred a gold bag—a mesh bag with a tiny initial on the corner—in diamonds?"

He looked at me curiously for a second. "Why, yes," he said. "I did. Not very long ago. Why?"

I told him about the bag found in the yard. He was greatly disturbed. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask why she had given him the pistol, when I suddenly resolved that if I were to unravel the disturbance in the house I had best keep my own counsel.

"Well," I said, "I am going out now for awhile. When Winifred comes down be nice, and, above all, take her as much into your confidence as you can. Perhaps if, when no one is looking, you would—"

But here Bob caught me in his arms. "What an old darling you are, Miss Hester," he said.

I straightened my bonnet and went into the hall. I was standing on one foot, putting on my rubbers, when Winifred came running down the stairs. She had on her fur coat, and passed me with the barest nod.

"Wait," I called. "If you are going down town I am going to the post office."

At the door she turned. "I—I am going the other way, for a walk."

There were tears in her eyes, but I saw something else besides. Over one slender wrist and a doeskin glove dangled a slender gold bag—a bag like that given me by Mary and now safely locked up in my top drawer on the third floor.

Winifred hurried on, and I pondered. Why had the children quarreled? Who was the intruder in the house last night, and what was Bob keeping from Winifred that should make her speak to him as she had? Well, it all brought me to where I started, and with a decided feeling of unrest I walked down the steps toward the street.

A lone figure was standing by the side of the house, his eyes bent on the snow, and instinctively I watched him. He dug in the snow with the toe of his boot. Then he walked a few steps forward and repeated the operation. Presently he turned his eyes my way and stopped. It was the Rev. Hezikiah Plit. He removed his hat and came forward.

"Pardon me, madam," he said. "Just a natural curiosity."

Perhaps my face was forbidding. It can be at times.

"I heard the village talk of the mysterious shot and I came up to look at the old house myself."

I said something, I don't recall what, and continued my way down the drive. But the man, minister though he might be, had lied to me when he said it. He had not come to look at the old house. He was searching for something in the snow, and I thought of the gold bag, the one like Winifred's lying upstairs in my bureau drawer.

TO BE CONTINUED

TWO features in your next week's FLYNN'S WEEKLY should prove particularly attractive. The first is installment one of "The Scented Death," a six-part novel by Anthony Drummond. Here is a combination detective-adventure novel in which much of the action is laid in the Russia that followed on the heels of revolution. Six installments is an uncommonly long novel for FLYNN'S WEEKLY, but here is a yarn that would hold your interest if you had to wait six months.

In the same issue will be "The Hand in the Glove," a novelette that is different, by Karl Detzer. The story is daring, the situation and setting are of a nature almost unknown in popular fiction, and the story is an uncommonly good one.

William J. Flynn

A Chinese member of the band was surprised by government agents

WILLIAM CARSE

By Operative D-1

FOR NEARLY A DOZEN YEARS HE HAS DODGED ABOUT THE EARTH, CLEARING UP MYSTERIES AND TRACKING DOWN CRIMINALS

A Story of Fact

IN the past three or four years there has operated in Honolulu, at the crossroads of the Pacific, one of the most skillful and ruthless bands of smugglers and desperadoes in the history of modern crime. It is known as the "Tin Can Alley Gang," and has claimed in its membership Americans, Britishers, Frenchmen, Hawaiians, Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese and Germans.

Honolulu, through the operations of this band, had become one of the most important links in a great international narcotic syndicate. So skillful was the operation of the organization, that government officers repeatedly failed in their efforts to apprehend its members or to put an end to its successful trade.

Early in the past summer, however, there appeared in Honolulu a rather tall, sleepy-eyed young man, with more than a little trace of military bearing. He walked down the gangplank of a ship from San Francisco, and after dodging about among cheap hotels for several days, he took up residence in one of the lowest neighborhoods in the city.

It was a district without caste or color line. Here, at the bottom of the social ladder—which is a very steep and very tall affair in the cities of the East—he found lodgings in a house that sheltered men of three colors and half a dozen races. He was not in the least interested in his fellow roomers at first, and seemed to shun them and shun everybody else as well.

The word got about that here was a "poor fellow" dodging the police. He was shabbily dressed, sullen, and apparently hungry. To those who were interested enough to ask he told of "getting out of Frisco in a hurry," and let them form their own conclusions.

It didn't take long for ring leaders in the Tin Can Alley Gang to see in him a

likely recruit. He was approached cautiously. For weeks he saw only messengers from the gang, no members of it venturing near him themselves.

Then it became known that he had suddenly come into a little money. How the rumor got about no one knows. It was followed by the story that a firm of British narcotic vendors had employed him to buy some "stuff."

Then one evening, shortly after midsummer, a Chinese member of the Tin Can Alley band was surprised in the door of his house by half a dozen government agents who overpowered him, and took from his person large quantities of opium.

The Honolulu Job

The agents sent him to the nearest police station, and hurried to another street. Here, once again, they surrounded a house, and when they had forced the door, discovered another member of the gang, and more narcotics. Still another raid, and another, and another.

The members of the unsavory syndicate, criminals with bad records many of them, fell into the waiting hands of the authorities. The final arrest was made late at night, and the man wanted showed fight. There was gunfire in the streets of Honolulu, and another prisoner was dragged in, with irons upon his wrists.

Then stepped out the shabby young man who had "left San Francisco in a hurry." But that night he was not shabby. He had led the raids. He emptied his pockets. There was evidence enough there to hold a dozen captives.

"I'll start in making out the papers, with my statements," he said. "There's one or two other little things that I might as well clean up at the same time. There's a Hollander I think we need, and a Japanese, on some other cases."

The papers were full of the feat in the morning. They described the shabby young man as "Operator William Carse, of the Treasury Department Secret Service Unit, an undercover man imported from San Francisco."

Carse had done his job in Honolulu. There was no reason for keeping up the disguise. In a few days or a few weeks he would be gone again, to some other far corner of the world, working quietly and unostentatiously, that new crimes be cleared up and old criminals brought to the justice they deserve.

He's gone from Honolulu by this time, and under some temporary name is performing his valuable and peculiar labors in some other guise.

William Carse is an international detective. For nearly a dozen years he has dodged about the earth, clearing up mysteries and tracking down criminals, now employed by one government, now another, now an agency, now a city, now working a precarious and skilled lone hand.

No man knows all the story of William Carse. But those parts of it that are known weave a tale of adventure and romance rarely equaled in modern crime and its detection.

Little of the early life of this wandering investigator is known. He rarely mentions anything that happened earlier than yesterday. But there is a belief among his few intimates that Carse is a Canadian by birth. At least he lived many of his early years in Canada.

Where Is He To-night?

It is believed by some that he served as a very young man in the ranks of the Northwest Mounted. The writer of this sketch, who has known him personally many years, and has worked with him on some of his most difficult cases, doubts that he ever served on the "mounties."

But about 1914 or 1915 Carse came out of Mexico. There is every reason to believe that he was associated in some way with Villa, the bandit and military leader. Perhaps he was only an "undercover man" there. Who knows? But he joined the United States Army, and at the outbreak of the World War was a member of the First Division, and one of the first Americans to arrive overseas.

He carried two wound stripes at the signing of the Armistice. Shortly after the first of the year, in 1919, he became a member of the Division of Criminal Investigation, the branch of the American Ex-

peditionary Forces that concerned itself with the suppression and investigation of crime.

This organization is not to be confused with either the military police or the intelligence department. It was a distinct unit, which coöperated with both the other secret service branches, but operated in its own particular field.

Carse was a detective sergeant in the D. C. I., assigned to the Embarkation Area. Some forty arrests of criminals badly wanted were chalked up to his credit in the year he served in that detachment. It was while there, through a series of skillful operations, that his work drew the attention of the Scotland Yard inspector on temporary duty in Paris.

With the return of the bulk of the American forces to their home ports, Sergeant Carse drifted away from the D. C. I., and with a handful of other American adventurers and detectives, joined the forces of the Lithuanian army. He was assigned by the provost marshal of that body to work in Paris, where he remained several months. Pay checks were slow in arriving, and the new army was in a bad state of disorganization.

William Carse bobbed up next in the ranks of the small detachment of American secret police in Paris. There he remained through most of 1920. Again he made a record of successes.

When the secret police were disbanded, William Carse dropped from sight. For two years nothing was heard of him. Then he appeared on the Pacific Coast, dodging from southern California to Vancouver and back again.

As a free lance operator in the employ of a great protective patrol, that was charged with watching over all the shipyards on the coast, he once more made a record for "getting his man."

Canada, Mexico, American Army, France, Lithuania, Pacific Coast, no one knows where else he has worked. He has trailed criminals in Paris, New York, San Francisco, Brussels, and London.

Once he fought it out, single-handed, against a band of desperadoes in the rugged hills of Normandie, again in the dark along the San Francisco water front.

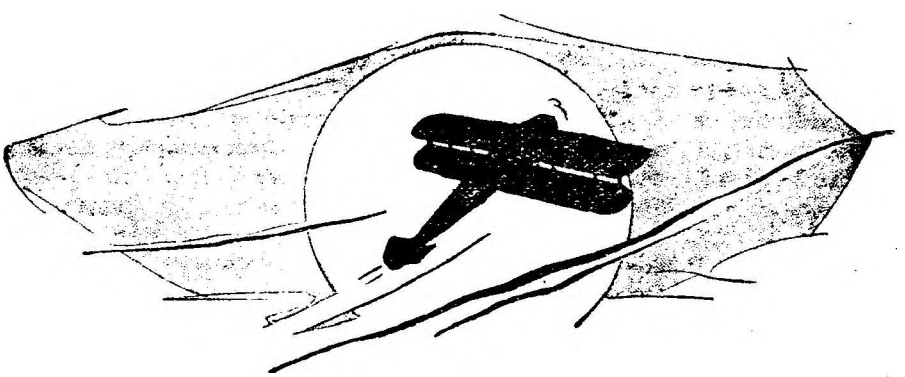
Yet this fellow who has played the game of cat and mouse with killers, robbers, spies, forgers, smugglers, has none of the earmarks of the detective, either of fiction or of fact.

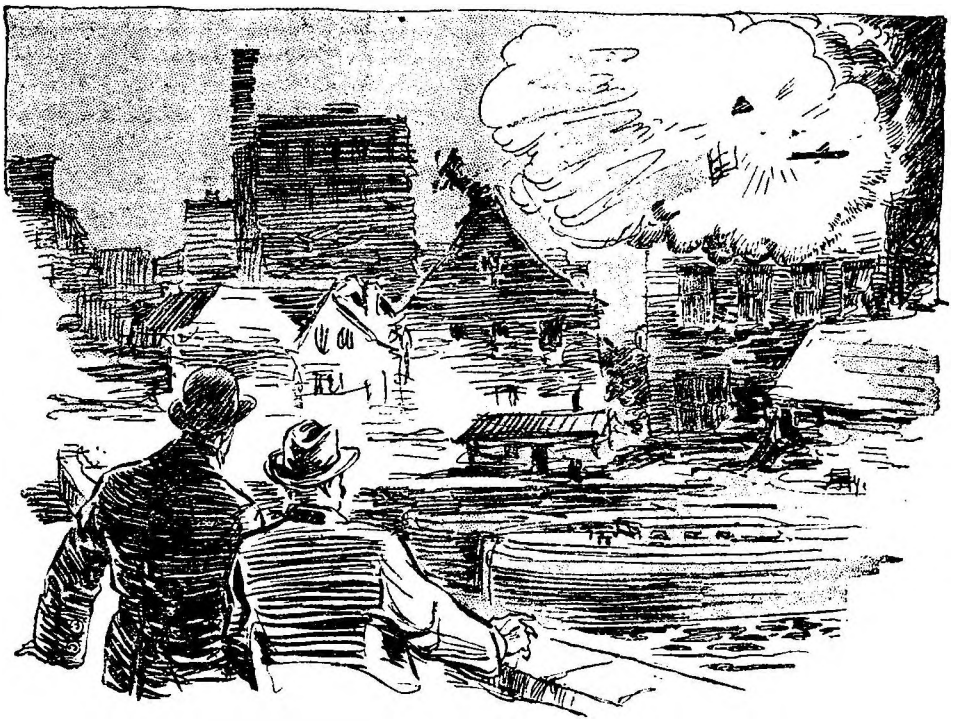
He is about thirty-six years old, nearly six feet tall, slender, soft spoken, with broad shoulders and a square jaw. In uniform he makes a handsome soldier; in blue serge a substantial civilian.

He speaks little, and his voice is low. He sees a great deal and says very little about it. No one would guess that he was a globe trotting detective who happened to see him, shabby or neat, in Honolulu, Paris or New York.

Such is the man who broke up the Tin Can Alley Gang. Where is he to-night? Paris again? Tokio? London? New York? Antwerp? Des Moines?

Perhaps the only man who knows exactly is William Carse. And likely as not, he wouldn't tell.





A flash of dazzling violet light burst from the building

LEFT BY THE FLAMES

By R. Austin Freeman

LATE ONE NIGHT SERGEANT BARBER SAW A MAN COME OUT OF THE HOUSE AND WALK QUIETLY AWAY AND HE FOLLOWED THE MAN

THERE was a time, and not so very long ago, when even the main streets of London, after midnight, were as silent as—not the grave; that is an unpleasant simile. Besides, who has any experience of conditions in the grave? But they were nearly as silent as the streets of a village.

Then the nocturnal pedestrian could go his way encompassed and soothed by quiet, which was hardly disturbed by the rumble of a country wagon wending to market or the musical tinkle of the little bells on the collar of the hansom cab horse sedately drawing some late reveler homeward.

Very different is the state of those streets nowadays. Long after the hour when the electric trams have ceased from troubling and the motor omnibuses are at rest, the heavy road transport from the country thunders through the streets: the air is rent by the howls of the electric hooter, and belated motor cyclists fly past stuttering explosively like perambulant Lewis guns with an inexhaustible charge.

"Let us get into the by-streets," said Thorndyke as a car sped past us uttering sounds suggestive of a dyspeptic dinosaur. "We don't want our conversation seasoned with mechanical objurgations. In the back street it is still possible to hear one's self

speak and forget the forward march of progress."

We turned into a narrow byway with the confidence of the born and bred Londoner in the impossibility of losing our direction, and began to thread the intricate web of streets in the neighborhood of a canal.

"It is a remarkable thing," Thorndyke resumed anon, "that every new application of science seems to be designed to render the environment of civilized man more and more disagreeable.

"If the process goes much farther, as it undoubtedly will, we shall presently find ourselves looking back wistfully at the stone age as the golden age of human comfort."

At this point his moralizing was cut short by a loud, sharp explosion. We both stopped and looked about from the parapet of the bridge that we were crossing.

"Quite like old times," Thorndyke remarked. "Carries one back to 1915, when friend Fritz used to call on us.

"Ah! There is the place: the top story of that tall building across the canal." He pointed as he spoke to a factorylike structure, from the upper windows of which a lurid light shone and rapidly grew brighter.

"It must be down the next turning," said I, quickening my pace. But he restrained me, remarking: "There is no hurry. That was the sound of high explosive, and those flames suggest nitro compounds burning. *Festina lente.* There may be some other packets of high explosives."

He had hardly finished speaking when a flash of dazzling violet light burst from the burning building. The windows flew out bodily, the roof opened in places, and almost at the same moment the clang of a violent explosion shook the ground under our feet, a puff of wind stirred our hair, and then came a clatter of falling glass and slates.

We made our way at a leisurely pace toward the scene of the explosion through streets lighted up by the ruddy glare from the burning factory. But others were less cautious.

In a few minutes the street was filled by one of those crowds which, in London, seem mysteriously to spring up in an instant where but a moment before not a person was to be seen.

Before we had reached the building a fire engine had rumbled past us, and already a sprinkling of policemen had appeared as if, like the traditional frogs, they had dropped from the clouds.

In spite of the ferocity of its outbreak, the fire seemed to be no great matter, for even as we looked, and before the fire hose was fully run out, the flames began to die down.

Evidently, they had been dealt with by means of extinguishers within the building, and the services of the engine would not be required after all.

Noting this flat ending to what had seemed so promising a start, we were about to move off and resume our homeward journey when I observed a uniformed inspector who was known to us, and who, observing us at the same instant, made his way toward us through the crowd.

"You remind me, sir," said he, when he had wished us good evening, "of the stories of the vultures that make their appearance in the sky from nowhere when a camel drops dead in the desert.

"I don't mean anything uncomplimentary," he hastened to add. "I was only thinking of the wonderful instinct that has brought you to this very spot at this identical moment; as if you had smelled a case afar off."

"Then your imagination has misled you," said Thorndyke, "for I haven't smelled a case, and I don't smell one now. Fires are not in my province."

"No, sir," replied the inspector, "but bodies are; and the fireman tells me that there is a dead man up there—or, at least, the remains of one. I am going up to inspect. Do you care to come up with me?"

Thorndyke considered for a moment, but I knew what his answer would be, and I was not mistaken. "As a matter of professional interest, I should," he replied, "but I don't want to be summoned as a witness at the inquest."

"Of course you don't, sir," the inspector agreed, "and I will see that you are not summoned, unless an expert witness is wanted.

"I need not mention that you have been here; but I should be glad of your opinion for my own guidance in investigating the case."

He led us through the crowd to the door of the building, where we were joined by a fireman by whom we were piloted up the stairs.

Halfway up we met the night watchman, carrying an exhausted extinguisher and a big electric lantern, and he joined our procession, giving us the news as we ascended.

"It's all safe up above," said he, "excepting the roof, and that isn't so very much damaged. The big windows saved it. They blew out and let off the force of the explosion. The floor isn't damaged at all. It's girder and concrete. But poor Mr. Manford caught it properly. He was fairly blown to bits!"

"Do you know how it happened?" the inspector asked.

"I don't," was the reply. "When I came on duty Mr. Manford was up there in his private laboratory. Soon afterward a friend of his—a foreign gentlemen of the name of Bilsky—came to see him.

"I took him up, and then Mr. Manford said he had some business to do and after that he had got a longish job to do and would be working late. So he said I might turn in and he would let me know when he had finished. And he did let me know with a vengeance, poor chap!

"I lay down in my clothes, and I hadn't been asleep above a couple of hours when some noise woke me up. Then there came a most almighty bang. I rushed for an extinguisher and ran upstairs, and there I found the big laboratory all ablaze, the windows blown out and the ceiling down.

"But it wasn't so bad as it looked. There wasn't very much stuff up there; only the experimental stuff, and that burned out almost at once. I got the rest of the fire out in a few minutes."

"What stuff is it that you are speaking of?" the inspector asked.

"Celluloid, mostly, I think," replied the watchman. "They make films and other celluloid goods in the works. But Mr. Manford used to do experiments in the material up in his laboratory.

"This time he was working with alloys; melting them on the gas furnace. Dangerous thing to do with all that inflammable stuff about. I don't know what there was up there, exactly. Some of it was celluloid, I could see by the way it burned, but the Lord knows what it was that exploded. Some of the raw stuff, perhaps."

II

AT this point we reached the top floor, where a door blown off its hinges and a litter of charred wood fragments filled the landing.

Passing through the yawning doorway, we entered the laboratory and looked on a hideous scene of devastation. The windows were mere holes, the ceiling a gaping space fringed with black and ragged lathing, through which the damaged roof was visible by the light of the watchman's powerful lantern.

The floor was covered with the fallen plaster and fragments of blackened woodwork, but its own boards were only slightly burned in places, owing, no doubt, to their being fastened directly to the concrete which formed the actual floor.

"You spoke of some human remains," said the inspector.

"Ah!" said the watchman. "You may well say 'remains.' Just come here." He led the way over the rubbish to a corner of the laboratory where he halted and threw the light of his lantern down on a brownish, dusty, globular object that lay on the floor half buried in plaster.

"That's all that's left of poor Mr. Manford; that and a few other odd pieces. I saw a hand over the other side."

Thorndyke picked up the head and placed it on the blackened remnant of a bench, where, with the aid of the watchman's lantern and the inspection lamp which I produced from our research case, he examined it curiously.

It was extremely, but unequally, scorched. One ear was completely shriveled, and most of the face was charred to the bone. But the other ear was almost intact; and though most of the hair was burned away to the scalp, a tuft above the less

damaged ear was only singed, so that it was possible to see that the hair had been black, with here and there a stray white hair.

Thorndyke made no comments, but I noticed that he examined the gruesome object minutely, taking nothing for granted. The inspector noticed this, too, and when the examination was finished, looked at him inquiringly. "Anything abnormal, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "nothing that is not accounted for by fire and the explosion. I see he had no natural teeth, so he must have worn a complete set of false teeth. That should help in the formal identification, if the plates are not completely destroyed."

"There isn't much need for identification," said the watchman, "seeing that there was nobody in the building but him and me. His friend went away about half past twelve. I heard Mr. Manford let him out."

"The doctor means at the inquest," the inspector explained. "Somebody has got to recognize the body if possible." He took the watchman's lantern and, throwing its light on the floor, began to search among the rubbish.

Very soon he disinterred from under a heap of plaster the headless trunk. Both legs were attached, though the right was charred below the knee and the foot blown off, and one complete arm.

The other arm—the right—was intact only to the elbow. Here again the burning was very unequal. In some parts the clothing had been burned off or blown away completely; in others enough was left to enable the watchman to recognize it with certainty.

One leg was much more burned than the other; and whereas the complete arm was only scorched, the dismembered one was charred almost to the bone.

When the trunk had been carried to the bench and laid there beside the head, the lights were turned on it for Thorndyke to make his inspection.

"It almost seems," said the police officer, as the hand was being examined, "as if one could guess how he was standing when the explosion occurred. I think I can make out finger marks—pretty dirty ones, too—on the back of the hand, as if he had been standing with his hands clasped together behind him while he watched something that he was experimenting with." The inspector glanced, for confirmation at Thorndyke, who nodded approvingly.

"Yes," he said, "I think you are right. They are very indistinct, but the marks are grouped like fingers. The small mark near the wrist suggests a little finger and the separate one near the knuckle looks like a forefinger, while the remaining two marks are close together."

He turned the hand over and continued: "And there, in the palm, just between the roots of the third and fourth finger, seems to be the trace of a thumb. But they are all very faint. You have a quick eye, inspector."

The gratified officer, thus encouraged, resumed his explorations among the débris in company with the watchman—the fireman had retired after a professional look around—leaving Thorndyke to continue his examination of the mutilated corpse, at which I looked on unsympathetically.

For we had had a long day and I was tired and longing to get home. At length I drew out my watch, and with a portentous yawn, entered a mild protest.

"It is nearly two o'clock," said I. "Don't you think we had better be getting on? This really isn't any concern of ours, and there doesn't seem to be anything in it, from our point of view."

"Only that we are keeping our intellectual joints supple," he replied with a smile. "But it *is* getting late. Perhaps we had better adjourn the inquiry."

At this moment, however, the inspector discovered the missing forearm—completely charred—with the fingerless remains of the hand, and almost immediately afterward the watchman picked up a dental plate of some white metal, which seemed to be practically uninjured.

But our brief inspection of these objects elicited nothing of interest, and having glanced at them, we took our departure, avoiding on the stairs an eager reporter, all agog for "copy."

A few days later we received a visit, by

appointment, from a Mr. Herdman, a solicitor who was unknown to us and who was accompanied by the widow of Mr. James Manford, the victim of the explosion.

In the interval the inquest had been opened, but had been adjourned for further examination of the premises and the remains. No mention had been made of our visit to the building and, so far as I knew, nothing had been said to anybody on the subject.

Mr. Herdman came to the point with businesslike directness. "I have called," he said, "to secure your services, if possible, in regard to the matter of which I spoke in my letter. You have probably seen an account of the disaster in the papers?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I read the report of the inquest."

"Then you know the principal facts. The inquest, as you know, was adjourned for three weeks. When it is resumed, I should like to retain you to attend on behalf of Mrs. Manford."

"To watch the case on her behalf?" Thorndyke suggested.

"Well, not exactly," replied Herdman. "I should ask you to inspect the premises and the remains of poor Mr. Manford, so that, at the adjourned inquest, you could give evidence to the effect that the explosion and the death of Mr. Manford were entirely due to accident."

"Does any one say that they were not?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, certainly not," Mr. Herdman replied hastily. "Not at all. But I happened, quite by chance, to see the manager of the Pilot Insurance Society, on another matter, and I mentioned the case of Mr. Manford.

"He then let drop a remark which made me slightly uneasy. He observed that there was a suicide clause in the policy and that the possibility of suicide would have to be ruled out before the claim could be settled. Which suggested a possible intention to contest the claim."

"But," said Thorndyke, "I need not point out to you that if he sets up the theory of suicide, it is for him to prove it, not for you to disprove it. Has anything transpired that would lend color to such a suggestion?"

"Nothing material," was the reply. "But we should feel more happy if you could be present and give positive evidence that the death was accidental."

"That," said Thorndyke, "would be hardly possible. But my feeling is that the suicide question is negligible. There is nothing to suggest it, so far as I know. Is there anything known to you?"

The solicitor glanced at his client and replied somewhat evasively:

"We are anxious to secure ourselves. Mrs. Manford is left very badly off, unless there is some personal property that we don't know about. If the insurance is not paid, she will be absolutely ruined. There isn't enough to pay the debts.

"Manford had been rather queer lately; jumpy and rather worried. Then, he was under notice to terminate his engagement at the works. His finances were in a confused state: goodness knows why, for he had a liberal salary. And then there was some domestic trouble.

"Mrs. Manford had actually consulted me about getting a separation. Some other woman, you know."

"I should like to forget that," said Mrs. Manford; "and it wasn't that which worried him. Quite the contrary. Since it began he had been quite changed. So smart in his dress and so particular in his appearance. He even took to dyeing his hair.

"I remember that he opened a fresh bottle of dye the very morning before his death and took no end of trouble putting it on. It wasn't that entanglement that made him jumpy. It was his money affairs. He had too many irons in the fire."

Thorndyke listened with patient attention and inquired: "What sort of irons?"

III

"WILL tell you," said Herdman. "About three months ago he had need for two thousand pounds; for what purpose I cannot say, but Mrs. Manford thinks it was to invest in certain valuables that he used to purchase

from time to time from a Russian dealer named Bilsky.

"At any rate, he got this sum on short loan from a Mr. Clines, but meanwhile arranged for a longer loan with a Mr. Elliott on a note of hand and an agreement to insure his life for the amount.

"As a matter of fact, the policy was made out in Elliott's name, he having proved an insurable interest. So if the insurance is paid, Elliott is settled with.

"Otherwise the debt falls on the estate, which would be disastrous; and, to make it worse, the day before his death he drew out five hundred pounds—nearly the whole balance—as he was expecting to see Mr. Bilsky, who liked to be paid in bank notes. He did see him, in fact, at the laboratory, but they couldn't have done any business, as no jewels were found."

"And the bank notes?"

"Burned with the body, presumably. He must have had them with him."

"You mentioned," said Thorndyke, "that he occasionally bought jewels from this Russian. What became of them?"

"Ah," replied Herdman, "there is a gleam of hope there. He had a safe deposit somewhere. We haven't located it yet, but we shall. There may be quite a nice little nest egg in it. But meanwhile there is the debt to Elliott. He wrote to Manford about it a day or two ago.

"You have the letter, I think," he added, addressing Mrs. Manford, who thereupon produced two envelopes from her hand bag and laid them on the table.

"This is Mr. Elliott's letter," she said. "Merely a friendly reminder, you see, telling him that he is just off to the continent and that he has given his wife a power of attorney to act in his absence."

Thorndyke glanced through the letter and made a few notes of its contents. Then he looked inquiringly at the other envelope.

"That," said Mrs. Manford, "is a photograph of my husband. I thought it might help you if you were going to examine the body."

As Thorndyke drew the portrait out and regarded it thoughtfully, I recalled the shapeless, blackened fragments of its subject; and when he passed it to me I inspected it with a certain grim interest and mentally compared it with those grisly remains.

It was a commonplace face, rather unsymmetrical—the nose was deflected markedly to the left, and the left eye had a pronounced divergent squint.

The bald head, with an abundant black fringe and an irregular scar on the right side of the forehead, sought compensation in a full beard and mustache, both apparently jet black. It was not an attractive countenance, and it was not improved by a rather odd shaped ear—long, lobeless and pointed above like the ear of a satyr.

"I realize your position," said Thorndyke, "but I don't quite see what you want of me. If," he continued, addressing the solicitor, "you had thought of my giving *ex parte* evidence, dismiss the idea. I am not a witness advocate.

"All I can undertake to do is to investigate the case and try to discover what really happened. But in that case, whatever I may discover I shall disclose to the coroner. Would that suit you?"

The lawyer looked doubtful and rather glum, but Mrs. Manford interposed firmly:

"Why not? We are not proposing any deception, but I am certain that he did not commit suicide. Yes, I agree unreservedly to what you propose."

With this understanding—which the lawyer was disposed to boggle at—our visitors took their leave. As soon as they were gone I gave utterance to the surprise with which I had listened to Thorndyke's proposal.

"I am astonished at your undertaking this case. Of course, you have given them fair warning, but still, it will be unpleasant if you have to give evidence unfavorable to your client."

"Very," he agreed. "But what makes you think I may have to?"

"Well, you seem to reject the probability of suicide, but have you forgotten the evidence at the inquest?"

"Perhaps I have," he replied blandly. "Let us go over it again."

I fetched the report from the office, and, spreading it out on the table, began to read it aloud. Passing over the evidence of the

inspector and the fireman, I came to that of the night watchman.

"Shortly after I came on duty at ten o'clock a foreign gentleman named Bilsky called to see Mr. Manford. I knew him by sight, because he had called once or twice before at about the same time.

"I took him up to the laboratory, where Mr. Manford was doing something with a big crucible on the gas furnace. He told me that he had some business to transact with Mr. Bilsky and when he had finished he would let him out. Then he was going to do some experiments in making alloys, and as they would probably take up most of the night he said I might as well turn in. He said he would call me when he was ready to go.

"So I told him to be careful with the furnace and not set the place on fire and burn me in my bed, and then I went downstairs. I had a look round to see that everything was in order, and then I took off my boots and laid down. About half past twelve I heard Mr. Manford and Bilsky come down.

"I recognized Mr. Bilsky by a peculiar cough that he had and by the sound of his stick and his limping tread—he had something the matter with his right foot and walked quite lame."

"You say that the deceased came down with him," said the coroner. "Are you quite sure of that?"

"Well, I supposed Mr. Manford came down with him, but I can't say I actually heard him."

"You did not hear him go up again?"

"No, I didn't. But I was rather sleepy and I wasn't listening very particular. Well, then I went to sleep and slept till about half past one, when some noise woke me.

"I was just getting up to see what it was when I hear a tremendous bang right overhead. I ran down and turned the gas off at the main, and then I got a fire extinguisher and ran up to the laboratory.

"The place seemed to be all in a blaze, but it wasn't much of a fire after all, for by the time the fire engines arrived I had got it practically out."

The witness then described the state of the laboratory and the finding of the body, but as this was already known to us, I passed on to the evidence of the next witness, the superintendent of the fire brigade, who had made a preliminary inspection of the premises.

It was a cautious statement, and subject to the results of a further examination; but clearly the officer was not satisfied as to the cause of the outbreak. There seemed to have been two separate explosions, one near a cupboard and another—apparently the second—in the cupboard itself; and there seemed to be a burned track connecting the two spots.

This might have been accidental, or it might have been arranged. Witness did not think that the explosive was celluloid. It seemed to be a high explosive of some kind. But further investigations were being made.

The superintendent was followed by Mrs. Manford, whose evidence was substantially similar to what she and Mr. Herdman had told us, and by the police surgeon, whose description of the remains conveyed nothing new to us.

Finally, the inquest was adjourned for three weeks to allow of further examination of the premises and the remains.

"Now," I said, as I folded up the report, "I don't see how you are able to exclude suicide. If the explosion was arranged to occur when Mr. Manford was in the laboratory, what object, other than suicide, can be imagined?"

Thorndyke looked at me with an expression that I knew only too well.

"Is it impossible," he asked, "to imagine that the object might have been homicide?"

"But," I objected, "there was no one there but Manford—after Bilsky left."

"Exactly," he agreed dryly; "after Bilsky left. But up to that time there were two persons there."

I must confess that I was startled, but as I rapidly reviewed the circumstances I perceived the cogency of Thorndyke's suggestion. Bilsky had been present when Manford dismissed the night watchman. He knew that there would be no interruption. The inflammable and explosive materials were there, ready to his hand. Then Bilsky had gone down to the door alone instead of

being conducted down and let out; a very striking circumstance this.

Again, no jewels had been found, though the meeting had been ostensibly for the purpose of a deal; and the bank notes had vanished utterly.

In view of the large sum, it was nearly certain that the notes would be in a close bundle, and we all know how difficult it is to burn tightly folded paper. Yet they had vanished without leaving a trace.

Finally, there was Bilsky himself. Who was he? Apparently a dealer in stolen property—a hawker of the products of robbery and murder committed during the revolution.

"Yes," I admitted, "the theory of homicide is certainly tenable. But unless some new facts can be produced, it must remain a matter of speculation."

"I think, Jervis," he rejoined, "you must be overlooking the facts that are known to us. We were there. We saw the place within a few minutes of the explosion.

"What we saw established a clear presumption of homicide, and what we have heard this morning confirms it. I may say that I communicated my suspicions the very next day to the coroner and to Superintendent Miller."

"Then you must have seen more than I did," I began. But he shook his head and cut short my protestations.

"You saw what I saw, Jervis, but you did not interpret its meaning. However, it is not too late. Try to recall the details of our adventure and what our visitors have told us. I don't think you will then entertain the idea of suicide."

I was about to put one or two leading questions, but at this moment footsteps became audible ascending our stairs. The knock which followed informed me that our visitor was Superintendent Miller.

IV

"JUST looked in to report progress," he announced as he subsided into an armchair. "Not much to report, but what there is supports your view of the case. Bilsky has made a clean bolt. Never went home to his hotel. Evidently meant to skedaddle, as he has left nothing of any value behind.

"But it was a stupid move, for it would have raised suspicion in any case. The notes were a consecutive batch. All the numbers are known, but, of course, none of them have turned up yet.

"We have made inquiries about Bilsky, and gather that he is a shady character; practically a fence who deals in jewelry stolen from those unfortunate Russian aristocrats.

"But we shall have him all right. His description has been circulated at all the seaports, and he is an easy man to spot, with his lame foot and his stick and a finger missing from his right hand."

Thorndyke nodded and seemed to reflect for a moment. Then he asked:

"Have you made any other inquiries?"

"No; there is nothing more to find out until we get hold of our man, and when we do we shall look to you to secure the conviction. I suppose you are quite certain as to your facts?"

Thorndyke shook his head with a smile. "I am never certain until after the event. We can only act on probabilities."

"I understand," said the superintendent, casting a sly look at me; "but your probabilities are good enough for me."

With this, he picked up his hat and departed, leaving us to return to the occupations that our visitors had interrupted.

I heard no more of the Manford case for about a week, and assumed that Thorndyke's interest in it had ceased. But I was mistaken, as I discovered when he remarked casually one evening:

"No news of Bilsky, so far; and time is running on. I am proposing to make a tentative move in a new direction."

I looked at him inquiringly, and he continued: "It appears, 'from information received,' that Elliott had some dealings with him, so I propose to call at his house tomorrow and see if we can glean any news of the lost sheep."

"But Elliott is abroad," I objected.

"True, but his wife isn't; and she evidently knows all about his affairs. I have invited Miller to come with me in case he would like to put any questions; and you

may as well come along, too, if you are free."

It did not sound like a very thrilling adventure, but one never knew with Thorndyke. I decided to go with him, and at that the matter dropped, though I speculated a little curiously on the source of the information.

So, apparently had the superintendent, for when he arrived on the following morning he proceeded to throw out a few cautious feelers, but got nothing for his pains beyond vague generalities.

"It is a purely tentative proceeding," said Thorndyke, "and you mustn't be disappointed if nothing comes of it."

"I shall be, all the same," replied Miller with a sly glance at my senior, and with this we set forth on our quest.

The Elliotts' house was, as I knew, in some part of Wimbledon, and thither we made our way by train. From the station we started along a wide, straight main street from which numbers of smaller streets branched off.

At the corner of one of these, I noticed a man standing, apparently watching our approach; and something in his appearance seemed to me familiar. Suddenly he took off his hat, looked curiously into its interior and put it on again. Then he turned about and walked quickly down the side street.

I looked at his retreating figure as we crossed the street, wondering who he could be. And then it flashed upon me that the resemblance was to a certain ex-sergeant Barber whom Thorndyke occasionally employed for observation duties. Just as I reached this conclusion, Thorndyke halted and looked about him doubtfully.

"I am afraid we have come too far," said he. "I fancy we ought to have gone down that last turning."

We accordingly faced about and walked back to the corner, where Thorndyke read out the name, Mendoza Avenue.

"Yes," he said, "this is the way," and we thereupon turned down the avenue, following it to the bottom, where it ended in a crossroad, the name of which, Berners Park, I recognized as that which I had seen on Elliott's letter.

"Sixty-four is the number," said Thorndyke, "so as this corner house is forty-six and the next is forty-eight, it will be a little way along on this side, just about where you can see that smoke—which, by the way, seems to be coming out of a window."

"Yes, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "The staircase window, apparently. Not our house, I hope!"

But it was. We read the number and the name, "Green Bushes," on the gate as we came up to it, and we hurried up the short path to the door. There was no knocker, but when Miller fixed his thumb on the bell-push, we heard a loud ringing within. But there was no response; and meanwhile the smoke poured more and more densely out of the open window above.

"Rum!" exclaimed Miller, sticking to the bell-push like a limpet. "House seems to be empty."

"I don't think it is," Thorndyke replied.

The superintendent looked at him with quick suspicion and then glanced at the ground floor window.

"That window is unfastened," said he, "and here comes a constable."

Sure enough, a policeman was approaching quickly, looking up at the houses. Suddenly he perceived the smoke and quickened his pace, arriving just as Thorndyke had raised the window sash and was preparing to climb into the room.

The constable hailed him sternly, but a brief explanation from Miller reduced the officer to a state of respectful subservience, and we all followed Thorndyke through the open window, from which smoke now began to filter.

"Send the constable upstairs to give the alarm," Thorndyke instructed Miller in a low tone. The order was given without question, and the next moment the officer was bounding up the stairs, roaring like a whole fire brigade.

Meanwhile, the tall superintendent browsed along the hall through the dense smoke, sniffing inquisitively, and at length approached the street door. Suddenly, from the heart of the reek, his voice issued in tones of amazement:

"Well, I'm hanged! It's a plumber's smoke-rocket. Some fool has stuck it through into the letter-cage!"

In the silence which followed this announcement I heard an angry voice from above demand:

"What is all this infernal row about? And what are you doing here?"

"Can't you see that the house is on fire?" was the constable's stern rejoinder. "You'd better come down and help to put it out."

The command was followed by the sound of descending footsteps, on which Thorndyke ran quickly up the stairs, followed by the superintendent and me.

We met the descending party on the landing, opposite a window, and here we all stopped, gazing at one another with mutual curiosity. The man who accompanied the constable looked distinctly alarmed—as well he might—and somewhat hostile.

"Who put that smoke-rocket in the hall?" Miller demanded fiercely. "And why didn't you come down when you heard us ringing the bell?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," the man replied sulkily, "or what business this is of yours. Who are you? And what are you doing in my house?"

"In your house?" repeated Thorndyke. "Then you will be Mr. Elliott?"

The man turned a startled glance on him and replied angrily:

"Never you mind who I am. Get out of this house."

"But I do mind who you are," Thorndyke rejoined mildly. "I came here to see Mr. Elliott. Are you Mr. Elliott?"

"No, I'm not. Mr. Elliott is abroad. If you like to send a letter here for him, I will forward it when I get his address."

While this conversation had been going on, I had been examining the stranger, not without curiosity. For his appearance was somewhat unusual. In the first place, he wore an unmistakable wig, and his shaven face bore an abundance of cuts and scratches, suggesting a recently and unskillfully mown beard.

His spectacles did not disguise a pronounced divergent squint of the left eye; but what specially caught my attention was the ear—a large ear, lobeless and pointed at the tip like the ear of a satyr.

As I looked at this, and at the scraped face, the squint and the wig, a strange suspicion flashed into my mind; and then, as I noted that the nose was markedly deflected to the left, I turned to glance at Thorndyke.

"Would you mind telling us your name?" the latter asked blandly.

"My name is—is—Johnson; Frederick Johnson."

"Ah," said Thorndyke, "I thought it was Manford—James Manford; and I think so still! I suggest that you have a scar on the right side of your forehead, just under the wig. May we see?"

As Thorndyke spoke the name, the man turned a horrible livid gray and started back as if to retreat up the stairs.

But the constable blocked the way; and as the man was struggling to push past, Miller adroitly snatched off the wig; and there, on the forehead, was the telltale scar.

For an appreciable time we all stood stock-still like the figures of a tableau. Then Thorndyke turned to the superintendent.

"I charge this man, James Manford, with the murder of Stephen Bilsky."

Again there was a brief interval of intolerable silence. In the midst of it we heard the street door open and shut, and a woman's voice called up the stairs: "What ever is all this smoke? Are you up there, Jim?"

V

I PASS over the harrowing details of the double arrest. I am not a policeman and to me such scenes are intensely repugnant.

But we must needs stay until two taxis and four constables had conveyed the prisoners away from the still reeking house to the caravansary of the law. Then, at last, we went forth with relief into the fresh air and bent our steps toward the station.

"I take it," Miller said reflectively, "that you never suspected Bilsky?"

"I did at first. But when Mrs. Manford and the solicitor told their tale I realized that he was the victim and that Manford must be the murderer."

"Let us have the argument," said I. "It

is obvious that I have been a blockhead, but I don't mind our old friend here knowing it."

"Not a blockhead, Jervis," he corrected. "You were half asleep that night and wholly uninterested. If you had been attending to the matter, you would have observed several curious and anomalous appearances.

"For instance, you would have noticed that the body was, in parts, completely charred and brittle. Now we saw the outbreak of the fire and we found it extinguished when we reached the building.

"Its duration was a matter of minutes; quite insufficient to reduce a body to that state. For, as you know, a human body is an extremely incombustible thing. The appearance suggested the destruction of a body which had been already burned; and this suggestion was emphasized by the curiously unequal distribution of the charring.

"The right hand was burned to a cinder and blown to pieces. The left hand was only scorched. The right foot was utterly destroyed, but the left foot was nearly intact. The face was burned away completely and yet there were parts of the head where the hair was only singed.

"Naturally, with these facts in my mind, I scrutinized those remains narrowly. And presently something much more definite and sinister came to light. On the left hand, there was a faint impression of another hand—very indistinct and blurred but still unmistakably a hand."

"I remember," said I, "the inspector pointed it out as evidence that the deceased had been standing with his hands clasped before or behind him; and I must admit that it seemed a reasonable inference."

"So it did—because you were both assuming that the man had been alone and that it must, therefore, have been the impression of his own hand. For that reason, neither of you looked at it critically. If you had, you would have seen at once that it was the impression of a left hand."

"You are quite right," I confessed ruefully. "As the man was stated to have been alone, the hand impression did not interest me. And it was a mere group of smudges, after all. You are sure that it was a left hand?"

"Quite," he replied. "Blurred as the smudges were, one could make out the relative lengths of the fingers. And there was the thumb mark at the distal end of the palm, but pointing to the outer side of the hand. Try how you may, you can't get a right hand into that position.

"Well, then, here was a crucial fact. The mark of a left hand on a left hand proved the presence of a second person and at once raised a strong presumption of homicide, especially when considered in conjunction with the unaccountable state of the body.

"During the evening, a visitor had come and gone, and on him—Bilsky—the suspicion naturally fell. But Mrs. Manford unwittingly threw an entirely new light on the case.

"You remember she told us that her husband had opened a new bottle of hair dye on the very morning before the explosion and had applied it with unusual care. Then his hair was dyed. But the hair of the corpse was not dyed.

"Therefore the corpse was not the corpse of Manford. Further, the presumption of murder applied now to Manford, and the body almost certainly was that of Bilsky."

"How did you deduce that the hair of the corpse was not dyed?" I asked.

"I didn't deduce it at all. I observed it. You remember a little patch of hair above the right ear, very much singed, but still recognizable as hair? Well, in that patch I made out distinctly two or three white hairs.

"Naturally, when Mrs. Manford spoke of the dye, I recalled those white hairs, for though you may find silver hairs among the gold, you don't find them among the dyed. So the corpse could not be Manford's and was presumably that of Bilsky.

"But the instant that this presumption was made, a quantity of fresh evidence arose to support it. The destruction of the body was now understandable. Its purpose was to prevent identification.

"The parts destroyed were the parts that had to be destroyed for that purpose; the face was totally unrecognizable and the

right hand and right foot were burned and shattered to fragments. But these were Bilsky's personal marks. His right hand was badly mutilated and his right foot deformed.

"And the fact that the false teeth found were undoubtedly Mansford's was conclusive evidence of the intended deception.

"Then there were those very queer financial transactions, of which my interpretation was this: Manford borrowed two thousand pounds from Clines. With this he opened an account in the name of Elliott. As Elliott, he lent himself two thousand pounds—with which he repaid Clines—subject to an insurance on his life for that amount, taken out in Elliott's name."

"Then he would have gained nothing," I objected.

"On the contrary, he would have stood to gain two thousand pounds on proof of his own death. That, I assumed, was his scheme; to murder Bilsky, to arrange for Bilsky's corpse to personate his own; and then, when the insurance was paid, to abscond—in the company of some woman—with this sum, with the valuables that he had taken from Bilsky and the five hundred pounds that he had withdrawn from the bank.

"But this was only theory. It had to be tested! And as we had Elliott's address, I did the only thing that was possible. I employed our friend, ex-sergeant Barber, to watch the house. He took lodgings in a house nearly opposite and kept up continuous observation, which soon convinced him that there was some one on the premises besides Mrs. Elliott.

"Then, late one night, he saw a man come out and walk away quickly. He followed the man for some distance, until the stranger turned back and began to retrace his steps.

"Then Barber accosted him, asking for a direction, and carefully inspecting him. The man's appearance tallied exactly with the description that I had given—I had assumed that he would probably shave off his beard—and with the photograph; so Barber, having seen him home, reported to me. And that is the whole story."

"Not quite the whole," said Miller with a sly grin. "There is that smoke-rocket. If it hadn't been for the practical joker who slipped that through the letter-slit, we could never have got into that house. I call it a most remarkable coincidence."

"So do I," Thorndyke agreed, without moving a muscle; "but there is a special providence that watches over medical jurists."

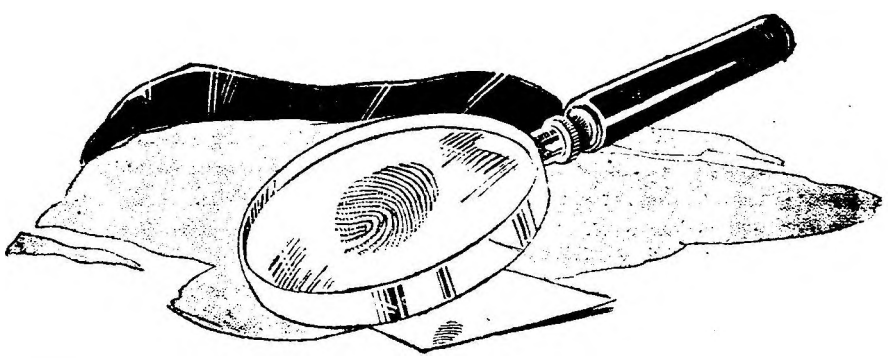
We were silent for a few moments. Then I remarked:

"This will come as a terrible shock to Mrs. Manford."

"I am afraid it will," Thorndyke agreed. "But it will be better for her than if Manford had absconded with this woman, taking practically every penny that he possessed with him. She stood to lose a worthless husband in either event.

"At least we have saved her from poverty. And, knowing the facts, we were morally and legally bound to further the execution of justice."

"A very proper sentiment," said the superintendent, "though I am not quite clear as to the legal aspects of that smoke rocket."



Captain Brady leaped from his chair—

THE BOMB

By Victor Maxwell

UNLESS YOU KNOW ALL THERE IS TO BE KNOWN ABOUT WOMEN, YOU WILL BE WISER FOR HAVING READ THIS STORY

CHAPTER I

SAVING A THOUSAND LIVES

"YEAH, boy, you missed some fun," said Captain of Detectives Brady to his aid, Sergeant Riordan, as the latter settled himself at his desk shortly after four in the afternoon, to relieve his chief of executive duty for the first night relief. "You ought-a been here, you'd have enjoyed it. It might have reminded you of the war."

Riordan smiled and reached for the reports awaiting him in the wire basket on top of his desk.

"I saw the headlines in the papers," he said. "'Bomb Plot Thwarted.' Glad you thwarted it, chief."

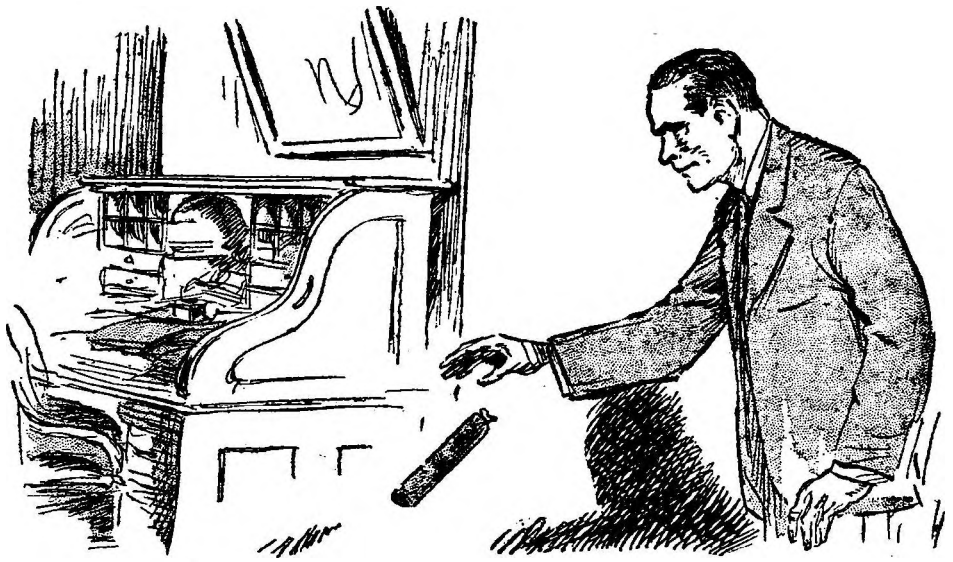
"It wasn't any of my thwarting, boy. Bombs are not exactly in my line. Let the bureau of combustibles of the fire department have 'em. They got this one, and welcome, too. Gosh, it gave me the shivers, hearing the darned thing tick, and not knowing when it was set for.

"You can bet I wasn't slow in getting it out of there, and leaving it be on the sidewalk till the service wagon came for it. And I didn't notice any of them bureau men any too anxious to pick it up.

"But there was a mob of people watching, and they're game guys. Just the same, I bet they were glad to get it where they could give it a bath."

Riordan raised his eyebrows. "You mean they carried it off in the wagon, without trying to stop it any?"

"Sure. What else could they do? Leave



—when Riordan dropped it to the floor

it down there in the banking district to go off, and maybe wreck a hundred thousand dollars' worth of plate glass, to say nothing of what else it might have done? And with all that mob looking on?

" Of course, we had the mob pushed back a block both ways, and they sure gave that service wagon plenty of room when it rolled by, too; but there was nothing else to do but cart it away. You got to hand it to 'em, they were game lads."

Riordan put the reports, unread, on his desk, and looked at Brady.

" Seems to me, chief, you were a bit game yourself, now that you come to mention it. Picking up that ticking thing and carrying it out of the bank. How'd you feel, anyway?"

" Boy, I didn't stop to feel. There was forty-eleven uniformed bulls and dicks standing round when I got there, and Partridge, too, all looking at this box with the ticker inside of it, and not doing anything.

" Of course, the thing to do first was to get it outside. So I reminds myself I was a cop, and packed it out, hollering at the same time for somebody to call the fire department and tell 'em to come and get it. But between you and me, I was darned glad to put it down just next the curb, in the gutter, and get back behind the three-foot thick walls of the bank.

" Parker, the first vice-president, came rushing up and shook my hand an' told me what a hero I was, an' all that, but I was so shaky inside I couldn't say anything in answer. I was afraid to open my mouth for fear he'd hear my teeth chatter."

" ' The cool nerve of Captain of Detectives Brady,' it says in the papers, chief. You made one big hit. Tell me all about it, you can't believe what the papers say, anyhow."

If there was any subtle irony in Riordan's remarks, Brady did not notice it.

" Well, boy," he said, " it was funny, in a way. First thing I knew I heard the roomful of dicks out there start stampeding. I knew something had busted, and I ran to the door. When I got the door open I heard the riot-call buzzer going.

" Lacey was on the desk, and I shouted to him to find out where it was. The First National, he says. I ducked back in here for my smoke-wagon and coat, and by the time I'd got down to the garage everybody and everything had gone except my car.

" Of course, as luck would have it, my battery was down, and the starter wouldn't work and I had to crank the darned thing.

So when I got to the bank there was nothin' but a millin' mob outside, cops and dicks shovin' everybody back.

"I had to play football to get through. In the bank everybody was jammed back, away from the entrance, all quiet and pious, and for a minute I thought I'd busted in on a holdup still going on, and I reached for my rod.

