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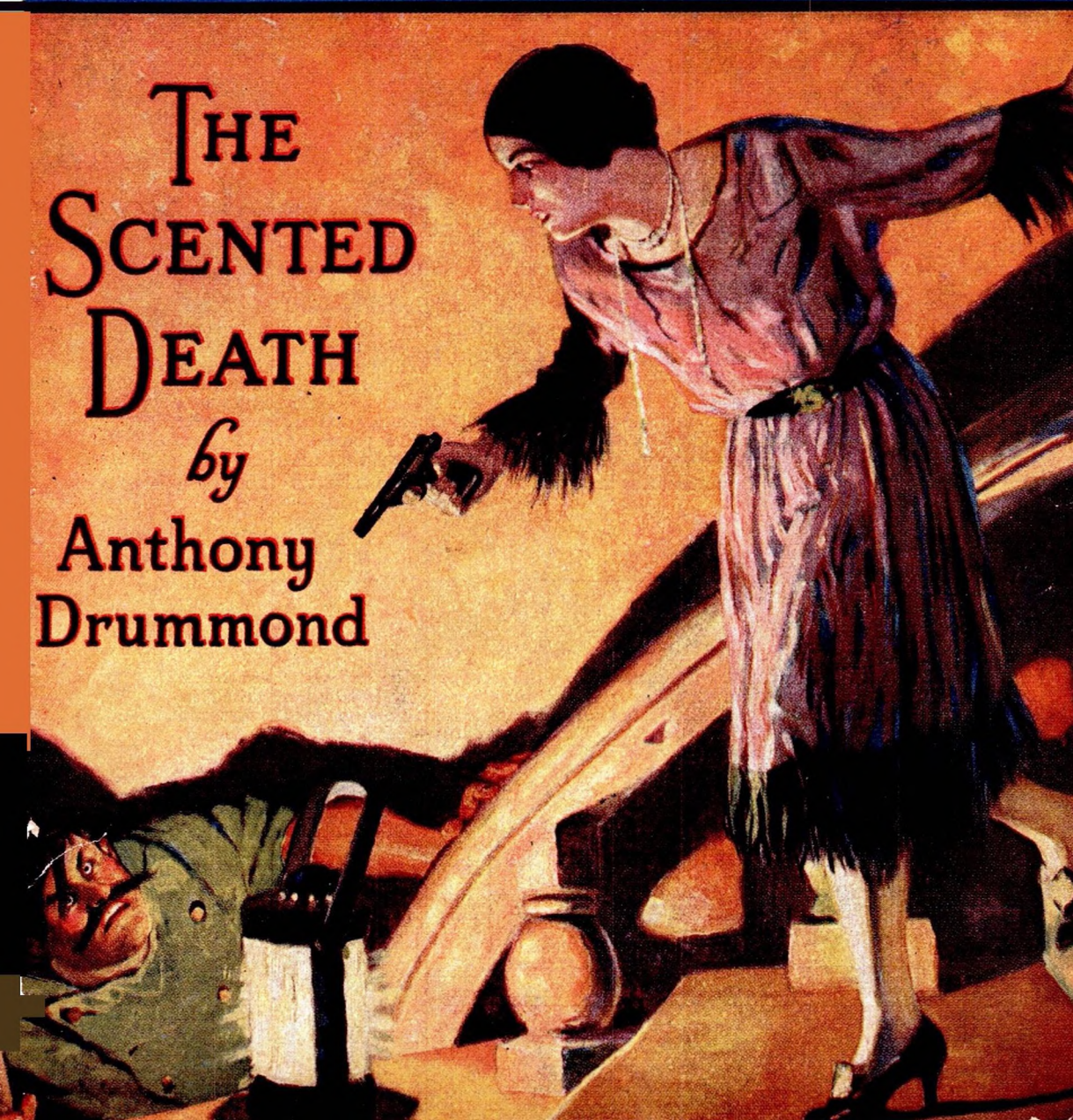

THE SCENTED DEATH

by

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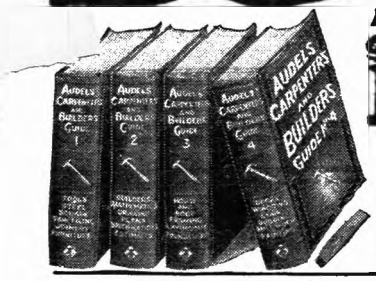

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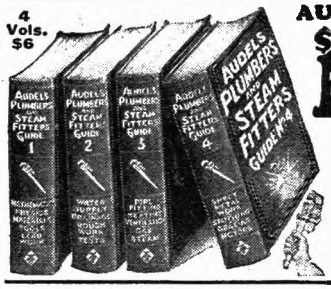

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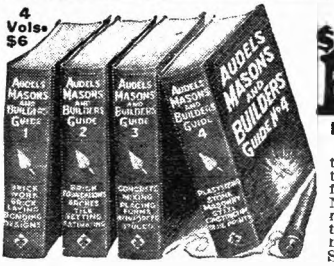

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WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

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He turned instantly and tried to pick out the one who had passed

THE SCENTED DEATH

By Anthony Drummond

"COMBINE A THINKING MAN WITH A COURAGEOUS, RUTHLESS ONE—AND HE IS DANGEROUS. SUCH A MAN IS SANCTUARY: BEWARE OF HIM!"

CHAPTER I

BEFORE MIDNIGHT

NAT SANCTUARY, late captain in his majesty's army, and still captain by courtesy, had just decided to seek the shelter of his desolate lodgings, when he saw the taxicab.

Its behavior, while not particularly intriguing to anybody blessed with a pleasant destination on such a night, was yet sufficiently diverting to attract the attention of a man who had nothing better to do than to stand beneath a rain-soddened tree on the park side of Park Lane, gazing into a future as cheerless as his immediate past.

At that hour—nearly midnight—and in such weather, Park Lane was practically deserted. The steady swish of the raindrops in the trees, the rattle and gurgle of

running water in the gutters, were the only sounds which broke the stillness. The broad thoroughfare stretched, lamp-splotched and dim, into nebulous shadow on either hand.

Behind Sanctuary the park was dark and silent. It seemed fitting that at such a time and place Sanctuary should brush past the cold skirts of death, and, in doing so, find himself over the borderline of mystery and terror.

The taxicab had appeared from the direction of Hyde Park Corner, traveling slowly up Park Lane, near the railings. In passing an electric lamp some distance away, it had revealed to Sanctuary that its hire flag was pushed down. It proceeded for about twenty yards and then stopped—not outside a house, but still on the railed side of the road. The driver got from his seat and hurried away.

Sanctuary watched. He was very wet, and the transitory interest aroused by the appearance of the cab would have immediately dispersed but that, within a few moments, the driver came back again and climbed into his seat. The cab moved forward.

The driver was now looking about him, as though he either searched for somebody he was to have met at that particular spot, or wished to insure that he traveled unobserved. Sanctuary, standing back in the deep shadow midway between two street lamps, and under the trees, was unseen by him. As the cab passed, Sanctuary caught a glimpse of a passenger inside it.

It crossed the road obliquely. A little distance to Sanctuary's left, on the farther side, was a great house which Sanctuary recognized as that recently rented by a man whose arrival in England had caused no little stir—Prince Alexis Marakov, who was one of the most notable refugees the Russian revolution had driven to London for shelter. The beauty of his only daughter, the Princess Xenia, had made her a social celebrity.

The cab stopped before the Marakovs's mansion, and now the driver was acting with some certainty, like a man who, after a period of hesitation and doubt, has made a decision. He slipped from behind the wheel and stood on the pavement, looking about him swiftly and keenly. Then he went up the three steps leading to the front door of the house and rang the bell.

It was what followed this ringing of the bell that stirred Sanctuary from mild interest to quickened concern. Immediately he had pressed the bell-button the driver jumped down the steps, and, turning into a narrow side street beside the house, ran as if for his life.

Sanctuary walked across the road. The person inside the cab had made no effort to get out, nor any effort to stop the driver from bolting. Contemplating this, Sanctuary found the night, with its darkness and its dreariness, taking upon itself a sudden and somber atmosphere of tragedy.

There was no certainty that anything was wrong: no reason why the taxi driver should not run away after ringing the bell, if the perversity of his desires dictated it, and yet—as he approached the cab, Sanctuary was conscious of a thrill.

A little ahead of the cab was a street lamp, and its light shone full through the windshield and the glazed front partition of the vehicle.

Sanctuary reached the cab and looked inside. As he had noticed from under the tree, there was a man there. He was sitting in a corner—and he was very still. His head was leaned sideways, resting against the glass of the window. Something about the dim figure checked Sanctuary's walk, so that he stood staring, sweat at his temples.

He stepped nearer, his hand automatically seeking the door handle. Before ever he pulled the door open, he knew that the man was dead.

He had the door open, and, for the first time, the breath of the elusive, dreadfully sweet perfume, which, ever afterwards, was to be associated in his mind with death, came to his nostrils. The incongruity of it shocked him. It was almost obscene. The sweetness of it, the seductiveness, the visions it conjured, and—the contorted thing which sprawled hideously in the cab, its open eyes leering at him from behind the livid mask of death—

He saw how the man had died, noticing it in passing, as an unobtrusive fact picked up amid the whirl of his emotions.

Below the dropped chin, buried in the folds of the throat, was a thin scarlet line of silk, knotted tightly at the nape of the neck. Strangulation, skillful, sure, and strong, had brought this man to his doom.

A flood of light at his back caused Sanctuary to look around. The door of the house had been opened in response to the taxi driver's ring, and he had a glimpse of a tesselated hallway, of a great mahogany staircase, richly carpeted, sweeping up to a broad gallery. In the doorway was a man whose clothes proclaimed him a butler. Sanctuary beckoned to him and he came down to the cab.

"What—" he began, and then saw the thing in the corner. He became silent, his eyes wide, his mouth partly agape, and Sanctuary saw his cheeks paling, his lips twitching. He looked at Sanctuary with a silent, awful question in his eyes. For the moment he seemed incapable of speech.

Sanctuary said: "I was standing under the trees." His words were clipped and his sentences breathless and short. He was still disturbed. "Saw this cab pull up. Driver rang your bell—bolted. I thought it was strange. Came across. Found—what you can see. Better get the police."

The butler pulled himself together. "Wait!" he said, and turned back into the house. Sanctuary stood by the open door of the cab. On all the street—seen through the distorted eyes of his excited imagination—the mantle of a great, secret terror seemed now to rest.

The butler had turned off the hall into a room at the side and Sanctuary heard him talking. There was a name mentioned—Stanev—and he heard the word "dead." The butler was addressing some person as "Your highness."

There was a hurried patter of feet, and a man came from the room, with the butler at his heels. He was a man who had once been tall, but whose height was now lessened by a pronounced stoop. He ignored Sanctuary and, making straight for the cab, looked into it.

During his life, Sanctuary had seen many men afraid, had seen fear riding roughshod across humanity in great retreats and amid fearful carnage, but never before had he seen such absolute terror as leaped to the eyes of this man, whom he concluded must be Prince Marakov.

"The Scented Death!" Marakov was whispering it, as though unconscious of what he said. "The Scented Death! God's pity!" Sanctuary thought he was going to fall, and moved impulsively toward him.

On that, Marakov aroused himself. He turned to Sanctuary with questioning eyes, but it was as though he saw past Sanctuary, through him. He said: "You found him?"

"Yes." Sanctuary's hand had already closed on Marakov's arm. "I suggest you phone for the police. There isn't a constable in sight." He was looking up and down the street as he spoke.

"Of course. Of course." Marakov glanced again, quickly, toward the interior of the cab. "Yes. We will go into the house. You will come, too? It is wet out here." He spoke automatically; he was taking no notice of Sanctuary; down at his sides his hands were working nervously.

Sanctuary assisted him up the steps. The butler followed. The cab was left outside in the darkness and the rain. Through the open doorway the rear part of the vehicle was visible, the hood and driving seat being cut off from vision by the door jamb.

In the brilliant light of the hall Sanctuary was able to examine Marakov more closely, and with the examination he found something vaguely and elusively familiar about him. Of course it was more than possible that this familiarity was accounted for by an unconscious recollection of published photographs in the press. Yet, somehow, it seemed based on something more solid than that, something which, for the moment, eluded Sanctuary's memory.

With their arrival in the hall, hesitation descended on them. Marakov still moved like a man half stunned, and while Sanctuary hardly liked to suggest again the necessity for summoning the police, the butler stood back, white-faced and scared, against the wall.

It was during this brief hesitation that Sanctuary met the Princess Xenia Marakov for the first time. She stepped into the doorway of the room from which the butler

had summoned the prince, and, seeing her, Sanctuary momentarily forgot the cab, forgot the dark tragedy the night had discovered for him, and saw only her beauty, and the wonder of it.

CHAPTER II

FROM MARAKOV'S HOUSE

WHEN Princess Xenia spoke her voice was very low and tremulous, and her eyes were fixed on Marakov.

"Is it Stanev?"

Marakov nodded. "He is dead. There is the perfume—"

Sanctuary was still watching her, and, on this, he saw her face change. She displayed no wild emotion, none of the stricken terror Marakov had evinced. Instead, it was as though all animation was temporarily suspended in her eyes and her features. At last, her lips moved.

"Father!" It was whispered, strained. Marakov stood with his head lowered.

The taxicab's engine had, all this time, been running, for the driver, in his haste to get away from his vehicle and its dreadful freight, had neglected to switch it off. In the tension following on the discovery of the dead man, the even ticking of the machinery had passed unnoticed.

Now, while Marakov and his daughter played out their little drama of secret fear before the eyes of Sanctuary and the butler, the ticking suddenly speeded to a clatter, and the unmistakable crunch of gearing came to the ears of those in the hall.

The Princess Xenia uttered a choked scream, the back of her hand had gone instinctively to her lips. Sanctuary and Marakov swung round.

The cab was moving!

While the others remained still, Sanctuary took swift strides to the door. But he was late by seconds. By the time he blundered out upon the rain-washed pavement, the cab was some distance down the street, and the man who had stolen, unseen, into the driver's seat, had got his top gear home and was driving furiously into the darkness.

Sanctuary suppressed an insane desire to give chase, and went back into the house. He found Xenia and the butler assisting Marakov into the room at the side of the hall, and while the butler brought forward a chair, the princess turned to Sanctuary.

He could see that she was making an immense effort to preserve her wits and her courage, and, on the heels of his admiration for her beauty came a stronger admiration for her bravery.

She said quietly: "My father suffered much—in Russia, and since." It was as though she felt some explanation was due for Marakov's collapse. The butler was pouring brandy into a glass.

Sanctuary nodded sympathetically. "If I might suggest it," he said, "I think it would be best if the police were summoned at once."

Marakov lifted his head. "Police!" he echoed, and then: "Giuseppe, you need not wait. I will ring if I want you again."

The butler handed him the glass of brandy and walked from the room, closing the door after him. Marakov drank the brandy at a draught, and, evidently stimulated and steadied, continued to address Sanctuary.

"Did you suggest sending for the police?" He checked his speech. He was staring. He put the glass slowly on the table. Again Sanctuary was aware of that vague familiarity in his appearance. In Marakov's eyes, displacing the blankness and the fear, was showing a great incredulity, with, behind it, something which Sanctuary named as hope.

"Captain Sanctuary," said Marakov quietly, and held out his hand.

Sanctuary knew Marakov then, and knew why he had been unable to remember where they had met before. For on that other occasion the prince had not called himself Marakov.

"Barinkin?" he asked. "But, of course, it's Barinkin. I remember now. Ever since you came out of this room I have been wondering where I had seen you before. And to meet you like this!"

Marakov was now animated, swung instantly from numbed despair to excitement. He turned to his daughter.

"Xenia, you will remember how I have

often spoken of Captain Sanctuary; you know well, how, at the risk of his life, and worse, he kept his word to a man whom he deemed but an unfortunate middle-class victim of the revolution. I want you to know him. Captain Sanctuary—my daughter."

Sanctuary bowed in a stiff, military fashion, feeling suddenly awkward and ill-at-ease. Xenia was offering him her hand, and he took it diffidently, conscious in an overwhelming fashion of his rain-sodden garments, of his poverty, of all his dark yesterdays and darker to-morrows. As she smiled at him, the dead man in the taxi-cab became an incident separated from that moment by a span of years.

And Xenia was aware of a feeling of interest and curiosity which she tried to think was entirely impersonal. She had heard so much of this man.

Her father had told her the full story of that night of reckless, almost devilish courage on the Galician border, when Sanctuary alone had stood between him and a torturing death, when, having given his word, the man she saw before her kept it against a multitude and delivered to safe keeping him whom he knew only as Barinkin, a supposedly wealthy shopkeeper from Ufa.

About Captain Sanctuary, of the Polish legion, as pictured by her father, had rested an aura of romance. On the recently passed anniversary of that night in Galicia her father had drunk a solemn toast in sparkling champagne "to the man whose nobility made this possible."

And now she saw him, lean and dark, with hard, stern eyes and a thin mouth, with a wolfish strength sitting easily on him, with, also, a wolfish restlessness born of his sufferings. She saw him in a suit which, once good, was now frayed and worn, in a collar like a dirty rag; and, reading the story they told to her and to all the world, she pitied him.

Marakov was talking. "Recognizing you, captain, has eased considerably the task I had set myself. I wished to discuss this matter of calling in the police. With you, I need use no unnecessary words, nor indulge in any false explanations. I would prefer that the police are not yet advised of what you have seen to-night."

"You mean you would keep this thing a secret?" Sanctuary was experiencing a return of his former bewilderment.

"Just that," said Marakov soberly, "for the time being. It will not be essential for me to give you my word that my reasons for keeping silent are sound and honest."

"Of course not." Sanctuary felt himself obliged to accede to the request. "I will do as you wish. After all, it is not my affair. I blundered on it by chance."

"Thank you. And now, captain, you will give me your address. The last time we parted you walked off into the Galician morning. This time you will not find it so easy to escape me. No. Please, I insist."

Sanctuary found a card in his pocket, one of the few he had remaining, and handed it to Marakov.

"It is late," he said. "I must go."

Marakov slipped the card into his pocket. He was very serious, and his excitement had given place to a grim kind of sobriety.

"Captain," he said, "the last time we met, you came out of the night when I stood in deadly peril. It may be that you will think my sufferings have unhinged my mind, but in your arrival to-night I see an omen. For again you have come to me when I stand in peril. This time the peril is far greater, far closer, far more formidable." He paused, studying Sanctuary. Then he added abruptly: "You will hear from me, captain. And now—good night."

Sanctuary bade him good night, and took leave of the princess. He thought she looked suddenly tired and beaten down. He went out of the house.

As he walked up the street, he became aware that he was being watched. He stopped and looked round. The dim figure of a man was lurking on the other side of the street behind him. After a moment of hesitation, he walked on.

When he reached his lodgings, his first act, before turning up the light in his room, was to step to the window and cautiously peep through the curtains. There was a man standing opposite the house, half-hidden in a shop doorway.

Sanctuary whistled softly. He had been tracked all the way from Marakov's house.

CHAPTER III

HE WHO ARRANGED EVERYTHING

WITHIN forty-eight hours Sanctuary received a letter from Marakov. It was curt, but in its curtness, he thought, was a hint of nervousness. The letter asked him to dine at Marakov's house.

From the moment when the taxicab was driven away from Marakov's door, Sanctuary had heard nothing further concerning the dead man inside it. The newspapers contained no news of a murder, and it was evident that the body had been spirited away in a remarkably clever and efficient manner.

Also, from the moment that he himself left Marakov's door he had been under close and constant surveillance. The surveillance had been skillfully conducted, and was remarkably unobtrusive, but Sanctuary had learned much in the school of hard experience, and a few simple experiments soon proved to him that his suspicions were correct.

However, the very cleverness of those who shadowed him convinced him that it would be extremely difficult to shake them off, and so he had accepted the shadowing as an inevitable aftermath of that night of mystery and death on which he had met Prince Marakov for the second time. Further, he was not too disposed to shake it off.

With it, he was finding a new zest in life. The despair of idleness, of blank days and black nights, lifted a little. He felt that he walked in a narrowing path, between hidden forces, toward a definite goal. When Marakov's letter came it was like a summons to action.

In the interval between leaving Marakov and the receipt of the letter, he had made some inquiries which he considered relative to the situation.

To his knowledge that Marakov was the famous Prince Marakov, who had been the wealthiest and most brilliant of that group of powerful men who bolstered Czardom and crashed with Czardom when the revolution came, and that the Princess Xenia, since her arrival in England, had been accepted as a leader of society, he had added several pieces of information of which the world at large was unaware.

Sanctuary now knew that Marakov, despite the fact that his palace in Petrograd had been one of the most magnificent dwellings in Europe, and that his Castle Marakov, on the Caucasian shore, had been a fairy edifice where he ruled as king, was nowadays a pauper, living on the charity of another. The sojourn of the Marakovs in England had been marked by a curious twist of fortune.

It seemed that at Castle Marakov the prince had employed an agent to watch over the interests of his wide estates there during his frequent absences. This agent, Feodor Boroff, had made money during his agency and invested it abroad.

When the crash came he found himself in fairly comfortable circumstances, and, on his arrival in London, he proceeded to convert what was already a considerable fortune into vast wealth. Rumor had it that Boroff had a genius for handling international finance, and whether rumor were true or false, the fact remained that Boroff had become a power, a man of tremendous financial interests, and that it was he who maintained the Marakovs in their house in Park Lane much as they had maintained themselves in Castle Marakov in the days of their greatness.

This singular example of gratitude and loyalty gave Boroff the entrée into social circles which might otherwise have been denied him.

When Sanctuary went to the house on the appointed evening, his mood was one of keen anticipation. He tried to persuade himself that this was entirely due to the fact that he hoped to get some explanation of the extraordinary affair of the dead man in the taxicab and perhaps find opened to him yet another side door of life which had hitherto been closed to him.

But he knew that something else, more potent than the promise of adventure, sent him hurrying down Park Lane in the dark-

ness—the memory of Princess Xenia, and the knowledge that unless he accepted Marakov's invitation, he might never see her again.

His visit, that night, to the house of Marakov lingered ever afterward in his memory, as being, even more than his discovery of the dead man in the cab, the most important event of his life.

For there he met the man whom afterward he came to recognize as the most formidable being he had ever encountered, a man who seemed sometimes above humanity, machinelike, inexorable, a mathematical intelligence fashioned in human shape—Feodor Boroff, concerning whom, that night, Sanctuary learned nothing more definite than his name.

The details of the scene remained always with Sanctuary—the oval, polished table, the glittering glass and the silver, the mighty room, stretched to shadowed immensity away from the table lights, the hint of oils on the walls, the soft red glow of the fire, the swift, noiseless servants, the tall, draped windows.

With the Princess Xenia sitting opposite him, Marakov at the table's head on his right, and Boroff—silent, immense, remote—at the table's end. And of them all, more, even, than Xenia, Boroff was the most distinct—the most ineffaceable memory of a memorable occasion.

Sanctuary could never imagine Boroff ever doing anything swiftly, could not imagine him ever doing anything in any way but surely.

With his great height and his immense shoulder breath, he seemed to hunch, threatening, across the table, and that which impressed Sanctuary as being actually sinister in him was emphasized by his flat, swarthy face, with its high cheek bones, little black eyes, and the black hair above it, cropped, Teuton fashion, so that it stood up straight on the top of his head.

There was an attempt at light conversation during the progress of the meal, but the attempt was almost futile, and the chatter it evoked rang false. Marakov was obviously nervous. Xenia was palpably uneasy. Boroff said nothing. All the time he watched Sanctuary.

Sanctuary became aware of this scrutiny from the moment he seated himself, and while at first he found it a little irritating, toward the end of the dinner it had become something more, an almost terrifying analysis of his physical and mental qualities.

He could hardly class it as offensive, for it was, he realized, absolutely impersonal, a cold calculation of himself as a foreign element introduced by chance into a scheme of things, the other concomitants of which were as well known to Boroff as were his own thoughts.

The meal ended and coffee was served. Marakov looked across at Boroff and Boroff nodded. At a word from Marakov, the servants withdrew, and the heavy door of the room was closed, so that the place became quiet and still. It seemed to Sanctuary as though they four at the table sat alone in all the world.

The princess was sipping her coffee, and her hand was trembling. Boroff lit a cigar and leaned back as though he tacitly assumed the position of a spectator.

Marakov spoke. "Captain Sanctuary, I know you to be a brave and honorable man." He paused, as though at a loss for words, and then added impulsively, but without raising his voice: "Would you risk perils of which I cannot speak; even death; would you set forth on a mission, the object of which must be hidden from you, for the sake of friendship?"

Before Sanctuary could reply, he went on: "The importance of the mission cannot be exaggerated. To me, to my daughter, it means more than any words of mine can convey—life, wealth beyond imagination—everything."

Sanctuary looked round the table. He was filled with an eager emotion which he hid only by a giant effort of will. The princess was regarding him with eyes in which there was an unmistakable appeal. Boroff was still watching him coldly.

"Before you answer, captain," continued Marakov, "I feel I must tell you that this mission was to have been undertaken by Stanev—the man who—died—in the cab the other night. I tell you this for two reasons. First that you shall realize a

tithe of the dangers confronting you if you accept; and secondly so that you shall realize the importance of the mission, in that, despite what happened to Stanev, the matter must still go forward."

Sanctuary steadied himself. He knew that outwardly he was preserving an extraordinary semblance of keen calmness and absolute poise, and knew also that what spurred him to its maintenance was the scrutiny of Boroff. Before Boroff he would show no surprise. It was, though he knew it not then, the first touch of the blades in a duel to the death.

"What is this mission?" he asked.

Marakov stated it with the bluntness of a man who, in an extremity, has no use for verbiage. "To protect my daughter during a journey she undertakes to Petrograd, and then south to the Caucasus."

Sanctuary looked across at Xenia. "You go to Russia—now? You!"

Marakov answered for her. "There is no other way. One of us must go, and she is the only one who can. The risk may not seem so great, captain, if I tell you that she was at school in Paris for two years before the war, that she was not in Russia during the war, nor afterward, so that she may well be quite unknown to those who rule my unhappy country."

Sanctuary did not answer. He was reflecting that such a hypothesis was too strained to be credible. Those folk who were masters in Russia would know the daughter of Marakov well enough.

"Of the details of the mission," Marakov went on, "it is unnecessary for me to speak. My daughter knows them, and it is she who will actually do what is necessary to accomplish the mission satisfactorily. You will be her escort. You know Russia, and you know the language. I know your bravery and your resource and your standard of honor. I am willing to intrust my daughter to your keeping, partly because I must, partly because I know I may do so without fear. It is for you to decide."

Sanctuary, after that last glance at Boroff, had been watching Xenia. There was, he decided, a lie somewhere, or, at least, a concealment of fact. That this girl was the only member of the trio before him who could carry out the mission in question was too ridiculous to be credible.

Marakov, waiting anxious for Sanctuary's answer, misconstrued his silence, and into his eyes came an eager, anxious light. "I know I am asking you to sacrifice a great deal of your valuable time, captain, and think I should mention the matter of compensation for such sacrifice. The compensation will be more than ample. Payment for such risks and such service cannot be reckoned on the meager basis of a monthly salary. The reward will be great."

Sanctuary heard this in a detached fashion, without entirely comprehending it, for he was still watching Xenia. She looked up at him as her father spoke, and her straight-gazing eyes told him that she wanted him to accept—because she wanted to go. Sanctuary could not imagine what drove her forth on so desperate a hazard. But she wanted to go, and if he refused she must stay behind. Marakov's talk of reward and payment passed him by.

He said very quietly: "I will go." It was a blind step in the dark, taken at the bidding of a pair of dark eyes he had looked into but once before.

Marakov leaned back with something very like a sigh of relief. Boroff drained his liquor glass and helped himself to more. In his eyes was a tiny, leaping flame.

With Sanctuary's acceptance, Marakov went into details. "Boroff," he said, "has arranged everything. He has obtained two passports for Moscow—the only city for which they were available—with the descriptions of the persons to whom they apply conveniently omitted."

Sanctuary was amazed. A man who could arrange such a thing as that, who could get blank passports for Soviet Russia was an extraordinary man indeed. The thing bordered on the miraculous.

They would sail, Marakov said, in forty-eight hours, on a Danish boat in the Baltic timber trade, Riga-bound from the Surrey Commercial Docks. Boroff had arranged with the captain.

"Boroff had arranged everything." There was nothing for them to do, for Boroff had

done it all. Boroff was omnipotent, omniscient. He sat silent while Marakov related all that he had accomplished, and still he watched Sanctuary.

It was ended at last. The passports had been filled in—by Boroff. Xenia and Sanctuary were to travel as brother and sister. They were given the name of Durand, for Xenia might pass as a Frenchwoman anywhere, and Sanctuary was to pose as a Frenchman who had lived in England all his life. Boroff assured them that it was best, and Boroff appeared to know.

There was about it all an inevitability which Sanctuary began to find disturbing. They were—the three of them—stepping forward, doing this and that, because Boroff had arranged it. Boroff sat back, silent. Marakov was his spokesman. But every word that Marakov said had been put into his mouth by Boroff.

Every move Marakov suggested had been arranged by Boroff. The whole mysterious pattern of awful hazard seemed to have been set out by Boroff. Boroff's hand was over everything. And Boroff said nothing.

They went into the hall, for Sanctuary was preparing to leave. Boroff vanished into a corridor beyond, leaving Sanctuary alone with Marakov and Xenia. On this, Marakov clutched Sanctuary's arm, and Sanctuary could feel his fingers trembling.

"Captain," he said, in a low, vibrant voice, charged with unfathomable agony, "you will guard my daughter? You will guard her? Into your hands I am placing my all, everything in my life. Back in the room I was unable to tell you—but more hangs on this journey than the wealth I mentioned. Her honor, captain, rests on it, her honor. She goes to save that which is worth more than all the wealth in the world."

At this moment Boroff reappeared, and Sanctuary thought, incredulously, that the princess seemed afraid that he might have overheard what her father was saying. Sanctuary and Boroff went out of the house together. Boroff's big limousine was drawn up beside the curb, with the chauffeur deferentially holding open the door.

Boroff stood beside his chauffeur for a few moments, and both of them stared after Sanctuary as he walked up the street. Then the chauffeur turned to Boroff.

Boroff said: "On the ship. Detail Petroff."

He got into the car.

And Sanctuary, walking swiftly through the night, trying to analyze his thoughts, found two things standing clear above the chaos of them, the eyes and the smile of the Princess Xenia, who was as above him as the stars, and the grim figure of Boroff. Boroff who could do the impossible, who could obtain blank passports for that country which was closed, Boroff—*who had arranged everything.*

CHAPTER IV

WHERE DEATH RIDES IN SHADOWS

THE ship was two days out from London River, and from the top of her reeling smokestack to her dipping waterline, she was wind-smitten and harassed. She had buffeted her way back and forth across the gray North Sea for more years than she could remember, carrying timber from the Baltic to England, and running back in ballast in the teeth of the wild northeasters.

Summer and winter she went, with her triple expansions hitting up their steady eight knots, with her bridge weatherings grayed and dirty, her plates groaning and wave-kicked. Fair weather and foul, she sailed on her appointed tide, and so would sail until the knacker's yard or Davy Jones claimed her at the last.

She was a dirty ship in more ways than one. She had a tublike habit of settling down in the trough of waves and taking them solid over her stem. In a seaway she had a curious shuddering stagger which was bad for the stomachs of those unused to her vagaries, but, withal, she was a sturdy little ship, one of those unsung travelers on the trackless seas which fetch and carry in silence that the land folk may live.

On her foredeck, late in the afternoon of this second day, Xenia Marakov sat beside Sanctuary on a heap of coiled rope. From the moment the ship swung out through the

dock gates on the heels of the fussing tug, forty-eight hours before, Xenia had avoided Sanctuary, and, with some shame, had endeavored to find a reason for that avoidance which was compatible with her honesty and what she termed her self-respect.

He interested her. For a time that was the only reason she could offer, and, being a woman, it was, naturally enough, paradoxical. Because he interested her she avoided him, knowing all the time that she interested him. At last she faced the position squarely, and was annoyed both with him and herself and all their circumstances.

Viewing the situation from the broadest standpoint, and without intention to insult, he was, after all, but a street waif, a man broken by the Great Peace just as surely as he had been made by the Great War, a man coming from nothing to a temporary importance, and dropping back to nothing when the factors which created that importance ceased to operate. While she—she was a princess, a daughter of the greatest, with a lineage which stretched back unbroken into the dimness of Russia's dawn.

It were best, she decided, to acknowledge that frankly at the outset, before this interest she had in Sanctuary strengthened beyond her control. Anything more than friendliness was impossible, and friendliness on such a basis was a dangerous toy.

So she avoided him until she found the avoidance impossible, and then was angry with him and herself.

And now despite the anger, despite the efforts at avoidance, they had sat on the rope for more than an hour, and during that time she had made him talk about himself. It was easy for her, and she dragged from him all his story.

He told of his fighting on the Archangel Front after long service in France, of his work in the Polish Legion, of all that experience in Russia which had given him the knowledge of the country and its language which fitted him so admirably for the position he then occupied in relation to herself.

She got from him the bitter tale of war's aftermath, the disillusion following on demobilization, the groping around for a job suitable to the hands of one who was essentially a fighter, born two centuries after his time. She got from him a confession of failure and prideful isolation. And she was sorry she had made him tell it all, for she could see that it had hurt him.

She pitied him, and found herself wishing—wishing a hundred things; that he had been born to a different station, that they had met under different circumstances.

"And what will you do when we reach England again, captain?" she asked.

He looked up at her. The sea wind had stung her cheeks, and their bright color showed vividly against the blue-black sheen of her hair and the gleaming darkness of her eyes. Her smile was kind and soft. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever known.

She flushed a little under his scrutiny.

"What will you do?" she repeated.

"God knows," he said.

She looked away. He should not have made her blush, and he should not look at her in that way. It amounted to presumption. She had been foolish to sit with him and talk to him as she had done. For her own sake she must keep him at a distance.

Besides, though he had been brave enough and honorable enough on that occasion when first he had met her father, it did not mean that he was not an adventurer pure and simple. His life over the past few years had certainly been that of an adventurer.

She changed the subject. "And have you found out if there is another passenger on board, as you said?"

"I haven't. The cabin near the captain's on the port side still has its door fastened. Yet it seems to be occupied. The skipper won't talk, and the men don't seem to know. I questioned one of them—a countryman of yours, by the way, named Petroff, and as ugly looking a customer as you'd care to know—but he just scowled at me and went away. I can only conclude that the occupant is down with seasickness."

"Poor thing. Shall we walk along the deck?"

They strolled aft.

That evening Sanctuary met "the scented death" for the second time.

It was a wild night, with a rising wind chasing white-flecked graybacks down the ship's path, and singing the song of the lost in the cables and the cordage; a night for killing, when the crash of the waves and the thud of the engines would drown any cries.

Ten o'clock—and dark with the darkness of the pit. Sanctuary was staggering along the corridor on the port side, where was situated the closed cabin to which he had referred when talking to the Princess Xenia. Above decks the masts and the smoke-stack were swaying wildly against the blackness of the skies.

Above the rhythmic thud of the engines, the crash and thunder of the waves was menacing and fierce. He found difficulty in keeping his feet, and had constantly to fend himself from the lurching, painted walls with his hands. The atmosphere of the place was heavy with the reek of oil and ship's smells.

He was passing the closed door when he stopped. Mingling with, and yet startlingly separate from the varied odors of the ship, he distinguished that perfume he had smelled when he opened the door of the taxicab in Park Lane.

It came from the cabin—from the cabin which was closed! The silent warning of the scented death!

It was on this ship. The thing which slew in the darkness, silently and dreadfully, was on this ship—with himself—with Xenia!

He stood staring at the door, that door which now was grimly, dumbly alive with threat unspeakable, and as he stared there was a movement behind him, and death itself leaped out of the shadows at his back.

CHAPTER V

"BOROFF'S ARRANGEMENTS?"

PETROFF used a knife. For the scented death, the scarlet handkerchief of silk; but for Petroff, the knife, as grimly silent and as deadly as the silk—and swifter.

Petroff saw Sanctuary plunge into the abysslike darkness of the port corridor, and in the movement he read his chance. When Sanctuary stopped before the closed door of that cabin which hid the Scented Death, Petroff was at him like a wolf.

Sanctuary heard Petroff's clothes rustle and turned as Petroff's knife came down. He saw it, not as one sees a picture or a scene, with leisurely appreciation of detail—but as a photograph impinging on the lense of his brain; and he went back against the corridor wall even in the action of turning.

The knife missed. He dared not stop to think how close it had gone, nor to contemplate the slashing of his jacket front where its eager edge had passed. For Petroff was at him again, lips agape, showing blackened, foul teeth behind them.

He was a brute, Petroff. If the dim recesses of his not overgood memory could have been searched, there would have been found a confused picture of slayings and harryings. He had been a Cossack.

He had been a member of a torture gang in one of the old State prisons. He had knouted hapless exiles across the snows to a lingering death in the swamps of Siberia. In his festerous past there were incidents of peasant women which cannot be told. He was strong and tremendous and had never known fear, and in this matter of secret killing he had yet to encounter his first failure.

He renewed his attack now so swiftly that he met Sanctuary chest on, as Sanctuary jumped in to meet him.

They stayed rigid for a space, Petroff's knife arm held aloft, the fingers of Sanctuary locked about its wrist, twisting, straining. Petroff gasped. He had arms of steel, arms which never yet had met their match.

But now, with this grip on his wrist, his right arm—his knife arm—was failing him. He felt a torturing agony up to his shoulder where his tautened muscles were twisted from their natural position. He felt his solidly locked fingers loosing their hold on the knife hilt.

That encounter in the swaying, staggering darkness of the port corridor was almost noiseless. There was no word, no cry—nothing but the swift hissing breath of the slayer and the man he would have slain, a gasp, a scraping of feet.

Petroff's arm was forced back and upward, and all his great strength could not withstand the steady thrust that threatened to wrench his arm from its socket. His fingers were opening. He felt the knife slipping.

It dropped to the plating at their feet, and with its dropping Petroff flung his right leg behind Sanctuary's calf and hurled all his weight forward. Sanctuary went back, sliding to a sitting position against the steel wall of the corridor, while Petroff, with a little sob, dropped to his knees and grabbed again for the knife.

The ship lurched and dropped sickeningly, and the knife slid to the farther gutterway. Petroff went scrambling after it, full length, his eyes mad with desperation, and, as his hand again closed on its haft, Sanctuary flung himself forward from the partition on to Petroff's back.

He had his hands under Petroff's chin. Petroff slashed round with the knife.

Sanctuary pulled up with his hands, hoping to make Petroff loose the knife from sheer pain at his throat, and, with the pull, reënforced as it was by a strength begotten of the hazard of the fight, there was a snap, startlingly loud.

Sanctuary got up slowly, and his eyes stayed fixed on the limp thing from which he lifted himself. He had always known he was strong—but not that he possessed the strength that this moment had revealed to him. Petroff's head was twisted round foolishly, as though his neck were rubber.

Sanctuary looked down at his own hands. He had killed a number of men in the heat of battle, with pistol or with rifle, but this was the first who had died under his naked hands. Despite the thud of the engines, the grind of the sea at the ship's sides, he felt as though he stood in a world of awesome, watching silence.

His eyes lifted at last to the door of the closed cabin, to that dumb thing which had witnessed the struggle, and which, in those moments when his imagination was soaring high on great flights of terror, seemed fantastically to typify the circumstances in which he found himself.

It was a door through which he could not see, a door which was kept locked against him, and behind which lurked death, secretive and slinking. So it was with this matter to which he had set his hand—a door of darkness shutting off his vision, a door of mystery close-locked, and beyond it—death.

He took a deep, long breath. Petroff was dead, and across Petroff's twisted figure the sweet perfume drifted to his nostrils. Petroff was dead—on this ship which took Xenia and himself to Riga and Russia.

He began to ask himself what manner of ship this was, which carried the scented death and the unknown assassin who had come at him from the shadows. Were Xenia and himself ever destined to reach the port for which they sailed?

In his mind had been an impulse to go straight to the captain and tell him what had happened, but now he thrust the intention from him. On a sudden the ship seemed to him an outpost of that land of close-locked secrets where terror came by night so that men vanished from the lives of those who knew and loved them.

He was moving in the dark against ruthless forces—against men of whose identity he was unaware and of whose next intentions he knew nothing. For the moment, attack must be his last method of offense. Petroff was dead; it might be best to let Petroff lie.

The whole affair wanted thinking about, for Petroff's attack was the first unmistakable warning that each step he took in the accomplishment of this mission was dogged by danger beyond his gauging. And with the grinning gray face of Petroff half-turned toward him, he could not give the matter the consideration it demanded.

The reek of oil and of the sinister perfume became curiously nauseating, and he had a craving for the fresh coldness of the great wind above decks. He turned away from Petroff and clawed up the companionway, and to the port railing.

Up on deck the night seemed gigantic, a wild, illimitable darkness with the great wind driving through like a madman yelling aloud. He clung to the rail, his face lashed by the spindrift, the wind tugging and jerking at his jacket and his hat, and in the race of the boiling seas which surged

past the ship's dipping side he strove to read a solution of the problem which was presented to him.

He stayed perhaps five minutes, and at the end of that time he saw something which made him forget the captain and the ship, and the question with which he wrestled. It was close in by the side of the ship, lost now and then in the yeasty surge of the water, and it rolled and dipped in the waves' embrace in ugly, semi-lifelike fashion.

He saw an arm lift and drop, as a shoulder came over slowly. A face stared up into his and was lost. The thing went by, back behind the ship to the ocean's heart and the vastness of the night. The face which had stared up and turned away was the face of Petroff—Petroff whom he had left five minutes before, dead on the floor of the port corridor.

Despite the wind and its chill, there was sweat on Sanctuary's forehead and he was trembling violently. An appreciable time elapsed before he forced himself to understand what had happened. Whoever—whatever—might be inside the closed cabin in the port corridor had heard the sounds of his struggle with Petroff and had waited confidently for the outcome, opening the door when those sounds at last died away, expecting to find him—Sanctuary—dead on its threshold.

Instead, there had been Petroff, lifeless, and therefore useless to the soulless organization which had employed him. So Petroff had been jettisoned like a splintered cudgel, or a broken knife, his value dropped to zero with his death.

The callous nature of the deed smote Sanctuary as with a whip.

He left the rail and made his way below, passing along the corridor. Not only Petroff but his knife also had disappeared, and even the perfume was no longer distinguishable. Sanctuary had now not the slightest inclination to investigate what lay behind the closed door, for his appetite for hazard was sated at least for the night.

In going to his own cabin, he passed that of Xenia, and involuntarily tapped on the door, for he could hear her moving about inside. The movement ceased, and, after a pause, she asked quickly: "Who is that?"

"I, Sanctuary. Are you all right?"

"Just a minute." She fumbled about, and at last the cabin door opened to disclose her swathed to the chin in her outdoor coat. "Why do you ask?" And then, before he could reply: "Something has happened!"

"Nothing," he said. "But it is a bad night, and I thought you might be frightened."

"I'm not frightened." She was searching his face. "Something *has* happened." Her voice dropped a little. "You look—you look—hard and dreadful. I've never seen anybody look like you do now, except—Boroff."

He laughed. "Is that a compliment? I assure you it is undeserved. Nothing has happened, really. And I mustn't keep you standing here talking. Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

"Good night," she said, her eyes still on his face, and then: "Do you know, when you speak to me, you mustn't look like this. It frightens me. Is that foolish of me?"

"Very," he said gravely. "Very foolish. And now—good night."

He walked to his cabin.

It had been ridiculous of him to knock at her door, yet he knew he had been driven to it by the anxiety aroused by his encounter in the corridor. She had compared him with Boroff, as though Boroff was the standard of dreadfulness.

Boroff—who had arranged their sailing on this ship which carried the scented death and the knife-armed assassin now miles behind them: Boroff who had arranged everything connected with their journey.

CHAPTER VI

NOTHING SO CHEAP AS LIFE

IN all the arrangements Boroff had made there was a certain completeness which was uncanny, and whether Sanctuary imagined those arrangements were for good or for ill, he had to admit that they displayed an astonishing omniscience.

For instance, special coaches left Riga twice a week for Moscow, and in all that deplorable chaos which was once the Russian railway system, this biweekly departure was the one event which could consistently be depended upon.

The Danish steamer ran into the Zollquai just in time to enable Xenia and Sanctuary to get to the Dvinsk Station and board one of these through coaches, and without leaving them any time to look out for the disembarkation of the mysterious occupant of the closed cabin.

The compartment they occupied would have been a disgrace to any railway service in the world, but, for Russia, it was miraculously comfortable. All the glass had been knocked from the window frames, and new glass was too expensive to obtain, but there was wood in plenty, and rough boards had been nailed across the apertures, which, though they shut out all sight of the country, certainly shut out, also, a great volume of cold wind.

The gas cylinders beneath the coach had long since ceased to perform the function for which they were intended, for the manufacture of gas was not considered an essential part of the Soviet program, but there was tallow and there was wick, and candles formed the compartment's illuminant.

It was certainly cold, but the coach traveled. Its wheels and its axle boxes were sound. There was, apparently, sufficient fuel obtainable to enable the engine to make a start, and so the passengers might reasonably hope to reach Moscow ultimately.

Sanctuary asked the conductor how long it would take them, and learned that the man had not the slightest idea. If the engine ran well and did not break down, and there was fuel to be picked up *en route*, then a day and a half might see them within sight of the Kremlin.

If one of these conditions failed them, then a week might elapse before they pulled in at the Alexander Station. The conductor, who was a pleasant young fellow with unswerving belief in the communism he supported, warned Sanctuary that it might be wise to take along food with them. One sometimes had difficulty in obtaining it at the wayside stations; but probably Sanctuary understood that already.

The population of the train was mixed and interesting. There was a Bolshevik commandant, all revolvers and epaulettes, who could talk earnestly of hunted days in Petrograd and horrid poverty on New York's East Side. There was a Polish Jew traveling on nobody knew what business, who found nothing at which to grumble either in bolshevism or capitalism, monarchy or republic.

There was a Scotsman from Clydebank traveling under the mandate of the council, an honest, straightforward man with downright views and an eagerness to hear all sides of any question which arose.

There was a German, placid, inscrutable, secret, one of Prussia's multitude of unofficial ambassadors already out on the old commercial trails carrying " kultur " to the end of the earth and bringing back cent per cent in gold. A big Russian, childlike, stoical, who could remember Tannenburg and the might of Hindenburg's onslaught, and a nightmare of horror on the Galician front.

An American journalist, keen and questioning, who made hot tea for Xenia over a Primus stove. And others, a motley crew, chattering half a dozen dialects, driving forward into the immensity of Red Russia, some with their lives in their hands, some on missions of charity, others seeking gain, even though they weighed it in human blood and suffering.

So they journeyed until, under cover of the night, they reached the frontier station.

The American said: " This is all right. I reckon we'll go right through here with a once-over." But he was wrong. They were all herded out onto the platform. There was a drizzle of rain driving hard before a wind which cut as though it blew straight from the ice packs.

The little platform was dimly lit, and the great jostling crowd filled the night with chatter and cries. There was a posse of soldiers and a hard-faced man in charge of them, and at a word from him the soldiers drove the passengers into the waiting room.

Here, Sanctuary and Xenia had their first sight of Russia under the red hand.

The smoke and the stench of mahorka hung heavy from the ceiling, above a cloud of damp air and steaming breath. The room was packed to the limit with men and women, and above them the great shining samovar, with its glasses and its steam, seemed to stand like a dominant god.

There were men asleep on the floor and under the forms and tables. People jostled over them and around them and left them undisturbed. Two white-faced, worn waiters were endeavoring to serve roast goose or soup to the clamoring customers who cared to yell for it. A man was praying in a corner before an ikon, and a drunken soldier was yelling at him the axiom of Karl Marx: "Religion—the opium of the people!"

Chaos—stench—filth—and more chaos: each man resting on his own hand, each man for himself, with death at his back if he made a mistake. Sanctuary read it all in this frontier station, this gateway to Russia.

The American journalist was jotting down impressions in his notebook and talking vociferously to Xenia. The officer in charge of the posse demanded a table. There were many tables, and they were all occupied, both above and below. Those above were slavering soup; those below were sleeping on the filthy floor.

The officer had a way with him, and his movements within the next five minutes supplied an awful commentary on the cheapness with which life is regarded in Russia.

He tipped up a table, sending soup and roast goose in a slimy mess to the floor, and, with the diners thus summarily dispersed, he began to kick the sluggish sleepers to wakefulness. They got up, some with alacrity at sight of his uniform, others slowly. One man ventured to grumble. A basin of soup had fallen on his face. Also he had drunk a good deal of vodka and was unsteady on his feet, while his eyes burned.

The officer said something to him sharply. He answered back. He was a freeman. Gospodi had made them all equal.

The officer laughed. He was inclined to treat the drunkard with contempt. The vodka-flushed face hardened. The man stepped forward, and his fist went up. Before anything could be done to prevent it, the officer was on the ground.

Immediately, a heavy silence came down on the place. The drunken man stood back—staring.

The officer got slowly to his feet. He was very white, except for a thin trickle of blood from his mouth. He fingered his cut lip, and looked at the drunken man.

Then he snarled an order, his eyes still fixed on the man who had knocked him down, and four of his soldiers stepped forward.

On this, the drunkard was sobered by swift fear. He swayed toward the officer, his hands outheld, his lips babbling incoherent pleas.

The officer turned away from him.

They took the drunken man out. The officer seated himself behind the table and began his examination of passports, and he had hardly started, when a rattle of rifle fire outside told the tale of him who had dared to grumble.

"Gee! That guy's dead!" Sanctuary heard the voice of the American at his elbow, and looked round. The keen face, with its semihumorous eyes, was pale and startled. Sanctuary nodded.

"The less said about it, the better," he replied quietly. "I know Russia. That isn't a dreadful outrage, but a little event in the day's work. You will notice that the officer does not heed the rifle fire, and that no one else takes any notice. Report it to your paper, if you like, but not as something extraordinary and unusual. It serves, in fact, as a comment on general conditions. Life here is the cheapest thing—cheaper even than the ruble."

The American swallowed hard and began to fumble for his papers. He was a man of high humanity, and it hurt him to reflect on the poor creature who had been led out to his death like a head of cattle.

Xenia reached the table, and as she presented her passport, Sanctuary's heart missed a beat. Boroff had supplied these passports, Boroff, who had sent them on to the ship with the scented death. They had accepted the things blindly, had ac-

cepted all Boroff's conditions blindly—and now had come the test.

The death of the grumbling man had shown how thin was the thread which suspended life in Russia. A little slip in the making of their passports, a tiny error, and they—Xenia, with her beauty and her wonder—might be as the dirty wretch who had just gone before his Maker.

Also—there was himself. Boroff might wish Xenia well. Her passport might be right, and it might carry her through in safety. But his own, this paper he held in his hand, might be a death warrant, for all he knew, something prearranged which, when he produced it, would give him over to execution.

Xenia was passed. The officer treated her quite impersonally, and hardly looked at her. He tossed her her passport with a grunt. Sanctuary came before him.

The passport was opened and scrutinized. He stood rigid, strained, and watchful.

And as he stood somebody brushed past him.

It drifted over his shoulder, deliciously sweet in the foul, damp atmosphere—that perfume he first had encountered in the dark taxicab in London.

Instantly, he turned and tried to pick out from the jostling crowd the one who had passed. The officer snarled: "What are you doing?"

Sanctuary had lost his man—if it were a man who had used the scent. It might have been any one of the dozens of men and women who filled the place, and with the officer's words recalling him to himself he swung round again toward the table.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "But somebody struck me with his elbow in passing."

The officer glared at him, and Sanctuary met his gaze steadily.

"There are worse things than being struck with an elbow," said the officer at last, and tossed him his passport. Sanctuary picked it up and went to Xenia's side. The American journalist was arguing with the officer in voluble French.

Xenia looked pale, and there was a little eagerness in the way she drew close to Sanctuary's side when he reached her.

"What was it?" she asked. "You frightened me. I was afraid that officer would be angry with you."

He smiled down at her. "Nothing." By this time they had reached one of the doors and he took her across the platform to their compartment, which they found to be empty.

There, she said: "Nothing? It is the same answer as you gave me on the ship. Always nothing." She leaned toward him, for he was seated opposite her. "I would rather know. That night on the ship something was wrong. Just now something was wrong. Do you think it is fair that I should not know the truth, but instead should have to create terrors for myself?"

He considered her a moment. "Perhaps not," he said at last. "I will tell you. On the ship, and just now, I detected that perfume."

"Oh, God!" She sat back, limp and smitten. "I had guessed something like it. Yet—it is dreadful to guess right in a matter like this. When one only guesses there is always the little hope that the guess may prove to be wrong. I almost wish I had not insisted on your telling me."

He tried to smile about it.

"Well, that is feminine, isn't it? You insist on knowing, and when you learn all, you wish you still had something to find out."

Her lips twisted a little, but her eyes were not smiling. She looked pitiful for the first time since he had known her. They sat in silence for a time, and still alone, for an hour would pass before the train started, and their fellow passengers were still in the waiting room, or tramping about the platform.

During this silence he knew she was studying him. At last she said:

"Captain Sanctuary, I said something to you on the ship which you may have thought strange or rude of me. You will remember that I compared you with Boroff when you looked so dreadful. There was the same look on your face just now, back in that room, when you swung round."

"Yes?" He was laughing. "I believe I asked if it were a compliment."

"Please don't laugh," she said. "I—I

am afraid I can't laugh just now. But I have wanted to explain to you. The word dreadful was wrong. I should have said formidable It has worried me to think that you might imagine I thought you dreadful at any time. Formidable was the thing I should have said."

Despite her plea, he could not help but continue to laugh.

"So you think I'm formidable, eh? A kind of ogre."

"I don't know"—very earnestly. "But I have always thought Boroff the most formidable man I ever knew—until that night on the ship. Only you are different, as well. Is that all mixed up?"

"I don't think so." His eyes were kind. He could see she was trembling. The knowledge that the scented death was close to them had shaken her. In touch with peril, she wanted to persuade herself that she was under the protection of a man at least as strong as any with whom she yet had come into contact. "At any rate, perhaps I understand, eh? I wonder when this train will start."

Seventy minutes later the train rumbled on its way.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTAIN OF THE REDS

THEY ran into the Alexander Station as dusk was falling, three days later, and it was dark by the time they got outside and sought vainly for an ishvostchik.

"The white-walled, golden-crowned holy city" was a ghost of its old self, standing deep in shadows as though to hide its ruin and desolation. Of street lighting there was none.

They were forced to walk from the station, and as they stumbled along the broken, uncared for roadways, they passed rows of empty houses tumbling to desolate destruction. Garbage littered the streets, and from the dark, open doors of some of the bigger buildings, foul odors were wafted to their nostrils.

Xenia hung close to Sanctuary. "I remember Moscow," she said. "It was always wonderful, a fairy city, with its churches and its towers. But this—this is like death, like walking through a graveyard."

Sanctuary had decided on the Batiatinska Bazaar as their stopping place, and he made for it as quickly as possible. They both had known it in the days of its glory as a hotel notable for its luxurious comfort, its faultless attendance, and its impeccable cuisine. It had been a palace, built with all that fantasy of Oriental architecture which is typically Russian. A German had owned it in those days, and a famous Frenchman had been its chef.

They reached it at last, in the Nikolskaya, dark and forbidding, a somber pile of lost memories rising threatening toward the stars. Its left wing had suffered in the street fighting, and the roof had collasped. In the ground floor windows of the right wing some lights showed dimly, and also through the ruins of the fourfold revolving door at the main entrance.

Xenia shrank back from the cracked, dirty steps.

"I can't go in," she said fearfully. "I can't. I had no idea—"

Sanctuary took her arm.

"We must," he said. "Else it means spending the night out of doors. There may not be a train for the south for a week, and we must stay somewhere. Let us go in for to-night, at least, and to-morrow we will have time to look round. Come along."

She accompanied him into the hall. It was marble paved and onyx-pillared, but now the marble was littered with the fragments of the great glass dome, and overhead they could see the stars shining clearly. A great electrolier swung from the center of the dome, but it was unlit, and round the hall at the level of the first floor ran a balustraded gallery to which the wide stairs ascended.

A man shambled forward to meet them. Yes, he had accommodation. There was no expression in his eyes or his face. They would, however, understand that only the privileged were allowed the luxury of hotels. Had the commissar sent them?

Sanctuary explained that, unfortunately,

he had overlooked calling on the commissar. On the other hand, he had a number of surplus rubles, and in the morning they would either see the commissar or go elsewhere. He exhibited some of the rubles as he spoke.

After a little hesitation the man took them. He would risk it. After all, they were brothers, and it was a devil if a man and his sister must walk the streets when there were hundreds of fine rooms standing empty.

He told them the numbers of their rooms —at the far end of the corridor on the first floor, he explained, so that they should be out of the way—and intimated that if they wanted anything to eat there would be hot soup obtainable in the *salle a manger,* after which he left them.

Sanctuary took Xenia up the first flight of stairs and along the corridor in question. It was lit up by a couple of guttering candles set far apart, and on either side of it were rooms, dark, with open doors swinging idly on whining, dry hinges to the winds which blew in through the broken windows. Their feet stirred the dust as they walked, and rats scurried from their path.

Their rooms were next to each other, and Sanctuary, having lit the candle he found on Xenia's mantelshelf, said good night, and went to his own room.

There he sat down on the edge of the bed and wondered if they would ever get out alive from Russia. Their task seemed hopeless. From his point of view they were blundering forward blindly, with difficulties piling up at every turn. Here that secret terror Xenia and her father called the scented death might be a power which stalked in the daylight and was not forced to slink in shadows as in London.

Ten minutes later Xenia came tapping at his door, and opening it, he found her standing in the draft-filled corridor, very pale and obviously distressed.

"I can't remain in that room any longer," she said. "It is utterly impossible. I shall scream if I do. There are rats and —and things on the walls—and loneliness. Please either take me from the hotel, or at least somewhere where I need not be alone."

Sanctuary made no effort to comfort her, in case it magnified her fears.

"We'll go and test some of that soup," he said. "Come along."

He took her downstairs and asked if the soup was ready. The janitor told them to go into the *salle a manger,* which they found on the left-hand side of the hall, and in semidarkness. The looting had swept it clear of all its original furnishings, carpets, and curtains, and all it contained were two long tables on rough trestles just inside the doorway, with unbacked forms on either side of them. A lantern stood on each table, and beyond the yellow rays of the lamps the vast apartment stretched away into cavernous gloom.

Xenia and Sanctuary seated themselves opposite each other, and when their soup had been served, they were left alone. The soup was very hot and very unappetizing, thick yellow stuff, with a few lumps of blackish meat bobbing about in it. Beside each bowl was placed a hunk of black bread. Xenia gazed at the mess in dismay.

"Have we to eat this?" she asked.

"If we're lucky, we shall eat it while we're in Russia," Sanctuary assured her. "If we're unlucky, we shall eat nothing."

At that moment they heard a clamor at the revolving door, and the rattle of booted feet on the marble of the entrance hall. From where he sat, Sanctuary could see into the hall through the broken paneling of the *salle a manger* door, and he said:

"Be careful of what you say now. Some Red troops have come in."

A raucous voice was demanding soup. The door of the *salle a manger* was flung open, and half a dozen men came into the room. They were of the Red Guard, but only the presence of their officer, and the fact that each man carried a rifle and bayonet evidenced it, for they were clothed variously in ragged civilian attire, having exchanged what military clothing had been issued to them for bread and other necessities.

The officer, however, like so many of his kind, surpassed in gorgeousness those very bourgeois tyrants he had clamored to overthrow. He bristled with epaulettes and

medals. A great sword hung by his side, and a heavy revolver was across his thigh. He was a mighty fellow, evidently of Mongolian extraction, with a thin, drooping mustache overhanging a cruel, twisted mouth.

His men gathered about the unoccupied table, and were soon served with soup. The officer intimated that, for the moment at least, he did not want any, and stood by the empty fireplace studying Xenia with an insolent frankness which he did not attempt to hide.

She looked across at Sanctuary with a frightened question in her eyes. Sanctuary was conscious of a little thrilling ripple in his nerves.

The officer suddenly said: "Foreigners?"

Sanctuary looked up with well simulated and polite surprise.

"French, *monsieur.*" He went on with his soup.

"Ah!"

The officer was silent again. Behind Sanctuary's back the troopers were whispering one to another. Sanctuary wondered how he could conveniently get Xenia out of the room without making her retreat the subject for quarrel. For, though the officer, as yet, had neither said nor done anything which was to any degree offensive, there was in his attitude, in his obvious appraisement of Xenia's beauty, a warning note which it might be well for Sanctuary to heed.

"I know Paris," said the officer. "I was there in the days before the revolution. Had a room in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. Know it?"

"Yes, *monsieur.*" Now Sanctuary did not look at him.

The officer moved from the fireplace and sat astride across the form Xenia occupied, so that he faced toward her.

"You are very silent," he said. "And in one so pretty that is sad. Cannot you say a kind word to me, dooshinka?"

Xenia looked across the table at Sanctuary, and in her eyes was desperate appeal. He met her gaze steadily, and continued to eat his soup. The officer, watching, smiled to himself, and edged a little closer to Xenia. His great bulk, which was enhanced by the monstrous, fur-lined coat he wore, his yellow, dirty face with its string of black mustache, and his gaunt, knotted hands gave him an appearance of gross brutality.

"No word?" he said. "You have nothing to say to me—who have been smitten by your charms. My little one, you leave me desolate."

As yet he had made no movement to touch her, though now his face was so close to her that his heavy chin seemed almost to rest on her shoulder.

Xenia was flutteringly afraid. Sanctuary, watching from beneath down-dropped brows, could see that she was hardly able to hold the spoon with which she made pretense of picking up her soup. Her eyes were asking him to take her away—and yet he knew he dared not.

Any action on his part would precipitate the crisis which, inevitably, was drawing nearer with each moment; and, despite this inevitability, it were best to wait. There might be a chance for a quick wit and swift action to extricate them from the difficulty. Force, he knew, would be useless.

The soldiers whom this ruffian commanded would be quick to prevent or to avenge any violence committed upon their officer. What had happened to the poor devil who struck the officer in the frontier railway station was quite sufficient to teach him that.

It must be something more subtle: something in which violence had no part—something more cunning than blows would be required to bring Xenia and himself safely out of this intolerable situation. And so he sat quietly and drank his soup with an appearance of indifference he was far from feeling, while Xenia sat quivering opposite him, beside the heavy-jowled Mongolian.

