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# MYSTERY

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May, 1935, Issue

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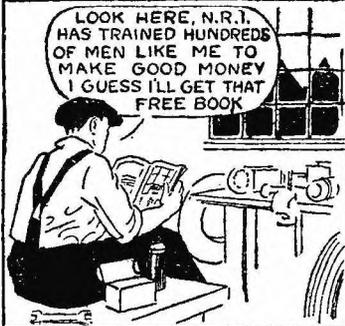
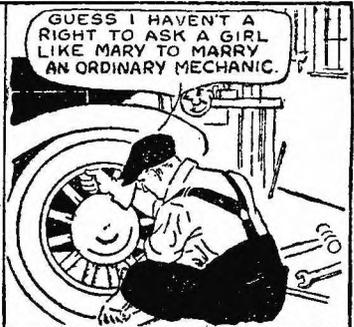
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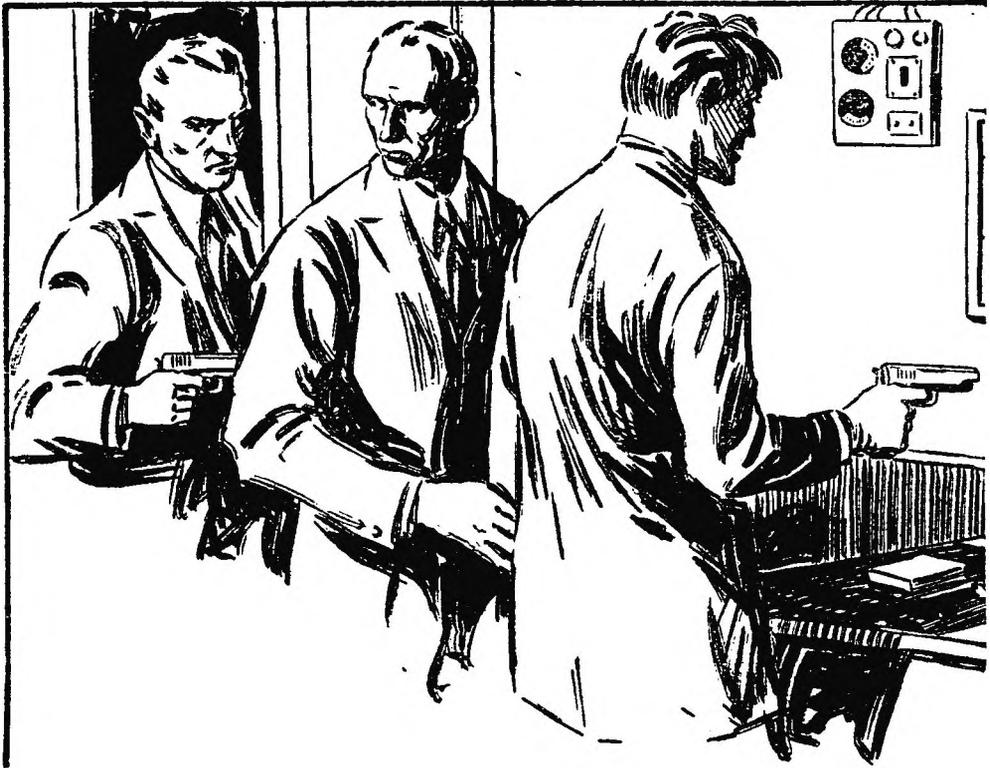
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# Murder Flies the Atlantic



*"Stand Perfectly Still!" Snapped Hand. "Throw Your Weapon on the Bed! My Friend Has You Covered, and He's an Excellent Shot!"*

## CHAPTER I

### MYSTERY IN THE AIR

**A**M I addressing Mr. Christopher Hand?"

The question was put to me as I opened the door of our London hotel room to a frock-coated stranger. Inexplicably, the fellow annoyed me. Perhaps, it was a premonition. That very morning the London papers had been filled with the sensational news emanating from Caverleigh Hall. Our incognito had been shattered by it.

By noon that day all England, or so it seemed, had become aware that Christopher

Hand, the New York criminologist, had secretly crossed the Atlantic in response to the appeal of the bereaved Duchess of Caverleigh. They knew, too, and were profoundly shocked by it, that Hand had just fastened the guilt for the ghastly murder of the duke upon the nobleman's own nephew, the Honorable Oliver Stratfont.

All morning reporters had besieged us to no avail. Hand was as inconsiderate to them in London as he habitually is in New York. But judging from the papers, Mr. Trevalyan, the duchess's secretary, had taken the gentlemen of the press to his ample bosom. Hand was nettled. For my part, I confess that I was gratified by the

A Complete Book-Length Novel  
**By Stanley Hart Page**

Author of "Sinister Cargo"



widespread praise that the solution of the case had called forth. It is not often that we get it, and there is no one to blame but Hand. He detests newspaper publicity.

I had planned, when the Caverleigh Case was cleared up, for us to spend a month or so in the Alps. And I had been successful in obtaining Hand's approval of the plan. Now as I stood peering at this stiff, dignified fellow in our doorway, fond prospects of Bellagio, Lugano, Stresa and Geneva seemed to receive a jolt that set them all awry.

"I am not Mr. Hand," I said coldly; "I am Mr. Ralph Clark."

"Ah, Mr. Hand's assistant."

The man favored me with a stiff smile and bow. I remained impassive.

"I should like a word with Mr. Hand," said he.

"I am afraid that is impossible," I retorted. "Mr. Hand is otherwise occupied."

"This is important and most urgent!"

"Messages of that nature have been coming in to us all morning. I think everyone in England wishes to engage my friend's services. He has been appealed to with varying degrees of urgency to find everything from missing jewelry to missing relatives. I have told everyone that Hand is not available. And I regret, my dear sir, that I must tell you the same."

"I tell you, Mr. Clark, I must see Mr. Hand at once!"

"Impossible! As I am busy packing, I shall have to ask you—"

"Ha! What's all this, Clark?"

I had left Hand in his bedroom of our suite. He had been in a brown study—his usual reaction to a trying case. I turned now to behold him stalking across the living-room.

"Mr. Christopher Hand?" cried the pest at the door.

Hand inclined his head. He subjected the stranger to a swift glance of appraisal.

"At your service," he acknowledged. "My dear sir, won't you come in?"

With a triumphant glance at me, the man quickly accepted the invitation.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said hastily. "I am Percival Hardwick, British representative of the Ocean International Airline."

"It's a pity," said Hand, abruptly, "that you didn't get your airship in operation a week or so before you did. I should have made the crossing on it if you had. As it was, I was forced to take a steamship and I was terribly pressed for time. Might I ask what drove you so desperately to have an interview with me?"

Mr. Hardwick took an impulsive step toward him. "Indeed, yes," he cried. "I have come in behalf of my company to make a most earnest request for your services and I implore you to accede to it. Although I am a Britisher myself, the Ocean International Airline is an American enterprise. Furthermore, it is a pioneer enterprise, blazing the way for a great forward step in our civilization. Anything unfortunate that might befall us now—"

He finished with a gesture of despair. Hand eyed him narrowly. I found myself regarding Mr. Hardwick a little less resentfully.

"An answer to my question, Mr. Hardwick!" said Hand, sharply. "What brought you here to consult me?"

The man's head seemed to settle lower on his shoulders. His eyes glittered. "Murder!" he said, hoarsely. "Mr. Hand, there has been murder on the Airship *Jupiter*!"

The sinister reply sent a tingle down my

spine. Murder on the first airliner ever to be put into regular service across the Atlantic? It seemed inconceivable. Mr. Hardwick continued to stare tensely at Hand.

"Come, Mr. Hardwick," said Hand tartly, "can you supply me with no facts?"

"Yes, yes; but not many," hastily replied Mr. Hardwick. "The man's name is Horton P. Lyons. The one who is murdered, I mean. And he was a passenger, Mr. Hand—a passenger!"

"His home?"

"Er — New York. Seven-fifty Park Avenue. I just looked it up on our passenger-list."

"Get me the cable office, Clark. And now, Mr. Hardwick, what other information can you give me?"

I stepped over to the telephone and asked to be connected with the cable office. While I waited, I listened to Mr. Hardwick's meager information.

"I can tell you very little," he said. "Perhaps, we shall find out more about it from Mr. Waters—our vice president, you know. He is in England and at the moment he is at Croydon. He has just telephoned me at our London office, having received this ghastly message by wireless from the *Jupiter*. Captain Finch's message from the airship stated that Lyons was murdered in his cabin. There is no clue to the murderer's identity!"

I interrupted to announce that I was connected with the cable office. Hand strode over and took the telephone from me. Quickly arranging to have the bill charged to the Ocean International Airline, he dispatched to Police Inspector Gerrity in New York the following message:

*Please obtain at once all possible information Horton P Lyons 750 Park Avenue N Y C —wireless information to airship Jupiter—haste most essential—Hand*

He broke the connection and turned to us. I thought I detected something exceedingly interesting about the embryonic case.

"I say!" I cried. "This is quite the cleverest thing you have done, Hand! Why, it is unique! You will remain stationary here in London, with your filaments pass-

ing out through the air, and solve a murder mystery on an airship flying over the Atlantic from London to New York!"

Hand smiled and glanced skeptically at me. "How do you do it?" he asked, with a shake of his head. "You'll be endowing me with supernatural powers next. Interesting thought, though, Clark—solving crime by wireless. And I have no doubt that we shall make some use of it. Your information, Mr. Hardwick, might have included that the *Jupiter* took off three hours ago from Croydon for New York."

"Yes, I—"

"But it was hardly necessary, since I read of it in the *Times* just this morning and remarked upon it to Clark. Let me see, she left Paris at eight o'clock this morning and stopped at Croydon. Did Lyons board the airship in France or England?"

"He took passage at Le Bourget."

"Have you any other information to give me?"

"No other information, Mr. Hand. But I have been sent here to request you to—"

"To go out," interrupted Hand, "to the *Jupiter* and investigate the mystery that flies with her?"

"By Jove, that's it!" cried Mr. Hardwick. "Will you do it?"

"Certainly."

"Bully for you!"

I seemed to feel a little dizzy. "What do you think you are, Hand," I demanded, "some kind of bird? How are you going to get on an airship that has been flying away from this point for three hours? Utterly absurd!"

Hand turned apologetically to Mr. Hardwick. "Clark," he explained, "has a bad habit of doing his thinking immediately after he has spoken."

"Well," I said stiffly, "I can't think of anything the matter with the questions I just asked. That airship is probably out over the ocean by this time!"

"Hardly," corrected Hand. "The *Jupiter*, according to what I've read of her, makes eighty-five miles an hour, depending, of course, upon what winds she encounters. If she encountered none she'd be no more

than two hundred and fifty-five miles from Croydon. She hasn't reached Land's End yet. If she reduced her speed we could catch up with her in an airplane."

"In—in an airplane!" I gulped. "What earthly good would it do us to fly hundreds of miles out to sea just to catch up with that airship? What are you going to do, jump from the one to the other?"

"Certainly not. The *Jupiter* is equipped to receive passengers from an airplane. The plane hooks on to a stage on the underside of the airship. And the passengers board her quite safely on a small ladder."

"Well—I—nothing sounds so thoroughly risky!"

Hand's eyes were kindling with excitement. He rubbed his hands briskly together. Mr. Hardwick waxed enthusiastic.

"Perfectly simple, my dear chap!" he assured me. "I have taken the liberty of making all the arrangements. We can rush you to Croydon. There is a plane warming up for you there at this minute! I will take care of all your details here in London. Put what things you will need in a bag and let us be off!"

"How about it, Clark," demanded Hand, "are we packed?"

"Well," I shrugged, "we have enough things packed to last us a day or so. As I don't expect to live much longer than a couple of hours, I suppose that will do very nicely!"

"All we really need," pointed out Hand, "is our big black bag. Don't forget that one, Clark; it has all our materials in it! While you get it I'll call Scotland Yard. My presence here will be required at Stratfont's trial."

"We'll bring you back for the trial on the *Jupiter*," cried Mr. Hardwick.

While Hand called the Yard I got our bags. A few minutes later we hurried from the hotel. Mr. Hardwick guided us to a powerful car standing before the hotel and hustled us into it. He got into the front seat and started up with a jerk. As we drove recklessly through the crowded streets of London, Hand leaned forward and spoke to him.

"You know nothing about any of the other passengers?" he asked.

"Only one," replied Mr. Hardwick, over his shoulder. "A man named Oswald Farrington was a passenger on the *Jupiter* the last trip over from New York to Paris."

"You don't say! When did he arrive in Paris, then?"

"Yesterday, at two in the afternoon."

"And he left on the *Jupiter* this morning at eight."

"Yes; he's making the round trip. Oh, by the way! Lyons came over on the *Jupiter*. He left New York on her the fourth of this month for London."

"When did the *Jupiter* leave New York on this last voyage?"

"She left New York last Monday."

"Hum-m, then Farrington left New York on the dirigible fifteen days after Lyons did. Were any passages engaged just before she sailed today?"

"Yes; it's a peculiar thing. There was a veritable influx of them at Le Bourget this morning. Lyons himself was one. And Farrington made his reservation shortly before sailing time, although, as I say, he had disembarked just yesterday. Then there were two people named Minuet, a brother and a sister. Let me see—there were five. Oh, yes, a German nobleman. He is Count von Grugheim."

Hand frowned thoughtfully and rested back in the seat. Thus he remained until we arrived at Croydon. We shot out on to the airport at precisely five minutes after two o'clock. I glanced with pride at the huge mooring-mast that had been erected for the *Jupiter*.

A plane was taking off. Another large one was circling the field, evidently to land. Men, standing or running about, dotted the field. Our car skirted a runway and jounced rapidly along. Mr. Hardwick halted us alongside a large plane standing in the open. Its propeller was slowly ticking over.

Several men standing beside the plane rushed over to us. Among them I recognized Mr. Waters. He had long been famous in American aeronautics.

"Mr. Hand!" he cried delightedly. "I knew you wouldn't let us down!"

Hand leaped out of the car. "Where is the *Jupiter* now?" he demanded.

"She's just picking up the Scilly Is-

lands," replied Mr. Waters. "I've ordered her to reduce her speed to fifty miles an hour. She has a three hundred mile start on you. But your plane will be in constant contact with her by wireless. You'll find her easily enough."

"What speed will we make in the airplane?" Hand quickly asked.

A chap in the group, one of a pair wearing helmets and goggles, spoke up. "We'll do a little better under a hundred, sir," he said. "We'll have a light tail-wind. So our land speed will be something over a hundred."

"Then," said Hand quickly, "it will take us approximately six hours to overtake the *Jupiter*. Put us rather more than three hundred miles at sea."

"Pretty rapid mathematics," grinned Mr. Waters. "It took us a little time to figure that out on paper. But you are absolutely right, Mr. Hand. It will take you approximately six hours to overhaul the *Jupiter*. And when you do, you'll be somewhere round three hundred miles at sea."

"Three hundred miles at sea!" I muttered.

"See here, Clark," said Hand, glancing sharply at me, "if you feel that this is a risk there is utterly no reason why you should—"

"Never mind that!" I said hastily. "Nothing would induce me to stay behind. Are we all ready?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Mr. Waters. "Here, you fellows, put this luggage aboard the plane."

The two airmen climbed into the front cockpit from which a mechanic had just scurried. Hand and I climbed into the rear cockpit. Our bags were stowed away in a compartment ahead of us. We hastily donned helmets and goggles that we found on our seats.

The chug of the motor leaped into a roar. The fellows on the ground stepped back and waved to us. We taxied over to a runway. For a moment the motor quieted down. Again it roared forth.

The plane moved off slowly at first. It gathered speed. The tail came up. The plane raced along the runway, bounced once or twice and we were in the air.

Below us the terrain was like a pretty patchwork of variegated green, with here and there a square or rectangle of brown stitched in. Miniature houses nestled among the trees. The earth looked like a toyland.

The railroad line remained steadfastly below. Successively we flew over Andover, Salisbury and Exeter. Later a foreboding, rolling, russet and olive expanse spread out before us—Dartmoor. In another few minutes we were directly over the Moor. I could distinguish the trees, lifting out of the dreary panorama, like dreadful fingers pointing with despair toward the brightness of heaven. Far off to the right a mass of storm-clouds scudded across the sky, pouring their torrents down upon the moorlands. Something sinister seemed to charge the very air—villainy that the dirigible had left in her wake.

At length we left Dartmoor behind us. But the pretty patchwork of the English countryside between Croydon and Exeter was nothing like what now lay below. We gazed down upon a drab expanse. Once again we picked up a railroad line. We passed over few towns and at six minutes after five o'clock by my wrist watch, we were leaving Land's End.

The Atlantic appeared calm—a vast surface of blue-gray. I glanced back longingly for a last glimpse at Land's End. It seemed to hold all that was safe and secure. For a moment I was gripped with poignant nostalgia. At a quarter of six I was glancing back with the same feeling to see the last of the Scilly Islands.

Thereafter there was nothing for me to pin my hopes on but vessels on the sea. We passed over one large steamer, almost at the end of her run to England. The fishing boats finally disappeared altogether. Henceforth we had nothing but the unbroken water below us.

I needed something to take my mind off the risk we had undertaken. Thus far I had kept my nerves, taut and raw from the effects of the Caverleigh case, in a somewhat tranquil state, by fastening my interests on the countryside below. Now there was nothing but the empty, disquieting sea and sky. I turned my attention to

inspecting our cockpit. My interest was immediately engaged. At the side, my side, hung a leather helmet equipped with ear-phones, with a wire running from them to the forward cockpit. Just above the hook the helmet was hanging from was a wireless transmitter-key. Hastily removing the helmet I was wearing, I donned the other, clapping the phones to my ears. I was delighted to find that a message was coming through them. I am thoroughly familiar with the Morse Code and had no difficulty in deciphering the dots and dashes. I quickly realized that I had broken into the middle of a message. What I heard of it filled me with wonder. It was:

*—ive reason why Hand turn back—is  
murderer found—Waters*

Nothing stranger could have come out of the blank air. It also seemed not a little heartening. I turned excitedly to Hand. I found him peering sharply at me. He unbuckled his helmet and rolled it up over his ear. Then he leaned inquiringly toward me.

"Something up," I shouted into his ear. "It seems that we're no longer wanted on the dirigible. That message was from Waters, asking—wait, I'm getting the reply!"

The reply completely bewildered me. It was:

*Advise follow my request—unable give  
reason—Finch*

So it was the captain who did not want us. I turned and bellowed the import of the two messages to Hand. I saw his eyes behind his goggles veil with perplexity.

And then another message:

*Deny request unless you give reason—  
mystery must be cleared before you land—  
terrible blow to ships reputation—must have  
reason—Waters*

But Waters did not get the reason he was asking for. The reply to that one was:

*Impossible to say why Hand must not  
come aboard—can handle murder problem  
without him—repeat request insistently—  
Finch*

My amazement grew apace. I waited almost breathlessly to hear what Waters would say to this. He took Finch down a peg.

*Consider request absurd—Hand must be taken aboard and given free rein—get in touch with airplane—Waters*

There were no more passages between the two. From then on there were nothing but messages between the airship and our plane. The *Jupiter* gave her position repeatedly.

I shouted to Hand, giving him the entire wireless altercation that I had heard between Waters and Finch. I could tell nothing from his expression.

"What do you think of it?" I bawled.

"We'll have to wait, Clark," he shouted back. "That's all we can do."

On and on we flew. The six hours that Hand had estimated it would take us to overhaul the airship were finally exhausted. Nervousness grew within me. To make matters worse, the sky ahead showed up overcast. Clouds soon took definite form. The pilot descended to get under them and not long after they were rolling weirdly above us.

I shall never forget the thrill of sighting the airliner. It came long after I had given up hope of ever seeing her. She hung a gigantic, ghostly object in the sky. Gradually her silvery form grew clearer, growing ever larger until her great bulk was suspended directly over us.

Gradually we slid under the tail of the monster. The speed of the airplane lessened until it was nearly equal to that of the dirigible. We glided up to an object, not unlike the ordinary circus trapeze, that hung from the underside of the ship near its center. The pilot expertly engaged a long hook above the cockpits with the trapeze.

Glancing up, I perceived a rectangular aperture in the bottom of the dirigible. Men were peering down at us. A small ladder slid swiftly down, almost into our cockpit, operated by a fellow turning a small crank near the opening in the dirigible. Hand cast off his lifebelt and sprang up the ladder. I cautiously followed him, carefully

refraining from glancing downward. We climbed into a narrow compartment, lighted by a single electric bulb in the ceiling. Three officers and four members of the crew were waiting there for us.

One of them, a stalwart man in gold and blue, stepped forward to greet us. His hair was silver at the temples. His blue eyes were keen and steady and the healthy color of his face attested to a robust, vigorous constitution. My friend quickly grasped his hand.

"Captain Finch," said Hand, "I've not had the pleasure of meeting you before, sir, but I have seen your pictures."

Captain Finch smiled but it did not relieve the grimness about him. "And you are Christopher Hand," he said. "I've never seen your picture but you've been described to me. And this, according to my advices from Mr. Waters, should be Mr. Clark."

I shook the captain's hand. He then introduced us to the other two officers. One, a tall, dark, jovial chap, was the ship's surgeon, Dr. Melcher. The other a cadaverous, gloomy fellow, was the first officer, Mr. Hawks. Hand touched my shoulder.

"Did you bring the bags, Clark?"

"Not I! Nothing would have persuaded me to climb up that ladder carrying a bag!"

Dr. Melcher covered a smile. Captain Finch turned briskly to one of his crew. "Fetch these gentlemen's luggage out of that airplane," he ordered. "Put it in their cabins."

"Well, Captain," said Hand impatiently, "I am anxious to start my investigation."

For a moment Captain Finch regarded him in silence. Then he nodded. "Very well," he said. "I suppose the first thing you want is to view the corpse."

"It might be as well," agreed Hand.

The captain turned briskly. He led us from the compartment by way of a couple of little steps and through an opening in the linen wall. This let us into a narrow passage. Dr. Melcher and Mr. Hawks accompanied us. A faint roar below us caused me to turn about.

"What was that?" I demanded.

"That's your taxicab leaving," grinned Dr. Melcher. "It's the airplane heading back for England."

"I'm glad I'm not on it!" I said.

The captain led us to the end of the passage and through a light door. We passed through an elegant dining salon and from that through an equally impressive lounging salon. I was finding it difficult to realize that I was on a dirigible.

In the lounging salon were grouped a number of people. Evidently they had been witnessing our arrival, for they were all grouped at large, concave windows of isinglass at the sides of the lounging salon. They peered at us curiously. Captain Finch escorted us through so rapidly that I was unable to observe much about them.

We mounted a companionway to a promenade deck. This was on the order of a wide, circular balcony above the lounging salon. Passing round this, the captain led us down a narrow corridor toward the stern. A line of doors were on either side of it. From the promenade deck I had noticed a similar passage on the other side of the ship.

The captain turned the knob of one of the doors and stepped through it. Dr. Melcher and Mr. Hawks followed Hand and me in after him. We had entered a small cabin. Everything seemed in order there. The bed was carefully made up. The only thing in the least out of the ordinary was a tray of cocktail glasses, standing on a small table over near a window. This window, curving out almost from the level of the floor, looked down upon the ocean.

Captain Finch crossed the cabin and threw open another door, diagonally across from the one we had entered the cabin by. The first thing I noticed was that it opened into a diminutive lavatory. Then I glanced down at the floor of it. A chill coursed through my veins.

In a grotesque heap at our feet lay the body of a man, his head all but severed from his body!

## CHAPTER II

### INFORMATION

**WE** stood in silence, gazing down upon the ghastly spectacle on the floor. I glanced up at Hand. As soon as he had

seen it, apparently, he had lost interest in the corpse. His gaze was darting about the lavatory.

"Weapon been found?" he inquired.

"No," growled Captain Finch. "We've looked all over for it. The passengers don't know anything about it. Every man of the crew turned out his gear under scrutiny. And we searched their persons, too. If the knife is on this ship, we haven't been able to find it. Don't think anybody could find it, either."

Dr. Melcher stepped over to Hand. "Might I make a suggestion, sir?" he asked, respectfully.

"Go right ahead, Doctor."

"I noticed when I came in here for the first time that the lavatory port was open. It occurred to me that the knife was tossed through it."

Hand nodded and turned to the captain. "Have you been able to determine," he asked, "the approximate time of this murder?"

"Well," replied the captain slowly, "the murder was discovered about twenty minutes after twelve. The doctor here estimated Lyons had been dead only a few minutes."

"Then where was the ship when it happened?"

"Oh, we were passing over Dartmoor."

Dartmoor! I cast my mind back to those grim moorlands that we had flown over. If wild, ruthless nature can call forth the brute in men, it was no wonder that the murder had been committed over the Moor.

Hand was thoughtfully fingering his chin. "This environment is unusual, at least it is for me," he said. "It occurs to me that it is an unusual environment for murder, too. We shall have to readjust one or two of our methods, Clark, I fear. As for the knife, Doctor, I am inclined to agree that it lies among the moorlands. The cotton gloves, too."

"What cotton gloves?" demanded the captain.

"Why, it's perfectly evident that the man wore gloves!" replied Hand. "Those bloody smears of his fingers on the white enamel paint of the deck, there beside the body! It's a simple matter to see that they

weren't made with a naked hand. I merely assumed that they were cotton gloves but, of course, I may be wrong about that. Who has been in here, Captain?"

"Nobody," grunted Captain Finch.

"Who discovered the body?"

"One of the stewards."

"Did he say that he didn't enter the lavatory?"

"Well, no. But I'd wager he didn't."

"We need something better than a wager. Let's have the steward here, Captain, and we'll find out."

Captain Finch turned to Mr. Hawks. "Get that steward in here, Mr. Hawks."

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Hawks, abruptly leaving us.

"Unless the steward entered the lavatory, Captain," asked Hand, "you are quite sure that nobody did?"

"Positive!" retorted the captain. "I was the first to come into this cabin after the steward discovered the body. He reported direct to me. I didn't go in and I ordered nobody to go in."

"It's a relief to find someone with forethought," sighed Hand. "But the doctor has already stated that he entered here."

"I sent for the doctor right away," explained the captain. "He didn't go in. He merely bent over him."

"Well," amended Dr. Melcher, "I'm afraid I did go in a little way, sir. The body was lying just as it is now. I didn't disturb it. The captain insisted that everything be left as it was found. But you can see for yourself, Mr. Hand, that he's lying quite near the door. It's so small in there that he couldn't very well be anywhere else but near the door. I knelt beside him, nearly on the sill of the doorway. A glance showed me, of course, that the fellow was beyond all help."

"You didn't go beyond the body?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Hawks returned with a white-coated, smart-looking fellow. Captain Finch turned upon him.

"Did you go into that lavatory?" he snapped.

"No, sir," briskly replied the steward. "I just saw him lying there and I rushed right off to report it to you, sir."

"That will do," said Hand. "Dismiss him, Captain."

Captain Finch waved the steward away. Then he turned to Hand.

"Well?" he gruffly asked.

"Then," said Hand, as if to himself, "the vestiges in the lavatory were all left by the murderer."

The captain squinted at the corpse. "Don't see any vestiges," he growled.

"They are quite plentiful," smiled Hand. "That wash-basin was used by the murderer. There is a faint red stain on the enamel. Washed his hands, no doubt. Hence the cotton gloves, Captain. Any other kind would most likely have kept the blood off his hands. No sign of a struggle. Murderer probably was hiding in this lavatory, opened the door, grasped Lyons from behind, pulled him in here and slit his throat, all in the space of a few seconds. Then he robbed the corpse."

"Robbed it, eh?" cried the captain. "Of course, that would be it! There's your motive, Mr. Hand! But how can you be so sure?"

"Of what?"

"Why, that this was a murder for robbery!"

Hand was regarding the captain somewhat oddly. So was I. The man seemed peculiarly relieved to find that robbery had been added to murder. Hand glanced down at the corpse again.

"Why," he said, "the man's right-hand coat pocket has been all but turned inside out. Perhaps we can—"

His voice broke off. He dropped to his knee beside the corpse, peering intently at the blood-drenched necktie. The necktie, I noticed, was partially pulled out of the vest.

"Now what?" asked the captain.

"It certainly appears," replied Hand, "that this fellow has been relieved of a stick-pin. I notice several small perforations in the fabric of the necktie, exactly like those left by a stick-pin. Then, of course, the tie has been tugged up out of the vest—simple to see that. Do you gentlemen happen to know whether Lyons wore a stick-pin?"

"He did," replied Dr. Melcher, excited-

ly. "You couldn't miss it. He wore a sparkler the size of your thumb-nail!"

"Have you looked through his effects?" asked Hand.

"Carefully," affirmed the captain. "The infernal pin wasn't among them!"

Hand once again regarded the corpse. "I should say that this fellow has lost a couple of rings, too," he said. "The marks on those pudgy fingers of their having long been adorned with the rings are plain enough. And the rings are gone."

"Right again!" cried Dr. Melcher. "He wore a couple of what I should say were valuable rings."

Next Hand went through the pockets of the dead man. Plainly he found nothing in them.

"The swine!" fiercely exclaimed Captain Finch. "Not only is one of my passengers murdered in cold blood but he's murdered by a common thief! Think of the reputation this will give the ship!"

Hand got slowly to his feet. Mr. Hawks glanced skeptically at him.

"Don't see," gloomily muttered Mr. Hawks, "how you saw those little holes in the necktie."

Hand smiled at him and shook his head. "Well," he said, "if he had anything of value in his pockets, it has been removed. Whoever robbed this body took everything from it, regardless of value. We must make an effort to learn what he was in the habit of carrying in his pockets. This was his second trip on the *Jupiter*. Do any of you know what he carried about with him?"

The three ship's officers looked blank and shook their heads.

"Afraid we'll have little success, then," said Hand, "for his fellow passengers probably knew him for only a very few hours. It would be significant, however, if we could identify some of his belongings in someone else's possession."

"It shouldn't be so difficult," said Dr. Melcher. "Why not search everybody and the cabins?"

"Dr. Melcher," said the captain severely, "if there are any suggestions to be made, I'll make them!"

"Very well, sir," replied the doctor, cheerfully.

"I don't think," said Hand, "that anybody would be such a fool as to commit this bloody deed and then keep on his person or among his belongings evidence that would convict him. As I said before, this is unusual environment for murder. The criminal is held to the scene of his crime virtually as though he were chained to it. I think it perfectly safe and reasonable to suppose that the loot has been hidden."

Mr. Hawks sighed and shook his head. "It would be quite a job to find it, and no mistake," he said. "You don't know what a dirigible is like."

"I have a rudimentary idea," smiled Hand. "Perhaps, if we watch carefully, the murderer will show us where he hid it. For the moment, I think we might better pursue our investigation elsewhere. I want a list of the passengers and crew. And then I want to interview the passengers."

For a few seconds the captain hesitated, dubiously rubbing his chin. "Well, all right," he agreed.

"I think we had better not disturb this body," mused Hand. "We'll lock this cabin. No one is to enter it, Captain. All right, let's get on."

Captain Finch locked the door of the cabin and led us back the way we had come.

The passengers were still in the lounging salon. As we passed round the promenade deck, I noticed that they appeared to be talking quietly, standing or sitting in small groups.

Captain Finch's cabin was above the control car in a small passage forward. The cabins of the other officers were also located in this passage. Hand and I followed the captain into his cabin, and Dr. Melcher and Mr. Hawks left us. The cabin was tiny. Besides a cot, a chair and a small desk of duralumin, there stood in it a small safe. This the captain approached and, bending over it, manipulated the dial. I walked over beside him.

"I didn't know," I said, "that you carried anything so heavy as a safe aboard an airship."

"Not very heavy," the captain tersely replied. "It's fireproof. Preserves the records in case of fire."

Captain Finch took a few papers from the safe. Laying them upon the desk, he stood aside to allow Hand to peruse them. After scanning the papers, Hand plied the captain with questions concerning the passengers. He elicited little information.

"What about this man Farrington?" he asked, at length. "He went over with you on the last crossing and he's back on board now. What got him to make such a rapid return trip?"

"You'll have to ask him," shrugged the captain. "I'm not nosey with the passengers. What they do is their business."

"Not always," smiled Hand. "What they do now is my business."

The captain turned quickly away to the safe. I thought I heard him growl something or other under his breath.

"By the way," said Hand casually, "what was your objection to my taking up this case?"

Captain Finch swung sharply round to face him. "What makes you think I had any objection?" he demanded.

"Before I get to taking advantage of you," smiled Hand, "let me say that Clark listened in on the messages that passed between you and Mr. Waters a little while ago—while we were in the airplane. You were anxious to have us turn back."

With a dark frown on his face, the captain paced up and down the little cabin. He stopped and glanced sharply at Hand.

"This is a damnable thing!" he said. "It is liable to do this ship no good. The foul story of it might become as much a part of her as her very name. Having you fly out here in that spectacular fashion would only intensify the publicity we are bound to get. Notoriety flies with you, Mr. Hand!"

"I think you would more properly call it fame," I said coldly.

"Perhaps you would," retorted the captain, "but I call it notoriety."

Hand continued to smile. "That is the only reason that you wanted us to turn back?" he asked.

"Of course!" gruffly replied the captain. "It's enough, don't you think?"

"Well," replied Hand, "to be frank, I should think that there would be a greater reason."

"Dammit, sir," blustered the captain, "do you think I lie?"

"Not at all," Hand hastened to say. "I spoke without thinking. I'm sorry. Pardon me while I make a copy of this passenger-list."

The list, just as he scribbled it on a piece of paper, lies before me now. I reproduce it below:

Joseph White—New York—tourist  
 Mrs. John Carter—New York—tourist  
 Miss Pansy Minuet—Jersey City—tourist  
 Drury Minuet—her brother—Jersey City—  
 tourist  
 Miss Lois Caldwell—Chicago—tourist  
 Miss Agatha Fenwick—her chaperon—Chi-  
 cago—tourist  
 Oswald Farrington—New York—traveling on  
 business, probably  
 Robert Enright—San Francisco—nothing  
 known  
 Count Ludwig von Grugheim—Berlin—travel-  
 ing on business  
 Miss Hattie Gordon—Brooklyn—nothing  
 known  
 Professor Ernest Steele—Boston—of Harvard  
 —tourist  
 Pierre Duval—Bordeaux—traveling on busi-  
 ness  
 Albert Fische—London—nothing known  
 Theobald Snook—Philadelphia—tourist

"Well," said Hand, squinting at his list, "we haven't much information there. You're sure there's nothing else you can tell me about these passengers or their pasts, Captain? I don't care how trivial it is, anything at all that they may have told you."

"Nothing," shortly replied the captain.

"What sort of fellow was this man Lyons?"

"Um, well, I hate to talk behind a dead man's back. But his personal appearance was surely against him. He had small, cold, fishy eyes and a cruel mouth. You can't tell it much from the way he looks now but that's the way he was. People avoided him. At least, they did going over."

"But not coming back?"

"I hadn't time to observe him much this trip."

"Such a man might have enemies. Well, let's go out and see the group that he might be with."

"Every last one of the passengers is in the lounging salon, I think. Do you want to interview them there?"

"It will do very nicely. If any are missing, we can rout them out easily enough. It's really extraordinary to be able to put your hand on everyone whom you want."

The captain nodded and led the way out of his cabin. The captain placed me at a loss. While he had still been nothing but a name to me, the messages he had sent through the air to Mr. Waters had puzzled me mightily. My first sight of him had warmed me to him. But his curt, almost surly attitude had quickly dissipated that.

We went directly aft to the promenade deck. As we descended the companionway there was a stir among the passengers. Clearly, they displayed as much anxiety as curiosity. Captain Finch paused on the bottom step and faced the group. Hand and I stood behind him.

And now let me digress for just a moment to explain exactly how we were situated. As I have said, Hand, the captain and I stood at the foot of the companionway. The passengers stood in a ring before us. Behind them, directly across from the companionway, was a short, narrow corridor leading into the dining salon aft of the lounging salon. Over it hung a light curtain, drawn only at meal-times. At either side of the broad lounging salon were the black windows, sloping upward to the circular promenade deck above. Bright duralumin chairs and tables of futuristic design stood about the deck.

To return to the proceedings:

"Ladies and gentlemen," gruffly began the captain, "allow me to introduce Mr. Christopher Hand. He has some questions, I believe, that he would like to ask you."

In a silence that was electric, Hand stepped from the companionway. He held the copy he had made of the passenger-list.

"First of all," he said briskly, "I want to make sure that all the passengers are here. I have a list of the passengers. I shall read it. And I should be obliged if you will answer to your names."

As he read the names, I made a mental

note of each person who answered to them. It developed that Mr. White was not present but that everyone else was. Hand turned to the captain.

"Will you ask that steward up on the promenade deck to summon Mr. White?" he requested.

The captain grunted and glanced up at the steward who was arranging the chairs on the deck above.

"Murphy," called the captain, "ask Mr. White to step down here."

The steward left his task and went off toward the passengers' cabins. I was observing the passengers closely. One of them seemed extremely worried and nervous. This was Miss Gordon, a timid girl with large brown eyes.

Again Hand addressed the passengers.

"It appears," said Hand, "that after Mr. Lyons was murdered, he was robbed. We have established that a stick-pin and two rings of his are missing."

"Shocking!" exclaimed Miss Fenwick, a woman past middle age, tall and uncompromising, with a sharp face and a cold gleam in her eyes.

"Perhaps," went on Hand, "there were other valuables taken from Lyons's body. Anyone would be aiding us greatly who could give even the least information concerning the man's possessions."

Mr. Snook, a little old man with white sidewhiskers, immediately responded. "I saw the stick-pin," he said. "It was a diamond, the size of the eye of sin! I saw the rings, too—a ruby and an emerald."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, I'll tell you something else! I think that feller was a crook! A high-class crook, maybe, but a crook just the same!"

Mr. Snook had worked himself into a state of excitement. He pulled energetically on one of his sidewhiskers. He was not the only one who was moved. In fact, Pansy Minuet was the only one among the passengers who was not. She might have been beautiful had her expression not been so hard and her hair not quite so yellow. Her blue eyes and her red lips belied each other. The eyes regarded Mr. Snook coolly and without the slightest spark of humor in them. Her lips curled smilingly. Her

brother also turned his face, sallow and pinched, upon Mr. Snook. But his pale eyes seemed incapable of remaining still. His hands trembled. He put them into his pockets.

"You might," Hand suggested to Mr. Snook, "just tell us how you formed this opinion of Lyons."

"You can bet your bottom dollar I can do just that!" cried Mr. Snook. "When I saw him last his name wasn't Lyons. Not by a darned sight! I saw him a week ago in Paris—he was at the same hotel I went to. And then he was calling himself—um—um—now, what the heck did he call himself?"

Hand moved over to him. "Think!" he pressed. "We must have that name!"

"I got it!" cried Mr. Snook. "It was Kenworthy. He was supposed to be an Englishman. I saw his name on the hotel register and had him pointed out to me. There were nothing but Frenchmen all over the place. I might as well have been dumb, yes, and deaf, too! I wanted to talk to somebody I could understand, somebody I could just pass the time of day with. But that feller was the most uncongenial cuss I ever saw. He acted like he hated to go on trusting St. Peter with the pearly gates!"

"You didn't get to know him well, then?"

"Not him! Every time he saw me he got up and monkeyed around. And the next thing he was gone. I got to watching him when he didn't spot me. He'd sit in the lobby, always looking around, as if he was expecting something. Every once in a while he'd hop up and beat it. Finally a strange feller came in the hotel. Lyons didn't see either of us. This feller walked up to Lyons and touched him on the shoulder. Lyons looked at him and jumped about a foot. So did the other feller. Lyons looked mad—dirty mad—and the other feller looked scared. Lyons took him by the arm and went out of the hotel with him. That night Lyons or Kenworthy or whatever his name is was gone."

"You didn't happen to know who the other man was, by any chance?"

"Not then, but I do now! He's right on this ship. That's—"

Suddenly Miss Fenwick shrieked, high and tremulous, more of a screech. She clapped her hand to her thigh for a moment. Miss Caldwell, a dark, pretty girl, rushed over to her. So did Mr. Fische, an expression of concern on his fair, handsome face. There was a commotion all about.

"Miss Fenwick!" cried Mr. Fische. "What has happened?"

"Somebody stuck a pin in me, that's what's happened!" hissed Miss Fenwick, indignantly.

"I say!" gasped Mr. Fische.

Miss Fenwick turned majestically about. Professor Steele, a tall, austere, bespectacled man with a white goatee, had been standing directly behind her.

"What do you mean by such actions, sir?" she demanded. "I should think you are old enough to know better!"

The professor gave a start. "I?" he asked, incredulously. "Surely, madam, you don't think that I stuck a pin in you!"

"Well!" haughtily exclaimed Miss Fenwick. "You deny it!"

"But, dear," cried Miss Caldwell, "couldn't it have been—I mean, maybe one of your pins just—"

"Lois!" Miss Fenwick drew herself up, her mouth a straight, white line.

"Pardon me," said Hand. "May we just get back to the business before us. Mr. Snook, who was the man you saw intercept Lyons in Paris?"

Mr. Snook was tugging furiously at his whiskers. Hand's question brought him out of a preoccupied study.

"What—what—oh, the man," he said, gazing slowly round the circle of passengers. "There he is."

He flung out an arm and pointed squarely at Oswald Farrington. The man gave a slight start. Farrington was well set up with a military bearing and a rather grim, dark face.

"You must be mistaken," he said tersely.

"Of course you must be, Mr. Snook," agreed Hand. "I happen to know that Mr. Farrington was not in Paris last week."

Farrington glanced sharply at Hand. "Might I ask," he said, "how you knew that?"

"Surely," smiled Hand. "You landed on this ship at Le Bourget yesterday, and you took it from the same field today. Might I ask why you made such a short visit to Europe?"

"A business trip," shrugged Farrington. "I had to get over and right back as quickly as possible. That is the beauty of this airship service."

"Do you agree that you were mistaken, Mr. Snook?" asked Hand.

"Yes, yes, by heck, I must have been," replied Mr. Snook. "I guess I've told you all I know about him—Lyons, I mean."

"Then," asked Hand, "is there anyone else who can tell me anything concerning this man Lyons?"

Robert Enright, who had been keeping toward the rear along with Professor Steele, seemed about to respond. He was a slight man of about forty, without any distinguishing features except a wealth of sandy hair. I had been observing him. He had seemed deeply troubled all along. Now he moved convulsively forward. But he checked himself in uncertainty, stepped back and compressed his lips.

Count Ludwig von Grugheim took the floor. He was a tall, beautifully built fellow of about thirty. His long, black hair was brushed smoothly back. With his glittering black eyes and military mustache, his swarthy, handsome face was instantly impressive. He smiled, revealing strong, even white teeth.

"Perhaps," he said, in an incongruous Oxford accent, "I have the privilege of being of some slight service to you, Mr. Hand. I flatter myself that I am something of a criminologist, although strictly an amateur one. It is my habit to notice things."

"Good!" said Hand. "You have some information, then?"

"Very little, I'm afraid," he replied. "I merely noticed a few of the items that Mr. Lyons carried about with him. Besides the stick-pin and the rings, he carried a gold watch and chain with a large diamond pendant attached to the chain. But possibly the most valuable article of his that I observed was his cigarette-case. The front of it was incrustated with gems."

"Excellent!" commended Hand. "Did you observe anything else, Count, that Lyons carried about on his person?"

"Nothing," replied the count.

He bowed slightly and stepped back with the ghost of a smile. At that moment the steward who had been dispatched after White came down the companionway. The captain glanced at him.

"Well?" he asked.

"I can't find Mr. White, sir," said the steward. "I searched all over for him. He's disappeared."

"Oh!"

The ejaculation came from Miss Gordon, as though it had been torn from her. She swayed and passed a hand weakly before her eyes. Miss Caldwell caught her by the shoulders and guided her to a chair. Hand watched them steadily.

"What seems to be the trouble?"

"I should think," said Miss Fenwick severely, "that you could let her alone for a minute!"

"Very well," bowed Hand. "Is there anyone else who could—"

"Yes, yes!" cried Enright, in an agitated voice. "I have been warned not to tell what I saw, but I—I cannot remain silent. I must—God have—"

His voice was overwhelmed in a splitting crash of shots. Women screamed, and men shouted hoarsely. Hand was in a heap at my feet. Enright pitched forward, caught himself, and then spun heavily to the deck.

I bent over Hand, only to have him leap to his feet and bound a few steps up the companionway. Over our heads he whipped out his long arm with his pistol in his hand, firing rapidly at the curtain in the little passage to the dining salon. There were more shrieks. And Miss Fenwick fainted.

Hand jumped from the steps and rushed across the lounging salon. "Stay here, Clark," he shouted.

He whipped the curtain aside and was gone.

### CHAPTER III

#### CATWALKS

I STRODE over to the fallen form of Robert Enright. With an oath the captain followed me. Farrington and Pro-

fessor Steele were already bending over him. Blood ran from a corner of his mouth.

"It's all over with him," said Farrington gruffly.

"What devilish thing is this?" rasped the captain. "Who in heaven's name could have shot this man down in cold blood?"

"I wish I knew!" growled Farrington.

There was a good deal of confusion. Fishe and Mr. Snook were valiantly endeavoring to quiet the women, at least all the women but Pansy Minuet. She motioned with her head to her brother. And together they mounted the companionway. I grasped Farrington and Steele by the arms.

"Look after those women," I said.

"I shall carry Miss Fenwick to her cabin," offered the count. "Miss Caldwell, would you mind showing me the way?"

He picked up the unconscious woman as though she were a feather. Miss Caldwell's brown eyes were wide with fright. She held her arm tightly about Miss Gordon who reclined weakly in a chair, seemingly in a half swoon.

"I'll help Miss Gordon to her cabin," said Fishe. "Come along, Lois."

Soon, to my relief, they began to move off. But Farrington and Steele did not heed my request. They remained standing beside the body. So did Captain Finch. I dropped to my knees beside it.

At that moment two of the ship's officers rushed down the companionway. One was Dr. Melcher. The other I had not met. He was a bluff man of about the same age as the captain, with much gold braid on his uniform. Captain Finch turned to him.

"Mr. Stuart," he said, "tell Mr. Burns to look alive and have the stewards attend to the passengers. There's been murder here. Dr. Melcher, look that man over and see if anything can be done for him."

The doctor dropped beside me with a set, professional expression on his face. He felt for Enright's pulse. He shook his head and rolled the man's eyelids back.

"Then," snapped the captain, "see to the passengers. Some were badly shocked."

The doctor nodded and went swiftly up the companionway. I drew a deep breath and commenced to search the body.

"What in heaven's name are you doing, Mr. Clark?" barked the captain.

"I want to see," I replied, "whether this man was carrying—hello! what's this?"

I had taken from Enright's coat pocket a crumpled piece of paper. As my three companions edged up to me, I smoothed it out on my knee. On the paper was scrawled a sinister message in a hand that was palpably disguised. It read:

*You are being watched. You won't last long if you don't mind your own business.*

"He said he'd been warned," said Professor Steele quietly. "You remember?"

Some inexplicable thing caused me to look up smartly from the note. Farrington and the captain were exchanging a significant glance. They both looked hurriedly away. Then the captain stretched out his hand toward the note.

"I'll take that," he said curtly.

"But I'd like to keep it," I protested. "This is a valuable clue."

"You know what it says. What more can you require of it?"

In such circumstances, Hand and I have always found a sample of handwriting such as this to be of immense interest. But I did not say so now.

"I can only say," I replied, "that I must keep this note."

