FLYNN'S WEEKLY

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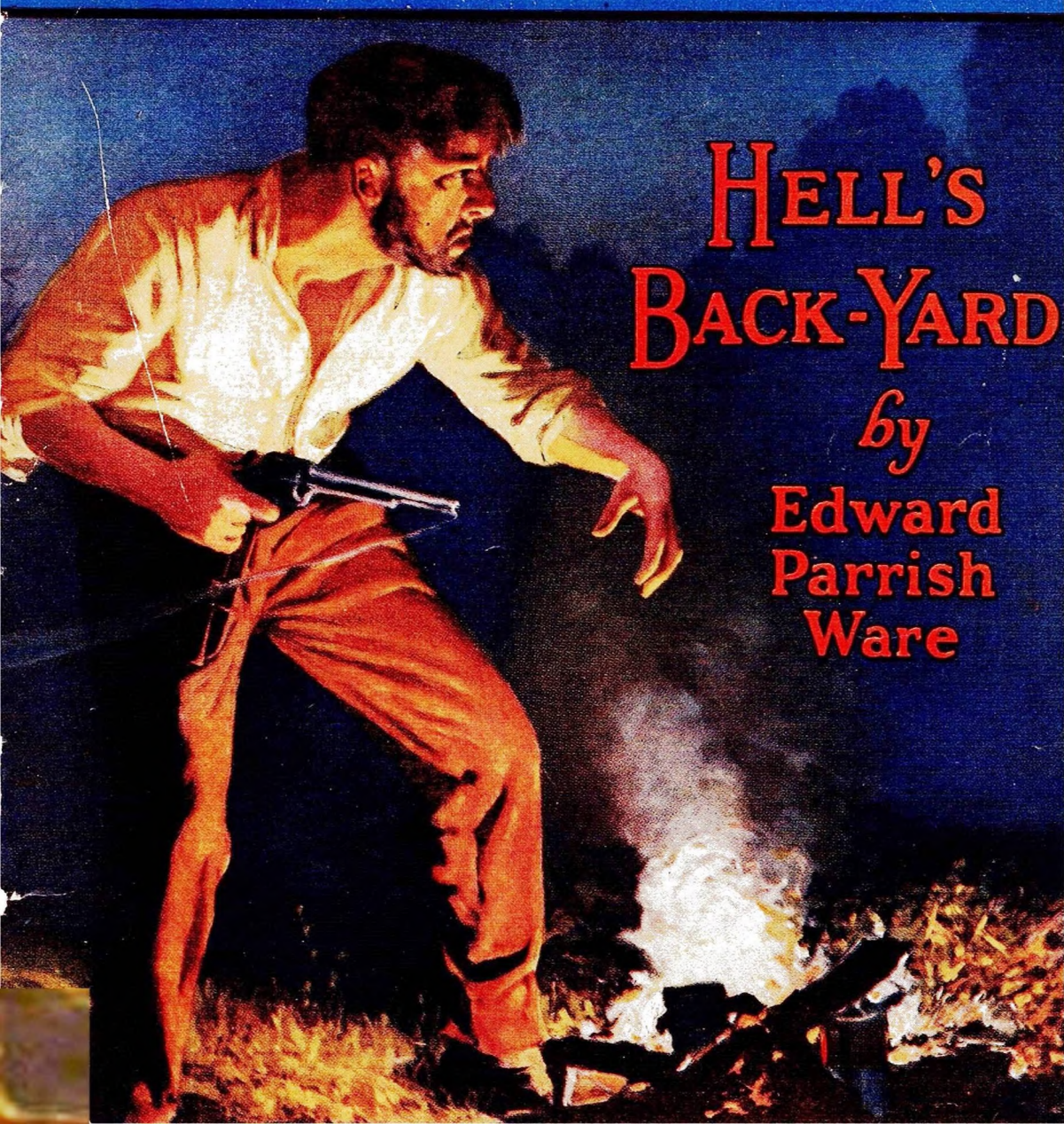

HELL'S BACK-YARD

by
Edward
Parrish
Ware

FLYNN'S WEEKLY

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

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VOLUME XXII SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 1927 NUMBER 6

SOURCE MATERIAL

NEXT week FLYNN'S WEEKLY is going to be featured by Part One of "Bloody Williamson," by Don H. Thompson.

Here is a typical FLYNN'S story; the type of story that is peculiar to FLYNN'S, that you can't find anywhere but in FLYNN'S WEEKLY.

Don H. Thompson went down into Williamson County, Illinois, and gathered first-hand the data that makes up this gripping document. What it contains is a matter of record, heightened and colored by the observations of an eyewitness.

History has been made in Williamson County in the last few years. As long as the United States have existed, there has been nothing anywhere comparable to the Williamson scene.

Much that has happened has not been a credit to its actors nor to its setting. But it has happened. It's an unusual story—and it's a FLYNN'S story.

Williamson County, Illinois, in the United States of America, has been in the past few years the locale of one of the most amazing dramas in civilization. Generations and generations of students of the future are going to find it so significant that it cannot escape study.

And when they want source material, accurate and complete, they are going to turn back in the files to the issues of April 2 and April 9 of FLYNN'S WEEKLY.

William J. Flynn

I had watched the cook eying a tall, filthy bum—

HELL'S BACKYARD

By Edward Parrish Ware

BLINKEY, NOW A PICTURE OF SATAN 'AT HIS WORST, WHEELED, AND I SAW A KNIFE FLASH. NOSEY CONNORS HAD TIME FOR ONLY A STRANGLED CRY—

CHAPTER I

BIG JOE DROPS IN

I HAVE said before, and I repeat: The sleuth who persists in going around with his holster hitched forward, and his fingers, itching with desire, caressing the butt of his gun, does not last long. Some vengeful gangster bumps him off, or his chief drops him on the skids.

That applies to the regular cop, and even more rigidly to the private agent. Never, since I founded and began operating the Kaw Valley Detective Bureau, have I kept an operative one minute after he betrayed a tendency to throw his gun upon any and all occasions where gun-throwing could possibly be done and got away with.

I assert that this business of detecting crime and tracing criminals is better done with the head than the gun—and I invite proof to the contrary.

I'm stressing this antigun attitude of mine because I want it clearly understood. I am, you might say, presenting my alibi in advance. For, in the meanderings of the case I now have in mind, it was on the cards that I was to be picked up bodily, as it were, and flung into the middle of some of the fastest gun-scrapping it has ever been my lot to experience.

Might not such as that be expected to happen in hell's back yard?

I plead, in advance, the circumstance of location, and dire necessity, for deviating from my antigun-throwing rule upon that occasion.

It was Big Joe Murphy who sent his

—and I was not unprepared for what happened

card in to me in Kansas City that day, else I might not have gone prowling in the back yard heretofore alluded to. Joe Murphy, however—well, if you were around Kansas City in the good days about ten years ago, you'll recall the big Irisher who directed traffic at the intersection of Twelfth Street and Grand Avenue.

That Irisher was Big Joe Murphy. He quit the force, though, went to Oklahoma, and prospered most gratifyingly. Then, all at once, the prosperity began to fade—at least, to give notice of fading—and Murphy took train for Kansas City.

So, having been a good pal of Joe's, I couldn't turn the job down. It was out of town, but the pay offered made my eyes bulge—and, as I have said, Big Joe was a mighty good friend of mine.

"Tug," said Joe, wasting no time in a preamble, "I'm in a hell of a fix—and maybe ye can get me out!"

"Joe," I replied, looking his huge bulk over and noting that he filled my office chair and overflowed on the sides, "tell me how!"

"I'm afther wantin' to be told how, that's why I come to ye, lad!" he exclaimed, wiping his red, perspiring, mournful countenance with a handkerchief. "Would I be comin' to ye, or to anny wan else whativer, if I knew how? Would I not be afther doing that little thing for meself? I'm askin' ye!"

"I see the fine Celtic logic of that, Joe," I apologized. "So I'll amend my answer to read: Tell your Uncle Fuller your trouble."

"Ye'll be knowin', I'm thinkin', that I wint to Oklahoma whin I honored th' request av th' chief that time, and quit th' force," Joe began. "At anny rate, so I did. I'd saved a bit of salary—I'd wink whin I spring that one, Tug, only I don't feel like doin' it—and I wint into th' dirt-movin' business. I gyppoed for awhile, meanin' I took subcontracts—"

"Never mind the explanations," I interrupted. "It so happens that I've slung 'a long-line' myself, back in the drear, dead days. Go right on, and don't stop to interpret."

"I'll do that. I made money, lad—a lot of it. Luck broke for me from th' start. Pretty soon I was in shape to handle a big contract for meself. That made me still more money. To-day, the J. Murphy Construction Company is somethin' av an institootion in Oklahoma—also, Texas, Arkansas, and elsewhere.

"Ten months ago, come July next, the Oklahoma and Southern Railroad Company let contracts for constructin' th' roadbed for a fifty-mile branch line. They let it in two sections. Wan begins at Red Rock, on their main line, and extends twinty-five miles east across th' hill's an' hollows which constitoot that part av Oklahoma, to end at Sand Creek. Th' second twinty-five miles begins east av Sand Creek and runs west to it. I got th' first section.

"Now—an' pay attintion to this, Tug me lad—th' company wanted some fast work done on this branch line dump, so they ups an' offers a bonus av fifty thousand dollars for th' contractor who got his section finished first—specifyin' a time limit, av coorse.

"For th' first twinty miles everythin' run along smooth enough—smooth, annyhow, as anny dirt-movin' outfit ever moves. I took an' kept a good lead on Tony Malvern, which got th' contract for th' second section. Thin things begun to happen.

"Accidents—that's what I minded they was at th' first. Me stable-tent at me number one camp caught fire wan night—a night of high wind, it was—an' I lost two hundred head av good work-mules, all their gear, a couple thousand dollars' worth of feed, an' a lot av other stuff which I can't recall right now. I had to outfit that camp all new. A week later, me powder-shack was blowed plumb to hell, loosin' me another thousand cold, besides killin' two of me men who happened to be comin' past th' place from me number two camp at th' moment.

"Ye'd think, lad, that that would be enough bad luck to happen in wan week. It was—so far as luck was in it. For I know now that luck played no part in thim things at all! Th' very nixt night, about two in th' mornin', a hundred yards of finished dump was blowed up on me. A hundreds yards, mind ye! Clean loss!"

Joe ended his tale of woe there for a moment, and I saw his big face grow hard, and when he raised his eyes to me again there was a glint of steel in them.

"Thin, two nights ago, murder was done," he went on. "Jimmie Doyle, me gineral foreman—th' best dirt man that iver laid a pickhandle over th' head of a fightin' skinner—was knifed in th' back! Damn th' bloody divils that done it! Killed on th' dump, not wan hundred yards from camp! Lad, I'd rather lost me whole outfit, me contract, almost me own life, than had him go that way! As fine a lad as iver walked a dump, was Jimmie Doyle!"

The big man's frame shook, and the look in his eyes was pitiful—though the grief in them was well tempered with rage.

"Of course, you would, Joe," I told him soothingly. "What was the idea for killing Doyle? It's easy to see that Malvern is trying to hold you back, so he can win that bonus. But, in just what way would—"

"What way!" Joe blazed. "Man, had ye known Jimmie Doyle, little need would ye have to ask that question! Jimmie could get hands, and keep 'em! He could get more good work out av twinty men than anny other boss in Oklahoma could out av fifty! He was a dirt mover from th' ground up! Why, Tug me lad, Jimmie Doyle was th' mainspring of th' whole works! That's why th' murderin' divils got him!"

I nodded, and rage began to tincture my thoughts. Killing a man because he was a good man! A first-class craftsman—loyal and square!

"But couldn't you protect yourself, Joe?" I asked. "Couldn't you have placed the work under guard, and avoided this mischief?"

"Hell! Do ye think I didn't do that same? Av coorse, I did! An' what did it get me? Nothin' at all, at all! How guard aginst a thing that ye can't localize? Tell me that, will ye? All th' approaches to me camps, as well as th' dump itself, has bin watched close—an' th' diviltry has happened just th' same. As for th' county and State officers—but I needn't say anythin' more. Ye'll be knowin' about thim kind yerself!"

"And it's your idea that I can go down there and get the goods on whoever is causing your trouble, eh?" I inquired.

"Exactly. It might be that ye'll be able to sthop it an' save th' day for me," Joe said. "But, more thin all that, I want ye to find th' murderin' divils that boomped

off poor Jimmie Doyle—an' thin lave 'em to me! Understhand, Tug—lave 'em to th' two hands of me!"

Joe got up, his big fists clenched, eyes blazing. Grief was gone, and animal rage held him.

I shook my head negatively. "I'll take the job, Joe," I told him. "But when, and if, I lay Doyle's killer by the heels, he'll have to go the law route. No violence on your part—none at all—much as I'd like to back you in such a play. Do you agree to that?"

Joe was silent for a long moment, brooding eyes on the rug. Then he looked up and nodded.

"Have it your way, Tug," he said. "Ye're right, av coorse—but, God above, lad, ye niver knew Jimmie Doyle!"

CHAPTER II

INNOCENT-LOOKING, BUT—

SENT Joe away feeling a bit better, and called Jim Steel, my chief assistant, into the office.

"Jim," I said, by way of greeting, "what do you know about hell?"

Steel looked me over, asked how long I'd been feeling that way, and offered to get a doctor.

"Because," I went on, motioning him to a chair, "I'm going to offer you a chance to brush up on just that locality—or worse. You will join Big Joe Murphy, who just went out, and whom you know very well, at Union Station in one hour. You will accompany Joe to his camp in eastern Oklahoma, and, arriving there, will pose as a detective—"

"Huh?" Steel broke in. "Let me get that again. Pose?"

"Exactly. Let it be widely known that you are down there to detect. Go about it in the regulation fiction-book manner—but don't do any detecting. I mean by that, don't yield to any urge to go out on trails which will take you away from camp after night has fallen. I'm not kidding you, Jim—I'm in dead earnest. After dark, keep close. I take it you think a lot of Jim Steel, and want to preserve him in the service of society as long as possible. Therefore, don't be tempted to do more than pose, as I have instructed."

I related the circumstances which brought Joe to me, pointing out that the gang after him was absolutely ruthless; that they would get him, Steel, the first opportunity, and think no more of it than they would of killing a crippled mule.

"By posing in camp," I explained, "you will be protecting me, who shall be posing as something else, at the same time. Above all, keep an eye on Big Joe, and if he takes a notion to start any investigating on his own hook, knock him down and hog-tie him.

"He's in greater danger, right now, than he ever has been before in his life—but he doesn't know it, else doesn't give a damn. Watch him. You'll hear from me, when I'm ready. Ever have anything to do with mule skinners?"

"No," Jim replied. "Though I've crossed up with a few of the breed here in Kansas City, when they've been in to blow their stakes. That's about all."

"Humph! Well, you'll be a lot wiser, after a few days. I remember what an old timer told me down in Texas, a good while ago, before I quit chasing cows for a living. I was about to roll my bed and light out for other parts, and he took occasion to offer me a bit of advice. 'Lad, keep away from th' skinner camps,' he told me. 'A big camp, one where mebbe four, five hundred men is hired, ain't exactly hell—it's a few yards farther on. It's hell's back yard.'

"I failed to take his advice, and I learned that he'd expressed it well: Hell's back yard. So that's where you're headed for now, Jim—hell's back yard. Draw from the cashier as you pass out. Notify friends and relatives, if any, where you've banked your savings, and what lawyer has your will. I'll see you within a few days—I hope."

At the door Jim paused, turned and gave me a half serious, half amused, and wholly comical look. "Tug," he said, "just how much damn foolishness have you been feeding me, and just how much—"

I didn't let him finish. "Jim," I

broke in, " in all seriousness, you will, within the next few days, be among men who, as a class, are the wildest, most lawless you have ever hooked up with. Not but what there are some fairly decent, self-respecting fellows among them—but, in an overwhelming majority, the first named predominate.

" Be careful. At night, suspect your own shadow. Better yet, don't make any. Stay where there is lots of light—and don't, whatever you do, fool around the outskirts of the camp. Ask Big Joe. He knows."

" Got you!" said Jim, and departed.

Jim gone, I proceeded with my own preparations. First, I visited a second-hand clothing dealer in Fifth Street. There I secured a pair of yellow corduroy pants, somewhat worn, but by no means in a disreputable state; a pair of scuffed but serviceable shoes, a blue cotton shirt, a shiny brown coat and vest—and, lastly, the most important item of all, a high-roller Stetson hat. A hat that had seen service, and been reblocked a time or two.

At another shop I secured a razor, a bar of soap, a pocket mirror, a towel, and a big needle with some thread. Elsewhere I procured two pairs of dice—one pair square and the other as crooked as the devil himself—and a couple of decks of cards which I afterward altered to suit.

A shop which dealt in new but cheap articles of clothing supplied the balance of my outfit. There I bought a pair of cheap socks, a suit of underwear—the dingy, yellow kind which looks as though it has been washed in a muddy creek—and a couple of blue bandanna handkerchiefs.

Every item in the above list was important—so much so that I chose them with all the care of a man who realizes that his life might well depend upon the selections made.

Does that sound melodramatic? It may sound so—but it is the grim truth. For I was headed for the " jungles "—and in the jungles are many different kinds of men, and there most anything can happen.

At a drug store, operated by a very good friend of mine, I made a final purchase. An ounce bottle of white powder—innocent-looking powder. But my druggist friend took a wallop at the Harrison Anti-Narcotic Law when he sold it.

CHAPTER III

INSIDE THE GATE

WHEN I unloaded from a " rattler " at Red Rock, two days later, I looked the hobo I pretended to be. The stains and dust of freight train travel were markedly visible. With the high-roller Stetson set well down over my forehead, the brim shading my eyes after the manner of all true mule-skinners, I stood on the little wooden platform above the depot and looked the town over.

There wasn't much to see. Six frame business houses, two of them " drug stores " —the kind that made Oklahama and Kansas famous—and the other four doing business as dry goods store, grocery, restaurant, and feed store. Fifteen or twenty weathered frame dwellings lay scattered in view.

Beginning at a point just below where I stood, and stretching away through the rocky hills to the east, lay the new railway grade with its twin lines of rusty rails, rusty because as yet unused by trains, and near by stood a new water tank.

Under the tank, resting on the wide timber foundations, I could see a number of men, and toward them I made my way. Getting nearer, I recognized them for what I foresaw they would be: Mule-skinners, mukkers, and construction camp workers of various sorts. I joined them amid a complete silence.

" Murphy hirin' any hands?" I asked casually, after I had found an unoccupied stringer, sat down, and rolled a cigarette.

Nobody answered. I smoked on. Presently:

" What's th' chances for a smoke, bo?" a broken-nose skinner asked, sitting up and addressing me.

I drew out my bag and papers and tendered them—though with no great show of willingness. Rather as though I would, but didn't particularly care to. He rolled a smoke, passed the bag and papers back, took an inhale or two, and spoke:

"Outa Kay-See?"

"Uhuh."

"See Shorty Blake up there?"

"Heard he was doin' a rap for vag, out at Leeds. Don't know anything about it, myself. Bullwhip Kennedy's there, though. Him an' Johnson-bar."

"The hell, they are! Ain't seen Bull ner Johnson-bar since we worked for Joyce, over on th' Santefee double track!"

"They come in off Colter's job, over in North Kay-See."

"Colter hirin'?"

"They come an' go."

"Sure, bein' right handy to th' big town."

I got up, stretched and yawned. "How far to th' jungles?"

"Five miles down th' grade. Say, Sandy, you was askin' about Murphy hirin'. All he can get—yeah. But they ain't stayin'."

"Stomach robbers?"

"No. Chuck's good enough, an' plenty. Payin' good, too. The works is jinxed."

"Besides bein' jinxed, is it boycotted?"

"No—not yet."

"I see. Time to make a road-stake, though?"

"If you hustle. Jughead Jones is stable boss, number one camp."

"Th' hell he is. Ain't seen Jughead since—lemme see—yeah, since Peterson finished that levee job at St. Joe. Guess I'll get along down th' line. Any you fellers headed thataway?"

Silence.

"Well, so long."

After I'd got a dozen or so feet away:

"Hi, Sandy!"

"Nosey" was on his legs, following me. I waited.

"How's th' weather aroun' Kay-See?" he asked with a wink.

"Snowy—when I left."

"Blinkey Joe still peddlin'?"

"Sure. Walk down th' way a bit—I got somethin'."

Nosey took the lead, there and then. Reaching a point where the brush was thick, he fairly trotted to cover.

"God Almighty!" he gasped. "I ain't seen a flake of snow for two days! Big Joe had a gover'ment dick in here, an'—blooey! Gimme some—quick!"

A moment later:

"A-a-a-h-h-h-h! Damn! Say, bo! Hope I don't sneeze an' lose it! A-a-a-h-h-h-h! Damn! Guess I'm not goin-n-n— Es-s-sc-c-hehe-w-w w!"

He sneezed—and lost it!

Right there I made a friend. He held the next one.

"Lissen!" he said, eyes now bright and face twitching. "I'll trade you some good info, for another jolt! What say? Will you? Huh?"

"Gimme th' info, an' if it's worth it, why all right."

"Lissen! Tell Jughead you seen Nosey Conners—an' Nosey told you to look him up. Remember, say: 'Nosey told me to look you up.' Get it?"

"Sure."

"Then, if you've got guts an' wanta make some real jack—you'll do a helluva sight better than herdin' Murphy's old skins over th' dump!"

"What's th' grift?"

"I ain't tellin' nothin'! But it's strong stuff—an' damn good pay! Now—do I git it? Huh? Do I? Hurry, bo—"

He got it—and went back toward the water tank, stepping high, and talking to himself.

I picked him for a snowbird the minute I saw him. Had he given me a real steer? Likely enough. That ounce bottle of coke clinched the thing for him. Quite likely, Jughead Jones was using him for the purpose of recruiting some reliable men for a game he was playing—either for himself, or for Malvern. I'd know later, of course.

Meantime I made tracks along the grade. That bunch of coke-heads under the tank would know the minute they laid eyes on Nosey that he'd had a snort or two, and they'd want some. I didn't intend to give them any. I depended on that little phial of white powder, for which my druggist friend took a chance, to ingratiate me into bigger company than that bunch of stew-bums back there.

I paid no attention, therefore, to the chorus of yells back of me:

"Hi, Sandy! Wait a minute, will ya?"

"Hi, Sandy, old-timer! I'm going yore way!"

And other pleas of like nature. They were snow hungry.

Night was beginning to come on when I reached the vicinity of the jungles. Presently the smell of wood smoke warned me that it was near and I paused to make sure the six-gun strapped to my thigh beneath my trousers was still secure, and that I could slip my hand through the slit in my right-hand pocket and get it quick if I needed it.

I'll explain a few things, then maybe you'll more clearly understand that I might well need it.

Mule-skinners are nomads—they do no work but grade camp work, and know no home but the tents and the jungle camps. They make a "stake," go to the nearest big town, blow it for "coke" and "white-line"—the latter a mixture of alcohol, simple sirup, and water, but mostly alcohol—go back to the work, or hit up some other job, then pull the same stunt over again.

What time they are not working, they live in a camp of their own, generally located near a big grade job, and which is kept going by those who are at work. Those working contribute "stew-money" religiously, too—for they will, a bit later on, be residing in the jungles.

Casting bread upon the water so to speak.

But mule-skinners are not the only type inhabiting the jungles. A far more sinister mob gathers there at times. The yegg, the hi-jacker, the peterman, stick-up—in fine, all the dregs of crookdom sooner or later, find it convenient to hide out in some camp or other. Sometimes they work on the grade, for there is no better place to lose oneself than in a big skinner camp, or in the jungle camps thereabouts.

Many a bottle of nitroglycerine—"soup"—is sweated from sticks of dynamite in jungle camps, to later on be used in cracking a box in some near-by town or, perhaps, a distant city. Sometimes even a really big gun—top-notch crook—avails himself of the protection of the jungles when things are too hot for him in better haunts.

All-in-all, the grade camps, and the inevitable jungles, deserve the designation of my old Texas acquaintance—hell's back yard.

I was going into one such jungle camp presently, and in it I might run across some crook or other whom I had had dealings with in the old days on the force in Kansas City. That was the chance—and about the only chance—I was taking. It was chance enough, believe me.

So, making certain that I could make a quick draw if the hue and cry should be raised, I skidded down the side of the dump, crossed the right of way, entered the timber—and stood for a moment with the jungle camp under my eyes.

CHAPTER IV

A MAN FROM THE PAST

A COOKING fire glowed in a makeshift oven constructed of stones, in the center of a clearing; on the fire were two five-gallon cans which once had contained oil, but now did duty as mulligan pots. Numerous two-gallon sirup cans, salvaged from the grade camp's dump, contained coffee. A great heap of quart cans lay near by, and from those the diners would partake of the mulligan and the coffee.

Scattered about the edge of the clearing, among the short growth oaks, were sleeping hovels constructed with great simplicity—poles laid across forked sticks set in the ground, and covered with brush and bark. Leaves and dry grass spread under this roof served for bedding.

The jungles held about fifty men, although some of them were merely passing through—perhaps a dozen. The others were, however, temporary dwellers there. They were scattered about on the ground in groups of three and four, or singly.

Those in groups were either discussing other jobs and men they had known, shooting dice or playing cards. The "singles" mostly occupied themselves with such homely tasks as sewing on buttons, patching trousers and coats, shaving, washing out clothes, and even half-soling shoes—for

every big jungle has a more or less complete cobbler's outfit.

One bunch of six were gathered beside a distant hut. They were laughing and talking, all at once and in high-pitched tones. That meant that they had a supply of "snow" and were hitting it up. A jungle or a skinner camp without white-line and coke is a sad spectacle.

I entered camp. A few of the loungers looked me over in silence, noted that I had all the earmarks of the clan, and paid no further attention to me. Such is the way in the jungles, when men are continually coming and going. If a man looks like he belongs there, he makes himself at home with no one to question. It is home to such as he.

If he finds acquaintances, as he likely will if he's an old-timer, he consorts with them. If not, he merely waits until some one begins talking to him, then loosens up. A forward "unknown" is in high disfavor in the jungles. As for eating at the general mess, he is welcome even though broke. If, however, he has a few coins and gives the camp cook something toward the next meal, all the better.

A broke man may stay in camp and eat free for a day or two; if he shows unmistakable signs of illness from drink, too much coke, or from any other cause, he is welcome so long as it takes him to get on his feet again. If, however, the moneyless skinner is in good physical shape, he must "throw his feet"—get out and go to work—within a couple of days at the most.

My opportunity to look the gathering over and determine whether I had any acquaintances there would come at mess time; so far I had seen no familiar face.

Sitting down against a tree at one side of the camp, I took out my needle and thread and sewed a rent in my trouser leg—put there on purpose. After that was done I selected a wash bucket, went to a near-by branch, returned with it filled and sought the cook.

"What's th' chances to heat a little water?" I asked.

He looked me over, seemed satisfied, took the bucket and found a good place for it on the fire. The fire is the chief cook's own particular province, and woe to the man who takes liberties with it.

"Comin' out, or goin' in?" he asked, after the bucket was on the fire.

"Goin' in, Blinkey." The cook had an eye missing, and I knew it was safe to give him that nickname. Just as Nosey had, after glancing at my thatch, known that my moniker would be "Sandy."

"Outa Kay-See?"

"Passed through. Stayed a week and blowed in. Come from th' West—Utah."

"Uhuh. Workin' fer Cameron out there, I reckon?"

"Yeah."

"Gyppo George still walkin'-boss for Cameron?"

"Was when I left. Yeah."

"Busted, I guess?"

I grinned. To have admitted the possession of any money at all, after spending a week in Kansas City, would have been fatal. At least, it would have detracted largely from my standing as one of the craft.

"Three days on skiis," I told him. "Then th' snow dried up."

Blinkey grinned appreciatively. "It always does," he commented. "Snow plentiful in Kay-See though, I reckon, if a guy's got th' jack?"

"You can shore start a storm any day you want, old-timer," I replied, "if you got th' jack. No trouble a-tall."

"Yeah. We'll eat in a few minutes. Your water's hot."

Invited to "scoff," and dismissed in the same breath, I took my bucket and proceeded to wash up. I had passed muster with Blinkey at least, and that meant much. He was in the premier position in the jungles. He was the cook, and the cook is boss.

"Come and get it, skinners!"

The supper call came, and it was answered promptly. Each man took a couple of cans from the pile and, falling into line, walked past the cook and his helpers. After that he fell to and scoffed.

I had noticed the cook eying a tall, filthy bum with a hangdog look, and was not entirely unprepared for what happened when he presented his can. Blinkey had been

stirring the mulligan with a long oak ladle, and when the bum came opposite him he helped him to stew—with a stiff whack across the face with the hot ladle.

"Git, ye damned buzzard!" he raged. "You been warned to throw your feet half a dozen times! Git, damn ye!"

The bum dropped his cans, clapped his hands to his scalded face, and, with a yowl of pain, broke from the line. As he passed rapidly toward the timber, an eater would ever and anon cease long enough to give him a paralyzing kick. Thus was he booted clear out of camp.

He was a "jungle-buzzard." A non-worker—a parasite of the camps. For such there is no mercy in the hearts of the regulars.

I found the stew and coffee good—better than any hash-house on earth can put out. Perhaps hunger helped me to that keen appreciation, for I had purposely come to camp half starved.

To have failed to gorge, I being in good condition and not showing a bad "hang-over," would have caused comment. I ate my allotment and, at a signal from Blinkey, took on a second helping. That was a mark of favor extended to me.

I had "stood up" with Nosey and Blinkey—thanks to the hour I spent loafing around Koenig's shipping office in Kansas City the day I left. There I mixed with skinners and picked up information that had enabled me to answer questions about various camps and men. My stall about coming from the West would account for me being unknown in the Southwest. I was congratulating myself while I ate.

If the skinner-camp proper is hell's back yard, the jungle-camp is surely the back fence. There one gets all the real news of the-work camps, if he knows how to put his ear to the ground. I'd gained my first objective.

"Say, yu! Haven't I seen yu somewhere before?"

I looked up. The speaker most certainly had—but never by word or look did I admit it.

In the tall, rawboned, lean-faced individual who had so summarily interrupted my scoffing, I recognized Long Bill Leeds—a man I'd sent up in Kansas City for ten years!

CHAPTER V

THE ACID TEST

THE camp became absolutely silent. All eyes were turned in my direction. No mistaking the challenge in Long Bill Leeds's tones when he put his question to me.

I looked the speaker over from head to feet, took a bite of bread and slowly shook my head from side to side.

"I don't recollect ever havin' seen yu before, bo," I answered. "Course, yu might 'a' seen me. I been around quite a bit."

"Yeah—quite a bit!" was the sarcastic rejoinder. "Live in Kay-See when you're home, don't yu?"

"I ain't answerin' no personal questions," I replied, getting to my feet with a quick motion. I stood fully as high as Long Bill, and had at least an equal amount of brawn. "I done told yu I don't know yu. Whut yu lookin' for—trouble?"

Long Bill's eyes glinted hard into mine, and his strong jaws clamped. I saw a look of indecision flash over his face, then its lines set hard. He stepped a few paces from me, and addressed the crowd which had begun to circle round.

"If this feller ain't a Kay-See cop, then he's a twin brother!" he declared, raising his voice. "If he's a skinner, then I'm th' governor of Oklahoma—an' everybody knows I ain't!"

Silence. Then Blinkey stepped up, his single eye boring into me. "Yu answered up all right, whilst I was talkin' to yu," he said. "Sounded an' looked like a shore enough long-line man—"

"Lissen!" I broke in. "I was skinnin' jugheads when this here long lad was battin' back doors for his biscuits! Th' big stiff wants to mix with me, seein' I'm new here—an' by God, I'm plumb willin'!"

"Let 'em mix!" somebody bawled.

"Shut up, you!" Blinkey turned on the speaker like a snarling wild cat. Then, no one answering, he turned to Long Bill.

"Whut makes yu think yu know this bird, Bill?" he asked.

"Hell, I don't only think," Bill rasped. "I know! He got me a stretch down to Jeff—an' I ain't forgot it ner him!"

Bill had gone up for cracking a box in the Stock Yards district. Got ten years, and ducked from a convict farm after putting up three of them. He'd been on the dodge, and successfully, for some three years then.

"Whut yu got to say to that, Sandy?" Blinkey demanded, his face darkening and his eye glittering.

"I says that this long feller here is a teetotal damned liar!" I spat. "I don't doubt but whut he got a ten-year rap—he looks like he might of had several of 'em, and ought to have a few more in a row, but he lies when he lays 'em to me! Me a cop! Hell, I got about as much use fer a cop as a mule has fer milk-weed!"

Long Bill's face had the look of blue granite, and his eyes were twin balls of fire. Yet he held himself from violent action.

"Make him strip, fellers!" he gritted, almost choked. "Search him good an' plenty! Yu'll find somethin' on him as will prove me right—yu can lay to that!"

"Yu willin' to strip?" Blinkey demanded. "Or would yu rather be stripped?"

"I'll strip, and stand a frisk," I replied. "But if they ain't no proof on me—"

I didn't finish in words. I merely gave Long Bill a meaning look—one that the whole camp understood.

I stepped out in the center of the circle where the fire-light showed me up distinctly. My hat went to Blinkey, who searched the sweat-band carefully. My coat and vest went the same way. The contents of the pockets were tossed on the ground in a pile, so all might see.

"Here's somethin'," I said, passing a handkerchief-wrapped object to Blinkey. "I want it back, too—see?"

Blinkey stripped the handkerchief away, glanced at what it contained, started, grinned widely—then placed a nearly full bottle of coke with the rest of my things.

There was a distinct stir among the crowd. They drew nearer, and I heard considerable comment exchanged in undertones. A moment before, that gang had been ready and willing to kill me out of hand, and no questions asked. They would have done so with no compunction whatever.

They still would do so, if convinced in the end that I was what Long Bill accused me of being. But that bottle of coke, with some of it gone and which they naturally supposed I had consumed, was a great item in my favor. It was just what a skinner would be expected to have in his clothes if he had just come out of Kansas City, or any other large center, and had been lucky enough to get out of town with it—kept enough money to buy it for a getaway.

In addition, my clothes looked like I'd lived in them for a long while; they were skinner clothes, to be explicit, and the contents of the pockets were such as any man "on the road" would have. In addition, I hadn't a dime to my name.

Then, dangling my pants in his hands, Blinkey dug up the dice and cards. A close scrutiny of the cards informed him that they were strippers—crooked—and he grinned again.

"Which one of these here pairs of dice is th' ones a feller couldn't throw seven on to save his old gran'mother's life?" he quizzed.

"Th' pair in yore right hand is tops," I grunted. "But yu needn't advertise it!"

The remarkable thing is—at least, it would strike an outsider as being remarkable—that no one took any special note of the holster and gun strapped to my right leg. It was not out of place, and without doubt, there were almost as many guns in camp as there were men present. It would naturally be there.

The gun, crooked cards, crooked dice and the bottle of coke made a deep impression. The tide was beginning to turn in my favor.

"Hell! That ain't no dick! Just a plain, ordinary skinner! A coke-head, an' a crooked gambler. Maybe a gay-cat, too!"

No one expressed the above sentiments, but I knew that such were passing through their minds.

The stripping was over with—even my underwear and socks stood the test. Suppose, now, I'd overlooked a bet, and had

on a pair of silk socks, or a suit of linen underwear? I'd have got mine, there and then. And it was:

"Don't find nothin' on him but a lot of proof that he's a skinner," Blinkey announced, his one eye on the bottle of coke, while his tongue began moistening his lips. "Lotta times, Bill, we gits fooled in takin' one feller for another. Course, a dick coulda got hisself up thisaway, but not so all-fired complete, I'm thinkin'.

"A dick as has a lotta experience skinnin' jugheads might of figured in a play like this—but it ain't likely. Besides," he paused, then gave out some information, "Big Joe has got th' dick he went to Kay-See fer. Brung him back with him, an' he's at number one camp. He ain't wuth a damn to Joe, I'm hearin'. Just a hick cop, an' he won't last long. Now, I votes this feller Sandy is O. K. Whut you fellers say?"

"By God!" Long Bill yelled. "You're makin' a mistake! He's whut I says he—"

"Shut up!" came a roar from the crowd—and at that instant I did what they expected I would do. I stepped swiftly to Long Bill Leeds, and landed on his jaw.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE

WHEN my fist cracked on Long Bill's jaw he took a tumble. That didn't spell much, however, for he rolled like a ten-pin across the ground, came up standing, and rushed me with all the fury of a rabid dog. I realized that I had a man-size job on my hands—and I knew that my prestige would rise or fall, in accordance with the outcome of the battle.

"Take him, Sandy!"

"Watch him! He's strong for a shiv!" Which meant that Bill would knife me if he could. I was warned.

"Clout him on th' head, an' finish him, Bill!"

"Eat him up, Long Boy!"

Bill had his well-wishers, too.

The battle joined, and raged. I took a clout high up on the left jaw that staggered me, and the next instant got a good one to his wind. Bill grunted, wavered, came on. There was little to choose between us, thus far. We gave and took—and what we gave and what we took was powerful enough to suit fight-fans of the first water.

Once we tangled and went to the ground together, and Bill's grip on my windpipe made me see a deeper night than the moonlit one above us. I broke him away just in time, rolled from him, and staggered to my feet, just as he rushed from a crouch on the ground and swung an uppercut for my chin. I ducked, and, as he whirled past, caught him under the ear with all I had.

Long Bill plunged on, dropped on his face, his arms crumpling under his weight. He gagged, coughed, struggled manfully to rise—then gave up. There wasn't an ounce of strength left in his body—but there was still plenty of fight there.

I had friends enough then. The victor always has. Blinkey offered a can of cold water, and I drank some, and then bathed my bruises with what was left.

I ached all over. But what mattered it? No doubt there were some men in that camp who were still suspicious of me, but the majority were well satisfied that I was one of them. That's what counted with me—all that counted, just then.

But I wasn't through cementing friendship yet. There was the little bottle of coke—enough to jag up half a dozen. A few words aside with Blinkey, and I knew who to invite to my party. They were the lads who seemed to hold a peculiar sway over the jungles. I called them out.

Yes, I had to take a jolt of the stuff myself—and, wow! It was strong medicine. I don't recommend it. But my new mates had a real enjoyable time—and an empty bottle attested it. I was not sorry to see the coke go; it had served its purpose, and served it well.

Long Bill Leeds, after recovering sufficiently to do so, took himself away. He departed in the general direction of the number one camp of Murphy's, though I suspected there might be other jungles farther off toward the works, and perhaps deeper in the timber. A sort of inner-circle gathering place.

Some such place might well be there, for

I was certain that the gang that was doing Big Joe so much dirt had at least a few members scattered in the jungles. It would be much to their advantage to have them there—couldn't hardly get along without them, in fact.

Was Long Bill one of them?

I was ready to bet he was. Bill was not a first class peterman; he was just a cheap yegg, and often turned his hand at any kind of dirty work offered to him. That he would now make himself scarce I was positive, for he was wanted back in Jeff City, and he'd figure that I would turn him in.

But I hadn't seen the last of Bill Leeds —that I knew just as well as though I could lift the veil and look upon future events.

I slept well that night, in spite of my bruises and the excitement and strain of the afternoon and evening. After breakfast, in spite of Blinkey and his own particular crowd urging me to remain there for a while, I departed for camp number one. Ostensibly, I was going to work. Might do so, in fact, at that. According to what lead I struck that morning, if any at all.

I hadn't forgot Nosey Conners's tip about Jughead Jones, stable boss at number one. There was a chance I might strike just what I was looking for by talking with Jughead. He had some under-cover jobs seeking men, and those under-cover jobs might well be in connection with the dirt being done Joe. I hoped they were.

That Joe was being knifed from inside his own organization was, to my mind, very evident. That would be the best way in which to throw him, and Malvern would probably employ it.

I reckoned that Malvern had a trustworthy lieutenant in Murphy's camp—one whom Murphy also trusted, with less cause to do so. The lieutenant in Joe's employ would have subs here and there, and some of those subs would undoubtedly be keeping a watchful eye on the various jungles.

No doubt Blinkey was drawing pay from the Malvern camp. I couldn't be sure about him, of course, but he'd certainly be in a fine position to serve the cause in the jungles. He would have his eye upon most every man who came in or went out, and he was a case-hardened old sinner for true. In addition, he knew a host of skinners and construction camp workers. By all odds, if Blinkey was not on Malvern's payroll, somebody had overlooked a mighty good bet.

CHAPTER VII

I HIRE OUT FOR—WHAT?

TWO miles from the jungles I came to where a big gang was laying steel, and just before I reached them I struck their camp. A good many small tents were scattered about the site, and they were occupied mostly by women. In town they would have been alluded to as "painted women." I don't know as there was much paint in evidence on the faces I saw, but there were other and far more reliable signs which I could read.

An hour later I came to where that hundred yards of finished dump had been blown up. It had been finished, but not yet accepted by the company engineers, so it was up to Big Joe Murphy to rebuild it at his own cost. That was being done.

I did not tarry on the job there, but went on until finally, near noon, I reached camp number one. At that camp four hundred men lived. It looked like the show grounds of a huge circus, so great was the amount of canvas spread.

Below the camp countless teams of mules were crawling about on top of the dump, their drivers manning fresnols, surfacing the finished grade. Everywhere was activity.

I found my way past the huge stable-tent and back to the corral. There I found the tent of the stable boss, Jughead Jones, and after ten minutes search found the boss himself.

No better description of Jones could be given than this: He looked very much like a gaunt, gray mule—as much as a man could look. Hence his nickname of Jughead. A man about fifty, I judged.

"Well," he said curtly, "what's your trouble?"

"Figured to set in on a job, if so be there's one open," I told him.

"What's your graft?"

"Oh, I sling a long line sometimes; good stable hand, and good in a harness room."

"Uhuh. They all say they're good. I've got a job open for a good harness—"

I gave him a slow wink, and we sauntered away to a remote corner of the corral.

"Well, what you mean by that wink?" Jughead demanded, coming to a stand and elevating one foot to the bottom rail of the fence.

"Nosey Conners," I said slowly, "told me to look you up."

Silence, during which he stared off across the corral as though interested in anything else under heaven but me. Then:

"Know Nosey pretty well?"

"Yeah."

"Where at?"

"Around Oklahoma City, Kay-See, St. Joe, and a lotta other places."

He nodded. "Where you work last?"

"Utah. For Cameron."

"Know th' walking boss out there?"

"Yeah. Gyppo George."

"Where'd you stay last night?"

"In th' jungles, over toward Red Rock."

"Know Blinkey?"

"Sure I know him. We had a session last night—"

"You ain't a coke-head, are you?" he asked quickly.

"Naw! I just brought along a little bit for the boys. Hate th' damned stuff, I do!"

He nodded in a satisfied manner. "I didn't think you looked like a snowbird," he stated. "I reckon I can use you. If you work like you are told, you'll pull down five hundred for a little job which is goin' to be pulled to-morrow night. Go back to Blinkey, and tell him I said to put you on. Just say that: 'Jones said to put me on.' He'll understand. Get it?"

"I shore do. An' I'll work anywhere you put me, though I ain't got no notion what you want me to do." I put out for a feeler.

"That's the kind of men I'm looking for—them that 'll work wherever they are put, and ask no questions."

I turned suddenly at sound of footsteps behind, and beheld a squat, heavy-set man of about forty approaching across the lot. He looked like authority, and a black cigar, mark of importance in a skinner-camp, protruded from under a short black mustache.

"Another hand, Jug?" he queried, coming to a stop and sizing me up.

"Yeah, Mike—one for Blinkey."

At that the man called Mike looked at me with new interest. After a bit he nodded and, without further words, went away.

"Who's the gent?" I asked.

Jughead gave me a look full of meaning, then answered:

"He's Murphy's camp boss," he said. "You'll see him later—maybe."

Murphy's camp boss, eh?

Well, it was beginning to look like I'd struck a real lead. One that pointed toward the big gun, and no mistake!

CHAPTER VIII

"GIT THEM HANDS UP!"

I LEFT camp at once, making no attempt to get in touch with Steel or Big Joe. I felt certain that it would have been impossible for me to approach either without that fact being known. Anyhow, there was really no need at the moment for me to do so.

It was fifteen miles back to the jungles, and too much of a walk, on top of the one I'd already made, for me to cover before night. Luckily I caught a lift on a freight wagon which was going to the steel-gang camp, and at the camp I fed and loafed until dark.

Rested, I resumed the hike for the jungles. If the job I was hired for was to claim me on the following night, it behooved me to learn as much as I could about it right away.

So far, Tony Malvern's hand was hidden, in so far as bringing the skullduggery directly home to him was concerned. Perhaps he could never be touched, unless his lieutenant, whoever he might be, could be trapped and made to talk.

As for the job I was to participate in,

I had good reason to think it was in connection with a final stroke against Murphy. He was within a few miles of Sand Creek, and Malvern, in spite of the delays he had been able to cause Joe, was still several miles behind in his work. The situation demanded action, and paralyzing action at that, if Malvern was to finger that bonus.

So I hustled on, hoping to be let in on the scheme by Blinkey, and in time to circumvent it. There was a young moon that night, and my path over the cross-ties between the rails presented no difficulties. I would reach the jungles within a couple of hours, and before the gang turned in for the night.

I had been walking for an hour at a pretty fast clip, the roadbed following a rather crooked course along a valley between hills, when I concluded to rest a short while and have a smoke. A big bowlder at the side of the track looked inviting, and I sat on it and loaded a pipe.

Just as I was about to scratch a match I saw someone moving along the dump from the west—a lone man. He came on until almost opposite me, looked about him for a moment, missed me in my position on the bowlder, then plunged down the dump on the far side, crossed the right-of-way, and disappeared in the timber.

He had hardly gotten well away when a second figure appeared, halted at the same point, then followed the first into the woods. Then came a third and a fourth—all single, and all following the same path into the timber.

I waited, refraining from lighting the match, watchful. Then a fifth man appeared from down the track, and the moonlight disclosed his identity. It was Long Bill Leeds. A moment, and he too took the path through the timber.

"Something going on over there somewhere!" I assured myself. "Probably that second jungle I have been thinking about—the inner-circle gathering place."

I waited for fifteen minutes longer, and no one else came. Then I crossed the right-of-way and slipped off through the woods on the trail of Bill. Bill was a yegg, his specialty being old-fashioned safes in small towns—ones he could crack with a bit of "soup and soap," since the more modern ones in the big towns were beyond his limited skill.

It was possible that the retreat for which he and the others were then headed was a rendezvous of a private character; which he and his "mob" used. If so, it was unlikely that I would gain any information about Malvern and his plans. On the other hand, it might well be a gathering place for the gang working for Malvern. It was worth investigating, at any rate.

There was a faint footpath which I had some difficulty in following, and it led straight back between steep ridges which were clothed with post-oak and black-jack trees, the undergrowth being quite heavy. Needless to say, I moved with utmost caution, not knowing at what moment I might round a turn of the trail and find myself altogether too close to my quarry.

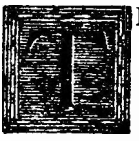
Long Bill Leeds was cagey—cagier than I had given him credit for. Quite likely he had brought up the rear of his party in order to do just what he did—hide beside the trail and make certain no one was following.

At any rate, that is just what he did.

"Git them hands up! Quick!"

CHAPTER IX

A RUNNING FIGHT



THE command came in low tones, but it was none the less menacing for that—and Bill Leeds's six-gun looked ugly in the moonlight.

I had walked into a trap!

While following the footpath I had slipped my gun out of its holster, and was carrying it in my right hand, down against my leg—but Long Bill's weapon was within three feet of my head. He had but to thumb the hammer, and I'd pass out.

Still, that was just what would happen to me anyhow. Death was awaiting me a bit farther along the path, and maybe not an instantaneous one either. Should I submit, and me with a gun in my hand?

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Bill snarled.

"Caught spying, eh, Mr. Cop Norton? Git 'em up, damn yu—"

I got one up—the right one—and with speed. So quickly, and so unexpectedly, that Bill Leeds was out before he knew his danger. His gun exploded, of course, since his thumb was holding the hammer back at the moment, but simultaneously with the report of my weapon, I dropped to the ground, and the bullet he had released lodged in the hillside beyond.

I didn't wait to examine him. A man doesn't live long after a forty-five caliber slug has passed clear through his stomach, and I had great need for hurrying. Those two gunshots would bring the rest of the crowd, and bring them in a swarm.

I started on the back track, ran perhaps a hundred feet, then stopped in full flight. A gun flashed in the darkness beyond, and a bullet hummed over my head so close I fancied I felt the heat as it passed.

I turned back, ran swiftly past the spot where Bill Leeds lay, and on between the ridges, eyes probing here and there in the hope of finding a point of easy access to the top on one side or the other.

I could, of course, have ducked into the brush, but that would have got me nowhere. I would have been hemmed in surely, I thought, and my capture assured.

Beyond me the ridges stretched, apparently without a break. They were steep, with outcroppings of ledge rock, and along the tops there was scarcely any timber. Then, on my right, I caught sight of the place I sought—a break in the ridge where it lifted in ledges clear to the top. I made for it.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

A few feet beyond the point where I must turn, somebody concealed in the brush was fanning a gun with the speed of an automatic. I felt a slug burn along my left thigh, on the outside, and another bit into my left arm. I leaped into the brush and tore my way toward the break in the hill, reached it and started up.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

The fellow in the brush was still fanning, and his lead was finding the rocks around my feet. That had to be stopped.

I leaped to cover behind a bowlder—and he made the mistake of opening up again. When he did I raked the spot he was in, locating it by the flare from his spouting gun, and when I ran from cover toward the top of the ridge, no more lead came my way.

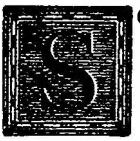
I gained the top of the ridge, and plunged down its opposite side, thankful for the brush which clothed it. I had got away, carrying two wounds. That they were superficial I was certain, since I suffered no more than the sting and ache of them.

But, even so—where did that leave me? If Bill Leeds and his bunch were a part of Malvern's machine, then what? My wounds would mark me as the one who'd had the run-in with Leeds.

At that instant my eyes caught sight of a blaze of light far down on a wide ledge—and a man was crouching over it!

CHAPTER X

I TEAM UP WITH A BUZZARD



QUATTING in the protection of a bush not more than fifty feet away from the camp fire on the ledge, and above it on a second ledge, I scanned the place closely. Only the one man was there, and he had a familiar look. Back toward me, he was in the act of cooking something on a stick over the blaze. After a couple of minutes he turned round to get a stick with which to poke his fire, and I recognized him.

It was the jungle buzzard — the bum Blinkey had struck across the face with the soup ladle!

What sort of reception would the buzzard accord me when I showed up at his camp? For that was just what I meant to do. Those wounds, slight though I believed them to be, needed attention. I didn't delay announcing myself.

"Hi, there!" I called, none too loudly.

The buzzard turned with a start, and his glance ranged the ledge above, while his right hand stole back to his hip.

"Never mind th' gun, bo!" I cautioned. "I'm not meanin' you any harm. Just want to talk to you a minute, and get you

to do something for me. Shall I come down?"

"Come on," the man said. "But don't start nothin'!"

A moment later I was beside him. A great, red streak across the right side of his face testified to the efficacy of Blinkey's ladle; it was a nasty scald, and must have been very painful. But there was a change in the appearance and manner of the jungle buzzard. Subtle, but unmistakable. I missed that hangdog air he had exhibited while in the jungles, and his eyes held level with mine when he looked me over.

"Well?" he asked gruffly.

"Guess you remember me?"

"Sure."

"I'm glad you do. Hear some shootin' awhile ago?"

"Thought I did. Couldn't be sure, though. Over the ridge from here, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. I got a couple of burns outa it, an' I need some attention. You've got water, I see, and my undershirt will make good bandages—"

"Any danger of anybody comin' over th' ridge after you?" he broke in.

"I know two that won't," I replied. "The others may. That's where you can help—if you've got guts."

His face reddened. "Listen, bo!" he almost snarled. "Somethin' happened to me last night that woke me up—understand? You saw it happen. I reckon th' manhood in me was just sleepin' a good, long sleep. But, by God, it wasn't dead! That lick across the face woke it—and I got guts enough for anything now!"

I nodded. So that was it! That was the change I had sensed in this jungle buzzard!

"Then you ought to thank your lucky star that Blinkey clouted you one," I told him. "Now, do this for me, and maybe there's a favor or two I can and will do for you. Climb up to the top of the ridge, where I came over — you can't miss the spot, because it's where the hillside breaks down into the cañon—and watch. If anybody shows up—say, you gotta gun? Wasn't stalling when you made that hip motion?"

"I got one—and a good one."

"Then, if anybody shows up before I'm through down here, let 'em have it. You'll be doin' a good job in bumping off any of them skunks—but I needn't tell you that. Will yu do it?"

He looked at me for a moment, then nodded. "I'll see you through," he agreed. "Since you've got wounds and need help, I'll give it. Get busy."

He started climbing toward the top of the ridge, and I proceeded to strip. Neither wound was in the least dangerous, but they felt better after I'd bathed and bandaged them. When I had finished I called to the buzzard, and he rejoined me.

"Not a sign of anybody," he reported. "Now, while I eat that rabbit I'd just cooked when you showed up, suppose you tell me what happened. Or maybe you don't want to?"

I told him about the fight that occurred after he was booted out of the jungles, and that the later fracas was an aftermath of that. It was easy to see that the chap had got a new grip on his nerve; that he was, in short, a greatly changed man. And a soup ladle had done it!

Self-respect—that is what he had regained. Sometimes, when it looks as though a man's pride is dead and the man himself begins to accept that viewpoint, a thing happens that revives it—and it turns out that it has only been lost for the time in a long snooze. So it appeared to have been in the buzzard's case.

While he devoured the rabbit, after I had declined to share it, I indulged in some quick thinking. After a bit I asked a question.

"I take it that you're aimin' to get Blinkey?"

He looked at me steadily, then said: "Well, what then?"

"Nothin', only I'm not sayin' nothin' against it," I replied. "He's got it comin' to him, an' no loss to th' world if he gets it—"

"*If* he gets it!" snapped the buzzard. "You mean *when* he gets it! Didn't I tell you that my self-respect has come back?"

I nodded. "I can see that it has, with

half an eye. But, while you're resting up before tackling the job of getting Blinkey, maybe you'd take on something for me? Something that will put a hundred dollars in your pocket."

He looked straight into my eyes, then his wavered, dropped, came back. "I reckon not," he replied. "A week ago I might have put in with you, no matter what the graft happened to be. Now it's different."

"This thing I want you to do is something for society," I told him, leaving off the vernacular, "not against it. A chance, old man, to do something clean and decent. Any objection to lending yourself in that direction?"

He gave me a hard stare, then a look of comprehension crossed his face. "Humph! I've got your number, I think," he said. "Suppose you tell me what it is you want me to do."

"A simple thing. Make your way to Murphy's number one camp as quickly as you can, and deliver a message to Big Joe. I'm going to tell you just what you are to say, and then you can judge as to whether you will be the messenger.

"Go to Murphy in private. Tell him this: Tell him that Jughead is crooked, and that Mike, the camp boss, is against him—with Malvern. Say that you got it straight from T. N., whom you met in the jungles, and that you are acting for him. Tell him T. N. said you were to be paid a hundred. Do you get that much?"

He nodded, and I went on.

"Tell him to expect big trouble to-morrow night—to-night, it will be then—and to gather all the men he knows he can rely on, arm them, and prepare for whatever may happen. I don't know just what is on the cards, but there's something—"

"You bet there's something—and it begins right now!"

I leaped to one side, and rolled away from the fire, almost at the moment the woods rang with revolver shots. Crashing through a low bush, I crouched low behind it.

The buzzard stood there with a smoking gun in hand, while on the ground lay the man who had burst so suddenly upon us.

It was Jughead Jones, Murphy's stable boss!

CHAPTER XI

CAUGHT LYING

"BACK from that fire!" I yelled.

The Buzzard leaped—and just in time.

From the top of the ridge, whence I had descended when I came upon the tramp's fire, spurts of flame stabbed the night, and bullets rained down.

"Make for where I told you!" I shouted to the Buzzard. "Remember, it's a chance to get back at Blinkey!"

Swinging my gun toward the top of the ridge, I raked the rocks and brush with lead, hoping to halt the oncoming yeggs until my companion and I could drop away into the timber of the lower ledges. Near at hand, the Buzzard answered:

"I'm with you! Make your getaway! I know my way about!"

Then I heard him crashing away through the brush.

I struck off in another direction, reloading as I ran, with the jungle camp as my immediate objective. Long Bill Leeds had been the only man among those in the cañon who had recognized me. I felt sure of that, because the other had been too far away. Jughead Jones was dead. So was Bill Leeds. If I could get to Blinkey at once I might still be taken into his confidence and learn what was afoot for the following night.

Six-guns still roared and flashed above me, and the gang fairly fell down the ledges toward the embers of the Buzzard's fire. I was safely away, however, and had only to cover the ground between me and the jungles with all speed. That I endeavored to do. While running, I planned.

I won't soon forget that five-mile sprint. It was down one ridge and across a valley, then up another ridge and down again, and on and on over the roughest kind of going. I had the satisfaction of leaving my pursuers behind, though, and that counted for much.

Finally, just as I was on the verge of

exhaustion, I sighted the jungle fire. A moment later I staggered into camp—and I wasn't stalling about staggering, either.

"Whut th' hell!"

The exclamation came from Blinkey who, with a dozen others, was sitting beside the fire. He leaped up, staring wide-eyed at me.

I dropped down on a chunk of wood, sputtering and gurgling. Blinkey's eyes were glued to my left shirt sleeve, and I realized that the exertion of my run had started the blood—that it had soaked through and dyed the sleeve.

"In—a minute!" I gasped. "I gotta—get my—wind!"

"I'll say yu needs it!" he exclaimed. "Whut yu run into?"

"I went—to Murphy's camp," I explained after a moment or two, "an' seen Jughead Jones. Guess whut else I got to say had ought to be said to you, by yoreself."

Blinkey walked away from the fire, motioning me to follow.

"Now—about Jughead?" His voice was sharp, and that single glittering eye of his was disconcerting, considering what I was about to attempt.

"Jughead said for you to put me on," I told him. "Said you'd understand."

Silence. Then: "Who sent yu to Jughead?" he demanded.

"Nosey Conners."

He took a closer look. "Yu know Nosey pretty well?"

"I shore do."

"Wait a minute then. Nosey is right here in camp. I'll fetch him."

He strode away toward a near-by hut. Nosey was in camp! Should I run, or stand my ground? I resolved to stick it out. Run later—maybe.

Presently Blinkey and Nosey came over to me. "This gent says he knows yu well, Nosey," Blinkey said. "Says yu sent him to Jughead. Take a look at him, and say if he's tellin' it straight."

The broken-nosed skinner stared hard at me, then a look of recognition passed across his face. "'Course, I knows him!" he exclaimed. "This here is Sandy. Me'n him knows each other well. Worked together. Think I'd send a man to Jughead without I knowed him?"

Was it the memory of those jolts of snow that turned the trick in my favor, or was the skinner afraid to admit that he had sent a stranger to the stable boss? I never learned the answer to that, but I got the benefit of his lie, whatever inspired it.

"Well," Blinkey said, his tense figure relaxing and his eye losing its threatening gleam, "that's diff'runt. Jughead told me to put you on—for what?"

But I had the answer. "For a little job that's to be pulled to-morrow night," I answered unhesitatingly.