His one hope was that Xenia would preserve her presence of mind and understand. If she were brave and cool and wary, if she were patient, if she were willing to endure so much that she might not be forced to endure more, then the slender thread of their chances was not yet broken and might still become a rope by which they could climb to safety.

From time to time the officer shot swift, malicious glances toward Sanctuary. He did not know the supposed relationship Sanctuary bore to Xenia, and in Sanctuary he saw her protector, for that he was not her husband was obvious from a glance at her left hand.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

"YOU travel together?" he asked.

Xenia nodded. She could not speak. At the table behind Sanctuary the soldiers were almost silent, like spectators at a play.

The officer considered her with a show of humble admiration.

"You are very pretty," he said reflectively. "Wonderfully pretty." And added, with another glance at Sanctuary: "Beauty and the beast, eh?"

Some of the soldiers tittered. One of them, a filthy ruffian with a fortnight's grime unwashed from his face and hands, cried to the officer: "Well said, Comrade Captain Kolotsky! You always had an eye for beauty—and for beasts! You should know them both."

His comrades roared at this, as though at a witticism.

Sanctuary swallowed a spoonful of soup. He did not look up. The tension in the atmosphere was increasing.

Xenia now abandoned all pretense of eating, and sat very rigid, her left hand on her knees beneath the table, her right still unconsciously grasping her spoon.

Kolotsky went on. His voice was dropped a little, and there was a smooth, bland note in it which combined hideously a quality of threat and smeary compliment.

"You are so pretty," he said, "that it is a shame you should travel with this brilliant conversationalist who sits opposite you. Does he not amuse you? Hear his jests! See him smile! By God! What a clever fellow he is."

He paused, and his chin crept over her shoulder, so that he spoke almost into her ear, very quietly.

"Now I should make him buy you prettier clothes than these. A man does not wear the fairest flower in his garden in the lapel of his oldest coat."

For Xenia, the room was whirling, as though a giant's hand spun it. She stared at Sanctuary, only to find him ignoring her. Surely he was not going to sit quiet while this ruffian poured into her ears the vilest of insults and implications!

She felt disappointed in him. All the feminine youth within her cried out against his seeming cowardice.

Kolotsky himself was aware of some disappointment and the slightest tinge of uneasiness. He read Sanctuary differently from Xenia, and he did not like this utter aloofness, this complete disregard of his insults and his unspoken threats. It is easy to strike or to kill a man in anger or hot words. It is difficult to quarrel with a man who ignores whatever is said and done.

"Some men," he said, "are so brave that they eat a whole basin of soup single-handed, and let the world pass by as they do so."

Sanctuary took no notice.

Kolotsky drew back from Xenia. It was in his mind to take her into his arms, and he would have done so immediately but that a little cautious voice urged him to make assurance doubly sure. Of his men he was not too certain. In the matter of duty they would stand by him. In matters personal they had their own ideas.

One of the complaints laid before the communist deputy at the previous month's inquiry had been that he was too fond of the girls. He might find himself forced to tackle Sanctuary alone, and though he was very confident of his ability to do this to his own glory, confident, also, that even if Sanctuary defeated him there would be swift retribution: yet, it might be wise, first, to put the stranger to the test.

He looked round. In one of the great fireplaces, overlooked in the pillage, were two big brass dogs with a long iron spit across them. This spit was a bar of considerable strength and thickness, and Kolotsky's eyes, after resting on it for a moment or two, strayed back to Sanctuary and to Sanctuary's basin of soup.

Here was an opportunity, not only to cow this silent escort of the beautiful girl, but also to show her exactly what a fine, strong fellow he himself was.

He lumbered across the form and stood up. Then he walked over to the fireplace and picked up the great bar of iron.

Everybody in the room watched him.

Swinging the bar as carelessly as he possibly could, in order to show how little he thought of its weight, he returned to Xenia's side. In all this he spoke no word, and by no gesture intimated his intentions. It was done with a silent intentness which made it dramatic, like the quiet movements of a mute figure on a darkened stage set for tragedy.

Arrived at the form, the officer laid one end of the bar upon it, first testing the form's strength with his foot. Then he put his boot-sole on the middle point of the bar, and, seizing the projecting end with both hands, pulled upwards. The strain was terrific, but, beneath it, while the veins stood out like blue cord on his temples, the bar bent some degrees out of the straight.

He put his foot to the ground, took a deep breath, and picked up the crooked bar, holding it so that everybody in the room could see it. Then he tossed it with a heavy clangor on to the table-top beside Sanctuary.

When their first little murmur of astonishment died away, the soldiers sat still, staring. This was the moment. Things were now going to happen.

Xenia sat breathless.

Sanctuary stirred his soup lazily and reflectively.

Kolotsky sprawled on the form once more. That Sanctuary had failed to evince any astonishment or wonder at his feat of strength annoyed him, and in his eyes was a little flickering danger light. He was now thinking almost as much of humiliating this stolid figure at the table as he was of kissing the pretty girl at his side.

He reached across the table, a great arm and filthy hand outstretched.

"All for one and one for all, comrade," he said. "I would share your soup in the name of equality."

So speaking, he plunged his hand into Sanctuary's basin, and, picking out one of the bobbing lumps of meat, thrust it into his grinning mouth.

Sanctuary looked up, and, for the first time, their eyes met across the table-top. Kolotsky, chewing bestially at the meat, was still grinning. Sanctuary was cold, and there was that in his face which the other could not read.

Xenia was leaning forward a little. The filthy nature of the insult disturbed her less than its dramatic possibilities. She could conceive no way in which Sanctuary might extricate himself from the position with honor, unless he resorted to blows.

Sanctuary picked up the iron bar.

The grin slipped from Kolotsky's face and his hand dropped instinctively to the gun butt at his thigh, while his troopers shuffled their feet and got ready to jump. But Sanctuary made no attempt to use the bar as a weapon.

Instead, he placed it across the table edge, and, using his hands alone, one at either end of it, he straightened it as nearly as it could be straightened without the use of fire and hammer and anvil.

"I think," he said suavely, "that this bar is an ornament hardly suitable for a dining table. I will put it back where it belongs." Kolotsky was watching him with wide, startled eyes.

"Meanwhile," Sanctuary went on, pushing the soup basin across the table, "I will certainly share my soup with you. I see that I have consumed just half of it. Surely, therefore, the rest is yours."

He handed the spoon to the officer with a polite bow.

For an appreciable space all life seemed to hang inert in the room. Xenia sat as though carved from stone, watching Sanctuary. The soldiers stared stupidly. Kolotsky stayed, still half-sprawled across the table, looking into Sanctuary's face. And across the dripping spoon Sanctuary's eyes met his gaze with saturnine irony.

Kolotsky took the spoon. Something made him do it, though he knew not what it was. Then he flung it with an oath to the floor.

Sanctuary was walking to the fireplace with the bar.

One of the soldiers laughed. It was the little necessary dip to the pan of safety in this balance of peril. His comrades joined in the laughter. It became a roar of merriment. Some coarse jokes were flung at Kolotsky, and even while he spluttered blasphemous replies to them, Sanctuary said to Xenia: "I suggest that you go to your room."

She accompanied him without a word, and nobody attempted to bar their exit.

As they reached the stairhead they heard a rattle of hoofs from the darkness beyond the hotel entrance, and, following on the metallic rattle and scrape that told of a horse being pulled to a standstill, a man ran in through the doorway.

Sanctuary and Xenia walked on.

CHAPTER IX

SENTENCE OF DEATH

THEY walked along the corridor in silence. Sanctuary was uneasy and wishful that they had never entered the hotel, for though Kolotsky was checked for the moment, the whole night was before them, and God alone knew what might happen before morning.

They reached their rooms, and Sanctuary turned toward his. Xenia put out her hand and laid it on his arm.

"I want to say something before you go," she said. Her voice was strange and low, thrilling.

She looked at him for a moment, silently, and her eyes were kind.

"I wanted to tell you how splendid you were just now." She was very close, and her hand still rested on his arm. "It is right I should tell you, because I wronged you in my thoughts. I imagined you were afraid, forgetting how you brought me here, how you watched over me. Then—afterward—I understood. There was a greater courage in your restraint than in any attack you could have made on him."

She was very close and, with her nearness, he found himself trembling, his lips dry. He heard her talking as from a great distance, and in a voice he hardly seemed to recognize.

He tried to answer her easily, but the effort was futile, and he stammered and hesitated.

"It was nothing. I—it just happened—the opportunity which anybody would have taken."

"Anybody?" she asked, with a little smile.

"I think so." Words were now coming to him more easily. "There is no man living who cannot rise to the occasion if the matter at stake is sufficiently big."

She knew it was foolish of her, she knew she had best leave well alone. Yet, her hand was on his arm. She was drawn strangely toward him—and she was a woman. She could not resist the little searching for compliment.

"You are good to rate your duty to my father so highly," she said.

He was eager now, and all traces of hesitation were gone from him.

"I had forgotten my duty to your father," he said in a low voice.

She had meant to urge him to some such confession, so that there should be for her a little pleasurable pride in it. But now the confession was made—not so much by his words as with his eyes—she was not pleased, but inexplicably hurt.

She suddenly saw him pitiful and herself cruel, and, doing so, wished to be kind.

"It is good of you to say that," she said, smiling.

"Not so good as that you should appreciate it," he answered.

She was drifting helplessly on the current of her own releasing. Incredibly, she realized that the situation was eluding her control. An impulse urged her to run to her room, but it was overpowered by a desire to stay, a desire to hear him talk, to watch his face and his eyes.

She was supremely beautiful, he thought, not only in face and form, but also in spirit and mind, and he could only stand and watch, and wonder. Her own gaze wavered, so that she looked away. They stayed still and quiet for what seemed to both of them an immeasurable time, although actually it was but a second.

Then she said: "I will go to my room. Good night."

His hand closed over hers. "Good night."

She went to her room, and when she reached it she turned. He was still standing, watching her, and she smiled. But her eyes were misted with tears, and when she reached the darkness of her room her cheeks were wet with them.

Sanctuary had not closed his door when he heard heavy feet on the great bare stairs which led up to the balustraded gallery, and, turning back to look, he saw Kolotsky with his men advancing in his direction. Kolotsky carried a folded, official-looking paper in his hand.

He saw Sanctuary, and cried, "Wait!" Sanctuary stepped back into the corridor, and, with that, Xenia came from her room to his side.

Kolotsky halted when he was within a few feet of them, and, pointing to Sanctuary, said: "Take him!" His voice was charged with triumph, and his little dark eyes were leapingly alight.

Two soldiers stepped forward and ranged themselves on either side of Sanctuary.

Xenia spoke before Sanctuary could move.

"What is the meaning of this?" She spoke in Russian, fluent and swift, though she was supposed to be French.

Kolotsky shot a sidelong glance at her. "I have here an order for the arrest of this man. You may inspect it if you wish, but it is hardly worth while. A courier has just brought it, and waits below for notification that the arrest has been affected."

"Who orders the arrest?" asked Xenia.

"The Che Ka."

Xenia fell back. That curt phrase was enough. The hand of the most dreaded secret police the world has ever known had stretched out toward Sanctuary and taken him. She turned to him, her hands outflung.

"But they can't arrest you—they can't! It is monstrous! You must not go! I will go with you! We shall tell them—" She was almost distraught.

Sanctuary smiled. With the return of Kolotsky he had become once more his easy, confident self, with just that hint of formidable threat about him which frightened had Xenia on the ship.

"They can take me," he said. "And they will. I am afraid we shall have to bow to the inevitable. And, of course, you cannot come with me. I would suggest that you seek out some English or American people to-morrow—there was that American journalist on the train, for instance—and ask them to assist you."

Kolotsky interrupted. "The lady has no need to look so far afield for protection," he said. "I myself will afford her that."

A light footstep behind him caused him to wheel round. During this talk a man had walked almost silently down the corridor and joined them. He was a slight man with evidences of a certain feline, graceful strength about him. He was dressed in a commonplace lounge suit, and from beneath the brim of his felt hat overlong black hair strayed. His face was pale and accentuated the hollow darkness of his eyes.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Kolotsky.

The stranger looked round at them all, his gaze resting last on Xenia with a brooding contemplation which was chilling.

He did not answer the question directly.

"I believe," he said, "that you were discussing the fate of this woman, or, if the word fate is too strong, her next movements. I shall relieve you of all responsibility in that direction."

Kolotsky spluttered. He had authority. He waved the document which bore the seal of the Che Ka. By God, he was not going to listen to a lot of insolence from strangers.

The dark man heard it all unmoved. "So you hold the Che Ka's mandate?" he said softly.

"Yes. And you may cross it if you dare."

"Does it apply to this woman?"

Kolotsky hesitated, stammered, and then burst into wilder rage.

"It gives me power!" he declared. "And I shall exercise as an officer of the Soviet Army."

"So!" The dark eyes searched his face. "Would you die in the exercise of your

authority, comrade?" It was very quiet and very even, but it was as though a bell had struck in heavy silence.

Kolotsky's rage drooped and died. He swallowed hard. That was the devil of it. In Russia one never knew who the next man might be. He tried to bluster once more.

"What the hell do you mean?"

The dark man's lips were betraying the least semblance of a smile.

"You have just arrested that man at the order of the Che Ka. I come from the one who instructed the Che Ka to effect that arrest!"

"Instructed the Che Ka—" Kolotsky was gasping.

"Further," continued the dark man, "I have instructions to see that that woman reaches her destination. She travels with me, on the next train south from Moscow to the Caucasus."

Kolotsky collected himself. These were fine words, and for a little while they had impressed him. Yet—the Che Ka was above everything.

"Your authority," he snapped.

The man produced something from his pocket, and with its production a perfume filled the air, sweet and sickening. It was a woman's silk handkerchief—scarlet!

Xenia uttered a cry. The soldiers huddled instinctively closer together, and one or two of them genuflected involuntarily. Kolotsky's mouth gaped. He did not read the paper the dark man thrust beneath his nose. He was staring at the dainty morsel of lace-edged silk, with its perfume and its horror.

"I may take her?" asked the dark man, and returned the handkerchief and the paper to his pocket. "You are satisfied that I am an agent of the scented death?"

Kolotsky nodded. His swarthy face was yellow, and there was perspiration on it in great, greasy beads.

"Gospodi! Take her!" He looked round at Xenia and Sanctuary, and to Sanctuary he snarled: "You have the better path, comrade—damn you! For she travels with the scented death! You will only die in the dark!"

Xenia moaned and moved forward so that again she stood before Sanctuary; only now she faced him.

She held something out to him, and he took it. It was a little brooch of gold.

"For me—comrade," she said. "To keep for me."

He could not answer her, but only look.

The dark man took her away down the corridor and so to the hall.

The officer rapped a command, and Sanctuary moved forward under escort.

TO BE CONTINUED

She shut the door quickly to cut off the sound of scuffling feet

THE PIPER'S NAME

By Joseph Harrington

SHE KNEW HER PROFESSION IN CROOKDOM AS INTIMATELY AS HE KNEW SOCIETY—AND SHE KNEW HOW TO USE BOTH

SLUMPED deep in the massive leather armchair in his comfortably furnished apartment, Jimmy was dreaming—dreaming of a golden-haired girl with wide blue eyes. It was no unusual occupation for Jimmy. Since his last encounter with Pat the Piper, sometimes known as Patricia Clifford, the cleverest girl jewel thief outside of Auburn Prison, he had spent much of his time thus. Probably at this very moment dozens of detectives were also dreaming of the Piper. But their dreams and Jimmy's took far different courses.

The tinkling of the telephone bell broke off Jimmy's reverie. Slowly and lazily he pulled himself upright, walked to the writing desk on which the instrument reposed, and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hello," he called.

A girl's voice came over the wire.

"Is this Mr. James Van Beuren?"

"Yes," he said, suddenly wide awake. He was scarcely able to believe his ears, and he waited until the voice confirmed the thought that had flashed to his brain.

"This is Pat—er—Patricia Clifford." There was relief in her voice, but it was overshadowed by a troubled note.

"What is it—Pat?" Jimmy queried, detecting the uneasy inflection in her tone.

"Are you busy?" Pat evaded the question.

"No; not doing a thing."

"Do you know where Francois's Place is on Forty-Fourth Street?"

"Yes."

"Will you meet me there in a half hour? It's very important."

"Certainly," said Jimmy, and heard a click on the other end of the wire.

Jimmy's mind was in a turmoil as he dove hastily into his topcoat. The sudden

call, at nine o'clock in the evening, bewildered him. He had never expected to see or hear from Pat again. And he wondered, as young men do, how she knew he was far more than willing to be of service to her.

It was only twenty minutes after receiving the telephone call that Jimmy entered Francois's little *table d'hôte* establishment. But Pat was there before him, sitting in a secluded corner with her face half hidden in the shadows. It was past the dining hour, and only a few, solitary patrons were in the place, none near Pat.

Pat smiled faintly as Jimmy hung his coat on the rack and dropped into the other chair at her little table. He dismissed the waiter with an order for coffee.

"You probably wondered why I should call on you for help," she began, after a steaming pot of coffee had been placed before them.

"Never thought of it," Jimmy lied, pouring coffee into her cup, then into his own.

Pat toyed nervously with the handle of her cup.

"As a matter of fact, Jimmy, you're the only one I knew would help me."

Jimmy's heart gained ten strokes per minute, and he felt curiously exhilarated. There was no answer to her statement, and he remained silent, waiting for her to continue.

"Have you read the evening papers?" she asked.

Jimmy shook his head negatively.

From the pocket of her blue sport coat, hanging from the wall beside her, Pat took a copy of the latest edition. Silently she passed it to him.

Jimmy's eyes widened, and he felt the color leave his face as he read:

WEALTHY GEM CONNOISSEUR SLAIN BY ROBBER

$125,000 IN GEMS STOLEN

"Pat the Piper," Girl-thief, Sought As Killer

Ronald W Chalson, noted jewel expert, was found shot dead in the library of his Park Avenue home this morning. The safe, located in the same room, had been opened and looted of gems valued at one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.

Police are convinced the killer was "Pat the Piper," notorious jewel thief, who already has a score of robberies to her credit. The elevator operator in the building, which was owned by Mr. Chalson, recalled that an hour before the body was found he had taken a strikingly attractive girl to the apartment of the connoisseur.

The description of the girl, detectives said, tallies exactly with that of Pat the Piper. She had, according to the hallboy, blond hair and blue eyes.

Mr. Chalson evidently admitted the girl to his apartment, there being no servants in at the time. It is thought probable that the girl herself posed as a servant, thus preventing Mr. Chalson from becoming suspicious. Once inside the apartment, the police theory goes, the girl probably drew a revolver and ordered Mr. Chalson to open the safe.

There were marks of a terrific struggle, showing that Mr. Chalson was shot when he refused to obey the bidding of the intruder and grappled with her—

Jimmy, pale and strangely disturbed, raised questioning eyes to Pat.

"I didn't do it," she said simply, and Jimmy believed her and sighed relief. She had lied to him before, he knew, but this time, somehow, he was certain she was telling the truth.

"I'm glad," he said, and shuddered as he thought of the ghastly suspicion that had entered his mind.

Conversation paused for a moment. Then Pat leaned toward him and spoke earnestly.

"Jimmy, you're probably the only one who believes I am innocent."

Knowing the truth of this, Jimmy made no comment.

"Up to now," Pat continued in a calm, almost reminiscent tone, "police, and for that matter, the public, too, looked upon me rather as a romantic figure. But this puts me in a different light—the light of a murderer!"

Jimmy nodded sympathetically.

"We've got to clear you somehow, Pat," he said with sincerity.

The girl smiled, and relief was written on her features.

"That's why I called on you, Jimmy."

"Do you mean," Jimmy was puzzled, "that you think we can clear your name?"

"Perhaps."

"How?"

"By effecting the capture of the real slayer."

Jimmy gaped at her, left breathless by the matter-of-fact tone in which she voiced the problem.

"But—" he stuttered—"how can we do that, when nobody has even a clew to the identity of this girl?"

"I have more than a clew," Pat informed him calmly. "I know who did it."

Jimmy blinked. It was moving too fast for him.

"How do you know?" he challenged.

Pat leaned over and whispered the answer in tones that could be heard no farther than Jimmy's ears.

"Because, Jimmy, there are only five jewel thieves in New York of the caliber that would attempt a big job like robbing Chalson."

Jimmy began to see light. Pat, he realized, knew the New York underworld as he knew New York society. There were perhaps a half dozen real leaders in society, and, being in that world, he knew them all. Pat, in the underworld, knew the leaders there in the same fashion.

"I am one of them," Pat continued, "which leaves only four possibilities. As soon as I read this—" she indicated the evening paper—"I made inquiries concerning the other four."

She paused a moment, evidently preoccupied, then continued: "Frank the Flash, I found, was picked up three days ago by headquarters men on suspicion of an out-of-town robbery. He's still at headquarters, which leaves him out.

"Bob Delano has been dead drunk for the past week—one of his periodic debauches. He usually stays drunk for a month when he starts. And the bartender in his favorite speakeasy tells me—and he's an old friend of mine—that Bob hasn't been out of his sight for that whole week. That eliminates Bob Delano.

"There are only two left—Roy D'Auria and Tony Villetto. Both of them have been missing from their usual haunts for a couple of weeks, which means they were busy during that time planning a big haul."

"But," objected Jim, "there was a girl mixed up in this killing, and all those possibilities you mentioned were men. How do you account for her?"

Pat smiled.

"I didn't think so much of that—at first I was sure the girl existed only in the imagination of a reporter—until I narrowed it down to D'Auria and Villetto."

"Yes?" prompted Jim when she paused, and he wondered what her next deduction would be.

"D'Auria, I recalled, had once been an actor. He is a small, slender, rather effeminate man, undeniably attractive in an insipid way. When I remembered that, I made further inquiries, mostly about his work on the stage, and—

"I found he had been a female impersonator!"

Jimmy whistled softly.

"That," he exclaimed, "explains the elevator operator's story of the girl!"

"Of course," Pat said simply. "And it also means that D'Auria is our man!"

Jimmy leaned back in his chair, gulped a half cup of coffee, which had grown cold, and pondered.

"Well," he said presently. "We know who the slayer is then. But, how in the world will we locate him and convince the police that he is the killer."

"I have already located him."

"What!"

Pat nodded calmly.

"He is less than half a block from here!"

"But—but—" Jimmy was breathless. "Hadn't we better telephone headquarters and tip off the police to where he is hiding?"

"And have a couple of heavy-footed uniformed men blunder up the stairs, knock on his door and demand that it be opened in the name of the law? That would be D'Auria's clew to leave these parts without dallying. He's as slippery as an eel, and he'd get out a window, or escape some other way."

"Well, what will we do?"

"We'll have to go there ourselves." Pat's mein was as nonchalant as though she were discussing a new gown. "That's why I wanted you with me—I'm no good at strong-arm work."

"Do you mean that you expect to go there with me and capture this man ourselves?"

Pat's eyes clouded suddenly, causing Jimmy to hastily add; "But I'm right with you, if you're game."

Pat's eyes cleared. She smiled, and her hand slid across the table and pressed Jimmy's.

"I knew you wouldn't quit me, Jimmy. Let's go."

She rose, Jimmy following suit. He helped her into the blue coat, paid the check and followed her to the street.

"He lives on the other side of Sixth Avenue," she told him, and led the way.

A possibility occurred to Pat, and she stopped suddenly. "Have you a gun?" she asked.

"No." Jimmy shook his head.

"Good. There must be no noise. I have one, but I don't intend to use it. He'll fight, I suppose. But I think you can take care of him"

She glanced at his broad, husky shoulders with approval.

"Let me do the talking," she continued. "I have a plan that I think will get us inside his apartment."

A few minutes later the two stopped in front of an old brownstone house, once a fashionable residence, which had been remodeled into a furnished apartment house.

Jimmy, tingling with excitement, followed Pat up the steps. The door was open, and they walked into a gloomy hallway. Thick carpet muffled their footsteps as they climbed to the second floor. Pat evidently knew the ground well. Without any indication of doubt she chose one of the four doors and tapped.

There was no response. Pat knocked again, harder. They heard a scuffling noise inside the apartment. The old floor creaked under a man's weight. A low voice came to them through the door:

"Who do you want?"

"Open the door, D'Auria," Pat commanded coolly.

"Who are you?" The voice was startled.

"This is Pat the—you know."

"What do you want?" The note of suspicion deepened.

"I think I can arrange to take some of that—er—merchandise you got this morning off your hands. Get you a good price, too."

"Oh!" The voice suddenly became cordial. "Wait a minute."

A key was inserted in the lock. But before it was turned the unseen man asked another question: "Are you alone?"

"Yes," Pat said.

Jimmy flattened himself against the wall at a warning gesture from Pat. It was a wise move, for the man inside first opened the door only a crack and peered out. He saw only Pat, and threw the door wide open.

"Howdy, Pat," he said jovially. "Come inside."

The smile on his face vanished suddenly when Jimmy's bulk loomed in the doorway. D'Auria attempted to slam the door, but Jimmy was already across the threshhold.

The men grappled. Not a sound came from D'Auria. He knew it would be insanity to call for police. So he fought fiercely and silently.

Pat had entered on Jimmy's heels. She shut the door quickly to prevent the sound of scuffling feet and the strained breathing of the fighters from reaching the ears of other tenants in the building.

D'Auria was slender, rather affected in his casual movements. But beneath his outward appearance of almost womanly frailty he had muscles of steel, and Jimmy quickly discovered that. Back and forth, across the floor of the living room, they struggled, each seeking to throw the other.

Once D'Auria loosened his grip on his opponent's body and viciously raised his thumbs toward Jimmy's eyes. Jimmy read his intent and turned his head quickly to avoid the blinding fingers.

"Gouging is against the rules," Jimmy panted. "But, so long as you want to fight that way—"

He raised his knee suddenly, knocking the breath from D'Auria's body. Before the crook recovered his poise, Jimmy tripped him, sending him tumbling to the floor, and then knelt on his shoulders.

Both men were breathing raspingly, even after D'Auria's muscles had relaxed and he lay supine in tacit surrender.

Meantime, Pat had not been idle. She had been rummaging about the apartment, and now she handed Jimmy a length of strong slender cord. Jimmy nodded. Warily watching D'Auria, he turned him over on his face, drew his hands together and bound them securely. He treated D'Auria's feet in the same manner.

While this was going on D'Auria remained silent. Only after he was again on his back and faced his captors did he speak.

"Whaddeya want?" he snarled, with an attempt at bravado.

"The Chalson jewels," Pat said simply.

"I ain't got 'em."

Pat gazed at him reflectively. Then she glanced about the room, apparently seeking the hiding place of the gems.

"Wait a minute," she told Jimmy, "while I look in the bedroom."

She disappeared into the adjoining room. Jimmy heard the rustling of cloth, and divined that Pat was pulling the covers from the bed. His conjecture was correct, and a minute later Pat reappeared, holding in her hand a small black leather case. It was open, and Jimmy saw jewels sparkling within.

Over Pat's arms were hung several silken garments—a girl's cloak and hat and a blond wig.

"This," she said, indicating the garments and wig, "proves we were correct about the female impersonation."

Jimmy nodded.

"Let's get out and turn that stuff over to the police," he suggested.

Pat shook her head.

"That wouldn't do a bit of good. They'd still think I did the job. No—we'll have to get the police here to find D'Auria and the stolen stuff."

"The cops!" whined the man on the floor. "Have a heart, Pat. You wouldn't squeal on a bloke, would you?"

Pat looked at him coldly.

"I have no sympathy for murderers."

She walked to the telephone on a small table, lifted the receiver and called, "Spring 3-1-0-0, please."

"Aw, listen—we can split—" The slayer was near tears. Pat silenced him with a gesture of finality.

"Hello, headquarters? Detective bureau, please. Hello, Lieutenant Noonan. This is Pat the Piper. No—no, I'm not joking. I just want to let you know that you'll learn considerable about the Chalson murder if you send a couple of men to Number 8-1-0 West Forty-Fourth Street, apartment 2 C."

She hung up, ignoring the flood of questions that came over the wire. Unhurriedly she picked up her bag, motioned Jimmy to follow, and walked out, heedless of the pleadings of the man on the floor.

"He's a killer, a bad one," she told Jimmy. "Otherwise I wouldn't do this."

Again on the street, Jimmy started to follow a natural impulse to hurry Pat from the spot. She laid a hand on his arm.

"No hurry, Jimmy," she said.

"But, those policemen will be here in a few minutes, won't they?"

"About four minutes," Pat informed him calmly. "Noonan will relay my message to the West Forty-Seventh Street station, and the detectives will only be a few minutes on the way from there."

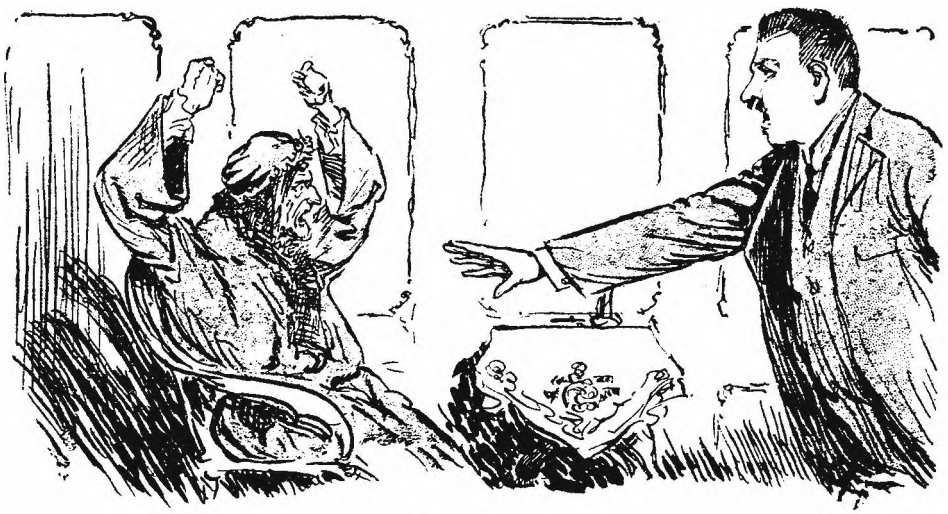
"Then hadn't you better get out of the neighborhood?" Jimmy was nervous.

"Not at all. They don't know me by sight."

They stopped on the corner, twenty yards from the house wherein D'Auria was undoubtedly struggling—vainly—to release himself.

A big touring car, with a "P. D." sign, rushed by them and came to a halt, with a screeching of brakes, in front of the brownstone house. Three plainclothes men jumped out and dashed up the steps. They were too intent on reaching apartment 2 C to notice the immaculately clad girl and youth, standing on the corner, chatting easily with each other.

"The Piper's Partner" will appear next week



The almost maniacal old woman shrieked and stormed—

A STUDY IN HATE

By Louise Rice

THE SCENES, THE CHARACTERS, AND THE AVARICE MADE FAMOUS THROUGH BALZAC'S NOVELS, COME TO LIFE IN THIS APPALLING TRAGEDY

A Story of Fact

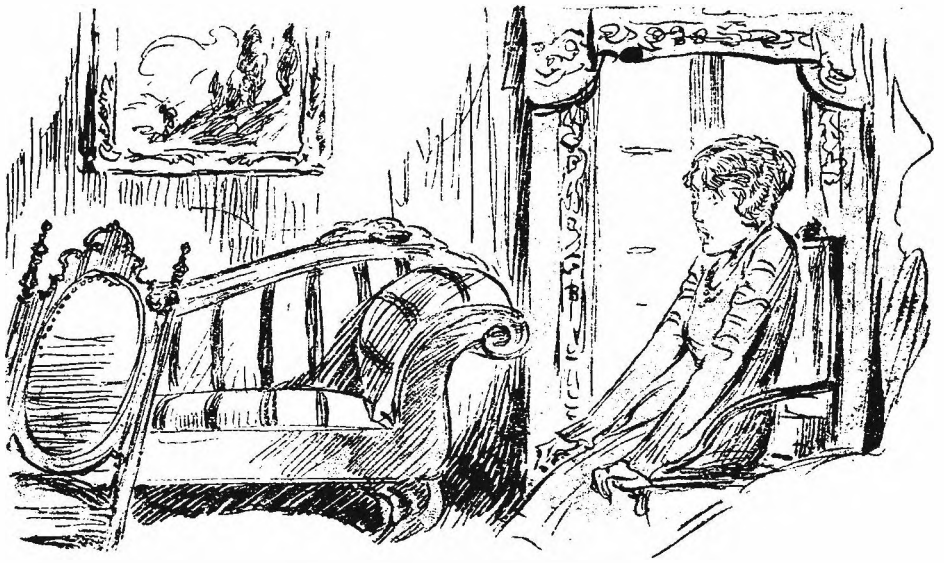
CAREFUL, painstaking painting of the background of the story; detail piled on detail but all focused on some pivotal point of the story; the chief character, sinister and unreal, yet slowly coming to life under what seems like the dull movement of the tale: the constant reiteration of sums of money, the gradual sinking into an atmosphere macabre and yet sordid—the reader of Balzac will easily recognize this formula.

That the master took many such a tale direct from his own surroundings has never been doubted, for the French, with all their many virtues, have an avarice which is extraordinary, minute, ingrained, and tinged with both the most selfish of human reactions and the most peculiar elements of fanaticism.

France has just closed the last chapter of such a story, an actual one, played in the glare of publicity of her very public police courts. The case of Mme. Guillaume Lefebvre, whose sentence of death by the guillotine has been commuted to life imprisonment, needs the pen of Balzac to do it justice. Let us try what we can do, however.

Guillaume Lafebvre, the daughter of a house of modest fortune, married what we would call "a promising young business man" when she was a trifle over the usual age of the French girl's probable marriage time. She was the daughter of a house in which thrift was the high passion.

A good seamstress, she bought "rem-



—every time she visited the home of her son and daughter-in-law

nants" of cloth and made all her own clothes. A good if Spartan cook, she could feed a household on what would not sustain two ordinary persons with bird appetites. At least, that is the reputation that she had when she was younger.

Her husband gave himself passionately to business, not in the restless and eager way that the American or Englishman does, but with the slow, plodding accumulation of sou upon sou, which is a total impossibility to the average Saxon, if he has any business acumen at all.

It is even not so common in France of to-day. We shall see that the next generation, still imbued with this abnormal thrift, still had moments when that was not the all pervading influence.

Madame and *Monsieur* had one child. They like a good many thrifty French families, believed in the limiting of the children born to a family. They often calculated, over the old wooden cradle which had been in the family for generations, that with the greatest care and frugality, their boy might have quite a respectable fortune by the time that he was twenty or so.

They looked on his baby features, saw that he was sound of wind and limb, and calculated that with the shortage, which is always prevalent in France, of eligible young men, they might expect that marriage would merely bring greater prosperity to their family coffers.

There was never a superfluous potato on the table of the Lefebvre's, there was never heat in the house until the last moment when health might be endangered by its absence; there was never anything worn by *madame* which had cost even as much as the gay petticoats of the midinettes.

The boy, André, was not allowed to waste time in play. He was obliged to work at some useful task when he was not studying his lessons for the very hard school to which he was sent. He learned that it was fatal to cross his mother's will.

Not that she would ever be violent with him. A pretty woman, with softly sunken eyes, under delicate brows, a rosebud mouth, and very fine, lank, dark hair, she got her way in her own house, by methods more exacting than threats, tears or bad temper. She merely stated what it was that she wanted done and then refused to act as if there could be the slightest possibility that any one should question that attitude.

To objections, to youthful tears and impatience, she opposed a soft, unsmiling but not very formidable face in which there was seldom a change of expression and her slow, quiet, assured assertion that she *could* not be disobeyed.

This hypnotic attitude bore down heavily on her son, and all the heavier in that he saw his father borne down by it, too.

Slowly, as the boy grew up, the Lefebvre money grew, too. The home continued to be one in which the food was of the plainest, in which comforts were only what were grimly necessary and in which the goddess of beauty was worshiped not at all.

White tablecloths were taboo. The cheap—and ugly—red tablecloth, which had the merit of not showing dirt, was used, the year round, on a table where the finest damask would not have been beyond the means of the household. Sweets, coffee, special dinners for festivals, birthday cakes, and parties—none of these things were part of the life of little André Lefebvre.

Monsieur Suffers in Health

He never had a toy in his life. He never went on a visit. Other boys might have even the pocket money of thrifty France, but not little André, whose hands were often blue with cold in the winter because they were not covered with gloves, and whose body was always frail because he was scantily fed as he was growing up and had so little of the usual boyish games and sports.

Nevertheless, in the silent, cold, and niggardly house, there was not actual quarreling. A sort of frozen politeness lay over all. *Madame,* emphatically the head, not only of the house, but of the estate and the fortunes of the family, was as considerate to her husband and her young son as she was to herself.

To be sure, that was not a great deal. The rare woman called in for a day's work, was struck by the stern, unsmiling concentration of the lady of the château on one subject and one alone: the saving of even the fraction of a sou, to say nothing of larger sums of money.

This unrelenting attention to business brought the reward that such an attitude usually does, no matter what the object. The modest fortune swelled and swelled, and the more it did, the more the Lefebvres pinched and pinched.

Yet, much as it interfered with all this, the mother gave up her son willing to France when France needed him. André Lefebvre is a man accounted brave by all his comrades in the Great War. He has the awards of that bravery. His record is one of which any man might be proud.

It would seem worth while to pause and wonder what his reactions were when first he got away from home, out in a world where money, even among the poor, did not make the bitter appeal that it had in his home. Anyway, he found physical courage.

A quiet and unassuming young man, who won approval from his officers by his obedience to discipline, which was what we might expect of him, but also, what we need not have expected, by his cool courage under fire.

Possibly nothing seemed very terrible to him after the few intense and fierce scenes which he had been through with his mother, on the rare occasions when he overstepped some small regulation of his home.

Anyway, the war was over finally, and the young man went right back home. He was not trained for business. By that time there was enough to do in managing the estate. Besides, *monsieur,* soon cowed and beaten into a pale copy of his wife, had begun to break in health.

A Spark of Manhood

It was necessary to retire him from business. His associates still draw in outraged if respectful breaths when they remember how *madame* contrived to pinch every suspicion of profit out of them and out of the general transaction of retiring *monsieur* from business.

By the time that matters were arranged, and Lefebvre merely a holder down of a chimney corner in his home, *madame* had begun to set her heart on a marriage for her André which should boost the family fortunes away up. The family fortunes which, from the modest beginning, now stretched out to the half a million mark and ever mounted, lying fallow on itself, undrained by even the ordinary expenditures of an ordinarily prosperous working man's household.

André, diligent, really affectionate, his soul and spirit infinitely hurt by the ghastly atmosphere in which he had been reared,

still had a good spark of manhood. That spark allowed him to fall in love with one of the prettiest, sweetest, and most intelligent girls in the circles which were open to him.

What was more, she was a rich girl. In the usual fashion of her country, no one thought it an evil thing that her lover, before agreeing to marry her, should demand that she pool all her financial interests with his—or, rather, according to the archaic marriage laws of France, that he take possession of hers.

Six Weeks of Travel

This she was willing to do, for she was really in love with the quiet, unassertive, dark-eyed man, who, to her, seems to have revealed a delightful aspect of character which was not clear otherwise. The " dot " which she brought him from her good-natured, and generous family was two hundred and fifty thousand francs.

This at once started the beginning of something which had just now seen the end. *Madame,* André's mother, scurried to the notary, to the lawyers, to the parents of the girl, and insisted that this would not do at all.

André would have more—a great deal more—when his parents died. It was inexcusable that the bride should at least not match the possessions of the groom: indeed, for such a pearl as André, the dot ought to be very, very much larger than his own.

The girl's name was Antoinette Mulle, and her family were sensible, well balanced people, who lived according to their means and adored their daughter. They and she were both amazed at the bitter persistency with which the groom's mother demanded another hundred thousand francs.

They drew back from the marriage settlement, warning the pretty and much sought after girl that they did not like the look of things at all, and that, in fine, they wished that she would stay home for awhile yet.

Truth to tell, Antoinette herself was considerably astonished. Even in France it is growing to be the custom that the groom tries to be gracefully nonchalant about this matter of the money which the bride usually brings him; he tries, as it were, to shove this matter into the background and ignore that it is there, but this was not the way of Mme. Lefebvre.

To her mind there was nothing whatever unpleasant about the bargaining except that it was not going the way that she wanted it to. So after awhile Antoinette's family gave her some more money and with a dot of three hundred and thirty thousand francs the old woman was bound to be content.

However, her torments had just begun. She was aghast to hear that the young couple intended to be absent on a honeymoon for six weeks. Six weeks! On a regular tour, too, taken through a travel agency.

She announced, in her usual final way, that nothing of the kind would happen; but André, for once in his life, was just as firm as his mother. He represented to her that for a person in their station in life, and for a girl who had been as popular as Antoinette, it would be socially impossible to go without the honeymoon.

Mme. Lefebvre, seeing that she could do nothing to stop this by talking, went to the travel bureau and cut down the trip to two weeks, and exchanged the tickets for second class ones!

They Set Up Housekeeping

With this slight exchange in amenities the wedding got off, at last, and the happy couple departed with what grace they could muster on their trip in second class associations. Many a sensible and thrifty couple of the working classes were doing the same thing.

It is well to do a thing in style once, eh? But for André Lefebvre and Antoinette Mulle, belonging to really rich families, it was absurd. Both of the young people writhed under the fact that all their friends were laughing behind their backs at this mamma-conducted honeymoon.

After the two weeks, though, they just paid their way as they went and it is to be suspected that that way was not second class. The third week brought an exasperated reproof from Mme. Lefebvre. What did André think that he was doing, wasting time and money like that?

Why didn't he bring " that extravagant girl " home, where she belonged? Did he think that the family was made of money? Her answer was a picture postcard which infuriated her to such a degree that the surface smoothness which she had always maintained began to wear away, and the spitting, vindictive hag began to make her appearance who is now so famous a figure in the minds and annals of her country.

The young people eventually got home and set up their very modest housekeeping, how modest, we can estimate, when we know that the trial which grew out of this story, as it was lived, brought to light the fact that four thousand dollars a year or slighly under, was the figure which the young Lefebvres were spending on their ménage.

Troubles Begin to Press

Madame had sent the young couple what she assured them would be plenty of good " antique " furniture with which to arrange their home, but the young bride, when it arrived, had the strength of will to have the old junk put up in the attic. There was quite a bit of money still belonging to Antoinette which was not tied up in her marriage settlements, and some of this she invested in nice but by no means unusual modern furniture.

Belonging to a family where the little niceties of life had been cherished, she had clean white linen for her dining table, good sheets for her beds, pretty towels, and other little refinements in her home. There were even times when she bought flowers—think of it!

Mme. Lefebvre watched all this, in her daily visits to her son's house, with an anguish which soon turned her from a rather dim replica of the girl who had married the serious young business man, to a nervous, almost maniacal old woman, who shrieked or futilely twittered every time that she entered her son's house.

The father of André, fully concurring in his wife's ideas, was not really a worry to the young people, except that he was no aid to them, but the old woman was, in herself, all the furies of ancient tradition. There was not an hour when they could count on being alone, not a moment when their most innocent pleasures might not be broken in on by a person who thought nothing of actually snatching the food from their table and putting it away, while she scolded about their appetites.

Servants were impossible to keep, friends who might happen to be calling for a bit of refreshment in the afternoon were insulted. The life of this pleasant, rather ordinary, but quite harmless and very modest young couple who were really in love with each other and who would have found life so agreeable, sane and normal, was made such a veritable hell that the wonder is that the reverse of the impending tragedy did not take place.

However, neither the devoted and still cowed son nor the rather spirited though sweet tempered and pliable daughter-in-law did anything very drastic. The Mulle family began to be pretty bitter and to sweep their daughter off for good times among their own generous clan; and André began to say, wretchedly, to his father, that he didn't know how he was going to stand it. But not until the early fall of 1925 did their troubles really begin to press on them.

One Who Did Not Thrill!

Young Mme. Lefebvre, about that time, saw that it would be impossible to conceal from the raging old woman, who now went daily to harass her, that there would be an heir after due time. She and her husband had discussed this matter again and again, for well they knew how the news would be taken, although they had no idea of the real effect that it was to have.

They just thought that there would be added scenes over the care that the expectant mother would soon have to have, and they were determined that she must have that care, as well as a measure of peace and comfort. In anticipation of the fact that she would need open air, André had bought a modest car, an act which had brought down on him vials of wrath, and had all but brought his mother to the verge of apoplexy.

Nevertheless, he kept the car. And despite protests, he bought his wife prettier

things and more of them, and gave her flowers in greater profusion, and generally, as his mother assured him, was taking the family fortunes "straight to ruin."

Well, André, spurred by everything that could spur a man, at last took courage and told his mother that she was to be a grandmother. If there is one thing which will touch the average French woman, it is an appeal to her motherhood and her pride in descendants. This is a very strong trait, indeed, of the French nature, and few there are who do not thrill to it.

Mme. Lefebvre was one of the few.

Has the "Miracle" Come?

However, she took the news far more quietly than she usually took anything which displeased her, and this threw her son off his guard. He was all the more convinced that his child would bring peace to all concerned when his mother came almost silently to sit in the same room, one day, and looked long and intently at his pretty young wife.

Had he had any power to perceive what was passing through his mother's mind, young André Lefebvre might to-day not be the bowed and broken man that he is. It almost seems that he ought to have felt the burning tide of hate that a more intuitional person would almost have perceived as a tangible thing, filling that quiet room.

She went away, did the old woman, shaking with secret rage all the more terrible in that it was now deadly: something at last beyond her control escaped from even the half normal place that it had had.

She went out and bought a pistol, and from the dealer gained information as to how to use it.

Then she let her son and daughter-in-law worry for awhile. She did not go to see them. She spent her restless, fevered days, without food, and almost without sleep, talking to her husband about the frightly, the ghastly, the awful thing which had happened to them; the acquisition of a daughter-in-law who was rapidly beggaring them.

The old man, beaten down long since to his wife's will, and usually little more than an echo of her, even he was alarmed and tried to quiet her. He did not know of the pistol, either.

Then there came a note, pleasantly worded, to André, asking him if he would bring his car and Antoinette, and let them all have a pleasant drive together.

This was so revolutionary a thing that the young people decided that at last they had won. Poor young creatures—they were pathetically gay as they set out eagerly to get "mamma" for the great event of a drive in the car that she had always so derided. They said to each other that the miracle had happened, and now they would "live happy ever after."

Mme. Lefebvre was quiet and collected for almost the first time in her life when she got into the hated car. She said little except that she insisted on being driven outside the city and to a rather lonely road. By that time André and his wife had both grown uneasy under the peculiar manner of the old woman, but he did as he was told, turned the car into what was practically a lane.

His wife and his mother sat together on the back seat.

By the Law of France

The motor made little noise. He heard, therefore, a sudden low cry which came with the shot.

He instantly stopped the car and turned around, and there was his mother with the revolver still in her hand and his wife unconscious, with blood streaming down her face.

"I have killed her," said his mother, gray and gaunt, shaking in an uncontrollable paroxysm.

Without a moment's pause to see if his wife might be helped, the young man turned the car and raced back to Paris. At the gates, as usual, he was halted by the customs officers of the Octroi, who asked casually if he had anything to declare—the ordinary question.

His wife was either dead or dying, and his mother was gibbering to herself with the revolver still in her hand, but André answered quietly that there was nothing!

Then he went to the nearest hospital and

got attention for his wife, who was hurried to the operating room: but she died before they could do anything for her. The police had at once taken charge of the mother, who, pistol in hand, had gloomily nodded to their accusation of having just killed her daughter-in-law, but flared up afterward, as they were taking her away, to denounce passionately the dead woman, who, she declared, had "wrecked our fortunes and ruined my son."

The evening papers of that date readily accepted this, and sympathy was with the mother, for the French cannot conceive of mother love being anything but noble. When the facts came out, as they did, at once, mostly brought to light by the outcries of the broken hearted and furious Mulle family, the feeling began to swing around to the almost fanatical rage which, at the end of the trial, made a whole court room stand up and call *their* verdict to the retreating jury, going into deliberation: "*A mort! A mort!* Death!"

The young husband, too, came in for a good deal of popular sympathy, which has gradually cooled somewhat, although it is conceded that he fulfilled the obligations of the conventional attitude when he refused to bear witness against his mother. However—family traits are his!

Right after his wife's death, when he was shaken by the most horrible conditions, surely, that ever thrust themselves into a man's life, with murder committed within his family, with his wife and his child gone, and his mother a prisoner charged with a major offense—right after that, while he was hardly more than turned from his wife's dead face, he carefully went to the superintendent's desk to claim his wife's purse, and to examine carefully the contents, to see that they were intact, and to ask that the jewelry that she had been wearing should be at once returned to him.

Yes—yes—André has not escaped the tarbrush of his mother's malady.

The Paris papers made much of this incident, and it is not surprising that they did. It is not often that anything so callous is brought to the public eye. And yet, the man loved his wife, and he has been a loving son. Now that his mother is out of the way, he will be a very wealthy man, for, of course, he is the heir to his wife's property, too.

They kept *madame* in jail a year, and never in all that time did she show the slightest sign of relenting or of sorrow for what she had done. Her son and her husband saw her sometimes, and she had such comforts as she could be persuaded to use, but most of the time, grim and absorbed, she seemed oblivious to her surroundings.

At the trial, conducted in the traditional French manner, where seemingly judge, jury, witnesses, and the populace talk when, how, and as they please, the accused again and again spat out her hate of the Mulle family, and showed clearly that even the full realization of the supreme danger in which she stood did not prevent her from expressing that hate to the members of that family.

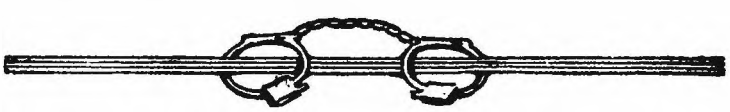
The mother of the murdered girl told of the long, serious procession of indignities, of the incessant prying and interfering, of the way in which the younger woman had tried to bear with the older, and of the secret fear which she had had of her.

From her seat the accused shouted out contradictions and hurled insults on the "wastrels, spendthrifts, fools, liars, and thieves" that the Mulle family were, she said. They let her rave.

And well they might. She was practically a dead woman from the first moment, for even with the sentence commuted to "life," that is really a sentence to shake the stoutest heart. With all of their seeming lack of sternness, the French law, once conviction is passed, is not a matter to trifle with.

Mme. Lefebvre has passed on.

She may be resurrected, some day: another Balzac may read of her and find in her one of the characters in a new epic of hate.



"He asked me several questions," said Mr. Montgomery, rubbing his plate with his napkin

SOMETIMES THEY MEET

By Louis Weadock

"OAK!" SAID THE TIMES SQUARE KID, HIS HAND STRAYING TO HIS NECKTIE, AND IT MIGHT MEAN ALL RIGHT OR IT MIGHT MEAN DEATH

PAUSING in his work of scattering uncut diamonds at the mouth of a prairie dog's hole on the desert in Arizona, the Times Square Kid, a New York gunman, thin of frame, thin of feature, thin of voice, addressed himself to the only occupant of the waiting automobile.

"Mr. Montgomery," he asked, wiping his hot face with his sleeve, "do you know what I think?"

"No," replied Mr. Montgomery, in that deep and mellow voice which had been of material assistance in making him a successful confidence man, "but I know what *I* think. I think you'd better plant the rest of those rocks, and hop back in the car. There's forty miles of this heat between here and Yates City. Let's get going."

"Oak!" said the Times Square Kid.

He dropped his remaining diamonds close to the mouth of the hole, took a long pull at the canvas-covered water bottle, slid into the hot seat behind the hot steering wheel, and gave her the gas.

Not until he had passed about a mile of alkali-coated sage did he speak again.

"Forty miles out and forty miles back," said he thoughtfully. "Eighty miles. When I was hackin' round the big town, I used to think eighty blocks was quite a jerk."

"I'm beginning to think you used to drive a hearse," rumbled the large and impressive man in the rear seat. "Step on it, will you? That's better. I've been melting back here, and you've been dubbing along as if you were in a traffic jam. You must like the desert."

"I do," said the New York gunman. "It's so kinda peaceful."

"It's hotter than the hinges," grunted Mr. Montgomery, his deep and mellow voice vibrant with sincerity. "You can have my part of it. I'm darned glad I've got only one more of these Turkish bath trips to make. After we make it, and I hand the wise mining engineer the convincer, the sidewalks of New York will be peaceful enough for me."

"Yes, sir," murmured his bodyguard respectfully, and said no more.

He would have liked to try to put into words the satisfying feeling of blended peace and awe which he never had known until this day. He realized he had no words with which to do justice to this feeling, but he would have liked to have done the best he could. He had thought that Mr. Montgomery possibly might understand.

It was only too evident that Mr. Montgomery was not interested in anything except the heat. "He's the boss," the Times Square Kid told himself. "He's givin' me a saw-buck a day, an' stall an' oats. All I gotta do is drive th' hack, an' pack Roscoe, an' pull that phony faint when he gives me the office. If I ain't a monkey, I'll stick to my racket. Because, tryin' a give-out to the boss is jes' like fightin' the City Hall. But, at that, I'd like to pay real geetis fer a ticket to talk to somebody about this desert, somebody that'll know what I'm talkin' about. I don't suppose I'll ever find 'em."

Suddenly, his meditations were interrupted by strange sounds from the rear seat. Mr. Montgomery had burst into song.

"East Side, West Side, all around the town," roared the big confidence man defiantly. "Boys and girls together, London bridge is falling down."

Weak as to words, even weaker as to music, but very, very strong as to voice, the singer fought his way to the end.

"Now, I feel better," he announced. "I wish you'd slow up."

The Times Square Kid pulled the car down from forty to fifteen.

"I'm sorry you can't sing, too," said Mr. Montgomery, in accents of regret. "If you could sing we could have a duet with 'Give My Regards to Broadway.' I like any of those songs about New York. But I don't like to sing alone. When we get back to the Yates City House, I'm going to dig up that landlord's daughter and see if she and I can't have a little music to-night. She's a cute trick for a rube."

"Not to-night you won't have no music," flashed the Times Square Kid, his thin voice trembling. "Marcella's goin' out."

"Marcella!" exclaimed Mr. Montgomery, leaning forward to clap a hamlike hand upon his driver's thin shoulder. "Stop this car! Look at me! Look at me, and don't try to lie to me. What's going on between you and this Marcella?"

"Who said anything was goin' on?" countered the other uneasily.

"Your voice said it. Now, let me tell you something. If I catch you breaking any of those promises you made to me in New York, I'll break every bone in your body. You swore that while you're on this job you'd keep away from booze and women. You swore—"

"Lissen, Mr. Montgomery, please lissen," broke in the thoroughly-intimidated gunman. "I ain't touched a single drink. I ain't goin' to touch one. But when you said I dassent mix up with gals, I didn't think you meant nice gals."

"I'm telling you now I mean 'em all!" his angry employer barked at him. "I'd have said so before if I'd dreamed that any decent girl would have let a no-good like you speak to her."

"This one," said the Times Square Kid, swallowing hard, "don't know I ain't no good."

His henchman's shamefaced confession produced upon Mr. Montgomery an effect, which, apparently, indicated that, after all, Mr. Montgomery had a soft heart. His frown vanished, his eyes softened, his mouth lost its grimness. He spoke, and his voice no longer was harsh, but again was deep and mellow.

"My boy," purred this postgraduate student of human nature, "I'll tell you what we'll do. Until this job is finished, both of us will keep away from all women, good and bad. Of course, when the job is finished—"

He left the sentence in mid-air. The Times Square Kid, sensing that he was expected to say something, said: "Oak!"

Mr. Montgomery was pleased. "Mitt me," he beamed, and, when the hand-shaking was over, he still wore his winning smile. "Now, let's beat it for Yates City," he beamed again, "and get all readied-up for that mining engineer. He's one we're going to take."

"Oak!" concurred the thin-voiced, thin-faced gunman, filled with pride because the great operator was treating him as an equal. The great operator, as the gunman knew, had as many vocabularies as a pickpocket has hats. Yet, instead of talking as a doctor, a lawyer, a merchant, a chief, a rich man, a poor man, or a beggar, he was talking like a thief.

It was a compliment which the Times Square Kid appreciated as, in all probability, the shrewd Mr. Montgomery felt, in his felonious bones, that he would. Like every other confidence man, Mr. Montgomery knew that great are the uses of flattery.

So skillfully did the silver-tongued Mr. Montgomery administer his verbal message that, by the time the car stopped in front of the Yates City House, Rates Reason able, the driver, who, like most gunmen, was accustomed to being treated with contempt by those who hired him, had become convinced that he and his friendly employer were two of the smartest persons in Arizona.

At that, he was half right.

II

A COUPLE of hours after he and his friendly employer got back from the desert, the Times Square Kid, sitting at a table beside an open window in the dining room on the ground floor of the Yates City House, was enjoying two of his favorite pleasures. He was ordering supper and thinking about Marcella Yates.

With such concentration was he thinking about her that he said to the golden-haired, golden-toothed waitress, whose name was Flossie: "I think you'd better bring me a T-bone steak, Marcella."

"Don't you think I'd better bring you a doctor?" was Flossie's unkind reply. "I ain't Marcella. There's Marcella over there, on the other side of the street. She's with Ernie."

"I ain't blind," declared the Times Square Kid. "I see her, an' I see the false alarm that's with her. I guess them telegraph companies is gettin' so they don't care what they make operators out of."

Flossie giggled. "You're just jealous," was her verdict, to which she added a bit of advice. "Ernie Bryson ain't the world's best key-pounder, I'll admit," said she, her voice smothering the gunman. "But he'll admit that he's the greatest sheik that ever run the railroad station in this man's town, and he'll admit that he can lick anybody that tries to interfere with him marrying this hotel. So, if I was you, and wanted to keep healthy, I wouldn't make any cracks about Ernie Bryson, and I wouldn't let him see me with Marcella Yates too much."

The Times Square Kid, who, with his fists, could hardly break a pane of glass, but who, in gang fights, private feuds, and uncivil wars between rum runners and hijackers, had shot, and been shot at, more times than he could count, took a sip of water before he spoke. The hand that lifted the thick tumbler was steady, so were the eyes that still were appraising the muscular young man who, across the street, was talking very serious to Marcella Yates.

"Much obliged, Floss," said he, his thin voice emotionless. "Have the steak rare to medium, will you?"

"Anything your little heart desires," she answered gayly, and, just as gayly, as she started away, gave his thin shoulder a little squeeze.

To himself he groaned: "Marcella saw that."

Whether or not she saw it, the bare-headed girl, bidding her surprised and resentful companion a hasty good-by, began to walk toward the hotel.

Under his breath, the Times Square Kid uttered the magic words with which he always prefaced his entry into those difficult situations known to him as "jams." "Up an' at 'em," said the Times Square Kid.

He would intercept Marcella in the

lobby, he would tell her how sorry he was he could not take her to the dance to-night, he would tell her how glad he would be if she would save to-morrow evening for him. His heart was beating fast, as it had done every time he had come near her during the week he had been in town. He started for the lobby—but he did not get there.

The large and impressive Mr. Montgomery intervened.

"Where's the fire?" asked Mr. Montgomery, looming before him.

Mr. Montgomery had been in the telephone booth. "Why the hell didn't he stay there?" bitterly asked the Times Square Kid of himself. Aloud, he replied to Mr. Montgomery's question.

"I was goin' after some cigarettes," he lied.

"You're a liar," observed his employer calmly, "you were sneaking out to talk to that Yates girl. Come back and sit down. I've got a word or two to say to you, young man."

The chilled-steel in his voice made the gunman uneasy. And the sight of Marcella Yates, who had appeared in the doorway, made him more uneasy.

"Lissen, Mr. Montgomery," he pleaded in an undertone, "I won't be only a minute."

"You won't be that long," affirmed his implacable employer. "If you know what's good for you, you'll get back to that table."

Convoyed by Mr. Montgomery, the unhappy gunman went back to the table, but he knew that, so far as his standing with Marcella Yates was concerned, going back to the table was not good for him. The flash of scorn from her dark eyes, the tilted chin, the way she walked across the lobby and disappeared up the brass-bound stairs, a way that an offended princess might have envied, told the Times Square Kid that Marcella Yates had decided he was a dummy.

The Times Square Kid neither knew, nor pretended to know, a great deal about girls. Girls were not his weakness. His only weaknesses were drink, cards, dice, and hand-books. But he knew enough about girls to be sure that no girl of spirit likes to be humiliated, and he knew enough about himself to be sure that he could not be easy in his mind until he had made Marcella Yates easy in hers.

Leaning across the table, he whispered hoarsely to Mr. Montgomery: "I wasn't goin' for no cigarettes. I was goin' out to tell Marcella I couldn't take her to the dance to-night. I gotta tell her that, ain't I?"

"No," said Mr. Montgomery, rubbing his plate with his napkin, as was his invariable custom when preparing to eat in any hotel or restaurant whatsoever. "No, you don't have to tell her. Her father 'll tell her. I've told him. I mentioned that an important business conference will occupy your entire evening. What did you order?"

"Did he, did he say anything about me, you know, whether he likes me or whether he's ag'in' me, or anything like that?" was the gunman's earnest but unresponsive reply.

"He asked me several questions about you," said Mr. Montgomery, with aggravating deliberation. "I forget what I told him."

"I ordered a T-bone steak," said the gunman breathlessly. "Ain't you please goin' to tell me?"

Mr. Montgomery frowned. It was a distant and forbidding frown, perfectly in keeping with the distant and forbidding manner which had been puzzling and troubling the Times Square Kid.

"I am going to beat your head off if you don't tear this nonsense up by the roots and attend to your business," said Mr. Montgomery coldly. "That mining engineer will be here in an hour. Are you sure you know your routine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure you can keep your mind on it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better," said Mr. Montgomery, in a voice of ice.

They ate in silence, which was broken only twice. Twice the confidence man demanded: "What's so interesting out there?" "Out there" meant the street, from which the Times Square Kid seemed

to be unable to keep his eyes. Twice the Times Square Kid answered: "Nuthin'." But each time he lied.

He thought it better to lie than to admit that what was interesting him was Ernie Bryson, who still stood where Marcella Yates had left him, and who, since she had left him, had not taken his eyes from the open window in the dining room.

Said the Times Square Kid to himself: "If he's lookin' for grief, he can get it. He must weigh around one hundred and ninety and I weigh one hundred and thirty-six and a half. I'll bet he wouldn't look very hard if he knew I was carryin' the difference in my pocket."

