

FLYNN'S WEEKLY

Detective Fiction
With the Thrill of Truth

FEB. 19

10¢

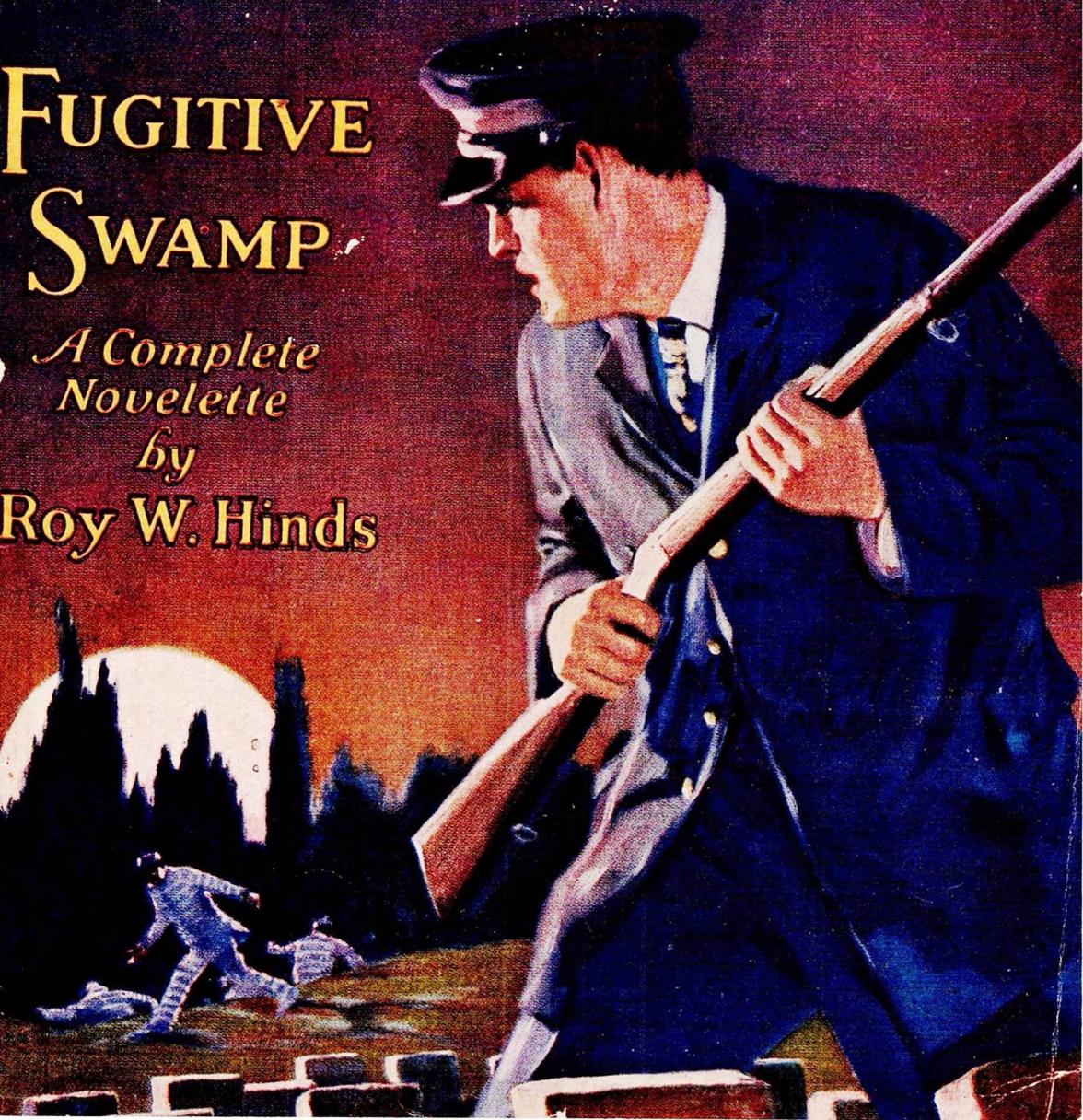
PER COPY

FUGITIVE SWAMP

*A Complete
Novelette*

by

Roy W. Hinds



Money-Making Tools



To those who enroll in near future—tools **FREE** of any extra cost whatever. Also, a drafting table. Act now!

I need YOU with 100 firms BEGGING ME to send them more DRAFTSMEN. Many offer to take BEGINNERS, at \$50 a WEEK. Graduates can start at \$90 and \$100! GET BUSY!



Drafting is the BIG field, men. Every industry you can name BEGINS with the draftsman. Without mechanical drawings—by the thousands—every shop in the land would be STOPPED.

In fact, it is the SERIOUS SHORTAGE of draftsmen that brings this offer: *I will furnish all instruments, supplies, even to the table, to those who start now!*

PAY AS YOU GO Don't give me the excuse that you have no ready money for this golden opportunity. I am not so interested in cash; I want your application. I want at least 200 men to start right now. I want them ready to recommend by Spring! We will get a flood of letters saying "send us draftsmen," from every sort of industrial and engineering concern, and we must make good.

The first week's pay envelope of many a Dobe-trained draftsman has held enough to cover the entire cost of the course! Most students learn evenings, keeping on with their old work until ready to step into somebody's drafting room. The first month equips you to take on simple drafting jobs on the side. It helps you learn; I gladly permit this.

Well-Paid Positions Every Way You Turn

A draftsman soon forgets the days when he used to wonder where to get a job. Instead, he asks "What line of work interests me most?" And "What part of the country suits me best?" Twenty of my graduates went to Florida this year; three are in Japan; last month one wrote me from Ceylon. And I wish we had the count of how many Dobe draftsmen have become chiefs!

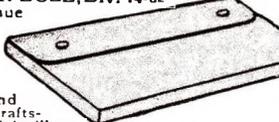
Positions loom up almost as soon as you are enrolled in a Dobe class! We receive requests daily for junior men—for men only partly through our course. "We'll take a beginner," some concerns write us. "So long as he is a Dobe-trained man and has begun right!"

IT'S EASY and interesting to learn drafting. For drafting isn't "drawing"! You don't need any "talent." A draftsman uses tools for every line and every curve. You couldn't make them crooked if you tried! That's why drafting is so easily learned—and so interesting. *For you do everything by rule.* So, I guarantee to make anyone a finished draftsman; if you can read and write, you can learn this line. One of my students is 51 years old; another is just seventeen. *But they'll all be making a grown-up salary by Spring!*

WARNING! The special offer of tools is for immediate action. Don't expect me to hold it open indefinitely. Clip the coupon now for free book:

CHIEF DRAFTSMAN DOBE, Div. 14-62
1951 Lawrence Avenue
Chicago

Special Tool Offer



Send me FREE and POSTPAID Successful Draftsmanship Book and material telling all about your home course, terms, etc.

Name.....Age.....
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No Joke to be Bald



Grow New Hair Quick

Let Me PROVE It To You FREE

What I accomplished on my own head, pictured above, I believe I can do for you, provided you are under 45 years of age and loss of hair was not caused by burns or scars. Anyhow, *I must succeed or you pay nothing.* No apparatus—my home treatment is simple, quick and inexpensive.

Send No Money Just your name and address and I will mail you full information with PHOTOGRAPHS, NAMES and addresses of men and women who have successfully used my treatment for dandruff, falling hair and particularly for baldness. Write Now. A postal will do.

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Big demand for Ash trays, Auto Radiator Ornaments, 5 and 10c Store Novelties, Soldiers and other all year sellers. We take care of selling goods you make; also buy them from you. Small investment puts you on road to success. WE FURNISH COMPLETE OUTFITS AND START YOU IN WELL-PAYING BUSINESS. No experience necessary. ACT NOW if you want to handle wholesale orders and share 1927 profits. Write for Free Catalog and full information. METAL CAST PRODUCTS CO., Dept. A, 1696 Boston Road, New York.

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I end bunions forever with my new Pedodyne Solvent treatment. Pain stops almost instantly. Actual reduction of the enlarged growth starts so fast that your next pair of shoes can be a size smaller—often two sizes smaller.

PROVE IT FREE—Just send your name and address, no money, and the full treatment guaranteed to bring complete results may be yours to try. No obligations—Address

KAY LABORATORIES

Dept. C-320, 180 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill.

A PRIZE FIGHT STORY WITH A REAL WALLOP!

25¢ will bring you a copy of the March issue of MUNSSEY'S MAGAZINE containing CHARLES FRANCIS COE'S novel, "CLASSIFIED."

In addition, the same edition contains one short novel, one other novelette and a dozen short stories. There are no continued stories in MUNSSEY'S MAGAZINE.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY CO., Dept. G., 280 Broadway, New York

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\$7,500 A Year!

C. W. Birmingham of Ohio was formerly a clerk in a shop, earning \$15 a week. Within a short time he has increased his earnings 900% so that, today, he is making \$7,500 a year. The book—"Modern Salesmanship"—proved the first rung in his ladder to Success!



Now President

C. V. Clampton of Illinois counts it a "red letter day" when he first read this remarkable book—"Modern Salesmanship." He says "It enabled me to learn more, earn more, and BE MORE!" Today he is president of his company and his earnings exceed \$10,000 a year!



\$1,000 A Week

D. D. Oliver of Norman, Oklahoma, was local manager of a mercantile business for 17 years—finally getting \$200 a month. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes and started him on the road to big pay. Today he earns more in a week than he previously earned in 6 months—or \$1,000 in the last 7 days!



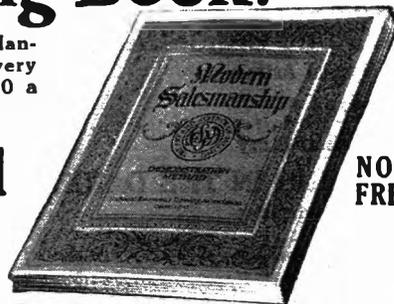
200% Increase

F. G. Walsh was a clerk earning \$1,000 a year, and trying to support a wife and three children. He had to do something. N. S. T. A. training built up his income last year to \$7,286—an increase of over 700 per cent.

-and They Started By Reading This Amazing Book!

Now—For a Limited Time Only—This Remarkable Man-Building, Salary-Raising Volume Is Offered FREE to Every Ambitious Man! If You Ever Aspire to Earn \$10,000 a Year or More, Read It Without Fail.

Where Shall We Send Your Copy FREE?



NOW FREE

A BOOK! Just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it contains the most vivid and inspiring message any ambitious man can ever read! It reveals the facts and secrets that have led hundreds of ambitious men to the success beyond their fondest expectations! So powerful and far-reaching has been the influence of this little volume, that it is no wonder a famous business genius has called it "The Most Amazing Book Ever Printed."

This vital book—"Modern Salesmanship"—contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid profession in the world. It reveals the real truth about the art of selling. It blasts dozens of old theories, explains the science of selling in simple terms, and tells exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen are achieved. And not only that—it outlines a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or dollar from his present position.

What This Astonishing Book Has Done!

The achievements of this remarkable book have already won worldwide recognition. The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of California who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to things he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning \$10,000 a year! Today he receives as much in 30 days as he used to receive in 365!

And then there's J. H. Cash of Atlanta. He too read "Modern Salesmanship" and found the answer within its pages. He quickly raised his salary from \$75 to \$500 a month and has every reason to hope for an even more brilliant future. And still they come! W. D. Cleary of Kansas City commenced making as high as \$850 a month. F. M. Harris, a former telegrapher, became sales manager at \$6,000 a year. O. H. Malfroot of Massachusetts became sales manager of his firm at a yearly income of over \$10,000.

From \$15 a Week to \$7,500 a Year!

"A few years ago I was working in a shop for \$15 a week. When my factory friends heard of my intention to become a salesman they laughed at me. Today these fellows are still working in a shop and I am making \$7,500 per year. I can only speak words of praise for N. S. T. A. for it offered me a position which I took and raised me from a \$15 a week job in the shop to \$7,500 a year as a salesman."
C. W. BIRMINGHAM, Ohio.

\$100 a Week Increase!

"When I took up the National Salesmen's Training Association Course, I was selling shoes for \$35 a week. Now I am earning a average of \$135 a week. I attribute this remarkable progress to N. S. T. A. Training."
JAMES JACOBSON, Kentucky.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man of average intelligence can duplicate the success they have achieved—for their experience proves that salesmen are made—not born, as some people have foolishly believed.

Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet. And through the **National Demonstration Method**—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. system of SALESMANSHIP training—you can acquire the equivalent of actual experience while studying. Hundreds of men who never sold goods in their lives credit a large portion of their success to this remarkable training.

Free to Every Man

If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. We cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. Find out exactly what the underlying principles of salesmanship are—and how you can put them to work for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession. Mail the coupon now!



Dept. B-2, N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. B-2,
N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Ill.

Without cost or obligation you may send me your free book, "Modern Salesmanship."

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

FLYNN'S WEEKLY

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME XXII

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1927

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THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
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150 Pieces In All \$100 DOWN

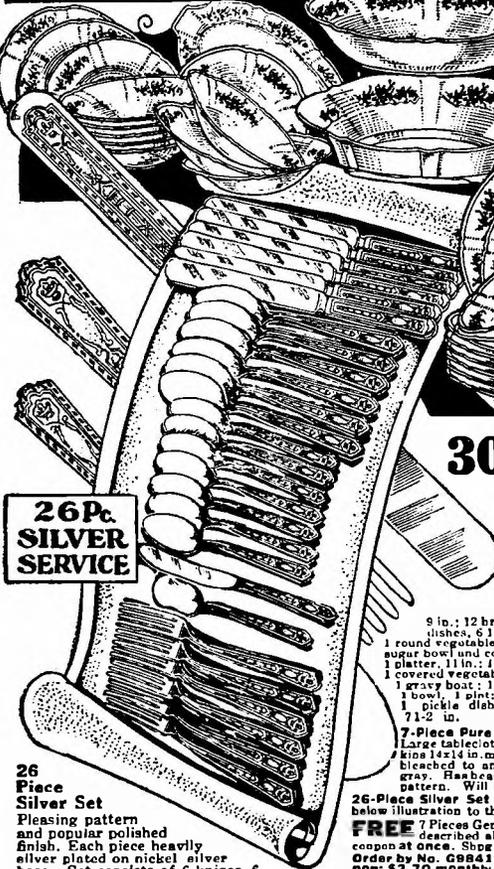


7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set — FREE

Extra special offer to those who hurry their order for the combination outfit shown here—7 pieces GENUINE CUT GLASS: Pitcher of 2-qt. capacity and 6 tumblers of 3-oz. capacity. Each piece is pure, sparkling & clear, thin and dainty; hand cut decorations, consisting of large floral design with appropriate foliage. A useful and handsome set. Only a limited number—so act quick.



110-Piece Dinner Set



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26 Piece Silver Set
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Yes, only \$1.00 with coupon below brings this 150-piece outfit (7-piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE) on 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied after trial, send it back at our expense and we'll refund your dollar plus all transportation charges you paid. If you decide to keep the outfit, start paying only \$2.70 a month until you've paid our rock-bottom price—only \$29.95 for the entire outfit with 7-piece Cut Glass Set FREE. 150 pieces in all—only \$29.95—and a year to pay! Where else can you find a bargain like that and such easy terms?

Outfit consists of:—110-piece Ivory Ware Dinner Set. Complete service for 12 people. Popular Ivory Ware. Rich, creamy ivory color. Stamped with Gold Leaf Decorations as illustrated. Newest Gloria shape. Set consists of:—12 dinner plates, 8 1/2 in.; 12 breakfast plates, 7 1/4 in.; 12 coupe saucers, 7 1/4 in.; 12 fruit saucers, 5 1/2 in.; 12 oatmeal dishes, 6 1/4 in.; 12 cups, 12 saucers, 12 bread and butter plates, 6 in.; 1 oval vegetable dish, 9 1/2 in.; 1 round vegetable dish, 8 3/4 in.; 1 soup bowl and cover, 12 pieces; 1 platter, 11 in.; 1 platter, 13 1/2 in.; 1 covered vegetable dish (2 pieces); 1 gravy boat; 1 gravy boat stand; 1 bowl, 1 pint; 1 cream pitcher; 1 pickle dish; 1 butter dish, 7 1/2 in.

7-Piece Pure Linen Table Set. Large tablecloth, 64x70 in.; 6 napkins 14x14 in. made of pure linen, bleached to an attractive silver gray. Has beautiful Grecian self pattern. Will launder perfectly.

26-Piece Silver Set as described just below illustration to the left.

FREE 7 Pieces Genuine Cut Glass (as coupon at once. Ship wt. approx. 125 lbs. Order by No. G8841A \$3 with coupon; \$2.70 monthly. Price \$29.95.

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Enclosed find \$1. Ship special advertised 150 piece Combination Outfit (7 piece genuine cut glass set FREE.) I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the Outfit, I will pay you \$2.70 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the Outfit with the 7 piece cut glass set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight or express charges I paid.

150 Piece Combination Outfit, No. G8841A, \$29.95.
(7 Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE.)

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SEND NOW!

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Guards ALL the teeth



In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

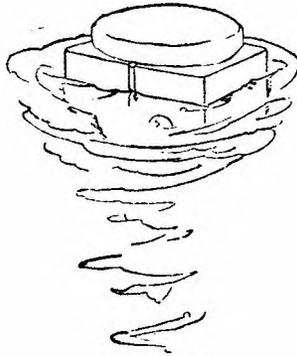


“You can't keep a good soap down!”*

THIS is a libelous portrait of a man of our acquaintance whose wife (gentle economist) tantalized him by the promise of Ivory for his bath—as soon as he had used up his cake of sinker-soap!

Unwilling to do further submarine searching for his leaden but elusive soap globule, yet loath to cross his smiling wife's wishes, our friend proceeded as follows:

1. Borrowed a cake of Ivory from his daughter.
2. Cemented sinker-soap to Ivory cake.



“It Floats”

3. Placed the ill-mated pair in bath water, and proved Ivory a life-saver, as shown.

At the present writing, the wedded soaps are wafer-thin—the sinker-soap from dissolution, the Ivory from lather-giving generosity; and thus one man has demonstrated the falsity of the adage that “you cannot eat your cake and have it, too.”

PROCTER & GAMBLE

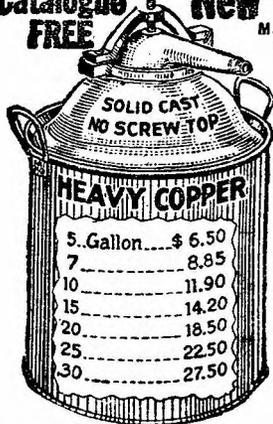
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99⁴/₁₀₀ % Pure

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Made of EXTRA STRONG, heavy pure copper, with a 5-inch Solid Brass Cap and Spout.

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ARE you sitting on the anxious bench wondering what will happen to you if business slacks up? Are you one of the many small-salaried, untrained workers who are always the first to go when employers start cutting the salary list?

Why have this spectre of unemployment hanging over you all the time? Why not decide today that you are going to make yourself so valuable to your employer that he can't get along without you?

You can do it if you really want to, right at home in spare time, through the International Correspondence Schools. In just an hour a day you can get the special training that you must have if you are ever going to get—and keep—a real job at a real salary.

You're ambitious, aren't you? And you want to get ahead? Then don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, marked the line of work you want to follow and mailed it to Scrantou for full particulars.

Surely it is worth at least a two-cent stamp to find out all about the I. C. S. and what it can do for you.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

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Then I got the idea that I was in the company of a dope fiend

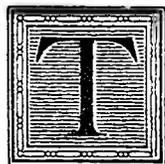
FUGITIVE SWAMP

By Roy W. Hinds

IT WAS UNCANNY, NOW THAT I KNEW THE CHARACTER OF THE MAN BEHIND THAT INHUMAN, REVOLTING FACE--A DEAD FACE ON A LIVING MAN

CHAPTER I

ON NAMELESS HILL



HERE were a lot of things I could have done at the time to dodge the mixup in which I suddenly found myself entangled, but when a thing like that comes up, rises right out of the ground all about him, so to speak, a fellow acts without thinking.

His movements are like an arm raised in self-defense, impulsive, without thought. No man who sees a gun pointed at him and behind the gun a pair of murderous eyes, if cover is at hand, stops to look very far into the future nor to weigh the chances of the present.

He doesn't stand there like a numbskull with his chin in his hand and ask: "Now what should I do now?" It isn't exactly a time for meditation.

When the first emergency passed and I found myself on the run with that bunch of escaped convicts, I did some tall thinking. But it was too late then. I was in for it.

Instead of bothering my head about what I should have done when that hurricane of human fury broke loose on Nameless Hill, as the convict cemetery outside the walls is called, I cudgeled my brains for a way out of the woods, escape from my desperate companions, and, ultimately, some means to convince the police and the world at large that I was not a confederate of the fugitives.

But, walking at a fast clip through the woods, stopping often to rest a moment and to look back and listen, I saw no way out. A quick dash would bring them upon me, vicious hands would find my throat.

So I went along with them—a man who had never committed a crime in his life nor spent a minute in jail; yet, for the moment, just as much a fugitive as any one of the eleven moving along with me, eleven men clad in black and white stripes, fantastic figures, sinister, in the moonlight that fell in the open spaces of the forest.

I was young, and a boomer. Every one knows what a boomer is, for the highbrows have been studying us for a long time and writing articles and tracts and delivering lectures on the roving workman.

They're trying to find out what makes us roam from one job to another, but if they would ask me, I'd tell them to look into the jobs we get and not into us.

If a fellow has any kind of a head on him and lacks education and training, if he's been kicked around ever since he was a kid, he can't help booming. The jobs he gets don't satisfy. He's got to be up and going or he'll lose his head. He's the first man hit by a labor depression, and no one thinks of giving a boomer notice.

There's no such a thing as being fired with a week's pay or more. I've been laid off at noon and not paid for a minute beyond that, and no notice except to draw my pay and move on. We have a kind of disrespect for each other, the boomer and the boss. He doesn't give me notice and I don't give him notice.

When spring gets into me and I feel the lure of the road, see the warm mist on the mountains, the fresh grass in the fields, the sparkle of a waterfall in the hills, I don't go to the boss and say I'm quitting a week later. I drop my shovel or my pick right then and there and demand my pay. So it's even up.

But what I'm trying to say is, that I was a young fellow who did not have a trade nor much of an education, and at the time I ran into those convicts, I was at a kind of a restless period in my life, moving from one disagreeable job to another.

I was a hobo, a tramp, in the sense of not being particular as to how I traveled, but I wasn't lazy nor I wasn't a beggar. I managed to get work enough to keep me in food and clothes of a sort, but I hadn't yet found a job nor a class of work that was more attractive than the urge to be on the move.

In all modesty, I record the fact that my brothers on the road often paid me the compliment of being a smart young fellow. By that they meant, I suppose, that I had more imagination and more of an interest in life than the average boomer.

I was strong and full of health, so full of it that hunger and hardship made only a slight impression on my cheerful disposition. And being young, I could look ahead with optimism. No situation was so tough that I couldn't keep up my spirits with the persistent assurance of youth that better times were just around the corner.

I could sleep like a log in a cold boxcar or walk hungry and footsore along a country road and not mind it. I could wake up in the boxcar whistling or walk along the road singing, joking with my companions, if I had any.

But I was alone when I reached the vicinity of that prison in the Far West. I had worked in the harvest in Nebraska, had boomed my way farther West, heading for the fall work on fruit farms. My money ran out.

In a little town near the prison I heard of a short cut to my destination which would take me by the grim walls. I took the short cut, and that is how I got into trouble.

I came in sight of the prison late in the afternoon. Leaves were falling. The hills and valleys were filled with autumn colors, brown, gray, but the day had been sunny and warm. The prison was in an open valley, with no tree within a mile of it.

I believe whatever woods there had been had been cut away, to remove possibilities of cover for escaping prisoners. The stone walls and towers gave it the appearance of a fortress. From that distance the only sign of life was a slow-rising plume of smoke from the tall stack inside the prison walls.

I could not discern a single human figure, and the lifeless aspect of the prison gave me a feeling of melancholy, for in my imagination I could see armed guards in the towers and hundreds of striped and suffering men behind the bars of the big cell-houses.

It was twilight, and I had an idea that the industrial activities of the prison were over for the day and that the convicts had been locked up for the night.

The gravel road that I had been following ran off at an angle, winding and wasting a lot of distance in following the hills. A fellow in the town ten miles back told me that if I left the road at that point, cut down across the valley past the west wall, through the convict cemetery on a hill behind, then up a higher hill, I would come to the road again, and thus save myself about five miles of footwork. I had walked all day, and five miles meant a lot.

I left the road, and walked down toward the prison.

It was dusk when I got down there, and lights had appeared at various points in the penitentiary inclosure. The top corridor of a cellhouse was visible, and the lights inside it shone through the barred windows.

I gave the west wall a kind of a wide berth, because I had an idea that a tramp in shabby clothing and with an unshaven face prowling about a prison, with armed guards in the towers, might be inviting trouble.

Yet I kept in mind the location of the cemetery on the rise of ground behind, called Nameless Hill. It was from there that I was to get my bearings.

The west wall loomed grim and forbidding on my right. I hadn't whistled nor hummed a tune since I came in sight of the place. It gave me a kind of a creepy feeling.

I circled around to the cemetery. It was dark. The moon had not yet appeared, but in the starlight I could see hundreds of little wooden slabs sticking out of the ground, a foot high maybe—grave markers, they were.

I stooped down and looked closely at one of them. Numbers. No name on it, no date, no epitaph—only three figures forming, I suppose, the prison number of the convict that lay there under the sod. Nameless Hill!

I straightened up, shivered. It wasn't cold, nor even cool, but that certainly was a spot to make any man shiver. I hadn't realized what an effect it would have on me—how it would almost frighten me, to be alone among all those little slabs; not fright exactly, but deep depression, melancholy. I hurried along, walking across Nameless Hill, between two rows of markers.

There were no mounds in that cemetery, just flat earth, dry, almost grassless, untended and strewn with rocks. On hot days the sun must have beaten down here with relentless fury.

Nameless Hill was exposed nakedly to sun and gale and rain, without a single tree to shelter or shade a grave. What a finish for a man—six feet of earth on that bald hill, inexpressibly forlorn, where a blade of grass had to fight for life, and no more than a set of convict numbers on a slab to identify his place in the world!

The cemetery curved over and down the hill, away from the prison. The crown of the hill thus formed a sort of breastwork between any one on the other side and the walls at the foot of the slope. I was walking fast when I got to the top.

It seemed to me that a score of human forms—or rather I should say inhuman—rose from the earth among the slabs; figures clad in black and white stripes.

They flitted toward me, converging on me, crouched and silent, as though so many convict graves had opened and their oc-

cupants come forth to a rendezvous of lost souls on Nameless Hill.

CHAPTER II

A PRECARIOUS PREDICAMENT



THE moon appeared over the rim of the hills, and the whole scene took on a semblance of reality, when faces stood out and voices sounded. They were human beings all right—my imagination had not played me a trick.

"Well," the foremost said to me in a habitually cautious voice, "it took you long enough to get on the job."

Not knowing what he meant, naturally I had no rejoinder. I looked from one face to another, as they thronged about me—haggard faces, eager faces, vicious faces—every kind of a face a man would expect to find among twenty or more convicts. The man who had spoken seemed to be the ringleader.

"Where do we go from here?" he demanded.

I could make no answer to that question either, but continued to look them over carefully. I could feel the dampness on my forehead. I must have broke into a cold sweat at my first fright, but I was steady on my legs now, and backed up a step or two.

"Ain't you got no tongue?" the ringleader persisted. "You held us up here—instead o' being on the job waiting for us, like you should o' been. Well, snap out of it. What's the route?"

Then I found my tongue.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I told him.

He stepped bang up in front of me then, stuck his face so close I could feel his breath on my cheek.

"What's a matter?" he inquired in a soft but threatening voice. "Lost your nerve—now't you see us?"

There were vague mutterings among his companions.

"I don't get you at all, brother," I insisted. "I was on my way over the hills, and—"

Then the hurricane broke.

There was a sudden stir among the convicts, another stir among the wooden slabs at the foot of the slope.

"Screws!" a convict cried.

Shots rang out. A man fell dead at my feet. His hand, in the death grip, plucked at my pantleg.

I was running down the hill with the fugitives, away from the prison. The "screws"—guards—were coming up the other side. I stumbled over a slab, fell down, took a painful bruise on my shoulder against another marker. For a few seconds I was by myself.

"There's the outside man!" a guard at the top of the hill cried. "Get him!"

They had evidently spotted my civilian clothes. Shots, bullets singing in my ears like bees. I ran a few steps, crouching—turned, with some vague idea of shouting an explanation to the guards. But their cries drowned whatever words came to my lips. There was no time nor chance for explanations.

"Get him!"

"The outside man!"

"Shoot his legs!"

"We want him alive!"

I got a look at a guard drawing a bead on me behind the glistening barrel of his rifle. I tore down the hill, passed two or three prostrate forms, dead or dying; got among the convicts, who had waited a little for me. All in a bunch, we raced for it, raced for life, across the open space, making for the dark woods.

The fusillade behind us kept up. A man now and then dropped out of our herd, with a curse or a groan. None thought of stopping to lend aid.

We made the woods, twelve of us, unwounded, and kept going. Instinctively, once under cover, the drove of fugitives turned off at a confusing angle. When the guards came along the trees, they wouldn't be sure which way to go.

I was in the very center of the bunch, the ringleader trotting along at my side.

"Bagler told me you'd be waiting for us," he complained. "We made it out just at dark—but lost time there waiting for you. Nice mess you got us into."

He was evidently very much upset by

the dead and wounded he had left lying behind.

Now I was just as scared of this bunch of desperate convicts as I was of the guards behind. I didn't know what they would do if I blurted out, insisted upon it, that I was not their "outside man," the confederate who apparently was to be waiting for them when they made their break, to guide them to safety.

They might have killed me then and there, instead of leaving me to join the guards later and put them on the scent.

And I had become now a target for the rifles of the guards, whenever they laid eyes on me. They wouldn't give me a chance. I recalled the import of some of their cries. They wanted to take the "outside man" alive, to question him, to prosecute him—but could I be sure that bullets meant merely to wound me would not riddle my vitals?

I couldn't be sure of anything in that terrible mixup. I was going along on instinct, getting away from the rifles first, depending on some development of the future to cast me free from the menace of the convicts. And that menace, I imagined, would amount to something when they ascertained that I was a stranger to their conspiracy.

The ringleader insisted on revealing secrets which, at the revelation, would make it imperative for the fugitives either to keep me with them, under observation, or to silence me.

"Bagler—he'll pull your thumbs for being late," the man assured me.

I didn't know who Bagler was, nor did I understand the penalty he predicted, yet this one's manner and his tone were far from reassuring.

"Now what's the route to Bootle's Swamp?" my companion demanded. "We can't run around these woods like blind men. You oughta have your head with you by this time.

"I thought Bagler'd send a man that's got some guts. You was scared stiff in that cemetery. But come on, snap out of it. Take the lead for Bootle's Swamp, and no more monkey business about it!"

Talk did not mean that we slowed up. We were jogging along at a comfortable

clip, a pace that could be kept up for quite awhile by strong men. There was no underbrush in the woods. The ground was hard, fairly smooth—and the moon lighted our way.

There were no sounds of pursuit. Losing sight of the fugitives, the guards' rifles were silenced. They had evidently scattered in the woods, and were proceeding more cautiously than the men they hunted, fearing ambuscades no doubt.

It was up to me now to do one thing or the other—pretend that I was the confederate sent to the scene by Bagler or tell the fugitives the truth. I decided upon the latter course.

My only hope with these men lay in convincing them that my presence there was an accident and trying to show them that they would come to no harm if they turned me loose.

If I professed an acquaintanceship with Bagler, I would soon be found out. Eleven desperate convicts bent on gaining their liberty wouldn't be gentle with a man who tricked them.

On the other hand, I knew something about the swamp for which they were bound. It was commonly believed to be absolutely inaccessible. I had been in the region before, a year earlier, but never that close to the prison. Bootle's Swamp was known far and wide.

It covered a couple of square miles of ground, uninhabitable except for snakes and other creatures which thrive in such places. It was full of bogs in which a man could be sucked out of the world in a twinkling, never to be found.

Not only that, but it was said to be haunted by the ghosts of a company of pioneers lured into the swamp and robbed and murdered by some old-time bandit who once terrorized the country. I couldn't recall his name.

The ghosts didn't bother me much—I didn't believe in that kind of a thing—but the prospect of being dragged into Bootle's Swamp by this gang of convicts did worry me.

Our position in relation to Bootle's Swamp came to my mind as that convict talked to me. Judging its position from a

fruit ranch on which I had worked the fall before, the swamp would be about thirty miles north and east of the prison. I could lead the way to it.

My dread of Bootle's Swamp was one of the reasons for my decision to tell my companions the truth, in the hope that they would set me free as quickly as possible. This was a ticklish business, but the longer I delayed complicated the difficulty.

"Brother," I said, "I'm not the man you're looking for. I don't know your friend Bagler and he doesn't know me. I'm a tramp, a boomer. I was taking a short cut across the hills, on my way to a fruit farm for a job, when I got tangled up with you.

"That's the truth, and if you'll let me go, I won't give any one a tip about the way you're traveling or where you're bound for."

The whole company had come to a halt as I talked, pressing about me. They believed me. The ringleader put his fist under my chin and chucked my head farther up with a movement in which his rage and consternation were clearly indicated. The moonlight fell full into my face.

"I ain't got no way o' knowing if you're lying or not," he said. "Only thing I know your name was to be 'Peters.' Ain't you Peters?"

"No. I've told you the truth."

He uttered a violent curse, and added:

"Well, I believe you."

The fact that he spoke the name of another confederate filled me with alarm. He was making no effort to keep his secrets from me. That meant that it didn't make much difference what I learned—when he got through with me I'd be unable to do him any harm.

The convicts were muttering. The ringleader stepped off to one side and conferred briefly with two or three comrades. Others walked close to me, peered into my face, sniffed. They had suddenly found an enemy in their ranks, a man who was neither a convict nor a criminal, and were filled with venom.

I began to weigh my chances of escape—either by fighting or making a break for it. My hope was slim, but of course I had to

take a chance if the conference now going on resulted in the sentence I dreaded.

The ringleader turned to the entire company, his arms folded. He said in a quiet, undramatic voice:

"Bump him off."

Three of his strongest men bore down upon me.

CHAPTER III

FATAL ODDS



SLUGGED the first one that came within reach. He went down, cold. I had heavy fists and brawny arms. But that blow did me more harm than good. It warned the others that I could fight and that I would fight. They came at me from all sides, eleven of them.

I had made a try to back away, but of course they were all over me before I could get into a running stride. We hit the ground in a tangled scrimmage. Fists were hammering me, and I was clawing, biting, kicking and gouging. Hands sought my throat.

I seized the proverbial straw of the drowning man.

"Wait!" I yelled. "I'll take you to Bootle's Swamp! I'll—"

My windpipe was squeezed shut. I continued to fight to the last gasp. But I had no chance. I just naturally floated off into dreamland.

Miraculously, I woke up—alive. I found myself laid out flat on the ground, gasping for breath. They were rubbing my wrists and temples. I had another notion of fighting, but heard a voice:

"His eyes are open, Sil."

The ringleader bent over me. He was apparently "Sil."

"Feel better?" he asked.

I nodded. They helped me up. I was wobbly in the legs, having been choked into insensibility. My head was clear though.

"At the last minute," Sil said, "I dragged them off'n you. I'm going to give you a chance. You said you'd take us to Bootle's Swamp."

I nodded, feeling myself stronger in the legs.

"You musta been in this country before, eh?"

"Yeh," I told him. "I know the country."

"All right. I'll take your word for it, but you better be telling the truth. We won't monkey—can't. First sign of a trick, out you go—see?"

He made a puffing sound, as though intimating the snuffing out of a life. I saw.

"If you try to lead us into some town," Sil warned me, "we won't argue. I got a general idea about Bootle's Swamp, and I'll know if you're putting us wrong. If we don't get nailed and you get us to Bootle's Swamp, we'll maybe let you go. See about that. It's up to Bagler. But if we see we're gonta get nailed we'll bump you off first. Now get going—for Bootle's Swamp."

I was thus given every incentive to lead this mob to Bootle's Swamp. They put it in such way that their capture meant my life—and I had a crazy desire to keep on living.

I started off through the woods, the gang pressing close onto me. Sil walked by my side. We drifted into something like a friendly conversation.

"More I think of it," he said, "the better I like it—you being with us. First I didn't think of nothing but what Bagler'd do to me for getting mixed up with a stranger and telling him about the swamp. Thought it'd be safer to bump you off. But if you're square with us, we'll be square with you. There might be things we can do for you—see?"

I nodded. I didn't see exactly what he meant, but I nodded anyhow. I suppose he meant that if I played square, and perhaps turned crook, they would let me into some of their profits.

"I just couldn't see how you wasn't Peters," Sil continued. "I never thought about anybody else being in that cemetery after dark. Seemed like you must be Peters. Nobody but a fool'd cut across by that prison, just to save a few steps. Man wouldn't come there if he didn't have business."

"I must be a fool," I returned. "I'm sure I'm a fool—the mess I got into."

"There's some maybe," Sil informed me,

"that wouldn't think it was such a terrible mess. Plenty o' fellas'd like to get mixed up with Bagler. Bagler's big stuff."

I got his slang. Big stuff meant that Bagler was a crook who conducted extensive deals. No petty thievery for a man like Bagler, if I got Sil right.

Once again I had the feeling that he was not employing reticence with me for the simple reason that it did not make much difference what I knew. I would never be in a position to employ my knowledge against Bagler and this gang—at least not until Bagler's enterprise was finished and he and the gang had passed out of the danger zone.

Ultimate disposition of me depended on Bagler, who now became to me a character of extraordinary interest.

Of course I had a chance of dodging some dire fate by joining the gang—or, at least, seeming to join it. However, it all depended on Bagler, and how much of a chance he was willing to take on a stranger.

"Who's Bagler?" I asked.

"Bagler himself 'll tell you who he is," Sil replied.

We stopped often to talk things over, to exchange ideas about direction and distance. I played square with them. I told them all I knew about the location of Bootle's Swamp.

We plugged along, making good time. The fugitives had managed to steal a quantity of meat and bread in the prison before their break. We devoured that, and found plenty of water in the hills. My slender store of cigarettes was soon exhausted.

We dulled our craving for tobacco by chewing from the bitter plugs which were part of the prison rations—two plugs a week for each man, Sil informed me.

Up hill and down and across valleys we went. We waded little streams. As the night advanced it grew chilly. At daylight we were, we reckoned, within five miles of Bootle's Swamp. We had not seen a single house nor human being.

Through the night I had had opportunity to size up the gang. There were some tough-looking birds among them, others not so tough, two or three decent-looking chaps, young like myself.

Sil was, maybe, forty years old, a slim man with shrewd eyes and a thin, beaky nose. None was very old, one fifty, perhaps. He was a gloomy man, called "Doc" by his companions. I found him looking at me more than once with interest and pity. He was the best-looking of the lot—I don't mean from a standpoint of beauty.

He looked less like a crook than the others. He had gray hair and a kindly face. Strip him of that striped uniform and dress him up like a white man, and Doc would look respectable, even distinguished.

I remembered that it was Doc who rubbed my temples and helped to get me on my feet after the fight in the woods.

His speech was different, too. What little he said had a kind of an educated flavor to it. It's hard to explain things like that, but I do know that he was different in every way—felt it, saw it. Yet he was dressed like the others, and had the same gray, haggard look of prison.

At daylight we stopped for another confab. Should we go on, or should we lie low in the woods until night came again? The striped uniforms of the convicts might catch the eye of a hunter.

We did not know the country very well—though there might be hunting camps scattered around at that time of year. The nearest town, we calculated, was Birston, between thirty and forty miles away.

We thought the chain of mountains ahead was the last we'd have to cross before we got down into the valley in which lay the swamp.

But we hadn't talked three minutes when we heard men coming through the woods. We darted for cover. Murder gleamed in the eyes of some of my companions.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL



FIRST there were voices; then, at intervals, cracking twigs. The on-comers—there seemingly were two of them—were not proceeding very cautiously, though there was a hint in the slowness of their approach either of fear or of un-

certainty as to what they might encounter in those lonely woods.

The twelve fugitives—I looked on myself as a fugitive now—were under cover, behind big trees or rock clusters. Sil and two other men were with me.

"If you start anything with these guys," Sil warned me—meaning that if I sought to warn them of the presence of the convicts—"out you go."

He again made that brief puffing sound so expressive of a life being snuffed out.

Before I could make any rejoinder, or even think of what I should do, in case the men proved to be armed hunters, one of them came into view. Sil stared, then stepped from behind the rocks with an exclamation of joy.

They were friends. Except for their civilian clothes, the two newcomers might have been convicts themselves. They looked as shrewd and tricky and as vicious as any convict in the bunch.

Sil, apparently, was the only one of our party who knew them. There were no introductions, yet most of the fugitives gathered around the new arrivals when they saw how things were.

The two men with me behind the rocks did not relax their vigilance. The diversion offered no chance for me to get away.

"Peters got in about midnight," one of the newcomers explained. "Said he missed you. Bagler sent us out to see if we could find you."

Mention of Peters, the man who was supposed to meet the fugitives on Nameless Hill, and for whom I had been mistaken, must have reminded Sil of me.

At any rate, there was a hurried exchange in undertones, and the two men came behind the rocks with Sil to look me over. They did this with scowling visages.

One of them had a crooked eye and a hole in his mouth where a tooth should have been. His lips curled back from his gums, not because of any emotion of the present. It was a fixed expression, and far from pleasant to contemplate.

One of his eyes turned in, while the other was sharp and penetrating. His gaze was disconcerting. The other man's features were regular enough, except that his eye-

brows were as thick and bushy across the bridge of his nose as they were above the eyes.

Both were dressed more for the city than they were for the woods, though their clothing was rumpled and otherwise showed marks of their unaccustomed outdoor life.

"A bum," said Crooked-Eye, with a contemptuous sniff.

I suppose I looked like a bum. Certainly I had been on the bum for several weeks, and tramping and traveling on freight trains do not tend to preserve an immaculate exterior.

But if that crook had called me a bum at some other place than this, and where we could have had it out man to man, he'd have come out of it shy several more teeth.

"Bagler'll tend to him," his companion said. "Let's go."

So we all started for Bootle's Swamp, proceeding with certainty now. The fugitive called Doc kept looking at me with a look of pity that was much intensified.

I set Doc down in my mind as one who might be swung to my side in case of a pinch, as I did one of the young fellows, a wiry little crook called "Georgie."

From the very outset Georgie's look had lacked the element of venom I found in the others. Once or twice he had smiled at me in a friendly way. As we started out on the last lap of the journey, Georgie winked, as much as to say: "Don't lose your nerve."

It turned out that we were about seven miles from Bootle's Swamp. We came to its vicinity through a pass in a chain of mountains, a pass which we probably would have missed altogether without our new guides.

This made our trip far less arduous. Naturally the eleven convicts and myself were worn out. I had tramped all the day before and all night. This, with the excitement of the last few hours, began to make itself felt. I was ready to sink down and to sleep at any moment.

I picked up additional information from the talk of my companions. Sil, to his friends sent out to look for the party, recounted the escape. It seems that twenty-one convicts hid out in the yard just at nightfall, and made their break over the wall.

If the man Peters had been on hand, it was likely that the entire crowd would have made it. But they lost time waiting for Peters at the appointed place, over the brow of Nameless Hill.

The check-up inside the prison revealed the escape before the fugitives really got going, and guards were sent out to look for them. Ten were brought down by bullets.

I heard Sil inquire:

"What'd Bagler do to Peters when he come in and said he missed us?"

"Wait'll you see Peters," was the answer.

I heard considerable talk, too, of other fugitives, and got the idea that Bagler and his gang had arranged the escape of numerous convicts from other prisons.

I couldn't just make this out though, but I wondered. What was this sinister enterprise in Bootle's Swamp that led Bagler and his gang of crooks to fetch such a mob out of their prisons?

I did not learn much as to how the escapes were arranged, if there were more than one. Sil undoubtedly was Bagler's right hand man in the prison. He had got the gang together, planned the escape.

How he and Bagler had communicated, to arrange the time and to make the appointment in the cemetery with Peters, was more than I could say. However, I knew that convicts often have underground routes for communication with their friends outside.

The information I now had was a source of much discomfort to me. I would be able to give all sorts of information to the authorities if I could get away from my captors. This they knew. And it was a cinch that they wouldn't let me get away.

Whether they would merely hold me prisoner or put me out of the way for good depended on Bagler.

"Wait'll you see Peters."

I recalled that remark. It spoke volumes. Bagler hadn't trifled with Peters for falling down in a task intrusted to him. The unhappy Peters, hastening back to Bagler by a direct route, had reported his failure, and undoubtedly brought down the wrath of Bagler.

Bagler!

I began to hate the name—to dread it.

Yet I would soon be face to face with him.

"Wait'll you see Peters."

Ominous words. What had happened to Peters probably was nothing compared with what would happen to me. Bagler would look on me as a dangerous piece of excess baggage, a bother to carry around, yet possessed of secrets which might prove his undoing.

Still, the man Sil had vaguely hinted of ways in which I might be useful to the gang, if I should turn out to be square with them. A gang of crooks, probably known to the police, and escaped convicts could find more ways than one to use a man who was not known as a criminal. Would I be able to make them believe they could safely trust me? That was my task.

In my life as a boomer I had come into contact with crooks galore, in boxcars, in hobo camps—in all the places where wanderers foregather. I had been invited to participate in more than one crime.

I had never accepted the invitation. My restless nature did not lean that way. Here were crooks in the raw, ready to kill a man at the snap of a finger—a wicked-looking lot, except for two or three of them.

They and their ways certainly were not attractive to me. Promise of financial gain never would draw me to them and their schemes. I would much rather have the carefree life I had enjoyed up to that moment on Nameless Hill.

Any promise I made to them would be the pledge of a desperate man bent on saving his life. Lies, deceit, trickery were justified. But I must appear sincere, and indifferent as to whether I joined in crime or not.

I must appear greedy for money, and willing to turn my hand to anything. Being a tramp without money, I had some chance of posing as being in that state of mind.

In other words, I must act—and act faultlessly, if I were to get by Bagler. I must prove my ability and my willingness to be of service to him.

And so we came to the rendezvous of criminals and convicts, on the edge of Bootle's Swamp.

The swamp lay dark and stagnant before

my eyes, filled with tremendous trees centuries old, their trunks and limbs swathed in coiling vines.

The sun was bright, yet its rays, falling so warm and clear on the hills and open ground, seemed to be baffled and repelled by the thick gloom of the swamp. I shuddered.

There were at least sixty men, besides ourselves, in and around the caves which pierced a hillside at the edge of the swamp. Five or six of them wore drab gray clothing, the uniforms of some other prison than that from which Sil and his gang had come.

The sixty presented a motley spectacle—thugs, bandits, sleek city crooks showing strange contact with the rough life of the hills, unshaven, rumpled and wrinkled; some of them drunk.

I sat on the ground, watched and guarded. Sil was explaining my case to a man far better groomed than the others, a man with a swarthy face and a small black mustache. Otherwise his face was smoothly shaved.

His close-set, shifty eyes kept wandering my way. He looked strong and lithe and dangerous. He wore a cap and knickerbockers, a kind of a golfing outfit, and he had managed to keep himself tidy and neat.

Bagler.

Suddenly Bagler's look turned sharply off to the right. My gaze followed his.

"Douse him with water!" Bagler cried to some men over that way.

They had some one strung up by the thumbs to the limb of a tree, strung up in such fashion that the tips of his shoes barely touched the ground, so that the terrible pull fell mostly on the thumbs.

But the man had fainted. The whole weight of his body hung on the thumbs. A can of water was dashed into his tortured face. He emerged from the faint with a cry of pain.

His lips writhed in agony as he sought to relieve the pressure by getting the tips of his shoes onto the ground. He managed it, and hung there gasping.

Sil walked over my way, standing over me with folded arms.

"That's Peters," he said, answering the question in my eyes.

He continued to look down at me doubtfully.

"Go on over there," he said, "and talk to Bagler."

CHAPTER V

AN UNKNOWN TO-MORROW

BAGLER never took his eyes off me, he did not even wink, as I walked up to him. He stood with the fingers of one hand clutching his biceps; the fingers of the other hand played with the little mustache.

His mood was dangerously gentle, reflective, toying, like a cat that watches a mouse draw closer to its paws. I stood squarely in front of him, trying to smile.

"Well," I said, to break the embarrassing silence, "here I am, Mr. Bagler."

He turned without a word, and jerked his head for me to follow. I did so. Just before we stepped into one of the caves, by far the most completely furnished, I saw that scores of men were watching us with an intentness that indicated they expected almost anything to happen. They looked on me as another victim in one of the spectacles of cruelty indulged in by their leader.

Bagler sat down on an oak chest, heavily built, with iron corners, locked with a padlock. He waved me to a seat on a box. He was in the gloom; I could just barely distinguish his face. I sat so that my face shone in the light coming in from the mouth of the cave.

"How do you like us?" he inquired softly.

"Tell better about that," I replied, "when I've had some sleep. That's all I been thinking about—sleep."

"Oh, now," he said playfully, "you must have been thinking about other things. A man doesn't travel all night with a gang of escaped convicts—come to a place like this, and see all these other fellows—without wondering what it's all about. Even if he is sleepy."

"Well, I'm wondering."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Well, it might mean anything. Tell

you the truth, I don't like to think about it."

"Scared?"

"I'm not exactly calm and collected," I assured him. "Wish I had a cigarette."

"I guess I can fix you up." He gave me a cigarette and lit one himself. "Well now, here's the idea," he added. "You're not a welcome guest here, but you might make yourself so. That depends.

"If it's all an accident—you getting mixed up like you told Sil—maybe we can come to an understanding. If it turns out that you met those fellows on purpose—well, you'll see how dangerous it is to butt in." He seemed to be studying me closely. "You might be a detective," he finished.

"Guess you know different."

"I think I got you right," Bagler admitted, "but I can't be sure. We'll see. If you are a detective, you'll give yourself away sooner or later. Then things will happen—quick."

I did not imagine that they would waste time. If they had reason to believe I meant to act against them they would not fritter about. It was so easy to remove me.

"Just a tramp, eh?" Bagler pursued.

"That's all."

"Ever been arrested?"

"No."

He pondered this.

"You may be useful," he suggested. "It all depends on how square you are. We'll see. Suppose you're hungry. I think Sil and his boys are fixing something. Better eat a bite with them, then catch some sleep. They'll show you where."

I went out of the cave. Over my shoulders Bagler gave some kind of a signal to the others. One of the men nodded. He led me to another cave, wherein I joined Sil and those who had come with us. I became ravenous in that cave, filled with an aroma of boiling coffee and frying bacon.

"All fixed up, eh?" Sil asked.

"Yeh," I told him. "I got along all right with Bagler."

After awhile he said in undertones:

"Be square with us, that's all—and you don't hafta worry. If you do that, your tramping days are over."

This was a definite promise that I stood in the way of being admitted to the profits of whatever enterprise was afoot. I certainly had a difficult rôle to play. One slip, and the hand of murder poised over my head would descend with a crash.

Food was passed around on tin plates. Each man got his eating utensils out of a box, and we held out big tin cups while coffee was poured. Sugar and canned milk were passed. I had eaten only a few mouthfuls when Bagler appeared. He looked over us, and said to Sil:

"Where's the doctor you brought along, Sil?"

The convict called Doc, who put down his grub and stood up.

"How do you do, Doc?" Bagler greeted him, very pleasantly, as though he understood this man to be of a higher grade than the others. "Wish you'd come out and take a look at a friend of mine."

Doc went away with him. He really was a doctor.

We knew what Bagler wanted. Something had happened to Peters. Something serious, more than a faint. The food lost its savor for me, but I continued to munch away at it.

Some one brought in a couple of cartons of cigarettes. We had finished eating and were smoking when Doc came back. He got a cup of hot coffee and proceeded with his meal.

There was a dead silence in the cave. Doc ate slowly, as though he too had lost his appetite.

"Well, Doc," Sil inquired presently. "what happened to him?"

"His troubles are over?" Doc replied.

"Kicked the bucket?"

"Yes, he's dead. It was just a little more than he could stand, after the hard trip he had last night. He must have been fagged out completely when he got here, after missing us. He couldn't stand much more—not that sort of business."

No more was said about it.

It was warm enough outside the caves, but rather cool inside, after the fire in the little stove went out. There were plenty of blankets, however.

The crowd of us—the twelve who had

made the night journey through the woods—were soon stretched out, sleeping. I had thought of getting in position to talk with either Doc or Georgie, but gave this up as likely to draw attention.

The men I had marked out as different had better be left alone for awhile. I could not afford to arouse suspicion that I sought to come to more than a common understanding with any man in the bunch. Time and circumstances must fetch us together.

Meanwhile, I had a curious confidence in Doc and Georgie. The latter, I had gathered, was a pickpocket. I did not yet have the faintest idea of how Doc came to be a convict.

So strong is the telepathic power of minds seeking to get together that I became confident that both Doc and Georgie were looking to me as much as I was to them. Every look we exchanged seemed to be significant.

Yet there was danger here too—danger that my hopes and imagination might lead me to bank too strongly on the men I wanted to be my friends. They might not have any such idea. They might expose me, if I hinted that I sought to form an alliance to defeat the game of Bagler and his motley crew. I left Doc and Georgie alone.

I slept, fitfully and with startling dreams at first—then deeply. Along in the afternoon my companions began to stir. Some of them got up and went out. I dropped asleep again.

When I finally got up the camp was in commotion.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT WAS AFOOT?



NEWCOMER had arrived.

Men were moving toward a common center. I was alone in the cave, putting on my shoes. I peered out.

Bagler and the new arrival stood in the center of the throng, which kept a respectful and admiring distance. My first impression of Bagler's companion was that he was a very handsome young man.

He was tall, with the frame of an athlete. He had brown wavy hair, and stood there

bare-headed. His face somehow reminded me of the pictures of young men in haberdashery advertisements, clean cut, unwrinkled—almost perfect. It was turned my way. It certainly was a fine-looking face.

Yet there was something odd about it. It was almost expressionless—a still, quiet face, like a wax figure. Only the eyes seemed to have life; restless gray eyes, sharp, roving. They fell on me, with my head stuck out of the cave. His gaze gave me an uncomfortable feeling.

Bagler said something to the newcomer that caused him to smile, and it was his smile that definitely filled me with dread. It was a mechanical expression, like the grin of a doll.

The corners of his mouth drew up, his eyelids narrowed a trifle—but there was something so fixed and masklike in the smile as to make it almost inhuman. For some reason or other I thought of a theater I was in once, with a medallion of a mask on each side of the stage—one a mask of tragedy, frowning, knitted; the other a mask of comedy, the mouth drawn up in a grin, every line of the face showing laughing cheerfulness.

This face was a mask of comedy, the face of this human being in front of me—a mask of comedy until the smile went out as mechanically as it had come, and blankness returned.

They were evidently talking about me. The restless gray eyes kept wandering away and returning to my face. I tried to look casual. Details mounted up in my mind.

The young fellow's face was like a painting, perfect lines, perfect eyebrows—but a painting into which the artist had failed to put life. Mechanically perfect, but lacking soul, expression. A wooden face.

Bagler beckoned to me. I soon stood in front of the latest arrival. I was a tousled vagabond, but I strove to appear cheerful.

"This is the boss," Bagler said. "The big boss. Willie," Bagler inquired, using for the first time the nickname by which I became known among that crowd of crooks—Willie, for Weary Willie, me being a tramp. "Willie, did you ever hear of Luther Sanders?"

The name struck an instantaneous chord of memory in my brain. I certainly had heard of Luther Sanders, as every knight of the road in the country had. Not only that, but Luther Sanders had made himself known to newspaper readers far and wide.

He was one of the modern bandits that had been terrorizing the country, probably the best known of the bunch. His pictures had been printed. My idea of Luther Sanders's face was altogether different from the face that I looked into now.

"I—I think I've heard of Luther Sanders," I found myself saying in surprise.

"Well, this is Luther Sanders," Bagler informed me.

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Sanders," I said.

He merely nodded, and turned his back on me. I edged farther back into the crowd. Bagler and Sanders continued their talk. It was about the camp and its surroundings. The real chief of the gang, Sanders, evidently was paying his first visit to the place. Bagler was pointing out various details. They walked out of the crowd and away.

No one offered to speak to me, and I wandered around alone, while the others stood in groups, watching Sanders and Bagler every time they appeared. They were going in and out among the caves.

The mystery of Luther Sanders's face grew upon me. I couldn't understand it. He was one of those crooks whose likeness appears in the newspapers every so often, after every big daring crime.

They were always saying a job looked like the work of Luther Sanders, and such a circumstance was a signal for a fresh printing of his pictures and a rehash of his career.

I remembered him as having kind of a vicious face, with a flattened nose, as though it had been broken. He was said to be a former prizefighter. His present face did not look any more like the printed pictures of Luther Sanders than I looked like George Washington. It must be—

Did he have a new face? Was his countenance a sample of the new-fangled work that surgeons were doing?

Some one had slipped up behind me. I

turned with a start just as a voice sounded in my ear. It was Doc.

"Plastic surgery," he whispered. "And they made a botch of it."

I nodded, understanding. Doc drifted away.

So that was it. Plastic surgery, which enabled Luther Sanders, notorious crook, to present an absolutely new countenance to the world. But, as Doc said, they had made a botch of it.

They had made a handsome face, built up the nose and straightened the tough twist of his mouth, removed the scars that resulted from his life as a gangster, but they had also robbed the countenance of expression. A mask was the result.

It was uncanny, now that I knew the character of the man behind it. The restless eyes in that wooden face! Inhuman, revolting—a dead face on a living man.

How had he come to this place? There was no sign of a vehicle; indeed, there was, so far as I could see, no sign of a road over which a vehicle could travel. Sanders appeared fresh and neat. He did not look like a man who had just got in from a long hike.

He was dressed on the order of Bagler, in knickerbockers and low shoes and cap. He had his cap on now, as I could see, when he and Bagler stopped in their walk, under the tree where the man Peters had been strung up until he died.

Sanders's eyes roamed up to the limb from which Peters had been suspended. Bagler was explaining it to him. Sanders grinned again that horrible, lifeless grin.

They walked away, into the woods.

I was surrounded by scores of men, yet I was alone. None wished to speak to me. They seemed to understand that I was on probation, that certain of their numbers had been delegated to spy upon me every moment, to watch me.

Not knowing just what was in my mind, these crooks and convicts did not mean to establish friendly relations with me. At any moment I might become an object of a dire fate. They had no wish to be embroiled in it by having appeared friendly. confidential.

What did that loneliness amount to?

Why, I had the feeling that I was looked on as a man marked for death. And I also had the feeling that Bagler and Sanders were even now, off there in the woods, talking over what they should do with me.

The state of my nerves was such that I got to wondering what form death might take. If they decided to kill me, would they come right up to my face and seize me, or would Sanders instruct some one to creep up behind me and lay me flat?

I might be killed at any moment. My life was at the whim of Luther Sanders. Any untoward development in his game might make it appear advisable to put me out of the way.

Waking or sleeping, I was never for a moment out of danger. I wondered if I would ever be able to sleep again.

And still Doc had spoken to me. That was one ray of hope. He had, in that casual remark, let me know that he was willing to talk. It was an opener. But assuming that Doc wanted to talk with me, and that he had not been appointed a spy to test me out, we would have to be extremely careful.

I made up my mind that Doc should make all the advances. He knew the men about us better than I did. And even with Doc, I had to beware of a trap.

I began to notice an extraordinary interest among the crowd for one of the smaller caves. Something or some one was in that cave, for men would walk by it, look hurriedly in, then talk to one another in hushed voices. I walked past the cave, looked in, but saw nothing but darkness. I kept away from it after that.

Suddenly Bagler and Luther Sanders came out of the woods, into the open space that ran from the foot of the hill down to the edge of Bootle's Swamp. Bounded by the hill, the swamp and the forest, this open space was a natural amphitheater. Bagler and Sanders now seemed to be moved by a definite purpose. Their casual air had vanished.

A hush fell. Men stood exactly where they were, waiting. There was an air of eagerness in the throng, anticipation, but it was not a pleasant excitement, like that among men who await a happy event.

There was a big flat rock in the center of the clearing. Luther Sanders mounted this. Bagler stood on the ground, leaning idly against the rock.

There was a concerted grouping about the rock. The still, masklike grin of Luther Sanders's new face shone down upon his gang, ranged before him in a semicircle.

I stood on the outer rim of the crowd, scarcely breathing, my heart thumping my ribs—awaiting I don't know what.

CHAPTER VII

THE "WEAK LINKS"

MEN," Sanders said, in a loud voice, "it's time we got down to bus'ness. There ain't a man in the bunch what ain't heard o' me, and yuh know what's in front of us, the crowd o' yuh, 'cepting maybe the bum that got mixed up accidental."

