DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

JUNE 11
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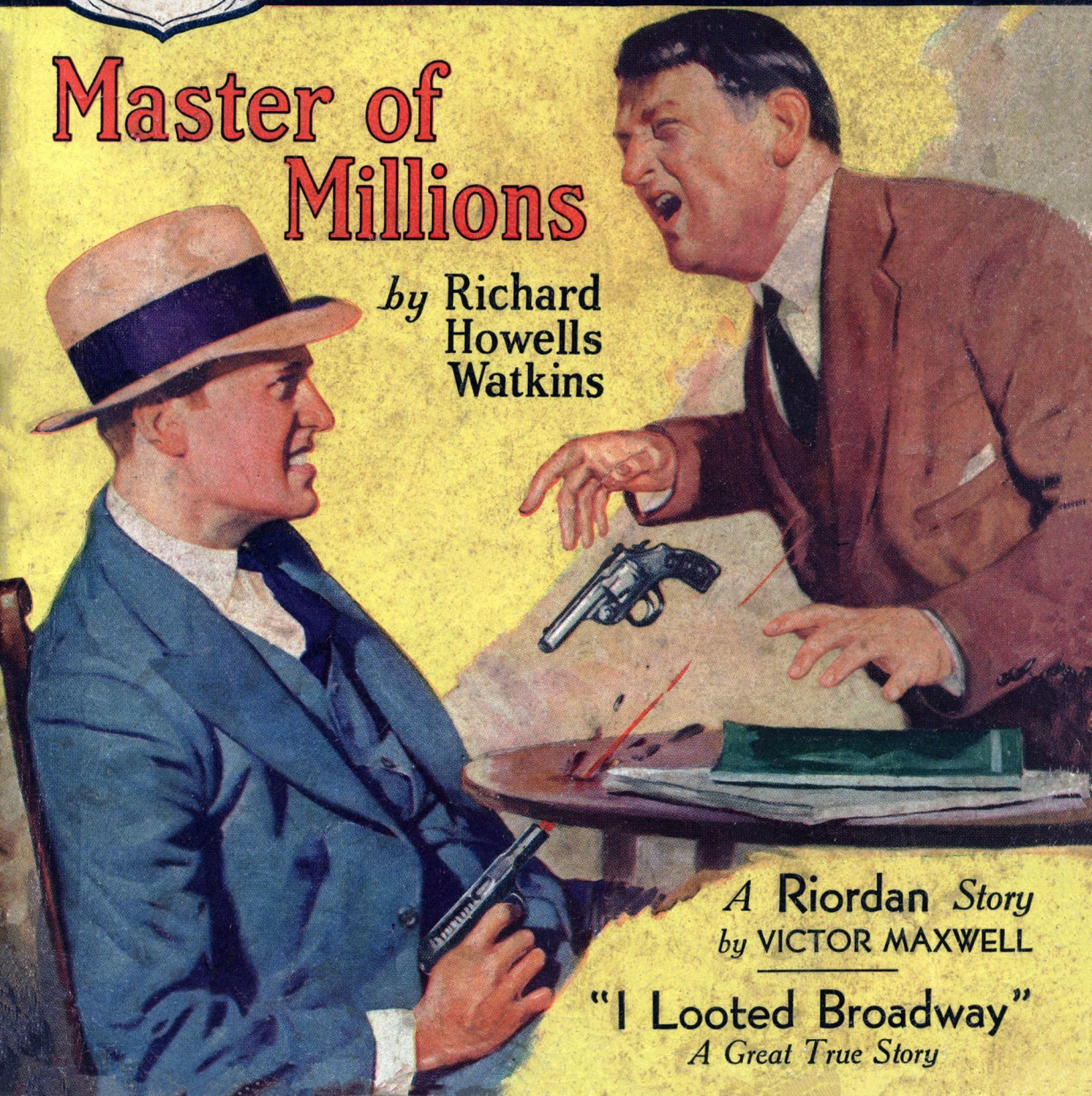

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by Richard Howells Watkins

A Riordan *Story*
by VICTOR MAXWELL

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by

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXVIII — *Saturday, June 11, 1932* — NUMBER 2

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

TRUE STORIES

SERIAL

FEATURES AND FACTS

This Magazine is on sale every Tuesday throughout the United States and Canada

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXVIII | SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1932 | NUMBER 2

Master of Millions

A Novelette

By Richard Howells Watkins

A man was crouching by the wall

Bisbee Was Wrecking, Looting, Getting Away with Millions—but He Wasn't Getting Away with Murder, Tom Heath Swore

CHAPTER I

Eric's Big Story

TOM HEATH frowned uncertainly into the telephone receiver. He drew squares and triangles on the stack of copy paper on the cigarette-burned shelf in the telephone booth; then stabbed at the much abused woodwork with his pencil.

"What kind of story, Eric?"

"It's big! It's staggering!" The man who spoke was Tom Heath's twin brother. The quiver of excitement in his voice was perceptible even over the telephone line. "I've been rounding up facts for days. I must see you this afternoon. How about four-fifteen in the lobby of the Merchants Trust? You

must come, Tom. It's—simply tremendous!"

"All right—unless something big breaks in town," Tom Heath said grudgingly. "But why not meet you up in your office? Is Jonathan Bisbee & Co. so busy in the middle of the world's biggest depression that—"

Eric's voice cut in and there was something in its intensity, its incoherence, that halted Tom's suggestion.

"No! Not in—Not there! Bisbee must not see you, Tom! It's about—I'm not sure—Damn it, man! In the lobby!"

"In the lobby, then," the reporter conceded. "I'll—"

The receiver clicked in his ear. Eric had hung up.

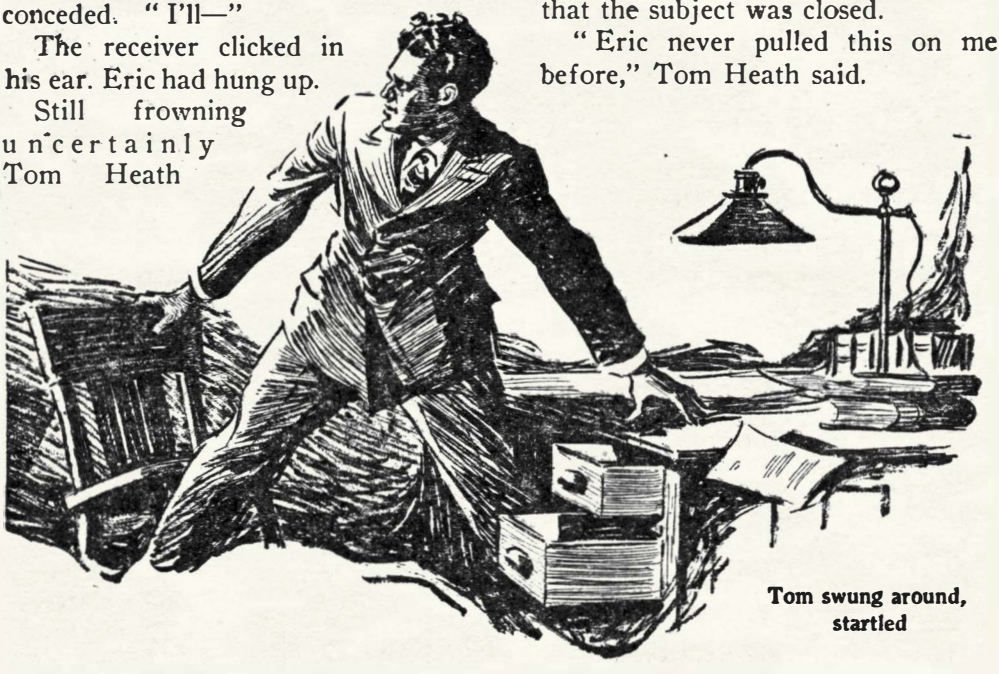
Still frowning uncertainly Tom Heath pushed his broad shoulders past the double doors of the humid phone booth into the city room of the *Morning Mail*. A few typewriters were chattering, but most of the reporters were still out on their afternoon assignments. At his desk he batted out a two-stick interview with a retiring fire chief and took it up to the city desk.

George MacQuiston, the city editor, was skimming an afternoon paper. He raised a quick and wary eye as Tom Heath paused beside the desk.

"Boss, my brother just phoned that he had a story for us," Heath reported uncomfortably. "He wants me to meet him down at the Merchants Trust just after four o'clock."

"You had your day off on Tuesday, Heath," the city editor said curtly. He sat bolt upright to take a police headquarters slip that the assistant city editor had just received over the telephone. Glancing at it, MacQuiston dropped it on his desk and tilted back in his chair again. He made it plain that the subject was closed.

"Eric never pulled this on me before," Tom Heath said.



Tom swung around, startled

George MacQuiston grunted. "If he works in Wall Street he's luring you down there to borrow two dollars from you," he said. "They're eating messenger boys in the Street."

Tom Heath chuckled. Then he stood silently at MacQuiston's elbow.

The city editor dropped his paper and made a dive at his littered desk. "Call up as soon as your brother's

story turns out to be a flivver," he said irritably. "And here"—his questing fingers caught up the assistant city editor's memorandum — "here's an ambulance call from headquarters. 'Man fell or jumped to street near corner William and Wall.' If it isn't just another broker there might be a story there."

"Thanks," said Tom Heath. He hurried away while MacQuiston was searching for more odd jobs around Wall Street.

HE headed for the subway. It was a warm afternoon, more like August than November. The subway was cooler than the street. Roaring southward he gazed skeptically at the ambulance slip. "Window cleaner fell one story and sprained an ankle," he diagnosed.

Ambulance slips usually turned out that way. It was his brother's high, excited voice that held his thoughts.

Downtown he moved briskly toward the Merchants Trust building, a tall new spike in the city's skyline. Eric had a good job there with a bond house of moderate size, Jonathan Bisbee & Co. It was one of the few financial jobs, so it seemed to Tom Heath, that hadn't wilted in the gloom of the big bear market. And now—

There was something going on in front of the Merchants Trust building. A crowd was milling about. Reserves from the Old Slip police station were doing what they could to get people moving. An ambulance went clanging away, with the young surgeon debonairely riding the rear seat. Almost simultaneously a police patrol pulled up.

Tom Heath pushed through the staring crowd, reaching for his police card. Two big policemen, carrying a covered stretcher and escorted by a wedge of other bluecoats, came out of the building. They shoved the stretcher into the patrol wagon.

Swinging up on the step of the car, Tom flashed his card at a scowling cop. "What is it?" he asked.

"Suicide," answered the bluecoat. He flung his hand toward the sheer flank of the towering building, then flipped back the blanket on top of the stretcher. "We got to get away from here, reporter. It ain't much—just a clerk."

Tom Heath did not hear the words, but he let go his hold on the brass rail of the patrol. He toppled back into the surging crowd. What he had seen in that momentary glance had been the mutilated but unmistakable body of his brother Eric.

CHAPTER II

Blank Walls

THE patrol clanged down the street before the fog lifted from Tom Heath's numb brain. The crowd which had upheld him by its density as he dropped off the step of the car was melting away, now, leaving him to support his own shaky body. The incident, in the opinion of the crowd, was over.

Tom Heath moved slowly toward the lobby of the Merchants Trust. In a daze he was fulfilling his part of an appointment that would never be consummated. As he entered the building and stared around at the marble walls he was muttering to himself:

"He didn't do it. He didn't kill himself! He didn't!"

Halting, he continued to stare at the impassive walls.

"Steady!" someone murmured in his ear, as he swayed on his feet. "Come on, Heath; come with me!"

Tom looked around and saw that Ted Stuart, the clever young financial editor of the *Mail,* was grasping him by the arm. Stuart's face showed purpose; Heath followed him mechanically.

Stuart guided him to an elevator. A pop-eyed operator shot the car upward at a signal from the alert starter.

"Here!" Stuart reached for his hip. "Take a shot of this!"

Tom Heath gulped a mouthful. His mind cleared of the horrible mist, but he still felt sick. The car stopped and he followed Stuart along a corridor.

"I was here—to get a paragraph from Bisbee, your brother's boss, when it happened," the financial editor explained. "As soon as they told me who he was I called up the *Mail.* But you had left."

"He didn't do it!" Tom Heath protested. "I know he didn't kill himself!"

"MacQuiston said the office would look after—after your brother," Stuart replied. "I'm taking you to Bisbee—you'll want to know about it, I suppose. Or you can just rest here in his office a while."

Tom Heath braced himself. "Yes. I want to know," he said grimly. He remembered the agitated message about the big story. The high thin note of excitement in Eric's voice still rang in his ears. Eric wasn't the sort who became excited easily. "I want to know," he repeated. "And I'm going to find out."

Stuart looked at the reporter with sudden fixity. "Maybe you will find out," he said without conviction. "I want to talk to you about that myself, after you've seen Bisbee. Here's the office. Steady!"

He opened a door modestly lettered with the firm name of Jonathan Bisbee & Co. and guided Tom Heath into a small reception room. The white-faced girl at the desk looked up at them, then vanished without a word at a nod from Theodore Stuart.

Jonathan Bisbee was alone in his office when Tom Heath and Theodore Stuart were ushered in.

Mr. Bisbee was slumped in a disconsolate attitude behind a plain oak desk. His powerful body was outlined against the black front of a big safe such as usually occupies the general office rather than the room of the head of the firm.

Slowly Bisbee rose to his feet. He was a tall man of singular appearance, slightly bent at the shoulders as if his big body habitually failed to keep pace with his narrow, projecting head. His thin nose curved like a scimitar and his eyes were coldly gray.

"This is Eric Heath's brother, Mr. Bisbee," Stuart said.

The bent, middle-aged man behind the desk turned his deeply imbedded eyes upon Tom Heath and nodded slightly.

"Sit down, Mr. Heath," he said in an uninflected and colorless voice. "I am so sorry."

His long curved fingers pressed a button. "I—I am overcome, Mr. Heath. Terrible! Terrible! I think Mr. Train, my secretary, knows more about it than anyone else here."

Tom Heath sat down. Bisbee looked impressive enough, but his hesitant voice, his slow movements, conveyed a strange indication of helplessness. And there was nothing in this small, quietly furnished office that hinted at the wealth of Jonathan Bisbee.

ALMOST immediately in response to the bell a short, exceedingly blond young man entered. He was irreproachably dressed and wore a flower in his buttonhole. Though

plainly enough upset he looked at his employer with attentive eyes, ignoring the others.

"Mr. Train, please tell Mr. Heath about his brother," said Bisbee.

"I really know very little." The blond young man spoke with jerky readiness. "When I last saw Mr. Heath he was in his office, a small room leading directly into mine. I put my head in just before I joined Mr. Bisbee in the library, where we were analyzing a corporation report. I asked Mr. Heath to answer if my telephone rang. He nodded and went on with his work. When I returned, about three-quarters of an hour ago, he was not in his office. Later—we heard."

"I myself was sitting in this room, waiting for Mr. Bisbee to return, when it must have happened, Tom," Ted Stuart put in. "There was only one room between me and your brother—Train's room. I didn't hear or see anything out of the way. Neither did Miss Stoner, a stenographer, who was here with me most of the time."

And that, despite the questioning of many employees, was all that Tom Heath could learn about his brother's fall to the sidewalk, fourteen stories below. No one had noticed anything unusual about Eric Heath's manner; no one had been in his room within half an hour of his death.

There was opportunity during that thirty minutes for almost anyone in the office to have slipped into Eric's room. Not even Ted Stuart had a sure alibi, as he pointed out, for the stenographer was not present all the time he was waiting in Bisbee's private office.

Tom could see no signs of a struggle. Both the windows in Eric's office were open wide at the bottom.

Various employees unconvincingly expressed the belief that, becoming faint, he might have leaned out too far. But Tom Heath did not credit for an instant the accident theory. He knew his brother's unfailing health too well.

He found not the slightest indication of that big story among Eric Heath's things. Not a hint.

A blank wall! That was what Tom Heath felt that he was up against. Anyone might have entered that room from the private hall, but no one had.

No one! Nothing! No clew! Everything was negative like the colorless, week-voiced master of the company.

Mr. Bisbee, after an hour, suggested with no indication of impatience that Tom Heath might request an expert examination of the room by the Homicide Squad.

"A detective came and went before you arrived," he said. "He saw nothing suspicious about the case, but we can ask police headquarters to send another man."

The financier's grey eyes, so sunken on either side of the narrow nose, dwelt in mild interrogation upon Heath as he spoke.

Theodore Stuart promptly seconded the suggestion.

Tom Heath shook his head. "No use," he said. "The police will think the same as all of you do."

Utterly at a loss, he turned away from Jonathan Bisbee and his watchful, almost fearful secretary. He walked out into the corridor that ran like an aisle between the various offices of the firm. Ted Stuart followed him.

Tom moved past a bench on which was seated that unpleasing creature, Nagle — Jonathan Bisbee's chauffeur. The man, clad in a grey whipcord liv-

ery that could not conceal the awkward grossness of his heavy body, stared stolidly in front of him. His small, protruding eyes, set in a huge expanse of blotched and surplus flesh did not even wink as Tom went by.

The reporter did not speak to Nagle. He had already questioned the chauffeur without result. Nagle had said that he had not left the bench where he awaited orders until after the discovery of the tragedy. He had seen nothing, heard nothing.

Five feet beyond him, Tom Heath looked around at Nagle with a swift movement of his head. The chauffeur's eyes had not followed him, as a man's eyes naturally would. They were still rigidly fixed on the wall.

"I'm getting out of here," Tom Heath said to Stuart. "This place doesn't seem to help me think. But—Eric didn't do it."

"You've done all you could," Stuart murmured approvingly.

Outside the building Tom parted from Ted Stuart. Although it was after five o'clock, dusk had not yet come down on the thousands rushing homeward through the street.

"I know you have your stuff to turn out," Tom said to the financial editor. "And I have—things—to do myself. Thanks for standing by. I'm all right now."

"Come back to the Wall Street office as soon as you can," Stuart told him with quiet earnestness. "I want to talk to you about this."

CHAPTER III

The Man in the Dark

TOM HEATH turned his steps toward the Old Slip police station. As he neared the river his eyes suddenly focused on a tall, barrel-chested man with reddish hair who stood on a street corner peering into his pipe. The reporter recognized the loiterer as Peter Watts, a detective sergeant of the Homicide Squad. Watts was usually standing on a street corner somewhere, reflectively nursing his pipe.

The detective threw away a pipe cleaner and jerked his head at Tom Heath. "Tough break," he mumbled uncomfortably. "I was up there."

"You were up in Bisbee's office, Pete?" Tom asked. "What do you make of it?"

Peter Watts shook his ponderous head, then began to fill his pipe. "Nothing to it for us," he said. "I had a look at the room. No suspicion of homicide so I beat it before the reporters could spot me and play it up as murder."

Tom Heath rubbed his chin with a tremulous hand. "Was it chance you were in the building?"

"I was coming to see Bisbee," the big detective explained. "Doing a job for the Connecticut police. Bisbee's car was stuck up and his chauffeur killed in the driveway of his own place up at Stamwich three weeks ago. A one man job. It was in the papers."

The newspaper man nodded. He remembered the case, although not much had come out.

"Underground, Bisbee raised hell about it with the Connecticut cops, called in private dicks, offered a reward and hired a tough looking gorilla to take the place of the chauffeur that was killed," Sergeant Pete Watts explained. "He didn't say so, but he was scared. My end doesn't look like much, but I wanted to talk to Bisbee. And when I got there—"

He shook his head. "No good me trying to make a murder case out of

a—" He stopped himself and stared at his pipe as if it had bitten him.

"Out of an accident," he added clumsily.

"Bisbee's employees don't seem to have much luck," Tom Heath commented with some bitterness.

"Millionaires are marks," Watts said succinctly. He continued to fill his pipe. "Especially these days. But Bisbee hasn't had much trouble with crooks. He don't stand out in New York. He's quiet. His estate up at Stamwich isn't anything wonderful, and his best car's a year old. He's got a high speed motor yacht that he commutes to New York in, but that's not big or new, either."

"You didn't see a thing in my brother's room that would make you think he might possibly have been murdered, Pete?"

"Not a thing," Peter Watts declared solemnly. "Nor on his body, Heath. I'm talking to you as a reporter and as a brother of the—the case. Your brother's gone. It's tough. But don't make it tougher."

He fidgetted with his pipe. "Same time, if I can do anything for you, I'm ready," he said, with awkward pauses. "You've always treated me right in the paper and out of it."

"Thanks, Pete," Tom Heath said. "I'll remember that."

The man from the Homicide Squad jerked up his pipe in a gesture of farewell and walked stolidly away.

Tom stared at the station house to which his brother's body had been taken, squared his shoulders a trifle and moved toward it.

IT was almost dark when Tom Heath descended the steps of the Ninth Avenue Elevated and headed toward the remodelled rear house on Twenty-fifth street where his brother had lived alone with his books in a small apartment.

In his pockets were his brother's keys, his brother's wallet and a few oddments and papers that gave no clew whatsoever to the big story or to why anyone should desire the death of Eric Heath.

He entered the red wooden gate and passed along the narrow cement way between two tenement houses. This led to a dignified old house in the center of the block that had once, a century before, stood in its own grounds. The dignity of the old place had sadly been impaired by numerous alterations, scaling paint and a blatant sign, "Apartments."

The windows of Eric's two rooms, on the second floor, were dark, but for a moment Tom Heath, glancing soberly upward, caught a glimpse of an errant beam of moonlight on one pane.

He pulled open the front door, which the careless housekeeper had left unlocked, as usual, groped his way through the dark hall and tramped up the long flight of stairs to the second floor front.

Again he had no need for his keys. A bundle of laundry, left just inside the door, told him why. He entered the living room, switched on the desk light and dropped his hat on the couch. He wandered into the small adjoining bedroom, switched on the light there and peered into the bathroom. The light from the other room revealed Eric's shaving tackle standing ready for instant use on a glass shelf above the washstand.

With tightening lips he came back into the living room and sat down at his brother's big desk. Here there was an ordered litter of bills, newspaper

clippings, letters, a book or two and a few stray papers.

Methodically Tom Heath began to go through the contents of the desk. He spent a moment or two over the clippings, which concerned the business depression. They were all of a general nature.

Then he came upon a typewritten sheet—doubtless the product of the portable machine that stood open on a stand beside the desk.

It was a list of safe deposit vaults. The name of the safe deposit company was given and then the address. And below it, in his brother's handwriting, as if scribbled unconsciously while deep in thought, were a few words. "J. Bisbee, his hoard," the penciled words read, and beside them was a picture of a money bag with "?oo,ooo,ooo" lettered across it. And beneath three more words: "What should I ——?" That was all.

Tom Heath studied it soberly. Safe deposit vaults! Bisbee's hoard! Could it be possible that this meant that his brother had discovered that Jonathan Bisbee had millions stowed away—

Suddenly the desk light above his head went out.

Startled, Tom Heath swung around. He leaped to his feet. Through his mind flashed the possible meaning of that errant beam of moonlight he had seen on the windowpane.

A quick, involuntary cry broke from his throat.

There was someone in the room. A man was crouching by the wall. As he straightened up Tom Heath made out by the light from the bedroom that he wore Eric's long silk dressing gown.

The intruder moved like a darting spear across the zone of darkness in the room toward the outer door.

Tom rallied swiftly from the shock of seeing a figure in his dead brother's gown. Then he lunged toward the man. One of his hands gripped a solid arm.

The man whirled. His right arm swung toward Tom's head.

Tom staggered. A thousand lightning flashes flared before his eyes. Bone and muscle turned to water in his body. He fought for his wits, a hand reaching spasmodically toward his blazing head.

Something thumped on the floor beside him. The man reached the door and flung it open. Then it crashed shut behind him.

Tom Heath rallied quickly from his pain and dizziness. He rushed toward the door. When he reached the head of the stairs the thump of the fugitive's feet had ceased. He heard the front door closing.

Staggering, he made what speed he could down the long flight. In the dark hall something soft entangled his feet and he fell. He climbed up and hurried on.

There was enough reflected light in the narrow alley that led to the street to tell him it was empty. He stumbled along with one hand gripping his aching head.

When he reached the street that, too, was empty of nearby pedestrians. And every one of the tenement doorways was an easy hiding place for a resourceful fugitive.

