FLYNN'S

ISSUED WEEKLY

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR
Twenty-Five Years in the U.S. Secret Service

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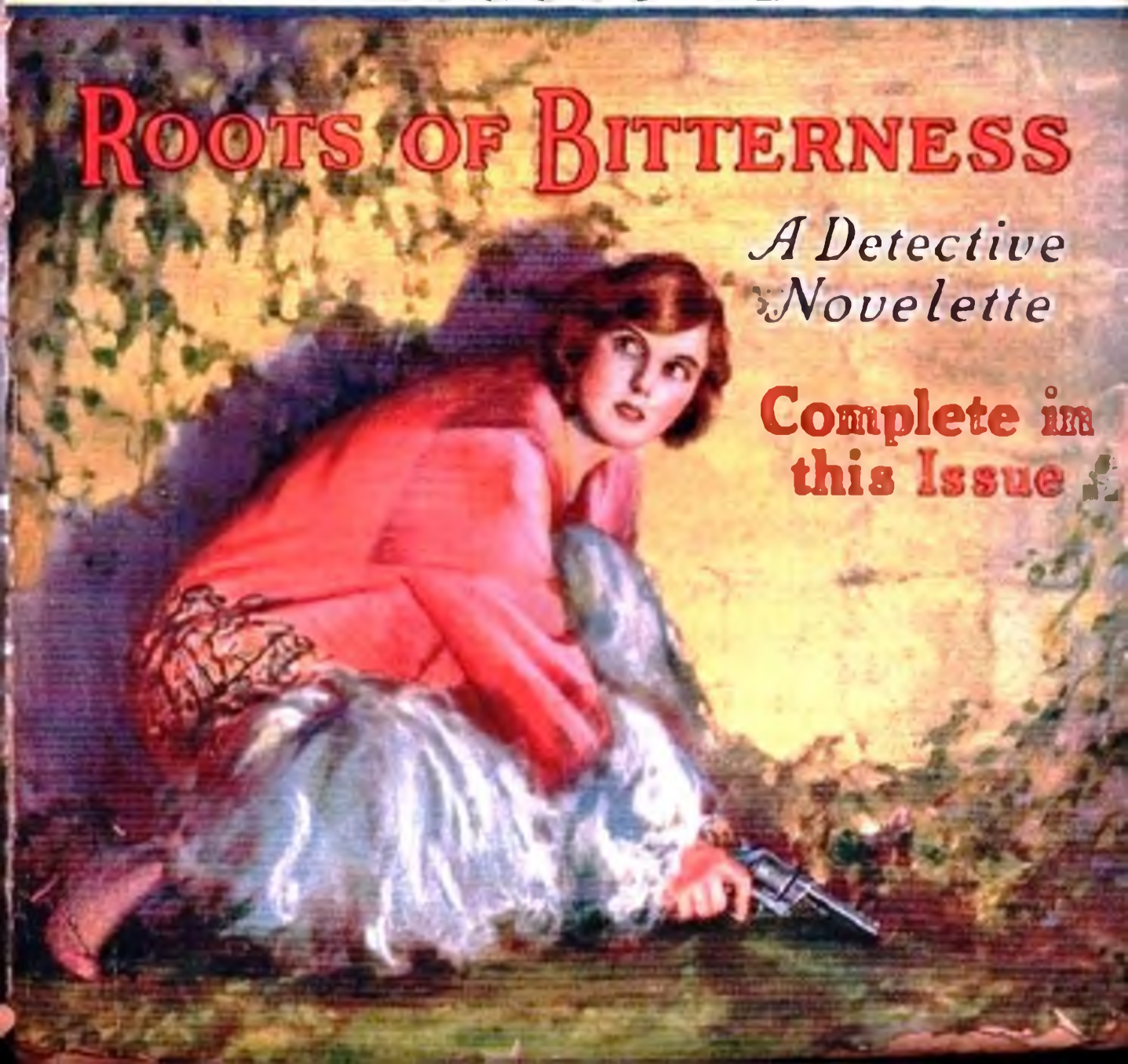

ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

A Detective Novelette

Complete in this Issue

Classified Advertising

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Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME IX SATURDAY, AUGUST 22, 1925 NUMBER 1

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Reaumur

C. T. DIXON, President WILLIAM T. DEWART, Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY.

Entered as second-class matter September 4, 1924, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

FLYNN'S
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VOLUME IX | SATURDAY, AUGUST 22, 1925 | NUMBER 1

"There is nothing you need explain. I trust you absolutely"

ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

By Houghton Allen

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT HE OFFERETH UP HIS LIFE FOR HIS BROTHER

WHO killed Elias Cates? Was it Guy Drew? Or Marilee? Or Teddy? Or Gorman? You will sit forward in your chair and demand the answer to that question a hundred times before you finish "Roots of Bitterness."

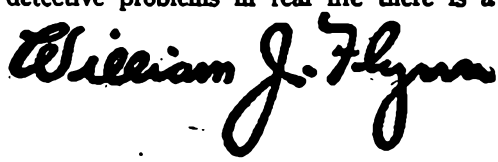
Houghton Allen is a new author in FLYNN'S. In this, his first story for us, he has created a fascinating problem. The gun belonged to one person, the finger-prints were another's, adequate motives hung about a third. Certain additional circumstances involved yet more.

This is a story with two dozen twists. Yet it never becomes involved. Always the way to the solution lies open before the reader. Can you outguess the detective? It's dollars to doughnuts you can't.

Guy falls in love with the ex-chorus girl, the adventuress, his uncle's widow. His

view of the case is colored by his love. It all contributes to the everlasting circle wherein A suspects B, and B suspects C, and C suspects D, and D suspects A. The true information is always in sight. But like most detective problems in real life there is a human equation to complicate justice.

It took an understanding of human nature, a carefully constructed plot, and a clever pen to turn out "Roots of Bitterness." Here it is for your regalement.



CHAPTER I

"I HATE YOU!"

GUY DREW knew all along that his errand was a wild goose chase from which he was certain to gain only humiliation. He had half a notion to turn around and catch the first train home without seeing Elias Cates at all. But since welching was not one of his characteristics, he squared his shoulders and waited quietly until his taxicab turned in at the huge granite entrance which had given his uncle's house its name, "Stone Gates."

Although it had been seven years since he had put foot inside these walls, Drew detected little change. There was the same ivy cloaking the gaunt old house, the same hungry lions on each side the grilled iron doorway, the same high brick wall surmounted by bits of broken glass and barbed wire. The grounds were part of the original tract of land on which Elias Cates's grandfather had "squatted."

Then all about had been virgin forest, but the town had encroached on the country until now it reached almost to Elias Cates's brick wall. Though not a sentimental man, Cates had preserved the log cabin where his father was born. It stood back of the big house and had been made over into an office where for thirty years he had transacted business.

A bitter smile curled the nephew's lips as, having dismissed the taxicab, he made his way up the familiar stone steps. He had expected things to be different. Most rich men who at sixty marry chits of twenty do make changes in their mode of living. "No fool like an old fool," you know, although Elias Cates was not an easy man to change. Guy sighed as he remembered how vainly his mother had striven during the twenty years she was nominally its mistress to beautify the gaunt old house.

Perhaps, he told himself a little cynically, the young wife had let the outside go in order to concentrate on the interior. The door which opened to his ring, however, betrayed the same somber furnishings he knew. Even the butler was the same as in the days when Guy had been looked on by everybody as Elias Cates's heir, old Gorman, whose faded blue eyes filled with tears at sight of the young man on the threshold.

"It's happy I am to see you, Master Guy," he quavered with more emotion than Drew had dreamed him capable of. "You are to have your old room and come out to the cabin immediately, sir."

Guy Drew looked with mingled emotions about the room. He had been less than a year old when he and his mother came to live with her brother. He had but to close his eyes to see himself, a shivering, wide-eyed baby, cowering in the huge canopied bed. Elias Cates had not believed in humoring children.

He held that a two-year-old should go to bed alone without a light, and Drew felt a stab of pity for the little tyke he had been, desperately afraid of the creaking old house and the howling wind and the dark. Sometimes his mother came and held him in her arms, and they sobbed themselves to sleep together. But she was as timid as he, and it was seldom either dared brave Elias Cates's sardonic wrath.

Another of his uncle's rules had been that toys and pets and coddling were bad for children. When Lelia Drew wanted to fondle her baby, it had to be done in secret. The unpardonable sin in the house was to disturb "Uncle Elias." Guy had never been allowed to romp and play like other

children. He had not even been permitted to laugh out loud. Small wonder then that as he looked around the huge gloomy room where he had passed the first twenty-one years of his life, it was more as one might view a prison from which one has escaped than anything else.

"There are fewer changes in the old place than I expected, Gorman," he told the old butler who was unpacking his overnight bag.

"No, sir," Gorman conceded, his thin lips tightening a little as he added: "not that it's the fault of *some* folks."

From which remark Drew concluded that the old butler had no liking for his new mistress. Guy was not surprised at that. He didn't expect to like her himself, little as he knew about her. She had been a chorus girl of twenty when she married Elias Cates, four years before, and by hearsay a beauty. There were rumors of a brother whom the aged bridegroom had had to take under his wing, and the usual twaddle that she came of a fine old family which had fallen on reverses.

"Uncle Elias is the last man I should have expected to marry a chicken out of the chorus," Drew concluded his thought aloud. "But knowing what I know, I dare say if she married him for his money she earns it."

"She does," Gorman acknowledged dryly. "I'd feel sorry for her, presumptuous as it is to say it, sir, if it wasn't for that brother of hers," he broke off with a scowl. "He's a bad egg, that Mr. Teddy. I wonder the master puts up with him."

Guy determined to lose no time beard-ing the lion in his den. Making his way around the side of the house, he came directly on the cabin itself, the same sturdy mud-chinked log building which his great-grandfather had built with his own hands. Elias Cates had retained the original two rooms into which the cabin had been divided, one being an outer office where all visitors were received, the other constituting his own sanctum.

Drew knocked, and being told to enter, did so. Here, too, there were few changes. He recognized the cane-bottomed chairs and dusty files. The man who had been his uncle's secretary for twenty years, had died a couple of winters before, however, and the person behind the desk was a stranger. He glanced up at Drew's entrance.

"Mr. Drew?" he asked. "Mr. Cates will see you in a few minutes. I am Thomas Blue, his secretary. Sit down, please."

As soon as Drew took the proffered seat the secretary resumed his interrupted task on a typewriter, which, in spite of its age, clicked fast and furiously under his fingers. Drew studied his uncle's new handy man with puzzled eyes. He was small, almost puny in stature with nondescript sandy hair, earnest blue eyes, and a high mincing voice. Guy wondered how he ever survived Elias Cates before whose cold violence and brutal tongue the bravest men had been known to quail.

But when the secretary rose to get a book from the bookcase Drew realized with a shock that he was dreadfully lame. Both legs were paralyzed. He used two crutches and then got along only by an effort, swinging his body from the waist down in a rotary motion pitiful to behold.

Drew became conscious after awhile of a subdued murmur in the private office, but the partition between was thick and he had been waiting some time before one of the voices rose suddenly to a bellow.

"I tell you not one penny! When I was fool enough to let you marry me for my money, I didn't bargain to support any one but yourself. Don't lie to me. I know you want this money for your precious Teddy. You'd sell your immortal soul for that young scoundrel. But he can't pull the wool over *my* eyes. I'm up to his tricks. And I tell you, no, not one cent, and if you don't like it, you can go back to the gutter where I found you, madam!"

"Oh!" the word came in a gasp. "How I hate you!"

With this passionate speech the inner door flew open and a woman came out. She was, for all her twenty-four years, strangely girlish. They had called her a beauty and she *was*, though not as Guy Drew had expected, dark-eyed, dark-

haired, with a wistful face and quivering scarlet lips. Something about her struck at his heart. He caught his breath as, eyes filled with tears, she brushed past him.

"You may go in." Guy started at the secretary's voice.

He glanced quickly at the other. Of course, the secretary had heard just as he had, but his face betrayed nothing. With his knowledge of Elias Cates, Drew imagined that this was not the first scene of the kind Thomas Blue had witnessed. Probably he was used to them. Drew's impetuous young blood was boiling as he turned toward the door.

CHAPTER II

HIS UNCLE'S WIFE

ELIAS CATES was a rawboned man with a shock of gray hair and a rat trap mouth. He looked every day of his sixty-five years, and yet he had changed less, even, than anything else about the place. For a moment Guy was a little tyke again cowering beneath his uncle's piercing gaze. It required an effort on his part to meet the other's protruberant blue eyes beneath their beetling brows. If Cates himself felt any emotion at the sight of one of his own flesh and blood, from whom he had been estranged for seven years, he gave no sign. They might have parted yesterday, for all the feeling his face betrayed.

"Well," he said harshly, "you wrote you wanted to see me. I'm a busy man. Don't waste any more of my time than you can help."

Guy was tempted to quit the room without a word. But having swallowed his pride and come this far, nothing was to be gained by failing to make his plea, hopeless as he felt it to be.

"My mother is very ill," he said, looking very steadily into the sardonic face across the desk. "The doctors tell me she can't live in this climate. Will you lend me the money to take her away?"

"When Lelia left this house to marry Jasper Trent," said Elias Cates coldly, "I told her she'd made her bed and she'd have to lie on it. Not a penny of mine goes to her or her worthless husband."

"But she's ill," her son's voice faltered slightly.

"Through no fault of mine," snapped the older man. "I warned her Trent was no good, but she wouldn't listen. Now she can take the consequences."

"But she loved him," pleaded the younger man. "He has had hard luck, but he is good and kind," he paused abruptly.

His uncle had uttered a short barking laugh.

"Yes, he's good and kind, kind enough to run through with every penny she had! He has had hard luck, bah! The man's a fool! He never gets his feet on the ground." He shot his nephew a sharp glance. "They say you've been making good. Why haven't you any money laid by?"

Guy's eyes shifted slightly. The older man laughed again.

"It's taken all your money for your mother and her poet husband? I guessed as much. Well, the day you took her part against me and left my house, I told you whenever you were done with her and her dreamer you could come back, but not before, and the offer still holds good. You can return here when you choose. My will divides my property equally between you and my wife. You're as near a son as I shall ever have." His voice rasped with bitterness. "But to Lelia Trent and her husband, not one penny!"

"But she's dying, sir," pleaded the son. "And she's your sister."

"The day she left my roof I ceased to have a sister!" Cates made an impatient gesture. "You're wasting my time and yours, Guy, I've said my say and I won't change. Not a penny!"

Suddenly Guy was shaking with rage. Scarcely aware of what he did, he leaned furiously toward the other.

"I've a notion to take it out of your hide, Shylock!" he cried.

There was something in his blazing eyes which startled the older man. His fingers pressed the button under his desk. There was the sharp tap, tap of crutches, and the

door behind Drew opened. Even the appearance of the secretary, however, could not check Guy's anger.

"I'll get even with you for this!" he cried.

Elias Cates's lips curled. Realizing he was making a spectacle of himself, from which the other derived a malicious joy, Guy turned on his heel and left the room, carrying with him a blurred impression of the secretary's shocked blue eyes.

There was a man waiting in the outer office, whom Drew recognized as Fred Kenneday from Hampton, a small mining town some twenty miles away, with as unsavory a reputation as Kenneday himself. Even in his blind rage Guy wondered what earthly business such a man could have with Elias Cates.

Guy's first impulse was to leave his uncle's house at once. The thought of accepting food and a night's lodging from a man toward whom he felt such bitterness choked him. He hunted up Gorman and told him to inform Mrs. Cates of the change in his plans and had begun repacking his overnight bag when the old servant tapped discreetly at the door.

"The mistress told me to ask you not to go, sir," he murmured. "She said she'd take it as a favor to her."

Of course, there was nothing for Guy to do but acquiesce, although he did not admit even to himself the strange thrill which shot through him at the thought of seeing Marilee Cates again even while he puzzled over why she had asked him to stay. She was in the drawing-room when he came down, standing, a slender, girlish figure before the open fire, the blaze playing on the warm ivory of her arms and throat.

Again something about her haunted dark eyes and wistful mouth caught at Drew's heart. She was talking to a handsome cub of a boy, whom Guy guessed was the brother Teddy. At first glance there was a decided resemblance between the two. But a closer scrutiny convinced Drew the resemblance was less strong than he had at first imagined.

About the boy, handsome though he was, there was a reckless expression, no trace of which appeared in the sister, and where her finely chiseled mouth and chin bespoke strength and determination, his betrayed a tendency toward irresponsibility, if not downright weakness.

The boy was speaking when Drew appeared on the threshold.

"But I've got to have the money, Sis," he cried in a high petulant voice, "or there'll be the devil to pay!"

Marilee Cates hushed him with a warning gesture and advanced toward the man in the doorway with a little three-cornered smile.

"You are Guy?" she asked in her low, musical voice.

She held out her hand as she spoke and Drew's heart quickened as he took it in his. Teddy bowed sulkily and his handsome eyes lowered. Guy divined that he resented his presence in the house, but he could find no hint of any such feeling in the sister's lovely face. It was past the dinner hour, but Elias Cates had not appeared.

"I don't know what can be keeping Elias," said Marilee nervously. "He isn't usually so late."

"I imagine he's been detained," murmured Drew courteously. "Fred Kenneday was waiting to see him when I left."

"Fred Kenneday?" gasped Teddy Ware. "Are—are you sure?"

"I'm not sure," Drew replied slowly, wondering at the boy's agitation. "It's been years since I've seen him. It may have been some one else."

Somewhat hurriedly Marilee Cates changed the subject. Drew was sure she was troubled by her brother's strange actions, especially when a few minutes later Teddy muttered an excuse and left the room. Just then Marilee was called to the telephone.

Guy strolled toward a window which happened to look out on the flagged path that led around the house, and what was his surprise to see Teddy stealing down this path toward the cabin. Before he reached the door, however, it flew open and Elias Cates appeared on the threshold. Instantly Teddy slunk behind a clump of shrubbery and hid there until his brother-in-law had disappeared into the house, a

procedure which left Drew more puzzled than ever.

Marilee Cates reëntered the drawing-room a moment before her husband and his first words were addressed to her in a tone which brought the blood to her cheek: "Where's that brother of yours?"

"He was here a moment ago," said Marilee uneasily. "He'll be back in a moment, I'm sure."

Old Gorman at that moment announced dinner. It was an uncomfortable meal. Elias Cates was in an unusually bad temper even for him. He looked up with a scowl when Teddy slipped into his chair, but said nothing. Drew noticed, however, that the boy avoided his glance. Marilee made only a pretense at eating, her gaze lingering on her brother's averted face. She started slightly every time her husband spoke.

Guy remembered bitterly his mother had had the same habit. No one at the table attempted conversation except the secretary, Thomas Blue. He flung himself more gallantly than might have been expected of such a little man into the discussion of a book in which no one else pretended any interest.

There was something pathetic about his high mincing voice carrying on so bravely in the face of the sultry silence around the table. In spite of himself Drew's heart warmed toward the little man.

It was a relief when the meal was over. Guy as well as Marilee drew a breath of relief. Teddy openly bolted. But on the threshold he was brought to a halt by his brother-in-law's rasping voice, "I want to see you to-night at the cabin, young man."

The boy's eyes dilated curiously. At that moment there came a crash followed by a whimpering cry from the hall outside. Guy ran forward, closely followed by the others. At the foot of the stairs lay Thomas Blue, his crutches still clutched in his hands, although both had been broken short off by the fall. He tried to smile as Drew bent anxiously over him, but he was very white and the blood trickled from a nasty cut over his left eye.

"I—I'm sorry to have made such a bother, sir," he glanced pathetically at Elias Cates, "but the stair is very slick and I fell."

He tried to get to his feet, but his limbs gave way and he sprawled helplessly. Guy bent down and helped him up, Marilee as quickly supporting his other side. He smiled up at them painfully.

"I—I'm afraid you'll have to help me upstairs," he said ruefully. "I—I can't walk without my crutches."

"Of course," assented Guy quickly.

"I have a friend in Hampton who has some crutches he'll lend you, I am sure," said Teddy eagerly. "I'll run in after them if you like."

Thomas Blue smiled at him gratefully.

"It 'd be very kind, I am sure," he said timidly, "if it's not too much bother."

"It's no bother, I assure you," cried Teddy hastily.

"It's never any bother for Teddy to go to Hampton," put in Elias Cates.

The boy gulped curiously, then flung out of the room. Marilee wanted to help carry the secretary to his room, but as the weight was negligible, Guy pushed her gently aside and, lifting the frail body in his arms, he bore him up the stairs to a cheerless bedchamber on the third floor. There, Thomas Blue insisting he could manage very well by means of a wheel chair which he kept for emergencies, Guy left him.

When he returned to the drawing-room Marilee Cates was alone. Guy's heart pounded as he crossed to her side. He had come to Stone Gates expecting to hate this slim, wistful creature for an adventuress, and instead he was learning every moment he stayed in her presence to—he broke off savagely. That way lay madness. It was not for him to think of love in connection with his uncle's wife.

CHAPTER III

"SHE SHOT ME!"

SHE looked up as he approached and the color stole into her cheek. He wondered if her heart was beating as wildly as his. The thought was intoxicating.

"It—it was very kind of you to stay

because I asked you, Mr. Drew," she said nervously. She no longer employed his first name. "I have long wanted to meet you or your mother."

"I also am glad to have this opportunity to know you," he said.

"I am afraid you regard me as an interloper here," she said timidly. "I know old Gorman does. He seems certain if your uncle had never married me he would finally have relented and taken you and your mother back."

"Nonsense!" cried Guy, suddenly impatient at the servant's unreasonable prejudice against this sad, wistful girl. "My uncle's quarrel with us has been in no way affected by his marriage to you. Had he remained single he would never have forgiven my mother for escaping his tyranny with the man she loves, nor me for taking her part."

She looked up at him as eagerly as a child.

"There is no reason then why we should not be friends?" she asked.

"None," he replied a little unsteadily, "I shall be most happy to be your friend, if you will permit me."

"Oh, I beg you to," she cried. "I—I am so alone." Her slender hands locked suddenly. "No one understands." She flung him a pleading glance. "Every one thinks because I married a man so much older than myself I am an adventuress. I —I did marry Mr. Cates for his money," she colored painfully, "but that wasn't all. I wanted a home and protection. I thought he would be a sort of father to me."

She paused and bit her lip. Guy imagined how much paternal tenderness she had received from his relative.

"I was alone in the world and I had Teddy to look after. I had been brought up in a sheltered way." She flushed. "We were not rich as the papers said; but until my father died I hadn't been out in the world. He never made much money; he was an artist; there was very little left when he died. It was necessary for me to go to work. But I didn't know what to do. I was confused and bewildered. A woman in the boarding house where we lived suggested the stage. She helped me to get a place in the chorus. I hadn't been used to such a life. It almost killed me." Her face went white. "It was a nightmare to me, only"—she looked up at him pathetically—"I never wakened. Then your uncle came. He was interested in my father's paintings. He seemed kind and good, and when he asked me to marry him I accepted.

"I didn't deceive him. I told him I didn't love him as a wife should. But truly"—her eyes pleaded for understanding—"I have tried to be a good wife. I —I am not, really I am not, the adventuress every one seems to think me."

"Of course you are not!" cried Guy almost roughly.

The tears stood suddenly in her lovely wistful eyes.

"Thank you," she said simply.

He took her cold, trembling little hands in his.

"You can count on me," he said huskily.

And he knew suddenly that every ounce of his manhood was back of the pledge. There was nothing in the world he would not do for this wistful girl whose low, sorrowful voice made music in his ears.

He could not sleep. A strange excitement made him restless. One moment he could think of nothing but his mother, to whose aid her brother had refused to come; the next he tingled with anger for his uncle's girl wife, whose heart he was sure was breaking under Elias Cates's brutality. At length about eleven, in despair of ever composing his nerves without physical exercise, he made his way quietly down the stairs.

Old Gorman was dozing at his post near the front door, but as Guy still possessed a key to the small side gate, which opened on the highway, he did not disturb him.

The night was black, except when the wind parted the scudding clouds and vouchsafed glimpses of a sickly moon riding high in the sky. Following a route familiar to him as a boy, Drew struck off down the highway, bent on outwalking his blue devils. He had swung back toward the house and pulled a cigar out of his pocket when he discovered he had no matches.

Remembering a small suburban store between Stone Gates and the end of the trolley, he made a wider circle, found the store was still in existence and open, and, lighting his cigar, covered the remaining ten minutes of his walk at a brisk pace.

The moon was submerged as he made his way through the gate, and under the trees the darkness was so intense Drew could not see his hand before his face. Even after seven years, however, he knew the way well enough to experience no great difficulty, and he had almost gained the flagged path which circled the house when he paused suddenly.

Some one was running toward him from the cabin, some one in haste approaching panic. Obeying an instinct stronger than reason, Drew stood perfectly still in the shadow of a giant myrtle bush until the flying footsteps paused before the side door, so near he could have stretched out his hand and touched the unknown's figure.

"Oh, what—what shall I do?" The words came in a stifled whisper, but at the sound his heart gave a strangled leap.

Wrung with despair as it was, he knew the voice, and at that instant the moon emerged for a moment from its enemy clouds, and he recognized the slim, girlish figure of Marilee Cates. She was staring wildly at an object in her distended right hand. By a supreme effort Drew checked the cry on his lips. For the object in her shaking hand was an ominous blue-black revolver.

While the young man struggled for composure, the girl apparently reached a decision. After a wild glance about her she stooped and thrust the revolver under the matted ivy about the foundation of the house. A moment later the door opened beneath her shaking hand and she disappeared within. How long he stood there staring after her Guy Drew never knew. Measured by heartbeats it was an eternity.

Actually it was probably only a few seconds until he stooped and fished out of its hiding place the object Marilee Cates had hidden there. That it should feel warm under his touch somehow did not surprise him. There had been tragedy in that white face which he had glimpsed for a moment in the moonlight.

Drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped the weapon carefully; then, thrusting it into his pocket, he turned suddenly and, his face white and set, walked rapidly down the flagged path in the direction from which, running as if pursued by furies, Marilee Cates had come.

The first thing that met his eye on turning the corner of the house was the lighted windows of the cabin. These were set so high in the wall, however, that it was impossible to see in from the outside. There was nothing to do but enter. With his hand on the latch, Drew hesitated. He shrank from crossing that threshold. Shaking off his depression by an effort, however, he turned the knob at last and went in. Then his vision cleared. He stood in the inner office. At first nothing unusual caught his eye. Then with a quick intake of breath his gaze came to rest on the desk at which his uncle had sat during their interview that afternoon.

Something lay in a huddle across the desk. It was the gaunt body of Elias Cates. He was sprawled forward on his face, the blood trickling from a neat round hole in the left temple, one arm dangling helpless at his side, the other outflung in such a manner as to have thrown the telephone over and jarred the receiver off the hook. At first glance Drew thought he was dead, but as he bent over the huddled body, calling his name in a husky whisper, the dulled eyes lighted. For one moment life returned to the haggard face and the bloodless lips parted.

"She—*she* did it, curse her! *She* shot me!" the dying man gasped and then fell back dead.

CHAPTER IV

A FEUD RESUMED

"NO, *no!*" The words burst involuntarily from Guy Drew's lips. "Not Marilee!"

There was no reply save the pounding of his own heart. Elias Cates would never speak again. His nephew drew

his shaking hand across his brow. Surely he was dreaming. But the revolver sagging heavily in his coat pocket was real enough, as was the dead man sprawling limply on the desk before him, and suddenly Drew realized that a car had clattered up outside the main entrance to Stone Gates, while some one was punching the bell which connected with the house in an impatient and peremptory manner. Who could it be at this hour of night?

He stood perfectly still, his straining ears following old Gorman's stiff progress down the path to the gate. Even the sound of feet on the bricks outside did not arouse him from his trancelike state, and it was not until the door of the room in which he stood flew open and the two men followed by the gaping Gorman filed in that he realized what had happened. It was the police!

The foremost of the two officers he knew. His name was Rudy Ellis, and his mother had been employed about the big house when there was extra laundry work. For some reason the two boys had been antagonistic. Guy had been smaller and of course knew nothing about the rough and tumble fighting of which the poorer boy was a past master.

At first he had been bewildered by the other's insults, but finally when he realized that Rudy was deliberately baiting him there was a battle royal in which Guy got decidedly the worst of it. Afterward some one told his uncle, and he ordered Rudy and his mother off the place. From that day the feud was on. While he no longer dared put foot in Stone Gates, Rudy Ellis made a practice of waylaying Guy every time he caught him outside and subjecting him to catcalls and brick bats and other forms of insults.

Even after both were nearly grown enough hostility lingered to strain relations between them. Guy remembered he had heard that during his absence Rudy had joined the local police force and become, as he recalled, a sergeant. At any rate, he was in charge on the present occasion, for it was he who advanced into the room and did the talking.

"Well, what 've we got here? *Murder?*" he asked harshly, his sharp blue eyes darting from the sprawling figure at the desk to his old enemy.

Murder! The word thundered in Guy Drew's ears. It was the first time he had voiced it even to himself. It wrung a whimpering cry from the old butler, whose faded eyes were fastened on the dead man. Even Ellis's companion, a gawky youth, evidently a recruit, changed color at the ominous term.

The sergeant alone retained his composure as, walking over to the desk, he peered closely into Elias Cates's bloodless face.

"Dead—he's dead as hell!" he commented hoarsely, turning on Drew sharply. "How'd it happen? Who killed him?"

Guy moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"I—I don't know," he stammered, coloring beneath the other's piercing and unfriendly eyes. "He—he was like this when I found him."

"H-m," grunted Sergeant Ellis, without removing his disconcerting gaze. "It was you who phoned headquarters then?"

Drew started. Some one must have sent for the police, but in heaven's name who? Fortunately, Ellis appeared to take his silence for acquiescence, for he turned again to the dead man, his eyes running sharply over the disordered desk.

Old Gorman began to whimper in a high, shrill voice. The police sergeant hushed him with a brutal gesture, his sharp eyes returning to Guy's drawn face.

"What you doing up and dressed this time of night?" he demanded.

Guy tried to collect his wits.

"I couldn't sleep and went for a walk," he said lamely.

"H-m," again grunted the sergeant. "How'd you happen in here?"

"I had returned and was starting toward the house," stammered Guy, determined to adhere to the truth as closely as possible without mentioning Marilee, "when I saw lights down here. I decided to come by and speak to my uncle for a minute. I found him like this."

"How'd you get in and out?" demanded Ellis brusquely. "Thought they kept everything locked up here after nightfall."

" I still have a key," replied Guy slowly.

" H-m," which appeared to be the sergeant's one retort. Turning sharply on his gawky assistant, " Pete, you and old Gorman there take a look at the gates. See if everything's locked up as usual."

After their departure Sergeant Ellis continued his cursory examination of the room, addressing Drew only once during the others' absence.

" You and the old man on good terms?" he asked, stopping short to stare at the dead man's nephew with his shrewd, hard blue eyes.

" As good as we've been for seven years," replied Guy dryly, knowing that the breach between him and his uncle was common knowledge. " If you mean, did I murder him, I tell you frankly, no."

" Well, that's that," replied Rudy Ellis coolly.

" Pete " and old Gorman returned at this moment, the latter reporting all the gates securely locked.

" It's an inside job all right," muttered Rudy Ellis. " There's powder marks around the wound. Whoever did it was well enough known to the old man to get pretty close without arousing his suspicions."

Guy winced. Marilee, Marilee!

Sergeant Ellis glanced at him sharply. " You ain't seen no weapon around here?" he wanted to know.

Guy felt himself change color, so conscious was he of his sagging coat pocket. But he made a brave attempt to bluff it out.

" N-no," he faltered, regretting the words the moment they were out; for by Ellis's narrowed eyes he realized the sergeant knew he lied.

" Of course you won't object to a search," Ellis murmured suavely.

Guy flushed, his hand going to his sagging pocket.

" It won't be necessary," he said shortly. " Here it is," and he drew out the revolver. " I found it on the floor there."

Old Gorman uttered a dismayed cry. Ellis said nothing, but his hard blue eyes glittered. Wrapping his handkerchief about his hand, he picked up the weapon and broke it, disclosing an exploded cartridge. A certain formality came into his manner that had not been there before.

" It's my duty, Drew, to warn you that anything you say now may be used against you," he said solemnly.

" You aren't suspecting me of killing my uncle—" Guy began thickly, then paused abruptly. After all, better he than that other.

Sergeant Ellis shrugged his shoulders.

" The coroner should be here any minute now," was his only comment. " Maybe that's him." He motioned to old Gorman as the sound of a car reached their ears. " Go let him in."

But it was not the coroner. Gorman returned in a few minutes with Teddy Ware, under whose arms, incongruously enough, dangled a pair of crutches. Apparently the old butler had not got up courage enough to tell the boy what had occurred, for he was expostulating loudly as he entered the room, " But what in the devil do they want with me, Gorman?"

At sight of that huddled figure sprawling across the desk, however, he stopped as abruptly as if some one had laid a hand upon his lips.

" God in heaven, what has happened?" he cried hoarsely, his eyes darting from face to face in the silent group of men about the room.

" Your brother-in-law has been shot and killed," explained Sergeant Ellis succinctly.

" But who—who did it?" faltered the boy.

Again Sergeant Ellis shrugged his shoulders.

" Mr. Drew *found* him," he said significantly. " Mr. Drew also found the pistol with which the shot was fired; but of course "—this with a venomous glance at his old enemy—" we ain't sure yet who done it."

" You don't mean you think he—" the boy broke off, his glance turning irresistibly toward the man the sergeant had tacitly accused.

Not a muscle in Guy Drew's face moved. He was thinking of one thing only, and that was the expression he had seen for one flickering moment in Teddy's eyes when his glance fell on the revolver by the dead

man's hand. Had it been fear? Had Teddy recognized the pistol? Had he any reason to connect the possession of it with his sister?

That the boy's thoughts were on her, Guy knew by his next remark: " Has any one told Marilee?"

Sergeant Ellis shook his bullet head.

" Ain't had time yet. Maybe you and old Gorman there had better trot on up to the house and break the news now," he said heavily.

Teddy and the old butler obeyed. A heavy silence fell on the three who were left. Guy's emotions were too harrowed for speech. Sergeant Ellis himself had taken refuge behind a masklike expression so that it was impossible to read his thoughts.

A sharp *rat-tat* on the pathway outside was the first sound to break the silence, and a moment later the little secretary hobbled in on the crutches Teddy had brought. His eyes widened at sight of his employer's lifeless body and his face went white. He was, however, as Drew was continually being forced to concede, braver than one would expect, for he did not evade the issue.

" He is really dead?" he asked in a low voice, coming close and staring down at the sprawling figure.

" Of course," snapped Rudy Ellis irritably. " And we're thinking the man ain't a thousand miles away who done it."

Thomas Blue started as he realized toward whom the police sergeant's vindictive glance was directed. His eyes narrowed slightly, and Guy recalled with a pang his rash threat of the afternoon which the secretary had overheard. Apparently the scene was set, so far as he was concerned. He had threatened the dead man. Every one knew there was bad blood between them. He benefited by his uncle's will.

The revolver had been found in his possession, and due to his care in removing them it would disclose no one's finger-prints but his own. He had a sudden choking sensation, but he took a desperate grip on himself. After all, as long as the police were hammering away at him, they were unlikely to stumble on the truth. And then his heart gave a sickening leap. Marilee was entering the room on Teddy's arm.

She was dreadfully white and trembling violently. A neatly clad maid whose name he learned later was Kitty hovered near her. Drew was terribly afraid. What would she do or say when confronted with the dead man? Suppose she should break down and admit— He pushed the thought violently from him. He would not acknowledge even to himself that there was anything for her to admit.

He realized the secretary was staring at her curiously, almost hostilely. Drew went cold. How much did Thomas Blue know about his dead employer's wife? A new fear assailed Guy. Why did she not speak? She must say something. She could not go on indefinitely staring at that ghastly dead face as if she could never tear her eyes away. He glanced nervously at Police Sergeant Ellis. He was watching her closely.

Then he realized that Marilee's white lips were parting. She was going to speak at last. But no sound came, only a moan as she slid noiselessly to the floor. Teddy with a startled cry caught her in his arms. The maid bent over her, sobbing, and between them they bore her from the room. Drew breathed easier when they were gone.

The coroner came at that moment. He was a chubby little man, abrupt in manner. He listened without comment to Sergeant Ellis's account of all that had occurred, his deep-set gray eyes fastening on Guy's face as if he would drag his secret from him. When the police officer had finished he ordered the room cleared.

" Of course nobody must leave town until after the inquest," interjected Rudy Ellis.

He glanced sharply as he spoke to the man whom he made no secret he suspected of the crime, nor was Guy surprised when, after going directly to his room, he opened the door suddenly and surprised Pete, Ellis's gawky assistant, on guard outside. He had no doubt he stood in grave danger of being indicted for his uncle's murder. But he had scant anxiety to spare for himself, precarious as he acknowledged his plight to be. All he could think of was the words with which Elias Cates had died. They echoed

and reëchoed in his ears. "She—she did it. curse her! She shot me!"

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE INQUEST DISCLOSED

THE coroner held his inquest the following afternoon at the precinct police station. The dingy court room was crowded. Guy, who had walked over with old Gorman, the ubiquitous Pete trailing in the rear as he had done all day, recognized many of the faces. It was highly significant, however, that most of his former acquaintances avoided his eyes, although from time to time he caught them stealing surreptitious glances at his averted face.

He had not seen Marilee all day. She had kept to her room. Teddy slouched in to breakfast as Guy was finishing, but beyond the curtest "good mornings" the two men exchanged no word. With the exception of Gorman, Guy had discussed his uncle's death with no one. The butler had come to him early in the morning in a state of great agitation. He had divined, of course, the way the wind was blowing, and he was highly excited over the probability of Guy's being indicted for the crime.

"We must get a detective down here, sir," he cried anxiously. "These country policemen are—are capable of fastening the thing on you, sir."

Guy was touched at the old servant's loyalty, but a real detective was the last thing in the world he wanted on the scene just then.

"Oh, I guess not, Gorman," he said quietly. "They're mostly bluster. I don't imagine anything will come of it, so far as I'm concerned."

The old butler darted him a sudden glance.

"You—you didn't do it, sir?" he whispered, his face graying.

"No, Gorman," replied Guy gently, "I didn't do it, and truth *will* out, you know. Run along now and don't worry."

But that the old servant was worried Guy knew well. His small body stiffened as they entered the court room. Guy searched until he found Marilee, seated between Teddy and her maid. She was heavily veiled and her eyes fastened on her hands, which were locked in her lap.

Directly behind her sat Thomas Blue, but as Guy and Gorman took their places in the rear of the room the secretary rose and came over to a seat beside them. It was rather a generous action under the circumstances, and again Guy's heart warmed toward the little man.

Coroner Hatcher, which was the name of the pompous little official, took charge of the case with gusto. The red-headed police sergeant sat at his left side, and they conferred now and then. As the trial proceeded it was not difficult to see Rudy Ellis's hand pulling the strings.

He was convinced Guy Drew was guilty and he was bent on wringing such a judgment from the jury, a rather sheepish-looking group of men collected from the small farms and stores on the outskirts of the town.

Ellis himself was the first witness called. He testified in a cut and dried manner as to the finding of the dead body, its position at the desk, and the significant fact that the fatal shot was fired from a comparatively short distance. He identified the weapon which the coroner placed before the jury as the one which Guy Drew had handed over to him and brought out with relish the reluctance the dead man's nephew had shown to admitting that the revolver was in his possession, also the damning fact that Drew was liable to prosecution for having attempted to suppress evidence in the case.

Altogether Sergeant Ellis contrived to make things look very black for his ancient enemy and if there were one present whom such a rumor had not already reached he was certainly aware of which way the straws were pointing by the time Rudy Ellis stepped out of the box.

The next witness called was the police surgeon who had performed the autopsy. He deposed as briefly as possible as to the nature of the wound and the caliber of the bullet that had effected death which was the same as the revolver already introduced in the case. He confirmed Sergeant Ellis's

contention that the murderer had shot at close range, as witness the faint powder marks about the wound.

The next witness to the old fellow's distress was Gorman himself. He was a tremulous object as he came reluctantly to the stand. They really wanted very little of the old servant, nothing as it happened but to establish the fact that he had seen to it that the gates were securely locked according to custom the night of the murder, that no one but the family had keys, and that the gates were all locked when he made his round of inspection at Sergeant Ellis's command after the murder was discovered. In other words as the coroner brought out very plainly the crime was bound to have been committed by some one on the inside, a fact over which the red-headed police sergeant openly gloated.

Old Gorman was on the verge of tears when he was finally allowed to stumble back to his seat and his faded eyes fastened on Guy with desperate pleading. The young man knew the old fellow was bitterly afraid that his reluctant testimony had blackened his favorite's chances, as indeed it had, but Guy smiled at him reassuringly and Gorman settled back in his seat with a gasp of relief.

The dead man's lawyer, a certain kind-faced old gentleman named Harvey Rice whom Guy had always liked, took the stand next. The old lawyer testified as briefly as possible that he had drawn up Elias Cates's last will and testament, that said will and testament reposed in his safe at the present time, and that by its provisions the dead man's property was divided equally between his wife, Marilee Ware Cates, and his nephew, Guy Thomas Drew, with himself as executor under bond.

A buzz ran over the court room at this testimony and Guy felt the furtive stare of many eyes. His face betrayed no uneasiness, however. As a matter of fact he was relieved. For with public interest centering on the fact that he benefited by his uncle's will, thereby establishing a motive for the crime, no one was likely to recall that there was another who also benefited by the will and might therefore have a similar motive for wishing Elias Cates out of the way.

Even the testimony of the next witness did not disturb his equanimity although it wrung a groan from old Gorman's lips and created a great stir in the court room. This witness, as the coroner's first question brought out, was a finger-print expert from the city.

"You have photographed the weapon?" the coroner asked.

The witness assented.

"Were you successful in finding finger-prints upon it?"

Everybody pricked up ears.

"Yes," the witness had an air of knowing his business.

"Have you been able to identify these prints?"

There was a breathless silence.

"Yes," was again the finger-print expert's reply.

"Whose are they?"

Guy's lip curled a little at the way every one in the crowded court room leaned a little forward the quicker to catch the reply.

"They belong to the dead man's nephew, Mr. Guy Drew."

During the commotion which this answer provoked, Rudy Ellis's coarse red face beamed. Apparently he thought this testimony formed a very substantial plank in the gallows he was carefully rearing for his boyhood enemy. Guy Drew, however, glanced neither at the witness nor the man who seemed bent on branding him with murder. His eyes were fastened on Marilee Cates's drooping figure.

Up to this point in the hearing she had sat perfectly motionless, never lifting her bowed head. But at the damning evidence contributed by the last witness she started violently and raising her heavy veil with a shaking hand she stared across the intervening heads at her husband's nephew, her pale lips parted as if she were about to speak. It was this moment more than any other in the trial that Guy had dreaded.

He did not doubt that Marilee had expected the evidence of the finger-print expert to be very different and he was desperately afraid now that she realized the trend of affairs she would feel impelled to speak.

This was why he had sent her a note early that morning by her faithful maid, Kitty. In it he urged her by the friendship they had cemented the night before to say nothing to any one about what she had secreted in the ivy, assuring her if she kept silent everything would come out right, but warning her if she spoke he could not answer for the consequences. And now with his eyes he pleaded with her again to obey his request, something which he saw she was having difficulty in doing.

She did at last, however, nod her head slightly to let him know she would abide by his wishes, but her face looked very troubled. Guy breathed a little sigh of relief. For the time at least the danger was past.

Then by a singular pause which had come upon the court proceedings he realized something of greater moment than had yet occurred was about to take place.

The coroner's face had gone very grave and even the stolid Rudy Ellis looked tense. Guy gripped himself and waited quietly for his enemy to play his trump card via Coroner Hatcher.

"The court will now hear from Mr. Guy Drew."

Old Gorman's thin hand closed convulsively on the young man's arm as if he would hold him in his seat. But gently releasing his feverish grasp Guy rose, advancing slowly to the witness stand, aware of the morbid eyes trained upon him but betraying it in neither face nor bearing. His voice was quite steady as he repeated the oath.

"You are the dead man's nephew?" asked the coroner curtly.

"Yes."

"You came down here yesterday to ask him for a loan?"

Before the witness could reply there was a commotion in the rear of the room. Thomas Blue, the diminutive secretary, was on his feet protesting determinedly.

"Mr. Drew should be warned," he was saying in his high mincing voice, "that anything he says will be used against him and that he has the right to refuse to answer without advice of counsel."

Rudy Ellis darted the interruptor a baleful glance.

"The young man is right," said the coroner quietly, "it is my duty, Mr. Drew, to warn you that anything you say will be used against you and that you may refuse to answer without advice of counsel."

Guy Drew bowed, puzzling again over the enigma of Thomas Blue's personality, which though housed in a mouse's body was lion's size. He threw the little man a grateful glance beneath which the latter colored shyly and looked away. The coroner repeated the question.

"Is it not a fact that you came down here yesterday, Mr. Drew, to ask your uncle for some money which he refused to lend you?"

"Yes."

"You needed the money urgently? In fact your mother's life depended on it? But though she was his sister Elias Cates refused?"

There was a certain grimness in Guy's muttered, "Yes."

"Mr. Drew, did you know at the time you talked with your uncle that by his will you shared equally in his estate?"

Guy realized that here was a question he might well refuse to answer, but there was a certain stubbornness in his make-up that made him determined in every instance, but one, to adhere to the truth.

"I knew," he said quietly while Rudy Ellis smiled broadly.

A certain sternness crept into the coroner's voice. He leaned slightly forward.

"Mr. Drew, is it not a fact that at this interview you lost your temper and after a bitter quarrel went so far as to threaten your uncle?"

There it was, the rash threat his anger had trapped him into making. So Thomas Blue *had* told. Not that Guy blamed the little secretary. It was no more than his duty under the circumstances.

"Yes," he replied in a low but perfectly steady voice, "I did quarrel with my uncle and I was foolish enough to threaten him."

The coroner and Rudy Ellis conferred for a moment, then the former resumed the attack.

"Mr. Drew, you claim to have happened

upon your uncle's murdered body by accident?"

Guy nodded slowly.

"How do you account for the fact that the weapon in the case was found in your possession?"

Guy Drew hesitated. Any reference to the revolver frightened him. He was so afraid Marilee would yield to a quixotic impulse and in an attempt to exonerate him, hopelessly incriminate herself.

"I—I do not know why I put the revolver in my pocket," he said lamely. "I—I was hardly responsible, I guess, from the shock and all."

"You are aware that you are liable to prosecution for having meddled with evidence in the case before the arrival of the authorities?"

"Yes."

The coroner's voice hardened.

"In the face of the evidence brought out here," he demanded very distinctly, "do you still deny you had a hand in killing your uncle?"

Unconsciously Guy Drew's shoulders straightened.

"As God is my helper," he replied solemnly, "I had nothing to do with my uncle's death."

"The witness is excused," was the coroner's sole comment.

He turned as he spoke to the jury. It was now his duty to instruct them in their task. But as he made his way to his seat Guy Drew knew perfectly well that in the hearts of those present he had already been tried and convicted. Old Gorman, however, stood faithfully by, reaching over to pat the young man's hand as he resumed his seat, while Thomas Blue reached up and whispered in his ear.

"I didn't tell them about the threat," he said earnestly. "Fred Kenneday squealed on you. He was in the outer office, you remember."

Guy did remember, and somehow he was glad his betrayer had not been the little secretary toward whom he was beginning to feel something like affection. Thomas Blue went on, pursing his lips oddly.

"They'll never worm anything out of me," he said stanchly, "though," and he stared in the direction of Marilee Cates's drooping figure, "there's plenty I could tell about some others, if I chose."

With an odd chill at his heart Guy Drew wondered why the little secretary's face always darkened when his glance fell on his former employer's young wife and how much after all Thomas Blue knew.

The coroner launched out pompously on his instructions to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he began, but at that moment a man near the rear of the room rose and came forward. He was a tall, fashionably dressed man about thirty, and extremely good looking. His manner was as leisurely and nonchalant as if interrupting fussy county officials when well begun on pompous panegyrics was all in his day's work.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Coroner," he said in a rather languid voice, "but I am here in the interests of Mr. Guy Drew," Guy started violently and stared blankly at the stranger, "and before you turn the case over to the jury I have a couple of witnesses I'd like to introduce. My name is Quincy, Jasper Quincy of the Metropolitan Detective Agency."

Guy Drew stared reproachfully at old Gorman. A detective, representing his interests, of course old Gorman had got him down there. That his suspicions were well grounded he read in the old butler's apologetic eyes, but Guy hadn't it in his heart to censure the faithful old soul although he trembled inwardly for the consequences of his rash act.

If Guy had been thrown into confusion by the appearance of the detective, Coroner Hatcher and Sergeant Ellis were completely bowled over, though each of them reacted differently.

The coroner was plainly flabbergasted, the sergeant disposed to be quarrelsome. Neither, however, dared to be downright rude to a man whose name carried a spell in certain circles. For a moment the three conferred in undertones. After which the celebrated detective took up his seat at the coroner's right, opposite the now disgruntled Ellis. Coroner Hatcher continued the investigation.

"Miss Polly Green will take the chair,"

he said, referring to a memorandum Detective Quincy had placed in his hand.

A subdued looking girl came forward. She was timid and ill at ease, but she tried to answer the coroner's questions clearly.

"You are employed by the local telephone company as night operator?"

"Yes."

"You were on duty last night between the hours of ten and two?"

"Yes."

"During that time did you get any call over the wire from Mr. Elias Cates's office, commonly called the cabin?"

"No, sir. The light came on from his station during that time but when I plugged in I could get no response. After trying for several minutes to complete the connection I reported the line out of order."

"Can you form any estimate of what time this occurred?"

"It was eleven fifty-seven, sir."

"How do you know the exact minute?" inquired the coroner testily.

"Because I am required to make a notation when I report a line out of order. My record shows eleven fifty-seven."

"Can you account for what had made the line go dead?"

"A great many things might," she replied slowly, "a broken wire, a loose connection, or the receiver being left down, or jarred off the hook accidentally."

There was a broad smile on Detective Quincy's face at this reply and he beamed on the witness encouragingly as Coroner Hatcher somewhat testily dismissed her from the stand. To his own visible perturbation Sergeant Ellis was the next witness summoned to testify.

"When you came into the room where the murder occurred, sergeant," asked the coroner, "did you notice the position of the telephone?"

"Yes," conceded the police officer with a scowl, "the dead man's arm which had fallen across it had knocked the receiver off the hook."

"You would conclude that the wire went dead when the dying man fell across it?"

"Yes."

"That would fix the hour of the murder at eleven fifty-seven?"

Rudy Ellis shot a baleful glance at Detective Quincy.

"Yes," he muttered sourly and left the stand.

Guy Drew started when he recognized the next witness. It was the man from whom he had purchased his matches the night before.

"You have a store near the Cates's house?"

"Yes."

"Did Guy Drew come into your place last night?"

"Yes, Mr. Drew bought a box of matches from me."

"What time was that?"

"About five minutes to twelve, I remember because I always close at twelve and I was just getting ready to lock up when he came in."

"How much of a walk is it from your store to the Cates's estate?"

"All of fifteen minutes, sir, ten at the very least."

"Guy Drew couldn't possibly have been in your store at eleven fifty-five and reached Stone Gates by eleven fifty-seven then?"

"No, sir, I am sure he couldn't have, sir."

The coroner waved the witness away. This time he made no attempt at addressing the jury and that body deliberated only a few minutes before returning the only verdict possible under the circumstances.

"We find Elias Cates was shot to death by a party or parties unknown," and with his own ill-temper reflected in Sergeant Ellis's glum face the coroner dismissed the hearing.

CHAPTER VI

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

TO Guy's relief Detective Quincy made no attempt to talk with him after the trial. Apparently Gorman had warned him he had been retained against the wishes of the very man in whose interest he had acted, for as soon as the inquest was concluded he disappeared, leaving Guy and old Gorman and Thomas Blue to walk back to Stone Gates alone.

For the first time since the murder the police recruit, Pete, was not in sight. Old Gorman made a halting plea for forgiveness and he was so elated at the way in which the detective had pulled matters out of a bad hole, and it was so apparent that nothing but Quincy's dramatic appearance had prevented Guy from being bound over to the local grand jury for his uncle's murder, the young man hadn't the heart to rebuke the old fellow.

"I am very glad things turned out the way they did, Mr. Drew," remarked Thomas Blue gravely and Guy realized that for some reason the little secretary had taken a fancy to him. "Of course I knew you didn't kill your uncle, but the way they kept piling up circumstantial evidence against you made things look bad.

"I'd have hated to see an innocent man suffer for the sins of others," his face darkened as he spoke and again Guy wondered just how much the little man did know.

He and Thomas Blue dined alone that night, neither Marilee nor her brother putting in an appearance. Each man determinedly avoided the topic uppermost in their thoughts. Blue talked very well on a number of subjects and Guy found it a decided relief to listen to his voice which, high and mincing though it was, was not unpleasant. He wanted to be diverted and he welcomed anything which kept his thoughts off the grim reality which he realized that sooner or later he must face.

They were on the point of rising from the table when Marilee's maid, Kitty, appeared at the door and beckoned to old Gorman. The two conversed in low tones for a moment, then the girl turned away. There was a troubled expression on the old butler's face as he returned to the table.

"The mistress wants you to come up to her sitting room for a few minutes when you've finished, Mr. Guy," he said, frowning a little.

For the second time Guy was impatient with the old servant for his unreasonable prejudice against his uncle's wife. Then he realized with a little shock that Thomas Blue was staring at him oddly, his earnest blue eyes more troubled even than Gorman's, his brow puckered as if he were nerving himself up to something unpleasant.

"I—I don't want to presume, Mr. Drew," began the little secretary, as soon as Gorman was out of earshot, "but I think —that is, it seems to me, it's my duty to warn you that—that woman is capable of—"

Guy did not permit him to finish.

"Are you referring to my uncle's wife, Mr. Blue?" he demanded so stiffly the little secretary paused, looking as rueful as if he had been slapped in the face.

Guy felt a twinge of compunction. After all the little man had stood by him when others had turned their backs and undoubtedly even in the present instance his motive was of the friendliest. But not even from him could Guy tolerate a word against that sad, wistful-eyed girl upstairs. The very thought of seeing her again filled him with a curious excitement and yet as he went slowly up the stairs he was conscious of a disturbing thought.

Why did old Gorman and Thomas Blue, both of whom knew her so much better than he, dislike her so cordially? She herself admitted that every one believed her to be an adventuress. Before he came to Stone Gates he had been ready to credit anything against her. Apparently Gorman and Thomas Blue considered her a sort of vampire. They had been afraid for him to talk to her. No doubt they feared she would try her enchantments on him.

Then he realized uncomfortably enough that she had already to a certain extent bewitched him. He had to admit that he had fallen headlong for her pathetic life story, a story common enough after all. Had it happened to another man he would have said she had pulled the wool over his eyes. If he were not bewitched why had he kept silent about the revolver he had seen her hide under the ivy?

That she had killed his uncle he had never doubted from his glimpse of her tragic face in the moonlight. But he had held stubbornly to his conviction that she had had ample provocation. He had believed her more sinned against than sinning and he had determined to shield her from the police even at the cost of his own lib-

erty and good name. Now, however, for the first time, since she had brushed by him in his uncle's office the afternoon before, he felt, and could not quite shake off, a doubt of her.

Was she after all an adventuress? Were Gorman and Thomas Blue right after all? Was she a dangerous woman he would do well to avoid?

His eyes were a little hard as at her low, musical, "Come in," he turned the knob and entered the daintily furnished room which alone in the gaunt old house reflected anything of its mistress's personality. She was seated at a small desk between the windows and her brother Teddy was leaning against the mantel near her.

He scowled sulkily and muttered something unintelligible at Drew's entrance, but Marilee came forward and offered Guy her hand with a tired smile. Could anything so sweet be capable of the bitter things of which he had been half suspecting her? Something in Guy's heart protested fiercely even while his reason reminded him coldly that Delilah and Cleopatra had undoubtedly looked just as guileless.

She must have sensed the constraint in his manner, for her own grew slightly confused and she turned somewhat hastily from Guy's searching eyes to her brother, holding out to him a slim slip of paper which the boy thrust into his pocket, turning with a muttered excuse to the door. Marilee followed, helping him on with his overcoat and patting his sleeve caressingly, attentions which the boy accepted with decidedly bad grace.

"Teddy is in a bad humor," murmured Marilee apologetically when he had flung out of the room. "He was arrested last night for speeding and I have been giving him a little lecture," she smiled deprecatingly. "Of course he insists he wasn't, but I know if Constable Hooper said Teddy was speeding, he was."

She, too, sat down, and for a moment there was a little silence. Guy stole a surreptitious glance at her averted face. How haggard she looked and yet how young. He felt his defenses weakening and made an effort to harden his heart against her. She looked up at him suddenly.

"I asked you to come here," she said gravely, "for two reasons. First, I want you to stay at Stone Gates until after the funeral," she faltered slightly, "in spite of everything, I think he loved you."

"Certainly I will stay," murmured Guy rather brusquely.

She looked at him quickly, then as quickly away.

"The other reason I asked you to come," she said, her lips quivering, "is because I owe you an explanation about—about"—it cost her an effort to go on—"what I hid under the ivy."

She looked at him piteously. And suddenly his heart melted. All the doubt and suspicion of the past hour vanished as if it had never been. He was conscious only of a profound tenderness for this shrinking, white-faced girl.

"There is nothing you need explain to me," he said, his voice vibrating strangely, "I trust you absolutely."

She said nothing, but her eyes thanked him, and even when away from the spell of her beauty in the cold sobriety of his own room he faced the fact that Gorman and Thomas Blue's worst fears had been realized, that to their way of thinking she had pulled the wool over his eyes again. He did not care. Quite recklessly he admitted to himself that nothing mattered but that just as he had told her he trusted her absolutely.

He was in Elias Cates's office the following morning when old Gorman entered, accompanied by Jasper Quincy. Thomas Blue had wanted Guy to assist him in getting together certain data which the dead man's lawyer needed for the settling of the estate and the two of them were hard at it when the old butler and his man entered.

"Mr. Quincy here was very anxious for a word with you, Mr. Guy," quavered Gorman, eying the young man doubtfully as if afraid he might refuse to have anything to say to the detective.

Guy was tempted to do just that, but rather than deal the old butler a slap in the face he accepted the matter with as good grace as possible.

"Proceed, Mr. Quincy," he said, leaning back in his chair and smiling up at the detective rather quizzically.

Jasper Quincy threw a sudden glance at the little secretary at work across the desk. Thomas Blue, flushing a little, reached for his crutches, but Guy shook his head and motioned him back to his seat.

"You may speak plainly before Mr. Blue," he said with an affectionate glance at the little man; "he's my friend."

Thus did he atone for his brusqueness of the night before and his reward was the shy light which stole into Thomas Blue's eyes.

"As you like," replied Detective Quincy, shrugging his shoulders. "I really haven't very much to say anyway."

Having got this far he paused and waited very deliberately to light a cigarette. Guy wished irritably that he'd go on. He wondered if it was a part of the detective's plan to put him on as great a strain as possible.

"Mr. Drew, just where was that revolver when you picked it up and put it in your pocket?" was Quincy's first question.

Any inquiry relative to the revolver made Guy nervous.

"Why—it—I don't remember exactly—but I believe it was about there," he stammered, indicating a spot near the desk.

"Here, eh?" murmured the detective, strolling to the place indicated and stooping to examine, and it was from this stooping position that he shot his next question.

"When you telephoned police headquarters, Mr. Drew," he asked, "what telephone did you use?"

Guy stared at him a moment in silence. Who *had* telephoned police headquarters, anyway? His spirit groaned. Who else, except Marilee? But she was not supposed to have known about her husband's death until long after the arrival of the police. If once they guessed it was she who telephoned there'd be the devil to pay.

"I—I phoned from the booth up at the big house," he lied desperately. "The—the telephone down here was out of order, you know."

"I know," replied the detective grimly. "So you phoned from the house?"

"Yes," replied Guy stubbornly.

Detective Quincy came back to the desk.