"Then I saw everybody was looking just over my shoulder, and I jerked round, expecting to see some guy with a bead drawn on me, and instead I saw this box standing on one of those marble counters. It was so quiet in there you could hear the darned thing ticking.

"Well, then I knew what I was up against; and, as I told you, I took a deep breath and packed the darned thing outside, shouting for the service wagon at the same time. Then, when I got my heart down out of my mouth and my nerve back again, I asked what was it all about and how come.

"Nobody seemed just to know. Out of Parker, however, I got the plainest statement. He says it was just before three o'clock, when they were getting ready to close up, that young Corbley, the cashier, who has a desk near the door, looked up and saw a box on the marble counter that separates his office from the main lobby.

"It was the kind of box bullion is shipped in, and he wondered who'd been so careless as to leave a shipment there. He got up and went over to it, and as he put his hands on the box to turn it round, so he could read the address on it, one of the messengers yells to him not to touch it, that it's a bomb and you can hear it tick.

"Corbley listens a minute, and that's all he needs, so he runs to his desk, presses the riot-call alarm button, and then starts back through the bank warning everybody to get back as far as they can.

"Of course, you know, boy, the First National is pretty well organized, and the minute the riot-call is pressed a big alarm bell rings in the bank, and everybody gets to stations.

"The tellers begun to slam all the money they could get their hands on into the vault, and a pile of the other employees grabbed guns and took stations, while still others of them rounded up what customers was in the place and chased them over into the corner by the entrance to the safe deposit vaults.

"Cap Reames, the bank watchman, shut the front doors; and by that time the gang from headquarters was down there, and a minute later Partridge and some of his men came in.

"And once they were all in there, they backed away from that box and listened to it tick. That's what they were doing when I got in, late because I had to crank my car. That's all there is to it. I got a detail working on it, but so far as I know they haven't turned up anything yet.

"Nobody knows who brought the box in to the bank or where it came from, and the bureau of combustibles hasn't let out any noise yet. When I got back here I called 'em up and told 'em to bring the container over here when they got it fixed so it would be safe—there may be some marks or something on it that will give us a lead."

"Who's this here messenger that first heard it tick?" asked Riordan.

"Dave Reeman. He's been with the bank about a year and a half. Parker is going to slip him a bonus for havin' good ears."

Riordan reached for the reports he had put down, and began going through them methodically, marking those that needed immediate attention, clipping assignment slips to them before he put them in the outgoing basket, and placing the others in separate piles on his desk, according to what they contained.

He had just finished this work, and was swinging about in his chair again to face his chief, when the door to the office was opened and two firemen entered, carrying a box between them. From the receptacle, the top of which had been split, came a persistent ticking noise.

They put the box in the center of the room on the floor, and one of them said to Brady:

"There it is, captain. You said you wanted it. There's all of it, including the noise."

Riordan got up, went to the box, lifted

the split top from it, and looked inside. Then a grin began to spread over his face. He reached a hand within the receptacle and took out a pinch of black grains, held them on his left palm, and striking a match with his right hand, brought the flame down into contact with the crystals. The match went out. From Captain Brady's chair came a sigh of relief.

"Boy," he said, "you'll be the death of me yet. Just because you've been to war is no reason why you got a license to try and set off gunpowder while you hold it in your hand."

The two firemen laughed, and Riordan joined with them.

"It's coal dust, chief," said the detective sergeant.

"Huh?"

"Yeah. But that don't make you any less of a hero, chief. When you picked it up you thought it was real."

"You told any of them reporters about this?" snapped Brady, looking at the firemen from the bureau of combustibles.

"Not one, captain. Didn't see any, in fact. And us two is the only ones who know it, except you and the sergeant here. We were detailed to open it up and bring it to you."

"Well, you keep your mouths shut—for awhile, anyway. I ain't aiming to be laughed at none, not just yet. Anybody asks you what was in that bomb box, you send 'em to me."

The firemen smiled and nodded their heads. Riordan, meanwhile, was delving again into the box. He brought out the works of an alarm clock, still running merrily and ticking at a lively rate, some more of the coal dust, and presently a long, whitish cylinder of waxy-looking material, wrapped in oiled paper.

"Dynamite!" exclaimed Brady.

Riordan dropped it to the floor, and Captain Brady leaped from his chair.

"You got rotten nerves, chief," said Riordan. "That would make a good candle if it had a wick in it."

"Ain't it dynamite, boy? It sure looks like it."

"The coal dust looked liked powder, too. And the old alarm clock looked like a time device. Somebody went to a lot of pains to make this thing look real. Wait a minute, there ought to be some caps in here, too, if it's a good job."

He reached for a paper from his desk, spread it on the floor, and dumped the box upside down upon it. Then, spreading the black dust about, he ran his hands through the pile, finally discovering eight red caps, such as are used in toy pistols, in the mess.

"There they are," he said. "Good job."

"But what for?" asked Brady, bending forward.

"That's all we got to find out, chief."

"How'd you boys open that thing?" asked the captain of the firemen.

The spokesman for the two grinned. "With an ax, captain. Bill and me were detailed to take the sting out of this thing and bring it to you. I was for giving it a bath in the tank the minute we got to headquarters with it, but Bill, here, had been nursing it in the wagon, and he said not to wet it.

"He claims it's all nailed up nice and neat and with a ticker inside of it, so it was a time bomb and not one you set off when you pry it open. Get the clock out first, says he, and it will be harmless. Bill's an old hand at this stuff, so I let him have his way.

"We got an ax and pried the lid up, and this here fake stick of dynamite was on top. He took that out, and the clock works were underneath it, with the coal dust kept back from it with a bit of pasteboard—there it is, on the paper there, where the sergeant dumped it out.

"Well, after we got the clock out we knew it was harmless, and it wasn't very long after that before Bill, here, says it ain't powder, nohow. And when we found out the dynamite was faked, too, we just brought it over here to you. But we didn't find out quite so quick as the sergeant here; he ought to be in our department, sir."

"I got a lot of use for Riordan right here," said Brady. "At that I'll say you boys have got your nerve with you, to go prying into things like that. Me, I'd have put it in the tank."

"Your nerve's all right, captain—you

didn't know what was in it when you picked it up."

Riordan, meanwhile, had been examining the box which had caused so much excitement. Finally he took the piece of cardboard that had been inside of it, and the splintered and split top, and put them in his desk.

Then he spread the rest of the material tastefully on the paper upon the floor; the works of the alarm clock first, then the eight caps, then the imitation stick of dynamite, and then the coal dust, which he gathered in a neat pile.

"We'll put one over on these reporters," he said. "No use explaining anything. Let 'em use their eyes and a camera or two. You two smoke-eaters, you want to use discretion, that's all. I'm going to call 'em in."

He went to the door and called instructions to the desk man outside, and then came back and sat down.

"You do your stuff, chief," he said.

Captain Brady reached into a drawer of his desk and found four cigars. When the reporters were ushered in the two firemen and the detective officers were gravely smoking.

CHAPTER II

WISE BIRDS

HERE, boys," said Captain Brady, his face grave, "is the contents of the box left at the First National Bank this afternoon. The top of the box and a piece of pasteboard that was inside of it, have been sent to the Bertillon room for miscroscopic examination and for other investigation. Any of you boys want to call your office photographers down here, it's all right with me."

. There was a rush for telephones. Then a wait, filled with questions. Captain Brady and Sergeant Riordan knew nothing. The two firemen simply said they had been detailed to open the box, and had done so. They gave their names.

The photographers arrived. Two of them were smoking cigarettes, and Riordan suggested they leave the cigarettes outside, though he himself continued smoking. But he remained at his desk. The photographers took pictures of the neat display on the floor, of the two firemen, of Captain Brady. Then they departed, and the reporters with them.

"Now they're all satisfied, and we haven't said anything at all," commented Riordan, rising and dumping the entire contents of the newspaper back into the box. "Much obliged to you two boys. You're heroes now, and will be, as long as you keep your mouths shut. Suit yourself about talking."

The firemen grinned. "Needn't fear about us talking," one of them said. "Not after getting our pictures took for the papers."

"Well, don't talk, anyway," said Brady. "Much obliged. Here, take a couple of cigars with you."

With the firemen gone, Captain Brady turned to his aid.

"Let me see what you've got in the desk there," he said.

Riordan passed over the top of the box and the bit of pasteboard. The split cover was of hard wood, and upon its surface there had been burned three dollar-signs. They had been done free-hand, and not with a die.

The pasteboard was absolutely without mark, but while one side was rough and neutral in tone, the other side was covered with cheap blue paper. Brady studied the two exhibits carefully, and then passed them back.

"Well?" he demanded.

"All we got to do is wait, chief."

"What for?"

"For the bank to find out how much they've been robbed of."

Captain Brady opened his mouth and frowned, as if he was about to give voice to violent protest, but the frown left his brow and no sound came from his lips. His mouth slowly closed and he looked intently at his aid. After several minutes he said:

"You mean this was a plant, and while all the excitement was on—while I was there, and all them cops and dicks—somebody cracked that bank?"

"Sure, you guessed it right away. It's

a plant, you can see that. But I'll bet you the robbery was pulled before you got there; pulled the minute the alarm bell was sounded."

"And the fellow beat it in the excitement?"

"No, stayed right there. Went out afterward, when they chased the customers out."

Brady blew smoke rings at the ceiling for several minutes.

"Inside job, eh?" he asked.

"Part of it. I'm inclined to think it was hatched outside, though."

"Boy, you're a fast thinker. Lemme see that box lid and that bit of cardboard again."

Riordan passed the objects over and Brady studied them anew, handling them gingerly.

"Going to have 'em finger-printed?" he asked.

"What for? I can get your prints easier. And I don't want the prints of them two firemen."

"But the fellow who put it together?"

"Probably wore gloves. This is clever work, chief. Nothing clumsy about it."

Brady threw the box cover and the pasteboard back to his aid, and Riordan opened the drawer at the bottom of his desk and tossed them into it.

"How much you figure the bank was tapped for, boy?"

"Not much. Hundred thousand, maybe. Not much more. Couldn't get away with more than two hundred thousand at the outside. No time, and no way of packing it out. Get a hundred thousand in good large bills, and you can stow it in your pockets easy and not bulge."

Captain Brady reached for his telephone and asked headquarters central to get him Vice President Parker at the First National. Connected, he said:

"Mr. Parker? This is Detective Captain Brady speaking—oh, all right, thanks. How are things with you? You are, are you? That's a good plan. I guess I'll send Sergeant Riordan down to see you, maybe he can find something. Yes, in a few minutes. Good-by."

He turned to his aid. "He says they're checking the stuff over. In the excitement, he says, everything was tossed into the vault. Now they're checking it over before closing for the night. You run down there, boy. Give you a chance to look around, anyway. Won't do any harm. I'll sit in here till you get back; I want to see how this is coming out."

CHAPTER III

EASY AS PIE

OLD Cap Reames admitted Riordan at the side entrance of the First National, about the outside of which a curious crowd was still milling, while leather-lunged newsboys were doing a land office business selling papers with screaming headlines. In the corridor leading to the lobby, Riordan put a detaining hand on Reames's shoulder.

"You see who brought that box in, Cap?" he asked.

"No, Matt, I didn't. There was a lame guy downstairs in the safe deposit department, and Bellinger, the gateman down there, had sent for me to help him upstairs. We'd just got into the lobby when the alarm bell went off."

"What'd the lame party do? Who was he?"

"He didn't do nothing, Matt. I backed him into a seat at one of those desks in the alcove where ladies go to write checks, and told him to stay there. It was old Cal Henderson, been a customer of the bank ever since he was born, I guess. You know him. And he was there till the excitement was all over and I went for him."

"Bellinger?"

"Bellinger never came up from downstairs. The minute the alarm bell rang he slammed the gate shut, with him on the inside. Then he shut the outer doors of the safety vaults. You can't open that gate from the inside, and after it was all over and they began to clear the bank I went down and unlocked him, so he and a couple of customers could get out."

"After you shut the street doors, what did you do?"

"Stood right there till the dicks come, and Partridge's men. I let them in. I let

in Cap'n Brady, an' I let him out when he picked up that bomb.

"There was nerve for you, Matt. Picked it right up, like it was nothing, and carried it out, he did; and it liable to go off any minute and blow him to nothing. I shook his hand when he come back. Then I stayed by the door while they were investigating, and nobody got in or out till Mr. Parker gave me the sign to open up again."

"Any of the employees gone out yet? Or are they all staying and checking up?"

"Oh, a lot of 'em went home. They only kept the tellers and some of the bookkeepers, to check with. All the girls and help like that, and some of the officers, they went out as usual."

"What you think about it?"

"I think it was some crazy job. I think whoever planned it figured that bomb would blow the side of the bank out, and give a mob a chance to get in. Planted it right near the front wall, you know, and that's mostly windows. But Cap'n Brady, he carried it out. Must have stopped the clockwork by jiggling it, I guess, and it never went off. Was it a bad one, Matt? Them boys at the fire bureau, they got it opened up yet?"

"Yeah, they got it opened. The newspapers 'll have pictures of it to-morrow. Well, I came down to see Parker."

Cap Reames led Sergeant Riordan to Mr. Parker's desk. The banker was nervously tapping on his blotter with his lead pencil, and a telephone was directly in front of him. He nodded to the detective sergeant and motioned to a chair.

"I've just put in a call for Partridge, Riordan," he said. "Glad you came down too. Two heads will be better than one, I guess."

Riordan sat down, but made no reply. The banker continued to toy with his lead pencil. From time to time he looked at the detective sergeant, but found nothing at all sympathetic in the officer's bland and unruffled countenance.

"Partridge, you know," he said at length, "is head of the Protective Association. We report all these affairs to them, as a matter of course. Have to, in fact, to comply with our insurance. We'll be very glad of any assistance, however, that the police can give us."

Riordan nodded his head politely. His silence seemed contagious, for the banker said nothing further. In five minutes Cap Reames led in Mr. Partridge, who greeted Parker warmly, but only nodded perfunctorily to the detective sergeant.

"I'm glad you two are here together," said the banker. "It will save time. Gentlemen, apparently this bomb was part of a plot to rob the bank. I am glad to say, however, that the immediate response of the police, and of your men, Partridge, and the bravery of Captain Brady in carrying that hellish thing outside at the risk of his own life, apparently frustrated most of the plan.

"However, in a check we have made, and which we are now making over again, it seems that the plot was at least partly successful. There is seventy-five thousand dollars we can't locate."

Partridge whipped out a notebook and pencil and began writing.

Riordan drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it. "Maybe it just got mislaid in the shuffle," he said.

"That is what I am hoping, gentlemen," resumed Mr. Parker. "That is why we are having the recheck made. It should be very easy to determine. The missing seventy-five thousand, apparently, was in a broken package of currency in the pay rolls teller's case.

"The packages contain a hundred thousand dollars each. He had eleven of them in his cage. When the alarm sounded he took what he thought was all of them and rushed to the vault. Now we cannot find the broken package."

"What is the pay rolls teller's name, please?" asked Partridge.

"Harry Fisher. He has been with the bank since 1902. He is married, and his residence is 2424 Agate Place."

Partridge wrote it down; Riordan went on smoking.

"Where's his cage?" asked the detective sergeant.

"It is the last one on the other side of the bank, sergeant. Back in the far cor-

ner, there, the tenth window from the door. You can see it from here."

Riordan looked where the banker indicated.

"What's that door alongside of his window?" he asked.

"That's the entrance to the cage corridor, sergeant. Yale lock on it. Only the tellers and messengers have keys to it."

"Have you questioned Fisher?" asked Partridge.

"Not yet. The matter was only reported to me just before I telephoned you, Partridge. I thought I'd wait till you came. I will call him."

He picked up his telephone and spoke into it. A few moments later Fisher came to the vice president's desk.

"Fisher, this is Mr. Partridge, of the Protective Association. This is Sergeant Riordan, of the detective bureau. You will answer their questions."

Partridge squared his shoulders, looked severe, and glanced at his notebook, but before he could begin talking Riordan shot the first question:

"Mr. Fisher, in taking these packages of currency to the vault, when the alarm bell sounded, did anybody help you?"

"No, sir, I gathered them up myself. They were in a stack on a shelf under my counter. I had just checked them over and was getting ready to close for the day. The broken package was on the top."

"Anybody offer to help you?"

"No, sir."

"Did you notice the broken package when you picked the pile up?"

"I really couldn't say, sergeant. I acted mechanically. When the alarm bell rang I jumped from my chair, reached under the counter and grasped the pile of packages in my right arm, opened the door of my cage with my left hand, and ran as fast as I could for the vaults.

"I think I was the first of the tellers to get there. I tossed the packages into the vault and ran back to my cage, took my revolver from the drawer, and stood looking out through the grille to see if there was any trouble in the lobby of the bank."

"You might have dropped the top package then, or somebody jostling against you might have jarred it off, in your rush to the vault?"

"I do not recall, sergeant, that anybody jostled against me."

"Did you see anybody running?"

"Certainly, everybody was running to their stations or to the vaults."

Riordan rose. "I guess I'll leave this to Partridge, Mr. Parker," he said. "He will be able to get as much as I could, and probably more rapidly. Two of us might get in each other's way. Pat, you'll stop at Captain Brady's after you get through, will you, and tell us what you've turned up? We've got that bomb up there, perhaps you'd like to look it over."

"Yes, I'll stop in, Riordan," snapped Partridge, turning at once to the pay rolls teller and beginning to fire questions at him.

On his way out Riordan strolled over to Fisher's cage and looked through the grille. Cap Reames came over and joined him.

"You want to look inside, Matt?" he asked.

"No, Cap. I guess I'll go. Let Pat look inside."

"Humph, you could see a lot more."

"Maybe, Cap. But there isn't anything to see—unless they find what they're looking for kicked into a corner somewhere. It's only seventy-five thousand."

Reames laughed satirically. "Only seventy-five thousand, Matt. That'd be a nice sum for you or me to find on the floor, wouldn't it? Well, if that's all they got it was a bum job, I'll tell the world."

Riordan nodded his head and followed old Cap to the side door, giving the guard a warm handclasp as he passed out to the street. Back at headquarters he greeted Brady with a laugh as he dropped into his chair.

"Go on out and get supper, chief," he said. "Come back about eight. Partridge will be here then to tell us all about it. He doesn't want to come up, but I made him say before Parker that he would."

"Partridge? They got something then, boy? How much?"

"Seventy-five thousand in currency."

"Is that all!"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, what's the idea of you coming

away and leaving Partridge there to make a grand stand play?"

"What would be the idea of my staying? Didn't I tell you it would be about a hundred thousand, and that it was gone before you and the boys got there? Pat will go through all the tellers and clerks in the bank now, and it will take him two hours. And he'll turn up nothing. Why would I stay and help him?"

Captain Brady rose slowly, went to his locker and put on his coat. On the way to the door he turned to his aid:

"Boy, you don't want to be too cocksure in this game. You ought to have stayed there. Partridge might turn up something. Besides it would—"

"Right now, chief, it's Pat's case," interrupted Riordan. "If he turns up anything, it'll be the first time he ever made a case in his life, and he's entitled to all the glory. There's only one man in the bank had access to that seventy-five thousand. He was locked in a cage with it.

"I talked to him. He tells a perfectly straight story. The party that got that money left the bank long before they discovered it was gone. He left just as soon as he could get out after this fake bomb was planted. So what's the use of me sticking round there and watching Pat go through the motions of a moving picture detecka-tuff?

"Now you run out to dinner, chief, and I'll do a little buzzing round from here while you're gone. Don't you get the idea that because I left the bank I'm going to play dead on this case."

Captain Brady shook his head and went out. Riordan glanced at his watch, then pushed one of the buttons on his desk. To the doorman who answered he said:

"Them traffic men come in at six o'clock, don't they?"

"Six-fifteen, sergeant."

"All right. You send word downstairs that I want to see the cop who was on traffic post by the First National Bank when he comes in."

"Yes, sir."

Riordan then turned again to his reports, and was still busy on the various lines of routine business they contained when the door opened and a brown-uniformed man from the traffic squad entered.

CHAPTER IV

THIS HERO STUFF

"YOU wanted to see me, sergeant?" asked the traffic cop, saluting.

"You're on post by the First National?"

"At the corner, yes, sir."

"You there this afternoon when the emergency squads rattled up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well before that, maybe ten minutes before or perhaps less than that or a little more, did you see any sort of a delivery wagon or motor cycle sidecar stop at the bank, or near it?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, sergeant, about fifteen minutes before the reserves rolled up, I should say it was, one of the light wagons from the Crescent Department Store double-parked right in front of the bank. I happened to notice it, sir, because he made a little traffic jam.

"I left my post at the intersection to see what was the matter, and just as I did so the driver ran out from the sidewalk, jumped in, and started up. I shouted to him that he mustn't double-park there, and he nodded his head, smiled and waved his hand as he shot past me. Young fellow he was, sir, sandy-haired and—"

"You happen to notice the number on the wagon or the license number?"

"Not the license number, sir. But the company number on the wagon was number ten."

"See anybody else on the wagon but the driver?"

"No, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Roderick, sir."

"All right, Roderick, much obliged. You got good eyes. Maybe some day I'll want you to identify that driver, but until I do you keep your mouth shut, see?"

"Yes, sir."

Riordan waved the man out, and a

moment later pushed his desk button once more.

"Halloran out there?" he asked the doorman.

The big detective, "rough stuff" member of the bureau, very presently lumbered in and made his usual futile effort at saluting, a mere upward gesture of his right hand. Riordan laughed.

"You big stiff," he said, "you're getting fatter every day. Why don't you go down to the gym and exercise?"

"I ain't got the wind for it, sarge."

"Course you haven't. Because you never do. If you'd exercise a little, Halloran, you'd get your wind back. In the old days fighting drunken longshoremen used to keep you in trim, but now you haven't got anything at all to do.

"Well, I got a job for you. Waddle down to the Crescent Department Store garage, over at Tenth and River, and buzz the night crew. What I want is all the gossip and everythin' about the lad who drives light delivery bus number ten. See how soon you can soak it up and get back."

"You want the driver?"

"I do not. And I don't want him to know you've been asking about him, either. Use your head."

Halloran again made his gesture of salute and waddled out of the office. Riordan opened the lower drawer, into which he had tossed the fake bomb parts, and, taking the slit cover and the bit of pasteboard, examined them slowly and carefully.

After going over them thoroughly he reached into another drawer for a magnifying glass, and once more studied the box cover and the cardboard. Then he replaced them in the drawer, and, rising, took the rest of the box and its contents from the top of the desk and carefully scanned the outside of the small wooden case.

Finally, apparently convinced that he had seen all that was worth seeing, he put the box back where it had been resting, returned the glass to its place, and once again took up his routine duties.

Captain Brady must have eaten a hearty dinner, or else had done something else besides, for it was just eight o'clock as he returned to the inner office of the detective bureau; and he had hardly taken off and hung up his coat before the doorman ushered in Mr. Partridge of the Protective Association. The latter greeted Brady with considerable courtesy, though with evident lack of warmth, but for Riordan he had only a curt nod.

"Well, Pat," said Brady, "what you got?"

"Not very much, captain. I questioned most of the employees at the bank, and had several of them, who might have had access to this money, searched. We found nothing. I came here thinking perhaps you or your men might have some lead."

"You seen the bomb yet?"

"No, captain."

"Boy, show Pat that bomb."

Riordan spread a paper on the floor, dumped the contents of the box upon it again, and passed the box to Partridge. Then he reached in the drawer and passed out the cover of the box and the bit of pasteboard. Partridge looked the display over, handling the wood and the pasteboard, but showing considerable respect for the other exhibits.

Riordan reached in his pocket for a cigar, bit off the end, and struck a match. After he had lighted the brown roll he tossed the still blazing match on to the paper upon which the contents of the box had been dumped. Partridge leaped from his chair and stamped the match out with his foot.

"Gosh, chief, the man's got nerve, hasn't he?" commented Riordan.

Partridge turned white with wrath.

"You fool, you might have set that powder off," he exclaimed. "Sometime, with your damned horseplay, you're going to do something you'll regret."

"Aw, shut up," responded Riordan gruffly. "I knew where I was throwing that match. I just wanted to see you jump. But I'll give you credit, you've got more nerve than I thought you had."

Partridge gulped, and resumed his examination of the box. Then he drew out his notebook and wrote in it, pausing to take out a reeled tape and measure the size of the box, and then jotted the figures down. Riordan winked at Captain Brady, but the captain shook his head, and his aid closed

his eyes. Presently Partridge finished his examination of the box and its contents, snapped his notebook shut and put it in his pocket.

"Put the stuff away, boy," said Brady.

Riordan bent over the newspaper, his cigar still in his mouth, and Partridge again leaped forward and snatched it from his lips.

"You can take any chances you want with your own carcass, sergeant," he said, "but while I'm here I'd rather you wouldn't run the chances of dropping ashes from this cigar into that powder."

Riordan looked up, then picked up the waxen cylinder, wrapped in oiled paper, and held it like a club.

"You put that cigar back in my face, Pat," he said, "or I'll throw this at you."

Partridge looked at Brady.

"Better humor him, Pat," said the captain.

The head of the Protective Association thrust the cigar forward toward Riordan's mouth, and the sergeant closed his teeth on it, and resumed gathering up the exhibits. Dumping them all in the box, he replaced it on his desk, and returned the lid and bit of cardboard to the lower drawer.

"That stuff interest you, Pat?" he asked.

"Well, it did, sergeant. That pay rolls teller, now, is building a cabin up on the west fork of the Crooked River, and he's got some blasting powder to blow out rocks with. If you'd stuck round at the bank you'd have heard that."

"So?" Riordan's tone denoted mock interest. "Think he stole the seventy-five thousand to build the shack with?"

"I haven't arrested him yet."

"Thinking of doing it?"

"I am going to look into his affairs very closely."

"You told him so?"

"I certainly did. He was very brazen about it, told me to look and be damned."

"Well, you probably will, Pat."

Captain Brady decided it was time for the show to end, so he said, pleasantly enough:

"You found out nothing really worth while then, Pat?"

"Nothing very good, captain. But there are two or three things that I think will bear looking into."

"What do you think about the infernal machine?"

"I think you did a very fine thing in carrying it out, captain. Mr. Parker told me about your heroism."

Brady snorted, but Riordan cut off anything he might have been going to say by remarking:

"Yep, the chief was most as big a hero as you were when you stamped on that match."

Brady flushed, then rose. "Well," he said, "I guess I'll call it a day and go home. I'll walk up the street with you, Pat."

As the two went out, Halloran came in. Captain Brady hesitated in the doorway, but Riordan waved his hand at him, and he went on out after Partridge. As the door closed behind them, Halloran lowered his huge form into the captain's chair.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

"ALL tired out, eh?" laughed Riordan. "Must have dug up a lot."

"Was you looking for a woman in this, sarge?" asked Halloran.

Riordan's eyes narrowed as he turned them on the big detective.

"By golly, Halloran," he said, "you're not half as big a fool as you look. I'll show you something."

He reached up for the "bomb" box, and passed it over to the burly officer. Then he took the cover and the cardboard from the drawer, and tossed them to Captain Brady's desk, where Halloran could reach them.

The detective's fat hands went into the box, and he picked up a pinch of the black powder. Then he took the waxen cylinder out and examined it, finally turning back some of the oiled paper and applying his tongue to the substance inside.

"Same stuff they put on jelly jars," he said, as he wrapped it up again and returned it to the box. Next he looked at the alarm clock works, which had run down

and ceased to tick; and then he took up the lid and examined the three dollar marks upon its surface.

"Pyrograph needle," he said. "Steady hand, too."

The cardboard also received his attention, but he made no comment on it. He passed the entire collection back to Riordan, who restored the box to his desk top and the other two exhibits to the drawer.

For a long time the two men looked at each other, then Halloran heaved himself out of his chair, reached into the box and took out the alarm clock works, and wound the key that still protruded from the back.

The wheels began to go round and the mechanism to tick. Halloran put it on the floor and placed his derby hat over it, pressing it down so the brim flattened itself against the carpet. He listened for a moment, then removed his hat, put the ticking works back in the box, and resumed his seat.

"Well?" demanded Riordan, smiling.

"I read what it said in the papers," said Halloran. "All I got to say is that them people in the bank must have had darned good ears to hear that thing tick when it was nailed up in that box."

"The chief heard it tick when he was carrying it out," said Riordan.

"Sure he did. Somebody told him it was ticking. Somebody told him it was a bomb. I'll betcha he heard it sputterin', too."

"No, Halloran, I think he heard it tick. He's got good ears, and besides that he had it close to him. The box would sort of act as an amplifier, if you were holding it, too. But I agree with you that a whole lot of people who said they heard it tick just heard their imaginations, after they got the suggestion.

"In a case like that, you know, the mental suggestion would be pretty powerful. As you said, I'll bet some of 'em even thought they heard it sputter. What were you saying about a woman?"

"The boys down at the Crescent Garage were talking about a blonde that this here driver of Number Ten is stuck on. She's a wrapper at the Crescent. Seems like she's playing this here driver for a sucker; and he ain't the only one, either. But he thinks he's winning a home."

"You got her name?"

"Uh-huh. Nice name. Claribelle Reynolds."

"And where's she live?"

"I didn't get that, sarge. Out Parkside Addition somewheres. She's got housekeeping rooms out there somewhere, the boys didn't know just where."

Riordan reached out a hand and dragged the city directory to his lap, turning the pages rapidly, and then running a finger down one of the columns of names.

"Nothing here," he said, slamming the book shut and putting it back on the desk. "She hasn't lived in one place long enough. Well, I'll say you've done a good night's work already. You go out and find young Willis, and tell him to get acquainted with Claribelle.

"It's early yet, maybe you two can roll out to Parkside Addition and smell round a bit. You might locate her. Lay off her, though; we don't want to scare her yet."

Sergeant Riordan was not very greatly surprised, later in the evening, when Captain Brady returned to the detective bureau. He did not open his desk nor show any signs of going to work, but dropped into his chair and yawned.

"Getting near my bedtime, boy," he said. "Guess I'll be going home."

"You came back to tell me that, chief?"

"No. Just dropped in. Been looking round a bit."

"Find anything?"

"Not much. But I'll tell you this, Pat isn't such a fool as he used to be."

Riordan laughed. "He ought to have learned something from the jolts we've handed him. What's making you think he's getting wise?"

"Sat with him while he had dinner. Never used to like him. Wouldn't say as I like him any too much now. But I can bear him, which is more'n I ever could before."

"Yeah?"

"Now don't you go to sneering at him, boy. You and he ought to get along better. You would, too, if you didn't ride him all the time. On this here bank thing, now,

he's got something might almost look like a case. He wouldn't tell you anything—you wouldn't expect him to, after the way you treated him.

"But he's got a pretty circumstantial case, one thing and another, hooking up this here bomb and that pay rolls clerk, Henry Fisher. Fisher, it seems, used to work for a mining company, bookkeeper and storekeeper. Knows all about powder and dynamite and detonating caps. Besides which he's building this place of his, and as a matter of fact is short of money. He's drawn his salary ahead—"

"You want to stop going to dinner with Pat," interrupted Riordan. "What he's got is catching. You don't mean to say you take any stock in what Fisher knows about explosives, do you?"

"Interesting, ain't it?"

"No, not in this case."

"Why not?"

"Gosh, you're getting like Pat. He's talked a nice plausible yarn to you, give you a good cigar, and got you hypnotized. Don't you know this bomb was faked? Coal dust and paraffin?"

Captain Brady banged his fist on the arm of his chair. "My gosh, boy," he exclaimed, "I'd forgot all about that. Fact, I had. That darned fool Partridge talked so serious and plausible—why, he even had me agreeing that you were foolish to take chances throwing that match. No use talkin', boy, I am getting old. Honest, he had me falling for it. Wait till I see him again! You got anything new?"

"Halloran's opened up a line. There's a dame he dug up. Him and Willis are going to take a look into her."

Captain Brady's mouth dropped open. Then he burst out:

"Say! You going nutty, too? A dame? What's a dame got to do with this bank case? There wasn't no dame showed anywhere. Talk about Pat being crazy, how about you and your dame? When the funny wagon comes around—"

Riordan smiled. "Listen, chief," he said. "I may be crazy, but I'm not as crazy as Pat. Look here, if you were going to fake a bomb with an old alarm clock in a box, what would you do?"

"I wouldn't do it."

"I'm serious, chief. Supposing you were going to, what would you do?"

"Put the clock in the box, of course, and some scrapiron to make it heavy, and some paper wadding to keep it from rattling. What are you getting at? What's that got to do with it?"

"Sure you would. So would I. So would Halloran. So would any man. Now what have we got here? We've got a good, heavy-looking box that isn't heavy. On the top of it we've got three dollar signs, burned on with a pyrographic outfit. Inside we've got the old alarm clock, and what else?

"We got a lot of coal dust to look like powder and some paraffin done up in oiled paper to look like dynamite, and some toy pistol caps to look like detonators. What for? Because the mind of the person that got up that fake bomb is one of those minds that wants the inside of the fake to look as good as the outside.

"Do you think a man did that? Does a man care whether the patch on his undershirt is the same color as the shirt or not? When a man wants to patch his trousers, where does he get the cloth from? He cuts it off the back or side of his vest, don't he, where it doesn't show.

"A man will wear sox that haven't any feet left, as long as the holes are hidden by his shoes; but he has a fit if there's a thread pulled above his ankles, where it's liable to show. But, chief, how about a woman?

"She's careful, just as careful about what doesn't show as what does show. If there's a hole in her stockings, and she can't get a new pair, she'll spend all day trying to get a spool of thread the same shade to darn 'em with. If she tears her chemise, she gets white thread to sew it with, so it won't show. She's just as neat underneath as she is on the outside; often more so.

"Now look at this fake bomb. It's faked inside as well as out. There was no sense in faking the inside, it was all nailed up. All it needed inside was the clock. It didn't need the fancy trimmings.

"But the party who made this bomb was accustomed to having everything all

right, whether it showed or not; so there's fake gunpowder in it and there's fake dynamite.

"And they're good faking jobs, too. And because she couldn't get detonating caps, or maybe because she didn't know what they looked like, but had just read about 'em, she got these toy pistol caps.

"If a woman didn't make that bomb, and pyrograph the dollar signs on top of it because it was a package going to a bank, then I don't know the difference between the way a man and a woman will do the same job."

Captain Brady made no immediate reply. For a long time he considered the exposition his aid had just made. Finally he looked up.

"Boy," he said, "you win. Now that you explain it to me, I can see it all. Of course I ought to have seen it right off the bat. You did, I'll bet. And Halloran must have, too—you say he's dug up a dame. I guess I'm getting no good at all. An' as for Partridge, I never did think much of him. I guess I've wasted a perfectly good evening. I'm going home now and soak my head."

"Aw, shucks, chief, you'd have tumbled to it when you got to studying it over. You're tired, that's all; first the excitement of carrying that ticking thing out of the bank, and then finding out it was a fake. You got a shock, that's all. Your nerves are tired, and you don't know it. You go home and get a good sleep, and to-morrow you'll have the whole thing. Probably have the pinch made before I get down to work."

Brady got up, shaking his head, and slowly walked from the room.

Shortly before midnight Halloran and Willis returned, with nothing of any vital interest to report.

"We been all over Parkside Addition, sergeant," said the big sleuth, "and nobody out there knows any Claribelle Reynolds. She must be livin' under another name. Willis, here, 'll go down to the Crescent Store to-morrow and get a lamp at her, and maybe follow her home after work. Then maybe we can locate her."

"All right, boys, it's time to call it a day, anyway. You stick to her to-morrow, Willis, and let me know what you turn up."

CHAPTER VI

JOLTING THE MANAGER

THE next day Riordan went without some of his morning sleep, and shortly before noon presented himself at the office of the Crescent Store. Danforth, the general manager, knew him because of various official meetings they had had in the past in regard to shoplifters and other annoyances, and greeted him warmly.

"I saw Willis, of your department, hanging round this morning, sergeant," he said. "Some new crooks in town?"

"There are always new crooks in town, Mr. Danforth. One of our jobs is to be on the watch for them."

"Well, I sure appreciate the work you've done for us, sergeant, at various times. What can I do for you to-day? Nothing wrong here, I hope."

"Not as far as your store is concerned, Mr. Danforth. But I'm curious about something. Tell me, you give your employees a reduction when they buy stuff in the store, don't you?"

"Why, yes. Twenty per cent usually. On some goods a little more."

"You keep a separate account of what they buy?"

"In a way, yes. We have to, to keep track of our profits. Why?"

"You got a book of some kind showing employees' purchases?"

"Not that would do you any good, sergeant. That is, if you want identifications. We have a ledger showing sales to our own people. The ledger is posted every day from the previous day's sales slips. What's on your mind?"

"I'm looking for a woman in your employ who bought some cake paraffin for sealing jelly glasses and a toy pistol."

Danforth laughed. "That's a warm combination, sergeant. I'd have hard work to locate the paraffin for you, it would be under the general head of groceries. But the toy pistol I might be able to find."

"I should think you'd list that under toys, too."

"We would, but for one thing. All the toy pistols we sell, and we only handle two kinds, we list under firearms. And I'll tell you why, they're explosives. One has a self-contained chemical mechanism, but emits flashes, and the other has a box of caps in each container. As a matter of insurance we list that goods with firearms. Wait a minute, and I'll see what I can do for you."

He left Riordan alone in the office for a few minutes, to return with two books, one larger than the other. Opening the smaller one as he sat down at his desk again, he asked:

"How long ago was this toy pistol bought?"

"I don't know. I don't know even that it was bought, Mr. Danforth. I'm on a fishing expedition. During the past month, I should say."

The manager turned several pages in the book, running his finger down each one rapidly.

"On the fifth," he said, looking up. "Employee number eight thirty-one bought a toy pistol."

He showed Riordan the page of figures, pointing to one line.

"How do you know?" asked the detective sergeant. "There's nothing about a pistol there."

"I'll tell you. This is the firearms ledger. You see here an item of sixteen cents. There's nothing in our sporting goods department that sells for sixteen cents. But sixteen cents is twenty per cent off twenty cents, and our toy pistols, with caps, are twenty cents.

"It's an employee's purchase, because it has the house number before it. And as we list those sales as firearms, and as that general heading comes under the sporting department, it stands to reason it's a toy pistol. Besides, it isn't the season of the year for big toy sales now, so this one stands out."

"That's neat work, Mr. Danforth. What's the other book, the big one?"

"That's the grocery ledger, sergeant. I brought it just on a chance. Let's look and see if this employee got anything on the fifth that looks as if it might be the paraffin you're talking about."

He opened the other book, and, turning to entries of the same date as the one in the smaller volume, began to study them.

"Here's employee number eight thirty-one down for a dollar," he said finally. "Wait a minute, and we'll see what that dollar was for."

He pressed a buzzer, and to the girl who responded gave an order. As the girl started to leave Riordan spoke up.

"Get me one of those pistols, will you?" he said. "I'd like to see one."

"Certainly, sergeant." Danforth turned to the girl again and gave her further instructions. Some minutes later she returned and placed a small box on the manager's desk, as well as a record sheet of some sort and a salesbook containing only carbon copies.

Danforth flipped through the salesbook until he came to a sheet near the bottom, and then looked up in amazement at his visitor.

"By heavens, sergeant," he exclaimed, "I'd hate to have you on my trail. Here's a sale of five boxes of kitchen paraffin to employee number eight thirty-one. Twenty-five cents a box makes a dollar and a quarter, and twenty per cent off makes a dollar. It's uncanny. How'd you know she bought two such widely different articles as paraffin and a toy pistol?"

"I didn't know it. I told you I was just fishing."

"I wish I could fish like that! Well, here's one of the pistols."

He passed the smaller box to Riordan, who ripped off its covering. Within the cheap paper wrapping was a plain pasteboard container, rough and neutral tinted on the outside, but lined on its inner surface with a thin, pale blue paper. Within the box was a cheap pistol of cast metal, and a pressed-paper box of caps.

Riordan reached in his pocket and drew forth another piece of pasteboard, similarly covered with blue paper, and compared it with the box material. Then he put both in his pocket and, reaching for his purse, counted out twenty cents.

"I'll buy the pistol," he said, "if you don't mind making the sale."

Danforth laughed and pushed the money back.

"Your con's no good, sergeant," he said. "You're welcome to the pistol, though. They cost us nine cents wholesale. We'll be only too glad to give it to you; we sure owe you a lot more than that for all that you've done for us. Tell me, what's it all about?"

"I don't know myself yet, Mr. Danforth. I'm still fishing. Can you find out for me who employee eight thirty-one is?"

The manager reached for a card index drawer in his desk and drew forth one of its sheets, passing it to Riordan, who read:

THE CRESCENT STORE

Employee's Record

Name Clara Reynolds Smith *Age* 27
Address 43 Parkside Ave. *Phone* none
Dept. Wrapper, Desk 5 *Employed* 6/23/
Canceled *Cause* *No.* 831

Riordan copied the card and passed it back.

"Much obliged," he said, rising.

"You're quite welcome. But come, sergeant, tell me what it's all about? You've got my curiosity all aroused."

"I don't know myself yet, Mr. Danforth. I've got to do some more fishing. In the meantime please don't let the lady know I've been inquiring. It may be nothing at all."

Danforth laughed. "It may be nothing. That's good, coming from you, who knew just what she bought. Well, you'll tell me in time, I know. Glad to have helped you; come in any time."

Riordan wandered about in the store for some little time after he left the manager's office, and at one of the entrances found Willis. He nudged him as he passed, and the detective followed him to the curb.

"I got her spotted, sarge," he said. "Waiting for her to go out to lunch."

"Never mind waiting, Willis. I got her myself. Go on with whatever else you have to do. To-night maybe you and I will go out and call on her. You did fine, you understand, only I happened to get another line on her. Run along now; I'll see that you're in on the case when it breaks."

The two parted and Riordan returned to his home, to work in the garden about the little house he and his mother occupied, until half past three, when it was time for him to leave to begin his duties at headquarters. Before going out to his garage to start his roadster, however, he called the First National Bank and asked for Mr. Parker, the vice president.

"This Mr. Parker? This is Sergeant Riordan, of the detective bureau speaking. Er—Mr. Parker, that messenger who warned your cashier, Mr. Corbley, not to touch that bomb—is he in the bank still? Well, Mr. Parker, we need a little information.

"I'll be busy working on another angle of the case until about eight this evening, but I'd like to see the boy about then. Do you suppose you could give him a note to me, any note at all will do, and ask him to deliver it to me at the detective bureau at eight o'clock to-night? Yes. No, nothing like that.

"But the boy was the first to recognize that it was a bomb, and seems to have used his head, and I'd like to talk to him. Dave Reeman, I think his name was. Yes, thank you very much. Good-by."

He hung up, kissed his mother good-by for the day, and climbed into his car to drive down to headquarters. In the office he found Captain Brady, who gave him a searching glance as he entered, but who said nothing beyond a gruff greeting.

He went to his desk and began to busy himself at once with his reports. When he had things pretty well sorted out for the night, he turned round to find Captain Brady still at his desk.

"Well, boy?" demanded the older man.

"Well yourself, chief. And then what?"

"Yuh got anything new?"

"I don't know, chief. I got somebody coming here at eight."

"Oh, you have, have you? Well, I'll be here at eight, too. I'm going out to dinner now—and it won't be with Partridge, either."

Riordan laughed. "I take it you've been busy then, chief."

"Busy is right, boy. But I haven't turned up a thing. I've been up at the bank snooping round. There's nothing there. Partridge came in while I was there and started on the pay rolls teller again.

"He's got Parker nervous I told him to sit tight, however, that Pat was barking up the wrong tree. That was all I'd tell him. He seemed sort of glad. Doesn't like Partridge to be interfering with his business, I guess. Suppose I ask Parker to be here at eight, too?"

"No, not at eight, chief. If you crave his company, tell him to come down later —say at nine."

"I'll do that, boy. It will make him feel better. He can see we're working then. He got sort of huffed at you for the way you walked out on him."

"That's too bad. You might tell him to have that pay rolls teller drop down with him to-night, if he wants company."

Brady cocked his head. "You barking up that tree, too, after all you told me about Pat being crazy?"

"No, chief. But the poor teller's got a right to see himself cleared, hasn't he?"

"Then you know who did it, boy?"

"Not yet, chief. Come back at eight."

"Boy, you're the most exasperating man I ever had in this department—but damn if I know what I'd do without you. Go on, work your own way. I'll be back."

CHAPTER VII

THE PARTY HOLDS FORTH

CAPTAIN BRADY went out to dinner and in some way put in the balance of time without bothering his aid. But at five minutes of eight he was back again, and took his place at his desk, lighting a cigar with evident relish.

"I'm getting to be an old man, boy," he said, laughing. "And I'm not so good at standing shocks as I used to be. Suppose you give me an inkling of this show you're going to pull at eight o'clock, so it won't scare me."

"I can't do that, chief, I might prove a bum prophet. Maybe there won't be any show. I'm taking a chance."

Brady leered. "Any time you take a chance, boy, I'll throw in with you. That's one reason I give you your head so much; I know you're safe. Oh, well, I can wait. Suppose I'll have to, anyway."

He settled himself back in his chair and closed his eyes. Riordan went on writing in his records and filing away reports of "closed" cases, a detail that he devoted himself to whenever, like the present, he was waiting for something.

After a few moments he took out his watch and looked at it, then returned to his task. Some minutes later he again consulted his watch. Then he put up his books, lighted a cigar, and swung round in his chair with his back to his desk.

Brady opened his eyes and looked at his watch, but said nothing. The two of them sat there, smoking silently for several minutes, after which Riordan again consulted his timepiece. Brady followed suit, noting the hour by his own watch.

"Your show's late in starting," he commented.

"Maybe I let my foot slip, chief. I told you I was taking a chance. My party's fifteen minutes late already; I sort of fancied he'd be early because he'd want to get away to spend the evening somewhere."

Five more minutes passed, and then the doorman thrust his head in.

"Young lad to see Sergeant Riordan," he said.

"Show him in."

A youth in evident high ill humor entered, looked from Brady to his aid, and then stepped to Riordan and held out an envelope to him.

The detective sergeant took it, ripped it open, and regarded the inclosure seriously, then looked up at the messenger.

"You work at the First National?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I'm a messenger there, sir."

"Get pretty good money, do you?"

"Eighteen dollars a week."

"Can't you get more than that somewhere else?"

"Sure I could. But there's a chance to work up at the bank, sir."

"What do you have to do to work up?"

"Be snappy about your errands, keep

your eyes and ears open, and learn as much as you can, sir. They give you a course in banking, too. It's better'n business college, and if you're any good you're sure of advancement. They move 'em up pretty fast at the First National."

"What's your name?"

"David Reeman, sir."

"Oh! You must be the boy who they're talking about down there. You're the lad who heard the clockwork in that bomb ticking, and warned Mr. Corbley, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"They ought to give you a reward for that. Mr. Parker thinks you did a very heroic piece of work."

"I didn't do anything, sir. I just heard it tick, and quick as a flash the thought came to me it was a bomb. So I yelled not to touch it."

"Then what did you do?"

For the first time the youth hesitated in replying.

"Then what did you do?" repeated Riordan.

Reeman hung his head. "I guess I lost my nerve, sir," he answered. "I ran."

"Where'd you run?"

"Back behind the tellers' cages; I was figuring on ducking out one of the back windows, so if the thing went off I'd have a wall between me and it."

"You're a rotten liar," said Riordan calmly.

Captain Brady, who had been listening intently to the youth, and slightly nodding his head, started at the words. Reeman, however, gave no sign that the charge had been a shock to him.

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded Riordan.

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"I told you the truth as near as I can remember, sir. I was so flustered I don't know just what I did. When I come to I was back behind the vault doors."

"'When you come to.' What do you mean? Want me to think you were 'out?' Scared out of your wits, or something?"

"Honest, sir, I was that scared, I was out of my head. I don't know what I did, except that I run."

"You got a girl that lives at 43 Parkside Avenue?"

"No, sir."

"Think again. You got a girl who lives at 43 Parkside Avenue?"

"No, sir."

"You've got less sense than I gave you credit for, Reeman. I'm going to have that girl down here pretty quick and see if she knows you. And you won't get the chance to tip her off first, either."

Real agony flashed over the young man's face, and he stepped forward appealingly.

"Ah, don't do that, sergeant," he cried. "She don't know nothing about this. Honest, she don't."

Captain Brady gave a little snort and closed his teeth firmly on his cigar. Riordan leaned forward and pointed a finger at the youth.

"See where lying gets you?" he said sternly. "Gets your girl all snarled up in it, too. Now you talk nice, and think what you're saying. What did you do after you shouted to Corbley not to touch that box?"

"I run back by the vault, I told you."

"With what in mind?"

"I told you, I aimed at climbing out the back window."

"It's got bars on it, and you're no Houdini to squeeze through 'em."

"I forgot it had bars on it. When I got there I seen them, and ducked behind the vault door."

"You'll stick to that, will you?"

"Yes, sir, it's the truth."

Riordan leaned back and laughed.

"All right. Now tell me this. How'd you get in back of the tellers' cages so quick? Don't you know there's a Yale lock on the door leading from the lobby to the corridor, and you couldn't run right through it? You'd have to stop, fish your keys out of your pocket, find the right key, unlock the door, wait and get your key out again, because the door opens into the lobby, and then dash through. Did you do all that?"

"I had my keys out when I started to run."

"Ah!"

The exclamation was so satisfying that the young man winced, and Captain Brady could see by his expression that he was hur-

riedly reviewing everything he had said, and weighing his words.

"What's this girl's name," asked Riordan, after a considerable pause.

"You leave her out of it."

"What's her name?"

"Honest, sergeant, she hasn't got anything at all to do with me or anything. She's a good girl. You forget all about her."

It seemed as if Riordan might do this, for he dropped the subject.

"How'd you come to get a job as messenger at the bank, anyway?" he asked.

"Mr. Parker hired me."

"You just walk in on him and ask for the job?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know Pete Swaze, who drives a delivery truck for the Crescent store?"

"No, sir."

"You don't know, then, that he's sparking your girl while you're in the bank?"

Reeman's cheeks grew dull red, but he made no answer.

"Yes, sir, Pete he's so soft on your girl that all the other boys are kidding him. The boys, they call him 'Claribelle.'"

Reeman locked his lips, and the red in his cheeks gave way to white.

"Yes, they call him Claribelle, and I guess she's putting it over on him just as much as she's putting it over on you," Riordan continued musingly.

"She's got no use for him," Reeman blurted out. "He hangs round her, but--"

"You had your keys out when you ran across the lobby," interrupted Riordan. "You've told us that much. Yet you say you were so scared you didn't know what you were doing. Pretty nifty subconscious control of your actions, I should say. Well, you got the door to the corridor unlocked in jigger time, and dashed through it back of the tellers' cages. Then what did you do?"

"I don't know, I tell you. I wanted to get as far away from that bomb as I could."

"Who'd you run into in the corridor?"

"I didn't run into anybody. I don't remember."

"Didn't you run into Westcott?"

"Westcott? Who's he?"

"Stop kidding me. Westcott says you nearly knocked him over."

"Westcott? There's nobody in the bank by that name."

Riordan leaned forward again. "Right you are, boy," he said. "Now you stop trying to kid me. You're thinking too fast for yourself, see? First slip you made was when you admitted you had your keys out when you started to run.

"Now you're trying to convince me that you were so scared when this thing happened that you didn't know what you did, yet when I ring in a phony name on you, you peg it right away and tell me there isn't any Westcott.

"Don't you see what a bum job you're doing, trying to fake and cover up? Trouble with you, kid, is that you haven't had much experience. Me, I've had a lot of it. About all the captain and I do, here, is to buzz birds like you all day long. And we're pretty good at it. Now you quit stalling me, for it isn't going to get you anywhere. Get that?"

"I'm not stalling," the youth said doggedly. "I'm trying to answer your questions. I tell you I was that scared—"

"How'd you come to get a job at the bank?" The question cut off his explanation. Reeman had to stop and collect his thoughts before any words would come. Just as he opened his mouth to reply, Riordan barked:

"Never mind that, it took you too long to think it up. After you left the bank, you went right up the alley behind it, didn't you?"

"Huh?" The exclamation was one of utter amazement.

"Yes, I guess so. That one knocked you for a goal, didn't it? You'd like to know how I found out. Well, I'll tell you —you told me. You give me the one thing I didn't know. I knew all the rest of it. And you told me the one thing—how you ditched the money so quick.

"You took a chance on that. If nobody came into the alley before you got there it was jake. If somebody came in, well, you'd lose the kale, but there would be nothing on you, and maybe you'd get another chance.

"Now here's what you did: when that bomb was planted you waited till somebody went to pick it up, and then you yelled not to touch it, and ran. You knew the alarm would be sounded, and you knew what would happen. So as you ran for the corridor door you got your keys out.

"You were through the door in a jiffy, and as you ducked down the corridor Harry Fisher, the pay rolls teller, came out of his cage with a bunch of money in his arms, headed for the vault.

"You figured somebody would come busting out, and you were going to offer to help 'em carry the money. But Fisher had an armful, and there was a broken package of bills on top, and you saw it.

"It looked big to you. Fisher was intent on getting to the vault, and you saw it, so instead of offering to help him, you just grabbed this broken package.

"You ran to the window with it, shoved it out in the alley, and then ducked behind the vault doors till the excitement died down. Then, first chance you got, you beat it, slipped around into the alley, and found the package just where you'd left it.