Tom Heath turned back. He was fighting a feeling of sickness that might become faintness any moment. In the lower hall he again felt something soft under his feet. Stopping, he lit a match. The thing that had floored him was his brother's dressing gown. He picked it up. And then, as the light of the match waned, he saw something else in the hall—a man standing stiffly

motionless, with his body jammed into a rear corner of the hall.

CHAPTER IV

Held Up

THE match dropped from Tom Heath's fingers. He let it die on the floor. Swiftly he crept toward the light switch. He snapped it on. Then, with a growl, he turned with clenched hands to the man in the corner.

"Now, damn you, slug me again!" he rasped.

From the stiff figure came a gasp of fear. The man seemed to crumple up as he stared with apprehensive eyes at the approaching reporter.

"This—this is a public hallway!" he stammered, shrinking against the wall. "You—you have no right to—to menace me like this!"

Tom Heath stopped. His fingernails ceased to bite his palms. He blinked as he stared at the man in the corner. It was Train, Jonathan Bisbee's blond and foppish secretary.

For a full thirty seconds Tom Heath studied unwinkingly the terror-stricken face of the secretary. He was struggling with a question. Was this meticulously dressed, shrewd but muscular young man the resourceful and hard hitting intruder who had so easily surprised and vanquished him?

Though Train's face was weak and frightened, Tom Heath had been deceived by faces before this. Train was breathing fast, but that might be due to agitation, not exertion.

"Why are you hiding here?" Tom demanded.

"I heard a struggle, slamming doors, a falling body, men running down stairs—all kinds of things—so I tried to keep out of it," Train explained. "Here was I—in a dark hall in a house I had never been in before—"

"And had no right to enter," Tom Heath put in.

"It's a public hallway, Mr. Heath," Train insisted. "And I have a letter to you from Mr. Bis—"

Tom Heath's hand shot out and halted Train's own manicured fingers as they crept toward his inside coat pocket. The secretary uttered a startled cry.

"I'll get the letter," the reporter said coldly. "It's mine, isn't it?"

He reached into the other's coat pocket and felt an envelope. But he did not pull it out until he had tapped both of Train's armpits and made sure there was no weapon hidden beneath that trimly tailored coat, or in the hip pockets of the well-hung trousers.

"Come upstairs," he commanded, at last, and pushed Train ahead of him. He picked up his brother's dressing gown and followed his prisoner.

In the living room of Eric's apartment he switched on the overhead light and stood for a moment, one hand on Train's trembling arm, to survey the disordered room.

Near the door lay the head and eight inches of the shaft of a broken golf club—a niblick. Tom felt the side of his own skull, where that heavy iron clubhead had impinged. There was a sizeable bump rising, but he no longer felt faint.

He knew that broken golf stick. It had lain in the big closet on the other side of the room for six weeks or more, awaiting repairs. In that closet, too, Eric's dressing gown usually hung. And the closet door was wide open, now.

It was easy enough to reconstruct the action. He had come into the house and surprised some intruder. The man

had hidden in the big closet. Seeing the search that Tom was making, the man in the closet realized that he would be discovered. So he had slipped on the dressing gown, as a disguise or concealment, crept out of the closet, jerked the cord of the reading lamp from the wall socket and bolted for the door with the broken golf stick in his hand. He had clubbed his way out and, quite safe from identification, now walked the streets. Unless—

Tom Heath swung around on his prisoner.

Train was standing in obedient stillness. But his head was bent sharply and he was staring with intensity at the typewritten list of safety deposit vaults that had dropped to the floor from Heath's hand during the scuffle.

TOM picked it up. He had a strong conviction that this list was the one tangible thing he had to substantiate his stubborn belief that his brother had been murdered.

"What is this to you?" he inquired, as he folded the sheet of paper and put it in his pocket.

Train shifted his weight to the other leg. "I—I thought it might be a—clew," he said. "Did he drop it—the man that ran?"

"Sit down over there," the reporter commanded. He plugged in the desk lamp once more, made a swift search of the apartment for a possible accomplice still in hiding, and then opened the letter from Bisbee.

It was a brief communication addressed to him. Couched in formal language, the letter offered to pay the funeral expenses of the "unfortunate employee."

"When did Mr. Bisbee write this?" Tom demanded.

"He thought of it after you had left," Train replied. He had regained a certain amount of composure.

"And then he went home?"

Train looked at him from under his yellow eyelashes. "Then he drove to the Metropolitan Yacht Club landing stage on the East River, boarded his commuter — his yacht — and went home," he said steadily. "He lives in Connecticut. I am to follow by train, as I often do."

"What do you think of my brother's death?"

"Suicide," Train asserted uneasily. "Sorry and so on, but what else could it be?"

It seemed to Tom Heath that the inoffensive-looking blond secretary was making a masked but determined effort to convince him.

"Why do you want me to believe that?" he demanded.

Train shrugged his narrow shoulders. He did not speak.

Tom Heath tossed Bisbee's letter into the scrap basket.

"Thank Mr. Bisbee for me and tell him the Heath family buries its own dead," he said curtly. "Now go!"

Train stood up. Near the door he paused. "Sorry and all that, but—" he began.

Tom Heath took a step toward him and the secretary vanished precipitately.

"It's ten to one that yes-man wasn't the fellow who swung that niblick," he told himself. "Unless — why did he come? Bisbee's letter is a blind. It shows that Bisbee's in it. That's something."

He drew out the list of safety deposit vaults again and stared at it. At last he thrust it into his pocket.

"I may be trying to hook a cheap burglary up with a murder that has

nothing to do with it," he warned himself.

It did not take him long to finish his inspection of Eric's papers. He found nothing that seemed to have any bearing upon his soft-spoken, cold-eyed employer.

Locking up the apartment, he left the house. Rather wearily he directed his steps toward Ninth Avenue. He saw a taxicab drawn up outside a darkened house, but ignored it.

The Elevated would take him downtown more quickly. The deserted street reminded him that it was getting late. He quickened his pace.

He drew abreast of the cab. From the shadows of the house a man loomed in front of him. Simultaneously he felt the jab of something pointed and hard against his backbone. There was a man behind him, too.

CHAPTER V

An Even Break

"IN the cab, you!" The big man in front of him spat out the words and shoved himself against Tom Heath's chest. And the pointed thing behind him prodded his spine in emphasis of the command.

Promptly Tom Heath backed toward the taxicab. The man behind him had the door open. A moment later he was sitting on the back seat with an enemy on either side of him.

"Squawk an' you're through!" snarled the big fellow. "We need a loan. Jake, let him have it if he moves."

"Damn right I'll let him have it!" the other thug muttered.

Tom did not move. He had six dollars with him, and more reasons than usual to live. Also, his head already ached and he was not fool enough to think that he could win out against two men.

He studied the big footpad intently. The man had a handkerchief covering his face from the eyes downward. That was something new in street robberies. Concerning the other man he could make out nothing except that he was of medium size and held an automatic.

The leader, with a flashlight to see by, emptied Tom's pockets.

"We need cash, buddy," he explained. "Cash is what we want. See?" But he collected in addition to Heath's wallet every other scrap of paper he had on him, including the list of storage vaults. That was new, too.

The reflected light of the torch enabled Tom to make out that the big crook's powerful body was round rather than broad. He was clad in a cheap, wrinkled suit of nondescript color, badly fitting. There was something definitely familiar about him.

Once the stick-up man inadvertently turned the light downward. Tom, following its ray, saw the big man's feet. The black shoes under the unkempt trouser legs were neatly polished and almost new.

"I'm leavin' you the chicken feed," the round-bodied thug said, thrusting back a handful of silver into Heath's trousers pocket. "You're a disappointment, buddy. Squawk and we'll come back for ye."

Swiftly he gripped the lapels of Heath's coat and pulled him off the seat. The silent man on the other side jabbed Tom viciously in the back with his automatic.

In an instant he was jerked out onto the sidewalk. Propelled by two pairs of arms he fell, sprawling.

"Lie there!" the big man warned. The glint of a gun showed in the hand he stretched through the cab window.

The cab started. It swept down the street as Tom Heath scrambled to his feet. His mouth was tight-shut.

The cab swung around the corner. "Black shoes — nicely polished," he said, dusting off his knees. "Didn't bother to change them. He might as well have shown me his fat mug. The other was just a hired thug."

ALMOST at once, though still thinking hard, he got under way. He walked down to Twenty-third Street and waited for an eastbound car. Fifteen minutes later he was approaching the trim landing stage of the Metropolitan Yacht Club.

The riding lights of only a few small craft not yet laid up for the winter gleamed in the East River anchorage of the club. A bored attendant surreptitiously dropped a cigarette as Tom approached. Straightening up to attention, the man placed a heavy foot on the glowing stub.

Tom Heath essayed a casual laugh. "Great Scot, my man, smoke if you wish," he said with easy generosity. "I'm not on the regatta committee. You're sure Mr. Bisbee's commuter hasn't gone?"

"No, sir," said the man stolidly, pointing out into the stream. "She's still there, sir. Shall I—"

"Not now," Tom Heath broke in, pausing. "Mr. Bisbee won't be going now till his man gets here."

"So Mr. Bisbee said, sir," the club attendant agreed.

Tom Heath turned down the ill-lighted waterfront. He walked on southward for two blocks.

Suddenly he darted toward the cover offered by a pier gateway. A man was coming toward him along the street — a man in a chauffeur's most impeccable uniform — a big, round-bodied man in a hurry. He was alone. As he passed a street light Tom Heath caught the gleam of his neatly polished shoes.

Then he swung on out of the lighted area around the lamp. He came nearer to where Tom Heath had flattened himself in the recessed gateway.

The reporter doubled up his right hand, with the thumb projecting beyond the bent fingers. He waited. The round-bodied man went past. Tom stepped out behind the hurrying chauffeur. He thrust his thumb with all the force he had in him against the big man's backbone. Tom Heath knew just how it should feel.

"Hoist 'em!" he snarled, and there was genuine menace in his voice.

The big chauffeur's hands shot up without an instant's hesitation. He stood stock still.

"You got me wrong, buddy," he murmured. "I'm light. But take a look, buddy, I ain't kidding you."

Tom Heath growled an unintelligible reply. Already his left hand was delving into the pockets of the uniform. He found a wallet and knew it by very touch for his own. He found papers and his police card and stuffed them all into his own pocket.

The big chauffeur suddenly swayed backward an inch or two against Tom Heath's tense right thumb. And then, certain that no weapon actually menaced him, the man whirled and reached for his own hip pocket.

Tom Heath's right hand was already clenched. He shifted his projecting thumb as he sent his hard fist upward in a swift and forceful uppercut.

Though it had failed as an imitation of a gun the fist succeeded, as a fist. It crashed against the point of the chauffeur's chin. The man's bones

seemed to turn to water in his body. He slumped in a lifeless heap.

Tom Heath went away. Heedless of the danger of being spotted by a patrolling cop he ran like a runaway steer with the stockyards behind. His ears were alert for the blare of a gun and he swerved as he ran. He left the waterfront and zigzagged into the heart of Manhattan. Gradually he slackened pace.

Not until he was on an elevated train and heading down town did he venture to glance over his recovered belongings. They were all there, including the list of vaults.

"An even break," he told himself. "And luckier than I deserve."

He hurried through the strange, deserted, echoing streets of the financial district to the building where the *Mail* had its untidy Wall Street office. Ted Stuart, with his feet on a desk, was waiting, his work done for the night. He sat up abruptly and looked at Tom Heath with a rather peculiar expression on his face.

"I suppose this slip is a coincidence, but it's queer," he said and passed over a sheet of paper to Tom Heath. "Have you heard about it? The night desk tried to get you at your place and down here. Our headquarters man happened to notice it among the routine stuff ten minutes ago."

Tom Heath glanced at the sheet. It was a report on a one-alarm fire, of which there are many every day and night in the city. It reported briefly that a fire on the second floor of a house on West Twenty-fifth Street had destroyed the contents of a desk, owned by "E. Hearn." "Cause unknown. No one injured. Damage trifling."

The reporter rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The address was the address of the rear house in which his brother had lived.

"Perhaps that's why the big one was going alone toward Bisbee's yacht," he said slowly. "The other one went to Eric's house to make sure nobody could find anything among Eric's papers."

"What's all this?" Stuart asked. "I want to tell you something about Bisbee."

"I've come to talk as well as to listen," Tom said and told what had been happening to him.

CHAPTER VI

The Hidden Hoard

QUIETLY sympathetic, Ted Stuart listened to the reporter's narration of his adventure and of the story that had died with Eric Heath. Half of Ted Stuart's success as one of the foremost financial writers in the city was due to his ability to listen intelligently. He was a handsome, well-mannered man in his thirties, one of the few remaining descendants of a family once a real power in the banking world. He wore his clothes as the genteel Train would never learn to wear clothes and he had played good football for his university. Although his name had originally gained him the interest of many big financiers it was his discretion that continued to hold their confidence. He was able to get stories quite out of reach of other Wall Street editors.

Stuart stood up and walked the length of the room when Tom finished.

"Your brother was running down one of the biggest stories that ever broke in Wall Street," he said. "And he's left a job behind him that you and I must finish. It's a job I'm sure he'd have given his life for, whether he actually did so or not."

Tom Heath examined the Wall Street editor rather dubiously. From Stuart's careful lips this sounded queer.

"What do you know about Jonathan Bisbee?" Stuart hurled the question at the reporter.

"Not much," Tom answered. "Eric said he was a big man down here in a very quiet way. I sized him up as a hard proposition."

"You are underestimating him," Stuart said. "Bisbee is the coldest fish in Wall Street—and the quietest. Also in his way, which is a different way from that of the important men down here, he is the biggest."

"What?" Tom Heath demanded incredulously. "You never hear of him as president or chairman or—"

"That isn't Bisbee's line," Stuart put in. "I'm a busy man, Heath, but lately I've spent a lot of time on Bisbee. I have my ways of getting a bit here and a word there about things I can't prove and therefore can't print. And I've about decided that what Jonathan Bisbee is interested in doing is wrecking. He isn't the biggest banker or broker by a million miles, but he's the biggest wrecker."

Tom Heath made no comment.

"That's just a suspicion, of course," Theodore Stuart said hastily. "But I have an idea that your brother had more than suspicions; he had proof."

"Come again!" Tom Heath muttered. "Are you trying to tell me that Jonathan Bisbee is some sort of Communist agent who—"

Stuart interrupted him. "You've been reading books," he said. "Bisbee doesn't give a hoot about Communism—or democracy. What he's out for is making money for Jonathan Bisbee."

"Well, how—"

"Why didn't the United States come out of this depression faster?" Stuart demanded. "We've emerged from every other a lot quicker and a lot richer. This slump was different. It had no bottom. Why? Because every time the markets—the stock market, the bond market, the commodity markets—every time they perked up a bit a selling wave hit them like an avalanche. It was different from the ordinary bull and bear struggle."

Tom nodded.

"People sold stocks, bonds, copper, wheat, cotton, everything—slung it on the markets from Maine to Texas," he said. "And the bottom dropped out of the markets again. Everyone lacked confidence."

"Right!" Ted Stuart declared. "And the reason confidence was lacking was that those selling waves were so cleverly timed and so devastatingly violent that they overwhelmed every effort of constructive bankers and financiers to arrest them. Right now trade shows all the signs of permanent improvement—but another terrific selling wave would kill the improvement, throw men out of work, and ruin a few banks."

He sat down and leaned forward over his desk toward Tom Heath.

"Lately, shrewd observers are beginning to wonder if there was not a single intellect coördinating and launching those panicky waves of selling, backed by the spread of alarming rumors. And my bet is that inconspicuous Mr. Bisbee, of the unimportant house of Jonathan Bisbee and Co., was, under scores of dummy companies and individuals all over the country, the big bear behind the selling trigger."

TOM HEATH studied the animated countenance of the financial expert of his newspaper. If Stuart felt that way about Jonathan

Bisbee certainly he, an inconspicuous reporter, was in no position to contradict him. And Tom was in no mood to contradict him, either, while the memory of Bisbee's narrow, cold-eyed face was etched so plainly in his mind.

" If Bisbee has been consistently on the bear side in a big way since the collapse in the autumn of 1929 he'll come close to being the richest man in the world to-day," Ted Stuart declared. "Most rich men have lost money by the carload because they thought the drop was over and bought too soon. I can't find that Bisbee ever bought any stock. And selling stock you haven't got and buying it in to cover when it reaches a ridiculously low figure in a panicky market is an infernally fast way of making money. You see, you never own anything but money—cash! And money can't go down. I've heard rumors here and there that Bisbee has demanded cash settlements of transactions."

"He must have a wad of cash," Tom agreed. Out of his pocket he drew the list of safe deposit vaults that he had found in his brother's desk.

"Money! He must have million upon million tucked away in banks, tucked away in safe deposit boxes, tucked away—somewhere," Ted Stuart murmured. " Think! What does he want with it? Security—or something else? An enormous fortune in cash alone! A mountain of money! Gold! Greenbacks! Bank deposits!"

"Bank deposits!" Tom Heath repeated skeptically. "Why should he trust banks when he's the man that was breaking banks? Look at that!"

He handed the list of vaults to the financial editor and told how he had come across it in Eric's desk. " Suppose that is a list of places in which Eric had discovered that his boss had locked up cash—greenbacks?" he suggested. "My brother was a square-shooter. If he had discovered that Bisbee had millions upon millions in bills hoarded up in vaults—money that is needed so badly in circulation just now—he'd expose him, no matter what the consequences were. And I guess the government would find ways of settling Mr. Bisbee before Mr. Bisbee settled the country by his partial corner on cash."

Ted Stuart was whistling softly to himself as he gazed at the list. "I knew that he had safe deposit boxes in four of these places," he said. "But if he has stuff in all—well, it may be Bisbee who is hoarding a good bit of the money that hundreds and thousands of people all over the country are supposed to have tucked away."

He took a dollar bill from his wallet and measured it with a ruler. " Six inches and a bit by two and a half inches and a bit," he murmured. " Let's say the bill measured six by three inches and that two hundred would make a stack an inch high. Then such a small stack, if of thousand dollar bills, would be worth two hundred thousand dollars, or, if of ten thousand dollar bills, two million dollars.

" You could pack away from twenty to fifty such stacks or from forty million to one hundred million dollars, in a moderate sized safe deposit vault. And Mr. Bisbee, if we are right about this list of your brother's, has—h'm—twenty-one boxes. From eight hundred forty millions to two bill— I am out of my depth. Perhaps we are crediting him with bills of too large denomination."

He put away his dollar bill with a grave face.

" An interesting speculation," he said. " But not quite credible."

" Too bad Eric is dead," Tom Heath

said bitterly. "He might have been able to tell us. But Eric fell from a window. He was dead in less than an hour from the time when he telephoned that he had a big story."

"Murder seems a bit crude for a man like Jonathan Bisbee," Ted Stuart demurred. "And you're overlooking something."

"What?"

"That this hoard of cash would inevitably draw crooks to Bisbee. They seem able almost to smell money in big lumps. Don't forget a lone robber attacked Bisbee's car and killed his chauffeur three weeks ago. Another sneaking super-thief may have killed your brother."

"Perhaps," said Tom Heath, quite unconvinced. "But I'm going to find out."

Theodore Stuart's handsome face hardened. "You and I as newspaper men and ordinary citizens have a plain duty to carry out. It may or may not solve your brother's death, but with all respect to him, it is more important.

"Once it is known that Bisbee is largely responsible for this terrific scarcity of cash which has been regarded as due to widespread hoarding the government can put a stop to it. Bisbee's fangs will be drawn before he can strike again—if he is planning to strike with another selling wave financed by cash and not merely to hoard it."

Tom Heath nodded slowly. "I agree," he said. "It's too late to help Eric, but I'm certainly going to try to finish his job for him."

"Right!" Stuart stood up. "Before we can break a story like that on a man like Jonathan Bisbee we must have the goods, the whole goods and nothing but the goods on him. And you must have even more than that to hang your brother's death on him."

"That's that, then," Tom said quietly. "I'll start on Bisbee in the morning."

"I've my doubts of Bisbee as an actual killer," Theodore Stuart said soberly. "But if I were you I wouldn't expose myself unduly when Bisbee or his gorilla chauffeur or blond secretary were near me."

Tom Heath smiled, not at all joyously. "I'll risk that," he said.

CHAPTER VII

The Vault Robbery

AT nine o'clock next morning Tom Heath tackled his new assignment. His first interview was with George MacQuiston.

"Probably I'm a bit off my head, but I want to find out more about my brother's death," he told the city editor. "Let me switch to the Wall Street office without salary until I work it out of my system. Ted Stuart is willing to have me."

MacQuiston glanced up at the white, haggard face of the reporter and hastily scrawled a memo. "Go ahead," he said, "but we won't start any precedent about reporters working without salary. I'm unpopular now."

Tom Heath knew what he wanted. He went down to the financial district to question, not bankers or brokers, but the men who made a living by writing news and gossip for magazines, ticker service and newspapers. They knew more than they wrote.

But it was from MacQuiston and not from Wall Street that he received news—news that sent him hustling up town.

"Here's a red hot tip from a district man that sounds as if it were right up your alley," the city editor said over the direct wire to the Wall Street office shortly after ten o'clock. His voice be-

trayed some slight excitement, an unusual symptom in MacQuiston. "A crook is supposed to have gotten away with the contents of Philip T. Train's safety deposit box up in the Brooks-Forty-second Street Safe Deposit vaults. One employee hurt or killed. Isn't Philip T. Train the name of Bisbee's secretary? Do you want to handle it?"

"I'm on my way," Tom Heath answered promptly. With a word of explanation to Ted Stuart, who had just come into the office to hammer out some notes, he shot out of the building.

On the way uptown, in the roaring subway, he looked at Eric Heath's list. The Brooks-Forty-second Street Safe Deposit Company was on it.

At Grand Central he pushed his way to the surface. Sprinting eastward, he came to the huge building in the sub-basement of which was located the impregnable steel and concrete shell within which several hundred New Yorkers stored their valuables.

There was a crowd gathered about at the top of the flight of stone stairs leading down to the entrance to the vault. The efforts of two policemen were not sufficient to dispel them.

Tom Heath, heading for the vault, swerved suddenly at the sight of another policeman standing in front of one of the shops in a side corridor of the subterranean labyrinth. A knot of curiosity stricken citizens ringed him in. Just beyond this group was the tall, barrel-chested figure of Detective Sergeant Peter Watts of the Homicide Squad. Watts was staring in profound distrust into the bowl of his briar pipe.

"What's doing, Pete?" Tom Heath asked.

The red-headed detective jerked his pipe disdainfully.

"Nothing in it for me," he said. "I just looked in, passing by. The fellow's got a crack on the skull, that's all. A doctor's fixing him up in there."

He turned his pipe toward the barber shop outside which the policeman was on guard.

"Just what happened?" Tom Heath asked. "I know these vault people will be as dumb as oysters. Can't you give me a line on somebody that will say something?"

"Sure!" said Sergeant Peter Watts. He pointed ahead with his pipestem and silently led the reporter around another corner and into a small locker room.

There was only one man in the room, a lean, gray-haired man with a grim and wrathful face. He was changing from a blue-gray uniform to a suit of street clothes and talking profanely under his breath as he did so.

"Jim," said the homicide man, "this is my friend Heath of the *Mail*. Let him have your stuff; he'll give you a break. Heath, you're talking to a police medal man, Sergeant Mulcay, retired."

"I'll talk!" said Mulcay, and Tom Heath saw that the man was blazing with a righteous and highly Celtic rage. "Will I talk? Listen!"

HE pointed a bony and quivering finger in the direction of the deposit vault. "I was on the door, there, when this robber came in," he said in a hoarse voice. "I'm doorman, do ye see? And why do I let him in? Because the man had rented a box in the place more than a month ago. And that's my job—to let them in when I know by their faces that they have a right inside."

He stoppped to button his waistcoat with agitated fingers.

"All right," he said. "He goes in,

this fellow. His name is Clarence Norwood on the books. He goes in like he's done a few times before, with a brief case in his hand, and he goes into the safe and he hands his key to Hanby, one of the clerks inside, and he gives the number. It's done hundreds of times a day, do you see? Only this time he don't give the number of his own box and he don't hand over his own key, do ye see? He gives the number of the box of a fellow named Train, right in the same section where his own box is located, and he gives Train's key, or a key that fits Train's box and looks genuine to Hanby. And Hanby takes out the box and carries it for him to a booth and turns on the light and leaves Norwood in there with it. In a minute or two out comes Norwood, hands the box and the key to Hanby and stands by to see it locked up again, takes back the key, nods to Hanby and heads for the door with his brief case."