Meaning me, of course. His lingo was still that of the gangster. I noticed his hands, too, as he made an occasional gesture, embarrassed, confused, like one not used to speaking from a rostrum.

They were big hands, with wide palms, short coarse fingers, knotted knuckles—the hands of a pugilist. The plastic surgery which had straightened the lines of his face could not smooth out the nature of the man within, as reflected in his rasping voice and tough manner of speech—and his hands.

Those hands spoke volumes—murderous paws, forever in motion as he talked.

"I ain't a man that goes beating around," Luther Sanders was continuing. "We all got a big chanst to clean up, things I got figured out. It's be'n a tough job to get this mob together, but we're all here now.

"There ain't a man in the crowd that's got much to lose, 'cepting the tramp. Anything I say don't mean him. He ain't one of us.

"Yuh're either just outa 'stir' with long stretches facing yuh if yuh're sent back er yuh're fellas that'll land in 'stir' if yuh show yer faces much.

"I got work that yuh can do—big work, big dough. Maybe yuh ain't all wise to the

racket yet, but yuh know me. Yuh know when I say we're gonna crack down, it means sumpin' heavy. That's the game, boys—heavy stuff, lots o' dough. Yuh're with me—uh?"

There was a chorus of assenting voices, mouthing numerous affirmative phrases of the underworld.

"That's what I like to hear," the speaker went on. "If I know the bunch is with me, I'll try anything. We got a swell lay-out here. Me and Bagler be'n framing this up a long time. Nobody'll come around this swamp looking fer runaways.

"They'll think ev'ry con that done the rabbit act lit out fer some town. They'll be hunting the cons along the railroads—not here. This swamp keeps folks away. And you other guys that ain't cons—yuh ain't much better off. There's stickers on ev'ry man's back."

"Stickers" is the vernacular for rewards. I thus learned that every man in the crowd was very much wanted, some as escaped convicts, others for crimes for which they had not yet been brought to answer.

Luther Sanders had for his purposes now as choice an aggregation of desperadoes as could be brought together. What crime would this gang back away from? None!

"But stand by me," Sanders assured them, "and I'll lead yuh outa these woods in a month er two maybe with loads o' dough. Ev'ry man in the crowd'll have dough—piles of it. But first thing we gotta have is pertection. Ain't that right, boys—pertection?"

There was another chorus of approval. My nervousness grew.

"There's a line I heard once," their chief was telling them, "what said a chain ain't no stronger'n its weakest link. That's a good line. It's a fact. Well, ev'ry man here is a link—see? It's up to us to weed out the weak links, ain't it?"

Assent was given to this ominous query in lower voices. Some of those who had lifted lusty tones before merely nodded now.

"That's right," Sanders insisted. "The jelly-backs gotta go. We gotta have men with stiff backbones, see? There's seventy-six men here now, counting ev'rybody.

"Well, it's a cinch that no seventy-six

men ever come together like we done that there wasn't a weak one—maybe more—in the bunch. See what I mean? Sure yuh do. Yuh get me. Like I say, I don't do no beating around. I up and says what's on my mind."

Not a single voice was raised during the pause that followed these remarks. It was a strange speech. The emotions which usually chase themselves across the face of a speaker so interested in his subject, were missing from the countenance of Luther Sanders.

He stood there, a big, handsome figure, true enough—the mouth in his remade face opening and closing like the mouth of a ventriloquist's dummy. Only his eyes glowed with a certain inexorable light.

It was rather a weak face, as it had been fashioned, for no strength of spirit shone in it—yet it was a face of doom.

"There's some fellas here," he proceeded. "what ain't never gonna leave this place. See what I mean, boys? They're gonna show their soft spots.

"They're gonna wilt, and when they wilt, one way er another, and show us they're li'ble to try and sneak out and maybe spill theirselves first town they get into, what 'a' we gotta do, boys?"

"Why, just remove them weak links, eh? Sure. That's plain. We can't let one er two fellas queer the crowd of us."

He paused again, looked at me; then bent down and whispered something to Bagler. The crowd was silent.

"There's one weak link now what we know of," said Luther Sanders, facing his men again. "I hope there ain't gonna be no more—but that one I got my finger on.

"We're gonna remove it, and when you fellas see how we do it, maybe some that're weakening will kinda stouten up. See what I mean? I'm wise when it comes to handling a buncha men. In any o' my gangs I never got soft when the gang's pertection come up. I just bumped off the weak ones.

"That way, no guy on the inside with me ever got a chanst to spill my secrets in some prosecutor's office. It's the only way. Polish 'em off. Well, we got a weak link here. Me and Bagler got a show framed up fer the bunch."

Sanders did not look my way, but I felt all the qualms of the condemned man. His words were clear. I was to be offered as a sacrifice in his terrible prayer that his gang should be infused with iron strength. I began to cast about for a way out, cautiously. I was listening to him again.

"Fella that brought me here tried to run out on me—mile er so back in the woods. His feet got frosty. I know him. He's a friend o' mine. He's be'n with me off and on fer two, three years. I banked on him, but this game's a little too heavy fer the likes o' him. That's what I say.

"Weak spots come out where maybe yuh don't look fer 'em. All to once, when we was getting close to camp, he wilted. Tried to run away. But I brought him around with my gun—didn't hit him; just let him know I had it on him.

"He come whining up to me like a dog, and I marched him in. Yuh seen us. Well, he's the weak link I be'n talking about."

Curiously, I experienced no great sense of relief at this announcement. The horror of the thing was too strong for a man to think only of his own life. It was almost as bad to be a spectator in such a ritual as it was to be a central character.

"I thought a lot o' that fella," Luther Sanders explained. "Yes, sir, me and him was friends—but what I say is, I can't throw my gang away just to save a friend. Fetch him out, boys!"

A dozen men who had evidently been chosen for the task and instructed therein detached themselves from the crowd. They entered the small cave which had been an object of interest. They lugged out a man bound hand and foot.

His face wore a hopeless, resigned expression. Yes, he was a friend of Luther Sanders's. Therefore he knew Luther Sanders, and even in his terror realized how futile it was to appeal for mercy. He was a middle-aged man.

I had an impulse to put up a fight. I didn't see how I could stand idly by and let such a thing happen. But, of course, I couldn't prevent it even by fighting. There would be two executions instead of one if I even made a sign that I wanted to rescue the hapless wretch.

I found myself looking about from face to face, searching for a man who felt as I did. I found him. Doc.

Still clad in the stripes of the prison from which he had recently fled, Doc looked on with the same horror that tore my heart. Our eyes met. We read each other's thoughts. But he was not so impulsive.

He shook his head slightly, grimly, as much as to warn me not to make a move. He was right, of course. What could Doc and I do?

We had to look on.

If I so much as averted my eyes from the spectacle, would not I speedily be marked as a "weak link?"

The whole crowd had moved in the direction of a fringe of trees. A young beech, scarcely more than a sapling, had been chosen for the purpose.

"Hustle up, boys!" *Sunders* cried. "It 'll soon be dark."

Not once did I detect an expression of pity, of regret, in his eyes. Yet, as he said, he and this man had been friends—he had "thought a lot o' that fella."

When six or seven men seized the sapling and bent it down so its top almost touched the ground, and held it there, in the form of a gigantic bow, I got an inkling of the sort of spectacle the execution was meant to afford.

I stood there, my legs stiffened rigidly, to keep them from crumpling.

CHAPTER VIII

DANGER AHEAD



WITH his own hands, *Luther* *Sunders* adjusted and tied a short rope about the neck of his erstwhile friend. He did not voice one word of comfort. The victim, mercifully, gave signs of swooning. They tied the other end of the rope to the sapling, close to the end.

They left the doomed man lying on the ground. What would happen was plain to see. I tried not to avert my gaze nor to cover my eyes.

I had been a stranger to churches since I was a Sunday school kid, yet I found myself muttering a prayer for the victim. No

sound escaped my lips, however. Weakness was a dangerous quality to exhibit in this crowd of outcasts.

Luther *Sunders* stepped back. When he lifted his hand as a signal, the men let loose of the sapling.

It straightened up with the whistling sound of a whiplash. A human form hurtled through the air, pulled the sapling far over to the other side, then dangled in vacancy.

It was all over.

"A neat job," *Sunders* said to *Bagler*. He snapped his fingers. "Cracked his neck just like that."

"Now for supper!" *Bagler* cried to the throng.

I compelled myself to eat. It was long after dark when we finished. The cave in which I was quartered with *Sil* and the men he had brought from prison was almost wordless during the meal. Once I peered out of the cave. In the moonlight I could see the lifeless form dangling from the young beech tree. I did not look out again that night.

Nor did I sleep much. The night passed at length, without my having a chance for a private word with *Doc*. The body was still there in the morning—a grim warning to potential "weak links." It was taken down about noon. I helped to dig the grave.

Meanwhile there were signs of activity and extensive preparations about the camp. An expedition of some sort was being made ready. It turned out that *Bagler* was to lead it. At least fifteen men, as nearly as I could count them as they vanished into the woods, went with him.

After the meal at noon clothing was issued to the men still in prison uniforms. Considerable difficulty was had in fitting them properly, out of piles of goods stolen somewhere, I suppose, and borne here on the backs of some of the men.

There were shoes, suits, hats, socks, underwear, shirts, collars, and even neckties and handkerchiefs. The prison clothing was piled up and burned.

Two safety razors appeared in our cave. We all got a chance to shave. The men from prison were not so seedy and rundown

as I was. Sil gave me a haircut. He went out to see Sanders, too, and came back with a new outfit of clothing for me.

"Get outa them tramp duds," he advised.

I did so. A gang of us went off into the woods and took a bath in a creek.

I kept out of Sanders's sight as much as possible. I did not wish to be a constant reminder of my presence. It was much better if he forgot me, let me mingle with the gang and gradually become one of them. In time, I hoped to go out on an expedition with them, and then seek a chance for escape.

It was likely that I was under incessant observation. I did not know. I could not afford to make a dash. The chances of getting away were slim. I would probably be overhauled before I could take more than a dozen steps. If I were to escape from the camp, it would have to be at night.

Yet, when night came again, I feared to make the break, for fear that some of my companions in the cave were keeping a furtive watch. I couldn't be sure. Of only one thing was I certain. An unsuccessful dash meant death. There would be no further probation.

I dreamed that night of being whipped into the air by a gigantic tree, flung as high as the mountaintops, it seemed.

I awoke, sitting up, sweating and cold. Moonlight filled the world outside. All my companions seemed to be sleeping, yet I could not say, for the gloom inside the cave was deep.

More than one pair of eyes may have been riveted on me. If I started for the mouth of the cave, I could not tell what might happen.

But I think the idea of escape, the hope and longing to get away from that awful company, would have drawn me into the endeavor if I had not perceived a man slinking across the open space in front of the caves.

He seemed to be coming from the swamp, and I saw him first when he emerged from its gruesome shadows. There was no route for him to the caves except across the clearing.

His movements were furtive. He was within sight only a few seconds, yet, in the moonlight, I became aware of his identity.

It was Luther Sanders. What he had been doing in Bootle's Swamp was beyond my strongest conjecture. I had understood that the swamp was inaccessible. Perhaps he had been merely in the shadows at the edge of it, or had skirted along it on his way from the woods.

Yet his nocturnal appearance was a mystery. Alone, furtive, he had been on the prowl somewhere.

I lay down again, snuggling into my blankets, shivering. The incident drove from my mind all thoughts of an attempted escape, at least that night.

I did not know what I might encounter outside the cave. The future perhaps held hope, the present none. I fell asleep again, but my disturbing dreams continued.

In the morning I became aware of suppressed excitement in the camp, something ominous simmering beneath the surface of ordinary things.

A man was missing from the cave next to the one in which I slept. A searching party sent out by Luther Sanders after the fact was reported to him had returned without having found a trace of the runaway.

That is what he was called—a runaway. It was a very serious development. Yet, it turned out, there was an additional element of mystery in the disappearance. I got this from the gossip I heard during the forenoon.

The man's name was Flobert. He was from another prison than the one near which I had become entangled. He had been a highly trusted individual. Early in the night he had been summoned from his cave by Luther Sanders. The two had had a long conference. They had taken a walk in the woods.

"We got through talking," Sanders had explained, "and I felt like staying out in the woods awhile—smoking, thinking. Flobert said he'd go back to his cave and hit the hay. I thought that's where he went. I come in by myself, thinking Flobert was in his cave."

And there the matter rested. No trace

could be found of Flobert. The other occupants of his cave had not seen him return.

Had he run away? Would Flobert make tracks for some town, and spill the whole business to the authorities?

Sunders, considering the matter, did not think so. I did not hear him say a word about it. I got his views from the gossip of others. It seems that Sunders decided not to do anything about it, feeling that Flobert merely wished to get away from the gang—that he would not tell what he knew in whatever towns he came to.

Flobert was an escaped convict. He could not squeal on Sunders without being recaptured. He had been a lifer. The chances were that he was concerned only in his own liberty—that he would get out of the country, and say nothing about how he escaped nor about the gang at Bootle's Swamp.

This idea was borne out by Flobert's character. He was a thorough crook, and there wasn't much for him to gain by turning traitor warning the authorities.

Yet there was nothing that Sunders could do about it if he did not abandon this camp. He must trust to the accuracy of his judgment in respect to Flobert.

Several times during the day I saw Sunders walking by himself along the edge of the swamp. The entire camp was merely marking time until Bagler and his men returned. We played cards, read old magazines and papers. Every time I got a chance I watched Sunders.

I noticed more than once a peculiar gleam in his eyes, a kind of a glare. It made me shiver all over. He seemed to be looking through a fellow and beyond him. I didn't let him think I was watching him.

Along in the afternoon, when Sunders was taking another walk down by the swamp, his arms folded, his head down, Doc managed to say a few words to me.

"Have you noticed his eyes?" he inquired.

"Yes. Kind of staring like."

There was an ominous tone in Doc's whisper.

"The man is insane," he said. "A maniac."

Doc drifted away. His words certainly gave me something to think about. And my thoughts left me hot and cold by turns. Doc's opinion was professional, expert.

A maniac! The lives of seventy-odd men hanging on the whims of a maniac. What might not this crazy man set afoot?

Sunders came walking up from the swamp, his eyes glaring a little—roaming about from man to man; looking, mayhap, for another victim—and on his face that awful wooden grin.

I got out of his sight.

CHAPTER IX

PUTTING A PROPOSITION



THAT evening another man came up missing.

He did not appear at supper time. A search was at once set on foot, but like Flobert, he had vanished completely. There had been a good deal of wandering about the woods during the day. Some of the men had even tried to penetrate the swamp.

The missing man had been in the woods, mingling with various groups, but none could remember his having given any sign that he meant to vacate. However, he was gone, and that was that.

Like Flobert, he was one of the escaped convicts. Luther Sunders applied the same reasoning to his case that he had to Flobert's. He hadn't left in order to squeal. He had gone away to pursue his own affairs.

"Put out guards?" Sunders said, in reply to a suggestion by Sil. "I don't like that hunch. If we gotta keep ev'ry one o' this gang under guard, it's a cinch we can't depend on 'em when we take 'em out. No pickets. We'll just keep our eyes peeled. It 'll go hard with any guy we catch running off."

He didn't seem to be much worried.

"Tell yuh what," he added. "It's up to the men theirselves. They got ev'rything to lose if one of 'em runs off and squawks. That means the cops'll come tearing in here, and all these guys'll land in stir. Comes to that, ev'rything goes flooye. It's up to the men.

"They oughta be able to nail a guy that's

fixing to run off. If they don't, they're bringing trouble on themselves. No, I ain't gonna picket the joint. What good's pickets? It 'll just make ev'ry man feel he's under suspicion."

Luther Sanders knew the strength of his hold on the gang. Escaped convicts and criminals eagerly hunted by the law in the outside world, they looked to him to lead them out of their troubles.

First, he was the bandit chieftain whose raids were to enrich them. Second, when the raids were over he would show them a way out. They depended on him, believed in him.

Most of them, nearly all, were determined to stick. The men themselves would take summary action against any renegade who tried to leave the camp behind.

A few men missing made no difference except that the possibility of them telling what they knew was a source of deep concern. So far, the runaways were men who had every reason not to squeal.

Bagler and his men were expected back any minute now. Sanders, that night, spent considerable time in the woods, off in the direction from which Bagler would appear—awaiting him no doubt, and a report of his raid.

Numerous others wandered about the woods. I did myself, early in the night. Sil was with me most of the time, or at least within watching distance. The moon was now at the full.

The night was still and warm—still except for the incessant clamor of insects and frogs in Bootle's Swamp. The moonlight in the forest was silvery clear. Luther Sanders walked by himself.

I wondered just how much I could safely say to Sil. I had begun to think of starting gossip in the camp that Luther Sanders was insane.

If I could do that, confidence in him might break—fear might bring about a general desertion, in which I could join. Yet if I started such a rumor and Sanders became aware of it, he'd seal my lips in his own way.

What would Sil do if I dropped such a hint? Would he worry about it, tell others, spread the gossip, or would he go to Sanders

and tell him I was trying to start something? That was a problem.

Nevertheless I took a chance, as Sil and I walked about in the woods, smoking. Sanders was off to one side, close to the swamp, alone, brooding, turning his glaring eyes every now and then into the woods, impatient for the appearance of Bagler.

"Notice he acts funny?" I said to Sil.

This remark did not have either of the effects I looked for. It did not worry Sil and it did not send him to Sanders. Instead, it brought from his lips an amused chuckle.

"Sure he acts funny," he admitted. "Who wouldn't?"

"What's the matter with him?"

Sil chuckled again, glanced at me tolerantly, as though he thought I was somewhat stupid, and remarked:

"There ain't nothing the matter of him, only he's enjoying the blizzard."

"Blizzard?"

"Sure. Snowstorm."

"Oh, yeh! I see. I guess maybe that's it."

Luther Sanders was full of dope—"snow." That was a reasonable explanation for his glaring eyes and his peculiar actions. I did not mention the opinion expressed by Doc. I didn't want to get Doc in bad.

My little scheme had fallen flat. Sil, and all the others, were aware of the idiosyncrasies of dope fiends. No fear of Luther Sanders could be inspired in that quarter. They would all laugh at me, as Sil had.

And perhaps Doc was wrong. Luther Sanders might not be insane, beyond the point at which every man is a little off when he'll full of dope. I dropped the subject.

Sil and I wandered back into the open space.

There were supposed to be twelve men quartered in our cave. Late that night some one noticed that there were only eleven of us. A man called "Kokomo" was missing. Sil waited awhile, and then went out and reported the fact to Luther Sanders.

He was gone a long time, and when he came back he let us know that Sanders had taken Kokomo's disappearance as he had

the others. Kokomo, too, was an escaped convict, one of the most vicious looking of the lot which had come with Sil—a silent, glowering man.

Sunders probably told Sil not to worry. A few deflections were bound to occur, and so long as the runaways were men who were not likely to squeal, good riddance!

At any rate, midnight came, and Kokomo did not show up.

My companions had gradually admitted me to their talk. I was no longer so much of an outsider as I had been. I joined freely in the discussion in our cave aroused by the absence of Kokomo.

But, of course, we could get nowhere with it. Kokomo was gone—where, no one had the faintest idea, except it was more than likely he was making tracks for the outside world.

“I think the hanging of that man on the sapling,” Doc said, “is the cause of these runaways. That was such a horrible affair, most of us are frightened.”

Sil was looking at Doc with searching eyes.

“Think so?” he inquired.

Doc realized that he had said a little bit too much; had expressed thoughts which were better concealed. In the light of the candle, Sil was sizing him up very attentively. I was alarmed for Doc.

“Did that scare you, Doc?” Sil pursued.

“It scared most of us, I guess,” Doc rejoined.

“Maybe you’ll run away, eh?”

“I hadn’t thought of that, Sil.” He began to argue his case. “Where would I run to? I’m a lifer. I seized the chance you offered me, to escape.

“Of course I was working right alongside you in the prison, and couldn’t help but know you were up to something. Maybe you offered me the chance to keep me still. But that wasn’t necessary, Sil. I was in that prison twelve years. I never told tales on another man.”

“That’s what I know,” Sil admitted.

“I was glad to get the chance,” Doc pursued. “I came. You told me what I would find here. I’m not sorry I came. I’d rather be almost any place than in that prison. If I ran away from here, I’d prob-

ably be caught and sent back. Don’t you see?”

That was plain enough to Sil. Yet it was apparent that Doc was something of an outsider. He was an escaped convict like the rest, but he was not a crook. Something besides theft had landed him in that prison. A lifer. Was it murder?

Well, if it had been murder, it hadn’t been the sort usually perpetrated by crooks. It was an emotional murder of some sort.

Doc had been brought along simply because, in prison, he became aware of Sil’s plot. Seeking to silence him, Sil had admitted him to it.

Doc, like myself, was an outsider—a man who was probably being watched. If only Doc and myself could get off by ourselves for a talk. But what chance had we for that? The slightest hint of collusion between us, two outsiders, would fetch onto us the wrath of Luther Sunders.

“Tell you what, Doc,” Sil was saying, “it don’t pay here to say too much. You’re a square guy—always showed it in that joint. I like you. I hope you don’t turn out to be one o’ the ‘weak links.’”

The term had come into common usage since Sunders’s harangue.

“I’m not weakening, Sil,” Doc assured him.

Georgie, the little pickpocket, who apparently had some sort of an understanding with Doc, held his tongue during the talk that followed. They were up to something, Doc and Georgie. I could see it in the glances they exchanged.

They looked at me, too, in a way that told me they were willing to take me in with them, if only they could let me know what was in the wind.

“Now, some o’ these guys that run off,” Sil said, “are bound to get caught in the act. Luther won’t monkey—”

The form of a man appeared in the mouth of the cave, walked in among us. His shadow, grotesque in the candlelight, fell across us ominously. It was Luther Sunders. His eyes were glaring—insanity or dope or both—but the still, masklike grin was fixed on his face.

He was bareheaded, in his shirt sleeves. His brown hair was rumped. He may have

been trying to sleep; then got up to seek diversion from his restlessness.

He looked us over. The grin came and went. His graven face was like that of a mechanical toy, which changes expression at the turn of a key.

"Where's the tramp?" he demanded presently.

I sat perfectly still. Sil nodded at me.

"Willie," he said, "you're wanted by Mr. Sanders.

I got up.

"I come almost forgetting you," Sanders said. "You and me ain't had a chanst to talk yet. Come on, we'll take a walk in the woods."

I followed him outside the cave. The moon had fallen behind the mountains. A faint silvery glow in the sky above one peak marked the course of its descent. Darkness lay heavily on Bootle's Swamp, and in the woods to which Luther Sanders led me.

CHAPTER X

MAROONED



HE was nervous. His big hands worked spasmodically. We were walking side by side. I watched him, and waited for him to speak. When he did speak it wasn't to me, but to himself. He muttered curses against the delay in Bagler's return.

Then I got the idea that I was in the company of a dope fiend who had run out of dope. Bagler was supposed to bring some back. We were nearing the swamp.

Suddenly he stopped dead still, and we faced each other in the gloom. He was a big powerful man, only a few years older than me, but I was husky myself. I had no fear of him physically, but, of course, if he had a gun on him—

"What're you doing here?" Sanders demanded.

"Why, you asked me to take a walk," I told him.

"I mean how'd yuh come to git mixed up here?"

I began a narration of the circumstances under which I had met Sil and his gang.

"Oh, sure—I got it now," he interrupted.

He had recalled the story told to him by Bagler and Sil. "Well," he added, after a pause, "I don't want yuh here—see?"

I certainly did not take this as a hint that he meant to run me off. No such luck. An invitation for me to leave would have been instantly accepted. I would have set out then and there. But I knew what he meant, and I was prepared for his next move.

I drew my head back when his fist came flying my way. The blow that did not land flung him a trifle off balance. He reached for his gun just as I socked him. Down he went.

But it was very dark there. I sprang forward, to leap on him; tripped over an exposed root, and fell headlong. I explored the ground with my hands, searching for him. I got up, and saw him rising. He fired at me. I fell onto him then like a thousand of brick.

The hatred I had felt for this man ever since he swung that fellow up on the sapling came to the surface now. No thought of fair play came to my mind. I gave him an unmerciful beating, there on the ground.

I had an insane desire to smash his new face, to knock it all out of shape again and plaster it with bruises that would leave scars. Then suddenly I desisted.

He was not fighting back. So long as he fought back, struck at me, tried to shoot me, I could beat him without a qualm. But he was insensible now.

I got off him, stood up, with his gun in my hand. Attracted by the shot, men were running out of the caves and across the open space toward the woods.

I got my feet into action to do a little sprinting myself.

In my confusion I got into the swamp before I realized it. I had not noticed that the earth was softer under my feet, so fast did I run—did not notice it until, in the thick darkness, my shoes hit plop into a puddle of water.

I got away from that, then realized with horror that I was in the swamp and, if I meant to keep out of the hands of those behind me, must keep straight on—deeper and deeper into that awful place.

Of course I did not mean to go any

farther into the swamp than necessary to throw off my pursuers. They were not following, but I could hear them running through the woods and shouting to one another. Perhaps they did not know that I had come into the swamp.

My position was such that I could not get out to higher land without venturing very near to them. I kept on, at a slower pace, picking my way over the boggy ground, testing it with my feet. The trunks of fallen trees helped me.

It was a dark, oozy place, wherever I went, and the darkness was filled with the terrors of the unknown. Yet behind me were known terrors, scores of men who would kill me on sight.

I had some idea of changing my course so that I would come out of the swamp at a point far down the valley, beyond pursuit, but it was first necessary for me to get farther in, if I were to proceed safely. The noises in the woods grew fainter and fainter.

I was wet and muddy up to my knees. My shoes weighed a ton apiece, with big lumps of mucky earth clinging to them. I kicked this off from time to time, on fallen trees, but picked up more as I went along.

There were little patches of higher ground, and I paused on these to rest. I could see very little of the sky through the limbs above me, but clouds seemed to be forming.

When sounds from the woods behind ceased I thought I was far enough into the swamp to be safe, and I altered my course to a direction which I thought would take me down the valley. Far enough down, I would cut back out of the swamp, to the woods and higher ground, and make all haste for the nearest town.

I carried Luther Sanders's gun in my coat pocket. It was an automatic. I understood the operation of it, and ascertained that it was almost full of loaded cartridges.

I was going down the valley now, on what seemed to be a ridge of fairly dry ground. I watched for the ridge to end at any moment, in a bog perhaps, and I picked my way step by step. Once I slid off the ridge, at a point where another strip of high ground seemed to join it, coming from the woods I had recently left.

I finished at the bottom, my feet plunged in soft earth. I pulled them out, set one down on something a little firmer, a log perhaps, and thought to climb back up. I drew my foot away as though I had stepped into fire.

By some mysterious sense, I knew onto what I had stepped. I clung to the side of the ridge, my fingers seizing exposed roots, clung there with a smothering sensation in my chest.

After awhile I got up courage enough to work my body into a fairly safe position and to strike a match.

The face of a dead man sprang out of the gloom at my feet. It was the escaped convict known as Flobert, the first to run away from the camp. The match went out just as I caught a glimpse of a bullet hole in the side of his head.

I lit another match, and confirmed this—steadier now. Flobert had been murdered in the swamp. I scrambled back up to the ridge.

But the high ground soon petered out. I came to the end of it with an idea in my mind that the body of Flobert offered a solution of the mystery surrounding the missing men. The thought hammered at my brain.

The last seen of Flobert was while he was walking in the woods with Luther Sanders. Had Sanders decoyed him into the swamp and slain him? Did Luther Sanders, dope fiend, perhaps insane, have a mania for murder? Had he slain the other missing men, and had he called me out of the cave as another victim of his lust? I had heard of such monsters.

This terrible surmise, that Sanders, while engineering gang robberies, also sought to while away the time by indulging in crimes that partly satiated his inhuman thirst, spurred me onward in the darkness of the swamp. My brain seemed to be in a riot.

I thought of anything and everything—of the man I had seen executed on the sapling, of Flobert's body, of the likelihood of my feet encountering other bodies in the swamp—those of the other missing men.

But when I came again to the end of the higher ground, I thought of my predicament.

I made various starts, but had to return to the ridge. I could not find earth hard enough to support me. In fact I seemed to be confronted with a stagnant pool. There was only one direction in which I could move, back whence I had come.

The presence of Flobert's body indicated that there was a way into the swamp by fairly dry land. I remembered the other ridge, which I had explored a little way, running off toward the woods near the camp. Did that run clear through? It was more than likely—and over it Luther Sanders had decoyed his victims.

I had become firmly convinced that Sanders had slain every one of the missing men.

Well, that was the layout. Back of me was the ground I had already traversed, with at least one path into the swamp, a path over which Sanders would come if he got a hint that I had fled into the swamp.

That meant that I had to fall back into the arms of my enemies, probably, if I moved at all. Ahead and on each side, a swampy pool, smelling of rotting vegetation, offering absolutely no hold for my feet.

I was marooned in Bootle's Swamp.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER WEARY HOURS



My legs trembled, and, for the first time, I realized that I was almost at the point of physical exhaustion. Spurred in my flight by thoughts of certain death if I were caught, I had not reckoned on the physical exactions of even that short trip through the swamp. I suppose I had covered little more than a mile, yet I was all in.

I found a dry place on the ridge, and stretched out. I knew that daylight must be very close now. I was wet to the knees and cold and disheartened.

Had it not been so close to daylight I probably would have tried to get out of the swamp, over the ridge running off this one, but now I regarded this as too hazardous. It would land me back in the woods, close to the camp.

Yet I faced a full day in the swamp,

without food, without water fit to drink, before darkness fell again. And I admit that dread of again passing Flobert's body in that thick darkness held me exactly where I was.

It seemed much better to lie there resting. I convinced myself that it was absolutely necessary for me to recover some of my strength before I tried to go farther. So I lay there—and presently slept.

It was broad daylight when I awakened, but I had no way of telling the time. The sky was cloudy, with no hint of the sun. The air was cold and raw. Rain threatened.

I had a feeling that I had slept several hours. I was very hungry, but was not conscious then of thirst. I lit a cigarette, and sat there with my knees hunched up, smoking and thinking.

In a few minutes I began to feel thirsty. I looked at the water surrounding me. It was covered with a greenish scum. No chance for a drink there. I found that I was on a little island, with just a few feet of the pool separating me from the ridge running backward. I could step over it. I hadn't noticed that in the darkness, had waded through it.

Tremendous trees, their roots in the muck, rose all about me. It was a jungle, quiet and ghostly. The trees appeared fantastic. Some of the limbs looked like gigantic arms with claws at the ends.

Big vines coiled about their trunks looked like serpents. I imagined that millions of eyes gazed on me, yet there was no sound of life. Even the birds gave this hole a wide berth.

I thought I ought to explore the swamp in the vicinity of Flobert's body, to see if I could find others, but could not bring myself to do it. Yes, I was scared—good and scared.

The looks of that swamp, the gloom of it, were eerie enough to make a man prefer to sit still rather than go hunting for dead men. I was getting thirstier all the while, and I had only two cigarettes left.

My hope seemed to lie in the coming night. I didn't know how far that was off. When darkness came, I meant to return to the woods and make a dash away from the vicinity of the camp.

I tried to sleep again, and presently succeeded, despite my growing thirst and nervousness. In the woods outside the swamp there would be water. I thought no longer of food—only water.

I aroused with a start, reaching for the gun. Luther Sanders, who had crept upon me, leaped just as I was getting to my feet. He had a gun in his hand, but, for some reason or other, he preferred to kill me by a less humane method than a bullet.

The murderous hate gleaming in his eyes was the look of a man who would not be satisfied unless he could mete out a slow and painful death. My gun was out, but the impact of his big body knocked it from my hand.

It sailed out into the swamp, hopelessly lost.

I reached his face with my fist, knocked him back on his haunches. He shot at me then. He had underestimated my speed.

I crouched and sprang for him. He pumped lead at me, but his aim was bad, for he was trying both to dodge me and to get into position to find a sure target in my darting body. A clinch was what I sought.

I rushed in, achieved it, and managed to strike his forearm with a lucky downward blow.

The force of it momentarily numbed his hand. The gun dropped, slid off the ridge into the water.

And there we were, on that little island, scarcely fifteen feet in diameter—man to man.

We fought mercilessly. Anything went. It was life or death. Once, in a clinch, he got his fingers into the sockets of my eyes. I was blinded, but I bit the muscles of his other arm until he shrieked in agony.

His fingers came out of my eyes, but it was several seconds before I could see anything but dazzling lights. My eyeballs throbbed and ached.

I fought for awhile under this handicap, striking and kicking wherever I thought he was. Then vision returned, but he had knocked me flat, coming up on me from the side.

I thought I was done for then. I was only half awake, but I slid out from under as he tried to climb aboard my prostrate

body. I got him by the throat. I don't exactly know what happened in the next few seconds, but we were both standing up when I got in that crushing blow to the point of his chin.

He went down in a kind of a sliding fall, and I sank to my knees from sheer exhaustion.

When I lifted my head and looked for him, I saw only his upturned face on the surface of the pool and his groping arms, hands clutching nothing but empty air.

"Helped me!" he begged.

And then I understood that he was being sucked under.

He was eight or ten feet out from the edge of the pool. I had hit him an awful wallop. I ran around, looking for something to extend toward him, a dead limb—anything. But I could find nothing.

It was terrible, to see him going down inch by inch, holding lips and nostrils up.

"Keep your arms still!" I yelled at him.

His frantic struggles were only sending him down the faster. There was no expression on his face outside the eyes—but in them were terror and mute appeal.

It was awful, but I certainly could not venture into the pool. My own feet would become trapped. I couldn't swim a stroke. The marks of my fists were on his face.

I ran along the ridge. The limbs of the trees were so high I could not reach them. No dead ones were on the ground.

I broke off a long tough reed that grew at the edge of the pool. It was not anywhere long enough, but in my frantic haste I seized what looked most useful. I heard an awful cry.

When I looked back that way, the still wooden face of Luther Sanders had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII

THE RETURN



ARKNESS was falling.

I averted my face when I came to the point where Flobert's body lay half in the water. I turned along the other ridge, toward the woods. I don't know exactly what I meant to do. I guess I

thought only of getting out of that awful swamp.

I did not know into what I would run, but now that Luther Sanders had disappeared from the face of the earth, I felt strengthened and emboldened. I knew now that he had filled me with dread from the very first.

Well, I had to get out and away from there—make a run for it, when I got clear of the swamp. Nevertheless, I slowed down. I was proceeding carefully when the tornado of shots and yells broke in the woods, off near the camp.

I got behind a big tree, at the edge of the swamp, and waited. There was a terrific battle going on. That meant that officers had arrived from somewhere. If they won, my troubles were over.

It seemed to be an age before the struggle was decided. The shots and yells ceased as abruptly as they began. It wasn't so dark there at the edge of the swamp, but night would soon come. There was a long silence.

I had about made up my mind to venture out when voices were heard. Men were coming toward me. I peered out, and saw half a dozen State Troopers dragging along one of the men who had lived with us in the caves.

"That's the way he went," the prisoner whined.

The officers were looking for Sanders. I clung to the shelter of the tree, fearing they might shoot if I appeared suddenly. I yelled out to them:

"Sanders is dead—drowned in the swamp!"

They called to me to show myself. I did so, with my hands above my head.

"Are you the fellow they call Willie?" one of them asked.

"That's me."

"Put your hands down."

I led them then to the spot where Luther Sanders had met his fate. I told them how it happened. My bruised face bore out the story of the fight.

"Well," the captain of the Troopers said, "we'll have to drag the body out. If we don't produce that, bo," he informed me, "you lose the reward."

"Reward?"

"Sure. There's ten thousand dollars' reward for Luther Sanders, dead or alive. His body will be proof that you're entitled to it. See?"

It turned out that there were thirty Troopers all told on the job. They had come to within two miles of the camp on motor cycles, warned from some mysterious source as to just what they would encounter at Bootle's Swamp. Some one had told them about me.

I was back in the camp, and there I learned that Bagler and his gang had returned during the night, after I fled into the swamp. They were prisoners. The caves were full of prisoners.

There was a row of dead men—eight of them—stretched out on the ground, under blankets. I wondered if Doc and Georgie were among them. But I asked no questions. I was busy eating, and drinking coffee.

The captain of the Troopers and seven or eight of his men were in the swamp, working in the light of torches to recover the body of Luther Sanders. I had indicated to them the spot at which it went down.

After I had finished eating, some of the Troopers got sociable and friendly with me. I had had an idea that I would have a lot of explaining to do to prove that I was not a crook and a member of the gang, but they seemed to know all about me and how I came there.

They congratulated me on the fortune that would come into my pocket when the body of Sanders was recovered. All I had to do, they said, was to claim the reward.

The ten thousand dollars would come from various sources, five thousand from an insurance company that lost a lot through one of Sanders's bank robberies.

I had been in a kind of a daze, but I now began to take more of an interest in things. I was on the threshold of riches. My booming days were over; I could start in now and educate myself—I could go into some kind of business. That is, if they found the body.

"Maybe it's clean gone," I said; "sunk so deep in the mud they'll never get it."

"Oh, I guess not."

Some of the Troopers were busy among the prisoners, fixing up their wounds. I was told that only one Trooper had been hit—wounded in the shoulder.

Bagler and his gang had robbed a bank sixty miles away from the camp. It was a certainty that the camp had been established so that various gangs could be sent out for just such raids.

There were all kinds of rich banks within a radius of a hundred miles. The crooks had another station ten miles away from this camp, a place where they kept automobiles.

"Say," I asked, "how'd you fellows know about me?"

"Doc told the captain," I was informed. "He and a little fellow he calls Georgie escaped from the camp during the excitement of your fight with Sanders.

"They made it through the woods. Got to our station about noon to-day—and spilled the works. They're in jail now, on the skids for the prison they ran away from."

"But they won't be there long," another Trooper volunteered. "The information they gave worth a couple of pardons."

"What was Doc in for?" I inquired.

"Killed a guy that busted up his home."

Doc and Georgie had told the police what they knew about me and how I had become entangled with the gang.

There was a flicker of torches in the woods. The captain and his men were coming back from the swamp. They carried two burdens, one the body of Flobert, about which I had told them. I knew what the other was, but I didn't look.

"Well, Willie," the captain said. "Under that blanket there is your check for ten thousand dollars."

I shivered.

"My name isn't Willie," I said. "That's a nickname these crooks fastened on me because I'm a kind of a tramp. My name is Bill Hazen—but nobody ever calls me Willie."

The captain laughed.

"All right, Bill," he rejoined. "You did a good job of it."

"But I'll never forget his face," I said. "I—I wish I'd never seen it."

"Now don't let that worry you, Bill," the captain urged. "The thing you did was a mighty fine act, for the world at large. That fellow's vanity was getting the best of him.

"His newspaper notoriety turned his head—that and the dope. He became a kind of a lunatic. For instance, look at this latest stunt of his—bringing men out of prison and gathering them here. He got so he had to kill some one every once in awhile.

"I don't think his men understood him thoroughly—not even Bagler. They looked on him only as a bandit who always won, and were glad to join him. But success goes to a crook's head, you know. He tried to make himself handsome.

"He thought he'd be a Napoleon in the underworld—but he met the Duke of Wellington, alias Bill Hazen, and his killing days are over."

I did not laugh at that joke, nor have I ever laughed since while thinking of Luther Sanders.

THE END





"The diamond!" exclaimed Perivale, and—

MR. ECKS

By J. S. Fletcher

WHEN A DEALER IN DIAMONDS IS FOUND PIERCED, AS BY A RAPIER, THE
MAGNET OF MYSTERY DRAWS TOGETHER A STRANGE ASSORTMENT

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

TO transact the sale of an extremely valuable diamond, M. Auberge, of Paris, representing a jewelry syndicate, had an appointment with Mr. Marcus Hartmore, of London, at Folkestone, an English town on the Channel coast. M. Auberge was known to have left his hotel at night on a mysterious engagement, before meeting Hartmore, and the following morning he was found dead on the Leas, run through the back by a rapier, never having returned to the hotel. Police Sergeant Daniel Perivale is in charge of the case, and all he can learn is that Mrs. Volstroem, a Folkestone modiste, spent a few hours with M. Auberge at Boulogne, where he showed her the dia-

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN HE ARRIVED



DETECTIVE SERGEANT DANIEL PERIVALE sat down again, giving M. Delardier, the Frenchman, a look that was intended to inspire complete confidence.

"Yes, *monsieur*?" he said quietly. "You suspect Hartmore?"

Delardier spread his hands abroad with

a gesture that seemed to indicate something very like cynical contempt.

"Who else, *monsieur*?" he replied. "Put it to yourself, this matter! Who, outside ourselves—I and my colleagues—and Auberge, knew of the existence of this diamond, or, at any rate, where it was, but Hartmore?"

"Suppose we grant that?" said Perivale. He had no mind, at present, to take Delardier into his confidence about the episode of the Hotel Crystal. "Let us agree that

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 12



— all stared at the thing in the inspector's palm

Hartmore was the only person, other than yourselves and Auberge, who knew. What do you argue, *monsieur*?"

"This! Auberge, according to you—I do not know how you got your information on that point, but I conclude that it is accurate—Auberge, you say, had an appointment with some person in this town, to be kept after his arrival from Boulogne. That appointment was not at this hotel.

"He comes to this hotel, he books his room, he goes up to it, he comes down again, he goes out—not a word to anybody as to whether Mr. Hartmore has arrived—no! Who is it he is going to meet—somewhere here in Folkestone? *Monsieur*—the answer is obvious! He is going to meet Hartmore!"

"Why should he meet Hartmore in the town, when, by letter, they had already arranged to meet at this hotel?" asked Perivale.

Again Delardier spread out his hands.

"How should I know that?" he exclaimed almost testily. "It is all—how do you call it? All of a piece! Hartmore only can say! Probably—at his suggestion. I have

made some inquiries myself, *monsieur*, since my arrival to-night. Hartmore did not come into this hotel until nearly eleven o'clock—between a quarter to eleven and the hour. Where was he until then? You see, I am familiar with this route—I travel a good deal between Paris and London, generally by Folkestone and Boulogne.

"There is no train, *monsieur*, which would bring Hartmore from Victoria to this town just before eleven o'clock. He had been here some time—for what purpose but to meet Auberge in the town? No doubt Auberge had an appointment with some person when he hurried out of this hotel just after nine o'clock on Monday evening—yes, that person was Hartmore!"

Perivale was thinking of what Mrs. Volstroem had told him. There was no doubt that Auberge had an appointment with somebody in the town; it was possible that it might have been with Hartmore. And he began to wonder if Hartmore's original intention had been to come to the Royal Pavilion, or if he had only come there at eleven o'clock after—but he scarcely liked to make a further supposition.

mond in the presence of one Mr. Ecks; that this unknown Mr. Ecks spent the same night in Folkestone that M. Auberge did, and he disappeared next morning; that the diamond cannot be found; that five sheets of ciphers were discovered in M. Auberge's deposit box, and that the jewelry syndicate, composed of Spring, Budini, and Delardier, have interviewed Perivale, the last of whom, in the absence of the others, confides that he suspects Hartmore.

Delardier, however, was not so diffident. He suddenly broke in on the detective's silence by bending across the table and speaking in a low, concentrated whisper:

"*Monsieur*, I tell you plainly what I think!" he said. "I think Auberge met Hartmore in the town! I think Hartmore lured Auberge to that place where Auberge was next morning found murdered, and there he ran him through the heart! Then he took the diamond and came to this hotel and asked for Auberge—and that, *monsieur*, was what you English call bluff—a piece of consummate bluff, *monsieur*—all done to direct suspicion from himself!"

"It is a serious charge!" said Perivale.

"It is a serious crime!" exclaimed Delardier. "But—unfortunately—it is not yet a charge; it is a suspicion. Still—it is my belief! I advise you, *monsieur*, to find out more about this man. Investigate him!"

With this final admonition, Delardier rose, and bidding the detective an abrupt good night, retired. Perivale sat for awhile ruminating on what he had heard. That there might be something in Delardier's theory he recognized clearly. There were elements of suspicion about Hartmore's relation to the case which could not be neglected.

It was a significant fact that when Auberge arrived at the Royal Pavilion Hotel he did not ask if Hartmore had arrived there. Did that not seem to argue that he was to meet Hartmore at some other place in Folkestone? Hartmore had declared that they were to meet at the Royal Pavilion, but that might not be true—it might be that Hartmore, as Delardier had suggested, had only come to the Royal Pavilion as an afterthought. Certainly he must make more inquiry about Hartmore.

And then, there was Ecks! Why did Ecks, who certainly came across from Boulogne on the same boat which brought Auberge and Mrs. Volstroem, not present himself at the hotel until more than two hours after the arrival of the boat? Where was he between nine o'clock and eleven o'clock?

Why did Ecks, whoever he was, make tracks for Dover so early in the morning of Tuesday? There were highly suspicious facts attaching to Ecks. Ecks had seen

Auberge exhibit the diamond to Mrs. Volstroem at the Hotel Crystal, across there at Boulogne. Ecks had been given a room at the Royal Pavilion, close to that assigned to Auberge, and as Auberge had left his key in his door, Ecks could easily obtain access to Auberge's apartment.

Oh, yes! But Ecks had made good his escape! In Perivale's opinion, Ecks had been back in France, by way of Dover and Calais, early on Tuesday afternoon—he had had a fine start, if indeed he was the real culprit. And by that time he might be Lord knew where—Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, or, more likely, safe hidden in some obscure retreat in Paris.

Hartmore, however, was there, and Perivale realized that he had to know more about him. And after a little more thinking, he took a room at the hotel, and went to bed, and was up early next morning and downstairs by eight o'clock. Early as it was, he saw Miss Adelaide Shepperson in the office, and made up to her.

"I stayed here last night," he said, seeing her look of surprise at his presence. "You'd disappeared when I got a room. I stayed for two or three reasons—one was that I wanted to ask you a question or two early this morning. Just let your mind go back to Monday evening!"

Miss Shepperson gave an illuminating glance.

"It hadn't had much chance of being anywhere else, since Tuesday morning, Mr. Perivale!" she replied dryly. "Has yours?"

"Well—then you can answer!" said Perivale. "Now, be sure! Are you dead certain that when Auberge came here on Monday evening he didn't ask for Hartmore?"

"He never mentioned Hartmore! Never asked if Hartmore was here, or was expected, or anything!"

"But when Hartmore arrived, he asked for Auberge?"

"At once! Showed great surprise, too, to hear that Auberge was out!"

"Very well! Now then—what luggage had Hartmore when he got here?"

"Nothing but a very small suit case. You could scarcely call it that—an *attaché* case."

"Which, of course, is in his room now.

Now look here! I may want you to give me the opportunity of taking a look at that room. You understand! Can it be done?"

"Done easily enough, if he's out," said Miss Shepperson.

"I'll see about that," replied Perivale. "Very well—all this is between you and me! You understand?"

"Oh, I understand!" answered Miss Shepperson. "I was not born yesterday, Mr. Perivale!"

"Not long before, though, I think!" responded Perivale gallantly. "You look very juvenile this morning!"

"Do I?" said Miss Shepperson.

"And more charming than ever—which is saying a lot!" added Perivale.

"Thank you!" replied Miss Shepperson. "Hadn't you better go and have your breakfast?"

Perivale laughed, and went. There were not many people in the coffee room, but one of them was Hartmore. Perivale joined him, with a word of reason for his presence.

"Seen our French friends—or, I should say, our friends from Paris—this morning?" he asked.

"I haven't," replied Hartmore. "I don't know that I want to. I've told them all I know, and I don't see that I can do more. I'm off to town by the eleven o'clock."

He spoke with the air of a man who has had enough of a subject, and for the moment Perivale said nothing. But after ordering his breakfast, he turned to his companion.

"I'm afraid you can't do that, Mr. Hartmore!" he said. "I told you, you'll remember, that you'd have to stop here a bit!"

Hartmore looked up from his plate, distinct dislike of the detective's last remark in his expression.

"Why must I stop here?" he asked. "I've already been here longer than I'd intended!"

"You've forgotten, Mr. Hartmore," replied Perivale. "There's the little matter of the inquest on Auberge. That's fixed for eleven o'clock this morning. Your evidence will be necessary—you can identify Auberge."

Hartmore showed his impatience.

"Very annoying!" he muttered. "I particularly want to get back to my business. As to identifying Auberge, these men from Paris can do that. They knew him much more intimately than I did!"

"Maybe!" asserted Perivale. "All the same, you'll be wanted there. The coroner will want to hear your account of things. I don't know if he'll get as far as that today, but, of course, he will want, eventually, to know all you can tell."

"Where's the coroner's court?" demanded Hartmore.

Perivale gave him the information he asked for, and presently Hartmore went off, grumbling.

And Perivale, making haste to finish his breakfast went off, too, on his own business which was first, to set a man to shadow Hartmore wherever he went, and second, to make a pilgrimage to the railway station, where, after some inquiry, he hit upon the ticket collector who had been on duty on Monday evening. This man was not on duty that morning, however, nor until late in the afternoon, and Perivale went to work with him.

"I want you," he said, after some preliminary explanation, "to be in the coroner's court—you know where it is—before eleven o'clock this morning, when the inquest on that Frenchman, Auberge, who was murdered on Monday night, near the Leas, is to be opened. You'll see me there, and I shall have sitting next to me a man"—here he gave the ticket collector a brief description of Hartmore—"at whom I want you to take a very careful look."

"I want you to try to recollect if you saw him arrive at the Central Station on Monday evening, and if so, by what train. The time is most important—don't make any mistake about it. Look at him well, and see what you can recollect. I'll see you when the inquest is over—or, rather, adjourned. I don't think there'll be more than merely formal proceedings this morning."

The ticket collector, interested at being called upon to figure in such an intriguing mystery, promised to do his best and recollect his hardest, and at eleven o'clock,

Perivale, seated in the coroner's court, with Hartmore at his side, saw him staring hard at the London diamond merchant.

The next moment, catching the detective's eye, he first nodded, then winked, and made a slight motion of his head toward the door. Perivale took it to mean that he had something to tell, once they got outside. And when the proceedings, which, as Perivale had expected, were purely informal, and merely for purposes of identification, were over, and the coroner had adjourned the inquest for ten days, he made haste to meet his man.

"Well?" he asked, when they had gone aside to a quiet place. "You saw the man I indicated to you?"

"I did, Mr. Perivale!" assented the ticket collector. "And I remembered him well enough, sir. He arrived at the Central at six thirty Monday evening. That's the five o'clock from Charing Cross."

CHAPTER XIV

ONE OF THOSE SWORD-STICKS

YOU'RE certain of what you say?"

"Dead certain, sir. There weren't many passengers got off. Perhaps a dozen, all told. This gentleman came out of a first-class smoking compartment, right opposite me, where I stood at the gate. I noticed him for a very particular reason, Mr. Perivale. When I'm not pressed for time, I'm a noticing sort of person—it's a habit I've got into."

"What was the particular reason?"

"Why, I noticed that he carried a very fine walking stick, what anybody would call a real handsome stick! It was some sort of a cane, what sort I didn't know at first, with silver mountings about the handle. I took stock of it, and when he came up to me to deliver his ticket, he had to search his pockets, and he leaned the cane against the barrier, so I saw it closer. And I saw, then, what it was!"

"What?" asked Perivale.

"One of those sword-sticks!" answered the ticket collector. "A sort of first rate article, too. I know a bit about that sort of

thing—I've a brother-in-law in Dover who keeps a stick and umbrella shop."

"Had he any luggage, this man, when he arrived?" asked Perivale.

"Only a small case, sir, which he carried himself."

"Do you know where he went? Did he drive off, or go on foot?"

"As far as I know, on foot, sir. But I paid no further attention to him after he'd passed me."

"And you're absolutely certain that that's the man, and that he reached Folkestone at six thirty?"

"As dead certain, Mr. Perivale, as that I see you! No doubt at all, sir!"

Perivale went off, asking himself one more question.

Where was Hartmore between half past six and eleven o'clock on the evening of Monday, October 23?

The more Perivale considered that question the more suspicious he became in regard to Hartmore. He had seen that Delardier was a shrewd man; possibly, Delardier had hit the right nail on the head in fixing on Hartmore as the guilty person. And leaving the coroner's court he turned in the direction of the Royal Pavilion Hotel, bent on making an inspection of Hartmore's room. On his way he caught sight of Hartmore.

Hartmore was looking into the window of a jeweler's shop; near him, but on the opposite side of the street, was the man, a fellow-detective of Perivale, who had been intrusted with the task of keeping an eye on him. And Perivale, presently seeing Hartmore walk into the shop, and knowing he was safe for a time, sped on to the hotel, and within a few minutes, through the agency of Miss Shepperson, was in Hartmore's room.

There was not much to see in that room. Indeed, there was nothing, outside the usual furnishings, beyond a small brown leather attaché case which stood on a corner of the dressing table. For the moment Perivale paid no attention to that; what he was looking for was the noticeably handsome stick or cane of which the ticket collector had spoken.

But the stick was not there. It was not

in any corner, nor in the wardrobe, nor on the mantelpiece—nor was it hidden under the mattress of the bed. Clearly Hartmore had not brought his stick to the hotel, or, at any rate, to his room.

Perivale turned to the attaché case. It was locked, but to open it was child's play to him. A bit of twisted steel which he produced from his pocket did that trick.

And, as he had expected, there was nothing worth his time or trouble. A suit of pyjamas, some socks, collars, handkerchiefs, toilet articles—that was all. Not a paper of any description. He made the case secure again with his bit of steel, and went downstairs, to find Miss Shepperson.

"More demands on your memory!" he said, leaning over the desk to her. "Go back to Monday night again. Had Hartmore anything beyond that small case with him when he booked his room? Be sure!"

"Nothing!" replied Miss Shepperson. "Absolutely nothing!"

"No umbrella?"

"No!"

"Now, are you sure he hadn't a stick—a walking stick?"

"I'm absolutely certain, Mr. Perivale, that he'd nothing but what I say! He'd just that case. He laid it down there—precisely there, where my finger is—while he signed the register. He'd no stick!"

"Good girl!" murmured Perivale approvingly. "You're a treasure—I love precision and accuracy in a woman. Your positiveness is so refreshing to me that that—"

"Well, what?" demanded Miss Shepperson archly.

"That I should like to see more of you!" declared Perivale boldly. "Just that!"

"You can see me, Mr. Perivale, at any time you like between nine o'clock in the morning and two in the afternoon, and again between six and some uncertain hours of the evening!" retorted Miss Shepperson. "And all for nothing, too! You've only got to come to this desk and you'll see me, behind it!"

"I should prefer to see you—elsewhere," said Perivale with meaning. "There must be times when you have what is vulgarly called a day off? Eh?"

"Well—there are!" admitted Miss Shepperson. "One can't always be working, can one?"

"When is the next occasion?" asked Perivale, disregarding the last observation. "The very next?"

Miss Shepperson gave him a shy glance.

"Oh, well!" she replied demurely. "If you really must know, Sunday after next!"

"Consider me your slave for that day!" exclaimed Perivale. "Meet me outside here at eleven o'clock in the morning and I'll take you for the most delightful joy-ride you ever had in your life, and look after you like a grandfather! Is it a bargain?"

"I don't think I'd like to be treated like a granddaughter!" said Miss Shepperson, smiling still more demurely. "But I'll come! Thank you!"

"Don't!" expostulated Perivale. "The gratitude is mine! I'm a lonely man—and I'm cursed with a sentimental temperament. Sometimes, when I read love stories at night, to take my mind off my work, I shed tears—fact!"

"You're a queer mixture!" said Miss Shepperson. "Sentimental one side of you—and I should say ruthless the other. By the bye, that French gentleman was asking for you just now—M. Delardier. He's in the smoking room."

CHAPTER XV

BAD DEEDS ARE RETURNED



PERIVALE went off without another word. He found Delardier in the same corner in which they had conversed the night before; Spring and Budini were with him. Before them lay a newspaper at which all three were gazing. As the detective approached, Delardier lifted a somewhat vexed countenance.

"There is something here that we do not like!" he exclaimed, when Perivale went up. "It must, we suppose, have come from you or from your associates of the police. There are things there, particulars, which we did not wish divulged. We should have been consulted!"

He handed Perivale the newspaper as he spoke, and the detective, glancing at the

indicated part, saw a column headed in big type:

MYSTERY OF A DIAMOND

Strange Revelations About the Folkestone Murder

The Diamond? Where is It?

Very much to his amazement, Perivale found that in the paragraphs heralded by this there was a full account of the story of the missing stone—of its having been intrusted by a syndicate in Paris to M. Auberge for disposal, of Auberge's bringing it to Folkestone to show to Mr. Marcus Hartmore—referred to as "a gentleman of the highest reputation and probity"—and of its mysterious disappearance after or through the murder of the Parisian diamond merchant. Obviously, the article was inspired. But—by whom?

"None of my work, *monsieur!*" said Perivale, handing back the paper. "Nor, I'll swear, of any of my associates! That has not been got from the police. We've taken particular pains to keep all mention of the diamond secret so far. It could have been mentioned at the opening of the inquest this morning, but it was never referred to."

"Who has given this information to the press then?" demanded Delardier.

"Can't say!" replied Perivale. "Haven't the ghost of a notion! Somebody who knows a good deal, anyhow!"

"It is not what we wish—" began Delardier.

"But it would have had to come out," broke in Perivale. "You couldn't keep such a material fact back long. It would all have come out at the adjourned inquest. What's the present theory? What's your own theory? That Auberge was murdered for the diamond, of course!"

"We do not mind it being known that Auberge was murdered for a diamond!" grumbled Delardier. "We do not like it to be noised abroad that it was for our diamond! I think some of your people have been got at by the newspaper reporters. Your police are not infallible!"

Perivale made no reply to that. Presently he left the hotel, and after thinking

a little bent his steps to the office of the local newspaper which Delardier had placed in his hands. He knew the editor-reporter there, and at once plumped him with a direct question:

"Who wrote that stuff about the missing diamond in your issue of this morning?" he asked. "You?"

"I did! What's the matter with it? Isn't it correct?"

"Correct enough—so far as I know! But who gave you the information?"

"That man staying at the Royal Pavilion—Mr. Hartmore. Diamond merchant himself, so he told me."

"Did you go to him?" inquired Perivale.

"Go to him? No—he came here yesterday. Said he'd give me some good copy. He told me all there is in the article. It is good copy! Why wasn't something mentioned at the opening of the inquest this morning?"

"Police reasons. Look here! I know you supply stuff to the London press agencies. Have you sent this off there, as well as used it yourself?"

"Sure? It 'll be in the London evening papers to-night, and the morning dailies to-morrow. Why not?"

Perivale gave no answer to that question. He was wondering what object Hartmore had in disseminating this news about the diamond; he had even told the writer of the article what it was supposed to be worth. That Hartmore had had some purpose in this it was impossible to doubt—but what purpose? Perivale put that question to the inspector when he got back to the police station. But the inspector shook his head.

"Hartmore's whole conduct—as you've set it out to me—is a puzzle!" he said. "I'm beginning to feel a bit suspicious about him. Yet—he seems a perfectly respectable sort of man, eh?"

"Quite!" agreed Perivale. "Bit furtive, though. Sort of man who gives you the impression of having something up his sleeve."

"Well, it's certainly advisable to keep an eye on him," said the inspector. "Now, these three men from Paris—the syndicate! What about them?"

"The leading figure is a sharp, suspicious Frenchman," replied Perivale. "Another is a stodgy Englishman, who says nothing. The third is an astute Italian—characteristically so! He holds his tongue and keeps his ears at their widest!"

"You think that diamond is really their property?"

"I've no reason to suppose it isn't. If it isn't, we'll soon know. That stuff in this morning's local paper will be in all the London papers within twenty-four hours, and in all the Paris papers in forty-eight. Oh, I think the diamond's theirs—they probably bought it cheap from one of these Russian refugees of high standing, as they say."

The inspector turned over a page or two of memoranda, and reflected.

"Something should be done about the man who calls himself Mr. Ecks," he said. "That's all very suspicious, Perivale! You think he made off to the Continent again?"

"Why should he hasten to Dover?" asked Perivale.

"Don't think that's conclusive," said the inspector. "He could get from Dover to London! He may have slipped over to Dover so as to avoid being seen in Folkestone that morning."

"Yes," agreed Perivale. "But—when Ecks was at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne he had two very good suit cases with him. Well, he didn't bring those suit cases to the Royal Pavilion Hotel! He brought nothing in the way of luggage."

"Well?"

"Well—I think he left his suit cases at the Maritime Station at Boulogne! I think that—"

At that moment a policeman put his head into the room.

"Man outside would like a word with you, sir," he said, addressing the inspector. "Name of Rosenbaum. This murder business, he says—just a word."

"Bring him straight in!" said the inspector.

"Well, sir?" he said, as a young Jew sidled into the room and closed the door behind him with particular care. "What can I do for you?"

The visitor, having taken stock of his

company, dropped on the edge of a chair and became confidential.