"Yu can git back to bed, Nosey," Blinkey told the skinner. "I wanta talk to Sandy, an' by hisself." After we were alone: "Here's whut I wants to talk about. Whut did yu git into? Answer me that, an' then I'll put yu wise to whut yu are to do to get that five hundred."

"I'm shore aimin' tu tell you all about it. Afore I left Murphy's camp, Jughead—which same I happen to know, just like I does Nosey—told me to wait an' he'd string along with me. Said there was a meetin' goin' on back in th' jungles, an' he had to be there. He didn't say whut th' meetin' was about, ner where it was to be held. We ketched a lift on a freight wagon, stopped at th' steel-gang camp, then went on.

"When we gits to a place on th' dump about five miles frum here, we sees a man sneakin' along th' dump. Jughead tells me to wait, and pulls me down behind some rocks. The sneakin' gent comes on—an' it turns out to be that buzzard yu run outa camp last night. Him, an' nobody else. He tuck to th' timber, and Jughead 'lows we'd better follow an' see whut he's up to.

"Well, we ain't followed far until we hears guns a goin'. We runs on, an' th' shootin' gits worse. A mile back in th' woods, we stumbles over a man layin' in th' trail, an' he's dead. It's Big Bill Leeds. That ain't all. Th' buzzard is runnin' up th' ridge an' we are hot after him. Comin' to th' top, we loses him.

"We don't lose him fer long, though. He's hit, it seems, an' far down th' other side of th' ridge he builds hisself a little

fire an' starts tyin' up his wounds. Then we drops down onto him.

"But we are away off. He's not by hisself. Seems like this here fire has already been built, an' somebody's been waitin' there fer him. That somebody open up on us, an' I gits two holes in me.

"Jughead," I paused. "Jughead gits shot dead!"

Would that yarn go down? I wondered, almost holding my breath. Blinkey had satisfied himself that I was a skinner. Nosey, evidently in the ring with him, had vouched for me. I had my wounds to show for my part in the battle, and there was the buzzard, whom he might easily suspect. But—would he swallow the tale?

"Yu—yu ain't lyin'?" he almost gasped, boring into me with his glittering eye. "Jughead done got his? Shore enough?"

"I'm tellin' th' truth!" I declared. "Jughead Jones is dead!"

"God Almighty!" Blinkey almost whimpered. "An' he was one of my best men! Old Murphy never once suspected him! An' jest when we was about to finish th' play—"

"Shut yore mouth, yu damned fool!" a voice blazed almost at our side. "He's lyin', damn him! He's a cop! I didn't only git creased, an' I'm live as he is—a damn sight liver than he'll be in another minute!"

The speaker—blood-stained, and white with exhaustion—was Jughead Jones in person!

CHAPTER XII

"WE'LL KILL YU IN PRIVATE!"

"STOP! Not here, you fool!" It was Blinkey speaking. With a swift movement he thrust aside the gun Jughead had thrust against my chest and, at the same time, seized my right wrist in a powerful grip.

"Lemme git him now!" the stable boss begged. "Ain't he done kilt Long Bill an' Sam Brady? Ain't he a damned, sneakin' cop—"

"Shut up!" Blinkey snapped, stripping me of my gun. "Whut's th' diff'runce whether he's kilt here or somewheres else? He's shore goin' to git it anyhow! How does we know who may be here in th' camp?"

Then he turned to me.

"So yu put it over on me, an' a lot of us? Thought yu'd get by with yore smartness, didn't yu? Well, yu ain't goin' to! Yu are goin' to die, but we'll kill yu in private!"

"Reckon yu're right, Blinkey," Jughead conceded grudgingly. "May be some more damned cops among us here. Likely they is. Best to git rid of this'n where they ain't nobody to see. Whar at?"

Blinkey made no answer, but whistled shrilly. In a moment Nosey Conners came trotting up to us.

"Git a rope," Blinkey commanded, and Nosey went after it.

A few minutes later, with my arms roped to my sides and Jughead holding to one end of the rope, we set off into the timber back of the camp. Blinkey led and Nosey, who had made no comment so far, brought up the rear.

As for myself, I had not opened my lips in speech since Jughead appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly. It was a slip up, I grant, but it could not have been avoided. Those fellows blazing away at the Buzzard and me, after Jughead fell, prevented me from making sure that the stable boss was dead.

I thought it unlikely that the Buzzard could have failed to kill at so short a distance. However, he had shot without the time to take even the slightest aim. So, all in all, I exonerated him. The thing which disturbed me most, aside from the fact that I was being led away to die, was this:

I had no inkling of the nature of that final move Blinkey was about to make on the following night—the one in which I had been slated to take part. Had Jughead delayed his arrival a short while, I might have got the information from Blinkey, and made a sneak before he got there. For I had no intention to trust too much in the cock-and-bull yarn I had fed the jungle cook on. There were too many chances for a leak. It had been my intention to depart from the jungle camp at

the earliest possible moment after I learned what I came for.

But—the cup had slipped.

Blinkey was speaking:

"Long Bill knowed what he was talkin' about," was his comment. "An' I'll admit yu shore did frame things fine. How many days yu been hangin' aroun' these jungles, afore yu showed up last night?"

I made no answer.

"Damn yu!" he grated. "Yu aim to keep yore mouth shut, huh? Well, that won't git yu nothin', an' I know a way yu could be made to spill, if I had th' time fer it. But I ain't. Things is happenin' too fast aroun' here, an' I got other things to do. Wasn't fer that, bo, I'd love to make yu squirm awhile afore yu croaked—that fer bumpin' off two better men than yu are! Say, Jug," he demanded, "whut wus yu doin' there where yu got shot?"

"I was goin' to th' jungles to meet Long Bill an' th' others, when I heard a big ruckus. Guns a goin' to beat hell. I was makin' along th' top of th' ridge when I seen a fire. That's how come me to find that buzzard an' this here cop. That's how it happened. After they left, thinkin' I was dead, some of th' boys come down th' ridge an' told me about Long Bill an' Sam. We scattered, lookin' fer this gent here an' the Buzzard, an' I 'lowed he'd maybe make fer th' camp. That's how come me to show up."

"Uhuh. Lucky yu did. I was jest about to spill things, damn me! Seems like yu made a big mistake, Nosey, when yu said yu knowed this here bird. How come?"

The skinner made no answer for a moment, then muttered something so low I did not catch it.

"Hey? Speak up!" Blinkey ordered.

"He's a dead ringer fer th' one I thought he was—"

"Yu lie!" Blinkey broke in. "He's goin' to be a dead ringer, though. A dead ringer fer a stiff! Yu bungled, Conners—else yu're a sneakin' double crosser!"

"Honest to God, Blinkey!" Nosey Conners cried, his voice pleading. "I ain't no double crosser! Take my word fer it! I thought I knowed him! Shore thought I did!"

Blinkey's answer was a snort of contempt.

"Blinkey," Nosey went on, "I ain't never been around where nobody was kilt like yu aims to kill this feller, an' I don't want to be! Lemme go back—"

"Yu goes right along with us—an' that ain't all yu does! Don't lemme hear another whimper outa yu!"

Silence then, while we stumbled along over the rocks and through the short undergrowth. Half an hour passed, and we came at length into a secluded hollow between great bowlders. There we stopped.

"This here is th' place I been headin' fer," Blinkey announced. "Right here, Mr. Kay-See Cop, yu gits croaked. Yore friend Nosey is goin' to do th' croakin'—"

"God!" Came in a bleat from the skinner. "I ain't! I can't—"

Blinkey, transformed into a living picture of Satan at his worst, wheeled, and I saw a knife flash in his hand. Nosey Conners had time for only a strangled cry of fright and agony, then he crashed backward into a clump of brush, struggled for a moment, then grew quiet.

CHAPTER XIII

A DYING BURDEN

"H' damned yaller pup!" the camp cook snarled, wiping his wet knifeblade on some leaves. "He might of knowed I aimed to kill him, too! Anybody which double crosses Jeff Nolan is as good as dead! That's whut he done, an' I got him. That's whut Big Joe Murphy done, an' his time's a comin'!

"That's whut yu done, damn yu!" he went on, his voice raised to a high pitch and his eye now resembling that of an enraged tiger. "Yu gained my confidence, then worked ag'in' me! Now yur time has come!"

At that moment I spoke, though I had no hope of stemming the tide of this demon's fury:

"Before you go any further with this slaughterhouse stuff," I said, "it may be as well for you to know a few things. In the first place, the man you thought was a

jungle buzzard is anything but that. He's a mighty keen cop, and he's got you dead to rights. No matter what you pull here, you won't get away with it, for he knows who you are and what you are. Sooner or later, you'll pay. Now, go ahead, if you're so minded."

It was a lie, of course, but it might work.

"Hell! Do yu think Jeff Nolan cares how many cops has been trailin' him here in th' jungles?" Blinkey demanded, his fury no whit abated. "Whut kin they do?

"I'm turnin' th' last trick to-night, instead of to-morrow night. I'm cagey, bo! An' I'll be where they ain't goin' to find me! Whut ever else Jeff Nolan may be, he ain't no fool! Big Joe thought he was, but he's found out diff'runt!"

"What did Big Joe ever do to you?" I asked, more to gain time than because I was really interested. Time, in my position was worth sparring for!

"None of your damned business!" Blinkey snapped. "Big Joe knows, an' Jimmie Doyle knew! Jimmie Doyle's dead, now—damn him! Tony Malvern knows, too, an' that's why he got me to—"

"Yu're goin' too far, Blinkey!" Jughead Jones interrupted. "Yu're mad, else yu'd have better sense! Even if this here cop is goin' to be dead in another minute or two, they ain't no use in yur doin' all that talkin'!"

Blinkey, though still shaking with rage, subsided. But he had given away a good deal. The knowledge might never do me any good, but I had learned what I had suspected all along: That there was something else back of all the destruction of life and property in Big Joe's camp. It had seemed queer to me that Tony Malvern would instigate and carry on such viciously criminal acts merely for sake of a fifty thousand-dollar bonus.

What had Big Joe Murphy done to incur the undying hatred of this demon, Blinkey? This devil of the jungles. This Satan, rampant in hell's back yard!

I asked myself the question, but could find no answer.

"I reckon I'll say th' rest of whut I have got on my mind," Blinkey said, in answer to Jughead's remonstrance, "to Big Joe in person—jest afore I sinks my knife in him! As fer yu, yu damned sneak—"

"Put your hands high!"

The command snapped with deadly brittleness and, wheeling, I saw the white face of the jungle buzzard, the red mark of Blinkey's ladle across it. He stood not more than ten feet away, partly concealed by the brush, his six-gun trained on the cook.

Blinkey's action was swift and unexpected. With knife in hand, he lunged toward me, struck, missed by an inch, then leaped backward into the brush.

As I swung away from his knifestroke, I came abreast of Jughead Jones. Lowering my head, I butted him full in the stomach, saw him go down writhing, then plunged into the brush where the Buzzard was.

"Quick!" the latter exclaimed in a whisper. "Run for it! I haven't got a single load in this gun!"

We were both running, and as we ran I wriggled free from the rope. Through the undergrowth we crashed, for I had no wish to face the demon back of us with no weapon save an empty gun.

Fifty feet distant from the scene of my escape, I came to a dead stop. A groan, almost at my feet, had caught my ear.

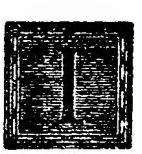
"Don't leave—me!" came a plea. "That devil—Blinkey—"

I stooped over the chap who lay on the ground, and the next instant was running again—carrying a dying man on my shoulder.

The dying man was Nosey Conners.

CHAPTER XIV

INTO THE BEYOND



KNEW it would be only a matter of a few minutes before Blinkey and Jughead were hot after us, and the burden I carried lessened our chance of escape very materially. Why carry Conners, since he was in all probability at the very door of death?

Two reasons: One, the human reason, I will not dwell upon. The other was this:

Maybe Nosey would cling to life long

enough to tell me a few things I desired very much to know. Just how much he knew of the plans of Blinkey and his gang was problematical. He might know all, or he might know but little. It was worth a chance.

I had my reward in another way, at any rate. I became conscious of something hard and heavy cutting into and numbing my shoulder. Lowering Nosey to the ground, I called to the Buzzard to wait. Another moment and I drew the skinner's six-gun from his belt—and it was loaded. In a pocket of his coat was a box of cartridges.

The dying man—he was dying, and going fast I could see—stirred, opened his eyes, then gasped:

"Am—am I—goin' to—kick off?"

"You are, Conners," I told him. "That was a deep wound Blinkey gave you, and I think you can't last many minutes. Here," I said to the Buzzard, "try these cartridges in your gun. Both the same caliber."

"They fit," he assured me, a moment later. "Now maybe we'll make a stand. What do you say?"

"Listen for them," I instructed. "Conners," I went on, "you can't live—so why not come through?"

"Sure—I'm—a goner?" he said pleadingly, clutching my hand.

"As sure as that I'm here with you," I answered. "Tell me what I want to know, and I'll even things with Blinkey. First, what is the play they are to pull to-morrow night?"

Nosey closed his eyes, and his lips came together in a firm line.

"They're coming!" the Buzzard warned. "Running through the brush!"

"When they get closer," I replied, "let 'em have a few slugs. I want to hear Conners say something, and we're not going to run with guns in our hands."

"Right!" said the Buzzard, and took his station beyond me, behind a tree in the direction the cook and stable boss could be heard coming.

"Come, Nosey!" I insisted. "Help me get even with Blinkey—he stabbed you without cause! He's got it coming to him!"

Conners stirred—and at that instant the Buzzard's gun roared. There was an answering shot, and again the Buzzard's gun thundered.

"Quick!" I cried, shaking Conners. "Tell me!"

"They're goin' to blow—th' dam—at Sand Creek!" he gasped weakly. "Let—water in—on—camp number—two—God! I'm a-goin'! Hold onto—me—Sandy—"

Bang! Bang!

The Buzzard was firing again, and the two men in the brush beyond were returning it. They had halted for the time at least, and the Buzzard appeared to be holding them.

"Get—Blinkey!" came from Nosey's white lips. "He's th'—main—one! Th' brains—of—it! Mike—Jughead! Malvern—pays! It's hell—to—go like—I'm goin'! It—shorely—is—hell—"

A convulsion—and he had passed out. The poor weakling—Nosey, the snowbird, was away on his last "sleigh ride" on the slopes of eternity.

Dragging his body to one side, I covered his face with a leafy brush torn from a small tree, then unlimbered my gun and got into action. At the same time I called to the Buzzard:

"This way! We haven't any time to lose!"

He joined me immediately, and we ran on for perhaps three hundred yards. Then I darted aside into the brush, and the Buzzard plunged in behind me. We crouched there, silent, watchful.

Blinkey and Jughead were no longer to be heard. They had lost our trail in the darkness.

"Conners—is he dead?" the Buzzard asked.

"Yes," I replied. "But before he went he came through with what I wanted most to know. There's work ahead—hot, deadly work. Do you want in on it?"

"Yes!"

That ladle was still working!

"All right. You'll not regret it. Now, how did you find me?"

"I saw, when it was too late, that Jones wasn't dead," was the answer. "I'd fired all my cartridges, and couldn't do anything

about it. When he struck off toward the jungles in the direction you had taken, I followed. Was close when you were taken, and followed to where Conners was stabbed. Tried a bluff—and it worked. That's all."

"It's not all, by a damned sight!" I contradicted feelingly. "But we'll talk about that later. In the meantime, let's be moving—for, if I'm right, there's going to be a lot of powder burned before daylight!"

Wipe out Murphy's camp number two, would they? Well, maybe not!

CHAPTER XV

AT CAMP NUMBER ONE

E struck out for the railroad dump, angling east and giving the jungle camp, where I was fairly certain Blinkey and Jughead had gone, a wide circle. It was my aim to get to Big Joe's camp number one as speedily as possible.

Bit by bit the plot, or double plot, against Murphy had been pieced together. The plot perhaps was one but there was a double motive behind it. Malvern's greed and Blinkey's hatred. I could understand the greed of Malvern, but could make nothing of the hatred of Blinkey.

Big Joe Murphy was never a man to oppress others. I had never known him to be intentionally unjust. Unless he had changed greatly since coming to Oklahoma, I felt sure that Blinkey's venomous activities against Joe had no root in any injustice of the latter's against him.

Yet the venom was there, as were the black deeds. Blinkey had hatred in his heart, and his brain and hands had been busily employed at its behest. Had Malvern chosen him to carry out his campaign of destruction, knowing his man and that he thirsted for revenge? Had he deliberately played upon those evil passions?

It looked like he had. Yet there was another angle worthy of consideration:

Had Malvern, after employing Blinkey, learned that he had bought more than he bargained for? Was it not possible that Blinkey had taken the bit in his teeth and run wild?

It seemed to me that some of the acts of the camp cook had been beyond the limit of what a sane man, such as Malvern must be in order to have achieved the material success which undoubtedly had been his, would sanction.

I could not vision him plotting the murder of Jimmie Doyle, for instance. Neither could I believe that the contractor would countenance so bold a thing as blowing up a dam and wiping out his competitor's camp and the work he had completed there. That didn't seem like the act of a sane man.

Granting that Malvern was of a stripe with his man Blinkey, would not his reason tell him that the blowing of the dam—an act which could have no other object than ruining Murphy—would be so suggestive of underhandedness as to point directly to him as the instigator? Malvern alone would gain by the dam's destruction.

On the whole, I began to believe that Malvern had, all unawares, unleashed a devil. But Malvern had unleashed him, and Malvern must therefore be adjudged equally guilty with him.

Those thoughts passed through my mind while the Buzzard and I made tracks toward the dump. We reached it, and paused for a consultation. The question was how to get to camp number one with the least possible delay. Ten miles to go, and nothing but our legs to carry us. Then the Buzzard remembered something.

"Got it!" he exclaimed. "The track-maintenance man keeps a speeder beside the dump a mile or so down the line. We can take that and make time until we reach the end of the rails. After that—"

"Come on!" I cried. "I've got an idea for 'after that!'"

We trotted down the track until we came to the speeder. It sat on a couple of short lengths of rail at the side of the track, and was locked. The lock defied us for about two minutes.

After that we were propelling ourselves along at a rate which threatened to land us in one of the numerous bar pits beside the way. We rattled through the steel-gang camp, and came to the end of the rails. There was yet four miles between us and camp number one.

"The stable tent of that gang that's rebuilding the blown up section of dump!" I said, pointing to where it stood half a mile from us.

We covered that half mile in a few minutes, and within a few minutes more were riding away on a pair of mules which we took from the tent—after an argument with the stable boss. It ended badly for him—got him a sore head at least—but there was no time to waste. He'd be all right in an hour or two.

I'd lost the old silver turnip I had carried, and had no means of telling the time, but it was getting well along past midnight I felt sure. A lot of activity had been compressed within a few hours' time, and I felt my part in it in every bone and muscle. Still, the end was not yet.

We reached Big Joe's camp, and, doubtless because we were riding mules and not attempting to hide, reached his office without challenge. There we dismounted, and I pounded on the door of his shack.

Murphy, with Steel beside him, came to the door. Both had been asleep.

"Get your clothes on, both of you!" I bade them, pushing past them into the shack, the Buzzard following.

"Damned if it ain't Tug!" Murphy exclaimed, eyes wide. "But, lad, I hardly knew ye! What's happened to ye this night?"

"A lot," I answered. "This chap with me—I don't think I know what your name is?"

"Just call me Buzzard, and let it go at that," said the strange man with whom I had teamed up in so singular a manner.

"Suit yourself," I agreed. "Buzzard has done a man's work to-night, Joe. I'm telling you that now so you won't forget it. He's worth more than half a dozen ordinary men. I recommend him to you. And now where is the tent of your camp boss, Mike?"

"Mike? What's wanted of Mike?"

"Don't ask questions!" I snapped. "Lead me to his tent, and don't make any noise. You come along, Steel; there may be trouble."

Murphy, the Buzzard, Steel and I then stole quietly through the shadowy aisles between canvas walls until we came to a small tent off to itself.

"He's in there," Murphy whispered, pointing. "But, for th' life of me—"

With Steel at my heels I was inside the tent before Joe could finish his remark. Steel's flash light picked out Mike, who sat on his bunk staring in bewilderment toward the door, and we got him a split second before he got his gun.

Five minutes later he sat in a chair in Murphy's lighted quarters, a sullen look on his face.

I turned to Steel and the Buzzard.

"Introducing Mike, hireling of Malvern, and underling of Blinkey, the one-eyed cooker of jungle mulligan—and, incidentally, the most dangerous, cunning and vindictive cook who ever manned a ladle.

"Blinkey," I went on, turning back to Joe, "has another name. It is Jeff Nolan—do you know him?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BUZZARD SPEAKS

"NOLAN!"

The ejaculation fell from Murphy's lips in tones of incredulity.

"Yes, Jeff Nolan. He's the chief tool Malvern chose to ruin you by. Our good Mike, here, and Jughead were bought by Blinkey with money furnished by Malvern. Doubtless Mike or Jughead blew up the powder shack, the dump, and burned the stable tent and the mules. I think they did those things together. I got it straight from Jughead that Mike is the one who killed Jimmie Doyle—"

I broke off in time to seize Big Joe, drag him from the cowering Mike, and hurl him into a corner.

"No violence, Joe!" I ordered. "Remember, you promised!"

"All right, Tug!" Big Joe grated, malevolent eyes upon the camp boss. "But th' damned snake is goin' to pay for that dirty deed! Mind you, he's goin' to pay!"

"Certainly," I agreed. "But the hangman will attend—"

"You cut that kind of talk!" yelled

Mike. "Jughead Jones—where did you see him, and hear him say that?"

My lie about Jughead seemed about to produce results.

"I saw him in the timber near the camp where he was to meet Long Bill Leeds, Sam Brady, and the rest of the gang. He didn't meet them, because Long Bill is dead, and so is Sam Brady. Nosey Conners is dead, too.

"Just before Jughead Jones left for the railroad station at Red Rock, with two of my men, he confessed to enough to hang every man we can catch—including Malvern. He swore that you stuck a knife in Jimmie Doyle's back—"

"Then he lied, damn him!" roared Mike. "Why in hell would he wanta saddle that on me? I didn't do it, and neither did he! Blinkey done it, and Jughead knows it!"

"Ah, so you accuse Blinkey? And why should he undertake that job, when he left all the others to his underlings?"

"Why? Just ask Joe Murphy if there'd be any reason why Jeff Nolan might wanta knife Jimmie Doyle!"

I swung round to Joe.

"Lissen, Tug," said the latter, "and I'll be afther makin' it all clear to ye. Whin I first come to Oklahoma and wint in business, th' firm name was Murphy & Nolan—Jeff Nolan holdin' but a small interest, and me th' rest. Jimmie Doyle, later, caught Jeff dead to rights when he was sellin' me out to me competitors. He tipped others off about me bids and got well paid for it. He stood to make more that way, he thought, than in takin' th' small legitimate profit from his share of work done.

"Well, th' proof was sthrong, and I kicked him out. Before he left he opened me safe, knowin' th' combination, and took five thousan' dollars of me money with him. But we caught th' dirty divil, an' he got five years.

"I remember, now, his term has been up for some time—but I niver thought he'd be afther comin' on to do me dirt, an' to kill Jimmie Doyle!"

"He probably was set on to do all the dirty work, by Tony Malvern—"

"No!"

The interruption came in ringing tones from the Buzzard. He stood erect before us, and there was nothing of the hang-dog about him then.

"Tony Malvern merely hired Nolan to harass Murphy as much as he could, delay the work, and all that," the Buzzard went on to explain. "But Blinkey went farther than that. Malvern tried to halt him, after the mules were burned, but he failed. What could Malvern do?

"If he took any drastic action against Blinkey, where would he be? You see, Malvern made the mistake of striking his bargain and paying over a big sum to Blinkey in the presence of witnesses—Bill Leeds and Nosey Conners. His hands were tied!"

"How do you know all this?" I demanded. "Who are you, anyway?"

For a moment the Buzzard hung his head, then he raised a flushed face to me.

"I must tell you, I suppose, in order to convince you that I know," he said. "My name is Henry Malvern—and I'm Tony Malvern's brother.

"But wait!" he exclaimed. "I want to say a few words more. Tony is lots older than I, and he brought me up in skinner camps—the only home he knows. I worked for him when I became old enough, on the grade at first to learn the business, then in the office. What could he have expected, living like that?

"I took to white-lime and coke, like I saw most of the hands doing, and he kicked me out. Since then, I've been wandering round, living in jungles, and trying to lose what little manhood that still clung to me. Nobody recognized me, because I have changed so in appearance.

"On the night Tony made his bargain with Blinkey, I was at my brother's camp. Had sneaked in there to beg money from him. Yes, I'd fallen that low. In an adjoining room, I heard all that was said between them.

"Let me add that I did not get the money, and that I have not seen Tony since.

"Something happened in the presence of this man here, whom I know only as Sandy, that caused a revolt inside me. I'm going

straight from now on—and that's all I've got to say."

"And that's enough!" I declared, gripping the Buzzard's hand in mine. "You've proved yourself a man to-night, and I'm for you first, last, and always."

Then I said to the amazed Joe:

"I believe Malvern has told the exact truth, for I had already come to the same conclusion. Now," I went on, "if the gang should blow up a certain dam on Sand Creek, one near your camp number two, how near would that come to ruining you?"

Murphy's face grew white. "God, man!" he gasped. "That would ruin me altogether, it would!"

"Then," said I, "we'll be moving—for that's just what's on the cards for to-night—"

"No!" Mike broke in. "That job was planned for Wednesday night, and this is Tuesday!"

I glanced at Murphy's desk clock. "It is two o'clock Wednesday morning," I corrected. "It is true that Blinkey meant to blow the dam on Wednesday night, but when he lost three of his men and it seemed that the net was closing in, he decided to blow the dam at once.

"He boasted as much. Riding hard, and on horses instead of mules, he and his bunch could reach the dam in a few hours, and we've just about got time to prepare for the big blow-up."

Meaning a "blow-up" quite different from the one the jungle cook was aiming for.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAM AT SAND CREEK

LEAVING Mike under guard of the commissary clerk and a timekeeper in whom Big Joe had confidence, we four, Joe, Steel, the Buzzard—for he'll always be such to me—and I, set out on a tour of the camp.

We separated and went with caution, it being our desire to make sure that all was quiet in and around number one. Finding all seemingly well, we gathered at the stable-tent, saddled up and departed quietly eastward.

We knew that Blinkey and his gang could not yet have reached the dam, which lay four miles distant from the number one camp. Therefore, we could easily be on the scene to receive them.

But how receive them? Mike either did not know what part of the two-hundred foot dam was to be blown, or he pretended ignorance.

"All I know is that the dynamite is already planted," he insisted. "It's been planted for a week past. No, I can't say as any of th' guards on th' dam are in it. Maybe so, as it would have been a mighty hard job to get the stuff planted unless one or more of 'em was in th' know. I ain't saying as to that."

Beyond that he would make no statement. So we had two hundred feet of rock and earth embankment to choose from, any part of which might hold enough explosive to blow the whole thing to pieces.

We were not even sure that Blinkey would be there in person. It seemed likely, however, that he would not leave that to any one else, since most of his trusted men were absent. Too much depended on pulling the big coup. He would in all probability be on the dam, or very near to it.

That settled, I began trying to figure out the most likely point of attack on the dam. Not knowing the locality, I could make no headway there.

"Joe," I asked, riding abreast of him when we were nearing the site of camp number two, "have you any men here whom you can trust?"

"Tug," he answered sorrowfully, "I'm afther trustin' nobody! Look at Mike and Jughead! I'd 'a' swore by them lads—an' look at 'em! Th' dirty, treacherous, bla'guards—"

"Forget 'em!" I admonished. "We four are a host. Blinkey can't have more than three or four men left at best. The rest must have been thinned out to-night. We'll handle the situation, but, I warn you—keep your wits about you, and keep close to me! Now, let's ride!"

We circled the camp and reached the sight of the dam a quarter of a mile beyond

it. Sand Creek runs north and south at that point, and it was not that creek which had been blocked. West of Sand Creek a smaller stream angled across the valley and poured its waters into the larger. In order to avoid having to build a bridge across this creek, a dam had been erected which had turned the small creek into the larger at a point well off the right of way.

Needless to say, Joe had the dam under guard, since it was so important to him. The guards were our first lookout.

I climbed to the top of the dam and walked along it, Joe and the others following. Fifty paces farther along, Joe halted me.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "There ought to 'av' been a guaard at this end, but there's none here!"

"Come on!" I returned, and started running down the dam.

We reached the far end—and nowhere did we encounter a guard!

"They've gone!" Joe cried. "Sold out—"

"But how could they have known about Blinkey's change of plan?" I demanded.

"I don't know that! But they're not here, lad, an' no mistake!"

The Buzzard spoke:

"Might it not be that they were cautioned not to remain on the embankment at night, after the dynamite was planted?" he asked. "There was always a chance that a change of plan might be necessary—the date for the explosion set forward. For their own safety, might not—"

"You've hit it!" I applauded. "That's the explanation. Those guards—how many, Joe?"

"Two," he replied. "One at each end."

"Well, they're far from here at this moment," I told him. "And little blame to them, seeing they must know the character of the man they sold out to. Blinkey might have suddenly decided to blow the dam, and neglected to tell them about it. Granted, of course, that the fuse is planted where he can reach it unknown to them.

"Well, we at least know what end of the dam they will approach first," I went on. "It will be the end farthest from your camp, since they would come from the jungle camp on the south side of the stream."

I considered the situation for a moment, then gave orders.

"We'll scatter in the timber on this side of the creek, keep a sharp ear open for the sound of horses approaching. You three attend to that, and I'll see if I can unearth this dynamite plant of Blinkey's. Three revolver shots in rapid succession means get together. Get it?"

After they had gone into the timber to stand watch, I began scouting along the sloping side of the dam, using Steel's flash light to examine anything the nature of which the dim moon did not reveal to me.

On the upper, or land side, the embankment was almost perpendicular, supported by a massive wall of cemented rock; on the lower, or water side, it sloped gradually to the creek which washed it. On the latter side the footing was very insecure, and I had to make my way with extreme caution. Yet I felt certain that this sloping side would hold the plant. I thought so for two reasons:

That side would be hidden from the camp, and those who made the plant would have been better able to work unobserved. Secondly, it would be a comparatively easy matter to drill deep enough into the loose earth and rock which composed that side, than to do so in the rock wall of the upper side. Therefore, I searched the sloping side most diligently.

Suddenly, when no more than halfway along the dam, I saw a flare of light at the water's edge and about fifty feet beyond me—a match, I guessed instantly. The next instant I was in action.

Whipping out my gun, I fired at that little point of light—fired three times. I knew I'd found that plant at last, but had I found it in time?

The match went out, and the next instant a fusillade of shots rang out, the bullets singing about me. Down the dam raced Steel, the Buzzard, and Big Joe.

"What's up?" cried Steel, dropping down beside me.

"They've stolen a march on us! They came down Sand Creek in a boat—and the question is, did the match I saw get in its

work? If it did, then this dam is going skyward in a mighty short time!"

CHAPTER XVIII

BLINKEY'S KNIFE DRINKS BLOOD

AT that instant a second match flared at the water's edge, and we were on our feet as one man, running down the dam toward it, shooting as we ran. That first match had failed!

We got bullets in return, too, but reached a point above the spot where the light had showed, without harm. There we flattened out and our lead fairly rained downward.

Bullets also clipped the earth and rocks about our positions, but we made poor targets at best. The moon was back of us, and the slope of the dam lay in deep gloom. We could only shoot into the darkness, hoping thereby to frustrate any further attempt to light the fuse which would, if ignited, result in exploding the dynamite which was cached beneath us.

Now and then a yell came up to us, and we knew that we had drawn blood. Yet they stuck on. Their gun-fire showed that.

Big Joe lay beside me, and his gun sent forth a steady stream of smoke, ceasing only for the few seconds required for reloading.

Then the gang below drew blood. It was Steel who suffered. He got a slug along the side of his neck when he leaned a bit too far over the edge, and the moon betrayed him.

Big Joe was next to draw lead—and it resulted in what appeared at the moment to be a disaster. His position was a precarious one, requiring considerable effort to remain balanced. When the bullet struck, he lost his balance, poised on the edge for an instant, then, before I could reach him with a free hand, slid over and plunged down the slope.

There was a loud splash when he hit the water, followed by a yell of glee from the crowd below.

Then, without the loss of a second, I was sliding downward on his heels. I do not know to this day who struck the water first, Steel, the Buzzard, or myself. I only know that we were all struggling there—and I thank the gods that be for waterproof ammunition!

There were two boat-loads of them. Evidently Blinkey had feared interruption, and that explained to me why he had wanted so many men along. He wanted them in case of a fight—and he was getting that fight!

In the first and nearest boat I could see a struggle going on, and I discharged my gun toward the second boat in order to do as much damage as I could in case it was fated that I, Tug Norton, was to pass out that night.

"Quick!" came in strangled tones from one of those who struggled. "Help, Tug! Help!"

It was Big Joe Murphy who called—and I saw red!

"Yu're too late, Mr. Cop!" Blinkey shrieked. "I told yu I'd sink my knife in him—an' here goes!"

I saw the gleam of steel in the dim light—then a figure shot past me, grasped the gunwale of the boat, capsized it, and the water was alive with struggling forms. I heard a shrill, blood-curdling yell, and the next instant the second boat bore down on me.

I got my third wound of the night, this one in the left shoulder, but it did not then hamper me seriously. I had found shallower water, and, standing up, I raked that craft, fore and aft, with lead.

Amid the din of shrieks and wails, I heard Big Joe shouting.

"All safe, Tug! Where are ye, lad!"

"Here!" I shouted.

He struggled through the creek to my side—and suddenly there was a deep silence over the water!

"How did you manage it, Joe?" I panted.

"I didn't!" he cried. "It was young Malvern! He turned the boat over just in time!"

"That shriek—who was it?"

"Blinkey!" he said. "That was when Malvern stabbed him to the heart with his own knife!"

Just then Steel and Malvern reported.

"If there's any more left, we can't find

'em!" Steel said grimly. "Maybe one or two escaped—but —I guess the water got 'em!"

But I was thinking of Blinkey and his knife. It had drunk blood again that night, just as he had said it would—but the blood was Blinkey's own!

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAGIC LADLE

BIG JOE MURPHY won the bonus. The fifty thousand dollars just about let him break even on his losses due to Malvern and the jungle cook. But that made little difference to Joe. He had made a fortune long ago, and continues in the game merely for love of it —particularly the fights it continually affords him. Joe is a fighter—but it is unnecessary to put that down here, since I have already said he is an Irisher.

He likes the atmosphere of hell's backyard.

I had his flourishing autograph awhile back, but did not keep it long. I scanned it closely in order to be sure it was genuine, then passed it through a wicket to the teller at my bank. It was worth five thousand more to me in the teller's hands, than if I had kept it handy merely as a memento.

Mike, the only member of the gang left alive, so far as we could determine, went to trial, but Big Joe failed to appear against him. So Mike went free.

Joe's reason for failing to appear against his former camp boss may be seen, should any one choose to visit him in Dr. Waldron's private sanatorium for the insane, at Kansas City. A mild patient, but mentally incompetent, notwithstanding.

Tony Malvern, when the full horror of the thing he had set going was made known to him, became a broken, doddering old man. Finally it was advisable to keep him under strict observation. Joe, on young Malvern's account, kept the matter under cover as much as possible. Mike's prosecution would have brought all to light.

But his situation might easily have been worse. As it is, he is tenderly cared for by his brother, Henry Malvern, erstwhile jungle buzzard, whom Blinkey's soup ladle so miraculously restored, and who took up Tony's business when he laid it down.

And so it may be seen that however loath I am at all times to indulge in gun-throwing, it is sometimes necessary to do it. When such is demanded, I earnestly endeavor to deliver.

THE END

BESIDES "Bloody Williamson" we offer you next week:

"Grass," a short story by Maxwell Smith;

"So the Papers Said," by Joseph Harrington;

"The Silent Partner," a novelette by Edward Parrish Ware;

"The Sapphire Flame," by Douglas Newton;

"Jungle Hate," by Walter Archer Frost;

"The Hell-Pot," by Frank Price;

"The Dead Grow Cold," a fact story by Charlton Fenwick;

"The Insignificant Motive," by Zeta Rothschild; and "A Frontier Jail," by Karl Detzer.

William J. Flynn

The young lady smiled and laughed whenever she was in the store

WIPED OUT IN BLOOD

By Zeta Rothschild

"I'D RATHER BE CURTIS DEAD THAN POINDEXTER LIVING," THUNDERED THE ATTORNEY, AND FROM THE AUDIENCE CAME A BURST OF APPLAUSE

A Story of Fact

THE story of John E. Poindexter and Charles C. Curtis of Richmond, Virginia, would read like the libretto of a comic operetta if the end of it had not found the one man in his grave and the other in prison for sending him to it.

Of course, there is a woman in the tale, and in fact without her there wouldn't have been anything to write about. She wasn't of the type you may imagine a woman who can bring about a murder so often is. There wasn't anything vicious about her, and her reputation was immaculate.

To be brief, Miss Isabel Cottrell was a perfect lady, according to the best traditions of the South and the year 1879. Again, you are mistaken if you think the two young men mentioned above were rivals for the hand of the fair Isabel. Nothing as romantic as that. But here is the chronicle that brought death to one young man and a murder charge against the other. For Isabel we can only hope the worst: she deserves it.

These three young people were inconspicuous citizens of Richmond, Virginia. John E. Poindexter was a bookkeeper in a tobacco factory. He was considered trustworthy by his employers, and was a member of the pastor's Bible class.

Charles C. Curtis had an equally good reputation. As a salesman in a shoe store he did very well, and was an active member of his church and Sunday school. Miss Cottrell made her home with her married sister in Richmond. She had not yet suc-

ceeded in providing herself with a husband, so one might say her life so far had not been successful. Perhaps she was desperate—she was twenty-six—and sought to titillate the slack affection of Mr. Poindexter when she told him of the unwelcome attentions of Mr. Curtis to her when she went to the shoe store.

Anyway, one fine Sunday morning Mr. Poindexter called on Miss Cottrell and invited her to drive with him to his farm, which was next to one owned by her brother. She gladly accepted the invitation, and during this ride and on her return to her sister's, told her admirer of her experiences with the shoe clerk.

"You Insulted a Lady!"

Miss Cottrell complained that on three occasions when she had had business at this shoe store, Mr. Curtis had insulted her with personal remarks and impertinent actions, and had used very obnoxious language to her.

From later accounts of the inquest and trial, the lady evidently was not more explicit. She gave no details, possibly thinking that Mr. Poindexter's imagination could supply more lurid suggestions than she could.

John Poindexter, on hearing the story, had been quite upset, and had said he was going to horsewhip Curtis. Miss Cottrell did not comment on his indignation, but seemed satisfied with the results of her campaign. That evening Poindexter told his brother about young Curtis, and added that he intended demanding a written apology from him. And even then he thought he deserved a thrashing.

"I want you to come with me," said John to Thomas, "in case there should be any one else in the store and they might prevent me from attacking him."

Mr. Thomas Poindexter agreed to accompany his brother to the shoe store the next morning, and then went to sleep.

About nine o'clock on Monday the Poindexter brothers started off. Under his coat John had a small riding whip. They walked to the store and asked for Mr. Curtis. When told where he was, John hurried to him and asked:

"Is this Mr. Curtis?"

"Yes, that's my name," answered Curtis pleasantly.

"You insulted a lady here on Friday."

"I did not."

"You did, sir, and you know it."

Without giving any more of an explanation, or asking for one, Poindexter pulled the whip from under his coat, where it had been concealed, and cut Curtis several times across the shoulders. Curtis tried to dodge the blows, but made no attempt to strike the other man. He seemed bewildered and stunned by the suddenness of this attack by a man he had never seen before and whose name he did not even know.

Others in the store now hurried over, and Poindexter decided he had better stop. Curtis insisted that he had not insulted any lady, but if any young lady thought he had he wanted to apologize. He was also curious to know the identity of the lady and to what she had taken offense.

"I would like to know what occasion or lady you refer to?" he asked. "I have insulted no one that I know of. If I have, I will apologize."

"You did insult her: she told me so," insisted Poindexter. "And I know you did, and damn you, I'll teach you some manners."

Opposed to Dueling

Curtis asked for particulars, which Poindexter gave. The interview ended quietly with the two men shaking hands.

But later, thinking it over, Curtis could not see that the lashing had been justified. He decided to confer with his lawyer, and told him of the morning's insult. His lawyer's advice was typical of his generation and his background.

"It has always been my opinion," he said, "that after a man has been struck with a cowhide he could only wipe out the insult by shooting his assailant down, or by challenging him. But knowing you to be a Christian, I don't give that advice in your case, Charlie."

"Oh, that is out of the question," chimed in another member of the firm, "as Curtis is a member of the church."

"Yes, I am opposed on religious principles to dueling or to shooting a fellow creature down in cold blood."

Mr. McGuire, the lawyer, then suggested that the only course for him, as he seemed convinced he must do something about the insult, was to go at once to Poindexter and demand an immediate apology or explanation, and if he refused, to proceed to beat him.

Curtis seemed to think this was the thing to do, and the quicker the better. His lawyer decided to accompany him. They first went to a store where good canes were kept, and together bought a rather light stick, remarking that he did not want to kill the man, only hit him. Then out of the store to the factory they went.

Charged With Murder

In the front office sat the proprietor. No one else was in the room. Opposite a door was a cashier's window in the partition which separated this room from the next, in which Poindexter was working. Curtis walked up to this window and called to Poindexter, who was at his desk.

"I want an apology."

To which the latter replied: "You can't get one."

Curtis then went round by the door and walked into the inner room, followed by McGuire. By this time Poindexter had drawn his pistol. Curtis saw it, and said quickly:

"I am unarmed."

As Curtis advanced with his stick upraised, Poindexter backed to the wall of the room. When Curtis hit him for the first time he fired. Then came a quick succession of blows and shots. Then Curtis fell.

"I didn't want to shoot him. For God's sake, somebody try to do something!" called Poindexter to the two other men who had stayed in the front room, and raised the dying man's head upon his arm. McGuire ran quickly for a neighboring doctor, while the proprietor of the factory picked up Curtis's stick and placed it on the safe.

On the other hand, a little less sympathetic account of the last moments of Curtis was brought out at the first examination of the eye-witnesses. McGuire said that when Curtis was about to fall he had hurried to him and caught him, and had begged some one to raise the window so Curtis might have some fresh air. Whereupon, Captain Lyon, the proprietor of the factory, had rather brutally replied:

"Ah, but you ought to have kept him in the fresh air when you had him there."

To which McGuire answered:

"About that I must be allowed to differ with you."

But to make a long story short, there was no doubt that Poindexter had shot an unarmed man and a man he knew to be unarmed. Also there was no possibility of his claiming that he had been attacked by two men simultaneously, for McGuire had stayed in the front room until the fatal shot.

The grand jury did not hesitate to return "a true bill" charging John E. Poindexter with the murder of Charles C. Curtis on March 3, and to refuse bail to the accused.

The Lady Who Caused It

Richmond was thrilled, to say the least. It was generally known that the trouble had been over a lady whom Curtis was accused of insulting. Those who knew Curtis could not believe that the meek-mannered youth —he was only twenty-five—could have made himself obnoxious.

And just what had he done? The rumors were unlimited because only a few persons knew the facts. Of course, if he had—then Poindexter, in the eyes of Virginia, was justified. The girl, for soon her name was mentioned, had a brother, and even if he had only one arm it was his right to protect his orphan sister. And then again, Isabel Cottrell was twenty-six —not so young either. I wonder— And the imagination of Richmond soared.

The young lady whose complaints had brought about the tragedy was quite upset. She repeated again and again she hadn't meant to make trouble, and when John Poindexter had said he was going down the next day to horsewhip Charlie Curtis she hadn't believed a word he said. No one

was more surprised than she when Thomas came back and told her John had just shot Charlie for the insulting remarks he had made to her.

Not until the inquest did Richmond learn the cause of the murder. Lest our readers think we are biased or prejudiced against the fair Isabel, we are going to give her testimony. Let her own explanation speak for her. But keep in mind that her interpretation of the events that led up to that fatal day had to be strong enough to justify John Poindexter's assault.

"What a Pretty Little Shoe!"

"I was not at all acquainted with Mr. Curtis," Miss Cottrell began. "I never saw him, that I recollect, but three times, and then at the store at which he was employed.

"I can't remember the dates, but the first time I saw him, I think, was six weeks ago. I went there to try on some shoes. He brought the shoes to me, and insisted I should try them on while he held them. I begged him to give them to me, but he persisted on holding the shoes in his hands. At last I succeeded in getting the shoes from him and put them on myself."

"What occurred next?"

"When he stooped to button the shoes I begged he would allow me to do it myself."

"What next?"

"He persisted in doing it several times, until at last I allowed him to button three buttons. He insisted on buttoning it all the way. I begged that he wouldn't do it, and found some difficulty in preventing him. His conduct was so exceedingly offensive that I took the shoe off. When I took up the shoe I had first taken off, he insisted on lacing it for me, and he stooped down right at my foot, and remained there until I had to change my position—turn my back upon him to lace my shoe. I purchased a pair of shoes and left the store."

The second occasion when Mr. Curtis, said Miss Cottrell, again insulted her, was on her next visit to the shoe shop. She had asked Mr. Crump, one of the firm, who was then in Philadelphia, to have a pair of shoes made to order for her, which in time were forwarded to Richmond by express.

They didn't quite suit Miss Cottrell, and she took them back to the store and asked for another pair. This second pair Mr. Curtis wanted her to try on. She didn't want to, and Mr. Curtis argued with her that unless she did she couldn't tell whether they would fit or not. But nevertheless Miss Cottrell insisted on taking home the new pair without putting them on. This episode was the second insult.

The third occasion was when Miss Cottrell returned both pairs of shoes. One pair she meant to return, the other to have heels plated. Mr. Curtis opened the package and remarked, in an impertinent way, insisted Miss Cottrell:

"What a pretty little shoe! I certainly would like to put it on you. I don't see how you can walk with such feet."

He then asked: "How do you walk?"

"I was very much provoked," Miss Cottrell continued, "and told him he would oblige me by not commenting on my foot, and please to show me the plates. He asked me to walk back in the store, which I did, when he showed me the plates.

Unrefined and Insulting

"I told him to use his own discretion about putting the plates on the heels. I started to leave the store, and he insisted upon my having a seat. I told him no, that I was going to Tyler's jewelry store, where my friend was waiting for me, and that I would call for the shoes in ten minutes.

"I did go back in ten minutes, and he brought the shoes with the plates on. I wanted to examine them."

And here came a slight argument as to whether the plates were new ones or old, Miss Cottrell objecting to paying full price for, as she said, worn plates.

"He asked me how I wore my shoe heels off. He told me to put my foot out and let him see it. I told him I would do nothing of the kind.

"He insisted, and advanced toward me, I thought, with the determination to throw my dress aside, or to make me show him my foot."

"Did he actually attempt to do that?" interrupted the coroner.

"No, sir, but I don't know what he might have done. I turned immediately to leave the store."

Miss Cottrell soon walked out of the store, and Mr. Curtis accompanied her to her phaëton.

"He helped me in, and in so doing gave my arm a very severe grip. I was very much provoked, and remarked to my friend that I would never go in the store again as long as he was employed there. I considered him not only very unrefined, but decidedly insulting."

The State's One Witness

Remember the year was 1879 and the place Virginia. There is no record that any one at the inquest snickered at this confession of the three "insulting occasions" complained of to Mr. Poindexter. We imagine the friends of Mr. Curtis openly derided the lady's tales and scoffed at her account of the "ungentlemanly manner" of the dead man. Others thought it likely that the young lady had not told all, and that the story given out at the coroner's inquest was only a synopsis of the tale Miss Cottrell would have to tell at the trial.

To those who can scarcely believe to-day that any person would be insulted if a shoe salesman offered to button her shoes or remarked that she had a pretty foot, we hasten to add all further details on this matter, brought out in the two subsequent trials that came off before this affair was settled.

When Miss Cottrell came to the witness stand the young lady was questioned briskly by the commonwealth's attorney, and added little to her first account. But instead of justifying her accusations, she only made her complaints seem more hysterical than before. She admitted that she had never been alone in the store with Mr. Curtis. Also that although she did not like the idea, it was customary for shoe clerks to button the shoes of the ladies on whom they were waiting.

On all visits there were also other people in the store, she admitted. Other salespeople and customers besides herself. Now, Miss Cottrell said nothing unpleasant had happened on her second visit. But on her third Mr. Curtis had told her she had a very pretty foot, and she objected to his comment.

To offset this testimony the State had only one witness. This was a young lad also employed in the store, who insisted the young lady had smiled and laughed whenever she was in the store, and didn't seem a bit offended.

And in reference to the time Mr. Curtis had helped her into the phaëton and annoyed her by squeezing her arm, it was explained by Mr. McGuire that in his first talk with him Curtis had told him his side of the story.

After wrapping up the shoes for her, Mr. Curtis had offered to carry the package to the phaëton. The lady waiting for Miss Cottrell was seated on the side near the curbstone, and holding the reins. She raised the reins for Miss Cottrell to get in. Mr. Curtis assisted her in stepping in, and as she lost her balance in stepping over the feet of her friend, his grasp on her arm tightened, the better to steady her.

That was all there was to the insulting grip on the arm that brought to an end the third and last complaint of Miss Cottrell.

Picking the Jury

If the defense had had any idea of putting forth the claim that its client, John E. Poindexter, had gone to the defense of Virginia's womanhood, it had now to discard any such intention. For the sum total of the complaints made at the inquest only emphasized how little cause or reason there had been for the attack on Charles Curtis. It must have realized that any such appeal would have been greeted with gusts of laughter, even in that romantic and gallant State.

The only course possible was to attempt to prove that Curtis had been the aggressor. And though Poindexter had been the first to attack on that Monday morning, when he had left the store he had considered the episode finished. Curtis came to the factory, he had started the fight, and Poindexter had shot him in self-defense.

Trials—for murder at least—came off

with less delay in those days. The shooting took place on the third of March; on the seventeenth, exactly two weeks later, the accused was arraigned and pleaded "not guilty." A week passed in trying to get an unprejudiced jury. The story of the inquest had, of course, been published in the newspapers, and those questioned for jury duty admitted that they had been influenced by these reports. More than three hundred men were called before the Court was satisfied it had an unprejudiced jury of twelve.

The Court Instructs

Very little not already told at the inquest was brought out at the trial. Miss Cottrell denied that she had told a reporter of the Richmond *Dispatch* that Mr. Poindexter, after asking her how large a man Curtis was, and on learning that he was rather slight and boyish in appearance, had said:

"It wouldn't do for me to attack a bigger man than myself and get whipped."

But she did admit telling him that Curtis was a much shorter man.

The defense had a hard task. It slurred over the events leading up to the last meeting between the two men at the factory. It paid no attention to the talk between Miss Cottrell and the prisoner, and the attack in the shoe store. But it claimed that when Curtis walked into the factory with his hickory stick in his hand and announced that he had come to thrash Poindexter, the latter did the only thing possible, shot him in self-defense.

The Commonwealth charged Poindexter with planning murder from the beginning. That he had gone to the shoe store with a revolver in his pocket, had not even asked for an apology or explanation, but had begun to thrash his astonished victim. Since Poindexter had provoked the assault of Curtis, he could not plead self-defense.

"I'd rather be Curtis dead than Poindexter living," thundered the Commonwealth's attorney, and from the audience came a murmur of applause and a clapping of hands.

At 7.40 P. M. on Thursday the jury retired. At 10 P. M. they retired to bed, in the sergeant's charge. At 5 P. M. Friday the jury submitted a question to the presiding judge.

"Shall the jury accept as an established principle of law the fact that if a party provoke an assault, and then, as a consequence of that assault, kill the party, that he thereby deprives himself of the plea of self-defense?"

The judge decided to retire and think over the question. On his return to the bench he gave his opinion that "if the jury thought the accused had killed the deceased through *real, or what seemed to him apparent necessity*, having first retreated until his further retreat was prevented by some impediment, then the Court instructs the jury that the accused was excusable in killing the deceased. But the Court further instructs the jury that in order that the accused shall be excusable in the killing of the deceased from necessity, they must be satisfied from the whole evidence before them that he was without fault in bringing that necessity on himself."

It seems the instructions did not do much to solve the difficulties for the weary jurors. The jury was brought into Court eight times, but admitted they had not yet been able to reach a verdict. On Saturday night, about ten o'clock, after fifty hours' consultation, the judge decided to dismiss them and call it a mistrial.

Sentence Is Passed

Rumor said the jury had stood ten for conviction for voluntary manslaughter, and two for conviction for involuntary manslaughter. The prisoner went back to jail, and the second trial was fixed for April 17.

Of two hundred men questioned for the second jury, only one man was found who had not already made up his mind about the guilt of the prisoner. The Commonwealth's attorney moved that the Court send to some locality remote from Richmond for talesman. The judge acquiesced, and fifty men were brought from Alexandria and Fredericksburg. From this group the jury was formed.

Some interesting details were brought out for the first time in the second trial. Miss Cottrell was urged to answer the question as to whether she was engaged to Mr. John

Poindexter. She admitted she was; in fact, had been for more than two years. Hitherto she had denied any attachment so as to bring out that he had come to her defense, as would have any Virginia gentleman to whom she might have told her story. With Poindexter her acknowledged fiancé of two years' standing, it was not as likely that his attitude would be shared with the male population of Richmond.

Miss Cottrell also admitted that Poindexter had remarked that "if he is a bigger fellow than I am, I might be afraid to attack him."

The trial did not last long. The account of a contemporary says of the Commonwealth's attorney's final argument, that "his line was about the same, but in language was new." Of the attorney for the defense he comments, "Very few persons can clothe their thoughts in handsomer language."

The jury was much impressed by the eloquence that beat about its ears. Equally doubtful as the first jury was of the grades of murder and manslaughter, it came back to the courtroom for advice. By eleven o'clock the jury had failed to reach a unanimous conclusion. But on the next morning it announced it had a verdict to render, that the prisoner was guilty of manslaughter, and must serve out a two-year sentence in the penitentiary.

Nothing more is said of the fair instigator of the crime. Miss Cottrell—yes, she was a blonde—fades out of the picture, leaving behind, however, a snickering suspicion that all the to-do about the Curtis lad getting a view of her feet—not even ankles, you recall—must have been due to the fact that she probably was knock-kneed, bow-legged and pigeon-toed, and therefore had an inferiority complex about her nether extremities!

READER RISES TO DEFENSE OF AUTHOR!

THERE won't be a Bureau of Correspondence in this issue, and it seems too bad to wait until there is one before we release the following.

February 19 we printed this note among half a dozen letters of criticism of different stories:

JUST ARITHMETIC

My dear Mr. Flynn:

Among your fact stories by Chas. Somerville is one entitled "Ten Million Dollars the Stakes." Please figure out for yourself the following, which I have underlined in pencil on inclosed clippings:

Cigar sales, two years	6,000,000.00
Profit in two years	$1,200,000.00
Profit per cigar	.20

As a fact story writer, Somerville ought to consult your M. E. Ohaver.

W. W., Corning, Calif.

We didn't even ask Mr. Somerville to defend himself, explain himself, or apologize. But we didn't need to.

C. I. S. writes from Miami, Florida:

My dear Mr. Flynn:

In your Bureau of Correspondence I find the inclosed clipping under a heading "Just Arithmetic." I think on a total cigar sale of $6,000,000.00 a profit of $1,200,000.00 only shows profit of twenty per cent on the dollar and not .20 per cigar, which is about the real profit in selling cigars. I believe Mr. Charles Somerville knows his onions.

Flynn's Weekly thinks so, too, and attests its thoughts by printing Mr. Somerville's stories.

The monstrous fire lit him red, like a fiend from the pit

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!"

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

FORMER CAPTAIN SANCTUARY, soldier of fortune, first encountered that mysterious and insidious death with its luscious, sickening odor, by chancing on one of its victims, who proved to be a secret agent for Sanctuary's friend, Marakov, a refugee Russian nobleman of strange connections. In the victim's place Marakov appointed Sanctuary to accompany his daughter, Xenia, to the Russian interior. Boroff, an extremely powerful companion of Marakov, and an unknown quantity, arranged everything for Sanctuary and Xenia. Sanctuary suspected that something was queer about the whole affair. On the boat to the continent he was attacked with a knife, and killed his assailant, who was later rolled into the sea by unseen hands. Twice on the way he smelled that unforgetable odor, and then, on the outskirts of Russia, he was arrested by Officer Kolotsky on order of the Che Ka, the supreme secret service power. He watched Xenia led away by a stranger of authority, an agent of the Scented Death.

CHAPTER X

HIGH SWING, LOW SWING!

THE slim, dark stranger made no attempt to hold Xenia nor to touch her, but trod quietly by her side, very inscrutable and self-effacing.

They had crossed the gallery, and were halfway down the stairs when they heard Kolotsky's harsh word of command which set the soldiers moving with Sanctuary under guard amid them, and Xenia awoke to a realization of what had happened.

She stopped on the stairs, and turned to her escort.

"Why have you come for me?" she asked.

He hesitated before replying, as though uncertain whether he should vouchsafe any information.

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY for March 19

"I was ordered to do so."

"But why? Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is hardly for me to say, *madame*. The order was given to me, and I obey it."

She studied him and then spoke with an effort at calmness.

"What—other orders—have you concerning me?"

He knew what she meant, and for once the flicker of a little smile played about his almost bloodless lips.

"For the moment—none."

She breathed heavily, and swayed. "So—I live—still?"

"For the moment, *madame*."

It was evident that he was inclined to treat her with some respect, in view of the fact that she traveled under the mandate of the Scented Death.

She went on down the stairs, and he followed her.

They reached the hall, and with that Sanctuary was led out on to the gallery, with much thudding of heavy boots and jingling of metal. Xenia turned and looked up.

She was then standing between the bottom of the stairway and the entrance door, through the shattered panels of which she could see, standing outside in the street, the horse that had brought the messenger of the Che Ka. The courier himself was lounging in the doorway of the *salle a manger*, smoking a cigarette and surveying the whole scene with stolid indifference.

The hall was square, not large in area, but great in height, and above, the gaunt iron framework of the big glass dome, with its massive pendent electrolier, stood naked to the stars. Beyond the electrolier, and over the entrance door of the hotel, was a deep-set window, having an inside sill about two feet broad.

The window was partly boarded up, but wind and weather had rotted the boarding, so that it was loose and ramshackle, and threatened with every breeze to come toppling to the marble beneath.

These things Xenia noticed, not before, but during the sequence of swift events which began with the bringing of Sanctuary upon the gallery. It was as though a stage had been set with mechanical figures, all standing still when the curtain went up—the courier in the door of the *salle a manger*, herself and her escort on the hall floor, Sanctuary and his guard up there at the head of the stairs.

Kolotsky made the first little move which set in motion the whole.

He stepped to the balustrade and waved his hand to her, for now all his old assurance had returned to him.

"*Adieu*—most beautiful!" he called.

Sanctuary moved.

There was a man to either side of him, and the two of them thundered to the floor.

Xenia screamed.

Kolotsky turned, snarling, his hand on his pistol butt. Sanctuary got him under the chin, so that he toppled back over the balustrade to the marble beneath, with an awful soft thud, and lay, curiously twisted and motionless.

His men were a-clamor. One of them lifted a rifle.

Sanctuary was on the balustrade—standing!

The courier, his cigarette fallen from his gaping lips, made for the stairs.