The ex-sergeant looked from Watts to Tom Heath as if challenging criticism and, receiving none, went on:

"What would I do but let him out? 'Tis my job. But not fifteen seconds later another of the clerks, Smithson his name is, who has been opening up for some other depositors, gets leary. He's got a queer memory, Smithson has, and it suddenly strikes him that the one side glance he'd given Hanby as Hanby put back the box for Norwood had stirred up something in his head, like. The position of the box Hanby was shoving back didn't agree with the looks of the depositor. But it strikes him a little too late. He asks Hanby a question and then out he tears after Norwood, saying he wants a look at the man. He isn't at all sure, do ye see? Of course I let him go through the gate and of course I stand by the gate. 'Tis my job.

"Well, Smithson goes around the corner after the man at a fast clip. He doesn't come back at once. After thirty seconds Hanby goes after Smithson. And just around the corner he gives a yell. For there's no sign of this Norwood—he's got clean away. But Smithson is there—shoved into a telephone booth, unconscious with a dirty wound on his head, and with his automatic half out of his pocket. And Norwood's clean away—with the stuff in Train's box."

He paused to raise an angry, shaking finger toward the vault again. "And after a bit the manager goes screamin' wild. He goes crazy with fear for his job, and he let the clerks have the rough side of his tongue and they take it like lambs. And then he sails into me, and, by God, I do not take it. And I fling his dirty job—and nearly my fist with it—in his open face before he can say the words to fire me. And how God give me the grace not to pull the man's head off his neck and roll it in the gutter—that I do not know! Me, an honor man in the department an'—"

"Do you know what was in Train's box?" Tom Heath broke in.

"That I do not—nor any other man in the safe. Train's here now—or was—with another fellow, an older man, an' all he would say when the safe was opened with his key was the stuff was gone. He took out what Norwood left in the box—packets of paper the size o' banknotes. 'Twas after that that the manager went wild at us—the white-livered tremblin' omadhaun! And it may be this Train and this Norwood have faked up a robbery on us—"

"You say Train's here with an older man," Tom Heath said thoughtfully, moving toward the door. "Thanks to you both and I'll see nobody knows where the *Mail* got this dope."

Sergeant Watts, with a word to Mulcay, came with him. "Millionaires are marks," he said succinctly. "I'm thinking it's Train's boss, not the little blond gentleman himself, that's out some valuables."

Tom Heath clutched his arm, stopping him fifty feet from the safety deposit entrance. "Look!" he said. "You're right enough, Pete. Look there!"

CHAPTER VIII

Bisbee Moves Boldly

UP the steps from the vault was coming the tall, bent-shouldered form of Jonathan Bisbee. He was wooden-faced and cold-eyed. Behind him trailed his impeccably clad secretary. Train's lips were working nervously as he faced the staring eyes of the crowd.

Out of the throng thrust the heavy, round body of Nagle in his gray whipcord uniform.

Tom Heath's eyes glinted at the sight of the round-bodied giant.

"Fear's a queer thing," muttered Sergeant Watts. "Look at that murdering gorilla in uniform and say if you think Bisbee's any safer by having a guy like that to protect him. Protect! Nagle would cut Bisbee's throat for a penny piece—if he thought he could get away with it. But Bisbee took him on against my plain warning."

Tom mumbled agreement. His eyes were on Bisbee and the two men with him as they moved through the milling crowd.

"I'll escort them to the door," the reporter decided. "See you later, Pete."

He followed the trio as they headed for the stairs leading up to the ground floor. None of the spectators trailed them; their eyes had reverted hopefully to the doors of the vault, as if they expected a shower of gold at any instant.

Tom Heath debated the matter of confronting Bisbee in the capacity of newspaper man. He decided against it. The millionaire not only would not, but could not tell him much more about the robbery than he had already learned. But something in the purposeful movements of Bisbee drew him on to follow inconspicuously.

In the lobby on the ground floor Jonathan Bisbee halted a moment and spoke cripsly to his chauffeur. Nagle saluted clumsily and departed down the passage.

Bisbee, with Train almost level with him now, walked to the street. A footman, seated on the box of a glossy black limousine of famous make, hastily swung open the door for Bisbee and his secretary.

Tom Heath lingered, just out of sight in the arcade. Bisbee sat in silence in the car, disregarding a few tentative words of his secretary.

Within five minutes the round, ungainly figure of Nagle reappeared. The chauffeur was carrying a new suitcase in either hand. They were not ornate suitcases; neither were they conspicuous suitcases, but they were large ones. The ease with which he swung them indicated plainly enough that they were empty.

He opened the door of the limousine and placed them inside at Bisbee's feet and received an order.

He got to the box and the car moved slowly westward amid the tangle of mid-morning Forty-second Street traffic. Tom Heath, diving impulsively toward an empty taxicab, suddenly caught a glimpse of Bisbee's formidable face turned backward at the rear window of the limousine. It was quite

evident that what the millionaire watched for was some sign of another car in pursuit.

Tom submerged himself in the hurrying crowds on the sidewalk. He sprinted like a belated traveler bound for Grand Central. His eyes were on the traffic light ahead. It had been green for a long time.

AN hour later Tom Heath dragged himself wearily out of a taxicab, scuttled across the sidewalk to a corner drug store and entered a phone booth. He called the Wall Street office of the *Mail* and spoke to Ted Stuart.

"Been trailing Bisbee," he reported. "By hoof and taxi. He's visited six safe deposit vaults with two big new suitcases that were empty when he started. The vaults are all on Eric's list. He's in one now with Train. And somebody got away with whatever cash he had in one vault."

Rapidly he outlined what he had learned at the Brooks-Forty-second Street vault.

"Our friend is collecting what spare cash the robber left him," Theodore Stuart asserted. "And I know why. He isn't so much afraid of thieves as he is of the government. I've just learned that some Department of Justice men reached town today. They're out to move heaven and earth to discover what has become of so much of the country's cash. The banks and safe deposit companies are going to be raked for evidence."

"I suppose the government could come down on Bisbee with subpœnas, injunctions, and special inquiries, tie up his money and turn him inside out," Tom Heath suggested.

"Maybe," said Stuart. "But if we get our facts today the *Mail* can do it tomorrow faster and better than the government — with publicity! That's what will get him—publicity."

"Eric's way," Tom Heath muttered. "Eric knew the best method. But what's Bisbee going to do with all the cash?"

"He's retreating to his second line of trenches—before the government gets its hooks into him. It's a bold move, but he has some secret and safe hole to stow his hoard. Then he can laugh at the government, the crooks—and us."

"That must be it!" Tom agreed. "The cash is the only proof of our story. The *Mail* can't dynamite him on just our hunch. Once he gets it tucked away we're sunk."

"And he's fairly desperate or he wouldn't be riding around New York with a super-fortune in his car," Stuart said.

"He's safe—for the moment," Tom Heath asserted. "The lone thief who looted the Brooks vault had to work weeks on his plan. Maybe he's pulled it at other vaults, too. But today the crook has certainly taken to cover with his spoils. It is Bisbee's one chance to act."

"He's jumped at it," Stuart agreed.

"Well, I'm going to stick and find out what he does with those suitcases," Tom Heath said grimly. "It's tough going, but he hasn't spotted me. The delay at every vault helps. I'll call you again—and I've got to give the robbery to the *Mail* by phone, too. But I'll hang onto Bisbee whatever happens."

"That's the spirit!" Stuart applauded. "Don't let him get away."

"Right!" Tom hung up and bolted from the store. The glossy black limousine still stood in front of a bank building a block further north on Madison Avenue. Bisbee and Train emerged from the vault a moment later with the

two bags, while Nagle and the footman, waiting beside the car, awaited trouble with grim faces and hands hanging loosely at their sides. None came.

The gruelling pursuit went on.

Eventually the limousine returned to the imposing front of the Merchants Trust building. Bisbee, coldly alert, and Train, visibly jumpy, followed the heavy figure of Nagle as he carried the suitcases to the elevators. It was quite obvious that the bags were very heavy, now.

Ted Stuart appeared from nowhere as Tom Heath watched from the curb opposite the building. "I'm letting Murchison do my routine work today," he said.

"They didn't miss a vault on the list," Tom reported. "If we're right you've just seen a man carry God knows how many millions of dollars through that doorway."

"I think we're right," Ted Stuart said. His usually placid mouth twitched nervously as he looked across at the towering building.

They made their plans. It seemed most unlikely that Bisbee would entrust, overnight, such a mass of wealth to the safe in his own office since he must plan to conceal it not alone from thieves but from D. J. agents.

"Two men can't cover every possible movement of that money," Ted Stuart said soberly. "But we can keep an eye on the most obvious destination."

"Right, we will," Tom replied briskly. "I'm on my way."

"With any luck we'll smear Bisbee's hoarded cash all over the front page of the *Mail* to-morrow morning," Ted Stuart predicted. "Then we'll let the government do the rest."

"Except that I'll still work on Eric's death," Tom amended grimly. "I'm going to find out just why such a law-abiding citizen as Jonathan must have a thug like Nagle for a chauffeur."

He departed.

CHAPTER IX

Heath Swims for It

TWO and a half hours later Tom Heath took down the receiver in a telephone booth in Stamwich, Connecticut. He called the *Mail's* Wall Street office. As before Theodore Stuart's voice answered him.

"We guessed right," the financial editor told him. "Bisbee drove with the bags to the Metropolitan Yacht club landing on the East River and took them aboard his yacht. Train went out with him. I left then."

"How about Nagle?"

"Nagle may have put the car up and joined his boss on the boat after I left, or he may be driving the car up."

"Take the next train," Tom advised. "I've been reconnoitering. Bisbee's place isn't big, but it has a wall around it, and I've seen several guards. However, that doesn't beat us. The house is on a point of land and there are a few fishermen out in boats, taking advantage of this warm weather. As a fisherman I can watch the house and the yacht from the water until it gets too dark. As soon as you reach here hire a boat and join me off the point."

"I'll be there," the financial editor promised.

Tom Heath hung up the receiver. He left the store and came out onto Stamwich Avenue. He had walked only a block toward the harbor when he stopped. There was a red-haired, barrel-chested man standing on the corner with a pipe in one hand and a tobacco pouch in the other.

"What's the idea, Pete?" Tom asked. "I thought you were down in New York working on that Brooks-Forty-second Street job."

Sergeant Peter Watts shook his head. "Not my line," he said. "Nobody was killed."

"Well, who's been killed up here today?"

"That's for Connecticut to worry about, not me," said the detective. "But I'm here to gossip with the Stamwich boys about their end of Bisbee's stick-up and his chauffeur's murder."

He nodded solemnly as he filled his pipe. "Maybe you and I are working on the same case and don't know it," he suggested. "No use pumping me, boy; I don't know anything."

"You'll have all the dope I've got by to-morrow morning—with any luck," Tom Heath assured him and hurried on to the harbor.

The rowboat he had chartered awaited him at a rickety dock. There were fishing lines aboard.

He got in and rowed with long and powerful strokes out of Stamwich Cove and then around the eastern point. He crossed the mouth of another sizable bay and approached a long and narrow peninsula. Upon the outer end of this neck of land stood a stone house of moderate size, fronting the Sound but fairly well sheltered by tall elms and maples.

On the western side of the headland, secure from the ravages of easterly gales, there projected a short but stoutly built pier and landing stage.

Near several other contemplative fishermen anchored off the point Tom threw his grapnel overboard and busied himself with fishing line.

The sun was setting now, but there was a long twilight ahead. No sign of life was to be seen about Bisbee's unassuming residence, but toward the landward end of the estate Tom Heath made out a thickset man in a dark uniform idling along the driveway toward the gate.

"Tom turned on his seat and stared the other way, westward down the Sound. Most of the yachts and small craft that graced the Connecticut shore in summer were missing now—already laid up for the winter. But several trim commuters, fast, comfortable motorboats that daily saved their wealthy owners a dreary train or car journey to town, were in sight. One of these was pointed straight for the estate off which Tom was anchored. It was moving like an express train.

"There comes Bisbee—with enough banknotes on board to buy himself a navy," Tom Heath muttered. His mouth tightened. "But not enough to save him if he killed my brother," he added.

He was right about the identity of the yacht. As it drew nearer the white ruffle of the bow wave subsided. The spruce white craft swung with diminishing speed in a half circle and approached the private landing pier projecting from Bisbee's grounds.

TOM HEATH bent over his line. His keen eyes, peering intently from under his brows, raked the yacht. The slender figure of Philip Train was visible in a chair under the awning on the after deck. Forward, Nagle and the footman lounged together, with a couple of sailors.

It was not until the commuter was drawing alongside the pier that Jonathan Bisbee emerged from the cabin. He beckoned to his two servants and entered the cabin again.

The yacht drew up to the pier with

a flurry of foam along her white sides as her screws churned astern. The sailors make her fast.

Immediately Bisbee came out on deck. Nagle and the footman followed him off the commuter. Each carried one of the familiar bags.

Train fell in beside his employer. The four men moved along the pier, up the steep pathway and into the house. A manservant opened the door for them and they all entered.

Minutes later Nagle reappeared. He wandered around the house, never straying far from its walls and moving in rather listless manner. Obviously the big thug was on guard duty.

Tom Heath sat tight. From this position off the point he had a clear view of part of the driveway and of the gate to the estate. In his reconnoitering ashore he had ascertained that there was only one gateway to that small estate. Unless the two suitcases were hoisted over the wall or spirited away in some small boat from the other side of the peninsula they could not be taken away without his knowledge.

"Not until after dark, anyhow," he amended.

The night was a tedious time in coming on that mild, clear autumn evening. Eventually grayness began to thicken into darkness. Tom Heath began to get more and more restless. It was time for Ted Stuart to appear, but his straining eyes could make out no signs of a small boat approaching.

Light appeared in the first floor windows and in some of the second floor windows of the stone house among the trees. A chilly little breeze sprang up. The advantages of his position of observation had vanished with the growing gloom. In this rowboat anchored off the point he was no better off than if he were in New York.

"It would be the easiest thing in the world for an unlighted car to carry away those suitcases," Tom muttered. He watched for another quarter of an hour.

"Time to move!" he told himself at last. Clambering forward he started to pull in the grapnel, then suddenly let it down again. He faced the fact that it was most unlikely that he could beach this heavy boat on Bisbee's waterfront without being sighted by one of the guards. He leaned over the side and tested the temperature of the water. It was not warm.

"I'll leave the boat here so Ted Stuart can find it and figure out where I am," he decided. Hastily he pulled off his coat, shirt and trousers and slipped into an old pair of dungaree trousers that the owner of the boat had offered him to protect his clothes. He removed his shoes and tucked them into his belt. Then he went overboard, feet first, into the chilly water, taking care to make no splash.

CHAPTER X

The Crossing Act

TOM struck out. Noiselessness rather than speed was his chief care. He gave the motor yacht, which was still tied up alongside the landing stage, a wide berth.

As he drew closer to the dark shore he headed toward a projecting ledge that showed ahead. Suddenly he stopped swimming and stared fixedly. The thing he had been moving toward was not a ledge; it was a rowboat drawn up near some bushes that grew just above the high water mark.

Tom Heath sheered away. He picked another landing place. He had not noticed that boat before darkness came down on the headland. Some slight

curve of the coast line might easily have hidden it from him.

He touched bottom suddenly with his knee. Putting his feet down he found he was in no more than three feet of water. Slowly he waded to the precipitous shore. He climbed out onto a shelving rock and stopped to put his soggy shoes on. The night breeze was unpleasantly cool as it blew gently through the clammy dungarees.

He clambered softly up the steep aclivity and saw through the trees the lights of the house.

Pausing for a moment he listened intently for sounds of nearby human presence. He heard nothing save the noises of the night, the wind and the water. Cautiously he made his way toward the house, avoiding a gravel path and crossing a broad and close-cropped lawn. He located the driveway, hesitated a moment and then moved on toward the nearest lighted windows. In that isolated house the shades and curtains were not too carefully drawn.

His distant observation had told him little concerning the inner arrangement of the house. Though his primary business was with the two suitcases he knew that their master would not send them away without going with them. A glimpse of Jonathan Bisbee would be good enough proof that the bags were still in the house.

At the first window he approached he had a glimpse of a ruddy-faced butler preparing one place at a large dinner table. That looked as if Bisbee were still in the house.

Tom moved on around the house. At a French window on the western side of the house he paused to peer under the shade. He caught a sudden, unexpectedly close view of Jonathan Bisbee. The financier was sitting at a desk within ten feet of him. As on the first occasion on which Tom Heath had seen him, Bisbee's bent, powerful figure was outlined against a massive, ugly looking safe at least six feet in height.

The room was a library with windows on two sides and ranks of bookcases around the walls. But that safe, with its angular steel sided bulk quite undraped or disguised, dominated the room.

Bisbee, at the desk, was sitting motionless, staring down at his hands. He was as impassive as a Buddha.

Suddenly Tom Heath, crouching, moved four quick steps from the window and flung himself on the ground under a bush. Somewhere in the darkness around him he had heard a footfall.

Fifteen seconds dragged by before he heard another sound.

Then it came again—another footfall. Turning his head he made out the loom of a big body approaching across the lawn. And then, close behind it, he saw another, smaller figure.

The two men drew near him. The big man was undoubtedly Nagle. Tom Heath shrank against the bush. He was shivering with excitement and cold, but his hands knotted up into fists, and he got one foot under him and ready for a spring.

The two, in file, passed by within six feet of the clump of bushes. They moved as if certain of their direction, but with increasing caution, to the window through which Tom had had his glimpse of Jonathan Bisbee.

The big man peered into the room. Then they both moved away from the wall of the house toward the nearest shelter from the light escaping from the windows of the house. This was the clump of bushes in which Tom had taken refuge.

For an instant they were both mo-

tionless and silent. But it was only for an instant. Then, beyond all doubt, Tom Heath recognized the reedy, frightened voice of Philip Train.

"God!" he murmured tremulously. "How much longer must we wait? They'll catch us! He's still there!"

"Lay off that whine!" Bisbee's chauffeur snapped. "We ain't done nothin' yet. Until—"

A SHADOW fell from within on the window they watched. At once Nagle crept toward the house to peer in. He slipped back as quickly as he had gone.

"The butler's called him to dinner," he whispered.

"Come on, then!" Train quavered, but his move toward the window was halted by the clutch of Nagle's hand.

"Wait, you!" the chauffeur commanded. "This guy Bisbee is slick. Give him a second to start feedin'. I can't make no mistakes. He's got enough on me to stick me in the chair—him an' his damn private dicks. If I get caught—"

"Quitting?" The blond secretary gasped out the question.

"I'm playin' safe, you shakin' sap! Come on, now!"

Once again they moved toward the house. Tom Heath, raising his head, saw them outlined by the lighted window. Suddenly Train's hand came up to point inside. The two men stood stock-still, peering into the room. Then Train retreated precipitately and Nagle followed.

Tom Heath pressed himself under the spreading, inadequate foliage, alert to dodge a descending foot.

Halting, Train gave vent to something like a wail of despair. "In the safe!" he moaned. "God! He put them in the safe!"

"Well?" Nagle snarled. "I've seen you open that safe. What's got you? You know the combination!"

"But—if he came back while—" Train was beside himself with fear. "He—he would know—it was I—if he found the safe open!"

"What the hell!" muttered Nagle. "We ain't stickin' around, are we? The car's ready. Now buck up!"

Cursing softly, he shoved the little secretary in front of him toward the house. He held the man while he peered in through the French window; then he swung it open. It had not been locked. He entered and Train slipped in behind him.

Tom Heath left his protecting bush. He c r a w l e d toward the window. Though he moved without hesitation he was in a quandary. Perhaps he was to witness the most stupendous robbery in point of loot that had ever been attempted. He felt no great impulse to stop it. He had not the slightest sympathy for Bisbee, the super-miser.

"If only Ted Stuart would get here!" he murmured. Not for a moment did he believe that these two ill-assorted thieves could get clear away with booty that made the proverbial king's ransom seem like a handful of pennies. But his instinct for news told him that an attempted robbery might give him an opportunity to throw the light most tellingly upon Bisbee's great hoard and the sinister thug he used as a guard.

There was a chance, too, that he might in pursuing them get hold of that mass of money himself and turn it over to the police. If he could do that he would forestall most crushingly any defense of denial of hoarding that Bisbee might have in reserve.

"I'll stand pat awhile!" he decided, and moved close to the open window.

In the brightly lighted room the two thieves were as plainly visible to him as if they moved on a stage. They stood before the safe.

The face of Philip Train was a mask of terror. Nagle had halted the attempt of the secretary to bolt to the window. Now he pulled a pistol out of his hip pocket and planted it against Train's back. He jerked a thumb at the combination dial. His savage face was more threatening than his automatic.

"Get goin'!" he commanded.

Train almost fell against the steel door. His hand, trembling uncontrollably, sought the dial. He struggled with it desperately and twice he failed. Then, at last, in response to his tug, the safe door swung open.

Nagle thrust the smaller man aside. He shoved his pistol back into his pocket and flung himself at the safe. He dragged out the suitcases. The two men bent over them like hungry beasts over a kill.

Nagle jerked his bag open first. He uttered a low half-strangled cry, then thrust both clawing hands into the suitcase. He pulled out a confused mass of papers, magazines and books. More books and magazines tumbled out as, with a frantic wrench, he turned the case upside down. No neat packets of bills—not a cent of money.

Tom Heath's jaw sagged.

Nagle swung around on his confederate. But Train had already emptied his bag. Books—papers—magazines.

"Done! Done!" Nagle muttered. He licked his lips. His eyes gazed stupidly, unswervingly at the suitcases.

"He—he must have left it all in the office safe!" Philip Train quavered.

Suddenly he flung himself at the scattered, worthless litter on the floor.

"Quick!" he gasped. "We must get it back—and close the safe! Quick! He must not suspect!"

With hysterical energy he began to throw the books and magazines back into one of the suitcases.

"That's right!" Nagle whispered. He stretched out a hand for the other case. "We can't make no getaway without a pile—"

Suddenly the expression on his face changed from apprehension to positive alarm. He stood erect, glancing warily toward the door. He took a step toward the open window, then hesitated and glanced down at the secretary, quite engrossed in his frantic packing.

Nagle swung his right hand in a fierce, back-handed blow. It landed full upon the secretary's jaw. He flattened out on top of the bag, quite motionless.

Instantly the chauffeur took two heavy, thudding steps toward the door. He was reaching for the handle when it swung open.

Jonathan Bisbee stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XI

The End of Train

EVEN as Tom Heath stared in at that strange tableau it seemed to him that he saw the curtain over one of the windows on another side of the room stirring slightly. It ceased as he turned his eyes that way, and he instantly forgot it as he gave full attention to the scene within the room.

Nagle swung around at the sight of his boss and jerked a finger toward the safe and the motionless secretary lying in front of it.

"I caught Mr. Train at them bags, sir, with the safe open. I come in the

window an' pasted him one. He didn't act right, boss, I figured he was getting set to run. I hope I ain't made no mistake."

His voice was smooth and humble.

In swift strides Jonathan Bisbee crossed the room. His eyes were merciless. He bent and gripped Train by his scrawny neck. With a single, powerful movement he heaved him to his feet. Then he literally shook the man back to consciousness.

"So you thought I trusted you, Train!" he said softly. "But there's a little electrical attachment on that safe—a private one, Train."

The dazed secretary attempted to speak.

Bisbee's long fingers tightened vengefully on the man's throat; he shook the spindling figure with feral vehemence and his steady gaze never left Train's paper-colored face.

In the secretary's eyes bewilderment was succeeded by terror, and then, almost at once, by awful agony. He strove to speak. His pipestem arms bent; his thin white fingers clawed at Bisbee's remorseless hand. He uttered choked throaty sounds.

Tom Heath bunched himself for a leap into the room. The sight of the unfortunate secretary's face was too much for his strategy. But Nagle intervened. He seized Bisbee's arm.

"Lay off! Lay off!" he muttered urgently. "You'll croak him altogether! Go easy!"