"Mister!" he said, eying the inspector. "My name's Isidore Rosenbaum, and I may as well tell you that I was once clerk to Mr. Marcus Hartmore, and that I've got my knife into him 'cause he done the dirty on me—proper! All the same, mister, what I'm going to tell you is truth—solid truth!"

"You see, I've read all there is in the papers about this here murder of the Frenchie, and having a bit of business myself this way, I thought I'd drop in and enlighten you! Now, mister, is it a fact that the Frenchman was done in by a stab from behind—run through the heart, mister?"

"The doctors agree that it was so, Mr. Rosenbaum," replied the inspector.

"Well, gents, of course, I've read that Hartmore is mixed up in this affair. And I'd have you know that Hartmore possesses and usually carries an uncommonly fine sword-stick! It's a beauty—the sword's a rapier of the finest quality. I seen it many a time! Gents, it seems a funny thing that this should happen when Hartmore is about, considering his possession of that sword-stick, don't it? Of course, there is such a thing as coincidence, but if I was a police officer—"

Ten minutes later, when Mr. Isidore Rosenbaum had discharged his duty to the public and departed, the inspector turned to Perivale. His air was definite.

"There's only one thing to be done, Perivale!" he said. "You'll have to bring Hartmore here and he'll have to give us some explanation! What we want to know is—where was he and what was he doing between half past six and eleven o'clock on the night of the murder. So—see after him!"

"Yes!" agreed Perivale. "There's nothing else for it. This afternoon then."

He had an idea that Hartmore would probably try to leave Folkestone that afternoon, the inquest having been adjourned for ten days, so he went straight to the hotel where, in the coffee room, he saw Hartmore at lunch. And this time he did not join him; he had no mind to force himself upon a man whom, as far as he could then see, it was very probable he would be ob-

liged to arrest. But when Hartmore rose and left the room, Perivale followed.

CHAPTER XVI

PEEPING PETER



HARTMORE, when he left the coffee room, turned in the direction of the office, and Perivale, suspecting that he was going to ask for his bill, preparatory to leaving the hotel, took up a position in the hall from whence he could watch him. As he stood there, affecting to read a play bill which had just been placed in a frame of announcements, a plainclothes policeman entered and catching sight of him, came to his side.

"The inspector wants you," he whispered. "Wants you to go up at once—something highly important. And he said," here he lowered his voice still more, "he said—if Hartmore is still here you're to tell Hargreaves to keep a stricter watch than ever on him—the inspector's got something fresh, I think."

"All right—coming," replied Perivale. "You go." He looked out of the hall door and saw the man who had been commissioned to shadow Hartmore hanging about the road in front of the hotel. "Stop, though," he added. "There's Hargreaves out there. I don't want to be seen speaking to him. You go to him. Tell him, from me, that you're to help him. The two of you are to watch Hartmore if he leaves this hotel, as he probably will, before long.

"Follow him wherever he goes! If he goes to the station, or takes a taxicab, you're to stop him and tell him he's wanted at the police headquarters. And mind this—if he makes any objection, you're to tell him plainly he's got to go there. Understand?"

"Perfectly!" said the plainclothes man. "I'll see to it!"

He went off toward the man outside. Presently Perivale saw them in conversation across the road. And at that, paying no further attention to Hartmore, he hastened to the police station and into the inspector's presence.

The inspector was not alone. With him,

perched on a chair in the corner of the room, was a man who was known to Perivale well enough as one of the curiosities of the town—a queer, eccentric, nondescript character who from his strange habits had earned the soubriquet of Peeping Peter.

His general appearance was that of a man who makes his bed anywhere and eschews soap and water as long as possible, his clothes were rags and his hair and beard long foreign to comb or scissors. Yet derelict though he looked, there was a certain sharpness in his unwashed face and a distinctive brightness in his shrewd eyes which betokened a more than average intelligence, and Perivale, who knew his reputation, was not surprised to see him there. Peeping Peter, he realized at once, had brought information in company with his rags and with the scent of rum which hung about his disreputable figure.

Perivale's rapid glance passed from Peeping Peter to something that lay across the inspector's desk. That something was a long, thin parcel, done up loosely in brown paper and a bit of old sacking. And as Perivale advanced into the room the inspector placed his hand on this parcel, with a significant nod.

"Here's a discovery. Perivale!" he said. "Any idea what is in here?"

"I'm not guessing!" replied Perivale.

"Well, I don't think you'd have to guess long!" remarked the inspector. "It's that sword-stick we've heard of this morning. Here it is!"

He drew out from the folds of paper and sacking a handsome Malacca cane, silver-mounted, and of evident value, and from it a rapier which Perivale instinctively felt to be of the finest steel and of exquisite workmanship. The two men stood side by side staring at it for a moment, then Perivale nodded at Peeping Peter, who from his corner regarded them in stolid but watchful silence.

"He bring it?" he asked.

"Precisely!" replied the inspector. He balanced the rapier in his hands for a moment, then replaced it in its sheath and nodded at Peeping Peter. "Tell Detective Sergeant Perivale what you told me, Macdonald," he said.

The unkempt figure straightened itself; the bright eyes, peering out through a mass of grizzled hair, grew brighter; Peeping Peter revealed himself as something active.

"Ye'll understand that I always had a bit of taste for the sort o' work that ye're engaged on yerself, Mr. Perivale?" he said. "I argued to myself that the first action of the murderer, having slain his victim, would be to rid himself of the weapon with which he'd slain him.

"Now the exact place where this murder took place is an ideal spot for concealing anything. What more natural than that the murderer should drop his weapon into some crack, or crevice, or hole?"

He paused at that, and producing, from some recess of his tattered garments, an old-fashioned snuffbox, helped himself liberally to its contents, and, thus refreshed, continued his story:

"A-weel, I'm no' going to trouble you with a full and verbatim account o' my researches. Suffice it to say that after several days of patient and intelligent observation, I this morning discovered the weapon which lies before ye! Gentlemen, I ha' no doubt whatsoever that ye see the blade which spilt the Frenchman's blood!"

He concluded with a dramatic flourish of his hands; it was plain that he was exceedingly vain of his achievement. But Perivale's voice, heard next, was matter-of-fact enough.

"Where—exactly—was it?"

"Shoved in a crack in the rock, right opposite the place where the man was found. The crack had been closed up by forcing soil and pebbles into the opening."

The inspector nudged Perivale's elbow and drew him aside.

CHAPTER XVII

PLAY IS FORCED



SUPPOSE there's no doubt that this is the stick, or cane, the ticket collector spoke of, and that the little Jew chap told us about?" he said.

"Hartmore must have hidden it! And that's about as suspicious—but where is Hartmore?"

"He's all right!" replied Perivale. "Hargreaves and Foster are attending to him. We must have him here. What about this old chap?"

The inspector turned to Peeping Peter.

"Well, Macdonald," he said, "you'll keep all this to yourself for the present, of course! Now you'll want some reward—what about a couple of pounds?"

"Man, I wouldna' know what to do wi' so much money!" replied the informant. "Gi' me a matter o' five shillings, and I'll come again when I want more."

Perivale remained talking to the inspector for some little time after the queer old man had departed; at last, remarking that he would see what Hartmore was doing, he went out. But at the door of the police station he came to an abrupt halt. For there was Hartmore, flustered and indignant, getting out of a taxicab, in company with the two plainclothes men.

Hartmore caught sight of Perivale as he stepped from the cab, and immediately made for him. But Perivale turned sharply on his heel and hastened back to the inspector's room.

"Put that sword-stick out of sight, quick!" he exclaimed. "There's Hargreaves and Foster here and they've brought Hartmore with them! What line are you going to take with him?"

"Explanation as to his movements on Monday night," replied the inspector. "We'll see what comes of that. If—"

The two plainclothes men appeared at the door ushering in their captive. One of them carried Hartmore's attaché case; the other introduced its owner as formally as if he had been making a business introduction.

"Mr. Hartmore to speak with you, sir," he announced.

"Come in, Mr. Hartmore; take a seat," said the inspector. "I was wanting to see you—"

Hartmore looked angrily from the inspector to Perivale.

"I want to know why I am brought here!" he exclaimed. "What right had these men of yours—"

"I wouldn't take that tone if I were you, Mr. Hartmore," interrupted the inspector.

"A little conversation with me will do you no harm. All right!" he continued, nodding at the plainclothes men. "You can go."

Perivale followed Hargreaves and Foster into the corridor.

"What happened after I left the hotel?" he asked. "What did he do?"

"Came out a few minutes after you," replied Hargreaves. "Carrying his little case. He walked to the corner and got a taxicab. We got another and followed. He drove up to the general post office. He was in there some minutes, nearly ten; then he came out and went off again—this time to the station.

"So we stopped him there, on the platform, before he'd got his ticket, and told him the inspector wanted him for a talk. He refused to go—we had to tell him he'd got to go. And—in the end he came. But he didn't like it and he blustered a lot."

Hartmore was showing signs of liking it still less when Perivale reëntered the inspector's room. He was listening with frowning brow and surly looks to the inspector's purposely suave and persuading accents.

"I can't see that it can do you any harm, Mr. Hartmore, supposing you are, as you assert, an absolutely innocent factor in this affair—and please bear in mind that I never asked you whether you were innocent; you volunteered that bit of information yourself—it can't do you any harm, I say, to tell me what I'd like to know, and that is, full particulars of your movements on Monday evening last? Why not?"

Hartmore glared at Perivale.

"He knows my movements!" he said irascibly. "He's had plenty of information out of me. He knows that I arrived at the Royal Pavilion Hotel at eleven o'clock, expecting to meet Auberge, who was to be there at nine. Auberge had come and had gone out, and after waiting up awhile for him, I went to bed."

"If your appointment was at nine, why weren't you there at nine?" inquired the inspector.

"I didn't say the appointment was at nine; I said Auberge was to be there at nine," retorted Hartmore. "The boat gets

in from Boulogne a little before nine. The appointment was for that evening—no time specified."

"Where had you been until eleven o'clock?" asked the inspector.

"Coming from London!" replied Hartmore promptly.

The inspector and Perivale exchanged glances. Then the inspector spoke more peremptorily:

"Mr. Hartmore!" he said, "I'd better be perfectly plain with you. You arrived from London at the Central Station here at half past six on Monday evening. Now, I want to know where you were and what you were doing between that hour and eleven o'clock, when you presented yourself at the Royal Pavilion Hotel."

Perivale, watching Hartmore closely, saw that this took him aback. But he replied readily and with a certain boldness.

"My business!" he answered.

"You won't tell?"

"I see no reason why I should account for my movements! For all you know, I may have a dozen friends in Folkestone!"

"Very good—I hope they will come forward. But since you won't tell me that, perhaps you'll tell me this: When you arrived at the station here, you were carrying a very handsome walking cane—a noticeable one. It's no use denying that, for we know. Where is it, Mr. Hartmore?"

"That, too, is my business!" retorted Hartmore defiantly. "Entirely mine!"

The inspector reached for the parcel and drew out the sword-stick.

"Mine, too!" he said quietly. "This is it, I think! Your name's on it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

INSIDE THE PACKET



THE sight of the sword-stick Hartmore suddenly rose from his chair. He was obviously startled, and, for the first time, Perivale saw a gleam of fear come into his eyes. But just as suddenly he resumed his seat and folding his arms, scowled defiantly at the two men who were watching him so closely.

"I see what this game is!" he exclaimed.

"That man"—pointing to Perivale—"has been wheedling things out of me with a view to charging me with Auberge's murder! Well—charge me! I didn't murder Auberge!"

"Up to now, Mr. Hartmore, nobody's asked you if you did!" retorted the inspector. "All I've asked is that you should explain your movements on Monday evening last, between six thirty, the time of your arrival at Folkestone station, and eleven, the hour of your turning in at the Royal Pavilion Hotel. Simple matter that—unless you've something to conceal!"

"I may have something to conceal that's nothing to do with this affair!" said Hartmore. "I did arrive here at six thirty. I did go somewhere—where is no business of anybody's but my own and another person."

"But this," suggested the inspector, "is your stick?"

"That is my stick!" admitted Hartmore. "Not going to deny it!"

"Well," said the inspector. "We know where this stick was found! Will you tell us what you did with the stick that evening?"

"I shall tell nothing until I've had an opportunity of seeing an attorney," replied Hartmore doggedly. "As I said before, I see what you're after! You'll keep me here, of course, now you've got me!"

"I'm afraid we've no option!" said the inspector. "If you could give us a full and satisfactory account—"

"I'm not going to give any account!" interrupted Hartmore. "All I say is—at present—that if you think I murdered Auberge, or know who murdered him, or have any knowledge whatever of the actual facts of the murder, you're making the biggest mistake you ever made in your life! And—you'll find I'm right!"

"I shall have to detain you, anyway," replied the inspector, with something of a sigh. "I can't do anything else!"

"At your own risk!" said Hartmore.

The inspector made no answer to this veiled threat, and when Hartmore had been removed he turned to Perivale with a doubtful expression.

"He seems pretty confident!" he remarked.

"That may be bluff," replied Perivale. "Anyhow, there's the sword-stick! Who but Hartmore could have put it where that old Scotsman found it?"

"Well, I don't know!" said the inspector. "On his own admission, Hartmore went somewhere in the town on Monday evening. He may have lost the stick. Somebody—the actual murderer, one would suppose—may have stolen it from him. There's a certain air of confidence about him that I don't like! However, I believe he knows something—probably a lot!"

"Yes!" assented Perivale. He began to recollect what the plainclothes man had told him of Hartmore's movements after quitting the hotel. "There's an inquiry I'd like to make," he said suddenly. "I'll not be long. Do nothing further till I get back."

He left the police station and hurrying to the post office got into touch with the postmaster, and after a few words of explanation asked if he could see the book in which entries of registered letters were kept? Presently the postmaster laid it before him.

And there, in the very last entry but one, Perivale saw what he had had an idea he might see—the duplicate of a receipt issued for a registered packet addressed to Mr. Marcus Hartmore, 567, Hatton Garden, London. This, then, was why Hartmore had driven to the general post office on leaving the Royal Pavilion Hotel!

"Will that packet have gone?" he asked sharply.

"Not yet!" replied the postmaster.

"It 'll have to be opened!" said Perivale. "It probably contains a clew—anyway, I've got to know what's inside it!"

"Better fetch the inspector," advised the postmaster. "If he'll give satisfactory reasons for opening it—"

Perivale hastened back, came back again with the inspector, the postmaster listened, nodded silently, and fetched the packet, a small, four-square box done up in a sheet of letter paper and sealed. The inspector began to open it, and Perivale stood by, expectant—laying odds about what he expected to see.

A cardboard box, bearing the address in

gilt letters of a Parisian jeweler came to light when the inclosing sheet was unfolded. Inside the box folds of tissue paper; then layers of cotton wool, and in the cotton wool something hard, tightly infolded. The inspector, his fingers shaking a little, tore aside the folds.

"The diamond!" exclaimed Perivale.

The other men stared at the thing lying in the inspector's palm; neither spoke.

"I'm getting a clear notion of this!" said Perivale, after a brief silence. "He evidently got the notion to-day, perhaps after the inquest this morning, that he was being shadowed—perhaps he found out that we were shadowing him—and that he might be stopped at the station! So he slipped in here and sent this thing off by post, to himself in London, lest, if arrested, it should be found on him. But—fancy his carrying it about him since Monday night!"

"He wouldn't," said the inspector. "He'd have it planted somewhere. Well, well!—I suppose this is the diamond?"

"We can soon settle that!" replied Perivale. "We'll go down to the hotel and show it to the syndicate! They'll know!"

The inspector put the diamond back in its box and the box in his pocket, and after transacting some formalities with the post-master accompanied Perivale to the hotel. They made straight to the reception office, where Miss Shepperson and her assistant were busy with their books and papers. A look from Perivale brought Miss Shepperson to the desk.

"Here to bother you again!" whispered Perivale. "Do you know where the three gentlemen from Paris are to be found?"

Miss Shepperson arched her eyebrows.

"Gone, Mr. Perivale!" she announced. "All three! Left!"

Perivale uttered an exclamation of genuine surprise.

"Gone!" he said. "Where? Why?"

"I don't know where, and I don't know why!" replied Miss Shepperson. "All I know is that I saw all three, after lunch, walking up and down outside the front of the hotel, talking a lot. They seemed to be—well, a bit excited: gesticulated a good deal, you know.

"And a few minutes later they all came

in, and the French gentleman, M. Delardier, came to me and said they were leaving and he wanted to settle the bills of all three, that minute. He waited here while I got the bills ready, then he paid them, and the three went out. As to where they went—perhaps the hall porter can tell you."

Perivale went to the hall and got hold of the hall porter. The hall porter, questioned, shook his head. All he knew was that the three gentlemen, none of whom had any baggage beyond small dispatch cases, easily carried, walked off together toward the corner of the hotel.

"Always taxicabs about there, you know, sir," he continued. "They may have taken one."

Perivale thought a bit.

"What time is the afternoon boat from Dover to Calais?" he inquired.

"Four o'clock, precisely, sir."

"And the corresponding train reaches Paris—what time?"

"Nine o'clock, sir."

Perivale turned to the inspector.

"They've gone off to Dover to catch that four o'clock boat!" he muttered. "But why? The last I heard of them they were determined to stop here until this affair was cleared up! What's happened to send them off in this way? Delardier told me only this morning that they were resolved on sparing no pains and no expense in recovering the diamond. Now—they turn tail! Must be some reason."

"They may not have gone to Dover," suggested the inspector. "They may have decided to shift their quarters to one of the other hotels in the town."

"No!" said Perivale. "They're off to Paris! Lord knows why! But we'll make certain! Come to the cab stand."

CHAPTER XIX

DETECTIVE FROM PARIS



HERE were several taxicabs on the stand; their drivers lounged over the wall of the harbor, gossiping. Perivale approached the nearest.

"Is there anybody here who took up three gentlemen as passengers this after-

noon, about a quarter after two o'clock?" he asked.

A man singled himself out from the others.

"Yes, sir, me, sir," he answered.

"Where did you take them?" inquired Perivale.

The man glanced from the detective's smart suit to the inspector's uniform.

"Well, sir—not far, sir!" he replied.

"They wanted to know where there was a garage in the town at which they could hire a first-rate car, sir. I ran them up to Makinson's."

"Did they tell you where they wanted to go?"

"No, sir—nothing about that."

"And you didn't hear anything at Makinson's?"

"Didn't stop, sir. I just took the three gentlemen there and left them at the entrance."

Perivale and the inspector walked away.

"Not Paris, after all!" said the inspector.

"No—but I guess I know where!" exclaimed Perivale. "London! And, as quick as they could! Why? They must have come to the conclusion that the diamond was to be heard of there. Well—but do you mind coming back to the hotel for a few minutes, inspector?"

The inspector minded nothing, and he went back with Perivale, who made straight for the hall porter's desk.

"Do you know if any of those three gentlemen from Paris had any letters this morning?" he asked. "Or if any telegrams arrived for any of them?"

"No letters or telegrams, sir," replied the hall porter. "There was a small bundle of newspapers for one of them—the French gentleman."

"French papers?"

"French stamps on it, sir."

Perivale touched the inspector's elbow.

"Come into the smoking room," he said. "I want to look round."

The smoking room, when they entered it, was deserted, save for an elderly gentleman fast asleep in an easy chair before the fire. Perivale glanced about him and then crossed over to the corner in which he had held his conference with Delardier and his

associates. There were several crumpled newspapers lying about on the padded seats, and he promptly collected them and sat down.

"Good job that I had my French well drilled into me, inspector!" he said, with a grim smile. "It's uncommonly useful in an affair of this sort. These, of course, are the newspapers Delardier got this morning, and I'm going to glance over them. For, in my opinion, it was something in these things that sent those three chaps packing!"

"Useful accomplishment, Perivale," assented the inspector. "Can't read a word of the lingo myself! Near as it is, I've never been across to France. So you think there may be something of that sort, eh?"

Perivale was rapidly skimming the contents of the various papers. He pointed a finger here and there.

"Something about the Folkestone mystery in every one of them—no more, of course, than we know ourselves!" he remarked. "Most of it's got from our own papers. Hashed up, you know, with special reference to the fact that the victim was a Parisian. But—ah, here's the sort of thing I was looking for—in the *Echo de Paris!* See?"

He put his finger on a sentence at the end of a paragraph, and translated it for his companion's benefit:

We understand that one of our most eminent detectives is leaving Paris for Folkestone at once in order to investigate the murder of M. Auberge on the spot.

"Ah!—ah!" exclaimed Perivale. "Suppose, inspector, just suppose that it wasn't convenient to those three gentlemen of the syndicate to be here when the eminent detective arrived? Eh? Lay a thousand to one that's why they cleared out! Now let's go to Makinson's garage and find out where they cleared to!"

That matter was easily settled—Delardier and his two companions had chartered a first-rate car for London. And the inspector and Perivale went back to the police station, and after another interview with Hartmore, in which they told him that they had found the diamond at the post office and that he would be charged with the

murder of Auberge, left him to consider his position.

"We'll bring him up first thing tomorrow morning," said the inspector. "There's the ordinary sitting of the magistrates at ten o'clock. Five minutes 'll do it—we shall only offer evidence of the arrest and ask for a remand. Hope we've got the right man, Perivale!"

Perivale pointed to the cardboard box which the inspector was depositing in a safe.

"How else did Hartmore get hold of that diamond?" he asked, significantly.

CHAPTER XX

WITH MRS. BLANK



PERIVALE, of course, expected no answer to that question, nor did the inspector trouble himself to give one, as some such question had been on his own lips. Hartmore's possession of the diamond was a stiff nut to crack, and at that moment neither the inspector nor Perivale could see how on earth Hartmore was going to crack it. Before night fell, however, they were to be made wiser.

Perivale, eating his solitary dinner in his rooms, got a message from the inspector bidding him go round at once. As Perivale had reached the pudding stage, he set down his spoon and prepared to go there and then. But as soon as he got out of the house his curiosity obliged him to inquire of the messenger, a young policeman, if he knew what the inspector wanted.

"Can't say exactly," replied the messenger, "but I think it's something to do with that Mr. Hartmore. He sent for the inspector half an hour ago, and the inspector, after seeing him, sent me for you."

Perivale quickened his steps. Perhaps Hartmore was in the mood to confess. He burst in upon the inspector, full of expectancy. The inspector looked up at him doubtfully.

"Hartmore," he said, before the detective could speak, "wants to tell us the truth. A few hours of meditation seems to have changed his outlook on things. The question is—will he tell us the truth?"

"We can settle that—ourselves—later,"

replied Perivale. "Of course we can test any statement he likes to make. Did he seem as if—as if he was likely to tell the truth?"

"I thought so! He doesn't want to face things. As I say, a few hours' detention has made him think differently. Well—we'd better hear what he's got to say."

He picked up writing materials, and led the way to the scene of Hartmore's temporary incarceration. Hartmore, quite comfortably lodged, sat by a table, twiddling his thumbs, and evidently thinking hard. He glanced furtively at his visitors.

"Now, Mr. Hartmore," said the inspector, "if you're still in the mind to tell us all you know about this business, we'll hear it. But I'm bound to warn you that I shall write it down and that you'll have to sign it, and that—"

"I know all that!" interrupted Hartmore testily. "You could use it against me! But you'll alter your tone, I think, when you've heard what I have to tell. And I may as well tell you, to begin with, that I'd have told it before if it hadn't been for something that—quite apart from all the rest—I must ask you to treat as private and confidential."

"What's that?" asked the inspector.

"The truth is," replied Hartmore, "there's a lady in the case! A lady now resident in this town. I don't want her name to come out. But—as things are—I've no objection to giving it to you and Perivale, in secret, and you can see her yourselves, and she'll corroborate all I say. I don't want to even speak her name—but I've no objection to writing it down."

The inspector looked at Perivale; Perivale nodded.

"Well," said the inspector, "that sounds satisfactory. But your own story first. If you don't want to mention the lady's name, call her Mrs. or Miss Blank, and give us the real name and address in writing when you've done."

He settled himself and his writing material at the table opposite Hartmore: Perivale took a seat between them.

"Go ahead!" said the inspector. "Begin wherever you like."

"I'll begin with my arrival at the Central Station here at six thirty on Monday evening," said Hartmore. "All that I've told Perivale about my appointment with Auberge, later that night, or next morning, is perfectly true: we were to meet at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, subsequent to our respective arrivals there. But I also had an appointment with my friend, Mrs. Blank, and on arriving at Folkestone I went straight to her house."

"Did you drive or walk?" asked the inspector.

"Walked," replied Hartmore. "I shall give you the exact location of the house, later, but I'd better say now that it's toward the west end of the Leas. I arrived at the house just before seven o'clock. I had dinner there, with Mrs. Blank, at seven thirty. Afterward—"

"A moment," interrupted Perivale. "Are there servants at that house?"

"Two," answered Hartmore. "Two women servants."

"Did they see you there?"

"Of course! Both of them."

"Could they speak as to when you arrived and when you left?"

"Certainly. The parlormaid admitted me, and helped me on with my coat when I went away."

"Well, after dinner?" suggested the inspector, busily writing.

"After dinner, I remained in conversation with Mrs. Blank until just about ten o'clock. I may say—as you probably have some suspicion on the matter—that this was not a love affair, or anything of that sort. As a matter of fact, it was an arranged meeting to talk over a very important and delicate family affair—Mrs. Blank is a relation of mine—but we didn't want any one to know anything about it."

"I see!" said the inspector. "Well—you've got to ten o'clock."

"Yes—I then prepared to go. I knew that Auberge would by that time have arrived at the hotel. It was a fine night, and Mrs. Blank said she would walk part of the way with me. We went out together and along the Leas. She suggested we should turn down one of the paths—that by the rocks—to the lower road.

"We went down there, and we had not gone very far, just as far as where the rocks and caves begin, in fact, when we saw a man lying across the path! My first thought was that he was drunk; then I went closer and striking a match looked at what I could see of his face. To my horror and amazement, I saw that the man was Auberge!"

Hartmore paused, in response to a signal from the inspector. For a minute or two there was silence, save for the scratching of the inspector's pen. Then the inspector spoke; his voice cold and emotionless:

"Yes? You recognized the man as Auberge?"

"As Auberge! The next instant I saw that he was dead. I felt his hand, his face—they were still palpably warm. Then I saw blood on the path. And I had an instinctive feeling that he had been murdered!"

Hartmore paused for a moment, looking from one to the other of his listeners. But he might as well have looked at any one of the four blank walls of the room for any sign he got from either the inspector or the detective—their faces were impassive.

"Murdered!" muttered the inspector, writing down the last word. "Yes?"

"I rushed back to Mrs. Blank, who had remained standing at the spot from which we had first seen the body, and told her what I had discovered. We stood listening for a moment, heard nothing—no voices, or sounds as of anybody being about. We discussed matters in whispers, but only for a few seconds. Then I remembered the diamond!"

"Of course, Auberge had been murdered for that! Now, from long experience of such things, I had a pretty good idea as to where he would carry that diamond, so I went back to his body and felt for a certain pocket in his clothing."

"Which pocket?" asked Perivale.

"The top left hand pocket in his waistcoat," replied Hartmore. "To my astonishment I felt something there—a box or packet. The pocket had a flap secured by a button. I undid the button and drew out the thing inside—a small cardboard box,

like a pill-box. I thrust it into my own pocket and hurried back to Mrs. Blank. We went up the path to the top road.

"I hastily explained the situation to her, and said that as there was no one about we had better leave the discovery of the crime to some other person—neither of us wished to be mixed up in it. She agreed, and at my wish she hurried home to her house. The understanding was that she had no knowledge of what had happened—unless it became a case of absolute necessity."

Again a signal from the inspector, again a pause while the pen traveled over the paper.

"Well?" said the inspector. "After that? Mrs. Blank went home. What did you do?"

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED!

I STOOD for a minute, thinking. Then I remembered my stick! It flashed upon me that if I were suspected—and already I saw that I might be, taking all the facts into consideration—my stick would be a very suspicious thing to have about me, for I had assured myself that Auberge had been stabbed from behind.

"So I went down the path again, and thrusting the stick into a crevice of the rocks, filled up the hole with soil. And then—well, I went off to the hotel. I got there just before, or about eleven o'clock. I inquired for Auberge. But Mr. Perivale there knows all the rest!"

"Not all!" replied Perivale. "What did you do with the diamond?"

"I hid it in my bedroom."

"After, no doubt, examining it?"

"No—I didn't examine it! I took a mere glance into the box—I saw it contained the diamond, packed in cotton wool, but I didn't take the diamond out. As I say, I hid it—in a safe place."

"Has it remained in that safe place?" inquired Perivale.

"Until to-day, yes! Naturally, I wasn't going to carry it about with me!"

"But its owners appeared! The syndicate—Messrs. Spring, Budini, Delardier. Why didn't you hand it over to them?"

"You see my position! How could I account for my being in possession of the diamond? They'd have accused me at once of having murdered Auberge! Besides—there was another reason."

"What reason?" asked Perivale.

Hartmore hesitated before replying.

"Well," he said at last, "I began to be a bit doubtful as to whether the syndicate had a *bona fide* claim to ownership in that stone! I suspected them! I know nothing against Spring, but I don't like his looks. I know nothing against Delardier, but I don't believe the devil himself could cheat him!"

"But I do know that in Budini I recognized a man who was concerned in some very, very shady diamond-dealing transactions at the Cape, when I myself was there some twelve years ago. He didn't call himself Budini then, though."

"Where is the diamond?" demanded Perivale. "Is it on you?"

Hartmore hesitated.

"Well, it isn't!" he said at last. "You see, I began to get an idea that you were suspecting me! That idea got stronger this morning, after you'd been pumping me at breakfast. I decided to get back to town this afternoon, and as I'd a notion that you might possibly—or probably would—stop me at the railway station, I decided to get rid of the diamond."

"In what way?" asked Perivale.

"Well," said Hartmore, after another pause, "I suppose I may as well say! I sent it off by registered post, from the general post office here, just before I went to the station."

"Addressed to—whom?"

"Myself! Addressed to myself, at my office in Hatton Garden. It's quite safe—I marked the package *Private*. My clerk will look it up when it arrives to-morrow morning—he won't open it."

"What were you going to do with it?" inquired Perivale.

"Lodge it at my bank until things were cleared up about Auberge," replied Hartmore promptly.

"You mean—until we'd found the actual murderer of Auberge?" suggested Perivale.

"Exactly! Until there was no doubt about it, and no grounds for suspecting me of it, or of complicity in it!"

"You think we can do that?"

"I think you're poor hands at your job if you can't. Somebody's guilty!"

Perivale remained silent until the inspector's pen ceased to move over the paper. Then he gave the inspector a meaning look.

"I'd like to have a word with you outside, inspector," he said. "We can return to Mr. Hartmore later. Look here!" he continued when they had reached the corridor. "Before we go further, let me run up to this Mrs. Blank's place and test the truth of what Hartmore says about her. Then we can talk to him again—eh?"

The inspector made no objection to this, and Perivale after going back to Hartmore and getting the necessary name and address from him, chartered a taxicab and went off. In half an hour he was back in the inspector's office.

"I don't think there's any doubt whatever about that!" he said. "An eminently respectable, and I should say well-to-do, middle-aged lady. She bore out everything that Hartmore told us, and I questioned the two servants as well. So—Hartmore certainly didn't murder Auberge! But now, this diamond! You have it locked up, inspector. Let me have it for a few minutes, and let us see Hartmore again."

The inspector unlocked a safe and handed the cardboard box to Perivale.

"What's your idea?" he asked patiently.

"Oh, I just want to have a look at this thing in his presence—and I may want it after that," replied Perivale. He led the way back to Hartmore, and when he and the inspector had resumed their seats, turned to Hartmore with a smile.

"Now, Mr. Hartmore!" he said. "I'm going to be confidential with you! I've got the diamond! I got it from the post office within an hour of your registering your package. Well—you say you never did more than glance at it after taking it from Auberge's pocket? Now, I want you to take a good, professional look at it. Here it is!"

He handed the diamond over to Hartmore, and Hartmore, astonished, seized and stared at it for some minutes. Suddenly he let out an exclamation of sheer amazement:

"Good God!" he said. "What's this mean? This is no diamond! It's—it's an imitation!"

CHAPTER XXII

WHEREFORE PASTE?



TMPERTURBABLE as inspector and detective had shown themselves up to then, Hartmore's exclamation startled both out of their stolidity.

The inspector, who had been preparing to write again, dropped his pen and stared from Hartmore to the diamond, and from the diamond to Perivale. And Perivale, with a sudden movement of his hand, reached for and took the thing from Hartmore's fingers.

"If this isn't a diamond," he asked sharply, "what is it?"

"Paste!" replied Hartmore with emphasis. "Just paste!"

"You're sure of that?"

"Stake my professional reputation on it! I've dealt in diamonds for twenty-five years, too!" retorted Hartmore. "If I'd only examined this sooner, or at any time since I took it from Auberge's waistcoat pocket, I'd have known it wasn't a diamond! But, as I've told you, I never have examined it until just now. I merely glanced inside the box, saw the gleam of the thing in its cotton wool wrapping, and concluded that it was the diamond. But—it isn't!"

Perivale turned the counterfeit over in his left palm, considering it from various points of view.

"I should have thought it was a diamond," he said. "Wouldn't you, inspector?"

"No knowledge of such things," replied the inspector. "Couldn't tell a diamond from a bit of glass!"

Perivale let his mind run back over the events of the day.

"Mr. Hartmore!" he said suddenly. "I saw you—this morning after you left the

coroner's court—go into a jeweler's shop here in the town. Did you show him this thing?"

"Haven't I just told you," asked Hartmore testily, "that I've never seen it myself except for a mere glance before hiding it? How could I show it to him unless I saw it? No—I went in there, to Relverson's, to look at some goods I saw in the window. If you want to know what they were—some old silver spoons. I bought them."

"Do you think Relverson's a judge of diamonds?" inquired Perivale.

"He ought to be," replied Hartmore laconically. "He's an old man, and he's sold plenty in his time!"

"Well, I'm going to Relverson's private residence, to show him this thing, and ask him what he says about it," declared Perivale, rising. "I don't doubt your word—you ought to know—but two opinions are better than one. Still"—he paused, hesitating—"what puzzles me is—why should Auberge carry this thing, if it is an imitation? Can you suggest anything?"

"He may have had an imitation made, for purposes of his own at which I can't guess," replied Hartmore. "This may be a close replica of the real diamond. They're clever at making these things in Paris."

"Well—but we'll hear Relverson's opinion," said Perivale. "What do you say, inspector?"

"Seems the right thing to do," replied the inspector. "Puzzling—very!"

"What about me?" asked Hartmore. "Now that you've heard what I have to tell—and I expect you've seen Mrs. Blank—you're surely not going to keep me here?"

The inspector looked at Perivale; they drew aside into a corner and whispered for a minute or two.

"Well, Mr. Hartmore," said the inspector at last, "it's quite true that we've made inquiry of Mrs. Blank, and she certainly bears out your story about discovering Auberge's dead body. Of course, you know, that'll all have to come out, later!"

"We'll try to keep Mrs. Blank out of it, if we can, but it may be necessary to call her to substantiate your statement. You both acted very foolishly—you should

have come to us at once, and you shouldn't have hidden that stick, nor kept things to yourself.

"However, you can go now if you'll promise me not to leave the town until we've done with you. You'll go back to the hotel, I suppose—and just bear in mind that I shall be obliged to keep an eye on you. I may as well tell you that we'd had you watched before, and we shall have you under observation again, until this matter's cleared up."

"I'll do what I can to clear it up," said Hartmore. "But I've been wondering—since I saw that thing—if Auberge really brought the actual diamond with him? And how are you going to find out if he did?"

Neither Perivale nor the inspector volunteered any reply to that question. Hartmore was allowed to go away, and Perivale, the imitation in his pocket, went off to the private house of Mr. Samuel Relverson, the jeweler. There, after apologizing for so late a call, he went straight to business.

"I want you, knowing your great experience in these matters, Mr. Relverson, to be good enough to tell me what this is," he said, laying the supposed diamond before the old man. "You, I am sure, will know!"

Mr. Relverson showed no surprise and made no comment. He picked up the proffered object, weighed it speculatively in his fingers, fitted a glass to his eye, examined it, laid it down and sniffed.

"Paste!" he said oracularly. "Just paste! Probably a close imitation of what, I should say, would be an unusually fine stone."

"They make this sort of thing, then?" inquired Perivale.

"In quantities! Many ladies who possess very valuable diamonds have counterfeits of them, in paste. The real things," observed the old jeweler with a smile, "are probably kept in the strong room of the lady's bank."

"Where does this manufacture go on?" asked Perivale.

Mr. Relverson shrugged his shoulders.

"They are very clever in Paris," he answered. "I should say this is Parisian work."

"Is it what you call an artificial diamond?"

"Oh, dear me, no! It's paste—a very different thing. An artificial diamond, in luster, density, hardness, and crystalline form is practically identical with the natural stone. But—no artificial diamond of this size, nor anything like this size, has ever been produced, and probably never will be—all the artificial diamonds I have ever seen are microscopically small. No—this is what I say—just paste!"

Perivale thanked the old jeweler, and pocketing the imitation went out—to wonder what it all meant. If Auberge had been murdered by somebody who wanted to get possession of the real diamond, and if this thing was being carried by Auberge as the real diamond, why had the murderer and would-be thief left it in his pocket?

Was it possible—for Hartmore had said that the body was still warm when he discovered it—that the murderer had been interrupted in robbing the dead man by the arrival of Hartmore and Mrs. Blank on the scene—and that he was in hiding close by when Hartmore withdrew the cardboard box from Auberge's pocket?

That might be. But even then—why did Auberge carry this paste thing instead of the real diamond he had come over to exhibit to Hartmore?

CHAPTER XXIII

RETURN OF THE FRENCHMAN



EDITATING on these matters as he walked away from Mr. Relverson's house, an idea came to Perivale, and he quickened his steps and went off in the direction of Mrs. Volstroem's shop. There was a light in the upper windows, and in response to his summons he was quickly admitted to Mrs. Volstroem's presence. And, as in the case of the old jeweler, Perivale went straight to the point.

"Mrs. Volstroem," he said, "we spoke, when I was here before, of your meeting with M. Auberge at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne, and of his showing you then, after lunch, a diamond. Now please do look at this!"

He placed the imitation on the table between them, and Mrs. Volstroem uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Is that what Auberge showed you?" asked Perivale. "Look well at it!"

Mrs. Volstroem bent closer.

"I should say it is!" she answered. "From my recollection of it—yes! Anyway, it looks just like it!"

"I'm going to take you into my confidence," said Perivale. "That thing is not a diamond at all! It's paste! And—it was taken from Auberge's dead body, a few minutes after he was murdered."

Mrs. Volstroem instinctively drew back.

"Horrible!" she said faintly. "He—he was murdered for—for that?"

"That we don't know," replied Perivale. "But those are the facts. This thing—an imitation diamond—was taken from him, as I say, just after he had been struck down. It was in the top left-hand pocket of his waistcoat. Now, where did he put the thing he showed you?"

"I am sure it was in one of his waistcoat pockets," answered Mrs. Volstroem. "The one you speak of, I think."

"He put it into a box, I think you said?" asked Perivale.

"Yes—in cotton wool."

"Is that the box?" said Perivale, producing the one which he had got at the post office, now devoid of its wrappings.

"Yes—I recognize the box, clearly! And I feel sure that this—paste or not—is what M. Auberge showed me!"

"Did he tell you it was a diamond?"

Mrs. Volstroem reflected.

"I can't say that he actually said it was a diamond," she answered, after thinking a little. "We were talking about diamonds and precious stones generally. He took this box from his pocket and extracted the stone from the cotton wool inside. I think the exact words he used were: 'What do you say to a diamond like that?'"

"And you—"

"I admired it, of course; I was amazed at its size. But I am not a judge!"

"And while he was showing it to you, there were others in the room?"

"There was a man standing on the hearth, and the headwaiter came in."

"They could see what he was showing you?"

"Oh, yes—he made no attempt at concealment. He had the diamond on the palm of his left hand, and he kept turning it over."

"Was it then that he told you it had belonged to a Russian lady of high rank?"

"No—that was later, when we were alone. The man I spoke of, and the waiter had both left the room then."

"He never gave you the slightest idea that this thing was only an imitation of a real diamond?"

"Oh, no—certainly not!"

"But on the other hand he didn't say definitely that what he showed you *was* a diamond?"

"No—oh!" said Mrs. Volstroem. "But, of course, I thought it was!"

Perivale presently went away and homeward. And as he reached his own door, he muttered the conclusion he had now come to:

"Auberge never brought the real diamond from Paris!"

But, half an hour later, as he was about to tumble into bed, he got another idea—of a totally different sort, and it made him sit down on the nearest chair, drop his head in his hands and groan:

"Supposing the murderer did extract the real diamond from Auberge's pocket, and put in its place this infernal paste thing—what then?"

"That's a stiff 'un!" muttered Perivale. "It would argue that the murderer was somebody very much in the know! For as far as I can learn, the imitation so closely resembles the original that anybody like myself, no expert, couldn't tell one from the other. Well—what will morning bring?"

Morning brought M. Delardier, who walked into the police station demanding to see the detective. Perivale was in, and judged it advisable to remark that he had understood that M. Delardier and his two friends had returned to France. Delardier spread his hands and shook his head.

"France? No!" he exclaimed. "We went to London! We wished to make an inquiry, a personal inquiry, there. But my

confreres, Spring, Budini, they are now returning to Paris; they are just off by the boat to Boulogne; to prosecute more inquiries. Me—I remain here! And your news, M. Perivale?"

Perivale took the Frenchman into the inspector's room, and after a whispered consultation with its occupant, told Delardier everything that had happened in relation to Hartmore, and produced the imitation diamond. Delardier, almost dancing with excitement, seized on this.

"This is not what I handed to Auberge in presence of my two colleagues!" he shouted.

"Paste? Yes, of course, it is paste! It resembles our diamond in appearance, measurement, too, perhaps, but then—ah, I do not believe one word of your Hartmore! He has stolen the diamond and put this thing in its place!"

"Why should Hartmore bother to post an imitation thing to himself, in London?" asked the inspector. "Personally, I believe that thing is what Hartmore took from Auberge's pocket!"

"Let me ask you a very important question, M. Delardier," said Perivale. "Had Auberge ever had the real diamond in his possession for any time before you finally gave it to him on the Sunday morning on which he left Paris? Think!"

Delardier thought—and his face fell.

"He had!" he exclaimed. "Yes—he had it in his possession for three days, about a fortnight before I finally gave it to him."

"Is a term of three days long enough in which to get an imitation made?" asked Perivale. "Because if it is, I suggest that Auberge did get one made—and that you now hold it in your hand! *Monsieur*—do you think the real diamond has ever left Paris?"

Before Delardier could realize the significance of this question, the door opened and a policeman brought in a card which the inspector presently handed to Perivale. And Perivale, after glancing at it, looked at Delardier.

"Here is assistance from your own people, *monsieur!*" he said quietly. "One of your famous detective officers!"



“Great God! It’s him!”

JEROBOAM BEAUCHAMP—HIS CONFESSION

Edited by Zeta Rothschild

READ THIS, PONDER UPON IT, AND SO SURE AS YOU LIVE
YOU WILL BE BENEFITED BY YOUR OWN REFLECTIONS

A Story of Fact



WHEN Jeroboam Beauchamp was eighteen years old, he decided to kill the man who had seduced Miss Anne Cooke and then deserted her.

That he was not related to her, nor had ever met either of the parties, did not matter. He saw himself going forth to revenge an unhappy woman, a crusader against the evil in mankind, as portrayed by the licentious Colonel Sharp. There was no doubt, then or thereafter, in Jeroboam’s mind of the righteousness of his mission.

If Jeroboam had never met Anne Cooke, his intentions might have faded and he might never have had any confession to

write. But, unfortunately, the young lady retired to a small farm a few miles from Glasgow where the young student was spending his vacation.

He made it his business to call on her, and soon persuaded her of his devotion. To which the young woman replied that the hand which should receive hers would have to revenge the injury a villain had done her. She said her heart could never cease to ache till Colonel Sharp should die by her instrumentality.

“No conditions, no earthly proposition she could have made me, could have filled me with such delight,” wrote Jeroboam in his confession of the murder. “Whenever I had contemplated a marriage with her,

I had always esteemed the death of Colonel Sharp a necessary consequence. I never, for a moment could feel that I could suffer a villain to live who had been the seducer of one I pressed to my bosom as wife."

Thereupon, Jeroboam, desirous of keeping faith with his lady, went hunting for the colonel. When he found him in a near-by town, he told him he had been deputized by Miss Cooke to take his life and challenged him to a duel. But this invitation Colonel Sharp declined and succeeded in evading another meeting with the infuriated lad.

Then the two conspirators decided to lure the colonel to Miss Cooke's estate where she, with pistols given her by Jeroboam, would have the satisfaction of killing her seducer herself.

Dressed for the Job

But the wary colonel, though he began his answer to Miss Cooke's invitation to visit her by swearing only delight filled his bosom when he read it and finished by saying death alone would keep him from her, nevertheless failed to keep the appointment.

Now Miss Cooke and Beauchamp decided to get married and make the problem of killing Colonel Sharp the joint effort of their conjugal life.

I had now meditated upon Colonel Sharp's death so long—wrote Jeroboam in the death house—that I was perfectly able to make dispassionate calculations with as much calmness as I would determine an ordinary matter of business.

I did not kill Colonel Sharp through a frenzy of passion. I done it with the fullest and most mature deliberation, because the dictates of my judgment told me I ought to do it! And I still think so. Never was a murder planned with such precaution.

On Tuesday I left home for Frankfort and arrived there about half an hour in the night on Sunday night. After I had been at Mr. Scott's—the innkeeper—some little time, I walked out to see my horse fed.

After supper I was conducted to a bedroom above stairs, and took out a book, observing to Mr. Scott I believed I would read awhile.

So soon as he left me I accoutered myself for the deed I was meditating. I had provided me with an old ragged surtout coat, which I had procured long before, and which no human being could have proved was ever in my possession.

I had provided me a large butcher's knife, several months before, the point of which my wife had poisoned—which no one could have proved I had ever owned or possessed.

When traveling in Tennessee I had passed a clearing where a negro had left his old wool hat upon a stick. I took the hat, and splitting the end of the stick, left a silver dollar in place of the hat.

I put on a mask of black silk, which gave me, at five steps' distance, in the clearest moonlight, the exact appearance of a negro, so well had my wife constructed and fitted it to my face.

I put on two pairs of yarn socks, to preserve my feet in running, and to avoid my being pursued by the direction in which I might be heard running in the dark if I had worn my shoes.

Besides, in this way, my track could not possibly be identified anywhere. But I took my shoes, my coat, and my hat, and hid them down near the river where I could run and get them after the deed should be done.

Lying in Wait

I crept out of Mr. Scott's house so easily that, although the family were all up, and passing about the house, none of them heard me; neither would they have heard me if they had been in the very passage through which I had to pass.

I had found out Colonel Sharp's house long before the ten o'clock bell rang. He was not there when I first went. I expected he had gone to meet his acquaintances, the members from Green River, at the Mansion House.

I sauntered up there, and could view the rooms from a distance through the doors and windows. I did not wear my mask, lest the parole might notice me as a negro, and I would have to fight them or expose that I was a white man masked.

I saw Colonel Sharp at the Mansion House and I determined to assassinate him on his return home, so soon as he left the

tavern. But while I had walked a little way from the view of him, he disappeared from the room I had left him in, and I supposed had gone home.

I hastened to his house, but he was not there. I feared I might miss him, and meantime he would get to bed before I could see him if I went back to the tavern to hunt for him.

Wherefore I determined to watch his house till he should come home. I could now, as I lurked about around the house, see all that was going on in it, and could see what rooms were occupied and what were not, as well as if I had lived about the house.

“Come to the Light, Colonel”

But while I was viewing the back part of the house, so as to know well its situation, he entered his house and was in his chamber before I saw him. After a moment's reflection I resolved to wait till all light was extinguished about the house, and all persons in it asleep, and then called the colonel up.

When I had waited enough, as I supposed, I resolved to knock in the alley, for I knew I could easily lure Colonel Sharp quickly to me at the back door by feigning myself as Covington, as Colonel Sharp and the Covingtons were on extremely intimate terms.

And if I could only lure him back into that alley, I would have an opportunity to let him know, as he fell, by whose hand he had received the stroke. For this I wished him exceedingly to know; and I would have risked a great deal to have him know who I was.

I drew my dagger and proceeded to the door. I knocked three times, loud and quick!

Colonel Sharp said: “Who's there?”
“Covington,” I replied.

Quickly Colonel Sharp's foot was heard upon the floor. I saw under the door he approached without a light. I drew my mask from my face, and immediately Colonel Sharp opened the door I advanced into the room and with my left hand grasped his right wrist as with an iron hand.

The violence of the grasp made Colonel

Sharp spring back, and trying to disengage his wrist, he said:

“What Covington is this?”

I replied: “John A. Covington.” And about the time I said that, Mrs. Sharp, whom I had seen in the partition door as I entered the outer door, turned and disappeared.

She became alarmed, I imagine, by the little scuffle Colonel Sharp made when he sprang back to get his wrist loose from my grasp.

Seeing her disappointment I said to Colonel Sharp, in a tone as though I was greatly mortified at his not knowing me:

“And did you not know me, sure enough?”

“Not with your handkerchief about your face,” said Colonel Sharp; for the handkerchief with which I had confined my mask upon my forehead was still around my forehead. I then replied in a soft, conciliating, persuasive tone of voice:

“Come to the light, colonel, and you will know me.” And pulling him by the arm he came readily to the door.

To His Heart

I stepped with one foot back upon the first step out at the door, and still holding his wrist with my left hand, I stripped my hat and handkerchief from over my forehead and head, and looked right up in Colonel Sharp's face. He knew me the more readily by my long, bushy, curly suit of hair.

He sprang back, and exclaimed in the deepest tone of astonishment, dismay and horror and despair, I ever heard:

“Great God! It's him!”

And as he said that, he fell on his knees, after failing to jerk loose his wrist from my grasp. As he fell on his knees I let go his wrist and grasped him by the throat, and dashed him against the facing of the door.

I choked him against it to keep him from hallooing, and muttered in his face: “Die, you villain!” And as I said that I plunged the dagger to his heart.

Letting him go at the moment I stabbed him, he sprang up from his knees, and endeavored to throw his arms around my

neck, saying: "Pray, Mr. Beauchamp." But as he said that I struck him in the face with my left hand, and knocked him his full length into the room.

By this time I saw the light approaching, and dashed a little way off and put on my mask. I then came and squatted in the alley near the door, to hear if he could speak. His wife talked to him, but he could not answer her.

Before I thought they could possibly have got word to the doctor, he came running in. So soon as he entered the room he exclaimed: "Good God! Beauchamp has done this! I always expected it!"

"How Did It Happen?"

The town was now alarmed, and the people began to crowd the house very fast. I still lurked about the house, to hear what would be said; and I wished some one to see me, not in the light of a candle, so that they would take me for a negro, with my black mask on.

At length, while I was endeavoring to peep in at a window, Mrs. Sharp came right upon me from behind, and cried out to the company to run there, saying she saw the murderer.

By the time they got out of the house I was out of the lot. I stopped to listen if any one pursued me, and I saw the lot full of people running down to me.

Whereupon I dashed off again, and went and got my coat and hat and shoes, which I had hid near the river. I then went a considerable way farther down the river, and took the old hat and coat in which I had done the murder, and tying them in a bundle with a rock, sunk them in the river.

I also buried the knife near the river bank. Then dressing in my proper clothes, and putting on my shoes, I came back into the town. I passed near Colonel Sharp's house, to hear what was said, but all was whisper and silence. But I had heard, and indeed seen, that Colonel Sharp had died without speaking before I left, which was my greatest anxiety.

I then went up to my room, creeping upstairs as softly as a cat, so that I could not hear my own feet touch the floor, having slipped off my shoes at the door.

I then lit my candle, burned my mask, and washed my hands, which were dirty from burying my knife in the ground. I then laid down with a certain calculation of being arrested the next morning, so soon as Dr. Sharp should have made inquiry and found I was in town.

But such were the happy feelings that invaded me, and the perfect resignation which I felt in the will of Heaven, having accomplished my long-settled purpose, that in five minutes after I had lain down I fell fast asleep. And slept soundly till the stirring of the family waked me the next morning.

Before I was done dressing I heard Mr. Scott come stamping upstairs to my room. He opened my door, and said: "Good morning, Mr. Beauchamp." I returned the salutation with a very pleasant politeness; but Mr. Scott very abruptly said: "Don't you think some one went to Sharp's last night and killed him?"

I put on a face of great astonishment and then said: "How did it happen, sir? In a street fight?"

Mr. Scott said: "No; some stranger called Colonel Sharp to his door, and just stabbed him dead." And thereupon he turned to go out of the room. I did not like his abrupt manner.

The Flag of Victory

When Mr. Scott had again returned to his home, I began, immediately he entered the house, to ask him further questions about the murder. I saw, from his manner, very evidently he had had his suspicions revived.

Said he: "Mr. Beauchamp, what profession are you of?" I told him my profession was that of a lawyer.

"Well, sir," said he, "are you a married man?" I replied I was. "Whom did you marry, Mr. Beauchamp?" said he.

"I married Miss Anne Cooke, sir," I replied. At that his face, black as it was, turned even blacker still.

I now left Frankfort, and, on the fourth day, in the evening, near sunset, I got to my own house. I got home within fifteen minutes of the exact time I had told my wife I would get home.

She was walking down the grove, upon

the road I was to come, anxiously expecting my arrival. So soon as I saw her thus alone, I hoisted my flag of victory.

She ran to meet me; and as I alit from my horse I gave her the flag, and she fell prostrate on her face before me. She then burst into tears, and lifted her voice in gratitude to Heaven that she was revenged of all the misery a villain had brought upon her family.

Then clasping her arms about my knees, she called upon the spirits of her father, her brothers, and her sister, to bless me, and to intercede with a just Providence to protect me from all harm for the righteous deed I had done.

Then rising up in alarm, she said: "Are you safe, my husband?"

To a Hair's Breadth

I told her I was beyond the reach of all that mortals could do to me, because the villain who had injured her had fallen by my arm. "But," said I, "the avenger of blood is after me."

I then called a servant to take my horse, and we walked to a more retired place, and I briefly recounted to her all the circumstances of the glorious deed.

And I can truly say I do not believe that there ever lived upon the earth two more happy beings than we were, notwithstanding I told my wife I was confident persons were in pursuit of me; and I even calculated they would be there that very night.

But Colonel Sharp had died by my hand! This consoled us for all misfortunes, and made us perfectly regardless of danger.

Next evening, about an hour by sun, I saw four men ride up to my gate and call to me to come to the gate. I was satisfied at once they were to arrest me. But I walked out to them with all the cheerfulness imaginable, and one of them asked me if my name was Beauchamp. I said it was.

He asked me if I had not lately been in Frankfort. I told him I had just returned from there the preceding evening. They all paused. I saw they were embarrassed. I had my rifle in my hand, for I was cleaning and loading it when they rode up.

At length one of the more frank and sensible of the men said to me in a feeling manner that I was suspected of the murder of Colonel Sharp, and, as a gentleman, I was called upon and requested only, to go to Frankfort and acquit myself.

I put on a face of astonishment to find myself suspected, but promptly avowed my ready determination to go immediately to Frankfort if there was anything said there prejudicial to my reputation.

To satisfy them of my sincerity in saying I would freely do so, I sent a servant into the house to bring out my arms and deliver them to the gentlemen. Presently they asked for my dirk to examine the width.

This pleased me, for I knew it would not answer the width of the wound. They also said they had the measure of the assassin's shoe track, which was found where he ran across the garden. This very much pleased me, as I imagined at once they had got upon some other person's track.

But how I was frightened when, on measuring my shoe, it did not differ in length scarcely any from the measure the men had! They cried out in the exulting hope of having made fortunes: "Exactly! Exactly! To a hair's breadth!"

Lured by the Reward

I saw, however, it was not exactly the measure of my shoe; but still it was nearer than I could have wished it. But as they said the width and all of the proportions of the heel were preserved, I did not fear the track, but was satisfied it would be in my favor.

They also had a handkerchief, which had been found at Scott's, with them, but did not then say a word to me about it, or let me know they had it.

I was anxious to hear whether the little stain of blood from my nose on it had attracted any attention; but I deemed it prudent not to make any inquiry about it, but to listen first for what had been said about it.

Who can conceive of my consternation and horror when I heard it would be sworn it had been found at Colonel Sharp's door! And that those who had come for me were

a poor set of devils, who had been lured on by a reward! And that the Legislature had offered a reward of three thousand dollars; the trustees of the town, one thousand dollars; and Dr. Sharp and other individuals, no one knows how many thousands more.

I now began to see sad forebodings of what I had to encounter. Wholly upon circumstances fabricated have I been convicted. For never, in any age or country, do the pages of history record such a complication of prejudicial tales as were recited upon my trial.

For the handkerchief was worn out, dirty and old on which I had wiped my nose when it had been bleeding a little. I recollect to have noticed, when my wife was tying up my clothes before my trip to Frankfort, that it had still the appearance of one or two small blood stains on it.

I Plan to Get the Handkerchief

After I had got out of town I recollected that as I raised up in bed, that morning, I had thrown the clothes of the bed down over this old handkerchief, and that I had forgotten it and left it there.

I now gathered from the guard all the information the public had in relation to this handkerchief, which was simply that it had been found the morning after the murder at the very door the murder was committed.

I asked the guard to let me see it. They done so; and, behold, a corner of it was cut off, and two holes cut in the body of it, as though the assassin had held it over his dirk and stabbed through it!

I was now at a great loss to know whether to confess the handkerchief was mine, and tell where I had left it, or not. The guard were a drunken, careless set of fellows, whom I could dupe or deceive in any way.

But whether it was best to make them drunk, and leave them, or take the handkerchief from them, was a considerable question with me. But as I could leave them after I had taken the handkerchief, or even if I should fail to get it, I determined to try the experiment first.

Accordingly, at Bluster's, where we stayed all night the second night, I took the

handkerchief and burned it. I done it this way: I slept before supper. But two beds were in the room, one assigned to me, and the other to those of the guard who slept while the others watched me.

That night we had some bounce, and I managed, by a few good jokes upon the excellencies of bounce and handing it round frequently, to make the guard all feel very heavy and sleepy. After supper I asked them to let us look at the handkerchief.

It was produced, and after I had returned my fervent thanks to Heaven for the handkerchief's having been found at Colonel Sharp's door, and observing to some bystanders that that handkerchief would clear me by leading to the detection of the really guilty, the guard put it away.

I noticed who kept it. I took very particular fancy to him, and when he went to lie down I even condescended to invite him to my bed, as three had to sleep together in the guard's bed. He very gladly accepted the invitation, and when he went to bed, threw his coat, in the pocket of which was the handkerchief, upon a chair at the foot of the bed.

Before I laid down, I walked out of the room, and as I came in, passing near the chair, I took the coat and carelessly threw it on the foot of the bed. I then went to bed, but complained of being chilly, and asked for my cloak and for a better fire to be made.

I then took my handkerchief from the guard's coat pocket, and soon after got up, still complaining of being chilly. This gave me frequent occasion to stir the fire.

We Go to Munfordsville

A young gentleman by the name of Anderson was sitting leaning back against one side of the chimney piece, so that his back was toward the fire. I set a piece of wood up between him and the fire, and commenced walking the floor and conversing with him on different subjects.

Carroll, one of the guard, was sitting up with young Anderson at this time, and I managed to get him so drunk that he was half his time asleep in the chair.

At length I stepped to the fire to put on a stick of wood. I had the handkerchief in

my pantaloons' pocket. I took up the stick of wood, and, seeing Anderson was not looking at me, I threw the handkerchief into the large fire, and threw the stick upon it.

It was consumed in a moment, without Anderson's having the least idea or suspicion. For a fine piece of cotton goods, as that was, will not be smelled burning when thrown into a very hot fire.

Next morning we rode to Munfordsville, to breakfast. There the people of the town crowded the room to see me. The guard had not yet at all missed the handkerchief. There were at the tavern to see me two gentlemen of my acquaintance.

They were lamenting the misfortune that was befalling me; but I took the earliest occasion to express the willingness with which I was going forward. For, I said, the assassin's handkerchief was found, which would, I doubted not, under the divine direction, lead to the detection of the guilty, and clear me.

The Villainy of John Lowe

They asked me where the handkerchief was. I said the guard had it, and asked him to let the gentlemen see the handkerchief. Carroll, who kept it over the night, felt for it, and, behold, it was not in his pocket! He exclaimed well and said, "It's gone!"

"For God's sake," I told him, I hoped not, and asked him to examine his pockets again. He done so, and said it was certainly lost. Then I asked the others to feel in their pockets, for I said I hoped they had forgotten who of them had kept it.