"The telephone call came from the big house all right," he remarked slowly. "We've traced that. But," his voice took on a sharper edge, "it did not come from the booth. Gorman is willing to swear that he was dozing outside the booth all evening and no one could have entered it without his knowledge."

Guy almost groaned.

"I believe now, since you mention it, I did go upstairs to phone," he faltered lamely. "I was so excited I hardly remember—"

But Detective Quincy cut him short with an impatient gesture.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Drew," he said coldly, "it was not you at all who telephoned the police. Sergeant Tucker, who took the message, is ready to swear it was a woman who phoned in. 'Some one has been shot in Elias Cates's cabin,' she said, and hung up."

"A—a woman!" stammered, aware of a curious glint in Thomas Blue's eyes.

"Yes, the call came from the big house, and it was in a woman's voice," repeated Quincy.

The men measured glances. Guy's was the first to fall.

"You didn't see anything of a woman near the scene of the crime?" the detective continued suavely.

"Of course, not," cried Guy angrily, "or I should have told the police."

The detective raised his eyebrows.

"There's a great deal you haven't told the police, I am thinking, Mr. Drew," he said coolly, while Guy flushed and bit his lip.

"Oh, well, we soon learn in my business," continued Quincy carelessly, "to respect the old adage, '*Cherchez la femme*,' and," he turned toward the door, "when young men do their best to get indicted for a murder they couldn't possibly have committed, it's always safe to begin to look for the woman in the case."

Guy strangled a "damn you," under his breath, as the door closed behind the detective. So this was the outcome of Gorman's well-meant interference. Guy smothered a groan. Better, far better to have been indicted himself than to start this human blood hound on Marilee's trail with

his disconcerting manner of picking up loose threads and knitting them into a dangerous whole.

CHAPTER VII

"HE DESERVED KILLING!"

GUY was on his way to his room to brush up a little for lunch, when he heard a commotion in the upper hall and came upon Kitty, Marilee's maid, clinging to the door which opened into her mistress's sitting room, and screaming for help at the top of her lungs.

"What is it, Kitty?" cried Guy. "What on earth is the matter?"

"Stop that screaming, Kitty," commanded Marilee sternly, hurrying from the housekeeper's room, "and tell us what has happened."

"I caught a man in there ransacking your desk, ma'am," cried Kitty between sobs, "and I slipped around and locked the other door and now I've got him penned up, the sneak-thief!"

"Here, let me, Kitty," begged Guy, loosing the girl's clutch on the door knob. "I'll see to him."

Kitty with obvious reluctance stood aside and, followed by Marilee, Guy opened the door and entered, stopping short, however, to strangle an oath as he recognized the debonair figure across the room. It was Gorman's detective, Jasper Quincy!

"What does this mean, Quincy?" began Guy angrily, with a furious desire to smash in the face of the man who, the least perturbed of the three, was regarding them as calmly as if being caught rifling lady's writing desks was an every day business with him. "How dare you enter Mrs. Cates's rooms without her knowledge and search her desk?"

Jasper Quincy did not reply for a moment. His keen searching eyes regarded them very steadily for long enough to make Guy fume with rage.

"I came down here to learn who killed Elias Cates," said the detective at last, "and I intend to do just that. Surely, neither the dead man's wife nor his nephew can have any desire to hinder my quest?"

"Of course, not," cried Guy testily. "We—Mrs. Cates and I—are more eager than any one else to see this dreadful mystery cleared up." The words did not ring very convincingly even to his own ears.

He paused abruptly. The detective had warned him he was looking for the woman he was shielding. Every word he spoke in her defense was dangerous. As it happened, however, Marilee herself took up the cudgels here, and her attack was so as to deprive Guy of the capacity for thought much less speech.

"You don't, by any chance, suspect *me* of killing my husband, do you, Mr. Quincy?" she asked very quietly. Guy had the satisfaction, short-lived though it was, of seeing the famous sleuth disconcerted for a moment at least.

"It is my habit to suspect every one until I learn differently, madam," he replied shortly.

"Which is no more than your duty, I am sure," murmured Marilee. "I will answer any questions you may put me, Mr. Quincy."

The detective drew a long breath. Guy was sure that he was nonplused by this slip of a woman with her mournful dark eyes and musical voice.

"When did you last see your husband alive?" he asked at last.

"At dinner the night of—of the murder," she replied in a low voice.

"Were you out at the cabin at all that day?"

She hesitated a second before replying. "I was there a short while in the afternoon."

"That was when your husband refused you money?"

Guy started. How on earth had the detective known? Then he remembered that Thomas Blue, like himself, had overheard that last conversation between Elias Cates and his wife. Had Blue told? The secretary did not like Marilee, Guy was sure of that. His heart climbed into his throat as he waited for her reply. She did not look at him.

"Yes," her voice was very steady.

"You quarreled?"

"Yes."

"You were much younger than your husband?"

Here Guy interrupted. "You've no right to—"

But Marilee hushed him gently.

"I am forty years younger than Mr. Cates was," she said quietly.

"He married you out of the chorus?"

Guy winced, but Marilee Cates did not falter.

"Yes," she acknowledged in a low voice.

"Your marriage was happy?"

Her lip curled slightly.

"Such marriages seldom are," she replied curtly.

Jasper Quincy took a sudden turn up and down the room. Marilee waited quietly until he confronted her again.

"Mrs. Cates," he said more gently than he had yet spoken, "do you know what people in town are saying about you?"

She shook her head without speaking. The detective hesitated. Perhaps even he was slightly susceptible to her sad, wistful beauty.

"They are saying that you married Elias Cates for his fortune, and that when you found you couldn't coax money out of him every time you wanted it, you shot him!"

"By God," began Guy furiously, "you shan't insult this woman in my presence!"

He made a threatening lunge toward the detective. Marilee laid her hand on his sleeve. Quincy smiled grimly.

"And do you know what they are saying about you, Mr. Drew?" he continued coolly. "They say you know she murdered your uncle, but you are shielding her because you've fallen for her yourself."

Again, but for Marilee's pleading hand, Guy would have hurled himself at the other. Jasper Quincy, however, did not vouchsafe him a glance. Turning again to the woman who, though white to the lips, had not flinched under his merciless attack, he went on.

"Have you ever possessed a revolver, Mrs. Cates?" he demanded.

She gave an anguished start and had to fight for the strength to answer.

"Yes."

Guy's heart gave a sickening thud. Oh, Marilee, Marilee!

"How did this revolver come into your possession?" There was something terrible about the way the detective hammered away at his victim.

"I—" she paused to wet her dry lips with her tongue—"I bought it about a month ago. There had been burglars in the neighborhood. Mr. Cates usually worked till late out at the cabin. I was often alone until past midnight," she tried to smile. "I am not very brave and I decided I'd feel less nervous if I had some sort of weapon at hand."

"Did your husband know you had the revolver?"

"No, I—I never told him. He would have thought it very silly of me. He had no patience with foolish fears."

Guy Drew remembered a baby cowering in a huge canopied bed in unbounded terror because Elias Cates thought it silly to humor childish fears. Ah, Marilee, more sinned against than sinning!

"Where did you keep this revolver, Mrs. Cates?" Quincy went on.

She shivered slightly, and her shaking hand crept up to her throat.

"In—in my desk yonder," she replied in a low voice.

"But it is not there now," pressed Jasper Quincy sternly. "I have looked."

"No?" she replied in a stifled voice.

"Mrs. Cates," the detective came a step nearer, she stared at him helplessly, "was it with your revolver Elias Cates was shot?"

Guy Drew uttered a choking cry, but apparently Marilee did not hear.

"Yes," she said in a hollow voice, "it was mine."

Jasper Quincy licked his under lip. Guy felt sick. The detective was torturing the woman he loved before his very eyes, for he no longer denied that though she be as guilty as hell, he loved Marilee Cates.

"Mrs. Cates, some one called the police after the murder was committed and notified them of the crime." Guy shivered; would the agony never cease? "The call came from this house and was in a woman's voice. Was it you who called?"

"Yes," she said, her hands locking, "it was I."

"You knew then before the police came that your husband was dead?"

"Yes."

"You had been to the cabin and seen him?"

"Yes."

"You saw your pistol there and knew it was with it he was killed?"

"Yes."

He waited a moment and Guy felt as if the silence shrieked.

"Mrs. Cates, was it you who—"

But Marilee Cates had broken at last.

"I—I'll tell you, I'll tell you everything!" she cried, trembling violently. "I did it! It was I—*I*—who killed him! I shot him, but, oh"—her voice trailed off into sobs—"he deserved killing!"

And then for the second time she fainted, and Guy, no less white than she, caught her as she fell.

CHAPTER VIII

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN

WHEN they took Marilee away between two deputies, whom Jasper Quincy had hastily summoned, Guy plead feverishly to be allowed to accompany her to the police station, only to be refused point blank. He had insisted she was in no condition to be moved, but after her momentary collapse Marilee rallied and, though ghastly white, she declared herself ready to go with the officers.

Guy followed the police car to town and made a desperate effort to have her released on bond, only to fail signally. She was denied bail under any circumstances, and he had to stand helplessly by and see her committed to a cell in the dingy county jail. He did succeed in getting a word alone with her before they took her away.

"You—you'll explain to Teddy?" she asked, looking up at him with quivering lips. "And—and watch after him?"

"Yes, oh, yes, my dear," he cried hoarsely.

As it happened, however, when he returned to Stone Gates Teddy had already heard the sad news. Guy found him in his room, alternately sobbing and cursing with rage and despair.

"Where is she? When will they let me see her?" he demanded, angrily brushing the tears from his burning eyes as he spoke, while the older man realized with pity that however Teddy had tried his sister's patience, he loved her devotedly.

"She's at the county jail," he replied, as gently as he could, "and I'm not sure when they'll let you see her, to-night perhaps."

The boy took a tortured fling up and down the room.

"They've got to let her out!" he cried fiercely, his voice breaking on a sob. "I can't bear it for Marilee to be shut up down there!" He fairly glared at the other. "I hope you're satisfied now with that detective you brought down here? I never trusted you. I told Marilee you weren't up to any good hanging around us."

Realizing the boy's almost distraught condition, Guy did not resent the insult.

"There is no one in the world who'd do more for your sister than I," he said quietly.

Teddy Ware had the grace to look a little ashamed of himself.

"Don't mind me," he muttered huskily after a moment's silence, "I'm about nuts, I guess, with worry and everything. You're all right, I reckon, Drew. Marilee thinks so anyway." Guy's heart thrilled even at this meager comfort. Teddy gnawed at his under lip.

"What I don't understand," he burst out at length, "is how that detective found out about the revolver. I didn't think any one but me knew Marilee had—" he paused abruptly, the color stealing into his white face.

Guy glanced up quickly, but the boy turned away without meeting his eyes. A startling thought seized upon the older man's brain. So Teddy had known about the revolver. As if he realized the trend of the other's thoughts, the boy feverishly changed the subject.

"If only I hadn't gone into town after those crutches for that little shrimp, Blue," he plunged on, his bloodshot eyes shifting oddly.

Guy was doing a piece of rapid calculation. They had finished dinner on the fatal evening about eight. It was almost an hour and thirty minutes' ride into Hampton, counting in a certain loss of time incurred by the necessity of ferrying a small stream *en route*. The trip both ways should have consumed less than three hours.

Even allowing for the time it took to secure the crutches Teddy could have been back then by eleven, but it was nearer twelve thirty when he entered the cabin. Guy had assumed, of course, that he had but that moment returned, but had he any real assurance of that fact?

Certain incidents which recent events had driven from his mind, assumed a new and sinister aspect. The money which Marilee had wanted from her husband had been for Teddy, or so Elias Cates had believed. He himself had overheard the boy tell her that he had to have money or there'd be the devil to pay.

Then there was Teddy's strange agitation when he learned that Kenneday had been at the cabin, to say nothing of his odd behavior when his brother-in-law commanded him to stop by the cabin that night. Why had Teddy been so excited when he knew Kenneday had visited Elias Cates? What possible connection could there be between the boy and a gambler like Kenneday? But for the matter of that what business had Kenneday had with Elias Cates, and why had Cates told Teddy to come by the cabin?

These and a thousand kindred thoughts raced through the older man's brain. Had Teddy got himself mixed up with Fred Kenneday? Was that his urgent need of money? Guy remembered the sneering manner in which Elias Cates had said it was never too much bother for Teddy to go to Hampton and recalled how the boy had flinched beneath his brother-in-law's piercing gaze. Guy's brain whirled. Aware of the necessity of moving guardedly he made a desperate effort to betray none of the excitement he felt when he spoke.

"By the way, when did you leave Hampton that night?" he asked carelessly.

His eyes did not leave the boy's face as he posed the question, but either Teddy missed its significance or was more cunning than Guy credited him with being, for he showed neither uneasiness nor dismay.

"It was about eleven," he said slowly. "I got here about twelve thirty, you remember?" He looked up at Guy and the latter nodded. "I'd have been a few minutes sooner if a cop hadn't held me up."

Guy was bitterly disappointed. If Teddy hadn't left Hampton till eleven or after he couldn't possibly have had anything to do with old Cates's death. What a mountain he had been building up out of a few mole hills anyway. Probably Teddy had been gambling with Kenneday and lost some money, and Elias Cates had found out about it and had been intending to rake the boy over the coals which he certainly richly deserved.

But, after all, one didn't kill a man for anything so trivial as that. In his desire to clear the woman he loved he had been eager to place the guilt on almost any one else, though he realized that he would get scant thanks from Marilee for making her beloved brother a scapegoat in her stead. His manner was gentler than it had been when he left the boy.

After all Marilee had commended Teddy to his care and he felt sorrier than ever for the youngster when the latter returned from a visit to the jail that night. Evidently the sight of his sister in such surroundings had been almost more than the boy could bear.

They buried all that was mortal of Elias Cates the following afternoon. It was a grim, somber affair. Guy was the only one of the dead man's kin present. There is something pathetic about a man being laid away to his eternal rest attended by so few real tears as were shed for Elias Cates, and Guy had turned away with a sigh from the depressing scene when Harvey Rice tapped him on the arm.

"Would you mind coming by the office, my boy, before you return to Stone Gates?" he asked slowly. "I've something I'd like you to see."

The old lawyer was seated at his desk when his confidential clerk ushered Guy into his private office a little later. For a

moment the two men chatted on impersonal subjects, then Harvey Rice turned to his desk and drew out of an inner drawer a slender slip of paper which he turned absently over and over in his hands as he talked.

"In the process of settling up your uncle's estate, my boy, it has fallen to my duty to check up his bank account and see that it is in shape for handing over to his heirs. While doing that I came across the following check." He held out the slender paper.

Guy took it and stared at it curiously, the blood mounting in his face as he realized that it was a check drawn in favor of Teddy Ware for the sum of five hundred dollars, signed in the big sprawling hand all who knew him were accustomed to associate with the dead man. Flipping it over he saw again with mounting color that it had been indorsed by Fred Kenneday of Hampton.

"Well?" he queried, looking from the document in his hand to the old lawyer who was watching him closely. "It looks regular enough to me. That's Elias Cates's signature and I'd bet on it."

"You're wrong," remarked Harvey Rice dryly. "That isn't Elias Cates's signature."

"Great Scott, you mean—" began Guy excitedly.

"I mean it's a forgery," replied the old lawyer. "Look here." He drew another canceled check from a sheaf in his desk and, laying the two of them under a magnifying glass, beckoned to the young man.

There was no question once the two lay side by side under the powerful lens. Similar though they were, the false signature lacked the firmness and dash of the original.

"Good God, you think Teddy forged—" Guy could go no farther.

A number of things which had eluded him before became suddenly clear. This was why Teddy had needed money so badly. He had probably given Kenneday the check, expecting to redeem it with money his sister would get for him from her husband. Failing in that, no wonder he had been electrified to know that Kenneday had been to see Elias Cates. Of course, Kenneday had smelled a mouse and had come to Cates to have the signature verified. Undoubtedly it was about this matter the dead man had wanted to see Teddy that last night at the cabin.

Guy felt a stab of pity for the boy who, weak though he certainly was, he could not believe wholly bad. No wonder Teddy had blanched when ordered to come by the cabin and had leaped at the first excuse to escape. His idea in going to Hampton had probably been to see Kenneday and learn for sure how much Elias Cates knew.

"What do you propose to do about it?" he asked the lawyer.

Harvey Rice shrugged his shoulders.

"That is entirely up to you and Mrs. Cates," he said quietly. "You are the heirs. You will have to prosecute if any one does."

"Then I say drop it," cried Guy hurriedly, "I don't want to push the thing, I assure you."

"Very well," remarked the old lawyer imperturbably, returning the check to its sisters in the sheaf.

Once outside Guy found his thoughts a sad jumble. Teddy had forged Elias Cates's name to a check, and by all indications Elias Cates had known it. He shivered slightly. Had the old man lived he would have shown his wife's brother little mercy, Guy was convinced of that. Elias Cates did not like Teddy, anyway. He would have been capable of sending the boy to the penitentiary for such an offense.

It was lucky for Teddy he was killed when he was. Then he realized where his thoughts were leading him and pulled them up sharply. But Teddy couldn't have killed his brother-in-law, he didn't leave Hampton until a little after eleven. At least he said he didn't. Guy's heart began to beat very fast.

He had only Teddy's word for that, of course, and now that he knew the boy had no trivial cause but a very serious one to wish Elias Cates out of the way, it no longer seemed possible to accept his word.

He recalled suddenly that Teddy had admitted being arrested for speeding, and from Marilee he knew the name of the man who had arrested him. With a new grimness about his mouth Guy resolved to see Constable Hooper. The constable, as he learned from a man on the street, was usually to be found around the office of Squire Woods, justice of the peace, at that hour of the day, and surely enough there Guy found him.

"Yes, I remember arresting young Ware the other night," he replied to Guy's query, "though it ain't the first time I've arrested him, nor the second."

"Could you tell me what time it was when you stopped him?" asked Guy, his voice shaking a little.

"No, I'm afraid I couldn't," replied the constable slowly, scratching his grizzled head with one gnarled finger. "I don't know as I can remember." Then brightening suddenly: "Why, yes, come to think of it, I guess I can. About five minutes after Teddy Ware's car had got out of sight, a man drove by in a truck and asked me what was the correct time, and when I looked at my watch it was ten thirty-five. It must have been then close around ten thirty or a little before when I stopped the boy."

There was an odd roaring in Guy's ears. At ten thirty Teddy had been out of Hampton, and yet he claimed not to have left the town till after eleven. If the old constable's story was true, and Guy did not doubt it a moment, Teddy must have reached Stone Gates by eleven at least, and Elias Cates had been shot at eleven fifty-seven. His heart began to pound convulsively.

Why had Teddy lied? Where and how had he spent the two hours which had elapsed between his being stopped for speeding and his dramatic entrance into Elias Cates's death chamber? He had known about the revolver. He had had a cause for killing Elias Cates and he had been on or near the scene of the tragedy at the time it occurred.

But Marilee had already confessed to the crime. Sudden tears stung Guy's eyelids. Oh, Marilee, Marilee, greater love hath no man than this that he offereth up his life for his brother.

CHAPTER IX

"HE IS LYING TO SAVE ME!"

BUT suddenly Guy Drew's face was very stern, Marilee should not be allowed to sacrifice herself. He would save her. He would see that justice was done her even though she never forgave him for it.

Teddy was in his room when Guy returned. The boy glanced up with a scowl when the door opened, but his face blanched at the other's expression.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

Guy came slowly to the boy's side, his eyes fastened sternly on Teddy's white face which twitched slightly beneath his accusing glance.

"You gave Fred Kenneday a check for five hundred dollars the night before Uncle Elias was killed?" Guy demanded without a preface.

The boy made an effort to steady his shaking limbs.

"Yes," he muttered sulkily. "What of it?"

"Why were you giving him checks?" pressed Guy.

"I'd been gambling with him. I expected to take up the check before he cashed it, but—" he gulped suddenly—"I couldn't."

Suddenly Guy pitied the haggard-faced boy before him, but he steeled his heart and thought only of Marilee in peril of her life.

"You admit then that the check was a forgery?" he asked sternly.

Teddy Ware drew a shaking hand across his twitching lips.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "It was a forgery. What are you going to do about it?"

"Why did you tell me it was eleven or after when you left Hampton?" demanded Guy, paying no heed to the question.

The boy started.

"It was eleven," he mumbled, his lips twitching.

"It was not!" cried Guy harshly. "You were here by eleven. You had promised to come by the cabin. Kenneday had told Elias Cates about the check. You knew what that meant. But before you talked to him you came up to your sister's room and got the revolver she kept in her desk, then when the old man threatened to put you in jail for forgery you drew the revolver and, God help you, you shot him!"

But the boy shook his head with a ghastly smile.

"I wish to God that was true, Drew," he said simply. "I'd—I'd give my life cheerfully if that was true, but—" his head fell forward on his breast—"it isn't. I did forge old Cates's name to the check. I—I never meant to let it be cashed. I thought Marilee could get the money for me and I'd take it up. Kenneday got leery. He drove over here and showed it to old Cates.

"I *was* back from Hampton by eleven, and I did stop at the cabin as I'd promised. We had a terrible quarrel, my brother-in-law and I. He—" he shivered slightly—"you know, Drew, what a devil he was. He told me he had got the whip hand over me at last. He hated me because Marilee loves me, I guess. To torture her he swore he'd send me to the penitentiary for forgery.

"I was desperate. I had only one thought, to kill myself. I knew about the revolver in Marilee's desk. I slipped into her sitting room and was rummaging in the desk when she heard me and came in. She saw the despair in my face and, running to me, flung her arms about me and begged me to tell her what had happened. Finally I told her.

"She didn't reproach me, she only kissed me and wiped my tears away." His voice broke on a sob. "Then she made me promise to go on off and let her talk to her husband. I went."

He said no more for a minute. Guy's heart sank. He had been so certain Marilee was innocent and yet he could not doubt the truth of the boy's story, wrung word by word from his aching heart.

"But—but you don't think she—she—" he could not go on.

Teddy raised his haggard face.

"I never had my hands on Marilee's pistol, Drew," he said. "I left her there by her desk. She was going to the cabin to plead for me. She—she—" his voice broke—"there isn't anything Marilee wouldn't do for me." Guy knew this to be true. "I went away for an hour as I'd promised. It was a few minutes after twelve when I returned.

"I left my car down the road a piece and stole up to the cabin window to see if I could tell what was going on. By means of the ivy on the wall I crawled up where I could see inside and—" a groan burst from his white lips—"I saw Elias Cates lying dead on his desk with Marilee standing beside him, the revolver clutched in her hand. Then I must have lost consciousness, because the next thing I knew you were bending over him.

"And then—and then—" his head drooped—"he revived a little. He—he stirred and—spoke—and—" the eyes of the two men who loved Marilee Cates met in stricken silence—"I heard what he told you with his dying lips."

The boy sighed heavily.

"Somehow I got back to my car. I heard the police come and I knew I had to put in appearance sooner or later, so I drove up to the gate and got out with the crutches which I had forgotten before. The—the rest you know," he said, his body sagging a little.

"Now you see why I wish to God your suspicions were true, why I'd confess to it anyhow if I didn't know that Marilee would never let me take the guilt."

Guy laid his arm about the boy's bowed shoulders. Not that Teddy was a boy any longer. It had been a man's eyes that had looked out of the boy's white face a moment before. The ordeal of the last few days had strengthened Teddy's spirit. He had learned his lesson. But at what a cost!

It was early the following morning that Guy received a call from Richards, one of the ablest criminal lawyers in the State, whom he and Harvey Rice had retained in Marilee's defense.

"Mr. Drew," he began very stiffly, "I want to return your retaining fee."

"What?" Guy gasped.

"I mean I wish to be released from the case," was the reply.

"But what has happened?" stammered Guy.

"Nothing had happened," snapped the other caustically. "That's just it. I refuse absolutely to continue on a case where my client denies me her confidence. Mrs. Cates will tell me nothing. She absolutely refuses to discuss the case with me. I have tried to convince her that unless she takes me sufficiently into her confidence to allow me to work out a plan for her defense she stands in grave danger of being convicted of having cold-bloodedly murdered her husband.

"I am positive that she had great provocation to do what she did, but I have been unable to persuade her to tell me what it was, and in view of these circumstances I wish to be released from any connection with the case."

"I will see Mrs. Cates myself this very morning. Please don't take any further steps until you hear from me," pleaded Guy.

"Very well," conceded the lawyer at last.

Guy understood only too well in the light of all Teddy had told him why Marilee had refused to talk to the lawyer. She was doing everything in her power to shield her brother. The idea of anything as gentle as Marilee killing her husband in cold blood was ridiculous. Of course she had acted out of a frenzy of despair when she realized what Elias Cates meant to do to Teddy.

But the fact that she had some time before provided herself with a revolver was certain to loom against her, and that, coupled with her stubborn silence, was enough to damn her. His mouth set grimly. Marilee must talk.

All this was in his mind as he set off for town. He went out by the small side gate and was in the act of relocking the gate when he recognized an immaculately clad figure some yards away staring intently at the bricks of the old wall and the somewhat sinister array of broken glass and barbed wire that topped it. It was the super-detective, Jasper Quincy!

"You, still here?" muttered Guy ungraciously.

The detective smiled.

"Still here," he replied cheerfully. "Gorman persuaded me to stop over for a few days' hunting. He offered to show me where the wild goose honks and the turkey gobbles."

"Well, I wish you luck," remarked Guy.

The detective looked at him suddenly.

"This is a curious old wall your uncle had built here," he said casually.

"Yes," replied Guy impatiently. "I guess I'm so used to it it doesn't particularly interest me. I can scarcely remember when it was built."

"But you *can* remember?" the detective caught him up eagerly. "It was built after you came here then? About—about how long ago?"

"Well," replied Guy slowly, "it's been all of twenty years, I'm sure."

"And the gates were always locked at nightfall?" pursued the detective.

Guy nodded impatiently.

"And before the wall was built was he so particular about locking up at night?"

But here Guy's patience snapped.

"I'm sure I don't remember," he said irritably. "I was only a little lad. Ask Gorman, he knows everything that's happened here since the year one, and *he* will be glad to oblige *you*, no doubt."

With this fling he departed. He found Marilee very pale but perfectly calm, too calm in fact. There was something about her attitude which warned him she was resigned to her fate and he was going to have difficulty in stirring her up to fight for her life and liberty.

"Marilee," he began at once, "Mr. Richards called me this morning and told me that you have refused to tell him anything on which he can base your defense. Don't you know you can't afford to take this attitude? You must tell him everything."

She looked at him with her sad baffling eyes.

"But there is nothing to tell," she said in her low musical voice. "I hated my husband and I killed him."

"You don't need to pretend with me, Marilee," he told her gently. "I know everything."

"Everything—" she caught her breath and stared up at him.

"About Teddy, I mean," he said. "He told me everything."

"Teddy told you?" her slender hands crept up to her throat as if she were choking. "But he lied, he lied, I tell you," her voice rose. "He didn't do it, Teddy didn't!"

For a moment a flame lapped at Guy Drew's brain. The thought which occurred to him almost blinded him.

"Marilee, look at me," he caught her hands and drew her around so he could gaze into her very soul. "Do you think Teddy killed him?"

"No, oh, no!" She fairly writhed in his grasp. "I tell you he didn't. It was I! If he says he did he lies!"

But her ashen face told Guy what her lips would never have admitted. Exultation leaped through him. Suddenly he knew and wondered how he could ever have been so blind that Marilee was innocent. In spite of her own confession, in spite of Elias Cates's terrible dying statement, Marilee was guiltless! She had taken what she thought was Teddy's guilt on her shoulders, but she, praise God, was innocent of her husband's blood.

"Marilee," he compelled her to look at him. "Did you see Teddy take the revolver from your desk?"

"No, no, I swear he did not have it!" she moaned.

"When you went to the cabin to plead for Teddy you found Elias Cates dead and your revolver beside him? You jumped to the conclusion that Teddy killed him?"

"No, no! You are wrong!" she whispered desperately. "It was I who took the revolver there and I who shot him!"

But the man who loved her had his eyes open at last and he knew she lied. She had not taken the revolver to the cabin, neither had she killed her husband. She believed Teddy guilty of both acts, and she had done everything in her power to divert suspicion from him. But Guy was convinced Teddy was as ignorant as she of how her revolver got to the dead man's office and of how Elias Cates met his death.

The two had been playing at cross purposes, each believing the other guilty, while in reality neither had had a hand in the hideous crime of which Marilee was self-accused. In that case then who could the murderer be, since it was neither of these? Elias Cates had certainly been shot and with Marilee's revolver, of which supposedly no one knew but her brother and herself. And yet Guy's thoughts suddenly catapulted. Some one else did know, else how had Jasper Quincy learned that Marilee had such a weapon in the first place?

It was then he reached a determination which he would better have reached long before to seek out the detective and tell him the whole truth, even to the dreadful words with which Elias Cates had died.

CHAPTER X

GUY IS PUZZLED

ONCE his resolve was taken Guy lost no time in putting it into effect. Hurrying to Stone Gates he hunted up the old butler.

"Have you any idea where that sleuth of yours is hiding out just now, Gorman?" he asked the old servant.

Gorman changed color slightly.

"Why—er—I think maybe he might be in the library, sir," he stammered.

"As good a place as any when a man's hunting wild geese and turkeys," murmured Guy slyly, making off before the flustered Gorman could frame a retort and finding Quincy, as Gorman had intimated, in the huge vaulted chamber which had been Elias Cates's pride.

"Any gobblers yet, Mr. Quincy?" asked Guy almost genially.

Jasper Quincy gave the young man a long and searching glance.

"Sit down, Mr. Drew," he said quietly, indicating a chair across the long library table from him. "What's on your mind?"

Guy flushed.

"I—I've been a good deal of a bull in the china shop in this case, Mr. Quincy," he confessed ruefully. "But I've come to my senses at last, and if you've time to listen I'd like to make a clean breast of everything."

"A very wise decision, Mr. Drew," said the detective dryly.

And so as briefly as he could Guy related from beginning to end his own and Teddy's movements on the fatal night, not even shirking the damning words they had both heard from the dying man's lips, and concluding with the theory which he had himself worked out that Marilee was innocent of her husband's death and was incriminating herself only because she thought Teddy guilty.

"I know it looks black for her," he concluded lamely. "There's her confession against her, and the fact that she had the pistol, and most of all, of course, Elias Cates's dying statement. It doesn't seem possible that she and Teddy can both be innocent, but I believe the boy's story implicitly, and yet I am convinced that she is as guiltless as I am, that unless I can make you believe in her and save her she is certain to be convicted of a crime she never committed."

Jasper Quincy drummed suddenly on the polished table before him.

"I have known for some time," he said in an emotionless voice, "that neither Marilee Cates nor her brother killed Elias Cates."

Guy stared at him in amazement.

"You have known for some time?" he stammered.

The detective nodded gravely.

"Ever since the day of her arrest," he acknowledged quietly. "On that day I questioned Kitty, her maid, and got it out of the girl that the revolver hadn't been in her mistress's desk at all the day of the murder. It seems Mrs. Cates was in the habit of sleeping with the gun under her pillow, and it was Kitty's duty to return the revolver to the desk every morning when she made her mistress's bed.

"On this particular morning, however, she left the revolver on the bed while she ran downstairs after fresh linen. When she returned it was gone.

"Nor was it to be found. She intended to speak to her mistress about its disappearance, but other things crowded the circumstances out of her mind, and after it turned up in Elias Cates's murder she was afraid to say anything for fear of dragging her mistress into the affair. As a matter of fact I had the dickens of a time worming the story out of her, she not being able to see that so far from blackening her mistress's chances the disappearance of the revolver definitely established the fact that neither Marilee Cates nor Teddy Ware committed the crime.

"For," he leaned slightly forward and lowered his voice, "whoever filched the revolver from the bedroom it was not they. Neither of them have the slightest suspicion that the revolver was not in the desk where it belonged, and neither could possibly have had a hand in taking it since both were not within three miles of Stone Gates at the time the revolver disappeared.

"But," cried Guy angrily, "if you knew this, why have you allowed Marilee to stay cooped up in jail all this time?"

Jasper Quincy regarded him steadily.

"Don't you know that the only way to convince the world Mrs. Cates is innocent is to produce the real murderer?" he asked quietly. "Even if I succeeded in having her liberated on such slender evidence as I have shown you in the eyes of the world she would be far from exonerated. For you and for me Kitty's story is sufficient.

"But how many others would accept as conclusive the statement of a maid who admits she'd lie cheerfully to save her mistress's life? The only way we can hope to clear Mrs. Cates of the charge against her is to find the real murderer. And don't you realize that, first, last and always, this has been an inside job? Not only did whoever killed Elias Cates have access to the house, but he also knew about the revolver the mistress of the house kept in her room and was able to slip into that room during Kitty's absence and steal it?

"Isn't it plain to you that we are dealing with a very clever person and one right here in our midst, and that the longer the person believes we think Marilee Cates guilty of his crime the better chance we are going to have to uncover his tracks?"

Guy gulped and nodded. Excited as he was, he had to acknowledge the truth of the detective's words, and already he was beginning to feel a boundless confidence in

Jasper Quincy's powers. With this keen and resourceful brain on her side Marilee could come to no hurt.

"I guess you're right, Quincy," he conceded humbly. He flung the detective a timid glance. "The worst thing I see in the whole affair is Elias Cates's dying statement. If he didn't mean Marilee whom did he mean? You know neither Kitty nor poor old Mrs. Asher, the housekeeper, did it."

"Certainly not," replied Jasper Quincy. "I have talked with both of them. The housekeeper knows nothing, and Kitty no more than she has told. Of course this is the first I've heard of Elias Cates's dying words. Either he was out of his head or you misunderstood him."

"Perhaps I did," admitted Guy, remembering that he had approached the dying man with the fixed idea that Marilee had killed him. "By the way," he looked up at Quincy quickly, "you said whoever killed Elias Cates knew about the pistol in Marilee's possession. How did *you* learn she had such a pistol?"

Quincy smiled.

"That is a leading question," he said good-naturedly. "No one but Mrs. Cates and Teddy and Kitty, who vows she never told, were supposed to know that such a pistol was in existence. But undoubtedly some one else in the house did know, for on the morning after the inquest I found this under my door at the hotel."

He held out a small white envelope containing a single sheet of cheap white notepaper on which Guy read the following pregnant statement, written in a small cramped hand, without preface or signature:

> Ask Mrs. Elias Cates about the pistol she bought last month.

Guy stared at the detective with dismayed eyes. Jasper Quincy regarded him narrowly.

"I don't suppose you recognize the writing, Mr. Drew?" he asked carelessly.

Guy gulped.

"Why—why it looks like—" he paused abruptly—"but of course it isn't."

Jasper Quincy nodded his head.

"Exactly," he said slowly, "it looks like Gorman's handwriting, and he was in town that morning. Of course he doesn't like Mrs. Cates, and he was hell-bent on clearing your name."

"But surely if Gorman had wanted you to have this information," protested Guy, "he'd simply have gone to you and told you?"

"Which is precisely what he would have done," acknowledged the detective quietly, "unless he had had some reason for not wanting me to know he knew about the revolver."

Again the two men regarded each other in silence, Guy's heart sinking sickeningly. Next to his mother and Marilee there was no one for whom he entertained a warmer affection than for old Gorman. Was it possible the faithful old butler was implicated in his master's murder? He waited dumbly for the detective to continue.

"As a matter of fact," said Jasper Quincy, significantly, "Gorman insists he knew nothing about the revolver and denies writing the note, although he admits that this envelope and paper are the same as some in a writing table in his room, and he does not deny that he came to the hotel where I was staying that morning and asked for me, although he claims to have left when he learned I was still asleep."

"Good God!" cried Guy in a stifled voice. "But what earthly reason could Gorman have had for killing my uncle, granting, for the sake of argument, that he did kill him?"

Jasper Quincy placed the fingers of each hand tip to tip and regarded him over them.

"He was very fond of a certain young man who had admitted being in sore need of money and who benefited by Elias Cates's death."

"Great Heavens," cried Guy, the perspiration starting to his brow. "You aren't insinuating he killed my uncle so I—in order to—on my account, are you?"

The detective pursed his lips.

"I am not insinuating anything," he said, a little tartly. "We were only assuming for the sake of argument, I thought."

Guy, unable to keep still, kicked his chair back and took a restless turn up and down

the room, coming to a pause at last near the detective's chair and staring down at him with troubled eyes.

"You don't know how even the thought of such a thing knocks me cold," he said ruefully. "I—it doesn't seem possible to me that the old fellow could have done it."

"Possibly he didn't," replied the detective. His expression changed somewhat. "By the way, Drew, did you ever hear anything about a man in your uncle's life named Latimer?"

Guy stared at him, his pulses quickening a beat.

"Hugh—Hugh Latimer?" he asked slowly.

Quincy nodded. Guy made an effort to drag out of his submerged memory all that that name recalled to him.

"There was such a man, I think," he said slowly. "It seems to me I recollect my mother telling me when I was a little fellow something about a man by that name. It was a long time ago."

"Twenty years ago, to be exact," put in the detective.

"Yes," Guy's face cleared a little, "I remember now. It had something to do with the wall my uncle was having built. She told me he was putting up the wall because a bad wicked man had threatened his life, and—and—" this with obvious excitement —"the man's name was Latimer. He had embezzled some of my uncle's money, and my uncle, although they had been old friends, had him prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

"During the trial Latimer resisted some officers and killed one and was sent up for life. But he swore he'd get even with Elias Cates if it took him fifty years to do it and—and that was why my uncle built the wall and always had the gates locked at sundown."

"Exactly," replied Jasper Quincy quietly, "and what has become of Latimer?"

"If any one knows, it's Harvey Rice," replied Guy slowly. "He was my uncle's lawyer at the time this all occurred and as I understand tried vainly to get him to be merciful to Latimer who it appeared was really a very good sort and had only taken the money temporarily because his wife was very ill. He intended to replace it or so he claimed."

"Get Rice on the telephone," commanded Quincy, "and find if Latimer is still in prison and if he outlived his hatred for your uncle."

Guy turned away obediently toward the telephone booth in the outer hall. He had some difficulty in locating Rice who had gone to his club for lunch and some difficulty in making him understand what he wanted.

"Hugh Latimer— He's dead. Died about a year ago in prison. No, he never relented toward Elias, or so the warden wrote me. He died cursing him for his heartlessness."

Guy turned back dispiritedly toward the library door. Apparently this clew was another blind alley. He paused on the threshold of the library, however, to stare blankly at Jasper Quincy. The detective was seated exactly where he had left him, but his eyes were burning with a feverish excitement. He seemed hardly to hear Guy's stumbling report and far from being cast down by the news was visibly exultant.

"Get Rice on the phone again," he demanded sharply. "Find out if Latimer had any sons."

Still puzzling over the startling change in the detective's manner Guy returned to the booth. For the life of him he couldn't imagine what the detective could have learned during his brief absence from the room to alter him so completely. He was still pondering the thing when he roused Rice for the second time from his lunch.

"Sons?" repeated the lawyer testily. "Hugh Latimer didn't have any sons at all."

"No?" repeated Quincy who had followed Guy to the booth, and who now looked unaccountably crestfallen.

"That's what he said," replied Guy curtly. "He said Latimer—" Jasper Quincy hushed him peremptorily. Two men were coming down the stair. They were Thomas Blue and Rudy Ellis. It gave Guy an odd turn to see them together. Blue did not like Marilee and Guy was certain the little man would be one of the most damaging witnesses against her. Rudy Ellis had even

less love for him and by now the world knew he cared for his uncle's wife. These two he felt, boded no good for the woman he loved. Rudy Ellis vouchsafed Guy only the briefest of nods. Thomas Blue, however, gave him a faint smile.

"When you've time, Mr. Drew," he said, struggling into his coat which was about all he could manage with his crutches, "I wish you'd come by the cabin, there's still some things we should check over."

"Certainly," murmured Guy courteously, relieved when old Gorman came to the aid of the crippled man, and finished buttoning him up.

Jasper Quincy gave him a violent start.

"By Jove, what an ass I've been not to have guessed before," he ejaculated, his eyes fixed on Gorman's tremulous old hands.

Guy stared at him blankly, more than ever at a loss to understand the startling changes to which the detective seemed given. Quincy took a step forward.

"Ellis," he said suddenly, "come here a minute. I've something I want you to do."

With rather more than his accustomed bad grace the police officer muttered an excuse to Thomas Blue who nodding quietly hobbled to the door and let himself out. Ellis approached the detective, his surly gaze lowering for a moment on Guy as he passed.

Quincy bent and spoke to the sergeant a few minutes in careful undertones? Rudy Ellis flung him an astonished, almost ludicrous look.

"See here," he began excitedly, "what do you think I am, a fool? Do you reckon I've got nothing to do but—but—" he spluttered angrily.

"You do exactly as I say," said Jasper Quincy sternly, "or it'll be decidedly the worse for you, my brave."

Again Rudy Ellis gave him that ludicrous look.

"Aw, come now, you don't really mean for me to—of course you're joking," he protested lamely.

"I was never more serious in my life," replied Jasper Quincy coolly. "Now out about it. We've no time to lose."

And with a rueful glance over his shoulder Rudy Ellis obeyed.

"Mr. Drew, if you'll come down to the cabin in a little while I may have some very interesting news to tell you," said Jasper Quincy.

He entered the telephone booth as he spoke and before he closed the door Guy heard him call the number of the club where the long-suffering Harvey Rice was making an attempt at lunch.

Evidently the old lawyer was due for a third interruption, but what could Quincy want now of the old gentleman, and what was the secret of the two inexplicable changes in the detective's manner, and what was the thing he had sent Rudy Ellis to do which had so obviously struck the police sergeant as the height of the ridiculous, but from which Jasper Quincy undoubtedly expected very interesting news in a little while?

CHAPTER XI

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

AS a matter of fact it was mid-afternoon before the detective entered the cabin where Thomas Blue and Guy were working away.

"Rudy not returned yet?" he asked after a sharp glance around the room. "Well, no matter," he muttered. "I'd better see the other first." He turned to Guy. "I want old Gorman down here and I don't want him to know I sent for him. Can you manage it?"

"I think so," replied Guy, his heart sinking as he picked up the telephone and called the big house. "Gorman? I'm down at the cabin. Will you fetch me a package of cigarettes out of the carton in my bag?"

His hand shook a little as he replaced the instrument. He felt like a Judas. Thomas Blue made a tentative gesture toward his crutches.

"You needn't go, Mr. Blue," murmured Quincy, "we'll need a witness, I fancy," and the little secretary with a swift glance at the detective's grave face sank back into his seat.

Guy was heart sick. He could hardly bring himself to face old Gorman when the

latter came slowly into the room, his faded eyes running from one to the other in the trio of unsmiling faces about the very desk on which Elias Cates had breathed his last.

"Thank you, Gorry," Guy muttered huskily, his fingers trembling a little as he accepted the packet of cigarettes from the old man's hand.

"You're very welcome, Mr. Guy," quavered the old butler, turning toward the door.

On the threshold, however, he paused, brought to a sudden stop by the detective's rasping voice.

"Since you're here, Gorman," he said, "there's a few questions I'd like to ask you."

"Yes, sir, certainly sir," murmured the butler, turning around and waiting patiently for Quincy to proceed.

"Before the wall was built around Stone Gates was Mr. Cates as particular as he was afterward about locking up at night?"

"No, sir," said Gorman in a low voice.

"Do you know why he kept the gates locked at night?"

"He was afraid of a man he'd wronged," said the old servant quietly.

Rudy Ellis at this moment entered the room. In his right hand he carried a small paper sack which he nursed with the left. Detective Quincy motioned him to one side.

"Where is this man now, the man of whom your master was afraid?" he continued.

"He is dead," replied the old servant simply.

"How do you know?" demanded Quincy.

"The master told me."

"He knew then? But he continued to keep the gates locked? Why was that?"

The old butler shook his gray head.

"I don't know, sir," he said quietly, "unless it was habit."

"Habit, hum?" replied the detective, rising and taking a turn up and down the room.

And then because he was watching him closely Guy saw Jasper Quincy make a gesture with his left hand, a gesture so slight as to be almost unnoticeable, and at the same moment Sergeant Ellis loosened his hold on the paper bag which until then he had held tightly clutched. As he did so something tiny and sleek and gray slid down over his knees and scampered across the floor.

"A mouse, great Scott, it's a mouse!" cried Guy.

"A mouse? Where?" echoed a high mincing voice followed by a clattering sound.

For a moment Guy could only stare stupidly in the direction from which the sound came. His outraged senses refused to take in the scene before him. The mouse, its grisly mission accomplished, had vanished but standing straight up in his chair, his crutches on the floor where they had fallen when he leaped to his feet, stood Thomas Blue, clutching his coat about him as a woman does her skirts under similar circumstances!

As a woman does her skirts, Guy drew a long breath, the thought which struck him leaving him dazed even while he realized that his own disconcerted expression was reflected in the faces of both Rudy Ellis and old Gorman. Only Jasper Quincy remained the master of his emotions as, his face like steel, he approached the ashen-faced secretary.

"I arrest you, Ruby Latimer," he said, "for the murder of your father's enemy, Elias Cates."

And with a shudder the secretary bowed her head.

"I did it," she said simply, "I promised my dad on his death bed I'd get Elias Cates and I've done it." Her head lifted defiantly. "I shot him. But I told him first who I was. I didn't want him not to know who he had to thank for it. I told him I was Latimer's daughter. He'd never suspected. Oh, I've been clever," her eyes blazed at them, "you have to admit I came very near putting it across. That's why I used *her* pistol. She'd threatened her husband. I thought they'd lay it on her. I hated her anyhow with her angel face," her eyes gleamed with malice.

"I didn't want you to suffer," she glanced shyly at Guy Drew. "I'd have confessed before I let them plant it on you. I meant to that day at the inquest when it looked as if they had you framed. That's

why I slipped you that note about the pistol, Detective Quincy. I wanted to put you on *her* trail. That's how you got next to me I guess, the note, I mean?"

"No," replied Jasper Quincy slowly, "although I was sure all along Gorman didn't write it. You are as you have said very clever, but you made two fatal mistakes. The first was when you left your broken crutches in the library for me to pick up and examine at my leisure." Guy remembered now that the crutches had stood against the wall in the library when he left Jasper Quincy to go to the telephone booth and returned to find him so completely transformed.

"As soon as I examined the crutches I knew you were not a cripple," continued the detective. "They had been cut in two not broken and glued lightly together so that when you pretended to fall down stairs the night of the murder they came apart in such a manner as to render them useless and so provide you with an alibi whereby it seemed impossible that you could have committed the murder.

"So much for how I knew you were not a cripple, now as to how I guessed you were a woman. When you stood before me in the hall up at the big house to-day getting into your overcoat you reverted to habit and to instinct as you did just now when you saw woman's pet abomination, a mouse. You started involuntarily to button your coat from right to left and were not even conscious of your mistake until Gorman came to your assistance.

"Now a man's coat never buttons from right to left but from left to right. A woman's, however, fastens just the opposite and it was your unconscious gesture which first suggested to my mind that you were a woman. A few moments' conversation with Harvey Rice taught me that Hugh Latimer had had a daughter. Then—I knew."

"Well, it was a great game while it lasted," murmured the erstwhile Thomas Blue with a shrug of her shoulders. "I suppose it's the pen for me for the rest of my natural life. They never have hanged a woman in this State and I don't believe they'll start with me. The penitentiary doesn't hold as much horror for me as it would for most," she smiled cynically. "I was just a little thing when they sent dad up. I was all he had in the world and he boarded me just outside the walls.

"The wardens' wives were kind to me. They let me come and go as I pleased. I reckon I've a hundred friends inside to every one out. It'll be a sort of Old Home week so far as I'm concerned," she turned with a swagger to Sergeant Rudy Ellis who was still regarding her in comical amazement. "Let's go, officer."

On the threshold she turned suddenly and shot a glance over her shoulder at Guy Drew's bowed head. It was a strange, yearning glance, and, in spite of the calloused manner she had assumed, rather a pitiful one.

Once the door had closed on Sergeant Ellis and his prisoner, Guy, like a man awakening from an unpleasant dream, started to his feet.

"By Jove if I'm to have Marilee released to-night I'd better be about it," he paused on the threshold with a shy boyish smile for Jasper Quincy.

"We can't ever of course express our gratitude to you," he said huskily.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Drew," said Jasper Quincy with a smile, "after all the game alone is worth the candle, not that I despise of course such friendship as yours and Mrs. Cates's."

It was just dusk when Guy entered Marilee's cell.

"I'm—I'm free to go home?" she faltered. "But then—who—is Teddy—?" she could not go on.

Guy smiled at her tenderly.

"Teddy is at home, Marilee, and all right, everything is all right, dear, I wouldn't deceive you. You have had a nightmare of a time but you are awake at last."

And suddenly as they looked at each other both knew he spoke the truth. They had come a long way on a very dark road, but they were out of the shadows now and into the sunshine, and in time they would come to a place where they could declare the love which each read in the other's eyes.

THE END

STRANGE PUNISHMENT

WITH the changes of living conditions and social customs that have accompanied the advance of civilization there has been a corresponding change in the methods of punishment used against criminals and merchants who cheated their customers. Some of these old-time punishments were almost incredible for their cruelty, while others were of such an unusual nature and so appropriate for the offense that they might almost be adopted to-day.

In Cairo, Egypt, one hundred years ago an "inquest" or commission was appointed which went about the city daily inspecting provisions and examining weights and measures. If this commission detected a baker selling short weight or bad bread, on his first offense they gave all the bread they found in his shop to the poor. Then the baker was nailed to his own door for a period of twelve hours, sometimes by one ear and sometimes by both.

On the second offense the offender's bread was distributed and he was punished by means of the bastinado. He was given two or three hundred blows on the feet or on his back. Afterward a broad board heavily loaded with lead was placed upon his shoulders, and bearing this mark of infamy he was forced to walk through the main streets of the city until he was exhausted. If he survived this punishment and committed a third offense he was condemned to be beheaded.

Somewhat the same method was used in punishing a butcher who was detected giving short weight or selling bad meat. His stock of meat was given to the poor and he was tied to a post where the sun would shine on him all day. A piece of his bad meat was then hung close to his nose and he was left in that position until the meat produced worms, which fell down upon his body. Besides this, he was sentenced to pay a fine.

For the second offense the butcher underwent severe corporal punishment and was obliged to pay a heavy fine. The third offense was punishment by death.

Thieves and housebreakers were also put to death after being tortured. If a pickpocket or thief was taken in the act, he was beheaded without any formal trial. But a housebreaker was stripped of his clothing and placed on a camel, his legs being tied under its stomach. The executioner rode behind him carrying in his hands thin candles made of brimstone.

The camel was led through the city streets while the executioner lighted the candles and placed them on the criminal's skin. They were very long and hung down over his shoulders and chest, burning from the bottom upward. When all of the candles were burned out the man was taken to the Karameitan, or "black square," where he was beheaded. After the execution his head was placed under his right arm if he was a Mohammedan. If he was a Christian his head was placed under his body.

In Denmark executions were rare. A great number of those convicted of child murder were condemned to work in the spin houses for life and to be whipped annually on the day and spot where the crime was committed. This mode of punishment was dreaded more than death, and after it was adopted it was said that the amount of this crime was greatly decreased.

A whipping post stood in a conspicuous place at the entrance of many of the towns in the country. On the top of the post there was a figure of a man with a sword by his side and a whip in his right hand. Gibbets and wheels were also placed in prominent places and sometimes after an execution the bodies of the criminals were left hanging to serve as a warning.

The places of execution were always outside of the city. Beheading was the common method of executing a prisoner and it was considered more honorable to have a sword used than an ax. For some of the more heinous crimes the prisoners were punished by breaking them on the wheel. In the case of state prisoners their right hands were often cut off. After a criminal's sentence had been confirmed he was allowed from eight to fourteen days to prepare for death. The length of this period depended on the opinion of the attending chaplain.

He did not hesitate, but surrendered his weapons

THE BIGGEST HOLDUP

By Joseph Gollomb

IF, AS THE NEWSPAPERS SAID, CHAPMAN WAS A SUPER-BANDIT, THEN THE NEW YORK POLICE WERE SUPER-SUPER DETECTIVES

A Story of Fact

NEW YORK *would* stage the biggest street holdup in police history. Not that it wanted to do it; nor because it is so lawless. But the biggest sharks are drawn to where the biggest fish forgather; and the killings are correspondingly big.

Here in the world's richest metropolis a mail truck will thunder past you and you may not give it the most fleeting thought. Yet, very likely that truck holds inside its steel walls enough treasure to ransom a king. Whether there are bandits bold enough to steal a king is beside the question.

But this is the story of three bandits who were bold enough to step out into Broadway and point a gun at the man who drove such a treasure trove, scoop up two million five hundred thousand dollars and flee. The hue and cry of the hunt; the lost trail; the finding of the scent again by the New York police; the cycle of flashing melodramas that followed; all make an engrossing story almost to the curtain that may fall on one bandit's life very soon.

It was ten in the evening of October 24, 1921, and from under the glaring arcs at the truck platform of the old Post Office at City Hall Park a big United States mail truck drew away for its trip to the new General Post Office uptown. Frank Haverack, the chauffeur, was the only man in charge of the truck.

The event which was to begin a new era and place the United States marines with loaded carbines on each mail truck was not yet due for ten minutes. As yet nothing had made the authorities doubt that a husky chauffeur like Haverack with a modern pistol in his pocket could protect a mail truck on its thundering dash uptown.

As Haverack guided his big machine into Broadway it had its usual deserted after-business-hours look. But as the truck put on speed he noticed a large touring car turn slowly into Broadway from Worth Street. There were three men in it, all wearing peaked caps pulled well over their faces. Haverack's only interest in them was to clear their car without grazing.

Looting the Mail Truck

But as the two machines neared Leonard Street he began to wonder why in the now deserted main highway of New York he should have such difficulty to keep the hubs of his car free of the other machine. For unmistakably the other car was crowding him.

The radiator of the touring car was now abreast of him. He turned to the driver with the words on his lips that would make clear his opinion of the other man's driving. Haverack was master of street vocabulary. But suddenly he found considerable difficulty in speech. For one of the men in the tonneau of the touring car quietly rose, swung himself aboard Haverack's seat, and dug something hard against the chauffeur's ribs.

"Slow up or we'll fill you full of lead!"

There was sincerity in the stranger's tone and there was the revolver muzzle pressing hard against Haverack's ribs. Haverack had his hands full with the wheel of the big mail truck. His revolver seemed miles farther away than the one that prodded him in the side. His ponderous machine was clipping along at thirty miles an hour. It would be suicide for him to try conclusions with a sensitive trigger.

Nevertheless, Haverack hesitated and did not clap the brakes on. His eyes darted ahead in the hopes of catching sight of a policeman's uniform. But Broadway was deserted, and the muzzle against his ribs reminded him that life could be short. So Haverack reluctantly slowed up his machine.

"Now turn west into Leonard Street!" said his guide.

The mail truck slowly wheeled into the narrower street. Here even less than on Broadway the street lamps revealed few signs of help for the hard-pressed chauffeur. At West Broadway he was made to stop his truck. The touring car so veered that its running step made a convenient platform from which to mount to the steel door in the back of the truck.

"Come back here and unlock the grille!"

There were three guns now covering Haverack, but he looked about, hoping against hope for a uniform to come in sight.

"Never mind the cops. Think of your life!"

Haverack did think of his life and, taking out a bunch of keys, reluctantly unlocked the grille. Into the mail truck jumped two of the bandits. Then it was that Haverack realized how carefully prepared the whole job was. For the bandits seemed to know exactly what the contents of the mail truck were. Without hesitation they threw aside four bags which Haverack knew contained ordinary mail. Under these they came to several pouches full of heavily registered and insured packets. A quick glance at the labels and these bags were hurled into the tonneau of the touring car.

"If you follow, we have men with shotguns who will pick you off your seat!"

While Wall Street Howled

Into the car vaulted the three bandits. The guns of two were still covering Haverack when the man at the wheel released the throbbing motor and, with a turn like a broncho's, the car was off to Broadway and out of sight.

With a heavy heart Haverack climbed aboard his pillaged truck and drove to the Beach Street police station.

Within thirty seconds after his arrival there telephone bells tinkled frantically; a police siren hooted; police street lights flashed; there was a hurrying and scurrying of patrols. But to no avail. The bandits had chosen time and place too well. Their

intrepid stroke had too sure an aim, their escape was as unerring.

The presses roared with the news next morning and the world of finance roared at the loss of two million five hundred thousand dollars' worth of securities, much of it negotiable. Twenty-four hours followed without a clew to the robbers; then whole days, then weeks. And men who could in three minutes snatch so big a treasure would know how to outdistance pursuit in the weeks that followed.

Who Is Loeber?

But the New York police spread the strands of a vast invisible net to catch the big sharks if they could. Outwardly the hunt seemed to have been abandoned. And indeed the police of New York could do little more than wait. For until their quarry should blunder against any of the strands of the police net there was nothing for the police to do, so carefully had the bandits covered their trail.

The serial numbers of every express check, stock certificate, bond and money bill in that two-million-five-hundred-thousand-dollar holdup was circulated and cashiers kept these lists of numbers pasted up in their cages.

For five months nothing came of it all. Then one day a woman came to shop in the department store of Altman & Co., on Fifth Avenue. She made her purchases, then gave a twenty-dollar American Express Company travel check in payment. It was made out in her name and she duly signed it.

But acting on instructions the clerk took it back to the cashier's desk. There was nothing particularly suspicious about the traveler's check and the cashier looked at its serial number merely out of routine.

But he took another look. Then he sent word for the nearest detective. It happened that Detectives John L. O'Brien and Fred Stepat, of police headquarters, were in the store on the watch for shoplifters. A whisper from the cashier and the two officers stepped up to the woman and politely informed her she was wanted for a bit of questioning. The woman's face turned sickly, but she went along without a fuss.

She had turned in an express check which had been part of a haul in Niagara Falls.

The New York police turned her over to the authorities of Niagara Falls, but kept in touch with developments. They soon got word that the woman had been living in New York with one Charles Fisher, an ex-convict, at 524 West One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Street. O'Brien, who had arrested the woman, Martha Fuller, had once arrested Fisher, so he was put on the trail of the man and found him.

"Charley, you'll have to do a little explaining," he told him. "How come Martha got those American Express Company checks?"

Fisher turned red and pale by turns. Finally he made a humiliating confession. "She must have been taking those checks from that new man of hers, Charley Loeber."

Detective O'Brien did a little digging into this statement until he was convinced Fisher was telling the truth.

"Where can I get hold of Loeber?" O'Brien asked.

"I don't know," said Fisher, "but my brother knows."

O'Brien looked speculatively at his man. "I don't suppose you're very fond of Loeber for being so good to Martha?" he suggested. "Not a bit."

A Visit to Rogues Gallery

"Then will you get your brother to make a date with Loeber where I can get a squint at him?"

Fisher evidently considered everything fair in love and hate, for he agreed to help O'Brien.

Fisher's brother came out of a café two days later with a stocky, dull-faced young fellow, who, in spite of his dullness, seemed to lack none of the prosperity that is the portion of brainier men. This was the man O'Brien wanted, Loeber.

But apparently he didn't want him for any immediate purpose. For when Loeber left Fisher's brother, O'Brien stayed far in the rear and trailed his man with all the caution and technique at his command. He saw him turn in at an apartment house at 862 Amsterdam Avenue.

O'Brien thought he recognized Loeber and went down to the Rogues Gallery at police headquarters to confirm his guess. Sure enough, Mr. Loeber's features formed part of that famous collection. A copy of the photograph was sent to the police of Niagara Falls to see if the gentleman had taken part in the robbery there, part of the loot of which Martha Fuller had attempted to pass at Altman's.

The police of Niagara Falls sent back word that as far as they knew, Loeber had nothing to do with their case.

Enter Bill Gans

Nevertheless, New York detectives kept a furtive but solicitous eye on Mr. Loeber wherever he went. For, following a hunch, the New York police felt that as birds of feather were likely to associate, and as the Niagara Falls job had several features in common with the two-million-five-hundred-thousand-dollar holdup in New York, Loeber might eventually lead to something.

