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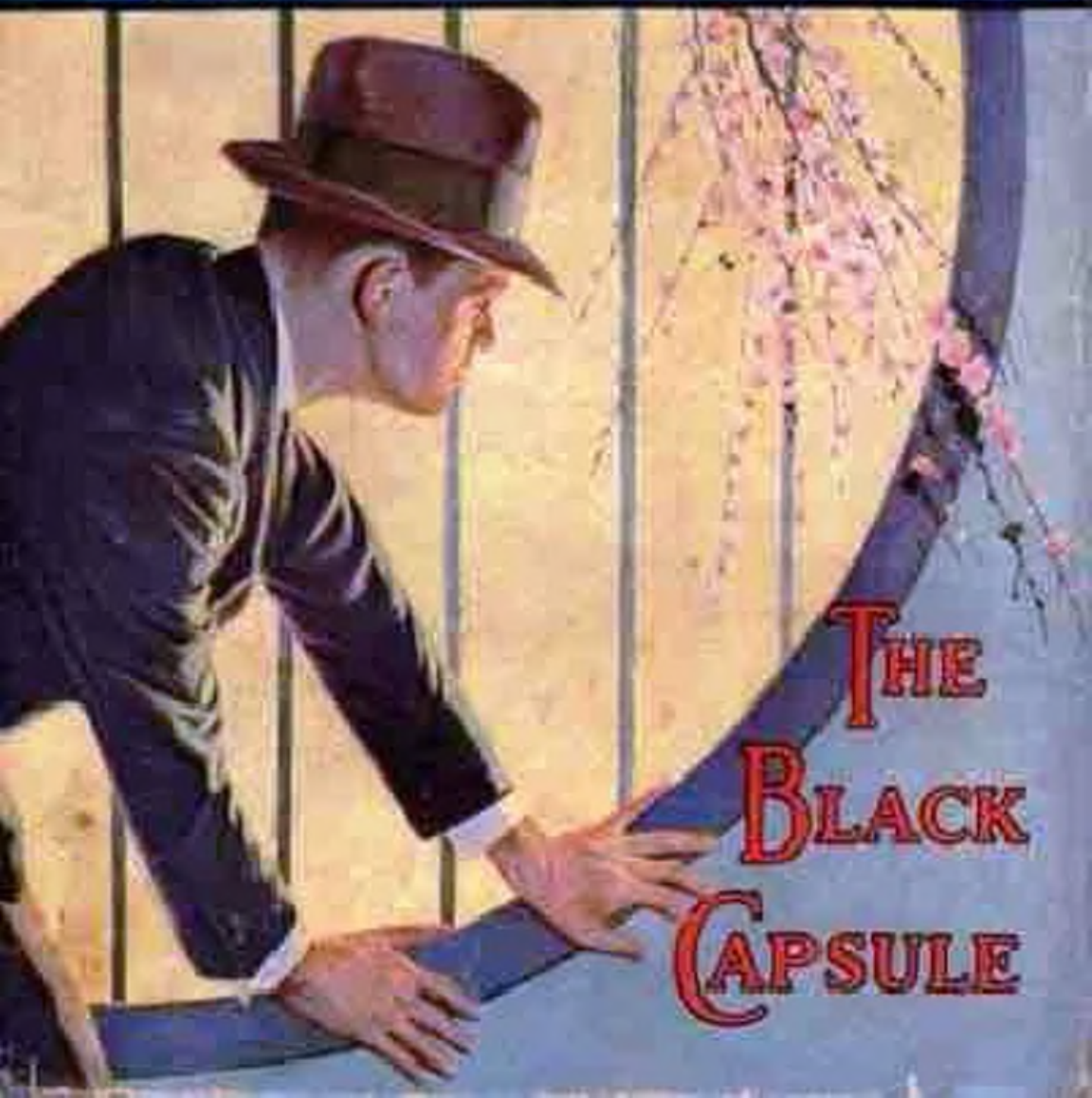

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Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR
Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME XXVI | SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 1927 | NUMBER 2

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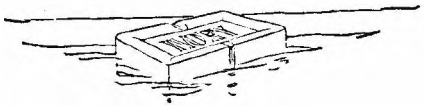


Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

VOLUME XXVI SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 1927 NUMBER 2

I folded the screen back and faced a dark-haired, blue-eyed girl

THE BLACK CAPSULE

By Don H. Thompson

BEING THE SWIFT ADVENTURES OF YOUNG DR. WARING, WHO SOUGHT ROMANCE AND FOUND IT IN A TORN LETTER AND A PRETTY GIRL IN A GREEN DRESS

CHAPTER I

AN INVITATION—REFUSALS NOT ACCEPTED

IT was raining, a dull monotonous drizzle. The window panes wept incessantly. A steady stream of water gurgled in the spout and ran into the street, while the high wind rumbled in the chimney and raised its voice in a triumphant whoop as it swirled between the houses.

I sat contentedly in my study toasting my shins before a fire in the grate as I prowled absently through a dozen back copies of the *Medical Journal*. Clad in an old smoking jacket, a worn pair of trousers and ancient slippers, I was enjoying a luxury for a busy young physician—a night to myself indoors. A night to puff my pipe, to think my thoughts, to read my books. A night—

My mind suddenly snapped back into the world of realities. I heard voices in the hallway. A door closed sharply against the wind. A knock.

"Well?" said I irritably. "What is it?"

"There's a man out here," came the voice of Mrs. Barkley, my housekeeper, "who says he must see you immediately. I told him you were out, but he says he knows better, and he won't leave the house. It's a matter of life and death, he says, and—"

"Yes, I know," I growled impatiently. "It's always a matter of life and death. Well, if he's as determined as you say I may as well be rid of him quickly. Show him in."

So much for my evening of peace and contentment at my own fireside. I closed my book, laid down my pipe resignedly, and got up to greet my caller.

He sidled into the room furtively, a small, weather-beaten little man in sodden clothes. His face was long and narrow, and I noticed numerous scars that showed through the sparse gray hair on his bullet-like head.

"Dr. Waring?" he asked, fixing me with eyes like twin gimlets and cocking his head to one side.

I nodded curtly. What could this strange fellow have to say to me? What had brought him to my door on such an evil night? He was not seeking my services for himself, and I felt certain that none of my patients had sent such a ragamuffin to me as a messenger.

"What can I do for you?" I inquired.

The little man stared at me for a moment, then his head turtled toward my housekeeper, who remained in the doorway, looking in dismay upon the pools of water which ran from my guest's clothing to the fine rug.

"I'd rather talk to you alone."

A smile fluttered at the edges of his thin mouth as the disdainful woman departed hurriedly.

"Mad, ain't she?" he asked. "Well, don't know as I blame her. She probably never saw a scarecrow like me before."

"What do you want?" I demanded sharply. "Speak up."

He grinned.

"Ever hear of Bill Copeland, doc? Huh?"

I shook my head.

"You know him, doc. Sure you do. Well, sir, I got a little letter here from Bill and he says it's right important, a matter of life and death, and he told me to get it to you no matter what happened."

He shot a skinny hand under his ragged coat and fished out a dirty piece of paper which he handed to me.

"Are you sure you have the right man?" I asked.

A queer little gleam came into my guest's eyes. It gave his lean face a crafty, dangerous look.

"It's for Dr. Hugh Waring," he said, "and that's you, ain't it?"

"It is."

Relief came into the little man's face.

"Then go ahead and read the letter," he replied.

I moved over to a lamp, unfolded the paper carefully, and this is what I read:

DR. HUGH WARING:

Six months ago you rescued a drunken wretch from the horrors of the inebriate ward at the City Hospital. You bought him clothes and gave him money. His name was William A. Copeland. He is now in a position to repay you. He must see you immediately. The bearer will show you the way. Do not fail to come, *please*.

WILLIAM A. COPELAND.

I looked up from the note.

"There," said the ragged messenger triumphantly. "Now you remember Bill, don't you?"

Yes, I remembered Bill. I had found him on one of my trips through the hospital, a dirty, drunken wretch, half dead from the effects of a debauch on rotten whisky. I had talked to him. There was something about him, some wistful appeal in the fellow's eyes, that got inside of me.

He had been, at one time, a gentleman of some refinement. But he would tell me nothing of his past. I took him out of the ward, got him a bath and a shave, gave him money and sent him forth in search of a job. I made him promise to inform me as to his progress. Six months had passed. Not a word from my protégé.

I decided that my venture in salvaging souls had been the usual failure, the fellow had most likely spent my money on one grand bout and had gone his old evil ways. I had dismissed him from my mind.

Now this letter, brought to me on a stormy night by a derelict who had all but forced his way into my house. The chances were, thought I, that my friend was down again and sought another lift out of the mire. It was probably a neat ruse to gain my sympathy and pave the way for another loan. I hesitated.

The little man seemed to follow my thoughts, and they made him acutely uneasy.

"Come on, doc," he urged. "Bill's on his last legs. He ain't tryin' to put anything over on you. He's got something valuable that he wants to give you. And, believe me, it must be valuable, 'cause Bill guards it with a big pistol and won't let nobody near it. And at night sometimes he raves about plots and gunmen and sometimes he yells for the police."

"I do not want any reward for my effort to make Copeland into a human being," said I. "If it's money he wants I might stand for a small loan, but I don't feel like traveling through a rain storm to console him. I will not go."

"Aw, doc, listen—"

"No."

My guest's eyes searched my face for an instant and then his long hand flashed into his bosom and came forth holding a nickel-plated pistol which he pointed at me.

"Doc," he said softly, "I hate to do this, but Bill says to bring you, whether or no, and if you won't come of your own accord I'll have to persuade you, get me?"

"Why the melodrama?" I demanded hotly. "Don't you realize that I could call for help and have enough policemen here in a moment to make an end of you?"

The little man grinned.

"But you won't," said he, "and there'll be plenty of melodrama around here if you start anything."

"Put up that weapon," said I, but the little man only stared at me from his queer eyes and shook his head.

"Well," I said, "I may as well go willingly, I suppose. Will you trust me out of your sight while I change my clothes?"

"Sure, doc."

The little man made another motion and the pistol disappeared.

"You see," he hastened to explain, "I promised Bill I'd bring you back, and I had to make good. Sure, doc, go ahead and get ready. I'll take your word for it that you won't call the coppers."

I changed quickly, and a few minutes later I was driving my curtained roadster through the storm at the direction of my strange guest, who sat hunched at my side.

"Market Street," he said, and I turned toward the river front. Darkness was deep over this part of the city, a district of cheap rooming houses and factories. Here and there a line of light edged a shutter, the only relief in the blocks of blind, wet buildings. My powerful headlights picked up a sodden ro[illegible] door or two, a vagrant doubled up in a [illegible] a policeman charging through the rain, his black rubber coat gleaming like the hide of a wet hippopotamus.

"Left," croaked my guide, "and stop under the light."

The car swayed to a halt beneath a feeble street lamp and we climbed out.

"Not a fancy neighborhood," grunted the little man. "Follow me."

We scurried through the rain and turned suddenly into a dark hallway, which we traversed a few paces. Then we climbed a creaking stairway to the second floor. The smell of wet plaster and cooking vegetables assailed my nostrils. My guide was fumbling his way along the landing, then he paused before a door and knocked lightly.

"It's me," he said in a low, tense voice.

There came a rattle of chains, the door swung open slowly, and we stepped into the room.

CHAPTER II

DEATHBED REWARD.

DRESSED in a dirty flannel night garment, Copeland, the wastrel, lay upon an iron bed, half covered by a greasy, ragged quilt. One look at the fellow told me that he was nearing the last

milestone of his life. His burning eyes, sunken cheeks and the little beads of perspiration that shone on his sallow forehead spoke eloquently of the ravages of whisky and drugs.

On a soap box at his side stood a lamp and a bottle, the latter half filled with a dark liquor. Near his other hand was a heavy pistol, and from time to time his long, skinny fingers reached out to caress it nervously.

"Well," I began impatiently, "what is it you want with me?"

"Lock the door," said the sick man in a low voice. "I don't want to take any chances now. I've got something here, doctor, something—"

"You are very ill," I interrupted in my best professional tone. "Perhaps I can do something for you."

I stepped toward the bed.

Copeland held up a shaking hand in protest.

"It is no use, my friend," said he with a half smile. "I'm quite beyond any of you fellows. My best medicine is in that bottle there, and every gulp brings me nearer my miserable end. No, doctor, I'll have none of your remedies. Keep them for your fashionable patients with the big pocketbooks."

I shrugged my shoulders and said nothing. The little man was replacing the chains on the door.

Copeland was talking again now in his quavering, thin voice.

"You saved me once, doctor, put me on my feet and gave me a chance. It is not your fault that this tale does not end differently. Yours was the first human treatment I had in many years. I appreciate it. Now that my opportunity has come I am unable to take it, so I pass it on to you. I will make you a rich man. Rich as you ever will want to be!"

I looked at him sharply. His sunken eyes were gleaming, his lean fingers were clenched, and the perspiration rolled from his face and bared chest, although he shuddered pitifully beneath his scanty coverlet. I concluded that he was delirious and tried to calm him.

"I'm not raving," he protested. "Listen to me, I beg of you, for I have not long to talk to any man."

He broke off as a fit of coughing seized and shook his emaciated body.

"The bottle. Hand me the bottle."

I passed the liquor to him, and a deep drink restored some of his waning strength. He spoke again in the same, quavering, hopeless tone.

"When I was taken to prison for the crime of being unable to care for myself I was placed in a cell with a large, well-dressed young man who questioned me closely about myself and finally, seeming satisfied with my answers, told me that he was carrying important papers which he did not care to have fall into the hands of the police.

"Knowing that he would be searched shortly, he proposed that I hold the documents for him. It was obvious that I was just a bum and the police would pay but little attention to me.

"I accepted the proposition, and he gave me a black capsule about the size of your thumb. It was sealed with wax. 'Return that to me next week at the Horton House and you will be well rewarded,' he said. 'Double cross me and I'll kill you like a rat.'

"An hour later I was whisked away to the hospital where you found me in the ward. The Lord only knows what became of the big young man.

"Of course, I broke the seal and opened the capsule. I found a half of a letter in it. Nothing that seems to make any sense or be very valuable. But I soon found out that somebody attaches great value to it, for I have been followed day and night. Attempts have been made on my life. I finally eluded them and came here and drank bad whisky until I felt myself slipping. Doctor, there is a fortune in that paper, some place."

Exhausted by the effort of talking, Copeland sank back on the bed and lay there gasping. Then one shaking hand fumbled in the pocket of his garment and produced a small black capsule which he handed to me.

"There is but one condition," he whispered. "If it is valuable, and I am certain

that it is, see that the man who brought you here to-night is rewarded."

He fell silent again. Outside the rain pattered on the roof, and the wind that came through the broken pane in the window rustled among the litter of papers on the floor.

The sick man stirred uneasily, closed his eyes, then opened them again.

"Good-by," he said feebly, "and good luck to you."

I found my voice.

"See here, Copeland, I don't want this infernal paper. Why don't you give it to your friend and let him recover the hidden treasure, or whatever it is?"

The wastrel smiled faintly.

"My friend is hardly in a position to be going about such things in person, if you get what I mean. He is slightly known at police headquarters and in other places. You see, he wouldn't have an outside chance. He couldn't—"

The words were choked back by another fit of coughing, and when it had passed away Copeland lay still. He looked like a corpse.

"Bill's about done," said the little man heavily.

I turned on him.

"Take this thing," I commanded, thrusting the capsule toward him. "I haven't any time for this sort of thing. I am a physician, not a dime novel hero."

The little man shook his scarred head.

"Nope," he said. "Not for me. I'll get mine going into other people's houses, but I'm damned if I'll monkey with that kind of stuff. I've seen 'em after Bill. There's a lot of trouble connected with that thing some place."

The sick man's voice came from the bed.

"Hurry!" he pleaded. "Get away from here. I've been watched for days. They've found me. I hear them in the hall and on the roof. Always watching! They'll be back to-night. Get away before—"

His voice trailed away into a thin whisper and died.

"Come on," said the little man. "I'll take you down to your machine."

We tiptoed out of the room and left Copeland mumbling and raving to himself on his filthy couch.

CHAPTER III

WOMAN IN THE CASE

I DROVE home through the storm at a furious pace, the black capsule in my vest pocket. Why hadn't I tossed the damned thing on the outcast's bed and departed in peace? Why should I risk my life in some outlandish plot hatched by a gang of river front crooks? Here was I, a dignified and able young specialist, prowling around at night with a pair of thugs and allowing myself to be elected chief buccaneer to recover the hidden treasure, despite the machinations of the black-mustached villain.

The whole absurd story reminded me of one of the melodramas that so fascinated me in my younger days. All I needed to complete the picture was a fair-haired heroine, her aged and honorable father and a mortgage on the family homestead. I laughed at the thought and cursed myself for a blooming idiot.

I turned my car into the driveway, left it there and dashed into the house, where I shed my dripping coat and hat. Now to return to my books. I stepped into the study and stood, for a moment, dumfounded.

The place had been ransacked. By the light of the dying coals in the grate I saw that my desk had been pried open, my papers and books were scattered about on the floor, and the doors of the cabinets on the wall were ajar. My eyes went quickly about the room. From beneath the Japanese screen at the left of the fireplace I saw a foot, a very small foot, and a slim, silk clad ankle.

With the blood pounding in my wrists and temples, I closed the door, locked it and dropped the key in my pocket. Then, feeling very much like a motion picture hero, I walked across the room and quietly folded the screen to one side.

A girl stood there, a dark-haired, blue-eyed girl, in a bright green evening dress, all covered with some sort of luminous spangles. She seemed paralyzed with fear,

unable to command her quivering mouth or her nervous hands that twisted an absurdly small handkerchief.

"Well," I said pleasantly, "I perceive that the characters in my melodrama are beginning to make their appearance. You, I presume, are the heroine."

She stared at me from wide eyes, and her distress was evident. Natural, thought I, to be distressed when caught rummaging through a man's house at midnight.

"On the other hand," I continued airily, "you may be the villain. We shall see. Now, perhaps, you will be good enough to explain what you are doing here? Don't be frightened. I would not have the heart to turn such a pretty burglar over to the police."

The girl's red lips formed three words:

"Let me go."

"Why should I? You have broken into my house, searched my desk, surely you don't expect to depart without even telling me what you are after. Come now, what is it?"

"I can't tell you."

"You can."

There was an edge to my voice now. She retreated into the corner and stood there, and at the look in her eyes I resumed my bantering tone.

"What kind of an act is this? How can I save you from the scheming double-dyed monster who undoubtedly pursues you, unless I know the plot? Can't you see that I am the hero? Give me a chance to do a little heroing."

The girl smiled. She was relieved. She was glad to see that I did not take the situation too seriously.

"Once again," I persisted, "would it be impertinent for me to ask what you are doing here?"

She laughed, a charmingly defiant laugh.

"You have something in your possession that does not belong to you. I came to get it. I am afraid that my visit was a—a little premature."

"So?" said I. "That's it. Well, well. The plot takes form. You are the agent of the pirates who seek the contents of the black capsule. Hum. I really believe this is going to be worth while."

I sat down, picked up my pipe, filled it and struck a match.

"Pardon me for not asking you to have a seat."

"I really prefer to stand."

I studied my guest carefully through the smoke. What was this girl? I had not decided. She was either a crook with the finesse of a fine actress or a very fine young lady in a devilish situation of some kind.

Suddenly I dropped my bantering.

"Why didn't they send a man?" I growled. "I would have been delighted to give him a good beating."

"You look ferocious."

"Indeed I am."

She regarded me with a hint of a smile as I puffed on my pipe and racked my brain for a reasonable answer to the riddle. I had concluded that the girl was after the black capsule which reposed in my vest pocket, but it was difficult to connect her with such a story as Copeland had related. Frowzy bums. River front crooks. Dark deeds. Hidden treasure. She looked more like gay parties, dancing, sunlight, music—anything but a silly quest for a document with an unsavory past.

And why, I asked myself, had she been sent to my home? If Copeland's enemies had trailed me, certainly they would have waited until I had a chance to hide the capsule.

"How did you know I had this thing you seek?" I demanded.

"You are known," said the girl steadily. She had recovered her poise now. "You are known to have removed a certain person from a hospital. We, that is, I, concluded that he had passed it on to you."

I fumbled in my pocket and withdrew the capsule.

"Is that what you are after?"

"Yes!" There was an eager light in her eyes. "Give it to me and let me go. Trust me. Believe me, when I tell you that this is none of your affair. Give me that capsule. Keep it and your life will be in danger!"

Danger! I considered carefully, watching the girl, partly in perplexity, partly in admiration and not without flashes of suspicion. Danger! The very word caught

at my imagination. I was bored to death by garrulous and complaining old men, asthmatic and gabby women, and homely, squalling infants. Danger! I drew a quick breath. Give me danger and a girl in a green evening dress!

I dropped the capsule back into my pocket.

"I'll keep it," I said decisively. "At least I'll keep it until I find out what this thing is all about."

Eagerness turned to incredulity in the girl's eyes.

"You fool!" she blazed at me. "You conceited idiot! Do you think this is a child's game that you can say smugly, 'I will keep it?' You will keep it until it is taken from you. Then you will probably get a bullet for your meddling!"

I was on my feet now. Her open scorn had sent the blood to my head.

"Listen to me, young lady," I snapped. "I can take care of myself. When you get back to your thieves' hangout, tell the boss brigand that I have this document and I intend to keep it. Invite him to come and get it, if he has the courage. I may shoot the next thief I find in my house, even if she does happen to be wearing skirts!"

Pale and defiant, she stared at me.

"Don't put on airs with me," she said evenly. "I know you, Dr. Waring, for just what you are, a cocaine smuggling, drug-peddling disgrace to your profession. May I go now?"

"You may go when I get ready to let you go," I retorted savagely. "Answer my questions. I am weary of this horse-play. Quit talking riddles to me and tell the truth if it is in you! Come now, who sent you to my house, and who told you that I am a drug peddler?"

"Do you really want to know?" she asked sweetly.

"Certainly!"

"Then try and find out."

And before I could stop her, she whirled, dashed to a window, threw it open and stepped out into the rain. A swish of the green skirt and she was gone, leaving me open-mouthed before the fireplace. For a second I stood there, then I hurried to the door, flung it open and gazed out into the darkness, but I could see nothing, and there was no sound save the splatter of the rain.

I laughed grimly and returned to the library. I had ruined my own plot. The heroine had flown, leaving me with the black capsule, and by all the rules of pirate conduct it was for me to search her out, halve her enemies neatly with a broadsword and then collect the treasure or whatever it might be.

I stirred up the fire in the grate and sat down to examine the mysterious capsule. It had been sealed with wax at one time but it was open now and I easily extracted a small piece of greasy paper which I unfolded. It appeared to be a half of a letter. I held it up to the light and read:

ake:

. I delivered the goods to

Princess Flavia. Meet him at

bring the stuff to me as I have

pose of them. Be careful as one of my

me we are watched.

Joshua Ba

CHAPTER IV

THEIR FIRST MOVE

I COULD make nothing of the thing, and after turning the matter over in my head without result I replaced the document in its shell. Where could I hide it? I finally turned out the lights, fearing that I might be watched from without, and dropped the capsule into an empty ink well upon my desk. Then I went off to bed, determined to get a good night's rest that I might be fresh on the morrow to begin my quest for the girl in the green dress.

But sleep did not come to me easily, and for the first time in my dull, well-ordered life I spent a restless night. Every time I tried to compose my mind there arose before me the picture of the girl behind the Japanese screen, and she flashed upon my memory in a dozen moods, now frightened, then defiant; laughing with the

pomegranate-red lips; eager and trembling and again dark-eyed and threatening.

I got up in the black middle of the night and groped for a glass of water. "I know you for just what you are." Her words rang in my ears. What had she meant? What was I? Nothing. That is, nothing romantic. Just a stodgy doctor, old beyond his years and knowing little of the life that thundered past his very doorstep.

"I hope," I muttered to myself, "that she really believes I am a drug peddler."

What was the matter with me? What had this strange girl done to the man who had strove among his books to the exclusion of all other interests? What swashbuckling, adventure-seeking demon had she aroused within me?

I laughed hollowly. I was a fool, a blithering fool, ready to follow strange gods into unknown fields.

The telephone bell rang insistently. I was awake instantly and saw that it was broad daylight.

My ear caught the sound of a strange voice.

"Hello, doctor," it said. "Don't fail to read the *Globe*. Second page."

"Who the devil—" I growled, but my caller was gone, and in vain did I rattle the receiver. What was this now? What could there be in the morning paper of interest to me?

I was all curiosity and it was not long before I was downstairs in the breakfast room, glancing hastily over the paper while Mrs. Barkley poured my coffee. I soon found what I sought, tucked away in a far corner under an insignificant headline. This is how it went, as I remember it:

VAGRANT SLAIN IN HIS BED

William Copeland, a beggar, was found stabbed to death in his bed in a rooming house at 1210 Market Street last night. The police are seeking a man who roomed with Copeland.

That was all. Just three or four lines of type, but to me they told a long story, for now I knew that poor Copeland's comic opera plot was a very real one after all.

I let the paper fall from my shaking hand.

"I shall be turning my practice over to Dr. Turner for a couple of weeks," I told Mrs. Barkley as she bustled in from the kitchen with the toast. "I feel myself sadly in need of a rest."

She eyed me suspiciously.

"And what," she demanded, "will your dear uncle be saying about that?"

"Damn my uncle," said I. "If he comes around here while I'm gone, tell him I'm at the races."

The effect of these words upon the poor woman was ludicrous. It was very much as if my pet dog had reared up on his hind legs and had demanded a cigar. Mrs. Barkley knew that my uncle had paid for my education and, with that as an opening, had appointed himself watchman over my social and business affairs, never allowing me, for a moment, to forget that I was a Waring.

The old man's idea of letting the world know about the Warings was to cultivate an insufferable stare and to walk like one had a catch in one's neck.

"Yes," I went on, "if the old boy makes any inquiries, tell him I left word for him to leap into the nearest ocean."

"All right, doctor," soothed Mrs. Barkley. "I'll do that, sir. You can depend on me." And she ducked hurriedly through the swinging door into the kitchen. It would not have surprised me if she had called the police.

I finished my coffee and sauntered into my office, where a dozen patients were awaiting me. The regular morning routine began. Mrs. Trimbell relating her imaginary ills; a young mother with a crying baby; a callow youth with a swollen throat; another baby; a garrulous ancient, and, lastly, a fine looking old gentleman upon the arm of his stalwart son. The father was white-haired and thin as a lath. The boy was a huge, barrel-chested fellow of frank countenance and engaging manner.

"My father is suffering from some strange malady," said the youth in a deep voice. "It has defied all diagnosis, but hope never dies in the breasts of the afflicted. We are praying that you may be able to do something to help him."

The old man was lowered into a chair

and I began questioning him. His answers revealed that he was, indeed, suffering from a rare disease. Here was something, I told myself, that promised to be of extraordinary interest. I made rapid notes of his symptoms.

We were deep in the discussion of his case when the patient suddenly lurched to his feet, his hands fumbling at his throat, and gasped out:

"I believe I'm dying!"

He staggered a few steps toward the door and collapsed lightly in a heap on the floor. His son ran about the office in great agitation, crying loudly for water and, finding none, he dashed into the hall.

I felt of the old man's pulse. It was quite normal. His wizened face was ruddy. Queer, I thought, as I frowned at him.

Then it came to me. I stepped swiftly over the body and into the hall. Where had the youth gone? I heard the sharp sound of heels overhead. The impudent dog was in my bedroom.

I leaped up the stairs, threw open the door and there he was, humming a snatch of a song as he calmly pulled the drawers from my bureau and dumped the contents in a pile on the floor.

"Well, sir!" said I, my voice rising in anger. "What have you to say for yourself?"

He looked up at me and a malicious grin spread over his broad, good-humored face.

"Hello, doctor," he replied pleasantly. "I was just doing a little exploring. Sorry to have messed up your room."

"You'd better be sorry," I growled, "because you'll need sympathy when I get through with you."

Still grinning, he cocked his head to one side and regarded me in mock dismay.

"Tut, tut, my friend. You have a nasty temper. You really ought to do something about it."

I pointed to the door.

"Get out!"

He dropped a bundle of my shirts and swaggered past me.

"Of course you know what I'm here for?" he suggested. "Might I hint that you should return my property to me and save yourself trouble, or will your violent disposition stand for such an idea?"

"Get out," I repeated, "and get out quick. I promised a certain lady that I would shoot the next intruder in my home. The only reason I have not kept my promise is that I lack a weapon."

The huge young man paused on the landing.

"Perhaps you are better off," he reflected. "Stick to the hypodermic, doctor. It's easier to handle and less dangerous. You have a way with you, haven't you? You are really a very clever fellow. I should like to see more of you, and something tells me that I will. By God, I believe I am going to have some fun out of this yet."

And with that he slapped me cordially on the back, turned quickly and stamped down the stairs, laughing in a great good humor. His robust bellow filled the lower hall. Then the door slammed and he was gone. When I got downstairs there was no sign of the old man. I sat down in my empty office and turned the day's events over in my mind. It had been a neat ruse. They had taken me in with ease. What would the next move be?

I decided that it was my turn now, so I clapped on my hat and hustled off to see Dr. Turner about taking over my practice and found him, as I had expected, agreeable to the proposition. We soon came to an arrangement that would allow me at least two weeks of freedom.

With that settled, I returned to the house to plan my campaign. The first thing I needed was an assistant. I realized how poorly equipped I was to cope with the ingenious scoundrels who sought the black capsule. Who could help me? There was Higgins, the lawyer. Too cold and businesslike. He would probably want to know how much his fee would be. Young Brillers at the bank might do, but he was tied down with a wife and children.

I cast my mind back to college days. Who was the wildest, most adventurous youngster in the school? I had it. Heywood, the president of my class. A harum-scarum chap he was, and I felt sure that my mystery would appeal to him. I tele-

phoned to the club and learned that he had last been heard from as a newspaper reporter for the *Globe*.

"Sort of dropped out around here," said my informant. "Guess his pocketbook wouldn't stand it, you know."

I called the paper and left word with the city editor to have Heywood drop in at my house.

"Something very important," said I by way of whetting that gentleman's curiosity.

CHAPTER V

MY CHOICE WAS WISE

IT was late in the afternoon when Heywood arrived. He came striding into the library and greeted me much as though we had been seeing each other quite regularly. A tall, rawboned man, slightly stooped, and with a prominent nose toward which all his features seemed to run, Heywood had the nervous, eager look of a fellow who was searching for something.

He helped himself to a cigar, took a chair, and gazed at me thoughtfully for a moment. Then he shot out an abrupt question:

"Well, doc, old sawbones, what's biting you?"

"Bored with life," said I. "Wearied to death by gabby old women, sad-eyed old men, silly young women, and bawling infants. Sick of the grind."

Heywood laughed dryly.

"That, I fear, is a universal complaint. Am I the antidote in this case?"

"You are."

"Hum. Well, it won't take me long to prescribe my remedy. Banish that worried expression. Grab your hat. We'll play pop goes the weasel and give this sad burg the once over. Let's go."

"I believe," said I, "that I have something better."

"Impossible," he snorted. "A man of your limited experience couldn't do it. Why, I know every dive in town. I even know a bootlegger who sells stuff guaranteed to improve the eyesight. Beat that if you can."

"I can," said I.

"Say." Heywood sat up in his chair. "Have you really got something serious on your mind? I thought you had got to browsing on our days at school and were looking for a skipping partner. Are you in trouble?"

"Not yet, but I hope to be, before long. Heywood, have you ever tried to solve a crime?"

He gave me a hard look. An abashed grin was upon his face.

"How did you guess that I had turned sleuth? I get all that kind of stuff down at the *Globe*—murders, suicides, kidnapings, and the like. I've untangled some of them, too. It's quite interesting to see what a little concentration will do. Doc, you and some of the other fellows may be headed toward success, but I am really seeing and enjoying life, although I live like a fireman and work like a dog."

"Fine," said I. "Great. You'll be the very man to help me out."

"Not so fast," objected my friend. "What the hell's this all about? Are you going to buy a pair of rubber heels and turn detective or have you killed somebody?"

"Your first theory is right, Heywood. I'm turning detective for a couple of weeks and you are going to help me solve a fascinating mystery and find a girl in a green evening dress."

"Well, well," said Heywood. "Sounds good. Tell me more. What is this dark mystery, and why do we seek a girl in a green evening dress?"

"I'll begin at the beginning," said I, and while the sun fell behind a bank of dark clouds and the shadows lengthened across the street, I repeated my experiences with Copeland, his black capsule, the girl who had invaded by home, and the strange pair of visitors who had tricked me so easily that morning.

"So," I concluded, "I am convinced that this letter means a great deal to somebody, and I am going to find out who it is. I need a vacation anyway. What do you think of it?"

"I think," said Heywood frankly, "that you are as crazy as a cuckoo clock on daylight saving time. You're as buggy as they make 'em. This plot is probably some low scheme that you wouldn't want to be hooked up with in a hundred years. It

looks to me like you've got a fine chance to get churned up into a merry mess.

"However, I'm with you, hook, line, and sinker."

He blew smoke rings into the air and then leaned over and peered at me.

"Say, doc, you're not in love?"

"In love?"

"With the dame in the green dress."

I laughed and tried to make it convincing.

"Well, hardly. I confess that she attracted me, but I wouldn't say it was love. She might be a lady safe-blower for all I know."

"Exactly." Heywood regarded the end of his cigar. "I was rather alarmed at your enthusiastic description of the lady. You say this girl had no coat?"

"Not that I saw."

"Hum. She couldn't get very far prancing the streets in an evening dress without being noticed. That's as good a place to start as any."

"Where?"

"Taxicab drivers. She probably walked a block and hopped into a cab. Worth trying. I haven't got anything to do this evening. Suppose I prowl around and see what I can pick up."

"Get back by seven and we'll have dinner and hold a coroner's inquest," said I.

"Righto."

Heywood seized his hat, shook hands hastily and hurried away. I knew by the gleam of interest in his gray eyes that my choice of a helper had been a wise one.

CHAPTER VI

HEYWOOD PROVES A SHERLOCK

THERE was a look of triumph about him when he returned.

"We are getting along amazingly well, Sherlock," he said as he took a seat opposite me at the dining table. "I've managed to get track of your husky young man and have proved, to my own satisfaction, that it was he who sent the girl to your house."

"Good," I approved. "Tell me about it."

"It was as I surmised. Your girl friend left here, took a taxicab and went straight to headquarters to report her failure. I had no difficulty in finding the chauffeur, and for a five-spot he drove me to the place. It is the home of Charles Blake, diamond importer, a rather imposing residence on the heights.

"I made a few discreet inquiries about Blake. A bad egg. Hardboiled as a dress shirt front. Been mixed up in some shady deals, but never caught with the goods. He has been suspected for a number of years with having some connection with a crowd of jewel smugglers. So, you see, we are going to be in rather fancy company."

"And the girl?"

It was the question in which I was most interested, but Heywood waved it away.

"Just an agent of Blake's probably, A mere incident in our story. Understand, I haven't seen this fellow Blake. Wouldn't know him from Adam, but it strikes me that he was probably the man who tangled up your shirts to-day.

"We will say it was like this: Blake, with the half of the letter in his possession, was arrested and, fearing that the police would see some significance in the message, intrusted it to Copeland. He learned that you had removed Copeland from the hospital and figured that the vagrant had given you the capsule then and there. He sent the girl to your house, not knowing that you were out calling on Copeland. Follow me?

"Well, between the time you left Copeland's rooms and got back to your house, other spies had found Copeland and had murdered him in an attempt to get the paper.

"Then they found that they had made a mistake. The girl returned and reported that you had the capsule, so Blake rigged up this sick-father business and had a try for it himself. That's the way I've got it sized up."

"Sounds reasonable," said I. "By the way, I presume this letter was written to Blake. You remember, it starts out, 'ake.' The 'b' and the 'l' were torn away. Now as to the man who wrote the letter. How will we get some trace of him?"

Heywood bowed over his steak.

"I have anticipated you, my friend," he smiled. "The letter mentions stuff. Since Blake is an importer, stuff would probably be jewels of some kind. The letter is signed 'Joshua Ba.' I picked up a city directory and looked under jewelers. There I found a man named Joshua Barton. Wouldn't it be reasonable to suppose that he is the writer of the letter?"

"It would. What's our next move?"

"Well, to-morrow I'll dig around in the police department among some friends of mine and try to get a line on what Blake has been up to lately. This capsule is undoubtedly connected with some of his schemes. If we can hit the right one, the rest will be easy. Then we'll give Brother Barton a look, see what kind of a bird he is and try to figure out his connection with Blake.

"If we uncover anything, all well and good. If we don't, we're up a tree."

We finished our meal in silence. I found myself thinking of the dark-haired invader who had temporarily changed my scheme of life.

"I don't believe it," I said suddenly.

"Don't believe what?" demanded Heywood. He looked at me like a startled hawk. "Why, it's all as plain as the nose on your face. Of course, we don't know what the letter means, but we've got a good line on—"

"I didn't mean that," I confessed. "I was merely thinking aloud. I don't believe the girl is crooked. There is something queer there, Heywood. She had a look about her that got inside of me. I tell you it's—"

"Rats," said Heywood. "Nice girls are usually found prowling around a man's house at midnight, aren't they? Forget it, doc, old boy. She is probably twice as crooked as a pretzel."

CHAPTER VII

THE NIGHT ATTACK

BUT I found myself unable to forget it as Heywood had advised and long after he had gone, I sat before my fire, trying to find some plausible excuse for the girl in the green dress, some explanation that would reveal her as the innocent victim of the plotters. Each time my mind went around the cycle of events and came back to the same starting point, always confronted by this one question:

If the girl was not a member of Blake's crowd why had she not spoken? Why hadn't she allowed me to protect her from whatever it was she feared?

Perhaps, I told myself, she had been watched from outside by another one of the conspirators.

The clock struck eleven. My efforts had come to nothing. I found myself wondering what part of the drama was being unfolded at Blake's house this night. Why not go and see? Give old Heywood a surprise and some information on the morrow. I set my jaw resolutely. I would do it.

A few minutes later I was backing the roadster out of the garage. It was another vile night. Great oily black clouds rolled in from the river and the air was heavy with the threat of the storm to come. I settled my chin deep into the collar of my coat, headed the car toward the heights and stepped on the accelerator.

I parked my car a block from the house which I readily recognized from Heywood's description. A yellow moon peeped from between the rifts in the clouds that swept majestically across the sky and in the dim light I could see the broken sidewalk that ran past Blake's home. The street, lined with great maple trees, had been a fashionable one in its day, but it had fallen upon evil times and was now the host to innumerable cheap boarding houses.

Blake's place stood a little distance from the road in the center of a generous but unkempt yard. It was dark and forbidding. There was no sign of life.

I groped my way up a side drive and found an opening in the hedge. The moon had buried itself behind an ink-black cloud and the darkness was intense, for which I was grateful. I stumbled through a small garden and finally brought up against the rear wall of the house. It was then that I caught sight of a narrow ribbon of light which came from beneath the window curtain of a back room.

My breath whistled between set teeth.

So far so good. Step by step I edged toward the window. From the river came the far-off rumble of thunder. I hoped, fervently, that the gods would dispense with any display of lightning. It would surely betray me.

I applied my ear to the window. Within a woman was speaking in a vibrant, passionate voice.

"What are we going to do now?" she demanded. "The success or failure of our whole venture depends upon getting the letter away from that fool of a doctor. Why are you waiting? Suppose he goes to the police? Then where will we be, my chesty one? Where?"

A man laughed. It was a hearty, boastful bellow. Surely this was the same fellow who had ransacked my room.

"He won't go to the police," he assured. "He's sitting tight to see what happens next. Blake will take care of him nicely. We want to get the capsule from him quietly. Can't afford to have too much fuss about it, for the idiot has probably talked and violence would lead to much trouble. Patience—"

"Bah!" cried the girl. "We have no time for patience. Let us strike now!

"What is the matter with Blake?" continued the petulant feminine voice. "Has he quit us?"

The man's reply, soothing in tone, was unintelligible to me. I must see these people. They had spoken of Blake. If the man was the chap who had visited me that day, then he was evidently not Blake. That would be my first information for the cocksure Heywood.

I glanced about me and saw that there was a smaller window high up in the wall. It had no curtain, but its panes were of colored glass. I peered at them closely. The uppermost piece was of plain glass. Perhaps I could see through it into the room.

"Worth trying," said I, and felt my way along the wall until I came to a small porch. I climbed up on its rickety railing and stretched my neck until I thought it would crack. I could just see the tops of the heads of the two persons in the room. One was the girl in the green dress and the other was the huge young man who had tried to trick me out of the capsule.

I let myself down from the porch cautiously. There was nothing more to be gained by staying there, and I confess that I was getting increasingly uneasy. I started back through the garden the way I had entered. The rolling of the thunder grew louder and a vivid flash of lightning split the sky, outlining the trees, the walk and a sun-dial in clear relief. Then utter darkness. Another flash. I halted in my tracks, my heart pounding wildly.

Through the garden, like the shadows of doom, three men were approaching me, silently and quickly, with jaws out-thrust and arms swinging menacingly. I had no time to take in their features as they converged on me in the gloom.

Well, here was something that I could understand. Here was no mystery of torn papers and puzzling conversation. This meant fight and my overwrought nerves welcomed the combat. I was a big, strong fellow for all my bookish ways, and I told myself that these thugs would know, when the battle was over, that they had been to the wars.

"Come on," said I. "Let's go!"

They came. I perceived, by the grace of another flash of lightning, that they were unarmed. Perhaps they feared to arouse the neighborhood by firing at me and then again perhaps they wanted me with a whole skin.

I had no time to dwell upon the subject. I heard the swift pat of a foot on the hard wet ground before me and my right fist lashed out into the darkness. Ah! My knuckles sunk, with a satisfying bite, into the cheek of one of my assailants and he went rolling into the muck of the garden.

"One down!" I howled above the noises of the gathering storm.

The other two charged at me in determined fashion. A heavy fist caught me behind the ear and the force of the blow spun me around like a top. I kept my feet and shook the cobwebs out of my brain. Then I lowered my chin behind my left shoulder and drove a terrific blow into the face of a huge man who arose at me out of the darkness. He folded up like one of those old-

style opera hats and I booted him out of the way savagely.

The fellow I had knocked into the garden returned to the fray. Two against one. It was not hopeless. The man I had smashed in the face would fight no more this night. He was done.

We stalked each other in the dark. One of the thugs worked his way behind me and before I could turn on him he hurled himself at my legs. Down we went into the mud in a tangle of flying arms. I managed to grasp one of my opponent's arms, locked my leg about it and began to slowly twist his wrist. It was a wrestling hold and a torturous one.

"Quit kicking, you fool," I growled. "I'll break your arm in two."

My victim groaned.

"Hey, Alf," he called in an agonized voice, "drive a knife into this devil. He's killing me."

"Can't," said Alf laconically out of the dark. "Hold on. I'll get him in a minute."

With a farewell twist that sent a shudder through the body of the man on the ground, I released him and hopped to my feet. I would have a better chance there.

"Now, Alf, my boy," said I. "Let me get my hands on you and this fight is over."

"Think so?" he sneered. "You may find that I'm not so easy as those two bums. You'll have to prescribe for yourself when I get through working on you."

With that he charged at me with both arms swinging. I sidestepped him quickly and dug two vicious blows into his ribs.

"Not bad," commented Alf as he swung around and charged again. "Not half bad for a bloomin' pill roller."

Another streak of lightning shot across the angry sky and I got a momentary glimpse of our battle-field. There was the man called Alf, a heavy, hulking beetle-browed ruffian. The victim of my wrestling hold was getting to his trembling legs and in the mud of the garden the unconscious villain lay face downward.

The flare had no sooner faded than Alf's big fist crashed into my chin and I slid to the ground. Badly shaken, I struggled to my feet and evaded him until my head cleared. Then we closed in.

"Might as well settle this now as to fight all night," I snarled.

"Sure," said Alf amiably as he swung and missed a fierce right to my head.

I shifted him into position, passed my arm around his face and locked my fingers. It was now or never with me. I must either injure Alf so badly as to put him out of commission or come out loser, for it was plain to me that I lacked the stamina to batter such a brute down in a finish fight.

Throwing every ounce of strength I possessed into the effort, I hurled him from his feet and we landed heavily on the ground, my arm still locked around his head. Then I began to tighten my hold, and though he kicked and struggled mightily, I managed to retain my grasp. I gripped him until I thought my arm would break upon his hard skull.

His struggles became weaker and weaker. Now was the time to drop him and flee for my life. That would be the wiser course, I decided, but before I could act the back door of the house banged open and a square patch of light fell into the yard. The man with the injured arm had gone for help and the rescue crew, composed of six or seven hefty fellows, was running toward me. All of them were carrying clubs and knives.

It was all up with me. That was plain. I tightened my hold viciously. I would make my friend Alf feel like he had thrust his head into a vise.

Now the crowd was upon me. I dropped Alf and lumbered to my feet waiting dourly for the attack. The first man who leaped at me got a solid punch in the eye and he fell back with an exclamation of pain.

"Well, by God, if it isn't the demon doctor himself!"

The huge youth was speaking and I whirled to confront him. A final swing at his square chin would not be amiss.

Then a blow from a club knocked me to my knees. Another blow and I was down. They swarmed over me.

Now I was being carried away, floating easily between many dark figures. Faintly I heard the complaining voice of Alf.

"Blake," said my late opponent with a string of oaths, "is a damned liar. He said this guy was a sawbones who couldn't lick anybody. I'll say this bimbo can trim any three men in the crowd."

I laughed insanely.

And after that I knew nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHIEF BUCCANEER

THERE was the smell of damp stones mixed with the savory odor of cooking. Also there was the swirling sound of running water. A man laughed boisterously and the measured tread of many feet intruded upon my bewildered senses.

Then I realized that I was lying upon a bed and I sat up. As I did so, I turned sick and dizzy and the strange place began to reel before my eyes. My hand went to my head and came away covered with blood, my hair was matted and my face felt stiff and swollen.

I got to my feet and looked about me. I was in a small room with stone walls and one heavily barred window. It was furnished with a narrow bed, a pine table, a chair and a candle. Over it all hung the heavy atmosphere of disuse.

I staggered to the window and looked out upon the river. It was daylight, early morning I judged, for the cold mists were just rising from the waters. I must be on one of the several little islands which dotted the surface of the stream just below the city.

My prison appeared to be an old mill. I looked at the bars and smiled grimly. They were new. Blake and his crew must have anticipated my visit or the place had been used to hold others who did not fit in with his schemes.

Close beside my prison and separated from it only by a small courtyard was another building of stone. It, too, had barred windows and a heavy door. Another jail? I was looking at it rather unsteadily when the door swung open and the girl in the green dress stepped out.

She wore a dark cloak about her shoulders, but her head was bare and her dark hair shone in the gray light. Walking swiftly to the river's edge, she suddenly flung herself to her knees and raised her eyes in supplication to the sky.

She was praying and as her lips moved, the tears coursed down her cheeks and fell upon the cold stones. Then she suddenly buried her face in her arms and her shoulders shook as she sobbed.

I paced the room in agitation and dismay. What new turn of events was this? Why did this self-possessed young woman now weep her heart out? I returned to the window and tried to call to her, but my voice was but a dismal croak. Feeling cold and sick I lurched to the door and, much to my surprise, found that it was open.

Clinging to the banister for support I made my way down the stairs to a hallway on the first floor. There were no windows here, and I paused for a moment until my eyes were accustomed to the gloom. Then I began feeling along the wall for the doorway which would let me into the courtyard where the girl lay weeping.

I had walked but a few steps when I became aware of the presence of another person, a lean, dark man who was staring at me from a corner.

"Somewhat the worse for wear, eh?" asked the man. He bit off his words venomously.

I held myself as stiffly upright as my sagging knees would permit and stared back at him. He was a lithe, young fellow of glowing vitality and a quick eye, dressed in a black, loose-fitting suit, a white silk shirt and a flowing bow tie.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"I?" The man threw back his head and bared his teeth in a sardonic smile.

"Yes, you. Are you the chief buccaneer? If so, turn me loose or it will be much the worse for you."

The smile left his face. The dark eyes burned into me.

"We've had enough from you," he snarled. "My name's Blake and no second-rate sawbones can horn into my business and get away with it."

He moved toward me across the hall, balanced lightly on the balls of his feet, his slim body tensed for combat.

And in the dim light I saw that he carried a long, flamboyant-bladed knife.

CHAPTER IX

TO SAVE A MAN.

SO it was all up with me. The fact dripped like acid into my weary brain as Blake came bounding across the hallway with the knife in his hand. I knew that I did not have the strength to keep him off, for it was all I could do to maintain my precarious balance much less fight an active, armed man.

I did manage to evade his first rush and plunged with heavy, uncertain steps into a corner. Blake was drawing back for another blow when a woman's voice, full of scorn, said:

"Blake, you coward! Would you knife a helpless man?"

It was the girl. She thrust herself between me and the man with the knife.

"Don't be a fool, Sonia," growled Blake. "Keep out of this. Your precious doctor won't be hurt. I was just demonstrating what might happen to him unless he is reasonable."

"Yes, I know," said the girl wearily. Her face was white and tired-looking.

Blake faced her, hands on hips, and in a low voice dripping with cold contempt said:

"It seems to me that it was you who urged violence in this matter. Now you call me a coward for following the plan which you suggested. I can't understand you, Sonia."

And with that he glided off down the hall like some evil shadow and disappeared.

"Thanks, my friend," I whispered weakly.

"Come," said the girl sharply. "You have lost much blood and are very sick."

She led me, stumbling helplessly, back to the room where I fell upon the bed. Then she procured a pan of hot water and gently bathed the cut in my skull and bound it with a clean cloth. Her quick, white hands smoothed my damp hair.

"Why," I asked presently, "did you step between me, your enemy, and Blake, your friend?"

She smiled and told me to lay quiet, warned me that I was badly hurt and needed rest, but I would not be put off. My brain was seething with a dozen questions and I did not intend to lose this opportunity to have them answered.

"What place is this?" I insisted. "And why have I been brought here?"

"I believe I warned you, doctor, that you were playing a dangerous game," she said coldly. "You refused to heed my words. You could have saved yourself all this by surrendering the capsule."

"What is that letter to you? What sinister plot is behind this?"

She tried to quiet me again, but the excitement of the chase was in my blood now and I would not stop.

"Answer me," I cried. "I know far more about this business than you imagine, and I'll use my information as I see fit unless you lay your cards on the table."

With that her reticence broke down and she began to talk freely, twisting her hands nervously in her lap as she spoke. The capsule meant everything to her, she said. More than life itself. She must have it. Blake, her good friend, had agreed to help her recover it and it was his agents who had been set to watch Copeland.

"And who murdered the poor fellow?" I interjected, but she chose to disregard my remark.

"Give me the capsule," she pleaded, "and you will never regret it. You will help right a great wrong and will save an innocent young man from years in prison."

"Did you know," I said softly, "that only half of the letter is in that capsule?"

"What!" her eyes were wide with astonishment and dismay. "No! No! It must all be there. Doctor, you are mistaken!"

"And did you know," I continued sternly, "that the letter was written to your very good friend who just attempted to stick a knife into me?"

"Oh, that cannot be true!" she cried, white to the lips. "Blake would not betray me! I cannot believe that."

I was on my feet at this, my battered face close to hers.

"Sonia, he is deceiving you. I don't

know how, but in some manner you are being made the cat's-paw in a game played by thieves. Come now, answer that question I asked you in my library the other night. Who told you that I was a drug-peddling rascal?"

"Who?" Her dark blue eyes were fixed on me with disturbing intensity. "Does that matter? You are, aren't you? You seek this paper so that you might use it for your own selfish ends, do you not? You are in this game for what you can get, I take it, and what difference does it make who told me your purpose?"

"It makes a lot of difference to me," I snarled. "I'm not after anything. I'm here because I was fool enough to believe that you looked like a girl in distress and I thought that I might be able to help you. Blake has told you these lies so that you would not have any objections to whatever they might decide to do to me. It was Blake who told you, wasn't it?"

"Yes," she replied slowly.

"Just as I thought. Now get this straight, I'm a fool of a doctor who accidentally fell heir to your capsule. I don't care a whoop about it. My curiosity was aroused. You appeared to need assistance. Understand?"

She looked at me with eyes full of inquiry and indecision.

"Oh, I can't understand anything," she cried. "I don't know where to turn. What reason would Blake have to keep this letter from my hands?"

"Reason enough," I growled. "Unless I miss my guess, he's in love with you and that letter proves, as sure as I am standing here, that he is a scoundrel."

I sank back upon the bed, wearied by the effort to talk.

"Sonia," I said finally, "I once read this advice to a lady who wanted a man to serve her on a dangerous mission: 'Give him a potion, one part confidence, one part pride, and one part just compensation and he will lay the moon at your feet.'

"And I, Sonia, ask for only the first two. No matter how hard you have tried to make me believe that you are a part of this scheme, I know you are not. I know that circumstances must have forced you under the control of Blake, sent you to my home and brought you here.

"What is it you seek? Tell me and I swear that I will aid you to the limit of my ability. I will cheerfully give you the half of the torn letter and will ransack the country for the missing part. But first you must give me the truth.

"There is nothing to prevent you from being frank with me, is there?"

She stood looking down at me and I could see that my words had made a great impression on her.

"There are some things that I will not tell to a living soul," she said at last, "but I will admit that your surmise as to my presence in your home and here is true. The letter of which you possess a part explains a crime for which an innocent man must suffer.

"He was just a boy, a student in Paris, when an unscrupulous man hired him to carry a package to the United States. He accepted and when the boat landed at New York he was arrested and searched. The package was found upon him. It was opened and found to contain stolen diamonds worth a fortune.

"The youth was sentenced to two years in Leavenworth for smuggling, but when his time is up he will be taken back to Paris to be tried for the theft. The possession of the gems is enough to convict him. It means twenty-five years in a French dungeon.

"That, my curious friend, is why I seek the letter. Do you understand now?"

"Yes," said I, "It makes a number of things clear to me. For instance, Joshua Barton is the man who wrote the letter and Blake is the fellow who received it. Probably they are the thieves who stole the diamonds."

"Do you know Barton?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"He is a thief and a cheat." It was said bitterly. "Yet he is so fortified with money and a fine reputation that it is impossible for a friendless woman to make a case against him."

With gesture of unutterable weariness she turned to go, but I raised up on one elbow and called her back.

"Sonia," said I, "what is in the next building that makes you weep so bitterly."

In the doorway she turned on me, drew a swift, nervous breath and stood there rigidly. Her face was blanched, her eyes terror stricken. One look at her and I was instantly sorry that I had spoken.

"Don't talk about that," she replied in a voice that trembled, "and if you get out of here, stay away from that building. Promise me."

"Well, I—"

"Promise!"

"I promise."

She left the room and this time I did not try to stop her. Instead I lay back on my pillow and thought of the things she had said. Barton, whoever he was, must be a thorough thief and Blake was probably his accomplice.

But why was Blake now making such a desperate effort to recover the paper? And what did its message mean? My thoughts ran back over its words; they sounded harmless enough. Yet they must have some hidden meaning to make a young girl associate herself with brigands, lead men to commit murder, and cause the kidnaping of a respectable young physician.

With an oath to see the adventure through to the end, I dismissed the matter from my mind and speedily went to sleep, and when I awoke, hours later, the helpless feeling had passed away and I was quite myself once more. I lay upon my couch stretching my legs and flexing my arms when the girl returned, carrying a small glass of whisky which I emptied readily.

"That," she said as she watched me drain the tumbler, "is the potion you spoke of this morning."

"Do you mean it?" I asked her.

"I have been thinking over what you said," she replied, withdrawing her hand. "You must leave here. Listen to me carefully. Later to-night I will lift the bar which locks your door from the outside. Make your way to the wharf. You will find boats there. Get away! Your life is in danger."

"But Sonia—"

"Do as I say. I can't explain now. Something has happened."

"I can't leave you here," I protested.

I was on my feet now and she walked up to me and placed her hands upon my shoulders.

"You are a brave fellow, doctor," she said. "Good luck to you."

And with that she hurried toward the door.

"One question, Sonia," I begged. "This fellow in the prison. Are you—in love—with him?"

She paused and gave me a hard look from her deep eyes. Then she smiled demurely.

"Yes," she said simply. "I love him very much."

CHAPTER X

TWO COUPS IN ONE

MIDNIGHT. The full moon, riding high in a cloudless sky, cast its yellow light into my prison and threw grotesque shadows upon the bare walls. For the twentieth time that night I left my bunk and stole to the door and tried to open it. This time it moved silently outward. Sonia had kept her promise.

I stepped out into the hallway and felt my way slowly down the stairs. I hoped to get out of the place without being noticed, but if Blake came upon me, I told myself that he would get the surprise of his life. I was far from the helpless man he had encountered that morning. My head was clear, my eyes were bright, and my brain was alert.

Opening the door that looked upon the courtyard I peered out cautiously. There was no one in sight. This Blake was a confident fellow. I found myself admiring the cool bravado of the man. Apparently he did not deem it worth while to have a watchman upon his river castle.

I crossed the yard quickly, gained the welcome shadow of the smaller building, and began to work my way around it toward the river where I hoped to find a boat. I had taken a few steps when I was halted by a low moan that came from within the building. A moment later the heavy silence of the island was broken by the most peculiar wailing cry that has ever

struck my ears. I stood motionless, cold chills running down my spine.

It is not easy for me to describe that awful shriek. It was not the cry of a person in physical pain, but rather the agonized, sobbing wail of some one suffering great mental anguish. Whether it was man or woman I could not tell.

I stood stock-still and waited. Once more the cry arose from within the building and this time it ended in a long-drawn note of despair. This was followed by a weird rattling of chains. I hesitated, not knowing what to do next. The words of the girl in the green dress came back to me:

"Don't go near that building!"

In the uppermost story of the mill a light flashed on and I saw the shadows of two figures upon the drawn window shade. They were probably coming to investigate. It was high time for me to be off. I slid around the corner of the building and took to my heels, scuttling into a dense clump of bushes that lined the crooked path to the river.

I soon came to the wharf, a small but substantial affair which had the look of having been recently constructed. Three rowboats were swinging in the current at its lower end and I had just indulged in a smile at the ease with which my escape had been managed when my ear caught the sound of heavy footsteps and a man hove into view. He came upon the wharf and began to stamp to and fro, singing all the while in a deep, robust voice:

> "And when I die, don't bury me at all,
> Just pickle my bones in alcohol."

I smiled again. Here was real luck. The singer of ribald songs was the huge youth who had ransacked my room. I had a score to settle with him.

Looking hastily about me I seized a stout piece of wood that was on the ground and balanced it in my hand. It would do very nicely, I told myself, as I moved toward the singing sentry. When I came to the edge of the wharf I flattened myself close to the timbers and waited until he had walked within a few feet of me and had turned back; then I hopped from my hiding place and followed him stealthily.

As he swung about again he faced me, eyes wide, mouth agape. For an instant we stood there; then his big hand went toward his belt, but he was far too late. I laughed as I brought the club down upon his head, and the force of the blow pitched him from his feet and sent him sprawling upon the boards. In the next few moments I did some fast work.

I loaded the big young man into one of the boats, after separating him from a wicked-looking pistol, cut the other two boats adrift and then shoved out into the river, pulling at the oars with all my strength. The current was strong and I was carried downstream with every stroke, but I did not mind. I could always walk back.

In the bottom of the boat my guest stirred and blinked at me from glassy eyes.

"What the hell?" he mumbled. "Put me back on land before I break you into nine pieces."

I laughed in his face.

"You wanted more of my company," said I. "Well, you've got it. Now roll back in that boat and shut up or I'll shoot you with your own pistol and drop your damned carcass overboard."

He passed a hand over his head. It came away covered with blood, and he let his fingers trail idly in the water.

"Blake will have me by the ears for this," he groaned. "The fool. Why didn't he keep a better watch on you?"

"What do you want me to do?" I growled. "Weep crocodile tears for you."

He subsided into the stern of the boat, where he sat watching me with a puzzled frown between his bloodshot eyes. I pulled lustily on the oars for a half an hour before I was rewarded by feeling the boat ram into the soft mud of the shore. I got out first, warning my prisoner to keep his seat, pulled the craft up on the bank and ordered him to stand up.

"Now there's an interurban line up here about a mile," I said, "and we're going to get a car back to the city. Get one thing through your head before we start. I'll be right beside you with this cannon. One offside motion and you're all through. Understand?"