I put on a very solemn face of deepest concern and begged them to let us all go back immediately to make a thorough search of the handkerchief. Then they began to hint their suspicions that I had taken it.

Whereupon I broke out into a torrent of abuse upon them and said they had suppressed the handkerchief because it was not mine and would clear me. So that if they did not go back for the handkerchief I would go no farther unless the law compelled me. But we finally agreed to send back and have search made, and we proceeded on to Frankfort.

When I got to Frankfort I found the whole country in a flame, and prejudice at its zenith against me, without the shadow of proof.

Now a man named Darby came forward and claimed that he had heard Beauchamp threaten to kill Colonel Sharp. Beauchamp denied he had ever met Darby, and the latter insisted that he had been at Beauchamp's house. Public opinion now insisted that both men were guilty, and the efforts of both were now concerned in endeavoring to pin the crime on the other, Darby to get out of the mess and Beauchamp to revenge the first lie.

Poor Darby—continues Beauchamp—became so frightened by clamor raised after him about having been at my house, that he then denied he had ever been there. But the more Darby tried to get clear of being a witness against me, the more my enemies clamored about our connection.

I come now to notice the treachery and double villainy of John F. Lowe, who was at my home the night I got home from Frankfort. Lowe was a neighbor of mine whom I had in many instances befriended. He was a constable.

His great ignorance led him to forever haunt me to instruct him in all his official duties. He was always much devoted to me, and had, once upon the trial of a warrant I was interested in, sworn a falsehood for me out of friendship.

All the World United

Soon after I was arrested I was much alarmed at hearing that my sister had been walking where she commanded a view of the road and had seen me approach my wife on my return from Frankfort, with a flying flag.

This she had passed some jest about in the hearing of Lowe, which, when I heard it, gave me great uneasiness. But not because Lowe could testify to what my sister had told him, but lest he should speak of it and get my sister to prove the fact.

My wife took great pains to prevent Lowe from divulging this matter, and he promised her solemnly nothing should ever

wring it from him while he lived; and he was then sincere.

I had Lowe summoned to the court of inquiry to prove my tranquil unsuspecting conduct the night I got home.

Besides I wished to prove by him the fact of my having wished to hire him to come to Frankfort in my stead to get some patents for my land, but that the process which was issued against me was the cause of my leaving Frankfort. All this Lowe could have sworn to with a clear conscience.

At first I had no idea about getting him to swear anything further. But soon the aspect of affairs began to blacken around me. An immense award hung over me, and an high hand of bribery was carrying on against me.

The connection of Darby and me together united all against me, and this, too, made Darby use every effort in his power to prove me guilty without him. For all the world united upon Darby and me, some saying one done it, and some that the other done it, and many that both done it.

To Prove Darby Guilty

And Darby, finding himself getting seriously into the narrows, had recourse to his usual bribery and subornation to extricate himself. He found it necessary to corroborate his own statements and to prove me guilty alone. He succeeded to bring this Lowe over to his purpose, and laid with Lowe a very apt scheme to ensnare me.

Darby then sent Lowe to my wife to tell her that Darby had been to him and offered him a bribe to swear he had heard me threaten Colonel Sharp's life.

Accordingly, Lowe came to my wife while Darby was in the neighborhood, and told her that Darby had been that day to his house, and offered him a bribe to swear he had heard me threaten to kill Colonel Sharp.

Lowe offered to go immediately before a magistrate and swear this, but he begged my wife to keep the thing a secret till she could write to me about it. And if I wanted him to swear anything in the world against Darby more than Darby really did say to him, he would gladly clear it for me.

My wife readily believed every word

Lowe said. She gave me a minute detail of all that did pass between Darby and Lowe, and added her earnest recommendation that I ought to embrace the opportunity to prove by Lowe whatever I chose against Darby.

It is needless to disguise that this occurrence gave me great satisfaction. I rejoiced to have it in my power to prove an attempt at subornation against Darby by Lowe.

I also gladly embraced the opportunity to prove Darby guilty of the murder, or, at least, to show by Lowe's testimony that Darby was the author of most of the perjuries against me, and that he was col-leagued with the reward hunters to palm the murder upon me in order to acquit himself.

I accordingly wrote out six sheets of paper containing all I wished Lowe to swear to. I glossed over ingeniously the story Lowe had told my wife and made it more completely feasible than it was in Lowe's way of telling it.

But I also added thereto many facts for Lowe to swear to against Darby which did not take place between them; making out in the whole a deep-laid scheme to palm the murder on Darby.

I had a very fortunate opportunity to do this by means of a fabrication in relation to the famous handkerchief I have spoken of. The handkerchief was burned. It could, therefore, never rise in judgment against me.

If, therefore, I could prove Darby had been seen with it since the murder it would completely fix the guilt upon him. Lowe had seen the handkerchief in the possession of those who arrested me.

The Time of Trial

I therefore prepared a statement for Lowe, that Darby had showed him the same bloody handkerchief, and another like it precisely, and had agreed to give him a large sum to swear he had got the last-mentioned handkerchief of me, and that I had another just like it, which he believed to be the one found at Colonel Sharp's door.

Several other facts were written out in plausible language, which Lowe was to swear to against Darby. These sheets of paper I had conveyed secretly to my wife,

with directions to her upon the envelope that no human eye, save her own, was even to see a line of it.

I was extremely careful not to put myself in Lowe's power. I wrote to him, but my letters were of an honorable, frank and open character, such as I cared not if the whole world saw them.

But still they were calculated to affect Lowe's ignorant mind and dispose him to my interest. Then my wife was to bend that disposition to my interest to such purposes as I choose, which I conveyed to her by a secret method of writing, known only to ourselves.

I directed my wife to not even let Lowe look upon my handwritings, but to read what I had written to him, and make him understand it well in every part, and then read it sentence by sentence to him and let him, in his own handwriting, take it down as she read it.

By the time my wife got this document, the time of my trial was at hand. She was abed with a very high fever, worn out in body and mind, and really almost bereft in reason when Lowe came for this document.

Her fever was raging and, owing to the violent rack of pain her head was in, she was unable to attend to reading the document to him. But the time for Lowe to start for Frankfort was at hand.

The Traitor Ensnares Me

I had written to my wife that the document was of vital consequence to be sworn to by Lowe—otherwise I would not go into trial, but would wait to make better preparation against the darkening storm which was gathering round me.

Lowe made the most solemn protestations of devotion to her, and prayed to be permitted to save me. At length my wife permitted him to take the document and copy it in her presence. He earnestly prayed that he be permitted to take the document home with him to read and copy all that night.

At length my wife permitted him to take the document with him, upon the most solemn oath no human eye save his own should see it, and that he would return it the next morning.

Lowe betrayed this document into the hands of my enemies! And, behold, this was the great point of all Darby's endeavor! For Lowe had all the time been acting traitor for Darby to ensnare me and procure from my wife something that would operate to my prejudice and to Darby's advantage.

He utterly denied all he had told my wife, or even that he had ever seen Darby at all! He swore my wife voluntarily gave him the document, without his promising to swear to it! But he joined to his misstatement what was calculated to clear Darby from the suspicion of being my accomplice. For it did not suffice Darby to prove me guilty, unless he proved me guilty alone.

Ably Prosecuted

Lowe also swore he had heard me threaten Colonel Sharp's life about the time Darby swore he heard me threaten his life. He swore my wife, about the same time, boasted to him that I would kill Colonel Sharp to revenge the injury he had done to her family. And that night before I got home from Frankfort she had intimated to him that that was what I had come to Frankfort for; and that the next night he went to my house for the express purpose of knowing whether I had done it or not; and that I had told him so plainly of it that he had become satisfied I had killed him.

For he said when he got there, my sister said I had brought home a flag; and that I had said yes, I had brought home a flag, a red flag, the sign of war and victory; and that I had gained the victory. That I intended to be a Christian, for things had turned up with me: that I now knew there was a God who would give vengeance to them to whom it was due.

All this and many other things Lowe went on to state, going so far as he could to swear I had plainly as I could told him I had killed Colonel Sharp, not to say that I told him in so direct, plain language.

There were many other witnesses summoned against me to prove each some unimportant trifle which I deem unworthy of the least mention, the more especially as I

have but a few more hours which I can possibly devote to this work.

I was most ably prosecuted by the prosecuting attorney, who traced me out in all my subtle, studied precautions for the commission of the murder with much accuracy, considering the entire want of evidence as to the true circumstances of the transaction.

I was also very ably defended; indeed, I cannot conceive how the case could have been argued with more ability and judgment. Nor could any man of any legal discernment, who heard the arguments, say with candor that the evidence was of such a character as the law contemplates, of circumstantial evidence, to convict of murder!

One Grave and One Coffin

The jury, after an hour's retirement, brought in a verdict of guilty, which, although it was unlooked for by many of my friends, yet it made no change in my feelings, because I had habitually calculated upon it; and was at all times so far reconciled to die, after I had killed Colonel Sharp, that death had no power to daunt me.

The court first set an unusually short time for my execution. This much vexed me, because it constrained me to rise to ask the extension of the time, in order that I might be enabled to write a history of the circumstances which led to my death. A longer time was readily granted by the court.

But now came a scene which, more than anything I had yet met with, aroused my feelings. Such was the spirit of fiendly revenge which existed toward my wife that, at a venture, it was determined to make her an accessory to the murder!

This was true. For she was strictly guilty, and liable as an accessory before the fact. But there was no sort of evidence whatever of the truth. However, just as they suspected me as principal, and suborned testimony to convict me, so they suspected her of accessory and procured testimony to prove that.

For this purpose this same Lowe swore she had not only explicitly confessed my guilt, but had confessed that she had her-

self devised the plan by which Colonel Sharp was assassinated! But this tale, though positively sworn to by Lowe, the justices utterly disregarded, in so much that they would not even commit her for further trial upon it.

But she would not quit my prison, nor has she since my conviction. She proudly glories to die with her husband, who dies for her. One grave and one coffin will inclose us.

I must now close this very imperfect narrative. I have now to bid adieu to this world. To-night my beloved wife and myself will lie down in each other's arms and sleep our long sleep.

I have a thousand duties to my God and my friends crowding upon me to-day. The evening draws to a close, and I wish to abstract my mind from external engagements, that I may enjoy with my wife the luxury of contemplating our happy exit from this world, as the destined moment approaches when we shall launch together into a happier scene.

JEROBOAM BEAUCHAMP.

POSTSCRIPT

I have now arranged all my papers, and closed everything preparatory to quitting this scene of action. My beloved *wife*—for whom, oh, how does my soul now melt in affection!—is preparing to lie down with me to sleep and wake no more!

Our spirits will, in a few moments, leave their bodies, and wing their way to the unknown abode to which our God may assign them!

We have a vial of laudanum, which my wife, with as much composure as she ever shared with me a glass of wine, is carefully dividing into two equal potions, one for each of us.

It has been maintained by some that no one ever commits suicide when in possession of their proper reason. Of others I cannot speak; but certain it is I never prepared to take an article of medicine with more deliberation and cool reflection than I now prepare to take a fatal potion of laudanum!

We will now trust to that God who is infinitely merciful, to forgive that sin which, even in praying, we commit.

I lay down my pen to *pray, and praying, take the fatal potion.*

My beloved wife and I have now drank the poison, which will shortly launch us into eternity. We can, neither of us, refrain from singing with joy, so happy are our anticipations for the scene we will ere morning's sun awake in.

Great God, forgive and bless us, and take us to Thyself, for the sake of Thy blessed Son. Amen, Amen.

J. O. BEAUCHAMP.

POSTSCRIPT (No. 2)

Thursday night, 10 o'clock,

July 6, 1826.

After we had taken the laudanum last night about twelve o'clock, we remained on our knees some hours at prayer, and when we laid down, placed our bodies in the fond embrace in which we wished them interred.

My wife laid her head on my right arm, with which I encircled her body, and tied my right hand to her left upon her bosom. We also, as laid side by side, confined our bodies together with an handkerchief, to prevent the struggles of death from severing us.

Thus we lay in prayer for hours in the momentary expectation of dropping to sleep, to awake in eternity. Some little after daylight I received a hope, a confidence that my sins were forgiven, and, in the joy of my soul, I shouted aloud and awakened all within my reach, and told them what the Blessed Redeemer had done for me.

I have ever since longed and prayed how soon it would please God to take me to Himself.

But, strange to man, near twenty-four hours have elapsed without the laudanum having any effect. My wife vomited about two o'clock, and soon after took a smaller portion of laudanum.

We took each, originally, the half of a vial full, which was about two inches, and as large as a common sized man's thumb. My wife is now asleep; I hope to wake no more in this world!

I have no more laudanum to take, and shall await the disposition which the Lord chooses to make of my body, content that

if I cannot die with my wife, ere this time to-morrow, to be in the realms of eternal felicity.

J. O. BEAUCHAMP.

Friday morning, 7 o'clock.

Between twelve and two o'clock I am, by the sentence of the law, to be executed. I did hope, even till late last night, that ere now the laudanum we had taken the night before would have ended our calamities.

But it has had no effect on me, and my wife has again despaired of its killing her, notwithstanding she repeated the dose.

She is so fearful of being left alive with no means to take her own life, and no one to console and strengthen her after my death, that I have, at her affectionate prayer, consented to join with her, and each of us stab ourselves!

I have all this morning, since midnight, tried to prevail with her to await the will of Heaven without making any further attempts upon herself, but she says it is all fruitless.

She says I shall never be buried till she also is dead, even if she is to starve herself to death. And she so fears the miseries which the disguised sympathy of her friends may bring upon her after my death, by attempting to thwart her purpose, that she has melted my heart to an acquiescence in her will.

For I had last night resolved to make no further attempt upon myself, but, oh! I pity her so much! I can refuse her nothing she prays of me to do. I commit myself for forgiveness upon the mercy of an all merciful God, Who has forgiven all the sins of my life, and will forgive, I hope, this last wicked act that carries me to eternity.

J. O. BEAUCHAMP.

DIRECTIONS FOR OUR BURIAL

We do not wish our faces uncovered after we are shrouded, particularly after we are removed to Bloomfield. We wish to be placed with my wife's head on my right arm, and that confined round my bosom.

J. O. BEAUCHAMP.

The following scrawl was written a few minutes before he was taken out to be

executed, and while his wife was in the agonies of death:

"Your husband is dying happy. For you I lived, for you I die! I hear you groan! I hope you may yet be recovered. If you are, live till it is God's will to take you, and prepare to meet me in a better world!

"Your dying husband,

"J. O. BEAUCHAMP.

"My beloved Anne."

ACCOUNT OF HIS EXECUTION

At an early hour the drums were heard beating, and men in uniform were seen mingling among the citizens. As the day advanced people came pouring in from the country in every direction, filling up the streets, while an increasing multitude was seen surrounding the gallows, which was erected on a hill near the place.

About the hour of ten o'clock the jailer went out and no person was left with them but Mr. Edrington—the guard. A feeble candle gave the only light which shone in this fearful abode. The only entrance was through a trapdoor above, in which stood a ladder.

Beauchamp and his wife frequently conversed together in a whisper. At length she requested Mr. Edrington to step out for a minute, alleging that she wished to get up. He ascended the ladder, and shut the trapdoor partly down, but kept it in a position to see what was going on below.

There was no movement, and he was in the act of returning when Mrs. Beauchamp said, "Don't come yet." "Oh, yes, come down," said Beauchamp. He then said his wife was too weak to get up, and expressed a wish that she should leave the jail, and the guard urged the same thing.

She said she would not leave her husband till he was taken out for execution.

After half past eleven the guard observed them whispering together for some time. At length Beauchamp said aloud: "My dear, you are not strong enough to get up. See how strong I am."

She then requested her husband to give her more of the toddy. He told her she would drink too much, but she would not be put off. He then gave it to her, and she drank.

She then requested the guard to step out immediately, pretending great urgency. He again went up the ladder, turned the trapdoor partly down, and was stepping round into a position where he could observe them when he heard a deep sigh, and Beauchamp called him.

He went down and found Beauchamp lying on his back, apparently in great alarm, and in loud and earnest prayer. Mrs. Beauchamp was lying partly on her left side, with her head on her husband's breast, and her right arm thrown over him. The guard supposed that in attempting to rise she had, from weakness, fallen on him.

Not suspecting anything very serious had happened, he sat down, resting his head on the table until Beauchamp had finished his prayer. As soon as he had closed his prayer he seemed entirely composed and observed to the guard: "Tell my father that my wife and myself are going straight to Heaven—we are dying."

The guard replied, "No, I reckon not."

Beauchamp said, "Yes, it is so; we have killed ourselves."

The guard sprang up, suspecting that they again had taken poison, but as he stepped round the bed he saw something in Mrs. Beauchamp's right hand. He raised her arm, and found it to be a knife sharpened at the point and bloody about half-way up.

He asked where they had got that knife. Both answered they had kept it long concealed for that occasion. On discovering the bloody knife, the guard looked upon the bed and discovered that Mrs. Beauchamp had a stab a little to the right of the center of the abdomen, which had been laid bare for that purpose. She did not sigh, nor groan, nor show any symptom of pain.

He asked Beauchamp whether he was stabbed too. He replied "Yes," and raised up his shirt, which had been drawn out of his drawers and rolled up on his body to leave it bare, but had fallen back over the wound.

He was stabbed about the center of the body, just below the pit of the stomach, but his wound was not as wide as his wife's. He said he had taken the knife and struck first, and that his wife had parried his arm,

wrested the knife from him and plunged it herself. She said he feared his wound was not mortal, and begged the guard to get some laudanum for him.

As soon as he discovered they were stabbed, the guard called for assistance, and the jailor and others immediately came in. Beauchamp begged that they would take his wife out and attempt to save her.

Without any opposition from her, she was immediately removed into one of the little rooms of the jailor's house. To the inquiries of those who surrounded her, she replied: "I struck the fatal blow myself, and am dying for my dear husband."

She now suffered great pain, and was evidently in the agonies of death. Her screams reached the ears of Beauchamp in his dungeon, and he asked, "Is that my dear wife? Do bring me word what she says." The physicians, Roberts, Majors, and Wilkinson, had examined her wound and pronounced it mortal, especially in her present debilitated state.

It was now determined to take him to the gallows as soon as possible. They were carrying him through the passage of the jailor's house when he begged to see his wife. The physician told him she was not badly hurt and would soon get over it; and some objection was made to stopping.

He said it was cruel, and they carried him in and laid him on the bed beside her. He placed his hand on her face and said, "My dear, do you know that this is the hand of your husband?" She returned no answer. He felt of her pulse, and said, "Physicians, you have deceived me: she is dying!"

To the ladies surrounding the bed he said, "From you, ladies, I demand a tear of sympathy." He laid conversing with perfect composure, occasionally putting one hand upon his wife's face, and feeling her pulse with the other, until he had felt the last throb.

"Farewell," said he, "child of sorrow, farewell, child of misfortune and persecution—you are now secure from the tongue of slander—for you I have lived, for you I die." He then kissed her twice and said, "I am now ready to go."

It was now half past twelve o'clock. The

military were drawn up, surrounded by an immense crowd, all of whom were listening with intense interest to every rumor of the dying pair.

As Beauchamp was too weak to sit on his coffin in a cart, a covered dearborn had been provided for his conveyance to the gallows. He was now brought out in a blanket.

Some of the ministers of the gospel had taken their leave of him, to whom he expressed the same confidence in the forgiveness of his sins and the hope of a happy immortality as in the morning. The drums beat, and the military and crowd moved up Clinton Street to Ann, along Ann Street to Montgomery Street at Weiseger's tavern, and up Montgomery Street.

"This music," said he, "is delightful. I never moved more happily in my life."

Observing many ladies looking out at the windows, he requested the side curtains of the dearborn to be raised, so he could see them; and, raising up a little, continued to wave his hand to them in token of respect, until the procession got out of town.

When they had reached the gallows, and he saw his coffin, he seemed wholly unmoved. The Rev. Eli Smith, S. M. Noel, J. T. Mills, and other preachers surrounded him inquiring the state of his mind. To all their questions he answered he was sure of going to Heaven—that his sins were forgiven him on Thursday morning.

At every interval of the conversation he would say, with some impatience, "I want to be executed—I want to go to my wife."

He was now lifted out of the dearborn in a blanket, and sat up, supported by those about him, on his coffin in the cart. He asked for water and requested, while the messenger was gone for it, the music would play "Bonaparte's Retreat from Moscow."

He then drank some water, and in a firm voice requested that they would tell him when they were ready, and he said he would rise up. He was told all was ready; with assistance he rose up; then shortly he was launched into eternity.

In a few hours his afflicted father started with the two bodies for Bloomfield, Nelson County, where they were buried in one coffin, there to lay until the last dreadful day.



Every man there looked on in amazement—

DEADFALL

By Frank Price

GRESHAM STOOD REREADING THE WIRE FROM HIS FIELD CHIEF.
"NOW, I WONDER," HE MUSED, "WHAT THE HELL IS A 'DEADFALL'?"



GRESHAM, chief of claims for the Citadel Life Insurance Company, tossed aside the sheaf of papers he had examined and spoke quietly to the man seated at the opposite side of his desk.

"A hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money," he observed, and added forcefully, "in any country. It doesn't look right, Barrow. So we're not paying. Not right away, anyhow."

Barrow, chief of the Citadel's field investigators, reached for the records discarded by his chief and glanced through them for the second time that morning.

"Three policies," he remarked, thinking aloud. "Yes."

"Three," Gresham said, in that odd way men have of needlessly restating a fact. "There's a twenty-five thousand dollar

policy that's been in effect three years. Then there's one for thirty-five thousand that he took out eighteen months ago, and the last, for forty thousand, has been in force exactly one year. It looks like he's been pyramiding on us."

The investigator nodded noncommittally. His had been a long experience at this sort of thing. His manner bespoke the young business executive rather than a merciless tracker of swindlers and suspected swindlers, but he was slow about offering any downright opinion on superficial evidence.

Frankly, he believed his superior's concern to be a somewhat unnecessary expenditure of energy. These disappearance cases were an old story with him, and they invariably wound up the same way—the discovery of the vanished policyholder in some distant place, living under an assumed



—as he rushed forward with outstretched hand

name and trying to forget former associations of which he had become tired.

The reasons for slipping the old fretful ties were varied, but they were of little concern to the Citadel's claim department.

The fact that the policyholder still lived and that substantial proof to that effect could be procured served to justify the demands of the underwriters. It saved them money.

Something like this was in Barrow's mind when he spoke again.

"A doctor," he said thoughtfully. "How good a doctor?"

"You'll find all we know about him in there," replied the claims chief, indicating the record. "An ordinary, small town doctor. His practice was good enough—worth from six to eight thousand a year.

"Not so much for a man to carry all that insurance on, but he was a good risk in every way; a professional man, income virtually assured, wife and three children, apparently quite happily married."

"Yes." Barrow, eyes still on the file, spoke again: "That's what I wanted to ask about. Do we know anything about his home life?"

"Not much. I figured that's where you'd start. Or will you begin up there in the mountains where he's supposed to have

drowned?" There was just the trace of an incredulous smile as the chief asked this last question.

The deference to his superior judgment pleased the investigator.

"It's always best to begin at the beginning," he smiled, "and that, of course, is his home. How complete a search has been made for his body?"

Gresham shrugged: "As complete as possible, I suppose. The local authorities made a search, and when they didn't find a trace the doctor's wife hired men to go over the ground again. Her investigators were just as unsuccessful as the others had been.

"But, as I understand it, there is nothing strange about that. The body might lie there forever without being discovered. It's a bad stretch of water he's supposed to have been lost in. There's considerable 'white water'—rapids, you know—and there are pot holes, as well as great piles of fallen timber overhanging the banks.

"The body might easily be wedged under a rock in a rapid or snagged down in one of the holes or under a ledge or tree along the banks. I say it might be there, all right. But I don't think it is."

Gresham was somewhat excited, and he half rose from his chair as he continued:

"The burden of proof rests on us. We've

got to show convincingly that the doctor isn't dead or we are out one hundred thousand dollars."

This was a habit with Gresham, and was one of the reasons why his fame as a claim adjuster had made his name a byword wherever insurance men gathered. He regarded the payment of a claim as a sacred obligation when it was just, but he was without mercy for those who would attempt to practice fraud in the collection of insurance money.

When he said "we're out one hundred thousand dollars" he meant just that, for had it come from his own resources he would have felt it none the less keenly, as long as the faintest doubt existed in his mind as to the validity of the claim.

Barrow arose.

"I'll leave immediately for Boonton, chief," he said. "If this claim is clean, the widow probably needs the money and we'd better move quickly."

And he started out.

II



HE disappearance of Dr. Arnold Slocum, Boonton practitioner, had aroused no suspicion in the minds of the authorities of the country in which the tragedy had befallen him.

Three weeks prior to the conference between Gresham and his aid, Dr. Slocum had taken an affectionate leave of his wife and children and had left home with his hunting equipment for the avowed purpose of roughing it in the north woods.

It was his first vacation in years, and had been made possible only through the generous consent of some of his Boonton colleagues, who, fearful for his health, had urged him to rest, promising the while to care for his patients during his absence.

Mrs. Slocum, herself agitated by her husband's failing health, and warned by his associates, had readily assented when the lone vacation was proposed.

"You must go alone," she told him, "so that you will have nothing to worry about, so that your freedom will be absolute."

The physician had selected a popular huntsmen's lodge, rested there a day or two,

and then set about preparing for his trek into the woods after game.

He engaged a guide, Repi, a breed who came to him well recommended, and when he started out on the trail was in high spirits. He shook hands with the proprietor of the lodge and followed Repi down to the canoe.

"I'll be back with a big appetite," he called back. "You'd better fatten up the calf while I'm away."

No white man ever saw him alive again.

At dusk of the third day following, Repi, footsore and, to all appearances, on the verge of hysteria, shambled into the lodge and announced that the physician had vanished.

On the second day out, he told the curious who surrounded him, they had made camp and he had set out alone, because the doctor was too tired to accompany him, to look for game. When he returned, several hours later, Dr. Slocum and the canoe had disappeared.

The breed sobbed as he told of his long hike down the bank of the stream in an effort to locate his missing employer, and how, after covering three miles through the tangled underbrush, he finally came upon the canoe, water-filled and on the rocks.

All day, he said, he had searched, without success, for the body of the doctor, and, convinced of the futility of further effort without help he had started the long, tedious fight back to the lodge afoot.

He left the canoe where he had found it, he explained, because of his fear of the law. He knew that suspicion would naturally be directed against him, and he wished to help the authorities so that he would be cleared.

The breed's story was plausible enough. And when the sheriff arrived at the lodge with three deputies, in response to an urgent message, he found Repi prepared to go back with him over the trail.

A careful examination of the camp in which Dr. Slocum had spent his first night in the woods well substantiated the guide's version of his disappearance. His belongings were in orderly array, and there were his footprints plainly to be seen leading to the water edge where the canoe had been grounded.

Repi showed the authorities the carcass of a deer he had slain, and carefully rehearsed for them the entire events of the day prior to his discovery of the doctor's disappearance. Then he led them downstream to the spot where he had found the canoe, and there it was just as he had described it.

For two days the sheriff and his men sought the body, then, concluding that it had been snagged in a pot hole or caught under overhanging roots of a tree, they abandoned their quest and exonerated Repi.

Mrs. Slocum, dissatisfied, had herself engaged two skilled detectives, and they, likewise, searched in vain and accepted the guide's story.

The mystery, apparently, was complete, if there was any mystery. And the Citadel's chance for justifying nonpayment of the Slocum claim was remote. This particularly in view of the fact that there were numerous woodsmen who would testify to the possibility of the physician's body having been so wedged under water that it might never be recovered.

This, then, was the status of the Slocum case when Barrow set out to "begin at the beginning."

III

BARROW found Mrs. Slocum a sincerely stricken widow. So real was her grief and that of her three splendid children that the investigator immediately dismissed from his mind the theorizing he had done in Gresham's office. Certainly there could be no apparent reason why any man should wish to break the home ties that here existed.

The investigator was graciously received by Mrs. Slocum, and she clearly understood, she said, the necessity for an investigation by the Citadel.

"We are not attempting to evade just payment to you," Barrow reassured her, "but there are some things we can't quite understand. For instance, Dr. Slocum's income was not more than eight thousand a year, was it?"

The bereaved woman smiled.

"We had often wished it were that much," she replied. "I believe six would be much closer to the true figure."

This was interesting.

"That's just it, Mrs. Slocum," he told her "We are unable to reconcile the large amount of insurance the doctor carried with the income he had. And you can understand, I am sure, why the way in which he acquired his protection would, to be blunt about it, arouse some suspicion."

"Why?" Mrs. Slocum's bewilderment at this turn was an honest lack of understanding.

"Well—" Barrow was not unkind; his success was attributed as much to knowing people as it was to any extraordinary ability as a follower of clues—"don't you see that when a man applies for insurance protection as the doctor did, and then after increasing his coverage so greatly and frequently as your husband increased his, disappears one year later, there is some cause for suspicion to be directed, not only at him but at his beneficiary as well?"

"Perhaps," the widow replied, with a quiet forcefulness that amazed even the shockproof Barrow, "perhaps I can explain those things. You see, I have an income of my own, and if it were not for that we could not, of course, have been so prodigal in our insurance investments.

"As for the large amount of protection my husband carried, I may claim the entire responsibility. It was I who urged him to apply for the forty thousand dollar policy last year, for no other reason than an honest conviction that our children should be adequately guarded against want in just such an emergency as this. He protested that we might better use the money for other purposes, but I convinced him."

Barrow accepted this explanation without reservation. His keen mind had quickly analyzed the widow's character, and she, at least, he believed to be guiltless.

"Were you happily married?" was his next query.

"More than that," was the response. "We were story book lovers. My interests have always been devoted to my husband and children exclusively, and I know that Dr. Slocum worshiped us.

"It was difficult to persuade him to take this holiday that has turned out so disastrously for us, because he insisted that he never was happy any place away from home and us."

"That," the investigator thought, "is as true as Gospel."

There was little more to be learned from Mrs. Slocum. As far as she was aware, her husband was as keen of mind when he left home as he always had been, and his affairs were not at all involved.

A visit with the town banker and to several medical colleagues of the vanished physician verified the widow's version of the Slocum family life. From the banker he learned that the physician had to be urged to withdraw from his deposits enough money to adequately see him through his vacation.

"He was always economical," the banker said, "in everything except the care of his wife and children."

So it was that when the evening train drew out of Boonton a completely bewildered investigator who was rated expert was one of its passengers.

But Barrow was headed for the north woods.

IV



EVER, perhaps, has this fore-gathering place for woodsmen and hunters witnessed such a sight as that which greeted its occupants when Barrow arrived at the lodge.

He was attired immaculately in city "duds," his small mustache was neatly waxed and twirled, and he fairly radiated stupidity as he burst in upon the amazed bystanders. As an actor Barrow would have gone over immensely, and he was playing a rôle now at which he was a master—the fop.

His first impulse had been to don the garb of a woodsman and rough-hew his way to a solution of the Slocum mystery, if that were possible, but this plan was abandoned after due consideration of what he might have to expect from local authorities in the final solution of the case. It would not have been well to antagonize any one.

Hence, he elected to become a dude—a city sap—which would give him a decided advantage at the outset, in that it would disarm all suspicion and possibly lead some guilty person to make damaging admissions in his presence.

"Good day, gentlemen," he greeted the astounded group. "I've heard this is a good resting place for a chappie who is rather fagged, you know, so I've come to visit you for a week or so. It's a balmy country, eh what?"

Every man in the place thumped his nearest neighbor in the ribs with an elbow.

"Oh, for goodness sake," one spoke up in high falsetto. "I'll say it is. Welcome, Marmaduke."

Barrow smiled delightedly and rushed with outstretched hand to the speaker.

"Marvelous, old thing, really," he chirped. "I shouldn't have believed it, really; but you must have met me before."

The woodsman scowled and slapped away the outstretched hand.

"Not by a damned sight," said he.

"Well, then, you have uncanny perceptive powers, really. How did you know my name is Marmaduke?"

"Because," the other hesitated, but only an instant, "because—why, damn it, man it couldn't be anything else."

Barrow smiled as though he were pleased. And he was.

"Simply confounding," he cried, turning to Clem Hawkins, proprietor of the lodge. And then he negotiated for accommodations and began to set in motion the machinery that he hoped was to solve the Slocum mystery.

It was not long before Barrow had completely won the confidence of Repi, the breed. From him he heard the original story of the drowning and the long and futile search for the body. He had not heard of the tragedy, he said when Repi finished, but he thought that some time he would "just like to paddle down that way and look around."

Repi immediately applied for the job as guide. He had been none too popular since the tragic result of his trip with Dr. Slocum, and huntsmen were superstitious enough to believe him a "jinx." To all appearances

Barrow had none of these misgivings, had heard nothing of the sentiment, and laughed it off when it was called to his attention.

"My word," he observed, "it seems to me the very fact that Repi came back so quickly and reported the accident speaks well for him as a guide. I shall be glad to have him." And thereupon he engaged the breed to take him down the river.

His tour of the abandoned Slocum camp and the waterway leading thereto was without incident. The breed guided well and brought him back to the lodge safely.

It might have been significant to the others, however, that, following his trip with the guide, Barrow decided that hiking afforded splendid exercise and frequently went out on foot and alone, to be gone for hours before returning. But they paid little attention to the dude, and treated him much as they might an irresponsible child.

Each day the investigator circled nearer and nearer to the Slocum camp, but on the sixth day of his explorations he had learned nothing of value. He began to feel the utter hopelessness of it all, when fate played her hand and things began to happen.

It was at daylight on the seventh day in the woods that Barrow was awakened by loud voices and shuffling of many feet coming from the great room of the lodge, and he hurriedly dressed to see what it was all about.

On entering the room he was surprised to find it crowded with strangers. They were a husky group, and evidently had just arrived after a night spent on the trail.

After the formality of a brief and all inclusive introduction, following which "Marmaduke" was unmercifully taunted by the newcomers, Barrow learned that they were employees of a lumber company which had just taken over a concession three or four miles to the north of the lodge and were to begin cutting timber the following day.

Just twenty-eight hours later Barrow, clad in his store clothes and carrying his cane, made his appearance at the new lumber camp. There he watched, with unaffected interest, the initial assault on the great trees, as the huskies turned to with saw and ax. The foreman spied him and

grinned good-humoredly as he offered him a job.

Barrow hastily declined, with profuse thanks, and the gang roared as he backed away from the proffered ax.

Immediately following this incident one of the gangs toppled a towering stick and, in falling, it struck the upper branches of a smaller tree where it rested.

Slowly, as though a giant athlete were straining at a great weight, the roots of the smaller tree began to give way under the pressure of the felled tree.

The two trees, interlocked, became stationary when the smaller one was half uprooted.

A swarm of lumberjacks then attacked the branches of the smaller tree to clear the way to the ground for the larger trunk. This accomplished, the small tree slowly returned to an upright position and workers tamped back the earth around its roots.

Barrow was interested. He turned to the foreman.

"That small tree will die now, won't it?" he asked.

"Hell, no!" the commander of the ax and saw brigade replied. "Ain't you never seen a deadfall before?"

The insurance investigator shook his head and presently walked away, heading back for the lodge.

The foreman shifted his quid, squinted after the dude, and made an eloquent gesture with his forefinger pointing toward his right temple and moving in circles, the same implying that the curious onlooker now departing was not only a "mama's boy," but was afflicted as well with an aggravated case of wheels in the head.

V



WHEN the first gray streaks of dawn rode the skies on the following morning they found the Citadel man already embarked in a canoe and heading for the Slocum camp site.

He was following a hunch, and, though canoeing through "white water" was a new experience for him, he had not hesitated to set out. Of such fiber are man-trackers made.

That ride was a hair-raiser and one that Barrow never forgot. He was tossed endwise, sidewise, and every way but frontwise, it seemed to him, but he kept on without real grief until he reached a bend about two miles above his goal.

There he was hurled into the current, and it was only after a bitter fight with the waters that he made his way safely to the bank. Spent from his exertion against the vicious rapids, he lay there an hour or more before rising to make his way, bruised and battered, to the camp site.

It was well along in the afternoon and Barrow had reached a spot more than two miles from the camp when he made his discovery. It required but a few minutes to verify his theory, and then, despite his absolute fatigue and a desire to throw himself down and sleep, he began the long trek back to the lodge.

As he turned the events of the day over in his mind, his exultation over what he considered a master stroke revived him to a point where his step became almost springy and the fatigue was unnoticeable.

He had determined what he was going to do as soon as he returned to the lodge, and, while it might be condemned as bad judgment in the event of failure, he felt it his only strategy. He realized the danger of damage suits and how difficult it would be to make explanations.

"But I'll do it; I'll do it," he told himself again and again as he drew closer to the lodge. "I've gone too far to back down."

It was midnight when Barrow reached the lodge, and as he dragged his aching muscles through the door he found the great room deserted. Apparently his absence had caused the others little concern. They were not much interested in this dunce who was trying to play man.

He moved over to the door of the proprietor's room and rapped softly.

The sleepy Hawkins leaped from his cot and threw open the door, growling his displeasure at the disturbance.

"This is a hell of a time o' night to wake a fellow up," he protested. "Whata matter?"

Barrow raised on his toes and whispered the answer.

"I've got Dr. Slocum's murderer," he said softly, "and you've got to help me."

The lodge-keeper began a second and more emphatic protest when Barrow urged him to dress and drive over to the county seat after the sheriff. But the investigator silenced him effectively:

"Now, see here, Hawkins," he warned him, "the men who come to your place would do it for me. It's a matter of justice, and they'll be interested to know that you helped to bring this killer to justice."

"But I can't believe it happened that way," Hawkins insisted.

The disgusted look Barrow shot at him cut him off abruptly.

"Oh, all right," he said, "I'll go. But I'd hate to be you if you've made a mistake."

"I'm taking the chance," said Barrow, curtly.

While Hawkins was dressing he informed him pithily of the part he desired the sheriff to play. The proprietor of the lodge listened attentively and departed with a promise to break all records in the drive.

Barrow began to feel the reaction of the strenuous day, and finally threw himself upon his bed, where he slept fitfully until aroused by the break of day. He hastily groomed himself and moved out into the great hall.

Repi, the breed, was dozing in a barrel-stave chair in front of the open fire, and as Barrow approached he voiced a half-suppressed cry and leaped to his feet.

"Oh," he grinned, as relief cleared his features, "I did not know you get up so airy, meester. Excuse, eh?"

"Certainly, Repi," Barrow smiled. Then he eyed the breed narrowly and thought he detected a nervous start when he added: "What's the matter, bad dreams?"

Repi's recovery was swift.

"Oh, no, meester," he replied. "My mothair she always say a good man she rests easy. Repi could have no bad dreams."

The assurance and absolute calm with which this neat little speech was made alarmed Barrow. Could it be possible for a man so guilty of an atrocious crime to be so self-possessed? What if he had made a grievous mistake?

The investigator wavered, but only for a moment. He would see it through.

It was decisions such as this that had made Barrow the most successful investigator in the insurance field.

And, further, it was at this point that Barrow remembered gratefully his instructions to Hawkins, for he believed Repi a bad man who would shoot to kill if cornered.

It was after he and Repi had breakfasted together, at his invitation, that Hawkins returned from the county seat with the sheriff. As they walked into the lodge Barrow rose and simulated great surprise at the sheriff's visit, when they were introduced.

Hawkins had done his job well, for the sheriff spoke his lines without a flaw.

"Had to come over," the law officer said. "Them fellers over to the lumber camp are a bad crowd and they've got two of 'em trussed up over there a-waitin' for to ride back home with me."

And then, as an afterthought apparently:

"Say, I need a deputy."

Barrow spoke up:

"I'll go with you, sheriff."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the sheriff. "I want a man deputy." And he turned to Repi. "What d'ye think o' that, Repi? He wants to be my deputy."

The breed echoed the laugh.

"That is good," he fell for the ruse just as Barrow believed he would. "A dude for a deputy. Ho, ho, ho!"

Barrow appeared hurt, and then suddenly whirled on the guide.

"Well, then, Repi," he challenged him, "if I won't do as a deputy why don't you help the sheriff out?"

Repi leaped to his feet and struck an heroic attitude.

"Certain," he agreed. "I, Repi, will help out the sheriff. Who could do better?"

"Fine," the sheriff agreed, and he walked over to the breed. "I'll do you a good turn some day, Repi, if you'll go. Got your gun?"

"Sure—and a knife, too." The breed patted them.

"That's great," observed the sheriff. "All you need now is the bracelets," and he

tossed over a set of handcuffs to the unsuspecting guide. "Know how to work them?"

"No," the breed confessed. "You show me, eh?"

"Sure." With a laugh the sheriff snapped one of the bracelets over Repi's right wrist. A quick flip and the left was fettered, although the now suspicious breed made a belated effort to snatch his arm away. The officer calmly removed the pistol and knife from Repi's person. Then Barrow stepped forward.

"Sheriff," the investigator announced, "I want this man arrested for the murder of Dr. Slocum."

"I've got him," said the sheriff. "Now tell us all about it."

VI



HERE was a situation not anticipated by Repi's accuser. He had not expected to be called upon to prove anything until the vital moment had arrived and that was still to come.

But he knew any attempt by him to fend off the sheriff's curiosity would be regarded by that worthy as a hostile move, and he decided to accept the bad break in his plan with as much grace as possible under the trying circumstance. He turned to the guide.

"Why," he snapped, "did you kill Dr. Slocum?"

"You're damn fool, meester," was the satisfying reply.

Barrow went on:

"You know, Repi," he spoke softly now, almost soothingly, "by making a clean breast of this mistake you will make it a lot easier for yourself. Why don't you tell us the truth?"

The breed was undisturbed.

"You think you know much, eh?" and he turned to the sheriff. "This fellow he's crazy, Jim. For many year Repi is good guide, good man. What for you lock him up, eh, Jim?"

The sheriff glanced at Barrow. "You ain't proved nothin' yet," he reminded him.

Barrow's composure was perfect. Convinced he had landed his catch, he proceeded with the job in hand—to wrest some

sort of admission from the prisoner. He strode toward the guide and grasped him by the arm.

"If the doctor drowned while you were away from camp," he demanded, "where did you get the money you've been spending since you saw him last?"

Hawkins here interrupted.

"Why that's nothing to take on about," he said. "Repi always has enough money to buy what he needs and has had for years. There ain't nothing to hang on him just on account of that."

Barrow smiled.

"That," he explained, "is beside the point here for a very good reason. Say, Repi"—he turned to the now triumphant prisoner—"didn't Dr. Slocum pay you before you left the Lodge with him?"

Repi suspected this question and his answer was precisely the one Barrow had hoped he would make:

"Cert'y not, damn fool," he insisted. "Repi nevaire takes money before job is finished."

"Good," said Barrow. "I thought so. Now, sheriff, if you'll just relieve your man of what money he has with him I believe I may show you something of interest."

The sheriff barked a "stand fast" to the breed and made a thorough search of his clothing, finally bringing forth a money belt in which were found a few crumpled bills of small denomination.

Before handing them over to Barrow he examined them himself and was moved to the observation that they didn't seem any different to him than any other money he had seen.

"Of course, they don't," said Barrow kindly. "An honest man is not suspicious." Again he spoke to the guide:

"Where did you get this money, Repi?"

"Oh, I have him a long time!" was the reply.

"That's strange!" Barrow was almost dreamy in the manner in which he said it. "This is new money—very new, though it has been crumpled a lot and soiled to make it look old and worn."

"How do you know it's new money," the sheriff demanded.

"That's easy," Barrow replied with a

smile. "I know by the feel of the paper and by the serial numbers on the bills. You know I made a stop at Dr. Slocum's bank before I came up here."

With a shriek, Repi lunged toward the investigator and missed only by a hair when he strove to strike down Barrow with his manacled hands.

"It's a lie, a lie," he shouted. "This damn feller he try to blame Repi. It's a lie!"

The sheriff had the breed under control now and the man-tracker returned to the job in hand. Cleverly he wrung the last admission necessary to convince the sheriff that he had made out a case.

"You know, sheriff," he said in voice calm and dispassionate, "I don't believe Repi killed the doctor. I'm willing to let it go at robbery. It's possible that the doctor drowned and that Repi, seeing no great harm in it, took his money and then threw his body back into the water. How about it, Repi? Is that how it happened?"

The prisoner, as Barrow had hoped, eagerly grasped at this straw of hope which had been deliberately dangled before him. He knew, of course, that Barrow had him cornered and had done it cleverly.

But he was convinced that he had so cleverly planned the whole thing that he would be comparatively safe in admitting this last version given by the insurance man. He acted the part now, and turning to the sheriff made his confession:

"He is right," he admitted. "Repi made big mistake, Jim. The doctor he won't listen to Repi and when I come back to camp he is gone. Then I find him two, three miles downstream, dead. White water got him. So I no think it bad, Jim. I take his money and put him back in water. I'm sorry."

The breed appeared genuinely contrite, and the sheriff and Hawkins were somewhat sympathetic.

"Well, shall I take him over to the county seat?" the sheriff asked Barrow.

"Not yet," was the reply. "You have heard Repi confess to robbery, of course, but that doesn't quite satisfy me. You see"—he added this when he saw the surprised and somewhat indignant attitude of

the others—"I'd like to have a look at the doctor's body."

"That's impossible." It was Hawkins speaking again. "When Repi threw the body back in the river he made a good job of it, for unless you saw it close by, it's been carried down one of those pot holes and will never come up."

"How, then, do you account for Repi finding it?" Barrow asked.

"Just luck. The doctor must have been close in shore when he went over, or he was a strong swimmer. Not once in a thousand times would a man make shore from the middle of that stream and anybody'll tell you so."

"Just as I thought!" Barrow exclaimed half aloud, and he hastily added: "But I am going down there, sheriff, and I want you to bring Repi along with us."

The sheriff and Hawkins both demurred. They considered further search for the body a foolish waste of time and did not hesitate to make their feelings known. The former could not see why Barrow wished to make the long trek down river when he already had the breed's confession, and said so.

"Well," he was told, "I'm not entirely satisfied with that confession, and I think we'll find something interesting. So we'd better go." And despite the grumbling, the law officer finally agreed to play Barrow's hunch.

VII



SEVERAL hours later a strange group debarked from two canoes at the river bank, two miles below the site of Dr. Slocum's camp. One man wore handcuffs.

As the party moved to a point a short distance from the river they came upon a clearing in which a great tree lay. Near by stood a smaller tree. Barrow led the party to the smaller tree and pointed to its base.

"Nice grave, eh, Repi?" he asked the breed.

"You go to hell," was the retort.

"Now, what's this all about?" demanded the sheriff.

"Yeh. Wot t'ell's it all about?" asked another voice. It was the foreman of the lumber camp, who had joined the party at the Hawkins Lodge at Barrow's invitation just before the long trip down the river began and who himself was fired with curiosity.

"Gentlemen," the investigator was serious now, and there was nothing of the fop about him. "You are standing by the most perfect man-trap I have ever seen."

The foreman's eyes widened, and he swiped a calloused palm across his wide-opened mouth.

"Hell's bells," he rasped, "that guy ain't no dude! Say, mister, who in th' hell are you, anyway?"

Barrow eyed Repi closely as he dismissed the lumberjack's query with curt finality.

"We'll talk about that later," he promised. Then he gave his entire attention to the accused.

"Come clean, Repi," he advised quietly. "I know all about it. Show the sheriff where you buried Dr. Slocum's body."

Defiant, and snarling a vile malediction at the implacable Barrow, the guide turned to the sheriff.

"You know Repi, Jim," he begged. "He's big fool, thees feller."

The sheriff was frankly disturbed, but the lumberjack, who had knocked about a bit more than Barrow's other companions, stepped into the discussion.

"Sheriff," he advised, "if I was you I'd listen to this feller. He ain't dumb enough to go so far as he's went unless he's got somethin' in his trick bag. Better stand by."

The sheriff stepped back and Barrow turned to address the man who had interceded for him.

"Thank you, friend," he offered. "Now I need your help, seeing that Repi is so stubborn."

"Shoot. What 'll it be?"

Barrow indicated the fallen tree.

"Anything peculiar about that?" he asked.

"Naw." was the reply. "I can't say there is. Somebody chopped her down, that's all."

"Did she drop straight?"

"Nope," the big fellow shook his head

with emphatic assurance. "She hit that baby tree yonder. Any fool can see that plain enough."

Repi glanced about furtively and appeared on the verge of an attempt at flight. The sheriff stepped to his side.

"No funny work, Repi," he admonished. "It all sounds like damn foolishness to me, but you stand fast."

Barrow grinned. Then he turned to the foreman.

"What is it," he asked innocently, "that you call it—you lumber men have a name for a situation like that—where a large tree lodges in a smaller growth on its way to the ground and partially uproots it? What is that again?"

Incredulity was stamped on the features of the man to whom Barrow spoke. He was beginning to see a great light.

"I told you the other day over at the camp," he chided. "That's a deadfall—and it's pretty recent, too," he added as a sort of an afterthought.

"Good; it is well named," and the Citadel man moved quickly to the half-breed Repi's side.

"Come on. Out with it, Repi," he demanded. "It's all up with you. What have you to say now?"

Not a muscle in the breed's body moved with the exception of those required as he spat at his questioner and snapped:

"You go to hell, meester!"

Barrow was not discouraged and he again hazarded one of the bold strokes for which he was noted.

"Gentlemen," he addressed the others, "the foreman is quite correct. That is a deadfall. When this large tree was felled it lodged in the branches of that smaller tree and partially uprooted it.

"The branches were then sheared free and it was a comparatively simple matter for the ax wielder to force the smaller tree back in position and tamp down the soil about the loosened roots."

There was a complete lack of understanding on the sheriff's face as this discussion went on.

"Well," he interrupted, "that ain't nothin'. Deadfalls happen every day. What's that got to do with Repi here?"

Barrow made the last cast of the dice in this game, with a final magnificent gesture.

"Only this," he snapped, "uproot that deadfall again and get me the body of Dr. Slocum. I've got to get back to work."

VIII



RESHAM was somewhat irritable when he reached his office the morning after Barrow's master stroke. He had been accustomed to expect nothing in the way of a report from Barrow during these investigations until the Citadel's investigator had developed conclusions worth while, but this Slocum case had dragged a little longer than usual.

Since he had been assured by his field chief through a phone talk the day Barrow was in Boonton that Mrs. Slocum was above suspicion, he, too, had been convinced that the doctor's disappearance was not of his own choosing.

He was troubled, therefore, because of the delay suffered by this worthy woman in the settlement of what he now considered a just claim, but which, as an insurance executive, he could not pay because of the lack of conclusive proof of the policy holder's death.

The Slocum record and reports were still on Gresham's desk and he had just gone over them again, when his secretary entered his office with a telegram. He reached for it eagerly, hoping it was from Barrow, and was rewarded by sighting the latter's name at the bottom. The wire read:

Have recovered Dr. Slocum's body. Guide jailed, having confessed murder, with robbery his motive. Pay Mrs. Slocum. Slayer lured victim to lonely spot far from camp, killed him, set canoe adrift on river, covered tracks by wearing doctor's shoes and buried body under deadfall. Explain later.

Gresham reached for his telephone, directed an assistant to see that the Slocum claim be paid immediately, settled back in his chair and smiled his satisfaction at the cleverness of Barrow in keeping the record straight. He reread the wire.

"Now, I wonder," he mused, "what the hell is a 'deadfall'?"



A shadowy figure moved across the wall

THE THING IN THE DARK

By Peter Perry

THE SUN WAS WELL UP NOW. A LIGHT SNOW HAD FALLEN, AND GREER AND KELLY STOOD BY THE NORTH WINDOW, WAITING FOR THEIR HOST



DOUGLAS GREER was awakened by the ringing of the telephone bell. The detective turned on the light and reached for the instrument without rising.

The voice of the desk sergeant came over the wire from headquarters:

"Say, Greer, sorry to wake you up, but we got a crazy man down here—ran him in at two o'clock this morning—caught him loping down Colfax in his nightshirt. Says he's had a warning of some sort he's going to die.

"The old bird looks hearty enough and none the worse for wading through the snow. Wish you'd come on down and see what you can make of it."

The detective rose reluctantly, struggled into his clothes, and drove down town through the bleak gloom that precedes a

winter dawn. He was not particularly interested in elderly lunatics with a penchant for snow baths.

But the prisoner seemed quite rational enough, though extremely nervous and worn looking.

Adam Baxter was not a prepossessing individual; he was about seventy years of age; his nose was bulbous; his eyes blood-shot under shaggy brows; his puffy, yellow face hung in loose folds; and he spoke in a querulous, rasping voice.

He was clothed now in a suit several sizes too large for him, and was not in the best of temper after having spent several hours in a cell.

"They think I'm crazy," he complained. "But they'd be crazier than I am if they'd seen what I have."

"Our senses are very unreliable weaknesses." Greer reminded him. "Magician's

tricks, you know, deceive the sharpest of us."

"Oh, so you think I've been seeing things, too?" Baxter snorted. "Well, do you think *that's* imagination?" He drew out a crumpled scrap of paper which he unfolded with trembling fingers and handed to Greer. "See if you see the same thing there that I do?"

Greer took the sheet. In crude, printed letters he read:

Adam Baxter—Leave this house at once or prepare to meet thy God.

"Where did you get this?" asked the detective.

"I found it on the floor of my room last night."

"When you went to bed?"

"No; it wasn't there when I went to bed. I found it about two o'clock this morning. The door and windows were locked, but, in spite of that, there it was in the middle of the floor."

"Was that why you ran out into the street?"

"That wasn't all," said Baxter with some dignity. "When I woke up there was a red light in the room, and—and—something else—"

"What?"

"I don't know what it was. As soon as I saw it, it was gone," Baxter declared testily. "It looked like a figure or a shadow, but it would come and go—appear and vanish in a second. I ran toward it, but there was nothing there. Then the room was dark again. It isn't the first time it has happened either.

"When I turned on the light, the thing was gone, and the note was lying on the floor."

"And you left the house?"

Baxter drew himself up haughtily. "Any other man would have done the same thing."

"Is this the first warning you have had?" inquired the detective.

"Yes. But I have seen that thing before. And my daughter and son-in-law have seen it, too."

"How long since you first noticed this—phenomenon?"

"Ever since we came home two weeks ago."

"You have been away?"

"We have been abroad for six months."

"How many times has it occurred?" asked Greer.

"I have seen it three times," said Baxter. "My daughter and her husband have seen it twice. But there have been other queer things, too.

"Once we heard the piano playing in the middle of the night. We went downstairs and turned on the lights. There was no one in the room. The piano was open. I saw the keys pressed down as if by an unseen hand!"

"What did you do?"

Baxter looked a little confused. "Why—we went upstairs again—and—"

"You made no investigation?"

"Damn it, man! There was nothing to investigate!" Baxter cried, exasperated.

"And your son-in-law saw it, too?"

"Yes; my daughter and her husband, Herbert Downey."

"Was there any one else in the house—children or servants?"

"Not then—our cook goes home at night. No; you can't explain it away like that. There was nobody in the house—we searched everywhere. The doors and windows of my bedroom were locked last night, too. Nobody could possibly have got in without our knowing it.

"They weren't locked the first time I saw the—thing. Since then, I have been locking them. I had a new bolt put on the door. But it doesn't make any difference. It comes in anyway. Nothing human could get in."

"Is it a bright light?" asked Greer. "Could you see the figure plainly?"

"No—just a dim reddish glow—with a sort of shadow in it."

"Where do you live, Mr. Baxter?" the detective inquired.

"In the fourteen hundred block on Delaware."

"Hmmm!" Greer pondered a moment in silence. "I think I'd like to meet your ghost, Mr. Baxter."

"You don't take it seriously now, but you will," predicted the old man.

"On the contrary, I think it promises to be a most serious and also a most interesting case," Greer assured him.

II



THE Baxter house was built in the eighties, in what was then the fashionable district of Denver. Most of the dingy old mansions have long since degenerated into boarding houses and light housekeeping apartments.

In front of some, little one story business houses have sprung up like queer excrescences. At the corner of Delaware Street, facing Colfax Avenue, stands the United States Mint, solemnly impressive, with its gray granite, prisonlike walls, its barred windows, and its great bronze doors, bullet-scarred.

And, stretching back of it, Delaware Street, with its grimy, ornate old houses of brick and stone, with high narrow windows, steep roofs, useless stone carving and fantastic gingerbread work.

The ugliness is partly concealed in summer behind a curtain of leaves, when the street is like a green tunnel under the over-arching elms. But in winter, its sooty blackness and dreariness is revealed starkly through the cheerless bare branches.

Here, between the mint and a forlornly respectable boarding house, stands the Baxter home, huge, gloomy, forbidding. The light snow of the night had melted under the morning sun, and it lacked even that sparkling brilliance to relieve its somberness when Greer approached.

Adam Baxter and his family were not the only ones who had seen the reddish light. A couple in the boarding house next door, who gave their names as Brown, had also observed the reddish glow flickering mysteriously in the upper windows of the old house.

Mr. Brown had been on the point of turning in a fire alarm, he confessed, when the light had disappeared completely. But no one else had seen the wraithlike figure that came and went in the night.

Adam Baxter's room, at the rear of the house, faced south and east. The head of his bed stood between the two south win-

dows, and a fireplace filled the space between the two east windows.

The other two walls were plain and bare, except for a door opening into the corridor opposite the fireplace. It was a big square room; the walls were plastered and covered with a light paper. Greer examined the room carefully.

There was no possible entrance except by the door. The chimney was not large enough to admit the passage of a human being. The windows were twenty feet from the ground, and the screens securely latched on the inside.

Baxter's daughter and her husband, Herbert Downey, occupied a room across the hall, also facing south. Mrs. Downey, a stout woman who tried to appear intellectual, was inclined to regard the incidents as occult manifestations.

"I never believed in spiritualism before, but after this experience, I am convinced that we are in touch with the unknown," she declared solemnly. "A medium once told me that I have psychic powers. Perhaps you will think I am to blame for all this?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Downey," Greer assured her.

"Do you think we should obey the warning and leave the house?" Mrs. Downey inquired anxiously.

"I don't think that will be necessary. I propose to occupy Mr. Baxter's room tonight, and see—"

"Oh, you shouldn't! You really shouldn't, Mr. Greer!" gasped Mrs. Downey. "Something might happen!"

"I am not afraid of spirits," Greer smiled. "And I am convinced that no human being can enter the room when the door is locked—at least, not without my knowledge."

"But we shouldn't run counter to the edicts of the spiritual world," Mrs. Downey protested. "You don't know what forces are at work. Father had a bolt put on the door on the inside—and yet—see what happened. How did that note get there—in the middle of the room?"

"Simply enough," said Greer. "It could have been slipped under the door and pushed across the floor with a long wire;

or it could have been blown across with a pair of bellows."

"But there was no one in the house. Don't you think my father should move away from this old house, Mr. Greer, and build a new one in a better part of town?"

"You don't like the house?" questioned Greer.

"Of course not—it's an old barn. Father had a chance to sell last year. Mr. Brown, next door, wanted to buy it—he wanted to put up a store building in front of it. But father wouldn't sell. I think he was very foolish. But surely, after this, he will be willing to move."

"I think I can convince him he has nothing to fear here," Greer answered.

Adam Baxter refused to return to the house that night, but had his things sent to a hotel. Greer prepared to spend the night in the haunted room. He bolted the door. It was a heavy steel bolt which had been put on only a few days before.

The room was cheerful and comfortable in the glow of a shaded reading light. An armchair stood by the hearth. Kindling and firewood had been laid across the andirons, and a well-filled basket stood near by.

The thought of an open fire was tempting, but Greer did not set a match to it. He must not be drowsy; he wanted all his wits about him; for, as he expected, he was to have little rest that night. He raised one of the windows. The tingling night air flowed into the room. He turned out the lights and sat down to wait.

The two windows by the fireplace overlooked the back yard and the rambling old brick barn, part of which had been turned into a garage. The two windows at the head of the bed faced the boarding house next door. Certainly, there was nothing mysterious or sinister about either view.

The night passed slowly. Greer heard the hours tolled off faintly by the clock downstairs. It had just struck two when the room was filled with a reddish glow. A shadowy figure moved across the wall opposite the bed. The next instant it had disappeared, and the room was dark. Then it was there again.

Greer whirled about. The light came through one of the windows at the head of

the bed. It lasted only a moment. The source of it would not be readily perceived by one lying in the bed.

But, even though it flashed and vanished so quickly, the explanation was simple enough to one in full possession of his senses and not just awakened from sleep.

Greer's first impression was that some one had lowered a magic lantern on a wire from the attic window just above. He rushed from the room and up the narrow stairs to the floor above.

The space under the roof had never been finished or divided into rooms. Only a few decrepit chairs, some stacks of books and old magazines were stored there. It took but a minute to make certain the place was unoccupied.

As Greer ran down the steps, Herbert Downey and his wife flung open the door of their room and fled into the hall. Both were scantily clad.