But merely trailing him didn't dig deep enough into the case. So the New York police decided some one had to get intimate with Loeber. It was a job that required the most delicate kind of maneuvering and no risks could be taken, for millions of dollars were involved. It was possible that men who could pull off the dazzling *coup* on Broadway might know New York detectives well enough to recognize one of them if he should attempt to play the good fellow in the underworld. An out-of-town man therefore was preferable.

This man was found in Gordon T. McCarthy, special investigator for the American Express Company of Buffalo, who was himself on the hunt for robbers. Quietly he was brought to New York. The police here gave him the information on Loeber and a plan was matured whereby New York detectives would be within call any moment he needed them. The problem now was to get McCarthy introduced to Loeber by some one the latter trusted.

An exhaustive search for Loeber's former prison mates brought to light one "Teddy" Rhodes, who was employed as detective now by the Pennsylvania Railroad in New Jersey. McCarthy and Rhodes dressed for their rôles; and one day in one of Loeber's favorite cafés the two men sat down at a table near his. Then Rhodes went over to Loeber and held out his hand.

"Remember me?" he asked softly.

Loeber scrutinized the man. Rhodes quietly mentioned the name of a prison and a year. Loeber's face lit up.

"Well, I'll tell the world I remember you! Sit down and have a drink."

Rhodes shook his head.

"Can't. I've got a friend with me."

"Who is he?"

"Bill Gans." Then Rhodes leaned over confidentially. "One of the best 'stickup' artists in the West. He's got a lot of stocks and bonds he's trying to sell quietly. Know anybody who's buying any?"

Loeber shook his head. "I've got some of my own I want to get rid of, but I don't dare try sell any of it in the East."

Rhodes reflected. "Say, you ought to be able to peddle Western stuff here, and Bill could more easily dispose of your stuff in the West. Why don't you two fellows get together?"

McCarthy, who seemed interested only in the women present, was finally induced to come over and meet Loeber. He appeared so suspicious of Loeber that the latter had his own suspicions of strangers lulled.

Strictly Business

Drinks followed and at the end of the evening Loeber took them riding in his shining Packard car, whose license number was 602,363. This the police found was registered by one "Charles Lambert," one of Loeber's aliases.

There followed weeks of carousing in which not a word of "business" was mentioned. Loeber took Rhodes and McCarthy about in his machine. McCarthy spent money like the prosperous "stickup" man he was supposed to be. Gradually Loeber began to feel confidence in him. Several times McCarthy or "Gans" tried to get Loeber to agree to dispose of securities for him in the East.

Loeber refused to bother with it. But finally he proposed that Gans do that very thing for him in the West. "I guess you

got connections enough out there to dispose of my stuff without much trouble," he said.

McCarthy appeared to think it over.

"Well, since I can't seem to do much in the East, I may as well turn an honest penny over in the West," he grinned. "What do you want me to sell?"

"Just as a tryout, let's start with some Packard Motor and Mexican 'Petes,' worth about twenty-one thousand dollars."

"That 'll cost you thirty per cent if I sell it. I'll have to go to Toledo to do it."

"Fair enough," said Loeber.

The three went to Loeber's room, where he gave McCarthy a bundle of securities.

Not Less Than $50,000

McCarthy ostensibly left for Toledo. Actually, he went down to police headquarters, where the numbers on the bonds were looked up. They were not part of the proceeds of the Niagara Falls job, but did tally with what was taken in the Leonard Street holdup. Meanwhile 'Teddy' Rhodes was keeping up a gay good time with Loeber.

One day in Loeber's room Rhodes was surprised to find his prosperous host getting into the livery of a chauffeur, apparently for a stylish employer. One doesn't ask questions under such circumstances, and Loeber did not offer any information. He parted company a little later with Rhodes; or rather he thought he did. But Rhodes trailed him in an automobile until he saw him meet two other men at One Hundred and Third Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

Here Loeber got into the car, a large Pierce Arrow, and took the place at the wheel. Rhodes saw the three men deep in talk for over an hour. He became interested enough to note the number of the car, 700,805 N.Y. After the conference Loeber drove his two "employers" about and dropped them at a popular restaurant.

They were both more than prosperously dressed, one of them even affecting a monocle, malacca stick, and spats. He was a slim, smooth-shaven young fellow with an intelligent face, studious forehead and mild blue eyes.

Events proved later that in his case at least the eye is not "the window of the soul" it is supposed to be. There was nothing mild in the man as history eventually proved. When Rhodes telephoned Detectives O'Brien and Stepat the number of the Pierce Arrow they traced it as owned by this mild-eyed man, "George P. Caldwell."

His residence was in that sedate and charming square, the center of the respectables of New York's "arrived" artists and literateurs, Gramercy Park. The other man in the car was found to be George Anderson, also with a residence in Gramercy Park.

Both gentlemen were now under constant surveillance of Detectives O'Brien, Stepat, and Edward Kiley.

Meanwhile McCarthy "returned" from Toledo and that night he, Rhodes, and Loeber resumed their round of road house festivities.

The moment came, however, for them to talk business. "Did you sell it?" asked Loeber.

"No. But only because my people out there won't bother with chicken feed. Fifty thousand dollars' worth is the least they'll handle. Have you got that much?"

"Careful Is Right"

Loeber chewed his cigar thoughtfully.

"I'll have to see my partners about that."

Several days later Loeber came back to McCarthy with word that there was to be a gay party at one of the road houses, in which his partners wanted to meet McCarthy. The party was gay, indeed. Five exceedingly gay women helped to make the proceedings noisy and apparently frivolous. But McCarthy felt throughout that Loeber's two partners, especially "Caldwell," were using the revelry as a device for studying him, McCarthy.

Apparently "Gans" stood the inspection well. For, on the following day when everybody had sobered up, Caldwell took Gans aside for a serious business talk. He proposed that Gans undertake the sale in the West of a collection of securities so large and valuable that McCarthy knew at once he was nearing the plundered treasure trove of the Leonard Street holdup.

"That 'll take a lot of careful work," McCarthy commented.

"Careful is right!" There was an ambiguous note in the man's manner that showed he was not yet fully convinced of McCarthy's rôle. "So we'll have to go slow about the business," Caldwell added after some thought."

McCarthy realized what the hesitation meant; and he knew that suspicion in Caldwell's mind would be a dangerous business for the detective. But he agreed that "careful is right" and played along at whatever pace Caldwell chose to set. The pace was a swift one as far as revelry and dissipation went. Road house parties, always with much women and wine were Caldwell's method of being careful while he studied McCarthy further under the cover of carousing with him.

A Few Husky Brokers

Meanwhile some of the side trails in the hunt were leading to a climax. New York detectives coöperating with United States Secret Service men had learned of three men, Louis and John Wolfe and Joseph Price who, it was discovered, had many stocks and bonds to sell. But they were looking for buyers who asked no questions as to where these articles came from.

Word came to these three from a man who had been introduced to them as "reliable," that a certain brokerage house in the financial district did a side line in buying stocks and bonds which had to be disposed of quickly and quietly. Whereupon, one afternoon the two Wolfe brothers went down town and entered a small office building near Broad Street. There was a single old-fashioned elevator there, and the runner did not look much different form the familiar type of elderly elevator runners, except that there was a competent look in his eyes.

The office they entered was a small one, but apparently busy. There were customers at the tickers, and many clerks at the various desks in the office, which had no partitions. There were only men there, and to an observant eye it would have seemed that they all had in common the quality of heftiness. Louis Wolfe asked to see the head broker. "There he is," said one of the "clerks," pointing to a stalwart man.

The two Wolfes walked over to the corner and sat down with the "head broker." The conversation in undertones developed the fact that the Wolfes had sixty-five thousand dollars' worth of securities to sell for which they wanted fifty thousand dollars in cash.

The head broker examined the securities with minute care. Finally he said: "I'll take them."

"Let me see the color of your money," said the older Wolfe.

The broker turned to a little wall safe and took out several bundles of greenbacks. Counting them, he tossed them over to Wolfe.

Eagerly the man took up the packages of money, his eyes intent on nothing but the counting. Suddenly he heard something that brought him to his feet.

"Put your hands up, boys, quick!"

Appalled, the two men slowly turned. The broker, the clerks, the customers, every one in the office but themselves had revolvers in their hands, all concentrated on them. When, five minutes later, they were taken down in the elevator to a closed and powerful car they found that even the "runner" was a detective.

At police headquarters the sixty-five thousand dollars in securities were found to be part of the Leonard Street loot.

Gans in a Hole

But their arrest was kept quiet. For, meanwhile, McCarthy, as Gans, was still being observed by Loeber, Anderson, and Caldwell. Something evidently kept Loeber's two partners from giving Gans their full confidence.

Gans was standing at the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and One Hundred and Third Street talking to the three men one night when an automobile with three detectives in it passed them. Caldwell apparently recognized who they were; for a significant change came into his eyes, usually so mild in aspect. Gans saw a steely look come into them and reveal the true man. Those eyes wandered to Gans and resumed something of their usual innocence.

"Say, Ganzy," he said softly. "Did you see that car just pass? Well, those were

bulls in it from police headquarters. I may be a bit nervous, but I prefer being nervous to careless. I thought I saw one of them give you a look of—well, recognition."

The three men were now regarding Gans so intently that not a shade of his expression would escape them.

"So, lest they nab you and search you for guns, you'd better slip yours to me right now," continued Caldwell.

"Got a Match?"

McCarthy knew that the supreme test was upon him. Caldwell's powerful Pierce Arrow was at the curb a few feet away. Loeber, Anderson, and Caldwell all had their hands in their overcoat pockets for purposes other than warmth. He knew they were testing him and at the same time insuring themselves. A moment's hesitation would lose for him not only the whole game he had been playing, but his life as well.

We did not hesitate. Sliding his hand under his coat-tail he brought out his revolver and a blackjack and, shielding them with his coat, passed them to Caldwell.

"Say, that's damn decent of you," he said heartily.

"Don't mention it," Caldwell replied slowly. The look in his eyes was a shade less cold, but was still not altogether friendly. "You go to lunch with Loeber. At two o'clock we'll be here in the car and maybe we'll take you up to my place for a business talk."

The "maybe" gave McCarthy food for reflection. He went to lunch with Loeber as directed. But in the midst of the meal he suddenly reminded himself of something. "Say, Charley, I want to phone Mabel before she leaves the house. You'll excuse me for a few minutes, won't you?"

"Mabel" apparently lived at the headquarters of the New York police. And McCarthy's message was to Detective Sergeants O'Brien, Stepat, and Kiley.

"If you don't hear from me in fifteen minutes, go to it! I'm lunching with Loeber at—" He gave the address of the restaurant. "And I'm to meet the other two at One Hundred and Third Street and Amsterdam."

Half an hour later as McCarthy and Loeber came out of the café several thickset men surrounded them.

"Better come along, you two," the leader said quietly. "And don't take any foolish chances!"

Loeber leaped back and his hand made a quick movement. But a heavy fist, solid as lead, caught him at the angle of the jaw, and when he was in possession of his faculties again he was in an automobile handcuffed and speeding to police headquarters. His companion Gans was not with him.

He was on his way further uptown.

He approached the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and One Hundred and Third Street just as a big Pierce Arrow with two men in it came toward it from the opposite direction. The three nodded in salutation as the car came to a stop. At the same moment three other men came in their direction, apparently just back from a highly satisfactory meal. They were all hefty looking gentlemen. They puffed away at hefty looking cigars, and had the expansive look of those who have just dined well.

As they came up to the men in the car one of the newcomers seemed to have trouble with his cigar. "Got a match?" he asked Caldwell, friendly.

"No!" Caldwell snapped.

"Here, Sam, I think I've got one!" each of the newcomer's companions said. Undoing their overcoats they appeared to fish in their pockets.

Caldwell's Real Name

Simultaneously the three newcomers and McCarthy whipped out revolvers and thrust them under the noses of the two men in the car.

"Up with them!" cried McCarthy.

Caldwell's hands were at his wheel. His mild blue eyes, now steely again, surveyed the four muzzles steadfastly covering him and Anderson. Later events revealed what a casting up of desperate chances there were in his mind at that moment. Anderson promptly put up his hands. Then slowly Caldwell's hands followed suit.

McCarthy mounted the running board of the machine and joined the hands of Caldwell and Anderson with steel links. Caldwell's eyes met his.

"Well, you had a tight squeak of it, old kid!" Caldwell said slowly. "We suspected you, and if you hadn't handed over your gat when I asked you would have got lead into your carcass!"

The party then proceeded to police headquarters.

At the same time the apartments of Caldwell and Anderson in Gramercy Park were being searched by other detectives. In Caldwell's rooms they found a fully loaded thirty-eight caliber Colt, another forty-five, a German Luger automatic pistol with silencer attached; many rounds of ammunition; a quantity of opium; inks of different colors, eradicating fluid, steel dies wherewith to change serial numbers on bonds, and four hundred thousand dollars worth of securities, all taken from the plundered United States mail truck.

Here, too, Caldwell's real name was revealed. It was Gerald Chapman, whose exploits and sensational escapes have filled the newspapers so amply in the last few months.

One of his attempts he made the following day when he was taken up to the General Post Office for examination. The quiz by the postal authorities was held on the third floor of the building. There were plenty of precautions taken to prevent Chapman from dashing out by way of the door. But no one bothered about guarding the windows, for there was a sheer drop of three stories to the street.

Suddenly Chapman leaped from his chair and dove out of the window. The detectives ran forward expecting to see his body dashed on the sidewalk. To their utter amazement he was no where in sight.

For instead of plunging to his death he had skillfully caught hold of a ledge just under the window, and, hanging on by his fingers, had made his way, hand-over-hand, around the corner and into the window of another room. He was caught, however, before he could escape from the building.

Much of the loot was later dug up from the floor of a barn whither Loeber led the detectives. For he had turned State's evidence. His reward was one year in Essex County Penitentiary. Chapman and Anderson were sent to Atlanta Federal Prison for twenty-five years each.

But Chapman did not stay there long. Seven months later he found another opportunity for his peculiar talents. He overpowered a male nurse in the prison hospital, sawed through three iron bars, slid down a rope of knotted sheets, and escaped. Two days later a posse caught up with him and in the revolver battle that followed three bullets laid Chapman low.

But not so low as to prevent him next day from making another, and this time, successful effort at escape.

From then on his movements were revealed only, so to speak, by the fitful flashes of his revolver in different parts of the country. A policeman killed in Connecticut; a daring holdup in Brooklyn; another job in Ohio. The press of the country were building up rapidly a figure of a superbandit when finally he was captured in Columbus, taken to Connecticut tried for the murder of the policeman and condemned to death.

For a month Mac worked him over the roads until he was ready to drop

THE GAMBLER'S CHANCE

By Don H. Thompson

NO HERO OF ROMANTIC FICTION EVER PROVED HIS LOVE BY A HARDER TEST THAN DID ANGUS McDOUGALL, A COP ON THE BEAT

THE lights of Brady's bar swam in a sea of smoke. Amber beer popped and foamed into heavy steins to be carried to the little tables by a dozen perspiring waiters. From the back room came the click, rattle and roll of the dice and the indefatigable hum of a roulette wheel.

"Rum joint, eh?"

Connors, the ward politician, who sat across from me, asked the question.

"Very," said I. My eyes ran over the crowd, a motley crew of sailors, wharf rats and gunmen.

Connors banged on the table to attract the attention of the waiter and finally gained it. The man, a tall, gaunt fellow, shuffled through the press of drinkers, nodded coldly to Connors, took our order and hurried away. He moved with a dejected air and his voice, when he bawled the order for beer, was a hopeless singsong.

"Queer egg," I ventured, jerking a thumb at the waiter's back.

"Yeh," said Connors. He did not seem to be particularly interested in my specimen. I looked at him sharply and he smiled.

"Did I ever tell you the story of Angus McDougall?" he asked.

"You did not."

The beer arrived. Connors sipped his meditatively. Then he lit a fresh cigar and began to talk.

In the days when it took two policemen to walk one beat—he began—Angus McDougall was the toughest copper that ever swung a club on the levee neighborhood. Six feet two in his socks, when he wore

'em, Mac was a sight to catch and hold the eye in any company. His hair was as black as a raven's wing and his green eyes looked at you with an impudent challenge as if to say, "Well, who the hell are you?"

When he joined the force the big bugs figured that he was pretty brash for a youngster, so they gave him a uniform, a gat, a pair of handcuffs and a club, and dropped him down in the old "Bloody Fourth" district, where a policeman usually had about as much chance as a sheriff in Hades.

All Mac wanted was the club. He had never had much use for firearms, but the hickory night stick was his best friend. The first day out he did something that was not being done in the Fourth in those days. He walked down the south side of Clark Street, heretofore regarded as the exclusive property of Biff Murray, politician, saloon keeper and gangster. On that side of the street, Biff was policeman, prosecutor and judge, and his word was law—to everybody but Angus McDougall.

A crowd of Murray's cohorts, with a big bully named Beeton as the leader, met Mac on the corner as a reception committee.

"Lissen, rookie," growled Beeton. "When you comes down Clark Street, you comes down de nort' side, see?"

"Is that so?" bellowed Mac. Then he put both hands to his club and knocked the chairman of the committee into the middle of the street. And when Mac hit 'em, they stayed down.

"Now," roared the policeman, "come on and fight! One at a time or the whole damn pack!"

They came. Mac swung the stick mightily until they overwhelmed him by the force of numbers and then he fought them with his fists and his feet. And all the time he fought, he laughed. Oh, Angus McDougall loved a fight in those days.

In a few minutes Clark Street was strewn with toughs in various stages of physical disability, and the two or three survivors were running up an alley with Mac in hot pursuit.

The thing spread all over the city, and the newspapers printed Mac's picture and told how he had trimmed Murray's crowd single-handed. The policeman was something of a hero.

Early the next day, Mac appeared at Murray's bar with a piece of plaster on his chin and trouble in his eye. Murray was behind the mahogany and there were one or two others in the place.

"Murray," said Mac, "I gave a few of your lads a damn good hammering yesterday, and I just dropped in to let you know that you'll get the same if you get tough."

"You big false alarm," yelled Murray. "I'll have you taken off this beat and put out in the woods so far that you'll have to carry something to rap your club on."

"Try it," barked Mac, "and when you do, I'm coming in here and punch your ugly mug."

Murray did try. He pulled every wire he could to get Mac off that beat, but we had a new police commissioner who was unfriendly to favor seekers, and there was nothing doing. The newspapers would have made too much noise, anyway, if the policeman had been transferred.

Mac heard about Murray's efforts and made good his promise. He walked into the bar one night when it was packed with gangsters and knocked Murray cold with one swing to the chin. Then he turned on the mob and dared them to attack him.

"Come on, you yellow-livered dogs," he invited. "Come on and fight."

Not a soul made a move.

Mac flung himself out the door after delivering a few choice epithets, and from that night on he was the king of Clark Street. The hardboiled boys figured that it was dangerous to bother him. When he turned the corner, they fled in all directions and Mac paced his beat with a smile of triumph on his face.

But Mac was riding for a fall, and it came when he met Marie Manton, the night telephone operator in a taxicab company on his beat. Mac fell for the blue eyes the minute he looked into them, and after that he found that his presence was required at the taxi company rather often.

Marie couldn't see Mac at all until a drunk wandered into the place and insisted on taking her to the theater, although

it was then well past midnight. Mac arrived on the scene just as the inebriated gentleman announced that he was going to kiss Marie. Mac picked the drunk up by the scruff of his neck and literally threw him out the back door into the alley.

"It must be wonderful," said Marie, "to be strong like that. So strong that you don't have to be afraid of any one."

"It is," replied Mac. "Will you let me take you home? We both get off duty at the same time, you know."

Marie consented, and after that Mac was always waiting for her, regardless of whether he was on the day or the night shifts.

When spring came Mac was walking on air. Marie had promised to marry him. He even loosened up and gave some of Murray's crowd a happy grin when he met them, instead of the old snarl and a dare. Not to be outdone, Murray himself, passed the hat to buy Mac a wedding present.

"That bird," said Murray, "is on the other side of the fence from me, but he's one square shooter and I'm for him."

II

WHICH only goes to prove that all the world loves a fighter.

A month or so later I met Mac on a street corner. His face was pale and pinched-looking and his eyes were smoldering with some great emotion.

"Well, Mac," said I. "Guess you'll be one of the benedicts soon, eh?"

"I don't know," he growled, and the look he gave me warned that questions would be unwelcome.

We talked for a moment about other things, and he passed on. I made some inquiry as to what had happened, and while I never did get it straight, it went about like this:

Shortly after Marie promised Mac that she would marry him, she met Johnny Nelson, a great, blond fellow, who was a table man at one of Murray's crap games. Nelson was handsome and he had a gay line of chatter that attracted the girl. He hung around the taxi company a lot and Mac even found him there a few times, but Marie laughed it off and he was not suspicious.

Then one day Mac sidled in the door and found Marie in Nelson's arms. That was when he demanded a show-down. He tried to tell her that Nelson was a gambler and probably a thief, but she would not listen.

"I don't love him, anyway," she declared.

"Do you love me?" Mac demanded.

"I promised to," she replied.

Marie had given her word and she intended to go through with it. Mac wanted Marie, but he did not want her that way. Yet he could not stand aside and see Nelson take her. He did not know what to do.

Then something happened that provided him with a way out. The safe in the First National Bank was robbed and about twenty thousand dollars' worth of securities were stolen. The bank was on Mac's beat and he went to work on the case, although, of course, the headquarters' men were also on the job.

Mac wasn't much of a detective. He prowled around the hockshops and other known fences day after day without finding anything. Then, in a dirty little dump down on the water front, he heard a man talking about a good buy in bonds.

Mac was in plain clothes and he followed the fellow away from the place. The man went straight to Johnny Nelson's boarding house.

That night Mac went through a window into Johnny's room and caught the young gambler flat on his back in bed.

"Stick up your hands," said Mac, pointing his revolver at Nelson. Nelson stuck 'em up.

"Now," Mac went on, "we are going to have a showdown. You robbed the First National Bank and I'm a policeman. By all the rules I ought to send you to prison, but if you do as I say, you may get out all right."

"You lie!" shrieked Nelson. "I didn't rob the bank."

"You did," retorted Mac. "Stay in that bed and I'll soon show you."

Acting on his hunch Mac searched the room and, sure enough, found part of the

stolen bonds sewed up in the lining of one of Nelson's overcoats. The gambler was pleading for mercy.

"I'll do anything, Mac. Come on, what do you want? Think what this means to Marie!"

"That's just it," blurted Mac. "You dirty rat, do you think I'd be doing anything for you if it wasn't for her? She wants you, I guess, and she's going to have you. Get on your clothes and come with me."

Nelson dressed quickly and the two of them went out the window, Mac with his revolver pressed into Johnny's back.

They disappeared completely. I heard later that Mac took Nelson to a country place about twenty miles from the city and worked him every day until he was ready to drop. For a month, Mac followed his captive over the roads on a regular training grind until the whisky was burned out of Nelson's body and his hand became steady and his eyes clear.

Then they appeared in the city again.

Mac left Johnny at his rooms.

"I've lost my job in the department," said Mac, "but don't think that I won't send you up if you double-cross me. Get yourself a job and go to work. Then go see Marie. That's all."

Mac could not stay away from Marie, though. He arrived at the taxicab company that night and she came to meet him.

"Where do I stand with you, Marie?" he asked, and his voice was low in his throat.

"Right where you always did," she replied. "I promised and I'll keep my word."

"And Nelson?"

There was a look in the girl's eyes that stabbed Mac in the heart. She did not reply.

Mac went away and he knew then that Marie thought she loved Nelson and he determined that she must break her promise to him. He set out hunting for Nelson, but that young man had not been seen in any of his old haunts. Finally Mac ran him down. He was back at the old racket, dealing a stud game in Murray's joint.

"Come down to Johnson's pool hall," said Mac, calmly ignoring the fact that he had threatened to send Nelson over the road if the gambler returned to his old trade. "Marie wants to see you. Meet you there in ten minutes."

Mac then got on the telephone and told Marie to come to the hall. Nelson joined them there a moment later. Mac led the way to a rear room.

"Now," he said, "we're going to settle this thing for good and all. Marie thinks she's bound to me by a promise. Nelson, you call yourself a gambler. How about gambling for her?"

The girl protested. She had promised and was willing to carry out the bargain, but Mac would have none of it.

"How'll we gamble?" asked Nelson. "Play a hand of poker?"

Mac grinned for the first time in months. "Poker, with you?" he barked. "A fat chance I'd have. I'll go into the hall, get two pool peas of different colors and hold one in each hand. You pick the hand and name the color. Is that fair?"

Nelson licked his lips. He would much rather have played with the cards.

"That's fair," he said finally.

Mac strode from the room and returned a moment later with the peas.

"One is red and one is blue," he said. "Name your hand. If it's blue you win. If it's red I win."

Nelson hesitated.

"Left hand," he jerked out finally.

Mac's big fingers began to uncurl. At this juncture, Nelson suddenly decided that he had been framed and before Mac could show the color of the pea, the gambler had his revolver out and had shot Mac through the shoulder.

"You ungrateful louse!" spat out Mac, and his fingers opened.

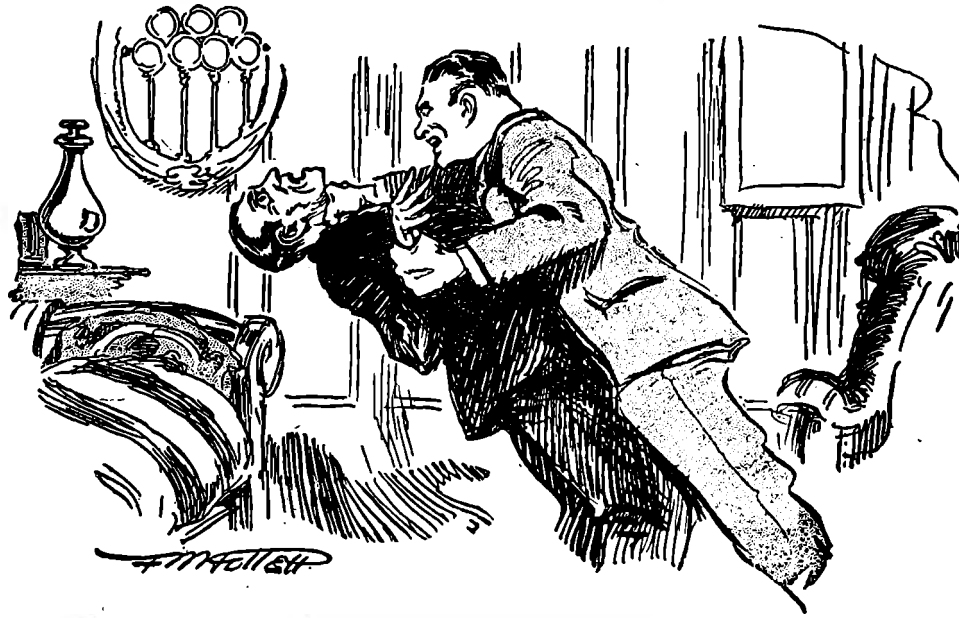
The two peas fell to the floor and rolled.

They were both blue!

Nelson stood stupefied and a moment later he was dead. Mac had whipped out a revolver and drilled him through the heart.

And that's all, except that Marie married a respectable young ice and coal dealer and Mac has been sinking lower and lower.

"Oh, Mac! Give us another beer."



I was on him like a panther, seeing red

THE WHITE CHAMPION

By Carroll John Daly

MY EFFORTS ARE CENTERED ON RIGHTING OLD WRONGS AND UNMASKING THE MASTER MIND WITH THE $100,000 FACE

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

I, STACEY LEE, adventurer, soldier of fortune, financier, have come to the end of my rope. My fortune is gone. My creditors are importuning me. Suddenly, like a thief in the night, the little old man steals up on me. "The White Circle," he calls himself. His business is that of a modern Don Quixote, righting wrongs that the police can't touch. He will pay my bills, see me out of bankruptcy, if I enter his service in fighting the nefarious criminal organization known as "The

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER X

MELODRAMATIC? PERHAPS!

OH, I saw it. Just the flash of the leader's hand as it shot downward. Where his gun came from it was hard to tell—he was remarkably quick. I fired wildly, blindly, above Mrs. Clayburn—pushed her aside, hurling her to her knees. And his gun spoke. Orange blue flame showed dimly in the brightness. There was the thud of a bullet—the splintering of wood. He had missed. He didn't fire again—no more than tightened his finger on the trigger.

There are few men who get two shots at me. My finger closed—my eye never wavered along the barrel. One blackmailer was certainly out of the running; his knees sagged. His gun turned in his hand, then fell from lifeless fingers. Without a word he sank to his knees, stayed there a moment

This story began in FLYNN'S for August 15

as if in prayer, and tumbled to the floor. Something told me that this dark-eyed scoundrel had preyed upon his last victim. I'm not one to miss.

The lights went out—darkness—sudden and impenetrable—had settled over the house. I didn't fire. Both those men probably had guns. If I hit one, the flash would give the other my position. In that one tragic moment when the leader and I both faced death, one of the others had acted—switched out the light.

I dragged Mrs. Clayburn to her feet, pulled her through the curtains, out into the hall and to the door. Frantically, I tore at the bolt, snapped the door open. It stuck—held tightly—a chain. Another precious moment—a shot—no whizzing bullet—no warning thud—nothing but the echoing report—and I had the door open, and shoved the woman out into the night.

"Your car—quick," I whispered hoarsely. "I'll protect your retreat."

"And you—what of you?" I heard her hollow voice as she clung to my sleeve. A little lump in the throat, that somehow gave me just the right feeling—that if I had killed, I had killed to save a good woman. Even in terrible danger she could think of the man who had saved her.

"Go—go!" I insisted. "I'll be all right—and the letters—when you're sure, destroy them." Another thrust and she was gone—running rapidly across the porch and down the front steps. Came the purr of a motor—the grinding of gears—and I felt that she was safe.

I'd wait there a moment, to the side of the front door. The Black Circle himself was expected. If his assistant was such a hard, cruel, unfeeling individual, what must the head of the organization himself be? Wouldn't the others fear his wrath at the escape of their victim? Wouldn't they even now be planning pursuit? Wouldn't they follow the car and stop it even on the outskirts of the city? Good—I'd stay behind and see that Mrs. Clayburn got a good start.

That was my reason for waiting, I told myself, but in my heart I knew that I wanted to get a glance at the one hundred thousand dollar face.

A minute passed—two—no lights flashed up from within the house—no purr of a motor, and I was sure I had made out the dark lines of a garage on the off side of the house. Weak sisters, both of them, I guessed. With their leader out of it they were helpless. So I waited, my eyes ever watching in the darkness within—and an occasional glance at the moon-lit lawn.

Distantly down the road, not in the direction Mrs. Clayburn had taken, but in the direction from which we had arrived, came two flashing lights—the hum of a powerful motor. The lights flashed a moment as the big car turned in beneath the stone arches, dimmed and went out. A black bulk swung up to the door, turning into a large sedan as it came into the moonlight.

I gasped—stepped back into the darkened doorway. The first figure to alight from that car wore a mask, a black mask. That others got out behind him did not interest me. Here was the Black Circle—and even to the house of his friends, of his own men, he came masked. That few knew him, I could believe. To-night then, there was to be a meeting of some importance.

I was trapped. A dash along the side porch and off in the darkness might get me clear, but there was a long, open space—and several men to shoot at me. Inside the house was my best place—surely, none would suspect that I had stayed behind—dared to lurk in that house occupied by the enemy. But there was nothing else to do. I backed into the doorway, slipped through the dining room as the footsteps crossed the porch and entered the hall.

Black Circle." An extra one hundred thousand dollars will be mine for merely discovering the identity of its leader. I accept. My first job is helping a Mrs. Clayburn out of a blackmailing mess. She is not bad. She has been foolish. And the Black Circle is torturing her. For awhile I discover nothing. Only that Josey Mears, my old playmate, seems somehow implicated. I follow Mrs. Clayburn into the country, force an entry into the house, where she is bargaining for the return of her letters. I get the letters at the point of a gun from the minions of the Black Circle, who are there, and tell Mrs. Clayburn to take them and speed away in her car. As she passes out of the room, her elbow joggles my gun arm.

A curse—a hoarse voice calling for "Eddie"—and a gruff demand for lights.

"That you, chief?" A trembling call came from the floor above.

"It's the chief, yes," a voice from below answered. "Where's the lights—what's happened here?" The flash of light—another curse—a cry—then several voices at once—and clearly one above the others.

"It's Pigion, and he's out—right through the forehead."

What would they do now that they had found their dead brother? Hand on the pantry door, I listened. Came another voice.

"It's the White Circle." And though this voice shook with passion, I felt that it was disguised—the natural tones kept from its companions. The Black Circle himself, I thought. Came orders quick and sharp. "Three of you to the grounds. This settles—this ends the White Circle farce. A joke before—now, killing—the old fool will—" and his voice rumbled off into nothingness. Then—suddenly, "All lights, and search the house. He's not here, of course, but search thoroughly. He may not have been alone. Let us hope the letters are safe." Now what could he mean by that?

But it was my cue. I could walk out and take a good slant at that one hundred thousand dollar face—but something told me this wasn't the time for it. Here was a man who knew his business. The first act was over and it was time to drop the curtain. I just slid through the pantry, into the blackness of the kitchen. I'd be out that window and over the wall before any of them could reach the grounds.

Up went the glass—over went my leg—and I stopped dead. A figure was looking directly at that window—a figure who raised a gun—pointed it—and hesitated. And I recognized those shoulders—the steady, calm attitude. It was the same lad who had stood in the room, with his arms serenely folded across his chest.

He saw me all right—there couldn't be any doubt about that. But he wasn't sure enough to fire. I might be one of his own crowd. As for me—if I wanted to fire at him, the chance was gone—for he slipped behind a tree, whistled once and was quiet. Running feet beat upon the path—came an answering whistle and a call. I dropped back from the window—shut it silently and turned again toward the pantry.

A hoarse whisper—and I stopped dead—then a voice.

"Mulligan was crashed on the balcony and a white circle pasted on his chest. Let's have a look in the kitchen."

I had heard enough. No chance that way; no chance out the window. The cellar was the only way open. Groping for the door, I found it, spun the key, slipped the door open, and pulling it to behind me, felt my way down the steps. A turn—half a trip, and I caught myself. Slowly, catlike, I descended to the dampness below.

How many lights they'd have to switch on down there, I didn't know. If they searched till they found me, things sure were going to end for me—and they were going to end in one mighty burst of glory. The fellow who got me wouldn't live to blow about it—that much was certain.

The last step, I let myself down it, stretched out my hand—emptiness. Where would the windows be? No moonlight there—windows too dirty, I guess—unless they were boarded up. Pleasant thought, that. I'd have to chance a light. I couldn't stand there playing blind man's buff while some killer switched on the light from above. A pretty picture the representative of the White Circle would make then.

A deep breath—the slightest swish of wind—a touch to my sleeve, and a figure slipped by me. A figure that, no doubt, was going above to cry the alarm—a figure which lacked the stomach to fight it out alone in the dark.

I didn't dare fire—advertising wasn't in my line now—but I shot out a hand—clutched a naked arm—and drew a wildly fighting body toward me. The next instant my fingers were on a soft throat—hair brushed my cheek—the aroma of perfume played gently in my nostrils. Gad—it was a woman.

My fingers just naturally slipped from that neck, my two hands tightened about small wrists. Even in such danger it somehow went against my grain to choke the

breath out of a woman. I could threaten her though—and I did.

"If you open your mouth I'll—I'll" And I stopped. The words wouldn't come. The little form so close to me seemed pitiably weak.

"Where are the windows?" I asked gruffly—trying to put fear in her heart by my threatening tones.

"All boarded up," she gasped.

"Is there a way out except up those steps and—" I started and stopped. No sound—but now we stood in the light—an incandescent almost above us blazed up suddenly. This was the end—one final, desperate battle. But I had a last card and I'd play it—perhaps this woman—this black head that hung mistily before me in the sudden glare was but a victim of the Black Circle. "If you breathe a word about my being here—then—beware the vengeance of the White Circle," I said harshly. Melodramatic, that—perhaps—but remember that this was a rather melodramatic stiuation.

I looked at the woman now—just a slip of a thing. In blue she was—in blue—a little dark head that almost rested on my shoulder. And I knew—knew before I lifted that head and looked straight into the wide, frightened eyes of Josey Mears. I didn't think of the danger above—my hands fell mechanically from her wrists—and she was gone—dashing up the steps—calling to some one above.

CHAPTER XI

THE BLACK CIRCLE

I CAME out of my trance—jarred back to reality—turned, and running around a great wooden partition was again in the darkness. A door slammed above—voices that trailed off to a distant hum—I was alone in the cellar—they were not coming down. The woman was afraid to speak then. The woman! Josey Mears—care-free, happy, little flapper, I had always thought her.

And now—at the best she was working with this vile gang—dragged into it, a victim, perhaps—but in it and a part of it just the same. It made my blood run cold. It was the first time that I knew I had looked upon Josey as a little different from the others—as—but that was all over now. She had been in the house while men above tore at the very soul of a woman.

And it was Josey and her note that had delivered Mrs. Clayburn into their hands. She had probably run into the cellar when the shooting became general.

Had she recognized me? Hardly—the white mask and cap completely hid my face and my voice had been deep and gruff. The sweater, too—but time was passing. The girl would get over her fright—see the absurdity of fearing a single man, trapped like a rat in the cellar. A way out—that was what I must search for.

I worked rapidly now—no more cautious secrecy. Besides, if the windows were really boarded up no light from within would show to the watchers in the night. I would find just how well they were boarded. Out came my flash—hurriedly I made the rounds of the windows; strong, heavy boards with great bolts—why, it would take hours to tear them away. An ax might turn the trick quicker, but of course that would only invite immediate attack from both within and without. Each window I carefully inspected—no use—and I spied a distant black hole at the back of the coal bin.

Over the coal I crawled—stopping now and then to listen for the arrival of the enemy—apparently they trusted the girl; believed that no one was in the cellar. Perched perilously on top of the coal I gazed into the chute—no light from the distant sky—I slipped my torch in—made out nothing but emptiness—and then—a flat, wooden wall at the end of the passage. Was it the end? Did there seem to be a curve there—surely, this was not the place they put the coal in.

A hidden exit from the house—I thrilled at the thought—stuck my shoulders in—and hesitated. Once in there—caught in there, and all hope would be gone. There was not room enough to turn around—even if it was a secret passage, mightn't the end of it be blocked? Wouldn't it surely be locked—or worse—perhaps guarded?

I'd—but no, I'd fight it out where I could be on my feet—not crawl for five minutes and stick my head into the night, to have some one crash it. Perhaps, after all, the girl would not tell—that was a possibility. But I'd be ready—so I slid back, drawing my head and shoulders out of that gloomy hole—yet I drew no coal dust with me.

Ruin! You'll have to take my word for it that my heart never missed a beat. Yet I knew that I was about to face death. The coal—did you ever hear it when it starts rolling—like thunder, it sounded now—rumbling and rattling from the top of the bin to the hard cement floor at the bottom. I might have known—might have guessed; but the thing was done.

They must have heard it all over that house. Would they believe that it was a natural occurrence, that happens every so often? Hardly, at a time like this. Even an easy-going householder takes a look, though he is more or less used to its slipping at strange, unaccountable times.

Somewhere above me a door closed with a bang—heavy feet trod across the floor—came a distant murmur of voices. Distant, was it—no—close to my ear—another voice, that—an eerie, queer little voice. I turned again toward that black hole—the voice came from there. Not distinctly, but understandable—no fancy. I stuck my ear close to the blackness of the chute.

"White Circle — this way — crawl through; White Circle—a friend—this way—crawl through." Several times the message was repeated—then stopped. Again it took up its cry—faint—ever calling the same words over and over.

Then it was drowned out—heavy feet were on the cellar steps—a gruff voice muttered, "Josey must be right."

And those were the last words I heard as I slipped into the black hole. Josey Mears had betrayed me.

The White Circle had called. Was it the little old man—was his far reaching arm still protecting me? It gave me hope. Surely, if it were some trap those hurrying figures would not be coming down the stairs.

Desperately, painfully, I wiggled along—their first thought would be the coal bin—their second, the chute—their third, to get to the other end of that chute.

Footsteps were already in the coal when I reached the turn and slipping on my side, rounded it. Light ahead of me—a few feet, no more—pale light to be sure—and air—a clear breeze of the late fall. And now a brighter light behind me. Some one had shot a torch into the passage. But I was safe—faintly now, through some bush, I caught a flash of the moon.

A few more feet and I was in the open—drawing my feet after me on to the grass. A thick bush to the right gave me shelter while I got my bearings and looked for the voice that had bid me to liberty.

And the voice came—close behind me—near the house. The same voice, yes—but a trembling, frightened voice—the high pitched, choking note of a man in terror. "I only guarded the exit," it feebly said. I peered through the bush and saw him—clearly, in the moonlight.

It was the youth of the sallow face—not so sallow now—but a pasty white, that stood out clearly. Then he was blotted out—a huge shadow was between—gigantic shoulders—thick arms—and the figure spoke. I stood erect—a real thrill in the sound of that voice; it was the disguised, deep, guttural notes of the man within the house—the Black Circle himself.

"You have betrayed your trust—you have lied. I stood close by and heard you call—heard you distinctly whisper," and his voice lowered, "the White Circle. Fool—did you think that he was in the cellar—that being there he could hear you?" And the voice now shook with wrath. "Traitor!" It fairly spat the word.

A great arm went up—there was a flash of steel, a gruff curse, and a muttered groan. Too late I dashed from the bushes. The sallow youth had slumped to the ground.

My foot struck a projecting root—I half stumbled—caught myself and stood erect. But the man had heard—for he swung sharply around. Clearly in the moonlight we faced each other. I was looking at the one hundred thousand dollar face—but unfortunately it was masked. The White and Black Circles stood less than a foot apart.

His gun was jabbed close up against my chin—and there was no tremor in his voice as he spoke. Unknown faced unknown—yet with a bitter hatred.

"One move and you die—" he hesitated then. "Just the slightest pressure of my finger to send a bullet crashing into your throat." His lips smacked beneath the mask.

I hope that I was as calm as he when I spoke.

"You think only of yourself," I said slowly. "Do you fail to note that the slightest pressure of my finger will send a bullet crashing into your dirty, black heart?" To add to the statement, I dug my gun a bit deeper into his body.

His gun hand moved the fraction of an inch and that was all the emotion he showed. But the cards certainly were in his hands. Time was his ally—not mine. Strange the feeling I had then—a desire to kill—will power alone kept my finger from tightening on that trigger. It might have been my hatred for the man; it might have been the still body of the youth who would have helped me, and now lay at my feet—and again, it might have been Josey Mears—a sudden gripping horror that she was in this beast's power.

A half minute passed—no more—but it seemed like hours. Fully I realized that I was playing directly into his hands. That at any moment those from the cellar would suspect the truth—swing around the corner of the house—see us there in the moonlight and—exit Stacey Lee, representative of the White Circle.

I was the first to break the impressive silence.

"We will meet again—" I took a step backward, my gun raised, my eyes upon his gun. "I am a remarkably fine shot," I went on, and meant it. "If you attempt to shoot, or cry out, I will press the trigger, come what may. Our lives—or our deaths—are locked together, for these few moments at least." Another step backward—would I trip over something—further and further I went. Hope now, a real hope of making the road and the thick woods beyond it. As for my car and Oscar—that seemed out of the question. I was on the wrong side of the house—my flight must lead in the same direction as that of Mrs. Clayburn.

Another step—two—three—a half dozen—all I needed was a start. Once away from that threatening gun I had as much chance as my pursuers. It would be a daring man, indeed, who would stalk me in those woods.

A shout—an answering call—the patter of hurrying feet, and the gun of the Black Circle spoke. Almost together we fired. I am not a killer but I am not a target either. The next instant figures had swung into view. I turned, zigzagged across the open, found the trees, and cleared the wall. No other shots broke the stillness. A message in that.

To kill me the Black Circle would chance one shot on what he no doubt believed an even chance. But a fusillade of bullets would be dangerous to him. Why? The surrounding country was not as desolate as I thought.

But I held no such fears. Glancing around, I fired at two figures who seemed to clear the wall together. Some satisfaction in that—they dropped to the ground together and I was in the woods, dodging through the trees. A crash through thick bushes—and I saw the road—just before me, too, the red tail-light of a car. Oscar? I opened my mouth to call, hesitated, dropped back in the bushes and skirted along—crouched low—well within the shadows. There was a whistle or two and an occasional shout. But if that was Oscar I was safe. Faintly only could I make out the shape of the car there in the shadow.

The car was moving, slipping out from the side of the road hardly ten yards from me. Tired, gasping for breath, my gun clutched in my hand, I raced after it. Distinctly I heard the gear slip from low to second, then high. The machine was hurrying away from danger. Had it been my shot that caused it? Now in the moonlight I recognized the car, made one final effort, dashed out upon the road and, lurching forward, grasped the tightly bound rim of the spare tire on the rear and swung up, easing my body into it. A tight fit, but I

had done the same thing before. I was safe.

CHAPTER XII

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT

THERE was no slackening of speed as I eased into the tight fitting, circular rim on the back of the car. They didn't see me, of course. I was with the best of friends. It was the red touring—Mrs. Clayburn's car. She must have been giving orders to the chauffeur; that was why she did not look behind, and the driver had his hands full at the wheel. This would be a surprise for the little lady in yellow. Just a chance to get my breath, be sure we were entirely out of danger and I'd call to her.

What was the car doing there? Why didn't it go on as I had directed? A breakdown? Hardly. Waiting for me? That might be; she had shown herself a plucky little thing when I sent her out the door. But why the sudden flight when I needed her most? Still she could not know that I was coming.

Useless to bother about such a question now; in a few minutes she would explain everything herself. It wasn't the little woman in yellow that kept bobbing up in my head, but the girl in blue. Josey Mears a crook; the meanest kind of a crook! If the police had suddenly swept down on that house in Crestwood, she as well as the Black Circle would be in the hands of the law. And what a haul they would have made this night! I'd speak to the little old man, the White Circle, about that.

A few minutes more now and I'd be riding back to town like a gentleman. Easy? Things had worked out well, or fairly well. If I had not caught my foot in that root, I would have seen the Black Circle's face sure, just ripped off the mask. I excused that error, put it down to over anxiety. I wanted to save the life of the youth who had helped me; and why had he helped me? I sighed. Excuses are all right, but two years ago that break never would have happened and, oh, one hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money.

We were making time now, traveling far off toward White Plains. Why didn't they cut over to Central Avenue and double back to the city? It looked like I'd have to take charge, every minute the car was gathering speed, the roads were not of the best and my position was a perilous one.

Chug! Sput! The car jerked and jarred along, turned sharply from the broad road and bounced into a little lane. I distinctly heard Mrs. Clayburn gasp, another jar, a bump, and the red touring car stopped around a curve in the shadow of huge trees.

Good! I dropped from the back and took a stretch. Why the stop? Engine trouble? Pursuit? But I had seen nothing. Then the shrill voice of Mrs. Clayburn.

"Duncan, what is this, what has happened?" There was an anxious, frightened note in her voice. She had been through a great deal.

"The engine, madam. A minute; no more. I thought perhaps the side road would be best, out of sight." His voice was low, respectful, and yet I felt there was a touch of familiar understanding in the soft whisper.

"The back seat, madam. My wrench is there. May I trouble you?" he was by the door now, I heard him open it, felt the car give slightly as Mrs. Clayburn came to her feet, heard her sharp intake of breath and peered around the side.

"Come! Get out of there, you." The man's hand shot in and clutched her by the wrist, dragging her roughly from the car, out upon the road half on her knees, half sitting on the ground. "Give me them letters, you—" a foul name. "Yes, I worked with them, stole the letters the first time. Come! I seen you stick 'em in your waist. Out with the letters or I'll drag them out."

A pitiful little cry, a weak, hopeless appeal, and—

"Duncan—you, Duncan—spare me. I've always been good to—"

"The letters!" He dragged the woman to her feet, holding her with one powerful arm. She fought, clutched at her bosom, scratched at the face of the now infuriated man.

"You foul slut." His hand came up, paused in midair before he struck and stayed there. That was all of that.

I have other things beside a quick trigger finger. As I said, I'm a strong man and always in condition. This was not the time for gunplay. If you had been an adventurer as many years as I, you'd understand the feeling of pride in the work, the dangers of a gun under certain conditions. It's pretty hard to draw a bead on a lad who's about to strike a woman, and not press the trigger. Then again, he might strike and— Oh, I just stepped out, clutched him by the collar and swung him around, facing me.

He had guts, had Duncan; more than you'd expect in a woman beater. He finished his blow by letting me have it. It was short, lacked force, and the muscles must have tightened under the shock of my sudden appearance; besides, he looked straight into two slitlike eyes that peered through the whiteness of a somewhat soiled mask.

Then I gave it to him. That was my excuse, that blow of his that grazed my ear, not damaging, but stinging slightly. And I struck with all the force of my hundred and eighty pounds of hardened muscle. Flush on the button he took it, clicked his heels together like a soldier, stared vacantly into space and went down like a clothing store dummy. It was a pretty blow. I nodded at that. Not conceited, you understand. You take pride in your business, I take pride in mine. A thorough job in any line gives one a certain feeling of satisfaction.

Duncan was out. Lucky that, for Mrs. Clayburn was clinging to me now, weeping softly, hysterically.

"Again, again," she kept muttering over and over as I took her hands from my neck and placed her gently on the step of the car. Women are funny creatures. She recovered almost at once, came to her feet, looked behind her and shuddered.

"Hurry! Let us get away. I can drive the car, quick, they may be coming."

Not complimentary to me, that, and yet a sensible thought. Personally, I was willing to call it a night. There had been enough action to satisfy even me. I understood, too, the reference to the letters back there at the house, the hope that they were still safe. Another slip on my part. Certainly I should have suspected the chauffeur, all alone in the car, out before the house, the final link in a wonderfully made chain. The ace in the hole, the sure chance of victory in the face of defeat. But the woman was at me again, thanking, pleading, begging me to go on.

"We have two things to do first," I told her. "After all, you and I are but pawns in a big game. Here, take my light." I slipped the flash into her nervous fingers. "Examine those letters; be sure they're all there, then we'll burn them. Hurry, I have a little business with Duncan."

For the first time, I didn't find the sticking of that seal a childish occupation. There was a sort of grim humor to it. And this time, in the brightness of the moon, the white stood out clearly against the red. I was none too gentle as I slapped it on. Duncan stirred restlessly as I struck, half opened his eyes and turned his head from side to side. Then I frisked him for his gun; as for tying him up, I didn't bother. And I made a threat, not a bluff, nothing to do with the White Circle. This was entirely a personal matter.

"Duncan," I said slowly, making sure that each word went home. "You've got your chance to get clean away. If we meet again," I studied that face long and earnestly, "we meet in death." Dramatic? Cheap stuff? Maybe, but I meant it then. Somehow, I had taken a violent dislike to Duncan.

Through the haze Duncan understood. I just turned my back on him and walked over to Mrs. Clayburn.

"The right letters?" I ask her, and when she nods through her sobs—those letters do not bring back pleasant memories—"Burn them now!"

It don't take me a minute to get a little fire blazing. One by one the letters go into it. And Duncan sees and understands. They won't be bothering Mrs. Clayburn any more. Then I ground the still smoking embers beneath my feet, stamped them

well into the dirt and helped Mrs. Clayburn into the back of the car.

"I'll drive," I tell her.

Twice, through the corner of my eyes, I've seen Duncan half sit up, only to fall back again. Am I careless in taking a chance that he might attack? I don't know. He's had his warning.

A moment more—a last look at the blackened fire and Duncan—and I'm in the front seat. Back down the narrow lane we slip—out on to the highway and speeding along. In silence we travel, and reaching a crossroad, I slip over it, turn into Central Avenue, by Hartsdale, and skip toward the city. My mask—it's got to come off.

Oscar! I don't worry about him. I daresay, at the first shot he started home. At least he was far enough from the dismal house, and Oscar is to be depended on in an emergency. Stolid, faithful, practical Oscar—who never saw romance or adventure, and who was absolutely devoid of imagination. Would he resign in the morning? And the girl in blue!

Too late I saw the flash of yellow as the woman behind climbed into the front seat beside me. I pulled my cap well down. This wasn't playing the game. I hadn't warned her to stay in the back—never thought. But she was speaking.

"I'm not going to try and—and identify you." Her voice was hardly more than a whisper. "I want to thank you—and the baby waiting for me at home!" A choke—a sob—silence.

I switched the subject quickly—head bent low.

"What were you doing—why were you waiting there by the house? Wouldn't—Duncan drive on?"

"Oh, yes." She wiped away her tears. "I just had to stay—you—the White Circle, you know—such danger for you."

I nodded.

"And the letters—why didn't you destroy them—tear them to pieces?"

"I couldn't." Her voice was very faint. "I wanted to keep them—oh, it never could happen again—but if ever I was tempted—why, I could read them and see—understand what a fool I'd been—what a bad, wicked mother."

No sense to that, you think. And you're right. But it's the way of some women. Why argue—the thing was done—the letters were destroyed.

She gave me directions to her home, told me that her husband would never suspect anything. It was three o'clock.

"I often stay late at such—affairs. Sometimes he's asleep—sometimes he's busy at his work. He never goes out with me." No rebuke in her words—just the faintest intake of breath. Yet you don't have to be a student of human nature to see the whole sordid story of a wrecked life in those few simple lines.

She held my hand a long time at parting—tightly clutched it in her two little ones. Nothing of the flirtation of a woman of the world there—just the clinging thankfulness of a child. She was gone, running up the steps and passing through the front door of the house in the upper Nineties.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO TELEPHONE CALLS

I DROVE on, parked her car in the garage two blocks away, and walked home. The air was brisk—the night, cloudless—and my work was finished. Work! Was it? Yet I would be paid for it. And the pounding at my heart was new to me. Something that choked up and swelled in my throat. I had dragged a woman's soul straight from the depths of hell. A great happiness that—and yet—one thing sung continually in my ears— What of Josey Mears?

I braced my shoulders—walked faster—turned in at my own house. Such thoughts were not for me. I had never been a one-woman man—nor a two or a three; or any other number for that matter.

Click—my key was hardly in the lock when a light blazed up within and the door swung open, I half clutched for my gun—looked up—started slightly—and laughed. Placid, quiet, unemotional Oscar stood in the doorway.

"Some one on the telephone—you're just in time," he said quietly, as if I had but stepped out for a walk.

I took the call on the downstairs phone. It was the little old man. I wanted to break it to him—give him the good news that I had succeeded—but he already knew. Remarkable that. Here I was just in the house and the White Circle was congratulating me on my success. He was even aware that Mrs. Clayburn had returned safely to her home.

Had unseen eyes watched through the night? Hardly—eyes that watched at Crestwood could not have watched by Mrs. Clayburn's door. I was startled—yes, but I got a few important things off my chest.

"About this White Circle business," I told him, "it's bad stuff in some cases. Now, if a man could use his own judgment—like to-night—why not keep the whole thing secret; hunt them down—find the leader without his being aware—?"

"No." His voice broke in upon me. "Such are the orders of the White Circle." He spoke as if he talked for another. "And the reason—" a moment's hesitation, and then, "not simply the psychology of the thing upon those whom he employs, nor the fear instilled by the steady activities of the White Circle. I do not believe that we will ever discover him, but I do believe that, driven to—well, perhaps in his pride, his hate, or the loss of some victim, he will hunt out us—hunt out the White Circle.

"From the defensive he will take the offensive. To-night you have done good work. Already consternation is in the enemy's camp. They cry out for vengeance."

"Have it your own way then." I still thought my idea of working secretly and without so much bally-hoo the best. "You may succeed better than you think. To-night I heard the man I think to be the leader threaten—well—you."

"Just how?" The dry old lips smacked over the wire.

And I told him. I'm not one to beat around the bush.

"He said the White Circle was a joke but that it had gone too far—and referred to you."

"Just how did he refer to me?"

A fair question, and I gave him a fair answer.

"He spoke of 'the old fool.'" I repeated the exact words. Of course, from the Black Circle's point of view there was only one conclusion to draw. These blackmailers were in on the know—suspected the little old man, to a certain extent anyway.

There was a soft chuckle. That was the first time I heard him laugh.

"Perhaps he is right. But I would ask nothing better than to meet this scoundrel face to face."

Courage enough? Yes—but fool talk for an old man.

"He's a tough customer—don't just sit back and watch, but is ready to act when the time comes. I just wish to warn you."

"It is good." His voice was free from the slightest tremor. "And the check—yes—you shall have a good one. To-morrow night I will bring it to you—and another case. A man this time—not much difficulty, I think. Just tact and foresight. This time we shall work together. If there is trouble, then I shall count on you."

"Good enough." I was feeling the lure of this man-hunt, myself. "Take care of yourself," I told him again—somehow, I had a presentiment of evil. But who wouldn't after such a night?

"I'm an old man." He spoke very low, yet very firm. "Every hour I walk in the shadow of death, and it is not the hand of man which directs me."

That was all—just the faintest click as the receiver snapped into place. Our conversation was over. He had given me no address, no telephone number. But I shrugged my shoulders. After all, it was his game to play in his own way—still, I was the power that drove the machinery he had constructed.

No dreams disturbed me. I slept as peacefully as a new-born babe. You'll admit I deserved my rest—just a face, nothing more mistily before me—a slightly turned up nose—a wealth of bobbed, black hair and two sparkling brown eyes.

Morning! A cold tub, a hearty breakfast, and I was ready for a new day—one of loafing in particular—that was my idea as I dressed—and then the phone. It has been incessant lately in its ringing—appearing at the clubs again had convinced my

many acquaintances that I was not entirely out of the running. Nice people! "Them that has, gets," was coined for that set.

A feminine voice—I recognized it at once. Got a sort of a thrill—half hopeful, quarter repugnant—and all interest. I just couldn't wipe out the childish innocence of Josey Mears.

"I was mean to you last night, wasn't I—Stacey." My first name slipped hesitatingly from her lips. "But don't be a cross boy. I'm sorry I was such a frump—perhaps I'll see you again—maybe."

"For lunch, if you like." This came spontaneously—but it was in my contract. Josey Mears was in the enemy's camp—Josey Mears might lead me to the hundred thousand dollar face—and Josey Mears was—well, Josey Mears—if you can make anything out of that.

Her free, easy, girlish laugh came humming over the wire.

"You're a dear," she said softly, "and I'm frightfully hungry—say one o'clock at—" Her voice trailed off to nothing.

"At your apartment—first," I suggested.

There was a delay in her answer—then:

"No—it's a fright. Silly—but I'm a woman. Say, Holiday's."

Tiny tables, shaded lamps, hidden corners.

"Holiday's it is," I told her.

"One o'clock," she returned. "You're very forgiving. I wish I had your disposition. But there's the doorbell and—oh—" A moment's pause; was there a touch of surprise in her voice—a tremble perhaps—and did I hear across the wires of the city streets the faintest thud of a closing door? I don't know. But distinctly I did catch the soft grating of the receiver on its hook before the click of a disconnected wire came clearly to me. Josey Mears had hung up—suddenly—but slowly and noiselessly. Why?

I shrugged my shoulders. Josey was bright—Josey had brains—and Josey had chosen her own bed. If it was not one of roses, why—then the thorns would have to prick. Oh, I gave consideration to the fact that she might be an unwilling victim, like Mrs. Clayburn. If so, where were the hollow eyes—the deep black rims—the trembling, frightened lips—that indescribable horror of the whole thing? Nowhere in Josey's make-up, that was sure.

Again, why did she ring me up? I had known Josey slightly for the best part of two years, met her at different affairs, been chummy with her perhaps. We had much in common. At least, our sense of humor ran along the some lines. There was many a laugh at the petty tragedies of the social puppets.

An evening here and an evening there. That was all—nothing on the outside—no tête-à-tête business—nor even a walk in the park. Once I had taken her home, when her taxi failed to show up. A raised hat—a quiet good night—nothing more.

I paced the room, thinking. Could I possibly be game for these blackmailers? Was there anything in the life of Stacey Lee that would interest them? Lots, perhaps, for a social climber to fear—but as for money—why, the only reason that much of my adventurous career had not appeared in the magazine sections of the papers was because the pay did not seem—well, we all have our pride. A single girl, with a past, is open for prey to these vultures—while a single man, with a past, is simply interesting.