"You weren't taking any chance, even then. If you got nailed in the alley with it, you'd say you found it there and were taking it back to the bank. If you didn't get nailed, it was all yours.

"Well, nobody nailed you. You made a clean get-away—at least you thought you did. And, playing wise, you ditched the money, didn't spend any. You were going to wait awhile: till it was safe. Then you and the girl—"

"You leave the girl out of it, I tell you," interrupted Reeman heatedly. "She didn't have a thing to do with it."

Riordan pushed a button on his desk. To the responding doorman he said:

"Send in one of the boys to take this upstairs."

Wagoner, one of the detectives, entered and laid a hand on Reeman's shoulder.

"Lock him up for awhile," said Riordan. "Put him in alone. Frisk him, but don't book him yet: I'll want him later. Bring what he's got on him down here."

Captain Brady looked at his watch. "Boy," he said, "it's pretty near nine o'clock. Mr. Parker and that pay rolls teller will be here pretty soon. That was what I call good work, boy. Now you're going to get the girl?"

"Pretty soon, chief. May have some trouble, though. That kid was twenty minutes late getting here. I mistrust he was out at her place. I took too big a chance there."

He stepped to the door, and, thrusting his head out, called:

"Oh, Willis!"

CHAPTER VIII

CORNERING A VICE PRESIDENT

HE young detective came into the office. Riordan reached into his desk and gave him a card, on which he had written the matter he had copied from the "employee's record," which he had been shown by Danforth when he called at the Crescent Store earlier in the day.

"You and Halloran go down to the garage and pick out a nice-looking bus," he said, "and drive out to that address. I want that jane brought in here. She's the one you were watching. If she isn't home and you can't locate her quick, you leave Halloran at the house to get her if she comes back, and you drive down to the depot to see that she doesn't take one of the night trains out."

"Yes, sir." Willis saluted and swung out, and as he passed through the door Mr. Parker and Harry Fisher, the pay rolls teller, came in. Captain Brady greeted them both cordially, pushed forward chairs for them, and chatted for a moment about the weather. As he was doing this Wagoner returned, placed a canvas bag on Riordan's desk, and handed him a small yellow ticket.

"There's his stuff, sergeant, in that bag," he said. "And this traffic tag, he asked me to be particular about. He said Mr. Parker gave it to him, to bring down to the traffic bureau and fix it."

Riordan nodded, dismissed Wagoner, and looked at the traffic ticket. It was checked for "parking by a fire hydrant." He looked at Parker and smiled.

" You get tagged to-day for leaving your bus by a fireplug, Mr. Parker?" he asked.

The banker shook his head. " No, sergeant. I never do that. I am always very careful. To-day, it so happens, my car is in the shop; the valves needed grinding. Why do you ask?"

Riordan waved the ticket. " Got one of your boys upstairs. He said you gave him this ticket to ' fix ' at the traffic bureau."

Parker laughed. " Somebody has been using my name."

" This is for a car with license number 788-887; that your number?"

" No, sergeant—er, what did you say that number was?"

" 788-887, sir."

Mr. Parker bit his lip. " I guess I'll have to plead guilty, sergeant. That isn't my car, but I told the owner, a friend of mine, to—that is—er—let me have the ticket, please, and I'll attend to it."

Riordan turned to his desk, pulled the automobile register to him, and looked through the back pages.

" The number isn't listed yet," he said. " Your friend must have just got the car. This list is complete up to the last ten days."

Mr. Parker looked slightly annoyed. " I believe it is a recent purchase, sergeant. Let me have the ticket, please."

" I can't do that, Mr. Parker. We took it off a prisoner. The man who robbed your bank, as a matter of fact. I'll have to hold it with his effects, for a time at least."

" You have the man who robbed the bank, sergeant? Who was he? Did you recover the money?"

" All in good time, Mr. Parker. We have one of the parties. I expect the other one shortly. That is why Captain Brady asked you to come down this evening. The captain thought you'd like to be in on it."

Mr. Parker smiled, but the pleasure soon vanished from his face.

" That ticket, sergeant. You say you got that among the effects of the man who robbed the bank?"

" Yes, sir."

" There must be some mistake, sergeant. I mean, the officer must have written the wrong number. Or somebody has a fraudulent license plate."

" What makes you think so, sir?"

" Because, sergeant, that license number is—a lady owns that car."

Riordan thrust his tongue in his cheek. He put the traffic tag in his pocket and looked at the floor for a minute. Finally, looking up, he asked:

" Mr. Parker, how did you come to employ this messenger—Reeman, I think his name is—the one who warned Corbley not to touch that bomb?"

Parker looked surprised and then embarrassed. " Why," he said, hesitatingly, " a friend—a friend of mine, recommended him. He seems a very nice boy, and he certainly saved us a tragedy—why, sergeant, you—you don't mean—"

" Got him upstairs now. He stole that seventy-five thousand."

" I cannot believe that, sergeant."

" Well, you will, pretty soon. Mr. Fisher, when you were going to the vault with those packages of currency, did you notice young Reeman?"

" He passed me in the corridor, sergeant. I supposed he was running to his post."

" Joggle you as he went by?"

" I do not recall that he did."

" Well, he's smooth. He got that top bundle, the broken package."

" I never should have suspected it, sergeant. I could have taken my oath I put all that money in the vault."

" I think you're mistaken, sergeant," said Parker. " Reeman was about the bank afterward. I took notice of him. In fact I sent for him and congratulated him on his quick wit."

" Partridge search him with the others?"

" No. I released him, with some of the other employees who could have had no possible connection with the robbery. In fact at the time I permitted them to leave we had not completed checking the day's cash in the vault, and did not know of the robbery."

" Well, you released a passing fair crook."

" I think you do him a great injustice. He warned us about that bomb."

" It wasn't a bomb at all, it was a fake. Planted. He knew it."

"Why, sergeant, I read in the newspapers—"

Riordan reached up to the top of his desk, grasped the box that contained the imitation bomb, and as Captain Brady whisked a newspaper open on the floor, dumped the contents out for inspection.

Fisher laughed immediately, and, reaching forward, picked up the cylinder.

"Why," he exclaimed, "how ridiculous! That's paraffin. A little dirty, mixed with something when it was melted. And these are toy pistol caps. And that's part of an old clock, it wouldn't explode anything in that form. And that isn't powder, it's—it's coal dust. What a crazy idea!"

"He's a former mining man, he ought to know," said Riordan.

"But I read in the newspapers," protested Mr. Parker, "that the bomb was a deadly thing."

"Sure you did. And saw pictures of it. We let the boys photograph it, and didn't tell them anything. They weren't powder men, and didn't know. It looked bad enough; and it actually ticked."

Parker considered. Finally he said:

"But why did Reeman, if he really did this, go to all that bother? Any box that ticked would have done as well: we weren't going to look inside of it."

"I didn't say he went to all that bother. I said he knew it was a fake. I haven't any idea he made it."

"Who did, then?"

"I expect to show you shortly, sir."

As if in answer to his words, the door to the office was pushed open, and Willis thrust in his head.

"We have that party, sergeant."

"Bring her in."

CHAPTER IX

THE DAZZLING BLONDE

WILLIS jerked his head and entered, to be followed by a dazzling and smiling blonde, behind whom loomed the huge bulk of Halloran. The woman looked quickly about the room, and as her eyes rested on the vice president of the First National Bank they gleamed with joy.

"Oh, Mr. Parker," she said, hurrying toward him, "I'm so glad you are here. I've been arrested—for not answering that traffic tag, I guess, and the policemen made me come down here. You'll tell the captain, for me, won't you, that it's all right? I gave the traffic tag to David and told him to be sure and take it down to the police station—"

"This is an outrage, Miss Reynolds," Parker cut in, rising and pushing forward his chair. Then he turned to Captain Brady.

"Captain" he said severely, "is it customary to drag a lady down here to headquarters because she is late in responding to a traffic tag? And at this time of night? I shall take this matter up with the mayor. Why, I—"

"Find yourself another chair and sit down, Mr. Parker," barked Riordan. "You ought to know we don't handle traffic cases here."

"I will not sit down. This lady—"

"Say, listen. You may be vice president of a bank and all that, but you are here by sufferance. Captain Brady asked you down here to see the wind up on this robbery case. If you don't want to hear it, get out."

"I don't like your manner, sergeant. I am very much interested in this robbery case, and I appreciate being called in; but as a friend of Miss Reynolds I must protest this unwarranted proceeding in dragging her down here over a trivial thing like violating a traffic rule.

"I am sure she did it unintentionally, and you heard her say she gave the tag to David, Reeman to bring down here. You know he had the tag—you have it now. So what's the idea of sending a couple of policemen out to arrest her?"

Fisher had pushed forward another chair, and he fairly dragged Mr. Parker into it, though the banker was still highly enraged. Once he had sat down, Riordan looked at the woman, who also had taken a seat in the chair Parker had pushed forward for her, and who now was smiling at each of the men in the room in turn. Willis and Halloran stood by the door, with "poker faces" masking their feelings. Riordan pulled the

traffic tag from his pocket and leaned forward, so he could hold it before the woman's vision.

"This the traffic tag you're talking about?" he asked.

"Yes, sergeant. That is, it looks like it. It has the license number of my car upon it."

"How long you had the car?"

"A week to-day, sergeant. I really didn't see the fire plug till the officer called my attention to it. He wasn't a bit nice."

"How'd you come to have an automobile?"

Mr. Parker erupted again. "Really, sergeant," he said, "I must protest at this. How Miss Reynolds happens to own an automo—"

"You buy it for her?"

The question snapped out like the shot of a high-power rifle. Captain Brady shifted uneasily in his chair. Parker's mouth snapped shut, and he sank back in his chair.

"You buy it for her?"

"I don't see that whether I did or not has any bearing on this matter, but just between us here, I'll admit that I did," said the banker quietly.

Riordan whipped around, tossed the tag back onto his desk, and, reaching farther among his papers, produced the paper on which he had copied the "employee's record card" at the Crescent Store. He passed it to the woman.

"Take a look at that," he said.

She glanced at the writing, and bit her lip. Then she straightened in her chair.

"Well, what of it?" she asked.

"On the fifth you bought a toy pistol and five packages of paraffin in that store, didn't you?"

The woman seemed to shrink down in her chair. She cast a pitiful glance at Mr. Parker.

"What's all this about, anyway?" he demanded savagely. "I tell you this lady is a friend of mine, and I'll vouch for her. This is no way to treat even a criminal, let alone a lady like this."

The woman recovered her poise somewhat at his words, but found Riordan glaring at her.

"On the fifth you bought a toy pistol and five packages of paraffin, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, look at that mess on the floor. Ever see it before?"

She glanced where he indicated, and grew so pale that the rouge and make-up on her cheeks and lips stood out livid. After swallowing a couple of times, she said:

"I never saw it before."

Riordan laughed. "Suppose I tell you," he said, "that little Davie has squealed? We got him upstairs. Got this traffic tag off him, which you gave him when he was up at your house to-night. Suppose I tell you I know where the coal dust came from, too; and the pyrographic outfit that burned the dollar signs on the top of that box. Now what you got to say?"

She turned terror-stricken to Mr. Parker again, but this time the banker sat still, almost as pale as she was. She looked at Captain Brady, at Fisher; turned and looked at the two detectives standing by the door. Then looked back at Riordan.

"It was a joke," she said. "I was going to play a joke on Mr. Parker."

"Yeah? Tell us the joke, then. Maybe we can all laugh."

"Why, I—oh, it will sound so silly."

"Go on, try it. Most jokes are silly."

"Well, I—I was going to a basket social at the church and Mr. Parker was going to be there, and I was going to tell him which was my basket, so he'd buy it—and I'd fixed up that—that box—as a joke. Don't you see?"

Nobody laughed. Riordan turned to the banker.

"Did you know you had a date for a basket social?" he asked.

Mr. Parker shook his head.

"Of course he didn't know it," said the woman, a catch in her voice. "I hadn't asked him yet. The social isn't till—isn't for several weeks yet."

"Ha! That's a good joke," exclaimed Riordan. "Well, now tell us the rest of it. How come Pete Swaze took that basket social box down to the bank? You know Pete Swaze, one of the Crescent delivery drivers? Where's Pete come in on the joke?"

The woman suddenly broke. "Oh, lock me up," she said, rising and stepping over to the two detectives.

Riordan smiled. "All right, lady. I'll just do that. Halloran, you and Willis take this woman up to the matron's quarters. On your way walk her through the jail corridor. Wagoner's got a young lad locked up there for me. Let him see you got this woman, but don't let her shout anything to him, nor make any signs. After you've turned her over to the matron, you get that lad and bring him down here."

The detectives departed with their charge, and Riordan busied himself somewhat longer than was necessary in gathering up the contents of the "bomb" from the floor and restoring the exhibit to the top of his desk. Then he looked at Mr. Parker.

CHAPTER X

SNAPPING THE WHIP

"WELL?" Riordan asked, not unkindly.

The banker shook his head, but said nothing.

"I think you've made a mistake, Mr. Parker," Riordan commented. "And if I'd guessed how this was going to break, I'd have seen that Mr. Fisher, there, wasn't in on it. We'd just as soon have these little affairs as private as possible. But I guess Mr. Fisher can keep his mouth shut."

"I don't care about Fisher," said Parker. "I've always trusted Fisher. Partridge wanted to arrest him, but I wouldn't stand for it."

Captain Brady emitted a nasty laugh. "You want to be damned glad Partridge is barking up the wrong tree," he opined.

The door opened again, and the two detectives returned with the young messenger between them. He looked sullenly at Brady and Riordan, but when he saw Mr. Parker and Fisher also in the room, his expression changed to one of fear.

"Now, Davie, you can tell us all about it," said Riordan.

Reeman looked at Captain Brady.

"Cap'n," he said, "if I come clean will you let her go?"

"You come clean first, boy, and then we'll talk. You'll find you can make a better bargain."

"No, you gotta promise me you'll let her go."

Mr. Parker spoke up. "Captain, I will not prosecute that woman. Reeman, you have my word for it. I will not prosecute her, nor will I permit any action to be taken against her if I can help it."

Riordan and Brady flashed each other an exchange of glances.

"That's enough for me," said Reeman. "I guess Parker's got influence enough to spring her. Anyway, I can see why he don't want to go to court any; not over her, him being a married man. But anyway, she had nothing to do with it, see. I'll stand for what I done, but I want you to know she was out of it."

"Well, go ahead then and help spring her," said Riordan.

"I'll do that, sergeant. Clara and me is pals, see? Nothin' wrong, just good pals. She's a bright girl. We've known each other a long time. Figurin' on gettin' married some day, when we got enough. But you understand, she's no crook. Well, we come here—when we come here.

"She met Parker here: he can tell you how, an' he took quite an interest in her. These old birds, you know, sergeant, they do that way sometimes. Well, after they'd got acquainted good, she tells him she's got a young man friend who's in need of a job. I was drivin' taxi at the time. And he gives me a job as messenger in the bank, see.

"Well. Clara, she goes to work in the Crescent. She feels like she has to have a job, to look respectable. She's all right, understand. Only she's wise. Parker here, he wants her to work in the bank, but she isn't that foolish.

"She has her own job, and she lives private, as you found out when you went and got her. She and me, we'd meet at dinner time, and every now and then we'd spend the evening together.

"But we weren't either of us getting rich enough to get married on. Parker, here, he give her clothes and last week an automobile, but no money. Clara ain't the kind of girl you can give money to, see?

"And so we was talking it over one night at dinner, and she says maybe we can scare him out of some money—enough to go away on and us get coupled up. One thing led to another, and she says she's been thinking of a scheme with a fake bomb: has it already made, in fact up at her room.

"Never mind what her plan was; it was no good. It'd been blackmail. But the bomb idea gets me to thinking—and I told her maybe I could do something with it, and to send it down to the bank to me.

"We picked this Swaze guy to pack it down, he was crazy over her. So she wraps it up and sends it down to the bank, addressed to me. She'd told me at lunch what delivery she'd send it out on, and she knew about the time it would be delivered.

"I made it my business to be at the door about that time, and Swaze slips it to me. He don't know what it is; all he knows is it's a package slipped to him special to hurry down here before he went on his regular route.

"Well, I got it, and ripped the wrapping off of it, and come into the bank. Nobody was looking, and I puts it on the counter in front of Corbley, and then went over to the other side of the lobby. Pretty soon Corbley sees it, and picks it up. You know the rest—you told me all about it when you had me in here before. But you see, she didn't have nothing at all to do with it, don't you?"

"Absolutely nothing," said Riordan blandly, looking at Parker.

"What did you do with the money?" asked Captain Brady.

"I done it up in a paper parcel and mailed it to myself here. General delivery. They'll hold it two weeks. I figured the thing would blow over by that time. Meanwhile, if there was any squawk, and I was suspected, they could search me and not find anything.

"If everything was jake I'd go to the post office and get my package. If things went haywire, I'd leave it—and try again some time. But, you see, Clara, she had nothing to do with it, don't you? I told her nix on her plan, it was no good. You got nothing on her at all."

"Take him upstairs and book him to Riordan for investigation," said Brady. "That'll hold him till we decide what to do. Then you two boys go down to the post office and see if you can get the night superintended to pry that package out for you. Tell 'em the guy's in jail and you'll bring him a receipt, if he wants one."

The two detectives and David Reeman left the office, and Brady returned to the banker.

"Well, Mr. Parker, looks like you know all about it now. What do you plan to do?"

The banker smiled wryly. "I guess I'll get Partridge keep on investigating," he said.

"That's all right. But that doesn't let us out. This is the police department, not a fixing bureau. We've got a bank robber in custody."

"And an accessory before the fact," added Riordan. "One Clara Reynolds, alias Smith."

"I won't prosecute her, and I won't let you do it!" The banker fairly shouted the words.

Riordan reached over and pushed one of the white buttons on Captain Brady's desk. To the responding doorman he said:

"Chase down to the press room and tell those reporters to come up here."

And as the doorman withdrew he turned to the banker.

"You won't, eh?" he snapped. "Well, you're going to be an awful busy man stopping it. I'm going to give up my guts to those news hounds the minute they come in here. If you want to try and stop it, you stick round. Otherwise that door there behind you leads down to the drill room and you can slip out that way."

Parker looked at Captain Brady. "Captain," he said, "you won't let—"

"You're darned right I'll let him," snapped Brady. "I don't cover up anybody. You ought to have thought of this when you gave her that automobile. You bankers seem to think—"

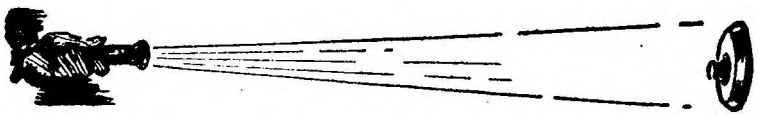
But he was talking to empty air. Parker had dashed out the rear door, and they heard him cluttering down the iron stairs to the drill room.

Brady turned to Riordan. "Boy, I guess

you'd better leave the jane out of it," he said. "Not on Parker's account, but on hers. This crook likely had her going; maybe she'll straighten up now. You always want to give a woman a chance. Reeman, he'll plead guilty, so there won't be any explaining to do."

And as Riordan nodded his head the office door was dashed open, and the reporters rushed in.

THE END



INDIAN TORMENTS AND TORTURES

G. E. GOULDSBURY, in his "Reminiscences of a Stowaway," told how a British police officer in India put off a train two apparent thieves that had been seated on brass-bound, wooden chests fastened with padlocks. It turned out that the suspects were high caste bankers personally conducting money they had advanced for a new loop line.

The British do not permit their police to torture prisoners, but Gouldsbury mentions the *chabutra*, a sloping table, on which the victim was stretched, with his head at the lower end. Water was poured over his face until he confessed to the native constables.

The same author recorded that the beards and mustaches of a Mohammedan pair were fastened to each other, the fastenings supplemented with strong cotton thread. Snuff was then applied to the nostrils. The effect may be faintly imagined. A parallel case is that of the Kilkenny cats, tied tail to tail and slung over a clothesline.

Gouldsbury heard of a physically harmless punishment when Hindu criminals were brought into the outer room of a hut for questioning by the native inspector of police. A suspect was led into the inner room, where one constable belabored a sack of rice with a cane, while the other constable yelled lustily. While waiting their turn in the outer room, the trembling prisoners naturally concluded that their companion was getting a severe beating in the torture chamber.

Branding was practiced on Hindu girls to cure hysteria, and on children of both sexes to cure various abnormalities. Branding was likewise regarded as efficacious in driving out possessive devils. The uneducated classes look on every disease as caused by *bhuts* or *jinn*—evil spirits. Then, too, the hot iron was resorted to here, as in European countries, for correction or revenge, as in the case of a young girl found in a brothel. Readers of French history will recall the convict's brand of the *fleur-de-lis*.

A well known punishment formerly meted out to Hindu military spies and others was binding to the cannon's mouth. Adams tells a pleasant tale of Penang, originally called Prince of Wales Island, out of compliment to the regent who became George IV.

Penang, at the northern extremity of the Malacca straits, was acquired from the Rajah of Kedah.

When Penang came into English possession, it was almost uninhabited, and covered with a dense jungle. Captain Light, the first Superintendent of Trade, soon made a road to the highest point. As to this work a curious legend is current among the natives, said Edwardes. It is to the effect that Captain Light pointed a cannon in the direction he wanted the road made, loaded it with powder, and, substituting dollars for shot, discharged the piece, telling the Malays they could have as many dollars as they could find. The ensuing scramble helped forward the undertaking.

Several dinner plates broke over the head of the luckless Jed while—

A PATHETIC PIRATE

By Joseph Gollomb

HIS FAME TRAVELED LIKE THE WIND, AND YET A FAIRY TALE COULD NOT WANT FOR A STRANGER END THAN BEFELL HIM

A Story of Fact

"A PATHETIC pirate?" you echo. "How can that be? How could a pathetic creature survive in a pirate crew, much less become captain as Avery did?" Which would be hard to answer if it were only the weak who are pathetic. But even the toughest spirits show up as something pathetic when life chooses to play cat-and-mouse with them. For compared to the vast forces that lie in wait for us mere mortals, even a Napoleon seems helpless, tossed up to the heights of power one day, into prison the next, as if some great cat were playing with him. But so far as we know a cat's play is never intentionally humorous; whereas life often seems capable of playing jokes—cruel jokes—even on a pirate chief.

What brings out the pathos in the story of Captain Avery all the more strongly is that almost up to his last chapter he never thought of himself as a poor creature. On the contrary there was a characteristic gleam in his sharp black eyes and a bit of smirk on his sardonic mouth that marked the man as quite pleased with himself. Perhaps as such men go he had some reason for the feeling. Even as a youth of sixteen he was tall as a man, wiry, strong and able to give an account of himself with his fists, with a club or a sheath-knife if necessary.

But he preferred winning a fight with the use of his wits, of which he had plenty.

— Captain Gibson wielded crockery, blows, and profanity in profusion

They were excellent wits, sharp, quick, resourceful, full of tricks and traps. They gave him an insight into the weakness of other men and a glib tongue that would have stood him in good stead either on the stage or as a salesman—were he inclined to give something for value received.

That, however, was not his way. He not only wanted stolen fruit, but he also wanted some one to do the stealing for him. That made the fruit doubly sweet.

His active brain was content in his youth with mere day-dreams. He dreamed of the sea; the glittering seas of the Orient, where great ships topped with silken sails and bearing vast treasures and beautiful maidens could be captured by bold pirates. He dreamed he was the most envied and successful of pirate chiefs. With strategy and a little fighting—only enough to give added spice to the adventure—he captured such a treasure galleon and with it some Oriental princess of great beauty. It is a common enough dream for a boy to indulge in. What is not common and what makes this story is what life did with Captain Avery's dream.

When he was sixteen he determined to set out and make that dream come true. Characteristically he went down to the sea. It was there that his spirit felt at home, and it was on land that he was, so to speak, "at sea," as the story will show.

India at that time fired men's imagination more than it does to-day; and even to-day the song goes:

> Beneath thy waves unnumbered pearls lie gleaming,
> Thy riches are beyond all human dreaming,
> Oh, wondrous land, dear land of India!

So young Avery looked for an easy passage to India. Naturally he did not want to pay for his passage; and if possible he wanted some one along who would bear the brunt of whatever hardships the trip would involve. So he devised a little plan wherewith to gain his ends. He induced another boy to run away to sea with him. This youth, impetuous in temper and not overintelligent, was born to be a cat's paw for Avery, to pull chestnuts out of the fire for him. And Avery had a born talent for using others as cat's paws.

With Jed Harris, his companion, Avery lurked about the docks of Liverpool studying the faces of deep-sea skippers as they came off their ships after a long voyage, lay up on land for a few days, then went to sea again after days and nights of drink-

ing. After several ships and captains had been thus studied by young Avery, he selected a rubicund-faced captain with whom he would take passage for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Captain John Gibson was in no way remarkable except perhaps for his capacity for grog. He was a typical British seadog; big of body, brave as a bulldog and as pugnacious; not a pleasant man to deal with when coming out of liquor; but easy to bamboozle by any one who had the wits.

His ship, the Duke, was a stout craft, presumably a peaceful trader. But she was so heavily "protected" by cannon and other arms that she could turn privateer or worse whenever it seemed profitable. Her usual run was to India—which interested young Avery.

"Who the Devil Are You?"

So he marched Harris and himself on board and applied for berths as cabin boys. They got them. Then Avery whispered to Harris:

"Ask to be made cabin's boy to the captain. That's the best job on the boat."

It seemed an unselfish thing for young Avery to do; and Jed, who should have known better, took Avery's advice. Captain Gibson was on shore at the time the two boys applied for their berths, taking on, as usual, a full cargo of liquor. The mate, scarcely hiding his grin of amusement, looked at Jed, found his looks to his liking—and let the youth have his wish.

Captain Gibson was as always, carried on board just before the ship set sail. He came to when the vessel was doing a lively dance on the high seas to the tune of a December gale. Then with his head raging as badly as his temper he called for a cabin boy to minister to him.

Young Jed answered the summons with a tray of food for the captain. Avery was hanging about just outside of the captain's cabin when Jed opened the door to enter it. It may have been an inopportune lurch of the ship or, what was just as likely, Avery's outstretched foot that sent Jed and his tray crashing to the floor of the captain's cabin. The cause mattered little either to Captain Gibson or to Jed.

The effect was that a storm and several dinner plates broke over the head of the luckless Jed with Captain Gibson wielding plates, blows, kicks and language in profusion. Poor Jed Harris got the full brunt of it all.

At the precise moment when "the storm" had blown himself out and while Jed was still in a state of collapse, into the cabin marched young Avery with another tray of food. Without a word he set it down on the captain's table. Then leaving the cabin briskly he came back with pail and mop and proceeded to make a workmanlike job of cleaning up the wreckage caused by Jed.

Captain Gibson glowered at the newcomer. "Who the devil are you?" he growled.

Avery looked up respectfully; he was really an excellent actor.

"I am one of the cabin boys, sir. I was just passing and saw this boy trip and spill his tray. I thought as how you'd be wanting your food anyway, so I told the cook you'd sent me for it. I hope you'll forgive the liberty, captain!"

"Take this fool out of here and you serve me hereafter!" Captain Gibson said to Avery. "But the next time you do anything without orders I'll drop you overboard!"

On Gibson's Shoulders

He never did drop Avery overboard, although the latter sailed with him for more than eighteen years. It was not that Avery avoided doing things without orders; on the contrary, if Captain Gibson had known of a tenth of the things that Avery perpetrated under his very nose, he would have carried out his threat.

It was the fact that Captain Gibson, Jed Harris and almost everybody else on board were unconsciously and consistently doing things that profited Henry Avery and nobody else, while everybody else reaped kicks and losses thereby.

Avery clung to Captain Gibson because the skipper was making a career for himself, both as trader and occasional privateersman. And the higher Captain Gibson rose in the world the higher Henry

Avery climbed on his shoulders. So that at the opening of the spectacular drama, which was to send his name ringing around the world and down the centuries Henry Avery had become first mate to Captain Gibson, with Jed Harris as second. Jed, too, had stayed by Captain Gibson and climbed, but chiefly because it was to the interest of Henry Avery that this should be. And Avery himself saw to it that Jed won promotion.

The Duke now had a companion ship, the Duchess. The two vessels at the opening of our drama were lying in the harbor of Corunna about to set sail for South America, where they were to help the Spanish guard the coasts of Peru from pirates. Each ship carried thirty cannon, a crew of over a hundred and thirty, and a generous store of small arms.

A New Captain and a New Flag

The two ships were waiting for some Spanish officers to come on board before setting sail for America. Captain Gibson as usual was drinking heavily on shore and one night was carried on board his Duke, fathoms deep in liquor and stupor.

He was put to sleep by First Mate Henry Avery and Second Mate Jed Harris. They locked him in his cabin and went on deck. From the Duchess came a rowboat loaded with about twenty of the latter's crew. As the rowboat neared the Duke a petty officer stood up and called out to Avery:

"Is our drunken boson on boat?"

"He is," Avery replied. "Come and get him."

Had Captain Gibson overheard the colloquy he would have been puzzled. No boson from the Duchess had come on board. Nevertheless the boatload from the Duchess boarded the Duke. What was more remarkable is that they seemed to have come to stay. They had their kit bags with them.

And the moment they were on board the crew of the Duke pulled up anchor and quietly sailed out of the bay. The captain of the companion ship, the Duchess, stared incredulously at the spectacle of the Duke leaving without him, but before he could do anything about it it was too late.

Nobody woke Captain Gibson, so he slept on till late next morning. When he did wake he thought he was still deep in liquor For everything was swaying, his cabin lamp and the cabin itself, berth and all. He lay for a long time waiting for things to come to even keel as they should be on a ship anchored in a sheltered port.

Then he happened to look out of a porthole. That gave him a severe shock. The ship was out on the sea—when it was supposed to be in port!

He made a dive for the door. It was locked. He seized the bell and rang it with fury. He had to wait a long time before he heard the approach of footsteps. A key grated in the lock and the door was flung open.

In the doorway stood Avery and behind him several of his officers, their belts showing knives and pistols. Also there was something unfamiliar—perhaps it may be described as only too familiar—in their manner.

"What in hell does this mean?" Captain Gibson roared.

Avery towered over him. "It means, Gibson, that this ship has a new captain and a new flag. The captain is me. The flag is black with skull and crossbones on it. I give you your choice; a place in the ship's company with a share in what prizes we capture—or we put you ashore."

With An Iron Belaying Pin

For the first time Captain Gibson saw Avery in his true colors. He realized now that the man must have been plotting behind his back for weeks, and that he had done it successfully. For as Gibson looked past him he saw that Avery was really in full control of the ship.

Gibson was too much of a man to give up without a struggle. He ran to his locker for his pistol: of course, it was no longer there. He found his knife gone, too. Then he sailed into his crew with his two fists—a gallant futile effort. Avery knocked him unconscious with the butt of his pistol.

When again Captain Gibson came to he was in a small boat alone bobbing about on the sea. But as it was a much frequented ocean lane he was soon picked up.

Meanwhile with two hundred men and

an added ten cannon to the thirty they already had, Avery and his crew were heading for the Indian Ocean.

The spirit and discipline on board the Duke were excellent. Captain Avery, instead of ruling with an iron belaying pin, got his effects by means of a glib tongue. He had every man on board feeling that of all the ship's crew Captain Avery thought him and him alone worthy of promotion.

European pirates at that time had not as yet become familiar in the Indian Ocean, and native piracy still clung close to the mainland. So that seagoing merchantmen in the waters about India little looked for danger from pirates and took correspondingly few precautions against them. Shrewdly Avery counted on this for his chances of fat pickings.

Three of a Kind!

One sunrise when the mists lifted the lookout reported two small ships together. Each was half the size of the Duke. They looked like merchantmen, and flew English colors. English colors, too, showed at the masthead of the Duke.

"There's our first real meat, captain!" said first mate Jed Harris.

"There may be a bone in it that 'll make it hard to swallow," Avery replied cautiously. "Suppose we first get close and parley with them before we show our colors."

For the first time there was division of sentiment among the crew. The fiery ones wanted fire at once. The others thought Avery's ideas were better. As usual, Avery's counsel prevailed.

But guns were unlimbered and everything got ready to fire at word from the captain. The three ships approached each other. There was something suspicious in the behavior of the two strangers. In the first place, they had an uncommon lot of cannon aboard; in the second place their men stood in the same attitude of preparedness as those on the Duke.

"They're on to us!" Harris exclaimed. "No use pretending any more. Let's hoist Black Jack and let 'em have lead!"

Avery nodded assent and the black flag broke from the masthead of the Duke. The gunners held their lighted matches ready.

To the astonishment of those on the Duke, from the mastheads of the two ships there now flew the same flag as on theirs—the black flag of piracy.

What now, to parley or to fight? Characteristically, Avery decided for wiliness. "I'll propose we three get together," he told his crew. "Together we can tackle big fish. And since we're the biggest of the three, I'll command the fleet. Then when it comes to fighting I'm the one to say who is to bear the brunt of it!"

And he winked significantly.

Those on the other two pirate ships did not see the wink, of course, or they would not have fallen in so readily with Captain Avery's proposal when they got together in parley. As it was, the three ships set out now on a hunt for game, big or little, and with the understanding that it was to be share and share alike. Captain Avery was recognized as admiral of the little fleet.

I mentioned the fact that merchantmen in the waters about India were not much worried about pirates. How much less, therefore, must have been the fear of pirates in the mind of Aurengzebe, the Great Mogul, Emperor of India, ruler over untold millions, rich beyond conception, and supreme in political power in the Orient—for England at that time, as far as India was concerned, was only a trading company depending for its prosperity on the potentate's good will.

The Great Mogul Sails

When his daughter, the Princess Patma, was due to make a pilgrimage to holy Mecca by way of the sea, the Mogul's biggest ship, the Kootab-u-Din, was selected for the voyage. As India's empire was by land she had little use for a navy, and as she feared little from the water the guns on the Kootab-u-Din were little more than ornamental.

Princess Patma, with her handmaidens, her guard of honor, her hundreds of slaves and soldiers, went on board amid the splendors of ceremony gorgeous beyond comparison. Part of the procession was made up of bearers of caskets containing the royal gems.

The ship sailed under, not canvas, but

silk. And from the peak of the mainmast floated the hugest banner of yellow silk ever seen on the water.

It was that great banner that first greeted the eyes of the little pirate fleet commanded by Captain Avery. He stared at the great on-coming ship as if he were seeing only a vision. Indeed, it seemed only part of his boyhood dream, that dream in which he, as a pirate, captured a princess of India.

"What flag is that?" he asked.

A sailor who had knocked about the Orient told him, with something of awe in his tone: "It's the flag of the Great Mogul, captain."

A buzz of excited comment ran through the pirate fleet. What a prize it would be for any pirate big enough to capture her!

The Veiled Woman

Captains Heron and Martin, of the other two pirate ships, were on board the Duke at the time. Avery could not take his eyes off the Kootab-u-Din. "What'll we do about her?" he asked.

The other two skippers had only reckless courage to guide them. "Take her!" they cried.

"Her decks are full of people," said Avery. "And she seems so sure of herself that she isn't paying the least attention to us."

"We're going back to our ships," said the captains. "Let's close in on her from three sides!"

Avery let the other two ships get a good start on his in the race for the Indian. True to his promise to his own men, he let the other ships bear the brunt of the attack.

From the Indian came puffs of smoke, and as the Gnat and the Gadfly ran alongside the big fellow the fighting became hand-to-hand. The Duke was the last to join the battle.

But it was not much of a fight. The Kootab-u-Din, as I have said, was not a warship, nor were the men on her accustomed to sea fighting. Whatever bloodshed took place was on the decks of the Indian, the Gnat and the Gadfly. By the time Avery came up the great silk banner began coming down in token of surrender.

Avery, as he boarded the magnificent vessel at the head of the pirates, could scarcely believe his senses. It was getting to be more and more like a picture out of youthful day dreams. The very soldiers and sailors, now prostrate on the deck in surrender, wore costumes such as he had seen only in pictures from fairy tales.

Everywhere the woodwork was inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver. The sails, as I have said, were of silk. Avery went below. Opening the door of the largest cabin he beheld a sight that made him hold his breath. On a small throne sat a heavily veiled woman cringing with fright. Loops upon loops of pearls draped her throat. Her fingers and wrists seemed armored with jewels. About her throne were twelve handmaidens, also cowering.

"The Great Mogul's daughter!" whispered to Avery the sailor who knew India. Avery approached and lifted her veil.

Were I to follow the mass of printed stories of this exploit—and my own inclinations—that princess would be of a beauty consistent with her station and setting. Indeed there were few, even among her followers, who did not think her, in looks, all that such a princess should be. But, alas, I must report that not always does nature live up to poetry. Princess Patma in plain garb would not have attracted the least attention; she was plain and plainly frightened.

The Princess As Hostage

Avery remained in the cabin and sent his officers to search the rest of the ship for loot. He himself attended to the treasures of the princess. When he came out of the cabin again his pockets and his blouse were stuffed with jewels.

Then, on the main deck of the Kootab-u-Din he held a council of the whole pirate fleet, and, before the eyes of the looted, he divided the loot. Some of the jewels came out of Avery's blouse and pockets and were added to the treasures to be divided. But some of it, unknown to the other pirates, remained in Avery's pockets.

The pirate council decided to let the Kootab-u-Din proceed, but without the Princess Patma. There was enough treasure taken off to keep the humblest man in the

pirate fleet in luxury for the rest of his life. Why, therefore, go on and risk hardship and danger in further piracy; especially what must follow when the news reached the Great Mogul?

Captains Heron and Martin voted to take the princess along. She could be held either as a hostage against the formidable Great Mogul's rage or for a ransom, Avery agreed, and let Captain Heron take the princess on board the Gadfly.

The loot in gems—with the exception of what Avery held—was divided in three parts, each third taken on board its own ship. Then the Kootab-u-Din, with its horrified crew, and handmaidens, was permitted to go.

Captain Avery Disappears

The pirate fleet made haste to leave Indian waters, and not until they had rounded Cape of Good Hope and were well on the Atlantic did Avery halt his ships and call a council of the captains. He had a proposition to make to them, which he put with all the glibness of a professional lawyer.

They were again in dangerous waters, he told his captains; there was danger from fellow pirates like themselves, and from men of war. Should the fleet be attacked it would be the Duke that stood the best chance of escape. He proposed that they all pool their loot into one great chest. The chest was to have three different locks on it. Each captain was to have the key to one of the locks, so that only the three together could open the chest. Then that chest was to be kept on board the ship that stood the best chance of escape. That, of course, was the Duke.

Then the three ships would proceed to Providence, where the pirates would once more divide the treasure, scatter, and each go his way.

We must remember Avery's gift of persuasion to understand his success in getting the captains to fall in with his plan. The great chest was made and the smith fitted three different great locks to it. Each captain kept a different key; and Captains Heron and Martin went back to their ships.

That night the fog came down in a heavy smother. When, late the following morning, it lifted the Gnat and the Gadfly were, as before, in plain view of each other.

But the Duke was nowhere to be seen.

Had she become lost? Or had Avery played his fellow pirates on the Gnat and the Gadfly a trick?

Not until the two ships reached Providence and waited long, if impatiently, did they give up hope of ever enjoying the benefits of the loot that had vanished with Avery and his ship. Captain Heron had long before decided that the daughter of the Great Mogul was an awkward passenger to have on board. What became of her, whether he put her on shore or dropped her overboard history does not tell.

But by history I mean authenticated record. Of the other kind, of pamphlets and wild rumors, of fantastic speculation and fairy tales passing for fact, whole masses spawned and multiplied from the moment the Kootab-u-Din returned to India without its princess.

The Great Mogul arose in majestic wrath and called on England to restore his daughter and her gems and to punish the pirates with ultimate torture. It took months in those days for news or communication to get from India to England. But when finally the Great Mogul's messengers reached England the sensation they created with their news can well be imagined.

In a Gilded Harem!

The government was deeply concerned and sent out a fleet to look for the missing princess. But where to look? A fortune teller could tell them as much as the best informed man on the subject. Speculation was the only guide. And what a wild and luxuriant crop of speculation there sprang up!

Penny-a-liners reaped a harvest. The one who spun the most gorgeous tale about Captain Avery and the Great Mogul's daughter naturally prospered most. The great Daniel Defoe, author of "Robinson Crusoe," himself took a hand at a version of the story. Some one else wrote a play called "The Successful Pirate" which was produced at the Drury Lane Theater and had a long and prosperous career. Popular

songs were written about Avery. Never did a pirate and his exploits so seize and hold the imagination.

These stories, of course, covered a wide range. Captain Avery had married his princess, who was ravishingly beautiful, and was living alone with her on some South Sea isle. Captain Avery did not marry his princess, but kept her a slave underfoot in some gilded harem he had established in China. Captain and his princess were king and queen of a new empire on the east coast of Africa. And so on and so forth.

Even the government of England debated seriously as to which of these many tales contained the truth and what course was best to pursue. To hunt Avery down as a pirate; or to offer him a pardon if he would restore the Great Mogul's daughter?

What the Bag Contained

And all the while that England was agog with fantasy over him, Avery, dressed as a poor sailor, was lying low and quiet in Bideford, a small coast town in England itself. He was suffering from some internal ailment and had to be quiet both for the sake of safety as well as health. But he was not worried much on the score of poverty.

For tucked away in the bottom of his ordinary seaman's chest was a canvas bag the size of a man's head. It was grimy-looking, that bag. But Avery took precious care of it.

Cautiously he wrote to one or two friends he had in London, business men, signing himself, "Hawkins," hinting that if they arranged a meeting with him he guaranteed them "much profit thereby."

These business men, like everybody else in England, were full of the stories about Avery. Something in this letter from Hawkins made them eager to see what it was that he had to propose.

They met him at his arranging in a field outside of Bideford. As soon as they saw him they recognized in him a youth who had gone to sea many years before. They did not know him, however, as Avery.

Now that he was on land Avery found himself out of his element. His wits functioned poorly when it came to trying tricks with land-lubbers. He tried to be secretive about his movements in the past few years. He came back from America, he told them, where some pirates commissioned him to dispose of some jewels they had picked up in the Caribbean Sea. If these merchants helped him dispose of these jewels they could keep one-third of all they got.

The merchants asked to see. Avery with some misgiving untied his canvas bag. As if some devil lit tiny fires in them the eyes of the merchants burned with greed and excitement when they beheld what the bag contained.

Only in fables could such treasures be; and there was but one fable current throughout the world that could at all account for such a treasure trove.

"All right, we'll try to dispose of these stones for you," said the older of the two business men.

Avery was in a terrible quandary. For excellent reasons he considered trust in man only a fool's virtue. How could he trust these men, whom he had not seen for many years, trust them with the contents of the canvas bag?

"If you find any customers bring them to me," he said.

The two looked at him shrewdly. "Are you sure you want visitors?" they asked.

It was a pertinent question to ask a pirate in hiding, especially one whose name was now a household word. Avery squirmed with anxiety and indecision. Cleverly enough the business men desisted from piling up arguments. Avery's own fears of being hung were sufficient.

To a Pauper's Grave

Anxiously he scanned their faces. "How do I know I can trust you with these jewels?" he demanded.

The two shrugged their shoulders. "You're trusting us with your life already," said one of them.

"What do you mean?" Avery cried.

"What do you think would happen if we haled you before a magistrate? You know the punishment for piracy!"

There was no answer to the argument. Avery was compelled to let them have the gems for disposal.

"But you will bring me the money for

them, won't you?" he asked anxiously. "And you will let me have some money in advance?"

"Of course, we will bring you what we get for the jewels. But as for money in advance—well, we haven't got much with us."

Avery accepted what they had; enough to keep him in modest comfort for a month or two while they disposed of the jewels.

His hand most reluctantly handed over the canvas bag to the two; and theirs visibly trembled as they accepted the bag. Before his eyes the contents were divided equally between the two merchants.

"For safety's sake," was the reason given for the division.

Then the two merchants left with Avery's jewels.

For a whole month Avery lay on a sick-bed tortured with pain and tormented with anxiety. Every time some one entered the cottage where he lived he started up either with hope or with terror.

But he heard nothing from the two merchants. He wrote them. There was no reply.

His funds ran low. His health grew worse. His anxiety almost drove him mad. Still no word from the merchants.

Finally his last penny gave out. The fisherman in whose cottage he was boarding had no particular fondness for this stranger from overseas, and once his money gave out saw no more reason for keeping him. Avery pleaded for time.

"I expect some relatives to come with money soon."

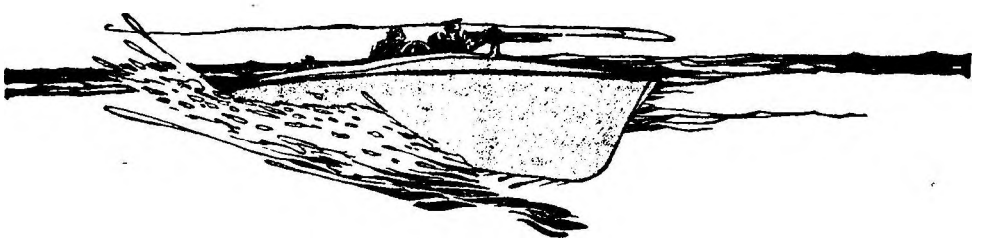
"You've been telling me that for a month now," said the fisherman's wife. "You can't pay for your board with fairy tales."

Avery thought bitterly of some of the fairy tales current among the fishermen and which he heard from the woman's own lips about the great pirate who at a single stroke won both fortune and an emperor's daughter and who was now at the head of a barbaric empire of splendor in some far-away tropic land. He had an apt retort on his lips, did this sick and penniless sailor. And the ironic gods must have laughed at the thing that sealed his lips.

As the man's "relatives" continued to absent themselves and as Avery grew seriously ill the fisherman and his wife threw him on the parish as a charity patient.

And as such he died in a few weeks and was buried in a pauper's grave.

That same evening the Drury Lane Theater was crowded to the doors with an audience envying the hero of "The Successful Pirate." On the streets hawkers were selling copies of popular ballads of Avery and his Oriental princess. In coffee houses and in fashionable clubs, in homes of every kind and over countless bars went the talk in envy of the man who had realized a boyhood dream.



He hurled the telephone at Redding as he arose

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"

CHAPTER LVII (*Continued*)

A NIGHT OF SURPRISES

A DEAD silence followed! Not even a faint humming of wires. Frantically Martin joggled the hook and listened again. There was no use; the instrument was dead. He leaped out of bed and feverishly went over the wiring again.

It was useless. He had planned and worked in vain. Either his wiring had been discovered or he had bungled the job in the corridor.

He became half mad with disappointment and fury. The clock told him that it was nearly eleven. Time was flying. He had wasted a priceless day. He walked the floor in panic But this would never do.

Controlling his emotion with an effort, he stopped to consider the situation from this new angle. As he must call the police, now was no time to give way to futile grief. What to do? What to do?

And he thought of the telephone in Dax's office. As this instrument had not been tampered with it would be in perfect working order. He had heard the Brazilian use it a dozen times during the day. The next thing was to get to it.

The four guards at the four entrances presented no difficulty. They would not know that he was in the office. But he had first to get out of his suite of rooms. He remembered the words of the doctor.

There was Calles to attend to his wants. If only the stolid South American had not gone to sleep somewhere.

Hastily he ripped loose the telephone, jerking the instrument free from the box. He cleared up all signs of his attempt to connect the thing, hiding all but the instrument itself in the clothes closet.

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 5

With the paper knife he had purloined from a writing desk in the lounge, and which he had found so useful in stripping the wires, he now painfully sawed the silken covered wires off at the base of the phone.

The receiver and the paper knife he put in the closet. The pedestal and mouthpiece of the instrument he swung experimentally through the air, judging its weight to be four or five pounds.

Then he got into bed, covering himself and the blunt implement with the top bedding. Arranging things to his satisfaction, he rang the bell violently. After a space he heard the footsteps of Calles coming along the corridor.

"Well, *señor*," said the man's heavy voice through the door, "you weesh something?"

"Come in," called Martin weakly from the bed.

The door was flung widely open. Then Calles entered the room. What suspicion he might have entertained was dissipated by the light and by the sight of his prisoner in bed. He halted near the door and looked at Martin inquiringly.

"I think I've taken with the cramps," said Martin gaspingly. "Get me a drink, please. A stiff one."

Calles nodded and withdrew, locking the door after him. Martin lay quiescent until he returned, a bottle and a small glass on a little tray. Calles placed the tray on a little table beside the bed and stepped back to leave.

"Pour me a drink and hand it to me, please," requested Martin.

Unsuspectingly the big man did so. When he approached the bed Martin merely raised his head a trifle. Perforce, Calles bent over to hold the glass to his lips. Martin drank and then clumsily turned his head, knocking the little tumbler from the other's hand.

It fell to the floor beside the bed and Calles bent over to pick it up. Instantly Martin brought his right hand across the bed in a great arc, the dismantled telephone securely gripped by the mouthpiece. The base of the instrument crashed against the back of Calles's skull with a sickening crunch, and the man collapsed.

Martin leaped out of bed and closed the door. Quickly he examined his victim. It appeared as though he had killed the man. He wasted no time in regrets, but trussed the fellow up so that he could not get free in case he regained consciousness.

For this purpose he used parts of the wire which had failed him in another manner. Rolling the inert form under the bed, he slipped out into the corridor.

He wasted no time in making his way to the office of the building. Fortunately he would not be in sight of any guard at the entrances. Finding his way into the office, he switched on the lights and located the phone. Swiftly he grabbed it up and held the receiver to his ear.

He could have screamed with despair. This instrument, also, was dead.

Fool that he had been to expect Dax to leave the possibility of communication within his power. Of course, the Brazilian had a master switch somewhere and had cut off the instruments all over the house. That was the reason his own phone had been dead. There was nothing for it but to hunt for this cutoff. And he had no unlimited time.

Swiftly his eyes followed the telephone cord from the desk to the wall and up to the ceiling along a door casing. He must find that cutoff before Dax returned or before there was a possible interference on the part of any of the man's hirelings.

It seemed that the wire went through the ceiling. It did not go toward the outside wall of the building. This was the east wing. If the wire led up to the second floor it led into that part of the building which had been locked against his explorations when he had been a tenant of the second floor.

He ransacked the desk for keys. He was desperate now. Finding no keys which might admit him to the locked rooms upstairs—the abandoned operating rooms—he cast about for a wrecking tool of some sort. There was nothing of a suitable size.

For such a large establishment this place was appallingly short of weapons. He was forced to fall back on the paper knife and the mutilated telephone.

Having forgotten whether or not the

hinges of the door upstairs were visible, he made his way to the second floor to find out. Through the dark he moved like a cat, having taken off his shoes when he went back for the paper knife in his rooms. Calles had not moved.

"I've got to make good now," he assured himself tersely. "God help us if I don't."

To his surprise when he reached the east wing on the second floor he found the corridor door unlocked. Noiselessly he turned the knob and passed into the forbidden wing.

He stole along close to the wall as he endeavored to estimate the distance he must go in order to be opposite or, rather, outside the room just above the office downstairs.

And then a ray of light along the floor halted him. It came from beneath the door of the old operating room. For a long moment he stood there, leaning against the wall with a telephone in one hand and a delicate paper knife in the other.

This light meant that somebody was here before him. It meant, doubtless, that the house was not as deserted as it seemed. It meant that his last plan had gone utterly awry. It meant—it meant the end of the world.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE GENT AT THE KEYHOLE

FINALLY he roused himself and advanced cautiously. At least he could listen, could peep through the keyhole and learn what was in that chamber. Perhaps the telephone wires did not lead into that room after all. He tried to remember where they had led into the building.

God knew he stared from all the upper windows long enough to have noted every twig on the denuded trees and every brown spot on the ground where the snow had melted. But he could remember nothing. His mind functioned no better than that of a ten-year-old child.

At least it was a good joke on Dr. Dax who thought he had captured a brilliant cohort.

He stooped and peered through the keyhole. And then he knew that he was walking in a nightmare.

Under the glare of an operating light on a glistening white operating table stood a dictaphone. A cylinder was on it and a man stood beside the table with a pair of receivers clamped to his head.

At his feet was an opened egg crate, and the crate was packed with dictaphone records. The man was the chap of the daily morning egg delivery. It was Redding, or so Calles had once called him. Eggs were not eggs at all.

But this, *outré* as it all was, was the most natural thing about the room. Beyond Redding, against the far wall leaned a long, padded case. It looked like a coffin without a top. And in this case was the body of a Chinese.

To the right, just within the range of Martin's eye, was another case identical to the first. And in this case reposed the body of a South American Indian. To the left of the first case was a third one, and herein was the body of a negro.

The hands of each body were folded across the breast; each face was set and rigid. There was a ghastly similarity between them, the significance of which did not dawn on Martin at once.

It was worse than a morgue. It was like coming upon a group of life-size figures from the National Museum, selected at random and brought together in one bizarre company. And Redding calmly operating a dictaphone, as oblivious to the weird crew as though he were alone.

This was too much for the nerves of the overwrought newspaper reporter. He sagged against the door, all control over his muscles gone. And the door gave before him. It had not been tightly fastened.

It opened and he fell forward into the brilliantly lighted chamber, his telephone bumping heavily against the floor. This made the nightmare complete.

A limp and wild-eyed young man attired in the height of fashion, a useless telephone in one hand and a fragile paper knife in the other, had come to join the company.

Redding jerked off the head phones and

wheeled sharply about as he both felt and heard the impact against the floor. The expression on his face was so awful that Martin rolled into a convulsive ball and sprang erect.