"Nonsense!" growled the captain. "I'll have it!"

He snatched it roughly from me and thrust it into his pocket. I rose indignantly.

"You are acting very foolishly, Captain," I said. "Your orders were to give Hand a free rein. I overheard them, you know."

"I'm master of this ship," he retorted. "I've given you a free rein. And look what's come of it! Another of my passengers murdered!"

A glance at Farrington and Steele informed me that I was receiving no sympathy from them. I felt baffled. But no good could come of quarreling with the captain.

"Well," I shrugged, "I think this poor fellow should be put in his cabin. By the way, is his cabin anywhere near Lyons's?"

"Just down the passage from it," replied

the captain grudgingly. "Only a few steps."

"Then," I mused, "he must have seen something connected with the murder of Lyons. Fate snatched a solution of that problem from us when he fell dead here. What a pity that—ah, there's Hand!"

He emerged from the port passage of the passengers' quarters. We stood in silence while his long legs carried him swiftly round the promenade deck and down the companionway. The captain watched him with a frown on his face. As he stepped up to us, Hand glanced somberly at the corpse.

"Dead," he breathed. "His assassin disappeared. Heaven knows where he got to."

"How did you get up there?" demanded the captain, nodding toward the promenade deck.

"You shouldn't have to ask that, Captain," replied Hand. "There are several ways. I took one."

"You might as well have saved yourself the trouble."

"So it would appear. Have you arranged to have this body removed?"

"I am about to do that."

"Then, Captain, it is vitally necessary to discover what has become of Mr. White. He must be hiding on this ship. And the ship must be searched for him."

"I'm not very anxious to follow your suggestions. I've already done that once. And look at the mess it resulted in!"

"But surely you can't let a passenger disappear like that!"

"No, and I have no intention to. Don't worry, Mr. Hand, I know how to look after things aboard here."

"Then the ship will be searched?"

"Yes, dammit, yes!"

The captain turned wrathfully and mounted the companionway. Hand glanced coldly at Farrington and Steele. They both became rather embarrassed. Farrington silently ascended the companionway, and Steele wandered slowly over to the starboard side of the salon and sat down. Hand turned and spoke guardedly to me.

"Well, Clark?"

"Enright's warning didn't die with him. He had it in his pocket, written on a piece of paper. It said: 'You are being watched.

You won't last long if you don't mind your own business.'"

"Let me see it."

"The captain has it."

"Why didn't you ask him for it?"

"I did after he took it away from me. He refused to give it back."

"So? What reason did he give for that?"

"None."

"Seems to be a habit of his."

Hand frowned and rubbed his chin. I found myself glancing nervously about.

Professor Steele sat stiffly by the windows, looking more like a corpse, with his pallid face and motionless posture, than did poor Enright.

"It's silly," I said, "but my nerves don't seem to be any too good. I keep expecting a shot to come from any direction."

Hand grinned at me. "Well," he said, "if it gives you the jitters here, follow me, we'll go somewhere else. We're wasting time here, anyway."

He led me over to the passage to the dining salon. I approached the ominous curtain with some trepidation. In it were the holes torn by Hand's bullets. He waved it casually aside and stepped into the darkness beyond it. At the end of the short passage he flashed his electric torch. The three tables in the dining salon, carefully set for breakfast, leaped in succession out of the darkness. We seemed to be alone. Hand extinguished his light.

"You have been considering the information we got from the passengers, Clark?"

"Yes, and a strange muddle it seemed, at first. I have been piecing it together. I think Mr. Lyons carried with him something of far greater importance than jewelry."

"Good. So do I. Was it something material or was it a secret? The strange part of it is that the captain knows. If you have pieced together what has been told us, you must realize that there are incongruities in it. We have enough to see that Lyons's trip to Europe changed his whole attitude. On the trip over he was an uncongenial fellow who preferred his solitude. He was when Mr. Snook met him in Paris. But on the way back he has given a cocktail party."

"That's right, by Jove—those glasses in his cabin! And look here, what a splendid opportunity for finger-prints!"

"Yes, that's your work."

I might say here that this was the first case that Hand entrusted me with this important work. I had been studying it for some time and now I was to realize the fruits of my labors.

"Don't you think," I asked, "that I should get right at it?"

"As soon as possible, Clark, but not just now. First we must determine what we can about Joseph White. By the way, do you know who he is?"

"How on earth could I? His name means nothing to me."

"Nor to me. But his face—that is a different thing. I saw him when he came aboard. He saw me, too, and it shocked him profoundly. He lost no time in hiding his face and probably he thinks I didn't see him. He is an old acquaintance, you see."

"Who is he, then?"

"His right name is Joseph Mahoney. Here's a concise history of him. As a youth of eighteen he got two years in Sing Sing for attempted hold-up. Shortly after he was released, I was retained by a man to find the murderer of his brother. I discovered that it was Joe Mahoney. But the man he had shot was an unsavory character and almost deserved to die, I thought. While I was working on the case, the war broke out. I had just tracked the crime to Mahoney and I found him in the Army, one of the first to enlist. He admitted his guilt to me. It was murder, all right. But if there is such a thing as justifiable murder, that was it. I put my tongue in my cheek and let him serve his country. He did it admirably."

"Just the same, he's a desperate character."

"He could be now. Then he could have reclaimed himself. And I hoped that his service to the flag would do it. Strange that he should pop up here. And we must find him. The stewards were unable to locate him in the passengers' quarters where he belongs. Therefore, he must be elsewhere about the ship, where he doesn't be-

long. I have no doubt that the captain will institute a search. Let's keep our eye on it and see what comes of it."

This conversation had not taken place entirely in the gloom. Hand had repeatedly flashed his light about the dining salon. Now he flashed it again and led me over to the little door at the side, the one we had passed through just after boarding the airship.

"We'll go aft," said Hand. "There'll be men searching there. It may be necessary for us to split up."

We stepped out into the little passage. It extended about thirty feet to the entrance of the airplane landing stage. The far end of the passage was open with a tenuous catwalk extending sternward. Far along the catwalk a light glowed bleakly, its rays carrying feebly to us.

The first thing that attracted my attention was a sound, so thoroughly familiar that in those strange surroundings it was enormously incongruous. It was the whine of a dog, a plaintive, appealing sort of whine, punctuated by low yelps.

Hand glanced sharply at me, motioning for caution. We crept to the end of the passage and out upon the narrow catwalk. I had no liking for that. To our right was a linen wall. To our left there was ten feet of thin air that extended to the curving, triangular structure of the side of the ship. Although we trod the catwalk no farther than twenty feet, it seemed like a mile to me. There we came to an opening in the taut, perpendicular wall of linen. Hand dodged through it. I followed into complete darkness. I brushed against him and stopped.

The dog's whining rose in pitch. The animal barked more sharply. And then, from some little distance off in the gloom, a voice came faintly to us. It seemed to be harshly reprimanding the dog. It failed of its purpose, for the beast commenced to howl.

I waited motionless. Finally I saw a light, flashing about somewhere off in the mysterious darkness. Slowly it moved toward me, its beam swaying sharply this way and that. I silently drew my pistol. I dared not move, for I did not know at what

moment I would step off into space. The user of the light reached my side. It was Hand. I had thought all along that we had been standing together.

"Didn't find him," he said. "There's a ladder back there that goes up into the passengers' quarters. I guess he left us that way."

"Where in heaven's name are we, anyhow?"

"We are in the freight and baggage compartments. The baggage is piled aft there. That's where our man seemed to be doing his prowling. We'll go back and see what we can discover. It may have been one of the crew on regular business and it may have been something quite different."

I wanted to pause long enough to look over the freight, to see what sort of stuff is shipped by airship. But Hand led me swiftly toward the stern, using his light freely now. Later, however, I found out that practically everything under the sun is shipped by airship. The dog heard us and greeted us joyously. He was somewhere out among the freight. We could not see him. We walked along an open lane that had been left near the linen wall.

The freight and baggage compartments were really one, the baggage being piled up at the extreme after end of the long space. With his torch Hand discovered a switch and turned it on. A light flooded its brilliance down upon us.

There were a number of bags on the deck but no trunks. Each bag had a tag tied to it, giving the owner's name. Our attention was quickly drawn to two of the bags and for a very good reason. They had both been cut open evidently with a knife and their contents lay strewn all about them. Hand picked them up and determined that they were emptied of everything that had been in them. We also determined that they were the property of the late Horton P. Lyons.

"So, ho!" said Hand softly. "This is what the gentleman who spoke to the dog was doing."

"By Jove," I said, "evidently the thing Lyons was murdered for hasn't yet fallen into the hands of the one who killed him!"

"It has that appearance, Clark, but it's

no certainty. This does seem to indicate, though, that whatever Lyons was murdered for is something material and not some information that he had the misfortune to possess—information that might have been dangerous to someone else. Ha!"

With this exclamation he picked up one of Lyons's bags, turning it around and peering at it intently. He did the same with the other. Then he commenced giving other bags the same sort of scrutiny.

"What are you doing?" I demanded.

I got no reply until he had inspected every bag in the place. Then he stepped back, appearing very well satisfied with himself.

"I wonder that I didn't think of it before!" he muttered. "Clark, we have just discovered something of the utmost importance!"

"Well, I haven't."

"But I will tell you. I have just read a whole history of events off those bags. The stickers, old boy! Hotel stickers, steamship stickers and even the stickers of the Ocean International Airline! They tell us where these people have been!"

"Of course! What did you learn?"

"Look, here are Lyons's bags. We are concerned only with those stickers that appear to have been stuck on recently. Here is the one of the Ocean International Airline, in fact, there are two of them on each bag. Here we have the Hotel Hastings of London—Lyons disembarked at Croydon, you remember. Now we move to Paris with the sticker of the Grandville. And he has gone to Berlin where he acquired the sticker of the Markheim."

"Are there similar stickers on any of these other bags?"

"A number of them. Mr. Snook's bear the sticker of the Grandville. That is where he saw Lyons in Paris. And Farrington's, my boy, has a brand new sticker of the Markheim, Berlin!"

"Jove! But could Farrington have landed in France yesterday, gone to Berlin and boarded the *Jupiter* at Le Bourget this morning?"

"Certainly, by airplane. And he'd have had time to register at the Markheim whether he spent the night there or not.

And he's not the only one besides Lyons who registered at the Markheim. Its stickers are on the bags of both Pansy and Drury Minuet!"

"The Minuets!"

"Precisely. It may all be coincidence. But we can determine that. Don't forget your suggestion in London—to solve crime by wireless. We'll send for information through the air."

"Perhaps the names that we know them by won't convey much to those at the Markheim. Lyons, at least, was profligate with names. Perhaps, Farrington and the Minuets were, too."

"Exactly. We won't rely much on the names, although we'll supply them. But we'll also give them a careful description of each one of them. We're getting our hands full, Clark. We must send these messages. We must find out about that cocktail party. And we must find Joe Mahoney. Time presses frantically in each case. I'll send these messages off at once. You go aft to keep your eye on the search."

We switched off the light and returned to the catwalk, leaving Lyons's despoiled bags just as we had found them. Hand immediately struck off for the forward part of the ship and I turned aft. With my heart in my throat I negotiated the narrow catwalk. It ended at some narrow steps that followed up the curve of one of the giant hoops of the main frame. I found them more terrifying than the catwalk. They took me up to another catwalk extending fore and aft the length of the ship on the starboard side. On it, with a vast amount of relief, I came upon Mr. Stuart. I was inclined to like him. He had a good-natured face and twinkling blue eyes. I edged over to him and raised my voice above the heavy growl of the motors.

"Have you started the search?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "and it's a strange one, too. First time I ever heard of a man getting lost on a dirigible."

"I'm inclined to think," I said, "that he's not so lost."

Mr. Stuart stood with his hand against a sort of squat boiler. I saw that numerous of these objects were distributed fore and aft along the inside of the catwalk,

connected upright to the framework in groups of threes. Between each group of them hung a large canvas bag. I asked Mr. Stuart what they were.

"These cylinders," he said, slapping the one he stood beside, "are gasoline tanks. They're made of duralumin, the same as the frame and about everything else on this ship. Those canvas bags are to contain water ballast. Our water recovery system, if it were one hundred percent efficient, would recover more water from the exhaust of the motors than the gasoline we use to run them. As a matter of fact, we recover about exactly the same amount of water as gasoline used. The water is pumped into these canvas bags which fill, you see, as the gasoline tanks empty. The result is that the weight of the ship remains constant."

"How remarkable!"

"We also use the water ballast to trim ship, by pumping it from one ballast-bag to another. For instance, if we are carrying too much weight forward, we pump the water ballast aft."

Again I took to glancing curiously about. In the faint light provided by the few bulbs that burned along the catwalk, the whole spectacle was one of weirdness and unreality. One could not see far in any direction. The whole interior of the great bag was cluttered up with a motley assortment of strange objects. Above our heads a yellowish cloth lay on white cord netting that extended from the side of the ship out over the gasoline tanks. From the edge of this the cloth drooped and sloped in soft folds down into the gloom. Directly in front of us a catwalk slanted from the one we were on to a little platform located in the center of the ship at the end of the cabin-structure. With the linen wall of the cabin-structure on one side of it and the yellow cloth drooping on the other, the catwalk appeared to extend into the depths of some unearthly cavern. A light-bulb glowed wanly over the little platform outside the cabin-structure.

"I presume," I said, turning to Mr. Stuart, "that this yellow stuff over our heads contains the helium gas."

He glanced up. "Yes," he replied,

"that's one of the gas-cells. There are twelve in all, between each of the main sections. The gas lifts the weight. The frame supports it."

"Those gas-bags don't seem to be full. If they were, they wouldn't droop so limply down there toward the center of the ship. They look like a gloomy back-drop of some sinister scene on the stage!"

"Well, I never thought of that," grinned Mr. Stuart. "I suppose they do look odd. But we couldn't carry them full. Gas expands when it gets warm, you know, and we have to allow for that. The gas-cells are about ninety-two percent full."

"Oh, I see. But, look here. I don't see how we're going to find a man among this heterogeneous mass of stuff."

"It won't be hard. He's got to stick pretty close to one of the gangways. There are only three—the one we're on, the one on the port side and the upper gangway. He could crawl up one of the main sections and hang on there, I suppose, but I wouldn't want to do it for any length of time. Then he might be in one of the fins. But I wouldn't care much for that, either. We'll rout him out soon enough, I fancy, when we get started.

"What's the delay?"

"The captain's got a party looking for him up forward. I've been posted here. Mr. Hawks is across from us on the port gangway. And there's another man above us on the upper gangway. He can't get by the center of the ship. As soon as they get through up forward, we'll begin to work aft."

I had to be contented with that although the time that wasted away was maddening. Finally some men of the crew came toward us along the catwalk from the forward part of the ship. They joined us and told us the captain's orders were to begin searching the after section. I decided to stick with Mr. Stuart.

The men crawled up the main sections, in each instance reporting negatively. We inspected a couple of repair-shops—linen cubby-holes just off the catwalk—and two engine-rooms. An engine-room, I found, was a larger edition of a repair-shop but contained a huge V-type motor.

"I thought," I said to Mr. Stuart, "that the motors were housed in gondolas outside the ship."

"They used to be in the older ships," he replied. "Having them inside cuts down parasite resistance. There's your propeller-shaft—goes right under your feet there and passes through the side of the ship. With that wheel over there we can turn the propellers one hundred and eighty degrees. We can use them to pull the ship up into the air or down out of it as well as to drive her along through it, simply by altering the direction of the dynamic force of the propellers."

Near the stern Mr. Stuart halted us. He stepped off the gangway and skipped down a ladder.

"Where's he going?" I asked one of the men.

"That ladder, sir," he replied, "goes down to the emergency control cabin in the lower vertical fin."

Mr. Stuart soon climbed back to the gangway. He shook his head at me and proceeded on. In short order we had reached the convergence of the port and starboard gangways. Mr. Hawks and three men were waiting there. The captain, another officer and three more men descended a ladder from above. We strung ourselves out along the two catwalks, with the captain in the center of us. He looked brisk and business-like.

"Nothing been discovered, eh?" he shouted, to make himself heard above the motors. "Those of you who have torches flash them aft there. Illuminate the after gangway and play them into the fins."

A number of beams stabbed forth, including that of my light. Labyrinths of shining girders and control wires sprang into being in the hollows of the horizontal fins. The after gangway ran a straight, narrow ribbon into the stern.

A member of the crew, the only one behind me on the starboard catwalk, cried out sharply. I turned about in time to see a fellow scramble up on the catwalk between us. I had a glimpse of an evil face and two eyes glittering in the gloom. Then the man sprang upright and struck at me with a long knife. I warded off the

blow with my electric-torch, turning the blade by the greatest good fortune. But I lost my footing and all but slipped from the catwalk. The airman who had been standing behind me leaped forward and grappled with the fellow. With a hideous cry of rage, the awful man whirled upon him and plunged the knife into his chest. The poor chap cried out inarticulately and toppled from the catwalk. His assailant sped away from us. Before I could collect myself, he had disappeared round the curve of the gangway.

So suddenly and quickly had the whole thing taken place that some of those behind me were totally unaware of it. But those directly behind me were shouting excitedly. They could not get by me; so clearly it was my place to start the pursuit. I found little relish in running along that narrow catwalk. I pulled my pistol from my pocket and tried not to think what a false step would mean. And then I halted abruptly.

Directly under a light-bulb stood the man I was pursuing. Twenty feet beyond him, balancing himself easily on the gangway, stood Christopher Hand. He was menacing the fellow with his pistol. The man shouted something unintelligible and brandished his dagger.

"Drop that knife!" Hand called to him. "Drop it, I say! Ha, so there you are, Clark! Don't approach him until he's got rid of that knife, and don't be afraid to shoot. Now, will you drop that knife?"

The man turned and scowled fiercely at me. He shook his shaggy head in impotent rage. Then he hurled the knife viciously from him. It cut through the fabric of the outer cover and flashed from sight.

"Follow me," Hand called to him. "Keep your eye on him, Clark."

"I will!" I shouted. "If he tries anything funny, I'll shoot him down like a dog! Get along there!"

#### CHAPTER IV

##### AN OBJECT OF CRIME

OUR captive sullenly followed Hand. I warned him whenever he began to overtake my friend. I was conscious that

a procession followed me but I did not look back. When he came to the point where I had climbed up to the starboard gangway, Hand skipped down to the catwalk below. The captive hesitated. At a sharp command from me, however, he climbed down. Hand covered him from below. I climbed down and joined them on the lower catwalk. Then we started off once again alongside the freight and baggage compartments in the direction of the dining salon.

We halted in the little passage near the entrance to the airplane landing stage and backed our man up against the wall. I turned my torch full on him. He was a powerful fellow, shabbily dressed and quite the ugliest looking villain I had ever confronted. His eyes blazed into the strong rays of my torch. Mr. Stuart, and one or two others entered the passage after us. Hand stepped up to the prisoner. But at that instant, Captain Finch elbowed his way over to us.

"Who the devil is this man?" he roared. "That's not Joseph White!"

"Have you ever seen him before?" asked Hand.

"Never!" retorted the captain. "By heaven, he must be a stowaway!"

"I daresay he is," agreed Hand. "Where did you find him?"

"He was hiding in the stern," growled the captain.

"Captain," I asked, dreading to hear the answer, "how is that man whom he stabbed?"

The captain frowned almost as fiercely as the stowaway. "The poor fellow's body," he growled, "crashed through the outer cover and fell into the sea!"

"So we have a murderer," muttered Hand. "Here, you, raise your arms! I'll make sure that you have no more weapons on you."

He ran his hands under the stowaway's coat and down his trousers legs. Then he thrust his hands into the man's two coat pockets. From one pocket he slowly withdrew an object, an object that made our eyes bulge. It was a gem-incrusted cigarette-case.

"Lyons's cigarette-case!" breathed the

captain. "By heaven, we have our man!"

To our astonishment, the stowaway threw back his head and roared with hoarse laughter. I thought for a moment that Captain Finch was going to strike him. The man's laughter died away as suddenly as it had burst forth. He scowled again and glanced unsteadily about.

"What's your name?" Hand snapped at him.

The fellow's frown disappeared. He smiled almost childishly.

"Miguel," he softly replied.

"Spanish?"

"Sí, señor."

"Where did you board this ship?"

"I climb on heem at Le Bourget when nobody look. I weesh to go to United States. I have uncle there. I work there before."

"Where did you get this cigarette-case?"

"I fin' heem. A man breeng heem back where I hide and put heem under little walk. When he go, I get heem."

"That's a damned lie!" snarled the captain.

With the ferocity of a tiger the stowaway leaped upon the captain, hammering at him with both fists. But Captain Finch was no weakling. He defended himself but not without difficulty. The rest of us seized Miguel and forced him back. The captain glared at him.

"The fellow's a madman," he said, breathing heavily.

"Don't try that again, Miguel!" warned Hand. "Now, then, tell me, did the man you saw hide anything else back there beside the cigarette-case?"

Miguel growled softly. He threw his shoulders back.

"I talk no more!" he said harshly.

Nor did he. Hand could get nothing more out of him. In the end we decided to chain him up. The brig, I discovered, was right in the corridor that Hand had led us to. It was diagonally across from the entrance to the airplane landing stage. It also was constructed of duralumin, the door being solid except for a small, grated window near the top. The thing was hardly larger than a closet, furnished merely with a light cot. A handcuff was fastened

round Miguel's ankle and clasped fast to the cot. The door was locked on him. And we filed out into the dining salon.

Hand carefully wrapped the cigarette-case up in his handkerchief and put it into his pocket. The captain watched him sharply. Mr. Hawks and Mr. Stuart were the only ones who had accompanied us. We walked silently out into the lounging salon. There we found Dr. Melcher pacing up and down and smoking a cigarette. He regarded us in astonishment.

"I'd like to see you in my cabin, Mr. Hand," said Captain Finch.

"Certainly, Captain," replied Hand.

The captain strode swiftly across the salon and mounted the companionway. We followed after him. Dr. Melcher fell in beside me.

"What's been going on?" he asked. "Have I missed any excitement?"

"Plenty of it," I replied. "We found a stowaway hiding in the stern. He killed one of your crew. And we found Lyons's cigarette-case on him."

The doctor regarded me aghast. For a moment he was unable to speak.

"For heaven's sake!" he softly exclaimed. "Who did he kill?"

"I don't know the poor chap's name," I replied. "It was horrible."

"You're sure it was Lyons's cigarette-case?"

"It certainly answers the count's description of it."

"Then the man must have been the one who killed Lyons! And he must have been the one who killed Enright! I hope they've taken care that he does no more mischief."

"He's locked up in the brig, chained to the cot. I guess he's safe enough."

At this point we had turned into the passage of the officers' quarters. Mr. Stuart called out to the captain.

"Shall you need me, sir?" he asked.

The captain halted and swung about. "No," he replied. "I won't need you, either, Mr. Hawks. You may return to the control car."

"Dr. Melcher," said Hand, "would you mind asking Count von Grugheim to come to the captain's cabin?"

"Not at all," replied the doctor,

"Why disturb the count at this hour?" demanded the captain.

"Well," replied Hand, "we assume that the cigarette-case we took from Miguel belonged to Lyons, but we aren't positive. The count seems to be the only one who could make sure."

"That can wait until morning."

"I prefer to have it settled immediately. If you please, Doctor."

Dr. Melcher was torn with uncertainty. He glanced uneasily from Hand to the captain. Captain Finch hitched his shoulders petulantly.

"Well, go ahead!" he said, in bad humor. "Foolish! I don't like it!"

He stamped off into his cabin. Hand and I followed him. The doctor went off after the count. The captain shut the door and swung rather truculently around to face Hand.

"Well, Mr. Hand," he said, "the case is closed. Your work is over."

Hand smiled skeptically. "I'm afraid," he said, "that I should never be satisfied to leave the case in its present status."

"But what's left to be done?" demanded the captain.

"Considerable," replied Hand. "We have no direct proof that Miguel is guilty of anything but the murder of one of your men."

"He's guilty of all three murders!" snapped the captain. "How else could it be? A jury would convict him in a minute, and will! I want it clearly understood, Mr. Hand, that this thing has got to be hushed up as much as possible!"

"A difficult thing when the crime is murder."

"Yes, of course there'll be a lot of damned publicity given it! But I don't want the passengers stirred up! They'll be besieged by reporters the minute we land. The less excited they are, the better off we'll be."

"I shall work quietly, Captain. Ostentation is not one of my habits."

The captain scowled and sat down at his desk. Dr. Melcher appeared. Behind him was the count. The latter was in pajamas and a dressing gown. He appeared not to have been asleep. His sleek, black

hair was polished back as nicely as ever. The captain quickly rose. Hand turned to the count.

"Sorry for this intrusion upon your sleep, Count," he said.

"Mr. Hand," gruffly explained the captain, "has a little business for you that he seems to think most urgent."

"Had you let me sleep through the excitement," smiled the count, "I should never have forgiven you. The doctor tells me you have uncovered a cigarette-case that you believe was the property of Mr. Lyons."

"Yes," said Hand. "We have taken into custody a stowaway whom we found in hiding in the stern of the ship. In his pocket we found this. Do you recognize it, Count?"

He took the case from his pocket and gingerly unwrapped the handkerchief from it. The count stretched out his hand for it. Hand smiled apologetically and withdrew it.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but you'd get your fingerprints on it."

The count's momentary expression of astonishment was followed by a smile. "To be sure!" he said. "Stupid of me. It is not necessary, however, for me to finger it. I can see quite clearly that it is Lyons's case."

"You're positive? It is most important, you know."

"I have no doubt whatever. You can see for yourself that the thing is unique. Yes, I can swear that it is Lyons's case."

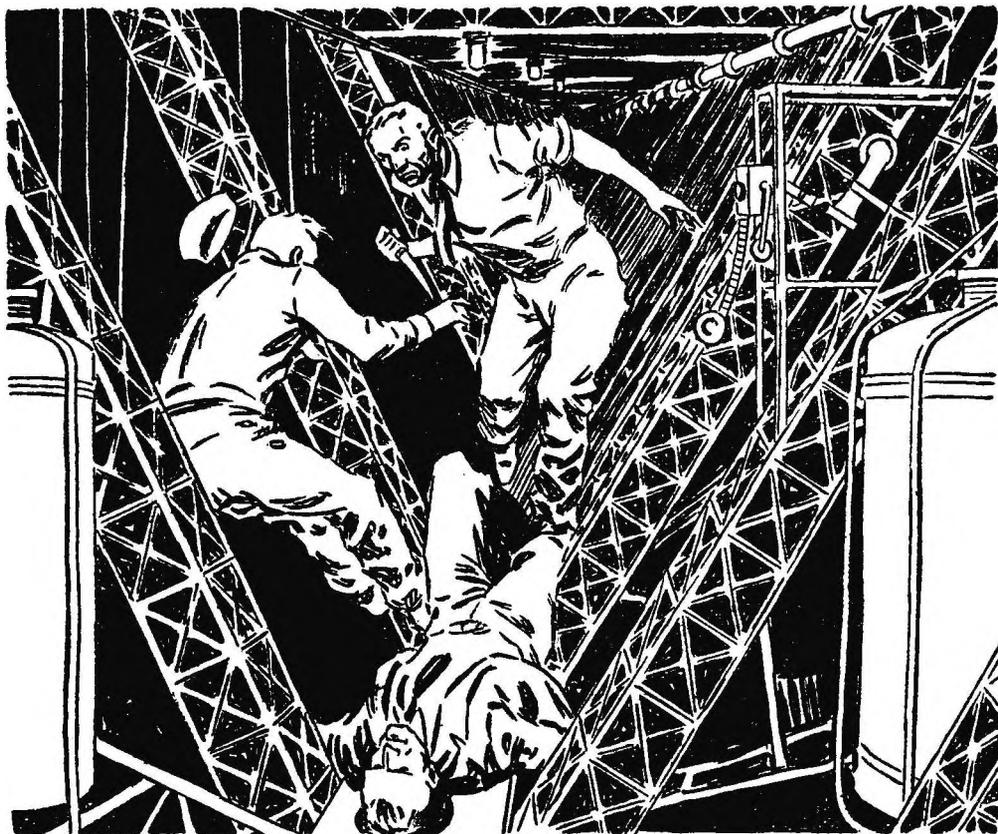
"Good!"

Hand carefully wrapped the case in his handkerchief and started to put it back into his pocket. Captain Finch rapped out: "I'll take charge of that."

Hand paused and glanced sharply at the captain. "I think," he said, deliberately, "that I had better keep it."

"I'm sorry. I won't have it that way. I intend to lock it up in my safe. I am responsible for it. I don't mean any offense but that cigarette-case is going in the safe!"

"Your word is law on this ship. But I want to make it very plain that I wish to keep possession of this cigarette-case."



*With a Hideous Cry of Rage, the Man Whirled Upon Him and Plunged the Knife into His Chest. The Poor Chap Cried Out Inarticulately and Topped from the Catwalk.*

"What good is it to you now?"

"Who knows?"

"Well, I don't! And I want it!"

"Very well, then."

Hand withdrew the case from his pocket and silently gave it to the captain.

"Want your handkerchief?" asked the captain.

"No," Hand quickly replied. "Keep it wrapped up in it."

"All right," agreed the captain. "I'm sorry I had to insist, Mr. Hand, but you see my position."

Hand shrugged and remained silent. The captain dropped the case into his pocket. Just then Mr. Hawks opened the door and thrust his head in. His expression was that of a man who has just come from a funeral.

"Pumping water ballast aft, sir," he reported. "Gasoline consumption from the

after tanks has made her a little heavy in the nose."

"All right, Mr. Hawks," said the captain. "I'll be with you in a minute. What's your altitude?"

"Still two thousand, sir."

"Very good."

Mr. Hawks withdrew, and we turned back again.

"Clark," said Hand abruptly, "give the count a cigarette."

The count's eyebrows raised ever so slightly in astonishment. "Why—why, I really should like a cigarette," he said. "How on earth did you know, Mr. Hand?"

"I saw you," smiled Hand, "fumbling futilely in the pocket of your dressing gown. I presume that you left your cigarettes behind you."

"In my cabin, yes," smiled the count.

"Thank you, Mr. Clark. And here is the doctor with a match. Such service!"

The captain took an impatient step back and forth. "Well, gentlemen," he said, gruffly, "I think we can part for the night. It is getting late. And I have things to attend to."

The count bowed politely to all of us and casually left the cabin. Hand, the doctor and I followed him out.

"Hi!"

We whirled about. Captain Finch, wild-eyed, stood in his doorway.

"Hi!" he cried again. "I've been robbed! Dammit, the cigarette-case is gone!"

Hand strode swiftly up to him. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just what I said!" fumed the captain. "I went to put it into the safe, and, by God, somebody had stolen it!"

"But," said Hand, "you put it into your pocket."

"Don't you think I know that?" roared the captain. "My pocket has been picked, I tell you! There's no other explanation, is there?"

Hand considered the situation. The rest of us stood grouped about the door, the count very much interested. Captain Finch glared from one to the other of us.

"It appears," said the count, "that we should all submit to a search."

"I was going to suggest that," said Hand, "but I didn't quite like to do it."

"Well," snapped the captain, "let's step inside!"

We filed back into the cabin. The captain resolutely shut the door and placed his back against it. Count von Grugheim turned to Hand.

"You are the one to search us," he said. "I claim the privilege of being searched first."

"Very well," complied Hand, "I'll do the searching but only on the condition that you will do the same for me, Count. Do you wish to search me first or will you wait until I have searched the others?"

The count slowly raised his arms. "I still request," he said, "that I be searched first."

"Wait a minute!" barked the captain. "Hand ought to be searched first. If he

has that cigarette-case he could plant it on somebody else. He hasn't done it so far. I've been watching him!"

"Precisely, Captain," smiled Hand. "Come, Count, you will have to give way to me. I shall be first, after all."

The count nodded. He lowered his arms and stepped over to Hand. He demonstrated that he knew something about frisking. He went through all of Hand's pockets and he ran his hands over every square inch of his clothing. Finally he stepped back.

"It is not in your possession," he said. "And now, Mr. Hand, I am ready for you."

Hand quickly frisked us all, giving me as thorough a going-over as he did the others. In the end he turned to the captain with a gesture of futility.

"Nothing," he said. "Are you positive, Captain, that you haven't overlooked it in one of your pockets?"

The captain hastily and angrily went through every pocket of his clothing. He searched in vain.

"I haven't got it!" he fumed. "Somebody stole it! And anybody who could have done it is right here!"

"And not a one of them has it," supplemented Hand. "This is quite the most mysterious thing I have ever known."

"It's a damned outrage!" flared the captain.

Count von Grugheim sighed and shook his head. "I should not have believed this could happen," he said. "To think, Mr. Hand, that the case disappeared right from under your very nose! And disappeared so completely, too!"

I could have throttled him. To be sure, what he said was perfectly true but it was heartless to mention it so blatantly.

"It is humiliating," admitted Hand with considerable embarrassment. "But then, we know that Miguel had it. And we have established that it belonged to Lyons. There is nothing more to be done here. But I refuse to give up hope that we shall recover it. I'm afraid, Captain, that I cannot be more encouraging than that."

"I'm afraid you're right!" snapped the captain. "I suggest that you get yourself to bed, Mr. Hand. Lack of sleep seems

to have put a damper on those extraordinary powers of yours that I've heard so much about!"

Hand nodded and turned abruptly toward the door. I quickly followed him out into the passage. Behind us in the cabin rose a murmur of voices—the captain's angry, the count's polite and the doctor's soothing. I could hardly contain myself. As we passed out to the promenade deck, I let go.

"That captain," I spluttered, "is the most ungrateful, thick-skulled nitwit that it has ever been my misfortune to come up against!"

"Come, now, Clark, you must make allowances. It did look pretty bad for me in there, I must admit. And for you, too."

"I refuse to change my opinion of him! What do you suppose the infernal cigarette-case was stolen for, anyway?"

"A very deep and sinister reason, Clark."

"No doubt! Then who do you think took it?"

"We'll discuss that when we get to our cabin. Right now we want to get those cocktail glasses out of Lyons's cabin and take them to ours. According to the passenger-list our names were put down for cabins fourteen and fifteen. They are on the opposite side of the ship from Lyons's. The count's is sixteen. Thirteen is vacant. We have superstition to thank for that. We'll work in fourteen, which will give us a vacant cabin on either side."

"We'll have to be careful how we talk. I suppose these cabins are very lightly constructed."

"They are. Everything about the construction of the ship is done with a view to keeping down the weight. But the cabins are quite sound-proofed. The walls are of two thicknesses of linen with a stuffing of feathers in between. Ah, here is Lyons's door. Now to find a key."

He tried one after another of his skeleton keys until he found one that fitted the lock. We entered and turned on the light. Lyons's body had been covered with a sheet. Otherwise, the cabin appeared undisturbed since we had last been in it. I picked up the tray of glasses and we left, locking the door again.

Hand led me aft along the passage. Near the end of it in the wall was a door with a sign on it: EMERGENCY EXIT. At the after end of the cabin-structure, the port and starboard passages were connected by another short one running perpendicularly between them. There was a single door in it, set in the sternward wall, and over it in black letters on white was a sign reading: PASSENGERS ARE FORBIDDEN TO USE THIS DOOR. I realized that the door led out to the little platform that connected with the gangways. At the end of the short passage we turned into the starboard passage and strode swiftly forward to cabin fourteen. I noticed now that the dirigible was swaying a little, a sort of undulating motion that was unique to me, not being quite like anything I had experienced either in an airplane or a steamship. But it was so slight that it scarcely inconvenienced me, even though I was carrying a tray of glasses.

Hand entered the cabin and switched on a light. As I placed the tray of cocktail glasses on the bed, he closed the door and locked it.

"Get out your microphotoscope, Clark," he said, "and set it up on the table. You can attach the cord to the socket of the table-lamp."

"A good idea," I said, getting right down to work. "I'll have to take a number of pictures of each one of those glasses. By the way, there's nothing to hinder you now. I'd like to know who you think stole that cigarette-case from the captain."

He applied the flame of a match to a cigarette. "What's your opinion, Clark?"

"Well, I have one. I must confess, though, that it's based on rather flimsy evidence. When the captain announced he had been robbed he looked accusingly at the count, it seemed to me, although his glance was so burdened with rage anyway that it might not have meant anything in particular."

"Yes, I noticed that."

"But the doctor's glance was not so hard to read. He glanced at the count with positive suspicion. I'd swear to that."

"And well you might. I observed the same thing."

"Then we are agreed on it! My deduction is that the doctor and probably the captain, too, saw something that made them believe the count was guilty of the theft. What do you say to that?"

"Excellent! And if they didn't see anything, no doubt they knew something about the count that drew their suspicions toward him. But they were wrong about it, anyway. Come, Clark, you've had that cigarette-case long enough. Hand it over."

"W-what? Hand it over? Why, I haven't it!"

"On the contrary, it's in your left-hand coat pocket."

"That's absurd! You see, my pocket is—Great Scott, it *is* in my coat pocket!"

"There, you see."

"But—I swear I didn't put it there! Why, until this moment I haven't so much as had my hands on the wretched cigarette-case!"

"You'd have a hard time convincing a policeman of that."

I caught myself and peered shrewdly at him. "Look here," I accused, "I think you could tell how that thing got into my pocket."

"You've fathomed it, Clark," he grinned. "You've found me out. I'm guilty."

"Then it was you who picked the captain's pocket! Why didn't you put the beastly cigarette-case in your own pocket?"

"Because I knew it would be found there. I was confident that I would be chosen to search the others but I knew I'd be searched first. That gave me the opportunity to search you, you see, and of course I didn't find it on you. The one risk was that the captain would decide to search us himself. Would have looked bad for you, Clark."

"It would have been jolly! I can just imagine it!"

"Well, are you all set up there? I want you to get microphotos of this cigarette-case first."

"Yes, I'm all ready."

I took pictures of both sides of the cigarette-case after I had accentuated the fingerprints on it with gold dust. The case was a ponderous, gaudy affair. No man with fine taste would have carried it. Hand seemed impatient to have me complete the

task. When I had finished it, he took the case, and sitting down on the edge of the bed, he held it up and squinted at it.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked.

He lowered the cigarette-case and peered vacantly at the dark slope of the window. "This case," he said, "seems to be the prize. Why has it been separated from the rest of the jewelry? Surely the aggregate worth of the other articles far exceeds the value of this. And when we consider the desperate measures taken to gain possession of it, it is difficult to think that its intrinsic value alone made it desired. In fact, that is positively foolish."

"But Miguel strikes me as being a madman."

"Even a madman would have a better sense of discrimination than to throw the majority of his loot away. Miguel says that a man carried this case to the stern of the ship and hid it there. If you examine the whole matter from all angles, you cannot easily brush that statement aside. It seems highly improbable that Miguel could have invaded the passengers' quarters unnoticed in the middle of the day. And what guided him to the cabin of the one passenger who was fond of loading himself down with jewelry?"

"Yes, that has been bothering me, too."

"Chance and coincidence, perhaps, but the theory is too weak. And what of poor Enright? There can be no doubt that he saw enough to make him suspicious of someone. Yet before he had time to report it, he received a warning that put him in fear of his life. It would have been difficult for Miguel to do that. No. It is easier to assume that the murderer was not Miguel. Then, if that be the case, we must take Miguel's statement at its face value. And the logical conclusion is that the murder was committed for the cigarette-case and for the cigarette-case alone. I intend to examine this thing very, very carefully."

And he lost no time about doing it. I turned my attention to the array of cock-tail glasses. There were ten in all but only eight of them had been drunk out of. One still contained a little liquid. The others

had all been emptied. They were conic in shape, set on a flat disc. I found it difficult to get the pictures. When I had just finished with the third one, I heard Hand utter a soft exclamation. I glanced quickly round at him.

He remained seated on the bed, with the cigarette-case in his hands. But he was now bending tensely over it and he seemed to be picking at it with one of his slender, wire-like steel instruments. A speck of white showed at the top of the hinge. He seized it with thumb and forefinger, and from the hinge he drew a little white cylinder.

"What have you found?" I asked, unconsciously whispering.

He did not reply. Throwing the cigarette-case on the bed beside him, with studied calm he took the cylinder in his long, sensitive fingers. The next instant he had unwound a sizable sheet of the flimsiest sort of tissue paper. I could see that it was covered with closely spaced type-writing, with a number of signatures at the bottom. Motionless, Hand read it through.

"My God!"

Like a spring uncoiling, he came to his feet. Even his iron emotions had not been proof against what he had read. He stared at the blank wall ahead of him.

"Let me see it," I said excitedly.

Hand held the piece of paper from me. "I dare not, Clark," he said. "I wish I had not read it! This sort of knowledge is deadly!"

"What in heaven's name can it be?" I demanded.

He looked at me long and steadily. Before he replied, he folded the tissue paper and rolled it once again into a cylinder.

"This paper," he said, tapping it upon his thumb, "overshadows human life, for if it fell into the wrong hands, it could lead to war!"

"My word!" I breathed. "What on earth was Lyons doing with such an awful secret?"

"We can merely guess at that and it's not even easy to guess. It's enough to say that this could be sold in certain quarters for an enormous sum of money."

"So there's the motive for all this work!"

"It is, except for the man you saw Miguel kill. And directly or indirectly, he probably lost his life because of it. It is worth a man's life to know this secret! That is why I am about to leave you—leave you in ignorance of it."

"Where are you going?"

"I have something that I must do at once. Get back to your fingerprint work, my boy, and pay no attention to me. We want those pictures developed as soon as possible."

I turned back to the microphotoscope and continued my task. Hand remained with me for a moment. I tried mightily to carry out his request not to pay attention to him, but try as I would, my ears insisted upon informing me that he was rummaging about in his bag. Presently, he was at the door.

"Lock this after me, Clark. If you should want me for anything, I shall be in the cabin next door."

I locked myself up alone in the cabin and went back to work. Eventually I had taken complete pictures of the eight cocktail glasses that had been used at Lyons's last party. It remained now to develop them. As I was preparing to do this, there came a tap on the door. I hastened over and threw it open. Mr. Stuart stood outside, with one of the crew.

"Mr. Hand here?" he asked.

"He's in the next cabin," I replied. "I can get him in a second. Is anything wrong?"

"That remains to be seen. Something may be decidedly peculiar."

"Did the captain ask you to summon Hand?"

"The captain's in his bunk. I'm not reporting to him until I make sure there's something to report. I thought Mr. Hand would be interested. A couple of the men seem to think there's a man hiding in one of the water ballast bags."

## CHAPTER V

### FOOTPADS OF THE AIR

I LOST no time in getting Hand. He was instantly alert to the situation. We went quickly out to the little platform

abaft the passengers' quarters and thence by way of the connecting catwalk to the starboard gangway. And here I almost wished I had stayed behind. The peculiar motion of the *Jupiter* had increased. As we made our way along the gangway, there was stretch after stretch with nothing to hold on to. But we came without mishap up to a fellow, a member of the crew standing on the catwalk peering intently at one of the large canvas bags. He glanced up at Mr. Stuart and nodded his head at the bag.

The bag, I noticed, was bulging more than those I had noticed when I had been before in the after part of the ship. Mr. Stuart got out his electric torch. He leaned far out and grasped the top of the bag. Leaning his body against it, with his feet clinging precariously to the catwalk, he got his eyes up to a level of the top of the bag. These bags were something of the shape of a woman's pocketbook and open along the top. Mr. Stuart switched on his torch, and directing its beam through the opening in the top, peered into the bag.

"So there you are!" he cried. "And half drowned, too. Well, you'll have to climb out of that!"

Not far along the catwalk there burned an electric light. We could see quite clearly. And Mr. Stuart's torch aided us to see the head of a man that was slowly protruded above the top of the bag. I was prepared to see a face both fierce and desperate. But the one that peered down at us was as lugubrious as that of a boy caught stealing apples. True, it had a battered, broken nose, a cauliflower ear and a powerful jaw, but woeful chagrin claimed the generous expanse of lip and the eyes, blue eyes that were quite boyish and exceedingly troubled.

"Hello, Mr. Hand," he said dismally, his voice all but lost in the growl of the motors.

"What do you think you're doing there, Joe?" demanded Hand.

Joe listlessly brushed back his sopping hair and shook moisture off the end of his nose and chin. He coughed dismally.

"Chees!" he sighed, "I ain't chasin' but-terflies across the Atlantic."

"No," agreed Hand. "Looks more as if

you'd been chasing fish. Climb down here."

It took a bit of assistance to get him safely to the gangway. His clothes were dripping, and water oozed from his shoes.

"Be careful," cautioned Hand, "that you don't slip with those wet feet. Have you got a gun on you?"

Joe gazed long and searchingly at Hand, and there was a good deal of anxiety in his glance, too. But I thought surely that his eyes were honest.

"You ain't changed, have you?" he asked. "You used to be one of the squarest shooters I ever struck, Mr. Hand."

"If I was then," retorted Hand, "I am now. I haven't changed and I don't intend to."

"Well, then," said Joe, "me gat's at the bottom of that dam' tank. What a heel I was to get in there!"

"Mr. Stuart," asked Hand, "do you suppose one of your men would get that pistol for us?"

"I don't suppose," replied Mr. Stuart; "I know blamed well one of them will! The thing might clog the outlet. Jackson, get in there and fish it out."

Jackson did not care for the job, you could tell that by his face. But he wasted no time. He was back on the gangway in short order, soaking wet, but with the pistol. He gave it to Hand, who carefully broke it.

"No empty cartridges," he said. "You didn't clean it and reload it, while you were in there, did you, Joe?"

"I'm tellin' you the truth—I didn't. I ain't shot it off since I got it, not even at a cop. The last time I was in France, I needed a gun, but this time I only needed a corkscrew."

"All right, Joe. Let's go to your cabin. You want to get out of those wet clothes."

We went back along the gangway, Joe walking timidly and squishily between Hand and me. Mr. Stuart followed us. Back in the passage, he turned to Hand.

"I'll have to report this to Captain Finch," he said. "Are you acquainted with Mr. White?"

"Yes, and have been for years," replied Hand. "Assure the captain that Mr. White will be treated courteously."

Mr. Stuart strode off somewhat puzzled. Mr. Hand followed him up the port passage.

"Is your cabin up this way, Joe?" asked Hand.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe. "We had a mix-up, but me cabin's right up here. You comin' with me?"

"Just for a moment. One or two things I want you to tell me."

This did not seem to hearten Joe. He got out his key, unlocked his door and preceded us in. He commenced to strip off his wet clothes, keeping at it while Hand questioned him and eventually he displayed a remarkable physique.

"What are you doing on this airship?"

"Goin' home. I ain't been up to nothin', Mr. Hand, honest! You asked me to go straight after we both got out of the Army and I did. I was in the fight game and I was goin' good but I busted me wrist. Then I went into the beer racket. No harm in givin' the people what they want."

"Well, millions of people condoned that philosophy, at least. I did—by taking advantage of it. But tell me, what took you to Europe?"

"Nothin' to hold me back. The beer racket went bloeey with this here New Deal. A friend of mine got stranded in Patee in the show business and sent me an S O S. I was glad enough to go—though I didn't have to. The bulls have been tryin' to tie the can on me ever since I did that stretch. They never got nothin' onto me!"

"Then what were you doing hiding in that water ballast bag?"

Joe briskly rubbed himself with a towel. "Chees, I didn't know they was goin' to turn it into no lake! I just wanted to keep out of sight. I didn't know who was comin' in that airplane and when I seen it was you, boy, I decided it was time for Joseph to duck! I was nuts. But with that guy bumped off, I thought the minute you lamped me you'd put me on the spot."