Sanctuary jumped—outward—above the great depth of the hall, and, with the jump, he clutched with sure hands on the rim of the great electrolier.

The thing swung under the impetus of his leap like the pendulum of a mighty clock—swung forward and up, with Sanctuary clawing his way to one of its cross-pieces, so that when it swung back he was standing on the rim, clutching the chain.

The soldier with the lifted rifle fired, and the roar of the weapon rocked the whole atmosphere of the place. The men were all shouting and confused. Xenia was back against the wall, breathless, her hand to her breast. The courier was halfway up the stairs.

The electrolier, having completed its return arc toward the gallery, dipped once more. Sanctuary urged it with his legs as a child urges a garden swing, so that now it went faster and lifted higher—higher.

He jumped from it just before it reached the limit of its lift, and, crazy though the take-off was, he landed in a heap in the

deep sill of the window above the entrance door, crashing against the rotting boards, so that they broke from their fastening and fell outward.

The rifle boomed again. Another soldier fired immediately. The bullets hit the masonry on either side of the window.

Sanctuary was seen for an instant outlined against the stars beyond. The courier, guessing his intention, was racketing down the stairs, but he was too late.

Sanctuary dropped. They could still see him through the door of the hotel, and they saw him vault into the saddle of the courier's horse.

By the time they reached the door all they knew of him was a rapidly dimming clatter of iron-shod hoofs on masonry in the far dark distance.

When they went over to Kolotsky they found he was dead.

Xenia stirred. It was impossible, incredible! It had not happened. But a few seconds ago she had been standing with the agent of the Scented Death looking up at Sanctuary on the balustrade, hearing Kolotsky's last insult.

Now—Kolotsky was dead, and Sanctuary was gone. The whole situation was changed as though a door had opened and slammed.

Sanctuary was gone. He had escaped! Escaped! He was free!

She felt a touch on her arm and turned to face her escort.

"We will go," he said quietly.

She went with him.

And as she walked by his side she found herself filled, not with joy, but with pride—pride which had found birth in the moment of that daring leap, in her memory of the man who had made it.

CHAPTER XI

GUN-WOMAN

WHEN Xenia reached the Kazan Station, to which her escort took her in a ramshackle cab, she found it to be a hollow hall of dismal memories, ill-lit, deserted, with rusted rails and crumbling platforms. At one of these a string of coaches was drawn up. Her guide conducted her to a coach nearly central in the string.

"This train," he said, "goes as far south as Maikop, when an engine and fuel can be found."

One of his rare smiles showed.

"In Russia, in these days, even the Scented Death cannot create a locomotive and fuel from nothing. We shall travel in this coach. It once served the Grand Duke Nicholas during the fighting on the Eastern front, and is admirably divided into a series of rooms.

"Unfortunately, as you will observe, the windows have suffered rather badly, and, as usual we have had to employ wood in place of the glass. Apart from that however, the coach should be fairly comfortable. I have ordered clean bedding, and there will be oil for lighting, cooking, and heating.

"I estimate that we shall be nearly a fortnight in the coach after we start so that we shall need those comforts. From Maikop we shall continue the journey to Marakov by car. I have already arranged for the car at that end."

He paused. "By the way, my name is Markheim. It is best that you should know it from the first. Allow me."

He stood on one side for her to mount the steps into the coach. She found the interior remarkably clean and tidy, and there were evidences that considerable attention had recently been paid to its appearance. There was a corridor down one side of it with rooms opening off. Markheim indicated them.

"This will be your bedroom, and the bedroom of our fellow passenger. You have yet to meet her. This room is mine." They were walking down the corridor. "This is the dining room of the coach. That," he pointed to a closed door beyond, "that door is fastened. It remains fastened until the end of the journey."

Xenia stared at this locked door, and her thoughts went back to the door on the ship! A locked door here—and on the ship. She remembered that Sanctuary had told her the Scented Death was on the ship.

Markheim pushed open the door of the

dining room. "You will meet our fellow-traveler?" he suggested, breaking in on her thoughts.

Xenia went into the cabin and met the woman who was to accompany her on this hazardous journey south, who, unknown before this meeting, was, from then on to stamp herself ineffacably upon her memory, was to flare across the skies of her life, leaving behind a picture of reeling passion and untameable spirit.

She sat at the little table cleaning an automatic pistol, and she lifted her head as Xenia entered.

She was slim and of average height, a feline, easy-swaying creature with nimble white hands, the left of which had its fore-finger stained brown with nicotine. A cigarette dangled from the corner of her mouth. Her hair was red-brown, like lighted copper—wonderful hair, standing out in a halo of fire about her pink and white, half-sullen face.

Her eyes were blue and dusky, lazy—slow eyes, which never seemed to look, but to watch. Her lips were full, the bottom one pulled down a little at the corner by the cigarette, and were vividly red. She wore a white blouse, very open at the throat to disclose a silky expanse of creamy skin and a hint of voluptuous breasts.

"Wanda," said Markheim. "This is she who travels with us." He turned to Xenia. "Wanda goes as far as Marakov."

Wanda took the cigarette from her mouth and tapped its ash on the floor. Her lazy eyes swept over Xenia.

"How are you?" she said, and went on cleaning her pistol.

Xenia noticed that round her waist Wanda wore a cartridge belt, with a pistol case attached to it. She heard a little click behind her, and, turning, found that the door was closed. Markheim had quietly left them.

Wanda swung the gun up and squinted through the barrel. "Sit down" she said. Xenia accepted the invitation. She hardly knew what to say, nor how to approach this strange, tigerish creature who cleaned a pistol with the practiced skill of a soldier, and who accepted her arrival so nonchalantly. She pictured Wanda as a sullen thing, a woman of few words, not knowing that the weeks ahead were to show her this same girl as a raging fury, a creature wild with eloquence, a destructive lighting riding high on a storm of her own creating.

"Can you shoot?" asked Wanda, clipping up the magazine.

"I have shot grouse," said Xenia, with a memory of a season in Scotland.

Wanda glanced at her curiously. "Grouse! By God." she laughed. "Can you shoot—men?"

Xenia did not answer. Wanda twirled the gun about her finger by its trigger guard. "This," she said, indicating it, "is the weapon of the revolution—not only of our revolution, but of all modern revolutions. It is the quick death, the hidden thing a man may carry in his pocket and use for slaying. It is certain and it is easy.

"The genius who invented it did more to break the laws of capitalism than all the orators ever accomplished. He put into the hands of those outcasts whom the capitalists call criminals a weapon such as they had never imagined in their wildest dreams. He gave to anarchy a prize, a possession, a power—in this little weapon."

There was truth in it, and Xenia realized it. The automatic pistol, she thought, was the murder thing, the weapon created for cold killing in the darkness. There was no romance in its squat ugliness; no glamor of battle line about its minuteness. No bayonet ever tossed in the sunshine on its barrel end. Yet it slew—slew from the pockets of ordinary lounge suits, slew from the hands of hooligans and ruffians.

Wanda slipped the pistol into its case. "Markheim says you're going to Marakov. Why?"

"He is taking me there. That is all I know." Xenia realized that this girl did not know who she was, nor anything about her, and, as Markheim had evidently not thought it wise to make any statement concerning her, she herself might find it best to keep silent on the subject.

"Markheim? That cold fish! Taking a girl to Marakov! By God! That's funny."

Xenia flushed. "If you imagine—" she began.

Wanda stopped her, waving her cigarette in her direction. "All right. I don't care what he does, nor what you do. Do you think I'm interested in your morality? Not I! I have my own virtue to think about." Her slow eyes were sardonic, and watched Xenia slyly. "We mustn't quarrel about that, or we shall fight like cats. Only—there are better men in Russia than Markheim. Where do you come from?"

Xenia nearly said London, and checked herself in time. "North," she answered vaguely.

"Ah! Petrograd, eh? Well—I've seen Petrograd. I was there on the twenty-fifth—the great twenty-fifth. This little pistol had a good day then. After that they sent me out to Simbirsk. Now they send me to Marakov. I think we shall enjoy ourselves in Marakov, you and I." She paused. "There has been real hell on the Volga—famine, starvation, and God knows what. With all those blasted English and Americans practicing piety and charity."

She glanced at the watch which was on her wrist, and which Xenia recognized vaguely was a man's watch. "Well, it's time I went to bed. You too. We shall lose our beauty, and then where will the kisses come from? Even Markheim might stall at a hag; not that I think he knows about it."

She got lazily up, disclosing herself as splendidly strong and lithe, and walked to the door with a mincing, swaying gait which reminded Xenia of the manikins she had seen in Paris and London.

"Good night—comrade. I shall see you in the morning."

She went out.

A few moments later Xenia followed her. Beyond the half boarded windows of the corridor she could see the platform, drearily dark, with the opaque immensity of the ruined station stretched beyond it. Markheim was walking slowly up and down the platform, alone, and by his gait Xenia imagined him deep in thought.

A cold man, truly, she thought, and one shut off from all ordinary converse with his fellow creatures. To him, she told herself, she was but a piece on the board his master controlled, something inanimate, to be moved around as the master mind directed.

She drew away from the window and sought her compartment. In the yellow flame of the oil lamp it was repellently sordid, and quiet. When she shut the door, the stillness of the cabin's interior seemed to live.

She found that the door lock did not work. The compartment was open to any intrusion.

She got into bed—afraid.

For several days the train stood in the Kazan station, and during this wait Xenia's only escape from the confines of the coach was an occasional, well-watched walk on the platform. Her guard—ostensibly her companion—on these walks was Wanda, with her cartridge belt and her pistol.

During these patrols Wanda did most of the talking, for Xenia, meeting in her a mentality she had never before encountered, did not know what to say to her. So mostly she listened, sometimes with astonishment, even incredulity, often with horror and sickness.

Wanda had been everywhere and in everything. The bloody wave of the Revolution had evidently carried her on its crest when it swept Russia from end to end. What devil's work she had seen, Xenia dared not guess. What she had been before Czardom crashed to dust Xenia never learned.

She was a creature born overnight in the travail of Russia's agony, thrust from the womb of that horror whose only creed was destruction. She fascinated Xenia and repelled her. The coarseness of her speech sometimes shocked, more often held Xenia tightly.

She spoke of death as one might speak of a meal, something coming in the course of the day's work. And all through her story there were men — brutal men, polished men, cunning men, and fools.

"Love and death," she once said. "That is all of life. Love and death. Kisses and killing. What else do you want? Why—even Christ died! And a woman wept at His feet—"

Xenia dared not listen.

During those two days Markheim held himself aloof. He had, it seemed, accomplished his mission so far, and he was disposed to ignore Xenia once he had placed her in the charge of Wanda. In fact, Xenia saw very little of him, for he was very often away from the station on some mysterious errands.

She spent much of her time standing in the corridor, and watching the station. It was a relief from the dreariness of her own thoughts. Sometimes, at dusk, she saw Markheim return.

It was on the evening of the third day that, standing thus, she saw Markheim coming down the platform. Behind him, perhaps twenty yards in his rear, walked another man. He was big, made bigger by a monstrous ill-fitting coat of fur, with a great collar hunched above his shoulders, and he walked clumsily in a great pair of knee boots, which, in Russia at that time, must have been worth a vast sum of money.

Markheim turned in at the door of the coach. The big man slouched by, looking neither to left nor right.

Xenia saw him again, two evenings later, and now he came alone, for Markheim had not yet put in an appearance. He hove in sight through the murk shrouding the station's entrance, and came down the platform as before, with the same hugged air of absolute concentration or lack of all mental effort. It was when he was within a dozen yards of the window that Xenia thought she recognized something familiar in his gait. She stared—and stared again: and her heart leaped high.

It was Sanctuary! Surely it was Sanctuary! She could not be mistaken. It was he. She thrust her arm through the wide aperture that had served as her spy hole, and waved to him, jerkily, childishly. The man lurched on. He was passing her. He had not seen her. Sanctuary was walking by and did not know she was there!

She rapped on the boards, pressing her face close to the opening. He was then opposite her. As she tapped, he halted. Her heart was babbling silent prayers. He would see her now.

He turned and stood looking at her. In the gathering darkness she could not see his features distinctly. He watched her as a cow might have watched her across a hedge in a Sussex field, with an air of slow bewilderment. While she stared, he stared. He made no attempt to come toward the coach.

The lilting joy in her heart changed to leaden despair. She turned away. The man was still standing, studying the phenomenon of the coach window.

She went into her cabin.

Until that moment she had not realized exactly how much alone she was—how lonely. She wept for the first time since her capture.

The train started at noon the next day.

CHAPTER XII

BOROFF'S DESIGN—COMPLETE

HEY were four days on the southward journey. Their progress had been slow, for the engine was constantly held up for fuel and oil, and they had spent one whole night stationary some sixty versts south of Moscow because an axle box had run hot and seized up.

In those four days the locked cabin was never unlocked. In those four days Wanda, finding Xenia uncommunicative and not at all conformant to her ideas of "sportiness," became her usual sullen self, and held herself somewhat aloof. And in those four days, also, Markheim changed.

The change was almost imperceptible in its growth, but at last Xenia recognized it and found in it a new source of fear.

Markheim became friendly.

It was not a sudden transition. It was spread over ninety-six hours of subtle alteration in his attitude, a gradual thawing of his cold nature. There were more smiles; some words. He began to speak about the journey, and confined his conversation no longer to the matter of Xenia's disposal and capture. The chill died from his gaze and into his eyes crept some warmth.

Gradually, Xenia realized it. Gradually she began to understand that this man was admiring her—or pretending to admire her. Gradually, Markheim, with a sub-

tlety which was truly astonishing, made evident the fact that his politeness to her was now no longer due to the fact that she traveled under the mandate of the Scented Death, but was the politeness, the homage, accorded by a man to the woman whom he thinks the most beautiful and desirable in the world.

His first definite step toward intimacy was his proffer of information. He said casually, one day, when Wanda was in her compartment asleep:

"It might interest you to know that your friend of the Batitinska Bazaar had not been recaptured up to the time we left Moscow, though all the troops in the town were hunting for him. His horse, in fact, was found loose, five hundred yards from the hotel, where he had evidently abandoned it." He paused and eyed her questioningly: "A clever man, that, and a daring one."

"Yes." Xenia answered as coolly as she could, though her heart was throbbing exultantly. Sanctuary was beating them. Playing a lone hand, hunted, desperate, driven, he yet kept his liberty, and they would have to reckon with him.

On the evening of the sixth day, Markheim came to Xenia in her bedroom. It was late—midnight—and Wanda would be fast asleep. There was no lock on the door, and Markheim walked straight in. He carried a lantern. Xenia, with a little startled cry, sat up in bed.

"You will pardon me, *madame*, but it is necessary that I talk with you in absolute privacy. This is my only opportunity. If you desire to dress I will withdraw until you are ready; or, if you are willing to do so, I suggest you throw a wrap about your shoulders and remain in your bunk. But that is for you to decide."

There was no threat in his attitude or tone, and Xenia realized that he spoke the truth. Whatever he might intend by this intrusion, direct harm to herself was no part of it. It might, she decided, be best for her to meet him halfway.

"Will you give me my wrap?" she asked.

He handed it to her, and holding it close about her chin, with the bedclothes drawn high, she waited for him to speak.

He placed the lantern on the table and seated himself. For a few moments he was silent, regarding her with glowing eyes. At last he said: "All my life I have been a cold man, *madame*, going about my duty and seeing only my duty—until I met you. I had always laughed to scorn the idea that a man should take risks, should break the laws, should flaunt himself in the face of fate, for the sake of a woman's smile—until I met you. I thought the man who did these things was a fool. Now I know differently."

She watched him dumbly, wondering. It was, she thought, the strangest declaration of love to which any woman ever listened, for, though it rang with apparent sincerity, it yet was stated coldly and dispassionately, as she might have imagined Markheim would state it.

Markheim drew a slow breath.

"You travel on this hazardous journey to accomplish a mission, of which I know as much as you. The mission, if brought to a successful conclusion, means wealth beyond dreams. If unsuccessful—it means death." He leaned forward a little, fixing her with his gaze. "May I tell you, *madame*, that the mission is foredoomed to failure? That you travel to death—or what you will regard as worse?"

She stammered, afraid, for in his quietness he was dreadfully impressive. "How—what do you mean?"

The old little smile curled his lips. "I have made a statement, and I will prove it. Who sent you? Who arranged all this journeying of yours?"

She whispered: "Boroff!"

He nodded. "Exactly. Now I will tell you some things about Feodor Boroff which will surprise you, and, before I tell you them I am not going to ask that you should treat what I say as confidential, because once you have heard, you will know it is true, and you will not dare to betray me, even though you may not be willing to accept the offer I shall ultimately make you."

He proceeded like a man who exposes a carefully prepared statement in a court of law:

"We will start at the beginning. The matter of this journey was first broached

by you to your father—whose name we will not mention—when he had given you certain information that surprised and humiliated you. That is right?"

She nodded.

"Boroff, far from opposing your enterprise, indorsed it, and suggested that he should arrange all its details?" Markheim hesitated. "Is it an insult if I mention here that Boroff is interested in you?"

"It is true," she said.

"So. When first the project was mooted, Boroff, who was engaged in some great financial deal calling for his presence in London, suggested that you should postpone your journey until he was ready to accompany you. It was well understood that your father must not venture into Russia—he is too well known, and certain death would have awaited him here. If your father and yourself had not both been convinced of that, it might have suited Boroff's plans to persuade your father to come."

"How do you know what was in Boroff's secret mind?" Xenia asked.

"Am I not Boroff's man?" Markheim answered suavely. "Boroff, then, arranged to be your escort; Boroff, asked you to wait until his business was completed. But because you feared and hated Boroff you would not wait. You remembered that Stanev, an old retainer of your father's, was in London, and would be willing to lay down his life for you if necessary.

"Stanev would go, if you asked him. You asked him—and Stanev laid down his life. You remember that night? He was to be there at a certain time. He came—on time; but I need not repeat how he came."

Markheim paused. "Stanev's body was sent to you. His appearance at your house in that taxicab was no vain theatrical touch. It was a thing done with an object. You were to be shown Stanev—dead; so that, knowing he was dead, you would realize that you must go with Boroff or not at all. The Scented Death killed Stanev, *madame;* but the Scented Death, which, as you have seen, commands in Russia, which can kill in London—is, itself, commanded by Boroff."

Xenia sat rigid, hands clutched tightly.

"Boroff arranged everything. Ah! I see you remember that. The phrase is significant, eh? Boroff arranged. Boroff, sitting in London, stretched his hand across Europe, and arranged.

"Boroff sent you round by Moscow so that you could not reach Marakov before he had planned that you should be there. Boroff sent me to the Batiatinska Bazaar. Boroff made your journey to Marakov—safe! It is after you reach Marakov that you will know all else that Boroff has arranged."

He nodded his head toward the partition which separated from the compartment that of Wanda.

"Boroff even arranged her presence. She travels with us, to Marakov, because Boroff has ordered it. And when she gets there the work she will do will be that work which Boroff has planned."

Xenia's brain was reeling. This picture of a close-meshed web, which, invisibly, was tangled about her feet, appalled her. Everything fitted in. It was wonderful, stupendous, inhuman.

And then, in the chaos of her thoughts, glowed a little lamp of memory.

"Captain Sanctuary?" she whispered.

Markheim shrugged his shoulders. "The one unforeseen element. Pure chance sent that man to your house on the night Stanev was killed. Captain Sanctuary stepped over the edge of Boroff's web and he tore some of the strands. The thing Boroff had killed Stanev to prevent, materialized after all. You journeyed to Russia ahead of Boroff. It left another thing for Boroff to arrange—the death of Captain Sanctuary."

She moaned, watching him with terrified eyes.

"The man who drove Stanev to your door in the guise of a taxi driver was one, Petroff, a murderous creature who was useful in the killing of people; an expert with the knife. To him was delegated the task of sweeping Sanctuary aside, and the time allotted to him was during your voyage to Riga. Petroff tried—and Petroff failed. Sanctuary killed him on the ship one night."

She was not horrified, but exultant, incredulous though the emotion was to her. She remembered, how Sanctuary had

knocked at her cabin door and asked if she were safe. That must have been the night—that night of shrieking wind and storm—when Petroff came by his doom.

"So," continued Markheim, "Sanctuary was arrested in the hotel, as you saw. It had to be done swiftly, and it was bungled. He has escaped, but there is little hope for him. I have seen so many, like him—brave, desperate, resourceful men—go down at last under a weight of odds impossible to compute."

His voice dropped a little. "There, I have told you all that matters. Of what is to happen at Marakov I know a great deal, even if not all. But this I can assure you. Every move you make, every journey you take; every move I make, every move Wanda makes; everything your father does—that we all do—is already written in the brain of Boroff—is already arranged!

"Unless somebody with knowledge, somebody who knows the whole complex stratagem, cuts across it boldly and courageously, risking all to gain all—the end is predestined. Is it necessary for me to suggest that end?"

"I—I think I know."

He nodded gravely. "Yes, *madame,* you know. There are two treasures to be won—that wealth which is uncountable, and yourself. And Boroff plays to win! That which was impossible to him in London is made easy for him at Marakov. That is why he allows you to go there."

There was silence awhile in the close, rocking compartment, and during it the even thud of the wheels beneath sounded drumming and loud.

Markheim went on: "Now for my part and my offer. I have already told you how I regard you and I will neither offend nor weary you by repeating it. For you—I would risk all. For you—I am willing to go against my master, against the Scented Death, against Boroff himself."

"You mean—you would ally with me—help me against them all?"

"I mean that," very gravely. "This is no sudden decision, as you may already be aware. It is a thing which has forced itself upon me through my close association with you during this journey. I can ask for no reward. I dare not hope that you will ever smile on me. But—I can be your helper and your friend, if you will accept me.

"You and your father alone know the secret of the treasure. Even Boroff does not know that. But knowledge of the secret does not help you to gain that treasure. For that purpose you need assistance. I proffer it. It is all I can do to express my homage to the one woman who has ever stirred me."

"But—but—" She stopped. She hardly knew what to say to him. His dark eyes were very earnest and urgent. In his whole manner was a great supplication. He might not have been offering friendship and powerful assistance, but begging a favor of somebody set above him.

"It is difficult to answer, is it not? I realize that. You think of me only as the man who came into the Batiatinska Bazaar, carrying the warrant of the Scented Death. I would ask you to forget that. I would ask you to forget who I am and what I have been, to think of me, now, only as a man who comes humbly to your feet, proffering service."

He stood up. "To-night is no time for you to decide, for you are, I can see, distraught. I will leave you. You can think it all over, and, before the journey's end, you can let me know. But—remember—without me, you have no chance. With me—you stand to win, after all."

He went out quietly while she still watched him, and he took the lantern with him.

As he closed the door, a little sly smile played about his lips, and his eyes, half veiled, shone with satisfaction.

Behind him, in the dark compartment, Xenia sat staring into the blackness. It was all true. It must be true. For it all dovetailed together like a clever, complex pattern. Boroff, whom she had always feared and hated, had sent her forth on this journey that she might fall into his hands at the last. Boroff had sent Sanctuary to his doom—Sanctuary!

Her thoughts stopped. Markheim had said that Sanctuary was the one unconsidered factor in the whole gigantic plan.

Sanctuary had, said Markheim, broken some of the strands of the web. And he was still free. They had tried to kill him and they had failed. Up to the present, in him, they had at least met their match.

Her eyes were filled with tears at the memory of him, not as she had last seen him, swinging to liberty on the swaying chandelier above the ruined hall of the Batiatinska Bazaar; but as he had stood and watched her in the dust-filled corridor when she went to her room.

A prayer lifted from her heart. "Oh, God—send him to me! Send him to me!"

It was a miracle for which she asked, and she knew it in the asking. Yet God grants miracles to those whose faith is strong.

CHAPTER XIII

BOROFF SMILES, AND PLAYS

FOUR days after Sanctuary and Xenia sailed for Riga, Boroff telephoned Prince Marakov and suggested that Marakov should dine with him that evening, or that he should dine with Marakov. He had, he said, something of importance to discuss. Marakov, who had a strange reluctance to leave the house, now that Xenia had gone, and left it empty in his sight, asked Boroff to dine with him.

That evening Boroff came.

During the meal, he deliberately refrained from making any reference to the important matter which had brought him, and watched with satisfaction Marakov's ill-concealed impatience to hear what he had to say. It was afterward, in Marakov's smoking room, that he broached it.

"Have you news?" asked Marakov eagerly.

"No. They would hardly be at Riga yet. By the way, do you read the newspapers these days?"

"I do—a little. Why?"

"Ah. I see you haven't read the little item in this morning's editions. There is an account of the discovery of a man hanged from the balustrade of the staircase of a poor lodging house in Brixton. Around the man's neck was a thin cord—a cord which would make such a mark as might be left by a tightly drawn silk handkerchief. In the man's pocket was a scrawled note: 'I am tired of it all.' The description of the man coincides exactly with that of poor Stanev. They seem to have covered that trail pretty effectually, don't they?"

"By God!" said Marakov. "What cunning devils they are! Boroff! If they did this, if the Scented Death killed Stanev—what does it all mean?"

Boroff was extremely grave.

"As you know, I have been engaged in a fight with the Steel Trust, on the result of which my whole fortune depended. I suggested that Xenia should wait until its conclusion before starting on her journey, so that I might accompany her. Unfortunately, she did not see eye to eye with me in the matter. The fight has now ended, and to-day, with a mind free from financial worries, I have been thinking about Xenia."

"Well?"

Boroff examined the end of his cigar. It seemed as if he did not wish to watch Marakov's face in case he saw something there which would hurt him. He spoke at last, suddenly, like a man who has a difficult task before him and wishes to rush over it.

"Marakov—you and I have been fools—worse than fools—almost criminal maniacs. Don't you understand?"

"I don't." The negative was half-hearted, and betrayed in its tone all the fear which was rising in Marakov.

"It is obvious. They—those devils out there in Russia—know of the existence of the treasure. I read it this way. They are searching for it, hoping to find its hiding place. By some means or other—and you know yourself how things are discovered in Russia and by those who rule Russia—they learned that Xenia was going to try and get the treasure away. They wished to stop her—because they wanted time to find it for themselves. That is how I read the killing of Stanev."

Marakov lifted his cigar to his lips with a shaking hand. He was very pale, and there was a heavy sweat about his brows. Yet he strove to be calm, strove to fight back the understanding which was leaping in his brain.

"Well?"

Boroff lifted his eyes to Marakov's. "Xenia has, nevertheless, gone to Russia," he said quietly. "That is all."

"I see." Marakov was now displaying less outward agitation. Rather did he look numbed and dazed, as a man stricken across the head. "I see. You mean—that—having killed Stanev—" He could not finish it.

Boroff drew at his cigar. "It may not be as bad as that. Of course, we were fools ever to let her go. We should have realized that the murder of Stanev was a warning—there was peril for her in every step she took. We should have insisted on her abandoning the enterprise, or at least, postponing her attempt. As I have already said, I tried to insist. Now—she is in Russia, or so far on her way there that she cannot be stopped."

Something leaped in Marakov's eyes. "But she must be stopped. She must! My God, Boroff! She goes to her death! My girl—to her death!"

Boroff's hand moved steadyingly. "A moment, Marakov. We are both men of the world, with some experience of danger and risk. This is no time for theatricals, nor for impulsive action. In fact, we have had sufficient of that last to satisfy us for good. It was sheer impulse which made you take that fellow Sanctuary into your confidence and send Xenia off with him."

Marakov moved uneasily. He did not attempt to deny the insinuation that he was responsible for Xenia's present position of peril.

"This is a matter for careful movement," added Boroff. "Xenia is in Russia, or nearly there. We must admit that. The arrangements were so complete that she would step off the ship onto a train, and we cannot get her at Riga. The ship on which she sailed carried no wireless.

"To all intents and purposes, she is in Russia. Now here, I may help. As you know, I have some influence, the web of international finance is anchored on far-reaching strands—and I think—I think I can guarantee her safe arrival at Marakov."

"You can do that, Boroff?"

"I believe so. It may be possible, by the spending of a little money in a discreet way."

"You are good, Boroff. I shall always remember it."

Boroff smiled deprecatingly. "It is not so wonderful as it appears on the surface. They may be quite willing for Xenia to get to Marakov, because she knows where the treasure is, and she alone can show them. That is how I shall get my friends to argue with them. So I think we can confidently reckon that she will reach there safely. It is after she is there, after she has discovered the treasure that she will stand in danger from our enemies."

Marakov was trying desperately hard to be as cool and businesslike as Boroff, and though the effort was all but a pitiful failure, he yet managed to utter a commonplace query:

"How will you surmount that difficulty?"

"By being on the spot. They will not expect that."

"On the spot! You mean at Marakov? You!"

"And you," said Boroff. "I have given the matter much thought, and I see it is the only way. My yacht is at Southampton, and she can sail to-morrow, if necessary. We can go straight to the Black Sea in her, and so to Marakov; and I calculate, despite the fact that we travel by sea, we shall be ahead of Xenia; for Russian railway traveling is the most uncertain thing in the world at the moment."

He did not add that it was all calculated to an hour, that the yacht had been ready from the day it was decided Sanctuary should go with Xenia.

"And we can land at Marakov?" the old man asked excitedly. "I—I can revisit my home? You have had news, Boroff? The scoundrels who have ruined my country will permit us—"

Boroff gave him a somber smile.

"We can land," he said, "but at what peril we have yet to discover. And for the Princess Xenia's sake the peril must be faced."

From Marakov only one reply was possible. He had an opportunity to meet his daughter at Marakov, to revisit the scene of his former greatness. No longer need he skulk in London, wondering, fearing, hop-

ing, praying. He could be out and up and doing. He could go to the aid of his only child.

His reserve broke down. There were tears in his eyes. He seized Boroff's hand and thanked him brokenly and fervently.

Across his bowed head Boroff smiled again.

CHAPTER XIV

A FOUL, CREEPING THING

FOR two days after he had put before her his remarkable proposition, Markheim seemed anxious to avoid Xenia. He took his meals alone, and when he met her in the corridor of the coach, he had nothing to say, only his eyes smiled at her and questioned her.

On the third day he asked her if she had made a decision, and when she said she was still uncertain, he half-apologized and withdrew.

Their progress was slow. The engine seemed to be continually developing small mechanical faults, which, while they could be remedied on the track, nevertheless delayed them for hours at a stretch. On one occasion the engine crew went on strike.

The train stopped one afternoon at a wayside station, and the crew got from the engine cab and the coach immediately behind it and held a meeting on the platform. There were, with reliefs, about ten of them, firemen and mechanics.

Most of the passengers and attendants got out and attended the meeting. Markheim told Wanda that she and Xenia might go if they wished. For himself, he preferred to remain in the coach and read. They left him studying the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Xenia found the meeting to be of a serio-comic nature. The malcontents were gathered in a circle on the platform, and their audience overflowed the rest of the platform, into the minute and ruined waiting room, on to the grass-grown track. Some perched on the roof of the coaches.

The whole affair was conducted with a ridiculous solemnity, and there was a big fellow who acted as chairman and who hammered on the platform boards with a chunk of wood when he considered any speaker had had his say.

The speeches were long—some of them would have been interminable had it not been for the big fellow and his chunk of wood—and were invariably greeted with terrific applause by the audience. The speakers wandered over a wide range of subjects, they quoted Karl Marx voluminously, and the Endels were dragged in every now and again.

What the speeches were about nobody quite understood, but through the fog they created Xenia dimly realized that the engine crew was protesting against night traveling, and wished for a six-hour day.

It was pointed out that even then they would be doing more than all the rest of the people on the train, who had nothing whatever to do but ride in comfortable coaches and fill themselves with food like pigs. All of this was spoken with a most admirable frankness.

The meeting lasted four hours, and ended in lamplight. At the finish no conclusive argument had been advanced either way, but, as it was very cold, the chairman decided to put the matter to the vote. On this, an excitable person on the roof of a coach—a passenger—leaped to his feet and declared that all should vote; that in this matter affecting all, all should have their say.

The big fellow laid his chunk of wood down with deliberate care. His slow eyes wandered round the throng. He and his colleagues, who were naturally unanimous on the subject of a six-hour day and no night work, numbered but ten. There were sixty people on the train, or thereabouts, and they wanted to reach their journey's end. In a mass vote, the motion would be lost.

He lugged out a long rusty revolver of Austrian pattern and addressed himself to the excitable citizen on the coach roof. Of course, the comrade could have his vote if he wished. The long revolver was cocked with a click amid a deathlike silence. He who spoke would be the last man to deny freedom of utterance or thought to anybody.

At the same time, in a great communal gathering, self-sacrifice should be the motto. He and his colleagues had work to do. The nights were long and cold. A little delay in the arrival of the train at Maikop would be not half so detrimental to the health of the passengers as those long night watches would be to the health of the engine crew. The revolver was tilting suggestively toward the coach roof.

The excitable one stammered. He merely wished to vote, he said, in order to show in a practical way his sympathy with the just demands of the engine crew. The big fellow smiled and picked up his chunk of wood.

"Comrades," he said, "the motion is carried unanimously. We remain here for the night."

Everybody cheered, and the people moved back to their places.

Wanda tugged Xenia's sleeve. "Damn fools," she said. "We shall be in this bloody train for weeks. Come on."

As they turned along the platform Xenia was aware that she was being watched. She looked round. Flattened back by the crowd against the walls of the waiting room was the big peasant whose appearance on the platform at Moscow had filled her with short-lived hope. He was staring at her in the same slow fashion as he had stared when she attracted his attention in the Kazan Station.

She looked away, and all the time she was pushed through the crowd toward the coach she knew the man was staring after her.

Inside the coach, Wanda was very annoyed. She told Markheim what had happened, and added: "Why the hell you couldn't go out and tell those fools that we must get on passes my comprehension. We shall be shut up here like rabbits in a hutch till the end of the world, at this rate, what with breakdowns and strikes and stoppages and the health of those blasted pigs on the engine."

Blasphemies sound never so foul as when they fall from lovely lips. Xenia contemplated Wanda's slim beauty, and shivered in the warm atmosphere of the coach.

Markheim looked up from his book.

"You imagine I could have influenced them?" he asked.

"Of course, you could. I could have done it myself. If I'd stepped into the ring and shown that big lout my gun he'd have got on with his job?"

"You say so?" He looked from Wanda to Xenia, and back again. "Suppose I were to hint that I had previously seen that big fellow and the engine crew? Suppose my instructions were that this train is to be delayed? What then?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Wanda said: "Oh!" And said no more.

Markheim went on with his reading.

Days and days passed. To Xenia, heartsick and weary, it seemed as though she had lived all her life in this train, had known no other world outside it. The train stopped at every wayside station, and at each important town there was a halt of many hours, during which everybody wandered around, drank tea or vodka, and played preference solidly through the night.

In this playing, the communal wealth of the train was in a state of flux. Money changed hands easily and quickly. A man was wealthy in the morning. By the evening he was penniless. Yet the following evening he became a man of substance once more.

There was one stoppage which was rather tragic. A Galician Jew, whose luck had been proverbial, was killed. They found him beside the track with a knife in his chest. The big fellow from the engine conducted the *post mortem* and the subsequent inquiries, with the aid of his chunk of wood and his revolver. It was found, unanimously, that the murdered man had cheated; and, after his money had been distributed among the rest, a vote of thanks was passed to his anonymous slayer.

The train went on, and everybody forgot the Jew except Xenia, who still saw his cold face upturned questioningly to the stars, with the knife hilt standing on his chest like a pointing finger of fate. He had died by the wayside and was remembered no more.

Xenia often saw her big peasant. He

was a dim thing to her, a shadow of which she caught glimpses under station lights and on platforms. He always seemed to be watching her, and, with a little smile, she asked herself if he was still trying to fathom why she had rapped on the window boards in the Kazan Station and had since regarded him so coldly. He played preference in the most hectic little circle on the train, and, despite his stolid stupidity, he appeared to do more than hold his own.

So the train went on, a caravan of vice and drunkenness, wild with raucous song at night, with quarrelings and with blows; a foul thing crawling desultorily across the face of the stricken country, with death ever hovering near to snatch the unwary or the unwise. Xenia came to thank God for Markheim and Wanda and the private coach.

CHAPTER XV

SILENCE IS WISDOM

THE days drifted into weeks. The monotony became more and more appalling. Yet Maikop was daily nearer.

Then the train stopped about three hundred yards north of the station of Dolobnitz in the middle of the afternoon, and Xenia, looking out through the boarded window, got a glimpse of the town, for at this point the line topped a gradient. Dolobnitz was she saw, built round a square, with a number of streets branching at all angles behind the faces of the square. Its buildings were of a monotonous height, with very few larger edifices to break the low level of their roofs.

It looked a poor place, whose wealthiest inhabitants might have been counted but comfortably off in a great city. As an exception which went only to emphasize its monotonous skyline, there was one great balconied building in the middle of the north side of the square which reared itself head and shoulders above the rest.

All the passengers got out of the train, and the big fellow from the engine came along to see Markheim. He was very sorry, but an accident had happened which it was impossible for him to repair. The bottom of the engine's firebox had fallen out, and they could go no farther. It was the way with engines built by the *bourgeoise*. The fireboxes were made of tin, he thought. Their journey was ended.

Markheim was furious. He asked if there was no engine at Dolobnitz. There was none. They had not seen an engine for months, since an armored train went through and shot down seven people on the Dolobskaya who were walking home from church. It was inevitable that some other means of transport must be found if Markheim and his women wished to proceed.

On the other hand, the thing might have been worse. There was a fête in Dolobnitz that afternoon in honor of Tubal Cain, and there would be great fun at night in the square. They could very well be content in Dolobnitz for at least twelve hours.

Markheim went back to Xenia and Wanda. It could not be helped, he said. And it was fortunate they had got so far. Dolobnitz was but thirty versts north of Maikop, where he had a motor car waiting in which they were to finish the journey to Marakov. He would immediately go out and bribe a man to ride to Maikop and fetch back the car. They would be away before midnight. Meantime, they could rest in the coach.

Wanda roused herself at this.

"I rest no longer in the coach," she said. "If there is a fête in the square, then I attend it. It will be a relief and a diversion from this monotony."

Markheim looked her straight in the eyes. "You will not go," he said. "We have our work to do, and we must take no risks. There will be hell down there to-night, and we were best in the train until the car reaches us."

Wanda's gaze faltered under his steady stare. "It's ridiculous!" she snapped, but with less than her usual fire. "What harm would it do?"

"It might do none. On the other hand it might spoil all. We cannot take the risk."

She got to her feet and flung out of the compartment. They heard her door slam heavily.

Markheim turned to Xenia.

"Now, *madame,* we are practically at our journey's end. You can count on the car, because I can certainly arrange for it to be brought. Have you decided to accept my offer of assistance?"

Xenia hardly knew what to say. All through the journey her thoughts had been busy with what Markheim had told her, and time and again she had endeavored to arrive at a decision. Now, after weeks of thought, she was no nearer to that decision than she had been when first Markheim put his proposition before her.

"I haven't decided," she said at last.

A dangerous light showed in his eyes. For a moment his self-control left him.

"Why?"

"I don't know. It is so difficult. I have thought and thought—"

He interrupted her. "Perhaps you are thinking that fellow Sanctuary will come along after all. If you are, you can cease to think. Because he will not. We left him in Moscow, hundreds of miles away, so that even if he has escaped death he cannot reach you."

"I may think of him, though," said Xenia.

His brows contracted. "Your answer? Can you give it?"

She was silent. At last she said: "I will give it you in the car. I must have more time to think."

"You mean you must wait till the last moment—hoping. Well, we will leave it at that. In the car. I will now go and arrange for the car to be brought."

He left the coach and walked in the direction of the town.

He had been gone about half an hour when a little group of men came up to the coach. There was the big fellow from the engine and several others who were strangers to Xenia. They were headed by a short, bow-legged man with a hunched back and red-rimmed eyes which were constantly watering.

The hunchback announced himself as the Leader of the People in Dolobnitz, and asked for Comrade Markheim.

Wanda came out of her compartment. "What is it you want?" she asked.

The leader explained. They were having a wonderful night in Dolobnitz. There was to be a great celebration, food, drink, a supper in the house of the late governor. Their good engineer comrade had informed them that so great a man traveled on the train. Would he consent to honor them with his presence at the feast and perhaps address the people?

Wanda looked at Xenia, and Xenia saw that in her eyes was a little spitefulness.

"He is down in the town now," Wanda said. "I will come with you and help you to find him. We will join in with you." She nodded to Xenia. "You had better get ready."

Xenia did not immediately obey, for she was remembering Markheim's instructions that they were to stay in the coach. As she hesitated, Wanda said curtly: "Did you hear me?"

Xenia's color heightened. She was about to make a spirited reply when she remembered Sanctuary and Kolotsky in the Batiatinska Bazaar. There were times when recognition of the inevitable was not cowardice, but wisdom. She went and fetched her hat and coat.

They all walked down to the town together.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DANCE OF SAVAGES

THERE was death in Dolobnitz. It slunk in the mean streets off the square; it stank in corners, and in cellars and in dwelling houses. It crept, veiled faced, through the city, touching here and there a victim.

Famine and typhus—typhus and famine—the sword of the Lord was lifted against Dolobnitz and all the country round it.

The red-eyed man, whose name was Bourkin, apologized profusely for it. It was hell, he said, but it must be endured. That *bourgeois* redeemer, Jesus Christ, was probably angry because His two-thousand-year-old fraud had been shown up.

They passed a side street. There was a cart standing some distance along it, with a thin horse between the shafts. Two men

were tossing things into the cart, carrying the things from the dark doorway of a ruined house. Xenia saw the form of a little child go over the edge of the cart. She closed her eyes and stumbled, so that Wanda had to catch her.

A woman went by them. She was swathed in a great cloak made from sacking, with a hood of the same material over her head. To her breast she huddled a little box of rough wood, nailed up. It was such a box as a baby might fit into. The woman's eyes were half closed, and were fixed, without life, like lamps gone out. She did not see the group as she passed it.

Bourkin jerked his thumb toward her.

"That woman," he said, "must be mad. Her baby has been dead three days. She has been well treated, too. We made her a box to put the child in, so that it should be buried decently. And now she won't bury it. It had typhus. But that is enough of death. We think of life."

They reached the square, and as they entered it they saw Markheim walking from a side street opposite them. He came straight across to them, and Wanda stepped ahead to meet him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

Wanda indicated Bourkin.

"That man is the leader here. He came up to the train for you. It seems there are to be festivities and a supper, a great fête. He wants you to attend and to speak to the people. I saw no harm in it, and, in fact, it will break the monotony. Anyhow, it might be unwise to refuse."

Markheim looked past her at the little knot of men, and Xenia saw the indecision in his eyes. Wanda had partially committed him by coming down to the town, and these folk he and his kind had stirred up to revolt were now the masters. He nodded.

"All right." Then he stepped very close to Wanda and spoke softly. "You have disobeyed me. You have brought her down here against my orders. Well—we shall see what happens. If aught goes wrong, you shall answer to my master."

Wanda laughed and turned away.

Markheim went up to Bourkin and shook him warmly by the hand, calling him friend and comrade. They all moved across the square, and as they went Markheim said quietly to Xenia: "A man rides now across the hills to fetch the car. I had just arranged it when you saw me."

Bourkin halted before the great building Xenia had noticed from the train.

"These are our headquarters," he said. "This was the house of the governor. We crucified him. He was a very religious man, and we thought he would wish to die like that. But he did not. He protested. However, his house is now our headquarters. There will be a meal served here soon. Shall we go inside?"

They went inside. Xenia was sickened and half fainting. It was her first glimpse of smitten Russia beyond the great cities. Wanda looked sideways at her.

"What is the matter, sister? You look pale. Do you think of all that outside?" She jerked her head back toward the door of the house.

Xenia looked into her face. "I don't know," she said. "I just don't know. But I am asking myself if there is any more hope in all the world, any more love and pity and compassion."

Wanda laughed. "Why! This is nothing. Wait until you see cannibalism, as I've seen it, and—"

Xenia put her hands to her ears. She did not hear the rest of Wanda's speech.

The house had been a magnificently fitted place, and some remnants of its magnificence had been preserved. The meal was served at twilight in the former drawing-room, a vast apartment, lofty and long, the tapestry of its walls untouched, and the wonderful carpet its former occupier had laid down still there.

Bourkin sat at one end of the table, with Markheim on his right and the big engineer on his left. On Markheim's right were Xenia and Wanda. About thirty people sat down to the meal, a motley gathering, the men armed to the teeth, the women young and old, some hideous and filthy, others young, with a slatternly raffish appearance and painted lips and cheeks.

Xenia found the volume of food and drink incredible. She had never seen so

much. There were soups and roast suckling pigs, duck, sausage, drinks of all kinds, a monstrous mass of stuff, enough, in her eyes, for a battalion of soldiers.

Bourkin, having drunk considerably, confided that the famine was at an end. They were getting food through. The typhus had killed itself by its very excesses. They were entering on a new era.

So they should drink and be merry, and in an hour the torches would be lighted in the square outside, the Austrian band would strike up, and there would be dancing and jollity right through the night. His red eyes looked past Markheim at Xenia. He smiled.

They ate and they drank, and they did both prodigiously. There were songs and oaths now ringing to the ceiling. Nearly everybody was smoking, and a heavy drift of gray cloud hung low across the table like a river fog. To Xenia it was all unreal. The lamplight and the dimness, the smoke cloud, the food and the drink and the glasses, the vile talk, the bestial faces leering through the mist—it was all of another, more horrid world than that in which she lived.

Bourkin got up and held his glass aloft.

"I call on you all to drink to Tubal Cain—the first killer!"

They drank and drank again. A man on the opposite side of the table staggered to his feet.

"Another toast, comrades! Damnation to the Cossack bandits! May they burn in hell!"

More clamor, more drinking. Xenia heard Markheim say to Bourkin:

"What is that about the Cossack bandits?"

Bourkin waved his hand vaguely toward the mountains. "There are bands of them —broken since the White armies were broken. They range the hills and they come down like an avalanche. But one day we shall catch them and crucify them all."

Xenia ate little and drank nothing. She shrank as far back as possible between Markheim and Wanda, both of whom, she observed with thankfulness, were also abstemious.

Two hours passed, and during all that time, throughout the speeches, most of which ended only when the drunken speakers forgot their words, the company had been eating and drinking steadily.

Through the broken windows of the room torchlights could now be seen in the square, and the music of a brass band sounded above the clamor. The great festivity had begun.

The meal ended at last, and Bourkin took Markheim, Xenia, and Wanda out onto the gallery beyond the window, while the rest of the company filed downstairs to the square.

The square was filled with people. The band was stationed at one side of it, and the whole space was covered with dancers. Torches had been set on the house walls and on poles, and they shed a lurid, leaping light across it all, so that the upflung, pinched faces looked like spirit faces seen in some pictures of Inferno.

Beyond the huddle of houses on the far side of the square the great hills rose, darkly close, hunched monsters slumbering against the skyline beneath the peace of the stars, and, faintly, a thin ribbon which soon was lost in their shadowed sides, Xenia could distinguish the hill road along which the car from Maikop must come.

"The people are glad," said Bourkin. "No more famine, no more typhus—nothing but the golden age."

Somebody lighted an immense bonfire in the middle of the square. Logs cut from the tree-swathed slopes above the town were hurled onto the fire until it became a monstrous thing, roaring and leaping aloft, house high, like the dominant demon of the orgy.

There was drink in plenty, and the bottles went from lip to lip.

Bourkin moved closer to Xenia. "You like it, sister?"

She tried to answer him composedly. "It is a change from the train."

Her eyes were searching the throng. Now and again she distinguished men and women who had traveled with them on the train, but strangely enough she saw nothing of the big peasant who had always watched her.

Bourkin's arm slid round her. She drew away, breathless. He smiled.

"You and I will go down and dance, sister." He was looking up at her from his grotesque littleness, his red eyes lasciviously alight.

As Bourkin voiced his invitation, Wanda smiled. It would be rather interesting to see how this woman captive of theirs, this woman of cold reserve, behaved under circumstances which might become decidedly trying.

Markheim looked perplexed. He would have forbidden Xenia to leave the balcony, but that might have offended Bourkin. And it was not a very safe thing to offend Bourkin on such a night, for he was a power in Dolobnitz, and he was drunk, as were all his people. Drunken men might be willing to brave the Scented Death, even though they shrank from its name when they were sober.

Markheim exhibited some of that streak of weakness, which, clever man though he was, and unscrupulous, had made him yet a servant all his life, instead of a master. He endeavored to temporize.

"The sister does not dance," he said.

Bourkin eyed him ironically. "So beautiful a woman! And she has not learned to dance! Then it is time she was taught. Now I am an expert." He eyed Xenia sideways. "I will teach her steps she has never yet seen. Come!"

Markheim glanced secretly at his wristwatch. The car might arrive at any moment. He still endeavored to temporize, he still took no definite stand.

"There was the matter of a speech you suggested I might make, comrade." Bourkin, with his hand outstretched toward Xenia's arm, stopped, and turned his head. "I should not like to forego the opportunity of letting the people hear it. And if we delay any longer they might not be in a condition to listen." He waved his hand toward the seething chaos of the square.

Bourkin considered a moment. He wanted Markheim to speak, for a speech from such a man might strengthen his position in the town. But at the same time he wanted badly to get Xenia away from the balcony, down into the mob, where she would be lost to the sight of Markheim and Wanda, lost to everybody except himself.

Yet—there was all the night before them. A few words from Markheim would not take long, and after the speech was over the excitement would be intensified, so that no man would heed what his neighbor did.

"All right," he said. "A short speech, comrade, and a good one. I will stop the revels."

He produced a revolver and fired it in the air. Instantly the dancing and the music stopped, and the people all turned toward the balcony. Bourkin indicated Markheim.

"A great man from Moscow will speak to you!" he yelled.

When the cheering and the hubbub had died away, Markheim spoke. Xenia had heard many orators and many speeches, but never had she listened to such a speech as when Markheim spoke to the revelers of Dolobnitz.

The monstrous fire lit him red, like a fiend from the pit, lit his dark eyes and his pale face, his lank black hair, his every gesture. He spoke of oppression and the crowd groaned. He spoke of deliverance and it cheered.

He spoke of vengeance and it snarled with the snarling of wolves. He swayed it this way and that with words—and all the time his eager eyes searched out along the dark mountain road for the headlights of the car from Maikop.

But the car did not come. He had spoken for half an hour, and there were no lights on the hillside. Bourkin became restless. He said quietly, while Markheim paused for breath: "Enough, comrade. It is a very good speech—but, enough. We will dance now."

Markheim ended off his speech, and Bourkin took Xenia's arm. "Come, my pretty sister, and let me teach you how to dance."

She twisted from his grip and stepped back to the rail, facing him.

"I would rather stay here," she said as coolly as she could.

"But I would rather you came with

me!" Beneath Bourkin's urbanity was a threat.

She had a tight grip on herself. Despair, terror, hysterical outbursts, would, she knew, be of no avail. She forced herself to smile. "Surely you will consider the wishes of a woman—so gallant a man as you?"

He cocked his head to one side. A little admiration was in his red-rimmed eyes. "Ah! But I flatter myself that I know better than the lady herself. Once she dances she will be glad she consented. Come!"

He took her arm again, and now his grip was strong and not to be shaken off. Xenia looked from Wanda to Markheim.

Wanda was pretending an indifference she did not feel, for now she was disturbed and wondering whether she would have to answer to the Scented Death for anything which might befall Xenia. Markheim shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

Xenia knew that there was nothing for it but to accede to Bourkin's request. She offered him no more resistance, but walked from the balcony by his side, and though her heart was heavy with fear, she carried her head high and managed to preserve her smile.

The square, viewed from the balcony, had been a scene of wild confusion. When she got into it, Xenia found herself swept this way and that by the raging mob. The music had restarted with a crash. The clamor and the din increased. There was madness in the crowd, and it danced as the Parisian revolutionary crowds had danced the carmagnole—an expression of sheer savagery loosed to the winds.

Bourkin put his arm about Xenia and dragged her through the throng. Markheim and Wanda, who had followed them, were dancing together and keeping as close as they could in the jostling, yelling, raffish scramble. Xenia hardly knew anything of what she did. Her head rocked to the hideous din, her senses swooned at the evil shapes that jostled and clutched, that laughed and yelled around her.

Bourkin guided her beyond the fire, and at the back of it a couple bumped into them. Xenia looked up. There was a fat girl with a greasy, unintelligent face, and the big peasant who had traveled on the train. He and his partner moved on as Xenia recognized him.

She looked over Bourkin's shoulder as they reversed in the movement of the dance, and she saw that the big peasant was now steering his partner in the opposite direction to which they had been traveling when the encounter took place, so that now he followed Wanda and Markheim, and so kept near to Bourkin and herself.

After a complete circuit of the fire Bourkin intimated that he was tired.

"All this jostling," he said, "affects a man of my sensitive temperament. Shall we retire and rest awhile?" He studied her cunningly.

She showed no sign of fear, but laughed. "Rest—already? Why, I am just beginning to believe you were right when you said I should like it. Come along. Let us dance at least one more round."

Bourkin grunted and consented with no very good grace. To their right a man was kissing a girl full on the lips and waving an empty bottle above his head.

They went on, with Wanda and Markheim a considerable distance back, and the big peasant with his fat partner hovering near.

Then a sudden shaft of brilliant light shot across the square, and Xenia saw an open touring car sliding out from between two rows of houses—a long, low thing, with powerful head-lamps which cut a white swath across the red, and brought the dancing to a standstill.

CHAPTER XVII

NEARER THE STARS

BOURKIN turned to Xenia. "Is that Comrade Markheim's car?" he demanded. "Did he send for it?"

"I think so."

Bourkin looked at the car and Xenia saw his brows contract. "So he thought to cheat me, eh? That speech was to waste time!" He clutched her wrist and dragged her toward the car. "We shall see!" he

snarled. "Perhaps I may do the cheating, instead."

Everybody was watching the car and Bourkin.

He laid his hand on the vehicle's hood and told the driver to get from his seat. The driver, a squat, low-browed peasant, instantly obeyed. Then Bourkin shouted: "I take possession of this car in the name of the people!"

The crowd cheered like madmen, for they were ready to cheer anything Bourkin proposed at that moment. The driver made no effort to protest. After all, the car was not his, the crowd was very great and evidently in favor of the car being requisitioned—and he already had his eye on a pretty girl in the front row of the press of people. It would be better to spend a jolly night in Dolobnitz than drive back across the still mountains in the cold and the wind.

There was a jostling in the crowd, and Markheim pushed forward with Wanda at his heels.

"This," he said to Bourkin, "is madness. That car belongs to the Scented Death."

There was a little hush. Bourkin's tongue touched his lips. Then he looked at Xenia.

"Damn the Scented Death!" he suddenly cried. "What say you, comrades? It cannot throttle a city!"

They agreed. They would agree with anything. They yelled blasphemies at Markheim and Wanda. They urged Bourkin to kiss his pretty girl. They screamed to the band to start up again.

Wanda's pistol was out. She elbowed between Markheim and Bourkin, with the weapon held low against her thigh.

"Swine!" she said, and in the silence which ensued on her movement her voice rang clear and high. "Take your hand off that car!" She called Bourkin something unrepeatable.

Xenia shrank back against the car side, her cheeks blanched, for if ever death peeped out of human eyes it peeped out of Wanda's in that moment.

Bourkin looked stupidly at the gun muzzle, and lifted his eyes slowly to Wanda's face. He giggled foolishly—but kept his hand on the car bonnet. It seemed he did not understand.

"D'you hear? By God—I'll shoot you where you stand!"

"Kill the woman!" A man at the back of the square shouted it. The crowd swayed forward like a field of corn struck by a wind. A low murmur came from it.

Xenia looked round the circle of wild faces. There were no more grins, there was no more hilarious agreement with Bourkin's wishes, but sullen, burning threat. She realized that their lives hung by a snapping thread.

Markheim put up his hand and opened his mouth to speak. The concourse howled at him like hungry hounds and he stepped back, biting his lip.

On this, Wanda turned like a tigress. Her gun gleamed blue-black and red in the glare of the headlights. The people nearest her fell back precipitantly on those behind them.

"If there's trouble," she screamed, "Bourkin dies first, and as many as I can get afterward!"

Those in front were silent, but those behind, beyond reach of her bullets, roared with rage. The crowd was now composed of two sections; those in front who wished to stand still, and those behind who wished to rush forward and swamp the car.

All might have gone well then, had not Bourkin suddenly recovered his wits and jumped at Wanda as she turned back to him.

He was a second slow. Xenia, stifling a scream, felt as though the floodgates of heaven's wrath had been opened with a slam, which shook all her world.

She saw Bourkin's convulsive leap stop as though, in mid-air, he had met a giant's invisible hand, chest on. His body convulsed, dropped face downward and settled at Wanda's feet. Xenia saw Wanda's wrist jerk, but the report of the gun was lost to her.

The crowd broke loose. Its voice was a monstrous thing, lifted high, smothering all other sounds. The next five minutes, were, for Xenia, a swift period of terror and incoherent action.

The front sections of the crowd held for

a moment. She was being urged toward the car by Markheim. Wanda had her back to the car, and was watching the crowd.

Xenia half stumbled into the car. Fleetingly, she had a glimpse of Markheim lying on the ground. Another man was pushing her in and down to the car's floor, and this man slammed the door behind her and scrambled into the driving seat.

He was the big peasant of the Kazan Station and the train.

The crowd broke. It came forward like a running surf, roaring.

Wanda turned and threatened the peasant with her gun. His right hand shot out, grabbed wrist and gun in one all-enveloping clutch, twisted, and forced the weapon to the stones.

The car's engine was running. A gear was slammed home, and the vehicle jumped forward at the crowd. Wanda stooped for her gun. Xenia saw this as a little picture thrown into a confused panorama of larger pictures which raced, chaotic, across her vision.

The big peasant could drive. He had the car in third gear with one clever change-up, and he had its engine racing full speed. Xenia felt the eager leap of it. She knew that it was charging the crowd like a maddened bull. Beyond that, she knew little, for the whole episode was, for her, mantled with yelling terror, enveloped in chaos.

She felt the car hit something soft, lurch, gather speed again. She saw men's hands outflung to clutch its sides. The big peasant was hunched before her over the wheel in a black mass of immovable solidity.

They were through! She realized that the car had swathed through the crowd like a scythe, and that in its track were the maimed and the broken who had tried to stay its progress.

She saw the narrow opening of a dark alleyway leap toward her as the hood swung through it. She was carried up through the alley and on to the dark mountain road.

She had made no effort to get from the car. She had only been able to crouch in its rear compartment, gripping the edge of the front seat, dazed by the supreme terror of the whole situation. There was danger all around, in every move she might make, and a choice of dangers was impossible in those hectic seconds. She conceived that had she stayed in the square she would have been killed. She could only die on the mountain road.

The car was now in top gear, and as the urgent roar of its engine died to a quieter note, a feeling of peace crept over Xenia. They were climbing the long slope easily and swiftly, and the clamor of the fight was rapidly lost to them. Far below, minute in perspective, was the red glow of the square. Before them and round them the dark hills stretched their gigantic shapes. The stars seemed nearer.

The car stopped.

Xenia lifted herself up. The peasant got from his seat and came round to her. He leaned over the side of the car, and looked into her eyes.

"I am sorry I had to dump you down there," he said, "but I thought there might be bullets flying. Perhaps you would like to ride in front with me?"

He spoke English.

She looked at him—silent, motionless. He smiled. "Surely you know me—now?"

She whispered: "It is you? It is? I am not dreaming? All my thoughts, all my prayers, that you should come to me have not made me mad? It is you?"