He hurled the telephone full at Redding as he arose to leap upon the man in self-defense.

It was all over now. The only thing that remained was to die fighting. And it took nerve to fight in such a room as this. For, now that he was inside the chamber, he observed more coffin cases leaning against the walls, placed at regular intervals about the barren white room. And in each case was the body of a human being.

Each face was set and rigid; each pair of hands folded across the breast; each pair of eyes staring glassily straight ahead. By a disturbing arrangement of the cases, every pair of these glassy eyes were focused on the table in the center of the room.

Redding dodged the hurled telephone, and the instrument crashed against the opposite wall close to the Chinese's head. Not a member of that ghastly crew blinked an eye. They continued to stare straight before them.

The expression on Redding's face changed swiftly to one of relief as he noted the identity of the newcomer.

"Wait!" he cried vehemently. "Don't—"

Martin shut off his words by closing fiercely with him. To protect his very life, Redding was forced to grapple. They toppled to the floor, wrapped in each other's embrace.

Like an eel, Redding squirmed his head out from under the reporter's arm, rubbing his features against the other's coat as he did so. He pinioned Martin's wrist, the hand which held the paper knife, to the floor as he panted for breath.

"Lie still, you berserk young fool!" he gasped. "You'll arouse the household, and then there will be a pretty mess."

The significance of the words was lost on Martin. He must silence Redding at all costs. He writhed about and reached with his free hand for the other's throat, and they lay face to face on the floor. The reporter's grip relaxed completely.

His eyes started in their sockets. For he was staring at the features of Philip MacCray. Smeared considerably by the effect of Martin's coat upon the carefully applied make-up, but, nevertheless, the familiar physiognomy of the detective from Chicago.

"MacCray!" whispered Martin weakly. "MacCray? Is it really you?"

"It is," grunted the other, a trifle sourly. "You're too impetuous."

"What on earth are you doing in this—this morgue?"

"This?" indicated MacCray, gesturing toward the ten or twelve cases around the wall. "Does this place give you the willies? It is merely the private museum of Dr. Dax. These sleepers are his choice subjects. Note the expression on each face. Queer lot, aren't they? There's one empty case. Must have been Hollisworth's."

Martin looked. And the significance which he had missed before now made him shudder. Each and every face wore the expression of Dr. Dax. Subjugated so long by their master's will, they had come to look like him. It was horrible.

"Look them over," suggested MacCray, "while I finish with these records. All but those three are white people. There are two women in the bunch. A motley gathering—poor devils!"

Martin paled at the mention of women. He thought of Celia, who lay in the same sort of trance downstairs.

"Don't waste time on that stuff," he gasped out. "Tell me what you are doing here. I—I thought you were a fellow named Redding. I thought you were in the employ of Dax."

"I am," admitted MacCray. "I am slowly going over the entire place for information on this hypnotist."

"But—but, how did you get into his confidence?"

"I'm not. There really is a fellow named Redding. He has been locked up since last Thursday morning. I am merely holding down his job for him.

"He was a crook who pulled off a few high class burglaries for the dear doctor. He knew little enough, so I had to take his job to learn more. I knew you were here,

but I hadn't found the opportunity to see you."

"Did you know that—that Celia—"

MacCray eyed him pityingly.

"Yes," he said sympathetically. "I know about her."

"And—and Cavassier?"

MacCray nodded. "As soon as I finish ransacking Dax's effects for more dope on him this whole outfit will be pinched. I expect we will raid the establishment the latter part of this week."

"That will be too late," groaned Martin.

The detective whirled on him sharply.

"What do you mean?" he snapped out bruskly.

"Listen and I will tell you. I must hurry before Dax comes back. To-morrow he plans to assassinate the President and put his hypnotic subject, Jonathan Rookes, as head of the United States."

"Ah!" exclaimed MacCray. "At last my case is complete. Give me the details quickly."

Hurriedly Martin poured out his story. In terse, searing phrases he outlined the diabolical scheme. From this he went back to his own experiences, telling MacCray all that had happened to him since they had parted that Sunday morning at the emergency hospital.

He had not completed this part of his narrative when the rustling sound of many garments filled the room, carrying above his low voice. He broke off and looked up around quickly.

Before his startled eyes he saw one of the women, a Spanish type she was, stiffly stepping forth from her case. With the jerky movements of a puppet, eyes staring straight ahead, a slow smile fixing upon her frozen features, she began to dance.

Around the two spellbound men near the operating table she swayed in a ghastly travesty of a dance of old Spain. And the occupants of all the other cases bent forward and unfolded their arms.

In perfect unison they applauded the dance by slowly clapping their stiff hands. It was the most appalling and nerve-racking scene Martin had ever witnessed. It was more than ghastly; it was unbearable.

"It seems," murmured MacCray, and even the dauntless little detective's voice trembled slightly, "that we are discovered."

CHAPTER LIX

A DIRE THREAT

MARTIN stared slowly from the figure of the somnambulistic dancer to the applauding members of that weird circle. In his wide eyes there was no expression save that of lethargic revulsion.

One horror had succeeded another with such unfailing regularity and such increasing malignancy that this final grotesquerie merely left him numb. He could not speak, he could not move, he could not cry out.

There was a limit to his reactions; he was incapable of new emotion. This crowning saturnalia of madness simply paralyzed him. He gripped the edge of the operating table and stared dumbly.

MacCray was the first to recover. He gripped Martin's arm fiercely and shook the reporter.

"Dax has returned," he whispered tersely. "But these subjects in themselves are harmless; they see nothing. If Dax has merely discovered your escape from your room and suspects your presence up here there is a chance of escape before he gets here."

Martin shuddered out of his dazed state. He looked from his companion toward the open door.

"Too late," he murmured. "I can feel him coming nearer. See! The hall lights go on! He is at the end of the corridor."

"Redding has no business here," went on MacCray. "I must not be found in this room. You will have to shake yourself together and stand the brunt of his displeasure. You must get him away from this chamber. I'm counting on you, Martin."

He did not wait for an answer, but turned and let his sharp eyes dart swiftly around the barren room. The windows were closed and locked. The second door of the chamber, which led into a surgeon's lavatory, was also locked. They were in a

perfect trap. But MacCray was resourceful.

He sped on tiptoe past the jerking figure of the dancing woman and approached the empty casket. Without pausing, he stepped into it and assumed the semiupright posture of the other spectators of the hideous dance.

His face set itself in a hard mask, his eyes glittered straight before him, and he stiffly clapped his hands in unison with the others. It was the most daring and superb bit of acting Martin had ever seen.

But would it work? Would not Dax remember there was one empty case in this room? Could MacCray succeed in his mad rôle? And the answer was, only if Martin aided him. And the young man, desperate and half mad himself, realizing that he might now expect any sort of hellish treatment at the hands of the Brazilian, rose to the emergency.

He rose to such a height of mad efficiency that the clapping MacCray nearly fell back in his case with astonishment.

Martin leaped forward and embraced the dancing subject. Grasping her unyielding waist firmly, he joined her in the grotesque measure. It was like dancing with a corpse, but Martin thought of the rigid state of Celia, and tried to think it was she in his arms.

At that, the woman would not have been so ghastly a companion had it not been for that awful cataleptic state and that fixed smile which was so like Dr. Dax's expression. Martin stilled his quivering muscles and steeled his quivering emotions.

To the horrid beating of dully clapping hands he danced with the dignity of a Spanish grandee. It was a moment of sheer horror that had the element of the ridiculous. It was the inferno of a mad Dante, the delirium of a diseased mind.

Upon this bizarre scene Dr. Dax appeared in the doorway to cast his eye. His body was tense with visible effort, his brow was drawn with the agony of directing the group action of his hypnotic puppets.

He was hatless, but he still wore his topcoat. In that awfully magnetic left hand of his was a familiar piece of electric drop cord. He halted in the doorway and started with amazement. Instantly all the subjects became immobile, ceasing their movements simultaneously in an arrested position, like the figures in a halted motion picture.

MacCray, his eyes fixed glassily on the subject in the case directly across the room from him, was just a fraction of a second behind the rest.

Martin released the stiffened figure of the Spanish dancer and stepped back. He bowed and thanked her courteously for the dance. Then he glared at the man in the doorway.

"Well?" he demanded angrily. "What do you want?"

Dr. Dax stared for a long moment. Then the irony of the situation struck him. The audacity and sheer contumely of the reporter had its effect. He lost his sinister attitude and laughed aloud. In his peculiar way Dax had a sense of humor.

"Undoubtedly, Señor Martin," he chuckled, "you have the nerve and the brazenness of the devil himself. Rather, you have no nerves at all. And I had expected to find you in a state of collapse! Each passing day proves to me what a jewel I have found in you."

Martin shrugged his shoulders as he advanced.

"I see you have been in my rooms," he commented in a hard voice. "You found the body of Calles, of course. I guess the jig is up."

Dax favored him with a brilliant smile.

"You are most industrious," he said. "What were you doing here? Tracing the telephone wiring, constructing a sending set, or merely listening to those interesting records?"

"I was trying to get word to the police, and you damn well know it," Martin said harshly.

Dax merely made a deprecatory gesture at his tone.

"Did you succeed?" he asked.

"You know better than to ask such a question," Martin grated. "Well? What are you going to do about it?"

The Brazilian glanced swiftly about the room before he answered. Martin experienced a cold chill as the man's eyes flitted

over the part of the room where MacCray was carrying out his ghastly pantomime.

He drew Dax's attention back to himself as he walked over and picked up the telephone which lay on the floor beside the cabinet which held the Chinese subject. The paper knife he slipped into his breast pocket.

"You have been very industrious during my absence," Dax's voice broke the silence. "Idleness does not sit well on you."

"No," agreed Martin heavily. "It doesn't. Call your guards. I surrender."

"Certainly," agreed Dax calmly. "But there is no need to call any attendants. The jig, as you term it, is not quite up. Are you ready to return to the first floor?"

Martin answered this by striding boldly out into the corridor. He controlled his nerves with an iron will as he saw Dax frown and tense his body. That slender left hand swept out in an embracing gesture.

The rustling sound indicated that the human puppets were settling back in their cases. He held his breath painfully as he waited for an indication that MacCray was discovered. But none came. Dax switched off the lights and closed the door.

"Let us go, *señor*," he said courteously. "Perhaps the poor Calles is sufficiently revived to make a statement."

"He isn't dead?"

"Not quite. He is a bull from the South American pampas."

"I'm glad," said Martin in relief. "I didn't mean to hit him so hard."

"Perhaps you should have struck a little harder," said Dax in grim significance that was lost on Martin.

"I am not in your class," returned the latter shortly.

"You will swallow all your insults, my friend," Dax assured him softly. "To the lounge, please."

In the main corridor on the first floor a hard-faced guard relieved Martin of his telephone. Silently the reporter followed to the Sybaritic lounging room.

Here, Dax motioned him to a seat and slowly removed his topcoat. Offering Martin a cigar which was refused, he selected and lighted a choice panetela. Settling back in his chair, he considered his recalcitrant prisoner thoughtfully.

Martin was content to have him spend all the time he desired; it would serve to keep him away from the operating room that much longer.

Finally Dax spoke:

"You are the strangest young man I have ever met," he vouchsafed reflectively. "I must confess that I do not quite understand you."

"You are not the most ordinary person I have ever encountered myself," rejoined Martin sardonically.

"No," agreed Dax, nodding. "No, I suppose not. But I wish to discuss you, not myself. I cannot understand how you have so thoroughly resisted my efforts to hypnotize you. You simply cannot be the normal young man you seem.

"You have proven conclusively that your determination and courage are insurmountable. It must have taken you all day to rig up that telephone system in your room. Fortunate for me that I had the foresight to cut off the line elsewhere, was it not?

"And then your escape from Calles, while simple, was sheer genius. I am confident that if Celia had not been—as she is—an anchoring chain for you, that you would have found means to overpower the necessary armed guards and escaped.

"You see, I give you credit for being able to do what no other has yet done—escape from me. That is, unless you consider Hollisworth's an escape. And you are to be taken in account there.

"I have told you a great deal, while I have asked nothing. Do you mind telling me just how you managed all this? I'd like to hear your version of the Hollisworth affair now, also.

"Come, you have puzzled me and you have almost confounded me. I admit it to you. Is not this a delicious sop to your pride and ability? Suppose you tell me about it now? There must be no secrets between us in the days to come."

Martin stared at the speaker hatefully. He was forced to summon all of his willpower to resist the impulse to talk. He knew that Dax was exerting his mental in-

fluence in this different manner, and the knowledge made him hate the man the more intensely.

"I've nothing to tell you," he declared tersely.

Dax looked faintly disappointed. Then, after a bit, he shrugged.

"Very well," he murmured smoothly. "In your present frame of mind you are not to be censured for your angry attitude. Frustration and disappointment are maddening things. By to-morrow night—to-night, I should say—I hope to find you in a more amiable mood. If not—"

He paused and glanced toward the little room where Celia lay entranced. Then he looked back at Martin. His brow became dark with fury held in check.

A wave of such malignance, such sinister ire smote the young man like a withering blast that he gasped for breath.

"If not," Dax continued, "you will rue the day as long as you live."

"Then you do not intend to kill me?"

"After your display of wit, courage, and ability to-night? Most certainly not, my energetic friend! But do not pride yourself on a victory of any sort over me.

"If you do not bend to my will—if you do not accept your fate without another single attempt to elude or evade me—if I catch you in one more effort to do other than as I bid you—*I will make that girl yonder a gibbering idiot.*"

CHAPTER LX

THE GIFT FROM DAX

MARTIN sat as if turned to stone. The psychic influence of the hypnotist was almost insufferable. He felt stifled, overwhelmed. And the voice of doom rang in his ears.

He understood that Dax had delivered an ultimatum. The fiend was as inexorable as grim fate itself. If MacCray failed him now—

"It is almost morning," Dax broke the oppressive silence. "You may go to your quarters."

He tapped his triangle smartly. Two armed attendants entered.

"Conduct this gentleman to his apartment," directed Dax harshly. "Place an extra guard outside his windows, handcuff him to his bed, double the guard in the corridor, and look in at him every thirty minutes. If he makes the least suspicious move report the matter to me at once. That is all."

And that was all. A very bitter remainder of the night Martin spent. He believed he would have gone mad if there had not been MacCray to think about and to pin hopes upon. Yet, he was tortured by thoughts of the detective.

Suppose Redding were missed from his quarters on the first floor? Suppose Dax returned to the east wing upstairs and discovered the detective before he could find means of escape?

What if the Brazilian had known MacCray to be there all the time and had merely played with Martin, allowing him to believe that the pitiful ruse had succeeded? The demon was quite capable of this.

The young man could not sleep, naturally. The opening of the door every thirty minutes was enough to disturb him without considering the misery of his thoughts.

He could still feel the clammy touch of the unfortunate woman upstairs who had fallen into the hypnotist's clutches at some past date, and he shuddered with loathing. Then, following a logical chain of thought, he remembered Celia who was in the same trancelike state. The hot tears welled in his eyes. She, poor girl, was in danger of a worse fate.

How could a father be so diabolical as to condemn his own flesh and blood to idiocy for control of a thousand earths?

At nine o'clock two guards entered his bedroom and unfettered him. One of them directed him to wash and dress himself. Briefly he was informed that he was not to breakfast in his own quarters as usual. He was to join Dr. Dax this morning. It was useless to object.

He attired himself in the same garments he had worn the day before. Listlessly he followed the man who led him to Dax's suite of rooms.

It was a handsome breakfast room in which he found himself. The table was

laid for two. An armed guard stood at the door, and a silent servant was ministering to the table.

Dr. Dax came out of his dressing room and greeted Martin cheerily. He was in the best of spirits this morning; his dark mood of the preceding night had quite disappeared. His wit was sparkling and sardonic, his manner almost gay.

Bidden, Martin sat down opposite his hated host and fastened haggard eyes on the man. He wondered if he could pick up a table knife and thrust it into the throat of his Nemesis before Dax could exert his hypnotic power or before the guard at the door could shoot him down. He did not try, remembering the penalty of failure.

If he was aware of these murderous thoughts, Dr. Dax gave no sign. He was the perfect host, charming in his manner. It might have been a social affair instead of a breakfast in Hades, if one judged by his manner.

He chided his guest upon his lack of appetite, eating his own food with zest. But Martin merely sat there woodenly. He could not have choked down a morsel. He would rather have died than to have eaten with the inhuman fiend.

Finally the agony was over. Dax, still in the gayest of spirits, consulted his watch. He arose and stepped to a walnut cabinet. He unlocked the case and took out a bulky object. This he brought back to the table, and Martin saw that it was a black leather case.

"It is eleven o'clock," smiled Dax. "I have an engagement within the next three hours, so I cannot remain in your vivacious company. This evening I shall make amends for tearing myself away now. This is a little gift for you to while away the hours while I am gone.

"I am permitting you the freedom again to-day which you rightfully forfeited last night. Your actions within this building shall not be interfered with. Am I not a generous victor? I remind you of nothing. You are a free moral agent.

"I must now bid you good morning, Señor Martin. I wish you a very pleasant day."

As Martin did not offer to take the black case, he handed it to the guard and motioned for the young man to leave the apartment. Martin followed the attendant dumbly along the corridor.

The man conducted him to the lounge and placed the leather case on the writing desk beside the morning papers. He bowed silently and withdrew.

As soon as he found himself alone Martin roused from his stupor and went in to gaze upon the lifeless Celia. She slumbered on in that deathlike state, undisturbed by the black cloud which hovered over her mind, imperturbed by the swirling emotions of which she was the vortex.

As he gazed upon her cold features from which all the light and life of her delightful personality had fled Martin yielded to ignominious defeat. If MacCray had failed, it would be folly to struggle longer.

The forlorn lover bent over and reverentially kissed that cold, pallid forehead. Then he slowly returned to the lounge. Here, his eye fell on that ominous black case.

He found it to contain a beautiful pair of powerful field glasses. For a space he stared stupidly at the queer gift, at a loss to understand the meaning.

Then the words of Dr. Dax came back to him: "I am permitting you the freedom of the house—I wish you a very pleasant day—a gift to while away the hours while I am gone." Field glasses! The freedom of the house. One did not use binoculars indoors. Then, what was he to do with the instrument?

The subtlety of Dax's irony struck him full force. He had been provided with the means of watching the crashing of the presidential airplane. What refined torture! What sublime confidence! And yet, was it meant for torture?

Dax had not waited to gloat over him as he opened the gift and realized its significance. The present of this field glass had been nothing less than a gesture of utter confidence.

Was it or was it not misplaced? Martin's thoughts raced like mad. He was afraid to attempt to force an entrance into the room of the hypnotic subjects to look for MacCray. Because of Celia he could do nothing now except wait.

He had done all that a human man could do. In a growing panic he hastily ran through the newspapers. He found what he sought—a detailed account of the day's program. This he devoured avidly.

There was to be a parade from the White House down Pennsylvania Avenue and thence to the aviation field. There were to be speeches and the christening of the giant plane. At two o'clock Major Rodchell was to take the President up for a flight over the city, a small American flag flying from the wheel truck.

There was a great deal more to the account, cuts of various personages and of the new plane, descriptions of the new fleet of airships to be built of which the Icarus I was the first.

CHAPTER LXI

THE STRIKING HAND

LONG before two o'clock Martin was in the southernmost window on the third floor of the sanatorium. Here, because of the elevation of both building and hill, he had a magnificent view of the Potomac River and the terrain beyond.

With his powerful glass he swept the country which spread out before him. Analostan Island was brought as close as Georgetown was to the naked eye.

He could see the Francis Scott Key Bridge which crossed the river to the Virginia shore from the foot of Thirty-Fifth Street.

As his binoculars swept onward over the country he could see Fort Myer, Arlington Cemetery, and, to the east, the three vast skeleton towers of the Naval Radio Station. But the aviation field itself was not visible; it was too low and too close to the river. The city itself intervened.

The great building was still. Dax had long since departed to be on hand at the aviation field to see that his plans did not miscarry.

There were guards calmly walking back and forth across the grounds below, but to all this Martin was oblivious. He remained at his aerie and watched the southern sky.

The long minutes passed while he endured a sweat of agony. In his mind's eye he could see the aviation field. Imagination peopled the grounds with crowds who had turned out for a gala day.

There would be soldiers from the fort—a parade of admirals and rear-admirals in their braided uniforms and their fore-and-aft dress hats—pomp and fuss and bustle—the marine band playing a symphonic medley—expectancy—excitement. And at last the arrival of the presidential party. The band would swing into a national air.

There would be speeches. Perhaps the President himself would make a brief address before the microphone and to the crowd. Martin had forgotten exactly what the papers had stated.

Cameras would click merrily, various news reel men would be grinding away as they made motion pictures of the day's event. Major Rodchell would now be standing beside his new plane while a swarm of mechanics went over the machine for a last inspection.

God! Why did they not turn on that sinister, elegant figure of the Brazilian who was in the crowd? Could they not feel the element of deadliness and evil in his baneful smile? The danger to the person of the President lay not in mechanical imperfections.

Blindly the fussing and stiff-necked officials of the day would be herding the President toward the airplane—the removal of his frock coat and silk hat and the donning of jacket and helmet of the aviator—smiles and salutations—contact—the sudden roaring of a powerful motor as the guileless major warmed it up—the take-off amid cheers and the playing of the band.

And over all the gay scene the hand of horror was stretching, overshadowing the sun with the presagement of catastrophe, its awful talons reaching out after that rising plane unseen, unheard, and unsuspected.

Ah! One, two, three army planes took to the air. Martin trained his binoculars on them frenziedly. One after the other he examined them. And he breathed in momentary relief. No flag fluttered from any of them; there were only the regulation United States markings.

A fourth plane took the air. He cried

aloud in his emotion. He focused his glass quickly on this last man-made bird, and his breath caught in his throat. And American flag whipped in the wind below the fuselage. The program had been strictly adhered to.

Was Major Rodchell the pilot of that ship, or had MacCray succeeded in forestalling the murderous plan? This was the last hope.

The moments passed as the machine spiraled higher and higher, becoming a mere speck even through the powerful binoculars. It flew easily and steadily. There was nothing to do save watch—and pray.

And even as he watched the plane swerved and dipped sharply. Something had happened to the controls. Dax had extended his mind across space and— But, no! The machine was descending swiftly, but it was not falling. It veered wildly and flew an erratic course, but it was dropping to the ground right side up.

How many thousand people were holding their breaths in suspense at the eccentric action of the plane? Surely the fact that something was wrong was not lost on the watching multitude.

Faintly the roar of the exhaust came to Martin's ear. At least the engine had not been shut off. Yes, it had—no—yes— It was alternately roaring and silent. What did this portend?

It was over the river now. It could not have been two thousand feet above the glinting, mirroring surface of the water. Martin could make out two figures in the cockpit, but he could tell nothing of their actions because of the erratic movement of the ship.

The perspiration was pouring from every pore of his body. Sweat trickled down between his eyes and befogged the lenses of the field glass. Frantically he wiped them and mopped the sweat from his brow.

When he sought for the plane again, it was gone. He thrust his head out between the bars of his prison and searched for it with naked eye. Ah! There it was, just over the Washington Monument, flying now in dizzy circles as it spiraled toward the ground. He clapped the binoculars to his eyes.

The great plane was lower than the pyramid which capped the tall obelisk with its fifty-five-foot hat. The plane was now just a few hundred feet from the ground, alternately appearing and disappearing as it circled the huge shaft.

What, in the name of God, was the pilot trying to do?

The plane was perilously close to the trees and buildings which intervened. When it dropped below these obstructions it would be lost to his sight. But it was coming to the ground in safety.

And then, before he could draw his breath, the machine banked sharply in one of its erratic circles. It tilted over on its side, at right angles to the earth like a flying insect that had suddenly lost one of its wings, and headed straight toward the massive pile of masonry.

Before his horrified eyes it crashed full into the side of the monument a good three hundred feet above the earth.

It seemed to hang for an instant against the white marble of the huge shaft as though fused to the stone. Then it burst into a mass of flames and dropped like a meteor to earth.

And to the straining ears of the man at the window came the faint echo of that terrific crash against the front of the unyielding obelisk which had been erected to the memory of the first President.

Martin flung the binoculars from him and staggered back. He crossed his arms before his face as if to blot out that terrible vision which was now limned indelibly on the tablets of memory.

The country was now in the grip of a madman; it would only be a matter of time. MacCray had failed. *MacCray had failed!*

And Martin groaned aloud in despair.

CHAPTER LXII

LIFTING SHADOWS

HOW long it was before he came to himself and turned leaden feet toward the stairs Fred Martin never knew. He was scarcely conscious of descending to the first floor.

In his stricken condition, he wandered

aimlessly through the building, oblivious to his surroundings, uncertain of his destination. He did not fully rouse from his stupor until he found himself standing before the draperies which hung before the entrance to the chamber of Celia.

He drew a long, sobbing breath and parted the curtains. Miserably he switched on the light and entered to feast his moody eyes upon that still form that was so rigid, so cold, so utterly in the keeping of a mad father.

What would become of them now? What would be the end of Celia and himself?

He cherished no great hopes for the future. He understood too well that Dr. Dax would never free Celia from his spell. She was to be the bond which forever shackled Martin to his side. Life, henceforth, would be a nightmare of existence.

It would be a round of terror, of hope deferred, of awful loathing, while he fetched and carried at the bidding of the master, performing deeds of execrable vileness, delivering himself into bondage in the hopeless task of releasing Celia from mental slavery.

Dared he hope for anything at the hands of the mad Brazilian? He knew better. Would Celia care to live under such intolerable conditions as would always exist until the death of herself—or her maniacal father?

Was it not better to die now than to wait for nothing? Why not put himself and Celia forever beyond the reach of her diabolical parent?

This thought, instead of shocking him, was like a beacon through the dark. He more than toyed with it; he embraced it eagerly.

Such a reaction to the idea of self-destruction which was generally repulsive to the normal mind should have warned him that he was treading close to the borderline of insanity. But all Martin could see was that here was a positive solution to his very heavy problem.

He felt about his person and found the slender little paper knife still in his breast pocket. In his supreme egoism, or confidence, Dax had not even had him searched. But this fact did not rankle now.

Fascinated by the thought of liberation through the portals of death, he drew the knife from his pocket and examined it.

True, it was a fragile affair, but it was a metal knife. It was flat and thin, of nickeled steel. It had no edge, but it had a point. Properly used, it would make a deadly weapon.

Driven carefully between the ribs, it could reach the heart without snapping. With its flat, black handle of slightly thicker metal and enamel filigree it was more like a toy than a weapon, but it had a point—

He approached the couch and fell to his knees on the soft folds of drapery which spread out for the space of a foot or two on the floor.

"Celia! Celia, I love you," he whispered brokenly. "What must I do? Shall we die, beloved? It seems the only way."

He clasped her folded hands in a fierce grip. Her fingers gave before his pressure. The arm nearer him moved at this disturbance and slid down off her breast, off the couch, and hung toward the floor.

In the same instant he realized that her flesh was no longer cold and hard. Startled, he arose and leaned over her. And now he saw that her lips were no longer blue. Her bosom rose and fell ever so slightly, and there was the faintest touch of color in her cheeks.

She was breathing! Trembling with hope, he jerked aside the white robe which covered her flesh and placed his ear against her breast. Joy of joys, her heart was beating! Faintly, but perceptibly, that stilled organ had resumed the duty interrupted by the commands of Dr. Dax.

Celia was no longer in a state of suspended animation. Miraculously she had passed from that deathlike trance into perfectly normal slumber. How and why he did not know. He cared not! The mere fact itself was sufficient.

"Celia! Celia!" he called in her ear.

Gently he shook her, then roughly. He raised her in his arms, his joy knowing no bounds as her body relaxed softly and naturally. Pillowing her head against his chest, he chafed her arms. He pinched her cheeks until they became rosy.

He worked frantically, fearful lest she slip back into that horrible marble state. And all the while she grew warmer in his arms. Her color deepened, her own olive tinting came slowly back. Her breathing became deep and regular and audible. Ah, the wonder, the joy, the sheer ecstasy of it as she responded to his ministrations.

At last, as if in answer to his anxious whisperings, her lips stirred and her eyelids fluttered. Slowly she opened her eyes and stared unseeingly up into his painfully tense face. That blank gaze frightened him.

"Celia!" he cried in anguish. "Ah, sweetheart!"

At the sound of his voice blessed recognition filled her lustrous eyes. She started in his arms, and then stared hard at him as if she doubted it was he. Her hands gripped him convulsively. Then she relaxed with a little sigh of happiness and relief.

"*Señor*," she murmured faintly. "It is you?"

For answer he embraced her tenderly, resting his cheek against hers. She was content so.

"Celia, you are all right?" he queried solicitously. "My darling, you suffer no ill effects? You have lain here in a trance for God only knows how long."

"Since last night," she whispered reassuringly. "That is all. I am not hurt by the experience. He—he put me to sleep as soon as he brought us to this strange place."

She shuddered slightly at the recollection of that hypnosis. Martin squeezed her fiercely.

"Since last night?" he whispered tenderly. "My poor little girl! That has been almost two weeks ago."

She started up.

"You do not mean it? Oh, my poor father! Where is *he* now?"

"He isn't here just now. He has gone—away for a time. Do you love him very much?"

"Whom? Dr. Dax? Oh, I loathe him! He fills me with such fear. Why do you ask such a question, *señor*? Ah! You speak of my father! Something has happened. What is it? Tell me, I implore you."

A sudden thought struck Martin. Celia had recovered from her trance. There was no longer any need to fear the anger or displeasure of the madman. If he could escape now, taking Celia with him, they would be free—they would be out of his power.

As long as he had this woman with him, and in possession of her faculties, he could defy Dr. Dax. But he must escape and hide Celia in a safe place where her demented parent could never find her.

Then to organize a group of national heads and take the mad Brazilian captive—kill him, if necessary. This was the only way to save the country from the mad genius.

There was much to do, and so little time in which to do it. If he could only convince the right men of the nation's peril! This unexpected respite, this reprieve granted by the recovery of Celia, gave him a new lease.

He could establish a new battleground and wage war against Dax to the death. To the death, yes, even if he lost Celia by alienation. But first he must escape.

"My dear," he said quickly, "let us escape while he is gone. I could not even attempt to leave without you, but now I can take you with me. Where are your clothes? This—this shroud will not do. But, of course, you do not know. Never mind. You can don masculine garments in my room. We must hasten. Oh, come quickly, darling!"

"But my father," she protested. "What has become of him, *señor?*"

Martin looked at her pityingly. Had that shock of surprise that Sunday night in the Kingsley apartment unhinged her mind a trifle?

"Dearest," he murmured soothingly, his eyes dark with pain, "you must have faith in me. You must do as I say. Believe me, it is all for the best. Your father will be taken care of. He—he is rather expert in taking care of himself."

"I know that," Celia replied anxiously. "But he cannot have had such an experience as this before. I—I am afraid that he is in grave danger. Has he not been heard from during these two weeks?

Oh, what if he has fallen into the hands of this—this monster?"

Martin could not credit his ears. Wild though her words, this was hardly the speech of an irrational person. He gripped her shoulders so fiercely that he bruised her.

"Are you trying to say that your father is *not* Dr. Dax?" he demanded, in a choking voice. "After you saw him turn from Debara into Dax that night? Do you mean that they are not the same?"

"No, no," she cried out in horror. "*Madre de Dios! Piensas este hombre es mi padre?* No, no, *señor*, it is not true. My father is Professor Debara. How can you think otherwise?"

Her vehemence, her speech—half English, half Spanish—carried conviction. Surely she would know her own father! And Dr. Dax had certainly not acted like a true parent. Hope indescribable rekindled a flame in the man's breast.

"Thank God!" he cried fervently. "Then, Celia, who on earth is Dr. Dax?"

She looked at him helplessly, her great, dark eyes wide with fright.

"*Pienso está el diablo!*" she whispered.

"You think he is the devil?" he repeated. "I can well believe it. But, come. We must hurry before it is too late."

CHAPTER LXIII

THE MIRACLE

OBEDIENTLY she put her bare feet to the floor and clutched the white robe about her. A wave of tenderness suffused the man. He gathered her up in his arms and carried her toward his own apartment. She should not be forced to place her little feet on the floors trod by Dax and his adherents in their heavy shoes.

He encountered no one in the corridors. It was well for the servants. With this precious bundle in his arms to protect he could have slain any who opposed his way.

He set her down in the bedroom and pointed quickly toward the wardrobe.

"Can you find suitable clothes, dear, or shall I get something out for you?"

"You, if you please," she replied, blushing. "I know naught of men's garments."

Hurriedly Martin laid out linens and a trim looking dark suit. He found a pair of lace shoes which had never been worn—he had had so little time to wear the various articles with which he had been supplied. They looked smaller than the other footwear in the closet. Celia could lace them tightly enough to hold them on.

"Now, make haste," he urged her. "I will wait in the corridor."

She nodded in understanding.

"My poor father!" she sighed, the tears coming to her eyes. "What can have happened to him? He is not in this building, *señor?*"

He shook his head. "I have been all over the place during the time we have been here. We are the only prisoners—"

He broke off as he remembered Cavassier. Hastily, so that she might not see his face, he turned to the door. She sensed something in his attitude.

"*Señor*," she cried out in anguish. "You have thought of something. What is it? What is it you know? In mercy's name, tell me."

"I know nothing, Celia," he said truthfully. "I merely fear."

She regarded him for a long space, one hand gathering her robe at her throat, the other extended appealingly.

"You fear," she whispered at length, "that he is—dead."

"I—I—oh, I hope not! Hurry and dress, dearest. I—we will search for him."

He fairly ran out of the room. Restlessly he paced the corridor while he awaited her. The time seemed interminable, but she opened the door in less than ten minutes. She made a delicious figure of a youth as she stood bashfully before him.

But this was no time for thoughts of dress. He seized her hand and led her toward the rear of the building.

"I have been in every part of the place," he said as they hurried along. "Your father is not on any one of the three floors. Neither is Señora Inez.

"There is only one place that I haven't been. That is the basement. We will go down there to make sure he is not in the sanatorium, and then we must escape. Hasten, Celia! Time presses us."

"Yes, yes," she answered. "I follow you, *señor*."

"Call me Fred," he snapped tersely as he strode down the corridor.

She glanced up at his set jaw and grim face, and thrilled at his manful, fierce expression.

"Yes—Fred," she answered dutifully.

"I must have a gun," he said. "This—" and he exhibited the paper knife—"is a mighty poor weapon."

"How are we to get away—Fred?"

"You will have to put that robe on over those clothes and decoy one of the armed guards into the house where I can jump him. Then, when the coast is clear, we'll make a dash for the garage where there is a car I want.

"I know the grounds—better than any one else around here, I imagine. If we fail to get away we'll have to barricade ourselves in the outbuilding and hold it until the sound of gunfire brings investigation.

"We will see how matters turn out after we make sure about your father. These are the basement stairs. Not too fast from here on as I don't know the way."

They hurried silently down the steps. At the foot of the stairs a massive door barred further progress. It was locked. There was a light over the flight of steps, and Martin switched it on. There on a nail in the door casing hung a key. It fitted the lock.

They opened the door and passed on into the cool dampness of a circular space in the center of the basement. It was dark down here, and Martin turned on the lights as they advanced.

The basement of the sanatorium did not extend out under the wings of the large building. Apparently it was just a great square place which was divided into four large rooms.

One after the other they opened the four doors and examined the chambers of cement with the beams and girders bracing the first floor exposed in their stark nudity overhead.

The first room they looked into was the coal bin, the next was the furnace room, the third was a bountifully stocked larder which was like the reserve stock of a prosperous market and grocery.

Dr. Dax never seemed to do anything halfway. This was a significant sidelight on his efficient character.

The fourth room was merely a storage room in which a heterogeneous litter had accumulated since the days when Dr. Standing had first catered to the whims of rich invalids. This room was filled to overflowing with junk of such range and variety that the term heterogeneity was the only word to describe it satisfactorily.

There seemed to be a narrow aisle cleared along the inner side of the room. When Martin turned on the light and peered down it he could see the corner of the room.

"There's no one in the basement at all," he said slowly. "I'll look in here, but it is useless."

He entered the storeroom and walked along the wall toward the far end. To his surprise, at the corner of the room, the narrow aisle turned with the wall and advanced to a door which was not visible from the other side of the room. Cautiously he made his way forward and tried it.

The barrier opened to his touch. By the casing was a switch. He turned it on. The black space beyond this newly discovered door sprang into being as a corridor which extended out under the west wing of the building.

Celia came up behind him and peered anxiously along that ominous passage. Before venturing into possible danger, Martin cast about him for a weapon of some sort.

The only thing at hand of a suitable size was a long-necked wine bottle of thick dark glass. This he gripped as though it were a club and led the way into the unknown corridor.

They had not advanced more than fifty feet when they observed a massive door of solid oak. They halted and examined it.

There was a small aperture near the top which was crossed by heavy iron bars. A light switch by the bolted door suggested a light for that black space beyond. The man turned it. A prison cell sprang into being.

"My God!" he gasped as he peered

through the bars. "This is a regular dungeon!"

The young woman shuddered as she glanced into the cubicle.

"There is another door on the opposite side, Fred," she said.

Her companion stepped swiftly along until he reached the second door which opened off the other side of the corridor. He snapped on the light and gazed into a larger concrete cell.

A man sat up on the iron bunk against the opposite wall and blinked in the sudden light. Celia uttered a little shriek.

"My father!" she cried out in horror.

CHAPTER LXIV

BEFORE THEY LEFT

MARTIN had difficulty in recognizing the immaculate Professor Debara in that pitiful object. Unkempt, unclean, a two-weeks' growth of beard on his face, half mad, half starved—this was the man Celia claimed as her progenitor. The prisoner looked dully toward the door.

Quickly Martin shot back the bolts and threw wide the heavy barrier. Celia uttered a choking cry which came from her heart and rushed in to the prisoner's side.

The man recognized his daughter in her masculine outfit just before she reached him. He started up with a cry of delight to greet her. There was the clanking of chains and he was jerked back against his bunk.

Martin turned aside as father and daughter embraced. He examined the prison curiously. It was damp and meagerly furnished. Besides the iron bunk there was a plain deal table and a cheap chair in the center of the room. This was all.

He turned his attention to the prisoner. He wasted little time in greeting the professor as he hurriedly examined the man's shackles. However, he did study him sharply. There was no doubt that Debara and Dax were separate individuals. He could see many differences between the two of them now, although, superficially, they resembled each other.

"I am thankful to find you," he said, as another great weight lifted from his mind. "But we must hasten. Tell me how you come to be here while I see about freeing you, professor."

"I have been here since that Sunday night at the gambling casino," replied Debara in a hoarse voice. "When Alexis Cavassier and I got into our car we were overpowered by two men who were waiting there for that purpose. One of them was Dax—as he calls himself.

"We were brought to this place at once. Then Miguel proceeded to my Kingsley apartments where he masqueraded as myself and trapped you and Celia and Señora Inez. I don't think he caught Alvarez—my secretary. We have been kept here ever since.

"I think Inez is in one of these cells down here. I do not know what became of Alexis—we were separated as soon as we were brought into the house.

"I think I was going mad, Señor Martin, when a man who called himself Redding came down here several days ago and told me that he was a friend and bade me to bear my suffering with patience.

"He told me that you and my child were really captives here as Miguel had said, but that you did not suffer as I. He promised aid. Since then I had begun to hope.

"Has he liberated us, *señor?* He seemed a most determined little man. I have been afraid, though—I know Miguel only too well."

"Miguel? You mean Dax?"

Debara nodded.

"Who has the keys to these locks? Do you know where I can find them quickly? Otherwise, it may take hours to release you."

"Miguel carries them in his waistcoat pocket," replied Debara promptly. "You have captured him, of course?"

"We have not," admitted Martin somewhat curtly as he cast about for another means of liberating the chained man.

"He is still at large?" exclaimed the prisoner quickly. "Where is he? If you have not overpowered him we cannot escape. I know his ability."

"If you know so much about him," demanded Martin irritably, "then tell me who the devil he is."

"Alas, *señor,* he is my half-brother," admitted Debara sadly. "His correct name is Miguel Debara. His mother, my father's second wife, was a witch from the Pyrenees."

"*Your brother!*"

The other two exclaimed simultaneously, staring at Debara in disbelief.

"Why, father, I never knew that," Celia cried out. "Oh—oh, the thought is unbearable! It cannot be true!"

"I never told you," replied the Brazilian in sorrow. "I never wanted you to know. I tried to keep him away from you, for I know he has been marked by Satan.

"I had hoped he would be content to go his way as Dr. Dax while I went mine, but all these last years while I have been hoping he has been plotting our ruin.

"He hates all the Debara blood like poison. It was jeering mockery when he chose the name of Dax, making it up of my initials in the reversed order. All his life he has hated me with an unreasoning hatred.

"He drove our father into the grave by his madness. He early developed great magnetic powers which he has increased through the years. Because I was able to resist them it made him hate me the more.

"The Señora Inez knows much about our terrible family history. I have tried to keep it from you. I tell you now because you must know that Miguel must be killed before we will ever be safe. That is why he keeps me chained. God help me, I would kill him if I were free.

"You can imagine my horror when you, Señor Martin, told me that my name had been involved in a murder. The fact that the murdered woman had lately returned from Brazil, the fact that an *attaché* of the Brazilian Embassy made that telephone call, and the fact that I had but one enemy so mischievously malignant in the world let me know at once the answer.

"I knew that Miguel was here in this country and up to some devilment. I could not explain to you, *señor.* I set about tracing Miguel myself. I was trying to find him that night he captured me at the Palace Nocturne.

"He has kept me here, chained to this iron bed. He has come every day to gloat over me and tell me just what he is doing from day to day. He is trying to achieve a vast madness that I cannot explain.

"If it does not culminate in success, I am to bear the brunt of failure. I am to be the sacrifice. Can you wonder that I have been half mad?"

Martin could only gasp at this astounding recital. No one knew better than he what were Dax's plans and how rapidly they were succeeding.

He discarded the empty wine bottle and started hurriedly toward the storeroom in the main basement in search of a better tool to release Debara. He was not two paces from the door of the professor's cell when a man appeared in the entrance. Celia screamed in fright.

Framed between the door casings, head swathed in bloody bandages, his piggish eyes glittering evilly, swayed the massive figure of Calles. Calles! Cerberus, indeed.

Martin had completely forgotten the hulking South American. And here he stood, gripping the door with one mighty hand.

"Ah, Señor Martine," he uttered purringly, ignoring the shackled man and the girl on the iron bunk beyond the reporter. "You are one great explorer, are you not? And last night you try to keel poor Calles so that you can prowl like the tomcat, eh?"

The presence of this venomous giant spelled immediate disaster to their hopes. With one step the Latin could withdraw and slam the heavy cell door shut, bolting them in as fellow prisoners with Debara.

He was a dangerous, lethal entity who was about to sound the death knell on their plans. Martin's mind worked rapidly. Cannily he fell back a step instead of crowding the big man.

"Calles," he said placatingly, "I am sorry I hit you so hard last night. Really I am. I apologize for that nasty lick. Don't look at me like that. Don't touch me!" He fell back another step in panic. "Don't do anything to me. I swear I am sorry—"

The vindictive Calles fell into the emotional trap. The signs of terror were soothing to his brutal soul. Martin's actions and his suggestions had a normal effect on his brutish mind. He chuckled in his throat and smiled evilly upon his victim.

" So you are afraid to die, eh? You want to beg off from Calles now, eh? *El medico* ees not here to protect you now, leetle man. You weel prowl no more, *señor.*"

He took his hand from the door and lurched into the cell. Martin went into a wary crouch, darting his eyes wildly about in search of a means of escape. Slowly, step by step, he retreated before that lumbering advance, whimpering like a child.

He was so obviously in mortal terror that Celia and her father stared at his back in surprise and faint contempt. But Martin had his eyes on the advancing Calles.

He continued to back as he lured the South American into the chamber. And Calles came on slowly, gloatingly, his great fingers crooked and his thick arms outstretched.

At last Martin felt the edge of the table against his back. It halted his retreat toward the iron bunk. At this apparent predicament a vicious grin spread over the hulking Latin's face. He lunged forward in a sudden rush to grasp his prey with greedy, itching fingers.

CHAPTER LXV

THE FIGHT

MARTIN did not move. He seemed paralyzed with fright. Then, at just the right instant, he squatted and gripped the charging Calles by one huge leg. He heaved upward and back against the table.

Calles, unprepared for any resistance—much less a trick like this—shot over Martin's head and over the table, landing on his hands and knees at the feet of the two people sitting on the bunk.

The reporter recovered himself and whirled to face his antagonist across the table.

" Celia!" he snapped out sharply. " Run! Out of this cell and bolt the door! Quick, quick, Celia, before Calles can lock us all in here!"

Debara saw the ruse to which Martin had resorted more quickly than his daughter. He gave her a sharp command and pushed her from the bunk. She darted around the edge of the room toward the door, as she now understood that Martin's panic had not been actual cowardice.

The tricked Calles realized the trap he had fallen into. With a mad bellow he scrambled to his feet and placed one vast hand on the table. He vaulted the piece of furniture in his great haste to reach the door.

But this time he met with a stiff resistance. Martin met him with two wicked body blows which took his breath before the big fellow landed on his feet.

He followed these two blows with himself, leaping upon the unbalanced Calles and bearing him backward across the table. They toppled over in a grotesque somersault to the floor at Debara's feet.

However, Calles now had his arms wrapped about his tricky antagonist who could think so rapidly. He crushed Martin to him in a bearlike hug that made the smaller man gasp from pain. The jar of landing on the floor on their shoulders loosened their respective grips.

Now they writhed about as they fought madly. Calles no longer thought of getting to the door. He had heard it slam shut and the bolts shoot home in their sockets. The only thing left was revenge. He could kill Martin for past and present injustices.

Handholds froze them in a state of immobility, then slipping with the startling suddenness of wrestlers seeking better grips. Their feet lashed out, striking the iron railing of the bunk as they almost rolled under the fixture in their mad scramble.

But the battle was as short as it was furious. Martin was no match for Calles in bull strength. The massive Latin succeeded in rolling uppermost. He gripped his slighter antagonist by the throat and levered himself into a sitting position astride the reporter.

Martin's eardrums roared like Niagara Falls. He heard a rippling noise like rifle

fire. In his weakening state he fancied he heard many strange sounds—the running of many feet on the ground, shouts, the firing of guns—through that surging roar in his head.

The bandages about Calles's head had come undone in that mad fight and were tangled about the pair of them. A strip had settled across his face, completely blinding him.

He pinned Martin against the floor by the throat with his left hand as he raised his right to jerk the bandage from his head. Martin's frantic hand touched the paper knife which was still in his pocket.

He drew it out, writhing over to one side to do so. Gripping it against the floor, he turned the point upward preparatory to striking at the other's body. But Calles saw his peril in time.

He ceased pulling at the bandage about his head and whipped down his fist in one terrible blow. With Martin's head turned on the left side as was his body, his lean jaw was temptingly exposed.

The blow landed squarely on the point of this bone, knocking Martin instantly unconscious. And at the same moment the long-necked wine bottle in the hand of Professor Debara crashed against the sorest and tenderest spot of Señor Calles's throbbing head.

He groaned aloud and sagged forward. Toppling over to the floor, he fell upon the point of the abused paper knife. With its butt against the concrete floor, steadied just long enough by Martin's relaxing fingers, it completely transfixed the bull-like neck of the wild gentleman from the South American pampas. The despised little weapon had vindicated itself.

Frantic with fear, Celia unbarred the door and rushed into the cell. She managed to roll the dead weight from Martin's body and she pillowed his head in her lap. She called him by endearing names, she pleaded with him to speak and tell her what next to do, she exhibited the wildest solicitation over his unconscious state that, had he known, would have driven him mad from rapture.

The rippling noise without ceased, giving way before the rapid marching of many rhythmic feet. And Martin slumbered on. He heard nothing.

CHAPTER LXVI

IN THE PATH OF DUTY

HEN Fred Martin came to his senses he found himself lying on one of the divans in the luxurious lounging room on the first floor.

Over him bent the truculent and crisp face of Philip MacCray. This was sheerest fantasy. MacCray was either imprisoned by Dr. Dax—or dead. He stared up.

"Here he comes," MacCray's voice reached his ears. "That hypo did the work, doctor. You narrowly missed a shattered jaw, young fellow."

"MacCray," Martin uttered thickly. "You—I thought you were dead. Why—where—how—"

"Take it easy, take it easy," counseled the detective, forcing him back. "Here, drink this."

Obediently Martin swallowed the concoction held to his lips. Then he struggled to a sitting position.

"I'm all right," he mumbled thickly. "Lemme up."

Up it was, and he blinked his eyes unbelievingly. The man MacCray had called doctor was a major of the United States Army. An armed infantryman stood at each door of the room which led to the corridors. A commanding officer, a colonel, stood near the foot of the couch.

"What—what the mischief?" spluttered Martin in amazement.

"A troop of soldiers has taken this place," explained MacCray. "This particular spot is now under martial law. The government came to life and took action along with the police department when the presidential airplane crashed."

Martin remembered. He groaned bitterly.

"So they waited until it was too late," he said sadly.

"Too late for Major Rodchell and Lieutenant Tonsey—poor chaps!" said MacCray soberly.

"I don't understand."

The detective indicated the two men in uniform.

"This is Colonel Johnson who took charge of the advance against this place, and this is Major Earles who was at the aviation field. Gentlemen, this is the missing Mr. Martin of whose bravery and nerve I have already told you."

The army surgeon and the colonel saluted Martin gravely.

"I think, Mr. Martin," said Colonel Johnson solemnly, "that you have performed a great service for your country. I have reason to believe that both you and Mr. MacCray will be cited for a Congressional medal."

"But—but, what's it all about?" demanded Martin hopelessly. "What has become of Dr. Dax? I saw that airplane crash against the monument. How—"

MacCray glanced at the army surgeon and inclined his head.

"Dr. Dax," said Earles impressively, "is dead."

"Dead? Who killed him?"

"He died of heart failure at two thirty-five this afternoon."

"Suppose you tell Martin the story, MacCray?" suggested the colonel. "He seems to be all at sea."

"Briefly, it is this," explained the detective in crisp sentences. "You can get the details when we go to headquarters.

"I got away from here safely and, with Clausen, put the story you had told me before the government. You see, I had faith in what you had said. Rodchell was quietly examined, but he laughed to scorn the idea that any living person had a mental hold over him. Poor fellow, he believed it! And they believed him!

"But the police department had enough weight to prevent the President from making that flight. Lieutenant Tonsey, who looks a great deal like the President, was substituted in order to carry out the program. If you saw the crash you saw what happened.

"Poor Tonsey tried to save both their lives. It was the mightiest contest between two men I ever witnessed. But he failed. Both of them were killed instantly.

"And we were on hand to grab Dax the moment the flight was over. It was too late. At the same instant the plane crashed he reeled and fell to the ground before we could touch him.

"When I got to him he was dead. Very queer, wasn't it? That's all.

"We rushed out here and took this place. You have Colonel Johnson instead of the police department to thank. He bagged the entire lot."

The colonel declined any honor, warmly congratulating MacCray and Martin for their share of the work. But Martin was not listening. He was thinking of Dr. Dax. He understood now how Celia had recovered from her trance. It had been after the death of the infernal Brazilian who dominated her sweet spirit.

He thought of the death of the mad genius. Heart failure! Let Major Earles call it that if he wished, but Martin had his own ideas on the subject.

He recalled what Dax had told him about the Hollisworth affair and his headache. He could see vividly the hypnotist throwing every ounce of his vast energy into the body of Major Rodchell as he sought to crash the airplane which carried the pseudo president.

With the dauntless Lieutenant Tonsey fighting to prevent a fatal accident, the great hypnotist must have exerted his tremendous will to the point where he was actually in the plane in spirit. When the machine crashed, killing his subject instantly—the conclusion was obvious to Martin.

He had been too close to the case not to understand much that others would never know. Now that the story was told, now that the horror was lifted, there would be many who would never believe the true facts of the case.

Perhaps it was just as well. It was too wild a tale to give the public. The biggest story of his newspaper career—and he could never write the true facts. He would never attempt to.

Let the world think a dangerous criminal had died of heart failure. There was Dr. Otto Richzig who might have differed with Major Earles's verdict. Richzig delved more into the realm of the psychical, of hypnotism and psychological phenomena.

But why raise the question? It was sufficient that Dr. Dax was dead, that his sinister shadow was lifted. A last crushing weight had rolled from Martin's soul. What difference did it make how the mad Brazilian had died? Perhaps it was heart failure of a sort.

His thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Celia Debara. The soldier at the door presented arms stiffly as the young woman, followed by her father and a rather forlorn-looking Señora Inez, came into the chamber.

She was clad again in her own feminine garments which had been found by the sharp-eyed duenna. The two officers saluted and bowed low. She smiled upon them and held out her two hands to Detective MacCray.

"Señor MacCray," she said fervently. "I can never, never thank you enough for what you have done. My father and I will always rest under an obligation to you."

"*Señorita,*" he answered, bowing, "you are kind to include me in the light of your favor, but I deserve no thanks. All I have done has been in the path of my duty."

She favored him with a look that would have warmed an iceberg. And then she turned her wonderful eyes upon the very sick young man who sat on the divan nursing a swollen jaw.

"Ah, *señor,*" she murmured as she stroked his throbbing head tenderly, her voice throaty with sympathy and love, "I thought I would die until Señor MacCray found us in the basement and assured me that you were not badly injured. Tell me, *mi nena,* do you feel pain?"