Just as they rose from the table, Ernie Bryson strolled across the street, in his bearing all the easy confidence that is in the bearing of a champion who is entering a ring. And he was singing, not loudly, but loudly enough for the Times Square Kid to hear:

I'm a rambler, I'm a gambler,
I'm a long way from home:
And them that don't like me,
Better leave me alone.

That he had dared to pass under the window, singing the song of defiance was bad enough; but what followed was worse. For, the Times Square Kid, out of the corner of his eye, saw Marcella Yates cross the lobby, wearing the simple blue silk dress he particularly liked, go to the front door, open it, and glance down the side street in the direction of the enthusiastic singer.

"Will you excuse me for a minute?" the gunman begged of his employer.

"You're coming to the depot with me. Come on," said the inflexible Mr. Montgomery.

"Oak!" groaned the Times Square Kid.

At the front door they passed Marcella Yates, and toward whom, with a triumphant gleam in his eye, was walking Ernie Bryson.

Impressively, Mr. Montgomery said: "Good evening, Miss Yates." Nervously, the Times Square Kid said, "Hello, Marcella."

Marcella Yates said: "Good evening, Mr. Montgomery. Wait just a minute, Ernie. I'll be right out."

During the walk to the railroad station, neither Mr. Montgomery nor the Times Square Kid spoke a word. But after they had stood on the platform for several silent minutes, the heartsore gunman, finding it beyond his strength longer to suffer in silence, lifted his thin voice.

"Mr. Montgomery," he asked humbly, "do you know what I think?"

"No," replied the unfeeling Mr. Montgomery, "I don't know what you think, and I don't give a damn. Here comes the train."

III

THE following morning, at ten minutes after eight, the Times Square Kid drove away from the Yates City House. He had, as his passengers in the car that Mr. Montgomery hired by the week, Mr. Montgomery and the mining engineer, and he was bound for the peaceful desert. So far as he was concerned, he could not get to it too soon.

For his ears still tingled from the burning words which Flossie, the waitress and information bureau, had poured into them at breakfast.

"It's all over town that you're so scared of Ernie Bryson you dassen't even speak to Marcella," Flossie had said. "And it's all over town that Ernie made Marcella give you back that book you give her. They'll be using you for a doormat next."

"Oak!" the gunman had replied, outwardly calm, and had said no more.

Nor was he doing any talking as he drove his employer and the mining engineer over the desert road which he and his employer had traveled the day before. But he was doing quite a little listening and considerably more thinking. And the more he listened and the more he thought, the less he liked Mr. Montgomery and the more he liked Marcella Yates.

"I'll bet ten to one Ernie Bryson didn't make her put that book in my letter box last night," he told himself. "I'll bet five to one he don't even know I gave her the book. I'll bet two to one I'll square myself with her to-night as soon as this job is cleaned up and I can talk to her with-

out this stiff, Montgomery, wanting to call out the troops."

Even in making mind bets, the Times Square Kid bet his judgment instead of his feelings.

"We was getting along fine till Montgomery put the press on me," he reflected. "When he takes it off to-night, it 'll be bad news for this grand-standin' Bryson guy. I'll bet thirty to one she never told *him* it was tough luck he was raised in a orphan asylum, an', instead of gettin' an education, had to go hustlin' papers, and then go skippin' bells, an' then quit anglin' for dimes, an' begin hackin' an'—an', anyway, I'll bet fifty to one she never told him she just knew there was a lot of good in some people that hadn't had a chance to come out yet, an' that she wondered why a feller with ambition didn't live in Arizona instead of New York."

He could have bet a hundred to one—and won his bet—that never before in a life which often had been rocky, but never had been dull, had so many miracles occurred in one week. Evidence of one of them was on the seat beside him—a book, *the* book, "The Complete Works of Shakespeare."

Every now and then, while the car rolled over the desert, the Times Square Kid, his feelings a mixture of pride and humility, dropped his right hand from the steering-wheel to the book.

"It's almost like touchin' *her* hand," he told himself. "An' there's poetry enough in it to keep her readin' for a year."

"I just love poetry," she had said, at their first meeting. "Here's some poetry," he had said, at their second. "I asked the guy in the drug store, where they sell the books, to gimme the best he had."

Much as he would have preferred to think only about Marcella Yates, the conversation in the rear seat made it impossible.

As usual, Mr. Montgomery was doing most of the talking. He, also, had done most of it the night before when, in his room where the shade was pulled down, a blanket was over the transom, and a hat was hung on the doorknob to blind the keyhole, he and the mining engineer, with the Times Square Kid, in his capacity of Mr. Montgomery's secretary, being present, but not voting, had examined blue prints.

Then he had talked in a confidential whisper; now he was giving his deep and mellow voice a fair chance to show what it could do.

The mining engineer, whose name was Thornwell, and who was a lean, leathery man, with a drooping mustache and kindly, patient eyes, had said little except "yes," or "no," or "I see," the night before, and was saying little except "yes," or "no," or "I see" to-day.

"Millions, I tell you, millions!" rumbled Mr. Montgomery. "The richest diamond field ever seen by the eye of man. You'll say so in the report you'll telegraph to New York to-night. I know you will.

"I know it just as well as I know that my stock issue will be oversubscribed as soon as your report reaches the public. But, believe me, if I were so situated financially that I could swing this deal myself, I would not part with one single, solitary share of stock.

"As it is, every dollar I have in the world is in the deal—and, at that, I didn't have enough to buy this land outright. All I could afford to do was to buy an option on it."

The mining engineer made what was, for him, an unusually long speech. He asked: "Who owns the land?"

"A certain party in Yates City," said Mr. Montgomery. "A certain party in Yates City."

"More bologna," thought the Times Square Kid. "That big grafter don't know who owns it. He never seen it himself until yesterday."

"Yes?" said the mining engineer. "Who?"

"The same party that owns about everything else around here," Mr. Montgomery replied promptly. "C. D. Yates. And here we are."

The Times Square Kid brought the car to a standstill, they all got out, and Mr. Montgomery led the way to the nearest prairie-dog's hole.

"The prairie-dogs find 'em underground and bring 'em to the surface," he explained,

pointing a dramatic finger at some of the uncut diamonds the Times Square Kid had planted the day before.

But the mining engineer did not seem to have heard him. The mining engineer was squatting in the sand near the hole, his glass in his eye, and upon his face an expression of amazement.

Half an hour later, he was squatting in the sand near another hole, again with his glass in his eye, when suddenly the Times Square Kid, who was standing near him, and who, for the last few minutes had been complaining of not feeling well, uttered a groan, swayed uncertainly on his feet, then crumpled to the ground.

"Sunstroke!" cried Mr. Montgomery.

"Poor boy!" muttered the mining engineer, the ring of sincerity in his words. "I'm sorry for him."

The poor boy, lying still and motionless, was sorry for himself when they emptied two water bottles over him, but he did not dare regain consciousness. According to the routine, he was not to come to until Mr. Montgomery used the code word, "Saturday."

They carried him to the car, laid him in the rear seat, worked over him.

"If he were my own son, he couldn't be any dearer to me," he heard Mr. Montgomery's deep and mellow voice declare. "It's hotter than the hinges out here. His heart's weak, anyway."

"Mr. Montgomery," said the mining engineer earnestly, "this boy needs medical attention. Shall I drive, or will you?"

"I can drive, but—"

"Then drive," said the other impatiently. "I don't have to see any more of your field. I've seen enough to know you've got the stuff."

"I could show you a lot more holes—" began Mr. Montgomery, but the mining engineer cut him short.

"Let's get started," he said curtly. "I'll ride back here and look out for the boy."

Mr. Montgomery must have driven at least ten miles in the direction of Yates City before he told the engineer that the thermometer in the lobby of the Yates House had registered one hundred and fifteen degrees no longer ago than Saturday.

"Oak!" muttered the Times Square Kid, a few minutes later, as he raised his head from the engineer's shoulder.

There was genuine concern in the voice and the lean, leathery face of the engineer, and a convincing imitation of the same in the face and the deep, mellow voice of Mr. Montgomery, as these men advised him to take things easy. But the concern in Mr. Montgomery's face and voice was genuine when he addressed himself to the expert who, thanks to the perfection of the routine, had seen what it had been intended he should see—and nothing more.

"Mr. Thornwell," purred the confidence man, "the only telegraph office in Yates City is the one at the depot. Do you want to stop there long enough to send your wire to New York?"

Holding his breath, the Times Square Kid awaited the reply. The sending of the wire meant the job was finished. The finishing of the job meant he would be free to make his peace with Marcella Yates.

"I think," he heard Thornwell say mildly, "New York can do without a wire from me until we get this boy to the hotel and into the hands of a doctor."

"Whatever you say," murmured the disappointed, but always discreet Mr. Montgomery, as he headed the car toward the hotel. And not only always discreet, but, also, almost always polite, he added: "Mr. Thornwell, here's something that belongs to you."

With these words, he reached back to place in the hand of the engineer "The Complete Works of Shakespeare." Accepting the book, the engineer said nothing; but, to himself, the Times Square Kid said one word: "Sunk!"

IV

DESPITE his protests that he was "feelin' oak," they took the Times Square Kid to his room, and put him to bed.

Undressing was attended by some difficulties, because, in a shoulder-holster of tan leather, was the gunman's revolver, the Roscoe, which he did not want the mining engineer to see. This, and the holster, he finally succeeded in secret-

ing between the sheets, and then, with an expression of resignation upon his thin face, he lay back upon his pillow to await the next move.

It was Mr. Montgomery who made it. "I'll get the doctor," said Mr. Montgomery, his voice exuding sympathy which the Times Square Kid felt was far from sincere.

Much more genuine was the solicitude of the mining engineer who, when they were left alone, busied himself with cold towels, which he applied to the wrists and temples of the unsuffering sufferer. Encouraged by these attentions, the gunman found nerve enough to blurt out: "Mister, that book of pomes is mine. You don't mind givin' it to me, do you?"

"Not at all," replied the mining engineer, with a queer smile. "I know it isn't mine."

Alongside the pistol-hand of the Times Square Kid he placed "The Complete Works of Shakespeare."

"Much obliged," the grateful gunman smiled up at him. "This is a funny world, ain't it, mister? Nobody never knows what's goin' to happen in it."

"True," said the mining engineer, with a sharp glance at him, "nobody ever knows."

That glance had made the gunman vaguely uneasy, nor was his uneasiness lessened when, after a thundering knock upon the door, C. D. Yates stamped into the room and seated himself upon the bed.

"Heard you were sick," said Marcella's father briefly.

"I'm all right," the gunman told him, but he did not feel all right.

How could he when he knew that the visitor had seated himself squarely upon the shoulder-holster which contained the revolver?

Yet, Mr. Yates, who was a good-natured giant of a man, betrayed no sign of knowing he had sat down upon leather and steel.

"Anything I can do for you?" he wanted to know.

"Not a thing!" replied the gunman, breathing more easily. "I'm all right, Mr. Yates."

"Yates?" echoed the mining engineer with awakened interest. "Well, Mr. Yates, there's something you can do for me."

Before he had a chance to say what it was, the door opened and Mr. Montgomery, palpably nervous, again was in the room.

"I couldn't connect with a doctor," he said hurriedly, "but I left word for one to come up. Hello, Mr. Yates, I didn't know you were here. Mr. Thornwell, would you mind stepping out into the hall with me for a moment?"

His voice was urgent, as was his manner. Never had the Times Square Kid seen him so moved. "Hell's popped somewheres," said the gunman to himself.

"I'll be glad to talk to you a little later," he heard the engineer tell Mr. Montgomery, his tone casual; "just now, I have some business with Mr. Yates."

That good-humored, but plainly puzzled giant quit sitting on the gunman's revolver and followed the quietly insistent Thornwell out of the room.

No sooner had the door closed behind them than Mr. Montgomery gripped the arm of the Times Square Kid, and in a voice tense with anxiety, began to whisper:

"Listen, sucker," he began, "the ice is getting thin. But it's got to hold us up till the pay off. It's got to hold us till I do the double-double on this guy, Yates. I've slipped him five thousand bucks for an option on that bunch of desert, and I'm out to get that five grand back.

"With that in my kick, along with the twelve thousand dollars' worth of rocks that I picked out of the sand, with this sap engineer looking on and seeing nothing, I'll be ready to blow. You're going to help me.

"Get out of that bed. Get into your clothes. Go out, and locate this guy's daughter. Tell her you know that her old man can make a killing by buying back that option from me for five thou'. Tell her you know for a fact the desert out there is lousy with diamonds.

"Tell her you're double crossing me by telling her so, but you're stuck on her and can't help it. Tell her anything you think she'll like to hear—only make her make her old man kick back to me with the five grand. What do you say?"

"I say, 'Oak!'" replied the gunman, his voice steady and his face a mask, as he scrambled out of bed and began to pile into his clothes. "But if I was you, I'd spread out th' old man an' this Thornwell guy before Thornwell gets to askin' him too many questions. There's somethin' about this Thornwell guy that smells copper."

"You're crazy!" said Mr. Montgomery decisively. "If he's a cop, I'm a cop. He's an up-and-up mining engineer. All I want out of him is that telegram. All I want out of you is some quick action."

"You'll get it," promised the Times Square Kid, his fingers busy in buckling the strap that held his gun, "if you'll square the doc when he shows up, an' go an' kidnap this Thornwell away from the ole man, I'll step out an' do my stuff."

"Go to it!" murmured Mr. Montgomery, his hand on the doorknob. "But what's the big idea of hanging on to Thornwell's book?"

"It ain't *your* book, is it?" countered the Times Square Kid defensively, as he slipped into his coat pocket "The Complete Works of Shakespeare," pulled his cap down over his eyes and stepped to the door. "I got a funny hunch it 'll bring me luck. Any objections?"

"None in the world," his employer assured him, opening the door. "And, right now, we *need all the luck* we can get."

It was with an increasing sense of uneasiness that the gunman walked down the brass-bound stairs, crossed the lobby, and sauntered into the street. The brief Arizona twilight had given place to darkness, a darkness which seemed peopled with danger undefinable but none the less real. "Up an' at 'em," the gunman muttered to himself, yet, for once, found no magic in the charm.

Instead of making him feel brave, it made him feel helpless. "The percentage is runnin' ag'in' me," he reflected, stopping under a street lamp to light a cigarette. "Montgomery's in a panic about somethin'. Marcella's old man knows I'm packin' a rod. That guy Thornwell's suspicions is workin'.

"Them two has got their heads together somewheres, prob'ly connivin' to trip up Montgomery. An' this guy Ernie Bryson, the demon telegraph operator, is roamin' around somewheres else, prob'ly gettin' readied-up to take a crack at me. I'm in for a tumble, an' they ain't no way in the world for me to find out how to beat the rap."

Toward him, as he still stood in the pool of light cast by the street lamp, hurried Marcella Yates, hatless, her eyes dancing with excitement.

"I've been looking all over for you," she told him breathlessly. "I wonder if I can get you to do something for me?"

"You can write your own ticket," he answered, his heart beating fast. "Just tell me what you want done."

At that moment, he felt capable of doing anything.

Frankly and fearlessly, her eyes met his. "I wasn't very nice to you last night—" she began.

"Forget it!" he interrupted, his thin voice jumping with happiness. "Just tell me what you want me to do."

She told him—and, before she had finished, the Times Square Kid knew he was being asked to take his life in his hands. She did not know this, but he did.

All she knew was that she was afraid her father was about to make a great mistake. She had overheard him telling the mining engineer that it was true he had sold to Mr. Montgomery an option on some of his desert land, and she had overheard the mining engineer telling him that the land was valuable: diamonds had been found on it; he had seen them himself.

She had been sitting in the lobby, reading a magazine, while this had been going on. She still had been sitting in the lobby, but only pretending to read the magazine, after Mr. Montgomery had joined her father and the mining engineer.

"I don't like Mr. Montgomery," she burst out impulsively. "I don't know why, but I just don't. And neither does dad. Dad likes you, though. What I wish you'd do is to go to dad and tell him not to buy back that option from Mr. Montgomery.

"He'll listen to you. He won't listen to me. He doesn't think I know anything about business. He thinks you know a lot.

Didn't he tell me he wished you'd settle down here in Yates City and help him run his business?"

The Times Square Kid drew a deep breath.

"You didn't have to read no magazine," said he sheepishly, "you got a book of pomes to read. Here it is."

A look of pleasure followed a look of surprise over her face as she accepted "The Complete Works of Shakespeare," which, with unaccustomed shyness, he offered her. But suddenly her face was grave.

"You'll talk to dad, won't you?" she asked, her eyes searching his. "You'll tell him to have nothing to do with Mr. Montgomery?"

He hesitated. She meant a great deal to him, yet his life meant something. "If I don't go through for her, I'll get the gate," he said to himself. "If I do go through for her, I'll get a bullet." Aloud, he inquired: "Where can I find your father?"

Not until she answered this evasive question was he at all sure he wanted to find him.

She said: "Dad and Mr. Montgomery and the other man have gone down to the depot."

"Me for the depot!" burst out the no longer irresolute Times Square Kid, the light of battle leaping into his eyes. "Gee! I wish I had a car."

"Take mine! It's right across the street," she urged, pointing with the hand that held "The Complete Works of Shakespeare."

"Oak!" he cried and was on his way.

V

TEARING over the unpaved streets toward the lights of the little railroad station, the gunman did some fast thinking.

"Marcella's old man an' the minin' feller wouldn't be pallin' around with Montgomery to-night, if that high-pressure fox hadn't talked 'em back into his pocket," he decided. "I can't talk fast enough to get 'em out now, but I'll bet ten to seven I can get 'em both out to-morrow if I can keep the minin' feller from sendin' that wire."

Fast as was his thinking, it was not so fast as his driving; and he reached the doorway of the station before he reached the details of his plan. Yet, so sure was he of the soundness of that plan, and of its ultimate triumph, that he crossed the threshold with his thin shoulders thrown back and with a look of confidence upon his thin face.

No sooner had he set foot on the unpainted floor of the dingy waiting room than his shoulders drooped and the look of confidence died. For the only other occupant of the waiting room was a muscular young man in pink shirt sleeves—Ernie Bryson, the telegraph operator.

He was standing under the best light in the room reading a paper whose color was a perfect match for his sleeves. Evidently more interested in it than in the visitor, he continued to read.

The Times Square Kid, his voice much gentler than his thoughts, broke the silence: "Would you mind telling me how long ago Mr. Yates and his friends left here?" he inquired humbly.

No answer.

"Would you mind telling me which way they went?" he inquired more humbly.

No answer.

"Would you mind telling me if one of them sent a telegram?" he persisted.

"There's one thing I don't mind telling you," sneered the other, mimicking the thin voice of the Times Square Kid. "I don't mind telling you that the next time you dare to speak to Miss Yates I'll break you in two."

The gunman's eyes filled with tears and he began to fumble nervously with his necktie. This pitiful exhibition caused the scornful Ernie Bryson to laugh disagreeably and to lift his hand as if to strike the weakling across the face with his open palm.

"Cut that out!" warned the excited voice of Mr. Montgomery from the doorway. "Do you want to get killed?"

Followed by Miss Yates's father and the mining engineer, Mr. Montgomery strode into the waiting room. Ernie Bryson dropped his hand and backed away from Mr. Montgomery. It was plain he was afraid of him.

But he was afraid of the wrong man. Because, as Mr. Montgomery could have told him, the Times Square Kid was never so dangerous as when tears were in his eyes and his right hand was on his necktie. The tears meant he was fighting mad. And when he was fighting mad, his hand was only too likely to dart like a snake from his necktie to his shoulder-holster.

"Boys will be boys," murmured Mr. Montgomery, pouring salve on the troubled waters. "They will play." He embraced everybody in a heart-warming smile. "We're as bad as you two kids," he added, letting his indulgent eye linger upon his henchman. "We start down here to send an important telegram, and stop on the way to fool with a slot machine."

The gunman stifled a sigh of relief. The all-important telegram had not yet gone. But his relief was short-lived. For now he saw the mining engineer and Marcella's father step to the counter behind which was the telegraph key. He saw the engineer draw a yellow blank toward him and prepare to write. He saw Marcella's father take out his check book.

Bitterly the baffled gunman said to himself: "Montgomery's got 'em hypnotized. I'll bet even money Marcella 'll be off me for life."

But Montgomery was not off him. With the light of victory in his eye, and with his deep and mellow voice sunk to a confidential whisper, he said to him: "Boy, you're all right. That's why I'm putting this century note in your hand. Slip it into your pocket with my compliments."

Sliding the one hundred dollars into his pocket, the Times Square Kid brought his eyes back from Marcella's father and the mining engineer to look inquiringly at the generous Mr. Montgomery.

"You've put this race in the barn," whispered Mr. Montgomery. "You don't know it, but you squared a beef for me. Yates was going to run out. And he was worried about you being sick, he said. When I told him you were all right again, he began to melt. He admitted he'd been getting suspicious. But he lost all his suspicions when his daughter told him she thinks pretty well of you.

"She told him she knew you were on the level. Boy, if she hadn't told him that, he wouldn't be over there now writing me out a check for five thousand bucks."

The Times Square Kid was breathing hard.

"I don't like to trim her old man—" he began in a strange and unnatural whisper.

His employer shot a sharp glance at him.

"I'm doing the trimming," he said uneasily. "I wish Thornwell would hurry up and get that telegram on the wire. Those suckers in New York won't understand the delay. If they don't hear from him in the next hour, the best part of the deal may be cold. I wish—"

"I wish you wouldn't trim her old man," pleaded the Times Square Kid, again in that strange and unnatural whisper.

"I wish you'd mind your own business," retorted Mr. Montgomery, his voice troubled.

And with good reason. For tears had welled into the gunman's eyes and his right hand had begun to stray toward his necktie.

Before it reached it, the hearty and untroubled voice of Marcella's father sounded through the room. Warm with welcome, it said: "Hello, Marcella!"

For a long moment, no reply came from the bare-headed girl who had appeared in the doorway. It was not until her gaze had traveled over all the faces in the room, and had come to rest upon the thin face of the Times Square Kid, that she said: "Good evening, everybody!"

Her intent gaze was still on the gunman's face when her father, with a slip of blue paper in his big hand, moved toward Mr. Montgomery and the thin-faced young man who was supposed to be his secretary.

"Here's your check," they all heard him say.

"I'll take it," volunteered the Times Square Kid, his voice casual as he extended his hand. "It's part of my job, isn't it, Mr. Montgomery?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Montgomery, with no hint of surprise in his voice or manner, but with an excellent imitation of

the serenity of a man of large affairs. "How about your telegram, Mr. Thornwell?"

"Ready in a minute."

"Good!" beamed Mr. Montgomery.

"An' rotten," growled the gunman to himself. "Th' chumps that'll get it 'll lose a lot of jack. That sap minin' guy that's writin' it 'll lose his job. Soon's they find out he fell for th' works, they'll turn th' fan on him.

"Somebody oughta turn it on me for peggin' him for a dick. He's only a ready-made mark. But he treated me fine when I was playin' sunstroke—an' he did throw back that highbrow book."

Then and there, flashed into the gunman's mind a great idea—if it would work.

He swung round. Two long strides brought him face to face with the girl whose hands were full of that highbrow book, "The Complete Works of Shakespeare." One short sentence was all he spoke: "Gimme them pomes."

"Well, of all the—" she began.

He stopped her by gently wresting the volume from her grasp. The next instant he confronted Ernie Bryson.

"Listen, feller!" he said, his thin voice urgent. "This ain't a book. This is a telegram. An' you're goin' to send it."

The muscular operator stared at him blankly, but not so the quick-witted Mr. Montgomery.

"Don't pay any attention to him," Mr. Montgomery told Ernie Bryson, his indulgent smile masking his real concern. "He's just having one of his spells."

"Spells or no spells," said the Times Square Kid doggedly, "this book goes on the wire—and it goes on right now."

Fortified by a glance from Mr. Montgomery, the operator was emboldened to inquire: "What address?"

The answer he got must have surprised Mr. Montgomery. For the street number which the eager gunman gave was the street number of Mr. Montgomery's hide-away in New York.

Fearful, perhaps, of what other graveyard information this unaccountable henchman of his might take it into his head to broadcast, Mr. Montgomery, with one eye on the listening mining engineer, said to Ernie Bryson: "I know New York. There's no such number. Anyway, this poor boy hasn't got enough money to telegraph a whole book."

"Maybe I ain't," said the Times Square Kid, ignoring the friendly hand his employer placed on his arm, and bringing his face close to that of the operator, "but I got enough to send some of it. Send me a hundred dollars' worth."

Mr. Montgomery, seeing him shove across the counter the one hundred-dollar bill which lately was his, turned to the mining engineer in whose hand was the telegram he had finished writing.

"We've got half an hour yet," whispered Mr. Montgomery, glancing at his watch. "Give me that message." Answering the question in the kindly, patient eyes of the engineer, he went on: "When this crazy secretary of mine isn't looking, I'll toss it to the operator with a bank note wrapped around it. He'll break in on the book long enough to get your message through. Nobody's any the wiser."

"Why all the whisperin'?" demanded the Times Square Kid, suspiciously, before the mining engineer had a chance to place his message in the outstretched hand of Mr. Montgomery.

"Easy, easy," admonished his suave employer, "can't you see that the young lady wants to speak to you?"

"Listen, feller," the gunman said to Ernie Bryson, "start sendin'. I'll be back in a minute."

But before he joined Marcella Yates he said over his shoulder, to Ernie Bryson: "I'll bet thirty to one I gave you the right address." And he repeated it.

"Did you want me?" he asked the girl humbly.

"No," she surprised him by saying, "I was trying to attract your attention because I want my book. When I get that, I'm going straight home."

"You ain't goin' just yet," he told her, trying to smile. "The book's in hock till your friend Ernie gets through with it."

"He was reading it a second ago, he isn't reading it now," she said. "He's reading something on a telegraph blank."

"He is, is he?" she heard him ask, and,

a second later, she heard him, his voice cold as ice, saying to Ernie Bryson: "How come you try a hip-switch on me soon's my back's turned? Take your hand off that key before I shoot it off."

But she did not see what Ernie Bryson saw—that his eyes were beginning to fill with tears. What she, and her father, and Ernie Bryson, and Mr. Montgomery saw, was the right hand of the mining engineer drop into his coat pocket, and what they heard him say to the Times Square Kid was this: "Steady, boy, steady! I'm trying to save you some money. The operator hasn't sent my message yet. He hasn't even read it—"

"I'd like to read it," volunteered Mr. Montgomery. "I haven't had a chance. I—"

"You will stand just where you are without making a move," said the mining engineer, in his voice a ring of command none of them had ever heard before. "Operator, read that message. Read it so this gentleman can hear it."

What Ernie Bryson read aloud was this:

> To Millerhelen, N. Y.:
>
> Wire me two hundred Yates Hotel here. Tell detective headquarters frisk apartment twenty, Vineplaza Apartments. Send extradition papers me. Yates Hotel, here. I have Montgomery in custody. Telephone my house am all right. No Signature.

Mr. Montgomery broke the awkward silence: "I'll say you're all right," he smiled. "You can take your hand off your gun. I've got *some* sense left."

The Times Square Kid cleared his throat. "Well, Mr. No Signature," he asked, turning to the man with the drooping mustache and the kindly, patient eyes, "what's the Millerhelen Detective Agency got to say about anybody else?"

"I can't speak for the agency," said the detective, encouraged by a look from Marcella's father, "but, so far as I know, anybody else can stay right here in Yates City and do anything they're big enough to do."

"I can do somethin' now," said the Times Square Kid, his eyes shining with happiness. "I can throw back this check for five grand."

Marcella's father, tucking the slip of blue paper into his worn leather wallet, put one hand on his daughter's shoulder and the other on the shoulder of the Times Square Kid.

"Bygones are bygones," said the old frontiersman, "we'll start with a new deck and we won't try to deal from the bottom, will we?"

"I don't know what you mean eaxctly," said his daughter, nestling against him, "but I guess we won't."

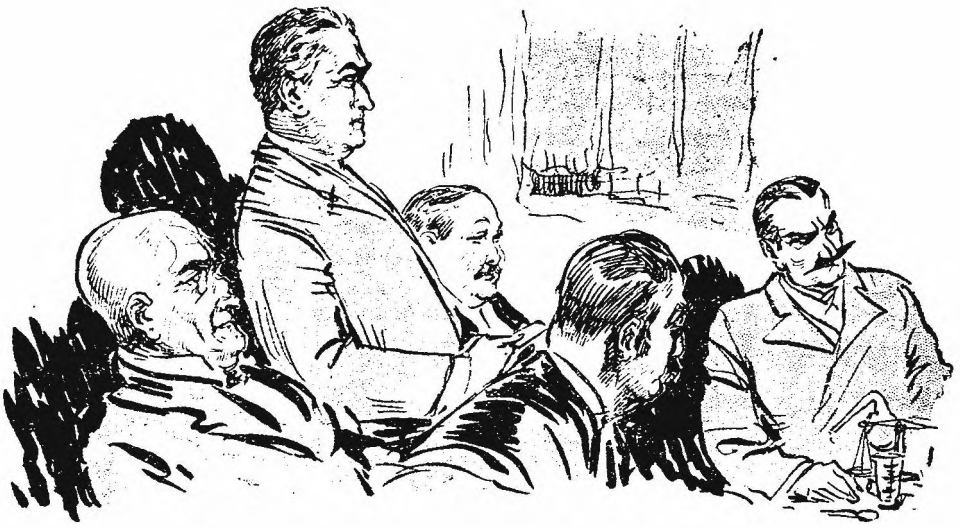
"What do you say, boy?"

"Oak!" said the Times Square Kid.

"You'll find," volunteered Mr. Montgomery, as he handed a cigar to Marcella's father and another to the detective, "that my young friend is more or less limited when it comes to expressing himself."

"His actions," said the detective, throwing away the match from which the others had lighted their cigars, and striking a new one, "will speak louder than his words."

"But I'm goin' to get some words," protested the Times Square Kid, taking from the unresisting operator "The Complete Works of Shakespeare." "This book is full of 'em. I ain't going to be a dummy all my life. I'll bet fifty to one I ain't."



Some of the greatest diamond experts in the world looked on while—

RUBIES AND ROGUES

By Joseph Gollomb

IMAGINATION AND DARING, A LITTLE DEFTNESS, AND THE WORLD'S RICHES ARE AT THE FEET OF THOSE WHO TAKE THE RISK

A Story of Fact

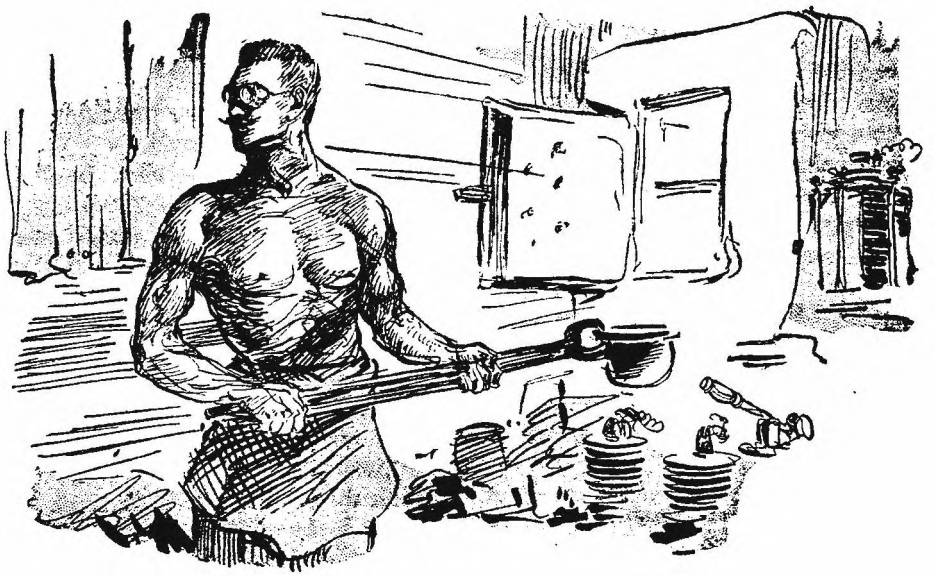
RUBIES, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, and sapphires—one could really call them tiny gloriously colored lamps of *Aladdin*. You remember, of course, from childhood days *Aladdin's* miraculous lamp, which, if you rubbed, brought for you the realization of your most extravagant wish.

Compared to a ruby, however, that lamp was a bulky affair, and what a ruby would bring you is not a whit less, it seems to me, than that lamp out of a fairy tale. Hold up, for instance, your thumb and forefinger and bring their tips to within one-half inch of each other; then imagine that small space occupied by a ruby. Or you can close your hand and hide it in your palm. Now wish.

Do you wish for a mansion and servants? Would you like a yacht and a tour around the world? Would it thrill you to have a thousand men at your beck and call for a whole year? Would you like a country estate? You don't need to rub your blood-red ruby to have any of these wishes gratified. There they are in your palm: you have only to choose which you want to buy with your ruby.

And, of course, a diamond, an emerald, a sapphire, or a pearl of great price would do just as well to wish with. It is no wonder, therefore, that these bits of poignant beauty have, for thousands of years, wrought romance and riches and have fired in man and woman lusts to own them.

And what interests us who meet here in these pages is that these pebbles of con-



—Lemoine demonstrated his method of making commercially available gems

centrated riches have also fired the imagination of the cleverest rogues in the realm of the underworld. So let us consider some of the exploits of jewels and roguery that have come to light recently.

One virtue I will claim for these true accounts is that their villains or heroes, as you choose to look upon them, picked for their victims not some helpless amateur owner of jewels, but in each case powerful merchants, surrounded by paid guards, whose shops were connected by electric wires to police headquarters.

There is a marvelous system, too, whereby the history of any precious stone, even medium-sized, is minutely recorded and its movements closely followed. These jewel merchants, so far as their rare merchandise is concerned, are armed with intelligence as hard-cutting as the diamonds they sell. So that it takes a rogue of rare gifts to outwit them.

An important Fifth Avenue gem house had just engaged a new employee, a young man by the name of Purcell. The merchants themselves were comparatively young in the business, but in the few years they had been established they had done exceedingly well. For this they had to thank the fact that they were becoming known for their impeccable honesty.

Not a customer had ever regretted a purchase there, or been dissatisfied with any bit of repairing left in their care. The merchants knew the value of their reputation, and jealously guarded it against the lightest breath that was likely to mar it.

They had minutely investigated Purcell's record before they engaged him. His honesty was beyond question. His tact—an indispensable virtue in those who would deal with a jewel-buying public—was exceptional. His eye for genuine gems was well trained. In every respect, therefore, Purcell was an acquisition.

Nevertheless he was engaged with the understanding that for a time he was only on trial. He was not given at first any position of responsibility. It was only during the inactive lunch period that he was allowed to take care of whatever accidental business might stray into the store. And even then he was not permitted to do any selling, but only to accept repairs.

One noon hour he was whiling away his time wishing some customer would turn up and give him a chance to show his worth to his employers. He saw an automobile make a quick stop in front of the store. His eye, trained to gauge prosperity from externals, made a quick mental note that one would have to be a millionaire to own

that car and hire those two uniformed chauffeurs.

A beautiful woman came hurriedly out of the car, dressed with that perfection of good taste which requires a second glance for the discriminating onlooker to realize how costly those clothes are. And Purcell, a good judge, appreciated that woman's dress. She seemed to be considerably in a hurry.

She entered the store and made straight for Purcell, and even as she crossed the store she began taking off a beautiful pearl necklace that graced her throat and showed up gloriously against the black silk of her bodice.

Five False Pearls

She tossed the long necklace to the counter in front of Purcell.

"I'm in a dreadful hurry. Sailing for Egypt in less than two hours. Do you suppose you can have my necklace restrung in time for me to take it with me?"

Purcell thought quickly. It would take five minutes to summon from lunch the man who made a specialty of restringing pearl necklaces, for the emergency the man could do the job in half an hour.

"Can you give us three-quarters of an hour?" he asked.

She bit her lip with vexation. "As long as that? No, I'm afraid I can't. I think I'd better have it done abroad."

Purcell knew the store's biggest customers by sight. This woman was new to him. If he succeeded in pleasing her with this small repair job she might become an addition to the clientele, which would earn for him desirable credit.

He took up the telephone receiver, asking as he did so, "Will half an hour do? We'll make a special effort."

She hesitated for a moment. "All right then; hurry up!"

Purcell was already in touch with the workman, who came hurrying back from lunch less than two minutes later. Meanwhile Purcell tactfully kept the waiting customer in conversation.

The workman took the necklace into the inner workshop and in twenty minutes brought it out again perfectly restrung.

Purcell glanced up at the clock and smiled as he handed the necklace to the customer.

"We're better than our promise by more than four minutes," he said.

He was particularly glad to be able to say that, inasmuch as one of the members of the firm had come in several minutes earlier, had acquainted himself with the job in hand, and, recognizing as Purcell did the outward signs of prosperity, was himself engaged in the art of making a good impression on the customer.

She took up the necklace, saying:

"I surely appreciate your helping me make time—"

Suddenly her expression changed. She broke off in the middle of her sentence, and her beautiful eyes took on a stern look. They were fixed on part of the necklace. Purcell and the member of the firm wondered uneasily whether their good workman had not for once blundered in rearranging the pearls. Then, to their dismay, the customer turned angrily to them:

"You have substituted five false pearls for some of my best ones! How dare you!"

Purcell and his employer looked incredulously at her; they could not believe their ears.

Purcell Is Confused

"Madam, how can you say such a thing!" exclaimed the merchant. "Pattison, who did the job, has the finest reputation for honesty and workmanship in the whole trade. Purcell, call him!"

Purcell hurriedly summoned a gray-haired, dignified artisan who, in his blue denim apron and his celluloid vizor still on his forehead, expected to hear words of appreciation. Instead, he saw his employer staring at the pearl necklace as if Pattison had spoiled it. The poor man was shocked to hear his employer exclaim:

"Yes, these five pearls are false! Pattison, what do you know about them?"

When the artisan had recovered somewhat he said quietly: "I noticed those false pearls on the necklace when it was brought to me."

"What!" the woman exclaimed. "How dare you charge me with lying?"

Pattison shook his head. "I make no charges. I only say that there were five false pearls in the necklace brought to me."

The woman's anger was mounting. She turned to the merchant. "I have no time to engage in dispute with your workmen. There were no false pearls in my necklace when I gave it to your clerk."

The merchant looked uneasily at Purcell. "Did you notice these false pearls before?" he asked.

Purcell colored. The anxiety of an innocent man is as likely to bring confusion in his looks as guilt.

To Avoid Notoriety

"No, sir. The lady was in such a hurry to have the necklace restrung that she could give me only half an hour in which to summon Pattison from lunch and have the job done. I was so anxious to accommodate her that I didn't stop to examine the necklace."

"That's all very well," the woman snapped. "But I either get my real pearls back or their equivalent, even if I have to cancel my trip. Please decide," to the merchant, "which it is to be—restore my pearls or pay me for them! Otherwise I shall have your men arrested and see to it that the affair comes prominently to the notice of the public!"

The merchant did some quick thinking. The story, carrying as it would the photograph of a beautiful woman and implicating the reputation of a reputable firm, would be sure to gain widespread publicity. Could his firm afford the notoriety?

There was but one answer—no! Not even if they had to pay thousands of dollars to avoid it. In the few moments the woman was giving him for his decision the merchant could not make up his mind as to who was the thief—the customer or one of his employees?

But as far as the damage to the reputation of his firm would be involved there was no hesitation in the merchant's mind. He and his partners could not afford to have this woman walk out of the store and raise a clamor in the newspapers.

"How much will you take?" he asked the woman coldly.

She gave him look for look. "Those missing pearls cost me eighteen thousand dollars."

The merchant slowly took out a check book.

"To whom shall I make it out?" he asked.

The woman carefully put the necklace into her handbag and turned to leave. "I don't like your tone or your manner. I shall let my lawyer collect for me. You will learn my name then. Meanwhile I have no time to stop to cash your check or bandy words with you!"

The merchant bit his lip. "I apologize. Will you select five pearls from my stock?"

She did. Ten minutes later she departed in her luxurious automobile five fine costly pearls the richer for the half hour it took her to consummate her clever swindle. For, of course, she had counted on the pressure for time she had brought to bear on Purcell to slip the false pearls past his observation.

Personally my favorite in this class of glamorous jewel crooks was Rene Turboit. His was but a single exploit, and interestingly enough he stayed practically within the law in pulling it off, although he cleaned up over two hundred thousand dollars by it, and at the expense of one of the foremost gem dealers in the world.

"Honeymooners!"

Let us call the victim Lorin's, whose famous shop is, in itself, one of the jewels of that most glittering street in the world, Rue de la Paix in Paris. What I like about Turboit is the refinement, cleverness, and imagination with which his exploit is colored.

Like many other of these jewel exploits this one begins with an imposing first appearance. Before the entrance to Lorin's there drew up, one bright afternoon in the height of the tourist season, the king of all automobiles. Obviously it had just left the place of its origin, so new it was. And from the car—its door opened by its liveried chauffeur—stepped a young man who in turn helped a young woman out.

Some of the modishly garbed salesmen in Lorin's saw the couple issue from the car and there passed among them a look

of sympathetic amusement. "Honeymooners!" It was quite obvious, so tenderly solicitous was the groom.

As they entered the shop they made a charming picture. He, considerably older than the woman, had, nevertheless, something youthful in the way his heart seemed completely wrapped up in her. He behaved as if he wanted to strew her path with flowers.

And few who saw her would have failed to sympathize with him. She was exquisite: a lovely flower bred in some hothouse, fragile, beautiful, with a kindly smile for all the world since none of the world's harshness had apparently ever reached her.

"Love At First Sight"

M. Lorin himself hurried forward to wait on them. He sensed lavish patronage.

"I am looking for something quite distinctive for my wife," the man said to M. Lorin. "Pearhaps a pearl. But it must really be unique."

M. Lorin showed him various candidates for the honor. The man was hard to please. "I have seen this before or something like it," was his way of dismissing gems that most men and women would have given their souls to possess. But he never gave his verdict without first glancing at his beloved to see how she reacted. The fact that no gleam of desire lit in her great violet eyes at the sight of any of the offerings was enough to condemn the most gorgeous jewel.

At last M. Lorin said: "I have but one thing left to show you. But I warn you it commands a high price."

"Let me see it," the man said almost eagerly.

M. Lorin took them into his private office and opened his personal safe. From it he took out a small Oriental casket, opened the lid, and there in a nest of cotton wool lay a pearl.

It was so breath-taking in beauty that it made one forget its great size. Its shape had not the mechanical perfection that makes some pearls appear monotonous: it looked as if it had been modeled by some sculptor's conception of what a pearl should look like. And just as in old amber or agate some bit of moss is entombed, this pearl seemed to have inclosed in its heart a gleam of sunset.

The moment the woman saw it she uttered a soft cry of delight.

"Love at first sight!" laughed the groom, happy at her delight.

Then he turned to M. Lorin. "How much?"

"One hundred thousand dollars!" M. Lorin said, bracing himself for bargaining.

The man took out his check book. "How long will it take you to cash my check on ——?" he named one of the foremost English banking institutions in Paris.

"Ten minutes," said M. Lorin. He was a little breathless at the ease with which he had obtained his top asking price. "It's just across the way, you know."

"Good!" exclaimed the man. "Please have it cashed at once as I want to come back in half an hour and take the pearl with us."

The jeweler glanced at the signature, "Walter Bannock Argyle."

"I will be ready for you, sir," M. Lorin assured him.

It was M. Lorin himself who went across the street to cash the big check. He wanted to find out something about so munificent a customer. The bank could only tell him that the check was good: that the account of Mr. Argyle, although only recently opened, was substantial enough to stand several such checks.

The Argyles See Paris

"A good man for you to cultivate, M. Lorin," said the cashier.

Naturally, M. Lorin was exceedingly attentive when his customer and his beautiful companion came to take the pearl away with them. M. Lorin asked if there was any service he could render the visitors to make them feel at home in Paris. Mr. Argyle admitted that Paris was new to them, that they as yet had no friends there and that they would be glad to avail themselves of M. Lorin's kind offer to make them feel at home.

A social contact of mutual advantage developed between M. Lorin and the Argyles. He showed them Paris as only a

privileged Parisian could reveal it. In return the Argyles made a number of other purchases at his shop, paying always in checks, and scrupulously refusing to take the purchases with them until the checks were cashed.

Argyle told M. Lorin something of his personal life and their plans for the future. He was a member of an aristocratic Scotch family to whose estate he was sole heir. His wife—they had been married only a week—could not stand the rigor of the Scotch climate and their honeymoon was also a search for their future home, with Paris as a likely favorite.

In Delhi, India

But to M. Lorin's regret Paris did not succeed in holding them. After several weeks they left and when he next heard from them they were in Sicily. From there came a letter. It was written by Argyle in a tone such as one would use to a friend with whom there is also a business relation; it was confiding, personal, and yet pleasantly businesslike.

It began with the news that Mrs. Argyle was on the way to fulfilling their fondest dreams for the marriage, and that in a few months they expected to be happy parents. The letter went on:

> As you can imagine, I am exceedingly anxious to do everything I can to give her pleasure. And in this connection you have no idea how much pleasure the pearl we bought from you has given her. In fact, I want another one exactly like it. You will then make up a pair of earrings for her of the two.
>
> I remember your saying that there was not another pearl like it to be found anywhere. I hope that was only a figure of speech. Because she has set her heart on having that pair. She talks of little else. And anything she wants as much as that I want to get for her. So please find me the mate to that pearl as soon as possible. In fact, I will be glad to pay a premium for speed in finding it.

M. Lorin set about the quest. He got into correspondence with jewelers all over the world, sending them a detailed description of the pearl Argyle had bought. When his search by mail and advertisement failed to bring results he wrote Argyle to that effect. The answer came back at once by telegraph:

> The mate to the pearl must be found at any cost. Send out men to look for it. Will gladly pay expenses when I purchase the desired article. ARGYLE.

A letter followed telling more of the reason for urgency in looking for the pearl. It seems that Mrs. Argyle was not doing so well in health, she was highly nervous, and had managed to work herself into "a state of mind." The only thing that kept her from panic was her feeling that the pearl she loved was a talisman that would bring her good luck in the coming ordeal—provided the mate to the pearl was found. The letter concluded as follows:

> So you see why I am so urgent. Finding the other pearl will undoubtedly have an effect on her spirits—and everything else is of lesser importance to me. Spare no expense.

M. Lorin took Argyle at his word. He sent out four of his men on a widespread search. One day he was notified by one of his hunters that practically an exact duplicate of the pearl had been located in Delhi, India. An opium merchant owned it.

An Exorbitant Price

"But," wrote Lorin's man, "he had heard that we were on the hunt for it and that perhaps our only chance of success lies in his hands. So he is holding us up outrageously. He says he will not let it go for less than three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars."

M. Lorin's heart sank. No man in his right senses would pay such a price for a pearl, splendid though this must be. He notified Argyle, adding: "Both as friend and business man and against my own interest I advise you that the price is exorbitant."

The answer came back by telegraph: "Pay it."

M. Lorin in turn wired his agent to contract for the purchase of the pearl. The Indian merchant held out for spot cash of the full amount. M. Lorin instructed his bankers to forward the money out of his own account.

The pearl arrived in Paris. M. Lorin examined it carefully and found that indeed it was a perfect match for the first pearl. How perfect it was we shall soon see.

He sent the pearl down to Argyle's address in Sicily.

The man who took it down there telegraphed back: "The Argyles have left Sicily giving no address."

M. Lorin stared at the cablegram. Then he set to work all the machinery at his command to trace the Argyles. He did it first without the slightest misgiving of trouble. Daily he expected to hear from Argyle.

On His Wife's Birthday

But when weeks and finally months elapsed and still the vanished Argyles remained vanished, M. Lorin began to scent trouble. And, of course, trouble it proved to be.

The pearl for which M. Lorin had paid three hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars was precisely the pearl for which "Argyle" had paid him one fourth that sum. No wonder it was a perfect match.

And what hurts M. Lorin as much as the enormous amount which his firm had paid in excess of the value of the pearl—which went back to its nest in his personal safe—was that if they ever do catch Argyle it is doubtful if he could be put in prison for the little deal which had so neatly brought him and his charming companion two hundred thousand dollars profit.

More daring, more imaginative, and much more violent was the game played by another jewel crook, a man. This time, also, the scene of the exploit was the Rue de la Paix.

Let us call the victims of this exploit Jumel Frères. In front of their establishment one day stopped an automobile, not so flashing in looks as the car in the preceding exploit, but impressive with that severity of style characteristic of the oldest, most conservative aristocracy.

An elderly flunkey, clad in black, opened the door for a heavy gentleman whose white hair and simple garb marked a man who was so sure of his station that he did not have to dress up to it.

The flunkey opened the door of the store for him and attended his footsteps. One of the proprietors of the establishment himself attended the prospective customer.

"It is my wife's birthday," said the heavily built man. "I want to present her with two or three stones to match in a necklace she has been accumulating. Will you let me look at some?"

He set no limit on the price, which gave the jeweler the chance to show him the best the house had. The presumptive customer pointed to eight or ten stones.

"It is from among these that my wife is likely to select," he said. "Please send one of your men up to my house with them."

The jeweler agreed. With customers of his class this was quite a common procedure. But it was almost a formality for the jeweler in such cases to take the utmost precautions, measures, however, which were discreetly kept from the knowledge of customers.

The messenger with whom the stones were sent was a former soldier, powerful of build, schooled in emergency fighting, and a good man with a revolver. Handily concealed in one of his pockets was a revolver as excellent as his skill.

The Messenger Arrives

While the stones were being done up in a small chamois bag the name and address given by the prospective customer were quietly being looked up in reference books. The name was that of a provincial branch of an aristocratic family. The address was in a part of Paris bordering on the fashionable Étoile section.

The customer went off in his car. The messenger, with the precious little packet in his breast pocket and his revolver in another, took the subway to the address given him.

He took this route because it was a policy of the establishment to have the carriers of valuable packages travel modestly to avoid attracting attention. Before entering the house at the given address he looked at the outside carefully.

Like the customer's car, the house was more severe in aspect than stylish. The

windows on the lower floors were barred. Every window in the house was heavily curtained. But there was no doubt that at one time or another it had housed conservative wealth.

The messenger mounted the stoop and rang the bell. The door, a heavy one, was opened by the elderly flunkey who had accompanied the customer to the store.

"Whom do you wish to see?" the man asked courteously.

"I have brought the diamonds from Jumel Frères," said the messenger, stepping into the dim austere hallway.

A Den of Thieves

"Ah, yes. Come this way, please. The comte and the comtesse are waiting for you."

Dignifiedly he preceded the messenger up a flight of stairs and round the turn of a corridor. Although everything about the house gave the impression of utmost respectability the messenger did not relax his watchfulness.

But as he stepped into a large drawing-room he was caught off his guard. From each side of the doorway two men sprang at him and pinioned his arms. One of them was the portly gentleman who had ordered the diamonds. He let the other men pinion the messenger. He confined himself to rummaging the messenger's pockets.

Pulling out the revolver, the heavy man gave it to one of the messenger's captors. Then he hurriedly left the room, while the other men completed their subjection of the messenger.

His hands were bound, as were his feet, and although no effort was made to keep him from shouting for help, his captors seemed little concerned with his cries as they bore him off to another room. Here they thrust him into what seemed to be a kind of cell. The door was slammed and locked on the outside, and he was left alone.

He knew, of course, that he had been robbed. He wondered now how long they would keep him in the cell. Or would they leave him there to starve? For he was certain the house had been rented for just that one job, and now that the thieves had succeeded in it they were probably all well on their way elsewhere. In that case there was an excellent chance that the prisoner would have to starve before aid came.

He put his ear to the keyhole in the door and listened. No, his captives had not all left. There were sounds of men occasionally going up and downstairs. Then he was startled to hear a cry from another part of the house, as if some one like himself were being attacked and robbed.

"Good God!" he thought. "This is a thieves' den, and they are here for a series of robberies!"

What would they do with him?

It was several hours before a key rattled in the lock and the door was opened. In the doorway stood two burly men and a professional looking gentleman. They entered the cell and the gentleman sat down by the messenger, perfectly friendly in manner.

The gentleman did not look like a robber, the messenger reflected, although, of course, he was in with the gang. But his manner and questions he began to ask puzzled the messenger more and more.

Who Is the Gentleman?

"What is it, my good fellow, that you feel?" asked the gentleman. "Do you feel any pains in the head? Are you afraid there is a plot against you?"

The messenger grew angry. "What's all this farce?" he cried. "You've stolen the diamonds belonging to Jumel Frères. What is your idea in keeping up this ridiculous pretense before me?"

The gentleman kept up his questioning patiently. And after a time the messenger recovered his temper. It seemed to him that the gentleman was sincerely trying to get him to tell his story, whatever it was. It was all so perplexing, this procedure on the part of a gang of crooks, that the messenger decided the simplest thing to do was to humor them, tell his story, and see what would follow. He did so.

The gentleman listened carefully. And the more the messenger told him the more perplexed the gentleman looked. Finally he asked: "Have you any proof that you are what you say?"

"You need only telephone Jumel Frères," the messenger retorted.

To his surprise, the gentleman rose and went out of the room as if to do just that thing. Five minutes later he returned, amazement written all over him.

"Good heavens," he cried to the two attendants. "This man is not at all insane and has been telling the truth. He really is a messenger of Jumel Frères and has been robbed here! The police are on the way."

"Then I suppose you will bid me a hasty good-by!" the messenger sneered.

A Pioneer of Science

But he was mistaken. The gentleman and the attendants were the ones to admit the police, who arrived soon after with the members of the jewelry firm.

Then the whole story came out. The house was a private insane asylum of best reputation. That morning a man had come to engage its facilities for his brother, he said.

"My unfortunate brother is a violent man and suffers from the delusion that he has a package of valuable jewels to sell, but that every one is plotting to rob him," this man told the doctors.

"He is dangerous, because I know he has recently bought a revolver. To protect himself, he says. I want him confined long enough for you to examine him. But I cannot get him here except on a pretense that you will buy his so-called diamonds. When I do get him here we must seize and bind him at once. Otherwise at the first suspicion that we mean to keep him here he will shoot."

The rest of the story is now self-evident. But by the time it was cleared up to the police and victims, the portly "customer" and his dignified-looking flunkey had obtained several hours' start—a handicap the police never overcame in that particular hunt.

Imagination, you see, and consummate acting, as well as dash, must the thief possess who would attempt to snatch the compact treasure of a store of jewels. But here is the tale of a man who exceeded the rogues I have told about in imagination and finesse and who did not have to snatch. Nor did he condescend to deal with mere jewelers, no matter how famous.

Let us enter at once on the big scene of his exploit. It is indeed like a scene out of a cinema or a melodrama. We are in London in a room into which no daylight is allowed to penetrate, although outside the sun is shining. The windows are shuttered and heavily curtained. From the ceiling hangs a powerful arc lamp, whose intense sputtering pale blue light throws a glare over the scene.

In the center of the room is an electric furnace which, when the current is turned on, is capable of generating a temperature of 4,000 degrees centigrade.

In front of it stands a man stripped naked to the waist. His is the spare frame and the large head characteristic of the student. His eyes, black, lustrous, and restless, have the touch of fanatic light often seen in pioneers in the world of ideas and science. He is a Frenchman by the name of Lemoine.

It is his claim that he can manufacture diamonds in that electric furnace of his. Now diamonds, small and of no commercial value, were synthesized and manufactured by Sir William Crookes, the inventor of the famous Crookes tube which made possible the discovery of the epochal X-ray.

To See the Diamonds Made

But Lemoine claims that, although he employs the method of Sir William Crookes, he has developed a chemical compound which, when used in connection with the Crookes method, will manufacture diamonds so large and superb in quality that they will not only compete with the greatest and best of diamonds mined in the great fields of South Africa, but will drive them from the markets of the world by the vast difference in the cost of production.

Should his claim prove true, then the great diamond mining companies will find themselves bankrupt within a week. For who will buy the costly mined product when he can get as good at one-thousandth of the current market price?

Of such importance to the diamond mining industry is Lemoine's claim that

gathered in the room with him while we are looking on are some of the heads of the great DeBeers Company, who are to diamonds what the Standard Oil Company is in the domain of oil. Here then are Sir Julius Wernher. Alfred Beit, Herman Hirsch, and two or three other gentlemen.

They have all come to see Lemoine make large commercially available diamonds.

The Experiment Repeated

The occasion, important though it is, has not been advertised. On the contrary, strictest secrecy has been maintained. That is the reason for the excluded daylight, among other things. And the explanation of the secrecy lies not so much in any anxiety Lemoine may feel that his secret formula would be discovered as in the concern his audience would feel should the test be successful and the news of it leak out into the world at large.

Lemoine is stripped to the waist to avert any suspicion that the diamonds to be manufactured came actually out of his sleeves. Indeed, under the terms of the experiment, he must keep away as much as possible from the furnace. Seated at a little table by the furnace is Leonard Jackson, an expert employed by the DeBeers Company. It is he who, following the spoken instructions of Lemoine, is to compound the substances Lemoine hands him in several containers.

Not a sound but Lemoine's words of instruction. Jackson says nothing as he follows them. The mixture is put into a crucible. The crucible is hermetically sealed.

Then Lemoine takes a shovel with a handle fifteen feet long, not unlike the great wooden shovels with which bakers handle the loaves in their ovens. Lemoine opens the door of the electric furnace. He throws in the switch and the furnace mouth shows white-hot.

With the long handled shovel Lemoine passes the crucible into the oven and closes the door. For twenty minutes, while Lemoine anxiously watches a chronometer, no one moves or speaks a word.

Then, exactly on the moment of the twenty minutes, Lemoine shuts off the current, lets the furnace cool, and opens the furnace door. With the shovel he takes out again the crucible.

It is Jackson, however, who breaks open the sealed cover of the crucible. A hard slatelike matrix comes out.

Jackson takes up a hammer and following Lemoine's instructions cracks the matrix open. Eleven large-sized, gloriously flawless diamonds are revealed.

They are passed about for inspection. The experts look at each other silently. There is no doubt about it, the diamonds are real and of fine quality.

Sir Julius Wernher clears his throat, for he is considerably agitated as we may well imagine.

"M. Lemoine, are you willing to perform the experiment once again," he asks, "this time with me to mix the ingredients?"

"With pleasure," says Lemoine.

"You understand, Mr. Jackson," continued Sir Julius, "this is not intended in the least to reflect on you. But as you know so much depends on the outcome of this experiment that when I come to my board of directors with the report I want to be able to say I took a hand in the experiment; therefore there can be no question as to my faith in it!"

Viewed By a Super-expert

Again Lemoine gave instructions for mixing the compound, this time to Sir Julius Wernher. Again the crucible was sealed and put into the furnace. Again followed twenty minutes of tense waiting. And again the crucible was opened.

This time thirteen superb diamonds came out of the shell.

But the test was not yet over. The twenty-four diamonds produced that afternoon were made into a packet and given to Jackson to take to a famous Hatton Garden jeweler.

Here, acting under instructions of Sir Julius, Jackson, without revealing his identity, offered the diamonds for sale.

The jeweler submitted the diamonds to the scrutiny of their Mr. Hansen. He was what we must describe as a super-expert on diamonds. For him to tell whether a stone were real or not was mere child's

play. He could do much more than that. He could tell by minute examination the place of the diamond's origin, not only the part of the world, but the very mine from which it was taken. At least that was his reputation.

Mr. Hansen reported favorably on the diamonds offered for sale. Not only did he give them a certificate of perfection, he also certified that the diamonds came originally from the Jagersfontein mine in South Africa.

On the basis of this report the Hatton Garden jeweler offered Mr. Jackson a good price on the diamonds.

Burning a Diamond

Hansen's report and the jeweler's offer brought together another secret conference in Lemoine's laboratory. For there were aspects both favorable and otherwise implied in the report. The stones that came out of Lemoine's furnace, until the news of it should break the diamond market, were of great value. So far so good. One could go on manufacturing them and by selling them slowly enough without telling the world as to where they came from clean up a vast fortune

But did they come from Lemoine's furnace? Here was the world's leading expert on diamonds not only judging them to be originally mined, but actually naming the mine. Either the world's greatest expert was wrong, or Lemoine was a fraud.

So important is the new conference that in addition to those we have seen present at the first experiment there is added to this conference a Mr. Oates, another De-Beers director.

Lemoine is called upon once more to demonstrate his process. This time it is Mr. Oates who mixes the ingredients at the directions of Lemoine, who as before, has to keep away from the furnace.

In the midst of this process Sir Julius Wernher suddenly calls out to Lemoine: "Look here, M. Lemoine, where does this wire lead to?"

Lemoine turns quickly. Then an expression of annoyance passes over his face as he explains that the wire Sir Julius suspected leads only to the arc lamp overhead. To convince his onlookers that this was so Lemoine turns off the switch and momentarily the room goes dark.

Then the experiment is resumed. The mixture is completed by Mr. Oates. He seals the crucible. Lemoine puts it into the oven, turns on the current. They wait the usual twenty minutes. The crucible is cracked open. Seven fine diamonds appear.

But Mr. Oates turns to Lemoine sternly.

"Sir, you are a fraud! When you were not looking I introduced a diamond of my own into the crucible. That diamond has been melted by your furnace. Your process is therefore a fake. Your own diamonds are not subjected to the heat. Otherwise they would be burned up as mine was!"

Lemoine looks at the faces about him. He sees in them not only suspicion, but certainty that he has been found out. He realizes now that Sir Julius's innocent question about the wire was only a trick.

In turn the others look for confusion in Lemoine's manner. They are surprised to find him the most self-possessed man there. He not only shows no confusion, actually he is mildly sarcastic.

Lemoine Explains It

"I'm afraid, my dear Mr. Oates, that neither your logic, science, nor sleight-of-hand are of the first order. I knew when you asked to mix the ingredients you had some ulterior purpose in mind. When Sir Julius distracted my attention I guessed there was something in the air. I turned off the light to give you a chance to do anything you wished so long as my process was carried out.

"As for your deduction from the fact that your diamond was burned up, permit me to point out its weakness by a humble analogy. Suppose that with a lot of raw potatoes I put into an oven to bake I included one that was already baked. When the raw ones are perfectly done the baked potato will be burned to a cinder.

"It is the same with your diamond. It takes exactly twenty minutes to generate my stones. If I had left them any longer than twenty minutes they, too, would have

been burned up. How then do you expect a diamond to withstand continued heat after it is a finished product as yours was?"

An agitated debate between the different DeBeers directors followed. Mr. Oates was not convinced by Lemoine's explanation and held out stubbornly. Lemoine was a fraud; his process was a swindle; and he, Oates, would have nothing more to do with the business.