Suddenly Train ceased to struggle. He went utterly limp. Bisbee opened his fingers. Train dropped to the floor like an empty suit of clothes.

Breathing hard, Tom Heath restrained himself. He did not enter the room.

"He's dead!" the chauffeur gasped.

"You fool!" Bisbee said in his cold, quiet voice. "You can't throttle a man in that time!"

Nagle looked down at the blue-faced secretary.

"You can if he's got a bum heart," he retorted. "Cripes! It looks like you'd done it!"

"And if I have?" Bisbee asked. His eyes dwelt with steady scrutiny upon Train's still figure. "Has a man no right to defend his property from treacherous—"

Abruptly he ceased to speak and studied with intensity the open safe and the other evidence on the floor. He picked up a magazine—a nautical magazine with a schooner under sail on the cover.

Nagle rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. It was plain that his generous instant had passed; he looked down at Train's body with evident relief.

"Well, if the guy's dead, he's dead," he said, and edged toward the window. "I didn't see this, boss. You can say he started to pull a gun on you an'—"

"Wait a moment!" Jonathan Bisbee commanded softly. He dropped the nautical magazine to the floor and his deep-sunk eyes shifted swiftly to the blotched and unprepossessing face of Nagle. His eyes focussed and remained upon the chauffeur's face.

"You are armed, as I ordered?" Bisbee asked.

"Sure, boss!" Nagle muttered.

"Let's see your pistol!" the financier said. He stepped toward the chauffeur with his hand outstretched.

Nagle hesitated. His eyes searched the saturnine face of his employer.

"Well?" inquired Bisbee softly.

Nagle pulled his automatic out of his pocket. His eyes never left the financier's face. Suddenly he thrust the weapon back again.

"You've seen it!" he said hoarsely.

Jonathan Bisbee nodded. "Good," he said in an equable voice. "I knew you'd obey orders, Nagle. If you didn't—or even if I should happen to die—you'd be in a bad way, Nagle. That data my detectives collected—ah, you appreciate its connection with the electric chair? I expect obedience from you, Nagle."

The chauffeur nodded sullenly.

Bisbee stepped toward the desk, opened a drawer and quite casually picked up a pistol. He slipped it into his side pocket.

"Now we are both armed," he said gently. "And we may well—"

He paused. Then he strode quickly to a window. It was the window of which the curtain had seemed to stir.

Bisbee pushed aside the drapery and stared through the half open aperture into the dark grounds. Then he turned back into the room.

"I seem to be nervous tonight," he remarked coldly. "Did you notice anything odd about that curtain, Nagle?"

"I didn't see nothing," Nagle growled.

"Come on, then," Jonathan Bisbee said with sudden decision, moving toward the door.

"How about—" Nagle began, glancing down at Train's body.

"That can wait!" Bisbee said. For the first time his voice had a rasp in it. "Come! I may have need of your services."

TOM HEATH deserted his post instantly. He slipped back through the bushes, gained the lawn and stood for a moment to get his bearings. He knew what he must do next. The nautical magazine had told him that.

With great care he moved toward the pier on the western side of the peninsula. Though he was safe enough near the house, around which only Nagle had patrolled, he might run into one of the other guards almost anywhere on the grounds.

As he approached the landward end of the pier he stopped abruptly. He had made out against the white painted railings of the structure a dark figure moving toward the dimly lighted yacht beside the landing stage. At least one man was on duty, then.

Tom changed his course. He headed directly down the slope toward the water. For a moment he stood on the rocks, staring this way and that. Then he slipped his shoes inside his belt again and pushed off into the lapping, chilly water.

With his noiseless stroke he swam toward the outer end of the pier. There was no riding light at the low masthead of the little yacht, but out of one of the forward ports came a dim glow from a light in the tiny quarters of the crew. And as he drew closer he caught sight of a faint, reddish glow on the fore deck. Doubtless it came from the pipe of a sailor or engineer.

Tom decided to give the smoker a wide berth. He was working around toward the stern of the craft when he heard footsteps on the planking of the pier. Two men were coming toward the yacht.

The glowing pipe raised itself abruptly higher and moved toward the landing steps on the inner side of the yacht.

"You — Simmons?" Jonathan Bisbee's low voice inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Has anyone been around here? Have you heard anything?"

"No, sir." The man's voice betrayed

respectful astonishment. "No one's been here, sir. I haven't heard anything. What—"

"Come ashore," the financier commanded abruptly. "Go up to the house and wait for me there. I may need you."

"Yes, sir," said Simmons. His pipe moved off the yacht as soon as the owner came on board.

Again Bisbee spoke.

"I want you on the pier, Nagle. Stay there—at the shore end. I wish to be undisturbed here. You understand?"

Nagle muttered assent. His feet clumped heavily but in diminishing loudness on the landing stage.

Tom Heath swam closer, heading for the bow of the yacht once more.

He heard the door of the cabin open and shut as Bisbee entered it. Then the lights within were turned on, illumining the after ports and the skylight. But immediately the beams of light from the portholes were cut off as Bisbee drew the curtains.

Tom reached the landing stage. He was almost numb with cold. He seized the edge of the float and after a struggle pulled himself half way up. For a moment he rested there, flat on his chest, with his legs still dangling in the water. Then, with extreme caution, he edged himself up onto the boards. He took his shoes out of his belt and laid them on the float. Then he groped about for the forward mooring line of the yacht. He found it and with a thumping heart pulled himself up hand over hand to the fore deck.

Moving on hands and knees, he found the forward hatch, leading down into the crew's quarters. He slipped down into it and stood still.

By the small electric light that the man Simmons had left turned on Tom saw he was standing in the V-shaped bow of the yacht, with a pipe berth on either side of him. A passage led aft, past two more berths, lockers, washroom and galley, all dimly revealed. Tom Heath moved softly along, his bare feet feeling their way.

He came to a place where the passage turned to the right and went aft along one side of the yacht to the cabin. There was a door in the wall in front of him. He put his hand softly on the knob of the door and twisted it. Cautiously he peered through a crack.

By vague, broken light which entered from further aft he saw that he was looking into a commodious stateroom. It was empty. A door at the other end of the room opened into the main cabin It was through this half open door that the light entered.

Tom Heath slipped into the room. He dropped to his knees and crept swiftly across the thick rug to the after door.

Screened by this he looked into the main cabin.

An expression of extreme astonishment fixed itself upon his face. He had come upon a strange dénouement.

THE tall, bent form of Jonathan Bisbee stood tensely beside the two bookcases built into the after partition of the cabin. One of the bookcases had been swung bodily out of place on pivots. His hand was still on it. The cavity thus revealed was literally jammed with rows and stacks of neat little packets of crisp, oblong bits of paper. One of these had fallen to the floor and the topmost bit of paper was a Federal reserve note.

Tom could make out "ooo" after its denomination. The breath rushed softly out between his lips.

Jonathan Bisbee was not looking

down at that packet at his feet. His head was turned sharply, his eyes were fixed coldly upon a man who had just stepped out of the passage beside the stateroom wall. And the man was Ted Stuart, smiling, quite at ease, with one hand tucked into the side pocket of his well cut lounge suit and the other holding a pocket flashlight.

"Call off your dog, Mr. Bisbee," he said with no great emphasis in his voice, and nodded his head toward the companion steps. "I would like to speak to you in private."

Bisbee did not move his head, but his eyes swept briefly in the direction that the editor had indicated. The broad, mottled countenance of Nagle, set in a ludicrous expression of doubt and uncertainty, showed at the top of the steps. The eavesdropper was petrified, unable to move, and his narrow-sunken eyes were fixed on Stuart.

"Get out," said Jonathan Bisbee in a level voice, and took his hand from the bookcase door to motion stiffly to his chauffeur. "Wait on the after deck," he added, almost at once.

Nagle's head withdrew. The swing door at the top of the stairs closed.

Tom Heath, who had lifted himself tensely to the balls of his feet, sank down again.

Jonathan Bisbee pushed the bookcase. It clicked back into position, concealing the close-packed space behind it. He bent, picked up the fallen packet, and thrust it into his pocket. He kept his hand inside the pocket.

"This will take a good deal of explanation, Mr. Stuart," he said politely.

"Not a tenth as much as your murder of your secretary, Mr. Bisbee," Stuart answered. His voice was almost as low as Bisbee's and save for a hardly perceptible touch of strain, quite normal.

"Mr. Train died of heart disease and so an autopsy will show," the millionaire said with gentle emphasis. "You seem to have honored my house as well as my yacht tonight."

Stuart nodded. His eyes did not leave the cold, controlled face of the other man.

Tom Heath did not move.

"Let us take our hands out of our pockets and discuss the situation," Theodore Stuart proposed. "We are not gunmen, Mr. Bisbee; neither of us does well in the rôle.

"What do you want?" Bisbee demanded. He advanced to the center table and placed both his hands on it.

"I want to help you—and I am the only man that can do it," Stuart answered. His voice shook with suppressed emotion. He, too, had come forward to the table. He laid down the flashlight and his fingers drummed for an instant on the table top.

"Do not think I haven't boundless admiration for your mentality, your tenacity, your courage. But you are in a hole, Mr. Bisbee. And no one man can do what you hope to do."

"And what do I hope to do?" Bisbee inquired in his soft voice.

Stuart raised a hand toward the bookcase.

"I am confident that you are no mere frightened hoarder of wealth," he said, almost in a whisper. "One day when most people think we are well out of this depression but before they have quite forgotten it, you will use suddenly all the power locked up in that ingenious little hole. The market will slide. Doubt! Fear! Panic! Madness! What happens in that wholly unexpected and inexplicable collapse will make the last two years look like good times. You will double—multiply your capital!

"And then—" his dry voice cracked, quite lost its semblance of coolness—"man, that is just the beginning! With your tremendous buying power, exerted at a time of panic prices, you will have half the banks and industries of the country in your grasp when we emerge from depression. There—there is no end to it—unless I end it to-morrow morning!"

"You can end it?"

"You know that I can! You know what will happen to your plans when the story of that incomparable accumulation of currency blazes on the first page of the *Mail*. I have Heath, your late employee's brother, almost within call. And you can guess what will happen to you yourself when the story of that ruthless murder blazes beside the other story on the first page."

"What do you want?"

"Partnership!" Stuart's dry, rasping voice almost croaked the word. "You need me. With my brains and yours we can bring off this coup. Of all the shrewd men in the Street only I discovered your plans. I've saved you from exposure once; you were too daring, my friend. And I can save you again to-morrow—and again and again in the future."

"You saved me once?" The repeated words were a gentle question.

"I saved you once. Don't ask me how—yet."

JONATHAN BISBEE looked down at his hands. He laid one finger after the other on the edge of the table, then lifted them again. He touched the flashlight idly and then looked up.

"And—ah—all you have to offer for your share of the partnership is—your brains?" he asked.

"My brains, your safety and a bit of money to prove that I am in earnest about this."

"How much money?"

"I haven't counted it yet, but I'm no piker." Theodore Stuart's voice had recovered something of its original coolness. "I'll put in the missing contents of your Brooks-Forty-second Street deposit box."

"Ah!" Jonathan Bisbee's tone had no element of surprise in it. "It has just occurred to me that perhaps you could contribute that much. No ordinary bit of robbery—that. A simple thing, but devilishly ingenious."

"It was simple, as you say," Stuart agreed. "But a few millions—whatever the box held—have no attractions for me. I am ambitious, Mr. Bisbee; I want to join you in your tremendous enterprise. And at last I am in a position to insist. You must decide to-night."

"I am deciding." Jonathan Bisbee continued to stare at his hands. "It was clever, that robbery. I quite understand you made a few slight changes in your appearance, rented a deposit box in the Brooks place and kept me or Train under surveillance. Clever! But did not the key present some slight difficulty? Perhaps you obtained the key from my open safe—inexcusable negligence, that—yesterday about the time that young Heath committed suicide in my office?"

Theodore Stuart nodded slowly.

"And perhaps—I am naturally curious, of course—perhaps it was then that you did me that service—saved me, you say? I must know, of course." The financial editor looked intently at the millionaire. Slowly Bisbee raised his eyes from his restless fingers and met the gaze of Theodore Stuart. The confronting faces were both woodenly expressionless.

Stuart nodded.

"Just a moment," Jonathan Bisbee murmured. "I have a question to ask my man. Nagle!"

His raised voice brought the unwieldy body of the chauffeur instantly into sight at the top of the companionway.

"Come down!" Bisbee commanded.

Theodore Stuart dropped into a low chair by the table with complete assurance in his movements. His back was toward Tom Heath. He let his legs sprawl out under the table. Fumbling in his pocket, he drew out a packet of cigarettes, fumbled again for matches and lit his cigarette.

"Nagle," said Bisbee, "I have a question to ask you. Mr. Stuart here is completely in my confidence so you may speak freely. It concerns a matter which I have not discussed with you. Was I wrong in assuming that after Mr. Train took those notes from Mr. Heath's desk Mr. Heath came in before you had left the room? Did I commit an error in assuming that you —ah—lost your temper under Mr. Heath's remonstrations and—ah—disposed of him?"

"Huh?" demanded Nagle, with his eyes as wide open as their lids would permit. "You sayin' I threw that guy out the window?"

"Some such thought had entered my mind."

"Well, listen, the both of you. I never laid a hand on him. Train—the scared little shrimp—called me in to protect him in case Heath came back to his office while Train was frisking his desk. But Heath didn't come. I was back in the hall sittin' on a chair when the guy went out the window."

He leered knowingly at his employer. "I don't know who handled Heath. And I ain't tryin' to guess. But lay off tryin' to hang that one on me. It can't be done."

"I see," said Jonathan Bisbee, after a brief pause. "Yes, I see—now. That's all, Nagle. Wait on deck."

Nagle clumped up the steps.

Tom Heath was standing up. He was trembling under the touch of the clammy dungarees and his hands were knotted into fists. His features were as rigidly set as granite. But he did not move a step. He held himself in check with inexorable will.

Bisbee turned toward the lolling figure in the chair on the other side of the table. Only the financier's hands were restless; they touched the flashlight on the table top and then wandered up to the lapels of his coat.

"Well?" he asked. "Was that the service you did me—getting rid of Eric Heath?"

CHAPTER XII

Guns Blaze

STUART nodded coolly. "I would have told you if you had asked," he said. "I knew how big this was from the first and how little a life or two mattered. When Eric Heath came into your office I managed to pry some interesting information out of him—things I had to know before I talked business to you. He was going to give the whole story to his brother. After he left I had my chance to take your second set of safe deposit keys out of your safe."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Unfortunately for him, Heath came back at an awkward moment. It was then that I had my generous impulse to save you. Alive, Eric Heath was an insuperable obstacle to us both."

"So we are both murderers," Jonathan Bisbee murmured ironically.

Theodore Stuart sat upright. "Right!" he agreed curtly. "I hold your life in my hands—you hold mine in yours. Do we annihilate each other? There's no middle ground. What's your answer?"

Bisbee raised a slender hand to his chin. He surveyed with a casual air the skylight above his head. And even as he looked upward, drawing Stuart's watchful glance with his own, his right hand crept toward his coat pocket.

"My answer is—no!" The last syllable, snarled out after three soft-spoken words, coincided with the jerk of his pistol out of his pocket.

His long fingers levelled it swiftly, in one movement, at the seated man on the other side of the table. But he never pressed the trigger.

The shots that roared out in that cabin were from the automatic that Theodore Stuart, under cover of the table, held ready in his lap. He fired below the table and the steel nosed bullets slashed through the thin wood and registered in red on Bisbee's shirt. The man swayed, toppled, fell.

"Greedy fool!" Stuart raged. He was out of the chair in an instant. He kicked the gun out of the relaxing fingers of Bisbee, caught it up and thrust it into his pocket. Standing over the outstretched millionaire he fired another shot into the man's head.

There was no indecision in his movements. He leaped now to the light switch and with a wary glance toward the companionway, engulfed the cabin in darkness.

Almost before Stuart's hand left the light switch the hoarse voice of Nagle came from the deck.

"What's going on down there? Boss!"

"Your boss is dead, Nagle," Stuart answered instantly. He was sheltered by the side of the door from direct fire through it. "You tried to cross me tonight, Nagle, but we'll forget that. Do you and I get away with wads of money? Or do we kill each other and leave the jack to the cops? Make up your mind!"

There was heavy silence on deck for ten seconds.

"It was Train that kidded me into that play up at the house," Nagle growled "What's your proposition?"

"Fifty-fifty—on millions!" Theodore Stuart answered smoothly. "I can't get away with it alone—neither can you! We've got to run for it in this boat; then unload the stuff somewhere. Make up your mind!"

"Get going!" Nagle spat out. "I'm with you! Give us some light! I c'n run the motor. Come up here an' cast off!"

Tom Heath was moving through the black cabin. He was headed toward the man who had killed his brother. His bare foot encountered an extended leg on the floor. He stepped over Bisbee's body and came on. He was silent, tense, inexorable.

One of his outstretched hands suddenly touched Stuart's shoulder.

With a quick-drawn breath Stuart whirled around. "Who—" he rasped.

Tom Heath had instantly sunk to a crouch. His arms, sweeping wide, whipped around Stuart's waist. They imprisoned Stuart's arms below the elbows.

Tom's arms tightened like a double belt. He lifted the other man from the floor. The pistol in Stuart's right hand flared in the darkness. The flying lead scored a gash down Tom's left leg.

He paid no heed. He lifted Stuart a little higher; then snapping his body forward, threw the man to the floor. And he flung himself on top.

He dropped chest to chest on Stuart. His left hand, lashing out in the dark, struck and then gripped at the right arm of the floundering man under him. He pinned down that arm, Stuart's gun arm. And then his other hand drove down into Stuart's neck.

"Nagle!" Stuart croaked, out of his constricting throat. "Shoot! Shoot!"

His clenched left hand flailed in a savage punishing tattoo on Tom Heath's face and neck. Tom bent his head to the limit against Stuart's chest, to guard his own throat.

Stuart's imprisoned right hand twisted and strained at the wrist. He fired again and again toward the body on top of his, but the muzzle of the pistol did not bear. One bullet cut a hole through Tom Heath's leg between knee and thigh, but that was all the injury the bullets did.

Suddenly the automatic was silent in Stuart's clutch. He let it drop and put all his strength into one effort to wrench himself onto his side.

Tom Heath, holding his clutch on Stuart's throat, was flung sideways by the heaving body under him. His head struck a leg of the table with a shock that jarred his brains. For a mere second his brain whirled in sick confusion. Then consciousness and purpose came back to him.

But Stuart had torn loose his throat. They writhed on the floor amidst the wreckage, striking and clutching.

"Nagle!" Stuart's voice was no more than a hoarse whisper. "Get him! Shoot!"

SIMULTANEOUSLY from the floor beside Heath's head a beam of light suddenly shot upward toward the skylight. It was the fallen flashlight that chance had put within Stuart's touch.

The ray flickered toward the stairs. Tom Heath, striking the light down, had a momentary glimpse of the menacing bulk of Nagle filling the companionway. He had a pistol gripped in his hand.

The two men who had been fighting in the darkness fought on in the dancing light. Stuart struggled to his knees. The light he held played briefly upon the grim face of his foe.

"You! You!" Stuart cried out. "Nagle! For God's—"

Heath beat down the light again; his fist smashed against Stuart's lips, then groped for his throat. Stuart leaped back convulsively. He dodged toward the forward end of the cabin, bringing up his flashlight.

But Heath was already plunging at him when Nagle cut loose his pistol. The bullet buried itself in the stateroom bulkhead.

All Stuart's agility and strength were devoted now to keeping away from Heath and lighting his moving figure for Nagle; all Heath's speed and power were exerted to close with Stuart and smash the flashlight. They darted, stumbled, staggered and dodged on that littered floor.

Nagle's automatic bellowed like a cannon in the confines of the cabin. The bullet snarled past Tom's ear.

Nagle fired again—and a third time at the man thrusting and charging below. The acrid fumes of the powder and the swirl of smoke filled the narrow room. The flashlight in Stuart's hand jumped and wavered, making the scene like some phantasmagoria out of a nightmare.

Again and again Nagle fired.

And then Tom Heath got his hold. His right arm swept around Stuart's neck as the man sought to duck; in an instant he had his other arm clamped

around Stuart's straining back. The flashlight thudded on the carpet, its beam glaring fixedly at the bookcase. The rest of the cabin faded into darkness.

"Both!" Tom Heath rasped in Stuart's ear. "Both!"

His powerful body, nerved to a mighty effort, swung Stuart aft, toward the bellowing gun at the head of the companion stairs. As Stuart's sliding feet got a grip on the carpet he pivoted desperately, thrusting Heath's body between him and the automatic.

Tom Heath did not resist the movement. His struggle was ebbing fast. He whirled himself on with it, and then, still turning, desperately dragged Stuart off his feet. It was a dim, grotesque dance of death. Again, by a frantic wrench from Stuart, their positions were reversed.

"Both!" gasped Tom Heath.

Nagle's automatic thundered once more. Heath, twisting in Stuart's frenzied grasp, felt a stab of fire through his right shoulder.

The man at grips with him coughed. He coughed again. His arms ceased to wrench at Heath's body. They fell away.

All Stuart's energy, all his strength, went into that choked, strangling cough. He fought to get air into his lungs, but it was not air that filled them. He fell, still coughing.

The flashlight which Tom Heath had knocked out of Stuart's grasp blazed on the floor. It shone with that brilliant white flare that comes from a filament about to burn out. And down into its beam fell the ghastly face of Theodore Stuart. The man no longer coughed. He no longer moved.

Nagle suddenly emitted a yell. A thump reached Tom Heath's ears almost simultaneously. Nagle pitched down the steps onto the cabin floor. He groaned and struggled feebly.

"Pick up that flashlight and turn it on that man!" a curt voice from out on deck commanded.

Tom Heath obeyed. Then he switched on the light.

Nagle was writhing on the floor, but he did not attempt to get up. Neither did he reach for his automatic, which lay by his shoulder. He put a hand to a cut on the back of his head and moaned.

A face peered at Tom from the top of the stairs. It was the ruddy face of Sergeant Peter Watts of the Homicide Squad.

The detective's left hand held by the muzzle a .38 calibre revolver. He shifted the clubbed gun swiftly into shooting position in the fingers of his right hand. He lowered his barrel-chested body slowly down the stairs into the cabin.

His eyes bulged as he took in the shambles on the floor. "Some business, huh?" he muttered. "What's—"

Tom Heath put his left hand up under his right armpit. He placed thumb and forefinger over the wounds where Nagle's bullet had drilled through his shoulder. Then he staggered toward the stairs.

"Get me out of here, Pete!" he begged. "To the house—telephone—quick! It's big! I'll tell you all about it at once—on the phone same time—Quick!"

Sergeant Peter Watts breathed hard as he stared at the floor of the cabin. His unoccupied left hand slipped his pipe out of his pocket. Instantly he thrust it back in again, violently. Then, with decision, he stirred up Nagle with his foot.

"I never won an argument with you newspaper birds about a story in my

life," he grumbled and again insinuated his foot in Nagle's ribs. "Get up, you, or I'll give you a real clip on the head. Help this man up the steps."

CHAPTER XIII

Bisbee—Benefactor

"NOW, listen!" said Detective Sergeant Watts emphatically to the man in the hospital bed. "Maybe it was you that give the *Mail* the main story, but it was me that put on the trimmings after you knocked the telephone over with your head."

"How far did I get?" Tom Heath asked.

Peter Watts irascibly probed the depths of the bowl of his pipe with a penknife before he replied.

"Plenty far," he assured Heath. "I left when you got to where you told about Bisbee's cache being in the yacht. Man! I went back to that boat on high."

He shook his head. "The stuff was still there," he said. "I plastered that yacht with Bisbee's guards and servants and told them to watch each other. I kept one man to guard Nagle. When I got back you were still talking."

Tom Heath nodded. "MacQuiston kept me going. We had to have that story—particularly as Stuart worked for us. You can see that."

Peter Watts grunted, then blew hopefully through the stem of his pipe and resumed his excavation work. "I told them a few things about Stuart after you'd passed out," he said. "That gent was certainly something new in the crime business. A million wouldn't tempt him, but—this was different. He saw a chance to make himself the biggest financier in America and he went for it like a bullet—and kept going.