Martin raised his head and stared deeply into her lustrous eyes. They widened as he stared, and once again he found himself plunging head over heels into their depths. He caught hold of her hand and pressed it against his heart. As God was his witness he spoke the truth when he said:

"Only here, *señorita.*"

Discreetly all the others withdrew from the chamber, the two officers eying each other wisely. MacCray was the last to leave. He smiled on the pair of lovers from the doorway.

He watched them embrace, their lips meeting in that first delicious kiss. Then he closed the door and glanced at his hands. He shivered distastefully.

"The next time I assume the character of another man," he remarked in disgust, "I'll choose one of a cleaner nature than Redding. Look at my fingernails. Positively filthy! I fear you gentlemen will have to excuse me for several hours. I'll meet you at police headquarters. I haven't had a decent bath in two weeks."

THE END

IN addition to features previously announced your copy of FLYNN'S WEEKLY for March 19 will contain:

"A Study in Hate," by Louise Rice;

"Sometimes They Meet," an amusing short story by Louis Weadock;

"The Piper's Name," which is a sequel to "The Piper Pays," by Joseph Harrington;

"Rubies and Rogues," by Joseph Gollomb;

"The Stolen Handbag," by J. Jefferson Farjeon;

"The Weird Dr. Waite," by Charles Somerville;

"The Wife of Tubal Harge," by W. E. Schutt; and stories and articles by Zeta Rothschild, Harold de Polo, Foxhall Daingerfield, M. E. Ohaver, and others.

William J. Flynn

Eyes like a reptile's gleamed balefully from under his hairless lids

THE VAN HOLBERG TRAGEDY

By Walter Archer Frost

"I WANT YOU TO GET AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS," VAN HOLBERG BURST OUT. "IT'S DRIVEN ME TO SUCH A TERRIBLE PASS THAT I DON'T WANT TO LIVE!"

"YOU see now," Ruggles said in a lowered voice, "why he did not come."

I saw well enough; before us on his bed was all that remained of our former client, Amos Stoecker, whose failure to keep his promise to come to our rooms had made us so anxious that we had gone to his.

Come he could not, for he was dead, and for that reason beyond the reach of the mysterious enemy from whom, in dread, he had fled to Ruggles and me for help.

Amos Stoecker was unquestionably dead. But even the fact of his death was not so shocking as the manner of that death: three hours before he had talked with Ruggles at our rooms and then had appeared highly nervous, Ruggles said, but, for all that, a presentable and upstanding man of not over forty, who had, in all probability, a score of vigorous, worth-while years ahead of him.

Now he was as dead as if he had never been alive at all—apparently every bone in his body had been broken.

"It is as if he had been crushed to pulp by a python," Ruggles said slowly. "It was done on the floor; then the body was picked up and flung here on the bed, landing in exactly the position it now occupies, without Stoecker being able at any time to do anything."

"Yes," I said, "though there's that gun on the table. Loaded, too," I went on, examining it. "He evidently kept it ready and handy."

"All of which shows," Ruggles said, "that Stoecker was murdered by some one from whom he did not expect an attack, or that the murderer came stealthily in on

Stoecker from behind and overpowered him before he could reach his gun.

" There's nothing for us to do here now, Dan. We'd better get out before the police come. Then, too, we've got to remember Van Holberg and Dans, Stoecker's two partners. He said they lived near here, so they may come here any time. He said, too, that they were coming to see me. We'd better get started."

" But, first, tell me—" I began.

" I can tell you very little." Ruggles replied, " except that Stoecker was crushed to death by his murderer's bone breaking arms."

Ruggles said nothing more as we descended the rear stairs of the house, and, by a roundabout way, returned to where we had left our car.

" It was well," he said as we drove back to our rooms, " that we were able to enter the house and to leave it without encountering any of the servants, for they would have given our description to the first policeman who called, and he would have given all he remembered of it to the first detective; there would have been explanations as a result, and explanations take time, and we have no time to lose."

As we opened the door of our vestibule, a card showed on the floor. Ruggles picked it up, glanced closely at it, then handed it to me. I read:

> Dans and I will be at your rooms again at nine thirty to-night. Must see you. Break other engagements!

This had been scrawled by a nervous, muscular hand above the name printed on the card, and that name was Simon Van Holberg. There had been an address, a very lengthy one, but this had been carefully scratched off.

" Simon Van Holberg," I said, keeping my eyes on the card.

" Yes." Ruggles replied. " You remember: Dans and Van Holberg are, or rather were, Stoecker's partners. I am glad they are coming. We should have had to find them, and now they are saving us that delay by coming immediately to us."

" You feel sure that they will keep the appointment?"

" They will if they value their lives."

" What did Stoecker tell you?" I asked. " I was out at police headquarters, you remember, when he came to see you."

" For a man who had so much he desired to say, and needed to say, he said very little, for he was in a nervous, almost disordered condition, so his talk was very difficult to follow; but he said that a curse had been put on him and his four partners for something—he would not say what, and two of the five of them had died mysteriously on the ship that brought them here.

" I asked him where he and the others had been, in what country, but he would not tell me. I assured him that nothing could threaten him in our rooms, and that he could speak out, but he glared around —you know the way men do when they're like that—as if he thought there were people listening all about him.

" I told him then to take his time about making his statement, and advised him to lie down in our extra bedroom and collect himself, stay there all night, and have breakfast with us here in the morning, but he said he'd go back to his rooms, get some sleep if he could, then come back here at nine. Against my advice, he went.

" In this doorway, here, he stood looking at me; he thanked me for listening to him as patiently as I had, and said he was not himself. His two partners dying the way they had, he said, had scared him and Van Holberg and Dans all the way through. And it certainly had scared Stoecker—he was white as chalk and weak as water.

" He told me he expected to die soon; and he was right about that, for death has come to him. Poor Stoecker! It's good he did not know how he was going to die."

Ruggles looked down at the watch on his big-boned wrist. " Half past nine, nearly. Van Holberg and Dans must be on their way here now. I yonder if they're anything like him. I hope they're not so close-mouthed, for it's hard helping a man who won't tell you all he knows of the fix he's got in."

" What was Stoecker like?" I asked. " I mean what nationality?"

" He was a Hollander, I think, though he didn't say so. He spoke perfect English

without any accent, and he generally gave the impression of a man who had lived most of his life in out-of-the-way corners of the world.

"His trouble wasn't the ordinary kind any more than his death was—it will be a long time before I forget how his body looked, there on his bed: like something that had been taken apart then put together wrong."

"It was the worst thing I ever looked at. I hope to God I never see such another one."

"I wonder," Ruggles said, speaking more to himself than to me, "what Van Beeder's body looked like, and Lannebeer's—the two who died on the ship; and I wonder what the body of the next one of the five to die will look like. Never mind. No use borrowing any kind of trouble, to say nothing of trouble like that!"

"Yes, no use," I agreed; "but what suggested such a terrible thought to you?"

"I don't know. Something I can't explain. But, if I knew that the two others had died as Stoecker died, it would be something to work on—something to work on. Now come: I believe that Stoecker told me the truth as far as he went; but I want to see the expression on Van Holberg's face and Dans's when they open our street door and come into our vestibule."

By a simple and effective device, which for obvious reasons I cannot go into here, Ruggles had so arranged it that, without being seen, we could see whoever entered our vestibule.

As Ruggles had explained to me more than once, the time it took our widely differing clients to walk the eight feet from our street door through to the inner door opening on our small first floor apartment was a critical period, indeed often a turning point in their lives.

Terror drove almost all of our clients to us, and they knew that when they appealed to Ruggles for aid, they must, at the very outset, tell him the fullest details of their predicaments. I can say with absolute knowledge that the great majority of them came through clean, hard though it was for them to admit the truth to us.

On the other hand, there were those who, like the self-styled "Colonel" Hawkins, in that very singular and sanguinary affair of the Bali Kris, attempted to substitute for the truth a fabrication of lies. But this invariably resulted in tragedy for the would-be deceiver.

Of this, poor, weak, guilty Hawkins was a terrible example: Ruggles and I saved him from the snake his unforgiving enemy set on him, but Hawkins died in agony by his own hand, unable to face the man whose life he had ruined.

I had worked too long with Ruggles to be surprised at anything those who hated or feared us might do; danger was the price we paid for the work we did, and we survived only through unrelaxed vigilance and Ruggles's amazing ability to anticipate the attacks our many enemies made on us.

Now, as we took our posts of observation which commanded a clear view of the vestibule, I wondered what class of clients these men, who were coming now, belonged to.

Were they criminals who felt Ruggles closing in on them and knew their only chance of safety lay in Ruggles's death? Were they, on the other hand, innocent fugitives from injustice, who desperately needed our help? Or were they guilty men who were trying to escape the fate they knew that they deserved?

II

OUR street door opened, and a man stepped uncertainly into our vestibule. Then, instead of closing the street door behind him, he kept it ajar with his right hand and just stood there, looking about and mumbling something I could hear but could not make out a word of.

The man was utterly off his guard now, for he had not the slightest notion that any one could see him, still less that Ruggles and I were close to him intently watching him.

He was apparently not over thirty, with a keen, emphatic face, and he lacked only a couple of inches of Ruggles's tremendous height, and perhaps twenty pounds or so of Ruggles's bulk. But the man, who seemed built for a fighter, was not that now: his

sturdily built limbs were as weak as those of a man who had just risen from a hospital bed, and on his face was stamped an expression of the most abject terror.

I knew that this man must be either Dans or Van Holberg, and Stoecker had said that both men were terror-struck at the death of their two partners; but not even that had prepared me for the look in this man's eyes, and nothing under the sun could have prepared me for his extraordinary mumbling.

As if the sound were offensive even to himself, the man raised his big hands to his lips as if in an effort to shut or to steady them, and, to my own relief, the mumbling ceased. He still had the door open. Rain had begun, with a wind driving it in hard from the river, and I heard it sluicing on our front steps and on the macadam of the street.

That sound, or some other inaudible to me, caught and held the man, or appeared to, for he stood with his ear to the open door, apparently listening, while all the time examining our vestibule with furtive, frightened eyes.

Then he slowly closed our street door, for a long moment stood motionless, leaning back against the wall, his lips locked, evidently making every effort to collect himself: and it seemed that he succeeded, for he straightened his heavy shoulders and began to walk slowly but quite steadily along the vestibule toward the inner door which let into our apartment.

Before he had reached it, I made up my mind, or believed I had, about him: he was not one of our enemies who was trying to destroy Ruggles: neither was he a guilty man trying to escape a deserved fate: I was sure that he was an innocent man who, through no fault of his own, had reached the point where he desperately needed all the help Ruggles and I could give him.

Ruggles and I left our posts and went swiftly, but noiselessly, to the inner door, and reached it just as our visitor's nervous fingers found the bell. In another moment he was standing in our living room.

"This is Mr. Crane," Ruggles said to him, in answer to his obvious surprise and displeasure at not finding himself alone with Ruggles. "Mr. Crane assists me on all my cases," Ruggles went on, closing the door behind our visitor. "You may speak frankly before him, and I urge you to remember this."

Then, as our client only bowed to me, without speaking, Ruggles went on: "Confidence and absolute frankness are necessary if we are to be of service to you. You are—"

"Simon Van Holberg," our guest said.

"Where," Ruggles asked, "is your partner, Hendrick Dans?"

Van Holberg glowered at us. "You must understand at once," he said sullenly, "that you must ask me no questions. I will tell you what I think you need to be told."

"Don't be a fool," Ruggles said sharply. "I know, far better than you seem to, what I need to know if Crane and I are to help you, Mr. Van Holberg. I am not trying to probe into any secret you may have and desire to preserve.

"You have come to me of your own choice, and I am trying to save time. Where is your partner, Hendrick Dans, and why did he not come with you? Take that dog's snarl off your lips and answer me, or take your hat and coat and go to the devil!"

Van Holberg's frame stiffened, then he half crouched, and for a moment it seemed that he would fling himself on Ruggles. But my companion's unyielding gaze and his huge form so little encouraged a physical encounter that Van Holberg backed down.

"Dans is at our rooms," he said hoarsely, "too scared to come out. That is why I have come alone. Dans thinks some one is following us, and—I—think—he—is—right."

"People have been following me for ten years," Ruggles said evenly. "They have tried everything their ingenuity and their friends could devise to kill me, and undoubtedly will continue to try killing me in one way or another for another ten years and more, but that does not alter the fact that I am still alive. So, if there is only one man trailing you and your friend, don't take it too seriously."

"You don't—know," our client said hopelessly.

" At least," Ruggles said, " I know, and so do you, that he has not followed you into this room. So light a cigar or a cigarette or a pipe and tell me what you want Crane and me to do."

" I want you to get to the bottom of this —thing," Van Holberg burst out, " this cursed thing that I can't get out of my thoughts until it's got me to where I don't want to live, and by — I won't live, unless I can soon get relief."

He clutched his head with his hands, and stood like a statue, saying nothing, seeming scarcely to breathe. Then his strongly built hands fell, and we saw the beads of perspiration standing out on his brow.

" Steady," Ruggles said sympathetically, as our distracted client, after pacing the room like a caged animal, flung himself into a chair and looked wildly about him. " Steady, man! We shan't get anywhere that way, let me tell you!"

" Then tell me," Van Holberg cried out, " why Van Breeder and Lannebeer died on the ship as they did, and why Hendrick Dans, the steadiest man of us all, is ready to kill himself now!"

" You have told me nothing," Ruggles reminded him: " You must realize how necessary it is for me to know more—"

" I can tell you nothing more—not a word more—now," Van Holberg burst out again. " If you could have seen Van Beeder's body and Lannebeer's—afterward—

" You're making me tell you! I won't be made to tell you—I can't tell you! Isn't it enough for you to know that they died —that they were murdered? Isn't it all you need to know—that, and that we had good reason to leave the place where we were before?" The words seemed to have been torn from him, and he clutched his throat as if afraid of what he might say in another moment.

" You say they were murdered," Ruggles began quietly. " Have you any active enemies here, that you know of?"

" I didn't know that I had an enemy in the world," Van Holberg said, more quietly. " That is, not up to the day before we sailed. If I have any enemy here, I can't think what he's got against me."

I caught the evasion in his words, and I was sure that Ruggles did. But my companion gave no sign of it. He said soothingly: " You, or the others, may have made an enemy on the ship. You may have done something without realizing it, on the steamer, I say, or at one of the ports you stopped at—Batavia—"

" What?" Van Holberg cried, wildly springing to his feet.

" At Batavia," Ruggles continued impassively, " at the Harmonie Club there; or at the next port, Semarang; or at the next, Soerbaia, where the club, by the way, is the Societet Simpangsche, I remember."

" How do you know—" our client breathed huskily. " How can you know?"

" Oh," Ruggles kept on unmoved, " you may have made an enemy at the next port, Balik Papan, in Borneo; or at Cebu, Manila, Hongkong, Shanghai, Kobe, Yokohama, Vancouver, British Columbia, or even at Seattle. It is a long cruise to this country from Batavia on the island of Java —a long cruise, such as would give any man ample opportunity to make more than one vindictive enemy."

Van Holberg's eyes seemed starting from their sockets. " Tell me," he begged rather than commanded, " how you know that we came here from Batavia."

" We can discuss that when we have time for it," Ruggles said. " But I believe that your trouble came from something you did before you left Java. Your own words have indicated that. Was it something you did to one of your Malay servants—an unusually severe beating? Do you recall anything of that kind?"

Van Holberg's face went white under his tan, and he put his shaking hands up to his twitching lips. " We did beat them," he admitted, " when they—needed it."

" When, for example?" Ruggles kept on insistently.

" Oh, I don't know," Van Holberg said, with a forced laugh, " I suppose it was when they didn't lay out our clothes the night before in the order in which we'd want them the next morning."

" And a worse beating, in case of any real breach of discipline?" Ruggles asked quietly.

Van Holberg's lips locked, then opened. "You've been making me talk too much again," he cried. "What happened in Batavia is all past and gone. What I want you to do now is to help Dans and Stoecker and me. Dans is the worst: he'll kill himself soon, if you don't step in and help him."

"Suppose we go and see Mr. Dans," Ruggles said. "I suggest that we go to him now: if he wants to kill himself, as you say, it stands to reason he must know what his reasons are, so we'd better see him at once." Ruggles got to his feet.

For a long moment, Van Holberg looked into Ruggles's expressionless face, then he got slowly up, saying: "Very well." He cleared his throat. "All right, you can see him, but," he went on huskily, "remember, I don't advise it. If we're going, we'd better pick up Stoecker on the way. He was coming here to see you, Stoecker was—" he spoke of it.

"We'll pick up Stoecker first, for he's the one to have along when we see Dans, for they're great pals." He nodded his well-shaped head as if to himself, and said, "Great pals, Dans and Stoecker are."

He put on his hat and looked irresolutely at us. "I've got a—car, out here," he began again, after a long, gloomy stare.

But he stood just where he was, as if an insuperable obstacle had just occurred to him and he did not know what to do.

III

"YES, we will stop at Stoecker's rooms on the way," Ruggles said; "but let Crane and me go in our car; we'll follow yours, then you will not have to bring us back. Go ahead now. We'll be out in a moment, and follow you."

"All right," Van Holberg said. His voice came back instantly, and his face showed what, to me, was unaccountable relief. "That's the ticket," he said. He jerked his hat firmly on his head and almost ran out through our vestibule to the street door.

"Don't hurry after him," Ruggles said to me, as I was opening the door. "Let him have all the time he wants, and see what he does with it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Ruggles said, "that he is covering something up. If he knew he was risking his neck by acting as he does, he would not do it. In short, with all the rope he now has, he may hang himself."

I looked at Ruggles, but he did not see me. He had gone to one of our front windows and was looking out into the street.

When I went to his side he said, without turning: "Look down the street there, on this side—Van Holberg's car—watch that tail-light!"

"I don't see anything wrong with it," I began. Then I stopped short, for I had never seen a tail-light act like that one: it rose a little, to the height, perhaps, of the waist of a very short man, or a tall man who was bending over, then it was still for a moment, then slowly moved to the left until it suddenly disappeared; then, as I continued to watch, Ruggles caught my arm, saying:

"You've never seen anything like that before, have you? Wait, and you'll see the rest in a moment—Van Holberg's car is being turned around by some one who has a back nearly as strong as a jack. There you are: there are the headlights—the car has been turned around all in a moment."

"You mean that some one has carried the rear end around?" I could scarcely believe it yet.

"That's what I mean, and it will be well to keep that in mind when—" He broke off abruptly, then began again: "Come! Van Holberg must be wondering why we don't come out to our car and fall in behind his. Better hurry, or he may get away, and we don't want him to do that—the case is much too interesting! Then, too, there is Dans to be thought of!"

He did not explain what he meant, and there was no time for me to ask him to. But, as we got into our car, I whispered:

"What about Van Holberg? Doesn't he need attention, too?"

"Yes," Ruggles said, "he needs attention and shall have it—the mystery is clearing; and Mr. Van Holberg will stand watching."

"Do you think he killed Stoecker and the two other partners? He looks capable of it."

"He does. But I'm not sure yet. His face will tell us something when we reach Stoecker's rooms and stand by Stoecker's body."

We went out to our car then and fell in behind Van Holberg's, which turned immediately in the direction of Stoecker's rooms. Ruggles said not a word, and his silence soon became intolerable.

Why didn't he tell me what his next move was going to be? I knew him well enough to be sure that he was following, step by step, a definite plan. I could not believe that a man lived who could kill his friend and then accompany us to view that dead friend's body.

It was clear that Van Holberg had lived most of his life in lands and among people who took civilization's laws lightly: where the life of a native meant little to the dominant race he served. Under such conditions, I had seen more than once the savage side of white men come uppermost.

Clean-cut and distinguished-looking as Van Holberg was, there was something tigerish about him in his moments of passion. A dangerous man, I knew he would be, when once that outbursting passion of his had got command of his almost Herculean body.

And, as I thought of the muscular effort of which Van Holberg would be capable at such a moment, there came before my eyes again the dreadfully distorted body of Stoecker as we had seen it, back less than one short hour.

What Ruggles and I were about to witness, not even Ruggles could know. But I looked at his rugged profile and felt sure that he would bring us through safely, whatever crisis came.

How he was able so well to understand and to anticipate the working of the criminal mind, how he could tread so unerringly the deepest jungles of New York's great underworld, I could not explain. Still more surprising was it that he was equally familiar with the great syndicates of organized crime in Mexico, South America, and Europe.

For he knew them all, those predatory animals: the perpetrators of crime and violence. He knew the never suspected, highly paid advisers, the seasoned chiefs, those master minds who worked out, with the pains and precision of engineers, the most minute details of every big coup the underworld pulled off.

He knew the rich rogues who financed the great criminal ventures, the desperate, conscienceless individuals who executed their chiefs' commands and formed thus the cutting edge: he knew, too, the weak unfortunates who were drawn into the web without realizing it and discovered their plight only after their fate was sure.

Ruggles knew them all, and they knew him. At first, in the early months of my association with him, I had thought that Ruggles's elaborate caution and unceasing watchfulness was the result of overstimulated nerves.

But I had soon realized my error—for in his file was a record of sixty or more desperate criminals who, from the various penitentiaries to which his evidence had sent them, had got word through to Ruggles that, as soon as they were free, they would devote the rest of their lives to taking his. And they meant it.

These and the host of other foes who assailed him with fanatic zeal, he held at bay and worked steadily to defeat with a combination of sleepless vigilance and reckless daring, and a resourcefulness and power to make final decisions instantly and accurately, such as I had never seen before.

Of course his extraordinary physical strength was always of the greatest value to us in those sharp, sudden encounters which the newspapers, because they have no better word, call "emergencies"; for example, when Ruggles, alone and unarmed, captured "Strangler" McMahon, whose ferocity and gigantic stature had made him the dread of every man employed to arrest him.

There was that affair, too, at Fairfax Courthouse, Virginia, where only Ruggles's great courage, strength, and quickness enabled him to overpower the half-crazed giant of a negro who, in another moment, would have executed his promise to tear the heart out of the judge.

But even more remarkable to me than Ruggles's physical strength, activity, and

skill as a boxer, was his knowledge of the tools which his more desperate and relentless enemies used; for example, I believe that there was not a known poison under the sun that he was not familiar with, and he knew equally well the antidote for each, and had it where he could get at it quickly.

So far as I knew, he had never attended a medical school; but I believe few doctors or surgeons could prescribe more wisely or operate more successfully on bodies afflicted with knife or gun wounds.

His restless and eager mind was a veritable storehouse of information on every subject under the sun, and always ready at the call of his photographic memory.

If he broke the law—and unquestionably he frequently did—it was never for his own gain, but always to right a wrong; his sins were always benevolent.

"I'm a near-crook," he said to me more than once; "but I wear better." Again, he said to me once: "There are pages in my life I'd give my soul to blot out." What these were, I was probably never to know. But I did know that he was the truest friend as well as the bravest man I had ever come in contact with.

Our car stopped. The deep red of Van Holberg's tail-light gave way instantly to the lesser parking light, and I opened the door of our car and got out.

Ruggles was out before me, and so it was that the three of us—Ruggles, Van Holberg, and I—went up the short flight of steps at the same time.

"I've a key that fits this lock," Van Holberg said at the top step. He threw a nervous glance behind him, for a moment seemed to be listening, then, as if reassured by something, put the key in the lock, turned it, opened the door, and admitted us.

"No lights on," he said, and his voice sounded thick and hoarse there in the darkness. "There's—there's a wall switch here somewhere—" He tried to find it, couldn't, and called up the stairs: "Oh, Stoecker, I'm down here with those two detectives you went to see. We're going to talk with Dans. Better come." He waited, but there was no answer.

"The lazy fool's gone to bed," Van Holberg said. He found the wall switch then and turned it, calling up the stairs again as the lights went on: "Oh, Stoecker! Stoecker!"

Again we all listened. But there was no answer, no sound of any kind, nothing.

"Is he a very sound sleeper?" Ruggles asked, looking up the short flight of stairs which led, we knew, to the bedroom which we had visited so recently.

"Seems to be," said Van Holberg; "sound asleep or drunk." He looked up the stairs, and so did not see Ruggles put his right hand into the pocket of his jacket, where I knew he invariably carried one of his automatics. As Ruggles did this, he swept the hall where we stood with a quick, all-embracing glance.

Then he said: "If you know where Stoecker's bedroom is, wouldn't it be the simplest and easiest way for us all to go up?"

"Yes," Van Holberg said, "I'll go up and see if he's there."

He bounded up the steps, disappeared into what we knew was the bedroom, snapped on the lights, then snapped them off as abruptly, calling down to us: "No, he's not here; must have gone out."

"There may be another room he could have gone into," Ruggles said. "Leave the lights on, please. Crane and I will come up and look around."

"You won't find anything," Van Holberg said, keeping just where he was, and so standing, intentionally or not, that his bulk completely blocked the narrow stairs.

"That probably is so, but we'll come up." As Ruggles said this, he started up the stairs, and a moment later came face to face with Van Holberg, who had not moved an inch. "Oh, you turned the light off in that bedroom," Ruggles went on. "Turn it on again, will you?"

Van Holberg had no choice now but to obey, which would leave the stairs free for Ruggles to come on up, or it would mean a flat refusal and taking the consequences. Again Van Holberg's scowl blackened his face, and again it seemed that he was about to pit himself against Ruggles in a hand-to-hand encounter.

But Van Holberg gave way this time, just as he had done at our rooms. "The switch is just inside the door at the right," he growled, stepping into the bedroom and turning the light on. "I said you'd find nothing here, and you won't. I'm not in the habit of having my word doubted, by ——!"

"I'm not doubting your word so much as your judgment, Mr. Van Holberg," Ruggles said significantly.

IV

HEN we stepped into the bedroom, which was flooded with light. We looked down at the bed. It was empty and immaculate—not a stain or a crease marred the white smoothness of the old-fashioned counterpane. The bed was empty, as empty and untouched as if it had never been used—even Stoecker's body was not there.

In an instant Ruggles was out in the hall again and running down the stairs, calling out as he passed Van Holberg and me:

"We must go to your rooms at once, Van Holberg!"

"Why?" our client demanded.

"Don't stand there asking questions," Ruggles warned him. "We're losing time. Do as I say! Even now it may be too late!"

"Too late for what?" Van Holberg cried in that strangling voice of his.

"Too late for us to save his life."

Ruggles's words flung Van Holberg around like a hand on his collar.

"Whose life?" he asked wildly.

"Dans's."

Van Holberg hurled himself down the stairs after Ruggles, and I followed him. "No, don't get into your car," he called out as Ruggles started thither. "It's only a few doors down! I'll show you!"

He did, at a pace which at once left me behind, puffing and blown. But I caught up with them by the time Van Holberg's shaking fingers had got his key in the lock and the door open.

"Hendrick!" he called up the stairs. "It's Van Holberg, Hendrick." After one tense, indescribable second he called again: "I say it's Van Holberg, Hendrick. In God's name, answer me! Are you up there?"

Ruggles and Van Holberg reached the top of the stairs at the same time, and I followed them into the bedroom and to the bed, beside which Van Holberg would have collapsed if Ruggles had not caught him by the arm.

For on that bed was huddled a man's body so crushed and contorted that it reminded me of only one thing in this world—the broken body of Amos Stoecker, which had so unaccountably disappeared.

"Hendrick! Hendrick!" Van Holberg gasped out, like a man dying. If ever a man's face showed horror and grief and incredulity all at once, it was Van Holberg's. "God!" he panted. "This is terrible! Hendrick, look at me! He is dead—dead!"

"Murdered," Ruggles said. "For no man could contort his body that way of his own power. He was crushed to death by his murderer."

"Who did it?" Van Holberg demanded hoarsely. Then, not waiting for Ruggles to answer: "We must find Stoecker; find him at once, and tell him—"

"What would you tell him if he were here?" Ruggles asked, looking at me and then at Van Holberg.

"Tell him? Great God, don't you know? But how could you know? Van Beeder and Lannebeer—their bodies were like this when we found them in their staterooms on the ship."

"Ah!" Ruggles cried sharply. "That is what I wanted to know! The fiend who killed them has tracked down Hendrick Dans and—"

"That is what I mean," said Van Holberg. "We've got to warn Stoecker before it is too late!"

"There is something you must be told now," Ruggles said, and there was that in his deep voice which stopped Van Holberg just where he was, as Ruggles went on: "You will never see Stoecker again."

"Stoecker!" Van Holberg breathed. "Do you mean—"

"Stoecker," Ruggles said, "is gone."

Then, as Van Holberg's dilated eyes went from one to the other of us, Ruggles said slowly: "That is what I mean, Van Holberg; Stoecker is like poor Hendrick Dans here—dead and distorted as Dans's body is."

"Who did it?" Van Holberg's hands tore at his collar as if he were being suffocated. "When was it? Where is his—body?"

"We don't know that. We saw it at his rooms, not an hour ago. But it has been taken away. As to who did it, you know that as well as I. It has been carried away and hidden by the murderer."

Van Holberg stood swaying slightly, peering at us all the time as if he did not see us distinctly even in that dazzlingly bright light. "I've got to get away," he said, as if talking to himself—"away from here."

"Before the police come. I would, if I were you."

The significant words broke Van Holberg down. "Help me!" he cried. "Hide me if you can and will!" His formidable hands fixed themselves on the ash rail of the bannister with a clutch which made it creak. "Can you get me away to your rooms?"

"Yes," Ruggles said. "We'll go there immediately, and you will be safe there. Now! And not too fast, either, remember, or you'll start people watching you. This is better," as we walked along. "Pull your hat more over your eyes, though, and get your coat collar up. More than one good fellow who would have had hard work to escape a life sentence or the chair, on the evidence, has been saved by such teeming rain and thick mist as this.

"Here our cars are, and this is where Stoecker lived; but don't look up there; keep your nerves sound as you can for what is coming. Have you had dinner?"

"Dinner? No. Why should I?" Van Holberg stopped and looked toward where he knew Ruggles was, as if the latter had suddenly become a curiosity.

"Well, for one thing," Ruggles replied, "no man's at his best on too empty a stomach, and I'll venture to say you've eaten nothing sensible from a fighter's standpoint. But our housekeeper will fix us up something of the right sort."

"Thanks," our client said weakly, "but my servant prepares all the food that I eat."

"Then bring him along with you, by all means, and have him fetch what he knows invites your sturdiest appetite. Where is he?"

"At—at my rooms, probably—where we just were."

"Go back then and give him his instructions," Ruggles insisted. "Crane and I will wait for you in our car. As soon as we see you enter yours, we will be off, and you can follow us."

Van Holberg turned and retraced his steps, and it seemed to me that something joined him almost immediately—a strange, awkward, stunted, but powerful shape—and went along with him.

"Did you think you saw anything—there with Van Holberg?" I asked Ruggles, trying to pierce with my eyes the mist and rain.

"What?" Ruggles asked. Evidently he had not noticed it, or I had simply imagined it.

"I wouldn't let him get off like that alone," I said, as we reached our car and seated ourselves to wait for Van Holberg to return from the house. "We may have lost him already. At least, we're giving him an excellent chance."

"An excellent one indeed, if he had any idea that we so much as suspected him. But you forget one thing: he regards us as protection and our rooms as a refuge."

"But why bring such a monster of crime to our rooms?" I argued. "Why not notify the police now, or arrest him ourselves at once?"

"Because," Ruggles said, "I must be able absolutely to prove his guilt."

"Haven't you enough proof already?"

"One might think so, but even now I am not really sure. Remember that the job he has set himself to is not finished."

"Not finished? Great God!"

"No, not finished," Ruggles repeated. "Remember, too, that one of the characteristics of his race is thoroughness, when it comes to acts of violence. And, finally, I

shall feel safer while having under my eye a criminal who is probably more dangerous than any with whom you or I have ever had to deal.

"From now on, keep your gun where you can get at it at a second's notice! Don't fire except as a last resort, but then shoot straight and fast and shoot to kill!" Ruggles turned the key in the transmission lock. "There come Van Holberg and his servant now."

We watched the two as they drew near to their car, which was some seventy or eighty feet ahead of our—Van Holberg, tall and broad-shouldered, and his servant, shorter by nearly two feet and looking still shorter because of his extraordinary build, for he was not above the height of a hogshead, but quite as wide and deep through as one.

Under one arm he carried a package, evidently the food he would prepare at our rooms for his master; the other arm held an umbrella over Van Holberg.

The next minute they were by their car, and one of them got in, for we heard the door of the car slam. We could see little through the sluicing rain and the heavy mist; but one thing we could make out with ease: the tail light of their car repeated its strange semicircular journey of an hour before. It rose a little, then moved steadily to the left until it disappeared; then the headlights of the car came to view.

"Gad!" I said, keeping my eyes on the car ahead. "We ought to have remembered and been ready this time." As I said it, I looked toward the driver's seat of our sedan. But Ruggles was not there. A moment later he stepped in from the rain and seated himself, nodding to me.

"I was right," he said. "It is the man I thought."

"The man who turned the car around by lifting and carrying its rear end, or the man who murdered four of Van Holberg's partners by crushing their bones like matches?"

"The great muscular strength which could accomplish one feat could accomplish the other," Ruggles said. "We'll lead and you follow, Van Holberg," he called, swinging our car around. Then we heard Van Holberg start his car and, looking back, I saw him fall in behind us.

"They'll give us the slip on the way," I insisted, as we drove along.

"Remember," Ruggles repeated, "that man doesn't know that we suspect him. But we must move very cautiously from now on, for the instant we show our hands we face a creature hardly more human and quite as dangerous as a hungry tiger.

"Another thing: don't touch a morsel of any food that Van Holberg's servant offers us. One more thing, Dan: we'll reach our rooms in another minute; as soon as I run the car up to the curb, jump out and tell Mrs. Watts that we have guests for the evening, and not under any circumstances to admit any one without consulting us."

We reached our rooms then. Ruggles ran the car to the curb, and I got out, wondering what was to be the nature of the crisis I felt sure was coming.

I gave Mrs. Watts, our excellent housekeeper, her instructions, made sure she understood them, then I went up the back stairs and so into our first-floor apartment. As I passed by the door of our kitchenette, I saw Van Holberg's servant stirring something, and knew he was losing no time in preparing the food he had brought for Van Holberg.

V

REMEMBERING what Ruggles had said of Malay servants in general, I looked at this one with some curiosity, which instantly gave way to a shudder of loathing and something closely approaching physical terror, though up to that moment I had not regarded myself as a coward.

But eyes like a reptile's gleamed balefully from under this man's hairless lids; he had scarcely any forehead or chin or neck; his skull was sunk almost to the ears, between his low, gigantic shoulders, and came to a point at his mouth as a snake's does; his chest protruded like that of a gorilla; his arms reached to his knees and were thick through and gnarled as the roots of an oak.

In spite of his extremely low stature—that reptilian head of his did not come to my shoulder—and his enormously heavy body which suggested such elemental strength, he moved swiftly and soundlessly with a stealthy, reptilian glide.

Our eyes met and the cold fire in his held mine; then they turned as dull as if he had suddenly gone blind.

I groped my way along to the door of the living room, and there stopped, chained to the spot by what I saw: Van Holberg lay rather than sat on the couch, in an attitude indicating almost complete collapse. Evidently he had exerted the last remaining power of his will to reach our rooms, and, having reached them, had had no reserve left and thus had fallen the victim of a mental torment which he alone could have described.

"Collect yourself, Van Holberg," Ruggles was saying. "You must do this, for I tell you the crisis has not been passed—there remains the final reckoning which you must steel yourself to face!"

"I have just seen Dans's body," Van Holberg cried, suddenly raising himself more erect on the couch. "Could anything be more horrible to me than that? He has been murdered. If you can tell me who the fiend is who killed him and Stoecker, do so for God's sake!"

"I know the man and where he is," Ruggles said. "I will show him to you tonight. But tell me, first, why you and Stoecker did not tell me that you had come here from Batavia, in Java! The truth, now, mind!"

"Have the truth then," Van Holberg said hoarsely; "we left Batavia because we got into serious trouble there." His voice failed and he looked straight at Ruggles, panting like an exhausted dog.

"Take some of this brandy," Ruggles said, pouring some out for him. Then, as Van Holberg drained it: "Go on, if you feel able, with what you were about to say."

"We got into trouble there in Batavia," Van Holberg repeated. "I should have told you this at the start; but it seemed to me to have only a remote bearing on our trouble in this country; moreover, no man likes to confess a thing which hurts the reputation of his friends."

The strong liquor brought Van Holberg's voice back, and he rose from the couch and stood erect. "It began," he resumed, "with Van Beeder and Lannebeer thrashing one of our Malays for something. Van Beeder had been drinking heavily for the three days previous, and Lannebeer was of a naturally savage temper when dealing with the natives.

"The Malay died. It was regrettable, but none of us thought a great deal about it at the time. Van Beeder and Lannebeer said the Malay had caught hold of a kris and turned on them, and they had killed him in self-defense.

"By morning, we had well-nigh forgotten it; but that afternoon a relative of the dead Malay appeared at our works and ordered our servants and workmen to leave us, and they all obeyed him as if he had been their king.

"To be left with a sugar plantation on our hands and no one to work it for us was serious, but no bribes or threats or floggings—and we tried all three—would bring our Malays back to work.

"Only the stranger, who had sent our men off, remained, and Van Beeder and Lannebeer seized him and bound him. We tried to induce them to spare the man, but they were beside themselves now and nothing could move them.

"They took him away, tried to compel him to order our men back, and, in the end when he still refused, they killed him, while he was putting a curse on the five of us.

"The killing of the first Malay was bad enough; but the killing of the second was ghastly business. It proved, too, that the second Malay had been a priest said to be descended miraculously from the *wayangs*, those legendary high-priests of the Malays; and when this became known, even our friends in the Batavia club, urged us to leave Java on the first steamer we could catch, and we did so.

"Only one Malay offered to so much as carry our bags aboard the steamer, and we brought him with us in gratitude as a body servant."

"The Malay you have here," Ruggles said, not putting it as a question, but stating it as a fact.

"Yes," Van Holberg said, "the faithful fellow who is back there now preparing my dinner in your kitchen."

Ruggles's lips opened and he seemed about to speak, but he did not, and at that moment the Malay entered and approached his master. Van Holberg mumbled something to him, and the Malay glided out.

"He is about to bring in my dinner," Van Holberg said, "and, since it consists of *ireess*, a typical Malay dish, I have asked him to serve three portions of it, one for each of us."

Ruggles bowed, cleared our center table, and I drew up three chairs. A few moments later, the Malay glided in again, this time arranging three plates, on which he placed bowls, with a spoon in each, and by each a biscuit.

Again he left us. We now seated ourselves at the table, after I had procured napkins. Then the Malay returned, this time bringing a large bowl of a thick, creamy-looking substance, and approached Van Holberg, to serve him first.

But Van Holberg corrected the Malay sharply, indicating Ruggles's bowl. The Malay turned to obey, but at that moment Ruggles half rose from his chair, striking the bowl with his shoulder, knocking it out of the Malay's hand, and spilling the thick contents on the floor.

"Never mind," Van Holberg said, checking Ruggles's apologies. "He has more of his supplies in your kitchenette, and will make up another lot."

Van Holberg gave a quick order to the Malay, who glided out immediately.

The instant the Malay had gone, Ruggles scooped up some of the spilled food and said quickly to Van Holberg:

"I knocked that bowl out of your man's hand on purpose."

"Why?" Van Holberg demanded.

"To prevent your eating it. Come!"

Ruggles led the way into our little laboratory and quickly separated from each other the various ingredients which had formed the thick, creamy-looking food. One after the other, Ruggles indicated these to us, until only one ingredient remained, and this he placed under a powerful microscope and directed us to study it.

We did so, Van Holberg first and then I, and both of us started back in horror at what we saw. For there, under the microscope, was what looked like a pile of motionless but intermingled snakes.

"In God's name," Van Holberg demanded, "what is that?"

"Chopped-up human hair," Ruggles said. "If we had eaten it, as he intended we should, we should have died in agony. This manner of disposing of an enemy is a favorite Malay trick, so your servant comes naturally by it. Have I convinced you of his guilt?"

"Yes. The devilish fiend! Think of a man using his own hair for that purpose!"

"He did not use his own hair," Ruggles said steadily. "His hair, as you know, is black as a crow's wing, whereas this chopped-up hair is yellow and brown."

At the words, Van Holberg stiffened as if an electric shock had been given him. He caught Ruggles by the shoulder and held him in a vicelike grip. "Do you mean what you imply?" Van Holberg demanded fiercely.

"I mean," Ruggles said evenly, "that this hair under my microscope is from the heads of Stoecker and Dans. It is their hair. He killed them both."

Van Holberg whirled, with a wild, fierce cry, and darted in the direction of our kitchenette. "I'll kill him! I'll kill him now!" he ground out between his set teeth, as Ruggles by main strength dragged him back.

"Wait," Ruggles commanded, still holding the panting man. "You will spoil everything if you give him warning. Remember the savage strength which crushed the bones of Stoecker and Dans and the others—we must close on him suddenly when he is off his guard. He will come in now in a moment. Promise me to wait for my signal!"

"I warn you not to delay your signal too long," Van Holberg said thickly; "but you have my promise." He seated himself, as we did, at the table.

Undoubtedly at that instant, he meant

to keep his promise. But the moment the Malay came in, Van Holberg sprang up with a fierce cry and was on the Malay in a twinkling.

Van Holberg's heavy blow got well home in the Malay's face, but it might as well not have; before Ruggles or I could get to our feet, the Malay's terrible arms had encircled Van Holberg's body like the coils of a boa and began their excruciating contraction.

Ruggles was over the table in a rush, which carried him almost to the Malay, who, letting Van Holberg fall where he would, waited Ruggles's assault with those awful arms extended.

Terrible as he was, the Malay had not long to wait. Ruggles sprang in and landed on the Malay's jaw a straight left that would have flattened a heavyweight. It sent the Malay crashing to the floor, but beyond that it seemed to have no effect whatsoever on this savage; he was up again with incredible quickness and this time his deadly arms found their grip.

They found it, but before they could contract, Ruggles's hands caught that reptilian head and with irresistible strength forced it backward, backward, backward—there was a sharp snap, and the Malay collapsed, his neck broken.

"Touch and go," Ruggles panted, freeing himself from the limp, heavy arms, and standing erect; "another second, and he'd have broken my ribs and back like matches! Phone Dr. Hammond to come right over!"

"You are hurt then?"

"No, it's for Van Holberg. That crack I hit the brute slowed him up a little, and that saved me; and my rushing in on him made him drop Van Holberg I hope before he got really started. Anyway, get hold of Hammond!"

VI

I GOT the doctor on the wire on the instant, and while he was on the way to our rooms, we laid Van Holberg on the couch. He was unconscious and his body presented much of the awful unnaturalness of Dans's and Stoecker's, and I feared the worst.

But Ruggles's diagnosis proved to be the right one, Dr. Hammond said when he came in a moment later; Van Holberg was not dead and he was not dying—the best surgical and medical care would save him; though he would never be the same man again, he would live.

After an ambulance had taken Van Holberg to a hospital which Dr. Hammond recommended, and the Malay's body had been cared for as the technicalities of the law required, I asked Ruggles what had been on my mind, it seemed to me, for many hours:

"What started you on the Malay's track in the first place? And how did you know that Van Holberg had lived in Java?"

"I'll answer those two questions at once," Ruggles replied; "you remember when Van Holberg entered our vestibule and we watched him through our peepholes?"

"Yes, of course."

"You heard him mumbling, and you thought that it was only because he was terrified nearly to the point of insanity."

"Yes, I did."

"He was not mumbling," Ruggles said. "He was talking Malay with an accent which I recognized as Javanese. That told me Van Holberg had lived in Java, and to go on from there to the strong probability that his residence had been at Batavia, was only natural.

"He was talking Malay, I say, with a Javanese accent, and, translated into English, his words were:

"'Stay there on the porch until I come out! Stand still and no one will see you! If the rain comes in on you, you must make the best of it.'

"Those were Van Holberg's words, and I knew that he would use them only to a servant; and I was sure that that servant must be a Malay."

"But what made you suspect the Malay of being the real killer, Ruggles?"

"Yes, I should have explained that. It was this way: Stoecker, you remember, had told me a wild story about a curse being put on him and the other four partners for some reason which Stoecker would not own up to. No one but a savage would try

to put a curse on any one, and that kept my thoughts on the Malay.

"I had, from that point, something to work on, a puzzle to put together.

"On the other hand, there was a strong possibility that Van Holberg himself might have killed Van Beeder and Lannebeer on the ship and killed Stoecker and Dans here, for in Dans's room I had found Stoecker's diary, which I had managed to get into my pocket without Van Holberg seeing me take it, and that diary, which I ran through very fast—it's not long—while you were talking to Mrs. Watts, downstairs and Van Holberg was lying with his eyes shut on our couch, gave some facts not encouraging to Van Holberg."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Ruggles replied, "that it said—that is, Stoecker had written in it—that every one of the five partners had insured his life in favor of the one who should outlive the other four.

"So, when we found that Stoecker and Dans had been murdered, it looked as if Van Holberg might have killed them as well as the two who died earlier, the idea being that in this way Van Holberg was going to grab off the whole bunch of insurance for himself.

"But, all the time, the Malay servant was in the back of my mind, and in spite of the diary, I believed that he, and not Van Holberg, was the murderer.

"Then, when I saw the rear end of Van Holberg's car picked up and carried around, I remembered the terrible distortion of Stoecker's body, and I knew the man who had the strength to do that, carry the car, I mean, could have crushed to death Stoecker and Dans and the two others."

"But it still might have been Van Holberg?" I reminded Ruggles.

"It still might have been," Ruggles admitted, "for Van Holberg seemed an unusually powerful man. I decided that either one of them *could* have done it. It remained for me to find which *had* done it; and I didn't know which until the Malay went into our kitchen—then he washed his hands, and when he wiped them there was tar on the towel, tar from the rear bumper of Van Holberg's car where the Malay had taken hold of it to lift it.

"That tar on our towel saved Van Holberg from the chair then and there, as far as I was concerned—that and the Malay trying to murder all of us by feeding us human hair."

"But how did you know that the hair he'd chopped up was Dans's and Stoecker's?" I asked.

"I recognized the color," Ruggles replied, "but probably I wouldn't have if I hadn't noticed, when I saw Stoecker's body and Dans's that some of the hair had been clipped off from the head of each—quite a little, just above the temples."

"Jungle Hate" is the title of Ruggles's next adventure

After a glass of beer apiece they went on, seldom speaking to each other

THE PASSIONAL CRIME

By Louise Rice

WHEN THEY FIRST MET THE TWO WERE RATHER SILENT AND MOODY PEOPLE, WITH SOMETHING DARKLY BEAUTIFUL IN BOTH THEIR FACES

A Story of Fact

UNDER this heading criminal investigators class the crime which is done under extreme stress of emotional stimulation; stimulation which has nothing to do with avarice or with the more sordid reactions of humanity.

America, usually accused of being the one country in the world where "the unwritten law" is allowed to have weight in a murder trial, is, as a matter of fact, usually more unrelenting toward the passional crime than many other countries.

France, for instance, has always allowed the plea that the crime has been committed under "unnatural stress," and in Italy it is universally invoked.

It is England which has maintained the sternest front toward all intrusions of emotional appeal in her law courts. If, therefore, we find that a case in those courts has been of such a nature that the verdict has been directly affected by such an appeal, we may take it that that case is a most significant one, and therefore worthy of study by the professional and amateur criminologist.

Such a case is that of Richard Massey, who was sentenced in October of 1926 at the Lancaster Assizes to three years "of penal servitude" for the "manslaughter" of Sarah Ellen Barker.

The most cursory review of English murder cases will assure us that such a sentence, handed down by a jury of the conservative middle class, of which nearly all English juries are composed, must have behind it a very extraordinary story, English justice being inclined to lean away rather

than toward mercy in the matter of the taking of human life, under any conditions whatsoever.

The story is one which we may well consider thoughtfully, showing, as it does, that the passions of the human heart are the same in all classes, and that love and hate are the two most potent forces in the world, no matter what the levels on which they operate.

The man who has just been sentenced to serve three years in prison for what would usually be a capital offense is rather uneducated, and the woman whom he killed was even less so. They were obscure people, who probably never knew that they were among those in the world whose love story was keyed to a pitch almost inevitable in its production of tragedy.

A Fateful Ramble

The little village of Briercliffe where they both lived, is truly a village—a bit of rural England: something which it would be hard to match in this country, where sophistication invades the remotest hinterlands.

Below the level of the cultured Englishman—than whom there is no one anywhere more cultured—there is far more simplicity and far less of a cosmopolitan thought in rural England than in other countries.

This little village of Briercliffe still preserves a good deal of the quiet life which we all knew before the telephone, the telegraph, steam locomotion, electricity, and the radio came to lend color to the earth, but also to rob it of a good deal of its peace.

Here there lived Richard Massey, who was twenty-six years old, and made his home with his mother. He was a weaver by trade, a poor man, often out of work.

He was never the lad for the girls: never the lad for staying out at night. Had no bad habits. Was known as a friendly and sincere person, who was liked by every one, although not especially familiar with many.

His mother, slightly above her station in intelligence, and a very honest and pleasant woman, kept a house which had all the decencies of life, although few of the luxuries.

In the same village there lived Mrs. Barker, a woman of thirty, the wife of another weaver. She had an excellent reputation, except that she was, like Massey, a person who was not readily intimate with any one and also was very moody.

Her husband, quite a thrifty person, but one who suffered, like Massey, from the fact that there was not work enough in the district, of their trade, to keep him always busy, was just the usual sort of a workingman type. Good enough to his wife; never fought; fairly sober; never openly affectionate.

Mrs. Barker was a person who had tastes which seemed to the class of people to which she belonged, very strange. She was a great roamer of the fields; sometimes would leave her work, just to go out, of "a pretty day." Had a disposition to be fond of flowers, and liked to sit dreaming at her open door when other women went visiting and tea drinking up and down the village street.

Sometime in 1924, Mrs. Barker and Richard Massey met each other in a ramble through the fields—two rather silent and moody people, with something darkly beautiful in both their faces; faces too seldom lit with smiles. They do not seem to have become friendly at once, but after that they frequently met each other, as they moodily wandered about.

The Friendship Grows

Gradually, and almost without consciously arranging it, they began "meeting"; always being a bit surprised at the coincidence. In time they tried to get away on Saturdays for a stroll through the woods. There was no real attempt to conceal this, although they often did not mention to their respective families that they had seen each other.

On the other hand, their appearance when together was so casual, they seemed so indifferent to each other, they displayed so little eagerness to meet and so little concern at parting, that even though the village occasionally saw them coming home together, nothing much was thought of it.

The manner of the two disarmed comment. They were not self-conscious. They

never seemed to avoid observation. They displayed no interest in the lives of each other.

On the other hand, Massey began to show even less interest in the girls of the village than before. And Mrs Barker became more moody, less attentive to her household duties, and more and more the rambler on the countryside.

Mrs. Barker's husband was not especially happy at this state of affairs, but he had the rather cool and impersonal attitude toward his wife which is, among some types of men, the nearest that they can come to being good husbands.

Desperately Unhappy

The fact that they more or less support the house, that they do not raise their hands against their wives, that they eat the food which she provides without comment, and that they are at least not quarrelsome in their homes, constitutes—for this type of man—all the ideal virtues of the husband and father.

It is worth while to note that it is this type of man who is most frequently found in tales of passional crime, in the background, as the husband or lover of the woman concerned in it.

On the other hand, Massey was the dreamer type of man, very unattractive to the gay and flirtatious woman, but beloved by those who got close enough to him to know him.

His mother, his brother, and all his connections "thought well of Richard," as they expressed it, by which, in their conservative English way, they meant that he was very dear to them, and that they respected him.

That they did not understand him is a sure thing. They wondered at the kind of books that he read, and most of all, they wondered at his reticence with girls, and at the fact that he would rather spend a day in the fields and idling along the country roads than to join his fellows in the taverns.

Well, these two people just naturally gravitated to each other, as any psychologist could have easily predicted, after the most casual study of them.

In fact, the student of human faces and bodies, who has been trained to recognize temperaments, might stroll through almost any community small enough to allow of a really careful inspection of all its important members, and pick out the couples who will naturally be drawn to each other, and the one or two couples in whom lie the seeds of the potential passional crime. The much displayed photographs of the two chief figures in the Hall-Mills murder case tell of exactly this overemphasis of personalities which might have prognosticated, to such a student, the possibility of just such a tragedy which did finally occur.

In May of 1926 these two figures which we are now considering, Massey and Mrs. Barker, were desperately unhappy; unhappy in a way which it would be impossible for the more sordid type of person or the more matter of fact person, to understand.

They were, in the first place, practically cut off from the possibility of a legitimate union, since getting a divorce in England is a very expensive affair, and only those who have a comfortable financial position can afford it.

No Way Out

Mrs. Barker had only the housekeeping money, and there was never more than a few shillings over, of that, each week, and Massey, although a good worker, and well liked, was not the man to curry favor, so that he was somewhat more often out of work than some of his fellows. He had little work all through the year of 1926, up to July, when he at last stepped into the limelight of tragedy.

Mrs. Barker took to roaming, and Massey took to roaming. They began to be wild and desperate. They were innately perfect mates for each other, understanding the strange moods of each other, thrilled by the outdoor world, hating the smug complacency of the small town life.

They saw no way out. In fact, there was none. Massey had his mother to take care of, to some extent. He could not leave her. Mrs. Barker would have left her husband "in a wink," as she once bitterly said, at a moment of rare expansion, "if" —and there she let the remark die.