Swaying weakly on his feet, the fellow grinned at me and nodded his head.

"Sure, doc, I get you. You mean you'll drill me if you get an excuse."

"That's it," said I. "Let's go." And we moved off. I kept my hand upon the reassuring butt of the automatic.

CHAPTER XI

OUR HOSTAGE

THAT first gray light that comes just before dawn was in the sky when I marched Blake's henchman down a side street to the modest flat where Heywood had his bachelor quarters. We made a strange pair, he with his rumpled, baggy clothes and the dried blood upon his square face; I hatless and with a dirty bandage wrapped around my head.

We had come by a devious route, for I had the wits to know that we would be stopped by the first policeman as objects of suspicion. The game would certainly be up if I were caught roaming the streets in company with a criminal and with a loaded pistol in my pocket.

The big young man leaned against the porch railing while I held my thumb upon the bell of Heywood's place. It seemed like an hour before the window on the second floor flew open and my friend's head appeared.

"What's the racket down there?" he demanded.

"Open up, Heywood," said I. "This is your pal the doctor with excess baggage in the form of one of Blake's bullies."

"Thank God," said Heywood fervently, and slammed the window. In a moment he was at the door, and shortly thereafter we were talking over our pipes, with the prisoner neatly trussed with a clothesline and deposited upon Heywood's bed.

"I was worried about you, sawbones," Heywood confessed. "I tracked you as far as Blake's house and there you disappeared like smoke. I was afraid to call the police and break into the house. Thought I might gum up the works. So I just rocked along, hoping that you would turn up. Well, let's have it. Who gave you that glorious red, yellow and blue eye?"

I sketched the events of my capture by Blake's men and of my escape from the mill, not forgetting what I had learned from the girl in the green dress.

"Barton, then, is our mark," I concluded. "We must find some way to sew him up and make him give us the details of the conspiracy."

Heywood shook his head solemnly.

"Not a chance, my friend," he retorted. "I've combed Barton's life from the age of five to the present age of fifty, and if he's phony he's a wizard at covering up. Not one single crooked move have I been able to find.

"Barton is a deacon in the church, a vice president of the Chamber of Commerce, a friend of the needy, a good father and a loving husband. He lives as straight as a string. I've given him a good going over, and I'm convinced that we are on the wrong track."

"We can't be," said I stubbornly. "The girl swears he wrote the letter."

Heywood shrugged.

"She may be fooling you. Suppose she wanted to gain your sympathy. You put Barton's name in her mouth. Why wouldn't that line of talk do as well as any other? Suppose she wanted to keep you off the real trail?"

"That is possible," I admitted, "but hardly probable. Remember, after she told me her story she unlocked the door and let me get away."

"True. Well, let's sleep on it. Now, what about the capsule? If it's in your house we better get it. Blake and his boys are sure to make another try for it."

"It's there," I whispered. "In the inkwell on the big desk in my library. I'll give you the key and you can get it later."

"Settled. Next order of business: Who is Blake holding prisoner in the building beside the mill, and why?"

"I give that one up," said I, and we puffed our pipes and racked our brains, but arrived at no conclusion that sounded reasonable. Finally we turned to other things.

"What about big boy in there?" I asked, waving toward the room where the man lay

bound and gagged. "What will we do with him?"

Heywood laughed sourly.

"I'll show you what to do with that bird. Let him lay there. To-morrow we'll take his finger-prints and I'll sneak down to police headquarters and see just who and what he is. If we can get something on him perhaps he'll loosen up with some real information. That looks like our best bet. Personally, I don't believe we can make any kind of a case against Barton."

"I suppose I am allowed to disagree with you?"

"Surely."

"Well, I do. It is my hunch that Barton is the brains of this whole thing, whatever it may be, and I believe we can find some way to smoke him out."

"I hope you're right," said Heywood good-naturedly. "Let's turn in and get some sleep."

We loaded the big young man on a camp cot in the kitchen, and Heywood insisted upon giving me his bed while he bunked on a small couch in the little living room. I was properly grateful, for I was thoroughly exhausted. A moment after I got into the bed I was sleeping a sound, dreamless sleep.

We did not get up until noon. Heywood fried bacon and eggs, while I said good morning to our prisoner and found him in a surly mood. He had recovered somewhat from the blow on the head and, apparently, the realization of the night's events had not improved his humor. He scowled at me darkly when I untied one of his arms to allow him to eat.

"You'll pay for this, my friend," he said. "I'll make you regret that you ever meddled in this affair."

"Perhaps," I admitted cheerfully. "Right now you are the one to regret that you ever got tied up with a pair of dirty crooks like Barton and Blake. What part did you have in the theft of the jewels and in the murder of Copeland?"

"I'm not talking," said the giant sourly. "Don't try to question me. You can't get to first base."

Heywood turned to us with a frying pan in his hand.

"Oh, you'll talk all right, my pretty bird," he assured. "I'll get all the way around the bases on you and you'll be damned glad to talk. Here, eat this. The food will be pretty rotten where you are going."

"What do you mean?" growled the youth. He ignored the plate which Heywood held out to him and stared belligerently at the reporter.

"Eat," commanded the latter, "before I take this stuff away from you and eat it myself."

We watched him as he grudgingly ate his meal, then we retied him, took our own food and left the room.

"Did you notice," said Heywood as we ate, "that the big boy was considerably disturbed when I hinted that he was about to go some place."

"Yes. What do you make of that?"

"He's crooked. Got a record, I'll bet, and shaking in his boots for fear that we'll get a line on him."

When breakfast was over Heywood got out a pad of ink and a piece of cardboard, and, after many dire threats, succeeded in taking our prisoner's finger-prints.

"What's the matter with you?" the reporter taunted as he worked. "Afraid, aren't you? If you were on the level you would be glad to have us identify you, but since you are as crooked as a hound's hind leg it hurts, doesn't it?"

The big young man snarled a profane answer, and Heywood nonchalantly shoved him back onto the cot.

"Lay there and shut up," he said, "and when I come back you'll talk or we'll turn you over to the police." He turned to me. "Let me have the key to your house. You stay on the job here and see that our desperate friend don't run away with the kitchen stove. I won't be gone long."

"Agreed," said I, "and while you're at headquarters see if you can get the record on the jewel theft. I know you haven't got much to go on, but somebody around there should know the details."

Heywood was getting into his coat.

"By the way." He turned with his hand upon the doorknob and smiled owlishly. "Did you get the name of the poor,

unfortunate lad who is serving the two years in prison?"

"I did not."

"Of course," he said maliciously, "that would have been bad judgment on the lady's part. Too easy to trace, eh?"

"Get out," said I bluntly. "You are the original cynic."

CHAPTER XII

BIG HUTCH, BAD MAN

AFTER Heywood left I dozed comfortably in a chair for an hour, with my pistol handy beside me, and awakened considerably refreshed. My mind immediately returned to the question of trapping Barton into revealing some connection with the black capsule. I picked up a telephone directory and looked for his number. There it was:

Joshua Barton, diamond importer, Forest 4600.

I called and asked for Barton's private office.

"Is Mr. Barton in?"

"No, he is out on business right now. This is his secretary. Can I do something for you?"

This was just what I had hoped for.

"Yes," said I. "This is the *Globe*. In connection with a business story we are printing, we were trying to recall when Mr. Barton made his last trip to Paris. Could you tell me?"

"In September—last September."

"Thank you." I hung up the receiver. So far so good. There was nothing to do now but await Heywood's return. If the facts he brought back with him fitted my half of the puzzle then nothing could shake me in the belief that Joshua Barton, respectable though he might be as far as appearances went, was, in truth, the member of a criminal organization.

I fell now to wondering what Blake had done when it was found that I had made my escape from the island. Had they fled, fearing that I might return with the police, or had they stood their ground on the theory that I would play the game out by myself? And Sonia, where was she? How would I find her again to give her the letter?

I dozed again and did not awaken until Heywood came stamping into the room, swinging his arms and grinning from ear to ear.

"We've got 'em?" he exulted. "We've got 'em now! Your little lad in the kitchen is bad medicine. His name is Hutchins. Big Hutch they call him down at headquarters, a stick-up man and a killer.

"He was in the holdover on suspicion about the same time that your friend Copeland was pinched, and, unless I miss my guess, he's the bird that gave Copeland the capsule. But that isn't all. No, sir. I've got a woman who identifies Hutchins's picture as the fellow she saw go into Copeland's room just after you and the other guy left. What do you think of that?"

"Huh," I said. "Looks very much like we've got a murderer on our hands. Did you get the capsule?"

"Sure did. It was waiting for me, snug as a bug in a rug."

"And the information on the Paris robbery?"

"Easy. Easy as pie. It was quite a famous case. All the boys knew about it. There was an Englishman named Denton living in Paris. He had an immensely valuable collection of diamonds. A crowd of thieves broke into his place, held him up, blew his safe and escaped with the best of his stones. They got away clean.

"The Paris police traced the gems to an American, but before they could grab their man the stuff had been passed on to another fellow. They finally narrowed their search down to a youngster named Drummond, but he beat them to the gun and got on a boat bound for the United States, so they cabled to customs authorities at New York and had Mr. Drummond plucked when he landed. The stuff was found on him.

"He hadn't declared the jewels, so the customs agents sent him over the road for two years for smuggling. When he gets out the French are going to make a try for him. If they get him back to Paris he'll get plenty."

"The robbery occurred in September, I suppose," said I.

"It did," agreed Heywood. "But how you knew it is one on your uncle."

"I knew it, because Joshua Barton was in Paris in September."

"What?"

"Absolutely. I just called his office and his secretary assured me that Mr. Barton had a fine time in Paris in September. Do you still think he's the lily-white gentleman?"

"Well, of course, it looks bad, but just because a man was in Paris doesn't convict him of robbery."

"No, it doesn't, but it convinces me that he's in on this some place."

Heywood was pacing the floor nervously.

"We can work on that later," he flung out. "I'm beginning to believe you are right on Barton. God, what a story it would make. I'm getting as jumpy as an alley cat. Scared green that the lid will fly off this thing some place before we get it rounded up. Let's talk to Hutchins and see what he has to say for himself."

We went into the kitchen, where our prisoner was lying motionless upon his cot. I lifted him into a sitting position, and Heywood thrust a lean forefinger under his nose as he began to talk.

"Listen to me, Htuchins," he said coldly. "We know all about you. We know you gave Copeland the capsule, and that you followed him to his lodgings and murdered him. We're disposed to be reasonable. Come across and we'll make it easy for you. Hold out on us and I promise that you'll get the limit."

"What do you want to know?" asked Hutchins cautiously. "And how can I tell that you won't double cross me?"

"You're in no position to worry about that," snapped Heywood. "Who gave you that capsule?"

Hutchins squirmed within his bonds. The perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"I told you I'd make you sweat," said Heywood, grinning. "Well, how about it? Do you care to speak up or not?"

"Blake," growled Hutchins. "Blake gave me the capsule."

"Why?"

"He—ah—you see—"

"Why?"

"Because he had a row with somebody and this fellow had tried to get the letter away from him."

"Who was the fellow?"

"I don't know. Blake never told me. Just said to take the thing and keep it until he wanted it again. Then when I lost it he told me to get on the job and recover it."

"Do you know Joshua Barton?" I interrupted.

"No."

"You are a liar!" barked Heywood vehemently. "Doc, call the cops. We'll turn this dog over to them and see that they hang him. I'll teach him to sit up there and tell me a string of bald-faced lies."

I turned to leave the room, but came back when Hutchins begged piteously for another chance.

"I know Barton," he pleaded, "but I ain't got a thing on him. I just went up to his place for Blake one time and got a package, that's all."

"That's enough," said Heywood grimly. "Now, did you kill Copeland?"

Hutchins's face twisted into a sour smile.

"Say," he protested, "you don't expect me to answer that one, do you?"

"All right, we'll pass that. Did you take any part in a jewel robbery in Paris?"

"Never been in Paris in my life."

"What has Blake got in that building near the island mill?"

"I don't know. He won't tell and nobody is allowed to go into the place but the girl."

"Who is she?" I demanded quickly.

"I don't know that, either. She's hot after that letter, but I guess she wants it for Blake."

"That'll be about all for the present," said Heywood. "Now Hutchins, I'm going to turn you over to a nice, jovial policeman who has killed about six gangsters in his day and he will take you to an outlying station where you will be booked under a phony name until we work this thing out. If everything turns out well, you may get off lightly. At any rate, the best thing you can do is to take things calmly and hope for the best.

"Come on, doc, we've got a lot of business to attend to."

When we got into the living room, Heywood said:

"I'm not bluffing about the cops. Friends of mine have agreed to hold Hutchins for us until we either succeed or fail in getting Barton and Blake. What's our next move? We have two ways to go. We can try to pin something on Barton and then go after the gang or we can raid the island now and trust to luck on finding some evidence. What do you say?"

"I'm in favor of going after Barton. If we can trap him, nail him with the goods, the entire plot will blow up. Blake is no fool. If he doesn't leave the island he will at least cover up. We might catch him, but what could we prove? We don't even know what it's all about."

"Um." Heywood sat down and filled his pipe. "Say, doc, you wouldn't care to see this girl, what's her name, in the hands of the police, would you?"

"I don't believe it would make much difference. If her story is straight, and I believe it is, she would be released quickly enough."

I had not told Heywood that I intended to turn the letter over to Sonia. I knew he would laugh at me, calling me a soft-hearted fool who was being taken in by a clever adventuress. Heywood, you know, had not seen the look in that girl's eyes when she told me her story. Even if he had, I doubt if it would have had any effect.

"Look here, Heywood," I said after a moment. "I've got an idea that might work and wind up the whole thing in a hurry. That's what you want. Do you know any crooks?"

"A few," said my friend laconically. "I don't know many that I'd trust very far."

"You don't have to trust them very far. Do you know one with sufficient reputation to command the attention of Barton?"

There was a glint of interest in Heywood's eye as he sat straight in his chair and grinned at me.

"I believe I do," he said slowly. "Doc, I begin to see your point. I beg your pardon. I thought you were a pill roller without a sign of imagination. Oh, man! If something like that would work, it would be the greatest story this town has ever seen in print."

"It's worth trying," said I; and we fell to planning the downfall of Mr. Joshua Barton, pillar of the church and vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce.

CHAPTER XIII

ALIAS "A CROOK"

EIGHT o'clock. Dressed in a fresh suit of clothes and clean linen and with my hair plastered down over the cut in my head, I sat in a taxicab, speeding toward that sedate and conservative part of the city where Joshua Barton had his home. Heywood had done his work well.

I was assured of an audience for, once again, I was in the rôle of a law-breaker, for I had been recommended to the diamond merchant as a clever and dangerous jewel thief who possessed something to sell. The something was a string of flawless pearls that reposed in my breast pocket. They belonged to Heywood's aunt, and what a devil of a time he had talking her out of them for use in the last chapter of our adventure.

"Here yuh are."

The driver pulled the door open, I alighted and paid him and he whirled away, leaving me on the curb surveying the great home of the Bartons. It was an ancient place. The heavy blinds, the deeply recessed door, the worn stoop were all sadly eloquent of generations gone by. The age of this melancholy mansion could not have been less than a century and it looked twice as old.

My hand instinctively went toward the butt of the automatic in my hip pocket as I rang the bell. The door swung open silently and I was admitted by a stone-faced butler who relieved me of my hat and stick and glided away to inform his master of my presence. He was back in an instant.

"This way, sir." He guided me over a soundless velvet carpet into the library where a feeble fire in the grate and one heavily shaded lamp furnished a subdued light.

Joshua Barton sat in a chair beside the fireplace. He hopped spryly to his feet as I entered.

He was a man of fifty, perhaps, under middle height, rather fat, smoothly shaven. His gray hair was closely clipped and his features, though regular, were pasty and almost expressionless. A very colorless fellow, I thought, except for his eyes. They were green and bright and were shaded by the longest, sly lashes that I have ever seen upon a human face. He was dressed in somber black, relieved by a foxy waistcoat of figured silk.

Barton bowed cautiously, rubbing his small, flabby hands together.

"Good evening," he said blandly. "Won't you sit down. Over here by the fire where we can talk in comfort."

When we were seated, Barton said:

"You come, ah, very highly recommended. Very highly indeed. Nevertheless I must tell you that in dealing with me it will be worth your while to keep your own counsel. We—ah—that is, I—have a way of rewarding those who keep faith with me. I also have a failing for doing a little something for anybody who is so foolish as to attempt to play me false. Understand? I'm sure you do."

"Quite," said I. "This is purely a business proposition with me. I have a string of pearls that I cannot dispose of just now. Neither can I afford to keep them. You can put them away or let them go through some quiet channel just as you see fit. In any event, you may be certain that I will keep my mouth shut. I would probably take a long trip as the guest of the State if my connection with this thing became known."

"Exactly," beamed Barton. "You are a man of good sense. And then, of course, you would be foolish to attempt to fasten anything upon me. Would it—ah—be too much to ask you if you have ever been convicted of a crime?"

"Yes," I replied shortly. "I am on the books."

"Excellent," sighed the gem dealer frankly. "Then I do not need to point out that your word would be of no value against mine."

"None," said I with just a trace of bitterness.

"Come, come, my friend," laughed Barton, "that is but a trick of fate. I shall treat you fairly. Now let me see, ah, whatever it is you have to dispose of."

There was a greedy light in the eyes that followed my hand into my inside pocket as I withdrew the pearls. I dropped them to the table top where they lay shimmering. For just an instant Barton smiled, then his face became a mask again.

"Very ordinary," said he.

"I beg your pardon," I retorted smoothly, "they are very fine pearls."

I made as if to pick them up.

"Don't be hasty. Don't be hasty. They will do very nicely. Now, ah, how much do you think you should be paid for your, ah, work?"

"I'll take two thousand dollars."

"I'll give you fifteen hundred."

"No." I thought it well to bargain with him. Where was Heywood? I fidgeted nervously in my chair. Suppose he failed to appear?

"Too much," Barton was saying. "When you consider the danger of selling them, I should make a very small profit. I will give you seventeen hundred, ah, on the chance that there will be other things and that I may be favored with, ah, your company again. Understand?"

"There will be others," said I grimly, "unless something happens to me. For these, however, I will take two thousand dollars or nothing. I know they worth much more."

"You are a hard bargainer. All right. I will give you what you ask."

He reached into his hip pocket and withdrew a fat wallet.

"A check wouldn't do, of course."

"No. I'll take mine in cash."

He counted the money out carefully. I was breathing hard with excitement. Where was Heywood? My ear caught a faint creak as though the library door was being opened. I did not dare to turn around.

"Fourteen hundred, fourteen fifty, fifteen hundred—" Barton's thin voice droned on.

Then there came a rustle behind me and

Heywood, with a jovial grin upon his face, stood in the light of the library lamp.

"Well, Barton," he said. "You've cooked your goose at last."

The jeweler, hands poised in midair, gazed at him and his Adam's apple danced nervously up and down in his fat throat.

"Who are you?" he finally managed to gasp.

"Me?" echoed Heywood jauntily. "Why, I'm a little detective from headquarters. I tagged your friend up here and found just what I expected. You know, we've had an eye on you for some time. You and your crooked partner, Blake."

"Blake's no partner of mine," croaked Barton.

I leaped to my fet.

"Listen to me, Corrigan," I snarled, "you haven't got a damned thing on me. I'm just sitting here. Barton's got the pearls and he's got the money. I'm as clean as a whistle. You can't hold me."

"Stow it," said Heywood shortly. "We don't care a whoop about you, anyway. You're small fry, my boy. What we want is the goods on this fleshy old thief here and this time we've got him and got him right. Get your hat, Barton, you're going for a ride!"

The jeweler made a low mourning noise in his chest and his puffy little hands fluttered to his perspiring forehead.

"For God's sake," he begged, "can't we do something about this? Isn't there any way I can square it up? Think of my wife and children and my business!"

"You've got one chance," snapped Heywood. "Just one. Come clean on that Paris robbery and I'll make it easy for you. Otherwise, up you go for buying these stolen pearls. Ten years, probably."

Barton's pasty face was sunk low upon his chest.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asked in a whisper.

"I want you to tell me how you engineered that Paris job, how you hired the boy to smuggle the gems into this country and where you planned to dispose of them."

"What can they do to me for that?"

"Not much. They'll never be able to get you back to France. You've got too much money and too many friends. You can say that you did not know the diamonds were stolen and you may get off with a heavy fine on the smuggling charge."

Barton held his head in his hands.

"It will ruin me," he groaned swaying in his chair. "It will wreck my reputation."

"That's too bad," said Heywood dryly. "You have my sympathy."

"Suppose I refuse?" Barton looked up at his tormentor and there was misery and indecision in his eyes. "Suppose I refuse to convict myself?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE OTHER HALF

"THEN," said Heywood in a voice that dripped honey, "I will back a patrol wagon up to your door in the plain sight of all your august neighbors, haul you down to headquarters and formally charge you with smuggling, robbery, and the reception of stolen property."

"My God!"

"I'm waiting."

Barton wrung his flabby hands and I could not help feeling a twinge of sympathy for the fat old crook, although I knew that he did not deserve it. Heywood evidently read my thoughts, for he turned to me and said:

"Tough on you crooks when you get caught. It's fine as long as you win, but when you lose, it's hell, eh? Then you come sniveling for sympathy."

And he winked at me and smiled.

Barton was talking now in a choked, halting voice.

"It was like this," he said. "Blake, who had been in Paris, learned of these diamonds and hired a man to steal them for him. He came to me with the proposition of getting rid of them. I had done the same thing before, in a small way. I was a fool to listen to him, but I did. I went to Paris and got in touch with the thief, paying the price that Blake had agreed upon for the stones. After I got them I was afraid to try to bring them back.

"Blake had argued that I would never be suspected, but I felt that I was being

watched every minute and I almost went crazy with the strain, expecting to be arrested every time I ventured out of the hotel.

"Blake sent a man to me and suggested that if I had lost my nerve I could line up somebody to carry the stuff to New York for me and I found this kid Drummond. He didn't know what was in the package and he didn't have sense enough to suspect. He was nabbed and sent to prison.

"I had written to Blake about the arrangement that I had made and the letter went out on the day before Drummond sailed.

"Blake was wild when he found what had happened. When I got back he came here and we had a violent quarrel. He blamed me for the miscarriage of his plans and threatened to ruin me by using the letter I had written to him. He demanded that I pay him the equivalent of his share in the theft and I refused. We fought. I am an old man, but I managed to tear half of the letter out of his hand before my butler arrived and threw him out of the house.

"From that day to this I have known no peace. My God, it's been terrible. Terrible! I'm glad it's all over—glad—"

His voice died away to a whisper and he sat shaking like a man with the ague.

"I'll take your part of that letter," said Heywood cheerfully.

"What do you want it for?"

"Documentary evidence that you and Blake framed this deal," said the reporter. "Do you want to leave this lad Drummond to rot in a cell?"

"No, no," muttered the gem dealer, "that boy's conviction weighed heavily upon my mind. I—ah—often thought of giving myself up, of making—"

He broke off suddenly, took a key from his pocket with a palsied hand and opened a drawer of his desk. For a moment he pawed through a mass of papers, then he brought forth the torn half of the note.

"Here," he said dully, "take it."

Heywood took the paper, looked at it, and then fished the capsule from his vest pocket. He extracted Blake's portion of the letter and laid the two together upon the desk.

Looking over his shoulder, I read:

DEAR BLAKE:

I delivered the goods to young Drummond aboard the Princess Flavia. Meet him at the wharf in New York and bring the stuff to me as I have arranged to dispose of them. Be careful, as one of my agents tell me we are watched.

JOSHUA BARTON.

"That settles that," said Heywood. "Barton, I know you aren't going to run away so I'm going to leave you right here until we get Blake and his gang rounded up. If everything breaks well you may get a chance to turn government witness and save your hide. As for this fellow here, I'll take him down to headquarters for safe keeping."

And so we marched out of the fine library of Joshua Barton, leaving the old man hunched over his huge desk, down the worn stone steps and up the avenue.

"Doc," said Heywood when we had turned the corner. "You are a great little actor."

"You're not so rotten yourself," said I. "Are your men ready?"

"Eight policemen and two Secret Service operatives await us at the Ferry Street dock. They have a launch, automatic rifles, a machine gun and a flock of tear bombs. It looks like a big evening. Let's go."

CHAPTER XV

KEEPING PROMISES

HEYWOOD and I sat in my library. Outside the autumn day waned with pensive grace. I had not seen much of him during the long, hot summer, for he had been out of the city on an assignment and I had dawdled about the beach resorts in half-hearted fashion. But the golden fall had brought us both back and we had spent this whole afternoon drinking and smoking and talking of our great adventure.

"I suppose you knew they convicted Blake to-day," said Heywood.

"Yes," said I. "There was a story in the papers."

"Queer, brazen fellow. Stuck it out to

the end and never batted an eye when the judge gave him ten years. Acted just like he did the night we swooped down on his island. Remember?"

"I'll never forget it. Was Barton a witness for the government?"

"Yes, he was there. Looked a hundred years old. Had to be helped to the stand, and his testimony was so faint that it couldn't be heard three rows back. That's the last of it, I guess. Hutchins in the penitentiary, Blake on his way, Barton broken and old, Drummond pardoned, and the girl in the green dress—"

He broke off and looked at me shrewdly.

"You never heard from her?"

"No," said I. "The last I saw of her was on the island. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I just had a hunch that perhaps you had found her and she hadn't— Well, hang it, you know what I mean. I thought maybe she wasn't up to expectations."

"I've never seen her, Heywood."

"Just as well that you didn't. If I may be frank, I'll say that I always thought she was a member of Blake's gang, regardless of what kind of a yarn she told you."

I smiled, but I am afraid that it was not very convincing.

"Wrong, Heywood. She was Drummond's *fiancée* in search of the letter to get him out of prison. Romantic, what?"

"Romantic if true. She must have been in pretty good with Blake, though. Remember, she was the only person allowed to enter the mysterious building near the mill. How do you explain that?"

"I've never been able to explain it," I growled. "That's the only unsatisfactory part of the whole affair. Why a man should have a place all fitted up with padded walls is quite beyond me."

"Queer," said Heywood, "damned queer. Oh, well, some day Blake may take a notion to talk and we'll unravel the whole thing. What a story that would make."

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Barkley sidled into the room and extended an envelope toward me.

"It was left here a minute ago by a messenger boy," she explained. "He said he was to tell you it was important and that you were to read it right away."

I took the envelope.

DEAR DR. WARING:

I feel that I owe you an explanation of some of the circumstances which surrounded my appearance in a recent case which came to your attention. Part of the story you guessed, but since I can now speak freely, I am glad to set the matter straight.

My father, Jackson Drummond, a diamond importer, became ill several years ago and specialists told us that he was losing his mind. He became steadily worse, and as my brother was abroad studying, it fell upon me to nurse and watch him. While he was in a hospital, I was informed that my brother had been arrested and sent to prison as a smuggler through the scheming of Barton and Blake.

Determined to possess the letter which I learned Barton had written to Blake, I cultivated the acquaintance of the latter and confided my father's condition to him. He removed father to the island, where he was kept in a building near the mill. I believed that Blake was sincere in his efforts to help me and thought he would aid me in recovering the letter which I believed to be in your possession.

Father died the day after you escaped from the island, and I had gone away with his body when you returned with the policeman.

It is all over now and, thanks to you, my brother and I are very happy. I have told him all about it. He says he wants to meet you.

Yours,

SONIA DRUMMOND.

P. S.—I am living at 412 Riverview Place.

"Heywood," said I when I had finished reading, "I hate to leave you when I have not had the pleasure of your company for so long, but an important matter has arisen which cannot wait. It is what you might call a crisis.

"In other words, Heywood, old fellow, I'm about to put on my hat and dash out to propose to a young lady who once wore a green dress and played burglar in my library.

"If you will wait here long enough, you can be my best man, if any. And while you are waiting, here is something you might amuse yourself by reading."

And I tossed the letter to him.

"It'll be worth waiting to see you with a wife," he sighed.

THE END

She started struggling: "Francis, help! Somebody is holding my feet!"

HAUNTS OF THE INVISIBLE—I

Edited by Alexander Stewart

STRIKING TALES ARE THESE, FROM THE PHANTOM WORLD, SUBMITTED JUST AS THEY OCCURRED—YOU TO BE THE FINAL JUDGE

A Story of Fact

"WHO has not either seen or heard of some house, shut up and uninhabitable, fallen into decay and looking dusty and dreary, from which at midnight strange sounds have been heard to issue—knockings, the rattling of chains and the groans of perturbed spirits? A house that people thought it unsafe to pass after dark, and which has remained for years without a tenant—which no tenant would occupy, even if he were paid for it?

"There are hundreds of such houses in England and the United States to-day. Hundreds in France, Germany and almost every country in Europe, which are marked with the mark of fear."

The above statement was made more than fifty years ago. It still holds good at the present time. For the so-called "haunted" houses are still with us.

In the pages which follow, the records of several of these houses have been set down. No explanations have been attempted. No theories have been advanced. The account here given is merely a plain statement of the facts so far as they are known.

In studying them the reader is asked to remember just one thing—

Although this is the age of science, there are some things which science has not explained. Haunted houses have been recognized by European law for several centuries. Their story is not just a mere fantastic romance.

For the benefit of people who think them a thing of the past, the first house chosen

is of very recent date—a villa in Comeada, a suburb of Coimbra, Portugal. The occurrences which took place there were first described by Mme. Frondoni Lacombe, of Lisbon, in an article published in *Annales des Sciences Psychiques,* March, 1920.

The main victim or hero—whichever you wish to call him—of the affair later described his experiences in detail in a book, "Le Parc du Mystere," published in 1923 in collaboration with Mme. Rachilde—a woman who up to that time had refused to admit the reality of psychic phenomena at any price, because her parents had been the victims of mediums.

The Mysterious Window

At the beginning of October, 1919, Homem Christo, a first year law student who had been expelled from the University of Coimbra for refusing to conform to a religious custom, and for armed revolt, rented a house in Coimbra. It consisted of a ground floor and a second story. Christo moved into it, together with his wife, their six weeks' old baby and two maidservants.

On the first night his wife complained of strange noises in the house. Christo, a sound sleeper, had heard nothing and thought it was just imagination on her part.

Eight days later his friend, Gomez Paredes, a second year law student, visited Comeada on business. He remained overnight and was entertained at the home of Homem Christo.

Paredes retired about 1 A. M. His room was on the ground floor, and his host warned him to be sure to bolt the shutters of the windows so that thieves would not be able to enter the house.

The following is Paredes's own story to Christo describing what happened:

"Having gone off to sleep after smoking a long time and using up all my matches, I was awakened by a sensation of brightness under the eyelids. It resembled that which is felt when one's closed eyes are struck by the sudden ray of a lamp or fire.

"It fell on my eyelids with such intensity that at last I opened them. I perceived that the shutters I had carefully closed in accord with your recommendation, since I was on the ground floor, had parted and that the moon's light fell directly on my face.

"I was, or thought I was, sure that I had closed them tight and pushed the bolt into the sill as directed. But I might have made a mistake.

"Then, since I wanted to sleep, suspecting nothing, and since the moonlight bothered me, I went to the window, raised it, hung it to the spring provided to keep it up and bent over to pull in the parted shutters.

"*They resisted.*

"Now, there was no wind. Since it was on the ground floor it might have been caused by some one standing outside on the garden path. Therefore I called out in a chiding tone, but not loud enough to awaken any of you:

"'Hullo, if anybody is there, let him get out or he'll catch it.'

"But almost instantly the spring which held up the window came undone, and I got such a furious blow on my neck that I was nearly choked, and had to struggle a long time to get free. I did not want to call you, as I feared the ridicule of my position.

The Shutters Open Again

"When I was out of the trap I closed the window again. And, for greater safety, I went out and inspected the neighborhood of the garden gate. There was nothing in the garden, or on the road.

"The night was calm and a bright moon brought out the smallest details of my window shutters standing as I had left them. It showed no obstacle in front of them.

"Such evidence has the effect of bringing one back to order and coolness. It was clear I had been mistaken. The shutter had not been held by any hand. The falling of the window was a mere accident. I had been half awake. My movements had been badly coördinated, as sometimes happens when one wakes up suddenly.

"I closed my shutters very methodically, put the window down and went to bed.

"But this time I did not succeed in getting to sleep again. In the first place, the back of my neck hurt me very much.

The blood was pounding in my arteries. I was restless and oppressed and could not settle down.

" It was then, with my eyes open to every possible reality, that I observed that horrible thing in front of me.

" *The shutters opened again*, their bolt having risen quite of itself. And I remembered the trouble I had had to get it into the hole deeply enough and without making a noise. Then, I heard behind my bed another horrible grinding sound like a muffled laugh.

With His Own Eyes!

" ' Somebody is making a fool of me. But who? Where is the fellow?' I said, clenching my fist.

" A series of heavy blows replied, struck on the wall, on the floor and on the furniture. Blows which found a dull echo in myself as if aimed at me alone."

Paredes sprang from his bed and looked around. He could hear footsteps as of some one walking about the room beside him. Doors, apparently, were being opened and closed all over the house. That horrible grating laugh again came from behind his bed. But as far as he could see—

" There was nothing in my room, neither a hidden animal, nor anything revolutionary. Nothing but myself, shivering in the cold moonlight.

" I did not take the trouble to warn you. I did not take time to think. I just bolted into the garden like a lunatic and ran straight before me, without even shutting a door. It did not take many minutes to get to my father's house, for I went like the wind."

The next morning Paredes told his father what had happened.

" That is singular," his father said. " Another tenant, who occupied that house before your friend, left because of the strange noises in the place. And the woman who now takes care of the meteorological observatory opposite the house spent a night there once. She vows she will never enter it again, and declares the house is bewitched. Tell your friend to watch some night and try and find out what it is."

As he thought over the occurrences of the night before, the thing which struck Paredes as most unusual was that nothing had happened as long as there was a light burning in his room.

He returned to Homem Christo's house to explain the cause of his disappearance. As his friend heard the story he laughed. Christo writes:

" When my comrade had finished I was silent for a moment. I had vaguely heard our professors tell about ' collective hallucinations,' but I couldn't explain to him so many things at the same time. And I was also struck by the circumstances that the actions or strange noises happened in relative darkness, light destroying the phantasmagoria.

" I drew his attention to that.

" ' Yes,' he replied. ' I had in fact used up my matches smoking last night. But I saw with my own eyes in the moonlight my shutters slowly opening, as if pulled by two hands. And when I wanted to pull them in I felt the queer resistance.

" ' Whoever held them was stronger than I am, I assure you. I should swear to that, even though that guillotine window of yours should cut off my head again.

"It Was, in Fact, War"

" ' And the noises I heard were the same noises as those described by your wife. She told you that *several* walked in the room, pulling burdens along and shaking all the furniture as if there was a moving going on; and yet you heard nothing, which is another mystery.'

" As for me, it seemed clear to me that after the row of my scandal at the university some practical jokers wanted to exasperate me. Another ' rag ' among the jolly students of Coimbra! One had to forgive them even though their pleasantry was in rather bad taste, considering that there was a young wife and a seven weeks' old baby in the case."

Christo decided to sit up the next night and try to catch the students he believed responsible for everything.

" I installed myself in the suspected room after inspecting the house from cellar to attic and locking in the servants. Considering the artfulness of servants, it was

always possible that they could be in league with the mischief-makers up to a certain point.

"I provided myself with matches. And, thinking that a candle was easier to light than a lamp, I took one with a high candlestick, saying to myself that this would not be blown out under my very nose.

"My wife, trembling in all her limbs—though my friend's adventure was unknown to her—put the baby's cradle at the foot of her bed upstairs, taking every precaution for the watching of the cradle and of her bolted door. She knew that she could expect no concession from me to the 'supernatural,' and that the trickster or tricksters, if caught, would be brutally done to death. It was, in fact, war.

An Unknown Force

"I had begun to forget completely why I was reading a law book, sitting in an easy chair instead of lying in bed, when, about 1 A. M., my candle began to wane. The wick fell in a little pool of wax and went out.

"I need hardly say that I had closed the shutters, pushed the bolt well in, and let my guillotine of a window slide exactly down into its grooves.

"As I put out my arm to seize the matches I saw—this happened automatically as soon as the light went out—I saw the shutters opening slowly, and the moon introducing into the opening the white cold blade of its sword of light.

"With one bound I was at the guillotine and raised it. I hooked it up and stretched my arms forward without bending my head, warned by the first inexplicable accident.

"I *pushed* the shutters with all my force. But they *resisted*.

"Those shutters seemed to be held by a crowd of people. They were both resistant and elastic to the touch, as if held by muscles working against my own.

"I was silent, fearing to disturb her who slept up there, but I felt bathed in perspiration. I underwent the baptism of fear, a first impression of fear which is a sort of nameless anger, an impotent rage which can only utter itself in blasphemies.

"Like my friend, I let go everything and bounded to the door of the passage leading into the garden. I opened it suddenly. The whole movement took me only five seconds.

"I found there was no human being behind the wooden shutters, no branch of a tree to stop them. No string attached—nothing but the pure night air.

"I ran around the house and came back to the door. *It had closed itself.*

"I was the plaything of an unknown force! I stood for an instant, dumfounded, grinding my teeth and swearing. Yet I had to get out of this terrible force, a force well planned. But by whom?

"Then I called to my wife in a voice as calm as I could make it. At once she came to the upper window, fully dressed, thus showing that she had not intended to sleep.

"'Please open,' I said to her. 'Like a fool I have got out, but the door got accidentally closed, and, of course, the front door is locked. It is silly, but after this little night round I believe we can go to sleep on both ears.'

"Although it was summer, my teeth chattered as I spoke. She came downstairs quickly and opened the door, not as yet suspecting my anxiety. I went to get my revolver, which I had left at my bedside."

Christo's Courage Fails

Another candle was lit and everything became peaceful once more. But as soon as the candle went out several heavy blows were heard on the ground floor door leading to the garden.

Christo crept down the passageway and stood just inside the door. The blows started again. He jerked the door open suddenly and thrust his head out.

There was no one there—nothing to be seen.

In a little room next to his bedroom, which had no exit, noises began and became louder and louder. As soon as a light was lit they ceased, but the moment the light was put out they began again.

Christo, anxious to catch the trickster, stood on the stair landing, revolver in hand. Hardly had the match he held in his fingers

gone out when he heard, close to his face, a loud burst of laughter which echoed all over the house.

He saw a white cloud before him, and two wisps of whitish light came from the nostrils of the figure.

This was too much. He felt his courage giving away. His searching fingers could find no more matches, and he called to his wife to bring some down to him. She came quickly, but, in his excitement, he dropped the candle he held, and it rolled away in the darkness somewhere.

The Empty Cradle

"I clasped my wife against my side with my left hand and said to her:

"'I have no more candle. I shall go up with you to find one. If I shoot at random don't be frightened. There is really nobody. Only, you know if somebody were there, it would be a good warning.'

"'No,' she replied, very much frightened, even more by my tone than by my words. 'I do not understand. Are you frightened, too?'

"'There is no cause, I assure you,' I said, trying to laugh. 'I am going with you. You will give me another candle because the moon lights things up so badly—' I went rambling on.

"As we were going up the stairs, pressed against each other, I suddenly felt her getting heavy and pulling me back with the weight of two bodies. She started struggling and crying:

"'Francis, help! Somebody has got hold of my feet.'

"We had arrived on the small landing lighted by a window opening on the garden at the back of the house.

"Without turning around, so convinced was I that I should not see anybody, I passed my right hand over my left shoulder and fired in that direction. The shot rang out fearfully in that sonorous house, and my wife, leaning across my arm, seemed to be dead.

"But I had not killed the evil thing which pursued me. For I received a violent blow on the cheek as if with five small sticks.

"Strangely enough, the blow on the cheek gave me back all my energy. Being struck means that one strikes out and reacts immediately.

"I tore my wife from the terrible thing which sought to take her away from me, and by the vague light of the window I saw once more that there was nobody behind her. We reached our room and I banged the door feverishly, as if I were crushing something in the doorway.

"My wife, feeling herself saved, and thinking of a malefactor because I defended myself with a revolver, rushed to the cradle of the child.

"*The cradle was empty.*

"Then she fainted away.

"Savagely watching the circle of feeble light, which the lamp shed around me and the woman on the floor, for a sign of the something which would no doubt appear there, I waited. It was useless to think of defense. Knife, revolver—all this became helpless against an enemy who could not be seized.

"From afar the servants, having heard the firing, howled like dogs at the moon. I know of nothing more demoralizing than the cries of women in the night.

When Day Broke

"But the soft wailing of a baby which seemed to come from under the floor awoke me from my moral feebleness. It had to be found, the little mite, for I knew from my wife's fainting fit that it was not she who put it away.

"So I had the courage—it required some courage to go up and downstairs in that house—to search the whole ground floor, holding the lamp on high.

"I found the infant quite naked, all its swaddling clothes taken off, placed on its back in the middle of a marble tablelike object of no value abandoned by a redoubtable robber in his haste to escape in the night.

"All night long I had to soothe the hysterics of my wife and the terror of my infant child. It was only at sunrise that everything returned to its natural order, and the mother went to sleep with the baby's lips on her breast.

"I must say that this horrible adventure put me into such a state of breakdown that I could no longer face my invisible enemy or enemies. This last conjuring trick, this baby being taken away without our being able to guess how it passed the staircase—or the walls—it could not be explained, could not be tolerated.

"My heart sank with a new fear, that of having to give way before having understood the phenomena. When day broke I decided not to yield without at least informing the Portuguese police of what had happened."

"Who Knocked Here?"

Christo's personal opinion was that the whole affair was the work of burglars who were trying to get him to leave the house so they could loot it. This was one of the reasons that decided him to call on the police for aid.

"These were very incredulous at first, but the notice given by both our servants the day after the events created a very favorable and convincing situation. They went away like two hens frightened by a motor car, bawling and cackling in every key, and adding details which were the more circumstantial for their having seen nothing."

Convinced that something had really taken place at Christo's home, the authorities placed a policeman and two constables at his disposal. Paredes and another friend, Henrique Sotto Armas, joined the party which was to watch the next night.

The house was searched and inspected by the group from top to bottom. Satisfied that there was no one hiding inside, they laid their trap. It was decided that the policeman should be outside the house, while the two constables and the other members of the party locked themselves inside and waited behind the outside doors and the window whose shutters had so mysteriously opened themselves.

The next is quoted from a letter written by Christo to Mme. Rachilde.

> . . . You have always claimed that these mysterious events only happen to one or two persons, more or less trustworthy, and that as soon as the police began to investigate they reduce themselves to nothing, as these haunted houses are not in the habit of yielding their secrets to the representatives of law and order.
>
> Here I must claim your attention, my dear Rachilde, for with the orderlies behind and in front of the doors *all the phenomena happened in exactly the same way as soon as the lights were put out.*
>
> When the lights went up the traces of the criminal or criminals were found, but never the shadow of their arms.

When every one was at his station the lights were put out. Knocks were immediately heard on the front door.

"Do you hear that?" Christo asked the constables.

"Perfectly," they replied.

The knocking began again. Christo suddenly jerked open the door. There was nobody to be seen except the policeman who was calmly walking back and forth a short distance away.

"Who knocked here?" Christo demanded.

"Nobody," the policeman replied.

"Didn't you hear the knocking just now?"

"I have heard nothing at all," the policeman insisted.

Sounds of a Struggle

Christo sputtered angrily. "This is too much," he declared. "Go on inside, and you two constables come outside here to watch."

The same thing happened again. The policeman and the people inside heard the knocking, but the constables heard and saw nothing.

It was decided then that everybody should watch inside the house. One of the constables was sent into the room where Paredes had slept on the first night he visited the place. When the man went to sit down on a bench it was pulled away so suddenly that he fell down.

The other constable, Paredes, and the policeman stationed themselves at other strategic points on the ground floor. Christo's wife and the servants remained in their rooms on the second floor with the doors locked.

As on the previous night Christo stood

on a landing of the stair leading to the ground floor.

They had hardly taken their positions before the strange noises and blows started. The racket was particularly loud in a small room next to one of the bedrooms. When this was investigated only a small trunk was found in it, and the trunk was empty. There was no outside entrance to the room. The men returned to their posts again.

As soon as the lights were out a tremendous noise and the sounds of a terrific struggle were heard from the guest room. Every one rushed in, thinking that the constable had at last caught the offender.

The Drama of Fear

But they were disappointed. When they got there all they saw was the infuriated constable striking with his sword right and left. As they appeared he dashed back into a little boudoir where there was a wardrobe with a mirror, which he broke in his fury.

He had to be restrained by force, and told them that something had struck him several times. Christo writes:

"He came out of that dark place declaring that he would sooner resign as a defender of the peace than start again on that kind of war."

Christo himself was the next man attacked. After the constable had been quieted he had returned to his post on the stair landing. The lights were put out again.

Suddenly he received a blow on his left cheek so hard that he screamed in agony and surprise. It seemed as if fangs had hooked themselves into the flesh to tear it.

The lights were turned on again. Four finger-prints could be plainly seen on his left cheek, which was red, while his right was an ashen hue. It was now about midnight. Of the succeeding events Christo writes:

"Boxes of linen, yet unpacked because of our recent arrival, were found emptied on the floor by hands which could never be caught in the act. Blows sounded throughout the cursed dwelling in the ears of the protectors who had come to help us. Cries and jeers smote them without giving them any possible idea why they were persecuted.

"There were no cellars in this specially haunted house where wires, good or bad conductors of electricity, could have been concealed; no thickets in the garden where clever disturbers of the peace could have concealed themselves.

"No. It was mystery taking possession of a very modern scene and playing the drama of Fear without accessories or scenery, addressing itself only to the mentality of incredulous man, perhaps in order to show him that whatever the times, the unknown forces always remain formed.

"To tell the truth, I was more angry than frightened. I could not admit discovering any trickery. But it seemed humiliating to turn my back on this cowardly and dishonest enemy who struck in the dark.

"Yet we had to go and leave an uninhabitable spot in the night, because of the infant which cried, and the mother who became more and more nervous."

White Lady of the Hohenzollerns

Although the mother and the baby were given as the reasons for the flight from the house, yet the men were equally terrified. The entire party went to a hotel to spend the rest of the night, and the stupefied police went home, swearing never again to enter such a place.

Christo sublet the house. But after two days the new tenant moved away, declaring that it was uninhabitable. It had to be left empty.

The above is the record of the experiences passed through by Homen Christo in 1919. In some ways they are even more amazing than those events which took place in the haunted castle of Calvados, and which will be told about at another time.

The facts have been verified by several investigators. And as one reads them one wonders. Are there invisible beings? Is there an invisible world? Do we know all the forces of nature?

For centuries "The White Lady of the Hohenzollerns" has appeared to the members of royalty to warn them of approaching death or misfortune. First heard of

about four hundred and fifty years ago, she has since been seen by many people, among them Napoleon and Frederick William IV of Prussia.

During the World War she again appeared. The Kaiser, aware of the sinister significance of her appearance at the Imperial House, was so much disturbed over her visits that he forbade the mention of her name at the court.

The White Lady is supposed to be Lady Bertha von Lichtenstein, the beautiful daughter of Catherine of Wurtemberg and Ulrich von Rosenberg, lieutenant governor in Bohemia, and commander in chief of the Roman Catholic troops against the Hussites.

She Visits Napoleon

She was the victim of an unhappy marriage, but much beloved by her people, and first appeared at her old castle at Neuhaus after the Thirty Years' War, when the annual feast held in her memory was temporarily discontinued.

There are many records of her appearance during the next century—always followed by death or misfortune. On August 26, 1678, the Margrave Erdmann Philip of Bayreuth was riding from the race track back to the palace when his horse fell and threw him. The prince died a few hours later. A few days before, the White Lady had been seen by several people, seated in his armchair.

Strangely enough one of the people to whom she appeared was Napoleon. Some time in 1805 his headquarters happened to be at Schönbrunn, where he was directing the movements preceding the "*Drei Kaiser Schlacht*" of Austerlitz.

"In the middle of the night," says the record, "he was suddenly awakened by a terrific shaking of his bed, and found that a lady, dressed in white and looking very angry, was trying to overturn the bed.

"Springing up, the emperor fled from the room, thinking that his visitor must be a lunatic who had strayed into it by mistake. Outside the door, however, the Mameluke, Rutau, was sleeping soundly. When the two men went back into the bedchamber they found it empty.

"Napoleon then decided that he had had a very vivid nightmare. When he spoke of the affair the next day, however, to his astonishment he learned that Berthier, who had been sleeping in a room some distance from his own, had had exactly the same visitor!

"Four years later, in 1809, Bonaparte again made Schönbrunn his headquarters after the battle of Wagram. This time he gave orders for his bed to be prepared in another room, thinking that the one he had formerly occupied was haunted.

"The precaution proved useless.

"Once more he was awakened in the middle of the night by the White Lady, and this time her manner was even more menacing than it had been before.

"'Who are you?' demanded Napoleon. 'And what do you want of me?'

"'Who I am,' the apparition replied in French, 'is known only to Heaven, whose messenger I am. I have to tell you that unless you desist from your efforts against Germany, you and yours will be utterly destroyed one day.'"

With these words she vanished.

Corroborative Appearances

The Viscomte d'Arlincourt tells of several appearances of the White Lady. On one occasion Katherine, the wife of King William of Wurtemberg, and a sister of the Emperor Nicholas, was lying in bed ill, when the door of the room flew open as if with a sudden gust of wind. The queen demanded hastily that it be shut again, as the draft annoyed her.

Her lady-in-waiting, who was reading to her, got up immediately to obey the command. When she had closed the door and turned to go back to her place by the bedside she distinctly saw the White Lady sitting in her chair. Two days later, January 9, 1819, the queen died suddenly, although she was not generally supposed to be seriously ill.

The White Lady is also supposed to have been seen kneeling by the bed of the dying Margravine Amelia of Baden, the mother of Alexander I of Russia, at the Palace of Bruchsal, which was once the residence of two Prince Bishops in succession.

In 1840 the White Lady appeared before the death of Frederick William III.

Mrs. Hugh Fraser, in her book, "A Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands" tells this particularly gruesome story of yet another appearance of the famous ghost of the Hohenzollern family:

"In July, 1857, Frederick William IV, of Prussia, and his queen were visiting the King and Queen of Saxony at the Royal Palace at Pillnitz. That night, between midnight and one o'clock, the sentry on guard outside the castle distinguished, through the dead silence around him, the distant sound of heavy, measured footsteps, as of soldiers marching toward him across the graveled space in front of his sentry box.

Her Latest Bow

"Presently he could make out the outlines of a company of some kind, advancing at the same slow, even pace. Then, to his horror, he saw five figures—a woman in white, followed by four headless men carrying a long, heavy object on their shoulders. They passed by him, entered a small side door of the palace and disappeared.

"For a few minutes the sentry stood paralyzed with terror, scarcely knowing whether he was sane or mad. Then the side door was pushed open again, and from it issued the same phantom procession.

"The headless men with their burden this time, however, preceded the White Lady, who followed a few feet behind them.

"They brushed by the sentry who saw that they were carrying an open coffin, in which was the body of a man dressed in a general's uniform, covered with orders and decorations. Among them he recognized the Order of the Black Eagle.

"But the body, like those of its bearers, was headless and a royal crown filled the space between the shoulders.

"The terrified sentry remained at his post and sufficiently collected his wits to note every detail of the appalling sight.

"Slowly the headless bearers, with their ghastly burden, followed by the White Lady, moved away; and the man when he made his official report the next day, stated that he saw the figures gradually disappear 'from the feet up.'

"The meaning of this appearance of the White Lady was soon revealed. Frederick William IV had been in poor health for some time, and during this visit to the Palace of Pillnitz the first grave symptoms of the distressing malady which later deprived him of his reason showed themselves.

"In the following October he was struck down with brain seizure, and his condition speedily became so bad that on the twenty-seventh of the same month the Prince of Prussia was reluctantly compelled to assume the regency. For three years the unhappy king lived with only a few occasional intervals of sanity, and died on January 2, 1861."

When Mrs. Fraser's husband was attached to the British Legation at Dresden, soon after the White Lady's appearance, this terrible experience of the sentry at the Palace of Pillnitz was still a much discussed topic.

The latest appearance of the White Lady was, as already mentioned, during the World War. Disaster followed for the House of Hohenzollern.

The Dead Stambuloff

In an article in the *Occult Review* of November, 1915, Elliot O'Donnell states that Ferdinand, the King of Bulgaria, was haunted perpetually by the ghost of Stambuloff, the minister whose death he brought about in 1895.

"On several occasions," he writes, "when Ferdinand had been seen out driving, or even walking, the spectators—though possibly those gifted with psychic powers only—have seen beside him a figure which they have easily recognized as the dead minister.

"On one occasion, when Ferdinand was visiting a certain princess, the latter seemed strangely agitated, as did her lady in waiting.

"Upon the latter being asked what was the matter with her and her royal mistress, she replied in an agitated whisper, that they were disturbed by the sight of the man who persisted in standing just behind his highness, and who looked just like a corpse.

"Her questioner said that the figure was

quite invisible to him, but on her describing it, no doubt was left in his mind that what she and the princess had seen was the ghost of Stambuloff.

"On another occasion Ferdinand visited a pretty little Hungarian fortune teller and had his hand read. Then, thinking to trap the girl, he came to her again the next day, this time in disguise.

"Rather to his chagrin—for he flattered himself that his make-up was particularly good—the pretty fortune teller recognized him immediately as the gentleman who had consulted her the day before, and told him that she had been expecting him.

"'How is that?' asked Ferdinand. 'Why, I've told nobody.'"

The girl answered that the gentleman who had accompanied him on his former visit had been to see her half an hour before, and told her that the king was already coming.

"Ferdinand, now becoming highly agitated, asked her to describe this strange person. She did so, and the description exactly tallied with that of the dead Stambuloff, while to his increasing horror the girl added that the gentleman had said to her:

"'Tell him when he comes that he will perish in much the same manner as I have,' and showed her his own hand.

"Ferdinand then asked the girl what she had seen written there, and she answered that she had seen the same ending to the life-line as she saw in his own; but what it was she would rather not say.

"Then she suddenly cried out that she saw his friend beckoning to him. But Ferdinand had heard enough, and, turning on his heel, left her hurriedly."

DATED August 20 the next copy of FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION will appear on the news-stands.

In it will begin "The Death Gong," a four-part serial by Selwyn Jepson. Mr. Jepson has never before written for this magazine. But he is not unknown to American readers. "The Death Gong" is a powerful story, and will repay the reading.

Louis Weadock offers "You're in the Army Now," a splendid short story. Peter Perry contributes "The Spider's Web," which is quite in his best manner.

Lin Bonner continues his discussion of stock swindles and stock swindlers with "Your Millions," not at all the sort of article that one could ordinarily hope to find in anything but one of the higher-priced periodicals.

Robert Sneddon discusses "The Mad Landlord," a fascinating, true murder story.

Carl Maddox presents Marcus O'Neil in a new case.

In addition to these headliners you will find "Haunts of the Invisible—II"; "The Vanity of Women," by Frank Price; "The Missing Man," by Louise Rice, which is one of New York's greatest actual mysteries; "Whitcher's New Hobby," by Harold de Polo; and other stories and articles which you will enjoy as much.

William J. Flynn

Elsie recoiled from the spectacle in the other room

A CROOK DE LUXE

By Charles Somerville

HIS TALENTS WOULD HAVE SHOT HIM TO THE TOP OF WHATEVER CAREER HE SELECTED AND HE USED THEM UNSTINTINGLY IN CRIME

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

REVOLTING against the drab life of bank clerk Jack Lawrence executed a clever holdup of Jerry Larkin, proprietor of a road house which Jack occasionally patronized with his wealthier friends. Through inexperience he was captured and served two years at the State Reformatory. There he was Johnny-up, ruler of the inmates, which resulted in his being taken into the powerful "mob" of Slim Gegan on his release. After six months with this gang he made a sensational robbery of the fashionable Gregory School, was again caught, and confessed to save Elsie Lane, an innocent girl who loved him, from suspicion and trial. During Jack's three-year term in Sing Sing, Madge Kimberly, under Slim's orders, constantly had written to him, declaring her affection, and on his release, met him and drove to Slim's apartment. Elsie, meanwhile, had become a movie star under the name of Anna Gray. Her letters to Jack had been destroyed by Slim's hirelings, and Lawrence thought she had deserted him. However, she, too, was at the gate, just as Jack drove off, not seeing her. She trailed the car bearing him to the Riverside Drive apartment which Slim occupied under the name of Mr. Allen, and by a trick learned his destination.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHOWDOWN—OF A KIND

WHILE awaiting Madge, whom he had sent in his car to Sing Sing to meet Jack and return with his protégé in crime to the apartment, Slim Gegan had amused himself this morning with his favorite indoor sport of torturing Dopey Buddy, the youthful drug fiend, whom he took a vicious pleasure in reducing to degrading abjection by withholding the potion that had actually come to mean life for the wretched creature.

All the instincts of cruelty of a savage were unmodified by civilization in the

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for July 23

nature of the dapper, slim, gray criminal. The feeling also of holding another human creature so absolutely in his power, make a slave of him, whetted his viciousness to an unspeakable degree.

For fully an hour he had inhumanly baited the white-faced, emaciated lad. He had withheld the drug from him till Dopey Buddy had come to him crawling, whining, sobbing, begging in mercy's name for Slim to open that drawer in his desk which the youth wildly eyed and dole him out the precious white powder that would relieve his mental and physical agony. With a tightening smile of his thin lips Slim held off minute after minute, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, a half hour.

He had the boy on his knees before him, wiping off his shoes, kissing his hand, writhing, hysterical. Now and then he would reach toward the drawer where the drug was kept. But as the lad's distorted lips opened to emit an animal cry of joy he would snap the partly open drawer back again and laugh at the gibbering suffering of the half-demented lad.

Dopey Buddy was on his knees praying to him, as if he were a god, when the stocky, dour-faced butler, a full-fledged member of the Gegan gang, knocked and told him of the telephone announcement of the arrival of Lawrence and Madge.

Then only did the torture cease. He opened the drawer, flung the half-mad boy the paper packet so infinitely precious to his drug-ridden body. Slim grinned like a mask as he saw Dopey Buddy take the powder down in a single, avid gulp.

It struck his notice that the lad did not behave as usual, which was to babble half-incoherent expressions of gratitude as the drug afforded swift and intense relief. Slim grinned the wider as, happening to look up, he caught the youth looking back at him with a gleaming glance of hatred cast over his shoulder.

"He'll be wiping my boots again in the morning," thought Slim. "Licking 'em clean if I tell him to."

Then he was up on his feet, both hands extended to greet Jack Lawrence.

"Well—well, Johnny-up! A little pale, my boy. But I've got a wad in the safe that'll take you down to seashore and put a good healthy tan on you in no time. 'Lo, Madge. I suppose you're feeling fine, too—your big boy back again?"

"I'm feeling so good I hurt!" gurgled the red-lipped, brown-eyed young woman.

"Is it too soon, Slim, to ask you just how I stand with you? What's coming out of the Gregory swag?"

"Got it all here in black and white. Abe Trummell took a chunk of it, of course. Had to let Phil skip his five thousand dollar bond. Been sending you a pretty, reg'lar income up in stir. Taxed you a little on Jerry's funeral money—even if he did double cross us. His brother knew too much. Had to salve him a little. All in all—what would you say to ten thousand?"

"Guess that's all right. How much can I have right now?"

"Will two grand hold you?"

"Sure."

Slim moved over to a wall safe, opened it and brought out a sheaf of new yellow money which he handed Jack, saying: "I hope you are not discouraged with the game because they've knocked you off twice. It was just a bum chance that brought Tunney up from the city on the case. Otherwise there'd have been a clean get-away."

"I'm putting it all down to experience," nodded Jack. "I don't think they'll ever get me again."

"You don't mean you are going to pull away—go back to punching a time clock?"

"I'll say not. What I mean is, Slim—"

There came a knock on the door.

When Slim opened it his butler conveyed with a slight nod of the head that he desired to speak with his master privately. Slim stepped out into the hallway and closed the door behind him.

"There's a good-looking young woman in the hall," said the butler, "says she must see Lawrence. I tried to say he wasn't here. But she said she knew better. She said she knew him and had seen him enter the apartment house and had learned that he had gone to Mr. Allen's rooms.

"Says she must see him. She'll wait, she says, in the hallway till he comes out if she isn't permitted to see him right away.