Mr. Downey, a thin, nervous little man, was trying to wrap a blanket round his shoulders, while his wife struggled with bathrobe and slippers. Mrs. Downey uttered a frightened scream at the sight of Greer.

"Oh—it's you!" she gasped. "Did you—did you—"

"It's in there now," Mr. Downey announced, trying to speak calmly. "We saw it. It's in there—in our room."

"I can't help it if I'm psychic!" Mrs. Downey sobbed. "It's just—"

She was interrupted by a low, vibrant note of the piano. The three stood breathless, listening. It sounded again. It was strange to hear that throbbing bass note repeated monotonously in the stillness of the night.

Greer ran down the stairs to the first floor. Downey and his wife followed timidly. The detective switched on the lights in the living room.

The Downeys peered over his shoulder. For a moment they stood in the doorway, staring at the upright piano across the room. The deep bass tones boomed slowly like a funeral dirge. The keys were pressed down as if by an invisible hand.

Greer sprang across the room to the piano. Putting his shoulder to the instru-

ment, he moved it away from the wall. The music ceased suddenly. A number of coarse black threads led from the hammers inside the case out behind the instrument and through the nearest window. The draperies had concealed the threads.

Greer raised the sash and peered out into the night. But the mischief-maker had vanished.

Mrs. Downey was laughing hysterically. Mr. Downey patted her comfortably.

"There, there, sweetheart. I told you it was nothing to be afraid of."

III



HE perpetrator of the uncanny tricks had disappeared, and Greer was unable to locate the source of the red light. But the Downeys and Adam Baxter were convinced that they had been the victims of a hoax.

Baxter's fighting spirit was aroused, and he was determined to restore his self-respect by capturing the culprits. He now pretended to take the whole thing as a joke.

"I guess the laugh's on me—getting scared at such kid tricks. But I ain't lost all my nerve yet. Just let 'em try any more tricks on me."

But Greer tried to persuade him not to return to the house. "Some one has threatened your life," he reminded him. "We don't know yet whether it is serious or not."

"Bosh! I haven't any enemies!" Baxter scoffed. "It's just a joke."

"I think there is more to this affair than you suspect," Greer warned him. "No one would go to so much trouble without a purpose."

"Well, I ain't afraid of anything that walks on two legs," Baxter boomed. "It will take more than a magic lantern to bluff me." He insisted on sleeping in his own room again that night.

"Have you a revolver?" Greer asked.

"Sure—but—"

"Sleep with it under your pillow," the detective advised. "And bolt your door."

Adam Baxter went up to his room at ten o'clock that evening. Greer was given a room across the hall, next to the Downeys.

Mr. and Mrs. Downey and another couple—the Browns from the boarding house next door—were engaged in a bridge game downstairs. Shortly after ten Baxter knocked on Greer's door.

"Can you let me have a match?" he asked. "I can't find any, and I want to light the fire. It's chilly to-night—the furnace isn't heating very good—I don't know what's the matter with it."

"I guess these hot air furnaces aren't very good for a two story house. But I like an open fire. I want to sit up and finish the book I am reading."

Greer handed him the matches. "Are all your windows fastened?" he inquired as Baxter turned back toward his room.

"Come see for yourself," the old man growled.

Greer followed him into the room and made certain that every window was securely locked. Baxter changed his coat and shoes for dressing gown and slippers. He drew an armchair up to the hearth.

"Nothing like an open fire and a book in winter, eh?" he murmured, rubbing his hands. "I'd like to see any one run me out of this room again. Better sit awhile and smoke, Greer."

"No, thanks," the detective refused. "I didn't get much rest last night. But if you are disturbed in the night, call me. I won't let the fellow get away the second time."

"I'd like to have a shot at him, myself," declared Baxter. He laid his revolver on the table between the reading light and the tobacco jar. "I don't be bamboozled by such foolishness again," he snorted.

He was kneeling on the hearth, applying a match to the paper and kindling. The flames blazed up and the high lights glistened on the polished brass of the andirons.

"Bolt the door when I leave," Greer ordered.

Baxter crossed the room and said good night. As the door closed between them Greer heard him slide the bolt home inside. That was the last time Adam Baxter was ever seen alive.

The next two hours passed quietly. There was no sound or hint of what was happening in the locked room. Shortly after midnight. Greer was awakened by

Mrs. Downey's frightened cries. She was beating her fists on Baxter's door.

"Father! Father!" she cried. "Why don't you answer?"

Greer came out into the hall.

"I stopped to say good night to father, but he doesn't answer," Mrs. Downey said anxiously. "He never sleeps so soundly. What can be the matter?"

"We can't get the door open. What can we do?" Mr. Downey wailed hopelessly.

"Get an ax," Greer ordered.

He put his shoulder to the door, but the oak panel was too heavy to be broken so easily. Downey soon returned with an ax. A few blows crashed in the panel. Greer reached for the bolt inside, and slid it back. He pushed open the door and switched on the light. On the bed lay Adam Baxter—dead!

He had apparently died in his sleep; he lay on his back, a calm peaceful expression on his homely face. There was no sign of violence or struggle or even of suffering. There was no wound on the body, nothing to show how death had occurred.

Mrs. Downey crossed to the foot of the bed and stood gazing at her father. The color drained from her face, and she swayed slightly. The room seemed intolerably close and stifling, though a gust of cold air swept through the door from Greer's open windows across the hall.

Baxter's windows were still closed and fastened. Greer examined the locks, then raised the sash of one, letting the sharp winter breeze flow into the room. The fire had gone out some time ago, leaving the wood half burned.

"I'm going to get a mirror and see if he is breathing," Downey cried, running out of the room.

"What has happened? How could it happen?" Mrs. Downey sobbed. "He was in perfect health two hours ago."

"It may be heart failure," Greer told her.

"Oh, but I'm sure it wasn't," she protested.

"Then he must have been poisoned."

"But he didn't eat anything we didn't."

"An autopsy will be necessary to determine the cause of death," Greer answered. "I shall have to call up headquarters and

summon the coroner. In the meantime, let everything remain as it is."

The detective hurried to the telephone in the hall below. As he finished talking, Downey came running downstairs.

"My wife's fainted," he gasped. "Help me get her to her room."

Mrs. Downey was lying on the floor beside her father's bed. They carried her across the hall. She was breathing convulsively, like a person panting. Greer opened the windows, and the fresh air soon revived her.

"When I came back with the mirror, I saw her falling—" Downey chattered on nervously.

"I never fainted before in my life," said Mrs. Downey, puzzled. "But suddenly, I felt so giddy—" She paused, still short of breath.

Downey buzzed about her excitedly. "It may be your heart. I'm going to call the doctor."

"I'm all right now," Mrs. Downey insisted, "though my head feels rather queer."

But Downey was already rushing to the telephone.

Greer returned to the room where the dead man lay. He shivered a little in the cold pouring in the open window, and lowered the sash again. Nothing had been disturbed.

Baxter's clothes, Greer noticed, were scattered about carelessly, his dressing gown on a chair in the corner, collar and shirt on the chest of drawers. He had not even hung up his trousers, but dropped them in a heap on the floor.

Yet Baxter had impressed Greer as being neat and orderly, a man who was even cranky about his possessions.

The revolver still lay on the table—he had not taken it to bed with him. His book lay face down beside it, open about the middle, though Baxter had intended to finish it.

He had built up the fire and planned to sit up late, reading. Yet a few minutes later he had undressed and gone to bed—undressed hurriedly, if his scattered clothes were any evidence. The fire had died out, and the charred logs were cold. Greer's in-

vestigation was interrupted then by the arrival of the officers from headquarters.

IV



AFTER the removal of Baxter's body, Greer returned to the bedroom where the tragedy had occurred. He found Sergeant Kelly there, still puzzling over the case. It lacked an hour yet of dawn. The windows were closed, but the room was chilly and damp. No fire had been started yet in the furnace.

"Close the door," said Greer. "I want to try to reconstruct what happened here."

"Have you any theory about it?" asked Kelly.

"I have an idea *why* he was killed—that's all," answered Greer. "I tried to prevent his returning to the house to-night, but I only wanted to save him annoyance—I had no idea there was any real danger."

"Who do you think poisoned him—that simple-looking son-in-law of his?" whispered Kelly.

"I don't believe he was poisoned—he seemed to have died without pain. Yet, I think he was not feeling well, since he changed his mind about finishing the book and left his clothes strewn about so carelessly."

"What happened then?"

"I'm not quite sure. He wasn't frightened," Greer mused—"the revolver has not been touched. It is still there between the lamp and the tobacco jar, where I saw him lay it. And he did not call out, or I should have heard him."

"He may have been feeling unwell, but his face showed no expression of pain—he was not suffering. The only other solution, and the most plausible one I can think of, is that he was gassed."

"Gassed?" echoed Kelly. "Then why didn't he open the windows or get out of the room?"

"Either, he did not have time before he was overcome, or he did not suspect the presence of the gas."

"You mean he couldn't smell it?"

"Yes; some deadly gases are odorless."

"Then how did it happen?" Kelly demanded.

"That's what I don't understand," Greer confessed.

"Well, we might as well make ourselves comfortable while we're figuring it out," said Kelly. "I'm going to make a fire. I'm getting a headache sitting here in the cold."

"Sit down; I'll make the fire," Greer offered.

Kelly made no objection. He sank back in the chair and clutched his head in his hands.

Greer shoved back the half-burned logs on the andirons. He drew up the half-filled wood basket, found newspapers, and soon had a blaze kindled. The ruddy glow brightened the corners of the room; the quick warmth was cheerful and welcome.

"I feel kind of dizzy," Kelly complained, drawing his chair closer to the fire. "It must be the flu," he prophesied gloomily.

Greer added more wood, and soon had the flames leaping up the chimney.

"Maybe the old fellow was chloroformed," said Kelly. "Could any one have got into the room?"

"No; the windows and door were locked on the inside, and the chimney is too small for any one to enter that way."

"Where were Mr. and Mrs. Downey?"

"They were downstairs, in the room just below this. But they had guests. No—they can't be responsible," said Greer, answering Kelly's unspoken thoughts. "I can't understand," he went on, "why Baxter changed his mind about finishing his book and went to bed instead."

"Maybe he got sleepy," Kelly grinned.

"Would he get too sleepy to pick up his clothes?" countered Greer.

There was a moment's silence. Kelly poked at the fire, which was not burning so brightly.

"That wood is making a lot of smoke," he grumbled.

"It is queer that the fire went out before," Greer mused. "Some of those logs were only half burned. And they weren't wet, either."

"Maybe that's the reason Baxter went to bed," Kelly ventured—"because the fire went out."

"But why didn't it burn?" asked Greer.

"He had it well started—I saw it. It's been my experience that once a log like that catches fire it goes right on smoldering till it's nothing but ashes, even if you try to put it out. And Baxter didn't put any ashes over the fire or throw water on it."

"Well, it looks as if it's going out again," Kelly observed gloomily, stirring up the embers.

The blaze flared up black and smoky like the flame of an oil lamp that is turned too high, then died down again sullenly.

"If Baxter was gassed," Greer reflected, "the gas might have been liberated down the chimney by some one on the roof."

"And that's what put the fire out?"

"That must be it. Some gases—"

"Say, I wish you wouldn't keep talking about gas," Kelly grumbled fretfully. "It makes me feel dizzy just to listen to you."

"Mrs. Downey complained of dizziness, too!" Greer exclaimed. "And my head is beginning to feel queer. Look! The fire is going out!" The flames flickered feebly. Then there was only smoke. "That fire was snuffed out—smothered!" cried Greer. "We've got to get out of here—quick!"

Kelly only stared at him dumbly. He was breathing with difficulty, in short little gasps. Greer half dragged him from his chair and shoved him toward the door. They stumbled out into the corridor, and Greer pulled the door to behind them. Downey came out of his wife's room and met them with frightened queries.

"Don't go in there," warned Greer, breathing heavily. "Open the windows."

Downey helped him get Kelly across the hall to another bedroom and opened the windows there. The sharp icy wind whipped into the room, carrying snowflakes with it.

"I don't want to get pneumonia," Kelly protested weakly. "I feel bad enough now."

"You'll be all right," Greer told him. "But it nearly got us."

"What? What nearly got you?" demanded Downey, his eyes bulging.

"Gas," said Greer. "That explains why Mrs. Downey was overcome—she remained in the room, while you and I left immediately."

Kelly was holding his head between his hands. "I wish I had a drink," he groaned.

Downey produced a silver flask with a flourish. "I always knew it would come in handy," he beamed. "That's why I carry it," he added hastily, with a sidelong look at the officers. "Have a drink?" he ventured timidly.

Kelly raised his head and glared at him fiercely. Downey checked himself abruptly. He seemed to wilt under Kelly's surprised, accusing gaze. Kelly uttered a hearty guffaw—he was beginning to recover from the effects of the gas. Downey grinned sheepishly and changed the subject.

"The doctor is still here—he stayed to look after my wife. I'll call him." The little man trotted out and soon returned with the physician, Dr. Cameron.

Greer told him of their experience.

"How did you detect the gas?" he asked.

"There was no sign at all—expect the fire went out," Greer answered.

"Odorless and colorless, eh?" mused Dr. Cameron. "You were lucky to escape."

"What kind of gas?" asked Kelly.

"I can't tell yet."

"There must be some one hiding in there!" Downey exclaimed suddenly. "Some one who tried to kill you!"

"If there is, he has committed suicide," returned Greer.

"Then—who did it?"

"I did," Greer told him.

"What?" Kelly glared at him. "Say, what kind of a joke is that?"

"I did it," Greer repeated. "Accidentally, however—by making the fire. I have an idea that the gas was generated by the heat. There must be some chemical concealed about the fireplace which gives off the deadly gas when warmed. And it was that which killed Baxter."

"When he noticed the effects of the fumes, he thought he was not feeling well, but did not realize the danger. He went to bed and to sleep. The heat continued to generate the gas, and he was overcome. The fire was extinguished, but Baxter never regained consciousness."

"Exactly," confirmed Dr. Cameron.

"When we broke into the room last night, it seemed close and stifling," Greer

went on. "Mrs. Downey looked faint, and I opened the windows. The room soon aired out, and there was no more danger from the gas until I lighted the fire again. But some traces of the gas must have remained."

He turned to Kelly. "You were in the room longer than I was, and you breathed enough of the vapor to give you a headache before I made the fire and generated the gas for the second time."

"The gas must be escaping now through the broken door," interposed the doctor. "We'd better open the windows and air the room."

V



GREER, holding his breath, entered the death room and opened the windows. The fire was not even smoldering, he noticed. It had been extinguished completely. The fresh wind, blowing through the room, soon cleared the atmosphere; and, after an hour, Dr. Cameron pronounced it safe to enter.

Greer poked about the now-cold hearth, fingering the rough brick and heavy andirons. One of the bricks, just below the center of the back wall, was loose. It fell out when Greer touched it. Then he saw it was only the face of a brick—half an inch thick. The back of it had been chipped away. Behind it, other bricks had been removed, leaving a big hollow space. This space was filled with a white, limelike substance.

"Look at all the old mortar that's fallen down there," said Downey.

But Dr. Cameron was on his knees before the fireplace, gingerly fingering the white stuff.

"Calcium carbonate," the physician announced, "or ordinary limestone. The trap was well laid for Adam Baxter."

"Is that poisonous?" asked Kelly.

"When heated, it gives off carbon dioxide," explained the physician. "That is not poisonous in itself, but an atmosphere containing fifteen per cent or more of the gas will extinguish a flame or suffocate animal life because of the deficiency of oxygen. Aside from that, it has an anæsthetic ac-

tion, so that Baxter was probably unconscious for some time before he died."

"And he made the fire himself," Greer mused.

"Just ordinary limestone," Kelly marveled.

"Yes," said Dr. Cameron. "They have to arrange to carry off the fumes in the manufacture of lime, you know. When the limestone is heated, carbon dioxide is set free and lime remains."

He moistened some of the white lumps they had taken from the chimney, and they crumbled and boiled, showing that lime had been formed in the process.

"Why didn't the draft from the fire draw the gas up the chimney?" Kelly asked.

"Carbon dioxide is heavier than air," Dr. Cameron answered. "That is why it is used in fire extinguishers. It settles over the fire and blankets it, shutting out the air."

"And Baxter, seeing that the fire was going out, would naturally poke it and try to rekindle it, which kept him hovering over the hearth, so that he received the full effects of the gas," Greer pointed out.

"When he began to feel dizzy, he undressed hurriedly and went to bed. He was afraid to open the windows on account of the weird tricks that have been played on him. And that was exactly the purpose of these almost-childish schemes to frighten him."

"Yes," agreed Dr. Cameron, "carbon dioxide could not kill him with the windows open. Well—I'll leave the rest for you to clear up," he added. "I must be getting on."

Downey accompanied him to the door.

"But why did they want to kill old Baxter? And who did it?" Kelly puzzled.

"From the moment I first heard of the attempt to frighten him," said Greer, "I have been sure it is a plot to break into the mint. But I had no idea they would carry it as far as murder."

"You mean tunnel through to the mint?" asked Kelly.

"It wouldn't be the first time it has been tried," returned Greer. "But I can't locate the tunnel. I've searched the basement thoroughly, and also the barn and garage."

"But they could have finished the tunnel and robbed the mint while the family was away," argued Kelly. "They've been gone six months."

"Perhaps they have finished the tunnel," Greer agreed, "but have been waiting for a propitious moment to break into the vaults. The vaults are protected by double walls with a passage for the guard between, you know; and there are all kinds of alarms."

"Possibly they have been awaiting the arrival of some master criminal to make the big attempt. Since they have been trying to get Baxter and the Downeys out of this house, the entrance to the tunnel must be from the basement."

Kelly ridiculed the idea. "There's no tunnel in the basement. I've had a look at it—it's all brick and concrete and as bare as your hand."

"But it must be an attempt to break into the mint," Greer insisted. "What other reason could there be for trying to frighten these people out of the house?"

"Why would they want to get them out? The gang must have keys to the house," Kelly contended. "They had to come in to tie those threads to the piano hammers and to fix this carbon dioxide stuff. Why couldn't they get into the tunnel just as well?"

"They could," Greer acknowledged. "But they couldn't haul out a truckload of gold and greenbacks without being discovered. They want the house to themselves for the big coup."

VI

DOWNEY came upstairs then, carrying a tray to Mrs. Downey. He stopped to tell the officers that breakfast was ready. Greer and Kelly accepted his invitation with alacrity.

The sun was well up then. A light snow had fallen during the night. Greer and Kelly stood by the north window of the dining room, waiting for their host. Beyond the strip of lawn rose the forbidding gray granite walls of the United States Mint.

At the rear of the government building, a driveway leads down into the basement,

where the armored car is loaded within the walls.

Greer stood contemplating the scene, wondering what madness made men risk their lives for the treasure behind those granite walls. Yet it was small wonder, for the vaults under the great mint are the principal gold bullion storage house of the nation.

Suddenly Greer's glance was riveted upon a path running diagonally across the lawn toward the mint. For a space two feet in width, the snow was beginning to melt perceptibly. But there were no footprints along it.

Downey entered the room then. "The furnace isn't heating very good," he began apologetically. "I've just put in some more coal."

Greer called his attention to the path through the snow.

"Is there a walk across the yard there?" the detective asked. "The snow always melts first over concrete."

"No," said Downey. "I wonder why the snow is melting there? I never noticed it before."

"Then there's a tunnel underneath," Greer announced evenly. "The tunnel is close to the surface, and the warm air from the house is melting the snow."

"It isn't very warm," Downey began, "the furnace—"

"The furnace! Of course!" cried Greer. "I wonder I didn't think of it before! It's a hot air furnace, isn't it?"

"Yes," Downey answered, puzzled.

"Where is the cold air duct?"

"In the hall."

Downey showed the detective the wooden grating in the floor near the front door where the cold air was drawn down. An immense galvanized iron pipe conducted the cold air down under the cement floor of the basement to the furnace, after which, it rose reheated to the various rooms. Greer lifted the grating with his knife blade and looked down into the galvanized cylinder. A small iron ladder was fastened at one side.

"Well, I'm damned!" Kelly began.

Greer lifted a warning finger for silence. He let the grille back in place and motioned

to the others to withdraw. In the dining room again, with the door closed, the three men discussed the best method of entering the tunnel. For that the cold air duct connected with a tunnel under the basement floor, there could be no doubt.

"No wonder you've had trouble keeping the house warm," said Greer, "with that tunnel absorbing the heat."

"There may be a whole gang of bandits down there now with dynamite and T. N. T.," Downey quavered.

"We'd better send for reserves and tear bombs or something," Kelly suggested.

There was a moment's silence. Greer, who was standing near the door, suddenly flung it open. Mr. Brown, from the boarding house next door, was standing in the hall.

"Brown! What are you doing here?" cried Downey, surprised.

"I just came over to see if there is anything I can do," said Brown. "My wife thought maybe Mrs. Downey might want her to come over and sit with her awhile—or help about something."

"How did you get in?" asked Greer.

"I didn't like to ring the doorbell on ac-

count of disturbing Mrs. Downey; and the front door was unlocked, so I just walked in," Brown explained. "I didn't think Mr. Downey would object."

Greer's glance sought the man's shoes. There was no snow on the edges of the soles—no sign of dampness.

"You didn't come in from outside," the detective said, drawing his revolver. "Put up your hands, Brown. Frisk him, Kelly."

"All right; you've got me," snarled Brown, complying with the order.

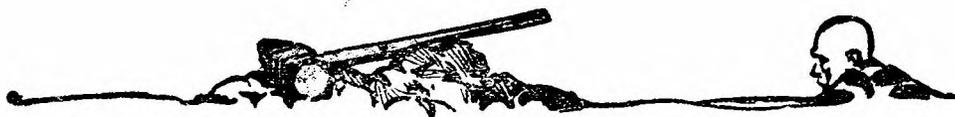
"Are there any others in the tunnel now?" asked Greer.

"No; I play a lone hand."

"He's not armed," said Kelly. "But here's his flash light—it has a red lens."

Kelly handed the pocket torch to Greer. On the red lens at the end was pasted a tiny transparent figure of celluloid, evidently cut from a Kodak or motion picture film. Greer snapped on the light and the figure was projected on the wall.

"There's your ghost that came and went so mysteriously," he told Downey. "I suppose Mrs. Brown manipulated that from the upstairs window next door, while Brown played the piano."



FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 26 will open with "Politics," a complete novelette by Victor Maxwell. This is not only one of the best Brady and Riordan stories Mr. Maxwell has written, but it is one of the best stories of police business ever published in any magazine.

Louise Rice contributes an article, "Family Life," in the same issue.

In addition there will be "The Steamboat Killer," a short story by Edward Parrish Ware; "The Feud," a special article by Don H. Thompson; "The Streak Pays Off," by Robert H. Rohde; "Heroes of Science," by Allen Saunders; "The Murder Club," by J. Jefferson Farjeon; "Yellow—Clear Through," by John Tyler Martin; together with other stories and articles.

Only in FLYNN'S WEEKLY will ten cents take you so far or so well into detective story fields.

William J. Flynn



The headless body was carried on by sheer momentum, but—

THE BORGIAS

By Joseph Gollomb

THE STORY OF A DYNASTY OF CRIME, UNEQUALED IN DEMONIC INGENUITY, WHOSE TENTACLES OF EVIL EXTENDED OVER ALL EUROPE

A Story of Fact

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

IN all the history of Europe there was never a ruler of any sort whose crimes, vices, cruelties, and cunning equaled that of Roderigo de Borgia, whose unscrupulous intrigue won him the exalted position of Emperor of Rome, His Pontifical Majesty, Pope Alexander VI. Exceeding him in everything, if possible, was his illegitimate son, Cesare, murderer of his brother, lover of his sister Lucrezia, arch-villain supreme, who, with the papal power behind him, trampled over all to constantly growing power and personal indulgence. In order to unite with a greater monarchy through a marriage with Lucrezia the Borgias wish to be rid of Lucrezia's husband, Alphonzo, son of the King of Naples, and for that purpose Alphonzo is guest to a festival and bull fight in Rome. Alphonzo is wary, however, and is accompanied by a protector in the person of Francesco Gazella.



THE climax of the Roman festival is the bull fight. The great square of St. Peter's is transformed into an arena. The streets leading into it are barricaded off. Only a single gate allows entry into the square.

The windows overlooking it have been transformed into private boxes for the world of the select. On the day of the combats Roman weather does its best. The sun is gracious, the air is light, the skies are turquoise.

All the glitter of the capital of Catholic Europe has come to look on. The most

This feature began in **FLYNN'S WEEKLY** for January 29



—the tawny head with its wicked horns dropped to the ground

beautiful women in Italy are there. Ambassadors and princes, the mighty in wealth, the aristocracy, and the great ones of the church look on. Alexander VI is in a box by himself.

The bugles sound. The sole gate to the arena opens. With a bellow, a spirited bull dashes in. Professional bull fighters bait him and the spectacle is on.

But the professionals serve only as an appetizer to the feast. No one in particular in that audience cares very much as to which got worsted—the bull or the professional bull fighter—provided the entertainment is good.

But soon the main dish of the feast is on. It is to be not only a feast, but a demonstration that between Cesare Borgia and his brother-in-law, Alphonzo of Naples, there exists good will so profound that each will prove it by risking his life for the other.

Each in turn will alone face an infuriated bull in such a way that only the other man can save him from a violent death.

Cesare, to show his trust in Alphonzo, will face the peril first. He enters on horseback. The animal is a good one, but not as fine a specimen as could be expected from the steed on whose fleetness depends the fate of Cesare. That is clear to the eye of

most of the big audience. The whisper runs that great indeed must be Cesare's trust in Alphonzo.

Alphonzo is not visible from the windows. He is supposed to be somewhere in the passage near the door leading into the arena. Cesare is unarmed.

The audience, at a pleasant tension, hear the trumpeters warn Cesare of the coming of the bull. The gate is thrown open. A splendid Andalusian bull, black as night, except where his eyes gleam with white and blood, plunges into the arena.

From the top of the arena wall, near the gate, a shower of darts and arrows descends on the bull and pierce his flesh. Some of these darts are so arranged that the instant the barb sinks into the bull a capsule of powder explodes and sets fire to the barb at the point where it has bit into the flesh.

With a bellow of agony the bull drops to the arena and, rolling about on the ground, tries to extinguish the torture. But the darts have been devised too cleverly, and the beast gets to its feet again, mad with pain.

He sees a man on horseback before him. Lowering its noble head and with a surge of its splendid body, the bull charges. Its long horns tapering to pitchfork points make

for the horse's flanks. A race ensues about the arena, the horse only a yard away from those lunging prongs.

But Cesare is one of the noted horsemen of his age. Were it not for his skill the race would be soon over. Skill alone, however, keeps the horse just ahead of the bull, but when endurance enters the contest the situation becomes grave. The twists and sharp turns to escape the bull tire the horse more than its pursuer. And now it is clear that if Alphonzo is to do his part he must come on the scene at once.

Suddenly the bull's horns gash the horse's flank and Cesare's leg.

In the Bull Ring

A gasp from the audience, and sounding high above it the scream of a woman. Cesare, with a lightning tug at the rein, jerks the animal to one side and the bull plunges on.

Cesare looks up. There is little concern in his face as to what the bull will next do.

But there is lively curiosity in his look as he turns in the direction from which came that woman's scream. It was so spontaneous and had such feminine concern in it that Cesare is interested. It sounded like the voice of an attractive woman.

He sees who it is, one of the maids of honor to Elizabeth, Duchess of Urbino. The maid of honor is Rosa Valenti, betrothed to Giovanni Caracciolo, Captain-General of the Republic of Venice. She is a beauty, and in the fleeting instant Cesare devotes to her at this time he tells himself he must see more of her.

But the bull has wheeled and is charging once more. The meeting will be—unless Cesare's bleeding horse can escape it—just in front of the gate leading to the arena.

It does not look as if the horse will win, and now the onlookers are on their feet.

Through the gate steps Alphonzo, on foot, a short cloak draped over his long Arragonese sword.

He jumps into the arena in such a way as to attract the bull's bloodshot vision. Here is a man on foot, the bull sees, easier to dispatch than one mounted. With a bel- low that seems to tear that mighty throat in its uttering, the bull checks his charge

on Cesare so suddenly that he slides to a standstill in a cloud of dust.

Then, wheeling, he contemplates Alphonzo for a few moments, while he lashes his black sides with his tail. Down goes that dust-caked noble head of the bull's and at Alphonzo he charges.

Alphonzo faces him with feet planted wide apart and his cloak-draped sword pointing rigidly. On comes the bull. Alphonzo does not budge. A second will see the issue decided. For the bull's horns are in the cloak

But thirty inches of steel plunge into his right eye and drop the animal to the dust. It quivers from head to foot—then moves no more.

There is a storm of hand-clapping and admiration. Cesare looks up at Rosa Valenti. She looks as if she herself had gone through an ordeal.

Horses enter the arena, ropes are tied to the dead bull, and he is dragged out. Cesare rides out, and in turn Alphonzo comes cantering in on a superb drappled Arabian. As Cesare was, so Alphonzo is now unarmed.

Again the trumpets sound and again a bull charges into the arena. They breed marvelous bulls in Andalusia. They are bred exclusively for the bull ring, with long horns, swift, vast of shoulders and front, and with the proverbial power of the breed.

Cesare Does Not Come

Cesare has seen to it that the bull in peril of whose horns Alphonzo has been placed is the pick of his herd. The barbs that pierce the bull's flesh and the fire that sears it at once render the animal savage.

At Alphonzo he charges, and, Arab though the horse is, it is nip and tuck between them after the first spurt. Around and around the arena thunders the race. Now there is only the length of a lance between the two animals.

In a window nearest the palisade inclosing the bull ring some one waves a long scarf just as the horse speeds abreast it. The sudden whip of color makes the Arab swerve.

Shrieks and alarm as the horse's flanks barely miss the sidewise rip of those long

cruel horns. The horse itself seems to know how near to death it is. Panic lends it increased speed at too great cost. The race, with its need for sharp twists and sudden leaps—a dance to which the bull sets the tune—is not the kind for which the Arab had been bred.

Through Alphonzo's mind there flashes an uneasy suspicion that Cesare may come into the arena too late. If so, will the tardiness be mere accident?

Alphonzo keeps the contest as near the open gate as he can maneuver it. It is closed from the outside, that gate, and only Cesare can open it. But were it wide open Alphonzo's pride would prefer a finish fight to running away.

And still Cesare does not come. There is agitation among the onlookers. The Arab is plainly, if slowly, losing speed. The rider decides for a straightaway race round the arena once more, and away they streak.

Alphonzo's Short Cut

But now the bull gains and the chase must end a little beyond the still closed gate.

The horse has just flashed past it when the gate flies open and Cesare leaps through it. Both his hands grasp the double-hilted heavy French sword with which we saw him practice in the bull pen in Pisa. His left heel digs into the ground. The great sword makes a circle of lightning in the sun; then the blade swishes up.

And down it comes squarely on the bull. A single cry breaks from every man and woman looking on; a cry as sudden as the sight that brought it forth.

A tawny head with wicked horns has fallen to the arena, while a headless body plunging from sheer momentum totters on ten feet beyond where the head lies staring up from the arena's dust!

A single stroke had done it!

A veritable frenzy breaks from the audience. Alphonzo, on his trembling horse, feels as if in a dream. Then he realizes that Cesare had held back for the more effect; and feels that his suspicion of him had been undeserved.

With something of contrition adding to the warmth, Alphonzo leaps off his horse

and embraces Cesare, while all Rome and the ambassadors from abroad applaud.

The scene, on the face of it, says to the world, even to the sophisticated world. "Had Cesare come an instant too late, even then few could ascribe murder as the reason. It must be that, after all, the Borgias want Alphonzo to live."

Cesare picks up the bull's head and, handing it to an attendant, gives instructions. It is to be fitly mounted and presented to the betrothed of Giovanni Caracciolo, the lovely woman who had so sincerely shown her concern at the moment of peril to Cesare.

The festivities are to continue that night with a banquet at the Vatican, at which both Alphonzo and Cesare are to share honors.

Alphonzo dresses for the occasion in his apartment.

His uncle had been called away by some stranger a little before Alphonzo was ready. Alphonzo, therefore, has to go to the banquet alone. He knows his way and makes for a door connecting two courtyards which will give him a short cut to the scene.

It is night, but the courtyard is well lit. Alphonzo has not the slightest misgiving. He finds the door between the courtyards locked. That surprises him. He decides, however, that it is a simple matter to go out into the square of St. Peter's and in again through one of the gates leading into the Vatican gardens. That will lead him through a short dark street, but his thoughts are not of the darkness.

"He Has Been Murdered!"

He finds the street darker, however, than he thought it would be. And suddenly from the mouth of a black alley there is a rush of several men. In the darkness he cannot tell how many. But he tries to whip the sword out of its scabbard.

Steel pierces his shoulder: another blade enters his side. A halberd cuts open the flesh on his temple. His legs are slashed.

He falls to the street unconscious.

The attackers run to the corner of the street.

In the shadow of the square forty horsemen are stationed. Into their midst run

the assassins. A horse is waiting for each man. They mount, and the whole cavalcade sets off at a brisk canter and unhindered they leave Rome by the Portese Gate.

An hour passes. In the banquet hall the Pope and Cesare, at the head of the tables, appear to be waiting with increased uneasiness.

The Pope dispatches a messenger. The guests hear the Pope's concern as to what can be delaying Alphonzo.

The messenger reappears in the doorway, alarm in his looks as in his cry:

"He has been murdered!"

The Pope and Cesare are on their feet with exclamations of horror.

There is a hurrying and scurrying, commotion and increasing consternation. Alphonzo is found in a pool of his own blood and brought to his apartment. The Pope personally takes charge of the marshaling of doctors—for, although unconscious, Alphonzo is still alive.

The Messenger Leads

Cesare personally takes charge of the hunt for the probable assassins.

Both Alexander VI and Cesare—the latter postponing his departure because of the attempted assassination—show profound distress over the affair.

But, thanks to Alphonzo's robust constitution, he fights off death. At last he is declared out of danger. He is convalescing.

Meanwhile Lucrezia hears of the attack on her husband, and sends word that she is coming to Rome to nurse him herself.

If anything is to happen to Alphonzo it must happen before Lucrezia comes. As a Borgia herself she will know how to keep a watch over him against those mysterious deaths which visit those whom the Borgias find in the way.

Cesare sends for his henchman, Michel.

Alphonzo's uncle, Francesco Gazella, hovers about Alphonzo's sick room with the alert eyes of a hawk. He knows something about the Borgias; but, as events will show, he does not know enough.

Attending Alphonzo personally is a hunchback, Reni, a valet-de-chambre, page, jester, and devoted slave all in one. He sleeps at the foot of his master's bed, and

never for a moment does he leave his room except when his master himself sends him out.

Along with Gazella and Reni there are three physicians and two women nurses. It would seem, therefore, that Alphonzo has plenty of company in his convalescence.

But now comes the night before Lucrezia's arrival.

At two in the morning a messenger comes to Francesco Gazella declaring himself an envoy sent from the King of Naples, Alphonzo's father. Gazella does not know him. But the messenger is urgent. "My lord," he whispers, "there is one with me who must not be seen but by whom the king has sent more confidential word than his majesty was willing to intrust to me. She waits for you in the house of the Duke of Colonna, only two streets from the Vatican. His majesty wishes you to see her at once."

The messenger shows credentials which Gazella does not question. He goes.

The man leads Gazella out of the Vatican and along the dark streets. Instead of leading him straight to the rendezvous, the guide blunders about and finally, in distress, declares he has lost his way. Gazella impatiently demands that he find out by asking some one. The guide is alarmed. "No, no!" he exclaims. "No one must know that you or any one else has visited the Duke of Colonna at this hour! A little more patience, my lord, and I will find the house!"

The Moving Shadows

The guide is profuse in apologies; he is a stranger in Rome; the night is dark, and so forth and so on. He manages to keep Gazella out of the Vatican for well over two hours.

In the meanwhile the attendant doctors and nurses are summoned away, one by one, apparently by an epidemic of various ailments in the household of the Vatican.

There is left finally in the room with Alphonzo only his faithful hunchback, Reni.

Alphonzo has dropped off into a light doze. Reni, somewhat uneasy at the fact that he alone is left on guard, decides not to go to sleep. Making a nest of cushions

for himself on the floor at the foot of Alphonzo's bed, he sits down in it with his back against the bed.

The room is somnolently quiet. The whole Vatican seems plunged in silence. A dim night light flickering on a little table by the side of the bed casts deep shadows and a drowsy light.

The light does not reach the corners of the room; heavy brocaded hangings and velvety shadows blend indistinguishably there.

Stealthily the shadows in one corner of the room behind Reni move; or is it only the flickering night light that moves the shadow?

Reni has drowsed off. Then, for an instant, he dreams that a nightmare is suffocating him; but only for an instant. He wakes to find himself stifling and borne along in strong arms. Heavy clothes muffle his head and almost strangle him. He cannot resist, since his hands and feet are in the clutches of those who are carrying him. He is taken down several flights of stairs.

Without Formality of Trial

The clammy night air of Rome strikes him and he knows he is in the streets. Still held tightly and muffled against an outcry, he is thrown into a litter and carried along for considerable distance.

Finally he is ejected heavily into the street. When he has disentangled himself from the cloak that had muffled him he looks about. His captors have vanished. He doesn't know where he is, for the street is without a light and the night is dense.

It is dawn before he succeeds in finding his way back to the Vatican.

Joannes Burchard, master of ceremonies at the Vatican at that time, kept a diary of things he saw, a day-to-day record intended for no eyes but his own. In this diary he had no need to pretend; and the record has become a source book of our knowledge of the Borgias.

This is his succinct entry, made the day after the events I have been describing:

This night Don Alphonzo, who declined to die of his wounds, was strangled in his bed.

Who did it?

The only ones who really asked the ques-

tion loudly were Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia.

Every one else in Rome, in all Italy, throughout Europe, when the news of Alphonzo's murder spread, had a fairly clear idea at whose instance it was that some professional strangler had done the job.

Alexander and Cesare with Borgia competence "hunted down the murderers."

Francesco Gazella, Alphonzo's uncle, was seized, thrown into the dreaded prison of St. Angela and before sundown was beheaded without the formality of a trial.

Reni met the same fate.

Lucrezia Mourns

The three physicians and two nurses who attended Alphonzo fared as badly as Gazella and Reni.

By the time Lucrezia arrived, genuinely distraught at the murder of her handsome young husband, she was told by her father and her brother that "justice had been meted out to her husband's murderers."

She was alone with her father and Cesare when they told her that. They were both regarding her with stern scrutiny. She had never seen quite that look in their eyes before. And though her heart wept for her lover-husband that cool Borgia brain of hers was functioning.

It told her just what that look in the eyes of her father and her brother meant. Was she with them or against them? Was her loyalty to her dead husband greater than her loyalty to the Borgias? Did she mean a war of revenge or would she behave herself?

Lucrezia had a spirit of her own. She would have declared war against any other human being who dared to kill her lover.

But not even her dead husband or her lust for revenge were dearer to her than life itself. And much—in their own way—as Alexander and Cesare loved her, she remembered what a Borgia was capable of doing even to his own brother when their interests clashed.

Lucrezia decided to endure life as best she could, and with sincere tears entreated her father and her brother to permit her to return to Nepi at once to mourn her loss in solitude.

With tears also in their eyes and eloquent condolences Alexander and Cesare bade her farewell. Accompanied by her guard of more than six hundred horsemen Lucrezia went back to her temporary isolation, to mourn her widowhood.

In Rome Cesare and Alexander sat down to that political chessboard, Europe, on which they played for such great stakes and with Lucrezia as queen, cast about for a king to match.

The City Circled

Cesare left with a strong army to resume Borgia conquests in the field. His next objective was the city of Faenza. Here Cesare struck a snag, an unexpected one. He knew the city was strongly fortified. But he also knew that the allies of the family who ruled over the city had abandoned them out of fear of the rapidly growing military strength of the Borgias. In fact, the reigning family itself fled, leaving behind them only an eighteen-year-old boy, Astor Monfredi, a kinsman.

Astor was a remarkable youth. In appearance he looked the last person into whose hands should be left the defense of a city against the terrible Cesare Borgia with his strong army and heavy artillery. The youth was described as "beautiful" in looks and figure; with long, curly, golden hair, eyes of deep violet, delicately chiseled features, a soft mouth, and a slender, graceful body. Outwardly, therefore, there was more than a suggestion of effeminacy about him.

Cesare expected to march into the city at the cost only of a display of military strength. He made his display before the walls of Faenza. The city replied with a thunder not of applause, but competent artillery fire. Cesare lost his temper and ordered a heavy assault.

It did not improve his state of mind to have that assault hurled back at him with the city's compliments and at considerable cost to Cesare's troops. The Borgia took a more careful survey of his problem.

He found that the crux of his problem was a mere youth. In every repulse of his troops he read the signs of a brilliant military mind and an indomitable courage.

By this time he knew that these were embodied in young Astor, whom he had never seen.

Cesare tried this and Cesare tried that to capture the city; and the city still refused to oblige him. But a Borgia knew how to wait. And to make time and season serve him.

Winter was fast coming on. Cesare decided to starve Faenza into surrendering. Meanwhile he pitched camp—for his soldiers—in a circle about the city. For his own quarters and comfort he chose the town of Cesena near by.

At once the third-rate town became transformed into a city of luxury and festivity, or rather debauchery. Courtesans flocked there. Wine merchants grew rich. An orgy of drinking and degeneracy set in, with Cesare as the satrap, while Faenza was being starved.

One day Cesare was riding along the high road near the town when he saw a litter coming his way protected by a score of armed horsemen. There was every indication that the occupant of the litter was a woman of influence.

A Gift from a Borgia

When he came abreast of it he saw and recognized the occupant. It was the exceedingly pretty woman who had shrieked out in alarm when at the bullfight in Rome Cesare was gored by the maddened animal.

In the press of event that followed with the murder of Lucrezia's husband Cesare had forgotten her. But now that he had the leisure with which to play he was delighted at the meeting.

As for the lady herself it would appear that her emotions were not nearly so much of delight at the meeting. Her outcry at the bullfight was only the reaction of a sensitive woman to what looked like the imminence of violent death before her very eyes.

That it was Cesare whose life was in danger was not the important factor in her exclamation. When he sent her the decapitated bull's head as a gift, she was uneasy. Even a gift from a Borgia was fraught with danger.

When it looked as if Cesare had for-

gotten her, she felt relieved. And now here he was, by the side of her litter with very evident pleasure glowing in his eyes, those eyes with their bloodstone gleams.

"What good fortune is mine, sweet lady!" Cesare cried. "You must come and be my guest at Cesena!"

Her distress amounted to open fright. "Most sincerely I thank your lordship," she stammered. "But I am on my way to Venice to marry Captain Caracciolo. And if I lose not an hour on the journey I shall be only in time for our marriage. So I entreat your lordship not to take it amiss if I go on to Forli without stopping I want to get there before nightfall."

Venice Dishonored!

Cesare studied the frightened girl. Then with a truly courteous demeanor he expressed his profound regrets at the cruel necessity of their parting—and rode off.

The young woman breathed a little easier and her party quickened their pace. Early evening overtook them, however, before they could reach Forli.

And with the darkness came disaster. From both sides of the road through the wood there sprang a strong party of horsemen masked. Without making any demands they proceeded to slaughter the young woman's guards. Some of her escort died at once.

Others caught a glimpse of the attackers, and recognized the colors of the Duke of Valentis, the coat-of-arms with the Borgia bull.

The attackers tried to exterminate every one of the guards. But thanks to the dark and the woods, a considerable number escaped. Eventually some succeeded in getting to Venice with the news. Then Giovanni Caracciolo, captain general of the Republic of Venice, learned that his bride-that-was-to-be was in the hands of Cesare Borgia.

The last seen of her, according to the survivors of the escort, was when the leader of the attacking party snatched Rosa to the saddle of his horse and had carried her off.

From some peasants the survivors learned that this masked man was next seen carry-

ing the unconscious young woman into a peasant's cottage just outside the wood.

Captain Caracciolo, the instant he heard the news, ran to the Ducal Palace where the Doge and the Council of Ten, the ruling body of Venice, were in session.

"Cesare Borgia has stolen my bride!" he cried. "If I have to go to him single-handed I shall! But Venice itself will be dishonored if it does not avenge this theft of a daughter of Venice by an incestuous murderer! Most serene *signori*, do I go alone or does Venice take up my quarrel with me?"

The Doge and the Council were appalled. The Turk was threatening war upon the republic. They needed every bit of support they could get to repel him. Certainly they could not afford to alienate the Pope and Cesare Borgia at this juncture.

And yet how could they take this outrage of Cesare's passively and thereby acknowledge to the world that Venice was abject in spirit?

While Faenza Starves

The Council in their dilemma compromised by sending Ludovico Manenti, secretary of the Council, to Cesare and express to him the deep displeasure of the Republic of Venice at the outrage inflicted by him on the republic's captain-general.

Cesare in his camp at Cesena received Manenti and his message with all the indications of astonishment and indignation. Of course, he denied indignantly that he knew anything at all about the abduction of Rosa.

"But we shall go at once to the house where she was last seen," he said. "The house into which the leader of the villains is supposed to have carried her."

Cesare himself went with Manenti. The location was easily found. But the house had been razed to the ground and the site of it ploughed up and leveled.

"Where next?" he asked.

Manenti did not know and was forced to return to Venice and pass the question on to the Council. No one for a moment doubted that Cesare still held the bride somewhere in captivity. But what to do about it?

And even the captain-general with the problem of an impending war on his hands had to sustain the loss of his bride as best he could.

Meanwhile winter and Cesare's siege were reducing Faenza to starvation. It was only a question of time when the last defender would die of hunger—unless the city surrendered.

Young Astor Monfredi starved along with his soldiers. And his men loyally starved along with him so long as he was determined to keep his flag flying above the walls. But the youth saw further resistance as only a vain human sacrifice.

Two Bodies from the River

He sent up a flag of truce for a parley. What terms would Cesare offer in return for the surrender of the city?

Cesare sent back word: "You can all go free if you surrender at once."

"Agreed!"

The hunger-decimated defenders with only flags in their arms, marched out of the city, their youthful captain at their head.

Cesare permitted the men to march away. To that extent he kept his word.

But when he saw young Astor he detained him.

"I want the pleasure of entertaining so valiant an opponent," Cesare said.

"My place is with my men and my men are marching off," young Astor replied. "I have fulfilled your terms of surrender. Good-by."

It was in Cesare's room that the interview took place, and the two men were alone. Cesare had been regarding Astor with a curious light in his eyes.

"When a Borgia offers entertainment," he said slowly, "it would seem the part of wisdom to accept it."

"Then I must pay the price of folly!" Astor replied.

And he made for the door.

Cesare permitted him to leave the room. But on the stairs Astor, who was unarmed, was seized by several of Cesare's guard, bound, and returned prisoner to Cesare's apartment.

That was the last time—with one ex-

ception—that Astor Monfredi was ever seen.

A year later a bargeman on the Tiber saw two bodies floating near the dreaded prison of St. Angela in Rome. He fished the bodies out, and although they had been in the water perhaps forty-eight hours, he saw that they had been personages in life. Both bodies had their limbs bound with rope and their throats cut.

The two bodies were taken before the authorities, who set about the task of identifying them. Within twenty-four hours it was established who the dead were.

The woman was Rosa Valenti, the intended bride of Captain Caracciolo.

The other was Astor Monfredi.

No one took the trouble to pursue the investigation into their deaths. When Cesare Borgia tired of any one, that ended the matter for those he discarded.

That was how he dealt with individuals. Let us see what was his course when a whole city had the misfortune to attract his greed.

We see him once again launched on a military campaign with ever more ambitious prizes in view. Here, for instance, is the city of Capua, rich and beautiful, but at war. It is at war at the same time with the King of France and with the Borgias. The King of France has besieged it and the siege has almost worn down the resistance of the city.

Under Paternal Reproach

Cesare's troops have had but little share in the assaults and in the siege, Cesare himself being in Rome and his troops at a distance from the field of operations. News comes that Fabricio Colonna, the warrior in command of the defense of Capua, has sent to the French general, D'Aubigny, a messenger with a flag of truce, asking for the terms of surrender.

General D'Aubigny, as commander-in-chief of the army that has brought Capua to the point of surrender, sends for Fabricio Colonna to discuss terms.

Defenders as well as the besiegers rest on their arms while their leaders discuss the forthcoming surrender. The gates of the city are, of course, still barricaded and

nominally the siege is still on. But both camps knew it is to be only a matter of days before a formal surrender is signed.

Cesare Borgia, as I have said, is in Rome in consultation with his father when the news reaches him of the state of affairs at Capua. The Borgias think enviously of the rich loot that is about to fall into the hands of the French. Capua!

"I wish you had taken a little more active part in the siege, Cesare," Alexander says acidly. "We would have had a right to a slice of the fat roast the King of France is about to carve."

Cesare does not feel happy at his father's words; they bring home too sharply the uncomfortable fact that for once a Borgia has overlooked a fine chance of loot. He, too, wishes he had taken part in the siege.

Not Yet Too Late!

With a Borgia to wish was to will.

"Perhaps it is not yet too late," Cesare says after a long pause.

"'Perhaps' is a word of cold comfort," Alexander retorts.

Cesare rises. "Then we will change it to certainty!" he says with a grim little smile, a smile of which even Lucrezia was afraid.

Cesare leaves Rome, and with his staff rides hard until they reach the camp of his troops a little distance from Capua.

He is told that Fabricio Colonna is still in conference with General D'Aubigny.

That evening Cesare quietly moves his troops up to the gates of the city. If the French notice the movement at all they pay little heed to it. These are allied soldiers and no one in the French camp thinks fit to look into the movement of Cesare's troops or doubt the official explanation that the change of Cesare's camp is only a matter of "greater comfort."

Cesare's "dagger," as Michel or Michelletto was called, dresses all in black that night and has no trouble in stealing into the besieged city. He uses the golden pass-key which opens barriers the world over no matter what the coinage of the land. He bribes heavily both French and Capuan sentries.

That he is able to get past the latter is

due also to the fact that everybody expected the articles of armistice to be signed the following morning. Michel whispers to the Capuan sentries something about a beloved of his in the city whose kisses were waiting for him and for which he could wait no longer.

Once in the city Michel seeks out not a beautiful woman, but an officer in command of one of the outer works.

He and Cesare had known this man, Guido Vicardi, at the University of Pisa. They know him for a lover of gold. Michel finds the man changed in looks, but not at heart.

There is a long whispered conference between the two. Michel has to do some effective arguing to win his point. Each argument is to the same effect—promise of gold and still more gold.

Finally Michel rises. The two men clasp hands in token of a promise made and accepted.

Michel then leaves, and stealing out of the city, rejoins Cesare.

Through Cesare's camp commands are whispered. His troops creep out of their tents and without showing a light steal to one of the gates of the city topped by the most stubbornly defended bastion.

Something has happened to the Capuan sentries at that point. For a score of Cesare's men have stolen up to the very gate and are prying at it with levers. The gate slowly swings open—and still there sounded no alarm.

The Quality of Mercy

In General D'Aubigny's tent he and Colonna are heatedly disputing one of the terms in the protocol they were drawing up. Suddenly through the night there comes the sound of cries and firing from the city.

Now the cries deepen in volume and grow shrill with the shrieks of women. The firing increases.

General D'Aubigny and Colonna rush out to see what has happened. They find their own camp in commotion and part of French troops pouring into the city through an open gate and firing as they go.

It is not till long afterward that D'Au-

bigny learned what really happened. The Borgias have been at work. The captain whom Michel had bribed to open the gates of the city has carried out his end of the bargain.

Into Capua rush Cesare's troops.

Then follows butchery. The defenders, rendered lax through expectation of an armistice and betrayed by one of their own captains, are practically at the mercy of Cesare's men. And Borgia mercy is scant.

With most of the Capuan garrison slaughtered by the Borgia troops and the rest scattered, the city itself lies defenseless. Through the streets rush Cesare's men bursting into houses and palaces, churches and convents, slashing, slaying, looting, and raping.

Those That Helped

Meanwhile the French in camp, hearing the attack and seeing one of the city gates open and men streaming in, decide that it is a free-for-all fight and a race for loot. Before they can be called back the French soldiery are in the city, too, killing and looting.

Seven thousand men and women of Capua are butchered in the streets and in their homes. The doors of churches famous for their wealth are smashed in and mobs of loot-crazed soldiers fight each other over gold sacramental service, relics and robes.

Within rich homes to the outrage of looting is added the terrors of rapine. Many a woman of the aristocracy that night learns what war is at its worst.

The gates of one of the big convents of the city are smashed in and a horde of mercenaries, crazed with wine, loot, and lust, storm into the sanctuary where hundreds of women had hoped to spend their days in peace and in service to their God.

Before the night is over many of these nuns throw themselves into the great well of the nunnery rather than face the bestiality of the attackers.

In the aristocratic section of the city there is a tower into which three hundred women of the noblest families have fled for protection. Cesare Borgia learns of it.

With a score of his officers he breaks

into the tower. Forty of the women he selects for himself and his officers. These he orders to be led out and taken to his quarters.

Then he tells his soldiery they are free to help themselves to the rest. I shall not dwell on the scene.

When General D'Aubigny tries to untangle later the causes for the attack on the city, he finds his own men had so large a share of the loot that he does not at first realize how he and his men have been tricked by the Borgias.

It is only when he learns afterward that it was Borgia troops who got the fat of the pickings of Capua that he begins to suspect the truth.

By then it was too late to do anything about it and once more the Borgias had cause to smile.

I have hitherto described what the Borgias did to their enemies or those who merely stood in their way. Now let us see what a Borgia could do to those that helped them.

In the shift and change of the fortunes of Cesare's military campaigns—although they had been mounting steadily in success—Cesare had a little overreached himself in his conquest of the country about Cesena. True, he had conquered it and his soldiery were holding Cesena quiet by means of a sword point held at the throats of the people.

Cesare's Chosen Captain

But he had won by brilliance, rather than through numbers, and if the enemy were down on their knees they still needed keen watching. For Cesare had gone back to Rome and the troops he left behind him to keep Cesena quiet were barely sufficient for the job. Only a ruthless hand in his absence could hold in subjection the restive people of Cesena. And Cesare saw to it that there was left such a ruthless hand to hold the sword over the city and its surrounding towns.

He left Ramiro d'Orco in charge. Ramiro was the kind of man we would expect Cesare to leave in his place. He was as cold-blooded as Michel, as pitiless as Cesare

himself. He was a professional killer and captaincy under Cesare was his natural destiny.

When Cesare left for Rome, the population of Cesena thought it was safe to raise a murmur. They didn't know Ramiro d'Orco.

By "murmur" I mean sporadic attempts on the part of small groups to feel out what might happen if Cesena should try to throw off the yoke of Cesare's troops. These small groups and individuals were no more than fifty people in all.

Ramiro caught less than a score of these plotters. He proceeded to deal in his own way with the situation. Simply he did a bit of mental arithmetic first. He said to himself: "For every one of these men I have caught there must be at least fifty who may be in league with him."

On the Central Pike

Twenty times fifty makes a thousand. Ramiro did not know, of course, who that thousand would be. All he needed to know, was that they would be citizens of Cesena. For purposes of moral effect on the rest of the population it didn't matter to Ramiro who those thousand individuals were.

He had caught the score of plotters at midnight.

Ten minutes later they were beheaded. Their heads were stuck on spikes and planted in the largest square of the city where they would be seen with the coming of morning.

Then through the night Ramiro sent squads and companies of the soldiers to different parts of the city to lie in wait for the sound of a signal gun. Each group of the soldiers were given a certain number of citizens of Cesena "to take care of."

The gun sounded at four in the morning. At once throughout Cesena there broke out the sound of doors being smashed in with axes, firing, and shrieks.

With military dispatch one thousand citizens of Cesena were butchered in their beds or near them.

One-sixth of the city's population had been thus wiped out—"for moral effect." Ramiro had done his work thoroughly and effectively.

Too thoroughly, in fact. So aroused did the survivors in Cesena become at Ramiro's bloody efficiency that it looked as if not only Cesena, but other cities subdued by Cesare would join in general resistance against him.

Cesare in Rome heard of this. His faithful captain was costing him rather high; to give one's enemy fighting spirit is as bad as lending him troops. It was true Ramiro was only carrying out the spirit of Cesare's instructions to him. But he had made the mistake of—making a mistake.

The situation at Cesena and about it was at boiling point, though it had not quite broken out. A slight difference in the fire under the kettle would affect things either way. Reducing the heat even by a trifle might yet save the kettle from boiling over dangerously.

Cesare, too, dealt with the situation in his own way, and from a distance. On the third morning after the news had reached him the citizens of Cesena, after an uneasy night, were greeted by a startling sight in the main square.

In the night a scaffold had been erected; no one knew by whose hands. In it were stuck five pikes, on the point of each pike was impaled part of a human body. On the central pike was a head.

It was the head of Ramiro d'Orco.

The Most Accomplished of All

There had been no sound or stir of revolt in the night. Nor was there apparent among Cesare's soldiers any great uneasiness, at the spectacle, as there would have been if the scaffold and the exhibit were the work of aroused citizens of Cesena. Then, too, the scaffold itself could not have been put up by the enemy without arousing the fire of Ramiro's troops.

It was clear, therefore, to every one that the execution of Ramiro was the work of some one whom the troops did not dare hinder.

The affair caused a great stir through Italy. The Republic of Florence asked its ambassador at Cesena as to the meaning of the execution and who its author was. The ambassador was himself one of the most famous teachers of stealth and ruthlessness;

his very name has added a word to every language. He wrote:

MAGNIFICENT SIGNORI:

I can tell you nothing concerning the execution of Ramiro d'Orco, save this—that Cesare Borgia is the most accomplished of all princes in the matter of making and unmaking men according to their deserts.

NICOLO MACHIAVELLI.

The execution of Ramiro somewhat relieved the feelings of the people of Cesena. The man in the street was, to some extent, mollified by seeing the butcher butchered by his master.

But the leaders among Cesare's enemies in various parts of Italy and the heads of powerful Italian houses saw further than the man in the street did.

Willing to Arbitrate

Jealous and suspicious of each other though they were, many of them in a state of feud, it became quite clear that unless the various smaller kingdoms united among themselves the Borgias would consume them all as a small pack of wolves devours a scattered herd of cattle.

There gathered at Maggione a conference headed by Paolo Orsini. The Orsini family I have mentioned before. Until the coming of the Borgias there was an old proverb which said: "No pope can reign a week if he has both the Colonnas and the Orsini against him."

Of others in the conference I will mention only Olivoretto da Fermo and the Duke of Urbino, whose wife's maid of honor, Rosa, had been kidnaped by Cesare on her way to Venice to marry Captain Caracciolo.

Divided as they hitherto had been, the men at this conference dared not, individually, make open war on Cesare. But they had friends and families in Rome covertly watching the Borgias for the first chance to stab them in the back; or in the heart, for that matter.

But now that they had united they spoke in no uncertain voice. Their many small armies would make a considerable single force, a force that would give Cesare a busy time. That is, if the newly formed league against him had a chance to mobilize their forces.

Cesare was again in a delicate situation. If he marched forth with his troops to crush the allies the act would at once precipitate the union of forces which as yet was only a matter of talk among their leaders.

So, instead of an army against the allies, he sent them only a letter.

It was said of the Borgias that their tongues were as dangerous as their poisons, because while you could be in the same room with Borgia poison and yet escape destruction, once you listened to a Borgia talking to you you swallowed, without being aware of it, a poison just as deadly.

Cesare's letter was a masterpiece. It said, in effect: "War of course is war; a costly thing. And it would be an insult to my own intelligence if I tried to deny that your alliance against me is likely to cost me much. On the other hand you must believe that a war between us would cost you something too. It seems to me that such a war need not be. I may be wrong, of course.

"If I am, there is time to find that out. But why not let you and I talk it over and see if hard-headed and, yes, hard-hearted as we all are, we may not agree upon issues which otherwise would cost so dearly in money and men.

"I am willing to come to your stronghold for the talk. I am willing to put myself in your power while we confer. Surely that should convince you of my sincerity in seeking peace with you."

The Camp of the Allies

What could be more fair? The allies nevertheless sharply scrutinized the offer. "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!" Beware of a Borgia most of all when he seems most just and reasonable. Try as the allies would to detect the trick behind the offer, they could see no harm in accepting it. So they sent back word they would meet him at Fano.

The allies had not yet united their armies. Each of them sent to Fano for the conference only a regiment of soldiers of one kind or another. In all it made a force of some seventeen hundred men. The camp about the city presented a gay, if rather confusing, spectacle, considering that it was a military body.

There were soldiers from at least a dozen small Italian states. Each contingent had its own liveries and uniforms. There were a dozen different Italian dialects spoken in that camp, and perhaps in no language does the dialect of one part of the country differ so widely from the dialect of another part as in Italy. A peasant from Northern Italy would have considerable difficulty, for example, in understanding a Sicilian peasant.