Money for a Factory

So effectively did he stick to his guns that one by one he won the others over to his position—all but Sir Julius Wernher. Sir Julius was one of those men who give their faith grudgingly. But once they are convinced it takes a great deal to shake it. He announced that he would cleave to Lemoine and his process. "If necessary I will make it my exclusive concern to launch this way of making diamonds."

"Sir Julius," said Oates, "you are a director of DeBeers. If you announce to the world that you are backing this scheme you will strike a blow at the value of DeBeers shares. You can't ride both horses. You will either have to ruin yourself as a DeBeers shareholder or abandon this fraud here."

Sir Julius shook his head. "I will abandon neither. I will back M. Lemoine with all the money at my command. I will build him a factory. We will go on making diamonds. But we will say nothing of the process to the world and feed our diamonds slowly enough to the world's markets to leave the prices of mined diamonds unhurt."

The other men departed, leaving him and Lemoine together.

"M. Lemoine," asked Sir Julius, "how much do you want for the oturight sale to me of your formula?"

"I have such confidence in my process," replied Lemoine, "that I will not sell it at any price. Why should I? It is true the ingredients and this special type of electric furnace cost enormously and have used up the last franc of my private means. And I want to share in the fruits of my invention."

He had his way. They drew up a secret agreement and Sir Julius advanced whatever capital was needed to build a factory, install turbines and furnaces, and purchase the costly ingredients of Lemoine's compound.

Half the net profit of the sale of the diamonds manufactured were to go to Lemoine, half to Sir Julius.

Sir Julius was compelled soon after to go for a long trip to South Africa. In his absence Lemoine was to start and build his factory at Pau, France. That he might be free to rush the factory to completion unhampered by lack of funds, Sir Julius gave him sixty thousand pounds in cash. Lemoine promised him that within five months and before the return of Sir Julius to England diamonds would be forthcoming at their factory.

Sir Julius left. Lemoine, writing in a code agreed upon, reported regularly "satisfactory progress" made in the building of the factory. Within three months of the time Sir Julius left, Lemoine wrote:

> I am practically ready to begin turning them out. But, alas, I had by far underestimated the cost of the building. I must have another forty thousand pounds if we are to begin by November.

This did not ring so pleasantly in the ear of Sir Julius. He decided to take another look into the matter without letting Lemoine know. Quietly he returned to Europe and made a secret trip to Argeles, near Pau, where his factory was presumably ready to begin operations.

Rocks of Another Sort

He found only a small shed which could not have cost more than one-thousandth part of the money he had left with Lemoine.

Sir Julius went back to Paris and arranged to have a cable sent Lemoine, who was in London, which would appear that Sir Julius was sending him word from Cape Colony of his intention to return at once to London. The cable asked Lemoine to wait for him in his London laboratory.

A subsequent letter posted at Marseilles told Lemoine that there was coming with Sir Julius a gentleman by the name of Carlin, who was interested in their project

and if convinced by a demonstration would put considerable money into the scheme.

Lemoine saw an opportunity not to be neglected. He cabled that he had moved his laboratory temporarily to Paris and it was there he wanted Sir Julius and Carlin to meet him.

The meeting took place, therefore, in Lemoine's new workshop in the Porte Maillot quarter of Paris. Only Lemoine, Sir Julius, and the newcomer, a sharp-eyed gentleman introduced as Carlin, were present. The demonstration began.

Carlin asked to be the one to mix the ingredients. Lemoine agreed. He was, as always at these tests, stripped to the waist. As always, too, he first "tuned up" the furnace and all the paraphernalia that went with the process. He went over the metal of the furnace with a piece of cotton waste soaked in oil. He carefully wiped off every speck of dust from inside the crucible. He tried out the current several times then he declared himself ready for the test.

But Carlin turned to Sir Julius.

"I caught him!" he said confidently.

He went to the furnace and taking up the wad of cotton waste which Lemoine had used in "cleaning" the furnace, went through exactly the same motions. It was not a prospective capitalist who went through these motions, but a professional prestidigitator, a man who stood near the head of his profession in the theater as a sleight-of-hand artist.

"It was inside of this wad of cotton waste that M. Lemoine concealed the diamonds 'made' in the furnace. And here is the little secret compartment in which you will find a duplicate crucible. In this crucible, which M. Lemoine so deftly exchanges for the one in which his compound is baked, you will find the diamonds he has substituted."

Lemoine had been putting on his clothes as the magician spoke. His poise in the face of the situation was remarkable. Without a word he started to leave the room.

"Stop!" cried Sir Julius. "You don't suppose I'm going to let you go now, do you?"

"Of course, I'm going!" Lemoine said with impressive quiet. Then he patted his pocket. "I have that in my pocket which will make it unwise for you to try to stop me!"

Sir Julius knew enough of his man to believe him. He let Lemoine leave the room without making the least effort to keep him.

Lemoine hurried down the steps of his workshop and opened the street door. At precisely that moment three men seemed to be engaged in a drunken brawl just where Lemoine emerged.

He tried to pass them. Suddenly, however, the three men dropped their dispute and with one accord flung themselves on Lemoine. One of them clutched his right hand with both of his and was barely in time to wrest it away before Lemoine could snatch out of his pocket the pistol that rested there. The others clapped handcuffs on him.

The trial of Lemoine for fraud took place only after a long series of delays. Lemoine had enough money to put all the legal obstacles in the way of Sir Julius's prosecution of him that money could buy. But eventually Lemoine stood in the prisoners' dock.

Even then he was not yet beaten. He actually had court transferred to his Paris laboratory where in his own defense he proposed to manufacture diamonds under test conditions. The court could not refuse his challenge and the test was held.

And diamonds actually came out of the furnace. But they were the small commercially valueless diamonds which were shown to have been made by the method invented by Sir William Crookes.

Nevertheless Lemoine's lawyer pointed out that inasmuch as he had actually made diamonds he could not be convicted as a fraud.

It looked as if the man would escape after all. But Sir Julius Wernher's lawyer sprang a painful surprise on the defense. He produced a Mme. Henz, who had turned on Lemoine. She showed that all the diamonds "made" by Lemoine actually came from the Jagersfontein Mine.

And for the next six years Lemoine was occupied not with diamonds, but in breaking vulgar stones in prison.

Across the back of the tract was a single smear of blood

THE HOUSE ACROSS THE WAY

By Foxhall Daingerfield

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

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

BEING the dressmaker in Winterville, I, Miss Hester Posey, am well acquainted with every one in the village, and that is how I happened to be supervising the servants at the Robertsons during the holidays when their daughter Winifred, home from school, was being visited by Bob Moreland, a youth we highly respected. When I retired the first night I was extremely uneasy, due to several peculiar incidents: I had observed Winifred giving Bob a revolver, Mrs. Robertson pleading with the Rev. Hezikiah Plit, a traveling evangelist, and later a strange woman being received at the Rev. Plit's quarters, and Mrs. Robertson secretly sending a letter to a Trenton theater manager. At three o'clock my fears were realized when, on being awakened by two pistol shots, we

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CHAPTER VII

FOLLOWED FROM TRENTON?

WHEN I reached the post office Clara Spense was more affable than the night before. She had heard of the excitement, knew I was staying in the house, so came at once to the window and, looking over her glasses, even had the grace to glance at the mail rack before her accustomed, "Nothing to-day, Miss Hester." I don't see why she insists on the "miss." We are exactly the same age, only I don't curl my hair or talk with a lisp.

"I hear you had some excitement at the Robertson's last night," she began.

"Yes," I said, "something quite unusual."

I was glad to find she wanted information. I felt while she was doing so I might

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find out what I wanted to know. So I told her of the happenings of the night before, but I made slow work of it.

Clara's mind is of the kind that anticipates what you are going to say and finishes each sentence for you. So at the end she had told me the entire story, substantiated by gossip brought her that morning from the village. Yet while I was wondering how to head her off, she played into my hand the very card for which I had been waiting.

"My," she gloated, "we haven't had such excitement since the Smunn child was drowned in their cistern, and all the time the family drinking—"

But I snapped her off: "It was anything but pleasant, Clara, the Smunns' child's death. Suppose you had been boarding with them at the time."

"Well," she lisped, "if I had the time to be running the streets I'd try to find out things instead of just hearsay." All the hearsay I had had was from her. "What with strangers in town. One of them a woman, too. Pretty? Oh, well, what with beauty doctors. I must say though, I wish I had her coat, still I wouldn't have got it the way it's likely she did!"

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "There are several fur coats in this town, and most of them got the same way you got your near chinchilla. By hard work. Now tell me what you are talking about."

Had she not been so anxious to give information she probably would have resented my remark about the coat. She bent closer to the window until I could see the tip of her nose between the brass rods.

"Why, that woman who's here for the revival. And, let me tell you, she's reviving things all right. But this little girl," and she indicated the bosom of her red silk waist, "knows her name, and that's more than most do, even those at the Eagle House, where she is staying. There she registered as Mrs. Something, which, of course, she ain't."

Catching her breath, she reared herself for her final shot. "Her real name's Follie Williams, and she came from Trenton." Sticking the tip of her tongue between her teeth I could see the gold in one next to me as she turned her head, her eyes narrowed with delight.

"Well, what of it?" I snapped. "Hasn't a woman with a fur coat from Trenton as much right to save her soul as you have in Winterville in your gray chinchilla?"

But Clara was not to be put down so easily. "Of course," she said, "I ain't saying anything, but didn't Bob Moreland arrive last night to visit Winifred Robertson, and didn't he hail from Trenton? Perhaps he did and perhaps he didn't, but if I was staying under the same roof with Mr. Bob and he follows up a fur coat and at the same time is making up to Winifred, I'd just put two and two together and see if they don't make four in that house the same as any other."

I was getting so exasperated I could have slapped her. "How did you find out her name?" I asked sharply.

"Letter," she lisped. "Last night's mail. Gray paper scented. Anything else you'd like to know, sweetheart mine?"

So that was what I found out from my visit to the post office. "Follie Williams? Follie Williams?" I kept saying over to myself. Well, if I knew her name I didn't know why she was in Winterville. Of course one look at her face had driven all thought of regeneration from my head.

I remembered the gold bag she carried in her hand when she entered the meeting-house and, like a flash, the recollection of Rev. Plit searching in the snow and the bag Mary had given me. How perfectly it all seemed to fit. I determined then and there on a bold stroke. I had reason to believe the bag belonged to the woman staying at the Eagle House. I would call upon her, and take the bag with me.

But I was doomed to another disappointment. When I reached the house I went directly to my room and opened the bureau drawer. At a glance I saw my

found Mrs. Robertson in a faint in the lower hall. Mr. Robertson gave an improbable explanation, but her bed was untouched, and Bob's revolver smelled of powder. The next morning I discovered the evangelist looking around the lawn, for, I believe, a gold mesh bag, which I had found the night before.

things had been disturbed. The mesh bag, with its twisted top and diamond letter, was nowhere to be found.

I perched on the side of my bed with the litter all about me. I first suspected Mr. Robertson. Next I had a wave of shame. Save for the quarrel of Bob and Winifred, there was no disturbance in the family. I was only an assistant housekeeper, and that temporarily, so why should I concern myself so deeply? True, I knew more than the others, but, after all, how little I had to go on.

The mystery of the shot and disappearing bullet hole were perplexing, and there was the pistol in Bob's possession and later its disappearance. But what had it all amounted to? My brain was becoming befuddled, and I determined not to think of the matter for awhile. So I went downstairs.

I found Mrs. Robertson dressed for the street and on her way out. She looked rested, and seemed to have recovered from her experience of the night before. I asked if I couldn't go out for her.

"Oh, no," she said hurriedly. "The air will do me good. If you don't mind, Hester, I think I will go alone."

As she went down the steps I ran after her. It was bitter cold, and I bundled my hands up in the black silk apron I had put on from force of habit.

"Is it all right if I go home for awhile this afternoon?" I asked. "There are one or two matters—you know I came off in a hurry last night."

"Oh, yes, by all means," she said. Her poor frightened blue eyes seemed looking over and through and past me all the time. "By all means. Stay as long as you like, only do, Hester, do come back this evening —it's—such comfort to have you in the house."

I remembered her saying this before. I have often wondered since how much she suspected and how much she knew, poor little woman as she stood there, uncertain, in the snow, telling me it was a comfort to have me in the house.

The wind was wrapping my skirts about my ankles, so I asked my question: "Mrs. Robertson, I intend to have some papering done at my house, the back room, you know. Do you remember who did yours three years ago? I thought now, in winter, it might be cheaper."

I was watching her, and if I expected to see anything strange in her face I was disappointed.

"Why, yes," she said after a minute. "The paper was bought in the East, let me see, oh, yes. Jimmy Mullen's father, out by the cemetery, you know, he was the paper hanger. Perhaps you would let me give you the papering for a Christmas present."

She was almost appealing. I thanked her politely and declined. I do not accept favors of this nature even from friends as close as the Robertsons.

So it was, that afternoon, I started for my walk to Mr. Mullen's, a mile out past the cemetery.

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE WAITING FOR DEATH

WHEN I reëntered the house, it was with a sense of pride in my powers of deduction. My brief words with Mrs. Robertson had confirmed a suspicion I had regarding the bullet hole, a suspicion which had deepened as I thought of it through the morning.

First I went upstairs. The coast was clear, and I carefully examined the place where the bullet hole had vanished. I had both my sewing and distance glasses, so, climbing on the bed, I made a thorough investigation. By passing my hand over the wall where the hole had been, I discovered I was right. Over the bullet hole, and matching the pattern of the paper exactly, a square of the original paper had been pasted, yet so cleverly as to escape detection.

I drew a deep breath and settled back on the bed and looked and looked. It did not seem possible, but here was the proof before me, plain as day.

I put on my bonnet and went out into the yard. The walk to Jimmy Mullen's house was a long one, and I had ample time for reflection. On every side I was baffled

by occurrences, simple in themselves, yet with the exception of the pistol shot and Bob's having a pistol, and one that smelled of powder in the bargain, of no great importance.

True, the gold bag worried me. I had proof that the lady who called herself Follie Williams had been to the house the evening before, so why not later in the night? And who was the dark figure I had seen at the gate? If Follie Williams had come back, why had she come, and who had stolen the bag from my bureau drawer?

I pondered on all these things and walked slowly, and by the time I came to the cemetery gate I was chilled to the marrow of my bones. The sun was already sinking, and the sky was streaked with crimson.

At the gate of the old burying ground was the forlorn little house occupied by one Jabez Smunn. It was a combination home and chapel, and altogether not a cheerful place. Mr. Smunn, a wrinkle-faced old veteran of the Civil War, was looking out of the window for a chance passer-by.

I nodded, despite the sharp wind tugging at my hat. He must have been lonely, for he raised the window and called to ask if I wouldn't stop and warm myself. I thanked him and declined, explaining I was on my way to the Mullen house on an errand.

"Well," he said, hoarsely as a crow, "they's home. Seen 'um go in mor'n an hour ago."

Evidently he had not heard of the last night's excitement at the Robertson house or he would have demanded the story.

I walked on to the Mullens's, a shabby little cottage set back some distance from the road, with snow banked almost to its windows. Before I could knock with my half frozen fingers Mr. Mullen admitted me. He had off his shoes, and was smoking an evil smelling pipe.

He invited me in to the "settin" room, explaining that his wife was splitting kindlings in the back yard. I was grateful for the fire, and in a few minutes explained my errand. The prospect of a job cheered him to the point of cordiality.

"Yes, Miss Hester," he said, "I did the paperin' fer Mis' Robertson. Got some of the paper left, though not enough for your room, I'm afeard."

I couldn't help wondering, as he talked with such pleasure of a job, why, if time hung so heavily on his hands, he didn't split the kindling. Next I asked if I might see the wall paper.

"Sure," he said at once, "pretty cold in the shop though."

I assured him I didn't mind, and together we went out into the little lean-to which served him for a workroom. It was a miserable place, littered with buckets and barrels and half used rolls of wall paper and smelling of sour paste.

"Here we are, Miss Hester," he said. "Never had no paper finer than this in the shop."

It was handsome, and I recognized it immediately. It had only been used in Mrs. Robertson's bedroom, so there was no trouble in distinguishing it. He unrolled a piece before me on a flat board set up with a brace for the purpose.

"Hum," he said meditatively, "funny you should ask fer this identical paper. You're the second party has asked me about it in two weeks."

I felt my heart give a pound. I asked him if this were all he had.

"No'm," he answered, sorting out the rolls before him, "but it's the only whole piece I got, 'cept them thar scrape. Last party come askin' 'bout it was a stranger to me, and he took quite a sample with him. Said he wanted to try it in a room. Claimed he'd come back, but he never did."

As he laid another piece before me I could see where the "sample" had been cut off. All the while I was planning how to ask my question and not excite his curiosity.

"Let me see," I said, sorting the pieces of paper before me. "If I should find there was enough for my little room and the gentleman decided not to use it, could you get the sample back and let me take that too?"

Mr. Mullen scratched his bald spot. "Well now, that I couldn't do," he meditated. "Fact is, he come here late, 'bout nine o'clock must h'a' bin. Me'n Mollie

wa goin' ter bed. Said it was awful important an' he worked at the mill an' couldn't come at no other time. So I showed him the paper an' he took out that piece sort of hurried like an' went on his way rejoicin'!"

"You don't know his name?" I ventured.

"La no. Never set eyes on him afore, an' doubt ef I'd know him on the street. Kinder muffled up he was, long coat and hat pulled over his ears. 'Sides, it was almost dark 'cept fer the candle, and that a blowin'."

I saw I was not getting anywhere. Even had the stranger given his name I doubt if Mr. Mullen would have had sense enough to remember it. So I could only thank him, tell him I would return, and start back to town.

As I neared the cemetery Mr. Smunn was still at his post. Then and there I decided on a plan, even though I had little hope for its success. Again he nodded to me, so I went at once to the door of his little dwelling.

"Good evening, Mr. Smunn," I said as I was ushered into his shabby little parlor, smelling honestly of cabbage. "I have decided to accept your invitation and warm myself. I had no idea it was so cold."

He threw some wood on the fire. The blaze sprang up, and its flickering light filled the corners of the room.

I explained about the wall paper I wanted, and thanked my stars I lived in a village where any one's business was every one's business and they were anxious to help one another.

Mr. Smunn thought for a minute. "Yes, I seen a man, a stranger, walkin' out to the Mullen cottage 'bout a week ago. I couldn't see his face, but guess I could recognize him again. Thar's a 'lectric light in front of the gate to the cemetery, an' strangers are such a rarity I ain't apt to miss one."

Next I asked if by any chance he had attended the revival meetings.

"Yes, 'um," he said emphatically, "I have. I ain't missed one in fifty years. Seems like its all I have to carry me over, one year to the next, buryin' the dead and hearin' what their neighbors got to tell of them when they give their 'Experiences.'"

"Can you tell me, Mr. Smunn," here I had to clasp my hands under my wrap. "Can you tell me if there is a chance that the man you saw pass and who later went to Mr. Mullen's for the wall paper, was Rev. Plit?" I held my breath for his reply.

"La, no, Miss Hester," he said at once. "That 'ere feller is tall an' skinny an' black eyes an' hair. I'd know him a mile off, way he struts and sticks his chin in the air. 'Sides he always holds his hands clasped behind his back. This 'ere feller was older, I should say an' not so long in the stride.

"No," he reflected, "I never seen him in the town an' yet thar did seem somethin' familiar 'bout him after all. I was studyin' about it that night till bedtime." He laughed apologetically.

"You see settin' here all day waitin' fer folks to die is a lonesome business an' anything I don't understand kinder gives me a thing er two to think about. Do you know?"

Did I know? "Yes," I felt like saying, "I do. Better than you think." After all we were somewhat alike. If he buried the dead, I had more than once made their shrouds.

I gave a little shudder of disgust at the narrowness of life, and adjusting my wrap held out my hand to thank him. He gave me a military salute and I walked off down the street smiling to myself.

I met Jimmy Mullen on his way home to supper and he stared at me as I came out of the gate. Jimmy removed his cap, but as I went down the street I heard him whistling, "There's a Little Bit of Bad in Every Good Little Girl." And as I walked on faster, frankly, I was furious.

CHAPTER IX

WE PLAN A MASQUERADE

ANGRY as I was at Jimmy's impudence, I felt a satisfaction in what I had accomplished. There was a stranger in the case already and who he was I meant to find out. Of course, the man's story might have been true and

he may have really wanted the wall paper, still it did not seem likely.

But who could it have been? The Mills were three miles from Winterville and a workman would find it difficult to do his shopping at nine o'clock at night. Besides, as a rule, it is a woman's business to select wall paper.

Remembering how carefully the bullet hole had been covered, I confess to a shiver as I thought how completely the whole thing had been planned.

By the time I arrived at these conclusions I came in sight of the Robertson yard. I heard the sound of laughter and then a girl's voice: "Stop! It's not fair." Looking over the wall, I saw Bob and Winifred, happy as two children, snowballing one another, their cheeks like winter apples. So that had all blown over.

"Give me lief," shouted Bob, aiming at my bonnet.

"Leaf of a tree," I called back, remembering the schoolboy witticism, to this day considered humorous by the young. I dodged the snowball and he and Winifred ran over to me.

"Did you ever see such weather?" she cried, dancing around me. Catching up a handful of soft snow, she sifted it down Bob's collar. He ducked and ran, she after him.

I was very happy for the children then. In their happiness my apprehension seemed to fade, and as I stood watching I wondered if all my worries would be swept away as easily as their small tiff.

Once inside, my coat and bonnet off, I asked Mary if there were any messages.

"Nothin' but dis hyr," she replied, giving me a pad on which she had scrawled a number. "Dey wants Mis' Robertson to call dis hyr de minute she gets home. Said hit was important."

I asked when they had repaired the telephone and she told me during my absence.

The number was that of Mr. Jim Horner, our leading real estate man. I had sewed for Mrs. Horner, and twice Mrs. Robertson had sent across the street for me when Mrs. Horner wanted me on the phone.

Also, I remembered that Mr. Robertson and Mr. Horner had quarrelled and the matter seemed to assume serious proportions at one time. For some months they did not speak to one another on the street.

I always thought it much to the credit of the stenographer in Mr. Horner's office that the village never got the straight of the story. We never knew, but some months later they made it up after a fashion, though there was a coolness between them ever after. It showed when they bowed to one another in church.

Before I went upstairs, Mrs. Robertson came in. She was obviously excited and a deep color burned in her cheeks. I gave her the message and she went to the telephone. I wanted to listen, but really there were limits and I thought it good discipline for myself.

As I laid off my bonnet I went over the whole matter of the wall paper again and a sudden thought struck me. I went to my drawer and drew out the object I picked up on the stairs. In the other interests I had entirely forgotten it. It was a small tube of library paste, dented in the middle where I had mashed it.

My first thought was that a goodly portion of it must have been left on the stair carpet, and suddenly it took on a double meaning. Some one anticipated the need for the paste and brought it along and he had dropped it on the stairs.

Had it—of course, the paste was used to put the wall paper in place to hide the bullet hole. I leaned against the headboard of my bed and felt a little sick. Well, nothing was to be gained by this, so replacing the tube, I went downstairs to see about supper.

The lights were on and the early winter darkness gathered around the house. Mary was setting the supper table. She told me Mrs. Robertson, after her phone call, had gone out in a great hurry, so hurriedly that she had left her gloves on the hall table.

This was a habit of Mrs. Robertson. She always left something somewhere, usually it was her gloves. It had been a glove which first started me on the mystery. I was disturbed at Mary's news. Mrs. Robertson was not strong and it was bitterly cold.

The family had assembled and were

ready for supper when she returned. She went at once to her room and I followed, intending to ask if I could do anything, help change her shoes or bring her a cup of tea. When I reached her door she was standing at the desk near the window and her back was to me.

I heard the click of metal and saw her thrust a small tin box in the center drawer between the partitions and drop a little key into a vase standing on the desk.

I tapped at the door and asked if I could be of service.

"Yes," she sighed, "I am tired, Hester. Would you mind bringing me some tea? I hate to ask it, but you are so kind."

I brought her the tea and made her sit before the fire I'd kept burning, removed her wet shoes and brought her slippers. Once she laid her hand timidly on mine and said how comfortable she was. I remember yet the expression in her wide blue eyes as she looked into the fire, her hand on mine. It has been a comfort in the months just past.

While the coal fire inspired confidence, I told her of my search for the wall paper —she was not to know of the bullet hole above the bed. As I did so I went behind her chair to watch her face reflected in the glass above the mantel.

If I expected a reaction from my story I was disappointed. She was sorry I had had my walk for nothing, seemed to regard the stranger's wanting a sample of the wall paper as purely coincidental and offered again to order the paper as my Christmas present.

"Wonder if I've been a fool?" I remember thinking as I went downstairs.

Well, these were the happenings of the day following our excitement. That was Tuesday. On Wednesday everything ran smoothly.

Bob and Winifred went shopping and returned full of excitement, having bought, each for the other, a gift under the other's nose without suspicion.

Mr. Robertson consulted me as to his wife's Christmas present. I was tempted to suggest a little peace of mind, but compromised on the Persian rug I knew she wanted.

Even Miss Eliza thrust the door shut with her foot and asked me gruffly what I thought of putting blue scollops on the green worsted slippers she was knitting and if I thought the idea too "advanced."

We were very happy that night. The excitement had disappeared and Thursday was even better. Winifred asked if she might give a party, and to my surprise Mrs. Robertson consented readily, even suggesting that they make it a Christmas masquerade. My heart gave a bound of pleasure. That meant fancy costumes for me to make, and a little money is so welcome at Christmas.

Thursday night as we sat about the fire talking over the party I couldn't help thinking how remote the disturbance of three nights ago now seemed.

Winifred and Mrs. Robertson were looking at the catalogue of fancy costumes I had brought over, while Bob and Mr. Robertson sat on the other side of the table.

Suddenly Winifred gave a little cry of pleasure. "Here it is! Look, Miss Hester. Could you make that for me? Bob, I have found the very thing. I am going as Folly, and here is the costume."

I raised my eyes in time to see those of Bob and Mr. Robertson meet for the barest second. Winifred snatched the book and danced over to Bob to show him the picture, declaring he must go as Court Jester so his costume would match hers. I mention this incident as it had significance enough later on.

As we said good night and went upstairs we were still discussing the plans for the morrow.

CHAPTER X

LOOKING AT A BLOOD SPOT

THE house was quiet early that night. So confident in each other's love were Winifred and Bob that they went upstairs openly holding one another by the hand. There was no lingering behind as on other nights. Miss Eliza seemed actually cheerful. She had tucked her knitting under her arm, declaring she would work after she went to her room.

Our general talk of the party had wrung a fluttering interest even from Mrs. Robertson, to whom the slightest effort always seemed a vast undertaking. At her door she bade me good night saying: "I don't dread even a fancy party when I have you in the house, Hester."

Poor woman.

I sat up a few minutes after I had closed my door, looking through the fashion magazine to be sure I could make the costume Winifred wanted, and vaguely wondered where Bob would get the tights for the one he chose. After that I undressed and got into my bed.

The storm of three nights before had not renewed itself, and for three days the weather had been glorious. To-night, after my light was out the moon streamed through the window, making a pool of light on the carpet, crossbarred by the shadow of the sash. That was the last thing I remember, looking at this light slowly, so slowly, shifting its way across the floor.

At exactly three o'clock I was aroused by a pistol shot. It came crashing through the house like the other.

In an instant I was wide awake, sitting up in my bed. I flung back the covering and threw on my wrapper and slippers. Groping for the candle, I lighted it as I had done three nights before.

Oddly at that moment there flocked through my brain a vivid recollection of the other night, and I listened for the second shot and the scream I had heard before. But all was silent.

Flinging open my door I rushed into the hall. More sure of myself than before, without waiting to hear Miss Eliza's answer, I struck violently on her door as I passed. Then I ran downstairs.

"Bob! Mr. Robertson!" I called at the top of my voice. I found Bob's door and flung it open. The room was dark, the moon having shifted to the other side of the house.

Instantly the draft from his open window slammed the door shut with a crash. In that brief second I realized that here was the sound of the second shot for which I had waited.

Bob had sprung out of bed and faced me, his hair tumbling into his eyes, and he was groping frantically for his bath robe.

"What was that?" he gasped. He flashed on the light and I saw there was no pistol on his bureau. Before I could answer he was out in the hall with me at his heels.

At that moment Winifred's door was flung open, and together we ran across the hall. Instinctively, as on the other night, we felt the shot had come from Mrs. Robertson's bedroom. I could hear Miss Eliza running down the stairs. "Hester! Hester!" she screamed. But I did not wait to answer.

Bob flung open the door, turned on the electric switch, and together we entered the room. The first thing I was conscious of was the strong smell of powder, then I looked at the bed. Against the farther side, with her face turned toward the wall lay Mrs. Robertson. She was dressed only in her nightdress.

Across her lower limbs lay the silken comforter from the couch. Across the bosom of her nightdress and slowly widening was a vivid scarlet stain. Bob and I rushed forward to the bed. Winifred took a step toward her, but her knees gave way, and she crumpled in a heap near the foot of the bed.

To this day I cannot tell why I did it, but as Bob reached across the bed I caught his arm and pointed to her hands folded across the blood upon her nightdress and in them, clutched fast, lay a shining new pistol.

At that moment the door leading into his bedroom was flung open and Mr. Robertson rushed in. He carried a heavy iron poker in his hand. His eyes were wide and he had a bathrobe half on over his pyjamas. Stumbling over Winifred, who still lay on the floor, he reached the bedside.

Miss Eliza had entered, and stood, frozen like a gaunt black shadow of death, it seemed to me, against the wall. Leaning over Mrs. Robertson's prostrate form, and tearing away the front of her nightdress, I saw that she was dead.

I cannot describe the events which took place in the next few moments, nor have I blamed the family for their seeming

stupidity. They were as a flock of sheep when lightning strikes their stable, stunned, bleating and helpless.

My first recollection is of Bob dashing to the telephone and trying to get Dr. Morton; of Miss Eliza demanding that we minister to her sister, who was beyond our aid; of Winifred recovering and coming to crouch, like a frightened bird, against the side of her mother's bed. Mr. Robertson was the first to speak coherently.

"I was asleep. I heard the shot, then some one running. I called to my wife and thought I heard her answer. I snatched up the poker from the fireplace and ran down the steps, thinking I could catch the intruder before he made the back door. I heard you call and ran back."

Just then Mary and old Caroline burst into the room from the hall door. Miss Eliza held up her hand, her tall figure wrapped in a black shawl, ghastly against the wall.

"Hush!" I heard her say. "She is dead!"

There was a wail from the two women, and it was some moments before we could quiet their ravings about tokens, back sliding and the like.

Bob and I tried by every known means to revive Mrs. Robertson. I bathed the wound, poured water on my handkerchief and placed it on her forehead. Mr. Robertson came and bent over her body. "Gone!" I heard him mutter under his breath.

Winifred must have heard, for she fainted away again, slipping and sliding until she lay again upon the floor. Bob lifted her to the couch and I heard him sending the two terrified negroes to watch for the doctor's arrival.

We sat about the bed, trying to speak when there was nothing to say. Miss Eliza covered her face with her hands and sank by the door and I heard her broken words: "The judgments of the Lord—"

Bob was bending over Winifred, who lay unconscious on the couch. He was whispering meaningless words to her, and I saw him kiss her on the lips.

I spoke. "Hadn't you better call the neighbors or you and Bob search the house? Perhaps—"

Mr. Robertson raised his eyes to mine. "I can't leave her," he gasped. "The door was locked down there." Then: "Look!" he whispered, pointing to the frail, helpless hands holding the pistol.

For the first time the word "suicide" flashed through my mind.

All this had taken the fewest minutes. I spoke softly to Bob:

"The doctor?" I asked. "On his way?"

Bob answered not even raising his head. I handed him a glass of water and he bathed Winifred's temples with a tenderness I should not have looked for in a man.

The front door opened and I heard the incoherent sound of the negro voices trying to tell the doctor what had happened, and he coming up the steps, three at a time. He wore an overcoat over his trousers and pyjama coat and motioning us aside, opened his bag and bent over the form on the bed.

I remember Miss Eliza tottering over to a chair and my turning on a reading light and removing the silk shade to give more light. Mr. Robertson stood still, almost as the form upon the bed, watching the doctor's movement. Finally he gently drew the blood-stained nightdress back across the bosom and straightened himself up. "Dead," he said in a low voice.

I think in our hearts there had been a faint hope that we had been mistaken. I had seen the doctor with his strong, capable fingers draw back the nightdress, unclasp the hands and gently lay the pistol on the cover beside her. But now at his word our strength failed.

Miss Eliza gave a scream I shall never forget, and fled from the room, and I heard her wavering feet on the stairs outside. Mr. Robertson dropped his face in his hands and sat as though turned to stone.

Dr. Morton walked a few steps away from the bed and beckoned to me. I saw him look at the pistol on the coverlet. "Suicide?" he said very low. My eyes met his. There had been an odd questioning in the one word and his eyes shifted to the floor.

Between us on the gray carpet was a dark red stain where blood had soaked through. I saw his eyes measure the distance from

the blood spot to the body. Looking at me as if answering his own question, he slowly shook his head.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT HER GOLDEN HAIR HELD

DR. MORTON was a kindly man as well as a wise one. After that moment when our eyes met above the blood spot on the floor, he was perfectly matter-of-fact. He gave a stimulant to Winifred and ordered Bob to carry her back to her room. Then he turned his attention to Miss Eliza, bidding Mary follow him upstairs and sit with her. Next he returned to the room of death.

Mr. Robertson refused to leave. I had not known that he was capable of such sincere grief, and I was honestly sorry for him.

At the door the doctor said: "You had better telephone for the coroner, Miss Posey. And see that nothing is disturbed."

I nodded and he continued:

"Later there will have to be arrangements."

I knew too well what he meant, and gave a shudder. An undertaker is always a horrible thing to me. Why must we leave those last sad offices, which should be those of love, to alien hands? I told him if he could persuade Mr. Robertson to leave I would sit with the body till the coroner arrived. But he shook his head.

"Let him alone," he said gently. "He will come himself in a few minutes."

Standing just outside the door, he asked a few questions as to what I thought about the death of Mrs. Robertson. I recounted as carefully as I could of the evening before and told him I had never seen her in better spirits.

Finally I persuaded Caroline to sit in the room with Winifred, while Bob could get into some clothes. Poor soul, she was stunned as the rest of us and she went shuffling out of the room in a daze. In a few moments I heard Bob go upstairs and in an incredibly short time he returned fully dressed to sit with Mr. Robertson.

It was four o'clock by now, and shortly after the coroner and his assistant arrived. I met him at the door myself, and after a brief examination he curtly asked Mr. Robertson to leave the room. He was about to send me out also, but Dr. Morton asked that I remain, explaining that as I had entered the room first, he wished him to hear what I had to say.

I was perfectly composed. The coroner was a brutal man, and I knew the doctor wished to have me behind him in certain statements he intended to make. While the man was making his examination I determined not to volunteer any information and that I should probably have to talk soon enough.

We were silent, the three of us, during those dreadful minutes while he was lifting the body and opening the nightdress. Once I handed him a damp towel and once, when I mistook an impatient movement on his part for a request for more light, I started to lay the pistol on the side table. he raised his head and growled: "Don't touch that," and I started back, closing my lips tight.

At last he straightened himself up and turned to the half dressed young man who had come with him. "Plain case of suicide," he said, and his assistant nodded.

He asked me to repeat the happenings of the evening before, and after I had recounted them turned to the doctor who told him briefly what he knew. The man took a pad and wrote for some minutes in silence. "Well," he muttered, "that's that." I had never seen a man so heartless.

He placed the pistol in his pocket. Even though passing judgment on the dead was his business, he might remember there were the living! "As plain a case of suicide as I ever saw. Pistol, powder burns, everything. You going to stay awhile?"

Dr. Morton nodded. I asked if he wished to speak to any of the family. "No, not now," he said. "I got to get some sleep." He was pulling on his overcoat as he spoke. "Of course, when I call an inquest, though," he continued.

"Wait a moment," the doctor said as the man was fastening his gloves. "I can't say I agree with you about the suicide theory."

"How's that?" the coroner looked him full in the face. Then he sniffed. "Well, keep your theories. I got mine, and mine are facts."

Dr. Morton walked to the center of the room, dropped on one knee and lighted a match and held it directly over the dark red stain in the carpet. I saw the coroner's eyes sharpen. He came over to where the doctor knelt and, pressing his fingers on the rug, held them to the light. They were stained with blood.

"Why didn't you show me this when I first came in?"

The doctor rose, and dusting off the knees of his trousers, said: "It was not my business to. I had no intention of letting you leave the room with a snapshot verdict until you had seen it, however," he added dryly.

The coroner glared at him and thrust forward his chin. I had never seen a man I disliked more, and began to understand why Dr. Morton hated him. Doubtless he had had many experiences of the same nature and was glad of this chance to put him in his place.

"Well," the coroner bullied, "what does it amount to? The woman shot herself standing near the center of the room. They always do it standing up." I winced at that. "Never saw one lie down to it yet, and I've been in the business twenty years."

I could scarcely believe my ears. It was ghastly. I approached the coroner. Much as I disliked him there was still Winifred and Miss Eliza to consider.

"Would you—" I began.

The man turned on me as though my addressing him had been an impertinence. He actually frightened the words out of my head for a minute.

"Would you mind if later I put a clean nightdress on her? Her daughter may wish to sit in the room, and that other—" here I shuddered away from the bed—"that other is so dreadful."

I do not know why I had to fight for words just then. I had often clothed the dead, sometimes alone, yet this seemed more than I could bear.

The coroner gave a short grunt of a laugh. I was pressing my hands together, and perhaps he saw that they were shaking. He was the type of man who takes advantage of a woman's fright.

"Guess there's no harm in that," he said gruffly. "Save the other, though. Can I trust her to do it?" and he turned to Dr. Morton.

The doctor nodded. "You can trust her," he said quietly.

The coroner and his assistant went to the door. "Some of you stay till I get back," he ordered. "About nine, I guess." As he and the young assistant were going: "And see to it that no one moves it till I get back."

Dr. Morton was growing white with anger, though he controlled himself admirably.

When the men had gone I sank in a chair completely unnerved. "What, what does it all mean?" I said at last. "You would think the man was an enemy instead of simply performing a duty."

But the doctor had recovered himself. "Oh, nothing. Just a roughneck politician drawing three thousand a year for the right to insult the living as well as the dead."

For some minutes we sat there speaking in the voice one uses in the presence of death. I told the doctor the incident of finding the bolster from the bed three nights before in exactly the same position the body now occupied. He was greatly interested.

The coroner had turned off the reading lamp by which he had made his examination and now we approached the bed and switched it on again. As I have said, across the lower portion of the body lay, neatly folded, the silken comforter from the couch.

I called the doctor's attention to it. It was folded across the middle and almost squarely over the feet and knees. I even pointed out that it had been tucked in.

"Miss Posey," he said, "I am going to take you into my confidence and trust you as you have trusted me. I am going to remove this comforter and then replace it. Remember it is our business, and not the coroner's. Whatever the verdict is, and whatever happens, you are never to mention it to any one."

He went to the door and glanced into the

hall. All was very still. Across the way I knew Bob was sitting with Mr. Robertson and Caroline was ministering to Winifred. Upstairs were Miss Eliza and Mary.

Dr. Morton drew down the silken comforter and held it to the light. Across the inside, where it had been folded, was a long scarlet stain. For some moments the two of us bent over the comforter. The stain was fresh. During the moments while the doctor replaced the comforter I could hear my own breathing.

"You see," and his voice sounded far-away, "the comforter was placed there *after* the death—not before."

That was all.

My eyes fled to the stain upon the floor, which as yet we had not covered. I could not speak just then. For some time we sat in silence. Once I remember smoothing the covering, and once, very gently, I replaced a lock of her soft curling hair which had strayed out over her forehead. She always kept her hair in order. It was one of her few orderly habits.

"Doctor," I said at last, "would you mind if I changed the nightdress now?"

He bowed his head in assent.

"I'll stand over here by the fire. If you need me just speak."

I did not need him. I had often cared for Mrs. Robertson, and had once nursed her through the flu. I brought a fresh nightdress from the bureau, and even ran a pink ribbon in the neck, using a hairpin from my own hair; and lifting her tenderly I drew on the clean nightdress, folding the other horror into a small package, crossed the room and handed it to the doctor.

I returned to the bed and, after tying the pink ribbon at her throat, began to arrange her hair. As I passed the comb through the heavy locks it seemed to catch in my hands. I leaned forward and ran my fingers through its thick waves.

There, in her hair I felt a small square object and carefully drew it forth. I glanced up at the doctor, but he was looking into the dying embers of the fire. I held it up to the light.

It was a tract, a duplicate of the one Mary had given me the day I entered the house for this visit. The cross in gilt, the lurid streaks of light, all were the same. I looked closer. I turned it over. Across the back, which was badly crumpled, was a single smear of blood.

I did not tell the doctor. I was not ready to tell any one. I slipped the tract in my pocket, finished smoothing and dressing the heavy golden hair of my friend, and went over to the fireplace and sat down near the doctor.

"Now," I said after a pause. "I think we might ask her husband to come in."

CHAPTER XII

I SEE MISS FOLLIE WILLIAMS

FOR more than an hour we sat there, saying little. When I rose to stir the fire and put on another lump of coal the doctor went into the bathroom and brought out a fresh linen towel, and I watched him go to the spot on the carpet and lay the towel over it.

About five Mr. Robertson came to the door. He did not speak, and we watched him go to the bed and stand looking down for some moments on the face before him.

Later, old Caroline came tipping across the hall and paused as though afraid to enter. I spoke to her, remembering her love for her mistress.

"Come in, if you want to, Caroline."

Her poor swollen eyes were brimming with tears, but she shook her head. She lifted a corner of the apron she wore and furtively wiped her eyes.

After a moment I asked: "Is Miss Winifred in her room?"

"Yas'um," she replied huskily. "She done gone ter sleep. I'z going back torrectly."

Once in the silent watch of the night I heard the sound of trampling feet, back and forth, back and forth from Miss Eliza's room, and once a door open and close.

As the pale dawn began to steal through the windows I went into the hall. Winifred's door was open, and I could see her lying asleep, her cheek pillowed on her hand. By her side sat Bob, with an expression in his big eyes I shall never forget. Even at that moment I knew that Winifred, what-

ever she might have lost, was safe in his keeping.

After this Mr. Robertson returned. He was fully dressed, and calmer than any of us.

"Miss Hester," his voice was shaky and his eyes had red rims around them, "let me sit with her for awhile, and you—you get some rest."

I glanced at the doctor, who assented, and went downstairs. The housewife's instinct is strong in me, and for something to do I went into the kitchen and filled the coffeepot and set it to boil. I went into the yard. It was beginning to grow light, and I thought how ghastly the world looked in its winding sheet of snow.

It was very cold. Not a soul was in sight, and far away, through the gray frosty air, I heard a cock crow. Through the naked branches of a tree the morning star shone brilliantly over the gray streaks along the horizon which heralded the coming day.

My breath came in a cloud before me. Far away an engine whistled two long and then two short notes. They came faint and mournful to me through the biting air.

Around the house, in the snow of three nights before, was the wide band of footprints of those who had searched about for the suspected burglar. I shivered in the cold and fell to musing. Which, in all that trampled mass, were those of Hezikiah Plit? Which Bob's, and which were Follie Williams's? The snow was now a trampled mass of shining ice.

The coffee on the stove boiled over just then, and I hurried in, scowling in the heat and steam. Filling two cups with the hot black liquid, I mounted the stairs. Mr. Robertson refused and shook his head without looking at me.

"Try and drink it," the doctor said, and mechanically the poor man took the cup in his shaking hands. It was curious how these unimportant details were photographed upon my mind that morning.

There was a muffled knock from below, and I went to answer it. It proved to be Jimmy Mullen on his way to work. He had heard of the tragedy from the coroner's assistant, and was the first to reach the house. I told him little, just the facts, and asked him to come back later, as I was sure there would be telegrams which must be sent.

By seven o'clock the village began arriving at the house, and I stationed Mary at the door, bidding her tie up the bell and answer the inquiries herself.

Clara Spense was the first of these arrivals, and I edged her near the door while she was talking. For once I anticipated the end of her sentences and finished them for her, wondering how she liked it. I recall her saying something about "When the camel gets its nose inside the tent—" as I shut the door.

Later came the family lawyer, Mr. Hope Graves, an eminent gentleman I greatly respected, accompanied by his wife. Mr. Horner and his family came too, and they were followed by Mr. Goatly and old Mr. Smunn from the cemetery. How soon we would see him again, I couldn't help thinking.

I heard afterward Clara Spense imperiled her position by closing the post office and conducting people to the house. She brought them no nearer than the porch, however, and did not try to get into the house.

It was very trying, these first two hours. I wanted to be civil, and later Bob came down and helped me by answering some of the questions himself.

None of the family came downstairs, I am thankful to say, so by eight o'clock, except for some curious ones who lingered about the gate pointing at the house, we had a lull in the calling. Yes, they all came that day: the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, and the world and his wife.

The family behaved splendidly, and I was proud to be their friend. Caroline resumed her duties in the kitchen, and at half past eight Mary came timidly in to ask if any one wanted breakfast. The doctor persuaded the family to come down, and we gathered about the table for a few minutes.

At nine Mr. Henry Allen, the district attorney, was announced. I went at once into the library to see him. He was a tall,

handsome man, with snow white hair and keen blue eyes. I had always admired him, and when I recalled he had been a political enemy of the coroner I was cordial.

He asked if he could see Mr. Robertson, and they were together a few minutes. Then Mr. Allen went upstairs to speak to Dr. Morton, who was with the body. Later, when I went to announce the coroner, I saw the doctor replacing the towel over the dark spot on the carpet, and knew the district attorney knew of the doubt in the doctor's mind as to the manner in which Mrs. Robertson met her death.

Well, that was what happened early in the morning. The inquest was set for three o'clock that afternoon, and after telling Mr. Robertson gruffly the witnesses he required, the coroner went away again, leaving orders that nothing was to be disturbed in the room of death.

I remember seeing him glare down the road at the figure of the district attorney, walking erect and handsome in the morning sun. I liked Mr. Allen better than ever after that.

For two hours the house was quiet. At ten Miss Eliza sent for me and I went to her room. She had aged ten years. She was standing before her bureau drawing out one garment after another.

"I know," she said, her voice sounding far away, "it is early to speak of it, but there are no black clothes in this house of death." I couldn't help shivering. "Do you think you could fix this over for Winifred?" And she laid a black china silk across my arm.

She looked up at me. I say that her eyes had sunk back into her head, and she fingered the black dress nervously. I was actually afraid of her.

"Of course," I replied. "I will get my things and sit with you and we will work on the dress together."

It took all my courage to say this. I had always feared Miss Eliza, and, without knowing why, I avoided her. She nodded, but did not seem to hear what I said, and really I was glad when I could get out of the room.

Throwing my cloak on, I crossed the street, entered my own door, and, securing needle, tape and thimble started back to the Robertson house.

Down the street came a closed hack—the snow was too deep for a motor—and I saw it was driven dangerously fast. It was the same I had seen three nights before, and I stepped back to let it pass. When it came up to where I stood I had a glimpse of a woman's face at the window.

Her hat was crooked, and her eyes were wide with fright. She cowered against the side of the hack as her glance met mine. But the one minute had been enough. The woman was Miss Follie Williams, and she was leaving Winterville.

I walked on to the house. It was ten miles to the junction, and the roads in a wretched state. I made a hurried calculation. The train did not leave until the middle of the afternoon. By rapid driving Miss Follie Williams should reach the junction in time for the express on the main line. Then, too, she need not be seen boarding the local from our village.

CHAPTER XIII

"I TAKE THE BLAME"

ON my way back to the house, my workbasket under my arm, I was thinking rapidly. So Follie Williams had left town. I had an impulse to go then and there to the district attorney and tell him what I knew. Then I thought how little, really, I had to tell of Follie Williams, only my suspicions, and I recalled that maiden ladies are often considered suspicious, especially where an actress is concerned.

Well, I didn't go—still, if I had, that morning, turned about in the snow and walked down to his office with my story, I wonder what would have happened.

It was noon when Mr. Henry Allen returned. Mr. Robertson had gone to his room, and while I was fixing the dress with Miss Eliza, Bob and the doctor, who had stayed on during the day, were in charge of the house.

Mr. Allen and Dr. Morton went into Mrs. Robertson's room, and closing the door behind them, remained for fully

an hour. When at last the district attorney prepared to leave, the doctor walked to the gate with him, talking earnestly.

Save for a brief conference with the undertaker, this was what happened before lunch that day. It was decided Mrs. Robertson should be buried the next afternoon in the family lot in the cemetery and the funeral set for two o'clock. It was not the custom, I found, for a body to be embalmed before an inquest, so this grim detail was postponed till late in the afternoon.

Considering the shock to the family, I asked Mr. Allen if it were not possible to postpone the inquest till the following day. He tried to explain the law to me, and I was only able to gather that the coroner had a perfect right to have an inquest when he chose.

He added that as far as he could see, the only reason for haste was that the man planned to leave the following morning for his Christmas vacation. Well, living in a village though I did, I was beginning to learn something of "city politics," and I was disgusted.

Directly after lunch I went to my room to prepare for the ordeal of the afternoon. I dressed myself in my black velvet basque and even put on my bonnet. I thought it looked more dignified, with so many strange men in the house.

At exactly five minutes to three I saw the coroner coming up the drive. He was followed by six men chosen by him to compose the jury. I found that it would not be necessary to hold the inquest in the presence of the body, so had, with Miss Eliza's and Mr. Robertson's consent, the men assemble in the library where chairs were placed. Mr. Allen and the doctor were present, and I had told the servants to be ready to appear should they be called.

I sat with the family in a group apart near the door. At the farther end of the room a table had been placed for the coroner. Save for Mr. Hope Graves, Mrs. Robertson's lawyer, and a stenographer he brought, there were no outsiders.

The coroner flung off his coat and gloves, sat down at the little table, looked at his watch, said something in an undertone to his assistant, then called us to order. In a disinterested voice he began a legal preamble setting forth our reason for being there.

Dr. Morton was the first witness called. He was duly sworn, and seated himself in a chair near the coroner. In his testimony he said he had been called by telephone a few minutes after three by Robert Moreland, who was visiting in the Robertson house, and was told that Mrs. Robertson had been shot.

He had dressed himself quickly and come over at once, arriving five minutes after being called, as his home was only a block away. He had found Mrs. Robertson in her bedroom lying on her back, her head slightly turned toward the wall.

On examination he found life extinct, due to a bullet wound over her heart, and, on further examination, found the bullet had been fired at close range, entering perhaps half an inch from the left breast, penetrating the heart, lodging against the left shoulder blade, and that he believed wound could have been self-inflicted or fired by second party at close range.

There were powder burns on the front of her dress. Death had been instantaneous. He had made no effort to move the body.

When the doctor finished, the coroner opened a book he carried called "The Coroner's Record." In it were two diagrams of the naked human body, one showing the front, the other the back of a figure. He handed it to the doctor.

"Show the jury the exact location of the wound," he said, as the six more or less stupid looking men gathered about. One, I remember—he cleans our cisterns in the summer, and is tipsy most of the winter—tried to look at it upside down.

The doctor pointed to the bosom of the diagram finally making a little cross over the heart.

I was called next. I was perfectly calm, and remember smoothing the front of my basque as I settled myself in the chair, after being sworn. He asked if I were Mrs. or Miss, and then purposely misunderstood and referred to me as Mrs. Posey through the whole investigation.

How he would laugh out of the other side of that mouth of his, if he had known what was going on inside my mind while he was asking his questions. I substantiated everything the doctor had said.

Earlier in the day Dr. Morton, knowing his man, had given me a hint not to volunteer information. I had reason to be thankful to him. Once I was put sharply in my place by the coroner when I began with "I think."

He cut me off with "It's what you know, we're trying to get, Mrs. Posey, not what you think." I suppose he meant to be funny. Well, it served to put me on my mettle, and I flatter myself he got little enough out of me. I told briefly of hearing the pistol shots on both occasions, and of rousing the house and the two visits to Mrs. Robertson's room three nights apart. But one may be sure I said nothing of the pistol.

Then Mr. Robertson was called. He described the hall the night we found his wife fainting on the floor, and recounted his experiences of the night before.

He slept in the adjoining room, and when for the second time there had been a pistol shot in the house, his first thought was to reach the back stairs to head off the intruder. He had snatched up a poker as he passed the fireplace, and ran down the back stairs; returned to find us bending over the lifeless body of his wife.

Next he was asked about the pistol. I was wondering when they would get to that. The coroner drew the weapon from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Robertson, and asked him if it were his. He replied, after a brief examination, that it was. He was asked where he kept it.

He replied, sometimes in his room, sometimes in the bureau of his wife's bedroom; explained that he never carried it, and that he did not even remember if it were kept loaded. He was asked regarding this, and explained he only kept a pistol because his wife was nervous.

How I longed to glance at Bob and Winifred at this moment. But the eyes of the coroner seemed everywhere at once, so I kept my eyes on Mr. Robertson's face.

Bob was called next. He told of being on two occasions roused by me, and of the events of the night before and three nights previous.

The coroner was frankly bored to think it was necessary to call him in the first place, and hurried so through the oath, once looking at his watch, that I could hardly catch the questions. As Bob and I both had testified to the whereabouts of the servants and Miss Eliza, they were not even called.

The coroner announced that he had finished, and, that after the jury viewed the body, was ready for a verdict. I remember being distinctly surprised. I knew the district attorney and the doctor were, for, as the jury rose to go upstairs, they went to the far window with Mr. Graves, and stood there deep in conversation. Bob was openly holding Winifred by the hand, so I went over and sat down by Miss Eliza.

At last I heard the clumping of the jury as they came downstairs, and they retired to the next room. After a few minutes they entered with grave faces, lock step Indian file. I wondered if they appeared to themselves more dignified for this grim formality.

The coroner knocked his pipe out in a bowl on the table, blew his nose, and asked if they had reached a verdict. The foreman read from a slip of paper in his hand:

> "We, the jury, find the body before us to be that of Margaret Robertson. We further find she came to her death at three o'clock on the morning of the 22d day of December, 1920, from a pistol wound in the left breast. We further believe said wound to be self-inflicted and with suicidal intent."

The room was very still. The coroner rose and said something to his assistant, who nodded and began to gather up his papers and place them in a brief case. "Dismissed," he muttered, and the jury relaxed their faces and dispersed into the hall.

We sat quietly until they had gone. The doctor and Mr. Allen had gone to the window, and were again deep in talk. I shall never forget Mr. Allen's face as I passed. His jaw was set, and he was speaking quickly.

The doctor was drinking in each word. I

could catch part of a sentence as I passed, and it was enough to set me thinking—"If there's a mistake I take the blame—not you." And I saw the doctor slowly nod his head.

I stood watching them as they went down the path to the gate. Mr. Graves, Mrs. Robertson's lawyer, joined them, and for a long time they stood in the snow talking. Later a decision must have been reached, for they walked off together toward the main part of the town.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIGURE ON THE FLOOR

THE events of that afternoon proved important later, so I shall have to recount them, trivial as they may seem.

I persuaded Bob to take Winifred for a walk, and later saw them going through the fields at the back of the place arm and arm. Suddenly my little Winifred had been changed from a happy child to the little blackbird I saw against the snow.

Mr. Robertson was seeing some men in the library, and, passing through the upper hall, I could hear Miss Eliza reading the Bible aloud to herself in her own room.

An hour later, when the undertaker had gone, I stood for a long time in the parlor, where the body had been placed, and looked down at my friend. She was very pretty. There was that dignity death leaves, even at times imparts, to those whom it touches, awing those who look through tear dimmed eyes at the face they have loved, yes, "Loved and lost awhile."

The shadows were lengthening when Miss Eliza came downstairs and joined me. As we stood there I remember thinking again how pretty Mrs. Robertson's hair looked. I had dressed it myself in the fashion she liked best, and once Miss Eliza said, in a gruff whisper, she looked like a picture of her mother, when a girl.

I left Miss Eliza alone with her for awhile and went to the kitchen to give directions for the supper. When I returned Winifred and Bob were in the hall looking timidly toward the door. It was their first experience with death, and I recalled a day when I, too, had been sent to walk and had later returned to find that long dark shadow in the middle of the parlor.

I had dreaded coming nearer, knowing what I'd find. Yes, I had passed through the moment Winifred was enduring now, only her grief was heavier than mine, and that is why I took her into my arms and kissed her.

Except for an occasional footstep on the porch and a whispered colloquy from Mary and a neighbor, the house was very still. As the early winter twilight began to fade Mary lighted the lamps in the lower part of the house and, beckoning me into the hall, asked if we could eat a little.

At eight o'clock Jimmy Mullen came up with a batch of telegrams, answers to those I had sent, and shortly afterward came the young editor of the *Weekly Examiner*. I liked the boy and saw him in the library, telling him all I could of the happenings, and asked that he print a notice of the funeral in his paper.

When he had gone I sat for awhile in the lower hall. I wanted the servants to have their supper and a little rest, and I decided to answer the door myself. Later Dr. Morton returned. I had asked him to give Winifred a sedative, as she had been in a highly nervous state all day, and a night's sleep would help her more than anything.

At ten o'clock he went away. Shortly afterward I gave the medicine to Winifred and asked her to go to bed. She consented readily enough, and later, when Bob asked if he could sit up, I asked him to lie down in his own room with his clothes on and leave his door open, and should Winifred wake or be nervous he could call me.

The family were very sensible. They did not ask to sit in the room with the body, and I was glad of it. The next day would be a hard one for them, so about twelve I persuaded Mr. Robertson to lie down on the sofa in the library, while Miss Eliza went to her room.

Old Caroline asked quietly if she might speak to me. There was grief and dignity in her black face and soft eyes. She had put on a black calico dress, and about her neck was a band of crape.

"Miss Hester," she said humbly, "I's a great han' wif de daid an' if you wants yo' sleep I'd tek hit a favor ef you'd 'low me ter set up."

I saw she was genuine in her wish. "No, Caroline," I said, "I am going to lie down with my clothes on and once in awhile go in and see if everything is right. I'd rather you would get some sleep. Tomorrow is going to be a hard day for us all."

She nodded her head. "Yas'um," she said humbly, "but ef I can't git no res' does you min' ef I slip in wunst in er while an' look at her and see ef dar's anythin' I kin do?"

I smiled at her. "No," I said, "come down if you like. You have been a very good servant to her, Caroline," I added after a moment. I think that pleased her.

I told the family I would lie down in Mr. Robertson's room, which was directly across the hall from Winifred's door, and I could hear her if she spoke. The servants had retired, and by half past twelve the house fell into quiet for the night.

A dim light burned in the lower hall, while the parlor, where Mrs. Robertson lay, was in darkness. For the first time I realized how tired I was. For two nights I had hardly been asleep at all, and my eyes seemed pressing back into my head.

Once, as the clock downstairs struck two, I rose and drew my wrapper about me and, taking a candle, went downstairs into the parlor. I remember as I passed the library door hearing a faint snore and being thankful that poor Mr. Robertson was asleep. I went into the parlor and looked about. Letting the light of my candle fall on the poor, calm face before me, I stood looking down. Then I softly ascended the stairs, put out my candle, and lay down upon the couch.

The sky had become overcast at sunset, and now the wind was rising. It sighed through the pine trees, and once, when I rose to look out of the window, I could see through the lights from the street that it had begun to snow again.

I had left open the door between the room in which I lay and that in which Mrs. Robertson had died. Also the door which led into the hall. There was no light save that which came faintly up from the lower hall, where I had set a night lamp with a shade before it.

The last thing I remember in my sleep-weary brain was hearing the clock in the hall strike half past two. It was growing colder, and I drew a blanket over my feet, and at last settled down in my mind to sleep, with the intention to wake again about four o'clock and going once more downstairs. I must have dropped off at once, for my next sensation was that of regaining consciousness with sleep dragging at my eyelids. So exhausted was I that I could barely realize I was awake.

My first sensation was that something was moving about in the hall. From where I lay I was conscious of a white shadow moving about in Mrs. Robertson's room. I could see it faintly through the door. I seemed to see, as though in a dream, a figure which glided noiselessly past the door and disappeared.

I am not easily frightened, and perhaps that is why I did not fully rouse at once. Next I was conscious of a clink of metal. Dimly, in the shadow, the figure stood or bent over Mrs. Robertson's desk.

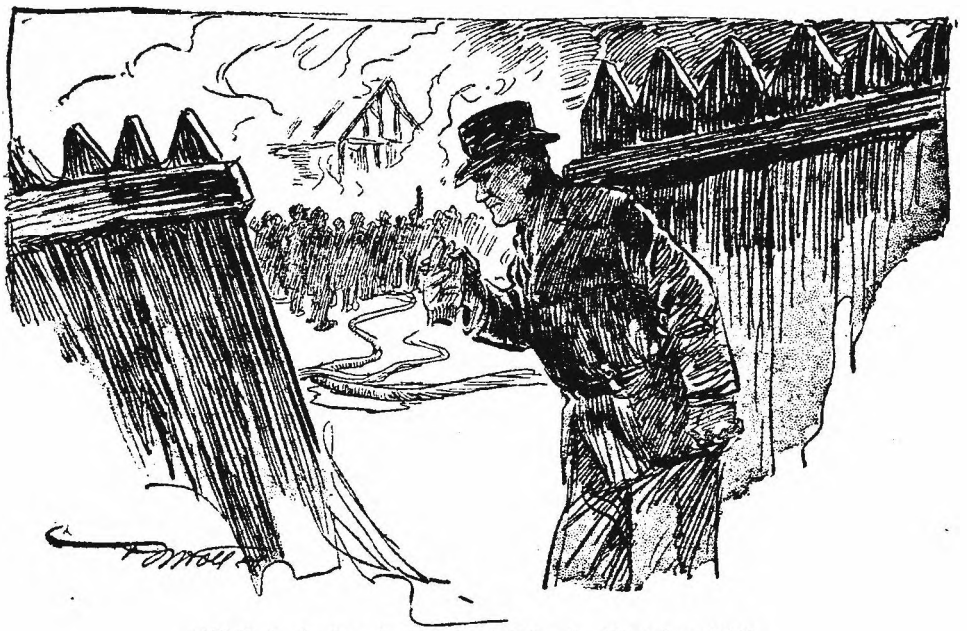
In a drowsy way I remembered old Caroline asking if she might be with the dead. I half opened my eyes and saw the figure straighten itself, then fade from my sight.

Whether I slept then for a second I shall never know. My next consciousness was a sound in the hall as though something had fallen limply upon the floor. I sat bolt upright upon the couch.