She'll wait, she says, if she has to wait all night. She talks like she means it. Talks like she would make trouble if put to it, Mr. Gegan."

"Give a name?"

"Elsie Lane—that's the young woman, ain't it, that—"

"Shut up."

Slim was troubled, as he had every reason to be. If Elsie saw Jack, she was bound to demand why he had never answered any of her letters. Jack might start an inquiry at the post office—serious predicaments might arise.

If Jack loved the girl he would be furious. She would hold the trump cards for winning him over. And, in his rage, he might turn on him, Slim, and—the girl must not be allowed to see Lawrence, must not. He must take swift and drastic measures.

"Go back and tell her that she'll see Lawrence in a few minutes. Slip her into the little reception room. But don't let her get out of it until I signal with the buzzer. Then bring her in here—into my room."

"Yes, sir."

Slim stepped back, closed the door and said:

"Pretty important matter come up. Fellow I've got to see right away. Madge, you take Jack into the music room and I'll have Markey take you in some champagne. I guess you and Jack are ripe for a few more hours of talk, eh? I don't expect this interview is going to take very long. I'll join you soon as I can, Johnny-up, and we'll talk over the future."

"Yes, Slim. I'm anxious to do that with you. As I said, I've—"

"Well, hold it a little while, Johnny-up. Take him along, Madge."

There were three doors in the room. The one at the front led into the main hallway. The door in the rear led to a private back stairway that dropped three flights before it admitted one into the main hallway of the apartment house below, where, if one desired, one might continue down four more rear flights to a rear door that opened on an alley along the side of the apartment house and running from the rear into the street.

The third door of Slim's room opened into an interior hallway from which entrance was to be had to several bedrooms, a large music room and a still larger salon.

It was through this center door that Slim motioned Jack and Madge, and he watched them as they traversed its length and disappeared into the music room. He reëntered his library, locked the center door, went to his big mahogany table, and touched a button beneath its top.

Very shortly thereafter Markey ushered Elsie Lane before him, and discreetly closed the door.

Miss Lane gazed coolly at the little, gray, ferret-faced master crook.

"I asked to see Mr. John Lawrence," she said.

"What if Mr. Lawrence doesn't care to see you, miss?"

"When he tells me so himself I'll believe it."

"Only that way, hey?"

"Only that way. May I ask who you are?"

"They told you my name downstairs, didn't they, when you asked where Mr. Lawrence had gone?"

"They called you Mr. Allen."

"That's who I am."

"Here, perhaps; Slim Gegan elsewhere, I fancy."

"Oh, you do?"

"I'm certain of it. But I didn't come here to see you, but to see Jack Lawrence."

"And I've kind of hinted that perhaps he doesn't want to see you."

"I've said I would only believe that when he told me so himself."

Slim relighted the cigar, which had gone out.

"No," he said. "Lawrence wouldn't have to tell you, if you knew what I knew."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Elsie.

"You're in love with him, ain't you?"

She blushed furiously and made him no answer.

"And you think he's still in love with you? Because he told you he was the day before he was sent away."

"He proved that he was by what he did to clear me," said Elsie hotly.

"But three years in prison make big

changes in a man. Besides you've grown famous. And you went too far away. There's been another girl seeing him all this time—visiting him up in prison—as his sister. He saw her, talked to her, touched her hand, while he saw nothing of you, got only letters from you that read like Sunday school tracts."

"What do you know of my letters?" asked Elsie.

"Oh, I saw him now and then. He told me."

"Still I demand an opportunity here and now to see Jack Lawrence."

Slim arose.

"All right. That goes. You'll get a chance to see him. And then if you want to speak to him—if after you've seen, it turns out that your pride is so small, so contemptible—why, I've got nothing against you, Miss Lane, I'm only trying to make it easy for you.

"I'm only trying to let you know that whatever you may have been to Lawrence, whatever he may have thought of you once—well, he never gives you a thought now. It's all right—all right. You are going to see him—mighty quick. After that it will be up to you."

"I don't understand what you are driving at."

"You just wait here a second and you will—you will. You just wait a second. I'll be right back."

Slim unlocked the center door, opened it and passed out of the room. He moved hastily to the music salon. There he drew back a heavy velvet curtain and looked in on Jack and Madge as they sat chatting, champagne glasses in hand.

"Just a minute, Madge—just a word with you."

She joined Slim in the hallway. He whispered to her swiftly. She gave him a nod of understanding and returned to the music room as Slim stepped briskly back along the hallway to his library.

He paused outside the door and listened until he heard the sound of a dance record as uttered by a gramophone from the music room. A small twist of a smile crossed his lips as he opened the library door and said:

"Suppose you come this way, Miss Lane."

CHAPTER XXXIII

"THE LAW COULDN'T GET YOU, BUT I CAN!"

SLIM GEGAN paused at the curtain shutting off the view of the interior of the music room. Then he drew it slightly aside and was satisfied. His whispered instructions to Madge had been that she start the gramophone in the tune of a dance.

This would place her in Jack's arms. She was to watch the curtain, and when he opened it slightly it would be her cue to be suddenly overcome with such an emotion of love for Jack that she was to wind her arms tightly around his neck and, willy nilly, press her lips to his own.

As Slim moved the curtain slightly aside and peeked in Madge was looking at him over Jack's shoulder. She winked to say that she had caught the cue.

Slim opened the curtain slightly wider.

"Suppose, Miss Lane, you look in without yourself being seen."

Before she realized that she was spying, Elsie had done so. While the gay music rippled off the phonograph she looked in on two figures that scarcely moved—Madge and Jack Lawrence, lips joined and in a full embrace.

Elsie recoiled from the spectacle. Her face became very white. She turned swiftly and fairly ran back to Slim's library, the little, gray man at her heels.

Once again in the room, he said to her, trying to put a touch of kindliness in his voice:

"I guess that finished your wanting to see Jack Lawrence, doesn't it?"

Elsie stared at Slim Gegan as if she didn't see him.

He went on:

"I know who you are and what brought you here. You are Jack's good angel, aren't you? And you came to take him away from my influence—rescue him from the villain's clutches. Well, my dear young woman, you are wasting your time.

"He wants the life. He wants kick, adventure, and quick money. He wants

me as much—more, much more than I have any need of him. He wants her, and he's got her. And, by the same token, you can see how much he wants you—how warm a welcome you could expect if you came preaching to him. Especially right now after three years of unnatural restraint."

"I am ready to leave here, if you please," said Elsie, holding back her tears and holding her voice steady with a great effort. "Will you kindly have your servant show me out?"

Slim seated himself before his big mahogany table. He tapped his delicate fingers on the polished surface of the table top. Then, very decisively, he shook his head in the negative.

"I can't do that—let you leave. Not for a week at least. Perhaps ten days."

"You can't mean that you will dare to keep me prisoner? You had better consider the danger of that."

"You can't blame me," he said, touching another match coolly to his long cigar. "You walked into it yourself. The only way you could have found out where I live was by following my automobile from Sing Sing. Well, then, you had no business following Lawrence here."

"I demand to be permitted to leave this house this instant!"

"Don't try hysterics. They'll get you nothing, Miss Lane," he retorted, looking squarely into her blazing eyes. "You see, you know who I am."

"Slim Gegan, the man who has fostered Jack Lawrence in a life of habitual crime!" she blurted.

"There you see. And the first thing you'd do when you got out of here would be to tell the police where I make my home. I can't permit it. You'll have to be my guest for awhile, Miss Lane.

"Oh, your person will be perfectly safe. I haven't the slightest intention of offering you any insult or attacking you. This isn't a movie. You see, I know too many other beautiful women who are more of my kind—more to my mind.

"I realize it will put you to a great inconvenience and cause tremendous anxiety to two or three movie magnates by my holding you here for, say, ten days. But please consider the tremendous inconvenience to which you are putting me. I'm certain you'd talk—tell where you found me.

"It would be very annoying and upset several of my plans to have the headquarters bulls and stools spying around here on me. It means that I will have to move elsewhere, much as I hate to do so. I am situated very comfortably here.

"But I'll have to get out—go to live somewhere of which you know nothing about. And while that little transfer is being made, you are going to stay here. As I said before, you've brought it upon yourself. That should be clear to you."

"Why, it would be kidnaping! You wouldn't dare?"

"Miss Lane, spare yourself any useless display of emotion. On the other hand, consider that I am really being very mild with you. Only kidnaping when," and he fixed her with a hard, clear gaze, "at my order I might put you out of my way for good and all!"

"Murder?"

"You'd get me if you could—send me to prison for the rest of my life, if it was in your power to do so. You already know too much. I don't want blood on my hands, but you've walked into my parlor unbidden, unwanted, trouble-seeking, and now you'll have to take your medicine. It will not serve you in the least to scream or shriek. For very good reasons of my own, I have had the walls of this room made absolutely sound proof."

He stepped toward the big table.

"Please go quietly with my butler when he comes. He will take you to his wife, my housekeeper.

"She will give you a comfortable room and see that you are supplied with whatever woman's stuff you'll need to wear while you are here. Please don't make a fuss, because if you do we will not be able to deal with you gently. We'll bind and gag you if necessary, Miss Lane."

She stood gazing at him with the silence of the spellbound as he put his fingers forward to the button under the table.

But he didn't touch it. Instead he snatched his hand away as if stung.

For the door at the rear of the room flew open with a force that sent it banging against the wall.

Miss Lane uttered an involuntary scream at the wild-eyed and disheveled figure she saw there.

It was Dopey Buddy. His long, pale, straw-colored hair was in a tangle on his forehead, falling half over pale-blue, red-lined, inflamed eyes. Bright red patches burned in his otherwise chalk-white cheeks. His loose, weak mouth was writhing, his malformed chin quivering.

Slim's small head darted forward on his shoulders like the head of a viper. His eyes shone with white anger.

"What the hell do you mean, you dog, you less than dog, by breaking into this room in that manner?" he snapped.

"Less than dog, I was, I may have been!" screamed the youth. "But I'll be no more a dog of yours—no more your whining, whimpering cur! What a fool I've been to grovel at your feet, to beg, to kiss your hand for the relief I must have when I could all along have so easily changed it all; as I'm going to change it now."

"Get out of this room or I'll have Markey tie you to a bedpost and I'll whip and lash you raw!" cried Slim Gegan.

But Dopey Buddy laughed at him, loudly, with the stridency of the insane.

"Listen, Gegan, I can't live a month. I found that out at a hospital a few days ago. The drugs you've given me have eaten the very heart out of me. I can't live a month, you understand? But, Gegan, you're not going to live another minute! The law can't get you, but, by God, I can!"

His right hand whipped out of his pocket. His lean, white wasted fingers were clutching an automatic.

Gegan put out his hand toward a drawer in the table where he kept a pistol.

"Don't move!" cried the boy. "Or I'll shoot!"

"Buddy, don't be a fool. Don't put murder on your soul."

His tone was now that of one addressing a child.

"There—over there is the drawer that holds a six months' supply for you. Go over and take it."

Now the young drug-fiend's voice came very calmly.

"I am going to do that when I have finished the job. It is just as I said, Gegan. The law couldn't get you, but I can."

With a gesture that appeared queerly nonchalant he lifted the weapon and fired once, twice, thrice at Slim Gegan's heart.

The little, gray master crook grasped at the end of the table, stood swaying for a second, not more. His gray face took on the green-gray pallor of death. His head suddenly fell striking the table, bounded away from it and it was the corpse of Slim Gegan that curled on the floor.

Dopey Buddy stared at it. He chattered at it and laughed at it. Then he rushed for the drawer and with a queer cry of joy possessed himself of the box from which Gegan had long doled him the drug at the cost of his complete degradation and poignant suffering.

The box tucked under his coat, the pistol slipped back into another pocket, he suddenly appeared to become conscious of Elsie's presence.

"Nobody has heard," he said. "No sounds can get out of this room. You've got time to get out of here. I don't know who you are, but you look—look decent. You don't want to be in this. Get out of here. Through the door I came in.

"Three flights down, then into the main hall and keep to the back stairway. It lets you out on an alley. You can get away from the place without the boys in the hall seeing you.

"Hurry. It will be lots of trouble for you, if the police come before you get away. Although I'm going to tell them that I did it. I'm proud that I did it. That wasn't a man I killed. It was a devil. He belonged where I sent him—to hell!"

By this time Elsie was at the door. She fled down the rear stairways and with a relieved heart made her way out of the apartment house unseen. She hastened to her car and was soon away.

Fifteen minutes later she was in her room at her hotel, shaken, cowering, unable to dismiss from her vision the wild-eyed youth, the white-faced terror that had flashed into Slim Gegan's face when the shots rang out,

the grotesque manner in which his head had bumped the table, rebounded, and his small body had curled or, rather, flopped spinelessly and lifeless to the floor.

Dopey, after her flight, had stood for nearly a minute leering at the upturned face of the murdered man. Then his frail body had suddenly straightened. He ran from door to door of Gegan's library and down each hallway screamed wildly:

"I've killed him! I've killed the fiend of hell!"

His cries brought Markey, the butler, and Jack and Madge running into the room where they halted, shocked at the spectacle of the slain, crumpled body on the floor.

In the rear doorway stood Dopey Buddy pointing, leering at the corpse. But before either of the three could speak to him he turned and darted down the rear stairs, filling the corridor as he went with the sounds of cracked and hideous laughter.

Emerging from the apartment house he dashed through the alleyway into the street. There he paused to open the box of drugs. One, two three of the paper packets he opened and gobbled the white powders they contained.

He waved his arms and yelled incoherences as he started once more to run at top speed. But at the second corner he came to a gasping halt. He tottered toward a lamp-post and succeeded in flinging a supporting arm around it. But his head with its disorder of long, straw-colored hair sagged against the mail box affixed to the post. His knees gave way. And next he sagged into the arms of a traffic policeman.

"The law couldn't get him!" said the boy with a slow smile, "but I did!" Ten minutes later an ambulance surgeon said to the policeman:

"Morphine—heart. Dead as a doornail."

CHAPTER XXXIV

OUT OF THIN AIR

MR. RODNEY FAIRFAX paid twenty-five thousand dollars a year for a suite in a Park Avenue apartment. But this didn't constitute his home. That was a grand mansion amid lakes and hanging gardens situated in one of the woodland sections of Long Island with the broad, blue Sound beyond. The Park Avenue establishment was merely for the use of himself and wife when the opera season was on and the affairs of society generally at their height.

All of which suggests that Mr. Rodney Fairfax was a man of great wealth. He was, indeed. Millions had been inherited and by his own business acumen augmented until his fortune stood at figures to seem fabulous.

His wife, Grace, shared the fame of his riches with a celebrity apart. She was known as the possessor of jewels enormous in quantity, exquisite and rare as to quality. It may be recorded that they were insured for one million and five hundred thousand dollars.

Nor were these gems allowed to glitter unseen in safety deposit vaults and other strong boxes. Mrs. Fairfax was unhappy if unadorned by them, even by day. At night in her opera or theater box or at this or that ball, reception, dance, she blazed with them.

There were separate sets for different costumes. Sometimes she appeared wholly in the prismatic flare of diamonds. Again in the creamy sheen of lovely pearls. Or the red glow of rubies, the soft blue of turquoise, the pale green of rare Chinese jade or shimmering in the flash and fire of gorgeous emeralds.

Not that Mrs. Fairfax entirely ignored the use of safety deposit vaults. But when in town she was passing in and out of them frequently, taking one or two sets of her famous jewelry away while replacing others she had recently worn. Twice a week unfailingly she appeared in her opera box in the world-renowned "Diamond Horseshoe" and on such occasions always wore the stones appropriate to that celebrated oval.

And now comes the record of a morning in the Fairfax apartment in Park Avenue when Mr. Fairfax arose by custom at nine for his bath while his wife continued to sleep beneath the purple satin and white lace coverings of the twin bed adjoining. When he had emerged from the bathroom,

his valet shaved him and then laid him a light breakfast in the small sun parlor.

In this room the servant also put out his master's clothing and, having dressed, Mr. Fairfax returned to his bedchamber to pick up the watch and gold-mounted billfolder that was invariably left on top of his dresser with whatever small change he might have in his pockets when he undressed.

Neither watch, billfolder, which he remembered had contained something in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars, or even the small change were where he expected to find them. Or anywhere else in the rooms. The pockets of his evening clothes were searched. Dresser drawers were hauled out. No sign of watch, billfold, or small change.

Yet at this time it did not occur to Mr. Fairfax that he had been robbed. The room showed no least sign of disturbance. He opened again a dresser drawer in which he kept several leather boxes that contained small articles of jewelry of his own. But these boxes were lying in order, the lid of none removed.

He pushed back the drawer and began to wonder regarding the honesty of his valet and the other servants. For the life of him he could not work up suspicion of them. His valet had been in his service for ten years. The servants he had brought to town were all long in his service, the pick of the Long Island mansion staff.

As he stood frowning and puzzled his wife said:

"What does all the fussing about mean, Rod?"

His rummaging and pulling in and snapping back of drawers had aroused her to complete wakefulness. He sharply and succinctly told her.

She was on her feet in an instant.

"My diamonds!" she cried. "I did not put them away in the wall safe last night! I left them in the top drawer of my dresser! Oh, my diamonds!"

She ignored the dainty slippers at her bedside, rushed across the room and swiftly drew out the dresser drawer.

"Well?" demanded Fairfax.

"Oh, Rod—they are all right!" she cried with intense relief. "Not a thing disturbed!"

"Well, it's certainly darn queer about my watch and—"

He stopped short in the speech because his wife had screamed:

"They're gone! My diamonds! Gone!"

"I thought you said they were all right?"

"I thought so when I first looked in the drawer. The cases were all as I left them. Lids on and everything. They did not look as if they had been disturbed. But, oh, Rod, I opened one. See—it's empty!"

She came toward him holding the jewel case with lid raised. Then she rushed back and snapped open the other cases.

"All gone! All my wonderful diamonds gone!"

She fell to her knees before the dresser and began to sob uncontrollably. As suddenly she arose:

"My jade set! It—I put it in the wall safe. Open the safe, Rod!"

"Well, a burglar couldn't have blown the wall out while we were sleeping," retorted Fairfax still standing with a black stare in his eyes. But he went to the wall safe nevertheless, twisted the knob this way and that, opened the door and then fell back.

"Cleaned out, by God!"

"My jade?"

"Your jade. And an envelope with a thousand cash in it I put in there day before yesterday!"

"But how could—"

"I fancy," said the wealthy Fairfax ruefully, "it's quite true about those thieves who can open a combination lock by the sense of touch. They say that such experts can open any lock that's been used six months. Sandpaper their finger tips and cultivate a sense of touch so refined they can tell by the fall of the hammer in the cog which cogs are those used."

"I saw that in a play and didn't believe it," gasped Mrs. Fairfax.

"Well, I guess—er—we both do now!"

"But the burglar alarms, were they set?"

"Absolutely. I attended to it myself when we got home last night."

"But there isn't a sign anywhere about the room of a thief having been here."

"That's right. You'd think we were robbed by a ghost—a phantom. Not a sound heard—not a thing apparently disturbed when I woke up. Yet everything of real value gone! *Some* expert."

"Oh, Rod! My diamonds—my wonderful diamonds! My jade—my exquisite jade!"

"Well, dammit, Grace, I've told you that your constant appearance in public fairly crusted with gems would some day lead to something like this. You've made a walking temptation of yourself."

"Rod—don't!" cried Mrs. Fairfax.

Frowning he lifted the telephone and presently was connected with police headquarters. He was informed that the most capable detectives of the department would be sent to his rooms forthwith. Then being a kindly man at bottom, he went to his wife's bedside and comforted her with assurances that he carried insurance to the full value of her diamonds and she should have another set as gorgeous as those of which she had been robbed.

Two tall lean men, dapper in dress, appearing surprisingly unlike detectives, were soon flashing their shields at the entrance of the Fairfax apartment. But in so far as their inquiry appeared to lead them it was only to add to the mystery. For their closest investigation not only failed of establishing any manner of clew, but their expert eyes could trace no method of entrance by the thief. Windows and locks had not been tampered with in so far as any examination by the headquarters stars could detect.

The Fairfax apartment being on the twelfth floor of a sixteen-story building, the only avenue of entrance available to a marauder was either by forcing his way through the outer hall doorway or through the rear windows leading into the kitchen past two of which ran fire escapes. But these windows had been securely fastened and their fastenings found undisturbed. Nor had the burglar alarm wiring attached to them been in the least tampered with.

On the face of it then, the detectives concluded, it must be an inside job. The Fairfax servants were questioned long and harshly, but unless they were all in a plot of robbery, their innocence was presumptive, for their characters had long been unblemished and they supported each other in testimony that all had retired to their rooms and to sleep about an hour before the return at half past midnight of their master and mistress.

A strict espionage was established on all of them, however. Special orders from the commissioner himself found their way to every detective on the force and every captain and lieutenant that the closest watch be kept on every known fence in the city and a description of the missing jewelry broadcast over the entire country.

CHAPTER XXXV

PHANTOM THIEF

THE newspapers were still headlining the Fairfax "two hundred and fifty thousand-dollar robbery," when public and police, especially the police, got a new jolt.

One of the grand, old brownstone mansions on aristocratic Brooklyn Heights, the home of the last of the Pearsons, wealthy since Colonial times, had been thoroughly ransacked. All of aged Mrs. Pearson's jewels, largely consisting of heirlooms, and thousands of dollars' worth stolen in the form of a solid gold table service, with jewels and gold plate had also been taken together with a sum of three thousand dollars in cash, and from a strong box certain negotiable bonds as easily disposed of as cash itself. The loot here was estimated at one hundred thousand dollars at least.

From the first there was no doubt that the robbery of the Pearson mansion had been effected by the same baffling, silent, ghostlike thief who plundered the Fairfax apartment.

The morning had opened at the Pearson residence without any outward sign of his visitation. All the furnishings in dining room and library whence the loot had been taken, had been left as if no hand had touched an article of the premises.

The mansion was arranged with an electric burglar alarm, but it had not sounded its signal at the headquarters of the agency engaged to protect the house. The win-

dows of basement and ground floor were faced with steel bars affixed for protection as well as ornament.

None had been pried apart. The only open windows had been those of the servants' rooms on the fourth floor, and one window open in the master's room on the third floor for ventilation. Unaided, a man would have to be a monkey to scale the sheer wall of smooth brownstone blocks to such a height.

But the detectives discovered that in the wooden casement of a window of Judge Pearson's room the thief had left his mark. It was a deep indentation, obviously freshly made by the long point of a sharp instrument which had dug deeply into the wood.

"A hook on the end of a rope ladder," surmised one of the headquarters men.

"But I am a very light sleeper," protested Judge Pearson. "He must have thrown the hook up to catch its sharp point in the woodwork. Equally that must have made a noise and the slightest unusual sound in the night always has the effect of awakening me. Positively no man could have thrown that hook up to the window casement and drawn it into the wood to such a depth without my having heard it."

"But there's the mark—fresh and new to prove that's just what he must have done!" came the protest from one of the sleuths.

"As you say—there is the mark, but I—I can't understand how it could have been done without waking me!"

The detectives shrugged their shoulders behind the old man's back.

Nevertheless they were worried men. And back at headquarters faced a chief of the detective bureau who plainly came to the decision that they had not been up to their jobs, for he assigned three other men with reputations as expert crook snatchers to pick up the thread of the mystery and see if they could follow it to some satisfactory conclusion. But they returned equally empty-handed as to results.

What proved worse was that the robberies of the Fairfax apartment and the Pearson mansion were but the forerunners of a score more evidently effected by the same skilled hand and with the same weird, ghostly *finesse*.

While puzzlement and exasperation racked the police department, the newspapers exhausted their largest type in recording fresh depredations of the thief to whom burglar alarms meant nothing, the combination locks on safes the same, who entered none could tell in just what manner and worked noiselessly, but with a startling thoroughness that overlooked nothing of value which was easily portable.

Within two months the "Phantom Thief," as the newspapers titled him, was notorious not only over the entire United States and Canada, but London, Berlin, and Paris journals were discussing him.

The quiet of his coming and departures, the effectiveness of his methods, the silence he maintained throughout his operations so that never a sleeper stirred, the wealth he was accumulating—it was estimated that twenty robberies had netted him something close to a half million dollars—made of him a figure in crime so strikingly mysterious and romantic that the public grew keenly hungry for every detail of his exploits and, over the chagrined reticence of the police, the newspapers did their very best to supply this demand.

The only clew to himself the amazing robber had thus far given was that he was a man of culture in the matter of things artistic. For in several of the houses he had visited he had, with a nice discrimination, plundered them of their rarest Chinese and Egyptian ceramics. Spurious things of such character in other houses and flats he had contemptuously left behind.

Five times he revisited Park Avenue; three times more the mansions of Brooklyn Heights; Long Island and Westchester country palaces suffered his deft touch and never had he been heard, never had he been seen. Nor did any of his loot ever turn up in the hands of the professional fences who had fallen into despair of being able to do business at all because of the closeness with which their affairs were watched by the now thoroughly angered and thoroughly aroused and alert detectives.

From coaxing and wheedling the "bulls" had passed to threatening their stool

pigeons that if some clew of identification of the Phantom Thief was not forthcoming, they would all suffer the common fate of a general round-up, and some old charges that had been forgotten would be diligently revived.

But the stool pigeons always came back with the same story—the Phantom Thief was not known to any of the mobs, he wasn't a regular, he was an outsider, a "swell guy" gone crooked was the best they could make of it.

The while the fences protested at the daily grilling they were getting, swearing each and all that no articles of jewelry resembling those stolen by the Phantom Thief had been offered them and no unset stones offered that would match up from the descriptions of the exceptional Fairfax diamonds and the ancient and equally celebrated Pearson pearls. They were as anxious to have the mysterious marauder caught as the policemen themselves, and the detectives came to realize it.

Twenty robberies was the Phantom Thief's score with the police at the end of that imposing string in just the same situation as they had found themselves after the first robbery—utterly balked, baffled, beaten.

While on a night about this time the Phantom Thief, had they but known him, might have been "knocked off," which is the technical police jargon for an arrest, as he sat in an orchestra seat of the Metropolitan Opera House, sweeping the fashionable and wealthy occupants of the boxes in the Diamond Horseshoe with a powerful pair of glasses, studying the glittering jewels of the women with a trained and cultured eye and smiling slightly as he selected his next victim.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FIGURE OF DARKNESS

THE young man thus employed was a handsome figure in his correct evening clothes. As he finished his scrutiny of the Diamond Horseshoe and arose to make his way out into the foyer many feminine eyes took more than a passing glance at him. His hair, they noticed, was a glossy, curly auburn, and well arched and strongly defined eyebrows of the same color caught one's attention, as did a small, jaunty mustache with sharply waxed ends.

Out on the promenade it soon became apparent that the young man was well and favorably known to the ushers and check room attendants. Smiles and bows came to him whenever one of them saw him—smiles and bows he affably returned.

Tips, substantial while not being extravagant, had paved the way toward all this good will. Besides, the young gentleman had been found to be charmingly democratic and as charmingly frank regarding this being his first season as an habitué of the famous opera house.

He confided to this usher and that, this checkroom boy or girl, of his passionate fondness for good music ungratified up to this winter in New York, when he happily found himself with the leisure to enjoy it.

He had casually mentioned his profession as being that of an architect, and his home, he had said, was in California. He was in New York studying the great new skyscrapers that were going up in such number and with such clever adaptations from the ancient Egyptian beauty and grandeur of structure.

He was frankly most intensely interested in the personages who sat regally in the Diamond Horseshoe, and the attendants were pleased to identify them for him, to yield him in gossip what they knew of them, their wealth, their jewels, and frequently volunteered information as to the location of their homes, a question the young man put himself.

Much valuable information had the Phantom Thief thus acquired toward the direction of his energies. But, in the main, he achieved his knowledge of prospective victims at first hand.

To-night, for instance, he had fixed on the Corcoran jewel collection as displayed in magnificent profusion by the celebrated social dowager of that name. When the final curtain descended the young man swiftly left the opera house and made for a side street where a speed roadster had been left parked.

Immediately he discarded the black coat

he had been wearing over his evening clothes and with it the silk crush hat. From beneath a seat in the tonneau he abstracted substitutes—a gray ulster with a broad fur collar and a rakish sports cap.

Then, before taking his seat at the wheel, with three deft movements he took off his red eyebrows and small red mustache and was a clean-shaven young man with brown eyebrows. His face for the matter of that was nearly entirely concealed by the big turned up fur collar.

He whisked his car around the corner and traveled it up and down the block in front of the Metropolitan, his maneuvers being wholly inconspicuous because of the large number of other cars moving in both directions. Finally he caught sight of the Corcoran dowager, her jewels hidden by an ermine opera cloak caught snugly around her throat.

Corcoran, the financier, was the most easily recognizable. The Phantom Thief saw them enter their big foreign made car, and took up the trail of it with an expert hand on the wheel. As on several other similar occasions, his shadowing led him into Park Avenue, where the Corcoran car halted before an enormous and palatial apartment house.

Swiftly, before the Corcorans had alighted, he slipped his own car into a side street, parked it there, and in a jiffy had changed back into opera hat and black overcoat and, without sign of haste, sauntered into the lobby of the apartment house in time to enter the same elevator with the financier and his wife.

His overcoat, opened as he walked through the revolving door, made a display of evening attire marking him for a type usual in the corridors of the huge, luxurious warren of the rich. Its occupants were so numerous, their town guests so many, that none of the attendants thought for an instant to question the right of this correctly attired young man to ride up on the elevator with the renownedly wealthy Corcorans.

Not many minutes later he descended to the ground floor, but was particular that he did so by an elevator other than that in which he had gone up. Back he sauntered to his car and, when certain the street was empty, changed again to cap and fur-collared ulster and drove happily away in possession of the knowledge he desired. He knew the floor, number, and exact location of the Corcoran rooms.

Next day, as a very well dressed young man, who presented an architect's card with a San Francisco address at the municipal building department offices, he was readily and courteously accorded the privilege of examining the general plans of some of New York's largest apartment houses, and among them found that in which the Corcoran's resided.

Thus the complete layout of the rooms was soon under his eye and swiftly copied. When he gained entrance to the apartment he would know exactly which way to direct his steps to further his purpose.

Now followed a daily examination of the columns of the newspapers which recorded the affairs of society most fully. Through these he found that Mr. and Mrs. Corcoran appeared as patrons of a large charity ball to be held on a certain near date, and as the names of the other patrons were of social importance equal to their own, the young man deemed it a fair inference that, in addition to lending their names as patrons the Corcorans would actually attend.

This, on the night of that particular date he found to be the case. At about half past nine o'clock he recognized the Corcoran limousine and chauffeur in front of the apartment house, and not long afterward he saw the wealthy couple enter their car and watched it drive away.

He then strolled down Park Avenue for about three blocks when he called a taxi and was driven to a Broadway moving picture theater, where he remained until a quarter to eleven o'clock. Leaving the theater, he summoned another taxi and was driven openly to the door of the Park Avenue apartment.

Again he entered nonchalantly, taking care to display the fact that he was in evening clothes, however, and, all unquestioned, sauntered to an open elevator, entered and left it at a floor three above that on which the Corcorans lived.

Down the back stairs he moved lightly

and then to the door of the Corcoran apartment. He listened outside for some time. He knew that in addition to Corcoran and his wife there were five servants: a butler, valet, cook, chambermaid, and Mrs. Corcoran's personal maid.

His copied plans of the premises informed him that the servants' rooms were all in the rear of the apartment. His plan further told him that the door before which he stood led into a wide corridor, and that the third door toward the rear as one entered would be that leading to the bedchamber of the financier and his wife.

He reasoned that in the hour and more in which he had waited the servants would have had ample time to correct any disorder in which the Corcorans may have left their dressing room and bedchamber when preparing to attend the ball.

His ten to fifteen minutes of intent listening distinguished no footfall in the corridors. Some of the servants had doubtless taken advantage of the absence of master and mistress and gone out for recreation themselves. Those remaining could now reasonably be counted on to be in the rear of the apartment.

He ungloved his hands and fishing into a right hand waistcoat pocket brought out a steel blade about six inches long. It was very thin. He paid no attention to the big patent lock on the door, but swiftly inserted the thin flange between door and casement.

He probed with it as a surgeon might for a foreign substance in a human body—delicately, and then, apparently finding what he sought began to manipulate the steel blade from side to side with sudden violent motions which, however, were soundless.

The blade had the flexibility of whalebone. So finely tempered was it that though, at times, in his side to side motions with it, he all but bent it double, it never snapped.

Suddenly there sounded a quick click. It was so faint he might not have heard it had he not been intently listening for just that thing. When it happened he continued to hold the blade between door and casement, took the knob in a firm grasp and turned it very slowly, very steadily. Then he applied a little inward pressure to the door and found that it was now to be readily opened. He did open it ever so slightly, merely sufficient for a quick look into the broad hallway and saw that it was empty.

Thus satisfied, he whipped out of the inside pocket of his overcoat a thin black silk scarf that opened up into large dimensions. This he knotted around his neck, tucking the dangling corners into his right and left waistcoat pockets. The black silk scarf completely concealed his white collar and shirt front. Then he changed his white evening gloves for black ones.

Next he doffed his hat, while from a side pocket of his overcoat he drew a black hood like a hangman's cap. He enveloped head, ears, and face in this dull black covering. There were slits in the mask through which he might see, but as he stood there he produced a black make-up pencil and rimmed his eyes thickly with it.

If he lowered the lids no part whatsoever of his countenance could be seen. He now stood a figure completely black from head to feet. No gloss or sheen was on any of his garments. Even his shoes were of dull, gunmetal tone. Concealed in a closet behind garments of dark color he would be invisible. Moving about a room with the soundlessness that rubber soles and heels guaranteed, he would be as indiscernible as a deep shadow.

Quickly he darted into the inside hallway and then into the spacious Corcoran sleeping chamber. From the plan of the rooms, especially studied as to this particular one, he moved directly to electric switch and flashed on the light. He took a swift survey of the furnishings, noting the situations of beds, closets, bureaus, a wall safe, a small desk, and reassured himself that there was a fire escape outside the windows. Its disadvantage was that it led down to an interior court. But this dubious fact he must face.

It was evidently not his plan to become immediately busy. The charity ball was a big affair, to which Mrs. Corcoran would doubtless wear her finest jewelry. He proceeded to investigate the closets and selected that of the financier in which to

hide. There were several dark blue and brown suits of clothing hanging there behind which he could merge himself completely into hiding. Behind them he would be as undiscoverable as if he were actually gifted with the invisible cap of fairyland.

Reckoning he would have a long wait, he switched on the electric bulb that he saw in a wall socket in the closet, turned off the light in the room, and, leaving the closet door very slightly open for the air it would afford, seated himself with his back to the wall and brought out a book he had recently purchased, published in Amsterdam but printed in French.

It was a technical volume dealing exhaustively with the ramifications of the diamond trade. Some of the knowledge was shortly to be vital to him, for he would soon need to put it to practical use.

And thus he engaged himself till he heard the door in the outer hall opened with the noisy snap of the lock. He closed his book softly and instantly switched off the light in the closet.

At half past two a sleepy elevator attendant, aroused by a prolonged and erratic ringing of the signal bell, ran the car to a gate three floors above that on which the Corcorans lived.

He admitted a good-looking man in evening clothes whose head waggled a trifle and whose friendly smile just missed being downright silly.

" Friend of Mistuh Pearson's and Mistuh Hobbs," thought the sable-skinned attendant, these being two convivial young bachelors with rooms on this floor.

The young gentleman entered the car with an unsteady step and regarded the elevator attendant with an amiable smile.

" Went and woke you up, did I? Not nice of me, was it, at this hour? How this —to square it?"

An ear to ear grin was the black boy's response, for a dollar note had been slipped into his fingers.

Thus easily, with his pockets lined with one hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewelry did the Phantom Thief pass away into the night. He grinned to think that never once as he gathered up the gems and the financier's billfold and watch, valuable cuff links and shirt buttons, all carelessly piled upon a dresser for the night, had he broken in on the heavy snores of Corcoran of Wall Street or disturbed the more delicate wheezing of the plump matron in the twin bed beside that of her lord.

CHAPTER XXXVII

NEW TRICKS IN AN ANCIENT TRADE

WHEN, at three o'clock this same morning, Jack Lawrence alighted from a taxi in front of the apartment house in the Nineties just off Riverside Drive, he remembered that his twenty-eighth birthday was about to dawn.

Twenty-eight years old!

How different the outcome of this night's pillaging adventure to that sad, bungling job on his twenty-first birthday, his disastrous criminal beginning when he toppled headlong over a chair in Jerry Larkin's inn and in the struggle which followed with Jerry's henchman, nearly added the killing of a human being to the crime!

He continued thinking about it as he undressed, got under a shower, put on pyjamas and a dressing robe and ran his feet into red Morocco leather slippers.

In seven years he had become—if you were to believe the statements of the detectives as recorded in the newspapers—the cleverest thief known for a quarter of a century. Indeed, one of them had declared him to be the cleverest that had ever happened in the records of the department.

He touched a match to logs arranged in the spacious fireplace, drew before it a small lacquered table, spread a black velvet cloth over it, and on this laid out the jewels which he removed from his discarded evening clothes.

He took a seat at the table and began deftly prodding the sparkling gems out of their settings with a long, finely pointed steel pin and a small pair of pliers.

Seven years! And when he finally disposed of all the loot he now had he would be a wealthy man!

But, he reflected, nearly six of those seven years had been behind prison walls. The first " stretch " had been hard to bear.

The shame and disgrace, his mother's illness and death, his bitter war for supremacy among the desperate youths with whom he had been incarcerated. The second stretch had seemed shorter.

He had not gone sick of the deadly monotony and sordidness of the life. This was because he had been mentally busy with his future plans, his mind tingling over the fascinating problem of how, when he regained his freedom, he would certainly acquire riches by an ingenuity that would hold the law helpless.

"It was my college course," he told himself, beaming in the glow of the flames from the logs. "It takes other men a good many times seven years to acquire what I've gathered now. Few ever do in seventy years. And more, lots more to come. I know my business now!"

One of the most important results was the resolve he had made that when freedom came to him once again he would work absolutely alone, have nothing whatsoever to do with other crooks. No confederates, no pals, no mob. This is what he had meant to announce to Slim Gegan on the day Madge motored him to Slim's apartment, but Dopey Buddy's bullet had robbed him of the opportunity.

Slim killed, the mob had been thrown into panic. In their extremity, even the aged experts joining in the offer, the mob had offered Jack Slim's captaincy. This was tempting. But he put it aside. His plan was the right one. So he made them believe that he had decided on a straight future.

He was going West to take on a job as an architectural draftsman. The boys could rely on their secrets being safe with him for all time. Slim had treated him white. But he felt that he couldn't live through another prison stretch and survive with his health and reason.

In truth, had he been sincere he might have done the thing he told them, for he was by this time thoroughly well qualified to hold such a position in an architect's office. In prison by day he had actually and faithfully continued the study of a subject which had not only a natural fascination for him, but the added advantage of being a convincing gesture to the prison authorities that he was genuinely intent on a life of reformation when his term was finished.

It was the unflagging application he displayed at his drawing board in the hours allowed the men for study and recreation that had brought about for him his release promptly on the expiration of his minimum sentence.

They certainly would not have been so prompt, Jack reflected, if they had known what other studies he had the while been also pursuing—studies to which he applied himself when night's darkness made secret activities possible in his cell.

Slim's power with the underground had kept Jack supplied with the necessary materials for practice. In which time he acquired a wizardy in the use of the flat, six-inch steel flange, an elastic jimmy it might properly be named. Save for his black mask, other make-up, and a small but powerful flash light it was all he carried, his only tool. But it was all he needed for the opening of doors, windows, strong boxes, locked jewel cases.

In the case of a door secured with patent locks thought burglar proof, the trick was to insert the thin flange between the door and its frame. He then worked the point of the flange in snakelike convolutions till it wormed its way into the receiving socket and back of the tongue of the lock.

With an expert twist of the wrist, the flange brought pressure on the tongue and forced it back into the lock and the thing was done. By similar manipulations chests, jewel boxes, locked drawers, anything short of a combination safe lock yielded to his magic wand.

With combination locks he had worked ceaselessly at night, sand papering his finger tips to an exquisite sensitiveness until he had acquired the rare but acknowledgedly possible feat of detecting the worn grooves into which the lock's hammer fell and thus reading the combination.

Previously has been described the methods of the Phantom Thief in spotting his victims, following their social engagements, timing his entrance to an apartment during such hours as master and mistress

would be away and the servants "at play" or, at any rate, relaxed and off guard.

And then to remain hidden until his victims laden with jewelry he coveted returned, retired, and soundly slept. He was already in upon them. Risk of awakening them on entrance as other burglars so frequently did, was eliminated.

When it was a country mansion set in the midst of open ground that he had selected for plundering, he usually chose the dinner hour for entrance. With the members of the household below stairs and darkness without shielding him, he would produce an ingenious contrivance. It was in two parts. One was a collapsible steel pole that could be extended for a full fifty feet. In a bracket on its top he firmly set a steel hook that came to a very sharp, thin point.

From the hook hung forty feet of silk rope ladder, tightly woven, trusty to his weight as if it were fashioned of steel like the pole and hook. When it was lifted on the end of the pole, the ladder fell noiselessly against the side of the house.

He lifted the hook until it was set firmly against the base of the wooden window casement. Then he dragged down on the pole until the ladder's hook was firmly and deeply imbedded. He could test it till certain it would bear his slim weight.

Watchdogs at this hour would not have been released to prowl the grounds, and if such grew sufficiently noisy to attract the attention of those within and caused any person to come outside to investigate —which when it did happen would, of course, be previous to his affixing of the ladder—they would be met by a young man in evening clothes and motor coat and cap who would indicate his car in the road and ask if this was the residence of some other person of wealth of the vicinity.

In such instances, suspicion had never been aroused. He looked so well the part of the young society man abroad on the roads in his motor. But, if all went well, as it usually had, he was free to gain entrance unseen and unheard, conceal himself till the household slumbered and, invariably armed with a plan of the premises, effect his plundering in his usual amazingly expert fashion.

Only twice had his movements about a room awakened sleepers. On each occasion he had slipped into a closet before a light was flashed up. On each occasion the person viewing the room in its usual aspect, undisturbed, bearing no signs of an intruder had concluded he, in one case, she in another, had been falsely alarmed, switched off the light, and gone back to slumber.

This part of his business, it will now be seen, he thoroughly knew.

But Jack had considered in the long prison nights, that many another burglar made successful entries, gathered his loot unseen and unheard, only afterward to be traced by the police and captured.

Why? And how?

For three chief reasons—the stool pigeon, the fence, a woman.

Mobs, he knew, were honey-combed by stool pigeons. They were, as a rule, cowardly, inexpert criminals over whom detectives held knowledge which would send them to prison if they did not do the bidding of the "knockers." The incautious word, the single minute's boasting of wine or whisky stirred vanity, had betrayed many a clever thief to the bulls.

Therefore Jack had resolved that when he worked anew he would eschew association with other crooks entirely. He would work with no pal. He would have no confederates. Not one. He would never be seen at resorts known to the bulls to be thieves' "fleabags."

The next danger was the fence. Where the plunder was big, the persons robbed, important financially and socially, the bulls would bring a heavy threatening attitude to the fences. It usually resulted in their betrayal of the "big gun" that they might the more freely go on with their immensely profitable trading with the smaller fry of crookdom.

And why give the fence two-thirds of the profit on that for which he had himself risked life and liberty? There must be a way around it. He would deal with no fence. But, how, if he did not, was he to dispose of his stolen gems and gold and platinum?

In his cell he had thought of the way to do without them—to reap in full for

himself the profits for the great risks he ran. The method was bold but new, and already he had partly put it into action successfully, though the major feature of the scheme had still to be enacted. But Lawrence was supremely confident that it was "bull-proof."

A woman, wife, or sweetheart—it was always one of the earliest moves of a detective to discover if a suspected crook possessed such. If he had fled, her mail would be watched in confidence that after a time he would seek to establish communication with her.

Her every movement would be shadowed in expectation that she would finally lead them to their quarry. Bitter third degrees would be imposed on her to wring from her scared lips the knowledge sought of a criminal's whereabouts. The results had long—for as long as there had been such a thing as police—justified the strategy.

Well, he would have to condemn himself to a life even more solitary than when he was in prison. Many of the crooks he knew were gay and likable companions against whose fascination other chance company would seem deadly dull. Pretty women—he would allow himself only the briefest contacts with such as could be most easily met. None of these would ever win a word of confidence from him.

Just give him another season as good this had been! And that would end it. Then he would enter on the enjoyment of a fine future. He had that future all schemed out. A young man would arrive in London who had made a fortune in the cobalt mines and oil fields of Canada. A fortune of a million would be invested in sound securities.

He would travel the famous resorts of the world. And would be free then to travel with an eye sharp for romantic adventure. Finally a pretty wife, children, a country estate, probably in England. That would be fine. If only the woman could be Elsie Lane! But with that thought came a frown. She was done with him. He couldn't blame her either. Yet it was bitter that as soon as fame beckoned to her she had downed all sentiment of loyalty toward him, abandoned him to crime.

But there was Madge.

He couldn't deny her great attractiveness. She loved him. She was almost too frank about it. Surely, he could trust her. But he must beware of her—must never trust her too far, never place her in possession of sufficient information concerning himself and his plans which might lead to her unwittingly betraying him.

For Madge wasn't sharp and clever. She wasn't cool and sane like Elsie. She was all emotionalism and self-indulgence. Yet he could not bear to think of dismissing her entirely from his life. Besides she already knew too much about him. Ignored, scorned, she might prove dangerous.

So he frequently passed time in her company—a dinner, theater, supper. His tact was always put to its utmost on such occasions to fend off her efforts to form the ties of complete comradeship, to make her understand the reasons why she must not know where he lived or under what names, why he must not confide, even to her, the activities which made him able to afford costly motor cars, the finest of clothing, and converted the costliest dinners and most expensive theater checks into nothing to worry about.

He was circumspect in all his actions. His "profession" demanded imperatively of him the steady nerves of a boxer, wrestler, or circus acrobat. Alcohol and tobacco he used meagerly when he used them at all. And in a certain principal branch of the Y. M. C. A. it would have given the striplings, who were the habitués of its gymnasium, the thrill of big surprise had they known that swinging on the rings, vaulting the bars, pulling the weights and thrashing in the swimming pool daily in common with themselves was to be found the sensationally chronicled Phantom Thief, most celebrated fugitive of the law.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THREE IN ONE

KUDI, Jack Lawrence's Japanese valet, who slept out, let himself very quietly into the apartment at half past nine o'clock, passed into the kitchen and there spelled over an English newspaper

for an hour before beginning the preparation of his master's breakfast. It was the young, wealthy American's custom to arise late, and that suited Kudi very well.

By eleven o'clock, however, he appeared at Jack's bedside with a steaming cup of tea, drew his bath and then in a sunny bow window from the West Side from which could be viewed the big, gleaming Hudson River, he laid a breakfast of grape fruit, bacon and eggs garnished heavily with water cress, toasted muffins, and a silver coffee pot.

To Kudi, Jack Lawrence was Mr. Lloyd Le Valley, as he was to the superintendent of the apartment, the proprietor of the garage where he stored his two cars. And for one of these cars the valet telephoned in his master's name while Lawrence was finishing attiring himself in a dark blue suit, tan-colored overcoat, and soft felt hat of the same hue and other articles of wear, a selection from not less than forty other suits of clothing, twenty top coats, about two hundred scarfs, one hundred shirts and some fifty pairs of shoes which the crook *de luxe* possessed.

Then he went forth with the becapped Jap at his side and flashed his car up and down Riverside Drive in the snappy winter air and sunshine, finally abandoning it to Kudi and entering a subway kiosk at Seventy-Second Street, alighting from an express train at the Cortlandt Street station. From thence he went to Maiden Lane and to the fifth floor of a modest building and to a door whose upper panel of opaque glass presented the lettering:

LLOYD LE VALLEY

New York—Amsterdam—Paris

DEALER IN PRECIOUS STONES AND METAL

Within a single large office room was a vault set in the wall, a handsome desk of mahogany, a swivel chair behind it and in front two heavy leather cushioned chairs such as might be offered callers.

It was apparent that Mr. Lloyd Le Valley engaged no assistants, not even an office boy. This would excite no curiosity in one of his pursuit as announced by the lettering on the door. There are many such middlemen in the commerce of precious stones and metals, many such who travel the country with a king's ransom tucked in a wallet on in an inside pocket.

The fact that his visits to his office and vault were sporadic was also in keeping with the part he assumed in the jewelry district of the great city. The very matter of his engaging an office in this closely, thoroughly watched district was, in itself, a recommendation of his probity.

He opened his safe and in one of the compartments placed the flashing, sparkling gems he had removed from their settings the night before. The settings themselves he tossed into another steel box, adding it to a large mound of settings already there.

Then from an inner recess of the safe he produced a small traveling bag of pigskin and dumped the entire accumulation of settings into it, snapped the bag together, locked it and soon thereafter Mr. Lloyd Le Valley departed from his office, bag in hand.

He walked west to the Cortlandt Street station of the Ninth Avenue " El " and left the train at Christopher Street. This brought him into a section of the city where there was an odd mingling of the offices and warehouses of wholesale provision and vegetable and chemical dealers, big laboratories of drug wholesale firms, interspersed with neighborhood barber shops, groceries and meat markets with tenement dwellings above them.

The aspect of those who crowded its streets in the early afternoon was as curiously mixed between poverty and affluence. Very well-dressed men rubbed elbows with very shabby ones. A well-dressed man would here be no such mark for observation as in another slum section of the town nor a shabbily dressed man as he would be in the stately precincts of upper Fifth Avenue or the broad lane of huge, modern apartment buildings that now constitutes Park Avenue.

None, therefore, gave Mr. Lloyd Le Valley the slightest attention as he passed through a dirty doorway and ascended a flight of oil cloth covered steps to a squalid hall room on the third story. There he quickly doffed all his fine clothing, even to his shoes and was soon attired in overalls,

sheepskin coat, brogans and with a smudged face and hands and a canvas, leather-bound bag from which protruded a big wrench and a heavy pair of pliers, soon emerged into teeming Greenwich Street.

But as well, in the mechanic's bag was a big tangle of gold and platinum settings which had once touched the flesh of American aristocracy.

It would have been only in his present disguise that his Greenwich Street landlord would have known him—James Martin, a steady young mechanic who paid his weekly rent on the dot and was, therefore, a cause of neither worry or further curiosity on the part of said landlord.

The bag was heavy, very, and Martin, the mechanic, weighed down on one side, made his way slowly to Fourteenth Street. There he boarded a surface car bound east. At First Avenue he alighted.

He made his way to an old brick building, the ground floor of which was a junk shop. Its two windows were crammed with a mass of rusty metal bedsteads, pieces of wrecked machinery, old tools, lanterns, some of them from ships, and locks and bolts and bars of all description.

The old Hebrew proprietor, his flowing red beard the color of the rust that marked everything about the place, was standing in the doorway. He gave the approaching mechanic a cordial greeting with an expansive gesture of both hands, as Lawrence-Le Valley-Martin passed through a side door and upstairs to a garret, the door of which was new and stout and festooned with two formidable brass padlocks of an expensive make.

Had you inquired of old Abe Goldfogle as to the identity of his top floor lodger, you would have been informed that he was a very nice young goy feller named William Green, who paid his rent promptly and was a skilled mechanic whose jobs mostly came from out of town so that he did not use his room much.

But he had need of the garret, Goldfogle would have told you, because he was an ambitious young goy who was working on an invention.

Just what this invention was—well, the young feller wasn't such a big damn fool as to tell people, and as long as he paid his rent promptly like he did, his business was his business and none of Mr. Goldfogle's business and none of anybody else's either.

But considerable heavy metal was used in it because it wasn't movable, and when the young feller went off on his out of town jobs he had to have a place to leave his machine where it could be kept securely under lock and key and away from prying eyes.

All of which, be it understood, Mr. Goldfogle thoroughly believed himself. And the lodger certainly was no trouble. Now and then when he was at work up there on his invention acrid fumes crept through the hallways, but this was small objection to a house that was odoriferous anyway.

As a matter of fact, what Jack Lawrence maintained in this East Side garret, was a miniature but effective smelter plant. In it he separated chemically the gold and platinum from their alloys and welded the precious metals into solid, virgin bars.

By the time darkness fell, he left his hidden plant, snapped the two big brass locks into place, and once again, carrying his mechanic's kit, traveled to his room on the other side of the city and, in the cover of night, left his Greenwich Street rooms again attired for the rôle of Mr. Lloyd Le Valley, occupant of the luxurious uptown apartment and once more with the expensive small grip in hand.

Kudi was not there when Jack arrived home, for he had told the valet he would dine out. He bathed, donned evening attire, enjoyed a light but delicious repast at a celebrated hotel, and soon thereafter was passing his usual pleasant greetings to the Metropolitan Opera House attendants who came in his path.

But that night he didn't scan the Diamond Horseshoe for another victim. A new step in the furtherance of his grand plan of thievery was now imminent. On this night he gave himself over wholly to the enjoyment of the fine music to which his ear was rapidly being cultivated, to the rich symphony of the orchestra and the golden voices of Caruso, Garden, and Scotti.

In dismissing Kudi the day before, he had apprised him of an early rising, and by ten o'clock next day had breakfasted and was ready for the street. Again impeccably attired and again carrying his pig skin bag he made his way to the financial district and into the assayer's office of the United States Treasury. Here the card of Mr. Lloyd Le Valley had already become known. There was no delay of admittance to the one in authority. And two bars of virgin gold were weighed, valued, and soon purchased for a sum in the neighborhood of thirty-five thousand dollars. Quite as he had disposed of several other such bars in the months preceding.

The Phantom Thief had chosen Uncle Sam for his fence!

As to the bar of platinum, he went with it to Fifth Avenue and received twenty-five thousand dollars for it from the metal expert of one of the most celebrated jewelry firms in the world—another fence created by the Phantom Thief, the only thief in the world, he smilingly reflected as he left the stately establishment which was a treasure house of rare and gorgeous things, who had ever received full value in money for his plunder!

CHAPTER XXXIX

FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

ON a bright morning when the sun had taken on the geniality of spring, Jack Lawrence, in the rôle of Lloyd Le Valley, stepped aboard the Titania, bound for Havre. It was the beginning of the great annual exodus of Americans of social prestige and great wealth, of the buyers for the wholesale and retail houses which deal in foreign finery, of theatrical managers carrying blank contracts to which they hoped to affix the names of celebrated stage personalities abroad, of American stage and musical celebrities hoping to win European approbation, and of those generally bitten by the wanderlust that stirs when an April sun begins to shine.

He had come to the final move of his long and well-planned game. And as he ascended the Titania's gangplank things looked smooth as glass ahead—smooth as the waters of the lower bay of New York harbor when the little tugs which had been clinging to bow and stern of the Titania, having completed their guidance of the sea giantess through the Narrows, fell away from her and she continued majestically onward toward the great and open sea.

But there is that adage of "man proposing," *et cetera*, and the other of Bobby Burns, "the well-laid plans of men go oft' agley."

While such was not going to prove wholly the case with Jack Lawrence, yet happenings entirely unforeseen were imminently upon him, surprises three in number. Out of one he was to get amusement. But the second was disconcerting, the third harrowing. And both of these last moved in the van of tragedy as yet hidden from his eyes.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when the Titania had passed down the bay toward the Highlands and Sandy Hook. And about the time she swung out into open water, Mr. Lloyd Le Valley's steward fetched him a steamer chair and set it on a deck already lined with many other such reclining seats, all of them occupied.

The "merchant in precious stones and metals" seated himself, cigarette between his lips, book in hand, when he heard a voice that was feminine but deep of tone saying:

"Oh, the police! The detectives! The stupidest creatures in the world, my dear Mrs. Fanshawe! My jewels are simply hopelessly lost, and instead of being at Newport, where I would infinitely rather be, I assure you, I am forced to make a trip to Europe to replenish my jewel cases.

"A cool hundred thousand dollars' worth the sharp wretch stole from me. And, to think that nobody heard or saw him. Not the slightest sound. Why, it wasn't until Mr. Corcoran and I had been up half an hour that we knew we had been robbed!

"The shrewd devil left everything in the room as he had found it—except, of course, the most valuable things, my jewels. But I mean there wasn't a sign of anybody having been thieving in the rooms.

"All the drawers were properly closed, and he left my emptied jewel boxes arranged in the drawers just as I always ar-

ranged them myself! It was really astounding, the man's cool thoroughness and cleverness.

"As Mr. Corcoran says, if any of the detectives only had half his brains there might be a chance of his being arrested. But—pouf! There isn't the slightest possibility, apparently. Except that the detectives keep assuring us that when he tries to dispose of the jewels they will get trace of them, and of him too.

"Well, it happened three months ago and they have still to admit they know nothing of him or the jewels. Mr. Corcoran also engaged a private detective concern in which he has great faith, but they have done no better than the regular police."

"A dangerous thief, indeed, to be at large," commented Mrs. Fanshawe, nervously fingering a gleaming diamond and emerald bracelet.

"I should say so! I would really be willing to forfeit almost half the value of the jewels for just a look at the creature—to see what a sly, expert thief looks like. What a social sensation I could cause by holding a luncheon in his honor!"

This thought caused both ladies of fashion to burst into laughter. Jack Lawrence couldn't help a chuckle himself. And, happening to look up then, he found himself glancing directly into Mrs. Corcoran's large, faded, pouchy blue eyes. She saw that he was smiling, and apparently didn't resent his joining in amusement at the notion which had come to her.

But to Lawrence, of course, it was a better joke than the wealthy Mrs. Corcoran was aware. With himself sitting looking squarely at her and her diamonds, emeralds and rubies in a wallet in his pocket!

He found it impossible afterward to concentrate on his book, so, snapping it closed, he lighted a fresh cigarette and started to make a circle of the deck.

Then a hand touched his shoulder from behind. That is always a most unpleasant sensation to a criminal, and Jack started in spite of himself, although the touch was not that of a heavy-handed detective, it was quick and light, and a feminine call of his name—his real name—accompanied it.

He turned to see Madge.

Her brown eyes had not now the sparkling cordiality that had always been in them on their previous meetings. Her red mouth was not provocatively curved and pouted for a kiss. Her eyes were flashing, but plainly with anger, her lips curved, but in an expression of aggression.

"You!" he said, and added sharply: "What are you doing here? You shouldn't have come! You—oh, why must you women be tricky, silly? You are always getting a man like me in trouble. If I had wanted you to come on this trip I would have asked you. But I had very good reasons for making no such invitation. And you must have realized that. And yet you consult only your own silly whim. I tell you, as I've told you a hundred times before—it will not do for us to be seen too much together!"

He stood utterly disconcerted, remembering that he had felt an explanation of his coming absence due her and had rashly confided that he meant to take a trip to Havre on the Titania as an important step in an affair which he expected to yield him a big profit.

There it was again—the crook and his moll! The very thing he so well knew had brought men as clever as himself low full many a time, the very factor, the woman in the case, for which the police always immediately hunted when a criminal came under suspicion.

As yet, in so far as he knew, he was absolutely unsuspected. Yet, of course, he might very well be under suspicion right at that minute and not be aware of it. If that were true, Madge had already been found out, shadowed, probably trailed to the Titania itself and followed aboard the ship. At that very second he might be under espionage!

"If I'd wanted you," he reiterated bitterly, "I'd have said so."

"Oh, I knew well enough you didn't want me. And the reason for it, too!" she retorted hotly.

"Of course you knew. And yet you do the very thing you knew I didn't want you to do—the very thing that might make trouble for me just when things are going exactly as I've planned them."

"Of course I knew you didn't want me along. And the reason. I know very little of the plans you talk about so glibly. You've never told me anything of them that I can remember, except that it was going to be necessary to take a trip abroad and that you were going to make it on the Titania. I suppose now you could bite your tongue off for having so thoughtlessly named the ship. As if I wouldn't have suspected when I saw the article in the newspaper about her!"

"Her!"

"As if you didn't know?"

"I don't."

"That's a lie, Jack Lawrence. A big, silly lie!"

"*Her?*" What are you talking about? What's on your mind?"

"Anna Gray—that's who is on my mind, Jack Lawrence! Anna Gray—star of 'Little Dorrit!' The great Anna Gray! Miss Sweetness! Miss Goody-good!"

"Do you mean that Elsie Lane is aboard the Titania?"