He opened the door of the car, and held out his hands to her. "Come and sit with me," he said. "Come along."

She stumbled forward against him, into his arms. She clung to him, crying. He lifted her up and placed her gently into her seat.

CHAPTER XVIII

BITTER—SWEET

SANCTUARY restarted the car, and, at a reduced speed, it hummed quietly upward into the hills. The scenery was changing with every mile. Height piled on height. Ahead, in the dark distance, the starlight gleamed white on snow high above them. The cold air became keener.

Xenia lay close against Sanctuary, and he heard her crying quietly, not with bitterness, nor with sorrow, but crying only as an expression of emotion long repressed. During the next half hour she said no word.

They topped the long sweep, and at the crest, with the lesser summits lying below them, and the greater heights standing like giant sentinels above them, Xenia laid her hand on Sanctuary's arm.

"Will you stop?" she asked. "We must be safe from pursuit, and there is a lot to talk about before we go any farther."

He pulled up and stopped the ticking engine, so that silence, absolute, came down on them.

Xenia looked round. They seemed alone in the world, set high on the roof of a gray fairyland, with only the stars to watch them. She took a long breath.

"You came," she said, "just when I needed you most, you came to me. I wanted to die, down there in the square—I was so afraid of what might happen if I lived."

He put out his hand, patted her shoulder, said nothing.

"And I thought you far away—in Moscow—dead perhaps. How did the miracle happen? How did you get away?"

He smiled at her, very tenderly. "It was easy. It would have been easy for anybody who knew Russian well and Russian ways. There is really not much to tell."

She smiled in her turn. It was a wan smile. Her eyes were soft and kind. "What happened after you escaped from the hotel?" she insisted.

"I rode down the street, and I was hardly out of sight of the hotel when I realized that a man galloping through Moscow on a horse in the middle of the night must attract attention. I therefore abandoned the horse."

"He told me you had done that."

"Who?"

"Markheim, the man who came for me at the Batiatinska Bazaar. But I will tell you of him afterward. And then?"

"Well—I heard this Markheim say you traveled south with him on the first train leaving Moscow, and, naturally, I was determined to be on that train."

"So you still had time—to think of me—even then?"

"I'd promised, hadn't I?"

"Yes," she said hesitatingly.

"I know Moscow very well, and I bolted straight for the Kazan Station and a house I know near by there. The house had, in the days I knew it, been kept by a Polish Jew, and I was risking whether he had managed to survive all the trouble and hang on. He had. I can give you his exact words when he greeted me. You'll picture him in a filthy underground room, a dirty, hook-nosed ruffian with eyes no larger than little black beads on a necklace.

"'Ah! The Britisher captain. Father Abraham be praised. Captain, do you remember when you went off owing me fifteen rubles?' I forget the rest."

Xenia laughed quietly at that, as he intended that she should.

"I gave him his fifteen rubles and eighty-five on top of them, without argument. Then I told him I wanted to travel by train as a peasant from the Volga regions. I laid things pretty plainly before him, because he's a trustworthy old soul to those he likes, and, for some reason or other, he always had a soft corner in his heart for me.

"I should say, for instance, that I'm the only man who ever left him owing him money. I told him, of course, nothing of our journey but only that I was wanted by the Che Ka.

"You can guess that frightened him a bit, but for another four hundred rubles he began to develop a little optimism. After that the thing was done. He got my ticket, he got my clothes. He hid me for a couple of days, and he allowed me to use his house as much as I liked.

"He fathered me all the time we waited in Moscow, and relieved me of exactly fifteen hundred rubles before I left him. He told me a lot of things I didn't know, and he was the finest encyclopedia of current events I've ever struck. You'll remember I used to be away from the train all day.

"I was up at his house, being taught everything that's happened in Russia since the doors were shut—who are the big men,

who are the men who seem big but don't really count, and everything else. It served me in good stead on the train, for I was able to converse with everybody I met—as though I'd been in the Revolution from the first. And that's all."

Xenia said: "Could that Jew have got you out of Russia?"

Sanctuary laughed. "Old Rosenberg could get anybody out of hades if he wanted to. He's the wiliest old dog I've ever met. Think of the Revolution, of the trouble with Poland—and realize that he's still seated in the same old room near the Kazan Station, still piling up rubles, still living the same life.

"As a matter of fact he offered me passage through Warsaw to Vienna and westward, for a thousand rubles. But surely you are not contemplating abandoning the mission and seeking his aid to escape?"

She shook her head. "No. I was only thinking it would have been better for you to escape while you could—that it was wonderful of you to follow me when you knew you were proscribed, and that your life hung on any chance recognition."

"Perhaps we will forget that," he said gravely. His hand slid over hers. "You have never really thought I should desert you, have you? You have thought better of me than that, all this time?"

Her eyes were shining so that they matched the stars.

She said softly: "I have never thought of anybody as I have thought of you. I have prayed God to send you to me. You have seemed to me my only hope." She paused. "Do you know, deep in my heart, I knew you would come. The period of traveling was like one of waiting. It was as though I looked for you each morning, each hour, each night."

He was silent. His eyes met hers steadily, and beneath his hand he could feel her hand trembling.

"And I have looked for you," he said, very low. "That first evening at the Kazan, when you rapped on the boards, I wanted to rush to the window, but I knew it would be suicidal. Somebody was sure to be watching. But I always kept as near to you at the halts as I dared without giving you a chance to recognize me. And then, in the square at Dolobnitz, my chance came. I knew it would come if I waited long enough and watched you all the while."

Again they were silent. Between them, mutely recognized by them, was a wall of things unsaid. It was the woman who broke the wall down.

She turned her hand over beneath his and clutched her fingers tightly round his.

"Just now," she said, "I said it would have been better for you to escape while you had the opportunity. I still say it, and say it, not because I think you would ever have taken the chance, but because I would have wished you to take it. I have prayed for you, and wanted you to be with me—but if I had ever been told that you were safely back in England I think I should have been well contented."

He was stumbling now, hardly understanding or not willing, not daring, to understand.

At last he said: "Do you mean what you say?"

"Of course I do," she said steadily. "Of course." Her breast was heaving quickly, but her eyes were very brave and did not flinch from his gaze.

They stayed looking at each other. At last he whispered: "What can I say? What dare I say to you?"

He was telling himself that he was a broken man, adrift like flotsam on the current of life, finding a temporary importance in this great adventure, to lose that importance when the adventure was ended, just as he had lost that other importance when the trumpets of peace stilled the guns of war. And she was set high above him. She bore a name which had endured since Russia's dawn. Her father was numbered with the great ones of the earth.

She understood his thoughts, and the ecstasy in her eyes gave place to pained bitterness.

"It might have been better—better if you had gone," she said breathlessly. "Better for you—for both of us, although—" she stopped.

"That is impossible," he said. "I could never wish I had gone, never for a

moment wish I had never seen you again. A memory of lost happiness is better than no glimpse of happiness at all."

She said: "Don't!" There was a little sob in her voice.

"But I must, because after this night, this hour, it must all be forgotten. We shall just go on, understanding—while I shall carry with me a memory of the most wonderful woman I have ever known."

She swayed toward him. Her head was tilted backward her face close to his.

"I would rather you did not carry that memory," she whispered. "Because I know it will pain you. I would rather you forgot. Only—because I am the woman, I may sometimes treasure little thoughts and little pictures of you, as I like to see you best, the little pictures I used to conjure for myself in the train when I was desperate and lonely and afraid."

She was close. He could have slipped his arms about her and she would have lain against him. She was soft and sweet, with love misting her eyes, her lips warm and quivering to be kissed.

He could have kissed her. He could have crushed her close and kissed her. But he knew that if he did so, he *felt* that if he did so, he would be stealing. Her kisses were not for him.

He steadied himself as best he could, though the effort was all but futile. She could feel him trembling. He lowered his hand suddenly and lifted her hand to his lips.

"My love!" he murmured. "My love!"

Her hand caressed his head. She could not see him clearly, nor the mountains nor the skies. Only she knew that all the world was dark and toppling, and that on this wind-swept road, with its loneliness and its silence, here in the heart of that Red Empire which once was holy Russia, she had come to the end of her life's path and could know no happy to-morrows.

She might win back to England. She might take treasure uncountable with her. She might step into that high place to which she had been born—but, for her, there would always be this hill-road and its darkness, this stooping man and his homage and his love.

There were tears in her eyes and in her heart. Her heart wept and cried out against it all.

She stroked his head as a mother might stroke the head of her little son.

They rode on.

The car covered miles steadily. Xenia sat close to Sanctuary.

"Dear," she said, "put your arm round me. It is just this night—our night. To-morrow we will only remember. Put your arm round me."

He did so, and held her close. She lay with her head on his shoulder.

"We should reach Marakov to-morrow," he said after awhile.

"Marakov!" It awakened memories within her. "But we must not go to Marakov!" she exclaimed. "I had almost forgotten."

He looked round at her. "Why?"

She told him all that Markim had told her in the train, of Boroff and his schemes, of the fate which awaited her at Marakov.

He listened without interruption, and at the end of it he said quietly: "I think that makes it all the more imperative that we should go to Marakov."

"I don't understand."

He explained. There was a delightful intimacy in his tone which thrilled her. She was no longer merely his partner in this mad adventure, but his love. Though circumstance might bar her from him, though convention might shut her off from him, she still could look into his eyes and know he understood and tell him that she, too, understood.

"If Boroff," he said slowly, "is going to Marakov, he may take somebody with him, somebody who is almost as important to him as you, somebody who can get the treasure if you should for some reason fail to arrive."

"My father!" She was instantly afraid.

"Exactly. So we shall go to Marakov together. I don't think Boroff will expect that—quite. The end of the game will be played out at Marakov."

She objected no more. "We will go. It was cowardly of me to contemplate staying away."

His arm tightened about her. "There is one thing puzzles me," he said, "throughout all this business. Who, or what, is that man or thing or organization which operates under the melodramatic title of the Scented Death?"

"It is Russian," she said simply. "All things are bizarre and dreadful in Russia. That is all."

"Yes, but what is it? What is its power? Why is it such a name of terror? And how can Boroff use it? Unless Boroff is the Scented Death himself."

"No. Boroff is not. I know that. I know a good deal about the Scented Death. Shall I tell you all I know?"

"I should like to hear it. It may help later on."

She snuggled comfortably into the crook of his arm, and while they drove along the winding roads among the crags, she told him of the Scented Death.

TO BE CONTINUED

HUMAN SACRIFICES IN HINDUSTAN

THE custom of offering human beings to the gods was borrowed, wrote Edwards, from the aboriginal tribes of India, was common in past centuries, and is not extinct. The Meriah sacrifices of the Khonds were suppressed by British officials. Nowadays, substitutes—sheep, goats, and fowls—are presented to Kali, Durgadevi, Chaimunda, and other savage patrons of fertility.

Modern cases have occurred among the Jats of the United Provinces—1891—near Calcutta—1892—and in 1902 the English magistrate in Gangain received a petition for the right to perform a human sacrifice intended to give a rich color to the turmeric—spice—crop.

Other instances of human sacrifice were reported in Behar and Orissa—1920; and in Ganjam, Madras Presidency—1921. At the first-named locality a deaf and dumb beggar was sacrificed to an idol by the village priest and his son. The Ganjam victim was a girl of four years.

The ritual murder of children still takes place sporadically. The sacrifice of a male child is regarded as a remedy for barrenness. Usually the murderers are women. Three such cases were reported in the Punjab—1921—when barren women murdered neighbors' children. One of the women bathed in the child's blood.

Baboo Bholanath Chunder, Calcutta, set forth that a party of Brahmins assembled under the influence of liquor. One of them proposed to offer a sacrifice to Kali, to which the others assented; but having nothing to sacrifice, one cried out: "Where is the goat?" On which another, more drunk than the rest, exclaimed: "I will be the goat!" and at once placed himself on his knees, when one of the company cut off his head with the sacrificial knife.

Chevers wrote that persons were caught in the act of carrying off a human victim to be sacrificed at Jainteapore. They affirmed that Koosa had for several years past immolated human victims, that after ablution of the intended victim, a garland of flowers was placed around his neck and his head cut off with a sword. These sacrifices were made to the Goddess Kali in hopes of procuring progeny.

Captain Gavin R. Crawford—"Bengal Annual"—sent a man disguised as a cloth merchant to procure information. He brought a detailed account of the sacrifices, at which he was an eyewitness.

The fort was of mud, with two gateways. Within were the temple and five huts belonging to the officiating priests. The temple, of cut stone, fifteen feet square, was eighteen feet in height. The sacrifice was offered in the temple portico, the Rajah of Nagpore being present. Five gossyns, *ten people of different castes*, six hundred he-goats, and ten male buffaloes. The victims were beheaded with a great sword.

The sacrifice took place every third year.

The number of victims was supposed to be fifteen. Were it impossible to seize travelers, or others, not inhabitants of the Bustar country, the rajah caused one of his own subjects to be seized.

The following account from the Calica Puran reminds one of the old Greek story of Perseus and the Gorgon: ". . . Previously to striking the blow, the sacrificer is to invoke the deity and worship the victim. Having immolated a human victim with all the requisite ceremonies at a cemetery or holy place, the sacrificer must be cautious not to cast eyes upon the body. The head must be presented with averted eyes."

Hindu criminals sometimes cloaked the murder of enemies under the guise of ceremonial sacrifice to the gods.

Russell stated that in the Maliahs of Goomsur the victim, first stupefied with toddy, was thrown into a pit where the blood of a pig had been allowed to flow. His face was pressed down until he was suffocated in the bloody mire. The priest then cut a piece of flesh from the body. All present followed his example. The head and face alone remained untouched. The bones, when bare, were buried with them in the pit.

Arbuthnot wrote that, among the Codooloos, the victim was kept in a continued state of intoxication from the moment of his seizure until he was sacrificed. The priest cut a small hole in the stomach of the victim, and the idol was besmeared with blood from the wound. The people then rushed forward and cut him to pieces. Each person tried to carry away a morsel of flesh to present to the idol of his own village.

According to Ricketts, a common mode was to bind the victim between two strong planks or bamboos, one across the chest, the other across the shoulders. The two planks were bound together and the sufferer was squeezed to death. If life still ebbed, the body was chopped in two with hatchets.

The Garrows—*vid.* Chevers—had the custom of offering a human head in some of their religious rites. The Dyaks of Borneo also do this for the propitiation of malign spirits.

A Hindu priest was tried, at Midnapore, for murdering a woman. Her head was found in a room of the prisoner's house, placed before the idol and covered with flowers. The body was in another room.

One Gogoieram, continued Chevers, considered a good tempered person, having a child ill with fever, said that he was going to the jungle for medicinal herbs, and to consult augury as to the fate of his infant. He took with him a neighbor's son, seven or eight years old, a favorite of his, and struck him a single blow with his *dah*, almost completely severing the head from the trunk; then, putting his mouth to the gullet, he drank the blood. The officer who tried the case came to the conclusion that he had deliberately sacrificed the boy to effect the recovery of his own child. The prisoner had always been of sound mind.

With a blare of music, three bizarre figures came in from the balcony—

GOLD AND WHITE BEAUTIES

By Douglas Newton

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SPRING NIGHT, SO THAT THE HORROR THAT LURKED BENEATH ITS SERENITY GIVES ITS MEMORY A GHASTLY QUALITY

IT was only with the kidnaping of the Hon. Lydia Martel that people began to realize that the nation was in the throes of a terror, even then, but few grasped its hideous, and, yes, curious significance.

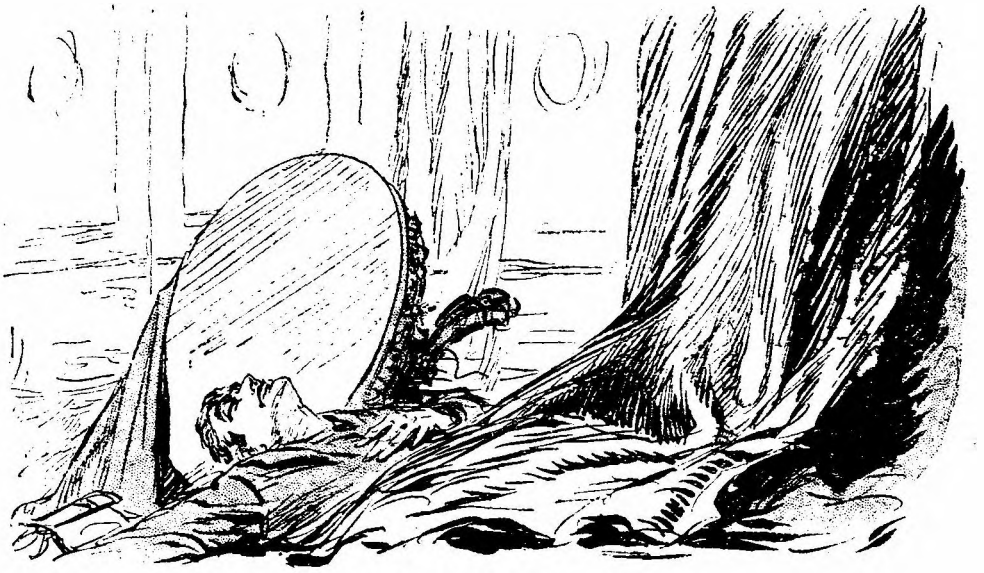
Before this the black business had only seemed an epidemic of disappearances such as the papers draw attention to when news is slack. The disappearances recorded were those of women. Men vanished, too, as I learned later, but newspapers pay little attention to men.

The first girl to be lost, anyhow as far as the papers noticed, was Rosalind Hough, the gymnasium mistress of one of the finest girls' schools in the land. There quickly followed notifications of the disappearance of Ethna Prin, the daughter of an old north country family; Mary Just, a girl who had won fame in the hunting counties for daring horsemanship; and Debora Clarges, the eldest child of a county family in the West.

All these girls, the oldest was but twenty-three, vanished within the same fortnight and without reason. They were all without cares or any sort of entanglements, and each left her home in the most natural way and was thenceforth never seen again.

As their homes were scattered over the country their cases were not at first connected. It was when Virginia Gaunt and Olive Cardew were missed that the press began to scent a first-class sensation.

Both these girls were minor London celebrities. Virginia Gaunt, the daughter of a general, was a swimmer, indeed she was reputed to be one of the best all-round girl athletes in the country. Olive Cardew was



—and I shut my eyes, still fighting the inertia induced by the drug

the well known model of a great artist. She was considered to be the nearest approach to perfect classical beauty living, and, in fact, was called "The Modern Venus."

The cases of both these young women did not differ from the others. There was no reason for their disappearance. They left their homes in the ordinary way and were seen no more. With their loss the papers began to have a great deal to say about "The Six Lost Beauties." All manner of suggestions were aired from the possibility of this being some form of epidemic to hints that it might be a new cinema stunt.

Even so mild and retiring a scientist as myself was intrigued by the matter—not because I was excited like the rest of the public, but because, from the first, I sensed a certain method at the back of the business.

When I saw the photographs of the lost girls printed in a strip across the center of the *Daily Graphic*, I was immediately struck by a similarity about the missing girls that seemed too close for mere chance.

They were all extremely handsome, yet with the same quality of beauty. They were tall, strong and deep-breasted—that is, like Olive Cardew, their loveliness was classical. They had fine, steady and serene faces with intelligent brows and eyes. To me they looked as though they had been deliberately hand-picked for all those wholesome qualities that make the finest womanhood of a race. I suppose I naturally appreciated these points for my scientific bent lies in the field of eugenics and race culture.

Another thing, they were all athletes. The editor of the paper had noted this link and had chosen photographs that emphasized it. They were all pictured as mistresses of sport—swimming, gymnastics, hunting and so on down to Debora Clarges shooting at Bisley.

The sensation was well under way when Olive Cardew and Mary Just wrote to their homes. Both girls said they were happy and well and that there was no need for anxiety or fuss. Both promised explanations later, neither gave any address. I read both letters as printed in the press and was struck by the strange and stilted phrasing as well as a similarity about the expressions. Looking at the photos I wondered why such intelligent girls had not been more individual.

The letters did not check the now growing curiosity concerning the Six Lost Beauties, and then, almost at once, there came the kidnaping of the Hon. Lydia

Martel. This was the first real shock of realization and alarm.

It was an ugly case. The Hon. Lydia Martel was a noted beauty and the daughter of a lord. She vanished from the grounds of her father's country house, Ladies Dale, one evening, but this time not without trace.

The deaths of two men marked her disappearance. One was a young gamekeeper of the estate, the other a stranger. The papers spoke of this man as a foreigner, probably Scandinavian, six feet six tall and of superb physique. His death was caused by the discharge, at point-blank range, of both barrels of the gamekeeper's gun. The wound was in the chest. The gamekeeper had also been killed, how it was not said, though it appeared that the man was *unwounded,* which made the matter mysterious.

There was no doubt that the gamekeeper had died in defense of Lydia Martel, and that the other man was one of those who had attacked her. The girl's walking stick was found on the scene of the crime, while her silken scarf had been caught in the bushes and dragged from her neck as the kidnapers forced their way through a gap in the hedge. There were no clews as to who had attacked her or how they had managed to escape with her. She and the criminal vanished utterly.

It was plain to everybody that gamekeepers do not shoot to kill even in defense of their mistresses. This one must have fired because his own life was threatened. That told the world that there were at large criminals so ruthless that they would not stop at murder to carry out such mysterious abductions. The mere thought sent a gasp of horror through the land.

The public, too, began to appreciate the queer significance behind this series of disappearances. When Lydia Martel's photo was added to the other six it was seen that her beauty was of the same strong, classical type as the others. Also she was an athlete, a mountain-climber.

Feeling that there was some ghastly plot behind the whole business the public immediately became panicky. They asked what kind of criminal it was who selected for his victims the loveliest girls in the land! Who was the master-mind who had carried off these outrages so brilliantly and yet so ruthlessly? Where were these kidnapings to end, and who was safe from them? Above all—what were the police doing?

I asked all these questions myself as I read the rather frantic papers in the almost cloistered calm of my great library-laboratory. Not for a moment did I realize that the answer, or part of the answer might lie with me. I was just one of the public keenly interested, but quite outside the matter until that moment when Raphael Phare of Scotland Yard, said to me: "Martin Sondes, who is Dr. Dyn?"

II

RAPHAEL PHARE is a tall young man so immaculately clad as to be almost painful to a careless person like myself. He is more like a petted member of a university boat crew than a criminal investigator, nevertheless his dandaical manner covers one of the most alert brains imaginable. I have been his friend for many years.

He came calmly into my great library—he is never flustered—sat, pulled imaginary creases out of his perfect waistcoat and fired that astonishing sentence at me:

"Martin Sondes—who is Dr. Dyn?"

"Doctor of what and Dr. Dyn of where?" I smiled. "It sounds a foreign name, and, though it seems familiar, the world is large and very full of doctors, my friend."

"I'm on the 'Seven Lost Beauties' case," he said, dusting his superlative tan shoes with a silk handkerchief.

"Interesting case," I said. "And you think that should jog my memory because you think this Dr. Dyn might be connected with it?"

He nodded. "We've got that much, and I thought your uncanny memory might place the name. How do you find the case interesting?"

I told him how I felt that the peculiar type of beauty and the athleticism seemed to link all the girls.

"That's good," he said, and I saw he was following up that line. "There are other points. They are all golden-haired and white-skinned."

"Blondes—the Nordic strain," I mused, and as I thought of the tall, fair racial type of northern Europe the name Dyn seemed to come very near the surface. But again memory eluded me. Raphael Phare said before I could speak:

"Also seven does not seem to us the true number. We're afraid we've got to put fifteen other disappearances down to the same source. And there may be more—all of them gold and white beauties, Martin."

"Great heavens!" I gasped. "A wholesale criminal plot?"

"We're afraid of that," he said calmly. "There's another point. A great deal of jewelry has gone missing with the girls, with all the girls—those unknown to the public as well as the seven—except in the case of Lydia Martel; discovery balked the brutes there."

"And you think the motive is robbery?"

"It's a queer business," he frowned. "We don't know. The girls may have taken the jewelry off with them: it was personal jewelry in every case even if it belonged to the parents. Or robbery may have been effected *after* the disappearance. If the latter it was the work of masters, for there are no clews.

"We haven't made this detail public since it is obviously dangerous to advertise the fact that a girl is wandering at large with anything up to five thousand pounds in gems on her. The fact remains, though, that if these disappearances are the work of one gang, as we are beginning to fear, they've also made a haul of jewels to the extent of quite forty thousand pounds, for all these girls were rich. That *does* seem a motive!"

"But you're not sure it's the main one?" I asked.

"Why should blond beauties be picked on always—in the past and hereafter?" he said.

"Hereafter!" I cried. "You mean the business doesn't stop with this Lydia Martel discovery?"

"We fear not—but read that and give me your opinion on it." He held out a filthy, crumpled piece of paper. "It was found on that big fair chap—Nordic type again—the gamekeeper outed. He was trying to get rid of it by burying it when he died."

I read the queer, harsh script writing that filled the sheet. It was in German, though in Roman lettering. It consisted of precise instructions to a subordinate who was to play a secondary part in some big venture.

The business of this subordinate was to station himself at a certain point in a certain unnamed square and watch a house, also unspecified. He was to report all movements dangerous to the main plan, and particularly those relating to a girl recorded as D. L.

There followed a description of the girl D. L. so that the watcher should know her from other girls in the house. The description was curiously and scientifically precise, and made it plain that D. L. was of the same fair, classical type as the other victims. The instructions were signed with the single word "Dyn."

"I'm afraid I can't be helpful," I said after reading. "The man who had this must have known exactly what it all meant. I can't even place the square."

"Oh, that," said Raphael Phare as if it were of little moment. "We know that. Worked it out easily. It's Bays Square in the West End. The house is No. 10."

"They're flying higher than ever then," I said, for Bays Square is one of those exclusive little backwaters that seem to be inhabited solely by members of the House of Lords. "And who is D. L.?"

"Lady Decima Lecharcles," he answered.

"Good God!" I cried. "The Marquis of Trane's girl!"

I really was staggered. Lady Decima was a reigning beauty, a celebrity as became the daughter of one of the greatest families in the land.

"She's the type that beast wants—tall, strong, white and gold," said Raphael Phare evenly. "There's no doubt that paper refers to her. It's the Trane house—and it's to be to-night."

"But if you know that much—" I cried.

"It's not enough," he smiled. "The dead blond brute had a diary on him. There was little in it save times for appointments—the appointment to kidnap Lydia Martel and others. Against to-day is the entry: 'D. L. 10 P. M.—2 A. M.' That times the abduction of Lady Decima, we think. The diary also contains a reference to a Dr. Dyn, the name on the instructions. Now we want to find out who this mysterious Dr. Dyn is, if he really is the man behind these outrages, and, if so, is he the sort to go through with to-night's affair after the Lydia Martel business."

"But you can't expect me to tell you all this from a mere reading of the instructions," I protested.

"Doesn't the description of D. L. help? Seems to me to be written in just the sort of scientific jargon you use in your eugenic, race-uplift writings—"

At those words I sprang to my feet. They seemed to draw together all the elusive hints that had made the name of Dyn seem so familiar.

"Odoric Dyn!" I cried. "Of course, that's the man, Odoric Dyn!"

I made for my library shelves.

III

"HERE'S the fellow," I said, pointing to an entry in a French medical directory. "Odoric Dyn, born 1875 at Starvereck, Denmark — a member of an ancient royal family—Honors man of Danish, German and other medical schools. And look at his degrees. He was a giant—chemistry, bacteriology, pathology, pharmacology. And that only represented a tithe of his brilliance as I remember him. He was master of the whole range of science. The world has seen few intellects so tremendous."

"Sounds like Lucifer himself," said Raphael Phare. "This, however, is more to the point." His finger indicated a line that ran: "Struck off Registers, 1913."

"That was his tragedy—and by heavens, your clew," I cried with excitement. "He was struck off for doing exactly what he is doing now."

"Abducting women?"

"Kidnaping fair-haired women," I answered, "and others."

"That doesn't sound like a great scientist," said Raphael Phare with a frown. "Why did he do it?"

"For the best possible reasons—for love of the world!" I said.

I had expected to startle Raphael Phare, but nothing startles him. He produced a cigarette and said quietly: "Crank, eh?"

"Of the most violent type. He was what you might call a Utopia maniac. He wanted to make the world anew and better—according to his own ideas. He had a crazy dream of founding a Master Race that was to make the world a super-heaven, inhabited, or rather run, by supermen."

"Fair-haired supermen?"

"Naturally. He was of that type—the Nordic type—himself. Odoric Dyn was an aristocrat, a prince, descended from the Vikings. He held that the old Norsemen had not only conquered the whole known world of their day, but were solely responsible for our present civilization."

"Shouldn't think *that* would encourage even a madman to bring 'em back," said Raphael Phare dryly.

"Oh, he held that only the blessings came from them. The evil in the world was the work of the lesser, baser races—all the people, like me, who are dark and black-haired. By sheer force of numbers these black-heads robbed the Nordic blonds of the natural right of molding and directing the world. And, mind you, Dyn isn't alone in thinking that. I can lend you half a dozen weighty scientific textbooks that argue in the same strain."

"Dyn put the theory into practice, though," said Phare.

"Yes. The trouble about Odoric Dyn was that he was a great scientific genius as well as a fanatic. He had an enormous ability, audacity and even unscrupulousness to back his mania. Where other men dreamed he boldly *did*. He was an immense man, an amazing man. I myself saw an audience of thousands carried off its feet by his wild and compelling brilliance as he proved that the myth that made the devil black and angels fair was

but a fundamental truth, a symbol standing for the ceaseless war between the fair Nordic races and the dark people of evil, and the need of the Nordic triumphing if there was ever to be a new heaven on earth."

"So you've seen the fellow?" said Raphael Phare attentively.

"At a lecture in Berlin. He was terrific. Tremendous in build, Viking-featured and Viking fair, he had a strange mesmeric beauty that was aloof and overpowering—like one of his own supermen.

"His eyes were brilliant, with an extraordinary, veiled glance of vision and power. There was something uncanny in his eyes, they seemed to burn and bind one—I dare say Mahomed carried away his followers with just such a glance of natural force—"

"Delete Mahomed—you can identify the lad, that's the point," grinned Raphael Phare. "And are you telling me he really believed in this New Race and New Heaven stuff?"

"Utterly," I said, "that's the danger of the man—he's the true fanatic, as I have said; the type that will dare anything even the gallows or the stake for his theories. He believes it just as the old Prussians held that through them and their kind alone could the world progress. He considered that the Nordic blonds had a monopoly of the brains, ideals, nobility, sense of order and rule and so forth. And as he was a prince of that race he considered he had a natural right to teach and mold the world.

"His own vast attainments supported that inclination. You called him Lucifer just now; he was that, a would-be benevolent Lucifer.

"The idea developed into an obsession through his quarrels with other scientists. They could not stand his arrogance, and he could not stand what he called 'the inferiority of serf-minds.' The truth is he was too daring and advanced for the majority of his calling, they were jealous and afraid of him, and showed it by constant attacks.

"Dyn said that these 'little men' knew that he stood for world betterment and were trying to block his work. The angrier he grew with them the more his wild and mighty mind felt that the only way to free himself and the world from the evils that shackled them was to bring the old Viking race back to power, and, of course, he saw that he, a prince of that race, was the one man ordained by Providence to do the thing, to gather together, train and endow that race with all the fruits of his great intellect. Thus only could the underlings be crushed."

"By conquest?"

"Lord, no, that was too crude. Dyn merely decided to gather together a colony of Nordic blonds. They must be perfect, physically, and intellectually and of the highest birth. He would train them to be supermen and superwomen, until their superior mental and scientific attainments would naturally make them leaders in all thought, science, laws and progress generally.

"Thus by right of intellect they would rule the world and make it an earthly paradise. Well, the idea so got hold of him that he made it his life's aim. He preached it throughout Europe—like a crusade. He obtained great support from Scandinavia and Germany, where the idea of blond supremacy was naturally favored, and he actually took a tract of land in the mountains of Norway as the first home of his Master Race.

"He gathered together some two hundred young people of both sexes for hard living and high thinking. I was told that he got wonderful results even in the short time before the smash, especially in practical science, while his system of training really did make his youngsters look like a race of blond gods. As a eugenist myself I felt the idea had many possibilities—"

IV

"BUT I'm a plain detective, Martin," grinned Raphael Phare, "and feed only on plain facts. What smashed the scheme? The usual thing with these 'uplift' settlements, the feminine element—scandal?"

"You can leave that idea entirely

alone," I said. "That sort of nastiness was utterly contrary to Dyn's ideals. He held to a strict recognition of social laws. Only a healthy, moral and wholesome people were fit to rule in his creed.

"The sanctity of the home, of love, of marriage and so forth were held to be binding. To sin against them meant expulsion from the colony, as did marriage with one of the lesser, darker races. The young people were quite free to make their choice outside, for there was no sort of compulsion, but if they did, out they went."

"What did break the scheme then?" asked Raphael Phare.

"The scientists," I said. "There was always war between them and Dyn, as I have said. They crabbed his idea from the beginning, ridiculed it, wrote against it, spread a feeling of distrust. Then Dyn, in his high-handed contempt of them, gave them a handle. He introduced his daring innovations among his disciples—or said he was going to. One was this monkey gland business.

"He declared he was going to perfect that, operate on himself and his Master Race, and so have a people who would live for over one hundred years carrying on their training, experience, ideals beyond the span of ordinary life. I don't know whether Dyn meant it or could do it, but the thing raised a storm of scandal that overwhelmed his scheme.

"Every scientist in Europe was shocked, or professed to be shocked, at the idea of this madman operating on helpless young people. They pictured the risk and danger of such experimentation by an unhinged and unbridled mind. Dyn became a monster, a ghoul who had imprisoned the cream of the youth of Europe for the purposes of the most horrible forms of vivisection.

"The public mind became inflamed, and even his stanchest supporters were scared at his unpopularity. Recruiting fell off, and even the members of the colony began to slip away. In a few weeks the whole thing crumbled. A body of loyal disciples remained with him in the mountains, but that was all, his grand dream was gone, his great scheme was shattered."

"And Dyn?"

"He was beside himself with fury. The real madman came out then. He said the hostility was the work of the evil dark races who knew that his scheme doomed them—and that this was all the more reason why the scheme must go on.

"Evil must be wiped out, it was his mission and his sacred duty to train and carry his Master Race to victory. He defied the world. He would go on despite all the world and all its laws—and he showed exactly what he meant by kidnaping ten young people he had already tried to get to join him. He did it in the same way as he is doing now.

"The ten young men and women vanished without trace. The authorities were all at sea, but, before they could get a clew, letters arrived to say they had joined Dyn of their own free will."

"Ah!" said Raphael Phare, looking at me sharply. "Letters!"

"Yes," I said, knowing what he was thinking of, "letters such as Mary Just and Olive Cardew sent home. Exactly the same—rather stilted and unnatural letters. You're suspicious about those letters, Raphael?"

"The parents, too," he nodded. "They say that, though the writing is undoubtedly that of their girls, the wording is such that they can't believe their girls wrote it."

"They didn't. Dyn dictated it. He did the same with the first ten he kidnaped."

"How did he manage that—drugs?"

"Yes; his scientific intelligence has enabled him to invent a drug that makes his victims will-less and subject to his dominance. A young man and a young girl escaped and told the amazing story.

"They had been carried off to the colony of the Master Race under the influence of the drug. There they were subjected to a concentrated effort in persuasion by Dyn and his loyal disciples in order to make them join the colony. No harm came to them—"

"You're sure of that?" said Raphael Phare quickly.

"Absolutely sure, the pair made that plain. They were perfectly happy as the

others were, and not even a threat was uttered—they were just kept prisoners until they had been won over to join Dyn's cause. Eight of the kidnaped youths were won over by the uncanny magnetism and eloquence of Dyn, and were given the freedom of the colony and, indeed, became enthusiasts as were the others. When the two saw that they pretended to give in, they were released, and immediately made their escape."

"And the police at once went after Dyn."

"The whole of the press and the people of Scandinavia were up in arms against the monster who was stealing the fairest youth of its people. Criminal proceedings were started—and Odoric Dyn and every member of the Master Race vanished into the blue."

"What!" shouted Raphael Phare.

"Fact. When the police arrived in the mountains they found the colony deserted. There was no trace of Dyn or his disciples. And no trace has ever been found. He was a great traveler, he had three celebrated explorers among his followers. It was thought that he had knowledge of some hidden pocket or island of the earth and had carried his colony off to it. Anyhow, that was the end of him. He was struck off the medical registers, and the coming of the war helped to obliterate his memory."

"Until now, confound him," said Raphael Phare, "and now he's at it again, collecting his Nordic supermen from *us*. Justifying himself, as fanatics will, that his end justifies his means."

"He's bound to do that," I said. "His great dream counts more than such minor things as imprisonment of victims, the suffering of relatives—"

"And the gunning of men," said Raphael Phare sternly. He drew from his pocket a magazine air pistol of strange design and power. Beside it he placed a conical pellet like a bullet, but made of some gelatinous substance.

"Handle that carefully," he went on. "It's filled with deadly poison—of a kind unknown to our experts. This pistol belonged to the fair-haired stranger killed in the Lydia Martel affair. He fired it at the gamekeeper. The gelatine cover of the bullet burst on impact with the chest or face, the poison, which is extremely gaseous, was taken in by the mouth and nose, and the poor devil was dead in thirty seconds.

"We've tried it on animals. The pellets make no sound, and the magazine of this pistol can hold thirty of them. A blackguard weapon."

"How came the kidnapers to leave such a weapon behind?"

"We think the gamekeeper came running up just as they were getting Miss Martel through a hole in the hedge. The dead stranger stayed behind to cover the get-away, and, in the struggle, must have pulled and fired this. The keeper, however, loosed both barrels of his gun at the same instant and so both men died.

"The other ruffians decided to get their victim away at once at the sound of the shot. We feel—and to-night will prove if we are right—that the gang is unaware that the dead man carried such evidence as the paper and diary."

I stared fascinated at the capsule.

"Even yet I can't believe that a man like Dyn, of his genius and great ideals, could be such a monster," I said.

"He's just the sort that is," said Raphael Phare. "A fanatic can be more dangerous and ruthless than any mere bad man. Fanatics have been like that since the world began.

"How many, even noble-minded men, have imprisoned and tortured—yes, and slaughtered their fellow men just for the sake of the philosophy or religion they wanted to force onto the world?

"The truth they feel within them blinds them to all else—to laws, scruples, pity, pain, everything. They will do anything, commit crime even to attain their ends. Your monomaniac is the most dangerous fellow on earth."

"And Odoric Dyn is the most dangerous of his class" I said. "I tell you that from my knowledge of the man, Raphael. That will-destroying drug and that ghastly pistol tell you what he can do in applied science. The mere thought of a man of his terrific attainments running amuck in the world suggests a reign of terror."

"All the more reason why we must take him to-night," said Raphael Phare. "You have convinced me that he will make the attempt on Lady Decima. We'll be at the Bays Square house waiting for him. You'd better come, too, Martin, to identify him."

V

I AM not likely to forget our first clash with Dr. Dyn in a hurry. For one thing, it was a delicately beautiful spring night, so that by mere contrast the horror that lurked beneath the soft serenity of the evening gives its memory a ghastly quality.

Raphael Phare had laid his plans with great care. We entered Lord Trane's house, not from the Bays Square side, but through a Mr. Quinn's house in Silver Street.

Silver Street runs parallel with the west side of the square, and by passing through the gardens of both houses we hoped to get into the back of the Trane house unobserved.

Silver Street was almost empty, save for a number of cars setting down guests at the house next to the Quinn's. Strains of music told there was a dance at that house.

"The Hartley Knights are giving a fancy dress ball," said Raphael Phare. "Not a bad thing: it covers the movements of our men."

"Your men," I said. "I was just going to say you ought to have men stationed in this street, for I see none."

"The English 'bobby' is not so bad at taking cover then." Raphael Phare smiled, "for there are ten of him in this street. There are twenty in Bays Square, five more in the gardens between the houses of this street and those of the square, more in the Trane house. All told I've got about fifty men in and about the Trane house."

I realized, as Raphael Phare outlined his plan, that he had a net drawn tight round the house in which Lady Decima Lecharles, Dyn's next victim, waited.

"We hope he'll walk into it," said Raphael Phare. "And if he does he'll never walk out. It's about as sure a trap as we can plan. At the first signal from us the men will close in, all exits from the square, and even this street, will be blocked —and no risks will be taken."

I knew what he meant by that. He was armed with an automatic pistol, so was I, so was every member of his force. We had orders to shoot from the pocket at the slightest hint that a poison pistol or any other weapon was going to be used. But Raphael Phare thought we might get the man before he did any real harm. The numbers were overpowering, the ring too strong for any man to break through.

We passed through the Quinn house under the guidance of a plainclothes man. Another met us as we crept like shadows through the gardens to the rear of the Trane house. The sound of the music from the ball was stronger here, for the Hartley Knight ballroom was built out into the garden almost up to the Bays Square houses.

At a tap at the garden door a policeman let us into Lord Trane's house, and a big, black-haired footman took us up to the room in which we were to wait and watch for Dyn. All the entrance doors of the house had a guard, and there was a man stationed on each floor. The house was like a beleaguered castle.

The room we watched in was a big sitting room on the first landing at the back of the house. The whole of the front of this floor was occupied by a great drawing-room, in which sat two policemen. Between the two rooms was Lady Trane's private sitting room, and in that sat Lady Decima, the girl we were to protect, and her parents.

It was thought best it should be so. Wherever she went such a monster as Dyn would have followed and attacked her, and it was better that she should have watchers in rooms on each side of her and a watcher outside the door, with plenty of help within easy call. She was only separated from us by great folding doors, for at great functions the three rooms—drawing-room and two sitting rooms—were thrown into one.

As we went into our room we heard the voices of Lady Decima and her parents through the doors, for they were playing some card game. There was absolutely no chance of Dyn's getting at her without our being aware of it.

I may say that Lady Decima was in utter ignorance of what threatened her. Only her parents had been warned, and they played up with that brave *sang-froid* that comes naturally to such people.

We were, I felt, in an invincible position for defeating this Dr. Dyn—and capturing him, perhaps.

Raphael Phare went to the great French windows at the back of the room that opened onto a little stone balcony, and looked down into the gardens between us and Silver Street. The light from the big windows of the Hartley Knight ballroom shone in his face, and going to his side it seemed to me that I could almost jump onto the flat roof of the ballroom, so close was it built to the Bays Square houses. Music came from it, showing that the dance was in full swing, but the blazing windows were of stained glass, and we could see nothing of what happened inside.

Raphael Phare signaled to the policeman in the garden, came back into the room and shut the windows all but a crack. The house seemed to grow strangely silent, the faint swing of music from outside, and the murmur of the card players beyond the folding doors seeming to accentuate that quiet. The silence seemed to grow deeper, more mysterious when Raphael Phare switched off the lights and we sat in darkness.

An hour went by, the faint, far-off and intermittent sound of the music, and the occasional murmur of voices from the card players alone breaking the thick, velvety quiet. Every now and then Raphael Phare rose and made a rapid tour of the defenses, the big, black-haired footman who was on guard on our landing standing by the open door while he was away, to be in touch with me if anything happened.

Another hour crept on, the murmuring in the next room dwindling, dwindling in a fatigued way, the throb of the dance music stole in upon the senses, soothing them, making one sleepy.

"Don't yawn, Martin," came Raphael Phare's quiet voice through the darkness. "Sleepiness grows if you give way to it—and it's only eleven forty-five. We've got until two—if he's coming to-night."

Twelve struck with an aweing solemnness from a neighboring clock, a quarter past twelve. Nothing happened—no hint of anything happening in the thick, dark night. About twenty past there was a murmur in the next room. I heard the clear voice of Lady Trane say: "Yes, it is getting chilly, you may switch on the big electric radiator—er—Higgins, isn't it?"

"Yes, m' lady," said the voice of the black-haired footman.

We heard him move about and go out. I heard Raphael Phare mutter: "Sounds as though that fellow was a new footman, Martin. I didn't know that."

Five minutes passed. Queer—it seemed to me as though the silence, the thick, dead silence of that house abruptly became more marked, as though all sound had suddenly stopped. It was a strange sensation—as though the world was suddenly holding its breath for something terrible to happen.

Raphael Phare's whisper seemed to flick through the darkness like a whiplash: "That's strange, Martin. They were in the middle of a discussion in there about Lady Decima's revoking, I think. And then their voices died down. Not stopped, you know, trailed off—like sleepy talkers. I'm going—"

The door suddenly opened: "Who's that?" snapped Raphael Phare.

"Me, sir," said the footman in a thick voice. "Chilly, sir — switch on radiator, sir."

I saw Raphael Phare stand up against the light of the door. "Look here," he snapped. "Why are you doing this? Who gave you permission to leave your post?"

I thought I heard a little scrunch as Raphael Phare walked toward the man, as though something had broken under a foot —Raphael Phare reeled in his stride—fell. The footman put out his hand, caught the detective, held him for a minute, and then dragged him to and dropped him into an armchair. He laughed a soft and chilling laugh as he did this.

He laughed because of me, too. I seemed to have guessed at once what that crunching noise meant—a foot shattering a phial containing something volatile—gas. I seemed to know instantly why Lady Deci-

ma and her parents had stopped talking in the next room, why the house had grown so suddenly and deadly quiet.

I guessed that the thickness in the footman's voice was caused by some sort of antigas antidote. All these things passed through my brain in a flash at the instant a soft, sweet, all-compelling languor assailed me.

Partly because I was drowsed, partly because I feared I might be gassed into sleep, I dropped out of my chair—dropped down by the French window where the gas-dispelling air poured through the crack onto my mouth and nose. Thus, though half drugged, half asleep, I was never altogether dead to my surroundings as Raphael Phare and the others were.

The footman stole softly toward me, carefully shone a torch into my face. I had already shut my eyes in a pretense of complete sleep. He was satisfied, he opened the windows gently and widely, looked out, coughed three times.

Then followed the most amazing ten minutes I have ever experienced. I played unwilling witness to it because my limbs had been rendered useless by the effects of the drug. I could not move. With my mind half asleep, half alert, the whole business seemed like the wild and bizarre happening of a dreadful nightmare.

VI

IN my half drowsed state the music from the ballroom seemed to blare more loudly—uncannily. I saw the footman peering into the night with the light of the ballroom on his face—and he was no longer black-haired. He was as fair as a Viking. He must have worn a wig.

Then suddenly he stepped back and held the window wide—and with the blare of music behind them, three tall figures came in from the balcony.

Three tall and utterly bizarre figures. Not only were they physically remarkable, they were clad in strange costume. One big creature was dressed as an Arab. The smaller of the three was garbed as an Arab woman, yashmak and all—a woman, yet taller than I and bulkier, yet of perfect and beautiful grace.

The third man was clad like a Viking chief of old. He was a giant. He seemed to tower above me as I lay there. I saw the glint of light on his armor and on the curving horns that stood out from his steel cap.

I saw more—I saw the light shine on an austere and compellingly beautiful face—a face of outstanding force, vision and sweetness. Yes, that was the terrible quality in the strange face of Dyn, its fineness, its exaltation. He had the look of some inspired prophet bent on leading a world of wrongdoers to nobler things.

But the eyes told of his fanaticism. They were almost coldly burning in their uncanny veiled wildness of vision and determination. Yes, this was Odoric Dyn coming to claim his victim buoyed up with his mad dream, brilliant beyond Raphael Phare and all his plans. I stared fascinated. Even through the languors of the drug the power of this man threw a spell over me.

I could not move—and Dyn went to claim his prey.

The doors leading to the inner room were opened by the footman. There, under the electric lights, sat Lady Decima and her parents—asleep from the drug the footman had loosed when he went in to switch on the radiator. All three were lying back in easy chairs—Lady Decima facing straight out at us. Her beauty thrilled me. Strong, gracious in its gold and white loveliness it was akin to yet so much more human and lovable than Dyn's Viking magnificence.

Not a word was spoken. Dyn advanced on the girl, lifted her arm. I saw the flash of a syringe. I struggled against the binding inertia of the sleep gas unavailingly—Dyn was rubbing the arm, spreading the drug through those beautiful veins, watching that glorious face with his burning and visionary eyes. Presently his voice, magnetic and commanding, said: "Stand, Decima!" That damned drug of his that could help him to control human wills was all-powerful. Lady Decima obeyed—obeyed like a woman in her sleep.

The woman with Dyn stepped forward.

From under her Arab garments she drew a set of silken robes exactly similar. In ten seconds Lady Decima's identity was completely hidden under the yashmak and the robes. Indeed, it was startling. The strange woman who had come with Dyn stood by her side for a moment, and to my drug-mazed brain it was as though one woman had suddenly turned into two, so alike were they.

Then Odoric Dyn, his companions, the footman—and his girl victim, turned, walked toward me out onto the balcony—and out of my sight.

There was just one terrible moment for me. As they grouped on the balcony the tall girl who had come with Dyn looked down at me—looked into my eyes. I saw her start. I knew in that instant she had seen that my eyes were opened that I had been a witness of the whole scene. She gazed down at me for a moment that seemed like an eternity. I expected her to touch Dyn, to warn him.

I expected poison death to strike me out of the world in one terrible stroke—I think I saw all this in those steady, lovely blue eyes. And then something else seemed to come there, a warmth, a gentleness—was it a smile?

I don't know. I am only conscious that that strange, tall and beautiful woman moved so that she stood between me and the eyes of her companions, and that as they passed along and over the balcony, their victim moving with the deadness of one mesmerized, she managed to hide me from danger.

She looked back just once as she, too, vanished—then the deep, silent emptiness of the night came down again with the swing and beat of dance music filling it with a pulse that seemed to grow and grow in my brain.

I suppose my will did relax then, for the next I remembered was Raphael Phare shaking me, and saying bitterly, "Wake up, Martin, it's all over, we're beaten. Lady Decima has gone, vanished without trace—Dyn has won the trick."

And even when I had told what I had to tell, the trick remained with Dyn. He and his confederates had been guests at the Hartley Knight ball, had got in with genuine invitations, though investigation along that line led nowhere. They had passed as ordinary guests in fancy costume, though Dyn's magnificent Viking bearing had been commented on.

It was a perfect stepping off point for their stroke, for it enabled them to pass the police unobserved. They had had everything planned to the drugging of the police watchers in the garden and means of getting out of the ballroom and clambering up to the Trane balcony.

The footman named Higgins, who had vanished, had dealt with all in the Trane house. Having carried Lady Decima off from that house full of drugged guards, Dyn led the will-less girl through the Hartley Knight ballroom, where in her Arab costume she was taken for one of the guests, to his waiting motor car. With that motor car she had vanished into the blue as the other seven gold and white beauties had vanished.

Dyn had won the trick against odds, and it was an indication of the terrible, bold power of the man.

That is how Raphael Phare looked at it in his anxiety for Lady Decima. Perhaps I did not look at it altogether in that way. I wondered whether Dyn had won the trick—absolutely if he had not exposed a weakness in his diabolical plans for a benevolent Master Race.

I don't want to boast, but it seemed to me that my dark brown, not at all classical looks might have an appeal to fair-haired white-skinned women. Tastes go by opposites, it is said. Had that girl who so obviously saved my life found my darker type attractive after so much fairness? And if so, was that a flaw in Dyn's armor by which we might bring him to book?

Dr. Dyn appears again next week

The pane shattered where Humpy was silhouetted against the sky

THE PIPER'S PARTNER

By Joseph Harrington

AS SOON AS THE WAITER LEFT, THE GIRL DROPPED INTO THE CHAIR OPPOSITE HUMPY. NOW SHE SPOKE IN EARNEST, WHISPERED TONES

HE was a newcomer to Larry Sanberg's establishment. It was only a week since he first shuffled into the brightly lighted, garishly decorated basement room, dropped into a chair at a corner table, and growled:

"Whisky!"

Slim Peters, the waiter, tried hard to appear shocked, using an air reserved especially for strangers who made such requests.

"We—er—have nothing like that here, sir."

The newcomer turned glittering eyes upon him, eyes that glared out of a dead yellow countenance and expressed a silent command.

"Well, just a minute. Maybe"—Slim stammered. He went into the back room and conversed with Sanberg, a heavily set, mustached man, who peered through a hole in the wall at the newcomer. The appearance of the stranger was sufficiently desperate to be reassuring to Sanberg, and a minute later Slim placed before the yellow-faced man a teacup, which had never, in the memory of any habitué of the place, contained tea.

Every night since then the stranger returned. He was never actually taken into the inner circle of the coterie of bandits, bootleggers, gunmen, burglars, and blackmailers whose rendezvous was Larry Sanberg's so-called "club." But on the third night there occurred an incident which made him a member, in good standing, of the organization, so far as Sanberg was concerned.

The stranger called Sanberg to his table and flashed a diamond ring.

"I wanna get rid of that," he muttered.

Sanberg examined it with the air of a connoisseur, which he was.

"How much?"

"Two hundred."

"I'll give you a hundred."

The stranger reached for the gem, as though scorning to haggle.

"All right," Sanberg said. He drew a roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off two fifties and five twenties, and passed them to the seller, receiving in exchange the diamond ring.

From where the stranger came and why, none knew. And none made inquiries of him, curiosity being considered a most unhealthy emotion at Larry Sanberg's.

None of the regular crowd knew his name, so they called him Humpy, because his shoulders were hunched in a peculiar fashion, almost like a hunchback. He didn't seem to mind the uncouth sobriquet, and some of the regulars grew into the habit of nodding casually to him. Sometimes he nodded back from the lonely corner where he was hunched over his teacup.

II

IT was after midnight, and Larry Sanberg's was beginning to fill with patrons. It was morning for them—the morning of their working day. There was subdued laughter, low whispers, loud jokes, and the tinkling of teacups. Some twenty-five men and women were gathered there.

The door opened and a girl entered, a tastefully clad girl, under whose fashionable cloth hat could be seen a mass of golden hair. In appearance she seemed oddly out of place among these desperadoes, even though they represented the highest element of the underworld. But in manner she was entirely at home.

"Hello, Tom." She greeted with a cheery smile one of the cleverest safe-blowers in New York.

"Howdy, Pat?" he grinned back. "Where've you been keeping yourself?"

Pat the Piper shrugged and passed down the aisle, nodding to friends here and there. One of the nods went toward Humpy, but it passed unnoticed by the recipient, his eyes being upon the cup before him.

The girl presently dropped into a chair at a table, after receiving a cordial invitation from one of the two men sitting there, a red-haired, hard-eyed individual of thirty. At first they chatted in audible tones, but later their voices sank to mere whispers.

If any one had been observing Humpy—which they weren't—they would have seen his eyes stray to the golden-haired girl and remain there fixedly, until he himself seemed to become suddenly self-conscious and bring his eyes back to his cup.

A half hour passed. The girl rose, sauntered aimlessly about, and finally came to a halt at Humpy's table.

"Hello, Humpy."

Humpy looked up and smiled a welcome—or, rather, he tried to smile. The result was a twisted leer, which disclosed three shining gold teeth. The muscles of his unwholesome, dead face, with its crooked, hooked nose, seemed to have forgotten how to smile. But he was plainly doing his best.

Slim Peters arrived with a freshly filled teacup for Humpy.

"When did you get in from Chi?" Pat asked Humpy.

"A week ago," he muttered in the low, guttural voice that grated unpleasantly on one's ears.

Slim Peters didn't know it, but that question and its answer had been spoken entirely for his benefit. As soon as the waiter moved out of earshot, the girl dropped into the chair opposite Humpy. Her expression and voice changed. Now she spoke earnestly, swiftly, in tones that carried only a few feet.

"Reddy Helfant and Lou Sims—the two I was just speaking to—are going to pull a job to-night! There's an old woman, somewhat a recluse, living around on Ninetieth Street. She's supposed to have a lot of cash and jewelry in her home—afraid of banks. She lives all alone. They think it's a cinch. Probably is. Suppose—"

She stopped suddenly. Reddy Helfant and Lou Sims had risen from their table and were on their way out, their path taking them directly toward Humpy's table.

"So they finally got poor old Murphy, eh?" She seemed to be lazily gossiping when the two men came up to their table. "Well, that's what he gets for not using gloves. He always said they interfered with his fingers on the dials. Too bad."

"Well—" Helfant broke in on the conversation. "So long, Pat. We're off."

"Wait a minute. I'll walk part of the way with you," Pat offered

"We'll wait outside," Helfant said, and, with his partner, he continued toward the door.

Pat rose and as she did so, she whispered tensely:

"Ninetieth Street and West End Avenue —in twenty minutes."

Humpy gave no sign of hearing her, and he raised the teacup to his lips as she followed Helfant and Sims out of the place.

For ten minutes Humpy sat silently. Then he beckoned to Slim, paid his bill—a sizable one, for he had emptied many cups during the evening—and shuffled out.

Ninetieth Street and West End Avenue was only a few blocks distant. Humpy timed his dragging walk to bring him to that point just ten minutes after he left Larry Sanberg's. As he reached the corner, Pat stepped out of a dark hallway and stood beside him.

"I followed them this far," she whispered, "after bidding them good-by over at Broadway. The place is just down the block. Follow me."

She led the way, walking swiftly. In front of a tall, dark apartment house she came to a stop.

"This is it."

"How did they go up?" Humpy's voice, although still low, was startlingly different from the guttural tones which Larry Sanberg's crowd knew. But the Piper did not seem to find the change surprising.

"There's a fire escape around the back," she murmured. "Here—I think they went through this alley."

She indicated a dark areaway at the side of the house.

"What floor, do you know?" Humpy asked.

"No, I don't."

"Wait here," he commanded.

She made a gesture, as though to detain him. But he was gone, vanishing in the dark alley.

Humpy, feeling his way cautiously through the dark, reached the yard. Then, with the aid of the dim moonlight, he was able to discern the fire escape. The hunch disappeared from his shoulders, and, reaching up, he grasped the lowest extremity of the fire escape. With an agility that would have surprised Larry Sanberg and his cohorts, he scrambled up to the first landing. He found the ladder and moved upward rapidly.

It was now three o'clock in the morning, and every light—with the exception of one —in the apartment house had been extinguished. That exception, Humpy saw, was on the third floor, and as he neared the window through which the single light streamed, he slowed his steps, moved with extreme caution and silence.

His head came to a level with the window, which was open, and he peered inside. His vision was partially veiled by lace curtains, but he was able to see the interior of the room quite clearly, and he caught his breath sharply at the spectacle that met his eyes.

III

CARELESSLY flung on a divan was a slim, silver-haired old woman. Her eyes, above the towel which had been bound about her mouth, effectively gagging her, were blue and clear and unfrightened. She was clad only in silken night garments, old-fashioned and severe in cut; and the cords with which her hands and feet had been bound cut deep into her bare flesh.

Despite her uncomfortable position and the shock her sense of propriety must have received when she awoke to find two strange men at her bedside, the helpless victim had not lost a certain prim dignity and poise.

The blue eyes expressed only scorn as she listened to Reddy Helfant, who was standing over her, a revolver swinging menacingly in his hand and his brutal features twisted into a triumphant grin.

"Now listen, old lady," he was saying, and the words reached Humpy's ears clearly through the open window, "we ain't goin' to hurt you—if you don't make any noise. If you do—" He gestured significantly wfth the gun, holding the barrel and swinging it like a blackjack.

Humpy's eyes were next attracted to the table. Lying there was a small heap of

scintillating jewels. They had been placed on another towel, evidently to be wrapped up at the thug's leisure.

Humpy wondered where Helfant's accomplice was. Helfant himself answered that question. Turning in the direction of an open door, leading into an adjoining room, he called:

"Any trace of it yet, Lou?"