"You ought to know better than that. Then your story is that you were in that water ballast bag from the time we came aboard until we fished you out of it?"

"Right! And it's the truth, Mr. Hand! It was pretty good and dry when I first

got in but then they started in to drown me. I guess somebody seen me movin' around in there, tryin' to keep from passin' out."

"You'll pardon me, Joe, if I don't take your word implicitly. I'll find out soon enough whether you've told me the truth. Now, then, did you attend a cocktail party yesterday?"

Looking more than uncomfortable, Joe slowly got into a pair of pajamas. "I'm tellin' you the truth, Mr. Hand, and that's more'n I'd do for no bulls! I was there. That dead guy's party—Lyons's, you mean?"

"That's it. Who else was there?"

"Well, there was the little Frenchman. And them Minuets, but that gal and her brother didn't get a big hand from Lyons. He was soused and he didn't mind tellin' the Minuets that they weren't invited to the party. The Frenchman didn't like the ruckus and left. But it didn't bother the Minuets. The guy looked scared but she give it back to him pretty. But finally they left, too. Then there was Mrs. Carter. I kind of hated to see her there."

"Why?"

"Well, she looks too good to be in with a bunch of mugs like us. The Frenchman's a classy sort of little bird but me and them Minuets don't rate so high. And Lyons looked like a hard lot to me, yes, and like a guy that always had somethin' up his sleeve, too. He talked like a gentleman but I'll bet he never was one. And Mrs. Carter looked like a lady, if you know what I mean. She's a little hefty and she ain't so young but she's still a good looker. Lyons took a shine to her."

"And you didn't care for that?"

"Nope, I didn't. He was soused. He wanted us to leave him alone with her. And we did. Only I wish we hadn't."

"Who left with you, then?"

Joe started and turned quickly away, but not before I saw an expression of dismay come over his face. "Nobody," he said. "I was alone."

"Come, now, Joe," Hand sternly directed, "I want the truth!"

"I told you," replied Joe, turning stoutly back to us, "I left alone."

"Then the only ones at the party were Pansy and Drury Minuet, *Monsieur Duval*, Mrs. Carter, Lyons and yourself? That makes six."

"Sure, that's all there was."

"Now, then, when did you leave Lyons and Mrs. Carter alone in the cabin?"

"Before twelve o'clock. About ten minutes to twelve."

"And what did you do from then until the murder was discovered?"

"I ain't got no alibi, worse luck! I was here in me cabin all the time."

"Didn't see anyone?"

"Nobody. Wish I did!"

"Very well, Joe, better get to bed. We'll see you in the morning. I hope your story stands up."

Joe dropped his bulk on the bed and slowly shook his head. "So do I," he muttered.

We went out and shut the door upon him. The last I saw of him he was staring moodily at the floor.

"He'll be there if we want him," said Hand. "Well, let's get back."

Joe's cabin was not far down the port passage from Lyons's. We struck off toward the stern and turned into the little passage at the end, that being the shortest way to reach our cabins in the starboard passage. But as we turned into the starboard passage, Hand spun about and leaped back, pulling me after him. I had had time to see the cause of this rapid maneuver. Down the passage stood a man, in a guilty attitude, peering in the direction of the promenade deck. Beside him another man was cautiously leaving a cabin. I thought it was one of ours.

Hand pushed me farther back and peered warily round the corner. Then he drew back beside me. Linking his arm in mine, he led me slowly toward the starboard passage. At the corner we all but collided with a man—Professor Steele.

The professor recoiled and blinked at us stupidly. The next instant, however, he had regained his composure.

"Good evening," he said.

"Don't you think, Professor," dryly asked Hand, "that good morning would be more nearly correct?"

"Er—perhaps, perhaps. I wonder if you are up for the same reason that I am. I noticed a peculiar motion about the ship and decided to inquire about it. It seems that we are encountering a storm."

"I have no doubt that we shall soon pass through it."

"Er—yes, I hope so. Well, I shall get back to bed."

He stalked by us, his lips compressed and his eyes glittering behind the lenses of his glasses. We continued round the corner into the starboard passage. A few steps on we halted.

"A mysterious business, Clark," muttered Hand. "Did you identify the other man?"

"I hadn't time."

"It was Oswald Farrington. It certainly appears that they have been up to something."

"They seemed to be emerging from one of our cabins!"

"No, I think it was nearer this way."

"Perhaps it was Farrington's cabin."

"No, his is forward of ours. He was heading for it, the last I saw of him, and he was losing no time about it. Come, let's see what we can find."

Hand led me to the door of cabin sixteen. That was the cabin of Count von Grugheim. We listened intently at the door. Distinctly I heard a knocking sound within it. Hand tapped smartly on the door. The sounds inside increased, a rapid succession of dull thuds. But the cabin door remained impassive.

Quickly getting out his skeleton keys, Hand inserted one in the lock. No key was in the lock to impede it, but the key did not fit. The second one he tried turned the bolt. He pushed the door open and found that the cabin was in darkness. Now there was no doubt that someone inside was hammering dully, frantically. Stepping boldly inside, Hand switched on the light. The sight that was revealed rooted us to the deck.

On the bed lay a man, his wrists and ankles tightly bound. A pillow case was drawn over his head and nearly down to his waist.

We set grimly to work to release him. I yanked off the pillow case and saw that the

man was the count. His black eyes were blazing. There was a bandage tied tightly round the lower part of his face, and, having removed it, I found that his mouth had been stuffed full with a cloth. Hand cut the ropes that bound his hands and feet. He flew upright and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

"Gott!" he raged. "Who has subjected me to this treatment!"

"Not us," I hastened to say.

"Don't you know?" demanded Hand.

"Don't I know!" spluttered the count. "How could I know, when he hit me before I could look?"

"Are you injured?" I anxiously asked.

He raised his hand and gingerly felt of the side of his head. "I was struck!" he growled harshly. "I was struck a cowardly blow from the side!"

"Your cabin has been ransacked, Count," observed Hand.

The count scowled and glanced fiercely about. His clothing was strewn about the deck.

"I shall demand an apology from the company!" he snarled. "And I shall demand damages for this! And I demand that the villain be apprehended at once!"

"Suppose," suggested Hand, soothingly, "that you tell us all you know about this unfortunate affair. How did you come to be struck on the head?"

The count scowled and muttered gutturally. He gestured angrily.

"I was called to the door," he said fiercely. "Someone rapped on it, insistently. I opened it, and there was no one in sight. I thrust my head out, and—and the villain struck me!"

"You didn't see him?"

"Nein! Nein! But he must be found!"

"Well, there is still hope of that. Let us see whether anything is missing. You weren't, by the way, expecting a personal attack?"

"That is foolishness! Who would attack me but a thief? A thief! Gott, my watch!"

He leaped up and feverishly snatched back the under sheet of the bed. Lying on the mattress where the pillow should have lain was a beautiful gold watch and

chain. He snatched it up and peered at it intently, as though it were necessary to convince himself that he had it. Then he noticed me glancing curiously at him. He sighed, and closed his fingers over the watch.

"Safe!" he said. "I would not lose it for the world. It was given to me by the All Highest!"

"Then," said I, "since you value it so greatly, I congratulate you upon its safety."

"Pardon me, Count," said Hand. "Would you mind looking over your belongings to determine whether anything is missing?"

The count nodded curtly and commenced collecting his property. At length he had put everything to rights. He stepped back, an imposing figure even in pajamas, and glanced haughtily at Hand.

"My money," he said, "has all been taken."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, all of it!"

"Dear, dear, how unfortunate. I hope you were not carrying much cash at the time."

"I was not. That is fortunate for the company, for it will have to be made good!"

"I've no doubt they'll be glad to do it. And now, Count, all you can tell us is that someone rapped on your door, you put your head out to see who it was and the next thing you knew you were lying trussed up on the bed. Is that correct?"

"Perfectly!"

"And you have no idea who it was?"

"None. But he must be found!"

"We will do our utmost. Would you like to have the doctor take a look at your head?"

The count carefully touched the swelling on the side of his head. "No. It is nothing," he replied. "If it bothers me, I'll have it attended to in the morning. I cannot let you go, gentlemen, without expressing my gratitude. But for you, I might have lain in that miserable condition the whole night through!"

We told him how happy we were that we had chanced along, and so we left him.

## CHAPTER VI

## PROWLER OF THE PASSAGE

**B**ACK in the cabin where I had set up the finger-print apparatus, we took counsel upon the latest developments of the case. The count's experience, of course, was uppermost in our minds.

"It doesn't seem," I said, "that Professor Steele and Farrington would be after anything so insignificant and petty as a little money."

"I think the count invented that," smiled Hand. "You may rest assured that the professor and Farrington were after bigger game. I think that they were under the impression that, among the count's effects, they might find the document that I got out of Lyons's cigarette-case."

"Farrington, of course, we know nothing about. But it's puzzling to find Professor Steele mixed up in this desperate business. Isn't he the celebrated member of the Harvard faculty?"

"He is, if he's genuine. And before many hours we'll have a fair idea whether he's genuine. When I wirelesslyed the Markheim in Berlin, I also sent a message to Harvard University, asking for information concerning their Professor Steele and where he is supposed to be at present. I also sent another message to Gerrity in New York, asking him to get me information concerning the Minuets and Farrington."

"Good! Such information should bring some light to us. What do you think of Mahoney's story?"

"So far, we have nothing to refute it with. But we should be able to tell without much trouble whether he told the truth about Lyons's cocktail party. Much rests upon the details of that party, I feel. It preceded his death by the narrowest margin. We should be able to—"

A tap on the door interrupted him. Hand unlocked it and threw it open. Outside stood a steward, holding a piece of paper.

"Wireless message for you, sir," he said briskly.

"Good!" said Hand, taking the message from him. "By the way, is the chief steward about?"

"He's not on duty, sir. I believe he's asleep."

"Request him to come here at once, if you please. Remind him that I have been retained by the owners of this ship to conduct an investigation aboard her. Tell him, also, that I want him to bring with him the steward who was at Mr. Lyons's disposal during the cocktail party yesterday."

"Yes, sir."

The steward turned smartly and left. Hand's request must have bitten deep into his curiosity, but he gave no sign of it.

After closing the door, Hand scanned the message that the steward had delivered. He nodded almost imperceptibly and handed the message to me. I read:

HORTON P LYONS MANUFACTURER  
MACHINERY FOR USE STEAMSHIPS—  
HAS ALSO SUPPLIED MUCH MATERIAL  
GOING INTO GOVERNMENT VESSELS  
INCLUDING WAR AND COAST GUARD  
SHIPS—HIS BUSINESS NOW BELIEVED  
FACING RUIN—DIVORCED TEN YEARS  
—PARAMOUR FORMER FOLLIES GIRL  
PANSY MINUET — CORRECT NAME  
PANSY MULLINS—LYONS HAS REPU-  
TATION HERE VERY HIGH LIVER BUT  
FEW FRIENDS—HE LEFT FOR EUROPE  
AIRSHIP JUPITER SEPTEMBER 4—  
MORE LATER—GERRITY

"By Jove, the Minuets!" I cried.

"Yes," nodded Hand. "There's a good deal of significance in that message of Gerrity's. Let's hope his subsequent ones will be as enlightening. You haven't finished up those microphotos yet?"

"I've taken all the pictures but I haven't developed them yet, I'm all set up to do it, though. But don't you think we should question the Minuets at once?"

"Not yet. I want to think the whole thing out first. And then we have the chief steward and his minion about to call on us. You can get right to work, Clark. When they arrive, we'll take them into our vacant cabin."

He lay back across the bed with his head and shoulders resting against the wall and he seemed to collapse. It is thus that he concentrates most heavily with practically no muscular activity at all except his faint breathing. I switched off the overhead light and got busy, in the glow of the red bulb,

developing the pictures. I was delighted with the results. In but one or two cases was the intensifier necessary.

But I had got only fairly started before the two men we were waiting for arrived. At their first tap Hand leaped over to the door and opened it. I was astonished to find that on such short notice both were fully clothed. The chief steward, Mr. Burk, looked stiff and efficient in his starched white uniform with its gold buttons. He was a thin man with a sharp, sallow face and a little black mustache. Oakly, the steward, was an alert, sandy-haired fellow with a frank, open face. Hand got their names out of them before we moved.

"Very well," he said. "Just accompany us to the next cabin."

I locked up the cabin I had been working in and went with the others to the next one. Hand seated himself at the little table and glanced sharply up at the two men. They remained impassive, no extraordinary emotion showing on their faces.

"Oakly," said Hand, "you took cocktails to Mr. Lyons's cabin yesterday some time before noon?"

"Yes, sir. I took a tray of glasses, ten of them, and a shaker full of cocktails as Mr. Lyons ordered."

"Do you happen to know who was in his cabin?"

The steward glanced at his chief who nodded his head.

"Well, sir," said Oakly, "I know who was there when I arrived with the cocktails and I know who was there later. When I first went in, those who were there were Mr. Lyons, Miss Minuet, Mr. Minuet, *Monsieur* Duval, Mrs. Carter, Mr. White and Miss Gordon."

"Miss Gordon, eh? That makes seven. Do you know whether anyone else joined the party?"

"I don't, sir."

"You spoke of knowing who was there later. Who was it?"

"I went back to get the glasses and the shaker, sir, and then only Mr. Lyons and Mrs. Carter were in the cabin."

"What time was that?"

"It was just about ten minutes of

twelve—a little before that, if anything."

"Wasn't it a trifle unusual for you to go back for the glasses and the shaker so early?"

Mr. Burk projected himself into the proceedings. "If I may explain, sir," he said, "it was by my orders that he went to Mr. Lyons's cabin for the materials. We carry but a limited supply because of the weight. I like to get everything back in the pantry as soon as possible. In that way we can make our supplies go farther."

"I see," said Hand. "Well, Oakly, you didn't get the glasses or the shaker. What happened?"

"Well, something did happen, sir. I'd hate to have anything I'd say go against anybody. Mr. Burk will tell you that we—"

"Never mind! You tell me everything and let me do the judging."

"Yes, sir. I walked into the cabin, and saw something that made me back right out again. Mr. Lyons and Mrs. Carter seemed to be having a row."

"Didn't you knock?"

"Yes, sir, but I guess they didn't hear me. I thought the cabin was empty. Mr. Lyons was pretty drunk. He had the lady by the arm. And she was pulling away from him. She looked mad. Mr. Lyons shouted to me to get out. I got out. He looked pretty angry."

Hand leaned forward and peered sharply at the steward. "Do you know whether Mrs. Carter left Lyons's cabin right after that?" he asked.

"No, sir, I don't think she did," replied Oakly. "It wasn't more than two or three minutes after that that I went back to Mr. Lyons's cabin. Mr. Burk could tell you why."

"Yes," said Mr. Burk, "I sent him right back. He came and reported to me just what he had seen and said he didn't think we could get those cocktail glasses back right away. It seemed to me, though, that the lady would lose no time in leaving Mr. Lyons's cabin. I sent Oakly right back after the glasses."

"And then," asked Hand, "what did you see, Oakly?"

"I listened at the door, sir, but I didn't

hear anything. These cabins are pretty well sound-proofed. And I guess that's why I didn't hear anyone inside. I knocked but I should have waited longer for an answer as it turned out. I opened the door and started in and then I bumped right into Mr. Lyons coming to the door."

"He wasn't alone in his cabin?"

"Well, he was alone in his cabin, sir. But I knew the lady was there, hiding. I saw the lavatory door shut behind her. She got in there before I could see her, but I saw the door close, all right."

"You are very observing, thank fortune. But are you positive that Lyons didn't close that door himself?"

Oakly shook his head. "He couldn't have, sir! He was over by the door of the cabin. He could have given the lavatory door a push and stepped away from it but then it would have closed quickly. It didn't close that way. It closed slowly. And I could tell easy enough that somebody behind it was pulling it shut."

"What took place then?"

"Mr. Lyons was hopping mad at me, sir. He bawled me out good and plenty and told me to get out again. I did. But as I was going out, another one of the passengers brushed right by me and went in."

"Who was it?"

"Count von Grugheim, sir."

"Ha! The count went into Lyons's cabin? Are you positive?"

"I am, sir. He went in and closed the door. I don't think Mr. Lyons was glad to see him, either. I heard him growl something or other but I couldn't tell what it was. Then the count closed the door. And I went on down to the dining salon."

Hand jumped to his feet and stepped over to the steward. "Didn't you get a single word that Lyons said? Think, man!"

"No, sir, not a word."

"I tell you this is most important! Think!"

"I didn't catch a word, sir. I left there right away. All I know is that he growled something at the count and didn't seem to want him to come in. Mr. Burk will bear me out that I didn't go back again."

"I thought," said Mr. Burk, confidentially, "that we had gone far enough."

"Then, Oakly," said Hand, "at what time did the count go in there? Be accurate if you possibly can."

"Well, sir, I got back to the dining salon at five minutes to twelve. It must have been just a minute or so before that."

"Now, then, Oakly, you say that you didn't return to Lyons's cabin. Yet it was you, wasn't it, who discovered that he had been murdered?"

"Yes, sir—yes, indeed! I meant that I didn't go back there right away again. Just before luncheon, so we could get the glasses and the shaker back before we had to go on duty in the dining salon."

"I thought," said Mr. Burk, as confidentially as before, "that we had waited a sufficient length of time you see, sir."

"The captain," said Hand, "estimated that the murder was discovered at twenty minutes after twelve. Do you agree with that?"

"I think," replied Mr. Burk, "that the captain must have been just a little mistaken about that. It was just twelve twenty-five by the dining saloon chronometer when I sent Oakly to Mr. Lyons's cabin the last time."

"Then that is established. Now, did either of you see any of those who were at the cocktail party during the time that Oakly last saw Lyons alive and the time that he saw him murdered?"

"I can answer for both of us, sir," replied Mr. Burk. "We didn't. The captain has already had me inquire of all the stewards whether any of them saw the ladies and gentlemen in question. And none of them did. And neither did I. I may say that this was not unusual. It was between five minutes of twelve and twelve twenty-five, you see. The passengers are very often in their cabins at that time, getting ready for luncheon."

For a moment Hand stood thoughtfully and pulled at his lip. Then he glanced at Mr. Burk.

"Very well," he said. "That will be all for the present. You two have been most helpful. Good night."

They quickly left, shutting the door after them. Hand sat down once again and lit a cigarette.

"By Jove," I said, "there was close work in that man's cabin just before someone killed him!"

"There was, indeed. And it appears that the count was better acquainted with Lyons than he allowed us to suppose. He knew him well enough to march right into his cabin and evidently above the protests that Lyons raised to it."

"That's right! And that woman hiding in there when he entered!"

"It certainly appears that someone was hiding in there when he entered. The whole thing might clear up on the evidence of an eye-witness. Suppose the count murdered Lyons, and Mrs. Carter or someone else was right there to see it. What would you think of that, my boy?"

"A long shot."

"Yes, we should have to find the eye-witness. And I'm inclined to think it was not Mrs. Carter. The finger-prints on the cocktail glasses may give us the clue we want. We have accounted for but six guests. Lyons would make seven. Yet eight glasses were drunk out of. It is possible, but not probable, that one of the guests used two. Your microphotos will tell us that. And we have also learned that Joe Mahoney lied to us—tacitly, at least."

"Yes, about Miss Gordon! He didn't mention her. And he must have known she was at the party. We've tripped him up there!"

"Yes. And now—back to your work, Clark. That must be finished!"

We returned to the other cabin where my red bulb still shed its feeble light. I at once became busy. Hand sat motionless in the gloom, piecing together the information we had gleaned. It is a strong point in his system to call a halt now and then to the grim hunt for clues and to concentrate his puissant powers of reasoning upon those in his possession. He forms scores of deductions, weighs them carefully each one against the others and discards all those he finds meretricious. The remainder form not only the strong pillars of his case, they also point the way to that which has lain hidden in obscurity.

I worked steadily on until at last my task was completed. Then came the ex-

alted moment of excitement, fully as great, I think, as the hunter's when he overtakes his quarry. What would be the secret of the intricate twirls and whorls that I had magnified and photographed until the gossamer lines of them stood out as plainly as a printed page?

I directed my attention first to those prints that I had photographed from the cocktail glasses. There were four reproductions for each glass, each showing a quarter of the outside surface. More than one person's fingerprints were revealed in each, but those that predominated held the significance. I compared the reproductions made from each one of the glasses with those made from the other seven. It was slow work, but at length I was satisfied. Switching on the overhead light, I turned excitedly about.

"Hand!"

Patiently I waited. He remained as still as a corpse. Had I not gone through this same experience many times before, I should have thought he had lost consciousness. Something over a minute later, he glanced up smartly.

"Yes, Clark; what have you found?"

"Eight people participated in that party. No two of these glasses were used by the same person."

"Excellent!"

"We must get the finger-prints of everybody! It will be simple to determine what glasses were used by the seven known persons. And it will be equally simple to determine who used the eighth."

"Exactly. And it will be just as easy, I think, to determine whether he was in Lyons's cabin while any of the others were there or after they had all left. If he was there after the others had left, and if he has not already admitted it, it will most assuredly place him in a position of embarrassment."

"It will, by Jove!"

"What about the cigarette-case?"

"I haven't examined those pictures yet. I'll get right at it."

Hand once again seemingly lapsed into unconsciousness. I bent over the reproductions of the finger-prints on the cigarette-case. A few minutes later I again

roused him, in the same manner as before.

"Ah, the cigarette-case, Clark?"

"Yes. Something peculiar there, I don't just know what to make of it. There are plenty of finger-prints on it, but they are all made by the same person!"

He seemed not the least astonished by this incongruity. Instead, he nodded his head most complacently.

"Miguel's, no doubt," he said. "It fits in very nicely. You will have to get the stowaway's finger-prints, my boy, and you might as well get them at once. While you are at it, I'll get Lyons's finger-prints for you. I want to make an excursion to his cabin, anyhow. Ring for the steward. He'll tell you whom to see to get into the brig."

Hand quickly left the cabin. I rang for the steward. While I waited, I gathered together the materials I should need to get Miguel's finger-prints. The steward was not long in arriving.

"I want to get into the brig," I told him. "I have some business with the prisoner. Whom do I get permission from?"

"I'll have to get it from Mr. Horn, the third officer, sir," he replied. "He's in the control car. Will you wait here for me?"

"I'll wait on the promenade deck."

The steward left me at the head of the companionway. He disappeared through an aperture in the wall of the passage through the officers' quarters. I glanced about the circular deck on which I stood and down into the lounging salon. A strange feeling of apprehension stole over me. Instinctively, I backed up against the wall. But few lights were burning. Everywhere were gloomy shadows and strange, indistinct contours. The airliner, at first a marvel of modern transportation, to me had become a sinister thing that seemed filled with evil. I tried to tell myself that I had leaned against the wall to steady myself against the motion of the ship but I knew that it was to be sure that no one was at my back.

The steward returned. He stepped briskly out of the passage and darted a glance about before he saw me.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "I have the key to the brig."

"Good. You will accompany me, if you don't mind. Are you armed?"

"No, sir."

"Then take this pistol. All right, let's go."

I did not enjoy picking my way through the gloom of the dining salon. It was a relief to arrive at the door of the brig. From outside, the steward switched on a light inside the tiny, metal compartment. Miguel was snoring outrageously. At least his conscience was not bothering him. The steward unlocked the door and threw it open.

I had to shake Miguel roughly to waken him. I was prepared for most any kind of outburst. But the stowaway seemed childishly amused and gave me no trouble. I had his finger-prints in short order. We locked him up again, turned out his light and left him alone once more. At the passage to the lounging salon, the steward held the curtain aside for me.

"Your pistol, sir," he said, handing it to me. "Do you want me any more?"

"No. And thank you."

He disappeared into the darkness of the dining salon. I did not care about being alone and made brief work of mounting the companionway and rounding the promenade deck. And then, as I was about to enter our passage, a sound came to my ears that chilled me through.

It was an inarticulate cry, a woman's, lasting but a moment, and it sounded as though the person who had uttered it had been strangled as soon as she had raised her voice.

So faint was the cry that, had not every fiber of me been keenly on the alert, I doubt whether I should have heard it at all. A glance down our passage showed me that it was empty. In a frenzy of apprehension, I dashed for the other passage and rushed into it. My haste was my undoing, that and the shock of what I beheld.

Miss Fenwick lay crumpled inert on the deck of the passage. Over her stood a frightful, gruesome figure—a man in a bulging, shapeless brown coat and a terrifying black hood completely concealing his head, exactly like that worn by a hangman. And in his grasp was Miss Caldwell, his

left arm clasped about her head and his hand pressed against her mouth. In his other hand he held an ugly pistol. Miss Caldwell's eyes were wide with terror but she did not struggle.

The man's eyes, glittering through two slits in the hood, saw me as soon as I rushed into the passage. He jerked up his pistol and leveled it squarely at me.

"Damn you!" he hissed. "What are you doing here? I have a mind to let you have it!"

I halted in dismay, realizing that I had, by not keeping my head, sacrificed all chance of helping the unfortunate girl. She moved pitifully to stand erect. The brute shook her roughly.

"Keep still, you little fool!" he snarled. "Here, you, pick up this woman!"

This last was directed to me. I looked into his blazing eyes and decided that there was nothing to do but comply. I lifted Miss Fenwick in my arms and turned inquiringly to him.

"Get in there!" he hissed, brandishing his pistol at a cabin door. "And be quick about it!"

I managed to twist the knob of the door. Finding it unlocked, I thrust the door open and stepped into the darkness beyond.

"Keep your mouth shut!" warned the hooded man. "Get in there, girl! A sound out of any of you will be the last you ever make!"

He thrust Miss Caldwell roughly into the cabin after me. Then he too leaped in, snapping on the light and kicking the door shut. Never once did he take his eyes off us. There was something terrifying about being watched so sharply by a man whose face you could not see. It made the eyes stand out by themselves, magnifying them, giving them a quality of belonging to nothing, and enhancing the evil in their fierce, scintillating depths. Miss Caldwell shuddered, as though some fearful reptile held her in its fascinating gaze.

A glance showed me that we had entered a vacant cabin. I laid Miss Fenwick on the bed, relieved to find that, apparently, she had only fainted.

"Stand still!" commanded our captor.

He stepped up behind me and relieved

me of my pistol. Then, threatening us with both his own weapon and mine, he backed over to the door. I tried to return his flashing glance with one of contempt but I doubt that I was very successful. I felt helpless, and other emotions stirred my breast. One of them was fear.

"I'm going to leave you here," said the man, his voice coming muffled and disguised through the hood. "I ought to fill you full of lead and I would if I had silencers on these guns! I'm going to lock you in here. Don't try to make a racket. If I hear a sound out of you, I'll come back and blow you to bits!"

Thrusting my pistol into his pocket, with his free hand he took the key out of the lock and opened the door. He glanced warily out into the passage, then, with a last baneful glare at us, he swiftly withdrew and closed the door.

I knew that I should raise an alarm. Evidently divining my thoughts, Miss Caldwell frantically seized my arm and shook her head. She was so terribly frightened and had such a world of appeal in her big brown eyes that I could do nothing but remain silent. Also, I was not sure whether the hooded man would carry out his threat. Instead, I leaped to the wall and pushed steadily on the button for the steward.

It seemed an age before there was any response to the bell. And when the steward did arrive, he could not unlock the door. I heard him outside and called to him.

"What's the trouble, sir?" he replied.

"Can't you open this door?"

"No, sir, it's locked. Haven't you a key in there?"

"I haven't. Get Christopher Hand, at once, and tell him Mr. Clark is locked in this cabin!"

Our release assured, I turned my attention to Miss Fenwick. She was stirring feebly with Miss Caldwell bending over her. I dashed into the lavatory, got a glass of cold water and sprinkled some of it in her face. She moaned softly. Then her eyes flew wide open, she shot bolt upright on the bed and she gave vent to the most soul-curdling screech that had ever pierced the eardrums of a passenger on a dirigible.

"Miss Fenwick!" cried Miss Caldwell tremulously.

"He'll murder us!" shrieked Miss Fenwick. "Don't defy him, Lois! Do just what he says!"

"But, dear," cried Miss Caldwell, "he's gone! We're safe!"

Miss Fenwick closed her mouth with a snap. She slowly turned her head, taking careful note of everything as it came before her eyes. In the course of a few moments, her gaze encountered me. She started violently.

"There's the wretch!" she breathed. "You've taken off that black thing, but I know you! Slaughter me if you like but don't you dare lay a finger on that young lady!"

"But, madam!" I protested. "I am not what you think I am. The man who wore the hood is—"

"This gentleman came to help us," interrupted Miss Caldwell.

"Don't tell me!" snapped Miss Fenwick. "You may be able to hoodwink this young girl, but one look at you is enough to show me the deceitful bully you are! What do you mean by frightening people out of their wits, and carrying that dreadful pistol the way you—oh, heaven help us!"

There came a scraping at the door—the sound of a key inserted into a lock. A moment later the door opened abruptly, and Hand strode into the little cabin. His eyes flashed about, taking in the tableau.

"What has taken place here, Clark?" he demanded.

I told him much as I knew. Miss Fenwick sat stiffly up in the bed, never taking her eyes off me. I could tell that she believed not one word that I said. Miss Caldwell was suffering from a reaction. I thought that she was going to weep, but she fought the tears away.

"That is all I know," I said at length, turning compassionately to the girl. "Do you think you feel able to describe what took place immediately I arrived on the scene?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, in a strained voice. "Miss Fenwick, you see, had been unable to sleep. She had not even un-

dressed. She sat in her cabin, poor dear, her nerves all frayed by these ghastly murders! At last she came to my cabin and wakened me. She asked me to get dressed and sit up with her in her cabin. She said she was constantly afraid something else frightful was going to happen. I got terribly nervous myself then. I got dressed quickly and then I suggested that we get Bertie Fishe to keep us company. Miss Fenwick insisted upon going with me to his door while I asked him. We had just stepped out of my door when we walked right into that frightful man. Miss Fenwick fainted dead away. I started to scream, and he grabbed me and put his hand over my mouth! It—it was horrible!"

Her voice broke. She bit her lips and turned away with a little sob. Miss Fenwick flew from the bed and put her arm about her, turning her head to glare malignantly at me.

At that moment Albert Fishe, in pajamas and a dressing-gown, leaped wild-eyed into the cabin. "Lois!" he cried. "I heard a scream! What in heaven's name has happened?"

"I'm all right, Bertie," replied Miss Caldwell unsteadily.

Mr. Fishe immediately commenced buzzing about the two women, deeply concerning himself with reassurances and passionate promises of his personal protection thenceforth. Joe Mahoney, Professor Steele and *Monsieur Duval* had appeared in the passage outside the door. They were plying the steward with questions and getting scant satisfaction out of him. Hand turned to me.

"Better get the doctor, Clark," he said. "I think his sedatives are in demand again."

I sped to the officers' quarters. I knew which was the doctor's cabin, because there was a red cross on the door with his name below it. The officers' doors had no locks and neither were their cabins sound-proofed. These were luxuries that weighed too much for all but the passengers. In their comforts, the officers, like the lowliest member of the crew, bowed deferentially to the goddess Weight.

I didn't bother to knock on the doctor's

door but burst unceremoniously into his cabin.

He was sound asleep in the bed. It didn't take me long to get him up. He bounded out of bed with an anxious: "What's the matter?"

"There's been more trouble," I said briskly. "Miss Fenwick needs you again. She's had another shock."

With experience born, no doubt, of his internship, he hastily donned trousers and jacket over his pajamas, while I gave him a sketchy account of what had taken place. He grimly led the way to the cabin where I had left his most chronic patient. Hand had gone out to the promenade deck. He motioned me to follow him. We neither of us spoke a word until we had returned to the cabin where I had been conducting my finger-print work. Hand sat down on the bed.

"Well, Clark, another mysterious episode. Could you get any idea as to the identity of that hooded man?"

"I'm afraid not the least."

"From your description of him, his disguise was about perfect."

"It was perfect. That brown coat he wore was so large for him that I could get no idea of his figure. And the hood entirely concealed his head. I saw nothing but his eyes and they were awful!"

"Try to recognize them among all the eyes that you see. But a mask like that makes eyes look quite different."

I dropped into the chair and cupped my chin in the palm of my hand. "The motive for that fellow's prowling round the passages like that can't be so faint," I said. "Evidently the search for that document still goes on as ruthlessly and mysteriously as ever."

Hand selected a cigarette and lit it with deliberation. He drew on it for several moments. Then he darted a keen glance at me.

"Yes," he agreed, "the search for the document still goes on. And it will continue, Clark, never fear. Only when you next mention the document, I beg of you to do it in a lower tone of voice. I have no desire to have the search turned in our direction."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BLOND PASSENGER

I HAD quite forgotten the cards bearing Miguel's finger-prints, resting in my pocket. I was dubiously wondering what possibly could happen next on that dreadful trip of the airship. Hand promptly recalled me to my unfinished task.

"You got Miguel's finger-prints?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, I got them. He gave them to me quite readily. The beggar was sleeping as soundly as a babe when I got there."

"A hardy conscience. Here are the cards with the prints of Lyons's dead fingers on them. You can segregate his cocktail glass now. And make sure that none of his finger-prints were on the cigarette-case. I shall be very much surprised, however, if you find any but Miguel's finger-prints on it."

I refrained from asking him why he would be surprised at such a thing. I still felt that I would be somewhat surprised if I found that Miguel was the only one so honored. I first matched Lyons's finger-prints up with those predominating on one of the glasses. I pasted a small piece of adhesive-tape to the bottom of the glass, and wrote Lyons's name on it. I then turned my attention to the cigarette-case and I was surprised. Lyons's finger-prints were not on it. Miguel's positively were the only ones that were. I glanced speculatively at Hand.

"Well," I said, "you can save your astonishment. Miguel's were the only finger-prints on the cigarette-case. I should very much like to know why and what that fits into so nicely!"

"I'm afraid, Clark, that you have been ignoring Miguel's statement. I have not, although I confess that I'm not trusting it implicitly. The man still may be guilty of murdering Lyons and Enright. But he says that someone went to the stern of the ship and hid the cigarette-case. If that is true, the man undoubtedly rubbed his finger-prints off the thing before he hid it. And if he did that, he necessarily rubbed *all* the finger-prints off it. Therefore it was all polished up to receive none but the finger-

prints of the man who next had it — Miguel.”

“Why, it’s perfect reasoning! And it’s a strong point in Miguel’s favor, too.”

“Yes, but the theory is not without its weak spot. Miguel may have polished the thing himself. It’s not unusual for a man and particularly for a man of his type to polish a thing of that sort while he gloats over it. However, the stronger theory is that someone actually did carry the cigarette-case to the stern and hide it there. And by the way, Clark, I have just made a discovery in Lyons’s cabin that opens up an interesting field of speculation.”

“What was it?”

“That Lyons had a straight razor, and it is not to be found.”

I raised my eyebrows. “If you can’t find it, how can you be sure that he had one?”

“Because I found the empty case. It is in the little cabinet above the wash-basin.”

“Oh, I see. Well, I suppose your thought is that Lyons’s throat was slit with his own razor. I agree with you. But that doesn’t help us much.”

Hand glanced at me askance. I knew at once that I had spoken too quickly.

“Your old failing again, Clark! You take note of something, jump to a logical conclusion and let it go at that. In this case, I think, your conclusion is correct, what there is of it. Its defect is that it leaves most of the field unexplored. The absence of that razor has furnished me with three deductions, one of them the same as yours, that Lyons was murdered with his own razor. And it also furnishes me the opportunity of asking a potent question. I have no answer to the question save one—a mere, colorless guess.”

“Let’s have the question first.”

“If Miguel murdered Lyons, why didn’t he do it with the knife he carried instead of the razor? My guess-work is that he had sufficient intelligence to leave that incongruity behind him in order to puzzle us.”

I shook my head doubtfully. “Well, at least I have no better guess to supplant it. Now, what are the other two deductions?”

“They balance, one against the other. The first is that the murder was committed

by a stranger to Lyons and therefore was unpremeditated. He went to the man’s cabin unarmed and decided upon the crime while he was hiding in the lavatory. He discovered the razor and used it.”

“And the second?”

“That the murder was committed by an acquaintance who premeditated it. He also went to the cabin unarmed because he knew of the razor and intended to use it.”

As I was pondering these possibilities, there came another tap at our door. It was the steward again with a second wireless message. Hand took it from him and closed the door. As soon as he had read it, I got it. It was from Berlin, and read:

AMERICANS PANSY AND DRURY MINUET ENGLISHMAN DAVID THORNE—THORNE DESCRIPTION SAME AS THAT SUPPLIED BY YOU FOR AMERICAN HORTON P LYONS—THORNE ARRIVED HERE 17 SEPT 6 P M IN COMPANY LEFT HERE 21 SEPT 10:30 P M—PANSY AND DRURY MINUET LEFT HERE 21 SEPT 11 P M—AMERICAN OSWALD FARRINGTON ARRIVED HERE 21 SEPT 9 P M—LEFT HERE 21 SEPT 11 P M—KOENTZNER—MARKHEIM

“That settles it!” I breathed. “They were all at the Markheim at the same time!”

“The hours of their arrivals and departures,” said Hand, “hold considerable interest. The Minuets and Lyons arrived together and were together at the Markheim from the seventeenth of September until the night of the twenty-first. Lyons left a half hour ahead of them. Farrington was at the Markheim but an hour and a half while Lyons was there. Lyons left a half hour ahead of him, too.”

“It has the appearance of his having stolen out on them!”

“It does, indeed. The Minuets and Farrington left at exactly the same time and must have been together. Maybe they joined Lyons before he left Berlin. If they didn’t, they pursued him, for they all boarded this airship at Le Bourget the next morning.”

“By jove! The whole thing looks decidedly sinister to me!”

“It could not look otherwise. We are beginning to find plenty of stepping-stones, my boy.”

"We must question the Minuets at once!"

"Only one of them, first. I think we'll get more out of Drury than we would out of his sister. But before we go after him I want as much information in my hands as I can get. Mr. Snook is next on our list."

"Ah, Mr. Snook! I wondered when we would get to him."

"You noticed, then, that Miss Fenwick could not have been turned into a pin-cushion at a more crucial point of Mr. Snook's testimony. He was about to name the man whom he had referred to as accosting Lyons in Paris."

"I thought all along that it was Pansy Minuet who jabbed her."

"But it could have been the Professor. I think with you, however, that it was Pansy. As soon as Miss Fenwick had been set to screeching, Pansy strolled casually over to Mr. Snook. I couldn't tell whether she spoke to him, because her back was to me."

"But Mr. Snook was suddenly filled with consternation, and it was easy to see that he was. Come, we'll go see what he has to say."

Mr. Snook's cabin was in the same passage as ours but nearer the end toward the promenade deck. It took some energetic rattling of the door-knob to rouse him. Eventually, he appeared in a nightshirt. His crop of snowwhite hair stood in all directions, and he blinked sleepily at us. When he saw who we were, his eyes flew open in alarm.

"Hello!" he gulped.

"A word with you, Mr. Snook."

"Sure. Come in."

He switched on the light. Then he sat gingerly on the edge of the bed and squinted up at us.

"What's going on?" he asked. "I was lookin' for you, earlier. You're harder to find than my natural teeth. Here, wait'll I get my store ones."

He hopped up and disappeared into the lavatory. He was gone but a moment. Then he popped back again and once more sat on the bed.

"I sound a little better now, eh?"

"Perfection, Mr. Snook. Even better than

you did last night. Why did you accuse poor Farrington?"

For a moment Mr. Snook regarded Hand shrewdly. Then he briskly nodded his head and tugged at one of his whiskers.

"You're on to me, eh? Thought you would be. That's why I was lookin' for you last night. I wanted to tell you the whole thing. But, look here, I'm apt to get shot up!"

"It's something that seems to face us all. But we'll do the best we can to protect you. Now, then, who was the passenger you saw together with Lyons in Paris?"

"Drury Minuet! That was the feller! And I'll tell you why I didn't say so before. You remember when Miss Fenwick yelled? Well, I'll bet it wasn't part of her gear that came loose and jabbed into her. I'll bet that Pansy Minuet did it. While Miss Fenwick was raisin' the roof, Pansy Minuet walked over to me. She took out of her bag a little pearl-handled pistol and she gave me a good look at it, holding it right in front of her so that nobody else could see. And there was a look on her face that no lady should have. She said just two words—sort of whispered 'em—'shut up!' Now what would you have done, Mr. Hand?"

Hand smiled. "The same thing that you did, I suppose. Well, I'm glad we've got this cleared up, Mr. Snook. That's all we wanted to know."

"Well, I'm done for if she ever finds out I told you. That woman'd shoot you full of bullets. I know she would!"

"She won't learn anything from me, I promise you that."

We tore ourselves away from Mr. Snook and went out to the promenade deck. Life aboard the airship seemed to have quieted down to normal. But the very atmosphere seemed burdened with dread. I found myself becoming very much on the alert.

"Drury Minuet, now!" whispered Hand. "His cabin is below Lyons's."

We were soon at his door. Hand softly tried it and found it locked. He knelt before it, prodding into the lock with a slender steel bar. Presently I heard the key fall out on the other side. We waited, tensely listening. There was no further sound. Hand silently opened the door

with a skeleton key and we floated into the darkness beyond. Stooping, he retrieved the key from the floor of the cabin and closed and locked the door. Then a click and the cabin was flooded with light.

Drury Minuet lay asleep in the bed. Even in repose, his sallow face was not one to inspire trust. He was in a deep sleep and remained in it despite the light that beat down on his face. Hand shook him roughly by the shoulder. He shot up in the bed, uttering a falsetto ejaculation, and glared at us with his pale eyes alive with terror.

"Get up!" ordered Hand in a low, cutting voice.

"W-what do you want?" breathed Minuet.

"Information," snapped Hand. "I'll give you five seconds to get out of there and then I'll pull you out by the hair!"

Squeaking with terror, Minuet scrambled out of bed and stood trembling before us.

"What's been your game, Minuet?" demanded Hand.

"No business of yours," he muttered with a miserable attempt at defiance. "You got no right in my room! I'll get you arrested! Get out!"

Hand pushed him roughly into the chair and stood menacingly over him. Minuet glanced up into his eyes and was completely unnerved by them.

"My—my medicine!" he babbled.

He reached a quaking hand out to the drawer of the little table and drew it open. From it he took a small white paper, neatly folded. Hand snatched it from him and thrust the drawer shut. He scowled down upon the man cringing in the chair.

"Dope!" he said disdainfully. "Well, when you've told me the truth about yourself, you may have it. Now, then, what have you and your sister been up to?"

"Don't bring her into it!" croaked Minuet. "I'll tell you about myself, but for God's sake don't ask me about her!"

"Well, then, I'll tell you about her. She was formerly on the stage and she has been intimate with Lyons. And now you're going to tell me what you've both been doing in Europe and if you don't, I'll accuse you both of murder!"

Minuet glanced wildly about, as if with the destitute hope that he might escape us. Then he slumped back in the chair, his face chalky.

"I'll tell you," he groaned. "But we haven't done nothing! Like you say, Pansy had Lyons twisted round her little finger. He gave her everything she wanted. And then he got up against it. He said his business was bad. Then he got wind of something. I don't know what it was, but he was going to make a lot of dough if it fell out right. And right after that's when he tried to give Pansy the air. But Pansy don't take that kind of stuff. He went to Washington and stayed at a hotel. She went right after him. He gave her a slug of cash—the last he could dig up, he said—and told her to leave him alone."

The man stopped and nervously wet his lips.

"Get on with it!" Hand grimly ordered.

"I—I will," whined Minuet. "I don't know whether Pansy knew what was up. I didn't and I don't yet. But she wanted to keep tabs on him and she got me to do it.

"He gave me the slip—got off to Europe on this airship. I found it out a couple of days later. I'm good at that stuff. But Pansy was like to kill me for letting him get away. We found out he got a ticket for England. She took the money he'd given her and the two of us went to England on a ship. I found out from the immigration people that he'd gone to France. Pansy said he'd be in Paris. We went there looking for him. It was just by luck that I caught him sitting in a hotel lobby, although I'd been in just about every one there was."

"What took place then?"

"He waltzed me out of the hotel and into an alley beside it. He told me if he saw me again he'd give me the works. That's a fact! He said he'd shoot me through the head! But Pansy had told me what to tell him if I found him. She said to tell him that—that—"

"Out with it!"

"Gi-give me my medicine! Just a little of it!"

"Not a grain until you've told me the

whole thing! What was it you were to tell him?"

"I—I—well, she told me to tell him she knew what his game was and if he didn't come across, she'd spill it. It got him right between the eyes. She said he was yellow, and he was. He got me to take him to her. He tried to talk her out of it—promised her all sorts of dough. It wouldn't get Pansy, though. She told him he'd go all the way with her or she'd put the skids under him. I don't think she knew what she was talking about because when he asked her what she knew, she wouldn't tell him. But she threw a scare into him, anyway. He always was scared to death of her."

"When did you leave for Berlin?"

Minuet glanced up fearfully. "Berlin?"

"That's what I said! You stayed at the Markheim. When did you leave Paris?"

"That same day. We got to Berlin by airplane. Lyons acted funny. He was nervous when we first got in with him and he kept getting worse. He looked as if somebody was after him all the time. Finally he shut himself up in his room at the hotel in Berlin and wouldn't see anybody. Not even Pansy could get in to him.

"She bribed some of the hotel people to let her know if he left."

"Then how did he get away a half hour ahead of you?"

Again Minuet started with fear and astonishment. "You know that?"

"I know more than you think I do! Don't try to lie to me. What happened when Lyons left the Markheim?"

"Well—well, we left right after him. There was a little delay, but we got word that he'd beat it. We found out from the door man that he'd taken a taxi to the Tempelhof Airdrome. When we got there, we found Lyons had hired a private plane and flown off to Paris. We didn't have the money to hire a private plane all for ourselves, and it looked like he'd given us the slip for good. I wish to the devil he had! But then Pansy found that another gent was hiring a plane to take him to Paris. She got the Germans to sell us a couple of seats in it. The guy that had hired the

plane raised a row, said he wanted the thing to himself, but the Germans made him take us along. They weren't missing the chance of a little more dough—not them! We landed at Le Bourget and found right away that Lyons was going home on this thing. And then Pansy—"

A sharp rattling of the doorknob halted him abruptly. A woman, her voice cold and brittle, called angrily in to us.

"Unlock this door!"

Minuet rose weakly to his feet. "It's Pansy!" he gasped. "My God, she'll kill us all!"

Hand leaped over to him and shook him roughly by the shoulders. Minuet's head rolled about, his mouth hanging open.

"Quick!" Hand said hoarsely. "Who flew with you to Paris?"

The doorknob rattled viciously.

"Open this door, or I'll shoot through it!"

Hand shook Minuet again. "Was it Farrington?" he hissed.

"Yes, it was Farrington," sobbed Minuet. "Open the door or she'll kill us!"

With a bound, Hand was at the door. He unlocked it and threw it open. Pansy Minuet stood at the threshold, her blue eyes snapping with rage. With one hand she clutched a negligée about her, with the other she menaced us with an evil, little pistol.

She looked quite capable of shooting it without any further preliminaries.

"Christopher Hand!" she cried. "I thought so! What have you been doing in there?"

Hand bowed. "Good morning," he said suavely. "Sorry we disturbed you at this obnoxious hour."

"Don't try that funny stuff with me!" she blazed. "What have you been up to. Talk straight or I'll blow you to the devil!"

"I believe you would," mused Hand. "But it wouldn't do you any good, you know. If you'll step in here, we'll continue the pleasant little conversation we've been having with your brother."