Madge might have read the sincerity of his query by the sudden whiteness that came over his face, the surprise in his eyes.

But she was too far beyond herself in anger to read these signs.

"As if you didn't know it?" she laughed shrilly. "As if that wasn't the 'important affair' you had on hand! For a man who thinks himself as clever as you do, what stupidity it was to think you could hide it from me.

"You must have forgotten what an important person the little village maiden has become—the Cinderella of our old high school! Why, she can't travel a step without getting into the newspapers. Her picture was all over them a few days ago. On her way to Paris and then to Switzerland. Going to do the rôle of *Cinderella*. No, of course, you didn't know anything about it!"

"I didn't."

"Well, I don't suppose she wrote you at that. It seems she left off writing to you, didn't she, when the chance for fame came. A convict sweetheart might be all right for Elsie Lane. But it would never do for Anna Gray!"

"Now," answered Lawrence, "you said exactly what should convince you that I had no idea of meeting her aboard this ship. You know well that whatever the understanding there was between Elsie and myself, it came to nothing long ago. And I have no bitterness against her for it either.

"There could be only one sort of an affair between a girl of her character and myself—marriage. It became impossible—that's all. And she must have made good friends who advised her that it was impossible. And I have loved her so truly that I am glad she came in contact with such friends."

Madge shook her head, her big brown eyes still flashing angrily.

"That's stage stuff you're talking now, Jack, and you know it. She loved you long before you ever woke up to the idea that you were in love with her. You know well she did. All we girls in the old days used to laugh at little Miss Prim and how plainly her adoration of you stuck out in her eyes every time she looked at you.

"I don't know what suddenly brought you to her feet. But it happened. And it seems to be lasting. And it seems to have taken all the pride out of you. Here you are on this boat trying to put yourself in her way—trying to see if you can't work your old fascination on her. That's what you are here for, and there's no use denying it."

"It is pretty evident that there is no use denying it to you. But you are crazy when you think that way. I've been too busy arranging for this trip in the last few days to do more than take a hasty look at the morning newspapers—saw none of the afternoon papers."

"If your trip on this boat isn't to meet Elsie Lane, what is it for?" came the flat demand.

Jack's impulse was to tell her. But he decided otherwise. It was against all the reasoning he had done in his cell. It was dangerous to have this girl know—know anything more about him. If she was convinced that he was still hopeful of attracting Elsie to him, she might become spiteful, vindictive, and in that mood she could be highly dangerous.

She didn't know him for the Phantom Thief of present world-wide notoriety. But she did know, couldn't have helped but observe, that he was enjoying a rich graft of some sort. She had only to direct police attention to him on that statement alone to put him in peril again of his liberty, indeed, of complete exposure.

Her own thoughts had been moving in the same direction.

"I was faithful to you when she abandoned you," said Madge. "I wrote to you when she failed you. I was at the prison gate to welcome you back to liberty. To all appearances you found great pleasure in my company. But now I find you sneaking away from me to put yourself again in Elsie Lane's path. I will not be cast aside as easily as that, Jack. Don't think it."

"I tell you I have no desire—no, I'll be absolutely honest—no hope of ever interesting Elsie Lane again. There's the width of an ocean between us now in our places in life. Can't you see that? Can't you see I'd be a fool to dream otherwise?"

"Will you promise that you will make no effort to speak to her if you meet on shipboard, as, of course, you must—I mean see each other? Will you promise that? For if you don't, Jack—"

"That's a promise easily given. I have no intention of seeking her recognition or of speaking to her."

"That's the only thing will convince me that you two are not passengers on the same boat by arrangement."

"Very well. But if she speaks to me?"

This, of course, might happen, probably would, and Madge's heart sickened at the prospect, at the certainty that Elsie Lane's first question to Jack Lawrence would be concerning his failure to answer the letters she had written him, the letters that he never got, but which, instead, through the corrupting money of Slim Gegan, had been given over to that arch captain of rascality, those "goody-goody" letters of Elsie's over which Madge and Slim had enjoyed such hearty laughter!

"But if she speaks to you, why if you've any pride you'll cut her dead after the way she threw you down."

Jack shook his head.

"If she should come to me—speak to me—"

"Suppose," said Madge with sudden earnestness, "we wait until she does?"

She seized Jack's hands, and the pressure of her own was tense.

"Can I really believe that her sailing and your sailing on the same boat was accidental?"

"It's the truth, Madge."

She studied his face closely.

"Thank God," she said, "I'm beginning to be half able to believe it. Because if I saw any sign of her trying to regain her old influence over you, I'd—"

Jack interrupted, attempting to lighten the tone of their talk.

"Aha, desperate woman!" he said with a grin. "Just what do you think you'd do?"

"Not what I think—what I *know* I'd do."

"And just what would that be?" he demanded.

"Jack," answered the woman, "if she ever got you away from me now—at the first sign that she might succeed, I'd ***kill her!***"

CHAPTER XL

"HELL HATH NO FURY"

JACK LAWRENCE was on the point of laughing at Madge as one might laugh at an overwrought child. But the laughter died on his lips. The expression of her eyes killed. And he saw that her hands were clenched so tight the knuckles of her fingers were turned white.

Nor could his mind gainsay his ears. There had been the timbre of deadly earnestness in her voice when she made the threat.

She meant what she said. And he knew her as being prone to act on any impulse. She could be rash. The abruptness with which she had turned her back on her home and parents, the recklessness with which she had flung herself into the most feverish form of New York life, her complete acceptance by Slim Gegan and his ilk as being one of their own kind and tendencies, all these signs gave warning that

Madge, sufficiently aroused, could actually be dangerous to the degree of murder.

It had been a mistake, for all her attractiveness, ever to have taken her back into his life when he came out of prison. It had been against the dictates of his own program for beating the law on a pirate's path to wealth.

Yet it had seemed harmless, their association of so superficial a character that he could toss it aside whenever it might become desirable to do so. But this decision he now knew to have been a serious error. He had been playing with fire. He must use his wits, and quickly.

He linked his arm in her's and began walking the deck with her, speaking rapidly, his voice softened and surcharged with all the earnestness he could put into it. He doubled his assurances that Elsie Lane, the now famous Anna Gray, had been dismissed completely from his thoughts of the future.

He feared to lie to her, to invent a reason which might ring false. He told her, therefore, what actually had placed him aboard the liner. It could not but sound credible to Madge. She squeezed his arm tightly when he confided the ingenious scheme he had evolved for marketing his stolen gems.

"Lord, Jack, that's smart—that's keen!" she told him.

By the time she left Lawrence to go to her stateroom to dress for dinner, she had apparently forgotten Elsie Lane completely. She and Jack had come back to their old status of gay camaraderie. Yet it was a worried Jack Lawrence who returned in his dinner clothes and went to the section of the deck where it was agreed he was to rejoin her.

It even occurred to him that it might be advisable to write a letter to Elsie Lane warning her that if she saw him aboard kindly to ignore him, neither to bow or speak to him no matter what her impulse might be. But, then, what reason had he to think that Elsie would do anything else? Of course, the now famous Elsie Lane—Anna Gray—would do exactly that—ignore him.

Nevertheless, he felt himself thrilled, his heart accelerated as he speculated on whether he was soon to have a sight of Elsie's appealing beauty in the dining salon.

Of course, he might not expect to set eyes on the simple, ingenuous girl he had known long ago. She would be much changed. Perhaps he might find that his love, so long suppressed in his thoughts, would vanish completely at sight of her in her new rôle of international celebrity. He had hoped that this would prove true.

On the brilliantly lighted deck, standing outside the broad entrance to the dining salon he saw Madge, her white cloak trimmed with ermine clinging to her shapeliness, her cheeks flushed, her red lips smiling their prettiest at him.

It would appear that she felt her own beauty could challenge that of Elsie Lane. She was certainly resplendent, thought Lawrence as he drew near. And she had been faithful to him, and she was one of his sort—the right one to stick to. So he approached her with a smile to meet in full the cordiality of her own.

When Jack entered the huge, glittering restaurant of the floating ocean palace he was grateful to the stately major domo who led him and Madge to a remote corner table designed only to seat two. From this outlook he scanned the scores of other tables already occupied, and was relieved to find Elsie Lane seated at none of them.

For he was doing his best to quell the stirring desire to see her which had overwhelmed him a little while before. It could only arouse emotion that was best dormant. The thought came to him of Elsie's innate modesty, and that she would probably elect to dine in her own suite and avoid the stares and comment certain to mount in the public salon when one of her celebrity entered.

But even as he reflected that for his own sake this was just as well, he beheld the giant form of the major-domo heading a procession of men and women toward a table not ten feet away—a long table which he observed for the first time marked by a sign: "Reserved."

The generalissimo of the dining salon was putting on his finest flourishes and gestures as he ushered this large party to the big table.

Four of the men were stout and middle-aged, their faces florid with good living and much grooming. The faces of two of them were easily identified from frequently printed newspapers photographs—Lupek and Grimes, high captains in the moving picture industry. Then, tall and slender behind them, moved Rennold Dupree, male emotional star, with the face of a classic statue of young manhood save for his overlarge, long-lashed, dull, black eyes.

Behind him, her small figure in an unadorned evening gown of light blue silk, not a jewel flashing at her throat, on her wrists or her fingers, walked Anna Gray.

Not Anna Gray to Jack Lawrence.

This was Elsie Lane—Elsie unchanged.

The same fine limpidity of eyes, the same kindly, gentle turn of the lips of her tender, pretty mouth, the same effortless grace in the carriage of her small, slender body. Elsie Lane—still a young girl in all appearance—still the girl of the old days whose love for him then he had been too stupid to realize!

Jack had forgotten Madge.

Her back was turned to the oncoming group.

But she read quickly the sudden intensity of gaze Jack was directing over her shoulder and past her.

She turned sharply and just in time to see the major-domo with his best and most pompous suavity holding back for Elsie Lane a chair at the right of Lupek, top multimillionaire of all the multimillionaires of the golden cinema world.

Elsie Lane triumphant—the once scorned, poor, shabby Elsie Lane queening it over the entire glittering assemblage in the vast, resplendent salon! Elsie Lane holding Jack Lawrence's gaze in complete and absolute fascination!

"You knew that table was reserved for her. You have deliberately put yourself in her way!" she whispered at Jack furiously.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" he retorted in exasperation. "If you wish, if it will bring you to your senses, I will arrange for a table as far away from her as we can get."

"Only to make yourself the more conspicuous by passing in front of her eyes!"

"If you won't be reasonable," said Lawrence, "I'll get up and leave the room entirely. See here, Madge, don't you know that if there is anything which puts a person in the most absurd possible light it is a display of jealousy? If you care as much about—about my liking you as you say you do, for Heaven's sake, cut this stuff out or—"

And then the red mounted into Lawrence's cheeks. It happened just at this instant that his eyes wandered back toward Elsie Lane to find her own, clear blue eyes fixed on him with the stare of very sudden surprise.

In spite of the trouble he knew well it must brew, he could not take his eyes from those of the girl who had once frankly confessed her love for him, promised to be faithful to it and then had so suddenly and strangely dismissed him from her life.

He could plainly observe that she was not indifferent to him now—to the sight of him. After the first flare of astonishment in her glance, her eyes became uncertain, troubled and a deep flush suffused her white bosom and throat and blazed up into her face. A lifted glass in her hand trembled, and she hastily put it down as if she feared she would drop it.

"Take your eyes off her—take them off her or I'll create a scene here and now!" Madge cried to him in suppressed tones, her brown eyes streaming resentment as she looked from the countenance of Elsie to that of Jack and back again.

Then Lawrence saw that Elsie had noticed Madge and recognized her. Instantly the features of the celebrated actress became immobile. All light of expression died from her countenance. She turned quickly and gave ear to something Lupek said to her and made him a lively, laughing reply which caused his fat, rosy cheeks to swell and his portly stomach to bob as he chuckled tremendously.

Jack and Madge ate hastily and in silence. She saw that Lawrence never again during the meal turned his eyes in Elsie's direction. And he was the first to rise at the end of the dinner, frankly anxious to leave the salon as soon as possible.

TO BE CONCLUDED

"Here," he added, "are two tiny shreds of excelsior which you both missed"

STRAIGHT LIFE

By Carl Maddox

IN WHICH THE POETIC MR. O'NEIL IS EJECTED FROM HIS EASY CHAIR TO PLUNGE INTO THE SEETHING MYSTERY OF THE MISSING SECRETARY

A DETECTIVE is usually, of course, an avenger. The solution of his problem commonly means the penitentiary at least, if not the death penalty, for the criminal he unmasks; and where the crime is deliberate and malicious, the work of a calculating and hardened offender, this outcome seems to be necessary for the protection of society.

I have noticed, however, that Marcus O'Neil is by no means eager to have punishment visited on the wrongdoers with whom he has to deal. He much prefers merely to straighten out a tangle and set all the persons concerned on the right path.

This humane aspect of his work has been somewhat exemplified in two of the stories I have already told, those which I have called "The Secret Circle of Dredd" and "Madame Valla's Pearls," but it is even more clearly exhibited in the case I am now about to relate.

This case came to him on the afternoon of February 2, 1926. I must admit that I had been most horribly bored that afternoon. Marcus had inveigled me to his rooms at the Hotel de Soto to hear some new poems which he had just written.

He well knows how little I admire his verses—how little, according to his version,

I am capable of appreciating them—yet he will insist on inflicting them upon me.

I listened perforce for two mortal hours, and was nearly ready to perish of ennui and impatience when the welcome interruption came.

It was a telephone call. Marcus reluctantly laid his manuscript down and answered it.

"Very well," he said with a sigh. "Send them up." He was evidently speaking to the operator at the desk.

"It's an insurance case," he added to me. "Stay if you like. It may prove interesting or very dull. Either way I shall have to go into it. As I believe I told you once, I have a retaining fee from one of the big insurance companies. Every little while they make me earn it."

"Is this the first you've heard of this case?" I asked.

"No. The chief of the claims department telephoned me this morning. A young fellow by the name of Davis over in Elmwood, New Jersey, took out, just a year ago—a year ago to-day, in fact—a policy for one hundred thousand dollars, straight life. Two days ago—two days, that is, before the second premium was due—he died under distressing circumstances which may point to suicide."

"And the company wants you to prove it suicide so as to escape payment?"

"That's hardly a fair way of putting it. The company would rather pay a claim than not. It hurts the insurance business when any claim is not paid, whatever the circumstances. But they owe it to their other policy-holders to refuse payment in case of fraud. The claims chief has sent over a couple of men from Elmwood who can tell us the story in full. Here they are."

II

THE knocking at the door had been peremptory, and the man who entered first when Marcus opened was a decidedly confident and impressive person: about forty years old, large, blond, well-dressed in businesslike gray, with a keen eye, a quick, ingratiating smile, and a manner of taking no refusal.

His smile was instantly in action, and he held out a cordial hand.

"Mr. O'Neil? Mr. Marcus O'Neil, the celebrated investigator? I'm pleased and honored to meet you. I," he asserted, "am J. Stewart Ayres, our company's representative in the small but thriving city of Elmwood, New Jersey. And this," he added, turning to a second man, who had entered more slowly, "is Dr. Richard Lovett, one of the company's examiners, and, incidentally, the coroner of Elmwood."

The physician was, at first glance, a much less prepossessing individual than the insurance agent. He was young, thin, stoop-shouldered, and nervously awkward, as if from an incorrigible shyness, with black hair which needed cutting, large glasses with shell rims, and a small black goatee ineffectively screening a weak chin.

"I'm pleased to meet you both," said Marcus. "Let me present my friend, Mr. Carl Maddox, who has been my confidant in a number of my cases. Sit down, gentlemen. Cigars or cigarettes?"

The agent promptly accepted a large cigar; Dr. Lovett did not smoke.

"And now I should be glad to hear the facts."

Marcus was looking at Dr. Lovett. Since he was the coroner, there had clearly been an inquest, and he was obviously the person to make an official statement of the circumstances.

But J. Stewart Ayres was not the man to let the chief speaking part go to another. He held out an impressive hand.

"Let me speak. I knew George Davis well. He was my friend as well as my client. I can tell his story as no one else can. I want you, Mr. O'Neil, to see for yourself that this suicide theory of Dr. Lovett's is impossible, simply impossible, given the character of the man. But Dr. Lovett shall check me. He shall see that I do not depart in the smallest iota from the true facts."

He swept on at full tide, as if he were selling a policy.

"I must begin at the beginning to give you a true picture. George was a poor boy, born on a small farm out in Ohio. His father was no good—that is conceded—a

lazy, shiftless bankrupt. But George was sound from the beginning, hard working, ambitious.

"He worked his way through high school and then through college. And no man ever made a finer record in college than George Davis did. I don't know so much about his studies and grades and such, but he was the captain of the football team and the star player of the dramatic club. And he was a mechanical genius besides.

"Why, he earned most of his expenses by repairing Fords and every other kind of car for the other fellows. Right after graduation he came to Elmwood, where one of the alumni, who had admired George's work on the gridiron, gave him a fine job as secretary in his silk mills.

"A few months later he married—a girl from a little town back in Ohio, whom he had known from boyhood. That may or may not have been a mistake for George. He might have done better. She hadn't much—er—background, you know.

"She had worked, I believe, as a stenographer while George was getting through college. But I'll say this for Mrs. Davis, she's a mighty pretty girl and was devoted to George, and he to her. There was never a more devoted couple than the Davises. And if she didn't know much at first, she was quick to learn, and all the right people soon took them up.

"She's the quiet kind, you know—says little, notices everything. And sort of masterful. She took charge of George all right. But most of our wives do that"—Mr. Ayres laughed loudly—"and we like it, and George liked it. After a year or so they had a baby, a fine bouncing boy, and about the same time George got a raise in salary, and everything was fine.

"It was right after the baby was born and he had had his raise that he came to me about insurance. 'You know, Mr. Ayres,' he said, 'that I didn't have anything to start with, and we haven't been able to save much. I'm buying the house we live in, and that's about all.

"'But I want my wife and boy well provided for if anything should happen to me. I'm going to put all my savings for the present into insurance.'

"He wanted one hundred thousand dollars. I advised him that that was too much for him to carry, but he insisted, and after all for straight life at his age the cost wasn't unreasonable. So I sold it to him. He was in the pink of physical condition then, as Dr. Lovett, who examined him, will admit."

The physician gravely nodded his assent.

"But then," Mr. Ayres continued, assuming a mournful expression, "his bad luck began. It was just at the beginning of February that he took out his policy. In March he came down with pneumonia and was very sick for two months.

"It might have been better, as things have turned out, if he had died then. But his wife nursed him through—how that woman nursed him!—and at last he seemed to get well. But his heart was affected, and his lungs too, for a cough hung on, and in July it was discovered that he had a touch of T. B.

"He got a leave of absence for three months, and they went to Colorado, he and Mrs. Davis and the baby. The first of November he came back without the cough, thinking he was cured. But a month of our Eastern winter brought him down again, worse than ever.

"It was pitiful. You never saw any one so blue as the Davises were last December. He had worked so hard and done so well, and he and his little family had been so happy—and there he was, down and out, a physical wreck.

"George himself had cheerful days, as consumptives do, when he thought he felt better. But Mrs. Davis had no illusions. She's one to face the facts, she is. She saw clearly enough that George might linger on for months, but would never get well, at least not here in the East, where he had to stay on account of his job."

At this point Dr. Lovett, with a sort of timid firmness, voiced a question:

"What was it he said about the insurance?"

Mr. Ayres looked very much pained.

"Well," he said, "he was rather bitter about it. You can hardly blame him for anything in his condition. The second premium was due the second of February,

and he knew he couldn't meet it. What he said once was, 'You have to die to get it.'"

"His wife," said Dr. Lovett, "made the same remark to me."

"What of it?" stormed Mr. Ayres. "It isn't fair to twist anything out of that! Think of the fix they were in!"

"Perhaps," said Marcus, soothingly, "it's time you came to the final circumstances—the death, you know."

"To be sure!" said Mr. Ayres, pausing only to cast one glance of lingering resentment at Dr. Lovett. "I will continue. By the first of the year poor George was so bad that he couldn't go to the office.

"It was evident that he would have to resign his position, and what he and his family would do then no one could see. But he got the notion that if he could have a couple of months in Colorado again he would be all right. He borrowed five hundred dollars.

"I backed his note myself, though it was as good as giving it to him, and he went off to Denver, by himself this time. January 15 it was he left, and the plan was that he should stay until some time in April.

"But after two weeks he unexpectedly came back. That was last Sunday, January 31. He said, Mrs. Davis tells me, that he couldn't stand it out there alone, away from her and the baby. He came in by the early train—5 A.M.—and went straight to the house, and he and his wife spent the whole day talking, talking—poor things! So the maid tells me.

"You'll need to see that maid, by the way, Mr. O'Neil. She's a little high school girl, named Irene Bishop, who gives Mrs. Davis part time. She's quite intelligent, and her evidence is important for certain parts of the tragedy.

"The only people in town who knew during the day that George was back were the Higginses—their only near neighbors, for the Davises were out in a new suburb—who dropped in in the afternoon with the idea of cheering Mrs. Davis up and found them together. They were both very nervous and depressed, Higgins says, and seemed to want to be alone, so the Higginses didn't stay long.

"That brings us right up to the *accident.*"

Mr. Ayres italicized the word "accident" and looked defiantly at Dr. Lovett.

"About eight o'clock George went out through the kitchen, where Irene was washing up after supper, on the way to his workshop. I told you George was a mechanical genius. He had fixed up a tool bench out in the corner of what was meant for the garage.

"The Davises hadn't a car, so they used it for his workshop and also as a sort of general storage place. Most unfortunately one of the things they had stored there was a shallow box partly full of excelsior; it stood at one end of the workbench.

"Mrs. Davis followed George into the kitchen.

"'I think you ought to go to bed, George,' she said—this is Irene's testimony. 'You aren't well at all. You said you felt faint.' And indeed, Irene says, he was looking terribly haggard and feverish.

"'I'm all right now,' he replied. 'Only restless. I couldn't sleep. I'll tinker a bit till I get quiet. Maybe I'll fix that toaster.'

"For, as it happened, that very morning their electric toaster had failed to work, and he had taken it out to the workshop after breakfast, saying then that he would fix it later in the day.

"So he went out. Half an hour later he telephoned to the house—he had fixed up a private line—asking for a cup of coffee. Mrs. Davis made the coffee herself and took it out to him. She stayed out there perhaps ten minutes, and when she came back her eyes were red and swollen with crying.

"She said nothing to Irene, but hurried on into the living room, where the maid heard her walking about as if she found it impossible to sit still.

"Another half hour passed, and Mrs. Davis came back into the kitchen, looking almost frantic.

"'Why doesn't he come in?' she cried, and then, staring out through the back window, 'Why, the light's out! Where can he have gone?'

"Irene, looking out, saw for herself that the garage was dark. But there was a

switch in the kitchen which turned on the lights in the garage. Mrs. Davis stepped quickly to that switch and pressed it, and one light went on—the one that hung in the center, but not the one over the workbench.

"For just an instant Mrs. Davis stared through the window.

"Then she cried, 'I'll get a wrap and go out!' and ran back into the front part of the house.

"She was hardly gone when Irene saw the blaze flare up. The garage was on fire and burning fiercely.

"Irene screamed 'Fire!' and rushed after Mrs. Davis, but found her on the davenport in a dead faint.

"It was three or four minutes probably before Higgins ran over—there are two vacant lots between his place and the Davises'—and when he got there the blaze was so well started that he could do nothing but send in the alarm.

"He swears there was no sound whatever from inside—no screaming, moaning, gasping—nothing. But he smelled the burning flesh.

"The engines responded promptly, and were able to save a part of the walls and roof. The blaze had been terrific in the corner by the workbench, where the excelsior had stood, but the rest of the structure, damp from the winter rains and snows, had to some extent resisted the flames. The stream from the fire hose soon stopped them.

"And then they found George's body. The poor fellow had fallen face downward in that shallow box of excelsior, and his face and all the upper part of his body were crisped to the bone. It was terrible! But the lower part of the legs was untouched, and it was undoubtedly George's trousers and shoes, and they found his watch and keys and stickpin.

"But the most tragic thing of all was the way in which the fire evidently started. There right beside his blackened skull, within the charred remains of the excelsior box, still hanging from a red-hot wire from which the insulation had been burned away, was that electric toaster! Warped and melted, but still connected to the socket which hung above the workbench!

"You can see for yourself, Mr. O'Neil, what must have happened. The poor fellow was working with that toaster. He had taken the bulb out of the socket above his workbench and connected the toaster to test it. Then he must have felt faint again, and decided to go in, and turned off the switch—and then fainted and fallen with his head in the excelsior. And as he fell he must have knocked the toaster off the bench so that it dropped down beside his face.

"He may have been dead then. We must hope he was. I told you his heart was affected by his pneumonia. But, my God, he may not have been. And then his wife, his wife, saw the lights were off and pushed the switch in the kitchen! The electric toaster glowed and set fire to the excelsior, and whether he was already dead or not that finished him!

"It's the ghastliest thing I ever heard of. But how any one can think it was other than an accident is more than I can see!"

Mr. Ayres glared again at Dr. Lovett.

"I challenge you," he added haughtily, "to point out any material fact which I have omitted."

The young physician coughed nervously.

"I do not say that you have left anything out," he conceded.

III

"STILL," said Marcus, "I understand that in your opinion it was, or may have been suicide."

"Exactly!" said Dr. Lovett. "*May have been.* And I think that, in justice to the company and its policy-holders, that *possibility*—I do not claim it is anything more—should be considered and investigated. I devoutly hope," he added, "that my suspicion may prove to be unfounded."

"Please state your theory," said Marcus.

Dr. Lovett sat forward on the edge of his chair and fixed his eyes earnestly on Marcus.

"Well," he began, "in the first place, it is a curious coincidence that this death should have occurred just before Mr. Davis's protection expired. As it is, Mrs. Davis gets one hundred thousand dollars. If the same thing had happened forty-eight

hours later she would have got nothing. It was, in a sense, strikingly opportune.

"Secondly, it is notable that the ghastly circumstances of the death and the condition in which the body was left by the flames made an autopsy almost impossible."

"An autopsy?"

"Yes. An autopsy, which might have determined whether the death was due to heart failure, as is assumed, or to some other cause."

"For example?"

"For example—poison. Please recall the incident of the coffee. Half an hour before George Davis died he phoned for a cup of coffee. That seems queer in itself, since he had complained, in the maid's hearing, of restlessness and sleeplessness and professed to be going out to the workshop to quiet down.

"One would have supposed that coffee was the last thing he would have wanted. Yet he asked for it, and Mrs. Davis made it and took it out and left it with him. Certain kinds of poison are frequently taken in coffee.

"It seems to me at least possible that George Davis took poison that night, and then deliberately placed the electric toaster in the excelsior and lay down to die with his head beside it, intending that his body should be horribly burned and the suspicion of suicide thus avoided.

"That supposition affords a logical and motivated explanation of what must otherwise appear as a very extraordinary series of mere accidents."

"But it assumes," said Marcus thoughtfully, "a very remarkable degree of fortitude and resolution on Davis's part."

"It does!" cried Dr. Lovett eagerly. "And also great devotion to his family. It is all to his credit, most of us would feel, except on the score of abstract integrity. Many men in his tragic situation would not hesitate at fraud against a thing so impersonal as an insurance company.

"As I see it, he may have thought the thing out on that long, lonely trip to Colorado, from which he returned so unexpectedly. He may have seen that he was doomed in any case, and that the only way he could provide for his wife and child was to take himself off before his insurance ran out. That's why I can't help recalling his remark, 'You have to die to get it.'"

"Why didn't he poison himself in Colorado then?" demanded Mr. Ayres. "Or throw himself from the train?"

"It had to seem an accident," replied the physician steadily; Marcus's close attention had evidently given him confidence. "The policy, being less than a year old, was still contestable and invalid in case of suicide. And perhaps he wanted to see his wife once more before he killed himself for her sake."

Marcus spoke:

"Your theory implies that Mrs. Davis may have been an accessory to the suicide, since she took the coffee out to her husband, and especially since, after just about the right interval, she pushed the switch to turn on the electric toaster and so start the blaze which was to avert the idea of self-slaughter."

"I'm afraid it does imply that," Dr. Lovett admitted sadly. "And I must point out one circumstance which seems to support it, namely, that the maid found Mrs. Davis unconscious on the davenport immediately after she had pressed the switch and *before* she had any reason to suppose that her husband or his body was in the burning garage.

"The same idea would explain the conduct of the Davises through the preceding day—their long hours of mournful talk, their nervousness before callers, Mrs. Davis's swollen eyes when she came back from the garage after what she knew was a last farewell, and her distraught appearance when she went out into the kitchen to press the switch, as well as her fainting immediately afterward.

"It all fits in only too well. It seems to me George Davis committed suicide to provide for his wife and child, and that she acquiesced and aided him for the child's sake."

There was silence for a moment in Marcus's study. Then Mr. Ayres spoke, registering a nice balance of pain and contempt:

"Dr. Lovett's theory is very ingenious—very ingenious indeed! But it's all moonshine, and a gross injustice to George Davis's memory! Why think up all that

stuff? Why not accept the facts at their face value? It was an accident—a horrible accident—and that's all there is to it!"

IV

MARCUS ignored this protest.

"We have had two theories," he said. "Obviously there are several others which might fit the facts."

"For example?" demanded Mr. Ayres belligerently.

"For example, a very slight amendment of Dr. Lovett's theory would point to murder on the part of the wife instead of suicide on the part of the husband.

"Your description of Mrs. Davis gives us a picture of a silent, inscrutable, and masterful personality—the very type most worthy of attention in connection with any complicated mystery or crime. And, after all, she is the beneficiary.

"If we assume for the moment Dr. Lovett's hypothesis of poison, it is clear that Mrs. Davis could have put the drug in the coffee, which she made herself, before she took it out to the garage."

"And waited till he dropped dead, and then laid his head in the excelsior, and put the electric toaster beside it!" cried Mr. Ayres in gruesome derision. "Unthinkable!"

"It *is* a large order," Marcus conceded. "Moreover, it implies that Mrs. Davis had poison up her sleeve, so to speak, ready to be employed at the first accidental opportunity, like her husband's request for the coffee, and that is not very probable.

"On the whole," he added, "I am inclined to agree with you, Mr. Ayres, that your construction of the matter as a simple accident is the most probable of the theories we have been considering. On the other hand, I am by no means disposed to dismiss the case without investigation. There are aspects, at least, of Dr. Lovett's hypothesis which demand attention. I shall have to go to Elmwood. Meanwhile a few questions."

He turned to Dr. Lovett.

"Doubtless you looked among the débris for the cup which had held that coffee?"

"I did. It still stood in its saucer on the charred work-bench. But it had been in the fiercest of the flames and was licked dry and blackened with smoke. It yielded no evidence."

"Second: When does the funeral take place?"

Mr. Ayres answered this question: "George's body—what was left of it—has been buried this afternoon—while we have been talking, in fact. I should have been there."

"Finally," said Marcus, addressing Ayres, "can you tell me anything of Mrs. Davis's plans?"

"So far as I know she has made none. How can you expect her to have any yet?" he added indignantly.

Ignoring this counter-question, Marcus got rid of his two callers, with the understanding that they would meet him at the station in Elmwood the following morning. I obtained his permission to accompany him.

V

WE reached Elmwood at eight forty-three. Dr. Lovett had been detained, but Mr. Ayres met us and drove us out to the Davises' house.

Mrs. Davis, we understood from Ayres, had been prostrated until after the funeral and was up for the first time that morning. We were somewhat surprised, therefore, to learn from the little high school maid, Irene, that she was out, had gone down town. She had said she would be back in an hour.

I thought Marcus seemed pleased as well as surprised. He said immediately that we would await Mrs. Davis's return. In the meantime he would like to ask Irene some questions and to see the burned garage.

"Mrs. Davis didn't say where she was going?" he added to the maid.

"No, sir."

"Well, then, about last Sunday?" and he proceeded to cross-examine the girl somewhat closely about the circumstances of the tragedy.

Irene was, as Mr. Ayres had said, intelligent. She answered Marcus's questions directly and freely. But he did not succeed in eliciting a single fact which had not been covered in Mr. Ayres's really ex-

cellent account. At last he gave it up, and we went out to the garage or workshop.

There again everything was about as we had reason to expect. The building stood at the back of the lot on the edge of a high bank made by a railroad cutting. The front was, of course, badly gutted. We saw the charred workbench, the charred remains of the shallow box which had held the excelsior, the battered and blackened toaster still hanging from its wire. George Davis's shoes, the remains of his trousers, and his watch, keys, and stickpin had been put in a box and taken into the house, Mr. Ayres said; we could see them if we wished.

But Marcus appeared to be indifferent about those ghastly relics. He stood in the center of the garage looking about at the concrete floor and at various boxes, barrels, and discarded pieces of furniture, all badly water-soaked, which still stood against the three remaining sides of the structure; Ayres had told us that the Davises used it in part for storage.

Suddenly he turned to Irene, who had accompanied us.

"This place has been swept since the fire?"

"Yes, sir. It was the first thing Mrs. Davis told me to do."

"When she came out of her faint?"

"Yes, sir. She said everybody would be seeing it and she wanted it to look tidy. It was all over cinders and soot and wet bits of excelsior from the fire."

"It would be, of course," said Marcus pleasantly.

"She swept it again herself this morning," Irene volunteered, encouraged, no doubt, by his agreeable tone.

"Well, between you you did an excellent job, I must say." He peered into the corners and even moved one or two barrels containing old newspapers. "Still," he added, stooping to reach down behind the barrels, "here are one or two tiny shreds of excelsior which you both missed."

He appeared to scrutinize those shreds closely, holding them right under his nose, so to speak, and then put them in his waistcoat pocket—all of which struck me as absurd.

His next move seemed to me equally pointless. He stopped at the back window of the garage, which was still intact, raised it, leaned out, and stared down at the railway tracks below.

"What road is that?" he asked of Ayres.

"A spur of the Jersey Central running up from Trenton."

But Marcus appeared to give little attention to this reply. His hand rested on a large trunk which stood below the window, flanked on one side by the barrels and on the other by a broken chair.

"Whose trunk is this?"

"It was Mr. Davis's," said Irene.

"Did he usually keep it here?"

"Oh, no. But he had it brought in here that morning when he came back, because it was so heavy. He had taken a lot of books with him to Colorado, because he expected to be all alone for a couple of months and to have nothing to do but read; and the expressmen who had to carry it downstairs when he left grumbled so much that when he came back he just had them back up to the garage and put it in here, and said he would unpack the books here and carry them up himself."

"And did he do so?"

"Yes—on Sunday morning."

"I should have thought that would have been too heavy work for him in his condition."

"It was. Mrs. Davis scolded him for having the men put it here. And she wanted him to let her bring the books in, but he wouldn't."

"There were a lot of them, were there?"

"Five or six armloads."

"Let's see if he got them all," said Marcus, the fatuity of whose proceedings seemed to me to be increasing.

He raised the lid of the trunk. The tray was empty, and he lifted it out. But the bottom also was absolutely bare.

"Yes, he got them all."

An inane remark, certainly. I read amazement and contempt on the self-satisfied, unfriendly features of Mr. Ayres, and was glad of the diversion which immediately followed.

It was a woman's voice, calling from the house:

"Irene!"

"Mrs. Davis is back!" cried the girl.

"Very well," said Marcus. "Please go in and ask if she will see us."

Irene returned almost immediately to say that her mistress would receive us in the sitting room.

We found a woman—a girl rather, for she was hardly more—who in happier days must have been very pretty indeed. A slender figure, regular features at once delicate and firm, brown hair becomingly bobbed, and wide brown eyes which met yours with an appealing directness.

She bore herself with an admirable, heroic composure, but her colorless cheeks and the dark circles under those wide eyes went straight to my heart. They told only too plainly the horror and grief she had suffered. Marcus's suggestion of the day before that she might be a murderess recurred to me as appallingly callous.

Mr. Ayres introduced us and explained that in any case of accidental death the insurance company makes an investigation of the circumstances, especially when the amount of the policy is large. "A mere matter of form," he added in a somewhat too casual tone.

"I see!"

The note of exclamation in her tone was, of course, natural; women do not understand how impersonal and unsympathetic business has to be. She looked searchingly at Marcus, and her delicate lips closed in a curiously firm line.

"I shall be glad to answer any questions," she said, in a flattened voice. "It is very horrible, of course," she added, closing her eyes.

I was glad to see that Marcus's regard, fixed upon her, expressed the same pity I was feeling.

"I think I need not ask you to go over the circumstances," he said gently. "I have the facts very nearly complete from Mr. Ayres. But I do need to ask two questions."

"Well?" she challenged.

"Please tell me where you have been this morning."

She looked, I thought, somewhat startled. But I was surprised myself; why this question first of all? She appeared to reflect carefully.

"I don't see how it can possibly concern you," she said at last, somewhat haughtily, "but if you must know, I have been down to the office of the Elmwood *Call* to insert an advertisement offering this house for sale."

"I see. That answers in part my only other question, namely, what plans you have made for the immediate future."

She regarded him steadily, I would almost say watchfully.

"Again," she said, "I do not see how that can interest you. But I am going back to my former home in Ohio. I could not stay here!" She shuddered.

"You will go as soon as the house is sold?"

"Sooner, I hope, unless it sells very quickly. I shall go," she added pointedly, "as soon as the insurance company pays my claim."

"Just so," said Marcus, rising. "Thank you very much. I need not trouble you further."

VI

"WELL?" said Mr. Ayres, when we were back in the car. His glance was quizzical, not to say pitying.

"Well enough," Marcus replied, cheerfully but noncommittally.

Ayres grunted, rebuffed. "Back to the station?" he asked.

"Not just yet. If you can give me the time, I should like to stop at the office of the Elmwood *Call*. And can you tell me when Dr. Lovett's office hours are?"

Ayres stared and scowled. "Eleven to one," he replied gruffly.

"Very good," said Marcus. "I must see him a moment, too."

The company's representative in Elmwood could hardly refuse to chauffeur us on these two calls. But his temper did not improve in the process. For at both places Marcus left us in the car, kept us waiting many minutes, and rejoined us without comment. It was a decidedly frigid Mr. Ayres who, still completely unenlightened, put us on the twelve fifteen for New York.

The smoking compartment of the chair car was empty, and Marcus laughed as we lit cigarettes.

"I treated him badly," he said. "But he's so devoted a partisan of poor Davis that I couldn't let him in on the thing yet. There's no reason, however, why I should keep you in the dark. Here's the answer, complete."

He handed me a small clipping from a newspaper.

"From to-day's issue of the Elmwood *Call*," he added.

It was a want advertisement and read:

> FOR SALE—Seven room house, with all modern improvements; new, clean, well finished; will please anybody who cares to investigate thoroughly; if desired will rebuild burned garage; suburban yet not buried in country; make inquiry to-day; any one who is in quest of an opportunity for safely investing should talk it over; a place you will love. Inquire of Mrs. Davis, 17 Whittier Road, Larchmont.

"You see?" said Marcus.

"It is certainly verbose," I replied, "and —well, incoherent. Mrs. Davis is naturally in no frame of mind to compose a good advertisement."

"But look at it, man! Study it!"

I did study it attentively, but could only shake my head.

"I don't see what you mean."

He laughed. "Well, Carl, we'll leave it at that for the present. But you shall be in at the death, I promise you. It will take me a week or ten days to wind the thing up properly. I'll let you know."

And then he began to talk of his infernal poetry!

VII

IT was nine days later that Marcus telephoned me to come down to the De Soto. I was detained and did not reach his rooms until half an hour after the time he had suggested. He shook his head when he saw me.

"You're late. I planned to give you the explanation first. But they've already telephoned from the desk. She's on her way up."

"Who?"

He did not answer, for a knock had sounded at the door. He opened it.

"Come in, Mrs. Davis."

She was becomingly attired in simple mourning, but her cheeks had not regained their color nor her wide brown eyes lost the dark circles beneath them. Evidently she was still tense with grief and—was it apprehension?

"You asked me to come here, Mr. O'Neil."

"Yes. Take this chair, won't you?"

She sat down stiffly, unable to relax. When she spoke it was with a pitiful, strained composure.

"I hope you are about to tell me that the company has allowed my claim."

"Not quite that, Mrs. Davis. Still I have good news for you—three pieces of good news."

She stared uncomprehendingly.

"First, Dr. Lovett, who is very much your friend, has succeeded in finding a purchaser for your house."

"Ah!"

"Second, I have found a job for you."

"A job!"

"Yes, a good secretarial position with one of the best firms in Denver. The salary is quite liberal and the opportunities for advancement excellent. And, finally, I have secured your husband's admission to an endowed hospital out there, where the charges will be quite within your means, and where I hope his recovery will proceed as rapidly as possible."

She lay back in her chair, breathing quickly, with piteous frightened eyes.

"You know, then? You have seen him?"

"Yes, Mrs. Davis. Your little plot was well devised, but you could not expect it to stand expert investigation. And, believe me, this is the better way.

"The worry and fear were hurting your husband's health. They might have killed him. And even if he had recovered and you had rejoined him under a new name, your lives would have had to be furtive and hidden, and the constant fear of recognition and exposure would have poisoned all your joy. As it is, you can start fresh in the open. The company will drop the matter.

"You can close the sale of the house to-morrow and leave for Denver immediately. The policy on which you were trying to realize by fraud was called 'straight life.' Your husband has agreed with me that a straight life policy for the future will be best."

VIII

WHEN Mrs. Davis, after a good many tears of relief and gratitude, had departed, Marcus was willing to discuss the case as a whole.

"Dr. Lovett," he said, "presented fairly well the more general a-priori reasons for suspicion of the alleged accident. In the first place it *was* remarkably opportune—I believe that was his word. In the second place, consider the chain of events which resulted in an unrecognizable corpse.

"That chain involved, first, the electric toaster's getting out of order on that particular day; second, the box of excelsior so dangerously placed; third, the man's fainting just after he turned out the lights; fourth, his falling in one particular direction, so that his head should rest in the excelsior; fifth, his knocking the toaster off in such a way that it should drop right beside him; and sixth, his wife's pressing the switch—after a convenient interval.

"Under any circumstances such a correlated series of small accidents, all necessary to a final result, would have been highly remarkable. In a situation where that result, a body burned beyond recognition, was worth one hundred thousand dollars to a couple faced by destitution, it was nearly impossible to regard the sequence as fortuitous.

"Dr. Lovett was justified, also, in recalling the remark, made by both the Davises, to the effect that insurance money can only be obtained by dying; and he was acute in pointing out that Mrs. Davis fainted too soon.

"But his theory of poison, though natural from a physician, was preposterous. It assumed, on the part of both husband and wife, a degree of sacrificial hardihood which was simply incredible.

"Moreover, we knew from Ayres that they were a very devoted couple. If they were plotting to get one hundred thousand dollars by fraud, their plot would include provision, not for his death, but for his recovery, so that they might enjoy their booty together.

"Altogether, it was clear from the beginning that the burned body was not Davis's. It was also pretty certain that his second trip to Colorado was for the twofold purpose of establishing a base there under a new name and probably a disguise and of obtaining a body, which he must have brought back with him; and that what he really did when he went out to the garage, ostensibly to fix the toaster, was to assume his disguise and to dress the body in his clothes and put it in position with respect to the excelsior and the toaster.

"The request for coffee brought Mrs. Davis out to inspect his work and for a last good-by. Then he climbed out the back window, scrambled down the bank to the railroad tracks, and walked the ties to Trenton, where he could catch a train.

"Mrs. Davis gave him half an hour's start, pressed the switch to start the necessary conflagration, and, having done her part, incontinently collapsed.

"Most of this was clear enough even before we went to Elmwood. The evidence I found in the garage there made the case complete. First, why had the place been so carefully swept? Why was that sweeping Mrs. Davis's first thought when she recovered consciousness? And why had she repeated it herself as soon as she was able to be out of bed? Obviously to remove something which might be incriminating.

"The floor had been covered, Irene said, with cinders, soot, and bits of *excelsior*. I hunted for and found several of those bits and smelled them. They had been soaked in kerosene. That was final evidence that the fire was premeditated. Second: that window at the back was Davis's most probable means of exit; and, looking out, I could see in the mud of the cutting where some one had recently slipped and plowed his way down the bank to the tracks. Finally, the presence of the trunk in the garage, with all that elaborate hocus-pocus about heavy books, confirmed my guess that Davis had got the body in Colorado.

" What remained was, of course, to find Davis, and the readiest way to do that was obviously to intercept the messages which must certainly pass between him and his wife. In view, however, of the careful study and elaborate foresight displayed throughout, it was probable that this danger had been perceived and some secret means of communication devised.

" This point was in my mind when I learned of Mrs. Davis's surprising promptness in advertising the house. A published advertisement is one of the commonest methods of sending code messages. Accordingly I stopped at the office of the Elmwood *Call* and looked up Mrs. Davis's ad. You did not seem to make it out when I showed it to you in the train, but take another look."

He handed it to me again.

" You will note," he added, " that I have now *underlined* every fifth word."

With this done the secret message stood out clear:

> FOR SALE—Seven room house, with *all* modern improvements; new, clean, *well* finished; will please any*body* who cares to investigate *thoroughly;* if desired, will rebuild *burned* garage; suburban, yet not *buried* in country; make inquiry *to-day;* any one who is *in quest* of an opportunity for *safely* investing should talk it *over;* a place you will *love.* Inquire of Mrs. Davis, 17 Whittier Road, Larchmont.

" Starting with the idea of a code message," Marcus continued, " one had only to pick out the words ' burned ' and ' buried,' which she was likely to use, and to note that they were five words apart. The rest was mere counting."

" This message," said I, " was conclusive confirmation of your theory of the plot, but I don't see how it helped you find Davis."

" Oh, I had only to ask to see the *Call's* out-of-town mailing list—not a large list, of course, in the case of an obscure, small-town daily.

" When I found just one Colorado subscription, in the name of ' George Meredith,' Denver, and that one entered within two weeks, I was fairly safe, I think, in assuming that ' George Meredith ' was the alias of George Davis.

" Of course, I could—perhaps I should—merely have reported the facts to the company. But I felt too sorry for that pitiful young wife and her husband. So I took Dr. Lovett into my confidence and arranged to buy the house myself through him, so as to give them a bit of ready cash. I shall be able to sell it again without loss.

" And then I ran out to Denver to see Davis and convince him of the folly of their plan even if it had succeeded and to arrange for his hospitalization and for a position for her in which she can support them pending his recovery.

" He confessed that he got the corpse by the ancient dodge of calling at a charity hospital and claiming to recognize the body of a friendless pauper who had just died as that of a distant relative to whom he wished to give proper burial.

" The directors of the company were a little shocked, I think, when I finally made my report, but they have approved my handling of the matter. Even corporations may have a heart, provided they don't lose money."

"Before you lie the thirteen half-moons—and death!"

THIRTEEN HALF-MOONS

By Peter Perry

"YOU CANNOT ESCAPE!" CRIED THE HINDU, HIS GAZE A LEERING MASK IN LIVING BRONZE.—DECKER FLUNG UP HIS HANDS TO SHIELD HIS EYES

FOR five years Lem Decker had feared a dead man. He had feared Howard Lawson alive; he feared him dead. The last words he had heard Lawson say were: "You'll pay for this, Lem Decker" —and he had said it calmly, as always—that was Howard Lawson. Calm—cool—even when the lamas were leading him away —leading him on foot, bound with leather thongs, behind their shaggy ponies, to that old walled lamasery of Muli, two weeks' journey into those barren mountains at the edge of Tibet.

Those words continued to haunt Lem Decker, though five years had passed since that day in Yunnan when red-robed lamas had come searching for the gold hat of the Living Buddha that had been stolen from the sanctuary of Muli.

Sometimes Decker heard that low, threatening voice in his dreams, and awoke in a cold sweat. But Lawson was dead—dead five years.

Decker had seen some of the punishments of these mountain tribes. Once he had seen a man sewed in a yak skin left on the barren hillside. In a few hours the hide would begin to shrink and stiffen in the sun; it would close in relentlessly on the victim, grip him with iron hands. But holes were cunningly devised so the man would not suffocate.

He had seen a man with both hands cut off for stealing a sheep. No cruelty would be too refined for the foreign devil who had stolen the gold hat of the Living Buddha.

But it had been Lawson's life or his own. And lucky that even one of them should escape. Decker had been afraid—terribly afraid. And, under the impulse of fear, he had removed the gold hat from his own baggage to Lawson's.

That solid gold hat with the wide, flat brim, the round crown with square spike on top, rather like a German helmet. Decker saw it sometimes in his nightmares. Saw again the wild mountain gorges of Muli—the hillside monastery, roofs weighted down with stones, the king's palace, curtains twisted and wrapped about the pillars, kerosene lamps that were never lit, soldiers in leopard skins and Tibetan boots, red-robed lamas, gilded shrines, gilded gods under silk umbrellas, gilded prayer wheels of yak hide; heard again the cymbals, gongs and drums, the weird chanting of the priests. The sounds increased in fury and volume until Decker awoke.

It was because of this haunting fear that Decker went to the fortune tellers. Though he did not believe their prophecies, he found relief in their assurance that he would live long and peacefully. But now came this Hindu with his disturbing, his uncanny knowledge.

"For many years you have known no peace, no tranquillity. But before you lies greater trouble. Beware of thirteen half moons," said the Hindu mystic.

Decker asked: "What do you mean?"

"When you see the thirteen half moons," whispered the Hindu, his dark eyes piercing Decker, "then soon, you will *die*."

Decker tried to laugh. His mouth seemed very dry. "Tell me something I can understand."

The probing eyes never left Decker's face. The Hindu's lips seemed to curl back from his white teeth. His face was hideously scarred. A livid gash across each cheek distorted his expression into a leering mask—a mask of living bronze beneath the white turban. He seemed to be grinning at Decker.

"You stole another man's wife," he said.

Decker was unprepared for this. "That's not true! Lawson is dead," he blurted out.

"You were his murderer," said the Hindu.

Decker sat silent and shaken. He wet his lips with his tongue, then said, coldly as he could: "You are trying to blackmail me."

"Not at all," murmured the mystic in his suave manner. He was gazing into the crystal now, seemingly oblivious of Decker. "Mountains," he whispered. "Mountains, a caravan, pack mules, yellow men, two white men, hating each other because of a woman. Jealousy—and—treachery."

Decker brought the palm of his hand down on the table so that the gleaming crystal quivered. "Enough of that!" He was on his feet. He flung a bill on the table.

The Hindu rose, too. His eyes fixed Decker. "You are in danger, grave danger," he intoned solemnly. "A relentless fate has been pursuing you."

Decker retreated toward the door. Step by step the Hindu followed him.

"You cannot escape. You must be prepared to die. Before you lie the thirteen half moons—and *death!*"

Decker flung his hands up before his eyes to shield them from the gaze of the Hindu and the twisted mask of the brown face. Then he broke down. "For God's sake, tell me what you mean! If you can read the past and the future, you can tell me how to—escape—what to do!" He jerked out his wallet.

"Put up your money," said the clairvoyant. "There is no escape from the consequences of sin."

"But I couldn't help it!" Decker cried, hypnotized. "It was my life or his! I did what any man would have done!"

"You murdered your friend and stole his wife."

"No, no; it was not murder—not murder!" Decker screamed. "He was not my friend. He was my enemy! I met Lawson in Hanoi—and loved his wife. He was not kind to her—he treated her like a slave because she was an Eurasian—her mother had been a half-caste dancing girl in Singapore. But she would not leave him—she was grateful to him—for marrying her.

"I persuaded Lawson to take me with him into Yunnan—to be near her. I knew something of the country. He was a naturalist. Very soon he knew—he knew why I had come. He left his wife in Yunnan City—with the missionaries. He made me go with him over impossible trails—up into the Himalayas—into Tibet.

"Once we lived for weeks on *tsamba*

and yak cheese, alive with maggots. He thought I would die. I was not so strong as he. He thought the hardships would kill me. An easy way to get rid of me!" Decker laughed harshly.

"That was your imagination," said the Hindu. "Because you hated this man and wanted to kill him, you pretended to yourself that he was your enemy."

"But I had not thought of killing him!" Decker cried. "Till—till—"

The Hindu prompted softly: "Till—"

"The lamas and soldiers of Muli were following us," Decker babbled on. "I had taken the hat of the Living Buddha—a queer hat of solid gold, it was. I did it only for a lark—I wanted it for a curio. I didn't think they would suspect a white man—they think we are so wealthy.

"After the reception in the king's palace, I saw the old treasurer carrying away the gold hat—I followed and saw where he put it. That night I climbed over the walls and got into the church—the most sacred shrine of the lamasery. I took the gold hat—under the eyes of a hundred gods—and escaped without being discovered.

"Next morning we left Muli. I begged Lawson to hurry. I wanted to get back to Yunnan-Fu and take the train to the coast. But he would not hurry.

"Before we reached the city, the lamas and soldiers overtook us. I saw them coming down out of the hills one morning at dawn. I hid the gold hat of the Living Buddha in Lawson's pack. So it was Lawson they took back to Muli instead of me."

"And did you tell Lawson's wife about the gold hat?" the Hindu asked.

"No, no; of course not. I said Lawson had been captured. The consul did what he could. A squad of Chinese soldiers was sent to Muli—but Lawson was never seen. We never heard what became of him. But the lamas would not have let him live long—except in torture."

Decker shuddered. "I couldn't go back to a death like that—cut to pieces bit by bit—or sewed up in a yak's hide. I took my only chance to escape. Those jabbering lamas with their ghastly drums and gongs, their fiendish gods, their devil dances!" He became incoherent.

"I was afraid—afraid—sick of the whole country. Those nightmare cities—people like animals—the filth. Opal was afraid, too!"

"Opal?" questioned the Hindu.

"Opal Lawson—his wife. She was—unnerved. She wanted to get away from Asia. We were married. But there's always been a ghost between us. Lawson is dead. But he said he'd *get* me. Tell me how to conquer this foolish fear!"

"Your fears are not foolish," the mystic chanted solemnly. "I can only give you a charm to drive away evil influences." He opened a tiny red lacquer box and disclosed an ugly, pot-bellied little god carved of ivory. "It is the god of luck. Sleep with it to-night on your breast—next your skin."

II

LEM DECKER could not throw off the spell the Hindu had cast over him. That leering scarred face seemed to be threatening him. He dreaded to face his wife—this woman for whom he had gone through hell.

Opal with her black hair, her cool white skin, her golden, tiger eyes. She did not love him—Decker knew that. She loved that man who had treated her like a slave. Yet she was always polite—considerate—gentle, in her Oriental way. Decker wondered if there were claws beneath her velvet manners.

He dared not tell her about the Hindu. But Opal's eyes were upon him—anxiously.

"Lem, you are not well. What is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing," he answered uneasily.

He escaped early to his own room, pleading a headache. Opal had company. They were playing bridge. Lucky they didn't need him to take a hand. He couldn't have kept his mind on bits of pasteboard to-night. What had that fellow meant by thirteen half moons?

Decker lay flat in his bed, the little ivory god of luck upon his breast. Why did he try these heathen charms? At last he fell asleep.

When he awoke, something was crawling

on him. He clutched at his throat, crushed a flabby, saclike body. He was conscious of a painful swelling on his chest. He reached up, turned on the bedlight. The little god of luck rolled across the covers. From a recess in the carved ivory a small black spider crawled forth.

Decker crushed it between the folds of the sheet. The tiny furry feet of another brushed his arm. He clawed at the soft, flaccid thing under his pyjama sleeve, felt the slime of it ooze out on his skin. He tried to spring from the bed, but something seemed to hold him. His feet were like lead.

Slowly Decker opened the folds of the sheet. The thing he had crushed lay flat and lifeless, belly up; and on the blackish smooth skin of the under side were thirteen tiny triangular spots—thirteen half moons! Decker grew cold with terror. He tried to scream, but only a feeble wail came from his throat.

He had heard of that spider—not for nothing had he worked for the naturalist, Lawson. He had seen a picture of it in one of Lawson's books. Absurdly, the name of it flashed across his memory—*Lathrodectes tredecim-guttatus*. Thirteen half moons! Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He killed another of the little insects—so ridiculously small to be so poisonous. They were crawling all over him. They had come out of the ivory god. The opening had been covered with a little fine white wax; the warmth of his body had softened it, so the spiders could claw their way out.

He heard the voices of his guests below. They were leaving. Opal's voice, a little husky, purring: "Come again. You should have bid two hearts, dear. Good night."

The door closed. Opal was humming a little tune. Decker tried to call to her, but no sound came—only the hoarse rasping of his breath.

He tried to throw off the nightmare horror that chained him to the bed. Then he realized it was not fear. It was paralysis. His feet were wooden. His fingers were numb. He pinched the flesh, struck at the table—no feeling.

He heard Opal cry out below: "Oh, who are you?"—frightened.

A man's voice, vibrant, like the Hindu's: "Opal—little jewel!"

"Howard—Howard!" Her tone was half questioning.

Had Howard Lawson come back? Decker struggled to pull himself from the bed. He thrashed about. His head rolled from side to side, but he could not raise it from the pillow.

He thought he had killed the last of the little spiders. But another crawled from the covers, close to his hand. His fingers closed around it—lightly—not crushing it. If Lawson had come back—if Lawson had done this to him—he would save one of the spiders of the thirteen half moons for him.

Frantically now, Decker fought at the covers, dragged himself to the edge of the bed. It was no use. He felt as if he were turning to stone. Perhaps it would pass. He shut his eyes. His head slipped off the pillow.

III

THE door of Decker's room opened. He heard Opal whispering:—

"Howard, how can I—like this? He's been good to me."

"I would rather you had starved," said Lawson. "You can't talk about a thing like this, Opal. Don't go near him. Come with me. I can't leave you with *him*—now that I've found you. God! If you knew what I've been through—tortured—"

Opal was sighing. "Oh, Howard—those scars! Those terrible scars!"

"Tied in a yak's hide—left to die by inches. It was like being paralyzed, incased in iron—pressed under weights. But one of my servants followed me. At night he cut the hide from me in strips. I was nearly suffocated—and weak from loss of blood. He had a dummy in another hide, so they wouldn't know I had escaped.

"He got me free. Then half carried me down the mountain all night. For weeks we hid in a mud hovel—till I was able to go on—then made our way out through Tibet, into India. I wrote our friends in Yunnan. They told me you had gone with Decker. I could get no trace of you."

"Oh, Howard, forgive me!" Opal cried. "But I was afraid—afraid. I wanted to

get away from Asia—I wanted to go where I would be a white woman—not a half breed."

"All these years I've gone about telling fortunes, crystal-gazing—hunting for you."

Decker tried to open his eyes. The lids seemed weighted. With an effort, he turned his head slightly. His vision was dull, but he could see Opal standing in the doorway. Behind her, a man with scars across his cheeks. It was the Hindu—but this man was white—not brown and turbaned.

His face was white—except for the red gashes; his hair was white. His eyes burned like dark coals.

The voice was Howard Lawson's:

"Opal, don't go near him—don't go into that room!"

Decker felt Opal's eyes upon him. He tried again to move—to speak. She should not go with Lawson! A hoarse gurgle came from his throat.

Opal screamed. "Lem, what is it?"

Lawson was holding her. "Opal, you *must* not go in there."

"But, Howard, he's sick—he's not asleep. He's dying!" She smothered a little scream at the sight of Decker's mouth lolled open, his head twitching in his efforts to speak. He had slipped down so that the light fell full on his distorted face. Opal broke away from Lawson and was beside the bed. Lawson caught her arm.

"Opal, don't touch him! Don't!"

"We can't go when he's like that, Howard! It would look like—like murder."

"Come away, Opal! No one will ever know," Lawson whispered. "I've made arrangements."

"What do you mean?"

"There isn't time to explain. We must hurry!"

Suddenly Opal cried: "I smell smoke—fire!"

"We must get out of here!" Lawson was half dragging her toward the door. "I've set the house on fire. There's some cans of gasoline—when the flames reach them—"

Opal freed herself and ran back to the bed. "We must get him out!" she screamed. "We can't leave him here—like this. Lem, Lem! What has happened? Tell me!"

She shook him and chafed his hands, trying to rouse a spark of life. She felt his heart—and uttered a little frightened cry. "His heart has stopped! Howard—he's *dead!*"

"Opal, for God's sake, come away!"

"He has something clenched in one of his hands, Howard," said Opal. "He's holding it tight."

She pulled open his fingers. Decker was powerless to stop her. He did not know even that she had opened his hand until he heard her gasp:

"Oh, a spider! A horrid little spider! It stung me!"