Even then the person to whom she said that did not suspect what the "if" covered. The village had gotten used to seeing her and Massey going off for ramblings together. That caused some gossip, but not a great deal.

A few, who had had the curiosity to sneak after them, had seen two people who tramped for hours without exchanging a word with each other, and who seemed to have no interest in common except occasionally to admire a wild flower, a tree—a winding road.

A Strange Agreement

The village shook its head and decided that the two were just "queer." It is certain that Mr. Barker and old Mrs. Massey had little idea of anything alarming in the odd companionship of the woman and the man.

Several times Mrs. Barker, idling down the street, stopped at Mrs. Massey's door. Sometimes Massey went right up to the Barker house and stood in the doorway, talking a little to Mrs. Barker, but more often just standing there, kicking one boot with the other, while Mrs. Barker leaned against the doorpost and appeared to contemplate the distant landscape.

The reader is asked to enter into this, and to try to feel the tension which lay between these two rather inarticulate persons, who, although desperately in love with each other, for months and months, as the prisoner stated, "never spoke or did aught they shouldn't."

Mr. Barker, meanwhile, although not a particularly observant person, got more and more hard for his wife to stand. He did not know what was the matter, but he knew that she grew more and more indifferent to her home, and that she was often away for hours on end.

There was little suspicion of Massey connected with this, and, as a matter of fact, it was often true that Massey did not even know that the unhappy woman was tramping the countryside. There were those, away from her own village, who got to know by sight "the strange woman."

They thought often that she was a gypsy until they got a good look at her and found that she had none of the characteristics of that type, so well known and so easily identified in England, where they have been part of the countryside life for generations.

Some who had never really seen her face, however, had thought that she *was* a gypsy, and one woman stated that she had so thought because the woman seemed so at home in the fields, and had several times been observed dozing beneath the hedges. In England, as in America, it is not the tendency of the country woman or the small town woman to walk among the fields with anything than rather a distant air, as of one who is not at home.

Well, this went on, and at last Richard Massey and Mrs. Barker "had a talk," as the prisoner explained it, in which they confessed to each other that they had found life apart from each other a practical impossibility, and that they were at the point where bitter and dark thoughts had begun to invade their minds.

This was the first time, he stated, that they had ever owned to what was troubling them, "but both knew it very well long before," and they then agreed that they would try not to see each other at all.

"Like a Crazy Thing"

Massey took up the search for steady work, and Mrs. Barker gave her attention to her home and her husband, the latter taking this very much for granted, and evincing not the slightest tendency to understand the pitifully nervous condition of his wife, who on several occasions hinted to him that if he would show more consideration for her it would be a great help—"in something that you don't understand."

Mr. Barker's attitude to this straw in the emotional wind was to make it clear that he was, as usual, fulfilling his practical duties as head of the house, that he had not beaten his wife for her inattention to her home, and that she might jolly well think herself lucky that he was as considerate as that!

Mrs. Barker, on one such occasion, went out of the house "like a crazy thing, though it was midnight," and sat in an outhouse all night, moaning and sobbing.

The next day she and Richard Massey met on the main street, and each stopped short at the sight of the other, as well they might, for even the unobservant village had been remarking on the wild-eyed pallor of Massey, and as for Mrs. Barker, she was so "harried looking" on this particular morning, that Massey, disregarding who looked on, took her hands and held them for a long time.

After the Fair

Neither one of the two unfortunates seem to have said anything; and it is a sure thing that they did not agree to meet again; yet the next day, which was Saturday, Mrs. Barker suddenly left her housework half done and went out, turning toward the country.

Her neighbors, at last aroused from their incurious attitude, and touched with the breath of tragedy which lay in her pale, distracted face, watched her out of sight, one of the women trying to catch up with the half staggering figure, but not succeeding.

Mrs. Barker went out to the fields beyond the village, and Richard Massey, according to his own testimony, "felt that she was out there and needed me."

So he, too, went away on that Saturday morning in July, having not a thought of anything, except that the woman he loved was in a wild state of mind somewhere.

They met in a field quite far from the village, having crossed each other's tracks several times. "She said naught, and her and I begun to walk away from the direction of Briercliffe. We didn't know where we was going."

They eventually stopped at a tavern called the King's Arms, but after a glass of beer apiece they went on again, with no destination, seldom speaking to each other, the woman sometimes on one side of the road and the man on the other. Several people who saw them on that day were struck by their manner, which seemed wild and haggard—the woman, especially.

There was a fair at one of the little towns they passed through, and they went in and wandered about, and Mrs. Barker, with one of her sudden changes of mood, was gay and "wonderful" as Massey said, groaning afterward.

She interested several people who saw her, who remarked that she was not pretty, but had "a way with her"—the one thing which has been said of every emotionally ardent woman from Helen of Troy downward.

Then they left the fair, for they had no money to spend, and Mrs. Barker was suddenly moody again. They went walking and walking, with nothing to eat, and finally it was night.

They found a car line that would take them back to the village, but the last car had gone, and Mrs. Barker declared that she wanted to stay out all night. That she could not "abide to return to that place," but that she wanted Richard to go home. He could walk, she said, until he met some wagon and got a lift. This, however, Massey would not do.

There was a stone wall near the car-stop, and beyond that a field. They got over the wall, and laid down together against it, "holding hands." They were up early, and drank water at a farmer's well; found some fruit in an orchard and ate some. Drank at a well later on in the day.

Longings for Death

Massey declared that the whole day was "a complete fog" to him. People who saw the pair wandering about thought that they were drunk, but aside from a bottle of beer, bought with the last of the little money that Mrs. Barker had with her, they had had nothing.

The night again saw them sleeping under the stars. "But we did not sleep," said Massey: "we did not talk, either; but sometimes we kissed each other, and she cried. I kept thinking that I heard voices, but there was no one there. We were in a far field."

The next morning the woman came out with the thing which was in her mind. She wanted Massey to kill her. She told him that she knew that she was going to have a child, and that it was not her husband's—it was theirs.

There was no money anywhere. Work

was harder and harder to get, and she had never been a good worker, anyway, and knew little of even such matters as would allow her to get into a servant's position. She had no recommendation, either—which in Europe absolutely bars a woman from domestic service.

Therefore, what Mrs. Barker wanted her sweetheart to do was to kill her.

She walked "along the canal bank, and cried and said she wished she was not afraid of the water so, she would get right in there and end it."

"I Saw She Was Dead"

This day, also, was without food, except the occasional fruit found in some orchard where Massey thought it safe to take a few bites. He thought that he ought to go home, but "everything was in daze so."

"I could see that she would kill herself as soon as I was gone, for she had bought some salts of lemon at a chemist's with some money that she carried around her neck on a string. 'There, Dick, goes the last cent I have or ever expect to have,' she said.

"I stayed with her in a field that night, and she told me that at last her husband had begun to make a row about her being out so much, and that he had heard that I was seen about with her. She said that she was never going home again. She said that she had tried to strangle herself, but that it was not easy, and that she wished that I would do it for her.

"I argued with her, but she said, 'If you love me, Dick, you would do it for me.' She kept at me all the time then, talking all the time, although I tried to make her stop. She fair drove me crazy with repeating that I should strangle her.

"When we got to Copper Bottom, she began again begging and praying me. She was driving me daft. She took the salts and mixed them in water that she got from a tub that was standing out along the road.

"And she said that after I had strangled her I could take the salts, and that would kill me too, and so we would be out of our troubles, and maybe somewhere we would find a nice, summer country, and meet and have the free life we wanted. She kissed me, and then walked off a piece and started to drink what was in the bottle.

"When I saw that she had the bottle lifted, I shouted, and jumped at her, and I don't remember another thing. That is God's truth, and may I drop dead if it is not. I had her in my arms when I remember, and she was very quiet and still. I shook her, and then I saw she was dead.

"I thought that it was the poison, for the bottle was on the ground, half empty. I took it up and drank the other part, and laid her out, and put her gloves in her hand, and then I fainted, I think. When I came to I was very sick, and went off from her and thought that now I would die, but after a time I knew that I was not to die right then, anyway. So I looked at her again, and put her handkerchief in her other hand, and got a lift back to Briercliffe."

The absence of the two, by that time, had become the chief subject of conversation in the village. Mrs. Massey, knowing that her son had been greatly distressed over not having work, had been firm in her declaration that he was just tramping about looking for a job.

A Straw in the Wind

She was horrified, therefore, to find him staggering into the house at four in the morning, of a Wednesday—he having been away since Saturday, his clothing disarranged, and wet, as if he had been in the water, his face haggard, and himself in such a nervous state that for a time she could make nothing out of what he said except that "the woman is dead."

After a few minutes, he said, "I have killed her and taken poison."

Mrs. Massey hastily gave him some household emetic, which brought on a sickness that relieved him, and then sent for Richard's brother, who lived near by.

The brother, knowing Richard as a steady and reliable man, was astounded; he came with speed, and found the other sitting in a chair, "white as death, and trembling all over, and could hardly speak." Being asked what the message about the woman meant, Richard at last managed to say:

" Go to Copper Bottom, near Fennifold Farm, and you will find a dead woman there."

The other Massey conferred with the mother, and although both of them thought that Richard had suddenly lost his mind, it seemed the best thing to get word to the police, the idea being that they would take charge of Richard as being of unsound mind, neither the brother nor the mother at first connecting Mrs. Barker with the alleged dead woman.

Therefore, the brother, leaving Richard to the care of his mother and several neighbors who had come in, attracted by the commotion in the Massey house, went to the police station himself and gave in the story, stating that he did not believe a word of it, and that what was really needed was a police medical examiner for his brother.

The police, however, who had received reports of a distrait couple seen near Copper Bottom, went to Fennifold Farm, and there found the woman's body.

It had been laid out carefully, the clothes arranged, the handkerchief in one hand, the gloves in the other.

Richard Massey was at once taken into custody and went with the officers without a word of protest. During his imprisonment, from July to October, he ate almost nothing, and seemed to be in a dazed mental condition, weeping frequently.

He kept a letter that the dead woman had written him, on his person, and some personal trinkets that he possessed of hers he often turned over and over, looking at them vaguely for hours at a time.

With the passing of time, however, his mind cleared somewhat, and when he was put on the stand he was able to show, illustrating on the neck of a constable, how, as he reached for the bottle with his right hand, he caught at the woman's throat with the left.

He was positive that he did not use both hands, and in this the medical examiner was in accord, stating that there were almost no marks of fingers on the throat, and that the victim probably helped on the matter of death by pushing against and not away from the hand.

All the physicians who had had some observation of Massey, and who knew the history of the case, agreed that the man and the woman were self-hypnotized with the death thought, and that supernatural strength lay in Massey's hand as he grappled with the woman in what was as much a desperate embrace as a struggle—and that the woman was in such an ill and nervous state, and so " self-hypnotized," that the slightest thing would have resulted in death.

How far this case goes to make a precedent for British law, the reader may judge when it is stated that the writer of this article has written it directly from the reports of testimony given at the trial. The appeal, not to the " unwritten law " which excuses a man or a woman for killing in the heat of jealous passion, but an appeal to the understanding of the psychological conditions which lie behind a highly emotional and non-sordid love affair, was what the defense made.

The jury was " out " just five minutes, and brought in a verdict of " manslaughter," with the suggestion of mercy in the punishment—adding, as British juries may do, the suggestion that three years in jail should be imposed on the accused.

The judge, who had been visibly affected by the trial, but who had retained his judicial demeanor, spoke severely to the accused, reminding him that it was unprecedented that he should have so light a sentence.

Massey thanked the jury and the court, adding only the single statement that he'd never be the same man again.

British usage does not encourage statements for the newspapers by the criminally charged or indicted, but Massey's case was so unusual that one or two of the weeklies used a careful study of the whole story, and in so doing commented on the fact that British law had seldom before taken into account the psychological condition and consequent history of a criminal case.

This is probably a straw in the wind, showing that the law is slowly awakening to many of the subtleties which have for so long engaged the attention of the more serious students of human nature.

Jimmy stopped in amazement, for the girl was Pat the Piper

THE PIPER PAYS

By Joseph Harrington

HER CLEAR BLUE EYES LOOKED INTO HIS AND MISS CLIFFORD SEEMED NOT TO REMEMBER THAT UNFORGETABLE NIGHT A MONTH BEFORE

JIMMY VAN BEUREN was frankly bored as he handed his coat, stick and gloves to the liveried servant and sauntered through the corridor toward the ballroom. The dance was being given by his younger sister, Ruth.

It was the first function she had sponsored since her marriage a year ago to Brandon Carewe, and Jimmy had felt duty bound to attend, although he foresaw only a tiresome evening devoted to discussing politics with the elder men, listening to the gossip of the matrons and chattering nonsense with the bob-haired, frivolous débutantes.

Pausing on the threshold of the brilliantly lighted ballroom that Carewe had built into his Park Avenue home, Jimmy surveyed the exclusive company of some thirty-odd persons gathered there, girls and women in jeweled evening gowns which revealed smooth white shoulders and arms, and the men in full dress with glistening snowy bosoms.

Mrs. Carewe, a piquant little bride, was standing near by, talking to a girl. The latter's back was turned and Jimmy saw only a mass of shimmering golden hair, a pair of slim, sculptured shoulders and a dainty neck above a silver gown.

Mrs. Carewe, glancing about, saw Jimmy and waved to him. He approached her, smiling to conceal his boredom.

"Two hours late, as usual, Jimmy," Ruth scolded with a sister's license. "I'll talk to you later about this, young man. Meantime, have you met Patricia Clifford? No? Patricia, this is my brother, Jimmy—Jimmy, Miss Clifford."

Jimmy started to bow formally, but

stopped abruptly as he caught his first glimpse of the golden-haired girl's countenance. His eyes widened and his jaw slacked in amazement.

For the girl was Pat the Piper! And she—the most notorious jewel thief in New York—was smiling at him, her clear blue eyes twinkling with friendliness. She seemed to have forgotten that night, a month before, when by a clever ruse she tricked him into holding two detectives at bay while she escaped with the proceeds of her latest theft.

"But we did meet before, didn't we, Jimmy?" Still smiling unconcernedly, she extended a tiny white hand—a hand that Jimmy knew was capable of twirling a safe dial with rare skill.

Stunned by the girl's daring effrontery and bewildered by her confident poise, Jimmy gaped wordlessly at her. From force of habit he took the tiny hand, held it for a moment and then dropped it hastily.

"Don't be surprised if Jimmy has forgotten you," said Ruth humorously. "There are so many girls in his life that he can't remember half of them."

The Piper joined her in laughter wholeheartedly. "I suppose I'm one of the unfortunates he can't remember," she teased.

"Well, since you know each other," Ruth announced, after a pause during which Jimmy tried to collect his scattered wits, "I'll leave you to yourselves."

And she strolled away, leaving Jimmy alone with the girl, who, for the evening, was Miss Patricia Clifford.

"I suppose," she said "that it's terribly improper for me to ask you to dance—but that's what I'm doing."

For a moment Jimmy entertained a thought of denouncing the famous gem thief then and there, while she, amusement in her eyes, surveyed him curiously and without a symptom of fear. But, half convinced it was all a dream, Jimmy remained silent. Automatically his arm encircled her waist and they glided off together on the waxed floor.

Presently he became aware that the girl was chatting and laughing, as though they were old friends discussing the latest bit of scandal. In reality her words carried actual import.

"Do you know, Jimmy—you don't mind if I call you that do you?—I never dreamed that Mrs. Carewe was your sister and that I would meet you here."

Jimmy regained the use of his faculties.

"If you did think so," he said grimly, "I hardly think you'd be here."

"Oh, I don't know about that." She looked at him mischievously.

Jimmy stopped dancing suddenly, although the music continued.

"Come with me," he ordered. "I want to talk to you."

He led the girl into the deserted conservatory. There, behind a clump of potted palms, they found a stone bench. The girl sat down, seemingly at ease, while Jimmy remained standing, glowering at her.

"Now answer my questions truthfully if you want to leave here without a police escort."

The Piper nodded, smiling.

"Why did you come here?" barked Jimmy.

"Don't you know?"

Jimmy scowled. "I suppose I do. And that's a perfectly good reason why I ought to call the police."

"But you won't."

Jimmy had a suspicion the girl was playing with him. "Why not?"

"Because—well, because you're a bit of a cavalier. That's all."

The frown on Jimmy's face deepened. He was in a quandary. His saner instinct told him to hold the girl there and notify the authorities. She was a notorious criminal, and she had as much as admitted that she was there to rob his sister and her guests.

But his imagination conjured up a picture of this dainty girl, unquestionably well bred, behind prison bars, clad in rough convict clothing and mingling with the lowest form of life—the flotsam that drifts to crime for a livelihood. He almost shuddered as he thought of it. Then he caught himself and tried to look stern. He pondered silently for a few minutes.

"Well," he said, finally making a deci-

sion. "I'll let you go, I suppose." Then noting her gleeful countenance, he added hastily, "Understand, though, that I'm doing this only because your arrest here would ruin my sister's dance."

"Thank you," said Pat.

Jimmy cleared his throat. "However, I think you'd better go right away."

She rose to her feet. "Very well. That makes another debt I owe you, doesn't it?"

"Forget it," growled Jimmy. "I'll go out with you and tell 'em I'm taking you home, so your departure won't look queer.

"By the way," added Jimmy, as they walked through an aisle of green, "how did it happen that you were invited to this ball?"

"I had a couple of letters of introduction to your sister—false of course, but they seemed above suspicion," Pat explained.

"I see."

They reached the entrance to the ballroom, and there they stopped suddenly, Jimmy with a premonition of trouble. For, during their absence, the air of gayety had vanished from the gathering. Now there was an excited hubbub instead of laughter, and the guests were grouped at one corner of the room, talking excitedly.

In the center of the group was a man whose street clothes distinguished him from Mrs. Carewe's guests. Jimmy recognized him as Robert McIntyre, noted private detective and close friend of the Carewe and Van Beuren families.

Ruth Carewe saw Jimmy and Pat enter and ran toward her brother. As she approached Jimmy saw there were signs of tears on her face and she was plainly laboring under great excitement.

"Jimmy," she gasped. "It's awful!"

Brandon Carewe had followed his wife and was patting her shoulder soothingly, although he, too, was clearly worried.

"What is it?" demanded Jimmy.

"Some of the guests," Carewe explained, "have missed jewels. Ruth herself lost the emerald pendant I gave her on her last birthday. Mrs. Simon Austin says her pearl necklace has vanished and Mrs. George Chapman's diamond brooch is missing."

Jimmy could not help glancing instinctively toward Patricia. Her guileless countenance expressed only shocked sympathy.

Robert McIntyre, gray-haired and capable, joined the Carewes and Jimmy.

"What do you think of it, McIntyre?" Carewe asked.

The sleuth shrugged. "Looks like the Piper's work," he opined, "although there's nothing definite to indicate such is the case. But it's known that she is as good at this sort of robbery as she is at opening safes."

"When did the guests miss their jewelry?" Jimmy asked.

"Only a few moments ago," McIntyre said. "But that means nothing—at least it does not mean that the thefts took place only then. The jewels might have been gone for an hour or more before their loss was discovered, due to the fact that in each instance the robbed person was wearing considerable jewelry. For instance, Mrs. Austin, who lost the pearl necklace, was also wearing a diamond collar, which evidently prevented her from noticing that the pearls were no longer about her neck."

"In fact," Carewe pointed out, "it was only after Ruth missed the emerald pendant that any of the others knew that they had been robbed."

Jimmy was thoughtful. "Are you sure," he asked after a pause, "that it was a robbery? Isn't it possible that the gems may have fallen somewhere?"

McIntyre shook his head. "If it was one article of jewelry that was missing, that might be so. But three—impossible!"

The detective pondered. "You say," he said presently, "that no one has left the house since the ball began?"

"Not one," Mrs. Carewe assured him. "Why?"

"Simply this: the thief is still among us!"

II

THE little group exchanged startled glances.

"And," continued McIntyre in a businesslike tone, "all we have to do is to search every one, including the servants—except of course Mrs. Carewe, the victims

themselves and the immediate members of their families—and we'll find the robber!"

"But," objected Mrs. Carewe, "think of the feelings of my guests over such a procedure. Why, it would be an absolute indignity. They'd never forgive me."

"There, there, dear," said her husband. "Really it's the only way, and I am certain they will all take it in good spirit."

Ruth protested, but she was overruled, and when the suggestion was put to the guests, they, as Carewe had predicted, took it good-naturedly. None of the victims would be actually inconvenienced by their looses, due to their wealth, and now that the excitement had somewhat subsided they were inclined to view the whole incident as a novel experience.

At the first opportunity Jimmy took Pat aside. He led her to a corner where he knew they would not be overheard. There he seized her wrist and forced her to look into his eyes.

"You've got those jewels," he accused.

"I haven't," she declared. She seemed to be entirely frank, but Jimmy knew that she earned her sobriquet by inventing convincing excuses and tales.

"Listen," he said, sharply. "If you give them to me now, I promise that you'll get away."

"I haven't got the jewels, Jimmy," she repeated, and this time he grudgingly believed her.

"Anyway," he muttered, "if you have they'll be found when you're searched."

McIntyre was approaching, and the conversation stopped abruptly.

"I wonder, Mr. Van Beuren," the detective said formally, "if you would please help Mr. Carewe and myself search the male guests?"

"Surely," Jimmy returned courteously.

They walked back to the gathering, which broke into two parts. The girls and women, led by Mrs. Carewe and a woman operative whom McIntyre had hastily summoned, went to Mrs. Carewe's apartment. The men filed up the staircase to Brandon Carewe's den.

Jimmy, his brother-in-law and the detective immediately set about their task. Jimmy, however, only went through the motions of searching the men assigned to him. He knew practically all of them and he bantered with them during the process of turning their pockets inside out and feeling the other parts of their garments.

Beneath his smiling exterior Jimmy was worried. He had shielded Pat thus far, and for some reason unknown to himself he did not want to expose her now. He felt guilty himself, knowing that if Pat had stolen the gems he was making himself an accessory after the fact by remaining silent.

The search in Carewe's room revealed nothing, which was quite as Jimmy had expected. He found himself anxious to return downstairs to hear the result of the search in his sister's apartment, but the men were in no hurry. They had several drinks, discussed the case leisurely and made various conjectures before they returned to the ballroom. There the women were waiting for them.

Jimmy's eyes went to Ruth's face. She caught his eye and shook her head.

"No trace of them," she told him.

Jimmy looked at Pat. She smiled, her demeanor expressing innocence vindicated. McIntyre was frankly baffled for the moment. He surveyed the guests, rubbed his chin reflectively, and then said: "Since the jewels are in nobody's possession, they must be hidden somewhere in the house. I will start a search immediately. Meantime, it is not necessary for any of you to remain. In fact, I would prefer that you all go, so as not to interfere with the searchers. Incidentally, by every one leaving, the thief, if he or she is among us, would be prevented from returning to the place where the gems are secreted."

Carewe nodded agreement and the guests started to file out. Jimmy slipped to his sister's side and voiced sympathy over the ruin of her fête. She smiled at him through misty eyes and gripped his hand.

Jimmy turned to find Pat standing beside him.

"Didn't you promise to see me home?" she queried.

Jimmy nodded and accompanied her to

the cloak room, and, after bidding their hosts good-by, they walked down the steps together to Jimmy's low-slung gray roadster.

"Where do you live?" Jimmy asked when the motor was purring smoothly.

She evaded his question. "Drop me at Eighty-Sixth Street and Broadway."

For the first few minutes of the drive Jimmy was wordless. The rapid-fire sequence of events during the evening had left his mind in a turmoil. Finally, when they were nearing their destination, he spoke.

"Do you know, Pat—or Miss Clifford, whichever you are—you don't seem to be in your element—I mean you don't seem to be a real criminal."

She laughed. "No?" she queried noncommittally.

Jimmy snorted, catching the teasing note in her voice, and thereafter he remained silent until they reached the designated corner.

"I think," he said, jerking the handbrake viciously, "that I'm a damn fool."

"Why?"

"To let you go free to-night, when everything indicates you took those gems."

She slipped out of the low seat, leaped lightly from the running board to the sidewalk and stood there for a moment, gazing reflectively at him.

"Do you hate criminals, Jimmy?"

"Yes, I do." Jimmy was emphatic.

"So you hate me."

Jimmy choked and sputtered, his dignity shaken. Before he could stammer any sort of a reply, the girl turned and was lost in the crowds on Broadway.

Jimmy swore for no particular reason as he crashed the gears into speed and drove down town toward his own bachelor home. He garaged the gray roadster and went to his own apartment. There he discarded his topcoat and hat, flung his dress coat carelessly onto a chair with luxurious untidiness and slipped into a dressing robe.

He was slumped in an easy-chair, turning the night's events over in his mind, when there was a tap on the door. He opened it to find a khaki-clad messenger boy standing on the threshold.

"Letter for Mr. James Van Beuren," the messenger mumbled sleepily.

Jimmy signed for it, tipped him with a sizable silver coin and tore open the envelope. It was written in pencil on a telegraph blank evidently in the neighboring office. He read:

DEAR JIMMY:

I do believe that you are actually reforming me! Astounding, but true. This is the proof:

I took that jewelry to-night, as you suspected. But that was before you arrived and before I knew that Mrs. Carewe was your sister.

Naturally, I couldn't return it then to the necks, gowns, *et cetera*, from which I had taken the pieces. Incidentally, I knew we were going to be searched, so I couldn't very well keep them in my possession. So—

I put them in your pocket! Yes, in the little pocket inside your dress coat.

It was quite simple. Before you arrived I had intended to slip them into your brother-in-law's pocket, and later induce him to see me home. The plan was to pick his pocket after we left the house.

Your appearance changed all that. I didn't have a chance to go near Mr. Carewe. But I used the same idea, slipping the jewels into *your* pocket while we were dancing.

It was easy. And it would have been just as easy to take them out again while you were driving me home—but I couldn't.

I don't think it was my conscience that stopped me. It's not likely that I have one. Probably it was a desire to pay that debt I owe you.

PAT THE PIPER.

From one pocket he yanked the piece of satin, from another the muffler

A SLIP OF THE PEN

By Ben Conlon

CERTAIN OF THE TABLOID NEWSPAPERS REFERRED TO THIS AS THE CASE OF "THE SLAYER WITHOUT A MOTIVE"

WHEN the newspapers announced the disappearance of George Blodgett Kirkham, very likely Jimmy Cruett was the only detective in New York who seriously suspected that here might be a case of murder instead of suicide.

Sitting up in bed—although the hour was close to 10 A.M. and Jimmy was in disgracefully good health—he finished the breakfast that the Greek waiter had brought up from the little lunchroom downstairs, and once more read the news story in the morning papers.

"I wonder!" Jimmy observed, as he came to the last line of the sensational item in the third of his morning newspapers. "I wonder!" he repeated, as he lit a cigarette from a crumpled packet on his bedside tabouret. He tamped the cigarette, after a few feverish puffs, into the well-filled ashtray, and bounded out of his bed and into his shower.

Twenty minutes later, Jimmy Cruett, looking anything but the popular conception of what a sleuth should look like, was descending the stairway of his little Brooklyn flat. He turned into the Greek lunchroom and bade the smiling young lady at the desk a cheery good morning. "Arline," he asked lightly, "how would you spell 'bear?'"

The blond-headed Arline giggled. "Why, Mr. Cruett!" she accused. "Ain't you awful? Whatcha been drinkin' so early this mornin'?"

"I just had a little orange juice," replied Jimmy, "and a cup of what this boss of yours calls coffee. Really, I'm serious,

Arline. How would you spell the word 'bear'—say, in a sentence such as 'I can't bear this job?'"

"Which wouldn't be no lie, what I mean," retorted Arline. "Why—b-e-a-r, o' course. Jus' like a teddy-bear," she added, with an attempt at humor.

"Correct!" was Jimmy's verdict. "I'd put you at the head of the class. Well, I must be stepping along. So long, Arline. Give my best regards to Mr. Santopolous."

He walked out into the street, Arline's gaze of puzzlement following his slender figure. "If that ain't the funniest guy!" observed the blond cashier to no one in particular. "Sometimes I think he's a brilliant guy an' then he seems to turn goofy all of a sudden. But he manages to get by without workin'."

Jimmy Cruett, however, was working this morning. To such as Arline he was a mysterious man of leisure. He occupied no office, his telephone was listed as that of a private individual, and he had searched Greater New York for an unimposing little flat where he could finecomb the newspapers daily, browse over his works on criminology, and keep as much to himself as he cared to.

He had finally located the apartment in a quiet corner of Brooklyn. It fitted, at once, his requirements and his purse. The lunchroom below catered to his luxurious habit of breakfasting in bed, and Times Square was but a nickel away on one of the subway's direct lines.

It was, however, at City Hall that he left the subway on this particular morning, and walked across the park to the office of one of the few large newspapers which had not moved to more palatial quarters uptown. There he spent a few minutes in the company of a reporter friend, who gave him much inside information on the Kirkham story.

A few moments later he was back-tracking across the park, turned down Chambers Street and entered the Interborough subway. The business rush had spent itself. Jimmy found a roomy space in a corner, glanced at his wrist-watch. Sheridan Square was but a few minutes' run, but he had time to reopen his batch of morning papers. His hunch on the Kirkham case had been based upon a very slight and subtle clew.

Kirkham had been a retired lawyer, about sixty-five years of age, quite well to do, and a collector of rare bindings in his later idling years. He had lived alone in a ground floor apartment on Beekman Place, a short block from the East River.

The morning previous his servant, Catherine Boland, who lived out, had found his apartment deserted. There were no signs of a struggle. But prominently displayed upon the dining room table was a note in Kirkham's handwriting:

> My health is failing. I cannot bare it any longer, and have decided to end it all. Please do not make any search for my body.

The newspapers pointed out that Kirkham had, in fact, been in poor health for the past few months. Some of them expressed surprise that he, a lawyer, should have added to the difficulties of his heirs by making a mystery of the whereabouts of his body. But not one reporter, not one detective, had seen any significance in the fact that he had written "I cannot *bare* it." In most of the printed accounts, Cruett noticed, the spelling was simply corrected to "bear" without comment.

But examination of all the papers proved that the mispelling had not been a mere typographical error on the part of a linotyper and left uncorrected by the proofreader. In two of the papers, the original was given, followed by the Latin word *sic*, in brackets. One writer did go so far as to say that Kirkham had evidently been much distraught, or he would not have been guilty of such a slip of the pen.

Jimmy Cruett regarded the misspelling as a hint that there might have been foul play. Various of his criminological works were authority for the fact that educated men are subject to hundreds of vagaries under stress of emotion, but not to this particular one.

They do not suddenly become illiterate. The habit of accurate spelling is too deeply ingrained in their subconscious minds to be thrown out of gear.

Cruett finished his quick analysis of the various journals as the local drew into the Sheridan Square station. He placed the crumpled newspapers in a refuse receptacle, then ran lightly up the stairs and set out briskly eastward toward Washington Square. The address he was looking for, he decided, would be on MacDougall Street between Third Street and the park.

In this MacDougall Street house, according to the newspapers, lived Doris Kirkham, the missing man's nineteen-year-old niece—an orphan, but evidently not a beneficiary under the terms of Kirkham's will, which had been made some twenty years before his death and left unchanged. Every penny of the lawyer-collector's fortune, it seemed, would go to his nephew George, a bachelor of thirty-five, known to have been liked and pampered as a namesake by the unfortunate old man.

As he walked toward the square, Jimmy summed up his slender facts. Kirkham, from various accounts, had been rather an original cuss, an iconoclast in his way, a hater of bromides and platitudes—certainly not a man to have gloried in such a well-worn phrase as "to end it all."

There seemed little doubt in his mind that Kirkham himself had penned the message. But Jimmy Cruett's eyes gleamed as he came to the park and turned down MacDougall Street. Supposing—just supposing—Kirkham had been forced to write at the point of a gun! He quickly reconstructed such a possible scene.

The phrases would have been dictated to him and checked up after they were written. But, banking on his assailant being too ignorant to detect the error, the wily lawyer might have deliberately misspelled a word. He might have hoped to warn the world not to take the message at its face value. He might have hoped that his guile would outwit some clumsier-minded would-be slayer and perhaps so maneuver as to effect a stay of intended violence.

Or, at least, he might have hoped for an avenger when, his guile unavailing, he had been done to destruction. Most of Jimmy Cruett's cases as a private detective had been secured because he had frequently seen in the evidence small points which the more obtuse eye of a rival might readily overlook.

He found the number he had been looking for on the east side of the street, a typical Greenwich Village studio block, probably the domicile of ambitious young painters, he assumed, and, as it happened, sadly in need of a coat of paint. He mounted the steps, rang the upper bell. A buzzer sounded and the front door opened. Jimmy ascended the rickety stairway.

A girl in a light blue smock met him at the head of the second flight of stairs. He recalled that the newspapers had mentioned her as an artist.

II

"MISS KIRKHAM?" Jimmy inquired.

"Yes." The girl's voice was low-pitched. Her eyes—and Jimmy noticed that they were most unusual eyes—were slightly reddened as if from weeping.

"I wonder," Jimmy asked, "if I might see you for about five minutes—in your studio, if possible, and if you are alone? The matter concerns the case of your uncle, Mr. Kirkham."

"I suppose so," the girl assented. She guided Jimmy into an interesting, if somewhat disordered, room boasting a fireplace, a skylight and chintz-curtained shelves of books. Jimmy shut the door.

"Do you happen to know, Miss Kirkham," he asked, coming to the point with his usual directness, "any one whose interests might have been served by your uncle's disappearance at this particular time?"

The girl's face clouded. "My cousin George is probably pleased it wasn't delayed a few weeks," she replied. "Oh, but"—she made a sharp little gesture of impatience with herself—"you're not a reporter, are you?"

"Not a reporter," replied Jimmy. "I am a detective. What you may care to tell me will be held inviolate, for my interests as well as for yours. You may be assured of that much. Do you mind telling me just why your cousin might have benefited

in one way or another by this mysterious development right now?"

"Uncle George," the girl told him, "intended to write a new will and leave some of his money to me."

"You had been good friends with him? He had helped you out at certain times, perhaps?"

The girl smiled a rueful little smile as her very unusual eyes swept the cheap little skylight room. Jimmy Cruett mentally observed that she had the quality of quiet humor.

"He helped me occasionally," she replied. "I'm afraid I needed his help very badly at times. The newspapers referred to me as an artist," she added, with a shadow of the same little crooked smile, "but their art editors don't quite agree with their reporters."

"Had your uncle set any date for changing his will?" Jimmy asked.

"No. Being a lawyer, he would have written the will himself. He had been delaying it, I understand, as he hadn't been feeling very well—and yet his illness, apparently, was not of a nature to cause him to act quickly in the matter. A touch of gout, I believe."

The development seemed important to Jimmy Cruett. Kirkham would have been unlikely to commit suicide, at least, without having drawn up the new will. Evidently he liked his niece, if only in an objective way. At least, he did not dislike her—if the girl was telling the truth.

And he would have gambled, Jimmy would, at this moment, that she was telling the truth. Those straight-gazing, purple-tinged gray eyes were not the eyes of a liar. But liars, he knew from experience, might have honest-looking eyes. He analyzed the girl quickly—either she was not given to prevarication at all, or she could lie very skillfully. Which? He hoped the former, and smiled a little at himself for being so impressionable.

"How has your cousin been fixed—in a financial way?" he asked.

"About like myself." The deprecating little smile was in evidence again. "Oh, worse off than myself, I should say. George has always been in debt. But for Heaven's sake!" she interjected quickly. "You don't think for a moment that he could have done anything to harm Uncle George, do you?"

Jimmy Cruett looked Doris Kirkham steadily in the eyes, sized her up finally, as a sensible girl in good control of her nerves, then laid his cards on the table.

"You see, Miss Kirkham," he explained, "I bring you a suspicion, without any real proofs to back it up—as yet. Unless we find the body and its condition indicates murder, the police can't and won't make arrests.

"I suggest that you retain me simply to establish whether or not your uncle is dead. Secretly, I'll probe the whole business. If I'm unable to show that a crime was committed, I shan't charge you a cent. If I make progress, and you benefit by it, I dare say you will be glad to pay me a reasonable fee.

"In the event that your cousin, George, is the—well, has been implicated in any way with the crime, he would cease, of course, to have any standing according to law, and would not gain anything from the will however it might be phrased. A felon has no rights under any will."

The girl looked at him shrewdly. "You sound reasonable," she said smilingly. "All this is exciting, anyhow. You see, I never knew Uncle George very well. I never saw him until I was sixteen years old. He was my father's oldest brother, and I cannot represent myself as heartbroken, for our association was very limited and very brief.

"At the same time, I cried a little this morning. Uncle George was very good in his way. I assure you, rather than gain from his death, I'd much prefer Uncle George to be alive. I hope you find that he is. And then, if he has been killed, I would like to think that no kin of mine had anything to do with it.

"Frankly, I do not like my cousin George or his associates, but I would like to feel that he would not stoop to such a heinous crime, whatever interest he may have had to do so."

"He is your first cousin?"

"Yes. The son of my other uncle, about ten years older than my father. Uncle

George lived to be the oldest. He was a bachelor." The suggestion of a smile was once more reflected in the gray eyes.

"If you will sign this paper then," suggested Jimmy Cruett. "No benefits to you, no pay for me. Strictly business."

He secured the paper, made his devoirs and left. And yet, as he descended the stairs and thought of those purple-tinged eyes of Doris Kirkham, he knew that it wasn't all business. Jimmy Cruett was a criminologist of some note. He could be a hard-boiled sleuth at times.

But, after all, he was only twenty-six years old. A bachelor of twenty-six has every right to admire a pair of very unusual eyes when they are set in an interesting feminine face. And those eyes, he recalled, were—were gems of honesty mounted in a setting of desire—they were the dancing-ground of a soul. You see, if Jimmy Cruett had lived in Greenwich Village instead of Brooklyn, he might have developed into a poet instead of a detective.

III

THE trail was warming a trifle. On the head of this development, Jimmy bought three evening papers, although it was still not quite noon, and took a taxi in the direction of Beekman Place.

He summed up the case thus far as he lolled back on the cushioned seat and puffed at a cigarette. The issues were small, but clean-cut. The word misspelled by an educated, meticulous, almost literary man. The bromidic phrase, "to end it all." The fact that even the illiterate Arline could spell "bear." The fact that Kirkham had planned to change his will and yet, according to the surface facts given in the papers, had committed suicide with the will unchanged—if Doris Kirkham's story was true about his intention. Jimmy Cruett compressed his jaws and decided that it was.

Also, there was the fact that Kirkham, himself a lawyer, should run the risk of muddling his own estate. The fact that he had liked his niece—it wouldn't be difficult to like *her*, Jimmy ruminated—that Kirkham knew she was not in the best of circumstances, trying for a foothold in the precarious field of commercial art. The close-hauled financial condition of the nephew, George Kirkham. And the girl had said: "I do not like my cousin George or his associates." His associates! Many a man has been forced into crime through "associates."

His first act upon arriving at the missing man's Beekman Place apartment was to interview the building superintendent, a heavy-shouldered man who spoke with a Scandinavian accent. "Mr. Kirkham lived absolutely alone?" he asked the man, Olsen by name.

"Ay tank so," was the reply. "Me, Ay live in the basement, but ay see or hear most t'ings goin' on. He seem to go to bed early, then he get up an' have his breakfast when the woman come."

"The woman?" Jimmy Cruett was all attention. "Kirkham knew some women?" The ancient *cherchez la femme* theory was racing through his mind.

Olsen deliberated just long enough to be irritating. "Ay mean the woman that worked for him, the maid." Cruett's face fell. "He used to get up an' have his breakfast when the woman came. Then he gen'rally went for a short walk."

"I'll look over the apartment," said Jimmy crisply. He had found that statements smacking of police authority brought better results than humbly couched requests.

Once inside the well-appointed suite, he began to go over it with a fine tooth comb for clews. The furnishings had not been touched since Kirkham's disappearance. He was obliged to admit, at the end of two hours of hard work, that there was not a single sign pointing to violence, or even to the presence of visitors on the fatal evening. If Kirkham had been kidnaped, then killed, it had been by men wearing felt slippers and rubber gloves.

The case reduced itself to one of finding the body.

Now, "Murder will out," is one of the oldest catchwords in criminology.

Jimmy Cruett realized that, like other catchwords, it is sometimes not literally

true. There are too many unsolved mysteries to prove to the contrary.

One salient fact, though, stood out in his memories of criminological research: When a murderer's safety depends upon his disposing of the body, the odds are all against him. A human body is the most difficult thing in the world to get rid of illegally.

Its shape is suspicious for shipping or carrying, and its size and weight as well. Only a skilled surgeon can efficiently dismember a body, and even then stains tell a story of possible crime. Hours are required to consume it in the hottest furnace, and without strong forced draft, certain bones are left to betray foul play, and the tallest of chimneys would be required to mask the act.

A crematory, the only place where a body can be swiftly reduced to ashes, requires a death certificate, records, investigations. Decomposition betrays its presence, if hidden, unless buried under several feet of earth. Scars are left upon the earth in cases of irregular burial, and fresh mounds outside of cemeteries excite suspicion, even assuming that the long and arduous task of digging a grave might be done under cover of night. The sea casts up its dead.

All of these things ran through the active mind of Jimmy Cruett. He had confidence that he was not chasing a rainbow, confidence that, granted there is a body to find, a detective who fails to do so can nearly always blame himself for having been short on imagination in analyzing the possibilities.

"Let's assume," he said to himself, as he sat in an easy chair in Kirkham's attractive library, "that Kirkham did commit suicide and that he was sincere about not wanting his corpse discovered. The obvious course would be to weight his pockets and throw himself into the river, which is conveniently near. Oh, well, I suppose this case will lead up and down a good many blind alleys."

He left the apartment house—just as a gesture of thoroughness, slipping into the cellar and examining the furnace—and strolled down to the riverside. The setting was more atmospheric than anything else.

He sat and thought awhile, then strolled west to a short-order hole-in-the-wall and snatched a delayed luncheon. A few minutes later he was reading another evening paper. Some reporter had described Kirkham's niece as "a very pretty miss."

"I'll say she's a 'very pretty miss,'" was Jimmy's murmur. It may have been business or otherwise that caused him once more to head for Greenwich Village. He built up an alibi for additional calls with his first sentence.

"I'm afraid I'll be inflicting myself upon you a great deal for the next few days, Miss Kirkham," he announced, when the girl, now dressed in attractive street clothes, answered the door. "I've searched your uncle's apartment. Nothing of interest, I must admit. Just thought I'd report."

"Very dutiful," observed the girl dryly, but her characteristic smile was friendly.

"The apartment," continued Jimmy, wincing a little under the gentle satire, "is very close to the river. Did your uncle ever walk over that way very much?"

"Not to my knowledge. I didn't know a great deal about his habits."

"Of course, that part of the river would be patrolled," Jimmy explained. "Any irregularity would have been noticed in the daytime, and a couple of Holmes men patrol each of those residential blocks all night. And a body would likely be washed ashore unless, by some chance, a man intending suicide could have got out to the middle of the river.

"Let's see. The Queensborough Bridge is only six blocks to the north. I suppose a sick old man could have walked that distance to make the plunge, but would scarcely have gone any farther."

He felt a little self-conscious as he presented his vapory theories, and yet he was destined to count this visit a success.

Doris Kirkham, a certain limited bohemianism about her, consented to his respectful invitation to accompany him to dinner. He would have liked to linger in the village tearoom atmosphere of intimacy and shaded candelabra, but shortly after seven o'clock took his departure, going uptown and spending a busy two hours in interviewing various night taxi drivers who had stands in the vicinity of Beekman

Place and a few others on the fringe of the vicinage who might have been hopefully cruising through that prosperous district.

He realized that Kirkham would be wily, even if planning self-destruction. He was a man who scorned the obvious. If he had chosen to taxi to the Queensborough Bridge, for instance, he might have first deliberately taxied to Brooklyn to secure another cab to take him back toward the bridge; or he might have paid the driver a block or so away, and walked the rest of the way.

And if this was a case of murder, slayers wishing to create the impression of suicide might have followed the same method of reasoning.

Once more he returned to the Beekman Place apartment. It would result in another little unexpected surveillance over Olsen, and, besides, a man of Kirkham's age might possibly have a record of a garage telephone number among his papers. Elderly persons are not so apt to be patronizing all sorts of haphazard, harebrained drivers.

The search proved fruitless, and he was on the point of starting for a whimsical reconnaissance in the vicinity of the bridge, when a key clicked in the lock and a man let himself into the apartment. Cruett's hand gripped the handle of an automatic in the pocket of his coat.

IV

THE man looked him over keenly and with some evidence of distaste. He was in his early thirties, a coarse-featured, dissipated-looking young fellow, but flawlessly groomed, and with an effeminate chin.

His eyes were circled with marks of revelry, and they were gray, purple-tinged. Jimmy had little doubt that this was young George Kirkham. The latter left no doubt of his identity when, with an air of proprietorship, he inquired: "Who are you? And what are you doing in this apartment?"

Cruett displayed his credentials, which the other read, scowling. "It isn't right of Doris to hire you to snoop around," he complained. "My uncle forbade anything of the kind in his note."

"She wants to satisfy herself he is dead."

"After reading that suicide note in his own hand? My God!"

"But there is no body in evidence. Are no efforts being made to find it?" Cruett asked innocently.

"The police are dragging the river at the foot of the street."

"Do you object to that?"

"Object?" repeated the nephew. "Why the hell should I? It's their duty." His inflection was such as might intimate that private detectives such as Cruett might be actuated more by avarice than by duty.

"Well," Jimmy suggested, "suppose I just trail along with the water cops."

"Fine! It's your best bet, anyhow," was young Kirkham's statement. "It's up to you what you want to do. What I don't want is a family hullabaloo. That would be an insult to Uncle George's memory."

Cruett took his departure, feeling certain of four things: that George Kirkham was not mourning the loss of his uncle, under the circumstances; that he was too well educated a man to have passed the written phrase, "I cannot bare it"; that if the nephew had been implicated in the Kirkham murder, the body would not be found in the shallow water off Beekman Place—he was entirely too willing that the latter should be dragged; that the younger Kirkham was a nervous and somewhat effeminate type, not the type to stand the terrible strain of cutting up and secreting a body.

Like all theories, Cruett's were subject to a few grains of salt. He realized this only too well. But he felt confident, felt ready to run each theory to the ground and then turn back with the confidence of a salesman who, failing to clinch a sale after long and hopeful preliminary work, still has to keep plugging.

He strolled up from Beekman Place and turned into the Queensborough Bridge, the long span connecting Manhattan with Long Island City and bestraddling Blackwell's Island on the way.

Various policemen, some of whom he knew, had seen no irregularities on the night of November 5. But shortly before

midnight an officer named Mallon reported for duty. The night in question he had patrolled the section of the bridge between Blackwell's Island and the Queens shore.

"About four o'clock I noticed a stalled car," Mallon recalled. "I walked up to see what was the matter. A couple o' guys was gittin' back into the car; said they'd been tightenin' a loose bolt an' was all set to go. They drove on, sure enough, without any bother."

"Did you see the license number of the car?" Jimmy asked.

"Nah! I can't be takin' the number of every stalled ol' tin can that crosses the bridge."

"Would you recognize the men if you saw them again?"

"I'm afraid not. It was a black night. D'ye think *you* could at four in the mornin', in this weather, an' in that spot?"

"What make of car did they drive?"

"A Ford, I guess." Officer Mallon's tone was perfunctory. He was unacquainted personally with Cruett, and quite possibly was beginning to regard the youngster with a touch of disdain.

Jimmy Cruett, however, made the most of this foggy lead. At least it was something—a car stalled on the Queensborough Bridge on the very night of Kirkham's disappearance. A black night. And, as the investigation proved, in a spot below which the river was at its deepest, a spot likely to fit in with the desires of men anxious to dispose of a corpse.

Cruett tipped off the water police to try there. They fished with their grappling hooks the next day—but not in too serious a mood and without results. It was practically wasted effort, they claimed, on account of the depth.

For the next two days Jimmy Cruett made many motions, some of which, he well realized, would also be "wasted effort."

He investigated the private life of young George Kirkham, found him to be a spendthrift, as his cousin Doris had implied. The rent on his West End Avenue apartment was seldom paid on time. He was in debt to several loan companies, and had large overdue accounts with grocers and butchers, not to mention bootleggers.

In the few days since his uncle's disappearance he had already borrowed money from friends, on his prospects when the will should be probated. He did not own a car. But he frequented numerous speakeasies and pool parlors, where he could certainly meet underworld characters who owned or could secure Fords, and who would take on a criminal job for a price.

Cruett could have started a long, weary checking-up of his associates, in the hope of learning that two of them had driven a Ford car to the Queensborough Bridge on the night of November 5. But there were numerous other little details requiring attention.

He overlooked no avenue of information. He kept a close watch on Olsen, the apartment house superintendent, and admitted that his movements seemed unsuspicious. He looked up the maid who had preceded Catherine Boland, and found her married to a policeman, who was inclined to laugh good-humoredly over the youngster's cross-examination.

He looked up and interviewed a butler who had worked for Kirkham up to a year before, when the lawyer had retired, given up his big house, and moved to the small apartment, and looked up the French maid to whom the butler had been married.

Neither had seen Kirkham since leaving his service. Withers, the butler, seemingly better educated than most of his trade, and a bit of a dandy as well, had opened up a small haberdashery shop and was prospering. He gave, rather reluctantly, some facts about Kirkham's private life, which Cruett regarded as useful clews.

Armed with this data, Cruett left the snug little shop and spent the afternoon interviewing several ladies, all of them much younger than Kirkham. They were not disposed to discuss the case any more than the ex-servants, who were mainly interested in the terms of the will. The various trails served only to lead Cruett up and down the blind alleys which are a necessary part of sleuthing.

And, in the meantime, if old George Blodgett Kirkham was dead, his body was

decomposing. Accordingly, Cruett preferred to get to work on a plan which he had formed to make the East River give it up—if that, indeed, was where it lay.

Most laymen are aware that if a human being is dead when thrown into the water, the corpse will rise to the surface more rapidly, after sinking, than if the victim has been drowned. The difference is one of several days—a drowned person has taken quantities of water into the stomach and lungs, displacing air.

But if there had been murder, the body almost certainly would have been weighted. Amateurs rarely do this scientifically. They know that a trivial weight is enough to sink a human frame in water, but they overlook the fact that gas generates in the torso, the increased buoyancy of the body partly counterbalancing the drag of the weight upon it. In that case, the body often raises itself to a certain distance and is carried along below the surface by any currents present in the water.

The East River in New York Harbor is not really a river, but the narrow neck of Long Island Sound. There is a slight tidal motion, and the bottling up of the water at Hell Gate results in a general southward drift toward the open sea.

Basing his calculations on the above, Jimmy Cruett constructed of rubber, wood and cloth a dummy so balanced with iron slugs and air bladders that it would sink a distance of about twenty feet. His final touch was to attach a small, gayly colored float to it with a light but strong silk cord.

Early on the sixth morning after Kirkham's disappearance he secured a motor boat and dropped his dummy into the river at the spot under the bridge where he believed the body might have fallen. It sank rapidly, but the float remained bobbing on the surface. From that moment, alternating with an operative who was out of a job and willing to accept reasonable wages for easy work, he became the tireless shadow of that circular bit of painted cork not as large as a man's head.

It proved to be a strange experience—interesting, too, for one of Cruett's proclivities. Time and again passenger steamers and tugs went over the float, but it did not get entangled in the screws, and Cruett would locate it tossing furiously in the foam after the danger had passed.

The risk of destruction made him nervous, though, that the work he had done might suddenly come to naught, so he added a second float, in case one might become the victim of a propeller.

He was forced to invent a dozen good stories to satisfy inquisitive watchmen and water police, who wondered why he should be cruising for hours on the dirty river.

Every morning required a new search for the floats—and every morning found them a few hundred feet farther downstream. The dummy to which they were attached was obviously drifting on a definite course. Cruett's hunch had been a sound one.

He grew enthusiastic, like a miner searching for gold, a suitor seeking the hand of a beautiful one. He might win, he might lose, but the latter would be chiefly mere loss of time, and meanwhile, faint heart—

.The afternoon of the eleventh day he ran into his big thrill in the Kirkham case.

The floats were then opposite the Wallabout Channel, rather close to the Brooklyn shore and a good three miles from the starting place. Caught in the wash of a passing steamer, the bobbing markers veered directly toward the Brooklyn Navy Yard, traveling under a long pier which protruded from the made land at the mouth of the channel, and came to rest.

Jimmy Cruett speeded away to get the necessary permit, and within two hours he was raking the mud below the pier. Here was the end of the chase, the final fling of the dice, to win or to lose.

His heart leaped as the weight of his grapnel told him that something had become fastened to it; and his pulsations quickened when, close to the surface of the unclean water, there showed up what might be the outlines of a body.

But Cruett's eyes lost their gleam when he found that he had recovered his own dummy. Nevertheless, he continued his grisly task, and his determination brought results. The next object brought to the

surface was the body of George Blodgett Kirkham.

It was dressed in a gray sack suit. It showed no marks of violence except a slight bruise on the head, which might have been acquired after death. The stones in either side pocket might well have been placed there by a suicide.