"I'll step in, all right!" she retorted. "But I'll do the talking and you'll do the answering!"

She backed into a corner of the cabin

where she could squarely face us. She held the pistol steadily, unwaveringly.

"I advise you to listen to reason," said Hand quietly. "You're in this thing up to your neck, and—"

"Oh, you think so?" sneered Pansy. "Drury, what have you told them?"

"N-nothing," chattered her brother.

"Don't lie to me!" she hurled at him.

"What have you told them?"

"They made me do it!" wailed Minuet.

"I had to tell them—to tell them—"

Falling back on the chair, he dropped his face into his hands and moaned wretchedly. Pansy Minuet's eyes flashed to Hand.

"I'll find out what he told you," she whispered dreadfully. "And then, Mr. Hand, I think I'll shoot you and your friend—shoot you down like the sneaking mutts that you are!"

She glared banefully at us. It was all very well for Hand to stand there like a wooden Indian with a grim smile on his face.

I could not do it. I felt the blood drain from my face and I wanted most terrifically to get behind something. I have faced a number of desperate men whom I shall always prefer to Pansy Minuet.

Had nothing intervened, no one can say what might have occurred in the next few minutes. But at that minute a man, striding by the open door, caught sight of us and halted. It was Captain Finch. He stepped into the cabin and glanced sharply about.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

Hand sighed and folded his arms. Pansy Minuet quickly concealed the pistol in the folds of her negligée.

"They broke into my brother's room!" she cried angrily. "That's what they did! I just caught them at it!"

The captain turned and glared fixedly at Hand. "This won't happen again!" he said grimly. "I'm very glad that I chanced along.

"Mr. Hand, I give you strict orders to keep out of my passengers' cabins! I want no more of your snooping! I'd be obliged if you and your friend would take yourselves out of this cabin!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### Loot

I FELT a stinging resentment against the captain, so strong that I had difficulty in holding my tongue. But we left the cabin in silence. Hand led me swiftly down the passage to the emergency exit door. He glanced back, made sure that we were alone in the passage and stepped through the door. I quickly followed him. He closed the door on us.

I found that we had entered a small compartment. Directly across from the door we had entered by was an opening in the linen wall, about four feet square. Over it was printed the words—FIRE EXTINGUISHERS.

I stepped over to the opening and looked through it. A bulb glowed outside on the port gangway. The extinguishers, about a dozen in all, hung suspended on either side from small duralumin girders.

Hand flashed his electric torch. It showed us an open hatch over at one side in the deck of the compartment, with a ladder descending from it. Hand lowered himself through the hatch and went down the ladder.

At the bottom, he flashed his light up for me to see by. I had soon joined him below. At first I was at a loss as to where we were, but then I heard the dog barking and knew we were in the freight department. By the aid of the torch, we picked our way through the dark, bulky objects to the cleared space on the far side. A few moments later we were at the door of the brig.

Snapping the light on inside, Hand peered through the grating of the window. I looked through beside him. Miguel had roused himself up in the cot and was blinking dazedly at the light.

"Miguel," softly called Hand.

The man's eyes flew to the opening in the door that we peered through. A change came over him, an expression of sullenness replacing the questioning one on his ugly face. He looked away.

"Miguel," repeated Hand. "Look up here! I want you to tell me all you can about the man you saw hide the cigarette-

case. What sort of clothes was he wearing?"

The stowaway shrugged his powerful shoulders. "*Quién sabe?*"

"Surely, you must know that much!"

"I no see heem."

"What? Why, you scoundrel, you told me that you did see him!"

Miguel merely shrugged and remained sullen and silent.

"You're tightening the noose round your own neck! If you didn't see the man hide the cigarette-case, how could you have found it?"

"Leave me 'lone. I no talk."

"You fool, the only way you can save yourself is to talk!"

He shook his head and turned his back squarely upon us. "Leave me 'lone."

Hand's eyes narrowed and glinted at the stowaway. Then he turned from the door, abruptly switching off the light in the brig. At the end of the little passage, outside the door to the dining salon, we halted.

"What's got into that fellow?" I whispered.

"There's a change in him," nodded Hand. "It's entirely possible that somebody has got to him and obtained his silence."

"That is possible, I suppose. But I think the man's a lunatic, and that may account for it."

"It may. But we can't lose sight of the possibility that someone has meddled with him."

He opened the door and entered the dining salon. A faint, smudgy light came through the great, curved windows, a light that illuminated nothing but permitted one to discern the vague outlines of dark objects. Day was breaking but it seemed not a promising one.

We passed carefully and silently through the dining salon. In the deep gloom of the little connecting passage where the dim light of the windows had not penetrated, my friend's hand came groping back through the darkness and touched me on the shoulder. He had not drawn the curtain that hung between the dining and lounging salons. I halted, scarcely breathing.

And then faintly I heard voices. One was a man's, hoarse, scarcely more than a nerv-

ous, sibilant breath. The other was a woman's, low and throaty. In spite of the extreme caution of their tones, a vibrant quality of excitement in them both carried the voices to our ears like a current of electricity.

"How many of them?" asked the woman.

"All but the cigarette-case!" replied the man. "The stick-pin, watch, chain, pendant and the two rings! Not one is missing from the lot!"

"Where are they now?"

"In the same place! In the bottom of my black traveling bag! But let's move over here, Lois, where we can see whether anyone comes out on the promenade deck; I'm afraid they might hear us!"

"Bertie, you don't think that—"

Her voice faded away and became indistinguishable. Seizing my arm, Hand guided me swiftly through the dining salon and back once more into the little passage outside the brig.

"Mr. Fishe and Miss Caldwell, without doubt!" he whispered into my ear. "I must get to his cabin at once!"

Hastily we made our way back through the freight compartment and up the ladder to the emergency exit compartment. Hand cautiously opened the door and peered out into the passage. No one was there. We strode swiftly down the passage to the first door in from the promenade deck. Hand got out his skeleton keys. But to our astonishment the door was not locked. It yielded to his hand. It was still too dark to tell whether the cabin was occupied. Hand flashed his torch into it, directing it first at the bed. It had been slept in, but there was no one in it now. He next shot the beam of his torch to the deck of the cabin. There sprang into being a black traveling bag resting there, open, and all about it in confusion lay scattered articles of a man's clothing.

"Are we too late?" muttered Hand. "Stay here and if they return try to steer them off until I can escape!"

He leaped into the cabin and closed the door. I waited in the passage, every nerve tingling. I suppose it was not more than two minutes, and probably less, before Hand rejoined me, but it seemed like an

hour. He closed the door and bounded over to me.

"There's somebody in there!" he hoarsely whispered. "Quick!"

Almost at a run, we sped back to the connecting passage in the rear. In it we halted. Hand snatched his little telescopic periscope from his pocket. He opened it up and protruded the lens slightly into the passage we had just quitted, and peered intently into the eyepiece of the instrument. Thus, unseen, he inspected the passage while I tensely waited behind him. A minute or so later he collapsed the periscope, returned it to his pocket and turned smartly to me.

"Back to the cabin where we've been working, Clark."

We had soon returned to it and closed the door. Hand did not lock it. Instead he went directly to the table and removed my finger-print material from it. He thrust his hand into his pocket and from it he took the very assortment of jewelry that Mr. Fishe had recently mentioned.

"So you got it, after all!" I cried.

"There it is," he said, as he laid it all out on the table. "It was in Mr. Fishe's bag where he said it was."

Hand took Lyons's cigarette-case out of his pocket and laid it on the table with the rest of the jewelry. I was badly bewildered.

"But that man in the cabin who you—" I began.

"Let me tell you the whole thing," he said, speaking rapidly. "I knelt beside Fishe's bag, with the beam of my torch directed into it, and started to look for the loot. Of course, I had to finish emptying the bag and when I had done it, there on the bottom lay the rings and the rest of it. I quickly gathered it together, and as I was lifting it from the bag I thought I detected a slight movement, out of the tail of my eye, over toward the lavatory door. I dared not move my head, but it wasn't necessary, as I could turn my eyes far enough to see. In the reflected light of my torch, I saw two eyes glinting down at me from a shadowy face.

"Good heaven! What did you do?"

"I don't know what I would have done,

but at that instant the man drew his head back behind the lavatory door again. I held the advantage. He didn't know I had seen him. I decided to keep it, if I could. I left the cabin. And then, with my periscope, I identified him when he left Fishe's cabin and I know what he did next."

"Who in heaven's name was it?"

"Farrington! And he rounded the promenade deck and went into the officers' quarters."

"Why, do you suppose, did he go into the officers' qua—"

The door opened abruptly. I turned about, and in consternation beheld Captain Finch, with one foot already in our cabin. The next instant his frowning glance fell upon the array of jewelry resting on the table. His frown deepened. And then his eyebrows flew up. His face turned a dull crimson.

"The cigarette-case!" he roared, turning pugnaciously upon Hand. "Confound it, then you picked my pocket!"

Hand glared in exasperation. "Is it your habit, Captain," he demanded, "to intrude in this fashion without knocking at the door?"

"No!" he roared. "But, by thunder, I'm glad I did this time! What did you mean by picking my pocket, sir? I demand an explanation!"

"Because it was necessary for me to keep it."

"That doesn't justify theft, by gad!"

"There was as much justification for that, at least, as there was for your refusal to let me keep it."

"Was there? I'll have you know I'm master of this ship!"

Hand dropped into the chair, a sardonic smile on his lips. "Then," he said, "I suggest that you look after the ship, for which you are admirably qualified, and let me conduct the investigation into this mystery."

"I'll look after the ship," stormed the captain, "and everything on it! I'll not have your high-handed methods, sir! I give orders on this ship and I'll have them obeyed!"

"Might I suggest, then, Captain," said Hand quietly, "that you be a trifle less

boisterous? You will surely rouse the whole ship. I see that you have already accomplished that for the count and Mr. Snook."

I glanced swiftly to the door, and so did the captain. Mr. Snook was peering excitedly at the jewelry on the table. The count smiled slightly and glanced at Hand. Both were fully dressed. And then they were joined by two others, Joe Mahoney and *Monsieur Duval*, both also fully clothed.

"Pardon me," said the count politely, "I see that I am intruding. I didn't know what the commotion was about. But I can't say that I'm sorry my attention was attracted. I am delighted, Mr. Hand, to find that it was you who caused the amazing disappearance of that cigarette-case last night. It was superb! My faith in you is entirely restored."

*Monsieur Duval* craned his fat neck to see into the cabin. Joe Mahoney looked uncomfortable when he saw who was in the cabin and he hastily departed. The captain's anger flared up anew.

"I have duties to attend to, Mr. Hand," he snapped. "I'll take charge of this stuff! It won't disappear again, if I know it!"

Hand flashed a glance up at him. "I advise you to leave it with me," he said evenly.

"Then I can't take your advice," growled the captain. "They're going in my safe where they'll be secure from everybody!"

"That safe of yours," objected Hand, "is not very secure. Once again I advise you to leave these things with me."

The captain's answer to that was to gather up the jewelry and stuff it into his pockets. "You're persistent, anyway," he said. "But it's no use. It's going in my safe!"

He turned and strode resolutely from the cabin. The count, in spite of his apologies for intruding, had yet remained an intruder. And so had Mr. Snook and *Monsieur Duval*. The count stepped back and followed the captain in the direction of the promenade deck. I closed the door on the other two. Hand and I exchanged a long glance.

"He must have known," I said, "that we had the jewelry here."

"I think there's little doubt of it, Clark."

"Then Farrington must have told him!"

"I think there's no doubt of that, either. For some time I've suspected collusion between the captain and Farrington and Steele. Last night the captain believed the count had robbed him of the cigarette-case. Shortly after it disappeared, Farrington and Steele raided the count's cabin."

"I believe surely that they are in league! But what are they trying to do?"

Hand chuckled. He folded his arms and slid forward in the chair, resting his weight on the base of his spine.

"It seems evident, Clark," he said, "that they are anxious for us not to learn too much."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BRIG

HAND and I remained in the cabin, talking over the case. He reproached himself for not having locked the door. I could not understand why I had not done it. He soon fell silent and took to smoking cigarettes, one after another.

I felt jaded after the long night. We had missed our dinners—no hardship for Hand, but I was ravenously hungry. I went into the lavatory and shaved. When I came out he was still sitting on the bed with an ashtray beside him containing his crushed cigarette-stubs. He got his razor and stalked into the lavatory.

I sat down in the chair and gazed through the window. Daylight had come, and with it sheets of rain. The ocean below was leaden and ominous. The heave and drop of the dirigible was more noticeable now. In the cabins the motors were almost unheard, a mere drone of a distant hive of bees. One got used to the sound and seldom heeded it. Hand returned and sat down again.

At length, when the swirls of smoke hung thickly in the air, Hand glanced at his watch and got to his feet. He nodded to me, and silently we left the cabin. We went out to the promenade deck and stood at the rail of it, looking down into the lounging salon. A number of the passengers were there. Among them was the count. He seemed to have fully recovered

from the abuse he had suffered the night before. He was making himself agreeable to Miss Caldwell. The girl was laughing at his sallies, but I thought her laughter forced and unnatural. Mr. Fishe stood over by the port windows, in the clutches of Mr. Snook. Joe Mahoney was also with them. He and the old fellow were carrying on an animated conversation. Mr. Fishe did not join in it. He was palpably nervous and he cast spiteful glances in the direction of the count. Dr. Melcher was talking to Farrington. Professor Steele stood by himself, gazing through the windows. Pansy and Drury Minuet were descending the companionway. Pansy espied us and stared malignantly over at us.

Hand turned quickly about. I followed his gaze and beheld Mrs. Carter emerging from our passage to the promenade deck. She was a little startled to find us confronting her. Joe Mahoney had been right. The lady was not too old to have lost her buxom beauty.

"Mrs. Carter," said Hand quickly, "may we have a word with you?"

Her face lost a little of its color. "Why—why, yes," she faltered. "What do you want to speak to me about?"

Before replying, Hand led her off into the corner at the end of the windows. She became increasingly nervous.

"I merely wanted you to tell me," said Hand, "just who attended Mr. Lyons's cocktail party yesterday."

"I knew it was that!" she breathed. "I was there, Mr. Hand, but—but I hope it doesn't have to be generally known."

"I'm sure that it doesn't. Were you present when the cocktail glasses were brought in?"

"Oh, yes. Several of us were."

"Who, in fact?"

"Well, let me see. *Monsieur Duval* was there. Then there were Mr. White and Miss Gordon. Then those people—I believe their name is Minuet. A brother and sister."

"And you and Mr. Lyons would make seven in all, then?"

"Let me see—yes, seven."

"Now, then, when did you leave Lyons's cabin, Mrs. Carter?"

She dropped her eyes and flushed. "I—I was the last to leave. Must I tell you what happened?"

"I think it would be wise."

"Yes—yes, I think I should. Mr. Lyons was not gentlemanly. In fact, if a steward had not happened to enter the cabin, I believe I should have had to call for assistance."

"Ah, you managed to leave while the steward was there!"

She glanced at him shrewdly. "No, Mr. Lyons put the steward out of the cabin before I could leave. But I left immediately after that. I threatened to cause a disturbance if he didn't allow me to go."

"I see. Had you known Lyons, previously?"

"I had never met him before. I—I was very foolish."

"Then you left his cabin at what time?"

"It was just ten minutes of twelve. I remember looking at my watch, and using as an argument that I had to get ready for luncheon."

"Now, tell me, Mrs. Carter, while you were there, did any but the seven whom you mentioned come into the cabin and drink a cocktail?"

"No. No one at all. I'm positive of that."

"Then, up until ten minutes of twelve, but seven people drank from those cocktail glasses?"

"Only seven, Mr. Hand."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Carter. I think I can assure you that your name will not be connected with this case."

"Oh, that is very kind of you! I could never get over it!"

She began to look a little tearful. Hand and I bowed ourselves away. She quickly rounded the promenade deck and descended the companionway. *Monsieur Duval* who had gone down while we were talking to her rushed forward and greeted her effusively. We slowly followed her round and went down to join the others.

Farrington and the doctor stood near the bottom of the companionway. The doctor turned smilingly to us.

"Good morning," he said.

"It doesn't look to be very good," I

smiled, glancing over at the rain-washed windows. "But this ship doesn't seem to mind the storm."

"Oh," said the doctor, "it would take a good deal more than this to bother her. But I've just been talking to Mr. Hawks, and he tells me we're due to run into better weather before long. Guess everybody will be glad of that."

"Really," I grinned. "I should never have suspected Mr. Hawks of such optimism."

"Well," laughed the doctor, "Hawks says we'll strike more bad weather later on. You can't keep him cheerful very long."

I had been observing Farrington. He was polite, but he seemed to take no particular interest in us. Hand smiled congenially and spoke to him.

"Wonderful thing, this airship, Mr. Farrington."

"Marvelous. Too bad these tragedies had to mar the trip."

"Well, the doctor says the sun is coming out soon. Perhaps it will clear up all our troubles."

"It is to be hoped."

At that moment a steward drew aside the curtain between the lounging and dining salons and announced breakfast. I saw Miss Gordon coming down the companionway. Miss Fenwick seemed to be the only one not present.

"Everybody is prompt for breakfast," observed Farrington.

"'Tis ever thus," grinned the doctor. "They don't miss any more of the trip through sleeping than they have to. We had a fellow a couple of trips ago who didn't go to bed the whole time. I almost had him on my hands for exhaustion."

There was a general movement for the passage to the dining salon. The doctor walked between Hand and me. As we were going through the passage, we followed directly behind the count and Miss Caldwell. The doctor spoke to her.

"I don't see Miss Fenwick," he said. "How is she?"

The girl turned about and flashed him a smile. "She's sleeping, thank goodness," she replied. "That dose you gave her worked marvelously. It didn't bother me, though. I'm up bright and early, you see."

"Youth will be served!" laughed the doctor.

The count seated Miss Caldwell at the captain's table at the end next to the captain's chair. The count seated himself next to her.

A steward guided Hand and me to seats directly opposite them. Dr. Melcher sat next to me, with Hand occupying the chair on my other side. Like Miss Caldwell, he sat next to the captain's place. The captain had not appeared in the dining salon. Professor Steele briskly entered, glared balefully at the count and then sat down next to him.

"Look at the professor bristle," chuckled the doctor behind his hand. "The count put Miss Caldwell into his seat."

Count von Grugheim remained oblivious to his hostile neighbor. His attention was entirely taken up with Miss Caldwell. To save my life I could not blame him. At a table beside ours, already presided over by Mr. Stuart, sat several of the others. Among them was Mr. Fishe. He was scowling heartily at the count's broad back. Beside him were two vacant chairs. I supposed that the one immediately next to him was the rightful place of Miss Caldwell.

All the passengers, I noticed, were distributed between the captain's table and Mr. Stuart's. Behind us another table was surrounded by empty chairs.

"Only using two tables," I observed to the doctor.

"That one behind us is Mr. Hawks's," he grinned. "We haven't enough passengers to fill all three tables, so the chief steward used his head and left Hawks's vacant. Hawks is first officer of this ship and a mighty good one he is, too. Knows his business. But he is a gloomy sort. Stuart is a good fellow. The passengers have a lot of fun at his table."

I glanced over at Mr. Stuart's table. "Not much joviality even over there today," I remarked.

"No," agreed the doctor. "This is an awful trip. Those murders have entirely ruined it."

"Well," I grumbled, "I shouldn't think the captain would be much better at the head of a table than Mr. Hawks. Perhaps

he doesn't come down at all, which would be just as well!"

"Oh, he'll be down," the doctor assured me. "He's always down for meals, unless we're in a bad storm. This little rain isn't troubling us. He's all right at the table, too. He'd do most anything to make the passengers' trip more enjoyable."

We got on with the breakfast, a very good one indeed. As the stewards were bustling about us, Captain Finch came in and took his seat at the head of the table. He appeared preoccupied and gruff, but he forced a smile in return for the greetings of those about him.

Hand had already finished his breakfast. With an air of great impatience, he waited for me to finish mine. He turned abruptly to the captain. As if a signal had been given, every voice in the dining salon was stilled.

"That stowaway," he said, his voice carrying clearly throughout the salon, "is something of a problem."

The captain poised a fruit-spoon above his plate. He glanced sharply at Hand.

"That so?" he said shortly.

"It is," replied Hand. "I had a talk with him not long ago. What he didn't have to say makes me think that I'll find out something from him later."

"I don't like riddles and I'm no good at them! You'll have to speak right out if you want me to understand you."

"Very well. I find that a change has come over Miguel. He has gone back on what he told us before. It almost seems that someone has been to him and got him to agree not to give me information."

"Sounds ridiculous!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say so, Captain. I don't base my deduction entirely upon what Miguel said. I also take into consideration the way he acted. I questioned him at some length and once or twice, I'm sure, he was on the point of telling me that someone had made him agree to keep his mouth shut. But he's stubborn. I did, however, succeed in planting a few thoughts in his head that will bother him. I plan to visit him again this afternoon. I've formed one or two convictions, and I think by this afternoon Miguel will be ready to verify them."

"You do, eh? Well, my only conviction is that Miguel is a poor liar. That's my conviction!"

"We may be agreed on that. But whereas you think he lied last night, I think he lied this morning."

Captain Finch grunted disdainfully and went on with his breakfast. But his appetite had left him. He gruffly excused himself and strode from the dining salon. Hand touched my knee and got up from the table. Leaving my unfinished breakfast, I followed him out to the lounging salon. As he was mounting the companionway, Hand stopped the captain.

"I wish to repeat my plea," he said, "that you let me take charge of Lyons's jewelry. I feel compelled to tell you that there is grave danger of the—"

"It's no use, Mr. Hand!" The captain flushed and glared down at us.

"This is a warning I'm giving you. It's risky business, having that jewelry in your possession!"

"I'll take the risk gladly! I don't wish to discuss it any further!"

Hand frowned and shook his head. "Very well," he sighed. "There is something else, Captain. I want to get the finger-prints of—"

"You'll have to pardon me, Mr. Hand," said the captain sharply. "We are passing through a storm area and my place is in the control car!"

He abruptly turned his back on us and ascended the companionway. I glared at his back, enraged at the rude treatment he had accorded us. Hand touched my arm and briskly mounted the steps after him. We went round to our cabin, entered and shut the door.

"What was the idea," I asked, "of talking so openly about Miguel before all those people in the dining salon?"

"Baiting a trap," he said quickly. "We have a theory that the murderer went to Miguel last night and got him to agree to tell us nothing. Down in the dining salon I painted the lily somewhat, and if our murderer was there, what I said must have alarmed him. Perhaps he will return to the brig to bolster Miguel's waning resolve. I can't devote the time to it, so I want you to

go down there and keep a watch for him."

"But where? I mean where shall I station myself?"

"In the airplane landing stage. That compartment, you know, where we boarded the airship from the dirigible. From the entrance to it you can see the door of the brig. But try not to be seen."

"I'll go down right away, then."

"Immediately! Go down by way of the emergency exit and take every precaution not to be seen. Go right into the landing-stage compartment and keep out of sight as much as possible. You'll have to be careful."

I wasted no time. I got down to the freight and baggage compartments certain that no one had seen me. The wretched dog howled at me, but with the aid of my torch I quickly got out to the catwalk. Thirty feet on was the door of the brig. The distance to the opening into the landing stage was about ten feet less. It lay on the opposite side of the little passage from the door of the brig. If Miguel were looking out of his little window, he could see me enter it. But I got into the compartment without Miguel's face appearing.

Practically no light penetrated to the airplane landing-stage compartment. And the passage outside was dim and gloomy. Miguel alone was favored with good illumination. A bright shaft of light fell through the little square window of his door. I placed myself against the wall beside the steps leading up to the opening. I could see the door of the brig perfectly and I felt that the darkness effectually concealed me.

At first I was terrifically alert. Time crawled. Little by little monotony gnawed into my enthusiasm. I became, I am afraid, rather more bored with the job than I was alive to the situation. My mind wandered back over the sinister course of events; my eyes wandered from the door of the brig. Two hours dragged by.

Like a shock of cold water a voice broke upon me—a low, weird, unnatural voice, but I instantly recognized it. I glanced over at the brig, and then instinctively drew back. The shaft of light from the barred window fell upon the ungainly shoulders

of a man, and black and gruesome above them was the shapeless, enshrouded head. It was the same monstrous apparition that I had encountered throttling Miss Caldwell's shrieks.

Miguel's face appeared behind the bars. From him I heard nothing but a mumble that I could make nothing of. But what the hooded man said I both heard and understood:

"They've been at you, have they? I've only a moment, but get this! They'll promise and they'll threaten but they mean to hang you! Your only chance is to stick to me! Don't answer their questions, get me? You keep your mouth shut and I'll get you out of this as I told you before. Now what do you say—quick!"

Miguel mumbled a reply, and I reached for my pistol. And then the blood all rushed and pounded into my head. I had no pistol. That very man I was set to capture had taken it from me, and I had neglected to provide myself with another. In consternation I drew farther back inside the frail linen wall. I had seen the pistol that glinted in the hand of the hooded man.

"That's the stuff!" I heard the fellow say to Miguel. "Lie low and wait. You've got nothing to worry about! They can't promise you what I can, and don't forget it!"

I heard him move stealthily sternward along the passage. A wave of bitter helplessness raged through me. The capture of the fiend was right in my grasp, and through my own stupidity I might just as well have never laid the trap for him. Each of his soft footfalls seemed to be carrying him toward a new victim, and I was powerless to stop him. Consumed with terrible despair, I was forced to wait until he had escaped me.

At length I stepped quickly forward and peered at the brig. Miguel had left the little window. Cautiously I peered down the passage and out along the catwalk. The man had disappeared. To do it so quickly he must have gone into the baggage compartment. And at that moment the dog commenced barking. I emerged and stole cautiously along the catwalk, leaped through the door of the baggage

compartment and lost myself in the gloom. The most I could do was to stealthily stalk the man.

I could see nothing. To use my torch would be to make of myself a clear target. Remembering my course through the compartment before, I picked my way among the invisible freight, filled with anguish at the time it cost me. At length I found the ladder to the emergency exit compartment. I bounded up to the hatch above. With an awful feeling, almost a certainty, that I would greet my last moment, I thrust my head and shoulders through. The emergency exit compartment was empty. Crawling hastily to the deck, I leaped over to the door and threw it open.

Only one person was in sight, a man, and he was walking rapidly down the port passage toward the promenade deck. And that man was Oswald Farrington.

## CHAPTER X

### SINGULAR TRAPS

I STARED in perplexity at the retreating figure of Oswald Farrington. I might have gone after him and accused him. But all he had to do was to deny that he had ever been near the brig. I decided, instead, to find Hand and lay the whole matter before him. I found him in his cabin, checking over some notes. He glanced sharply up at me.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You are back, Clark, and that should mean but one thing! Tell me about it."

"Your theory worked out. The man returned to the brig."

"Who was it?"

The elation in his eyes sent a pang through every fiber of me. "I don't know," I admitted miserably, "except that it was the same fellow who locked me up with those two women in the vacant cabin!"

"He wore the hood?"

"Yes. It completely covered his head."

Hand made a gesture of exasperation. "Couldn't you unmask him?"

I gave him a detailed account of the whole unhappy episode. He sat motionless and heard me out, his face itself a mask after the first surge of disappoint-

ment. I concluded by telling of seeing Farrington retreating from the direction of the emergency exit compartment. Hand raised his head and peered sharply at me.

"It wasn't possible, then," he demanded, "to recognize the man by his figure?"

"No. You see, the coat he wore was so large and bulky that it concealed his figure quite as well as the hood concealed his head."

"It was the same coat, was it, that he wore on the other occasion when you saw him—a brown suit-coat?"

"The very same one. Positive of that."

"You feel sure that the man mounted the ladder to the emergency exit compartment?"

"I think there's no doubt of it. I lost his trail there. Unless he was Oswald Farrington. But I have utterly no way to prove that Farrington was in communication with Miguel. Afraid I bungled it frightfully, Hand."

He smiled, got to his feet, and clapped me on the shoulder. "You did a very valuable piece of work! Of course, we missed our chance to nab the fellow there and then, but the blame for that doesn't rest entirely with you, my boy. I was thoroughly aware that you had surrendered your pistol, and it should have occurred to me to make sure you were armed. Thank Heaven you didn't do anything rash and get shot up for nothing!"

"I almost wish that I had tackled him!"

"Wouldn't have done the slightest bit of good; he'd have finished you, and got clean away besides. As it is, I think we can strike at him from a different angle."

"What have you been doing while I was down there?"

He reached into his inside coat pocket and handed me two slips of paper. Then he dropped into the chair and had another cigarette. On the slips were typewritten messages from the wireless room. One was from his friend, Gaylord, of the Harvard faculty. It said:

STEELE IN ATHENS ON ARCHAEOLOGIC EXPEDITION—NOT EXPECTED HERE BEFORE JANUARY—HOPE NOTHING WRONG—GAYLORD

I glanced over at Hand. "I'll bet a kettle of fish," I said, "that the real Professor Steele is still in Athens getting acquainted with a lot of Plato's old property."

"You might lose your fish," grunted Hand. "If Professor Steele were at home, obviously he couldn't be on this ship. Since he's not at home, but, indeed, supposed to be in Europe, it's not so obvious that he couldn't be aboard here. But, as you say, the dignified professor may at this moment be driving a pick into the ancient soil of Greece."

I glanced at the other message. It was from Gerrity, and said:

NOTHING REPORT ON OSWALD FARRINGTON—DOUBT HIS HOME IS NEW YORK—STILL TRYING—GERRITY

"Well," I sighed, "these don't prove much."

"No," agreed Hand. "By the way, Clark, the count did not drink from one of those eight cocktail glasses."

"You got his finger-prints?"

"I did. I offered him a cigarette, by which I mean that I offered him my cigarette-case. It was, of course, highly polished and ready to receive finger-prints. He was mildly astonished, I think, when I offered him the case unopened. He was forced to open it to get the cigarette. And I got his finger-prints."

"Serves him right. He never seems to have any cigarettes with him."

"Well, his finger-prints are on none of the cocktail glasses. We have Lyons's glass designated, but the other seven remain mysteries. Up to now I have questioned everybody but Duval who was at the party anyhow, and not a one except the six we know about admits to having a cocktail with Lyons yesterday. Our seventh guest is hiding in the shadows."

"By Jove, though, we are ready to strike. All that remains is to get the finger-prints of everybody and, by comparing each in turn with those on the seven glasses, find our man!"

Hand smiled thinly and rubbed his chin. "Perhaps," he conceded. "But you allow yourself to be carried away. Suppose we

do prove that another besides the six known guests visited Lyons's cabin about noon yesterday and drank a cocktail with him. Is that proof that he murdered his host?"

"Ah—well, I suppose not."

"But it would be an important step, though. Come, we must see about reaping a harvest of finger-prints."

"I've just been wondering how you are going to do it."

Hand shrugged and turned to the door. "We shall have to ask the captain's permission. Let's see whether he has left the control car yet."

I found little encouragement in that. But I went with him in quest of Captain Finch. On the promenade deck sat several of the passengers by the windows, gazing silently down at the sea. I caught sight of others below in the lounging salon, doing the same thing. Without exception they seemed to have given themselves over to awe, with the peculiar, wondering expressions of people witnessing that which their understandings cannot quite fully grasp.

I glanced through the window and felt much the same way, as though all the landmarks of existence had been swept away in a flood of newness. But I was capable, nevertheless, of realizing with relief that the weather had cleared. The ocean as far as I could see was brilliantly spangled and overhead the sky was bright and blue. I felt an urge to drop into a chair and be gripped by a fascination that I knew awaited only my submission to it. Hand, however, continued on, and I stayed at his side.

We did not pass by without breaking the passengers' odd reveries. As we rounded the promenade deck I was conscious of many eyes on us. Hand turned abruptly into the passage of the officers' quarters. We strode directly up to the captain's cabin. A glance backward showed me that we had passed from the view of those behind us. Hand, reaching out to tap on the door, stayed his fingers and stood motionless. Suddenly keyed to a pitch of excitement, I strained my ears and heard a mutter of voices within the cabin. For fully a minute they remained nothing more

than that; then one, clearly that of Captain Finch, was gruffly raised. His words came muffled to my ears. But I understood them.

"Stop worrying about that!" he said. "You may take it from me that Hand will learn nothing!"

"But," objected an indistinct voice, "I don't think you should have allowed those messages to be delivered to him."

"I tell you I don't dare hold up his messages! I've gone in deep enough without that! And we know what the messages were!"

"He's dangerous. But I think this is too much for him. We'll leave it as it is."

Hand seized my arm and hustled me back to the promenade deck. No sooner had we reached it when the captain's door opened and Oswald Farrington stepped out. He paused momentarily, upon catching sight of us standing at the head of the companionway. Then he calmly walked out to us.

"Ah!" he said. "I expect interesting news, Mr. Hand. You intimated just before breakfast that the weather and this mystery might clear up together. Have you noticed that the sun is out?"

"It was merely a hope, Mr. Farrington. Afraid it has not been fulfilled."

"Dear, dear, sorry to hear it! The captain is most anxious to have this thing all cleared up before he makes his landing. I have just been chatting with him."

"I thought the captain was convinced he had the murderer in the brig!"

Farrington's eyes narrowed, ever so slightly. "Does he think so? As a matter of fact, we scarcely mentioned the murder. I inquired about it, naturally, but it seemed to upset him."

"It does seem to upset him. One can hardly wonder at it. He is in his cabin, then?"

"To be sure!"

"I just want to have a word with him."

Farrington nodded and strolled off round the promenade deck. Hand walked up to the captain's door and this time tapped on it without hesitation. A few seconds later Captain Finch opened it and glanced brusquely out at us.

"Yes?" he said shortly.

"May we come in, Captain?" asked Hand. "I have a request."

The captain nodded and stood aside for us. I scarcely dared look at him lest my feelings toward him should be revealed. He closed the door after us and turned briskly to Hand.

"Well," he demanded, "what is it?"

"I have come to the point," said Hand, "when the finger-prints of everyone aboard and particularly all the passengers are essential. I should like your permission to go about getting them."

The captain was beyond being astonished by Hand. He lowered his head and stared at him from under his brows. "How do you expect to go about it?"

"Perfectly simple. I have an ink-pad. First I roll the person's fingers on the pad, then I roll them on a blank sheet of white paper one at a time. The result is an excellent print of each of the fingers."

"And you expect me to order my passengers to submit to that?"

"I hardly think it necessary to go so far, Captain. They might refuse to obey your order, and I don't know just what we could do about that. But if we requested them to let us make prints of their fingers, I feel confident that they would all agree."

"Don't know about that. Don't think I'd let you gum my fingers all up with ink, Mr. Hand."

"Oh, I'm sure you would. I'm sure that anyone who had nothing to hide would be perfectly willing to agree to it."

Captain Finch crossed his arms and frowned thoughtfully. I had to admit that he was an imposing figure, standing there in his blue uniform with its gold trappings. At length he resolutely shook his head.

"Can't let you do it," he said. "It is not only my wish but it is my duty to prevent annoyance to the passengers. As you say, if I issued such an outrageous order, they undoubtedly would feel under no obligation to obey it. And I'd refuse to enforce it! And if I requested or even consented to their being requested by you to have the prints of their fingers taken, how could they refuse? It would be throwing

an assumption of guilt upon every last one of them! Five minutes after we landed my owners would be demanding an explanation for the outrageous treatment accorded my passengers and what could I say?"

"You might say that you yielded to my request. They retained me, you know."

"Impossible! There is no such thing as passing-the-buck in this organization! Whatever I allow on this ship I answer for! And I will not allow my passengers to be treated like a bunch of common criminals!"

"Has it ever occurred to you that one of them may be just that?"

"No! I have the only criminal on board locked up in the brig! I am satisfied, Mr. Hand, that this case is closed and I desire that you should feel the same way about it."

Hand smiled grimly and slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry, Captain."

"Then you intend to continue this foolish investigation? You're pressing far beyond the limits of ordinary common sense!"

"Depends upon whose common sense you refer to. Mine tells me that this affair cuts much deeper than you seem inclined to suppose."

The color of Captain Finch's ruddy face mounted to a lively crimson. Drawing himself up, his eyes blazed straight at Hand.

"By gad," he barked, "you'll not annoy my passengers! I have recovered the loot for which Lyons was murdered and I have his murderer locked up in the brig. I am determined that the passengers, so far as possible, shall forget the whole ghastly affair. I'll not have you keeping alive a spirit of suspicion aboard this ship!"

A cold glint leaped into Hand's eyes. "I'm sorry to have to do it, Captain," he said evenly, "but by threatening me you force me to threaten you. When we have landed it is possible that I shall have something to say concerning obstructing the ends of justice and I doubt whether your owners would enjoy that! I mean to continue this investigation until I have brought to light every shred of evidence connected with it that I can. I warn you of that.

And I also fervently recommend that you turn that jewelry over to me."

The captain was nearly apoplectic. But with an effort he kept himself in hand. His voice when he spoke, however, was strained and harsh.

"Very well! Go your way, Mr. Hand. But if you annoy my passengers, I'll restrain you and that I mean!"

Hand nodded coldly and stalked from the cabin. The captain kept his irascible glance on us until he shoved the door to behind us. We started slowly for the promenade deck.

"That was bad, Clark," said Hand, with a shake of his head.

"For myself, I was glad to see it," I said, with no little satisfaction. "You certainly told him a thing or two! I enjoyed it immensely!"

"He told us a thing or two, also. If you go molesting the passengers, my boy, you'll find yourself in the brig with Miguel."

We stepped out upon the promenade deck and fairly bumped right into *Monsieur* Duval who was making in his sprightly way to the other side of the ship. Duval exclaimed apologetically. But he manifested no desire for our company. He started, instead, to go elsewhere without any further loss of time.

"Ah, *Monsieur*," called Hand, "might I have the pleasure of a word with you?"

Duval halted and turned suspiciously about. He slowly approached us, glancing inquisitively at Hand.

"I understand," said Hand, in a low tone of voice, "that you attended a cocktail party in Mr. Lyons's cabin about noon yesterday."

"*Certainement*," affirmed Duval more spiritedly than seemed warranted. "Why should I not be there? Many others were there to be sure!"

"I don't know," smiled Hand, "of any reason why you shouldn't have been there. But it would be interesting to hear something of Lyons's last moments."

"I do not know of his last moments!" protested Duval. "I left long before his last moments arrived!"

Hand appeared keenly disappointed.

"That's too bad," he said. "I suppose all the others left when you did."

"I do not know. *Madame* Carter left with me, together. I do not keep track of the friends of *Monsieur* Lyons for him!"

"What time did you and Mrs. Carter leave the cocktail party?"

"Ah, *Monsieur*, it was before the noon."

"Then you must have left long before anything of interest to us took place. Might I ask what prompted you to leave?"

Duval shrugged his shoulders. He cocked his head. He pursed his red lips and spread his pudgy hands. "*Chacun à son goût*," he said volubly. "*Ma foi, Monsieur* Lyons he was drunk! I did not desire him drunk and I do not think I desire him dead! The trouble he has caused—it is too much!"

"Well," said Hand, "it seems that you are unable to give us any information. But perhaps Mrs. Carter could. Perhaps she went back again after leaving the party with you."

Duval twisted his round form violently about and banged upon the rail of the promenade deck. "*Mais non, Monsieur!*" he cried. "*Madame* Carter did not go back! I am the—the witness! We sat here until the lunch call."

"Then neither one of you saw Lyons after twelve o'clock?"

"*Non, Monsieur!*"

Hand sighed. "If I could only find someone who did," he said. "But I shall have to look beyond you and Mrs. Carter. Idling here will never accomplish it. I am profoundly obliged, *Monsieur*."

With an absurd bow, *Monsieur* Duval turned and strutted off. Hand circled the promenade deck to the passage leading to our cabin. Again the passengers subjected us to a curious scrutiny. We paused to speak to none of them and soon we were back in our cabin.

"That," I said, "was startling testimony of Duval's."

"It was, indeed. I have the word of the chief steward that neither Duval nor Mrs. Carter was to be seen until luncheon was served. And we have the word of the lady herself that she was the last of the six who took part in the party to leave it. Evidently she has not bothered to in-

form Duval of her confession. She is accounted for to the time they all learned of the murder after lunch."

"Then why is he endeavoring to establish an alibi for her?"

"Chivalry, perhaps. But it takes its place among the points for our consideration. Ring for the steward, Clark. I want fingerprints."

"The steward's?"

"Not yet, and perhaps we shall never need his."

He fussed about among his impedimenta. When the steward arrived Hand sent him right off after Mr. Burk.

"See here," I said, as we waited, "you overheard what Finch and Farrington said to each other in the captain's cabin."

"Merely the last remarks made by each."

"Well, that's all I heard. But they were extremely odd, to say the least. I'd say their remarks implicated them in the whole thing!"

Hand rested his chin on his knuckles. He said nothing for several moments. His eyes were troubled.

"We are playing a dangerous game, Clark, but no more dangerous than that being played by some others."

"It isn't difficult to tell who the others are! And one of them must be the fellow who goes stealing about wearing that hood!"

Hand viciously struck the table. "I can't be sure! I tell you, aside from you and me, there is no one on this ship above suspicion! Don't forget that flying through the air with us we have a savage, brutal killer, and I don't think he's locked up in the brig, either. Watch yourself, my boy! The life of none of us is safe until we draw this fellow's fangs!"

"You look for further violence?"

"Anything is possible! I know there are sinister influences all about our heads. Had I the key to this riddle they would all dissolve like mist before the rising sun. Our solution of the case has been interfered with and delayed. Please Heaven, it doesn't result in further mischief!"

He went back to arranging the mass of material in the big black bag. He had disquieted me more than I cared to admit. Al-

ways there had lurked in my mind the expectation of some new horror. I had kept it submerged, preferring not to dwell upon it. It was foolish. The best way to prevent a crime is to be prepared for the attempt to commit it. But my expectation of tragedy was vague, induced mainly by the hideous acts already committed. If another ghastly blow were to fall among us, there seemed nothing to indicate where it would strike.

My meditations were interrupted by the arrival of the chief steward. Mr. Burk, when I let him in, appeared suspicious and uncomfortable. Hand turned upon him with a professional air.

"Mr. Burk," said he, "I have a job for you."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Burk with a visible slump of spirit.

"It cannot possibly get you into trouble—unless you talk about it."

"I'm glad of that, sir."

"Nothing that I tell you here is to pass your lips! You are to divulge nothing that I say and none of your subsequent acts that it will lead to to anybody until this case has been terminated, not even to the captain!"

"The captain! Suppose he should ask me?"

"Then you are to put him off. This is murder, Mr. Burk—the worst offense against the laws of God and the laws of man!"

Mr. Burk paled. But he set his jaw and looked squarely at Hand.

"Very well, sir," he said quietly. "I am with you."

"Excellent! The tables are set for luncheon?"

"They are, sir."

"Then at twelve o'clock precisely, Mr. Clark will go to the dining salon. And you are to exclude all the stewards from the dining salon from twelve o'clock until I tell you they may re-enter it. Have you a pair of gloves—preferably cotton gloves?"

"Yes, sir, a pair of white cotton gloves."

"Splendid. Put them on and meet Mr. Clark in the dining salon, precisely at twelve o'clock, and strictly alone! Bring with you a pair of soft cloths and don't

forget to wear your white cotton gloves."

"I will wear my white cotton gloves, sir, and I will bring with me a pair of soft cloths. The stewards will not enter the dining salon until I tell them they may, and I will meet Mr. Clark there at exactly twelve o'clock. Might I ask, sir, whether we are going to poison someone?"

"Certainly not! You are going to polish the water glasses."

Mr. Burk gave a slight start. "I—ah—you mean, sir, that Mr. Clark and I are going to polish the water glasses? Mr. Clark and I, sir?"

"Exactly. That's why you are going to wear gloves. You are going to polish every water glass in the dining salon until it shines like crystal."

Looking more uncomfortable than ever, Burk shifted his feet and shook his head. "Well," he said apologetically, "I'll tell you, sir, if you don't mind my doing it—we polish the glasses pretty well before we put them on the tables. We don't wear—I mean, *they* don't wear cotton gloves to do it, but they put quite a good enough polish on them. And—er—the fact is, sir, that *I'm* not in the habit of polishing glasses at all!"

"It is," replied Hand, "not something that Mr. Clark is altogether accustomed to, either, Mr. Burk. But today you and he polish glasses. And after you get them polished, no one is to touch them!"

"Afraid that would be difficult, sir," said Burk, with a dubious shake of his head. "Suppose one of the passengers would like to take a drink? And I don't see how I could stop the captain, if he got thirsty."

"I didn't make myself clear, Mr. Burk. After you get them polished, no one except those who take their luncheons in the dining salon must be allowed to touch those water glasses.

The passengers and the officers who eat in the dining salon may touch them all they like. Indeed, they must touch the glasses quite a bit. I am going to let you see to that."

"Er—you mean, sir, that I should request them to drink their water?"

"It won't be necessary. You are serving soup for luncheon?"

"Oh, yes, sir — *Consommé Montmorency*."

"Then see that there is a goodish amount of salt in it. That should make them go after their water glasses!"

Mr. Burk was distressed. "You wish me to spoil the *Consommé Montmorency*!"

"Don't need to spoil it, exactly, but make it quite briny."

"Well—well, all right, sir."

"You have everything clear to this point, then? Good! Now, then, after you have polished those glasses, you stay in the dining salon until the people have come down for luncheon. And then you stay there until they have all gone from the dining salon after luncheon. Give your stewards strict orders that under no conditions are they to permit their hands to touch those water glasses—before luncheon, during it or after it! You stay there to see that they don't! If they are required to replenish a water glass, tell them to do it without touching the glass in any way. You keep your eye out to see that they obey. As soon as the last person has left the dining salon, clear the place of stewards again. Don't even let them remain to remove the dishes. Send one of them after Mr. Clark and you wait there in solitude until he joins you. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

"Yes, sir. As I understand it, you wish to have no one touch those polished glasses except the persons who drink out of them at luncheon."

"That's it! This may all sound silly to you, Mr. Burk, but I tell you, lives may depend on it! That is all, Mr. Burk. Mr. Clark will see you in the salon at twelve."

"Yes, sir."

"So," I chuckled, "we are setting traps to catch finger-prints."

"Yes," smiled Hand. "And our prisoners, though mute, should tell us an interesting tale."

## CHAPTER XI

### A GENTLEMAN OFFERS TO SHOOT

CHRISTOPHER HAND smiled quietly to himself and turned back to the little table. He rested his hand on it and seemed lost as apparently he turned something over

in his mind. His smile gradually faded, until it was replaced by a thoughtful frown. At length he briskly nodded his head.

"Ring for the steward, Clark. It is time, I think, for us to place a finger upon at least one pea in this pod!"

I did his bidding and glanced inquisitively at him. "What now?"

"I feel sure that we have arrived at a point where we can begin to narrow the investigation. There are two among those under our notice who probably don't belong in the pale of our suspicion. The smaller the focus of our light the more brilliant it becomes. If I can establish the true connections of these two, certain other aspects of the case are bound to be seen in their proper proportions."

"Then who are these two?"

"Farrington and Professor Steele. There are others we shall no doubt eliminate. We have seized upon every semblance of a clue, and unquestionably a number of them are of no value."

"Farrington and Steele! What are you going to do with them?"

"You will find it more interesting, I'm sure, if you wait a few moments to find out. And I think, Clark, that your patience will be further rewarded. If matters turn out as I expect, you will learn the secret of that document I discovered last night in Lyons's cigarette-case. It is the core of the case, and it indicates influences at work that—ha, the steward!"