Josey might be slated to sound me out. They did not know if I had money—the sudden advance in my social status had marked me, perhaps, as future game. And Josey's acquaintance was an easy road to information. Good enough—nothing would suit me better. I might even drum up a few wives whom I had inadvertently neglected to divorce, and give the Black Circle a decent run for their money.

The day was cloudy, with a promise of rain before the afternoon, when I made my way to The Antlers Club—exclusive club, that—the best of the best. My introduction was received through a head waiter. A bank roll and the will to use it were the requirements. A good system, I dare say, for the club flourished—showed a profit at the end of each year.

It was almost impossible to believe that an organization like the Black Circle could exist there in the heart of the world's greatest city. Masses of people passed before

the club window—tall, broad shouldered guardians of the law stood majestically guiding the traffic by a simple raising of the hand. And there—under the very noses of these cogs of the powerful police system, slinking, haggard-faced people, victims of a great criminal organization, passed.

CHAPTER XIV

A FLAT AFTERNOON

WELVE THIRTY — and the rain came. Great torrents of it bore down upon the streets, cleansing it of the frozen, dirty snow of a few weeks before, and clearing it too of people. The dense mass of a few minutes before was now a hurrying, scraggling line. Was it the rain that made me think of Josey—or was it the faintest sound of that closing door that had drifted over the city streets? At any rate I decided to call for her at her apartment.

A decision with me is action. A quick, deft tuck to my coat—the reassuring feel of a heavy revolver—and I was out the door and entering a taxi. Ten minutes later we drew up at the six-story apartment house.

The taxi waited—a dollar in the hand of the elevator boy and a jesting dig in the ribs earned me the right to ascend to the fifth floor unannounced.

"Miss Mears will be expecting me," was all that I said, and quite enough. The boy understood—too well, I thought. Had others—but 5-D was the number and I stood before the door as the elevator descended.

Did voices come from within? Was one a masculine voice, raised in anger—and did I, too, hear a half defiant, pleading little voice that provoked a threat? I don't know. I didn't wait. Ignoring the bell I raised my closed fist and brought it sharply down, three times, upon the heavy oak paneling.

Silence—a movement of feet—a pause—another wait and the door opened the tiniest crack.

"Gave you a start, eh?" I laughed, thrust open the door and stood in the hallway. Josey for once was surprised—and the natural redness of her cheeks was missing.

"Raining out," I told her. "Ready—still hungry? And—why, the apartment is perfect."

Had I overdone it? Josey, always so sure of herself—always so poised—was in a panic as I stepped into the living room. For a moment I wished I hadn't come. It was weird to see Josey like that. Was it my sudden appearance or something that had gone before? I had hardly saved her from a trying ordeal, for there was no relief in her face—no sense of dawning security in my presence.

If I had wanted to startle the great calm and self-assurance of this bit of a girl, I had succeeded beyond my wildest hope. I couldn't look at her. To do so and not question the reason of her paleness of face, uncertainty of limbs, as she leaned against the wall, would surely arouse suspicion later when she recovered enough to think clearly.

"Slip into your wraps," I told her easily as I dropped into a chair, half turned it so as to be sidewise to drawn curtains. Twice the curtains swayed; a draft perhaps—and yet I felt no breeze. Of a certainty eyes were watching me—a lurking figure slunk behind that drapery. Uncomfortable for Josey—my coming like that. Maybe. But I gave myself a bad three minutes also. I knew who Josey's friends were—knew that some one stood behind that curtain—wondered, too, if it were one that could possibly connect me up with events of the previous evening.

Had I disguised my voice then? For the life of me I didn't know. I was beginning to be a novice in this game. A laugh there—I picked a book from the table and slowly thumbed the pages. Just had to do something with my hands—the temptation to dash between those waving curtains was hard to resist. Think of it—cold-blooded, heartless murder—and yet— Josey had returned. I dare say we both sighed with relief.

A red was on her cheeks—simple of explanation, that—but the sparkle to her eyes was missing as she stretched out a tiny hand to me. The light banter of her voice

lost some of its naturalness as her cold, damp fingers tightened unconsciously about mine. A moment later the door closed behind us, the marble floor rang beneath our feet, and the buzz of the elevator bell echoed up the shaft. For the first time Josey talked—really talked.

"I'm so glad that's over and we're out," she started in, as she shot those great brown eyes up at me. "You notice so much—and that front room behind the curtain—it's a fright—I paint, you know." She offered the final in explanation.

"You don't look it, Josey." I smiled straight down on that—yep—sweet young face. I can read faces, too—nothing of bad there and—

"Horrid." The hand that reached up and pulled my ear was not so cold now. "If we weren't in the elevator—I'd box your ears," she whispered.

And I—silly perhaps—but that was the sort of conversation I wished to encourage for awhile. Josey mustn't know—mustn't suspect that I saw anything strange in her actions. If she was to lead me into a trap—why, I was willing to be led.

So we chatted inanely of nothing as we skidded over the slippery pavements to Holiday's. Somehow, I had a new interest in Josey—the paleness of those cheeks, the trembling, shaking little body. The bed was certainly not of roses then—and why had my appearance so affected her? I looked at her now—a wonderful little slip of a thing. A tiny table in a distant corner—the dimness of lights—the independence of that little turned-up nose.

Decidedly, Josey had personality. There was character even to the saucy tilt of the nose—and the sparkle of her eyes was back again. I forgot the Black Circle—neglected my duty to the White—business was off. I declared it a holiday. My interest was entirely in the girl across the table. The lights were low, the food good—the girl vivacious and—most of all, entertaining.

Somehow I think that Josey took the same attitude. We were young and this was life. We had a great deal in common. Again—Josey was simply Josey, and you can make what you want to of that.

Just the lure of the girl—a feeling strange to me—something of that romance I derided. I looked long and steadily at her—a girl that a man would fight his way to—and the spell was broken—Josey was talking.

"I often wonder about you, Stacey—gossip, you know—yet nothing is ever said. What is your business? What—is your—oh, past—we all have a past."

The light banter of her voice didn't register. It was as if she said: "Are you worth cultivating? Have you got the money? Have you done anything that you'd pay to keep quiet?"

If there was ever a time when anything could be read on my face that was it. A second only and I was playing poker. There was no hardness in my eyes as I looked at Josey—no nervousness to my fingers as I lighted a cigar and held for a moment the dying match between my fingers. Steady! I smiled over at her.

But I didn't lie. Didn't give her a wild story of abandoned wives—or indiscreet letters written to the charming wives of old but wealthy husbands. Somehow, I couldn't. I was careful of course—suspicious, too, but the loathing I expected wasn't there. A pity for the girl, perhaps; a deeper hatred for those who had made of her a creature of that other world, certainly.

"I used to be an actress," she went on—her eyes on mine. "Not a great one—just a hopeful one—now I paint a bit—you see, I received a legacy which makes me nearly independent."

I nodded. I guess I knew where that legacy came from—blood money. She hoped for a return of my confidence. I could see it in the expectant, eager thrust of her chin above the table.

"Me, too," I told her. "Used to be an actor—got a legacy—a small one—a broker now—dabbling a bit in stocks." It would be to the interest of the White Circle to lead her on, yet I didn't. Just couldn't. Explain that? Can't. Didn't want her to play any part in my end of it, I guess. And when the time came for a show-down, why, Josey could have a new lease on life—alone.

I didn't want any part of a woman who could look you so straight in the eyes

and plan to squeeze a few dollars out of your soul. Not me! Despite it all I'll admit I liked the kid, but there was a feeling, too, that I'd like her better at a distance. She had personality—she had character. But was it good character, if you get what I mean.

Josey overworked it. She was too insistent. So I gave her the sign to lay off.

"Drop it, Josey," I said. "If you're bent on starting a social register, look me up in *Who's Who.*" And that knocked her, brought her hand to her chin and knitted her eyes.

Things were flat over the coffee, and I guess we both were glad to leave. The rain had stopped and the streets were dry. We decided to walk and we did, close enough together, but plodding along in silence. To see us you might think we had been married for years. It was getting to be what is known as a dead afternoon.

The clouds came and blotted out the sun. Up Fifth Avenue we strolled until we hit the park.

"Are you busy?" Her voice seemed very far away as we stood there by the gate across from the Plaza.

"No," was all I answered, and despite a drip of rain we turned into the park, shot off the main highway and down toward the lake. Did she take the lead or did I? I don't know. We were about as far apart as the poles. Yet we both wanted something from the other. She wanted my past, my life. I wanted, oh, I wanted something, I guess. It couldn't just be her company.

CHAPTER XV

ROMANCE DASHES IN

WE were down by the very edge of the lake when she turned on me suddenly. The clouds opened, the rain came, and neither of us noticed it, or bothered with it. Her hands were raised, tightly gripping at my shoulders; her chin was on my chest, her brown eyes questioning, demanding, pleading.

"Stacey! Stacey! Tell me something about yourself, your past, your life now. I must know." Josey had thrown all caution to the wind. My thoughts went back to those voices when I stood by her apartment door. A cruel master, the Black Circle, then. She had been given a job to fill.

What was the price of failure? What threat did they hang above this little black head? Here was a different Josey. There was fear as well as pleading in her voice. For the first time I saw the horror in those deep brown eyes, the same hopeless look that I had read so plainly in the eyes of Mrs. Clayburn.

When I did not answer Josey shook my shoulders. The rain fell in torrents, dripping streams from my soft hat upon her upturned face, making little rivulets of white through the rouge. And Josey had never before used rouge.

"Tell me, tell me, Stacey," she repeated over and over again in a deadly earnestness. "I must know, I must know."

"We all have our skeletons." I tried to smile down on her. Poor kid, if she was frightened like that why, I'd give her something to take back to them. "What's come over you, Josey? Why do you ask? Have you some trouble, something that I can—well, help you out of?" Nothing in my mind now but a great pity and an opening for her.

"Me—me! Do you think that I am thinking of myself?" The eyes came wide open. "No, don't think that. Oh, Stacey—"

Throw in an empty space. I can't write it. How it happened, why it happened. But it was done in a moment. Soft, wet hair had brushed my cheek, great eyes had opened up fathomless wonders to me. Arms were around my neck, I held her lithe young body close and our lips met. Just love, nothing more. I guess I acted like a fool and told Josey so over and over. Yet it didn't seem new to me but like I had known it all along. It was the same with Josey, too.

"I've always loved you, Stacey—always—always." She just clung to me. Right in the heart of the city, we were. Those in the windows of the big hotel or the New

York Athletic Club must have grabbed some eyeful, but as far as I was concerned we might have been in the middle of an African jungle.

"You'll always think of me, Stacey, always remember that I really love you, though you're far away."

That was an easy promise and I didn't hesitate to give it. I had no intention of being far away. Not me.

"And you'd do anything for me?" Her voice was pitifully low and weak.

I gulped, held her the tighter a moment, and set her back on the ground. The truth was coming out now, she wanted to break with those vultures, she wanted me to help her. Good, I guess that murder was in my heart when I answered.

"I'll do anything for you, Josey, anything." And then, the caution of years of training, perhaps the words of the little old man ringing in my head: "Anything that an honorable man can do." Just a stock phrase in this case, but for once they were words of wisdom.

"You must promise to leave the country." Her eyes, two deep, frightened balls of fire, were steadily searching mine.

"I can't Josey, I can't." I spoke rapidly. "What of you, you need me here. And why, why should I go away?"

She sighed, paused and then:

"I cannot tell you, it is a trust of another. I only ask that you leave the country—at once—travel—any place—but get away from the city—now."

I shook my head. Then an idea, an inspiration. I had a duty to the White Circle, of course, but my first duty was to Josey, the woman I loved. If I could take her away!

"Josey," I held her at arm's length, "will you marry me—to-morrow—leave the country with me. You say that you love me."

I thought that the word "yes" was forming on her lips, but no word came. Then the arms that I held were free, flung about my neck, her lips touched mine, and she was gone without a word, speeding over the wet grass, onto the path and up to the road. Came the creak of worn wheels, the sudden stop of a cruising taxi and Josey was out of my paradise and into the city.

Had I made a promise? Had Josey agreed to go with me? And would the word "coward" be stamped upon Stacey Lee for the first time? Was I deserting a good cause, breaking faith with the little old man? A question there. I was working for pay, had performed my first task well. After all, I had promised nothing to the White Circle, nor to Josey either for that matter. I had simply asked her a question, a question that she did not answer. Couldn't I do more to save her by staying in the city, running the leader of her organization to earth?

And did they suspect me? Was Josey trying to save me from their vengeance? Josey had not betrayed me the night before. She had not recognized me. Of that much I was certain. She loved me and —a step, a shadow from behind the boathouse. I turned sharply, saw the figure disappear on the off side. There was something familiar about the hunch of those shoulders; I followed.

The man had either noticed that I saw him or was innocent of any evil purpose there. For he whistled a half forgotten ballad as he strolled out into the teeming rain and stood beside the lake. I came up behind him and he turned around.

The recognition was not mutual, for I had worn a mask the night before. But this was the lad who had stood with arms folded while Mrs. Clayburn was crouched in the chair and I peered through the drawn curtains of the lower room in that dismal house at Crestwood.

"Ah!" he smiled. "Another student who admires nature. Not in the sunlight is the lake most beautiful, but during the storm, when the myriad of raindrops fall like soldiers at a drill. The lake, to me, is the most beautiful thing in nature." Indifferent to my searching eyes he turned, and extending both hands far apart, gazed out over the lake.

Of course, he had spied upon us, snickered at the tragedy hidden in our new found love. With what result, I did not know, did not care at that moment. Anger is not a part of my make-up, sudden pas-

sion, new to me, but then so was love. But if he admired the lake so much, let him drink his fill of it.

I just took him by the back of the neck and threw him into it. No white seal was stuck on this bird. This was pleasure, not business. If he had a story to repeat to the Black Circle, he might as well make it a good one. There's plenty of fun in life if you only have the will to see it.

He hadn't made any suicide pact with any one, not him, for as I backed up the grass and up on the path, he disappeared again behind the boathouse. Which all goes to show that if you pay ten dollars a day for a room in the Plaza, you sometimes get your money's worth out of it.

Strange thoughts, suspicions, and Josey Mears in them. I'll admit I had them all. I've got a head as well as a heart, but I loved Josey and would fight to save her—even from herself. As for the Black Circle, I'd fill it as full of holes as a porous plaster; there was a personal interest in it now. And listen to this—call it love; call it downright thick-headedness, or lay it to a desire to die young—I believed in Josey Mears, at least as far as her love for me was concerned.

Back to the club again, wet clothes and all. I wanted time to think, and my little window there was the place for it. Just stare out over the heads of the people, and day dream, good stuff sometimes. Thinking, as a rule, don't pay much, but here—well, there was nothing else to do. The club would be deserted now.

And it wasn't. I couldn't have found a worse companion for my piece of mind. Did you guess it—the old bore himself. Robert T. Townsend—all of him. See me? I was hardly in the door when his right hand brushed his forehead and his left stroked his chin. That was his warning signal. And with it he lighted on me.

"Just the man, believe it or not," he started in, as he led me to a chair over near the dying embers of the lunch time fire. Mrs. Townsend was set on it, too."

I tried to head him off.

"Dead tired and wet." I don't think I was any too cordial. "Dropped in for quiet and rest."

"Me, too," he agreed as usual. "Just the place for it, here by the fire. I was soaked a few minutes ago, and tired, but now—" He pushed me into a chair, dragged another opposite and began to talk on the stock market. Not advice, exactly, not anything. I guess, the hum of his voice was all I got after a bit. My thoughts were far away.

"Damn it, what was that?" The sharpness of his voice, the scraping of his chair, brought me upright. I swung around, an attendant had passed behind us. So, I smiled to myself. Robert T. Townsend had nerves of his own. That was some satisfaction; he didn't just play upon the nerves of others.

"Ought to make them wear something beside rubber soles; slip right up on, but—" his long arm came over and patted my knee—"you're just the man, as I said. Dinner party to-morrow night. One man disappointed us. Wife says, 'there's that Mr. Lee. I'm sure he'll help us out and fill in.'" Then leaning a bit nearer: "'Most attractive young man,' she added. 'Head our dinner list after this.'" Once again the old bore was waiting for me to fall down on my knees with delight.

I was about to put the damper on the whole show, tell him to run out and bury his face; that any one would be glad to lend him a spade—when he shot in again. And this time he said something, not just talk.

"You'll take in Miss Mears, Josey Mears." I was at the receiving end of a dig in the ribs from pudgy fingers. "Lucky dog. I told the wife you must have arranged Charlie's sickness. Saw you dancing with her, but what say, nothing on for to-morrow, eh?" His eyes closed slightly, mean little eyes they were then, and he kind of wet his thick lips. Something like an animal, Townsend, big, good-natured enough if his stomach was full and business going right, I guess, but a selfish brute.

This time I coddled to his idea. Came out of my trance with a vengeance and made a play for his good will. Where Townsend's crowd went, so would Josey Mears. And where Josey Mears was—but enough. For the best part of an hour

I chatted with Townsend—actually had him listening for a change. Big game hunting in Africa—some imagination to be sure—but I gave the dear old bore some real thrills. Women were his long suit, he told me with a wink. Now laugh that one off.

CHAPTER XVI

A MESSAGE FROM THE BLACK CIRCLE

HIS time he went first, and his clamlike hand lingered in mine as his long, heavy arm pump-handled away. I was in strong. I dare say no one had listened to him or stood for him so long before. He was my friend for life now, if he had any pull with his wife—but such is life—less than two hours, two awful hours, to be sure, had turned the trick.

Love, adventure, society, murder lurking in the background. And I had thought of shaking the dust of the city from my feet to get a thrill! Man, I was having all kinds of thrills. Good stuff, as a rule, but love; I'd prefer to take that dose spending a quiet honeymoon on the deck of some great ocean greyhound. When a man's ready to get married, he's ready to settle down.

Here I was, just starting out. Why, it was like kissing the bride at the altar and going to the front line trenches and then finding the bride sitting there, up to her neck in mud and water.

Oscar had an unconscious way of letting me know when he had visitors. His cadaverous appearance took on a more deathlike aspect than usual, which was something for Oscar. Guess he got the habit from the pile of creditors that had been making of my house a sort of rendezvous for the "meet your neighbor" movement among the tradesmen.

"A gentleman inside, *monsieur*." He emphasized the "gentleman" to such a degree that I knew at once the visitor's right to such a distinction was open to question. But I passed into the little front room and took in my visitor.

His clothes marked him the gentleman—the rest of him, anything but—in a way he was the counterpart of the sallow youth whom the Black Circle stabbed the previous night. A little taller, a little older, and perhaps longer a criminal. The grin on his face was something that I had decided to wipe off before ever he opened his mouth.

I knew his breed. You could drag a net through any hotel lounging room and grab yourself off a dozen or more. He was marking time for the penitentiary, was this bird. But not a real gunman. Physical violence was not in his line, that is, from his point of view.

"I am most unfortunately the bearer of bad news." He bowed very low, then sat down again. I guess sitting down came natural to him; safety first. People get used to using their feet on his type. He was already labeled. But he came right to the point.

"You are," he said, "in love with another man's wife." And as he spoke his hand sought his coat pocket. Bad move that. I knew then that he caressed a gun, though he had neither the hand nor the eye to use it.

I smiled to myself. The Black Circle had already marked me for a victim. I knew it the minute I spotted this duck. He was the typical fixer. And I was supposed to fly into a rage and act high and mighty, threaten to kick him out. He knew the line, and so the gun for protection.

But I just nodded.

"I am perhaps in love with several men's wives," I told him easily. "In fact, for all you know, I may make a practice of it." I was sizing him up, thinking, too. Was this what Josey Mears had tried to warn me against? And who was the woman? One thing they couldn't do—that was to hang a dame on me.

And Skinny Face is surprised. This isn't on his list. I don't do the usual stuff. He's stuck for a minute, half draws his hand from his pocket and goes on with his speech.

"I feel for you." He gets it out slow. "I am simply an agent, one who bears a message. Others are in possession of your secret. My card." He shoved over a bit of pasteboard.

"Meyer & Meyer—Attorneys at Law."

I whistled softly. Here was a rather high-handed bit of business. Still the name might be fictitious. Anything pertaining to the activities of the Black Circle was of importance, so I put it in my pocket.

"And now what?" I asked easily.

"Meyer & Meyer will protect your interest in this rude attempt by some one to blackmail you. We will want a retainer, of course. And I presume you would rather settle than have the whole thing become public. They are hard people to deal with. We hope to pull you through with the least possible expense."

His eyes regarded me shrewdly a moment. "There is the law, of course, a most unpleasant way, to be sure. Still, we will be glad to fight these people openly, but the interest of our clients comes first."

Clever! Yes, in a way, you've got to admit that. Meyer & Meyer would fight the case, simply fight it, and you'd pay for their doing nothing but proceeding against "people unknown."

"How did you hear of me?" I was certainly interested.

"Telephoned less than an hour ago. Told that Mr. Stacey Lee was badly in need of some legal advice. Shall we say a hundred, just to show good faith? We shall submit the best figure we can obtain to you later."

"And if I prefer to sit tight?" I eyed him carefully, especially the hand by the gun.

"That, sir, is your privilege. We are not in need of business. But this husband is a foreigner. Will make trouble. Real physical danger. Besides, there is the unpleasant notoriety. From the tone of things, I think we can settle rather—well, inexpensively—as these things go."

"You have had much experience in this business then?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Some one must help the erring. I dare say we all have our little secrets. The unfortunates are those who are found out. Our charges are reasonable, our first duty to our clients. We assure you of protection against future attacks upon you."

I'd have throttled the truth out of him if I thought that he knew anything. One of his eyes had a deep gash under it, and his nose had been bent not so long before. Some one else evidently had the same ideas, but he could lead me nowhere. I grew tired of his chatter, rose, half turned my back to him and leaned against the marble mantel above the fireplace.

"You have wasted your time," I told him. "I have been going back through my memory and do not, at the moment, recall any affair with a married woman. Try the house next door. The man's out late nights, fights continually with his wife and has money. No charge for the information. I like your face."

And to a certain extent I did—liked the way it had been pushed around lately. I didn't muss him up myself because of the feeling that Oscar wouldn't approve—not good form.

"Perhaps—" he said, very slowly, "perhaps I can refresh your memory—with the lady's name. Often we are mistaken concerning a maid or a matron."

"All right," I said lightly. "Let's have the lady's name. I may have missed one or two going over the list."

"The lady," he started—stopped a minute, the smirking grin slipping over to the corners of his mouth. "She is an actress who calls herself Miss Josey Mears."

Did I lose my head? Yes—completely. I was on him like a panther. My right hand clutched his throat—my left wound around his right wrist, shaking the stub-nosed automatic to the soft carpet. For a moment I saw red. Boy! Meyer & Meyer came near to needing another clerk. A hard-headed, fast-thinking man of the world I'd always been. Now—I'll admit it—there was murder in my heart.

Somewhere, far back in my head, something snapped—seemed to send a rush of blood pulsing through my brain—my vision cleared—my heart grew more regular—I saw plainly the white face, the darkening lips and the protruding tongue—even the grapelike, bulging muscles on my straining fingers. That was all—I just opened my fingers—stepped back and let Skinny Face sink to the floor.

He half crouched there a minute, sucking

in great gasps of air. His eyes rolled up at me like a black-face comedian—he understood—felt how close he had been to death. I paced the room. Overwhelming, blood-red anger is a terrible thing!

Some feel a trembling of the whole body afterward—a reaction of weakness that knocks one completely. I didn't. There was just a deadly calm—and a brain as clear as a mountain stream, though racing as rapidly, too.

One thing stood out—overshadowed all the others. Josey Mears had been an actress. Was she still one? Had she played a part that afternoon? Certainly, unless Josey was actually married, this blackmail was a useless farce without the help of the girl.

The creature on the floor had crawled to the door—pulled himself erect and stood there, leaning against the casement—bracing his body as he clutched spasmodically for the knob. Twice he opened his mouth to speak—twice he raised his hand and pointed a finger at me. Whether his tongue was too dry, or there was something in my face that stopped him, I don't know.

But he said nothing—stood so a moment, found the knob and passed out into the hall. I heard him fumbling at the front door, followed quickly, and gave him my parting shot.

"That the—the girl is married, I don't believe," I told him, and my voice rang with a deadly meaning. "But if she is—this husband, this foreigner—who would practice physical violence, if he's a friend of yours, warn him to steer clear of my house—I make no threat, mind you, but use your imagination. I have little patience with swaggering, bullying—" I paused, just opened and closed the fingers of a hand that stretched out toward the cowering dandy who pressed his body flat against the door.

It was enough—a hand behind him sought the knob, a quick spin, a sudden turn of his slender body, and the door was open. Just a shadow there for a moment, then the faint light of gathering darkness. The villain in this latest little piece was gone. As some lad once chirped: "He could a tale unfold."

My first thought as I stepped back into the front room—had I done anything that would hurt Josey? No—I thought not. The threat of the Black Circle was, this time, an idle one. They couldn't very well give publicity to any story that would link my name up with Josey Mears. Her usefulness to that gang would be over then.

Often, one who can't pay is picked on simply to call the attention of wealthy victims to their own immediate danger. A little example pointed out to a wealthy prospect would bring good results. And Josey? Had I, after all, been a puppet in her hands? Would she work with them? Was her love a pretended, shoddy thing? Why had she urged me to run away? Did she really love me—and yet must she betray me into the hands of these vultures?

Was there a husband—a foolish, childish marriage from which she had long since escaped? Was that what these blackmailers held over her head? Were they through with Josey? Had her usefulness ended? Were they casting her off like a worn and ragged glove? And—oh, was she after all, an actress—a great actress? I clenched my fist—despite it all I still loved Josey Mears.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CALL FOR HELP

ONE thing stood out. The deeper the scheme, the more enmeshed Josey became in the clutches of the Black Circle—the more she needed me. To save one from others demands physical courage—to save one from one's self demands a moral courage; a work in which the former sinks to insignificance.

Twice I went to the phone, determined to call Josey, and twice I half lifted the receiver and let it fall back into place. Indecision with me was a new feeling—and not one that inspired confidence. Confidence—that was my strong point—and now—but I'd see Josey the next night. Then I would understand more—find out perhaps that, after all, she was only an actress—and I a puppet in the hands of the very organization I was trying to hunt down.

The habits of life are strong—that eve-

ning I spent in reading, and actually following what I read. Twenty-four hours and I'd know the truth, read what was behind those great brown eyes, pierce beneath that look of childish innocence.

Nine o'clock, and no little old stranger. Ten, and I grew worried. Why did he not come? And the check? But I passed that off with a shrug of my shoulders. Perhaps it had just been put through the bank—cash, more likely, since he seemed bent on—

The phone—sharp, imperative, forewarning. I knew even before I lifted the receiver that something had gone wrong—terribly wrong. And it had. A whisper—a faint, inarticulate voice—a sudden, spasmodic gurgle—and a single shriek—then clearly, cutting like a knife across the wires, the words:

"Help—White Circle—Black—death. And—and I have seen his face—it is—"

The distant thud of a falling body—the metallic, resounding bang of a crashing phone—a far-away rumble and the tiniest click, as if some one replaced the receiver on the hook.

The voice I knew—it was the little old man. The appeal in it I understood—he was in the hands of the enemy. The conclusion I guessed at. Somewhere among that myriad of houses murder had been done. At his home, of course, where else would he have the opportunity to call like that? And now—how could I reach him? Where did he live? How did he expect me to help him?

Central, of course. The call could be traced. But that would take time—and explanation, too. Too late to save the old man—too late also to lay a hand on those who wrung that agonizing cry from those old pale lips.

God, what a minute as I paced that room! Thinking, muttering aloud—drawing and replacing my gun. Nervous fingers—quick, uneven steps, and the door opened. Oscar entered—watched me for a moment. For the first time, I think—for my vision was not clear—there was emotion on his face. Every action, every movement of my facial muscles told him that something was wrong—terribly wrong.

He crossed the room, took me by the shoulders, half pushed me close to the mantel, and poured me a drink. But I pushed it away—the thing would pass. Josey was forgotten—the check was forgotten—those gray, honest eyes—that determined, wrinkled face—his final words of the night before, when he spoke of his fate being in the hands of God.

"It's the little old man who came here the other night." I gasped out the words to Oscar. "I must find him—Oscar—must find him at once. But how—I—"

And Oscar's face lighted up.

"His house, sir, No. —— West Ninety-Seventh Street." And as my eyes widened in surprise: "I did not like him, sir—his way of coming, his actions—I followed him the other night and—"

Good old Oscar, good old suspicious, practical Oscar. No imagination, maybe, but a great deal of common sense.

I was too choked up to speak, but my face must have shown my gratitude as I pinched Oscar's shoulder.

"The car;" was all I could get out. And Oscar understood—he was gone in an instant. I was my own man again—my sweater, my cap, my gun I slipped into the loose pocket. This was action. This was soothing to my nerves. Could I save the little old man? Hardly. Could I avenge him?

I clutched the gun the tighter. They would search his place, no doubt. Perhaps he was still alive—they sought information from him—they had not killed at once, otherwise, how the phone call? Somehow he had outwitted them. Might he not—"

I dashed from the front door. White seals, white mask were forgotten. This was no errand of paid-for mercy. This was not the White Circle—this was Stacey Lee—Stacey Lee, of the old days, bent on vengeance. In each man's soul there lurks the germ of the killer. So I thought as I urged Oscar on to greater speed as we dashed through the streets of the city. A few blocks across town, ten blocks uptown, no more—and we were there, skidding to the curb across the street, a half block away.

For the first time I realized just where the residence of the little gray stranger was. Smacked close up against the house of the Clayburns. Was this his home or

just a house rented, to be near the woman he would save? Thoughts only—no wasted time. I had dashed across the street, sought the great front door, found it open, and burst into darkness.

Cautious in the hall? Not I. A trap? Would others wait for me? I did not care. This was a time when a man fought it out, shooting as his foes shot, watching in the darkness for that orange-blue flame that directs a return fire. How steady my hand was now—how calm my nerves—how regular the beating of my heart!

Darkness below—an eerie silence and a light above—the faintest glimmer. Three seconds in the hall below, and I was on the stairs, mounting them as silently as it is possible when one takes two at a time. Seconds count in a matter like this. The light! A door at the end of the narrow hall, flung wide open, shooting its rays into a square upon the worn carpet.

Hidden foes, shadows within the darkened rooms I passed? Perhaps. But their opportunity to shoot was come and gone in a moment. I just swung down the hall—into that square of light, and the door closed softly, swung over gently by an unseen hand or a bit of a breeze.

Yes, it closed, but it did not bar me. I had slipped through the ever-narrowing crack—placed my back against it as it clicked home—and stood in the burst of light.

There was no blaze of a roaring gun, no sound to break the stillness, no living creature. Just a waving curtain by the open window, and—yes, the tightly bound figure of a dead man, who lay—soft, gentle, gray eyes staring unblinkingly up at the two electric lights on the ceiling.

Dead! That is something that a doctor didn't have to tell me. One look was enough—more than enough. There is a feeling that comes over me when I stand in the presence of death—and now, when I looked more carefully, that feeling was intensified to a certainty. A long, sharp knife—two inches of the razorlike blade glimmering above his chest—the black, rough handle standing upright.

Straight as an arrow it marked the downward passage to the dead man's heart. No need to tell you—no need to be surprised. The gray eyes of the White Circle would see no longer. My little old man was dead.

I didn't bend over the body—try to reason out why the hands and feet were bound—fathom the gruesome story connected with the telephone that stood by his head, just at the foot of the small oaken table. Each little detail told its story.

And yet what interested me mostly then was the story of that gently closing door, the draft from the window, perhaps, more than likely, but I was taking in the whole room—the open closet door, its bleak, dark background, with its hanging robes and clothes.

Gun ready, eyes ever on the window, I ducked in and out of that closet. Not the sign of a soul—I had already looked beneath the high, single bed. No other place to hide a cat in. Nothing but that open window, with its swinging drapes. I had been careful in watching that—careful to keep to the side of it—now I approached it cautiously, shot the drapes aside with the barrel of my gun, and shoved my head without.

A quick glance up and down for hidden figures, then a more careful survey. A balcony there, a little wooden affair, not a fire escape, you understand. Nothing above—the darkened sill and the faintest outline of a window. But below, the wooden floor of the little porch broke my view and I dared not step out and look more closely. A window, dark and with drawn shades, was opposite, three feet, no more. If a curious neighbor came into that room! I spun the key in the door.

Not a living soul watching me, anyway—that much was certain. And my duty now was to the dead. Slipping back into the little room, I knelt beside the body. Gruesome in a way? Yes. And, somehow, I felt responsible for his fate. Last night—the havoc I had caused at Crestwood, my rescue of Mrs. Clayburn, the destroyed letters, the man I had shot down in that first exchange of shots. All this was directly the cause of his death.

An old man who had stepped out of his part of good Samaritan to many and played with fire. And I—I had encouraged him.

His idea? Certainly. His game? Yes. His plot—the entire result of his unceasing efforts to help others. And yet it was through me that vengeance had come.

The police! Of course I could notify them—should, but I didn't. That would not be his way—not be his desire. As if I had heard his spoken words, I knew that his dying wish would be that another carry on his task to completion, the running down of the Black Circle. And then I saw it, in the middle of his forehead, but so tiny and so awkwardly made that one might have taken it for a smudge of dirt. But to me it stood out clearly—a black circle.

I had used several seals in my first night's work, laughed over them, perhaps, and yet been a bit proud of my work. Now, in one single smudge of black the enemy had overshadowed all my petty accomplishments—laid low the foundation of a slow building up of evidence against this one wanted man—this directing genius who guided blackmailers—caused suicides—and now had turned to willful murder.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WHITE, SLENDER ARM

A SEARCH of the body brought nothing—each thing that I touched I replaced, and then, in his hands I saw it. The murderer had overlooked that, a tiny slip of paper. A message, to me perhaps. The note that would reveal the identity of the Black Circle himself; for the dead, gray eyes had looked in life on the man that he had sought and recognized him. Hadn't he been about to tell me the name?

I pried apart the tenacious grip of those lifeless fingers, smoothed out the tiny strip of paper, read the lines upon it in disappointment. Yet, with a little gulp somewhere within me. The old man had died as he had lived.

> What is the death of one for the good of so many? The White Circle, directed by the hand of God, will yet strike.

Now, just what did that mean—and his hands were too tightly bound to write—besides, the paper was faded, the ink dried. Had he had a presentiment of his end, had he clutched it from the desk in the corner when they were upon him? Who was to continue the activities of the White Circle? I, but then I had just been engaged—a hired—

"Throw them up and throw them high!" I knew before the words were spoken that I was caught—trapped like a child in a plot I half expected. From the window, too, the words were spoken as heavy feet thudded upon the floor. My gun clattered to the hard boards, my hands went up, I was facing death, and I knew it—that powerful black, flat nose of a heavy automatic was not three feet from my chest.

But could he use it—use it and get away? A hope there. At the best, though, I had been recognized by an agent of this murderous organization. Would I be spared this time, to later feel the vengeance of the Black Circle? Were those two glaring eyes that watched me through the slits in the black mask marking me for death?

The man was huge and powerful—not tall—rather, the semblance of strength lay in great shoulders—hunched forward—hamlike hands—steady, knotted fingers that gripped tightly at the gun.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Something in that. They had not known me then, had not known to whom the little old stranger telephoned.

"An acquaintance of this—this man." I half looked down at the body. "I was passing—was to call on him to-night and—I find—" I shuddered. There was no need of acting out my horror—I felt that—a few days—hardly more than a few hours, and I had grown very fond of this eccentric old stranger.

If I could play the part of an innocent fool who had just happened in—well—even the powerful hand of the Black Circle would hardly take human life needlessly. This man was thinking things out. I could see the indecision in his every movement. The desire to kill in that finger that tightened about the trigger—and yet he hesitated. The Black Circle doubtless planned for one killing—not two.

"Where did you get that gun?" he asked

suddenly, and his head came up like an animal who gets the scent. Perhaps he had searched this room before I did—would know if I lied. But I tried it anyway.

"In the closet there." I jerked a thumb toward the still open closet door. "On the floor—back in the corner—my foot kicked against it."

His eyes gleamed the brighter through the slits—but I could not get what he was thinking.

"Your name—and how did you come here?"

"Fred Saunders—I came by appointment." My answers came fast enough; nearness to death never dulls my brain.

"He telephoned you." And although the words were flung quickly at me—a statement and not a question—there was just the slightest note which told me the speaker was not sure. I tried another lie.

"I called him—thought that he called for help—at least, it sounded that way. But he's dead—" And then narrowing my eyes, "Did you owe him money, too?"

The man started slightly at this. Did he read the crafty look that I put into my eyes. If I could only have seen his face! Been sure how he was taking it. For all I knew he might be playing with me—have recognized me at once. But he didn't speak like a man who moved in the social circle that held many of the Black Circle's men—and yet it was hard to tell.

Came a sharp intake of breath. And then—

"I'll search you—turn around."

That was good—a single man with a gun could never search me and get away with it. I had a trick or two of my own that I had used with his sort before. But I swung about. That he wouldn't try going through my pockets with my face toward him, I knew. His kind didn't. They see too much danger in that. Yet his very caution would be his downfall.

He would have to reach around my body to get his fingers into my vest pocket. That would bring him very close to me—too close to shoot when I grabbed that wrist and lurched backward. Dangerous! Of course—but one must take chances, and here was the time to take them. That he had been taken in by my fool talk, I did not for a moment believe.

He wanted only to gain time—to think—to piece out the puzzle that brought me—and to fit me into it—learn exactly what part I played.

The expected hand never came. Instead there was a chuckle behind me—a low, evil laugh. Nothing of humor in it—cold, cruel, heartless—and with a touch of hate, if you get what I mean.

"You can turn around again," he said slowly, but there was a new note in his voice. Not one of indecision now—he had made his plans. And it came to me that they—well—were not exactly adapted to long life and the pursuit of liberty for Stacey Lee.

I swung around again and faced him. He with his back close to the blowing curtain; I in the middle of the room—nothing between us but emptiness and—that round, black hole at the end of cold steel.

"Fred Saunders it may be." And there was a touch of swagger to his head as he spoke. "But I'd know them shoulders of yours anywheres."

Disconcerting certainly. But where had he seen them? As to that he was not going to enlighten me just yet.

"I was in the room above when you came in." He nodded his head up and down, and there was considerable satisfaction in the tone of his voice. "A rope ladder, you know. You see, I helped put out the old party. Ready and willing I was to do it."

"And you'll die for it." I quit playing the fool now. This man had marked me for death and I knew it. The time was coming when I'd have to reach out—reach for his throat. Would I get it? There was a chance, of course. Just a matter of how well he directed his lead, and if the force of the bullet would hurl me back.

"Not me." He shook his head. "Not me. I ain't one to die by the rope or by electricity—or even them itching fingers of yours." I took the hint and straightened my hands. "You see, there was a sort of duty in this job—in the old party going over. But to—well—meet you like this and be paid for it—that's oh, more than

any man has a right to expect. The old party had a hand in the killing of my brother."

"A very laudable obituary for him," I sneered. The thing now was to make this swaggering bully lose his head. I had hope again. This lad took pleasure in his killing. "You're from the Black Circle, of course?"

But I couldn't goad him into anger—or startle him into moving that gun hand.

"Yes—" he said very slowly, and I felt that his teeth clenched, for his words were not so clear—though articulate enough. "This man planned the killing of my brother, but you—" and now the hatred blazed forth in his voice, "you committed the crime. You—" I had been about to make a bid for it, but his gun was thrust forward—his chin out—his black mask close to my face. I could feel the pressure of the cold muzzle right against the—yes, the even beating of my heart. "I mean last night at Crestwood." He never let his eyes leave mine.

So he knew me. That was it. It was bad enough to have the vengeance of the Black Circle hanging over my head—and now—one of them with a personal grudge in his mind—murder in his soul—and his gun against my heart.

"You know, do you?" I could feel that his finger was ever tightening. Now was the time—no chance of life—death sure—but I'd die as I had lived—fighting to the last. I had heard of dead men's fingers clasped like locks of iron upon another's throat. We'd see what there was in it. The muscles of my arms bulged—that one supreme effort must do it—my fingers must close before—and I stooped.

"You've got me," I said. "Just a minute though—I can tell you something of interest to you—perhaps then you will let me go."

And I hadn't spoken a second too soon—I heard the click as the trigger dropped back into place.

"About the White Circle—something about him—maybe—but he's dead now. There's another working for him perhaps—if there is, and you give me the name—" And so he went on, all eagerness—a minute meant nothing to him, there in that lonely, deserted house. If he could learn something to take back to his devilish master—then he'd shoot.

Why did I encourage him? Simple enough. I was not looking at his black mask any more—not thinking of fingers that itched to wind around his throat. I was looking over his shoulder—watching a long, thin, white arm—a snakelike, curving, flitting sort of an arm—that was creeping further and further into the room from between the curtains at the window. And something black and heavy and searching now hovered above the dark cap of the man who was bent on murder.

I bit my lip and waited—I didn't talk any more. I couldn't. That thin arm fascinated me. Would it strike in time—would it strike hard enough to save me? Was it the arm of the law? Hardly—a creeping, slender bit of bone—no muscle—white and delicate.

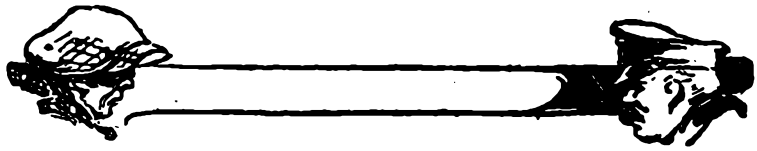
"Damn your hide! Open your face or close it forever." My friend of the black mask had not studied control. Then it all happened at once. That white arm flashed like a gigantic wing—up and down—with a strength and swiftness that belied its delicate softness.

I turned sidewise with the quickness of an eel—heard the thud of iron upon a skull—the roar of the automatic—the sharp pain in my side felt as if a red-hot iron had been scraped across it.

Black mask sagged to his knees—hesitated a moment and fell to the floor—one hand stretched out and resting upon the upturned face of the little old man he had killed. Dead! Why, the blow was like that of a steel drill driven by steam. His head had been crushed as completely as if a huge bowlder had fallen upon it.

The suddenness of the whole thing—the sharp sting in my side—that one terrible blow—the echoing roar of the gun—and the penetrating odor of powder left me for once out of the running. I just stood and stared. At what? At nothing—the waving curtains, where the arm had been, still stirred gently in the quiet breeze—no footstep echoed upon the balcony.

TO BE CONTINUED



THE BAREFOOT BURGLAR

IN the crime annals of Los Angeles, the case of James A. Gleenor presents an interesting angle on an unusually astute criminal mind. I say unusually, advisedly, since contrary to popular belief, criminal minds are not very original. Any detective will bear me out in this. The reason that our penitentiaries are filled is that the habitual criminal always leaves some mark by which the deed can be traced to him, as surely as if he had put his brand on it. The only problem is to locate him.

That is why when reformers cause certain questionable dives to be closed, the detective force of that particular city groan inwardly, no matter how heartily it may be in sympathy with the movement for reform, for the criminal has his favorite haunts just as surely as you and I have our clubs, and the closing of these haunts means a hard time to locate him.

James Gleenor was a negro—a very black negro in fact—with a real estate office in the old Golden Star Hotel. His real estate business, however, was a blind to cover up a more nefarious business. Gleenor was a Southern negro, a soft-spoken, educated man, and a graduate of a certain famous school for negroes. I knew him quite well. I was at the time a collector for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, in which company he carried a small policy, and the premium of which I collected once a month.

I used to stay and talk with him for an hour at a time, after our business had been disposed of. I found him well informed on almost every subject that came up and an exceedingly interesting man. Little did I suspect that I was talking with one of the most desperate and resourceful criminals which Los Angeles had ever known.

For several years the city had been terrorized by a burglar known to the police as the Barefoot Burglar. All they knew about him was that he worked in his stocking feet—not really barefooted—the appellation was due to the imagination of the public, which delights in romancing. Another peculiar thing about his depredations was that he never *broke* into any of the houses he robbed. Apparently he just walked in, helped himself to what he wanted, turned around and walked out again, without leaving as much as a jimmy mark or a broken window.

Night after night, reports of his burglaries came in. The police were at their wits' ends. Then one night a call came in from a certain fashionable suburb to the effect that the caller, a woman, had the famous Barefoot Burglar locked in her bedroom closet, and would they please come out and take him away. They would and they did. They found the lady seated on the edge of her bed, balancing a revolver on her knee in the approved movie fashion. Unlocking the door of the closet they found there a large and somewhat chastened negro, who permitted them to handcuff him without a struggle.

That he was not as docile as he had first appeared to be, was manifest after his trial and conviction—he got ten years, if I remember right—when two deputies were taking him North to San Quentin prison. Somewhere along the route he managed to knock out both his guards and escape by leaping through the window, handcuffed, and making good his escape for several weeks. He was finally recaptured and taken to prison.

Not long after his arrival there he broke jail and was at large for months. The officers got him again, however, and he is now serving out his time, a model prisoner, I am told.

After his arrest the officers raided his

offices in the old Golden Star Hotel, and there they found, among his effects, one of the most remarkable records of criminal activity, covering a period of six years or more. To give you an idea of how he operated, I must go back to the beginning, to his arrival in Los Angeles, and to the inception of the idea that made him one of the cleverest and the most original criminal minds which the Southern California police ever had to deal with.

Renting a suite of two rooms in the old Golden Star Hotel, whose owners were not too particular about the doings of their tenants as long as they paid their rent promptly, Gleenor established himself there as a real estate broker and rental agent. The fact that he was a negro he capitalized for all it was worth. Inserting a modest advertisement in the leading papers, he stated that he had recently arrived from the South —which was true enough—and that he had a large clientele of old Southern families who were looking for houses to lease for the winter—which was not true.

When the owners of such houses called upon him and saw that he was a negro, they were at first inclined to be wary, but his suave and gentlemanly manner soon allayed their fears that he might lease their houses to undesirable tenants. Before leaving they usually gave Mr. Gleenor the listing of their vacant house and a passkey that he might show it to his clients.

Gleenor's next step was to go to the house, let himself in and make a careful floor plan of the premises upon a sheet of paper prepared for this purpose, noting the position of the bedrooms, closets and dining room buffet; also the exits in relation to these. Then he would have a duplicate key made.

Sometimes he actually found a tenant for the house, as his records showed; more often he did not. He confined himself to the better class of homes on the West Side. People who were able to pay the rent of the properties he handled, did not relish climbing the three flights of stairs to his office. Whether he or some other agent finally rented the house, was a small matter to Gleenor. He had the floor plan and the duplicate key.

Then some time, after weeks and even months of patient waiting and watching, Gleenor would get his chance. During the absence of the new tenants, some day, he would go through the house at his leisure, always leaving the front door unlocked behind him when he departed. The occupants upon returning and finding the front door unlocked and the house robbed, would blame one another for their carelessness in not seeing that the door was locked before they left.

This was precisely the effect that Gleenor was after. Walking through an unlocked door and helping himself, was technical grand larceny, breaking into a house forcibly was burglary. In the event of capture and conviction, there was a very substantial difference in the sentence each offense carried. He had overlooked nothing!

In his office he kept an elaborate filing system of his own devising. It was a very complete affair and he took great pride in it. It contained the ground plans and miscellaneous records of every house he had robbed and of the houses he contemplated robbing. At a glance he could tell precisely how much each job had netted him.

Had any one stumbled upon this filing system, it would have meant nothing to the finder. The numerals and cabalistic figures written upon each card were of Gleenor's own devising. The key to it existed nowhere outside of Gleenor's head.

There was one rule which he always followed, a rule which earned him the sobriquet, The Barefoot Burglar, and that was to slip a pair of socks over his shoes at once upon entering a house, On being questioned by the officers why he did this, he explained that a stockinged foot rarely made a recognizable track, such as a leather shoe did, and that it also enabled him to work with greater stealth.

For six years he baffled the police of Los Angeles, until the lady before mentioned surprised him at work and backed him into her bedroom closet at the point of a gun. He is now walking softly in a place where passkeys are not handed out by the owners—the people of California.

The knife fell limply as the arm was pinioned to the spot

NINE HOURS TO LIVE

By J. Jefferson Farjeon

HE WAS TO DIE AT MIDNIGHT FOR A SINCERE CONVICTION, BUT X. CROOK, DETECTIVE, CHANGED THE CLOCKS

"SO you are to die at midnight?" said Detective X. Crook.

"Apparently," answered Henry Barthorpe, M. P. "Nine hours in which to put my house in order."

The detective glanced at the clock on the wall and suddenly shook his head.

"Not quite so long, I'm afraid, Mr. Barthorpe," he remarked. "Your clock is twenty minutes slow."

The M. P. looked surprised. "Surely you're mistaken?" he queried.

"No, I'm not mistaken," replied Crook, glancing at his watch. "The correct time is twenty minutes past three."

A slightly puzzled expression came into the M. P.'s eyes and he frowned.

"You will forgive me, I am sure, if I require a little more proof," he observed somewhat dryly. "A man who has assumed his expectation of life to be nine hours, does not willingly have it reduced to eight hours and forty minutes."

The detective rose and walked to the telephone by the window. Before he took up the receiver, he glanced through the open window, beneath which, on the lawn outside, a gardener was pottering among the roses. The bald top of the gardener's head was just visible as it bent over its work.

"I wonder your gardener doesn't wear a hat on a boiling day like this," commented the detective inconsequently.

The M. P. did not reply. This strange man interested him. There was a quiet assurance, a sense of purpose behind his every word and action which fascinated the M. P. as a worker and comforted him as a doomed human being. Mr. Barthorpe

This series began in FLYNN'S for June 20

wondered why the detective still paused before taking up the receiver, yet felt sure there was some good reason for it that he would learn in due season.

"Am I connected with the Exchange?" asked Crook. "I saw another instrument as I came through the hall just now."

"They are both in direct communication with the Exchange," answered the M. P.

"And one instrument can summon the other?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

Detective Crook now took the receiver from its support and spoke to Exchange. He asked for the time by the Exchange clock, and when he had received the information, replaced the receiver with a smile.

"As I said," he remarked. "You are twenty minutes slow. The exact time is three twenty-one. Will you alter your clock and have all the other clocks in the house altered, too?"

"You wish this?" asked Henry Barthorpe, feeling something like an unprotesting schoolboy in the presence of a dominie—an unusual sensation for him who was accustomed to domineer.

"Of course," replied the detective. "Time is a matter of some importance to us. It is absolutely necessary that every clock and watch in this house should be right—every clock and watch."

Barthorpe nodded and left the room. A strict disciplinarian where his subordinates were concerned, he never hesitated to carry out orders himself when he felt they were necessary.

He was gone five minutes and Crook did not waste the time. He examined the room thoroughly with his eyes, noted the position of the writing desk and the important-looking documents upon it, the heavy, dark green curtains, now drawn slightly aside by the window, the chairs, the carpet—thick, soft, Turkish weave—and the arrangement of the lights.

Then he took from the desk the sinister message which his host had received that morning and which was the cause of his own presence there. The message was the last and the most definite of a series, and it ran:

> If you do not drop your Anti-Strikers' Bill and resign from Parliament, you will die tonight at midnight. This is the last warning of the S. D. D. P.

He was reading the message when Henry Barthorpe returned.

"A pretty document, isn't it," said the M. P. "You think I do right in taking it seriously?"

"Yes, I'm sure it must be taken seriously," replied the detective.

"I ignored the first ones I received," continued the M. P. "Public men often get threatening letters. But these notes have been more frequent of late, and this is the first time I have been honored with the initials of my anonymous correspondent. What do you make of them?"

"What about the Society for the Destruction of Dangerous Persons?" suggested Crook.

The M. P. smiled.

"Sounds very possible. Though, I confess, I had never regarded myself precisely in that light."

"Extremists always regard their opponents in that light, Mr. Barthorpe. If I don't regard you as a dangerous person myself, it is not because I like your bill, but because I am not an extremist. The law of force—of which your bill is an example—will always evolve its rebels, who attempt to apply, by crude means, the very force against which they are rebelling. It is the tragedy of the vicious circle in which we rotate. If I try to trap criminals, I must not complain when they try to trap me."

The M. P. considered for a moment, then nodded approvingly.

"That sounds like good logic," he agreed. "All the same, I still desire to be alive after midnight, if it can be contrived. That, of course, is why I sent for you."

"Have you thought of taking a temporary holiday as a means of extending your life?"

"No!" rapped out the M. P. decisively. "I'm not built that way. I could never

run away from danger. Perhaps I'm a bit of a fatalist, Mr. Crook. A man can't run away from his doom—he can merely prolong the agony."

"Still, though you won't run away from fate, you believe in standing up to it?"

"That is my position exactly. I mean to stand up to it to-night—and to turn the tables on its more cowardly instruments if I can!"

"I'll do my best to help you," responded Detective Crook quietly. "Tell me—does your family know of your danger?"

"No. I thought it best to keep it from them."

"But suppose—the worst happened?"

"My diary gives the whole story of these threatening letters. It would explain everything."

Crook asked one more question.

"Why haven't you notified the local police?"

"Because I preferred to notify you," retorted the M. P. "You're near enough to the police to suit my purpose, and it occurred to me that you would go to work more quickly and quietly. I'm a bit of a gambler, perhaps. I don't mind taking a risk, if it also increases the risk of the other party." Suddenly he thumped the desk with his fist. "Mr. Crook," he exclaimed, "I want to catch 'em!"

"So do I," answered Crook thoughtfully "Though I also pity them. Even the blackest soul has its whiteness—if only one can find it!" He paused and looked again out of the window on the sunny lawn, purring with peace, and heat, and beauty. Then, abruptly, he added: "We'll have to stay in this room to-night."

"I am here many nights," answered the M. P. "I work late."

"Yes—I expect the S. D. D. P. know that."

II

THEY rose and went out on the lawn. In the distance, the old gardener was still pottering among his roses. When, presently, the butler emerged from the house and called to him, he gave an exclamation of surprise as he straightened himself and rubbed his grimy fingers on his apron.

"'Oo'd 'a' thought it was so late!" he trebled.

"Four o'clock," replied the butler. "Our clock was slow."

Tea was served on the lawn. It was a delightful meal, enlivened by the amiability of the M. P.'s wife and the bright chatter of his daughter. It seemed impossible that a shadow hung over this household, and that, on the morrow, the laughing voices might be hushed. On what slender threads our moods depend, and our very lives!

A breeze, blowing through some former phase of time, might have made of this laughing girl a tragic, poverty-stricken child; or the freakishness of a wave might have given happier thoughts to the sinister figure waiting somewhere for the stroke of midnight.

Over tea, a telegram was brought to the host and he gave an exclamation of surprise when he opened it.

"What is it, dear?" asked his wife.

"It's from my brother Herbert," replied Barthorpe, handing the pink form over. "He's just arrived from New York and is traveling down from Liverpool this evening."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Miss Barthorpe. "I love surprise visits. Now we'll hear all the latest American slang! Is he coming straight here?"

"He says he will telephone as soon as he reaches London," replied her father. "About half past eleven or twelve. Probably he'll have to stay at a hotel overnight and come on here in the morning."

"But I suppose you'll stay up for him, in case he phones," said Mrs. Barthorpe.

"Well, I wish he could have come this afternoon," sighed the girl. "To-morrow's Monday, and the sales, and I've simply *got* to leave early to buy hats."

"Does your brother often pay you surprise visits?" asked Detective Crook, turning to his host.

"He paid us one six months ago," answered Barthorpe, "but I asked him to give us a little warning next time. He is as irregular in his habits as I am regular in mine."

"Yes, you're much *too* regular, father," chimed in Miss Barthorpe. "You're like a bit of clockwork. I should think your diary, dad, must be the dullest thing imaginable!"

The M. P. and the detective exchanged glances. The diary of Henry Barthorpe would have been the reverse of dull to his family, could they have read certain recent entries.

Tea over, the detective retired to his host's library and, despite the heat, he did not leave it again until just before supper. He spent almost all the time in a great armchair, looking idly through the wide-open window, and half screened by one of the ample green curtains.

Nothing vital appeared to happen. A young man called to play a game of tennis with Miss Barthorpe and the detective watched them pass across the lawn on their way to the court. The young man was pitching into her father's bill, and she was roundly defending it; but soon their voices ceased, to be raised again in the more peaceful, intermittent cries of "Fifteen-all, Fifteen-thirty."

The gardener went on clipping and pottering. He worked ceaselessly, his bald head growing shinier and shinier, and only paused once to wave a tramp away.

"What are you doin' 'ere, my man?" cried the gardener.

"On'y wanted a crust," whined the tramp.

"Be off," snapped the gardener.

The tramp hesitated, but when the butler appeared on the scene, he slunk away and was seen no more.

"If you see him again, just let me know," remarked the butler as he returned to the house. "I'll tell him off!"

Later the tennis players returned, hot and happy, politics forgotten.

Suddenly Detective Crook rose and went to the door. His host was out and had told him to regard the house as Liberty Hall, but, until this moment, the detective had chosen to keep himself in the background. Now, seeing a maid in the passage, he beckoned to her.

"Is there an A.B.C. here?" he asked. "I'd like to look up a train, if I may."

"Certainly, sir," replied the maid. "I'll bring it at once."

She disappeared and returned in two minutes. Crook glanced at her as he took the book and suddenly asked her to wait. Mystified, and a little flattered by the guest's attitude, she stood by while he turned to the Liverpool trains.

There were four possible routes. The last Sunday train to St. Pancras arrived at four fifty-five. The last train to Euston arrived at five. The last train reached Paddington at nine, and the last reached Marylebone at ten twenty-four.

"Which means," reflected Detective Crook, "that Mr. Barthorpe's brother will arrive at Marylebone and will hang about for an hour before telephoning—after having hung about Liverpool for a good many hours previously."

He closed the book and returned it to the maid. Then he said:

"I wonder if you'll answer a few questions about your master? I am writing an article for one of the monthly magazines concerning his home life—his new bill makes him a person of special interest at the moment—and perhaps you can give me some particulars regarding his habits which he would find it tedious to answer himself. But the public is curious, you know," he added with a smile. "I dare say you are, yourself. You like to know your favorite actor's pet color and what your favorite author eats for supper."

The maid smiled back and murmured a vague acquiescence.

"Does Mr. Barthorpe have supper, for instance?" the detective went on. "Is anything brought to his library when he is working late?"

"Yes, sir," answered the maid. "He has a tray brought to him every night."

"Who brings it?"

"I do, sir."

"Oh! Not the butler?"

"That's funny you should mention it, sir. He's wanted to lately, but 'no,' I ses. 'I've always done it and I don't see why there should be any change.'"

"Quite right! And what is on the tray, as a rule?"

"Cheese and fruit, sir. And he has an

egg and milk every night last thing, with port wine in it."

"I suppose you prepare it?" he ased.

"No, cook does," she answered.

"Ah—that's *her* right. I expect she's done it for a good many years now, hasn't she?"

"Ever since she's been with the family, sir, and that's thirteen years, as she'll tell you."

"That's very interesting. I shall draw a picture of how a great politician ends his day! He goes to bed late as a rule?"

"Very late, sir."

"After everybody else?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then perhaps he sees to the locking up?"

"No, sir. Hilton—the butler, sir—sees to that."

"At about what time?"

"About a quarter to eleven, sir."

"Now tell me. On Sunday nights—such as this—does Mr. Barthorpe usually stay in his room till he goes to bed, or does he ever go out for a stroll in the grounds?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. I think he stays in his room," answered the maid.

Her face looked slightly puzzled, till Crook observed that great thinkers often strolled in their grounds late at night, and he was wondering whether Mr. Barthorpe had this habit. The maid's face brightened. The explanation brought Crook's questions back into the regions of journalistic logic.

"I'll have to ask the gardener about that some time," said the detective. "I expect he'll know. He lives in the cottage by the gate, doesn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I suppose he spends his evenings here and then walks back?"

"Yes, sir."

"At about what time?"

"Generally just before the place is locked up."

"Thank you," said the detective. "You've given me quite a good deal of copy." He slipped a ten-shilling note into her hand. "I'm not such a late bird as your master myself—will my room be ready for me by ten o'clock?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Thank you, sir. I'll see that it is."

She was about to go, but he detained her.