At that moment a scream, prolonged and horrified, rang through the house. It swelled up and up in agony, then broke off in a sickening, strangling silence. At the same moment there came, from the back stairway it seemed to me, a terrific crash. Then all was deathly still.

I ran out into the hall and met Bob coming from his bedroom. As he groped for the light switch I was conscious of a white thing on the floor. He flashed on the light, and there before us, lying face upward in her nightdress, was Winifred, her arms outstretched, and to all appearances dead.

TO BE CONTINUED



"Hello! A glove? For the left hand. That fixes it!"

THE HAND IN THE GLOVE

By Karl Detzer

INSIDE THE GUARDED FENCE AND WITHOUT HE WORE WHITE COTTON GLOVES—AND LIVED TO RUE IT

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE THE GATE

SILVER BROOKS, in a new pearl-gray hat, strode down the electric lighted passage between the smoky, low-roofed wings of the Midland and Great Lakes coach shop. He was a tidy, well pressed figure among the grimy cranes and sooty windows of the railroad yard. His shadow, thrown sharply against the brick wall by vigilant strings of incandescent lamps, was possessed of bulk, of smooth, fat contours, and he walked with an air of peace and detachment.

But those who passed him might have noticed, also, that his right hand hung easily in the pocket of his sack coat. And in the fingers of that hand, gripped firmly for any emergency, rested a blunt-nosed thirty-eight caliber automatic pistol. For Silver Brooks commanded the railway police of the Marion division, and a strike was on.

He paced around the end of the north wing, into the glaring open space of the coach yard. Here, too, electric lights clustered in pendants about tall, wooden poles, and shone in a grim frieze atop a new ten-foot fence decorated with barbed wire. Over to the right, in the darker spaces of the yard, long strings of black day coaches made massy shadows, split here and there by reflections in car windows.

Men were strolling about the inclosure, men in groups, in pairs, singly—short, dark fellows, most of them, with a lazy look.

The alert eyes of Silver Brooks, veiled behind the impassivity of long training, made mental notes regarding them.

"That bird," his eyes told him, "is a yegg. Done time somewheres. Nice boy he's with. Young feller's had trouble at home and blew. That's an old timer, sitting over there on those ties."

He crossed the yard to a small, new, temporary shack, and entered through its unpainted door, which already was smeared with the prints of several hundred oily thumbs. The man at the desk looked up, nodded, glanced down again at the papers sheafed before him on a pine clasp-board, made a note of a figure, and stuck his short pencil behind his ear.

"Hello, cap! Any news?"

Silver Brooks shook his head. He dusted a chair carefully with a white handkerchief, then decided to remain standing.

"Running on the same old way, I guess. I'm getting fed up. How's the car report? How's the finks doing?"

"Rotten!"

The young man at the desk looked out of place in a railroad shop yard; at any rate, out of place in a strike-ridden yard. His fingers were too white for the car shops. He carried his head too high. But Captain Brooks remembered, notwithstanding the young man's appearance, that here was the most valuable card in the railroad's hand to-night.

For Cherry Dunn, night car shop foreman, in spite of a college education and a smooth voice, was the most popular official up or down the line. If anything or any one under the stars could get those six hundred hot-headed strikers back to work, it was Cherry Dunn. He was grumbling.

"These finks of yours—"

"I'll leave it go this time," said Silver Brooks, winking a blood-shot eye, "but remember old Superheater says they ain't finks. They ain't strikebreakers, they're new employees!"

"Rats!" Dunn answered without smiling. "There's not a mechanic in the lot. Steal? They're stealing us blind! How many real car repairmen in the whole three hundred? Not one. And they expect me to turn out decent jobs, and safe jobs—"

"Any violence?" asked Silver Brooks.

"Of course not! Do you think my men would start anything? There was a little stone-throwing about seven o'clock, some shooting somewhere. But I'll stake my brake beam that it wasn't our old men! Some rowdies, half tanked up out there! Why, I pass in and out all day, right through their pickets, and not once have they given me anything but a decent good evening!"

"You'd best not go out," Silver Brooks warned. "I told you last night to stay in. Got a gat?"

"Don't be a fool!"

"I ain't. I don't take chances. And besides, they know that if one of them was to make a pass at me that I've got enough good loyal patrolmen on this division to take care of 'em, one or two at a time, until there wouldn't be any more of them left after a couple of years.

"They know it. But I don't take chances! But listen, Cherry, what I come to tell you. Meeting to-morrow night—Petrosky's coming to represent the strikers. Down in old Superheater's office. Might just happen to drop in—might say a word, you know. The boys are about ready to come back—"

"I'll be there!" Cherry Dunn answered. "I'll do everything that I can to get them back! Lord, Brooks, I hate to see them out there on the other side of that barbed wire!"

"And watch your step, mind you! No chances!" Silver Brooks growled. "Get a gun, and let 'em know you have it!"

He passed again into the yard, and walked straight along a sawdust path to the broad street entry. Here a squad of special guards lounged within the high, double-battened gates. They took down the bar from a small wicket at one side, mumbled a good evening, and the police captain stepped out. Across the roadway a group of loiterers stirred, peered through the dull light, and became motionless. Pickets, he guessed. A dark, hopeless job they had! He looked at the sky. It was overcast. Probably rain by morning.

Silver Brooks walked back toward his office in Marion, a stiff three miles, along

the company right of way. Beyond the car shops, on an inclined terrain, fifty engines stood in ordered ranks, blocked and whiteleaded, awaiting the winter rush. Further on the smith shop showed ruddy windows, where the night shift labored.

This was the locomotive department—the regular crew—no strike stuff here, Silver Brooks reflected. They knew when they were well off, these motive power men. Had a strike once that settled them for all time! Good mechanics and good citizens; now if these car shop boys—

The tank shop loomed high before him, a gaunt, thin-waisted building filled with a hollow, drumming boom; behind it the chipping and cleaning cylinders of the flue shop lifted a discordant clamor. Farther down the tracks rapped the air hammers of the boiler shop, giant, goggled flickers with steel beaks, biting into boiler iron. The green mercury vapor lamps of the erecting shop shone for a minute on a traveling crane prosaically carrying a whole locomotive in its talons.

Silver Brooks passed the superintendent's building, and saw that the lights still burned brightly in Superheater McKay's private office. Perhaps he'd better go in —no, everything quiet now, no need to stir up that old volcano. There'd be a million questions. He walked on to his own headquarters.

Police Lieutenants Clark and Jones were standing in the middle of the floor, staring across the rubber mat. Jones held the telephone in his hand, receiver still off the hook. Clark had removed his hat.

"Aw, cap!" he began. Jones finished for him.

"Cherry Dunn just went outside the gate. They got him. Dead."

CHAPTER II

NO MORE MEN

THE office of Superheater McKay was a tall, stiff, drafty apartment, fitted with the substantial comfort that would please a railroad superintendent who had climbed to officialdom from the caboose. Such decorations as were permitted had a hearty ring of craftsmanship Each of the high walls carried a heavy frame meticulously in the center of its checked plaster.

Three of the frames surrounded photographs of crack engines of the types most in favor on the Midland and Great Lakes railway, a *Mallet*, a *Pacific*, and an *Atlantic*. The fourth frame contained a blue print, the cut-away cross section of a locomotive, denuded and disembowled for the edification of the curious.

The shades were drawn tight at the four windows. Tobacco smoke clouded the air. About the flat, empty table sat five stern-faced men—four large and one small, four smoking cigars and one not smoking, four tense, excited, and one calm, four with pistols in their pockets, one unarmed.

Nathan Petrosky, president of the Associated Car Workers, blinked through thick spectacles at the other four. He was a bony, colorless man, with the look of not always having had enough to eat.

His hair, that recently had been well wet down, was plastered insufficiently across the bald spot on top of his round head. His suit, of smooth gray in a minute pattern, was newly pressed, with discreet darns at the elbows. His hands, protruding violently beyond their cuffs, were red and lumpy. He was talking to Superheater McKay. The latter was scowling.

"It is not so!" Petrosky spoke slowly, with a lisp, all that remained of a Slavic accent. "Our boys feel so sorry—so sorry! Cherry Dunn was our friend. We would not go shoot our only friend. Violence?" A rising inflection catapulted the final syllable. "Violence? No! The car workers need none of it! The right is our side!"

"Well!" Silver Brooks unbuttoned his vest and rebuttoned it. "He was bumped off all right! And a gang of your men hanging right across the street when I went out that same gate not forty minutes before! Then these letters—"

Petrosky forsook his calm.

"My men did not write those letters!" he growled. "I tell you it was none of our doing! We play the game fair—"

"Fair?" Superheater McKay broke in. He was a huge man, wrinkled, bald, with

the air of a naval commander. About his gray eyes interwove a pattern of fine lines, deep creases flared from the lobes of his veined nose, puckering his upper lip.

"Play fair? Who's talking of fair play with a nest of rattlesnakes? We granted all your demands except recognition. I was sorry for those boys—used to work with them, a lot of them, before you came to this country, Petrosky. I planned this meeting before Cherry Dunn was shot.

"I asked you to come here to-night to have one final talk with you, to talk common sense. You'd have been back at work in the morning. It would have been us two, no one else—"

"There seems to be plenty of others," Petrosky nodded his round head about the group.

"Yes, and there'll be a lot more! I'm telling you, I wanted a decent settlement. Then last night—" He waved a knuckly hand. "So I called on the sheriff, and I asked Captain Brooks in, and I also invited Mr. Bailey. Mr. Bailey knows all about strikes, Petrosky. He's got plenty of new men to do our work without the associated car workers.

"Think not? Well, you'll see by the time we're through. He's in charge at the shops. He'll run them. After a bit, Petrosky, the best of your men will come back. They'll not butt their heads against a stone wall. They've too much sense.

"Bailey will take them in, one at a time, on his own terms. Up until next Saturday night—that's one week. After that they'll not come back on any terms!"

"Bailey—he looks like a scab," said Petrosky.

The big man to whom he alluded sat adamant in his chair. He grinned a little at the name.

"I been called worse," he said.

His voice sounded hoarse after the car worker's high, thin one. Having spoken, he took another comfortable breath of smoke, resumed his study of the blue print of a disembowled locomotive, and twiddled the gold nugget at the end of his watch chain. He was a massy fellow, hard as granite, middle aged, with a cold, relentless air of calculating confidence.

"And so instead of talking terms, Petrosky," Superheater McKay went on, "I'm going to warn you. You can't bluff the Midland! You can't scare us. You can shoot down loyal employees, but that only aggravates us. And as to these letters, threatening to destroy the shops and bridges—"

"I never saw those letters!" the union man shot back.

"As to these letters—here they are—threatening to burn the shops and blow up the bridges, and bump me off, incidentally, you can have them back! I don't scare worth a damn, Petrosky! But I warn you that one more low, filthy trick, and I'll make you rue the day you were born! How about it, sheriff?"

The county official was a plump, smooth-skinned man, slightly nervous. He had held a discreet and silent tongue, and frowned a great deal during the discussion. Marion was an industrial town. Great railroads and their banded employees controlled politics. But murder had been done.

"I gave my statement to the newspapers," he explained hesitatingly. "I won't stand any gunplay. I refused to deputize special guards outside the shops. But if there's any more strong arm work, well, Petrosky, I'll have to take a hand. You'd best hold your men down."

"And I guess that's about all," Superheater McKay nodded to the labor official. Petrosky stood up, reaching for his hat. He seemed anxious to get away. McKay walked to the door with him, touched his arm, and spoke quietly into his ear. The short, stodgy car worker turned violently.

"I'll see you in hell first!" he enunciated clearly, and slammed the door after him.

McKay turned to the other three.

"See?"

"They're sot, them Polacks," the sheriff affirmed. "Mr. Mac, I guess Spike Bailey's right. You'd best have a bodyguard. I'll swear in a couple of good men—no roustabouts, understand—but a couple of good citizens to ride with you."

The division superintendent sat down heavily in his chair, and drummed his desk with a fine-pointed yellow pencil.

"I don't need a guard!" he refused surlily. "I'm right enough. But it's the shops. The roadbed. Bailey, how many men do you have to-night on gate and stockade guard?"

"Forty. Not enough?"

McKay looked up suspiciously. Spike Bailey was an old campaigner. A hundred railroad and industrial plants had known him, with his crews of strikebreakers; their striking communities had felt the lash of his generalship. He was a "boss fink" of a fast disappearing school, a leader of finks who go in when regular workers go out, a hard-handed, ruthless battler who never gave a step. But he wanted always more men—

"Forty!" mused the superintendent.

"I got forty on guard," said Bailey, "and two hundred and sixty in the shop. But there's three hundred more waiting in Chicago—"

"Maybe we'd best send for them," Silver Brooks suggested.

"Mean more trouble," Sheriff Tod Robinson interjected.

"Thirty bridges and culverts," Brooks reminded the superintendent. "And what can I do with only fifty patrolmen? I know, Mr. Mac, what you're thinking. You're thinking it will mean a lot more expense and a mighty little more work turned out. You're thinking of the cost of bunking them, and feeding them, and paying them, and giving Spike ten dollars a head for them before they get here—"

"No!" Superheater McKay snapped his decision. "No more men. Three hundred out of Chicago would cost the Midland three thousand dollars, Bailey, just for your share. No, sir! Stir up your patrolmen, Brooks."

CHAPTER III

ABOUT A KIDNAPING

THE sheriff drove away relievedly in his own car. Silver Brooks lingered on the steps to talk to Spike Bailey. Personally he didn't care for Bailey, but in times of strife he admired him. Not much of a hand to give the other side a fair show, Bailey wasn't, but when it came to a battle—he had seen him work in Pittsburgh!

"They's a back gate to the car shops," he told the strikebreaker. "Locked all right, but not more than eight foot high. I was there just after dark. Nobody on guard—"

"I know it. Haven't the men. Haven't men enough for half the protection you need."

"Well, I'm sorry," Brooks agreed. "Superheater's against laying out any more money. But best have some one keep an eye on that gate. Remember the letter about burning the planing mill—and that gate's not ten foot from the trash chute. Shavings—"

"I'll do my damnedest, Brooks. But you know, with only forty men for guard, in three tricks, I don't have much to fall back on. They're walking around half asleep from long hours. Now if I had them three hundred out of Chicago—"

"Forget it!" answered Silver Brooks. "When Superheater says 'no' he ain't meaning 'yes' very often!"

They parted glumily and Silver Brooks returned to his office. Lieutenant Clark was there ahead of him, a tall, brown, young giant in loose fitting jacket and dusty shoes, with a blob of soot on the tip of his nose. Just now his eyes were drawn from lack of sleep.

"How's things?" Brooks asked.

"Quiet. Say, cap, you'd best turn in. I'll tend the office. Call you if—"

Silver Brooks waved for quiet with his left hand. It was a sizeable fist, its utility mocked by a gaudy red stone.

"I got to think," he answered. "Lay down there on the cot yourself. Grab forty winks. Hear anything from Jones?"

"Nothing. He's still checking up where Pertosky was last night, and the rest of the gang. Not a line on anything yet. Them witnesses is clams."

"Lay down," Brooks ordered. "Maybe I'll want you to go with me in a bit."

Lieutenant Clark obeyed, but did not sleep. He lay staring idly at the 'lookout' file on the wall, with its unflattering front and side view photographs of men

wanted. In his own private office Silver Brooks took off his coat, unbuttoned his vest, spit several times, and rumpled his white hair.

Too many jobs for one day! Find who killed Cherry Dunn, trace those threatening letters, protect the shops, the yards, the trains—have to be a centipede to keep a thumb on all this business at once! Brooks sighed and removed his shoes.

Patrolmen coming in from tricks of dark duty in the freight yards signed their reports, received orders, asked the night clerk in the outer office for news. The telephone bell tinkled intermittently. Each time, Silver Brooks listened in, silent, at the instrument on his own desk.

The diminutive clerk knocked once. Lieutenant Jones was waiting. He had discovered nothing new on the murder of Cherry Dunn.

"Tell him to take over the office, me and Clark's going out."

Once more the telephone bell in the outer office jangled. The captain glanced at the wall clock. Two thirty. He heard the clerk say "hello," lifted his own receiver, and listened.

"Eh?" he shouted, kicking at the waste basket. "Brooks talking! Me, Mr. Mac! Eh? Sure! I'm coming!"

In the taxicab he explained brusquely to Lieutenant Clark.

"Superheater called. He's home. Burglar, he says. Voice kind of faded away like."

"Burglar!"

"And you may have a notion what kind of burglar it is, from them letters. Hey, driver, this ain't a funeral!"

The division superintendent owned an old house on the far edge of the little city of Marion, an old, brick house behind iron pickets and a lilac hedge. A widower, he lived simply and alone, with one servant. Silver Brooks had spent many evenings with him, in peaceful times, and knew his habits and his house intimately.

The taxicab halted at the corner. The captain ordered the driver to wait, whispered a command to Clark, and turned alone into the alley. A hundred seconds later he opened the rear gate to McKay's home and let himself in quietly. The lower portion of the house was dark. A single lighted window shone upstairs. Old Superheater's room.

With acute ears the captain listened. Then he heard the obedient Clark ring the front doorbell. In the shadow of the garage Brooks waited. The light still burned in McKay's room. No shadow crossed the yellow curtains, and the lower floor remained dark. A second time the bell sounded. Brooks planted his feet hard on the sod, listening, watching alertly. Then a shout. Clark's voice.

"Cap!"

Silver Brooks galloped with his hand in his pocket. The front door stood open. The beam of Clark's flash light sprayed unsteadily across the floor of the entrance hall. On the deep-napped carpet a man lay upon his face, a short man in pyjamas. Blood stained his left shoulder. Owens, the officers recognized him, McKay's house man and only servant. He was unconscious, but was breathing, and smelled of chloroform.

"Get a doctor — one of the company doctors," the captain ordered. "Telephone right there—I'll find McKay."

Clark snapped on the lights.

"Phone's been jerked out the wall," he reported.

"They's one in his bedroom — private line—come on!"

Brooks plunged up the stair. Superheater McKay's bedroom door stood open. Here the reek of chloroform was sharper, a powerful breath of it stopped the detective in the entry. The light still burned. Bed clothing was tumbled over the floor, blankets were strewn about, the mattress lay bare of sheets. Beside an overturned table sprawled the telephone. McKay's clothes, carefully spread on hangers, were suspended correctly from an oak hatrack at the foot of the bed.

But of the superintendent himself there was no sign.

Silver Brooks stumbled across to the windows, jerked them up, and leaned out, filling his lungs with fresh air. Then he turned back. His cataloguing eyes told him the story.

"Somebody was here when McKay come in," they said. "In the house ahead of him. He's dog tired. Goes right to bed. Gets to sleep. This bird's listening, got the bottle of chloroform handy. Waits till Mac drops off—maybe a snore or two.

"Then this yegg turns loose the sleep maker. Spills it around on the floor and bed. After that he beats it—maybe to the hall. Just before old Superheater goes dead off he gets a smell of the stuff. He guesses something's wrong. Grabs the telephone. This bird's listening. Hears him. Sneaks in behind him—"

This formulation of the plot flashed in rapid pictures across Brooks's tired, bloodshot eyes. The chloroform caught in the crook of his throat, and he coughed. When he glanced back at the door Clark was standing there, an awkward, impotent figure, gazing in.

"Lights!" ordered his commander. "Lights all over the house! Turn 'em all on! Keep your irons handy—maybe some one's here yet. Telephone a doctor first. Try that phone—there on the floor. I'll look below. You hunt up here."

At the foot of the stair Silver Brooks paused, backed against the wall, and glanced at the four closed doors leading to rooms left and right. Then he crossed to little Owens, who was moaning.

"You're O. K.," he encouraged, turning the serving man over. "Have a doctor in a minute. I'll lay you on the sofy." He picked up the injured houseman and spread him clumsily upon the couch. Then he closed the front door and examined cautiously each of the four rooms off the hall. They stood in perfect order and arrangement.

Overhead the heavy heels of Lieutenant Clark thumped upon uncarpeted floors. The odor of chloroform spread through the house with a sickening sweetness. Silver Brooks stepped into the dining room, pressed his flash lamp button, and turned on the lights. The remains of a supper spread upon the Flemish oak table. In the kitchen everything was in order.

"Hum!" Silver Brooks trotted down the cellar steps. "Nothing here."

A ring at the front door brought him back panting. It was the policeman on the beat, who had heard from neighbors across the block that a shot had been fired. Silver Brooks explained the situation tersely.

"Very good, sir. I'll go report from the call box," the patrolman answered.

"And that," Brooks grumbled, "is an invitation to the reporters! If only the newspapers could get along without them reporters, they wouldn't be such a nuisance!"

Lieutenant Clark clumped breathlessly down the stair. His long ham of a face bore a look of juvenile mystification.

"Ain't seen a thing up there. Sure I telephoned for a doctor! What's it all about, cap?"

"It's about a kidnaping, Clark, that's what it's about. Somebody has took Superheater away. This little fellow"—he jerked his massy jaw toward the couch—"come to help. Maybe when the doctor peps him up he can say something. I tell you, Clark, I never was in favor of strikes!"

He leaned over the man on the couch, spoke to him, and received only a feeble groan in reply.

"Got it in the shoulder," he explained. "Hello, here's the doc!"

A pale, bright-eyed young interne from the office of the company surgeon swung a new, black bag into the door.

"I brought the ambulance," he explained. "Shall I—" He glanced at the couch and walked across hurriedly. "Hum! Why, the man's shot!"

"I kind of figgers he was," said Silver Brooks, tramping toward the rear of the house. "Oh, Clark—best call the office. Ask if Mumaugh's phoned. I had him trailing Petrosky after our little love feast in McKay's office to-night."

Clark bounced up the stair. The doctor ripped off Owens's pyjama coat. A pair of company ambulance attendants stood in the door, a folded litter on end between them, both sleepy and disinterested.

"Take him to the dispensary," the physician ordered. "Guess it isn't serious. Who shot him?"

Silver Brooks hesitated in the door.

"Brother," he said, "I ain't got a idee.

But when he's coming near his right mind you call my office. Maybe he knows. I want a statement soon as he can talk."

"Cap!" Lieutenant Clark thundered down the stair. He saw the retreating backs of the ambulance crew, held his tongue a moment, then blurted out his story.

"Petrosky was here!"

"Eh?"

"Just talked to Mumaugh. He shadows Petrosky from the time he quit the office—McKay's office. Went right to union headquarters. Stays there ten minutes. Comes out and starts to hoof it up Sutton Street. He stops at a Eyetalian fruit stand and buys a apple. Who comes driving along but old Superheater. Superheater don't see him. Stops, and just goes over to the apple counter.

"'Hello!' he says, surprised, and so loud Mumaugh hears him across the street. They talks quiet a minute; Petrosky hollers 'no!' two or three times, then kind of calms down. They stand on the curb eatin' apples, and talkin' confidential. Then this Petrosky seems to give in, gets in the car with Superheater, and they drives off."

"Together?"

"Like a brace o' lambs. Mumaugh jumps a taxi and follows. They comes straight to this house. Mumaugh waits across the street. Old Superheater leaves the car in the drive by the side door there. They comes in and turns on the lights.

"After about ten minutes Mumaugh slips across and watches them out of the bushes by the door. They're still in the hall, both talkin' hard. Then this Petrosky goes all to pieces. He spits and hollers and runs out, slammin' the door after him.

"Mumaugh guesses he's wise that some one's trailin' him, for after he walks a ways, growlin' to himself, he turns around, looks back, and does a evaporation stunt in an alley. Mumaugh hunts, but can't find him, so he goes back to the office."

Silver Brooks listened impassively to the story. Then he lighted a cigar. At the same moment a car squealed in the driveway, and heavy feet thumped on the porch. City police and detectives blurted into the front door.

"Go out," Brooks ordered his lieutenant, "and see what you can find in the yard." Then he explained, briefly, to the detective sergeant in charge of the city men. He did not mention Petrosky. It didn't pay to tell too much in one breath. He glanced up at Clark, beckoning from the doorway, and crossed quietly to the entrance.

"Superheater's car ain't here — not in the drive, not in the garage," the lieutenant informed him. "But this here—there by the drive I found this."

He passed to his superior a white cloth glove with narrow, blue wristband—one of those shoddy cotton gloves that great corporations issue on requisitions to their shop and yard employees. It was such a glove as mechanics in the car shops wear on rough work. It was made for the right hand. And on the cuff band, which he held to the light, the captain read the initials, "M. & G. L. Ry."

"Well, maybe this glove means something—maybe not," Silver Brooks said. "Anyhow, go back to the office. Take my taxi. Stir out the boys. Have 'em get Petrosky. Want to talk to him. Bring him in. I'll be there."

CHAPTER IV

THAT LEAVES TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY

T four o'clock in the morning the car shops planing mill burned.

Captain Brooks, walking back to his office in the first anæmic light of dawn, saw clouds of yellow smoke pour up from the car shops. He quickened his step, heard distant, crying sirens of the fire department, and cursed the carelessness of fink watchmen.

But it was his fault, as well as Spike Bailey's. He should have stuck one of his own patrolmen on guard there. But what's a man to do, with only fifty on the force, and two hundred miles of double track railroad to patrol?

A sleepy cab driver picked him up, and ten minutes later he passed through the guarded gates to the car shops. The newly awakened crowd across the street, un-

sympathetic and vocal, hooted at volunteer firemen from the shop, and urged less speed on the men of the city department. A great section of roof already had fallen in. A dozen streams, each thick as a big man's arm, battered in the face of surly fire. A somber, opaque, yellow cloud lifted sluggishly above the flames, and shut out the light of the sky.

Spike Bailey straddled the roof beam at the head of a wriggling line of volunteers. With great oaths and wide slashes of his hose pipe, he defied the blaze, the breath-clogging smoke, and the crowd beyond the gates. City firemen pushed up their ladders. Engines throbbed in the street.

Captain Brooks glanced once at the fire, then circled the plant cautiously, outside of the high, board fence. As he passed the end of the planing mill he stopped at a narrow gate. It swung loosely upon its hinges. Brooks leaned over and examined the lock. It had been broken.

Once more his eyes told him the story.

"They come in here—before daylight. Bust the gate. Easy, with a crowbar. Nobody on the job guarding it. Just touched off those shavings over there—hello! A glove? Sure enough, a glove. For the left hand. Well, that fixes it! Whoever kidnaped McKay done this job too. Talk about dropping clews."

He stuffed the second cotton glove into his pocket with the one Clark had found early in the night, and stepped out. The surly crowd of strike sympathizers jeered at him from across the way. Without looking back, he continued his patrol.

When he came again to the shop yard, he saw that the firemen were gaining, that professionals and volunteers were beating back the blaze. Spike Bailey was pushing his fight. Four fat hose lines trailed across the roof. Water spattered in dirty, chattering cascades from the eaves. Yellow smoke still poured out of the broken slates, but the battle had turned.

Lieutenant Clark crossed the yard, beckoning.

"Well?" demanded Silver Brooks.

"I can't find Petrosky," the lieutenant reported. "He didn't go home last night."

"Anything else? City boys run into anything?"

"Why, yes. One thing. That servant Owens, who got shot up, talked."

Silver Brooks stopped. "What'd he say?"

"Told about hearing the argument with a little thin man who talked funny. Gave them his description. It fits Petrosky. Says he was just going to sleep again and he heard a noise. He woke up in a sweat, smelled something wrong.

"Kind of groggy like, he was, but he heard a racket in front of the house, and he ran out in the hall. All he could see was somebody wrapped up in a sheet and another man in the front door. He couldn't make out neither of them clear. Groggy, and no lights. Sure, the lights was out. Then one of them plugged him."

"That all?"

"Only they found that the cellar window was forced. That's how they got in—the burglars. Looked like it was pried open with a crowbar. A crowbar with red paint on it. Some of the paint scraped off on the sill."

Silver Brooks wheeled, stared reflectively a moment at his lieutenant, then started at a brisk walk toward the other end of the yard. They waded through low hanging smoke, passed the smoldering mill, and halted by a small gate at its rear. Brooks stooped over, examining the broken lock and the edges of the planks.

"See!"

Red paint streaked the inside of the panel and end post of the fence. The lieutenant leaned down and eyed the bruised timber thoughtfully. Silver Brooks stood over him, squinting.

"Well?" he asked. "What do *you* see?"

"It looks to me," said Clark, "like this job was done from the inside!"

"And to me, too. Clark, this gate was busted from in the yard. See, how the crowbar was jabbed in? Somebody forced this gate from in there, to make it look like a outside party touched us off. And the red paint—you say they's more of it out to McKay's house? And this here pair of gloves—"

He rubbed his chin, which showed the

effects of twenty-four working hours and no razor.

"A inside job!" Clark spoke harshly, angrily. "And that other—"

"I'm going to grab me a bit of sleep," Silver Brooks interrupted. He added, "In a barber chair. Maybe it will help me think."

Twenty minutes later he lay back luxuriously in the chair, eyes closed, giving no attention to the remarks of the man who rubbed lather into his chin. His mind was busy cataloguing all the impressions of his ears and eyes, tabulating them according to his method, worked out by long experience. In another thirty minutes he stepped into the street again. It was breakfast time.

"Might buy a apple and see what happens," he grunted, smiled to himself, and passed into a restaurant near the Union Depot. With his bacon and eggs he studied the situation further. The morning papers carried only brief and garbled accounts of the kidnaping. He returned to his problems.

There were so many of them! First, there was the strike business. That itself was calculated to set a man on his ear. Not enough patrolmen, then old Superheater cutting down on Spike Bailey's watchmen. How Superheater hated to pay Spike ten dollars a head! Cutting down, eh? And refusing to have a bodyguard! Well, things hadn't gone very well so far!

There were those letters, which this moment he carried in a heavy Manila envelope in his pocket. Mean letters, threatening, and seeming to know what they were about. First of all they said that Cherry Dunn would be killed. Well, Cherry was dead, and no one within a thousand miles of arrest.

Then, they promised to bump off old Superheater. And Superheater was gone, kidnaped, heaven only knew where, dead, perhaps. And little Owens in the hospital with a hole in his shoulder. And Superheater's automobile gone. And Petrosky, who was the last man known to have seen him—missing. Better get Petrosky. Work hard for Petrosky. Still—

Now came the first real clew. The cellar window at McKay's house had been opened with a red crowbar. And a workingman's glove, with the initials of the railroad on it, just outside the window. There were fifty thousand of those gloves scattered around. Take a long time to figure out where it came from. But it had something to do with the strike. There was that other glove. And that other red paint, on the shop gate, to work on.

Then the fire. There'd been a letter promising that, too. Busy little letter writers, whoever they were! The fire and that gate busted from inside. It had been opened by somebody in the shops.

Whoever started the fire was in the shops last night and smashed the gate to make it look like an outside job. Red paint there—red paint at McKay's house—the same crowbar. And the other glove— This bird must have been spilling clews! But that let Petrosky out. He hadn't been inside. Some one else—

Silver Brooks glanced up at the front windows of the restaurant, where a tall man with long arms was peering in. It was Jones, his junior lieutenant. The officer strode through the door, crossed to his superior, and leaned down.

"Got Petrosky!" he whispered. "He was in the coach yard."

"Petrosky! In the coach yard! Inside the stockade?"

"Sure. But he's unconscious. One of them fink guards let him have it on the head with a club. Petrosky was running, kind of staggering, from what I get hunting a way out. Must have got penned in after starting the fire."

"Jones," Silver Brooks asked absently, "remember The Eye?"

"The Eye? Old man Pinkerton?"

Brooks nodded.

"Well, he used to say when you got all the facts in a case all you had to do was to stick them together, and they told you something. We got facts enough, but what do they tell you?"

"Nothing!"

"Same here!" said Silver Brooks. He halted at the door, wiping his mustache. "But one thing, Jones. It was a good yegg's been pulling this. And a wise one.

Them gloves—Clark told you about 'em—why does a man wear gloves when it's no colder than it was last night? Why, for one reason, just. He don't want to leave no finger-prints."

Jones replied with a nod.

"Which means," the captain continued, "as he's a old hand at the business. Knows his stuff. Smart."

"That leaves Petrosky out," was Jones's comment.

"In most cases it would, Jones. But Petrosky's in. You tells me so yourself. In the yards. Inside the fence. Somebody left him in—who was it? Somebody that was inside already. Now how many finks is there in the shop? Three hundred! And how many o' them finks is law-abiding citizens, Jones? Maybe a dozen, if you don't examine them too close. That leaves two hundred and eighty some to work on. And on top of them the gang foremen and clerks. I never trust a clerk, Jones. Let's go to the office."

CHAPTER V

THREE FINGERS MISSING

GRAYSON, chief clerk to Superheater McKay, was thin, fifty-five, bald, important, and fussy. And he was very much annoyed. Three times since the informal meeting opened around Silver Brooks's desk, he had taken off his glasses, glared belligerently at the captain, and demanded his master.

"You'd best find Mr. McKay!" he warned. "And find him quick!"

"Yes, we'd best," Silver Brooks admitted, and went on with something else. Grayson, the clerk, had little respect for the ability of the police. And he had a great show of respect for McKay. He was invited to the meeting merely because Brooks decided it was time the general offices down east heard of the kidnaping of the division superintendent. It was Grayson's job to notify them.

Spike Bailey, singed from his battle against fire, dirty, still spitting mightily, lounged in smoky, ripped clothes by the window. The sheriff, the chief of city police, the car shop day foreman, and Lieutenant Clark offered suggestions. Silver Brooks, clean, shaven, brushed, smoked a cigar. He sat in his shirt sleeves, the golden star of his office pinned jauntily upon his vest. The meeting was not a success.

"Better get together to-night," Brooks suggested. "Say about ten o'clock. This bird Petrosky—he's coming out all right. He's on the cot in the front office there, and Jones with him. When he talks maybe we'll hear some news."

Spike Bailey waited until the others had gone.

"Well, Brooks, it's like this," he confessed. "I got some bad ones in that outfit of mine. And I know it. Who ain't? There's a chance some of them has sold out to the union. That's the only way I can explain this business—Petrosky getting in, I mean."

The captain screwed up his mouth.

"I know. I've knowed a few finks—no use getting mad, I ain't being personal. I knowed that man down in Pittsburgh—Burkhart. You remember Burkhart?"

"Burkhart?" Bailey shook his head.

"Well, that was ten years ago, but *I* ain't forgot him! He was one o' your finks, and he sold out to the strikers. Feller with three fingers off. Went to smashing machinery, starting fires, and everything. Made a get-away before we could nab him."

"Don't remember him. They's so many of 'em," the boss fink replied. "I do remember we had trouble there—had a idea it was a gang foreman or something."

"Nope, it was Burkhart—three-finger Burkhart. I'd forgot him myself, almost. Well, no matter, that doesn't help us here none."

After Bailey had left, Silver Brooks sat a long time looking moodily at his desk. Burkhart—three-finger Burkhart. Hadn't thought of that crook for years. But it wasn't Burkhart who worried him now, it was Petrosky. He shuffled the papers before him. Petrosky—maybe in another ten years he'd almost have forgotten that name too.

It was two o'clock when Nathan Petrosky, his head bandaged, eyes at once angry and frightened, sat glumly on a stiff

chair opposite Silver Brooks. He faced the broad window, which the police captain, using one of the oldest devices of the detective business, kept at his own back.

"Make the other fellow face the light," he told his men, "then you see more than he does." Brooks smoked comfortably, spilling ashes on the desk and on the floor, sorted and resorted a pile of documents, and never once looked up. But out of the corner of his trained eye he perceived the labor chief across from him fidgeting, growing more nervous each moment.

Petrosky had been conscious three hours. He had not been permitted to talk. Now he wanted to. Silver Brooks kept him waiting twenty minutes more. At last he put down the papers, nodded to his stenographer, and spoke to the striker.

"You don't need to say anything," he said.

"Don't need to?" Petrosky's voice cracked, as if his throat were dry. He felt with one palm along the bandages atop his head. "Well, you don't need to listen. I'll tell it somewheres else."

"To the judge," Silver Brooks predicted. "I got the papers all made out. There's enough to make you stretch."

Petrosky swallowed, then sobbed. His inquisitor knew that the time had come, the moment for swift, keen questions, for a barrage of interrogation.

"Where's Mr. McKay?" he demanded.

Petrosky shook his head.

"How do I know?"

"You *do* know! What did you do with him?"

"I *don't* know! I don't know what it's all about! I haven't seen him since—"

"Since when?"

The union official closed his eyes. His lips moved slowly.

"What day is this?" he asked, and his voice had a lost, childish accent.

"It was Friday when I got up this morning," Silver Brooks explained. "What did you do with McKay? Tell me just what you done! Go back to last night. What was it made you go home with him?"

For a moment Petrosky did not reply. His face colored, and he looked guiltily at the floor. Then he said simply, "So you know about that!"

"Sure—I now a lot more than you guess. Why did you go home with him?"

"Because he asked me. Said we'd settle this lockout—"

"Strike!" Brooks corrected.

"Said we'd settle this lockout just between us. Said he wanted us back to work. Said he believed I was playing square—"

"Then when you got home with him—tell about your row."

"Well, he wasn't goin' to give us recognition. Everything else fine. 'Recognition', I says, 'or it's all off.' Then he gets bull-doggy. I couldn't talk no more. So I left."

"And then?"

"When I'd gone a few blocks I got to thinking it over. What's the use staying out just for that? They are hungry, our people. We must go to work. We get our raise, and our hours. And I see in his eye, there in the hall, that he won't give in to the rest. Maybe, I think, we can go back, and get recognition later. So I cut across the field—how the devil do you know where I was?"

"Petrosky, if you had a idea what I knowed about you, you'd be jumpin' out the window!"

"So I cut across the field—it was dark—and I came in through the bushes at the side of the house. At first I felt ashamed, going back. Besides, I wanted to think it over some more. I was sitting there a long time on the edge of the bushes. Then the mosquitoes got bad. I stand up, and walk around to the front of the house.

"There is just one light, then. Upstairs. But when I passed a window I see a flash light—puff—like that, inside. In the hall, on the first floor, where the carpet is so thick, I stopped, you know how you will. Just looked in.

"The next minute I hear a racket upstairs. Somebody was hollerin'. I start to run to the front door. I hear McKay. He's callin' for help. Just when I get to the door I hear them fightin' in the hall. Then there's a shot. I don't know where it's from. Then somebody's behind me, on

the walk. I get an awful wallop on the head. Now that's all—"

"Petrosky, you ain't got any business being a car worker, with that head o' yours! You ought to be a high-paid writer for the movies!"

"But it's true, true, true!" he cried. "So help me—every word! When I wake up—*you* never had so much headache—I am in the coach yards. In an old day coach on the siding. It is daylight. I know where I'm at. Then I understand. You have stolen me. You want it to look like I broke in. You put me there—you and your cossacks—"

"Eh?" responded Silver Brooks.

"A frame up, sticking me in the yards! Knocking my head, shoving me in that coach, then get one of your gunmen to hit me again—"

"It sounds like a story book," the captain commented. "Oh, Clark! Take him away and keep him cool. Then come back."

"Turned him over to the city men," the lieutenant reported after a moment. "And, cap, they's about a thousand people outside the gates at the car shops. They say we kidnaped Petrosky. Must of seen us when we brought him here. Spike's called all his finks off work and has them backin' up the gate guard with clubs."

The telephone rang. It was Spike Bailey.

"I need help, Silver. Mob outside. Like to rush the gate any minute. My crew can't handle them once they starts. Your order about guns, you know!"

"That order stands!" Captain Brooks shot back. "No gats! I'll get Clark and some of my boys down. Let them in the back way. No rough stuff, unless the gang breaks through. But if they do break through—"

"I get you," he heard Spike Bailey answer.

He turned from the telephone.

"Send half a dozen of the boys from the freight yards. Let the car checking go. Go over and help Bailey. Don't be rough, just keep the mob out. I'll be there myself after a bit."

Silver Brooks squeezed into the half-opened gate of the car shop exactly at five o'clock, while a ragged crowd across the way jeered. "Scab!" they were howling. "Gunman!" a dark man challenged. The captain watched the guards close the gate, and strolled languidly across the open spaces of the yard. In a little while the finks would be out for their supper and evening recreation.

Brooks was at the telephone in the temporary pine office when the whistles thundered. The strikebreakers had gulped their suppers and were idling lazily in the yard. The police captain walked out among them. Twice and a third time he circled the open space. A lethargic game of handball occupied some of the younger men.

Like the shutters of speed cameras, his eyes clicked off faces, expressions, random professional opinions. Which of these men set the fire at the planing mill? Or, if Petrosky set it, which of them had smashed the rear gate and let him in? And why should any of them do either?

Spike Bailey loomed bulkily in the door of the east wing. The two men recognized one another, and both started talking at once.

"Say, Bailey—I wanted to ask you—where was it exactly, Petrosky was, when they see him first this morning?"

"Over by the coaches, somewheres."

"Show me the place."

"Wait. I wasn't there myself when they drug him in. I'll get Anderson—it was him beaned him. Good man, Anderson. I was just talkin' to him inside." The boss fink turned to the door and shouted.

A stooped, bald man, his unshaven face bulged with tobacco, advanced toward the captain at a peculiar, loose-kneed gait, with a broad-faced wooden maul in his hands. He looked up curiously out of eyes with drooping lids.

"Mr. Anderson's done time somewheres," Silver Brooks decided. "He never got that chain-gang shuffle goin' to church! Well, that's all the company might expect, bringing in a mess of imported strike breakers." He waited for the fink to speak.

"Show the captain where you run into that prowler this morning, Anderson," said Bailey. "Take him over."

Brooks followed the workman silently to the end of the first string of cars.

"He come around here—runnin', and makin' for the ladder," the fellow explained. "I figgers he ain't got no business here, so I hollers at him. He turns around once, then starts runnin' again. So I lets him have my persuader on the bean."

"Right here? He came from between those cars?"

"Yes, sir."

Silver Brooks rubbed his chin. What would Petrosky be doing here? What was his game? Hiding in the cars? The workman stood waiting.

"Good job you done!" The captain praised him. "Mighty good job. Shake!"

The strikebreaker looked startled, embarrassed, and extended his right glove. Silver Brooks gripped it, held firm a moment, bit on his cigar, and said brusquely, "Thanks, that's all."

He stood very still, neck bent, hand in pocket, watching his informant shuffling back to the shop door. Then he scowled and glanced at the sky.

"So it's him!" he grunted.

For the ragged, white glove he just had gripped responded with a curious, claw-like pinch. From the hand inside of that glove, three fingers were missing.

CHAPTER VI

THE SWAYING HAND

BURKHART? Surely not! Yet, who else? And didn't this explain it all? Didn't this tie up Petrosky? Or did it? If Petrosky were in league with Burkhart, or Anderson, as he chose to call himself now, what would Burkhart be doing hitting him on the head and turning him in? They'd had a row? Then why hadn't Petrosky told?

Well, it was lucky that he'd shaken hands with that yegg, anyway. At the gate he came upon Lieutenant Clark, whose tall figure braced against the panels as if he alone were responsible for keeping the mob outside. The captain motioned to him.

"Run into something!" he whispered. "Actually run into something important! No, listen. Know a rat named Anderson here? A fink? Little feller, bald headed. He works at that end of the shop somewhere. He's the guy as rapped Petrosky on the head this morning, and—"

"Sure I know him! Wasn't you talking to him a minute ago?"

"That's the one! Now after a bit, after these dumb bystanders outside get tired and go home, you check up quiet on Anderson. Find him and bring him to the office. Search him first. His real name's Burkhart."

"Not Three-finger Burkhart of Pittsburgh!"

"Him! See why I want him? Bring him to the office. Be careful—he's tricky. May have friends outside. Best have a patrolman follow you."

Brooks glanced idly across the yard. There was something familiar in that slouching figure, moving cautiously through the shadows toward the strings of empty day coaches. Burkhart again! With a bag on his back!

"Quick, Clark! There he goes! He smelled trouble when I shook hands, and is beating it. Run around the corner—around the other side—and come in on him. I'll follow—"

The fugitive was racing between two strings of cars, giving up all pretense, and speeding with a will. Clark slipped into his way, he tried to double back, and ran full into Brooks's outflung arms.

"Come on, Burkhart!" Silver Brooks commanded. "Here, Clark, shake him down. What's he got? A persuader, eh? And a iron? Well, well! Put the bracelets on him. Take him to the paint shop. I'll send one of the others to stand guard with you—no—two others. Don't let anybody else near him. And when the crowd's gone, if I ain't back, bring him down to the office."

"Aw, captain!" Burkhart whined. "Leave me talk to you. Leave me have a bit o' talk with you alone—"

"Say! Think I ain't aiming to have you talk? Fink, you'll talk pretty, and you'll talk straight, down to my office. I'm going to gold fish you if you don't—understand? Talk? Why, you ain't going to

have so much as a private opinion when I'm done. Take him away!"

One hour, two hours, three hours, the surly crowd beleaguered the shop gates, still demanding their leader. Silver Brooks drove through the noisy, undisciplined ranks in a yellow taxicab, drew up at his office, and found the sheriff waiting.

"Hear they're trying to bail out Petrosky," that official reported.

"The devil! And he's only charged with rioting—hard to make the kidnaping stick—yet. They could bail him for five hundred."

"I hope he gets out."

"Out? Sheriff, he'll not *stay* out! I'm beginning to get things cleared up in my mind. Just picked up a fellow at the shops. Burkhart's his name. Him and Petrosky was playing some kind of game together, the way I figure it."

"I hope Petrosky gets out!" Sheriff Robinson insisted doggedly. "That crowd at the gates—I think he'll quiet them. No one else can. And if they stay there a couple of hours more—"

"I know, it will mean fighting. Got any of your deputies out there?"

"Four. But what could four do? Handful of city men, too, in plain clothes. But—"

"Hasn't the chief stirred up anything? Heard of McKay, or McKay's car? Anything on who killed Dunn?"

"Not a word. But I don't believe Petrosky had anything to do with any of them."

"You don't know nothing about it!"

Silver Brooks stood at the open window, after the sheriff had slammed the door behind him, and stared into the dark railroad yards. Switch lights poked pale, yellow faces through the smoky murk, mirrored in long reflective streaks on the polished surfaces of the rails.

All the yard twinkled, glittered like a carnival. Locomotives emitted choky blasts as their engineers called for blocks or demanded orders and right of way.

An imperious eastbound passenger train —No. 26, the Wall Street Limited— boomed up the incline toward the depot, a flicker of lighted windows, with glimpses of snug, comfortable Pullman and club cars, and travelers confidently at ease.

Beside the flagman on the windy, rear platform stood a tall man in an overcoat. He was not a passenger, Silver Brooks knew. He waved his hand as the end of the train rumbled past the office. Brooks waved in reply. Jennings, that was, of his own force.

Really, this was too big a job for only fifty patrolmen! All those lives to safeguard, all those millions of dollars of company property, all the freight, the express, the mail—and here this blasted strike tearing his mind to pieces!

Better go out and keep an eye on things. Mooning in the office didn't help find Superheater McKay. Certainly it wasn't getting very far on his hunt for the killers of Cherry Dunn. The city men were working on that. Jones was with them. So was Mumaugh. Good men, Jones and Mumaugh. Hard workers, and some sense between their ears.

Silver Brooks mumbled to his clerk, nodded to the night patrolmen on emergency duty in the outer office, and strode heavily down the stair. He was sleepy. How long had it been since he'd slept? Why, only this morning, in the barber chair, of course! No business to be sleepy!

But he was; might grab off a wink or two later in the night. After he got through with Burkhart, then there'd be time enough to sleep. Couldn't get Burkhart out till the crowd had gone. Now he'd take another look at that fool crowd. He'd be with it this time, out among them. It would be too dark for them to recognize him. He'd listen, watch—and on the way he could think a little, too.

So this bird Petrosky claims he was kidnaped himself! Sounded half true, did that story. But it couldn't be true—just couldn't! And it was Burkhart caught him; Burkhart who sold out to the strikers in Pittsburgh! That only tied up the trouble worse than it had been. But what was this business, all of it? How did all these things fit into each other?

Cherry Dunn; McKay; Petrosky; Burkhart; those letters; the fire; the white gloves; red paint on a crowbar— And

there was the strike itself. It alone would have been easy.

Captain Brooks scowled as he plodded through the autumn night. The whole blamed affair was unreal. Started out quiet as a sewing circle, that strike! Not a stone flung, not a man slugged, not a window broken. Just sat outside the gates and wouldn't come in.

Queer customers, those Polacks. Now, if they'd been section workers, Italians, things would have started with a whoop and been over long ago. But here the strike had been on nearly a month, and just when company and men were almost agreed, and everything running smooth as an observation car—bang, the trouble started!

The slow, eccentric reverberations of great steam hammers thundered out of the glowing windows of the smith shop, interrupted by the staccato bark of bulldozer machines, whanging with a quick, frenzied precision. Iron clanked on iron, and through the smoky vistas behind barred windows, cascades of white sparks bubbled like toy volcanoes from the forges, and showers of luminous, orange scales sprang from steel anvils, under hard driven hammer blows.

Beyond a tall picket barricade the roundhouse glowered under its eternal cloud of smoke, and behind it, windows alight, the classification yard office made a patch of clear-etched brilliance in the sooty, night obscurity of the yards. Silver Brooks followed a tall white fence along the planing mill, past the carpenter department, beyond the power plant, to the car shops. Here incandescents burned in an ecstasy of protective zeal on top of new palisades.

Silver Brooks crossed the street. The roadbed was worn and wrinkled, for it was very old, and old, old houses on narrow lots looked out of smudgy windows across the way. For the most part they were dark. Here lived the strikers, the regular workmen from the car shops.

As he approached the main gates, where the lights expanded into an unrestrained glare, the captain trod more slowly. Men lounged on the sidewalks, looking east, watching the lighted entry with a passionate, morbid expectation. Women, garrulous in harsh, foreign tongues, rattled excited talk about his ears. He only glanced at them, listened, passed on.

The immediate circle of light before the gates was empty of loiterers. But clustered in the shadows at its outskirts, milling around under a hum of surly voices, waited five hundred bitter men. Brooks kept to the darker areas, still watching, still listening, alert. He held his hand in his coat pocket.

"Gunmen!" he heard one man proclaiming. "They killt Petrosky!"

"Killt?" another demanded. His voice was keen with goaded wrath. "You sure he's killt?"

"Them gunmen got him. But they's enough o' us to rush the gates. Tear down the shops, we can! They'll run! Them cops will run!"

"But who's to start it?"

No one seemed to know who should lead the attack. Silver Brooks grinned, there in the dark. No matter who started it, he knew who would finish! He knew that Spike Bailey, with a scantling in his big, raw, willing fist, was waiting anxiously beyond the gates.

He knew that three hundred fellows, none too cautious, fondling chisels and mallets and chunks of two-by-four stood prepared just over the fence. He knew that Clark and a handful of lean, silent, experienced men with bulging pockets were circulating idly among the finks. Really, it didn't matter which of these loafers *started* the fight!

The boring lights of an automobile swayed along the roadway. They stopped at the edge of the crowd. Silver Brooks, expecting trouble, edged closer. He recognized the tall man who got out first—the city chief of police. He stared at the second fellow.

Nathan Petrosky!

"Here you are!" the chief said cheerily. The crowd closed in. "I hope there's no trouble."

Petrosky answered in an undertone, then lifted his voice. It was that voice which had won him the presidency of the union, Brooks knew, pleading, fervent, pitched to

vibrate sympathetically on the heart rather than the head.

"I am back, my brothers!" he cried. "Some kind friend—I, myself don't know who—hired a lawyer, put up my bail. Five hundred dollars. I am back!"

The smoky night rumbled with the cheer that followed. Heads popped over the barbed wire across the street. Silver Brooks loosed the pistol in his coat pocket. When the shouts had died he heard Petrosky, in a high voice, carrying on:

"The gunmen!" he was declaring. "Look—my head! They beat me! They kidnap me! In free America! They say I killed Cherry Dunn! They say I shot McKay! Sure, McKay was shot—or something. The cossacks, they—"

"Let's tear down the shop!" a great voice boomed over his head. "Come on, Nate, let's go!"

Others cried: "Aye, let's go!"

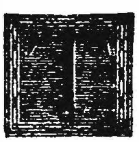
"Burn out the cossacks!"

"But wait!" Nathan Petrosky warned. "Not to-night! Listen! All members come to the hall. I want to tell you—private. Who knows how many spies are there here? There are always sneaks and spies. We would have settled. I would have had you back at work to-day, at our terms—our terms!" he shrilled. "But the gunmen—they beat me—they maul me—no, not to-night. Come! To the hall first!"

For a space the crowd stood resolute. A few of the hotter-headed argued. Now was the time to attack. But the piping, pleading voice of Nathan Petrosky urged them, calmed them, drew them after him. Silver Brooks watched them go. Only the women remained, and a handful of rowdies.

CHAPTER VII

NUMBER THREE



THE captain slid off into the darkness, circled the barricade, and rapped upon the back gate of the coach shop yards. Cautious workmen admitted him. He saw Spike Bailey crossing the lighted open space, a club still in his hands, sweat upon his face. Brooks hailed him.

"Lord, Silver, that was a close squeak!" the boss fink complained. "Where was you?"

"Outside, along with them."

"What stopped 'em? I thinks they was comin' in sure—and me with not half enough men—"

"Petrosky held them up."

Spike Bailey wheeled.

"Petrosky's out! You left him go?"

"He's out. I see him there. Says somebody bailed him. Some silly soft head!"

"Then there'll be hell popping!"

"Petrosky's out," Silver Brooks answered hopefully, "but Burkhart's in! Where'd you run into Burkhart, Bailey?" He swung on the boss fink challengingly. "You wasn't very careful who you picked! What you mean, bringing troublemakers like him—"

"Ain't careful?" Bailey's face twisted angrily. "How'd I know who he was? I ain't a fortune teller! They shipped him out o' Chicago with the rest."

"And you never seen his hand!" Brooks grunted.

"Sure I seen it! Lots o' men lose their fingers."

"Well, I ain't wasting no more time guessing what his game is, Spike. I'm going to make him tell me. I'll have him down to the office in an hour or so. Drop in."

"I'll be there," Spike Bailey agreed.

Lieutenant Clark was waiting on the paint shop stair. He jerked his thumb upward.

"He's havin' a swell time cussin' out everybody he sees," the lieutenant reported.

"We'll go get him. Did you shake him down?"

"Yep—nothing but his locker key and a couple of dollars."

"Go open the locker. See what he's got. Meet me at the gate. Me and you'll take him down to the office. I'll relieve whoever's guarding him."

Silver Brooks passed through the sharp, electrical glare of the pattern shop, with its pleasant odor of freshly carved wood and moist shellac. In the paint department the air thickened with the smell of oil and pigments. At the far end in a

small room Burkhart waited, in handcuffs, glowering at the tall, youthful patrolman who stood watch over him.

"Come on," ordered Silver Brooks. "Me and you are going to have a nice sociable little chat."

The prisoner looked up, blinking in the glare of precautionary lights, kept burning night and day, against emergencies. He grumbled and arose reluctantly.

"Decent break you gives a guy!" he complained. "Go catch a crook for you, trying to burn the shop, and you sticks these on me!" He rattled the handcuffs. "Now maybe you'll do the rubber hose trick, eh?"

They stepped into the paint shop, a-litter with fresh, shining car parts. In a far corner, mammoth against their cramped background, half a dozen newly blackened and gilded locomotive cabs stood on low, iron-wheeled trucks. The narrow aisles dodged between racks of freshly varnished panels. Coach doors, still wet from the painters' brushes, were strewn across the work floor.

"Step out," Silver Brooks commanded. "I'll follow. Down the stair!"

He had reached for the top step when the lights went out. Blackness crashed into the stair well like the blow of an iron sledge. Feet scuffled. Silver Brooks grabbed at his prisoner, but his hands clenched together empty. He cried out, heard the patrolman's voice, somewhere in the dark, shouting "Halt, I say!"

A sudden lunging weight bent the captain's knees, and he flung violently down the stair. His right hand squeezed the trigger in his pocket, and he shot a useless hole through the blue serge of his coat. Then as quickly as they had disappeared, the lights flashed on again.

The patrolman, gun in hand, was charging aimlessly about the lower floor. The acid odor of burned powder hung in the smoky stair well. Silver Brooks glanced up, down, all about.

Burkhart, alias Anderson, had disappeared.

Spike Bailey came charging at the head of a squad of rescuers. Clark, with a long, gangling stride, swung in from the yard.

"Scatter!" Silver Brooks commanded. "Get him! Upstairs! And downstairs! Out in the yard! You!" he ordered the night foreman, who ran in with his mouth open and sweat upon his cheeks. "Where's the switchbord at? The master switch? The one that could turn off all the lights together?"

"Upstairs!" the foreman shouted back.

"Come on!" Silver Brooks charged up ahead. He carried the pistol in his hand. No need to conceal it now. The foreman slapped open a metal door, and stepped cautiously into a small, insulated room. Fuse plugs, lightning arresters, switch levers, and sockets spread on a broad panel across the wall.

"Everything right enough here," the shopman commented breathlessly. "What's it all about?"

Silver Brooks did not answer. He was staring at the floor. There, palm up, lay a white canvas glove.

"That's number three," he grumbled, stooping over. He stuffed the glove into his burned pocket and turned back toward the door. "Better get that fellow before he flies over the wall."

Burkhart refused to be got.

For two hours patrolmen, strikebreakers, railway police, and deputy sheriffs searched the yards, shops, and storerooms. Newspaper reporters cooled their heels at gate shanties, or telephoned back accounts more imaginative than accurate to city editors who watched the clock.

Silver Brooks went home at two in the morning, after calling his office. Burkhart was gone. The single real clew to all this beastly business had evaporated. And the search for Superheater McKay so far had been unsuccessful. From the time he was bundled out of his own house, Marion had seen neither the division superintendent nor his car. So Silver Brooks surveyed his ruined coat and went to bed.

At first he did not sleep. He was thinking of that dark stair well at the paint shop, of the white glove on the floor of the switchboard room, of the escape of Burkhart. One thing came out of to-night's work clear as print. Burkhart was really a bad egg. He was the one they wanted—no mistake.

And Burkhart had some accomplice in the shops. Burkhart, Petrosky, and still one more! Who else? Or had Petrosky got back in?

It was not at all surprising that the strike-breaker made a get-away. Easy. Had it all planned, in case he should be caught. Simple to slip over the wall, down by the ruins of the planing mill. But who had turned out the lights? What had Petrosky to do with it? Anything? Who shot Cherry Dunn? Where was Superheater McKay?

CHAPTER VIII

ALL THINGS POINT

HE took the questions to sleep with him, and the jangle of his telephone answered the last one exactly at five o'clock. He reached across to the stand, staring wide awake, at the first rattle of the bell.

"Hello, who is it?" he demanded, believing that the fine points of social intercourse were less vital than information.

"Jones, cap. McKay's found."

"Eh?"

"McKay's found. He's home. Mad as hell. Wants you."

Three minutes later the captain stamped impatiently on the curb, buttoned his vest, and waited for the taxicab. At home, eh? Mad? Well, he wasn't the only one who was mad!

In front of the old brick house Brooks ordered the cabman to wait, and strode up the cement walk to the broad wings of the front porch. Although it was sharp day now, lights still shone in the lower hall, in windows at both sides, and in upper rooms. Lieutenant Jones, whose clothes were awry from catnaps taken on duty, ran down briskly to meet him.

"Maybe you'd best not go up. He was *that* crazy when I found him!"

"Where'd you get him?"

"Here—in bed."

"Bed? Eh? Quick! How come?"

"I worked all night, cap, hunting him. Hunting information, with a couple of city boys. Nothing doing. Not a line. Then I starts home—I live over that way about six blocks, see? Just walks past here. Thinking. There's a light upstairs. I know nobody's supposed to be in the house. So I come a-runnin'."

"Was it daylight yet?"

"Just ready to turn. East kind of gray. I went up on the porch, tried the door—this door—it was open. So I step in. Looked around like. Nothing down here. Upstairs—there he lays in bed, blindfolded, and a wad of cloth in his mouth. Tied down with ropes. Mad? Say!"

Captain Brooks trotted heavily up the stair. He turned to the left into the lighted door of the superintendent's bedroom. Superheater McKay stood in the middle of the room, in soiled shirt and wrinkled trousers, rubbing his wrists, twisting his neck, and swearing whole heartedly. At the sight of the police captain he choked, gulped, and broke into a new rash of violent vocabulary. Silver Brooks listened admiringly, mystified.

"Where you been?" he asked, once McKay halted for breath.

"Been!" Superheater screamed. "Where none of you found me, that's sure! Where have *you* been? Allow a man to be stolen out of his own house, beaten, tied up in a basement full of rats—" He hesitated. For an instant he frowned, panted quicker. "How's the strike? Anything new?"

"Nothing except you. Now, Mr. Mac, tell me about it. You'd best set down, might get hit by the falling sickness, state you're in. Tell me just what all has happened."

"How do I know?" Once more he swore with a squeak of irascibility. "Went to bed here. Heard some one in the house after awhile. Been sick—smelled like ether—called you, didn't I?"

Silver Brooks nodded.

"Come as fast as I could."

"I thought I'd called you. I'm kind of mixed up in my mind. Then some one hit me from behind. They must have given me some more of it—that ether."

"Chloroform, it was," the captain corrected.

"Well, then, chloroform. I remember sort of scuffle and a shot. It was a long time afterward I waked up in a cellar. I

was tied on an iron cot, without a mattress. Something like those cots in the fink bunk houses. Ever had your neck and head pushed against cot springs, Brooks? Well, there I lay, with a lot of greasy waste in my mouth, hands tied under me, legs together, and all hitched to the cot. Couldn't move—hardly breathe with the smell of gasoline—"

"Gasoline?"

"The place stunk of it. A basement. Damp. Steel beams and concrete floor above. Big place. Three or four times the size of this room. No lights burning. Nothing else there but a couple of old tires—"

"What kind o' tires?"

"Automobile tires! What's there for you to get excited about? I'm the one who should be excited! Then a fellow came in—two or three hours ago, I guess. Blindfolded me, stuck a pistol in my side, took me off the cot, tied my hands behind me, and marched me upstairs. We got into my car. I know the feel of my own car. It's out there on the drive now. There was a man in it ahead of me. They tied me in bed here when they got me home, and one of them, the one who was in the car ahead, went out. It was the other fellow did the talking. I was still here when your man Jones came in."

"Did they feed you?"

"They did not!"

"Better come have some breakfast," Silver Brooks suggested. "And in the meantime this fellow, what did he look like?"

"Middle sized man—couldn't see much in the dark. Talked like a cutthroat."

"Did you happen to notice—did he wear gloves?"