"Nope!" came the response.

From the other room there emanated the sound of furniture being moved, and Humpy guessed that Sims was hunting for more loot.

Humpy moved closer to the window and studied the plan of the room. He nodded to himself as he saw, not a dozen feet from where he was crouched, the electric switch controlling the lights in the room.

"I've got it!" The low cry came from Lou Sims. A second later he appeared in the living room, a plethoric roll of bills in his hand.

"Right behind the picture of some old geezer, probably her poor departed husband," he chuckled. "Ain't it queer the way some people don't trust banks?"

He laid the currency on the towel with the gems, wrapped up the entire loot and left it on the table while he went into conference with Helfant.

"Do you think," Sims hazarded, "that it's safe to leave the old dame like this? Hadn't we better tap her on the bean to make sure that she'll be quiet for the next fifteen minutes or so?"

Helfant scratched his red head and pondered. Both men were standing, facing the old woman, with their backs toward the window.

Then Humpy acted!

With a sudden move, he catapulted himself into the room. That one leap covered the twelve feet to the electric switch. Before the thugs, hearing the thump of his feet on the floor, could turn, he had pressed the button, plunging the room into inky darkness!

Startled oaths spouted from the lips of the surprised crooks. For the moment they were stunned, blinded, paralyzed by this sudden turn.

In that moment Humpy swept up the loot, and, sure-footed as a cat in the dark, he bounded back to the window. He vaulted through the aperture, and, with one hand, he pulled the sash down after him.

Momentarily Humpy was silhouetted against the sky, affording an excellent target for those in the darkened room. A pistol cracked viciously. The pane shattered and a slug whizzed by Humpy's ear.

A shrill scream penetrated the darkness. The victim of the robbery had loosened her gag! And she was using the only weapon she had—her voice—against the robbers.

As he stumbled and slid down the fire escape, Humpy heard the sounds of the entire house rousing. A police whistle shrilled wildly. Some cool-headed citizen had thrust his head out of a window and was summoning help by that means.

"That's good!" Humpy muttered to himself. The uproar meant that the little, brave old woman would soon be released from her bonds. He had not had time or the opportunity to do that himself.

More curses reached Humpy's ears as he leaped the last few feet to the courtyard—the curses of Reddy Helfant and Lou Sims as they crashed their way through the window to the fire escape and started to follow him down.

Humpy raced to the street. Pat was waiting for him, crouched in the shadows of the apartment house.

"Here," he thrust the towel and its precious contents into her hands. "Take this—and duck—quick!"

The girl understood. She took the bundle and dived hastily into a near-by hallway. She was barely out of view when the first bluecoat rounded the corner from West End Avenue on the run.

Humpy, knowing that no one would be looking for a girl and that, therefore, Pat was safe, bent his efforts toward saving his own skin. He broke into a run, heading toward Riverside Drive.

He had gone but fifty yards when Helfant and Sims appeared. In the darkness they could see Humpy only vaguely, and he knew that, without his slouch, they did not recognize him.

Anyway, Helfant and Sims had no eyes for Humpy. They saw their own danger

and ran toward the Drive, taking the same direction as Humpy only because they were blocked otherwise.

Glancing back, Humpy saw more policemen springing into view as though by magic. He estimated that a half dozen officers were now following the two thugs and himself.

Reaching the Drive, Humpy turned south and increased his pace. Helfant and Sims turned north. The policemen split, two following Humpy and the others hot on the trail of the other two fleeing men.

For seven blocks Humpy ran, the distance between himself and the bluecoats neither diminishing nor lengthening. At Eighty-Third Street he turned the corner sharply, thankful that no other policeman had appeared in his path and headed him off. Humpy, although he had proved himself a rare athlete by the chase, was beginning to pant heavily as he sped toward Broadway.

He dodged into an alley—too late to evade the keen eyes of his pursuers. They had rounded the corner just in time to see him leave the sidewalk and dodge between two buildings.

In the alley Humpy seemed to be on familiar ground. He reached a certain spot, stopped and leaped straight into the air, his arms stretched over his head.

His fingers caught the lowest rail of a fire escape, invisible in the darkness. In a second he was up on it, climbing like a squirrel. He chuckled as he thought of the delay the fire escape would cause the policemen. In the inky alley, it would be next to impossible for them to locate it without a light, and only a tall man could reach it with a leap.

IV

WITH peculiar sureness, Humpy stopped at a certain window and flung up the sash. As he leaped inside and closed the window behind him, he could hear the patter of the patrolmen's footsteps in the alley.

Now Humpy worked with feverish haste. He fairly leaped out of his nondescript garments, hiding them carefully in a closet. From the same compartment he took a silk dressing robe and pyjamas and donned this apparel. Then he dove for the bathroom.

A swift application of copious hot water and liquid soap swept the unclean pallor from his face, revealing a healthy tan. His fingers slipped into the nostrils of his nose and brought out two peculiarly shaped objects of rubber and steel. Miraculously, his crooked nose was transformed into a straight, symmetrical feature.

Now the deft fingers went to his mouth. He tugged thrice and three gold shells came off the perfect teeth they had concealed. All these things took less than a minute, so fast did he work. And when he walked out of the bathroom—he wasn't Humpy any more. He was Jimmy Van Beuren, society idler!

He had just stretched himself luxuriously on a big easy chair and picked up a novel, when the bedroom window opened. A red-faced, panting policeman burst in upon him.

Jimmy raised his eyes from the book and glared at the intruder, his demeanor expressing petty annoyance.

"What! Again!" he exclaimed petulantly. "What's it all about?"

The officer tried to catch his breath. "Did—any one come in here a minute or two ago?"

"Rather!" Jimmy snapped pettishly. "A wild-eyed individual burst in here through that same window, waved a gun at me and, without so much as an 'I beg your pardon,' he rushed out."

"Out? How?"

Jimmy pointed to the door leading to the corridor of the building. Simultaneously there were hurried footsteps outside the door. A moment later it was opened and another policeman, followed by Parsons, the superintendent of the building, entered.

"Is he here?" demanded the newcomer, rather ambiguously.

The first policeman shook his head. "No; we missed him—so this chap said. He tells me the burglar just ran through this apartment into the hall."

The second policeman glanced at Jimmy, noting the silk pyjamas and the costly dressing robe, which precluded suspicion.

"You know this man?" he asked the superintendent, as a matter of formality.

"Certainly!" Parsons was shocked by the question. "He's Mr. Van Beuren, a very old resident here."

"Oh, well, let's go—we must have missed him on the way up here. But we'll search the building, anyway."

They all hurried out, leaving Jimmy alone. He dropped back into his chair, looked toward the ceiling and grinned happily.

"Most fun I've had in a year," he murmured to himself.

He was still sitting there ten minutes later when the telephone rang.

"Jimmy!" There was sudden relief in the feminine voice that came over the wire. "So you got away all right. I'm glad. If —if anything happened I'd never forgive myself."

"Forget it!" Jimmy's voice was low but happy. "Tell me, what are you going to do with that stuff?"

"Why, send it back the first thing in the morning. What a question! Do you think I'm a—a—"

Jimmy laughed. "No, certainly not. But why do you do these things then—rob people, send some stuff back—and what do you do with the jewels you don't send back?"

The wire was silent for a long time. Then Pat said: "I can't tell you—yet."

BURNING WIDOWS ALIVE

MANY hundred years gone, Strabo wrote that *suttee—sati*—or the burning of widows on the pyre with their dead husbands, was devised as a check to the women's practice of poisoning their lords and masters.

Said Captain Hamilton—1688 to 1723: ". . . If any faint-hearted lady has not courage enough to accompany her spouse to the other world, she is forthwith shaved and degraded, and obliged to serve all her husband's family in all kinds of drudgery."

Chevers recorded that in 1803 no less than two hundred and seventy-five wives were burned with their dead husbands within thirty miles of Calcutta; and in 1804, *suttees* to the number of one hundred and fifteen were performed near the city itself. *Suttee* is regarded as past history, yet in 1866 a young man and his wife, Brahmins, immolated themselves under the walls of the Allahabad fort. They came from the Oude district with hundreds of others to worship at the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna. A large pile was erected and they burned themselves upon it in the presence of a crowd. So late as 1870 a Brahmin's widow is reported to have burned herself at Shahabad.

One day the landlord brought him a very old manuscript

MR. KELLY AND DR. DEE

By Louise Rice

ARMED WITH THE THINGS FOR WHICH KINGS WOULD AND DID BARTER THEIR VERY THRONES, KELLY SET OUT FOR LONDON

A Story of Fact

NO more astounding, nor diverting history can be read than that of Mr. Kelly and Dr. Dee. The only reason that it has not been told oftener is that it is contained in books and pamphlets which are now hard for the average person to read.

Please consider that the writer of this authentic history has done no more than translate this archaic language into what we use to-day—and at once it is clear that here we have a story which might be written of our own times, except for one thing.

That one thing is that at the period when the strange pair were living and operating all over Europe there was a delusion then prevailing, a delusion which died hard, and that was, the delusion that alchemists could turn baser metals into gold.

Mr. Kelly, the ruling spirit of the pair, did, in his times, just what any rascal of to-day will do; he seized on the salient weakness of his times and made capital out of it—but so far as the actual details of the story of his nefarious operations are concerned, they might as well be dated eighteen hundred and something as fifteen hundred and the forties.

Like other sinister figures of the underworld, it is very hard to find out just when and where Edward Kelly—if that was his name—was born. He always claimed to have been a graduate of Oxford, but the records of that ancient institution, as well kept in fifteen hundred as in 1926, show no Kellys as being students there during the years when it was possible for our friend Edward to have been one.

Therefore we can discount that, to begin

with. Some way or other, though, he managed to read law and then to set up as a practitioner, probably in Lancaster. This was a profession on which there was less of a sharp watch, then, than on many others, so that it was sometimes possible for a shrewd fellow to slip into a practice in one city, and then travel from place to place with the continually added renown of the last place he hailed from piling up on him. Registration was required, as now, but locally this was often evaded.

In Hood and Cloak

That he was, like a good many rascals, possessed of a keen and nimble mind, is not to be doubted, for at a time when few were really proficient in reading and writing the English of the times, Kelly taught himself to read "old English"—meaning the half Norman, half Anglican, mixed up with mongrel Latin, which was partly in use in remote districts until the thirteenth century—and also ancient Welsh, which is, of all tongues, the most confounding.

He was also a skilled penman—an even greater distinction—and just before he really bursts upon us clearly, in history, seems to have been a good deal admired and looked up to—practicing law and being more or less an administrator of real estate and of title deeds and so on.

That he therein started his career is not to be doubted, for he falsified deeds to lands, rewrote old wills to suit himself and then dug up claimants for them and got a handsome fee; and otherwise dabbled with the majesty of the law—and was caught.

The majesty of the law in those days was something to think about seriously; it had odd means of punishments. It took Mr. Kelly, chucked him in the stocks and incidentally cut off the outer parts of his ears, thus leaving him marked for life as a felon. At least, that was the intention. But Mr. Kelly, being a man of resource, found in that fact an inspiration for something which was of great advantage to him.

Having a long, thin face, with deep and burning eyes and a short nose, being long and lean in body and having the thinnest and longest of fingers, Mr. Kelly made for himself a black hood which came tight over his head, and hung in a peak on his forehead and along both cheeks, tidily fastened beneath the chin.

To this he added a long black cloak and a sour look and had an *ensemble* which he never thereafter forsook; an *ensemble* which was to be to him just as good as money in the bank.

Leaving England, where they were too apt to remember what was—or was not—under the hood, Mr. Kelly now betook himself to Wales, at that time a wild and unfriendly country, where the average Englishman did not go unless with some kind of an official escort.

The figure in the hood and cloak, however, stalked along the lonely roads and the superstitious if ferocious Welsh took to the other side; and when the farmer saw it at his door he hastily gathered up food, drink and such money as he had and respectfully suggested that it should accept the offerings and take its baleful presence away.

What sardonic laughter there must have been beneath that hooded face!

In time Mr. Kelly, as yet anonymous, arrived at an inn near Glastonbury Abbey and—some time having now elapsed—allowed the landlord to become friendly with him; and, leaving off his Satanic airs, assured the simple fellow that the hood was worn because of a religious vow.

St. Dunstan's Notes

Very soon, with the skill which was afterward to carry him so far, Mr. Kelly was settling legal disputes, reading old books and generally taking the place of the *savant* of the neighborhood. Possibly, at that time, he had no more thought than to live at ease in the inn—to which he attracted a good deal of custom of the better class—and gently to slip into a law practice for the untutored gentry of the countryside.

But an accident turned him into the arch rascal that he became.

One day the landlord brought out for his inspection a very old manuscript and a couple of boxes which contained one a red and the other a white powder. The manuscript was in ancient Welsh and no one had been able to read it. Edward Kelly

could, and we can imagine his amazement when he found that it had been written by St. Dunstan, who had for long been buried in the Abbey yard. It was the diary of an alchemist's attempts to perform the "great Work"—as it was called—*magnum opus,* which meant, of course, the transmutation of metal—or the making of gold—and the powders were the famous "hermetic" tinctures which were supposed necessary for at least part of the operation.

High in the Queen's Favor

Just how much of this Kelly really believed is doubtful; for while many wise men, including the one whom he was to so strangely dupe for a whole lifetime, thought that it was only a matter of time when this feat would be performed by some scientist and thus become the property of the world, a good many of the rascals of that age were as scornful of the idea as we are to-day.

The way in which Kelly acted, at various times thereafter, would seem to show us that his reverent joy and awe at finding the famous manuscript with the supposed-to-be priceless tinctures was, like nearly everything he did, a piece of excellent acting.

However, he knew his world, did Kelly. Armed with the thing for which kings would—and afterward did—barter their kingdoms, he returned to London and there sought out a man, whom the world in general knew as a scholar and philosopher.

This was Dr. John Dee, who was born in London, July 13, 1527, and who was such a prodigy that at fifteen he was a famous honor student at St. John's College, Cambridge. No doubt about his birth or parentage. He never had a youth, for in 1546, when only nineteen, he was already feared, as "a man" who knew too much.

He felt this and left England, going to the University of Louvain, where he was highly regarded, the professors of that institute of learning being far more interested in alchemy, and other unpractical studies than those of Cambridge.

The Continent of Europe, however, had a good deal of influence with the throne of England and so the learned doctor at the ripe old age of twenty-four, returned to his own country with the glamour on him which foreign travel and training usually imparts to a native son and was well received at the Court of Edward VI.

This set the doctor up, of course, and he proceeded with his studies, much admired and also making a good deal of money by the practice of astrology, of which he was a past master.

In this line of work Dee also fell into one of the long series of disasters which were to afflict him. Elizabeth, afterward the queen, sent to Dee to know when Queen Mary would die. It is said that Dee told her. This got to the ears of the court, and Dee was thrown into prison, charged with attempts on the queen's life "by means of magic enchantments."

He indignantly denied this, and as the blamelessness of his character was pretty generally conceded, he was then charged with heresy, and with extreme difficulty argued himself out of that. Of course, that killed him as a social asset, and people forgot that they had been interested in him, but Elizabeth's star rose, and the doctor was again high in favor.

A Strange Partnership

He now had a house at Mortlake, and a good income from his astrological practice, and for quite awhile seems to have been at peace, but his mind was always running on what we would now call psychic experiments.

He tried to call up demons and spirits, spent many hours in silent and motionless meditation, and eventually seems to have become a spiritualist, with all sorts of "manifestations" to his credit. However, this did not satisfy him, for while he was a dreamer, and almost a madman in one lobe of his brain, he was an exact thinker in the other. He wanted something definite on which to take hold.

Well, now we are ready to bring Mr. Kelly onto the scene, who, with the precious manuscript and two boxes, went straight to the doctor, of whom every one interested in alchemy, wizardry, astrology, and so forth, knew.

That Kelly was a clever deceiver, his life story attests. Just how much he really

deceived Dr. Dee—just how much the man of science condoned some chicanery, in the belief that to get money, by any means, for scientific experiment, was excusable—just how much Dr. Dee was a madman—it is not possible, at this distance of time, to tell, but it is likely that all sorts of motives, self-delusions, and partial quackery entered into the partnership which Kelly and Dee now entered into.

The Count from Poland

The doctor, however—at least, for years—took the matter of the ancient manuscript seriously, for in the efforts to make gold by the intricate and vaguely described processes given in it, he spent all of his private fortune and most of what he made by his practice.

Dee had already tried crystal gazing, with but little effect.

Kelly undertook to be the medium, and with the doctor standing in a distant corner of the room—so as not to interfere with the spirits—wonderful results were attained, Dee carefully keeping a record, much of which is still preserved, of the many manifestations which his partner received.

It was most unfortunate that the doctor never succeeded in seeing anything in the crystal himself, but he was reconciled; he could write it all down in his little book.

Mr. Kelly was a clever man and a well read man, and one of profound thought, so he succeeded in "seeing" so much that was timely and pertinent in his crystal gazing that all sorts of people started to flock about the doctor's house.

Before that they had contented themselves with paying for any actual astrological work that the doctor did for them, but Kelly soon shamed them out of that. He said that it was a pity that so great a man as Dee should not be paid for his conversation—and this remark bore fruit.

Among others who came and went, there appeared soon one of the important personages of this history. Count Laski, of Poland, a wealthy nobleman, who was more intelligent and better educated than many of the nobility of the times, went to see the great Dr. Dee, and remained to fall under the spell of Mr. Kelly, who ultimately admitted him to the crystal gazing performance and finally gave him personal messages, prophesying that the count would have great social elevation in his own country and would be a fabulously rich man.

The combination of the scientist dreamer, madman, and clever rascal, was too much for the credulous minds of that age. Everybody in England had been fooled by it.

Now the Count Laski became infatuated, and to such an extent that he picked up bodily, not only the two men, but their wives, and Dee's rather numerous family, and with servants and horses and outriders and retainers and whatnot, started out for Cracow, in Poland, near which was the great estate of the count. The trip took four months, and was one of great pleasure and jollity; also of expense, which was borne cheerfully by the count. Was he not to become soon the richest man in the world?

In the palace which the count put at their disposal, in his home town, Dr. Dee and Mr. Kelly went to work, with retorts and furnaces and crucibles and scientific apparatus of every description.

With Regal Honors

At no time in the history of the world has it been possible to equip a scientific research laboratory of any kind cheaply. The one in which the two men now labored used, also, a great quantity of various kinds of precious and extremely expensive materials. Month after month flew by; no gold was produced, although the two experimenters constantly announced, that this time the operation was really going to come off. The families of the scientists were maintained in a high state of luxury.

Poor Laski, with his estates mortgaged, and, no doubt, with his family and heirs growling ferociously about it, at last packed off the wolf and the demisheep, placating them with a letter of introduction to Rudolf, of Bohemia, then a rich and powerful state.

What a weary and yet relieved sigh must have gone up from the Laski clan when

they saw the two families and their heads, off, bag and baggage. We can imagine that anybody who mentioned the transmutation of metals to the worthy count, in after years, might have stood in danger of having the trusty dagger of that ruffled gentleman heaved in his direction.

The King of Bohemia was an especially easy bird to pluck for Mr. Kelly, for the reason that Prague was—even yet is—a hotbed of all the pseudo sciences. Kelly and Dee were received with regal honors, and for a time lived in such luxury, and so prodigally spent the money which the king allowed them, that the nobles, courtiers, and people got their heads out of the mystic fog in which they usually wrapped them, and asked themselves how they liked having foreigners come in and get all this, along with the favor of the king.

Straight from the Crystal

Pressure was brought to bear, and the king gave Mr. Kelly and Dr. Dee and all their families and retainers just twenty-four hours to get out of the country.

Back into Poland went the *entourage*, and there soon got hold of Count Rosenberg, with whom it remained for several years. They lived a little less high there than they had with Count Laski or in Bohemia, but were, nevertheless, very comfortable! They had every care and a good many luxuries, a great deal of honor and attention, and a fine laboratory in which to work.

It was here that, with tranquillity to soothe him, and with what was more or less a real friendship between himself and the Count of Rosenburg to hearten him, Dr. Dee was saner and more really scientific than he had been, and got a good deal more respect than Kelly, to the latter's disgust and rage—both those passions rising so high that the high-toned attitude was forgotten and downright quarrels began to arise between the two.

One potent cause of dissension was the fact that Kelly insisted that when he looked into the crystal he saw a magic being who told him that henceforth he and his friend should hold their two wives in common.

The point of this is that Kelly had a sour tempered and ugly and assertive wife, and that Dee had a pretty, gentle, and attractive one. The latter, very naturally, objected to taking the orders of the crystal, in this particular instance, and Kelly, threatening that now Dee would find that all spirits were uncommunicative, metaphorically went out and slammed the door.

Dee tried to use his youngest son, Arthur, as a medium for the crystal, but the child protested that he saw nothing at all in the glass ball. Also, Dee had for so long been accustomed to leaving the details of the "experiments" to Kelly that he could do nothing with them, and was in despair.

We cannot escape the conviction that some confidential servant of the Dee household was also the confidential servant of Kelly, for, as the doctor himself records it in his journal, it was when despair had really seized on him, and while he was vainly and for the steenth time trying to get Arthur to see even a little of the much that Kelly could — that the hooded one walked into the laboratory—although the door was barred against all, as usual.

Dissolved by Death

Kelly walked right up to the crystal and in no time at all, all sorts of demons and spirits and saints were visiting with him in the same old way. The doctor gave in, crushed and astounded by this evidence of power. He even conceded the matter of the wives.

The joint agreement, between John Dee, Edward Kelly, Jane Dee and Joan Kelly, in the doctor's own cramped handwriting is one of the odd titbits of antiquarians.

Just what happened after this is not clear, but the next we know, Dee and Kelly are back in Prague, with the king more friendly than ever and with Kelly, now the practical man of the firm, busily engaged in trying to complete the great work—that of turning base metals into gold.

That this man, so evil and so sinister, who never failed to inspire aversion in all but the fanatical Dee, had a real mind, is easily seen by the fact that he, alone, of all those who dabbled in science, in that

age, saw the absurdity of this scheme of turning other metals into gold, for, of course, the moment that that could be done, gold would drop in value and something else, which could not be manufactured, would take its place as the word's standard of value.

Kelly understood this very well, as a good many veiled allusions that he made attest. He made them with his tongue in his cheek, no doubt, perfectly sure that not even the wisest men of his age would understand what he meant.

He was also very clear on a good many other subjects and if he had really put that mind of his to work on real science, he might have been one of those who were, later, to lead the intelligence of the world out of the fog of superstition.

Some understanding of the doctor as a mild but talented madman seems to have belonged to the king, who shut Kelly up, practically in prison, demanding that he should make good on the gold proposition or stay where he was—and who then with fact, diplomacy and good nature, contrived to send Dr. Dee off to England, handsomely appointed with a retinue and considerable money.

Queen Elizabeth had always remembered the doctor kindly and she now received him with every mark of distinction. He had a fair amount of money left and he had been accustomed for many years to living without a thought of the morrow.

Therefore and quite inevitably, he soon began to be in need of money, and this was something which the nobles and the aristocracy and the queen herself, could not understand. A man who had the secret of making gold out of any odd bit of stuff lying about the house ought to do it and not ask others less fortunate to supply him, while he idled away his time and refused to exercise his gifts. That was the very natural attitude which they took and stuck to grimly.

Whether Dee was honestly bewildered by his inability to perform the "work" on which he had spent so many years and so much money—whether he just pretended to be—whether he had hopes that if Kelly joined him again they might have better fortune—whether he believed that this better fortune would be brought about by Kelly's mystic powers or by his successful roguery—no one will ever know.

It is a sure thing that Dee ceaselessly importuned the queen to demand Kelly of the Bohemian king and that she at last did.

The king was unwilling to do this; the queen was unwilling to force matters too rapidly. Kelly, knowing of the effort to return him to England and sure that he and Dee could again take up their partnership successfully, tried to get out of his prison with a rope which was not strong enough.

Halfway down from his upper story window, the rope parted and Kelly fell and broke his back.

In this year of Kelly's death—1595—Dr. Dee got the appointment from the Queen of Warden of the College of Manchester. This might have been a tranquil haven for the scientist if he had been content to quiet down and be sensible, but he had had too dramatic, troubled and intense a life to suit himself to the slow thoughts and practical conclusions of the ordinary college instructor. He was shunned, hated and feared, although his manner, as always, was meek and unassuming.

He still had his half dismantled house at Mortlake and there he went, in 1603, a broken old man, who told fortunes, in the vulgar style, for the countryside—and could find none educated enough to even understand the higher aspects of astrological forecasting—not even though it was at greatly reduced prices!

Mortlake was beside a river and very pleasantly situated, but no house is good to live in, in which poverty, distress and neglect reign.

Dr. Dee died in abject misery, forgotten by all who had once fawned on him, and what was left of his family were buried with him near the stream which—he had once said—would bear to his door the dignitaries of the world, come to give homage to the "great philosopher."

This was in 1608.

Nobody knows where Edward Kelly's bones were laid.

He applied the match to his cigar, while with his other hand he scribbled on the wall

THE STOLEN BOX CAR

By Will King Bowen

A DOG BARKED SOMEWHERE, FAR AWAY, AND THERE CAME A SOUND OF RUSTLING WEEDS ALONG THE BANKS OF THE CREEK, CLOSE TO THEM

FROM the gangway of a rocking, swaying locomotive cab, on the engineer's side, Bill Dalton, a tramp hoghead, looked up the dark, silent right of way. As the engineer, Jake Beezer, opened the latch and slipped the throttle a notch out on the quadrant, the ponderous, long-bodied eight-wheeler lengthened her stride.

She was heavy, but light on her feet when she got the long string of boxes and flats rolling. She hardly slackened her speed as she stepped up the grade, with the sparks flying brilliantly from her stubby stack.

The grade smoothed out like a ballroom floor under the giant drivers. Bill's eyes followed the glare of the electric headlight, dancing over the rails and ties which came twisting rapidly out of the darkness toward them.

A flash of white shot by, and was swallowed up in the blackness of the night. It was the first whistling post of Midland City, the north terminal of the Q. and G. Railway, the end of the run.

Jake lazily reached for the whistle cord and two long and two short blasts of the chime whistle screamed about them. He was calling for the target at the signal tower, as a small scatterment of houses flashed by.

"Is this the terminal, Jake?" Bill flung toward the broad back of the engineer, who was cutting the midnight fruiter down in entering the lower yards.

Jake shut off the injector, threw a glance

ahead, then jerked back his gray-haired, black-capped head.

"Yeah," he returned, "and you'd better hit the cinders, Bill. McGuire and his gang of cinder dicks are thick as hops in hell about here, tryin' to grab off a few freight car thieves. They're jailin' all suspicious characters, but you got your brotherhood card and that'll square you."

Jake slipped the throttle nearly home, then turned to Dalton.

"See that brick building over there?" he went on, pointing to the dull outlines of a building, where a solitary light streaked over the cinders from a ground floor window.

"Yeah, I see it," returned Bill.

"That's Cal Spencer, the train master's office. Go hit him for a hog. He's short runners and will fall when you spring your card."

"I'll do that little thing," agreed Dalton.

"Need any coin?" quizzed Jake, with a friendly grin.

"Nope. Got enough till I squint the little red pay car sliding round the curve," snickered Bill, hitching up his trousers.

Jake slammed the throttle closed—full, then turned a frowning face toward the tramp.

"Why in all hell don't you grab yourself off a good hog and stick?" he growled, easing the compound through a spur switch.

"Nothing doing, what you're thinking of," grinned Dalton. "This is the life. I crave new scenery and a change of atmosphere."

They were abreast the roundhouse and with a "so long, Jake," Bill slipped to the cinders, and stood while the engine and first refrigerator clanked by.

Mindful of Jake's warning, he turned suddenly, darting swiftly across the open moonlit space into the deeper shadows of the roundhouse. Keeping in the clear much as possible, lest he run afoul of the railway detectives, he circled the turntable and ran toward the open window of the train master's office. A shaft of light from the hanging incandescent in the room, spread its length on the cinders and rails.

Sidestepping the light, Dalton crouched beneath the window with clear, gray eyes level with the sill, sweeping the interior of the office with a single glance.

Cal Spencer glared across the littered table at Harvy McGuire, the heavy-set, bald-headed, red-faced chief of the railway detectives, who was slumped dejectedly in a chair. McGuire was chewing savagely at a stub of a cigar, while Jameson, the divisional superintendent smiled placidly.

"And I don't give a damn, Spence," McGuire was saying, "I'll get the brains of that gang yet!"

"Humph! Shouldn't wonder if they don't swipe a whole car next time—not stop at merely looting it," replied Cal.

"Bunk! Bushwaw!" snorted McGuire. "Ain't my men, under Sweeny, combing the whole blamed division, even now? I'd like to see 'em start something—that's all!"

Looting—systematic looting of valuable freight shipments had been going on for some time, in spite of the alert detectives and flaming posters which announced a substantial reward for the capture of the gang. But the reward had gone begging.

McGuire was at his wits' end, trying to obtain satisfactory results. Action—anything. He wanted something in his report to general headquarters that would show favorably in the eyes of those big, silent men who sat before mahogany desks. The insistent demands for results had stung him to a sullen fury.

McGuire laughed harshly.

The divisional super, Jameson, smiled and eyed the tip of his gold-banded cigar.

"You have been working on this case for a week now," Jameson said, "and are getting nowhere fast. Those crooks have your number. They know your every move—have you up a tree, and, well, you know it, Mac."

"Take the case of the Berkner shipment," cut in Spencer. "Remember? It was robbed while hooked to the through freight, going down Murphy's Hill at a forty clip.

"We dumped the car to the consignee. His men open the car door, squint in, then raise a howl to the skies! The car was absolutely empty, with nary a seal broken! Can you beat it? Honest now, ain't it hell?"

"That was the time all the crew except the hoghead and his tallow pot blew their run and forgot to come for their pay," the chief snorted. "Attaching a new seal after the door was opened, is a cinch, but"—pointing his cigar butt at the grinning train master—"I've got a sort of line on them birds and I'll get 'em yet!"

"Getting a line on them doesn't satisfy general headquarters, Mac. They crave results."

"Well," questioned McGuire sharply, "what else can I do but run my legs off? I've used my noodle and legs both, but neither seem to get me nowhere. Every time I get something started—something tangible, it blows up."

"That's why I sent a requisition into general headquarters for George Kingston, and—"

Bill Dalton, under the window, swore softly, earnestly, under his breath.

"Kingston!" McGuire exploded as he straightened stiffly in his chair, allowing his feet to hit the floor with a bang. "Let me tell you, Jameson," he fumed, "if George Kingston sets his foot on this division—"

"You'll stick and work with him, and under any orders he cares to hand you," flared the super. "Kingston is the best operative on the four divisions and can bring this bunch of crooks to time in short order. Besides he's not known on this end."

"Wire him to lay away. I can handle this thing alone? I don't need Kingston or any of his crew."

"He's coming, don't you fret," smiled Jameson.

There came a sudden snarl in the detective's voice.

"I balk at the idea of him slipping up here and telling me just where I am to head in."

Bill Dalton was no longer listening. His lips parted in a hard smile.

Circling the building, keeping in the shadows until the corner was gained, he straightened up. Passing through the main doorway, he stepped down the long, bare hallway, then stopped before the train master's door.

He hammered on the panel of the door with his knuckles.

II

THERE followed a moment's silence, then a voice bawled:

"Come in!"

Bill Dalton opened the door but slightly, sticking his head through the opening.

"What you want?" frowned Spencer, while the other men looked at him critically.

"Are you Cal Spencer?"

"What do you want with him?"

"I want to speak to him."

"Well—what is it?"

"Are you Mr. Spencer?"

"Damn it, man—yes!" he thundered, "Now what in hell do you want?"

"Me? Oh, not much of anything. Jake Beezer said you was in bad need of hogheads."

Dalton's glaring impudence staggered Spencer so that he allowed his cigar to drop from between his teeth and scatter ashes over his vest. He slowly took his feet from the table and straightened in his chair.

"No," he snapped impatiently, "I don't need any enginemen—get out, we're busy."

"Wouldn't be any show to climb the right side of a hog then?" he questioned. Entering, he closed the door, then calmly leaned against it.

"There'll be a damned good show to get bumped into some hospital if you don't snap out of here," growled the train master.

To Cal's utter bewilderment, Bill helped himself to a chair, tossed his hat on a heap of unfinished work on the desk, crossed his legs, then looked the men over.

"Don't mind getting slapped in some nice clean hospital if I get full time while there," he stated, rubbing an unshaven chin.

Spencer, boiling inwardly, eyed Bill through a thick haze of tobacco smoke, while Jameson smiled tolerantly—wisely.

"What the hell do you know about an engine, anyway?"

"Ran one for years."

"Humph. Some fool fire engine, I suppose."

"Nope. A man doesn't get a brotherhood card for that kind of work. The last hog I slipped a latch on was a Baldwin on the G. H. & J. out of Hartford."

"So you got a card, eh?"

"You bet. Carried one for ten years."

"Who sent you here at this time of night?"

"No one. Just came in on the fruiter. Rode the front end with Jake Beezer. He said you may need hogheads."

Cal Spencer's eyes glinted coldly.

"Listen to me," he said, and his voice took on a hard note, "if you're looking for a job—all right. And if you're looking for trouble—all right again. I can furnish both. If I give you a hog, how long are you going to stick?"

"Give me a show and see," came the evasive reply.

Cal Spencer's jaws clicked.

"You're on," he said. "But mark me well; the first fishy move out of you, I'll wring your neck!"

The train master glared across the desk at the composed man seated there, then flared:

"I suppose Jake's told you about men quitting this end on a minute's notice and forgetting to come for their pay?"

"Beezer told me all about the crooking of your freight shipments, if that's what you're driving at," he came back, shooting a level glance toward the frowning train master.

Cal turned a pleading eye toward the superintendent.

"What you think, Jameson?"

"I'd take him over to the roundhouse and find out what he knows about a hog. I'll wait till you get back," replied the divisional master.

They walked in silence through the huge, barnlike door of stall No. 4 at the roundhouse, where locomotives hung over pits, some steaming softly, others cold and dead. Cal waved his hand toward Engine No. 77.

"Look her over and say what you think."

Dalton's critical eye swept her from pilot to tender marker lights. He turned to the waiting train master.

"She sure is rigged for speed, and is a racer. See, she's a Lima Hog. I could make that lady climb a stiff grade with forty cars dragging in nothing flat."

Picking up a chunk of waste from the fitter's bench beside the engine, he swung up through the gangway with the ease of an old timer.

Cal watched every move, then gave a grunt of approval.

Bill Dalton pinched the throttle, slowly steaming out of the stall, and shut off as the locomotive's pilot loomed over the turntable pit. He backed to the roundhouse again, then shut off, allowing the air to seep through the valve and brought the engine to an easy stop.

"Think you can handle her?"

"Don't only think, but know I can," grinned Bill, dropping to the oil-soaked floor. "You use soft coal here—I'm used to hard. Give me a tallow pot that has brains enough to keep the kettle boiling and I'll snap you through Spanner's Gap so fast you'll have to tie your false teeth in."

"Where'd you hail from, anyway?"

"Back there—back a long ways," Bill returned, jerking his head in an easterly direction.

It is not the custom, on the north end, to pry too closely into a man's private affairs. Spencer made no comment on the evasive reply.

"And what did you say your name is?"

"Didn't say," Bill grinned frankly.

"Well, what is it?" rapped Spencer.

"Bill Dalton."

The night roundhouse foreman, Murphy, eased around the tender of Engine No. 77.

"Say, Cal," he blurted, "Bates failed to show up, and there ain't no hoghead to roll Extra 77."

"What's the matter with Jake Beezer? He's just in. Send a call boy for him."

"Yeah, an' sure he runs plump into th' sixteen hour law an' is due to lay out for eight."

"Well, Murp, try this man. He's a new runner. Name's Bill Dalton. Thinks he's a fire-eater. Mark him out on that No. 77 transfer southbound. I don't think he needs a pilot, but if he does, fit him out, and if you catch him at any shady tricks—kill him and report it an accident!"

"Soft! Soft as velvet!" Dalton chuckled as the train master's broad back disappeared around the engine's pilot. "And to think I got away with it! Well—a few years does smooth things out a bit."

III

ENGINE No. 77 came from the roundhouse onto the turntable, was swung partly round, coasted down, backed to three box cars, which were plastered with flaming posters advertising a famous plow, then ran to the neck of the siding and stopped.

It was to be a transfer of three box cars, and was sent down the line to Bradford, to be hooked to the through eastern freight.

Bill Dalton sat on the right hand seat, eyes glued to the tall semaphore light at the signal tower which snuggled close to the crossover, when a man swung up through the gangway on the fireman's side.

"Murphy sent me to pilot you down," he announced.

Bill turned, and from the dim light which showed over the steam gauge, beheld a man whose face held a sly leer.

"I don't need any pilot," said Dalton. "I told Murphy I was all set."

"Don't, eh? What you know about this track layout anyhow?"

"Been over this Spring Valley Division once—on a Sunday school picnic, I think it was—and, if I remember rightly, you roll out of here onto the main. It's a single track all the way. The right of way drops gently into Spring Valley, a straight shoot of seventeen miles to the little village of Flint. A twenty car siding is there on the right side of the tracks—usually choked with busted down coal cars. Then up a grade through Hookers, round the curve at Jones's Wood, again a straight shoot of fifteen miles into the north yards of Bradford, where the W. & N. crosses our right, and—"

"That's far enough," the man cut in. "I guess you know the steel, all right. My orders are to pilot you down, and I'm going to ride the front end."

"Help yourself," said Bill, turning toward the front.

The block was given and he whistled off. He jerked the throttle far out.

There came a hissing escape of steam from the cylinder cockpits, a hoarse cough of the exhaust, which belched the red sparks skyward, and No. 77 spun her drivers, gripped, then held the steel, jerking the engine forward suddenly.

The violent start from a dead stop, pitched the pilot man back into the tender. He scrambled to his feet, rubbed his head, then glared at the grinning engineer.

"You're too damned fresh," he fumed.

Bill did not reply, but slipped the bar farther and farther out on the quadrant.

Quicker and quicker came the bark of the exhaust. No. 77 clattered past the crossover at the signal tower.

Around and about Dalton was a roaring, swaying, dizzy chaos as, like some mad thing, the compound reeled through the night. Dalton eased her, helped her whenever he could, but kept his eyes fastened to the swath of light which showed on the glistening rails. Now Extra No. 77 held a steady stride of fifty per.

The deafening roar was in his ears—the pounding of wheels on the rail joints; the screeching flanges; the whistling wind; the full toned throbbing of the exhaust which vibrated back and forth through the deep, silent woods which skirted the right of way.

In the pocket of his greasy jacket Bill had a "flimsey," his orders. He had the right clear to Bradford.

The pilot man clawed cinders out of his neck with one hand, while with the other he clung grimly to the tender, then bellowed up to the engineer: "Some engine!" His eyes swept the gauge-covered boiler head. "Stepper, ain't she?"

A whimsical half smile crossed Bill's features as he partly turned from the window, staring down at the other in the dim lighted cab. "Bull!" he bawled as he swung about, facing the wavering headlight along the rails.

The pilot man swayed on the deck, with legs apart to steady himself. He curtly nodded to the fireman, then, without the least warning, whipped out a savage looking automatic from his pocket, jamming it in the astonished engineer's back.

"Keep her rollin', buddie," came the warning cry above the roar of the engine. "Let her ride as she lays."

Bill whirled to face the sinister automatic, and a pair of half closed eyes which grimly stared at him.

"You're a nut!" he blazed furiously. "Who's running this engine, you or me?"

"Turn about and do as you're told," came the crisp command. "Here, Mike," he called to the grinning fireman, "blindfold this wise guy and tell him how to run this damned hog. Now get busy."

Bill, revolting inwardly, was compelled to submit. He was hoodwinked with a filthy, sweaty bandanna handkerchief, after being frisked for his gun. The pilot man glanced whimsically at the automatic, then slipped it into his pocket.

Bill always carried a second gun, strapped close to his body under his left armpit, and was grimly pleased to find they passed it up, being satisfied that the engineer had only one weapon.

Under instructions of the fireman, he slowed down, kicked at the air, then opened up again. He now held a steady speed of about forty miles per. The old locomotive plunged and lurched frightfully, and it was with difficulty Bill kept his feet on the deck.

What was their game? He was in the hands of the freight car thieves which Jake Beezer had told him about, but as his train held only three cars of farm plows, the crooks surely weren't going to loot them. He frowned in perplexity under the stinking handkerchief.

He momentarily expected orders to shut down—but no, he pounded steadily on.

Finally the fireman spoke:

"Here's the north yard limits of Bradford, Whitie. Better shut her off, buddie. I'm going to fade."

"Mike, haven't you any brains, at all?" snapped the man called Whitie. "How many times has the chief told you and the rest of the gang not to mention names? You sure are wise!"

Bill Dalton felt the pressure of the gun's barrel leave his back. Furious now, he jerked the cloth from his eyes, squinted helplessly, as Whitie aimed a blow at his head with the butt of the gun.

Bill ducked. Too late. He dropped to his knees. The cab spun dizzily. He pitched forward at Mike's feet, rolled partly over, then lay still.

IV

BILL DALTON'S head hurt like fury. He tried to open his eyes, but found it hurt him to do even this. Every joint in his body ached dully. He lay on a dirty floor of a squalid room, which contained a solitary window. The sickly light from a street arc light streaked across the floor. The plastering and laths had been torn off in several places. The laths stuck out like the ribs on a lean horse. He arose with difficulty.

Brushing the cobwebs from the dirty panes, he looked down into the street.

There lay the shipping wharves of the town of Bradford. The ships lay snug in their slips. Faint and far away, came the wail of some seagoing tug boat.

Bill made his way to the single door, and examined it critically. It was substantially built of heavy oak panels, securely bolted.

The entire single episode flashed through his brain: He had foolishly butted into their game, only to be bumped off. He realized now what he was up against. A gang of desperate crooks who would not stop at anything to gain their point. He frowned in perplexity.

Why was he brought here? Why didn't they settle him once and for all in the cab of No. 77? Dalton slowly shook his head. Where is Extra 77 now? And that shipment of plows. What was the game in fooling with a lot of farm plows anyway—what was the sense of it?

Bill slumped into a broken, dusty chair, clamped his aching head in his hands and tried to think.

His eyes searched out the dim, cobwebbed shadows of the room, seeking some means of escape. They alighted on a broken spot of plastering close to the door.

He arose quickly, and stepped to the wall, twisted an exposed lath sideways. It snapped in his hand and dropped to the floor. Now he clawed at the opening, en-

larging the hole at every yank. Careful now, lest he make undue noise, he broke out more of the lath until the opening was of sufficient size to admit the passing of his body.

Slipping through hole, he eagerly scanned the narrow, dirty hallway.

He slipped down the hall to the stairway, which showed from the glimmer of a sickly gas jet below. Bill listened. Nothing to alarm him. The silence of the place was profound.

Bill Dalton's face grew into hard, sharp lines as he hurried noiselessly down the uncarpeted steps. At the floor below he peered at a door under which a shaft of light spread along the dusty boards of the floor. He crept silently toward the light, hugging the wall closely. Now he could distinguish muffled voices of men in the room. Bill applied his eye to the keyhole, then drew back sharply.

Seated at a table, in direct line of vision, was a thin, nervous, sharp featured man. His complexion was swarthy, eyes dead black, and his features seemed to converge to his nose, giving him a decidedly fish-like appearance. He was none other than "Sharky" Morgan, a saloon keeper. He was held in deadly fear throughout the entire water front section of Bradford. Few had the nerve to cross him in anything.

He was talking, and his voice, hardly above a whisper, carried with it the sting of a viper. The man's thin smile conveyed no mirth.

"That's quite enough!" snapped Morgan, turning toward some one out of Dalton's line of vision. "I left it entirely to you, and, as usual, you muddled it!"

In spite of the attempt to control his voice, the tones quivered slightly, showing the volcano which raged within the man.

"Naw," whined a voice, "I didn't. We had to switch your orders. Had Bates all set to take that damned transfer south to here. How could I figure he would sneak off, and how could I dope out this fresh hoghead would be sent down by Spencer?"

"For your information, I'll state: Bates never turned me down. His orders were to roll Extra No. 77 south and help us get the one car. I slipped when I told him to break the seal on the last car before it left the yards. He was attending to that when one of McGuire's men caught him. In spite of his protests, he was taken down, and McGuire has him in jail at Midland City."

"How'd you get wise?" came the startled cry.

Dalton strained his ears to catch every word.

"The long distance telephones seem to work about right," dryly retorted the chief. "Swartz reported to me."

Morgan jabbed a fresh cigar in his mouth, took it out, and picked at the end.

"There's one man I want to talk to, this engineer named Dalton," Sharky said slowly.

"When this wild hoghead showed up, we had to cook fresh dope to take care of him," the same voice continued. "Whitie Baldwin stalled him—played the pilot gag, and, with Mike's help as tallow pot, made a good job of it. Got any kick comin' there?"

Morgan grunted.

"And we knocked this Dalton cold, an' got him upstairs in th' sail loft. You can pipe him any time."

Sharky shot a quick glance toward the end of the table.

"That's the first glimmer of real brains you've showed for some time," he flashed, as his lips parted in a dangerous smile.

"Is Weller ready to take care of his end? Does he know all about the car?"

"Yeah. Got the jacks in the truck now. But what'll we do with that damned engine?"

"Where is it now?"

"In the yards, on th' main line, with all lights out."

"And would you be fool enough to go near it now?" questioned Morgan sharply. "You have brains—I don't think! Did it ever occur to you that the yard men have spotted it long ago, and have reported the missing car?"

"Ah, I—"

Bill Dalton straightened up suddenly, with clenched fists.

Seventy-seven was in his charge! And, to top it all, it was deserted in the yards!

He was responsible for the safety of that train! There came a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He stepped cautiously down the hall to the stairs, which gave onto the street. A loose board cracked under his feet.

A second passed—another.

The door was flung wide, and a dark form bulked in the opening, closely followed by another. Two men leaped at him. A revolver flashed. There came an angry bark.

Dalton sprang for the stairway, taking them three steps at a time A man, coming up, blocked the way. With a flying tackle, the man went crashing and cursing to the bottom under Bill's rush.

There came a crash of pounding feet, racing swiftly along the hall.

A minute—that was all he wanted. At the bottom, he scrambled to his feet, whirling round the sagging door to the street as a vicious bullet tore a ragged hole in the door frame.

The street was empty. Dalton ran for the nearest corner, gained it, doubled back to the next one, then darted swiftly up a lane toward the railway yards.

If he was elated at discovering Sharky Morgan was the brains of the looters, he did not show it, only to grin whimsically as he sped on.

His lips tightened at the thought of Whitie Baldwin being the pilot man. No doubt that was Whitie's room back there. Well he would settle with Baldwin later.

When the long paralleled steel lines spread before him, flashing under the arc lights, he distinguished the engine with all lights out. His jaw sagged as he noted only two cars attached to Extra No. 77!

She was standing with her feet on a spur track, steaming softly, with smoke rolling lazily from her stubby stack.

V

BILL ran up the yards, through the bewildering maze of tracks lighted by red, green, and yellow, squatty switch lights, past a yardman with his bobbing white lantern, then swung up into the engine.

He flipped the headlight and gauge switches, after getting the electric generator going, when two grim faced men came from the darkness of the tender into the cab.

"I guess this is the bird we're looking for, McGuire," one of the men said, turning Bill around for a closer inspection.

"Get out of here—both of you!" Dalton returned coldly.

"Who in hell do you think you are—slipping us orders like that?" demanded McGuire.

"I'm the engineer in charge of this transfer," he shot back, swinging suddenly about facing the men.

"And I happen to be the yard master, and this man here is Chief McGuire."

"Yeah, I know. I fell for a guy who said he was to pilot me down here. His line listened good, and I got sapped on the noodle for listening to him," grunted Dalton.

Now the light was full on the engineer's frowning face, and McGuire drew back sharply. "So," he said, "you're the wise guy that hit Cal for a hog to-night."

"Yeah, and what of it? He hired me and I came down here with three cars, and now I only got two."

"You say you came down on the front end?"

For a moment, Bill's gray eyes glared into the yard master's and his fist drew back. With his teeth set he turned to his duties, but the yard master clawed at his jacket sleeve.

"Did you hear what I asked you?"

Dalton wheeled and knocked the hand away.

"Did you hear me?"

"I did."

"Why don't you reply then?"

"Because I don't choose to. I told you I'm in charge of this train—and I'm not going to tell you again to hit the cinders! Better beat it."

The yard master, McCune, looked closely into the coal-dust rimmed eyes of the engineer, then patiently laid a friendly hand upon Bill's broad shoulder.

"Now listen, friend," he smiled, "if you came down on this hog you can easily prove it. Where's your flimsey? The hoghead

who rolled this transfer did it under orders —have you got 'em?"

His train orders!

He eagerly reached in his jacket pocket and drew out a wadded tissue paper—his orders, and passed it to the waiting men.

Under the dim lights from the gauge lamps, McGuire carefully scanned the tissue, then turned it back to Bill, who stuffed it into his pocket.

"Satisfied now?" he questioned.

"I guess you're all to the good, pardner. We'll uncouple here and turn the cars over to the yardmen and highball to the station, where we can wire headquarters," said McCune.

"That's just what I was going to do when you butted into my plans," grinned Dalton.

Bill opened up and the train rattled, bumped and jerked its way down to the throat of the spur, where a fussy little switcher was hailed by the yard master.

Orders were given, and in the dancing gleam of the headlight, the yarder shot away with the two remaining box cars in tow.

"We reported No. 77 abandoned in the yards," grunted McGuire. "They replied if you showed up I was to bring you back —if you have nerve enough to face it out. If not, I'm to take you down."

They dropped off the engine at the station and entered the operator's office, where the night man was chuckling over a slip of paper he held in his hand. Looking up, he grinned broadly as he called to the chief:

"Hey there, McGuire, a man brought a message for you, and it's about the missing box car!"

He passed the paper to the frowning chief.

McGuire read aloud:

"McGUIRE:

"When you caused the three cars of silk to be sent down through the transfer, you gave the whole thing away by violating Rule No. 1788 of the American Railway Association. The very fact those cars were covered with fake advertisements drew my attention to them, otherwise I would have ignored them completely. You are a thick-headed flat foot to do a fool thing like that."

There was no signature.

"Where'd you get this?" demanded McGuire, white with fury.

"Some bozo came in, slapped it, together with a five spot on the desk, and told me to shoot it to you."

"What about this rule No. 1788—what is it?"

The night man leisurely reached for his book of rules, which lay on a shelf at his elbow, turned to the section relative to the duties of station agents, slipped his finger down the page, then stopped at Rule No. 1788.

"This rule says: 'They must not allow advertisements to be placed on any freight car.'"

He slammed the book shut, tossing it on the shelf.

"What the hell's this talk about silk?" demanded Bill. "Those cars contained farm plows."

"Don't you know each car contained silk floss valued at eighty thousand dollars?" flared McGuire. "And the signs were a stall?"

"Eighty thous—good Lord!" gasped Bill weakly.

McGuire shot a sly, cynical glance at Dalton.

"You'd make a damned good actor," the chief grunted.

"What do you mean by a crack like that?"

"I think you know a whole lot more than you're tellin'. Come on now, lead me to where your gang put this car and Jameson will see that you're let off light."

Bill spun around, facing the operative, while his hand stole under his left armpit.

"So," he gritted, "you'll see that I get off light, will you? And you think you're going to jail me, eh?"

Bill whipped out his gun, and slowly backed toward the door.

"Sorry, McGuire, I can't go to jail with you, because I'm going to hunt up the man who acted as pilot on No. 77, and when I get my hands on him, I'll find—"

"One of your own men," cut in McGuire grimly.

Bill Dalton gave a mirthless laugh.

"Have it your own way, old timer," he

returned evenly. He slowly, cautiously backed through the door into the darkness.

"The first man who attempts to pass through the station doorway before a minute is up—and I don't mean perhaps!"

Bill darted between a cut of cars, and sped down the yards toward Water Street, heading for the same room where he had heard Sharky talking. It was Whitie Baldwin's room, and he hoped to catch him there. If he did—

His fingers closed tightly.

VI

BILL turned into a lane, swung around the corner — now Water Street stretched before him. He slipped into the deep shadows of Mother Jones's doorway. A dirty card tacked to the door announced rooms for rent. Bill grinned as he thought of how he had come flying down those same stairs a short time ago.

He critically eyed the dim-lit hallway and the rickety stairs leading above, then slowly shook his head. He had a better way than that. Turning again to the street, he glanced sharply up, then down.

There was no one in sight.

Hastily stepping up the broken sidewalk, he turned into a narrow lane, dodging ash cans as he went.

Stopping abreast a high board fence that inclosed Mother Jones's yard, he scrambled to the top, then dropped to the inside of the yard, and darted for the coal shed, where he stopped, listening.

Up on the opposite fence, then to the roof shed, across a flat, tin roof of the kitchen, to where, ahead of him, showed a window with a torn blind drawn far down. It was Whitie Baldwin's room. And Baldwin was the pilot man on Transfer No. 77!

Bill needed every second he could gain. Even now McGuire's men would be after Whitie. He must beat them to it!

Slowly, he crossed the moon-lit space, gaining the deeper shadows at the window. He raised his head and peeped through a slit in the blind, which had been repaired with a nail—then laughed to himself. Here was one time Whitie wouldn't be so brave!

One look was enough. He was alone.

A dreary light wavered through the crack in the blind, but there was no sound from within. Whitie was slouched over a table, and Bill could not see what he was doing. A whisky bottle stood at his elbow.

The window was raised and, jerking the blind aside, he swung a leg over the sill, stepping into the room.

Whitie Baldwin was playing solitaire. A card was poised in mid-air and he stared foolishly at the intruder. Bootleg liquor had glazed his eyes, and he swayed in his chair.

"What in the hell do you want?" he growled.

"Want?" mimicked Bill. "I want to know what you meant by climbing on my hog and sapping me to-night."

Now Baldwin was coldly sober. He looked up from beneath shaggy eyebrows at the grim, coal-smoked-faced engineer on the opposite side of the table.

"Didn't sap no one. Haven't been out this room all night," he muttered. But into Whitie's eyes crept black despair. He saw he couldn't get away with it.

"I want to know where your gang kicked that car of silk."

Bill's tone was deadly in earnest.

Whitie shook his grisly, uncombed head. "Dunno what you're gabbin' about," he sneered, as a card dropped from his nervous fingers.

"I want this info and want it damned sudden," rapped Bill Dalton coldly. He knew Baldwin was in deadly fear of Sharky and, if made to talk at all, must be forced.

Whitie arose, and kicked the chair from under his feet.

"Where's that car?" demanded Bill.

"None of your damned business!" he flared.

For a minute, Bill studied the features of the man across the table. "Do you realize, Baldwin, I'm down here for information and have no time to argue with you?"

Whitie made a dive for the open window. The bulky figure of the engineer blocked the way. "Not so fast, young fellow," he laughed as he slammed him back into the chair.

Baldwin leaped up in a frenzy of passion and fury. He drove a blow at Dalton's face. Bill caught him unawares and the crook crashed back against the table, breaking it down.

Whitie sprang to his feet and advanced with bearlike hands extended.

With a pantherlike leap, startling in its swiftness, Bill was at him. A pile-driven blow sent Baldwin crashing to the floor.

There came a flash of a revolver and, with a mighty wrench, Dalton twisted the gun from the hand of the fallen crook. Chairs went crashing to the floor. Baldwin and the engineer were on their feet again. Whitie struck at Bill's grinning face. Dalton caught the wrist as it grazed his ear, and with a twist, had the body of the enraged man on his broad back. Bill flung Baldwin to the floor like a sack of corn.

Quicker than a flash of lightning, Bill was on him, with steel-like fingers in the man's collar.

"Spill it," Dalton panted, with his fist doubled ominously.

"Why should I tell you anything?" Whitie gasped. The surly note had gone from his voice.

"Suit yourself," grunted Bill, with a vicious leer. "I happen to know who pulled the fair grounds robbery last year —and the cops never did get the straight of it—so go ahead and refuse."

"My Gawd, you wouldn't belch, would you?" whined Baldwin in a fright.

"Well—where is that car of silk?" questioned Dalton softly. He leaned over the fallen man, and his face was not good to look upon.

"Aw—aw, I dunno where any car was dumped—I fergit."

Bill jerked him ruthlessly to his feet, slamming him into the chair. His eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Spill it," he grimly repeated.

"And promise you'll never tell," Whitie grunted miserably.

Bill's straight lips barely moved. "Go on—I'm listening."

Whitie slumped into the squeaky chair, sweat pouring from his forehead.

"That damned car was uncoupled from No. 77 and dumped—"

And then, almost on the instant, came a crash at the door, together with an imperative command to open in the name of the law!

Kingston was on the job and was taking care of his end, only now Bill must work fast. He took a firmer grip on Whitie's collar, then hoarsely whispered:

"Remember the fair grounds job!"

Baldwin's glassy eyes were fastened upon the quivering panels of the door, as blows were rained there. His lower jaw moved —but no words came.

"Car was uncoupled—what then?" cried Bill, twisting the collar tighter.

The sinister voice of McGuire bawled through the door: "Open up here, Whitie, and cut the horse play. I'm gonna take you down."

Baldwin frantically tried to tear himself free. He gave a despairing look toward the open window—and freedom.

Another twist and the man's face went black, then Dalton slackened his hold.

"Open up, and spill it," he commanded harshly.

"Gawd!" Whitie choked in agony. "Lake trestle—under—"

Dalton jerked his clenched fingers free, and gained the open window as the door fell. He threw his legs over the sill and dropped to the flat tin roof, a few feet below. Crouching in the shadows, he could plainly hear the bull-like voice of McGuire, bellowing orders to his men. The uproar was heightened by the protesting wails of Whitie.

With a swift glance over his shoulder toward the window, Bill took his way across the roof. Dalton had hardly taken three steps until a broken section of the rusty tin roof let out a wail as his weight was applied. A nervous sweat broke out over him. Hastily removing his foot he stepped back, and the buckled tin snapped into place with a loud report.

A man's head was framed in the window.

"Halt!" roared McGuire.

Throwing all caution aside, Bill plunged forward and dropped onto the fence, then to the lane as the bullets sang over his head. He ran on, dodging barrels and heaps of refuse. All was now silent. He

slowed down to a swift walk. The world, apparently, was asleep.

Bill Dalton shook his head. Everything had worked fine—so far, but his next move which he planned worried him. He had determined to go straight to Sharky Morgan's saloon and join his gang. No one outside of Baldwin and Mike, the fireman, had seen him.

There was a faint possibility that the men who helped Baldwin carry him to the sail loft would recognize him. But that was a chance he must take. He felt of the automatic in a holster strapped under his arm, and seemed assured.

VII

BILL shrugged his shoulders as he stepped out onto the street. He was burning all bridges behind him—there was no turning back now. He had the grim satisfaction of settling his score with Baldwin, and now would try for game higher up—Sharky Morgan!

A dirty sign hanging over a saloon door on Water Street creaked and groaned as it swung in the stiff breeze which blew up from the lake. If any one cared to stop and figure out the sign, with over half the globes burned out, one could read:

SHARKY MORGAN
Fine Wines and Liquors

On passing through the double swinging half doors into the saloon, Bill Dalton saw that, despite the late hour, it was filled as usual. Lakemen, railway men, and toughs were lounging at the card tables. The air was filled with tobacco smoke, and the odor of stale beer and whisky.