"I wonder if I may ask just one personal question?" he said. "I come from Lancashire myself and, by your accent, I think you come from there, too. Am I right?"

This pleasant man's interest was very flattering. The maid flushed slightly as she replied.

"Me from Lancashire, sir? Dear me, no! I'm from Sussex."

"Ah, Sussex. You're all from Sussex, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir. At least, all but Hilton. Now, that's funny. *He's* from Lancashire."

"Not Liverpool, by any chance?"

"Yes! So it is."

The detective smiled, thanked her again, bade her remember that he was going to turn in early and returned to the library. He felt that his ten shillings had been very well spent.

III

WHEN Barthorpe returned, just before the evening meal, he found his guest ensconced in the armchair by the window, smoking.

"Well, how does it go?" asked the M. P.

"Very well, indeed," replied Crook. "But you realize, of course, that we are in for a lively night."

"Yes. And I hardly know whether I ought to expect you to share in it, Mr. Crook."

The detective smiled.

"We are both free agents, Mr. Barthorpe," he said. "Perhaps I don't like running away any more than you do."

"Good!" exclaimed Barthorpe. "Now, what's the plan?"

"Simply this. After supper, you will retire here to work, and you will not want to be disturbed. I, officially, am retiring at ten. In reality, I shall be here with you. I have a revolver in my pocket. For the rest—time will show."

"Upon my soul!" laughed the M. P. suddenly. "This is going to be an ad-

venture! But—we'll look a couple of fools, won't we, if midnight strikes and nothing happens?"

"Don't worry—something will happen," answered Crook as the supper gong sounded.

Henry Barthorpe had plenty of courage, but toward eleven o'clock that evening, as he sat in the library with his visitor, it occurred to him that he was developing nerves. He was a fanatic for work, and during the past three months he had not spared himself. With this back history, the tension and reactions of the last few hours had taken a good deal out of him.

Externally composed, anxiety fretted at his heart and he envied the detective for his calm and passive assurance. That very assurance, in truth, was one of the factors which contributed to his discomfort in an odd, illogical way.

To be boxed up in a room with a man who appeared his superior, and upon whose quickness and judgment his very life might depend, was humiliating. He longed for the hands of the clock to hasten, till the hour of trial should strike. This inaction was the very devil!

And yet, at other times, he wished the hands of the clock would lag. If, indeed, midnight were to end his life, each living moment was unutterably precious!

It was quite dark by now. There was no moon and the lawn outside was invisible, save for the small patch illuminated by the light from the open window.

In this patch, night insects sometimes flitted, atoms of ephemeral existence that made one wonder why one clung so tenaciously to life one's self. And, once, a bat shot into the illuminated space, wavered as though it had lost its way and shot out again.

At ten o'clock, the maid had brought the tray containing fruit and nuts and cheese, and the egg beaten in milk. "By Jove—is it ten already?" the detective had yawned. "I must be turning in!" But he had not turned in.

At a quarter to eleven the gardener had been heard to say good night, and trudge away through the darkness to his cottage. Five minutes later doors closed and bolts were shot. The household was going up to bed. And afterward—silence, broken only by the ticking of the library clock and occasional scraps of conversation, delivered in quiet, low voices.

Half past eleven, a quarter to twelve, ten to twelve. Henry Barthorpe stirred uncomfortably.

"Reckon I'm gettin peckish," he mumbled. "But you won't let me drink my egg and milk!"

"Go ahead," smiled Crook.

"No, thanks," replied Barthorpe, summoning a smile also.

Five more minutes ticked by.

"Sitting a bit close to that window, aren't you?" suggested the detective. He himself was screened by the curtain.

"Ah!" jerked Barthorpe, and drew his chair back. "Funny thing my brother doesn't telephone," he added suddenly.

"Yes—he's been hanging round Marylebone station for nearly an hour and a half looking for a telephone box. Unless his train is that much late."

"Wouldn't it be Euston?" asked Barthorpe.

"The last Euston train got in to-day at five," said Crook.

"By Jove! Then—so you mean—you think the telegram was a hoax? There won't be a telephone call—"

"Yes, there'll be a telephone call. But it won't be your brother at the other end."

"Who then?"

"We'll know that in a couple of minutes."

The minutes ticked by. The clock on the mantelpiece began to chime the hour; and, in the middle of the chiming, the telephone bell rang.

"My God," murmured the M. P., and hesitated.

"Stay where you are—I'll answer it," whispered Crook. "Hang on to this—though I don't think you'll need it."

He handed the M. P. his revolver and slipped quickly to the telephone. Lifting the receiver, he listened, but did not speak himself. Barthorpe watched him with anxious eyes and breathed a sigh of relief when the detective laid down the receiver and came away.

"What was it? Who was it?" asked Barthorpe.

"Hilton, your butler—"

"Hilton!"

"Sh! Don't raise your voice. I'm sure it was he, calling 'Hello.' He's been caught beautifully. He was twenty minutes before his time. We'll describe that as a dress rehearsal, I think, with one of the principals absent."

Barthorpe frowned uncomprehendingly.

"Beyond me," he said; but the next moment his eyes lightened. "Then our clocks *were* right?" he exclaimed. "You'd planned all this?"

"I thought it might help us, if we confused the time a bit," nodded Crook. "One half the story's been told. And I think we'll have Hilton in for the other half. Quick—I want my revolver back."

He ran out of the room and returned a minute later with the frightened butler in his grip.

"Hilton! What's the meaning of this?" cried Barthorpe. "Did you ring me up on the phone just now?"

"Oh, sir! Please tell this gentleman to let me go!" cried Hilton wildly. "Yes, sir—it was me."

"But why, in Heaven's name—"

"I waited up, in case your brother arrived, sir," stammered Hilton miserably. "And I rang you up just now down the hall to ask if you'd heard anything."

"Well, that seems possible," said Barthorpe, turning to Crook with an inquiring glance.

But Crook shook his head. "If his story is true, he will soon be able to prove it," remarked the detective sternly. "In eighteen minutes, midnight—the real midnight this time—will be here. You will ring the phone in the hall, Mr. Barthorpe, and Hilton—evidently a member of our S. D. D. P.—will answer it—here."

The butler protested vigorously, but his protests were vain. And now, three people waited in the library and, having adjusted the clock, watched the hands crawl round the face again.

At three minutes to twelve, Crook made a sign to Barthorpe, and the latter slipped out into the hall. The three minutes ticked by. Then, coinciding with the mantelpiece timepiece, the distant chimes of a church clock struck the hour; and, again the telephone bell sounded.

"Go and answer it, Hilton," whispered Crook. "One moment's hesitation and you'll get a bullet."

He pressed his revolver into the butler's back and the butler lurched forward.

"Go straight to the instrument and take up the receiver," commanded Crook.

As the unhappy man reached the telephone, a figure darted up to the window, an arm was raised and a knife flashed. But the knife fell limply as the arm was suddenly pinioned to the spot. Detective Crook had leaped forward and closed the window upon it.

"Got him!" cried the detective. "Out into the garden, Mr. Barthorpe. Quick!"

Barthorpe, in the hall, heard him. In a moment he was out on the lawn and had completed the capture of his would-be assailant.

A ragged tramp had called once too often that day.

"What a devilish scheme!" exclaimed Henry Barthorpe a few minutes later, when two miserable men were securely locked in a cupboard and were waiting for the police to conduct them to their next quarters.

"Yes—even worse than your bill, Mr. Barthorpe," replied Detective Crook. "There are fanatics at both ends, you see—and fanatics always ride for a fall. They lack the vision of the middle class man."

The M. P. smiled. "You think I am a fanatic, too, then?"

"A fanatic in your belief in force, yes. Force always fails. Your bill will fail in the long run, just as such societies at the S. D. D. P. must fail."

"You may be right," sighed the M. P. "But we must all follow our destiny, as we see it. Tell me one thing. How were you able to decipher those initials? Do you know much about the S. D. D. P.?"

"Only that once I was asked to join them," replied Detective Crook smiling. "Having refused the invitation, I understand I am picked out for special attention to-morrow week!"

The rocking chair struck him and spoiled his aim

HIS LAST CRIME

By William J. Quilty
Chief of Police, Springfield, Massachusetts

THE DEEDS OF THIS COWARDLY SLAYER AROUSED ALL MASSACHUSETTS BEFORE HIS STARTLING IDENTITY WAS DISCLOSED

A Story of Fact

JUNE 24, 1908, marked the beginning of a series of burglaries and attempted housebreakings that continued uninterrupted for a period of sixteen months to a day. The crimes were obviously the work of one man. He worked alone, always armed with a big army revolver, and successfully eluded all our efforts to capture him during this period.

More than a score of burglaries were committed by this desperado in Springfield and as many more were traced to him in neighboring towns in this State and in Vermont.

A coward in all that the word means was this fellow. In nearly every instance he singled out to rob homes where he knew the men were away and the women unprotected. A singular feature of his operations was that his crimes, with one or two exceptions, were committed after the evening meal had been finished and before ten thirty at night.

Our principal difficulty in our efforts to apprehend him was that we had no description of his features. None of his victims had seen his face. This was due to the fact that he always wore a black mask, which was made of a black silk handkerchief with holes cut in it for the eyes. To render his disguise more effective and sinister, he always wore a black slouch hat.

Sometimes his mask was not worn above the eyes. On such occasions the black

slouch hat was pulled down to the eyebrows. But even then the only portion of the face visible was the bridge of the nose.

There was another singularity about this elusive burglar—he always carried his revolver in a holster, military fashion.

Sometimes he held long parleys with his victims. There is one known case where he talked with those he robbed for half an hour or so.

Planned in Advance

Some described his voice as soft and cultured. Others had it boorish and coarse. Some who had encountered him set him down as a plain, common, garden variety of crook. Others were equally insistent that he was polite, highly educated, a college man, a gentleman in search of unusual adventure, a veritable Raffles.

Stripped of the false glamour that enshrouded this masked man of mystery, the truth of it was that he was a careful, cold, calculating, cruel, cowardly, murderous sneak-thief.

A burglar in the very nature of things is a coward. But a burglar looks with scorn on a sneak-thief whose chief prey is a home guarded by an unprotected woman and children. To call this particular criminal a burglar would be to dignify him and his crimes.

Except on a rare occasion or so, there was not a man in any of the homes he broke into and robbed. Lone, defenseless women and children were his special prey. He knew exactly when the men folk were away on business, or at their club or lodge.

He was young, tall, well set up, and muscular. A blow from one of his big, powerful fists would have knocked a woman unconscious, perhaps caused death. And that he had reason to believe that he would encounter only women or children was evidenced by the rare occasion or two when a man happened to be present in the home he had marked for robbery. This made his revolver carrying a wanton act of brutality. But then the professional criminal, even at his best, is not the sort of person one would hold up as a paragon.

But there were many others things about this man's crimes which showed his cunning, revealing that his crimes were carefully studied out and planned in advance, and that he was prepared to kill even a frail, defenseless woman, if her death stood between him and freedom.

On at least two occasions that I recall offhand this fellow knew that in some adjoining home to the one he had set out to rob there was a ladder. And that he had noted the exact spot where the ladder could be found while it was yet daylight was demonstrated by the fact that he knew just where to go for the ladder when he came to maraud in the dark.

Everything indicated that in each instance the fellow had carefully examined the surroundings of the scene of his robbery and made a mental map of them. This belief was borne out by his effective escapes over fences and across lots and by the further circumstances that in some instances he removed his coat and vest and shoes before entering the house, muffling his tread with soft-soled moccasins while sneaking through the rooms. And on every such occasion he returned to where he had hidden his belongings, decamping with them.

The nearest we came to capturing him during the sixteen months of his constant burglarizing in Springfield was on November 30, 1908, when he robbed the home of Mrs. Frances E. Page, on Sheldon Street.

A Risky Hiding Place

What happened in the Page home is typical of the methods of the thief. He had effected an entrance through a window in the rear of the house. Once inside, he concealed himself in a clothes closet. Then, when he felt confident that the coast was clear, he stole into the bedroom of Mrs. Page.

At the time the marauder entered the house, Mrs. Page and her daughter were in one of the front rooms. As the hour of retirement approached, the daughter accompanied the mother to her bedroom and bade her good night.

Mrs. Page, with no thought of fear, undressed, put out the lamp, and went to bed. As she was dozing off she was roused into complete wakefulness by a noise under the bed.

She called to her daughter, who immediately lighted the lamp. The light she set on the floor. The daughter then looked under the bed.

The sneak-thief was under the bed, his face to the wall so that even the black mask could not be seen. He was devoid of either coat or vest and he was wearing moccasins. He never moved, pretending to be asleep.

Mrs. Page and her daughter did not lose much time in running from the room and summoning help.

Gilhooley's All

This gave the fellow the chance that he wanted, for when the police arrived, he had fled, taking with him several pieces of personal property and forty-five dollars which he found in a drawer in a bureau in Mrs. Page's bedroom.

His first known burglary in Springfield, when he robbed the home of Dr. Robert P. M. Ames, on Seventh Street, was somewhat similar, excepting that in this instance his presence in the house was not discovered. He gained admittance to the Ames home by cutting a hole in a screen door in the rear of the house. This cut was made near the lock. The family, at the time, were sitting on the front porch. The wire mesh cut, the sneak-thief turned the catch on the inside.

The black-masked intruder, with the revolver butt sticking out of the holster, had only half completed his work when he heard Dr. Ames and his family entering the house to go to bed. He hastily concealed himself in one of the bedrooms. There he remained until every one was asleep, when he crawled out and continued his ransacking of the house, which he did at his leisure, escaping with considerable loot.

The Ames burglary occurred June 24, 1908. Several others occurred in the next month or so, just how many I could not say without referring to the records, but I distinctly recall that it was on August 6 that the thief fired his revolver for the first time, although he had flourished it menacingly before this time.

This case, however, was not a burglary. It was a street holdup and the only time the sneak-thief played highwayman in Springfield.

The victim was Michael J. Gilhooley, a motorman on the King Street car line. When Gilhooley saw the highwayman with the black mask and a big army revolver in his hand, he attempted to escape. Gilhooley did not run far. He fell with a bullet in the thigh.

Gilhooley had only some small change in his pocket, and little of that, perhaps a dollar or so. Yet the thief took Gilhooley's all.

But it wasn't Gilhooley he had intended robbing. He had carefully planned to hold up the conductor, but the latter, as the highwayman ordered, "Hands up!" made his escape with the fares he had collected.

This holdup also was carefully planned. The robber again left nothing to chance. He knew that in that place, at that hour, he could fire the revolver without attracting any attention, as the robbery was staged at the end of the line, and after sundown the place was a dark, lonely, deserted spot.

After this crime we redoubled our efforts to capture our man. From his height, size, voice, black mask, and big army revolver, we knew it was he who had made his criminal début at the Ames home. We reasoned that he would attempt some more holdups of street car conductors and planted men in plainclothes at some of the terminals of the street car lines. But our efforts again went for naught.

Santa Claus Reversed

The thief returned to his safer calling—the robbery of homes where women and children were unprotected.

The depths of his meanness, we thought, was reached on Chirstmas Eve, 1908, when he sneaked into the bedroom of Mrs. Helen J. Fiske, on Calhoun Street, where she was tying up some presents for her children. She had gone to her room so that there was no possibility of the youngsters discovering that she was an agent of good old Santa Claus.

Hearing sounds behind her, sounds such as children might make in stealing up behind a parent, she turned round to find the

mysterious burglar glaring through the holes of his black mask, and with his fearsome army revolver pointing at her.

The little presents for the children, which she had been planning to buy all year, the intruder was appropriating!

A robbery on that holy night! A robbery of Christmas presents for the children! It seemed incredible!

Her mother love roused her spirit to revolt at this double profanation. She disregarded the sharp glare of his eyes and the deadly muzzle of the huge revolver that menaced her.

"Put them down! For God's sake don't take those—those are presents for the children!" exclaimed the mother.

The Departing Guests

You may have been born and brought up in the country. You may have lived there all your life. You may have surprised a mother partridge and her young brood hundreds of times. The experience is no novelty to you. Yet each time the mother bird flew straight toward you, out of the brush, and fell, apparently wounded, either in leg or wing, and dragged her dainty feathered body a little ahead of you on the ground, making that queer, weird noise, which seemed to say: "Kill me if you wish, but leave my little ones unharmed!" The effect was always the same.

You were overmastered by that sublime mother love. You could have captured the mother partridge alive, if you wished. But even though you were a fiend from hell itself, you would not have done so. You were in agony while you watched that mother partridge going through that age-old performance.

You knew the poignant suffering she was going through as she offered herself up as a willing sacrifice for her young. And you heaved a sigh of relief when she gave the sign that her little ones had gone to some safe and distant covert as she rose majestically and took flight to gather her brood once more under her protecting wings.

But this burglar, while abashed by that mother's fearlessness, dropped the Christmas presents for the children, but would not leave until he had been given a couple of bills. He looted, too, some silver spoons and a napkin ring.

This was the man with which we had to deal. It was a horrible experience for peaceful, staid old Springfield, whose steady growth in population and wealth and whose healthy diversity of industries have been the envy of other New England cities.

At this time I had been chief just about a year. Until I was appointed to that office we did not have a detective bureau. Two men in plain clothes did what detective work was necessary. But there wasn't a man in the department who was not up on his toes all during this time, working and praying to get his hands on this burglar.

With 1909 came more burglaries. In the early spring, while reconnoitering the home of W. M. Swan, on Bellevue Avenue, he was surprised by departing guests of the Swans. The black-masked bandit was then on the porch. It was either flight or brazening it out. He chose the latter, and could well afford to, as he had his big army revolver with him.

As the front door opened he leveled the weapon at the departing guests, crying he wanted their money and jewels. Mr. Swan was in an upstairs bedroom with his small boy. One of the guests—a lady—attempted to turn aside the revolver. Instantly the coward fired three shots. Fortunately no one was hit. Mrs. Swan, who was seeing her guests to the door, shouted to her husband not to come down.

Telltale Initials

Mr. Swan, with great presence of mind, diverted the attention of the sneak-thief from his murderous design and shouted down the stairs that he would throw down his wallet with all it contained. This he did immediately.

The thief then sternly commanded one of the women to pick up the wallet and hand it to him. This order complied with, he slowly backed off the porch, still covering the party with his revolver, and made his escape.

The next extraordinary adventure of his was at the home of one of our former alder-

men. There he surprised Miss Dell Rogers, the charming daughter of this respected citizen, and at the point of a revolver forced her to lead him to where her mother had laid her purse containing a small amount of money. He then compelled her to act as guide while he bundled up the family silver.

An aunt of Miss Rogers was sleeping in her bedroom when the criminal had impressed the niece to his service. As he passed this room he demanded money from the aunt. Being told she had none, he went on his way to the sideboard where the plate was kept.

Before leaving the house he tore the telephone wire from the transmitter to prevent the occupants from calling the police.

But once he was outside, Miss Rogers and her aunt raised a hue and cry. This frightened the robber. He dropped his loot in order to make certain of his escape, and it was recovered.

The 1909 activities of this burglar ended on the night of September 23. This was the most unusual known incident, save one, in all his career. It occurred at the home of Atkins E. Blair, on School Street, a stone's throw from the house of ex-Alderman Rogers.

What happened at the Blair home was planned as a typical second-story job, but was frustrated by Charles Simons, the father-in-law of Mr. Blair.

The criminal had surreptitiously obtained a ladder from a neighboring home and placed it against a window on the rear end of the side of the Blair home. As he was ascending the ladder, he was seen by Mr. Simons from the window through which he had planned to enter.

The eyes of the honest citizen and the marauder met. The thief unceremoniously slid down the ladder and escaped in the darkness. Mr. Simons gave chase, but the crook was too fleet of foot. He fled through flower beds, climbed over a fence, and thence to safety.

The following morning Mr. Simons found an inexpensive gold locket containing a monogram in simple script on its face. The letters were, "B. G. S." Inside the locket were the pictures of two women, sweet-faced, and evidently mother and grown-up daughter.

This locket was found in a flower bed a very short distance from the ladder, and had unquestionably been wrenched from a watch chain in the thief's slide down the ladder, and dropped from his garments as he was making his escape.

II

HIS telltale locket remained in the possession of Mr. Simons for more than six months. Friends and relatives, to whom he showed it, knew that he had it. But he did not immediately inform us of his find. In fact, it did not come into our possession until Saturday, April 2, 1910.

That the thief knew he had lost it was conclusively proved to my satisfaction by the cessation of his robberies for more than six months. The criminal well knew that if his luck did not continue and he were captured, that locket, with his initials engraved thereon, would link him up with the numerous crimes he had committed in Springfield during the sixteen months' period beginning June 24, 1908. His apprehension, he had every cause to believe, would be followed by a long term in prison, for the city was considerably wrought up over his depredations.

But the thief, when more than half a year had gone by, had calculated that the loss of the locket had not betrayed him, and on the last night in March, 1910, he felt it was perfectly safe to venture out again. Before leaving his home, he put his flash light, black mask, and other implements of burglary in his pockets and strapped a belt around his waist, to which was attached a ponderous leather holster. He then examined his big army revolver, which he had not used in many moons, and after loading it with fresh cartridges, sallied forth to resume his long interrupted profession in his former cowardly way.

He headed for one of the most rustic residential sections of the city—Round Hill, which boasts many splendid homes. Many of these houses are set back among the big trees quite a distance from the road.

One of them is the home of Mrs. Sarah J. Dow. On this night there sat down to the table with Mrs. Dow her two daughters who lived with her, Lucy and Harriet. The latter is a teacher in the Jefferson Avenue public school. They had a guest for dinner, Miss Martha Blackstone, who, like Miss Harriet Dow, taught at the school.

Miss Blackstone was a frequent visitor at the Dow home. She was unusually talented, of keen intellect, and graduated with honors from Smith College in 1893. Her constant kindliness and eagerness to serve had endeared her to pupils and teachers alike.

After dining and washing the dishes, all four women sat around a table in the back parlor trying to piece together a jig-saw puzzle picture. Not another person was in the house.

Murder Added to Robbery

It was then a little after eight o'clock. Suddenly a huge bulk filled the door leading from the hall. Miss Harriet Dow was the first to perceive the intruder. It was the mysterious bandit of the black mask, masked as usual, and carrying, as he always carried when he entered a home, a big army revolver sticking out of a holster attached to his waist.

Miss Dow, on beholding the sinister, menacing figure, gave a cry of alarm.

"Shut up or I'll kill you!" commanded the masked bandit. "Give me your money!"

The bandit, before coming in on the Dows and their guest, had ransacked the bedrooms, stealing some pieces of jewelry, including two diamond rings and a glass beaded girdle of quaint design. This last had been made for one of the daughters by a friend and contained two valuable stones. To the uninitiated the girdle of glass beads might pass for a bit of Indian craftsmanship.

Mrs. Dow was the first to speak.

"I have no money," said Mrs. Dow.

The women were now thoroughly alarmed. The bandit saw it.

He darted across the room, his big army revolver gripped in his right hand. He paused when he reached the arch connecting the room the women were in with the front parlor, the windows of which faced the street.

This was a strategic position for him as he now covered the chief means of escape to the street and at the same time prevented his victims from calling to passers-by for help.

Miss Blackstone was panic-stricken. She started up from her chair and tried to dash to safety past the burglar.

The army revolver, designed to knock down a big, strapping man in the prime of youth at the first shot, was leveled at Miss Blackstone's breast. The man fired point-blank at the defenseless woman.

Miss Blackstone, who had unselfishly given up her adult years to teaching the youth of Springfield, fell lifeless to her knees, her head resting against a couch.

The bullet had pierced her heart.

Miss Harriet Dow followed Miss Blackstone in her flight.

Everything was happening quickly.

The younger sister had rushed over to the telephone at a desk in the room the women were sitting in when the murderer started for the arch. It was her intention to call the police. The receiver was at her ear barely a second when the shot felled Miss Blackstone.

Miss Lucy Dow dropped the instrument and rushed into the front parlor at the instant Miss Blackstone fell in a huddled heap against the couch.

An Impromptu Defense

Miss Harriet Dow, as she reached the arch connecting the two parlors, slipped on a small rug and fell to the floor.

Her mother assisted her to her feet.

The murderer, seeing a shade of a window up, started toward it to pull it down.

Mrs. Dow, the moment the murderer turned his back in his hurried stride to the window, started to run out of the room. The murderer suddenly halted before he reached the window. He sensed the mother's purpose. She was going to summon neighbors to their aid.

This must not be. The mother must be slain.

The assassin made a right-about-face.

Up went his revolver, the barrel still smoking. It was pointing at the mother.

But only for a moment.

Before the murderer could pull the trigger something happened.

There were now only three live women in the house. The fourth lay dead. The murderer had nothing to fear from them. He was armed.

That which happened is worthy of going down into immortal verse with some of the many other deeds of heroism that have made Massachusetts a Commonwealth of heroes.

Miss Harriet Dow, who only a second before had been lifted to her feet by her mother after she had accidentally fallen, was not of the fainting type. She saw the murderer turn his smoking revolver on her mother. She seized the only weapon near her. It was a rocking chair.

In less time than it takes to tell the chair was hurtling through the air.

As the assassin was about to press the trigger a second time the rocking chair struck him with terrific force on the right arm, which held the revolver. The blow spoiled his aim.

The murderer did not know where this attack came from. He wheeled about with military precision. Seeing that the only person behind him was Miss Harriet, he pointed the weapon at her.

The bullet intended for the mother was destined for the daughter.

"So you want to die, too?" growled the murderer. "Then die!"

And the bullet which Miss Harriet prevented the murderer firing at her mother now struck her.

She fell to the floor.

While this was happening Mrs. Dow had managed to get out on the front piazza, where she shouted at the top of her voice for help.

At the sound of the second shot she rushed back into the house.

She found her daughter, Lucy, back at the telephone, which she had left when Miss Blackstone had been slain. Her other daughter lay on the floor, blood flowing from a wound in her head.

The murderer had escaped by running out of the door leading to the piazza as Mrs. Dow ran back into the house. Once on the piazza he vaulted nimbly over the rail and disappeared in the darkness.

Next door neighbors hurried to the assistance of the Dows. Police headquarters was immediately notified and at fourteen minutes after eight—it was after eight when the assassin surprised the four ladies while they were amusing themselves with the jigsaw puzzle—the first of our detectives arrived on the scene. Accompanying them were Sergeant Littlefield and two patrolmen, who jumped on the clanging patrol wagon as it tore madly through the streets on its way to Round Hill.

Mrs. Dow, who had maintained her presence of mind through all the trying ordeal, asked the detectives as they entered if Miss Blackstone still lived. What nobility! Her guest was her first concern.

Mrs. Dow, who had tenderly laid out the young woman on the floor beside the couch when she failed to respond to her questions, was hoping against hope.

One of the detectives, Inspector Martin P. Costello, felt the teacher's pulse. He shook his head.

Costello then went over to Miss Harriet Dow. Her pulse was beating.

The heroine recovered after a stay in the Springfield Hospital, to which she was taken. The bullet, while rendering her unconscious, had fortunately only grazed the top of the head, causing a slight fracture.

The assassin's aim had been spoiled by the impact from the rocking chair, and that same blow not only saved Miss Harriet Dow's life, but the lives of her mother and sister.

III

IT was obvious now that we had to deal with the mysterious bandit of the black mask. Everything pointed to him.

But we had as little to go on as when he had been marauding during the sixteen months of 1908 and 1909.

No one had seen his face. Our detective bureau was only three years old. But it was in command of one of the ablest detectives in the East, Captain John H. Boyle,

now retired. Under him were some able men who did splendid work on the case, notably, Inspectors Costello, Daly, Raiche, and St. Ledger. Two State detectives, McKay, of Northampton, and Bligh, of Pittsfield, were sent to our assistance. They, too, rendered valuable aid. Also aiding us were the pick of the Boston agency of the Pinkertons. Six of these were added to our force.

Further, we obtained the assistance of four-footed manhunters, businesslike looking bloodhounds, from Poughkeepsie, New York.

And the maddening part of it all was that I could not take active charge of the case, as I was lying on my back on a hospital cot. But I did not worry about the outcome, knowing that Captain Boyle and the men under him were well able to handle the case.

The city and State were aroused as never before. Our Chamber of Commerce generously offered a reward of fifteen hundred dollars for the capture of the murderer. The Mayor and the Board of Aldermen offered an additional award of five hundred dollars. And the Governor of Massachusetts, on Saturday, April 2, issued this proclamation:

> Being of the opinion that the public good so requires, the Commonwealth will pay the sum of five hundred dollars to any person who, in consequence of this offer, apprehends and secures the person who murdered Martha B. Blackstone at the home of Mrs. Sarah J. Dow, in Springfield, on Thursday evening, March 31. This offer is made because, in my opinion, the person cannot be arrested and secured in the common course of proceeding.
>
> (Signed) EBEN S. DRAPER.
>
> Executive Chamber, April 2, 1910.

Here was acknowledgment from the chief executive of the State of the unusually difficult task confronting us. But all concerned faced the task unflinchingly.

The day Governor Draper issued the proclamation was the second day after the murder of Miss Blackstone.

It was memorable not only for that, but for two other singular events.

One was the arrival of the bloodhounds from Poughkeepsie, who picked up the scent of the assassin outside the window of the Dow house through which he had entered and followed it through part of the city. A crowd trailed the dogs, all anxious to see the hounds at work and all earnestly hoping that the dogs would get their quarry. Three times the hounds attempted to trail the assassin to his hiding place. Three times they failed.

For many persons had gone over the trail of the murderer since Thursday night and the noble animals proved of no use. They knew they had failed and looked appealingly to their keeper for pardon. But it was not their fault. They were forgiven without question.

But the third unusual event of the day put us hot on the murderer's trail.

It was the turning over to Captain Boyle of the gold locket with the tell-tale monogram B. G. S. on the outside and the photograph of a mother and daughter on the inside.

This was the trinket found by Charles Simons the morning after he frightened away the bandit the previous September, as he was about to enter the home of Simons's son-in-law.

Within one hour after the locket was in his possession, Captain Boyle knew who had murdered Miss Blackstone and where he was to be found!

IV

THAT monogrammed gold locket with the miniature photographs of a mother and daughter inside was the key to the whole mystery.

Until we obtained this priceless clew every conceivable sort of speculation as to the identity of the assassin was being made. One report, which passed from lip to lip and was generally believed, had it that we were about to arrest a prominent citizen of the town, a graduate of a leading university who was known to have an army revolver and a black mask in his possession. Many estimable citizens were suspected by the populace of being the murderer of Miss Blackstone.

But the truth of it is that until we had that locket in our possession we were completely at sea as to the identity of the crim-

inal, with scores of what seemed important clews to run down.

From the beginning we were all convinced that whoever had committed the crime was thoroughly familiar with Springfield. This led us to the obvious conclusion that the assassin was a resident of the city. Our search was narrowed.

That gold monogrammed locket gave us three of the most tangible clews imaginable to work on—the monogram and the photographs of the two women. Either of the photographs would have been enough to run down the owner of the locket. They were even of greater importance than the "B. G. S.," for the assassin's face had never been seen by any of those who met him in his clever guise.

"B" Stands for Bertram

And in certain circumstances I can conceive of the actual murderer, the owner of that telltale locket, were the photographs absent, perjuring himself out of the grip of the law. For there are many men in the East whose initials are B. G. S.

But those photographs of the murderer's mother and sister—such we assumed them to be—would be mute, yet perfect witnesses in rebuttal, if the assassin attempted to set up an alibi.

The photographs were enlarged, while the city directory, the telephone book, and the list of voters were being examined.

Turning to the letter "S" in each of these three lists we found but one name preceded by the initials "B. G." And these silent volumes shrieked out the name of the slayer of Miss Blackstone. His name was—

Bertram Gager Spencer!

He was known to some of the members of the department, but only as a respectable family man, who lived a quiet life with his wife and son.

Spencer measured up to the physical description given by his victims—tall, almost six feet in height, big of bone, and powerful.

He had seen service in the Navy. He had been a member of a National Guard Unit in California.

Either of these two circumstances would account for the description we had of him concerning his manifest familiarity with an army revolver and his carrying it always in a holster.

But Spencer had no criminal record. He had relatives in the city and all over New England, many of them people of importance in their respective communities, and all enjoying the respect of their neighbors.

With such a man as the one we sought at large, it was obvious that we must move slowly, lest some all too hasty step might cause us to stumble and give him a chance to escape the disgraceful death he so richly earned.

Captain Boyle and his men, with the enlargements of the photographs in their possession called at the address listed in the directories as the home of Spencer. This was 53 Greenwich Street, a house occupied by Mrs. Edgar C. Pierce. On being shown the photographs and asked if she recognized them, she answered:

"Those are the photographs of Mrs. Spencer and her daughter."

"And they are what relation to Bertram G. Spencer?"

"Mother and sister."

But Spencer was no longer living at the house. He had moved some time before.

We learned, however, that Spencer had moved to West Springfield and lived near the old Toll Bridge with his family, in a very small street known as Porter Avenue.

Thence we tracked him. He was living in a house owned by a relative. It was a two-story and attic affair and overlooked the Connecticut River.

Delving Into His Record

We had already decided that there must be no haste. We knew we had our man. But he bore an excellent reputation among those who knew him. He was then twenty-eight years old, a native of Connecticut, where his father had kept a general store, and was quite regular in his habits.

We learned also that for a few years he had lived in the West, in the Rocky Mountain States, and on the Pacific Coast, and while in the latter place he joined the California National Guard.

Wherever we made inquiries regarding Spencer we always met with the same answer; he was a steady, hardworking, honest

fellow. True, he had run away from home as a youth. But that could not be held against him, for many men who have risen to distinction in all walks of life took French leave of the ancestral roof in a juvenile impulse to see the world.

Spencer had left Springfield in 1903. He went West, living for a time in different States, including that of Washington. It seemed that he had relatives in all parts of the country, and in some of his wanderings he had lived with them.

Our investigation disclosed that in this Western trip, which lasted three years, he was the same industrious worker that he was here. He worked on street car lines as a conductor in Seattle, San Francisco, and Oakland.

Arranging the Arrest

He returned to Springfield in 1906 and resumed his work on the street cars here. He worked for a time on the Boston and Maine Railroad as a brakeman and later went to work in the big packing house of H. L. Handy & Company, where a relative held a responsible position.

Such a man, with such a past, we could not arrest on mere suspicion, no matter how strongly convinced we were that he was the murderer of Miss Blackstone. We must have a case against him that would be copper riveted before we could make the arrest. There must be no miscarriage of justice. A blunder on our part might cause one. We bided our time. Spencer was under surveillance. He could not escape us.

A little after midnight on Tuesday morning, April 5, the fifth day after the murder of Miss Blackstone, Captain Boyle decided it was time to spring the trap.

Knowing Spencer's handiness with the revolver and not wanting to endanger the lives of any of the splendid men who had worked up the case to the point where we could arrest Spencer, Captain Boyle decided to take no chances.

There were eight or nine men under Captain Boyle when they took up strategic positions around Spencer's home.

All night long the detectives kept their vigil. They knew Spencer's room. They saw him turn out the lights as he went to bed. He of course never suspected that he was watched.

Captain Boyle wanted to get Spencer alive and without injury to any of his men. Some of them would be wanted as important witnesses at the trial—if we took him alive—and the suggestion that Captain Boyle surprise Spencer while he slept and take him prisoner was frowned upon as an unnecessary risk.

"We can take him when he goes to work in the morning," said Captain Boyle.

And this was agreed upon.

A little before daylight Captain Boyle, taking three detectives with him, crossed the old Toll Bridge and made their way to the packing house where Spencer's duties began at seven in the morning.

This was the arrangement: When Spencer left his home in the morning, which he usually did before six thirty, the detectives on guard were to follow him, and if he went directly to the packing house in Hampden Street, were not to make any move to arrest him. If, however, he should direct his steps elsewhere, suspecting that his arrest was imminent—although there was nothing, so far as we knew, which would give him grounds for any suspicion, as everything had been done by Captain Boyle and his men in such fashion that we had reason to believe that he was unaware of our activities—they were to close in on him.

Protestations of Innocence

Spencer left his home at the usual hour. He walked across the old Toll Bridge to his work. As he did so, two of the detectives on guard, who had been concealed in the office of a paper factory near by, followed him.

Spencer walked straight to the Handy packing house, where he was met by Captain Boyle and his assistants. He was told he was wanted for the murder of Miss Blackstone. Spencer declared that he was innocent and protested that he had never been a burglar or sneak-thief. He vehemently denied that he had killed Miss Blackstone or had been anywhere near the scene of the crime on the night of the murder.

Before taking Spencer to police headquarters, Boyle called up the Springfield Glass Paper Company—it was in the office of this concern that our detectives were concealed when Spencer left his home—and told his men to search Spencer's home.

V

SPENCER at police headquarters was innocence itself. He stood a long grilling without confessing to a single burglary, let alone the murder of Miss Blackstone. At nightfall Captain Boyle, who did practically all of the interrogating, had extracted nothing from him.

The cunning that the prisoner showed while undergoing the relentless fire of questions was expected. That he had displayed in numerous occasions when, at the close of an honest day's work, which brought him in enough to take care of himself and his family, he turned criminal, terrifying unprotected women with his display of force, looting their homes, and finally crowning his criminal career with murder.

The detectives who searched his home brought back with him more than a hundred articles, some trinkets and fraternal emblems, and pieces of jewelry, including rings, bracelets, stick pins, and watches.

These were all part of the loot he had obtained in his burglaries.

Some of the stolen property had been taken from the home of the Dows, where he had killed Miss Blackstone. But the most vital bit of evidence was the belt of glass beads containing the two valuable stones, which a friend had made for one of Mrs. Dow's daughters.

With various plausible stories Spencer tried to account for the loot found at his home.

"How about this glass-beaded belt?" asked Captain Boyle.

"That I bought in Albuquerque, New Mexico," said Spencer. "I bought it from an Indian squaw. I gave her fifty cents for it."

"That glass-beaded belt," said Captain Boyle with studied slowness, "was never made by an Indian. It was made, Spencer, by a friend of Miss Dow's."

Spencer paled at this. It was his first sign of weakness. He could, perhaps, with the aid of suborned testimony account for the pieces of jewelry he stole from the home of the Dows on the night of the murder, and no doubt was relying on such an explanation. But there could be no accounting in any such manner for the possession of the belt of glass beads.

Spencer, however, continued to stick to his story of obtaining the belt from an Indian squaw, but his protestations were noticeably weaker.

It was useless to continue the questioning at that time. So he was returned to his cell.

During the day, several of the persons whose homes had been burglarized, readily picked him out of a lineup as the mysterious man of the black silk mask.

But these identifications did not affect Spencer's dogged determination to clear himself.

That night, however, Spencer did not sleep well in his cell. There was a drunken man in a near-by cell. Some believe that the man in the near-by cell was not drunk. Those of this belief say that the man was a detective or a stool, who feigned intoxication. Whether he was or not is of no consequence.

But all that night the man cried out that Spencer was a murderer, that Spencer had killed Miss Blackstone.

"Spencer killed Miss Blackstone and he has been identified by Mrs. Dow as the murderer!" shouted the prisoner at the climax of one of his outbursts.

During the day Spencer's nerves were anything but the best. Dr. Boyer, the city physician, had ordered that he be given bromides every two hours.

At midnight State Detective Flynn visited Spencer's cell. Spencer spoke to him.

"There's a drunken fellow in one of the cells who said that Mrs. Dow has identified me as the murderer of Miss Blackstone," whispered Spencer. "Is it true, Mr. Flynn?"

"I can't answer that," evaded Flynn.

And all throughout the night the drunken man in the near-by cell continued his assertion about Spencer's guilt.

Captain Boyle was up early the next morning. All this splendid detective had in the way of sleep that night was a cat nap. But he was no exception. Those who worked with him had as little rest.

"Spencer, how are you feeling this morning?" greeted Boyle.

The prisoner gulped and then made answer:

"Captain, I want to talk with you alone."

Boyle concealed his satisfaction. He ordered the cell door unlocked and took Spencer to the detention room, locking the steel door behind him. Over the door was a half-opened transom. Spencer noticed it.

"Please close the transom," said the prisoner.

Then Spencer confessed the murder. It began with a cunning preface. There was much talk of his boyhood and early youth, all with a view to showing that he was not responsible for his criminal acts.

"Well," thought Captain Boyle, "here's where we are going to have insanity pleaded as an excuse for the murder."

Spencer went on. He had been grossly abused as a child, he said. And he told of a boyish theft of a jackknife from a companion.

"And since that time I've stolen all over the country," said Spencer. "I've stolen in every place I've been in. The revolver I killed Miss Blackstone with I stole from an armory in Oakland, California."

As a member of the National Guard, Spencer had access to the armory.

After describing how he entered the Dow home by an open window, he went into details concerning the robbery which had preceded the murder, and when he came to that, he said that the women began screaming, and that then everything went blank and he could only think of shooting—to scare somebody.

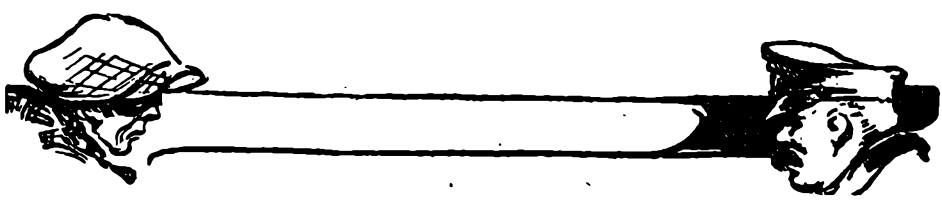
This was clever. Spencer had not intended to kill any one, and he had been irresistibly stealing all his life, and had been abused as a child. But the screaming of the women caused everything to go blank, and then he could think of doing nothing else but shooting—to scare somebody!

As we anticipated, insanity was Spencer's defense. He feigned it while in the Hampden County Jail, and was then committed to the Bridgewater State Hospital to be examined.

While there, for nearly a year, he wrote "insane" letters—the first in his life it should be noted—and on November 13, 1911, he was put on trial.

Throughout the trial Spencer continued to play the part of an "insane" man, trying to burst out of his steel cage, hurling obscenities at witnesses, and otherwise "faking," as one of the alienists of the Commonwealth characterized his actions. The trial was largely a battle of alienists, as are all trials where insanity is the defense, and the jury returned a verdict of murder in the first degree.

Everything that Spencer's friends could do for him was done. Even the President of the United States was appealed to. Powerful pleas for executive clemency were made to the Governor, but all were in vain, and on September 17, 1912, nearly two and a half years after the brutal murder of Miss Blackstone, Spencer paid the extreme penalty for his crime in the electric chair at the State Prison at Charlestown.



"It's a lie, I tell you!" He stood trembling, gripping the back of his chair

MEMORIES OF GUILT

By Ray Cummings

ONE OF MURDERED ANITA'S TWO SWEETHEARTS WAS RESPONSIBLE AND THE SCIENTIFIC CLUB CALLED UPON MEMORY TO POINT THE UNERRING FINGER

"IT may have been an accident," said the doctor, "but, gentlemen, we do not think so. The probability is it was suicide—or murder."

"What did you say her name was?" the chemist asked.

"Anita Paolino—a girl of Spanish parentage, born here in New York."

The doctor gazed around this private room of the Scientific Club in which a few of his fellow club members were gathered.

"If it were a suicide, gentlemen, there is nothing to be done. But Detective Marberry thinks there is a reasonable chance it was murder. In which case—"

"Found floating in the river, you said," interrupted the banker.

"In the Narrows, off Staten Island. The circumstances are simple. Altogether too simple, in fact. A murder devoid of complicating circumstances is usually the most difficult of all to solve. A bizarre, involved crime is generally quite easy.

"If you push your victim off a dock—using no weapon—leaving no evidence of the time or the location of the murder—and particularly if you have no specific motive—or perhaps a motive held in common by several other people—then, gentlemen, you are reasonably safe from detection."

"Did this girl get pushed off a dock?" asked the astronomer.

The doctor shrugged. "We have, as yet, no idea. Here is the sum total of our knowledge—and I think you will admit it gives little basis for routine detective work. Last week the body of a young girl was found in the Narrows. It had been in the

water rather a long time—just how long, there was no way of telling with any exactitude. No marks of violence upon it—and the autopsy showed death by drowning.

"In the morgue it was identified as the body of Anita Paolino—identified and claimed by the father and mother. Anita had disappeared on January 4th last. She was fifteen years old—a small, dark-haired girl. She lived with her parents—Spanish, but they lived in the Italian colony near Stapleton, Anita was one month under sixteen. A Spanish girl matures very young. She looked fully eighteen.

"About five o'clock on the afternoon of the 4th Anita took a five-dollar bill and started for the grocery near by. She did not return—nor did she ever get to the grocery. No one could be located who had seen her. No slightest clew, until her body was found in the Narrows.

"Her parents say that at the time of her disappearance she seemed in good health, though they had noticed and been puzzled that apparently she was depressed and unhappy for a week or two past.

"The condition of the body would indicate that she had been drowned on the 4th, 5th, or 6th of January. The autopsy revealed perhaps the most common motive for this type of tragedy—she was to become a mother—a fact unknown to her parents. Hardly an accidental death, therefore. Most likely a suicide, or a murder.

"No clews at all, gentlemen. Assume it was murder. We can't tell where it was committed, or when. The motive is clear—yet it is a motive any one of a number of persons could have possessed. The girl—so far as her parents believed—was a good girl. Gentle, sweet, obedient—gave them no trouble.

"She was remarkably pretty, and popular. She knew and liked many young men—of both Spanish and Italian families. But her parents can name only two whom she seemed particularly to favor. Both are Spanish—by name Ramón Gutierrez, age eighteen, and Julio Salta, age nineteen.

"Anita's parents liked them both—thought possibly she might ultimately marry one of them. Both were young men of good reputation, good family—in school still and with no business prospects, no reasonable prospect of marrying for some years."

The doctor's face was solemn, his voice earnest as he went on: "If we are to assume murder, gentlemen, we can only reason that the greatest probability lies with one of these two young men. A pathetic sort of thing, isn't it? Three respectable, hard-working families—with youth to bring tragedy upon them.

"The appalling youth of it! A girl of fifteen, young men of eighteen and nineteen. No vicious, depraved criminal in this—only youth, inexperienced, heedless of consequences."

The lawyer said: "Is there any choice between these two young men?"

"No. We can find no choice. One small detail I haven't mentioned. The girl had a gold locket; in it she carried a tiny picture of each of them. The locket was on her when she disappeared; it was still on her when her body was found. The pictures were wet, but both easily recognizable.

"The parents can remember no preference for either of the young men—the parents did not dream there was anything serious at all. The girl—since she did have some secret attachment—may easily be imagined hiding it with an outward careful impartiality.

"Marberry has, of course, investigated the whereabouts of Ramón Gutierrez and Julio Salta during the days in question. We believe that Anita met her death on January 4th, 5th, or 6th. I need not go into details concerning the proven movements of the lads over this period.

"Both live at home in Stapleton with their parents. On January 4th neither showed any unusual absence from home. For the 5th, Ramón's movements are not so well proven—and for the 6th, Julio has no witnesses to prove where he was much of the time.

"This is not unusual, of course, particularly as we cannot altogether credit the testimony, when favorable, of the immediate families. But gentlemen, just try yourselves to give subsequent, satisfactory legal proof of your movements during any specified period of time.

"It frequently cannot be done. Yet, merely as an indication of probability, we would have to suspect Ramón more strongly of a crime committed during the evening and night of the 5th—and Julio for one committed the evening following.

"Only an indication of probability, gentlemen. Either could no doubt have had opportunity any evening and night. Yet the laws of probability are strong factors to be considered. Probable things happen much more frequently than improbable things."

"But you don't know on which night the murder was committed," the inventor remarked.

"True. But we may be able to find out. We assume it was after dark. Also presumably during the evening, when Anita may have been lured to the water. Let us say she ran away from home, fearing exposure. Ignorance of youth—pathetic, yet so normal! Young people don't know what to do when trouble comes.

"She ran away—perhaps to hide—and get work. Or hoping the young man would marry her, and they might go away together. Conceive her hiding somewhere—perhaps with him visiting her secretly. Himself confused by this trouble—this menace fallen upon him.

"Then, one of these evenings they go out together to the waterfront somewhere, where in winter it is lonely and desolate. Fearfully, helplessly they discuss what they are to do. He knows she cannot swim. A sudden impulse—without plan, thought, or reason—and he has removed the menace and become a murderer.

"That's about the way such things occur, gentlemen. And I honestly think one of these young men did it, on one of those evenings. In choosing the man and the evening, we have a greater probability for Ramón on the 5th, and Julio on the 6th. With no distinction between the nights except that the 5th was moonlit and the 6th heavily overcast. A detail which might be turned to advantage—"

"Frank, listen," the banker interrupted. "You're getting altogether too delicately technical for me. Have you got some scheme for prying the truth out of one of those young men? If you have what is it? I can't follow this hair-splitting theory on probabilities."

The doctor smiled. "I'll be practical enough in a moment, George. Yes, I have sent for the young men. Marberry's assistant is on his way over here with them. I'm going to attempt—with Dr. Gregg's supervision—an experiment in psychology upon them—"

He indicated the alienist who sat beside him. "Dr. Gregg thinks it possible for us to learn from the guilty one—"

"Here they are," ejaculated the very young man.

II

THREE men advanced into the room—the detective's assistant and the two suspects. As the doctor had said, there was little to choose between the circumstances incriminating Ramón Gutierrez and Julio Salta, so indeed was their appearance quite similar. The same type exactly—slim, rather small youths, with sleek black hair, dark eyes with lashes almost girlish, and swarthy complexions.

They were well-dressed—presented a dapper, jaunty aspect, which in an American would have seemed effeminate, but in them was only characteristically Latin. They were eighteen and nineteen years old, yet both looked and acted as though they were well into their twenties.

As they were being introduced to the club members, they bore themselves with a quiet, unconscious dignity. Charming manners—the type of young man who is at his best on a dance floor among a bevy of girls. Yet both were obviously nervous.

Julio, rather the larger and the better looking of the two, lighted a brown-paper Spanish cigarette and puffed it furiously. Ramón, paler, more studious in appearance, smiled gracefully. He seemed somewhat more composed than his companion, but obviously it was only outwardly.

The doctor placed their chairs side by side. Ramón sat down, Julio shoved his chair further away. Their glances crossed and every man in the room was aware of a hatred smoldering between them.

The doctor was saying: "I know that neither of you wanted to come here to-night. You both resent the grilling the authorities have put you through? But you have to submit, naturally."

His tone was not particularly friendly. They gazed at him, first with surprise, then with darkening anger. Julio said: "What is it that you want of me?" A musical voice —perfect English with that slow, careful enunciation of the foreigner, a Spanish accent and a slight Spanish twist to his phrasing.

The doctor smiled. "You will learn in a moment." He met Ramón's antagonistic stare and added: "You have nothing to fear from us—nothing at all. For innocent young men, you have been put to a great deal of annoyance—indignity. That is unavoidable. You have conducted yourselves well—like gentlemen, both of you. And I know you will continue to do so."

"What is it that you want now?" It was Ramón who asked the question this time. "I have told all that I know. Also has Julio—"

"You take care of your own affair," Julio burst out angrily.

The doctor raised his hand. "No quarreling, please. You were both in love with poor little Anita—and very likely each of you thinks that the other murdered her. Do you?"

He shot the sudden question. Neither answered; but their glares of hatred toward each other were answer enough.

"Murdered her," the doctor reiterated. "Yet why should any one murder her?"

Still no answer. A sullenness seemed to have fallen upon them. Or was it that they were intelligent enough to fear a trap—knew that their safest course lay in being silent?

Abruptly Julio said: "She loved me—not him. He was jealous. He—"

Ramón cried: "That is a lie! I was not jealous of him. She did love me and I would have married her some day. We would have planned it soon—"

The doctor checked him. "None of that can be proven. The point is—Anita was murdered. The authorities believe you are both innocent or you would have been arrested days ago. But we do not *know* you are innocent. You are intelligent enough to understand the distinction. And until your innocence is established satisfactorily to the police, you will have to submit to investigations."

He eyed them narrowly. "On the other hand, each of you believes the other is guilty. You dislike each other. You both think there is a chance that the other may suddenly be proven guilty. That's what you are hoping now—and that's another reason why you're going to do what we tell you—now, to-night."

"What is it that you want?" Ramón repeated.

Julio looked up from the floor at his feet. "I will do what you tell me."

The doctor relaxed. "Of course you will. Well, that's fine." He smiled a friendly smile, which both of them made a forced attempt to answer.

"A simple experiment in psychology," the doctor went on easily. "The result of it will perhaps exonerate you both. I'm not going to explain its technicalities—you've doubtless heard of psychological tests—you know what I mean. A test of memory.

"Detective Marberry has questioned you very closely concerning what you did during the days of January 4th, 5th, and 6th. You had difficulty remembering some of your movements. Perfectly natural. If you asked me where I went and what I did two weeks ago to-day, I'd have trouble telling you.

"But what we want now is to discover just how normal your memory is. We want to be sure that you can remember details as well as you should. You understand me? If you prove to have normally retentive memories, why then we will be satisfied."

The doctor paused a moment. Both the young men seemed to be pondering his words—puzzled, and with a growing perturbation. They were intelligent youths. His explanation was far from satisfactory to them. They did not know what he meant—could not fathom the purpose in what he had just said. And the realization seemed to alarm them. Yet obviously they grasped that any sign of reluctance would be incriminating.

The doctor repeated: "It will be best for you if your memory proves normally retentive. If I've puzzled you—just keep that one fact in mind. I'm absolutely sincere—I wouldn't like to have either of you show us that you can't remember details. Not when we've had you testify so minutely to your movements during those days. It would very largely nullify your testimony. You see that, don't you?"

They nodded dubiously.

"Quite so. To be specific then. I'm going to give you an account of what happened to Anita Paolino. Oh, yes, we know what happened! We have ways of finding out. We know all about it except, unfortunately, we do not know the guilty man. Listen closely— Dr. Gregg, may I have your memoranda?"

The alienist handed him a paper. "Thank you. Now listen closely. Here is a brief description of the murder of Anita—exactly as it happened." He adjusted his glasses, and read very slowly:

"They went down to the shore. It was high above the water. They sat down on the bank. It was a lonely spot. It was not very dark because of the reflection of the starlight from the water, Anita said: 'I do not have to marry you.' They almost quarreled. Then he kissed her. She was toying with the chain of a little pendant she wore about her neck. She said something to him. He answered loftily: 'You can't make me believe it, my child.' Later he suddenly pushed her off the bank."

The doctor looked up. "You hear those brief, almost unrelated facts? Well I want you to remember them. Listen carefully— I'll read them again."

He reread the paragraph, dwelling upon each statement. The young men listened with a fascinated attentiveness. The doctor finished the second reading and put the paper in his pocket. "You keep those facts in mind, won't you? Keep your mind on them. I don't want you to forget them." He rose to his feet. "Jack, is everything ready in there?"

The very young man nodded. "Yes, sir. All ready. Who goes in first?"

The doctor crossed to where temporary curtains enclosed a corner of the clubroom —a space some ten feet square. Within this curtained area was a table with a light above it. On the table were scattered some twenty-odd small articles. A fan; a dance card; a hoop of embroidery; a gold locket on a gold chain; a ring; a large tortoise-shell comb—all belongings of the dead girl.

The doctor led Ramón and Julio forward. "Anita's things. Most of them you have seen before, of course. I'm going to let you—one at a time—gaze at this table for two minutes. I want you to regard these things closely. There are twenty-four separate articles.

"You will have two minutes to look at them. When you come out, you will write a list of all of them you can remember. It is merely a memory test. If you can name between fifty and seventy-five per cent of them correctly, it will answer our purpose and we will consider you normal."

"Who goes in first?" repeated the very young man.

"Immaterial. You, Ramón. Go inside. We'll close the curtains. I'll call you in two minutes."

Ramón entered. The doctor drew the curtains upon him. The very young man had disappeared, but no one noticed the fact.

"Time's up," called the doctor. He opened the curtains. Ramón came out; Julio went in.

Ramón said: "Shall I write them at once?"

"Yes. Dr. Gregg will give you paper and pencil." His watch was in his hand. "All right, Julio— Your time is up." He drew aside the curtains. Julio took a last look at the table and came out.

"Get your paper and pencil from Dr. Gregg."

Within five minutes the lists were made out. The doctor handed them to the alienist with whom he exchanged a sharp glance. Julio said hesitantly: "I do not know, Dr. Adams—some of these it may be are wrong."

"No matter," smiled the doctor. "We only expect to get approximate results. Stay seated. Keep your pencils—here is another sheet of paper. I want you now to write down all you can remember of those facts concerning the murder. Write just

what I read you a few moments ago—write it freely, just as you remember it.

"What Anita said to the young man and what he said to her. Where they went and what happened. Don't be alarmed! There's nothing to alarm you in this. Just write out approximately what I read you—no hurry, I'll give you plenty of time."

They began presently to write. The very young man had reappeared. Quietly, but with an obvious excitement, he drew the doctor aside, whispered to him.

The doctor's expression was triumphant. "He did, Jack?"

"Yes! I saw him plainly! Smeared it with his thumb! Can you beat it?"

"Sh!"

"Yes—but listen—what about his list? He's the guilty one all right. Did you see his list yet?"

"Wait, Jack! Quiet! We'll get him in a moment!"

III

THE written paragraphs were ready at last. The doctor took them. He conferred with the alienist.

Ramón said impatiently: "I have done what you ask, Dr. Adams. Is there more of this?"

"No. Not much more." Papers in hand, the doctor rose to his feet. His face was grim, his voice tense as he swung to address the club members.

"Gentlemen, it isn't necessary for me to accuse one of these young men of murder. Their own writing speaks for itself. One of them is plainly innocent—the other one is guilty—as guilty as though he had confessed his crime to us in so many words!"

The detective had quietly edged forward. "Sit down, you!" He waved them both back to their chairs. The color had drained from their faces. One terrified by his guilt; the other frightened by the fear that he might falsely be accused.

The doctor went on: "I need only read you what they have written, gentlemen—and every one of you will know at once who is guilty. It takes no technical skill to see it. Only common sense. Judge for yourselves. Here is the original paragraph I read them. Hypothetical facts—designed only to approximate the possible real facts. I'll read you the original paragraph again. Listen to it."

He read rapidly:

> "They went down to the shore. It was high above the water. They sat down on the bank. It was a lonely spot. It was not very dark because of the reflection of the starlight from the water, Anita said: 'I do not have to marry you.' They almost quarreled. Then he kissed her. She was toying with the chain of a little pendant she wore about her neck. She said something to him. He answered loftily: 'You can't make me believe it, my child.' Later he suddenly pushed her off the bank."

The doctor tossed aside the paper. "I read that to them twice. I distracted their minds for a time with a second—comparatively unimportant—test. Then I made them try and remember what I had read. One wrote this:

> "They walked along by the shore front, where the bank was high. He kissed her. It was lonely, but not so dark because of the bright stars enlightening the water. Her fingers were wound in a small thing which was hanging about her neck. He quarreled with her. She said: 'You cannot make me marry you,' and he said: 'I do not believe that, child.' He knocked her violently off the bank and she fell into the water."

The doctor hurried on, without comment: "And here is what the other one wrote, gentlemen:

> "They walked along where it was high above water and sat down on the bench. It was a lonely spot. It was not dark under there because the moonlight was reflected from the water. Then he kissed her and they almost quarreled. Anita said: 'I do have to marry you.' She was pulling at her locket, which was hanging around her neck. She said something else to him and he answered angrily: 'You cannot make me think it is my child.' And then he pushed her off the dock."

The doctor's glance darted over the room. "Which is the guilty memory, gentlemen?"

"The last one!" Several of them chorused it.

"Yes! Of course. This latter one—written by Ramón Guiterrez!"

Ramón was on his feet. "That is a lie!"

"Is it?" The doctor whirled on him. "I read you about a hundred words. I named some twelve separate facts. Julio Salta, with no guilty memory to confuse him, repeated most of them in substance. And in not a single instance did he change the sense of the original. But in your case it was not so easy. Your guilty memories mingled with the memory of what I read. Mingled into confusion.