"Which finger, Opal?" cried Lawson. "You must let me cut it off—quick!"

Opal screamed in terror. "Oh, no! No! Call a doctor!"

"Opal, you must—"

Decker could barely hear them. It was as if their voices came from a great distance, though he knew they were standing by the bed. It was like being smothered in cotton wool.

Opal exclaimed, surprised: "My arm's numb!" Then she was screaming: "Howard! Don't leave me! The fire—the fire!"

Decker could hear no more. A great silence closed in on him.

"At least, I've cheated him out of Opal," he thought. "He shan't take her."

He knew that Lawson had fled from the burning house; he knew that Opal had fallen across the bed, though he could neither see nor feel. He knew that flames were eating into the room, though he could not smell the smoke.

By now perhaps, they were even licking out at his body, but he could not feel the heat. His body was dead. Opal had said he was dead. Decker wondered if he really were dead. After all the years he had feared death, he was a little disappointed.

Peter Perry will present another story next week

One of the State Troopers grabbed Sammy by his luxuriant black locks

DYNAMITERS

By Lin Bonner

SO MANY VICTIMS, FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, FALLING PREY TO WILY SWINDLERS SUGGEST THE QUESTION: IS ANY ONE SAFE?

A Story of Fact

WHEN, some twenty-odd years ago Mrs. Cassie Chadwick, that amazing Cleveland woman, made cat's-paws of astute bankers in a swindle that netted her somewhat more than a million dollars, editorial writers and the world in general gasped their astonishment that wise and sophisticated men could be such dupes.

The same thought grips us every time we read of a supposedly intelligent man or woman being taken in by a swindler nowadays. That is because we never have been "dynamited"—canvassed by master salesmen in whom bullet-fast thinking and ruthlessness are outstanding characteristics. Histrionic talent of a superior order also is an important part of their make-up, and they do their acting for higher stakes than Chaplin, Barrymore, or any of the other great thespians garner in a limited period of time.

Until Keyes Winter was appointed Deputy Attorney General of New York State and placed in charge of the Fraud Prevention Bureau with the Martin anti-Bucketshop Act as his lance, the "Dynamiters," or hundred per cent swindlers, ran as wild as weeds in New York and environs. Now, after a little more than two years of this combination, the high power gangs have been broken up and their personnel scattered to the ends of the earth. Some are in prison, many more are fugitives in this country and Europe.

To appreciate how this clean-up was made possible after the swindling gentry had held forth for scores of years, seemingly immune from punishment, it is only necessary to know that the Martin Act is the most potent weapon ever placed in the hands of a public prosecutor.

By its terms, the attorney general or his deputies can pry into the family secrets of any firm, corporation or individual dealing in stocks, bonds or other commodities at any time they suspect the subject of being engaged in fraudulent activities. Summary powers, including that of subpœna plus arresting authority, are vested in the enforcing officer and he can compel a person to answer questions or produce records in certain circumstances under penalty of fine and imprisonment.

What Is a "Mooch"?

He also can institute injunction proceedings and have receivers appointed for suspected concerns. It is the padlock law of the financial world and, in the hands of Winter, has resulted in closing out more illicit enterprises than the Volstead law has speak-easies.

But unlike the victims of the Prohibition padlock, who merely shift their base of operations to a new location when the quietus has been put on them, those who have felt the mailed fist of Winter rarely resume again. Also, the immediacy with which offenders are indicted and brought to trial does not give them much chance for organizing any new "rackets."

There is no lost motion, no procrastination in the Winter method. He usually has a complete case against his quarry before he ever makes an arrest, and the result is that he rarely fails to get indictments and convictions.

Not every crook nailed by Winter and the Martin Act has been put behind bars, because he has concentrated his efforts upon landing the ringleaders in the swindles and has permitted the lesser minds to turn State's evidence in many cases.

"It is not our desire," he told me, "to load the jails of the State with a lot of cheap crooks, but we do want to get the master schemers there. Our work follows largely the theory that 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' It is preventive as well as corrective, and we have demonstrated the efficacy of our method by ridding New York City and State of bucketshops, 'Dynamiters,' 'Reloaders,' and 'Peat' men.

"With all these classes of swindlers rendered impotent through imprisonment or fear, they have been prevented from organizing or operating fake stock propositions or other games which, in the past, have cost the public billions of dollars. Those millions and billions which have been lost by investors in oil, mining, and manufacturing Utopiás which existed only in the minds of the glib stock shovers never can be recovered; but other millions and billions of dollars which might have been enticed from them are, we believe, reasonably safe."

In another article dealing with the enforcement of the Martin Act by Winter and his staff, activities of a bucketshop ring and a house which failed for many millions of dollars were revealed. It was explained therein that the sucker, or "Fall Guy"—any person who gives his money into the hands of these vampires of the financial underworld—is known to the larcenous fraternity as a "Mooch." The bankers who fell for the specious schemes of Cassie Chadwick were mooches, so were those who intrusted their millions to Ponzi.

Three of the Genus

And understand that the larceny involved in these schemes is not all on the side of the man who takes the money from the mooch. For if the mooch did not think and believe that he had a chance to make huge and sudden profit he would not hark to the siren song of the stock swindler. The latter class work on the theory that "there is a little bit of larceny in everybody" and, if their philosophy were not more or less true, they could not survive and live in the luxury they do.

As with the fictionist who seeks to present "the Perfect Crime," the dream of every dynamiter and every other crook engaged in filching from the public is to find "the Perfect Mooch."

In this article, three of the genus are presented: One who begged off from testifying against a gang that had taken seventy-five thousand dollars from him, another who refused to believe he had been robbed when it was shown he had been looted of twenty-two thousand dollars, and a third—a banker —who permitted himself to be jobbed out of ninety thousand dollars in four raids by the same gang on the same proposition.

The Greek Banker

Each of these men was intelligent, each had made himself financially independent through his own ability and shrewdness. Yet they were all dynamited out of their thousands; deliberately swindled by stick-up men who dressed like fashion plates and carried no weapons save their wits. For the dynamiter is the suavest and most personable of all confidence men, always two jumps ahead of "What the Men Will Wear" and at all times thinking twice as fast as his victim. The smarter the mooch, the faster he thinks, and he always has the answer to any question which the prey may ask.

Consider the man who lost seventy-five thousand dollars and pleaded with Winter to let him lose it without any publicity attaching to the loss. He was and is, a man high in the affairs of Tammany Hall in New York; a millionaire building contractor who has erected a large proportion of the schools of New York City in recent years. Regarded as a man of wisdom, impossible to conceive in the rôle of a sucker for a racket. Yet—here is the story:

A few years ago, an impressive and pompous-looking gentleman who maintained a suite in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel was wont to promenade the famous Peacock Alley of that hostelry. He was served by a valet and changed his attire three or four times a day, and never was seen after the dining hour except in immaculate evening clothes.

He and evening garb seemed to be in affinity, so fine a picture did he make in such habiliments. He was about five feet and seven inches high, with very broad shoulders and generous girth. He had sleek black hair, scintillating black or deep brown eyes, and a healthy complexion. But the thing which distinguished him from all the other beaus and cavaliers of Peacock Alley was an artistically groomed mustache of black, tightly curled at the ends.

"That," an informer would whisper to inquirers, "is Mr. John Papamakas, the millionaire Greek banker."

Banker he was, to the extent of several hundred thousands of dollars; but his fiduciary activities ceased with his own personal account. The informers and the listeners, of course, did not know that. Nor did they know that a speaking likeness of the splendid Mr. Papamakas at that moment nestled in the archives of the New York police department, along with the "mugs" of thousands of proved confidence rogues.

At this time, John—known as the Greekie among the sacrilegious police and people of his own world—was a thriving bachelor, with no thought of getting himself entangled in the bonds of matrimony. But it so happened that during his periodical parades of Peacock Alley, he was introduced to a very charming lady, the sister-in-law of one of the partners in the marbled halls of J. P. Morgan & Co.

Opportunity Knocks for John

This, of course, made it different. John, already known as one of the shrewdest operators of swindling pools in the country, immediately saw an opportunity—and he was not the kind of boy to overlook an opportunity when it bumped into him. So, looking and acting the part of a big banker, he "promoted" the lady into marrying him, just the same as he would promote a mooch into buying a waste basket full of worthless stocks.

He was not true to her, for like all of the dynamiters and high pressure stock swindlers, he had a passion for the life that is Broadway, and spent much of his time away from her. That she is suing him for divorce now is not due so much to the fact that he neglected her as to the enlightenment she received about her banker husband when he was arrested and exposed as one of the most daring crooks that ever wooed wealth from the unwary.

But, while he was going well, John made the most of the opportunity he had married, and a large part of the success of his last recorded swindle rested on the fact that his underlings, in pointing him out to prospective investors, mumbled his marital status in such a way that it sounded as if John were a brother-in-law of the mighty Morgan himself.

" Big shot "—" On the inside "—" Gets the real dope through his Morgan connection." These and similar statements were whispered awesomely behind the hand.

A Pool Is Organized

With the false Morgan background his marriage had given him, John engaged a large suite of red-carpeted and velveted rooms in the Waldorf Astoria, and there held luxurious court every evening. Enchanting women displaying shimmering shoulders above gorgeous gowns; gay and handsome men; Lucullian feasts and a bottomless well of fine wines and liqueurs; music and dancing. All these were gathered nightly, and the man of the coiling mustache paid the bills, totaling thousands weekly.

He was a benign monarch, but he held aloof from the crowd and its frolickings. He was not easily accessible and those who seemed to know him best were chary of introducing newcomers to him. These timid or seemingly timid ones were in reality his hired steerers and their attitude, along with the whisperings about his affiliation with Morgan, was all part of the little comedy —or tragedy—staged for the deception of the mooch who had been steered into the elegant " trap." It was what is known as " the build-up," the game of giving John importance and impressiveness in the eyes of the sucker.

The sesame which usually exposed the wealth of the mooch to the relentless clutch of John was a blackboard on the wall of the big dining hall, similar to those which are part of the trading room of every brokerage office. On it were names of stocks listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange and alongside each name were figures showing the career of the stock that day.

This, by the way, was an illustration of the Greek's astuteness, for not one person out of a thousand who plays the New York stock market would know the least thing about the Toronto list. And to learn anything about it they first had to be introduced by one of the steerers to the master himself.

This usually followed an inquiry by the visitor as to what the figures on the board meant. The steerer would plead ignorance, adding: " I'll introduce you to *him,* and you can ask him about it." This was the first step in the genteel game of shearing the guest.

Introduced to the magnificent John, the sucker, or mooch, would be left alone with him, and John would explain the movements of stocks at Toronto, pointing out on the board the various issues. Somehow or other a stock called " Hattie Gold Mines," selling for around eleven cents a share, would stand out conspicuously from the rest, and invariably the visitor would ask about it. John then would confide in him that he had taken a fancy to the stock because his wife's name was Hattie—which was the truth, because he had named the stock for his wife—and he had such faith in it that he had organized a pool in it.

Buying His Own Property

The mooch would ask to be let into it and try to buy stock from John, but he had none to sell. So they would go to their banks next day and ask them to buy from some good broker in Toronto a few thousand shares of the stock. They would go into the market to get it and succeed, because as the purchase shoved the stock up a little, John would sell. In due time, the stock, accompanied by a draft from the brokers, would arrive at the sucker's bank, the draft would be paid out of his account and the stock turned over to him.

The stock would then be delivered to John as manager of the pool, to be sold or held as he saw fit. John then would send the stock back to Toronto and, telling his followers that he thought it was time to start a buying campaign in order to shove the price up, would order Mr. Mooch to buy some shares. He, trusting creature,

would do so, getting in return for his new money his old stock, which he still owned. As all the stock in Toronto was held in John's name, all the new money went to him without his having spent a cent on the stock.

It was into this brace game that the wise Tammany contractor was led by one of John's deputies. He was carried through the routine outlined above, and stuck with it until John was put out of business, at which time he had sunk seventy-five thousand dollars.

Absentmindedness

So long as he remained in the rôle of pool manager and made the suckers buy their own stocks, John was within the law and doing naught that has not been done by bigger and more highly respected financiers a hundred times in Wall Street. Even the reselling of their own stock to his followers would have been a difficult matter to prove against him, because there were millions of shares of Hattie Gold Mine and John could have delivered the stocks to the owners at any time they demanded it.

But, after he had got at least six hundred thousand dollars, and probably a million—an estimate by the man who arrested him—he tripped over a measly seven thousand dollars, committing that tiny error which always prevents the perfect crime.

One night, his chief lieutenant and steerer, one Waldo, a wine-soaked derelict of the bucketshop lanes and former member of the firm of Dean, Waldo & Co., 49 Wall Street, led up to the slaughter the mooch that was to bring John's swindling structure tumbling about his head. The victim was a woman, a high-salaried seller for a manufacturing concern. The trap, in even greater splendor than had prevailed at the Waldorf, was now located, en suite, in the Biltmore Hotel.

As per formula, John, with his high pressure salesmanship and mock austerity, dynamited the lady out of seven thousand dollars after she had explained to him that she had scrimped and sacrified all her life so that she could send her daughter to college. The girl was then a student in Syracuse University.

John took her money with the same ease that he had that of the millionaire Tammany contractor. And then he made the fatal error of stepping out of his character of pool manager and outside the law as well. For, in acknowledging receipt of the woman's money, he wrote "we have purchased for your account." This absentmindedness automatically changed him from an agent to a dealer in securities, and as such he was amenable to the provisions of the Martin Act.

Some time passed and nothing happened in the way of rising values on Hattie, so the mother of the girl who was in Syracuse University called upon John the Greek for her shares. He couldn't deliver them, because, preparing for a new killing, he had promoted a gold mining company to work the Hattie claim, which was located in the Red Lake district of Canada, and had placed all of the shares in a holding company. This, an operating corporation, had no authority to deal in stocks, and John could not produce the certificates.

Waldo, the Steerer

But he offered her something "just as good," a bundle of securities of even more dubious value than those of the Hattie. The saleswoman refused to accept the substitutes and took her story to the office of Winter. From the description she gave of the beautiful rooms at the Biltmore, with its superb tapestries, Oriental rugs, and fine furniture as the setting for John's lavish entertainments, he sensed a major case of dynamiting on a big scale.

It so happened that Winter, upon taking office, had created, partly from his private fortune, a compact but highly efficient Secret Service, backed by stalwart State Troopers. He had been deeply touched by the woman's sad story, especially when she told of her sacrifices and declared she had been compelled to withdraw her daughter from the university. He at once called in the chief of his Secret Service staff and the best men in the department, told them the story and sent them out to run down the perpetrators of the fraud.

For many days the hunters could make no contact with the crooks, for John had

been using a strange name—not his own—when he robbed the hard-working mother in his Biltmore den. Then, through an underground source, they got a line on Waldo, the steerer. He was located at the Times Square Hotel, Forty-Third Street and Eighth Avenue, New York.

Armed with a subpœna issued under the authority of the Martin Act, Winter's squad of wolf hunters raided Waldo's quarters and routed him out of bed at seven o'clock in the morning. He was ordered to dress while the detectives and State Police stood by, then he was taken down to Winter's office, then located at 66 Broadway, in the shadow of Trinity Church.

A Night in a Cell

He was subjected to a bitter examination all day, but stoutly maintained he knew nothing whatever of the swindle. But, along toward twilight, his liquor-razed nerves gave way and he made a full confession, explaining the entire scheme and giving the name of John Papamakas and the Tammany man who was one of the principal victims. He also informed the investigators that John Papamakas was living at No. 410 Riverside Drive, and they immediately organized a raid for that night.

Accompanied by Waldo and the woman victim, city detectives and his own State Troopers, the chief of Winter's Secret Service proceeded, at ten o'clock in the evening, to the Papamakas demesne overlooking the Hudson River. They were readily admitted to the apartment, as richly and exquisitely appointed as had been John's workshops in two of New York's most gorgeous hotels.

John and his wife were both at home, the latter beautifully gowned, and the master of Hattie Gold Mines at ease in a handsome black satin smoking gown. He received his visitors calmly and courteously, smiled and graciously offered them chairs. Winter's representative flashed his badge, then turned to the victim of the Papamakas.

"Is this the man you gave your money to?" he asked.

"Yes!" said the woman.

"And is this his partner?" pointing to Waldo.

Again she answered in the affirmative.

"All right, Greekie," said the investigator, who knew the swindler well, "get on your hat and come on."

Papamakas volubly but vainly protested his innocence, declaring the woman had made a mistake. But in the midst of his protests he was taken from the luxury of his apartment, given a fast ride down town and placed in a cold, cheerless jail cell.

The following morning he was arraigned before Magistrate Rosenbluth, who regarded his offense as of so serious a nature that he held him for the grand jury without bail. He remained in jail only a comparatively short time, however, for he had plenty of money and was able to employ the best of legal talent. By the time he had been indicted for grand larceny, they had succeeded in having one of the higher courts fix his bail at twenty-five thousand dollars.

John paid this promptly, and as promptly vanished from New York. He was last heard of in Canada, a fugitive from justice and a bail jumper, as well as the deserter of the wife whose family connections he had used so nefariously. She, disillusioned after her husband's arrest, is seeking freedom from the bond that tied her to him.

A Question of Ethics

While preparing the case against Papamakas for the grand jury, Winter's chief investigator subpœnaed the big Tammany mooch to tell how he had been "clipped" for his seventy-five thousand dollars. But he did not wish to appear against the dynamiter, fearing the ridicule which would follow his exposure as a sucker for a stock racket would destroy him politically. Matching the seventy-five-thousand-dollar loss against possible city contracts running into millions of dollars, from which his profit would be many times what Papamakas had taken from him, he was glad to remain silent and unnamed in the case.

If Papamakas heard of his big victim's attitude he must have had one of the most satisfying moments of his career. For what could be sweeter—to a dynamiter—than a mooch who would "go" for "seventy-five grand," as the sharpshooters refer to thousands, and then refuse to "squawk?"

Perhaps the big man of business was not entitled to any sympathy in the matter. He was just one fellow who thought he was smart and met up with one who was smarter. The real iniquity of the Greek adventurer lay in his robbery of the woman who had struggled to give her daughter a better chance in life. In the first instance, the investor, wordly wise, was out to make a big cleanup. In the other case a trustful woman risked her pathetic all in the hope of making it secure in a legitimate investment.

Cashier of the Bank!

More tragic, but less pathetic was the case of the banker who demonstrated that lightning, in the guise of a fake stock proposition, may strike in the same place not only twice, but four times. In addition to sacrificing ninety thousand dollars to the wily crew which plucked him, he also forfeited his life and brought the bank for which he worked perilously close to wreckage. As it was, the bank had to close its doors for a brief period until an audit could be made of its books to ascertain if any of the institution's funds had been diverted to speculative channels.

Somehow or other, whenever a banker is revealed as the victim of a confidence game, it always seems more dreadful than is the case when any other class of citizen is the goat. That is because the banker is the guide, philosopher, and friend—as well as guardian—of the layman in matters financial, just as the doctor or lawyer is in his particular line of public service. The banker is credited, first, with an abnormal streak of caution, and second, with expert knowledge of all forms of investment.

If you ever have tried to borrow money from a bank, even a few hundred dollars, you will recall how you felt as the credit man impaled you with a cold eye while he probed the innermost secrets of your soul; how he made you wish you never had stolen those cookies from the pantry when you were a hungry kid.

Made you feel, in short, that there was something distinctly dishonest about your trying to borrow money from your bank. You were willing before he had half finished giving you the third degree, to kick yourself and wish that you never had started on the miserable enterprise of trying to get the loan. You would gladly have let the matter drop and leave without the money.

With such personal knowledge of the keenness of the banker, is it any wonder you should experience surprise, shock, unbelief, and amazement when you read that the banker has surrendered to a band of swindlers a sizable fortune, a sum sufficient at six per cent interest, to provide an income of more than one hundred dollars a week for life?

The people of Nichols, Tioga County, New York, received that kind of a jolt when they heard about the easy prey a gang of blood-sucking dynamiters had found in John Edsall, respected cashier of the Nichols National Bank.

So far as the records show, there was nothing criminal in the actions of Edsall, unless gullibility and an abnormal faith in mankind can be regarded as criminal traits. Of these, poor Edsall was plentifully endowed.

Prey for the Mob

The disaster which literally swept Edsall into a ruined man's grave was inaugurated by an undersized rat of the financial underworld, one of the waifs of Wall Street who exist on crumbs from the table of crookedness. Rodent men, too illiterate or too incompetent to promote a swindle themselves, but nevertheless sufficiently nimble-witted to filch information and peddle it to the high pressure thieves in return for a cut-in on the proceeds of the deal.

The weasel-like creature who ferreted out John Edsall for the dynamite mob that ultimately wrecked him was a little Italian who was despised even among his own kind as a nerveless, spineless double crosser and tout. With his peculiar gifts for snooping information, he managed to learn that Edsall, whose name was on a sucker list downtown, was a wonderful mooch prospect. Those who knew of him were holding him in reserve until such time as they could rig up an attractive proposition for extracting his money from him.

Mere knowledge of the fact that Edsall

had money was sufficient for the little tout, and he dashed up to the roaring Forties, where the dynamiters held forth, looking for a market for his stolen mooch name. He found a buyer in Jerome " Red " Pomeroy, a Beau Brummel of Broadway and a high pressure man with the reputation of being as slippery as an eel.

Pomeroy's passion was clothes, and he was credited with having the most extensive wardrobe of any sharpshooter on Broadway. Standing five feet and eleven inches tall and weighing about one hundred and sixty pounds, his slim, muscular figure was a fine model for clothes.

A Real Killing

He affected the professional man's garb of striped trousers and cutaway coat most of the time, and he usually displayed such fine taste in the selection of his raiment that his dazzling mane of red hair was made one of the most conspicuous units on the dance floors of the all-night drinking and dining clubs.

For some time prior to having John Edsall thrust upon him by the little Italian, Red had not been doing so well in a " business " way, and neither had some other energetic boys of his set.

Then, all of a sudden, he blazoned forth in glorious new garb. The rest of the mob were wise immediately—Red had " knocked off " a mooch!

Like maggots after cheese, they crowded around the elegant Red and begged to be let in on the snap, but he wisely kept his own counsel. For a sucker name, in the dynamiting racket, is a real asset and no sane grafter ever surrenders one unless he has to do so, or else sees the lion's share of the loot coming his way.

We now see the beginning of a game of cheating cheaters. Try as they would, with blandishments of which they were masters and prolific plying of Red with liquor, the others could not shake him loose from his secret. He did weaken sufficiently, however, to tell a couple of the boys that he had taken his man for two thousand dollars.

That was good enough for the others, who were none other than " Dynamite Dan "—otherwise Tom—Kelley and Mr. Packey Lennon, known as " the Butterfly Man of Broadway." Each of these worthies was rated as clever as Red himself, and the latter knew it. Although, it must be told, the escutcheon of Mr. Dynamite Dan Kelley was slightly smirched by the fact that his handsome countenance adorned the rogues' gallery of New York, due to a bit of youthful carelessness in being caught in a confidence racket.

Be it known that the dynamiters and other swindlers have their own system of getting the financial rating on a prospective victim and, if they cannot obtain the necessary information there are certain alleged mercantile agencies which will do it for them—for a good price.

Thus, Dynamite Dan and Packey counseled Red to get a " line " on his sucker and, if he seemed possessed of sufficient " sugar," or money, they would work a " peat " on him. In other words, make him the subject of a real killing by selling him a given stock and then pretending to have a market wherein, if he had several times the number of shares he was known to hold, he could sell his block at a substantial profit.

Done By Telephone

Red cogitated the matter over many Scotch highballs, and finally agreed to the proposal. He quickly ascertained the financial rating of John Edsall, deemed his holdings sufficient for the purpose in mind, and cast in with the other two precious thieves.

Would you be duckling enough to let some unknown person canvass you out of two thousand dollars by long distance telephone for a stock of which you knew nothing? Well, that is what poor John Edsall, supposedly cautious bank cashier, did.

That was Red's first contribution on the " peat " after he agreed to let the other two in on his good thing. He explained to them that he had obtained the name—never mind how—and had called Edsall by long distance telephone to offer him a few shares of Interstate Mortgage bonds.

These were legitimate securities, but they only had a market value, among unlisted securities, of six dollars a share. In a

previous article, mention was made of these same bonds having been used to swindle Dr. Babcock, professor of economics at New York University, of almost two thousand dollars, the perpetrator of the fraud now being a resident of Atlanta, where the Federal prison is located.

The caliber of men these fellows chose for their victims is a key to their boldness and cleverness.

Red went on to say that he had sold Mr. Edsall two thousand dollars' worth of Interstate Mortgage at something like seventy dollars a share. This meant that he had only about twenty-eight shares of the stuff, the real value of which would be less than one hundred and seventy dollars.

"Glad to Take Them"

With the history of the case revealed, Red, Packey, and Dynamite Dan held a triple christening party, out of which they emerged with brand new family names. They then rented a handsome suite of offices in the Capitol Theatre Building at Fifty-First and Broadway, New York, and went to work on Edsall immediately.

Red Pomeroy, who had been Mr. So-and-so when he sold Edsall the securities originally, now became transformed into Mr. Henley, or a similar name, president of the Broadway Finance Corporation. Again he brought into play the old reliable long distance telephone and, when he had John Edsall on the wire far up in New York State, told him that the financial syndicate of which he was the head was buying up control of the Interstate Mortgage Company and were willing to take his stock at a price which would give him—Edsall—a neat profit. The conversation ran about as follows:

Pomeroy: Mr. Edsall, our syndicate is engaged in acquiring control of the Interstate and we find your name on the list of persons who hold stock in that corporation. If your holdings are sufficient to make it worth while, we will be glad to take over all you have at one hundred dollars a share.

Edsall: But I only have about twenty-five or thirty shares of it.

Pomeroy: That's too bad, Mr. Edsall, because you were in a way of making a nice little profit on your investment, no doubt. Sorry—by.

Two telephone receivers click upon their hooks. At one end of the line there is a chuckle, at the other a sigh of defeat.

That conversation had cleared the way for the "peat," and laid the corner stone of the swindling structure that was to be reared in the near future. Edsall had now been opened up, his cupidity aroused by the knowledge that, if he had a sufficient number of Interstate Mortgage shares, he could sell out at a profit of thirty dollars per share. He was ready for "clipping."

Three days passed and then, to his surprise and delight, Mr. Edsall went to the long distance telephone to find that Mr. So-and-so—in reality, Packey Lennon or Dynamite Dan—was at the other end of the line. The salesman had got hold of a few more shares of Interstate, it would seem, and he had just called up to ascertain if Mr. Edsall would care to take them off his hands.

Would he? How much of it did he have? About twenty-five thousand dollars' worth? Glad to take them. Just express them cash on delivery to him at Nichols, and he would lift them with a certified check. His orders were obeyed, the six dollar value securities were shipped to him by express—to avoid the embarrassing detail of explaining away possible future charges of using the mails to defraud—and he acquired them in exchange for a certified check of the value of twenty-five thousand dollars, paying the previous share price of seventy-five dollars.

A Deal of Magnitude

In the course of his conversation with the supposed president of the non-existent financial syndicate, Edsall had been given the telephone number of the latter organization. So, immediately upon getting his new allotment of shares, he called up the president and told him what he had.

"That's fine," said President Pomeroy, or whatever name he was using. "Edsall, you're a fast worker, and we're glad to do business with you. Our vice president in charge of the Interstate purchase will be up to see you in a few days and take your

holdings off your hands at the hundred dollar figure."

Edsall waited a week, but the purchasing agent did not show up. He was not particularly concerned, however, because he knew that in deals of such magnitude things were likely to bob up to disrupt the working schedule. And, sure enough, his deductions proved correct, for the very next day the president of the syndicate called him up and apologized for the non arrival of the buying vice president, explaining that he had had to run out to the Middle West to unsnarl a purchase involving many thousands of Interstate shares.

Set for the Grand Slam

He probably, the president regretted, would be detained out there for two or three weeks longer. But, meanwhile, the syndicate president hoped, Mr. Edsall would preserve those securities for him and, if possible, try and dig up some more among his friends.

"We can handle as much again as you now have," he informed the banker.

Whew! That meant that Edsall must get about thirty thousand dollars more of the Interstate certificates. But it meant double the profit he had previously sighted on the horizon, and he determined to get the stock if he could.

Having thus kept their mooch in line by dangling the bait of double profits before his eyes, the dynamiters now decided to let him rest awhile. They didn't attack him again for almost two weeks. Then his unseen friend of the long distance telephone, from whom he already had bought twenty-seven thousand dollars' worth of the issue, called him and asked if he would be interested in taking over about thirty thousand dollars' worth more. He not only would, but did.

It seems that about this time Edsall was at the end of his own resources and had to seek outside assistance to swing his big deal. Whether he borrowed the money or not was not very clear, but it was said that he enlisted the aid of a millionaire lumberman of Owego, New York, George Fenderson, either as partner or backer.

At any rate, he paid over the thirty thousand and he again called his Broadway financial syndicate and told the president of his good fortune in getting the additional stock. For which gladsome intelligence he received the heartiest congratulations and thanks of the president, our friend Red Pomeroy.

This thing was so soft that the trio decided to play him for a grand slam, and so they decided to invite him down to the palatial offices in the Capitol Theater Building for a conference. It was arranged and the stage was set to receive him.

At this juncture the ugly game of cheating cheaters thrust its ugly head into the situation in the person of the little Italian who had first discovered Edsall's name. While the dapper dynamiters had split more than fifty thousand dollars of Edsall's money, the discoverer had not received a cent.

But, in his own peculiar way, he learned that the three had a mooch coming into town at an early hour the next morning, to be met at Grand Central Terminal by the exquisitely dressed gentleman whose face adorns the rogues' gallery, Mr. Dynamite Dan Kelley. He rightly surmised that the sucker was Edsall, his discovery, and he decided to declare himself in on the play.

Going to the offices of the dynamiters, he informed them that he wanted his "bit" out of the takings from Edsall, threatening, if they refused to share him in, to expose them to Edsall as he came into the building with the sucker. They laughed him out of the office.

Introductions All Around

When, however, they later found him lurking outside the building, they realized that he meant to carry out his threat. So, to stall him off and placate him, they told him Pomeroy had lined Edsall up for another two thousand dollar job and that his share of it would be six hundred dollars. This satisfied the little Italian.

That night, in anticipation of the morrow's fifty thousand dollar coup, it seems that Dynamite Dan Kelley and Packey Lennon staged an all night celebration, the result being that Dynamite Dan, who was to meet Edsall, showed up at the rendez-

vous in what he later described as a " stinking " condition.

However, his state evidently did not register with Edsall, because he made no comment at the time, or later, and permitted himself to be escorted to the thieves' den in the building which houses what has been called the most beautiful theater in the world.

There, the usual business of absorbing Scotch whisky had given way to the business of appearing busy. A great display of activity met the eye of Edsall as he walked into the " trap," which had every appearance of a private banking or brokerage office under full steam. The poor dupe was introduced, with due formality, to Mr. Lennon, but the sorrel-topped Pomeroy was absent. Nevertheless, the business of stringing him anew was quickly under way.

The End of the Game

Remember, please, that until he was confronted by the illuminated Dynamite Dan Kelley at Grand Central some minutes previously, Edsall never had laid eyes on any of the men to whom he had given more than fifty thousand perfectly good dollars! He was now meeting his trimmers *en banc*, as they say in the courts, for Lennon and Kelley were the ones who were actually jobbing the stock to him.

While clerks were whirling in and out of the offices with bundles of papers—supposedly bona fide securities—opening and closing a huge empty safe, the negotiations were carried on. The swindlers were selling Edsall more of the Interstate shares and doing a fine job of talking. He, in his turn, had very little to say, and mentioned not at all the fact that he was loading up with the stuff so that he could unload it on the Broadway syndicate at a profit of thirty dollars per share.

The upshot of the negotiations that bright morning was that Edsall engaged to take fifty thousand dollars more of the paper, to be paid for in two installments of twenty-five thousand each. He fully intended to do that, but, by a strange trick of fate, the dynamiters were destined to receive only half of the total amount.

Edsall, as per his agreement, dispatched a check for twenty-five thousand dollars through the Federal Reserve Bank at New York. But there it was found he had made one of those odd errors which are committed, at some time or other, by all of us. In one part of the check he wrote twenty-five thousand dollars, as he intended, but in another he wrote twenty-five *hundred* dollars.

This discrepancy being discovered at the bank, the check naturally was voided and returned to the maker. But Edsall was a sincere mooch and he promptly sent another check, free from flaws and good for twenty-five thousand dollars.

When the boys heard about that ill-fated first check, they had a hunch that Lady Luck was about to desert them, and, while subsequent events proved they would have received the other twenty-five thousand dollars in due season, they decided their position was getting " hot " and that the discreet thing to do was to cut their line and let the fish get away. So, with the record showing that more than eighty thousand dollars' worth of Edsall's money had found its way into their pockets, they closed their handsome offices and wandered out into the wide open spaces of Broadway.

So far as they were concerned, Edsall could keep the rest of his money, along with his precious Interstate shares, and await the coming of the syndicate's purchasing agent, who never would show up.

Expiating a Crime!

But, while the dynamiters were through with him, Edsall was not through with the stock business. Nor with the business of being a perfect mooch. He was destined for a new adventure, with a specious gentleman now sojourning at Sing Sing acting the rôle of villain.

This individual is known by the picturesque title of " Dapper Don " Gutterson, with a record of financial chicanery covering many lines and many years of activity. At present he is serving a term in Sing Sing for a bond swindle apart from the Edsall job, but he is still under indictment in the latter case, and will have to stand trial when he comes out of the penitentiary walls at some date in the future.

The appearance of Dapper Don on Edsall's horizon was said to be the result of a little fancy double crossing in which Red Pomeroy figured as the manipulator. Gutterson and Red, years before, had been associated in business which culminated with their arrest and indictment for a half million dollar swindle.

Upon their conviction, Red had expiated his share of the crime by serving a single day in jail, while Dapper Don had to remain in durance vile for thirty days. If they split fifty-fifty on the half million dollars, Red, with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars as his bit, registers the highest earning power for one day's service in the history of the world. Gutterson, doing the thirty days, earned his share, then, at the rate of eight thousand, three hundred and thirty-three dollars per diem. Not such a bad scale itself.

Edsall Gets Suspicious

Shortly after Pomeroy, Lennon, and Kelley withdrew their fangs from the unfortunately gullible Edsall, Dapper Don, seated in a splendid motor car, rolled into the town of Nichols, New York, where the bank cashier was a citizen of substance. That the latter was still unsuspecting is demonstrated by what Gutterson did to him.

Seeking out Edsall with the boldness characteristic of him, Gutterson engaged him in a discussion of stocks and investments. He learned, among other things, that Edsall held wads of Interstate paper, and he tactfully suggested that perhaps the banker was making a mistake in placing all his eggs in one basket. The idea took root with Edsall, and he in time agreed that perhaps Gutterson was right. He still had that twenty-five thousand dollars which was to complete his fifty thousand dollar deal with the New York boys—and Gutterson knew it.

Putting on his strongest pressure method, Gutterson managed to engage Edsall in a deal whereby the latter parted with a block of his Interstate shares—they, at least, were worth six dollars apiece—and ten thousand dollars in cash. In exchange, he received from Gutterson a wad of engraved paper which had practically no value whatever. Dapper Don bade him a fervid farewell, reëntered his beautiful motor, and rolled out of the town which boasted Edsall as a citizen.

That is how the upstate man was looted for more than ninety thousand dollars, and now comes the story of how his defilers were run to earth and placed behind prison bars.

Some time after Gutterson had visited him, Edsall seems to have risen to the suspicion that perhaps all was not right with his Interstate deal. It had been weeks since he had heard anything from the financial syndicate about purchasing his holdings and he had heard nothing from the stock sellers since he had paid his last twenty-five thousand dollars.

Futile efforts to find trace of the dynamiters ripened his suspicion into certainty. He felt that he had been trimmed and he investigated, as he should have done at the outset, the market for Interstate Mortgage stock. There he learned the truth, and realized for the first time that he had been swindled out of many thousands of dollars. His predicament could not be kept from the directors of the bank, there was an inquiry, and the institution closed its doors for several days while an audit was made of its affairs.

Winter's Case Goes Up-state

The bank being a national institution, the Department of Justice was notified and its operatives went to Nichols. They began a hunt for the swindlers, but, after several weeks, had failed to get a trace of their men. The matter was then referred to Winter, as head of the Fraud Prevention Bureau.

From descriptions given by Edsall, Winter's secret service chief immediately recognized Dapper Don Gutterson, Packey Lennon, and Dynamite Dan Kelley. As Edsall never had seen Red Pomeroy, the man who initiated him into his downfall, there was no description of him available. Winter, under the authority of the Martin Act, swore out warrants in Tioga County, charging grand larceny to the three high pressure men, who were identifiable from the Edsall descriptions.

The reason Winter took out warrants in the upstate county rather than in New York, where the gang would most likely be apprehended, was predicated on the knowledge that in the rural section the criminals, if caught, would have to stand trial before a backwoods jury, combat the charges on their merits and stand or fall on the evidence.

In the big city, they had ways of enlisting influence and "fixing" which might bring them scot free or get them off with some ridiculous penalty like those imposed upon Gutterson and Pomeroy in the half million dollar swindle.

Dapper Don Surrenders

The chase now was on, with Winter's picked men and burly State Troopers determined to close in on the dynamiters as quickly as possible. It lasted for many months, however, and led through most of the big hotels and most glittering cafés in the White Light district.

Then, after one lead following another had been run out, there came the break. The little thing that, typically, the big money crooks had overlooked in the hurry of getting the swag.

It was the little Italian ferret from Wall Street. They had neglected, out of their huge stake of more than eighty thousand dollars, to pay him his petty six hundred dollars! They double crossed him, as they had intended doing even as they promised him the money. And he was sore.

So sore, in fact, that he was babbling his hate all up and down Broadway.

Soon, through the underground maintained by the Winter secret service, his wailings came to the ears of the hunters. They picked up the Italian and, after lengthy examination, he squealed. He poured into the ears of the man-hunters the complete story of the swindle, from the time he had picked Edsall's name off the sucker list until Gutterson had bored him for the last ten thousand dollars.

While the hunt was on Gutterson, who was operating a racket known as the Union Mortgage Company, again entered his elegant car and drove brazenly into Nichols. He went to the authorities.

"I understand," he said, "there is a warrant out for me. I have no idea what it is for, but here I am."

They obligingly arrested him, and his bail was set at ten thousand dollars. He laid the money down on the desk and walked out of the place. He got into his car and drove back to New York.

Red Pomeroy, the ring leader, had fled, and it was more than a year before anybody engaged in the hunt laid eyes on his flaming hair; this despite the fact that local officers and Department of Justice agents were looking for him all over the land.

Where the red-crested dandy had been hiding during the long hunt was not ascertained, but one day word was received at the Winter offices that Pomeroy had boarded a train in Detroit and was due to arrive in New York at a given time. When he stepped off the train at Grand Central he was welcomed home with vast enthusiasm by a reception committee made up entirely of operatives from the deputy attorney general's office.

Red was shocked and chagrined, not to say disappointed by the turn events had taken, but those emotions constituted the only balm he got out of the situation. He was escorted at once to Winter's office and, after many hours of severe questioning, was placed aboard a train and taken to the Tioga County jail.

The Law Is Relentless

While the hunt had been going on, Edsall died of a broken heart, and it looked to Pomeroy as if, the chief witness and victim of the swindle being thus removed, there was no way by which anything could be proved against him and the others who participated in the fraud. Unfortunately for the dynamiters, though, Winter's men, as the result of the little Italian's "squawk," had picked up two minor figures in the job, known as Sanford Tack and Charlie Whitaker.

They were indicted, along with their chiefs, and immediately turned State's evidence. Their testimony helped to convict Pomeroy, and he was sentenced to serve five years in Auburn prison, where he was sojourning at last reports. The in-

formers were liberated under suspended sentences.

During the trial of Pomeroy the net was spread for Packey Lennon, who had used some of his ill-got wealth to start a flashy cabaret on Broadway, and he was finally apprehended one day as he was leaving a brokerage office of shady reputation.

Taken upstate to face the music, he arrived almost at the moment that the jury brought in its verdict of guilty against Pomeroy. He was brought to trial shortly thereafter, convicted, and sentenced to serve eleven months in the reformatory at Elmira, New York, as a first offender.

A Farmer's Story

Thus, with his conviction, three of the four principals who participated in despoiling the misguided Edsall were behind bars—Pomeroy, Lennon, and Gutterson, although the last named had not been brought to trial on the indictment naming him in the case. Dynamite Dan Kelley is the only one of the quartette who escaped capture, but he has been made a fugitive and has been driven out of New York, his choice of all the real estate that goes to make up this old earth.

The Edsall swindle was not the biggest that ever was put over via the "peat" racket, but it affords a splendid illustration of a gang of dynamiters functioning at their best—or worst—and proves that no man, not even one saturated with the cautiousness bred by banking policy, is immune from the wiles of the polished gentry who gain their livelihood through their ability to outtalk and outthink the average business man.

The experiences of Edsall and the Tammany contractor heretofore mentioned are glittering examples of what can be done with so-called mooches of intelligence, men familiar with stock gambling and big finance. But for downright dumbness, they do not begin to compare with one Stephen Baker, a truly rural citizen engaged in farming outside the little town of Belmont, New York, about fourteen miles from Buffalo.

He was such a perfect set-up for the dynamiters that it is difficult to decide whether one should laugh or cry over what a gang of fast workers did to him and his fortune. For so thoroughly sold was he that even after his bank and the attorney general's office showed him where he had been buncoed out of more than twenty-two thousand dollars, he refused to believe it and still thought the dressed up dudes were joshing him.

Baker's story, as it is unfolded here, will appear to the reader so improbable—so comical—in spots that we may be suspected of rewriting "The Old Homestead" or some other rural comedy drama, so be assured at the outset that the narrative is one hundred per cent true.

Baker was the victim of what is known among the high pressure gentry as "laying in a 'Zex,'" or slipping a hot one to the mooch.

It is springtime, in 1925, and there are gathered in a charming suite at the Alamac Hotel, on upper Broadway, sundry lovely women and well groomed men. They are drinking much liquor to the accompaniment of gay laughter and music of the brand that makes one giddy. A perfectly grand time is being had by all, and this has been going on for many weeks, with a group of clever dynamiters supplying the ammunition to keep things lively.

A Brand New Wrinkle

But even dynamiters sometimes run low in funds, and that was a contingency now confronting the hosts to the merry company at the Alamac. It was imperative that they turn a trick quickly if the good times were to continue. So they decided to buy a sucker list and work a racket.

For their purposes, any old sucker list would suffice, but it so happened that the list they acquired was that of a tire promotion inaugurated during the boom days of the war, stock for which had been worked off on almost four thousand investors. This list was a ten-strike for the dynamiters, for it not only provided them with the sucker names, but also presented a sorely needed new "angle" for separating the public from its surplus cash.

About this time, Ford Motor Company stock, selling for about four hundred and

fifty dollars a share, became the medium for a brand new wrinkle in stock dealing. Reasoning that the market figure was prohibitive for the average investor, certain legitimate brokerage houses in Wall Street conceived a plan for giving the small trader a chance to deal in the issue without too much outlay of capital.

This plan provided for the purchase in open market of Ford shares which were then split up into one hundred parts, or units, of a face value of four dollars and a half. A transfer office was established and these shares were offered to the public at their face value of four dollars and a half each, plus two dollars to cover the original investment and expense of handling the units.

With Full Stage Settings

This made the price of each unit six dollars and a half, so that a man with sixty-five dollars could acquire ten units, or one-tenth of a full share of Ford stock, and share in dividends proportionately. Millions of dollars' worth of these transactions are said to have been consummated, and the " Ford Motor Unit " market became one of the most active little trading points in the financial district.

The unit certificates closely resembled the real full shares of Ford Motor stock in appearance, so that the unwary investor might be easily tricked by an unscrupulous dealer. This situation was made to order for the Alamac boys, and they immediately conceived one of the most brazen confidence schemes imaginable. A merger between the Ford Motor Car Company, the biggest automobile property in the world, and the mythical tire company that long before had been listed among the " stillborn " war babies, if you please.

The promptness with which they perfected this imaginary deal was due to the fact that the stock ghoul is a schemer at all times, and this particular crew reasoned there were enough suckers on the tire list who would pay the price of a full share of Ford stock for a unit worth only one one-hundredth of the amount to make a campaign profitable. So they set forth to pilfer and rob.

Out of the list of nearly four thousand purchasers of the tire company stock, they selected friend Stephen Baker of Belmont, New York, as the first beneficiary of their new philanthropy. He was shown to hold three thousand shares of tire stock, bought at one dollar a share some years before.

It would never do for them to approach a canny farmer cold on a stock proposition such as they had in mind, so they devised a little drama that would afford Stephen a thrill and give them much profit.

Came a day, as they say in the movies, when a gorgeous Rolls-Royce motor car came whirling along the Belmont road and, just as it reached the gate leading to the Baker homestead, it suddenly halted. It seems something had gone wrong with the engine. Five immaculately garbed business men stepped out into the road to stretch their legs and see what was wrong with their car.

Stephen Baker gazed at them from the porch of the home that had been in his family for generations. He was the typical hard-working American farmer—slightly under six feet tall, spare of build, with shoulders bent and hands warped by hard work in the fields. His ruddy face was topped by a pair of heavily prismed glasses, for Stephen was regrettably nearsighted. It were well for the well dressed strangers that they could not know Stephen's idea of " big money," else they should have rolled along their way and missed a small fortune.

Ten Dollars a Day!

For Stephen, some time later, boasted to the chief of the Winter secret service, by way of proving his shrewdness, that he had taken advantage of the sugar shortage during the war to make a fortune.

" Warn't nothing said," he declared, " against usin' honey while they were holdin' down on the sugar, and I just about made a fortune in honey. Why, man, my sales of honey used to run sometimes as high as *ten dollars a day!* Yes, sir, I made *big* money."

While Stephen was looking over the city fellers, they, in turn, were giving keen study to him without his being aware of the scrutiny. Soon they called him down to

the gate and asked him if he could lend them some tools. Stephen, kindly soul, did so, and even tried, in his awkward way, to help repair the car.

All the dressed-up strangers did the same, with the result that they soiled their perfectly manicured hands. This they had done deliberately, as a means of gaining entry to the Baker home. They asked if they might wash their hands, and Stephen hospitably invited them into the house.

While he was getting towels and wash basins ready, the strangers animatedly discussed some big deal in which they were engaged, and Stephen, remembering the success of his flyer into honey, listened in on the conversation.

"Your Fortune Is Made!"

From what he was able to gather, it seems these gentlemen were the principal owners of the tire concern in which he held three thousand shares of stock. They were on their way to Buffalo, where they were to be joined at dinner in the Statler Hotel by Henry Ford, himself in person. After dinner they were to close the deal whereby their company was to become a part of the vast Ford organization, and their tires were to go out on all new Ford cars.

The gentlemen had introduced themselves by names which sounded very financial and important, but as Stephen sized up the party he saw, actually:

1—Samuel Taschoff, otherwise "Hot Stove Sammy," veteran of a hundred swindles; about five feet, eight inches tall, and weighing one hundred and forty pounds. A prepossessing gentleman with black hair and brown eyes, known to have a penchant for two hundred dollar suits, and the tenant of an elaborate apartment on West End Avenue in New York.

2—Murray Burkhardt, a burly and forceful individual who bore the title of "the Ape," because of his physical resemblance to one.

3—Henry Kahn, a rotund, dignified man of quiet mien, with silver hair at his temples. Known as the Bull or the Banker, because of his ability to pose as a policeman or a financier as needed.

4—Mike Lawlor, a high pressure stock swindler for whom there were said, at one time, to be one hundred and fifty warrants. Noted for his made-to-order Stetson hats and twenty-five dollar shirts.

5—Sammy Golden, a desperado well known in the underworlds of Philadelphia and New York, also a very superior dynamiter.

As Stephen returned to the room with towels and basins, the financiers were still absorbed in their own affairs, but Hot Stove Sammy Taschoff, acting as spokesman for the party, thanked him for his kindness and expressed the wish that they might be able to reciprocate. Then Stephen, plainly embarrassed, explained that he had overheard part of their conversation, and that he was the owner of three thousand shares of the stock they were negotiating with Henry Ford.

"That's splendid!" said Hot Stove Sammy enthusiastically. "Mr. Baker, your fortune is made! Suppose you let us look at the stock."

The Travelers Are Generous

Stephen left the room, to return shortly carrying a large black strong box which, when opened, was seen to hold a stack of very good bonds, some of which had been purchased through S. W. Straus & Co., of New York. The three thousand tire shares also were there, a fact which had been known to the swindlers from the first day they looked over their sucker list.

So appreciative of Stephen's kindness were they that the important travelers, after a brief whispered conference, decided to let him in on the Ford deal. They told him they would let him have a twenty-five thousand dollar interest which he could finance by putting up his three thousand dollars' worth of tire stock and twenty-two thousand dollars in bonds or other good collateral. They even went so far as to invite him to dine with them and Henry Ford at the Statler that evening. Stephen was almost overwhelmed by his good fortune, and he accepted the invitation.

It was suggested that he spruce up and put on his best suit, and that he be ready when their car should come, at six that evening, to take him to Buffalo and the

presence of billions. Just before they were to leave, the austere banker, Mr. Kahn, suggested that it might be a good idea if they closed the deal with Mr. Baker on the spot, because in the turmoil of the vaster deal with Mr. Ford they might forget his smaller proposition and he would be denied an opportunity of a lifetime.

Stephen felt that way about it, too, and so he at once turned over to them twenty-two thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edge bonds, receiving in return naught but a promise to send him twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of Ford Motor Units, and a final admonition to be ready when the car should come for him that evening.

Valuable Ford Stock!

The crooks should have been satisfied to go with what they had, but, buzzards that they were, they had to pick the carcass clean; and in so doing they laid the trail that was ultimately to bring them to grief.

In their lightning-like survey of the contents of Baker's strong box they had seen a bank book which showed him to have a savings account of one hundred and fifty dollars, deposited in a Pittsburgh bank. One of the gang suggested that the expense of transferring the tire stock and other little details would amount to about one hundred and fifty dollars, so Stephen wrote a check for the amount, thus wiping out his little savings. His friends then left.

Six o'clock that evening found Stephen, freshly shaved and in a state of exultation, waiting for the Rolls-Royce. He hadn't deemed it necessary to keep secret the fact that he was to dine with Henry Ford, and the result was that the little town of Belmont was buzzing over his great good fortune. But, for some reason, the Rolls-Royce never arrived, and Stephen solaced himself with the thought that it probably had broken down along the road or else the bankers had found it necessary to alter their plans at the last minute.

He never questioned their good faith, and his trust seemed to be well placed when, a few days later, a package insured for twenty-five thousand dollars came addressed to Stephen. It arrived via American Express, because the gang, like the Pomeroy mob, had no relish for mail fraud prosecution. The station agent rang up Stephen on the telephone, and, as it was a party line, a large part of the town of Belmont learned for the first time that Stephen Baker was a man of means.

The package contained Ford Motor Units, worth four dollars and a half apiece, but assigned to him at one hundred times that much. For his twenty-two thousand, one hundred and fifty dollars he had received paper worth exactly two hundred and fifty dollars. He gave them only a cursory examination, then tossed them into the black box and went about his farming.

A few weeks later he needed some ready cash, and he decided to borrow it on his new Ford stock. Taking the unit certificates to his bank, he asked for the loan and was informed that the collateral he offered was only worth two hundred and fifty dollars.

Instead of being alarmed, Stephen became indignant and told the bankers that they didn't know their business. Some time later, in Buffalo, he visited the broker who had sold him the bonds he had given to the sharpers and told him of his deal.

One Little Error

He was again informed that he had been swindled, and the broker put the matter up to the fraud bureau. Even now Baker thought he was being made the butt of a joke and didn't want to make a complaint against the dynamiters.

Other complaints about the Ford Motor Unit swindlers had been filtering into Winter's office, but the case of Baker revealed such raw piracy that he sidetracked all the others and concentrated on it. He took over personal control of the case and assigned his best secret service operatives the task of running down the swindlers, telling them to spare no expense in landing their quarry. As Winter is himself a millionaire, this meant that he was ready to delve into his personal fortune to bring the crooks to justice.

Baker was of little help to the inquiry, due to his aversion toward the investigation and his nearsightedness, which prevented him from giving a fair description of the men who had swindled him. He was

able to give Winter's office the numbers of his stolen bonds and the cancelled check for one hundred and fifty dollars which they had squeezed from him at the last moment. This comparatively small sum proved to be the "little error" which broke this particular crime wide open.

Through an undercover man in the employ of Winter, it was learned that this check, indorsed by "Joe Brown"—later revealed as Murray Burkhardt—had been cashed by a bootlegger named Goldman who, in turn, had cashed it in Lindy's restaurant, next to the Rivoli Theater on Broadway, and at that time the hangout of the dynamite mobs.

The Farmer Comes to Town

The undercover man told Winter that the "Zex crowd," or hundred percenters, hived at Lindy's, and a secret service operative was sent to work his way into the sharpers. Through fragments of conversation, picked up at various tables, this investigator got a pretty fair notion of who the men were that had dynamited Baker.

He learned, also, that the same gang was planning a raid in Syracuse, at the Onondaga Hotel. Winter quickly notified his Buffalo representative to get Baker and have him in Syracuse for the purpose of identifying the crooks, then he and a force of secret service men picketed the train on which the gang was supposed to leave from Grand Central Terminal.

The dynamiters did not board the train—it was learned later that they had crossed to New Jersey and traveled north via the Lackawanna—but the Winter party proceeded to Syracuse, expecting to find the gang there.

When Winter spotted Stephen Baker in the Onondaga he almost suffered a stroke. The man looked so palpably what he was, a farmer, that the head of the Fraud Bureau feared some sharpshooter might kidnap him before he had a chance to identify the New York crooks. For one thing, he had on a frowzy overcoat and wore his trousers tucked into his boots.

Winter sent him forth to be rearranged sartorially, buying him a wing collar, black tie and new overcoat. He also made him drop his trousers legs outside his boots. But even in the new make-up, the detectives had a busy time guarding their man against pickpockets and others who spotted him as legitimate prey.

All day long the Winter party, planted at strategic points in the Onondaga lobby, waited for the New York dynamiters, but they failed to show up. That night Winter went to Buffalo and instructed his chief investigator to take Baker down to New York. The investigator reported upon arrival that the Belmont man was in terror all the way, being sure the train would be wrecked because it was going so fast.

His first night in New York, Baker was housed in a small hotel across from the Grand Central Terminal and the clerks were under instructions not to let him out on the street lest he fall into the hands of a confidence man. The next morning, *en route* to Winter's office, Baker was in a state bordering upon panic, fearful that the high buildings would fall down upon and crush the taxicab.

Trouble in Identification

Learning that some of the suspects were at the Alamac Hotel, arrangements were made to raid their apartment that afternoon at five o'clock, an hour when the highballs would be bouncing and a crowd would be present. In preparation, Winter's Secret Service man who was hobnobbing with the swindlers and regarded as one of their crowd, was brought in and introduced to Baker as Mr. Walker. He was told just who Walker was and instructed not to show any sign of recognition when he saw him later at the hotel.

That afternoon, as per schedule, the raid was made. Murray Burkhardt and Henry Kahn, two of the men wanted, were in the crowd which was lined against the wall so that Baker might look them over. But he only was able to identify one man—Walker. Yet, in the line-up were two of the men who had robbed him in his own home.

One of these was Burkhardt, the other was Kahn. The former is the man who had taken his check for one hundred and fifty dollars and cashed it, the latter the one who had put on the crusher that placed

the twenty-two thousand dollars' worth of bonds in the hands of the dynamiters.

Baker's identification of Walker, the man he was instructed not to recognize, almost cost that young man his life as the betrayer of the mob and only exceptionally quick thinking extricated him from his perilous position.

Knowing as he did that Burkhardt and Kahn were two of the men wanted, Winter nevertheless had to let them go as the result of Baker's failure to pick them out of the crowd. Realizing that the man, due to his visual impairment and his natural disposition, would be of no help to him, Winter sent Baker back home and, a few days after the fiasco at the Alamac, forwarded to him a rogue's gallery picture of Burkhardt. The farmer readily identified him, then, as one of the swindlers.

When Crooks Fall Out

But his help was now too late to be of any good. A warrant for Burkhardt was sworn out, but when State Troopers went to serve it they learned their man had fled to England. Kahn also had taken flight. Both men are to-day fugitives from New York, facing arrest any time they show their faces in the metropolis or any other part of the country.

Through the bond numbers supplied by Baker, the Winter agents now sought to work back to the dynamiters and, after some intensive investigation, met with partial success. The bonds were traced to several legitimate banking houses, each of which mentioned the same man as the purveyor of the securities. This man, when located, satisfied the probers that he was an innocent party in the matter, but what was more important, supplied them with the name of the man from whom he had purchased the bonds.

This turned out to be Hilly Goldman, the bootlegger who had previously cashed the fatal check which first pointed the way to the bandit crew. Subsequently, it was learned that Goldman was in league with the dynamiters, acting as the "schleifer" or fence for the gang and taking a rake-off for each bit of plunder of which he disposed.

The man to whom Goldman had sold the Baker bonds led the Winter agents to the bootlegger's rooms in the Markwell Hotel, on West Forty-Ninth Street off Broadway. They invaded his quarters and placed him under arrest on the charge of receiving stolen property; in other words, acting as a fence.

At first Goldman tried to brazen the thing out, waxed indignant and disclaimed any connection with the dynamiters. He admitted he had sold the bonds, but asserted he had received them in payment for a cargo of contraband liquor.

Asked to describe the men who had given him the securities, he misled the police by giving them false descriptions and locating his alleged patrons in Chicago and other Western cities. He did his best to be loyal to the gang and, if they had been loyal to him, they might never have been brought to trial.

During the first ten days of his incarceration on the fence charge, Goldman, who had been taken to Rochester, received money from the gang and then the remittances stopped. An effort was made to double cross him into the penitentiary, the lawyer who had been engaged for him by the gang, advising him to plead guilty to the charge that laid against him. But, instead of accepting this counsel, Goldman, by no means a fool, put the double cross on his betrayers by squealing to Winter.

The Only Safeguard

In return for the information given by Goldman, Winter agreed to protect him against the mob's vengeance. Goldman declared that he fully expected to be "bumped off," murdered for revealing the secrets of the dynamiters, and at his behest, Winter delayed bringing him to trial for eight months, or until all danger of his assassination had passed. He willingly remained in jail during that time.

The result of Goldman's confession was that "Hot Stove Sammy" Taschoff, the only member of the original quintet still in New York, was arrested the next morning. It was barely seven o'clock when a raiding party from Winter's office descended upon the magnificent West End apartment of the redoubtable Sammy, who was in the

midst of his morning bath. Finding him in the tub, one of the State Troopers reached down, grabbed a handful of Sammy's luxuriant black locks, and literally lifted him up by the hair of his head.

Sammy's capture turned out to be one of the most important that had been made in years, for when his picture—the first the police ever saw of him—was broadcast through the country, he was recognized by Stephen Baker and hundreds of others who had been victimized by him in stock frauds similar to that worked on the Belmont farmer. So many places wished to get possession of Hot Stove Sammy that he was taken on a sort of triumphal tour of various cities where he had been active, and indictments were returned against him in Poughkeepsie, Pittsburgh, and dozens of other places.

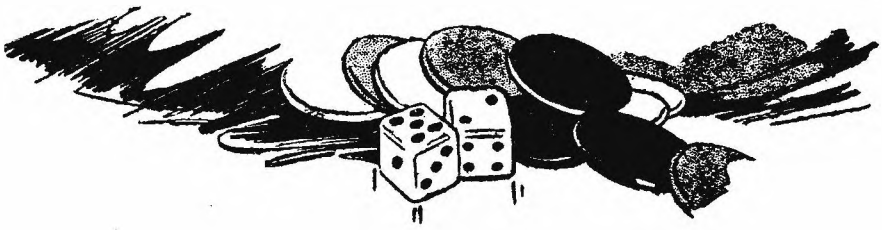
Out of all the charges against his man, Winter elected to have him tried on one at Mineola, Long Island. There Sammy was charged with having swindled a maid in the household of Supreme Court Justice Philbin out of her savings and the jury was not long in bringing in a verdict of guilty.