This mixture of uniforms and dialects made considerable confusion in the camp of the allies.

Cesare Is Reasonable!

Few of the soldiers of any given contingent could tell who was who among the other contingents. To add to the confusion, new detachments of troops kept arriving daily as more allies joined the league against Cesare and sent forward their contributions of men.

The influx of new troops finally confused even the leaders. It seemed as if half Italy were rushing into the alliance and as promptly rushing troops to Fano.

Then, on December twentieth, Cesare arrived. He had with him only Michel, two or three letters, and a bodyguard of only a dozen men.

Needless to say the allies watched his arrival keenly. But he had apparently brought no troops with him. On the other hand Fano was surrounded by a military camp in which no uniforms showed but those in league against Cesare.

A conference gathered in the council room of the palace of the reigning Duke of Cesena. Cesare, with his small body of advisers, was surrounded by allied leaders to twice the number of his party.

Outside the palace, and even outside the door of the conference room, were stationed strong details of picked troops.

Cesare sat down to talk terms, and his manner was a triumph of good acting. "Here I am, gentlemen!" he said, "in your power. Half a dozen men surrounded by the troops of a score of states or more. You are all united against me. Surely, for once, you cannot doubt the sincerity of the motive that brings me here."

He then proposed a series of terms in a

treaty to be drawn up between himself and the allies, a treaty of peace. They were astonishingly liberal terms, as if Cesare were already a beaten force.

Naturally the allies demanded even more. Cesare was in a reasonable mood. He made counter suggestions, but he did not refuse to consider any proposition.

It was Michel who seemed to be the impatient one. Several times he protested, "Cesare, they are taking advantage of you!"

And, as if he could no longer endure the outrageous demands, Michel rose from the council table and strode over to the window. He remained there frowning out over the square for all the world like a sulky schoolboy.

Cesare went on talking, but his eyes wandered often to Michel at the window. Michel continued to glower at the world outside.

Suddenly a clatter of hoofs rushed up to the palace, mounted messengers. Evidently something quite serious was in the wind. The messengers had flung themselves from their horses and held breathless parley with the sentries before the palace.

A Feather in the Cap

Then they were rushed up to the door of the council chamber. An agitated officer stepped in.

He brought disturbing news. The camp of the allies was in a turmoil, its origin a mystery. It seemed as if half the camp were about to fly at the throats of the other half. Something had started the soldiers quarreling among themselves. It was not only a case of the soldiers of one state quarreling with those of another. In practically every camp half the soldiers of any given contingent was at sword's point with the other half wearing the same uniform.

The leaders of the allies for some moments looked at each other suspiciously. They remembered past enmities and suspected present treachery. But none of them could see in the others any possible motive for tricks or treachery at this moment when they seemed about to reap the rich fruit of their alliance.

Cesare was for the moment forgotten.

Michel had been forgotten by the allies some time before.

From Cesare to Michel went a look.

Michel took out a colored handkerchief from his tunic and touched it to his lips. He could be seen from the square.

From the peak of the gabled roof of a house which overlooked both the square and much of the surrounding country some one, a woman, shook out a long colored scarf as if dusting it.

At once throughout the camp encircling the city firing broke out. The quarrels among the soldiers had exploded. Fighting of the most savage kind turned a military encampment into a welter of blood.

Then the slashing and the shooting came nearer. Detachments of cavalry and broken companies of foot soldiers poured into the city and up to the palace where the allied leaders had been in conference.

These were now too confused to be called leaders, and too suspicious of each other to feel allied.

They saw various troops rushing up to the palace, but although the uniforms and liveries were of those of their own contingents they did not recognize the men. The Duke of Urbino saw the colors of his ancient line worn by men whose faces he had never before seen.

Into the palace rushed the motley collection of soldiery. Up the stairs they charged.

Then the doors of the council room were flung open and in stormed a hundred armed and hostile soldiers.

"What does this mean?" roared the Duke of Urbino to men wearing his uniform.

For answer the men seized him, threw him to the council table and, holding the points of a dozen poniards to his throat, turned their eyes to Cesare.

At the same moment the other allied leaders were similarly seized by men from whom they had every right to expect obedience—if the colors they wore were any indication.

Cesare had joined Michel at the window and onto the balcony, from where he looked down on the captured allies with amusement.

"There is too much confusion here," he laughed. "You must adjourn to a more quiet place."

One by one the allied leaders were led out by their captors. One by one the lesser among them were either strangled or knifed. Only Olivoretto, Gravina, Vitelli, and the head of the powerful Orsini were for the time being spared.

These were thrown into the city's dungeon.

The fighting in the camp outside, while still raging, was resolving itself into hundreds of small groups, some fleeing, others pursuing. In another hour, however, soldiers in groups and squads began to straggle back to the camps.

And now a strange thing developed. The soldiers who had returned, though they still wore the colors of a score of different states, now not only no longer fought each other, but they seemed to unite for the first time under a single command.

Officers issued orders, and with military efficiency the whole camp obeyed as one.

Into the camp strode Cesare.

The whole camp, as one, roared a salute, then stood rigidly waiting his command.

Too late the victims of Cesare's latest trick learned just how he had played it. It was he—although not in his own name, of course—who had prompted some ten or twelve of the smaller Italian states to rush into the alliance against him in order to create the confusion in whose troubled waters he could fish with benefit to himself.

He had powerful contingents of his troops dressed in the colors of every one of the allied states. It was Cesare's troops, therefore, who flocked into the camp about Fano.

And no matter what uniform they wore, whether of the house of Urbino, Colonna, Vitellozo, or Gravina, there was a tiny feather in the cap of every one, a speck of color that went unnoticed by every one except those for whose eyes it was intended.

When the fighting broke out all over the camp Cesare's men, of course, had all the advantage. They knew at whom to strike—those who did not wear the bit of feather. The others did not know.



"O-o-m-m-, Swa-a-O-o-o-m-m. Wahoo, brother, I greet you"

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

By Alexander Stewart

HE DREW HIMSELF UP IMPORTANTLY. "I AM SWANDA," HE SAID. "I COME, BEARING A GREAT GIFT, AN AGE-OLD SECRET OF LIFE AND POWER"



WHEN Hugh Dekay came to Redbank there was no blare of trumpets announcing his arrival. But the manner of his arrival, his departure—everything about him—are things which will never be forgotten by the residents of that little town. It is a never ending source of conversation among the people there.

And yet, Hugh Dekay had no desire for publicity. There were too many people anxious to see him. His name and his occupation had already been thoroughly advertised in various circulars sent out by the police of cities where he had visited and lingered awhile.

He knew about these circulars. But he had no wish to renew his former acquaintances, and had gone to some pains to make

sure that no one would recognize him as the notorious bank burglar and confidence man who had for several years successfully avoided all attempts at his capture.

"Big Jake" Schaeffer, night sergeant at the Redbank police headquarters, was the first man who saw him. The old policeman was dozing at his desk when the sound of footsteps on the stairs aroused him. Lifting his head, he blinked sleepily and looked up to see who his visitor was. As his gaze focused on the man who was climbing into view he sat up with a jerk and pinched himself to see if he was awake.

For twenty years the veteran policeman had been on the night desk. And before that he had pounded the streets as a patrolman for longer than he cared to tell. During that time he had seen many strange sights.

But the individual who now approached

him presented the most startling spectacle of any human being he had ever encountered.

Tall and powerfully built, the youthfulness and vigor of his bearing were belied by an immense beard which hung halfway to his waist.

And as Big Jake's fascinated gaze traveled down the length of his form he perceived that from the bottom of the beard the hair continued in curls which had been looped up and fastened to the man's shirt with a huge safety pin which seemed to be almost a foot long.

But this immense beard, unusual as it was, was the least startling aspect of the man's appearance. The visitor's head was bare, his wiry hair had been plaited and twisted into two weird-looking stumps which thrust forward from his forehead with an appearance of horns.

The sergeant scarcely gave the man's hair a glance, for his eye had been caught by two strange objects which hung suspended from his ears. As the visitor turned his head in the light so that Big Jake could see what the objects were he gulped so hastily that he choked and almost swallowed the chew of tobacco he had placed in his mouth a few minutes before.

The ear appendages were two live turtles. Even as the policeman looked he saw one of the turtles thrust out its head and then hastily draw it back inside its shell again.

The visitor's arms were bare to the shoulders and bronzed like copper. More than a score of arm bands and bracelets of strange designs slipped backward and forward over their surface and jangled and clattered as he moved.

An ordinary flannel shirt, from which the sleeves had been torn, formed the basis of the upper part of his costume. But over it had been thrown a cloak or tunic which appeared to the policeman to be made from an uncured calf skin.

A pair of trousers made of dark leather, resembling in their style the "chaps" worn by the cowboy of the movies and fiction, completed his costume.

Striding forward, he halted a few steps from Big Jake's desk and raised his hand

in a majestic gesture. A deep, rolling voice intoned the words which he addressed to the policeman:

"O-o-m-m-, Swa-a-O-o-o-m-m. Wahoo, brother, I greet you."

At his words, Big Jake stared hard and finally grunted. If this freak thought that he was kidding him, let him try it.

"In the name of the Four Hills, peace be with you," the visitor continued, then added in an important tone, "I am Swanda."

Big Jake returned his gaze in silence for several seconds. Then, seeing that the other man apparently was waiting for him to speak, he demanded truculently:

"Well, what of it?"

His visitor drew himself up to his full height and importantly repeated his announcement:

"I am Swanda. I come, bearing to this city a great gift. I bring the secret of life, of power, the secrets of the ancients."

Big Jake leaned back in his chair and hooked his thumbs under his suspenders, letting his unbuttoned coat gape open unheeded as he surveyed the strange man before him.

"Now, that's mighty thoughtful of you, Swanda. You're one of them ancients, I suppose?"

With even more impressive dignity the man drew himself up. He frowned for a moment, and then, with a sudden air of graciousness, replied:

"I have been called. Your city needs me. I bring for it a message, a great boon."

The sergeant was staring hard at his visitor. There was something about this man that he did not like, and the more he saw of him the less he liked him. But nothing of his feelings showed as he mildly and with apparent innocence inquired:

"Is this message for the police force, Mr. Skunda?"

A flicker of annoyance passed over the other man's face.

"Swanda, Swanda," he pronounced hastily. "My message is for all people. But I come to you for another purpose. It is to see about the matter of a license."

A sympathetic look appeared on Big Jake's face.

"Well, now, that's too bad, Mr. Swaba,"

he replied. "I'm sorry you had to climb all the way up those stairs for nothing. But you'll have to see the chief to-morrow. He handles all the peddler and fakirs' licenses."

For a moment there was a flash of intense anger in the visitor's eyes. Then he inclined his head condescendingly.

"No doubt there are many of these persons whom you call peddlers and fakirs," he said with crushing dignity. His voice rang sternly as he continued, "But it is only the ignorant and the frivolous who mock and scorn the wisdom of the ancients."

He paused for a moment, and then added, in a tone of resignation that was belied by the gleam in his eye:

"Still, it is the lot of those who come bearing gifts to an ungrateful world, to be looked down upon and ridiculed."

He turned. His hand rose in a gesture of benediction, and he intoned the same salutation with which Big Jake had been greeted at the start of the interview.

"May the peace of the Four Hills be with you," his voice rolled out sonorously. "I go, to come again."

Big Jake stared after his receding form. For several minutes after the man had disappeared from view he sat looking fixedly at the head of the stairs: In the end he slowly shook his head in puzzlement, and grunted.

"He may be an ancient, and he may come from the Four Hills, wherever they are," the policeman ruminated aloud. "But he certainly does wear high-priced shoes. Takes mighty good care of his hands, too. I'd like to bet that those Four Hills are near a subway station."

Down on the street below the visitor was smiling grimly to himself. That fat police sergeant up there was probably having a laugh at his expense, he thought. But it was much better that way. As long as the police laughed there would be no suspicious watch kept over his actions, no dogging of his footsteps.

He started along the street with the air of a man who knew what he was about. There was much to be done before he could take the gift which, he felt sure, Redbank

would exchange with him for the "secrets" he possessed.

II



THE next afternoon Big Jake, sent down town by his sister to do some shopping for her, saw his visitor again. Swanda had set up a stand in the narrow vacant lot between the railroad building and the end of the river bridge.

As he noted the stream of people which passed and repassed, crossing the bridge and coming and going from the railroad station and offices in the building, the policeman had to admit to himself that, no matter what his eccentricities might be Swanda was a good judge of a business location.

A crowd of people had gathered about the strange looking man and were listening as he told of the great boon which he had brought for the people of Redbank. Big Jake walked closer, curious to see what kind of business the man was really engaged in.

The ancients discovered the way. They knew the secret of life, and of power. Their civilizations have passed and are forgotten. Their secrets have been lost in the crumbling years which have destroyed their temples and buried their cities."

His sonorous voice rolled out with an almost hypnotic effect. The policeman began to get interested in spite of himself.

"What peoples were they who taught the Egyptians how to build great pyramids? Thousands of years ago they knew the true magnetic north. Those monuments which still stand, defying the sands of time, have presented puzzles which our modern science has been unable to solve.

"By what means were those great blocks of stone raised in the air and then fitted into place so closely that not even the point of a knife blade can be inserted between them to-day? Our modern science cannot tell, or emulate the feat.

"In the great Pyramid of Cheops, written for those who can read, there is the prophecy of the birth of Christ, of his death. The date when the great World War would begin was foretold, the date of its ending, and the time when the next great war will

begin and end—all were inscribed there thousands of years ago.

"Who was it that told the Egyptians these things? How could they do these things? They did not possess the knowledge of themselves. They were merely utilizing and recording the things which had been taught to them, which had come down from ancient civilizations.

"What knowledge did those old ancients possess? What secrets that we do not know! The records were written for those who can read them. And it is from them that we are learning. It is from them that we have obtained the message which I bring to you. They knew the secret of life, and now we have discovered it again."

The speaker's voice rose as he swept on to the climax of his speech. But Big Jake did not hear his words.

The old policeman had been listening for a minute or two when he became conscious that his feet hurt. He looked around for a place where he could sit down, and, in his quest for a seat, had edged through the crowd to a point which was at one side and to the rear of the speaker.

From where he was seated he could see the rude shelter which Swanda had erected back of his stand. A wagon was drawn up to one side of the lot, and beyond it an old tent was pitched against the side of the railroad building.

A bony looking horse was standing with drooping head beside the wagon. But it was not at this that Big Jake was looking.

His eye had been caught by a movement behind the drawn tent flaps. And for a moment he had the impression that a face was peering out at him from the darkness.

He glanced at the wagon as he turned away, and then stopped, puzzled by the sight of a small electric dynamo which lay partially covered in its bottom.

What was Swanda doing with an electric dynamo, he wondered. And then, as he noticed the lights which had been strung up in front of the man's stand, the explanation came to him. Of course! He frequently must be obliged to generate part of his own power.

He turned back to the speaker. Swanda had produced a bottle, and now he was ex-

tolling the virtues of its contents. The "Elixir of Life," he called it.

Big Jake grunted and turned away in disgust. Nothing but a patent medicine peddler, after all, he thought to himself as he walked away. But as he plodded along toward his home, thinking over the speech which he had heard, there was a puzzled line between his eyes.

"You would think that a man with a line of talk like that would be able to sell something worth while and make some real money out of it," he declared when he told his sister about the occurrence. "I still can't figure out what kind of a percentage he can see in it."

He mentioned his thoughts to Chief Gordon that evening at headquarters. The chief nodded in agreement.

"Some of these fellows certainly are queer characters," he remarked. "More than half of them could make a lot of money if they got into any kind of a legitimate business, and settled down and stayed in one place. But there seems to be something about the life which gets them. This man's stuff is harmless, though."

He turned away and was starting down the stairs when Big Jake called after him:

"By the way, chief, did you get a look at the party he had with him?"

"Why, no. From what he said I got the impression that he was by himself. He only paid for a license just for himself. Does he have some one helping him?"

"He didn't when I was there," Big Jake replied. "Whoever it was was keeping pretty carefully out of sight. I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman."

"It's no use bothering your head about it then," the chief decided. "It's probably his wife traveling with him. I wouldn't blame the woman for wanting to keep out of sight."

But at intervals during the remainder of the evening Big Jake's thoughts returned to the medicine man. There was something about him, a certain keenness and purposefulness, discernible under the mask he wore, which the policeman could not reconcile with the business in which he was engaged.

And if he could have heard the conversa-

tion which took place in Swanda's tent that evening he would have realized that his suspicions, vague as they were, were more than justified.

The medicine man was speaking to a thin round-shouldered man who had been lying sprawled out on a little cot in the back of the tent, while the ballyhoo was going on outside.

"Are you sure you've located all of the wires?" Swanda demanded.

His companion nodded.

"It's a pipe," he declared. "The guys that wired that vault didn't know nothing. All we have to do is to keep away from the door. As long as you don't try to monkey with it you can do anything else you want to without setting off the alarm."

"You're sure about that?" Swanda demanded sharply.

His companion shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"Ain't I just been telling you that it's nothing but an old-fashioned cheese box," he exclaimed in disgust. "What d'ya think I am—an amachure?"

Swanda readjusted his weird looking costume and turned to the tent flap.

"Get the dynamo hooked up, then, and start drilling," he ordered. "I'm going out and fuss around the stand. If any one comes along, I'll give you the high sign."

He stepped outside and drew the flap to behind him. For more than an hour afterward a curious humming sound came from inside the tent, where the thin-faced man was engaged in drilling into the wall of the building at the back of the tent.

Once or twice the voice of Swanda could be heard raised in a sonorous incantation outside. On these occasions the thin-faced man stopped his labors and the humming sound ceased. But for the most part the work continued without interruption.

The medicine man finally went back to the tent.

"That's enough for to-night," he decided. "Just so you get the masonry cleared away. We can use the torch on the vault Saturday night."

Big Jake knew nothing of the events of the evening. But, as a result of his deliberations, he went down town again the next

afternoon. Swanda was apparently doing a good business.

The policeman pushed forward through the crowd and bought a bottle of the "Elixir of Life." When he was handed the bottle he clasped it gingerly by the neck with his big fingers and looked at it closely for a moment.

Satisfied, he turned away and returned directly to his home. There he carried the bottle into the little workshop he had fitted up in the rear of the house. When he appeared again, an hour later, he was whistling softly to himself, and there was a general air of contentment and well-being about his person.

The "Elixir of Life" had apparently had the promised effect.

That evening Chief Gordon paused at his desk before leaving for home.

"I went down to-day and told this patent medicine fellow that he would have to stop doing business before four o'clock in the afternoon, Jake," he remarked. "Some of the business men around the square were complaining that he had been jamming up the sidewalk and was spoiling trade for them.

"We don't want him to make a nuisance of himself, so tell the boys to keep their eyes on him and see that he doesn't make too much noise when he is doing his ballyhoo."

In the meantime another conference was going on in the medicine man's tent, pitched at the side of the railroad building. Swanda had just outlined a plan to his companion, who grinned admiringly.

"If you can get away with it, you'll certainly make that turkey necked chief of police wish he'd let you do your 'ancient' stuff in the afternoons," the thin-faced man declared. "But, if it was anybody else, though, I'd say you was a fool. What's the use of taking so many chances on some one 'making' you? We'll get plenty of dough as it is."

Swanda shrugged his shoulders as he turned away.

"I'll be the one who is taking the chances, so you don't need to worry your head about it," he said. "All you have to do is keep under cover for the rest of the

week. The way that fat sergeant has been acting I think he must have spotted you that first time he was down here."

III



TALL, well dressed man walked briskly along South Main Street and up the steps of the First National Bank. Swinging through the door, he looked around and made his way to the cashier's window.

"Good morning," he said. "Could I see the president, or whoever is in charge?"

The cashier sized up the man before him. Rather prosperous, keen and alert—probably a business man, he decided. He picked up the card the stranger had laid down, and read the name.

BEVERLY P. JONES

"Why, yes, I think so. Mr. Jones," he replied. "If you could tell me what the nature of your business is, I will see what I can do."

"I want to open up a business account here," the stranger replied.

"Just a moment," the cashier requested, leaving the window. A few seconds later he reappeared. "Step this way, please," he told Mr. Jones, and led the way to a private office in the rear of the bank.

A portly, middle-aged man rose at their entrance. He was introduced to the stranger as Mr. Sherman, the vice president of the bank. He glanced at the card he held in his hand, and motioned his visitor to a seat.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Jones?" he asked.

"I'm in the manufacturing business, Mr. Sherman," the visitor replied. "I came down here with the purpose of looking around, and, perhaps, locating our factory here if I can find a suitable site.

"I've been looking around for some months, and, frankly, in its location and railroad facilities and ample labor supply, this town is the most satisfactory I have found anywhere.

"My reason for coming in here this morning was to open an account in your bank. I don't like to carry so much money around with me, and now that I know where

I want to locate there is no reason for me to keep it on my person any longer."

"What is the nature of your manufacturing business, Mr. Jones?" the bank official asked.

"I manufacture the 'Sanito' drinking cup," the visitor replied. "We will employ about one hundred and fifty people, and it is my policy to do my business and financial transactions with local merchants and banks as much as possible.

After some further conversation the visitor produced a certified check for five thousand dollars, and a bulky-looking envelope which he laid on the table before him.

"Now, I will deposit this check, together with about one thousand dollars more in cash which I don't desire to carry around in my pocket any longer," he told the bank official. "In this envelope here," he added, "I have a number of securities which I intend to use as collateral, if necessary, to finance the purchase of the factory site.

"You understand, of course, that I have not sold my present factory and do not intend to sell it until I have definitely made arrangements for a new location. And in the meantime I intend to use these securities to take care of the temporary financing that will be necessary. If you can give me a safety deposit box here I would like to leave them in it."

The necessary arrangements were soon completed. At the end of the interview Mr. Sherman escorted his visitor to the door with the utmost friendliness and cordiality. It was not often that his bank had formed a more desirable business connection, he decided, as he went over the interview in his mind afterward.

Several days passed during which Mr. Beverly Jones occasionally dropped into the bank to talk over with its officers possible locations for his business.

If his visits were always made in the morning and he was never seen around the town during the late afternoon or evening, no one noticed the fact or attached any significance to it.

His pleasant personality and direct, straightforward manner impressed Mr. Sherman more and more favorably every time he saw him, and on several occasions

he congratulated himself on the fact that Mr. Jones had chanced to come to his bank instead of going to their competitors, the Warren County Trust Company, in the railroad building.

In the meantime Swanda, the "discoverer of the secret of life," continued to do a thriving business at his stand beside the railroad building. He was always the height of urbanity and politeness, and seemed to take with good grace the order prohibiting his ballyhoo before four o'clock in the afternoon.

No one ever saw him when he was not appareled in his strange-looking costume. And it was this strange appearance which was, to a certain extent, responsible for the crowd which gathered in front of his stand.

The two small live turtles, suspended from his ears by means of small wires through holes in the edges of their shells, held the fascinated gaze of the spectators, many of whom constantly watched them in the hope that sooner or later one would bite the prophet.

Two or three times during the week Big Jake joined the crowd that stood around the stand, and studied Swanda with a look of puzzled concentration in his eyes.

On each occasion he edged his way around to the side where he could see the wagon and tent back of the stand. But his closest scrutiny did not reveal any signs of the other person who, he felt sure, was accompanying the medicine man.

At the end of his performance in the evening Swanda would disappear into the little tent. Except for the rare occasions when he emerged to buy food he would be seen no more until the next afternoon when he would take a stroll through the streets of the town before starting his ballyhoo.

Saturday night came, and the biggest crowd of the week listened until late in the evening to the message of the Ancients. When the last loiterer had departed Swanda carefully looked about him and walked back to his tent. The thin-faced man impatiently waiting, peering out from the flaps.

"I thought you would never finish," he growled. "Jim'll think something went wrong, and skip out."

"Keep your shirt on, Slim," Swanda ad-

vised. "And get busy while I keep a look-out."

His companion slipped away in the darkness toward the river. A few minutes later he returned with another man. Between them they carried a long cylinder which they lowered carefully to the ground.

Swanda wasted no time in greeting the newcomer.

"Everything all set, Jim?" he asked.

"Set!" the other man replied. "That's all I've done all evening. And if any one thinks that an oxygen tank is soft to sit on, let them try it."

The medicine man paid no attention to this outburst.

"Get the other tank," he ordered. "We can't stay here all night."

His two companions slipped away through the shadows. When they returned they were carrying with them another and smaller cylinder.

Swanda stepped inside the tent, and flashed an electric torch on the wall of the building at the rear of the tent. The light showed a hole several feet square in the masonry, penetrating to the steel casing of the vault of the Warren County Trust Company which was located on the ground floor of the railroad building.

After studying the hole for a few moments Swanda snapped off his light and stepped back.

"Get busy," he told his two companions. "The rest is easy enough." His eyes flashed for a moment in the direction of the thin-faced man.

"God help you if you were wrong about that wiring, though," he added grimly.

For almost an hour afterward the traffic policeman, on duty in the Square, saw the medicine man pacing back and forth behind his stand. He wondered what made the "Ancient" so restless, never for an instant dreaming that in the tent beyond Swanda two men were rapidly cutting their way into a bank vault with an oxy-acetylene torch.

Apparently the medicine man succeeded in conquering his restlessness, for he finally disappeared into his tent again. Later, as he strolled toward the stand, the policeman looked up in surprise to see Swanda ap-

proaching. The medicine man greeted him with stately courtesy.

"Peace be unto you," his deep voice rolled out. "I have consulted the stars and they tell me that thou art one of those who shall receive the message of the Ancients.

"Be not grieved that their secrets are yet too deep for your understanding. For with the future shall come enlightenment. And it is written that some day ye shall know, even what I do now."

The policeman scratched his head. This "Ancient" business sounded foolish to him, and he had an uneasy feeling that he was being kidded. Swanda talked on smoothly for several minutes.

By that time his apparently aimless steps had succeeded in leading his companion to another part of the square. There he abruptly ended the conversation, and raising his hand in a gesture of benediction, departed.

Back in his tent he found the other two men waiting. The light from the street gleamed on the two revolvers that were clasped in their nervous fingers when he raised the tent flap to enter.

"Put up those guns," he ordered sharply. "I told you when you came into this that there wasn't going to be any gunplay." His companions reluctantly obeyed his order. "Where's the stuff?" Swanda demanded.

The thin-faced man pointed to several bundles at his feet. Swanda drew his flash light and began examining them.

"Give me a hand here, Jim, while I see what these bonds are," he directed. "And you," he added, speaking to the thin-faced man, "keep an eye on that cop. But remember, don't go pulling any wild West stuff, or you'll have me to deal with."

As he spoke there was a sinister threat in his voice which was all the more deadly because of his calm, almost casual manner.

For some time he was busy examining the contents of the bundles which had been brought from the yawning hole behind him. When he finished they had been divided into three piles which he quickly wrapped up.

"Take this bunch back and leave them there," he ordered, handing one of the packages to the man called Jim. "They're

not negotiable, and there's no use taking them."

He picked up one of the remaining two packages and thrust it into his pocket.

"I'll keep these and dispose of them myself," he said as he handed the third package to the thin-faced man who had turned back to watch the proceedings. "Did Jim fix the time clock?"

"She's fixed so that it will take at least a day for them to get the combination open."

It was Jim himself who answered as he climbed through the hole behind them. Swanda began piling empty boxes and rubbish before the opening. When he had finished he tossed a blanket over the top of the heap, and for a casual observer the hole in the wall was completely hidden.

"Get those two tanks out of here," he ordered. "Sink them in the river, but not too close to the shore."

While they were gone he made a final survey of the tent. Opening a satchel which was lying at his feet, he took from it two packages of bills, all of small denominations. He counted them over and was standing with them in his hand when the two men returned.

"Here's a thousand apiece for you now," he told them, and then pointed to the third package of bonds which the thin-faced man still carried. "You know what to do with those," he added. "Be sure that Skinner gets them to-morrow, and tell him I said that as long as he sells them before Monday noon, it will be absolutely safe and he can get the full price for them.

"I'll see you at the usual place Tuesday."

His two companions glided away to the river, and a few minutes later were drifting silently down the stream in the boat in which Jim had arrived earlier that evening.

Swanda remained in the tent for almost an hour longer. When he finally emerged there was no semblance between his trim, well-dressed figure and that of the strange, wild-looking individual who had been selling the "Elixir of Life" a few hours before.

The barbaric costume was gone. As he walked softly toward the rear of the build-

ing, with the satchel in his hand, he might have been a business man returning from a trip to the city.

IV



HE inevitable group of small boys hung around the stand the next day, waiting for the medicine man to put in an appearance. But Swanda apparently believed in observing the Sabbath and the flaps of his tent remained drawn shut.

Earlier in the week his horse had been taken to a livery stable, so no one thought it strange that he did not leave his tent all day.

On Monday morning the cashier of the Warren County Trust Company, going to the vault to open it in preparation for the day's business, found that the door would not open. An examination disclosed the fact that the mechanism of the time clock apparently had become out of order and the clock had stopped.

The combination had been set for nine o'clock and until the clock hands had completed the necessary number of revolutions the vault could not be opened.

An inspection of the rest of the bank failed to show anything else out of order. Nothing had been disturbed anywhere, and there was no alarm felt.

There was no one in the town who possessed sufficient knowledge to open the vault. The safe company was called by long distance phone, and promised to send an expert to open it. He would get there that afternoon, they said.

A hurried conference was held and it was decided to call on the other bank in the town temporarily for the funds needed to carry on the day's business. Mr. Sherman of the First National Bank readily agreed to the arrangement when he was apprised of the situation by telephone. Several thousand dollars were hurriedly sent over, and at nine o'clock the Trust Company opened its doors for business as usual.

About that time Big Jake Schaeffer, clad in bath robe and slippers, was examining the contents of a package which he had received in the mail that morning. As he

looked over the various inclosures he lost the sleepy, phlegmatic attitude which he habitually wore, and his eyes snapped with excitement.

Going to the head of the stairs, he called to his sister:

"Fix me up some breakfast, Mary. I'm going to get up and go down town."

He returned to his room and picked up several photographs which had been in the package. After looking at them for several minutes he read the letter again which had accompanied them.

It was from the New York Police Department.

"The finger-prints which you have sent to us are those of Hugh Dekay, a notorious bank burglar and confidence man. He usually works with 'Sunny Jim' Harris and 'Slim' Wilson. All of them are wanted in several cities and there are rewards out for their arrest.

"We are inclosing photographs and circulars which will give you all of the available information concerning these three men."

When he had finished reading the letter and circulars Big Jake pushed them to one side and reached for his clothing.

"The secrets of the Ancients, huh!" he muttered to himself as he hurriedly dressed. "I guess that buzzard had a few secrets, all right. But they weren't very ancient."

He was silent until he had finished dressing. But as he started down the stairs a grim smile came to his face, and a moment later, standing in the doorway of the dining room, he startled his sister with his greeting.

"O-o-m-m, Swa-a-O-o-o-m-m. Wahoo, sister, I greet you," his deep voice rolled out the words.

There was a crash as the frying pan slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor. With her hands on her hips she stood staring at him in amazement.

"For the land's sake, Jacob Schaeffer," she exclaimed, "have you gone crazy, or what?"

Big Jake grinned and sat down at the table.

"I've just discovered the secret of an Ancient, Mary," he replied.

Fifteen minutes later he started down the street, carrying his package of photographs and circulars under his arm.

V



It was just nine thirty when Mr. Beverly P. Jones entered the doors of the First National Bank. The manufacturer appeared to be in a good humor that morning and greeted the various employees with even more geniality than usual.

He asked to see Mr. Sherman and was immediately ushered into the vice-president's office. The two men chatted for several minutes before Mr. Jones got down to business.

"I have found a satisfactory site for my factory," he told the bank official, "and I would like to close with the owner today. There are several buildings already erected on the grounds, so that the price has run somewhat higher than I expected. But still that will save part of the expense of building later on, so it is very satisfactory.

"Now, the price of the property will run about twenty thousand dollars, but I believe that if I pay cash I may be able to get a good sized reduction.

"Now, this is my idea. I have twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of New York Central Railroad Company stock among the securities which I placed in your safe deposit vault here. And my bank balance is about six thousand dollars.

"I don't want to clean out my bank account too closely, so if your bank will accept that railroad stock as collateral. I would like to borrow fifteen thousand dollars on a sixty-day note.

"Of course, I could do this at my bank in New York. But, as long as I am going to have my factory here in the future, I prefer to throw my business to the local people as much as possible."

After a few inquiries which were answered satisfactorily the bank official agreed to make the loan. Mr. Jones visited his safety deposit box and returned with the envelope which he had left there.

The stock shares were produced and

counted. As a matter of business routine Mr. Sherman compared their serial numbers with the list of stolen securities which the bank kept on record.

Everything was satisfactory, and the note was made out.

When the transaction was completed the bank official appeared to be somewhat embarrassed, as if uncertain what to say. The fact was that the temporary loan made to the Trust Company had reduced considerably the amount of ready cash which the bank had on hand, and if the money for the purchase of the property was taken away in cash, it would leave his bank somewhat pressed for funds during the remainder of the day.

But before he could bring himself to speak Mr. Jones saved him the embarrassment of making an explanation.

"There have been so many holdups lately that it has made me just a little bit nervous," the manufacturer declared. "And I don't like the idea of carrying all that money around with me. How would it be if you made out two certified checks, one for fifteen thousand dollars and the other for three thousand dollars? Then I would only have to take about two thousand dollars in cash with me. That will leave about one thousand dollars to my account yet. If I can get the reduction for paying cash I won't need the full two thousand dollars, but to play safe I'll take it with me."

Mr. Sherman readily agreed to the proposal. The checks were made out and given to Mr. Jones, together with the money which he needed.

The manufacturer arose to leave, and was once more bowed out of the door by Mr. Sherman. There was a mutually pleased look on the faces of the two men as he took his departure.

Big Jake Schaeffer, walking hurriedly along the street on his way to police headquarters, almost bumped into Mr. Jones as that worthy descended the steps of the bank. But he gave the manufacturer only a glance and hurried on.

Mr. Jones looked after the retreating policeman with interest for a few seconds, and then began casually strolling down the street in the direction of the railroad station.

As he passed through the square Big Jake had noticed that the medicine man's stand and tent were still up. His main anxiety now was to get to headquarters and have Swanda arrested before he would have a chance to leave town.

Chief Gordon, seated at his desk on the second floor, stared in astonishment as the old sergeant clumped up the stairs and halted before him.

"What brings you out this time of day, Jake?" he asked.

"This," Big Jake replied, laying on the desk the package which he had received in the mail that morning. "Take a look at those pictures and circulars, once."

The chief studied the contents of the envelope in silence for several minutes. Finally he looked up inquiringly.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

"What about it?" Big Jake repeated. "Just this. That medicine man who's been selling this 'Elixir of Life' down at the square is this fellow Dekay. There seemed to be something phony about him, so I got his finger-prints off of one of his bottles last week and sent them in to New York. That's the answer they sent me."

Chief Gordon's eyes narrowed, and he leaned forward slowly in his chair.

"That medicine man a bank burglar?" he said. "You're sure you didn't make a mistake on the finger-prints and get them mixed?"

The old policeman shook his head impatiently.

"No chance," he said briefly.

Gordon picked up the circulars and studied them again.

"What's Hugh Dekay doing with that kind of an outfit?" he asked softly, speaking half to himself.

Big Jake grunted.

"I don't know, but I intend to find out mighty quick," he declared shortly. "We'll need several men along when we make the arrest. I'm pretty sure that one of those other fellows is there with him, so we want to be ready for trouble."

The chief nodded, and stood up.

"I guess you're right, at that," he said. "Do you want to go down with us?"

"I'm here, ain't I?" Big Jake growled.

"What do you think I got out of bed and came down for?"

Chief Gordon smiled as he turned away and began issuing orders to the policeman who had answered his buzzer. Besides Big Jake and the chief, there were three other men in the party which left headquarters in an automobile a few minutes later. Two sawed off shotguns had been stowed in the car at Chief Gordon's orders.

"There's no use taking any chances," he said in explanation. "A man has a good chance of dodging a single bullet. But there is no way you can sidestep a load of buckshot, and these crooks know it."

Beverly P. Jones, waiting on the station platform for a train that was to carry him to New York, looked up with sudden interest as the automobile filled with policemen rolled around the corner into the Square and stopped a few yards away.

His eyes narrowed at the sight of Big Jake clambering from the car with a shotgun in his hands. Apparently to better view the strange actions of the group, the manufacturer drew a pair of tortoise shell glasses from his inside pocket and put them on.

He was not the only one who seemed to be mystified by the strange conduct of the police as they scattered along the station platform. The waiting travelers and their friends drew back in alarm at the sight of the weapons which the men carried.

But the members of the party did not give more than a passing glance at the people who they saw there. Acting on a prearranged plan, two of their number walked to the rear of the station and disappeared around the corner of the building. The other three remained near their car for a few minutes and then began walking slowly along the side of the square toward the bridge.

The waiting people rushed to the end of the platform to watch them, then turned back reluctantly as their train thundered into the station. Looking from the window of his car as the train pulled out, Mr. Jones could see one of the policemen standing in front of the medicine man's booth, with his eyes turned toward the rear of the lot.

The train moved on, carrying him out of

sight of the drama which he felt sure was being enacted there.

VI



BIG JAKE and Chief Gordon edged forward until they were only a few feet from Swanda's tent. Each of them carried a sawed-off shotgun in their hands. The other men had been ordered to take cover farther away.

Waiting until the chief had slipped behind an empty packing box, the old sergeant raised his shotgun and held it ready for instant action.

"Swanda, we want you. Come out of that tent," his voice boomed out in a summons to the man he felt sure was hiding there behind the drawn flaps.

For several seconds there was a tense silence. No sound came from the shelter. Big Jake leaned forward.

"Swanda, there's a bunch of us out here and you don't have a chance to get away this time. Are you coming out, or must we come after you?"

There was an ominous ring in the policeman's voice as he gave this warning. But no reply came from inside the tent.

Big Jake cocked both hammers of the shotgun and stepped forward.

"I'm coming in after you," he announced. "And just remember that if there is any gunplay this shotgun is likely to go off, no matter what happens to me."

Without any further hesitation he strode up to the tent and pushed open the flap with his gun barrel. Chief Gordon, watching from behind the packing case saw him stoop over and enter. There was an exclamation of surprise and the sergeant reappeared a moment later.

"There's no one here," he announced.

A few seconds' search convinced the other policemen that their quarry was gone. The pile of rubbish in the back of the tent was given only a casual glance. It was obvious that no one could be hidden there, and Big Jake and Chief Gordon were puzzled for the moment as to what to do.

The crowd of people attracted by the raiding party now swarmed about the place. The news that Swanda was in reality sup-

posed to be a bank robber caused the greatest excitement and spread like wildfire.

Big Jake, standing beside the medicine man's wagon and staring at the electric dynamo which still lay there, turned at a touch on his shoulder. One of the employees of the Warren County Trust Company had come up and was standing behind him. The man's face was pale and he seemed highly excited.

"Is it true that this fellow was a bank robber?" he demanded.

The sergeant nodded ruefully.

"Yep," he said, "but you don't have anything to worry about now. He seems to have skipped out."

The other man drew closer and lowered his voice.

"That's just it," he exclaimed. "We haven't been able to get the vault open today. There's something gone wrong with the combination. We didn't want to scare anybody, so there was nothing said about it outside the bank."

Crash! Big Jake's fist came down on the footboard of the wagon with a thump.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed, half to himself, half to his companion. "I knew that dynamo wasn't being carted around by that bird for nothing."

He plowed through the crowd to the tent like a bull buffalo.

"Clear out of here," he roared, sweeping every one from the tent. "Get back there and keep out from underfoot."

Summoning the chief, he told him what the bank employee had just said. The tent flaps were drawn and the three set to work on the innocent-looking pile of rubbish.

"Clean as a whistle," Chief Gordon pronounced the verdict when he crawled out of the uncovered hole in the wall a half hour later.

VII



SEATED in the living room of a bungalow in a suburb of New York, the two men who had assisted Swanda on the night of the burglary were eagerly reading an evening paper a few days later. The thin-faced man suddenly gave an exclamation:

"Listen to this!" And then he began to read aloud:

"The full extent of the amazing nerve displayed by the bank burglars who robbed the Warren County Trust Company at Redbank of thirty thousand dollars in cash and seventy-three thousand dollars in securities last week, was just disclosed this afternoon when it was discovered that Hugh Dekay, the ringleader of the band, disposed of some of the stolen securities at another bank in Redbank on Monday morning before the burglary had been discovered.

"Posing as a cup manufacturer who intended to bring his factory to Redbank, the bandit leader posted twenty-five thousand dollars worth of bonds as collateral for a loan of fifteen thousand dollars from the bank. The collateral which he posted is now found to consist of stolen securities which bankers say he ordinarily could not have disposed of.

"All doubt as to the identity of the leader of the burglars was removed when Mr. Sherman, vice-president of the First National Bank, positively identified pictures of Dekay, as being the same man who negotiated with him for the loan.

"With this new development it was learned that on Monday while the police were raiding the tent which he had occupied next to the bank, Dekay was standing on the rail-

road station platform only a few yards away, waiting for a train to New York.

"The police are sure that at least two other men assisted him in the robbery, but so far no trace of any of the burglar band has been found."

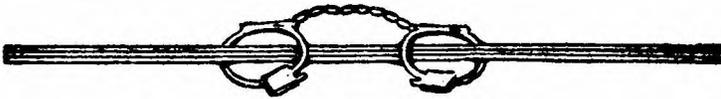
The reader turned to his companion.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed triumphantly. "You can't beat the boss. He pulled seventy thousand dollars on that job if he got a cent, and got away clean as a whistle."

Back in the Redbank police headquarters Big Jake Schaeffer and Chief Gordon had also been reading the same article. They knew by that time only too well how completely the medicine man had cleaned up. The subject was a sensitive one, and Big Jake threw down the paper and picked up a Sunday supplement instead.

There was silence for several minutes. The sergeant suddenly looked up.

"Say, chief," he remarked, "there's something in the paper here about that there pyramid at Cheops. I believe that Secrets of the Ancients stuff Swanda was giving us was the straight goods after all."



READERS of FLYNN'S WEEKLY who follow the newspapers were grieved to read of the recent death at his home in Ossining of James Jackson.

It was two years ago that FLYNN'S WEEKLY published the epic story of his life under the title, "Forty-Five Years a Manhunter."

Mr. Jackson was eighty-six years old when he died. Behind him he had left a monumental lifetime of work on the side of law and order.

To him had come the unique distinction of being the only man in all history to have carried in New York State the title of State Detective. The post was created for him by special act of Legislature and was abolished on his retirement in 1918.

Into "Forty-Five Years a Manhunter," Mr. Jackson wove the details of as picturesque and brave a fight against outlawry as any man ever fought.

No epitaph can carry the force of this simple, straightforward tale.

William J. Flynn



"I—I simply can't thank you for your leniency,"—

THE HAND OF HORROR

By Owen Fox Jerome

"WE DIDN'T JUST STUMBLE ONTO THIS GHASTLY AFFAIR," REMARKED MARTIN. "WE WERE SENT HERE FOR A STRANGE REASON"

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

THE star reporter of the Washington *Times-Journal*, Fred Martin, is sent to interview the South American celebrity, Professor Debara at his apartment in Kensington Mansions. Accompanied by a *Times-Journal* photographer, Tracy by name. Martin calls at Kensington Mansions, but instead of finding the professor, to his horror, he discovers a young woman who has been murdered by the breaking of her neck. She is the wife of the diplomat, Palmer Hollisworth. Martin had stumbled upon this tragedy through a misunderstanding of Professor Debara's address, which was Kingsley Mansions instead of Kensington Mansions. But apparently some one had a hand in the misunderstanding.

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XX

THE HOLLISWORTH HISTORY



FROM the standpoint of impressiveness the ten-story building on North Michigan Boulevard, which housed the Chicago National Trust Company, was a monument worthy of ancient Greece.

The first two floors, in height really three

floors, were given over to the business of the trust company which was also a bank of solid and growing resources.

Great vaults and repositories in the basement, marbled-fronted bank cages on the first floor, and business offices on the second, the very fluted columns of the lofty bank exuded an air of massive dignity and conservative affluence.

The Chicago National Trust Company was a prosperous concern. When such men

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for February 5



— he said, and picked up his hat and turned to the door

as Melvin Brockman, the packing magnate, left his vast estate in its care there was reason to consider the company as solid and as permanent a corporation as existed in the United States.

Mr. Francis K. Echols, the worthy president, had builded well. He had reason to feel at ease with himself and the world. The landing of the Brockman estate had been a distinct victory for his firm.

Well-groomed, complacent, far-sighted fox of finance that he was, Mr. Echols sat in his luxurious office one morning in early January, looking ahead for future conquests of the new year and gazing back over the gains and profits of the past.

There was the handling of the Brockman estate, for instance, now entering its eleventh year in trust. Mr. Echols allowed his mind to wander back some fifteen years.

Too bad that he had not been able to secure the custodianship of the Hollisworth fortune so that his company could have consolidated the two estates into one formidable whole upon the death of Melvin Brockman.

But that would have been too much to expect: he was fortunate in having gained the larger of the two fortunes.

Some fifteen years previous, at the age of thirty, Fremont Palmer Hollisworth, last living descendant of a venerable family, already had his affairs in the hands of the City National Bank. The Hollisworth family was an old Chicago institution that traced its ancestry back to the early settlers of the Virginia colony.

Wealth had, of recent years, been added to their already considerable position, the branch of finance had been successfully grafted to their genealogical tree.

Thanks to the judicious investments in Chicago real estate on the part of his grandfather, Jason Hollisworth, young Fremont Palmer, sole surviving scion of the house of Hollisworth, was a millionaire.

Mr. Echols remembered the young man very well. At thirty young Hollisworth had been alone in the world, an aristocrat, a man of culture and lineage, and a bachelor meritorious, on whom more than one lynx-eyed matron had cast calculating glances.

Philip MacCray, well known Chicago detective, who has been summoned by Mrs. Hollisworth, learns that his client has been murdered. He assumes the responsibility of investigation and enlists the aid of Reporter Martin. They learn that the finger-prints about the room in which Mrs. Hollisworth was killed are those of her missing husband. But it is apparent that the chair with which the deed was done was wielded by a left-handed man, and Hollisworth is not left-handed.

But Palmer Hollisworth, having spent most of his life in Cook County, Illinois, was considering a change of residence. With nothing else to demand or engage his attention he was earnestly considering a diplomatic career. He had no enthusiasm for the buxom or languishing marriageable maidens of Chicago.

It seemed that Chicago would lose him to a designing woman of a foreign country—until he met Lillian Brockman.

Lillian Brockman was the only child of the renowned meat packer, Melvin Brockman. True, the solidity of the Brockman name extended back hardly so far as that of Hollisworth, but the Brockman millions extended a great deal further.

Besides all of which, Lillian was a real patrician in spirit; she was a born lady. She would have been a lady had she been born in a wretched hovel in the squalid regions of South Chicago instead of in the imposing mansion at Evanston, that exclusive suburb north of the metropolis.

She was worthy of the best that the matrimonial market offered. No one knew this better than her shrewd old father. The question to him was, was this Palmer Hollisworth good enough to marry his daughter? He investigated.

Investigation must have thoroughly satisfied him, because very shortly the society columns were filled with the pre-nuptial events of the Hollisworth-Brockman wedding, the biggest event of the season, while financial pages were filled with speculation on the effect the amalgamation of these two fortunes would have on LaSalle Street.

Speculation not only was rife, it was vain. Melvin Brockman settled a cool million on his daughter as a wedding gift. That was all.

When the old packer died a few years later it was discovered that he had left his immense fortune in trust for a period of ten years, during which his daughter could decide, with her wealthy husband, just what they cared to do with so much money.

During the ten years the trust company had sole administration of the estate, merely paying to Lillian Brockman Hollisworth the net income.

Mr. Echols recalled the past decade of

management with a great deal of pleasure. It had made the Chicago National Trust Company the large concern that it was today.

And there was no indication that the heir was dissatisfied with the present arrangement. Thus, while the Palmer Hollisworths roamed afield their wealth remained in Chicago.

And they did roam considerably afield. It had been fully twelve years since Hollisworth, F. Palmer Hollisworth, as he now divided his name, had taken that long considered step and entered the diplomatic service of his country.

More than a decade of years had passed while he labored on foreign shores and gradually mounted higher in the service of his country on the slippery rungs of international diplomacy.

While he and his charming, talented wife became mere ghosts in the morgues of Chicago's newspapers, their star was looming brighter and brighter in society. Chicago's loss was Washington's social gain.

Mr. Echols wondered idly where the distinguished couple now were. If he remembered correctly they had recently returned from Brazil. Or had they returned?

Not that it made any difference, but—it did make a difference. It made a vast difference as the trustee and banker learned upon this very morning of his sleek complacency.

His secretary brought in a card and laid it on his glass-topped desk. Mr. Echols nodded and continued to dream for a brief moment before coming down to the prosaic world of business which went before the realization of dreams such as he entertained.

"He is waiting to see you, sir," ventured the secretary.

"Eh?" Mr. Echols looked up sharply and then down at the card. "Who's this? F. Palmer Hollisworth? Oh! Oh, yes! The ex-minister to Brazil! Certainly, certainly," he said in alacrity. "Show Mr. Hollisworth in immediately."

He rose to his feet to greet the ex-Chicagoan who was now a national figure of growing importance.

"Charmed, Mr. Hollisworth, I am sure," he beamed as he shook hands warmly with

his distinguished visitor. "I did not know that you were in the city. In fact, I was not sure that you had returned from Brazil. I was just thinking of you this morning. You haven't given up the diplomatic service?"

"Not at all," replied Hollisworth in his grave voice. "I am merely resting now while I await an appointment to Europe."

"Where will you go?"

"I have reason to hope that I shall be sent to Great Britain or France."

"You have climbed high in government circles," praised Mr. Echols admiringly. "And just to think that I can say 'I knew him when—' and all that. Will you be long in the city, Mr. Hollisworth? And did your charming wife accompany you?"

"No to both questions," replied the diplomat. "I am here on business this time. In fact, it is upon business that I have called to see you this morning."

"Yes?" smiled Echols happily, scenting money from afar. "In what way can I serve you? I thought the City National Bank handled all of your Chicago affairs."

"They did—they do, sir," responded Hollisworth a trifle nervously. "It is about my wife's estate that I am here."

Mr. Echols's smile was hardly so expansive. He was on guard now.

"Indeed?" he bowed. "And what can I tell you about the Brockman estate that has not been included in the annual reports?"

"Nothing at all, sir. You have handled Mrs. Hollisworth's interests most commendably. Mr. Brockman could have left them in no safer, more competent hands. But we are now making a radical change in our affairs. First, let me present you with this paper."

He took from a slender portfolio a sheet of paper and passed it over to the banker. Echols accepted it with a solemn air and perused it silently.

As he read the smile left his face to be replaced by a wondering frown. The paper was a legally executed power of attorney from Mrs. Hollisworth to her husband.

"Mrs. Hollisworth has turned her estate over to you? Ah, a wise move surely. But just what is it you wish me to do for you?"

"Just this, Mr. Echols. You will convert all of my wife's holdings into ready cash at once. To do this means a certain sacrifice I know, but we are willing to sacrifice in order to have the cash at our immediate command."

"But—but, Mr. Hollisworth! What you ask is impossible. In the first place, the estate is in trust."

"Was in trust," corrected the other. "Get your copy of the late Mr. Brockman's will and reread it. You will find that, after a period of ten years, it is at the disposal of my wife."

Mr. Echols experienced a sickening sensation in the region of his stomach. It was not necessary for him to reread that will.

He had been dreading the coming of this day, hoping fondly that his company would be permitted to remain in charge of the estate. No good banker likes to relinquish command of seventy-five millions of dollars.

CHAPTER XXI

ECHOLS GETS BUSY

"**B**UT this is unexpected—sudden—like a bolt from a clear sky," he expostulated. "May I inquire into your reasons for doing this? Hasn't our administration of the property been satisfactory?"

"It has. But we are investing our combined holdings in—in Brazilian interests," answered the diplomat with a touch of wistfulness.

"But is this wise, Mr. Hollisworth? Especially when you are losing touch with Brazil? You are doing that, are you not?"

Hollisworth could not repress a faint shudder.

"God knows I hope so," was his queer reply.

"Won't you reconsider?" pleaded Echols. "Won't you consult with me on the details of this project and let me offer my advice?"

"No," declined the diplomat coldly. "I know exactly what I have to do."

The banker considered his caller more carefully. He saw a tall, slender man of middle age with silvering hair that was

snow-white at the temples. A lean, aristocratic face Hollisworth had, a patrician face which had grown lined and grave in the service of his country.

Upon closer scrutiny the man seemed to be laboring under an inner strain; his eyes were haggard, his manner nervous. Worry and sleeplessness had written their story boldly across his features. The man looked older than Echols himself.

He was aging rapidly, he was breaking. He had changed woefully since Echols had seen him last. Perhaps Mr. Echols saw more than was really apparent, but then Mr. Echols saw with the sharpened eyes of the financial ferret who is on the verge of losing its prey.

"Very well," he finally bowed in submission. "I think you are making a mistake, but that is your business. You will have to give me some time to dispose of the various properties of the estate."

"Certainly," agreed Hollisworth soberly. "I can give you one week, sir. I shall remain here in Chicago while you attend to it."

"One week? My dear Hollisworth, you are a wiser business man than that! It will be impossible to do anything in one week."

"I have already stated that I am willing to take a certain loss because of haste," said the diplomat coldly. "See that you govern your actions in accordance with my wishes, sir. I must care for these affairs before I leave for Europe."

Echols, regardless of his private thoughts, bowed in assent. He touched a button on his desk.

"I can but accede to your demands and the authority of this paper," he said, picking up the power of attorney and glancing at it again. "I will call a special meeting of the board of trustees for to-morrow. Where are you staying, Mr. Hollisworth?"

"At the Blackman."

"Very well. I will call you there in the morning. At that time we shall go into the details of converting the estate. I will keep this power of attorney until then as my authority for such a drastic move."

"Kindly take care of it," cautioned Hollisworth. "It would cause both myself and my wife inconvenience were it lost. Mrs.

Hollisworth is no nearer than Washington, you know."

The banker reassured him and bowed him out as his secretary entered the room.

As the upright form of the diplomat disappeared Mr. Echols dropped heavily into his chair and stared down at the piece of paper in his hands, a mere scrap of paper with the power to move seventy-five million dollars.

"You rang, sir?" inquired the soft-voiced secretary at length.

The banker looked up sharply.

"Yes," he answered in a harsh tone. "Get me the papers on the Brockman estate from the trust company's vault. Make haste!"

Surprised at the tone of his employer's voice, the secretary withdrew to return shortly with a steel box under his arm.

"These are just the records, Mr. Echols," he said. "I didn't suppose you wanted any of the stocks or securities themselves."

"This is right," said Echols, producing a bunch of keys from his desk. "See that I am not disturbed unless I ring for you."

Alone, the banker opened the strongbox and lifted out a mass of papers. Among the first was an envelope containing the last will and testament of one Melvin Brockman.

For no reason at all Echols drew forth the paper and read through it again. It was now rather unpleasant reading with that power of attorney spread open beside it.

With a gesture of impatience Echols laid the will aside and delved deeper into the papers. Thirty minutes passed while he sorted over many things. Then he ran across one of the earliest acknowledgments of Lillian Brockman Hollisworth of receipt of her annual check.

"What is this doing here?" he growled to himself. "It ought to be in the correspondence file. I--"

He hesitated as he glanced at the signature on the legal form which gave into Palmer Hollisworth's keeping all of these millions. Curiously he compared the signature on the letter with the signature on the power of attorney.

He frowned and fell to studying the two

very closely. Then, a queer light in his eye, he rang for his secretary.

"Ask the cashier to come here for a moment," he directed the man.

Upon the arrival of the bank cashier Echols wordlessly handed him the two sheets of paper, pointing at the two signatures. The cashier glanced sharply at his superior and then looked over both papers. He studied the two signatures of Lillian Hollisworth carefully.

"You want an opinion on these signatures, Mr. Echols?" he inquired.

The president nodded, fearing to trust himself to speech.

"They are not the same," answered the cashier briefly. "Which is supposed to be authentic?"

Echols shook his head.

"I cannot say," he replied carefully. "That's all, Smythe. Thank you."

As soon as Smythe stepped out of the room the banker called his legal advisers on the telephone.

"Come downstairs right away, Mr. Marmon," he said into the transmitter. "This is an urgent matter."

While he awaited his lawyer, Echols sent for the correspondence file containing all of Mrs. Hollisworth's letters to the firm. He verified the authenticity of the signature on the acknowledgment and found that on the power of attorney to differ from all. He was in a fever of anxiety when Marmon entered the office.

He put the case before the lawyer quickly.

"Smythe says that this signature is not the same," he concluded. "It doesn't look the same to me. And yet Hollisworth himself brought this power of attorney in. What do you think of the matter?"

"Are you sure it was Hollisworth?" inquired the lawyer gravely.

"Certainly," snorted Echols. "I know the man personally."

"Have you checked up his statement that he is putting his own fortune in this Brazilian project?"

"No. Wait! I'll call the City National Bank right now."

Marmon toyed with the charm on his watch chain as he awaited the results of

the other's telephoning. It took some little time, but the answer was enlightening.

"Hollisworth hasn't a penny in Chicago," informed Echols as he at last turned back to the lawyer. "His estate of fourteen millions has all been converted into cash during the past six months at a loss of three million dollars. And Hollisworth has withdrawn every cent of it.

"Now he is here to do the same thing for his wife's estate. What do you make of this astounding state of affairs?"

"Nothing," answered Marmon briefly.

"But, what am I to do?" demanded Echols.

"If that power of attorney is all right there is only one thing you can do."

"But I am not sure of that."

"Wire Mrs. Hollisworth for confirmation of its legality. Wire her so that she will have to establish proof of identity to get your message. Then, if that fails to satisfy you, you'll have to send a man to Washington to see her."

Echols nodded.

"I'll do that," he said. "I don't want to get into any sort of damage suit. Neither do I wish to offend a man as well known as Hollisworth, but the circumstances warrant an investigation. Hold yourself in readiness to handle this matter."

The lawyer nodded and withdrew. Echols immediately dispatched a telegram to Washington which caused a certain lady there quite some inconvenience to receive.

But the effort made by President Echols was well worth the trouble. Just before noon he called Marmon back to his office to lay the reply before him:

I know nothing whatever about the matter. I did not know Mr. Hollisworth was in Chicago. Kindly wire details immediately.

CHAPTER XXII

"ONE THING TO DO!"



HE lawyer pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Well?" demanded Echols at length, "what am I to do? If I don't wire Mrs. Hollisworth she will probably be rushing out here to learn what is wrong. If I do wire her,

what I am to say? What am I to do about Hollisworth himself?"

"This power of attorney is a forgery," mused Marmon.

"And not an exceptionally clever one at that," added Echols.

"Under most circumstances it would not have needed to be," commented Marmon. "Its presentation by Hollisworth himself was enough to pass it. You discovered that it was spurious quite by accident, you told me."

"But, since it is a forgery, what must I do?"

"Call in the police," advised Marmon. "There is dirty work going on."

"The police?" gasped Echols in horror. "Arrest such a man as Hollisworth? Why, he hasn't made a crooked move yet. I haven't given him anything. Besides, his wife would not think of such a thing. I want legal advice, Marmon."

"Call in the police," repeated the lawyer firmly. "I didn't say to have Hollisworth arrested. Personally, I don't think he is a crook. Why would he have to be—a millionaire in his own name?"

"But his millions have disappeared," pointed out Echols.

"That's just it," agreed Marmon decisively. "There is something rotten in Denmark. It needs investigation. Since it has come to your attention it is your duty to go into the matter."

"But I should call in private detectives—not the police."

"Private detectives won't be able to block Hollisworth in his moves. How are you going to keep him from drawing money? How are you going to explain to him why you won't recognize this power of attorney?"

"I can simply refuse him."

"Certainly. And let him withdraw and go about his business—you without finding out what this is all about. This is a criminal proceeding which has been attempted in the State of Illinois. You have the evidence in this paper. Hollisworth needs to be questioned. Private detectives haven't the authority.

"You call the plainclothes department and—I know the very man who can in-

vestigate this affair with tact and diplomacy. Get hold of Philip MacCray. He is the assistant chief of detectives. Get him on the case and then set your mind at rest."

"This is your final advice?"

"Absolutely. Call MacCray out here and explain the case to him. Because this is an attempted illegality in the city of Chicago he will have the power to act. Follow his advice."

Thus it was that the city of Chicago became interested in the doings of Mr. F. Palmer Hollisworth.

Detective McCray's method of handling the mystery was short and to the point. He simply cut the Gordian knot. As soon as the Chicago National Trust Company put the matter up to him he made a quick decision.