"A very simple, almost infallible psychological test, gentlemen. The mind cannot distinguish a true from a false memory, once they have become mingled in the subconscious mind. It is impossible. This Ramón remembered the dock, the bench, the moonlight—and he thought I had read them.

"She wore her locket that night. He forgot I named a pendant—naturally he thought I had said locket; his mind was centered on *which of the real incidents I had named*—and he confused the details. Julio couldn't remember the word pendant. He had no guilty knowledge of the locket, and so he omitted the word.

"And that moonlight! Ramón remembered a dock, evidently with a roof over it; and the moonlight came up from the water. The moonlight night was the fifth—the fifth—the night I told you gentlemen we would have to suspect Ramón most strongly."

"It is a lie, I tell you!" Ramón stood trembling, gripping the high back of his chair.

"Is it? Well, you needn't confess—we'll convict you easily enough without it. I read you—'*She said, I do not have to marry you.*' You left out only one word—but it changed the sense completely, changed it to the real facts which your guilty memory prompted.

"Again. Julio knew nothing of the girl's unfortunate condition. I read: '*You cannot make me believe it, my child.*' Julio naturally had no difficulty in repeating the substance of that sentence correctly. But you wrote: '*You cannot make me think it is my child.*' Almost the same words, but changing the sense completely—changing it to the true fact which you knew, but Julio did not!

"You want another item of proof? The lists you and Julio made of those articles on the table over there—Julio remembered them with normal correctness. He named '*Anita's locket,*' for instance. He had always thought of it as Anita's locket, and he called it that.

"*You* named some of the articles correctly, but you omitted the locket. It had a guilty memory for you and you were afraid to put it on the list. More than that, Jack Bruce here was watching through a slit in the curtains. You opened the locket! Your picture was there. That frightened you, too.

"You were clever enough not to remove the picture, but you smeared it with your moistened thumb—left Julio's picture, but made your own unrecognizable! An impulsive, not very sensible thing to do. But you are impulsive, aren't you? You murdered Anita on impulse—we'll admit that. Oh, so you do want to confess? Take him over there, Marberry—hear him out."

Ramón had suddenly broken. "I did not plan to do it! I did not even realize I had done it—until I saw her struggling there in the water. I was mad—insane. We had been trying to plan what we should do, but there was not anything we could do. I pushed her in! Then I was frightened—but I let her go down.

"We would have told her father. But she said he would beat her. She ran away from home so they wouldn't find it out. And she was only fifteen—they would have sent me to jail. They would never have let me marry her—and her father would have sent me to jail.

"It seemed so much easier for me—this way with her in the water—and it seemed that it might be easier for her, too. I couldn't think. I just—pushed her in and stood there watching her die. And I loved her! *Niñita, mia*—I loved her! *Ay Dios mio*—"

He broke down completely, babbling in Spanish as the detective led him aside.

The doctor gazed after him. "The pity of it, gentlemen! Reckless, heedless, inexperience of youth, so self-confident until real trouble comes—then so helpless. Can we blame that pretty little fifteen-year-old

girl? Can we blame this boy of eighteen? He's a murderer—we'll make him pay a just penalty.

"And yet—doesn't it seem, gentlemen, that we who are older could convince youth how incompetent it is to get out of trouble unaided? This Anita and Ramón — how much better a solution could have been reached! Yet they were afraid to tell."

The doctor's voice turned very solemn. "This thing we have faced here to-night happens so frequently. And sometimes I wonder—just who is to blame. Respectable, hardworking families, loving parents—children who never before had caused the least trouble. Yet the girl and her unborn child are dead, and the boy is a murderer. It's rather a pity, isn't it?"

THE MAGIC CUP

YEARS ago, before any one knew of such things as coroners' inquests, sharp-witted sleuths, dissection and chemical analysis of the remains, the crime of murder, even half way ingeniously perpetrated, was in the majority of cases a successful thing from the point of view of the criminal. If a man were found dead, yet with no external traces of violence done, very little attention was paid to the case. Poisoning might have been suspected, but further than a mere suspicion it could not go. They knew no way of making evidence.

A clever alchemist was looked upon as a magician, often with diabolical intentions, who kept dark secrets of invisible and horrible deaths for those whom he had found cause to hate. Often enough, a person was found with his throat raw and empty of blood, and that was the end of it. But where death was designed upon a personage, a minister of State, a rich legator, or an emperor, more careful tactics were employed by the criminal to remove any trace of intent of violence.

Therefore, kings and kings' men found it necessary to sip their wine carefully. Often they had seen a friend, an officer in the court, turn waxen-faced from the banquet table only to throw his tortured body on the floor, be seized with violent convulsions and shrieks of torment, and finally to lie still for ever.

Poison, then a mysterious and devil-born thing, was a favorite instrument in the hands of court assassins. Poison was first known, probably, when scorpions, reptiles and the juices of roots were first known. But when was it discovered that antidotes could be found to counteract these poisons?

The first on record brings us far back to ancient Chinese civilization. Relics can be found to this day in the museum at Copenhagen of antidotes more mysterious even than the poisons they counteracted.

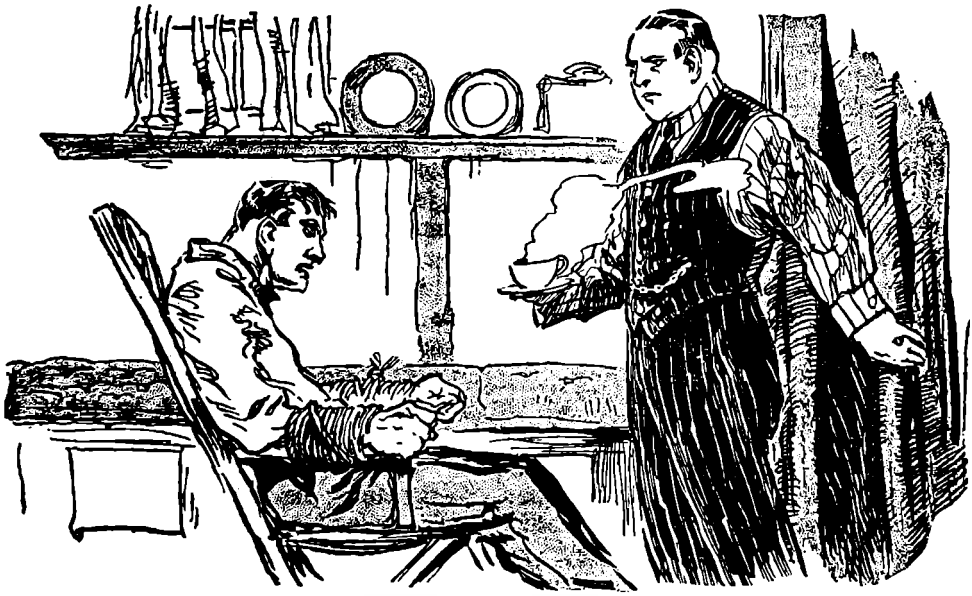
We look with curiosity at wine goblets made of the horn of the rhinoceros. Wine that contained poisonous ingredients would instantly record its deadliness upon these magic cups. Does this seem incredible? Yet it is true.

The tradition seems to have found its way from China, far into Europe as early as the fifteenth century. It is known that William the Second used such a wine goblet for that very purpose. Later, the belief spread to the Norsemen. In fact, most of the antipoisonous cups that exist to-day are of Danish make, often fantastically carved with intricate and artistic designs.

How far this tradition is true may be ascertained from the opinions of present day physicians and chemists. The explanation which they offer is simple enough, and no longer has the suggestion of the supernatural about it.

They tell us that the horns and nails of animals are both used in medicine, and contain in them a good deal of volatile salt and oils which are useful to resist poison. It absorbs and destroys malignant acids which come in contact with it.

When a bit of poisonous liquor is contained in a horn goblet, the outer surface becomes moist after a short time, and the entire cup perceptibly changes color.



A man came into the room bearing a steaming cup

THE WAGES OF PERIL

By Jack Bechdolt

HOPE HOLDS OUT A STRANGE HAND TO ROGER BLAINE AND BECKONS HIM TO A MISSION OF ADVENTUROUS PERIL

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

ROGER BLAINE, buffeted by hostile fate until he is forced to join a snow-shoveling gang on the streets of New York, is suddenly offered a profitable job. A man styling himself Mr. Larson offers Blaine sixty dollars a day for the work. The snow shoveler accepts and is given a month's pay in advance. He is to deliver a message to a woman, whose address he has, on verification of Larson's death. Larson is found murdered, and Blaine is arrested and charged

Continued at bottom of following page

CHAPTER XXVIII

WEIRD CIRCUMSTANCES

JANE CARROL released her hands from Roger's grip with a final pressure that told of her gratitude. She gave him a sad little smile.

"Partners!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid you'll find it a partnership full of trouble—yes, and danger!"

Roger urged conscientiously: "Are you sure you want to trust me? We can't go into a thing like this without complete confidence between us. And, after all, what do you know about me—"

"More than you think." The answer was prompt. "I know, for one thing, that you keep a confidence. Toby Small reported to me all about your interview with Davenport yesterday."

"He did!"

"My own orders. You see I have been

This story began in FLYNN'S for August 8

investigating you before I trusted you too far. I think you are just what you claim to be—and better!"

Her declaration, so frank, so generous, left Roger gasping. It had the same effect as that expression of Fanning's confidence that he remembered so well. He wanted to deserve it. To serve this girl who acknowledged her trust in him so honestly, he was ready to undertake anything.

"First, I want you to know all that I know and what Carl Fanning has been trying to do," Jane said.

Carl Fanning and Richard Carrol had been classmates at college and close friends ever since. They loved the same woman, the woman Carrol married, Jane's mother. Carrol's marriage did not break that friendship.

News of Richard Carrol's death brought Fanning home from a leisurely tour of Europe. Fanning refused to believe that Carrol had taken his own life or that he had stolen the securities and wrecked his own business. Unlike other friends who protested this, Fanning set to work to prove his belief. He began an independent investigation into the affairs of the brokerage house.

Jane had accepted the protection of Austin Davenport at her father's death. Davenport was unmarried, but his sister, the head of his household, made Jane welcome to The Elms and both did all they could to make her life less hard.

"Mr. Davenport helped Fanning," Jane said. "The three of us would discuss the investigation together. Davenport professed to believe Fanning's theory, that my father did not take his own life, but in his heart he never agreed with us. He doesn't believe to this day! He does not say so—but I can feel it!"

Jane said it with a crooked little smile. That smile showed her to Roger far more vividly than her words, a girl alone in a tragic situation—deserted in faith even by the man to whom she had turned for comfort. She seemed to Roger very little—very slight—and suddenly helpless.

He wanted to do something to show her that she had a friend in him, but did not know what to do.

Jane went on: "Fanning's investigations," she said, "met with unexpected success. He got track of the missing securities whose loss had bankrupted Richard Carrol. He recovered them in secret and removed them to a secret hiding place."

"Why didn't he say something?" Roger exclaimed. "Why didn't he make this public and clear your father—"

"Because he found out something else—something far more important!" Jane's voice trembled. Her dark, tragic eyes flashed with sudden fire. "Fanning discovered that my father—Richard Carrol—had been murdered."

Roger's lips echoed, "Murdered!"

He glanced nervously about the little gilt and rococo room that shared the grim secret.

About them, in other such rooms, the business of Malleaux Soeurs was going on briskly. Women models were parading the newest vanities in silks and gold cloth and costly feathers and furs. Idle women were opening purses and wasting money on idle whims. And, rubbing shoulders with all this, they shared this grim reality of theft and murder.

"Murdered!" Roger exclaimed. "But your father was found in his car. That car was in the garage. The garage door and windows were locked—from the inside! The engine of the car was running. Your father died of carbon monoxide gas, generated by the motor!"

"He was murdered!" Jane whispered vehemently. "In cold blood, by a man paid money to do it. Struck down!"

The story came brokenly from her lips. Even now, Roger saw, its details horrified her. Only a hardened, brave resolution kept her to the telling.

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with the crime. On the heels of this the tool of an underworld czar, known as Benny the Gorilla, also is found murdered. Several threats are made upon Blaine's life and he learns that he has been marked for death because of what he knows. He, nevertheless, delivers his message to Jane Carrol and is told that it announces the death of her best friend. But the girl nurses even a greater sorrow. For her father had taken his own life after the failure of the brokerage firm of which he was the head. The girl asks for aid, and Roger offers his services.

Carl Fanning had worked with patience and persistence. He had formed the theory that a murderer had been concealed in the garage at Rosebriar the morning Carrol met his death.

Carrol's regular habit was to take out the car he kept for personal use at half past nine every morning. Counting on this habit, the killer had secreted himself in time to meet Carrol when he went into the garage.

To enter the garage unseen, the murderer had used a thin bladed instrument that unlatched one of the windows at the rear.

Fanning had discovered scratches and splinters in the window frame left by this manipulation—his first corroboration of the theory.

"My father was stunned by a blow from a padded instrument," Jane said. "His assailant then locked the garage door from the inside, placed his victim in the car and started the engine going. He knew that the gas in that closed garage would finish his work. He escaped through the window by which he entered and from the outside snapped shut the catch of that window with the same instrument he had used to open it."

"But can you prove this?"

"Carl Fanning proved it. He has identified the murderer."

Roger stared incredulously.

Jane went on: "Fanning discovered a witness who saw that murderer enter the garage and saw him leave. That witness is a newly arrived foreigner, a cousin of one of the gardeners at Rosebriar. He had been warned not to visit the place because he wasted our man's time.

"Having occasion to see his cousin, he came on the land that morning and lay hid in a little wood near the vegetable gardens waiting for his cousin. While he lay there he saw a man leave the wood, enter the garage as I have described, and later leave. The murderer passed close to this witness and was recognized.

"When Fanning examined him, the witness picked the man he saw from a hundred photographs of suspects. He has made proper depositions and will testify when needed. More than that, Fanning obtained enough corroborative evidence to send the guilty man to the electric chair."

Roger exclaimed: "But didn't he go to the authorities with his information? Didn't he call the police? Didn't he take any steps?"

Jane shook her head.

"Fanning kept his information a secret. He did nothing."

CHAPTER XXIX

FANNING'S TRAP

JANE said with a little smile: "You act and look exactly like Mr. Davenport did when we got that far—"

"Davenport! Did he—"

"I told you that Davenport, Fanning and I shared our secrets. Except that he never told where he kept his evidence, Fanning told us all that he found out. When his case against the murderer was complete, Davenport insisted we should go to the proper authorities at once. He wanted the man in prison. He wanted my father's name cleared—"

"And Fanning didn't want that—"

"Oh, he did! But he knew there was more work to do. 'We have found only the instrument,' he said. 'We know the man who killed Richard Carrol, but that man is only the little fellow in the case—a murderer who works for hire—a gangster.

"'No gangster like this one inspired that murder. No gangster inspired the ruin of my friend! That was done by a man of brains who expects to profit by it. Now we must find the man behind it all—the real thief and murderer.'"

"That was good advice, I think."

"Davenport did not think so! Mr. Davenport is a man used to having his own way. He did not like it when we vetoed his suggestion. From that time on, our ways separated. Fanning confided in me, but he did not confide in Davenport. Nor did I."

"You don't trust him."

"The man, yes. I trust him implicitly. He has been my best friend. But Davenport's good judgment—no! So we left him out of our confidence."

"And what did Fanning do? What was his plan?"

Jane lowered her voice cautiously. "An ambush," she whispered. "A trap. Fanning has let the people concerned know all that he has discovered, all except where his evidence is hidden.

"'I've baited my trap,' he said. 'Sooner or later the real criminal will try to get from me the loot and the evidence that endangers him. When he does, I'll be ready for him. This is our secret, Jane. My life depends on your keeping it. I've got to think faster and better than the crooked mind behind all this, if I win—but the stake is worth it!'"

"Then," Roger whispered, "this stolen fortune in securities and the evidence of the murder—it's all hid together?"

"Yes."

"But you don't know where?"

"I don't know," Jane sighed. "That secret died with Carl Fanning. A month ago, Fanning left for Detroit. Word had come to him that somebody who knew all about the case could be found there. It must have been on his return from that trip that you met him."

"And he was followed by gunmen! Do you see what that information was? Somebody set a trap for Fanning, got him on this trip and meant he should never come back."

Jane nodded vigorously.

"I can bear that out, I think. It must have been the day after he was killed that I received, by registered mail, an envelope addressed in his hand. Inside was nothing but the half of that torn claim check.

"I didn't understand then, but don't you see? He must have known he was in great danger. He must have taken that precaution only for some very great—some vital reason! Whatever happened, he meant his work to go on."

"And he intrusted it to us!" Roger exclaimed. "Half of it to you, half to me. And sent me to you with that message about the museum. Why, yes, he said when he hired me that he wanted a liaison officer; that he must be free to work out his plans under cover and I would be used to keep him in touch with you.

"And if he died, I was to go to you with the message. You see, what he has trusted to us is the very thing he would trust to nobody so long as he lived. It can only be one thing, Jane!"

Roger used her name without thought, totally unaware that he had done so.

Both had risen. They stared at one another solemnly.

Jane said: "Of course, it is! Just what I thought, the address of the hiding place of those bonds—and the evidence!"

They were speaking in whispers, standing close together. Roger would have been less than human if he had not realized the seriousness of the undertaking. Between them they shared a secret which already had cost three lives: Richard Carrol's, Carl Fanning's and Benny's.

The murder in Coogan's Court was very vivid in Roger's memory. Benny the Gorilla, gasping his last in the kitchen of that melancholy flat in the West Side, still haunted his dreams. And just yesterday he, himself, had barely missed a bullet that would have sent him to join the others.

All holiday aspect of romance vanished from the affair. Instead, Roger saw a succession of tragic events generated by sordid motives, saw hired gunmen and unscrupulous principals moving in a maze of greed and murder lust.

All, save Fanning!

Fanning was white and his purpose was high.

But Fanning was dead, with the others.

Far better than Jane Carrol, he understood the danger of their secret.

"What must we do?" Jane whispered.

"Go ahead. Finish Fanning's work."

"Oh, we will," she said with effort.

"What I suggest is that you trust me to work out this riddle Fanning passed on to us. It's a cryptogram of some sort—the real address disguised so that others can't read it. Then let me find what he hid. After that, well, circumstances will have to decide, Miss Carrol—"

"I think you had better call me Jane, as you did a few minutes ago. It's simpler—and we may be together some time, Roger— And I agree with you, all but one thing."

"Whatever you say, of course."

"It's not that I do not trust you." Jane smiled frankly. "But simply I shan't let you do the work alone—and assume all the risk. We must work together, find the hiding place together, act together, whatever comes up—"

Roger protested violently. "No. You don't understand. Listen, please. You can't understand as I do! The people against us, they're not the sort to spare a woman. Not for a minute! And I have reason to know they'll shoot behind a man's back. They're sneaks, cowards, hired assassins, the scum of the very worst that money can procure. You must not mix up in this, Jane! Never."

His impassioned, whispered plea fell on deaf ears.

Jane only shook her head. "I forbid you to do anything without me. Do you understand?"

Roger protested more violently, but to no good.

"We work together," she said. "Or not at all. Only—it isn't fair! Dragging you into this."

Roger laughed.

"Try to keep me out!" he said wickedly.

CHAPTER XXX

BEGINNING A GRIM GAME

THERE came a rap at the door of the fitting room.

Kitty Whimple stepped in quickly.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she whispered, "but the forewoman is asking about Miss Carrol. I'm afraid they'll make it unpleasant if they should find out you're not really buying."

"Thank you," Jane smiled. "I will be down in the shop in a minute, and Malleaux's needn't worry about my buying! I'll satisfy them!"

"We must hurry," Roger whispered. "It would cost her her place, if Malleaux found out. You remember Fanning's message?"

"American Museum of Natural History," Jane repeated.

"Yes, and Gayhead Group, Lower Left. He must have meant us to begin there. Say this afternoon?"

Jane shook her head.

"The friend with whom I am staying, Anita Eldridge, made plans for the afternoon. Don't think I am letting a social engagement interfere! But if I break it, questions will be asked. It may seem unusual—and I must avoid that. Mr. Davenport's detectives are still working, you know."

"Any time you make it."

"To-morrow morning. Ten o'clock. Do you know the great meteorite, just as one enters on the lower floor?"

Roger nodded. "Ten o'clock, at the meteorite," he repeated. "Good-by—Jane."

By common instinct their hands met and clasped again.

The contact heartened them both.

Roger walked briskly from the receiving door of Malleaux Soeurs's wearing his deliveryman's hat and carrying the six dozen hat frames.

He went directly to the subway entrance at the corner of Seventh Avenue and hurried down the stairs.

The big platform was empty and he was a city block distant from the change booth. He ran to the end of the platform and tossed his burden of hat frames into the dark tunnel. The deliveryman's cap he sent after them. He had a cloth cap in his pocket and donned that. A local, bound south, rumbled in and he boarded it.

The red-faced detective in the Apple Blossom Inn had read his morning paper with a deliberation that was beginning to pall. He was very glad to see Jane Carrol step out of the elegant little building of Malleaux Soeurs and look about for a taxi.

The red-faced man summoned the waitress and paid his check. Then he recalled something with a frown. "Say, how about those toasted crumpets I ordered?"

The waitress pointed out crumbs on his place. "You must have eaten them, sir."

"Oh, those! So that's a crumpet! I always thought they were some kind of a squab!"

In the noon hour, disengaged taxis were scarce. Jane started on foot eastward across Fifty-Seventh Street.

The noon was bright with a vivid blue sky. The pavement was well filled with pedestrians. All along the windows displayed expensive frocks and furs and hats and lingerie. Expensive cars slid up to the curb to call for or deposit expensive women intent on spending money.

The sunshine and fine air and all the normal bustle of fashionable shopping about her made it seem fantastic that she carried in her possession a secret that men had been killed for.

That secret only a few minutes before she had whispered fearfully to Roger Blaine; and together they had embarked on it, a dangerous, intricate adventure. It was almost more than she could credit.

Jane went to the Ritz, where she had an engagement for lunch with her friend, Anita.

She was surprised to see Austin Davenport in the lounge.

Davenport made something of an entry.

Jane, watching him cross toward her, noticed with an amused smile—as she had noticed often — that Davenport moved with a slight strut. Never had she seen her friend and guardian completely unconscious of himself.

Behind Davenport a burly, tight-mouthed man with an alert eye moved ponderously, keeping behind him, but never far off. He was Davenport's bodyguard.

Not that Austin Davenport needed a bodyguard!

Davenport was not notoriously rich in a country and era of great fortunes. He lacked even a swollen fortune to lift him from the rut of commonplace obscurity. And lacking every claim on public attention he invented his own, a bodyguard, a staff of secretaries, too many servants. It was an expression of Davenport's revolt against personal insignificance, which was typical of the man.

"I took the liberty of altering your plans," Davenport explained, seating himself beside Jane. "You and Anita are to be my guests this noon. You'll forgive me, Jane?"

Jane nodded, her smile mechanical, her mind still occupied with thoughts of that secret interview with Roger.

"I had another reason—a less pleasant one," Davenport confessed with unusual frankness. "I wanted to talk with you, first chance that offered. Jane, have you any word from Fanning?"

Jane did not attempt to conceal her surprise. "None at all. Have you?"

Davenport shook his head. "No. Honestly, I'm worried!"

The man looked worried, Jane thought. There were signs of uneasiness in his small-featured, commonplace face. His manner was restless; ill at ease. He went on in a confidential tone: "I wish Carl would be careful! I wish he had confided more in his friends, so that we could keep better track of him! Why, I don't even know where he went."

"It had something to do with the case, Austin. He must be all right, surely!" Jane had an hysterical impulse to jump up and leave him. How could she bear it, to sit there lying about Fanning, when she knew he was dead and buried under another man's name?

"I don't like it," Davenport muttered. "He's mixed up in a dangerous affair. Trying to play a lone hand against a gang of thugs and murderers. Suppose he were—suppose they had killed him!"

His small, pale eyes gave Jane a sharp, searching glance. Her cheek was pale and her hands clenched convulsively. She turned on him with a cry. "Oh! You don't think—Austin, you have information? You're keeping it back—"

"I have no information of any sort." Davenport's tone was actually sulky. "You know how Carl treated me! Because I disagreed with him about what he should do, he ceased to honor me with his confidences."

"He had secrets from all of us," Jane sighed.

"But not from you! I'll never believe that!" Again that quick, sidelong scrutiny of her face. Davenport covered the rudeness with a sulk. "That's why I have to come to you for news."

"I'm sorry you two didn't agree! When

the only two men in the world I can depend on can't work together, what am I to do?" The tears in Jane's eyes were real; her distress genuine.

Davenport apologized hastily. "I didn't mean to distress you. I know my manner's beastly. But it's because I am worried about Carl. If I don't hear within a day or so, I shall go ahead on my own responsibility."

"What will you do?"

"Find the man who killed your father and bring him to justice."

"But Carl is the only one who knows that man. He concealed the evidence. How can you—"

Davenport patted her hand reassuringly. "I've got the best detective talent in America at work on this. What Carl found out, they can find out for me. Money can get anything done, my dear. Don't you worry! And, by the way, I think there's something else I ought to tell you. About that young man who drove in Toby's place the other night."

"Yes?"

Jane was surprised at the eagerness in her question. Caught off guard she had betrayed an embarrassing interest in Roger Blaine. She saw, with chagrin, that Davenport had noticed the betrayal and was staring, frowning anxiously.

"Austin, there was nothing—wrong—or queer about that, I hope? Oh, if you knew how all this frightens me! I feel that every thing I do is watched and spied upon; as though those people who killed my father were only waiting to—to—" Jane ended the outburst by clutching her guardian's sleeve. She was rewarded for her acting by seeing his frown disappear.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN APPOINTMENT WITH COOGAN

DAVENPORT spoke with grave unction:

"Don't worry," he said. "The young man will never bother you again. That's all attended to."

"But who is he? What did he want? What could he hope to get from me?"

"What does it matter? He did no harm. But to make sure, I had his record looked up. It seems he has a police record; rather a nasty one. I sent for him yesterday and let him understand that any further attempt to bother you would be severely punished. He will not appear again."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you for all you have done."

"But one thing, Jane—if I seem to insist, to doubt, blame it on my anxiety to help you—you are *sure* there was nothing said by him, no word or hint other than what you have already told me?" Davenport's voice trembled with anxiety.

Jane assured him, wide-eyed in her innocence. "No. There was nothing said or done. Nothing! We mustn't be too hard on him, Austin. I think he meant only to help Toby out, no matter what his past may be."

Across the lounge they both spied Anita Eldridge coming to keep her engagement. They rose.

"Don't worry about him any more," Davenport assured Jane hurriedly. "He's taken care of. As for Carl, well—I'm sure everything will be all right."

"Oh, surely!"

Anita, a willowy, a vivacious blonde, talked enough for all three. Davenport, a perfect host at lunch, had time for his own thoughts and his former haggard, worried look returned.

"That perfect duck of a ring!" Anita exclaimed, taking Jane's hand better to examine the Chinese gold bauble with its chip of jade.

"My luck ring," Jane smiled sadly. "I'm never without it. And it will bring me good luck some day. I'll keep on hoping."

"By George," Davenport cried, "I never thought of that! Wonder he didn't steal it the other night!"

"Who steal it? Oh, Jane!" Anita stared excitedly between them, scenting romance.

"Fellow who drove Jane," Davenport explained. "Our chauffeur was taken ill—or drugged, as I believe—and some stranger drove Jane to your house. Even stopped the car and spoke to her."

"Only about some fancied trouble in the

differential," Jane protested. "It was a public road. He would never have dared."

"You can't tell about a fellow like that! Perhaps your good-luck ring saved you a lot of annoyance, Jane!"

Anita wailed: "Some people have the luck! No handsome stranger ever took my chauffeur's place—or spoke to me— or anything!"

"I never said he was handsome," Jane protested with an enigmatic smile.

Roger left the subway. Climbing the stairs, he encountered Stub Coogan.

This was Coogan's usual post.

The stream of passengers in and out of the busy station included, at rush hours, thousands of girls from the lofts about, working men, manufacturers, none of them rich. It is such people who give most generously to your professional beggar—people to whom "poverty" is something more than a word in a crossword puzzle.

Coogan's little wagon was parked where it was sure to be seen. He held his broad, felt hat before him, in it his stock of lead pencils and chewing gum. There was about Coogan's red face an air of good humor that suggested he was making the very best of his unfortunate, legless condition. It never failed to appeal.

Coogan answered Roger's greeting with a wheeze. "Pencil, mister? Chewing gum. Go on, buy something, stupid!"

Roger bent down and dropping a nickel in Coogan's money cup brought his ear close to Coogan's lips.

Coogan's hoarse voice rumbled: "Got somethin' to tell yuh. But not here. Go over to the court and wait for me in the hotel. Tell Charley I said you was to—"

Roger chose a pencil and nodded.

Charley proved to be the red-eyed caretaker of the Hotel For Men Only. Coogan's message melted him to welcome Roger into a small, dingy office. From its one window he could see the court, frowzy in the daytime, dirty underfoot with stable litter, its melancholy lamp-post leaning drunkenly. He saw Coogan's little wagon come bumping through the tunnel.

The wagon went to the house next the hotel and Coogan left it, hoisting his big torso up the steps with a rapidity and skill that was amazing, when one considered he depended solely upon his hands for locomotion.

"The boss is a spry one," Charley cackled. "Why does the likes of him need legs? He can outrun both of us wit' his mitts. Come along, now, friend."

Charley led the way down the corridor, across a rear porch, and into the house adjoining. He opened the door of a room and ushered Roger in, taking his leave as he did so.

Roger stared about the large room in some surprise.

The house was old. At some remote time it had been the abode of people of means, a country place standing in the healthful suburb of old New York known as Chelsea, doubtless commanding a pleasant prospect of green fields rolling away toward the North River.

Its ground floor parlor was deep and high with a fine old black marble mantel which still held an open grate.

Above the mantel a great mirror framed in walnut rose to the ceiling and at the front of the room, between two windows, another mirror rose from the floor reflecting a curious abode.

Coogan evidently was a man of comfortable means with an interest in professional sports.

Tables were piled with sporting magazines and pink newspapers.

On the walls were fully a hundred framed photographs and colored prints.

There was a large portrait of the sturdy John L. Sullivan in his prime, autographed, Roger noted. And about him ranged most of the other and newer heroes of the prize ring and baseball diamond. Babe Ruth swung his bat, Jack Dempsey, Georges Carpentier, all the ring fraternity were there.

Zev and Papyrus were preserved in action photographs. There were programs mingled with these pictures and trophies, souvenirs of six-day bicycle races, baseballs that had been clouted for famous home runs, duly dated and signed, a pair of worn ring gloves, the trunks once used by a champion.

Bookshelves held many volumes and Roger saw that they were the biographies of Coogan's heroes.

There was a normal amount of comfortable furniture of various sorts, a good rug underfoot, a business desk against the wall and in the far corner a bed or couch that stood only a few inches off the floor, adapted to its owner's condition.

CHAPTER XXXII

ROGER'S GREATEST TASK

MOST extraordinary of all, ranged between the front windows and before the long mirror, was a liquor bar, a short, well worn mahogany bar, brass rail and all.

And the bar was stocked with pyramids of bottles and glasses and boxes of cigars and cigarettes.

In the window itself a parrot swung in a big low-hung cage, going a solemn round of exercise, clinging with its beak and claws to the wire bars, inverting itself and staring with irascible gaze upon Roger.

Coogan's home was not only his castle, it appeared to be his saloon as well.

Roger would have looked farther and marveled more—his eye had just caught a collection of firearms hung upon the wall, firearms and rogues' gallery photographs of men and women of notoriety—but his host's voice hailed him: "I hope you got an eyeful! Like it?"

The beggar was perched in the depths of a deep chair. Roger hastened toward him with the assurance: "It looks mighty fine. I had no idea—you certainly have some place!"

"Snug," Coogan wheezed. "Pretty snug. All mine." His hand waved grandly. "The whole house is mine and the one next door," he confided hoarsely. "Bought it and paid for it."

"Good work!"

"Oh, I do pretty well. I'm not kicking!" Coogan rumbled inwardly with sneezing laughter. "Get that? Not kicking any, see?"

Roger smiled at the pleasantry. "No, why should you—"

"Have a drink? Anything yuh want on the bar—got that bar out of Dad Murphy's place. Dad gave it me the night prohibition came— No? Cigar then?

"Some time maybe yuh'd like to look over all them pitchers and souvenirs. They ain't another collection like it in the country, they tell me. But just now I guess we'd better get down t' business. Draw up that chair."

Propped in his own comfortable chair, facing his seated visitor, the beggar achieved normal height. His red face grew serious. "Listen," he whispered hoarsely, "about last night, see? I've got me ways of finding things out. I can get th' straight dope, where others can't. That was a frame up to get yuh, last night."

"You know who did it?"

"I know who handled the job. He's a bad man to cross. I don't know a worse one to go up against."

"Can you tell me his name?"

Coogan reflected. "I can tell yuh his name. But it don't signify, because this party works for hire. He's a boss gunman."

"It wasn't Sinclair Lacey?"

Coogan rumbled: "How'd yuh know? Not so bad! I guess you're wiser than I thought you was."

"It was only a guess. I don't know any other boss gunman," Roger admitted. "But this Lacey—I met him once—he seems to have a nasty habit of being mixed up in everything that bothers me."

"Lacey's a big guy," Coogan reflected. "He's got a lot of jobs on all the time and he has to keep a big staff. Yuh see Lacey's a regular mayor of his part of the town. If a bootlegger wants protection, if some crook thinks a witness against him can't be intimidated, or say some rich man wants a guy put out the way, why, he goes to Lacey and gets it done. And gets it done right; yuh know what I mean?"

Roger looked very thoughtful. It is no disparagement of his courage to say that he looked scared.

"Better lay off," Coogan urged. "Lacey ain't no man to have down on yuh."

"I can't lay off! The thing I'm in isn't the sort of work a man can lay off."

The beggar's head wagged ominously. "I don't ask your business, but if it was me I'd make meself hard to find."

"If things were different, so would I!" Roger grinned ruefully. "This is a matter of keeping my word. I'll have to go through with it!"

"All right. Your affair."

"I'm obliged to you, Coogan. You've done a lot for me."

"Don't let that worry yuh! When I take a liking to anybody, I stick by him, see? You're all right! I knew it from the first. And maybe I can do somethin' for yuh now and then. I'll do me best. But if yuh got to go ahead—"

"I have. So that's the end of that."

Coogan nodded at the intent, grim face.

"Sure, I know how that is! More credit to yuh! Now look, yuh got to be careful all the time, see? Because Lacey's got a lot of men and he don't give up a job easy. Keep off the streets after night."

"I will, as much as I can."

"If yuh do go out, go to public places."

"As much as I can."

"And don't worry, see? I'll do all I can for yuh. I got me own ways, see? I'll get busy."

Roger promised.

Coogan's parting words lingered in his memory after he took his leave: "I'm not kidding! You're up against bad medicine, if it's Lacey! Watch your step all the time."

That warning took the gilt out of the sunshine.

The noonday streets seemed to him to hold a million unseen, lurking dangers.

A shabbily dressed, whiskered foreigner, clinging to a dirty slip of paper, hailed him to ask an address. Roger brushed past him with a celerity that left the man gaping.

A taxi overtook him. He plunged into a doorway. After it passed he found himself in a cold sweat.

His progress to Mrs. Whimple's was a painful series of alarms. He found his hand shaking so that he scarcely could use his latchkey.

Lacey was after him. He had no reason to doubt Coogan's word. And Lacey was possessed of a hundred eyes and as many trigger fingers, waiting to speed the lead that would end everything for him.

Roger found himself wondering if even the loquacious Mrs. Whimple was what she seemed to be, or just another of Lacey's operatives.

He went to his room.

He closed the door and mopped his forehead. "This is getting my nerve," he gasped.

He thought to stay at home until the following morning, when he must keep his appointment with Jane.

He closed the blinds, lest some lurking foe without should see him and fire. He sat down and filled a pipe and fought to get a grip on himself.

The thing was worse than shell-shock, worse than the *fear* of being afraid which he had dreaded so when first he went under fire on the other side.

"What ails me?" he marveled. "I never was like this—never at my worst!"

It was Jane Carrol that ailed him.

He realized for the first time how utterly she depended upon him and the size and value of what was staked on his ability to outwit Lacey.

Thinking over the morning's interview he came to see this, and found some measure of relief in the knowledge. The panic passed. Roger grinned again. "I went through the Argonne racket! There must have been hundreds of men trying to pot me—and they missed. What's one or two gunmen, after that!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN URGENT SUMMONS

ROGER discovered that he was puffing vigorously on his pipe and the pipe was out. He had stuffed it with tobacco methodically. He remembered lighting a match; remembered blowing the match out, but he had forgot to light the pipe!

He laughed at himself.

On his bookshelf was a copy of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice." His pipe out, Roger opened it and made himself

read. Nothing could be farther from his actuality, made up of crime and hired gunmen—of Jane Carrol, Sinclair Lacey, Stub Coogan—than this leisurely narrative of English country families and the stilted, conventional life they led. It was a good antidote for nerves.

But "Pride and Prejudice" palled.

The afternoon was fine and his room stuffy.

Roger had an itching curiosity to go to the Museum of Natural History at once and satisfy himself about what Fanning's cryptogram meant.

"*Gayhead Group. Lower Left,*" was a simple direction. There must be some object there that would give them the clew to the address of the stolen securities and that photograph that was so vital in convicting the murderer of Richard Carrol.

He had to check the impulse. His conscience forebade his taking any step without Jane. Were they not partners?

But he could no longer sit inactive on a fine afternoon. He went out and walked over to Fifth Avenue. As he swung along uptown his heart began to lift; his shoulders went back; he found himself swaggering.

Damn Lacey and his gunmen! Here he was! Let them shoot, if they dared.

Roger walked to Fifty-Ninth Street and turned into Central Park. He spent the afternoon rambling, and every minute of it he felt better for ignoring the danger at his heels. It was good medicine.

He dined uptown and returned to the Whimple's about eight thirty o'clock. He felt in splendid spirits now, not that he was ignorant of his danger, but because he had ceased to run away from it.

Joe Stein was calling on Kitty.

Roger made a third to the company and enjoyed himself.

Mrs. Whimple called him. "Somebody on the telephone for you. It's a young lady, Roger."

Roger leaped up, daring to hope it might be Jane.

All afternoon he had wondered about Jane, hoping to meet her by happy accident, scanning faces in every car that passed him, staring into stores and shops, lingering wherever people of leisure and money had collected.

No sooner was the receiver at his ear than he was delighted. The voice sounded like Jane's and the words, "This is Miss Carrol," bore out the voice.

"It is necessary that I see you at once. Something has come up. Can you come to me?"

"Where are you?"

"I've slipped away from my friends. I am telephoning from a drug store on Broadway near Kingsbridge Road. Leave the West Side subway at Fort George. It is the first drug store going north along the right hand side of the street. Can you come at once?"

"I'll take a taxi. But even that will need nearly an hour."

"I can wait that long, I think. But you know I am under strict watch. Hurry!"

"The very best I can do! Good-by, Jane."

"Good-by, Mr. Blaine."

Roger hung up the receiver.

"*Mr. Blaine!*" he murmured. "Not so very friendly after— Now, that's funny!"

He took up the receiver again. "Official Five-O" he dictated. "Could the call just completed be traced?"

A supervisor promised immediate attention. Roger fidgeted before the telephone. He felt that he was wasting golden minutes, minutes that might mean much to Jane Carrol. Perhaps even her own safety!

Yet it was odd she had called him "Mr. Blaine." After their pact of the morning, the circumstance clamored for attention. And they were leagued against men like Lacey, who, if he had any way of knowing Jane's movements, would not scruple to use a decoy. Roger recalled the Fort George neighborhood as lonely and sparsely built up, the very spot for an ambush.

The telephone signal rang at last and he was given the information he sought.

A hurried call got the attention of the drug store. The proprietor? No, sir, a clerk.

Could he describe a woman who had used the pay telephone not more than ten minutes ago? Very important.

Yes, the clerk could. The enthusiasm in his tone suggested that the young man paid attention to the girls who used the store telephone and had been impressed most favorably. "A pippin!" he declared.

Roger urged some attention to details, trying to curb his impatience with the limited intelligence he must depend upon.

The lady was about five feet four or five inches in height. Wore a close fitting little hat. Wore a swell cape with fur on it. Big, dark eyes. Black hair, the clerk thought. Couldn't recall anything else, but she had lots of class.

Roger seized his hat. He was satisfied.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW THE JOURNEY ENDED

THE drug store was still open.

Roger breathed a sigh of relief, knowing the early closing habits of small drug stores.

But Jane Carrol was not there.

He had run from the taxi, which had deposited him at the corner after a wild ride. He stood surveying the store.

A young man came from behind the screen at the rear. He wore a white jacket and his hair was sleek in a glossy, black plume off his knobby, pimply forehead. He had a knowing eye and vast assurance. Undoubtedly the clerk who had answered the telephone.

"Anything for you?"

"A young lady," Roger began. "She was to wait here for me."

"Name, please?"

Roger stared and gave his name.

"That's all right then. I guess you're the party that phoned? The lady was in here, but she couldn't wait. She said to tell you that. And she said you would find her at this address."

The youth handed Roger a scrap of paper on which he had noted a street address. Roger stared at it with some misgiving.

"Another thing." His informant fumbled in his jacket pocket. "I was to give you this."

"This" proved to be a gold ring, set with a chip of green jade.

Roger could have kissed the youth in his gratitude. Now he was sure everything was all right. The ring was a peculiar little bauble and he had noticed it that morning on Jane's finger. He did not kiss the young man, but he gave him a dollar for his trouble. "This address near here?"

"Kind of. You go five blocks north. Then you turn east toward the river. It must be just about the end of the street, I guess."

The street along which Roger hurried was lonely and uninviting.

It led eastward toward the Harlem River Ship Canal. A block or two of apartment houses, then a detached warehouse or two, sheds, yards, open lots and more open lots.

There was a cement sidewalk, but no paving, only road. Street lamps were properly placed, but several had been broken and were dark.

The sky overhead was thickening with mist and the mist along the southern horizon was colored a dirty yellow by the glow of the city, outlining the heights of Fort George in silhouette.

Ahead of him, except for the lights of one low, brick building, evidently a garage, the prospect was uninviting and dark. A coal pocket loomed up and beyond a glint or two the lights of the opposite height were reflected in the black river.

Roger stopped at the garage to inquire about the address. A negro porter directed him farther on. "Must be one of them houseboats at the end of the street, boss."

He came to the street end.

Along the river bank boats stood high and dry, launches and cruisers hauled out for the winter.

The place was a confusion of strange objects, and its one light was a small bulb glowing above the door to some craft anchored to the bank.

Roger approached gingerly.

The craft was a houseboat and the number on it was the address he sought.

He hesitated, keeping out of sight.

The tide of the ship canal was talking along the muddy banks. A chain of lighters rubbed one another and complained to the night in ceaseless groaning. A gust of wind reminded him that he was getting chilled.

He ventured nearer the gangplank that led to the houseboat and spied an object dropped there. It was a small, gray leather glove.

Jane had worn gray gloves that morning.

Roger stooped to recover the glove.

He fell forward violently, his face against the wooden gangway, conscious of a terrific pain at the base of his skull and a million lights dancing a mad fandango.

CHAPTER XXXV

A FAMILIAR FACE

THE lights persisted.

So far as Roger was concerned, their pyrotechnics seemed never to have ceased, but among them he distinguished one constant light that burned his eyes painfully. He made it out as a carbon bulb set in a ceiling.

The ceiling was low. It was composed of narrow, close-joined planks, painted a robin's egg blue. Because it was unlike any ceiling he was used to, Roger pondered on it for some time and his wandering eyes discovered that it was joined to walls, as most ceilings are and that the walls, also, were lined with the narrow planking painted that same blue.

He made out a low window, a longish window that was closed with a sliding panel, ingeniously arranged. He made out a doorway, low and curtained with red hangings instead of the usual door. He made out a plate-rail that ran about the cabin, for the room was more ship's cabin than room, and he pondered all these and decided he must be inside the houseboat with which memory connected him by painful degrees.

His face was wet and his head throbbed like a hard working engine.

Somebody said, from a vast distance: "Let him be. He'll make the grade."

Roger rolled his eyes to find the speaker, but either he was too slow or the voice was disembodied. By the time he surveyed the room, it was empty. However, the red curtain wavered as though some material body had pushed it aside in passing.

He found that he was reclining, half seated, half at length, in a deep, easy chair. He tried to lift his hands to wipe his face. His hands were immovable. He focused his vision on them and made out that his arms had been bound with light, strong rope to the arms of the heavy chair. His legs, also, were tied at the ankles. He was incapable of doing anything.

The houseboat cabin was simply furnished. Two ranks of bunks occupied one side of the room. There was a table fixed to the floor in the center and room for several chairs, including the big one he was tied to.

There were lockers, too, with tops cushioned in the same red stuff as the curtain. The walls were bare of ornament except for a cheap thermometer that advertised some hopeful pants presser who made old clothing look like new.

There must be another room, perhaps several, but Roger could only guess. The structure had a disconcerting way of swaying unexpectedly, creaking slightly as it bowed to the current, and in his present state this made him very giddy. The silence was murmurous with the lap of water about the scow that was its foundation.

An odor reached Roger's nostrils, the delicious smell of coffee preparing. While he sniffed, the red curtain at the door waved aside and a man came into the room, bearing a steaming cup.

The man was Sinclair Lacey.

Lacey was in his shirt sleeves, but otherwise as immaculate and expensively dressed as the night Roger saw him in the restaurant, their first meeting.

"Swallow some of this," Lacey advised, holding the strong coffee to Roger's lips. "Don't be afraid of it, I'm not going to poison you!"

The coffee helped clear Roger's head. He finished the cup and nodded his thanks at Lacey. Lacey put the cup on the table, drew a chair near and smiled at his involuntary guest without any trace of humor or good will, a merely mechanical lifting of the lips. "Well, Mr. Tom Smith of Akron, Ohio!"

"Drop it!" Roger groaned. "Let's lay our cards on the table. You want some-

thing, or you would have shot me first and asked questions afterward."

"Quite right, Blaine. I want something from you." Lacey settled back in his chair. He fumbled for a platinum cigarette case, picked out a cigarette—Roger noted his cigarettes were monogrammed—and lighted it from a clever little jeweled pocket-flint.

Meeting his enemy face to face, Roger studied him keenly.

Outwardly, in all material things, Lacey was a radiant refutation of the supposedly degenerating effect of a life of crime. The man's skin was pink with health, his eye clear and his hand steady. His taste in clothes either was born in him or had taken years of the careful study of a gentleman.

Perhaps he had an excellent valet. A gunman like Lacey could have most anything he wanted. Had Roger met the man under other circumstances he would have put him down for a prosperous broker or banker or bond salesman, certainly as a man whose life calling had to do with money.

For every visible and outward sign about Lacey said that money was his mainspring; avarice his vice. From Lacey there was nothing to hope for in the way of charity or fair play.

Yet it was to a sense of generosity that Roger appealed. "Lacey, you got me cleverly enough! Would you mind telling me just one thing, to set my mind at rest? Did Miss Carrol actually telephone to me, or was that your bait?"

In spite of his anxiety to make the question casual, Roger's voice showed a little of the worry in his heart.

Lacey blew a cloud of smoke and considered. "That was my bait—" he conceded.

A tremendous weight lifted from Roger's heart. Jane was safe.

"I picked a woman that looks enough like her to answer a general description," Lacey went on.

"Not to mention stealing her jewelry and gloves—"

"Jewelry and gloves can be easily duplicated."

They stared at each other gravely.

"Thanks," Roger acknowledged the information. "Do you mind my saying that you're a clever crook? Now, what can I do for you?"

"You can listen a few minutes, Blaine. If you're at all fond of your own life, or the safety of that girl you spoke of, just listen and consider what I say."

CHAPTER XXXVI

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

LACEY laid aside his cigarette and brushed a spot of ash from his knee.

"I played mighty fair with you," the king of gunmen said sternly. "Didn't I tell you to stay away from that girl? Didn't I warn you— You must have known what you went up against, disregarding that. Why, even Joe Stein could tell you about me!"

Lacey's lip curled at the thought of the police. It was curious to see how far above the law the man held himself. So safe!

"You warned me, Lacey. You even went to the trouble of trying to shoot me first. I suppose that was just to emphasize your warnings?" Face to face with the danger that had menaced him, Roger ceased to worry, even to think of consequences.

Of the immediate future he expected nothing but death at Lacey's hands—whatever Lacey might promise otherwise. Roger put no faith in his promises, even though Lacey's bargain should be one which he could honorably accept. He didn't care. While he lived, he meant to prove to this gunman that he could not terrify him.

"The man that missed you will never work for me again," said Lacey dryly. "But it happens, now, that we need you alive, to answer a few questions. How about it, do you want to keep on living?"

"I wouldn't care to, if it was to be a partner in any of your business."

"Be yourself! You haven't the brains or the guts to be a partner in any of my business!" Lacey reddened a little. He was thin skinned, after all!

"What do you offer for information?"

"A running start out of the country. Yes, I'll do more. If you need the money, I'll buy you a ticket myself."

"A ticket to where?"

Lacey considered. "I'll tell you what! I'll get you passage on a sailing ship, a freighter bound for San Francisco by way of the Horn. That'll take care of you for long enough."

Roger laughed mirthlessly. "Don't take me for a fool! Did you think I'd believe that? The minute you get what you're after—whatever that may be—you'll shoot me in the back!"

"Not if I say I won't!" Lacey exclaimed earnestly. There was a puzzling sincerity about the words. He seemed to take no offense whatever at the implication of his rascality. He was merely in earnest.

"If I tell you I won't shoot you in the back, I won't! My word is good, Blaine. You can ask anybody. A man like me that does business on honor has got to keep his word good. It's his stock in trade!"

Roger believed him. It was no mistaken fancy to assume that Lacey was in earnest. The curious psychology that made nothing of shooting a man in the back, still vaunted its word of honor because it was stock in trade! Roger understood for the first time that he actually could buy his freedom. But at what price?

"You want me out of the country? Well, what else?"

As he spoke Roger noticed something. Keeping up the best appearance of interest in Lacey he could manage, he devoted his real attention to this other development.

The red curtain that closed the door of the room or cabin hung within an inch of the floor. In the crack between the curtain and the floor something had moved, something that caught a gleam of light and reflected it back. Roger thought it was the highy polished toe of a shoe.

He watched narrowly. The movement came again, silent, restless little movement that proved it was a shoe, a man's shoe.

The owner of that shoe must be concealed just behind the curtain. He had grown fatigued with his vigil and shifted his weight from foot to foot.

"What else do you want?" Roger repeated, turning his eyes on Lacey.

"Information that you've got. I don't mind saying that if I had found it on you, as I hoped, you wouldn't be here making bargains now. You're in luck!"

"Let's hear your questions, Lacey."

The restless boot toe ceased to move, as though the hidden listener held himself at strict attention.

Roger realized with the keenness of an electric shock that he was close to an answer to the mystery that began with the murder at Coogan's Court. Perhaps just a few feet of distance and a red cloth curtain separated him from the answer.

There was somebody behind it all, the instigator of Richard Carrol's ruin and death.

That same man, if Fanning's theory was correct, was searching now for the wealth that had been stolen from him and for the photograph of a hired assassin which he knew might convict him of murder.

Who but that man could have inspired Lacey?

What other had any interest in Roger Blaine?

Roger raged inwardly at the thought his hands were not free. If only he could seize that coffee cup, standing so near by and hurl it into the flimsy barrier that hid the listener's face! If, some way, he could tear that curtain down and look, just once, on the man behind it all, death would be no great price to pay!

Lacey was speaking and Roger fixed his attention on the words. "What I want from you is an address that was given you by a man named Larson in Coogan's Court the night he was killed. You've got it. Don't try to stall me."

"Yes, I know it. I know where the stuff is hidden."

Roger fancied that the red curtain shook, as though the listener behind it had been betrayed into movement by his excitement.

"Do I get it?" Lacey questioned. "Or shall I kill you?"

The threat, delivered with such cold-blooded sincerity, failed of its mark, or Roger was a wonderful poker player. Lacey saw and added: "Another thing about that, I know who else has got this dope. If I have to, I can get it from her."

Roger could not conceal his start of

alarm. Did Lacey know, or did he guess that Jane had the information? In either event, the man could get it from Jane—at least would not hesitate to try. And he would not be alive to help her! Roger was convinced that Lacey's cold-blooded cleverness could accomplish anything!

"You know what I mean, I guess, Blaine? It's a case of you or the girl. Well, I've got you and I'm ready to talk business. Do I get it?"

"Give me a minute," Roger pleaded. "I've got to think this out."

"Make it snappy! I'm a busy man."

Thought of Jane alone, unprotected, in the hands of Lacey and his kind filled Roger with panic.

Any price was cheap to prevent that.

What of the money! What, even, of establishing a murderer's guilt and Richard Carrol's innocence? They were beaten, why not admit it?

CHAPTER XXXVII

ROGER'S FINAL ANSWER

FOR a few seconds another alternative gave him false hope, adding to the terrors of his indecision. He might lie to Lacey. He might invent a cryptogram that would satisfy him and lead him nowhere.

Roger realized the impracticability of that. Lacey would take no chances of letting him out of sight until he had proved the information. Though it won a little delay, his chance of reaching Jane and warning her would be no better.

As for the real information, he could not surrender on any terms. He had given his word to Fanning and he must keep his word to him.

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell Lacey bluntly to go ahead and kill. A little incident held him.

The chair in which he was tied was not more than a foot or two from the wall of the houseboat. The window he had first noticed was close by his head. It's sliding shutter fastened with an ordinary brass hook dropped over a brass peg.

Without the slightest sound, a thin, metal blade appeared through the crack between shutter and window sash.

The stealthy little tool protruded its tip a fraction of an inch within the room and rose upward, catching beneath the shank of the hook and lifting it gently.

Roger had dropped his head as a man might who was trying to reach a decision. He watched the queer little blade from the corner of his eye and remembered with a start that Jane had told him the garage window at Rosebriar opened in just such a way.

He wanted time to watch developments. He said to Lacey boldly: "I'll tell you what I will do. I'll deal directly with your principal."

The shoes, seen beneath the red curtain, vanished quickly. A board creaked.

"Principal!" Lacey sneered. "What do you think I am? A hired man?"

"I know you are. If I talk, I talk to the boss."

"If you ever talk any more; you'll talk to me. Now, how about it?"

The hook had been lifted off the brass peg. The window shutter was unlocked. Roger saw it sliding open.

The shutter opened a crack, far enough to show a ring of dull metal—the mouth of a pistol.

The pistol was close to Roger's head and pointed at it.

A cold sweat broke out all over him.

Roger had hoped, in one fantastic moment, that the stealthy lock-picking boded some interruption that would aid him. It dawned on him now, with a terrible feeling of utter helplessness, that Lacey had concealed his assassin outside so that even his victim might not see his face. The victim? Yes, and another, the man hidden behind the curtain. Lacey was protecting his own man from all chance betrayal!

"How about it?" Lacey repeated. "Talk—or shut up forever."

Roger met his cool stare, conscious he was no very heroic figure. He hoped his voice would not betray him. "You can go to hell, Lacey. I don't talk to you—or to your boss."

"That's your word?"

"That's my word."

Lacey hesitated. He rose and walked to the curtained door. Roger heard the murmur of a question. He heard a murmured answer and strained his ears to catch the voice, "Go ahead. Don't waste time on him."

Lacey wheeled sharply.

His pistol seemed to spring from his inner pocket and dropped smartly at aim. The maneuver was skillful from long practice and had the precision of a fine machine. Lacey's lip laid back from his teeth in a sudden grimace of blood lust as the barrel rose. His cold eyes were without compunction.

A roar like the crack of doom came close beside Roger's ear.

Instant darkness followed.

Roger might have thought it the end of his life, but why did Lacey utter that shout of rage and astonishment?

Why did another voice echo that shout and the feet of two men trample the bare deck of the houseboat in instant confusion?

He was not dead, but in the dark, the pitch black dark. Lacey had not fired. That pistol at the window had exploded its charge and the light in the ceiling had flickered out.

The room beyond, was in blackness also. Somebody crashed into a table and the table must have held china. The breakage was a perfect avalanche. Two voices cursed together.

A heavy body collided with Roger. Hands felt him over. A voice whispered, "Blaine?"

"Yes."

"Steady a sec—there!" One of Roger's hands was freed. The speaker fumbled at his other, a sharp knife blade pricked Roger, then his bond was slashed. The rescuer knelt at his feet. They were freed.

"This way!"

He was fairly snatched from his chair and turned toward the window. It stood wide open now. He needed no invitation to hurl himself through and the rescuer was on his heels.

A low speed boat rocked alongside the houseboat. Roger leaped into it, the other behind him and it was cast loose. The hurrying current of the ship canal swept it into the stream.

The other man had jumped into the cockpit.

The boat's engine sprang to life with the roar of a Liberty motor.

The boat leaped halfway out of the water, spun in a short circle that tore the black current into wide streamers of phosphorescent lace and the nose pointed south. Tide and unlimited horse power gave them wings.

A great wave sprang up at either bow and Roger crouched low, head down against a shower of spray.

Ahead of them, along the left bank, a train raced toward the city.

To those in the boat it slowed to a crawl, stood still, shot astern.

The great arch of High Bridge loomed, engulfed them, was gone. A minute later and they sped like an arrow for one of the narrow, tall arches of Washington Bridge, striding across the river on its antiquated stone stilts.

The exultant song of the Liberty motor made speech impossible. Their speed held Roger crouched low, glad to cling to the substantial coaming of the passenger pit.

Coogan's bluff, a dark ribbon of flying silhouette laced with lights, unreeled on their right hand. The freight yards of Mott Haven showed a glare on their left. They roared beneath railway bridges and Randall's Island loomed dead ahead.

The cross currents of Hell Gate, where tide and rivers fight it out, tossed them in a choppy sea, but slowed them scarcely at all. Tearing the whirling, boiling waters to an egglike froth, the speed boat held on south, laughing at time and space.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MAN HIGHER UP

USTIN DAVENPORT maintained a convenient little apartment in one of the older, comfortable buildings along Fifth Avenue.

Davenport had rented the flat several years ago, at a time he was engaged in what he expected to be the most moment-

ous struggle of his life. Davenport was swinging a big corner in a motor stock and, like many a general, he wanted to sleep on the field of battle. The city flat became his campaign headquarters.

Up to that time Davenport had not been an operator in stocks worthy of notice.

His fortune was an inheritance from a grandfather whose memory, if not altogether savory, at least still was fresh in the minds of many an old timer in New York financial circles.

Davenport determined, somewhat late in life, to win fresh laurels for the family name. He listened to sound financial advice and began cornering a stock that was idle at the time, but had great possibilities.

It needs courage of a sort to do what Davenport attempted. His stock manipulation was well advised, but the reaction his financial experts promised was slow in showing. For an anxious three weeks Austin Davenport, for the first time in his life, stared failure in the face.

Instead of clearing several millions and making of himself a financial figure that would attract universal attention and respect—a man who would be pointed out wherever he moved—the unhappy plunger saw himself ruined—a laughing stock—a jest.

On an erratic fluctuation of a point or two, Davenport closed out his great deal. He came out of the campaign with embarrassing losses. For several weeks more, he counted himself a skillful general to get off alive. Then he lived to see bolder men profit where he had lost. Fortunes were made in the meteoric rise of his pet stock and other names than Davenport's got into print.

His friend, Richard Carrol, advised him with a good natured laugh. "You're lucky you got out with your shirt, Austin! You're not cut out for that sort of warfare."

Davenport still kept the apartment. He meant some day to renew his depredations in the market. He meant to show the world that his was a name and personality to be feared.

To this small, quiet apartment Davenport was hastily driven about midnight, an hour when Roger Blaine was still speeding down the East River in the motor boat which had come so unexpectedly to his rescue.

Davenport crossed the pavement from his car with nervous strides, looking to right and left to see if any chance pedestrian was observing him—perhaps had recognized him. The heavy-footed bodyguard followed. At the door, Davenport dismissed him for the night.

A secretary was yawning in his apartment.

One of his young men had orders always to be in attendance there, in case of need. Among the bright young men of his staff who shared the duty in rotation, all called this period the "dog watch."