Sammy was sentenced to a penitentiary term of four to eight years and is now serving that "bit," with the prospect of spending a large part of his future behind prison walls, because scores of untried indictments lie against him in all parts of the country. That he will be brought to trial on many of these is almost certain, because forty-five States are united now in the work of eradicating the stock swindler, and they will overlook no opportunity to make an example of such a brilliant member of the dynamiting fraternity.

Aside from the smashup of the Taschoff band, one effect of the Stephen Baker swindle was the suspension of dealing in Ford Motor Units, even by legitimate brokers. Winter, showing the vast possibilities for swindling schemes which lay in the plan, readily obtained agreement from the brokers to abandon the business and the little man's chance to get a slice of the Ford dividends was wiped out.

In the three different forms of dynamiting chronicled here, it is hard to determine whether the "mooch" or the manipulator is most deserving of censure. But there are certain specific facts which stand out. First, and most important from the standpoint of investor protection, is the fact that three dangerous bands of swindlers were wiped out. Second, that the Martin Act, in the hands of a vigorous enforcer such as Winter, is a most valuable weapon for offense and defense. And, third, that hardly any man is proof against the skillful dynamiter.

These super-salesmen, keen students of human nature, have an uncanny ability for sizing up a victim and locating his weak spot and about the only safeguard against them, so far as the layman is concerned, is for persons desirous of investing in securities never to buy any stocks or bonds without first consulting a reliable expert in financial and market affairs.



With shaking hands he produced the copy of his mother's marriage certificate

PARTNERS

By John Goodwin

WHEN THE DEAD AWAKEN RETRIBUTION IS METED TO EVERY ONE, AND THERE IS CONFUSION AS EACH RECEIVES ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS

CHAPTER XLIV

FOR BIGGER GAME

DELIA had the supreme thrill of her life, when, sitting with the tiller in her grasp, she steered for the beach and saw the little knot of men scurrying toward their boat with the speed of fugitives who find their retreat cut off. The zest of the hunter was in her blood.

"Pull!" she cried. "You've got them now—pull!"

Tommy and Maffet tugged at the oars with bursting chests and straining muscles. The long pull back from the landing stage against the wind had taken nearly ten minutes already, but they still had a spurt left in them and the boat leaped from one wave-crest to another in a cloud of spray.

For awhile Delia—neither knowing nor caring for the consequences—thought that success was sure. Then with a gasp of disappointment she saw the other boat reach the dark bulk of the ship a hundred yards ahead of her, and her eye caught a flash of foam as a propeller kicked up the water.

"They're away!" she cried.

Pursuit was hopeless now. The motor vessel was surging ahead with gathering speed. Maffet dropped his oar and spun round on this thwart.

"Hold up there! Stop!" he roared, and as a hoot of defiance came back he whipped out a police revolver and fired twice over the launch, repeating his order, and then twice more, point-blank into her as she drew clear. Maffet, a most orthodox officer

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for July 16

and seldom a man of impulse, was bursting with breathlessness and wrath and he had forgotten his surroundings and his company.

He achieved some result. There was an outburst of shouting from the launch, three tongues of flame stabbed the dark and a bullet sang close by Maffet's head, two more zipping into the water alongside the boat. Tommy flung himself in front of Delia.

"Quit that!" he cried, "you'll be getting her hit! Quit it, man!"

"Never mind about me!" said Delia. "Don't let him lose them!"

"Shooting's no good. We've lost them anyway."

They certainly had. The launch was well away. She was churning into the night at fifteen knots, headed for the sea, the dinghy towing drunkenly behind her at the end of a long line, its bow cocked high in the air. In a few minutes there was no trace of her on Loch Killin except the lather of foam left by her wake.

"Gosh!" said Tommy, mopping his forehead, "if we'd been five minutes earlier and hadn't you with us, we might have scrapped up a naval action. That was the ship that tried to ram Rab's trawler the night I dropped off the Ottawa."

Inspector Maffet preserved a stony silence.

"I'm afraid it's all my fault," sighed Delia apologetically. "They've got away with Slaney, of course. Do we have to land and make sure?"

The boat grounded on the beach. A brief inspection of the tower and the rope that lay among the broken stonework told all there was to tell.

"I think he must have hurt himself a little," said Delia. "I thought I saw them carrying somebody; they were all in a bunch."

They retreated to the boat, and Inspector Maffet's protracted silence became oppressive. It was like walking next to a loaded bomb. Delia eyed him sympathetically.

"If you seem to want to say anything, inspector, don't mind me," she suggested. Maffet shook his head sadly.

"I couldn't do it justice, madam," he said, much more quietly than she expected. "Let's get back to the castle."

Not a word was said during the homeward row. They made the boat fast to the landing stage.

"You do understand how sorry I am about this?" said Delia unhappily.

"My fault, not yours," replied Maffet. "I should have stayed on the island and let you land. Only I wanted to keep the boat by me. It was the toughest sort of luck, those fellows shoving in just while I was taking you ashore. He had been safe there all the week. Twenty minutes later, and I could have laid for that crowd and scooped them."

"If they didn't scoop you," suggested Tommy. "They were a fairly tough crowd at odds of ten to one."

"I'd have been lying up ready for them before they landed," said Maffet confidently. "They wouldn't have got away with Slaney. I'm not blaming you, Miss Allister. But we'll waste no talk on it; I want to use your telephone as quickly as possible."

The moment they reached the castle, Maffet went to the library telephone and put through a police call, which takes precedence of all others day or night. While he was busy, Delia and Tommy, wet and rather exhausted, made for the great west room, where there was a blazing fire. Just as they crowded up to it, Drumcleugh protruded an inquiring face through the doorway, apparently to see whether there was anything they wanted.

"Andy!" said Delia, "we've lost our prisoner. He's made a clean break of it and got away to sea!"

Andy raised one eyebrow.

"Ay?" he said serenely. "Aweel-weel. Ye're gey an' wet, mem. Ye should change your claes."

He helped her out of her spray-drenched raincoat and carried it away with him, making no further comment. Even Tommy was surprised at his serenity in the face of such news. The sequestration of Slaney had evidently been no secret to Drumcleugh.

"Tommy, say something nice to me," pleaded Delia. "I feel so miserable."

"Forget it!" said Tommy, drawing her on to his knee in the armchair nearest the fire. "Show me anybody with the nerve to say you're not the most wonderful kid in the world. As for the rest of it—Maffet told you not to worry."

"But it's Inspector Maffet I'm worrying about. I've let him down dreadfully. Do you think it's going to be very awkward for him? It all looked so good, too. But the way it finished up—"

"Nobody could help that. But, of course, after all the trouble you took to get Slaney—"

"Oh, Slaney! That doesn't trouble me now. I didn't really care whether he got away or not."

"You didn't—what?"

"Not really. Of course, one was rather galled to see them pull him out from under our noses like that, but as far as losing Slaney goes, it wouldn't cost me half an hour's sleep.

"You see, I lost all interest in Slaney when I found he couldn't give away Renée or whoever is sicking him on. That's all I wanted him for. But couldn't you see he didn't know? He's just a cheap, clever little crook, who hasn't even been allowed to know whose money he is earning.

"If you wanted to hire Slaney to do something crooked, Tommy, you'd take pretty good care not to put yourself in his power, wouldn't you? I'm sure I should. Probably those friends of his know more about it.

"I wonder if we could have got it out of them if we'd caught them. But Slaney himself—why, we've got most of the facts about him, and Maffet is a witness, so it clears you of any trouble.

"It's different for the inspector. Of course, he wanted Slaney, he hasn't got him and it's all through me. I should think Maffet might get into some pretty bad trouble over it, don't you? And he was ever so nice to me about it. Maffet is a gentleman."

Footsteps were heard approaching and Delia disentangled herself from Tommy and the armchair just in time. Inspector Maffet entered.

"I have put a warning through to the coast stations to stop that motor ship wherever she shows herself," he said briefly. "They'll probably get her!"

"Hope they do," said Tommy.

"I have also told the Barmouth police that the body they have is not Chaytor, and to trace up Michael Brain of Wexford. I believe that item of Slaney's story, at any rate will be found correct."

"One pearl of truth from the Slaney oyster—I think so, too. And now how about some grub and a drink before we part, inspector—for I suppose you've got to be buzzing off on this new trail?"

Inspector Maffet shook his head.

"No. I'm going to ask you to put me up here for the night, if you'll be so good," he said. "I mean to stick to Dunkillin for the present."

"My dear fellow, delighted, of course," said Tommy warmly, though with some surprise. "Then you don't—"

"I have a final word to say to you, and to Miss Allister, before I turn in," interrupted Maffet.

"I am uncommonly glad, both personally and officially, Mr. McKellar, that you are cleared of this business of the alleged Chaytor's death. When I came down here, I was afraid that was going to be a bad stumbling-block."

"A stumbling-block. What d'you mean?"

"I call it that, because it would not only have been very unpleasant for you, but it looked like getting in my way and hindering my work. I'm thankful that we're quit of it, and we owe that wholly to Miss Allister whom I should like to accept my congratulations, even if her methods were a bit irregular.

"I am going to leave the Barmouth inquest and the chasing of Slaney in other hands, and remain here over to-morrow. For I may tell you that what brought me to Dunkillin is something a good deal bigger than the disappearance of 'Harbord Chaytor.'"

"The devil it is!" said Tommy, sitting up. "Then hadn't you better tell us—"

"I prefer to say nothing more at present. It is a difficult and delicate case, and I am going to handle it my own way. But I accept your hospitality thankfully, and as you

were good enough to mention supper I should be glad of a wash and brush up."

Tommy attended to the needs of the inspector, and returning to the room, found Gillespie already laying supper with his usual air of grave efficiency.

"Make it a good supper, Gillespie," said Delia, "we've had a pretty strenuous evening all round."

"Indeed, madam?" said Gillespie, setting down a decanter of Burgundy. "I hope everything ended satisfactorily."

"Not very. We lost somebody who interested us quite a lot."

"So I understand, madam," said the butler calmly, smoothing the tablecloth, "but if I may say so, as things are now, developing it will probably make no great difference in the long run."

Delia looked at him quickly, and catching Tommy's eye, took his arm and led him out of the room.

"They're all telling us the same thing, Tommy," she murmured, "but if it's Gillespie's opinion I'm believing it. I've more confidence in him than any one in Dunkillin, Maffet not excepted."

"So have I," said Tommy. "I learned the habit when I was ten."

CHAPTER XLV

ANOTHER WOMAN

At eleven next morning when Tommy and Delia were in the library, Inspector Maffet came in abruptly. They had seen nothing of him since the night before. He breakfasted by himself at seven and left the castle, returning at ten and taking charge of the telephone in the steward's room without consulting his hosts.

The moment he entered the library they guessed that something unforeseen had happened. There was a scribbling-pad in his hand, a pencil thrust behind his ear, and about his mouth an odd, rather grim expression.

"Now what?" said Tommy.

"Luck's a queer thing," rejoined Maffet soberly. "Disarranges plans—never know when it will get up and hit you. Tod Slaney probably thought that last night—if he'd time to think of anything. This message has just come through to me from Glasgow, in answer to mine:

> "S. S. Iona, McBrayne, coasting steamer, docked at Greenock this morning, reports: At eleven fifteen last night off Isle of Eigg, in thick weather gale, fresh gale blowing, Iona collided with large motor trawler showing no lights; sunk immediately. Iona cruised round for two hours, but no trace of survivors. Very heavy sea running."

Delia said nothing. Tommy looked thoughtfully at Maffet.

"Sure it's the same?" he asked.

"What else could it be? Time and place agree. Unless we get more news, we shall never know what vessel it was, or if any one survived. These things happen at sea. Running in a gale—with no lights. She took one chance too many."

Maffet paused.

"This motor vessel," he said, "all you were able to tell me of her, was No. 99, Milford. If you were right, that number was faked; no such vessel is registered at Milford. And up to now, we hadn't traced her.

"Probably her owners kept her at some Irish port, and tracing a vessel in the Irish Free State registry, to say nothing of the thousands of creeks and loughs over there—well." He shrugged his shoulders, and smiled grimly.

"I don't know that we paid much attention to your story of the motor vessel, Mr. McKellar. She convinced me when she turned up last night. Whether we shall get a complete history of her now, is uncertain. By this report, I think we can take it that Tod Slaney and his friends are—out and under."

Tommy nodded.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"Nothing, personally," replied Maffet. "I've told the Glasgow police about the vessel and who Slaney is—if there's anything to be done they'll do it. I can't go off on a cold trail; my hands are too full as it is."

He rose from his chair.

"I'm going to ask you a favor, Mr. McKellar. Will you give me a free hand,

here at Dunkillin, to make any arrangements I want to?"

"Certainly. I'm afraid we've rather let you down, so far. Do anything you choose."

"Thank you, sir," said Maffet, making for the door, "I don't think you'll regret it."

As soon as they were alone Tommy turned to Delia.

"Well, that's a cold wet finish for Slaney & Co.," he said.

"If it's true," said Delia quietly, "and I've no doubt it is—it's the same sort of ending they intended for you. That's all I have to say about it—except that I could wish Renée and her partner Mr. Drumont had been in their place. That would have been cold justice, Tommy."

Tommy strode up and down the room.

"Look here," he said. "Even if that's so how is it going to affect Renée's claim against me?"

"Surely it ought to knock her claim sky high."

"But if they don't bring it home to her? How will it help my right to the McKellar money, or my legitimacy?"

"If Inspector Maffet is as busy as he says, it ought to do something even to that."

"Maffet is no fool. But somehow I can't feel the confidence in him that I ought," said Tommy. "Yes—come in! Letters? Bring 'em here!"

Gillespie entered with the mail on a tray. There was a long registered envelope, and a letter from Innes, Dalrie & Innes, the solicitors.

Tommy ripped it open eagerly, and as he scanned it his face grew dark. Delia read it over his shoulder. The news was not good and Mr. Brodie Innes had written in pessimistic mood:

DEAR MR. MCKELLAR:

As you will see by the papers sent you under registered cover, the suit McKellar *versus* McKellar opens at Edinburgh on the 28th. Your attendance on the opening day is, of course, essential, but I shall come myself to Dunkillin for another consultation with you before then.

Counsel's opinion is not favorable. I wish I could give you encouragement, but to be candid, I do not see much hope for us except by a compromise, supposing that such a thing is possible. I will keep you informed.

Yours very truly,

BRODIE INNES.

Tommy's face flamed scarlet with anger and dismay.

"Compromise?" he said savagely. "Not for me!"

"Not for either of us, Tommy. No surrender."

"I'll sink the dashed inheritance in Loch Killin first. We've got to fight it out if it takes a year. What does Innes mean by sending me a proposal like this through the mail? He's weakening. I never did think much of Innes—"

"He does sound discouraging," said Delia. "But he hasn't got the latest news from Dunkillin yet."

"We're landed with the beastly lawsuit now, anyway. It's cut loose, and it's going to be a lot worse than that turn-up with Slaney & Co," said Tommy gloomily. "It's—"

The telephone bell rang sharply. He picked up the receiver and answered.

"It's Innes himself," he said. "The old bird seems all wrought up. Yes—speak up!"

The long distance call came at first confusedly over the wire, and then the line cleared:

"Mr. McKellar? You get my letter? Take no steps till you hear from me again. I have just received the most amazing communication about your case.

"What— Yes! I can't tell you about it over the phone. I think they'll drop the case. I'll come to you myself to-morrow night. Do nothing till I arrive."

The line was cut, and Tommy, perfectly dazed, repeated the disjointed message to Delia.

"What in thunder does he mean?"

"Why, that you're winning, Tommy! Renée and her partner have got the wind up, and they're backing out! That's what it means—if anything at all."

"I don't believe that? Nothing would scare that woman. But *does* Innes mean anything? The old buzzard keeps contradicting himself. Yes—what is it?"

Gillespie stood in the doorway.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," he announced.

Tommy's face hardened.

"Nothing doing!" he said abruptly. "Is it—"

"No, sir," replied Gillespie calmly, "not Mrs. McKellar."

"No? What name then?"

"She prefers to give her name to no one but yourself, sir," replied the butler. "And if I may say, sir, I think you should see this lady without delay. It will probably prove to your advantage."

Tommy became flustered.

"Will it, by gosh!" he exclaimed heatedly. "See here—say—Gillespie, is this *your* doing?"

"My doing, sir?" said Gillespie with polite surprise.

"All right—never mind—bring her up. Trot her along."

He turned anxiously to Delia as the door closed.

"Tommy, you don't want me to go away, do you?" she said firmly, "because I won't!"

"Of course not! If you go, you won't see my tail for dust! Stand by me, Delia. I would sooner handle ten Slaneys than one strange female. I suppose Renée sent her, and I don't think Gillespie ought to spring this sort of thing on me—"

The door opened, and the visitor was ushered in. Tommy stared at her wonderingly. She did not look formidable.

On the contrary, she looked comfortable. She was large and elderly and very stout. She wore a sort of prehistoric dress of dark silk covered with little black beads and an uncompromising black hat trimmed with a curled ostrich feather. Her face was large and plain, but it had character. It was the face of a female philosopher. Her eyes were tolerant, her nose soft and amiable and rounded, but she had an uncommonly firm mouth.

Under her arm she carried an unfolded umbrella. She pointed it at Tommy.

"This Mr. Thomas McKellar?" she inquired.

Tommy bowed, and placed a chair for her hastily, choosing a solid one.

"Thank you, sir," said the lady, seating herself with a voluminous rustle of silk. "My name's Harding."

CHAPTER XLVI

ACCORDING TO LAW

THE visitor addressed herself exclusively to Tommy.

"Susan Harding," she repeated, "and what I've got to say to you is private and confidential, Mr. McKellar. At least, it's no great odds to me, but I shouldn't think you'll want to have it spread about."

She turned a considering eye on Delia.

"Miss Allister—Miss Harding," said Tommy. "Anything you have to say—"

"Tommy has no secrets from me," said Delia, laughing. "I'm going to marry him."

"Are you indeed, miss?" replied Susan Harding amiably. "I hope he'll have no secrets from you when he's your husband. Hope is cheap. Anybody that's going to get married ought to lay in a cellarful of it. Not that I've anything to say against Mr. McKellar. He looks all right. They often do."

"Are you opposed to marriage, Mrs. Harding?" asked Delia.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Harding. "I ain't opposed to marriage any more than I'm opposed to the influenza; it's no good being opposed to what you can't stop. We're told to take precautions, but we seem to get it just the same. All I say is that people ought not to go out of their way to spread the infection. Of course, you never know your luck."

She turned to Tommy.

"You're the son of Mr. John McKellar the millionaire, I understand, sir? I suppose he was fairly well known, but, not being what you might call a mover in society circles, I never heard of you nor your father till Mr. Gillespie sent for me the other day."

"He sent for you, did he?"

"Yes. It was a Mr. Drumcleugh that came to see me first, down where I live, which is a goodish way from here. I've never been in Scotland before, and I can't say I think much of it. Havin' lived a

very quiet retired life up to now, perhaps I ain't much of a judge of foreign parts. However, I ain't here to talk about myself, but rather about a girl by the name of Margaret Deane."

"My mother! Do you mean to say you knew—"

"Who married Mr. Vivian Harding, away back in 1896."

"Yes! But what—"

"It was a silly thing to do," said the visitor philosophically. "But girls do silly things, and have to pay for 'em in time. She was very young at the time. Goodness knows, I oughtn't to talk.

"When *I* fell for Vivian, I was old enough to know better. I'd had a fair amount of experience, but experience don't always do as much for you as it ought. What I did was done with my eyes open. Only I didn't know all the facts.

"A wife more or less was no great odds to Vivian in those days, not if he set his fancy on anybody that had a little bit of money."

"Are you Vivian Harding's wife?"

"Well, I'm his widow, in a manner of speaking. And what I don't know about Vivian by this time, nobody else is likely to be able to tell me. I'm an expert on Vivian, as you might say. He was a tricky lot, but I was too many for him."

"Mrs. Harding, this is very important to me!" said Tommy. "My lawyers and I have been trying to trace everything possible about that infernal scoundrel—that is—I mean to say—"

"Oh, I shan't quarrel with any remarks you may make about Vivian, sir," said Mrs. Harding, tolerantly, "you being another sufferer, so to say. We can all make mistakes when not taking precautions, and Vivian was my mistake. Mind you, I'm not blamin' any one but myself.

"Whatever else one may say about Vivian, he was it. All his people were it. My people were fish curers down Rotherhithe way. And for a girl like me, brought up correct an' generally having plenty of sense—to go an' marry a gentleman—well, of course, I was asking for it. And I got it.

"In your mother's case, sir, it must have been quite different. She was just a young lady with no experience at all, and a good deal younger than I was when *I* met Vivian. She wouldn't know how to look after herself, and I can only suppose there wasn't anybody to do it for her—"

"Look here, Mrs. Harding!" said Tommy in deep agitation, "for goodness sake tell me—"

"One moment, sir," said Susan Harding kindly. "Let me tell this story my own way, or we shan't get it straight. You're worrying about your mother, and what I'm here for is to tell you it ain't half so bad as it looks. I'll ease your mind for you.

"I've not much to say about your mother, for I never set eyes on her, but it's not so surprising she should let Vivian fool her into marrying him. Unless you was up to his ways, he was very taking. He talked beautiful—better nor I do.

"Sometimes I'd hardly know whether he was reading a bit out of the paper or just talking, words came that easy to him. If he wanted to make a girl sure he was what she'd always been lookin' for and never expected to meet up with, Vivian had a way of doing that in quick time and leaving her to fill in the blanks afterward when she came to know him a bit better.

"Now I'll tell you just what I know about it, an' don't interrupt me, for I'll make it as short as I can.

"Vivian and me was married in London. After about a year of what they call the bliss o' matrimony he disappeared, taking along with him a tidy bit of money that he'd been able to lay his hands on.

"It wasn't till twelve months later I found out—never mind how—that there was a Mr. Harding up in Yorkshire, who seemed to me to answer the description. I don't believe in actin' on rumors, so I went to have a look for myself.

"Nobody knew anything about Vivian in Yorkshire, so he would have a pretty free hand. Nobody knew anything about me either. He'd fixed things up to marry a young lady, and, as far as I could find out, he hadn't even changed his name.

"Of course, changing your name is just about as risky a thing as not changing it—not that Vivian ever took much account of risks when his mind was set on anything.

But if he'd changed it, I might never have copped him at all. As it is, I was just too late.

"He'd made a runaway match of it—Vivian did most things on the run—at St. Dunstans, York, by special license. I got there at twelve fifteen, and made inquiries.

"The rector who'd performed the ceremony told me I was too late to be present at the happy occasion—Mr. an' Mrs. Harding having been married all regular and correct at 11 A. M. I saw the signatures in the register. The bride's name was Margaret Deane, spinster."

Tommy, white with excitement and consternation, could keep silent no longer.

"Why then—you mean—look here, Mrs. Harding, do you mean to tell me—"

Delia suddenly laid a restraining hand on his wrist. She was watching the placid, capable face of Susan Harding.

"Let her finish, Tommy dear!" she said, and Tommy, with a violent effort, controlled himself. Mrs. Harding, now in the full tide of her narrative, swept on.

"You might suppose I'd have raised a riot, right on the spot," she said. "But I couldn't help feeling even then there must be some mistake. I'd nothing to go on but the name, and it seemed to me even Vivian couldn't have been such a fool. Anyhow the job was done as far as the poor old rector was concerned, and I'd look a still bigger fool if I started upsetting a marriage that was no concern of mine, and maybe letting myself in for an action for slander.

"I'm one that believes in making sure, in a dangerous case. So I didn't tell the parson who I was, and, learning that the happy pair had left for Harrogate, I hurried along there by the next train.

"Harrogate was the sort of classy place that a man with Vivian's ideas might very likely pick out. I got there at four in the afternoon and tried three of the biggest hotels, asking for a couple by the name of Harding. At the third, the best o' the three, I struck lucky. They'd arrived an hour ago. I asks for Mrs. Harding, and was told the poor young thing had gone out in search of comforts for the patient."

"Comforts?"

"Yes, my dear. Arnica and lint and so on, and a hospital nurse. The doctor had only just left. What happened was this: Vivian had taken her by train to Weatherby, where he had a smart dog cart ready, and driving her along the Harrogate Road in that dashing way of his he shaved the corner by Rudding Park a bit too close and turned the cart over.

"It was before the days when automobiles became popular, or I daresay he'd have smashed himself up just as handy in one o' them. The lady fell soft, but Vivian broke his collar bone and put his shoulder out, besides collectin' several abrasions and contusions.

"Vivian was always a bit clumsy, and this time he was what you might call put out of action. A brewer's van took him to Harrogate, where the doctor attended him.

"The pore young bride went out to the chemist with a list of things necessary for the patient, no doubt thinking her married life hadn't made a specially fortunate start. She didn't know it was more in the nature of a happy ending. Not many girls that get married have such luck as your mother did, sir.

"Having got these particulars from the lady clerk at the hotel, I got the number of Vivian's rooms an' went upstairs. And there was Vivian, propped up in bed and looking like something that had been caught in the machinery. His neck an' shoulder was bandaged up, and so was his arm.

"It ain't often Vivian was at a loss for a repartee, but all he said when he saw me was: 'My dear Susan, is this you?' And I says: 'Yes, Vivian.' And that was that.

"I had him out of that bed and into his clothes. It was a painful process, and he didn't like it. But it was that or the police, and being such a gentleman, Vivian had a prejudice against the police.

"He scribbled half a dozen words on a bit of paper saying something unfortunate had happened to him and she had better keep quiet about it for her own sake—I didn't suppose it would be any good, but I let him do it.

"And I led him down the stairs behind

the elevator to the back street, where I got him into a cab. And in about half an hour we was both in the train for London."

Mrs. Harding smoothed her black silk dress philosophically.

"There's always the silver lining, if you looks for it," she said.

Tommy was already on his feet.

"You were married—legally married to Harding—before he ever met my mother? There's no doubt about this?"

"Well, I can't see any," said Susan Harding placidly. "I'm not asking you to take anything for granted." She opened the black leather purse bag that was slung over her arm. "You can have a look at this. It's me marriage lines. A thing I always believe in keeping handy. It looks respectable."

She smoothed out the slip of paper. It certified her marriage to Vivian Harding, at the Deptford registrar's office. Date, May 2, 1894.

Tommy swiftly unlocked the desk that stood against the wall, and with shaking hands produced the copy of his mother's marriage certificate. He wanted to see it again, in black and white. The place was St. Dunstans, York. the date, June, 1896: two years later.

"Correct," said Susan Harding calmly. 'I see he's described here as 'Vivian Harding, Bachelor.' That's nothing. Vivian could describe himself as anything that happened to be convenient at the moment. I've given him better descriptions of himself, many a time. Yes, Mr. McKellar, there's no doubt your mother's marriage at York was no marriage at all—according to law. I congratulate you."

CHAPTER XLVII

"FEMALE OF THE SPECIES"

EVEN now, Tommy was scarcely able to get a full grip of this heartening revelation. It seemed to him too good to be true. Delia's eyes were shining, and she laid an impulsive hand on Susan Harding's shoulder.

"Mrs. Harding, do you know what this means to Tommy?" she cried. "It means his right to a name the law can't challenge, his right to all that his father has left him—and it upsets as wicked a frame-up as the police ever had on their hands!"

"I thought it might," said Mrs. Harding, "from what Mr. Gillespie said to me. It looks as if you've been up against it."

"But how is it that this has only just come out?" said Delia. "Who got hold of Vivian Harding and obliged him to keep the story dark all this time? I want to know what became of him. How am I sure this isn't going to bounce up again and hit Tommy?"

For the first time Susan Harding looked rather uncomfortable.

"Well, I'm no lawyer, but the way I figure it, you'll be all right," she said. "I've a little confession to make. Maybe I'd best tell you what happened to Vivian, after I'd snatched him out of Harrogate and patched him up. I told you I got him safe away to London.

"You may think it a bit weak of me," continued Mrs. Harding. "I ought to have let things take their course and got rid of Vivian. But he was my husband, and I didn't particularly want him lagged for bigamy. After he'd done a year or two's hard labor, he'd still be my husband.

"Nor I didn't see it would do the girl any good either. She'd probably find out about it for herself, and could take what steps she liked. But I never heard a word about her from that day till a week ago, and there wasn't anything about it in the papers even.

"Maybe she took the advice in the note he'd left, and I wouldn't wonder if she hadn't come to see already what a silly thing she'd done in marrying Vivian. Very likely it was a bad shock to her for a time, but you've always got to pay for foolishness, and having a tooth pulled out quick is better than leavin' it there to ache and worry you. And when you've been extra silly you don't want to advertise it.

"Two years in prison might have reformed Vivian, of course, or it might have just made a jailbird of him, like it does of most. If they did reform him, they wouldn't have made as good a job of it as I did, though perhaps that ain't saying much.

"After leaving Harrogate, me and Vivian

lived a very quiet, retired life. I put it that way because, from that day on, Vivian came to see that where me and him was concerned his number was two—and often thirteen. I'd got that two years hangin' over him, and he knew it and just settled down naturally into his place, like a cat does when you take off the tin can the kids have tied to its tail, and butters its feet and gives it a place on the hearth-rug. Yes, Vivian soon got to know who was master.

"I took particular care of him. I sold up my little fish-curin' business at Rotherhithe, and moved over to Belgium for four years, which is the only foreign country except Scotland that I've ever been in. There was good openings for my business over there and I did pretty well.

"Vivian became useful for the first time in his life, him being very well educated and knowing the language. I employed him myself, and his wages were what I thought he ought to have, subject to deductions, and not too much at a time. He never tried to get away from me again but once, which was owing to his being frightened about his past sins overtakin' him. Thought the police was coming his way, and started on a sea voyage."

"When was that?" exclaimed Tommy.

"He slid out and booked his passage on the steamer Malabar, that sailed from Antwerp for the Dutch Indies or some such silly place. I was too many for him and I had him off the ship just before she left. That was Vivian's last attempt at a fade-out. He got something from me that sickened him of ever tryin' it again.

"Besides that he soon came to see what I'd saved him from, for the Malabar was lost with everybody aboard, off the French coast. Which was very unfortunate for them. But things work out curiously in this world sometimes—it was lucky for Vivian. His name was on the passenger-list. Nobody knew he hadn't sailed.

"So Vivian Harding was posted as among the missing. It got into the newspapers, along with the other names. Later on he had a paragraph all to himself—what they call an obliquity notice, I believe. He was always fond of them long words.

"I don't know where they got it from, but I always suspected Vivian of working it himself. He was a tricky lot. And, of course, even he had sense enough to see that being dead was the best thing that could happen to him.

"Anyway, the papers not only mentioned the death of Mr. Vivian Harding, but his place of birth, where he was educated, and the names of his relations—some of them very swell people. I should think it must have come as a great relief to them; one of them losses that you can bear up against easy enough."

"But didn't they know he was married to you?" said Delia.

"No, my dear, they didn't. Vivian never went out of his way to inform them. Nor did I. I'd no use for that sort of folk, having been stung quite bad enough already. No, my marriage with Vivian wasn't even as fashionable as his wedding with the second lady he made a fool of at York. Him and me had been hitched at a registrar's office. It's quiet and cheap, but it can do you in just as thoroughly as a ceremony at St. Margaret's, Westminster, with a carpet laid across the sidewalk, and a lot of other fools throwin' rice and confetti.

"To finish off the story, for you don't want a family history in three volumes, Vivian was dead, and I took care that he stayed dead. He knew he was all right as long as he kept quiet.

"It made a model husband of him, so far as you could make anything at all of Vivian. I'd took him away from his friends and all his other bad habits, and I should say he owed me his life.

"Later on we thought it was safe to come back to England. We dropped the 'Vivian,' which I never had used, anyway; my pet name for him was Moppet, and occasionally any others that came handy. We was known as Mr. and Mrs. John Harding, which is a common name enough.

"And that lasted till he died at Stukely only three years ago, quite quiet and peaceful. His funeral cost me forty-seven pounds and ten shillings. I missed Moppet, for though no doubt he was a bad lot, I'd got used to him. The wound has healed all

right. I'm always one for making the best of things.

"Still, seeing he was dead, I gave him his right name. No good comes of putting lies on a grave-stone or a register, so he was buried as Vivian Harding. They couldn't do him any harm once they'd buried him. After which I went into retirement in London, carrying on as usual, and keeping myself to myself, as has always been my custom.

"That's my story, Mr. McKellar. I've told it you because I feel you'd like to know that your mother's marriage, which has upset you so much, was never a real marriage in any sense of the word, legal or illegal. Though, of course, if Vivian hadn't been my husband, it would have been legal enough to hold her I suppose. Even if she never set eyes on him after leaving the church."

She turned to Delia.

"And I'd like to say this, miss, if you or Mr. McKellar feel sore against me for not tracking up the other lady and telling her all the facts as maybe I should have done by rights—I ask you to put yourself in my place. If you was married to a man and fond of him, however foolish it might be—would you feel bound to go out of your way to get him sent to prison for the sake of somebody you didn't know?"

Delia was at a loss for a reply. But Tommy broke in:

"Mrs. Harding, don't think I'm blaming you for anything you did! You've done me one mighty good turn anyway: it's the greatest relief of my life to hear what you've told me. And you've made me the happiest man in Scotland."

"I'm pleased to hear it," said Susan. "It seems to me the sort of country that could do with any happiness it gets: though I suppose there's some that likes all this heather and rocks and water. And, of course, you've got the wireless. Anything else I can tell you?"

"Yes. I want to know if you've heard of a lady by the name of Renée McKellar. Have you come across her?"

Mrs. Harding shook her head.

"No, sir. Have I missed anything?"

"Nor of a man called Laurence Drumont?"

"Name's new to me."

"Then you can't say if either of these people were likely to have known of your marriage to Vivian Harding, or the date?"

"It would surprise me very much if they did—whoever they may be. Moppet and I took a lot of trouble to cover it up, and I should think it could only have been found out more or less by accident. Nobody knew who Moppet was. It beats me now to guess how Mr. Gillespie found out about it—especially as he isn't a policeman."

"All right—let that go," said Tommy. "Mrs. Harding, what you've told us makes just the difference of a fortune to me—and I'd like to see that you don't lose by it.

"And in the meantime, as we're all starving and yonder's the gong being banged by Gillespie, come along and have lunch."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd be much more comfortable in the steward's room," said Susan Harding. "I can't enjoy my food with a lot of servants fussing round. Vivian liked that sort of thing, but I've no use for it. I hope you will let me have my dinner along with Mr. Drumcleugh and Mr. Gillespie, for I want to have a talk with them."

"Do you? I want to have a talk with Gillespie myself," exclaimed Tommy, "and it can't wait—I want it quick! Where is he?"

He left the room hurriedly, and Delia went with him, for she, too, felt that the settlement with Gillespie could no longer be delayed.

To their astonishment, he was nowhere to be found. It was the first time on record that Gillespie was not on hand when wanted. The household staff had seen nothing of him for an hour past; not only had he faded out of sight and hearing, but Drumcleugh also was missing.

CHAPTER XLVIII

SECRET COUNCIL

EVEN Gillespie's absence could not depress Tommy's triumph. As soon as they were in the morning room where lunch was laid, he ignored the food, and seizing Delia waltzed her frantically

round the table, letting go all the pent up emotion with which he had been bursting for half an hour past. They were interrupted by the entrance of Janet McQuoid.

"Hae ye gone gyte, the pair o' you?" she inquired.

"Yes. Stark, raving mad. Crazed with joy and relief and—and what not—greatest day of my life, Janet! Here, we'll have Mrs. Susan in—she's got to lunch here. She's a peach!"

He rushed off in search of her. But his blandishments were wasted; Susan Harding was adamant. She refused pointblank to join the lunch party, and insisted on taking her dinner in the steward's room, even if she took it alone. Tommy retired defeated, to find Delia at table with Janet, to whom she had already explained the Harding marriage.

"Weel, yon's good news, Tam," said Janet calmly, "but d'ye think ye're out o' the wood yet? There's the policeman to reckon with."

"Haven't had time to think of anything yet. The title to the estate's clear anyway! My foot's on my native heath, and my name's McKellar!"

"I'd be the less surprised if it was Renée that had been getting herself married too often. The wumman is capable of anything. What she needed was a husband wha'd gie her a good beatin'."

"That's the score of being a vamp," said Tommy, "she's too beautiful to beat."

"I'm not for it as a general thing," grunted Janet, "but there's times when it's a good auld-fashioned remedy. I thocht ye were doing it to Delia when I cam' in and found ye rampin' around the table."

"The man who'd lay hands on a woman—"

"He wouldn't go as far as that. I'd like to see him try!" interrupted Delia. "Though he certainly shook me, once. And did it properly."

"I hae nae doubt ye deserved it."

"Chuck it, Delia!" pleaded Tommy, growing crimson.

"Well, I did," said Delia. "I was trying how mad I could make Tommy. To exasperate cocksure young men is every girl's duty sometimes, and I was tired of that easy temper of his; I went the limit. He stood for it like a lamb till I said things to him that any one else would have killed me for, and at last Tommy's Highland blood got all wrought up and he took me by the shoulders and shook me. He shook me till my teeth rattled, poor boy."

"What did ye do?" asked Janet.

"Laughed. The more I laughed the more he shook me, and the more he shook me the more I laughed. It did us more good than two rounds of golf. But he made it up very nicely afterward, and I can always bring it up against him when I want to."

The lunch grew cold while Tommy and Delia discussed the morning's triumph. Janet attended steadily to her food, and presently they left her to it and went down into the hall. There they found the missing partner had returned.

Gillespie was sitting in an armchair, his head slightly bowed, staring into the fire of pine logs on the open hearth. Seeing the two coming toward him, he rose hurriedly.

His face was strangely gray and drawn, there was a blue tint about his mouth, and he swayed on his feet. Tommy darted forward and put an arm round him.

"What's wrong, old chap!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Gillespie murmured something inaudible and sank back into the chair. Delia knelt beside him, one cool hand supporting his head, while the other quickly loosened his collar and his prim little black tie, looking at him pitifully, for at the moment his appearance was disquieting; he looked really ill. But he smiled at her faintly.

"It's nothing, madam," he said. "A little over tired—that's all. Thank you so much."

Tommy came back with a glass of brandy; they put it to his lips. In a minute or less the color returned to his face and his strength seemed to come back to him.

"Thank you," he said, "better, sir, much better. Perhaps I've been rather overdoing things. Came over me suddenly. I am very sorry to have given you this trouble. You were asking for me, sir, weren't you?"

Tommy was through. He had all he could bear.

"Uncle Paradine!" he said, "dear old fellow—we know what you've done for us, and you know we know. No need to keep this up now. I can't stand any more of it!"

The old man pressed his arm and looked into his face.

"Tommy, my boy," he said, "thank goodness there's an end of it! We needn't keep it up now, but it will just rest between us three till to-night—that's all. And I have one or two things to say to you, which you may as well hear at once. And—I'm a little afraid of telling you."

He stood up.

"We can't talk here. Shall we go into your library?" he said.

"Not yet! Are you fit to talk about it?"

"Quite—quite! The sooner the better."

"I'm not coming," said Delia quickly. "You won't want me."

The old man caught her hand and pressed it, and a rush of moisture came into his eyes.

"Of course I want you," he said. "My dear Delia, I want you, just as I want this lucky young fellow here. Come along."

He walked into the library between them, one hanging to each arm.

Nearly an hour later, Tommy and Delia emerged from the library and came down the stairs together. Tommy was unusually pale and silent. He looked like a man who found it difficult to get a grip on his emotions and pull himself together. His eyes were shining.

Delia was clinging to his arm. She too was rather pale, but her face was lit with a light that Tommy had never yet seen in it; her eyes were red, and her long lashes wet.

"Let's go where we can be alone," said Tommy. "Out in the open, don't you think? Out on to the heather, where we can feel the sky over us."

"Yes," said Delia. "Come on, dear."

It was not to be. Fate interposed in the shape of Inspector Maffet, who came striding in through the porch with a decisive step, like a man who means business.

"Mr. McKellar!" he said. "I am lucky to find you in; I'd meant to warn you not to leave the house this morning. However, all's well. I have some urgent news for you which you must hear at once."

"I hardly feel equal to it just now," said Tommy. "Can't it wait?"

"No, it can't. It's a job that won't stand for any delay, sir, in your own interest. Miss Allister had best hear it too."

Tommy led the way to the library, which was now empty.

"If you've any news more surprising than I've had already to-day," he said as they seated themselves, "it will have to be something startling."

"That so? I'm afraid my news is going to beat yours, sir," said Maffet. "But if you've anything fresh since the morning, you had better tell me before I start in."

Tommy told him of Mrs. Harding's visit, and the story of the Harding marriage. Maffet listened to the end, without comment.

CHAPTER XLIX

"THE QUICK AND THE DEAD"

"MR. McKELLAR, I congratulate you!" Maffet said at last. "That pulls you out of a very ugly mess. It sets you right on your feet. But it isn't by any means the end of this business, and I'm afraid there's an uglier settlement to come, which we've got to face.

"Tracking Mr. John McKellar's marriage was not my job. And Slaney is not my job either; at the most he was only a sideshow. My real business is with Mrs. Renée McKellar and Mr. Laurence Drumont. As far as I'm concerned, that's been the chief issue, from the first.

"That's what I came down here for three weeks ago. This has been the queerest case in all my experience, and I doubted whether we'd ever fill in the evidence against them. But now I have them set.

"I may tell you there's been suspicion against those two even before you came over from America. But they're coming over here this afternoon. And I want you to receive them."

Tommy sat up.

"Here! To Dunkillin?"

"Yes, sir. I arranged it! They know

nothing about me; they imagine they are coming for a final interview with you. I should like you to let them have it. If you won't, I'll deal with them myself."

Tommy stood up frowning.

"I don't like this; I'll have nothing to do with it," he said abruptly.

"You will remember, sir," said Maffet, "you gave me a free hand to make what arrangements I choose. I told you the case was not an easy one. In a business as serious as this, it is up to you to give the police all the help you can, however little you like it. If for no other reason, because you owe it to the memory of your father."

"Can't you leave my father out of it? He is dead."

"Yes, sir," said Inspector Maffet quietly, "and for that I hope to bring Mrs. Renée McKellar before a jury, and to see her convicted."

Tommy sank back into his chair, staring at Maffet dumbly.

"The evidence," said Maffet, "has been built up, piece by piece, and it all points in this one direction. The woman has been diabolically clever. Your father's death occurred when she was out of the country.

"I am applying for a home office order for exhumation; I am sorry to tell you this, but it is necessary, sir. What am I going to do now? It depends, for the moment, on what I get out of her when she comes here this afternoon—as she will. But she'll not slip through my fingers, now or later.

"I should not be telling you any of this, sir, but for its concerning you so very closely, and because you have helped me already. But I'll outline the case. Your father's death, I suppose, gave you no cause for suspicion; everything vouched for and in order. We have a different opinion at headquarters, though the case didn't come to our notice till seven weeks ago.

"Mr. John McKellar died in April. He was attended during his brief illness by two persons only: Dr. Ker of Inveralloch, and an old sick nurse named Gourlay. Both these persons have completely disappeared, and there is no doubt they left the country, one within a week, and the other a month after the death of your father.

"Dr. Ker signed the certificate of John McKellar's death as due to acute pneumonia. I am confident we shall find that it was not due to pneumonia nor any other natural cause. Here again, I am not going to fill in for you all the details.

"I need only tell you there is evidence that a cumulative poison, nux vomica in the form of a concentrated essence, had been introduced into a medicine chest that your father apparently kept in his bedroom.

"There is no doubt what the final result would be, if he unwittingly took that poison in several recurring doses. And no qualified medical man could really have been ignorant of the cause of death in such a case; not even the most obscure and backward country practitioner.

"On my first visit to Dunkillin, which, you will remember, occurred just before Mrs. Renée McKellar had removed her belongings, I found traces—very slight ones—of a drug that seemed to call for investigation.

"It's my experience that the most careful and far-sighted criminal will make a stupid slip somewhere, and fail to remove a clew that can sooner or later be unraveled. Like most criminal investigation department men, I have a working knowledge of drugs, but the home office pathologist has reported fully on those traces that came into my hands.

"And since then I have succeeded in adding several links of evidence to the chain which connects Renée McKellar with your father's death. You have followed me closely, sir, and I need not labor that point.

"As to motive, it is clear that Mrs. McKellar had discovered something which your father intended to keep from her—that he had recently deposited with his lawyers a new will under which—whatever happened—she would inherit fifty thousand pounds. And in the event of your own decease, she would come into another three millions and the Dunkillin estate. Her reward, I'm glad to say, is going to be of quite a different nature."

Inspector Maffet sat back in his chair,

with the quiet satisfaction of a chess player who has mated his adversary.

"You will understand now, sir, that when I came down here to investigate the affair of the missing Harbord Chaytor—whom we didn't know anything about except that he was missing—I then looked on that business as a hindrance and a nuisance.

"It might have turned out very awkwardly for you, and possibly prove an obstacle that would upset my case; though it's likely we could have pulled you out of the mess. I am glad to say that the intelligence and decision of Miss Allister cleared that obstacle right out of the way. We are now concerned only with Renée McKellar—and probably with her partner, Laurence Drumont."

Tommy, who had listened in silence, huddled in his chair and staring down at the carpet, raised his eyes to the inspector's.

"I see," he said slowly. "Then you believe—you have a certainty?"

"Yes. As far as anything can be certain in police work. Don't you see it for yourself?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "Yes—it does look complete."

He stood up, with a little sigh.

"I have one request to make," he said, "that I hope you'll agree to. There's one person in this house, inspector, who, though he only has a subordinate job, I've learned to place considerable faith in. I propose to have him come here and to get his view on this before we go any farther."

"Who is it?"

"Gillespie," said Tommy, pressing the bell.

"Your butler? Certainly have him in if you like. He is a witness, of course."

"Ask Gillespie to come here," said Tommy to the footman who answered the bell. The butler appeared in due course. He had apparently recovered from the weakness that had overcome him in the hall.

"Sit down, Gillespie. We should like to have your advice on a very serious matter."

"Thank you, sir," said Gillespie respectfully. "I prefer to stand."

"Put as shortly as possible," said Tommy, "it's this." He gave a brief outline of the charge Maffet had detailed.

Gillespie listened without remark. His glance traveled from Tommy's face to Delia's, and then to the inspector's.

"Can you throw any fresh light on this case, Gillespie?" asked Maffet, a trifle ironically.

"Yes, sir."

"Then let us have it."

Gillespie paused.

"If what I say should give you any offense, sir," he said, "I apologize beforehand. But I fear you will find it difficult to prove that Mr. John McKellar was murdered."

"Why?"

"Because," said Gillespie, "I am John McKellar."

CHAPTER L

MONEY CAN KILL

GILLESPIE sat down in the chair that Tommy had placed for him. Inspector Maffet stared at him with an impression that the butler had suddenly become insane.

"I am John Herries McKellar," said the old man, "some time of the McKellar Foundries, and of Dunkillin. Tom McKellar here, is my son. Miss Allister, I am proud to say, will soon be my daughter-in-law."

Maffet continued to stare at him dumbly.

"As to the exhumation of my body," continued Mr. McKellar, as though he were apologizing for some trifle, "the coffin which is stoned up in my family vault contains nothing more than a hundred and sixty pounds of pig-iron, which is not worth the cost of recovery.

"I am very sorry, inspector, to have been the cause of so much trouble. But we must judge by results, and I think I can convince you that the arrangement has been an excellent one for everybody concerned."

Delia was feeling uncommonly sorry for the inspector. He had risen to his feet and was glaring at Tommy, who, while remaining perfectly calm, quite shared Delia's sympathy for the officer of the law.

"Then you've been deliberately trying to fool me, right along!" said Maffet.

"Not at all, inspector," said John McKellar. "Tom didn't know it himself till an hour ago. As I'm responsible for this trouble he has allowed me to make my own confession when I chose. In which he's perfectly right.

"And if you find it surprising that a son should not know his father, Tom had not set eyes on me since he was ten years old. A month ago—I confess it with grief—I should not have known him if you had introduced me to him in the street."

Inspector Maffet resumed his seat.

"It seems you have been playing a pretty dangerous game all through, sir," he said grimly, "and if you wish to tell me—"

"Indeed I do. It's necessary you should have the facts. My confession is not an easy one to make to a policeman—nor to any one else. But I'm not afraid of the law. I have that inestimable asset, a clear conscience. Of course, there are some who hold that a wealthy man's conscience is apt to stand in a class by itself. However, in telling you, I won't spare myself.

"My marriage with Renée Lisle, for some years past has not been a happy one. Perhaps it never was very happy. I blame the fault on myself. I suppose there are some men—not always weaklings—who in their home life surrender themselves to the influence of a woman, for good or ill.

"As a policeman, you will probably have had experience of some of them. The result's uncertain; it may be the very devil. Or it may be a quite excellent arrangement. I am afraid the McKellars are apt to have that weakness. If it comes to a conflict with a woman—a woman whom they love—they cannot put their foot down.

"But as I grew older, and particularly during the last two or three years, that influence and domination to which I had surrendered, became more distasteful to me, until at last it was unbearable.

"I don't think I should ever have fought against it even then, but for one thing. I longed more and more intensely for my only son. As my life drew nearer to a close, I realized how unjust I had been to him. I wanted my child.

"At the same time I knew—for I'm not altogether a fool—that an open reconciliation would be very difficult. It would lead to conflict, and trouble, and very likely to eventual failure. I knew I was still likely to be defeated if I attempted this in defiance of Renée.

"There was another danger, still more difficult to avoid. I was not in the best of health, and I had lately made a will which left the bulk of my property to my son, with a provision for Renée. She contrived to make herself acquainted with the conditions of that will. Of course, I could have made another. But how would that have helped me?

"For I found good reasons for believing that, after my decease, she intended to try and upset my son's claim. There was a legal difficulty in the matter of my marriage with Tom's mother, which was not as thoroughly cleared up, a few months ago, as it is to-day.

"I had no idea, till then, that Renée knew anything about it. The more I considered it, the more I became convinced that my son was likely to come into a stormy inheritance.

"Suppose that I were to die, suddenly—unexpectedly. It was not so unlikely, at my age. Renée would have been left with a clear field. I could not tell what measures she might take, when I was out of the way. She is clever—a very clever and resourceful woman.

"There were more means than one, by which she might have succeeded. Whether she succeeded or failed, there would be endless unhappiness and scandal: a shadow thrown on my boy's name, and on his mother's. At the worst—his life was between Renée and a great fortune. At the best, she might have forced him to compromise, which would still have left him in her power."

"She very nearly did that," said Tommy. "It would have come off but for Delia."

"And so," continued McKellar, "having laid my plans, I decided to put this problem to the only possible test. Once out of the way, I should, of course, be considered a factor no longer to be reckoned with. Yet, if what I feared did actually come to pass, I should still be there to prevent it, and to protect my son from disaster, for I

should then hold all the master cards in my hands.

"And so, I arranged official decease and burial. I can quite understand, inspector, that you would suppose such a thing very difficult to achieve.

"It was much simpler than you think, for a man with unlimited command of money, living a retired life, and with two or three allies on whose devotion and interest he could rely.

"The first of these was my old friend Dr. Ker of Inveralloch. We have been companions from boyhood, he understood my situation thoroughly, and he had a very deep sympathy for me. We saw less of each other of late years, for he was not what you would call a *persona grata* with my wife Renée. Her absence abroad gave me the opportunity I needed.

"I told Dr. Ker my plans quite frankly; they appealed to him, for he was a man with a humor of his own—and I persuaded him to fall in with them and help me. It was not easy, but in dealing with men, and particularly with friends, I can generally get my own way.

"To be brief—for there are details I will omit—he attended me for a slight cold on the chest. It was quite a genuine cold. And he signed the death certificate of a man who is still, as you see, in pretty good health and able to protect his own interests and his son's.

"Dr. Ker, though not considering that he had committed any crime that was likely to keep him awake at night—those were his words—felt that after this event he would not care to continue in practice as a medical man. But he was due for retirement and he did me this service of his free will. I was grateful, for it was not a small thing to ask."

CHAPTER LI

IT WAS A WINNING PLAY

"TO be plain, I suppose you gave him a thumping bribe, sir," said Maffet acidly.

John McKellar looked at the speaker through narrowed eyes.

"Dr. Ker is now living abroad in a pleasanter climate where he can enjoy ease and leisure," he said quietly. "You will never find him and could take no action if you did, for he was guilty of merely a technical and certainly not an extraditable offense, in signing that rather ambiguous warrant.

"The Medical Council would not approve—but he was a cantankerous old fellow and never a warm admirer of that distinguished body of men. My own view is that Ker did a very beneficial and in no way a blameworthy thing. It depends on the angle from which you look at it.

"The other person concerned is the sick nurse who attended me during my unfortunate illness, old Meg Gourlay. It was she who, assisted by Dr. Ker, brought Tommy into the world. I had no difficulty at all in inducing her to do exactly what I required.

"A most capable woman and an excellent nurse. Meg had lived in pensioned retirement at Inveralloch, but she still practiced when required, and another of her sources of income occasionally was the 'laying out,' as I believe it is called, of those who die.

"She did it very efficiently in my case; at least, she fulfilled my instructions to the letter. Meg, too, is now living in a district remote from Inveralloch, and is very comfortable and happy. I like to reflect on Meg's happiness, but I was thinking, throughout, chiefly of my son.

"Meg hopes Tom will go and see her some day, and though it is a far cry from here, I've no doubt he will do so. I do not think I need trouble you with her address, inspector.

"The only persons concerned are an obscure provincial undertaker and two of his men, who were not admitted quite so far into my confidence, but who obliged me in the matter of the iron pigs and the coffin. With them it was solely a question of money, and I dare say you have noticed, Inspector Maffet, the influence that is wielded by a large sum of money—provided it is ample enough and especially if there is no risk attached for the acceptor.

"A bargain which provides a moderate independence for life in return for a few

hours' work seldom comes into the market. Of course, I made all my arrangements carefully and left nothing to chance.

"With the help of Andy Drumcleugh, on whom I can always rely and who entered into these plans of mine with exactly that grim efficiency which I required from him, the arrangements were carried out without the smallest hitch, and the interment occurred in due course, leaving not a trace of suspicion behind.

"Andy has been a tower of strength throughout, and his only comment was that it was a pity I had not done it long ago. He evidently hoped that my resurrection would be the first step to a better life.

"I don't suppose he altogether approved of the method, and he also complained of the expense. But relatively my expenditure was not large, considering there were three millions at stake. It was less costly and more rapid, in any case, than a lawsuit. And more certain.

"I had already left Dunkillin before the burial, and when that ceremony took place I was in London. There, having collected all the factors that I needed, I waited on events, receiving information of all that was going on. My son arrived in England, and it soon became clear that I'd been right in expecting trouble. But there was complications which, I confess, I had not dreamed of.

"The only safe place for me, the one place where I could handle the situation, was Dunkillin. And so, according to arrangement, Andy installed me as the butler Gillespie. I took a chance, there, of course. If my son recognized me, I'd have to own up and take him into my confidence.

"That would mean exploding the mine immediately—sooner than was desirable. I wanted the opposition firm to carry on till I had them nailed down tight. It's the same in your own profession, inspector. You don't make an arrest till you've a sure case. But all went very well. Tom didn't know me.

"Any elaborate disguise, of course, would have been foolish; but white hair clipped and dyed iron-gray, with darkened eyebrows, were as far as I cared to go, and lifted a few years off my shoulders.

"I didn't, as Miss Allister would say, entirely get away with it. Events moved so quickly that it was impossible not to arouse suspicion that I was something more than a butler. And the family likeness was perhaps suggestive. It never entered Tom's head—how should it?—that I could be his late father.

"But he did make a mistake and place me as my brother Paradine, to whom, I am ashamed to say, Tom owes more than he ever has owed to me. Paradine and I both have the McKellar face, and doubtless the McKellar character. We were so alike in many ways that, perhaps for that very reason, I fear we never got on very well together.

"I think, inspector, that is all I need tell you; the rest must be obvious. You don't want an account of everything I've done since I have been at Dunkillin. I have given a fairly full explanation because it is due to you. But there is no law that I know, which forbids a man to allow his empty coffin to be interred in the family vault—if he thinks fit to do so and has no dishonest motive."

Maffet had long recovered from his stupefaction and his resentment. As he listened to the tale, he eyed the old man searchingly.

"In all my experience, Mr. McKellar," he said, "I never heard such an amazing admission as this. But do you really imagine that you were justified in doing what you've done?"

"Surely," said McKellar, "my justification is clear. If I were now lying in my coffin, instead of sitting before you in the flesh—my son would have been cheated of his inheritance, and his mother's name dishonored."

"I don't see my way to deny that," said Maffet slowly. "And it seems he might have lost not his inheritance, sir, but his life."

"Yes," replied John McKellar. "But that, you probably know more about than I do, inspector. I don't see my way through it. It does look to me as if there were two direct attempts to meddle with Tom—and in both cases his adversary got very much the worst of it.

"You may think it strange, but I never

took that so seriously as I did the other thing. I would like you to tell me something, inspector. Have you evidence in your hands which will bring that home—to my wife?"

Maffet did not answer. He looked hard at McKellar. It was exactly that evidence which he had not got.

"Whose ever work it was, it's a bit of luck for them now that it didn't come off," growled Inspector Maffet. "They would be up against it worse than they are already."

The squeal of a car's brake was heard below. Tommy stepped quickly to the window and looked down. His father joined him.

"That appointment of yours, Maffet," said Tommy, "is kept punctually. Here they are."

An open four-seater was standing on the gravel, Laurence Drumont sat at the wheel. Renée McKellar stepped down and entered the porch.

"It's my wife," said John McKellar, leaving the window. "You have an appointment with her, inspector? Very well. As everybody concerned is present here, we cannot do better than receive her now."

"I'm with you there, sir," said Maffet grimly. "Do you wish to be present?"

"Yes," said John McKellar. "After all, she *is* my wife. There is no getting away from that."

"Quite so. And I think you've said everything there is to say."

CHAPTER LII

THE END OF HER REIGN

"THERE is just one thing more, inspector. You have come to a certain conclusion; a perfectly natural conclusion, on strong circumstantial evidence; a case that I admit seems very well supported. But circumstantial evidence often breaks down when put to the test.

"I use the drug nux vomica myself; a fad of mine, possibly a dangerous medicine, but not in the small doses to which I am accustomed. I know few people use it nowadays, but I find it excellent for nervous headaches.

"And I have frequently got Renée to procure it for me. Whatever else my wife has done, I do not think she has ever attempted to poison me. And if she had, she certainly would not have succeeded. I am going to be reasonably fair to her. She has enough to answer for without that."

Maffet rose from his chair. Before he could answer, the young footman appeared.

"Mrs. McKellar, sir," he said to Tommy.

John McKellar looked at his son.

"Show Mrs. McKellar in here," said the old man, and the footman withdrew. A minute later Renée McKellar walked into the library. The door closed behind her.

Renée, always admirably dressed, was now in half mourning, which suited her soft yet vivid type of beauty still better than the deep black which she had worn when she left Dunkillin. And even Delia could not help envying the quiet self-possession with which she faced the three men who had risen to their feet to receive her.

She looked first at Tommy, with just the trace of a bow. To Maffet she gave scarcely a glance. Then her eyes turned inquiringly upon the unobtrusive figure of the butler, standing by the table; intensely respectable in his sober dress clothes and little black tie.

Renée looked at him, and slowly, very slowly, the color faded from her face till it was chalky white. But she did not move, nor speak; a little sigh escaped her lips, and that was all. She remained perfectly motionless, facing her husband, looking him in the eyes.

Tommy, watching her, felt, at that moment a tinge of pity for Renée, and perhaps a touch of admiration. Whatever qualities Renée McKellar might lack, she certainly had courage.

Mr. McKellar broke the silence.

"You were suspected of having made away with me, Renée," he said mildly. "Inspector Maffet—the gentleman on your left—had what seemed to be a very strong case against you, and I am glad to declare your innocence. I am rather trying to live with, but I feel sure you would not go so far as that. It would have been so dangerous, and so obvious."

Renée stared at him, speechless.

"But considering how short the time of your bereavement has been," continued Mr. McKellar gently, "I may say that I think you have left off your full mourning rather early. Was that your idea, or Laurence Drumont's?"

Renée McKellar found her tongue. And her voice, at the outset, was amazingly calm and steady:

"You were always very ingenious, John," she said slowly. "How you've arranged all this, I don't know. I only see that—you have laid a very clever trap for me."