"Y'see, it was a crazy anonymous tip to Headquarters that Theodore Stuart was the one who held up Bisbee's car and shot his chauffeur that put me on the case. Not so crazy, either. Somebody knew something, but didn't dare to squawk because of Stuart's position and family.

"Well, Stuart didn't find in the car the cash he was after. He got some of it later in that vault robbery stunt. But I couldn't pin a blasted thing on him except that he was spending a lot of time on Bisbee and his affairs. Not a thing!"

"I don't blame you," Tom put in. "He was infernally smooth. He used me as his tool up to almost the end. And he got some information out of Eric before Eric caught him at Bisbee's safe. Stuart must have been the man I cornered in my brother's rooms where he was looking for more definite information about Bisbee's hoard. All I got out of finding him there was a crack on the head. He escaped without my recognizing him."

Sergeant Watts shook his head moodily. "Some crook," he conceded. "I didn't know until this rough boy Nagle started talking that it was Stuart who worked Nagle into the job of chauffeur for Bisbee."

"What?"

"Sure. Under cover Stuart terrorized Bisbee for weeks — trailed him, prowled around the house at night, worked on his nerves and finally stuck up his car. Those millions pulled him, but he couldn't get a grip on them. Finally he sold Bisbee, who was thoroughly scared, the idea of hiring a real tough egg—a fast shooting, what-the-hell desperado—as a bodyguard instead of a slow, fat private dick. He named Nagle casually.

"Bisbee set dicks on Nagle and they

dug up enough to about put Nagle in the chair, so Bisbee figured Nagle wouldn't dare to do anything but obey orders—any orders—if he hired him."

"Were you trailing Stuart when you turned up on the yacht?"

"JUST sort of," Peter Watts said. "I went back to the railroad station after talking over the stick-up with the local dicks. And who hops off a train but your friend Stuart, in a hurry. I trailed along. He took to a rowboat. After I'd figured where he was heading I took a taxi. A rowboat is a funny thing to go calling in when it's getting dark.

"I got by the guard at the gate to Bisbee's place on my shield and face. I'd been there before. But I didn't go to the house. What for? I took a walk along the shore in the dark. I guess I was falling over bushes and sliding off rocks while Train was getting his up at the house. When I found Stuart's rowboat beached and empty I started up to the house and almost ran into Bisbee and Nagle clipping along toward the pier. Bisbee spoke to Nagle; that was how I knew it was them. I hung out by the path to see if Stuart happened to be following them, but he didn't come — that way. Maybe he was ahead of them."

"He was," Tom Heath put in. "He was at a south window of the library while I was at a west window wishing he'd show up. When he saw Bisbee pick up a yachting magazine out of the junk from the two suitcases he figured that on the way back from the city Bisbee had switched the money to some hiding place in the yacht and now was wondering if it was safe there."

"Huh!" muttered Peter Watts. He started doubtfully to fill his pipe.

"I worked it out the same way. Stuart headed for the yacht overland. I swam to it, so he got there first. He slipped into the cabin while the engineer, the only man of the crew aboard, was sitting on the fore deck. Bisbee arrived and showed him where the money was hidden."

Tom Heath relaxed against the pillows. "The money!" he said. "How much was there?"

"On the yacht?" Peter Watts asked. "Only one hundred and fifty-two million, nine hundred and forty thousand dollars. But he left enough more to make up a billion in several other safe deposit boxes that weren't on the list—most of it in cash, U. S. and state bonds that couldn't go down.

"As soon as your story came out in the *Mail*, the town of Stamwich, the city of New York, the state of Connecticut, the state of New York and the United States of America all sent messages to the executors of the estate of Jonathan Bisbee, deceased, saying 'Stick that cash in the banks where it belongs.'

"There were no executors of the estate of Jonathan Bisbee. He never made a will. He had no relatives alive. There was no one in the world he wanted to leave a nickel to. Money was his life, but he didn't care what happened to it after he died. He was through, so what did it matter?"

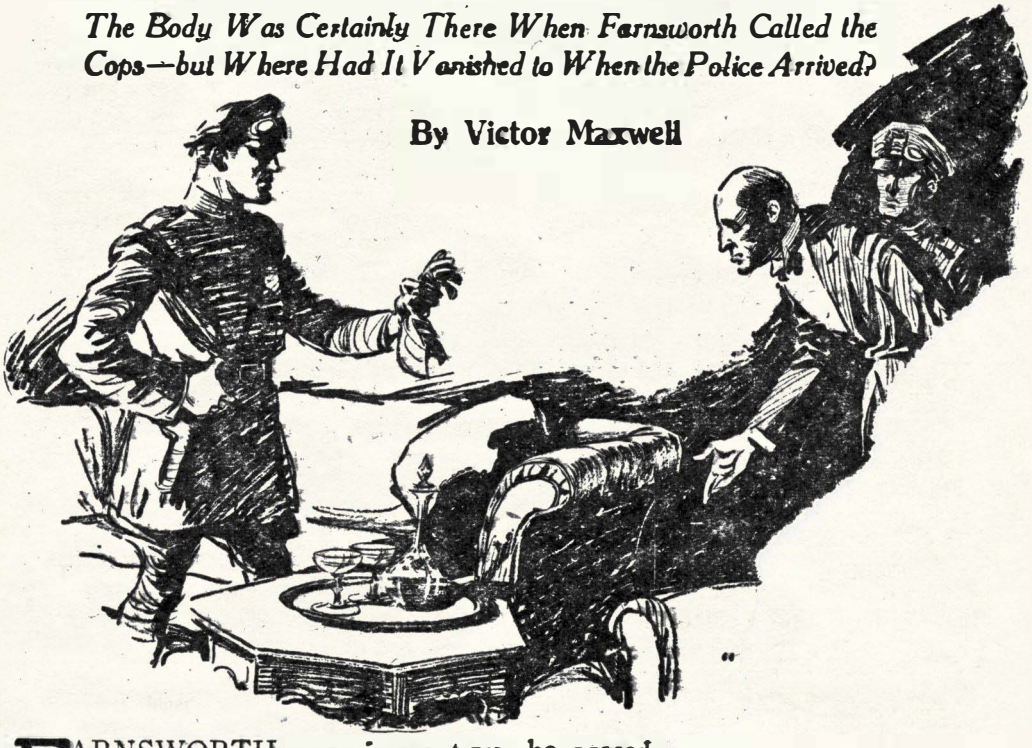
"Then that makes Jonathan Bisbee one of the biggest benefactors of humanity that ever piled up a fortune," Tom Heath said slowly. "If this billion goes to the state, people will get their taxes reduced; thousands of other people will get jobs on public works; the depression that he hoped to foster for his own profit will be shoved off the map much sooner.

"I guess my brother didn't die for nothing," he added. "That helps."

The Corpus Delicti

The Body Was Certainly There When Farnsworth Called the Cops—but Where Had It Vanished to When the Police Arrived?

By Victor Maxwell



FARNSWORTH, carrying a tray bearing a decanter and two tall glasses, glided silently into the library. Placing the tray on a table by the fireplace he looked about. There was but one light burning and the room was in semi-darkness. Facing the logs was the big leather lounge, drawn forward so the leaping lights and shadows from the open fire played over it. At one side was the overstuffed armchair. All other details were lost in the gloom that pervaded the further part of the chamber. The butler glanced inquiringly about, frowned slightly, and gently cleared his throat.

"The decanter and the glasses, sir," he said.

No comment answered him, and he moved forward to more closely examine the darkened part of the room. As he passed
leather lou
feet attract
at it, halted su

"Mr. Cosgra
voice a trifle unstea

Again there was no re
over, regarded the shadow at
As his eyes became more accust
to the gloom he saw what it was—t
form of a man, its legs widespread upon the thick rug, its torso close to the padded back of the lounge, and the head hidden beneath the oaken framework that held the cushions. He bent over gingerly and grasped one of the legs.

"Mr. Cosgrave, sir! Are you ill, sir?"

The leg which he touched remained perfectly inert. He leaned forward,

placed a trembling hand upon the torso and gave it a prodding shake.

" Mr. Cosgrave, sir! Is something the matter, sir?"

Still no reply, no reaction in the limp and still form. Farnsworth straightened suddenly, turned and passed quickly from the library, closing the door behind him. He went directly to a telephone desk at the end of the hall and lifted the instrument, calling a number which was prominently dis-
ed on the cover of the directory.
is the police? . . . This is the
Mr. Raymond Cosgrave's, sir.
ght Chester Place, sir. . . .
ve it right. I think you had
somebody, sir. A doctor,
officer."
r?" came a gruff
ir. Mr. Cosgrave
urt, sir."
ms to be hurt?"
ir. He is on the
and does not—
id not an-
rd a sigh
a gruff voice
tler. Yuh stay
on't touch nothin'
e. I'll send 'em right

"THE BOYS" came with a banshee wail of sirens—two motorcycle men, with the Emergency Hospital interne in a side-car. Farnsworth had the front door open as they came up the walk and mounted the steps.

" It's Mr. Cosgrave," he said. " In the library—the second door down the hall."

The interne and one of the cycle riders moved ahead, the second officer remained at the door.

" Now you tell me," he said. " What was the ruckus, and all about it? Who was here, who . . .?

The butler held up a hand. " Yes, sir, I will tell you," he interrupted. "That is, I would tell you if I could. But I do not know anything. Simply I went into the library and Mr. Cosgrave was lying on the floor . . ."

A shout from down the hallway interrupted him. The first officer was looking from the library door. " Hey, Bill, bring that old buck here," he called.

Dragged in a very undignified manner to the library, Farnsworth found it brightly illuminated. All the incandescents were glowing, turned on by the police. The interne, in his white coat, was standing before the fire, the decanter in his hand, smelling its contents. The officer who had entered with him was directly behind the lounge.

" Now what's all this about?" he demanded, as Farnsworth was pulled into the room. " What's the idea of calling us an' the sawbones out here and sending us to an empty room? You been drinking out o' that bottle, have you?"

The butler pulled free of the second man's grasp and moved forward, staring at the floor behind the leather lounge. Save for the heavily-shod feet of the first officer there was nothing there. Farnsworth's eyes grew large, a cold perspiration broke out on his forehead.

" Why, why, he was there, sir," he gasped in a shaking voice. " Just a moment ago. When I telephoned. Lying behind the lounge, there, sir. I could not rouse him. His body was—was all limp, Mr. Cosgrave, sir."

" You think he was out? Knocked out, I mean? Somebody had slugged him?"

The butler nodded slowly, looked dazedly about the chamber. The other motorcycle man, meanwhile was trotting about like a dog trying to pick up a scent. Suddenly he stooped over and retrieved something from the floor.

"Job, all right," he said. "Here's a 'sap.' Got hair and a smear on it. Better call the dicks. You stick here with this guy—I'll go call in. You'd better stick, too, Doc."

The interne put the decanter back on the tray and sat down upon the leather lounge, regarding Farnsworth curiously. The other motorcycle man kicked the door to the hall shut, and then began to walk about the room, touching nothing but looking at everything. He paused before a window that looked out upon the lawn.

Some moments later there was a whine of a siren outside, an auto headlight flashed from the street. The front door slammed and heavy footsteps came down the hall. The library door opened, and a large, ruddy-faced man, dressed in a dark business suit, entered. His eyes swept the room, then he nodded to the interne.

"What yuh got, Doc?"

The motorcycle man at the window turned and answered:

"Got a call here, Sarge, that somebody was hurt. This bozo there, he's the butler, says the ruckus was in here. We come in an' the room was empty. The butler swears this guy was lyin' on the floor . . ."

"That'll do for yuh. Get outside an' help yuhr partner prowl the house," cut in the newest arrival. As the motorcycle officer saluted and moved to the door, the big man stepped to the lounge and sat down beside the interne.

"What is it, Doc? Yuh had a drink of it yet?" His thumb jerked to indicate the decanter.

The hospital man smiled and shook his head. "Smells like sherry, Sarge. But all I did was smell it. The old buck here, he said there was a sick man in here. When we got in there was nobody. I don't drink stuff in a room where they disappear."

The sergeant turned to the butler, motioned him forward.

"Yuhr name?"

"Farnsworth, sir. Thaddeus Farnsworth, sir. I am butler here, sir. I have been with the Cosgrave family for sixteen years."

"Uh-huh. I'm sergeant of detectives. Now tell me all about this."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Cosgrave, sir, came home about seven. A little after. He said he would not dress for dinner, and ate immediately. It was a little before eight when he had finished. He left the table and came in here, with the evening papers. Called me a moment later, and said he was expecting a gentleman to call between half-past eight and nine. Told me to show him directly in here, without first announcing him. And added that just at half-past eight I was to bring in the decanter and two glasses.

"Just as the clock in the kitchen said twenty-nine minutes after eight, I got the decanter and the two glasses and put them on a tray. Brought them in here. The room was dark, there was but one light burning—the one in the reading lamp. I did not see Mr. Cosgrave. I put the tray on that stand there, and looked around. Then I stepped forward, so I was behind the lounge. Mr. Cosgrave was lying on the floor. I touched him, shook him, but he did not answer. He was very—very still. Limp, sir. So I—I called the police. When the officers came I told them to come in here. This gentleman entered with them. As I was closing

the front door one of the officers brought me here—and Mr. Cosgrave was not in the room, sir. I cannot understand it."

"Uh-huh. Yuh had a drink of that wine, did yuh?"

"No, sir. It may seem strange to you, sir, but I am a total abstainer."

"Yuh any idea who it was Mr. Cosgrave was expecting?"

"N-no, sir. No idea at all."

"Try it again."

"No, sir, I do not know whom the gentleman is."

"What'd yuh call the bulls for?"

"I thought it the proper thing to do. Mr. Cosgrave seemed—seemed hurt, sir. One of the officers said he found a . . ."

"Yeah, I know all about that. Mr. Cosgrave got a family doctor?"

"Yes, sir, Dr. Prentiss."

"Why didn't yuh call him?"

The butler hesitated before replying. He looked uneasily about the room, at the window, at the decanter and the two glasses.

"Well, sir, I will tell you," he answered, finally. "Mr. Cosgrave has been having some trouble. I do not just know what it is. I think it is about money. He has been—has seemed to be—to be—to be afraid of eventualities, sir. So when I found him here this evening, I thought—thought it would be best to call the police."

"Yuh mean yuh thought somebody had got to him?"

"Nobody came to the house. That is, nobody came to the door. But that window is not very far above the terrace on the lawn."

One of the motorcycle men thrust his head in the door.

"Not a thing in the house, Sarge," he announced. "They got a darkey cook—Gawge Tompkins it is. He don't know a thing, Sarge; was sittin' up stairs in his room readin' the Bible, this not bein' his night for steppin' out. Didn't hear nothin' and don't know nothin'. Then there's a Mrs. Summers, a housekeeper. Nice, quiet old lady. She's been housekeeper here since before the Cosgrave girls all got married an' left. She don't know nothin' an' didn't hear nothin'. That's all the servants there is. House is in apple-pie order, nothin' roughed up at all. You want we should take the cook an' the old lady in?"

The detective sergeant shook his head and motioned the man to withdraw. Then he turned to Farnsworth again.

II

"MR. COSGRAVE told yuh to show this man into the library, eh? Like he had an appointment?"

"Yes, sir," the butler answered. "I think he was sure the gentleman would call."

"And yuh say nobody came?"

"Nobody came to the door."

The detective sergeant nodded. "Yuh go upstairs to Mr. Cosgrave's rooms," he said. "Look around. See if he did not take his hat and coat and perhaps go out. Take a good look. Find out if any of his things are missing."

The butler bowed and walked from the room. The detective sergeant waited a moment, then went into the hall, found the telephone, and called Police Headquarters.

"This is Riordan o' the dicks," he said. "Gimme upstairs . . . Hello, Ghormley? . . . This is Riordan. If Enright or Willis is in, send one o' them to 8 Chester Place. Send one o' the boys up here right away, if neither o' them is in."

He hung up, went back to the library. He examined the decanter and smiled at the interne.

"What yuh think about it, Doc," he asked.

"I don't know, Sarge. The window—one of the boys I came out with said he found a sap."

Riordan nodded. "I sent him in with it, to the Bertillon room. When he told me I had a look outside below the window. No prints—an' there's a soft batch of dirt there, where they've tore up a lot of plants. I don't think much o' the window, Doc."

"Maybe the butler slugged him."

"That's an idea, Doc. Yuh're gettin' right clever after associatin' with the bulls like yuh've been doin'. Reasonin' along that line, the butler will beat it, now I've give him the chance by sendin' him upstairs alone. An' if he does he'll run right into Halloran, who come out in my bus with me. The big lummox is pussy-footin' round the outside o' the house just for a chance like that."

The interne laughed. "You're not as dumb as you might be," he commented.

"Thanks, Doc, I'll buy a drink for that." And so saying the sergeant poured out a little of the wine in each glass, passed one to the interne, and with a "Here's how," tossed off his drink, smacking his lips. The interne did likewise. Riordan replaced the glasses and resumed his seat on the lounge.

Farnsworth returned, a baffled expression in his eyes.

"Mr. Cosgrave's things have not been disturbed, sir," he reported. "His hat and coat are where I hung them when he came in. He could not have gone out, sir."

"He never went out without a hat, then? He only got one hat?"

"Oh, no, sir; he has several hats—and coats. What I mean is there is no indication that he has gone out, sir. And I never knew him to go out without being properly dressed, hat, coat and gloves at this season of the year."

"Uh-huh. I suppose if the house was afire he'd wait to dress, eh? He live here all alone, does he, with yuh an' the two servants upstairs?"

"Yes sir, since Mrs. Cosgrave died. His mother, sir. The elder Mr. Cosgrave died some years back, as you doubtless know. Mrs. Cosgrave died last year. The girls—the Misses Cosgrave—they have all married. This is the Cosgrave family home, and young Mr. Cosgrave inherited it."

"He fool around with women any?"

The butler shook his head emphatically. "No, sir, not at all."

"Engaged?"

"I believe so. But it has not yet been announced, because of his mother's death so recently. But I understand that he will marry Miss Mabel Clifford. Her father is an attorney."

RIORDAN nodded his head solemnly. "An' yuh called the bulls," he said, "because yuh knew he had been in trouble an' yuh was afraid somebody had come in an' slugged him. Somebody he was expectin' tonight—but yuh don't know who it was. That yuhr story?"

"Yes, sir, that is what happened."

"If I was to take yuh down to jail an' lock yuh up, Farnsworth, do yuh think yuh could guess who it was that was comin' here tonight?"

"No, sir, I have no idea who it was. And I hope you will not arrest me, sir."

Riordan smiled grimly. "We'll see about that," he said. "Now yuh can take me over the house. I want to

have a look around an' talk to the rest o' the help."

The inspection, apparently, netted no new information. The interne, who accompanied Riordan and the butler, could not see that anything was developed that would be at all helpful. The two other servants appeared to be perfect blanks, as far as information went. Returning to the lower part of the house, they found Inspector Willis waiting in the hallway, one of the motorcycle men having admitted him.

"This is Mr. Farnsworth, Willis," said Riordan. "Farnsworth, this is one o' my boys. Yuh'll find him a nice fellow. He's goin' to stay here awhile. If Mr. Cosgrave comes home, Willis will talk to him. I think likely he'll come home. Willis will want to camp out down in the library—yuh'll see that he gets everythin' he wants?"

"Yes, sir, and I will be very glad to have an officer in the house."

Riordan nodded. "All right, fine an' dandy," he said. "Come on, Doc, I'll drive yuh in. Willis, yuh make yuhrself to home here. Farnsworth will tell yuh what's happened. Yuh keep yuhr eyes an' ears open. I'll give yuh a ring later, likely."

Back at headquarters, Riordan flung himself into his chair in the little office he shared with Captain of Detectives Brady, and reached for the telephone book. Turning to "Attorneys" in the classified pages at the back he found "Ennis, Clifford & Egan" as the only law firm in which the name Clifford appeared. Turning to the body of the book he found the number of the Clifford residence, and then reached for his outside phone.

Mr. Clifford, he was told, in answer to his inquiry, was not at home. No, it was not likely that he would return later, he was out of the city. Would probably be gone for several days. Riordan thanked his informant and hung up.

Just before eleven o'clock Inspector Halloran lumbered in to the inner office, his two hundred and eleven pounds having in tow a thin, scrawny, shrimp of a man, clothed in rags and pale of countenance. The sergeant laughed.

"Gosh, yuh pick big ones, don't yuh!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Halloran ignored the irony, slammed his captive into a chair and sank down into a larger armchair himself.

"I lay around the Cosgrave dump, Matt, like you told me," he said, "an' nothing come out. Nothing at all. Finally all the lights went out but in the library, where I could see young Willis. Pretty soft for him, sittin' up there on cushions, smokin' fine cigars, an' me out in the bushes in front o' the house. Well, I lay there till ten o'clock, like you said, an' then I started down to the car line to get me a ride in. And in a vacant lot at Fourteenth an' Chester I runs acrost this. He was curled up in the weeds, he was, an' I spotted him by the spark on the end o' his cigarette, so I reaches in an' hauled him out before he had a chanst to take it on the lam.

"He makes me for a dick the first thing—which is no great wonder. He says he is just a bum an' was floppin' there for the night. O' course that neighborhood is no place for bums, so I brang him on in. He wants to know what is all the bulls doin' out there, so by that I know he has been layin' out there for some time. But when I put the bee on him he sticks to his story, that he has been pan-handlin' the back doors, an' was layin' out there so he could get a early start in the mornin'.

Which, o' course, is a mess o' lies. Shall I go to work on him?"

III

THE prisoner flinched at the question and cowered in his chair. Riordan cocked an eye at the little man and leered.

"Yuh figger we're that dumb we think bums flop in vacant lots up town?" he demanded. "Yuh want the big feller, here, to start workin' on yuh? Or will yuh talk? Come clean, now!"

The little man regarded the sergeant with beady eyes.

"What was all the bulls doin'?" he asked.

"What would yuh think they was doin'; lookin' for four-leaf clovers in the dark?"

The little man shrugged impudently. "Well, whatever it was, I had no part in it," he said.

"Uh-huh. Likely, me bucko," sneered Riordan. "Now yuh listen to me. What was yuh hidin' out there for? All about it at one crack, or I'll turn yuh over to . . ."

"Aw, cut it out," interrupted the prisoner. "All you can do to me is hold me for after-hours or vag me. I could use thirty days eatin' on the state."

"Want to be tough, do yuh?" commented Riordan. "All right, yuh can be tough. I'll tell yuh what was all the bulls doin' up there. Young Mr. Cosgrave was found stretched out stiff in his own home. How yuh like that, eh? Yuh want to go over to the county on suspicion o' murder, or will yuh talk here?"

The little man's face went deadly pale—so pale that the dirt upon his features stood out in gray streaks. He knew only too well the fate of bums when the police had a homicide on their hands, and when the handiest pinch was often the easiest way out of a bad mess. Where a moment before he had been antagonistic, he was now all eagerness to be of assistance.

"Oh, Gawd!" he exclaimed. "Honest, sergeant, I didn't know nobody was croaked. I'll tell you all of it. So help me. I was waitin' for a guy. He was goin' to set me up to a flop an' a piece o' change. That's all I was doin'. He says for me to be there about half-past eight an' he'd be along. I was waitin' for him when I saw the bulls. You know how it is; it ain't healthy for a bum like me to be 'round the bulls, so I took a dive into the brush. That's all, as true as I'm sittin' here."

"Is zat so? What's this guy's name yuh was waitin' for?"

"Sergeant, I don't know. I was down to Stenger's pool hall, keepin' me hands warm. I was broke, I was, an' lookin' for somebody I could mooch for a piece o' change, or mebbe run a errand for. This here guy come in an' give the place the double-o. He seen me an' he knew I was right. You can tell when a guy's right, you know. This guy was right, too. He come over to me an' says how is tricks. I tol' him rotten. He slips me a buck an' says do I want some more. You know what I said. Very well, he says, meet him at Fourteenth an' Chester at half-past eight an' there would be a five in it. I says I'll do no rough stuff, an' he says he don't ask me to. Just to be there. Well, the guy looked like he was right, so I said I'd be there. An' I was. That's what I was waitin' for when I see the bulls come up."

"Yeah? And what was this guy like?"