The place was brilliantly illuminated and the heavy gilt mirrors hanging on the walls, reflected the light many times. The bartenders, in their shirt sleeves, were busy, while the cash register kept up a constant clatter.

A man stood at the end of the lunch counter, his body resting against the bar. He was coatless and had stub of a cigar clenched between his teeth. The man was Sharky Morgan. He paid no attention, beyond the merest glance, to Dalton.

The engineer came into the room, stepped to the bar, and ordered a beer.

A foaming glass of beer was slid across the bar toward him, then the bartender turned to wait on other thirsty customers.

Bill took his glass, went over to a vacant table and sat down.

Later the place, a buzz of confusion at all times, was now strangely silent. The cause was apparent to all. McGuire and one of his men, Sweeny, stood inside the double swinging doors, looking about them.

Every eye was upon the men, and Sharky glanced their way coldly. He shifted his cigar with the tip of his tongue.

"Well?" came the icy tones of the saloonkeeper.

"Just dropped in to look 'em over, old timer," replied McGuire.

"Who you lookin' for?"

"No one in particular—just passing by."

"Better keep on passin', far as we're concerned," replied Morgan.

Bill pulled his hatbrim down over his eyes and tilted his chair against the wall.

"We ain't lookin' for no trouble at all. Give us a beer."

McGuire gazed about the room, and his eyes alighted on Bill, who apparently was sleeping.

"Say, Shark, who's your friend over there?"

"Don't know. He just came in."

"Guess I'll give him the once over, if you don't mind," said McGuire.

"Help yourself, only don't start anything in here," came the warning reply.

Stepping over to the sleeping man, the chief shook him roughly. "Here, you—what's your business? Where do you work?"

Bill slowly pushed his ragged hat up, eying McGuire coldly, then replied shortly:

"You know damned well where I work, and that I'm a Q. & G. engineer."

"Oh, it's you, eh?" grinned the chief.

"Who is he, Mac?" queried Sweeny.

"He's the engineer we sent down with that No. 77 transfer."

"Well, what of it?" came the surly reply. "You haven't a thing on me!"

Bill Dalton allowed the front legs of the chair to drop to the floor. He calmly

lighted a cigar and blew an easy ring of smoke toward the ceiling.

"No, but we will have if you don't clear out of this section," flared McGuire angrily.

"Say," snapped Dalton, "what the hell's it to you if Sharky don't kick if I stick here?" His voice was so loud that all in the place could hear. "Did I ask you for any advice, and do you think I'd be sucker enough to act on it? You damned cinder dick, speak when you're spoken to!"

Dalton thrust out his lower jaw, and his clear gray eyes glittered dangerously, while a murmur of admiration and sympathy ran about the saloon.

"Don't get rosy, my friend," warned Sweeny. "We was giving you a friendly little tip to clear out, seeing's you're new on this division."

Bill's cold eyes were slowly elevated to the level of the officer's. He spoke with deliberation:

"I may be new to this town, but I'm not new to you and your kind!" His mouth closed with a snap. "I guess you bulls are all alike; always horning in on some one. What surprises me is that Morgan stands for it in his place."

"Mebby we'll see more of you before long," grimly remarked McGuire.

"I guess I'm not hiding from you, am I?" Bill shot out sharply. "Day or night I can look the likes of you straight in the eyes and tell you to go straight to!"

"You guys caught a Tartar, ain't you?" came the chilling voice of Morgan. "Better snap out of here while the snappin's good."

Sweeny turned toward the door, but McGuire stood eying the engineer surlily.

"I told you to get the hell out of here, McGuire," came the crisp command of Morgan. "I don't aim to have any trouble with the police in this town, and you railroad dicks ain't going to start anything in here."

As McGuire slowly turned toward the door, Dalton called after him:

"Say, you big wise guy that Sharky called McGuire, the next time you attempt to stop and question me—well, bulls have turned up missing before this—you know!"

Bill Dalton yanked his hat down over his eyes, screwed himself into a more comfortable position on his chair, and went back to sleep.

A wave of astonishment swept over the room.

"Come on, McGuire," advised Sweeny from the doorway, "we haven't anything on him—yet."

The detectives left the saloon in silence. The noise and confusion was resumed. The main topic was the bawling out the railway detectives received at the hands of this man Dalton. Curiosity was at a fever heat, and was communicated to Morgan.

Nodding curtly to Fat Shay, one of his henchmen, Morgan walked to the table opposite Bill. Sharky laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What the—" Dalton growled, jerking his hat from his eyes and swinging around.

"It's only me, young fellow. C'm here and sit down. I want to gab with you."

"All right. You can talk if we drink while we're talking." Bill dropped the front legs of the chair to the floor and, arising, swung the chair into position and sat down at the table.

"All right—shoot."

"How comes the bulls are on your neck?" queried Sharky, with a friendly leer.

"I came from the South to-night on the fruiter, and hired out as a hoghead at Midland City. They sent me down here with Extra No. 77 and we lost a box car somewhere along the pike, and they say I had a hand in crooking it. I didn't and ain't going to be made the goat for no damned railroad."

"Where'd you hail from?"

"Chi."

"Ever been in this section before?"

"Only on trips over the division. Never dropped off, though. Huh. Got fired the first trip out on account of that damned car."

"How much did you get out of it? What was your split?" Sharky allowed the merest flicker of a smile to play about the corners of his stern mouth.

"Huh. Got canned—that's all the split I got."

"Kinda funny you couldn't get a job in Chi, ain't it?" scoffed Fat Shay.

"Oh, I could get plenty of work, all right."

"Why did you leave then?" quizzed Morgan.

"That's a question them bulls would like to have answered—damn them!" flared Dalton. His fingers clenched tightly around the handle of a beer mug, and he momentarily stiffened.

"In trouble?" asked Sharky sympathetically.

"Huh," came the noncommittal reply.

"A pen job?" insisted Morgan.

"Worse than a few spaces," Bill returned rather grimly.

"Not a killing?" Sharky winked knowingly at Dalton.

"Say, what's the idea?" he snapped, as his hand slipped under his coat.

"Not so fast with your hardware," Morgan warned in a friendly tone. "I don't know you, and I'm looking for an extra truck driver who can take a hundred smackers for a night's work then jump the town for good. In a way, you are in a jam about this stolen box car and I thought you'd like some easy coin to sort of square things.

"Now the last question: not a killing?"

"It's pretty early in the game to talk of such things, as I don't know you at all," came the cautious reply. "I've got my reasons for jumping Chi, and that's enough for you!" His eyes darkened in sullen anger, as he glared across the table at the men seated there.

VIII

"ALL right—all right!" Sharky hastened to say. "No harm done. The boys will think none the less of you, anyhow."

Bill shot a suspicious glance at Morgan's sallow face.

"About this job: picking me for a fall guy, I suppose. No—I don't want no job.

"The main reason I had for lighting in this burg was that I knew Whitie Baldwin," he lied, "and also Bull McCarthy told me in Chi that if I wanted any inside info, or wanted to be wised up on what's going on in this neck of woods, I should see you or Baldwin, but"—with a suggestive shrug of his shoulders—"I guess it was a bum steer at that."

"You know Bull?" burst out Morgan.

"I'll say I do, brother."

"Why, he's doing time now!" cried Sharky, with a meaning look at the engineer.

"That so?" Bill drawled. "You mean was doing time. He made a get-away about six months ago and is laying low on Clark Street now."

"Just a moment, my friend," grunted Sharky, and his eyes partly closed as he glared at the composed man seated there. His lips tightened. He turned toward Shay, who had been listening to the conversation.

"Know anything about that, Fat?"

"Hell, yes!" snorted Shay. "This bozo's right. Bull was nailed up in a packin' case and shipped to Chi. They never did get their paws on him."

Fat looked Bill critically over through a thick haze of smoke.

"What kinda lookin' guy is Bull—tall like?"

"Naw. He's short and stocky built, scar across his nose. Has a split left ear and a busted right one.

"Bull also tipped me off to look out for pikers down here. Said they were a bunch of tin horners down here from the heart out. All they could do was to rob blind men and kids."

That was the only time Dalton ever saw Sharky smile. A twisted, sickly grin spread over the saloon keeper's face.

"And as I knew Whitie," Bill lied on, "I went to his room to get the low down on where your joint was, when McGuire, with his gang of flat foots, rushed the dump and took Baldwin down."

"What's that you're saying?" snapped Sharky, as he paled under his yellow skin. He shot a swift glance at the face of Bill, settled back in his chair with a disgusted look on his face, then said, "Go on."

"When they busted the door in, I highballed out the window. McGuire said Baldwin knew something about that damned box car."

Sharky Morgan chewed nervously at the stub of his cigar, and glared about the

room. His steel cold eyes swept to Dalton's face.

"Do you think Baldwin will squeal?"

"No. Not unless they 'third' him, which that fat headed McGuire will likely do," volunteered the engineer.

"That's possible," assented Morgan.

"Listen Shark"—Bill leaned far over the beer-soaked table, lowering his voice—"I wasn't hatched yesterday. You pulled that car stunt yourself. And, as the fall guy, I want some of the gravy."

For a full moment their eyes met coldly, then:

"What leads you to think I had a hand in it?" grimly questioned the saloon keeper.

"Baldwin told me you just pulled a good freight car job, and would need help in getting the loot into the clear."

"Say!" Fat Shay gripped Morgan's arm tightly. "I think this guy's stallin'. Ask him how comes if he knows Whitie, why he didn't speak to him when he played the pilot gag?"

Sinister eyes swept across the table.

"Huh? When Baldwin stepped on the deck of my hog, he tipped me the wink, and, knowing something was in the wind, I stood pat. That damned fireman got busy with his gun and sapped me. Any more fool questions, Shay?"

A grim faced, half frightened man burst through the double half doors, and stepping into the saloon, shot a swift glance about the room. Spotting the proprietor, he slid toward the table.

"Say, Shark, I want to slip you some info," he said.

"'Lo, Jake. Come have a seat. This is Bill Dalton. I guess I'll let him in on this deal, so go ahead and spill it."

"That damned cinder dick, McGuire, has nailed Whitie! Some other guy was in th' room with him, but he made a get-away out th' window!"

"I know—Bill just told me. What else? Have you watched the division like I told you?"

"Yeah, an' the railroad dicks are searchin' out th' section with headlights fastened to th' side of th' tender of a hog!"

"What!" burst out the astonished saloon keeper in a hoarse whisper, partly arising from his chair, and looking from one to the other. "What the hell's the meaning of this?"

"Dunno," droned Jake miserably. "I dunno—honest to Gawd, I dunno."

Bill Dalton stretched lazily in his chair, and glanced whimsically at Morgan.

"Huh, that's a pipe," he laughed. "Whitie Baldwin's in the cooler, ain't he? Well—McGuire has worked, and worked fast—that's all. He's bled that sucker bone dry, and ain't losing any time. They have made Whitie come clean about No. 77. What else could make them search out the right of way at this ungodly hour?"

"You think they've thirded Whitie, do you?" flared Morgan.

"Sure do," came the positive assertion. "And sooner or later they'll fall on the place where you've put that car!"

Sharky's jaws clicked.

"What you think, Bill?" he anxiously quizzed.

"How many men can you dig up on a minute's notice—no more Whities. We want trusted men."

"About twelve, not counting us."

"All right. Now get them together," snapped Dalton. "We'll tackle this car now—beat McGuire to it." He shot a glance over the bar at the face of the clock which hung there. "Twenty minutes to three. Can we get on the job before three?"

"I think so—if we hustle," assented Morgan.

"Where is this damned car? And how'd you pull it?" demanded Bill. "Jake, here, says they've searched out the right of way on both sides clear to the yards and seen nary a car. How in the hell did you get away with it?"

Sharky hunched over the table. His eyes glittered unnaturally. He drew a crude sketch of the railway system on the table top with his finger and spoke quickly.

A puzzled frown spread over Dalton's face, which broke into a sheepish grin. "Now who in thunder would have thought of a stunt like that?" he grunted, settling back in his chair.

Bill arose and stretched lazily.

"I'll be back in a few minutes, Shark.

I want to get some fresh air into my system to freshen me up a bit."

"All right. I'll get the gang together," replied Morgan, arising.

Hardly had Dalton disappeared than Sharky snapped his fingers toward a short, wiry man, who was seated at a card table talking to a painted woman, and silently pointed toward the swinging saloon doors.

With a sly, twisted grin of understanding, the man slipped out into the darkness of the night.

Bill shuffled aimlessly along the narrow street. As he loitered, a feeling, which mounted to a certainty, took hold of him, that he was shadowed. He did not turn his head. Maybe Sharky didn't swallow his line of talk as easy as he'd thought.

Dalton stepped to the curb and looked idly up, then down the narrow street. It was deserted save for a man who leaned against a lamp-post. Bill had seen the man loafing in the saloon.

A faint trace of a smile hovered about the corners of his eyes, as he watched the man. Then his eyes swept to a darkened doorway a few feet beyond, while opposite the street, between the narrow space of two buildings, he glimpsed a shadowy form of a man—one of McGuire's men.

Bill smiled whimsically as he carefully licked a cigar end, jabbing it into his mouth. Slipping to the doorway, as though shielding his light from the wind, he cupped the match in his left hand, applying it to his cigar, while with his right hand, on the wall, he scribbled a message with the stub of a pencil, then, as an afterthought, scrawled: "Three o'clock."

Turning again to the street, puffing at his cigar, he shot a glance out the corner of his eye across the street at the crouching man, and grinned wisely.

IX

LEISURELY he turned down the sidewalk in time to see Sharky's man dart into a friendly doorway.

Swinging into the saloon, tossing his cigar into a sawdust box, Bill approached the saloon keeper.

"All set, Shark?"

"Yeah. Wait till I give this man some orders and I'll be with you."

Dalton's eyes followed Morgan as he stepped to the wiry man who had followed Bill. He grinned as he heard the words: "All to t' good. Only smoked a stogie," pass to Sharky.

"I'm ready now, Bill," nodded Morgan; "come on."

"We'll beat them to it," Bill announced grimly. "Set the car afire. That will catch the woods, giving us ample time to get in the clear. Let's go."

The Q. and G. right of way crossed Fox Creek a few miles below the sleeping village of Flint. The road crossed the creek over a high trestle. And at Fox Creek, under the towering trestle, where a rough wagon road wound its way through the stumps of the Lake Lumber abandoned cuttings, five heavy duty auto trucks wormed their way over the scattered trees and underbrush. The motors hummed steadily as the drivers cautiously picked their way.

At the north abutment a flash light gleamed from the front driver's seat and five motors ceased to hum. For a space of time all was strangely silent, then Bill Dalton, who was driving the leading truck, together with Morgan, who was showing him the way, slipped to the ground.

"Good enough," grunted Sharky at last. "I'm glad it's dark to-night. It 'll give us a better chance to make a cleaning.

"Hey there, Jake!" he called to a man who was climbing down from the second truck, "bring them axes and pass them out. We got to get busy. Jones, swing your truck into position so's your headlights will shine down here."

Morgan had struggled ahead, and now called to Bill out of the shadows of the abutment. A beam from his flash light cut a wide swath of light through the darkness of the night. There came into the circle of light what at first appeared to be a heap of underbrush piled there by the lumber jacks.

"See that, Bill?" he chuckled. "Here is your lost car of silk!"

Dalton stepped over a fallen log and came close to the saloon keeper's side. His

eyes searched out the vague shape of an overturned box car. It lay as it had fallen, evidently from its position, from the tracks on the trestle, which loomed far above. The upright side of the car was cluttered with heavy branches nailed in such a position that they stood upright.

A dog barked somewhere, far away, and there came a sound of rustling weeds along the banks of the creek, close to them, as though men were worming their way through.

"How in hell did you cut it?" exclaimed Bill in open admiration.

"When you lit out of Midland City, my men caught the rear of your train. We had the screw jacks ready here, and my men, on your train, cut off the last car, and set the brakes, stopping it on the trestle, just at the edge of the creek. They jacked up one side of the car, tipping it into the ravine, beside the abutment here."

"Well, I'll be damned! But what about those tree branches sticking up and nailed to the car—what's the huge idea?"

"Huh!" grunted the saloon keeper, with a show of egotism. "That's my own idea. Suppose they searched out the entire right of way in the daytime, or even at night, like McGuire's done. Any one up on the trestle, looking down here, could only see the tops of these branches, which they would naturally take for the tops of the trees. Got that idea of this camouflage from seeing a gun doped that way in a war picture."

"Now that's what I call brains. I'll take back what I said about you coming to Chi and learning anything," grinned Bill.

Now Dalton's whole attitude changed. There came a tense moment in which his fingers fairly itched to get at this man Morgan. Make a fool out of him, would he? Have one of his henchmen sap him on the head with a gun while he was attending to his duties, eh?

Dalton knew the detectives were grimly on the job, and men were about in nearly every bush. Even now he sensed they were completely surrounded. He impatiently shot a glance upward at the right of way, frowning at the delay, when a shrill blast from a police whistle sounded, splitting the silence of the night!

Suddenly, as a flash of lightning out of a clear sky, a blinding glare of light, shooting down from above, cut a wide swath through the forests. The rays from an electric headlight, fastened sideways on the tender of an engine, illuminated the scene plain as day!

McGuire sprang from a bush to the clearing, gun in hand, with men close at his heels. "Hands up—everybody!" he crisply commanded. "The first man that reaches for a gun gets plugged."

Men—grim faced, determined railway men, with rifles crooked in their arms, swarmed down the steep embankment from the train above.

Then hell broke loose. McGuire's shoutings were heard far above the roar. Groans followed by curses filled the night air. The railway men were not to be stopped, however, but pressed on.

The chief's bull-like roar was heard above the din. "Clean 'em, boys!" he screamed. "Give 'em a fight of their lives!"

Bill Dalton spun about, searching out Sharky Morgan. Out of the darkness of the underbrush came a face, white with fear. It was Morgan's ashen countenance.

"What the hell's the meaning of this?" he cried.

"Meaning of this?" mimicked Bill Dalton grimly. "It means that I have double crossed you! Think you're damned smart sending Baldwin as pilot man, then slinging me in a dirty sail loft and, to top it all, when I went down the street for a smoke, you sent a thick-headed simp to spy on me! You fell for my line of talk. Why, you damned crook, I never done a dishonest thing in my life except to lie to you."

Bill sprang toward the man, and Morgan spun partly round, then crumpled to the ground. He wabbled to his feet, but a crushing blow drove him to earth again.

An automatic, in the hand of Morgan, sprang into view, but he moved too slow.

Bill closed in before the ominous barrel could be swung about, side stepped it, knocking the man's hand, and sent the weapon flying. Now he worked without

mercy, driving a fist of iron against a weak chin and face until, with a well-directed blow, he sent the saloon keeper against a stump of a tree, bleeding and helpless.

"Come on, boys—fight through them! We'll get old Sharky himself!" bawled McGuire.

The railway men stiffened at the chief's command. They met the crooks with a thud. Groans followed. Curses and screams drowned the sounds of blows. Above it arose the laughter of Bill Dalton.

A few knives flashed in the blinding glare of the headlight. The sight of steel drove the grim-faced railway men mad. They were not to be stopped now.

Sharky Morgan gasped, flicked the blood from his mouth, spat out a tooth, clutched vainly at the top of the tree stump for support, then crumpled to the ground.

"I quit," he panted. "I got plenty. I don't kick at foolin' with an army mule, but I'm balkin' at playin' with a pile driver. I—I had you figured as a thick-headed engineer, but guess I got my wires crossed."

X

BULLETS sang freely about. One stern messenger of death fanned Dalton's cheek.

"We're breaking through their lines now, boys. Don't let any man get away!" cried McGuire, springing over a log and dashing into the thickest of the fray.

At the chief's cry, fury knew no bounds. No power on earth could stop those determined railroaders. For once in his life he was powerless to stem his human horde. Morgan's men broke and fled. The fight terminated in a rout. The crooks frantically broke for shelter. After them came McGuire's men.

The chief swung toward Dalton, who was standing over the fallen saloon keeper. One glance at that battered face was enough.

"Who done this?" he snorted.

"I did," replied Dalton. "No damned saloon keeper can make a monkey out of me and get away with it. I'm satisfied, and you can have him now."

"Humph! Tryin' to square yourself, are you?" he snorted.

"No—I haven't done anything to need squaring," evenly returned Bill.

McGuire turned his attention to Morgan.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Not until I see my attorney," mumbled Morgan shortly, nursing his jaw.

Bill was speedily relieved of his battered prisoner, and now stood watching a railroader with a flash light poke about in a clump of bushes a few feet away. A cynical grin spread over the railway man's dirty, grimy face.

"Hey there, Mr. McGuire, here's another one of Morgan's birds!"

Fat Shay, seeing resistance was worse than useless, stepped out and glared about him. He was covered with a rifle in the hands of his captor.

Sharky was handcuffed to the sullen Shay, and a string of men, closely guarded, trudged and struggled up the steep embankment to the waiting freight car above. Bill was shoved into a dark box car with the men, and the long ride to Midland City began.

In the train master's office, Jameson and McGuire quizzed Bill Dalton as to his part in the game. The engineer stood in the middle of the floor, with hands fastened behind him. Never did he lose his good humor. He stepped over and seated himself on a chair.

"Well," bragged McGuire, "you see now, Jameson, I got them without the help of George Kingston. In fact he never showed up at all, and I'm just as well satisfied."

Bill Dalton grinned whimsically.

"What you got to say for yourself," asked Jameson, turning toward Bill.

"Nothing—I've been busy listening to McGuire. He says that George Kingston hasn't been on this case. I'd like to ask him who was it that sent him a message to search out the right of way with headlights fastened to the sides of the yard engine, and also, who tipped him off where the car was, and when the gang would try to get at the loot?"

McGuire spun about, his face blazing furiously.

"Some one did tip me off where the car was, but I think it was one of my own men!" he snorted.

"Apple sauce!" grinned Dalton, yawning lazily. "Do you suppose George Kingston would bring a brass band when he came up here to work on the case for you?"

"Huh, I suppose you're trying to intimate that you are Kingston," sneered McGuire.

"Don't have to intimate nothing," evenly returned Dalton, "as I happen to be the man we're talking about — George Kingston!"

Under his instructions, McGuire fished about in a secret pocket of his coat and produced a letter which was addressed to the divisional superintendent—Mr. Jameson.

The master looked up after reading the missive and said:

"I'm satisfied. McGuire release him."

Rubbing his chaffed wrists, Bill Dalton, *alias* George Kingston, said:

"Mr. Jameson, the reason I didn't show up here soon as you called me was, I first wanted to get the dope on who's who up here. I figured the looters would be busy watching McGuire and his men, leaving me free to act. Sharky Morgan seemed to be the leader in all the devilment that went on in Bradford, but I couldn't seem to find a gang leader here in Midland City, so I fell back to Sharky.

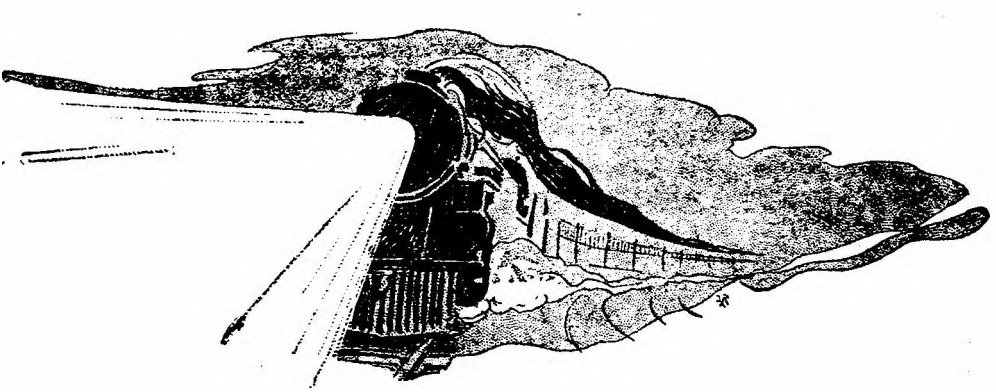
"This saloon keeper had every man in the underworld under his thumb, and would not hesitate to take sharp measures with any one who dared to tell of his activities. When I hit Spencer for a hog, I was satisfied that Sharky was the man I was looking for, but didn't figure they'd have the nerve to steal a whole box car. You know the rest.

"The thing for me to do is to take the first train out of town. Let McGuire raise a hue and cry that I have escaped. He must take all the glory of this capture of Morgan and his men, or my future usefulness on the Spring Valley Division will be at an end."

McGuire was man enough to take Kingston's hand and say:

"You sure heaped it thick on me, George. I was determined to slap you behind bars."

Bill Dalton slipped out of Midland City, and the chief reported along the division that he had escaped, when Sharky and his gang were brought to trial. Now the Q. and G. Railway can safely send its shipments down the pike without fear of freight looters. McGuire modestly took all the glory, and his men look up to him as the best operative on the four divisions.



His mouth half open, the detective slept the sleep of the just

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

WHILE I, Miss Hester Posey, the dressmaker of the village of Winterville, was staying at the Robertsons during the holidays, when their daughter, Winifred, was being visited by Bob Moreland, a youth we highly respected, the house was aroused one night by a pistol shot, and Mrs. Robertson was found in a faint in the lower hall. Prior to that I had noticed Winifred giving Bob a revolver; I had seen Mrs. Robertson pleading with Rev. Hezikiah Plit, a traveling evangelist, who later received at his quarters a strange woman; and I had secretly mailed a letter for Mrs. Robertson to a Trenton theater manager. Then several days later, when all was quiet,

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XV

AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS

TO this day the next few minutes are not coherent in my memory. Bob and I bent over Winifred to see if she were living. As we looked she slowly moved her right hand toward her throat. I saw Bob's arms tighten about her. I sprang to my feet.

"Call Miss Eliza!" I commanded. Then, for one sickening moment, it occurred to me that the cry I had just heard might have come from her. But at that moment I heard her coming down the stair from her room above. I took my candle and started down the narrow hall leading to the servants' stairway.

I flung open the door and stood looking at the well of blackness. Then I saw Mary. She was tottering down the hall from the servants' rooms, and in the light

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from my candle I could see her mouth open and her eyes staring.

"Mis' Hester," she gasped. "Mis' Hester, who's dat? Who was dat hollered?"

"I do not know," I answered. "You must come with me." I started down the steep stair leading to the kitchen entry below. Mary clung to my arm, and I could not throw off her weight.

"Let go," I commanded sharply. "If you are afraid I must go down alone." For some reason I felt our search would end at the foot of the servants' stair. Mary moved at my threat, and together we started down the steps, I shielding the flame of my candle with my hand.

When we were almost at the bottom I was stopped by her fingers tightening on my arm. She paused, frozen, and pointed down the stair. Directly before us was a white object hunched against the wall in a dreadfully ludicrous posture.

"Yonder," Mary gasped under her breath.

I hurried down and bent over the figure on the floor. I spoke, but there was no answer. It was old Caroline, dressed only in her nightdress, and she had broken her neck. For a brief moment I gazed at her and then at Mary. "What," I gasped, "does it mean?" I was so horrified I was absolutely incoherent.

"Dunno," shuddered Mary, shrinking against the wall, and covering her face with her hands. "I never heard nothin' till dat scream. I was too col' wid fright ter git out of de baid quick, an' when I did yo was openin' de do' yonder and comin' into de back hall wid yo light."

While she was speaking I had bent over the dead form of old Caroline and, lifting her head, slipped my folded shawl under it. Mary dropped to the floor at her side and began to rearrange her clothing.

"Get a blanket and put it over her," I ordered.

"Yas'um," Mary answered, and then I saw her mounting the stair.

I looked about the tiny square hall. My eyes fled from the distorted face of the poor creature lying before me. I felt somehow, I could not bear any more. But in the moment I looked away I saw something else. On the floor, perhaps two feet distant from the body, was a square object.

I bent over it with my candle. It was a duplicate of the little tract with the gold cross on its cover and the slanting rays of light. It was the second I had seen in the last two days. I had drawn one from the hair of my friend lying quiet in the parlor of her home. Now here was another. I heard Mary coming, and I slipped it into my pocket.

I hurried through the dining room to call Mr. Robertson. I ran to the library door. He was stretched full length on the divan, his arms under his head, his mouth open, sound asleep. I shook him, none too gently, and told him what had happened. He sprang to his feet and started to the door.

"Go to Winifred," I said. "I found her in the hall and do not know if she is hurt."

Together we mounted the stairs. Winifred's door was open and the light on. She was conscious, and Miss Eliza was administering smelling salts, while Bob was bending over her. The girl's eyes met mine as I entered.

"Miss Hester," she gasped, "is—is everything all right?"

I went to her and placed my hand on her forehead. "Yes," I said. "Now lie quiet a moment and tell us what frightened you."

A strange thing happened then. Thinking it over now, I wonder I did not notice it more. Here was Winifred rousing from unconsciousness and at the same time asking me a direct question; one, in fact, that I might have been expected to ask her instead.

"Why should you think I was frightened?" she said in a low voice, and her eyes wandered to the window.

"We found you lying in a dead faint on

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though the shooting yet unexplained, a pistol shot awakened us and we found Mrs. Robertson dead. While she was in the coffin and I was dozing in the upper hall, I thought I saw a white shadow glide through the room. Later I was startled by a crash and a scream, and, flashing on the lights, Bob and I saw Winifred lying on the floor in a white nightdress.

the hall floor," I answered sharply. My nerves were going. I wanted to find out if she had heard old Caroline scream.

She struggled up into a sitting posture on the bed. "Oh, when is it all going to stop? When will it all be over? Bob, Bob, don't go away from me. It—it is killing me, Miss Hester."

I saw she was becoming hysterical, so I made a sign to the others to be quiet. "Winifred," I said firmly, "it is essential that you tell me what frightened you. I know you are unnerved, but much hangs on your answer. Now tell me."

She leaned against my shoulder, her body shaking with sobbing. "I—I started into the hall—"

"But," I interrupted her, "tell me first why you went into the hall?"

Her eyes wandered past me to Bob. "I —I am ashamed to tell you."

"Nonsense," I said. "You need not fear to tell us anything. Why should you be afraid?"

"I went—" but she seemed to be unable to continue. "I went out there because—because I was afraid of mother."

We stared at each other blankly. My mind fled to that poor, broken, peaceful thing downstairs. Who could be afraid of her?

"I know it is wicked and dreadful, but all day I have been afraid of her. Afraid to think about how she looked; afraid I would have to touch her; afraid to see her lying in her coffin, and, oh, Miss Hester, Bob told me it was wicked to be afraid of my own mother, and it was slowly killing me.

"I heard a little noise out in the hall and thought it might be you, and I knew if you were awake I needn't be afraid, so I got up to creep downstairs and sit there just a minute alone with her, and perhaps I would never be afraid again. I got as far as the parlor door, and, oh, it was so dark in there.

"I tried to wait, but something seemed catching me by the gown to drag me inside and lock the door and leave me alone with her. I turned and ran—I ran for my life up the stairs. I reached the top and saw—" and here for a minute she covered her face with her hands, her loose hair falling between her fingers.

"I saw mother's door open, and a white figure seemed to float out into the hall. I tried to speak and it stopped; then it came toward me. I tried to scream, but I couldn't make a sound. I saw it raise long white arms with a cloud over them as though to crush me to the floor, and then—then I fainted."

I was too surprised to move. I felt her shrink back against my shoulder. "You are all right now, child, and safe with Miss Eliza and Bob. Try and be quiet for a little, and then I will come back."

"Promise," she gasped as I went into the hall.

Mr. Robertson followed, and together we went down the back stair, where Mary was standing, her eyes bulging with fear, beside the body of poor Caroline. She had placed a blanket over the figure, and nothing was visible save the white hem of the dead woman's nightgown.

Mr. Robertson asked Mary for her story, and she repeated what she had told me. I told him I would stay with the body, and while Mary got into some clothes he must telephone for the coroner and the doctor.

While they were gone I had time to reflect. I did not want Winifred to find out about the death of Caroline until daylight, and saw no reason for distracted Miss Eliza to find out either, if it could be helped. The woman was dead, and in that brief moment I determined the doctor was the person who could help me solve the horror around us, if any one could.

I recalled Caroline and the visits of the angel. I thought of Mary and her "tokens," and of the tracts that had heralded, and followed, also the deaths which had come so close on one another's heels.

Mr. Robertson returned saying both men were on their way, only that the assistant was coming as the coroner had already started for his Christmas vacation. After ten minutes' waiting the men arrived, and the four of them, the assistant, the doctor, Bob, and Mr. Robertson carried the body into the kitchen and placed it on two chairs.

I shall never forget the four men struggling under the large bulk of poor old Caroline, of the dreadful difficulty they had in getting it through the narrow door. Mr. Robertson had told Bob of the second death in the house, and he behaved wonderfully.

The assistant coroner questioned Mary, and, after hearing her story and mine, went away to the telephone. Mr. Robertson and I had decided, in the few moments left us, that the body must be moved to the undertaking establishment. With Mrs. Robertson lying dead in the parlor, the two deaths seemed more than we could bear.

It was gruesome, this hastily settling the placing of the remains of poor faithful Caroline, but I had become so numb to shock that now it was the living, and not the dead, with whom I was concerned.

The doctor and I sat down on the lower step, not two feet from where I had found the body, and I told him all I knew. I felt the time for secrecy had passed, and already there was a sense of guilt at having kept the matter of the tracts, which in some way were linking themselves with death, from him.

He was tremendously interested, in fact so much so that I was obliged to tell part of it twice. It was a great relief to get the matter off my mind, and while I was inclined to take the tracts as a ghastly coincident, I could see the doctor did not regard it in the same light.

He asked me what I knew of the movements of the family for the previous week. Next, oddly enough, if I had ever gone to the Rev. Hezikiah Plit's revival meetings. I told him I had not, and then saw what he was getting at.

"I hardly think, doctor," I said, "that you could lay the matter of the tracts directly to him. The town is flooded with them every time there is a revival, and they are much the same."

Then he asked me if those I found before were like the one I held in my hand. I replied that they were, I thought, identical.

By now it was beginning to grow light, and I went into the parlor to see that everything was right. I opened the blind a little and, crossing over to the coffin, stood for some moments looking down. How differently she looked in the dim gray of the morning!

The nervous lines around her forehead and eyes were forever wiped away, while on her lips was that faint, sly smile of the dead. I straightened some of the flowers around her, and one lock of her yellow hair had slipped down upon her forehead and gently I replaced it. I drew the blind again and, closing the door, went out to the kitchen.

The undertaker and his men had arrived and were placing Caroline's body in a long wicker basket, so I saw I was not needed. By now it was broad daylight, and I started upstairs to Winifred. At the door the doctor called me back.

"Miss Hester," he said. "I wonder if you would let me see the three tracts you told me of?" And he lowered his voice. "Especially the one with blood upon its cover."

"Of course," I said, and went up to my room.

I had thought, as I went upstairs, that there had been enough mystery in one night. But as I came downstairs another surprise was awaiting me. The doctor was in the dining room, and as I crossed the hall I saw three strangers standing at the door.

They removed their hats as I let them in, and the oldest man had a paper in his hand. He was the sheriff, and at that moment Mr. Robertson came down the stair. The man went up and spoke to him. The paper the sheriff held was a warrant for Mr. Robertson's arrest, sworn to by the district attorney, Mr. Allen, and the charge was murder.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE CHARGE OF MURDER

I SAW Mr. Robertson's face when the warrant was served upon him. All the blood seemed to leave his cheeks, and his lips were gluey. He sank limply down on a sofa in the hall and for some minutes could not move. Bob and Winifred had not come down, and I

was thankful. They would know soon enough of the arrest.

Mr. Robertson was allowed to go upstairs and get together a few things to take with him. His first thought was to call a lawyer and arrange bail, but on being informed bail could not be granted, considering the charge, he turned away and started upstairs, the sheriff with him.

The rest of us waited in the hall. When he came down he had regained something of his composure, and asked if he might go into the parlor and say a last good-by to his wife. The men exchanged glances at this, but there was no reason for refusing him.

He was only with her for a few minutes, and the door was left open. When he came out into the hall his eyes were red, and his hands shook as he put on his overcoat.

Things had happened with such rapidity that I had had no time to think. The death of Mrs. Robertson and the arrest of her husband was a distinct shock. But there was one person whom it did not surprise. That was Dr. Morton.

The little group left the house, walking down the drive to where an automobile was waiting. The snow was falling fitfully, and a dull gray sky hung over all. A bitter, lowering day, with promise of more snow in the air.

As I stood looking after them with frightened eyes I saw some one turning in at the gate. It was the district attorney, Mr. Allen, and as he passed Mr. Robertson I never saw such a look pass between two men.

To my surprise he asked for me. I led the way into the room where Dr. Morton was waiting. He closed the door and drew his chair to the fire.

"Miss Posey," he said kindly, "I am going to ask you to make a clean breast and tell me all you know about this business. Dr. Morton has been with me all night and we believe her husband committed the crime."

I am sure I went white, for I shrank back in my chair gripping my hands together. "I will answer anything you wish, Mr. Allen," I said as steadily as I could. "You must forgive me, but the shock of Mrs. Robertson's death coupled with the tragedy of last night, in the death of her old servant has left me unfit for thought. I—" and I am afraid my vioce shook—"I haven't been to sleep for two nights."

The lawyer broke in kindly: "Just take it easy, Miss Hester," he said. "I only want to ask you one or two questions, as you were intimate in the house. Besides," he said cleverly, "I believe you to be a woman of sense."

That braced me, so I drew myself up. "Very well, I'll tell you all I can," I answered.

"First of all," he continued, "have you, in the past few months, been aware of any friction between Mr. Robertson and his wife?"

I thought a minute. "No," I said at last. "I haven't. She was always rather afraid of him, in a way, but then she was afraid of everything."

I did not mean to evade him or try to hoodwink the law. I was thinking of Bob, Bob whom I loved as my own child and Bob who I knew had had the pistol in his possession part of the time.

The lawyer continued: "Since I was here last night, I persuaded the coroner to turn the pistol over to me. I have had an expert examine it and find that it has been fired twice recently."

My heart sank at that. I wondered how much I ought to tell him. Then I came to a sudden decision. I told him all I knew of Follie Williams, beginning with the night I saw her at the meetinghouse and ending with her hurried departure from the town. He was greatly interested.

I saw him make some notes in a little book he had and he asked me Clara Spense's name a second time. I told him, then added: "I do not believe she can give you any more information than I can, sir."

I wasn't going to let Clara Spense find out any more than she need. Besides I was fighting to protect Bob. I asked him if I might look at the pistol. He drew it from his pocket and together we went to the window.

"Mr. Robertson confessed to its ownership," he said. "I have traced it to the shop where he made the purchase. Finding

the blood spot on the carpet led me to believe Mrs. Robertson was murdered."

He seemed to be turning something over in his mind.

"Now I am going to tell you something else. Last night I sent for Mr. Hope Graves, Mrs. Robertson's lawyer. He told a most remarkable story. I asked him regarding a will. He admitted Mrs. Robertson had made one some weeks ago, leaving a large part of her property to her husband, the remainder to go to her daughter, Winifred."

I was not surprised at this. It was just the sort of will I should have expected her to leave.

"But here is the odd part, Miss Posey. About two weeks ago she called at the lawyer's office and asked for the original of the will which was sealed and in his keeping. The only other copy had already been given to her. She explained she had misplaced it. The lawyer handed it over readily enough asking that she return it as soon as convenient.

"She wanted to study certain phrases, she said, and perhaps change several small bequests. That was over two weeks ago. She did not return the will, and Mr. Graves tells me, pointedly avoided him up to the time of her death. Now, have you any knowledge of where Mrs. Robertson kept her private papers?"

I thought a minute and recalled her desk where she had written the letter to the Gayety Theater. "There is a strong box in her desk behind a little door. I know where the key is kept."

The district attorney flashed a question at me: "How do you know this?" he asked.

I could see his eyes sharpen and it made me angry, but I collected myself. "As it happens, sir," I said icily, "I once saw her place the key there. I had come to do an errand for her and she placed the key in a little vase on her desk. I suppose it is still there."

The man rose to his feet. "Let's have a look," was all he said, and then followed me up the stairs.

Mrs. Robertson's room was in bleak order. On the floor still lay the towel covering that dark stain. Save for this everything was in its normal condition. We went to the desk between the windows and I found the key as I had said, in the vase.

The district attorney opened the door and found the strong box. I confess I held my breath while he inserted the little key, turned the lock and opened the box. It was empty. For some moments we stood looking at one another.

"Do you think," he said at last, "the will was kept here?"

I told him I could not say positively, but so far as I knew this was the only hiding place she had in the house.

The district attorney replaced the key and after asking me to describe again the happenings of the night, he and the doctor went away, saying they would return later.

At the foot of the stair they paused. "I have one last unpleasant duty, Miss Posey," he said. "As deeply as it pains me I must speak to Miss Eliza and Miss Winifred, that is unless you can answer for them."

I braced myself, for what I did not know. "What is it?" I asked, but my lips were dry.

"I may demand an autopsy on the body of Mrs. Robertson," he went on hurriedly. "I believe it imperative, to clear up this mystery. I would like to warn the family that I think it best to have the body placed in a vault at the cemetery and not in the ground. I am sorry, Miss Hester, but if you can get them to consent it will avoid disagreeable complications later on."

I hesitated a minute. I knew my time was short, so then and there I took the responsibility upon myself. "Yes," I said boldly, "I will arrange it. I am sure if I say enough they will consent. Since her death they have left everything to me."

The district attorney looked relieved. "If they should not agree, you must let me know," he continued. At the door he took my hand. "Miss Posey, I want you to help us through this thing. I am going to trust you and I want you to feel I am your friend."

Then he touched his hat and went away down the drive. I felt better after that, better and ashamed. How much I was withholding and how much I was afraid to

tell! But the thought of Bob helped to steady me.

Yes, I would fight for him until the last and if I implicated myself by withholding facts just then, surely in the light of what happened the end justified the means. After that I gathered my strength and went upstairs.

Bob had told Winifred of Caroline's death and they were sitting in Winifred's room. They looked up questioningly as I entered and shut the door. I did not mince matters. I told them gently as I could, of Mr. Robertson's arrest. The children were absolutely stunned. Then Winifred sprang to her feet.

"Have they taken him away?" she gasped. "They must not! I tell you they must not. Bob, go after them and—"

But Bob was before her at the door. "Win!" he commanded. "Have you lost your mind?" He caught her by both wrists and together they looked hard into one another's eyes. But he was the stronger. "It will all come right," he said in a low voice. "It has to come right."

But she broke away from him, her back against the door. "Bob!" she gasped. "He has been sent to jail. If—if the worst comes to the worst—you must face the music. I'll stand by you and you must —tell." Then she threw herself upon the bed in a fit of uncontrollable sobbing.

I left Bob with his arms about her, his cheek upon her hair and went away to find Miss Eliza, and tell her of the change in plans for the interment.

CHAPTER XVII

EX. XII. 23

THE news of Mr. Robertson's arrest spread like wild fire, and before noon the house was besieged by neighbors, hungry for news. The editor of the *Weekly Examiner*, arrived along with reporters from distant papers to whom the tidings had been wired and the double mystery of old Caroline's death only added fuel to the flames.

One isn't apt to look forward to a funeral with any degree of pleasure, but I was devoutly thankful when the preacher arrived and only those nearest and dearest to the dead were admitted to the parlor and the Episcopal burial service had been read.

Clara Spense came. She had actually put on a black hat and gloves. The thing that steadied me through the funeral was her openly wiping her eyes, and once, during the prayer, she reached over and pinched off a rose from a garland near the casket.

The family did not come down for the service, but afterward drove through the biting air to the cemetery. Mr. Smunn was at the gate, his head bared as the carriages passed, directing the procession to the stone vault set some distance from the gate back among the pines.

I was grateful to the old man for arranging things as I had barely had time to notify him of the change in plans after getting the consent of Miss Eliza.

She seemed stricken dumb by the whole affair and asked if the burial service could still be read! I told her I didn't believe even a district attorney could prevent that. Not that I resented Mr. Robertson's arrest. I was pleased by it. I thought him guilty of an affair with Follie Williams if nothing else.

It was still snowing and we stood grouped about the cast iron grating which covered the entrance into the vault while the commitment service was read, and then stood with bowed heads through the prayer. After that a quartet sang a hymn.

I remember, as I walked with the doctor to the carriage, looking back to where the coffin rested on two standards, dimly seen through the iron gate and falling snow. My last recollection was of Mr. Smunn turning the key on the poor, peaceful body of my friend and trudging away through the snow to his little chapel at the gate.

When I reached the house Winifred, Bob, and Miss Eliza had arrived and gone upstairs. The doctor told me he would see them before he went away and I had a moment to see about some food.

I thought of Mr. Robertson. He, too, was behind an iron gate and I could not help wondering which of the two were better off. I felt a stab of guilt. Why had

I not told the attorney all I knew? Would it help or hurt Bob if I told of Winifred's giving him the pistol?

At that moment a sudden thought came to me. It came in a flash with no apparent reason, and I was beside myself to do something. Then and there I determined upon a bold stroke of my own. If only I were not on a cold scent!

I was thrilling with adventure as I put on my bonnet and slipped out into the snow. It was beginning to grow dark as I wended my way down the street. Few people were abroad and I only had to stop twice to tell neighbors that there was nothing new regarding the happenings in the house. When I turned into Main Street the snow was ankle deep and I had to wade to the store I wished to find.

There it was, dimly in the back, and through a collection of shovels and rubber boots and advertisements of plows I could see a light burning on a desk while on the windows was painted a sign, "Simmon's Hardware."

I had tied a veil over my hat to protect it from the snow and I could not see very clearly. A young woman rose and approached from the desk at the rear of the store.

"Good evening," she said.

I looked at her sharply. I had never seen her before. "Good evening," I responded. I wanted to see if my voice sounded natural. "I came," I said, "to purchase some pistol cartridges."

The girl looked at me. She was a stranger, and I thought I knew every one in the village. "Didn't the others suit?" she asked.

Her remark drew from me a question I had reason to regret later. "What others?" I demanded.

She looked at me more closely. "Pardon," she said, "but I mistook you for the lady I waited on before. I'm new in the town. Just got this job a week ago and haven't got used to faces yet."

"I understand," I said.

"No harm done. If you'd seen the lady I sold to before you'd have been pleased to have been took for her. Young and pretty she was." I wondered if she meant that for impertinence. Turning to a shelf she began to take down some small square boxes.

"Yes," I said. "It's always nice to be mistaken for some one pretty." Then I had an idea. "You are pretty yourself and ought to know."

She smirked at that, then laid out the heavy little green boxes full of greasy cartridges. "What size?" she demanded.

Then I tried a subterfuge. "Oh," I said, "I'm getting them for a friend. Didn't tell me the size. I am sorry to be so stupid."

The girl looked at me pityingly. "Forty-fives was what the other lady got. But here's all kinds," she said.

I think my hand tightened in my muff at that. The bullet which had ended Mrs. Robertson's life had been a forty-five. "By the way," I said, "did you happen to notice the other lady? Perhaps she has some left over from those she bought. You see, here in the village we know each other and often borrow stranger things than pistol cartridges. I might save a trip down town in the snow."

It was a dim chance I was taking, and had the girl been clever she would have seen I was trying to pump her. But she did not, fortunately. She had been in the store all day and was lonely and anxious to talk, so she warmed to my suggestion.

"No, ma'm," she said, "I don't know her name. She came in here in a hurry like and bought the cartridges and went right out. Bought ten, or six, I forget which now." Then she laughed. "To tell the truth I was so took up with admiring the gold bag she paid for them out of I didn't think to ask her name."

I could only stare at her..

"Anything else? It's about closing time for me." Here she looked at the clock ticking over the counter.

But I tried one last shot. "Did you—do you recall how she was dressed?"

"Well, no." she said, scratching her head with the point of a pencil as she replaced the boxes of cartridges. "I didn't notice specially. Fur coat, I guess. It was the gold bag with a little diamond letter on the corner that caught my eye."

I thanked her and left the store. My head was in a whirl as I walked up the street. Who had bought the cartridges; Winifred or Follie Williams? I looked at my watch. It was half past five, and already dark. I felt I must stop at my own house. I wished to sit alone and think things over.

When I reached for the key in the guard by my doorpost I made a discovery. As I felt in the dark, my hand seemed to slip across some soft substance and I rubbed my fingers together. I took out the key and opened my door and lighted my lamp.

I looked at my hand. It was stained with blood. For fully a minute I stood staring at it, and then, taking my lamp, I went out on the little porch. I held the light close to the doorpost. On either side, and on the level with my eyes, was a vivid smear of blood. I stared in amazement.

There was blood smeared on the lintel also. Below the smear on the right doorpost something had been written. It was as though some one had dipped a finger in the blood and scrawled some numerals. "EX. XII. 23." That was all.

I made a careful examination, then I went inside and closed and locked the door. I remember seeing myself in the mirror over the mantel, and I shall never forget the picture I made. My face was blue white and my hair stringing about my face from the wind.

In one hand was the lamp, while the other member, stained with blood, was held before me. I put the lamp on the table and sat down before the empty fireplace and stared at the gray ashes.

"EX. XII. 23," I kept saying to myself. For some reason I had an inspiration. For many years I had taught Sunday school and a thought flashed through my head. Trembling with haste I got down my Bible. Placing it on the table, with shaking fingers I began to turn the leaves, and at last I found it.

Exodus, XII Chapter, 23rd verse.

Here is what I read:

> For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

I closed the book and for a long time sat looking into the gray ashes. To this day, when I come to that chapter in my Bible there is a faint smear of blood.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE IS NO MORE!

THE following two days were quiet, but it was the quiet that precedes the storm. After finding the blood spots on my doorpost and on the lintel I returned to the Robertson's and went immediately to my room, and for some time lay on the bed. I was too shaken to talk to any one.

I do not know to this day, when I had been through so many worse things, why that finding of the blood should have unnerved me as it did. Perhaps it was because it showed that Mrs. Robertson's death, followed by old Caroline's, had been a beginning and not an end. What was the meaning of it all?

The only deduction that I could make was that some one wished to tell me I was safe, that the Lord would not "smite" me. I had always feared the Lord, but it had not occurred to me that he would smite me, so why should some one take this obscure way of pointing out the danger to me? In fact, it was the living I feared just then.

Supper that night was a dreary meal. Winifred was white as a ghost and crumbled a roll by her plate, not tasting food. Bob sat in absolute silence, his mind far away. I tried to eat a little and encourage the others to do so, but my efforts at nourishment and conversation failed.

While we were sitting there the telephone rang. Every happening had come to have its meaning, and I laid aside my fork and openly listened to the conversation. It was the jail, and Mr. Robertson was sending a message to the house to see if some food could be sent in. The fare at the prison was evidently not to his liking. I watched their faces as Bob delivered the message. Winifred was the first to speak.

"Listen to me," she said firmly. "Mother would wish us to make him comfortable if she were here. Mary must fix his meals, and, if others refuse, I shall take them to the jail myself."

Bob reached across the table and took her hand. "What a brick you are, Win," he exulted.

They went into the kitchen together, and when Mary had fixed a tray, Bob carried it down himself. I mention all this as it settled one thing in my mind. The children believed Mr. Robertson innocent. But how much they knew of this innocence, I was not to learn until later.

The house was quiet that night. In the morning the children seemed rested, and I was thankful for it. In the afternoon I wished them to go with me to poor Caroline's funeral in the little graveyard surrounding the negro church on the outskirts of the village. Then, too, I had to find another servant to take her place.

Bob had taken Mr. Robertson's breakfast to him, and I watched him carrying the tray with its white cover down the drive, so I went into the parlor, where were several belated offerings of flowers, and I decided to take them to the cemetery myself. Besides, I wanted to speak to Mr. Jabez Smunn.

It was a morning of crystal blue and biting cold, and, wrapping the flowers in a newspaper to prevent their freezing, I started down the street. When I neared the cemetery Mr. Smunn was again at the window. He nodded to me and, opening his door, invited me in.

I explained my errand, and he turned to a nail by the door and took down a brass key. "Want me to lay 'em inside?" he asked. "By the way, Mis' Hester," he said, lowering his voice, "I seen him again." He paused and looked at me curiously.

"Who?" I demanded. I was very cold, and the mist had gathered on my glasses so I could not see him.

"Remember the night you come here askin' me about a stranger walkin' by toward the Mullen's house. The night you went over there to see about some paperin'?"

"Yes," I said quickly. "When did you see him?"

The old man drew nearer. "Last night after dark. I was settin' by the winder and I heard something. Over cross the way there is a stable where Mullen keeps a few sheep an' the like. I heard 'em bleatin' like anything an' thought perhaps a fox or weasel was in among 'em.

"But before I could get my gun and git over there they was quiet. Well, I never thought any more about it till, while I was goin' out to the shed for more wood, I chanst to look across the road and there, against the street light, I seen that same feller walking toward the town.

"Seemed like he was carryin' somethin'. I never gave it any heed till all of a sudden I remembered you'd asked me concerning him, so I went on the porch and looked up and down the road, but there weren't a sign of him."

"Did you get a good look at the man this time?" I asked breathlessly.

"It was snowin' hard, an' what, with the dim light, I could just make out it was the same man I had seen that night 'bout two weeks ago."

I was frantic for him to continue. Here he had held the clew to the mystery under his nose if he had only the sense to go out and ask the man his business. He would have had a good look at him at any rate. "And was that all?" I asked.

"Yes an' no. Early this mornin' I went over to where I'd heard the noise and if that wasn't a young lamb lyin' on the snowdrift with its throat cut. No weasel had done it neither. I just throwed it back in the field. Knowed if Mullen found it he'd eat it, and, besides, it wasn't none of my business."

When he had finished what he had to say I rose and went with him to the door, and together we started across the cemetery to the vault. All of a sudden he stopped and pointed to the snow. "Look there."

I looked and saw some heavy tracks leading in the direction we were taking. They were comparatively fresh, and led directly to the vault. For some time they had stood before its gate, for the snow was trampled, and there by the side of the tomb, on a

clear patch of snow, were some drops of blood. The tracks had turned about and led away to the wall, where they disappeared in the maze of tracks in the snow of the road.

I stood looking at them in silence, and Mr. Smunn spoke. "Guess it's some curious party looking 'round. They's always like that where there's a mystery in the death of some one just buried." He was very cold, and, I saw, was anxious to have me finish my errand.

"Could you," I asked hesitatingly, "open the gate and let me step inside? I should like to tell Miss Eliza and Winifred I laid the flowers there myself."

The old man shook his head. "Sorry, Miss Hester, but it's against the rules. I'm sorry not to 'commodate you, but it's as good as losin' my place, openin' a vault without the written consent of the coroner in a case like this."

I was very much disappointed.

"Know the coroner?" he said.

I nodded.

"Well, guess you won't get no consent from him."

I saw it was useless, and really it did not matter. I placed the flowers I had brought, and together we went back across the cemetery yard.

On the way down to the village my mind was taken up with what I had found in the cemetery. So the stranger had returned. What was the blood upon the snow, and who had killed the lamb? I remembered the blood upon my own door, and for a moment I stood still in the road.

My mind was going in a circle as I passed through the village, but when I was almost home I remembered an errand. I had taken over the affairs of the household, and there was much to do. I welcomed the chance of action of some sort, and thought of the bills to be paid, the new servant to be employed, and saw I must take it upon myself.

At the door of the Citizen's Bank I paused. It was difficult to ask questions of Mr. Robertson, so I decided to speak to the president of the bank regarding expenses; to get his advice and act accordingly. I went to his little private office at the back of the building and found him sitting at his desk.

I had known him for years, and my little account was in their charge. He got up and shut the door after me.

"Sit down, Miss Posey," he said. "What can I do for you?"

His name was Charles Swope, and I had implicit confidence in him.

"Mr. Swope," I began, "as you know, I have been staying at the Robertson house and was with them through the tragedy."

He nodded his head.

"They have asked me to take over the affairs of the home—Mrs. Robertson is dead, her husband in jail, Miss Eliza is in no condition to be troubled about money, and neither is Winifred. I wonder if you would advise me as to what I shall do regarding money. There are the running expenses and bills to be paid."

Mr. Swope looked at me curiously, and I did not understand it.

"I happen to know Mrs. Robertson had her account with you," I began.

He stopped me with a gesture. "Miss Posey," he said, "I am in a peculiar position toward the Robertson family just now. I don't know what will be thought of my telling you this, but I am going to tell you. Mrs. Robertson, in the last few weeks, has drawn from our bank every cent she had on deposit, and has even realized on the securities she had with us. Her account was closed the day before she met her death."

He sat with finger tips together looking at me. For a moment I could not speak.

"But what—" I managed to say.

"That is all I can tell you, Miss Posey," he interrupted. "Perhaps at the other bank, but no, I do not think that likely. Mr. Robertson had some sort of disagreement with them. Still you might ask."

I was too surprised to move. For some time I sat there thinking. "But what are they to do," I asked at last, "if the money has disappeared?" I thought suddenly of the will and of its disappearance. How I wished I knew more of legal affairs.

I was going to ask more questions, but saw Mr. Swope had no kindly feeling for the family. Doubtless his bank lost a

valued client when Mrs. Robertson withdrew her money. When I rose to go he went to the door with me.

"I am sorry I cannot help you," he said again. "Perhaps if you would go to her sister for running expenses till this matter of the death and withdrawal is cleared—but that is all I can suggest."

I thanked him and started home. I had never seen Mr. Swope like that. Why had Mrs. Robertson closed her dealings with the Citizen's Bank, of which he was president? As I walked on toward the house I fell to wondering if he had told me all he knew.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THREE O'CLOCK AGAIN

WHEN I entered the door Mary was waiting for me in the hall. She beckoned me into the dining room and closed the door. "Mis' Hester," and I saw she was greatly agitated, "dar's been awful things happenin' since you went out. Er man come hyr with Mr. Allen an' dey's been in de parlor wid Mr. Bob talkin' and hollerin' at one anudder an' twict de phone rang an' ast fer Mr. Bob an' I's skeerd to git him out of dar."

I tried to reassure her. "Who is the man, Mary?" I asked.

"One ob em's er detecter or somethin'."

I saw I must quiet her, so I asked something about the housekeeping. But it only made matters worse.

"Law, Mis' Hester," she continued, "I don' see how I's gwine ter stay wid you all, now Carline's done struck down in her sin. I don' see how I's gwine ter stay. Dar's happenin's goin' on right under our noses an' dar's mo' tokens comin' an' comin'. Dis mornin' when I was drinkin' my tea dar was a cross in de tea leaves an' it's er sign of def sho as you's livin'."

I thought about the token I had had, of the blood sprinkled on my door. Suppose Mary knew of that. How long would she stay in the house?

As I went out into the hall the door opened and from the parlor came Bob with his face very red and his hair tumbled over his forehead. Behind him was the attorney and a stranger. They went to the door and with only a nod for me I saw the two men walk rapidly down the drive.

"Come in here, Miss Hester," Bob called. I could see he was very angry. "We've had a time since you went out. Mr. Allen has got a detective down from the city and has demanded that he be allowed to question us all.

"They kept Winifred in here until I couldn't stand it any longer and I opened the door and told them they had no consideration for a sick girl and if there were questions they wanted to ask they could ask me." He looked at me hard. "Miss Hester," he blurted, "what do you think Win knows about her mother's death?"

I was dumfounded. "Why, nothing! Absolutely nothing!" was all I could answer.

"That's what I told them," he said. "And they asked when you were coming back and to-morrow they want to talk to you."

"Well," I said. "I am ready for them. What did they ask you?"