"A trap? For you?"

"Yes, and a vindictive, and foolish one. You thought I might marry Laurence, and then—and then you could expose and disgrace me, if you chose! Do you see how foolish it was? For I never had any such intention—the idea never entered my head!"

"I am glad to hear that, for it never entered my head either," said John McKellar. "At least, it never entered it very far. I should not have permitted such a thing, Renée; I should have taken most effective steps.

"The moment Laurence attempted to marry you—supposing it entered *his* head—you would have had my protection at once. Or rather, the protection of the authorities. I think you understand me."

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and the conversation paused. Mr. Laurence Drumont protruded a sleek and well-groomed head into the room. He was anxious and even eager to join the party, but in spite of the invitation he had received and his natural assurance, he seemed a little doubtful. His eye lit upon Tommy and he paused.

"Come in, Mr. Drumont," said Tommy, "we were expecting you."

Encouraged by Tommy's tone, which was not at all hostile, Mr. Drumont stepped inside, recovering a good deal of the confident swagger habitual to him. It declined a little as his glance rested on Inspector Maffet, and he paused again. But when he turned his eyes upon the impassive countenance of John McKellar, Mr. Drumont stopped with a jerk, as though some invisible hand had seized him.

His neck elongated and he took a half step forward, still staring. His mouth gaped wide open, his face turned a sickly green, and his eyes bulged like the eyes of a rabbit. For one silent moment that seemed to the others like an eternity, Mr. Drumont continued to drink in John McKellar Then he made a sudden plunge through the open doorway and was gone.

Maffet started up, but McKellar interposed.

"No, no!" he said. "It's of no importance, inspector. "He is really not worth while. This is one of those simple problems that settle themselves."

There was a noise on the staircase as of a sack of coal descending, and a sort of scurry in the porch. Tommy, standing by the window, saw Mr. Drumont leap into the car—Renée's car—and getting it going in record time, swung round for the exit.

In motion picture plays Tommy had often seen motor cars dashing about and making rings at incredible and unnatural speeds. He had never expected to witness anything of the kind in everyday life.

But this came very near it. The car flung itself in a curve like a capital S into the main drive, whizzed through the park gates, and, shooting on to the southward road over the moor, disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Mr. McKellar smiled.

"Six years ago," he explained, "at Renée's request, I gave her cousin Laurence Drumont a berth in McKellars, Limited. He embezzled two thousand pounds, but was allowed to leave the country unprosecuted on condition that he never returned. He has broken that condition, and no doubt he thinks it very inconsiderate of me to return from the grave in this tactless fashion. I do not think we shall hear any more of him."

He turned to Renée.

"If you feel a little aggrieved, Penée," he said mildly, "you will hardly see your way to reproach me in view of the uncomfortable position—now happily cleared up—in which you have placed Tommy. Fortunately he loses nothing, and he be-

comes incontestably McKellar of Dunkillin. The withdrawal of that lawsuit of yours, which once looked so promising, saves you expense and worry, besides the humiliation of defeat.

"You know my rule. Family scandals ought to be prevented or avoided; one gains nothing but humiliation by ventilating them publicly. So I am not going to reproach you. What I do require is your silence. Your absolute silence. I can now enforce it—a thing I've never been able to do before. In return I shall keep silence, and keep faith with you."

He glanced at Tommy.

"My dear boy, will you go out and leave us together now?" he said. "You and Delia—and the inspector?"

"Certainly, sir," said Tommy, and opened the door. Delia passed out. Maffet lingered for a moment, hesitating. Then he followed the others. John McKellar was left alone with his wife.

He placed a chair for her, and Renée, who was breathing rather hard, seated herself not ungracefully. Mr. McKellar remained standing.

"I have a piece of good news for you, Renée," he said quietly. "It's exclusive to yourself—I have not told Tom. A little while ago I learned from the doctors that I cannot live for more than a year, if so long. I don't regret this at all.

"As far as the medical prophets can assure me, I am not likely to suffer much. My end, I hope, will be a peaceful one. I shall know, at any rate, a period of happiness with my son—and his perfectly charming young wife.

"In a year or less, then, you will be entirely free. I require only that you go into retirement and live quietly and decorously—as to which I shall inform myself. Meanwhile you will enjoy the legacy that has come to you under my will—a little prematurely. You will have also the satisfaction that your period of mourning will be already over by the time you actually acquire your freedom.

"You have nothing to fear, Renée. I think you will allow that I'm not being vindictive—a quality for which I have an intense dislike, especially toward a woman. I do not forget that you have been my wife for fifteen years.

"Within another year you will be my widow. You have only to keep silence on everything that's passed. So long as you do that you'll be perfectly safe—just as safe as if I were lying in the Dunkillin vault. Where, officially, I intend to remain.

"Any other course will be very troublesome to me and my son, but completely disastrous to you. That's what enables me to rely on your absolute discretion for the time that remains to me."

Renée, very white, stared up at him.

"John!" she said, "you don't—you can't mean this?"

"Of course I mean it."

"I don't understand it. Can't you see—it's impossible?"

"On the contrary, it is quite simple. There may be one slight difficulty, but I am confident I shall overcome it. And now we are at the parting of the ways, Renée; you will find Drumcleugh below. Tell him you are to have the car and chauffeur from the garage; they will take you wherever you wish to go."

He moved to the inner door of the library, which gave upon the landing to the side staircase, and stood waiting.

For a few moments Renée sat where she was. Then she rose and walked across to him. Her eyes dwelled on his face for awhile appealingly, as if she would still find in him the signs of that influence under which he had lived so long.

But John McKellar seemed to have merged again into Gillespie, the butler. He looked at her steadily, and very quietly, very respectfully, opened the door for her. Renée passed out.

CHAPTER LIII

AN OLD MAN'S HAPPINESS

"THERE'S only one thing certain, sir," said Inspector Maffet. "You're in such a mess that the devil himself couldn't get you out of it. Mrs. McKellar has gone?"

"Yes," said McKellar. "I expect you saw her go, didn't you?"

"That doesn't trouble me," replied Maffet. "I can find her at any time I want to."

"Of course you can. The way you have handled this case already shows me that. You have been right about the two principal parties from the start; you tracked them up, you caught them out at the correct time, and I must say the way you brought them both here was masterly," said McKellar warmly.

"Still—we can all make mistakes, and this poisoning charge, sound as it looked, has rather fallen through, hasn't it? Here am I, alive and pretty well—and happier than I've been for a long time past.

"Then there's my son. He is also alive, in flourishing health—and particularly happy. He seems to have enjoyed himself uncommonly at Dunkillin; and when it comes to direct action Tom is what we Scots call an ill lad to fratch with. I'm glad, on the whole, that he didn't succeed in shooting that little ruffian who broke into his bedroom and broke my head.

"One is allowed to shoot a burglar, I believe, though naturally it leads to all sorts of awkward inquiries and troublesome justifications. But that affair is still a little mysterious, inspector.

"One goes by evidence, and as you have no evidence which definitely connects it with Mrs. McKellar, can you do any good by arresting her? The whole scheme throughout is a record of failure.

"There is, of course, the unidentified body at Barmouth, carrying Mr. Harbord Chaytor's papers. Apparently a sailor who met with some accident at sea; one of a shady crew the rest of whom seem to have disappeared completely. But I suppose his identity is a matter for the coroner at Barmouth, who will probably now discover his origin and whether he really came from Wexford or not.

"I am not deeply interested in that. Finally there is John McKellar, officially dead four months, and him I place unreservedly in your hands, inspector. Though the statement might surprise a purist, my conscience is quite easy, and I don't think I have broken the law. But if you would like to arrest me, I am ready."

"Arrest? I can't arrest you!" said Maffet. "But—"

He broke off, and subsided for a few moments into a grim, reflective silence. Everything that McKeller said, Maffet had already told himself. He was a hard-working officer of average ability, and he was up against the most amazing case he had ever dealt with. He had every thread of it now at his fingers' ends, and yet was more helpless now—so far as making an arrest was concerned—than when he started.

"The sad fact remains, inspector," said Mr. McKellar, "that you really have no actual crime to report at all."

"Yes, sir," said Maffet. "In a sense that's so. But—it's very embarrassing for me, and still more so for you. It's going to play the devil with all of us. It beats me what the yard will have to say, when I report that you are alive."

McKellar smiled.

"It seems rather a pity to entertain them with a story that is really none of their business," he suggested.

The inspector stared at him.

"You have a distinguished record up to now, I believe—and a long one," said Mr. McKellar gently. "Have you never thought how pleasant it would be to retire? To a nice little farm, shall we say, on the south coast."

Maffet flushed scarlet to the ears. He turned squarely to McKellar, bristling like an angry dog.

"Do you suppose, sir," he said icily, "that you can—"

"With the interest on a capitalized sum of, say, twenty-five thousand pounds," continued Mr. McKellar soothingly, "to make the remainder of your days comfortable and happy? I like making people happy, having till recently known so little happiness myself. Listen to me for a moment more.

"I am more than satisfied with my name of Gillespie and my present status, and I wish to continue it—not as Gillespie the butler, but as John Gillespie, the trusted friend and confidant of my boy and his wife. Between ourselves—my son is not to know this—it won't be for long; my life is not a good one.

" We are going abroad, together all three of us. That's already been settled. We have all had enough of Dunkillin—for the present. I don't mind if I don't see the place again; its associations are not of the happiest for me.

" But the young couple are very attached to Dunkillin, and they will return to it when they are no longer encumbered with Mr. Gillespie."

The flush faded from Maffet's face as he listened. The resentment died out of his eyes. He looked at the old man pityingly.

There was a long silence.

" You're going abroad, sir?" he said at last.

" Yes. John Gillespie is going abroad. Scotland will see no more of him. Now, how about it, inspector? If I didn't know you to be an honest man I should not make this offer. I am only asking you to respect a personal confidence which I made to you of my own free will. To break it will benefit nobody.

" But as personal confidences are unusual between a citizen and a policeman, I suggest that after you have made the necessary report—which your experience and intelligence will suggest—upon events at Dunkillin, and avoiding any mention of the survival of John McKellar, you resign your post at Scotland Yard and accept this acknowledgment of your discretion.

" For twenty-five thousand pounds, Mr. Maffet, will not only keep you and your wife and family, if you have any, in comfort, but you will vastly relieve an old man who has never known very much peace, and who would like to enjoy, undisturbed, any happiness that may be coming to him."

There are policemen who sell their coats, but Inspector Maffet was not one of the breed. In this case, however, he would be wronging no one. He was not shielding an offender against the law. Here was an offer to take or leave. Maffet, now cool-headed and master of himself again, reflected rapidly. There was not much difficulty; what little danger there was he was prepared to face. And—twenty-five thousand pounds? He looked thoughtfully at the man who had known so little happiness.

" It can be done," he said.

" And you will do it?"

" I'll do it," said Maffet. " And—thank you, sir."

He took the hand that was held out to him. John McKellar smiled.

" We rich men are very unscrupulous, are we not, inspector?" he said wistfully.

The sun was setting in amber and purple glory behind Ben Buie, glowing over the mauve floors of heather that stretched to Dunkillin gates. John McKellar lay comfortably in the deep armchair before the windows over the porch, drinking in the scene. Tommy sat on one arm of the chair, Delia on the other. Her arm was round the old man's neck; he was beaming gently.

" Dad, dear," said Delia, " you're the most wonderful man in Scotland. Nobody else could have done it."

" Not one," said Tommy happily. " Dad has them all shinned."

Mr. McKellar beamed again, as Delia stroked his cheek.

" You put me too high in the class, Delia," he said. "I don't know what Tommy would have done without you. But he's done just what I wanted him to, anyway."

" I put Tommy at the head of the class of cherubs," said Delia. " Tommy did nobly all through. When he sheds his wings and flies off the handle, he's magnificent in a scrap. Of course he's young yet; he hasn't your finesse."

" He's better without it," said John McKellar. " Finesse is not a good thing in a husband. I want you two to get married at once. I shan't be really happy till you are. Listen. Tuesday? United Free Church, Glasgow? By special license."

" And then, dad, where do you want us all to go?"

McKellar laughed and closed his eyes.

" Much I care where we go—if I can be with you."

" Don't imagine you're going to get away from us. Listen!" said Delia. " America?"

McKellar's eyes opened again.

" Always wanted to go to America! Never had the chance yet. New York, Delia? You'll show me round, will you?"

"Will I! I'll be your gillie on Manhattan Moor, dad. We'll give you the time of your life. I think I'll take Neil Tull along too. We'll be back to Dunkillin and the heather when the spring breaks."

She bent down and kissed his forehead.

"Well," said John McKellar, "it's been a pretty full day, and I think I'll go to bed. You bairns will have something to say to each other."

The dusk had fallen, a silver moon hung high over the loch, and the armchair now held only two.

"Tommy, he's just the dearest old man living," said Delia. "My eyes go wet when I look at him. *I'd* never have let that woman get away. Still, of course—she was his wife. And the McKellars are like that."

"Needn't dwell on it now. All finished," said Tommy.

"I'm not. I'm thinking of poor dear Maffet's face when dad sprung it on him, 'I am John McKellar!'" Delia laughed, and wiped her eyes. Then she became intensely grave.

"Tommy."

"Yes, darling?"

"I want you to promise me something."

He slid his arm a little farther round Delia's waist and took a careful look at her. There was a warning gleam in Delia's blue eye that he had seen before.

"What is it?" he said warily.

She laid her head on his shoulder.

"It's about my children."

"Eh!"

"When you get married the second time," said Delia, shaking gently all over, "to a fascinating peroxide vampire—you won't let her ill treat the dear little things, will you? Tommy, don't shake me like that, you're making me giddy! Oh, Tommy!"

THE END

They found the landlady very much upset over the extraordinary circumstances

THE COMPLICATED CASE

By Louise Rice

HERE IS THE STORY OF ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX CRIMES THAT HAS EVER BEEN BROUGHT TO LIGHT IN THIS COUNTRY

A Story of Fact

IN considering a criminal case, we usually have the one chief figure or the two chief figures, and such difficulty with the case as exists is concerned with them.

In the case of Milton Bowers, afterward to be known as "Dr." J. Milton Bowers, there are a lot of things which have never been explained, and which do not seem to "fit," although we know that they do, somehow and some way.

Bowers was born in Baltimore, and had every advantage as a youth. He was one of these precocious youngsters whose brains never seem to have to go through the slow processes of the average child student. At sixteen he went to Berlin, and although he was not a matriculated student, he had already decided that he wanted to be a physician, and therefore made medicine his chief study.

He seems to have been considered peculiar by his teachers, who thought that he had promise, but that he was too easily led into the pursuit of pleasure. How long he stayed there is doubtful. About 1859 he returned to America and was caught in the vortex of the Civil War. He did not achieve distinction and made few friends.

In 1865, just after the war was over, Bowers went to Chicago, settled, and seems to have had something to do with a patent medicine firm.

He married Miss Fannie Hammet, who had some money of her own and carried a life insurance policy.

Mrs. Bowers seems to have dropped hints to several people that her husband was a fiend in human shape, and that she was mortally afraid of him, but he was one of those men whose good manners,

thoughtfulness for their wives and social graces made a favorable impression on many people.

Women were apt to think that the pale, furtive and sour looking Mrs. Bowers was enough to try the spirit of any man. Her friends told a different story, and when she died, very suddenly, and without any attendant save her husband, there were a good many murmurs.

However, no investigation of the death was made, despite the amount of talk that there was about it.

Beautiful, Talented and Good

Soon after the death of his first wife, Bowers happened to be in Brooklyn on a visit, and there he met again a very clever actress who had been his patient in Chicago. She was Thresa Shirk, beautiful, talented, and good.

His fine manners had always attracted her, and she listened sympathetically to his account of a marriage "entered into too young for true congeniality," a legend which his "patients" in the windy city had believed.

"Dr." Bowers and Thresa Shirk were married in Brooklyn, and they then went to San Francisco, as Bowers was really not very well, and it was thought that the climate of the Pacific coast would do him good. His new wife was also very fond of California, and glad to go there. This was in 1874.

As in Chicago, the doctor soon had a good many patients who thought that his wife did not appreciate him; they found her quiet and dull of appearance, and, though different from his first wife, she showed no fear of him, but she did show resentment.

She was a high spirited, proud woman, who disdained to discuss her domestic affairs with any one, but there was the shadow of a tragedy on her beautiful face.

She carried a life insurance policy, though not for a very large sum; a fact on which her husband sometimes laughingly joked with her, or, rather, at her, for on such occasions she turned and looked him in the eye as though defying him.

All this did not escape the attention of friends of Thresa Shirk Bowers, and when she died at the Palace Hotel, on January 29, 1881, the clamor was a good deal worse than it had been about the unfortunate Fannie Hammet.

By that time, however, Bowers had important friends, people who knew him as one of the few men in the western metropolis of the time who had cosmopolitan culture and the easy, graceful manners of an assured social position. They knew him to be extremely clever and popular.

It is easy to construct the scene and to see that the few who actively suspected him of having a hand in his second wife's mysterious death were unable to do anything about it.

Among the patients who had become part of the doctor's clientele was a divorced woman named Cecelia Benhayon Levy, a very beautiful woman, who had the reputation of being "gay," if not worse, although she contrived to keep a certain social standing. She had a brother, Henry Benhayon, who was a traveling salesman, and a child by her divorced husband, named Tillie.

His Wives Are Slaves!

The popular doctor had been seen at a good many Bohemian resorts for months before Thresa Shirk died, and less than six months after he had buried her he married Cecelia Benhayon Levy, against the vehement potests of her mother, who had heard stories about the doctor's other wives' lives and deaths, which did not soothe her.

Mrs. Levy, however, was as infatuated with her husband—for a time—as his other wives had been, and she cheerfully forsook the company of her relatives, making it clear that she did not care what their opinion of her husband was.

Bowers sanctimoniously pretended to be sorry to "have been the innocent cause of this dissension," but among his cronies he blatantly preened himself on his ability to "make my wives slaves."

It was in 1881 that Mrs. Levy married Bowers, and it was only two years until she, also, began to have the sullen look of those other women who had borne the name of Mrs. Bowers.

Shortly after this she was beginning to fight against her husband taking out a life insurance policy on her, but in the end she capitulated, and secured various policies, one of which was for five thousand dollars from the American Legion of Honor, others bringing the sum total up to seventeen thousand.

The doctor, about 1884, again became an habitué of Bohemian resorts, and was just a little bit "tougher" than he had ever seemed before. In July, 1885, Mrs. Bowers began to suffer from a strange malady. Her face, head and body began to swell.

Six Investigators

Her mother, alarmed at the reports about her daughter, went to see her, and could hardly believe that the bloated creature who could hardly move for her unnatural bulk, was her beautiful Cecelia, who had been a heart breaker among men.

Bowers attended his wife, and announced that she was suffering from an abscess on the liver. She certainly suffered. Convulsions frequently shook her. She complained bitterly, in her lucid moments, though of what no one exactly knew.

The conduct of the "doctor" was criticized, for he often left his dying wife alone, while he was seen in cafés and other places of recreation and amusement.

In October of 1885 a stranger went to the offices of the American Legion of Honor and hinted that an insurance policy which had been taken out in that fraternity was held by a certain person, and that the person whom it concerned would die shortly, "very strangely."

This man left the office of the Legion before his name could be secured, and he was never identified. Another mysterious stranger entered the coroner's office on November the 2nd, and announced that Mrs. J. Milton Bowers had just died at the Arcade House, 930 Market Street, and that it would be well to look into the matter.

This man was never identified, either, and the descriptions of himself and his insinuating partner were found not to fit anybody who was known in the town at all. This part of the case was never cleared.

It was surmised that these men were enemies of the doctor, who had a great many queer "friends," but that is all it is, a surmise.

Dr. O'Donnell, the coroner, went at once to the Arcade House and found Bowers alone with the dead woman. When the coroner told the doctor of the strange visit of the man who had made the insinuations, the doctor did not even seem to be listening.

He merely said that he had decided to have the funeral on the following afternoon, and that if there was to be any investigation, Dr. O'Donnell had better hurry up and attend to it so that the services would not be interfered with—and the coroner, being human, was angry.

He saw to it that six physicians should make the autopsy, and that Bowers should be made as uncomfortable as possible.

The six investigators of Mrs. Bowers's death gave it as their united opinion that she had not died from an abscess of the liver.

Other physicians were called in, who thought that the symptoms of the illness which had carried off the unfortunate woman were those of phosphorous poisoning.

Charged With Murder

The funeral was postponed, greatly to the "doctor's" annoyance, and the dead woman's stomach was taken out and subjected to further tests, which disclosed some evidences of phosphorous poison.

The examining physicians and police contended that Bowers had received many samples of this poison from manufacturing chemists, but when his office was searched, no trace of these samples was found. He claimed that, having no use for them, he threw them out.

On November 4th, a coroner's jury found that Cecelia Benhayon Levy Bowers had come to her death through phosphorous poison, and her husband, J. Milton Bowers, was arrested, charged with administering it to her.

This charge was largely brought about through the testimony of Mrs. Bowers's mother, Mrs. Benhayon, who stated that when she first saw her daughter after the

long estrangement it was her opinion that the young woman was dying, but that Bowers stated that she was, on the contrary, getting better, and that he would soon take her for " a nice, long trip in the counntry."

Thus reassured, the mother waited for the evidences of better health in her daughter, but as the days went by, and there was no improvement, she had insisted that another physician be called in, but Bowers had strenuously opposed this, until forced to call Dr. W. H. Bruner.

A month going by, with Mrs. Bowers getting worse and not better, Mrs. Benhayon had called in Dr. Martin, of Oakland, who had not succeeded in easing the suffering woman any.

Sentenced to Be Hanged

However, about this time her skin had taken on a beautiful, pearly appearance, and Mrs. Benhayon, now greatly disturbed, asked Dr. Martin if it could be that Bowers was poisoning his wife with arsenic.

Mrs. Benhayon then went on to say that Mrs. Bowers's aunt and cousin, calling to see their sick relative, had been forcibly ejected from the sickroom by Bowers, who was very much excited when he found them there.

" Although Bowers had seventeen thousand dollars' insurance on my daughter's life," she said, " he has always refused to have any policy made out for Tillie Levy, the daughter of the first marriage.

" When doctors left medicines for Cecelia, he would never allow any one to give them to her, but took them off, examined them, and then gave her what he said were the medicines, himself."

On the 8th of March, 1886, began the trial of J. Milton Bowers for the murder of his wife, Cecelia.

Eugene Duprey, who was afterward to defend Durrant long supposed to be the murderer of two girls in a church, and who was hanged on that charge, was, in this case, the special prosecutor. In his opening speech he stated that he expected to prove that a Mrs. Zeissing, who was Mrs. Bowers's nurse, and Thresa Farrell—who afterward married a John Dimmig—had attempted to shield the doctor.

He claimed that he could prove that before the death of his wife, Bowers had made arrangements to marry a woman in San José, and that she actually had her trousseau ready while her predecessor was alive; and that this courting of one wife before the death of the other was habitual with the man—that it could be proved that he had done it before.

It was also charged by Duprey that the practice on which Bowers had subsisted for many years was that of illegal operations. The prosecutor tried to have the police of Chicago bring forward much damaging testimony which had been unearthed in that city, but to this Bowers's lawyers made a successful protest.

The case was carried through rapidly, and the verdict brought in was that of murder in the first degree. This was on April 23, 1886.

In June of that year Bowers was sentenced to be hanged, but he appealed, and while the decision was still pending, the truly remarkable feature of this case came to light.

Three Telltale Letters

Henry Benhayon, the brother of Cecelia, had always been a sort of ne'er-do-well, trying now this and now that, sometimes being a salesman, but more often living on his mother's bounty, and frequenntly being helped by his sister, after she married again.

He and Bowers were sometimes friendly, but frequently were not, so that there were times when he would sneak into the Bowers's *menage* and get money from his sister, unknown to the doctor.

This man had attracted little attention during the progress of the trial of his brother-in-law, and had seemed to continue his usual, shiftless life.

On Sunday, October 23, 1887—while the decision as to the new trial of Bowers was still pending—some one called up the coroner's office and said that the body of an unknown man had been found in a rooming house at 22 Geary Street.

The officials proceeded at once to this address and found the landlady, Mrs. Higgson, very much upset over the extraordi-

nary circumstance of finding a dead man, whom she had never seen before, in a room which she had rented to another person, who had seemingly never arrived. How the man came to be in the room she had not the slightest idea.

On the 18th of the month, a young man, not the one now dead, had called and asked if room number twenty-one in her house was for rent. She told him that it was not, but offered other rooms, which he refused.

He called the next day to see if the room was still occupied, and she then told him that it would be vacant Saturday. He offered five dollars' deposit on the understanding that he was to have the room on Saturday, and Mrs. Higgson, agreeing to this, accepted the money and gave him keys, both to the front door and the door of room twenty-one.

On Sunday, hearing nothing in the room, she opened the door with her pass-key and found a strange young man dead.

This dead man was laid out very carefully, as though in his coffin, so that it was obvious that he could not have composed himself in that way, no matter how peaceful his manner of death.

The next hour the body was identified as that of Henry Benhayon.

Three bottles were found in the room, one containing liniment, one cyanide, and one whisky.

Three letters were found, too. One to the editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle*. It said:

To the Editor of the Chronicle:

SIR—Inclosed find one dollar to pay for this advertisement and the balance as a reward. I will call in a few days.

Yours truly,
HENRY BENHAYON.

October 21, 1887.

The copy for the advertisement was as follows:

LOST—October 20, near the City Hall, a memorandum book with a letter. A liberal reward will be paid if left at this office.

Then there was a letter to Bowers, which read:

DR. J. MILTON BOWERS:

I only ask that you do not molest my mother. Tillie is not responsible for my acts, and I have made all reparation in my power. I likewise caution you against some of your friends, who knew Cecelia only as a husband should.

Among them are C. M. McLennan and others, whose names I cannot think of now, but you will find some more when the memorandum book is found. Farewell.

Yours,
H. BENHAYON.

The third letter was addressed to the coroner and was entitled:

CONFESSION

The history of the tragedy began after my sister married Dr. Bowers.

I had reason to believe that he would leave her soon, as they always quarreled, and on one occasion she told me that she would poison him before she would permit him to leave her.

I said in jest: Have him insured—

She said all right, but Bowers objected for a long time, but finally said: If it will keep you out of mischief, all right, go ahead.

They both joined lodges, and I got the stuff ready to dispose of him, but my sister would not listen to the proposition and threatened to expose me.

After my sister got sick I felt an irresistible impulse to use the stuff on her and to finish him afterward. I would have been the administrator for my little niece, Tillie, and would then have the benefit of the insurance.

I think it was on Friday, November 24, 1885, that I took one capsule out of her pill-box and filled it with two kinds of poison. I didn't think that Bowers could get into any trouble, as the person who gave me the poison told me that it would leave no trace in the stomach. This person committed suicide before the trial, and as it might implicate others if I mention his name I will close the tragedy. H. BENHAYON.

P. S.—I took Dr. Bowers's money out of his desk when my sister died.

These remarkable documents made a tremendous stir, as well they might. Everything that was brought to light concerning the young man only made the matter of these letters the more extraordinary.

Benhayon was last seen alive on Saturday night about eleven, on the streets of San Francisco, in a condition which was then thought to be that of rather extreme intoxication, but which might just as well have been that of being drugged.

He was accompanied by a man and a woman, but their faces were not seen dis-

tinctly and whoever they were they never came forward to tell what they were doing with the man nor where they were going, nor where, if anywhere, they left him alive.

On the Saturday afternoon Benhayon had been seen entirely sober and quite as usual. He had made an appointment with a dentist for the following Monday and had purchased tickets for himself and his little niece, Tillie, for the theater on Sunday night.

The most rigid search failed to show that he had ever bought poison anywhere or had seemed to know anything about poisons. If he did commit suicide, there seemed not a reason in the world for it, for, granting that his confession was true, not the slightest suspicion had attached to him.

"A Woman from San Jose"

If he really had a bad opinion of his sister he had kept it carefully to himself, for he had vigorously defended her before her marriage to Bowers, and after her marriage she seemed to have entirely lost her tendency toward a gay life. The accusations of the letter as to the person named and "others" was obviously not true of the woman's life after she became Mrs. Bowers.

Just before he was found dead Benhayon expressed to friends his belief in Bowers's guilt as to Mrs. Bowers's death and expressed undying hate for what he called "that damned murderer."

The lost memorandum book was never found. The "large reward" offered for it could not have been more than sixty cents, since the advertisement itself would have cost about forty.

The identity of the person who engaged the room was never learned, as Mrs. Higgson soon remembered that that person was a different one from the man who asked about the room on the eighteenth—*that* man being proved, without the shadow of a doubt, to have been John Dimmig, who had married Bowers's housekeeper, Thresa Farrell.

Mrs. Dimmig and Mrs. Zeissing, who had been Mrs. Bowers's nurse, were close friends and frequently visited Bowers during his long incarceration. Dimmig was born in Ohio, where he learned the drug business, but later drifted about a good deal and finally worked in a drug store at Eleventh and Mission Streets, San Francisco, where he left to become a book agent.

Dimmig admitted that he had inquired for room twenty-one at 22 Geary Street, although he had a home on Mina Street. He claimed that it was sheer accident, his asking for that particular room, and that was just one of the ways in which he "stalled" when he wanted to get into a house to sell books.

When Dimmig saw that the police openly scoffed at the idea that he used this for a "stall," he then pretended to confess that he had wanted the room so that he and "a woman from San José" might have a "chat."

He said that he knew this woman only by the name of "Timkins" and that she had written to him, saying that she wanted the room for Saturday night and that they could then have a talk. He claimed that he destroyed the letter.

All Sorts of Forces at Work

Dimmig heatedly denied delegating any one to go and engage the room for him, denied that he met Timkins at all, on Saturday, and said that he had not an idea how Benhayon could have got into the room, but that, being very drunk on the day after he had been to see about the room, he might have mentioned to Benhayon, whom he had met, that he had asked for it and that that might have put it into the other's mind. He could not explain why he had mentioned that particular room.

After all this, which took several days, Dimmig then handed to the police a letter which had been addressed to him at the Weston Perfumery Company, 26 Second Street, which read as follows:

> J. A. DIMMIG:
>
> Sir—Call on me at once. I am in a devilish fix. I don't want your money, but your advice. I think that it is all up with me. You will find me at room 21, 22 Geary Street.
>
> HENRY BENHAYON.

Notwithstanding the astonishing fact that this letter showed that Benhayon was now

occupying the room which Dimmig had been so eager to get, the latter contended that this did not occur to him as at all remarkable.

It was shown that Dimmig was not in the habit of receiving mail through the perfumery company, but that just after the letter arrived for him there he called and asked if anything had come to the company for him through the postal service and that they gave him the letter, expressing surprise that it should have been sent in the care of the company.

A Dr. Lacy, who owned a drug store, soon came forward and proved that Dimmig had procured through him twenty-five grains of cyanide.

Next, it was discovered that Mrs. Zeissing roomed at a house on Morton and Grant Avenues and that the back entrance to the house at 22 Geary Street adjoined the back entrance of Mrs. Zeissing's rooming place. Mrs. Benhayon stated that her son Henry hated this woman greatly.

Louis Goldberg, who had known Benhayon quite well, told how he had met his friend on the street some weeks before his death and went with him to a room on Market Street where, as Benhayon stated, "he was doing some copying for a book agent."

Goldberg knew that the other's writing was very poor and very slowly made and wondered at the occupation. Of course, if Dimmig had forged all the letters and notes, then his "hiring" of the always impecunious Henry was easy enough to understand.

It was for the purpose of getting samples of his handwriting, otherwise scarce and hard to come by, for Benhayon was not a man to write anything unless necessity demanded.

Dimmig admitted that at one time he had had a room on Market Street, but claimed that he could not remember where it was. Efforts made by the police could not bring any identification of this room.

Four witnesses testified that on Friday evening preceeding the death of Benhayon, Dimmig went to Dewing's Bush Street bookstore to buy some books for Mrs. Zeissing and that he then had with him a bottle of whisky like that found in Benhayon's room.

With all this in hand, Captain Lees, of the San Francisco police, made the charge of murder against Dimmig on November 12. On March 14, 1888, the jury, after being out sixteen hours, disagreed.

On the second trial in December of the same year Dimmig was acquitted after the jury had been out for twenty-three hours. The verdict aroused a storm of protest.

In the meantime the Supreme Court had at last sent down a decision allowing Bowers a new trial, but as Kytka and other handwriting experts had given it as their opinion that the Benhayon letters were genuine and not forgeries, it was thought that it would be impossible to convict the doctor, and he was allowed to go free; another matter over which San Francisco was heartily indignant.

Bowers at once married "the woman of San José" who had been waiting for him all that time and lived with her in the town where his name had been made so notorious, until his death in 1905.

Dimmig and his wife drifted out of sight. Mrs. Zeissing also drifted out of public notice. Mrs. Benhayon went away somewhere, and was forgotten.

To the student of criminal history this is one of the most puzzling of cases, with several well defined possible motives for murder and with more than one possible murderer.

The handwriting experts undoubtedly foozled matters a good deal. We no longer believe that identity can be positively proved by handwriting. There were, it would seem, all sort of forces at work. The police continually found their efforts blocked in trying to get witnesses, find details and so on.

Whether Benhayon really did the deed —surely a crazy man, then, if ever there was one—whether he was murdered so that his "confession" might free the doctor—what part Dimmig and his wife and Mrs. Zeissing took—we can only conjecture.

What we can be sure of is that Bowers was the center of one of the most complicated cases of crime that we have had in this country.

"Where I go, the mutt goes!" declared Big Scar

THE TOMATO-CAN VAG

By Henry Leverage

LOWLIEST OF THE LOWLY IS HE, A BONY CUR AT HIS HEELS; BUT HERE WAS A MASTER AND MONGREL—IN A DANGEROUS GAME

FROM all appearances the man who parted the bushes and crawled up the slope of the Susquehanna and Southern Railroad was a tomato can vagrant, who slept most anywhere in the bedroom of stars.

Big Scar, sometimes known as Scar-Faced Guffman, glared north and south along the line of slippery rails, then he scowled upward at the drizzle that came down from the skies. He was wet to the skin; water dripped down the furrows of his unshaven features; mud oozed from the cracks of the shoes he wore. A white gash across his cheek turned blue as he shivered in the clammy cold.

Behind Big Scar Guffman crouched a mongrel dog with a stumpy tail and three black spots on his hide. The dog's eyes were sharp and clear—somewhat unlike a mongrel's. They seemed to match the steely glitter in Big Scar's glances.

Master and mongrel were a pair—in a dangerous game.

A stone milepost, at the side of the track, indicated to Big Scar that he was thirty miles from where he wanted to be. The Susquehanna River flowed through the bottoms like a tideless sea; the land about was mostly swamp, good only for duck hunting; there was nothing more civilizing in sight than a lone box car perched on a siding one mile north of the hobo's position.

"Come on, Spot," Big Scar mumbled. "We'll mooch up an' see if we can get dry inside that rattler."

A position one half mile from the box car brought Big Scar to a sudden stop. He hunched forward his broad shoulders; his broken hands went on his knees; he ap-

praised the box car with a vagrant's suspicion.

There was a tiny plume of smoke issuing from a chimney at the near end of the car. The scent of burning wood came down the wind to Big Scar. Mingled with it was the odor of cooking.

Both man and dog's nostrils quivered. Big Scar stood erect and took a hitch in his belt. He braced a pair of shoulders that were as wide as the box car's door. "Here's where we eat," he told the dog, "if we have to tap somebody on th' bean to get it."

Big Star was a specialist in cracking skulls; he had an arm equal to three average brakemen; the sectional jimmy he carried under his coat was heavy enough to rip a strong box apart or stun an elephant. It was a tempered tool somewhat out of keeping with his hobolike appearance.

"Come on!" he repeated to Spot. "I smell a Mulligan stewin', an' it'll taste mighty good to us."

A cheerful song greeted Big Scar when he reached the box car and rested his unshaven chin on the door sill:

"Oh, th' lady-loves, th' lady-loves,
Take 'em away—
Oh, bring them back to me!
I've been out East—I've been out West.
Oh, take 'em—oh, bring them—"

"Hello, bo!" throated Big Scar Guffman.

The occupant of the sidedoor Pullman dropped a frying pan on a sheet iron stove and wheeled with the quickness of a cat. He worked his brows up and down and peered at the prying yegg. Big Scar hooked a knee over the door sill and climbed inside the car. He lunged at the man.

"Mitt me!" said he, offering a hand. "I'm Guffman. Me moniker is Big Scar—cause of this scar on me cheek. Remember me? We did a bit together in th' big house at Columbus, Ohio. Remember th' principal keeper there. They used to call him Jimmy Ball."

"Sure," grinned the sidedoor Pullman tourist. "I'm called the Phantom Kid now. I wasn't then. I quit larceny. I was so full of it in the old days I was breakin' out all th' time—like th' measles. Now me graft, Scar, is workin' th' railroads—for what I can get. See that box over there?"

Big Scar scowled at a box that resembled a telegraph operator's layout. It contained an aluminium bar sounder, a key, batteries and several coils of wire. A pair of well-worn climbers was beside the box.

"That's all th' tools I carry," explained the Phantom Kid. "Th' dicks can't pinch me for havin' them in my possession. I taps th' train dispatcher's wires, when I feel like movin' along, an' orders th' trains to pick me up. I spent th' winter rollin' around Florida; last year I was all over th' West; I'm restin' here until th' next notion seizes me."

"S—o," grunted Big Scar, caught with the idea. "That's fine—for me—'cause I've got to meet with th' mob at Bedbug Island, an' that's thirty miles from here. Told them in a letter I'd be there to-day. Bedbug Island is out in th' river, between Hangman's Ferry an' Finchburg."

Big Scar moved toward the stove; he plucked a slice of bacon from the top and cooled it between his fingers as he continued:

"Get out y'ur juice box, Kid. Shin up th' nearest pole an' tell th' conductor of th' next train goin' North to pick this car up an' put it on th' sidin' at Hangman's Ferry. Y'u know how to do it, Kid. If y'u don't do it—I got a dog outside that eats bigger men than y'u. Th' dog's name is Spot. He's waitin' for some of th' scoffins we smelled y'u cookin'!"

The yegg poised the slice of bacon. "Gawan!" he repeated to the Phantom Kid, who was fifty years old and about one half Big Scar's size. "Sling that juice an' get us picked up. I ain't promisin' nothin', but I'm due for a big job with th' mob on Bedbug Island an' I may cut y'u in for a piece of it."

Slightly appeased, the Phantom Kid lifted his instrument box, tucked the climbing irons under one arm, and approached the door. He stared down at Spot, whose eyes gleamed.

"Won't bite y'u unless I give th' word," said Big Scar. "I got him trained to do whatever I want him to do, by signs. He's great for chasin' off other dogs when I'm

hittin' th' main stem for handouts. An'," added Big Scar, " th' bulls, seein' me with a dog followin', think I'm a tomato can vag. Spot's a good stall."

II

THE PHANTOM KID leaped down; Big Scar selected two slices of bacon, inserted them between two thick chunks of bread, and munched on the meal as he watched the Phantom Kid climb a pole, cut a wire, make a number of splices, and listen in on the train dispatchers as they gave orders for the trains on the Susquehanna and Southern Railroad.

" Pretty soft," mused Big Scar, after wiping his lips with a sleeve. " Here's what I call luxury. Sidedoor Pullman, signs on th' sides of it ' Construction,' a swell bunk to kip in, and all y'u have to do is to tap wires to be taken most anywhere. Maybe the Kid's havin' trouble," he added with concern when the time lengthened.

His old prison pal came down the slippery pole, finally. " All set," announced the Kid. " We're to be picked up by Extra East No. 12. Th' station agent at Greenbrier got th' order. What are you goin' to do with th' mutt?"

Big Scar reached down and called to Spot. He lifted the dog with an easy heave. " I'll close th' door," said the Kid. " An' I'll douse th' fire. Them railroad shacks on them locals are curious. No use letting them in."

The box car, after being bumped and jerked for thirty miles, was sidetracked near the ferry house at Hangman's Ferry. Big Scar sprang to the cinders; he called to Spot, then, after the dog had leaped down, he instructed the Kid:

" Keep my private car right there. Maybe I'll need it, an' maybe I won't, to-night. It's a swell get-away, an' I don't just trust th' mob I'm goin' to meet."

Big Scar avoided the ferryman's house and detoured, with Spot at his heels, through underbrush and reeds until he stood on a spit of land jutting out in the Susquehanna. His signal to the yeggs on Bedbug Island was a fire, made from damp wood, that spiraled smoke up into the leaden air.

A rowboat appeared, propelled by a pair of brawny arms. Canada Red, a yegg with a flaming beard, climbed from the grounded boat. " Hello, bo!" he greeted. " Toledo Ed is on th' island waitin' for you. Did you bring th' can opener?"

For answer Big Scar tapped his chest. " I got one inside m' coat that'll take th' day door from a First National keister. Come on, let's go to th' island. An' y'u do th' rowin'."

Canada Red's lips curled slightly. He appraised Big Scar's vagrant appearance. " Oh, all right, pal," he gulped. " How about that mutt? Ain't goin' ta take him, are you?"

" Where I go he goes!" declared Big Scar. " I've been ridin' in private cars, I have. An' I got a right to a full-blooded pet, I have. An' y'ur goin' to row us to th' island—'cause if I'm goin' on th' job you got planned I give orders. Ain't I a graduate safe opener, an' y'u never could open anythin' harder than a cracker box, y'u couldn't."

" All right," snarled Canada Red. " Me an' Toledo Ed thought you'd kinda run things—but we didn't know who else to invite."

" Invite, is good," chuckled Big Scar.

Toledo Ed greeted the two yeggs when they reached Bedbug Island. He led the way to a hobo shack where were bunks, a table and a stove made from sheet tin. Sometimes in the summer a hobo convention met on the island. The near-by police seldom bothered any one sojourning there. They were glad enough to have the predatory gentry at a distance.

" Getting down to cases," explained Toledo Ed, thrusting a thin face across the table toward Big Scar, who had sprawled on a soap box chair like a ragged *Falstaff*. " Cuttin' details," resumed Toledo Ed, " me an' Canada Red spotted a swell touch at Duffel City, six miles th' other side of Finchburg. Over there." The yegg pointed eastward, toward the shore.

" I know th' town," grunted Big Scar.

" There's a miser lives at th' south end of th' main stem, in a big house," went on Ed. " He's been pinchin' pennies an' shavin' notes since th' time of strong boxes

that opened with keys. He's got one in his house—crammed with kale. There's six or seven grand in it. Me an' Canada were goin' to turn th' trick alone—but them old boxes ain't so easy. Our idea was to sap th' old miser on th' bean an' burn his feet with matches if he didn't open the keister. He's got th' key hid. But—"

"We," broke in Canada Red, "might get a tough bird who wouldn't come across. An' we mightn't find th' key. An' maybe we couldn't spring th' box. So, that's why we want you along, Scar."

"I'm good at burnin' feet!" Big Scar said with disgust. "I've burned me own feet on many a mile of railroad—but this is th' first occasion I've been invited—"

"We ain't goin' to do that!" injected Toledo Ed hastily. "We'll let you rip th' keister wide open with th' can opener, while Canada an' I sit on th' miser. How about it, bo?"

"Th' kale goes three ways?" questioned Big Scar. "'Cause if it don't—if it don't—I'll go over there an' turn th' job alone. Me comin' all this way in a private car an' gettin' th' small end—"

Toledo Ed glanced at Canada Red.

"Oh, all right!" he agreed. "It goes three ways. We want to all hang together on this job."

Big Scar had opened scores of safes in his life. He had a saying that the harder the door the easier it fell. He graduated from Chicago and the time of the Drainage Canal, when yeggs first learned to use nitro or soup.

"We'll hang," he grunted. "Y'u two would hang anybody. I gotta run this job—from beginnin' to end. I ain't looked it over. I'm goin' to. I'll go ahead an' be a gay-cat—a tin can vag—with me dog an' can. I'll mooch around th' touch an' see if it's what y'u say it is. Then, when I gives th' office, y'u two can come on an' we'll tie up Mr. Miser."

A dollar watch was drawn from Toledo Ed's pocket. "It's goin' on seven now," he objected. "It's nine miles to Duffel City, not countin' th' river row. We'll all go together."

Big Scar overturned the soap box. He struck the table with a hairy fist.

"Me an' Spot," he declared, "go first, in that small boat t'other side of th' island. Y'u two follow in about an hour. Them's orders. D'y'u want th' hick bulls to see a mob?"

"Maybe he's right," consented the two yeggs finally.

Spot crept into the shack.

"He's better than a look out," Big Scar explained. "He'll growl every time he sees a copper—an' a blue uniform makes him wild. I taught him that. I trained him to stay outside a job, an' nobody's pinched me since I've had him."

"Don't these hoosiers around here know that mutt?" asked Toledo Ed.

"Maybe they do. Wot of it?"

III

BIG SCAR motioned to Spot; they went across the island, where Big Scar bailed out a boat, found the oars in the bushes, and shoved from shore. He glared over his shoulder, now and then, to see if Toledo Ed and Canada Red were obeying orders.

"I wouldn't be seen in their company on a bet," commented Big Scar Guffman. "They remind me of that kind of woman a self-respectin' man just don't dare walk th' streets with."

The yegg had a sense of social position. He hated a squealer; he could never turn informer, if he went to the electric chair for it. He took pride in his work and found joy in reading the small town papers after he had ripped a strong box open.

A sense of cover was in his tomato can vag disguise. He beached the boat on the bank of the Susquehanna, called to Spot, and, after a satisfactory scowl across the dark water toward Bedbug Island, he selected a course through paths and unfrequented country roads that would avoid Finchburg and bring him to the outskirts of Duffel City.

Spot followed his burly master, like a white shadow.

From Canada Red's description Big Scar recognized the house of the miser. It was set back of an unkept hedge; maple trees shaded its front porch; unlighted windows, one or two of which were broken, stared

at Big Scar with cold invitation. "We'll mooch round to th' back," the Yegg mumbled to Spot. "Y'u go ahead an' see if y'u can scare up any dogs. If y'u do—chase 'em away."

Spot had helped Big Scar prowl more houses than one; he rounded the hedge and started nosing through a wilderness of chicken coops, tool houses, and glass frames.

Everything about the place reminded Big Scar of poverty and neglect. He began to doubt Canada Red's glowing account of seven thousand in a keister. "I'm goin' in through that side window an' make sure," he decided. "Maybe Canada dreamed of all that kale."

He glanced around for Spot. The animal was not in sight. Big Scar listened intently. He worked his shaggy brows up and down. The dog had disappeared.

"He's chasin' some mutt," decided Big Scar. "He'll be back to stand guard—he always comes back."

Selecting an unlocked window, Big Scar raised the sash, sniffed inside a room, strained his ears, and then climbed with a twisting motion that landed him, without sound, upon a rag carpet, between two curtains. Again he listened. No one was stirring. The scent of the room was of hair-stuffed chairs and chintz draperies.

Big Scar drew a cigar stump from a pocket; he had picked it up from the road. He lighted the charred end and dragged a spark to a large round circle. His unshaven cheeks worked in and out. He exhaled the smoke.

The glowing end of the cigar, shaded in a cupped palm, made a miniature lamp by which he could see some distance in front of him. Big Scar did not believe in flash lamps; they were dangerous things to have in one's possession with so many hostile constables about.

The miser's safe was in that room. Big Scar crawled to it and studied its construction. He redragged at the cigar, sending a halo of soft light over keyhole, hinges, and outside frame.

"This box," he muttered, "is th' softest pete I ever saw. It was made out of pig-iron by some blacksmith."

A diversion came, unexpected and chilling. Big Scar's jaw snapped shut. He got down on all fours and backed away from the safe, like a disturbed grizzly.

Framed in a doorway stood a gray-haired woman, holding a candle aloft in one skinny arm. Her eyes were fixed and staring.

"I smell cigar smoke," she whispered. "Who would dare smoke a vile weed in my house?"

Big Scar, with one section of the can-opener clutched in his hand, cleared his lips. The cigar had been vile. It was a five-center, popular to that region.

He began to perceive, as the woman advanced step by step toward the center of the room, that she was blind. Her scrawny hair fell over sightless eyes. She did not brush it away.

"Some one is in this room," she declared with intuition. "I hear some one breathing. Why should they come to my poor house and break in on me. I live alone. There is nothing here for any one to steal."

Big Scar began to join a few details together. Canada Red and Toledo Ed, both somewhat yellow-hearted, had selected a job against an aged, sightless woman. They had informed him it was a man—a miser. The strong box, ancient as it was, might have been more than a match for their ability.

Their plan to burn the old woman's feet, if she did not give them the key to the safe, was just their size. To further back up this plan, if the woman did not produce the key, the two yeggs had invited him along.

Getting on his feet, Big Scar lunged toward the woman. He had made a decision in a split second.

"Don't scream," he throated with a blood-curdling threat. "For if y'u do—if y'u do." Big Scar lowered his voice, and changed it to a deep rasp. "If y'u do—I'll fix y'u, lady. Come with me. I'm goin' to lock y'u in another room. Gimme th' candle."

She struggled vainly in his grasp. He urged her before him. "That way, lady," he indicated by pressure with his fingers. "Right into this large closet. I see there's

a window in it—high up. Y'u'll be comfortable on them rugs. Don't call for help—for if y'u do, I'll come back—I'll come—back."

Big Scar locked the door on the outside and slouched toward the safe. He set the woman's candle on one corner of it. The face of the grandfather's clock, overlooking the operation of opening a strong box with a can opener, would have shown astonishment if it had eyes instead of hands. Big Scar went at the keister like a famished man plucking a fowl.

He was forced to move the candle when the entire box seemed ready to fall apart. Out through the shattered door fell ancient heirlooms—a silk shawl, an album, a Bible, and a stocking, of another period, crammed with bank notes.

Big Scar's eyes bulged when he ran his fingers into the stocking. The bills, mostly large ones, were crumpled with age. Some were torn, others pasted together.

"There's five or six grand here," Big Scar muttered. "Canada Red was right. An' he won't get a cent of it. I'm goin' to double cross them two crooks; they got it comin' to them, burnin' an old woman's feet—"

He took precautions before he left the safe and climbed out through the window. His tattered right sleeve served to wipe away any trace of finger prints. The candle, with its soft wax, had better be taken along. It would retain thumb marks.

The outer world was damp with mist when he started away from the woman's house. Canada Red and Toledo Ed would be along any minute. They would break into the house, after a vain wait for him, and find the shattered safe. No use then torturing the woman. Big Scar had checkmated his unsavory pals. He looked around for the Spot; the dog was still missing. He whistled softly. Spot always answered that signal.

A sound of two men coming along the country road decided Big Scar. Spot was a sagacious animal; he would be sure to make his way toward Hobo Island. Often before, Big Scar had overheard the dog barking on the shore, and gone with a boat to bring it out to the hobo camp.

He avoided being seen by the two yeggs when he circled the house, stumbled over a pile of tin cans, and climbed a wire fence beyond which was a lane that led in the general direction of Finchburg and the river. His boat was drawn up as he left it. He looked back for Spot; again he whistled, this time shrilly.

"Th' whole mob's busted up!" he muttered. "Even Spot's scattered. I'll row out an' see what happens when we get together."

He rather thought much would happen when Canada Red and Toledo Ed found the crib cracked and came fuming toward camp. He reached Bedbug Island and entered the shack, where he lighted a fire and started cooking a Mulligan in a kerosene oil can.

While the stew boiled he sprawled across the soap box chair and waited for developments. A second stump of a cast off cigar filled the place with biting smoke.

"They're long comin'," concluded Big Scar, crossing his leg. He finished the cigar and spat it to the floor. Getting up with a sudden idea, he went outside and buried the sectional jimmy in a spot that he alone could find.

"No use havin' evidence when you're on a job with that yellow, feet-burnin' bunch. They might get pinched an' squeal on me."

IV

HE slouched back toward the shack. Parting underbrush, he was about to cross the clearing when his form grew rigid. Sounds came over the river of more than one pair of oars. A constable's hard voice called a command:

"Get around on th' other side of th' island, you. We'll give it a good frisk an' see if any yeggs are there. If they aren't here, they'll be over by Hangman's Ferry."

Big Scar knew he was trapped: he believed that Canada Red and Toledo Ed had squealed on him. The chief of police from Duffel City found the yegg sitting in the hut, smoking a third cigar butt with the air of a nabob.

"Come along!" ordered the chief, while a rifle was thrust in through a broken window. "You're wanted for a job—openin'

a safe. We've got your pals in th' jail. One of them had a letter in his pocket, mentioning this island. That's how we found you. We got a dog over at th' lock-up that 'll be sure to recognize you. He did th' other two—first crack."

Big Scar did some rapid thinking.

"So," he replied to the bristling chief, "so I got pals an' there's a dog. Gawan! An' y'u said somethin' about me openin' a safe. I couldn't do that—even if I had a combination. Me, a safe cracker? I'm a tourist, I am. I whitewashed one jail once, that was near Scranton, for stealin' a ride on a freight train. That's th' only wrong I ever did, mister."

"Come on!" snapped the rural chief. "We'll see."

Big Scar was searched. The chief found nothing more incriminating than cigar stumps, small change, matches, and candle grease. He overlooked the last clew. Big Scar had tossed the woman's candle in the same hole that concealed the can opener.

Leaving a deputy to search the island, the posse hurried Big Scar across the river. He was rushed to Duffel City by auto. Canada Red and Toledo Ed sat in separate cells. Their features grew sullen when Big Scar came lunging through the jail door.

"Ever see this tramp before?" queried the chief.

A brooding, sullen silence was their answer. Big Scar scowled toward his pals.

"They're strangers to me," he rumbled. "That runt there looks like a bo I knew down in th' Lehigh Valley—but he ain't. That bo had one eye an' this one has two."

"Bo!" the chief repeated. "Them ain't hoboes—them be yeggs! We picked them up near th' Widow Henderson's after one of their number had locked th' widow in a closet. Lucky for her the telephone was in that closet, an' she phoned me."

Big Scar winced; he had overlooked the telephone. The closet, near the front stairs, was a logical place for it.

The chief whispered to one of his deputies. He turned on Big Scar. "We'll test you," he said. "Maybe we'll have to let you go—maybe we won't. Let th' dog out of th' cell, Nate. See if it knows this fellow."

Spot came out of a gloomy hole and shook himself. He looked toward Canada Red and Toledo Ed. He wagged his tail at them. The chief explained: "We found this animal caught in some chicken wire. It belongs to those two yeggs—it knows them. How about this fellow, mutt?"

Big Scar's foot shifted slightly. "I never saw that dog before," he protested. "It ain't mine. I'm too poor to own a dog."

Spot growled at Big Scar; its short, white hair bristled; it showed a gleaming row of teeth.

"Call it off, it 'll bite me!" cried the yegg.

A disgruntled chief showed Big Scar the jail door. He aimed a parting shot in the yegg's direction. "Make tracks from this town. You don't look like a man who could steal six thousand—but those birds I got in there, do."

Big Scar rounded the block; he came to the back of the jail. There was a small yard there. A flight of stone steps led up to an open door through which streamed a light that glowed into the early morning.

Spot, as chief witness, had the freedom of the yard. Big Scar leaned over the fence. He whistled peculiarly. Spot's ears lifted. Again Big Scar whistled, this time louder.

Casually Spot glanced at the chief and jailors. He moved toward the door unnoticed. He bounded across the yard and cleared the fence.

"Good dog," muttered Big Scar, mooching off. "Y'u denied yore own master when I signaled for y'u to do it, with me foot. We'll mosey along where they ain't no jails.

"Spot," he added, outside of Duffel City, "I got to write a letter to that Widow Henderson."

The dog looked up at Big Scar's moving lips.

"I put that kale in a tomato can by th' side of her house, Spot. I'll write her where it is. If she'd been a he miser I'd of kept it."

Spot barked once, joyfully.

"Shut up!" snarled Big Scar. **"I ain't** lookin' for sympathy."

Then she plastered a smack on each cheek, the burny kind

THE SERGEANT'S GYPSIES

By Arthur Evan James

"HIGHBROWS 'UD CALL THIS A PERFECT DAY, BUT TO US IT 'UD BE DANGEROUS, FOR IT MADE YOU FEEL LIKE GETTIN' DRUNK OR FALLIN' IN LOVE"

CAPTAIN MARTIN of the Pennsylvania State Constabulary parked his feet upon his desk and chewed off the end of a long, black cigar. It was a minute before he spoke.

"Runyan, that new sheriff in the county above here, just phoned before you came in, sergeant," he said. "It seems the freight station at Greenwood was robbed last night—safe picked—and they find themselves something like eight hundred dollars short.

"I didn't get all the details because that green sheriff was so excited that he rambled from one thing to another. I've never met him, but judging from his conversation, he must be a beaut!"

"Don't know him, either, captain!" I cut in. "But I hear he's a card—as thick as they make 'em!"

"Anyhow, I managed to understand what he wanted," the captain went on after he had lighted up his cigar. "He thinks the fellow that pulled the job is hooked up with a gang of gypsies, now camping at Cold Springs."

"Why don't he go and nail him then, instead of spieling to you?" I blabbed out.

The captain blew a big puff of smoke up in the air and kind of smiled. "A little technicality of the law seems to be troubling him, sergeant! You see, Cold Springs is not in his county—it's out of his jurisdiction. And he can't get hold of the other sheriff—he and his deputy are taking a prisoner to the penitentiary to-

day. So he wants a member of the constabulary on hand to make things look right—to take the responsibility for the arrest in case he finds his man.

"He's such a sticker for legal points that he asked me to be sure to have a man on the ground before he arrived, so that he can say he was merely helping the constabulary—not the constabulary helping him. I guess I'll give you the job!"

"A swell chance he'll have of getting his bird, once I hit the camp in the uniform!" I sputtered. "Them gypsies is damn cute—and don't you forget it!"

The captain gave me one of his chuckling laughs. "Of course, you can't go in the uniform, but in plain clothes—who could be better? Just talk and act natural, and they'll never get wise you're a State cop. There's no one in the company who could carry out the part of the rube sucker as well as you!"

That kind of tickled me, 'cause I always felt I had the makings of a star actor, only I never had the chance to show my stuff.

"I'll have the stage all set for that rattle-brained sheriff—just leave it to me!" I spouted. "All I want is a little time—then if his man's in the camp, I'll hand him over to him when he comes. As I was saying, them gypsies is cute, but I'll show 'em there's a man floating around here that's a dam' sight cuter!"

"It can't be that you're speaking of yourself!" the captain drawled.

Of course, the captain didn't mean it—it was only his way of edging a fellow on.

"I'll dig up some other clothes," I said, paying no attention to his little joke, "and I'll report before I pull out."

"Do!" The captain picked up the morning paper. "I'll phone the sheriff when you start."

I pulled off a salute, walked out of his office, and hustles to the bunk rooms in the other end of the barracks. On the way, I happened to think that the coat to the only store suit what I owned was in a tailor shop, getting fixed. I'd got it torn in a mix-up at the Mine Workers' ball, the week before.

But that didn't worry me, 'cause I knew I'd be able to pick one up in the bunk room—some fellow always left his sparking clothes hanging on the wall.

When I got to our snoring quarters, I saw I was right. Red Calahan had left his new, checkerboard suit on a hanger, back of his bunk. And me and Red was always pretty good friends. As long as I've got to borrow the coat, I thought, why not take the whole suit? I figured my black trousers and vest wouldn't go so well with that ice cream coat.

I knew I'd be able to get into it somehow, even if I was almost five foot eleven, 'cause Red was only a couple of inches less. Of course, I expected it'd be a little tight and short, but what of that! I wasn't going to make a call on some swell chicken—I was going out on business—the business of the law.

So I grabbed Red's glad rags and went to my own bunk. Sinking down on the springs, I threw off my big cowboy hat and peeled off my leather leggings. Then I stripped off the tight-fitting, dark gray jacket and my nifty, peg-topped, riding trousers. It wasn't long then—just a little longer than it took me to change my flannel shirt for a white hard-boiler with a high, stand-up collar, and fix my new, bright red tie—before I was all set, in Red's suit.

It fitted kind of snug and the bottoms of the pants didn't quite come to the tops of my shoes, but I figured if I took it easy, I wouldn't bust it. The thing that worried me the most was those blamed short sleeves. They didn't cover a bit of my cuffs, and I didn't want those cuffs to get dirty, 'cause they was the only pair I had.