"Sergeant, he was a middle-aged feller, grayish hair. Dark skinned, not

like a wop, not so dark. A swell-dresser, all gray, an' good stuff, too. He had a square beard like a shovel, but no lace-curtains on the side of his phiz. Black eyes, an' hard. He was right, all right."

"Yuh mean he'd been in stir?"

"Sure, what would you think I meant?"

"How many jolts yuh had?"

"Only one, sergeant. I was in the reformatory when I was a kid . . ."

"You're a dirty liar," rumbled Inspector Halloran. "I make you now. Duke Hillis, he is, Matt. I seen his face in the picture-books. His moniker is Paste-Face. He's a three-time loser, or more. A dope, Matt. He done his last job in Oregon, an' was pardoned out that time the governor there floated a whole mess o' yeggs. There was a stink about it in the papers. This guy's line is dope an' shake-downs."

RIORDAN nodded, much pleased that Halloran's remarkable memory had at last begun to work. The expression on the prisoner's face was ample evidence that the two hundred and eleven pound inspector was correct.

"Take him upstairs," he said, "an' book him for investigation—hold for forty-eight. Telephone the Federal Buildin' an' get one o' the Harrison Act men an' tell him about this bozo. Mebbe they'll want him. Then come back here."

While Halloran was escorting the little man to the jail, the detective sergeant reached for the phone book, found the number of the Cosgrave residence and called.

"Willis? Riordan talkin'. Listen, this may be a dope case. Cosgrave may be eatin' it or snuffin' it. Buzz the butler. Yuh might even prowl the house again, lookin' for snow. Try that darkey cook. An' listen, yuh stay there. An' lay over that butler. If he goes out, tail him. Call me if yuh dig up anything."

Hanging up, Riordan held the instrument in his hand some moments, while he considered the strange case. Reaching a decision, he lifted the receiver and called Chief of Police Roberts at his home.

"Chief? This is Detective Sergeant Riordan. I got a funny job, an' I thought you'd better know about it. Young Cosgrave, it is."

He recounted, briefly, the strange circumstances. Roberts listened, occasionally exclaiming profanely, as his displeasure mounted. When Riordan had finished he burst into song.

"I'm glad you called me, damn glad. Riordan, there is liable to be all kinds of hell over this. No matter how it breaks. The damned papers will smear it all over the front page. Besides that, Cosgrave is real people. Tell you what you do—you call Ennis, of Ennis, Clifford & Egan. That's counsel for the Cosgrave family. You'd better go see Ennis. Hop right out there. And you'd better put somebody to work on that punk you've got. Make him come clean. Use any measures. Find out who this other man is in the racket, and what it was. Cosgrave is too big people to let this thing lie as it is. Get busy, and give me a ring later if you get anything."

Riordan hung up, half wishing he had not called the chief. Roberts was going to get excited about this, that he could see. And when Roberts was excited, life in the department was—well, just one thing after another. When Halloran came back he told him to sit in at the desk for a while, and then, donning his dress uniform,

climbed into his roadster and went out to the attorney's home.

IV

RETURNING, an hour later, he found Chief Roberts sitting at Captain Brady's desk. The prisoner, Duke Hillis, had been brought down and—judging from appearances—had suffered a sad and hectic time. Inspector Halloran had used his persuasive powers to make the little man talk, but had gained no new information. The man still stuck to his story. As Riordan entered Roberts told Halloran to take the prisoner back upstairs, and whirled upon the detective sergeant.

"Well? What'd Ennis have to say? Raised hell, I suppose. He would. Damn! This hophead you got here won't talk. Swears he don't know this other guy. He's lying by the clock! What's Ennis say?"

"Not very much, chief. He's naturally not very happy. Says young Cosgrave owns the house outright, and has three hundred grand coming to him when he marries. He thinks he's been—kidnaped."

"Kidnaped, hell," exploded Roberts. "He's been slugged. And God knows what else. You got any report from the Bertillon room yet?"

Riordan reached for the inside phone and was busy at it some moments. Then he turned back to the chief.

"Hunter says there's no prints on the 'sap.' Whoever handled it used gloves," he said. "There's some hair in the blood smear, but Hunter's got none o' Cosgrave's to compare it with. As to the blood smear he don't know—hasn't had time to test it yet."

Roberts leaped from his chair and stamped his feet. "I guess I ain't got any dicks, either," he roared. "Everybody sittin' round. I'm goin' out to Cosgrave's myself. I bet you I get some of his hair. I bet you I get something on this case. I bet you I make that butler talk. Wouldn't be surprised but the butler pulled the job, an' all this is a fake alibi."

"Want me to drive you out, chief?"

"No, I got a car. I suppose I got a driver, too, if he ain't gone to sleep. You stay here an' see if you can run the dicks. You certainly got nothing when you were out there before!"

He was gone, with the door slammed behind him so that the very wall shook. Riordan shrugged his shoulders, reached for the report basket and began methodically going over its contents, once again taking up the routine work. The telephone on his desk tinkled. He reached for the instrument.

"Detective bureau, Sergeant Riordan speaking," he said.

"Sarge, this is Willis," came the voice over the wire. "I'm up near Ennis's house. He telephone the butler, Farnsworth, to come see him. The butler is still inside. I'm tailing him, like you said. Listen, will you get one of the—"

"Yuh see the Old Man?" interrupted Riordan.

"No."

"Well, yuh're lucky. He's wild. Went out to Cosgrave's. What were yuh sayin'?"

"I want you to have somebody pick up the driver of cab number 56 of the Black & White Taxi Company. Find out where he got the fare he was driving on Chestnut Street at a quarter after ten. Whoever it was, he was tailing the butler, too—from the taxi."

"So?" Riordan's eyebrows arched. "I'll do that, son. Listen, when that butler comes out o' Ennis's house, yuh bring him down here."

He slammed up the phone, dashed out into the main room, his eyes sweeping the desks.

"You, Enright," he barked. "Take Stacy an' Halloran with yuh. Down to the Black an' White Taxi office. Get the driver of cab 56. He had a fare on Chestnut Street at ten fifteen. Find out where he picked him up and get a description. If yuh can—if yuh got a coon's chance—two of yuh beat it an' pick up that fare an' bring it in. The other one o' yuh bring in the driver. Take a flivver an' work fast—the Old Man is on the ramp, an' yuh'd better have somethin' to show when yuh get back."

THE three inspectors scrambled to their feet and stampeded from the room, tangling themselves, as usual, in a jam at the door. Riordan smiled grimly, returned to his office and called Captain Brady at his home.

"Yuh'd better come down, chief. We got a ruckus on," he said. "Sorry to wake yuh up, but the Old Man is on the warpath. I'll tell yuh when yuh get in."

Twenty minutes later there was the strident shrieking of an approaching siren outside, a rumbling clash as a big car, driven at high speed, slammed over the rise through the curbing in front of the police garage, and within six seconds the office door banged open to admit Captain Brady.

"Where's the Old Man?" he demanded.

"Still out, chief. But due in any minute," said Riordan.

Brady's face showed sudden relief. "Well, what's broke?" he asked.

Riordan told him, in succinct detail. Captain Brady scowled as he listened, cataloging each of the strange incidents in his mind. When his sergeant had completed his account, he looked down for a minute, then demanded:

"You got in touch with this frail he's to marry yet? The Clifford girl?"

"No, chief. I tried to phone Clifford, but they said he was out of the city."

"Better get the frail, boy. Willis would be a good one to send to see her. He's young and smooth."

"Willis is tailing the butler. He'll be in soon."

"Soon ain't soon enough, boy. Time to get out there is now. Matter of fact, time was when this first broke. You slipped on that." Brady scowled again, then turned to the door. "Boy, I'm going out to get that Clifford frail. You stick here till I get back. I may be longer than you think. But stick here. If the Old Man comes in, tell him I'm working. Tell him I'll be back. You stick here."

The captain whirled and vanished through the door. Riordan, surprised, and trying to see where he had "slipped," heard Brady's machine leave the garage with grinding gears and speed away down the street, siren screeching a warning. What had the Clifford girl to do with it? He was still puzzling over that—for he had great respect for Brady's acumen—when the door slammed back against the wall as Roberts barged in.

The chief flung himself into Brady's chair, bit the end savagely from a cigar, and broke two matches trying to light it. Then he glared at Riordan through a cloud of smoke. Before he could find words to relieve his feelings, Inspector Willis, accompanied by Farnsworth, the butler, entered the office. Willis closed the gaping door behind him, saluted the chief, and spoke to Riordan.

"While I was tailing this man, ser-

geant, as you ordered," he said, " I saw a taxi was following him. The one I telephoned you about. Driving slow, about half a block behind. Holding it back, the driver was. He was so busy watching this man I don't think he saw me. I . . ."

" The officer is right, sir," spoke up Farnsworth. " I noticed myself that I was being followed. At first I thought it was a coincidence, so I did not go directly to the home of Mr. Ennis. Turned off a block, sir. The cab still followed me. I turned this way and that, back and forth, but the cab was always behind me. I was in great fear, sir, and got to a well-lighted street as rapidly as I could."

" Yuh see Willis followin' yuh, too?" asked Riordan.

" No, sir. I was quite surprised to meet him when I came out from Mr. Ennis's."

" What difference does it make if he saw Willis or not?" burst out Roberts. " Who was in this taxi? That's what we want to know."

" I've got three men out, sir," cut in Riordan. " One to bring the driver in and the other two to get his fare."

" Well, I'm glad to hear it. First sign o' brains you've shown tonight." Roberts turned to Farnsworth. " You the butler at Cosgrave's? What kind of a cock-and-bull story is this, anyway, huh? Now you tell me the straight of it, and pronto!"

V

FARNSWORTH related his original tale. His account did not vary an iota from his first report. He recounted Riordan's arrival at the residence, his questioning, and the subsequent events, including details of his visit to Mr. Ennis. The attorney had asked him what had happened, and he had told him. Together they had reviewed recent happenings in young Mr. Cosgrave's life, but neither of them could find anything that would shed light on the strange occurrences of the evening. Roberts was in the midst of grilling the butler when Inspector Enright entered, a taxi driver in tow.

Roberts dropped his questioning of Farnsworth and turned on the taxi man with ferocity.

" Chief, I dunno nothin' about it, nothin' at all," said the driver. " I was on stand at the Belmont-Grand when a guy an' a skirt asked me was I busy. They said to put the clock on the hour rate and drive out to Chester Place. It was just half past eight when I loaded 'em and pulled out o' the stand. We was rollin' into Chester when two bulls on gas bikes roared by us. The guy in back says to pull into the curb. This was about Twelfth an' Chester. I pulled in, an' he says to wait there. While we was waitin' the sergeant, here, come tearin' by in that red buggy o' his. The guy in my bus asked me was that more bulls, an' I tol' him yes an' who it was. He says to drive out to the park.

" After we got to the park he says is they any roadhouses, an' I took 'em to Rookway's joint. They was there an hour or so, he tellin' me to wait. Then they come out, an' he says drive back to town. On the way in him an' his skirt was jawin' all the time, fightin' over somethin'. I didn't get what it was. We get back to town an' the guy says drive out Chester again an' stop at Fourteenth. I pull out there and flag down on the corner an' the guy looks around but don't leave the bus. Then he says drive up Chester to the end. I done that an' he has me park there awhile.

" By an' by he says turn roun' an'

drive back downtown. I went roun' the block an' come back to Chester. There was a guy walkin' down Chester, an' this fare, he says to slow down an' tail this guy. So I stall my motor an' jus' roll. We tail this guy all over town an' onto Broadway, an' then out to Clinton. The guy we're tailin' goes into a house there, an' I pull on a ways an' then park. The fare an' the skirt, they have another argument, an' then he says to drive down to the Rochester Apartments. The skirt gets out there, an' then the guy has me drive him to the Central Hotel. He pays me off there an' slips me a dollar tip. I was low on gas then, so I goes down to the garage to get a refill, an' there's three dicks waitin'. They grab me an' buzz me about the fares I had, an' this one brings me in. What for I dunno."

Roberts questioned the taxi driver about his fares, getting a description of them. His report of the man tallied with that Duke Hillis had given. The chief demanded the driver's license card, made a note of his name, address and number, and waved Enright to take him out and turn him loose.

"Who's after the two in the cab?" he demanded.

"Stacy and Halloran, sir."

"Well, they better get them, that's all," growled the chief, and he resumed his questioning of Farnsworth.

THE entrance of Inspector Stacy and a flashily-dressed woman, still young and easy to look at, interrupted him. He leaned back in Brady's chair, and shot a telegraphic glance at Riordan.

The sergeant rose, pushed forward a chair for the woman, and then looked inquiringly at Stacy.

"The name on the bell, Sergeant, was Luella Cummings," said Stacy. "The janitor at the apartment says she was the only tenant come home in a taxi tonight. He always watches till about half past twelve; says he aims to run a decent house and not have no trouble."

Riordan looked at the woman a few seconds and smiled. "Sister," he said, "I want to tell yuh somethin'. Yuh're likely to be in a jam. We got the taxi-crab driver what dragged yuh around all evenin', an' presently we'll have what was with yuh. Yuh want to talk any?"

She regarded the sergeant with a whimsical smile. Then she turned and studied Chief Roberts, whose face had become a blank mask. Farnsworth got but a glance; Willis she studied for a moment before, apparently, she had catalogued him. Stacy she did not consider at all—she had been riding with him in a police flivver and already knew about him.

"I guess it's up to you to keep the conversation going," she said, pertly. "I didn't know it was against the law to ride in a taxi in this man's town."

The telephone on Riordan's desk rang, and he turned to answer it. Those in the small office listened attentively to one side of the conversation.

"Detective bureau, Sergeant . . . uh-huh . . . who? . . . that so? . . . yeah, I'll do that. Goodby."

He hung up, reached for the inside phone, and spoke to the exchange operator downstairs. "Send a bus o' some kind to the Central Hotel. Halloran'll be waitin'. Better send a man along with the driver."

Hanging up, he turned back and regarded the woman, a quizzical smile on his features.

"Sister, we got 'Payoff Joe' Harrison," he said. "Yuh want to talk before he gets in here?"

The woman did not lose her poise. "You offering me a trade?" she asked.

"I don't deal in trades, sister. We got a case on. Right now yuh're brought in here for questionin'. Maybe later on yuh'll be locked up, or maybe yuh can talk yuhrself out of it. Yuh've got about ten minutes, the way the boys drive."

"And Joe?"

"Forget Joe. That's my advice. All he's done for yuh is to get yuh in a fair way o' bein' jammed. If yuh can talk yuhrself out o' it, yuh may get a floater out o' town. That's the best yuh can get, if any."

She looked down, tapped with her foot on the worn carpet. Made a futile gesture with her hands and stared about the room again, particularly at the hard, blank face of the chief. Then shrugged her shoulders.

"It's a laugh," she said. "A big laugh. Lot of work for nothing. I'll tell you. I've never squealed on a guy that's played with me right, but Joe... well, it was the same old game. Joe put it up to me. Said I had the looks, and that this guy would fall hard for me. Cosgrave. But he didn't. Took a run-out powder, instead. Joe said this guy Cosgrave would get three hundred grand when he married. I was to make him fall. If he fell hard and married me, we'd cut the three hundred grand. If he didn't, Joe was going to have him sued for breach of promise. You know.

"Well, Joe fixed it for me to meet him at a Racquet Club dance. Joe can get in to anything, got a good front. Cosgrave, he had a few drinks—Joe saw to that—and he seemed to think I was all to the mustard. We got him out of the dance and to Tony's joint on the Highway. There he begun to lap up the wine. Said it was the first time he'd been out since his mother died. He was quite a live party, after he got started. We had a private room, him and I, and Cosgrove got pretty — pretty chummy. You know, a guy that has had some drinks usually feels pretty good.

"Then Joe burst in on us. He made out he was my father and he was all horrified that Cosgrave had me in a private room. Pulled a rod on him and threatened to shoot him. Said Cosgrave had to marry me or he'd kill him, right there. I wish to God my real father had been that particular about me—I wouldn't be here now if he had.

"Well, Cosgrave parleyed him—parleyed Joe, I mean. We all come back to town together in a taxi. They let me out at my apartment. Then I guess Joe took him home.

"Anyway, next day Joe met me downtown and said Cosgrave wanted to buy out, but would have some trouble getting the coin. Would have to see somebody and borrow it. Seems like Cosgrave don't get his money till he marries, that was in his old man's will. Joe says we got to play along with Cosgrave till he raises the dough. So we play along. It was all set that tonight he was going to come through—Cosgrave, I mean. Joe was going to his house to get it. So I was home, in the apartment, waiting for Joe to come back with my cut. Fifty-fifty it was to be.

"BUT Joe, at the last minute, he changes his mind. He says likely Cosgrave will belch after he's paid, and we better get ready to beat it. He says I better come along with him to the pay-off. That's all right with me, for it don't give Joe any chance to run out on me. So we get

a cab and start for Cosgrave's place. As we get near a couple of motorcycle bulls go past us, and Joe, who is nervous, tells the driver to pull in to the curb. The bulls go to Cosgrave's. Joe says Cosgrave has crossed us up and we better beat it, but I say maybe something has happened. While we're arguing it a car goes by hell-bent, and the taxi driver says it's more bulls.

"So we get away from there. Go out to the park and then out in the country. Joe is all for dropping it, says Cosgrave has crossed us up. The bulls getting there the same time Joe was supposed to be, looks like it. But I said the bulls were going in a hurry, and if they were laying for us they wouldn't be that way, but would be pussy-footing up quiet. I told Joe we'd better drive back and see how things looked. So we went back.

"Everything was quiet about the place. Pretty soon somebody comes out, and Joe says it's the butler or some flunkey he'd seen the night he took Cosgrave home. We follow this guy, Joe figuring on asking him what had happened. But there's somebody following this butler—I saw him out the back window of the taxi. So we don't want to stop and brace the butler till this other party drops off. He didn't drop off. The butler went to a house on Clinton Street and this other fellow, he hung round under the trees. It was too deep for us, so we decided to call it off. Joe dropped me at the apartment — and this officer came. That's all there was to it. You can't do anything. We had a plant, but we didn't put it over."

She looked at Riordan blandly, even impertinently. Smiled.

"Yuh done pretty good, sister," he said. "But yuh left some out. Paste-Face Hillis. Where'd he come in?"

The woman laughed. "Oh, him? He wasn't in it at all. He was just a punk. Joe picked him up in some dump and had him planted near Cosgrave's, so if there was any double-cross and Cosgrave had flatties around, Joe could throw this punk to the bulls. You know, start wrestling with him on the street, and when the bulls come up, he'd say he'd seen him running from Cosgrave's, and throw him to the bulls. While the flatties would be grabbing the punk, Joe would fade out. Joe's clever, he thinks of everything."

"You're a sweet mess," exclaimed Roberts, looking at the woman with flashing eyes. "Take her upstairs, Stacy—tell Mrs. Sergeant Hovenhauer to put her on ice. We don't want her here when Halloran brings in this 'Payoff Joe.'"

Her head in the air, and a taunting smile on her lips, the woman followed Stacy from the room.

VI

"COOL piece," said Roberts. "Be hard to stick, too. She'll turn state's evidence and weep at the jury, snitch on Joe and say he led her into it, and walk out. At that she's lying by the clock."

Riordan shook his head. "It checks with the taxicrab man," he said.

"They likely got him fixed."

The office door opened and the huge form of Inspector Halloran bulked in, dragging a dapper, dark-skinned man behind him. Roberts jumped from Brady's chair, jerked Mr. Harrison from the big detective's grasp, and slammed him back against the wall.

"Where's Cosgrave?" he bellowed.

"Payoff Joe" Harrison recovered his balance, put his hat back straight on his head, slid a step or two out of the chief's reach, and held up a hand.

" Now be nice, Chief," he said. " If I knew where Cosgrave was I wouldn't be here. You ought to know that."

Roberts flung himself back in Brady's chair and glared at the prisoner.

" Joe, I got your moll upstairs and she's squealed. I got the butler here, and he'll identify you as the man who brought Cosgrave home the night you got him drunk . . ."

" Beg pardon, sir, but I never saw the man in my life," interrupted Farnsworth. " If he came home with Mr. Cosgrave, sir, he must have remained outside in the cab. I never . . ."

" Shut up! Willis, take that doddering jackass upstairs and lock him up!"

Mr. Harrison looked at Halloran and smiled thinly as Willis and the butler departed hastily from the room. Roberts rubbed his chin in perplexity. The sergeant leaned forward.

" It makes no never-mind, Joe," said Riordan. " We got yuh. We got the Cummings woman, or whatever her name is. She'll testify to anything to save her neck. We got the ' sap ' that Cosgrave was slugged with, an' likely we'll be able to find yuhr prints on it. I seen prints get on most anythin', when there was need. Yuh got a record as long as my arm, an' yuh know it. We got Paste-Face Hillis, a dope an' a three-time loser to boot. We got the taxi driver. Yuh better talk."

" Payoff Joe " Harrison realized the situation. He was sufficiently familiar with police methods to see his predicament. He pressed his lips together and his face grew serious. And just then the door opened again, admitting Captain Brady, accompanied by two men in outing clothes.

" 'Evening, Chief. This is Mr. Clifford, the attorney, and young Mr. Cosgrave," he said.

Roberts rose, nodded to the two men, then shot a glance at Halloran.

" Take your man upstairs and sit on him," he barked.

RIORDAN dragged forward chairs. Captain Brady opened the lower drawer of his desk and produced a box of cigars, passed it around. For an interval there was no sound in the room but the soft whisk of matches being scratched and the gentle exhalations of smoke-burdened breaths. Then Mr. Clifford's chair creaked as he hitched it forward.

" I guess, Roberts, I'm pretty heavily in your debt," he said. " If you've been to any expense in this matter, I'll be glad to take care of all costs. Captain Brady here is a very fine officer, I wish to specially commend him."

The Chief's cigar, upthrust at a ridiculous angle in his lips, was the only thing that belied his dignity

" I'll hear what you have to say, Mr. Clifford."

" Thank you, Roberts. I'll be brief. Mr. Cosgrave, here, was the victim—well, let us say he fell into the clutches of an unprincipled woman and her male companion. A variety of the badger game. He was thoroughly frightened, though perfectly innocent. It is often that way. He came to me—I am a member of his family counsel—to borrow, to arrange a loan. I saw he was in some difficulty, and I persuaded him to tell me the whole story. I gather you have by this time learned the details. Sergeant Riordan, here, I know to be a very efficient officer, and I suppose he has managed, by his skill, to get this man Harrison, and the woman.

" The plot, Chief, was that Harrison wanted Cosgrave to pay him one hundred thousand dollars. Plain black-

mail, of course—but Cosgrave did not see any other way out of it. His engagement to my daughter is to be announced soon, and, of course, publicity in this affair would be—would be very painful. To go to the police would be equally as disastrous, it seemed. There would have to be a prosecution. So it seemed to me that the best thing to do was to have the police on hand without knowing—without knowing what they were summoned for. I mean without knowing about the blackmail matter."

"You could have come to me, Mr. Clifford," said Roberts, "and I would have. . . ."

"Yes, I know, Roberts. But it seemed to me it would be better another way. So I instructed Mr. Cosgrave what to do. I relied upon the butler, Farnsworth, to do the obvious thing. I know Farnsworth very well and I know how his mind works. He is very matter-of-fact—has no imagination whatever. An admirable butler, Chief. He came into the library, found Mr. Cosgrave apparently the victim of an attack, and called the police. The minute he left the room, Cosgrave rose from his position, opened the window, closed it behind him, and, standing on the ledge outside, reached up and grasped the set-back cornice overhead, and, hand-over-hand, swung along until he was over the front steps.

"He dropped to these, ran down the path, and entered my car. I was waiting for him, and we immediately drove to my fishing lodge up the river. So, you see, Cosgrave left the house while Farnsworth was summoning the officers. I was going to call you in the morning and explain. I supposed that this man Harrison would appear at the house just about the time the police arrived—or while they were there—and would either be frightened away or would be apprehended. After I had explained it to you, we could have dealt with Harrison quietly—on some old charge, perhaps."

Roberts looked at Brady. "How'd you know where they were?" he snapped.