"Gloves?" Superheater McKay turned around sharply. "No, but I felt his right hand when he was tying me in bed. Blindfolded, couldn't see, just feel. His hand was all chewed up. Most of the fingers gone."

Brooks rubbed his chin.

"What's that?" McKay demanded. "Say that again!"

"I was just saying, it was him then! Mr. Mac, I pulled that yegg early last night. He got away. After that he must have brung you home. Come on, let's eat!"

CHAPTER IX

THE FOURTH IS ARSON

A COUNCIL of war was held at nine o'clock that morning, in the superintendent's office. Spike Bailey, his eyes red from want of sleep; Silver Brooks, once more calm, his clothes pressed, linen clean; McKay, still stiff and irritable; the day car shop foreman; and Grayson, the chief clerk, they sat about the long conference table.

"Whoever it was," Spike Bailey suggested, "was just showing you what could be done. They hadn't no mind to hurt you—either that, or their plans got shot up."

"Maybe their plans got shot up," Silver Brooks agreed. "If they didn't get shot up they was the first ones in this business that didn't. But when we get this fink Burkhart, then we'll have the story. He's our only bet now, and I'll get him."

McKay sat back in his chair, glaring at the table. Grayson, the fussy little chief clerk, balanced nose-glasses on a finger, chewed a pencil, and scowled. In the exact center of the table lay an envelope, split across one end. Silver Brooks glanced at it curiously.

"They can threaten me and be damned!" Superheater McKay exploded. "Brooks—there's another of their letters. Take charge of it."

The captain leaned across, picked up the envelope, started to pull out the contents, and pushed the sheet back. From his own pocket he drew a similar envelope.

"I guess it says about the same as this," he commented.

"You got one, too?"

"Sure! Don't think they'd leave me out all the time. If they was sure of Spike's name he'd have one."

"Like to see 'em send me one!" the big boss strikebreaker bristled. "I'd make the bird what wrote it eat it!"

"What are you going to do about it, Brooks?" McKay demanded.

"Do? About mine? Oh, nothing. But about yours—I've assigned a couple of my patrolmen to guard your house, and another to stand bodyguard, wherever you go. Come on—we don't get nowhere arguing! And I've a notion the guard on the shops ought to be doubled."

Superheater McKay exploded wrathfully.

"Guard, guard, guard! And what good does it do? They kill the shop foreman, they shoot Owens, they burn the mill, they kidnap me and stuff my mouth full of rags, they shoot up the paint shop and the only man you lay hands on gets away! Guard?"

"Yes, sir," Spike Bailey put in, "but not enough."

"I'm sick of that talk! Brooks, you want to show up something to-day. To-day, understand! I'm tired of this playing around. I want *results*!"

"Mebbe *I* don't!" his police captain retorted. "*I* ain't been in bed long enough since this strike started to get kidnaped!"

McKay laughed at that, and Silver Brooks smoothed his own ruffled feathers.

"I've got hopes for to-day myself," he conceded. "I'll be back here at eight o'clock to-night—no, make it ten—maybe have some news. And if any of you got any idees, bring 'em along. I'm going to be busy to-day." He returned hotly to his own office.

Find fault with results, eh? Results! Well, he'd show 'em! Neck or nothing, he'd show 'em!

He had not seen Clark since he left the paint shop the night before. Now the lieutenant was waiting, sitting straight up in his chair, asleep. He jerked to his feet when his superior entered.

"You didn't wait last night for them things from Burkhart's locker," he commented. "I brought 'em down here and stuck 'em in the safe."

"Get them out," Silver Brooks directed.

Lieutenant Clark dropped a canvas bag upon the table. He loosed the draw strings.

"Not much here," he said.

Brooks snorted, rubbed his drawn eyes, and stared. For the first thing that dropped out of the sack was a bundle of white canvas gloves.

"Never want to see another mitten long as I live!" the captain growled. "What's those papers with the rubber bands around them?"

"Envelopes."

Brooks reached into his pocket and drew forth the two letters which the morning mail had brought, with threats to himself and McKay.

"The same," he grunted.

"And these here," Clark passed across a ring with two flat, brass keys clinging upon it. His chief examined them, and dropped them back upon the desk, shaking his head.

"And that's all," Clark continued, "except for tobacco and some pants buttons."

"It's enough to make my fingers itch for Burkhart!" Brooks shifted about in his chair and glared at the key ring. "Gloves! And envelopes like these here love letters me and Superheater got! And a couple of keys! Clark, know the garages around here very well?"

"Some."

"Well, Superheater was kept in the basement of a garage, the way I dope it. He says they was a cement floor above him, and the smell of gasoline. And some old tires scattered around. Maybe we might find the joint we want. And if we do, we'll find Burkhart hiding in the basement, most likely. Get Jones and Mumaugh and a couple of others and go looking. Hunt over the town—see what you see. Keep your eyes open for a red crowbar. Watch for the ratty places. Stay under cover—don't start nothing—and Clark—"

"Yes, sir."

"When you go out, tell the clerk to send in the box of graphite."

Silver Brooks watched him go, and turned encouraged to the new clews upon his desk. Plenty to work on now. All except two things. What was Burkhart's motive? That's number one. And where was Burkhart? Number two. Solve the second and the first would solve itself. And the first would clear up everything else, too.

The diminutive clerk brought in a tin box, placed it carefully on the desk, and

closed the door as he retired. A perfect devil of a mess! Nothing could bring back Cherry Dunn. Nothing but hard work could rebuild the planing mill. There was a lot undone that could not be repaired.

Brooks turned to the desk, removed the two threatening letters from his pocket, and shaking them out of their envelopes, dropped them upon the table. Beside them he laid the bundle of envelopes from Burkhart's locker. He opened the tin box, and shook the powdered graphite upon them. Leaning over, he blew the particles off the surfaces. There remained sharp imprints of fingers and thumbs.

"That's Clark's paw, there," Brooks told himself. "He'll never learn to handle things by the edges! Hello! What's this? Yep! The first finger and the stump where the second ought to be! That's Burkhart, all right! Right hand—one finger plain—one stubbed—the rest missing. We got his prints if we ain't got him. Now let's see—here's some more—"

He opened the left-hand drawer, drew out a small glass on a tripod, and set it over the paper. Through the lens he studied a third set of prints. They were the marks of first, second, and third fingers, dim, but clear enough to detect through the glass. Some one else had been playing with these envelopes. Perhaps the fellow who sold them—

Silver Brooks turned from the bundle of envelopes to the first of the letters that had come through the mail, the one addressed to him. He grunted. It was a short and emphatic warning:

> Lay off the strike or you'll get bumped off. In twenty-four hours. Pull out the finks or we'll put them out. And there's bridges and trains to think of.

"What a sweet dispositioned bird he is!" exclaimed the captain. He examined the letter to Superheater McKay, and read:

> We was just playing with you. Next time we mean it. We was showing what we could do if we want to. Lay off the strike stuff. Run your finks out of town. Keep your cops away from the yard. We'll burn your shops no matter how many finks you got on the gates. You can't keep away from us. You can't keep us out.

Once more he scattered the black powder, this time over the letters, and blew it mightily. The prints of thumbs and fingers stood out sharply upon both of them. Silver Brooks whistled, scowled, and leaned closer.

For these prints were the same as the third set he had found upon the envelopes. And here there was no sign of Burkhart's scarred hand. Burkhart had the envelopes. Some one else was writing the letters. Who else could it be? Petrosky?

He labored studiously over the penmanship. Not get much there. Disguised handwriting. But the prints! Here was something real! Here was the other accomplice, the fellow who turned out the lights and let Burkhart get away.

The rap upon the panel of the door was imperative.

"Come in!" Silver Brooks shouted. The clerk showed his small plump face.

"Cap!" he whispered. "Petrosky's out there. Wants to see you."

Silver Brooks lifted hands above his head.

"Send him in!" he bade, and lighted a cigar.

The union official still wore his bandages, and looked sourer than ever. He shook his head impatiently when his host offered a chair.

"I'll not set!" he said firmly. "I ain't aiming to get chummy with you. I just want to warn you. You'll not win any strike by trying to set my house afire."

"Eh?" Brooks shouted.

"Don't need to look so surprised! I saw you do it! I was awake—wife sick—I was up. I put it out right away. I just warn you not to do it again!"

"I had no one near your house last night!" Brooks flared up. "I'll not pull that kind of stuff! You can! You can shoot and burn all you want! But I'll not! Petrosky—there wasn't one of my men near your house last night! Not one!"

"None of your men, mebbe. But you. I seen you, out in the alley. Sneaking

through to the back porch. Think I wouldn't know you, no matter how dark? Well, I just told the newspapers about it. They been printing so many lies I thought mebbe they could print the truth, once."

"Listen, Petrosky! Somebody tried to burn your house?"

"You make me laugh!"

"Then laugh all you've got a mind to. But tell me one thing. It looked like me? You think I done it?"

"I *know* you did! And you dropped your glove. Here, I brung it to you."

He flung down a white cotton glove, spit on it, and stalked through the door.

Silver Brooks stood looking at the floor dazedly, and sat down with a sudden plop upon his chair.

"That's number four," he muttered.

CHAPTER X

BASE OF OPERATIONS

FOR twenty minutes the captain sat there, studying the finger-prints, growling, smoking hard. Finally he nodded his head violently.

"*Me?*" he inquired of the desk. "It was *me* as tries to burn out that Polack? Six foot tall—good strong build—two hundred pound—put together neat—now who else around the Marion division looks like that? Superheater? The old boy himself? He's fatter than me.

"Hardly. And he left another glove! Well, he ought to of worn them when he was writing letters! The smarter they are the sooner they slip. He don't stop at nothing! Hey!" he cried to his clerk. "Take this note to Spike Bailey. Run out to the car shops—wait for a answer."

The clerk fussed into the office with a stenographic notebook.

"Must have more protection," he dictated. "How many more men can you have on the job by to-morrow morning out of Chicago office? Please reply by bearer. Say nothing to McKay, and nothing to his chief clerk about this letter."

The typewriter outside rattled for a moment, and Silver Brooks signed the note with a great deal of manner.

"Stick it in a envelope — and hurry! And listen. Don't say nothing to nobody about this—understand?"

He picked up the two keys, eyed them closely, and dropped them into his pocket. Perhaps Clark, Jones, and the others might find that garage. Perhaps not. Might find the red crowbar. At least, these keys should lead somewhere. They were a start. He tried to shake out of his head the suspicion that lodged there. Then he strolled over to the office of Superheater McKay.

Grayson, the superintendent's fussy chief clerk, greeted him unpleasantly. Silver Brooks scanned his wizened features. The kind of man you'd expect to dislike the police! Yes, McKay was in. Brooks crossed to the desk, opened his fist, and dropped the keys. He peered sharply at his superior.

"Ever see these before?" he asked.

McKay picked them up, held them a moment on his palm, and shook his head.

"I don't think so. Why?"

"Took them off that fink that got away. Burkhart."

"Clews?" the superintendent laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh, on the verge of scorn. "You're collecting a houseful of them. I hope they're worth more than the rest. Found Burkhart yet?"

"Guess he's skipped town. Not a sight of him. My men are hunting him, though."

Grayson stuck in his crabbed face.

"Pittsburgh on the telephone, sir," he said.

Silver Brooks waved good-by and stepped once more into the street. It was noon, and workers from the locomotive department swarmed from shop gates. But the policeman did not notice them. He was hunting in the recesses of his mind for a way to trace the keys. Perhaps it was a blind chase. Perhaps these keys belonged to Burkhart before he came to Marion. His own house or flat in Chicago—Pittsburgh—New York—

His thoughts shifted to Petrosky. Funny, that little business this morning. Some one tried to burn out the labor man, eh? Not very particular who he picked! Of course there were hot-heads in the strike, there were in every strike. Might have been dis-

satisfied with Petrosky's way of handling things. Tried to stir him up a little. Perhaps—still—

Spike Bailey's reply to his note lay unopened on the desk. He closed the door, locked it, and turned to the table. He always locked the door when he wanted to think hard. Kept his mind in, that way. First, he glanced through new reports of his investigators and patrolmen, stacked evenly at his right hand. Nothing exciting there. He slit open the envelope from Bailey, and saw the slip of paper flutter out. It read:

> Can have three hundred men by morning. Advise order early. Takes three to four hours to get them together.

He stood a moment looking out of his window, shut it, and turned back to the desk.

"Three hundred," he told himself. "Three thousand dollars before they get here. Well, I hope we don't need 'em. Hope I got a good hunch for once."

It was an hour before he opened the door. He crossed to the basin in the corner, washed his hands, and lighted a cigar. He was whistling under his breath as he nodded to his office staff. Twice during the afternoon Clark telephoned in. He had discovered no public garage that seemed to be the one he wanted. He had found no red crowbar. Nor had Jones, after his third trial.

"Keep at it!" Their orders had been simple.

Silver Brooks supped early and made his regular evening inspection of the car shop barricades. The shop yards extended half a mile north and south, a mile east and west. A street lay along one side, the railroad yards along the other. Spurs and special sidetracks with a wilderness of warehouses and unloading platforms bounded the company property on the north. To the south the motive power shops thrust their tall steel stacks through the dusk.

Brooks stalked past the main gate. There was no crowd to-night. The strikers were holding a mass meeting down town. Only a sleepy city policeman lounged against a pole, the reflection of fence top lights glittering on his star. The captain answered his greeting with a bob of the head, and walked to the north end of the fence. Scattered arc lamps sent a dismal radiance through the murk of switches and spurs.

Corrugated iron buildings blocked off the shop yard along the company boundary, where a cinder roadway led around the end of the railroad property. Brooks paused under the street lamp and looked at his watch. Exactly eight. In five more minutes it would be quite dark. He had two hours before the meeting in McKay's office.

What a meeting it would be! Brooks felt younger than he had in a month. Get Burkhart? Well, maybe not. Try mighty hard, though. But that wasn't the most important job. He chuckled. He was anxious to see McKay's face when he heard the story. And Bailey's. And Grayson's! Particularly Grayson's! Grayson who had been so superior to the police!

Funny the idea hadn't hit before. And it was so plain now—how could he have missed it? Well, he had two hours more to wait.

"Might as well walk around," he told himself, and set out doggedly along the cinder path. "Might as well follow the fence and come back the other side."

He passed the second and third of the windowless buildings with their black iron doors. They were the unloading sheds, where newly arrived car parts were unrolled from the trucks and stored. No need to keep watch along this end. No need for wooden fence and barbed wire. It would take a regiment of safe blowers to break through from this side.

The company storage tanks for kerosene, crude oil, and gasoline humped up on giant stiltlike underpinnings. They cast blots of impenetrable shadow, ate up such small lights as crept in from the smoky yards. Confounded dark! Perhaps in a week all this strike prowling would be over. He'd be mightily relieved!

Brooks touched the pistol in his pocket and strode through the secretive obscurity beneath the tanks. This was the oil storage house here on his right—really ought to have a guard on it, even if nobody could get in. A bad spot, once they thought to

set it afire. Tons of gasoline up there in that tank—thousands of gallons more stored in red drums in the building. In red iron drums!

He said "Humph!" and halted. He sniffed. Damnably dangerous, this place unguarded. He crossed to the iron door and tried it. The lock held. Gasoline—oil—petroleum—the smell was stronger.

Had any one been listening he might have heard Silver Brooks laugh. The captain glanced both ways along the black walls. Then his flash light spotted the earth at his feet for a moment. He shook the door again. Keys and small change jangled in his pocket. They were not his own keys.

These he always carried in a rattle-proof leather case. They were two keys on a ring that had come from the locker of Burkhart, alias Anderson. He tested the first in the lock. It did not fit. The second slipped in, turned under the pressure of his thumb, and the iron door hung loose. Gasoline, eh? In red iron drums! And long iron bars that they used to roll the drums to the racks!

"All I got between my ears is cotton!" he told himself. He listened, pulled the sheet iron panel boldly, and stepped in. There he stood silent, breathing through his mouth, listening. His flash lamp illuminated a circle of oily cement floor. Blue barrels, red drums, and black tanks stood in orderly tiers on both sides. The air was thick with the odor of oil.

Silver Brooks waited. He never before had looked professionally inside the oil house. That was out of his routine. He must collect his senses. This had been too swift—too sudden. Here was the place. No doubt about that! It was clear as print. Superheater McKay had told of a cellar, of the smell of gasoline.

Well, here was a cellar, under this cement floor. And it explained other things, this storehouse did. It wasn't in use much just now—no need to use it during the strike. No cars going out, why any need of oiling them? Keys? Cherry Dunn had held the keys. Cherry Dunn was dead. Whoever shot him pinched the key ring. System!

And there were two doors, all these storehouses had two doors. This big one through which he just had come, and another into the shop yard at the rear. Simple! This yegg Burkhart used the oil house as a back way in and out of the yards. Dark—no one could see him in a hundred years.

And here, right in his own plant, while police searched a hundred miles around, they had hidden Superheater McKay and his automobile. There were the tire tracks in the earth outside; drove his car right in through the double doors. Easy to look after him there. Keep an eye on him without stepping outside.

Something moved in the dark at Brooks's right hand. It was so faint a suggestion of sound that at first he was not sure he had heard it, a minute creak, deadened, far away. Down cellar? He stood taut on his solid feet. Now another sound, something brushing against wood. Then a louder creak. A trapdoor. Close by.

Silver Brooks held his breath and slid the pistol out of his pocket. The sound was repeated. That trapdoor moved, wherever it was. Some one was lifting it. Must be pretty close. Dared he use the flash? The odor of oil and grease was heavy in his nostrils. It tickled his nose. He struggled a moment in horrible apprehension.

Then Silver Brooks sneezed.

CHAPTER XI

"WASN'T HE DUMB?"

THE trapdoor snapped shut. Brooks whirled back, stumbled over an empty drum and sprawled. He felt about the floor with frantic fingers. His hand closed on the ring of the trap. He jerked it up.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded. "Stand aside—I'll shoot!"

Burkhart's voice! Glory! Burkhart!

Brooks leaped aside. The calf of his leg thumped against the same empty oil drum. Cautiously he rolled the metal container over, jerked up the trap, and sent it spinning down the steep stair to the basement. It cannonaded against the cement floor below. Three shots followed, close to-

gether, and three sharp whangs as the bullets bit into the iron sides of the drum.

"That's all I wanted to know," Brooks shouted down. "If you got a gat you can keep it. I'll just shut the door."

He slammed the trap and padded heavily to the entry. No other way for that thug to get out, that's sure! All these sheds were built alike, with just one trap to the cellar. Penned in right! And that policeman just around the corner at the gate—city cop—harness bull, better than nothing.

Brooks whistled, three long, low notes, and three short ones. The Marion police have their own signals. The captain knew them. He ran back, leaped upon the trap, and planted his heavy soles solidly. The uniformed officer panted up to the open door, flashing his light.

"Come here!" the railroad chief ordered. "They's a bad yegg we want down cellar there. Stand to one side a bit. If he opens that door—I'll show you in a minute—let him have plenty. And plenty means all you got!"

"I'm on duty at the gate!" the uniformed man protested.

"Never mind that. I'll tell the chief about it. Don't leave nobody else in—except Clark—you know him? I'll get him down here to relieve you right away."

The captain bolted breathlessly into the office of the car shops, jerked up the telephone, spit out sizzling commands and puffed back to the north end of the yards. With the city policeman he waited in the shadow for ten minutes. Then a taxicab squeaked its brakes and Clark with three railroad patrolmen climbed out. Silver Brooks whispered his orders.

"I got a tear bomb coming. That ought to bring him out," he concluded. "City boys are bringing it. Just throw it in the cellar and he'll come out with his mits grabbing the sky. When you get him bring him right down to Superheater's office. Maybe I'll have somebody else we want then."

"Who?" Clark asked.

"I said 'maybe!'" Captain Brooks replied, and climbed into the taxicab. The address he gave to the driver took him to the door of a small, tidy cottage in the industrial district. Nathan Petrosky stepped out, a newspaper in his hands.

"What do *you* want?" the labor man demanded. "What trumped up charge now?"

"Aw, forgit it!" Brooks countered. "Leave me in. I want to talk to you."

Petrosky considered.

"Come in," he said at last. "I'll not keep any man outside. Not even a cossack or a cop." He waited sullenly. "What's your game?"

Silver Brooks cleared his throat.

"Now, if Mr. McKay was to throw out all our new men," the captain began.

"Them finks?"

"Yes, them finks. If I was to clean them all out by daylight, and Super—Mr. McKay was to say he'd grant all your demands, except, er—"

"Recognition?"

"Except recognition—"

"Nothing doing!"

"But if we get rid of all the new men it will amount to the same thing as recognition. Can't you see that? That's all you demand now, Petrosky. This business of hours and pay—he's give in to that, not as you deserve it, but he has. All the rest is smooth. Now you say to McKay to-night, as you'll bring your boys back in the morning, if he fires the new help."

"There's a trick to it!" Petrosky affirmed. "Never knowed anybody trust a cop yet, without getting hit on the head for it."

"Now, looky here!" Silver Brooks warmed up. "I don't like the talk of you! It ain't respectful, and it ain't good American. You come along of me, and tell McKay that you're tired of loafing. Tell him that if he comes halfway, you will. The men will do whatever you say—"

"What about that kidnaping business?"

"I got the guy that kidnaped you. Sure I have! And unless we get together, me and you, he'll get off free. Coming?"

The union man felt the bandages on his head.

"I'll go with you," he volunteered. "But if there's any crooked business, God help you!"

Superheater McKay put on his glasses when he saw Petrosky with the police cap-

tain. Grayson, the chief clerk, took his glasses off. Spike Bailey scowled, spit, and dropped ashes on his vest.

"You're late!" McKay challenged, glaring first at Petrosky then at the clock.

"Sorry," said Silver Brooks. "But I was held up a bit. Was ending the strike."

"What's that?" McKay wanted to know.

"Cleaning up that shooting business—Dunn—you know, and the burning of the shops, and kidnaping you, and I was settling the strike, and finding who wrote them letters—"

"Well, who did?" Bailey put in.

Captain Brooks glanced toward the door at the boss strikebreaker's back. He saw Lieutenant Clark's bony but triumphant figure propelling Burkhart into the room.

"Take him out. Leave him to Mumaugh. Then come here," the captain ordered. Bailey had turned, and saw the men behind him. He looked back suspiciously at Silver Brooks.

"Who you after?" he demanded.

"You!"

"Me?" Bailey shouted.

"You! Keep your hands on top that desk, Spike!" the captain commanded. "Up—stick 'em up—higher—I got the drop on you. Here, Clark, step in behind him—out of range, I tell you—lift that gat out his pocket. Now try the other. Two? Stand up, Bailey. In the corner. Keep him covered, Clark, while I speak my piece."

"Brooks!" the superintendent was shouting. "Brooks! Are you crazy? What's all this Wild West stuff? Have you lost your mind?"

"It's been lost for a week, Mr. Mac—and I just found it. Spike Bailey's the yegg we was looking for all the time."

"He's cuckoo!" Bailey protested. "Cuckoo, Mr. Mac! Plain cuckoo—"

Captain Brooks spat magnificently on the floor.

"This is Burkhart's buddy, Mr. Mac. Sure I know. Ain't I got his finger-prints on them sneaking letters—"

"You ain't!" Spike Bailey lost his bravado.

"I ain't? Well, I'll show 'em to you in a minute. Photos of 'em. Originals is in the safe. Know anything about finger-prints, Mr. Mac? Got some latent impressions on them letters that fit up perfect with Bailey. Yes, I have, by Jerusalem! You didn't want this strike to end, Bailey. If the strike ends, you're out of a job!" He swung on the superintendent. "Remember how he was always hollering for more men? Hollering for that extra three thousand bucks?"

Bailey growled.

"I'll have you jailed for this, Brooks!"

"Shut up and be polite or I'll stick my hat in your mouth," Brooks answered. "It don't suit him to have things settled up nice and decent, Mr. Mac. He's getting graft from every fink in the shop. A shake down. Ten cents a day out of every man. That's why he wants three hundred more. Why? More money. You ain't smart, Bailey, or you wouldn't of brought Burkhart here. Burkhart and him knowed Cherry Dunn was going to end the strike, Mr. Bailey, so they killed Dunn—"

"By heaven, Bailey—" McKay stood up in rage.

"They was just trying to scare more men out of you, Mr. Mac, when they made off with you. Thought you would order extra guards. Bailey burns the mill—"

"*You* burned the mill?" McKay shouted. "A man in the road's employ?"

"He takes a crowbar out the oil house and busts the gate to make it look like it's done from outside. He writes letters. He finds Petrosky at your house and knocks him on the head. Throws him in a coach inside the shop fence.

"Gets Burkhart to knock him on the head again. Knows we'll arrest him. Then he bails him out. Wants him out. Sure, you bailed him, Spike. I just checked up on that. You want Petrosky so mad that he'll keep the boys stirred up outside the fence."

Brooks stopped a moment for breath.

"Keep his hands up, Clark. Sit down, Mr. Mac, there ain't much more to tell. He wears cotton gloves so's there'll be no finger-prints. But when he writes letters, he forgets the gloves. Here they are, the photos of his prints. Here's the one he wrote you, threatening. Here's one that he

sent me this afternoon under his own name. I asked him if he really wants more help, and he grabbed a pen quick. Sure, they are the same prints. Then last night he set fire to Petrosky's house, still stirring up the monkeys. That's when I got my eyesight back."

Petrosky leaned forward violently.

"*He* burned my house?"

"Him!" Brooks answered. "I know, I know. You thought it was me touching off your shack. Me! Kind of made me mad, that did! But I thought it over. Now who is there about my size? I asked myself. Then I think of Spike Bailey. We're about of a size, except as I'm better built. That gets me to thinking something more. It's thinking clears up a business like this, Mr. Mac, not running around all the time like you wants me to. So I got Spike's finger-prints, and everything is absolutely jake."

He paused.

"You keep on playing nurse girl to Bailey, Clark," he bade. "I'll go see if Burkhart is ready to talk."

Spike Bailey's face whitened.

"I come clean," he muttered.

"We have the whole story," Silver Brooks told Superheater McKay an hour later. "Bailey was splitting money even with Burkhart. Burkhart admits that he did everything except shoot Cherry Dunn. He saw Bailey do that."

Superheater McKay, sweating mightily, called his clerk.

"Order a second section of twenty-seven in the morning," he commanded, "to take the finks back to Chicago."

"That's good," said Silver Brooks. "I finished the strike. Me and Petrosky have got it fixed. The men go back to work at noon."

He settled comfortably into a large chair and lighted a cigar.

"Wasn't Bailey dumb?" he commented. "To pick my division for a job like that!"

THE END

FLYNN'S WEEKLY for March 26 will open with a fine novelette, "Hell's Backyard," by Edward Parrish Ware.

Zeta Rothschild will contribute "Wiped Out In Blood," a story of fact.

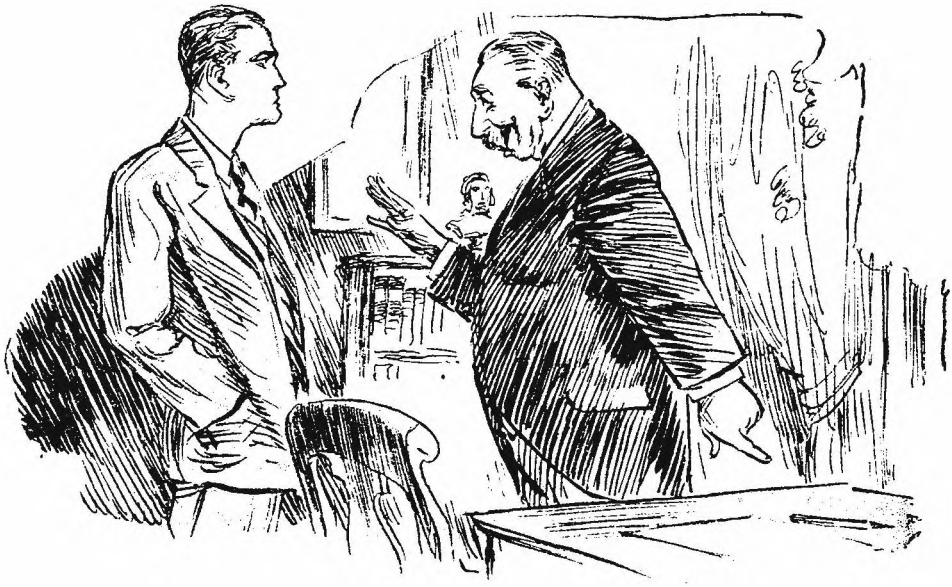
"Gold and White Beauties," a short story by Douglas Newton, is the first of a new series relating the perfidies of the terrible Dr. Dyn.

Joseph Harrington offers "The Piper's Partner"; and Louise Rice tells the strange story of "Mr. Kelly and Dr. Dee."

"The Stolen Box Car" is the title of a yarn by Will King Bowen, a new author in FLYNN'S WEEKLY.

Other contributors include Jack Bechdolt, Joseph Gollomb, Anthony Drummond, J. Jefferson Farjeon, Casselton Doones, Foxhall Daingerfield, and M. E. Ohaver.

William J. Flynn



"There's your pencil, Crook!" he said with a laugh

THE STOLEN HAND BAG

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

DETECTIVE CROOK OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION, VIEWS A CRIME, AND PROVES HOW SMALL THE WORLD IS

THE food at the Spanish Restaurant off Regent Street is excellent and the service unimpeachable, but Detective Crook was interested neither in the food nor in the pleasant, dark-skinned waiter who was looking after his temporal needs so admirably. He was listening, almost automatically, to a conversation which was proceeding at the next table.

There was nothing discourteous in his attitude, and his curiosity was not impertinent. Concerned with law and order, his mind became instinctively alert when contrary elements prevailed, and it was his habit to register them for possible future review.

"And the funny part of it was that there was nothing of any value in the bag, and the bag itself was the shabbiest thing imaginable. You know the one—the old brown one. Now, if it had been any other, I could have understood it."

The speaker was a rather elderly lady in a dark blue dress. Her younger companion nodded.

"Well, you were lucky," she said. "When I had *my* bag stolen last year there was fifteen pounds in it!"

"There you are!" exclaimed the elderly woman. "If you opened your bag anywhere—in a shop, say—and the thief saw the notes, you were worth shadowing. But what did he expect to find in *my* shabby old bag?"

"You don't mean to say you really think you were shadowed?" replied the younger woman incredulously.

"Well, of course, I couldn't swear to it,

But, as I told you, I thought somebody's hand snatched toward it when I left it on the counter at Selfridge's, and then I was jostled before I got on the bus."

"I suppose," remarked the younger woman, after a short pause, "you're quite certain you *had* the bag with you—"

"Of course, I had it!" retorted the older woman. "I just said I nearly lost it in Selfridge's."

"Oh, yes, so you did."

"And then if I hadn't had my bag when I was passing through Austin Grove where should I have put my little find—oh, but don't let's talk about it any more. There's a sweet I had when I lunched here on Tuesday—I want you to try it. Now, what was it called? Something about Madrid, I think— Or Granada—"

The conversation drifted into other channels, and diet received its due.

Half an hour later, at two o'clock, the detective left the restaurant and ambled through Swallow Street into Regent Street. Turning to to the right, he walked toward Piccadilly Circus, and as he came in sight of the Criterion the voice of a newsboy reached him.

"Suicide of a well known baronet!" yelled the newsboy. "Suicide! Aston Villa's Decision. Suicide of a well known baronet!"

The detective smiled.

"Tragedy or football—it is all fish to the newsboy's net!" he murmured. "I wonder if that baronet would have been consoled, after he had stabbed himself or taken his fatal dose, if he realized that his agony at least meant a few extra coppers to that ragged little urchin over there?"

He beckoned to the urchin, to add his copper to the harvest, and the urchin flashed up to him.

"*Star*, sir," he chirped, and was off again in another flash. "Suicide! Baronet commits suicide! Aston Villa's Decision. Suicide of a well known baronet!"

He knew his public. Tragedy was even more attractive than sport.

Detective Crook opened his paper, found nothing, and turned to the stop press news.

Early this morning, Sir Thomas Braxter—well known as the "Bachelor Baronet"—was found dead in his study at Raglan Square. A penciled note, now in the police's possession, suggests that suicide was caused by some private trouble.

Raglan Square? Crook pondered. Why did it make such an odd impression on him?

Sir Thomas Braxter, the suicide, the penciled note—these, for the moment, hardly interested him. But Raglan Square registered itself. For some reason he could not explain, but for some good reason, he was sure, Raglan Square became a magnet. It teased and tantalized him, and there would be no peace until he ended the intriguing torment. He hailed a taxi.

In ten minutes he alighted at Raglan Square. It was a quiet, old-world spot, such as might be selected by one who, while relishing peace, could not yield up London. A peaceful patch of railed-in green was rather primly surrounded by weather-tempered Georgian houses. No streets broke the delight of the corners, the square being reached with prim symmetry by four roads which neatly severed the houses in the middle of each side.

Crook walked round the square, oddly puzzled. Outside the house of the dead baronet a small knot of people had collected, prominent among them a policeman. Presently Crook would join that knot, and enter very likely, but he could not do so yet.

There was something to be done first, some loose knot in his own mind to be tied. It would not be tied inside the house. It could only be tied somewhere outside, in Raglan Square—Raglan Square—

He walked round again, and, all at once, stopped. He was standing at the junction of the square and its southern artery. Raising his eyes he saw something on the brickwork above him.

"Ah!" he involuntarily exclaimed.

His mind grew easier, yet with that ease came increased alertness. It was as though a weight had been lifted from his brain, allowing it action, or a little light had been lit there, illuminating a tiny portion of a picture. And Crook meant to see the whole of that picture.

"Good afternoon," said a voice at his

elbow. "It hasn't taken *you* long to smell us out!"

Crook turned, and responded to the smile of the inspector who addressed him.

"Good afternoon, Bracebridge," replied the detective. "So it's suicide, eh?"

Inspector Bracebridge did not reply, but raised his eyes to the spot at which Crook had been staring.

"What were you seeing?" he asked. "Bloodstains?"

"What do *you* see?" inquired Crook in return.

"Only the name of the road," replied the inspector. "Austin Grove."

II

"HAT'S all I saw," answered Detective Crook. "Tell me all about this affair, will you? And don't begin, please, by saying that it's a bad business. We'll take that for granted—although death is not always the bad business it is said to be."

"Ah, but suicide is," returned the inspector. "That's always a bad business!"

"Sometimes it ends a bad business."

"H'm. Well, I hope I should find some better way of ending mine. However, I'm not here to criticize the dead, and maybe if I'd had a name as high up in the social world as Sir Thomas Braxter has—or, had—I'd feel a bit sick if my nephew married the last turn at a music hall."

"Oh, was that the trouble?"

"That seems to have been the size of it. Sir Thomas's nephew—hello, there he is, just going into the house—looks a bit green, doesn't he?—well, as I was saying, he's made a fool of himself over some girl, and the old man felt pretty down about it."

"How do you know that?"

"It's in a penciled note he left. A pitiful note." The inspector paused, and frowned. "He wrote it as he was dying. A bit too late—God, the straggling letters give you the creeps. Poor devil!"

"Can I see the note?"

"Of course," replied Inspector Bracebridge, and looked at his companion rather hard. "Interested in this case, eh?"

Crook nodded.

"Did you know the old fellow?"

"No."

"You didn't?"

"No."

"Then—you're thinking things?"

"Are you?"

The inspector's brow puckered.

"It's our business to think things—but, the devil is, it's so darned easy to think too much!"

"You're right there, inspector," agreed Crook. "And it's darned easy, too, to let the journalists know what you think, isn't it—unless you're careful."

"I'm not down on the journalists," replied the inspector, after a pause. "That is, not as a class. They've got their bread and butter to earn, same as the rest of us, and sometimes they're useful. But, at other times, they do rush things just a bit, and that's when we clash. It's slow and sure with the police, and quick and a risk with the journalists. But come along to the station, and then you can see that note."

"I'd rather go in the house first, if I may," answered Detective Crook. "I'd like to see the body, and the room they found it in."

"Right," nodded Inspector Bracebridge.

They entered the house, and went, first, to view the body. As they stood beside the remains of what, a few hours previously, had been a living, active thing, the inspector explained briefly but clearly the position in which they had found Sir Thomas, the position of the knife that had inflicted the wound—a sheath knife which Sir Thomas always kept on his desk—and all the other points of technical interest.

"Rather an odd way to kill himself," commented Crook.

"Suicides act oddly," responded the inspector. "You know that as well as I do. You can't lay down any rule for them, because—at the time—they're not sane.

"Besides," he added, "I think when we've got in all the medical evidence we'll find that Sir Thomas wasn't in a very fit condition when he died. His family doctor's away, but we're likely to get a little more light in that quarter, I believe."

"Strengthening the theory of suicide?" asked Crook.

"You insist on calling it a theory," smiled the inspector.

"I can see it's only a theory with you, too," answered the detective, also smiling slightly. "Now can we go into the study?"

As they neared the study they heard voices. An altercation was going on.

"I'm sorry, sir, but them's my instructions," came the stolid tones of a constable.

"They may be your instructions, but I don't admit your authority," retorted an angry voice. "May not I do what I please in my own house?"

"Ah, but this isn't your house—that's where you're wrong, sir," replied the constable.

"I am Sir Thomas's heir," said the angry one. "Though I don't profess to understand the law, this house *will* belong to me, and in the meantime I've the right to—"

The argument ceased abruptly as Inspector Bracebridge and Detective Crook entered the room. The constable looked relieved.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, addressing the inspector, "but wasn't my instructions that nothing was to be touched or moved by nobody?"

"They were, and they still are," replied the inspector briskly, and turned to the young man who stood by glowering. "I'm sorry, sir, but the constable is only doing his duty. This room must not be entered without permission—"

"No? Then who's your friend?" demanded the young man heatedly. "Is he more interested in my own uncle's death than I am myself?"

"I am not nearly so interested as yourself," replied the detective, speaking for himself, "but I am interested, all the same. I am a detective, and the inspector has given me permission to enter—as I am sure he will give you, also, if you tell him your object."

"Bit late for permission," grunted the constable, eying the young man. "'E's in, as it is!"

"What is your object?" repeated Crook.

The young man hesitated, then suddenly made up his mind.

"I'll tell you," he said bluntly. "I'm wondering—"

But he hesitated again, his words sticking in his throat.

"Well?" said the inspector sharply.

"I'm wondering," continued the young man, "whether my uncle really committed suicide."

There was a short silence. The inspector looked thoughtful, and Detective Crook regarded the young man gravely.

"Does that explain your presence here?" he asked.

The young man nodded. "I—I thought I might perhaps find out something—some clew." He laughed suddenly. "But I expect I'm a fool. That note he left—and then, as I've already told the inspector, I always had a feeling that my uncle was suffering from some trouble or other he never spoke about—"

"You mean physical trouble?" interposed Crook.

"Yes. I can't believe that—well, the fact that I've disappointed him could have been the sole cause of it." He frowned hard, and paused. Suddenly he burst out:

"Family tradition! To hell with it! *I'm* not responsible for my family traditions. Why should my marriage have upset him so? What right had he to—"

He turned away abruptly. The inspector cleared his throat.

"I don't think there's much doubt about it being suicide," he said. "Still, one has to consider every possibility, and if there's any clews to be found, you can trust us to find them."

"But I can help?"

"I don't see why not," replied Crook, glancing at the inspector, who was tugging his mustache. "But he had better not touch or move anything."

"Then a lot of help I'll be," grunted the young man. "However, I'm under orders. Carry on."

III

THE search proceeded. It was conducted mainly by Crook, for Inspector Bracebridge had already made his investigations, while the successor to the late Sir Thomas Braxter had been instructed not to touch. He stood by anxious-

ly, and watched the detective working quietly and methodically, until at last the silence got on his nerves.

"Well, are you finding anything?" he jerked out.

"Is there anything special you expect us to find?" replied Crook.

The young man shook his head. Another minute of silence went by, while the detective examined surfaces, investigated windows and doors, and opened drawers. Then, all at once, as he opened a small, long drawer in a desk, Crook remarked:

"What about Sir Thomas's will? This looks like it."

The young man sprang forward.

"What?" he exclaimed. "The will—in there?"

Detective Crook looked at the paper he had taken out and shook his head.

"No, I see now it's a lease, not a will," he said. "Who has the will?"

"I believe it's with my uncle's solicitors," responded the young man quickly. "As a matter of fact, I'm sure it is. You won't find any will here."

"Unless he made another will just before he died?" suggested Crook.

"Why should he do that?" demanded the young man.

"Well, he wasn't very happy over your marriage, I understand," answered the detective.

The young man flushed, looked as though he were about to retort, but thought better of it.

Two minutes later, Detective Crook intimated that his investigations in the study were concluded, and the inspector nodded.

"I didn't think you'd find much," he commented.

"I haven't found anything," admitted Crook.

"I was afraid you'd be wasting your time."

"Ah, but I've not wasted my time, Bracebridge. Something I have *not* found interests me far more than if I had found it."

"Oh, and what may that be?" demanded Bracebridge, opening his eyes wide.

"I'll tell you when I've found it," said Crook. "By the way, has anything been taken from this room since you first entered it?"

"Only the note—that's all. And, of course, the body itself."

"And the note was found—"

"On the desk."

"When was the body discovered?"

"Seven o'clock. By the housemaid."

"Was the door locked?"

"No."

"When is he assumed to have died?"

"Round about midnight."

"I see. What about his pockets? Were they examined?"

The inspector smiled.

"We know our job a bit," he said. "Yes, we examined the pockets."

"What was found in them?"

"Watch, fountain pen, a bunch of keys, lettercase, handkerchief, and three pounds seven shillings and eightpence. How's that for Pelmanism?"

"What was in the pocketbook?"

"The usual sort of papers."

"And nothing else? Nothing but papers?"

"That's all."

"Then let's get back to the station now," said the detective. "I'd like to see that note."

On their way, Crook asked one more question:

"Our young friend—Sir Thomas's successor—what is his name?"

"Same name. Braxter. Edward."

An hour later, Detective Crook was back at the Spanish restaurant. He asked for the manager, and the manager nodded his head in response to his first question.

Yes, he knew the elderly lady in the blue dress who had been sitting at the table next to the detective at lunch. Yes, she was a quite frequent visitor there. No, he did not know her name. Yes, she would very likely be there again shortly. This evening, maybe. On the other hand, she might not come for a week.

Happily for Detective Crook, she returned before a week. She returned the next day, and found the detective waiting for her. She would have found him if he had had to haunt the restaurant for a month to effect the meeting.

"But, really—it's very good of you—but the bag's not worth worrying about," she exclaimed in a flutter, after Crook had introduced himself and his subject. "It was an old thing, and there was next to nothing in it. That's why I haven't troubled."

"I think it is worth worrying about," replied Crook, gravely. "Anyway, all I am asking you to do is to answer a few questions. Will you? It's a matter of greater importance than you imagine."

"Well, of course, I will," murmured the mystified lady. "Is it a gang you're after? You know, I feel sure I was shadowed, but I couldn't understand it, because the bag was not really worth taking."

"There was more than one attempt to take it?"

"Yes. Once, in Selfridge's. And then I was jostled after that. And when I actually lost it—well, I'd just got on a bus at Oxford Circus, and there was a big crowd, and some one in front of me said: 'Does this go to Marble Arch?'

"But it was going the other way, to Tottenham Court Road, so this fellow elbowed his way back past me, pushed against me to get by—and then, a minute later, when I was in the bus, I found my bag gone. And, of course, by that time there was no tracing him."

"Thank you," said the detective. "Can you describe the man?" She did so. "Good! And what was in the bag?"

"Practically nothing. Certainly nothing of value."

"But what, exactly?"

"Let me think! A little notebook, and a little powder-puff—and, oh, yes, a handkerchief. Oh, yes, and a small comb I'd just bought at Selfridge's. Oh, yes, and some chocolates I'd just bought at Oxford Circus. That's all."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

The detective looked puzzled and disappointed.

"You must at least have had some money," he commented.

"Oh, yes—but that's the funny part of it. I had about two pounds in my purse, but after buying the sweets I carried the purse in my hand, and I had it in my hand when I got on the bus. Wasn't that lucky?"

"Ah," exclaimed Crook, his face brightening. "Was there anything in the purse besides money?"

His companion frowned slightly, and grew a little agitated again.

"Dear me—you're making me think I've done something dreadful!" she exclaimed. "There was something else, and I suppose I've been rather slack about it. But I never thought—you see, it wasn't really very valuable—"

"It? What was it?" asked Crook.

"Just a pencil. I picked it up in Austin Grove—"

"Off Raglan Square?"

"Yes, that's it. I picked it up earlier in the morning. Some one must have dropped it. It was a silver case, but I never thought it would be possible to find the owner, though it had some initials on it. You take these things to the police station, you know, or Scotland Yard, and no one ever claims them—"

"May I see the pencil?"

"Yes, I've got it with me."

She produced from her bag a small silver pencil-case, and handed it to the detective. He examined it for several seconds without speaking. Then he slipped it into his pocket.

"I know the owner of this pencil," he said quietly. "I will return it to him."

Thanking her, he rose, and left the restaurant. A taxi conveyed him quickly to the police station to which Inspector Bracebridge was attached. The inspector was in.

"You want me to go with you to Raglan Square?" he said, in reply to the detective's request. "Well, I'll go with you, certainly—if you can promise me you're not going to waste my time."

"Will it waste your time to clear up the circumstances relating to Sir Thomas Braxter's death?"

"They'll be cleared up at to-morrow's inquest."

"And if you like you can be the man to clear them up," smiled Crook, grimly. "In such direction distinction lies!"

A few minutes later they were in the deceased baronet's study.

"Now," said Crook. "Look round, and tell me where is the pencil that scrawled Sir Thomas's last note?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the inspector.

"It was not here yesterday, when I searched the room. You told me yourself that nothing had been taken from the room barring the note itself. You also gave me a list of the articles found in Sir Thomas's pocket, and there was no pencil. But a pencil must have been used."

The inspector blinked, looked toward the desk, and suddenly laughed.

"When did you develop blindness, Crook?" he asked sarcastically. "There's your pencil!"

Crook followed the inspector's gaze, and saw a small pencil lying on the desk. A puzzled look came into his eyes as he walked toward it; then the look slowly hardened.

"This pencil was not here yesterday," he said quietly. "Nor is it the pencil that scrawled that note. This is a hard pencil—HH. The lead of the pencil used for the note was soft."

As he spoke, he took the silver pencil-case from his pocket. "Here is the pencil that was used, Bracebridge," he continued. "Look at it. Soft lead—BB. You can compare it with the note presently. But, first, look also at the initials on the case."

"E. B.," read the inspector, and whistled softly.

"Now," said Crook, "suppose this E. B. tried unsuccessfully to persuade an uncle whom he had angered against making a fresh will that would cut him out. And suppose, failing, he killed his uncle, in a fit of frenzy. Suppose, further he decided to scrawl a note which would make it appear that his uncle had committed suicide, and, finding no pencil, used his own."

"Go on," murmured the inspector, for Crook had paused.

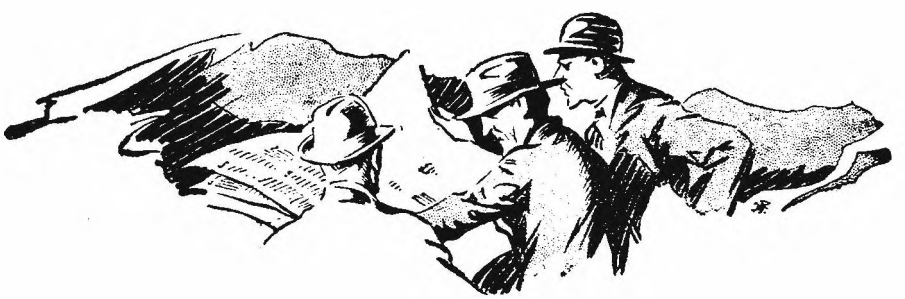
"And, finally, suppose that he lost his pencil in a street near by, and when he returned to find it saw it picked up by a passerby. He would not want to draw attention to himself by claiming the pencil then and there. It might prove awkward later.

"Yet he must get that pencil back. So he might shadow the person who had found his pencil, get hold of the bag which he believed contained it, fail to find it in the bag, and eventually get in a panic when the theory of suicide began to be questioned."

"But would he question that theory himself?" interposed the inspector.

"A blow half met is but half felt," answered Crook. "That would merely be to throw suspicion off himself. He might grow so anxious at last that he would place another pencil on the dead man's desk, to explain what he gathered was puzzling a detective like myself. Think it over, Bracebridge."

The inspector thought it over. "E. B.," he muttered. "E. B." He sighed as he added: "Poor young devil! What damned fools—and scoundrels—there are in the world, eh, Crook? I reckon this little pencil-case is going to hang Edward Braxter!"



He did not see a man who sidled into the next booth

THE WEIRD DR. WAITE

By Charles Somerville

ALL THE SING SING OFFICIALS AGREED THAT HE WAS THE MOST AMAZING CREATURE THEY HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED

A Story of Fact

ANOTHER angle of this unique case was presented by Arthur B. Reeve, famous detective fiction writer and criminologist, in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for December 6, 1924.

A WEIRD and astounding murderer, indeed, was young Dr. Arthur Warren Waite, and there are no more fiendishly cold-blooded and deliberate murders of record than the two he perpetrated. And to those who detected and prosecuted him he is still known as the "Smiling Assassin," still remembered as such.

He committed his murders with a smile, smiled to see his victims die, smiled when he was caught, smiled when he covered himself with infamy reciting the most extraordinary story ever told by a murderer in his own defense, smiled when he was declared guilty of murder in the first degree, smiled when he was sentenced to death, smiled when he entered Sing Sing prison, smiled through the harrowing months in the death house, and still smiling and cool as if he were giving himself into the hands of a barber, he placed himself in the strap and wire hung, ghastly chair from which he knew he would never arise.

Prison warden of the time, prison chaplain, prison doctor, keepers of Sing Sing ten years ago agreed that Waite was the coolest murderer ever executed there, a fact I can fully corroborate, having also wit-

nessed his execution. In nerve or, perhaps, lack of nerves, Waite was a marvel.

I have seen many others go the same gruesome route and some with a degree of steady courage. But invariably these were buoyed by religious exaltation, calmed by drugs, or fortified by liquor. Waite, we knew, had disdained any of these aids. It is true, that he had a belief in an hereafter, but it was founded on no orthodox religious faith, was hazy, merely hopeful.

A cup of coffee and a cigarette at midnight and ten minutes later he stepped into the death chamber. He did not move with the affected jauntiness of bravado. Simply stepped easily in, a lithe, graceful figure, a lively smile on his face, which was made the more youthful for the fresh barbering.

Nonchalant Effrontery

He took a deliberate, clear-eyed look around the entire chamber, smiled a little more broadly as he gazed at the death-dealing chair, dropped his cigarette, tapped its fire out neatly with the toe of his shoe, and said in an even voice to the head prison keeper immediately in front of him:

"So—is this all there is to it?"

He then turned a pleasant glance at the Rev. Mr. Peterson, Protestant chaplain of the prison, who was walking beside him, intoning a prayer for God's mercy on his murderer's soul, but himself not joining in the prayer. He nodded, still smilingly, at those newspaper reporters among the witnesses whom he recognized and then let himself down easily into the death chair.

In his nonchalance, he crossed his legs. Instantly, however, the swinging foot was seized at the ankle, dragged back against the leg of the chair, the split trouser bottom pulled widely apart and the cold, wet sponge of the electrode pressed and fastened against his naked calf.

Now, had all this serenity of demeanor on the part of the debonair doctor been a pose to cloak a mind and soul in a hideous agony of fear, the cloak must have dropped from him then on the sudden, swift seizure of his leg to drag it back to be strapped to the deadly apparatus. This surely must have broken down his indifference were his indifference simulated.

But it was genuine. His smile never left him as he looked down to observe what his leg was needed for and even nodded what might be taken for a silent apology. Then, still smiling, he lifted his head for the metal cap and beneath the mask the smile remained and was made fixed and rigid by death.

"The calmest man who ever went to the chair by far," the prison officials said of him then. Nor has any other walked to it since with such complete nonchalant effrontery.

Waite's story is as romantic as it was horrible. And it was the merest slip which betrayed him to justice. It is a little thing which usually does betray a big crime, but ordinarily this little thing takes the shape of a tangible clew.

It was not so in Waite's case. It was a mere momentary break in the characteristically urbane, suave demeanor which had carried the young doctor to social and financial success—a single show of irritability, annoyance, bad temper, a minute's drop of his ingratiating and attractive mask, that caused the exposure of a double murder, doubly heartless, cowardly and revolting.

The Darling of His Family

But this dramatic incident and those which followed have a future place in the narrative which properly begins with a picture of Waite as a farm boy down at Carmousberg, Michigan, and in his student days.

A slim, good-looking, bright-eyed, agile-minded boy, he appears to have been very much the darling of his family. He was babied not only by his parents, but by his two more stalwart, serious-minded brothers. He successfully eased his way out of most of the hard work that had to be done on the small Michigan farm.

The profits of this were so meager that his father, Warren Waite, ambitious to give all three sons the advantage of an education, moved to Grand Rapids, where he became a peddler of farm truck to the markets. He developed soon from a peddler to a commission merchant, although the family fortune never became large.

There were funds, however, with which

to see Arthur through high school and enter him into the dentistry school of the University of Michigan. Boys and girls of wealth attended the Grand Rapids High School side by side with those of humbler fortune, and Arthur aimed and aimed successfully to cultivate acquaintance among the boys and girls who had fine homes and motor cars.

The Goal of His Desire

He could sing, tamp a banjo, thrum a guitar, dance most gracefully, and was deft of speed and skill with a tennis racquet. He went through school and college course without mishaps, and his parents happily foresaw a fine future for him. His qualities of personal attractiveness, his wide friendship acquired among the wealthy youth of Grand Rapids must crowd his dental parlors when he set up in business. This seemed assured.

At the time of his graduation, however, a firm which conducted a chain of dental establishments throughout South Africa offered the young graduates of Waite's Ann Arbor class what appeared a fine opportunity to acquire experience and excellent profit simultaneously.

The signing of a contract for five years' service in South Africa was demanded in exchange for which there was a salary which began at two hundred dollars a month and increased yearly, with also a percentage of the profits of the establishment in which the man was placed in charge. This increased annually as well for the duration of the five years.

Waite signed up. On arrival in South Africa it was found that the American three years' course did not suffice for British practice. So Waite was sent by his firm for a year's added study at Edinburgh. But he assimilated the required course in three months, obtained the necessary license, and went back to South Africa and to work.

He didn't stay the five years. He was back in four. But he came back with pockets lined. While other young men who had gone out the same time and had found the contract too irksome, broken it and returned, came home pockets empty. None of these, however, had aught to say regarding this disparity.

However they may have accounted in their own minds for Waite's affluence on his return, they kept it strictly to themselves. Though Waite, when his big crash came, was to tell glibly how he had stolen right and left from his South African employers, robbed them of every pound and shilling that he could lay his hands on.

Through this accession of a thousand pounds or more, the ease and safety with which he had filched it, the luxury in living that it afforded, brought upon the young dentist a fever of cupidity. He came to the absolute decision that the only thing worth while in the whole of the world was money. Over friendship, love, learning, over all other human possessions for happiness, money, lots of it, was to be the glittering goal of his desire.

He couldn't see himself acquiring hundreds of thousands, a million dollars, extracting teeth and plugging them. He scanned his horizon for a surer, swifter means. Finally his gaze reverted to himself. As with such a selfish and vain ego as he possessed it was bound to do.

Percy's Nose

He very possibly appraised himself in a mirror scanning the attractiveness of his jet black, curly hair, lively gray eyes, straight nose, well shaped head and chin, his brilliantly attractive smile, the lithe grace of his trim, muscular, medium height figure. Also he thought of his fine dancing, the music he could make with instrument and song, his acquired profession, the general completeness of his components for making some heiress a desirable husband.

Nor was he long in finding the heiress. Miss Carrie Peck was younger than himself by five or six years. She wasn't beautiful. Nor even pretty. But she was well bred, wholesome, and her father, a sturdy merchant and lumberman, had amassed a fortune very near, if not, surpassing one million dollars.

Moreover, she was the favorite of an aged spinster aunt, her father's sister, Miss Catharine Peck, her godmother, from whom it was certain young Miss Peck would inherit

richly, for this old woman was worth something between three hundred thousand dollars and four hundred thousand dollars. Of her father's larger fortune there was only one immediate relative who had an equal claim on it. This was her brother, Percy Peck.

The suave and brilliant young Dr. Waite fascinated Miss Peck. More. He fascinated father, mother, and aunt. He didn't at any time wash down so well with Percy, but the Pecks figured that Percy's nose was somewhat out of joint, as he was a quiet mannered, steady young gentleman, dull in comparison with the gracious, graceful, witty, socially accomplished young dentist and suitor for the hand of Miss Peck.

Germs in Her Food

Young Waite openly courted Miss Peck. He had no reason for doing otherwise, soon discovering that his suit was regarded with kindly eyes by her parents and her aunt. So that he should give a hoot for Percy!

The fact that he was a poor young man with his way yet to make scored against him not at all with the Pecks. The old merchant who had carved his own fortune looked upon the alert young doctor as destined to be a sure winner of his own. So did Mrs. Peck, and Miss Catharine Peck.

They were all for him, and when the daughter of the household confessed that she loved him and wanted to marry him, genuine and sincere blessings fell from the old couple and godmother on the scheming head of the wily young man.

He won them to ready agreement that Grand Rapids was too small a field for such as himself in which to practice his profession. Father and godmother settled between them an income of three hundred dollars a week on the young people, to defray New York expenses until Dr. Waite had worked himself into a lucrative practice.

It was Miss Catharine Peck, the aunt, who most enthusiastically seconded the adventure to New York. For she herself was resident of the city in a costly Park Avenue apartment. She was delighted at the thought of having her dear niece and her dear niece's delightful young husband near.

Waite and his wife settled in a handsomely furnished apartment in Riverside Drive, and he opened offices separately just off the ultra fashionable Central Park Plaza. But he had no intention of fastening his life to the grind of a dentist's drill.

Although he returned home with big stories of professional activities, including attendance on and giving aid in many delicate operations at the city's hospitals, the truth is most of his time was taken up in giving financial advice to the wealthy Miss Catharine Peck and obtaining large sums of money from her for investment.

He was honest with these sums, did invest them, and frequently turned in a profit to her. He won her complete confidence and had seventy-five thousand dollars of her money in his possession at the time of his arrest.

He was cutting no dishonest capers with her wealth because he was regarding it as really his own or what would shortly become his own; for at this very time he was doing his level best to kill the old woman by slipping disease germs into her food!

A Use for Cremation

At every opportunity that came to him he was injecting germs of diphtheria, influenza, pneumonia, and typhoid fever into her food, and secretly damning their lack of virulence, for the old lady, of tough-fibered country stock, though she had some unpleasant moments of illness, successfully fought off and downed the microbes.

She had her lucky stars to thank that at this time Waite learned that her fortune was tied up in a legal way so that his wife would not be free to inherit during the lifetime of her parents any of the fortune of Miss Peck, her godmother. On obtaining which information Waite stormed the mails with affectionate invitations to his parents-in-law to visit the home of his daughter and himself, the daughter adding to these invitations her own in all sincerity.

Father Peck couldn't arrange his business affairs just then in a manner to enable him to visit New York. But old Mrs. Peck was moved by a great desire for a reunion with her daughter, her sister-in-law and the delightful doctor. She came on.

Within a week she sickened, within two weeks she was dead, and within forty-eight hours after her death her body, returned to her Grand Rapids home, was cremated on the suggestion of Dr. Waite, who assiduously escorted the coffin from New York.

And with the cremation of old Mrs. Peck's body was wiped out all proof that in addition to being a victim of typhoid fever, her devoted son-in-law had added a touch of sulphonal poison to make sure of her passing.

Immediately after the funeral young Dr Waite had several tender talks with his deeply bereaved father-in-law.

With a False Signature

"You must get away from your familiar environment for a time," he urged "The sight of the rooms she once occupied, of all the objects the possession of which you shared in common will torture you, keep alive the tragedy that has come into your life. Make a trip to New York with your daughter and me. The change will be good for you. It will keep you from brooding. You will have your loving daughter near you. And I will do all I can to cheer and comfort you."

The old man actually put his arms around the young man and told him he was a noble boy and that his advice was good. Accordingly he accompanied Dr. and Mrs. Waite to their Riverside Drive apartment. Two weeks later he also was dead, and on his way back in a sealed coffin.

His body, loaded with arsenic poisoning, was within a few hours of being carried to a crematory as advised by his devoted son-in-law, when a telegram was placed into the hands of the doubly bereaved son, Percy Peck, that halted the body on its way to incineration and obliteration: a telegram that smashed the murder scheme of Dr. Waite, robbed him of half a million dollars and more, for, in the end, it robbed him of life itself.

This telegram was sent to Percy Peck from New York as a direct result of a little moment of impatient anger which the cool and merciless Waite had allowed to break through his habitual exterior of suavity!

This telegram brought forth the unraveling of a frightful murderous intrigue, one of the victims of which had gone to her end with the crime wholly unsuspected. The telegram sent to Percy Peck read as follows:

> Suspicion aroused. Demand autopsy. Examine body.

It was signed "K. Adams, Colosseum Apartments, Riverside Drive, New York City."

This was the apartment house in which Dr. Waite had his home.

Waite and his wife had accompanied the body of her father to Grand Rapids as they had that of her murdered mother.

Percy Peck went to Waite.

"Do you know a person named K. Adams in New York?" he asked.

"No," answered Waite truthfully enough, since there was no such person in his life—no K. Adams, for that matter, in reality. A false signature had been placed on the message.

"I have received a telegram signed in that name," said young Peck, "and giving the same address as yours in New York—the Colosseum Apartments."

From Natural Causes

"Don't know any such person, old man," said Waite. "Don't remember ever having come upon the name in the apartment. What about it?"

"Just look at this telegram, Arthur, and see what it says,"

Waite scanned it. Young Peck was later to assert that the calm, nervy or nerveless villain never turned a hair.

"Some silly busybody, I suppose. Some one of those Paul or Polly Pry's who think they see something suspicious in the fact that your father and mother had the misfortune to sicken and die while on visits to me."

"But that is the fact—they did sicken and die while on visits to you and within something less than three weeks of each other, and they had both enjoyed exceptionally good health up to that time."

"Do you mean to say, Percy, that you suspect your sister and myself of anything

wrong in connection with their illnesses? How could you think such a thing? And evidently you forget that both your mother and father had the best of medical attention, that their deaths from natural causes have been attested by a physician of the first class."