Then I was a little bit bothered about a hat. I knew without digging it out of my trunk, my black derby wouldn't look so good with that splashy suit. But I remembered all of a sudden that Bud Rosser had showed me a new straw hat that he'd bought yesterday. He wouldn't want it before evening—I'd see if I couldn't find it!

I found it all right, only it fit a little tight—stayed up on top of my head, making my ears look kind of low. But it stuck on when I shook my head, so I decided

to wear it. Then I was all fixed to go on the job, excepting for my gun and badge.

But when I tried to get my big Colt into the hip pocket of those bologna skin pants, it couldn't be done. And the coat was too short to wear a holster. Any one would have seen the gun a mile away. I had a pocket automatic in my trunk, and I made up my mind to take that. Even if some one saw it, they wouldn't get wise—the constabulary didn't carry that kind of a shooting iron.

I see you're dying to know how I got it, then. Well, mum's the word, but we troopers don't always turn in everything we get hold of. Of course, we always turn over to the captain anything we haven't got any use for—such as raw green moonshine, liquor made from wood alcohol, wornout bootleggers' trucks, counterfeit money, and the likes of that, or anything that really amounts anything.

But when it comes to a single quart of good old rye, a lone case of real, honest-to-goodness beer, or an extra nice piece of small artillery, we sometimes get a trifle forgetful. If we didn't, they would only pass down the line until they landed in some county official's stomach or pocket, and what's the use of that! Enough said—that automatic was a dandy!

After I had packed the automatic in the hip pocket of Red's sporty pants, I picked up the jacket of my uniform and started to take off the badge. But then it struck me that it would be pretty dumb to have a State cop's badge anywhere on me, knowing how nifty them gypsies were at picking pockets, and remembering how I'd have to let them fuss around me when I kidded them into thinking I was a rube what had come to have his fortune told.

And I wouldn't need it nohow—not when I was dealing with this bunch. So I left the badge on my jacket and takes my roll of money from my breeches.

It looked like a good, respectable roll, but to tell the truth, it wasn't as respectable as it looked. I had a nice new ten-spot wrapped around the outside of thirty ones—making just forty dollars all told. But it looked like four hundred when I flashed it around, and what's life anyway but a game of bluff? After I'd counted it over to see that none was missing, I stuck the roll into Red's jeans and starts for the captain's office.

When I clicked my heels together and threw a salute, the captain laughed so hard that he almost toppled over in his whirligig chair. I knew what was making him laugh without asking. I'd peeped into the little mirror by my bunk after I'd got dolled up. And I saw that the color of Red's suit didn't go 'tall good with my complexion.

I got one of those regular he-man faces, all tanned and roughened and big. While the colors in Red's suit was meant for some pale, sleek little fellow what fits ladies shoes or jerks a soda fountain. Then my flat nose looked awful masculine, too, spread out underneath Bud Rosser's new straw sailor hat. It's a shame I ever had to get that smash, but the crook that done it is doing twenty years. He didn't get away even if he did flatten out my nose.

After the captain got through laughing, he reached for the phone. "Never seen anything better, sergeant!" he said. "You can't be beat! The smartest man down at headquarters would never pick you for a State cop! Start for Cold Springs at once—I'll phone the sheriff you're on your way!"

Those kind words of the captain sort of made up for his laugh. Outside of the compliments, it made a fellow feel good to know that after nine years in the service, he didn't carry the marks of a human bloodhound when he was dressed up. For there's some people that's not specially friendly to State cops, and when a man tries to get a little pleasure mixing with strangers at a clam bake or dance, he don't like to get snubbed.

"Tell the sheriff I'll be with those gypsies in less than an hour, and I'll try to have his man spotted before he gets there if he takes his time," I spoke up.

"I ain't been over Cold Springs way for almost three years, but they tell me the new road's pretty good. I guess it 'll be all right to take that old Dodge—not so classy-looking, but it won't take so long as my horse."

"Sure, sergeant!" the captain sang out. "Help yourself—and good luck!"

And his smile reached from ear to ear, showing me he meant it. He's a fine fellow, the captain!

Another salute, and I was on my way.

II

IT was one of those bright, tickling, May mornings when I rattled along the road to Cold Springs. As I got out of the hard coal country, into the farming lands on the other side of the mountain, I could sniff the smells of spring.

The whiffs of blossoms was fine, but the whiffs of fertilizer wasn't so good. Taken altogether, though — with the fresh green trees, the chirping of the birds, the croaking of the frogs, and the itching of that tickling, warm air—it was what the highbrows call a perfect day. But fellows like ourselves would call it a dangerous day. It made you feel like going fishing, or getting drunk, or falling in love.

When I came to the top of the hill that dropped down to the Cold Springs, I happened to think I'd forgotten to bring a pair of handcuffs. But maybe it was just as well, I told myself, 'cause them gypsies were great fanners, and if their fingers happened to touch a pair of nippers, they'd get wise in a jiffy. Anyhow, the sheriff calculated to make the actual pinch—he and his men would have plenty of bracelets!

As I got toward the bottom of the hill, I spied the heathens' tents scattered around in a grove of pines, standing on a bluff a couple of hundred yards back of the springs. Three big covered wagons with a pair of nags tied to each of them, stood on a patch of level ground, right off the road. About the tents I could see gypsy kids playing, gypsy women working, and gypsy men loafing around with big, long pipes in their mouths. About a dozen all told, not counting the kids, I figured.

Knowing I'd have to be pretty cute, I made a bluff at stopping at the springs for a drink. While I guzzled a little water, I saw the gypsies watching me with all eyes. Seeming not to pay any attention to 'em at all, I started back to my car and jumped into the seat. Then I shoves my foot down on the starter—only I didn't throw the switch in. Of course the motor wouldn't go, and I jumped out and lifted up the hood, pretending to be all puzzled like.

Pretty soon I hears some one walking up to me, and I turns around.

There, giving me the glad smile, stood the prettiest gypsy girl what I ever seen.

She had the whitest teeth, the darkest eyes, and the blackest hair of any woman I ever took a squint at. And her complexion; say, it was real—just the color of creamed coffee and without a wart or a mole.

She was all dolled up in a white, blousey, cutaway waist over which she wore a kind of a black velvet vest. The vest didn't come together in the front by at least six inches, and the bottom of it didn't quite reach her wide red sash. The tails of the sash trailed down on one side below the end of her black skirt. But you mustn't get it into your head that those tails were so terribly long, 'cause her skirt didn't quite come to her knees.

"You stuck?" she asked, still smiling. "How far you got to go?"

"Stuck for keeps!" I growled, trying to look kind of worried like. "My farm is way up in the next valley. It's nearly twenty miles from here. I'll have to wait around until I can catch a ride to the nearest garage."

I could see before she opened up her yap she'd fallen for my clever acting. She stood eying me, just like a kid eyes a plate of ice cream he expects to get.

"Too bad!" she heaved—she seemed to pull it out from way down near her sash. "Too bad machine broke! But never mind, Rita tell your fortune while you wait. Come over to tent!"

"Don't know as I want my fortune told," I stalled, to fool her all the more. "I'd never like to know just what's going to happen—life would get too damn tame."

"Then Rita show you how to make lots of money—how's that?"

"Not so bad!" I grunted. "In that case I'll go over to your tent."

Rita's smile would knock you cold.

I let her start and I followed.

Up the footpath we went, going past the bubbling springs and then between a bunch

of big rocks higher than your head. The way that girl walked it didn't seem more than two minutes before we was in the middle of the gypsy camp.

As I gaped around, just like a rube would, taking in all the gypsies about, I saw a tall, dark, skinny heathen, standing as straight and stiff as a poker with his arms folded over his chest. He was parked near the flap of the biggest tent. Rita must have caught my rubbering look, for she stopped short and grabbed my hand.

"My father—the chief!" she sort of whispered, her eyes shimmying up into my face.

"Fine man!" I said out loud, and then finished to myself. "To hit over the head with a blackjack."

I took another squint as we started to move along. Back of the Old Boy, peeping through the flap of the tent, I spied another face. And he wasn't no gypsy, either! His hair was brown like mine, and his eyes were gray—that cold kind of gray that seems to look clear through your skull.

I'd run across fellows like him before. They were always good-for-nothing trash, what didn't have the guts to be a real crook. They'd pull off some little picayune job and then hide among a bunch of negroes, gypsies or Chinese, shivering for their lives.

"That's the sheriff's man, sure as you're born!" I thought, quick taking my glimmers from the tent so they wouldn't get suspicious. "But since I've got him fooled, I'll give him plenty of rope."

You see, I wanted to draw out of Rita all I could about that fellow before she found out I was a State cop. It was my game to get all the dope to be got before the sheriff breezed in. And besides, I told you it was Spring.

It was only another minute before we were in Rita's tent. As the chief's daughter, she had one all to herself. Hers was the farthest from the road and the smallest in the camp. I took care to flop down where I could watch the chief's canvas through the opening. If that gray-eyed geaser made a move to get away, I'd nail him quick!

I just got fixed nice when Rita dropped down on the ground beside me, and taking Bud's straw hat off of my head, she began running her fingers through my hair.

"If you got any money with you, Rita show you how to make it double," she mooned in my ear, at the same time catching ahold of one of my paws with her other hand. "Such a handsome man I never seen!"

Of course I had to kid her along. When we made the pinch, I'd get the money back. I could afford to be real generous for a few minutes. And somehow I kind of liked the feel of her hands. It was Spring.

"I haven't got so much—only about forty bucks," I said, pulling out my roll—the ten spot wrapped around the thirty ones. "But even that would be nice to have doubled. How's it to be done?"

"Rita takes the money and put it in your inside coat pocket over heart. Then Rita get thread and needle and sew up pocket so that money can no get out. Then Rita say some magic words and rub heart with hand. In one week—not before—mister is to cut threads open and he will find the money doubled.

"It is a great gift which Rita has. It was given her by her grandmother — the great queen of the Shada tribe."

I chuckled to myself. I'd heard of that game before. When the gypsies got hold of a fellow that was sucker enough to fall for it, they'd palm off a roll of blank paper for the roll of good money and sew it up in his pocket tight. Then how the poor boob would rave at the end of the week when he ripped open the pocket! Long before that time the gypsies had made their getaway.

But I was always curious to see just how they worked it. And I had to kill the time somehow until the sheriff got on the job. Besides, I didn't have any great objections to Rita fussing around me and rubbing my heart—not as long as I was going to get the roll back later. It was Spring.

"Go to it!" I said. "But don't you think a couple of kisses would help along the magic?"

She laughed like only one of them gypsy girls can laugh, and bobbed up on her knees. Then she plastered a smack on

each cheek. I can almost feel them yet! They were the burny kind—the kind that sticks there for weeks.

"Rita, get the thread and needle," she cooed, taking her arms from around my neck. "Take good care of money until Rita comes back!"

"I'll do that!" I promised. But she was already outside, running to her old man's tent.

I knew what she was after, along with the thread and needle—the wad of blank paper. And I had a good laugh to myself.

III

WHILE I was laughing, I heard a motor car pull up in front of the springs. Getting up on my feet and sticking my head out of the tent, I saw three men with Winchesters climbing out of the machine. I knew it must be the sheriff and his posse, and I shot my eyes toward the chief's canvas, watching for that gray-eyed gink.

In a couple of seconds he comes running out and looks down toward the springs, then toward the back. He was somewheres around my age, tall and well set up, and had on a dark blue suit. He'd stopped short when he caught sight of the sheriff, and I was up on my toes, ready to nab him if he started for the woods.

When he didn't move, I wonders why until I saw four more men with rifles coming different ways through the trees in the back. That sheriff didn't mean to lose his bird! He had the back and sides of the camp covered before he pulled in.

I could see that my gray-eyed friend knew the jig was up. His smooth, long face twitched and squirmed. He shifted his weight from one foot to another, and stood rubbing his hands, all nervous like. If you ever seen a scared crook, he was it!

About that time Rita comes running out of the big tent, plainly not knowing anything about the sheriff and his men, when the gray-eyed fellow in the blue suit grabs her by the arm and rushes her back into her dad's canvas.

It wasn't more than a few seconds before she comes shooting out again and runs like a white-head toward me, while the gray-eyed fellow steps out and watches her every stride.

I was mighty curious to see just what she was going to do, seeing how the sheriff and his men were drawing close to the tents.

"Quick, mister!" she pants, dashing into the tent and holding out her hand. "The police—they come! Hurry with money before it is too late! Rita, sew quick."

That kind of knocked me off my feet—or it would, only I was sitting down again, seeing that Mr. Gray Eyes couldn't get away. I had to hand it to that girl's nerve!

Even with a young army coming in on her, she didn't mean to lose those forty bucks. And I'd take it away from her in less than five minutes. I couldn't disappoint her—it was rich!

"Sew away!" I said, handing her the roll. "And don't forget the rubbing part!"

She grabbed the money with her right hand and then swaps it with her left for the thread and needle. Throwing back Red's coat, she drops a roll of something into the inside pocket and begins sewing for dear life. I never seen any woman's fingers fly so fast.

Taking a squint out, I saw the man what I took to be the sheriff stepping up to the chief. I always thought I'd like to see just how one of those rube sheriffs made a pinch, and here was my chance. I'd lay quiet for a minute or so longer and see just what he'd do.

You see, Rita had just snapped off the needle and was starting on a lot of queer lingo. She hadn't got to the rubbing part yet. And it was Spring!

The lingo didn't last so long, but the rubbing would have lasted longer if I hadn't seen that gray-eyed skirt hanger starting to walk toward the sheriff.

I had to have a little credit in the pinch, seeing how I'd spotted the bird and worked out of Rita, between rubbings, that he'd only been in the camp for three days.

"Just a minute, Rita, darling!" I said, sweet like, loosening her arms and getting to my feet. "I've got to leave you for a few seconds. I'll be back later!"

Rita gave me the grandest smile. "Don't forget! Come back as soon as the police

go! Rita will be waiting with kisses. And the magic—it is not yet finished!"

"Don't worry that I'll forget!" I blarneyed, thinking of my forty bucks—also a few more of those kisses. "I'll be right back just as soon as this row's over!"

As I came running toward the sheriff, I saw that gray-eyed beezer touch his arm.

"There he is—your man!" I heard him say, pointing his finger right at me. "He's the fellow that robbed the freight station!"

I'd never given fellows like him the credit of even as much guts as that, and it made me boiling mad.

"You damn low-down skunk!" I shouted, leaping across the ground and grabbing him by the throat. "I'll choke your black tongue out of your head!"

But before I got him down on his knees, that whole rube army of the sheriff's was on top of me. When they piled off, I was wearing a pair of bracelets.

By that time, I was so mad that I was sizzling. They stood around me, the sheriff with his gray Buffalo Bill whiskers reaching almost to his pot belly, and the rest of his hayseed outfit grinning like fools.

"You damn dumb-bells!" I screamed. "Don't you know I'm the State cop from over at the Coalville barracks?"

I saw the gray-eyed gink's face kind of twitch, just like things weren't going to suit him. He started to fidget around on his feet.

"No matter who he says he is," he sort of mumbled, "why don't you search him?"

"Not a bad idea 'tall!" the sheriff spouted. "Here, Silas, give me a hand!"

IV

WHILE I lay there on the ground, handcuffed and raving, the sheriff and his man Silas went through me from head to foot. It didn't take them long to yank out my automatic. And then their fingers struck the roll sewed up inside of my coat.

When the sheriff called for a knife to cut open the stitches, I got all over my grouch and started to laugh to myself. I could picture just how foolish he'd look when he pulled out that wad of blank paper. I kidded him about taking care not to cut the bills when he started out with the knife. He got kind of mad, and told me to shut up.

Then he gets the pocket cut open and sticks in his hand. I sets myself to give him a big roar.

When his fist came out, all doubled up tight, I let her go. I bet you could hear that laugh for a mile.

But when his fingers opened up, that laugh stopped quick! It turned into a gag—then into a choke. Nestled right there in the sheriff's horny hand was a big roll—and it wasn't a phony roll, either! I could catch a big fifty on the bill wrapped on the outside.

In a second the sheriff had slipped off the rubber band and began counting the bunch of real money.

"Eight hundred and ten dollars!" he at last sang out, his voice trilling like a guy's what's praising himself. "The exact amount to a penny that was stolen from the Greenwood freight house."

The sheriff wheels around to that gray-eyed gazabo and sticks out his hand. "Mighty glad for your help. The captain promised to send over a good man. And he did. I knew you were the right State cop for the job the minute I laid my eyes on you."

"Don't mention it, sheriff," the fellow muttered, letting go of the sheriff's hand quick. "I'm only too glad to help. Since you got your man, I'll be moving along—lots of things to do yet, to-day, you know."

"Sorry you can't stick around a little while," the sheriff breezed. "I was figuring to scare up a little drink."

"Don't be a plump lunkhead altogether, sheriff," I screams out. "He's no more of a State cop than he's a gypsy. I'm the State cop from the Coalville barracks. He's the crook!"

The sheriff and his men just laughed till they shook.

"That's the best I ever heard," the sheriff bursts out. "Can you imagine anything like that a State copper! I do believe the fellow's off his head along with being a crook!"

"Since when do the State police carry these new fangled shooting irons?" one of

the sheriff's men joshed, holding out my automatic.

"And if you're a State trooper, let's see your badge, captain," kidded another.

"Never mind about the shooting iron and the badge," I shouts back. "But I tell you I'm the State trooper—and a sergeant at that."

"I'm Napoleon, only I don't have on my cocked hat," the sheriff laughs. "But since you had the dough, you can tell the judge you're Cal Coolidge for all of me."

By that time I was so fighting mad that I was chewing up my own tongue. "Go to hell, all of you!" I roars out. "You're the dumbest bunch of animals I ever seen!"

The sheriff reaches out with his hob-nailed foot and gives me a stiff boot. "Shut up!" he hollered at the top of his voice. "If you don't keep quiet, I'll smash you over the head!"

"Guess you can handle him all right, sheriff," the gray-eyed shyster speaks up, edging away from the crowd. "I'll be on my way."

"Leave the nutty crook to us—we'll fix him if he don't keep his trap tight shut!" the sheriff flings back. "Much obliged for the lift and, remember, if anything's said, you made the pinch and turned this fellow over to me on the other side of the county line."

"Sure, sheriff. Good day."

The next minute I seen Mr. Gray Eyes pulling out a motor cycle from somewheres behind the trees and go trudging down the path.

As I sat there on the ground, mussing and dirtying Red's good suit, I couldn't help admiring that fellow's slickness even if he didn't have no guts. I began to see just how smart he'd doped things out.

He knew in a second, when he first caught sight of the sheriff and his men, that some one had given them the right tip, and that they were sure to make some kind of a pinch. Just at that time, eight hundred and ten dollars didn't look so big—not near as big as those walls around the pen.

It was easy enough to get rid of the money, but it wasn't so easy to get rid of the sheriff. He'd have to have a prisoner of some kind before he'd be satisfied.

It was more than likely when Rita first went into the big tent, before any of them got wise to the sheriff's party coming, that she'd told them all about the rube sucker she had in tow, and how she hoped to make forty bucks quick.

So when Mr. Gray Eyes hears a car stop and steps out to see the sheriff coming, he loses his nerve, but not his head. If the sheriff had to have a prisoner, he'd get one—not him, but that rube sucker over in Rita's "budwoir!"

He just about got it all figured out when Rita comes running from the big tent. So he grabs her and rushes her back in. Then he tells her what he's up against, and slips her the wad he stole from the freight station, asking her to sew it into the sucker's coat instead of the phony bundle which she had got ready.

But even to this day I could never believe that Rita saw through all his game. 'Cause I'm sure she was awful sweet on me, cutting out all about the forty bucks. No girl could have smacked her lips on my cheeks the way she did unless she had been hit—and hit hard. And it wasn't much to be wondered at if you stop to think of it—she, a girl of the great outdoors, and me, a regular he-man—and Spring!

The only way I could ever figure it out was that Mr. Gray Eyes had never told her anything about his intending to palm me off as the crook. She thought he only wanted to hide the money in a safe place until the sheriff left.

Then what did those bunch of rubes do, just about the time I'd got things all straightened up in my mind, but come and pick me off the ground and march me into their car. Stepping down on the gas, they had me in Greenwood in a little over an hour and locked me up in the jail.

I guess I'd be in the hoosegow yet if I hadn't managed to coax the keeper into phoning to the captain. He came rushing over in his Hudson Super and got me out.

Did I get my forty bucks back? Not so's you could notice it! Me and the captain stopped at Cold Springs on the way back, but them gypsies had flew the coop.

And Mr. Gray Eyes? They're looking for him yet!

And so the murderer had flung both his hatchet and his cloak over the fence

WHO KILLED HELEN JEWETT?

By Zeta Rothschild

PUBLIC OPINION WAS DIVIDED; AND A REV. MR. BROWNLEE OPENLY SUPPORTED THE MURDER AS "A DEED TO BE COMMENDED"

A Story of Fact

ALL New York took sides in the manner of an old-fashioned spelling-bee when Helen Jewett was found murdered in her bed one night in April, 1836.

Was Frank Robinson, the last man seen in the girl's room that night, responsible for her death? Did the blue cloak found in a neighboring yard belong to him? And did the hatchet, with which the girl's head had been smashed before her bed was set afire, come from the store where Frank Robinson worked?

A large faction of vengeful New Yorkers would have shouted "Yes" to these questions. It urged the district attorney, by way of the New York *Sun,* to hold Frank Robinson for trial.

The same paper held up for ridicule the one man who provided Frank Robinson with an alibi for the time during which Helen Jewett was murdered and boldly asserted in its columns that nobody who knew him would believe him under any circumstances.

And later the prosecution was blamed for the alleged lackadaisical manner in which it conducted the trial. Was it possible that political pressure had been able to persuade the State to go softly?—insinuated the press.

On the other side was a small minority who saw Frank Robinson as a victim of a series of unhappy coincidences. The only witnesses against him, or rather, the most important ones, were Helen Jewett's companions in the house she called home. And was the word of these fallen women to be taken seriously?

The jury had not much difficulty in making up its mind as to the guilt of Frank Robinson. In less than half an hour it brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty."

But in the cold, calm eyes of almost a century later, there seems to have been some justification in the clamor of those who yearned to see Frank Robinson mount the gallows.

Helen Jewett was a very beautiful lily of the field. Of her early days—she was only twenty-three when she was murdered—rumor credited her with a series of affairs, more or less honorable, and more or less profitable.

A Column of Smoke

At the time of her murder she was an inmate of a house patronized by the dandies of New York. The house itself, located at 41 Thomas Street, was "large and elegant," wrote the elder James Gordon Bennett who covered the story for his newly acquired *Herald*, and was painted yellow. It was also elegantly furnished with mirrors, splendid paintings, sofas, ottomans, and every variety of costly furniture.

On the night of the 9th of April, 1836, this story opens.

Rosina Townsend, the head of the house, was the first to testify at the inquest. At nine o'clock, she said, she had opened the door to Frank Robinson, had called Helen and had seen them go upstairs together.

About half past eleven she had taken a bottle of wine up to them. It was the last time she saw Helen Jewett alive.

In answer to questions, this witness said that Robinson had worn a cloth cap and a dark cloak. He had kept his face muffled in the cloak when she let him in, but he always did that. Anyway, she had seen him in the room with Helen when she took up the wine and so had no doubt that it was Robinson.

At a quarter past twelve, she had locked up the house and gone to bed. Some time later—it turned out to be three o'clock—the Townsend woman was awakened by a violent knocking on the front door. She went downstairs to see who it was.

To her surprise there was a lamp burning in the parlor. She thought it belonged to one of the girls, but when she called their names, got no reply.

Then the witness said she went back to her bed and was just falling asleep again when she thought she heard another noise at the front door. She went downstairs a second time, went close to the door and called out "who's there?" But getting no answer, she turned back again. But she wasn't through.

This time, however, she decided to see if all the girls were in. She knocked at the first door, found it locked, and could hear its occupant asleep. The second room was Helen Jewett's.

When she tried this door, it opened. A column of smoke poured out and choked her. Rushing to the adjoining room, she beat on the door and told the girl Helen's room was on fire.

The neighboring watchman had now been aroused by the cries of fire coming from 41 Thomas Street. He hurried to the house and up to the second floor. One of the girls had braved the smoke and made her way to Helen's bed.

Reasons for the Murder

And as the smoke cleared, the officer, surrounded by the terror-stricken girls, saw the body of Helen Jewett, her skull battered in by hatchet blows, and her left side horribly burned. There was no doubt that the hatchet had killed her.

The discovery of the crime occurred between three and four in the morning. Within an hour the police had begun to hunt for clews to the murderer. Though mockingly dubbed Leatherheads in those days, they had rather keen wits and alert eyes, nevertheless.

One officer found a hatchet in the back yard adjoining Mrs. Townsend's. Another found a cloak similar to the one, if not the same, worn by the man Robinson, and a third had arrested Robinson in his room at 42 Dey Street.

An inmate of the Townsend house, who slept across the hall from Helen's room, testified that at 2 A. M. she heard groans coming from Helen's room and that on peeping from her door, she saw Helen's door slowly open and Robinson emerge and

go softly downstairs. Then, she said, she heard him leave by a back door.

This testimony, in addition to Mrs. Townsend's description of Robinson and her account that he was the last person in Helen's company, sufficiently impressed the jury, and Frank Robinson was held for the murder.

Before the trial the newspapers gave much space to possible reasons for the murder. Some credited the report that Robinson was engaged to the daughter of his employer, Hoxie, and that when he told Helen, she threatened to break the match.

Over the Fence

Others spread the story that in a moment of relaxation, Robinson had told Helen Jewett of various mistakes of his youth. Mistakes that if repeated to the interested parties would bring him to jail. And that Helen for some real or fancied wrong had threatened to tell these stories. So, in order to silence her forever, Robinson had decided he must kill her.

Public opinion was divided. Enthusiastic meetings of sympathy were held in several of the churches, the Rev. Brownlee, of the Chatham Street Chapel, openly supporting the murder of Helen by Robinson as "a deed to be commended."

The newspapers that demanded justice despite the reputation and character of the girl were spoken of as hounding an unfortunate youth to his grave.

The girl was a common blackmailer, argued some of the righteous, and her violent death was a just retribution for the life she had led. On the whole, it seems that while it was generally conceded that Frank Robinson was guilty, it was thought unnecessary to hang a man for killing such a girl.

The first day of the trial brought out about the same evidence as was given at the inquest. The second day opened with an uproar. A mob of more than five thousand excited men and women tried to crowd into the court room and a special force of thirty deputy sheriffs was ordered out to clear the room.

Not until twelve o'clock was order restored. And then after a consultation with the mayor and other city officials, it was decided to exclude from the room all but the members of the bar and the representatives of the press.

The prosecution now brought before the jury the cloak and the hatchet found in the yard adjoining Mrs. Townsend's. The coroner said the hatchet had the same red stains when first handed to him, and also a white string tied securely to its handle. The cloak had also a piece of string tied to an inner strap.

And, in the opinion of the coroner, these two pieces of string had originally been one. To him, it looked as if the murderer had carried the hatchet beneath his cloak, and the better to hide it, and to leave his arms free to hide his face, had tied it to the cloak with the string.

When he left the house by the rear door, he had had to climb a fence ten feet high. And so the murderer had flung both his hatchet and cloak over the fence and then vaulted over himself. But possibly disturbed by some noise, he had hurried on, leaving the cloak and hatchet behind.

Sewing for Frank

The officers who had found both these articles and who had later searched Robinson's room testified that in the latter place they had picked up a pair of breeches belonging to the prisoner.

On the front of the breeches and also on the side of the leg were white stains. And it was here dramatically brought out that the ten-foot fence surrounding the yard of Mrs. Townsend had been recently whitewashed. Any one climbing it would have stained his clothes in just the places that Robinson's breeches were so marked!

Robinson on the night, or rather early morning of the murder, had, when questioned, denied that he owned a blue cloth cloak. But the prosecution now brought forth a witness who testified that on the night of the murder he had walked up Beekman Street with Robinson and that the latter was wearing then a cloth cap and a dark colored cloth cloak with velvet collar.

On being shown the cloak found in the backyard, he identified it as the one Robinson had worn or else one exactly like it.

Under cross-examination this witness said he lived in the same boarding house as Robinson, that he had often seen a blue cloth cloak in the latter's trunk and had seen him put on the cloak before they went out together that evening.

Another witness, a companion of Helen Jewett in the Townsend establishment, gave even more convincing testimony as to the connection between Robinson and the cloak found in the back yard.

About two weeks before Frank Robinson had asked her to sew a broken tassel on his cloak. She had taken some braid, not like that used to fasten on the other tassels, and sewed on the loose tassel.

When the Clock Struck Ten

When the cloak was first brought into the house, she had told the officers of the tassel and the braid. And on examining the cloak, they had noticed the difference.

Cross-examination did not shake her testimony, but brought out one more fact that helped to identify Frank Robinson as Helen's caller that night. When he came, she said, she heard Helen say: "Dear Frank has come."

A porter in the store where Frank Robinson was the bookkeeper was the next witness called by the State. He swore that the hatchet found in the back yard was the one used in the store. He had not seen it in the store since the day of the murder. The hatchet had some peculiar markings and he was sure he was not mistaken.

The third day opened without any disturbance. A few witnesses were called who identified Frank Robinson as Helen Jewett's caller on the night of her death.

A drug clerk testified that Robinson had tried to buy arsenic from him in order, he explained, to kill rats. He did not get the poison. Nothing vital was produced, and about noon the prosecution closed its case.

The first witness of the defense offered a perfect alibi for the prisoner. A man who kept a grocery store at the corner of Nassau and Liberty Streets said Frank Robinson came into his store the Saturday night of the murder, bought a bundle of cigars and sat down and smoked there until ten.

He was certain of the time, for when the clock struck ten the prisoner took out a small silver watch and said it was one minute past ten. And the witness then took out his and compared it with the prisoner's.

Then the porter went out and brought in some barrels from the sidewalk. The witness and Robinson chatted until a quarter past ten and then Robinson left.

It was fully a mile from this store to the house in Thomas Street, added the grocer, who said also that Robinson that night wore a dark frock coat and a cap.

The defense on the following day now brought forth one of the watchmen—policemen were then called watchmen—who had been the fifth man to reach the house on Thomas Street the morning of the murder.

He testified that Mrs. Townsend had told him that Frank Rivers—the name Frank Robinson had used on these occasions—had been in Helen's room and that she wouldn't know him by daylight. He had been there only a few times, and she had not seen the man when she took the wine upstairs.

The witness had asked the girls if any of them knew the man and they had said no. Two other men had been present when this conversation took place.

A Confession of Shame

The one later called to substantiate this witness's testimony testified that Mrs. Townsend had told him she believed Frank Rivers to be the murderer and that she said she knew him only by his voice.

Unfortunately Maria Stevens, who had occupied the room next to Helen Jewett, had died the week before the trial. Some thought her death rather mysterious and much to the advantage of the defense. But there was apparently no reason to suspect Frank Robinson or his friends of having been a party to it.

Mrs. Townsend was now recalled by the defense. She said she was certain that she had not told any of the watchmen or any other person, for that matter, that she had not seen the face of Frank Rivers when she let him in.

Now the defense had a surprise for the

court. It brought forth Frank Robinson's roommate, a young man by the name of Tew, who, it was claimed by the defense, also used the name of "Frank Rivers" when he called at Mrs. Townsend's.

He had had tea with Robinson the night of the murder, and had gone out for a walk with him and others. Had also gone with him to Mrs. Townsend's, but lost sight of him there.

He went home and to bed about a quarter past eleven, but didn't know at what time Robinson returned, although they occupied the same bed.

At first, it looked as if the defense was trying to confuse the identity of the two Frank Riverses, but there was nothing to connect Tew with Helen Jewett.

Very little was added to the story of the murder and the fourth day was over.

On the fifth day of the trial the defense and the prosecution made their final pleas to the jury. The defense offered a strange interpretation of the murder and one which, odd to say, it had made no effort to substantiate during the trial.

It argued that Helen Jewett had been murdered by Mrs. Townsend, aided by some of her miserable boarders who were jealous of the beauty of Helen Jewett! Also that Mrs. Townsend, afraid of the evidence proving this theory that might or would have been given by the Stevens girl, had poisoned her!

The cloak and hatchet, continued the defense, had been procured and placed in the next yard by these female fiends. Their client was not guilty, in fact, was not in any way responsible for the death of the miserable Helen Jewett.

He, as well as the dead girl, had been the victim of those foul and miserable harpies who corrupt the life, health, morals and character of all with whom they come in contact.

The summing up by the defense, however, emphasized the legal points of the case. "Circumstantial evidence may be sufficient to convict," argued an able member of the defense, "but to warrant a conviction the circumstances proved ought fully to exclude the belief that any other person could have committed the crime.

"The proof in this case consists of coincident circumstances, but taken severally or united they do not necessarily exclude the hypothesis that some other person might be guilty of the murder, and if they do not, the prisoner ought not to be convicted."

The prosecution ran quickly over the details of its case. It was to the advantage of Robinson alone that this girl should die. His cloak and hatchet were found near the scene of the murder.

To contemporary critics, the judge seemed to favor the defense. And the jury, in less than half an hour—says one account, in not more than ten minutes—brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty."

The newspapers were thoroughly out of sympathy with this decision. They continued to try the case, implying that the prosecution had been bribed to overlook certain witnesses whose testimony would have impelled the jury to convict Frank Robinson.

Another rumor credited a wealthy lady living on the north side of Washington Square with having bribed several of the jurors to bring in a verdict that would return Robinson to her waiting arms.

The public at large was never reconciled to the verdict. Robinson was hooted at and scorned until he found life too uncomfortable in New York City. So, within a short time of his acquittal he migrated speedily to Texas.

Rumors drifted back and were given space in the New York papers. It was said on one hand that Robinson had reformed, settled down, had married a respectable girl and had already begun to raise a family. And on the other hand—and it is possible that the wish was father to the thought—another rumor believed by many was that Robinson in grief and remorse had committed suicide.

As for Furlong, the man who had first furnished Robinson with an alibi, he actually did jump from a boat into the North River a few weeks after the trial. And the anti-Robinson faction could see his death only as a confession of shame for his share in absolving Frank Robinson of the murder of Helen Jewett.

He started dragging me toward the fire

OUT OF THE HELL-BOX

By Allen Saunders

HE WAS ONLY A PRINTER'S DEVIL, AND YET SOMETHING TOLD HIM THAT BERT HUFFY'S PECULIARITIES WENT DEEPER THAN THEY SEEMED

I DIDN'T have any use for Bert Huffy from the first day that he set foot inside the *Argus-Enterprise* office and went to work on composition. He hadn't been around for more than two hours before he had dropped a hunk of hot type metal down the front of my overalls and held my arms behind me until the stuff had blistered a long streak on my leg. And every day after that he had a new scheme thought up for making my life more miserable.

The other fellows, especially the older men, got pretty tired of a great big hulk like him always picking on a fifteen-year-old kid, and he got sorer than a boiled owl when they went after him about it. After that he did most of his dirt on the sly, but he was meaner than ever, if that's possible. Things around the shop had come to a place where it looked like a battle might break out just any time. Then Huffy's wife died.

We all felt pretty bad the night it happened. I felt worse than anybody else, for a little while, because you see I was sort of responsible, you might say for the way she died. But that doesn't come just yet in my story. I guess I'd better go back and start at the beginning.

I'd been devil on the Bardstown *Argus-Enterprise* for about a year when Huffy came to Herb Smith—Herb was foreman—and asked for a job in the composing room. Herb didn't say yes right at first, and certainly nobody could blame him.

I never saw a worse looking sample of a tramp printer than this fellow was. It was in the middle of the winter, but Huffy didn't have on enough clothes to pad a baby's crutch. His old torn coat was turned up around his scrubby neck and his hat was

pulled down low, but you could see enough of his face to know that he'd lost his last job because he saw all his letters double.

Besides, I could smell his gin breath clear down where I was sitting, between the type cases. While he talked he shifted back and forth on his feet, and the black snow-water squished out from the ends of his shoes every time he moved.

He put up a pretty whining sort of a story, about how his wife was an invalid and he was trying to make enough to send her to some sort of a specialist. Herb had been short a man in the comp room ever since Harry Transcoe left to take a job in Columbus, so he wound up by taking Huffy on for a trial.

Huffy turned out to be an A-number-one man around the place. I'll say that for him even if he did make life mighty miserable for me. The city government had the blind-pigs and 'leggers all scared out at that time, and Bert never had much chance to get tight, so it wasn't long before he was a regular hand at the plant.

He rented a little house out at the edge of the town, just across the Hollow from my mother's and had his wife come down from his sister's where she'd been living. I used to see her once in a while when I'd go past with my papers, but I never liked her much better than her old man.

She was a sloppy, fat old thing, always complaining because I didn't throw the paper up on the porch, or else because it was hard on her heart for me to sling the folded copy against the front of the house with such a thump.

Nobody ever saw much of her around town. She didn't even go to church. When Brother Beeson, our preacher, called on her to invite her to attend church she told him that her heart wouldn't stand the least little shock, doctors had warned her, and that she was honestly afraid that the praying and singing—not to mention Brother Beeson's ranting sermons—would be too much for her.

On the afternoon of the day she died I had finished my work and was sacking up a bunch of papers to deliver on my way home. You see, I had a paper route for four years before I got a regular job around the shop and it was still part of my day's work to deliver to a batch of houses out in the west end around the Hollow. It was a hard part of town to get to and it was right on my way home, so I was glad to do it. But after Mrs. Huffy died I wished a hundred times that I'd had a different evening job.

Well, anyhow, on that particular afternoon while I was folding the papers Huffy came into the carriers' room. The other boys had all left and the circulation manager was down in the front office, so I was all alone.

Huffy looked around sort of queer like and asked me if I wouldn't like for him to deliver the papers in his neighborhood that evening. He said it was so snowy that the road around the Hollow would be hard to get through and that he could put the five or six papers out before supper as easy as not.

I was pretty much tempted to let him do it, but I got to thinking about all the mean tricks he'd pulled and it struck me that this was more than likely something new to cause me grief. So I told him that I'd manage somehow, thank you.

Then he did another thing that was mighty funny—for him. He gave me a quarter and told me to run down to Switzer's cigar store and buy him a plug of chewing tobacco. He said for me to be sure to go clear over on Market Street to Switzer's to get it on account of their stock being fresher, and for me to take the change and buy myself some candy or an ice cream sundae.

I didn't see any point in my going, but rather than have a row I tore out, leaving my papers behind. When I got back, about twenty or twenty-five minutes later Huffy was nowhere in sight.

I asked the colored janitor downstairs about him and he said that he had heard some one leave through the back door about five minutes before I got back from my errand. I didn't know what to do with the tobacco, so I stuck it in the drawer of a type-case, so mother wouldn't find it on me, and took my bag of papers and started home.

When I passed the Huffy place it was

dark as pitch. I whistled and threw the folded paper at the house, being careful to get it on the porch without banging it against the door. You see, I remembered Missus Huffy's crankiness.

I listened to see if I'd got it clear up on the porch and was pretty much surprised when I heard it thump against the house. I hadn't realized that I put so much whip behind it. I sort of hung around for a minute to see if blind old Missus Rafferty came out to feel around for it like she always does when I hit the house or whistle.

Sure enough, in a minute she opened the door and I saw her on her knees reaching around on the cement floor for the folded paper. She found it close to the threshold and straightened up, unfolding it. I figured that there wouldn't be any kick to-night and went on to the other houses, getting home about supper time.

I remember that we ate as soon as I got the chores done because I had to hurry back down to the shop extra early to melt up a batch of type metal. You probably know that the metal used in making slugs —lines of type—is all remelted after it's used and run out into molds to make little blocks called "pigs," just the size to go into the pot of a linotype machine.

It was my part of the job to melt the old metal down every Saturday night, but there was a lot of stuff standing on the stone, a bunch of catalogues, the by-laws of the Odd Fellows lodge, and stuff like that, and that used up so much metal that I had to melt twice a week. Herb had ordered me to run a big batch through that night and I was anxious to get it done as early as I could.

We were about half through eating when Mr. Scoggins, who lives next door to the Huffy's, came running up to the kitchen door and called mother out. "Missus Huffy just dropped dead," he told her. "Come right over will you?"

II

I GRABBED my hat and mother threw a shawl around her shoulders and we followed him back to Bert's house.

Dr. Ferris was there when we arrived and as we came in he was just saying that somebody 'd better send for the coroner, because he didn't feel that it was exactly his place to sign the statement. There were several neighbors in the little sitting room, all talking in whispers.

They had carried her into the front bedroom downstairs and you could hear Missus Rafferty in there carrying on. I don't know whether she was honestly sorry Missus Huffy was dead or just upset by the suddenness of it all.

Bert Huffy was sitting over behind the stove, all hunched over, with his face in his hands. He didn't say a word unless somebody spoke to him and then he only answered by nodding or shaking his head. He acted like a man who had had a terrible shock.

Everybody sat around for about a half hour, looking sober, with now and then somebody saying something in a low tone. Some of the boys from the shop came in and shook Bert's hand and finally the coroner got there.

He, Dr. Manifew, was a skinny, yellow-haired man with a drooping mouth and eyes cold like ice in the moonlight. Dr. Ferris had gone a little while before, so the coroner took charge all by himself. First he called blind old Mrs. Rafferty in and asked her a lot of questions.

She told him how she had heard me throw the *Argus-Enterprise* up on the porch and had carried it in and turned it over to Missus Huffy, who was sitting by the lamp, over to one side of the stove. She said she heard her unfold the paper and settle back in her chair, with a long sigh, like she always does.

The evening paper, you see, was about the only thing that happened to break the monotony for her all day. Missus Rafferty went on to tell how she had gone out to the kitchen to set the table and how, after she'd been out there about five minutes, all at once she heard Missus Huffy give a funny little gagging cry and fall out of her chair.

She ran out of the kitchen as fast as she could, which was pretty slow, she being old and blind in the bargain, and tried to help Missus Huffy up. The old woman wasn't quite dead when she reached her

and screamed somethinng about, "My Gretchen!" before she died.

"Wait a minute please," the coroner interrupted her. "Who is this Gretchen?"

Huffy answered him. "She's my wife's daughter by her first marriage. She lives in Texas."

"Let's see that evening paper," said Dr. Manifew. "There must be something in it that will explain things."

Nobody moved or said anything for a minute, then old Missus Rafferty called, "Bert, you git it. You was lookin' at it last."

Bert dug the paper out from under the stand-table, looked at the date, and passed it over. I noticed when he did it that the creases from my folding were still sharp, and wondered how that happened.

The coroner looked through the front page, column at a time, then did the same for every other page, running his long nose up and down like a rabbit dog. Directly he put the paper down and frowned.

"There isn't a thing here about anybody by that name," he growled, "and as far as I can see there's not a statement in the whole sheet that is exciting enough to give a woman a shock. It may be that your wife misread a line or else dreamed she saw something about her daughter. At any rate, I can't see that I'm concerned in the matter particularly." And after a few more questions about Missus Huffy's age, health before death, and so on, he filled out some form papers and left.

I'd found the whole business pretty interesting—although it was sad, of course—and stuck around till after Dr. Manifew was gone. Then I remembered my work down at the shop and told mother that I was going right on down town from the house. Bert overheard me and got up out of his chair.

"I guess I'll walk down with you," he said. "I've got to do something to pull myself together. Besides, I'll have to send some telegrams to her folks." He was putting on his coat and hat while he talked and, while I didn't much relish the idea of taking him with me, he beat me out of the door.

He turned around to pull the door shut in a certain way, so that it would latch in spite of the felt packing around it and I went on down the steps. As I stepped off the last one I felt something under my shoe that didn't feel like snow or cement. I stooped over to have a look, but when I saw what it was I straightened up quick before Bert saw me. The sight of the thing gave me an awful jolt. It was a folded copy of the evening paper, the one I had thrown up there two hours before!

Somehow I felt in my bones that the best thing to do was to say nothing about the matter to Bert. I'd begun to have funny ideas about him. So when he came down off the porch I made some fool remark about having a ton of work to do before midnight and hurried on down to the road.

When we came out of the gate Bert turned to me and put his hand on my shoulder, sort of pally like. I pulled away from him, but he went on talking.

"Kid," he said, making his voice sound off-hand and casual, "You had a hard day to-day. Go on home and get a good night's sleep. I'll run on down and unlock the forms and wash 'em up and run the pigs. I couldn't sleep even if I went to bed to-night."

I honestly thought it was pretty considerate of him to offer to do all that and was about to say I'd accept with thanks, when there popped into my mind that queer business about the evening paper, and something just told me to keep a stiff upper lip and saw wood. So I made an excuse about being afraid the boss would fire me if he found I was letting somebody else do my night work, and said I'd just go ahead and fix things up myself. Bert said all right, he'd give me a lift anyhow.

The *Argus-Enterprise* is printed down in the basement of the plant on an old-fashioned flat-bed press and it was part of my duties to trundle the forms back up to the make-up room every evening before I went home, and then to come back after supper and wash and unlock the forms. This left them all ready to be "thrown in" early the next morning.

So the first thing I did after we got to the plant and I had lighted the fire under

the big melting pot was to take off my coat and start in washing up the day's forms. Huffy began on the same job, picking out the front page form to start on.

He was back at the other end of the room and I didn't see exactly how it happened, but somehow he tried to slide the big heavy form of type across the stone an let it fall off. It made an awful racket and splintered a board in the floor, not to mention pieing all that type, and I was pretty sore. I ran back there to see what had happened and found Huffy down on his knees gathering up the scattered slugs, headline type, column rules, and so on.

"I'm sorry," he said when I came up. "I'm just too nervous to work to-night, I guess." I really pitied him, he seemed so cut up, and got down with him to help clean up the mess.

Some of the column rules and wooden "furniture" were bent and broken in the fall and I laid them to one side as we worked. "These," I remarked, "will have to go to the hell-box, I suppose."

Now there wasn't anything in that remark to excite any one. A "hell-box" is just a big old packing case or chest of some sort where printers throw damaged type, broken wood, and such junk as that. It is off in an out of the way corner and gets cleaned out about every ten years.

I couldn't see why Bert should get his back up so when I mentioned it, but as soon as the words left my mouth his face went dark and he grabbed me by the arm with a grip like a clamp.

"Don't you go near that damn thing!" he snarled out. "I'll take 'em back there myself!"

I told him that I hadn't said anything about who was to take the stuff and that he was welcome to the job as far as I was concerned. But that didn't seem to satisfy him, and he got up right then and there and grabbed the junk and headed for the back room.

As soon as he got through the door I went down the front stairway four steps at a time, and ran back through the lower floor, and came up the back stairs just as Bert got to the corner where the hell-box stood. His back was toward me and I hadn't much trouble in sneaking over behind a halftone cabinet about five feet from the place where he was standing.

When I peeped around the corner I saw Bert down on his knees pawing over the stuff in the box. He seemed to be hunting something—something important. After a minute or two I heard him mumble something to himself and saw him straighten up.

He must have had some kind of a hunch that he wasn't alone just then, because he whirled all at once and peered down toward the door of the make-up room—I guess he noticed that I wasn't making any noise down there. Anyhow, he started tiptoeing toward that door.

I held my breath and waited till he passed the spot where I was hiding, praying that he would give me time to get back to the front end the way I had come. As he passed me I saw that he was carrying in one hand a bunch of type slugs.

I was standing there shaking and asking myself how in the world that new type metal happened to be in with the junk when my elbow grazed a gasoline can and it fell to the floor with an awful clatter Huffy spun around like a mechanical doll, and before I could budge he was on top of me.

"You sneakin' little spy," he screamed, "I'll teach you to butt into my business!" And he grabbed my shirt collar with his free hand and jerked me out in the middle of the floor.

I was too surprised to show any fight for a minute and before I knew it he had pulled me across to the door of the carriers' room where the big vat of hot metal was bubbling away like pictures you've seen of the crater of a volcano. The glow from the fire lighted his face up till he looked like the Old Scratch himself.

His eyes were bulging out of their sockets and his lips were pressed together so close that they made a pinkish white line across his ugly face. It wasn't till we got near the metal cooker that I began to realize that the man was crazy—crazy with anger.

"Just you wait till I get my other hand empty," he yelled in my face, "and I'll stick you head first into that kettle if it's

the last thing I do on this damned earth!" And I honestly believe he'd have done it too, if I'd given him about another minute.

III

IT broke on me all at once that he was working over to the type vat to throw that handful of metal in so that he could use both fists on me, and just about then I got my ire up.

I'm pretty husky for my age—having made a living for mother and me with my two hands ever since dad left us six years ago—and before Huffy knew it he had all he could handle.

I braced myself against the door jamb and pulled back as hard as I could, kicking Huffy's shins whenever I could reach him. He saw that he needed to use both arms and turned to throw the fistful of slugs at the pot.

I jerked just as he let them fly and most of the pieces fell short of the pot and landed on the floor. That made him absolutely wild and he grabbed me with both arms lammed me down on my head and then started dragging me toward the fire, swearing every inch of the way.

We were close enough to feel the scorching heat now and I never did feel as near death before.

My fingers gave way every time I got a fresh hold on a benchleg or corner and I'd about given up hope when my dragging hands brushed over a pig and before Bert knew what was coming I drew myself up on one elbow and let it fly at his head.

It struck him over one eye and he fell like a stuck hog, with blood streaming from the gash. I took time enough to gather up the four lines of type that he'd been fighting over and ran down and out the front door as fast as I could tear.

I felt easier when I got down town, about two blocks away from the plant, and stopped in front of a drug store to think. I realized one thing; that was that I didn't want to go home by myself—out across the Hollow. Bert might come to in time to meet me out there before I could reach our house. Besides, I had those precious slugs in my hand and I was anxious to turn them over to somebody.

I held them up in the light from the store window and tried to make out what they said. And I saw something on one of them which made up my mind for me. I caught the next dinky street car that passed and rode out to Dr. Manifew's house.

By good luck he was at home, just getting ready to go to bed, but, tired as he was, he listened to my story with the closest attention. I told him about the extra paper in front of Huffy's house, about the slugs in the hell-box and about the fight.

Then we got a bottle of ink and smeared on the type lines and I pulled a proof on a piece of writing paper. The lines didn't look like much at first glance. They read:

body will be sent to this city for bur-
identified as Gretchen Lane, daughter
Sante Fe. The engineer stated that he whis-
is an employee of the *Argus-Enterprise*.

I didn't have to study those words more than a minute before the whole story dawned on me.

"Look, doctor," I cried. "It's as plain as the nose on your face." The doctor was too interested to take any offense at that personal remark, but just nodded his head two or three times, quick.

"See here," I went on. "Here's the whole thing. Huffy waited to-night till I had brought up the forms. Then he sent me on a wild goose chase long enough to give him time to pull out a stick or two of type from the front page, in a prominent spot, where his wife would be bound to see it.

"During the day, at noon probably, he had set up this story about her daughter being killed in a crossing accident. He slipped that story into the form—fudging it's called in a newspaper office—and probably pulled a hand proof of the front page with a block and mallet. He'd have plenty of time while I was gone, and there is no one in the make-up room at that hour of the day.

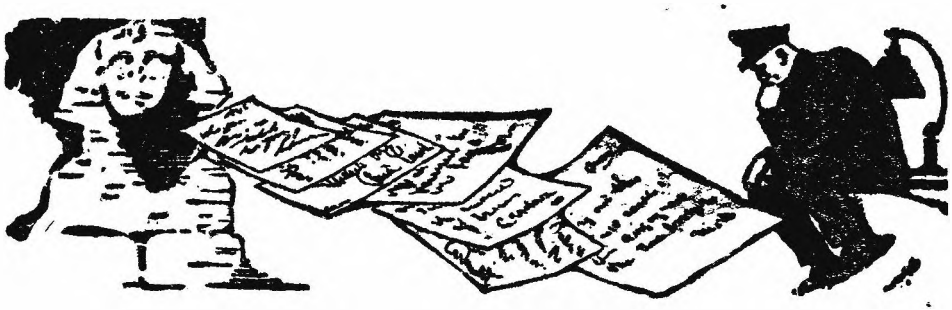
"He pasted that front page on a regular edition, knowing that his wife would never notice the pasted edge, and hid beside the porch till I came along. When I threw my paper he was there to see that his was the one that Missus Rafferty got hold of.

"He waited outside till the thing had done its work, then he went in and destroyed the dummy *Argus-Enterprise*. He could have stuck it in the stove without a bit of trouble, Missus Rafferty being blind and terribly excited. He had hid the type slugs from the fake story in the hell-box till he could get a chance to destroy them and pied the form they came out of so nobody would notice the hole they left. If we didn't have these four pieces of metal there wouldn't be a thing in the world to accuse him!"

The coroner sat still a minute after I finished, then jumped to the phone and called the police station. "Go arrest Bert Huffy," he ordered them. Then he stood there listening to something that they were telling him.

"Well I'll be hanged," he exclaimed after a minute. "Well, perhaps that's the best after all." He hung up the receiver and turned around to me. "Bert Huffy jumped off the railroad bridge about fifteen minutes ago," he said, slow and solemn-like.

The next day Dr. Manifew and I checked over the case and found that my guess had been right on every count. It came out, too, that Huffy had been carrying two thousand dollars' life insurance on his wife for years and years. I guess he just couldn't wait any longer.



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

HEAR YE, ALL LITERARY DETECTIVES! RARE OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT YOU HERE, IN ONE OF WHICH IS "A GREAT REWARD"

IN the first number on this week's program readers of this department are offered a chance to prove their skill as literary detectives.

The objective of this proposed attack is the solution to the following "Cyphral Distich," which occurs at the close of a tract by Sir Thomas Urquart, seventeenth century Scottish author and translator.

5.3.27.38.32.14.21.8.66.8. 70.39.5.9.12.18.2.3.
56.5.1.7.3.2.13. 10.3.25.0.3.10.0.
25.15.13.6.11.20.5.1.2.12. 1.20.20.40.20.20.35.
33.4.6.8.35.5.38.5.5.18. 10.3.11.32.42.

Of carping Zoil and despightful Momus,
Let th' innate baseness be exiled from us,
Who worthily would hear or read this book;
For if upon this Cyphral Distich look
An honest, skillful man, he'll therein finde
His own heart's wishes, and the Author's minde.

To our knowledge this cipher has never been solved. So try your hand, and send in your ideas or solutions. Any contributions to the problem will be given special mention in a subsequent installment of the department.

The translation of last week's cryptogram No. 51 is as follows: The number of cipher systems is practically without limit; and many of them are capable of an almost infinite change by means of variable keys.

The most interesting feature about this cipher probably would be the alphabet, which can readily be used in constructing other types of ciphers. This was built upon the keyword CRYPTOGRAPHY by first crossing out all repeated letters after their first use, and then writing the remaining letters of the alphabet in lines of the same length as the keyword, and in regular order beneath it.

Taking the resultant formation by descending verticals from left to right, the subjoined transposed alphabet is obtained in which the substitute for any letter is that letter immediately following it. For example, C plain is represented by B in cipher; B plain, by U; U, by R; and so on, S using the first letter, C, as its substitute.

C R Y P T O G — A — H —
B D E F I J K L M N Q S
U V W X Z
CBURDVYEWPFXTIZOJGKLAMNHQS

Last week's No. 52 (J. A. Dockham) can be done by hand, or by typewriter, if desired. But the best way is to prepare a number of strips or slides upon which the alphabet has been written vertically, twice repeated, with letters at equal distances, and in regular order. By the way, a piece of apparatus constructed along these lines, and using twenty or twenty-five slides, forms a most valuable addition to any cryptographer's equipment.

However, in the present cipher, each word of the message is enciphered by a separate manipulation of the slides, which are merely adjusted vertically until the let-

ters of the desired word are in the same horizontal line. Whereupon the letters in any of the other twenty-five lines may be taken as its substitute.

It is hardly practicable to show these slides here at full length. But enough of them is represented to explain the system. For example, the ninth word of the message, NEAR, as shown in the illustration herewith, could be written in cipher as OFBS, PGCT, QHDU, and so on. RIEV was selected in this case, our correspondent making it a point to use pronounceable groups, whenever possible, to give the cryptogram a more mysterious air.

(Enciphering)	(Deciphering)
*N E A R	*Y O F A D B
O F B S	Z P G B E C
P G C T	A Q H C F D
Q H D U	*B R I D G E
*R I E V	C S J E H F
S J F W	D T K F I G
T K G X	E U L G J H
U L H Y	F V M H K I
etc.	*etc.*

To decipher a given group, similarly adjust the slides so that the letters of the cipher word are in the same line. The equivalent in clear text will then be found in one of the other lines. The illustration shows how the tenth group, YOFADB, of the present cryptogram, would thus be deciphered as BRIDGE.

It is possible, of course, for a given group to have more than one translation in this system. This is especially true with the shorter words, with the probability of such an occurrence decreasing as the words increase in length. Message No. 52, in full: HIGHWAY HAS BEEN MINED WITH DYNAMITE AT POINT NEAR BRIDGE TO BE TRAVERSED BY ARMORED PAY CAR.

Taking up this week's ciphers, No. 53, with its lack of short words, is a somewhat more than ordinarily difficult simple substitution cryptogram. Nevertheless, clews are almost as numerous as rattles in the old flivver. How quickly can you get it?

O. D. O. says that the sentence in his No. 54 is "a great reward." If you can't decipher it, let your best girl try. There's a reason! Also, try to find out all you can about the cipher system here.

No. 55 is a variation of No. 52, described above, with the difference that a mixed alphabet, instead of a straight A to Z arrangement, has been used, materially increasing the difficulty of the problem.

This cipher, in effect, uses twenty-five simple substitution alphabets in arbitrary order. A number of words found to be in the same alphabet could be solved by simple substitution methods. Other words could be determined by context. Nevertheless, the task is hardly what you would call easy. Hence, the longer time allowed for its solution.

Which brings us to the question: What do you think of the plan now in effect of allowing more than one week for solving the more difficult ciphers? Do you find that you need it? We want to adjust all such matters to our readers' satisfaction. Conducting a magazine department is something like broadcasting over the radio.

The "audience" indicates its likes or dislikes by the nature of its "applause." So drop us a line occasionally as to how things suit you.

CIPHER No. 53 (M. Walker, Akron, Ohio).

TNEVBHIVC CVGOHMVG TCVGSHUR PNEOSNG SEUR XHBSHU WNEOS BNFPBHUR IWVRHKMWMVG TVOMCHO QMVURGBNWG EPPNBHBN

CIPHER No. 54 (O. D. Overman, Stockton, California).

MKPJTGTGQL ZOFSWN OZGTTGYC ZOFSPJZO SFCYYCNWWNSF ZOFSGTSF

CIPHER No. 55 (J. A. Dockham, Oakland, California).

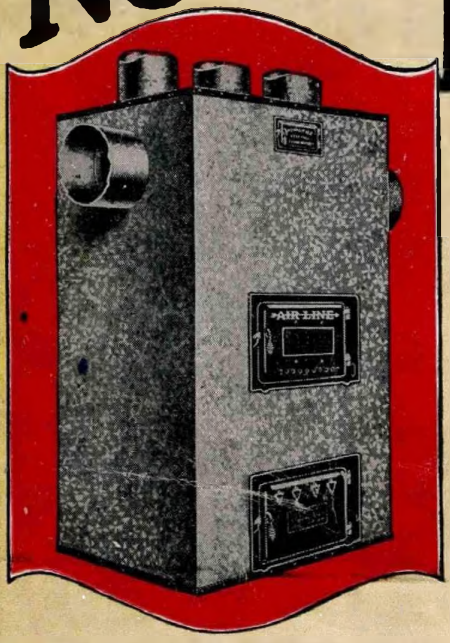
AIFJAOFEB GOSAH HEER XOYVTO EDFU ULFE MO AOSNUJAOJ UCA EDRUDLCAMOW ER LYSA ID YS UAK AO I IDUFOLKMUB DEINZ EFFE XAFWUBRIK ZUXI O ULYO UL LYS SICC UA PAT GERIXNAU NEI MO PUK ID LYDSS LIOUYSP UBPA I BOLM YGRISA IFYD AC AEET YUFUJZI FOS LENOOCZE GRUB XYRL SO RFOLADS

Solutions to ciphers Nos. 53 and 54 will be published next week, with the full explanation of No. 55 in three weeks.

J. Levine's "open letter" cipher, No. 50 of the July 30 issue, will also be fully explained next week.

As a last word, we would again remind readers to include translations and explanations with ciphers submitted.

New and Better Furnace!



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