The captain gave a deprecating shrug. "It didn't fit, Chief," he answered. "If Cosgrave was dead he wouldn't get up and walk out. If he was slugged he wouldn't. The boy here — Riordan — called Clifford's house, likely to talk to Miss Clifford, for she'd be apt to know if Cosgrave was planning a trip. He found out that Clifford was suddenly out of the city; they told him that when he called. Likely whoever answered the phone thought he was asking for Mr. Clifford and not for Miss Clifford.

"Well, I've seen these things before, so I went out to Clifford's Saw Miss Clifford, asked her where her father was. She said he was up at his fishing place and she was going up in the morning. I didn't say anything about Cosgrave then—just drove out to Mr. Clifford's fishing place. It looked like the best chance."

CHIEF ROBERTS leaned back in his chair, an expansive smile gleaming on his face.

"I got a good bunch of dicks, Mr. Clifford," he said. "They were too fast for you. Next time you have any trouble, though, you want to come to me first. Save a lot of—of excitement. Well, we've got the woman and 'Pay-off Joe'—you'll be down in the morning and sign a complaint?"

"No, Roberts. Mr. Cosgrave does not care to sign any complaint. Nothing has happened, you understand? Mr. Cosgrave and I went fishing, that is all. We don't know Mr. Harrison or

this woman. Anything I can do for the department, Chief? A cheque for the Police Benefit Association, for instance?"

"But this guy, 'Payoff Joe,' Mr. Clifford, he's a bad egg. He ought to be put away," protested Roberts.

"I agree with you, Chief. He has no visible means of support, he has a record—that ought to help you. At least you can get rid of him—run him out of the city.

"Say a thousand dollars for the Police Benefit Association—how would that be? On the condition that there is no mention of—of our fishing trip. Or anything else."

"It's not right, Mr. Clifford. Blackmail is . . ."

"There was no blackmail, Roberts. No money passed, no marked bills, no evidence, nothing. Think of my daughter, Roberts. Suppose it was your daughter and her young man. You will look after it?"

The Chief shrugged his shoulders. Turned to Brady.

"You done so well, Brady," he said, "see what more you can do. You an' your boys ought to be able to line up something that'll hold 'Payoff Joe' for awhile. Get right after him in the morning. All I got to say is, it's a heluva life, this police business."

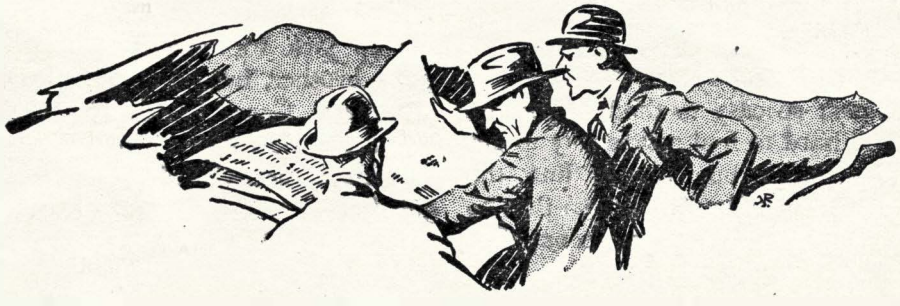
Everybody stood up and shook hands all around. Roberts left the office, to escort Clifford and Cosgrave downstairs. Captain Brady and Detective Sergeant Riordan faced each other alone, and each slowly opened his right hand. Clifford had bade them adieu last of all, and they had kept their hands closed after his parting grip. Now each beheld a crumpled fifty-dollar bill in his palm.

"Boy," said Brady, "as the Old Man says, it ain't right. But the police business is a heluva business, an' the up-and-up folks can't be smeared with their own foolishness. You got to take what you can get. We can get Joe ninety days for vagrancy, anyway, and then push him up the track. Show him the town's on fire. I'm goin' home now. Before you go, see that any reports on this job are kept off the press bulletin. Good-night, boy."

Riordan regarded the crumpled bill in his hand.

"I wonder what he give the Old Man," he said.

Brady paused at the door and laughed. "Give him a slap on the back," he said. "Roberts would rather have that, boy, from Clifford, than anything else. The Old Man ain't under civil service like you an' me, boy. He's in politics—an' Clifford is chairman o' the county central committee. Good-night, boy."



I Looted Broadway

By Al Hurwitch

As told to Howard McLellan

A True Story

The Important Place of Two Bottles of Old Crow in the Elegant "Finger" Kindling's $5,000,000 Society Hold-up

"She's always cargoed with a half million dollar load of sparkle"

Al Hurwitch came to New York City, living by his gun. He became a partner of Gene Moran. A crook they used on a job, The Marquis, was picked up by the police. Hurwitch and Moran, in fear lest the police learn from The Marquis too much about their activities, hired Counsellor Snitkin to get The Marquis declared insane. Snitkin's price was $10,000. Hurwitch and Moran robbed a Mrs. Meyers of her jewels to raise the $10,000.

CHAPTER XXV

A New Hide-Out

IT wasn't so easy to think quick and think hard to find a safe way to get the $10,000 bug money into the hands of Counsellor Snitkin so that he would make a quick move to put The Marquis into the nuthouse.

Other thoughts were on my mind, too, and they concerned the split which Gene and I took of the $1,250 that remained from the Meyers job.

"That gripes me," I said to Gene. "We take all the chances, and look at our cut! A little over six hundred bucks for each of us."

"No funerals, Al. We gotta take it on the chin. There's nobody but us to dig up jack for The Marquis. He's got a brother, but—"

"Wait, Gene," I cut in sharply. "You say he's got a brother?"

"His name's Charlie. He's a square guy."

"What's the matter with sending him to Snitkin with the ten grand?"

"He's not in our racket; don't know nothing about it."

"All the better, Gene. He don't need to know nothing. We'll take the ten grand—you've got it in grand bills—put it into an envelope and tell him to hand it to Snitkin. We'll just tell him Snitkin's gonna help his brother out. He won't bother to peep into the envelope, and if he did, being The Marquis' brother, he'd deliver the jack to help him out. He certainly wouldn't go south with the dough in that case."

"You're thinking," Gene grinned. He located Charlie Curtis on the telephone, and a little while later he was in my office. I explained to him that the boys were getting together to help The Marquis out of his tight jam and that the envelope I handed him was the go-ahead to Snitkin that would make the lawyer jump in and do something quick for The Marquis.

So he agreed to carry the envelope to Snitkin. Charlie was a simple sort of a guy, worried about his brother and anxious to do anything to help. He busted out of the office with the envelope.

The tragedy that dumped itself all over Charlie Curtis, who knew nothing about the Meyers affair, who never even suspected us of it, didn't even know there was money in the envelope, is enough to make the heart turn cold. He suffered plenty through that envelope he carried that day to help his brother, but the story of what happened to him belongs in a later place in this chronicle of events.

He delivered the ten grand and Snitkin broke into action. A sanity commission was ordered by the court; both Snitkin and his partner appeared. The Marquis, having been compelled to lay off the junk for sometime, made a heavy showing as a phony nut. When the sanity commissioners heard the story of how he had packed a quart of soup around in the crowded city, had even kept it in his apartment, where his girl also lived, and his pals hung out occasionally, he was put down as a dangerous nut and rushed away to Matteawan Hospital for the criminal insane until he regained his sanity.

If his sanity did not return then he was in the house of madmen for life.

"There she lays," Gene gloated. "If The Marquis does ever take it in his head to spill about us they won't believe a word he says, because, don't you see, legally he's a nut."

"But think of a guy salted in a place like that maybe for the rest of his life," I said.

Gene's face lit up. He blinked his small eyes. "Al," he said, "do you think The Marquis is gonna stick in the booby hatch? Nothing can hold that guy. In 1914 that baby kidnaped the warden of Dannemora Prison and they handed him ten years extra for rapping a guard over the bean. In 1917 he was in Sing Sing prison, and wha'd he do? He led a big break. And what happens in 1920? His sentence is commuted by Al Smith, the Governor, and there you are. Junk or no junk that guys an eel. Nothing can hold him providing he gets a little help from the outside."

"From what I hear Matteawan's no easy joint to slide out of," I said.

"Cripes, The Marquis could take the lam from Devil's Island and get away. In fact I'm running up to Matteawan myself tomorrow to look the joint over and see what's what and just where I can help the poor junkie."

The six hundred dollars in my pocket felt like small change. "If you're going up to Matteawan," I said,

"I think I'll breeze up and take in the races at Saratoga. The only chance I've got with this pin money is to lay it on a horse and clean up or shut up."

At the races I got rid of the pin money in one plunge and came back to the showroom on railroad fare borrowed from a bookie.

GENE came busting in at noon. He had a newspaper in his hand.

"Al! Al!" he cried. "Get a peep of this." He held up the paper and tapped it with his knuckles. "The Meyers jane has been down to Police Headquarters. They showed her the mugs of all the prowlers in their gallery. The dicks says she picked out one. Geez, that might be The Marquis."

"They haven't got my mug," I said.

"No, but they've got mine from that rap on the gun-carrying and here I am still on the lam on that squeal."

Gene didn't talk like a man who was frightened. He just felt the heat. His eyes were blinking like someone had thrown pepper into them.

"It won't make any difference with The Marquis," he went on. "We've got him bugged and he wasn't in on the Meyers job. But they might go up to him about that and get a spill out of him about the Harrington and other jobs. Geez, I hope he makes a getaway before they can do that." He flattened the newspaper on my desk and for a minute read in silence.

Suddenly he hit the desk with his fist.

"Holy . . . Al, what d'yuh think of this? The sheet here quotes the dicks as saying that the mob that knocked over the Meyers' apartment is the same outfit that took Charlotte King Palmer for six hundred thousand in jewels and furs . . . and . . . that the same mob killed that guy Elwell, the bridge expert in the Seventies."

"What?" I fastened my eyes on the sheet. I read about the Palmer knock-over.

"Why, it says that job was back in 1920, Gene. I wasn't in this racket then. And the Elwell killing was in 1920 too."

"That's all right for you, but not for me," cried Gene, and for the first time he showed white under the gills.

"Well, you didn't pull those jobs, did you, Gene?"

"Hell, no, a foreign mob got the Palmer stuff. But get this, Al, my old man has lived in the same house with Mrs. King, the mother of Charlotte, for years down in Richmond Hill."

"You're shivering, Gene."

Gene scowled at me.

"Who wouldn't? Don't you get the lay? Suppose the dicks work back on that Palmer knock-over, find out my old man's connection, then work that around, nosing it out till they get to me? And me a lamster! Them dicks'll just wrap one around me and around the old man. Me, a well known prowler and him living in the same house with the Palmer girl's mother, where he easy could get a finger on her daughter's jewels. And that ain't all. Read that about how the Palmer job was pulled."

I read aloud to him . . . how three birds, all gatted, waited for Charlotte to enter her house, seized and gagged her and bound silk covered wire around her ankles, and then stripped her of $696,000 in diamonds, pearls, emeralds and rubies. I looked up at Gene.

"Our system of knocking 'em over and three guys . . . silk wire . . . a gag," said Gene. "Is that much different from the Meyers job?"

"Damned little difference," I answered.

"And the Elwell job, well, some guy pushed in on him and threw a bullet into him. Geez, if they worked around to me through the old man's connection with the King house, the dicks'd rip open the sky to fasten all those jobs on me." He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

I hooked my leg over the corner of the desk. "Well, what's the next move?" I asked.

"To get set for a pinch," said Gene, tightening his small eyes until they were hardly visible. "Here." He jammed his hand into a hip pocket and hauled out a gun.

"Sink this rod in your pants and be ready," he instructed. "It's okay. I doctored the numbers. I was gonna try and slip that to The Marquis on my next trip. I'm heeled with a rod, too, in case the dicks give us a sudden flush."

He turned out his trouser pockets to show he was broke.

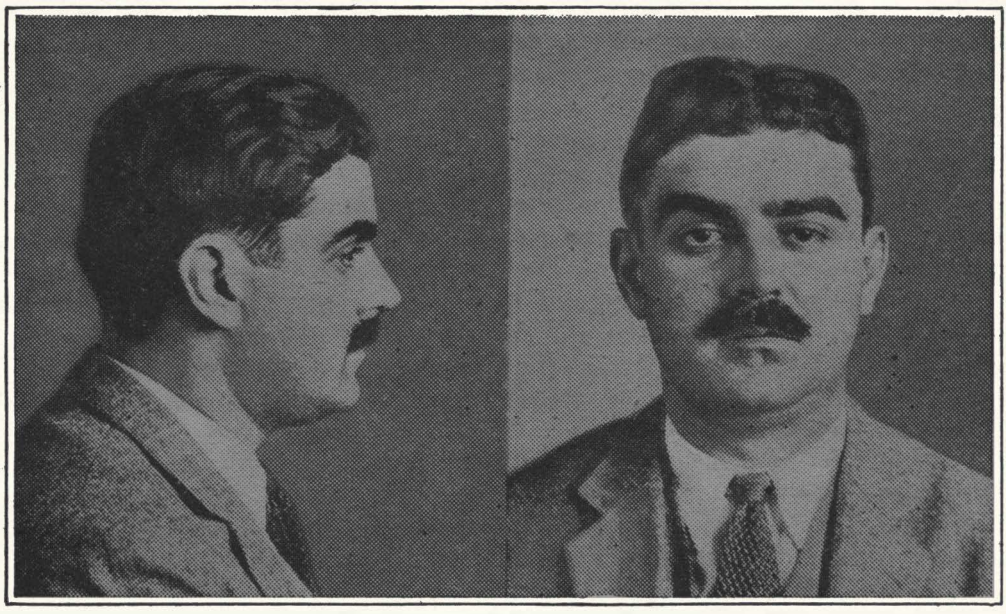
"I haven't even got lunch money," I said.

"Never mind eats now," said Gene. "The next shift is to get a new hideout. This place is getting crummy. Too many prowlers coming in. First thing you know a stool'll worm himself in. We'll go over to Fifty-third Street and pick out a flat. Coming down from Matteawan I got off at Mt. Vernon and got a little flat where Lou and I can be."

"Why plant ourselves right in the heart of the white light country?" I asked. "I'll get a place out near Mt. Vernon, too."

"Don't be silly," Gene grinned. "Always take a bold step in a hole like this. Come right down into the heart of town where they wouldn't expect to find you and face 'em out."

The Stevens was outside. Gene and I got in and made a spurt into Fifty-third Street. We picked out a small, old style flat. Just off the front door



MATTHEW (MICKEY) BIDDULPH
The "finger" who spotted the Schoellkopf set-up

was a low stoop boarded in all around. It caught Gene's eye. He pointed to it as we came out.

"A handy thing," he said, "in case we hi-jack and need a place to plant booze in a hurry. Now scatter the word that we've got a new hide-out and keep all those fish from coming into your office."

"Why tell any of them we're moving?" I said.

"Hell, we want the fingers to know where we are," said Gene. "How else can they hand us their tips?"

CHAPTER XXVI

A Breeze from Sliver

PASSING out word that we had switched headquarters, involved only a simple operation. At the corner of Broadway I got out of the Stevens and Gene drove off. I ambled along the bright main stem and went into a little two-by-four drug store. It was known as the "lam spot," an underground postoffice. In the course of any day big and little guns on the clout, or trying to get on the clout, or looking for a bang of happy dust would drift in to find pals, or, in case of a sudden scatter, to leave word of their new hangout.

One clerk, who had a face like putty and used junk, was the walking directory. He knew everybody. Through him the mobs kept track of each other when a sudden clean-up by the police scattered them.

"If anybody wants to hook up with me or Gene," I said to him, "slip the new address." I gave him the number of the new hide-out in Fifty-third Street. I started away.

"Oh, Al," he called out. When I turned he was swinging around the counter. He came running up to me. "Lissen," he whispered, "you know anything about a guy named Charlie Curtis?"

"Charlie Curtis?" I asked. "Why do you ask me about any Charlie Curtis?"

"A little guy I've got pegged as a stool was in here cracking about a Charlie Curtis. I've asked everybody if they knew him. Nobody ever heard of him."

"Neither have I." Untrue, of course, but I was not putting the finger on the Charlie Curtis I knew, and with whom Gene and I had done undercover business. It made me stir, however, to learn that somebody was looking for him. I shot out of the store, looked for Gene at the showroom, found he wasn't there, and dug out for the hide-out in Fifty-third Street.

I opened the door to the flat and saw Gene lower a gun. "What the hell Gene! What's the gun—"

"I was fixing for a dick," said Gene, putting away his rod.

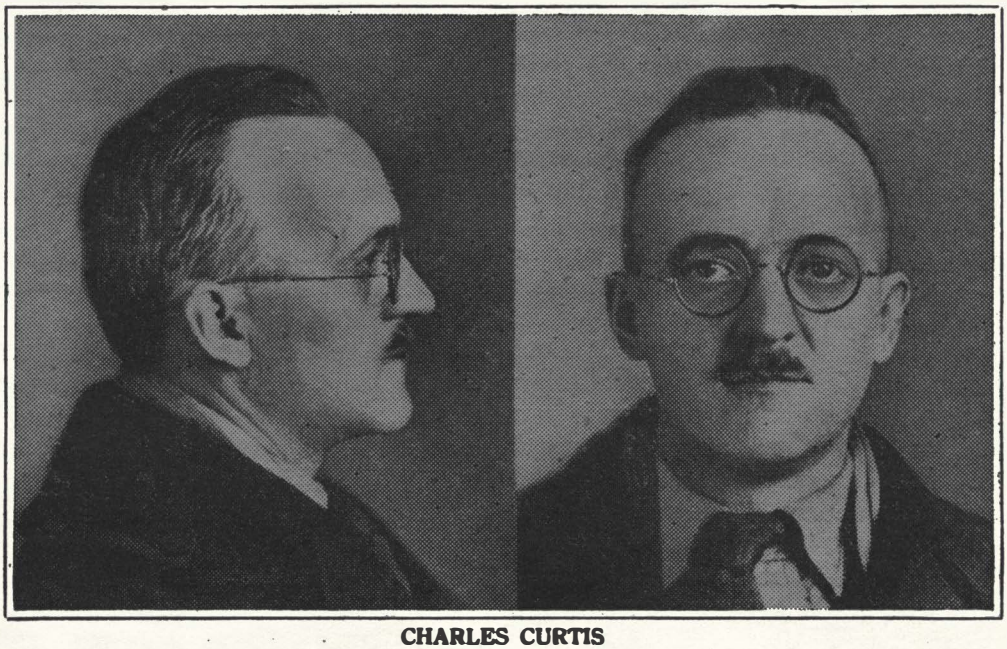
"How could they rap to a place we just moved into?"

"They're after Charlie Curtis," Gene sang out. "I don't know why, but they must've tailed him in or out of Snitkin's office...or maybe somebody leaked. And I picks up a sheet and see where the dicks crack that Lillian Meyers names a bird known as Curtis as one of the guys that knocked her over."

I dropped to the bed. "There's something brewing," I said. "That snow-bird in the drug store asks me if I know a Charlie Curtis, and he says a police stool was asking him if he had ever heard of a Charlie Curtis."

"Yeah," exclaimed Gene. "Well, it don't make much diff. Charlie's got ice in his feet and has lammed. If they did slough him he couldn't say any-

thing. How could he, when he don't know a damned thing about the Meyers job? You know, and I know, that guy is as clear of that as I am broke. I called up his family and they told me he had taken it on the hoof. Scared dizzy, that's all."



CHARLES CURTIS
"He suffered plenty"

That afternoon Gene went to Matteawan to see The Marquis and find out if he knew anything about his brother Charlie. I went down to the drug store to once-over the gang in there and nose around. The junky clerk hadn't heard any more about Charlie Curtis so I bought a stack of cigarettes and planted there. A long-nosed bird called Sliver eased up to me.

"Looking for Gene?" he asked.

"What Gene?"

"Mor-an-n-n," he drawled.

"I know him, but I'm not looking for him."

He looked wisely out of the corners of his eyes. "You guys are teamed, ain't yuh?" he asked.

"I sold him a used car once," I said. "That's all I know about Gene Moran, and that he's a good skate."

"You think he's a good skate, huh?"

"Yeah, I size him up that way."

"Let me have a word, will yuh, buddy, and don't get sore at what I say."

"Shoot."

"I don't wanta know how close you and Moran is, but—but if you ever have close-in business with him, give him a neat eye if he happens to have a sawed-off shotgun around."

"He's a shooting bucko, huh?" I laughed.

"Yeah, but he uses the sawed-off artillery only when he wants to rub out a pal. Understand?"

"What of it? I'm no pal of his."

"I'm just saying." Sliver ripped the air with his open hand. "You can

take it or leave it." And he walked off.

THE breeze from Sliver at first gave me a cold chill. It had never occurred to me that Moran might ever want to push me out of the picture. We knew what we had done together; had the goods on each other, but we never had had any words. Still there was a streak of recklessness in Gene, especially when he had a gun in his hand. It was then that his gray eyes spit fire. The reckless way he had opened up with the undertaker when he knew that shots would attract the cops; the way he had sailed into the coal black Amanda indicated to me that when he got steamed up it was only a matter of a hair's breadth whether there would be a kill or not. I could never see into Gene's icy gray eyes. They had no bottoms; they lived on fire. Sure, a time might come when he would get sore at me in the flush of a job and turn his gat on me. I had never seen him with a sawed-off shotgun. If he had one, or had ever used one, he said nothing about it to me.

It dawned on me suddenly that he might have a hidden reason for having The Marquis bugged at a cost of ten grand, and now that he was anxious to help The Marquis escape from Matteawan it occurred to me that he might want The Marquis outside so that he could blow him into silence with a sawed-off shotgun.

But on the other hand there hadn't been as much as a ten-word argument between Gene and I, and, when it came to slicing the swags he had divvied them to the last penny. I hadn't caught him in a lie. After all, these were the things to measure a guy by, not a breeze from a fish like Sliver, who might have been trying to put a rap in against Gene to get hunk. By all the tests that I could make, Gene Moran was a square guy. But I buried the Sliver's spill about the sawed-off shotgun in the back of my bean. This seemed a natural thing to do, for about every few days some little gun's body was picked up somewhere with his head blown off by a shotgun—a mobster put on the spot by some other mobster and his bean shot off to keep him from being identified.

Back in the Fifty-third Street hideout I found Mickey Biddulph and a bird called Kindling waiting. I had never set eyes on Kindling before, but I knew that he was a high-class finger and that he got his name because some big jobs had been started, kindled, by him.

Kindling was disappointed at seeing me. He kind of sniffed at me; asked me when Gene would be in; and when I told him I didn't know he picked up his walking stick and swaggered out.

Mickey looked over the flat and remarked that it seemed like a good plant for liquor. He had an overnight growth of beard on his face and his clothes were baggy. He said he had been planted all night in a truck on a hi-jack and something had gone wrong and the job was smeared. He went out to get a shave and a pants press.

Two prowlers came in a little later. They were puffing.

"Where's Gene?" asked one of them.

"He'll be in after," I said.

"I got a swell lay," he cried. "There's a dude, calls himself The Count. Just over from the other side and he's got a shipload of booze coming into Long Beach. How do you think that'd sound to Gene?"

"Just in our line," I grinned.

The prowler gave me The Count's telephone number. I wrote it down. "I'll put it up to Gene when he comes in."

"Yeah, but remember where you got the tip-off from," said the prowler.

"Did you ever hear of us kissing out a finger?" I said.

"That's okay, but you guys are busy birds and you just might forget accidentally."

They went out. Gene's battered suitcase was lying at the side of a dresser. I took a peep into it, but there was no sawed-off shotgun in it. I made one move then which I figured I ought to make on general principles for emergency's sake. I took my rod out of my hip pocket and slipped it down under my vest on the left side where my belt held it and I could grab it without making the usual telegraph move to my hip. Not that I didn't trust Gene, but merely because, when he got to the stage where his eyes blazed, and he had a gat in his hand, I'd be prepared in case the fire ate him up and he turned on me.

Outside snow had begun to fall. It reminded me that it was November and the holiday season was due, and this made me think of The Count and his shipload of booze which would make a nice piece of pie to cut up.

CHAPTER XXVII

A $5,000,000 Job

GENE came in half an hour later. As he brushed snow from his shoulders he said he had just seen The Marquis at Matteawan and things were working out nicely.

"But he's in need of dough," said Gene, "and I had just enough to ride me to Matteawan and back."

"I'm no better heeled than you," I said.