Bob was still so angry at the grilling Winifred had received that he actually glared at me. "Oh, everything! Asked if Mr. Robertson had ever been unkind to her mother and a lot of rot like that. Asked if she had ever said she would take her own life or threatened it in any way. As though a woman who takes her life would go about boasting about it beforehand."

I motioned him to a chair. "Bob," I said, "I am going to ask you a question, and I want you to answer me. This has gone far enough. Why did Winifred give you a pistol the night you arrived from Trenton?"

For a second he was actually livid. He stood staring down at me and he half raised his hand, as though he would strike me. "Who, who told you that?" he said.

"Be quiet," I warned. "No one told me. I saw it for myself."

His mouth dropped open and he stared at me.

"You see," I continued, "I was coming up the drive behind you that night and saw Winifred come out of the house in the

snow and give you the pistol. But I saw something else. I saw you kiss her and then I knew you were in love."

Bob ran over to where I sat and dropped on his knee and took my hand in his. "You will not tell, Miss Hester? Not yet! I promise you it is all coming out right, and as God is my judge, Winifred and I are innocent of all knowledge of this as you are yourself."

I think I put my hand on his hair then. I remember looking into his earnest young eyes. "No," I said at last, "I will not tell. Now or ever."

Then I said: "You see, there was a time when your father and I—yes, once he held me as you held her that night she placed the pistol in your hand. That's why I am going to fight for you," I added simply.

It was then Bob threw his arms around my neck and kissed me.

After I had gone upstairs and quieted Winifred, I saw Bob going down the drive with the tray of supper things for Mr. Robertson at the jail. I waited more than an hour, but he did not return. About eight Mr. Allen and the detective were announced.

The latter was a nice young man, and I thought him very intelligent. He was not aggressive in his questioning, and I was surprised that Bob should have got the impression of him he did. They questioned me carefully and I told them all I knew—or rather all I thought they should know.

I began at the time I entered the house and told them even of Mrs. Robertson's letter to the manager of the Gayety Theater, because I could think of nothing else. They were greatly interested. Next I recounted the shot fired at three o'clock in the morning, three days before Mrs. Robertson met her death.

The detective asked me to show him the covering that had been laid over the feet of the dead woman and the blood spot in the carpet. I took them upstairs and did as they wished. For a long time he lay on his face examining the stain with a magnifying glass and took the coverlid to the light and examined that.

"Where has this been since the death of Mrs. Robertson?" he asked.

I told him it had been in the press near the door where it was kept when not in use on the lounge. He held it to the light.

"Something has been lately effaced," he said. "It looks as though some one with a strong brush had given it a scrubbing here at the middle."

I could scarcely believe my eyes. Where the doctor and I had discovered the stain which had escaped the coroner's eyes, was a streak of white where some strong cleaning fluid had been applied.

"Do you know if this streak has been here long?" the man asked me.

I remembered my promise to the doctor. "I am not familiar with the articles in the house, that is, enough to say positively." Then I added: "I do not remember seeing this before, however."

The man looked at me curiously. How I wanted to see the doctor just then. Here was I, Hester Posey, respectable seamstress, Episcopalian and a member of the Guild, actually hoodwinking the law and placing myself in an unpleasant position should the truth come out.

We folded the cover, placed it in the press from whence it was taken. After that we returned to the parlor and about ten o'clock the lawyer and the detective went away. At the door the young man paused.

"Tell me, Miss Posey, have you, by any chance, heard or seen anything strange since the death of old Caroline in the house? I mean any happening which you could not explain."

I thought of the footprints in the snow and the blood on my own door, but remembering Bob, I said steadily, "No, nothing unusual has happened in this house since then." I was actually weak when they closed the door and I heard the sound of their retreating footsteps down the creaking snow of the driveway.

A little after ten Dr. Morton called to ask after Winifred. I told him of the questions I had been asked and of my evading the detective. Together we got out the coverlid and examined it, and because I could think of no good reason for withholding it, I told of the footprints in

the cemetery and the blood marks on my own door.

He was so interested I had to go over the whole thing from the beginning to end a second time. After I had finished he walked the length of the room twice then he sat down before the fire and for a long time was lost in deep thought.

It was while we were sitting there that I heard Bob come in. I asked the doctor if he wanted to see him and he replied in the negative. I spoke a few words to Bob and asked him to be quiet going to his room as I hoped Winifred was asleep. When I returned the doctor was standing before the fire, his hands in his pockets.

"Miss Hester," he said. "I do not wish to alarm you, but I am going to ask you to let me stay in the house to-night. Mrs. Robertson's death was not the end of things here. Unless I am wrong, coupled with old Caroline's death, they were only the beginning. Don't ask me any questions now, only I would feel easier if you would let me stay. I will lie down on the couch in the library if you have no objections."

I saw he was in earnest and frankly I was very glad to know he was in the house. I told him I would leave my door open and look in on Winifred now and then, and if he should call I would hear him. I brought him a pillow and some blankets and left him for the night.

He asked that I extinguish the light, and when I went upstairs the house was in darkness. This was about twelve o'clock. At half past twelve the telephone rang and I heard Bob answer it in the upper hall and went to my door to listen.

I heard him say a few words and return to his room. He saw me in my door and mumbled something about fool reporters calling up at all hours of the night. Once I heard Bob moving about in his room and hoped he would not rouse Winifred. After that I must have dozed off.

At three o'clock I was awakened by a crash, then a smothered exclamation and the sound of a heavy body falling to the floor. A door slammed violently and all was still. I sprang up and ran into the hall and turned on the light. I ran to Bob's door, but he did not answer to my knock. I threw it open. The room was empty.

I went to the head of the stairs and switched on the light in the lower hall. At the foot of the stair, lying on his face, was Dr. Morton. I ran down the steps calling to him, but he did not move. As I bent over him I saw a slow trickle of blood creeping from under his head out across the waxed floor.

The front door was wide open, and from the blackness of the night the cold wind was blowing through the house.

CHAPTER XX

A HOUSE OF GLASS

KNEELING in the blast of icy air from the yard I pressed my handkerchief to the wound on Dr. Morton's forehead. He began to move his head from side to side and struggled to a sitting posture on the floor. His eyes opened and he came to his senses. With a lurch, which nearly sent me over backward, he rose to his feet and ran to the open door and stood looking out into the blackness of the yard.

He was swaying from side to side as he gripped the doorpost on either side of him and thrust his head forward, listening intently. "Has he gone?" he demanded of me, and I realized he meant Bob. At that moment I heard a noise from the foot of the yard.

It sounded like a wheel scraping on the side of a carriage as it is turned about in the road. The doctor reached his hand in his hip pocket and I saw him half draw a pistol. Springing down the step he ran without hat or coat down the driveway. At the same moment I heard the sound of wheels and a horse's hoofs rapidly departing down the road.

Above, Miss Eliza and Winifred were standing at the top of the stairs calling to me. I said something, I can't remember what, to quiet them and gathering my shawl about me ran down the drive after the doctor. After so many nights of excitement, to find some one stunned and not dead was positively a relief.

At the foot of the yard I came upon Dr. Morton. He was standing at the gate leaning his head on his arm and looking down the road. When I spoke to him he turned on me. "What are you doing here?" he demanded sharply.

"I found you unconscious on the hall floor," I said, "and bleeding profusely from a wound on your forehead. I heard a crash, a slamming door, and happen to know that Robert has disappeared. I think that warranted an investigation."

I was icy to him. What right had he to demand to know what I was doing? I saw he had taken no notice of my reply and was staring fixedly down the road. Then his mind seemed to clear a trifle.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Hester; I was violent and rude. I did not intend to be. Now do not question me, but go at once and stay with Winifred and Miss Eliza. Go quickly. I have reason to believe they—" here he paused and again stared down the road in the blackness of the night—"are not safe," he finished.

I confess a shudder ran down my back at that. I looked up toward the house; silhouetted in the light from the hall door were the figures of Winifred and Miss Eliza.

"Very well," I said. "I am going back, but you are in no condition to be standing here yourself."

As I turned away I saw he was clutching the pistol he had drawn from his pocket. "They would come this way, surely," I heard him mutter as I went back to the house.

Of course, there was a scene in the hall when I returned. I actually would have missed a nocturnal excitement as time went on. There had been but one quiet night in five and I was beginning not to dread them. "Nothing more than a burglar alarm," I said cheerfully as I came up. It was a case of being cheerful or hysterical and I chose the former.

Winifred broke away from Miss Eliza and ran to me. "Bob," she whispered, and I saw her look past me into the darkness. "Where has he gone?"

"I do not know, child," I said. My nerves were fraying, and I was inclined to be sharp. It seemed that every one had their private mystery. And here I was trying to solve them, yet kept as much in the darkness as an utter stranger. At that moment she caught sight of Dr. Morton coming up the drive.

I suppose she mistook him for Bob; anyway she sped past me out into the night and down the road. And she in only a flannel dressing gown and bedroom slippers. I put a detaining hand on Miss Eliza's arm. "Let her alone," I said. "She will be back in a moment, and the doctor will see to her."

If, when they entered the house, I expected to see a frightened and trembling Winifred, I was mistaken. As they neared the door they were deep in conversation, and as they came into the light I saw Winifred shake her head violently. The doctor tried to quiet her, but she drew sharply away and gave him a deadly look. Did Winifred know where Bob had gone, I wondered?

Miss Eliza left us, and the doctor and I sat in the lower hall. I asked for his story, and here is what he told me.

He had heard the phone ring and had taken up the receiver from downstairs and heard what passed when Bob had answered. All he could catch was a voice, a stranger's, saying, "By the gate at three." Bob had slammed up the receiver, and the doctor gathered he was to meet some one at three o'clock.

He therefore planned to be there at the same time. A little before three he crept to the foot of the stairs and heard some one moving about above. Thinking Bob planned to go out by the back way, he started up the stairs, intending to hide in the upper hall and see what happened. Half way up he heard a smothered exclamation, and almost at the same moment was struck a violent blow on the side of the head.

He reeled, caught at the banister and fell headlong down the stairs. As he lost consciousness there was the sensation of a heavy body passing over him. The next he knew I was pressing my handkerchief to the wound on his forehead.

As soon as it was light the doctor and I made an inspection of the grounds, and

I shall never forget his appearance. A purple lump on his forehead kept his hat at a rakish angle. This, coupled with the seriousness of our errand, was distinctly amusing. We walked twice around the house, but the result of our investigation was absolutely nihil..

I was frantic with anxiety over Bob's disappearance. When Winifred heard of it she went white as a sheet, and for the rest of the day sat staring out of the window or taking long walks with a black veil over her face.

The rest of that day was spent in seeing reporters and answering questions. The doctor's appearance, together with Bob's disappearance, set them off again, and it was with difficulty I avoided a " close up " from a moving picture camera with my hair in crimps and still clad in the dressing sack of the preceding night.

That was what happened the day following Bob's disappearance. Where he had gone I had not the slightest idea, and all effort on our part or that of the young detective to locate him failed.

The telephone girl could give no record of the call the night before, save that a stranger had come into the office and used the pay station behind her desk. She had not seen his face, but thought he was a tall, middle-aged man in a long coat. Well, every one wore coats at that season in Winterville, and I looked severely at the girl's sleepy, stupid face.

I thought of the stranger who had passed the Smunn cottage at the cemetery. But how could I find out if it were the same? The road was too well broken to show anything, and except for a vague impression in the doctor's mind as to which direction the horse's hoofs had taken, we were as much in the dark as ever.

The following night passed quietly. The district attorney and the doctor had a long talk that afternoon, and the result had been that the young detective was to stay with the doctor in the house that night. I didn't like strangers about, yet neither did I like the things that were happening, so I made no objection.

Well, if they expected anything exciting to happen in the night they were disappointed. The doctor occupied his former place on the sofa in the library, and by this time had a bandage over his forehead and was more respectable looking. The young detective asked for an armchair in the upper hall near the door leading to Mrs. Robertson's room, and about twelve the house was quiet.

At eleven Miss Eliza and I went into the kitchen and fixed a pitcher of milk and a plate of sandwiches for the watchers and placed them on a table in the upper hall. They declared they had come to watch, and not eat, but first thing I saw next morning was the empty tray and pitcher on the table. Besides, there were plenty of cigarette stubs about. The hall carpet smells of them yet.

But when I went downstairs that morning I saw something else. For all the watching we might as well have lived in a house of glass. Upstairs in his chair, his mouth half open, the detective slept the sleep of the just, while downstairs in the library on the sofa Dr. Morton was following his example, only he was snoring. Nevertheless I gave little heed to them, for the front door stood wide open to the icy morning air, and through the hall leading to the back door, which was open, were the heavy muddy footprints of a man.

CHAPTER XXI

HOMELESS, PENNILESS

HE happenings of that night were discovered by the reporters about eight o'clock, before I had had time to see about breakfast for the family. I left the doctor and the detective berating one another, and went to the door to beg the sleepy looking young men to either come in and have breakfast with us or wait until we had finished. They did come in and were pathetically grateful for the coffee I sent into the library.

Dr. Morton was seen carrying the milk pitcher I had left with them the night before into the parlor. I wondered at the time if he thought there wouldn't be enough breakfast to go around, considering the arrival of the reporters, which all goes to

show that, in my excitement and self assertiveness, I was not as sharp that morning as I might have been.

Well, I have never blamed myself for what happened that day. I was nearly crazy about Bob and had got so accustomed to strange happenings in the night that I wouldn't have cared if a troop of cavalry had passed through the lower hall if they had only brought Bob back. Besides, the carpet didn't really belong to me.

Soon after the young detective departed. About nine o'clock he came back in triumph. He had with him a disreputable looking individual in a broken silk hat and mangy looking fur coat and carrying a long whip in his hand. He worked in a livery stable at the other end of town, and I had only seen him a few times in my life.

Like his hack, he only came out for weddings and funerals. I was allowed to come into the parlor with them, and my first detective work of the day was discovering that our visitor smelled honestly of the barn.

The detective began his questioning, and here is the story the man told. At a little after twelve the night before a man he had never seen before had come to his stable and roused him from his sleep. Said there was sickness in the neighborhood and it might be necessary for one of the family to leave for the junction to catch the early train to consult a doctor in Trenton.

The stranger told him to be ready with his hack and drive past the Robertson house at exactly three o'clock. He had been curious as to his errand, knowing of the recent tragedy, but the bill the stranger placed in his hand was a large one, and he had asked no questions. He drove to the gate at the appointed time and waited some minutes in the snow.

He had seen a light spring up in an upstairs window, and a moment later the front door flung open, then banged so violently he could hear it down in the street. He saw some one, a man, running down the drive. His fare was much excited, had sprung into the cab, called out, "the junction," slamming the door, and he had driven away. As he went down the street he had looked back at the house and saw a second figure, somewhat indistinct, running down the drive.

Twice his passenger urged him to hurry, and once, when the cab had stuck in a drift, he got out and helped clear away the snow with his own hands. They had reached the junction before daylight, and his man had given him ten dollars and told him to get back to town as soon as possible, explaining he was waiting for a train to the south.

That was all.

The detective and the doctor questioned him fully, but failed to shake his story. The man was evidently telling the truth. At last, as he was leaving, he turned from the door. "Tell ye, boss, thar's one thing I might say to you, since you don't think I was up to nothin' an' ain't goin' to get me into trouble. That there stranger never took no train to the south."

The detective took a step forward. "Where did he go then?" he demanded.

"Well," replied the driver, "I turned round and seen how my horse was blowing. I drove a hundred yards up the road and give him a rest. Just then I seen the through freight comin' an' heard her blow. I'm a railroader myself—that is I wunst was. She slowed down for water, an' I seen the young feller slip over to where she stopped and slide on them rods as neat as you could have done the trick yourself, sir."

"Where was the train going?" asked the doctor, not heeding the allusion to his abilities as a hobo.

"She's the through freight fer Philly, Trenton, and the East," the man said, with a show of superior knowledge.

Dr. Morton glanced at the detective. After that the driver was allowed to go. The two men left the room, and I stood looking after the shabby figure disappearing down the drive. Just then the telephone rang. The call was for me, and I went at once to the phone.

It was Mr. Horner, the real estate man, or realtor, I believe they prefer now to be called, and he asked if I could come to his office that morning. I was faintly surprised, as I could not think why he should want to see me. I told him I would be down

presently, and, after getting ready, went in to say a few words to the reporters.

The editor of the *Weekly Examiner* was there, and king among the representatives of the larger papers in the East. The Robertsons had been of considerable prominence, due to Mrs. Robertson's wealth, and the double mystery had given the country another thrill.

Miss Eliza had taken to her bed and full authority had been given to me, so I told them they might take as many pictures as they liked, and went off down the drive to Mr. Horner's office.

He was standing at the door expecting me, and asked me into his private office. As soon as I had warmed my hands he began:

"Miss Posey, I understand you have, in a way, taken charge up at the Robertson property?"

Realtors never say house or home. Everything is property to them.

"Yes," I said. "Miss Eliza has collapsed, and Winifred is in no condition to see to things." But I did not guess what he was driving at.

"I wonder," he said at last, "if you could give me permission to show the house to-morrow afternoon?"

I only stared at him.

"I realize things are a little upset there," he said easily, "but my clients are pressing, and really I haven't the right to refuse them. Perhaps," he added, "if the house is not available for inspection just now I might persuade them only to go over the acreage at the back."

"Really, Mr. Horner," I said, "I fear we are talking at cross purposes. The Robertson house is not for sale, at least not to my knowledge. Nothing is farther from the minds of the family. Please explain that to your client."

The expression on the man's face puzzled me. "What?" he said after a pause. "Miss Posey, the Robertson property was sold by me a little over one week ago to the railroad company, who have always wanted it. The property is owned by them in fee simple, and the money was paid by me in cash to Mrs. Robertson's own hand."

I must have gone white just then. I remember I sank back in my chair and stared at the man.

"You mean," he demanded, "that the family are in ignorance of all this?"

"Yes," I managed to say. "No one has ever dreamed of such a thing. Did Mr. Robertson know?" I demanded.

"It was not necessary for him to know," Mr. Horner said. "The property stood in his wife's name, belonged to her, and by the laws of the State she could sell when she chose, without her husband's consent.

"Some months ago I came to them with this offer and Robertson practically ordered me off the ground. Doubtless you knew of the coolness between us. The whole village knew. Well, about two weeks ago Mrs. Robertson came to me and asked if I still had the offer.

"I replied the railroad company stood ready to give even a larger figure if she would close with them immediately. I arranged a conference here in my office, and the very day before she met her death I handed over the money to her."

I could only clasp and unclasp my hands. "But what," I said at last, "has become of the money?"

Mr. Horner shook his head. "I have no way of knowing. The sum I turned over to Mrs. Robertson in cash was two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

I gasped at that. I had had no idea the property was so valuable. "But did no one, even the family, know? Miss Eliza? Winifred?" I asked.

Mr. Horner shook his head. Rising he drew a paper from a strong box on his desk. "Here is a copy of the deed. It is signed, sealed, and delivered. The condition of the sale was absolute confidence on my part. Believe me, Miss Posey, I should not think of asking such a thing at such a time, but the property now belongs to the railroad, and they are ready to begin surveying for the new line. Besides, they had waited almost two years to get control of it."

"Tell me, Mr. Horner," I said finally, "did the sale include the house as well as the rest of the property?"

He nodded. "The house and, with the

exception of certain reservations as to personal belongings, its entire contents."

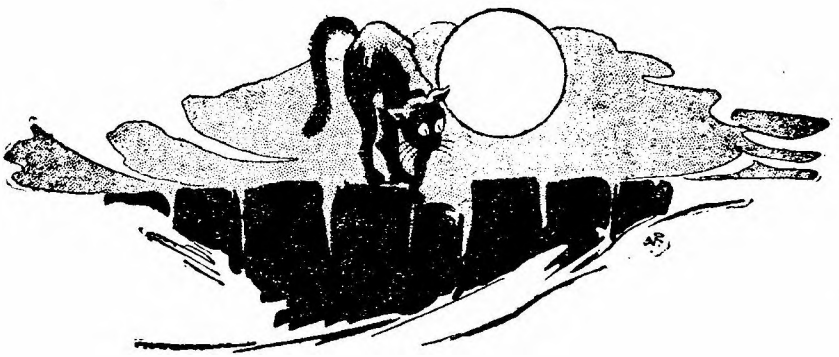
I was utterly amazed. So Winifred was homeless, and I had nothing to offer her but my three room cottage. And what about Miss Eliza? She had a bare two thousand a year in her own right, and gave most of that to the church. I thought of the will, the will which had disappeared, and, because I was almost frantic with my anxiety, I told Mr. Horner of my conversation with the bank. He was greatly interested by what I had to say.

"But what—what can she have wanted with the money? And where has it gone? In all about four hundred thousand dollars?"

For many minutes we sat there staring at one another. Finally I collected myself and rose to go. I told him before I left that since the place was sold, of course the owners could examine it at any time they chose.

The realization came to me as I started up the street that upon my shoulders rested the task of telling Winifred she was homeless. And now there was no Bob to help me with my burden.

TO BE CONCLUDED



Dr. Cotter was behaving like a madman

THE CLEW IN THE DUST

By Jack Bechdolt

CAPTAIN CORNISH GAVE AWAY THE BRIDE BEFORE HE MADE THE ARREST ON A CHARGE OF MURDER

ON the day of his Uncle Edgar's funeral, Dr. Meredith Haskell was drunk and ribald. In his madness he was heard to curse the name of his benefactor, expressing the hope that he had sent his uncle to roast in hell. The ugly fact was plain, unmistakable. The Haskell kin heard it that night from the lips of Mary Sewall, Dr. Haskell's own housekeeper.

A plain, middle-aged woman, Mary Sewall had served Dr. Meredith Haskell for years. Her loyalty to the doctor always had been unquestioned. Her loyalty to the truth was even stronger, as everybody knew. She was a devout church-goer and a stern moralist.

Mary Sewall came to a conference of the Haskell kin, held the evening of the day of Edgar's funeral. Old Edgar Haskell's will had been read and Mary Sewall knew that she had been handsomely remembered, as well remembered as all the blood relatives excepting Dr. Meredith, who inherited the bulk of a large estate. Nobody could possibly impute any base motive to Mary Sewall's testimony.

"You've all been asking why Dr. Meredith didn't attend the funeral," said Mary Sewall. "He was drunk. Disgracefully drunk and cursing his uncle's name—"

"Impossible!" Sylvia Braun exclaimed. Sylvia Braun was a second cousin, engaged to marry Dr. Meredith Haskell. A slender, patrician, dark-haired woman, she leaned forward suddenly from the irregular circle of chairs in Edgar Haskell's drawing-room. Her pale cheeks flushed. "Mary, you're mistaken. I don't believe a word of that!

Meredith doesn't drink. Besides, I saw him at noon, sober—"

"And I saw him at noon, sober," Peter Haskell exclaimed. Peter Haskell sat next to Sylvia Braun. He was in the late forties, a powerfully built, rather stocky man. He was the only Haskell other than the deceased Edgar who was rich. Peter Haskell's fortune had been accumulated in South America and its possession left him financially disinterested in the affairs of the family.

"I talked to him just after lunch, Mary," Peter said. "He was sober—"

"I know it," the servant said. "Less than two hours later he was boiling drunk. It was when he didn't come downstairs and I went to tell him to hurry for the funeral that I found him. He was tearing up and down his room, laughing like a madman. He was staggering and reeling and jumping over chairs—"

"Jumping over chairs!" Wallace Haskell exclaimed. Wallace was a lawyer, a fat, moist-skinned man who had never been very successful. Wallace had hoped all his life that his Uncle Edgar would leave the bulk of his fortune to him. He was a bitterly disappointed man since the reading of Edgar's will. Now his prominent eyes stared at Mary as he said in his court room manner: "Mary Sewall, remember that what you say is a serious matter. We are witnesses to it. If this is false—"

"He was jumping over chairs," Mary Sewall repeated grimly. "I saw him. He staggered and laughed like a fool. Then, when I tried to remonstrate he shouted at me: 'Funeral? What the hell do I care. The old goat's dead, isn't he? I ought to know. I hope right now he's roasting over the coals of hell, where I sent him.' Dr. Meredith Haskell said that to me. Shouted it at me, laughing all the time like a drunken fool." Mary Sewall looked grimly from face to face of the family circle, defying anybody to challenge the truth of one word.

The Haskell kin gasped. Two maiden aunts clasped each other hysterically. Sylvia Braun, her cheeks blazing, tried to make herself heard, insisting that Dr. Meredith was out of his head, that he had suffered a nervous breakdown, that they must get him medical attention at once.

"Medical attention?" Mary Sewall sniffed. "I called a doctor, Dr. Binney, from the village. He was lying asleep on his own rug when the doctor came. We got him into bed and he's there now. And Dr. Binney says there's nothing in the world wrong with him except acute alcoholism. I guess you all know what them words mean!"

"Stop!" Wallace Haskell exclaimed, pointing a threatening finger. "Mary, refresh your memory. You have quoted Dr. Meredith as saying: 'The old goat's dead—I hope right now he's roasting over the coals of hell, *where I sent him.*' Do you want us to understand you have quoted Dr. Meredith exactly?"

"Word for word."

"You will take your oath to this?"

"I'll take my oath to this anywhere, anytime. It's the truth."

Wallace Haskell turned on his relatives with a spreading gesture. "You hear that? And this is the man who attended our Uncle Edgar as his personal physician. The man who was with him, alone, the night he died!"

Out of the silence Peter Haskell exclaimed: "Oh, stop that nonsense. You'll find, if you look—"

"I mean to look," Wallace said slowly, with dire emphasis on his words. "I mean to look, Peter! There is more here than meets the eye. May I remind you all that Edgar Haskell's will was radically altered less than six weeks ago? *After* Edgar was taken ill. *And after* Dr. Meredith Haskell became his one and only personal physician—responsible for his life—or death!"

One of the hysterical aunts cried out: "Meredith Haskell poisoned him for his money!"

"That's a lie," Sylvia Braun cried. Peter Haskell caught her arm and spoke soothingly: "Take it easily, dear."

Said another of the kin eagerly: "I'm not one to accuse any person unjustly, *but*—well, everybody knows that Edgar had put me down for an annuity of two thousand dollars. And now—"

Aunt Helen Ebey, a thin, stringy woman with queer, waxy skin exclaimed: "What's the sense of fooling ourselves? Everybody knows that Meredith Haskell never earned enough to support himself until he got hold of the old man. He talked him into changing his will and he got rid of him. It's plain as print—"

"Stop!" Wallace Haskell exclaimed. "Stop, all of you. This is a grave matter. A matter of life and death. This is a matter for the law—"

"Oh, no!" Sylvia Braun began. but Peter Haskell urged her to wait.

"A serious charge has been made. The most serious in legal jurisprudence," Wallace went on, infatuated with his own solemnity. "This is no place. We are not competent—I say to you solemnly we must not discuss this matter or attempt to judge. The proper steps must be taken. Permission can be had from the county authorities and an expert retained to examine the body of Edgar Haskell, late deceased. I myself know of an excellent toxicologist—"

"What's that?" Mary Sewall snapped.

"A physician who is expert in detecting poisons, Mary—"

"You're going to dig up the old man's body and see if Dr. Meredith poisoned him?"

Wallace turned to them all, his gesture begging them to reason with him: "I ask you, all of our family, under these circumstances, in view of these startling revelations, what less can we do?"

II

MEREDITH HASKELL met his two callers in the living room of his bachelor flat. The doctor was a youngish man, tall, with red hair, lean and keen of face. He had delightful blue eyes that usually held a friendly twinkle of humor. Just now the eyes were bloodshot and about his head was bound a damp towel. Meredith had thrown on a dressing gown when Peter Haskell and Sylvia Braun were announced.

"Peter, what do you think?" the doctor exclaimed, his arm about Sylvia who had gone to him the moment he came into the room. "That fool Binney's just been here. He says I have been beastly drunk all afternoon. Says I got drunk and missed Edgar's funeral—"

"Of course, you didn't!" Sylvia said, pressing closer. "You've been ill, dear—a breakdown."

"Ill—I'll say I've been ill!" Meredith pushed uncertainly toward a roomy chair, leaning his weight on Sylvia. He dropped into its seat heavily and groaned, one hand to his aching head: "Peter, old top," he said appealingly, "did I get drunk? On the level, did I?"

"Utter nonsense," Peter Haskell said stoutly. His florid, broad face expressed stalwart belief in the young doctor. "But why ask me? You know yourself—"

"Peter—Sylvia—that's the awful part of it! I don't know! I can't remember, You were with me, Peter. After lunch—"

"Right, old man!"

"We did have a drink. A hooker of brandy—"

"My suggestion," Peter contributed. Sylvia turned a startled look upon him. "Merry was all in," Peter explained. "Done up with the last few nights. He hasn't had a chance to sleep since Edgar's last stroke, Sylvia. He needed a drink. But it was only one, Merry. I saw you put the bottle away."

"Of course. And I remember shaking hands with you. Said I'd see you at the funeral. And then—" Meredith groaned. "My God, do you realize I can't remember a thing after that? Not one thing! but from Mary Sewall's looks—and Binney's reports— and that bottle of brandy!

"Peter, I found it thrown under the table. Found it half an hour ago. The whole quart was gone. Did I go clear off my chump and drink that quart of brandy? Did I break up furniture and act like a madman? If I did, I tell you I can't remember a minute of it. What have I done? What did I say? Why do Mary and Dr. Binney look at me as if I'd committed a murder? Will somebody please tell me?"

Meredith stared curiously at Sylvia. She was crying. He turned to Peter. The

rich bachelor tried to avoid his eye. His ruddy face was grave and shocked. He said slowly: "I think you ought to know. I'd better tell him, Sylvia?"

"Yes, Peter—"

Meredith interrupted wildly: "Well, stop looking at me that way! What's the matter with you two? Even if a drink went to my head when I was all fagged out, why treat it like—like a murder?"

"Don't say that word," Sylvia shuddered. "Meredith, you don't know what you're saying—"

"You'll have to know now," Peter said. He told the bewildered doctor of Mary Sewall's report and the result of the family conference.

Beads of sweat stood out on Meredith Haskell's gray skin. He tried several times before he made his words clear. "Mary Sewall is crazy! I couldn't—have said—that!"

"If it was anybody but Mary—" Peter began.

Sylvia snapped at him: "Peter! If you believe that of Meredith—"

Peter sprang up, shocked. "I believe it? God forbid!"

"It's the most damnable nonsense I ever listened to," the doctor groaned. "I—why, it's so absurd it isn't worth denying!"

"Of course, it isn't," Sylvia echoed. "Mary's gone crazy—"

"Yes," Peter agreed, "but—"

They both watched him, fascinated by their terror. "Don't you see?" Peter reasoned. "There's only one thing to do, of course. The whole family has heard the story. Some of them believe—"

"A lot of soreheads! Believe me, it wasn't my fault Uncle Edgar cut down their bequests. I didn't know a damned thing about his new will. I'll swear it. They'll accuse me of murder because of a few dirty dollars—"

"Just what I'm trying to show you both," Peter agreed. "They don't think. They just feel. And act. This thing has been said. Started. It's got to be answered. Finished. There's only one way."

"Let them investigate. I'm not worried about that," Meredith groaned.

Sylvia still protested: "No! They'll smear your name with dirt. No matter how innocent you are, once this gets known, there will always be people, mean, spiteful, *little* people who will say—"

The two men talked her down in chorus. "The thing has been said," Meredith cried. "It's got to be answered—"

"I'll see that it is answered," Peter was saying at the same time. "Wallace likes to take the initiative. All right, I'll stand behind Wallace and see that he goes through, all the way. I'll make him do it, if it takes all the money and pull I've got. They've got to prove their murder charge, Meredith, or shut up forever."

"Right!" The young doctor was on his feet, grasping Peter's hand. "You're the only one in the lot with a clear head, Peter. Thank God you're my friend!"

"Sylvia's friend. Sylvia comes first, Meredith. With both of us, you know." Peter rose abruptly. His expression was grave. "I'll wait for you in the car, Sylvia," he said.

Dr. Meredith took the girl in his arms. They clung to each other without talk. Sylvia freed herself finally. She said in a low voice, tremulous, brooding with tenderness, "Don't worry, Merry!"

Meredith promised soberly, "I won't. But Sylvia—good God—what did happen to me—to-day?"

Alone in his big closed motor Peter Haskell waited for Sylvia, without a trace of expression on his broad face.

III

DR. ADOLPH COTTER was a small man endowed with great professional dignity. Long ago Dr. Cotter had tried to overcome the insignificance of his physical being by garbing himself in a long, skirted coat, by wearing spats and a tall hat, and by stringing a broad ribbon through the glasses that perched on his sharp nose.

Dr. Cotter devoted his greatest enthusiasm to the study of poison. He was honest and efficient, and often appeared in criminal proceedings as an expert witness, sometimes for the State, sometimes against the State.

Dr. Cotter sat behind his big desk and turned his shrewd, beady eyes upon his caller, Peter Haskell. The doctor had removed his glasses and dangled them by the broad black ribbon while he inquired Mr. Haskell's business with the deference due to a man of great fortune and some influence in the city of Shelburne.

"I understand, doctor," Peter Haskell began, "that you have just completed your autopsy on the body of my late uncle?"

"Yes. Completed to-day, Mr. Haskell."

"You have made—h'm—a report, I suppose?"

"I have," Cotter said composedly. His eyes turned ever so slightly toward an envelope lying upon his desk. Peter Haskell noticed the slight gesture, but gave no sign of intelligence.

"I suppose, doctor, your report will go to the county prosecutor?"

Dr. Cottor joined his finger tips and said, as though speaking by rote, "I was commissioned by the county prosecutor to undertake an autopsy upon the body of the late Edgar Haskell, recently deceased. My instructions were to examine the body as I saw fit, to ascertain if death had been caused in any other manner than by a natural breakdown of the heart. I was particularly to ascertain if there were traces of poison in sufficient quantity to cause a death."

"Exactly," Peter Haskell agreed, for the doctor ceased speaking them. The doctor said no more. Peter shifted uneasily in his chair and summoned a smile of apology. "That's very interesting, doctor. I suppose you—h'm—made the usual tests and investigations?"

"Yes, sir." Another silence. Cotter stared at the rich man over his joined finger tips.

Peter leaned forward, his manner confidential. "Perhaps you know my interest in this case, Dr. Cotter?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"It's rather a personal matter. A young relative of mine, Dr. Meredith Haskell, attended Edgar on his death bed—"

"Yes, I have heard that."

"Owing to a curious circumstance, the story was circulated that Meredith had—well, had ended Edgar's life—deliberately—in order to inherit a considerable fortune."

"Murder," Cotter said, composedly.

"Yes. I suppose it might get to be called that. Well, doctor! Meredith Haskell is very close to me. A dear friend. Much more than a kinsman. To be quite frank, I am entirely responsible for your being assigned to this case. I determined to end this ugly rumor in the only way possible. I had this investigation started, and used my influence to retain you—knowing that the family could not find a more competent or honest authority anywhere." Peter Haskell made a slight bow to accompany his pleasant smile. Dr. Cotter nodded stiffly. He never smiled.

The rich man waited, without getting what he hoped for. "I see that I must be entirely frank," he exclaimed. "Because of my love for Meredith Haskell I'm naturally the most interested person in this investigation. As much so as Meredith himself. More, by heaven! Doctor, you know I'm a man of means. Financial considerations are nothing to me. In this case, absolutely nothing. Here's the situation. For the sake of my kinsman, my best friend, I want to know what's in that report you have just finished. I want to tell you, in absolute confidence—"

"Yes," Cotter nodded unexpectedly, "I thought that was it, Mr. Haskell."

"Nobody will ever know. It's between us two, man to man. You understand. And—wait, Dr. Cotter! A moment!" Peter drew a check book from his pocket. Consulting its stub he numbered a check, dated it, made it out to "Cash" and signed his name. The amount called for he left a blank. He pushed the check toward Cotter, remarking gently, "I think you may know that my bank balance is always good for any amount up to two hundred thousand."

"A bribe," Cotter said composedly. Nothing more.

Peter Haskell flushed. "Call it anything you like! I tell you I'm pretty desperate, doctor! Because of poor old Meredith I must know what's in that report. I've got to know it before anybody

else. And I understand that, so far, you alone know what evidence you found in your autopsy—"

"Yes, sir," Cotter agreed stiffly.

"Do anything you like with that check! Fill it out to suit yourself. But let me know!"

"Impossible!"

"Don't say that, doctor—"

"I do say it, Mr. Haskell. I was retained to make this autopsy by the county prosecutor. Until my information is in the hands of that official and he has acted as he sees fit, no living soul shall ever learn from me what is in this report." As he spoke Dr. Cotter touched the envelope that lay on the desk in front of him.

"Impossible!" he repeated. "No living soul shall ever have that information—never, Mr. Haskell. Never—*from my lips!*"

Dr. Cotter had turned the envelope between his fingers. With a sudden start of interest Peter Haskell saw that the envelope had not yet been sealed. He froze to rapt attention as Dr. Cotter pushed back his chair from his desk and rose. "You must excuse me, a moment," Cotter said stiffly. "I have overlooked a memorandum for my secretary. My secretary has gone home for the day, but I would like to leave a note upon her desk."

Dr. Cotter laid the long envelope containing his report back on his desk. He picked up another paper and left the room. It did not escape Peter Haskell's watchful eye that the doctor had picked up, with the second paper, the blank check he had passed toward him.

Peter Haskell seized the long envelope the moment Cotter had left the private office. He slipped out the inclosure, read its typewritten page hurriedly, then folded it and replaced it. He was careful to place the envelope exactly where Cotter had left it lying.

The rich man sat huddled in his chair. His lower lip drooped thoughtfully, and he twisted it between thumb and finger while he pondered. The signs of deep thought vanished from his face as Dr. Cotter returned, after an absence of five minutes.

Peter rose, smiling slightly. His hand extended toward Dr. Cotter and the smile became more cordial. "I thank you for your patience, doctor. And I congratulate you on your principles!"

Dr. Cotter took the extended hand and allowed his own hand to be squeezed. "Good day, Mr. Haskell," he said solemnly.

"Good day," Peter Haskell said gently. "Or, in the fine old phrase, God be with you!" The rich man let himself through the door into Dr. Cotter's outer office.

Dr. Cotter remained standing behind his desk, watching him go. When the door closed he remained standing, staring at its panels, solemn as always. But something of his nervous tension demanded expression and could not be denied.

Dr. Cotter raised the hand which Peter had shaken and passed it over his bald head and down his face, smoothing and soothing the aching muscles. The hand shook noticeably, for Dr. Cotter was laboring under intense excitement. Dr. Cotter was only human—and had not been, heretofore, a rich man.

IV

IT was past five o'clock, an hour later, that Wallace Haskell, puffing gently with his own importance, opened the door to Dr. Cotter's outer office. The lawyer's round face was somewhat flushed, his protuberant eyes gleamed with purpose.

As the delegated leader of the Haskell family in this investigation of Edgar's death, Wallace felt his importance. And he considered that he had a duty. The duty fell in beautifully with his own intense curiosity. He wanted to know exactly what conclusions Dr. Cotter had reached after the autopsy on Edgar's body. He had reasonably definite assurance that Dr. Cotter would tell him—a Haskell—and the leader of the Haskells.

Wallace pushed open the reception room door and saw an empty office. But as he entered, the door to the inner room, the private office and laboratory, flew open suddenly. Dr. Meredith Haskell dashed out.

Meredith stopped short at the door and

gaped at his kinsman. The young doctor's face was gray and his look wild. Wallace saw him back up against the wood and glass partition and lean heavily. He seemed out of breath.

"Well, Meredith," the lawyer remarked stiffly. "It's a bit strange, your being here! In view of the circumstances—well, rather odd, isn't it?"

"Is it?" Meredith said tonelessly. "Odd, you think—"

"Now pull yourself together, Meredith! Let's act like two reasonable men. I didn't instigate this investigation, you know. I don't say that, personally. I believe a word of any of these rumors that have been flying about. So we need feel no personal antagonism—"

"Antagonism? No!" Meredith said it so suddenly and queerly that the lawyer opened his mouth and forgot to close it. "You came about that report, Wallace?"

"I came to see Dr. Cotter—"

"To learn what he found out? The autopsy, I mean—"

"Yes. Perhaps that, among other things—"

"Oh, yes. Among other things! Well, I came for the same reason, Wallace. Got here three or four minutes ahead of you. I had to know what Cotter had found out. Just like you!" Meredith made a nervous gesture with his two hands. His lips twisted into something like a sardonic grin. "We came on a wild-goose chase—so far as Cotter is concerned!"

Wallace felt a sudden sinking of his heart. Why was the doctor staring at him in that way! Why did he talk in this peculiar manner, almost as if he knew some joke. And the joke was on Wallace Haskell! The lawyer turned red and a little angry. "I don't know what you mean, I'm sure. Perhaps Dr. Cotter won't talk to you. He certainly can have no objection to talking to me. Not under the circumstances—"

"He won't," Meredith said with sudden, vehement positiveness. "Not even to you. Not under any circumstances. Look here, Wallace! I was just running out to call help."

Meredith opened the door he had so recently closed. He held it for his kinsman, who stepped forward reluctantly, suspiciously. "Good Lord!" Wallace exclaimed. "Good Lord in heaven!" He began to back away from the door and from Meredith.

Meredith spoke savagely. "That's the way I found him. Haven't touched a thing. Hear what I'm telling you, Wallace? I may need you to bear witness. Remember, not a thing touched. I found Dr. Cotter exactly as you see him now."

"What did it?" Wallace whispered shakily.

"I don't know."

"But you're a doctor!"

"I tell you I didn't try to find out. I didn't try to find out anything, except make sure he's dead. I just came in ahead of you, on the same errand that brought you. I was going out—to call the police—when we met. Remember I told you that, Wallace Haskell, or I'll make you remember!"

V

CAPTAIN FRED CORNISH of the Shelburne police brought with him in the department car a police surgeon and a young newspaper man, John Wells. The three men found a patrolman already in Dr. Cotter's office. To him they intrusted temporary custody of Wallace and Dr. Meredith Haskell while they closeted themselves in the private office with the mortal remains of Dr. Adolph Cotter.

They had no particular reason to doubt that Cotter lay as Meredith Haskell had found him, on the rug by his desk, his small body grotesquely contorted. He was not a pleasant sight. Certainly not one to invite disturbance by his discoverer.

Captain Cornish, a big, athletic fellow with a shrewd, homely face, stared and bit his lip thoughtfully. John Wells, newspaper man, leaned nonchalantly on his malacca stick and hoped that he did not show the shock that he felt. The physician knelt beside the body without any emotion except keen professional interest.

"An overtaxed heart," the doctor murmured presently. "At fifty a man ought

to be careful of things like that—and Cotter looks as if he'd been running a foot race! What in Heaven's name did he do, that brought this on?"

Captain Cornish looked slowly about the private office. A chair had been overturned. A number of books had been knocked off their shelf to the floor where they sprawled with broken backs and twisted pages. A coat tree lay prostrate.

John Wells, who had followed Cornish's glance, hazarded slowly: "Maybe it was a fight? Looks like it."

"Not a sign of it," the police surgeon remarked cheerfully. "Looks more like a jag—except everybody knows Cotter was a rabid prohibitionist. Or dope. Look here, captain!"

Cornish bent over the body and the newspaper man looked over his shoulder. The medical man indicated a slight smear of brown on Cotter's cheek. It traversed the bridge of the nose and extended below the wing onto the upper lip. It looked almost like a smear of iodine.

"And here!" the doctor added briskly. "It came from his hand. Look!"

Across the dead man's index finger, on the inner side, was trace of the same brown smear. The doctor was using a pocket magnifying glass. "Dust," he announced. "Fine particles of brown dust—"

"Which he could easily get off the furniture or one of those books," Wells drawled.

Cornish said: "No, he didn't! Look at this office. Clean as a hospital! Look over those books. I'll bet you'll find they haven't a trace of dust on them. Besides this is some kind of brown stuff and city dust is black—and grittier. Look for a jar or bottle or box, John. Something with brown, velvety dust in it. If it's some sort of dope he was taking, it must be around here."

"I think we can do something with this at the laboratory," the surgeon remarked. He began removing the traces, wiping them onto surgical gauze which he took from a tightly sealed bottle.

Cornish picked up the long, white envelope his quick eye spied on Cotter's desk. "Looks like a note. Might be suicide," he murmured. He opened the unsealed envelope and glanced over its inclosure. Then he added: "Well, he did one thing before he died! He finished up his report in the Haskell autopsy."

John Wells turned from his fruitless search of the room. "What does he say, Fred?"

"Guess," Cornish remarked with a grim smile, and placed the envelope in his pocket beside his wallet. He added in an undertone meant for Wells: "I'll save it for you, John. But first I'm going to talk to those Haskells out there. And I don't want them to know what this says until they tell their stories."

VI

WHEN Cornish and Wells returned to the reception room they found two new visitors with Wallace and Meredith Haskell. One was a broad-faced, prosperous man of middle age. Wallace Haskell introduced him at one, "I think you know my cousin, Mr. Peter Haskell, Captain Cornish?"

"Heard of you often," Cornish admitted with a nod and a look of inquiry.

Wallace explained: "I took the liberty of asking Mr. Haskell here. In view of Dr. Cotter's connection with affairs in our family, I thought it proper—"

"No objection," Cornish agreed. "If Mr. Haskell can enlighten us any about—that—in there—"

Peter Haskell smiled regretfully. "There, I'm afraid I'll have to be excused. The first I heard of this was from Wallace when he telephoned just now. A terrible affair!"

"Yes," Cornish said noncommittally, and let his look stray toward the other newcomer. He was squat, middle-aged, with an enormous mustache and curly gray hair.

He wore a black alpaca coat, rubbed shiny, and shapeless gray trousers and a cloth cap perched at the back of his head. As Cornish met his eye he ducked his head and crossed himself hurriedly.

"He's got something to tell you," the patrolman whispered hoarsely to his chief. "Name's Vespucci. Got the shoe-shining job in this building. Heard of the case and came around to volunteer his story."

Cornish pulled a chair to the window where he could survey the others. He opened his notebook, shook his fountain pen to insure its flow and remarked after jotting down a date: "I will ask you gentlemen to describe just when and how you came into this office and discovered Dr. Cotter's body. Dr. Haskell, first."

Meredith Haskell took a chair the patrolman placed for him. The young doctor was composed, rather pale and serious.

"I came here to learn something that concerns me vitally," he began. "You probably know, captain, that Dr. Cotter held an autopsy on my uncle's body. The family—some of my kin—are under the impression that I poisoned Edgar Haskell. Naturally I was nearly frantic with anxiety to learn what Cotter found—"

"You came to ask Dr. Cotter?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps it was a fool idea. I rather feared it was. A man will do funny things when he's waiting for news like that! This afternoon, about four thirty o'clock, I saw Peter Haskell. I told him I was nearly crazy with all this suspense. We decided there would be no harm in my going to Cotter and asking him."

Peter Haskell, in the background, was nodding his head. He interrupted: "That's quite correct, captain. I urged Dr. Meredith to try it. I think he left me at about twenty minutes of five."

"You came directly to the office?" Cornish asked.

"Yes. It was at my apartment I talked to Peter. I rode down town on a surface car. It was five minutes of the hour when I came into this building. I came directly to the office. The door was not locked. This room was empty. I knocked at the other door. Since there was no answer I went in. I did not see Dr. Cotter's body at first—" Meredith stopped to swallow hastily.

"So you went farther into that room?"

"Yes. Thinking Cotter might be busy in the alcove, his laboratory bench, you know. Then I saw him. I saw that he was dead. It didn't take long to see that! And I turned and hurried out that door. As I came out Mr. Wallace Haskell there was coming in from the hall."

The doctor waited for questions. Obviously he had finished his story, as much as he meant to tell at least. Cornish said: "There's one point. You came here to find out what Cotter said about the autopsy—"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you find out?"

"Naturally not! Cotter was dead. Lying on the floor! I didn't stop to worry about a report when—"

"Exactly." Cornish agreed quickly. "Now, Mr. Wallace Haskell."

The lawyer was talkative and somewhat breathless. His protuberant eyes had a light in them that could not be quenched, a gleam of something like malicious satisfaction. But he stuck to facts.

Because of his position as organizer of the autopsy he had visited Dr. Cotter, desiring information. It was just five o'clock or a minute or two later, that he came into the office. As he entered Meredith burst out of the inner office and told him that Dr. Cotter was lying in there, dead. Meredith showed him the body.

What had been Meredith's condition when he told? Nervous, Wallace would say. Decidedly upset. And pale. What had Meredith said, exactly? That Dr. Cotter would not reveal his findings to Wallace or anybody else. He had put it like that, making a sort of mystery out of it and then horrified his kinsman by opening the door and showing him the body. And he had insisted that he had only been in the office a minute or two and had touched nothing. He was very insistent about having touched nothing.

Meredith Haskell listened to this and his look grew strangely fixed. But he admitted that Wallace's story was quite accurate.

Peter Haskell had nothing to contribute except to recount having dropped in upon Dr. Meredith at Meredith's flat and having advised him, because of his intense worry, to chance asking Cotter for advance information about the autopsy.

"Vespucci," Cornish summoned. The bootblack came forward hurriedly. Like Wallace, Vespucci was filled with words. But, unlike Wallace, his English was so

mixed with Italian that he was hard to follow. This they made out with patience:

Vespucci blacked boots in the office building. He went from office to office every day, carrying his blacking box and brushes. He had regular customers. Among them Dr. Cotter, who always liked his shoes shined just before going home for the day.

At half past four Vespucci had come into the office, unannounced. He always came in that way, but he had knocked at the door of the private office, finding the other empty. He heard somebody speak, and opened the door, thinking he had been ordered to enter. Here the man paused to cross himself hurriedly. His dark eyes began to widen. His English became more involved.

He had looked into that inner office. Dr. Cotter was there, alive. But behaving very strangely. In fact, Dr. Cotter was behaving like a madman.

"How?" Cornish insisted. "Slow, now. Take it easy. Tell us just exactly what he did."

Dr. Cotter was dancing.

Vespucci stuck to it. Yes, dancing. On the toes. Like a ballerina! Trying to leap into the air. Yes. And laughing. He looked at Vespucci and laughed. And the way he laughed drove the bootblack out of his office, a shocked and worried man.

No, Vespucci had not told. Why should he tell? Dr. Cotter was a grand gentleman. And a good customer. Did he not have his boots done every day? Suppose a gentleman was to feel, shall we say, a little hilarious? Was that something to tell about the building? Vespucci had gently closed the door, tactfully, like a man who has seen what he was not meant to see and ignores having seen it. That was all Vespucci had to tell.

VII

WELLS, the newspaper man, found Captain Cornish busy with a powerful magnifying glass. Beneath the glass he had arranged the typewritten report of the autopsy on the body of Edgar Haskell.

The police captain looked up with a wave of his hand. "Just a minute, John—"

"'S'all right, if you're busy—"

"I'll be through in a second—"

"Just dropped in to see if you had made your pinch yet. Dr. Meredith Haskell, I mean. Of course you're going to!"

"Little mind reader!" Cornish chaffed. "How do you newspaper men do it?" The captain pressed a button and intrusted Dr. Cotter's report to a sergeant, with instructions that it go to a handwriting expert.

"What does Cotter's report say?" Wells inquired languidly.

"That Edgar Haskell died from an overdose of a powerful heart stimulant—"

"Just like Cotter!"

"Just like Cotter. Yes—"

"So obviously Dr. Meredith Haskell goes to the hoosegow. I told them at the office they'd better dig up a two column portrait and biographical material on our newest poisoner. But I do wish you'd hold off the arrest for the afternoon papers—or, rather, for the *Times-Tidings* exclusively. Now listen, cap, we've always been good friends of the department—"

Cornish waved aside this stock argument of newspaper men who seek exclusive news. "Unfortunately, we can't arrange to hold all our murders for afternoon newspaper time," he said with heavy sarcasm. "And I'll pinch Meredith Haskell when I think it's time to do it. Now, forget that stuff! Sit down and reason with me. I need all the help I can get, even yours!"

Captain Cornish and the newspaper man had been friends for years. They had worked together on many mysteries, together had passed through some close calls. In spite of things they said, they trusted and respected each other.

"John," the captain said seriously as Wells draped himself in and about a chair, disposing of his long legs with languid grace, "Cotter died of poison. A poison that acts as a powerful heart stimulant. So powerful it might be said to fairly explode a man's heart—"

"That dust stuff?"

"That brown dust. Yes. It's been analyzed. Analyzed, but not exactly classified. So far as the chemist can make

out, it's some sort of fungus growth, something akin to the composition of one of the poisonous pasture mushrooms, *amanita muscaria*—"

"The death angel mushroom! The one some darn fool is always mixing up with the edible ones!" Wells exclaimed.

"Yes. But this isn't our amanita. Something like it. It killed Cotter. And here's the coincidence: Cotter's report of his autopsy shows that the same thing killed Edgar Haskell!"

"Fine!" the reporter exclaimed. "Looks like a good, clean-cut case."

"As for instance?"

"Meredith Haskell murdered his uncle because he wanted the old man's money. He killed Cotter to keep Cotter from proving that he killed his uncle—"

"Says you!"

"Says I!" The reporter stared. "What's the matter with that?"

"Nothing, except—if Meredith killed Cotter to bury Cotter's report of the autopsy, why did the darn fool leave that report lying on Cotter's desk, where I could find it?"

Wells sprawled luxuriously. He blew a perfect smoke ring and admired it. Finally he said languidly: "Wallace Haskell blundered into the office before Dr. Meredith had time to glom the report. That's all—"

"It's not enough for me! If a man wants a paper bad enough to kill another man to get it, he grabs that paper just about the first thing he does. And Meredith didn't grab that report."

Wells stirred uneasily. Something about Cornish's reasoning disturbed the perfect content of his pose.

"Another thing, which seems to have slipped past your newspaper mind altogether," Cornish resumed. "You remember my outlining the evidence that Haskells brought in when they wanted the autopsy. The housekeeper's story, particularly?"

"I remember your telling me. Her name was Sewall. She said Meredith was drunk and talked wild the day of the funeral."

"Yes. And what else?"

"What else? Oh—hanged if I remember!"

"Meredith Haskell *jumped over chairs*," Cornish said significantly. "*Dr. Cotter dance.* Does that strike you as interesting?"

Wells remarked that he would be consigned to everlasting perdition, and sat up straight in his chair. "And then what?"

"I was talking to our poison man. He's a shark on it, like Cotter was. It's got his goat that he can't name this brown dust. But he can make guesses. Among his guesses he mentioned stories told by explorers among primitive tribes.

"There are various Indian tribes, John, primitives south of the equator, who lash themselves into a sort of fury with drugs which the medicine men prepare. Their medicine men use poison fungi, something like the pasture amanita. And the effect of diluted doses is to make men dance and skip!"

Wells looked uneasily about the plain, commonplace little office in police headquarters. "I don't mind their dying," he remarked uneasily, "but this dancing business—ugh! Cotter didn't look very pretty when we saw him. And Dr. Meredith Haskell—but he didn't die!"

"No," Cornish said softly. "But suppose he knew the drug? Suppose, possibly, he used a little of it as a stimulant?"

Wells pondered that. Then he suggested, "Or suppose Dr. Meredith Haskell was marked for another victim? And the stuff didn't work in his case?"

"Then who did it?"

Wells suggested Mary Sewall.

"Possibly. If she knew of such a poison—"

"Wallace Haskell. He's sore about the will. Might want to break it—"

"He's a fat head. But go on—"

"Peter Haskell?"

"A rich man. Got all he needs. Any more?"

Wells shrugged. "There's a dozen other Haskells! You're at liberty to suspect them all. But, as far as I'm concerned, it comes straight back to Dr. Meredith! He's a physician. Ought to know poisons. Needed the money. Had the opportunity.

And, besides, obviously he murdered Cotter to cover up the other thing."

"Excellently reasoned," Cornish smiled, reaching for his hat. "Got a good head, John."

"Where are you going?" Wells asked.

"To arrest Dr. Meredith Haskell. I hate to do it, but—"

A patrolman on duty in the general office came in and announced. "Lady to see you, captain."

Cornish stared at the card the man brought. "There's one person we forgot, John!"

Wells looked at the card. "Miss Sylvia Braun. Isn't that the girl Meredith Haskell is engaged to?"

VIII

BOTH men rose and regarded Sylvia Braun with alert interest when the patrolman ushered her in. Cornish explained, "This is Mr. John Wells, a newspaper reporter. If you wish to speak to me alone—"

The slender, dark, aristocratic woman hesitated. Then her smile flashed at John Wells. "I think Mr. Wells will use his best judgment about telling anything we say, captain."

A real sport! Wells recognized aristocracy and delighted in it. From that moment he was Sylvia Braun's champion.

Sylvia had lost her smile as she turned anxiously to Cornish. "Is it true that Dr. Meredith Haskell is to be arrested?"

"He's at liberty so far as I know, Miss Braun—"

"But you suspect him! You are going to accuse him of this terrible murder this afternoon! Captain Cornish, I want to know just what you are going to do to Dr. Haskell. I—it is very necessary that I know!"

Cornish indicated a chair and saw his visitor seated before he resumed his own seat by his desk. "Who told you Dr. Haskell was in danger of arrest?" he asked gently.

"Several persons. Members of the family. Mr. Wallace Haskell in particular. He told me what you found out about Dr. Cotter's murder. To-night, just a little while ago, I tried to reach Meredith at his apartment. He did not answer the telephone. And then I was afraid that he—that you—"

"He is not in a cell. Not under arrest, yet."

"Oh!" Sylvia smiled through tears. "I've been very foolish—imagining all these things—"

"But he is in some danger of arrest, Miss Braun."

"Oh!"

"Perhaps you may be of some service to him by answering a few of my questions. I am trying to get at the truth. If Dr. Haskell escapes arrest and trial, only the truth can make that happen."

Sylvia looked steadily at the police captain. Her cheeks were pale, and the dark eyes looked enormous. But she maintained a splendid self-possession. "What can I tell you, captain! I'm afraid I haven't any direct knowledge of this case—"

"Why are you interested in Dr. Meredith Haskell?"

"Because I love him." She said it calmly, in a low steady tone. "We meant to be married soon."

"You are a distant connection of the family?"

"Very distant, yes."

"And didn't you inherit something from Edgar Haskell?"

"A legacy of two hundred and fifty dollars." She smiled faintly. "Nothing to get excited about."

"You were at the family conference when it was decided to investigate Edgar Haskell's death?"

"That was absurd! I did my best to stop it!"

"You were outvoted—or overruled, I suppose?"

"By Dr. Haskell. And by Peter Haskell. Meredith wanted the investigation. Insisted on having it. And Peter said it was the wisest thing to do. They convinced me."

John Wells had been ransacking his memory. He interrupted with a question now. "Miss Braun, were you once engaged to marry Peter Haskell?"

"Yes. But that was five years ago. We decided that we were not suited. And—" She smiled, a rare, intimate confessional smile. "I had met Meredith. Everything was different then."

"Five years!" Cornish exclaimed. "A long engagement."

A shrug and another little smile, rather sad. "We are not rich, captain. Dr. Haskell was only out of medical college at that time. We waited."

"And—pardon me, if this seems an intimate question. I must have the truth, Miss Braun! About Peter Haskell? Was he also—well—resigned?"

Sylvia's chin rose proudly. "Peter is a dear," she said. "He has been our best friend ever since I told him. My friend—and Meredith's. Always loyal!" Sudden tears sparkled in her dark eyes. She brushed them away with a handkerchief that remained clutched tightly in her hand.