This was the fact, and Dr. Waite turned away in confidence that the telegram was to be disregarded. But when the next day he learned to the contrary, when he heard from his wife that Percy had ordered an autopsy, his indignation seethed.

"We've Got to Skip"

He told Percy he could regard the action only as a high insult not only to himself, but to his wife. For if he were guilty of any sinister act toward the old people, young Mrs. Waite must have had cognizance of it. Had she not been constantly in their company during the time they visited the apartment? Young Mrs. Waite, still tremendously in love with the attractive Arthur, shared his indignation, and told her brother so.

But Percy Peck had never joined in the family adulation for Waite. He had never believed in Waite's sincerity of love for his sister. He, in brief, had always thought Waite too smooth. The indignation of his brother-in-law and Mrs. Waite did not shake his resolution. The autopsy, he said, would be held.

Then Dr. Waite said he would abide no longer under the Peck roof. He would return to New York, search out this K. Adams, and call him or her, whoever it might be, to severe account for the libelous and scandalous telegram. His wife might remain for her father's funeral, but under the circumstances he could not, would not.

Instead of crushing Percy Peck with this outbreak, its effect was to stir that young man into having Waite shadowed on his journey to New York by private detectives, with instructions to follow up every move he made after his arrival in the metropolis.

The trail got hot from the very minute of Dr. Waite's arrival in New York. The first thing he did was to make for a booth telephone in the terminal station. He did not see that a man quickly sidled into the next one. Or if he did, was too intent on a single purpose to appraise its possible significance.

The man in the next booth heard the young dentist call a number which shortly thereafter was to be identified as that of a big, fashionable New York hotel. Waite asked for Mrs. A. G. Walters. And then his voice sounded, saying:

"We've got to skip out! Fly! But wait at the hotel until I can get in touch with you!"

He shied out of the booth and made for a taxi. As he drove off the observant driver of his taxi passed him the information that he was being followed.

"Saw two men jump into a cab behind and point us out," asserted the driver of the cab.

Waite, who had given directions to be driven to the Plaza, instantly changed them. Instead, he had himself taken to a garage, where he got out his own car and drove to his apartment in Riverside Drive.

As he passed through the foyer, the superintendent of the building stopped him and said:

The Soul of Honesty

"Doctor, there have been some men in your apartment earlier to-day. Detectives, I think."

"Were they asking questions—er—perhaps about me and another woman?" asked Waite with his best smile.

But the superintendent shook his head negatively.

"No," he answered, "it wasn't about a woman."

Waite didn't push the inquiry further. He was afterward to say that when the superintendent replied to him in this manner, he knew the game was up, realized the significance of the visit, was certain it meant that the Grand Rapids autopsy had disclosed Mr. Peck's body to be teeming with arsenic and that either by telegraph or long distance telephone the New York authorities had already been started on an investigation of himself and his affairs.

One of the two men who had visited the Waite apartment before the debonair young doctor returned from Grand Rapids,

was Detective John Cunniffe of the district attorney's office. He was stepping warily just then, for when Miss Catharine A. Peck, who had not gone on to Grand Rapids to attend her brother's funeral, had been approached and questioned regarding Dr. Waite, she had acted vigorously the part of his champion.

"He is a fine young man, incapable of thinking of such a crime much less committing it," she had indignantly told the detectives. "In all the time I have known him I have found him gentle, considerate and he has been the soul of honesty in handling the money I have intrusted to him from time to time.

White Powder Medicine

"Why on earth should he have wanted to kill my brother? His wife was due to inherit half my brother's fortune and probably more than half my own? Meanwhile they were enjoying a very comfortable income, and if money had been needed in anyway, Dr. Waite knew very well that myself or my brother would have gladly advanced it.

"We have been proud of him as a son-in-law. He was a young man well on the way toward great social and professional success. He could have had no motive for committing such a crime and I have every faith in him."

And then quite as an afterthought, all unsuspiciously, so great, indeed, was this old lady's faith in Waite, she said:

"Now, that I think of it, it is possible that my brother took some arsenic in mistake for some other medicine from a small bottle of the poison Dr. Waite had in his desk for his professional uses."

"You know that Dr. Waite had such a bottle of arsenic in his desk?" inquired Cunniffe not too strenuously.

"Oh, yes. I saw a small bottle there."

"There is no K. Adams at the Colosseum Apartments," said Cunniffe. "Can you imagine who could have sent that telegram to Grand Rapids?"

"None in the world. But, as I said before, what motive could Dr. Waite have had for wanting to kill my brother? It was not necessary for him to have poisoned either of us for our money. We are both old people. He and his wife were bound to inherit our fortunes within a few years."

Cunniffe left the old lady in whom Waite had made such a firm friend and called at the Waite apartment. He was just in time to see Dora Hillier, the West Indian maid employed by the Waites, entering the apartment which had been left in her charge in the absence of her employers.

And a most significant statement was forthcoming from Dora.

"Two days before Mr. Peck dies," said she, "I see Dr. Waite put a white powder medicine in the old gentleman's soup and in his tea."

Following which Cunniffe stepped into Waite's library. He found the drawers of the desk unlocked and in a compartment came upon the small bottle of arsenic described by Miss Catharine Peck. It was a small bottle, but it still held, half filled, thirty to thirty-five grains, and it only requires three grains of arsenic to take human life.

Waite was not then under arrest. No warrant had been issued for him. Cunniffe, under the circumstances, hardly dared remove the bottle. But it bore a druggist's label and he copied the name and address.

Premature Gray Hair

Druggist Timmerman, with a shop in the fashionable district of Madison Avenue and Sixtieth Street, duly recalled the circumstances of the purchase of ninety grains of arsenic from him by Dr. Waite.

"I first heard of him in a telegram message from my friend Dr. Karl Muller who lives in the neighborhood. He said Waite was a doctor and wanted the arsenic with which to kill cats who were annoying him at night, and Dr. Muller said he would vouch for him. When Dr. Waite came here I suggested that strychnine might serve his purpose better. But he insisted on arsenic. He purchased a quarter's worth."

"How much would he get for a quarter?"

"Ninety grains, not less."

"Enough to kill a few people, I guess?"

"A few? *Mein Gott,* yes! It would kill thirty!"

So then Cunniffe sought Dr. Muller.

"I have known Dr. Waite for more than a year," said the physician. "I specialize in treatment of the hair and he came to me first for treatment to prevent premature graying of the hair. I was a little surprised, for his hair showed no signs of going gray—it was jet black. But he said premature gray hair was characteristic in his family, and he wished to take no chances.

Waite's "Soul Mate"

"I gave him two treatments, during which we became quite friendly. I found him a very bright and attractive young man. And"—here Dr. Muller dropped the first clew as to the diabolical murder schemes that had long been running in the mind of Waite—"we had many interesting talks on bacteriology, of which I have made a special study. He expressed his own desire to take a special course of study on the subject and I referred him to Dr. Hausman who had been my own professor. He enrolled with Dr. Hausman."

Before another half hour was gone Cunniffe had interviewed Dr. Hausman and discovered that Waite, through him, had been given orders on the Cornell laboratory in New York by means of which he could possess himself of germ cultures of deadly diseases did he but specify them! And the Cornell laboratory, it was found, a few minutes later, had furnished the debonair doctor with such germs in large quantities and over a period of many months!

The while two of the private detectives who had followed Waite from Grand Rapids to New York, had gone to investigate the identity of Mrs. Walters at the Plaza Hotel, to whom Waite had telephoned in trepidation as soon as he arrived in town.

They found that Mrs. Walters and her husband had been registered at the hotel for several weeks. The description of her "husband" tallied exactly with that of Dr. Waite. They made no effort at the time to interview Mrs. Walters, but watched for her. They saw her when she came down to luncheon.

She proved to be a very pretty, dark-eyed, black-haired woman in her middle twenties. She was fashionably dressed and was evidently finely bred. Her manner at luncheon was extremely nervous. She ordered food, but ate very little of it.

As a matter of truth this young woman was Mrs. Margaret Horton, wife of a well-to-do business man. Waite had met her at one of the country clubs of which, as a skilled and prominent amateur tennis player, he was a member. He had fascinated the young woman, inveigled her away from her husband, and convinced her she had found her "soul mate."

Their affair was by no means wholly sordid. They were studying Italian and Spanish together at the Berlitz School of Languages and they had a grand piano and other musical instruments in their suite at the Plaza where they spent hours in musical study and practice.

Waite had been accounting to his wife for the hours spent with Mrs. Horton by telling Mrs. Waite he was engaged in the performance or assisting in the performance of delicate operations in dentistry at the clinics of prominent New York hospitals.

"It Looks Queer"

Though, as a fact, during their year or more of residence in New York he had not lifted a finger in the practice of his profession. He had been very busy with his tennis racquet, however, and had come up into the finals of several tournaments and on one occasion won a country championship.

The private detectives were in conference with District Attorney Swann that afternoon when Cunniffe called up to report his important and sinister findings. Swann directed his detectives to go to Waite's apartment immediately and request the dentist to come to the district attorney's office for a talk.

"No arrest, you understand. Handle him gently. I've my reasons for it. I don't want him too badly scared."

Cunniffe found Waite at home. Almost deferentially he requested the dentist to come with him to the district attorney's office.

On his arrival down town, Waite was

handled with velvet gloves. He was treated as a distinguished visitor and was presently closeted with District Attorney Swann alone. Or he thought so. But two listeners were stationed behind doors.

"Dr. Waite, arsenic has been found in your father-in-law's body—in large quantities. Taken with the fact that his wife also died in your apartment a few weeks previously—well, it looks queer."

"I suppose it does," nodded Dr. Waite without apparent agitation. "But might not the arsenic have got into the body through embalming fluid? It is used, is it not, in embalming bodies?"

Burning His Bridges

"It is against the law to use it in this State," replied the district attorney. "And yet, of course—well, if that were shown it would explain everything. Now, Dr. Waite, I don't want you to think I am unfriendly. You are a man of means and there is a good deal possible.

"Perhaps you know I have been a judge. Well," and the district attorney half closed his eyes and looked at the wall. "Sometimes when I was judge I let men go, and as district attorney I have even more power. It rests with me whether this investigation goes a step farther."

Waite's intuition warned him that he was being angled for. An obvious suggestion had been made to him to buy the district attorney off. He nearly fell for it as he was afterward to admit. But, instead, another plan opened itself to him in his desperation. And he decided to make a trial of that before coming down to a flat attempt to bribe his way out of his desperate predicament.

"I have just returned from Grand Rapids and am very tired and would appreciate an opportunity for a night's rest and a chance to think things over."

"Oh, by all means, doctor," said the district attorney graciously.

The instant Waite got home he sent for Potter, the undertaker, who had embalmed Mr. Peck's body for transportation to Michigan. And he talked turkey. How much would it cost to have Potter turn in a sample of embalming fluid loaded with arsenic when the district attorney's office should demand a sample of the fluid used in the Peck embalming?

It was burning his bridges behind him, admitting his guilt to another. But Waite was in desperate straits. Potter told Waite he would have to talk to his embalmer directly on a subject like that. Who was the embalmer? Eugene Kane.

Waite got his address and went that night in search of him. He lost no time in making Kane an offer of ten thousand dollars in cash, and offered to sign an agreement to pay him ten thousand dollars a year for the next five years if he would prepare samples of embalming fluid containing arsenic and hand them over to the district attorney on demand as the sort used on the body of Mr. Peck.

Yes, yes, he knew it was against the law to use arsenic in embalming in New York State, but it would mean only a fine, or at worst a moderate fine and a very light prison term. If Kane would only consent he would write him a check there and then. But Kane said a check would be dangerous.

A Bribe Too Late

Waite promised to find the cash and hand it over to him the next day. Kane hesitated. But it was a powerful temptation. Kane agreed. Waite busied himself that very night. He found a hotel keeper friend who accepted his check and gave him ten thousand dollars in cash.

First thing next morning he sought Kane out at his home and pressed the money in his hand. Kane said he had a friend who was a gardener on a Long Island estate, and used a great deal of arsenic in protecting plants from insects. This friend would supply him arsenic secretly with which he could dose the embalming fluid samples. Kane was so nervous that he didn't count the money handed him.

"Is there ten thousand here?" he asked.

"No, nine thousand. But you'll get the other thousand when the arsenic fluid is turned in to the district attorney. I've got ten thousand, but I need the other thousand for something special," said Waite.

The special thing he needed it for be-

came apparent directly he left Kane. He made straight to the druggist from whom he had purchased the arsenic he had used in the poisoning of Mr. Peck. He offered him the one thousand dollars he had remaining as a bribe to mark off his register of poison sales the name of Dr. Waite, and substitute some other name, or to obliterate the record entirely—burn the whole thing, preferably, and lay it to accident. But to his dismay, Waite found that the district attorney's office had beaten him to it. Cunniffe had already taken a copy of the entry, date of sale, and so forth.

Enough for an Epidemic

Yet he plumed himself that he had covered himself for all that. When the arsenic embalming fluid was presented, the case against him would receive a staggering, solar plexus blow.

Next he conceived a tactical move somewhat dangerous, but very smart if he could put it through. It would enable him to stave off the grilling that he felt and knew was being prepared for him in the district attorney's office, to stave it off until Kane should have come forward with doctored embalming fluid. He appears to have had no delusions as to the possibility of bribing the district attorney to conceal murder.

That same morning he had been in telephone communication with Mrs. Margaret Horton, and engaged to meet her at the Berlitz School of Languages. Now this young woman had no complicity whatsoever, in Waite's schemes of murder. When he telephoned her that they must skip out, fly, she thought it had to do with his wife's discovery of Waite's secret romance.

And she thought his nervousness, when he met her this morning, was from the same cause. He sent her out to purchase a dozen or more trional tablets.

She returned to the Berlitz School with them, and he left her, saying that when he had been able to get a good sleep and command of his nerves, he would effect plans to take them out of their troubles—that he would make arrangements for them to sail for Europe, well supplied with funds, and that once across the ocean no angry husband nor angry wife could bother them.

Back he went to his apartment and took a heavy overdose of the narcotic. It sent him into a coma. And thus he was found by Cunniffe and Ray Schindler, chief of the private detective agency that had him under espionage.

Dr. A. A. Moore, the same who attended Mr. and Mrs. Peck, and had been deceived by Waite into issuing certificates ascribing natural causes to the deaths of the aged couple, was sent for by the maid, Dora Hillier. It was found impossible to arouse Waite for questioning. Which was as he had designed.

But he had hardly expected Cunniffe to come that day armed with a warrant for his arrest. Cunniffe, however, had such a paper, and it empowered him to search the apartment. The delving brought up damning evidence against the dentist. There was found in his library a medical work on poisons, and paper markers had been used to indicate the sections which described arsenic, sulphonal, and chlorine gas poisoning.

Cunniffe now took possession of the bottle of arsenic. And in lower drawers of the doctor's desk fished out two dozen germ culture tubes and one hundred and eighty-five glass slides between which were cultures of typhoid fever, pneumonia, influenza, diphtheria, and other virulent diseases!

Kane Gets Scared

That settled it. Waite, still in a coma from which he did not recover for three days, was packed off to Bellevue Hospital.

He came out of it in smiling confidence. He said he had not the slightest intention of committing suicide in taking the trional, but that he had revived from the first dose in a haze, and vaguely remembered taking several more tablets, hardly realizing what he was about.

Still, no one could blame him under the circumstances for having been very nervous and sleepless, he explained. However, had the embalmer reported to the district attorney? Had he turned in samples of the fluid used on Mr. Peck. There, Dr. Waite told Cunniffe, he was certain would be found the explanation. But Cunniffe yanked that prop from under him.

"Samples of the embalming fluid have been turned in," said he, "but they contain no arsenic."

Kane had played him false! Taken his money and hadn't delivered the goods! And this was true.

Kane, the day before, had been dug up in hiding with his friend the gardener down on Long Island. He hadn't dared go through with his part of the compact. The more he thought of what he had undertaken, the more scared he got. The money he had accepted from Waite was so uneasy to his fingers that he hadn't dared so much as to count it. Yet he hated to let it go.

On Grounds of Insanity

So he had taken it to a lonely spot on Orient Point, just beyond Coney Island, and stuck it into a tomato can and buried it there. He had been taken tremblingly out to the Point, where he showed the place of interment of the money roll, and detectives dug it up. Actually there were bills in the sum of eight thousand seven hundred dollars. But Kane swore it was all Waite had given him—every cent—though Waite at the time had told him it was nine thousand dollars.

When Cunniffe told the doctor that the embalming fluid showed no arsenic, the young man sobbed. Now, he said, he would tell the truth. The fact was that his father-in-law, whom he had loved dearly, had induced him to get arsenic for him, had won him over to act as his accomplice in a suicide plot. He said the old man had been suffering pain for years, and was weary of it. He had desired over all things to go to his eternal rest, and had pleaded so piteously for the opportunity that Dr. Waite had been moved to procure arsenic for him.

Cunniffe nodded a sorry head.

"Say, honest, doctor, do you think that story will wash with me or anybody else?" he demanded.

Waite studied his face a few seconds, and then suddenly grinned.

"Hell, no. Of course not," he replied quite cheerfully. "I'm done for. You've got me. I killed 'em both. There they were—two very old people with a lot of money they couldn't enjoy. While I was young, but passing thirty. They might live ten, fifteen, even twenty years longer. And then I'd be too old to enjoy their money when I got it. As I say, they were old, they had had their lives. What good was life to them? But how wonderful life could be for me if I had their money!"

"But you were well off. You could have got anything from them."

"No, you don't understand. I'd just had enough of a taste of real money to want a whole lot of it—to want to wring out of life every luxurious pleasure and sensation there was. By the way, I tried to kill Miss Catharine Peck, the aunt, too, but didn't get away with it."

From that time Waite threw off all disguise. He made a confession topping what the most vivid imaginations had conceived of the depth of his criminal scheming. So amazing a story was it of heartless arch villainy that Walter R. Deuel, his lawyer, decided the best thing for Waite to do before his jury would be to paint himself in his true colors in the belief that no jury could listen to the tale and not become convinced they were listening to a man whose mind and heart were so inhuman that he could not be accounted sane.

An Immoral Monster

In a few States a man may plead guilty to first degree murder and be sent straight to his punishment without trial. But where the old English law prevails as in New York State, a man, even if he admits guilt, must have a trial, and his confession must be corroborated by outside evidence before a verdict of death can be turned in against him.

So the young doctor had to face a jury. And those who saw him do it, and heard the story he told, will never forget it. Here was a defendant who, far from trying to excuse himself or deny the accusations piled on the evidence of his villainy beyond that alleged against him by his prosecutors.

His counsel may have thought that by having him do so, the jury would become convinced that the man was strangely, horribly mad. Alienists took the stand who

said they thought so. But all the while one could see that Waite himself had no delusions as to what view the jury would take of him. Yet, also, that he enjoyed telling his story.

He looked with sparkling eye and beaming smile on the shocked faces everywhere before him. His egotism fairly sang with joy as he lolled back and let the world know what a vicious, evil thing he was. Even as he had beamed and smiled on the alienist who had described him as "one of the most immoral monsters of all ages."

Billions of Germs

Carefully attired, spick and span as to barbering, he sat in the witness chair, now and then taking an effeminate glance of admiration at the perfection of manicuring that had been done to his long pink finger nails and said:

"I began by trying to poison Miss Catharine Peck in the summer of 1915 before I was married to Miss Clara Peck. I first tried putting ground glass in her marmalade. Then I put a culture of disease germs in a can of fish she ate. I forget what the germs were. Some I obtained from some sort of decayed matter.

"These didn't work, so I got a germ culture of typhoid and of influenza from William Wober, clerk at the Cornell laboratories. I tried them on Miss Peck many times. But they didn't work. They weren't virulent enough, I guess. I placed disease germs again and again in fruit, candy, or jars of milk that she placed on the window sill in her Park Avenue rooms.

"When my wife's mother came in January I turned my attention to her. I did this because I had learned that Miss Peck's will would leave her fortune to Mr. and Mrs. Peck during their lifetime, my wife being unable to inherit until her parents were dead.

"I gave mother germs as soon as she arrived. Typhoid, influenza, diphtheria. They acted on her immediately. She got sick, but wouldn't get any worse. I had Dr. Moore in attendance, and he was evidently pulling her through. So one night I told my wife I would sit up to give mother her medicine when required. Mrs. Waite went to bed. I had got some sulphonal and sat up in order to give it to her.

"I did And then I went to my room, got into bed with my wife and fell asleep immediately. When my wife got up in the morning she found her mother dead. I had put the germs in her food in the first place. I had made it my business to assist the maid at meal times by carrying the food from the kitchen into the dining room, and whenever Dora, the maid, wasn't looking I slipped the disease germs in mother's portions of the meals. How many germs did I use?"—the doctor permitted himself an audible chuckle—"heavens, I must have used billions of them!

"Two weeks after burying mother at Grand Rapids and seeing to it that all evidence of my crime was obliterated by causing her body to be cremated, I induced my father-in-law to come to New York with myself and wife and stay at our apartment. I also started giving germs to father as soon as he arrived.

"I gave him bigger, more virulent doses than I had given mother. But they didn't affect him at all. How often did I give him germs? Why, every chance I got to slip them into his food. I used the same pathogenic germs that I had given mother, only stronger, larger doses.

"They Didn't Catch On"

"When the germs failed I bought him a nasal douche, which I suggested he use after taking rides in our car. I put germs in the spray. But these didn't affect him either. I tried every way I could to get the germs stronger. But nothing happened. His system was too healthy and fought the germs down.

"So then I tried making him sick and weak so that he would fall prey to the germs. I dosed his food with calomel. Put large doses of calomel in his food and especially in his tea, because you know calomel both looks and tastes like sugar. I did get him feeling sick and weak and fed him germs right along. But they didn't catch on.

"I tried to make him take cold by taking him driving on cold March days in a car with all the windows down. But that

did nothing. I was getting so desperate that once I figured driving him into a smash-up and taking my chances of coming out safely myself. But I abandoned that.

"Next I got a chlorine solution and put it into the nose spray because I had heard that chlorine would make the membranes of nose and throat raw and thus make them easy prey to diphtheria germs. But that didn't work.

"Then I got a chlorine gas apparatus, manufacturing the gas by mixing chlorate of potash with hydrochloric acid and put the machine to work one night just outside father's door. The chlorine gas would, of course, have suffocated him.

What Dr. Moore Recommended!

"I put an electric stove in his room so that he would think the odor from the chlorine gas stove would be the smell of hot varnish from the woodwork on the wall. But he woke up in the middle of the night complaining of the electric stove. I had to put that out and deemed it wiser to remove the chlorine gas apparatus as well. That reminds me that once I turned on the gas to kill Mrs. Peck, but she awoke and thought it was the maid's carelessness and lectured Dora severely next morning."

"When," he was asked, "did you give your father-in-law arsenic?"

"I don't exactly remember," smiled Dr. Waite in a manner as one who might say he couldn't recall such minor details. "Let me see—I got the arsenic, ninety grains, on Thursday, but whether I gave it to father that night or next morning I really cannot recall."

"How much did you give him?"

"Oh, I can't say. At first two to three grains—just enough to cover the tip of a spoon. It didn't affect him at first. I gave him some more and then some more. I put it in his food at breakfast and again at dinner. I put it in anything I could find that he ate. I put it in an egg nog once and again in rice pudding.

"He got quite sick, but under the ministration of Dr. Moore, who thought he had some sort of intestinal complaint, he rallied. And he appeared quite well when he saw his friend, Dr. Cornell, of Somerville, New Jersey, that evening. But I got some more into him after Dr. Moore and Dr. Cornell had left. I figured that he was now sufficiently weakened for it to take effect.

"So I told my wife she need not mind sitting up with father. I said I would sleep on a couch in his room so as to be near father. I awakened to hear him moaning. I got up and asked him if he was in pain.

"He said he was and that Dr. Moore had recommended hot soda and aromatic spirits of ammonia to relieve such cramps. I had no ammonia, but I had," said Dr. Waite with a beaming smile, "a small bottle of chloroform. I put it on a handkerchief and went over and applied it to his nostrils.

"'Here, father,' I said, 'is a mixture of ether and spirits of ammonia. Inhale deeply and I am sure it will soothe you." He did and he said 'Yes, that's all right, all right.' I held it still longer and heard him say slowly, dreamily: 'That's nice—that's nice.'

"Then I used more and more chloroform until I was certain he was thoroughly anæsthetized. Then I got a pillow and put it on his face to stop his breathing entirely. I next went to the telephone and called up Dr. Moore. I told him I feared that father was dead. He said to go back and make certain.

When Waite Lost His Smile

"I went back and he was dead. So I called Dr. Moore again and he came over. By the time he had arrived all odor of chloroform had disappeared. I next called my wife and told her the worst had happened. Then I left the body with her and Dr. Moore and went to sleep. Oh, yes, I slept soundly—very—until quite late that morning."

"Do you remember a call made at your apartment that morning—the morning of Mr. Peck's death by Dr. Cornell and his nephew, Mr. Swinton?"

"Ah, yes," said the doctor. "I do. I understand that Dr. Cornell says I treated him discourteously. But I do not remember doing so. Nor was I effusively cordial naturally. But I am sure I treated him

as I would have treated anybody who came to my house that day."

Momentarily Waite lost his smile. As well he might. It was this impatient, half angry reception he gave Dr. Cornell and Mr. Swinton, this slight abandonment of his usual urbanity, that had brought disaster upon him.

For Dr. Cornell had seen his old friend quite recovered from previous illness twelve hours before and had promised to call on him in the morning. He was astounded to find that his old friend was dead, and when Waite proved averse and impatient to go into details of what had happened, Dr. Cornell had left pondering.

To Pay His Expenses!

The physician, like Percy Peck, had never been favorably impressed by Waite. And he had heard Mrs. Waite tell of all the important clinical operations her husband was compelled to attend while the old doctor knew that such a rapid rise of a young dentist from Grand Rapids in the metropolis crowded with experts was more than merely unlikely, quite improbable.

He also had reason to suspect that young Waite was otherwise not playing fair with his wife, daughter of his lifelong friend. For he and his nephew entering the Hotel Plaza restaurant one day had observed Waite there in a snug corner table with a pretty woman companion, who was Mrs. Margaret Horton.

Waite had been at pains to come to Dr. Cornell's table and make elaborate explanation regarding the young woman with him. He said she was a trained nurse, aiding him at a near-by hospital in a delicate operation that was taking up the whole day, so he had invited her to luncheon during an hour's respite from their labors.

But he did not offer to introduce the old doctor to the "trained nurse." Obviously the doctor might engage in professional talk and Mrs. Horton would not have been prepared to reply in kind.

Remembering this, remembering that both his old friends had come to Waite's home only to sicken and die, whereas prior to that they had enjoyed excellent health for old people, topped by Waite's surly and irascible behavior when he called to find the apartment for a second time a house of death—all these considerations brought Dr. Cornell to a resolution. He sent his niece, Miss Elizabeth Hardwick, to the telegraph office and the "K. Adams" message of warning to Percy Peck at Grand Rapids had been the result.

Perhaps the most astounded person of all when Waite's testimony was given was Miss Catharine Peck. In spite of black circumstances which had arisen, she had clung to the hope that Dr. Waite could either prove his innocence or it would be demonstrated that his fiendishness was the outcome of a subtle form of insanity which could be proved in a court of law.

Such was the friendship he had inspired in this old woman whom he had repeatedly tried to kill with disease germs, that it was she who had come forward and out of her own pocket engaged expensive counsel for him!

With an ever increasing smile, Waite confessed to his jury that he had always been utterly selfish, had no love for kith or kin or wife. He admitted that he had frequently thought of getting rid of his wife, and added:

"Good-by, Here's Bumps!"

"I probably would have done so in the end if the first part of my scheme had worked out. My wife had nothing to give me intellectually or in beauty. Margaret Horton had. I supposed I was as nearly in love with Margaret as I could be with anybody. Though I have quite dismissed her from my mind now.

"I have been a thief and a crook all my life," he went on suavely. "As a boy I stole the examination paper questions from the desk in our professor's private room. I cribbed at Ann Arbor. Besides, I stole books and instruments and sold them.

"I have held about six jobs, and was fired from all of them for stealing. I could always talk my way out of being punished when I was found out. I got off with a lecture every time. I robbed the South African dental concern right and left. That's how I came home with so many good clothes and a pocket full of money.

"No, I never had the slightest love for Miss Peck. She was so rich. So I went after and got her. There's no use discussing anything. I've lost. I'm perfectly sane. I know what murder means—knew what murder meant when I committed it. But I wanted that money. That's the flat of it. I expect to die for all this. I'm not asking for mercy. And I'm not insane. I am not back of that talk. Much good it will do them to try to make you believe it."

And thus speaking, laughing outright, he left the stand.

Eighty-three minutes after the jury went out, Dr. Waite was returned to the court room to hear their verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree—the chair.

He gazed at the foreman affably after the verdict was announced. He smiled at his guards. And he crossed the Bridge of Sighs on his way back to his cell whistling in perfect time with its jaunty rhythm the Spanish dance, "La Paloma!"

And thus to the very chair itself he never lost his smiling pose.

Said the Rev. Mr. Peterson, Protestant chaplain of Sing Sing, after the electrocution:

"Waite was an enigma. He had no well-defined religious views, but he had thought deeply on theological questions. He seemed to be more of a spiritualist than anything else, and believed firmly that he would go to another life after he was electrocuted. He regarded the death ordeal as a sort of great adventure. I prayed with him often, and he listened attentively, and would thank me, but acted as if he felt no need of spiritual consolation."

"The most remarkable man from my standpoint that ever went to the chair," said Dr. Squire, Sing Sing physician. "No stimulant or drug of any kind was given him. He spent the entire day before midnight, the time set for his execution, as quietly as all the preceding days.

"He appeared deeply engrossed in a work on psychology, ate heartily, was perfectly calm all through. And when his time came, before he passed through the 'little door' to the chair, I took his pulse and temperature and found both to be exactly normal! That's never happened before in any case that has come under my observation."

It is further recorded of this amazing creature that when he was being led from the main death house to a secluded cell near the chair, he turned gayly to the other snared assassins watching his departure with fearful eyes, and called:

"Well, good-by, fellows. Here's bumps!"

READERS will notice rather an unusual circumstance in this copy of FLYNN'S WEEKLY. Mr. Blythe's "Two Bad Women" and Mr. Gollomb's "Rubies and Rogues" each contain an illustration of a certain type of swindle. The details are different in the individual anecdotes, but the basic idea is similar.

They are published here in close conjunction merely because it may interest our readers to make the comparison and to notice how cleverly such an illegal scheme can be adapted to fit individual cases.

William J. Flynn

Transfixed, Annie could not move until he was upon her

THE WIFE OF TUBAL HARGE

By W. E. Schutt

WITH A MIND AS DISTORTED AS HIS BODY HE DESIGNED A FIENDISH PLOT WHICH NEGLECTED TO ACCOUNT FOR WOMAN'S PSYCHOLOGY

"YE-AH, ye can't fool me, Annie," cackled the misshapen cripple, whose chin, stained with the huge wedge of blueberry pie he was eating, came just above the table edge. "Clem Dart caught you and him together up in the woods pasture night afore last, and Clem wouldn't dare lie about it."

Anniebelle Harge, a soft, pretty woman of twenty-one, in the full flower of her young womanhood, whose slim roundness of arm and waist had not yet been marred by the hard manual labor she had had to do since she became the second wife of the cripple's father, gripped the table edge in her sudden fear, and stared at the malignant face of the cripple opposite as if he were a venomous spider poising to leap at her.

"It's a lie," she gasped. "I don't care who said it."

The cripple wiped off his mouth with the back of his great splayed hand, and leered at her.

"Ye-ah," he repeated, "I know it's the truth now, from the way ye look. Probably been goin' on all summer, ever since Kemp Downes first come around these parts."

Annie Harge fought for self-control. After all this summer of illicit love with a neighbor's farm hand, the truth was out at last.

Illicit? It had never seemed that to her. Annie Harge had accepted marriage with

Tubal Harge, the country blacksmith, four years before, when she was seventeen and he was a widower of forty, as the best way of getting her invalid mother looked after short of the poorhouse. She had but small notion then of what marriage to him would mean; for he stood well in the community as an upright, God-fearing man, a stanch man of property.

But when her mother died, two years before, she saw before her only the appalling prospect of living through the rest of her years with these two creatures—Tubal Harge and his twenty-four year old crippled son, Samson—of whose world she was not and could never be. For she was village born and bred; she could not endure the solitude of Harge's Glen. And she was soft and feminine, and Tubal Harge put her to a man's work.

Small wonder that she had fallen for the seductive wiles of Kemper Downes. Small wonder that she had clung to that romance with him, and had found love sweet all summer, with no thought of the future, had taken what she had while it was hers, more and more secure in it as time passed without discovery. And Samson Harge's speech was her first inkling that her affair was known.

She forced a laugh.

" You know yourself, Samson, that Clem Dart is one of the best liars between here and Enfield."

His great coarse features leered at her.

" Ye-ah, but your pretty face hain't such a liar."

Annie Harge, none too clever, knew there was no longer hope of jesting the business off. Samson Harge was possessed of a diabolical intelligence that frightened her. In her untutored mind, she imputed to him almost supernatural powers of intellect, as if all the prodigious strength of the Harge's, denied outlet in a healthy body—for both his legs were withered from birth and were as useless as bits of rope—had been diverted to feed his brain.

He had never been off this little farm in all his twenty-four years; he had never so much as learned to read, for old Tubal Harge was not a man for books except his Bible. Yet Annie Harge was always in awe of his brain, and she knew she had no chance against his keenness of perception.

" Who all has Clem Dart been tellin' this awful lie to?" she asked.

His head bobbed back and forth with a power that made his little iron basket creak; that little iron basket on wheels in which the great torso rested, which was Samson's sole means of getting about.

" What you mean to ask me, Annie, is whether Tubal knows?" the cripple asked.

" Well?" she breathed.

" No, he don't know," Samson said with emphasis. " And, what's more, I told Clem I'd murder him at sight if he told another livin' creature. I put the fear o' God into him, even if I am a cripple."

Annie could well believe that.

" That's good of you, Samson," she said, in a sudden great relief.

" Good of me? You bet it is," he grinned. " Only what are ye goin' to give me to keep it quiet?"

Annie Harge's breath failed her again at this new trap she had fallen into. There was a flash from those deep-set, burning eyes almost at table level opposite her, that told her balefully what she, with her woman's instinct, had known these three or four years now—that her husband's son—or, rather, the helpless trunk of him propped up in the iron basket, was in love with her.

She was always afraid of that love. It was a sinister and uncanny thing. She feared and hated these signs of it, lest Tubal Harge read them, and blame her; fearful of some awful tragedy as a result of it.

" What do you mean, Samson?" she shuddered out.

" You know what I mean. I've been in love with you ever since I knew you, and I get nothin'; but the first whippersnapper that comes around gets all you've got to give. Now, what ye goin' to give me, to keep it quiet?"

There was a sudden creaking of the little iron basket on wheels. Annie, glued to her chair by fear, saw the head move with incredible swiftness around the table toward her, until he came bearing down on her side, pushing himself along with his broad splayed calloused hands against the floor, now one and now the other.

Transfixed with the sight of this evil thing, Annie could not move until he was upon her, reaching for her with those powerful hands of his. Then she leaped with a wild cry, to leave a part of her skirt in his grip. It was the first time that his love for her had ever come to this open show.

He snarled at her.

"Run away from me, would ye? When I can't run after ye, and ye knows ye're safe? Only ye hain't safe. What ye goin' to give me to keep still?"

She caught up a long keen butcher knife from the stove rack, and held it out in front of her with every muscle tense.

"You come anear me again, Samson Harge, like that, and I'll stick this into ye, so help me God—I got to do it anyway, I guess—you or me. You tell Tubal, and I'll kill ye dead."

"Ye-ah. God, if I had my legs." And his heavy face was torn and distorted with a rending of baffled passion.

"You know what's comin' to ye," she chattered in her fear.

Schooled by his helplessness, Samson Harge accepted his defeat—outwardly at least.

"No, I wouldn't tell Tubal on ye, Annie," he promised, his voice aquiver, yet rather gentle. "Tubal'd kill ye, and then where'd I be?"

Then there came an interruption that made them both cower and look at one another: the hoarse bellow of a man's voice through the fog, a roar that not even the thunder of the waterfall in the gorge some fifty yards beyond the house could drown out.

"Annie! Samson! Come over to the forge. I want ye should help me," the voice said.

"The old hellion," snarled Samson with a show of tobacco-stained teeth.

"We'd better hurry afore he gets mad," Annie suggested, glad of the opportunity to get away from this murderous spider which her imagination had made of Samson Harge.

She drew on an old coat against the chill dampness of the October afternoon, waited with the door open until Samson, in his little creaking basket, had gone through it, and had shot down the ramp which Tubal had constructed there for the cripple's egress and ingress. She walked slowly behind Samson, who pushed himself along the cinder path that led down to the smithy.

Annie Harge lived an age in that short walk. She could throw herself into the gorge easier than she could give up Kemper Downes. For him she loved with a passion that was life itself. She must see him once more, and they must plan to run away. Run away together: that was the only answer. Until then, she must keep on the good side of her husband and this cripple.

II

THE smithy loomed before her, through the pall of the cold gray mist, a tiny four square ancient building with three small windows, opaque with a half-century accumulation of grime and soot and cobwebs, stuffed here and there with rags where a pane was missing. It was perched almost in the lip of the gorge, where the mountain road crossed by a bridge.

Her husband, Tubal, was the third generation of Harge's who had owned and worked this countryside forge, and he, like his ancestors, was a worthy follower of the fabled half-god for whom he had been named—the Tubal Cain of the early days of Israel, he who was "instructor of every artificer in brass and iron."

Annie advanced now to push open the smithy door, though she dreaded to see him. Her eyes pierced fearfully through the fire-crimsoned interior. He was at the bellows, bringing the fire to welding heat—a huge figure of a man, looming even larger than reality in the red-hued gloom, in a long leather apron that somehow set him apart from humanity.

He wore a rough flannel shirt flaring open across his hairy chest, its sleeves rolled nearly to the shoulder above biceps that dragged at the bellow-handle like the chest of a straining Percheron; gray of hair at his forty-five years, with wide sweeping gray mustache and shaggy gray eyebrows, from beneath which his eyes gleamed almost

threateningly at his wife and son as they entered.

"Got to get an axle welded for Angus Cramp this afternoon," he told them, "and you've got to hold the ends while I forge it."

Annie caught herself up, and, in spite of her will, stole a glance at Samson Harge. Angus Cramp was the neighboring farmer for whom Kemper Downes had worked all summer. Samson's eyes met hers with a look that was evil, yet somehow reassuring. Perhaps he meant to tell her, she thought, that proof was here of Tubal's ignorance of her love affair.

Both his helpers knew their work. In a minute more Tubal, the smith, drew the two pieces of the axle from the fire and carried them to the anvil. Samson Harge held one end of the long bar, his hands on a level with his chin, so that the bar would come to the height level with the anvil. Annie stood on the other side and supported her end, and a moment later her slender, graceful body shook with every swaging blow of Tubal's eight-pound sledge against the glowing metal.

Suddenly Tubal checked in mid-air one of those deft terrific blows, and, sledge still poised high above his head as if in threat, glowered through the misty, red-stained darkness at his wife.

"Hold your end of the axle up, woman, or it'll break your wrists the next time I hit it," he commanded, in a voice that drowned out the thunder of the waterfall.

Annie managed to lift her end until it lay perfectly flat on the anvil. She glanced across at Samson, the son, whose eyes were darting at his father lightnings that would have slain the elder man if intent could have worked his will. This was but another sign of the cripple's love for her.

"Hey, you old hellion," yelled Samson, "you give her the heaviest end. No wonder she let it sag. Let me wheel around and take her end."

Tubal Harge did not cease one stroke of his swaging.

Neither of his helpers dared relinquish their hold for a readjustment. The smith did grunt out:

"Samson the strong man, eh? Be a man before you offer to do a man's work, or a woman's either."

It was that way between the two men. Annie sometimes felt sorry for the cripple, because Tubal derided him constantly in the bitterness of his own frustrated hopes, a hope best expressed by the name Tubal had given his son at birth, before he knew that this being was to be but the torso of a Harge.

It was a living irony, that name, one that goaded Tubal as much as it did the cripple. But for the most part, Samson kept control of himself, and met his father's barbs with a malicious, threatening smile more terrifying, however impotent, than hysterical outbursts—a threat of mind and soul to kill, even if the body was weak.

But this time, the cripple did not let it pass so easily.

"I'll show you a man's work some of these days, you old hellion," he ground out. "It'd be a man's work to kill you, wouldn't it, Tubal? Big strong bull that you are. Yet I could shy this horseshoe at ye, and if it hit you right, you'd go down like a lump of lead."

The cripple dropped one arm to pick up a heavy horseshoe from the anvil block, and feigned to hurl it at his father's head, with a force so violent that the swish of his arm through the air was like a gust of wind.

Annie shrieked out a "Stop, Samson." Tubal Harge gave him one glance, and took no further notice. Samson Harge laughed harshly, and let the horseshoe clatter to the iron débris on the floor.

"I won't do it, though," Samson laughed in grizzly fashion, "and you know I won't—not so long as there's a gallows waitin' for me. I'd be a fine-lookin' stump swingin' from the gallows—me without any legs, like a sack o' wheat—Only for that, I'd show you a man's work, Tubal Harge."

"Stop this minute," cried Annie with a shudder that shook the whole iron bar. "You scare me, Samson."

Tubal Harge scowled at her and stopped his terrific blows.

"Can't ye hold the axle still, woman? How do I know where to strike if ye shove it this way and that? What a pair of help-

ers for a Harge to have. A Samson, eh?" He laughed gutturally. "And a Jezebel!" He laughed diabolically at Annie, who cowered away from that look.

"What do you mean—Jezebel?" she stammered. "What's Jezebel?"

"Read your Bible and know. But never mind. You're my woman, and I'll keep you—now with all this tomfoolery I've got to heat up the axle again. Samson, you lay hold of the bellows and blow 'er up hot. You can do that much, can't you?"

He took the axle from them, and carried it over to the forge. Annie stood aghast, riveted to the spot by fear and ignorance of what he had meant. Samson Harge looked at her with that sinister spider's grin, and started to do his father's bidding.

The groaning crunch of the little basket cart across the uneven floor was interrupted by the sudden thrusting open of the smithy door.

Through the curtain of fog that drifted in, a man's figure stood framed in the doorway—a tall, slender man of thirty or so, more graceful of build than the men around Enfield were wont to be, more erect of bearing; but, dressed as he was in leather coat and mist-wet slouch hat and overalls tucked into rubber boots, in most outward respects but little different form the natives.

His square cut, too handsome face, was not so weather-beaten as most others, nor were his black eyes so dulled by the monotony of living here. For Kemper Downes had spent more of his life in city factories than he had on farms.

Annie Harge saw him first. Her panic-stricken eyes swung to her husband who, back to the door and intent on the reddening iron, had not yet been aware of the intrusion. She was on the point of waving a signal to the intruder to escape while he could, when the cripple's voice called a sardonic greeting:

"Hello, Kemper Downes!"

Tubal Harge turned his ponderous bulk slowly. Upon recognizing the newcomer, he dropped the iron bar with no concern for where it fell, and scuffled across the smithy in his unlaced shoes. Downes smiled to the approaching Tubal with ready self-assurance.

"Just on my way down to the village, Tubal, for some smoking tobacco. Angus asked me to drop in and see whether you had his axle welded. He wants me to stop and get it on my way back if you'll have it ready."

Tubal Harge stood in front of Kemper Downes, towering over him, hands on his hip bones and arms akimbo.

"I'll take the axle up to Angus myself when it is done, Kemper Downes," he said. "And as for you—I don't hanker to have the brand of Cain laid on me, but if you set foot on my land again, I'll fill you full of buckshot."

Kemper Downes passed his hands across his eyes to shake from his lashes the fog condensed there. He glanced in his amazed fear past Tubal to Annie, and dropped his eyes shamefacedly.

Annie waited, confident in her love of the man, that he would rise to his own defense. But in that she was disappointed. For Downes, without a word, turned on his heel and left the smithy, pulling the door shut quickly that it might stand between him and Tubal Harge's wrath. Then, out of the depths of her anguish, Annie sent a cry ringing out into the heavy mist:

"Kemper! Wait for me."

She rushed to the door to follow him. But Tubal thrust his powerful form in front of her and held the door. He pounded his heavy fist down hard upon the latch of wood, driving it hard home.

"Get back to your place, woman, and hold the axle for me to weld."

Annie went staggering back to the far side of the anvil, her body slack with her fear. She stumbled over that horseshoe with which Samson Harge in his bit of play-acting had threatened the old man's life. She looked at it for a moment, dazed, stooped swiftly to pick it up. But she found Tubal Harge's eyes fixed upon her in a spell that robbed her of her will, and the horseshoe fell from her nerveless fingers.

Tubal Harge, entire master of the situation, turned back to his forge. He brought the reheated axle back to the anvil, gave one end of it to Annie and the other to

Samson, quite as if nothing had happened. Dominated utterly once, Annie accepted her task. The little four-wheel iron basket groaned as the cripple propelled it over the uneven floor back to his place.

Not a word was spoken by any of them while the smith made the weld as perfect as if it had never been broken. He plunged it into the annealing tub with an alarming gust of steam, and let it stay there. He drew off his leather apron and donned a much worn woolen mackinaw.

"I'm takin' this axle up to Angus Cramp now," he said. "Get the milkin' done while I'm gone, Annie."

He took the axle, and closed the smithy door behind him.

For a silent moment the two left in the smithy stood staring at one another until Tubal's shuffling footsteps upon the stony road were out of hearing. Then into the cripple's eyes came that light which Annie always feared—a passion so consuming that the great torso shook with the violence of it. She started toward the door to escape him, but he stopped her with a harsh word of command:

"Stop!"

Her hand already on the latch, she looked round at him.

"Why?" she asked, palpitant with her fear.

His manner became instantly ingratiating now.

"Say, Annie, we both hate him, don't we?"

"Yes. Why?" She was now on her guard.

"And we'd both like to see him dead?"

"Well?"

He pushed his groaning little cart over toward her so that he might talk more confidentially with her. But he stopped midway of the floor when he perceived that she preferred escape to his proximity, and conducted the rest of his conversation in a hoarse whisper across half the floor.

"And we're both afraid of him," he went on in that husky growing undertone, while his eyes burned with the exultation of his own thoughts. "But we're afraid of him only because he makes us so. I've thought that all out. I think a lot by myself, Annie. I'm a whole lot smarter than that old hellion is. No reason why you and I together should be afraid of him."

Annie was held for the moment by his very insistence. She nibbled at the bait.

"But what can we do?"

"Kill him."

"Kill him? Samson!" she gasped.

He leered at her.

"What you're afraid of is that people might catch you at it. You're afraid of the gallows—that's what you are."

She thought a moment, studying the toe of her wet shoe.

"So are you," she told him. "You said so not half an hour ago."

A look of triumph flashed across his evil face.

"But I hain't afraid of that any more," he declared. "I've found a way. Nobody'll ever think it's us. Nobody'll ever think it possible. I'm smart, I am. I'll show him whether I'm a man or not—safe, too. Just as safe as his killin' the hog for Christmas." He laughed hoarsely. "Damned old boar that he is. He's killed enough of 'em. Now let him take a taste of it himself. Only I'll need your help, Annie."

Annie stared at him appalled at the thought, fascinated by it, fearful, hopeful, on the brink of irresolution.

"I—can't, Samson," she said slowly, considering her words. "I can't lend my hand to it. I'd die from guilt. He'd come back at night if we killed him, to visit us and torment us."

The torso laughed in derision.

"Him come back? Never! I'd kill him again if he did, and kill him and kill him—ghost or no ghost—besides, Annie," he smirked engagingly, "Kemper Downes would help to keep him away from you—you could go to Kemper then."

She shut her eyes, and spoke very slowly, in tones scarcely audible:

"Samson—how would you do it—if I helped?" she asked, her eyes still closed. "Not that I would help, but—I'm willing to listen."

And Samson Harge, triumphant in a victory which he knew was already won, told her the plan, a plan that could have been

evolved only from such a life, such a brain as his.

III

TWENTY minutes later, the trap that was to kill Tubal Harge was set. The crimson glow of the dying fire lighted up an uncanny scene.

The smithy door was braced open about a foot. Annie Harge had built up a stout plank platform by the door. Two stout oak planks had been laid in an inclined place, up which Samson Harge had propelled himelf. Two strips of half inch tire iron had been laid across the door, from a cleat on the top of the door frame, to rest very lightly on the top edge of the door.

Upon these iron stays lay a discarded anvil of a hundred and fifty pound weight, which Samson Harge had, with his amazing strength and dexterity, dragged over from a junk pile in the corner, had drawn to the platform by a rope tied about it, and, with Annie balancing his torso, had lifted to its delicate balance place above the door, and lowered gently upon the iron strips so that their delicate adjustment was not disturbed by so much as a hair's breath.

To Annie Harge it was nothing short of a miracle that this torso of a man could accomplish such a feat.

The trap set, she stood beside him for a moment in the middle of the smithy floor and regarded their evil handiwork.

"And he said I wasn't a man, eh, the old nellion?" crackled the cripple. "He'll see whether I am or not, when he comes back from Angus Cram's—best part of it is, Annie, nobody else thinks so either. No one'd ever think any one short of Tubal could lift that anvil up there. And God knows they'd never think you could do it—that is, if they even think about the anvil."

Annie only shuddered. She was tense now with fear lest Tubal Harge return and try to enter the smithy before they had removed the traces of their trap setting. "Let's get out of here," she begged Samson.

"Naw, I want to wait to see it. Gawd, Annie, hain't it clever? Them two iron strips barely meet the upper edge of the door. The shove of one finger weight on the outside of the door will fetch this anvil down on his head, and down he'll go under it—skull smashed, shoulder smashed, God knows what all—wouldn't it be fun if the horn of the anvil fell first and run right down through his head, eh? Maybe that would hold him for awhile, eh?"

"What if he don't come into the smithy at all when he comes back?" Annie whispered with chattering teeth.

"He will. He can't help coming down along the road to get to the house. I'll stay here and keep the forge fire up a little. He'll see the red glow through the open door, and come in to put it out and lock the door. He'll come in, all right—get this stuff back where it belongs now, Annie."

And she set to work with shaking haste, so that in two minutes not a timber nor a trace of the platform was left in its place. She looked in blank dismay at the foot-wide crack between open door and door jamb. Samson understood her fear and laughed at it.

"You'd better climb out of the window, Annie, less'n you want to fetch that anvil down on your head."

"That's right," she said dully. "You stayin' here, Samson?"

"Sure I'm stayin' here, till it's safe to open the door. I can't get out of the window, can I? And besides, I want to see how he looks when he finds out I'm a man. And I must stay here to take care of the body and put the anvil back in its place, and hide the iron strips before anybody comes. I'll slide over and get you as soon as it's all over.

"Now you'd better go do the milkin' and get supper ready. And say, be sure to set three places, just as if you surely expected him back to eat. Don't forget that. And don't lose your nerve. I've got everything figured out fine and safe. Never felt so smart in all my life as I do this evenin'."

Annie Harge, with trembling difficulty, climbed through the back window and shut it after her. She was sure that the smithy was left exactly as Tubal Harge had left it, save for that hideous mantrap above the

door, and Samson Harge lurking for his prey in a darkened corner.

To escape from that dark, close, crimson lighted building with its sinister occupant, was like escaping from a nightmare. The sense of solid ground beneath her feet, the cool caress of the mist, even the murky twilight that seemed to shut her in a world by herself, revivified her spirits.

Away from the spell of fear that Samson Harge had cast about her, she found herself able to face with equanimity what the future held. She saw now at last the safe rupture of the shackles that bound her detestably to Tubal Harge. She was no longer afraid of Samson, because she could escape him to go to Kemper Downes; and he would never dare tell because he was an accomplice. She saw Kemper Downes released from his fear of the mighty and inexorable smith. She saw marriage with him, a happy and normal life.

Her spirits lifting with every step, she walked swiftly along the cinder path to the house. There was not much need of hurry now, for Tubal Harge could not reasonably be expected back for an hour yet. She found the two Jersey cows lowing at the bars for shelter and milking.

Their presence was friendly and comforting; they brought, moreover, vivid memories of Kemper Downes and summer evenings with him. She liked to stay with them, caress them. She even brought a handful of salt from the dark stables for them, and crooned to them, stroking their silken jowls as they licked her hand.

Finally she gathered courage to go from them into the darkening house. She stirred up the fire in the kitchen range, lighted the most brilliant of the lamps against her return, and went out to milk and feed the cows.

Now she began to wonder if she would be able to hear the heavy thud of the falling anvil. Her nerves became tense with straining after the sound, even though reason told her she could not expect it for a long time yet! Continually she would cease the pulsing spurts of milk into the pail to listen; until, having taken twice as long to milk as she had ever taken, and finding no further reason for delay, she plucked up resolution to leave the cows, to return to the house, and prepare supper—for three.

A score of times—perhaps a hundred times, she went to the door to listen; for sounds would not come easily from the smithy over that distance and through the closed door. But she could hear nothing above the thunder of the waterfall. The sudden striking of six o'clock alarmed her to a jump and a little shriek of nerves; but she calmed down immediately afterward and made a resolution not to listen again until the clock should strike the half hour.

She kept to that resolution until the squealing crunch of the little basket cart that served Samson Harge in lieu of legs, came to her startled ears just outside the kitchen door. How did he escape from the smithy—unless the trap had been sprung? She caught a look at the clock. Quarter past six. Perhaps Tubal had hurried back unwontedly, though he could usually be depended on to stay for a glass of cider or two when he went up to Angus Cramp's.

She rushed to the door, afraid to see that living torso with its baleful eyes, yet irrepressibly eager to see him. He was within whispering distance on the ramp when she opened to him.

"It worked, Annie," he whispered.

She clasped her hands to her throat.

"He's—he's dead?" Her mouth was suddenly parched, and she scarcely knew that she had spoken aloud.

"Sh-h. Don't tell the whole hillside," he growled low-voiced. "Get the wheelbarrow and come quick. We've got to get the body out and away before any one chances along. Hustle."

Annie knew the part that had been laid out for her, and dared not shrink from it now. She heard Samson Harge's dry lips clicking as he moistened them with his tongue. There was fear in him, at least; some least touch of humanity. It comforted her a little against that which faced her.

"He looked awful, Annie. Terrible. That anvil crashin' down on him. I was afeared it'd turn your stomach and make you faint, so I did him up in a horse blanket. That'll keep the blood from drippin', too.

And I'll take the horse blanket back to the forge and burn it as soon as we're through with it. Hurry up with the wheelbarrow."

More dead than alive now, what with her fear, she managed to find her way around to the toolshed for the barrow, while Samson pushed his little cart back over the cinder path with amazing speed. She reached the smithy no later than he. The smithy door was wide open as she drew her barrow up alongside it. Annie looked once at the huge blanketed figure prone by the door, lighted in pale grim fashion by the red glow of the forge.

Samson maneuvered himself inside the smithy by a peculiar swinging of his body between his downpressed palms.

"You'll have to take one end, Annie. He'll be heavy, too. But two hundred pounds is nothin' to wheel over a hard road in a wheelbarrow, so long as you keep the balance. I can't do that."

Between them they lifted the body to the barrow, and adjusted it to a careful balance. Annie Harge trundled the barrow along the edge of the hard road to the gorge, careful at every step to listen for sounds of any one coming along that deserted thoroughfare. Luck was with them. No one interfered. Two or three times she had to stop to rest. Then Samson, following her close, a gruesome figure more hobgoblin than human in that half light, urged her on with only the shortest of breathing spells.

Finally the strange procession reached the bridge, beneath which the falls of the mountain torrent thundered down to break into clouds of mist. Here Samson took charge of things again.

"I'll 'tend to it now, Annie. I'll have to take the horse blanket off before I shoot him down into the gorge. 'Cause if that's found wrapped around him, they'll all know he didn't fall over when he come home drunk. And I've got to throw him down on the rocks there so's to account for his head and shoulder bein' smashed in.

"It hain't a pretty sight when it's unwrapped. You'd best go back a ways and wait till I unroll him and throw him over. Then come back and get the wheelbarrow and the blanket."

What with her terror and her unwonted exertions, Annie Harge was by this time shaking like a leaf in a gale. It seemed to her that she could not force her muscles to do her will's bidding; least of all to carry her out there somewhere in the dark mist, away from the living companionship of Samson.

"Samson," she stammered in a whisper, "I can't go. I'm scared. Do what you've got to do. I dassn't look—and then come back to me."

"Go on back out of sight," he commanded hoarsely, and shied a pebble at her.

Afraid even of him now, she started to run. But her knees gave way, and she fell in a huddle on the damp ground, and lay there, face hidden in arms, shaking violently. She did not look around, while Samson was at his gruesome task. But when she heard his contented grunt, and heard a muffled thud in the bottom of the gorge, most of all when Samson rolled up to her, she recovered her nerve, and rose to wheel the barrow to the smithy.

She went slowly now, afraid to leave Samson. She threw off the blanket at the smithy door. Samson commanded her to go on to the house while he burned the blanket. But she was afraid to do that, and sat on the barrow until he came out to report that the blanket was burned, and the ashes dumped into the pit below the forge.

Then they two went on into the house. She began making listless preparations for supper, while he scrubbed his splayed hands in the kitchen sink.

Annie shuddered under Samson's look while she put plates and cutlery on the red checked tablecloth.

"Don't forget to set up three places, Annie," he reminded her.

"Layin' a place for a dead man," she whimpered softly. "It's enough to bring him back."

Samson smiled to himself, and looked carefully at his hands. "Mebbe—mebbe he might come back at that, Annie," he said.

"I s'pose I'll be afeared of it all my life now," she said with dry lips.

"No reason for you to be afeared of it, Annie—I'll see to it he don't hurt you."

She looked at him strangely.

"Hurt me? A dead man?"

He chuckled.

"Trust me, Annie. No matter what the doctors and the sheriff say about that body in the gorge, I'll see to it that the law takes Tubal away from you."

Her teeth chattered a little. "You gone crazy, Samson?"

"Never smarter than I am to-night," he assured her. "The sheriff may say it's accidental death, but he won't think so when I've told him about the quarrel over you, and show him the blood stains on the old anvil, and the hole in the floor where the anvil fell, and the door scraped off where the iron strips was laid. The law 'll take him for it, Annie; never us. No one'd believe that we could have h'isted that anvil to the top of the door."

By this time Annie Harge had stopped her work, and was staring at the cripple in shrinking terror.

"What are you talkin' about, Samson? The law'll take—who?"

He laughed.

"What did you think you wheeled out to the lip of the gorge for me?"

"Tubal Harge." She almost shouted the words, for some inkling of the truth was becoming hers now.

"Ye-ah," cackled the cripple. "I know you thought that. What good would it 'a' done me to get rid of Tubal, when you'd go straight to the arms of Kemp Downes? No, siree, I'm smart this evenin'. That was Kemp Downes you helped me wheel out. I heard *him* come along the road on his way home, and called *him* into the smithy. *He's* gone. Now the law'll swing Tubal, and that leaves just us, Annie. Just you and me. Now don't you think I'm smart?"

Annie staggered to a chair and slumped into it, speechless.

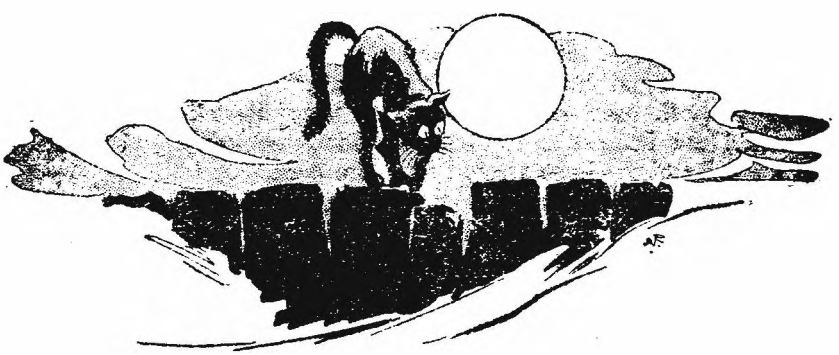
Samson glowered at her in a change of mood.

"But you want to be good and quiet," he warned her, "when the old hellion comes back to-night, if you want to save your neck from the gallows—good thing you set out three places 'stead of two—there he is now."

And it wasn't until Tubal Harge's great frame filled the doorway, that Annie could believe what Samson had told her.

Yet Samson Harge was not as clever as he had accounted himself. When he pointed out to the sheriff the bloody anvil that would incriminate his father, the sheriff saw also the plain marks of broad, splayed, deformed hands on it. Moreover, Samson hadn't taken into account a woman's breaking point under a third degree. Samson didn't know much about women, nor about police gruellings. So he did swing from the gallows, like the sack of wheat of his own comparison.

Tubal Harge sacrificed his property and mortgaged his life to get Annie cleared. There was a technicality: she hadn't plotted the death of the murdered man, and the jury was inclined to leniency. And she lived with Tubal Harge the rest of her life, not so long, at that.



The net closes in while they boast of their bravery

TWO BAD WOMEN

By Richard R. Blythe

WHERE ONE POISON HAD FAILED, THE POISON OF PASSION SUCCEEDED—AND THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF THE EVENING FLED A YOUNG WOMAN

A Story of Fact

IT is highly improbable that any one would calmly choose a career in crime rather than accept the more comfortable mode of honest living, even though the money did not come quite as easily, but yet there are those who are born to be fugitives from justice.

Habitual criminals they are called on the police records, and in due course they have justice meted out to them accordingly. The law demands long terms in the "quod," and a "stir" is chosen where a "crash" is most unlikely.

Russia had its Siberia, France the Bastille. London the "Tower," and America has Dannemora. But even these hard, forbidding walls fail to deter the certain element of law breakers that daily make raids upon the unsuspecting public.

In view of the foregoing it would seem even more improbable that women should find a place in the world of daring criminals. The gentler sex is not usually associated with revolvers, in fact they are even supposed to be hardly aware of which is the "business" end of a modern automatic.

Crime, however, has a strange fascination, a lure that is so strong that many are unable to resist—to many it is similar to the "call of the wild" that haunts the tame fox.

In numerous cases it consists of a challenge to a match of wits against the smug complacent business man. Shoplifting, pilfering and other acts of petty larceny, though they do constitute an irritat-

ing form of crime, are excluded from the acts of bold daring which amount almost to brigandage, and yet women have found a place in that category.