He crossed over to the door and opened it to the steward. After sending the man off to request Farrington and Steele to pay us a visit, he returned to the other side of the cabin and sat down in the chair. I peered at him, somewhat disgruntled.

"It's a pity," I grumbled, "that I must wait to share your confidence with such as these two!"

Hand's brows came down in a serious frown. "Without tremendous cause, I have no right to divulge the secret to anyone—even to you! It is too dreadful in its far-reaching consequences. No less than our national honor is at stake. That is the least of it. It could plunge us into war! It is the document that lies back of all this bloody work! That collection of garish

jewelry that was stolen with it was taken as a blind—a ruse to conceal the real purpose of the crime.”

“Perhaps it would be better if I remained in ignorance of the—”

“You won’t be able to, unless I’ve misjudged my men. After all, I’m basing this throw of the dice almost purely upon hypothesis! If I have erred, I may quickly find my life in the hollow of my hand. That is why I am about to station you behind that lavatory door, armed this time, Clark, with my pistol, cocked and held ready for action! Not to protect my life, my boy, but to protect this secret!”

“Can it be that you contemplate revealing this terrible secret to Farrington and Steele?”

“Hardly that! I shall soon tell whether they are already aware of it as I think they are. I plan merely to reveal that I am also aware of it. They have not — but enough of this! I think our friends are here. My pistol! Don’t be afraid to shoot! Now behind that door with you! And remember, a sound from you may cost us both our lives!”

I had not heard a tread approaching our door, but a moment later there came a tap upon it. I seized the pistol Hand extended to me, drew in my breath and went through the lavatory door. Pulling the frail thing all but shut, I discovered that through the crack where the door was hinged I could survey almost the entire cabin, with no likelihood of being seen by those within it.

Hand strode to the outer door and threw it open.

Professor Steele and Farrington stood at the threshold. A gleam of hostility shone in the professor’s cold eyes. Farrington’s expression remained wooden.

“Step in, I beg of you,” invited Hand.

“If I may do so,” retorted the professor stiffly, “I should like to inquire as to the nature of the business you have with us.”

“I can think,” replied Hand, “of no quicker way to learn than to step into my cabin and hear what I have to say.”

“Perhaps,” said the professor coldly, “I have no inclination to hear what you have to say.”

Farrington quietly stepped by Hand into

the cabin. “I think,” he said, “that it would be as well if we did.”

The professor quite reluctantly followed. Hand closed the door and placed his back against it. In order to face him, Steele and Farrington were forced to present their backs in my direction, giving me a distinct advantage if I had to intervene.

“Well?” snapped the professor.

“It is time,” said Hand, evenly, “for some plain talk between us. You are aware of who I am and why I am here. It would be well for you both to declare as much about yourselves.”

Professor Steele stiffened. Farrington thoughtfully stroked his chin.

“Just what do you mean by that, Mr. Hand?” he asked.

Hand’s voice was incisive. “There is no need of beating about the bush! I know where the document is that you’re looking for!”

He had shocked them both. I could see the side of the professor’s face. It turned as livid as though he saw death staring him between the eyes. Farrington’s face I could not see at all. But his body quivered as though from a blow.

“Wha—what do you mean?” he gasped.

“Just what I said!” snapped Hand. “And I’ll say no more until you have both properly identified yourselves to me!”

For fully a minute they stared dumbly at him. Then the professor flushed angrily and squared his shoulders with a violent twitch.

“Is this one of your thrusts in the dark, Mr. Hand?” he gritted. “I warn you! I warn you that you are playing with fire such as you have never approached before!”

Hand’s eyes glittered. “I am thoroughly aware of the situation. It could not be more damnably explosive. Come, identify yourselves!”

Now I could hear Farrington’s breath hissing through his teeth. He held himself tense, as though ready for a spring. “This document!” he said harshly. “Where is it?”

“I know where it is!” snapped Hand. “You can take my word for that or no, as you like! But you hear no more from me until I know who you are, both of you!”

“Do you realize,” asked Professor Steele

ominously, "that we would willingly kill you to get possession of that document?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Hand. "But it is one thing to be willing and quite another to accomplish it. Let me inform you that no threat whatever would induce me to disclose where the document is."

"If we accede to your demand," said Farrington, "of course, you will turn the document over to us."

"Not I!" said Hand. "I mean to wireless ahead and have agents of the Department of Justice meet me when we land. I know some of them, and only those agents with whom I am acquainted will receive it from me!"

"Why," cried Steele, "the Secretary of State would be there himself! But you can't wireless such information to—"

"Never mind that!" snapped Farrington, turning to glare at the professor.

"This is abominable!" said the professor, flushing.

"See here, Mr. Hand," demanded Farrington, "what is the purpose of all this? If you won't turn the document over to us if we—ah—accede to your request, what is the purpose of asking us to—to identify ourselves?"

"Because I want to be sure of you!" snapped Hand. "Up to the present moment I find myself aboard an airship, dealing with a force whose frightful influences cannot even be estimated, and there is no one aboard except Mr. Clark whom I can trust! If we are working toward the same end we had better find out about it before it is too late to aid each other!"

Professor Steele squinted suspiciously at Hand. "How," he shrewdly asked, "can you possibly say *before it is too late* if you have already accomplished the end toward which you've been working?"

"Who can say that I have accomplished it?" demanded Hand irritably. "A man has once committed murder to get possession of this secret. He'd do it again! So long as that man goes undiscovered that document is not safe!"

Farrington considered the matter. He appeared to have mastered his emotions and seemed to be quietly rubbing his chin.

"Well, Mr. Hand," he said, "you can't

expect us to give you information for nothing. Before I identify myself I want to know that your claim is authentic! What is this document that you have been speaking of?"

"Must I repeat myself, Mr. Farrington?" demanded Hand. "I told you that I'd say nothing more until you have identified yourselves. Let's be done with wasting time. Either do what I ask or let us part at once!"

I could see the expression of neither Farrington nor Steele. But something in the manner in which they held themselves shrieked that they were torn between terrible doubts. Instinctively I placed myself ready for action.

Farrington was the first to make his choice. "All right!" he snapped. "I wish to heaven it were not my responsibility to come to this decision! But there is no course open to us except to place our confidence in you, Mr. Hand."

"It might have been well," murmured Hand, "had you done that in the first place. You have something to show me?"

Farrington grunted and fumbled about at his chest. He produced a small card that he thrust viciously at Hand. "My departmental identification card!" he said gruffly. "There, does that satisfy you?"

Hand took it and scrutinized it carefully. He nodded and passed it back to Farrington who made shift to conceal it once more on his person.

"Quite satisfactory," said Hand. "I am not unfamiliar with those cards, and I don't think a counterfeit would get by me. And now, Professor?"

Steele had made no move. He appeared, indeed, as if his cold exterior had quite frozen up. Farrington turned upon him rather brusquely.

"Come, Professor," he said sharply, "there is no point in your holding off! Produce your identification!"

The professor turned his face to Farrington, and I could see the hard glitter in his eyes. "As you wish," he acquiesced, coldly. "Let me remind you that you are my superior, and I have no course but to obey."

I could see that he got his card from somewhere inside his vest. He gave it to

Hand who, after he had scrutinized it quite as carefully as he had Farrington's, returned it to him. The professor, with lips compressed and white, put it back inside his vest.

"I am satisfied," said Hand.

"Then," said Farrington angrily, "perhaps you will be good enough to satisfy us that you haven't been playing fast and loose with us! What is this document that you lead us to believe you have in your possession? I demand an answer!"

Hand dropped his voice almost to a whisper. "Willingly," he said. "I have read the document through and I really wish I hadn't. Indeed, had you taken me into your confidence at the outset I assure you heartily that I would not have read it. But I did read it through. I have a trained ability to furnish my mind with photographic impressions and, unfortunately, I could quote that document for you from beginning to end, word for word."

"My God!" exclaimed Professor Steele with a start.

"Don't do that!" swiftly cautioned Farrington. "Just indicate the nature of this document. And for Heaven's sake, keep your voice low!"

"Exactly," agreed Hand. "The document is printed on the lightest kind of tissue paper and is the property of the United States Department of State. It relates to a Pan-American treaty that, in case of war, would bind practically every nation of both North and South America solidly against the world, if need be! It also calls for a gigantic, secret boycott of the goods from certain quarters of the globe! It plans to raise North and South America to such commercial and military power that, if it now became known, certain nations would inevitably resort to—"

"Enough!" hoarsely commanded Farrington, glancing uneasily about. "Someone might hear you! I haven't been told everything that lies back of this devilish treaty, but I know enough to realize how delicate it is! The document that is missing is merely a part of the entire pact, all of which is surrounded with the most deadly secrecy! But should that one document fall into certain hands abroad, it would be

sufficient to cause international counterplots and intrigues that might easily rock the foundations of world peace! Certainly, if the secret should transpire abroad through fault of ours, those with whom we negotiated it would be highly incensed!"

"Yes," said Hand, "I realized that. I also realized how Lyons, supplied with the document, could set all Europe bidding for it. I frankly confess that I cannot understand how a document of such fearful importance fell into the hands of such a rogue."

Farrington shifted uncomfortably. "I can only say," he growled, "that it came about through the despicable treachery of an official at Washington! Lyons was a manufacturer of marine machinery and long had had dealings with Government officials, including this beast! They plotted together. A bungling officer of the State Department gave them their chance. He left the document unguarded for a moment, and it was gone in an instant! We finally managed to uncover the official responsible for the disappearance of the document. It didn't take us long to get his wretched story out of him! Fortunately, he had heard from Lyons just the day before, so we knew exactly where to look for him. I was immediately dispatched on the mission. The professor, who was at the time in Europe, was contacted and ordered to Paris to collaborate with me. I found Lyons easily enough."

"And yet," said Hand, "although I have several theories to explain it, I confess that it seems unusual that you sent him fleeing back to the United States. I can think of no place that should have enticed him less."

"When I found him," replied Farrington, "he was in fear of his life. He had failed to realize the lengths certain powers would go to gain possession of that document. He was beset by foreign agents who threatened him time and again. He dared not sell to one for fear of violence at the hands of others who he knew would never be convinced that he no longer had the document. He had played a dangerous game and he wasn't made of the proper stuff to play it!"

"Then he admitted to you that he had the document?"

"Virtually. Although he didn't intend to and probably never realized that he had. He was terrified. In one breath he told me about those who were threatening him and in the next he denied all knowledge of the document. Lyons was not hard to see through. But I couldn't get the document from the scoundrel! I suppose he fled home believing his guilt could never be proved against him and he could shake himself free of the menace he had stirred up in Europe. Evidently, he was unable to escape it. And now, Mr. Hand, I want to know how you got possession of the document!"

"But I'm afraid the time has not come when I can tell you."

This calm statement had a stunning effect. I could see the professor gaping foolishly at Hand.

"What?" gulped Farrington.

"I'm afraid," Hand serenely explained, "that when I said we were both working for the same end I was not quite accurate. I am retained to prove someone guilty of murder. I must say, having learned what I have, that I would gladly let my case go if I thought it were necessary. But the safety of the document is not assured until I have my man!"

"I demand it!"

Farrington's voice was so strained that he could scarcely utter the words. Hand crossed his arms and smiled. "Perhaps I can convince you that your demand is unreasonable."

"Never!"

"But I shall make the attempt. Place yourself in my position. Would you turn this document over to two men concerning whom you have nothing but their own word and two identification cards that could have been stolen or counterfeited? I don't think you would, Mr. Farrington."

"I can listen to no arguments! For the last time you have an opportunity to turn that document over to me of your own free will!"

"Again I must decline."

For a moment Farrington remained motionless and tense. Then his hand flew

back to his hip and, darting forth again, held a blunt automatic leveled with deadly aim at Hand's breast. "You've made your choice!" he snapped. "I'll have the document from you whether you're dead or alive! You have sixty seconds to consider it! Time it, Professor!"

Steele whipped out a gold watch and glanced steadily down at it. The smile faded from Hand's lips. His eyes glittered at Farrington.

"I alone know where that document is," he said evenly. "Take my life and I take the secret to eternity!"

"We'll get it, one way or another!" snarled Farrington. "Either you'll tell us where to find it, or when she lands we'll dismantle this ship to find it!"

Hand slowly shook his head. "I'll not tell you," he said. "As for dismantling the ship—a precarious business, Mr. Farrington. Let me suggest that it would be better to permit me to hand it over to the proper persons upon our arrival. It involves no risk, I assure you."

"Let me suggest," said Farrington ominously, "that you stop talking and make up your mind!"

"You have thirty seconds, Mr. Hand!" whispered the professor.

Hand gave me no sign. His flashing glance remained steadfastly upon Farrington. But Farrington's demeanor warned me that when the sixty seconds had elapsed, he intended to shoot. Pushing the door open before me, I stepped silently out into the cabin, with my pistol pointed at Farrington's back, and my eyes on both him and Professor Steele.

"Take your time, Farrington," I said softly; "don't make me shoot!"

They both rose a full inch into the air. The professor's watch descended to the deck with a destructive clatter.

"Stand perfectly still, Farrington!" snapped Hand. "Throw your weapon on the bed! My friend has you covered, and he's an excellent shot!"

"You—you—" snarled Farrington, choking over the words.

Every muscle in his body seemed as taut as a violin string. Gradually he relaxed under Hand's impelling glare and reached

out listlessly to drop his automatic on the bed.

Hand quickly retrieved it and thrust it into his side pocket, keeping his hand there with it.

"Splendid, Clark, splendid!" said he. "Not even in melodrama have I seen anything to equal it! You have quite taken the starch out of our friends. But I think you can put away that pistol now. Nothing does more to discourage a congenial atmosphere than the sight of one of those things!"

I complied with some reluctance. But the outline of the automatic he was firmly holding in his pocket reassured me.

"A trick!" grated Professor Steele, bristling wrathfully. "What fools we were to trust you!"

"It seems to me," I said from behind him, "that you are in a poor position to rant about trusting anybody!"

"Easy, Clark," smiled Hand. "If these gentlemen are what they say they are we can only admire them."

"You'll have precious little time for it!" sputtered Professor Steele. "It won't be long before you have quite a different feeling toward us! I'll see you in Leavenworth for this!"

"I suggest that you calm yourself, Professor," frowned Hand. "It is seemly for neither a professor of history nor a Secret Service man to lose his temper."

Steele drew himself up and glared balefully at Hand. Farrington quickly regained his composure, but his face remained very white.

"May we be permitted to leave?" he asked coldly.

"By all means!" cried Hand. "I have hoped that we might part in understanding. But we may yet arrive at that."

He opened the door and stepped aside. Professor Steele quickly stalked out, and Farrington followed him.

"Mr. Farrington," smiled Hand, "your pistol."

He took the weapon from his pocket. Holding it with the muzzle pointed at his own chest, he proffered it to Farrington. With a start, Farrington turned about and his eyebrows flew up. Then he shook his

head, and the ghost of a smile appeared about his stern lips.

"Thank you, Mr. Hand," he said, taking the pistol. "I begin to feel very sorry for the murderer of Horton P. Lyons."

He thrust the pistol into his hip pocket and strode off after Professor Steele. Hand closed the door and turned slowly to me.

"Would you say success or failure, Clark?"

"Success!"

"Yes, I think so. I wanted primarily to determine whether they were Secret Service men."

"It certainly appears that they are not!"

"Oh, on the contrary, I should really be surprised to learn that they are impostors."

"Secret Service men offering to shoot you down in cold blood?"

"Well, well, Clark, the circumstances surely justified it. But I hardly think Farrington meant to carry out his threat. All the same, I am tremendously grateful to you."

"But I don't see how Steele could be a Secret Service man. Why, he's a member of a university faculty! Or do you think that is just put on?"

"Oh, no, he could be the authentic Professor Steele of Harvard and still be a Secret Service man. Many men of his type affiliate themselves with the Department of Justice, both for the excitement and from a genuine desire to serve their country. I might be myself, and if I were, you wouldn't know it."

"By Jove, I wonder if you are!"

Hand grinned. "Perhaps, and perhaps not. I merely point out the possibility to show you that there is an equal possibility that Professor Steele is indeed a Secret Service man. His card says that he is merely an agent. Farrington's card places him considerably nearer the top in the service. I think we have shed some light on both. But we'll watch them, Clark, we'll watch them!"

## CHAPTER XII

### THE STORM BREAKS ANEW

CHRISTOPHER HAND folded his arms, bowed his head and took to pacing up and down the little cabin. I

dropped upon the bed and pondered this latest, enlightening episode. Now surely I could understand Hand's fear of further mischief. And it seemed to me that I detected something more behind his lively interview with Farrington and Steele than just to determine their business on the ship. Might he not, I asked myself, have attracted danger to himself, that it might be lessened elsewhere?

A mysterious, muttered observation of Hand's broke in upon my thoughts.

"No," said he, "they wouldn't be kept near him. But they'd have to be convenient, yet safe from discovery. It would be the very place!"

"What's this?"

He stopped his restless pacing and swung about to me. "You recollect, Clark, the coat worn by Miguel's visitor at the brig?"

"Yes. The brown one, you mean, worn by the hooded man?"

"That's it. It was not his own."

"Well, now, I wouldn't—"

"Of course it was not his own. You told me yourself it was far too large for him."

"So it was!"

"Well, then, whose was the coat? I'll tell you, my boy. The man who owned it is dead, and his name was Horton P. Lyons."

"My word!"

"Another reason to suppose that the one you saw wearing it was the unfortunate man's murderer."

"Is this another theory?"

"By no means! The trousers and vest that match a brown coat are hanging in Lyons's lavatory. Mean to say you hadn't noticed the coat was missing from the suit hanging there?"

"I—I'm afraid I didn't even notice there was a suit hanging there."

He sadly shook his head at me. "Hopeless, Clark, utterly hopeless! Now, the murderer took that coat for a disguise, such as it was. It was the only thing to his hand. This is another point in the theory that the murder was not carefully planned."

"But an ordinary suit-coat is not much disguise!"

"It could be and it was. Because of it you were unable to tell me much about this man's figure. But let us follow our

thread of reasoning. Our man has just committed murder. He has taken from his victim something of tremendous value that he wishes to hide and he has quickly determined to hide it in the stern of the ship. But he has no desire to be seen going aft there and recognized. He has precious little time to waste on a disguise. The best he can do is to snatch the coat from the hanger. He rolls it into a ball and quickly gains the emergency exit compartment. There he exchanges his own coat for Lyons's. He makes his way to the stern, hides his prize and returns to the emergency exit compartment. There he dons his own coat again and steps out into the passengers' quarters. Now what is the inference?"

I wrinkled my brow. "The—the inference?"

"Don't tell me it escapes you! Why, the inference, my boy, is that he had to hide Lyons's coat! He didn't dispose of it, because he has used it since. You saw him wearing it twice since then. And I am positive that he used it at least upon one other occasion since the murder was committed, for surely you did not witness his only visit to Miguel. But on the second occasion of his using the coat he had more time to perfect a disguise. He made a hood to conceal his head. It stands to reason that somewhere on this ship both the coat and hood lie hidden."

"Why, there seems no doubt of it!"

"Now we come to something infinitely more concrete upon which to base our reasoning. Upon one excursion when he wore the disguise you were right behind him as he gained the haven of the emergency exit compartment. I fancy something less than a minute elapsed between the time he entered the compartment and the time that you did. Yet the man was not there and neither was the coat nor the hood."

"I begin to see!"

"It might have been Farrington whom you followed. But surely he would not have strolled down the passage nonchalantly carrying the disguise. On the other hand, it might not have been Farrington. To an able-bodied man there is more than one way to leave that emergency exit compartment besides the ladder below. There is the door

to the passage and—there is the aperture through which one reaches to get the fire extinguishers.”

I leaped to my feet. “By Jove, Farrington could have thrust the coat and hood through that hole and then stepped out into the passage!”

“Did he have time to do it? Remember, he had to take the coat and hood off, perhaps hang them on a girder outside the aperture and then put his own coat on.”

“Hum, well, yes. I think, if he was quick about it, he could have!”

“Then he may have been the one. But he is not our only possibility. It seems to me that an energetic man could climb through that aperture and gain the port gangway. He may have been on the gangway, Clark, hiding the coat and hood when you mounted the ladder and passed through the compartment. By the time he’d have accomplished it and returned through the compartment, you would have been out of the way. You would have missed each other nicely. But let us put our theory to the test. Come, we’ll see whether we can find that coat and the sinister hood!”

Hand locked the cabin door behind us, and we quickly gained the emergency exit compartment. I held my breath while Hand looked through the aperture across from the door. If he found the coat and hood hanging outside of it, I was convinced it would go far toward identifying Farrington as the hooded man. But Hand finally turned to me and shook his head.

“Nothing hanging there, Clark,” he whispered. “Hardly thought there would be—it’d be too easily seen from the catwalk. But I’m more than ever convinced that a man could climb over to that port gangway.”

I peered through the hole and caught my breath. The catwalk was above the hole and at least five feet off to the side. It meant climbing along the narrow girders from which the fire extinguishers were hung.

“If you ever slipped,” I said, “you’d fall right through the fabric of the bottom of the ship!”

He grinned and nodded. “You might,” he said. “But I hardly think that I shall

slip. It’s not necessary for you to try this acrobatic feat; I have better work for you. Go out to the catwalk through the door at the end of the passengers’ quarters. Come up the port gangway until you are right here at this compartment. If anyone is in sight I want you to warn me.”

I found my orders simple to follow and a great relief. In fact, I found that the catwalks had quite lost their terror for me. I was soon opposite the emergency exit compartment. Through the gloom I could see Hand’s head protruding through the hole.

“All right,” I hissed, “there’s no one in sight!”

Reaching through the hole, he grasped the slender girders and pulled himself through. I held my breath, but in a trice he had clambered up beside me. I sighed with relief.

“You see, Clark,” he whispered, “it can be done in a very few seconds.”

“Now what?”

He turned his head one way and the other. Although the light was very faint, his eyes flashed in it.

“Notice the ceiling of that cabin-structure, Clark?”

I had paid no particular attention to the ceiling of the cabin-structure but I took pains to do so now. Except where it was cut in to accommodate the fire extinguishers, the linen covering of the ceiling sloped obliquely downward from a point about four feet from the catwalk, meeting the tops of the cabin windows. The helium bags drooped from the netting suspending them above our heads and met the ceiling at the point where it slanted down to meet the windows. Thus a triangular space was left, through which the gangway ran. I turned inquiringly to Hand.

“The helium bags,” he whispered, “rest on the top of the ceiling of the cabins. A good place to hide things—under that fabric.”

He led me forward along the catwalk to the nearest gasoline tank, a distance of no more than twenty feet. “This,” he said, “is the nearest place to the emergency exit compartment where he could find something to cling to while he hid the coat and

hood under the helium bag. I think we'll soon tell, Clark, whether we've been wasting our time."

Hand turned from me with a shrug and seized a stanchion supporting the gasoline tank. He swung his body out toward the ceiling of the cabins and reached in under the fabric of the helium bag. For a moment he fumbled about under it, then with a sibilant exclamation he swung himself upright upon the catwalk. In his outstretched hand he held the coat and hood!"

"Ha!" he said softly. "What do you think of this, Clark? Our friend the professor undoubtedly would class this as a successful shot in the dark, but I think our reasoning left little darkness to shoot in."

"By Jove, this is extraordinary!"

"We dare not linger here, Clark. I'll put these back and we'll get away from this danger spot!"

After carefully replacing the coat and hood under the helium bag, Hand led me speedily back to the passengers' quarters. As we turned into our passage I beheld Captain Finch striding in our direction.

"The very man I want to see," Hand muttered to me. "Hello, Captain. I wonder if you would mind stepping into my cabin for a moment."

"No, I wouldn't," replied the captain, and although his voice was naturally gruff, it was by no means as disagreeable as formerly. "As a matter of fact, I was looking for you, Mr. Hand."

"Excellent! Shall we step inside, then?"

The captain nodded and walked with us to our door. Hand unlocked it, and we all went in. The captain declined Hand's offer of the chair. We all remained standing. The captain frowned, and seemed embarrassed.

"I have just been talking with Mr. Farrington," he said.

"Ah!" said Hand. "He gave you an account of our interview?"

"He did. You gave him the worst of it, and no mistake. He's upset about it. And I upset him worse than ever, I think. I'm here to apologize to you, Mr. Hand!"

This last was blurted out, and he colored painfully as he did it.

"Oh, that's hardly necessary, Captain," quietly protested Hand. "I think I understand the baffling position that you were thrust into. I presume that, after they learned that I was flying out to the ship, Farrington and Steele went to you, identified themselves as Secret Service men, and asked you to prevent me from conducting an investigation."

Captain Finch flashed him a glance and nodded. "It was the damndest thing!" he growled. "And then, when Waters wouldn't order you back, I agreed to interfere with you so that you wouldn't learn anything."

"Did they tell you what was at stake?"

"Not exactly. All I know is that the country faces possible war if they don't retrieve what they're after. That was enough for me!"

Hand's eyes kindled with admiration. "That was a man's choice!" he said with an uncommon ring in his voice. "Without hesitation, you defied your owners, although you knew that the probabilities were it would cost you your command. The very nature of this dreadful crisis would seal your lips and forbid you to defend your actions. Your company will never hear me complain of you, sir! The whole country was proud of you when you commanded the Navy dirigible, and I think they were even prouder of you when you resigned to take command of our first airliner. But none will ever be so proud of you as Clark and I are at this particular moment!"

The captain flushed and looked uncomfortable. "That's magnanimous of you, dammit! I should think you'd raise Holy Ned about the way I've treated you! And I might as well have saved myself the trouble, for all I accomplished by it! I'll go no further with it, by gad! I told Farrington right from the start that you could be trusted, but he wouldn't listen to it. Right now he'd have me compel you to submit to a search, and turn your cabin inside out, besides! But you'll find me no trouble from now on, Mr. Hand. If you want the passengers' damned fingerprints, you may have them!"

"I won't have to bother them, Captain; I've made other arrangements."

"Well, now, I'm glad of that. I really am."

"But I would like to have that jewelry of Lyons's."

The captain frowned. "There you have me right back in the hole!" he growled. "I just told Farrington I'd keep them; I did promise him that. And I can't break my word to him!"

"I'll see Farrington. Perhaps I can get him to release you from your promise."

"That stuff will be safe with me—make no mistake about that!"

"I'm sure that it will be! But I should like to have it."

"Well, I'm agreeable to any arrangements that you make with Farrington. I'm glad we had this talk, Mr. Hand. I've felt like a beast, treating you the way I have!"

"And so am I glad we had it! I hope, Captain, that I can count you among my friends for a long time to come."

"That you may! And now, if you'll pardon me, I'll get back to the control car."

He nodded and went out. In a few brief minutes my feelings toward him had entirely changed.

Hand snatched up the bottle of gold dust from the table and thrust it into his pocket. "I've something I must attend to at once," he said. "Clark, I want you to go out and mingle with the passengers and keep your eyes and ears open!"

"Then that's what I'll do. What are you after, finger-prints?"

"I doubt it. I'll join you fairly soon."

He locked the door and struck off sternward along the passage. I went out to the promenade deck, and found not one soul there or in the lounging salon. I went below and selected a chair by the windows. There I sat, gazing down upon the beautiful sight of the sparkling ocean. Presently, Dr. Melcher stepped up beside me.

"Hello," I greeted him. "By Jove, I'm glad you happened along. I needed somebody to talk to."

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself all alone," he laughed.

"Well, I was. But it's much better to enjoy it with someone."

"I wish I could oblige you," he smiled,

"but I've got to run along to Miss Fenwick. She has a headache and is making a horrible fuss about it! She swears it means there's a thunder storm lurking about."

"I hope she's wrong!"

"The fact is that she may be right. We've been trying to dodge a storm all morning. Say, that friend of yours—I never saw anything like him. He notices everything!"

"What now?"

Dr. Melcher made a helpless gesture. "I was talking to him out here shortly after breakfast and I told him just what I told you, that we were dodging bad weather. And he said he knew it. I asked him who told him, and what do you think he did? He took a little compass out of his pocket and grinned. By thunder, he'd been keeping track of our course!"

"I'm not surprised. But tell me this, have we succeeded in dodging this storm? It's bright sunlight as far as I can see."

"Yes, but the storm area lies ahead. From what Mr. Hawks tells me, I'm afraid Miss Fenwick will have her thunder storm. There's a local disturbance that we've got to ride through in order to get round something worse. We'll be running into it before very long."

"Er—you aren't worried about it?"

The doctor smiled disdainfully. "No! We'll be out in clear weather again before you know about it. Well, sorry I can't sit here with you for a while. Don't know where everybody is. Usually find the whole batch of passengers out here, but this trip it's different. I suppose that devilish set of murders has got everybody all upset."

With a wave of his hand he was off up the companionway. He circled the promenade deck and disappeared. I had scarcely settled back into my chair when two others appeared on the promenade deck. They were Miss Caldwell and Mr. Fishe. I took careful note of them. They both appeared nervous and worried, especially Mr. Fishe.

They did not see me at first. I sat looking up at them as they strolled slowly round to the windows opposite me. There they stopped and got their heads together, talking very earnestly between them. I wished mightily that I could overhear what they were saying to each other. Then Mr. Fishe

espied me. They both turned and glanced my way. I waved rather gayly and got to my feet. Although they had given no sign that they would welcome my company, I mounted right up the companionway and walked round to them.

"Hello," I said cheerily. "I hope I'm not intruding."

"Not at all," said Mr. Fishe stiffly.

"So glad you joined us," unconvincingly murmured Miss Caldwell.

"At least," Mr. Fishe coldly pointed out, "we saw you coming. I must say you and Mr. Hand move about like a couple of ghosts. He's always popping up at my elbow, without so much noise as one would expect from a gnat!"

"Now, Bertie," cried Miss Caldwell, "is that a nice thing to say?"

"Oh, I mean to say," explained Mr. Fishe, "it's most interesting!"

"Well," I admitted, "it is rather interesting, although for myself I'm not the noiseless creature that you seem to think. I am clumsy and I can't help making some noise."

"Not a sound!" protested Mr. Fishe.

"If you think I move silently," I said, "you should observe the movements of Christopher Hand. Watching him is like watching a silent moving picture. He does things from which it seems some sound must come, but all remains as silent as the grave."

"I should think," said Miss Caldwell, "that sometimes you'd wonder whether you'd become deaf."

"Sometimes I do," I smiled. "But you see, I know how meticulously he has trained himself. He knows exactly when to stop exerting pressure on anything, be it what it may, before it emits a sound. Thus he opens a window without a squeak and turns a key in a lock without the slightest bit of grating."

"He seems to float right through locked doors. Sometimes, without any need for quiet, he materializes before me with a suddenness that is startling, as though he had floated down from the ceiling."

"Disturbing sort of thing!" muttered Mr. Fishe.

"Oh, look!" abruptly cried Miss Cald-

well. "Isn't that a ship? It must be! Look, off there ahead of us!"

She was pointing excitedly. Following her directions, Fishe and I strained our eyes.

Finally we agreed upon a speck away off on the sunlit sea. Miss Caldwell declared it was a ship.

"Wait till I get my binoculars," she cried. "I'll be right back. Don't lose sight of it!"

She swiftly left us. Fishe and I kept our eyes on the speck in the watery wastes, but I managed to steal a glance at him out of the tail of my eye. His brow was furrowed, and he looked thoroughly miserable. The girl returned with the glasses and excitedly focused them. Then she uttered a little cry of disappointment.

"Why, it's only a little boat!" she said. "I was hoping it was one of the big liners. It's a dirty little thing, too!"

She gave the glasses to Fishe, who peered through them for a moment in a very perfunctory manner. "I fancy she's some little tramp," he said. "Yes, hardly more than a scow."

It came my turn to glance through the glasses. The steamship, I discovered, was a dumpy little thing, squat and rust-covered. She lumbered slowly over the rollers, like a fat old charwoman bowing to an acquaintance.

As I watched, the water round the ship ceased glinting in the sun's rays. It became sullen and gray. I lowered the glasses and glanced down at the water beneath us. The sunlight still sparkled there, but I could see that these flashes were likewise doomed. A heavy shadow was rapidly advancing upon us, covering the face of the sea with an angry complexion. Then I glanced up at the heavens.

To my consternation a black mass of clouds tumbled low over the ocean directly in our path. A moment later a jagged flash of lightning split fearsomely through them. An electric storm!

I found Miss Caldwell glancing apprehensively at the approaching storm. Turning to see what Mr. Fishe thought of it, I was astonished to find that he had disappeared.

"Why, where's Mr. Fishe?" I asked light-

ly. "He vanishes quite as remarkably as Hand appears!"

"I—I think he's gone to his cabin," replied Miss Caldwell in a thin voice. "He'll be back in a moment. That—that looks like quite a bad storm, doesn't it?"

I forced a smile and spoke reassuringly. "I imagine it's not so bad as it looks," I said. "The doctor was telling me just now that we had dodged the worst of it. He seemed not to mind this at all."

"I don't like thunder storms!" declared Miss Caldwell quite pitifully. "They're bad enough when I'm home with my closet to hide in, but up here in the air with it—oh, dear!"

"I never heard of an airship being struck," I said, trying to conceal my own nervousness. "Come, we'll look at that ship below there. We ought to be able to see it better now. I believe we are going to fly right over her!"

"I don't think I care about the ship any more!" wailed Miss Caldwell. "I—I think I'll go—"

There was a shriek from behind us. We both gasped a little and turned quickly to see what had happened. It was Miss Fenwick, bearing down upon us with arms extended and much white showing in her eyes.

"I'll be killed!" she screamed. "We'll all be killed! Lois, come help me pray! This thing is going to be struck by lightning and, oh—oh!"

She rushed up to Miss Caldwell and threw her arms about her. It appeared that the girl would be strangled before any other misfortune could befall her. I sought to reassure the lady.

"Mrs. Fenwick," I said excitedly, "I implore—"

Miss Fenwick turned upon me, rectitude glittering momentarily through her terror. "Miss Fenwick!" she sputtered. "I'll have you know I'm a spinster, sir!"

"But," I insisted, "I implore you to be calm! There is no danger! I'm sure this ship is capable of riding out that storm!"

This, I felt, was not strictly speaking the truth, so far as my own feelings went. But I thought it an excellent thing to say. Miss Fenwick, however, seemed determined to be killed.

"I don't care what you're sure of, sir!" she snapped through chattering teeth. "I know we are all going to be killed! We won't even have a decent burial! Our b-bodies will never be found! Lois, oh, why did you persuade me to go on this thing?"

Miss Caldwell had been tremulous enough before but now she was becoming as terrified as her chaperon. The bloom had left her face. She stared wildly at me. Both women clung to each other as though defying the elements to tear them asunder. I muttered something derogatory about Mr. Fishe for having gone off.

I was aware that others had come out on the promenade deck. The air of excitement did not merely include our own little group.

"W-why don't they run away from the storm?" demanded Miss Caldwell. "Must w-we run right into that awful lightning?"

"The captain," I pointed out, "must know his business. You must rely on him!"

"That captain will kill us!" wailed Miss Fenwick. "I know more about it than he does! I've had a headache all morning; that always means a thunder storm! Come, Lois, c-come to my room. We'll die together; your father would never forgive me if I didn't do that!"

They started off along the promenade deck for Miss Fenwick's cabin, there to die together. No longer was the *Jupiter* gliding smoothly along. She rolled and pitched. Occasionally she shot upward, the deck rising so abruptly beneath me that I could feel the strain in my ankles. Just as often she dropped with sickening suddenness.

Miss Fenwick and her charge were making poor progress along the deck. To make matters infinitely worse, Miss Fenwick displayed alarming symptoms of becoming airsick. Clinging to the rail, I struck off to assist them. But Mr. Fishe, with a set expression on his face, rushed by me. He took Miss Caldwell's arm, permitting Miss Fenwick to fend for herself.

And at that moment a man's voice, vibrant with alarm, filled the air and congealed the blood in my veins.

"Murder!" it cried. "My God, now we have another murder!"

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE LAST OF THE STOWAWAY

I AM afraid my wits were badly scattered. By pure reflex action I whirled about in the direction that the voice had come. Mr. Hawks stood at the head of the companionway, his back to the passage to the officers' quarters. He looked more animated than I had ever seen him.

A shocked silence followed the terrible announcement.

"Who says there's been murder?" I shouted.

"I do!" Mr. Hawks vehemently replied. "The captain has been foully murdered and he's been murdered by Professor Steele!"

Again a tense silence ensued, broken by a wail from Miss Fenwick. Then Professor Steele himself strode out of the passage behind Mr. Hawks. His face was as white as his mustache and goatee. He glared at the back of Mr. Hawks' head.

"That's a lie!" he cried in a choked voice. "It is true that Captain Finch has been done to death, but—"

Mr. Hawks turned savagely upon him. "I found you in there!" he shouted. "You killed him, and I'll see you hanged for it!"

I made my way as quickly as possible round to them. From the malevolent glares they were exchanging, it appeared that more blood might be spilled at any moment. I grasped Mr. Hawks by the arm.

"Where did this happen?" I cried. "Where is the captain now?"

"In his cabin!" rasped Mr. Hawks. "He's lying there with his head smashed in! And that—"

He poked his finger viciously at the professor.

"Keep your opinions to yourself for the present!" I sharply told him. "Let us go to the captain's cabin at once."

The captain's door was closed. Stepping up to it, I paused for a moment; then I slowly opened it. The contorted limbs came first into view. And then, as I gave the door a push, I gazed down upon the still body. The slain captain lay sprawled on his back, his chin pointed into the air. The iron-gray hair over his right temple was stained a dark crimson, and blood

dripped into a widening pool on the deck beside his head.

It was a minute or so before I turned back to Mr. Hawks. And then I saw that a little crowd had gathered behind me, morbidly craning their necks to see over my shoulder. I pulled the door shut behind me.

"I must ask every one of you to leave," I said. "Mr. Hawks, stand guard at this door. Allow no one to enter, and don't touch a thing! Christopher Hand must view this scene before anything has been touched! I will go find him."

Count von Grugheim, standing directly before me, nodded his head. "That is very wise," he murmured. "No doubt Mr. Hand will find some very valuable clues there."

I started herding the others toward the promenade deck. And then, to my relief, my mission became unnecessary. Dr. Melcher and *Monsieur* Duval turned into the passage from the promenade deck, and I caught sight of Christopher Hand right behind them. He strode swiftly up to me.

"What has happened here, Clark?" he sharply demanded.

"It's murder, that's what it is!" spoke up Mr. Snook. "The villains have murdered Captain Finch!"

Hand's eyes narrowed and gleamed like points of fire. "In there, Clark?" he asked, nodding toward the captain's door.

"He lies in there," I replied.

He spun about and scowled at the others. "There is nothing to keep you here!" he snapped. "Dr. Melcher, go in and see what this is! I want no one else in that cabin except you, Clark, and Mr. Hawks!"

Dr. Melcher quickly entered the captain's cabin. The passengers, somewhat abashed, slowly drifted back toward the promenade deck. Mr. Hawks appeared badly perplexed.

"I ought to be in the control car," he said. "We're running into bad weather, and this thing leaves me in command of the ship."

"Very well," grunted Hand. "If I want any information from you I'll come to the control car and get it."

He turned briskly and followed the doctor into the captain's cabin. I stepped in

after him and closed the door. Dr. Melcher was crouched beside the captain's body, feeling the pulse. He straightened and stepped to the door.

"Dead?" I asked.

"Afraid so," he grunted.

He went out and returned a moment later with a stethoscope. He clamped the instrument to his ears and dropped to his knees. Unbuttoning the captain's coat, he listened for the heart-beat. Then he rose slowly to his feet, gazing sadly down upon the captain.

"Well?" prodded Hand.

"He's dead," said the doctor hoarsely.

"Couldn't have been killed more than a few minutes ago," observed Hand. "Blood is still flowing quite freely from that wound."

Dr. Melcher nodded in agreement. "Skull's fractured to splinters," he said. "Killed him just about instantly, no doubt about that. Looks as if he'd been hit with a club."

"He was hit with the butt of a pistol," said Hand.

Both the doctor and I glanced sharply up at him.

"How do you know?" demanded Dr. Melcher.

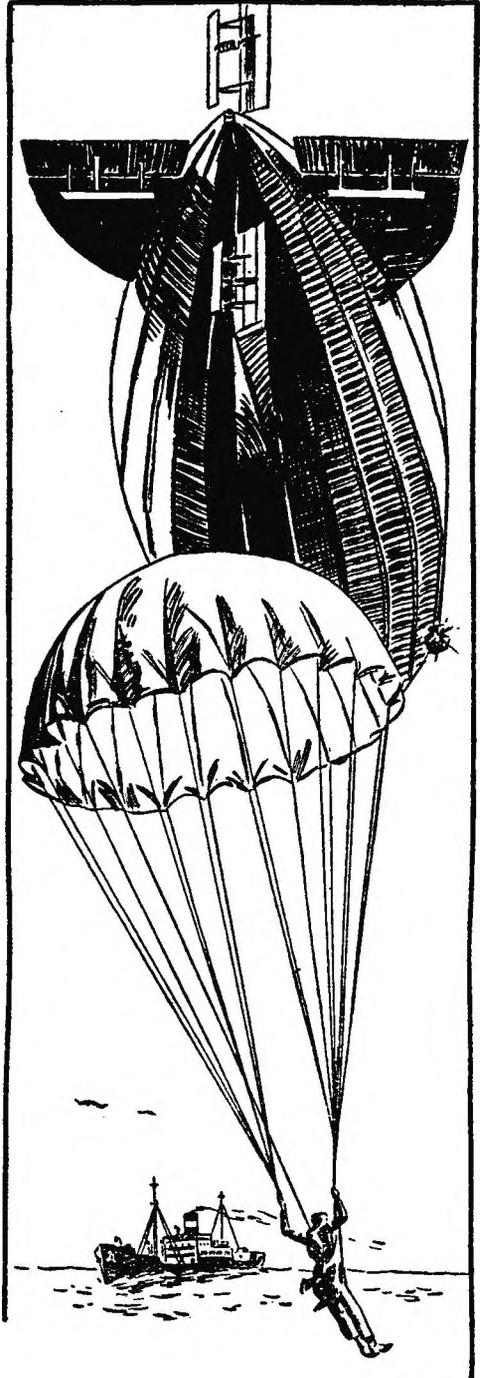
"The pistol lies there, just under the bed," shrugged Hand. "I may be wrong, but I think I perceive that it has been used as a club."

The doctor stepped over the body and crouched beside the bed. He turned part way round and glanced up at us. "I think that's his own pistol!" he exclaimed. "Captain Finch, you know, resigned from the Navy to take command of this ship. I think this is his service automatic. He kept it in the top drawer of his desk. Just a minute."

He sprang over to the desk and pulled the top drawer open. There were two other drawers in the desk, and he yanked them open in turn. Then he turned grimly to Hand.

"His automatic," he said, "is not in the desk! I'm sure that one lying on the deck is his! But what makes you think it was used to club him to death?"

Hand also stepped over to the bed and



*A Few Hundred Feet Below the Dirigible the Body of a Man Swung Dizzily from the Ropes of a Parachute.*

crouched before the weapon lying below the edge of the bed. "Yes," he nodded, "of course, the butt of this pistol is stained with blood."

"See here," I cried excitedly, "Professor Steele might easily have known where he kept that gun!"

The doctor gave me a puzzled glance. "Why Professor Steele?" he asked.

As I was about to reply, Hand uttered a gruff exclamation. He was leaning forward on hands and knees, peering down through the isinglass of the window.

"By heaven, an escape!" he muttered.

We quickly moved over beside him at the edge of the window. Glancing down through it I beheld that which took my breath away.

A few hundred feet below us the body of a man swung dizzily from the ropes of a parachute!

"Who is it?" cried the doctor. "By thunder, he must have jumped from this ship!"

"And he jumped this very minute!" supplemented Hand. "That parachute has just opened!"

"He must be insane!" said the doctor hoarsely. "He'll fall into the ocean and be drowned. It's impossible for us to pick him up."

"No!" I cried suddenly. "The ship! He's jumping to the ship!"

"What ship?" asked the doctor.

I did not reply. Instead I crouched lower to see off ahead of us. And then I saw it, the little tramp steamer that we had been looking at through the binoculars. The *Jupiter* was just about to fly directly over her.

So rapid was our progress through the air that the little steamer quickly came below us. I extended my arm toward it.

"There!" I cried. "That fellow will fall near that ship, and she'll pick him up!"

"You're right, Clark," snapped Hand. "We must contact that ship. Dr. Melcher, show us the way to the control car."

Out in the passage we encountered a junior officer, just stepping from the ladder that came up from the wireless room. Hand accosted him.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Somebody just jumped from the ship in a 'chute, sir," he hastily replied. "Mr. Hawks sent me aft to find out who it was."

"Never mind that," snapped Hand. "You are aware that the captain has been murdered?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to guard the door of his cabin until I return. I'll be back presently. See that no one enters the captain's cabin, understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The young officer appeared more than a little dubious but he went off to carry out Hand's orders. We descended to the wireless room forthwith. Hand paused long enough to order the operator to contact the ship below.

"I've been trying to, sir," he said. "Mr. Hawks' orders. She doesn't reply."

Hand nodded. He led us down the short companionway into the control car. I was surprised to find that it was so small. And almost half of it toward the rear was taken up with a navigation room. Two officers there were poring over charts and reports. They paid scant attention to us.

Mr. Hawks stood in the isinglass incased forward compartment. He seemed to be pondering deeply and gloomily. Hand stepped up to him. Mild astonishment flickered across Mr. Hawks' saturnine features.

"Mr. Hawks," said Hand, "I must know what ship that is below there."

"I don't know how," retorted Mr. Hawks in a sepulchral voice.

"Can you tell whether she's equipped with wireless?"

"She doesn't respond, and I can make out no antenna on her."

"Mr. Hawks, we must hover over that ship!"

Mr. Hawks stared gloomily through the glass side of the control car into space. I waited somewhat breathlessly. Would he respect Christopher Hand's suggestions? Or, like his unfortunate predecessor, would he scoff at them? I watched him narrowly. About the only change that came over him was a deepening of his natural gloom.

"This storm!" he said, flinging his arms out toward the turbulent clouds.

"Do you think the ship is in any danger?"

"No! Of course not!"

"Then again I request you to hover over that ship."

Mr. Hawks glanced morosely at Hand. Then he sighed heavily.

"All right."

Having made up his mind, Mr. Hawks immediately changed my impression of him as a commander. He issued crisp orders to the men in the control room. It took two fellows to steer the *Jupiter*, one at a wheel in the extreme front of the control car and the other on the port side of it. One operated the vertical fins and the other the horizontal. Mr. Hawks was getting them to operate both energetically. He snatched up a telephone and manipulated a switchboard at the rear of the compartment. A moment later he ordered the motors cut down.

The big airship commenced to swing round in a circle. Bracing myself against her pitch and roll, I peered down at the white bulge of the parachute, growing smaller and smaller. The fellow had calculated well, for it appeared that he would settle on the water quite close to the little steamer. Evidently he had been seen by those on the ship almost as soon as he had jumped. I could see that she had hove to. Hand had helped himself to a pair of binoculars that hung by the windows, and I took another pair. Through them I could see the steamer clearly. She rolled in the swells, and I could make out men on her deck preparing to launch a boat.

The wireless operator entered the control car, faced Mr. Hawks, and touched his forelock. "Can't get a reply from that ship, sir," he reported.

"Then," said Hand, lowering his glasses, "let's waste no more time trying to raise her by wireless. Mr. Hawks, we must descend low enough to identify that ship!"