"Jolly Hollisworth along for the entire week if necessary," he said crisply. "Wire his wife that everything is explained and that Mr. Hollisworth will be home in a few days. I'll see to it that he doesn't get any messages from her to alarm him.

"During this time I'll go over his record with a fine-tooth comb. Hold this power of attorney and this wire from his wife. I'll keep in touch with you. That's all. Good day."

And that was just about all. The week passed without MacCray finding a blot on the Hollisworth escutcheon. Neither did he find the missing millions. As a last resort he wired the Secretary of State for a complete record of Hollisworth's period of service with the United States Government.

This was the last thing he could do to check up on the man, and before he got a response on this Hollisworth informed the trust company that the week was up. It was at this juncture that MacCray endeavored to solve the mystery by cutting the knot.

Mr. Echols was in an agony of hesitancy.

"What must I do?" he demanded of the detective as he paced up and down his office. "You have wasted the week without unearthing a single thing, and Hollisworth is outside now to see me. He expects a certified check for the amount of the estate, and you know I haven't got it. Great God! What a dilemma!"

"Don't say that I have wasted a week," snapped MacCray truculently. "You bankers irritate me with your fussing about mere money. I have greater things to consider."

Mr. Echols halted in his restless pacing and eyed the detective in astonishment.

"What can be greater than seventy-five million dollars?" he demanded.

"Seventy-six millions, of course," ripped out MacCray savagely. "I have come to the conclusion that Hollisworth is the victim of some sort of plot. As we have no more time to work under cover there is only one thing to do."

"And what is that?"

"Bring Hollisworth in here. I'm going to sweat him."

The banker did not know whether he was glad or sorry. But at the glare MacCray gave him because of his hesitation he hurried to the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CRISIS



HE diplomat entered calmly enough. He stopped short at sight of MacCray.

"I beg pardon," he said.

"I thought you were at leisure, Mr. Echols. I can wait a few minutes, but I shall have to hurry, as I am leaving for Washington this afternoon."

"Sit down!" commanded MacCray, before Echols could answer. "Your name is Palmer Hollisworth?"

The diplomat drew himself up haughtily at the tone of voice. He made no move to comply.

"That is my name," he admitted coldly. "Who, may I ask, are you?"

"My name is MacCray," snapped the detective shortly. "You are here to withdraw the estate of Lillian Brockman from this institution?"

Hollisworth turned to Echols in nervous amazement.

"Who is this man?" he demanded. "What is the meaning of this?"

Echols wrung his hands wordlessly.

"Answer my questions," grated MacCray harshly.

"By what authority, sir?" demanded the diplomat frigidly.

"By this," snapped the detective, exposing his shield. "You are facing arrest in the State of Illinois and the city of Chicago for forgery. Are you willing to talk, or shall I call the wagon?"

With a cry of horror the accused man reeled backward. His face went perfectly white and then grew unutterably old as the other two watched him. He collapsed in a chair.

"Ruined!" he groaned. "Disgraced! I might have known."

"You should have known," corrected MacCray, biting. "What have you done with your own fortune?"

"I—I lost it," gasped Hollisworth.

"Where? How?"

"In—in Brazil."

"That must be a lie. You have converted your fortune into cash since returning to the States. What did you do with it?"

There was no answer forthcoming. Hollisworth slumped lower in his chair, his head sagging against his breast.

"Come," said MacCray impatiently. "If you want to avoid a national disgrace answer my questions. What did you do with your own estate? Who got the proceeds?"

Still there was no answer. MacCray turned toward the banker in mock finality.

"Call the police station, Mr. Echols," he said crisply.

Palmer Hollisworth raised haggard eyes. He saw the banker's hand moving toward the telephone and a look of utter despair filled his eyes. MacCray looked at him in time to see an expression of terrible resignation in his face.

With a sudden exclamation the detective leaped forward and caught the diplomat's right arm just as the hand went into a side pocket. A brief struggle—and the officer held in his grasp an automatic pistol he had taken from the accused man. He glanced at Echols significantly.

"Suicide!" he whispered. "You see this is a more serious matter than you thought."

"What, in God's name, are we going to do with him?"

MacCray turned back to the diplomat.

"Come, Mr. Hollisworth," he said gently. "In exchange for the information you can give us we will squash this charge against you. Make a clean breast of it, and we will hush this matter up and permit you to go free. What do you say?"

"Call the police," answered Hollisworth in an old, weary voice. "I am ready to go to the penitentiary."

"We dare not do that," whispered Echols nervously. "Lillian Hollisworth would never forgive me. What are we going—"

"Shut up!" growled MacCray savagely. "I'm handling this case now. Hand me that telegram from his wife."

He took it and thrust it into the lax hand of the broken diplomat.

"You've something else to do, first," he said kindly. "Go home and explain this to your wife."

Hollisworth looked up quickly. He eyed the telegram stupidly. Then he read it.

"You—you mean that you shall let me go back to Washington?" he faltered.

"I do," nodded the detective. "Go home and make peace with Mrs. Hollisworth. This affair remains in abeyance for the present."

"You're not going to arrest me, then?"

"Not unless Mrs. Hollisworth prefers a charge."

The man's eyes lighted up with faint hope. He straightened imperceptibly.

"I am free to go? I will not be arrested in some public place?"

"You will not be followed past that door," stated MacCray. "I wish you a pleasant journey to Washington."

Without a word Hollisworth arose and picked up his hat. At the door he paused and turned, his eyes glistening with tears.

"I—I simply can't thank you for your leniency," he uttered huskily. "I—I—good afternoon, gentlemen."

And he was gone.

Echols turned quickly on the detective.

"What did you let him go for?" he cried.

"What were you going to do?" said MacCray in exasperation. "You said not to arrest him. Were you going to hold him here in your office as a sort of fixture?"

"What is the best thing to do now?" went on the banker unresentfully.

"I'll take that power of attorney," said MacCray curtly. "All you've got to do is to forget the whole matter. As soon as I get word from the government I shall be on my way to Washington to see Mrs. Hollisworth."

"You are not dropping the case, then?"

"On the contrary, I am just picking it up in the interest of the Chicago commonwealth and Palmer Hollisworth himself."

"Then you still think he is the victim of some sort of plot?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But what?"

"Nothing that I can learn about in this country."

"Blackmail?"

"Perhaps."

"But where? Where do you think he got into trouble? Brazil?"

"That is what I hope Lillian Hollisworth can tell me."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHILE MARTIN SNOOZED

"AND that," said MacCray somberly, "is the story of the Hollisworth family. It's the reason I'm here in Washington. And I've come too late to avert a tragedy."

Fred Martin stirred in his seat as the detective concluded his lengthy recital and yawned prodigiously and looked at the silent man behind the desk.

The latter nodded thoughtfully, staring down at his hands. Then he looked up keenly at the dapper little detective.

"And Hollisworth came home as per your advice, but instead of straightening out the matter with his wife he murdered her?"

"I have not said that, Mr. Clausen," replied MacCray carefully. "He has been home for two or three days. Would it take him that long to quarrel with her and slay her?"

"Possibly," said Clausen. "It may have been a cumulative quarrel."

"Perhaps," agreed the Chicago detective.

"I do not know the facts—yet."

"What will you do now?"

"Among other things, join in the search

for Palmer Hollisworth. If he is still alive that man must be found."

"Why shouldn't he be?" offered Martin. "Why isn't it possible that he killed his wife to inherit her estate? That would give him control of the fortune."

"It is possible," agreed MacCray gravely. "I don't deny it for a minute. But one thing I may have failed to make clear to you, is the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Hollisworth were deeply attached to each other—unless they have fooled the entire world, including their various servants."

"Besides, my former knowledge of the couple, in less than two weeks I have learned a great deal more about them—without learning that which I am seeking."

"Did you get your report from the Secretary of State?" asked Clausen.

"Not yet. I want you to send a man out with me to call on him this morning. Speed is now an essential."

"I'll go with you myself," announced Clausen. "He has probably referred the matter to the department of consular service. We'll have the dickens of a time getting any action on Sunday."

Martin glanced at his watch and rose to his feet.

"It's morning," he announced hastily. "If you men will excuse me I'll run over to the plant and pound out the story on this case for a special edition. I guess they are in hysterics over my absence now. How about printing some of that Chicago dope, MacCray? That is sensational news."

"No," said the detective sharply. "Nothing on any of that until I give you the word. Don't even mention my name."

"How about Hollisworth's fingerprints?"

"Don't identify 'em," snapped MacCray. "Don't theorize. Just give your story of the murder and say that Hollisworth has not made a statement. If we don't get a line on him to-day you can use a story on his disappearance. Call up here before you go home; I may have something to tell you."

Martin agreed and took his departure. He hurried to the office of the *Times-Journal* where he found the night editor in a nervous rigor over his disappearance.

Sending a man out to a restaurant for sandwiches and coffee, he sat down at his desk and typed out a furious yarn of the murder. It was difficult to construct a story which told less than half he knew, but he managed to do so.

Tired, exhausted, and about as sociable as a wounded grizzly, Martin was ready to leave the newspaper building only when the early church bells over the city were calling the religiously dutiful to worship.

He bundled himself into his outer garments and made ready to walk out as the type-setting machines downstairs were pouring out slug after slug of hot metal containing the words of his article.

While he waited for his taxi he called the Municipal Building. He got MacCray on the wire.

"I've just finished the yarn," he informed the detective, "and I'm on my way to bed. You said to call you first. What's the news?"

"Hollisworth has completely vanished," informed MacCray. "He hasn't been seen since day before yesterday. When he walked out of the Kensington Mansions at noon yesterday he walked out of existence. Morris, the elevator boy, was the last person I've found who saw him."

"He could have left Washington yesterday afternoon—if he is running from justice."

"All of the surrounding cities have been notified. The sea coast is being guarded. If he is a fugitive we will have him in twenty-four hours."

"You say 'if.' If not a fugitive, what?"

"One of two things, either a prisoner or a corpse."

"Have you got a line on him from the diplomatic service?"

"Not yet. We'll have that early this afternoon. Three men are at work on his record."

"Well, I guess there isn't anything else to do right now," yawned Martin sleepily. "If you have nothing on your mind for the present you'd better run out to the house with me and get some sleep."

"Go ahead," said MacCray. "I can't. I have an engagement at ten o'clock with Andrew Peterman."

"You are going to keep that?"

"Certainly. I promised him. I'll call you this evening at your boarding house. Good-by."

Martin hung up the receiver and descended to his waiting taxi.

"That man's a human dynamo," was his decision. "I'm fagged out myself."

As the cab skidded and spun its dizzy way out Fourteenth Street he dozed off out of sheer weariness. Twenty-seven hours without sleep was an unusual strain and a severe drain on his body. No wonder doctors took to morphine sometimes. Ten murders would not arouse his interest now until he got some rest.

If the Reds were to blow up the Capitol Clifton or Rainey would have to write the story. Nothing could command his attention for the next twelve hours except a certain bed at the Belmont Inn.

CHAPTER XXV

BUT HERE'S WHAT DID



HIS conviction was firmly set in his mind and he was imagining himself already between the sheets when a startled exclamation from his driver brought him out of his doze with a start.

There was the sudden racing of the motor as the clutch was disengaged, the screech of brake bands, and the sickening feel as the taxi skidded sharply on the icy street.

Martin barely glimpsed a handsome dark blue sedan crossing the street in front of his car, a woman's white face at the rear window, before the crash came. At the same instant his taxi shot into the sedan and shoved the latter against the opposite curb of the cross street.

The heavy metallic crash as bumper met running board and body, the shivering of glass, the frightened scream of the woman—and silence.

Flung against the back of the driver's seat, uninjured because of the relaxed condition of his body, Martin clawed his way to his feet and tumbled out of the cab. Thoroughly awakened now, he quickly sized up the collision.

The taxi was uninjured save for a crumpled fender and a broken bumper. It was the sedan which had suffered the worst. The heavy glass of that rear window had been shattered and the rear wheel on the other side had splintered against the curb, leaving the big car at a slight angle and halfway on the sidewalk.

A policeman and a crowd appeared from nowhere while the taxi driver and the chauffeur of the sedan began to exchange pleasantries on the merits of each other's driving, not to mention questionable mental attainments and authenticity of ancestry.

"Shut up, you fools!" snapped Martin. "Let's see if the lady is hurt."

He hurried around to the opposite side of the sedan and jerked open the door. And then he caught his breath sharply. In a crumpled little heap on the floor lay the girl of the bowling alley, the lady of the tweed skirt and white sweater. With a sharp pain at his heart he entered the limousine and gathered her up in his arms.

"Well?" said the patrolman to the drivers brusquely. "Which one of you was to blame, and don't both speak at once?"

Oblivious to all this, Martin was anxiously examining the girl for signs of injury. Fortunately the window had shattered outward, had probably been broken by the impact of her head as she was thrown against it.

There was no cut about her face nor any glass in the car. So far as he could tell there were no bones broken. She seemed merely to have fainted from fright.

She was dressed in a fairly modish gown of blue serge under the handsome mink coat. Her trim felt hat had come off and her disarranged hair had tumbled down the side of her cheek.

She was ineffably sweet to gaze upon as she lay against his chest, the pulse beat barely perceptible in her neck and her young bosom faintly rising and falling.

The man was conscious of a tingling sensation, an inner emotion of some sort which made him tremble noticeably. Perhaps it was the reaction from the collision, or the result of physical fatigue.

Then she stirred and closed her slightly parted lips. To his boundless relief her

eyelids fluttered and she slowly opened her dark eyes to gaze uncomprehendingly up into his anxious face. It seemed to him that the depths of those black orbs were fathomless.

He felt like he was falling into their bottomless abyss, falling—falling—falling as easily as an aviator descending with a parachute. Then, to his amazement, she smiled faintly, recognition coming into her eyes.

"Ah, it is you, *señor*?" she murmured in English, a perfect English with a delicious trace of an accent.

She closed her eyes in time to save him from drowning in their lovely depths. Martin nearly dropped her in his surprise.

"She has taken me for somebody she knows," he reflected quickly. "Here, miss—*mademoiselle*—*señorita*—or whatever it is. Are you hurt? Tell me. Do you feel pain?"

"Only here, *señor*," she whispered, one little hand feeling for his and placing it over her beating heart.

This was a pleasant sensation to Martin, but he frowned down at her askance. This sort of thing was not according to convention. Who and what was this woman? What had he let himself in for? Confound that taxi driver and that careless chauffeur, anyway!

"Here!" rasped the hard voice of the police officer as he stuck his head in through the shattered window and glared at them. "What's the big idea?"

The slender form in Martin's arms quivered violently at this raucous, foreign sound. The girl started erect and stared around wildly. Her eyes went wide at sight of the broken window and the glimpse of the taxi behind the policeman.

She turned toward Martin and eyed him strangely. Her eyes were no longer fathomless pools of blissful loveliness. They were the frightened eyes of a bewildered young woman.

She was completely aroused now, her shapely hands fluttering about her person, rearranging her raven hair, straightening her garments, feeling tenderly of the side of her head, gesticulating most expressively. They were like tiny swallows in their nervous, graceful darting.

Martin let her sink back against the deep cushions of the seat and retrieved her hat. This he handed to her with a courteous bow. She accepted it gratefully and smiled at him, but with eyes that strictly forbade presumption on his part.

"I—I must have fainted," she murmured. "I think my head hit the window glass. At least it feels such a tenderness. A taxicab ran into me, did it not, *señor*?"

"It was my taxi, miss," admitted Martin, studying her face curiously. "I was trying to see if you had been hurt."

He could almost see her retreating behind barrier after barrier of reserve under his glance.

"No, no," she answered nervously. "I am quite all right, thank you. Is there any harm done, *señor* officer? I must be on my way home."

She turned from the too-staring gaze of Martin and spoke to the policeman.

"You can't get far with this car," informed the latter, his demeanor softening under the charm of her beauty. "Your right rear wheel is smashed to pieces."

"Oh!" she gasped in panic, her eyes searching frantically for her chauffeur. "Perhaps my chauffeur can repair it, is it not so?"

"Not this side of a garage, miss," said the officer, shaking his head and turning his attention to Martin who stood on the opposite side of the car. "What's your name, mister, and how did this smash-up happen? I can't get any sense out of the drivers."

"I am Fred Martin of the *Times-Journal*," admitted the reporter, displaying his badge. "I was half asleep when the accident took place, but I saw that my driver was to blame. The lady's car had the right of way. The taxi company carries insurance on their cars."

"There will be no trouble about paying for the damage. Just take the driver's name and number. He'll report the accident. I guess it couldn't be helped on account of the slippery streets."

The officer nodded as he drew forth a notebook.

"What's your name and address, miss?" he inquired.

"Celia Debara," she answered. "My address is Kingsley Mansions out on Sixteenth Street. I think this car belongs to the Brazilian Embassy, *señor*. It was put at the service of my father while we are in your city."

"Thanks, miss," saluted the patrolman, turning toward the taxi driver.

"But, *señor*, what am I to do? How am I to get home? Who is to care for this poor car?" she asked anxiously.

Martin gulped in consternation and grasped the car door to steady himself. He managed to command his voice.

"Pardon me, Miss Debara," he said, "but is your father Professor Xanthus A. Debara of Brazil?"

"But certainly, *señor*," she answered him, surveying him with eyes of cool reserve. "Do you know him?"

"I do not have that honor," he bowed. "But I have heard of him. As you have no other conveyance at hand, will you accept the use of my taxi? It is not harmed past running condition. I will consider it a great favor to be allowed to see you home."

She appraised him with half-frightened eyes. He could see the formation of a polite but icy refusal in her manner. He smiled willingly.

"Please allow me, Miss Debara," he pleaded earnestly. "You heard me tell the officer who I am. My name is Martin. I am a reporter on the *Times-Journal*. As my cab did all the damage, you owe me the opportunity to make amends to the best of my ability. And I will attend to the details of caring for your car."

His manner was so boyishly earnest that her frown of reserve slowly disappeared.

"Very well, Señor Martin," she acquiesced in quiet dignity.

He held out his hand to assist her to alight, but she ignored his assistance and held to the side of the door. Rebuffed at her cold manner, Martin stood back out of her way. She descended to the walk and straightened herself erect.

At once her hand flew to the side of her head, and her lips went white with pain. She swayed and would have fallen had not the man leaped forward and steadied her in his arms.

He felt her body stiffen against the profanation of his touch, but even this did not efface that same tingling thrill he experienced at touching this lovely creature.

This icy, haughty being was not the same woman who had opened her eyes in his arms a few moments ago, and yet the thrill of contact was still there.

An insane jealousy welled up in his heart at recollection of that one delicious moment. With all of his soul he envied the man she had mistaken him to be.

However, no trace of these various and conflicting emotions appeared in his face or his manner as he steadied her on her feet and then withdrew impersonally.

"Thank you, *señor*," she said distantly. "It was the severe pain in my head. I have one violent headache."

"Can I get you anything from a drug store? Is there—"

"No, please. Just take me home."

Martin helped her into the taxi without further words. While she spoke to her chauffeur, who came to the door of the cab in a belated inquiry after her welfare, Martin conferred with his driver and the policeman. Then he turned to the Debara chauffeur.

"You will stay here until the wrecker comes for this car," he informed the fellow as he climbed in beside the girl. "I will see that you get assistance at once after I see Professor Debara and learn whether he wants to prefer the claim against the taxi company or if he wishes to leave the matter to the Brazilian Embassy."

"Officer Danweeks says it will be all right to wait as your sedan is not exactly in the way."

"To the Kingsley Mansions, driver."

CHAPTER XXVI

MARTIN IS INTRODUCED



HE settled back in his corner of the cab carefully aloof from the young woman. Since her real nature was to be so damned reserved and unapproachable, what would she say if she knew she had lain in his arms for an ecstatic moment and pressed his hand against her breast?

Confound that policeman for awakening her? And who the devil was the man she had been thinking about?

He glanced toward his companion resentfully. To his astonishment, she was looking at him in faint amusement. He flushed under her rather mocking gaze and squirmed like a schoolboy in June. Why did she have to ogle him in that supercilious fashion?

"It is necessary for the *señor* to see my father before the embassy car can be moved?" she inquired, a hint of laughter in her sweet voice.

Heavens! What a thoroughly delectable little morsel she was. If anybody ever had that intangible but most potent essence so well touted by a popular novelist she certainly had it.

"I thought it best to learn Professor Debara's wishes before I took the liberty of ordering the disposal of the car," he answered with dignity. "Perhaps he hasn't time to prefer a claim for damages. He doesn't seem to have time for anything but his private business."

Her eyes widened as she studied him.

"But you left the car at a street intersection, Señor Martin. It could not have been taken to a—to a garage? Poor Wilber must sit there and cool his heels in the snow?"

Was she making game of him.

"To tell you the truth, Miss Debara," he answered frankly, "I am using this as an excuse to meet your father. I am asking you to do me the favor of introducing me to him.

"I know I am a perfect stranger to you, but you are not to me. I saw you two different nights at the bowling alley up here close to Columbia Road."

"I know, *señor*," she answered calmly. "I saw you there. I remember asking one of my escorts if he knew who was that handsome young American."

Martin eyed her sharply, flushing to the roots of his hair. So she was making sport of him. It showed in her dancing eyes. He set his jaw grimly.

No woman was smart enough to hold him up to ridicule and get away with it. But he was too much of the gentleman to refer to

that moment of semiconsciousness when she had dreamed of being in the arms of another.

"Thank you," he replied ironically. "I generally have a guard with me to keep the women at arm's length."

"Yes? Of what does the *señor's* body-guard consist?"

"Six prize fighters with clubs," he retorted shortly.

She laughed so merrily that he could not resist joining in. Then her face contracted swiftly.

"The headache," she explained as he sobered anxiously. "The *señor's* sense of humor made me forget it."

Despite the headache all sense of constraint had passed. The unconventionality of their introduction, if introduction it could be called, had been satisfactorily bridged. They were well on their way to a friendly acquaintance. They chatted amiably as the taxi labored along the snowy streets.

"I was on my way home from church when we met," she remarked somewhat later.

Again they chatted, and a moment later were on another subject.

"You will introduce me to your father, won't you?" he asked.

She gazed at him mischievously.

"Father doesn't entertain newspaper men," she informed him, her expressive eyes mocking him again. "I am surprised you do not know that."

"If I had known he had such a charming daughter I would have seen him long ere this," he replied.

She flashed him a glance of disapproval and instantly withdrew into her mantle of reserve. Aloof, icy, proudly reserved, this daughter of a Latin country was unapproachable.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I meant no offense."

She nodded her head coolly in forgiveness.

"But my father, seriously, would refuse to see you, *señor*."

"Don't tell him that I am a newspaper man."

"But that would do the *señor* no good.

It is as a newspaper man that he wishes to interview Professor Debara."

"If the *señorita* will be so kind as to make the introduction the *señor* will attend to the rest of the matter his little self," he replied in the same cool tone.

* The *señor* does not find it impossible to see the good professor, but he prefers to meet the worthy gentleman as a friend. The *señorita* will oblige, yes? No? A couple of yeses?"

Celia Debara could not resist his ironic humor. She melted charmingly and nodded her head. She even condescended to take his hand when he offered to assist her to alight before her door.

Martin followed her gravely into the Debara apartment on the second floor. An elderly woman came forward to meet them, taking the girl's fur cloak with an air of subservient proprietorship and glancing sharply at the man.

"This is Señor Martin, Inez," the young woman said. "*Señor*, this is Doña Inez, in Brazil my duenna."

The old woman dropped Martin a suspicious curtsy and then lent an attentive ear to a voluble stream of Spanish from the lips of her mistress. She replied in the same language.

At a command from Celia she trotted out of the room. The young woman turned toward Martin with a graceful gesture of her arms and *svette* shoulders.

"My father is closeted with his secretary, *señor*, but Inez goes to summon him. He will enter immediately to convey his thanks for your so splendid courtesy in escorting me home."

Martin bowed in acknowledgment.

"The rest of the matter I am to leave to the *señor's* little self?" she smiled at him.

"*Sí, señorita.*"

"You speak Spanish?" she asked in surprise.

"I do," he nodded. "And why do you? I thought Brazil was a Portuguese country."

"It is, *señor*. I speak Portuguese also. But the Debaras are of Spanish descent."

Martin nodded in understanding, and turned to gaze upon the man who was entering the room.

"My father, Señor Debara," said Celia.

"Father, Señor Martin, the gentleman who was so kind as to bring me home."

CHAPTER XXVII

INTERVIEWING DEBARA



ANTHUS AGOSTO DEBARA

was a slender man of dark complexion like his daughter. His hair was brushed straight back from his lofty forehead.

His upper lip was adorned with a thick but fairly close-cut mustache.

His eyes were jet black, like Celia's, and he wore heavy rimmed glasses. His hands were slender and tapering.

While he was proudly erect and haughty, there was a scholarly air about him which rendered him mildly benevolent, softening to some extent the unyielding fierceness of his manner. It was impossible to read his thoughts through those thick-lensed spectacles.

He shook hands courteously but perfunctorily, thanking Martin in a cool way that was the perfection of courtesy, but which was unquestionably a request for the caller to take himself off without more ado.

"I will have my secretary attend to the sedan, Señor Martin," he said when the details of the affair had been explained to him. "I am under obligations to you, sir, and if at any time I can favor you in the future you have but to call on me."

"You can do so now, Professor Debara," replied Martin bluntly, ignoring the hint to leave. "I am a representative for the *Washington Times-Journal*, and I would like to ask you a few questions."

Debara held up a graceful hand in refusal.

"I am sorry, sir, but I am giving out no interviews to the press. Since I am under an obligation to you, I promise to grant you a first account—if I ever have any information for the papers. May I bid you good morning, *señor*? I am very busily engaged."

"I am sorry, but it is necessary for you to answer my questions, sir."

The Brazilian drew himself up in astonishment.

"Sir?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me I *must* do so?"

"Exactly," said Martin tersely. "For your own interest you *must* answer my queries. Do you remember your secretary asking you about an interview last night?"

"I do. Are you the man?"

"I am, sir. Do you know where I was when I called you?"

"It is not of the least interest to me, *señor*," rejoined the professor frigidly.

"Pardon me, but it is of vital importance to you. I called you from the Hollisworth apartment at Kensington Mansions, where I had gone in response to a telephone message summoning me to an interview with you."

"Well?" demanded Debara in ominous calm. "What of it, sir?"

Martin glanced at the listening Celia. The young woman showed no inclination to leave them alone together. If she insisted on remaining in the room she must hear it then.

"Just this, sir," he answered grimly. "There was no one in that apartment but a murdered woman. Now, why was your name used to decoy a newspaper man there? Who are you, anyway? What is your business in this country?"

"If you do not volunteer information to me now the police will cause you great inconvenience when they come to drag you before the public in their investigation of this killing."

The effect of his words on father and daughter was telling. Both of them were startled and dismayed. Celia clasped her hands and stared at the reporter with bright eyes. The professor paled and fell back a step.

"A woman murdered?" he articulated. "And I will be dragged into the public eye because my name was mentioned?"

"Exactly, sir. Now, what can you tell me about the matter?"

"I? Nothing, Señor Martin, absolutely nothing. I know nothing of the affair—why my name was used—positively nothing. I scarcely understand you, sir."

"Then, tell me something about yourself. Why are you here, and why are you so secretive?"

Debara reflected anxiously.

"I am here unofficially on business for

my government," he announced slowly. "More I cannot tell you. Senator Billings, Rear-Admiral Roberts, the Brazilian Embassy, will all vouch for me. I—I—why, it is preposterous to connect me with this sordid affair!"

"Quite so," agreed Martin. "Therefore, can you think of any reason why this is the case?"

"Not unless it was a coincidence, *señor*. I will tell you something about myself. I am an envoy from Brazil to your government. Personally I occupy a chair in the highest national university of my own country. I was born in Brazil and so was my daughter here. I am a widower and of Spanish descent.

"My profession is that of a naturalist and somewhat of a psychologist. I have been here since last September. If you will refer to the people I have named I think you will be reassured upon my standing.

"More than this I can tell neither to you nor to the police. Kindly consider that final."

"You believe us, do you not, Señor Martin?" Celia Debara asked him anxiously.

Martin turned toward her. In contemplation of her bewitching beauty he nearly forgot her father. He could only gaze on her pretty distress, enchanted. Debara's voice recalled him:

"In the limited means at my command, *señor*, I will endeavor to investigate this puzzling incident. If I learn anything I will only too gladly communicate it to you."

With this, perforce, Martin was satisfied. Celia walked with him to the door.

"You gave me no warning, *señor*, of what you would ask my father," she reproached him with trembling lips. "This poor woman who was murdered, was she beautiful?"

"One of the most beautiful women in Washington, Miss Debara."

"And—and did you know her, Señor Martin?"

He shook his head regretfully, watching the marvelous play of expression on her features.

"Ah," she sighed. "I am so sorry for her, *señor*. It pains me here."

And she cupped her hand under her heart. Instantly Martin was reminded of that delirious moment she had lain against his chest and had pressed his hand so against her breast. The thought left him quite giddy, and he dropped his eyes hastily.

"You will do all you can to save my father inconvenience, *señor*?" she went on pleadingly. "He works so hard as it is. This would quite distract him."

Before he realized it Martin was promising faithfully to see that the professor was not molested by the police.

"I will call again if need be to see what he may have learned," he said. "If you wish to reach me, or if I can serve you, you can get me at the newspaper office or at my residence—the Belmont Inn."

"Thank you, *señor*," she whispered almost shyly. "You are most gracious. And you will be welcome here."

Martin walked all the way home through the snow without knowing that his feet were sopping wet.

All he could see was that lovely face against his shoulder. All he could smell was the delightful fragrance of her hair. All he could feel was the beating of her heart under his trembling fingers. All he could hear was her soft murmur, "I feel pain only here, *señor*."

"Damn the man she was dreaming about!" he muttered savagely. "I hate Latins, anyway."

Thus, it was not until he was tumbling into bed for that belated sleep that he felt like kicking himself for not having interrogated Professor Debara more closely. Why had he not had sense enough to ask the Brazilian if he had known Hollisworth in Brazil?

CHAPTER XXVIII

A REPORTER'S HUNCH



THE ensuing week was one of hectic excitement. The story of the murder having broken upon an unsuspecting public through a special edition of the *Times-Journal*, the city of Washington went wild.

Newspaper reporters from all the papers

besieged the police and clamored for news. In diplomatic circles the brutal horror of the murder was discussed with accompanying shudders, while the news flashed over wires and cables to all parts of the civilized world.

Lillian Hollisworth, wife of the well known ambassador, herself one of the notable figures at the Capitol, had been foully slain. It was one of the most impressive funerals of years, almost like an affair of State. The whole city mourned the loss of a charming and beautiful woman of repute.

And through the entire week of all the excitement and sorrow there was no word of F. Palmer Hollisworth. The fact of his guilt was now conceded by the majority of the public and was being hinted at by more than one paper.

Wilson, of the *Times-Journal*, had gone mad in happy frenzy and had turned Martin loose with a free hand on the case. But nothing further happened, and for want of fuel the story was dwindling to mere paragraphs and slipping toward the back pages until the sudden reappearance of Palmer Hollisworth.

During the week Fred Martin had been busier than he ever had been in his life. Dodging reporters from other papers, keeping his own stories up to the minute, working with MacCray on the quiet, investigating many things on his own account, and calling at the Debara apartments filled his every waking moment.

Professor Debara he had investigated thoroughly: Thanks to police assistance he got the information that the newspapers had thus far been unable to obtain.

But he could not print it. The character of the Brazilian seemed above reproach, and all of his references were *bona fide*. He was in Washington to interest the United States Government in the millions of acres of undeveloped rubber resources of his own country.

Because of the British rubber monopoly it was impossible for the least hint of his business to be given out to the public until his work was finished.

There were many little meaningless clues to be run down. There was his daily column

of editorial material. And there was his growing intimacy with Celia Debara.

The Lillian Hollisworth murder had been the opening wedge for this acquaintance, rather the sesame for the continued acquaintance. Debara could freeze him out over the matter of the car accident, but he could not do so over so important an affair as a murder in which he was inexplicably involved.

But of Debara himself Martin saw very little. He met him twice during that week of daily calls. However, the investigation of the murder notwithstanding, he could not blind himself to the fact that it was Celia he came to see and not her father.

Of MacCray he saw much and yet he saw little. Brief moments of contact in which they conferred and the dapper little detective offered advice and suggestions.

As Martin had become somewhat of a conspicuous figure because of his participation in the murder case, MacCray had decided against ever appearing with him in public. What little leisure the detective had in which to see Washington, he passed in the company of Andrew Peterman, a splendid guide.

To what extent MacCray went with the suave bond broker Martin did not learn: that was a matter outside of his interest in the affair at hand.

That the detective had made a firm friend of the debonair Peterman, he knew. That the benevolent broker was spending delightful hours in the company of the man who was the chief detective in the Hollisworth case, it would have been impossible for Peterman to know. For MacCray had been ignored as completely as had the matter of the broker and his little arrest.

Toward the close of the week, when the public interest in the case was dying, Wilson informed Martin that he would have to go back on regular assignment if he expected to remain on the payroll.

"That was a big story, Fred," he said. "You easily kept the *Times-Journal* ahead of the other papers, but the affair is dragging now. It is now nothing but a case for the police.

"Of course, if anything startling comes up you can go back on it, but I can't keep

a high-priced reporter following police routine on one murder."

"Mr. Wilson, please don't take me off the case," pleaded Martin earnestly. "There is something in the air. I feel it. I know it. This story has just started instead of ending.

"Ever since the moment I entered Kensington Mansions with Tracy I've had this feeling that I can't shake. I can't explain it, but something is going to happen."

"I suppose you want to sit around and starve while you wait for it?" inquired Wilson.

Martin looked at his superior reproachfully.

"I haven't been sitting around for a week, and you know it. This is the best story you've had this winter. And I got Debara into the papers to some extent for you."

"I know it, son. But the story's dying now for lack of fuel."

Martin shook his head obstinately.

"I don't care what you think, but this story is still on the boards. I tell you that I can feel an element of—of horror creeping over the entire city. I know that something awful is yet to happen. There is a deeper mystery than I have written for the paper."

The editor eyed him keenly.

"If you know something you haven't given us write it," he snapped brusquely. "What are you holding out?"

"Something that I can't write yet."

"You're a calamity howler. Either stir up something startling about this Hollisworth case, or you go off of it to-morrow. We've got two police reporters covering the Municipal Building."

"But you haven't got a reporter covering what I am covering," declared Martin.

"To-morrow," Wilson said shortly. "I need you on other assignments."

Twenty-four hours! One simple revolution of the earth about its axis and he would be taken from the Hollisworth case by the man who had accidentally put him on it. Martin squared his shoulders and left the building.

"Well, something has got to happen by to-morrow. That's all," he soliloquized

fiercely. "I'd better hunt up MacCray and tell him."

The finding of MacCray was no simple thing. In fact, it was impossible. Having spent the rest of the morning in a fruitless search for the detective, he took himself gloomily to the restaurant where he was in the habit of eating lunch with a number of men from the *Times-Journal*. He found Clifton there before him.

"Why so gloomy?" inquired the latter. "You should be on top of the world with all this publicity you've tumbled into."

"I'm about to tumble out," said Martin. "Wilson is going to take me off the case to-morrow."

"What of it? It's dying on its feet. You've made the most of it. What on earth do you want for your money, you bargain hunter. We've some mighty nice planets we're displaying this spring. Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune—take your pick at twenty-five cents each, the quarter of a dollar.

"Then, for discriminating and exacting patrons we are exhibiting complete solar systems in perfect working order and guaranteed indefinitely. These materials are of the finest workmanship and are reasonably priced at—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Martin in hearty disgust. "This is more serious than a half-wit like you can understand."

"Ah, an affair of the heart!" exclaimed Clifton sagely. "Tell papa your troubles, little one."

Martin glared at the police reporter for the *Times-Journal* in exasperation.

"Dampfool!" he snorted. "I tell you there is something so deep about this Hollisworth affair that we, with all we know, haven't more than scratched the surface. Go ask Tracy. He has the same feel about the thing as I have.

"And you know MacCray is still working like blazes on this affair. As sure as we sit here there is something in the wind."

"Something dead up the creek, eh?" said Clifton, dropping his levity and attacking his steak.

Martin looked startled.

"Why do you say that?" he inquired.

"No reason in particular. Still looking for Hollisworth around here?"

"MacCray says that the man has not left the city," replied Martin. "And if he says so I believe it. That fellow has one of the keenest minds I ever met."

"And with all that he can't find a man he says is still in Washington?"

"That's one of the queer things about the case. If Hollisworth were dead we'd find his body or learn something about his death."

"The police are not everywhere," pointed out Clifton. "I who follow them most indefatigably know that better than any one. Police work and interviews are my meat. You know that."

"But somebody is everywhere. Somebody would be sure to report anything suspicious to the police."

"If they ran across it," agreed Clifton. "What did MacCray learn from the government about Hollisworth? Do you know?"

"Nothing. His record was perfectly clear so far as government reports went."

"Well, I think you boys are barking up the wrong tree, anyhow. MacCray had better be looking for a hulking bully who broke into the Hollisworth apartment for burglary and unintentionally committed murder. Hollisworth probably knows nothing about the matter."

Clifton was not informed on the Chicago aspect of the affair, not having been present when MacCray told Clausen and Martin his story.

"But where is Hollisworth?" cried Martin impatiently. "Why doesn't he come home? The papers have been full of the murder. If he is alive and not guilty he would certainly show up."

"I don't know," said Clifton. "You've gone bugs over the affair. What you need is a change of venue, if you know what I mean.

"I've got to go down to the wharves this afternoon and get a last minute interview with an old hen of a Senator's wife who is sailing to St. Petersburg to join her sick husband. Come along with me to get the old girl's report on herself and family."

For want of a better suggestion, Martin

agreed to go. A half hour before sailing time they were walking along Water Street to the pier of the *Sustanis*.

CHAPTER XXIX

MARTIN SEES IT THROUGH



BOARDING the steamer, *Stanton* hunted out the lady he was seeking and engaged her in conversation. Dumbly Martin stood near them, watching the rapidly working mouth of the woman in faint distaste, his interest far from this vessel and all that pertained to it.

Finally he left them together on the sunny side of the saloon deck and wandered aft.

How lovely it would be to be sailing southward out of this cold and sloppy weather to the sunny coast of Florida. It was almost worth being a sick Senator to do so.

Idly he glanced at the few passengers he met on the deck, occasionally turning to look at the openings to the staterooms on one side. He paused beside the open window of a stateroom to shield a match from the various air currents as he lighted a cigarette. The sound of voices attracted his attention.

"Purser," said a pleasant, grave voice, "this is the package I want you to put in the safe for me."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Pointell, but it will be necessary for you to come to the office and sign your deposit slip."

"But that is why I called you here—to save me the trouble. Didn't you bring the necessary forms with you?"

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the purser.

Martin thought there was a vaguely familiar timbre to the voice of the passenger addressed as Pointell. He strolled slowly past the open port and looked in. He had no eyes for the blue-suited figure of the ship's officer, but he studied the other man sharply.

The man was elderly, slender and tall. His carriage was stiff and somewhat jerky as he stood there talking with the purser.

Martin could not see a full view of his face, but the profile looked more familiar to

him than the voice had sounded. He halted and stared through the window.

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," Pointell said to the officer. "Let's go and attend to the business now and get it over with."

"Yes, sir," saluted the purser, stepping aside for the other to pass through the door which opened onto the inner corridor.

Pointell picked up from the bed the bulky rectangular package which he wished placed in the ship's safe and preceded the officer out of the stateroom.

Greatly interested in the proceedings, and piqued at the faint air of familiarity about the passenger, Martin decided to follow them.

Knowing their destination, he hurried around the stern of the boat and entered the central gallery. He was just in time to see the two men descending a companion-way to the main deck. He hurried after them.

There was need for haste, as the vessel was on the verge of sailing down the channel toward Chesapeake Bay and the open sea.

He crowded into the purser's office after his quarry and stood near the door while the man went through the formalities of depositing his package in the safe-keeping of the steamship company. Then the man turned to retrace his steps and Martin met him face to face.

The reporter realized how foolish he had been to follow a stranger about as though the unknown was a thief. For the man called Pointell was an utter stranger to him.

The face was drawn in sardonic lines, the eyes were a bit queer in expression—in fact, the expression of the entire face was queer in some intangible fashion. But it was a perfectly human face. And it was that of an unknown.

He halted in obvious surprise at the young man who barred his way. Martin, caught in a trap of embarrassment, gulped and spoke hesitantly.

"Your name is Mr. Pointell?" he inquired.

"That is my name, sir," answered the other. "I fear you have the advantage of me."

Closer at hand that voice sounded strange. It was slow in speech, as though its owner were half asleep and conversed with difficulty. And once again that impression of familiarity assailed the reporter.

This man's face was familiar and yet it was strange. Martin experienced a queer feeling as he looked at Pointell. It was an inner revulsion against something unnatural.

"I—I guess I am mistaken, sir," he stammered. "I thought you were a Mr. Pointell from Duluth, Minnesota, when I saw you a moment ago and heard your name called."

"No," said Pointell in his slow voice, fixing Martin with his queer stare. "No, I am not from Minnesota."

"Excuse my mistake," murmured the young man, falling back out of the way to let him pass.

"Certainly," said Pointell, and he smiled.

At such a smile Martin recoiled. It was like the leering of a diabolical mask. The eyebrows arched satanically, and white teeth gleamed between the mockingly parted lips.

He passed on, seemingly unaware of the uncanny effect he had on his accoster. Martin watched him disappear up the nearest companionway, shaken and undecided.

"Where the devil did you go?" Clifton's voice sounded in his ear as the other reporter rushed up to him. "I was looking all over the saloon deck for you. We got to get off this boat right away unless you want to swim. Come on!"

But Martin held back reluctantly.

"I don't know but what that would be a good idea," he muttered to himself.

"On the first of February! Be yourself, kid. You're not a polar bear. Hurry, there goes the warning whistle!"

"Never mind the whistle. Clif. We're riding the Sustanis as far down the river as Alexandria—farther if we have to. I've got a hunch that we're going to follow up."

"That you're going to follow up, you mean," rejoined Clifton promptly. "You are the playboy on the *Times-Journal* staff. I got to report at the office this afternoon if I want to hold my job. S'long."

"Wait! It wasn't kind of you to emphasize those pronouns and give me that dirty look. Remember, I paid for your lunch to-day. Be a sport and go as far as Alexandria. We can get back to Washington in thirty minutes by taxi. I'll take the blame if you are late at the office."

"You lost the price of my lunch by matching with me," stated Clifton suspiciously. "You can't pull that reciprocity stuff on me."

"What if I did gamble with you? The fact remains that I plunked down cold hard cash to put good food in your gullet. Why can't you eat as sparingly as Tracy when you're dining at my expense? Have you no gratitude? You had no mercy."

Clifton glanced at the preparations for the Sustanis to get under way. A few people were scurrying ashore to wave to friends and acquaintances from the dock. He sighed in resignation.

"Well, what's on your infant mind?" he demanded. "It hasn't been half an hour since you were in the dumps. What has caused the marvelous transformation?"

"There is a man on this vessel by the name of Pointell," Martin explained rapidly as he drew his companion forward until they were alone against the railing near the bow of the boat. "He just left a package that looked like a portfolio in care of the purser. I want to have a look at that package."

Clifton drew away as though he had been contaminated.

"Huh uh, not me, brother," he stated firmly. "I like to do all my looking at jail from the outside. What's got into you?"

"Come along!" ordered the other perpetratorily. "I want you to see the man and find out if he impresses you like he did me."

CHAPTER XXX

AN AMAZING REAPPEARANCE



HEY ascended to the saloon deck and followed the railing aft until they were opposite the stateroom occupied by Pointell. The wide port was still open, and they peered in.

The passenger who suffered under Mar-

tin's suspicion was calmly unpacking a suit case, his back toward them.

"This the man?" asked Clifton. Then, at Martin's nod of confirmation: "Unpacking his suit case. Damned queer, isn't it? What do you suspect him of having? An extra suit of clothes?"

Martin ignored this sarcasm.

"Wait until you see his face," he said.

They waited. After a bit their patience was rewarded. Pointell straightened from beside the bed and turned around. Clifton started and clutched Martin's arm.

"I've seen that face before," he whispered. "It looks like—like— No, I guess I'm mistaken. Ugh! Uncanny looking duck, I'll admit."

"Yet, his features are regular enough," pondered Martin. "He's not deformed in any way. Who did you think he was for the moment?"

"I don't know," admitted Clifton in perplexity. "It's as hazy as a dream."

"Look!" exclaimed Martin quickly. "He's paying no attention to us. Watch him."

The man in the stateroom stood stiffly erect, his head slightly forward and a far-away look on his face, as though he were listening to something. Then he turned back toward the bed so that his eyes fell directly upon the two men at the window. But there was no recognition in them.

They stared through and past the two reporters with the disconcerting glare of a wax figure. Stiffly he sat down upon the bed and then rolled over on his back, remaining rigid in the position in which he had fallen.

"As batty as a crowded asylum," was Clifton's verdict. "That fellow is crazy. I'll bet he's a cataleptic. He's in a rigor now."

Martin looked hurriedly in both directions, and then tried the door of the stateroom. It was locked, and he turned back to the window.

"This is a priceless opportunity," he said. "Wait'll I open the door."

"Here!" gasped Clifton. "What the dickens are you doing? You'll get us in a jam."

Martin did not answer. He slipped into

the room and tiptoed softly over to the bed. The man lay with glassy eyes staring up at the ceiling. He did not move.

The reporter hurriedly admitted his reluctant confederate and then covered the two windows of the stateroom. He locked the two doors and switched on the light.

"We'll roll him for that purser's receipt right now," said Martin. "And while I stay here with him, you'll go down to the office and get that package."

"How?" gasped Clifton, stunned at the other's audacity. "We've already left the wharf. What if they catch us at it?"

"Don't be so finicky. Show your police badge if the purser or his assistant won't give you the bundle. I'll wait here with this gentleman to pacify him if he wakes while you are gone."

"Do you realize that you're facing a jail sentence if you are playing a bum hunch?" queried Clifton fiercely.

"Certainly, but we'll hope he stays in his trance. Ah! Here is the elusive receipt. Now, go get that package and bring it back here."

"What do you suspect him of being? An international jewel thief?"

"I don't know what I suspect," admitted Martin as he turned from the rifling of the rigid one's pockets.

"And you carry through a play like this on that slim sort of hunch? Well, you're crazier than he is!"

"Go get that package!" ordered Martin. "Don't waste any more time, you—! Just call for your own package and present that receipt. Tell 'em there's something else you want to put in it. Likely they won't remember who is who. If they should get wise to you flash your badge! That'll work."

"Until this bird puts up a howl," added Clifton as he unlocked the door opening on the inner gallery that ran through the vessel dividing the double row of staterooms.

"We'll worry about that later. Hurry up!"

It seemed like an hour before Clifton was back and tapping softly on the door. In reality it was possibly ten minutes.

"Clifton?" interrogated Martin before he unlocked the barrier.

"Yep. And I got the package. Open up."

Under the glow of the electric bulb in the ceiling they knelt on the floor and ripped open the package. It was sealed, but Martin ruthlessly tore through these telltale preservers.

"Just as well go the whole hog or none," he observed. "We're up to our necks already."

"You didn't mention anything about riding back from Alexandria in a patrol wagon," murmured Clifton, one eye on his companion's actions and the other on the man in the trancelike state.

As the last paper came away from the package a cordovan brief case came to view. It was a new and sturdy leather case and comfortably filled with papers of some sort. It was locked.

"There's a bunch of keys in his left-hand pants pocket," said Martin. "Get 'em."

With a delicate care that was commendable Clifton did so. One of the keys unlocked the case. Martin dragged out a handful of engraved papers, crisp and neatly folded papers snugly held together by a large rubber band.

At a glance he could see that they were municipal bonds of a Midwest city. The name of the town caught at his memory.

He delved in again and brought forth ten thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds. This time suspicion had hardened into certainty. With an exclamation the reporter dumped the contents of the brief case out on the floor.

It took him but a few moments to ascertain that here was exactly sixty-seven thousand dollars in various securities before him.

"Clif, the missing bonds of the Milner case!" he exclaimed.

"Good Lord! What a find! But are you sure of it?"

"Of course I don't remember all the numbers of the stuff, but these papers correspond to the same list of stuff that was reported missing. And the amount totals the same. What else would you believe? I guess my hunch—"

He was interrupted by a cry from his companion, and he whirled quickly about.

Mr. Pointell was sitting bolt upright in bed and glaring at him with an expression that boded him no good.

As he looked Pointell's hand shot under the pillow and came forth clutching a gun. Clifton yelped in dismay and scrambled to unlock the door opening onto the outer deck.

He managed to fling it open just as the man's revolver jerked to cover him. At that instant Martin flung the brief case at the enraged occupant of the stateroom and followed it with himself. He grappled with the man as the gun barked once.

But the shot, thanks to the leather brief case, went wild, and Clifton darted out of the door with a whole skin.

The struggle was over as soon as it began. The impetus of Martin's lunge flung Pointell backward across the bed, and his head cracked sharply against the wall. He went limp, and Martin took possession of the pistol.

Clifton turned on his heel and sprang back into the room, slamming the door to behind him, but forgetting to lock it.

"Now, we've played hell," he panted. "That shot will bring a flock of folks down on us. Did you kill him?"

Martin shook his head.

"Just stunned him a trifle. Here, stuff those bonds back into this brief case."

He tossed the case to his assistant and stood guard over the man on the bed. Before Clifton had finished gathering up the securities Pointell groaned and stirred. Martin backed away as he struggled to a sitting position.

He paid no attention now to the two men in his stateroom as he staggered to his feet and stood swaying there as though the Sustainis were being tossed by a storm in mid-ocean instead of steaming calmly down the Potomac River with no intention of getting out of sight of land.

"Sit down and keep quiet!" snapped Martin. "One queer move on your part and you'll—you'll— My God! Clifton, look at him! Quick! Am I crazy?"

The man called Pointell was staring straight ahead of him. It was obvious that he neither saw nor heard either of the two men before him.

His sardonically lined face, with its foreign and faintly diabolical expression, was changing before their very eyes. Like soft wax in the sun melts and changes its shape, so were Pointell's features changing.

No, they were not changing in shape or texture, but it was in expression that they changed. And in changing they altered the whole appearance of the man. It was like gazing on a plainly seen face on the silver screen and having that face blur because it was out of focus. And as the operator adjusted his lens, to have the face slowly come back into focus and again be plainly seen—*only as a different face.*

The unknown quantity, the queerness, the strangeness of this man's appearance had gradually melted away, had been sloughed off as an actor might emerge from a created character of grease paint into his natural self in his dressing room at the end of the play.

And, with the superimposed characteristics missing, the faintly familiar ensemble of face, expression, and individual mannerisms crystallized into a man well known to both Martin and Clifton.

"Palmer Hollisworth!" ejaculated the frightened Clifton in awe. "Heavens! What a transformation!"

TO BE CONTINUED



DEADLY DIAMOND DUST



L. ADAM, author of "The Indian Criminal," summarized the celebrated case of Colonel Phayre. The following account is abridged:

It was the custom of Colonel Phayre, resident of Baroda, to drink a glass of sugared water and fresh pummelo—grapefruit—juice every morning upon returning from his early walk. One day he was handed such a drink by one of his servants, and, having swallowed a mouthful, he noticed that it had a peculiar taste. He thought there was something wrong with it, although at the time he did not suspect foul play. He was about to throw the remainder away when he noticed a sediment in the glass. Subjected to analysis, the sediment was found to contain a mixture of arsenic and diamond dust.

Poor servants could not have afforded such a costly agent. One of Colonel Phayre's servants must have been suborned to carry out the murderous deed. Ravji confessed. His belt was fitted with a slide through which a sword or truncheon could be passed. The police officer was about to return the belt when his eye fell upon a secret pocket. Into this he thrust his fin-

gers, which came in contact with paper containing a powder identical with the sediment in the glass. Ravji had been hired by the Maharajah—the Gaekwar of Baroda.

In ostentation and international importance the great trial—1875—has never been equaled in the annals of criminal law. It was the first time a native prince had been publicly tried on grave charges. The local excitement was tremendous.

His Highness the Maharajah Scindhi Scindhia wore white muslin embroidered in gold, and two necklaces, one of large emeralds, the other of superb pearls. Beneath the necklaces was a plastron of diamonds, immensely valuable, that glistened in the bright light. Over this plastron hung a large emerald. From his left ear was suspended a cluster of pearls, and two clusters were suspended from his right ear. His wrists were adorned with diamond bracelets. On a finger of his right hand was a diamond star about as large as a hazel nut. On his left hand was a blazing emerald.

The prisoner was found guilty by the Europeans and not guilty by his peers. Deposed and deported, his issue was debarred from all rights, privileges and honors.



A few minutes later he saw a man pass through the cleared space

THE LUCK OF THINGS

By M. J. Brown

McVICAR SAT DOWN AND THOUGHT IT OUT. "MIGHT AS WELL SEE IT THROUGH," HE CONCLUDED. AND BEFORE DAYLIGHT HE WAS ABOARD THE STAGE



HE supply truck had come in and there was a grand rush for the bundles of old magazines. McVicar, a student engineer, got away with three. He hid two in the bottom of his grip and the other under his bunk bedding, for present consumption. To-morrow would be Sunday and he would read every word in all of them, after which he would swap.

But he swapped the first one as soon as he had read it, and he continued to swap, and it was two weeks before he had to draw on his storage: then on Sunday morning he took the two periodicals and climbed into the hills. He wanted to get away from the card games, the horseshoe pitching and the usual Sunday tumult of a construction camp.

He found a shady spot by a little spring

and lighting his pipe he opened one of the magazines. As he turned the pages he came onto a sealed, stamped and addressed envelope. It was addressed to Peter Ragan, Sonora, Texas.

"Some guy used this for a book mark and then forgot it," mused McVicar. "I wonder how long it's been in storage? If it was only in a girl's hand, or if it was addressed to a girl, I might imagine a little desert romance.

"But it's a man's scrawl. It is to Peter Ragan and it likely tells him the range is 'done dried up' and he's got to drift his sheep."

He looked at the date of the magazine, a year and a half back, but reasoned that that had little to do with fixing the date of the letter, for magazines do not die in New Mexico until half of the first story has been read off.

Anyhow he would shoot the letter along, as its passage was prepaid. Then a thought came to him and he wrote his name and address on the corner. He would know whether or not the letter reached Peter Ragan.

About a week later, when McVicar had forgotten about the letter, it was brought to his mind again. Jacobson, a foreman, came into the big mess house one night and asked if any of the men had found a letter in the magazines brought in. No one admitted the find.

McVicar saw a well dressed stranger with the foreman and he concluded he would tell him about the letter privately. After the meal he located him.

"Don't need to worry about that letter, brother," he said. "I found it in a magazine, and as it was addressed and stamped, I sent it on."

"The devil you did! Did you read it? Who was it addressed to and what post office?" The stranger came close to McVicar and he was clearly excited.

"Slow, brother. The letter was sealed and I did not read it. I don't recall the name or address. I simply dropped it into the P. O."

"But, man, can't you remember something about where it was going, or the name? Did it have a return address? Seems funny you can't remember."

"Seems mighty funny also that you should give me the third degree without any explanations. I did just what most any white man would have done with the letter and that's all there is of it."

The stranger looked McVicar over for a moment, then a smile spread over his face. "Pardon me, brother, I'm not mistaking you for a wop, but that letter is mighty important and what you said took me off my feet for a minute.

"You see, it was written by a man who died soon after he wrote it and it could not be found afterward. The conclusion was that he left it in the magazine he was using to write it on and he died before he remembered to have it mailed. So we have been tracing the magazines the janitors sold to the junk shops. My name is Sievers and I am an attorney."

"Well, it's all right now," McVicar replied. "I found it last Sunday and mailed it the same night."

"But it isn't all right," the lawyer opposed. "The writer died some time ago and it is an even break that the man the letter was addressed to isn't there now.

"Are you dead certain there was no return address on the envelope? And can't you recall any place that sounds like the name of the post office?"

"I'm dead certain there was no return address: the letter went to some place in Texas, for I remember the State was spelled out in full, but the name I don't recall—seems like it was Peters or Peterson. That's all I know about the matter," and McVicar walked away.

"A hunch told me not to spill everything about that letter," McVicar mused as he went to the bunk house. "If the man it was addressed to gets it, then it's Jake for the dead man; if he doesn't, then it will come back to me. I'll sit tight and mull it over."

Sievers remained in the camp for three days. One night when McVicar went to his suit case for a writing tablet he found that it had been rifled, evidently hurriedly. A packet of letters and receipts was loose and scattered and other articles disarranged.

Some one had been hunting for that letter, McVicar concluded: his story to the lawyer was doubted. And thereafter he went to the temporary post office each night and asked for mail.

One night mail came—that letter returned to the sender. McVicar glanced at it hastily and noted the word "dead" scrawled under the return address.

He put the letter in his pocket and as he looked up he saw Jacobson, the foreman, standing in the doorway, looking at him. As he walked away he wondered if the foreman had been watching him nightly when he called for mail, or whether his standing by the door that night was simply a circumstance.

An idea came to him to find out and instead of going to the bunk house he struck out for the hill above the camp. For about a half mile he walked up the bald side to

the scrubby timber, then entering the brush he doubled back, hid along the edge and watched.

A few minutes later he saw a man pass through a little cleared space near the top of the mountain into the timber. That night McVicar slept with his socks on, in one of which was the unopened letter.

In the morning he made a close roll of the letter and slipped it into the narrow, deep pocket of his overalls, used to hold a carpenter's rule or pencil. During the day's work he decided he would read the letter that night.

The man it was sent to was dead: the lawyer had said it was an important letter and he had as much or more right to read it as the lawyer, who had offered very flimsy claims to ownership.

After he had read it he would know what kind of a poker game he was sitting in on.

After supper he started out for the sand wastes below the dam, where if any one followed he would have to come out in the open. He opened the letter as he walked.

It was written in pencil on each side of a tablet sheet, and was without date, address or signature. McVicar walked slowly and read:

If you get this letter I'm done for, have made a die of it. Pill pusher tells me I've got Bright's. I don't believe him, but he might be the best guesser. It sure would be hell to croak now, just after serving three years in Huntsville. If I feel myself slipping I will have the nurse mail this. If I get better I will take care of the matter myself.

'Bout three and half years ago I came to your camp with my arm busted up with a bullet and near blood poisoning. Your girl doctored that sore for more than a week, and this letter is to her instead of you, but I don't know her name. She will remember losing a ring one day and cried about it, and I found it for her. Now have her dig in the same place I dug to find her ring, about a foot down, and she'll find a bottle. What's in it is hers, and it's enough to buy the best ranch in Texas. It came from another country and no one here has any claim to it, or this part of it, anyhow. Be durned careful in getting it and getting rid of it.

McVicar read the letter twice, then fastening the name and address on the envelope in his memory, he lit a match to the envelope and watched it burn to ashes.

"Reckon that makes the play safe," he said. "I could hang this letter on the camp bulletin board now and it wouldn't do Sievers or any one else any good. The name and address are the keys and they ain't worth a fag to me until I hunt up that girl, and she's got to come through with a split before she gets this letter.

"Wonder what's in the bottle? It's a funny one all around and if that Sievers hadn't showed up I'd figured it a big hoax. Anyhow I'll look up that Sonora town later on and see if I can get a line on what may be left of the family."

II



HE "later on" came soon. A notice was posted on the bulletin board stating that all work on the dam would be suspended for two months.

A hitch in financing was the rumor that circulated around the works. Saturday the men were paid off and notice was given that auto trucks would take them to the railroad the next day. McVicar was packing his grip when Jacobson came in, sat down on the bunk and said:

"Mac, let's you and I cross out that lawyer and go it alone on the deal—he's a crook and snide. I'll give him a bum steer and get shut of him. I know you got that letter back and Sievers says it tells where the dough is cached. What do you say?"

"That letter doesn't tell anything to any one but the man it was written to, and he's dead. There's no map or anything like it. It simply locates a place where something happened to them, but both men are dead and that ends it."

"But how about the wife or kids? Won't they know where the something happened?" Jacobson asked.

"Where are they? If they were anywhere around, the postmaster would have sent the letter on to them. It's all off, Jake, and we might as well forget it."

But McVicar had no thought of forgetting it and three days later he got off a train at San Angelo, in western Texas, and an hour later he was on the auto bus to Sonora, a county seat cow town, sixty-

five miles south. He carefully looked over the eight passengers; they were all strangers.

"Pete Ragan died three or four years back, in Humble," the postmaster told him. He and his girl camped out in Samuel's pasture for a spell, waiting for some sheep he'd made a deal for, but something turned up and they wan't delivered.

"Then he left the girl here and went away; got a job rig building in the oil field and was killed in less than a week. Girl tried to find out about the sheep deal, but couldn't and then she left.

"Never heard a word about her till last week, when Bob Stemmons said he saw her in Austin, running the cash register in an eating house."