On Davenport's entry the young man stifled his yawn midway and came to attention with a flattering start. Davenport waved his hand. "Nothing for you tonight, Mr.—er—"

The young man thanked him, gathered up his Russian leather dispatch case and bade him a respectful good night.

Davenport's personal retinue was reduced now to one man, a man named Higgs, a valet, caretaker and utility man all in one.

Higgs was a thin, anæmic, dried-up specimen whose dusty white skin looked mummified. He had served Davenport for some years. Higgs had been a gentleman's gentleman most of his long life, a perfect, well-oiled human machine that never talked and even never seemed to see what he was not supposed to see.

Higgs was married, father of a growing family and had bought a prosperous little poultry farm in Jersey, out of his savings, though few people but Higgs knew it. Certainly not his present employer.

"Will there be anything, sir?" Higgs inquired respectfully.

"Sherry and a biscuit—no, make it Scotch."

"Yes, sir."

Davenport dropped into a deep chair and sank back among the cushions. Alone for the moment, the man let go the mask he had held before his thoughts during his return home.

He began to tremble violently. He

sought a handkerchief to wipe his moist face, and his hand shook awkwardly as he performed the simple act.

As the handkerchief withdrew from his pocket, something entangled in it, dropped to the floor and glittered there. Davenport pounced on it with a lack of dignity totally unlike his normal self.

In his fingers he turned about a ring of wash gold, set with a triangle of imitation jade—a cheap replica of a much finer piece of jewelry Jane Carrol had worn that day—the ring Roger had believed Jane's, taken from Roger while he lay unconscious at the houseboat.

His hand sought his pocket again and brought out a gray leather glove, crumpled up.

Higgs's discreet cough as he entered the room caused Davenport to thrust both articles hurriedly out of sight.

"Scotch and soda, sir," Higgs announced imperturbably. Davenport snatched a glass and filled it.

"No soda?" Higgs inquired, gravely surprised.

His employer muttered something about, "Damn the soda," and bade him set down his tray near by and get out. Higgs retired with dignity to the adjoining bedroom and began to lay out his employer's pyjamas and draw a bath.

Alone, revived somewhat by his generous drink, Davenport got out his trinkets again and his eye roved the room. He went to the window and considered throwing them out. Hesitating, he consigned them to a desk drawer and thought better of it.

A wall safe offered itself, but was rejected. Finally he lifted a corner of the handsome Chinese rug and slipped them under it. He was still on his knees, considering the advisability of that place of concealment, when the doorbell rang and he scrambled up.

"A gentleman," Higgs reported presently. "The one who was here earlier this evening, sir."

"Send him in. And leave us alone."

Higgs opened the door for Sinclair Lacey and shut himself outside as he closed it again. Higgs continued to supply subdued, discreet sounds from the distance, the splash of the bath water, an occasional cough from the bedroom, but mostly he was directly outside the door, his ear against a keyhole, his face perfectly grave.

Lacey helped himself to a drink without invitation. When he had downed it, he found a chair and drew it close to Davenport's. "Everything's attended to," he reported. "My friends will wait for Blaine at his boarding house. I had a man get the houseboat in order and be sure we left no signs. And listen—that light wasn't shot out. Somebody cut the feed wire from outside. What do you make of that?"

"Who cut it?"

Lacey shrugged. "Tell me who slipped that boat alongside with two of my men watching the place, and I'll tell you who I think cut it."

"And you never fall down!" Davenport sneered. "Wonderful work!"

Lacey flushed. But he held his tongue and his temper. "That won't get us anywhere," he answered quietly. "We've got a lot to do."

"We?" Davenport mocked with peculiar emphasis.

"You heard me say '*We!*'"

It was Davenport's turn to flush.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HIGGS TAKES A PART

BUT Davenport did not permit men like Sinclair Lacey to assume any partnership interest in his activities. Up to the present Lacey had recognized that with the same flattering readiness to which Davenport was treated by everybody about him. Davenport flushed and glared at the rebel and was on the point of a cutting retort, but thought better of it.

"The question is," Lacey said earnestly, "shall we try the girl? I can get her."

"Under no circumstances! No! If any harm comes to her through you—"

"I didn't say harm! I know how to treat her kind. And it can be done without her ever getting wise to us, just by showing her what'll happen to her friend if she doesn't come clean. She'll be a lot easier to handle than this Blaine, because

somebody is keeping an eye on Blaine beside ourselves.

"Motor boats don't show up and electric wires aren't cut by accident—and I'm too old to believe in fairies. I tell you we've got to get the dope quick and act quick or we all go up the river! Do you get that, or do you want a diagram?"

Davenport did not heed the impertinence. He had not noted it. His mind was fascinated by Lacey's phrase, "up the river."

"Up the river," was the place where suburban trains shot under a black tunnel; where one got a flying glimpse of cold, gray walls with guard towers and armed sentries, of smokestacks, smoke, stones, wasteland and ugliness.

Even Lacey had lost a little of his easy manner. His round, smooth face was not so cheerily colored and his eyes had a furtive, scared look.

"Somebody's getting wise!" Lacey murmured earnestly. "It isn't this young Blaine, either. It's somebody with a good head on his shoulders, somebody behind Blaine, that uses Blaine and is going to make a pair of monkeys out of us! We've got to get the dope from the girl, find the stuff, and cover our tracks before somebody beats us to it."

"I tell you she doesn't know anything! Blaine didn't tell her a word that night—and he has never seen her since. I know what she does every minute of her day. I've had her watched constantly—"

Lacey interrupted with one short, sharp ejaculation, which might signify scorn, but never mirth.

"You had her watched; that's good. Where was she between eleven o'clock and twelve fifteen to-day?"

Davenport turned to a desk, drew out a typewritten sheet and glanced over it. "At Malleaux's, the dress place in Fifty-Seventh Street," he said with an air of quiet triumph.

"Do you know who else was at Malleaux's?"

"What do you mean?" Davenport burst out anxiously.

"I'll tell you who came out of the back door of Malleaux's at twelve twenty o'clock, the door in Fifty-Eighth Street, where deliveries are made. It was Blaine. He was wearing a deliveryman's cap. He carried a bunch of hat frames."

Davenport stiffened in his chair, frozen to attention. His small, plain face had turned a sickly yellow. "It couldn't be him."

"It was him. One of my men passed him coming out of there. My man wasn't looking for him. It was an accident. But knowing who he was, he followed him to the subway. Blaine went into the subway, threw his cap and the hat frames into the tunnel, put on another cap and rode down town. And all this time the fathead that draws your money for trailing the girl was sitting in Fifty-Seventh Street like a cat watching a mousehole, I bet!"

The recipient of Lacey's news fumbled at his collar, running his hand around the band to loosen its stricture about his dry throat.

"Of course!" Lacey waxed sarcastic, "maybe the young fellow needed a job and maybe he got one delivering hats and *maybe* he went to Malleaux's on business. And *maybe*, too, if he met the girl, they just talked about the weather! Yes, they did."

"You should have told me this. What do you mean—"

Lacey shrugged. "We had our plans laid to bring in Blaine, why should I worry? Besides, you've got a lot of swell dicks of your own to watch that girl."

"But I—I talked to her at lunch! She told me then she hadn't seen him— Why, the way she talked about him—and Fanning—"

"Oh—yeh?" Lacey drawled. His manner became earnest, dictatorial. "Now look here, Davenport. I'm no fool. I know Fanning passed on something to this Blaine before we got him. Else Blaine never would have heard of the girl. And he as much as said so to-night. What Blaine has done is tell the girl Fanning's dope."

A spasm of excitement convulsed Davenport's face. At heart the man was as great a physical coward as he was morally. His swift-working imagination went over the long, sordid chain of events that had evolved from his bitter, poisonous resent-

ment of Richard's Carrol's jest about his financial ability made two years ago. The walls of his elaborate edifice tottered around him, threatening to crush him.

Davenport caught Lacey's hand and clung to it desperately. He tried to speak, failed, and moistened his lips with his tongue. "What—what would you advise?"

"Get the girl, of course! We don't know where Blaine is. It isn't safe to monkey with him, even if we found him in time. We know where the girl is—"

"No harm to her! Remember what I say."

"Leave me to handle it! I won't touch a hair of her head—not unless I'm forced to."

"What—what do you mean by that?"

Lacey shrugged. "You've heard of self defense? I've got just as much at stake as you have. If the girl won't act like a lady—"

Davenport's collar was too much for him. He wrenched at it angrily, ripped the linen free and sent it flying into the corner, tie and all.

He sat panting, like a man who has run a hard race, his eyes shifting all about the room, everywhere, except to meet Lacey's direct, slightly scornful glance.

Davenport gasped angrily at last: "I don't want to hear a word about this, you understand? Whatever you do, you do on your own responsibility. I have no connection with it. None whatever—none!"

Lacey shrugged and smiled.

He rose leisurely, said "good night," and made his way to the door.

Still Davenport avoided his eyes, avoided seeing him at all. Desperation had driven Davenport to ignoring the whole affair with a determined, sulky, inflexible belief that whatever he ignored could not exist.

The man named Higgs came into their presence as Lacey let himself through the door. He offered Lacey his hat and stick and held the outer door wide. "Good night, sir," he murmured.

Lacey nodded magnificent acknowledgement of the courtesy and went his way like a man with much business on hand.

The man named Higgs opened Davenport's door just a crack when Lacey had gone. He glanced at his employer, saw that Davenport was much preoccupied and closed the door again.

Higgs caught up his own hat, let himself out of the flat very softly and presently was closed in a telephone booth in an all-night restaurant a few doors distant. He returned to Davenport's flat long before Davenport thought of needing his services.

CHAPTER XL

A NIGHT AT COOGAN'S

ROGER BLAINE leaned wearily in the corner of a subway car, the last car of a local train rumbling northward up the island.

He had the car to himself—it was past midnight—and he looked like a man dozing after a hard day.

He was tired, but except for a headache and a lump on his skull that was exceedingly tender to the touch, he was well enough.

The motor boat had held on at top speed until it rounded the toe of Manhattan. The engine stopped. It slipped in to the Battery and snuggled alongside the sea wall.

"Jump out," the man in the cockpit ordered.

Roger turned on him with questions.

He saw a bulky figure of medium height, wrapped in a jacket, little more than a silhouette in the dark. The jacket collar had been turned up and the man's cap was drawn low. Roger made out a bush of whiskers and the gleam of glasses that covered the eyes.

His questions were met by a peremptory wave of the hand. "Not now! We can't talk here—"

"But I've got to thank—"

"Some other time. You'll hear from me. Jump out and go home. Take the West side subway. And hurry!"

Roger would have persisted. His rescuer's whisper was angry: "Do you want to get me into trouble?"

Roger scrambled to the sea wall. The boat shoved into the bay; its motor roared; it vanished into the dark.

A patrolman was strolling slowly past the ferry houses, coming his way. Roger walked hurriedly to the subway kiosk.

Things were happening faster than they had any right to happen! In the present state of his headache he could make nothing of it except that he had been near furnishing Sinclair Lacey a target and, somehow, had cheated him.

The doorway, with its red curtain, lingered vividly in his thoughts. If only he could have torn that curtain aside and caught one glimpse of the person hiding there, the person who prompted Lacey?

He realized with a start that the train had reached his station. He raced to beat the door already sliding shut and found himself on the platform, his head throbbing hard from the exertion, his feet wandering like a drunken man's. He leaned hard on the stair railing as he climbed giddily toward the street.

On the landing, half way up the stair, he almost stumbled over Stub Coogan.

Coogan's hand caught his coat and pulled him low.

"Don't go home," Coogan wheezed. "Keep away from there."

"What's up?"

"If yuh ever got in at all, yuh'd weigh more by at least a pound of lead. Gunmen planted all around the place. Listen, go right to me place in the Court. Walk right along and don't pay attention to nothing. A fellow will pick yuh up as you come out on the street.

"He'll trail yuh, but it's all right; just a friend of mine to see yuh don't get into any trouble. Go to me place and I won't be five minutes behind yuh. Hurry now!"

Roger had a faintly resentful feeling that he had obeyed about enough orders for one night. He wanted an explanation before he went much farther! Nevertheless an ambush of gunmen waiting his return to Mrs. Whimple's was explanation enough for the present!

He went on up the stairs and along the street, conscious of being followed as Coogan had promised.

Coogan's place at least was a safe haven. Roger dropped into a chair and stared at the beggar's parrot. His head throbbed and he was very weary. His unseen bodyguard had vanished into the shadows of Coogan's Court as Roger entered the house.

The parrot was an aged, irascible looking bird with a glaring eye.

It considered the visitor with its head at one angle and another. Suddenly it reversed itself and tried the effect upside down and seemed to think no better of Roger. It expressed its opinion in one short, contemptuous "Awrrk!"

Roger's head sank on his hand.

Perhaps he dozed for a moment, for he realized with a start that somebody called "Coogan!"

Roger stared at the parrot. The sagacious bird was making the rounds of its cage, clinging by beak and claw.

"Coogan," said the parrot distinctly. "Coogan! Are you there, Coogan?"

Roger rose and approached the cage, idly curious, cajoling the parrot with the usual inane compliment: "Pretty Polly!"

"Coogan!" The parrot repeated. It had a curiously deep, resonant voice for a parrot.

"Keep away from that cage!"

The door had swung open and Coogan himself was hurrying in, swinging his torso along with the active strides of his strong arms. "That parrot's liable to take a chunk out of yuh, yuh won't forget easy," the beggar warned, hastening to the low hung cage. "Shut up, yuh devil!"

Coogan caught up a cloth and draped the cage with it. "That'll shut him up. He'll go to sleep."

"He's a wonderful talker."

"What'd he say?" Coogan's query was sharp and a sharp look went with it.

"He called you. Asked 'Are you there?'"

"Yeah? He come from England. Fellow off a ship give him t' me. He thinks he's talking over an English telephone, see?"

Coogan lifted a corner of the drape from the cage, grinned at his parrot and wheezed: "Yuh wise crackin', hardboiled mutt! Speak when you're spoken to, or I'll wring your neck for yuh!"

"Awrrk!" said the parrot, and Coogan and Roger laughed together.

"Now," said the beggar swinging himself into a chair, "I tell yuh what yuh do. Spend the night here. This is safe, see?"

"Let me take a room next door in the hotel."

"Nothin' doing! Have yuh forgot what happened to Larson? Stay where you're safe."

"I can't take your bed."

"You're goin' t' take it. And I'm not going to use it. Got too much t' do. Yuh look all in right now. Get some sleep."

"I got an awful rap on the head!" Roger acknowledged. He told Coogan of the last few hours.

Coogan commented: "It was Lacey, eh? What'd I tell yuh?"

"Yes, but who is the other man? Who was it shot out the lights and got me out of there?"

"Ah, who?" Coogan shook his big head, his broad, red face screwed into a look of mystery.

"You don't know?"

"Who, me? How should I know? I can't go around runnin' motor boats wit'-out me legs."

"And it wasn't any friend you sent?"

"Me? How could I send somebody when I never knew you was out at this houseboat?"

Roger clasped his aching head tightly between his hands. "If it wasn't you, who was it? I thought, of course, it was you! And after you met me and sent me here, I was sure of it."

Coogan shook his head vigorously, his face all screwed up with puzzlement. He exclaimed suddenly: "How about Joe Stein? Yuh say he was at Mrs. Whimple's when the message come? Mightn't it be he followed yuh and got yuh off?"

"Joe Stein with a motor boat that uses a Liberty engine!" Roger scoffed. "Joe would call the wagon and the riot squad! He's a policeman!"

"Then I give it up! Go on to bed! What do yuh care; yuh got off safe?"

Roger would have protested and argued. Coogan enforced his advice with profanity that was none the less forceful for being well meant. Roger agreed that he would lie down just to rest his head. He stretched out on Coogan's bed and, for all his wonder and anxiety and puzzlement, lost consciousness almost instantly.

It was early morning when he woke with a start and a stare about him. A pallid, gray light sifted through the windows at the front of Coogan's queer, big room. Roger's head was much better. He sat up, yawning, trying to puzzle out a dimly remembered incident of his slumbers that might have been a dream or might have been reality.

He remembered, very clearly, opening his eyes to see Coogan propped up before the parrot's cage. That remarkable bird was talking and Coogan was listening. And instead of the usual parrot rigamarole, Coogan's bird had been talking sentences. Roger recalled one bit vividly: "Watch the girl! Lacey will try to get her. Be sure the girl is guarded!"

So vivid was his recollection of this that he was moved to hurry at once to the remarkable parrot. The bird's cage was covered. Roger lifted a corner of the cover and peered in. The parrot's baleful eye gleamed out. Roger talked, whistled and cajoled, but all he could get in answer was an impatient squawk.

He grinned and was reassured that the fantastic incident was the stuff dreams are made of.

CHAPTER XLI

IN THE TUNNEL

COOGAN returned as he was freshening himself for the day. The beggar was much excited.

"Keep away from them windows," he husked. "They're wise that yuh slept here."

"Who?"

"Lacey's gunmen. Three of 'em planted out in front. God knows how many watching the back. One thing, they called off the gang from Whimple's to get you here. You're all right, if yuh could slip out."

"I've got to slip out! Look here, Coogan, I've got a lot to do to-day! I've got to get at it."

Coogan nodded. "Keep your shirt on! I'm tryin' t' help yuh, ain't I?"

"But with Lacey's men out there! Can't we clear them out, some way?"

Coogan began to rumble with laughter. It wheezed from his lips in painful gusts, purpling his face with emotion. Roger stared amazed.

When he could get his breath, Coogan explained: "I thought of how! All it takes is a little nerve—and I guess yuh got nerve all right."

"What's so funny about it?"

"You're goin' t' double for me! See what I mean, kid? Yuh take me little wagon and squat in it, your legs underneath yuh. Wear me hat and me big coat, see? Pull the hat down over your face and keep your head down. And yuh paddle along wit' me own clogs. Roll right out under their noses and go on down the street about your business. They'll never get wise, if yuh start now before it gets light!"

Roger's face reflected Coogan's grin.

"Coogan, you've got a head on your shoulders! Pretty work."

"Yea! We'll show them stupids somethin'."

"But your wagon?"

"Leave that at Mrs. Whimple's, see? I'll send Charley for it. Leave me coat and hat, because I can't do business wit'-out them. Now yuh come wit' me to the basement. I keep the wagon there and yuh must come rolling out at the area door, like I would meself."

"Wait," Roger said earnestly. "I want to talk seriously to you, one minute."

"Shoot!"

"I'm going to ask you a question. I want a straight answer. Coogan, you know a lot more than you pretend!"

"Well, I don't spill all I know, if that's what yuh mean."

"You've done me a great service. You saved my life again and again. I like to think that was out of pure friendship."

"Sure! I told yuh I like yuh."

"But there's more than that behind it, or you couldn't act as promptly and efficiently as you have."

"There might be more behind it. I'm not claiming all the credit!"

"If you're my friend, is it fair to keep me in the dark? Knowing what I'm up against and who is after me? Tell me all of your information, Coogan!"

The legless man stared up at Roger's earnest face and considered. "Look!" he exclaimed. "You got some errand t' get done that has t' do wit' this fellow Larson they croaked next door, ain't it so? What is that errand?"

"I can't tell you."

"I'm your friend, ain't I?"

"It's not that, Coogan. But what I have to do is not my secret. I gave my word of honor not to tell anybody!"

"There yuh are! Yuh can't tell me; I can't tell yuh! Supposing I was workin' for somebody that had got me word of honor to keep his business under me hat? What kind of a dirty dog would I be, if I was to go tellin' yuh?"

"You are working for somebody under those same conditions? You mean that—"

"I don't mean nothin' and I ain't tellin' nothin'—that's what I mean, see?"

Coogan's declaration, involved as it might seem, was clear to Roger. The man was on his honor. "I won't bother you with any more questions," Roger promised. "Let's get that wagon. Daylight's coming fast!"

The light was coming faster than Roger could have wished when he doubled his legs beneath himself in Coogan's little wagon.

The court was clearly visible in black and white, though the tunnel leading to the street still was only a black pocket in which his enemies lurked.

The beggar accompanied him as far as the door to the basement entrance, instructing him in the use of the little cart.

Coogan's broad, flopping hat hid most of Roger's face. Coogan's coat gave him additional bulk about the chest and shoulders and its collar was turned up, helping to conceal more of his face.

His legs were covered with a robe.

In his hands he clasped the wooden clogs Coogan used to propel the cart. The little headlights and tail light were switched on.

"Go to it!" Coogan whispered. "Don't pay no attention to nobody, see? Go on about your business. Good luck!"

The little cart rolled out.

Roger felt inwardly the same icy qualms he felt when first he went over the top into No Man's Land. The cobbles of the court were uneven and he lacked Coogan's skill in propelling the cart. His course was erratic.

He pushed on toward the shadows. The tunnel engulfed him. It was dark in there and the cart would not keep to a straight line.

The tunnel could not have been more than fifteen feet long, though to Roger it seemed endless. Midway of it Coogan's cart swerved over a cobble and skidded into something huddled against the wall.

An oath ripped out. "Coogan! You—— Me foot!"

Another voice husked sharply: "Can that chatter!"

The little lights of Coogan's cart cast a dim glow over a man's legs. The man was writhing on one foot, his other off the ground as he hobbled.

Roger wheeled the cart and shoved off.

A flash light stabbed the dark as he did so. He dodged his head lower and paddled hard.

The whispered command snarled down the tunnel: "Put out that light." The speaker growled out of the dark: "It's all right, Coogan. We ain't bothering none of you."

"Hey, wait!" the man with the flash was exclaiming. "Say, Coogan—"

The words ended there so sharply that Roger knew a hand had stopped the mouth. A buzz of whispers followed and meantime Roger paddled with both hands, shoving Coogan's cart with all his strength toward the open street.

Sharply, between his shoulder blades, he could feel a pang, as though a dozen weapons were trained full upon his back.

TO BE CONCLUDED

WHAT would you like to see in your next week's FLYNN'S? It's the editor's job to guess, and to get it ready for you. That's why we have assembled these things listed below and others which are reserved as a pleasant surprise. We picked these things because we think they are the things you will like—short stories, fact articles, serials, special features, all selected to please *you!*

"Find the Motive," an unusual novelette by Helen M. Leys. A group of tourists in Switzerland are visited by Miss Terry—which is a bad pun. And among them is a famous detective who traces Miss Terry home and learns her right name. What was it?

A store detective contributes an enthralling article on his own experiences called "Robbing the Big Stores." There will be more of "The White Champion" and the conclusion of "The Wages of Peril." Detective X. Crook appears again, and Joseph Gollomb concludes his New York series with "Those Cordial Crooks."

The true story of John P. McDonald, captain of detectives in Rochester, New York, is an unusual item. Captain McDonald and Pat Crowe got together this spring. The results of their meeting are revealed here for the first time.

William J. Flynn

She had gone out only to return and find the occupant gone

A MURDEROUS COIL

By Louise Rice

WITHIN THIS FAMILY OF BLACK SHEEP A FOUL PLOT SEETHED—ITS END A TRAGEDY FOR LIVING AND DEAD

A Story of Fact

LIFE for even the gentry in Scotland in 1766 was an affair so primitive that it would be almost impossible to find any analogy to it to-day. Food was not only simple, but had no variety. Eggs and chicken, game, porridge, bread, milk and some butter, with the most meager assortment of vegetables and fruit comprised all the possible ingredients of the menus.

Tea was imported from India and sugar was high. It was just a hundred years since sugar had been a pound a case—which would make it a dollar a pound. In a state of life where a shilling was a good deal of money, it can be seen that few would have much sugar in the house for the whole year.

Communication was slow and hard; letters were delivered by carriers who often had been a week on their way from towns fifty miles distant. Medicine was so crude that such a thing as actually determining what a patient was suffering from was frequently impossible. Little knowledge of poisons and almost none of surgery was possessed by the medical fraternity.

Quite typifying this state of things was a family by the well-known name of Ogilvie, in a small town called Glendisla, who were well-born folk. To be sure, a most astonishing series of misfortunes had followed them.

The head of the family had been taken prisoner during some small political upheaval a good many years before the time when we begin this tale, and in trying to escape from an old castle in which the temporarily successful party had incarcerated him, he had fallen and broken his neck.

One son had gone to sea and fell overboard. Another hung himself in the sheep house on the family estate. It is related of him that he found he had not quite room enough in which to stretch his neck, whereupon he bent his knees and so contrived to make an end to himself.

An Astounding Match

Of the remaining sons, one was Patrick who had been a lieutenant in the army, but had been gently let out of his place in it without overembarrassing explanations, and was now living at home on a very small half pay. Another son was Alexander, the youngest of the family, who was away at Edinburgh, learning to be a doctor and also a great many other things less creditable.

The third and oldest son was Thomas, the "Laird" of Eastmiln, as the estate was called. His mother had come from a noble house and she was called Lady Eastmiln. He had a sister, married to a Mr. Stewart, and a sister married to a Mr. Spalding, both of them living in a small town near by.

According to the recorded statements of that time, Thomas was a very slovenly dresser, was something of a hypochondriac, was forty, beginning to be bald, and had always suffered from gastritis—or "a stomach fever," as the physicians called it.

In great contrast to Patrick, who had smooth manners, was good looking and a very dandified dresser, the laird was almost wholly without attractions, and yet he brought home as a bride, in this year 1766, one of the most beautiful of the young heiresses of that section.

Katherine Nairn was not the beauty by reputation only, that so many women are who afterward become notorious and gain as a sort of courtesy title. The picture of her in the British Museum shows us a graceful head crowned with fair hair, large, frank, blue eyes, small and charming features and a beautiful neck set on graciously sloping shoulders.

A fair and well born lady, by all appearances, just nineteen when she married the Laird of Eastmiln, and fated to have one of the strangest destinies and one the least compatible with her appearance.

Why she married Thomas Ogilvie, with his unprepossessing personality, his very moderate means, his niggardly assortment of graces and amenities and his family, so unfortunate that the countryside had begun to be superstitious about them, is the beginning of a long series of mysteries in connection with this beauty which have never had any adequate answer.

Katherine's family were against the match. The Nairns were highy educated people with standards of living far superior to those of the Ogilvies, although both were of equal birth and both were old families of the gentry. Sir Thomas, Katherine's father, held a magistrate's office, and her uncle, William, was clerk of the court in Edinburgh.

The men of the family had been respected and honored, and the women had had more of social grace and personal liberty than was quite the style in the country families. Nevertheless, the marriage was made, gladly, it would seem, on the part of Katherine.

The Lay of the Land

The home to which she went was such as we would consider to-day not more than a cottage. It had been in the possession of the family for a long time, and was old and damp. It stood, not unpicturesquely, in the middle of the "holding," or farm of Eastmiln, and there were tenant farmers on the outskirts of the property to add some feudal dignity to it, but the house itself, had only four rooms.

From a drawing made for the use of the court, at a time when the lovely Katherine was the cynosure of all eyes in the British Isles, we see that downstairs there was a room which was both dining and living room, as well as the bedroom of Lady Eastmiln and the guest room, and on the opposite side of a passage, which did duty for a reception room, there was the kitchen.

Upstairs the laird and his new wife had the room over the kitchen and the lieutenant had the one over the dining-living room. There was a closet for the joint "best clothes" of the family between the two bedrooms and storage room in the garret. The three servant maids slept in the kitchen. The boy who helped about the horses slept with the animals in the barn.

Old Lady Eastmiln

This should be well borne in mind—that this very small house was so constructed that there was practically no privacy in it. The servants down in the kitchen could hear what the laird and his wife said to each other in their bedroom, and the folks going up the stairs from the passage downstairs could hear every word and every movement made in either bedroom.

There were no romantic and secluded spots of shrubbery, hedges, or trees where a sort of privacy out of doors might have been gained, even temporarily. The house was so arranged that it was open to view everywhere. With such a setting it would seem that there could be nothing mysterious, and that no story could unfold there which was not of the most commonplace character. Such, however, was far from being the case.

With the coming to her new home of Katherine Nairn, there fell over the house of Ogilvie and the holding of Eastmiln a shadow which grew and grew until it had wrapped every one there in its folds.

Katherine soon began to repent of her bargain, though she was a dutiful wife, giving heed to the comfort of her husband and living a life which seems very staid and uninteresting for such a radiant and pleasure-loving young creature.

She felt that her husband should dress a little better and that the family life ought to be a little more "genteel," as she phrased it, and that Lady Eastmiln need not run the house on quite such a cheerless and meager footing. Patrick, who had seen service abroad and was very much a "gentleman of quality" backed her up in this.

Being much younger than his brother, more worldly wise and far vainer, he found Katherine's ideas greatly to his taste. The ill health of both the brothers, however, occasionally came to prove itself as a peacemaker, and then Katherine would attend on both with equal good nature and unselfishness.

Old Lady Eastmiln, Mme. Ogilvie, was a singularly tight-mouthed woman, either wise beyond human nature, or one of the shrewdest and possibly one of the wickedest old women that we know in criminal history. Along with many of the players in this strange drama she remains a mystery who inspires us to continual speculation.

From the first, she took a withdrawn, silent and uncommunicative attitude toward her daughter-in-law, although she had been glad enough to have her son make such a marriage, as well she might. Patrick, however, was the beloved.

She admired him tremendously, and sometimes could not help holding him up to the laird as an example of what a gentleman could be, despite the fact that the lieutenant was vain and lazy and had had none too savory a reputation before some mysterious affair had thrown him out of his profession.

The Black Sheep, Alexander

Alexander was out of favor with all of the family, including the new daughter. News of his disreputable life had seeped down even as far as the small town in which his family had been established for so long.

And just before the marriage of his eldest brother to Miss Nairn, he had espoused a woman of low repute, who was also of the commonest birth and had herself no education whatever, either in the superficial things which were all that women's education consisted of at that time, nor in the refinements of manner and feeling which the well-born usually possessed.

Toward Alexander, all the house of his relations and all its outlying members, the two daughters and their husbands and their husbands' connections—were bitterly opposed, and of him they were utterly ashamed.

Therefore, there was a good deal of agitation at the house of the laird one morning, not two months after he had been married, when Miss Anne Clark, a distant relative who had always lived in Edinburgh, arrived suddenly for a visit, for she was known to have been, for quite a while, on friendly terms with Alexander.

How friendly these terms were they did not suspect, nor did the small town of Glendisla. Both Mr. Stewart and Mr. Spalding, the brothers-in-law, though slightly better acquainted with the world than the rest of the family, had their opinion that she was a meddling and tale bearing person.

Machinations at Home

Even they, however, had not the slightest idea of what this Anne Clark really was like, and it was not until the fearful event, which is the cause of the story of Katherine Nairn being part of history, took place, that the unpleasant details of her life came fully to light.

Into the small house at Eastmiln Miss Anne Clark, a kinswoman and thought to be a respectable spinster—she was about thirty-five—was welcomed and was given the "box-cot" in the living-dining room, where Lady Eastmiln also slept, thus making one more in the house already so indecently packed with human beings.

Immediately she began a series of the most extraordinary machinations, seeming to have for their object the making of an estrangement between the laird and his young wife. When vague rumors came to Glendisla of her career in Edinburgh, she piously drew down her mouth and was "shocked that even such things should be spoke of to a respectable female."

As for Alexander, all she wanted, said she, was to cause his mother and brothers to forgive him all that had gone before and just estimate the fact that now he was a married man, all legal and proper, and that, while the social status of the lady left much to be desired, still it was undoubtedly true that she was of a caliber to hold in check his vagrant impulses and that in that respect, at least, the marriage was something for which to be thankful.

The laird, his mother, his brother and his wife all failed to see the matter in this light. They made it clear to Anne that Alexander need expect nothing, not even recognition from his family.

Miss Clark was pained, but not surprised, and expressed a pious wish that she might be accredited in the heavenly scrolls with at least having tried to do a kind deed. However, as she had so failed, she would acknowledge that dear Alexander had tried her sorely. He had, indeed, for the couple had lived together for two years before he had taken to his bosom the blowsily, good looking young daughter of a porter.

But Anne was of an accommodating disposition. She went and lived with the newly married pair until the wife, uneducated as she was and ignorant of her rights, rose in her wrath and put the woman out of their poor home. Anne faithfully told of all this, but carelessly mentioned another name than that of her own. She remained discreetly silent on her own means of livelihood, on her disreputable acquaintances and other details of her life in Edinburgh, which would have caused her instant expulsion from the town, had they been known.

Hostess and Guest

Young Mrs. Ogilvie, shut up for two months in a dour and unsocial house, where the duties of the farm and the visits of relatives were all that occurred to break the monotony of the days, was more than pleased to see Miss Clark, who brought with her a breath of that larger world for which the beautiful Katherine Nairn had always had a yearning, some natural aptitude, and instinctive talent.

Miss Clark had read a good deal, something which no one in that house did, and she and the young wife of the laird often talked about books and music and fashionable folk and the styles of the year, until all the rest of the household were silent in awe of these two who seemed to know so much.

Katherine began to take little walks around the farm with Miss Clark, so that she might tell her that marriage was not all that she had hoped that it would be,

and that the laird was not everything that she had pictured a husband as being.

Right here we have to stop and begin to separate what Miss Clark said that Mrs. Ogilvie said and what Mrs. Ogilvie afterward declared that she said to Miss Clark.

So far as the surface of things was concerned, Miss Clark continued for some time to be the welcome guest, and then the laird began to fret as to when she would be going. Patrick also took to making sarcastic remarks to and of her and old Lady Eastmiln grew ever more silent.

Scandalous Gossip

Anne, however, had not the slightest intention of going, and as Scotch hospitality is almost a matter of religion, and as hospitality to a kinsman or woman is a solemn duty, she took her place as a more or less settled member of the family, to the great discontent of the laird and to the impatience and openly expressed dislike of Patrick.

In the meantime, Patrick and his sister-in-law had found many common interests. They walked and talked together a good deal—openly, they said afterward, and because they were both lonely, but with no other thought or intent. And, indeed, had they any intent to familiarity which was not of the most casual nature, they would have been hard put to it, it seems, to come by any occasions when they might have the merest shred of privacy.

Mrs. Ogilvie was always at the beck and call of her husband, and when he was not at home, of his mother. There was little social life, outside of the tea drinkings of the family. She could not be out of sight for five minutes without being inquired for.

Miss Clark seemed to bear the gibes of the lieutenant meekly, and all the household continued to tolerate her. She said that she warned Katherine that she was too much in the company of her husband's brother. High spirited Katherine retorted that all the world was welcome to look on. Miss Clark said that she acknowledged to a guilty passion for Patrick. Patrick and Katherine continued to the end to declare that their friendship was nothing save that of two people who find themselves congenial.

So then Anne turned to and suggested to Lady Eastmiln that she had better tell her son to look out for his wife. The old lady, slow and cautious as always, keeping her thoughts to herself, said that she did not reckon the danger serious.

Nevertheless, she told the laird that cousin Anne was making insinuations. The laird snorted and said that cousin was a dangerous liar, but when he and Patrick fell out over a financial matter some days afterward, he added to the row by saying that mother had said that Anne had said—

Well, that really started the whole matter which I am now trying to make clear —one of the most murderous and involved coils into which human beings ever got themselves.

Patrick left the house. Katherine, ignoring the fact that the quarrel had been partly over her, insisted that her husband had been in the wrong and that he had better ask his brother to return to the parental mansion. She had her way.

The laird wrote his brother that he wanted him to come home, that he did not believe anything which Anne had said and that he regretted having mentioned the gossip. A very manly and fine letter. But Patrick did not come home and he aired his grievances among his friends.

Rat Poison for One

According to Anne, when he did not come back, Katherine then stated that for a long time she had intended to poison her husband and that now was the time. She asked, said Anne, that rat poison be procured, but Anne dissuaded her. According to Mrs. Ogilvie, it was Anne who offered to go and get the poison and who suggested the possibility of its use.

Lady Eastmiln also opened her mouth more than usual and said that it was a pity that the laird did not have the pleasant disposition of Patrick. She is alleged to have heard the very extraordinary conversation between Anne and the wife of her oldest son and to have said nothing whatever.

The student of human nature will pause

right there and make some very interesting speculations as to this grim, self-contained, proud old woman, who must often have suffered from the sight of her eldest son and the representative of the family, shambling and shuffling along, unshaven and almost dirty, without grace or pride, and prematurely old, while she admired—and did not hesitate to say that she did—the fine figure and genial personality of her second son.

"To Murder Her Husband"

Could this unnatural mother have been secretly in league with Anne in the desire to eliminate a man who did not grace his position? Or with Katherine? Conjecture along this line was not pursued at that time, nor until long after, but that it did strike the observation of some thoughtful men, even in an age when the complexities of human nature were not scientifically studied, is proven by this letter written by a private gentleman of the neighborhood, after the great uproar which the affair made had died down:

> Indeed, I do think that Lady Eastmiln may be the core of all this matter; she was ever accounted a hard female, with less of the natural feelings of the sex than we like to think possible.

Katherine at this time was in delicate health and she had secretly asked her brother-in-law, when next he went to visit Mr. Stewart, to look in his sea chest and see if he had any "powders" left. By this she meant some kind of general family medicine. She also said that she had not been sleeping well at all and that she wished that she might have a few drops of laudanum to eat on a little sugar, so as to get back into the habit of sleeping the night through.

Patrick agreed to do this. The singularity of asking this was not strange in that day, when drugs were hard to get and expensive. Patrick had had some slight training in medicine and had always carried various remedies with him on his sea trips. Both Patrick and Katherine always declared that this was exactly what the conversation had been, and that the powders, which afterward arrived for her from her brother-in-law, were just what she had asked for.

The laudanum she took only a few drops of and returned to him, as witnesses proved. Unfortunately there was no witness to the conversation about the powders, but Cousin Anne, engaged in her customary occupation of snooping, stated that what was really said was quite different; that it was agreed upon between them that arsenic and laudanum should be sent and that it was to be used as a fatal dose on Katherine's husband.

Also, Anne stated, Katherine made no matter of concealment when she found Anne listening, but boldly stated that she intended to poison her husband. Then Anne tried her best to dissuade the girl from "this strange resolution," and exhorted her to remember the consequences "in this world and the next." To this Katherine replied that she wished her husband out of the way so that she and Patrick and "dear Anne" would all be happy together. Lady Eastmiln also seems to have heard something of this conversation, but "said nothing" as usual.

What About Laudanum?

However, Katherine never ceased to declare that this conversation took place only in Anne's mind and that Lady Eastmiln did not hear it, of course. Lady Eastmiln was never asked to speak in the court proceedings which eventually came along, and this has always been an astounding thing to both legal and lay minds which have considered the case. She never discussed the matter with any one, in fact, so far as we are able to find out by the records.

On the very day when this alleged conversation took place, as to Katherine's getting arsenic and laudanum from the lieutenant, Cousin Anne had a very strange conversation with a surgeon of a town, at a little distance, about what would be a fatal dose of laudanum and how it would affect a person. She went to this place and returned, and did not mention the fact to any one, not even to her confidant, Lady Eastmiln. In fact, she accounted for her absence by a lie.

She never mentioned the fact at all, until subsequent proceedings brought her into the limelight and the surgeon came forward with his tale. He was a man totally unknown to the house of Ogilvie. This exceedingly odd incident, on which the case would undoubtedly have pivoted at any time these last fifty years, was never stressed and never treated with the attention that it deserves.

A Remarkable Letter

Well, then, we have the lieutenant from home, Katherine either expecting that he would bring her salts and laudanum or arsenic and laudanum, Cousin Anne whispering about to every one in her usual busy little way, and Katherine imploring her husband to write to his brother that he should return. She herself also wrote him this letter, which has about six different explanations:

DEAR CAPTIN:

I was sorrie I missed you this day. I sat at the waterside a long time this forenoon. I thought you would have comed up here. If you had as much mind of me as I have of you you would have comed up, tho you had but stayed but out-by as there was no use for that. There is more rooms in the house than one.

God knows the heart that I have this day and instead of being better it's worse, and not in my power to help it. You are not minding the thing that I said to you before you went out here and what I wrote for.

Meat I have not tasted since yesterday dinner, nor won't or you come here. Though I should never eat any, it lyes at your door.

Your brother would give anything you would come, for God's sake come.

This document is remarkable in more ways than one. It is not well expressed and Katherine Nairn was an "elegant" writer, using all the flowery, redundant expressions which were so admired at that time. The letter was never found until long after the laird was dead and then it was produced by Alexander under conditions which were peculiar, to say the least.

There were no handwriting experts in those days, and when Katherine declared that she never wrote it and Patrick swore that he never received it, the person to claim that it was in the handwriting of Katherine was Cousin Anne. Why in the world the girl's own father and mother were not sworn on this most vital matter is just another of the big question marks with which the whole story is studded.

The lieutenant, meanwhile, was dawdling about the country, visiting. Among other things, he had dinner with two friends at an inn. One of them was a physician, and at the request of his host he brought with him three small packages of arsenic and a bottle of laudanum.

Patrick told him that he wanted the laudanum for his sister-in-law, who was sleeping badly, and that he wanted the poison to kill off some wild dogs who were running the game off of the wild hills back of the town where the young man was accustomed to hunt.

He then went to the house of Mr. Stewart for a visit and while there a servant girl from Eastmiln came over to bring some household matter to Mr. Stewart's wife from her mother, Lady Eastmiln. She also brought Patrick a letter from Mrs. Ogilvie, which she delivered quite openly, having had, as she afterward swore, no instructions to be private about it.

The lieutenant swore that it was a note asking him to be sure to send her the salts and laudanum soon. Anne said that it was the note which Alexander afterward so opportunely happened on. Katherine swore that she wrote for the salts. as she was feeling more and more ill.

What Mr. Stewart Saw

That day Mr. Stewart saw his brother-in-law open the sea chest—a large affair which had been kept at Mr. Stewart's because the house of Eastmiln was so small and so crowded—and take from it a package of salts. This and a bottle of laudanum were supposed to be tied up in a bundle. Mr. Stewart did not actually see the tying. And then Stewart goes on the little visit to Eastmiln which he was accustomed to take every so often.

Arrived there, he handed the package to Katherine in private, not because he thought there was anything in it which should not be there, but because he understood that the family did not know as yet

of her condition of health. She did not open it, but put it in a drawer of a bureau and locked the drawer. Mr. Stewart saw her do it. The bureau stood in the little clothes closet in the passage, between the two bedrooms.

Anne, we may be sure, was not far away, and as he turned to go downstairs, after Katherine had gone into her bedroom and shut the door, Anne asked him what it was that he had brought Katherine and was it from Patrick.

She Wished Him Dead

Mr. Stewart, as he afterward stated, said at first that he brought nothing, " because I considered Miss Clark as a person given to raise dissension in families," but seeing that she knew something *had* been brought, he told her, whereupon Anne affected great fright, said that the package contained " black drugs " and that Katherine had got them to poison her husband with, and that she meant to do it right away.

She said that the package contained laudanum and did not mention arsenic. Stewart was astounded and went to Lady Eastmiln with the suggestion that all this matter should be brought to the attention of the laird. Her reply is a classic of mystification. She said that " it would be improper to speak to the laird about the matter!"

With these various and exciting things in the minds of all concerned, the rest of the day was passed without note, and that night the laird, his wife, his brother-in-law, Stewart, and Cousin Anne all went out to have supper at an inn in Glendisla, leaving the Dowager of Eastmiln at home with the servants.

During the festive meal the laird told Stewart that he had been feeling much worse than usual of late and that the day before, when out on the farm, he had " swarfed "—fainted. Cousin Anne, sitting very quiet at the board, thereupon left on an excuse and ran across the road to the minister's, thinking to get advice from him on the ticklish state of affairs. At least, that was what she said she did. The minister was not home.

She was singularly unlucky in not ever having any one to back up her statements. There was plenty of time for her to have gone back to the house and gone upstairs without being seen, for Lady Eastmiln was in the kitchen comfortably chatting with the maids during the absence of the rest of the family. The laird's bottle of spirits, from which he always drank before he went to bed, was in the bedroom.

Whether this is what she did, or whether she did, indeed, walk about and ponder on what to do with the situation, no one can ever know. She was missing from the board for a time and then came back to her place again. That was all that was ever known.

As the party started home, Anne and the laird were together and Mr. Stewart and Mrs. Ogilvie. To Stewart, Katherine confided the fact that she was very unhappy with her husband and that she wished him dead and that if that could not be, she wished herself dead. Anne, walking with the laird, warned him that he was about to be poisoned, and urged him to take nothing from the hands of his wife.

He seems to have taken the advice with the good natured impatience that we give to what we consider are nonsensical ideas, and in telling of this afterward Anne could not keep from showing the rage which his contempt and indifference to her—shown in this interview so plainly that she had to own to it—roused in her. He had already told the neighbors that if he did not get her out of his house he did not know what he should do.

To Break Open the Bureau

Anyway, he took his pretty young wife affectionately by the arm as they were going off to bed, and they could be heard talking very amicably together as they were heard to move about the room above, a fact to which attention was drawn by Lady Eastmiln as she and Stewart and Anne sat downstairs and consulted together.

Despite the refusal of the old woman to take the matter seriously or even to talk about it, her son-in-law was considerably disturbed. He had paid little real attention to Anne's statement about the poison, although he had gone to the mother about it. But the fact of what Katherine had said

to him, coming right after the incident of the package, seemed to him ominous. His suggestion was that they should break open the bureau and investigate the package.

Neither Anne nor Lady Eastmiln would agree to this.

And the old lady succeeded in making him think that Anne was merely excited over nothing. The amiable Anne seemed not to be hurt by this imputation on her sagacity and even smiled when her hostess added that it might be that the spinster was just jealous of a happily married pair.

Death in a Bowl

So " to bed," as Mr. Pepys so often remarks, but not to sleep all night, for in the early hours of the morning the laird was very ill, indeed, and at breakfast time could not leave his bed. His dutiful wife took him up a " bowl of the first tea "—*i. e.*, the first drawn from the pot and supposed to be the most fragrant. An hour and a half after this he was taken very ill again.

Cousin Anne went right up to investigate and came down shortly with the concise remark that the laird had got a bad breakfast. To Mr. Stewart the sick man said that he felt " all wrong inside." Urged to have a doctor for him, his wife said that she knew he would soon be better and that what with Anne's telling it everywhere that she was to do a hurt to her husband, it would be a cause of great talk if she had the doctor in.

So Mr. Stewart went away and soon after the laird did feel better and got up to attend to the business of the day. But he was soon back at the house and so ill in the kitchen that he had to be helped upstairs to bed, where he grew instantly worse, with all the usual symptoms of a violent case of poisoning, including thirst and heat and pains in his legs.

In the afternoon Anne went to the room while Katherine was out of it, and after that the laird was passionate in his accusation of his wife. Some broth was brought him in the bowl which had had the tea and he cried out: " Damn that bowl! I have got my death in it already!"

To a servant, Elizabeth, said he: " I am poisoned and that woman did it." And when his mother reproved him for saying this, he added: " It is true and my death lies at her door!" And to a neighbor and friend he said: " I am gone, James, with no less than rank poison."

Anne remained in the room with him, sometimes alone and sometimes with others, until he died, at midnight, the doctor who had been sent for not arriving until afterward. Patrick had arrived meanwhile, and he and the widow took the doctor to look at the corpse, both seeming to be in great distress. To him Katherine made a request which seems sheer insanity, no matter how you look at it. She asked him that whatever he might think was the cause of her husband's death, he would conceal it from the world. He thought this " singular," as well he might, but after viewing the body, formed no conjecture and went his way.

In the morning Anne and the servants filled the fatal bowl with broth and gave it to the dog with the idea, it seems, of proving that it had been impregnated with the poison and would poison the animal. However, he was none the worse for the meal. According to her, she told Patrick that morning that she knew the poison had come from him and that he replied that he had sent it, but that " he had not thought she had so barbarous a heart as to use it." Patrick died denying that he had any such conversation with her.

The Mourners Quarrel

The mourning was ordered for the family, but none for Anne. And the neighbor to whom the laird had said that he was " gone with rank poison " saw gentle Cousin Anne at the moment when this was discovered " strike at the wood of a door " with her clenched fist, and on perceiving that her action had been observed she stated " with spleen " that Katherine and Patrick should pay dear for their neglect and insults.

Some kind of a quarrel arose between Lady Eastmiln and her guest on the following day and on the Monday which preceded the day set for the funeral—which had been much delayed by the failure of physicians to give any verdict as to the

cause of death—Anne was paid in money for any services that she might have rendered and sent packing. She afterward denied this, but the testimony of the neighbor, " James," pinned that lie.

She stayed at the public house in the village for the day and on the next morning, as the funeral was about to begin, Alexander, from Edinburgh, comes upon the scene full of wrath and accusations. Anne swore that she did not communicate to any one " either by letters or otherwise " her belief that the laird had been poisoned and that she could not imagine how Alexander knew anything about the matter, since the family had not even notified him of the death.

Alexander Takes Charge

The good neighbor who had stood by the family during all this turmoil, asked Patrick if he were guilty, and Patrick replied: " God and my own conscience know that I am innocent of it."

Alexander demanded a post mortem and neither Katherine nor Patrick made the least objection, but he would not allow it to be done by two local physicians until a man from a distance, whom he wanted, had come. The man did not come and the physicians left. The doctor that he wanted finally came and would not make the post-mortem, so *he* left. So Alexander, after all his fuss, allowed the burial to take place!

However, he was not idle. He and Anne conferred with the sheriff and other dignitaries and three days afterward Katherine and Patrick were arrested and Cousin Anne returned in triumph to Eastmiln, where Alexander, the deposed, was now lord and where he seemed to be on much better terms with his mother than would have seemed possible, in view of the fact that he had cast a dreadful suspicion and a great disgrace on the son of whom she had been the fondest.

But there is nothing, in fact, about this strange figure of the stern and silent and ambiguous old woman, who was now head of the house of Ogilvie, which is more bewildering than the way in which she seemed to have no real attachment to any one, no real feelings about anything—or, perhaps, the way in which she contrived to cover up everything about herself.

Anyway, with her oldest son recently dead, with her son's wife and his brother in jail for murdering him, with the son whom she had repudiated and the woman whom she had put out of the house lording it over her, she continued to be the silent and uncommunicative person that she always had been, the person on whom, seemingly, no impression had been made by the long succession of deaths and accidents and suicides which had occurred in the family.

Instantly the unregenerate son set about despoiling the home. On the seventeenth he " rouped the stocking upon the farm "—he sold off the cattle, as the representative of the family, and appropriated the money.

Katherine, taken to Edinburgh, refused to talk, and so did Patrick. Both of them had got eminent counsel by that time, but previously Katherine had stated that the powders sent her were the salts she had desired, that she had taken them and that she had had two doses of the laudanum and then had returned the bottle to Patrick when he came to the house to see about his brother. This last she was able to prove and also that very little was gone from the amount that the bottle could have contained.

Miss Clark Speaks

The letter, quoted previously, now turned up in a manner which left it open to question. The sheriff had searched Eastmiln after the removal of the prisoners from it and found nothing, but the next day he received the letter from Alexander, who said that he had " happened to find it " in the house.

The sheriff expressed surprise, as he thought that he had thoroughly combed the place, especially Patrick's room, where it would logically be. Despite the fact that Katherine and Patrick denied it, and that no witnesses to the writing were examined save Anne Clark, it was undoubtedly this letter which convicted both the prisoners of the crime of having poisoned the laird of Eastmiln. It also, of course, convicted them of having had a criminal love affair.

The examination of Miss Clark occupied hours, and brought to view a most astounding story of a criminal life with the lowest of associates, which she and Alexander had pursued. It ruined her reputation forever, but her statements as to Katherine and Patrick she stuck to. The thing that threw the balance toward belief that in those statements she had at least approximated the truth was not only the alleged letter written by Katherine, but another fact, which was that Patrick had not said a word about the "poison for wild dogs" that he had gotten at the same time with the laudanum.

Evidence on Poisons

The doctor, being like the surgeon whom Anne had consulted, convinced that this was a most peculiar and involved case, volunteered the statement to the authorities. Upon which Patrick tried to amend his statement, but was not allowed. To his lawyer and others he made the unofficial statement that he had not mentioned it as he feared that it would "seem suspicious," but that he really had used the poison on bits of meat that he had left where the wild dogs were accustomed to run.

The doctors who were called on the case stated that the appearance of the body seemed to them indicative of death from poisoning, but they could not swear to it. No *post-mortem* had been made, and nobody, at that time, had thought of exhuming a body for the purpose, beside which, *post-mortems* were pretty unreliable operations in those days, when laboratory tests were still in their infancy.

However, there were many witnesses for the defendants. Five witnesses from Glendisla swore that before the package arrived from Patrick, therefore before Katherine was accused of having poison in her possession, the laird was exceedingly ill while visiting some of his tenants, and that he expressed himself as very much astonished at the way that he had been feeling for several days.

It will be remembered that the supper party was on the night when he was taken ill, a few hours afterward, and that Cousin Anne was absent from that supper table long enough to have gone to the house and done any little job that might occur to her fertile mind.

No real stress was ever laid on this very arresting fact, and it was not until almost a hundred years afterward, when murder cases began to be really scientifically treated, and the evidence in them properly weighed, that those who wrote of famous cases began to speculate on this point in the case.

Another point was that the doctor who had sold the poison for the dogs came forward to state that he did not even know whether it was arsenic or not, but that he had had it a long time, and had always sold it for the poisoning of wild dogs and rats. This shows us the exceedingly primitive state of medical science at that time, and explains many of the difficulties of the case under discussion.

Elizabeth, the maid, swore that she saw Mrs. Ogilvie taking salts, and that she had part of them, to her physical betterment. There was no place and no person ever brought forward to say that Katherine had bought those salts of them or at that place, so that it would seem that it must have been the salts of her brother-in-law which she took, and yet, aside from the caution of the physicians in not swearing to the cause of the death of the laird, it cannot be denied that that death bore every evidence of being due to poison.

The Jury Gets Tired

As for the declaration of the laird, as he lay dying, that he had been poisoned by his wife, he had made it clear that he thought the poison was in the bowl of tea. And yet Elizabeth, lying abed the morning that the laird began to be ill with a slight indisposition, had been given the remainder of the bowl of tea which the sick man had not been able to take, young Mrs. Ogilvie being far more humane and kind to the servants, as they all testified, than the old lady or any of the Ogilvie family proper.

The condition under which trials by jury were held in Scotland at that time almost passes belief. The jury ate and drank and talked to every one while the case was being tried, and when the testimony of the

defendants had been given for three hours and only ten of the over a hundred persons who had come there prepared to make statements relevant to the case had been heard, *the jury refused to listen any longer.*

They closed the case, instantly, and pronounced a verdict of "Guilty!" against both Katherine Ogilvie and Patrick Ogilvie. They did this after the three hours of listening to the defense of the accused and thirty hours of listening to the proof brought forward against them.

"May God Forgive Them!"

The lawyers for the defendants instantly protested, as well they might, but the court would not allow a protest, and sentence was pronounced on Patrick, who was to die on the 25th of September. Katherine, however, was to have a child, and she was sent to prison to await its birth before sentence should be pronounced for her.

Meanwhile the English Bar was much agitated by the end of the famous trial, which was one of the first to receive nation-wide attention, day by day, through the public press. Finally a barrister wrote to one of the Scottish law journals a fierce indictment of the trial. The chief point he made was that both defendants had been tried for two separate crimes, the greater depending on the proof of the lesser as to motive. "The intrigue was supposed to be certain, because the husband was supposed to have been poisoned; and the husband was believed to be poisoned because there was a supposed proof of an intrigue," he said.

Patrick got several reprieves, while his lawyers did their best to get a new trial, but they failed, and he was executed on the 14th of November. He had been a weak, vain man, but he was never shaken in the dignified attitude which he had taken, well exemplified by the speech which he made before he died.

"As to the crimes I am accused of, the trial itself showed the propensity of the witness to make civility and possibly folly into actual guilt. Of both crimes of which I am accused, and for which I am now doomed to suffer, I declare my innocence, and that no persuasion could ever have made me condescend to them. I freely forgive every one concerned in this unhappy affair, and wherein any of them have been faulty to me, I pray God to forgive them."

He seems never to have seen Katherine after sentence was pronounced on him, and while she was in great distress at his fate, she certainly made none of the motions of intense grief which might have been expected had she really cared for him.

Three months after the unfortunate lieutenant had passed away a daughter was born to the prisoner, who had been very kindly attended by a professional nurse, a Mrs. Shields. On the 15th of March, 1766, the court met with the intent to pass judgment on her, but the bird had flown!

She had escaped by claiming to be ill on a Saturday, and so, getting rid of attendants, had dressed herself in the clothes of Mrs. Shields and calmly walked away, much helped in the disguise by the fact that the nurse had kept her head wrapped in a cloth for several days previously, claiming to have had the toothache.

There was a great hue and cry, but from that day to this, Katherine Nairn, Mrs. Thomas Ogilvie, is a vanished figure. No person ever told of seeing her go. Mrs. Shields was alive as late as 1805, but she refused to even mention the name of the woman whom she had helped cheat the gallows.

The Perplexing Aftermath

On one occasion, though, she did say that it was incomprehensible that she, of all people in the world, had never heard one word from "the little dear" after the Saturday when she had gone out of the prison room, for a little, only to return and find the door open and the occupant gone. The doorkeeper swore that he thought that it was Mrs. Shields, and that he slapped her on the back as she went out, and that she answered him with the voice of the nurse.

Rumors came thick and fast. Katherine was in the disguise of an army officer; she was in a French convent; she was in London; she was hidden with her uncle; and so on.

Her relatives were watched, but they one

and all declared that they knew nothing of her, and their actions seemed to bear this out, though Mr. William Nairn, who afterward was given the title of Lord Dunsinnan, was thought to have assisted her.

Reports of what happened to this beautiful girl after her escape continued to find their way to the newspapers long after she had disappeared. They had her married in France, in America, in South America, in Germany—always to a rich man and with a large family, but these reports were never substantiated any more than the reports, so persistent, that she was an inmate of some remote religious house.

But one thing is certain. When the logical time of her possible span of life had passed, there was no headstone in the family burying place with her name on it, nor any unnamed grave. If she had died, and the family had known where she was, it does not seem possible that they would have failed to have her body sent home.

There she is, then, one of the most pathetic and intriguing figures of criminal history, fading out into absolute mystery, as teasing a problem as that of her guilt or innocence, a matter over which legal lights and those curious enough to delve into the intricacies of the case have argued for over a hundred years.

"Was she guilty, was she innocent, and if innocent, why did Patrick Ogilvie buy arsenic?" That is the way that Andrew Lang comments on the case, but he, with a good many others, seems to entirely lose sight of other aspects of the mystery which were even more baffling.

Could Anne have brought arsenic with her from Alexander when she came from Edinburgh? He would have been easily in a position to secure it, and that without suspicion. Or, did Alexander send with her some other poison, and was that the reason that he contrived that the *post-mortem* did not take place? Why did Anne visit the surgeon with a thirst for information about laudanum?

Did she suggest to Katherine that she should ask the lieutenant for salts and laudanum, so that the coil might be woven about the two? She might have done this in such an indirect way that Katherine would not have realized that it came from her.

Did Anne find Lady Eastmiln open to the idea of doing away with the son whom she disliked in order that the son whom she admired should have the place as head of the family? Was the damning letter fabricated by Anne? By the mother? By Alexander? And why did Katherine marry as she did, anyway? If Patrick wanted to buy poison, why did he not go up to Edinburgh, as he well might have without arousing suspicion, and buy it there of some obscure chemist?

The sale of poison was not restricted in those days. If a poison different from arsenic and laudanum was used by some one other than Katherine, did Anne ask about the effects of laudanum so that she might be sure that the symptoms would seem like that poison?

Did she leave the supper party and poison the bottle of spirits? In the course of the testimony at the trial no mention was ever made of this possibility, nor question made as to what became of it, and yet there seems not to have been any in the room when the laird lay dying, for Anne procured some from Lady Eastmiln for her son. Whichever way the student of this crime turns, there are new possibilities.

As for Lady Eastmiln, she alone remained of all her house, for the infant which Katherine left behind her died soon after its birth. And on the 1st of March, 1766, on the anniversary of the ill-fated day when Anne Clark arrived at Eastmiln, Alexander was arrested for bigamy, having taken to himself a second wife without the formality of divorcing the porter's daughter.