"It wouldn't be safe," complained Mr. Hawks. "We are in very bad atmospheric conditions. I dare not fly too low."

"I merely wish," retorted Hand, "to get her name and home port off her stern. It's hardly possible at this altitude. We don't need to fly too low to pick that out with the glasses."

Again Mr. Hawks gloomily acquiesced. He issued more orders. The *Jupiter*, continuing to circle, steadily lost altitude. Mr. Hawks darted glances alternately at the altimeters and the swirling, lightning-pierced clouds.

I turned my attention back to the parachute. And as I did so I saw it flatten out on the water. A tiny boat moved over to it. I could see them pull the jumper out of the sea and haul his parachute aboard. Then the life-boat moved off toward the steamer.

Lower and lower swung the *Jupiter*. Mr. Hawks watched the altimeters with increasing anxiety. So did I. They dropped to the thousand-foot mark, and still Hand remained immovable, peering through the glasses at the steamer. Then he snatched the binoculars from his eyes and turned to Mr. Hawks.

"The *Clairmont* of Boston!" he briskly announced. "We must wireless for news of her. It's imperative that we learn her next port of call!"

Mr. Hawks accepted this dictum with a vast amount of relief. "All right," he agreed. "But first I'll get some altitude beneath me!"

Hand immediately strode out of the control car. Clutching and groping at things to keep my balance, I followed him out. Behind us we left Mr. Hawks energetically getting his altitude.

We gained the captain's door. Hand stopped to speak to the man we had left on guard there. "No one has entered here?" he demanded.

"No, sir, not a soul. I'll get back to finding out who jumped in that 'chute, if you don't mind, sir."

"But I do mind. I want you to stay right here until I return. Mind you, nobody is to enter that cabin! I'll find out who made that jump. I don't think I shall, but I may need a ship's officer to give me proper authority. How about it, Doctor, can you go with us?"

"Delighted," said the doctor eagerly.

We descended to the dining salon. On the way I noticed several of the passengers on the promenade deck and in the lounging salon. With varying degrees of awe, they

were all watching the appalling spectacle in the heavens so dreadfully near to us.

As we strode through the dining salon I wondered whether Hand intended to polish the glasses without further delay. Dr. Melcher glanced curiously at me.

"Are we going to interview the chef?" he whispered. "Ah, I see where he's taking us now! The brig, to be sure!"

Hand opened the little door in the rear of the dining salon, and a moment later we had passed down the passage to the brig. A glance was sufficient to show us that the door stood ajar. And a second showed us that the lock had been smashed.

"The stowaway!" cried Dr. Melcher.

"Transferred his affections," growled Hand. "He's aboard that steamship now, without a shadow of a doubt!"

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "He broke out, murdered the captain and then escaped from us altogether!"

"What fools we were not to shackle him!" said the doctor fiercely. "Anybody could escape from this tin brig!"

"He was shackled," said Hand. "You see, he's broken the bar of the cot that he was handcuffed to. Yes, I fancy the brig was never intended to be very secure. I don't suppose the idea of escaping from the ship with a parachute was ever given a thought. I imagine the brig was merely for punishment of the crew, if need be."

"That's about the size of it," gloomed the doctor.

Hand carefully inspected the broken lock. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Simple thing to smash that lock," he said. "It's not very important, but let's see whether we can determine the point of Miguel's departure."

He led us over to the aperture leading into the airplane landing stage. He skipped down into the compartment. Dr. Melcher and I were content to stand in the passage and peer into it. If anything, the motion of the ship was worse than it had been before. A glance downward was sufficient to show me that the sliding panel in the floor of the compartment had been thrust back. It was through that hatch that we had entered the ship. And I had no desire to be precipitated back through it.

Hand remained in the compartment but a few seconds. "Now," he said, rejoining us in the passage, "we had better relieve that fellow at the captain's door."

"The stowaway," said the doctor, "leaped through that hatch, eh?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Hand.

Quickly we retraced our steps. The officer we had left on guard was relieved in more ways than one. Hand told him to report to Mr. Hawks that Miguel had escaped. He lost no time in starting back to the control car.

We entered the captain's cabin and closed the door. Again it was a shock to see the ghastly spectacle of Captain Finch lying dead. Dr. Melcher grasped Hand's arm.

"Don't you think we could move him?" he asked. "It seems—well, disrespectful to leave him lying on the deck like that."

Hand shrugged his shoulders. "If you want to," he said, "you may lay him on the bed."

Together the doctor and I laid the dead captain on his bed, covering the body with a sheet. I was only too glad to direct my attention back to Hand. He had pulled on his gloves and was crouching before the little safe.

"Know the combination of this, Doctor?" he asked.

"I don't," replied Dr. Melcher. "So far as I know, the captain was the only one on the ship who knew it."

"Surely Mr. Hawks must know it!"

"Maybe he does. Shall I get him?"

"Don't think he need bother to come here to open it. This safe is not much superior to the brig. I think I'll have no trouble with it."

He placed his ear close to the combination and twirled the dial. In less than a minute he shot the bolt and opened the safe. Dr. Melcher regarded him askance.

Crouching before it, Hand fumbled about in the safe. Then he slammed the door. He shot upright and turned stiffly to us.

"Unfortunately," said he, "the jewelry of the late Mr. Lyons is missing again."

The fact did not surprise me. The regrettable part of it was that a man always lost his life whenever Lyons's wretched jewelry disappeared. But it seemed now,

at least, that there would be no more of that on the *Jupiter*.

"Look here," said the doctor, "that safe was locked. Who could have opened it to take the jewelry out?"

"Almost anyone," smiled Hand, glancing down at the little safe. "As the captain said, it was intended to protect important papers from fire. Even an amateur cracksman would have little difficulty in opening it. But I think it was the same careful fellow we've been trailing all along."

"Well," grimaced the doctor, "it looks as if the trail has leaped to the Steamship *Clairmont*! But there must be something here to identify him! How about finger-prints on the knob of that safe?"

"Afraid not," replied Hand. "Either he wore gloves or he polished his finger-prints off the knob. There appear to be none on it, but I shall inspect it more carefully. I think it probable that he wore gloves. Quite evidently he was surprised in the theft. He had no time, you see, to polish finger-prints off whatever he had touched. We may find some significant finger-prints on the pistol, but I doubt it."

"Everything seems to lead to a blank wall!" I muttered.

"Well, Clark," said Hand, "whether it leads to a blank wall I don't know, but you surely gave us a lead a few minutes ago. What prompted you to remark that Professor Steele would know where the captain kept that automatic?"

"Yes," nodded Dr. Melcher, "that's what I asked you before."

"You would more properly have asked Mr. Hawks," I replied. "He claims that when he discovered this murder he found Professor Steele crouching over the captain's body. As I understood it there was no one else in here beside the professor."

The doctor shook his head. "Doesn't seem possible!" he averred. "I mean, I suppose the inference is that Professor Steele murdered him. Not surprising that the professor would come in here; they were very friendly. But by the same token, it seems impossible that the professor would kill him!"

"We shall have," said Hand, "to ques-

tion Mr. Hawks on that score. But just at present I—"

A light rap on the door interrupted him. At a nod from Hand I stepped over and pulled the door open. Mr. Fishe stood there, appearing quite perturbed. And besides, he had lost his pink complexion.

"Er—ah—Doctor," he asked, "could you be spared for a few moments? Miss Fenwick is in really frightful shape! Air-sick, you know. If she had the strength to do it she'd crawl over to the window and hop out. She said so herself or words to that effect."

Dr. Melcher glanced wryly at me. "Now it begins!" he sighed. "Without a question of doubt this beastly malady is contagious. Yes, I'll be busy for a while! Mr. Hand, if you—"

"Go right ahead," smiled Hand. "I don't think you'll find Clark or me on your sick-list."

The doctor grinned sadly and left us.

"I don't feel so jolly well myself," muttered Mr. Fishe, disappearing with him.

I closed the door and turned to Hand who was slowly peeling off his gloves. The sight of Mr. Fishe had recalled something to me.

"Hand," I said, "there is something deucedly peculiar about that chap!"

"There is usually something deucedly peculiar about anyone who is getting air-sick. You mean Mr. Fishe?"

"Yes, I mean Mr. Fishe! He and Miss Caldwell and I were out on the promenade deck just before Mr. Hawks came crying murder."

"Then that more or less eliminates Mr. Fishe."

"You don't understand! He disappeared! And he didn't return until a moment or so before Mr. Hawks shouted that the captain had been murdered. And Mr. Fishe came from the direction of the captain's cabin!"

Hand suddenly whirled upon me. He shot questions at me as though someone were robbing him of every second that passed.

"Who else was out there? Who else can you account for at the time this murder was committed?"

"I—I didn't pay so much attention. Mr. Snook was there, and—"

"Was Count von Grugheim there?"

"Yes, yes, he was there. At least he was when Mr. Hawks appeared."

Hand grasped me by the shoulder. "We must take a chance!" he hissed. "There's not a second to lose! Please heaven we haven't lost too many already! We must find—"

The door opened and Oswald Farrington stood frowning at us. "Well," he demanded, "are you in complete charge here, Mr. Hand?"

"On the contrary, I am about to leave."

"Has anything been disturbed?"

"The captain's body has been placed on the bed. I have opened the safe and ascertained that Lyons's jewelry has been stolen from it."

Farrington carefully closed the door. He turned to us with a gesture of disdain. "The jewelry!" he muttered disgustedly. "I don't care about the damned jewelry! You know why Captain Finch was murdered. They thought he had the—document!"

"Precisely. And now I—"

"While you've been snooping here at the scene of the murder, I've been looking for a reaction to it elsewhere."

"Excellent. And now we shall leave you in complete charge here."

Hand opened the door. He herded me out before Farrington's astonished gaze. He closed the door, grasped me by the arm and hurried me off toward the promenade deck.

"What now?" I tensely asked.

"We must find the count!" he whispered, his fingers tightening on my arm. "Everything depends on it! If we have to dismantle the ship we must find Count von Grugheim!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### COUNT VON GRUGHEIM'S THEORY

**WE** TURNED out upon the promenade deck. I glanced quickly about for the imposing figure of the count. He was not to be seen. Hand stepped over to the companionway and peered down

into the lounging salon. Then he returned to my side.

He spoke softly. "The next thing is to see whether he's in his cabin."

We circled the promenade deck. As we traversed the windows I saw with a good deal of relief that the storm was abating. The lightning flashes, now far off, were less terrifying. The swirling clouds had lost most of their threatening blackness.

Halting tensely before the count's door, Hand reached out and tapped upon it. Then with startling abruptness he seized me by the shoulders and turned me so that I faced down the passage. Then he relaxed nonchalantly at my back. Intuitively I knew that he wished me to stay in that position, and in that position I stayed, like a wooden Indian. With a surge of inexplicable relief, I saw, out of the tail of my eye, Count von Grugheim open his door.

"Ah, Count!" Hand exclaimed. "I wonder whether you would be good enough to assist me."

"Delighted," smiled the count. "Won't you come in?"

"As a matter of fact," replied Hand diffidently, "I should not like to take such liberties with your cabin as I propose. Mine is all cluttered up, but we could use Clark's. You see, I wish to interview some of the passengers. I understand that you are something of a criminologist and I should like to have you collaborate with me."

"You honor me!" murmured the count.

"Not at all!" protested Hand. "I should like to lay before you the information that I have gleaned. Then I should like to have you aid me in interrogating certain of the passengers. Following that, I should like your opinion on the case."

The count gravely bowed his head. "Shall we adjourn to Mr. Clark's cabin then?"

"By all means!" said Hand. "We won't have to trouble you much there, for his cabin is right here between yours and mine."

The count closed his door and accompanied us to mine. It was the second time I had set foot in my cabin since we had

come aboard. My bag was there, resting in a corner. Hand excused himself and returned with the chair from his cabin. He put one chair to the left of the table and the other to the right of it. He offered one to the count and sat down in the other. The count seated himself and glanced rather quizzically over at him.

"Ring for the steward, Clark," he ordered. "And now, my dear Count, let me acquaint you with the facts that I have uncovered."

I confess that this bold offer stirred me with misgivings. I sat on the edge of the bed and listened intently to what Hand told the count. My apprehension gradually vanished.

Although Hand deceitfully gave the impression that he was telling all, I soon realized that the count was far from being thus favored. Not the slightest hint was given of a missing State document. Hand makes a complete job of an investigation and, consequently, uncovers much that in the end proves to be nothing but sidelight. And it seemed to me now that it was merely this sidelight that was being revealed for the count's benefit. The count sat with serious mien and took it all in.

The steward arrived. At Hand's request, I asked him to wait outside until we were ready for him. At length Hand asked me to bring him in.

"I am going to require you for some time," Hand told him. "I shall send you after certain persons. When you have conducted them here, I want you to wait out in the passage until I need you again. Now, the first person I want you to get is Mr. Hawks. Tell him I will be very much obliged to him if he can return with you at once."

The steward left. Hand turned once more to the count. "We shall," he said, "go on by looking into the murder of Captain Finch. I am strongly of the opinion that if we detect the murderer of the captain, we shall also have the murderer of Lyons and Enright."

"I agree with you," said the count firmly. "On the face of it, of course, one would be inclined to choose the stowaway—who has committed a murder about

which there is no doubt. Just let me recapitulate the information you have just given me. Mr. White hid away in the ballast bag last night. And I call to your attention that the man's very appearance is by no means prepossessing. Then we have your discovery of Lyons's jewelry in Mr. Fische's cabin. Hum-m, extremely significant! But I cannot believe that Miss Caldwell is implicated in the desperate business."

"It does seem strange," admitted Hand.

"Then," said the count, "we have the Minuets—palpable blackmailers. I am inclined to agree with you that they would not kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. But one can never tell! We have the threat she made Mr. Snook if he named her brother. Do you think that the Minuets murdered Lyons, perhaps, in a moment of rage?"

"No, I don't," said Hand. "Besides, they couldn't have killed Enright, since they were both standing before us when the man was shot down."

"Again we agree," nodded the count. "And now, finally, we have the strange alibi that *Monsieur* Duval sought to provide for Mrs. Carter. I am inclined to think that the Frenchman was merely being chivalrous. But you have not told me—er—whether you have any proof that the lady remained in Lyons's cabin after the other guests had left."

"We have the best proof in the world," replied Hand. "We have, indeed, the lady's own word that she was the last to leave."

"Nothing to it," said the count loftily. "The Frenchman became alarmed when you—"

The door opened. Mr. Hawks entered the cabin. Saying nothing, he closed the door after him and turned slowly to Hand. The count frowned importantly and settled himself back in his chair. Hand glanced sharply up at the new commander of the dirigible.

"Mr. Hawks," said he, "what can you tell us about your discovery of the captain's murder? From what I hear you should have something interesting."

"Interesting!" exclaimed Mr. Hawks,

aghast. "It was anything but that! It was horrible! And I'm afraid the horror of it drove me to make an accusation that I've now come to regret exceedingly!"

"Um, yes, I believe you did state that Professor Steele was the murderer. But from what I've heard you could hardly be blamed for that. Just tell us the whole thing—how you happened into the captain's cabin, just what you saw there, and what you did yourself."

Mr. Hawks reflected with his usual gloom. "Well," he said, "it was this way. We were trying to maneuver round a storm area. We managed to do it, but in order to we had to encounter the storm we've just been passing through. The captain asked me to confer with him in his cabin.

"Well, when I went in there I saw the captain stretched on the floor and a man with his back to me, kneeling beside him. I jumped right into the cabin and then I saw that the captain was dead. And then, to my amazement, I recognized the man kneeling beside him. It was the professor. I should have kept my head better than I did. But it was a terrible shock! I ran out and gave the alarm. That is all I can tell you."

"But you haven't told us what Professor Steele did when you surprised him in that predicament."

"Oh, well, I don't believe I know what he did. I rushed right out."

"It seems that he followed you."

"Yes, yes, it seems so. He was right behind me when I accused him of having murdered the captain. Worst thing I ever did!"

"Where were you and the captain when he requested you to confer with him in his cabin?"

"We were both in the control car."

"Then the captain left before you did?"

"Er—no, we left together. But we separated. You see, I went to my cabin before I joined the captain in his cabin."

"To get something, no doubt."

"A chart. It was one I had made of weather conditions on a former trip. I thought the conditions today were about the same, you see."

"Then you were separated from the captain but a minute or two?"

Mr. Hawks considered. "A little longer than that. I had to select the right chart, and then I had to compare it with the one I am keeping on this trip. I studied them both very carefully. I should say it took me about ten minutes. I can tell you I didn't expect to find Captain Finch dead when I next saw him!"

"I should think not. Did you encounter anyone else near the captain's cabin besides Professor Steele?"

"Not another soul."

"Very well, Mr. Hawks. That's all, and thank you very much."

Mr. Hawks nodded absently and left. I summoned the steward. This time Hand sent him off after Professor Steele. I got ready to witness some fur flying.

"Not a very strong case against the professor," observed the count. "Although the circumstances certainly point to his guilt. But the motive is not apparent."

"I forgot to tell you, Count," said Hand quickly, "that we found the captain's safe devoid of Lyons's jewelry. He was keeping it there. And it must have been stolen by the man who murdered him."

The count shook his head and smiled skeptically. "I hardly think," he said, "that the professor would commit murder to avail himself of those trinkets."

Hand nodded and they lapsed into silence. The professor came in with a very definite chip on his shoulder. I was really astonished that he had responded at all. He stood tall and austere, his eyes glittering at Hand.

"Well?" he snapped.

"It seems," said Hand, "that you were the first to see Captain Finch lying dead in his cabin."

"Indeed?" sneered Steele. "I had quite expected you to say that I was the last to see him alive! At least you seem to be attacking the problem intelligently. Might I ask what Count von Grugheim is doing here?"

"Certainly. The count is collaborating with me."

"So!" The professor bristled worse than ever. As though he had set up an

energy that was inductive, the count bristled too. They glared at each other.

"The count," Hand soothingly explained, "is not unversed in criminology. And I need all the help I can get. He has very kindly agreed to give me the benefit of his assistance. Anything you may say to me, Professor, you may say in his presence."

"Well," flared the professor, "there is nothing I wish to say to either of you!"

Count von Grugheim changed his attitude to one almost of pathos. "A moment ago, Professor," he sighed, "I was inclined to scoff at the mere thought of attaching guilt to you. Perhaps I was too hasty."

Steele trembled with wrath. Hand quickly leaned forward.

"Professor," he said, "I implore you to calm yourself! You cannot deny that fate has placed you in an embarrassing position. There is no sense in resenting it. Your wisest course is to accept it as a fortunate circumstance, for you are in a position to assist us to the solution of this deplorable riddle."

"Very well," retorted the professor coldly. "I'll tell you what I have to say and then I'll get out! I went to the captain's cabin looking for him. I wanted to inquire about the seriousness of the storm we were approaching. To my utter horror I found him lying dead on the floor. Just as I had knelt beside him that ass Hawks came in. He rushed out bleating that I had killed Captain Finch! Preposterous! I tremble to think that Hawks is in command of the ship!"

He closed his mouth with a snap and turned purposefully to the door, fulfilling his promise to say what he had to say and then get out.

"One moment!" Hand shot at him. "You may not like our methods, but you are bound to assist us, Professor Steele!"

Steele halted in the act of opening the door. He closed it again and turned half round to face Hand. "Well?" he asked shortly.

"Tell me this," said Hand. "As you approached the captain's door did you see anyone or hear anything unusual?"

He glanced shrewdly at Hand. "I did," he said harshly. "As I turned into the

passage from the promenade deck a man came hurrying toward me. He looked distraught and he had just passed the captain's door—if indeed he had not come from it! It was Mr. Fishe! I leave you to draw your own conclusions!"

Again the professor turned resolutely to the door. Hand raised no objection to his departure. He viciously removed himself.

Count von Grugheim frowned at the floor. Finally, he lifted his handsome head and glanced sharply at Hand.

"Strike a difficulty, Count?"

"There is one matter which is unsatisfactory."

"I'll wager you stuck at the ease with which both Mr. Hawks and the professor determined that the poor captain was dead!"

"Why, of course! Apparently a glance was enough to inform them both that the man was dead!"

"There is a logical explanation, but we must take it for what it's worth. We questioned them after it had been positively determined that the captain was indeed beyond help. Viewing it in that light, they might easily have been subconsciously induced to state here that the captain was dead when they first laid eyes on him."

"Perfectly sound reasoning, Mr. Hand. But I shall reserve judgment."

"And so shall I. The important thing is to interview Mr. Fishe. To inquire into his entire connection with the case we shall, unfortunately, have to summon Miss Caldwell as well."

The count nodded mutely. Hand motioned to me, and I stepped out to send the steward off after Miss Caldwell and Mr. Fishe. As we waited, both Hand and the count frowned in silence. I would have frowned in silence, too, but I wanted Miss Caldwell to find at least one of us looking cheerful. As it fell out there was no need for my thoughtfulness. The moment she entered, the count was on his feet with a flashing smile, offering her his chair. Mr. Fishe, who appeared quite pasty, managed to glare at him.

Miss Caldwell forced a little smile and accepted the count's chair. She clasped her hands on her lap and, her smile disappear-

ing, glanced apprehensively from Hand to Mr. Fishe.

"Poor Bertie!" she cried. "He's so sick, Mr. Hand. Why, he's almost as sick as Miss Fenwick!"

"It was hanging about Miss Fenwick," said Mr. Fishe thickly, "that got me like this."

"Let us come down to business," said Hand quickly. "It was common gossip this morning that Captain Finch obtained Mr. Lyons's jewelry from me. You must have realized immediately, Mr. Fishe, that I had got it from your cabin. I'm afraid I am unable to apologize for invading your quarters until you have explained why I was called upon to do it."

"My head isn't very clear," complained Mr. Fishe. "Afraid you'll have to be more specific."

"Well, then, the plain fact is that I want to know how Mr. Lyons's jewelry came into your possession last night."

"Can't help you out."

"I'm sorry indeed to hear that!"

"My dear fellow, not half so sorry as I am! I'm not used to having dead men's jewelry cropping up in my bag!"

"You mean to imply, then, that you don't know how those articles got into your bag?"

"I'll tell you all about it. You recall the ghastly fright that some blighter gave Miss Caldwell and Miss Fenwick last night. I was aroused, as you know, and I dressed and sat up with them the remainder of the night. The stuff that Dr. Melcher gave Miss Fenwick had a telling effect upon her—it made her drowsy. She fought off losing consciousness, saying she preferred to be killed while she was awake. But the drug overpowered her, and she slept. I had smoked up all my cigarettes, and I went back to my cabin for another package. They were in the bottom of my bag, and in getting them, I produced all that jewelry! The shock was terrific!"

Hand turned to Miss Caldwell, but not unkindly. "And now," he said, "how did you happen to become mixed up in this deplorable affair?"

"Bertie took me out to the lounging salon and told me," she replied. "He was in a frightful state. I don't blame him!"

"Can't tell you," moaned Mr. Fishe, "how I've felt ever since I heard of the row you had with the captain this morning over that stuff!"

"If only," wailed Miss Caldwell, "we'd gone straight to you about it!"

Hand frowned thoughtfully. "So," he said, "it appears that somebody stole into your cabin while you were asleep and put the jewelry there to incriminate you. No doubt it was the hooded fellow Miss Fenwick and Miss Caldwell surprised in the passage.

"Now tell me this, Mr. Fishe, when you came aboard this ship did you have a mix-up over your cabin?"

The count pricked up his ears. So did Miss Caldwell. Mr. Fishe appeared thoroughly amazed.

"Why, I did!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. White figured in it?"

"Correct again! The blighter said they'd put me into his cabin. And there I was, all established. They finally persuaded him to take the cabin I'd been booked for."

"Then Miss Hattie Gordon's cabin is right next to the one you are in?"

"I believe it is. But look here, I scarcely know the young lady. Never saw her before!"

"Well, I don't doubt it. But here's another point, Mr. Fishe."

"I say, no!"

"It appears that you must have been in the vicinity of the captain's cabin at the time the captain was murdered."

Miss Caldwell gasped. Her hands fluttered to her face. Mr. Fishe blinked.

"Do you know," he said, "I must have walked right by his door as he lay dead on the other side of it!"

"So it appears. But why were you there?"

"I saw that storm coming up and went to see what the officers thought about it. Couldn't find one of them. I was up there where their cabins are when I heard Miss Fenwick screech. Miss Fenwick, if you've noticed, is a sort of volcano smouldering under a mound of ice. It sounded as if the ice had gone asunder, in which event there would be havoc on all sides. I dashed out to the aid of Miss Caldwell."

"Then you saw no one at all in the passage outside the captain's door?"

"Absolutely no one."

Hand smiled and rose from his chair. "I think that clears up everything," he said. "I hope that you will be feeling better soon, Mr. Fische. The storm has all but abated."

Miss Caldwell also rose. She tilted her chin. "I'll tell you something else!" she said spiritedly. "You may think it funny that Mr. Fische would take his troubles to me, but it's only natural since we are to be married."

"W-what!" cried Mr. Fische. "You're—you're really going to accept me, Lois, at last?"

"Come along, Bertie," she said, with all the world in her lovely eyes, "and I'll tell you all about it."

Mr. Fische was transported with joy. In fact his health seemed to be improving much faster than the storm was abating. "Lois, dear girl!" he cried. "I—I say, Mr. Hand, if you want to put me in shackles, wait a few minutes, will you?"

"Afraid I'll have to wait a long time," chuckled Hand. "Anyhow, the shackles Miss Caldwell suggests are far better than mine. Run along, both of you, and may you live happily ever after."

And run along they did, the tension of the past few moments entirely eradicated. I closed the door after them.

"That," said Hand, "is a cure for airsickness that I must call to the doctor's attention."

"Seems to me," I grinned, "that we're running a matrimonial bureau instead of an inquisition."

Count von Grugheim grimly seated himself. He turned his head and glanced haughtily over to Hand. "Mr. Hand," he asked, "are you believing everything that these people are telling us?"

"What do you think of it, Count?"

"I am still reserving judgment!"

"An exceedingly wise thing to do. And now I think our investigation leads directly to Joseph White. This, Count, is the man of many aliases. I shall call him Joe Mahoney, for as nearly as I can tell that is his right name. Dispatch the steward after him, Clark."

Joe, by the promptitude of his appearance, had not been hard to find. He nervously watched the steward recede into the passage, closing the door after him.

"See here, Joe," said Hand sharply, "you have some explaining to do!"

Mahoney swung about and swallowed hard. "Yes, sir," he huskily replied. "I can explain anythin'. Just try me, Mr. Hand, and see if I ain't right."

"Very well. Why didn't you tell me that Miss Gordon attended Lyons's cocktail party yesterday?"

Joe's blue eyes became more troubled than ever. "I knew it!" he gulped. "I knew there wasn't no use of me tryin' to keep nothin' from you, Mr. Hand. I was a sap because I know I can trust you! But that gent settin' beside you—he don't look honest to me, and I don't mean perhaps!"

The count stiffened violently. I had a sudden impulse to clap Joe on the back.

"You owe Count von Grugheim an apology for that, Joe," said Hand sternly. "The count is a gentleman. Whatever you can tell me you can tell him. Come, why did you attempt to protect Miss Gordon?"

"I'll tell you!" cried Joe. "So help me, I'm—I'm married!"

"To Miss Gordon?"

"That's it! I don't want nobody to know it until I can get away from New York with her! Some of those mugs have got me on the spot. And I'm afraid she might get hurt on account of me. My old captain in the Army will give me a job any time I want it—out West. And that's where I'm goin', me and her. I'm through with the rackets, I am!"

"An excellent idea, Joe. Now, do you suppose you can tell us where you were at the time the murder was committed?"

"Sure! I was with Hattie! She could tell you. She's my wife, Mr. Hand. Nobody knows it, but she could show you the license and all."

"You were very wise to tell us this, Joe, and I assure you that it will go no farther. And I will use my influence to see that no harm comes to you or your wife until you have left for the West. Now, there is something else I want to ask you about."

"Oh, my G—gosh!"

Joe passed a hand over his febrile countenance. The count continued to stare coldly at him.

"Who remained," asked Hand, "at Lyons's cocktail party when you and your wife left his cabin?"

"Just him and Mrs. Carter."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure! All except her and me and Hattie left first. Lyons acted like he wanted me and Hattie to git. So we got."

"All right, Joe, that will be all. I'm glad you're giving up the rackets and settling down. There's good stuff in you, boy."

Joe left almost without first bothering to open the door. He bowled the steward out of his way and disappeared. Hand motioned the astonished steward to enter.

"I want," he said, "to see Mrs. Carter and *Monsieur* Duval."

The steward nodded and withdrew, closing the door. Count von Grugheim thoughtfully stroked his chin. Hand regarded him.

"Come to any conclusions, Count?" he asked.

The count frowned pompously. "I don't like the stories of Fishe and Mahoney," he said. "I have already considered a theory."

"Excellent!" cried Hand. "It was to get just such help that I invited your collaboration."

"It may astonish you," said the count loftily, "but my theory is that Fishe and Mahoney are in league. They are distinctly different types, it is true, but in my country such a baffling combination of criminals is often found. It is quite possible that Fishe is no Englishman at all. Posing as one, he would more completely sever what apparent connection existed between him and Mahoney. That little difference over the wrong cabins when they came aboard would heighten the deception, you see."

"Adroit reasoning, Count. I am delighted."

"Of course my theory does not seek to implicate Miss Caldwell. The poor girl is being duped! None but the most craven wretch would do that! But, you see, it fits in nicely with our conception of the fellow. We are dealing with a desperate, unscrupulous villain, Mr. Hand!"

"Unquestionably."

"I venture to say—"

The door opened and Mrs. Carter, closely followed by *Monsieur* Duval, entered the little cabin. Again the count bounded out of his chair. Mrs. Carter quietly sank into it. The little Frenchman fairly danced with rage.

"*Monsieur*," he shrilled, "I demand the explanation for this!"

"You shall have it," smiled Hand. "There is something that we must straighten out. Whereas you say that Mrs. Carter left Lyons's cocktail party with you, it is certain that she did not."

"I lie?" asked Duval, ominously. "I do not stand for this! I am publicly defamed!"

"Mr. Hand!" cried Mrs. Carter, starting up from her chair. "*Monsieur* Duval has sought merely to protect me. He won't be defamed. He will be shown in his true colors of a chivalrous French gentleman! It was all my fault, anyhow. Yesterday, after luncheon, when I heard that Mr. Lyons had been murdered, I was terrified. I went to *Monsieur* Duval and told him that Mr. Lyons must have been murdered right after I left him! He advised me to say nothing. But of course, when you asked me, Mr. Hand, I had to tell the truth."

Duval sighed dolefully. "*Madame*," he said -dismally, "I have got you into trouble!"

"It's not very serious," smiled Hand. "I presume, Mrs. Carter, that the prospects of notoriety were appalling to you."

Her hands trembled. "My husband," she said, "is a very jealous man. I knew he would draw the very worst conclusions if he heard of it."

"Then he never will," said Hand, bowing to her. "That will be all."

Tears of relief flooded into Mrs. Carter's eyes. *Monsieur* Duval was distressed by them.

Displaying a great deal of concern, he escorted her out of the cabin.

Hand glanced at the count, his eyebrows raised.

"I remain unaltered," asserted the count. "The Frenchman spoke the truth. Fishe and Mahoney—they are the ones! The more I consider it, the more I am convinced

of it. This Gordon person, no doubt, is in league with both of them."

"We have got on, Count."

"To be sure! I suggest that as soon as we land, Fishe, Mahoney and Miss Gordon be immediately placed under arrest!"

"Your suggestions are not to be taken lightly. But I really think we would derive much benefit by going into this fresh information a little more deeply."

The count abruptly rose and rubbed his hands slowly together. "I quite agree with you," he said. "It is my practice to store all information away in my mind, and then later bring it out, bit by bit, and scan it all very carefully. In that way evidence can be judged for its own worth."

"A very admirable procedure," commended Hand.

"Then, Mr. Hand," suggested the count, "let us meet later on, after we have each deliberated individually and bring our ideas together."

Hand smiled impulsively. "You have been very kind, Count," he said. "And I hesitate to impose upon you further. But the fact is that we are pressed for time. I am most anxious to conclude this investigation before we land. I would appreciate it indeed if you will remain with me a little longer."

The count seemed rather nettled. But he tried his best to cover it up. He took his seat again, but his black eyes gleamed irritably.

Hand consulted his watch and glanced sharply up at me. "Jove, Clark," he exclaimed, "it is all but twelve o'clock! Didn't I hear you make an appointment with someone for the stroke of noon?"

## CHAPTER XV

### A SECRET TRANSACTION

**E**VENTS from this point on came with telling effect. I can see now that Hand had laid such complete groundwork that he really commanded the situation. But the greatest skill was employed in shaping the case to its conclusion.

When I left him with the count in my cabin, I knew, of course, what the appointment was that Hand had mentioned. It

seemed that I was about to polish glasses in the dining salon. I set right off to do it.

Passing through the lounging salon, I observed Mr. Fishe and Miss Caldwell sitting by themselves in a far corner by the windows. Joe Mahoney and Miss Gordon, too, had selected chairs apart from everyone else. Monsieur Duval, Mrs. Carter and Mr. Snook sat together. Mr. Snook regarded my progress through the salon with high interest. I studiously paid no attention to any of them.

I brushed aside the curtain and stepped into the dining salon. Mr. Burk was there, white gloves and all, bearing the appearance of someone who is expecting the worst. He peered sharply at me. Then his glance shot upward to the chronometer on the wall. I looked at it and saw that it registered one minute after twelve o'clock.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Mr. Burk.

"We'll get right to work, Mr. Burk."

"Here is your cloth, sir. You have gloves?"

"Good heaven, no! I forgot them completely!"

"I could get you a pair in a moment, sir."

"Please do. We must hurry."

Mr. Burk vanished through a door leading to the galley, reappearing a moment later with a pair of white cotton gloves. I quickly donned them and accepted a square of cloth from him. I nodded and we went silently and assiduously to work. While I polished the glasses on the captain's table, Burk energetically rubbed to a sparkle those on Mr. Stuart's. Toward the end of the job we worked back to back.

"I'd die of shame," confided Mr. Burk, in a stage whisper, "if anybody saw me doing this. It's hardly the work for a chief steward to be doing, Mr. Clark. I wouldn't have done it for everybody."

"The ways," I said, "of a criminologist are strange, Mr. Burk, especially those of Christopher Hand. If you could have seen some of the things he's had me do it would open your eyes. Sometimes one would think he'd gone out of his mind."

"If the stewards," muttered Mr. Burk, "should see me now they'd think I'd gone out of mine! But they won't! I told them I'd fire the first one that stuck his

nose in here until I told them they could."

"It's an excellent thing that you did," I said. "Did you tell them to keep their hands off the glasses?"

"They have their instructions," he assured me. "Not a steward will place his hands on these glasses until Mr. Hand gives the word!"

I set the last glass on the table and stepped back with satisfaction. "Well," I said, "you will not be humiliated today, Mr. Burk, for this menial task is completed."

We stood side by side, cloths in hand, and surveyed our handiwork. It did not cause my breast to swell with pride, but just the same it was a good job. The glasses glittered as though they were made of pure crystal.

"A quarter past twelve," I observed. "Don't you think, Mr. Burk, that you and I might fill these glasses with water now? Then there will be no chance of anyone's touching them until the passengers lift the glasses to drink out of them."

Mr. Burk sighed resignedly. Once again he disappeared through the door to the galley. He brought back with him two large carafes of water.

"They all know," he moaned, "that I'm filling the water glasses. Not too full now, Mr. Clark, the ship is still tossing a bit."

He had to make three trips, that to him must have been misery, to refill the carafes. In the end all the water glasses were supplied. The water did not slosh about in them much, from which I judged that the *Jupiter* must have quite flown out of the storm area.

"And now, Mr. Burk," I said, "you are prepared to deal with the soup?"

A bitter light came into his eyes. "The *Consommé Montmorency*," he muttered, "will be just so much sea water! I'm sick about it!"

"Then I'll leave you," I said quickly. "We have got on famously."

I passed through the curtain and out into the lounging salon. I imagined that everyone had gone to his cabin to get ready for luncheon, for no one remained there. I mounted to the promenade deck, selected a chair near the windows and prepared to wait for Hand. My guess that the *Jupiter*

had left the storm behind was correct. The sky was clear. But below me the ocean looked as though it had been whipped into a fury by the storm that had passed over it.

The motion of the ship that the storm had caused had all but ceased. Miss Fenwick, no doubt, was at the moment offering up prayers of thanks for her deliverance. She would have been in worse case had she been on a steamship. Indeed, strange as it may appear, it occurred to me that an airship is a steadier vessel to travel on than an ocean liner.

Hand soon appeared on the promenade deck. He stood at the end of the passage and beckoned to me. I quickly made my way over to him.

"Where's the count?" I guardedly asked.

"He's in his cabin."

I noticed that Hand stood so that he could look down the passage past the count's door.

"The count," I said, "didn't seem to be in the best of humor when I left you. Have you smoothed his plumage?"

"Oh, yes. How did you make out with the glasses?"

"All clear there. Not so much as a speck on them. Mr. Burk is on guard and the *consommé* whatever-he-called-it is loaded with salt."

"Good job, Clark."

"But about the count. You were playing some sort of game with him. You gave him to understand that you told him everything, but you forgot to mention all the important items."

Hand smiled serenely upon me. "Most discerning, Clark."

"But what is it all about?" I insisted.

"You are right. I am playing a game!" he said, and now his eyes were glittering. "But to do it I must keep abreast of an action that from this moment is accelerating dangerously! I shall be held up by this business of the water glasses! Why in heaven's name didn't I think of that in time to make use of it at breakfast!"

"My word, what is apt to happen?"

He appeared not to hear me. "It isn't absolutely essential for me to go through with it, but I think I can control matters until I have. It's the one thing left to per-

factly round out my case. If only too many of them are not absent from the table because of this cursed airsickness! Not another word, Clark. Here comes Mr. Snook."

Mr. Snook had emerged from his cabin. He wore a peculiar expression, as though the lower portion of his features were endeavoring to hide behind his side-whiskers. He caught himself and gasped tremendously. "My teeth!" he exclaimed, and darted back into his cabin.

"Thank fortune!" breathed Hand. "Quick, these instructions, Clark—I should have given them to you before! We must wait here for the count. We must go into the dining salon with him, and it will help tremendously if a group of the others go in with us. I should like us to crowd through that passage from the lounging salon, do you see? I have every reason to believe that the count will go directly to his cabin from the dining salon and he may leave early. You follow him, Clark, but don't let him see you! After he goes into his cabin you station yourself in your doorway, right next to his, and if he comes out stay with him! Don't let him shake you! It is of the utmost importance that he—ah, Mr. Snook again!"

This time Mr. Snook strutted right up to us. "Ready for luncheon?" he demanded.

"Yes," I smiled. "Your appetite doesn't seem to have been impaired by the storm, Mr. Snook."

He volubly explained what a good sailor he was. In the midst of it Hand interrupted.

"Wonder how many fell a prey to airsickness," he said casually.

"Miss Fenwick, poor soul," replied Mr. Snook, "is down and out. Don't think there are any others, although the Minuets and Mr. Fishe had a touch of it. But here comes the doctor. He can tell you."

Dr. Melcher walked briskly up to us. "Well," he said heartily, "this is a healthy looking lot!"

"Have much trouble, Doctor?" smiled Hand.

"Had a terrific time with Miss Fenwick," he said ruefully. "It's a lucky thing it let up when it did. Mr. Fishe and Miss Minuet

and her brother were all on the verge but they're straightened out now."

At that moment I saw Count von Grugheim leave his cabin. He strode right down the passage to us. Very formally he acknowledged our greetings.

"We might as well go down to the lounging salon," suggested Hand. "About all the others seem to be there. Luncheon should be served in a minute."

We slowly made our way below. A moment later the dining room curtain was drawn back. Everyone seemed to be present but poor Miss Fenwick. A general movement started at once for the tables. Professor Steele succeeded in claiming his rightful place next to the captain's chair. It put him, of course, right next to the count, whom he stiffly ignored.

The count had a habit, that I had noticed repeatedly before, of placing the thumb and first finger of his left hand in the pocket of his vest where he kept his watch. He did it again as he stepped up to his chair. I chanced to be observing him, and I saw him give a start. He quickly recovered himself, but a peculiar light remained in his eyes. He jerked his fingers from his pocket, pulled back his chair and sat down. Thereafter he was unusually taciturn.

The soup served its purpose admirably. It was decidedly salty. After having drunk it I was driven to my water glass more than once. I was no exception. In fact, the stewards were kept busy replenishing the glasses. Countless finger-prints were being made for our edification. Only Miss Fenwick had escaped.

The first one to leave the dining salon was Count von Grugheim. I was the second. As the count hastily departed Hand glanced at Dr. Melcher who sat on the other side of me. At the moment the doctor was carrying on an animated conversation with *Monsieur Duval*. Hand leaned close to me, his sharp eyes on the retreating back of the count.

"Follow him!" he whispered tensely. "Don't let him get off alone except to his own cabin!"

From where I sat I could look out into the lounging salon. As soon as the count had disappeared from view up the com-

panionway, I laid down my knife and fork. I tried to look as dismal as possible.

"Afraid," I muttered, "I didn't get through the storm so well as I thought. Pardon me!"

I rose and made a hasty exit. Out of the tail of my eye I caught Mr. Snook snickering at me. Halting unsteadily in the little passage, I put my arm out to the wall. Glancing cautiously up I just caught a glimpse of the count as he passed from view round the promenade deck. I waited a second or two, then I stepped out in the lounging salon. The count had disappeared. I quickly mounted the companionway. A few steps took me where I could look down the passage that the count had been heading for. I was fortunate enough to catch sight of him as he stepped into his cabin.

What had taken him to his cabin with such dispatch I had not altogether fathomed. Evidently Hand had, for he had predicted this very thing. I gave up the riddle as soon as I had propounded it and gained my own door. There I had other things to think about.

If the count came out, what was I expected to do? It would be a little awkward to step right up and accost him. I decided that if he opened his door I should probably hear him. I intended, then, to draw back into my cabin and then step out, meeting him as if quite by accident. I perceived that I should have to cover the whole thing with a lot of persiflage and got busily to work thinking up what I should say.

But the count did not leave his cabin. Hand was quite long in appearing. When he did he had with him a steward, the man carrying a large tray covered with a white cloth. From the general contour of it I guessed rightly that here were the glasses just used by the passengers. Hand opened his door and motioned the steward to enter. Then he stepped over to me.

"Still in his cabin?" he whispered.

"Yes. What took you so long?"

"Had to label those glasses with the names of the people who drank out of them. That's all done, at least."

"Look here. I was watching the count in the dining salon. I'm quite certain that

he discovered something in his vest pocket that startled him."

"He did. It was a note. Did you see him read it?"

"No."

"Well, he did. He read it during luncheon as surreptitiously as I had slipped it into his vest pocket just before luncheon."

"My word! You slipped it into his pocket?"

"While we were all going into the dining salon. He can't possibly suspect who did it."

"But what did it say?"

"It told him to go to his cabin immediately after luncheon. It also instructed him to stay there until another note is thrust under his door. If he follows out his instructions he will read the second note, but he will make no effort to learn who passed it under the door to him."

"Hum-m. I'll wager it'll be you who passes it under the door to him."

He grinned and laid a hand on my shoulder. "Excellent deduction, Clark. But I can't waste any more time with you. I have learned so much that what I have to do now is nothing but a test. But if it works out as I expect, my case is all but complete! Stay here and keep tabs on the count."

He clapped me lightly on the shoulder and disappeared into his cabin. The steward emerged from it and walked quickly aft, disappearing round the corner of the passage. I waited a matter of twenty minutes. Farrington and Mr. Snook came down the passage and entered their cabins. I managed to keep out of their sight. All was quiet in the cabin next to mine, where the count waited for his second note of instructions.

I stood in my doorway, eyes cast down, thinking deeply. All at once I found myself peering at a pair of shoes. With a start I glanced up and beheld Hand standing before me. He placed his lips close to my ear.

"Clark," he whispered, "the test was a complete success. I know the man who drank alone with Lyons! We have the man who used the seventh cocktail glass!"

I turned excitedly and looked into his

gray eyes. A fire smoldered in them. In my features he read the question that leaped to my lips.

"Don't ask me who it is, Clark. I dare not tell you. That honest face of yours with its abominable habit of displaying all your emotions nearly gave me away before the count this morning. You recall how I had to turn you away from his door so that he wouldn't see that wretched, tense expression on your face!"

"But consider how expertly I made my exit from the dining salon to trail the count!"

"Yes, yes, Clark, but I can't waste time arguing here! I must satisfy the count's curiosity. He must be burning up with it!"

He snatched from his pocket two pieces of paper, both folded into four. He unfolded each and glanced at them. Then he folded them again and returned one to his pocket. Stealthily he approached the count's door. Crouching before it, he flicked the note between the door and the sill and tapped lightly with his finger-nail. Waiting not an instant, he shot upright and bounded to my door.

Before the glare in his eyes I retreated into the cabin. Like a cat he sprang in and all but closed the door. Placing his ear to the inch-wide crack between the door and the jamb, he stood there for at least five minutes, as motionless as a statue. Then he closed the door softly and grasped my arm.

"He will carry out his instructions," whispered Hand. "But you stay here, Clark, until I return. Now we approach the supreme hazard!"

He opened the door and peered up and down the passage. Then he stepped quickly forth and strode off in the direction of the promenade deck. I advanced as far as the door and watched him. He stepped out upon the promenade deck and glanced swiftly about. He started to walk out of my range of vision but something halted him. Warily approaching the rail, he glanced down to the lounging salon. And there he waited, as tense as any wild animal stalking its prey.

I began to think that Hand would never move again. But suddenly his head

snapped about, and he darted a glance in my direction. Then his hand flashed into his pocket and withdrew the second note. He held it over the rail. And then I saw it flutter down into the lounging salon.

For a second or so Hand remained motionless. Then he leaped away from the rail. His long legs carried him swiftly toward me. As he passed me he barely slackened his pace and turned his head.

"Quick!" he hissed. "Shut your door and follow me!"

I all but had to break into a run to keep him from distancing me. With an apprehensive glance over his shoulder, he whisked round the corner and disappeared into the connecting passage at the rear. I caught up with him at the door to the catwalks. He seized my arm and pushed me through. Then he stepped through after me and closed the door.

"Good!" he muttered. "We made it!"

"You delivered the second note?"

"I did! Fortune smiled upon us there, Clark. I had a plan for delivering it, but a much simpler method presented itself. I found my man talking to another in the lounging salon. There was no one else there, and I was alone on the promenade deck. The other man left, leaving my fellow standing directly below me and quite alone. All I had to do was to drop the note at his feet. For all he knows it fell right out of the sky."

"What is the purpose of these mysterious notes?"

"They arranged a meeting, right here, in slightly over a half hour from now. Neither knows whom he will meet, but they will both show up. Rest assured of that, Clark."

I reached out and clutched him excitedly by the shoulder. "Ah, I begin to see!" I said. "What are we going to do here?"

"Look over your head, Clark."

Had a deadly snake hung directly over my head I should not have glanced up more swiftly. But all I saw was the gas-bag resting on the white cord netting. "W-what did you see?"

"Only what you are seeing now. You notice, Clark, how the helium-bag rests on the ceiling of the cabin structure? Well, your station is lying on the roof of the

cabin, with the helium-bag resting on you."

"What! Why—why, I can't get up there!"

"It's quite simple, Clark. Come out here."