McVicar sat down and thought it out. Might as well go on through with it, he concluded. The girl was in Austin and she was the key to the cache: it was her ring that was lost and no doubt she could remember where. Before daylight the next morning he was on the return stage to San Angelo.

A half day's search of the restaurants in Austin and he found where Edna Ragan had been employed, but he was informed that she had been in a hospital for some weeks with a slow fever and was then at her rooms in an apartment house.

McVicar had thought out a dramatic little play for the meeting with Miss Ragan if she was as fair and engaging as the head waitress had declared she was.

He would tell her how fate had directed the letter into his hands; of the efforts made to rob him of it, and how he had searched the country over for her.

Then if she came forward with outstretched hands, perhaps he wouldn't propose a fifty split, but rather would suggest that together they would hunt the treasure and then—well, he'd let things shape up the finish.

When Edna Ragan came into the darkened room Neil McVicar's dream faded with the first glance at her. Instead of a handsome girl of twenty he saw a wan, frail woman with pinched features and great, black eyes, which gave an almost spectral look to her pallid face. Wearily

she sat down and waited for McVicar to speak.

Sentiment and romance faded in a moment and in its place came pity. McVicar forgot his well-rehearsed part and in a few words he told his story and read the letter. Then in conclusion he said:

"When you get well and strong enough, Miss Ragan, we will go back to the place where you camped and if there is any money we will get it. I have employment on a concrete bridge south of the city and you may write me when you are ready."

"And what assurance have I that you are not one of the conspirators who you say are trying to locate the place?" she asked. "What reason have I to believe you are trustworthy? When I am able I will make the investigation and if there is anything of value there you will be rewarded."

"I am amply rewarded already, Miss Ragan, by your full appreciation of my efforts to find you and deliver the letter. Perhaps you may find men who can prove their honesty. I can't prove mine. Good night."

She called to him as he passed out, but he did not heed. He was angered by her distrust and suspicions. He would drop the whole matter. If there was anything of value in the cache he hoped she would get at least a part of it, but he would not offer any further help.

"It's all in the deal of the cards," he said as he sat in his room that night. "I thought I was doing a whale of a generous thing when I faced my cards and gave her the whole pot.

"Jacobson or Sievers will now get in their work and get the find. Well, I've had a kick out of it; now I'll forget."

But he wasn't permitted to forget. A letter came from Edna, a worried, pitiful appeal for advice, and an apology for her hasty words that night. The letter had been stolen from under a dresser drape where she had concealed it and she did not know what to do.

"I am not yet strong and I am so worried," the letter concluded. "I fear to go to friends or officials, for the story would then get out, and it may be but a hoax."

By return mail McVicar wrote her not to do or say anything. "Just let the matter rest and tire them out. Six months from now is just as good as now—and better. Sit tight, Miss Ragan. That letter is no more than a blank sheet of paper to anyone but you, but the one that stole it did not know this."

A few days later McVicar was surprised to see Jacobson added to the bridge gang. He had come down to see what the State Capitol looked like, he said, and had landed a job until work on the irrigation project in New Mexico was resumed.

His presence explained to McVicar the disappearance of the letter—he had paid some employee of the house to steal it.

Some three weeks later McVicar went into the city for the week end, and he went to the restaurant where Edna had worked to ask about her. The waiter pointed to the cashier's cage. McVicar stared at the girl sitting there, and she smiled and nodded.

What a transformation from the thin, haggard woman he had left in the gloomy sitting room a month before. "That girl will be some looker when her hair grows and her face rounds out," he whispered.

In the park that night he told her that he would soon return to the work in New Mexico and he asked her if she would let him know when she made the search for the treasure.

She said she would write him, but that she would wait until spring, as she had hospital and doctor bills to pay before she could leave.

Three months later McVicar received a letter from her, asking if he would join her at Sonora a month hence and help her search for the treasure. He was at the little desert town a week ahead of time and he passed the days tramping over the Samuels pasture, becoming familiar with the locality and the roads.

"Never mind telling me how handsome I have grown, Mr. McVicar," she said, when they were seated on the gallery of the hotel after her arrival. "In four days I must be back. Let's go right out and see if there is anything there.

"If there should be, then I will not be

in such a hurry to return, but somehow I have lost my enthusiasm. I can't help but feel that it is all a joke or a mistake."

At noon the following day they took a car and drove out, taking no pains to conceal their going, and the girl wondered. As they passed through a cut a few miles out she told him it was the place where a wagon wheel had broken when she and her father drove through.

As the car went on the girl called attention to many familiar places, and she asked McVicar to drive slowly as they neared the camping place. A few minutes of silence and she called out:

"Oh there's the spot, at the right—see that V-shaped rock? That's where we had our fire—it was an old fireplace—and our tent opened to it. It was there that I lost my ring—it slipped from my finger into the fire.

"I screamed, and the man who had been staying with us kicked the wood off, poured water on the ashes and then recovered the ring. If there is anything buried in a bottle, it is under the ashes of that old fireplace. Stop, Mr. McVicar, and let's dig."

III



BUT McVicar did not stop: he increased the speed and went on. The girl looked at him in suspicion. For a half mile they continued, then McVicar turned the car from the road and stopped it near a small spire-shaped rock. He got out and walked to the stone, while the girl slowly followed, distrust flashing through her mind.

Near the base of the rock McVicar commenced digging with a trowel. "Fine!" he exclaimed after a moment's work. "I was afraid there might be a layer of rock." He loosened the sand with the trowel and scooped it out with his hands. After some time he stopped and turning to the wondering girl said:

"Some times I play hunches and this is 'some time.' I have a feeling that something will happen and I am not taking any chances. If I am wrong I will tell

you what I feared; if I am right, you will know. Let's return."

For some time nothing was said. McVicar drove slowly and the girl noted that he seemed apprehensive and closely watched each side of the road ahead.

Was it all a part that he was playing?—she questioned. Had he planned this trip to find the location of the cache so he could return to it? Had he—

A man stepped out of a cluster of mesquite, his face covered with a red handkerchief and signaled them to stop. McVicar applied the brakes.

Then the barrel of a rifle was pushed out of the same bushes and an unseen man ordered them to get out of the car, hold their hands high, face about and stand still. The masked man began to search McVicar.

"You'll find it in my hip pocket, stranger," McVicar said, "and you are dead welcome to it. It's an April joke all right and I'm glad to share it—take it away."

The man raised McVicar's coat, and from his hip pocket took out a small bottle, held it up, then poured out a few lead shots into his palm. McVicar laughed mirthlessly.

"I've hunted for that phial for six months," he said, "and now that I have found it I pass it on to you with my compliments. There's sure a bunch of easy marks left in Texas."

The masked man laid the bottle on a rock and continued his search; then passed on to the girl. She removed her coat and and he carefully searched her clothing, then he ransacked the car of everything in it.

The man in the brush called to him and after a few minutes' talk he ordered McVicar and the girl to get into the car; the masked man took the rear seat and McVicar was ordered to drive back to where he found the bottle and to "step on 'er."

When they came to the place where McVicar had dug the man got out and examined the hole. Then he motioned for the car to turn back and he got in. When they arrived at the place of the holdup the two men talked together in the bushes. Then came the order, "beat it."

"My hunch was good," McVicar said after they had driven some distance. "I felt it would work and I baited them. Now, Miss Ragan, it's time to act."

"At midnight I will return on foot and if there is anything under the ashes I will get it. If we take the sheriff and a guard, these men will claim the treasure is theirs and as the letter to you has been stolen, they may make it stick. No, not a word—" as the girl interrupted with a "But—"

"Wait up for me—I will return before daylight."

In the early morning Edna yet waited, but she felt it was a useless vigil. Again and again the suspicion forced itself on her that it was all an arranged plot, and that having found where the treasure was buried McVicar had secured it and was even then hurrying away while she sat there inactive.

Then she sprang up. She would awaken the sheriff and give chase.

As she stepped out onto the gallery she heard a low "Hist" followed with "It's me—Mac" and a man came from the darkness to the gallery railing.

"Listen closely, Miss Edna," the words were tense with excitement. "I've got the stuff here—diamonds, lots of them—in this box, in a bottle. I've sealed the slide so the bank can't open it. Take it and my revolver and sit up until morning. Shoot to kill if any one attempts to enter your room."

"Take it to the bank in the morning and get a receipt for it. Those two men are after me, but I doubled back and fooled them. I will skip and draw them away—they'll think I have the treasure. Stay here until you hear from me." He reached out a hand in the darkness and grasped hers warmly. "Good-by," and he was gone.

With the box hidden in her waist and revolver in hand the girl waited for the morning. When the bank finally opened and the box was at last safe in its vault, the nerved-racked girl returned to her room and went to bed.

At last the anxiety and uncertainty were over and dreamed-of wealth was really

hers. And Mac, he was honest, and he had taken all the risks for her alone.

IV



THREE days later when Edna had returned from a visit to a cave, she found a stranger waiting for her. He was clearly a city man, well dressed and a large diamond glistened from a ring on his finger.

"I am Grant Dillon, Miss Ragan," he said, "nephew of Warren Grant, who died in a hospital in Santa Fe, and who buried a bottle of valuable stones on a ranch near here about four years ago.

"He told me that as soon as he was able he would come here with me and we would recover the stones. I was away when he was taken much worse and fearing that he would die before I returned he wrote a letter to your father telling where the treasure was buried, and asking that a part of it be given to you for your kindness to him when he was hurt.

"The letter was left in a magazine when he died; it came into the hands of a rascal who goes by the name of McVicar. He rewrote it and brought it to you knowing he could steal it from you when you had shown him where it was buried.

"You know the rest, Miss Ragan. An officer and myself were so close behind him that he dared not take the stones with him.

"He gave them to you rather than have us recover them. We caught him in Brownwood and when he told the whole story and signed this paper we let him go. Here is an order from him to deliver the box in the bank to us."

Stunned, the girl mechanically took the paper. It was typewritten on the sheriff's stationery, and it ordered Edna Ragan to deliver a wooden box and contents to Grant Dillon, as the property was his by inheritance and could be recovered by law.

It was signed George Meredith, alias Neil McVicar, and was witnessed by a deputy sheriff. In the corner, written in pencil, were the words: "Sorry, girl, but they beat us to it."

"You will see, Miss Ragan, that you

have no legal claim to the bottle; you did not find it and you are no kin to the man who buried it.

"Now if you will not put us to any legal expense to get it you will be recompensed for all your time and trouble, depending on the value of the find. Mac himself did not know the value; he said he just had one glimpse of the sparklers from a match light—and it was that flash that betrayed him to us."

The girl sat in thought for some time. "Very well," she replied wearily, "you may have it. If you care to pay the expenses I have incurred, you may, but nothing more. Poor Mac—it has all been like a terrible dream."

As they started for the bank Dillon called to a man sitting in front of the hotel and when he joined them he was introduced as Dillon's lawyer.

The three went to the bank, the men waiting outside while she went after the box. When they returned to the sitting room she handed it to Dillon.

The man's hands shook as he cut away the wax from the box and when the cover would not slide he forced his knife blade through it and split it apart.

Then frantically he clutched the bottle and held it up—a bottle of lead shot—and Edna knew by the rubber stopper it was the same bottle McVicar had given to the masked man the day they were held up.

Slowly the men raised their heads and looked into each other's eyes, then both looked at the girl. There was a minute of dead silence while comprehension came. Then Dillon broke out:

"Gyped, buncoed by that rat, like farmers at a three shell game. Here we sit like lambs while McVicar is making a clean get-away with plenty of time to 'fence' the stones. Oh, what fools!"

V



THE dinner rush was over and the cashier was balancing the day's receipts when a messenger boy handed her a blank envelope. She opened it and took out a deposit slip on a St. Louis bank.

It was credited in her name and the

amount was four thousand—she looked again and again—the amount was forty thousand dollars, and above the cashier's signature was a request that she arrange for identification.

Attached to the bottom by a clip was a slip of paper which read:

Part of the shot bottle.—MAC.

A waiter came to a table in the rear of the dining room where a well-dressed man sat reading, holding the paper well before his face.

"Mister, the cashier lady says for you to go across to the park and she will join you as soon as she recovers."

"It was tough, Edna, but I thought it was the way to play it safe," McVicar was explaining when they had somewhat calmed.

"Sievers was laying for me at Brownwood and I jeered and taunted him; told him that you had the stones safe in the bank at Sonora while he was chasing me around the State.

"I laughed at him for a rube and told him to get a job on a dairy farm. I hoped it would work, and it did. He sent a telegram to Jacobson in Sonora—the man I had spotting him said he heard him order it telephoned on from San Angelo—and no doubt Jacobson's reply was that you were living quietly at the hotel there.

"I had the diamonds loose in my pocket and was wild to get Sievers off my trail so I could sell them. The next night Sievers took a train west when I took one north.

"It took me a long time to sell part of the diamonds without exciting suspicion. The remainder are in a bank in your name. When I returned to Sonora you had left, gone back to Austin they told me.

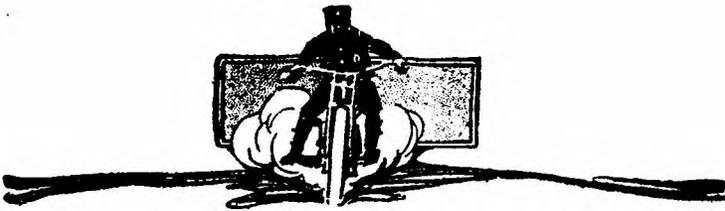
"I suppose you split the shot in the bottle with Sievers and Jacobson after they had threatened to bring suit for all of it, and had framed up a story that I was an escaped murderer, or something worse. How did they like the stones?"

"Here's a sample stone I held out on you, girl," and McVicar placed a diamond in her hand. "They are Brazilian red diamonds, some of them highly valuable. I am going to have this one—ah—I was thinking of—by the way, what became of that bottle of shot?"

"I have it in my cage for a paper weight. What did you say you were going to do with this stone?" as she handed it back to him.

"What? Oh, yes, I forgot, but I'll finish on our way to Kansas City." He reached over and touched a ring on her finger. "Isn't that the one you lost in the ashes?" She nodded.

"Let me have it for a few days, please. I want to get the size."





He easily secured a key to fit the lock

IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

By Colonel H. C. Whitley

Former Chief United States Secret Service

THIS REPORT OF THE DETECTIVES SENT TO CAPTURE
THE SCHEMER FURNISHES A CHAPTER OF RACY READING

A Story of Fact



TIMES were pretty lively about Washington during President Grant's administration. The great, the near great and the shabby genteel politicians were to be daily met with. Each had an ax to grind. It was a busy day for adventurers and sharpers.

Every device that human ingenuity could invent was in vogue for money making purposes. Men of respectability when at home often turned crooks after sojourning at the nation's Capital for a time. The war had left its demoralizing influence upon many and the opportunities for acquiring wealth were numerous and varied.

For a long time before General Grant took his seat in the President's chair, there had been a looseness in the administration of government affairs resulting in frauds that would not be tolerated in this day.

The Credit Mobiler conspiracy, the whisky ring and many other monumental steals were being carried on in high-up official and private circles. The big fellows set the pace and the smaller crooks loitering about the city felt quite safe in taking a hand in what was going on.

Some of the devices resorted to by the lesser fellows were quite ridiculous. I will disinter one of these schemes for the purpose of exhibiting the folly of some of the plotters of that day.

Shortly after President Grant's inauguration in the spring of 1873 he sent a messenger with a note requesting me to call at once at the White House. On entering his office I found him at his desk. He pointed to a near-by chair and bade me be seated.

Reaching into a drawer of his desk he took out two long black cigars, and handing me one of them he bit off the end of the other and put it between his teeth. Straightening back in his chair, the big black cigar was pointed upward at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

As the smoke curled lazily above his head I saw that there was something in his manner indicating that his usually placid temper was riled. Picking up a package of letters from his desk he said:

"Here, colonel, is a matter that needs your careful attention. During the last few days I have been receiving these letters. I want you to make an investigation at once. The persons engaged in this work must be punished. It is an outrage. It is probable that there is more than one person in the scheme."

President Grant spoke with great earnestness and I saw that he was not a little disturbed and that his idea was to let no guilty man escape. The circulars he handed me were printed in letter form and had been sent through the mails to many postmasters through the South and West.

The circulars read as follows. I give them verbatim.

Executive Mansion, Washington,
Oct. 12, 1872.

Memorandum of conversation between the President and his secretary:

Secretary: I wish to refer this telegram of Senator Morton's to the President—

"To the President:

"A conspiracy has been formed to overrun southern Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, and to keep the colored vote from the polls in the Southern States. Several thousand nonresidents will vote in Indiana. Men and money are needed. I send a man to you who has been in their council. "O. P. MORTON."

President: Yes, I have thought that matter all over, and had a long talk with the man the Senator sent. What does Mr. Cook say about money? You know that we have none, and that the committee's means are all necessary for the regular business.

Secretary: Mr. Cook will furnish you any amount you require.

President: Very well, I will take the responsibility. Have Captain C— select a dozen men to go West and South with funds and organize. The mere fact of a good organization will deter lawless bodies from attempting to defraud the people at the polls.

Additional conversation, March 24, 1873.

Secretary: Mr. President, have you determined how you will reimburse Mr. Cook for the money furnished last October?

President: Yes, I have. The bishop has suggested the Rev. J. Hale Barney to act as secretary in the matter. Appoint him immediately, and as our mails are so large and go to clerks to be arranged and briefed before we see them, you will have all letters on the subject addressed to him. Call upon our friends, and allow no one to contribute over ten dollars, and, to prevent publicity and trouble, direct the remittance to be made by a single ten dollar note. Registered letters, drafts, or express would necessarily tend to publicity. Mr. Secretary, you will make an alphabetical list of every contributor, to which we can hereafter refer.

CONFIDENTIAL CIRCULAR NO. 10

Executive Mansion, Washington,

April 5, 1873.

The annexed conversations are submitted to the friends of the President in confidence. Our friends can address the Rev. J. Hale Barney, who is temporarily secretary in that behalf. Any one having conscientious convictions against contributing need only silently decline. The President has acted in good faith and confidently relies upon an active and cheerful assistance. Suppose nothing had been done and the state of affairs existing in Louisiana had more extensively prevailed, what would have been the result? Read carefully the President's views and act as your judgment dictates; remember this subject is confidential and known only to three persons besides the President and that whatever is sent should be in currency in the inclosed envelope.

Very respectfully,

O. E. BABCOCK,
Secretary.

With the above circular was also inclosed the following letter for return after being filled out:

REV. J. HALE BARNEY,

Ex-Secretary, Etc.,

Washington, D. C.:

Sir—Please find inclosed ten dollars in currency which you can apply in any way you think necessary for the good of the cause.

Yours truly,

With this letter was an envelope addressed as follows:

REV. J. HALE BARNEY,
Executive Secretary, Etc.,
426 Sixth Street, N. W.,
Washington, D. C.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the foregoing circulars had been concocted for the purpose of obtaining contributions from the appointees of the President. The Rev. J. Hale Barney was discovered in the person of one Colonel Pardel, who had recklessly assumed the rôle of a clerical gentleman for the purpose of making money.

Racy Reading

The circulars turned over to me were a source of great annoyance to the President, General Babcock and Senator Morton. Although the scheme was a foolish one, it was one of the boldest swindles of a pecuniary and political character that ever came up in Washington.

It involved no less than three kinds of crime—using the mails for fraudulent purposes, forgery and obtaining money under false pretenses. The President was quite indignant. It was not alone a reflection upon him personally, but upon his administration.

Many of the postmasters of the South and West receiving these circulars remitted the amount called for at once. Others were surprised and doubtful as to their genuineness and forwarded them to the President with a letter of inquiry.

Taken altogether it was a most remarkable affair, planned and carried out in a reckless manner. The report of the detectives sent to capture the schemer furnishes a chapter of racy reading.

It was discovered that a lady who rented furnished rooms at No. 426 Sixth Street had some time prior to the discovery of the forgeries received a letter from a man signing himself Rev. J. Hale Barney.

He said he was a Methodist minister and that he would be absent from the city much of the time attending to the duties of his circuit, but he wanted to hire a good lower front room in her house for office

purposes, for a place to receive his mail and to sleep.

He explained further that he had been appointed executive secretary of the Christian Brotherhood.

The lady thought it was a rare opportunity to secure an occupant of distinction. She had great confidence in Methodist ministers as she leaned that way herself, and she answered favorably. In a few days a large trunk was forwarded by express.

It had an aperture in its top through which letters could be dropped. There were also forwarded two large cards upon which was printed "Rev. J. Hale Barney, Executive Secretary of the Christian Brotherhood," one to be hung upon the door, the other in the window of the room. Money was sent to pay a month's rent in advance.

The madam was delighted to rent to such a nice man. She had always maintained a highly respectable place and intended to keep it so.

The trunk was put into one corner of the room hired, and all mail addressed to the reverend myth was dropped through the hole in the top of the trunk pending the arrival of his reverence.

Laid by the Heels

The old lady was wholly unsuspecting. A Methodist minister was above reproach with her.

The back room adjoining the one engaged by the reverend was already occupied by a quiet and unobtrusive gentleman who paid his rent regularly and went and came at his pleasure. He, too, was above suspicion.

There was also a very nice young man occupying a room upstairs. He was always busy writing and attending to his own business. Many letters postmarked at different towns of the West and South addressed to Rev. J. Hale Barney were being delivered daily. These were put in the trunk.

The detective detailed to unearth the fraud rigged himself out in a suit of genteel black clothes and presented himself at No. 426 Sixth Street. Here he was kindly received by the nice old lady.

It did not, however, take the smooth-tongued detective long to calm her fears and secure a room. He was not particular about the price. He had heard that her house was a quiet place. He was a law student and did not like to be disturbed while engaged in his studies.

At the first opportunity the detective slipped into the front room and examined the lock on the trunk with the aperture in its top. It was an ordinary affair and the officer easily secured a key to fit it. He had several circulars printed in facsimile of the original to be used as decoys.

These were postmarked and given the appearance of having been sent by postmasters in the South. Some of them contained marked money. Excuses were made in others: money would be sent in course of time. Some of these letters were signed, "A friend of the Cause," "A Sympathizer," "Depend on me," etc. A letter carrier was made use of and the detective was kept posted in regard to delivery of the letters.

When the "nice man" occupying the room back of the parlor was absent the letters contained in the trunk were examined by the detective. A short time after the return of the "nice man" he was seen to slip into the parlor through the rear door.

The detective again examined the trunk. The letters were gone. Shortly afterward the "nice man" occupying the room back of the parlor was arrested while in the act of dropping letters into the post office.

These letters were discovered to be circulars addressed to postmasters and others. The "nice man" arrested was searched and the marked money placed in the letters by the detective was found where he had put it in his pocket.

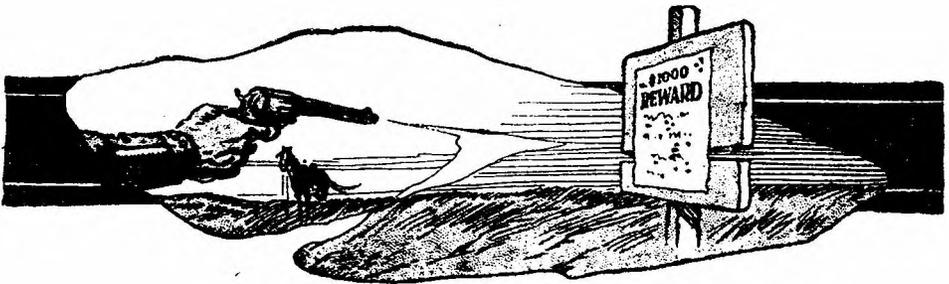
It was now certain that Rev. J. Hale Barney and the individual arrested were one and the same. The silent young man upstairs was suspected and arrested. His room was searched and a large number of printed circulars and envelopes addressed to postmasters were found.

The plot, although silly in its conception, was catchy because of its boldness. The "nice man" caught was a person of considerable prominence. He had served as a colonel of a regiment during the Civil War and was a gallant fighter.

The young fellow upstairs was a printer and had done the work on the circulars. Both of the schemers were convicted and sentenced to do time in the penitentiary.

This was only one of the many bold schemes practiced in our Capital City by persons maintaining the outward appearance of eminent respectability.

There will be another Whitley article soon in
FLYNN'S WEEKLY





"Yes, miss," responded Mr. Simpson. "and I can count to fifty and name the capitals of ten States"

DECOYS

By Joseph Fulling Fishman

DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DECOY AND A STOOL PIGEON? IF YOU DO, OR IF YOU DON'T, TRY THIS ONE



R. QUINCY ADAMS SIMPSON eased himself apologetically into the office of E. L. Monahan, "Post Office Inspector in Charge." He fixed his rather pleasant eyes on a peppy little stenographer who was engaged at the moment in telling a complaining Government customer that the matter had been referred to the proper department and would receive immediate attention.

Miss Applegarth, the stenographer in question, glanced up impatiently at a slight clearing of Mr. Simpson's throat, obviously made for the purpose of inviting the attention of all interested parties to the fact that Mr. Simpson was there. Probably another one of those fatheads who expected the whole post office to turn out to find a lost love letter.

"Write out your complaint," she directed, jerking her finger toward a pile of blank forms which, together with a liquid which once was ink and three or four typical post office pens which couldn't be made to write, were spread in some confusion over the top of the table.

Mr. Simpson gazed at the young lady with a mixture of sadness and admiration. We should say, admiration and sadness, to give them their proper order.

To think that a nice looking young girl like that—why, she was even more than nice looking, she was actually pretty—a beautifully arched neck, too, and ripe red lips that were—let's see, where was he?

Oh, yes; to think that a beautiful girl like that should be so indifferent to him. All girls weren't like that, though. Some of them did notice him. Of course, one couldn't help seeing—

He walked slowly to the table and glanced down at the appalling list of questions: Name, address, business address, kind of letter lost, where mailed, time mailed, how mailed, was it really mailed, are you married or single, are you sure you mailed the letter, why are you sure, and so on, and so on, until the post office knew every single one of those little crimes and indiscretions in one's past life which one is so anxious to keep hidden.

Mr. Simpson's gaze again wandered to Miss Applegarth. Certainly was small; couldn't be much over five feet, and such black hair, such—

Miss Applegarth whirled around at his second apologetic throat clearing. "Can't you read and write?" she inquired, a trifle more kindly. She always felt sorry for the bewildered foreigners who didn't know the difference between their post office address and the size of their hat, even though this disability made it necessary for her to answer the entire fifty-nine questions for them.

"Why, yes miss," responded Mr. Simpson, and then added, with just a trace of justifiable pride, "and I can count up to fifty and know the capitals of ten States and can bound Colorado and can name three principal rivers in North America."

"Fresh smart-Aleck," said Miss Applegarth to herself, for the first time taking a good look at this latest office annoyance, and following with another mental "Not bad looking: guess he's just dumb." For Mr. Simpson was tall and straight, with the same pleasing, boyish look as is possessed by Red Grange and Hughey Jennings, both Miss Applegarth's heroes.

Looked like the kind of a man who would stick to you, once he was your friend. But it didn't do to let them get fresh; they always tried to take advantage of it.

"Well, if you can write, why don't you fill out the blank?" she inquired.

"But I didn't lose any letter," explained Mr. Simpson, with a slight tinge of regret that the post office had been so efficient "You see, I have some information which I kinda thought Mr. Monahan might want—about a man who's getting a lot of money in the mail."

"Well, what of it?" Miss Applegarth inquired. "Lots of people get money in the mail."

"Yes; yes indeed," responded Mr. Simpson, after giving this startling bit of information a little thought. "Yes'm that's true. Only this man ain't giving anything for it."

For the first time she showed a little interest. "You mean you have a case?"

Mr. Simpson was startled by the suggestion that he, of all people, might be connected with anything of such importance. "Why, I don't know," he replied, "that is, not exactly—you see—"

"Of course it's a case," Miss Applegarth insisted. "Sit down and wait a minute. Mr. Monahan's busy."

She suddenly evaporated into the inner office, only to reappear with the same Houdini-like suddenness. "You can go in," she said, not quite as curtly as before, immediately seating herself to inform another disgruntled postage stamp customer that the matter had been referred to the proper department and would receive immediate attention.

II

IF Miss Applegarth was terse, Mr. Monahan more than counterbalanced it by the hearty good will with which he greeted Mr. Simpson, and it was not long until the latter, decidedly uneasy at first, was feeling thoroughly at home.

The inspector didn't try to cut his somewhat rambling statements short. He was too old in the game for that. "Let 'em talk," was one of the three or four mottoes which guided his business life.

He had found by experience that, nine times out of ten, if given a free rein, they would tell much more than they had first intended to.

So, after a veritable plethora of words, the Inspector gathered that Simpson was engaged as a partner with one Albert Wiggins in selling small phonographs by mail.

The alleged musical instrument sold for \$12.00, and cost, according to Mr. Simpson, almost \$2.50, leaving a nice little

profit for the partners, even taking into consideration the high cost of advertising.

"But," explained Mr. Simpson, "he ain't shipping them out: that is, if he can help it. He waits until they complain a lot."

"You mean he tries to wear them out?" inquired Monahan suavely.

"That's it," replied Simpson, the light of understanding flooding his countenance. "They're the very words he uses. Some of 'em get tired of writing.

"Some of 'em he tells it's been shipped and gotten lost in the mail and that it'll take three or four months to trace, and a lot of other excuses. When I saw what he was up to I spoke to him about it, but he won't pay any attention to me and I'm kinda scared of him. Guess he'll be pretty hard to catch."

"I guess he won't," responded Mr. Monahan, a trifle boastfully. "Just send out decoys, that's all."

"What're they?" inquired Simpson.

"What're what?" Monahan came back mechanically, his mind having wandered for a second or two.

"The coys."

Mr. Monahan made a mental note, "'At's a hot one to tell the boys," but aloud he responded, "Oh, send in money, fake orders you know, and if he don't fill them, pinch him."

"Yeh," Simpson said reflectively, "that's the word Albert's always using. Once he sent out five or ten phonographs he hadn't intended sending out because he looked them over kinda careful and told me he thought they were coys."

Mr. Monahan pondered a moment. Evidently Simpson's partner knew his way around, even if Simpson was a mental blank.

"Well, don't worry," he said at last, "we'll send him enough so's he'll be bound to slip up on a few of them. Now," he continued rising, "you go back to your office, pretend like nothing has happened, and I'll get busy. Then you drop around every few days and let me know what's going on."

Into Mr. Simpson's mental consciousness came the picture of the peppy little

stenographer just outside the door. "Oh, I'll be around lots of times," he said reverently, and, as Monahan looked up in surprise at his ardor, "this won't get me into any trouble, will it?"

"No, indeed, no trouble at all. We'll take care of you, all right. All you gotta do is to follow our instructions and you'll come out all right." He put a friendly hand on his shoulder. "Run along now, or your partner may think you got lost or something."

"Of course, I ain't got anything against Albert--" began Simpson, but Monahan cut him short.

"Of course not," he agreed, heartily, "but a man's got to look out for himself."

Mr. Simpson wandered into the outer office. "You know how to make an exclamation point without bringing the carriage back a space?" he inquired apropos of nothing, seating himself in the typewriter chair which Miss Applegarth had just vacated.

Miss Applegarth stared in surprise. This certainly was a freshie, if ever there was one. Most men, even the freshest ones, were a little overawed in a Government office, but this one evidently didn't have sense enough.

Mr. Simpson paid no further attention to her, but began putting in a slip of paper. Miss Applegarth, like all stenographers everywhere, prided herself on the many little tricks she could do on a typewriter. But here was one she didn't know. Almost before she was aware of what she was doing, she was standing alongside of Simpson.

"You see," the latter went on, "you just hold the space bar down while you punch, first the period and then the apostrophe. Holding the space bar of course keeps the carriage from moving and prints both characters in one place, just like taking a double exposure with a camera."

He looked at her until it became embarrassing to both of them. He must do something if he wanted to stay a little longer. Let's see, what was the other trick he knew? Oh, yes.

"Can you draw a straight up and down

line," he began, but Miss Applegarth, her face a trifle flushed, broke in hurriedly.

"You can tell me some other time. Mr. Monahan may come out. He'd think it was—funny."

"Sure," agreed Simpson apologetically. "I'll be in in a day or two again. I'll show you the trick then." He put out his hand. Miss Applegarth didn't know why she took it, but she did, immediately pulling her hand free when she felt a slight pressure.

Mr. Simpson smiled—he *did* have a pleasing smile—took his hat from the top of the file case and departed.

III



IMMEDIATELY Simpson left his private office, Monahan rang for his first assistant, young Ed. Carlson. After a confab conducted in low tones, the two inspectors took down from a rack inside the vault a selected assortment of rubber stamps, and began to fix up the decoys.

A letter appeared to come from Duluth, Minnesota by the simple expedient of stamping the envelope "Duluth, Minn.," in a little circle, with a date set sufficiently far back. And a dozen other letters, by a similar simple process, came with amazing speed from a dozen widely separated points.

Some contained \$12.00 in money, some a money order (also properly doctored) for the same amount, and one or two checks, of which the inspectors had a liberal supply, already signed.

"Send him about a dozen right off the bat," Monahan directed. "He's a foxy bird, and if only one or two of the phonographs ain't sent, he can claim some kind of a mistake. We gotta get at least twenty-five to prove to the jury that it couldn't have been a mistake or a matter of chance."

Ten days passed and none of the men whose names were used in the decoys (they were all post office employees) had received their phonographs. Monahan sent for his assistant.

"Looks like an open and shut case, Ed," he announced, "but we'll make absolutely sure. He might say he was out of stock

or something of the kind and that the delay was caused by waiting for a new supply.

"'Mail Order Pete' Edison sprung that on the jury in a case I had against him about fifteen years ago, and got away with it too. I ain't taking any chances any more. Have all the boys send in a squeal."

So, over a period of several days, the decoy "customers" wrote in to inquire, with varying degrees of indignation, why they didn't get the phonographs for which they had sent their money. A week later one of them reported receiving it.

During the following week seven more made similar reports. Monahan waited two more weeks, but the four decoys remaining out of the dozen sent in reported no phonographs. Monahan rang for Ed.

"Four down," he announced jubilantly. "Just had that fathead Simpson in here again. I told him it wasn't necessary to come in more than once a week, but he shows up every day just the same.

"Told me his partner was looking over the complaints pretty carefully and was weeding out those he was a little scared of. Get out twenty-five more to-day, Ed, and try to frame 'em up good."

Meanwhile, Mr. Simpson's social affairs were showing excellent progress: at least they had been until the day the twenty-five additional decoys were sent out.

Miss Applegarth had expressed wonder at his immense knowledge of typewriter tricks (he only knew two and had paid a typewriter expert to show him a few new ones), was thoroughly convinced that he had an unusually nice smile, and had begun to look up rather expectantly when the door opened any time between ten and eleven in the morning.

And the night before she had gone to the theater with him, and then to dance a little at one of the night clubs. "The nicest evening I ever had," she told herself, as she sank happily back into the pillows. Her hand tingled.

Mr. Simpson had held it an unnecessarily long time, and she felt quite sure that once he had pressed his lips into her hair while they were dancing. She had pulled away, not because she had wanted to, but because she was afraid it might be noticed.

She wondered if he would be in in the morning. He had said he would. That was the last thing he had said.

But the next morning Mr. Simpson's cheery "Hello there" was met with a very formal "Good morning," nor did Miss Applegarth return his cheerful smile.

In fact, she kept right on telling people that the matter had been referred to the proper department, while Mr. Simpson, flushed and uneasy and with even his great poise shaken, remained looking at her ardently and helplessly, wanting to go up and whisper a word or two of affection to her, but somehow not daring.

"Got a new typewriter trick—" he began, but Miss Applegarth cut in, "I don't care to see it, thank you. Sit down. Mr. Monahan's out, but he'll be back in a few minutes."

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked pleadingly. "Did I do something to hurt you last night?"

"No; nothing's the matter," said Miss Applegarth, answering the questions in their reverse order.

"But there must be," he insisted. "Won't you tell me what it is?"

"No," she responded. "It's your own business. If you're that kind of a man that's all there is to it."

"What kind of a man?"

"A—a—well, never mind."

"But you've got to tell me; I want to know. What kind of a man?"

She whirled around and looked him squarely in the eye, speaking with a cold, cutting harshness:

"A stool pigeon," she said bitterly, "a man who squeals on his own partner to save himself."

Simpson stepped back a pace or two as though suddenly slapped in the face. So Monahan had told her. She knew all about what had brought him there. Why hadn't he thought of that possibility before? If he'd had any sense at all he should have realized that she would ultimately learn of it. The only thing funny about it was that she hadn't been told before.

Before he realized it he found himself using the little three-word sentence which has done such splendid service on the stage:

"You don't understand," he said miserably, scarcely able to return her steady gaze.

"No," she said coolly, "and I don't want to."

The door opened and Monahan came in. He showed no particular elation at seeing Simpson; in fact, a close observer would have noted a shadow of boredom cross his face, while a mind-reader would have found him thinking, "Great Scott, that fathead again!"

A few minutes later Simpson came out of Monahan's private office.

He paused a moment by Miss Applegarth's desk, stood irresolutely as she continued pounding the keys without giving the slightest indication that she knew he was there, then took his hat and with a sigh slowly left the office.

In the meantime the twenty-five new decoys had been duly dispatched, and Monahan wired his chief in Washington in code for special authority "to expend not exceeding two thousand dollars for decoys, important case." The following morning the authority came, with the usual injunction to "keep expense low as possible."

All but six of the new batch received their phonographs within the course of a few weeks, although old Aaron, the janitor, who had been a decoy ever since he could remember and had spent thousands of dollars by proxy on a salary of sixty a month, announced that it looked more like a coffee mill than a phonograph, and that it sounded even worse.

Several more batches of decoys were sent out at intervals of about two weeks, until Monahan had a list of thirty-two "customers" who had ordered phonographs, had money order receipts to prove it, and who had gotten no musical or other instrument of any kind in return.

Mr. Simpson came in that same morning, looking more dejected than at any time during the past three or four weeks, which, Monahan told himself, was some dejected. "Don't know what's the matter with the old fish," he told Ed. "Guess he's scared to death or something. Looks like he's lost his sweetheart."

"But he's a good snitch, if ever there was one. On the job all the time. Too much, if you ask me. Getting tired of looking at him, particularly since he's been such a Gloomy Gus."

"Well, Simpson," he said genially to that mournful figure, "we'll be up this Thursday at half past ten in the morning to give your joint the once over. That's day after to-morrow. You be sure and be there. Act like you're scared to death when we come in and Wiggins won't suspect anything."

Mr. Simpson protested feebly that he'd rather not be there, that he was sick and tired of the whole business, and wished he'd never done it. Monahan began to feel alarmed.

"Buck up old man," he said heartily. "It isn't going to hurt at all. You gotta be there. The boys'll take care of you, all right; you don't have to worry." Mr. Simpson departed, shaking his head mournfully.

IV



PROMPTLY at ten thirty the following Thursday morning, Mr. Monahan accompanied by the ever-faithful Ed and "Ginger" Dalton, one of his new men, strolled into the office of the Manhattan Phonograph Importing & Distributing Company, winked assuringly to Mr. Quincy Adams Simpson and, without further formality, kicked open the door marked "Private—Mr. Wiggins" and walked in.

Mr. Wiggins, a meek-looking, cadaverous, bald-headed little man, but with a voice like the booming of the surf on a particularly stormy day, looked up from his desk as the three badges flashed before his eyes.

"Yes, gentlemen," he roared, "what can I do for you?"

"You can tell us, old sport," spoke up Mr. Monahan, "why you're taking in money for phonographs and not delivering the goods."

"I don't get you," bellowed Mr. Wiggins.

"Oh, yes you do." Monahan replied

genially, "but if you want the details, I'll be glad to give them to you. To begin, why didn't Mr. H. L. Reeves, of the Opelika Grocery Company, Opelika, Alabama, get the phonograph for which he duly remitted by money order the sum of twelve smackers?"

"And Anna Edgecombe, of Tulsa, Oklahoma," broke in Ed.

"Not to mention C. Elbert Madison, of South Bend, Indiana," added Ginger.

"Reeves? Edgecombe?" repeated Wiggins, a puzzled look coming into his eyes. "Funny! I saw those names a day or two ago. Lemme see, now? I got it!" he exclaimed suddenly, a great light of understanding flooding his face. "They was in the batch that Robinson stole."

"Robinson?" inquired Monahan. "Who is Robinson?"

"Clerk of mine," explained Mr. Wiggins. "At least he was until two days ago when I found out he was stealing from us. He took the money and hid the orders and the complaints about 'em.

"Don't know why he didn't tear 'em up, but he didn't, because I found a whole batch of 'em under a lot of typewriter rags in the bottom drawer of his desk. So I fired him and shipped the orders out myself."

"How many were there?" inquired Monahan in a queer voice, with a sure instinct that he knew just what the reply would be. He was right.

"Just thirty-two," came the expected answer, "some of 'em several months old."

"But there were a lot of others that didn't go out for several weeks after you received the money. How was that?"

"I ran out of stock," explained Wiggins, "and had to wait for a new supply."

Monahan looked at Ed, who looked at Ginger, who looked back at Monahan. Ed was the first to break the silence.

"Where's this Robinson live?" he inquired.

"I'm blessed if I know," roared Mr. Wiggins. "He came into the office once and asked for a job. Never told much about himself; think I know why now. Said he lived up in the Bronx somewhere."

"But Simpson told us—" began Mona-

han, and then stopped abruptly as Ed stepped on his foot.

"Eh?" inquired Mr. Wiggins. "What's that?"

"Oh, nothing," responded Monahan hastily. "Nothing at all."

"The place is yours, boys," went on Mr. Wiggins hospitably. "The books are open and you can ask any questions you like. I got parcel post insurance receipts for every phonograph shipped out of the office. You'll find them in the top right-hand drawer of the desk here, including the thirty-two."

"Oh, I guess it's all right," said Monahan, taking it like a sport. "Just the regular inspection, you know. C'mon, boys, let's beat it."

V



ABOUT two hours later Mr. Quincy Adams Simpson, and his partner, Mr. Albert Wiggins, were having lunch in a quiet nook at Sam's.

"Quince, old bean," said Mr. Wiggins. "I gotta hand it to you. We ain't got a phonograph left. Whole two hundred cleaned out. And b'leve me, with the radio takin' the way it is, we'd 'a' been about forty years getting rid of those two hundred machines."

"You sure juggled her pretty. Getting a hundred and ninety-two decoys at twelve smackers a 'deek' out of a P. O. dick's office is some job."

"Sure, I know I'm good," admitted Mr. Simpson impatiently. "You don't have to tell me. But it's my last crooked job."

Mr. Wiggins looked deeply hurt. "You don't mean to tell me," he said in aggrieved tones, "that you're not going in with me on the popular song racket just on account of that girl."

"You bet I ain't," Mr. Simpson responded decisively. "You ain't seen this girl or you wouldn't talk that way. And I mighty near lost her, lemme tell you. Wouldn't even let me talk to her to explain anything until last night when I got her when she was leaving the office and spilled the whole thing."

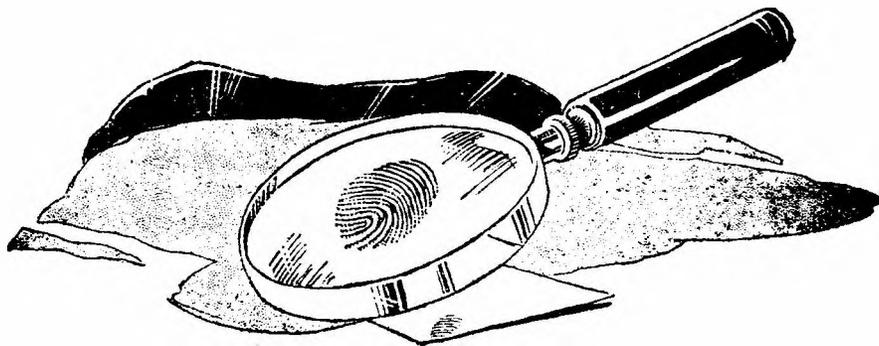
Mr. Wiggins looked genuinely alarmed. "You told her it was all a frame-up? Suppose she squeals?"

"Not her," responded Mr. Simpson with deep conviction. "You see, I married her the first thing this morning and she's quit- tin' her job to-day."

For a long time Mr. Wiggins remained silent. Then he sighed. "Well, Quince, old onion, I wish you a lotta luck, but I sure hate to lose you. Don't know what I'll do without your brains. I wasn't born with much of my own."

"I'll tell you what," Mr. Simpson exclaimed suddenly, "let's get hold of a good seller and go into an honest mail order game."

Mr. Wiggins looked startled, then surprised, then meditative. "Well, by gosh," he said slowly. "I never thought of that!"





BUREAU OF CORRESPONDENCE

SOME COME WITH PRAISE AND SOME WITH CRITICISM. BUT ALL AT-
TEST TO INTEREST IN THE STORIES PUBLISHED IN FLYNN'S WEEKLY

A PEACH OF A STORY

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

"Mystery Boma" in your issue of January 1 is certainly a peach of a story.

I, for one, would like to read some more of A. Hazen Green's stories.

W. P. S., New York, N. Y.

BEGINNING THE NEW YEAR

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

I am writing to congratulate you on FLYNN'S WEEKLY for January 1. If it is the model for the year, we readers are certainly lucky. In my opinion, "The Little Pigeon" is the best short story you have published. I would like to see more like "The Tryst." Basil Lisle in his new rôle should be more popular than in the old.

I believe it would be an improvement to publish the cipher department oftener—and the same goes for the finger-print department.

H. C. B., Pittsburg, Kan.

JUST ARITHMETIC

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

Among your fact stories by Chas. Somerville is one entitled "Ten Million Dollars the Stakes." Please figure out for yourself the following, which I have underlined in pencil on inclosed clippings:

Cigar sales, two years.....	6,000,000.00
Profit in two years.....	\$1,200,000.00
Profit per cigar.....	.20

As a fact story writer, Somerville ought to consult your M. E. Ohaver. W. W., Corning, Calif.

ALMOST UNPARDONABLE!

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

My interest in your magazine, FLYNN'S WEEKLY, of which I am a regular reader, has been based upon the natural and plausible character of its fiction, and the consistent form in which

the framework of its stories is built. So rarely is there a flaw that when one is found, it stands out the more prominently.

I regret that so interesting a tale as that entitled "Written In Blood," from the pen of R. Austin Freeman, should be marked by such a weak spot as to make it ridiculous even to a reader who makes no pretense to analytic ability.

I refer to the fact that an astute investigator, such as Dr. Thorndyke, could not possibly have neglected to determine whether or no Robert Fletcher was suffering from a wound, or blow, sufficient to *draw* blood, before attaching any suspicion to him on any grounds whatsoever. The delicate matter of blood analysis would most certainly be unnecessary until that fact had been definitely established, and yet it is entirely forgotten in the network of the story! That is almost unpardonable

E. M. S., Chicago, Ill.

ALL FOR TWO HUNDRED

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

As a constant reader and admirer of your magazine, may I point out to you something in your issue of January 8, which is a trifle absurd? The story is "Queen of Fake."

The passage reads: "She spent her two hundred dollars on *striking clothes* and a *ticket to Baltimore*. The *clothes she did not wear* she placed in *half a dozen big trunks*, all *marked with a many-colored coat of arms*." All of that for two hundred dollars?

H. G. A., New York, N. Y.

ANOTHER SATISFIED READER

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

Just a few lines to let you know that I am another satisfied reader, and appreciate your work in placing a magazine of such merit on the market.

I have been a steady reader from its first issue, and may I say that the fact stories are the main feature. May they always continue.

I wonder if you couldn't publish the case of

Mr. Ambrose Small, who mysteriously disappeared from Toronto, Ontario, a few years ago. I think the detective on that case was named Mitchell.

I am inclosing a news clipping, which you will see is the story of the death a short time ago of the widow of Detective Fitzgerald, who was the cause of the arrest of the Biddle brothers.

B. C. M., Turtle Creek, Pa.

THE BIDDLES AGAIN

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

I care not to bother you with communications from your readers, but feel it a duty to thank you for the review of the Biddle brothers. This was a famous affair in a time that the writer was just old enough to remember this occurrence, and had been hoping to see it in your magazine. It was criminal history that I never understood, so your reproduction of the matter was educating to me.

May I say "Faking Fakers," by Elzina Howells, was not only well written, and thoroughly plotted, but with a tubful of humor, it illustrated the workings of these hounds who prey upon those who have met misfortune. And one thing Mr. Howells could have added to his story, which he did not add, was "A story of fact."

A. H. M., Great Falls, Mont.

A HIGH GRADE MAGAZINE

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

I have just finished reading a copy of your magazine dated Saturday, October 23, 1926, in which you had published the first part of a four-part serial written by Edgar Wallace. Will you be kind enough to send me the three following issues to complete this extremely fine story. I am inclosing thirty cents in stamps to pay for these issues.

In closing I will state that the FLYNN'S WEEKLY is a very high grade magazine of detective fiction. I enjoyed it very much. Your special features give one something to ponder over, considering that they are true. If you did not specify that in the heading I really believe that some people would take them for fiction.

The one that I liked the best was that article by Louis Davidson. The best novelette in this issue in my estimation was "Riordan Seems Stupid," by Victor Maxwell.

R. E. McG., Milwaukee, Wis.

A LARGE ORDER

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

In your latest issue of FLYNN'S WEEKLY you invited comments on increasing cipher secrets, and decreasing the short stories. If you will permit me, I would hate to see any change in the FLYNN'S WEEKLY, unless you wanted to add another serial novel every month, and thus decrease short stories.

I want to congratulate you, Mr. Flynn, upon some of the novels you have published, "The

Joker," by E. Wallace, was fine; "Tiger's Spring," by A. Wynne, was fine; "Trent of the Lone Hand" also is good. If you will permit me, I want to say that I like the space you use for announcements.

For future novels, *et cetera*, I am glad you will publish another story by E. Wallace, "The Feathered Serpent," it sounds very good. The new novel by W. Johnston also sounds promising. I would like to see you publish some novels by Louis Tracy, Lec Thayer, Booth, Sax Rohmer, F. Packard, A. Rees, John Hawk, Harper Williams, Chas. Dutton, A. Small, Sidney Horler, W. Sequeux, A. Muir, Burton Stevenson, E. Philipps Oppenheim. You will please excuse this large order.

W. B. B., Ft. Thomas, Ky.

P. S.—Since you have published FLYNN'S WEEKLY, I have never missed one copy. It's a fine magazine. Thanks.

MR. STANTON'S WORK

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

Ever since the first FLYNN'S WEEKLY appeared on the news-stands I have been its steady reader, and that I think it the best ever goes without saying. However, never has a story stuck so in my mind as "Along the River Road," in the November 26 issue by John N. Stanton. Please, Mr. Flynn, let us see some more of Mr. Stanton's work.

T. J., Berkeley, Calif.

WITH A FOUR-DOLLAR CHECK

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

This is indeed a pleasant moment for me, for I gain by it; another year's "interesting" reading. FLYNN'S WEEKLY dished up a wonderful menu last year and the total number of "punk" stories that were in it, I could count on the fingers of one hand, and still have enough left to hold my favorite cigar.

In a local paper I am reading "American Crime Crisis," by Judge Marcus Kavanagh. I wonder if he couldn't produce a series for you, for he has "understanding."

As you know, I like "fact" stories, for to me they tell of real happenings and they seem far more real than any fiction story, no matter how good the writer may be.

For, in writing "fiction" stories, the writer must make up his characters and scenes as he goes along and because of this, he oftentimes weakens the story by not being sufficiently sure of his facts.

As a suggestion: "Why not seek stories by policemen, chiefs, and man hunters from all over the world?" For in every country crime and criminals are ever in power and action. Have them tell of their most interesting experience.

Being on the ground, so to speak, they would be far better equipped with facts and customs, that their story would have a realness not to be had by any fiction writer, no matter how much he read up on the case.

I do admit that the stories you print are real and that your writers do know their "onions." Having had some experience in this line myself, I know that it is no small job to prepare even a short story.

This draft that I inclose was one of several that I traded for at the bank, giving as exchange a magazine's check that came a short time before. This way, I reinvested "thought" money for issues containing "well written" thoughts of others, and I believe that I will be a gainer by it, for we all need a "yard stick" by which to judge ourselves and our actions.

So with the wish of a long, rich (worthwhile stories) successful year to you, I am signing off,
S. W. H., Berkeley, Calif.

CONCERNING BIG TIMBER

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

In Mr. Ware's story, "Big Timber," on page 650, second column, third paragraph, the Forest Ranger, Calhoun, makes some statements regarding the grading of timber over in that swamp lands country that are interesting to an extreme. It is not that Mr. Ware is inaccurate in his statements, for there is no error so far as I can see; however, he *docs* make one statement that somebody not really correctly informed might challenge, which is the occasion of my comment.

In his classification of timber according to its value as lumber, Calhoun places the gum very low in the scale, stating that it is, or was, of small value for lumber. As a matter of fact, were the story and its scenes laid in that country or in the Mississippi Delta to-day, that statement would not pass unchallenged, but when one recalls that the action of these Calhoun stories takes place in 1801, Mr. Ware's information, as stated by Ranger Calhoun, is correct.

The wood of the red gum is rather heavy, with a close, fine grain, and when finished in the usual ways by cabinetmakers and furniture manufacturers is a very good looking wood, indeed, and at the period named, there was no objection to the wood on that account: that being for an entirely different reason, which I will try to explain.

At that time, before certain methods of seasoning and drying were adopted, it was practically an impossibility to saw up that wood into planks, for, in drying, there was no wood on earth that would twist up into as many different shapes as red gum. In fact, it would hardly be stretching things to say that if a sawmill man cut up a gum log into timber six by six inches dimensions and ten feet lengths, he need not be surprised when it was thoroughly seasoned to see those timbers in the shape of a twist drill! And if they didn't twist into spirals they would bend into very good imitations of the rainbow.

At an earlier period my father was an old-time cabinetmaker living in an East Mississippi town, and I recall more than one experiment of his with this wood. The fact is, he never used it for anything but turned work, like table legs,

et cetera, and when polished and varnished it was very pretty, but when he wanted to put any of it into a piece with a flat top he would make the flat parts of the piece of heart poplar and stain that as near to the color of the red gum as he could get. One time I recall his really making a very pretty table top out of the wood, but in addition to the under sides of the table itself, he anchored it down with some steel braces made for the purpose and which the customer was willing to pay for, and even then he refused to guarantee that the gum planks would stay put.

Not long after the period of Mr. Ware's stories the sawmill men found ways of seasoning the gum wood without the twisting referred to, and as the practice grew the wood increased in value, especially as it was really a pretty good looking wood when finished. For that reason, Ranger Calhoun's statements about the red gum would hardly hold good to-day, but no doubt Mr. Ware knows that perfectly well: at any rate, his statement is strictly correct for the period of the story itself.

I left the East Mississippi town and went to Memphis in 1801, and I can state correctly that to many of us who lived in that city in those years those Arkansas swamps were an unknown land. As for myself, and I was by no means alone in that, I lived in Memphis until 1808 before I ever entered the State of Arkansas, crossing the Mississippi River Bridge for the first time that year. At the time of Mr. Ware's stories the bridge was still under construction, not having been opened until 1802. Personally, I was better acquainted with conditions in the timber lands of the western section of Mississippi in those days and there were features of life in that section, too, that would be interesting in fiction. Maybe Mr. Ware is familiar with conditions there, too, and could write of them at some future time. I might try it myself, but for the fact that when one man is already on a job like that and doing it well I don't like the idea of trying to profit by a semi-imitation of background and material.

W. E. M., San Antonio, Texas.

CORRECTION AND ANSWER

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

Another of your usual asinine articles has appeared in print in the form of an article purporting to be the story of the Biddle brothers. Aside from the following misstatements the story was a good one.

1--The Biddle brothers escaped on January 30, 1002, not 1001.

2--The name of the slain detective was Patrick Fitzgerald, not James Kirkpatrick.

3--George Kahney was not a recluse. He had a wife and family who were in the house when he was slain.

4--The robbery and murder of Kahney occurred at 2 A.M., not 10 P.M.

5--The Biddle brothers and Walter Dorman

were not found in the same room, nor even in the same house, but in houses several blocks apart.

6—Fitzgerald had no idea that the people he was sent to arrest had any connection with the murder of Kahney. The Pittsburgh police were wholly unaware of the Biddle brothers' criminal activities, or that they were in the city.

7—The arrest of the Biddle brothers and Dor-man occurred at noon on the day of Kahney's murder, not "on the same night."

8—The house was not surrounded. Only Fitzgerald and Inspector Robert Gray went to the house to arrest the Biddles.

9—In the fight between Jack Biddle and the two detectives Biddle was so seriously wounded that his life was despaired of.

10—Guard McGarey did not fall from the cell tier. He was hurled over the railing by the Biddles.

11—No pursuit occurred at Mount Chestnut. The detectives had headed off the Biddles, and pursuers and pursued met face to face on the road.

12—Mrs. Soffel was not sentenced to the Allegheny County Jail, but to the Western Penitentiary.

I could go on indefinitely, but what's the use? And I'll bet you won't publish this letter.

C. H. W., Pittsburgh, Pa.

The letter of Mr. Woods concerning my article on the Biddle brothers interested me very much, and I hope that you will publish it.

Mr. Woods shows a present-day familiarity with the details of the Biddle case, which is the more surprising because I was unable to find any one now living in Pittsburgh who seemed to have anything like his intimate acquaintanceship with the affair. Indeed, I was compelled to obtain most of my details from old newspaper files and other accounts now long since forgotten.

As a matter of fact, I was referred to a certain popular account of the famous case published in paper covers by I. and M. Ottenheimer, of 321 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland, and written by Arthur Forrest under the title of "The Biddle Brothers and Mrs. Soffel." This was copyrighted by the Phoenix Publishing Company under date of March, 1902, and I was told by those who should know that its details were complete and accurate.

It was at considerable effort that a copy of this book was obtained for me, as it has long since been out of print, and collectors now pay a considerable premium for it. If Mr. Woods is sufficiently interested I shall be glad to loan him my copy for his reference.

I am forced to disagree with him, however, on one point at least, and that is the lack of credit to the Pittsburgh police department. Every old Pittsburgh newspaper man to whom I talked on the subject agreed that the Pittsburgh police deserved every credit possible throughout the whole case. And trust a newspaper man to know whether the police are measuring up or not!

HUGH WEIR.



HOW important is our "Bureau of Correspondence" to you? We have published it spasmodically now for approximately two years. Undoubtedly to readers who have ideas to express, it is an essential part of the magazine.

But to you who are too busy to write, to you who read the letters of others and never reply, how important is it to *you*?

This question is of particular moment now that we are about to inaugurate a policy of a short cipher article every week.

How often, if ever, is the publishing of random letters from the magazine's correspondence files worth the space it takes?

William J. Flynn



To Men Getting
BALD
Here's My Contract

Give Me 15 Minutes
a Day for 30 Days

and I'll give you
new hair or no cost

By **ALOIS MERKE**

Founder of the Merke
Institute, 5th Avenue,
New York



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At the Merke Institute, 5th Avenue, New York, which I founded, many people have paid as high as \$100 for results secured through personal treatments. Now through my Home Treatment I offer these same results at a cost of only a few cents a day or money instantly refunded.

In most cases of baldness the hair roots are not dead, but dormant—*asleep*. Ordinary tonics fail because they treat only the surface skin. My treatment goes beneath the surface—brings nourishment direct to dormant roots and stimulates them to new activity.

Free Book Explains Treatment

"The New Way to Make Hair Grow" is the title of a 32-page illustrated book which explains the Merke Treatment—tells what it has done for thousands—contains valuable information on care of hair and scalp. This book is yours—Free—to keep. Mail coupon TODAY! Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept 1262, 512 Fifth Ave., N. Y. C.

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Please send me in a plain wrapper—without cost or obligation—a copy of your book, "The New Way to Make Hair Grow," describing the Merke System.

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DANDRUFF?



It speaks for itself—

UNLIKE halitosis, you don't need a best friend to tell you that you have loose dandruff. You can find out for yourself in case you haven't already looked to see.

Here's a dare! Some day when you have on a dark coat or cloak (the ladies aren't exempt), just brush your hair thoroughly for a few minutes. If you produce that tell-tale shower, it is time to do something about it. Be entirely frank with yourself. Do you know of many things more revolting than signs of loose dandruff? By one glance every other charm may be offset. It is simply disgusting.

But we have good news for you. Listerine and loose dandruff simply do not get along together. You can prove that so easily for yourself. It is very likely that there is a bottle of Listerine on your bath room shelf right now. Just douse it on full strength and rub it in vigorously. Do this for three or four days in succession, and watch the result. You will have one more proof that this company does not make false claims for its products.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.*

P. S.—It's nice to know that Listerine is not greasy and will not discolor hair or clothes.

L I S T E R I N E

—and dandruff simply do not get along together