But the incorrigible carelessness of murderers was once more demonstrated by the fact that Kirkham's legs were lashed together with a man's knitted muffler. The fragment of satin attached to it by little more than a thread, water-soaked and silt-stained, read:

. . . thers, Fine Haberdashery,
. . . Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Jimmy Cruett placed the wet, soiled label in the pocket of his coat. It might be a worthless clew. It told where the scarf was bought, but not to whom it was sold. The haberdasher might know nothing about it. ———thers. It might mean some firm of brothers; it might mean—

Jimmy Cruett wasted no time in looking through a classified directory.

As soon as possible, he dashed to a taxi-cab stand and was on his way to the Flatbush Avenue address. As the cab drew up in front of the shop, he read the sign:

Gents' Furnishings
JOHN WITHERS
Collars—Ties Hats—Gloves

V

HE bounded out of the cab and into the store.

Either the tall, stooped man behind the counter did not recognize him or else he pretended not to.

"Let's see some mufflers," ordered Jimmy. "You sell 'em here, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"I thought so," said Jimmy. His eyes were leveled at the pasty face of the man before him. "Withers," he said, sharply, "did you ever see this one before?"

With a quick, almost dramatic movement, he yanked the damning piece of satin from one pocket and the mud-stained muffler from another. "Happened to pick these up from the bottom of the East River," he announced.

Jimmy Cruett had faced many guilty men; had seen some smirk and bluff, others keep inscrutable poker faces, others retort with hot words of indignant denial.

But seldom had these men been guilty of the crime of murder, and in the few cases where guilty slayers had controlled their steel nerves when confronted, the third degree had been given weeks, sometimes many months, after the commission of the crime, the interim serving to dull such terror as may lurk in the hearts of men who kill.

His feeling as he faced Withers was one of triumph, mingled, somehow, with compassion. Even murder—and surely guilt and terror were limned in Withers's face. Here was a once faithful ex-butler who had stooped to the crime of crimes.

"Withers," said Jimmy, "we know everything. Was young George Kirkham in with you?"

"I've never spoken ten words to young Mr. Kirkham," was the reply. "And you *don't* know everything, either—that's just a bluff. All you know is that I killed Kirkham. I tell you that freely, since the game is up. No, you don't know 'everything'—and maybe never will. You can take your hand out of your pocket, sir. I'm going with you peaceably. And, God! What a relief!"

The man was speaking calmly now. "You look like a real man," he continued. "I wonder if you'd care to make a bargain with me."

Cruett's lips tightened. "I don't make bargains with men who kill, Withers!" he said grimly.

"I'll try you anyhow," was Withers's decision. "This, I suppose, is an important side of the case. I went to Kirkham's that night to get a packet of letters. Kirkham refused to give them up. He was a stubborn old duck—very few folks knew Kirkham as I did. There were many shady chapters in his life. He deserved to be killed if ever a man did.

"I knew the combination of his wall safe. I took the letters—after Kirkham had been sandbagged and gagged. I had to work quickly. The morning after the—

after the affair—I discovered that I had an unexpected document in with my packet. It was Kirkham's new will, sharing his estate between his nephew and his niece. Of course I couldn't return it then. I thought of mailing it back, but even that might have left some clew."

"You have that!" cried Cruett eagerly.

"I have it." Withers's tone was calm, almost monotonous, the tone of a man resigned to the inevitable. "You can have that will in your hands within an hour—if you do one thing for me. Otherwise the secret of its whereabouts will go to the chair with me.

"I want you, after I have been placed in a cell, to go where I ask you to go, to get this packet, to retain the will and see that justice is done Miss Kirkham. And the price of this is your word that every other document in that packet is torn to a thousand pieces, and then burned."

Jimmy Cruett was thinking over the ethics of the case. "But are you sure—" he began.

"I am sure!" cut in the man before him. "Yes or no? I suppose I could make arrangements with my brother. I prefer not to, for a particular reason. I mean nothing to you. I am guilty of murder, cold-blooded murder, if you will, murder justified, in my opinion, but certainly murder long deliberated upon, which brings it, I believe, to first degree—particularly when the slayer is a servant and the slain a wealthy man," he added with a bitter laugh.

"My brother would bring these letters to light to try to save me. I cannot be saved. I have no wish to be saved. I assure you that you will be serving the ends of justice if you do this thing."

Outside on the avenue, trolley cars jangled along, taxis hooted; homeward-bound, perhaps weary but happy, eager feet were scuffing along. Jimmy Cruett—his hand still in his coat pocket—pondered over the oddities of the present case, one of the most peculiar within his experience.

Jimmy Cruett, detective, making terms with a murderer, a butler who had turned haberdasher, and who spoke like a professor. "I'll do it!" he said.

Withers turned to one of the shelves, rummaged beneath a pile of undergarments. Jimmy's hand still rested on his automatic. But Withers produced only a small key. "The parcel," he informed Cruett, is in Safe Deposit Box 17, in the basement of the McAlpin Trust Company.

"The box was taken under another name, of course. You'll find only the one packet in the box. Keep the will. Destroy every other scrap. I think the bank is open nights until eight. If not, to-morrow morning will do. But, remember! If a murderer can make a bargain and keep it, you ought to be able to do so."

"I ought," Jimmy assented. "And I will! I have a taxi outside, Withers!"

Once more his feeling was one of compassion, mingled with triumph. The McAlpin Trust Company was a short walk from Greenwich Village.

The case of Thomas Withers proved an unusual one in that he talked freely concerning his crime and his manner of committing it, and none at all about his motives. He flatly refused to implicate the professional thug who helped him sandbag George Blodgett Kirkham in his home, immediately after he had been forced to pen the suicide note.

Certain of the newspapers referred to this as distorted loyalty. Certain of the tabloids referred to Withers as "the slayer without a motive." Others referred to him as a man without gratitude, the slayer of a warm-hearted employer. Jimmy Cruett, although he destroyed the letters without reading them, had his own theories. Meanwhile, justice was being served. He kept his own counsel concerning them.

Withers was very calm as, seated in his cell, he talked with the young detective who had effected his capture. He had taken every precaution, he explained, had even forced Kirkham to misspell the word "bear," that he might leave a false clew—he could always prove, he maintained, that he had attended a university abroad, that he was a linguist, something of a scholar, and surely not one to pass a misspelled word.

"I did it a bit too fine," he admitted to

Jimmy. "Oh, well, if it hadn't been that it would have been something else."

"You're making me a fool for luck rather than a great sleuth," was Jimmy's rejoinder, with a boyish little laugh at himself. If one can like a murderer, Jimmy Cruett almost liked this one.

Kirkham, according to Withers's story, had been taken in the gunman's car to the Queensborough Bridge, and had there shown signs of recovering consciousness. Withers, panicky at this development, had thought it safer at the last moment to tie his victim's feet before throwing him into the river.

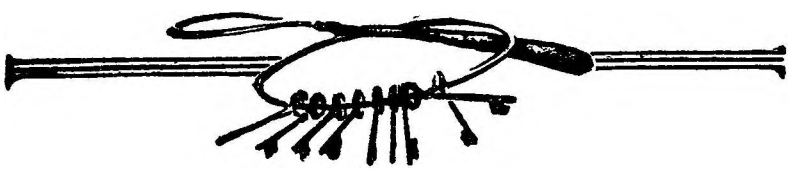
He had done just the wrong thing, in a second of emergency. Murderers usually do, often add stupidity, incautiousness, to crime. Yes, there have been unsolved cases. How many? And how many solved cases?

Jimmy Cruett probably spoke with authority on this particular question. He was lolling in a deep chair before the roaring wood fire in Doris Kirkham's snug little quarters. As a matter of veracity, it must be stated that Doris Kirkham was sitting on the arm of his chair. The life of a private detective isn't all crime.

"The statement 'Murder will out,'" Jimmy was saying, a trifle dogmatically, "is, after all, the catchword having the fewest exceptions. Withers refused to implicate his confederate, but I'll bet the best dinner in New York that this man, since he is a professional thug, will end up in the electric chair. One of these nights he'll be caught."

"And in case you should lose, I'll collect the bet now," said Doris. "You've said I'm the best cook in New York, so I ought to be able to prepare the best dinner in New York. Come on down the street and help me shop, Lazy."

And once more she smiled that whimsical little smile.



DHATURA POISONERS

CHEVERS made a long and elaborate analysis of Hindu poisons and gave the evidence in many poisoning cases. Such a moist and fertile country, said S. M. Edwardes, produces an abundance of toxic plants. The populace are familiar with narcotics from their habits of opium eating and hemp—*hashish*—smoking.

After the suppression of *thuggee*, the poisoning of road travelers was frequent. The popular poison was *dhatura*—stramonium—that caused insensibility and delirium. Mixed with a person's blood, and smeared between the eyes, *dhatura* was esteemed as a love charm. No other drug known to science in its effects represents so close an approach to the slow poisoning of the Middle Ages.

In 1921, professional poisoners were arrested and convicted in the United Provinces of India. One man had a record of five previous convictions for the same crime. In every case the traveler was drugged and robbed at a railway station.

The frowzy head of a middle-aged woman appeared at a small window

THE MAGNIFICENT FAKER

By Eric Howard

I DON'T KNOW NOW, AND I DIDN'T THEN, WHAT IMPULSE MADE ME REACH FOR MY CHECK BOOK. BUT IT SAID: "GO AHEAD! TAKE A CHANCE!"

EXCEPT for the girl at the telephone switchboard and myself, the offices of the Nu-Art Advertising Agency were deserted that Saturday afternoon. She was compelled to remain on duty because once an important message had been telephoned to us, long distance, on a Saturday.

From that time on the general manager of the Nu-Art—he was responsible for that name, too—kept one of the girls at the switchboard after the other employees had rollicked away to spend their pay checks.

As for myself, I was at work. Some work of my own was occupying my thoughts, and my office was the coolest, most pleasant working place I knew of—far better than the hotel room I called home. I had lunched quickly and had returned to the office.

I worked for perhaps an hour, perhaps two. The girl at the switchboard paid no attention to me, nor I to her. She was bored to death, and desperately trying, as she told me, "to get a kick" out of the magazines on her desk.

Along about two or two-thirty she came to my office and opened the door.

"Say, Mr. Williams," she said, "there's a fellow out here that wants to see you. I told him I thought everybody had gone home, 'cause he's a seedy looking hick, all right. I guess he wants to make a touch. Looks like it. What shall I tell him?"

"What's his name?" I asked.

I had no idea who the man might be. But I was not so important as to refuse to

see anybody. However seedy he might be, let the fellow in. I have been seedy myself, upon occasion.

"He didn't have a card, he said," replied the girl, chewing her words with her gum. "I asked him for one 'cause I knew he wouldn't have. But he's got a high-sounding name. It's Arthur Garrett-Ford, and he says it's hyphenated, and he pronounces it like it was all one word."

Even then I had to think for a moment. The high-sounding, hyphenated name didn't mean a thing to me. I thought back, chronologically, to college and school days. Art Ford! Suddenly I had him placed.

I had not seen, nor heard of him, for years. If he had gone to college, it had been to one I had not attended. But, in high school, we had been acquainted. High school days, for me, were fifteen years away.

"What shall I tell him?" the girl repeated.

"Oh, send him in."

"Do you know him? Gee, he looks seedy, and I'll bet it's a touch."

"Send him in."

"Oh, all right!" And she flounced out.

"Hello, Williams!" Art Ford greeted me heartily as he came in the door. "How are you?"

I shook hands with him. I should not have known him had I passed him on the street. He was thin, haggard, a bit gray at the temples. He was smoking a cigarette, and the hand that held it shook nervously. He tossed a brown felt hat, of the crusher type, to a chair and sat down.

He wore a rusty brown suit of tweeds—once a good suit, but now frayed beyond repair and showing evidences of long wear. His pongee shirt, not quite immaculate, had been mended at the collar, and his tie looked also as if it had seen long, hard service.

"Let's see!" Ford—or Garrett-Ford, as he called himself—made himself at ease. "It's been fifteen years since I've seen you, hasn't it? Remember how I sat across the aisle in that stupid English class, in the old Oakwood high school? And listened to Miss Bennett try to tell us what she didn't know? Ha! Fifteen years!

"I'll bet you're wondering how I happened to look you up, eh? I saw you size up my clothes. Not quite what the well-dressed man should be wearing, what?"

"Oh, no," I protested. "I'm very glad to see you."

You must understand that Ford had never been a close friend to me. For two years or so, in high school, we had seen each other every day. But he was not one of my pals. I knew little about him at the time.

He had gone out for track and football, and had distinguished himself rather brilliantly. Then he had disgraced himself, just before our biggest game, by getting himself expelled from school. As a result, we lost the game. All this came back to me now, as he talked.

I remember that Ford might have remained in school, at that critical time, if he had been willing to apologize to the principal for some hasty words. But he wasn't willing to do so, even though the school's honor—very important to us then—was at stake.

Instead, I remembered that he had said, "I'm damned glad to be leaving!" And he had left, cursed by the coach and in great dishonor with the rest of us.

"Well," he was saying, "I've knocked around the world some since I saw you. Been everywhere, done everything. It's a great life."

"Did you go to college?" I asked politely.

"Three of 'em!" He raised three fingers. "Count 'em!" And he named three great American universities. "A. B. A. M. And Ph. D.," he said, with a smile. "After exhausting the American culture factories, the Sorbonne and Heidelberg. I'm one educated guy!"

"Really?" I said.

He nodded. "But I learned more this last time—I just got out of another college—than ever before. The fact is, Williams, I've just come from California. I've been two years in San Quentin. That accounts for this—" he indicated his clothing and took in his pallid, unhealthy look.

"Jail isn't quite salubrious, despite the changes the prison reformers have worked.

And San Quentin is not the best of jails. I came on to New York because too many people in California knew me. New York is the best place to get away from people who know you."

He had spoken so rapidly, and with such frankness, that I had no chance to murmur my surprise. He wanted no pity. As I say, I had not known Ford intimately, but I had nothing against him. He was a nice enough chap—a bit erratic and irresponsible, even in his youth, but rather brilliant, too. And of course I was sorry to hear that he had been in jail, even though justly imprisoned.

"I was the goat," he explained tersely. "I got sent up for another man's work. Had no defense. Couldn't afford decent lawyers. Well, I was philosophical, as a doctor of philosophy should be. It's over now, and the two years were worth it, just for the experience.

"I shan't bother to explain the details of the business. They're not interesting, and, besides, whether I was wrongly or justly imprisoned is quite unimportant, even to me. I would be frank enough to tell you the truth, even if I had been justly sent up. However—

"I read something you wrote, Williams, in one of the liberal weeklies. Called up the editor and he told me you were working here. I've seen a few of the fellows I used to know at school and college, through the years, and they're all pretty stupid. You seem a bit brainier than the rest. So I've come to you.

"You see," he laughed gayly, "I couldn't bear even to borrow money from a person I considered stupid! And I'm here to borrow money!"

"Well—" I began, reflecting that I could afford to let him have ten, twenty or even fifty without suffering from its loss.

"Wait!" he said. "I haven't come for a few dollars, enough to keep me going for a week or so while I look for honest work. And I don't want you to feel the slightest compulsion about it, for the sake of old times—or any such rot. Listen to my proposition, and then say 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"Well?" I asked.

"I have a chance to make a good deal of money in a short time. It isn't by gambling, speculation or any of the usual means. It will be entirely through my own efforts, and it is altogether within the law.

"I say that because you're dealing with an ex-con. It isn't ethical, in my own understanding of that word, although I could get scores of ethical leaders to say that it is. And, anyway, I haven't much of a conscience. The chances are I shall help some people. Certainly I shall injure no one. And I shall be very well paid for it.

"I should net, in six months' time, at least twenty-five thousand dollars. I want you to lend me five hundred dollars, unsecured, on the word of an ex-con, for one month. At the end of that time I shall repay it with high interest."

His references to himself as an "ex-con" were so frank and insouciant that I found myself interested in his proposal. It savored of gambling, and, like gambling, it had a romantic allure. Here he was, self-confessed jailbird, a man I scarcely knew and had not seen for fifteen years, calmly asking for five hundred dollars. With that sum, he planned to launch some vague enterprise of an unethical nature.

To make the matter even more alluring, I was positive that Ford didn't really care whether I lent him the money or not. If I refused him, I could see him shrug, smile and walk out, in which case I should not see him perhaps for another fifteen years. There was mockery in his gray eyes as he waited for me to speak. If I refused him the money, he would think it was because I dared not take a chance.

As it happened, I had lately made a little more than a thousand dollars, over and above my adequate salary. I was thinking of investing it somewhere.

"What is the enterprise you wish to launch?" I asked Ford.

"Myself," he replied. "That's all I can tell you. If I told you any more, you'd be worried about the ethical side of it—I know your New England complexes—and would turn me down. I can assure you that it isn't criminal, that others of high repute—in the world's eyes—have done similar things, and that even you would

consider it ethical enough if anybody but an insincere ex-con put it over. I consider it unethical because I have a very high ethical standard—which I do not always live up to. Well, how about it?"

I don't know now, and I didn't know then, what impulse made me reach for my check book. Something within me seemed to say, "Go ahead! Take a chance!" And I had the curious feeling that this mocking, smiling chap across the room would be capable of killing himself if he didn't get the money.

Probably in that I was altogether wrong. I had no reason to believe that he possessed suicidal tendencies, and he was too philosophical to take anything—even a two year jail term—very seriously.

At any rate, for what reason I do not know, I reached for my check book and wrote him a check for five hundred dollars.

"Make it out to Arthur Garrett-Ford," he said. "That hyphenated name isn't just a flourish, old man. It's always been hyphenated, but my father cut it out."

"How are your parents?" I asked.

I had not known them, though they lived in Oakwood, where my people lived, and Oakwood is a city of moderate size, but it seemed the thing to ask.

"I really don't know," said Arthur Garrett-Ford. "They look upon me as a very black sheep, especially since the San Quentin episode. I haven't heard from them since then."

"Oh!"

"Well, *auf wiedersehen*, old chap!" he said, pocketing my check. "I'll let you know as soon as I get things going. You know, I really didn't think you'd lend me this. Thanks. I haven't any address right now, but as soon as I get one I'll phone you up."

"I say! Can't you have dinner with me? And perhaps I can put you up at my hotel, until—until you get settled."

"Very good of you. Thanks. But I'd rather not. I have a few acquaintances in town. I'll look in on one of them this evening and spend the night. Monday, as soon as I've cashed this, I'll get to work. And please don't worry. You'll get your money back, all right!"

With that he waved his hand, took up his shapeless hat, and walked out.

A little later I left the office. Miss Kelly, at the switchboard, was still on duty.

"Was it a touch?" she asked.

"It was."

"And you let him have it. I could tell that by the way he looked when he went out. Gee, you must be easy!"

"Oh, he's all right. I went to school with him. He's an A. B., an A. M., and a Ph. D.!" I told her.

"And an I. O. U., too, I'll bet!" she observed sagely.

II

I CAN perhaps best explain the attraction Arthur Garrett-Ford had for me by saying that I have always been thoroughly conventional. At college I had done the usual things, in the usual ways. I knew the usual people.

Ford, as I always called him, was quite otherwise. He never had hesitated about kicking over the traces; in fact, he had preferred to kick over them. His attitude toward his family, for example; it seemed utterly callous. And he had, apparently, no friends—only acquaintances.

During the week that followed his call at the Nu-Art office, I was frankly worried about my five hundred dollars. I reflected that I had been an idiot to lend it to him, not only because it was almost certainly lost forever, but also because there was no telling what sort of scrape he would get involved in with it.

The fact that he cashed a check of that size bearing my signature might cause comment at the bank, where I seldom drew a large check, especially if Ford later got into trouble.

"Pshaw! Don't worry!" I would tell myself. "He said you'd get it back."

Then I would start worrying again. There was the further possibility that his unethical scheme might turn out to be more than unethical. I had taken his word for it; the word of an ex-con.

The week passed quickly. On the next Saturday morning, at about eleven, Ford telephoned.

"Hello, old chap," he said. "If you can join me for lunch, I can repay part of your money and I'll lay all my cards on the table."

"All right," said I. "Where shall we meet?"

He named a famously obscure restaurant in the Forties, and I agreed to join him there.

I was not prepared for the transformation that had taken place in the man within a week. When he rose to shake hands with me, he looked incredibly clean and healthy. His clothing was not only immaculate; it was of the finest black broadcloth, cut most conservatively, and worn with dignity.

He was an impressive figure; he was positively distinguished. He commanded the respect of our waiter by addressing him in his own Tuscan dialect. We were served with delicious food and with a little wine of rare vintage.

"You seem to have got started very well," I remarked.

"Oh, yes," he said lazily. "Of course I knew I could do it or I should not have borrowed your money. I can let you have half of it now, the rest next week, and the interest the week following."

"Do you mind telling a hard-working advertising man how so much money is to be made in a week in New York?" I asked, faintly sarcastic.

"Not at all," he smiled. "It can be made by any one of intelligence and little conscience. There was once a gentleman named Barnum who compiled important statistics on the birth-rate of suckers. He made only one mistake. Recent investigations have led me to believe that there are *twins* born every minute. What is the greatest human need?" he asked abruptly.

"Food, I suppose," said I.

"Yes, of course. And clothing and shelter, where the climate makes them necessary. But these things granted, as they are to most people, there remains one greater still—the need of *advice.*"

"Advice?" I laughed.

"Advice," he repeated solemnly. "Good advice, bad advice, any kind of advice. People must be advised. Not one in ten is capable of deciding anything without advice. Does John Smith desire a new automobile? He asks advice of all his friends. Doctors will tell you that most of their patients come to them for advice.

"The clients of most lawyers are simply advice-seekers. And in the more personal problems of life, people seek advice anywhere—fortune-tellers, character analysts, practical psychologists, sob sisters on the newspapers, everywhere. I—" he said after a pause—"am an adviser."

Then he handed me an engraved card. It read: Arthur Garrett-Ford, Ph. D. Confidential Adviser.

"It is likely that I have had more varied experience than most men of my age. I am a trained psychologist. I can read character with unusual accuracy. I have no prejudices and no complexes. I am, I may say, a philosopher.

"It occurred to me that I might sell my philosophy and my training to people who crave advice. That is what I am doing. My fees, to those who can afford it, are very high. I have an exclusive clientele."

"But," I objected, "that doesn't sound particularly unethical. Given your experience and training, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to help people."

"Ah!" he smiled. "You would make an excellent client, or you might be my publicity man, although I don't need publicity. It is unethical, according to my standard"—he frowned—"because no one can help another to solve a personal problem. Each must help himself."

"But—"

"Never mind!" he cut in. "Let's not talk of that side. Of course, my clients think that they are helped. They send their friends to me. But it's bunk, pure bunk."

"I don't see that," I said. "You have a cynical slant on things. You just think it's bunk."

"Rats!" he snapped. "Anyway, I'm making money. I shan't continue more than six months, I think. In that time I should have gained a competence. Then I'll retire and write a book."

We finished our lunch with reminiscences of school days. Then Ford suggested that

I look over his new quarters. I was willing enough, for I was curious to understand the sort of thing he was doing.

His suite of rooms was in a building not far away. We walked there, Ford swinging his stick at my side and chatting gayly. He could be a delightful companion, queer as he was in many respects. He interested me.

His offices were in a building chiefly occupied by physicians, optometrists and the like. While they ministered to the physically ill, Ford—as he said with a cynical smile—cured souls.

"If you can call them souls," he added.

In the outer room of the suite, fastidiously furnished in mahogany, with a fine Oriental rug on the floor, sat Ford's office assistant. She was a girl of perhaps twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and a girl of unusual distinction. She may not have been beautiful, although her features were almost classical.

But one saw, first, her eyes; they were large, and deep, and clear gray. They were intelligent and spiritual. She was unusually well-poised, which most modern girls are not, in spite of their determined air of assurance. Her dark brown hair she wore "put up" in a rather old-fashioned way. I was attracted to her at once.

"Miss Deming," said Ford, "may I present my old friend, Mr. Williams? Williams, Miss Barbara Deming."

She offered me her hand, and I bowed over it.

"It is a pleasure," she announced softly, "to meet any friend of Dr. Garrett-Ford's."

We went into Ford's study; a large, beautiful room that commanded a view of the Hudson.

"You've done yourself very well," I observed.

"Sure. Have to impress the clients. Rent's high, but it's worth it. Have a chair. I have one or two appointments later this afternoon, but for the present I've nothing to do."

I took the chair he indicated.

"Now," he said in his professional manner, "why have you come to see me?"

I saw that he was mocking himself, and smiled. There was, I could see, a look of compelling earnestness about the man when he wanted to show it. I could imagine that many wealthy persons, harassed by one worry or another, might come to him, be won by his voice and manner, and make him their confessor.

For an instant I had an ugly suspicion that he might be engaged in this work as a preparation for a campaign of wholesale blackmail. He was an ex-con and he admitted that he lacked a conscience.

Miss Deming knocked and entered the room. There was a frown between her eyes and she seemed nervous.

"Dr. Garret-Ford," she began, "there's a man here who wants to see you. I don't know why, but I think he's a detective. He will not give his name. He said to say that you knew him as Bunky."

I was watching Ford. I saw him start, and grow pale.

"Yes," he said, with a familiar nervous gesture, "I know him. Send him in. Wait, Williams."

The dapper little fellow who entered was a creature of the Tenderloin. Unless I was mistaken, he bore the stamp of prison. His shifty eyes moved from Ford to me and back again, and when he spoke it was in a husky, low voice, little more than a whisper.

"Say, feller," said Bunky, "this is one swell dump."

"What's on your mind?" asked Ford. "Mr. Williams here is a friend of mine. Speak right up."

"Listen!" Bunky involuntarily looked around and lowered his voice. "You got Jenkins fired, didn't you?"

"I hope so," said Ford. "I did my best, after I was let out. I wrote letters about him, and I think they'd have some weight, even though they came from me."

"Yeah, you got him fired, all right," Bunky nodded. "And he's on your trail, buddy. He's here, in the Big Town right now. And he's out to get you, one way or another. I run into him down town, and I thought maybe he was after me. But he ain't after anybody but you. Told me so. Say, listen, I know that guy! If I was you, I'd pick up and beat it. Go to Canada, or somewhere. And cover your trail."

"Does he know where to find me?" asked Ford tensely.

"I didn't tell him, of course," said Bunky. "But hell, you're easy to find, runnin' a joint like this. The best thing for you to do is to beat it."

"No. He can't do anything. There's nothing crooked about this."

"Say! You don't know Jenkins. It don't matter to him whether you're crooked or not. He's out to get you, and he'll do it—one way or another."

"I think not!" Ford spoke firmly. "Run into him again, Bunky. To-day. You can find him. And when you do, tell *him* to go to Canada. Tell him I said so. And tell him, too, that Big Joe Murphy gives him the same advice."

"Big Joe!" murmured Bunky. "Is he in town?"

"I don't know. But tell Jenkins that anyway. And give him to understand that Big Joe and I are working together."

"Gee! Well, you know what to do, I guess. But, honest, doc, I wouldn't take any chances with Jenkins. He's mean, that guy."

Ford smiled.

"Thanks for the tip, Bunky. But you do as I say."

Ford took a fifty-dollar bill from his billfold and tossed it across the table.

"Expenses," he said. "You may need it."

"Thanks, doc. Well, so long."

And Bunky backed out of the room.

"And Barbara," Ford smiled as he spoke, "thought Bunky was a detective! I'll have to train her for better observation!"

"What's the trouble, Ford?" I asked.

"Hm! Well, first, Bunky—the charming person who was just here—happened to be my cellmate in prison. He was released shortly after my own term expired. A very loyal individual. It was my privilege to save him from a severe beating, once, at the hands of Jenkins. This Jenkins was head jailer at San Quentin, a cruel beast of a man and a drug peddler, besides. Through my efforts he was discharged. I wrote letters to the prison board and to the newspapers. They were effective letters, too. Naturally, he has it in for me. It wasn't the job he loved, but the opportunities for graft that went with it. He's here, as Bunky says, to get me. He may prove difficult, unless the mention of Big Joe frightens him. The only man he fears is Big Joe Murphy. If I could locate Big Joe—but I haven't the slightest idea where he is. In hiding somewhere, and the police can't find him. So—"

Ford shrugged and smiled.

"We shall see!" he said calmly. "Now, Williams, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment in a few minutes. And I must try to find Big Joe. If I can locate him, and bring him and Jenkins together, all is well. If not, anything may happen!"

III

I LEFT my hotel at eight o'clock Monday morning. As was my custom, I picked up two of the morning papers at the news-stand. Opening one of them, this caption caught and held my eye:

MILLIONAIRE FOUND DEAD
Psychologist Under Arrest

Below the headline was the story. Aubrey J. Dulac, millionaire sportsman, member of the boards of directors of many corporations, had been found, shot dead, in the office of Arthur Garrett-Ford, psychological adviser.

It was reported that Mr. Dulac had been having domestic trouble and that he had consulted the psychologist a number of times. The body had been found late Saturday afternoon. The psychologist had been arrested and was now in the Tombs.

Beyond saying that he had left Mr. Dulac in his office for a few minutes and had returned to find him dead, Garrett-Ford would make no statement. He had reported the millionaire's death to the police, who gave out the information that the psychologist had served two years in a Western prison. He was charged with the murder.

I glanced up from reading the account to find the dapper little fellow known as Bunky at my elbow.

"Say, mister," he said in his hoarse whisper, "the doc's pinched. It's Jenkins's work, I'll bet anything. We got to help him. If we don't, they'll send him up. They've got his record O. K. And a man with a record hasn't a chance.

"That's a fact! But he didn't do it. Hell, no! It's Jenkins's work. The doc told me to warn Jenkins to get out, 'member? Well, I started huntin' him, but I didn't find him. Chances are he was somewhere in that building, right then, waitin' for a chance. He'd do anything to get the doc, even to killin' a man he had nothin' against. You and me are the doc's only friends. We've got to help him."

It was thus that I was brought into the affair. Bunky took it for granted that I would help Ford. And, of course, I intended to. I did not believe for a moment that he had killed Dulac; however conscienceless he might be, he was not a murderer. As I read the newspaper account, I had planned to go at once to see Ford and to offer him whatever help he might need. Bunky, however, was more practical.

"We've got to find Big Joe Murphy!" he said. "That's what the doc was tryin' to do. Big Joe will do anything for the doc. And he hates Jenkins. Once we find big Joe and get him after Jenkins, the doc'll be fixed, all right. If Big Joe sees the papers, maybe he'll get in touch with me. But maybe he won't see 'em. I've got a hunch where he is."

"Where?" I asked.

"Down town. There's a house down there where he used to hang out, when he was here before. I think he still does. The bulls are after him, for a Chicago bank robbery that he pulled last month. But I think he's here. If you'll go down there with me—I need you along to convince Big Joe, 'cause he might think I was a stool if I went alone—I think we'll find him."

I thought quickly of the possible consequences of becoming involved in the affair. Having secret communications with a man wanted by the police was not in my line. And it might lead to disastrous results. But Bunky was so earnest in his plea, so expectant of my coöperation, that to fail him, I felt, would be an act of cowardice.

"All right," I said. "Just let me telephone and I'll go with you."

I told the office that I would take the day off and then called a cab. Bunky got in beside me and whispered an address to the driver. It was an ill-smelling street, I knew, on the lower East Side.

"Say," asked Bunky, leaning back, "what's your graft?"

"Advertising," I replied.

"Advertising! Hell, are you honest?"

"I hope so. Why?"

"Oh," Bunky expressed a vast disappointment in me, "I thought you was one of us! But you're on the square, I guess. You're really doc's friend?"

"I knew him as a boy," I answered. "I hadn't seen him for fifteen years, until a week ago. We've never been close friends, but I want to help him because I don't think he's guilty."

"No, he ain't," said Bunky. "But it wouldn't make any difference to me if he was. The doc's one wonderful guy, I can tell you that."

Our cab turned down Second Avenue, crossed through a side street in the direction of the East River, and at last came to a narrow street of ill-favored houses.

"Let us out here," directed Bunky, looking around to make sure that we were unobserved.

I paid the driver, and we walked down the street. It was not one of the East Side's busy thoroughfares. Except for a few children playing in the street, we saw no one. Bunky darted into an areaway and halted at a door under the steps, a door leading into the basement of an old and forlorn-looking house. He rang a bell.

For several moments there was no response. Then the bleached, frowzy head of a middle-aged woman appeared at a small window at one side. Presently she opened the door a few inches.

"Whatcha want?" she asked.

"Listen!" whispered Bunky. "Tell Big Joe that Doc Garrett-Ford—get that name, see—is in trouble. Tell him Jenkins is back of it. And tell him I want to see him. See? I'm Bunky. He knows me."

"Whatcha talkin' about?" asked the woman with a cultivated blank expression.

"Hell, you know!" snapped Bunky. "You tell Big Joe what I said. We're all right, Lou. Sure, I know you. Wasn't Big Joe always tellin' us what a pal you was? Come on!"

Evidently he had pleased the woman. But she gave no sign of admitting us.

"I don't know whatcha mean," she repeated. "I don't know none of these people you mention. I don't know no Big Joe, and no Little Joe neither."

With that she closed the door, and locked it. I started to move away.

"Wrong house, eh, Bunky?" I asked.

"Hell, no. Stick around. She's gone to tell Joe."

A moment later there was a movement of the soiled curtain at the little window, and we were inspected by a man. Then the woman came again to the door and opened it.

"All right," she said. "Come in. But start something and you'll be at the bottom of the river to-night. He's a damn fool to take such chances."

She went off, muttering to herself, and we followed her into the dark hall. Unaccustomed to the dim light, I could see nothing at first. Then I perceived a long arm reach out toward Bunky, who had preceded me.

"Hullo, Joe!" said Bunky.

"Huh!" grunted the individual known as Big Joe. "Gimme your gat."

"Help yourself, Joe. This is Mr. Williams, a friend of the doc's. He ain't armed."

Big Joe, after a glance at me, took Bunky's word for that and led us into a room off the hall. Within the room there was more light, and I saw Big Joe clearly. He was not, I thought, a criminal type. His face was that of a happy, good-natured workman. His large blue eyes were surrounded with laugh wrinkles, and he had a smiling mouth.

He was a large man, and very muscular. His arms bulged through the woolen shirt that he wore.

"Well," he said, sitting down on the edge of a couch that he evidently used as a bed, "what's the dope?"

"Seen the papers?" asked Bunky.

Big Joe shook his head, and Bunky handed him one of my papers.

"There's the story," he said. "It's Jenkins's work, all right. I met him Saturday, and he told me he was out to get the doc. I figger he laid for a chance and shot this man Dulac so it'd look like the doc had croaked him. With the doc's record—well, you know how it is, Joe."

"Sure," said Joe. "Sure. Well, what can I do? And, say, how'd you know I was here?"

"Just a hunch. You used to hang out here, and I knew Lou was still here. I thought I'd try."

"Nobody else knows I'm here."

"No. And you can trust Mr. Williams here. He's a old friend of the doc's. He ain't one of us, but he's a square shooter."

At this Big Joe looked me over.

"I guess I can," he remarked, concluding his survey. "Yeah, he's all right. But how about you?"

"Hell!" observed Bunky. "I'd do anything for the doc, you know that. And you can help him. You don't think I'd double cross anybody that'd help him, do you?"

"I don't know. You know me—I don't trust any crooks," said Big Joe frankly. "I'll help the doc, if I can without gettin' pinched myself, 'cause he's a good guy. But I take no chances."

"Sure. Well, listen, this is Jenkins's job, if you ask me. Now I can find Jenkins, I'm pretty sure. What I figgered to do was to get him and bring him here, not tellin' him he was to meet you. See? Then we'll fix him, somehow. You can make him do anything, 'cause you've got his goat."

"I should have killed him years ago," said Big Joe softly. "He's no damn good."

"Sure," agreed Bunky. "Well, all I want you to do is this: stay here, or let me know where you are, until I can land Jenkins. I'll bring him here—on a stretcher, if necessary. Then, by damn, we'll get the doc out. Will you?"

Big Joe turned to me.

"Is this on the square?" he demanded.

"I—I think so," said I. "The doc, as you call him, is in jail, accused of murder.

Bunky here thinks it's Jenkins's crime. I'm sure Bunky wants to help the doc. I believe he's loyal to him. You can help him. Will you?"

"Well, I'll take a chance. I'll stay here, Bunky, and wait for you to turn up Jenkins. I'd like to see that bird just once again, anyway. But if the bulls find out I'm here, it'll be through you, Bunky, and I'll get you if you're the last guy I do get."

"Sure," said Bunky. "This is on the level. Honest!"

"Honest! You don't know the meanin' of the word!" scoffed Big Joe.

I was a little perplexed by this exchange of compliments. I had at least partially believed the old saying about honor among thieves. Evidently, though, they were just as suspicious of one another as their less crooked brothers. Also, I was curious about another thing. It seemed to me that Big Joe was taking a big chance by hiding away in the city of New York, in the very house that he had formerly used for that purpose. I asked him directly about it.

A pleased, boyish smile crossed his face. He looked more than ever like a law-abiding, good-natured mechanic.

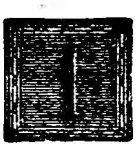
"I'm outguessing them," he said. "This is the last place they'll look for me. In this game audacity—as the doc calls it—is the safest bet."

"Well, I'll be after Jenkins," said Bunky. "Gimme that gun of mine, Joe. I may need it to work over Jenkins's skull."

"So long," said Joe, surrendering the gun that belonged to Bunky. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Williams. If you go down to see the doc, tell him I'm on the job."

With the queer feeling that I had been honored by his confidence, I shook hands with the bank robber, the fugitive from justice. Then Bunky and I left the house of ill omen and rode uptown in another cab.

IV



'LL tell you what," said Bunky. "You know that girl that worked for the doc? Well, we ought to find out where she stands. She might spill something about the doc's business—I don't savvy that graft of his at all—that'd look bad for him. I'm goin' to have some job findin' Jenkins, but I think I can find him.

"There are plenty of birds here that have it in for him, and I'll get 'em all on his trail. S'pose you go and talk to the girl, and get her to keep her trap shut. Women get goofy when the bulls come around and talk too much. And you better stay up there, at the doc's office, till I phone you."

I did not resent being ordered about by Bunky. Having let myself into the affair to this extent, I decided to go through with it. And Bunky, by reason of his superior knowledge of certain phases of life, was a practical guide.

"But don't you think I should first of all retain a lawyer to defend him?" I suggested.

"No. He don't need a lawyer yet. Lawyers can't do much anyway. His hearing won't come off for a few days, and by that time, if I can land Jenkins, they'll let him out. You just keep the girl from talkin', if she ain't talked too much already. And, listen! Stick around the doc's office, all day, so I can reach you there or at your hotel."

"All right," I agreed. "I'll do that."

"Good!" And Bunky dropped out of the cab as it slowed down in a traffic jam. I went on to the building where Ford had his offices.

I was fairly sure, even before I got there, that Barbara Deming would not talk unwisely. I had no idea of what she thought of her employer, but she was not a chattering woman.

I found her at her desk, in the reception room of the suite. A detective lounged in another chair, smoking a cigar.

"Oh, Mr. Williams!" Miss Deming cried. "I'm so glad you've come. I haven't known what to do about this—this awful thing. I went to the Tombs this morning and saw the doctor. He made me promise not to bother you, and he seems to have no other friend in the city. I offered to get him an attorney, but he said he wouldn't need one at the preliminary hearing. He thinks he'll be cleared then."

"Huh!" grunted the detective. "Cleared nothing!"

I observed this man, whose name was Byrne, as I learned later. He was a fat man, with a sullen expression and hard eyes.

"I don't know what I can do," I said. "But I think he'll be cleared at the hearing, too. Of course he isn't guilty."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that!" cried Miss Deming. "Of course he isn't!"

"Huh!" observed Byrne. "If he ain't guilty I'm a choir boy! It's an open-and-shut case. He was alone here, with Dulac. The chances are Dulac refused to be blackmailed, and this feller with the split name had to croak him or be exposed. Clever, too, reporting it right away. But he's an ex-con. We've got his record, all right. And we can send him up. Who else could've killed Dulac?"

"You weren't here Saturday afternoon?" I asked Miss Deming.

"I was here when Mr. Dulac came in," she answered. "That was just a few minutes after you left. Then the doctor said I might leave. Mr. Dulac and he were together when I left. The doctor says that after talking with Mr. Dulac for half an hour or so, he left him to come out here for a book.

"It was a book he wanted Mr. Dulac to read, because it applied to his case. You see, he had been having some trouble, and the doctor was advising him. I had been reading the book myself, and had left it in the drawer of my desk. So it wasn't in its place on the shelf. Dr. Garrett-Ford looked for it, and didn't find it at first.

"Then he remembered that I had been reading it, and looked through my desk. He was probably away from Mr. Dulac for five or ten minutes. Just as he found the book he heard a shot. He ran back into his own room and found Dulac, dead! He phoned the police at once."

"Was a gun found?"

"Naw," snapped the detective. "He'd got away with that. But we'll find it yet. It's a phony story. Imagine leaving a man in an office for five or ten minutes and coming back to find him dead. Rats! If this fellow's as brainy as everybody says, he should have thought up a better one than that!"

Byrne, of course, was voicing the theory of the police. It had been discovered that Ford was an ex-convict. His record was against him. Also, since he had a record, the police were suspicious of his work as a psychological adviser.

Doubtless it appeared to them, and the same idea had occurred to me, that he had established himself in this profession in order to launch a campaign of blackmail.

In what better way could that be done? His clients came to him as to a confessor; they told him their troubles, their worries, their secrets. Such confidences as he was capable of inspiring could be used, by an unscrupulous ex-convict, in blackmail.

On the surface it was, as Byrne said, an open-and-shut case.

And Bunky's story—was that plausible? Did it seem likely that this man Jenkins, in his hatred of Ford, would go to the length of murdering Dulac, against whom, so far as we knew, he had no enmity? Bunky thought so, and Bunky knew Jenkins. But, failing to find Jenkins, could that theory be advanced as an explanation of Dulac's death? It could not, of course.

I felt that Miss Deming, because of her interest in the case, should know what I knew. I invited her to lunch with me.

"Thank you," she said. "I shall be glad to. I want to talk with you."

"Say," said Byrne as we made ready to leave the office, "you two come back here, see? I've got no orders to keep you here, but you'd better show up within a reasonable time. We may have to pinch the two of you. We ain't sure yet that this young woman wasn't here when it happened, and, as for you, Williams, we know you was backin' Garrett-Ford in this business."

"Backing him? Nonsense!" I protested. "What makes you think that?"

"He was broke when he landed here, see? We were watchin' him. Then he calls on you and you give him five hundred. With that he establishes enough credit to take these rooms and get goin' at this graft. We figure you're his partner."

"That's absurd," I said. "I went to school with him, years ago. He looked me up and asked to borrow five hundred dollars. I let him have it. Saturday he

repaid half of it, promising to let me have the rest next week. It was simply a loan."

"You just let him have it, eh? You didn't know what he was goin' to use it for! No, you didn't! And you ain't gettin' part of the graft! Oh, no!"

"No, I'm not," I answered, as calmly as I could. "I didn't know what he was going to do with the money, and I'm not getting a share of the profits."

"Of course not!" Byrne waxed sarcastic. "Oh, no! You're just a philanthropist, ain't you? Maybe you didn't know he was an ex-con, eh?"

"Yes, I know that. He told me he was."

"But you lend money to anybody, don't you, just 'cause you went to school with 'em. Gosh, I wish I had been to school with you."

"If you had," said Miss Deming caustically, "you might have learned something about grammar!"

"Oh, ho!" observed Byrne. "Watch your step, young woman! How long have you known this feller Garrett-Ford?"

"For several years," was the girl's surprising answer.

"You have, eh?" gloated Byrne. "So, you're an old pal of his! Well, well! Knew him before he went to jail, eh?"

"Yes, I did."

"Say, the chief will want to hear that!" Byrne commented. "All right. Go ahead and eat. But hurry back. Personally, I think you two had both ought to be pinched, but we'll take a chance."

"If any one telephones and asks for me," I said, as we passed through the door, "tell him I'll be back within an hour."

"All right," nodded the detective, giving me a suspicious look.

I thought that it was unlikely that Bunky would find Jenkins and telephone before we returned. And I wanted Miss Deming to know Bunky's plans, especially since she seemed much more than Ford's employee.

If she had known him before he went to prison, she must also know of his prison term. Knowing of that, and working for him in this new enterprise, she must have great faith in him. And it was incredible that a girl of Barbara Deming's character should have faith in a scoundrel.

"You said that you have known Ford for several years," I prompted her after the waiter had taken our order.

"Yes," she nodded eagerly. "And that's why this charge seems so impossible. I *know* that he couldn't have killed Mr. Dulac!"

"He told me that he had gone to jail for another man's crime," I said. "You knew about that?"

Her eyes fell, and an inexpressibly sad expression passed over her face.

"It was—my father's crime," she murmured softly. "He—Arthur—shouldered the blame that was not his. I didn't know it then. I was sorry for him, but I thought him guilty. And all the while it was my poor father. I didn't know—until he died—while Arthur was in jail."

"Oh!" I said.

"It was the noblest thing a man could have done," said Barbara. "And he did it nobly."

"He didn't tell me that. Of course, he wouldn't. And this new business of his—he frankly called it 'bunk.' I'm afraid that it, with his jail record, makes his present trouble all the more serious."

"I know," she nodded. "But it isn't bunk! That's his way—the most exasperating thing—of speaking. He has helped scores of people. He has charged those who could afford it high fees, but his services were worth high fees. And he has helped others for nothing.

"If he has any failing, it is that of having impossibly high standards—of excellence and of honor. Anything that falls short of those standards arouses his cynical scorn. But he is tolerant! And kind! He calls this work he is doing 'bunk' because it is not as fine a work as he would like to do. But it isn't!"

I was glad to hear her say so, in that way. And what she said of Ford gave more than a clew to his character. He had intimated something of the kind to me. And I saw that, given "impossibly high" standards, in this world of material struggle, a man might become scornful and cynical.

I remembered some copy I had been asked to write, in a national advertising campaign, to sell an article that seemed to

me worse than worthless. I had written the copy, cloaking my scruples in the sophistry of necessity. And I should have been the first to protest had any one dared tell me I was dishonest. In the same situation, Ford, very probably, would have scorned himself.

I looked up into Barbara's eyes. They were misty with tears.

"Excuse me," she murmured. "I—I love Arthur. And this seems so terrible."

Impulsively I caught her hand.

"It isn't as bad as it seems, perhaps," I tried to reassure her. And I told her of Bunky, and Big Joe, and Jenkins.

"Bunky," I concluded, "is even now searching the strange corners of the underworld for Jenkins. I think he will find him. Men like Bunky seem to have efficient ways of doing such things. And when he does, if somehow we can get Jenkins to Big Joe, I'm sure Arthur will be cleared."

"I hope so!" she murmured. "Isn't there anything else we can do?"

"Not yet," I said. "He can represent himself at the preliminary hearing, as well as an attorney could. After that, if he isn't released, I'll get a good lawyer. Let's go back to the office, in case Bunky phones."

"It's good of you," Barbara laid her hand on my arm, "to come to his aid. He told me that he could not ask you to help him. But you are helping him!"

I felt well repaid, by the glance Barbara gave me, for getting involved with crooks and law-breakers.

V

T was not until four o'clock that we heard from Bunky. Byrne still kept us company, under orders from his superior. Evidently he was suspicious of us, and I think he had telephoned to central office the recommendation that we be placed under arrest as material witnesses. He kept his eagle eye upon us.

At four, then, the telephone on Barbara's table rang, and she lifted the receiver.

"It's for you, Mr. Williams," she said, and handed the instrument to me.

"Hello!" I called into it. I was somewhat excited, for much depended upon Bunky's report.

"Say," and I recognized Bunky's voice, "I've sure spilled the beans, but it wasn't my fault. Say, me and Jenkins are both in the can! Yeah, in jail—at the Twenty-Third Street station. Yeah, jail! I found him down in a Chelsea dump, see? And I just about had him kidded into comin' with me.

"I was takin' him right over to Joe's. Had him in a taxi. Then he got suspicious, damned if I know why, and started gettin' rough. Said he wouldn't go anywhere with me, see? And I tried to bean him with the butt of my gat, right in the taxi, see? But the son of a gun was too strong for me.

"We roughed it up quite a bit, and the taxi driver says: 'Hey, what the hell?' We kept on fightin', 'cause I was desperate. I figgered if I could land a K. O., I'd fix the driver and get Jenkins over to Joe's anyway. Well, we busted the top light in the damn taxi, and I guess that made the driver sore, 'cause the next thing I knew he had pulled us up in front of the station here and we was pinched! Can you beat that for luck?

"Hell! Of course, the charge is only drunk and disorderly, and I guess we'll be let out, maybe with a small fine, in the morning. But this wrecks our plans, don't it? 'Cause I could never get near Jenkins again.

"Say, what do you think? Do you suppose you could get to Joe, and tell him this? Maybe he'll be able to do something. Hell! I hope so. I got to ring off now, 'cause this jailer here says I've talked long enough. Naw, he's *thick*—he don't know what I'm talkin' about! So long! Do what you can, mister!"

And that was all.

"Good Lord!" I said. "That ends that chance!"

"What is it?" cried Barbara.

Byrne, instantly, was on the alert. He leaned forward and waited for me to speak.

"If you will pardon us, Mr. Byrne," I was sarcastic, "we will discuss this matter in private."

"Huh!" observed the detective.

I opened the door into Ford's own room, and Barbara stepped into it. After I had closed the door upon Byrne's curiosity, I gave her Bunky's report.

"Now," I said, "I shall have to visit Big Joe, and try to get him to help us somehow."

"I'll go with you!" she said.

"No," I protested. "You must not."

"I must," she corrected me. "I must do something. And perhaps I can convince Joe that he should—help us."

I saw at once that she was determined, and I realized that, alone, I should have difficulty in swaying the hard-headed, individualistic Joe. Perhaps Barbara—

"Very well," I said. "Let's go."

We left without heeding Byrne's warnings that we return promptly lest we be picked up. And I was very careful, once outside and in a taxi, to observe that we were not followed. I directed the driver to take a rather circuitous route.

When we reached the edges of a district into which few girls of Barbara's type ever ventured, save uptown settlement workers in their chauffeured limousines, we dismissed the cab and walked. We were not shadowed, I made sure.

Once again I stood before the basement door at Lou's place. And Lou herself, looking frowzier than ever in a faded pink dressing-gown, came to the door, opened it a few inches and glared at me.

"Watcha want?" she demanded, with a keen look at Barbara.

"I must see Big Joe again," I said. "It's about the doc's case."

"You wait!" said Lou, banging the door shut.

Presently she returned, muttering protests under her breath, and let us in. Big Joe again met me in the hall.

"Howdy!" he said. "What's up?"

I introduced Barbara, and she offered him her slender hand. As he took it his happy blue eyes glowed and he gave her that honest workman's smile.

"Jenkins and Bunky are in jail," I said, and went on to give him the details of their fight and arrest.

"Hm! Bunky always was a bungler," he commented. "All he had to do was let Jenkins get in the cab first, and give him one on the head while his back was turned. Lord, some people never learn how to do anything!"

And Big Joe laughed with the greatest good humor.

"But," he frowned, "that makes it bad for the doc, don't it? It's a safe bet Jenkins did the job, all right. I've been readin' the papers, and they haven't uncovered anything anybody might have had against this Dulac feller.

"The doc didn't do it, that's a cinch; and there bein' nobody else mixed in, so for as we know, it must have been Jenkins! He's loco, that's all—Jenkins is. And how he hates the doc! Yeah, he'd kill a man if he thought he could send the doc to the chair for it! Well, whatcha goin' to do?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "That's why I came to you."

"Huh!" Big Joe grinned pleasantly. "I'm in no position to help, as the banker said to the Community Chest collector. What can I do? They want me, you see.

"There's half a dozen plainclothes men in town that know me. And they'd send me up for that Chicago job, sure as hell, even if they couldn't prove it on me. Of course"—he laughed gleefully—"I did it! But they've got no proof. Still, I don't want to go up, and they'd send me up. And Jenkins in jail!

"I can't go to him, and it seems like he can't be made to come to me. If I could get that guy here once, all we'd need would be somebody to take down his confession! He knows me."

These last words were uttered without boasting, as a simple matter of fact.

"I'd like to help the doc, sure," he went on. "But not to the extent of gettin' myself on the inside lookin' out. No, sir. That ain't my idea of a good time."

Carelessly he leaned back on the couch and took out a coin. With a negligent flip he tossed it into the air, catching it as it fell.

"Heads it is!" he said. "All right. I'll take a chance. Leave it to me. Maybe I can help, after all. I'll try to have Jenkins sprung. And with the promise of dope—

sure, he uses the stuff he sells—the law-guy that springs him can bring him here. Maybe. I'll see."

He got up and went to a desk in a corner of the room. He scrawled a note with a pencil.

"Here, lady," he said. "You better take this. The law-guy is kind of on the dodge, and he might be suspicious of a man. But he can't be—of you."

The compliment brought a flush to Barbara's cheeks. She accepted the note he held out.

"Thank you," she said. "Arthur and I will never forget—"

"Say!" Big Joe stopped her. "I owe the doc a lot."

VI

WAS reluctant to allow Barbara to visit the dingy offices of the shady criminal lawyer alone. But she, following Big Joe's theory, insisted upon it. What happened at her interview with Attorney Sol Lessing, and subsequently, I learned from her later.

Lessing had been disbarred once, and had even served a term in Sing Sing. He had, however, staged a come-back; had even won considerable publicity in the sentimental press as one who had taken a wrong step and had then redeemed himself. In his own opinion, his only wrong step was that he had been caught, red-handed, with the spoils of war. He had erred by taking marked money.