He led me over to the starboard side. We mounted the little steps to the gangway, and Hand guided me over a few feet to where the cabin structure ended. He pointed to it.

"There is," said he, "a duralumin beam there along the edge of that cabin structure. You can wriggle along it, Clark, until your body is completely under the helium-bag. In order for you to be entirely concealed it will, I'm afraid, be necessary for you to rest a portion of your weight on the linen ceiling of the cabin below. The cabin is unoccupied, and the linen is strong material. Understand, it is not necessary for you to see what goes on, but it is for you to hear it. But every minute we stay here is dangerous! Come, Clark, up under that helium-bag with you!"

I confess that I hung back. "I don't care much about climbing up there."

"It's perfectly simple!"

"Well—all right."

On hands and knees I crawled fearfully up the sloping, linen-covered girder. I discovered, to my relief, that it was not such a difficult matter to get under the helium-bag. But when it came to resting a good portion of my anatomy on the linen ceiling of the cabin my heart did some queer antics.

And Hand kept urging me farther from the edge.

"That's it, Clark, fine!" he commended at length.

He had descended to the short catwalk that ran from the little platform outside the passengers' quarters. I lifted my head and peered over the edge at him.

"See here," I demanded, "how long must I stay in this abominable place?"

He glanced at his wrist watch. "They should be here," he replied, "in exactly twenty-four minutes. Draw your pistol, Clark. But be careful not to rip that gas-bag; helium doesn't support combustion and it doesn't support life either. If you are discovered, shoot without asking ques-

tions. After they have met, go back to my cabin."

With this advice cheerfully given, Hand left me. A matter of a few minutes later found me nearly suffocated. I managed, however, to arrange a channel in the folds of the gas-bag that brought air to my nostrils.

"So you got here, did you?"

This sudden remark nearly had the effect of dislodging me from my precarious roost. The voice I distinctly recognized.

"Yes, I got here. I'm not surprised to find you here, Count."

This voice I also recognized. I had heard it twice before. Then as now I knew that it was disguised. Before I quite realized what I was doing, I lifted my head and peered over the edge.

On the little platform stood two men. One was Count Ludwig von Grugheim and the other was the hooded man!

I hastily dropped my head.

"Where is the document?" demanded the count.

"You may have it," replied the hooded man, "in exchange for the draft you are carrying with you."

There was a pause. "How did you know that I have a draft in my possession?"

"Quite unconsciously you mentioned it once within my hearing. It is, to be specific, a draft for five hundred thousand dollars, made out to the order of cash. But we have no time to question each other! You may have the document in exchange for the draft—quick!"

"How do I know the document is genuine?"

"How do I know your draft is worth the paper it's written on? But I'm willing to take a chance on that."

"The draft is certified."

"And so is the document—by the lives of four men! Come, are you ready?"

"Yes."

Once again I could not resist the temptation to raise my head. But they were so intent that there was little likelihood of their spying me.

The count had taken out his watch. He had opened it and was twisting his fingertips against the inside of the back. A little

gold disc fell out. From behind it he took a small square of paper, neatly folded.

The hooded man was also busy. He took what appeared to be a fountain pen from his vest pocket. But when he had unscrewed the cap I saw that the hard rubber case contained a cylinder of paper.

They hastily made the exchange. Each hurriedly inspected his new acquisition. The count's, I saw when he unrolled it, was a large piece of very flimsy tissue paper. He ran his eyes over it.

"This appears to be what I wanted," he muttered.

"I hope this draft is as good!" growled the other.

The count swiftly folded his piece of tissue paper and inserted it into the secret compartment of his watch. The hooded man rolled up his draft and placed it in the hard rubber case. Without a word he turned and walked off along the catwalk toward the port side of the ship. It had been over there that we had found his coat and hood.

Count von Grugheim snapped his watch shut. He thrust it into his vest pocket and took a long, deep breath. Smiling with satisfaction, he walked through the door into the passengers' quarters.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE COUNT'S GESTURE

I WAS in a fever to find Christopher Hand. But I was also mindful of the probable consequences should I tumble from the cabin structure. And although the count had removed himself, I was not so sure about the sinister person with whom he had concluded his secret business. It was several minutes before I had gained the door to the passengers' quarters.

Carefully opening the door, I peered cautiously out into the passage. No one was in sight. Avoiding the passage in which the count's cabin and ours were located, I made my way swiftly to the promenade deck by way of the other passage. A steward, peering anxiously about, stood on the promenade deck over near the entrance to the other passage. It was Oakly, and he was fingering a white enve-

lope. He hurried over to me. He looked around nervously.

"Mr. Hand asked me," he said, "to stay here and watch out for you, sir. I was to give you this."

He handed me the envelope and turned to depart.

"Wait a minute!" I said.

He stopped and returned, standing respectfully a few feet from me. I glanced at the envelope and saw that it bore my name in my friend's handwriting. Turning it over, I saw that he had sealed it with his signet ring.

I ripped the envelope open and extracted from it a note. It read:

*Clark—Get Count von Grugheim, Oswald Farrington and Professor Steele, and all four of you go at once to the captain's cabin. When you have all entered the cabin, close the door and call my name. Summon Farrington first and tell him to keep his eyes on the count!—Hand.*

It is hardly necessary to say that the note puzzled me mightily. But it is my habit to carry out Hand's orders as speedily as possible and not to waste time trying to fathom his methods. I stepped over to the rail and glanced about.

Oswald Farrington sat by himself in a chair on the starboard side of the promenade deck. Neither the count nor Professor Steele was to be seen. I motioned the steward over to me.

"Do you know where Professor Steele is?" I demanded.

"No, sir."

"Well, find him! Tell him to join me over there where Mr. Farrington is sitting. And find Count von Grugheim, too, and give him the same message. You may find them both in their cabins. Don't waste any time!"

I wheeled about and strode over to Farrington. He was staring grimly out of a window. He glanced sharply up at me. I dropped into a chair beside him.

"Farrington," I said quickly, "are you willing to cooperate with Christopher Hand?"

He peered at me shrewdly. "In what way?"

"This."

I handed him the note that the steward had just delivered to me. He read it through and frowned at the window.

"Count von Grugheim, eh?" he muttered. "What do you know about von Grugheim?"

"We know a good deal. But you'll have to find it out from Hand himself."

"I know a good deal about him myself! I've been keeping my eyes on him as much as possible. Count von Grugheim is a foreign agent, no doubt about that! He's the one I'm watching, but there are two other foreigners on board."

"Mr. Fische and *Monsieur Duval*?"

"Yes. There's little chance of either of them being in this. Our men, on my instructions by wireless, have looked them up carefully. Fische met Miss Caldwell in London several weeks ago and he's been trailing her all over Europe ever since. Duval is going to America on legitimate business; they've established that."

"Yes, I think the count is—but here he comes! Ah, and the professor, too. That steward routed them out in a hurry."

The count and the professor met, perforce, as they came up to us. They coldly ignored each other. Farrington and I rose to our feet. I stuffed Hand's note into my pocket and addressed them.

"I have requested you gentlemen," I said, "to join us here because there is something that I should like to call to your attention. Will you accompany me to the captain's cabin?"

The professor frowned a little. "Why the captain's cabin?" he asked.

"Come," said Farrington, "let's not quibble. I, for one, will accompany Mr. Clark."

"Of course, I shall too," said the count politely.

"Very well, then," agreed the professor.

I led them hastily round the promenade deck and down the passage to the captain's door. I stepped aside to allow them to precede me in. Even Farrington appeared a trifle uncertain. I followed in after them and closed the door. The still, sheeted figure of the captain's body lying on the bed sent a momentary chill through me.

I was concerned to discover that Hand was not in the cabin. In fact, aside from

the body of the captain, the four of us were alone. My companions were regarding me curiously. There was but one more instruction for me to carry out, but I felt a trifle strange about doing it. I cleared my throat.

"Hand," I called. "Hand, we are here!"

Curiosity deepened on the expressions of all three. And then, as though we had heard a ghost, we all started nervously.

"Excellent, Clark!" replied a sepulchral voice, but a voice, nevertheless, that I instantly recognized. "All three of the gentlemen are with you?"

"Yes," I called; "Farrington, the professor and Count von Grugheim!"

"Then pay attention! You are about to be joined by the murderer of Captain Finch. He will enter the cabin in exactly the same fashion as he did when the captain found him there rifling the safe. Clark, keep him covered!"

I felt the hair starting at the back of my neck. The faces of the other three were drawn and tense. I drew my pistol and waited, breathlessly.

"Good God, look!"

The count was responsible for the hoarse exclamation. A seam in the slope of the linen ceiling above the window had parted, and a foot slowly appeared through it. The seam split farther. Another foot followed the first, and then a pair of legs clad in dark blue trousers. The man slowly lowered himself, and I saw with a thrill that he was wearing a brown coat that was far too large for him. His feet groped about and touched the deck, just in from the window.

For a moment he stood motionless on his toes, his back to us and his raised arms and head protruding through the seam in the ceiling. Then he bobbed his head forward, thrust against whatever he had been clinging to through the ceiling, and spun about to face us.

A black hood incased his head, and through two slits in it his eyes glittered defiantly at us.

"What in heaven's name!" gasped the professor.

"Stay where you are, Count!" snapped Farrington.

Count von Grugheim had started swiftly toward the door. Farrington whipped out

an automatic and swung it on him. I held my pistol directed steadily at the hooded man.

"What do you mean, sir!" said the count angrily. "Will you tell me what you think you are doing?"

"No," retorted Farrington. "But I'll tell you what I'm going to do if you move another step—I'll shoot you through the leg!"

Professor Steele hastily drew a pistol and aimed it at the ceiling. "Who is this coming through?" he cried. "I have him covered!"

Another pair of long legs slid through the split seam. A moment later Hand stood before us. With a dubious expression Steele lowered his weapon.

Hand glanced swiftly about, his eyes kindling with satisfaction at the scene. He rubbed his hands briskly together.

"Everything seems to have fallen out well here," he said. "Good work, Farrington."

Count von Grugheim drew himself up. "Mr. Hand," he said heatedly, "will you tell this madman to put that gun away!"

Hand paid no attention to him. He turned to me. "They met, Clark?"

"They did," I replied, without taking my eyes off the hooded man.

"And the count purchased the document?" asked Hand.

"He has it," I said, "in the back of his watch. This fellow with the hood has a draft for five hundred thousand dollars in a hollow fountain pen in his vest pocket."

"What!" cried the professor.

"It is indeed a shame, Clark," smiled Hand, "that you can't get the Congressional Medal for this."

He walked behind me and approached the count, being careful not to place himself in Farrington's line of fire. Count von Grugheim glared at him.

"What treacherous plot is this?" he snarled.

"I suggest, Count," said Hand pleasantly, "that you raise your hands above your head."

"If you dare lay hands on me," grated the count, "I'll have you jailed for it!"

Farrington swayed the muzzle of his automatic ominously back and forth. "Re-

member your legs, von Grugheim!" he growled.

The count choked with rage but he slowly elevated his arms. Hand quickly went over him. He slipped a blunt automatic from the count's hip and dropped it into his own pocket. Then he took possession of the count's watch and chain. Von Grugheim's black eyes flashed dangerously. His lips drew back tightly over his white teeth. Slowly he lowered his arms.

Again Hand walked round behind me and approached the hooded man. The fellow made no move to prevent Hand from taking the fountain pen from his vest pocket. Hand stepped back. He dropped the fountain pen into his pocket and peered down at the watch in his hand.

"How do you open this thing, Clark?"

"The back of the case opens up. There is a gold disc over the works that unscrews. The document is behind it."

"My word! I must say, my boy, you astound me!"

He quietly opened the case and commenced unscrewing the disc as the count had done. Overcome with rage, the count lunged forward.

"Give me that watch!" he snarled.

"Get back there!" snapped Farrington.

The count, glowering upon Farrington, slowly retreated. Hand paid no attention to the flare-up. He quietly continued unscrewing the disc until it fell out in his hand. He picked the tissue paper out from behind it and carefully examined the watch.

"Very ingenious," he mused. "The case is about twice the size necessary to accommodate the works. Leaves room for quite a good-sized compartment in the back. But here, my dear Count, I have no wish to steal your watch. Just let me screw this disc back in . . . so . . . and close the case . . . there you are!"

The count snatched the watch viciously from his outstretched hand. Frowning fiercely, he returned the watch to his pocket. Hand unfolded the tissue paper and scanned it.

All at once Professor Steele fell into a tense crouch. He jerked up his automatic and leveled it with deadly determination at Hand.

"Turn that document over to me," he commanded in a low, trembling voice, "or, by heaven, I'll put an end to you!"

My blood ran cold. Hand could not have foreseen this ghastly turn of events. Every action that had taken place in the cabin I had seen out of the tail of my eye. Never once had I taken my attention off the hooded man. I was peering tensely at his eyes, glittering through the slits in the hood, and now I saw them kindle with hope.

There we stood in deadly silence while time seemed to end—Farrington's automatic held steadily upon the count, Steele fiercely menacing Hand, and I covering the hooded man. I realized with sickening dread that the slightest misunderstood movement could reduce the cabin to a shambles in the space of the next second. Our very existence seemed to merge into thin air.

"Very well, Professor," Hand quietly capitulated. "I must say that you have the upper hand of me. Allow me to congratulate you."

He carefully folded the document and, with an elaborate flourish, presented it to Professor Steele. The professor greedily snatched it from him. He thrust it into his trousers pocket, keeping his hand there with it. He slowly backed against the wall, glaring about, and swung his automatic menacingly.

"Let me warn you," he gritted, "not to try to recover this!"

"I won't," said Hand; "I give you my word. And now, Farrington, I think we have enjoyed the company of Count von Grugheim long enough. There is no action that we can take against him. Indeed, Count, I must salute you as an adversary against whom it has been an honor to pit myself. Patriotism drove you to accepting a mission that might easily have cost you your life. We can say no more for ourselves."

Astonishment wiped out the glitter in the count's eyes. It was several seconds before he spoke.

"Then, Mr. Hand," he said, "you can understand the bitter disappointment I am feeling at this moment. But the first thing I shall do when I reach New York will be

to invite both you and Mr. Clark to have dinner with me."

Hand stepped over to the door and opened it. "And we shall accept," he said. "I will destroy the draft, Count. I'm sorry that I can't return your pistol until we meet in New York."

"You may drop it into the sea, for all I care."

"Instead, with your permission, it shall become one of my most prized mementoes."

"I should prefer that! And now, am I permitted to leave?"

Hand smiled and nodded. The count stepped out into the passage. He faced about and bowed to Hand but he did not smile.

"*Auf Wiedersehen,*" he said.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HOOD

FROM what I could see of him, Oswald Farrington seemed uncertain about letting the count march off like that. But he did nothing to interfere. Hand closed the door and turned briskly to face us.

"I suggest," he said harshly, "that you other two men assist Clark in covering that man. He hasn't the count's excuse. He has attempted to betray his country in as abominable a fashion as I care to imagine! The memory of one of his victims I hold in no regard, but an honored corpse lies there felled by his treacherous hand!"

Farrington frowned at the quiet outline under the sheet on the bed. He stepped up beside me and held his automatic on the hooded man. I could hear his breath hissing through his teeth. I thought for a minute that he was going to shoot the man down where he stood. The eyes through the slits in the hood glared malevolently at him.

Professor Steele continued to peer narrowly at Hand. "You'll not throw me off my guard!" he snapped. "I'm watching you, Mr. Hand. Remember that!"

"Who is this animal?" harshly demanded Farrington, viciously poking his automatic at the hooded man. "Take off that cursed hood!"

The man's eyes gazed steadily at Far-

rington. But he made no move to carry out the order to remove his hood. Hand stepped to the center of the cabin.

"One moment, Farrington," he said. "Let me talk to this fellow. Now, do you admit that you committed this triple murder to gain possession of a valuable document?"

The man's reply was to shake his head slowly in the negative.

"I hardly thought you would," said Hand. "Perhaps when you hear how I tracked you down you will decide to. Should you care to hear it?"

For a moment the eyes peered thoughtfully through the slits in the hood. Then the man nodded his head.

"I suppose you would," said Hand, peering keenly at the fellow. "But I shall wait to do that until we are in court. I think it will suffice to tell you exactly what your actions have been. So far as I'm concerned they began with your going into Lyons's cabin yesterday shortly before twelve o'clock, when the guests at his cocktail party had all departed. You had a cocktail with him. There came a knock on the door. You dived into the lavatory and closed the door. You didn't want to be seen drinking cocktails. Captain Finch knew how to deal with a member of his crew who disobeyed orders by drinking while the ship was in the air, especially if the offender was one of his officers."

Farrington started. "What!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say this is one of the *Jupiter's* officers?"

"I do," said Hand. "Let me proceed. You stood in the lavatory. It was a steward who had knocked on the door. You waited for Lyons to get rid of him. But before he could do that Count von Grugheim forced his way into Lyons's cabin. The steward departed, and the count closed the door. You overheard the count offer Lyons a draft for five hundred thousand dollars for a document belonging to the United States Department of State.

"The count left without obtaining the document. Lyons was drunk. No doubt, the count had terrified him. He quite forgot that you were hiding in his lavatory. He must have decided that the time had come when he no longer dared to keep the

document. In his drunken condition he probably muttered about it. You positively learned, at any rate, that it lay hidden in his cigarette-case."

"In the cigarette-case!" cried Farrington.

Hand frowned and nodded. "Lyons," he said, "no doubt intended to hurl the cigarette-case into the sea. A chance for a fortune was slipping from your grasp. You hastily put on the white cotton gloves that are a part of the uniform of the ship's officers. Then you armed yourself with Lyons's razor, that you found in the chest above the wash-basin. Lyons stepped over to the window, the cigarette-case in his hand, ready to drop it into the ocean. You slowly opened the lavatory door. Seizing the man from behind you jerked him into the lavatory and slit his throat!"

Now I could read fear in the eyes of the hooded man. But he moved not a muscle.

"You threw the razor out the lavatory port hole," went on Hand, "and then you threw your blood-soaked gloves out after it. Then, after robbing Lyons's body of all his jewelry to cover up the real purpose of the crime, you washed your hands and inspected the cigarette-case. You didn't know how to get the document out of it and you decided to hide it until you could examine it at your leisure. The stern seemed the safest place. But you didn't want to be recognized going aft. You took that brown coat from a hanger in Lyons's lavatory and hastily left the cabin. In the emergency exit compartment you exchanged coats. You no longer looked like a ship's officer. And because Lyons was much heavier than you are, the coat concealed your figure.

"Making your way to the stern, by way of the baggage and freight compartments and the catwalks, you hid the cigarette-case and quickly returned to the emergency exit compartment. Then you crawled out to the port gangway and hid the brown coat under the helium-bag on top of the cabin structure. You got back to the passengers' quarters in time to answer Captain Finch's summons to Lyons's cabin.

"But your hasty plans had not worked to perfection. Enright had seen something that made him suspect you. You scribbled a warning and somehow delivered it to him,

threatening his life if he told what he had seen. When I questioned the passengers shortly after I boarded the ship, you hid behind the curtain to the dining salon to make sure he wouldn't incriminate you. He disregarded his warning and died by your bullets as a result of it.

"Had you left matters alone, we might never have found you. But the cigarette-case had fallen into our hands, and you were determined to regain possession of it. It required dangerous work, and you completed your disguise to perform it. You fashioned that hood out of a bag made to contain a pair of dress shoes, and you wore it on several occasions. One, I fancy, was when you stole into Mr. Fishe's cabin and planted Lyons's jewelry in his bag. But I really think you intended that for Mr. White who had been booked for the cabin that Mr. Fishe got into by mistake. It might have been better had you not separated the cigarette-case from the rest of the jewelry, because it gave me a clue to the especial value of the cigarette-case. I examined it closely, and found a secret receptacle in the heavy hinge of it. In the receptacle I discovered a document of terrible importance."

"And now I have it, thank fortune!" breathed Professor Steele.

"I had intended," continued Hand, "to bait a trap with the cigarette-case and apprehend you when you attempted to steal it again. Unfortunately the captain got it from me. The matter was so delicate that I dared not take Captain Finch into my confidence. I proceeded along other lines to detect you.

"The most fortunate circumstances prevailed when I discovered the hiding place of the coat and hood. For it is the hood that has betrayed you!"

Farrington glanced sharply at him. "What under the sun do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just this," replied Hand grimly. "I felt sure that in one way or another, after I had found the coat and hood, I could trick him into wearing them again. And I arranged matters so that if he did put it on again, I would know who wore the hood."

"But how?" insisted Farrington.

Hand gazed steadily at our prisoner, his pale eyes glinting grimly. The body of the hooded man stiffened.

"Among our finger-print materials," said Hand slowly, "Clark and I have a bottle of gold dust. You know as well as I do, Farrington, that it is used to accentuate finger prints. I took that little bottle out to the port companionway where we had found the coat and hood and I sprinkled gold dust into the hood. I knew if the man wore it again I would find gold particles glittering in his hair."

I saw those eyes looking out of the hood become dull and hopeless. Farrington glanced admiringly at Hand.

"There was little doubt," said Hand, "that eventually I would get my man. But by the time my plan worked out, and I had identified him, it was too late! I found a man with yellow particles glinting in his hair, but not until just after Captain Finch had been murdered!"

"If only we had confided in you!" bitterly muttered Farrington.

"The story is nearly told," said Hand. "I managed to arrange a meeting between the count and this murderer on the little platform aft of the passengers' quarters. Clark lay hidden on the ceiling of the cabin structure above them and witnessed the count purchase the document."

"Only to lose it to me!" snapped the professor.

Hand flashed him an amused glance. The professor's fingers closed tighter about his automatic.

"When the transaction had been completed," went on Hand, "this fellow returned to the port catwalk to dispose of the coat and hood. I fancy that, having no further use for them, he intended to dispose of them by dropping them through a window along the gangway. But I had climbed from the emergency exit compartment to the port catwalk, and I met him as he stepped up to it. He found a pistol thrust into his masked face, and he had nothing to do but surrender. I forced him to precede me along the catwalk until we had arrived just over the captain's cabin. I had noticed before that a seam had been ripped open in the ceiling of this cabin. It

was not very difficult to do, since the officers' cabins are not sound-proofed, the walls and ceilings being nothing but a single thickness of linen. I made him climb down through the ceiling to join you in here, just as he climbed through it to steal Lyons's jewelry out of the captain's safe."

"And Captain Finch surprised him in here while he was at it," mused Farrington, "and was murdered as a result. This man must have freed the stowaway and provided him with a parachute, just before he came here to steal Lyons's jewelry.

"Exactly," nodded Hand. "He no doubt worked it all out beforehand with Miguel. They waited until the *Jupiter* passed over a ship that the stowaway could jump to. This man stole the jewelry and threw all of it into the sea but the cigarette-case, and no doubt he did the same with that after he had got the document out of it. The price Miguel paid for his liberty was to assume the guilt of having stolen the jewelry. The poor fool probably didn't know that he also assumed the guilt of having murdered Lyons and Enright. And he couldn't have known that the captain would surprise this man in here and be murdered by him."

"It was nice work of yours," said Farrington, with a shake of his head, "to notice the split seam in this ceiling. I didn't!"

"My dear fellow," protested Hand, "surely you don't think that such a thing would escape me. I noticed that immediately after the captain's murder had been discovered. I grant you, though, that those linen ceiling-strips are stretched so tightly that the seam, although the stitches have been cut, closes itself quite nicely."

Again Farrington shook his head. "Mr. Hand," he said, "I must say that you have made a complete job of it."

"There is good advice in that!" said the professor sharply. "Your job is completed, Mr. Hand! I sense that you are either dishonest or you doubt our identities. If you make the slightest attempt to regain this document, I will assume that you are basely dishonest, and it will be the worse for you!"

"Have no fear, Professor," said Hand

quietly. "You will find that document quite as unsatisfactory as the count would have, had he been able to hold on to it."

The professor suddenly appeared ill. "What do you mean?" he weakly demanded.

"Only," replied Hand, "that it is thoroughly fictitious, and worthless. I wrote it myself and substituted it in the cigarette-case for the authentic one. I have told you what I intend to do with the real one."

"I—I—w—what?" gasped the professor.

"Well," Farrington sighed resignedly, "I surrender, Mr. Hand. I confess that I'm reconciled to letting you handle it in your own way.

"But now, by heaven, I'll get that fellow's hood off him! I want to see who he is!"

He stepped truculently forward. The man held up a restraining hand. Farrington halted uncertainly. Through the slits in the hood, I saw the man close his eyes. His voice broke hollowly upon us.

"Mr. Hand," he said, "I am ready to admit everything. But you won't get me into the electric chair!"

His eyes flew open and glared piercingly at us. And then, before we could move to stop him, he spun about and hurled himself at the window, shattering it to pieces. As he disappeared through the splintered isinglass Farrington and I with a gasp of horror leaped over to it. The man's body, spread-eagled and slowly turning in the air, was growing smaller and smaller. I passed my hand over my eyes and staggered back.

"My God!" hoarsely cried Farrington. "Who was he?"

Hand thoughtfully took from his pocket the hard-rubber case. Unscrewing the cap, he drew forth the count's draft. After glancing at it for a moment, he deliberately tore it to pieces. He screwed the cap back on the little case and held it up for us to see.

"Not a fountain pen, Clark," said Hand softly. "This is the holder of a clinical thermometer. When the *Jupiter* sails again, she will have a new surgeon in place of the late Dr. Melcher. I rather hoped he'd do that."

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# Death Without Notice

By Wyatt Blassingame



"I STRUCK him with my riding crop," Mr. Crane said. "It left a pretty gash across his cheek."

Mrs. Crane made a slight grimace of distaste. Her face was small and beautiful, yet somehow like that of a cat. She said, "You should have got rid of him a long while ago, Arthur. He's always been impudent."

"I hope you hit him a beastly good blow," Peter Feasdale said. "I never liked the man's expression." His voice had a strong English accent which didn't quite ring true. It reminded Oliver Crane of Americans who spent one year in England and came back too-Oxford to be understood.

Oliver Crane thought of the groom his father had struck—a small, fox-faced man with shifty eyes and a twitching mouth.

Oliver said bitterly, "I expect several persons were standing by so that Bill couldn't get up and knock hell out of you."

Mrs. Crane raised her thin eyebrows and said, "Oliver!" She was no older than her stepson.

"I'm not too old to take care of myself," Arthur Crane said. His hard mouth was curled in a sneer. "I've been threatened before, but no one carried it out."

"Before?" Peter Feasdale's voice was anxious. "You mean that groom threatened you?"

Arthur Crane laughed shortly. "Not only me, but you. And all the rest of you. He lay there in the hay where I knocked him and cursed. He said he'd kill me and all the rest of us for being 'so damn stuck up.' Those are the words he used."

The butler was removing the entrées.

Mrs. Crane swayed her cat-like body very slightly to one side to keep from touching him. Oliver Crane saw the corner of the man's thin, sensitive mouth jerk slightly, go expressionless again. "I hope you had him arrested, Arthur, for threatening us," the woman said.

Arthur Crane fingered at his white dinner tie. "Why should I? I've been threatened before. Those rats never have nerve enough to try anything."

Oliver Crane said pleasantly, "Bill Weeks used to be in a circus. He was a sword swallower and magician, I think. He might find some way to get you." He turned to the girl seated on his left, and his voice changed, went bitter. "You won't marry into this family if you have any sense. The whole world hates us and I don't think we can blame them. You see the sort of people we are."

The girl was very beautiful. She had blond hair and wide, violet eyes. Her mouth was large and soft. Bare shoulders curved delicately into high breasts which moulded themselves into a white evening gown. She tried to laugh, but her eyes were serious.

Oliver Crane gulped slightly and stifled an impulse to reach out and take her hand. He'd never gotten used to her beauty; it was such a simple and open thing that it caught him by surprise. It didn't hold the hint of darkness and intrigue that he could see in the face of his stepmother. He'd proposed to Nell Ellis and she'd accepted, but he had insisted that she spend a week-end at the Crane's country home and meet his family. Oliver Crane wasn't proud of his family. He turned now to look at them as the next course was served.

There was Arthur Crane, white hair brushed back from his forehead like a lion's mane, hard eyes, hooked nose, hard mouth and chin. Sixty-five, but as arrogant and domineering as he had been thirty years before. Then he'd inherited a small fortune, had built it into a big one through ruthlessness. There were men who said he had no weakness, but Oliver Crane knew otherwise. His father's weakness was pretty women.

Two years ago he'd married Stella Feas-

dale. She was in her late twenties and beautiful. Dark and sleek like a cat. Her dark hair was pulled back from her small face. Her body was slim and lithe and showed in her black evening dress like the body of a snake. Her whole being had a distinctly animal look. Oliver had never seen her before she married his father. She was supposed to be English, but at times he thought there was the accent of Chicago in her voice and her attitude with servants never showed the democracy which usually marks the real aristocrat. All the servants hated her and her brother.

Brother? Oliver looked at the man across the table. Peter Feasdale was in his early thirties. He had black hair parted in the middle. He was medium-sized and his features, dark eyes, small mouth, long chin, were regular and rather handsome. But men looked at him twice and didn't like him. Oliver had seen him kissing Mrs. Crane on several occasions with what may have been brotherly love.

Mrs. Crane spoke sharply, "What's the trouble, Arthur?" Oliver turned toward his father.

The man had slid forward to the edge of his chair. His eyes were puzzled, but his mouth was twisted with pain. His big shoulders were twitching under his dinner coat. There were large beads of sweat on his forehead and cheeks.

Oliver Crane leaned forward. That wasn't sweat on his father's face.

It was blisters!

Mr. Crane continued to twitch. He raised one hand toward his face, stopped it, stared at it. "My God!" he said. His voice sounded choked.

"What is it, Arthur?" Mrs. Crane asked irritably. "Why can't you sit still?"

"My God!" the man said again. His eyes were getting large in his face. Fear and pain began to show plainly. "Look!" He thrust his hand out over the table.

Oliver Crane leaned forward. He pulled a deep breath through his nostrils. There were large white blisters showing on his father's hand and even as he watched others began to appear. Mr. Crane put out his left hand. There were blisters on it, too.

He touched a blister on the back of his right hand. It broke and the flesh under it was raw and nasty. "God!" the man said again. "Good God!"

It was very still in the dining room for a half second. Mrs. Crane shuddered. "Ugh! I wish you wouldn't look like that, Arthur."

Her habit of repeatedly calling Crane by name had always antagonized the man. His mouth jerked open, his eyes glittered. He flung himself back in his chair.

Abruptly he screamed. He clawed at his hips where they had scraped on the chair. The chair crashed over. "Oh, God! Goddam! Goddam!" Crane was shrieking, writhing on the floor. The blisters on one side of the face broke, leaving the flesh raw and bloody. He kept thrashing about, a man gone mad!

It seemed to Oliver Crane that he sat a long while in his chair, staring at the man on the floor. There was no feeling of fear or sympathy in him at first. Only amazement. He sat stunned, unable to realize what had happened. A few minutes before that thing had been his father, now. . . .

The screams beat high and shrill and terrific against his ears. He saw his father's face. It was like a bloody steak from which black eyes glittered.

Then Oliver Crane was moving. His chair skidded across the hardwood floor as he shoved it backward. With two strides he reached his father, knelt beside him, caught the older man's shoulders. Arthur Crane's voice jumped higher, wilder. He beat with pulpy hands at Oliver's arms. "Don't touch me!" It was a half mad prayer.

There was the tap of shoes on the floor and the butler was kneeling beside Oliver Crane. He was slim, middle aged with a thin, sensitive face and quick eyes. "If you'll take his feet, sir," he said.

Together they got Arthur Crane to his bedroom and undressed him. Oliver shuddered and his teeth bit deep into his lower lip. He turned away, feeling sick at his stomach, for his father's body was one mass of raw flesh. Blisters had covered his skin and broken as he writhed on the

floor. There was no blood, but bare muscle and quivering nerves stood open. The man's face was almost featureless now. Low moans drooled incessantly from his mouth. He had quit struggling, but the raw flesh continued to quiver and jerk.

Voices sounded in the hall outside and the door opened. Oliver turned, watched Dr. James Pearson come into the room and close the door behind him. He was a big man in his early forties, bald, with a high forehead and a bold, strong face. Oliver watched him as he stopped beside the bed and looked down at the naked, gruesome body lying there. Pearson and his father had not spoken for ten years, not since he had beaten the doctor in a stock market deal. But Pearson had a country home on the next estate and evidently Mrs. Crane had called him because he was near.

The examination was brief. The doctor gave a hypodermic and coated the body with a thick, white salve. Crane was unconscious now, but he continued to moan, softly, constantly.

Dr. Pearson turned toward Oliver. "It was an acid of some sort, no doubt, though I don't know what. I don't think he has much chance, but I'll be back in the morning. In the meanwhile I'll try to find out what acid was used. I think the police had best find out who applied it."

Oliver Crane said, "I'll see to that." The doctor went out, followed by the butler. Oliver Crane was alone in the room with his father. The moaning continued, as soft and steady as the howling of a winter wind.

Crane turned to the window and stood gazing out into the early night. A golden haze had been flung into the sky in the east and as he watched a full moon floated up into it. But Oliver Crane was not seeing the things at which he looked. He had a jaw as hard and long as that of his father, but his mouth was larger and more curved. His eyes were black and often bitter, but without the hardness of his father's. Having been reared with more money than he could spend he'd acquired confidence, but with the example of his father and stepmother before him he'd

avoided too much pride. Instead he had rebelled and gone to the other extreme. During his rather hectic college career he'd become engaged to chorus girls and co-eds, and once to one of the family servants. His father had been relieved to see him fall really in love with Nell Ellis. Her family had lost its money, but there was no other fault that Mr. Crane could find, although Mrs. Crane had continued to oppose the wedding.

There had never been any bond of fellowship between Oliver Crane and his father. Oliver hated the methods which his father had used to build his fortune, he hated the arrogance and conceit which the money had brought. It was only now, as he stood gazing out of the window, listening to the slow, slobbering moans behind him, that he realized he had admired and respected a great many things about his father.

Crane's hands clenched slowly, his long jaw set hard. To call the police now would mean a house full of detectives, newspaper publicity, a smear in the tabloids. It would mean turning his private affairs over to someone else. The traits which he had inherited from his father began to harden in him. His voice was husky when he said, aloud, "I'll settle this myself. I'll find out. . . ."

It was then that he felt the first touch of the fear and horror which were to come. Bill Weeks, the groom, had threatened his father and a few hours later this thing had occurred. But how? An acid, the doctor said. But who could have put acid on his father as he sat at the dinner table? And how could it have been put on him without touching his clothes?

Oliver Crane stiffened suddenly, remembering the words he had spoken at the dinner table: "Bill Weeks used to be with a circus. He was a magician. . . ." Crane shrugged. It was crazy to start thinking about magic.

The moaning of his father continued, filling the room with a vague whispering like the rustle of dry leaves. He turned to look at the bed which stood near the hall door. A reading lamp flung its mellow light down across the ghastly head.

Red flesh showed in nasty splotches through the thick salve. The flesh was swollen so that the eyes were closed. Oliver Crane's teeth gritted; the muscles of his throat contracted to keep down the sickness that swelled in his stomach. He went quickly out of the room.

The hall was vacant. He went to the end and down the stairs to a landing leading out on a small balcony. Moonlight silvered the garden at his feet. A wind shook gently through the tall elms and blew cool across his face. It brought the faint odor of roses with it, reminding him of the perfume Nell Ellis used.

And then his heart went cold and still.

Bill Weeks had threatened not only his father, but the whole family. He and Nell were to be married. Did that mean . . . ?

Crane shrugged again. "I'm going nuts," he said half aloud. "There's no proof that Bill Weeks did this. How could he? But even if it were Weeks, he wouldn't hurt Nell." Crane's jaw set and his mouth jerked as straight and hard as his father's. By God! he'd make sure nothing happened to her! He'd see Weeks and. . . . He stopped short. He didn't even know where the man was. How could he accuse him of throwing acid on his father when he had not even been present?

"Hell!" Crane said aloud. "I am beginning to believe it was magic."

He heard someone coming up the steps and turned. A girl's figure showed in the darkness of the landing. She saw Crane and paused. "Oliver," she said softly. The moonlight glowed full across her face as she stepped on the balcony.

She was very pretty with a sensuous, alluring beauty. Her hair was jet black and wavy. It was cut in a long bob and fell like a dark storm to her shoulders. It made the paleness of her face very vivid. Her eyes were dark and slanted, almost oriental. Her mouth was full and red and lascivious. She wore the usual black and white maid's costume, but the dress fitted closely and showed the full curves of her body.

"Oliver," she said again, softly. She put both hands on his chest and leaned her body against him.

For a moment Oliver Crane didn't move except for his mouth. It twitched slightly and there was a puzzled look in his eyes. He'd always found it easier to get new girls than to discard the old ones. His fear of being thought as arrogant and conceited as his father kept him considerate to the very end of an affair. After a moment he put his arms around the girl, loosely.

He said, "We can't stand here like this, Nancy. Someone . . ."

She pushed closer against him. "I'm afraid. What happened to your father? I saw him as you brought him upstairs and he was moaning and . . ." Her hands slid across Crane's chest.

The muscle in Crane's arms jerked hard again. He'd promised himself to settle this without calling the police and here he stood, doing nothing. He raised the girl's face, kissed her quickly, then tried to slip out of her arms.

She let him go, but her mouth quivered. "A few months ago, in the Caribbean . . ." Her voice was bitter.

Crane put his arms around her again. He didn't know what else to do. A few months ago he'd gone on a Caribbean cruise with his family. Mrs. Crane's maid had been taken along; she'd lived on the island of Saba before coming to New York. The moonlight and the blue water and the girl's beauty had been too much for Oliver Crane who had inherited his father's weakness for pretty women. He'd got himself in deeply, and now that he'd found Nell Ellis and fallen in love, he was having trouble with Nancy Hassel.

The girl pressed closer to him. He could feel her breasts flattening against his chest. She said, "Oliver, you do love me, don't you?"

Crane swallowed hard. She knew he was engaged to Nell Ellis, why didn't she leave him alone? But if she loved him, he didn't want to hurt her. He didn't want . . .

The scream jerked through the house like a living terror! Pain and horror mingled in wild panic flung themselves in shattering chaos through the house in that one cry. The sound smashed at Oliver Crane's

ears, jangled on his nerves like grating fear.

"My God!" he said aloud. "It's father!"

He leaped for the landing, went up the steps with a rush. Behind him he heard the furious tapping of Nancy Hassel's shoes. Then the scream came again, drowning out all other sound in a torrent of pain and fear.

Crane reached the door of his father's room, whipped through it. He struck the man standing there before he could stop. Crane caught his balance, jerked at the man, snapped him around. He looked down into the pale, sensitive face of the butler.

Arthur Crane screamed again. The cry was not so loud, but wailing, slobbering into silence. As Oliver turned toward him, the older man slumped back on the pillow. The flesh on his face, so swollen that the eyes were closed, quivered and shook. The hands, a horrible mottling of raw flesh and white salve, beat feebly at the sheet. In one of them was a book with a string around it. From one end of the book stuck a piece of paper. It made a fluttering sound as the old man waved the volume. Nancy Hassel had come into the room and was standing close against the door.

Still holding the butler, Crane stepped to the bedside, took the book from his father's hand. It was a copy of *Russia's Iron Age*. Arthur Crane had liked to read about Russia—and snort.

Oliver slid the paper from the book. It was ordinary tablet paper and the printing on it had evidently been done with a ruler to prevent detection. It said:

"This is the first one. The rest of the family—and those who plan to become part of the family—will follow. There have been too many stuck-up Cranes already."

Slowly Oliver Crane crushed the sheet of paper in his fist. In the downstairs hall he could hear persons crying out and feet were clattering on the steps. His long jaw set hard and his black eyes squinted. The breath seemed very cold in his nostrils. For the first time in his life he was afraid. He looked at the nasty thing which had been his father, heard the insane drooling

sounds that came from his lips. This had happened to him without warning, under the bright light of the dining room while they all sat and watched.

Now it promised to destroy the rest of them. Himself—and Nell Ellis!

## CHAPTER II

### MOONLIGHT, ROSES, AND DEATH

FEET were clattering in the hall, excited voices calling out. Crane turned to Nancy. His voice was brittle. "Get out and explain to them. And shut the door." His right hand still gripped the butler's shoulder. He turned to face the smaller man.

Oliver Crane was almost smiling as he looked into the quiet blue eyes of the butler. Crane's voice was soft, almost gentle but there was a fierce joy in it. He had something to work on now. He intended to make the most of it.

He said, "Why did you put that note in the book?"

The butler stiffened, seemed to grow taller. His thin nostrils flared. "So I gave him the note," he said slowly. "And why did I put it in a book and hit him with the book so hard he screamed and got me caught in the room?"

Crane's mouth tightened. The butler could have put the note on the bed and walked out without being seen. But the note had been put in a book and a string tied around the volume. Why? He let go the butler's shoulder and stepped quickly to the windows. Both were open with curtains blowing gently in the wind. But this was the second floor. There were no trees outside.

And why send a note at all? It could only aid in the criminal's capture. Was it merely to torture the family through fear before killing them?

Crane turned swiftly. "Well," he said, "what did you see when you came in the room? Who did leave the note?"

The man smiled slightly. "I didn't see anything and I don't know who left the note. But whoever it was, he has my gratitude." He turned and went out of the room. Crane watched him and his long

jaw set harder, the pleasant curve of his mouth faded. It was to be a duel to the death with somebody. And they had threatened Nell Ellis—they couldn't mean anybody else by "*Those who plan to become part of the family.*" Well, he'd see about that.

Nell was in the hall outside with his stepmother, Peter Feasdale, and most of the servants. Oliver Crane took her hand in his. "Come on," he said, "I want to talk to you."

Mrs. Crane caught his arm. Her eyes were green like those of a cat. Her evening dress was cut very low over her breasts. She said, "That note promised to kill the rest of us. Nancy told us. I'm going to call the police."

Oliver Crane looked down at her with expressionless eyes. "All right," he said. "They'll bring the reporters with them. You'll be over every tabloid in the city. You'd like that."

There was a sudden flicker of fear in the green eyes and her face went so pale that the rouged lips seemed bloody. "But what are we going to do?"

Crane said, "I'm going to learn who put that acid on my father."

Peter Feasdale stepped forward and took his sister's arm. "Oliver's right. We don't want a lot of vulgar publicity. I'll help him find the—the . . ."

Crane said coldly, "If father dies we will have the police, whether we want them or not." Holding Nell Ellis' hand he turned toward the stairs.

Moonlight spilled over the garden, filling it with a soft, liquid brightness, but the shadows were very dark. Oliver Crane stopped under a wisteria arbor and turned slowly to face the girl. He could scarcely see her blond hair. For a moment he stood looking down at her, without speaking.

Looking at her, fear began to gnaw like a small, furry animal through his stomach. He kept trying to guess how the acid had been put on his father. It must have happened at the table, under the very eyes of the family. Against something that struck invisibly what chance did he have of protecting himself—protecting Nell?

His hands came up quickly and caught her shoulders. He said, "You've got to get away from here, quick. Tonight."

She said, "No. I'm going to stay with you." Her voice was very low, but very determined. Even before he began to argue he knew that it was no use. He tried but she only shook her head. "If it's going to get me," she said—there was a little quiver in her voice now—"it won't matter where I am. I'd rather be with you."

The fear deep in his stomach leaped suddenly upward. Once more he remembered the thing he'd said at dinner, "Bill Weeks used to be a magician. . . ."

It was very dark and very quiet in the garden. For a long while neither he nor the girl spoke. His mind worked swiftly, precisely, and yet he kept coming back to the same spot. Bill Weeks had threatened his father and the family, but what proof had he against Weeks? The butler had been in the dining room at the time. Perhaps . . . Certainly the man disliked the whole family. Probably he had held a much better job a few years ago. His face and manners indicated as much. Ill fortune might have soured him, driven him crazy. He was proud and he resented the insolence with which the Crane family treated servants.

And the doctor? Pearson hated his father, had for years. But why should he hate the family? There were always the fortune to consider, but what hopes had Pearson of getting that?

Then there was his stepmother and her brother. Brother? He'd often wondered about that. Any good looking woman had been able to lie to his father and make the old man believe it. Oliver was an only son.

If he and his father were out of the way, the whole fortune would go to Mrs. Crane. But why . . . ?

His thoughts clicked short. He heard the soft murmur of voices, the sound of steps. Almost involuntarily, keeping totally silent, he and Nell Ellis turned. Crane's nerves were jerky, his muscles taut. If a thing could strike under the eyes of four persons, in a brightly lighted

room, without being seen, what chance would he stand here in the darkness?

The voices were closer now, more distinct. The moonlight touched on a group of rose bushes just beyond the wisteria arbor, then shadow closed in again under the elm trees. At the very edge of the shadow he saw the figures, saw them pause. They were close together.

He recognized Peter Feasdale's voice. It was hoarse with passion. "Please let me come. I've wanted you so damn long. There's no reason to keep putting me off." The heavy Oxford accent was gone.

The girl's voice was weary, and angry. "We've talked about all this before." It was Nancy Hassel.

"Why not?" Feasdale said. He caught at her shoulders.

"Damn it," the girl said, "you're hurting me." Her voice was brittle with anger.

The man pulled her closer. "You can let me come to your room. Nobody'll ever know." He tried to kiss her.

She almost tore herself away, and then, very suddenly, she stopped struggling. Her body went limp and his arms closed around her. He pushed her head back roughly and for a long while their lips clung together. They swayed, and the moonlight splashed over them. After a second they turned and side by side went toward the house.

Oliver Crane was half smiling. So that was the way it was! Well, he wouldn't have to worry about getting rid of Nancy. He was still grinning when Nell Ellis touched his arm. "Look," she whispered. She pointed toward an upstairs window.

Mrs. Crane had pulled the curtain of her bedroom window slightly to one side and stood now gazing fixedly at the spot where Peter Feasdale and the maid had been a moment before. Even in the dark shadow of her head there was something rigid and fierce. Then she turned back into the room and as she did the light touched for a second on her face. Oliver Crane shuddered at the passion he saw there. If ever a woman had murder in her soul, it was Stella Crane.

It was nearly midnight when Crane and Nell Ellis went back into the house. Out-

side her door he kissed her goodnight. He waited until he heard the lock turn. It was an old fashioned home with a long hallway down the second floor and all the family bedrooms opening onto it. Oliver Crane cut off the lights and walked to his own bedroom. There was no sound in the darkness except the thud of his steps and the soft, incessant moaning of his father. When he closed his door the sound boomed along the hallway.

Without turning on the light he took off his shoes and coat. From a dresser drawer he took a .38 automatic. Then he opened the door very quietly and went back into the dark hallway. Outside Nell Ellis' room he sat down.

There were windows and a stair at each end of the hall. Moonlight silvered the panes but left the hall in darkness. An elm tree in the back threw a dancing pattern of shadow over the window. There was no air stirring in the hallway. The soft moaning of his father intensified the stillness. Now and then he could hear Nell moving about her room as she undressed.

Gradually, as he sat there, Oliver Crane knew that his muscles were growing tight, his flesh cold. He could feel something deep in his chest, stirring. His heart beat swiftly, then paused. It made the blood seem to surge in his veins, jerk short, and start again.

His muscles kept getting tighter. Little prickly spots began to come over his flesh. And then, suddenly, his long jaw jerked open. His lips were very cold and thin. "God!" he whispered. "What's happening to me? Am I . . .?"