Cornish looked at his desk, his face a blank. Wells simulated interest in a calendar. The captain broke a long silence with gentle seriousness:

"Suppose you knew that Dr. Haskell was about to be arrested, Miss Braun? Suppose you knew he will be charged with the murder of Dr. Cotter? Would you still marry him?"

"I would," Sylvia Braun said promptly, proudly.

"At the first opportunity?"

"The very first!" She blushed slowly. "That's why I came here to-night. I want to marry Dr. Haskell. I want to marry him now. In the face of all this!"

"To prove your belief in his absolute innocence?"

"Yes. He is innocent!"

Cornish rose with a smile. "Miss Braun," he said, "this is the first time I ever promoted a match. But I'm going to, to-night. If you love Dr. Meredith Haskell, I want you to marry him now. Will you?"

"I will!"

"Then, by George, I'll see that you do. It will take some wire pulling to get a license, but I'll pull the wires. And we'll find Dr. Haskell and get a minister. And, mind you, the minute you're married I'll arrest him for murder."

Sylvia smiled proudly, a little curl of scorn in her lip. "Arrest him! I'm not afraid."

IX

CAPTAIN CORNISH was in a humor almost hilarious. A smile lighted his plain, homely face. There was a dancing light in his eyes. He whispered to John Wells: "Can you beat it? Me stage-managing a wedding? And everybody knows about it but the bridegroom!"

"Yeah," Wells drawled, "and suppose the bridegroom balks?"

"Hey? Dr. Haskell isn't that dumb—"

"I'm not so sure, Fred! Would you marry a girl that loved you, if you were about to be arrested for murder?"

"I'd marry this girl if I was about to be hanged," the captain insisted. "Her kind don't come in pairs."

Wells was inclined to agree to this. From the moment she consented to a marriage with Dr. Haskell, Sylvia Braun had carried on like a thoroughbred. Wells imagined with reason that this couldn't be exactly the sort of a party a woman like Sylvia would choose for her wedding.

Her kind might prefer something a little less spectacular than marriage under police auspices to a man in the shadow of the gallows. But her kind were also the kind that stick to the man they love though it cost them humiliation and agony. Wells was a bit romantic.

They had obtained a license through Cornish's influence. They had found a clergyman. They had arranged many things and located Dr. Meredith Haskell as well.

The young physician did not know what was about to happen. Cornish had insisted that it be kept secret. Meredith had agreed to wait their coming at the home of Peter Haskell. All this they had done within an hour and also John Wells had found time to buy a bouquet for the bride.

Now they were in a closed car, speeding to Peter Haskell's big town house, Wells and Cornish in front talking in whispers,

the bride-to-be and the clergyman on the rear seat.

Peter Haskell met his visitors at his door. The rich man looked disapprovingly at the police captain and the newspaper man. The sight of the clergyman and Sylvia carrying a bouquet left him gaping. John Wells studied that rapid change of expression. Peter Haskell had turned pale, as if he already guessed what was about to happen. He was making a supreme effort to control himself. "He's still in love with her," Wells guessed.

"Where is Dr. Haskell?" Cornish inquired.

"In the library, captain."

Cornish turned to Sylvia. "Go to him," he said. "You tell him. And now, Mr. Haskell, if we might talk somewhere in quiet—"

"This way." Peter led them into a small reception room. He indicated chairs, but himself preferred to stand.

Said Cornish: "I am sorry to say I am about to arrest your kinsman, Dr. Haskell, on a charge of murder."

Peter said slowly, after a deep sigh: "I was afraid of this. But I warn you, captain, you're making a serious mistake!"

"I don't think so, Mr. Haskell—"

"Meredith is innocent! I don't give a hang what evidence you've got—"

"It happens I have so much evidence I can't do anything else but arrest him. If he is innocent, a loyal friend like you—"

"I'll spend every cent I've got to prove he's innocent! Meredith Haskell can have the shirt off my back! By Heaven, Cornish, I love that boy!"

"He's a lucky fellow," Cornish smiled. "Miss Braun just told us the same thing."

"I know," Peter said quickly, his voice low. "She loves him—"

"She wants to marry him, Mr. Haskell. Now. Before his arrest."

"Yes. I guessed something like that—when I saw her—and the clergyman."

"It's rather fine, Mr. Haskell. She wants to prove her faith in him, before everybody. I encouraged the idea."

"The plan is—splendid," Peter said. Wells saw his fingers clench. His face had turned a ghastly yellow. But he maintained his calm dignity. "We'll hold the ceremony at once, captain. I won't detain you any longer than necessary. And Mr. Wells, no doubt, will print the news in his paper so that all the world will know how one splendid woman believes in Meredith's innocence!"

"The very program I was about to suggest."

Peter forced a smile. "I dare say the bride and groom are waiting—impatiently." He moved toward the door and they began to follow.

Wells caught Cornish's arm and drew him back. "On the wall," he whispered. "Look at that spear! That blow gun! All that junk with the cockatoo feathers! This bird must have traveled among savages in South America—"

"Shut up," Cornish grunted, nudging the reporter sharply. "Shut up! And John! Watch me. Follow my play. I may need your help in a hurry."

Cornish followed hastily after Peter Haskell. A servant had stopped their host and Peter now turned to Cornish. "You are wanted on the telephone, captain."

There was an instrument in the hall. Cornish spoke briefly, and listened to what must have been a brief message. He interrupted himself long enough to suggest over his shoulder that the others wait a moment or two for him.

When he disconnected, John Wells caught something of his infectious excitement. Cornish outwardly was cool enough and unhurried, but Wells, who knew him so intimately in many moods, knew that some plan of his was drawing near a conclusion.

In the library Dr. Haskell and Sylvia greeted them quietly. But their faces told the story. Pale, serious, standing in the shadow of tragedy, they were happy in their abiding affection for each other. "I don't need to ask," Cornish smiled. "You are both agreed on this wedding!"

Peter Haskell stepped forward. He took Sylvia's hands in his and kissed her on the brow. They heard him murmur brokenly, "God bless you, dear." He turned to Meredith quickly and shook his hand. "Will you wait for me just a minute, please? I wish to speak to my house-

keeper." The rich man hurried from the room.

Meredith Haskell whispered to Sylvia, "Poor old chap!" Sylvia's hand pressed his arm in answer.

"Pretty rough on the old boy," Wells muttered to the police captain. But Cornish was not for romance just now.

"Cut the mush and follow my play. Don't forget," he answered earnestly. "Remember, this isn't Romeo and Juliet!"

Being a police reporter, Wells had witnessed few weddings. Murders were more in his line. But had he been a connoisseur of romance he was satisfied he could not have seen anything more impressive than this.

Peter Haskell stood up with his kinsman. Captain Cornish, in his official blue and brass, serious, homely to the point of ugliness, his shrewd eyes missing not a detail of the scene, gave away the bride. Peter's face was strangely set. Like a plaster cast, Wells thought.

The man must have been hard hit by Sylvia's charms. It hurt him to see her go to Meredith Haskell, but he bore the blow with dignity. Obedient to instructions, Wells watched them all, and particularly Cornish. Whatever Cornish started, he was ready to aid and abet.

The words were soon said. Dr. Meredith Haskell and Sylvia Braun were man and wife, their future a dubious vista in which loomed black and sinister the shadow of a gallows. The little group of five dissolved.

Peter Haskell kissed the bride, Cornish close at his elbow. And behind Cornish, waiting a sign, stood Wells. "Meredith, old man!" Peter exclaimed.

Dr. Meredith Haskell stretched forth his hand. Peter's hand groped for it, ready to seize it and clasp it. Peter's face was ghastly, his eyes slightly glazed.

Their fingers touched as Cornish pounced upon Peter Haskell. His blow struck their hands apart. The captain's hand caught Peter's wrist and twisted it back.

The two men were struggling while Cornish panted: "I thought that's how you did the trick! John, grab his other arm!"

Bride and groom and the clergyman stared aghast at this interruption. Peter Haskell was fighting like a beast in a trap. His lip had curled back. A snarl was his only speech. Then the snarl changed to a cry of pain.

Between them, Wells and Cornish had him powerless. The reporter pinioned his arms while the captain forced open the fingers of the clenched hand. As he did so a trickle of fine brown dust sifted from between the fingers onto the rug.

"Where do you keep the stuff?" Cornish demanded.

Peter Haskell only snarled. Cornish began a search of his pockets and was rewarded. "There you are, John. Our fungi!" He held up a small vial. It was partially filled with small, fragile, brown pellets. Each was about the size of a pea. A light touch, as they proved afterward, would dissolve one into dust, a powder that clung to the skin it touched.

John Wells saw them always with a shudder, for he knew now the devilish potency of this indecent puff-ball growth that could drive men mad before it killed.

"Haskell," the police captain was saying, "I don't think I'll have much trouble convicting you of Dr. Cotter's murder now. You've pretty well convicted yourself."

Peter Haskell only glared. Cornish turned to the others to explain. "This man has been half mad about Sylvia Braun for years. Their engagement was broken off when she met Dr. Meredith. But Peter Haskell hoped and tried to win her back again. It was not until Meredith inherited from his uncle that Peter knew he was beaten. With the money Dr. Haskell could marry the woman he loved.

"Peter Haskell meant to kill you, doctor. On the day of the funeral. He used the same poison that afterward killed Cotter. The brown dust of this fungus. His mistake was in too slight a dose. What poison he left upon your hand to be wiped onto your mouth or nostrils was only enough to intoxicate.

"Since he didn't kill you, he tried to make capital of the failure and easily had others accuse you of a murder plot. It was necessary, for his success, that Dr. Cotter's autopsy show that Edgar Haskell died

by poison. Unfortunately for his plan, the autopsy showed nothing of the sort—"

"But it did!" Wells exclaimed.

"Wrong, John! What we found on Cotter's desk was the report prepared by Peter Haskell and left there for us to find. Cotter's signature to that paper has been traced from another signature. I can prove that in court. And, besides, I had a second autopsy at once. I just got word of that by telephone. Edgar Haskell was not poisoned. But Cotter was poisoned.

"He was poisoned by this same fungus poison Haskell tried just now against the man who stands in his way. That poison Peter Haskell must have got when he spent five years on tributaries of the Amazon, exploring for rubber.

"Since the stuff is not a drug in medical use, nor can it be bought in any market, I think we will have no trouble proving that the man who possesses the only supply was the man who deliberately ended Cotter's life."

HINDU PRISONERS

ADAM related that while Colonel MacPherson was superintendent of Singapore jail a Parsee on the evening before muster observed a convict bury something. Hastily withdrawing the blade, the Parsee returned the handle to the ground. On the morrow, as Colonel MacPherson passed along the line, the convict seized the knife to make his blow at the superintendent, but at once he saw how he had been balked in his villainous purpose.

A lunatic prisoner, only eighteen years of age, was overcome in a novel manner—*vid.* Gouldsbury. Guards swathed in layer after layer of blankets entered his dungeon, and permitted him to stab them to his heart's content until he was exhausted and could be overpowered.

True hermaphrodites, that is, with strongly marked outward signs of double sex, are exceedingly rare, but two Hindu prisoners classed as hermaphrodites were emphatic in declaring themselves sisters. They had been accustomed, said Adam, to wearing men's clothing at night when they could commit robbery. By day they wore female attire, and for a long time escaped detection. Medical authorities classed them as males, and to their annoyance they were made to work like men, but kept in separate cells from the rest of the prisoners and not forced to associate with them more than was necessary.

In Hindustan, as elsewhere on this globe, the wrong person is sometimes apprehended. Adam supplied these two following anecdotes:

A man convicted of murder was transported to Ramree Jail for life imprisonment and recognized a sentry as the victim he had been accused of killing.

Another man suddenly disappeared from home. A suspect murderer was arrested. A skeleton was declared to be that of the missing man, and produced in court, but defense found the skeleton to be several inches shorter than the missing man. The prisoner was discharged. The missing man returned home. The skull of the skeleton indicated a violent death.

When they tried to buy him a drink, they met an absolute rebuff

WHEN ROBBERS WERE PATIENT

By Joseph Gollomb

TO BEGIN THIS TALE, LET US POST OURSELVES AT LONDON BRIDGE RAILWAY STATION ONE MAY EVENING IN THE YEAR 1855

A Story of Fact

PSYCHOLOGISTS are still battling over the question as to which is the more responsible for the criminal, what is inside of his skin or is it his environment? The battle seems to be going in favor of those who say that it is a man's surroundings that are more to blame.

Which makes the true tale of the gold robbery of the South-Eastern Railway Company all the more interesting; though to me the interest in it lies not so much in the psychology as in the deftness, the impressive patience, the complicated structure the plotters erected wherein to work and the completeness with which they carried off their delicate job.

If genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains, then here is a work of genius; and were it not for the inartistic greed of one of the workers long after the job was done the world would have perhaps never heard of it, which would have been a pity; for aside from the matter of justice served, the story is a perfect one of its kind.

This was in the days when robbers were patient; they are less so to-day. A gang learns of a gold shipment on Monday morning and the same afternoon a car whirls up, there is a blazing of revolvers, a snatch at booty, automobiles go tearing through crowded streets to the accompaniment of a duel of bullets, and it is a sheer gamble as to what will be the upshot for the robbers, escape or disaster. I admit there is more crude melodrama in this, more dash.

But to me there is more fascination in the workings of a clever mind than in the gamble of a man who is just as ready to die as survive. Any criminal can attain the low intelligence it takes to shoot a bank messenger dead in broad daylight and grab his bag. But few thieves could have woven the delicate plot in this present tale.

Let us post ourselves at the London Bridge Station of the South-Eastern Railway one May evening in the year 1855. Just a little before the train for Folkestone is to leave, there arrives at the station a ponderous truck, drawn by great horses and guarded by four stalwart Britishers with revolvers in their pockets.

Shipments of Gold

From the truck three iron-bound boxes, each dangling two heavy locks, are carried one by one to the special freight car assigned to these boxes. It takes the four stalwart guards to carry each box. While they have their hands thus full they are escorted by a strong guard of railway employees. For the boxes contain gold coins to the value of a small fortune.

As each box is brought in to the station it is put on a scale and weighed. The weight is carefully noted by a railway clerk by the name of Sharman. He writes out the weight on a receipt and gives it to the men who have brought the gold to the station.

In the freight car Sharman, in the presence of others, puts tapes about each box, then, pouring hot sealing wax, sets the company's stamp on the seals. Should the seals or tapes show, at the end of the trip, the slightest signs of having been disturbed there would be instant alarm raised. But Sharman leaves the freight car and locks it securely on the outside. No one is permitted to stay in the car or enter it until at Folkestone Sharman, accompanied by receiving agents and guards, is to enter the car again.

After locking the freight car Sharman goes into the adjoining passenger coach and rides along with the shipment to Folkestone. He is a taciturn, stolid young Britisher, whose record is just the kind to earn his selection as the man with whom the keys to those iron-bound chests could be trusted.

When the train arrives in Folkestone he, as I have said, accompanied by guards and others, unlocks the freight car. As the tapes and seals on the strong-boxes are untouched husky guards carry the three boxes on board the Channel boat. Here they are placed in a small strong-walled room; there is no other way to get in or out of the room except by the door; and after the boxes have been placed there, the door is doubly locked and three men sit outside the door throughout the trip across the Channel.

When the boat arrives at Boulogne, Sharman, always accompanied by guards, unlocks the room and has the three chests carried at once to the receiving agents on the pier. Here the chests will be weighed again as at the London Bridge Station; the weight again noted and marked on a receipt; the receipt given to Sharman—whose responsibility for the shipment is thereby ended for that particular trip.

As the first box is loaded onto the scales no one feels any particular interest in what the scales will show, for this is one of the regular series of shipments; no one has ever attempted to tamper with any of these heavily guarded shipments; and certainly the tapes and seals on the boxes this time show not the slightest sign of having been in the least tampered with.

Forty Pounds Short

But now the weighing clerk, peering at the scale register, turns to Sharman and says, "I say, do let me see your weight notation, will you?"

Sharman releases one hand from his attempt to light a cigarette in a shore breeze and hands the receipt over.

The weighing clerk studies it for a moment. "That's queer, you know!" he says slowly. "My scales show the boxes five ounces heavier than your notation. Either your scales at London Bridge Station or your notation of the weight must be wrong."

Sharman throws away his cigarette, peers at the scale register, then at his own receipt.

"That *is* odd!" he mutters. "Let's

weigh the others. This box must have enjoyed the trip and fattened on it."

The second box seemed to have thrived almost as well. It was now, according to the Boulogne scales, four ounces heavier than it was in London.

But it was the third box, the instant it was put on the scales, that gave the men now crowding about the shock of their lives.

It was forty pounds in weight *short!*

"Your keys, Sharman, quick!" exclaimed the receiving agent.

Scotland Yard Baffled

In consternation Sharman took out of his inside pocket a ring with two keys on it. Each key was needed to open the two locks on each box. Sharman could scarcely control his fingers as he unlocked the first of the safes. Finally the lid went up.

Instead of canvas bags containing gold coin, the box showed small burlap bags containing only lead shot. The second box showed the same; so did the third.

Somewhere between the London Bridge Station and Boulogne those boxes had had their tapes and seals removed; the two locks on each box were opened with appropriate keys; gold of two hundred pounds in weight was stolen; and the tapes and seals made whole again.

Scotland Yard of course, got to work at once. The boxes inside and out were minutely examined. The freight car and the storeroom on board the boat were gone over microscopically to see how the robbers got in and out past the noses of the guard.

Every man in the least related to the shipment of the gold all the way from the bank to the weighing man at Boulogne was stiffly cross-examined and had his personal history gone over thoroughly—with a thoroughness which has made Scotland Yard a household word. Of course the man who had the easiest access to the gold was Sharman.

His usual routine in connection with such shipments began at the railroad station in London, where he was one of two clerks at work in the ticket office. Here in this office was a well secured safe in which were kept the keys to the locks of the gold boxes. As soon as the boxes arrived from the bank that shipped them and began their journey from London Bridge Station, Sharman and the keys went along with the shipment to Boulogne.

Scotland Yard did not waste much time with any theory based on suspicion of Sharman. And we can take their word for it—especially in the light of the final explanation—that Sharman was not only innocent of any complicity in the crime, but not even guilty of the slightest remissness in his full duty.

But if investigation of Sharman brought Scotland Yard no results, neither did any other line of ferreting. At the end of several months of utmost effort Scotland Yard had to put the gold robbery down as one of its infrequent failures. A great question mark had to be entered on the record. Not only did the thieves get away with their loot, but Scotland Yard could not even begin to guess at how the whole thing had been done.

And if now I am able to lay before you a detailed account of how this exceptionally artistic piece of work was achieved, it is not because of any help from the police, but because one of the thieves made a mistake in psychology, guessed a little wrong as to a woman's heart and thereby unloosed an emotion that blew up the gang and bared its secret.

Printing the Tickets

In the same way as we watched the gold being delivered on board the train at London Bridge Station, let us now go back more than a year before the robbery and from our ideal vantage point study every step of its genesis, culmination and after-effects.

We will have to post ourselves first in a large London printing office and watch a young man feed bits of blank paper into one of its presses and take them out stamped as tickets of the South-Eastern Railway.

He is about twenty-seven, is lean, as so many people are who have high strung nerves; he has a keen, intelligent face, and a high forehead topped with sparse sandy

hair. His eyes, which are small and bright but furtive, are never at rest; because his mind is restless, too.

His name is William Pierce. He is married, and has a child of five, a little boy. His wife, Fanny, is one of those patient devoted women who will stand a great deal from their own families; so much that they give the impression of being nothing but docile domesticated creatures. The Pierces live in a small house in the suburbs of London.

Pierce Seeks a Partner

Pierce has tried his hand at several occupations. He had been employed as a clerk to a bookmaker at a race track; he had worked for some time as a bank messenger; again in a broker's office, and now had turned printer, and was, when we first see him, running off those tickets for trips between London and Folkestone.

In all his occupations money or its equivalent passed through his hands in a constant stream; but nothing more than a niggardly pay as a clerk or pressman fell to his share. That restless mind of his followed in imagination the constant procession of negotiable wealth; he could not help picturing the comfort and luxury which would be the fortune of Fanny, his little son and himself if some of that wealth stopped its procession past him and accumulated in his hands.

Now that is a dangerous game for a poorly paid clerk to play. From picturing how it would feel to be rich Pierce went on to ponder how he could realize the picture. That restless mind of his was casting about.

One day he was sent down with a package of the tickets he had printed to the London Bridge Station of the South-Eastern Railway. He delivered the package to Sharman in his ticket office and had just turned to leave when there arrived several husky guards carrying iron-bound doubly padlocked chests. Pierce saw Sharman go to the safe in his office, unlock it, take out two keys and, putting on his hat and coat, accompany the chests to the weighing machine.

He watched the chests being weighed, the weight noted, the receipt given and the departure of the chests, together with Sharman, on the train. The whole procedure fascinated him, this ceremony of dispatching treasure chests. As he walked back to his printing shop his imagination was on the train along with the gold. He found himself playing a game, trying to hatch a plot that would nullify every one of the precautions taken against the loss of that gold.

Several times thereafter he was sent on the same errand and saw the same scene enacted at the station. With each repetition his mind resumed the game, the dangerous game of playing with the thought of crime. There comes a point in such play when the player in his heart no longer says, "I would do so and so," but, "I will do so and so."

Pierce reached that point; and found himself no longer playing but planning. Of course it was out of the question for him to attempt anything alone. So he began to look about for a confederate. He took to hunting hangouts of thieves and cultivating friendships among them.

The Job Is Planned

Out of the many he met and studied for his purpose he finally selected one, Edward Agar. This man specialized in the more clever aspects of burglary in which locks were not smashed but picked. Like Pierce, Agar was slight in build, nervously alert and furtive in the look in his eye. He did not even meet the eyes of his pals squarely; for which there was excellent reason.

After several months of studying Agar, Pierce finally put before him the idea of robbing one of the gold shipments. Agar was to pick the locks. Agar smiled angrily.

"That's a wonderful plan!" he sneered. "All I have to do is somehow to sneak into the locked car with the chests or on board the boat in the freight room and in the dark manufacture keys that will open those padlocks. How very simple!"

But Pierce had given the matter more thought than Agar supposed.

"Suppose I got you wax impressions of the necessary keys, what then?" Pierce asked.

Agar reflected. "I don't see how you'll get them. But if you could get them I could make the duplicate keys. That would make it somewhat simpler. Not much, though. How would I be able to get into the car? How get out? How carry hundreds of pounds in metal about me when I do get out?"

Pierce rubbed his chin reflectively. "It's clear we have to have some more people in on the job, people who work for the railway."

Their First Stealthy Steps

The two thereupon set about cultivating friends among the employees closest to the transportation of the gold shipment. First they tried Sharman, the key man in more than one sense. They cultivated him—or rather tried to. They found Sharman close-mouthed and unresponsive. They redoubled their efforts and affability; and thereby brought danger on themselves.

For a Scotland Yard man who remembered Agar's face vaguely and seeing him making up to Sharman warned the latter.

"That man, I believe, is a crook. If he is making up to you it is because he wants to get something out of you. Perhaps he's got some oil stock to sell you or some other way for you to get rich quickly. Better not have much to do with him. And I'll keep an eye on him myself for a little while."

The next time Agar and Pierce tried to buy Sharman a drink they met with such a rebuff that their suspicions were alarmed. Sure enough, as they left the public house Agar recognized a Scotland Yard man on his trail.

Pierce and Agar were so frightened at that that for several months they did nothing more on their plot. But Agar was soon assured that there was nothing more to be feared from Scotland Yard; and indeed there was not. After trailing Agar for some time the Scotland Yard man decided that Agar was going straight, and as he had nothing definite of which to suspect him the detective went elsewhere.

Cautiously Agar and Pierce resumed their patient plotting. They were soon rewarded by the affability of William George Tester, a clerk in the office of the traffic superintendent of the South-Eastern Railway. Tester would know about the movements of the gold shipments, although he himself at no point of the routine of the trip came in direct contact with it. Under the skillful manipulations of Pierce the lock to Tester's character was finally picked with the key of golden promise. He became party to the plot.

With his aid a fourth man was soon added, Jim Burgess, one of the crew on the train that usually carried the gold shipments from London to Folkestone.

The gang was now ready to make their first stealthy move. Agar and Pierce—the latter left his printing job to devote himself to his adventure—spent whole days loitering about the London Bridge Station. from a distance watching Sharman, who had charge of the keys.

They hoped to find that at some part of the day the clerk left his office, if only for a few minutes. In that case Agar would try to do some quick work, pick the lock of the office, open the safe if he could, and take a wax impression of the keys to the gold chests. But the system that guarded those keys and the thoroughness with which Sharman attended to his duties gave the gang not the slightest opening.

Wax Impressions

They had come to despair about getting the keys by stealth; for there was no use stealing them, since the moment they were gone the locks on the cases would be changed. Indeed Tester, the representative of the band in the traffic superintendent's office, brought them news that the locks on the gold chests were being changed. He told them this as bad news. To his surprise Agar's eyes lighted up.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "If you can only discover who is to make the new locks."

Tester said he would try; and the following day came back in better spirits. "It is Chubbs, the lock manufacturer, who is making the new locks."

"Good!" exclaimed Pierce. "You must find out the exact time the messenger from Chubbs will arrive with the locks and keys.

Then you are to meet him outside the office and ask him if he came from Chubbs. Try to get those keys into your hands if only for five seconds. That will be all that is necessary for you to press the keys against these bits of wax which you will keep in your palm."

Tester did as he was told, waiting for the messenger from Chubbs's outside of Sharman's office. The locks and keys arrived in a sealed paper bag. Tester tore the bag open and handling the keys deftly managed to press each one against a piece of wax.

But the messenger from Chubbs was protesting.

Imperfections to Be Fixed

"You'd no right to tear that bag open!" he exclaimed. "I was instructed to get a receipt for a sealed bag. Now you must either sign such a receipt, that you got the bag sealed, or I take back the locks and keys!"

"I'm sorry," said Tester. "I didn't know that the locks were important, and I'm not going to sign for a sealed bag. You can take your package back."

To the messenger and to his employers, who were told of the incident, Tester's action seemed that of a man who had made a blunder in tearing the bag open, but was acting as a conscientious employee afraid of being reprimanded. And as the sole damage seemed to have been the loss of a bag, no more was thought of the incident.

It took Agar several weeks to manufacture the keys from the wax impressions Tester brought him. Meanwhile the others of the band were working on creating an opportunity for him to use the keys.

At that time of the year the gold shipments against which they were plotting were so small that it would not be worth their while attempting to rob them. But the crook play they were preparing needed much rehearsing. They simply could not afford to have the slightest slip on the night of the performance. Good lock-and-key mechanic though he was, Agar was not at all sure that the keys he had made from the wax impressions would work on the crucial occasion.

But the locks manufactured by Chubbs were noted for the fineness of their workmanship. Still, a difference of one one-hundreth of an inch in thickness would upset the whole business. There simply had to be rehearsals.

When the strong-boxes on each shipment came back empty from Boulogne there was naturally much less care taken to guard the storeroom on board the boat and the compartments in which they had traveled on the train. Nevertheless, it did take fine managing for Burgess, the train guard, to hold the door of the freight compartment open one night long enough for Agar to slip in under cover of darkness.

The next moment the train was speeding on to London. In the freight car Agar did not dare strike a light. He had to work blind. And his keys, just as he had feared, were imperfect. They needed filing down at this point, thickening at another.

The ride ended, Agar slipped out of the freight car while it was yet in motion—and still he had not had enough opportunity. He would have to take at least three or four more such trips before he could hope to get his keys to work.

They Await the Treasure

Dangerous as the business was Agar did take several such trips. Finally one of his keys touched the right nerve to its lock and opened it. Then after three more trips the second key did the trick.

But now Agar realized what a great burden in weight it would be to carry off such a gold shipment as they would try to steal. How to smuggle several hundred pounds in gold out of a closely guarded car was a ticklish problem.

But people wore overcoats with capes in those days; and much could and was concealed under such capes. The gang then made themselves canvas belts containing large pockets. These belts they would wear under their capes "when needed."

Meanwhile Agar, as the technician of the gang, was at work on duplicate keys to the locks on the freight car, wax impressions of which had been secured by Burgess.

Then Agar got an engraver friend of

his who specialized in fine but illegitimate work to make a duplicate seal of the one with which the tapes on gold shipments were stamped by Sharman.

All the properties were now ready. Rehearsals had begun. There were still bits of important action that had not been practiced, and could not be without too great a risk; that would have to be part of the hazard of the single performance. There was now only the treasure to be waited for.

Tester, as clerk in the traffic manager's office, learned that a particularly heavy shipment was to be made one afternoon in May. The gang had their meeting on the morning of the shipment. Whatever their fate they would meet it that day, they voted.

On a Dangling Rope

Tester had asked for the day off, pleading illness of his mother, who was supposed to be in Folkestone. He put on his canvas belt with the pockets in it, stuck a revolver in one of them and went down with Pierce to the South-Eastern Station at London Bridge. Pierce also had a canvas bag and a revolver under his cape.

Some time prior to this Burgess, the guard on the train which carried the gold shipments, found occasion to "inspect" the roofs of the cars that made up the train. On top of the freight car in which the shipment was usually locked he left a coil of fine but very tough henequen rope, tied to a bolt in the ridge of the roof.

Pierce and Tester, having bought first class tickets, took places in the car next to the one in which the gold shipment was to travel. Agar, the all-important, also with canvas belt under his cape, entered the car too, but pretended to be a stranger to the other two.

The boxes with the gold shipment arrived. Sharman weighed them, noted the weight on his receipt, then had the guards take the boxes to the freight car. Here he unlocked the car with his keys, had the strong-boxes put in; locked the door of the car; put the key on the same ring with the two that would open the gold boxes; and went into the passenger coach.

Not into the one in which the gang sat, but on the opposite side of the freight car. The gang knew which car the methodical Sharman would use.

The train pulled out of London and as fortune would have it the day was dark with downpour and some fog. Across the country it raced, the rain curtaining the windows of the cars.

In the passenger coach occupied by the gang alone Agar arose. His confederates gave him their silent good wishes. Leaning out of the car window Agar found a bit of rope dangling, provided by Burgess. Grasping this—the strength of the rope had been well tested as one may expect from so careful a group—he swung out.

The speed of the train swung him like a pendulum at first along the side of the car. But finally he caught hold of the edge of the roof of the car and held. Then flat against the car he crawled along till he was on the roof of the freight car. Here another rope enabled him to lower himself till he was on the level with the lock to the car. Holding on to the rope with one hand he fished out the duplicate key he had made and, opening the lock, worked open the door and swung inside.

A Woman's Fury

Out from the several pockets of the canvas belt came prepared tapes and sealing wax, matches and the faked seal—and many bags of burlap filled with lead shot. Then from a pocket came two keys made with such pain and danger.

The two keys opened the locks of the strong-boxes. A knife snipped open the tapes. Up went the lids. The bags of gold came out. The bags of lead shot went in. The boxes were relocked. The tapes bound about. Wax was melted and dropped on the tapes. The false seal was pressed on the melted wax.

The boxes now looked as if they had not been tampered with.

Cautiously Agar opened the freight car door a bit. The train was crossing a trestle over a shallow stream. Out of the door and into the water dropped the bags of gold.

Out of the car on to the rope swung

Agar. With one hand he locked the car door. Up to the roof and on to the next one he crawled, taking with him the rope. Over another stream went the train and into it dropped the ropes; but by now Agar was back in the car.

His confederates, pale and wide-eyed, caught a nod. Their faces flushed.

At the next station three passengers left the train. They walked a number of miles through the downpour. But as there were few to note them no one remembered them.

In the shallow stream they found the gold sacks. Their canvas belts were barely ample enough to contain the gold coins.

But this would have been the last chapter—or, rather, none of this story would have been written were it not for Agar's greed. When the division of the spoils was taking place he insisted on the lion's share as the man who had taken the gravest risk and done most of the work. He got almost the lion's share.

This encouraged him to try further. He had long before looked with desire on Pierce's wife, Fanny. Now he proceeded to reach out for her.

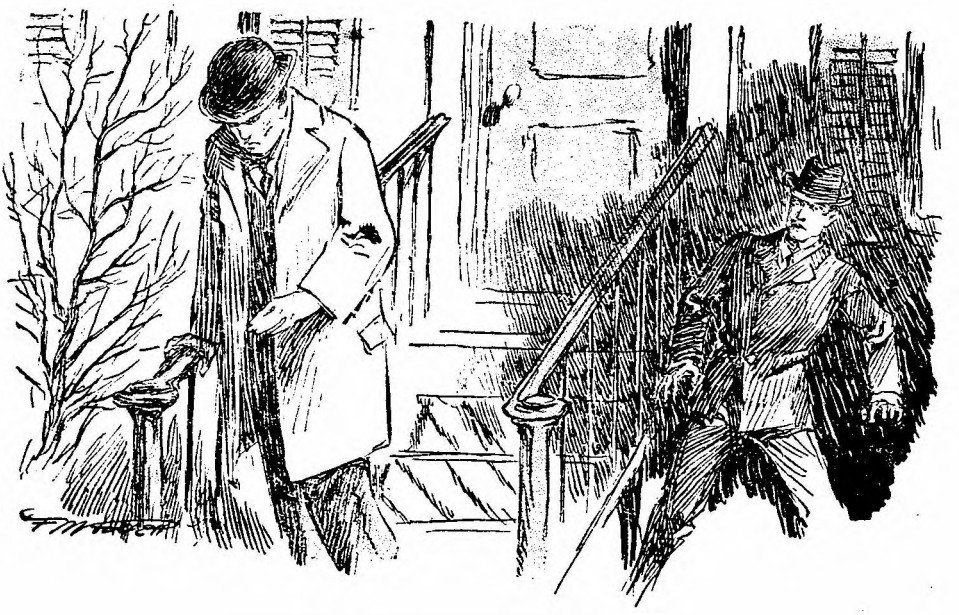
As skillfully as Agar had manufactured false keys and used them so he now proceeded to manufacture a trap for Pierce that would hold him captive while Agar was left free. He got Pierce into a forging plot and so worked it that although only Pierce was arrested, he never suspected Agar.

Pierce was sent to prison for a long term. Agar then paid court to Mrs. Pierce. She felt something lacking in this; a poor sort of loyalty toward a pal, she thought. A man who would do such a thing would do anything to a pal—perhaps even get him sent away to prison.

With this suspicion she began to watch him closely—and found out the truth.

Then the quiet little woman deprived of her husband for years by this man startled and shocked him with the violence of her revenge. She went to Scotland Yard.

And that is how the world learned the story of the robbery I have told here. Agar got his deserts; so did the others of the gang. And Scotland Yard for once felt humbly grateful to the fury of a woman.



He groped his way down the steps that led to the street

PRESCRIPTION 93b

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

"GOD, I WISH I HADN'T THAT AWFUL POWER!" SHE BURST OUT SUDDENLY. "BEAUTY CAN BE HELL"

DETECTIVE CROOK stepped back into a doorway as the little Chinese slithered out of the shadows and swiftly crossed the road. Opposite, three absurd glass globes of red, yellow, and green invited ailing humanity to enter the premises of L. P. Golding, chemist and druggist. The Chinese passed in.

"What are you up to now, Lung Ho?" thought Crook; and waited.

Whatever Lung Ho was up to, his business did not take him long. Scarcely a minute had passed before he came slithering out again, glancing with inscrutable almond eyes up and down the road. The Chinese's eyes did not miss much, but they missed Detective Crook, for when Crook liked he could be as cunning as any Chinese, and could obliterate himself with equal cunning.

"If, in the last sixty seconds, Lung Ho has performed some charitable act, or has committed a murder," reflected Crook, "his eyes would remain the same—they would tell nothing."

The Chinese disappeared, and for an instant the detective hesitated. He had been watching the Oriental for several days, in the hope of establishing some definite point which cautious Law could grasp. Should he continue to follow him, or should he concentrate now on the shop of L. P. Golding, chemist and druggist, Little Chapter Street?

He decided in favor of L. P. Golding. Or perhaps fate decided for him. Another figure drew near the shop, paused for a moment on the threshold, and entered.

The second figure was utterly different from the first, and appeared to belong to a different world. It was the figure of a tall, beautiful woman, who moved with a languorous, almost bored grace, and whose eyes, as she had paused outside the shop, had looked almost unnaturally brilliant. "You are pale beneath your color," thought the detective, "and your eyes are not always bright." But at the moment, whether through art or nature, her physical attractions dominated, aided by a touch of indolence and hint of scorn.

Making up his mind, Crook crossed the road after her, and lingered outside the shop. He had not wanted Lung Ho to see him, but of this lady he had no fear. Through the doorway, issuing from the brightness of the shop into the gathering gloom of the gloaming came voices.

"Can I see Mr. Golding?" The woman's voice—musical, but with a touch of imperiousness in it.

"He's out—I'm sorry. Can I do anything for you?" A young man's voice—pleasant, matter-of-fact.

A short pause, and then:

"When will he be in?"

"I couldn't say madam."

"But isn't he usually in at this time?"

"He was called away suddenly. But if it's a prescription—"

"A prescription?" A little amusement entered the woman's tone. "Yes—it is a prescription. But I'm not sure whether you know it."

"Haven't you got it with you?"

"No. It's 93b. Can you let me have it?"

The number was repeated. Crook visualized the shaking of a head.

"Well, never mind," came the woman's voice, rather quickly. "Mr. Golding knows it, and, when he returns, perhaps you could ask him to send it round."

"Yes, madam," said the young man. "What name?"

"Drayton. He knows the address. Good night."

The door, ajar, now swung open again, and the woman passed out into the street. She walked by Crook, and although her skirt brushed the detective, she did not pay any attention to him. Perfume hung in her wake.

He looked after her, then turned back to the shop, at the door of which stood the chemist's assistant. He, too, was looking after the beautiful woman who had just left, but when he encountered the eyes of the detective, he returned inside rather abruptly. Detective Crook waited a few seconds, then followed him.

The assistant was staring at the low counter behind which he stood. The counter was hidden from customers by an array of bottles and boxes, and Crook could not see what he was staring at. Not until the detective spoke did the assistant raise his eyes, with a little start.

"I want some 93b," said Crook.

The assistant frowned.

"Yes I said 93b," nodded the detective, watching him. "I understand it is obtainable here."

"Then you understand more than I do," replied the assistant tartly. He was a pale youth, good-looking in an ordinary way, though some might have considered him better looking if he had been a little less intent. At the moment he seemed to be laboring under some emotion.

"Am I wrong, then?" asked the detective cooly. "Don't you supply 93b?"

"What do you know about 93b?" demanded the assistant.

"What do you?"

"Nothing!"

Crook studied the assistant, then remarked, "I believe you."

The young man flushed.

"Why shouldn't you believe me?" he exclaimed. "Look here—may I ask what this is all about? You're not the first—" He stopped abruptly.

"Oh—has somebody else been here after it?" inquired the detective.

The assistant shrugged his shoulders. "That's not your business," he said rudely.

But Crook only smiled. "Suppose I report your manners to Mr. Golding?"

"You can do what you like, sir," retorted the assistant. "I'm under notice to go, anyway, so it makes no difference."

He spoke bitterly, and Crook looked at him with increased interest.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he replied. "Would you think it impertinent of me to ask why you received your dismissal?"

The assistant now looked at the detective with interest.

"Do you really want to know?" he demanded.

"If I didn't, I wouldn't ask."

"Well, I'm supposed to be incompetent."

"Supposed? And *are* you?"

"I'm no genius, but, as a matter of fact, I do my work all right. I've passed my exams."

"Of course. Or you wouldn't be here. Have you made any bad blunders?"

"No."

"Then incompetency can't be the real reason."

"P'r'aps it isn't."

"Do you know of any other reason?"

"I guess I'm not lucky."

"But he wouldn't dismiss you because you were unlucky," said the detective, with odd persistence. "The dismissal is bad luck itself."

"That's what I mean, isn't it? Why are you—"

"Then there is no other reason?"

The assistant stared at his interrogator, and looked puzzled.

"I ought to resent these questions—but somehow I don't," he remarked. "Why on earth are you interested in me? Nobody else is. Yes—there may be another reason. My employer doesn't like me."

"Do you like him?"

"No. I detest him."

"Why?"

The young man's eyes dropped, and he looked again on the low counter before him.

II

"I DON'T like his methods, that's all. I don't think I'd trust him very much." Crook drew a pace nearer, but the medicinal wall still intruded, and the assistant suddenly shoved whatever he was looking at into a drawer. "I oughtn't to speak like this," he muttered. "Don't know what's come over me. I don't mean all I've said—"

"Yes, you do," interposed Crook. "And very possibly you're right. It may not be good to trust Mr. L. P. Golding."

A customer came in with a prescription. The assistant attended to her, and grew uncommunicative. He looked tired and worried. Bidding him good evening, Detective Crook left the shop.

But he did not leave the vicinity of the shop, and when, later on, the assistant closed the shop and walked away, the detective followed him.

He was curious about this young man. There was something odd about him, some hint of excitement and hidden purpose, and his connection with matters and personalities which already interested the detective gave the assistant himself an interest.

Where would he go? Home, wherever that might be? To Mr. Golding? To the haunt of Lung Ho, the Chinese? Or to Miss Drayton, whose address, if he did not know it, he could doubtless find in the shop register, or local directory.

He chose the latter, though the decision seemed to cause him some agitation. He walked past the house in which Miss Drayton lived three times before he plucked up courage to ring the bell. But, whatever his mission, he did not desert it. In a few seconds, the front door had opened, and the young man had passed in.

"When he comes out again," reflected the detective, "one of two things will have happened. Either he will have delivered prescription No. 93b to Miss Drayton—or he will know what it is."

A detective's life is varied, not only in its incidents, but in its method of accumulating them. A dozen things may happen in ten minutes. Or nothing—apparently—may happen in ten hours, beyond monotonous waiting and shadowing.

For more than ten hours now Detective Crook had made it his business to wait and to shadow, and his patience was unlimited. Another hour went by. Then the young man appeared again, and his eyes were drawn and haggard. He was breathing fast, and his pale cheeks were flushed with color.

He groped his way down the stone steps

that led from the front door to the street. He appeared to have let himself out. Once again, Crook found his interest divided. Should he tackle the source of the assistant's emotion, or should he find out where it led. Both he could not do, for the source was behind the front door from which the young man had just issued, and the young man was already hurrying away.

Crook stepped quickly forward. The young man did not see him, or made no sign of having seen him. It occurred to the detective that to stop the young man and question him would produce no useful result, and might even interfere with the course of the strange tide that was carrying them on toward some unseen goal; so he did not detain the hurrying figure, but merely watched it till it disappeared, and then turned toward the house in which Miss Drayton lived.

He went to the front door, and knocked.

To his surprise it was opened almost immediately, and by Miss Drayton herself. An impulsive smile changed to a quick frown, and Crook thought, "She did not expect to see me here. She expected some one else—possibly, the return of the chemist's assistant." Aloud he said:

"May I have a word with you, Miss Drayton?"

The frown deepened. Miss Drayton was wearing a loose, pale-blue wrap, and in the half shadow of the hall she looked even more beautiful than she had looked in the shop. "And," reflected the detective suddenly, "even more tragic." Yes, standing there, she was a tragic figure.

"May I know your name?" she asked, abruptly pulling herself together. "You seem to know mine."

"My name is of no importance to you," replied the detective, "but—I think—you may regard me as a friend."

The reply was unexpected, and Miss Drayton studied her visitor more closely.

"Friend!" she exclaimed suddenly. "There is such a thing?"

She looked cross with herself the next moment. Crook had a disconcerting habit of drawing unprepared remarks from those he was with.

"Am I allowed in?" he asked quietly. "I will not keep you for more than three minutes—unless you desire it."

"Yes, come in," answered Miss Drayton. "But I hope your susceptibilities will not be shocked. I am quite alone here."

"This is not a conventional visit," returned the detective, as he entered. "Its nature need not shock either of us."

"Whoever you are," murmured the lady, as she led him across the small hall to her sitting-room, "you are an extraordinary man. I ought to be rather frightened—but I am not."

"I think I know why you are not frightened, Miss Drayton," said the detective, when they had sat down—she on a settee, he on a chair, almost facing her. "Firstly, you know you have nothing to fear from me. And, secondly—"

He paused.

"Yes, secondly?" she repeated, with a slight smile. "Don't be dramatic!"

"Secondly, Miss Drayton, you have advanced rather beyond the range of conventional emotions, and it would take more than an incident of this kind to frighten you."

She considered the theory, then nodded.

"Yes, there's something in what you say," she acquiesced. "I find you the reverse of frightening. In fact, quite nice and soothing. But what sort of an incident, do you think, *would* frighten me?"

"I am to be frank?"

"Oh, of course."

"Perhaps no incidents would frighten you. Unless you call sensations incidents."

"Sensations?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I have had plenty of sensations in my young life!" she laughed suddenly, and stopped as suddenly when her visitor replied:

"I can see that."

"You can?" Rebellion dawned in her eyes, to be quelled immediately. "Well, then," she said, almost sullenly, "what sort of sensations?"

"The sensations that follow the decision to run away from life," answered Detective Crook gravely, "after one has drained life's normal supply of sensations too rap-

idly. The sensation, for instance, that might follow the temporary forgetfulness produced by a dose of prescription No. 93b."

"Oh!" gasped Miss Drayton, momentarily beaten. A minute ticked away before the next words were spoken. Then she said, in a voice as quiet as the detective's:

"Perhaps you really are a friend, after all?"

"I have tried to imply it."

"And—perhaps—that other poor idiot was a friend, too."

"Mr. Golding's young and impressionable assistant?"

"You are quick! Have you been watching this house?"

Crook nodded.

"I have been watching this house, and I saw him enter and depart. He was laboring under some great excitement, and if you have confidence in me, perhaps you'll tell me the cause of it. I was also outside the chemist's shop when you went in to ask for No. 93b.

"If my deductions are right, the destructive and miserable drug was supplied to Mr. Golding by a certain Chinese I know of and Mr. Golding would have personally passed it on to you—as to other clients—had he not been suddenly called away from his shop. The assistant knew nothing of it, I think."

"Oh, no—the poor, dear assistant was as pure as virgin snow!" exclaimed Miss Drayton, fighting real feeling with irony. "He knew nothing. But when he took it upon himself to open the private packet addressed to Mr. Golding, and which your Chinese ought only to have delivered into Mr. Golding's own hands, he grew wise." She paused and smiled faintly. "I'm afraid our young assistant is rather impressionable."

"I gathered that, from his eyes."

"You gather a great deal. Did you gather anything else?"

"Yes. I gathered that besides being impressionable—which is only another word for human—he's a bit of an idealist. Too much of an idealist to serve Mr. Golding's shop."

"He is, indeed! Poor fellow! He has only been there a month. I'd not seen him before to-day."

"But you have power to attract men who see you only for the first time?"

"God, I wish I hadn't!" she burst out suddenly. "Beauty can be hell."

"When it's uninstructed," answered Crook. "Only then. Otherwise, it can be the reverse of hell. The world needs beauty, Miss Drayton. Don't destroy yours."

Again she laughed ironically.

III

"YOU don't think I've destroyed it, then?" came her challenge.

"It will soon be destroyed, if you don't alter your way of life. But whether you can do that, only you know. I don't. There is no substitute for the beauty that is natural. Paint is not beauty. Nor is the elusive elation of drugs and opium. Nor is the road that leads there—"

"The road that leads there!" repeated Miss Drayton. "How does one get onto it? The dullness of life drives one there."

"No—one's own dullness," corrected the detective. "And also one's impatience. Life is not dull."

"For the Lord's sake, don't preach!" she cried. "I've had enough of that. Our young assistant has been preaching in that very chair for over half an hour. I felt like throwing things at him."

"Was that why he came—to preach?"

"Don't ask me why he came! Oh, yes, but of course I know. He saw in me a goddess—a fallen one!—and all his idealism burst forth. He opened the Chinese's packet, and he brought it here. But he had no intention of giving it to me—it was merely his excuse."

"And you let him in?"

"Oh, yes. I was bored. I'd refused to to go to a night club—nearly everything bores me now—and I thought he might prove entertaining. Besides, at first, I thought he was going to let me have No. 93b."

"What happened, Miss Drayton, when

you found he was not going to give you what you wanted?" asked the detective.

"Oh, we had a terrible row. I enjoyed it thoroughly. I did a little of the Circe business, and managed to get the packet from him. Then I promised I would throw it away if—" She colored suddenly. "I was an idiot." She added swiftly: "I only asked him to kiss me."

Crook did not reply for a few moments. He visualized the scene—the young man's temptation, the excuse he could have given himself, and his almost quixotic renunciation of the chance—because, perhaps, he feared what might follow that kiss.

"And then?" he asked.

"He nearly fell, but not quite. He is a spotless youth! Don't think because I mock at him, I don't admire him. He lectured me, and, in return, I told him a few of the things I *didn't* do, and that although I accepted No. 93b from Mr. Golding, I by no means exhausted that person's vast and attractive possibilities. Bit of a black sheep, Mr. Golding."

Abruptly, the detective rose.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Drayton.

"You told Mr. Golding's assistant all this?"

"Yes. I've said so."

"How did he take it?"

"Very badly. He seemed almost to go mad. He's got some senseless idea that woman—*all* women—are worth saving. Even poor me! Before I knew it, he'd wrenched the package away from me again and ruined its contents before my eyes, and then he was off before I could stop him. When you knocked, I thought he was coming back to apologize."

"Forgive me, Miss Drayton, but I'm going to leave you now as abruptly as he did. I will return and explain later if I may. To-morrow. Meanwhile, one question." He was already at the sitting-room door. "Do you happen to know where Mr. Golding lives?"

"Yes—at the back of his shop. I think he has an all-night trade." She ran to him and looked at him anxiously. "What's the matter? I'm a bit human, you know—why all this hurry?"

"I hope to help you to avert *your* tragedy, Miss Drayton," he responded, "but first I've got to try and avert another. Good night."

She followed him into the hall and stared at the front door when it had closed and he had gone. Suddenly she shuddered.

IV

DETECTIVE CROOK hurried through the dark streets till he reached once more the premises of L. P. Golding, chemist and druggist, Little Chapter Street. No brilliant colors now invited the passer-by to enter, and the front of the shop was almost in darkness. Almost, but not quite. Through the heavy blinds a faint light glowed, as though from some back room the door of which might be open.

He went up to the front door and tried it softly. It was locked. There was a night-bell, but he did not press it. Instead, he entered a narrow alley beside the shop and made his way round to the back.

The back door was also locked. A crack of light showed under it. Detective Crook knocked softly.

There was no response. He knocked again. Footsteps approached.

"Who's there?" came a quiet voice.

"Let me in," replied Crook, also quietly.

Somewhat to his surprise, a key was turned and a bolt shot back. The door swung inward.

He stepped in quickly, and as quickly closed the door again. The young assistant stood before him.

"Well?" asked Crook.

"It's too late —you can't do anything," replied the young man. His voice was almost emotionless. "I expect you're a detective?"

"I am," said Crook curtly, and began to push by the assistant.

"I tell you, you can't do anything," repeated the assistant, barring the way. "Just wait a moment. Then you can go in."

"I'm going in now!" retorted Crook, and shoved the young man aside.

Half a minute later, the detective was

back in the narrow hall. The young man had not moved.

"What have you to say?" asked Crook.

"Nothing much," answered the assistant, his tone still expressionless. "Perhaps you know as much as I can tell."

"Shall I tell you what I know?"

"If you like."

"I know that Mr. Golding, who lies dead in there, was a blackguard, and I have no reason to doubt that he ruined, or helped to ruin, very many young girls' lives. I know that the Chinese, who lies dead with him, was an equal blackguard with probably an even worse record—I happen to have been on his track for some while.

"I know that a man like you would go mad with frenzy when learning that such blackguardism existed—particularly if you made the discovery through coming upon some beautiful human victim—"

"That's right," nodded the assistant. "I went quite mad."

"The only thing I don't know—"

"Is what I'm going to tell you. I got here a little while ago—I can't say how long—and I heard voices in the back room. Mr. Golding seemed angry, and the Chinese was arguing with him about something." Crook's face suddenly changed, but the speaker did not notice. "It was money, I think, but also something else, too. Things were going wrong between them. Anyway, they were quarreling. And I—"

"Go on," said Crook, for the young man had paused.

"I waited for a few seconds. I even waited when I heard a chair fall over, and a muffled cry. Only when everything was quiet again did I go in. And then I saw—what you've just seen—Mr. Golding with a gashed head, and the Chinese with a knife in his chest. Dead—both of them." He smiled all at once. "Thin, isn't it?"

"Still it might be true," replied Crook, looking at him searchingly.

"Whether it's true or not," said the young man, "you've found me here, and I had *meant* to murder Mr. Golding."

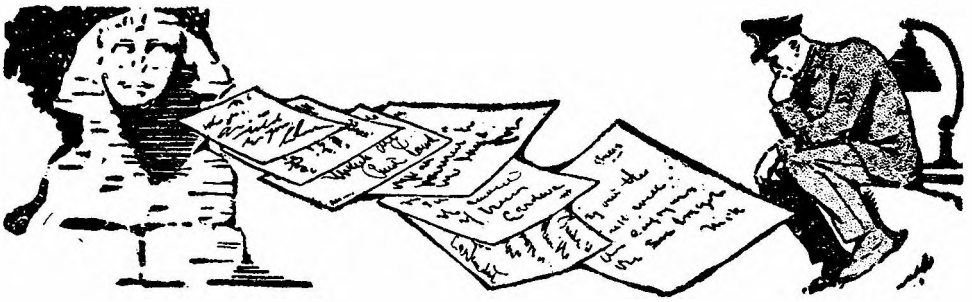
"Don't overdo your quixotism, my friend," responded the detective. "And don't tell any one else that you meant to murder Mr. Golding."

The young man passed his hand across his brow.

"What are you going to do?" he murmured.

"We've got one tragedy in there," said Crook, "and I think that's enough. So I'm going to avert another. Go home."

And, opening the back door, he gently pushed the young man out.



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

HERE, IN AN INTERESTING MANNER, IS DISCUSSED AND DEFINED JUST WHAT CONSTITUTES A CRYPTOGRAM

WHAT is a cryptogram?

Secret writing, of course, is a generally accepted meaning.

But is secret writing always cryptography?

Would a message written, say, in an established system of shorthand, or translated into a foreign language, unknown to any who might intercept or examine the communication, be properly called a cryptogram?

This interesting question is brought up by W. W. Rouse Ball in the eighth edition (London, 1919), of his "Mathematical Recreations," in which is included a chapter on cryptography, a subject not discussed in the previous editions.

Ball defines a cryptogram as a communication that may be freely given to all the world, and yet be intelligible only to those who have the key.

While foreign languages, or recognized language notations, cannot by this rule be classed as ciphers, such noncryptographic devices may, on occasion, be quite adequate for purposes of secret communication.

For example, during the St. Mihiel drive in the World War it was found that the Germans, intercepting the telegraphic dots and dashes, could easily read messages in any of the classical languages. But they were completely nonplused by the signals of two Choctaws communicating in their own language.

A similar scheme, according to Ball, was used by the British during the Sepoy Mutiny, when intercepted messages, written in English, but using the letters of the Greek alphabet, effectively resisted decipherment at the hands of the enemy.

An ingenious communication of a similar nature was resorted to by a lady who intended to puzzle Philip Thicknesse, author of "A Treatise on the Art of Decyphering, and of Writing in Cypher, with an Harmonic Alphabet," published at London in 1772.

In this instance the epistle was also in English, first rendered, as shown below, in the French orthography, but, as Thicknesse received it, written in Etruscan characters, an ancient alphabet which our readers will find reproduced in Isaac Taylor's "The Alphabet," London, 1883.

"Sur, as yeux air il, doux comme & change the climat: here, yeux mai have game, fiche, duc, fat mutin, foule, porc, aile, port, fruit, & admirable menchette an butter; an mi sistre (a joli nymphe) tu chat tu yeux, & sing yeux an ode, tu the lute, or violin: yeux canne have a stéble for ure hors, & a place for ure chaise. Mi son met a physician neér the river, tissé fêtal signe! thé sai, the pour Docteur dos grive about the affaire, oing tu the rude

Squire:—but pardon mi long lettre, pré doux comme tu us about mai, if yeux canne: mi service tu ure niece: hoüe dos Raïe doux?

Adieu mi friend,

* * * * * * * * *

P. S.—

Pré doux comme: for ure pour Nenni seize but feu beaux."

We have not learned that the Hon. Mr. Thicknesse accepted this invitation. But if he did, could we have cautioned him, it would have been to say that the writer of such a delightful missive could only have a most charming sister.

As a still earlier example of the same general class of communications may be cited the celebrated Diary of Samuel Pepys, once believed to be in cipher, but found, aside from a few modifications, actually to have been written in *Tachy-graphy*, a shorthand invented by J. Shelton, first published in 1620, of which Pepys employed the sixth edition issued in 1641.

To some extent Pepys turned the Shelton shorthand into cipher by omitting vowels, by using arbitrary symbols of his own invention for certain words, terminations, and particles, and by the insertion of nulls or nonsignificants. The last mentioned device and the use of foreign languages was resorted to when the subject matter, according to Ball, was such as could scarcely be expressed with decency.

A knowledge of Tachy-graphy, however, and the several languages used in the Pepys Diary would afford adequate means of deciphering that famous document. Likewise the Thicknesse note would occasion no difficulty for one familiar with the Etruscan alphabet.

The Sepoy Mutiny communication, similarly, would have been readily interpreted by any one knowing the English language and the Greek alphabet; as would also the World War messages, by a Choctaw.

As far as results go the employment of such artifices as these might often be as effective as the use of cipher. By Ball's test of exposure to the whole world, as has just been shown, however, they cannot be properly classified as cipher systems.

A cryptogram is thus a communication which, unless resolved by the special processes of cryptanalysis, is intelligible only to those in possession of the key.

Here are two cryptograms, submitted by our readers. Can you resolve them without their keys?

CIPHER No. 6 (Dr. G. A. Ferrell, Bessemer, Alabama).

HEEAS	LCTDB	LRINY	LHEL
LSECE	PSCET	AHNHN	IBEAG
EOPUA	ERTHT	SIUEI	ENRTA
AWBII	T		

CIPHER No. 7 (Francis A. Gauntt, Chicago, Illinois).

60-46-45-58-20-86-48-20-70-36-29-45-36-47-77-47-39-57-66-20-79-66-37-88-56-60-68-37-58-39-60-26-75-83-20-45-38-20-68-50-26-46-70-50-65-57-56-65-60-58-65-70-26-56-66.

The following simple substitution alphabet based on the key word KNAVERY was used in cipher No. 5, last week's crypt. Note how the cipher alphabet was taken out by "alternate verticals" starting with the last column downward:

K	N	A	V	E	R	Y
B	C	D	F	G	H	I
J	L	M	O	P	Q	S
T	U	W	X	Y	Z	

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Y	I	S	Q	H	R	E	G	P	Z	X	O	F

N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
V	A	D	M	W	U	L	C	N	K	B	J	T

There are still two weeks in which to solve one or two of The National Puzzlers' League contest crypts published in last week's department. The first three prizes are copies of "Real Puzzles," a book dealing with the history, construction, and solution of several standard types of word-puzzles, with one hundred and fifty original examples. Have you mailed your entry?

The solutions to this week's ciphers Nos. 6 and 7, and to No. 1, Mr. Davidson's contest cipher of three weeks ago, will be published next week.

There will also be some chat, more ciphers, and other items of interest in next week's issue.

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