He was given the verdict of banishment from Scotland for seven years, but was allowed to be out for a short time to settle up his affairs, and while doing so he fell out of the upper story window of a house and broke his neck.

Anne Clark and Lady Eastmiln were living amicably together when this happened, and the last we know of them they were still doing so, which puts the final touch of the incomprehensible on the whole affair.

The owner of the head continued his ascent from the cellar

FRIEND AGAINST FRIEND

By John Willoughby

CHARGE AND COUNTER-CHARGE CONFUSE AND PERPLEX, BUT V. V. IS DETERMINED TO SEE THE THING THROUGH

IT was a sultry, stifling night, the beginning of the trying dog days of 1912, which taxed the hospitals of the East as never before. Captain Vincent Viggiano, known to his friends as V. V., head of the Italian squad of the New York police department, had just entered his bachelor lodgings after a hard day's grind.

His quarters were on the second floor of an old house in the Italian colony, just south of Washington Square, and consisted of a bedroom, library, a sitting room in itself more spacious than the average modern apartment, and another room of manorial proportions. This last served as living room, dining room and kitchen. In one corner of it, behind a screen, was a cot.

Here slept Don Pietro, the silent, gray-haired servitor, who was cook, chambermaid, valet, and major domo rolled in one, and who looked after V. V. as he would a son. Several big comfortable chairs, almost lost in the vastness, and a table, comprised the rest of the furnishings of the room which boasted not even a scrap of rug. But the walls belied the seeming scorn of the luxuries of life, for a few soulful products of the etcher's needle, all of modern artists save a Crare impression of Lo Spagnoletto's "Apollo and the Cumæan Sibyl," arrested the attention of all who entered the room—even that of the most untutored in this fascinating branch of the arts.

V. V. was toying with a steaming hot cup of coffee when the bell rang. The famous detective, who drank his hot coffee no matter what the weather, glanced at Don Pietro, but said nothing. His old servant saw

the raised eyebrows of his chief, which eloquently inquired if he had any idea as to who was making a midnight call, and responded in the dialect of their own little Neapolitan village, the sole medium of communication between them when alone:

"It is Arturo Lombardo. He has been here twice this evening and said he would come back again."

"Lombardo of the restaurant of the Two Friends?"

"The same."

While this brief dialogue ensued, Don Pietro had pressed the button which opened the street door, and footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs. A knock on the living room door, which was opened by Don Pietro, and a stocky, dark complexioned man of about forty, with a trooper's bristling mustache, entered.

"Lombardo!" exclaimed V. V. rising with outstretched hand. "Why you look as if you hadn't slept for nights!"

"Captain, I come to you as a friend," was the anguished response. "I am in distress. You can help me. But I want to talk to you as I would to a brother. And I want you to give me your word of honor that you will forget that you are a sworn officer of the law and aid me, for I know you can. I am almost frantic!"

"Friend Lombardo, confide in me," said V. V. comfortingly. "I cannot deny you the test of friendship when so solemnly demanded. You have my word, for I know you will not talk unless I pledge it, and so proceed."

"Amalfi, my trusted partner, has betrayed me!" exclaimed Lombardo in a voice expressive of sorrow and despair. "He is a thief!"

V. V. threw up his hands.

"That cannot be!" protested the detective.

"I knew how you would feel!" cried Lombardo. "Conceive my torture of soul when I know that the son of my father's best friend has been the meanest kind of thief for these four weeks past, stealing from me, my family, and himself. But he is mad! The tragedy of it is that he will ruin our little business just as it has begun to prosper beyond our fondest hopes.

"As you know it is only three years since I brought my beautiful wife and first-born from Italy. You should hear the beautiful English that little girl is learning in the public school! And then our bambino, born here! And Amalfi is destroying my plans for those little children! Do you know I have pictured them great Americans! Maybe—who can tell? The bambino may be the President of the United States! I pray nightly that he may. Damn Amalfi! No, I should say pity poor Amalfi! What is to become of him? We must save him from destroying himself and all of us!"

"Courage, Lombardo! First let me hear the details. Then, together, we will work out a plan."

"But remember your word!"

"Friend Lombardo, that is given," returned V. V. impatiently.

"I didn't mean it so," apologized Lombardo. "I had only in mind that there must be no public exposure of Amalfi, for although he is a vile thief, and has done evil by me, I shall neither wrong nor cheat him, although he has been robbing me regularly now for nearly a month."

"But tell me how?"

"You know our system at the restaurant. One of us quits work at seven o'clock one week while the other comes on in the afternoon and remains until midnight or such time as our late customers leave. And whichever of us has the late trick locks up the place and it remains empty until six o'clock the next morning when the other opens up for the cook."

"Yes, I know all that. And you change about each week."

"That's right, captain. Now you must also remember that only Amalfi and myself have keys to the place."

"Hasn't the cook a key?"

"No, captain. That is because we have always twenty-five dollars in small bills and silver in the cash drawer which is put in by the one who closes up."

"The money is left there overnight?"

"Yes, so there will be change to do business with in the morning. It is out of this money that Amalfi has been stealing."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, but it is all perfectly clear. Only he and I have keys. And if it were some one else I would have caught the thief, for I have laid traps. I know it is Amalfi, who may steal undetected."

"How much has been taken in the four weeks this has been going on?"

"Exactly one hundred and fifty-two dollars. I have figured it up. He has been stealing about forty dollars a week. And you know that if this goes on very much longer we will have nothing."

V. V. whistled. He knew intimately the business conditions of the two ever since they started, as prior to joining the police force under circumstances which created considerable stir at the time, they discussed their affairs with him daily. He knew Lombardo was not overpainting the picture. V. V. had worked in Dr. Ferri's drug store adjoining the "Ristorante Degli Due Amici," as the swinging black and gold sign described the eating place to all who went by.

And while he no longer ate there two and three meals a day, as when he was a drug clerk, it was still his favorite restaurant, and the friendly relations among the three had grown closer with the years. V. V. knew that a leak of this sort could not continue very long without the Two Friends hitting the rocks.

"Does Amalfi know you suspect him?" asked V. V.

"He does, but he is a very devil," groaned Lombardo.

"What does he say?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! He is the very devil."

"Suppose we start from the beginning?"

"Yes, captain. The first time he stole the money I was on at night. It was just four weeks ago yesterday. I counted out twenty-five dollars in small bills and silver and put it in the cash register, as was our custom. Then I took the rest of the money, put it in the money belt around my waist and went home. The next day when I arrived at the restaurant Amalfi said: 'You only left eleven dollars in the cash register last night. It left me quite short. I had to run next door and borrow some money from Dr. Ferri.'

"I said I must have been careless, for I felt certain that I had made a mistake, and thought no more about it. That night, after checking up the receipts of the day I counted out fifteen dollars in ones and twos and ten dollars in small change.

"And I slapped my forehead with my open hand when on going to the store the following noon Amalfi greeted me with: 'You must leave twenty-five dollars in the cash register every night, for less leaves me short.'

"For a moment I was speechless. I stared at Amalfi. But that devil only stared back. He is without shame! When I found my voice I said:

"'How much did you find in the drawer?'

"'Ten dollars in bills. No small change at all.'

"This was his shameless answer! I bit my lips to keep from telling him to his face that he was a thief, thief, thief! And instead of speaking the truth, I lied. I even apologized to him. I said I must have made a mistake and that it would not occur again. I did not have to look after things in the restaurant for another couple of hours. So I ran, not walked, into the open air to get out of the foul atmosphere of that devil, and to forget his thieving face.

"I felt I must talk to some one. I went next door, to your old place, the pharmacy. But Dr. Ferri was not in. Only the clerk was there. I did not want to confide in him. So after chatting a few minutes with him I left the drug store, walked up the street to Washington Square, sat on a bench, near the statue of Garibaldi and worked out a plan. I would return to the restaurant, repeat to Amalfi that I was certain I had made a mistake, lull that crook into believing that I was not sure of myself, and watch the place that night."

II

"DID you?" demanded V. V.

"Yes. I kept the restaurant open until two o'clock and then I concealed myself in the doorway across the street."

"And what happened?"

"I stayed in the doorway till dawn. Then I went into the hall, and watched the restaurant through a chink in the door. Although it was a warm night, I shivered. But nothing happened until six o'clock that morning, when that thief Amalfi, whistling merrily, came up and opened the place for the day's business. I did not want him to see me, so I knowing that it would be only a minute before he would be back in the kitchen, I kept watching through the narrow opening until I detected, from the lights being switched on in the back, that he was in the kitchen and could not see me.

"Then I rushed out of my hiding place and hastened home. The cunning devil must have learned in some way that I was watching, or he at least suspected as much, for he reported no shortage when I went to the restaurant that evening. Just before Amalfi left, he not having mentioned the subject, I inquired how he found the cash drawer when he opened up.

"'You made no mistake last night,' said Amalfi. And would you believe it, he leered at me!

"He was treating me like he would a fool! I felt like throttling him. I restrained myself. Late that night I learned where the money was going. He was gambling. He had been losing steadily at baccarat, and that night he had lost sixteen dollars at Fratello Michele's home.

"How did you learn that?" asked V. V.

"The drug clerk in Dr. Ferri's told me."

"Which one?"

"Tony Coletti."

"Who plays in the games?"

"Dr. Ferri, Maggio, Rigo, Gavarani—all the same old crowd."

"Does any one know just how Gavarani lives?"

"No. He is still a mystery."

"Who are the chief losers in the games?"

"Amalfi, Tony Coletti, and Dr. Ferri."

"Was the cash drawer robbed the day after Amalfi lost the sixteen dollars?"

"No."

"And was the cash drawer robbed the next day?"

"No, not for three days. Then Amalfi said that it had been ten dollars short. Came the next week, and Amalfi's turn to lock up at night, and mine to open up in the morning. The first morning the twenty-five dollars was intact. The next morning there was but seventeen dollars in the drawer. And there were three of the remaining five mornings when it was apparent that Amalfi had looted the till. I said nothing. I kept my own counsel. Yet not a word did that devil say to me of money. Of course there was no use watching the place, as I had done the week before, for it was all too simple for Amalfi to go on with his thieving without the slightest possibility of detection.

"The next week, when I was on duty at night, I made it a point each afternoon, thinking that that would stir the conscience of the devil, to ask Amalfi how much money he found in the drawer. Sometimes he would say: 'It was all right.' Other times he would refuse to talk until I pressed him and then he would lie about it and say that he found a shortage. He has virtually stopped talking to me, or to put it more correctly, we have had little speech with one another.

"And this week, my week to open up, I have found the cash drawer short four mornings running, and being unable to stand it any longer, I decided when I finished work this evening to come to you."

Lombardo was almost a nervous wreck by this time. He slumped, a quasi-inert heap, into one of V. V.'s big chairs. Don Pietro handed him a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," said Lombardo, heaving a sigh keyed in misery.

V. V. was deep in thought. He was hunched up in a chair, his huge blond-fringed forehead a contracted mass of wrinkles, his deep blue eyes focused on a spot on the ceiling. Suddenly his six feet of impressive manhood—Neapolitans are among the tallest of the Italians—rose like a tower, and in his rich, resonant basso, he said:

"Amico Lombardo, I have it. Have a duplicate key made and turn it over to Don Pietro here. The quicker the better."

"But there will be no arresting of Amalfi?" inquired Lombardo, in a tone half plea and half protest.

"Let us not travel over the same ground

again," said V. V., with a show of irritation. "Have that duplicate key to the restaurant made without delay. Get it here by to-morrow afternoon. Say nothing to any one. The matter is now in my hands. Let me do the worrying."

Lombardo, gratefully acknowledging the situation, departed with the promise, repeated several times, to have the duplicate key in V. V.'s hands not later than that afternoon. It was now almost one o'clock in the morning.

III

V. V.'s plan of action was simplicity itself: he would let himself into the restaurant of the Two Friends with the key Lombardo would provide and then—trust to fate. He was very fond of Amalfi, more so than he was of his recent visitor, and time and again, as he sat hunched up in his chair, he was earnestly praying that Amalfi was not the culprit. His prayer expressed his faith.

He was indulging in a freshly brewed cup of coffee when—Lombardo had not been gone more than half an hour—the door bell rang again.

"Now who can that be!" exclaimed Don Pietro. "Will my *capitano* never get to bed to-night?"

"It's all part of the work," said V. V. comfortingly to his faithful servant.

Don Pietro pushed the button, and this time through the opened door entered Amalfi himself! His face was haggard. He, too, looked as if suffering had laid a heavy hand on him. He did not wait for an invitation, but with the air of one who knew he was always at home, plumped himself into a chair facing V. V. and sat there until he had regained his breath.

"Amalfi is getting too fat," said V. V. to Don Pietro. "He is eating too much."

Lombardo's partner muttered an apology for his unseasonable visit.

"I had no choice save to come here," said Amalfi. "I know I would go crazy if I didn't come to you and lay bare my heart."

"Before you say anything more, accept a cup of coffee," said V. V.

"Thanks, *amico*, I need it," responded Amalfi, and a second later was offering his thanks to Don Pietro, who, anticipating his wants, had poured out a cup of coffee when he entered.

Amalfi emptied the cup in one gulp.

"Ah! I feel better!" he exclaimed as he set the cup and saucer on the table. "I can talk now. Perhaps you are wondering at this visit. I shall be brief, never fear. Only to an old friend such as you would I dare to be guilty of such seeming thoughtlessness. But then a mutual friend of ours needs our help. His happiness, and that of his family is at stake. In a word Lombardo is crazy."

V. V., who in his first years in New York had not hesitated to go to Amalfi for a loan when he was short of funds, nevertheless looked hard at his friend.

"Lombardo, your partner, crazy?" queried the detective.

"Without a doubt. How else can you explain his actions? He is stealing, stealing, stealing every day. He has been doing it now for a month. There is scarcely a day that he does not take five, ten, and fifteen dollars from the till.

"At first I thought he was just a plain thief. But no. The poor fellow has worried over something until he is not responsible for what he is doing. He has not been acting like a sane man. He cannot help suspecting that I know, for when it first began I made no effort to conceal my suspicions. If he were single and without responsibilities, as I am, I would not care a fig. But he has his family. It is of them I am thinking. But something must be done if we are to save the business, and more than that, to save Lombardo and his family."

"But what is he doing with the money—is there another woman?"

"No, *signor!* Most certainly not! I don't know what he does with it. Nor can I imagine. He does not gamble."

"Did you say anything to Lombardo to indicate that you intended telling me?"

"No, *signor!* But I knew we two together could think out some means of salvation. If he were a thief, I would not come to you. But he is not sane."

"Have you considered any plan?"

"Yes. Our good friend Sarubbi has a farm down on the Jersey Coast, near Manasquan. Sarubbi would do anything for you."

"Or for you," put in V. V.

"I know. We could ask him to invite Lombardo and his family to spend a month down there. There won't be any school for another five weeks. It would do the children good. Country and seashore in one. And he's passionately fond of fishing. There's good fishing down there. Do you remember the striped bass we caught down there at the Inlet? He hasn't had a vacation in several years. But then, neither have I. And while he is gone I can work day and night."

"But that would kill you!"

"V. V., when Lombardo and I left Italy, sworn brothers, we went to the Pennsylvania coal mines. There if you fall sick you lose your job. Lombardo fell sick. He did not lose his job, for I did his work and mine with these arms, piling the coal into the little trains, piling in the coal two men should have piled, piling it in day after day until he got well and returned to work. I did that for eight weeks. And I never felt it. Why, working from six in the morning until closing time in the restaurant is nothing! I could do it for years and not feel it."

V. V. made no response. Don Pietro, knowing his master as a father would his son, had a cup of coffee ready for him. V. V. sipped it slowly, looking fixedly at the floor. V. V. wanted time. Here was a mystery. He could not tell Amalfi that Lombardo had been there less than an hour ago. It was necessary to fence a bit.

"Amico Amalfi," said V. V., "you have but sketched your story. Give it to me in detail. When you have finished, we will talk of plans."

This Amalfi did. Save for a difference in phraseology, and the utter absence of any bitterness, such as Lombardo displayed toward Amalfi in his version of the pilfering of the till, Amalfi repeated the story of his partner almost word for word. Like Lombardo, Amalfi was positive that there were but two keys to the restaurant.

When he finished, V. V., as he had in the case of Lombardo, asked that a duplicate key be made for him, and that Amalfi say nothing of his visit.

"Leave the key for me at my office in police headquarters," said V. V. "Don't bring it here. Have it ready not later than to-morrow afternoon. In the meantime not a word to any one. Maybe in a day or two we will discuss Lombardo's vacation on the Jersey coast."

IV

AFTER three hours' sleep, V. V., thanks to his alarm clock, was awakened feeling thoroughly refreshed. His anxiety to clear up the mystery quickly acted as a stimulus.

He had scarcely taken his cold plunge and dressed before Don Pietro, sleepy-eyed, and unprepared for this early rising, was on hand with a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," said V. V. "Run back to bed and finish your sleep. I'm breakfasting at the Two Friends. You were asleep when I reached this decision."

A minute later the detective was in the street, heading toward the restaurant, rapturously inhaling deep draughts of the invigorating ocean breeze.

Although it was not yet six o'clock, the tenements lining the half dozen blocks he had to traverse were bustling with industry. Mothers, all of V. V.'s race, were promenading the sidewalks while it was yet cool, getting the benefit of the morning breeze—not for themselves, but for the children in their arms or toddling beside them.

Half way in his journey the detective stopped short at the corner of Carmine and Bleecker streets.

The scene would have stayed one with a lesser appreciation of the beautiful. A dingy horse car was halted in the middle of the block by two truckmen quarreling over the right of way. The curbs were lined with pushcarts, fairly rioting color, and piled high with almost every variety of fruit and vegetable. Here the tropics and the temperate zones were competing.

By ship, and truck, and train came the products of grove and field and farm and

plantation. Potatoes and golden-tasseled corn from the sandy coasts of New Jersey and Long Island; Florida, California, and Sicily sent golden oranges and other citrous fruits; bananas from Central America; cauliflowers, white and purple, and deep green broccoli with vivid yellow buds from near by; seedy, mouth-puckering, persimmons, both red and yellow, from some Gulf Stream kissed shore; prickly pears of soft, pastel tones—alluring to the eye, but treacherous to hand and tongue and lips of the uninitiated.

Haggling women, most of them clinging affectionately to the picturesque headshawls of the old country, lent additional color to the scene.

In the background were drab tenements, flanked at the extreme left by the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii, which, were it not for its gilded cruciform symbol, would have passed as a transplanted Greek temple.

V. V. began to hasten. He wanted to be at the restaurant before it was opened.

He arrived as Amalfi was putting the key in the door.

"*Buon' mattin'!*" greeted V. V.

"What a pleasure!" returned Amalfi.

"How soon may a hungry man eat?"

"Immediately."

Once inside, and the door closed behind them, V. V. strode over to the cash register, pressed a master key, causing the cash drawer to fly open.

Together they counted the money.

There was but nineteen dollars in the till.

"Now you see what a thief he is!" fumed Amalfi.

V. V. ignored his companion. He was standing over the open drawer, sniffing audibly, like a hound picking up the scent.

He lowered his head until his nose was in the till.

"This is interesting," mused V. V. aloud.

He sniffed the keys, each one separately, coming to the two master keys last.

"It's on one of these also," said V. V.

"What?" asked Amalfi.

"I'll have two eggs in black butter and a large cup of coffee," evaded V. V.

Amalfi disappeared into the kitchen.

The detective went to the cigar case and sniffed the knobs on the small sliding doors. The odor was absent there.

"This is simplifying things," said V. V. "I have known that odor to live for days."

He sat down at the table Amalfi had set, and while eating his breakfast, asked Amalfi to put the bills remaining in the cash register in an envelope.

"How many dollars here?" queried V. V. and he placed the envelope in his pocket.

"Nine."

"Here's a ten dollar bill, give me change for one and we'll be square. I'm keeping these. And mind you, not a word to any one."

"But this constant stealing, stealing, is driving me crazy."

"Perhaps this is the last theft."

When V. V. returned to his lodgings he took out the envelope containing the bills from the cash register, examining each one carefully. With a snort of satisfaction he put one on the table, scrutinizing a corner of it under a 10X magnifying glass, one of the most powerful instruments of its kind.

"Unmistakably brown!" said the detective aloud. "And even under this glass the starch crystals show up clearly."

He went into the kitchen, found a carton of corn starch, thrust a match end into the white, pulvery mass, and returned to the telltale dollar bill.

Meticulously V. V. held the starchy end of the match over the corner of the bank note, and tapped the stick sharply.

Some of the corn starch flaked off, and fell near the almost invisible specks he had been examining.

Again V. V. brought the magnifying glass into play, and speedily checked up his original findings to his complete satisfaction.

"Starch crystals beyond question," said V. V.

V

THE following morning, a little after two o'clock, V. V. admitted himself to the darkened restaurant of the Two Friends by means of one of the duplicate keys given him by Amalfi and Lombardo. He had been hiding for nearly

an hour in the same doorway across the street from the restaurant, where Lombardo hid when he first suspected Amalfi. He picked a time for his stealthy entrance when the road was clear. It was Amalfi's week for closing up.

Once within, the detective, after locking the door, quietly reconnoitered every nook and cranny of the place, which were as familiar to him as to either of the owners of the popular little restaurant. There were two rear windows opening on a yard. They were securely fastened from the inside, so ingress was not possible through either of these. The same was true of the rear door, which in addition to a lock and bolt, was barred by a heavy steel rod slipped into sockets on either side of the door. The only entrance could be by the front door, to which he and the proprietors alone had the keys.

His survey finished, V. V. took off his coat and threw it over the cash register. He pressed one of the keys, opening the cash drawer. The coat performed the service assigned it: it muted the sound of the bell which rings whenever the machine opens or closes. He counted the money. There was twenty-five dollars in small bills and silver. V. V. penciled his monogram on the bills before replacing them. He then closed the till.

This was as he had anticipated. For he could not bring himself to believe that Amalfi was a thief, and he was also confident that when he solved the mystery it would show that Amalfi's suspicions of Lombardo were equally unfounded. He had his own idea as to who the thief was, and yet he was secretly hoping that his deductions were faulty, and that he would meet with a surprise.

V. V. put on his coat and went back to the kitchen, which like the rest of the restaurant, was in total darkness, save for the ghostly glimmer from a rather distant street lamp. He groped around the wall near the door for the electric buttons. He recalled just about where they were, for he was a clerk in Dr. Ferri's drug store next door when the electric lights were being put in, and took considerable interest in the work of installation. He found them. His memory had not tricked him. There were three switches in the row. The first, he recalled, controlled the lights in the windows; the second, the illumination of the dining room; the third, the electrics in the kitchen.

V. V.'s next move was to gather up some soiled tablecloths, lay them down on the floor of the dining room in an off corner, and walk off a space to survey the effect.

"They attract the eye at once to that corner," said V. V. half aloud. "That will never do."

He returned to the kitchen and found some dark clothes of the cook which he threw on top of the carefully spread tablecloths, completely hiding them. Now the corner was as inconspicuous as the rest of the floor, and almost as comfortable as a mattress.

This was where V. V. was going to spend the better part of the night. He could sit or lie down, and command an almost unobstructed view of the street door and the entire dining room. All that intervened were the legs of tables, which afforded an ideal blind.

Altogether V. V. was greatly pleased with the whole situation. He pulled out his watch, saw it was half past two, and decided that if his reasoning were sound, he might look for action any moment. He examined his service automatic, to be certain that the magazine was primed, and having assured himself of its serviceability, placed it on the table nearest him.

V. V. then loosened his belt and shifted an old-fashioned, six-chambered revolver, which he carried on his hip in a leather holster, until it was within immediate reach of his right hand. Amalfi had presented him with this the day he joined the police force. It had been the property of Amalfi's brother, a sergeant in Italy's crack military corps, the picturesque Bersaglieri of the plumed sombreroes.

"V. V.," said Amalfi, "my brother, who gave this revolver to me, and I, lived together on the edge of the little village of Spinoso from the earliest time I can remember. He worked around the farms and in the vineyards, for he was big—he seemed a grown man to me then! And he was, in purpose and accomplishment. But when

I grew up and learned for the first time that he had been but a mere boy of twelve when we lost our parents, and that he had been fond father, loving mother, and devoted brother to me, I cried myself to sleep. And seldom do I recall it now without emotion.

"Until I met you he was dearer to me than life itself. But you, because of your gentleness to me, as well as to Lombardo, have placed yourself in that same niche in my heart where the memory of my brother lies enshrined. Sometimes I have upbraided myself for this seeming lack of loyalty to him, and once I wrote him of it, and his answer was one of the most joyous letters ever penned. He was happy to learn I had such a friend. That letter and the picture of my sainted mother, are two of my sacred possessions. I have given you the third."

"Poor, tender, self-sacrificing Amalfi," said V. V. to himself as he conjured up the scene of the presentation of the revolver. V. V. was feeling a little downhearted. He was on the point of lighting a cigarette to buck himself up when he heard a fumbling at the street door. He raised himself on one knee, drawing Amalfi's revolver as he did so. The fumbling continued. It was unquestionably some one trying to get in, some one who had a key. V. V. was cursing his luck which caused the maker of the doors to use nothing but wood in their construction. Had they been glass, he might be able to tell who was on the other side.

He kept his revolver trained on the door. Gradually it opened. V. V. as he recognized the form swung his revolver so that it pointed away from the intruder. He could hear his heart beating, and as the faint light from the street lamp shone on the features of the man, V. V. stifled a groan.

It was Amalfi!

V. V. was a God-fearing man, and he prayed fervently that Amalfi had returned for some other reason than robbery. Amalfi locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He was not making a sound. Why this stealth in his own place? V. V.'s heart beat faster. What was he to do if Amalfi should—but no, Amalfi couldn't be a thief. Then why was Amalfi here? V. V. found himself unable to give an answer. Instinctively he kept his eyes on his friend.

V. V.'s heart began to sound in his own ears like claps of thunder when he saw Amalfi head straight for the cash register. His hand convulsively tightened its grip on the revolver Amalfi had given him. There were but eight or ten paces between the door and the cash register. Yet it seemed that Amalfi required an age to take a single pace. Each step was stealthy, deliberate, catlike. It was evident Amalfi didn't want to make the slightest sound. He had taken about four steps and was halfway to the cash register when his progress was checked by a noise.

The noise was caused by some one at the lock. Amalfi detected the cause at the same time V. V. did, for the detective found himself swinging his revolver in the direction of the street door at the very moment Amalfi dropped on all fours and crawled quietly along the floor to a place of concealment beneath a table within a few feet of V. V.

There was no longer any doubt about it. Some one was entering the place. There was a key in the lock. The heavy tumblers could be heard as they were swung violently back. The door opened, and entered —Lombardo!

There was nothing stealthy in Lombardo's actions. He was subtly humming an old-world tune under his breath. He stood a moment in the open door before closing it and took his time in locking it from the inside. But in spite of his apparently care-free actions Lombardo closed the door without noise.

This was a situation V. V. had not calculated on. What should he do? He was wondering, as Lombardo was turning the key in the door, if he shouldn't announce himself when his attention was turned to an indefinable noise under the floor where he was kneeling.

Lombardo heard it, and stood stock still.

V. V. knew that Amalfi could also hear that noise, now grown to a pronounced and continuous rumble, and he lowered his head, peered under the table, looking in the direction of Amalfi.

Amalfi, who was almost midway between

V. V. and Lombardo, was squatting on the floor, with drawn revolver.

V. V. noticed that it was pointing downward.

Raising his head so that it once more was above the table level, V. V. observed that Lombardo, who had not stirred from the door, had also whipped out a revolver.

Lombardo, of course, did not know but that he was alone, and Amalfi, while he knew of the presence of his partner, had not the slightest thought that there was a third person in the restaurant.

The noise became more distinct. It was the sound of footsteps.

Of a sudden a trap door in the floor raised.

A head appeared.

The owner of the head continued his ascent of the stairs leading from the cellar. In another second or so, he had cleared the stairs and was making directly for the cash register.

V. V. recognized him. His deductions had been right.

It was Coletti.

Now V. V. was blessing the maker of the doorway, for had they been paneled in glass, as he had been wishing when Amalfi was trying the door a short time before, Lombardo's form would have been silhouetted against the light from the street. As it was, Coletti did not see Lombardo and pressed one of the cash register's keys, causing the drawer to fly open.

V. V. knew that both Amalfi and Lombardo were equally cognizant of the identity of the thief. Lombardo, the detective observed, had never moved, but kept his revolver covering Coletti.

Coletti took out a handful of bills, counted some, and put them in his pocket. Then he started back to the trap door.

"Halt there!" commanded Lombardo. It was the Italian equivalent he used, *Alto la*, which carries with it the implied order of "Hands up!"

Coletti's hands went up.

V. V. was beginning to enjoy the situation.

There wasn't a sound from Amalfi.

"So you're the dirty pig of a thief!" continued Lombardo in his mother tongue, without moving from his place at the door.

Coletti remained silent.

"Don't shoot!"

This cry came from Amalfi.

"Where are you?" from Lombardo in an amazed tone.

Amalfi answered by leaping to his feet.

"Don't shoot!" echoed V. V., adding quickly: "It is I, V. V.!"

Whereupon the detective stood up, and seeing that his friends, both of them armed with revolvers, recognized him, stepped to the electric switches in the kitchen and flooded the place with light.

V. V. next handcuffed Coletti, searched him, and found the marked money, totaling twelve dollars. Coletti pleaded to be let go, offering to make restitution of all he had stolen.

"Coletti," said V. V., "you should have washed your hands last night after making the valerian pills. You left some of the powder on the bills you handled when you were here last. And though you did not handle any of the sedative to-day, your hands still reek of the odor. I've had it cling to me for days."

"So that is what you were sniffing—"

"Silence Amalfi!" cautioned the detective.

"Have pity on me!" pleaded Coletti. "I'll return every cent I stole."

Coletti continued his pleading. The two friends were for letting him go. V. V. was adamant.

All four walked the short distance to police headquarters where Coletti was booked on a charge of burglary.

"But had the thief not come in through the door leading from Dr. Ferri's cellar to our place, what would you have done?" queried Amalfi as they were leaving headquarters.

"Yes," added Lombardo with a chuckle, "what would you have done—especially if he had come in by the street door with a key?"

"We'll talk that over when we get to my quarters where Don Pietro will make us some much needed coffee," laughed V. V., who was walking in the middle, his arms linked in those of his two friends.

With a sinuous flick of his foot, Basil sent his heel into the other's chin

CHASING A MOONBEAM

By Roland Johnson

AN UNFORTUNATE TURNING, AND THE MOTOR CRACKSMAN IS IN UNKNOWN TERRITORY WITH THE HUE AND CRY DRAWING CLOSER EVERY MILE

ON an October evening, Basil Lisle — Motor Cracksman —accompanied by his garage manager, Mr. Stycey, and by his wonderful motor car "Moonbeam," began to pursue his business.

Moonbeam glided down a leafy bylane, and stopped with engine silently ticking. Basil dismounted and wound about his face a black silk handkerchief. Through two slits his eyes sparkled. Over his hands, he pulled black silk gloves. His black overcoat was muffled up to his chin.

The black snake of a man skirted the damp hedgeway until he came to the main road. Then, hidden in the bushes, he waited for his prey. He did not have to wait long.

A beautiful touring car, with spluttering engine, came to a standstill almost opposite the crouching figure. Its engine had been "doctored" in Mellbury, while its occupants had been dining. Basil himself had disturbed the carburetor adjustment.

Basil stepped noiselessly forward. His revolver glinted in the rays of a sidelamp.

"Excuse me," he said quietly. "You will have to walk to the nearest station! I desire this car!"

Then the unexpected happened.

A sharp clatter of footsteps down the road—a shout of delight from the driver of the touring car. Came a squad of plain-clothes men, who had been secreted in the ditch.

"Damn!" said Basil softly, as, shadow-like, he flitted in the blackness of the hedge. He came to a gap—forced himself through

—men a yard behind him. His foot caught in the undergrowth. He fell. An eager hand grasped his ankle.

"Got him!" yelled a hoarse voice.

With a sinuous flick of his foot, Basil sent the heel of his neat shoe into the other's chin and knocked him dizzy. The next second he was sprinting across the field—vaulting a fence.

"Trapped," he said laconically to Stycey, as he flung himself into the driver's seat and jammed in first gear.

"Serves you right for working on the same road three nights running," remarked Stycey. "Look lively!"

"You know what to do?"

"Yes!"

The Special Flying Squad of police reached the bylane just as Basil let in the clutch of the great car with a jerk which sent the back wheels skidding round. A hail of small stones shot up as Moonbeam leaped out into the darkness of the night.

Standing behind a tree—complacently watching all—was the portly figure of Mr. Stycey.

"That young man will be the death of me!" he murmured.

The police were temporarily baffled, but they were too well trained to permit unnecessary delay. A sharp word of command from Superintendent Malcolm and steps were retraced to the main road. Carefully hidden, their motorcycles had been picketed.

Sharp crackles from the well-tuned engines—hasty instructions—and the mechanical sleuths were off on the hot trail. Malcolm himself followed in his racing Vausdall as the nucleus of operations, commanding the motorcyclists by signals from his electric horn. His assistant, standing up in the back of the car, switched on a powerful searchlight and scanned the countryside.

Mounting a gradient could be seen the torpedo-shaped car of the Motor Cracksman. The next minute it disappeared behind a slope.

"I'll get him—I'll get him." Malcolm gritted his teeth as he swung up the bylane on two wheels.

To the superintendent there was something personal in the chase—a matter between his own racing car and that of the thief, whose vehicle was reported to be the fastest in the world, and, ghostlike, elusive beyond measure.

And also, had not the unknown man—the Motor Cracksman—flaunted his deeds before the public to make a laughing stock of Malcolm himself—Superintendent Malcolm—who had never known failure?

With a slight smile playing on his now uncovered lips, Basil Lisle bent over the steering wheel and opened out the supercharged engine of Moonbeam. The burble of the exhaust gases rose to a high-toned chuckle as the lean, low structure seemed almost to fly through space.

He doubled back along a parallel byroad and came out onto the Great North Road, which glistened white between shining telegraph poles in the brilliant beams of the headlights.

With his right hand caressing the steering wheel and guiding the monster car with the inspired touch of a born motorist, Basil Lisle lay back in his seat, and with his left hand extracted a Perfecto Finos cigarette from his gold case. The electric cigar lighter on the dashboard glowed pleasantly, and then, dreamily watching the straight road ahead, Basil Lisle thought out a method of escape.

Came the long wail of an electric horn.

From the downward gradient a mile behind, the beam of a searchlight flitted across fields and bridged each byroad with its silvery strip of light. The police were taking no chances—they were determined not to lose their victim by allowing him to slip unseen up some little frequented track.

But they did not recognize Moonbeam—the record-breaking sixty h.p. car which was ever the center of attraction at Brooklands. Still less did they know the skill, courage and resourcefulness of its owner.

Basil Lisle had, perhaps, grown careless in the last few weeks. It had been so easy to lay hands on motor cars, convey them to his garage—Pershall and Perivale, of Hammersmith—dismantle them and reassemble them as rebuilt ex-government

vehicles. But, while he had never before been properly hunted, the thrill of it sent warm blood into his smooth girl-like cheeks and brought an added sparkle to his brilliant eyes.

The descendant of the laughing highwayman was not afraid of chase by the law—he was not afraid of the law, for he was afraid of nothing. Apart from the possibility of fear, he had complete and utter confidence in his own abilities and in the abilities of his car Moonbeam.

The speedometer showed seventy miles an hour as he glided smoothly up a gentle incline. Moonbeam clung to the road like a leech. Her perfect springing, the even distribution of weight over the chassis, the tuning of the engine, made her invincible. With the engine replete with oil and the tanks full of gasoline, nothing could stop her progress for three hundred miles.

And yet—a cordon of police?

A barrier across the road?

Bullets?

So great was the fame of the Motor Cracksman that the police would, without a shadow of doubt, stop at nothing to lay hands on him.

II

BASIL glanced behind him and started slightly. He had expected to find that he had completely outpaced the feeble efforts of the police—to find that he had left them far behind.

Yet, scarcely more than a mile away, were the lights of half a dozen motorcyclists and the brilliant beam of a searchlight from Superintendent Malcolm's racing Vausdall.

Six racing drivers—six of the most skilled motorcyclists in England—helmeted, begoggled, bent over their handlebars as they whirled through the air, bent upon the chase.

Malcolm sat at the wheel of his 30-98 h.p. car, and, as he gritted his teeth, he swore to the gods that this would prove to be a chase to a capture, and, if necessity decreed, a chase to the death.

Basil Lisle pressed the accelerator pedal still farther down until the speedometer needle quivered at *eighty*. Only a genius such as Basil, could have negotiated the uncambered corners of the main road. Time and time again it was necessary to jam on the four-wheel brakes, and with tires grinding on the road, to swing round a bend with sickening lurches.

But Basil knew the road—it was his business. He knew every tree and house and sign post, the gentle up-gradient into Swanburton, the sharp bend at the top of the village, then along the straight once again, like a flash he had passed through civilization and was out onto the open road.

He chuckled. He had increased his lead by two miles. But what was two miles? At the most, a lead of two minutes. The police behind had in all probability raised the alarm. Even Moonbeam—wonderful Moonbeam—could not compete against the telephone.

While Basil mused on these things, the road forked, a dimly familiar sign-post showed white for a second and then was left hundreds of yards behind. An unfamiliar group of cottages passed—Basil had taken the wrong turning!

Fool! Idiot! What could he do? To stop, turn around in the narrow road, retrace his way, would be an act of madness. Already the searchlight of the police was playing in the clouds almost above him. In less than two minutes they would be upon him; certainly there was no time to do anything else but to go forward.

Yet Basil knew as he pressed open the throttle once again and Moonbeam shot off in the darkness, that he was trapped, trapped on a strange road. He could not hope to negotiate unknown bends and twists at high speed. He could not hope to avoid the squad of motorcyclists behind him — hounds in full cry — hot upon the trail.

He determined to do his best—and more than his best he could not do. With eyes straining along the line of his powerful headlights, body bent forward over the wheel, a wheel now held in both hands, ready for swift motion, he maintained his lead.

And then came the red triangle of a

danger sign. Basil was past it before he could stop. The road turned sharply to the left, ahead were wrought iron gates of a private drive. As luck would have it, they were open. It would have been impossible for Moonbeam to follow the curve of the road, therefore Basil did the only thing—put himself into a hopeless *cul-de-sac*.

Yet there was still hope. Once through the gates, he drew up in a long skid, leaped from his car, ran back and closed the gates.

And then he came back to his car. Just before the first motorcyclist appeared in sight, Basil switched off the lights of his car and was hidden by the friendly darkness.

With a great noise, the squad of police negotiated the dangerous corner and passed into the distance.

Basil Lisle, with a smile playing on his lips, crept up the drive to the house, found a telephone wire and cut it.

Superintendent Malcolm lost scent of his quarry just near to the village of Dilworth, but his suspicions that the Motor Cracksman had evaded him were not confirmed until he reached Pennington, fifteen miles further on.

A telephone message had caused the police of that sleepy old town to keep a sharp lookout. Every motorist had been stopped. Not one had been detained. No car like the gray torpedo-shaped vehicle of the thief had been seen.

Malcolm heard the news with a frown on his face.

"Vanished!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Vanished into thin air! That man's a devil!"

"Seems like a spook to me," said one of the motorcyclists. "Why, he must have had wings! My Norton was touching sixty-five most of the way!"

"I missed him near Dilworth," muttered Malcolm. "Well, he can't be far. We'll go back to Dilworth, lads, and with the help of the local constabulary, we'll make a cordon!"

The Motor Cracksman had vanished from the main road as mysteriously as he always vanished. His conspicuous car had, in some curious way, made itself inconspicuous.

There had been byroads near Dilworth which the searchlight on the Vausdall had been unable to illuminate by reason of high banks and trees. It might have been possible, argued the superintendent, for the thief to have crept up one of them.

It was a small army of police who crowded into commandeered lorries and rumbled back along the road to Dilworth. Making his headquarters at the Dun Cow, whose landlord opened the door to imperious knocks with mild surprise written over his moonlike face, Superintendent Malcolm had brought to him a large scale map, and in a few minutes he rapped out staccato commands.

Ten minutes later every road was guarded.

Malcolm sighed with satisfaction.

He guessed that the hunted man and his car were within his cordon of police. If his guess proved to be wrong, he would hear from outside police—for every town, village, and hamlet, had been put on its guard. The Motor Cracksman was a marked man—a circle of fifty miles might be the size of his trap—but it was as safe and sure as if he were already in a prison cell.

Once previously when Inspector Gregory—*Lantern-jaw Greg*, as he was called—was hot on the trail, the Motor Cracksman had slipped through the fingers of the police.

It would not happen again.

Yet, little did the superintendent know that behind the gates of Dilworth Hall, a mere hundred yards up the road from the Dun Cow, the hunted man was enjoying a Perfectos Finos cigarette and formulating plans with his customary thought for every detail.

III

WHEN the last sounds of the police squad died away into the distance, Basil Lisle's first action was to reopen the gates at the entrance to the drive, and to listen intently for any sounds which might indicate that his actions had been observed.

Thereupon he started up the engine of Moonbeam, and brought the car to a standstill outside the entrance of what seemed to be an imposing residence. The luminous clock on the dashboard showed him that it was well past midnight. The house was shrouded in darkness. No doubt its occupants were in bed and asleep.

After a moment's hesitation he rang the bell. For some time it remained unanswered, but, after repeated pulls at the old-fashioned iron knob, the door was fumblingly opened and a gray head of hair plentifully decorated with curling pins, showed round its edge.

"Excuse me," said Basil, "but would you permit me to telephone? The lights of my car have failed and I would like to get into touch with the nearest garage."

"I am only the housekeeper,"—the old lady hesitated for a moment, "Perhaps—perhaps I had better arouse the mistress."

"If you wouldn't mind," said Basil.

He had no fixed plan, but if he could gain a shelter for a few hours until the hue and cry died down—shelter for both himself and his highly conspicuous car—fortune might favor him with an inspiration. Perhaps he could get into touch with Stycey. At any rate, he could find out where he was. By taking the wrong turning at the fork of the main road, he had lost for himself all ideas of his whereabouts.

In a few minutes the housekeeper returned and ushered him into a sumptuously furnished lounge-hall. Basil was greeted by a young girl—she could not have been more than twenty-six—who looked at him with considerable interest.

Basil could not help observing, despite the dilemma which crowded his thoughts, that she was exceedingly pretty. She had dressed herself hastily in the evening frock which no doubt she had worn the previous night. Violet eyes looked at him from beneath long black lashes. Her thick black hair was parted down the center and gathered in clusters over the ears.

"I am very sorry to trouble you," explained Basil in polite tones, "but the lights of my car have failed me. May I use your telephone?"

For a moment the girl hesitated.

"Are you one of the race?" she queried.

"I don't understand—what race?"

"We heard a great noise a few minutes ago—I thought I heard shouts, too. I gathered there must be a race. We often have them past here."

"Well, I'm part of the race," said Basil with a slight smile, "but I'm out of it now!"

"You will find the telephone in the gun-room. First on the left down the passage."

Basil went to the gun-room and shut the door. He knew well enough that he could not telephone, for he had cut the wires to prevent any alarm. After three or four minutes he came back to the hall to find an inviting tray of drinks set out on an oak dresser.

"It is very annoying," he said mournfully, "but I can get no reply."

"Oh, of course not! I had forgotten! It is only a village exchange, and it closes at eleven o'clock! Dear me, I wonder what we can do for you. Perhaps the chauffeur could help?"

"I doubt it," answered Basil hastily. "I'll wait outside until daylight if you have no objections."

A cloud passed over the face of the mistress of the house, and she glanced inquiringly at the housekeeper. Basil Lisle intercepted both the inquiry and the affirmative nod of the old woman.

"I can't allow you to spend the night out of doors. Mrs. Williams, would you wake up Dombey?" She turned to Basil. "The butler will arrange a bedroom for you. If you wish to be up early, he will call you at any time you desire."

"I am very grateful to you," said Basil.

From the not far distant road came the sudden noise of well-tuned motorcycle engines—and the sharp *blip* of a racing car. The police were returning. They had realized that they had lost the scent. Yet had they lost it? The noise abruptly ceased before the vehicles could have had time to pass the village. Would any man notice that the gates at the entrance were now open, whereas they had been closed? Would they see the significance? Would they reconstruct the Motor Cracksman's actions?

"The race seems to be coming back

again—they don't do that as a rule," said the mistress of the house with a puzzled air.

Basil smiled.

"Would you mind if I smoked?" he asked quietly.

He extracted his gold case with care. With equal care he lit a Perfectos Finos. His hand did not shake as he flicked the match into the smoldering remains of the fire. Any moment he expected to hear the tramp of feet. The damning evidence of his precious Moonbeam was enough to convict him, although no one had seen his face.

Dombey, the portly butler, came hastening downstairs.

"This way, sir!" he said between his puffs of breath. "Shall I lead the way, sir?" He turned to the girl, "Is that all, m'lady?"

"Thank you, Dombey, yes!"

Basil turned on the stairs and came back to the hall. He held out his slim white hand.

"I cannot really express my gratitude," he said suavely. "And it is possible that I will not see you in the morning, for with your permission I must start early! My name is Basil Lisle. May I have the honor of knowing yours?"

"Lady Calerton."

"Good night, Lady Calerton!"

"Good night, Mr. Lisle!"

Basil was shown to his bedroom.

Ten minutes later the house was once again in darkness.

Basil did not undress. Although the butler had placed on his bed a suit of pyjamas. He had not only much to think of, but much to do. Immediately the sounds of the house had died down and the landing light had been switched off, Basil brought from his pocket a small electric torch and crept silently down the stairs.

IV

HE must find out where he was—what he could do to make good his escape. Not many hundreds of yards away was the Special Flying Squad thirsting for his capture.

Basil reached the darkness of the hall—and felt his way as best he could to the window. He remembered that he had seen by the window a writing table. The address on the note paper would assist him materially.

Dilworth Hall,
Nr Aylesbury

"Ah hah!" murmured Basil Lisle.

As luck would have it, he knew the Aylesbury district well, and already there formed in his head a scheme. Somewhere within a few miles was the Birmingham-London Canal. Would it be possible for him to make an escape by *water?*

He knew enough of police methods to surmise that he was hemmed in, and that on all sides—main roads and by-roads, a cordon of men were keeping a sharp lookout for a "great gray car." No ordinary means of escape were left to him.

He paused by the front door to listen for sounds. The night was both still and silent. There were obviously no suspicions of his identity from within.

Any minute might herald the approach of a search party.

Basil opened the door and closed it gently behind him. Moonbeam rested on the open stretch of gravel, visible to any searcher within fifty yards.

Skirting round the back of the house, Basil proceeded to explore the possibilities of escape in that direction. A cart track bordered the high wall of a kitchen garden and led through a broad field down to a clump of trees. It might be a possible cross-country road. Basil walked quickly down it.

After some two hundred yards it ended abruptly. Glory of glories! it opened out on to a quayside—a quayside of a canal! Luck was in favor of the Motor Cracksman, for moored by the side of the quay was an old barge, broad of beam, cumbersome, weighty, slow, but a canal barge, and well able to carry the two-ton weight of Moonbeam.

Without waiting to investigate further, Basil ran back to the house and down the drive. It was imperative that he should find out what active preparations were being made for his apprehension.

He reached the main road, and with great caution began to walk down the street. The village was in darkness but for a glimmer showing through the blinds of the village inn—the Dun Cow. Outside stood a car, a racing Vausdall, which was easily recognizable as that belonging to Superintendent Malcolm.

"Malcolm himself!" muttered Basil, as he crept up to the window. "Then there's a big game a-foot!"

The sound of voices came through the window which was open at the top—the gruff voice of the superintendent, and the wheezy tones of a stranger (in point of fact, the landlord).

"The car escaped us in or near the village," Malcolm was saying impatiently. "What road could it have taken?"

"There's no road in the village except the main road, superintendent," came the puzzled tones of the other. "There's the drive up to the Hall—that's the only road, and that isn't really a road to anywhere as the saying is."

"The Hall?" asked Malcolm quickly, "What Hall?"

"Dilworth Hall, Lady Calerton's house. You passed the entrance just by the corner along the road."

"I wonder," said Malcolm thoughtfully. "Is it a big place?"

"Big enough—why there's thirty acres of park and large gardens. The largest place around these parts, I reckon."

"He might be there," said Malcolm to himself. "It's worth searching!"

"There's many cars run straight in to the drive without thinking," continued the landlord, whom Basil began instinctively to dislike. "You see, it's a sort of continuation of the road which turns sharp to the left. There's been accidents there—but if the gates are open then there's no accident—"

"Hy—Simpson, and Johnson, and Silloth," called the inspector. There came from the interior a shuffle of boots. "Go up to the Hall and make inquiries. Look along the bushes, too, he might have hidden the car. And look lively!"

Basil did not wait for more. It was neck or nothing. His lithe legs carried him almost to the wrought iron entrance gates of Dilworth Hall, before, glancing over his shoulder, he saw a beam of light from the opened door of the inn.

Sprinting up the drive, he started up the engine of Moonbeam, and, as silently as he could manage, without lights he followed the car track down to the banks of the canal. As he reached the quayside, he saw through the trees the lights of motorcycle headlights coming up the drive.

Was the barge occupied? He dared not shout. He dared not make a disturbance, yet he had a bare five minutes in which to make arrangements.

"Any one there?" he exclaimed. "I want you!"

"Only me!" said a familiar voice. "I thought you'd find me out!"

"By all that's marvelous! Stycey!" said Basil joyfully. "You old tub, how did you manage it?"

"I'll tell you when we get Moonbeam stowed away beside this nice touring car," said Stycey, coming into view and flinging to the quay two stout planks.

"Everything ready!"

"Bring her along!"

It was a matter of seconds before Moonbeam was driven carefully over the planks on to the flat topped barge. It was a matter of minutes before she lay carefully hidden beneath a great tarpaulin—under cover from prying eyes beside a glistening touring car.

And then—down into the hold—went Basil Lisle, followed by his manager. By the carefully screened light of a candle, they drank each other's health from a flask of whisky.

"Out with it," said Basil impatiently. "What happened?"

Mr. Stycey nursed his flowery waistcoat and chuckled quietly.

"When you dashed off in Moonbeam with a herd of police on your trail—I—according to your instructions and our long-standing preparations against such emergencies—made for the *bait*—the touring car. Would you believe it—Malcolm had been so keen on the chase that he forgot about leaving a driver for it.

"It rested on the road by itself. There

was nothing easier than to correct your misadjustments of the carburetor. I got the engine running. I found out that she was charged with gasoline and oil.

"What was I to do? I daren't go back—I would probably be spotted. The only thing for me to do was to follow. Besides, I never knew when you might want help—and the only place Malcolm would not look for you, was at his back. When you went wrong at the fork of the main road I confess you puzzled me. When you came back to open the gates of the drive—I began to fathom your game. Yet I wasn't *certain* it was you—I had to guess.

"When you went into the house, I saw the car, I recognized it as Moonbeam. Now I know this district pretty well. I knew where the canal was. I knew that Malcolm would sooner or later return, and I was therefore in danger of being caught. Therefore I followed the cart track to the back of the house and, at my leisure, squared the bargee."

"Where is the bargee?" asked Basil curiously.

Stycey pointed to a little door in the wall.

"Fast asleep in his bunk. That's all right—it only cost a fiver!"

Basil laughed long and low.

"I propose that we both go to bed—and after a nap—"

"I had, of course, to rely upon your intelligence," said Mr. Stycey, as he curled himself upon a heap of sacking.

"Quite," murmured Basil sleepily.

"I thought you'd hit upon the canal."

"The canal," said Basil as he finally settled himself for the night, "was the only possible egress from a horde of objectionable policemen!"

"Quite," reiterated Mr. Stycey, "but it'll take us a week to get down to London. A week or a fortnight!"

"A very pleasant holiday!"

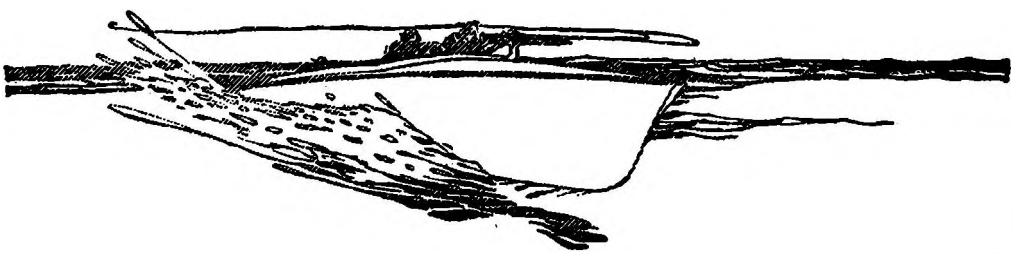
Day came—a brilliant sun turned the brown leaves of trees to gold and lit up to silver the sullen waters of the Birmingham-London canal.

With the dawn rose two dirty unshaven men, while a third man, slim and lazy, leaned against a tarpaulin covered cargo. An antique motor was started, and with a gentle swirl of eddying waters the old craft moved off south.

Far away in the distance, came the faint wail of Superintendent Malcolm's electric horn.

The cordon of police was vainly drawing closer and closer.

"Highwayman's Conscience"—a new Motor Cracksman story—will appear in an early issue



BUREAU OF CORRESPONDENCE

FLYNN'S READERS TURN WRITERS AND DISCUSS CIPHERS, THEIR FAVORITE STORIES AND AUTHORS, AND WHATEVER ELSE MAY INTEREST THEM

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

I have just finished reading "The Art Vandal," by Jerome. First, allow me to say that I thoroughly enjoyed reading this story, and that I congratulate Mr. Jerome upon his work.

However, there is one thing which has been emphasized, which to the best of my knowledge and belief is a grave error. This is in regard to the prayer wheel and the Wheel of Life.

The Wheel of Life is the wheel which has been described with fair accuracy by Mr. Jerome. Its most usual form is that of a drawing upon parchment, paper, or similar material. It is a graphic device for explaining to illiterates the involved philosophy of Nirvana. Never before have I heard of it being mounted in such a manner that it may be turned.

On the contrary, the prayer wheel is a common instrument in Tibet. It is a *cylinder*. Upon its surface is the inscription, "Om Mani Padme Hum"—not Hung, although this spelling may be permissible as Mongol sounds are with difficulty rendered in English. "Hum" is the accepted spelling.

For verification see *National Geographic Magazine*, April, 1925, pages 478-479, which give excellent photographs of lamaistic prayer wheels.

Errors of this kind decrease the pleasure in reading such fine stories as "The Art Vandal."

H. C. McK., Eustis, Fla.

THRILLS OF SLAUGHTER

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

Being vastly entertained with the story, "Cub of the Lion," by Fred MacIsaac, because of its setting and general fidelity to newspaper work, it was with sheer delight that I came upon this in Chapter XLIV:

"Bill felt a bit queer; it was the first time he had killed a man."

This downright statement provoked reels of thought. Was it correct? Was it, strictly speaking, accurate? Was it not, between ourselves, somewhat overemphasized?

Did any one actually feel queer when making a first killing of a man, or even a woman? Recalling a long list of homicides, as any editor must, how did your first killing of a man actually affect you? Did it make you feel queer? Or was it exultant? Or just a little shamefacedly proud? Or—or—well, just tell us all candidly how it *did* make you feel—won't you? It isn't out of mere curiosity this request is made, but from a strictly imaginative interest in a psychological study: a moot question that should be settled. That's all.

J. L., Norfolk, Va.

Mr. MacIsaac is young, so is Bill. Of course there must be a first time for everything, even murder. It is pleasantly amusing to hardened editors who have forgotten the thrill of their first great crime to observe the naïve emotions of those embarking on that blood-stained but stimulating pathway.

W. J. F.

HOW TO BECOME A DETECTIVE

MY DEAR MR. FLYNN:

This question I ask in the most earnest manner. "Where can a fellow get a start in real detective work?"

I can fully realize that you have received letters like this before, but nevertheless I am serious and would appreciate an answer to this. During my past five years on the road I have studied characters of many descriptions and enjoy it. It is a hobby of mine to scrutinize one and notice common and uncommonnesses. I have worked with the police indirectly and satisfied myself that I am capable of doing such work. Have traveled through the North and South and observed the changes of living, speech, and actions.

To fulfill my ambitions I desire to get in with some agency or such so that I can spend all my

time in the sleuthing direction. I am a theater musician by trade, but my desire is as I have named above. You can form an outline from what I have said and any word to encourage or discourage me or information as to where I can obtain my liking, will be appreciated by me, I assure you. B. G., Winchester, Va.

It is contrary to our policy to make suggestions or give advice to readers as to how they may engage in detective work. This is a specialized occupation requiring particular fitness and training. Most men get into it through work on the uniformed force or some State police department.

The United States Secret Service for example, requires the applicant to have had at least one year of experience in police work, or some type of investigational work equivalent thereto.

Of course men are hired as private investigators by detective agencies without police experience, but such employment is usually on the basis of some especial fitness. W. J. F.

ONE STORY DID IT

My dear Mr. Flynn:

The writer having seen so much comment in your magazine about the story "The Trail of the Bullet," thought I would add mine, although it's slightly different from any of the others. This will tell you that one story gained for you a constant reader—myself. I have always thought the detective magazines were pretty much trash, and have fought shy of them on general principles, but as I am a rifle crank and use a telescope sight, the picture on the front cover caught my eye in passing. I saw the writer was Horace Kephart, and as I had read with much interest his Southern Highlander, thought that if he contributed it could not be so trashy and I bought that issue and started the story.

Allow me to say that I have never missed a copy since. E. H. B., Tenafly, N. J.

INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIVE

My dear Mr. Flynn:

I have been associated with police work in many different capacities for the last thirteen years and have naturally been interested in any publication devoting all or part of its efforts to securing readable detective and mystery matter.

My experience has covered ordinary city and county police work; investigations in regard to narcotics; forgery of personal, corporation, and A. B. A. and express checks; blackmail and extortion; theft and embezzlement by employees of banks and business firms; murder; arson, and in fact, all branches of investigational work, both official and private. I am at present doing some special narcotic work here.

This experience has covered practically every part of the United States, Canada, and Mexico and I feel that with this varied experience I should be a fair judge of this particular class of fiction and I wish to say that I have never read any publication that can compare with Flynn's in this field.

Some of your stories are necessarily better than others, but I have never been really disappointed in but one since the first issue. By this I don't mean that they have all been perfect, but they have been far above the average.

I find Flynn's not only interesting, but highly instructive.

Your department on ciphers has been one of particular interest to me as that is one branch of the profession in which I have had no experience and it has been very instructive to follow your problems from one issue to the next, though I must confess I have had very little success in deciphering them myself.

F. J. F., Los Angeles, Cal.

WHAT OF JACK THE RIPPER?

My dear Mr. Flynn:

I have been reading your unique magazine for the past six months, and am frank to say that it is the best magazine I ever read. Your special articles interest me the most, especially those dealing with noted crimes and criminals of bygone days. Your vast fund of information on those matters induces me to ask you a favor. When I was a boy in England there occurred a horrible series of murders in the Whitechapel district of London. The victims were invariably women of the "demimonde," and the crimes were of such a nature that the murderer became known as "Jack the Ripper" by the denizens of the underworld. The murderer was evidently deft with the use of the surgeon's scalpel, and when he had time and was undisturbed, completely disemboweled and dismembered the bodies of his victims, and strange to say, carried off a certain portion of the body. I left England while these crimes were going on, and came out West, and lost track of the case entirely, and I am intensely curious to know if the "Yard" ever solved the mystery, if any one was ever convicted of the crimes, or if it became only another of the "unsolved mysteries." I have never read any account of the murders since coming to America, except a fanciful half novelette, that was evidently fiction based on the events. In reading your magazine it seems to me that you are just the most likely one to know about and could at least tell me where I can get hold of an authentic account of those crimes, and the outcome, if any. H. F., Mankato, Minn.

The Whitechapel murders are still an unsolved mystery. Many suspects were arrested, but the crimes were never definitely traced to any one.

It was evidently the work of a degenerate who perhaps ended his activities by taking his own life.

There is no evidence, however, that any such thing happened. W. J. F.

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