He took a long breath and all at once he knew what was happening. It made him want to laugh and curse, but it made the thing in his chest grow larger and his heart constricted. He was afraid. Something was going to happen. He knew that without understanding how he knew. And he wouldn't be able to stop it! How could he prevent a thing he couldn't see, couldn't understand? He thought again of the way it had come to his father. No human being could have done that to his father, and yet . . .

Oliver Crane knew that he hadn't been in the dark hall more than five minutes but it seemed that hours had crawled past. His nerves were stretched and quivering and his breathing sounded very loud in the stillness. The thin thread of light which had marked Nell's door had gone out. The shadows on the window at the end of the hallway danced eerily.

It happened without warning.

### CHAPTER III

#### DEATH CALLS AGAIN

**T**HE scream burst high and furious. It howled along the dark hallway, clawed at the walls, hammered with a wild intensity at Oliver Crane's ears. He was on his feet in one frantic leap whirling, staring into the darkness.

The scream broke again, agony and terror fighting in the sound. Crane pivoted, gun ready. Up the hallway a door burst open, smashed back against the wall and sent dull thunder booming down the corridor. Somewhere a woman whimpered in terror.

A man came through the open door into the hall. His body made a black shadow against the far window. He was reeling, clawing at his body, screaming. But there was something new in the sound now. It was choked, harsh as though a hand were gripping tight at his throat.

He came down the hall, staggering. "Good God!" Oliver Crane said. The man was Peter Feasdale and he had come from his own room.

Crane leaped. His shoes boomed in the hallway. The gun was hard against his hip as he whipped past Feasdale and turned into his room. He skidded to a stop. His left hand pawed at the wall, turned on the light.

There was nobody in the room.

Crane circled the room swiftly, but carefully. The window was too high for a person to drop from safely and no one could have gone into the hall without being seen. But the room was empty.

Crane heard the woman cry again. It was one room down and across the hall, his stepmother. If the terror in her voice

wasn't real she was doing a good job of pretending, Crane thought. But there was no time for her now. He went back into the hall with a rush, turned toward Feasdale.

The man was still reeling down the hallway, clawing at his throat. From the servants' quarters below came excited shouts. A thread of light marked Nell's door. Crane hit it with his shoulder, hard, but the lock held. He shouted, "Nell? Are you all right?"

The girl's voice was frightened, but steady. "Yes. What's happening?"

Crane said, "I don't know. Keep your door locked." He spun toward Peter Feasdale who was a dim, writhing shadow in the darkness.

The man had stopped screaming now. The only sound that came from his throat was a little gurgling sound as though his breath was torn through swollen muscles. Crane leaped toward him. At the same moment Feasdale made one last sobbing cry, and pitched forward.

Dropping to his knees, Crane grabbed the man's shoulders. The heavy silk of Feasdale's pajamas felt sleek under his fingers.

Crane said, "What's happened, man? Tell me! Quick!" He twisted the man so that his face stared upward.

"I—I—it came—I don't know." Feasdale's thin mouth twisted. The lips were open and bulging and his words were barely intelligible. "I—I . . ." There was a gurgling sound in his throat and his body jerked and was still. The black eyes, wide open in terror, kept staring upward.

Crane released the body and stood up. He heard feet pounding in the downstairs hall. The light switch was near the steps and he put it on just as the butler, a dark blue dressing gown tightly around him, reached the landing. At the foot of the steps he could see Nancy and behind her the fat German cook.

"Oliver! What's . . ." The voice broke with a gasp. Then in a whisper, "Peter."

Crane turned. His stepmother, who was no older than himself, stood in the doorway of her room. She was wearing a negligee, a thin lace wrap that served to

show her figure rather than conceal it. The dark eyes in the small, beautiful face were very large as she stared at the body of Peter Feasdale. "Oh, God!" she said and went toward him in a tottering run.

She flung herself down beside him, leaned forward to kiss him, and stopped. Terror came in her face, driving out the sorrow. She jerked backward without touching the body.

Peter Feasdale's face was one mass of white blisters.

"Whatever the acid that was put on Mr. Crane is, it's the same used on Mr. Feasdale," the doctor said. His bold eyes swung from Oliver to Mrs. Crane who still wore the negligee that clung to her body, accentuating the curves.

Oliver said, "Why did it kill him so quickly when," he paused—they were standing in the hall. The servants had been sent back to their quarters, but Peter Feasdale still lay where he had fallen. From the door of Arthur Crane's room came the soft moaning of the dying man. "When father is still living?"

"Feasdale not only got the poison on him," Dr. Pearson said, "he drank it. I think you'll have to call the police this time."

Stella Crane's pale face went suddenly white. She moved close to the doctor, her body swaying like that of a cat. "No," she said. "Not the police." She caught herself and when she spoke again her voice had regained its English accent. "With all that nasty publicity in the cheap papers. I'm sure it's . . ."

Oliver Crane said, "There's no way out this time. You can't hide murder. I've already called them."

The woman said, "Ohhh."

Dr. Pearson's bold eyes glittered as he looked at her. He put one arm around her waist, the hand flat against her body. "You'd best lie down," he said. He went with her toward her room.

It was two a.m. before the police left. But now they had gone and Oliver Crane was standing in the darkened hallway outside Nell Ellis' room. Certain things one of the detectives had said and done kept recurring to him: the way the man had

looked at Stella Crane and Peter Feasdale, the questions he'd asked about Mrs. Crane's marriage, about her home in London. And Oliver Crane remembered also the face of the woman in the upstairs window as she had watched Feasdale and the maid. Crane turned and went on slipped feet along the hall and down the steps.

A thread of light showed under Nancy's door and Crane tapped gently. There was a long silence, then feet whispered along the floor. "Who is it?" the voice sounded stiff with fear.

"Oliver."

"Just a moment." The door swung open and Nancy Hassel stood framed in light. She was wearing a dark wrap and it was pulled tighter than necessary about her body, making it evident that she wore no other clothes. Her black hair hung thick about her face. In the pale light her cheeks seemed as pale as a moonflower, but her lips showed dark and hungry. "Oliver," she said softly and raised her arms toward him.

Crane pulled the door closed behind him. The girl was close against him and he pushed her away gently. His long jaw was set hard, his eyes narrow. "I came to *talk*," he said.

Her eyes widened. He saw pain flash through them, saw her lips quiver and knew that he'd hurt her. But there was death at large tonight and if he had to hurt this girl to save Nell Ellis, well . . . He said, "How long had Peter Feasdale been out of this room before he died?"

She went back a step and her hands came instinctively toward her breasts. For a long second she stood motionless, without breathing. Her voice was hoarse when she spoke. "You believe that?"

"I was in the garden. I couldn't help but overhear you. How long had he been gone?"

She stood biting her lips, looking from Crane to the floor in quick, half frightened glances. "You don't have any faith in me," she said.

Crane didn't answer.

"All right," she said. "You won't believe me, but this is the truth. He never came inside this room. He's been after me

and after me and after me, but I'm not what you think. I was afraid of him there in the garden. I wanted to get away so I pretended to give in. I told him he'd have to go to his room first in case anyone had seen us and then slip down here. When he came I had the door locked—and I didn't open it."

"Then he'd been back in his room for a couple of hours when he—he started yelling?"

"I don't know. He kept trying to open my door for three or four minutes, but he was afraid to make much noise." She raised her head suddenly and her black eyes flashed. "That Mrs. Crane may be his sister, but I don't believe it."

Crane said, "All right." Before the girl could speak again he pulled the door open and went out, closing it behind him. Maybe she was lying, maybe not.

Outside his father's door Oliver Crane paused. The moans had ceased. At each end of the hallway he could see the moonlighted windows, but inside there was only darkness, and silence. The very air of the corridor lay close and motionless about him.

When he heard the sound it was so faint that he couldn't be certain he'd heard it. The muscles back of his ears jerked taut and his eyes strained into the darkness. He leaned forward on the balls of his feet, head cocked to one side, shoulder muscles rigid.

A small creaking sound, a tiny crack in the silence of the hallway. There was someone at the window of his father's room!

Crane's left hand found the doorknob. His right hand dug the automatic from his hip pocket. The butt felt cold and solid as his fingers tightened about it. He stood poised for one-half second, thinking. The light switch was just inside the door to the left. That might be his father moving about. It might be only the wind at the window. It might be . . . He thought about Peter Feasdale, his body horrible and raw as though the flesh had been peeled from it. The muscles in Crane's throat tightened and sweat suddenly began to break out across his forehead. What

chance would he stand against . . . He checked his thoughts. Whoever had done these things, he was a human being and if he were in that room now it was because he had come back to finish the job. A fierce joy surged up through Oliver Crane and his long jaw set. At last he'd have something to put his hands on and fight.

He twisted the knob, flung the door open and went through with one long stride. The gun was hard against his hip. His left hand felt along the wall for the switch. Across the room there was a curious, growling sound.

His fingers found the electric button, pressed it. Light blazed in the room—blazed for one flashing moment and crashed out. Crane got a flickering glimpse of the table and lamp going over, of the thing behind it, growling and going in one great leap for his father's bed. Then the lamp struck the floor like thunder and darkness smashed through the room.

Orange flame lashed from the muzzle of the automatic and the gun jumped in Crane's hand. Once, twice, but there was only darkness and he knew he'd missed. Then, while the booming of the gun still shook through the room, the man on the bed screamed. It was one short, high-pitched cry that suddenly changed into a gurgling, bloody sound and faded.

Crane hurled himself toward the noise. His foot struck a chair and he went headlong. He hit the floor on his back. The gun bounced from his hand and went skidding off in the darkness. He groped for it on hands and knees.

Something brushed against him and he whirled. There was a dark shape between him and the window, blotting out the light. Crane dived for it. He struck it and they went down hard. For one moment then he lay still, sucking a long breath into his lungs. For the first time he knew that he was fighting with a human being.

The fellow twisted savagely, making growling sounds in his throat. His arm swung up and there was a glimpse of the long knife against the moon-coated window, a glimpse of the blade dark with blood. The knife slashed down.

Crane rolled, flung out his right arm.

Pain spurted along it, from elbow to wrist. The man made a whimpering, blood hungry sound and swung up the knife again. Crane's left hand leaped up. As the knife came down wrist and hand struck. The blade seemed hung in moonlight three inches above Crane's face. It pressed down hard, fighting its way closer. Crane's eyes began to dilate, to strain in their sockets as he watched.

The man twisted like a cat. His wrist slipped from Crane's fingers and the knife shot downward. But in the moment that the wrist slipped Crane began to roll. The blade tipped his cheek and he heard it strike the floor with a thud.

The man crouched like an animal above the knife, tugging at it, trying to free the blade. Balancing on his knees Crane swung hard. His fist made a crunching noise when it landed. The man went over sideways, struck the floor and lay still.

Crane pulled the blade from the floor. He was standing up before he became conscious of the confusion of sounds in the hall outside. Persons shouting, a woman screaming time and again, heavy steps booming along the floor. The door burst open and a white spear of light struck Crane's face. A man said, "Don't move, or I'll blow hell out of you." The hall was lighted now and light falling through the door showed that the man held a gun in his right hand, a flashlight in his left.

"All right, get your hands up," the man said.

Crane said, "What the hell? Who . . . ?"

The slim figure of the butler came through the door behind the man. He found the reading lamp at the head of Mr. Crane's bed and switched it on. The man with the gun stood motionless, glaring at Oliver Crane.

## CHAPTER IV

### BLISTERS DESTROY BEAUTY

**A**BRUPTLY Crane remembered he had seen the fellow. He was one of the detectives. Then the butler, his thin face showing no emotion, his voice blank, said, "Well, I see you got Bill Weeks. And he got your father."

Crane turned and looked at the man on the floor. He was lying very still. His eyes were open, but still dazed. He was a small man with a narrow, fox-face, a twitching mouth and the dark eyes of an animal. The detective stuck the flashlight in his pocket, stepped forward and jerked Weeks to his feet. "What the hell you doing here?" he snapped.

The butler said quietly, "This is what he was doing." He nodded toward the bed. Arthur Crane's body, raw and nasty, was half uncovered. Blood had ceased to flow from two knife wounds in his chest. Oliver Crane needed only one glance to know that his father was dead.

The detective snorted. "This the guy you said threatened your father?"

"Yes."

"I thought he might try to come back and finish tonight. That's why I waited outside. I heard those shots. He used a ladder to get in the window."

There was the clatter of a woman's slippers and Nell Ellis came through with a rush. "Oliver. Oliver!" Her arms were around him, her blue eyes wide as they looked into his. "Are you hurt?"

"Only a scratch." He looked down at the shallow trench the knife had plowed from elbow to wrist.

In the doorway Mrs. Crane, Nancy Hasel, and the cook stood grouped and motionless.

The detective said, "Well, this should clear the whole thing up. We'll find out what this guy used beside a knife. We'll find out all right." He rapped Weeks with the muzzle of his gun. It left a long welt across the man's cheek.

"I ain't used nothin' but a knife," Weeks said. "And I'm damn glad I got 'im."

"I reckon you done that with a knife." The detective shoved the muzzle of his gun toward the hideous skinless corpse on the bed.

For the first time Bill Weeks looked at the body. His narrow, close set eyes jerked suddenly wide. His thin lips parted in horror and the sound of his breath was audible in the still room. "Christ," he whispered. "What . . . ? What . . . ?"

The detective slapped him with gun bar-

rel again, still holding him with the other hand. "I'm asking the questions. What'd you put on him?"

"I—I—" Weeks kept staring wide eyed. Fear and horror showed in every line of his face. "I ain't done that. He beat me and I come after him with a knife, but . . . Great God! He ain't got any skin on 'im!"

"THERE ought not to be any more trouble tonight," Oliver Crane said. "Maybe you can get some sleep at last. It's after three." He was standing in the hall outside Nell Ellis' door.

She pushed the blond hair back from her face. "You think he really was the one?" she asked. "The detective seemed certain enough, yet . . . Somehow I don't believe he did that to your father, and to Mr. Feasdale. I was watching his face when he saw your father, and he—he looked so surprised."

Crane said, "You go on to sleep and leave that to the police." He tried to grin, but he knew that the tone of his voice was hollow.

He too had seen Bill Weeks' face. The police, now that they had a goat, would naturally try to hang everything on him.

"You go on to sleep," he said again. He leaned forward to kiss the girl. She turned her face up to his, her lips soft and waiting. "Lord! You're pretty," he said. His head bent lower.

Down the hall a woman screamed, high and fierce and terrible. The sound froze the blood in Crane's veins. Even as he swung away from Nell Ellis he knew what had happened.

Crane was half way to his stepmother's room when he saw the man on the stair landing. Light spilled from the upstairs light to the landing, and in that pale dimness, crouched close to the wall, thin mouth leering, he saw the butler. Then he was outside Mrs. Crane's door, twisting the knob, crashing the door open with his shoulder, skidding in.

He stopped, stood motionless, swallowing at the hard lump in his throat. He had known what to expect and yet now that he saw it the blood turned thin and

cold in his veins. His lungs felt stiff with fear.

Mrs. Crane was in the center of the room, stark naked. Her pajamas, torn from the haste with which she had removed them, lay on the floor near the far wall, but her long black hair was still sleek around her cat-like face where the lips twisted and writhed over small, white teeth. Over her lithe body, from shoulders to feet, tiny blisters were appearing.

She stared at Oliver, almost blinded by terror and for a moment did not see him. Then she began to cry, "God! Get me a doctor, quick, quick!"

Crane spun, saw Nell Ellis standing in the door. "Call the doctor," he snapped and leaped past her for his father's room and the salve which had been left previously.

He had not finished coating Mrs. Crane's body before Nell was back. "I had to call another doctor," she said. "Pearson wasn't at home."

Between half choked sobs Mrs. Crane said, "You'll be the next. I know! I know!" She flung one hand toward the bed and cried out in agony at the movement.

Oliver Crane swung toward the bed, and stopped. The cover was pulled half back as though Mrs. Crane had been about to retire, and there on the sheet lay the note. "*Only two more to go. The girl who wants to join the family will be first.*"

"Great God!" Crane said. The words clogged in his throat.

With Nell's help he got Mrs. Crane in the bed.

Then taking Nell's hand he stepped out into the hall, and closed the door behind him. Near the stairway at the right Nancy Hassel, the butler and the cook stood watching, but not one of them spoke. Crane looked at the butler. The sardonic eyes, the thin, sensitive lips seemed to be half smiling. Twice this man had been near when death had struck. Just now he might have been on the stairway for some very normal reason, and he might . . .

Then there was Dr. Pearson. Why wasn't he at home? He had hated Arthur Crane, but why should he exercise that

hatred against the other members of the family?

Oliver Crane shrugged. There wasn't any way to figure it out, but there was one thing had to be done. He *had* to get Nell Ellis away from this house. That note had marked her as next. Crane could feel the muscles of his throat contracting when he thought of what might happen to her. And after that his turn . . .

He said, "Nell, go get your coat. I'm taking you away from here."

"Will that—that do any good?" The girl's eyes were wide and blue and frightened. She bit her lips to keep them steady. "And it wouldn't save you."

"To hell with me," Crane said. "You get out of this."

"We can't fool this—this thing," Nell said. There was a deadly, a hopeless certainty in her voice. "I love you, Oliver. I'm never going to give you up. I can't. And you can't quit loving me either. Saying that we don't want to get married won't—won't fool this thing. It'll know."

"You mean," Crane said slowly, and stopped. He knew what she meant. But this couldn't be anything supernatural! It couldn't be! And yet, otherwise . . .

His lungs hurt as he sucked in a long breath. Well, if it had to come, he'd at least be trying. He turned toward the butler. "Get the car and bring it around to the front," he said. He looked at Nancy and the cook. "You better go to your rooms and stay there."

And then, very slowly, he bent and kissed Nell Ellis. "Go get your coat," he said. "I don't know whether or not it'll do any good, but I'm taking you away from here. I'll meet you in the downstairs hall after I get my coat." Heeling he went toward his own room.

It was dark in the room. He found the light, switched it on. Sitting on the edge of the bed he removed the slippers he had been wearing, put on his shoes. His coat lay over the back of a chair and he was half into it when he heard the sound at the door, the click of the latch as it closed. He spun, hand reaching for his hip.

Nancy Hassel was standing with her

back against the door, her dark hair framing the paleness of her face. She was wearing the dressing gown pulled tightly about her body. Her hands were clenched behind her.

For a moment she stood, unmoving, and watched him. Her face was expressionless as though calmness had been forced on it. She said, "I don't want you to leave me, Oliver. I'm afraid."

Crane thought, "I hope to God she doesn't make a scene. I've got to get out of here with Nell, but I don't want to hurt this girl's feelings, though I do wish she'd leave me alone." Aloud he said, "But I've got to go, Nancy. Whoever, whatever, is doing this has threatened Miss Ellis, and I . . ."

"They threatened the person who wanted to marry you," Nancy said. Her voice was low, toneless. "I want to marry you, Oliver."

"You know I love you and once you loved me. You . . ."

"I know," Crane said quickly. He was cursing under his breath. "But I'm engaged to Miss Ellis. They can't mean anybody but her."

"Then you're going to marry her?" There was no change in the girl's voice. "You've forgotten the things you said to me when we were in the West Indies. That night, down at the beach in Saba, when you . . ."

It was the expression on Crane's face which stopped her. His mouth was open, lips bloodless. His eyes began to widen and a muscle quivered along his lean jaw. "Great God!" he whispered. "Then it was . . ."

She said quietly, "Yes, I hated all of them except you. You'll have the whole fortune now. I hated your father because he kept you from marrying me. You never said so, but I know he would have disinherited you for marrying a servant. And I hated that woman for the way she treated me and that man who claimed to be her brother. He was no more her brother than I am. They were lovers, but he wouldn't leave me alone. I wanted to get rid of them, so that you would have all your father's money—and I would have

you. I thought I could frighten this girl into giving you up, but . . ."

"Oliver! May I come in?" The door swung open, Nancy Hassel moved out of the way and Nell Ellis stood on the sill. She saw Nancy, stopped. "Oh, I'm sorry, I'll . . ."

"Stay where you are!" Nancy said. There was a new ring coming in her voice now. She swung her hands in front of her and Crane saw the large glass full of white, milky fluid.

"You think she's prettier than I am!" The voice was still calm, almost soft, and yet there was a note of hysteria creeping into it. It was the voice of a woman gone almost insane. "That's all you want out of a woman, her beauty. I know that now. Well, I'll show you how pretty this one is. I'll throw this in her face and you'll watch it burn. Burn! Do you hear? And then I'll throw it on you!"

"Good God!" Crane said. His voice was no more than a panting whisper. Nell Ellis stood as though frozen, her hands stiff at her sides, her eyes looking into those of Nancy Hassel. "Listen. I'll give you the money. It's all mine now. I'll give it to you, but don't—for God's sake don't throw that on her. She hasn't done anything to you."

"I was in love with you," Nancy said. "I don't want the money—now." She brought the glass breast high, tilting it toward Nell's face. The girl watched motionless, hypnotized with horror.

"Don't!" Crane's voice leaped toward a scream. "That's murder! You'll go to the chair." He was leaning forward, hands clawlike but afraid to move. There would be no chance to reach her before she could jerk her hand and throw the liquid.

"I don't care," the girl said. "I don't care what happens to me. I want to show you how pretty this girl is—when her face is gone. And then I'll throw it on you. You won't tell anybody who did it, not with it in your mouth." Her hand swayed up.

The doorbell jangled, soft and far away, yet sounding loud in the room. Nancy paused, her gaze wavered and Oliver Crane went forward in one long dive. His hand

slapped the glass. The milky liquid spewed upward, slushed across the face of Nancy Hassel. The glass crashed on the floor.

For a long moment then the tableau held. Nell cried out, "Quick, Oliver, help her. Get it off!"

Crane's hand jumped to his hip pocket, groping for a handkerchief. He touched the automatic, pulled it out and flung it on the bed, snatched his handkerchief from the same pocket.

But Nancy Hassel had already moved. She caught up the pistol, turned toward Oliver with the liquid still thick on her face. "I hope you won't look at me, after this stuff starts . . ." The shot made rolling thunder in the room. The girl swayed, then fell almost at Nell Ellis' feet.

"It was a good thing the doctor you phoned came when he did," Crane said. He was standing on the balcony with Nell Ellis. The trees showed dark against the sky. From the east gray light was flowing upward, wiping out the stars.

Nell said, "I still don't understand."

"It was the juice of the Manganeel tree she used. She used to live in Saba. The tree doesn't exist in the other islands, ex-

cept for Haiti, and only two or three of them there. But one whole bay on Saba is fringed by them. She told me about them when we were there. It takes the juice quite a while before it starts to burn, but then it takes effect almost at once. It's been known even to kill cattle. She must have put it on father's clothes, on Stella's and Feasdale's pajamas. I don't know how she got Feasdale to drink some after he went back to his own room. The notes were just to frighten you, make you decide that you didn't love me. Father was blind and she must have gone in his room, fixed the book and note with a string tied to the door. When it was opened the book fell on father and he cried out. She stayed on the landing nearby, followed me into the room, and while I grabbed the butler she removed the string from the door. It was just done to make you quit loving me."

Nell Ellis was very close to him. He could smell the soft odor of her hair, mingling with the scent of the roses in the garden below. "Nothing could make me quit loving you," she said.

A mocking bird began to sing in one of the elm trees, but Oliver Crane did not hear it.

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# The Perfect Crime

By Leslie Charteris



"THE defendants," said Mr. Justice Goldie, with evident distaste, "have been unable to prove that the agreement between the plaintiff and the late Alfred Green constituted a money-lending transaction within the limits of the Act; and I am therefore obliged to give judgment for the plaintiff. I will consider the question of costs tomorrow."

The Saint tapped Peter Quentin on the shoulder as the court rose, and they slipped out ahead of the scanty assembly of spectators, bored reporters, dawdling solicitors, and traditionally learned counsel. Simon Templar had sat in that stuffy little room for two hours, bruising his marrow-bones on an astonishingly hard wooden bench and yearning for a cigarette; but there were times when he could endure many discomforts in a good cause.

Outside, he caught Peter's arm again.

"Mind if I take another look at our plaintiff?" he said. "Just over here—stand in front of me. I want to see what a snurge like that really looks like."

They stood in a gloomy corner near the door of the court, and Simon sheltered behind Peter Quentin's hefty frame and watched James Deever come out with his solicitor.

It is possible that Mr. Deever's mother loved him. Perhaps, holding him on her knee, she saw in his childish face the fulfilment of all those precious hopes and shy, incommunicable dreams which (if we can believe the *Little Mothers' Weekly*) are the joy and comfort of the prospective parent. History does not tell us that. But we do know that since her death, thirty years ago, no other bosom had ever opened

to him with anything like that sublime mingling of pride and affection.

He was a long, cadaverous man with a face like a vulture and shaggy white eyebrows over closely set, greenish eyes. His thin nose swooped low down over a thin gash of a mouth, and his chin was pointed and protruding. In no respect whatsoever was it the kind of countenance to which young children take an instinctive shine. Grown men and women, who knew him, liked him even less.

His home and business address were in Manchester; but the City Corporation had never been heard to boast about it. Simon Templar watched him walk slowly past, discussing some point in the case he had just won with the air of a parson conferring with a churchwarden after matins, and the reeking hypocrisy of the performance filled him with an almost irresistible desire to catch Mr. Deeever's frock-coated stern with the toe of his shoe and start him on one sudden, magnificent flight to the foot of the stairs. The Manchester City Corporation, Simon considered, could probably have kept their ends up without Mr. Deeever's name on the roll of ratepayers. But the Saint restrained himself, and went on peaceably with Peter Quentin five minutes afterwards.

"Let us drink beer," said the Saint.

They entered a convenient tavern, lighting cigarettes as they went, and found a secluded corner in the saloon bar. The court had sat on late, and the hour had struck at which it is lawful for Englishmen to consume the refreshment which can only be bought at any time of the day in nasty, uncivilized foreign countries.

And for a few minutes there was silence. . . .

"It's wonderful what you can do with the full sanction of the law," Peter Quentin said presently, in a rather sourly reflective tone; and the Saint smiled at him wryly. He knew that Peter was not thinking about the more obvious inanities of the Defence of the Realm.

"I rather wanted to get a good close-up of James, and watch him in action," he said. "I guess all the stories are true."

There were several stories about James Deeever; but none of them ever found their

way into print—for libel actions mean heavy damages, and Mr. Deeever sailed very comfortably within the law. His business was plainly and publicly that of a moneylender, and as a moneylender he was duly and legally registered according to the Act which has done so much to bring the profession of usury within certain humane restrictions. And as a plain and registered moneylender Mr. Deeever retained his offices in Manchester, superintending every detail of his business in person, trusting nobody, sending out beautifully worded circulars in which he proclaimed his readiness to lend anybody any sum from £10 to £50,000 on note of hand alone, and growing many times richer than the Saint thought anyone but himself had any right to be. Nevertheless, Mr. Deeever's business would probably have escaped the Saint's attentions if those few facts had covered the whole general principle of it.

They didn't. Mr. Deeever, who, in spite of the tenor of his artistically printed circulars, was not in the moneylending business on account of any urge to go down to mythology as the little fairy godmother of Manchester, had devised half a dozen ingenious and strictly legal methods of evading the limitations placed on him by the Act. The prospective borrower who came to him, full of faith and hope, for the loan of £10 to £50,000 was frequently obliged—not, one must admit, on his note of hand alone, but eventually on the basis of some very sound security. And if the loan were promptly repaid, there the matter ended—at the statutory rate of interest for such transactions. It was only when the borrower found himself in further difficulties that Mr. Deeever's ingenious schemes came into operation. It was then that his victim found himself straying little by little into a maze of complicated mortgages, discounted cheques, "nominal" promissory notes, mysterious "conversions," and technically worded transfers—straying into that labyrinth so gradually at first that it all seemed quite harmless, slipping deeper into it over an easy path of documents and signatures, floundering about in it at last and losing his bearings more and more hopelessly in his struggles to climb back—

finally awakening to the haggard realization that by some incomprehensible jugglery of papers and figures he owed Mr. Deever five or six times as much money as Mr. Deever had given him in cash, and having it proved to him over his own signature that there was no question of the statutory rate of interest having been exceeded at any time.

Exactly thus had it been proved to the widow of a certain victim in the case that they had listened to that afternoon; and there were other similar cases that had come to the Saint's receptive knowledge.

"There were days," remarked the Saint, rather wistfully, "when some lads of the village and I would have carved Brother Deever into small pieces and baited lobsterpots with him from the North Foreland to the Lizard."

"And what now?" queried Peter Quentin.

"Now," said the Saint, regretfully, "we can only call on him for a large involuntary contribution to our Pension Fund for Deserving Outlaws."

Peter lowered the first quarter of his second pint.

"It'll have to be something pretty smart to catch that bird," he said. "If you asked me, I should say you couldn't take any story to him that wouldn't have to pass under a microscope."

"For which reason," murmured Simon Templar, with the utmost gravity, "I shall go to him with a story that is absolutely true. I shall approach him with a hook and line that the cleverest detective on earth couldn't criticise. You're right, Peter—there probably isn't a swindle in the encyclopædia that would get a yard past Brother James. It's a good thing we aren't criminals, Pete—we might get our fingers burned. No, laddie. Full of righteousness and the stuff that passes for beer in this country, we shall draw nigh to Brother James with our haloes fairly glistening. It was just for a man like him that I was saving up my Perfect Crime."

If the Saint's halo was not actually visibly luminous when he called at Mr. Deever's offices the next morning, he at least looked remarkably harmless. A white flower ("for purity," said the Saint) started in his button-hole and flowed in all

directions over his coat lapel; a monocle was screwed into his right eye; his hat sat precariously on the back of his head; and his face was relaxed into an expression of such amiably aristocratic idiocy that Mr. Deever's chief clerk—a man hardly less sour-visaged than Mr. Deever himself—was even more obsequious than usual.

Simon said he wanted a hundred pounds, and would cheerfully give a jolly old note of hand for it if some johnnie would explain to him what a jolly old note of hand was. The clerk explained, oleagiously, that a jolly old note of hand was a somewhat peculiar sort of thing that sounded nice in advertisements, but wasn't really used with important clients. Had Mr.—er—Smith?—had Mr. Smith any other kind of security?

"I've got some jolly old premium bonds," said the Saint; and the clerk nodded his head in a perfect sea of oil.

"If you can wait a moment, sir, perhaps Mr. Deever will see you himself."

The Saint had no doubt that Mr. Deever would see him. He waited around patiently for a few minutes, and was ushered into Mr. Deever's private sanctum.

"You see, I lost a bally packet at Derby yesterday—every blinkin' horse fell down dead when I backed it. I work a system, but of course you can't back a winner every day. I know I'll get it back, though—the chapple who sold me the system said it had never let him down."

Mr. Deever's eyes gleamed. If there was anything that satisfied every one of his requirements for a successful loan, it was an asinine young man with a monocle who believed in racing systems.

"I believe you mentioned some security, Mr.—er—Smith. Naturally we should be happy to lend you a hundred pounds without any formalities, but—"

"Oh, I've got these jolly old bonds. I don't want to sell 'em, because they're having a draw this month. If you hold the lucky number you get a fat bonus. Sort of lottery business, but quite gilt-edged an' all that sort of thing."

He produced a large envelope, and passed it across Mr. Deever's desk. Deever extracted a bunch of expensively water-marked papers artistically engraved with

green and gold lettering which proclaimed them to be Latvian 1929 Premium Loan (British Series) Bearer Bonds, value £25 each.

The financier crunched them between his fingers, squinted at the ornate characters suspiciously through a magnifying glass, and looked again at the Saint.

"Of course, Mr. Smith, we don't keep large sums of money on the premises. But if you like to leave these bonds with me until, say, two o'clock this afternoon, I'm sure we shall be able to make a satisfactory arrangement."

"Keep 'em by every manner of means, old bean," said the Saint airily. "So long as I get the jolly old quidlets in time to take 'em down to the three-thirty today, you're welcome."

Conveniently enough, this happened to be the first day of the Manchester September meeting. Simon Templar paraded again at two o'clock, collected his hundred pounds, and rejoined Peter Quentin at their hotel.

"I have a hundred pounds of Brother James's money," he announced. "Let's go and spread it around on the most frantic outsiders we can find."

They went to the races, and it so happened that the Saint's luck was in. He had doubled Mr. Deever's hundred pounds when the result of the last race went up on the board—but Mr. Deever would not have been seriously troubled if he had lost the lot. Five hundred pounds worth of Latvian Bearer Bonds had been deposited as security for the advance, and in spite of the artistic engraving on them there was no doubt that they were genuine. The interval between Simon Templar's visit to Mr. Deever in the morning and the time when the money was actually paid over to him had been devoted to an expert scrutiny of the bonds, coupled with inquiries at Mr. Deever's brokers, which had definitely established their authenticity—and the Saint knew it.

"I wonder," Simon Templar was saying as they drove back into the town, "if there's any place here where you could buy a false beard. With all this money in our pockets, why should you wait for Nature to take her course?"

Nevertheless, it was not with the air of a man who had collected a hundred pounds over a couple of well-chosen winners that the Saint came to Mr. Deever the next day. It was Saturday, but that meant nothing to Mr. Deever. He was a man who kept only the barest minimum of holidays, and much good business might be done with temporarily embarrassed members of the racing fraternity on the second day of the meeting.

It appeared very likely on this occasion.

"I don't know how the horse managed to lose," said the Saint mournfully.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Deever unctuously. "Dear me! Did it lose?"

The Saint nodded.

"I don't understand it at all. The chappie who sold me this system said it had never had more than three losers in succession. And the stakes go up so frightfully fast. You see, you have to put on more money each time, so that when you win you get back your losses as well. But it simply must win today—"

"How much do you need to put on today, Mr. Smith?"

"About eight hundred pounds. But what with buzzing around an' having a few drinks and what not, don't you know—if you could make it an even thou—"

Mr. Deever rubbed his hands over each other with a face of abysmal gloom.

"A thousand pounds is quite a lot of money, Mr.—er—Smith, but of course if you can offer some security—purely as a business formality, you understand—"

"Oh, I've got lots more of those jolly old Latvian Bonds," said the Saint. "I think I bought about two hundred of 'em. Got to try and pick up a bonus somehow, what?"

Mr. Deever nodded like a mandarin.

"Of course, Mr. Smith. Of course. And it just happens that one of our advances was repaid today, so I may be able to find a thousand pounds for you in our safe." He pressed a bell on his desk, and a clerk appeared. "Mr. Goldberg, will you see if we can oblige this gentleman with a thousand pounds?"

The clerk disappeared again, and came back in a few moments with a sheaf of

bank-notes. Simon Templar produced another large envelope, and Mr. Deever drew from it an even thicker wad of bonds. He counted them over and examined them carefully one by one; then he took a printed form from a drawer, and unscrewed the cap of a Woolworth fountain-pen.

"Now if you will just complete our usual agreement, Mr. Smith—"

Through the glass partition that divided Mr. Deever's sanctum from the outer office there suddenly arose the expostulations of an extraordinarily loud voice. Raised in a particularly raucous north-country accent, it made itself heard so clearly that there was no chance of missing anything it said.

"I tell you, I'd know *thaat maan* anywhere. I'd know 'im in a *daark* room if I was *bliindfoalded*. It *was* Simon Templar, I tell you. I saw 'im *coom* in, an' I says to myself, '*Thaat's Saaint, thaat is.*' I 'aad wife an' loogage with me, so I taakes 'em into 'otel an' cooms *straaight* baack. I'm going to see *thaat Saaint* if I waait here two years—"

The buttery voice of Mr. Goldberg could be heard protesting. Then the north-country voice drowned it again.

"Then if you won't let me in, I'll go *straaight* out an' fetch policeman. *Thaat's* what I'll do."

There was an eruption without, as of someone departing violently into the street; and the Saint looked at Mr. Deever. Simon's hand was outstretched to grasp the pile of bank-notes—then he saw Deever's right hand come out of a drawer, and a nickel-plated revolver with it.

"Just a moment, Mr.—er—Smith," Deever said slowly. "I think you're in too much of a hurry."

He touched the bell on his desk again. Mr. Goldberg reappeared, mopping his swarthy brow. There was a glitter in Deever's greenish eyes which told Simon that the revolver was not there merely for the purposes of intimidation. The Saint sat quite still.

"Look in this gentleman's pockets, Mr. Goldberg. Perhaps he has some evidence of identity on him."

The clerk came over and began a search. The monocle had vanished from the Saint's

right eye, and the expression on his face was anything but vacuous.

"You filthy miser!" he blazed. "I'll see that you're sorry for this. No one has insulted me like this for years—"

Coolly Deever leaned over the desk and smacked Simon over the mouth. The blow cut the Saint's lip.

"A crook should be careful of his tongue," Deever said.

"There's a letter here, Mr. Deever," said the clerk, laying it on the blotter. "It's addressed to Simon Templar. And I found this as well."

"This," was another large envelope, the exact replica of the one in which Simon had handed over his Latvian Bonds. Deever opened it, and found that it contained a similar set of bonds; and when he had counted them he found that they were equal in number to those which he had accepted for security.

"I see, Mr.—er—Smith." The close-set eyes gloated. "So I've been considered worthy of the attentions of the famous Saint. And a very pretty swindle, too. First you borrow money on some genuine bonds; then you come back and try to borrow more money on some more genuine bonds—but when I'm not looking you exchange them for forgeries. Very neat, Mr. Templar. It's a pity that man outside recognized you. Mr. Goldberg, I think you might telephone for the police."

"You'll be sorry for this," said the Saint more calmly, with his eyes on Deever's revolver.

A police inspector arrived in a few minutes. He inspected the two envelopes, and nodded.

"That's an old trick, Mr. Deever," he said. "It's lucky that you were warned. Come along, you—put your hands out."

"You don't need those," he said.

"I've heard about you," said the inspector grimly, "and I think we do. Come on, now, and no nonsense."

For the first time in his life Simon felt the cold embrace of steel on his wrists. A constable put his hat on for him, and he was marched out into the street. A small crowd had collected outside, and already the rumor of his identity was passing from mouth to mouth.

The local inspector did not spare him. Simon Templar was a celebrity, a capture that every officer in England had once dreamed of making, even if of late it had been found impossible to link his name with any proven crimes; and once arrested he was an exhibit to be proud of. The police station was not far away, and the Saint was compelled to walk to it, with his manacled wrists chained to the burly constable on his left and the inspector striding on his right.

He was charged with attempting to obtain money under false pretences; and when it was all written down they asked him if he had anything to say.

"Only that my right sock is wearing a bit thin at the heel," answered the Saint. "D'you think someone could beetle along to my hotel and dig out a new pair?"

He was locked in a cell to be brought before the magistrate on the following Monday. It was Simon Templar's third experience of that, but he enjoyed it no more than the first time.

During Sunday he had one consolation. He was able to divert himself with thoughts of what he could do with about ten thousand pounds.

\* \* \* \*

Monday morning brought a visitor to Manchester in the portly shape of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, who automatically came north at the news of the sensational arrest which had been the front-page splash of every newspaper in the kingdom. But the expert witness who came with him caused a much greater sensation. He examined the contents of the two envelopes, and scratched his head.

"Is this a joke?" he demanded. "Every one of these bonds is perfectly genuine. There isn't a forgery among them."

The local inspector's eyes popped half-way out of his head.

"Are you sure?" he blurted.

"Of course I'm sure," snapped the disgusted expert. "Any fool can see that with half an eye. Did I have to give up a perfectly good day's golf to tell you that?"

Chief Inspector Teal was not interested in the expert's golf. He sat on a bench and held his head in his hands. He was

not quite certain how it had been worked, but he knew there was something very wrong somewhere.

Presently he looked up.

"And Deever struck him in the office—that isn't denied?"

"No, sir," admitted the local inspector. "Mr. Deever said—"

"And you marched Templar through the streets in broad daylight, handcuffed to a constable?"

"Yes, sir. Knowing what I did about him—"

"I'd better see the Saint," said Teal. "If I'm not mistaken, someone's going to be sorry they knew so much."

He was shown into Simon's cell, and the Saint rose languidly to greet him.

"Hullo, Claud," he murmured. "I'm glad you've arrived. A gang of these local half-wits in funny hats—"

"Never mind that," said Teal bluntly. "Tell me what you're getting out of this." Simon pondered.

"I shouldn't accept anything less than ten thousand pounds," he said finally.

The light in Chief Inspector Teal's understanding strengthened slowly. He turned to the local inspector, who had accompanied him.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you never found that man from Huddersfield, or whoever it was that blew the gaff?"

"No, sir. We've made inquiries at all the hotels, but he seems to have disappeared. I've got a sort of description of him—a fairly tall, broad-shouldered man with a beard—"

"I see," said Teal, very sleepily.

Simon dipped into the local inspector's pocket and calmly borrowed a packet of cigarettes. He lighted one.

"If it's any help to you," he said, "the report of everything that happened in Deever's office is perfectly true. I went to him for some money, and then I went to him for some more. Every time I offered excellent security. I behaved myself like a law-abiding citizen—"

"Why did you call yourself Smith?"

"Why shouldn't I? It's a grand old English name. And I always understood that you could call yourself anything you liked so long as you didn't do it with

intent to defraud. Go and tell Deever to prove the fraud. I just had to have some cash to go to the races, I had those Latvian Bonds with me, and I thought that if I gave my real name I'd be making all sorts of silly difficulties. That's all there was to it. But did anyone make an honest attempt to find out if there was a fraud?"

"I see," said Teal again—and he really did see.

"They did not," said the Saint in a pained voice. "What happened? I was assaulted. I was abused. I was handcuffed and marched through the streets like a common burglar, followed by shop girls and guttersnipes, snapped by press photographers. I was shoved in a cell for forty-eight hours, and I wasn't even allowed to send for a clean pair of socks. A bunch of flat-footed nincompoops told me when to get up, when to eat, when to take exercise, and when to go to bed again—just

as if I'd already been convicted. Deever's story has been published in every paper in the United Kingdom. And d'you know what that means?"

Teal did not answer. And the Saint's forefinger tapped him just where his stomach began to bulge, tapped him debonairly in the rhythm of the Saint's seraphic accents, in a gesture that Teal knew only too well.

"It means that there's one of the swellest legal actions on earth waiting for me to win it—an action for damages for wrongful imprisonment, defamation of character, libel, slander, assault, battery, and the Lord alone knows what not. I wouldn't take a penny less than ten thousand pounds. I may even want more. And do you think James Deever won't come across?"

Chief Inspector Teal had no reply. He knew Deever would pay.

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# IT HAPPENED TO ME

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The writers of published letters will receive FREE one year's subscription to MYSTERY NOVELS MAGAZINE. Send your letters in as soon as possible so that they may be published in the next issue. Address all letters to Doctor A. Mystic, Room 204, 165 Franklin Street, New York City.

Dear Dr. Mystic:

Two years after my grandmother's death, my mother awoke from one of those dull deathlike sleeps, that we all have at one time or another to find herself sitting bolt erect in her bed with a sense of expectation. Eerie-riking was very dark, so much so that she couldn't see her own hand in front of her face. Slowly a light glowed, then gradually became brighter until it formed a broad and shining star straight up into the heavens. At the top two large white clouds rolled apart to reveal my grandmother standing in the very clothes she was buried in, with her arms outstretched as though beckoning someone. "Where's Pa!" she asked and smiling faintly she turned, looked over her shoulder and said, "This way, Dear." The clouds slowly rolled together again and the vision faded.

Finding she could not sleep mother sat staring into the darkness until morning. About six o'clock she heard someone riding madly up the drive. Rushing to the door she threw it open to face the Sheriff. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Brown," he said in a kindly voice, "but your father's body has just been found on your mother's grave. He shot himself through the temple." Mother gasped but she did not faint. She had been expecting something like this since she saw what she did.

Nine years later mother was sitting on the porch when she again saw the same thing. Except that instead of "Where's Pa?" grandmother asked "Where's my boy?" Mother rushed in, tears streaming down her face.

"Bob's dead," she cried. "Oh! I know he is!" We tried to comfort her but she insisted she was right. The next day we received word that Bob had died the night before at 8:35 P.M. which was around the time mother saw her vision.

Some people say mother was dreaming. But she claims she really heard and saw her mother. What do you think? Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Dr. Mystic:

Music was a gift to my sister. She loved her piano better than anything else in her life. A few minutes before she died, she pleaded for father to take her to her piano. She played softly for ten minutes, then died in my father's arms. A night or so later, to our surprise several keys of the piano played softly. I screamed and ran to the piano. It was locked just as we left it the night my sister died. Then father told me he had heard it play the night after my sister's death. We think this strange because we have no cats or rats to climb in the back of the piano and it is never unlocked.

Mrs. J. C. Hancock.

2019 North Shepherd,  
Houston, Texas.

Dear Dr. Mystic:

Years ago, we rented an old farm-house that we saw while touring the country one day in the Spring. The main beauty about the place was a large apple tree in full bloom. It was a thing of unsurpassed loveliness. The pink and white blossoms sent out a delicate, haunting fragrance which appealed much to my artistic senses. It fairly charmed me.

I persuaded my husband to rent the old house, though it looked run-down and antiquated. The

bank handled the renting fee and I imagined the clerk looked at us rather queerly, but it was not until we were all moved in, that we found out from peddlers who stopped there, that the place was shunned for miles around as it bore the unsavory reputation of being "haunted."

Neither my husband nor I believed in ghosts so we laughed it off. However, when weird tappings came at the window nights, we could not sleep and even when we discovered it was just the branches of the apple tree hitting against the window, we were at a loss to account for it, for there had been no wind.

In the Summer, uncanny-looking scales formed on the apple tree and we engaged a tree surgeon to doctor it. In the Fall when we should have harvested apples, we discovered the fruit was withered and uneatable. At night the trees looked dark and eerie against the sky and sent chills up my spine. Finally I decided to have the tree dug up and destroyed. Apple wood makes a cheerful blaze in the open fireplace in the Winter.

It was when the men were uprooting the old apple tree that the tragedy was unearthed. It took a charge of dynamite to uproot the giant tree. For beneath its hoary roots we found a much-disintegrated child's skeleton, which had no doubt been buried years ago. Investigation proved it to be a secret murder committed by a man now long dead—it was the child (illegitimate) of his daughter, whom he had killed in a fit of anger. The child's mother had never revealed the extent, committing suicide rather than expose her father's criminal deed. From that time on, the place had been suspiciously haunted and shunned by superstitious villagers. The apple tree, because of its weird formation and noxious fruit, had been dubbed "The Devil's Apple Tree." With its uprooting, the spell was broken. Shortly after, however, the place burned down, much to my sorrow.

Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy,

1 Providence St.,  
Providence, Rhode Island.

Dear Dr. Mystic:

My grandmother, a saintly old Irish lady, lay dying from a stroke. She had been sick for weeks, and now a sudden change that was discernible in her condition caused us to send out an emergency call for the doctor. He was a young chap, only a few years out of college, but a competent physician (now a brilliant surgeon). The young doctor entered the room and examined my grandmother carefully. Slowly, in negative fashion, he shook his head. Death was creeping on—and could not be averted. Suddenly, from overhead, came the sound of sweet music, music too beautiful to be of this earth's creation. The doctor, who was not of our family's faith—Roman Catholic—stood amazed. Then reverently he sank to his knees, spellbound by the music. For two or three minutes, possibly, the tones floated out over the room. Suddenly they stopped. The young doctor arose, like one awaking from a coma, he stretched forth his hand to feel my grandmother's pulse. She was dead. Subsequent inquiries proved that there was no possible way to account for the the music in a natural manner. The doctor, even to this day, claims that he positively heard angels' music welcoming my grandmother home to heaven.

A. J. M., Jr.

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