Now he was the leader of that section of the bar that lives upon crime and criminals. Only supercrooks could pay his fees. Big Joe, it was reported, had given him an annual retainer of considerable size for some years.

Lessing was, at first sight, a hale, hearty man with an open countenance and a loud, cordial voice. Inspected more closely, one saw evidences of cunning in his small eyes, surrounded by flesh, and in the way he had of talking out of the cigar corner of his mouth.

To Barbara he was courteous and cordial. That was because he could not place her as a member of any of the criminal professions with which he dealt. He suspected that she might be engaged in "shoving the queer," but his use of that phrase only puzzled her. After making several other tests, he decided that she must be honest; it surprised him, for he was not in the habit of meeting any but lawbreakers.

Barbara gave him Big Joe's note. The bank robber's presence in the city was evidently a surprise to him, and Barbara saw his eyes gleam wickedly. She felt a little fear for Big Joe; he could not altogether trust his attorney. That was why he had hesitated, had flipped the coin, before taking a chance.

"Of course, I can get this man Jenkins out—on bail," he remarked, after reading the note. "But the rest that—er—my client suggests isn't so easy. As a member of the bar," he said with dignity, "I cannot, of course, aid and abet in the abduction of Jenkins. It is possible that I might engage some one to lure him to my client's home, but I could not have any part in that phase of it."

"What's the difference," asked Barbara with frank logic, "between hiring some one to do it and doing it yourself?"

"Er—you don't quite understand, my dear young lady. A member of the bar must be careful."

"I see. Well, of course, it isn't wise to have any more people than are necessary involved in this affair. As Mr. Joe implies, he's doing this to clear Dr. Garrett-Ford. The man Jenkins is the murderer. We are reasonably sure of that. But it would do no good to turn him over to the police and openly accuse him. Big Joe can make him confess—he has some hold over him."

"Many fear—my client," nodded the lawyer.

"He said," went on Barbara, "that Jenkins is a drug addict. By this time, unless he has a supply of whatever drug he uses with him, he will probably crave it desperately. If you can bail him out now, do you suppose I could lure him to Joe's?"

"My dear young lady!" protested Lessing, shocked at the frankness of the suggestion.

"We might as well be frank," said Barbara. "And there's no time to lose."

"Well—er—well, of course, Jenkins doubtless knows me by reputation. I could vouch for you. I might assure him that you have a large supply of drugs, just landed, and that you need a peddler. That would probably win him. Yes, I think so."

"Good!" said Barbara. "Let's lose no time then."

"Do you want me to represent Dr. Garrett-Ford at the hearing?" asked the lawyer suavely.

"No," Barbara said promptly. "God!" she thought. "With your reputation, he'd surely be convicted!"

They drove, in Lessing's car, to the Twenty-Third Street station. The attorney tried to be gallant—an attempt that made him, to Barbara, even more ridiculous.

"If you will get into that taxi," said the lawyer, indicating a cab at the curb, "I'll bring Jenkins out and have him get in beside you. You will direct the driver to Joe's address. By the way, where is Joe?"

"Didn't he give you his address?" countered Barbara.

"No. Perhaps he forgot it."

"I'll have him send it to you then," promised the girl.

The attorney bowed, acknowledging his defeat. Then he turned into the police station, while Barbara took her place, after a word to the driver, in the waiting taxicab.

She waited there for some minutes. When she first saw Jenkins, preceding the lawyer out of the station, she felt an uncontrollable fear. He was a man nearly as large as Big Joe, but of an utterly different type. His manner, just now, was extremely nervous; his gestures almost maniacal.

He was shattered by his addiction, by the suffering he had undergone by reason of having been deprived of his drug. Lessing was talking earnestly, in low tones, guiding him toward the taxi. Barbara had to steel herself to remain there. Her impulse was to flee. But she remembered that everything now depended on her courage.

At the door of the cab, Jenkins paused and stared at her. She could scarcely bear his wild, mad scrutiny. Yet she held herself to the thing that must be done. Barbara alone, I think, being what she was and looking the part, could have lured Jenkins. He trusted her.

He turned to Lessing and threw off the latter's hand, which was resting on his shoulder.

"All right," he said. "I'll go. But, say, I've got to have some stuff right now."

"Just as soon as you get there. In ten minutes," the lawyer assured him. "And after that, you've got the chance of your lifetime. We've got the biggest supply you ever saw. They don't know you here, and you can sell fast. You'll make a hundred thousand. And if you should get picked up, with me as a mouthpiece you'll be off in no time. See you later."

Jenkins stepped into the cab and it moved off.

"Say, where'd a lady like you get hold of all this stuff?" he demanded, with a recurrent suspicion.

Barbara had thought of that.

"My husband brought it in," she said calmly, "on his own boat. He had landed it safely, and hidden it. Then he was killed. It's on my hands, and I've got to get rid of it. Lessing said you were the man to handle it for me. He told me I could trust you."

"Sure you can!" swore Jenkins, at that moment turning over in his mind the possibility of stealing her alleged supply of drugs. "You bet!"

Barbara forced herself to talk of their plans all the way to Joe's. Only by keeping him interested and his cupidity aroused could she get him there. And she must do that!

At last, to her immense relief, the taxi halted before the ugly East Side house. She led the way to the basement door. When Lou opened it, this time, she held it wide.

"I knew it was you, deary," she said, "by your ring. Come on in."

Barbara stepped inside, Jenkins at her heels. The door closed. And as it closed, a long arm reached out and seized Jenkins. It was the arm of Big Joe. Jenkins, turn-

ing to fight, looked into the face of the man he feared.

"God!" he screamed. "Big Joe! It's Big Joe!"

Barbara, nervously exhausted, sank into a chair, and Lou hurried away to get her a glass of water.

VII

ARTHUR GARRETT-FORD, A. B., A. M., and Ph. D., clasped my hand and thanked me heartily.

"But," I protested, "I did nothing—nothing at all."

He had been released from prison the morning after Jenkins had been led to Big Joe. Barbara herself had taken down the confession. Her stenographic report was really unnecessary, for Jenkins, by that time, was so completely mad, so fear-stricken, that he could not refrain from confessing.

"You had no reason to help me," said Ford. "Yet you were willing to get involved, seriously involved, with lawbreakers. I appreciate it, old man."

"And so do I!" said Barbara, who was now Mrs. Garrett-Ford. They had been married immediately after Ford's release.

"Thank you," I bowed to her. "But it was you who really did it all."

"Babs is a game girl!" Ford put his arm around her. "She was in deadly fear of Jenkins, all the time. But she didn't show it."

"Yes," she nodded, "I was afraid of him and yet I was sorry for him, at the same time."

"Will he be executed?" I asked after a moment's pause.

"Not if we can help it!" said Ford. "He should be locked up, of course, because he's dangerous. Even before he used drugs, he was that. But he shouldn't be executed—he is not responsible."

"And Big Joe?"

Ford chuckled.

"Big Joe—bless him—took a long chance. Lessing would have turned him up if the bankers' association had made it worth his while. Joe knew that, but he had to get in touch with Lessing. That's why, as soon as he got through with Jenkins, he left.

"By now he's in Canada. And the police are looking for him here. Very probably, by the time they begin looking for him in Canada, he'll be back here. That's the way Joe does it! You know, whether you approve of his profession or not, you must like Joe!"

"Yes, that's what I discovered," I agreed.

"And I did, too," said Barbara. "If he would only stop—"

Ford laughed tolerantly.

"He never will," he said, "until he gets tired of it. Joe is a reincarnation of one of the old bandits. He belongs to a time when banditry was romantic. To-day it isn't—crime is ugly now. Joe's sort doesn't belong in this age."

"And Bunky?" I asked. "Is he—"

"I had a note from Bunky this morning," said Ford. "He's sentenced to thirty days, and he wants to serve his time. He says that after his fight with Jenkins, he needs a rest. When he gets out, we'll look after him. In Bunky's case, crime was not a chosen career. It was forced upon him, by environment and conditions. Given something else to do, Bunky will be all right. Bunky isn't a Big Joe."

"And you?" I went on. "Shall you continue in this work?"

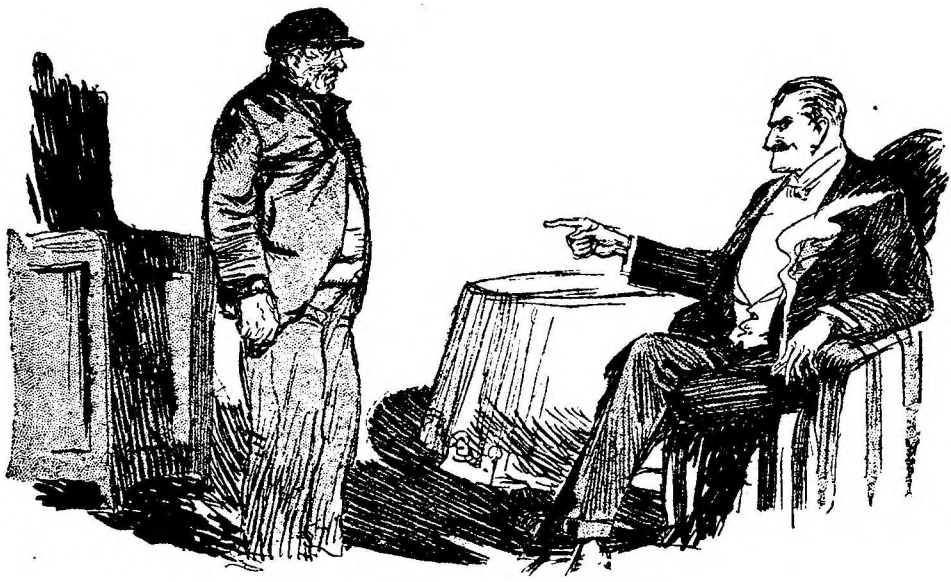
Ford frowned. Then he nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Barbara is right. If I give myself to it, without cynicism and without desiring to reap an unfair reward, I can help people. Even poor Dulac—I had helped him. Had he not come to me when he did, I truly believe that he would have died soon by his own hand. Poor Dulac!

"But with Barbara—I should not be cynical, should I?"

And as he looked at his wife, his eyes were so deeply tender, so full of compelling sincerity that he seemed already to have dropped the cloak of cynicism that concealed his idealism.

Of the work he has done since then you probably know. If not, you will find a very modest account of it in Ford's latest book, "Ills of the Spirit."



"Sit down. I think we can fix this thing up"

A LITTLE OLD HABIT

By Eric Heath

"SOME MYSTERIOUS POWER HAS DECREED THAT YOU SHALL GO TO THE ELECTRIC CHAIR INSTEAD OF ME," SAID THE OTHER. "AND WHY NOT?"

SCOTTY drew back into a shady corner near the depot out of the glare of the sun. He was not used to sunlight. The cell from which he had just been released and which had been his home for the last eight years, had only one small barred window and that had looked out on a sheer wall of rock.

Somehow, too, the rattle of a hand-truck and the distant shriek of a locomotive whistle made him nervous and jumpy. He glanced at himself in the mirror of a penny weighing machine.

His pure white hair and sunken cheeks brought home to him forcibly the fact that he was now an old man. This had been his third stretch—nearly twenty years in prison, all told.

He ran his fingers over the thin bit of cardboard—the ticket that had been given to him to take him "back home." But his home was not the city in which he had been convicted of house breaking—the only home he had ever known was back in Eastern Colorado.

The little, white farm house with its border of many colored hollyhocks still remained vividly in his memory. And he was going back—back home after thirty years, most of which had been spent in prison!

The letter from Mary, his sister, was tucked safely away in his inside coat pocket. True, it was soiled from many readings and yellow from age, but the invitation it contained would still hold good—Mary never went back on her word.

She had written him that his father and mother had both died, unforgiving, but that she had always known that at heart

he was pure and good. She begged him to come back and help her run the little farm. She hadn't sent him any money to get back to Colorado—probably she didn't have it to spare.

But, somehow, he would manage to earn that much and then he would go back and spend the rest of his days working on the farm and feeling the joy of being out in the open where he could really breathe.

Scotty braced back his narrow shoulders. He was going straight from now on! He had never been much of a success as a crook, anyway—always got caught sooner or later.

He used to laugh at wiseacres who told him that honesty paid the best in the long run, but now he realized that they were not so foolish as they looked.

As the train pulled out, he caught a glimpse of the drab walls of the prison, with their fortress-like turrets containing alert guards—human mechanisms ready, if need be, to shoot down one of their kind.

To Scotty the men in the turrets seemed to be hideously abnormal—and yet, deep down in his heart, he realized that such things had to be. After all it was a case of the survival of the fittest and those who lived within the law were stronger than those without.

But, although Scotty was not aware of it, those armed guards had a much deeper psychological significance.

Deep rooted in his nature there was a driving, inexorable conviction that killing, no matter under what pretense, was unjustifiable. Never in his career had he carried a loaded revolver.

He always went armed with a gun, but fearing that by some mishap he might commit murder, he refused steadfastly to load the cartridge chamber. In half-hearted condonation of his crimes, he had always averred that there was nothing terrible in stealing from a man who had plenty and who would be able to duplicate what had been lost.

But to take a man's life—that was something that allowed for no comeback. It wasn't fair. Scotty had a peculiar moral code all of his own, a strange mixture of childlike sophisms.

Arriving in the city he expended three dollars of the five which had been presented to him before he left the prison, for a week's rent of a tiny room over a Chinese restaurant.

The window of the room looked down upon the roof of the kitchen of the restaurant and at intervals the stench from the garbage cans in the back yard was almost unbearable.

He tried to overlook this unpleasant feature of his abode by endeavoring to recall the fragrance of the nasturtiums and sweet peas which grew in wild confusion in back of the farm house back home.

But when he returned to his room the following evening, after tramping the streets looking for work, his journey to Colorado seemed but an unreal and fantastic vision. Nobody wanted to hire an old man like him.

They were all looking for young, aggressive fellows. He realized that things had changed since he had gone to prison eight years ago. This was the age of youth. Why, women as old as he were wearing skirts up to their knees and had their hair bobbed like girls of fourteen.

Maybe if he could get rid of that shuffling prison gait and look people more boldly in the eyes, he would make a better impression.

Fortifying himself with such thoughts, he ate two "hot dogs" which were no longer hot and made himself a little tea by holding a tin cup over the gas jet.

But Scotty had been in prison too long to ever entirely eradicate the prison brand. Those days and nights of silent suffering had left their mark, scars that death alone could entirely erase.

He was not, popular opinion to the contrary, hounded by the police. Possibly the eye of the law was upon him, but if it was he never knew it. One thing is sure, no rough-neck "dick" tried to queer him from getting a job. His failure was one involving pure economics.

Business houses did not want the responsibility of taking an old man into their employ. He would be too likely to become a liability instead of an asset—and especially an ex-convict. For, if asked point

blank, Scotty admitted that he had been in prison.

He felt sure that if they hired him they would find out sooner or later and it would be better that they knew from the first.

It is a trit, but truthful saying that hunger will undermine the will, break down the moral fiber. This applies to even the most powerful of us.

It was natural, therefore, that starving and discouraged Scotty could be found one night making his way across a spacious lawn toward the small, but aristocratic looking house on the outskirts of the city.

He had put up a big fight to go straight, get enough money to return home, but he had been licked—licked from the start.

The only bit of luck he had had, and that carried rather a sardonic touch to it, was in finding among a heap of rubbish in the closet of his room, a formidable looking revolver with a cracked handle.

At first he thought of selling it to buy the wherewithal to exist for a few more days, but he decided that such a procedure was too risky.

The law was very stringent in regard to the carrying of concealed weapons—and especially so when those weapons happened to be in the possession of ex-convicts.

Possibly the revolver with the cracked handle had something to do with his ultimate return to a life of crime—a subtle suggestion offered by the Evil One.

Scotty had noticed a well-dressed man leave the house earlier in the evening and to all appearances the lay was a good one. The nearest habitations on either side were fully a quarter of a block away and the street was quiet and deserted.

His joints cracked as he pulled himself up to a low porch at the side of the house and crouched back in the shadows breathing heavily. He then started to work on the fastening of the French window.

He had no money to buy tools with and had been forced to make an improvised jimmy out of an iron bracket supporting the springs of his bed.

After he got inside he would, no doubt, have to content himself with such loose valuables as could be taken without undue effort.

His fingers had lost their sensitiveness through years of hard labor—and he had also noted that safes were different from those in use when he had been sent up the river.

It seemed that cracksmen now used such devices as acetylene torches, stethoscopes and other new appliances. He was hopelessly behind the times.

II

TEPPING cautiously through the window into the room, he crouched down and listened attentively. No sound came to his ears except the faint ticking of a clock.

He struck a match and held it up in front of him. In the flickering, yellow light he saw that he was in a spacious room, the walls of which were lined on three sides by carved walnut bookcases.

In the center of the room was a handsome walnut table and on either side of which were two enormous, plush covered chairs, placed so as to be well within the light from the bronze reading lamp in the center of the table.

Above the bookcases were a number of small oil paintings and tapestries. But what caught his attention at once was the small, iron safe in the corner. Just as he was taking a good look at it, the match burned down to his finger tips.

Turning, he pulled down the blinds, making the room utterly dark. Then he lighted another match and made his way to the table. He switched on the reading lamp. Instinctively he knew that the house was empty.

He had found that the presence of people was always indicated by some indefinable atmospheric vibration—something too intangible to explain in words.

His glance at the safe had been sufficient to reveal the fact that it was very old. Maybe he could make it after all. He dropped to his knees and started manipulating the dial.

He placed his right ear up close to the cold steel surface and listened for the fall of the tumblers. He found after a moment that he was making no headway.

He pressed the tip of his forefinger into his other ear as an aid in distinguishing the little clicking sounds that must be noted before he could work the combination.

It was on this account that he did not hear the front door open. Neither did he hear the sound of approaching footsteps and it was only the clatter of a falling cane that brought him to his feet, his hand reaching for the empty revolver with the cracked handle.

His fingers had just closed on the butt of the revolver which protruded from his hip pocket, when a mocking voice exclaimed:

"I have you covered, my friend! Bring your hands up *empty!*"

As Scotty slowly raised his hands, he turned his head. There, standing in the doorway, was a tall, hawk-faced man in a dinner suit. The revolver in his right hand was aiming directly at Scotty's heart.

There was something about the man's appearance that caused Scotty to shiver with apprehension. He could expect no mercy from those sneering black eyes.

There was something about the fellow, in his immaculate evening clothes, that reminded Scotty of an operatic Mephistopheles he had once seen at the opera house when a boy.

As the man came up to him, however, and relieved him of the revolver with the cracked handle, Scotty suddenly became aware that his captor was breathing heavily and that there was a haunted look of fear in his eyes.

Was the fellow afraid of *him* even now that he was disarmed and powerless?

This idea was dispelled at once, when the man placed both revolvers in his side pockets and seated himself comfortably in one of the big chairs.

He lighted a cigarette and after exhaling deep drafts of smoke, he looked at Scotty with a cool, appraising glance.

Scotty wondered why the fellow didn't do something. Why didn't he call the police? The suspense was becoming unbearable. It was just like a cat's playing with a mouse.

Just as he was about to break the silence by demanding that his captor call the police and have it over with, the man gave a sardonic chuckle.

"What y' laughin' at?" demanded Scotty, losing control of himself. "'Spose y' think you're smart fer catchin' me in the act! But you ain't so clever! I ain't much good any more—oughter had better sense than to think I could get away with it any more."

Scotty's voice dropped. His aggressive attitude fell from him. His shoulders sagged and he seemed to be talking to himself. "Guess the county has to take care of old wrecks like me—maybe the Salvation Army would 'a' helped me to get back home—"

"Sit down," commanded the other. "I want to talk to you."

His remark dragged Scotty back from his recriminating murmurings. He stared at the man in surprise.

"Sit down, I said," repeated the man with a friendly wave of his hand. "Don't be frightened. I think we can fix this thing up alright. In fact, you are a gift from God—or the devil—I don't know which."

Scotty, with a glimmer of hope, seated himself in one of the big chairs. It was so soft he thought he was being smothered in its depths. He allowed his hands to fall to his knees and looked mutely at the man across the table.

"I'm going to give you an opportunity to earn your liberty." The man flicked ash from his coat sleeve.

"You mean y' won't have me pinched?" exclaimed Scotty, his heart beating wildly.

"It all depends. You shall go free, however, if you carry out my instructions faithfully. If you don't, I'll prosecute you to the limit of the law.

"Judging from your looks you are an old timer and it will be your spirit and not your body that will leave the next prison you enter."

Scotty shuddered. He didn't want to die in prison. He had looked forward to spending his last hours back home, where he could look out the window at the distant mountains, go out listening to the birds in the cottonwoods surrounding the little white farm house.

The man turned, and placing his arms

on the table, addressed Scotty. His deep-set black eyes were like sunken pools of mystery.

"In order to explain what I want you to do, I'll have to take you into my confidence." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a necklace set with diamonds.

The many-faceted stones sent out a myriad of sparkling beams of fire as he dropped it on the table.

"This necklace was stolen—from a friend of mine who lives near by. The thief who took this piece of jewelry was—*my sister!*" At the flicker of surprise in Scotty's eyes, the man smiled. "She is a kleptomaniac."

"Oh," murmured Scotty.

"Now what I want you to do is to go with me at once to this house. I will wait outside while you break in. You will return this necklace, placing it in the upper drawer of the desk in the room which you will enter.

"You understand that I am making this bargain with you in order to save my sister from disgrace, from being branded as a thief. This is not her first theft. I have saved her before and will continue to do so as long as possible."

"'Spose I'm caught?" Scotty asked.

"That's your lookout," returned the other, "although I think there's very little danger as I happen to know that the family is away. The point is I can't afford to run any risk of becoming involved myself."

Scotty nodded. This man, after all, was good hearted. He was fighting for his sister's sake. Scotty felt that he had made a mistake in judging him to be cold and ruthless.

His captor looked at his watch and jumped up.

"We must be going at once. The sooner this job is over the better." He paused and looked Scotty squarely in the eyes. His suave attitude suddenly changed and his face took on a strained expression. "I'll have you under the cover of my gun every instant, and if you try to double cross me, I'll kill you as I would a filthy rat!"

Scotty, who had risen, cowered under the lash of the words.

"You're givin' me a square break. I'll do just what you say, as long as you lets me go when the job's done."

The man nodded. "I believe you. To be frank, you look like one of those weak-kneed thieves who are half straight and half crooked."

He pulled out two fifty dollar bills and extended them to Scotty. "Here's a little something to buy yourself a square meal—after you finish the job."

As Scotty took the money with trembling fingers and put it in his pocket, he caught in the brooding, black eyes a glint of something mysterious, something cynical. It lingered only momentarily, but it gave Scotty a vague foreboding of disaster, a suddenly renewed distrust of his captor.

"Put the necklace in your pocket and when we get out on the street, you walk on a few paces ahead of me. And even though I believe I can rely on you—just for safety's sake, I will be close enough to shoot you, should such a procedure by any possible chance become necessary."

"I told y' I'd do what y' says!" exclaimed Scotty. "I ain't got nothin' to gain by double crossin' y', have I?"

"No," answered the other, "and for your information I'm under the impression that those diamonds are paste."

III

OLLOWING the low, staccato instructions of his guide, Scotty made his way up the long gravel driveway at the end of which he discerned a palatial, colonial style mansion with its white pillars and broad verandas.

Through the trees at his left he could glimpse the lights of the city below. The shadowy valley in which the city lay seemed like a portion of an inverted summer sky with thousands of twinkling stars, tiny worlds cast down to earth through the whim of a heavenly ruler and doomed to signal back pathetically to their comrades above.

In a moment he felt the touch of guiding fingers on his arm and was led across the lawn to the shadows of a clump of lilac bushes. As they proceeded stealthily, Scot-

ty sized up the house and was reassured by its deserted appearance.

The shutters were all closed and not a single ray of light gleamed out through the apertures. There was something ghostly about the desolate, white structure and, to Scotty, the moan of the wind in the bordering pines was like the whisperings of departed spirits—shades of those who had once strolled peacefully through the spacious gardens.

The man drew him back well within the darkness of the shrubbery and pointed over at the house. Scotty vaguely noted that the extended fingers looked strangely white and waxen.

"Do you see that second window from the front, off the porch?" Scotty nodded. "You will enter there. The writing desk is in a corner at the left side of the room. You will place the necklace in the top drawer. Make haste, now, and don't forget, I shall be watching you!"

"Don't y' worry, guv'nor, I'll have the sparklers back in that desk inside of less than ten minutes."

"Very good."

Scotty stole across the lawn and swung himself over the porch railing. Reaching the window he worked noislessly on the shutters, and then on the window. The improvised jimmy proved more efficacious than he had anticipated.

As he stepped into the room he couldn't help being aware of the novelty of this "job." Never before had he broken into a house to *return* anything; it was always the other way around.

His feet sank into the soft depths of a rug and deadened the sound of his entrance. He stood for a moment, listening intently. A faint beam of light through the open window fell upon an upturned chair.

There was something so incongruous about an upturned chair in a room which he felt must be one of luxury, that he placed himself on the *qui vive* and advanced with redoubled caution.

He had a subtle conviction that those mesmeric black eyes were looking at him, watching his every move. He realized that he was a trifle dizzy. The stuffy atmosphere of the place seemed to suffocate him. Maybe it was only because he had not eaten much lately—or else the excitement was too much for him.

Pulling himself together, he struck a match and looked around. To his surprise he noted a large, steel safe in the opposite corner of the room. The door of the safe was open and on the rug in front of it was a confused mass of papers.

The dying match burned the tip of his fingers and he dropped it to the floor. He wondered why the safe was left open. But that wasn't anything that he should worry about. He must find the writing desk, put the necklace in the top drawer and get out.

He struck another match and looked around. The room was elegantly furnished with gilded chairs and tables, a velvet-covered chaise longue, oriental vases—but where was the writing desk?

At his right, so near that he could almost touch its polished surface was a baby grand piano draped with a cloth of gold. He moved around the corner of the instrument, and as he did so, he stumbled against some object lying on the floor and fell forward with a faint thud.

He staggered up, and reached into his pocket for another match. He became aware that his hand was moist and sticky. He struck the match. Horrified he saw that his fingers were covered with blood.

He looked down and stood as if frozen to the spot. There at his feet was the body of an elderly, gray-haired man, his face chalk-white against a crimson-stained rug—

Scotty tried to regain command of his limbs. He must run—run anywhere, just so long as he got out of this house—away from the sight of those staring eyes that seemed to be looking up at him with cold, deadly hate.

Without warning, the room was flooded with light. For an instant he was blinded. Then, out of a filmy red haze, appeared the figure of a man in evening clothes. He was standing near the window. In his right hand he held a leveled revolver aimed directly at Scotty.

A cynical smile played around the cor-

ners of his mouth. His eyes were triumphant. He advanced, speaking as he did so.

IV

"JUST sit down in that chair over there, my dear helpmate. You look tired and overcome at the sight of death."

His words brought Scotty back to life.

"What's the idea?" he demanded in a quavering voice. With shaking fingers he pulled the necklace out of his pocket and tossed it to the floor. "There's the sparklers. I done what you asked me to, and now I'm leavin'." He started toward the window.

"Stop!" commanded the other as he brought the pistol forward sharply. "You do as I tell you, or I'll shoot you."

With a moan, Scotty stood rigid. He was trapped! He might have known all along that this devil was up to something.

"Now sit down like a good fellow," purred his captor.

Scotty sank into a chair and rubbed his wrinkled hands together with short, jerky movements. Still keeping the gun trained on the shivering figure in the chair, the man stepped back and picked up a telephone from a small, pearl-inlaid table.

"Give me the police station." He spoke in such a muffled tone that had not the words "police station" been so significant in Scotty's life he would not have heard.

He started to rise, then sank back as he saw his captor tighten his finger on the trigger of the pistol.

"Police station?" A pause. Then, "Send an officer at once to 211 Hillcrest Drive. My uncle has been murdered! Yes—211 Hillcrest Drive. Right. This is his nephew, Arthur Salton, speaking."

Salton hung up the receiver and seated himself in a chair near Scotty. Placing the revolver in his lap, he took out a silver cigarette case. As he lighted a cigarette, his hands trembled violently.

He seemed, for an instant, to have lost his self-control. His face was harshly pallid, and his eyes held the expression of a hunted animal. He braced back his shoulders and looked at the cowering man.

"I presume you understand what is about to happen?" he inquired.

Scotty nodded, his white hair gleaming in the glow of the brilliant chandelier suspended over his head.

"You're goin' to blame me fer *that*." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the dead man.

"Your astuteness is remarkable," replied Salton.

Perspiration broke on Scotty's forehead. He clutched the arms of his chair, his bony knuckles showing white beneath the thin heavily veined skin. He seemed about to speak, when Salton went on;

"I will explain the whole situation more fully in order that you may understand and not think too hard of me. You see, I have nothing against you, my man. You just happened to be the instrument of fate.

"If you had gone straight after you last came out of prison, this would not have occurred. It seems that some mysterious power has decreed that *you* shall go to the electric chair instead of *me*. And why not? You've lived your life and wasted it. I'm just beginning mine."

The words "electric chair" lashed Scotty's dazed mind into a frenzy.

"For God's sake!" he cried.

"Quiet!" commanded Salton picking up the revolver. "Keep still until I get through!" As the old man sank back limply in his chair, the suave voice continued, "I did not intend to kill him. He is my uncle—my mother's brother. He hated my father, because he defrauded my father out of a lot of money.

"You know how it is, when a man gets the best of another one he always hates the man he cheated. Just why I cannot say.

"I never asked my uncle for anything until to-night, but like you, I too, took something that did not belong to me. I had to make it good or go to prison.

"*He* was my last resort. He was kneeling before the safe as I entered this room. I asked him to loan me the money. He was fingering a huge roll of bills as I made the request. He sneered. Then I demanded it as a part of what he cheated my father out of.

"He cursed me and ordered me out of the house. I saw red. I shot him, with this revolver." He paused. "Strange, but I didn't feel bad about killing him. I was just terrified at first at the thought of prison, disgrace—the chair."

Salton brushed his hand across his eyes. His calmness dropped from him again, and he looked about wildly. With jerky fingers he lighted another cigarette, which seemed to bring back his self-control.

"If you had not come," he continued, "I would have been convicted for a certainty. Every one knew that my uncle and I were enemies. Detectives these days are very clever." He leaned forward and pointed his finger at Scotty.

"But when I tell them that I found *you* here—you, a convict, caught in the act of robbing the safe, with my uncle lying there dead—murdered—I shall go free! Free!" Salton's voice was raised hysterically. He jumped up, his eyes glittering with the light of madness.

"Stand up!" he commanded, brandishing the revolver in front of Scotty's face.

Scotty staggered to his feet. Not a single ray of hope flickered in his tired, gray eyes. This was the end. So—he was to go to the chair—for *murder,* for taking human life—he who had always regarded this as the one unpardonable sin—

"Stand over there near the window!" cried Salton. "The police will be here any minute now, and I must set the stage!" He smiled grimly. "Not *too* near," he added as Scotty shuffled toward the open window. Scotty stopped short.

With a shove of his hand, Salton upset a small table leaving an unobstructed view of the body of the murdered man.

With a shuddering glance, he tossed the revolver over near the dead man, pulling another revolver from his pocket as he did so, and bringing it quickly up in line with Scotty's heart.

"Now," he went on, with frenzied exultation, "there you are, over near the window! I've caught you just as you tried to make your escape. The safe over there, which I rifled before I left, tells its own story. The pistol by my dead uncle has one empty chamber." Salton paused, significantly. "Everything is perfect! Not a chance for a slip up!"

Scotty stared vacantly at the pistol on the floor. No—there wasn't a chance in the world for him! Even now he could hear the roar of the motor car outside. The police were coming up the steps! Why did that revolver seem to hold his attention? Was it beckoning for him to come and pick it up—fight for his life?

He brushed his hand across his face, and then gave a cry of exultation. *That gun didn't have a cracked handle!* It was Salton's gun. The gun Salton was pointing at him, was *his*—the one with the cracked handle—the gun with the empty chamber! Salton had never dreamed that a crook would carry an empty gun.

Like a flash he turned and ran to the window.

"Stop!" yelled Salton, as he pulled the trigger.

There was no answering report. With a cry of dismay, he stooped and reached for the revolver on the floor. He fired just as Scotty jumped from the porch to the ground. The bullet whizzed harmlessly over his head.

Scotty glanced back through the window as he darted for the underbrush. He saw two officers rush into the room, and grab the smoking revolver from the hand of Salton. Salton could never explain, now—he had fallen into his own trap.

Turning, Scotty ran on through the underbrush and down the hill to the near-by woods.

The first orange fingers of dawn were spreading out across the sky when Scotty left the woods and made his way along the dusty road. He recalled that he had placed the stub of a cigarette in his pocket the day before. Maybe it was still intact.

As he searched through the torn lining, his fingers came into contact with the two fifty dollar bills which Salton had given him. He pulled them out and stopping short, he stared at the crisp new notes.

With smiling lips, he stumbled on down the road, his long white hair blowing back over his ears, his ragged coat fluttering grotesquely in the breeze.

We crept out through the kitchen

GUESSWORK

By John H. Thompson

"IT'S TIME TO GO," BILL SUGGESTED. "INNOCENT MEN HAVE BEEN HUNG BEFORE, AND I'M NOT HANKERING TO INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE"

"DETECTIVES" ventured Bill as he tossed the evening paper aside, "are living examples of the theory that if a man makes enough guesses about different things he is bound to guess correctly once in a while. Omar Khayyam, or was it Hoyle, figured all that out when he compiled his famous law of averages.

"If a detective happens to guess right he is hailed as the greatest sleuth since Sherlock Holmes asked Doctor Watson for the needle. If he guesses wrong and isn't quick enough with his announcement that he was misquoted, he is denounced as a bonehead."

"All of which," I suggested, "puts detectives in a class with men of other professions, some of whom are good guessers and some bad."

Bill ignored the observation.

"Take this Raymond murder case," he continued, indicating the headlines spread across the front page of the paper lying on the floor. "It is played up as a tremendous mystery, but it is no mystery to me. I always was pretty good as a guesser," he added complacently.

"I see that the police lieutenant is quoted as saying that robbery undoubtedly was the motive inasmuch as Raymond was supposed to have several hundred dollars in his possession and the wad is missing. He—"

"He's wrong, all wrong," declared Bill with an air of finality. "He's one of the bad guessers. I've read every word in the paper about that murder and I've got it all doped out. See this."

He picked up the paper and pointed to a paragraph toward the end of the article.

The paragraph described the position of the body when it was found in the alleyway back of a warehouse on a side street, with a bullet through the head. Bill designated the closing sentence of the paragraph. It read:

> Clutched in the dead man's hand was a wilted flower—a carnation.

"Well, what about it?" I demanded.

"There's the solution of your mystery," declared Bill triumphantly. "It's written there as plainly as the headlines on this page."

Certainly, there was nothing secretive about the headlines.

"I fail to see what that has to do with the murder," I remarked.

"So do a lot of these official guessers," said Bill. "They apparently attached no significance to the presence of this flower. They just can't guess how it happened to be there, and just because some money was missing they guessed that robbery was the motive."

"Well, what is your guess?" I knew that was my cue.

"A woman," declared Bill triumphantly.

"But they say this Raymond was a bashful sort of a cuss—never had anything to do with women."

"Still waters run deep," interposed Bill sagely. "I don't say that a woman did the killing but a woman was at the bottom of the row that led to the killing. There's no question about it. Why would an ex-prize-fighter be roaming down an alley with a carnation in his hand if he hadn't gone crazy over some skirt?"

"Maybe the murderer put it there to throw the police off the scent," I suggested.

"If the murderer put it there, it only bears out my theory all the more," said Bill emphatically. "Why should a murderer stick a flower in the hand of his victim? Why?"

"You got me," I admitted.

"For only one of two reasons," declared Bill. "Either as a message to some unknown woman to let her know why this man met his tragic end or for symbolic purposes, the flower being symbolic of woman, just as the slayer in that Jeanfavre murder out in Kansas last week marked a dollar sign on the forehead of his victim who had foreclosed a mortgage on him."

"But why should the murderer take the money, then?" I queried.

"Easy stuff," said Bill derisively. "This Raymond probably swindled some woman, undoubtedly the sweetheart of the man who did the killing."

"It looks like a pretty good guess," I conceded. There are times when I am convinced that Bill is a man of brains. His reasoning seemed air-tight.

The presence of the flower in the dead man's hand undoubtedly suggested that there was a woman in the case; and the fact that money was taken might suggest retaliation for some financial wrong just as much as it might suggest robbery.

"The whole thing is so simple that I can't understand why the police are concentrating on the robbery theory," said Bill.

"Raymond's watch and diamond scarf pin were taken," I pointed out. "How do you account for that?"

"It all dove-tails in with my theory," replied Bill. "The woman in the case probably gave the pin and watch to Raymond. Engagement presents perhaps. They were to be married. Then, instead of marrying her, Raymond swindled her out of her money.

"The woman in her desperation went to a former sweetheart, or perhaps to her brother, and told him the whole sordid story. Then came retaliation and death. It was natural that the slayer should take the watch and pin as well as the money; natural too that he should leave the flower as a symbol."

"But this Raymond was pretty well known and made good money as a fighter. Why should he have stooped to swindling?" I was doing my best to pick flaws in Bill's diagnosis.

"Jim," said Bill, "you and I have been traveling about the country now for nigh on twenty-five years." I nodded assent. "What's mine is yours and what's yours is mine." Again I nodded assent. "But if some dame should get you on a string, do you know what I'd do?"

I confessed that I didn't.

"I'd abolish our common treasury and buy a pocketbook of my own," said Bill emphatically.

"It wouldn't have to be a very big pocketbook," I conceded cheerfully, recalling the thirty-nine cents that Bill and I had left over after we had paid our room rent.

"But," I added, "what has that got to do with the subject."

"When a man goes daffy over a woman, nobody knows what he is apt to do next," declared Bill. "This murder case isn't any mystery. As the French say: 'Cherry, cherry, the foam.'"

"Cheese it, cheese it, the femmie," I corrected him.

"Just a matter of pronunciation," said Bill airily. "Do you know what I'm going to do?" he demanded.

It never is easy to know what Bill is going to do next.

"I'm going to call up the police and tip them off to this flower clew. If the dumbbells don't know enough to see it themselves somebody ought to tell them!"

"You're a blooming fool to get mixed up in a murder case," I declared, but I might just as well have used my breath to blow up a toy balloon with a hole in it. When Bill once makes up his mind to do anything, argument is absolutely useless.

He pulled on his coat and sallied forth. The idea of being caught around a telephone booth while trying to send in an anonymous clew in a mysterious murder case didn't appeal to me one whit, so I remained in the room.

About twenty minutes later Bill blew in again. He seemed to be peeved and a bit worried.

"Well, what luck?" I inquired as he flung his hat and coat into the corner.

"I told 'em," he replied curtly. He sat down but immediately arose again and peeked out into the street from behind the window shade. "Let's put out the light, it's more pleasant sitting in the dark," he suggested a bit nervously. Without waiting for me to vote on the question before the house, he snapped off the lights.

"It took you a long time to tell your story to the police," I ventured.

"Listen!" whispered Bill through the darkness.

The next instant he laughed nervously. "Thought I heard somebody out front," he explained. Then he tried to change the subject.

"The telephone service is rotten in this town," he declared. "I got the police station on the 'phone and started to tell the desk sergeant to look for a woman if he wanted a clew to the slayer of Raymond. I don't know whether he got the message or not. The 'phone clicked and buzzed and I spent about five minutes trying to get a better connection. I finally gave it up."

"Holy mackerel," I ejaculated. "You spent five minutes in the telephone booth?"

"Yeh," Bill replied absently. He was over by the window again peeking from behind the shade.

"You poor idiot," I declared pityingly. "The sergeant was fiddling with the 'phone just to hold you there until an officer could be sent to investigate."

Bill sighed dismally. "That's what I'm afraid of," he admitted. "There was a big fellow waiting outside when I came out of the store. He followed me home. I think he's out there now, watching the place. If he isn't a dick I never saw one."

Without further ado I stumbled across the room, upsetting a chair in the dark, fumbled around on the bureau until I got hold of our hairbrush and stuck it into my pocket.

"Come on, Bill, I've got the baggage. We'd better leave town," I said.

II

"I WAS going to suggest that myself," said Bill. He was hurriedly trying to find his hat and coat in the dark. "Come on, old pal." He hadn't stopped to put on the coat. "We don't want to get mixed up in a murder case. Two shabby strangers might have a hard job trying to impress the police under a third degree.

"Innocent men have been hung before

this and I'm not hankering to increase the percentage. The least we could expect after the third degree was over would be six months for vagrancy."

We cautiously opened the door of our room, crept down the stairs and out through the kitchen, which fortunately happened to be in darkness. It was a streak of luck for us that we didn't encounter the landlady.

We had been in the rooming house only two days, but in that brief period we had discovered that the landlady spent practically all her time prowling about the hall, watching perhaps to see that nobody ran off with the dilapidated antiques with which the rooms were furnished.

As we were opening the back door and emerging into the night air, we could hear somebody banging on the front door.

"Let's run," suggested Bill. We lost no time in adopting the suggestion. We stumbled over gardens and hedges but finally emerged into a side street and headed toward the center of the town.

I was for hitting out into the country, but as Bill pointed out, it would be easier for us to escape attention where the traffic was heavy. On a rural road two shabby strangers would be as conspicuous as coffee stains on a white vest, but in a crowded street they would be no more noticeable than a fly speck on a pepper and salt suit.

We prowled until nearly midnight when the crowds on the streets began to thin out, and then sought refuge in a secluded section of the park. It was a cold, disagreeable night and every time we thought of our cozy rent-paid room we cursed the ill-timed hunch that caused Bill to seek fame as a detector of criminals.

Every time a park policeman ambled past Bill shook so that I was afraid the officer would think there was an earthquake. We were worried, too, as to how we could get out of town. We figured that in all probability the car lines and highways would be closely watched. Our one hope was that the police would follow Bill's tip, trace the woman in the case and through her capture the actual slayer.

We stayed in the park until long after daylight, when the streets began to fill with people on their way to work. We mingled with the crowd and headed for the nearest restaurant. A night in the open air had given us appetites which threatened to make our thirty-nine cents look as slim as the collection at a prayer meeting in a country church on a rainy night.

A newsboy entered the restaurant.

"Uxtry, all about the big murder case!" he shouted.

We promptly squandered three of our precious cents for a paper. Bill trembled in spite of himself as he spread open the first page.

"Police Find Slayer In Raymond Murder Mystery," screamed the headlines.

"That's you, Bill," I groaned miserably.

"Shut up," he whispered, glancing about apprehensively. "Somebody will hear you." Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

Suddenly he gave an exclamation of relief. He had read the subheads.

"They've caught the murderer. The mystery is solved," he declared.

He pointed triumphantly to one of the subheads.

"See that?" he demanded. He stuck out his chest like a Beau Brummel trying on a fancy vest. He pointed to a black line. "See that?"

"Flower Clutched In Dead Man's Hand Proves Clew Which Leads To Capture," said the headline.

Bill's guess apparently had been right. I gazed at him admiringly. "Some brain," I conceded enviously.

"I'll say it is," said Bill complacently. He was as proud as a hen with a deformed chicken. Complacency gave place to bewilderment, however, as he read further. Suddenly he crumpled up the paper and shoved it into his pocket.

"Let's read some more," I proposed. "Who was the woman in the case?"

"Oh, what's the use of bothering with all the details now," protested Bill. "Let's eat."

"You certainly ought to be on the detective force," I remarked in a congratulatory manner while we waited for the counterman to sling the coffee. "And to think that those dubs thought right along that the

motive was robbery," I added scornfully. "'Cheese it, cheese it, the femmie.' That's the dope, eh?"

Bill changed the subject rather abruptly but I returned to it as quickly as I could. It wasn't natural for Bill to be so modest.

"Do the police give you any credit for the tip you gave them about the woman? Do they say what the woman did when she learned that the murderer had stuck the flower in the hand of her former lover who was slain?" There was a lot of questions I wanted answered.

Bill pretended he didn't hear me. I reached around and grabbed the crumpled paper out of his pocket. A hurried perusal of the subheads gave me the story.

The slayer was "Jack the Dude," an old offender wanted in many cities. Robbery was the motive. The accused himself confessed it. Raymond had been held up and slain in cold blood. In falling he had lunged forward and grasped at the coat of his assailant and had torn a carnation from the button-hole of the lapel.

The presence of the flower had directed suspicion to Jack the Dude, as the police knew his weakness for *boutonnières*. The arrest had been made shortly before midnight.

"I don't see anything about the woman and all that other stuff," I remarked to Bill. "Listen to this," I added mercilessly as my eye fell on a paragraph of the article: "'From the outset the police were certain that Jack the Dude was the slayer, though a mysterious telephone message was received at headquarters last night intimating that a woman was at the bottom of the slaying. Investigation of the call, however, revealed that it had been sent in by an irresponsible individual in an east side rooming house, who presumably had read about the case in the newspapers and had done some wild guessing.'"

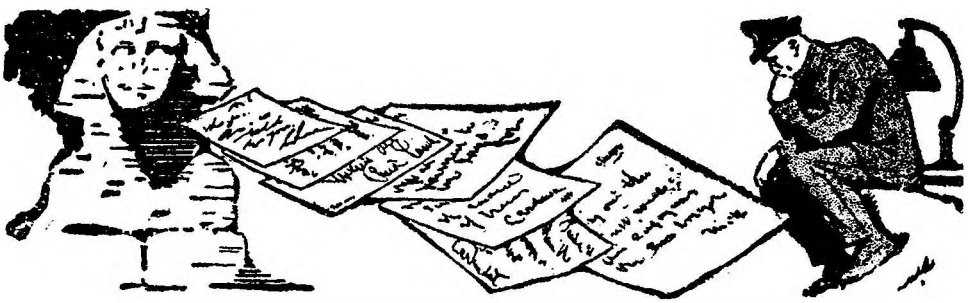
Bill looked as sheepish as a young bachelor dandling a baby.

"As a guesser, your batting average is minus nothing," I declared inexorably.

Bill essayed to change the subject. "I guess we'll go back now to the room and get some sleep," he ventured.

And this proved to be a guess that boosted his average considerably.

Anthony Wynne's famous detective character, Dr. Eustace Hailey, is soon to make his reappearance in FLYNN'S WEEKLY



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

BEGINNING A SIGNIFICANT EXPLANATION OF THE ESSENTIALS OF CIPHER COMPOSITION—ALSO A SPECTACULAR PRIZE ANNOUNCEMENT

LAST week's article promised for this issue the first of a series of rules and regulations governing the structure of cipher systems.

The above mentioned digest of rules is calculated to aid our readers in judging the relative merit of various ciphers. And to further this end, this weekly series will be interspersed with brief surveys of the different classes of ciphers.

Here is the first proposition:

> (1) A cipher should employ symbols that are easy to write, read, and pronounce; and that are transmissible by existing modes of communication.

Since existing methods of communication are in general best adapted—aside from a few punctuation marks or special signs—to the sending of letters and figures, in selecting symbols for a cipher system it would seem best to limit one's self to these latter characters.

For various reasons most ciphers employ either letters or figures only. But should it be decided to use both letters and figures in the same cipher it would seem advisable, to avoid confusion, to omit either the letters I and O, or the figures 1 and 0.

Proposition one would appear to scrap all arbitrary character ciphers, such as the stroke cipher of Charles I explained in this article.

But are such ciphers altogether taboo?

Not at all.

It is even conceivable that in some particular case such a cipher might serve better than any other.

Further, arbitrary character ciphers possess their own peculiar virtues. Thus, signs or marks are capable of minute differences of form whereby a number of symbols, apparently identical to casual observation or even to a very close inspection, might actually have as many altogether different meanings.

But the advantages of the cipher of ordinary letters or figures in general far outweigh those of the arbitrary character cipher.

For example, letters and figures are easier to write, read, and check, in enciphering and deciphering. They can be transcribed by hand or typewriter; or printed with ordinary type in any newspaper, magazine, or other publication, without any special process of reproduction.

In common with any written communication, ciphers of letters and figures can, of course, be dispatched by the usual carrier methods; as, for example, mail, courier, carrier pigeon, messenger dog, or message-throwing devices such as the message-carrying projectiles used during the World War.

Using auxiliary alphabets, of which the International Morse Code is an example, such a cipher is also capable of acoustic

transmission by guns, bells, musical instruments, raps, scratches, and so on. And the symbols being pronounceable, oral and telephonic transmission are also practicable.

Similarly, visual systems—such as signal panels, smoke signals, the heliograph, flash lights, pyrotechnics, and wigwag and semaphore flags—come in for their share of attention. Nor must we forget the most important of all, electric transmission, including the land, radio, and cable telegraphs.

The above brief survey by no means exhausts the above classes. And communication by the senses of touch—blind writing, for example—taste and smell have not even been mentioned. Enough has been said, however, to demonstrate that from the viewpoint of transmission a cipher of letters or figures is the most desirable.

Our first proposition being thus firmly established, we can now turn our attention to this week's cryptograms. Both of these are typewriter ciphers, using some symbols that are not transmissible by some established communication methods. Hence, they are somewhat beyond the pale of the above proposition.

They are not intended to be very difficult. Nevertheless, they will be found amusing and instructive, especially if the solver tries to discover the principles of the cipher alphabets, as aids to analysis. Another interesting fact about typewriter ciphers is that any one familiar with typewriter keyboards can often identify the machine upon which a given cipher has been formulated.

The answers to ciphers Nos. 3 and 4 will be published in next week's department.

Here goes. Let us know how you make out.

CIPHER No. 3 (Louis K. Bender, Los Angeles, California).

BWYGEBH LW KEJJE?RSY NRY
V:T NI OWB NT EBKRLYUT

CIPHER No. 4 (Arthur Bellamy, Jamaica Plain, Boston, Massachusetts).

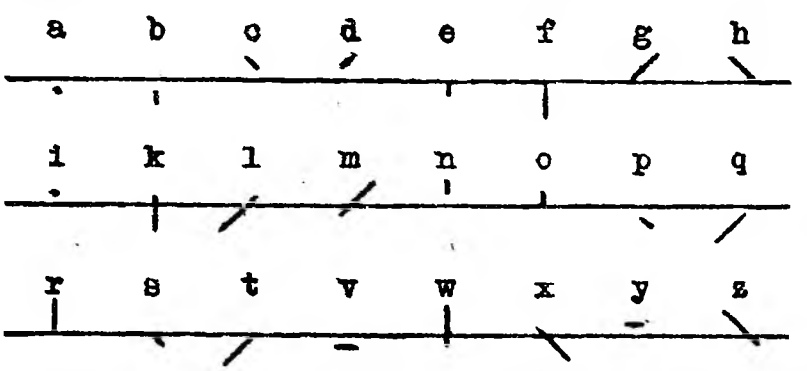
5603248534$ -74:8$* 7$ $3'34@#
3&$6 ;35*9%$ 9- $3:%8:_ ?8o*34
;3$$&_3$ @$:7;3497$ 8:_3:897$
$?*3;3$ 9- $7''$5857589: @#o*@''35$
@43 43@%8#6 %3'8$3% -94 8:$5@:?3
5*3$3 17334 ?*@4@?534$ @43
178?=#6 248553: 7$8:_ 5*3 23##
=:02: 597?* $6$53; @:% 5*8-5
=36

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S CIPHERS

Last week's No. 2, in Charles I stroke cipher, as simple substitution ciphers go, should have been relatively easy to solve. The two symbols used alone, of course, signified *A* and *I*. The three-symbol group occurring three times was evidently *THE*.

Substituting these values in other short words wherever they occurred should have led to the immediate discovery of *AND, AT, IN*, and *THERE;* after which the rest of the translation, subjoined, should have followed in a few minutes: "The blow I saw given, and at the instant there was such a groan by the thousands as I desire I may never hear again."

Here is the Charles I stroke alphabet:



Remember, you still have one more week in which to solve last week's No. 1, Mr. Davidson's free subscription cipher.

And, speaking of contests, we beg to announce one for next week in which there will be *a prize for every solver!*

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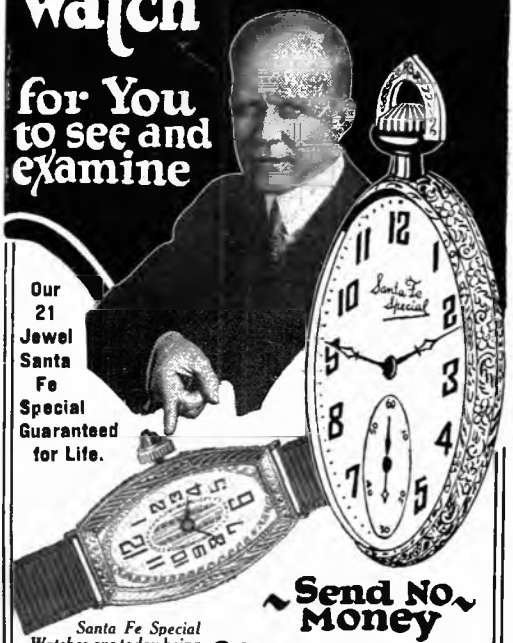

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When you're hungry for good candy—when your appetite craves a wholesome sweet—**Baby Ruth** fulfills every longing. There's ten minutes of delight in every 5c bar.

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