Only a year or so ago the papers rang with the exploits of the Bobbed Haired Bandit, a schoolgirl of tender years, who mystified and terrified New York with her deeds of daring. At any moment the merchants of the secluded sections of Brooklyn expected to see a demure little girlish customer turn into a flashing "gunwoman" who would demand the day's receipts.

At an Exclusive Fur Store

In deeds of daring and cunning the "gentle sex," as represented by the members who have tried their hands at this precarious mode of livelihood, have been tried and found not wanting.

Belle Starr, whose exploits have been told in detail in this magazine, should be enough to set any boy's ears burning with shame. She could ride and shoot along with the best of them in her day.

My first case deals with the cunning of a woman that is equal to-day with the best wits of any of our notorious gang leaders.

At the request of the police department the *nom de plume* of our fair heroine must be left still unwritten as she is still at large, even though some of the keenest police talent has expended every effort for her apprehension.

A number of check forgeries began her career, these were rapidly followed by two cool daylight holdups, where at the point of a gun, she demanded the entire contents of the cash register and of the safe.

To all intents and purposes these nefarious expeditions provided her with sufficient capital to launch herself into "business."

With your indulgence for a moment we will see what manner of person this is. Elizabeth Erickson, as she may be conveniently called, possesses the rare charm of an engaging personality combined with a most disarmingly innocent face.

Her large gray eyes may be either melting, warm and supplicating, or hard, relentless and demanding, at will. Her figure is boyish, lithe and graceful, with dainty ankles and shapely limbs; the *tout ensemble* is topped with a mass of shining auburn hair.

Perhaps with the single exception that the corners of her mouth betray the cold calculating spirit within, she might easily be mistaken for an artist's model, or the wife of some successful young millionaire.

Elizabeth Erickson is now the head of one of the most cunning bands of criminals that has for some time come to the notice of the police. The following almost humorous account of one of her escapades in New York was told to me by a member of the police department of the City of West New York.

A handsome limousine with liveried footman and chauffeur drew up before one of New York's most exclusive fur stores on Fifth Avenue one afternoon, and there alighted from within the luxurious depths of cushions the beautiful young Elizabeth.

She was escorted to the guarded portals by her footman, and the pompous doorman bowed low as he ushered her inside. After strolling idly past the showcases brimming over with costly furs she beckoned to one of the expectant salesladies.

The Germ of Affluence

"I would like to see an ermine wrap for evening wear, please," she suggested.

"With pleasure," replied the saleslady as she selected one of the most beautiful cloaks in the store. "Each one of these skins has been selected with care, and, as you will note, there is not the slightest discoloration anywhere.

"They have been matched with skill, and I venture to say that there is not another garment in America that can surpass this one for beauty of design or material."

Miss Erickson smilingly nodded as she tried it on.

"Yes, it is very beautiful. But I wonder what my husband will say when he sees me in it to-night. You know of course that my husband, Mr. William J. Wharton, is a retired financier, and, oh, how he does hate to part with his money! But it will be all right." Elizabeth Erickson, alias Mrs. William J. Wharton, hastily added.

"He just loves to have me look as well dressed as any of the members of our set.

"While I'm here, I might as well look at your full length mink and sable coats for everyday wear," and thus gradually, while adding each time a more expensive fur piece to her unusually large order, Elizabeth was inoculating the saleslady with the germ of affluence and wealth.

She prattled on about her social connections, her husband's wealth, and about the members of her set. During the course of the conversation her uniformed footman stood at a discreet distance, thus seeming to substantiate the inferences of financial independence.

Some One to Send

At last it came time to pay for the fur cloak, coats, and silver fox neck piece. "Do you wish to take them with you?" the attendant inquired.

"Oh, yes, of course! My man can carry them, and I have the town car waiting for me," the psuedo Mrs. Wharton replied.

She opened her purse; a little exclamation of vexation involuntarily escaped her: "Now isn't that just like me! I mean, I am so careless about money and just the days that I don't need any I usually carry far too much, and then when I drop in to do a little shopping I often find that I am short.

"My husband has so often told me not to carry large sums of money about loose in my purse, and now what am I going to do?" and the large soft gray eyes almost seemed to fill with tears of distress.

"I must have these things for the bridge party this evening. You see," and Elizabeth disclosed in the depth of her purse just five one hundred dollar bills and some loose change. "I never can make sure when I have enough money. Will you please ask the manager to come here, because I am sure that he can suggest some way to help me."

Of course when the store employee spoke to the manager she told him that she had been talking to a Mrs. Wharton and said that she was sure that she was a wealthy society woman who was doubtless somewhat careless about money.

Just as Elizabeth Erickson had planned, the saleslady was naturally anxious to make the sale because there would be a handsome commission in her weekly pay envelope. The manager carefully reviewed the situation.

"I regret to state, madam," he stated to the fascinating "Mrs. Wharton," "but the rules of this establishment are that no one except our regular charge customers are able to take any merchandise without paying for it."

The fair customer seemed almost ready to weep. "But I know that Mr. Wharton would pay for it if I asked him. He probably will be at home later on this afternoon, and if I telephone him he will have the money ready for me.

"Isn't there some one whom you can send with me in the car to collect the bill? You see the party to-night is to be attended by—" and Elizabeth named several of New York's most prominent citizens and included the wife of a Senator of New Jersey.

The manager thought the matter over carefully. It would be folly to offend such an esteemed customer, and more especially one whose connections and acquaintances included the most substantial residents of the city.

Equal to Her Task

"Then may I suggest," cautiously ventured the store official, "that I ask one of our store detectives to accompany you, both as a matter of protection to you and the furs, and as one with whom we can trust such a sum of money as your husband will give him. The bill is, altogether, $38,500, is it not?"

Mrs. Wharton was overjoyed. "Ah, that is the solution!" she exclaimed. "I just knew that you would be able to help me. Perhaps that is why such a big firm like this has chosen a man like you to represent them. I will not forget your kindness, and I am sure that Mr. Wharton will write and thank you."

In a few moments the expensive limousine with the liveried chauffeur and footman was speeding up Fifth Avenue bearing the resourceful Elizabeth Erickson, the detec-

tive and a large parcel of very valuable furs.

The only remaining step in the chain of events that would lead up to the full possession of the furs without the formality of paying for them was to get rid of the worthy detective. But Elizabeth was equal to her task.

Over the Fifty-Ninth Street bridge and out on to Long Island they rolled, both of the passengers apparently enjoying the spin. Before long the car drew up in front of a secluded building which the detective easily recognized as one of the more or less exclusive sanatoriums for the feeble minded.

"What Does It Mean?"

The entrancing Mrs. Wharton descended, and after asking the store representative to pardon her for a moment, she walked up the path that led to the building.

In the office of the head alienist she presented a pathetic figure. "You see," she explained, "I am in a most embarrassing position; we are to have a social function of much importance, and as I explained to you before, my husband suffers with occasional fits of delusions.

"When I called upon you yesterday it was to make whatever arrangements were necessary to have him undergo treatment, and to relieve me for the affair to-night of a recurrence of his delusions which would ridicule me before all my friends.

"My husband believes that he is a detective, and at the most inopportune moments he waves one of those detective badges and insists that he must arrest some one. It becomes unbearable at times."

"But we must have a permit from the city medical board authorizing us to commit your husband to our care. We are not allowed to take in patients upon the word of friends or relatives. I, however, understand the position that it places you in, but as I explained when you called before, we can do nothing without written authority," explained the medico.

"Oh, that will not be difficult," hastened the alleged Mrs. Wharton. "I have a very close personal friendship with the wife of the head alienist of Bellevue." And again she named several prominent physicians who were known to her listener.

"I can secure the permit to-morrow, if that will do; but I am worried almost sick about to-night." A dainty little handkerchief appeared from within the purse, and the damsel in distress quickly wiped a furtive tear from the large, gray, supplicating eyes.

"Couldn't you just help me out for to-night?" she begged. "Here, I have five hundred dollars with me, and I am willing to pay you for your trouble. All I ask is that he be kept in your care until to-morrow and then I will have the papers made out. At all events you will not have to worry to-morrow; if I do not get the papers I will send the car and my chauffeur to bring him home."

Her pleading was not in vain, for within a few moments four of the strongest attendants from the institution strode out to the car with instructions to bring in the gentleman who was seated in the rear of the limousine.

"What is the meaning of this?" angrily demanded his worthy.

"It just means," said the spokesman, "that you are to be our guest for to-night. Now come along quietly, and we will take good care of you."

A Palpable Hoax

"Absurd and preposterous," exploded the detective. "I am a detective and have been sent by my firm to accompany Mrs. Wharton to her home. I refuse to leave this car."

"Well, then, if that is the case we will make you the head detective of our palatial hotel," and without more ado they pulled the resisting officer from the car and in no uncertain manner hurried him into the building.

Our little heroine, who had waited quietly in the doctor's office, now hurried out to her car, and the limousine, the $38,500 worth of furs, the liveried footman and chauffeur, and the laughing young Elizabeth Erickson disappeared down the road.

It took the detective over four hours

to explain the situation and to finally convince the sanatorium authorities that he was in truth a rather sad protector of some very valuable furs, and that the whole affair had been a palpable hoax.

The detective bureau of the City of West New York and other police bureaus, were placed upon the trail, due to the fact that the swindler had used the names of prominent persons from several communities. Of course the parties referred to never heard of such a person as Mrs. Wharton, and so far all the clews have led to practically nil.

"Western" George Howard

This excellent example of super criminal ability is not by any means a rare thing among women who have decided to make it a "short life but a merry one." They display a natural instinct for acting that is most misleading.

Under ordinary circumstances the male criminal becomes, after a time, his own enemy; vanity, a failing so often found in men of this class, soon leads to their downfall.

Hundreds of suspects have found the net closing in about them because they boasted of their bravery to some admiring sweetheart.

In their actions, through drunkenness or while under the influence of a drug, they often betray their secret. Through her access into the higher circles of society a woman is often able to cloak her true personality with an atmosphere of demure respectability that is almost, if not quite, impenetrable.

Love, they say, is blind, and this adage is particularly true in reference when applied to women criminals. When under the influence of the opiate of love, or its reaction, jealousy, they will expose themselves mercilessly to gain an end.

For love a woman of this character will go to any lengths to help her lover. If she is jealous she will expose herself to harm him.

Many of the readers of FLYNN'S will recall from the articles of the famous Detective Jackson "Forty-five Years a Manhunter" the details of the robbery of the Manhattan Savings Institution, the proceeds of which amounted to $2,858,700 in cash and securities.

The job, technically speaking, was pulled off by the famous Jimmy Hope and his band of nine assistant bank breakers; Ned Lyons and Johnny Dobbs, who worked directly with Jimmy in the delicate work of blowing the steel safes and removing the fabulous plunder; John Nugent, who took care of Werkle, the janitor; Johnny Hope, Jimmy's son; Eddy Goodey, Abe Coakley and George Mason, the lookouts; Billy Keely, the guard, and "Banjo" Pete Emerson, who impersonated the janitor, Werkle.

After this epoch-making event in the annals of American crime the police became anxious to apprehend the financial "Angel" who had backed Jimmy Hope and his corps of coworkers during the fourteen months that it took them to plan the details of the robbery.

"Mother" Mandelbaum was under suspicion, as at that time she was the "Queen of Fences" in New York, but the investigation showed that the only member of the gang who had any direct connection with Mother Mandelbaum was "Western" George Howard, who had cleverly learned the details of the vault locks, but who had been killed near Yonkers a year before the actual break.

A Victim of Heart Failure

It was finally ascertained that John D. Grady, a diamond merchant whose offices were directly opposite the Manhattan Bank, had been the one who had not only financed this affair, but who had been one of the prime movers for years in America's criminal underworld.

Grady was found dead in his home before he could be arrested, and thus his spectacular career came to an abrupt end. It is strange but not unusual that he should have died directly as the result of a love affair. Few know the actual details of Grady's death.

"Old Supers and Slangs," as Grady was known to the members of the higher order of the criminal fraternity, dealt only with the "aristocrats" among bank burglars.

To him pickpockets were "rats of the lowest order."

As time went on he met a number of the socially elect of New York who, either through gambling, stock speculations, or drink, fell into hard straits. Among these was a very beautiful young girl, a penniless but most attractive widow, who had become tangled in the intricacies of fast finance, and for whom there seemed no escape.

She sensed that Grady was strongly attracted to her, and in the little deals that they worked out together she unhesitatingly used this weapon to gain her end.

As his passion for this attractive girl grew, her hatred for him increased. From the very first she had instinctively distrusted and despised him, but her judgment guided her to keep him at a distance and yet to accept his aid.

She worked in several swindle affairs and acted as a "lay-out spotter" for some of the most notorious of the gang. Carefully she planned his downfall, with the same cunning that she used in carrying out his nefarious schemes.

Matters were rapidly coming to a crisis following the Manhattan robbery, and as Grady prepared to flee the country, he hesitated only for the sake of his protégée. Everything was packed and the loose uncut diamonds that formed the balance of his valuable stock were in little packages in his pockets. The young widow was now ready to act.

"Before we leave, let's have a little drink, here in the old house," she suggested. "Come on, just for good luck."

"But there is only one glass left in the place; what will we use?"

The woman glanced quickly about the room. "Oh, I'll use that old tin cup. Get it for me, will you, please?"

As Grady left the table, she slipped a little phial of poison from her muff, and poured it in his glass. Then she filled the glass with wine, Grady returned and she filled the cup.

He turned. "No, you drink out of the glass, I will use the cup. That is as it should be." Quick premonition had warned him. But when he said, "Very well, I will use the glass," she could not conceal an involuntary sigh of relief.

But as he raised the tumbler to his lips, his stonelike gaze met hers. She seemed fascinated, like a bird in the toils of a loathsome snake, the pupils of her eyes dilated, her skin became blanched and white.

It was murder in cold blood, and her spirit revolted. Old Supers and Slangs, long schooled in the art of reading his victims' eyes, read the message of warning.

His voice was like the chill of cold steel. "So you're trying to make this a little bumping off party, are you? Well, I guess that I can have a hand in this sort of game too."

He splintered the glass on the floor. With a wild lunge his talon-like fingers had closed over her arm. "But before I kill you I'm going to make you kiss me and like it," he cried.

His cold eyes became distended with passion, the blood surged to his face as the woman struggled to wrench herself free. She did not know that Fate was taking a grim hold at that very moment. Her fright seemed to paralyze her vocal chords; she wanted to scream, to bite, and to ward off the clinging maniac that tore at her.

At the very moment that he lunged forward toward her recoiling form, his lips relaxed, the eyelids fluttered, and he fell groping to the floor, a victim of heart failure.

Where the poison liquid had failed, the poison of passion had succeeded. Through the shadows of the evening the shadow of an almost fainting woman fled through the door.

Almost coincidentally with the discovery of Grady's participation in the Manhattan Bank robbery came the news of his death. In his hand was found a part of the sleeve of a woman's dress, on the floor the broken glass showed traces of poison.

But the autopsy brought out the fact that the boss of the underworld had passed away as the result of a heart attack. In his pockets reposed a fortune in diamonds, and somewhere in New York there darted a horror-stricken woman to a refuge of solitude and forgetfulness.

CRAWLING FEAR

NOT only the serpents, but the insects of India are utilized as instruments of hate and retribution. Adam recalled a chief warder who, searching a prison carpenter shop, came upon a small *chatty*—earthen water pot—buried just under the ground, and covered with wood. Putting in his hand, he was stung by a scorpion that had been placed there by the wily prisoner. The poor treasure consisted of snuff, tobacco, and two *annas*—four cents—in copper coins.

According to Chevers, a common punishment in Bengal was to place on the navel either spiders or a mole cricket called by the natives *ghoorghoora pooka*, covered with a shell or an earthen pot.

The old practice of exposing persons to be gnawed by ants was formerly common in this province. The Burmese say that among the trials to which Buddha was subjected was smearing him with molasses and letting the flies torment him. He was then scorched with fire.

Baboo Bholanath Chunder instanced a petty landlord who punished his defaulters by putting them into a House of Ants. The Nawabs of Moorshedabad confined men in arrears for revenue to a Dwelling of Insects. Offering themselves to their attacks is one of the practices of religious mendicants in India.

Ward alluded to parents hanging their children up alive in trees for the ants and crows before the doors of houses. He thought that this was done when the little one was born with bad omens, or supposed to be afflicted by an evil spirit.

The collector and magistrate of Canara knew a prisoner to be laid on a nest of red ants as a means of extorting a confession. A certain man stated that he remained tied by the arms to a tree all night, and was severely bitten by large black ants.

Referring to Demmin's "Weapons of War," Chevers described the *bag-nuk*, or tiger's claw, preserved in the Meyrick collection. This instrument was invented, 1659, by Sivajee, and used by a secret society for purposes of murder, as, counterfeiting the wounds inflicted by a tiger's claws, it diverted suspicion from the offender. Todd wrote that during the eighteenth century Zalim, regent of Kotah, not satisfied with the use of more natural weapons, occasionally made his corps of gladiators fight with the *bag-nuk* when they tore off each other's flesh.

Adam wrote that in 1845 Singapore was infested with tigers that swam across the narrow part of the Old Straits, from Johore to Kranji. A considerable number of natives and Chinese working on the gambier and pepper farms were carried off by these animals. Gambier is used for chewing with betel nuts. Scarcely a day passed but a man was so killed. In 1860 two hundred such deaths were reported to the police and doubtless many were not reported.

Curious superstitions are entertained by the natives concerning tigers. They believe that by eating their flesh they become endowed with their distinctive features. The collar bone is supposed to have particular virtue, and the whiskers the power of conferring strength upon the possessor. The claws are used as charms. One of the most solemn oaths of an aboriginal tribe, the Santals, is sworn on a tiger's skin. Brooches and earrings are made of tigers' claws, mounted in gold.

"Wa'n't it you was a-sayin' somethin' 'bout a rob'ry?" Whitcher—

PURPLE CLAY

By Harold de Polo

SHERIFF WHITCHER BEMIS FOLLOWS HIS AXIOM OF NOTICING MINUTELY EACH DETAIL WITH AN APPARENT ABSENCE OF ZEAL

PALPABLY out of breath, Chet Thomas and Boyce Hutchins brought their canoe to a halt alongside the wharf at Noel's Landing. They also displayed such uncharacteristic agility in getting from the craft and tying it up, did this pair of usually laggard young men, that Del drawled in his dry voice from the doorway of the store:

"Judas Priest, boys, looks like y'd gone 'n' discovered where they was a bar'l o' cider left over from the winter 'n' was hotfootin' after it—'r else p'r'aps mebbe y've solved that there problem 'bout livin' 'thout workin' 'n' are a hustlin' t' go 'n' git it patented f'r y'r private use!"

The chuckles that came from the group about the post office porch, however, seemed to be actually relished by Chet and Boyce. The former broke into a laugh, raising his hands and shaking his head as if overcome by the cause of his mirth:

"Shucks, no—shucks, no," he presently got out, "nuthin' so simple as *them* things, Del. We jest seen lightnin' strike in the same place f'r aroun' the— Hell, must be aroun' the tenth, 'leventh time, mustn't it, Boyce?"

Young Hutchins, doing his best to keep the gleam of cunning triumph from his eyes, gravely stroked his chin and spoke with mock solemnity:

"F'rgettin' there ain't *anything* mi-miraculous where Whitcher's c'ncerned, ain't y', Chet?"

"On'y thing 'ud be miraculous 'bout W'itcher," cut in Del Noel, "ud be if you two young squirts 'ud jest f'r once stop makin' fools o' y'rselves a tryin' t' speak wrong of him."

—asked, staring at the city man as if he had just noticed him

But this pair of enemies of Whitcher Bemis, the sheriff of Noel's Landing, again appeared to welcome the titters and winks that came from the loungers at their expense. They worked smoothly together, these two—worked indefatigably in the interest of Boyce's elder brother Ned, who had been beaten last election for the office now held by Whitcher Bemis.

" Shucks, Del, *we* wa'n't a goin' t' speak *ag'in'* Whitcher," purred Boyce, " we were a goin' t' speak o' how plumb *lucky* the ol' critter is. Sure, we were a goin' t' tell 'bout how there ain't no mistake concernin' that famous ' dumb luck ' o' his! W'y, here's one o' the biggest rob'ries that's ever happened in the county—yessir, the biggest, I guess—one o' these real *jewel* rob-'ries y' read 'bout—an' where do y' suppose Whitcher was?"

He paused. He did not expect to get a rise out of his listeners, for these men of the backwoods Maine lumber settlements have a rigid code that does not allow them to show undue curiosity—verbally. He wanted, merely, to let his words sink in—and Chet ably helped him out:

" Yep," mused the latter, as if speaking to himself, " comes t' thutty, forty thousan', Mr. Corley says the loss does."

Boyce nodded, casually confirming this, his too shrewd eyes squinting in a smile as if he couldn't get over his first amusement. He surveyed the knot of store loiterers, his gaze finally coming to rest on the postmaster:

" Yessir, Del, where d' y' suppose Whitcher was? Nope; he wa'n't troutin', like y' might expect; he wa'n't phi-philat'lin', like y' call that a playin' with them stamps he collects; he wa'n't off some'eres lookin' t' see how the pa'tridge eggs was comin' along—he was a trollin' f'r salmon right by the Corley camp, by Judas Priest, when the rob'ry was first noticed!"

Hesitating again and glancing at Chet, the old-timers knew that it was done only to give his pal a chance to slip in another point. He did not fail:

" What I was tellin' Ned, 'fore he went an' got nominated to run 'gainst Whitcher: ' Ned Hutchins,' I says, ' y're wastin' time buckin' Whitcher. I admit y' got all the up an' comin' methods f'r the job, an' are backed by the real live folk—an' I also admit he's so old he can't think of nothin' but fishin' an' gunnin', an' lately this stamp business—but he's so dumb lucky that the pencils of voters seem to git plumb *hypnotized* an' mark the ballot f'r him!' Yep; that's what I told Ned, an' I guess I told him right. Why, I tell y' that the *thieves*

are goin' to git hypnotized, next, an' run after—"

"Guess y' mean *swim* after him in this case, don't y', Chet?" put in Boyce with a laugh.

"Reckon I do, Boyce—reckon I do," chortled the other. "An' darned if the crook won't, too. I'm *bettin'* on it!"

It was apparent, to the audience on the porch, that Chet and Boyce were getting ready to send in what they deemed their most telling dig at Whitcher Bemis It came, as expected, from the younger brother of the man who had been defeated for the office of sheriff:

"Swim after him is *right*, boys, 'cause what d' y' think ol' Whitcher done when Corley come out onto his dock an' told him he'd been robbed an' asked him t' come up an' investigate? Damned if he didn't shake his head no, like, an' pull at his big lip the way he does an' keep on a rowin'. Well, Corley gits purty mad at that, an' yells at him:

"'Look here, sheriff, I'm askin' y' to investigate in y'r *official* capacity; I'm demandin' my rights as a citizen of the United States,' he says. 'Shucks, Mr. Man,' comes back Whitcher, 'they ain't no sech thing as *'ficial* business where *fishin'* business is concerned. Me? I'm a trollin' this here sandbar with my fav'rit' blue phantom minnow f'r that ol' sockdologer 'at must go twen'y pound 'r more, an'—' Oh, I guess you fellers know how he went on and on. Anyways, he kept rowin'—"

"These wise ol'-timers of Noel's Landin' know that without bein' told, Boyce," broke in Chet. "They wanted to elect a *fisherman*, didn't they? Well, they *got* one!"

Both were silent for a moment, speculatively rubbing their jaws as they gazed out over the wind-whipped lake waters of late April. As they did so, they heard two men behind them, in the group, muttering their surprise—two men, new to the region last fall, who had been on the fence at election time and had only been persuaded at the last moment to vote for Whitcher by the advice of the graybeards.

"Mean t' say Bemis wouldn't even pull up his boat an' traipse up to the camp with Corley?" asked one of them.

Boyce turned slowly, his reply all ready—but a more eloquent answer, he saw, was coming to his aid. Stretching out an arm, he pointed to a square-sterned, sponson-sided canoe, rigged with outboard motor, that was putt-putting toward them from around the bend of the eastern shore:

"Here comes Mr. Corley now—ask *him!*"

II

RONALD CORLEY, however, did not have to be asked. Coming up to the wharf so rapidly that he dented the bow of his craft, he stepped out and began to utter words that were sweet and soothing to the ears of Chet and Boyce:

"I'm appealing to you, Mr. Noel, as you're the postmaster and store proprietor, and probably the leading citizen of this place. I'm not a voter up here, but I'm a taxpayer, and I've put a pretty decent amount of money into this Cranberry Lake section since I built my camp on the upper bay. In fact, I've thought that the cash I've circulated in this town would be appreciated.

"Now I've been robbed — my wife's jewels—but that isn't the point, for every locality is always apt to have a bad egg or two. The point is, Mr. Noel, that this Bemis man who's sheriff calmly refused to come and investigate. He went on salmon trolling, and mentioned something about it being impossible to think of any other business when fishing business was on hand. I—"

"Yes, Witcher has got ways about him," admitted Del slowly, as he noticed the two most recent voters frown disapprovingly.

"It's time they were stopped, or else that a capable man was put in his place," said Corley angrily. "Why, every minute may count, in a robbery, in tracing the thief. I'll wager that the insurance company investigator, when I tell him about the thing, will have something to say to this Bemis man. It's—it's an outrage.

"Over forty thousand dollars in jewels gone, and your officer of the law out there on the lake placidly trolling for salmon! Jove, it really would be laughable if it weren't so serious! If I have to go to the *Governor*, I tell you, I'll see that a competent man is put in office here as long as I remain a property holder."

"Whitcher *is* a comp'tent man, Mist' Corley," drawled out Boyce innocently. "Not bein' a res'dent here, y' don't seem to know that these—well, that these elderly gen'lemen o' Noel's Landin' want a good *fisherman* to hold down the job. Why they didn't elect my brother, f'r that reason. He's jest a ord'nary up an' comin' hustler that b'lieves in up-to-date idee—"

"Looks like W'itcher comin' now, Mr. Corley," interrupted Del gladly.

It was. In his ancient, patched boat, scrupulously cared for during the past score of years, the sheriff of Noel's Landing was rounding the bend along the east shore. He was still rowing slowly, evenly, for the ice had been out for no more than a week and the salmon were still hitting close to the surface and over the shallows.

Few were ever taken this near to the store, but Whitcher did not believe in missing any possible chance when it came to gunning or fishing. He brought his boat alongside the wharf deftly, cautious not to mar the paint. Then he reeled in his line —and he had out a good seventy-five yards of it—without saying a word to any of the onlookers.

"Any luck, Bemis?" asked Chet, with a wink at Corley, standing there as if he were charging up preparatory to exploding.

"Seems t' me you young fellers never *will* git teached they ain't no luck in huntin' 'r fishin'—experience 'n' skill 'casionally allows a man t' git his share. Didn' want no more'n enough f'r a meal—'n' another f'r Del. Cal'late one 'ud go four pounds, tother p'r'aps a' ounce over four 'n' a half!"

Reaching down, he took up a pair of salmon, and laboriously got his two hundred and sixty odd pounds out of the boat and onto the dock. He stood there, holding out the fish and joyously contemplating them with his wide, round blue eyes, much in the manner of a schoolboy who has done a proud thing. For all the evidence he gave, he had not even noticed Corley. The latter, however, suddenly exploded:

"Keep right on looking at those fish, Mr. Bemis, my friend—oh, yes, keep right on looking at them, because it occurs to me that it 'll be a damn long while before you'll be able to do anything else. When I finish laying my case before the State authorities, I can tell you, you won't do any more sheriffing as long as—"

The man from Boston went on in this vein for a fair five or six minutes. He covered his inmost thoughts on the sheriff quite exhaustively, and when he stopped he waited expectantly for his answer.

Whitcher, at the silence that came, began to blink his eyes in his vague manner, allowing them to rove rather aimlessly around the group. He fastened them, finally, on his detractor, and then he began to nurse his ponderous lower lip that hung far down. He pulled it out, hesitated as if on the point of letting it flap back—and then apparently changed his mind. He looked at the fish again, frowning. Then, his eyes blinking rapidly, he turned to Del Noel and allowed his lip to snap back with a resounding plop:

"Dunno's I'm right 'bout that there bigger one, Del," he drawled critically, as if he were trying to decide one of the most momentous questions in the universe: "Mebbe— mebbe he *might* go two-*three* ounces over four 'n' a half. Lawsy, Del, strikes me I'd most *bet* he would, at that. Yessir, I—"

"By God, this is *too* much," cried the now thoroughly excited Mr. Corley. "I won't stand any more of—"

"Wa'n't—wa'n't it you was a stoppin' me, up th' upper bay, 'n' a sayin' somethin' 'bout a rob'ry?" inquired Whitcher gently, staring at the city man as if he had just noticed him.

It is useless to transcribe the lengthy and fervid speech of the other. Whitcher, quite plainly, did not do much listening to it. He separated his pair of fish, handing one to Del and putting the mate back in his rowboat. Then, turning to the now

almost breathless Corley, he soothingly suggested:

"Reckon we'd better be gittin' up t' y'r camp. Y' see, I ain't got much time t' spare, I ain't. Most noon now, 'n' I want t' catch me that four 'clock stage f'r East Chatham so's I c'n make that train f'r Boston. Need a new phantom minnow, 'r two, I do—them blue-backed, white-bellied fellers.

"Best bait *I* c'n see f'r salmon, 'specially w'en th' apple blossoms git on the trees. Be here in a week, now, 'n' I don't aim t' be took *on*-prepared. Lawsy, Mister Man," he ended up, smiling happily, "but I'm a-sayin' *that's* th' time t' git the big ol' sock-dologers. Hey, Del?"

The postmaster did not get a chance to give his opinion in this vital matter, for Roland Corley, who had sufficiently mastered his emotions to the extent of being able to use what he thought was cutting irony, spoke with a little bow of his slim body:

"Although I assure you that I appreciate the valuable discourse on the proper bait for salmon trolling, Mr. Bemis, I'd likewise appreciate it if you'd follow out your kind promise of getting back to camp with me. I—"

"Shucks, Mr. Corley, don't mention it," nodded the sheriff benignly. "Allus glad t' give a man hints on tackle 'r bait 'r things like that, 'specially w'en he comes up so early, like y' do, right after th' ice goes out. Take that blue phantom, f'r instance. W'ot I mean is, see, that—"

Stepping into the sturdy canoe, and finding himself a comfortable place in the bow, Whitcher went on in his rambling manner while Corley span the engine, and the graceful craft putt-putted out over the water, headed for the upper bay.

"Three rousin' cheers f'r our noble sheriff o' Noel's Landin', gen'lemen," grinned Chet Thomas with a grandiloquent wave of his hand after the receding canoe.

"Hmmm, they's two votes he mebbe won't be able t' count on nex' year," grimly retorted one of the pair who had settled in the region the previous fall. "Eh, Jim?"

"Sure does look f'r certain that we'd gave 'em to a *crazy* man, Lige," concurred the other.

III

AT the Corley camp, an elaborate log structure with numerous outbuildings, there didn't seem to be very much "investigating" to do, as the city man had called it. The missing jewels, of which the main item had been a necklace of diamonds worth around thirty thousand dollars, Mrs. Corley testified, had been taken from a cunningly contrived little safe in the log wall of her bedroom.

The two servants that they had brought with them for this "campy" fishing trip, she assured Bemis, had been with the family for years and were to be unqualifiedly trusted. It must, she told him, have been some native—not that she liked to suggest that the locality was dishonest—or else some prowler who had planned the coup in advance.

Anyway, she concluded, the jewels had been in the safe that morning when she and Mr. Corley had gone out fishing, each in a separate boat, with one of the men servants to row them, and on her return they had been gone.

"Gosh," said Whitcher with a sigh, nursing his lip, "that sure was a right purty necklace, too. Used t' plumb enjoy seein' it, I did, w'en y'd come down t' the post office wearin' it some aft'noons. I—lawsy," he finished, flushing with sheepishness, "I sort o' hate t' think o' not seein' it no more. Nice 'n' glit'ry, all right—like a brook trout jest took from the water!"

Mrs. Corley, a cool-faced woman with cool gray eyes, in her early thirties, exchanged a glance that seemed slightly tinged with scorn with her more nervous, dark-eyed husband. She made a gesture, with her hand, that signified he was to allow her to handle the situation.

"Yes, Mr. Bemis," she said kindly, "they *were* pretty stones, and I *do* indeed remember your admiring them. I think you're rather pessimistic, though, don't you? Surely there's *some* hope of finding them, isn't there? I—you see," she added with an impulsive smile, "I've made up my

mind to reward the man who gets them back for us with a thousand dollar check."

Whitcher seemed to catch his breath with a little gasp. He stared into space in that unblinking way he had, his blue eyes round, while he rubbed at the fringe of ash-gray hair that circled his otherwise bald pate. His right thumb and index finger then made the inevitable movement to his lip. Out of deference to the lady, perhaps, he let it go back somewhat softly.

"Judas Priest," he almost whispered, fascinatedly, "that'ud buy a feller one o' them new-fangled over-'n'-under English guns—'r a pair o' the finest han'made rods they is, with all the trimmin's—'r—'r else some o' them early *U*-nited States stamps that come t' be so durn rare!"

"That's true, you have a rather interesting stamp collection, they say, haven't you?" remarked Mrs. Corley.

The sheriff, however, did not appear to have heard. He was immersed, it seemed, in deep thought—in troublesome thought, if one were to judge by the worry that showed in his eyes.

"Reckon y'r offerin' that *re*-ward means y' ain't got them jew'ls insured no more, don't it? My, that's too ba—"

"Oh, no," she said. "Your local Mr. Blake, of the East Chatham Mutual, insured them for me two years ago. Indeed, I have you to thank in a way, because it was when you admired them one day, and called them to Mr. Blake's attention in doing so, that he persuaded me to take out a policy.

"It isn't the money that bothers us—it's the necklace and rings. They were old family things, you know, and I thought the very world of them. I—well, Mr. Bemis, I think we might increase that thousand dollar offer if you actually regained all of the stolen heirlooms for us!"

"Thousan's a right gen'rous offer, seems like t' me," admitted the sheriff.

"You can have it if you get the stuff back, as Mrs. Corley told you," said her husband, seemingly in a better mood.

Whitcher, in answer, went over and again scrutinized the cleverly devised safe, fashioned by having a short section of log, between two windows, pull out and swing down on unseen hinges. After much gaping, much rubbing of his fringe of hair, much caressing of his lower lip, he finally turned about, helplessly shaking his head, his face utterly bewildered:

"Gosh, they don't seem t' be *nuthin'* t' tell by, does they? No marks, no fingerprints, no— no—"

He paused, his speech stumbling, shifting his great weight from one foot to another. Appealingly, his face quite red, he turned on Corley in the manner of a pleading child:

"Wa'n't—wa'n't there *suthin'* t' give y' a clew? Ain't there jest a *speck* o' news y' c'n give me t' go by?"

Ronald Corley, his lean, alert face grave, was presumably trying to think.

"Not a thing, not a thing," he presently said. "That is," he added with a laugh and a wave of his hand toward the great living room, "not a thing unless you count a couple of fairly expensive fishing reels this chap took a fancy to, I suppose. Yes, maybe he *was* a brother of the rod and reel, at that, for I also missed two or three tandem salmon spoons. Still, I don't see how that helps. No marks or prints on the tackle cabinet, either. Oh, he probably just saw the stuff as he passed and reached in and helped—"

But Whitcher Bemis, with what amounted to a shout of joy, had broken in.

"I knowed it—by Judas Priest, but I *knowed* it," he chortled. "Yes, sirree, *Bob*, I've did some detectivin' in my time, I have, 'n' I ain't *never* seen no case w'ere they wa'n't *some* clew! W'y, Mr. Corley, that proves he was a *fisherman*, don't it?"

It was Mrs. Corley, with a laugh that was decidedly more friendly than her usual one, who answered:

"Heavens, Mr. Bemis, but *you're* about the most famous fisherman around here, for that matter."

"Yes," chimed in her husband, with a smile that was actually comradely, "you and poor Nick Bascomb are the only two crazy fishing bugs around here—so *that* doesn't solve the local end of it for us!"

But Whitcher Bemis had held up a hand, his eyes staring off into space as if he were in a trance, his finger and thumb auto-

matically fondling his great lip. This time, after a moment, he seemed to completely forget about the presence of a lady, letting his lip flop back with a smack that was literally startling.

"Jest a minute, jest a minute," he drawled, his big eyes narrowing with a cunning gleam. "Wa'n't Nick one o' the boys, three-four year back w'en y' builded this place, t' do some o' the fittin' o' th' logs together?"

"Oh, come, Bemis," disagreed the Boston man. "I hardly think poor Bascomb, even with all his worthlessness, would—"

"Mister Man," interrupted the sheriff, his face and his voice intense, "I'm a-tellin' y' that y' don't know Nick. Y' see," he went on, with an apologetic little laugh that flushed his face quite red, "it must sound funnylike, comin' fr'm me, but—well, I been wonderin' 'bout Nick lately.

"Course, we all know he ain't never been one t' work: we all know that fishin' 'n' trappin' 'n' drinkin' hard cider's been his main objec's 'n life: 'n' folks, too, has sort o' blamed me f'r stickin' up f'r him 'n' helpin' him 'long a mite. I—lawsy, Mr. Corley, I got t' admit that mebbe, p'r'aps, they was partly right.

"Y' see, this las' winter I caught Nick doin' one-two tricks that— What I'm gettin' at, anyways, is that knowin' 'bout this safe, the way he most likely did, it's jest pos'ble that poor Nick might've went crazy enough t' do this here thing!"

Whitcher finished breathlessly, as if the explanation had been hard on him, and he dragged out a generous blue bandanna and mopped his face.

"But it seems preposterous—utterly preposterous," Mrs. Corley commented firmly. "Why, he's so—so *simple!*"

"I know, dear, I know," countered her husband, who seemed to have been doing some swift and heavy thinking "but Bemis *should* know what he's talking about. Perhaps—"

"Judas Priest, Mr. Corley, I'm hopin' like sin I'm wrong, y' know," broke in the sheriff, his wide eyes showing pain. A sheepish note crept into his voice, and he averted his head. "Y' see, Nick's a good fisherman, no matter w'ot else he comes t' be, 'n' good fishermen is too almighty scarce. I—"

As his words trailed off into an unintelligible mumble, it was the lady who came to the rescue:

"I'm sure you'll find you're wrong, Mr. Bemis."

But Whitcher was letting his eyes roam aimlessly around the room as he fidgeted with his ponderous lower lip—and once more he forgot the proximity of one of the gentler sex, as they are still called in the remote Maine logging settlements.

"Tell y' w'ot, Mr. Corley. Let's me 'n' you chug on over t' see Nick."

"Looks as if I'm under your orders, sheriff—come ahead," agreed the city man, genially.

IV

DOWN at the dock, before stepping into the square-sterned canoe, Whitcher displayed some more of what Corley looked upon as his aimless conversation. Almost covetously, it is true, he gazed into the big boathouse adjoining the wharf, where the opened doors showed several motor boats, some rowboats, a few canoes, that had been put up for the winter the previous fall.

"Gosh," he mused, "cal'late 't must be great t' be rich, all right, Mr. Corley. Judas Priest, but that big speed boat's a humdinger, ain't she? 'Member w'en y' had her doin' thutty 'r better, take it there last summer. Wouldn' mind ownin' me one o' them hell-goers, some day."

Corley, who presumably had decided to continue along in his pleasant mood, smiled ruefully:

"Damned expensive buying gas for those babies, though, I can warn you."

Whitcher, nursing his lip, blinked solemnly and admitted with a flush that he hadn't thought of that side of it. He then clambered awkwardly into the sponson-sided craft with the outboard motor, and almost upset this canoe that was guaranteed to be non-capsizable. He chuckled amusedly.

"Clumsy cutter, I be, like th' boys tell me. Lawsy," he added with a deeper laugh,

"lucky it wa'n't that tricky red devil in there, ain't it? 'Member the time I seen y' topple over in her w'en y' had a fr'en' out trollin'? She's the durndest canoe!"

He pointed to a light, fifteen foot specimen that was on a rack in the boathouse—a canoe that was notoriously tippy. Corley, too, as he started the outboard motor, looked at the craft in question and smiled.

"You're right, she's a fidgety thing. You don't notice *me* touching her any more. Sell her to you, Bemis," he ended, jokingly.

"Not t' me, y' won't," the sheriff assured him, as the motor pushed them out far across the lake.

During the ride over, Whitcher went back to his favorite topic. He pointed out spots where he had taken salmon of note, where he had battled with unusually big bass, where he had captured giant pickerel when fishing through the ice. The ramshackle old farm buildings hove into sight, in perhaps twenty minutes.

The house was paintless, the clapboards were warped and rotted, few of the windows retained their panes, yet Nick Bascomb had doggedly hung on here although he might have sold his water front for a choice sum to some of the "summer sports" who were more and more coming to the region. It was choice shore frontage he possessed, with woods and deep water at one end and a strip of sandy, clayey beach at the other.

He had always insisted, though, that all the money in the world wouldn't buy it from him. He liked the view that all the Bascombs had enjoyed for over a hundred and fifty years; he was close to the best salmon grounds; behind him, too, there was unsurpassable partridge cover. What more, he had frequently said, could a man ask? And Whitcher, for one, could not tell him.

"'F Nick done it he'll own up right quick, w'en I talk t' him," said the sheriff, as Corley brought the canoe to a halt at the massive old log that served as a wharf.

"Well, let's see what he has to say," said Corley, stepping out. "Remember, Bemis, I've warned you that I think you're on a ridiculous fool's errand. Why poor old Bascomb—"

He broke off suddenly, snapping his fingers as a frown of annoyance creased his forehead.

"Hang it, but I've just remembered. Nick isn't even here, at that. I met him out on the lake late yesterday afternoon, and he told me that he was starting up to Old Baldface this morning for a couple of days or so of trout fishing! I guess *that* surely proves you're on the wrong track, Bemis," he added with a smile.

"Gosh, gosh," droned Whitcher dully, his eyes wide, "sure looks like I am, don't it?"

He stood there for a moment, nursing at his lip, apparently shocked and puzzled. They were standing in the ill-kept path leading up from the water up to what was left of the ancestral dwelling of the Bascombs—and suddenly Ronald Corley bit his fingers into his companion's arm and pointed down into the tall grass with his other hand as a hoarse cry broke from his throat:

"Look, Bemis! Great God, man, look at that!"

Slowly, wonderingly, Whitcher's wide, startled eyes followed the pointing hand—followed it to a spot perhaps a couple of yards away, where something glittered in the tall grass.

"One of my missing salmon spoons," Corley was saying in a dry whisper. "I—Lord—it seems incredible—madly incredible But—but I could tell it anywhere; I have them made to order, according to my own design. I—gad, man, it almost looks as if you were right, after all. I begin to see. I suppose that business of mentioning his fishing trip was all—oh, was all told for an alibi. He must have dropped that spoon, the poor idiot, when—"

"W'ot did I tell y'—w'ot did I tell y'?"

Whitcher Bemis was almost gleeful, and his big, round blue eyes were nearly popping from his head.

"Course," he went on, "I'm right sorry 'bout Nick doin' this, but I guess w'en I git them jewels back fr'm him y'll prob'ly be kind enough t' go easy on him. Oh, lemme talk t' him, mebbe, 'n' jest keep it 'mong ourselves—*I* don't want that reward, gosh knows. I'm plumb glad, hows'ever, I *was*

right. I'm tellin' 'tain't on'y 'n *Boston* y' see real detectivin, by Judas Priest," he ended exultantly.

Corley now clapped the sheriff on the shoulder. He spoke admiringly:

"Yes, I've got to give you credit, Bemis. And—well, if you can get the necklace and rings back from Bascomb, and throw a good scare into him, I don't suppose either Mrs. Corley or myself would insist on prosecuting."

"Thanks," nodded Whitcher. Then, with a very slow and very long wink, and a very droll smile, he drawled: "Cal'late it's 'bout time I was gettin' m'self t' the stage f'r that trip t' Boston, ain't it?"

"Eh?" gasped the other, apparently not understanding. "I thought you were going to get hold of Bascomb!"

Whitcher Bemis, in reply, winked the other eye—winked it just as slowly and lengthily. His drawl was quite as droll as before:

"Said I was goin' t' Boston 'fore the boys 't th' store, didn't I? Look funny 'f I don't, specially after engagin' a seat on the stage. Nick Bascomb, all right, has gone over Baldface way, 'n' it strikes me that mebbe—*mebbe,* see—a man c'd git offen that there East Chatham stage 'n' mosey over to'ards that brook I reckon I know he means t' fish.

"'Nother thing 'bout did a man do it thataway: He'd be goin' in fr'm a diff'ren' side, 'n' folks mightn' be so li'ble t' warn Nick that anyone was trailin' after him. Got a heap o' fr'en's up in that Baldface country, Nick has—that is, every one that's scattered up in them hills is a fr'en'. All them things bein' so, seems t' me was y' t' keep w'ot we know quiet f'r two-three days, 'n' was I t' go t' Boston, we'd—"

"Whitcher Bemis, you're a great man," broke in Corley.

V

IT was just two days later that Whitcher Bemis alighted from the East Chatham stage. Chet and Boyce were on hand at the post office, and these slick young squirts lost no time whatsoever in opening up their usual barrage.

"Well, sheriff," grinned Boyce, "I reckon y' prob'ly was interviewin' them p'lice in Boston 'bout learnin' methods t' solve this here Corley rob'ry, eh?"

"Shucks, Boyce," frowned Chet, as he expertly spat with graceful nonchalance, "y' seem t' fergit Whitcher was too plumb busy a buyin' phantom minners."

Whitcher, ignoring these remarks, began to fuss with the straps and locks on his battered rattan suitcase. He paid no attention, either, to the scornful grunts of the pair of most recent voters who had made a point of being present. He managed to open his frayed valise, before long, and bring out a cardboard box. From it, he hurriedly and clumsily extracted several salmon lures. Squatting down, he proudly spread them out on the porch for inspection.

"W'ot I call great bait, Del," he eagerly volunteered. "Take that there balance, now, them Hardy people puts in their minners. Makes all th' dif'runce—"

He expounded a veritable thesis, for the next ten minutes, on the relative values of various brands of salmon lures—until he suddenly stopped his harangue, somewhat abruptly, in the midst of a sentence. His eyes widened, as he halted, and his right thumb and index finger went to caressing his nether lip, and he explained his reason for interrupting himself:

"Judas Priest, Del, but I clean wen' 'n' f'rgot 'bout that Corley rob'ry! Gosh, got 'mportant news f'r him, I have. Ring him on the tel'phone 'n' ask him t' come 'long down, will y', Del? Got plenty o' power boats, he has, 'n' mebbe he won't mind putt-puttin' t' see a feller. Say I got clews—oh, real 'n' reg'lar *detective* clews!"

Del went to do his bidding with a sigh and a shake of his head, doubtlessly wondering what it was all about. Chet and Boyce, exchanging looks, intimated what a pity it was to have things in charge of such an apparent dolt. Jim and Lige, the two most recent settlers, openly snorted their antagonism, also muttering about how they would handle their next ballot. But Whitcher Bemis, placidly surveying his phanthom minnows, sat there on the steps as if he had not a care in the world.

It was not long before Ronald Corley came into view, this time in one of his speed boats—a mahogany and brass trimmed affair that was cleaving the water in a manner beautiful to behold. The Boston man, making a good landing, stepped onto the dock and spoke to Whitcher with a geniality that surprised the knot of loungers:

"Well, sheriff, what's the big news?"

Bemis opened his eyes wide, his gaze becoming aimless. He fidgeted uncomfortably on his feet, as if his "store" shoes and clothes irked him; he went to solacing himself, then, with that inevitable nursing of his lip—only this time he let it go back softly, as if loath to release it. Ponderously, he winked one eye—his left—and drawled out:

"Got—got w'ot I went after, Mr. Corley!"

The city man, as if taking these words as a sign that he might come out in the open with their plans, licked hastily at a dry lip and spoke anxiously:

"Then you got him? You found the stuff on him?"

"Didn't I say I'd got w'ot I'd went after?" answered Whitcher, as if hurt because he thought the other did not believe him.

Ronald Corley, at that, waved an arm with a triumphant gesture as he turned to the others on the porch.

"Yes, boys," he said, "I've been having Whitcher give me a hand at some detective work, concerning that stolen jewelry. Nick Bascomb took it—traced him through a salmon spoon he stupidly dropped. Seems as if he couldn't resist the temptation to pilfer a reel or two and some lures, even though he'd successfully managed to grab a necklace and rings worth over forty thousand. That's the way it is, though," he ended, with a superior little chuckle; "a crook always gives himself away because he insists on fooling around with some unimportant thing!"

"W'ot I allus claimed m'self, Mr. Corley—*'xac'ly* w'ot I allus claimed m'self!"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing, as he dragged out the words, put a certain something into them—as he was so well able to when necessary—that caused Ronald Corley and Chet and Boyce and every one else there to unconsciously stiffen and gaze at him expectantly.

But insted of answering their questioning looks immediately, he himself stared blankly around and took to the caressing his lip, which oddly enough, somehow seemed to increase the tension.

"Yep, Mr. Corley," repeated Whitcher, losing no time and speaking more rapidly than usual, "I allus claimed a *un*-honest human'ud allus give himself away jest by—well, by *f'rgettin'* t' 'tend t' some c'm—*c'mpar'tively un*-important detail! Detail, that's it—detail! Had a sayin', my grammy did, when I were a little shaver. Oh, one o' these here axioms, one o' these here proverbs: 'Whitcher,' she usta keep a tellin' 'n' a tellin' me, 'allus remember t' give a minute regard t' detail with a' apparent absence o' zeal!'"

Whitcher paused—and when Whitcher wanted to he could make a pause exceedingly dramatic. He used this faculty now, and he had every man breathing hard, all keyed up. Corley, too, showed distended nostrils and tightly clenched fists.

"Y' see, Mr. Corley," continued the sheriff, his voice taking on a purring quality, "th' fust thing I noticed, two days back, was a gob o' purple clay under the bow o' that red canoe in the boathouse. They's on'y one spot 'n all Cranb'ry Lake, 't so happens, w'ere they comes t' be that kind 'n' color o' clay—'n' that's right on that beach 'afore Nick Bascomb's house.

"W'y I went right on rowin' w'en y' called me, 'cause I knowed y' hadn't been *s'posed* t've had that there tricky red canoe out this spring. Yep, Mr. Corley, y' allus ought t' think o' the *bottom* o' things, 's well 's the top. Careful 'nough 'bout that latter, y' were, w'en y' paddled over the night 'fore the 'rob'ry' 'n' planted that there salmon spoon on—"

"You—you damned old fool—you damned hick dolt," broke in the Boston man ragingly. "I'll wring your—"

But Bemis had held up a hand. He was smiling—smiling, however, in that way that was disturbing, ominous.

"Shucks, no, Mr. Corley," chuckled Whitcher. "I wouldn' go f'r t' do no

threat'nin', was I you. Judas Priest, man, that clay wa'n't the on'y thing. Whole case, seems t' me, is w'ot them slick, educated detectives fr'm th city 'ud call shot plumb full o' holes. Kind o' allus *did* suspicion y' wa'n't exac'ly square. Come t' me one day three year back, w'en I seen y' land a' *on*-dersize salmon 'n' keep him 'stead o' throwin' him back!"

The sheriff hesitated again, his smile this time being very soft and taking in his entire audience.

"Y' see, I got a little axiom o' m' own, I have. Tells me, it does, that a man who'll keep a fish below size, 'r shoot game out o' season, 'r things like that, ain't somehow jest right! Outside o' that, seems 's if I can't go 'n' *help* rememberin' that minute regard f'r detail' my granny tol' me 'bout.

"Happen t' notice this spring, I did, sev'ral letters come f'r y'. Had on the envelope, up in the corner, on'y *Room 1005, Bancroft Buildin', Boston, Mass.* Funny thing 'bout envelopes like that, Mr. Corley. Nine cases out o' ten, I've got teached, they come fr'm collection agencies, 'r fr'm cheap lawyers dunnin' a man in a cheap way f'r bills.

"'Nother thing, too, 'f y'd like t' know. Allus struck me 's right *on*-usual, it did, t' see Mrs. Corley wearin' them di'mon's up here t' the lake. 'Course dunno's I'm up on this here et—et'quette business, 'r 'What Ladies Wear, 'n' When' stuff, but it don't seem t' me a glitterin' necklace at a huntin' 'n' fishin' camp ain't c'rect fashion.

"On top o' that, jest 'cause a man 'pears t' have money don't make him averse t' stealin' some more w'en it can be done so simple, like he's apt t' think!"

Bemis stopped again. He took a step nearer, now, to the white-faced, frightened-eyed Corley.

"Anyways, Mr. Corley," he went on, almost briskly, "I took that stage t' East Chatham th' other day, I did—'n' I likewise took me that train t' Boston. Hunted up that there Room 1005 'n the Bancroft Buildin', 'n' found it was a c'lectin agency like I'd thought.

"T' make a long story short, seems like this here agency was dunnin' y' f'r the *one* bill y' should 'a' paid. Yep, Mr. Corley, they was dunnin' y' f'r that imitation necklace y'd had made, a couple o' year back, as a dooplicate f'r the one s'posed t' be stole. Did more investigatin' 'bout y'r pers'nal affairs, after that, 'n'—"

"*Damn your soul to hell!*"

There was venom in the words, but Whitcher Bemis waved them away casually.

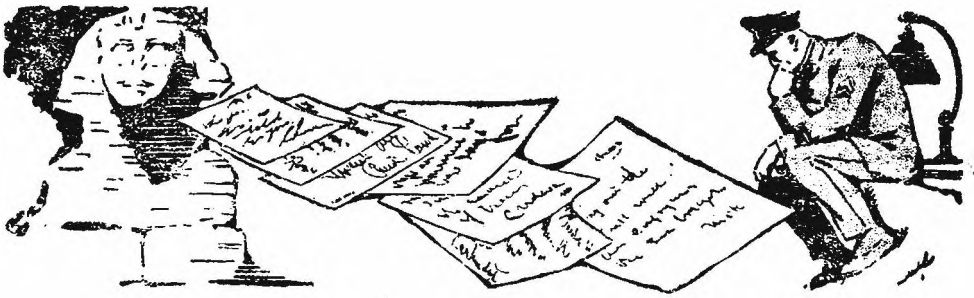
"Lawsy, no, don't cuss *me*," chuckled the sheriff. "Plenty o' cussin' t' do, y'll have, w'en the East Chatham Mutual people begin suin' y' f'r attempted fraud, 'n' when Nick Bascomb mos' prob'ly 'll take my advice 'n' likewise sue f'r def'mation o' character! Me? Judas Priest, no, Mr. Corley, *I* ain't got nothin' t' do with it all fr'm now on. Got w'ot I wanted, I did. Leastways, I *cal'late* I did!"

Whitcher stopped, his eyes going wide and his thumb and index finger going to his lip. His wandering gaze sought out the men called Jim and Lige—the men who had vowed they would never again cast a ballot for a crazy man.

"Jest lookin' f'r two votes, I were—two votes I want t' show I'm worthy o' keepin' year after year. Ain't much, it may not seem, but I like me this sheriff job, I do, 'n' two votes is two—"

"Them two votes 'll dumb soon be four votes," broke in Lige, "'n' 'twon't be long 'fore them four 'll be seven. Got a boy each 'll be o' age next 'lection, we have, 'n' we got three more young uns between us a-growin' right along!"

"Do m' best t' give 'em 'n' you all the protection I c'n, 'n the years t' come," said Whitcher Bemis gravely, as Chet and Boyce slunk away, and as Ronald Corley stepped into his speed boat.



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

HERE'S A PRIZE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT'S BEEN WORTH YOUR WAITING FOR—AND A HELPFUL EXAMPLE "TO LIMBER YOU UP"

"A *PRIZE for every solver!*" So read last week's announcement; and here is the promised contest.

Through the courtesy of The National Puzzlers' League we are enabled to offer our readers a contest at crypt solving, any one being eligible to compete except members of the aforementioned organization.

Just what is meant by "crypt" is explained elsewhere in this department. Three select specimens of this type of cipher, however, are offered in this contest.

An entry to the contest shall consist of the solutions to any one or two of the crypts. Solutions to all three are not required, nor would they afford the contestant any advantage.

To each of the three correct entries accompanied by the best letter expressing the solver's opinion of this particular type of cipher will be awarded a copy of "Real Puzzles," the league handbook; the three books being presented respectively by The National Puzzlers' League, The Norman, Remington Company, publishers, and FLYNN'S WEEKLY.

Every other correct entry will be awarded a full year's subscription to *The Enigma*, a magazine for puzzlers, published by the league.

All entries must be mailed not later than three weeks from the date of this issue to Mr. John Q. Boyer, 2034 North Fulton Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland, who, as editor in chief of *Real Puzzles*, will act as judge. The solutions to the crypts and the full list of winners will be published in early issues of this magazine.

Here are the three crypts. And remember—

"*A prize for every solver!*"

CRYPT No. 1 (Rev. A. L. Smith, Mildred, Pennsylvania).

Imsjtc, kdjnfea ioghnfle, ehbdjmpu denpj, skmp ioscdlq ibdrackbdhafr lcghae qaboggflk hcbbafr bacqage.

CRYPT No. 2 (Charles N. Crowder, Baltimore, Maryland).

Rpqckb jgvqvbxkjq jgxqxdpv ngxwfwp hkzqzmx, kzdjq wkscqcmdf, dvqxkfm gjmz bdwfxgz vdrjwkzs djxkbgq wkltmtx.

CRYPT No. 3 (H. B. McPherrin, Denver, Colorado).

Redmagic Handup htsm, dblp lgsh, lsbkiyn upety; isgkr fehc, ycosn mbdf "Gdusn Ypostum" porabf ptsfgi; eako fnrc, lbhc.

To assist those who may not know this type of cipher-puzzle it may be said that the "crypt"—short for *cryptogram*—uses a simple literal substitutional alphabet: that is, an alphabet where a given message letter is represented at every occurrence by one certain cipher letter; any given cipher letter, conversely, fixedly signifying but one certain message letter.

The message or solution of a crypt must

be in grammatical English, as a general rule without abbreviations, and should contain about ninety letters. To render analysis more difficult, frequently used letters, letter combinations, and words, are avoided as much as possible in preparing the message. The crypt must observe the normal word divisions, punctuation, and capitalization of the original message.

Here is an interesting crypt by "Osaple," with its solution, taken from *The Enigma* for September, 1925:

Solution: Shipwreck victims
Crypt: Hydraulic bdizdph

clutching hatchway swam landward;
ifgziydke ysziyasx hasp fskmasum;

built flimsy, impromptu shanty
tgdfz ofdphx, dprunprzg hyskzx

midst thick upgrowth.
pdmhz zydic greunazy.

The letters of the crypt alphabet may take on any desired arrangement, excepting that it does not seem usual to use any letter for its own symbol. The following alphabet was employed here. The substitutes for J-Q-X-Z are not given, these letters not having been used in the message.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
S	T	I	M	L	O	E	Y	D	-	C	F	P

N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
K	N	R	-	U	H	Z	G	B	A	-	X	-

This crypt may be taken as a very mild example as regards the employment of unusual words. Some crypters do not hesitate to use whole strings of such words as: sjambok, umquhile, pterodactyl, syzygy; in short, any words that can be found in any of the standard reference works.

Some of the simpler crypts are thus, to all purposes, only simple substitution ciphers. From one viewpoint, however, the most virulent of the species are practically double ciphers, since their solutions are often expressed in such extraordinary English as almost to be cryptograms in themselves.

To assist our readers along the rugged path toward the solutions of the prize crypts we are appending, in cipher No. 5, a somewhat ordinarily worded example for practice.

Remember, solutions to the prize crypts Nos. 1, 2, 3 must be sent to Mr. Boyer.

But the answer to No. 5 should be mailed to this department. Also, whether you solve it or not, we would appreciate your opinion of this type of cipher. And if you think others would enjoy solving this sort you might send along a sample for publication in these pages.

CIPHER No. 5.

Jav qywxuafh eoyqh vhyw oarlj rpw fyuxu ywlrco waech kgpoul upeglhq dwhj lgwc swcfiopve iwpqeh qwyku uoakoj vpeg.

The answer to last week's No. 3 is: "Nothing so difficult but may be won by industry." This cipher was based on the touch system of typewriting, the substitute for a given letter being the character in the same key bank printed by the same finger and position of the opposite hand. The alphabet is thus one of coupled pairs, Q=P, P=Q, W=O, O=W, and so on, as shown below, where the typewriter arrangement is clearly evident:

Q	W	E	R	T	A	S	D	F	G	Z	X	C	V	B
P	O	I	U	Y	:	L	K	J	H	¼	.	?	M	N

Cipher No. 4 was based on the familiar three-bank keyboard, the substitute for a given letter being the character printed by the same key with the figure shift depressed. The solution:

"Typewriters furnish us several easy methods of sending cipher messages, as numerous ingenious schemes of substitution alphabets are readily devised. For instance, these queer characters are quickly written using the well known touch system and shift key."

The time limit for prize cipher No. 1 in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for March 5 expires with the date of this issue. The answer will be published in two weeks.

At this point we wish to correct the impression possibly erroneously conveyed in previous prize announcements that any factor other than merit would influence the judges' decisions.

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4th Prize	50
5th to 8th Prizes ($25 each)	100

Here's fun for every member of the family. This picture needs a title. Perhaps chewing Black Jack and enjoying its good old licorice flavor, although not a condition of this contest, will help you to find the winning title that fully expresses the story this picture tells. Everybody residing in the United States or Canada is eligible except employees of the manufacturers of Black Jack Chewing Gum.

• RULES •

1: Each entry must contain a title suggestion in 10 words or less and the name and address of the sender. 2: Contestants may submit as many answers as they wish. In sending in suggested titles white paper or the reverse side of Black Jack wrappers may be used. 3: All entries for this contest must be sent to "Black Jack Titles", Dept. 1, American Chicle Company, Long Island City, New York, and must be in before midnight, May 25th, 1927. Winners to be announced as soon thereafter as possible. 4: Each entry must be sent first class mail, postage prepaid. 5: Originality of thought, cleverness of idea, and clearness of expression and neatness will count. 6: The judges will be a committee appointed by the makers of Black Jack and their decisions will be final. If there are ties, each tying contestant will be awarded the prize tied for.

Study the picture. Think of Black Jack's delicious licorice flavor. Then send in your title or titles on plain white paper the size of a Black Jack wrapper (2¾x3) or on a Black Jack wrapper. Contest closes at midnight, May 25th, 1927.