"What th' hell if something did break bad for us," said Gene. "We wouldn't have a nickel's fall-money to take care of us. And I don't know but what any second some dick'll get wise to my old man being connected up with this Charlotte Palmer's mother, and trace back, and, nosing around, run into a tip on the Meyers job." He was pouting like a peeved school boy.

I slapped him on the shoulder. "Bury the sadness," I laughed. "I've got a line on a swell load of holiday booze. Two fingers were just in here and they—"

Two soft knocks on the door brought Gene out of his funk. I went to the door. It was the finger, Kindling. He hooked his walking stick on his arm and started to take off his white chamois gloves as he stepped in. He was an elegant visitor, smooth, well dressed and well spoken. He addressed Gene as Eugene and then looked at me.

"What about this person?" he asked, in a slight accent which I took to be French.

Gene held up his hand, joined two fingers by twisting one around the other and said, "Al and me are just like this."

Kindling's long, thin lips spread into a tight smile as he looked at me. "You'll pardon me, old fellow," he said.

"Sure," I replied.

Gene sat on the bed with his legs crossed, tailor-fashion, and Kindling sat on its edge.

"I can't go into details at this minute about the matter I have in mind," said Kindling, "but let me inquire, are you too busy to take a try at a few jewels?"

"Yeah, I'm always busy," said Gene, "but I'd let anything slide to work a job for you."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Kindling. He turned to me. "Do you feel the same way?" he asked.

"It depends," I answered.

"Now, Eugene, if your friend here isn't going in with you on this proposition well, either he or I ought to leave the room."

"Not so fast," I put in. "Gene and I have handled jewels. About the only money in those jobs the fences or the fingers got. Unless it's big, and I don't mean five figures, I can't see any percentage in taking the job."

"Do *I* look cheap?" he asked, throwing his big, wide-open blue eyes on me and then on Gene.

"In a way," said Gene, "Al's right. In the last knockover we got no more than we gave the finger."

Kindling was sitting with his hand over the hook of his cane. He wriggled the hand, raised the cane, and stamped it on the floor.

"Well," he smiled, "how does a five million dollar project look to you, gentlemen?"

Gene unscrambled his legs and jumped up. "Where is there so much stuff as that?" he asked.

"Can't tell you that . . . yet," said Kindling. "As I explained at the start, I can't go into details. I need about two thousand dollars to bind my deal with one other person. With that money placed I'll turn the details over to you . . . for the usual ten per cent."

"We haven't got that much jack on us," said Gene, "but I guess we could get it, huh Al?"

"Inside twenty-four hours or less," I said.

"Yeah, about tomorrow noon."

Kindling arose slowly. He started putting on his gloves. "You're looking well, Eugene," he said.

"You look top, too," said Gene.

"Not as well as I would look if I had some of the magic substance in my wallet," said Kindling. He strode toward the door. "I'm glad to see you've got an ambitious partner. I'll be in tomorrow at noon. Cheerio."

And the elegant presence left us.

I LOOKED at Gene. "Is that dude kidding?"

"Lissen," Gene bawled. "That baby talks millions and he handles millions. He's got a pedigree as long as your arm. I only know snatches of it. He's played with the jewels of kings. He works the other side of the pond, and the only reason he's in this country is that the two guns he works with are doing a bit in Dannemora prison—two Russian brothers, a pair of international prowlers — and Kindling's looking for a chance to grab a big swag and use it to spring them."

"Five millions . . . geez." I stood in a trance, with Gene staring at me as if he were in a trance, too. It was hard to picture a swag that enormous. If it were in jewels it would fill a suitcase, no, a laundry basket. The stuff would be heaped, great gobs of concentrated wealth. Easily it would be the biggest haul ever made in New York City. I even wondered where I could pick up a laundry basket. It wasn't possible accurately to picture loot like that. It was too big to dream about. It could never mean $5,000,000 to us, because, of course, the fence would take his slice, the biggest; the finger would have to get his, but even then we would come out with more than a million for ourselves. Then there was the picture of the suave, cool,

gentlemanly spoken Kindling, a big-timer to work with. A job like that, with a master like Kindling to work with, would graduate Gene and me into the international class.

"Five millions," I finally repeated.

Gene laughed. "Never mind dreaming now, Al. How about raising the two grand Kindling needs for front money?"

And in the brief space of a fraction of a minute we had jumped from a $5,000,000 jewel robbery, the biggest job ever pulled, to a measly booze hijack to get $2,000 with which to set the wheels in motion.

I went over to the telephone.

Gene sat on the bed with his arms folded and red fire streaking out of his small eyes. I called the Long Beach number which the two booze prowlers had given me. A voice with an English smoothness in it answered. I gave him the name of one of the prowlers. This opened the door and I asked him what he had in holiday rye, Scotch, and champagne, using, in place of those names, the usual proxy—"goods."

"Oh, my dear man," he said, "I've the finest quality of goods and I'm in the best possible position to deliver it to you at a moment's notice."

"I've heard that about your stuff," I said.

"Then all you've heard, my dear fellow, is quite so, quite so." I had to put my hand over the mouthpiece to choke off the big laugh that the high-hat language gave me.

"Within hawf an hour I could have it at your residence," he went on.

"Oh, no . . . no," I said. "I'm not fixed for it here. Where can I meet you and talk over price and so forth?"

"I'll be at the Vanderbilt Hotel in an hour."

"Okay. How'll I know you?"

"You cawn't miss me, my dear fellow. I'll be wearing a monocle!"

I crashed the receiver into its hook and went zigzagging toward Gene, doubled up with laughter. I slapped Gene on the knee as I dropped to the side of the bed. "A lime-juicer with a shipload of booze," I laughed, "so green in this country that he still wears a monocle."

"What a mark," said Gene.

"What a man," said I. "And anxious to do business without knowing a, b, c about me, the price, or anything. I'll try and take him for the shipload so we can slip the two-grand front dough to Kindling and have a little velvet to play around with between knock-overs."

On the way down to the Vanderbilt at noon I spent my last thirty cents on a white gardenia and stuck it in my buttonhole.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Easy Money

MY man was waiting in the lobby. The blue eye back of the monocle was twice as large as its mate. He was short and thin, with a long nose and a loose, sloppy hat, the mark of a Briton. When I told him I needed three hundred cases of goods, one hundred of rye, one hundred of Scotch and the same amount of champagne to pass around to my friends during the holiday season, he said he didn't think he could deliver that much.

Not having a nickel left in my pockets, or a check book it was my cue to make him anxious, to tease him along.

"If you can't deliver that much," I said, "that's just too bad. I don't want the goods coming up to my place in dribs and drabs, so much from one man

and so much from another. I want it all in one chunk."

He snapped for the bait. "I'll do the best I can to fill the order," he said quickly.

With his mind dreaming about the big order, I shot him a question about price. He named $90 a case for the rye, $65 for the Scotch, and $80 for the champagne. I told him that was satisfactory and arranged for delivery.

I gave him an address in Fifty-fourth Street.

"But before you drive up," I cautioned him, "drop off and phone me that you're coming. I may not be in the situation to take care of the load. If I'm not I can make quick arrangements if you phone me."

I gave him the phone number of our Fifty-third Street flat.

The monocle dropped from his eye and he shook my hand.

He stood looking at me as I went down the stairs. In order to give him the right picture of a well-to-do gentleman, I halted at the curb and spoke to a chauffeur sitting at the wheel of a Cadillac. I asked for directions to get to Twenty-third Street and he gave them to me. Then I pointed in that direction and shook my head, made a phony move to get into the car, backed up as if I had forgotten something, and hurried away, leaving the monocled newcomer in the American booze racket to congratulate himself that he had found a live, wealthy customer who had a Cadillac and a driver.

Apparently he was satisfied, for about two hours later, as Gene and I and the two prowlers were sitting in the flat the phone rang.

It was the rum runner, calling to apologize for not being able to deliver more than fifty cases each of the stuff I had ordered.

"Man alive," I growled, "you've upset all my plans. I'll have to get the rest from somebody else. I don't like that kind of a deal at all, at all."

He explained that the truck was on its way, so I told him to come on, but to phone me from the drug store when he got to Fifty-fourth Street.

Gene took out an inspector's police shield and laughed.

I gave the two prowlers their orders to be at the drug store.

We all patted our hips and felt our gats.

Gene led the prowlers out. I followed them to the door and gave them a send-off.

IN half an hour the phone rang. The truck was ready to push in.

"You can't push in right now," I said to the Englishman. "You forced me to get the rest of the goods from another gent and he's making his deliveries now. I can't have this place over-run with you fellows. Hold your truck there and call me in half an hour."

"My dear fellow, I can't hold this truck about here," he yelped.

"Have your men drive it out some place and then come back."

With a load of booze adrift in the big city he was in a tight spot and he followed directions.

I breezed out, jumped into the Stevens, and picked up Gene and the two prowlers.

The truck of booze had already started north and we tailed it. A youngster was driving; the big boss was on the seat with him minus his monocle and dressed like a gangster.

On Jerome Avenue, about a mile and a half from the heart of town, as the truck was rattling along under the Elevated Railroad structure I cut ahead

of the load of booze and dropped Gene and his helpers.

I saw them swing aboard the truck with drawn guns; saw Gene flash his badge. The truck halted.

A uniformed copper, with his blouse open at the neck and smoking a cigarette—which marked him as off duty—started for the truck. Gene jumped off, went back to the copper and headed him off by telling him that the guy in the truck had just bumped into him and everything was being settled okay. The cop nodded and went away.

I drove the Stevens up alongside the truck, but well behind the seat as Gene got into the seat.

" My dear fellow," the Englishman was saying, " you can have the whole load if you'll let us go."

" Naw," said Gene, " you guys come with us."

The Englishman pulled out bills. " It's all I've got," he said. Gene looked at the bills and then took them.

The kid leaped from the seat and beat it for a vacant lot. The Englishman followed him.

In two deliveries we got rid of the one hundred and fifty cases at $60 for the Scotch, $80 for the rye, and $70 for the wine, and drove the truck into an alley and ditched it.

We saved out one bottle of rye for ourselves and I carried that to the flat. Although I had given the monocled gent my telephone number, there was no chance that he'd look us up and holler, for how could he holler about a load of hot booze, and who could he make the holler to?

We split ten and a half grand that night—a grand each to the prowlers and the rest for ourselves. Gene took out $2,000 for Kindling and the final split between us was $6,500.

Gene folded his bills. He was putting them in his pocket when he said: " Some of this jack'll be a great help to The Marquis. He's getting set to go."

" Don't let anything break into the big job Kindling has for us," I said.

" Don't worry," he grinned. " I'll be here tomorrow noon to take on that job." He went out.

With my split in my pocket I looked through the racing entries in the newspaper. Next morning I laid a grand on the noses of two steeds, dropped it, and plunged all except $100 trying to get it back. It was a good thing Gene was carrying the $2,000 front money for Kindling, because, if I had been carrying it, probably it would have disappeared trying to get back what I lost.

It was the old story. Hot money, big swags of it go just as fast as little swags. A man goes dizzy planning to get it, takes all kinds of risks getting it, more risks trying to get away with it, and finally dizzy again trying to find safe ways to spend it, and eventually drops it where it can do him no good because it's lost on a game of chance.

And when we got a swag it didn't alter our style of living. For safety's sake we had to live in dingy hide-outs, always on the watch for dicks or fighting off the biters with their quick, hot touches or trying to control the hungry little birds we were working with. After a job, with our swags in our pockets, we ate a little better. Gene went in for thick rare steaks, because now his nerves were settled and he didn't need to sharpen them with sour pickles or boiled potatoes with vinegar soaking them.

Whether we had the dough of millionaires or the small pickings of punks, the dough slipped away with little more than a big steak or a new suit of clothes to show for it. It was the same now as it had been when I was a boy in

Old Cove, shooting off my first firecrackers one by one, getting mild kicks from them, and then lighting half or the whole bunch to get the final grand kick. Was it worth while? I asked myself the question and then said to myself, "Well, five million bucks will mean the last job, and after that the easy life for good."

For a while I was as sour as a lemon. My hands were black and greasy, and their knuckles skinned from handling the cases of booze hi-jacked from the gent with the monocle. It was dirty work and hard labor. But presently I was again feeding myself on the picture of $5,000,000 in jewels. The prospects of this rich haul took the sting out of my bum hands and the losses on the ponies.

There seemed to be nothing stirring on the Meyers job. Both Gene and I had been making the usual rounds in the Broadway section and no one had tumbled to us. So that job was sunk, and the income from it gone.

It was a few minutes before twelve when Gene blew in. The Marquis was pat he announced, but raring to go. He was still acting the part of a phoney nut and Gene laughed when he remarked that the Matteawan authorities would "get a great kick if they knew what was really going on inside The Marquis' noodle."

CHAPTER XXIX

The Moving Finger

IN a few minutes there was a soft, polite knock on the door and Gene admitted Kindling. For a second I didn't know him. He was dressed in a light tweed golf suit and a pepper and salt top coat, wore a cap and glasses, brown kid gloves, and carried no stick. It was plain that Kindling was taking no chances on being recognized by anyone as the same man who had visited the hide-out the day before.

He gave me a warm smile this time. After a few words of greeting, Gene laid the two-grand bills in his hand. He crushed them in his hand as though they were ordinary pieces of paper. He was used to big money. A few grand were like chicken feed to him. He finally stuffed the bills into his coat pocket, then raising his coat drew out a roll of paper.

As he unrolled the paper on the bed he asked if Saturday night would be all right with us.

"Sure," Gene and I chorused.

It was now Wednesday noon.

Kindling was holding down the curled ends of the paper and I could see that the sheet contained drawn plans of a large house.

"You boys have heard of ——?" Kindling asked.

"The oil man?" asked Gene.

"Yes, the big butter and oil man," said Kindling. "These are drawings of every room in his big palace at Roslyn, Long Island. There are no less than forty rooms in the house. That should give you some idea of what he's worth. As a matter of fact, he has two estates in Roslyn. They adjoin. That gives you even a better idea of his wealth."

He put a finger on the largest drawing on the sheet. "We'll be interested in this room, the dining room, and ball room used for state occasions," he said. "But before we go into that there are certain other details which will show you what an accurate set of plans this is. For instance." He moved his finger from one to another of the smaller drawings. Gene and I bent closer.

"Those are bedrooms," he said.

"Every one has a safe in its wall, and that should tell you that the people who live in this palace or stay there have something that needs a safe."

He spoke slowly with a dry smile.

There were small, red-ink circles on each of the sleeping room drawings.

"You'll get a laugh out of those," he smiled. "Each one of these red circles indicates a bathroom with a sunken bathtub in each one. Now, every bathroom has a toilet, and at every toilet there is a roll of pink, or blue or orange toilet paper. When a piece of toilet paper is torn from the roll a little music box plays a tune, but what tunes I don't know."

Gene and I laughed.

"Geez," said Gene, "you certainly got the details down pat."

"I'll say he has," I put in.

"I've had just as fine details on finer places than this on the other side of the pond," said Kindling. He moved a finger back to the dining and ballroom. "Getting back to this room," he went on, "this is where you'll operate. Next Saturday night —— is giving the grand social mêlée of the season. At dinner and a dance he'll entertain at least two hundred of the crème de la crème of society."

"Whew," whistled Gene.

"Two hundred?" I gasped.

"All of that," said Kindling. "Plus forty, perhaps fifty servants." He pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket. He read off names, a list of the high spots in the Social Register—Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Rhinelanders, Astors, all the swellest and richest of New York families, and the names of Washington, D. C., diplomats and government officials.

"Not least among the guests will be Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, wife of the publisher," said Kindling. "That alone means that one of the finest assortment of jewels in the country will be there." Then he read off each name again, together with figures in the hundred thousands.

"The figures," he explained, "represent the value of the jewels which will be worn at this gay party. I'm not guessing, either. I've checked against guesses. —— is giving the party because he's made a heavy clean-up in oil and wants to make society gasp at the jewels he's gathered. So, what the party amounts to is really this . . . a battle of jewels, a race to see who will show up grandest next Saturday night. I think five millions is a bit low for the total, but I'd rather have you boys delighted than disappointed, so I've made the figure conservative."

I DON'T know how Gene felt about it, but the description of the swag and the size of the party made my heart feel like something was pounding it.

"I almost forgot to mention," Kindling went on, "that there'll be a jazz orchestra there of twenty pieces, and at least four servants who will be undercover operatives for the Pinkerton detective agency."

Gene's eyes flew open.

"Oh, don't worry about the Pinks," said Kindling, quickly. "They'll have guns, probably pearl-handled twenty-twos. By merely herding all the servants into the kitchen, then driving them out into the stable and garage"—he indicated the stable and garage on the plans—"by locking them up in the stable and garage they're easily put out of commission." He smiled. "I could even tell you what the menu is to be and what tunes the orchestra will play and little details like that, but nothing

will be gained by that. It will be a king's feast with six or seven wines, and that will fill them up about to their necks."

He pinned his finger on blue lines running away from the walls of the mansion.

"These," he explained, "are telephone wires. A pair of wire cutters will take care of them. It's up to you to pick the man to take care of that end of the job."

Gene looked at me. "Gentleman Jim'll snip the wires," he grinned. "He did plenty of that when he was knocking over honky tonk banks out in the sticks."

"If Jim can't," I put in, "my old prowling friend Boston Tommy'll take the job."

"That detail is up to you gentlemen," smiled Kindling.

Gene took a cigarette and handed me one. We lit up and sighed big clouds of smoke into the air.

"The next step to consider," Kindling continued, "is the time—the zero hour to move in and take."

"What time do they sit down to the eats?" asked Gene.

"Nine on the dot," said Kindling.

"Why not push in then?" asked Gene. "When they sit down."

Kindling shook his head. "I don't agree with you," he said. "Sitting people are always risks. They could very easily reach a gun with their hands hidden under the table."

The size of the job had staggered me. I hadn't done more than listen and think.

"Of course," said Kindling, "it's got to be a straight dash-in-and-stick-them-up, and away, and not more than four men actually on the job. Somehow you've got to take time in as a partner."

"What about just after they've eaten?" I put in.

"They'd be pretty well scattered then," said Gene.

"Better yet," I exclaimed, "what about closing in just before the party breaks up?"

"Why so late?" asked Gene.

"Well, they'll have their wine—they'll be loaded down with food—they'll be logy and tired and be thinking about bed, bored stiff with all the chatter and then they can be taken easy."

Kindling smiled out of the corner of his mouth at me and addressed Gene. "You've got a genius for a pal," he said.

"It's only common sense," I said. "When people are low they don't have the inclination to put up a battle. And they're thinking of sleep, not jewels. Nobody can fight off sleep, especially well fed and heavily wined people."

It was finally agreed that the attack would be pulled off after midnight.

"What about the getaway?" asked Gene.

"That's up to you boys," said Kindling.

"Well," said Gene, "give us the lay on the grounds around the estate."

"I can't do that," said Kindling. "I've spent all the time I could afford getting every detail on the inside. Anyway, the getaway is strictly your part of the job. I'm not a good hand to advise you, and I'm not going to, because I have my own getaway to think about."

"Do you know anything about the local cops?" I asked.

"Some of them will be there the night of the party," said Kindling. "They'll do what they always do, however—hunt for crumbs—load up in the kitchen with champagne or

whatever liquor they can get. You needn't worry about them. You'll probably stumble over them lying in the grass, stewed to the gills." He got up from the bed. "You keep the plans," he said.

Gene rolled up the paper.

Kindling started to put on his gloves. "Of course," he said, "there'll be a roar about this job in the papers. But there'll be a few who won't say exactly how much stuff they lost for the simple reason that not all of the stuff that'll be worn there Saturday night got into their hands duty-paid. You understand? The U. S. customs service will be interested in looking over any list of jewels that appears." He stepped to the center of the room and started buttoning his topcoat. "I guess I've given you boys all you need," he said.

"Plenty," said Gene.

"What about a little snifter for a closer?" I asked.

"None for me," said Gene. "A thimbleful of firewater now and my torch would explode." The fire was flashing in his small eyes.

"What have you got?" asked Kindling.

"Some rye—monocle rye," I said, with a laugh. I got the bottle that we had razored out of the Englishman's load.

I poured two drinks. Kindling took his glass, held it up before him, and twiddled his fingers. He drew himself up pompously. "'The moving finger writes and, having writ, moves on,'" he laughed.

"We've got a poet for a finger," I grinned.

"That was written long before you were born," smiled Kindling, "by an old Persian moon-gazer."

Kindling downed his drink and smacked his lips. In a flash the moving finger moved on.

CHAPTER XXX

Old Crow

QUICKLY, Gene disposed of the drawn plans by tearing them up and burning the pieces in an old-fashioned, marble-faced fireplace. His first move after this was to get Gentleman Jim, while I found Boston Tommy. Gentleman Jim brought a fresh newspaper with him. Gene grabbed it, looked into the society columns, and read aloud an account of the party to be held in the great Roslyn mansion and the names of the big bugs who were to be there.

Then a period of dreaming set in. We all sat silent and I suppose we all dreamed the same dream. With all those high bloods in the ballroom, what a marvelous function it would be! Gene was dreaming, with eager excitement written all over his face and his small eyes flashing. I could see the jeweled women, lights from great chandeliers lighting the pearls, drawing white and blue fire from diamond tiaras, brooches, necklaces, bracelets.

I could see Gene and me walking in on them, with guns drawn, and coolly telling the kings and queens of society to line up and hand over their stuff. Then the quick wind-up, the dash to our Stevens waiting in the roadway and the fury of the getaway while panic unloosed itself in the great mansion.

It was a magnificent picture, brilliant from the standpoint of the assembled guests and brilliant from our standpoint of swag, fast and furious action, the mad getaway and the chase which would start the minute the victims regained their wits and sent out the alarm.

The details were yet to be settled.

Gene addressed the gray-haired Jim, who drank in every word with mouth gaping.

"You'll start with the kitchen," said Gene, crouching and slapping his hands together. "Put your gat on the cooks and maids. Be damned careful, old boy. Some of them servants will be Pinks planted among the servants."

"I'll take care of Pinks," said Jim.

"When you get them herded in the kitchen," Gene went on, "drive 'em out to the stable and hold them there, and plug the first one that makes a move you don't like. Then lock 'em in."

"What about phones and alarms?" I asked.

"Phone and light wires bunch just at the side of the kitchen door," said Gene. "Don't get the wires mixed up and cut off the lights. Snip the phone wires only."

"I've snipped the chatter wires on whole towns," crowed Jim.

Gene turned to Boston Tommy, the seasoned yegg.

"You'll take the doors in the dining room," said Gene, "while Al and me are putting on the frisk. When the job's done you pile out, meet up with Jim and join us in the Stevens."

The Stevens with its bullet holes, although they were ironed out and newly painted, was red hot. Cops everywhere had their eyes out for it. Yet we figured it comparatively safe, for cars were crowding the streets, the traffic control wasn't well organized, and Gene and I would never stop for cops any time. And Moran wanted his daily thrill. Traveling in a hot car would give it to him. A thrill to him was like a cold shower in the morning. Gene always woke up hungry for a thrill and he wasn't satisfied until he was getting it. And we both knew that we had got away with that chase through Hell's Kitchen when the cops were firing at us and taxi cruisers were chasing us.

Finally Gene turned to me. "Now, Al," he asked, "what do you think about the frisk? How'll we pull that?"

"Well, they'll all be in the big room, dancing, chatting, or moping around. You and me'll just blaze in, put the rods on them, and split 'em in two lines. I'll go down one line and do my frisk, you go down the other. Of course everybody'll have to line up, including the orchestra."

"It'll have to be a quick frisk," said Gene. "A coupla hundred people."

"That's easy. The stuff'll be showing; we'll just grab, grab, grab what we think is worth grabbing. The getaway is the thing to fix for now. We've got to get the lay of the grounds."

"Do that with a plant," said Gene. "We've got Thursday and Friday to work on that."

"And we've got two of the best soft shoes in the business," I said, nodding at Gentleman Jim and Boston Tommy, who were sitting on the bed in a kind of a dream. "We won't put them on the plant, though, till Friday night."

"Why draw it out like that?"

"Well, if they're gonna have guards around the place for Saturday night they may shove 'em in on Friday night to get 'em used to the place. And another thing, Gene, the sheet says that a lot of the guests are going down already. . . house guests to make a stay over the week-end."

FRIDAY turned out to be a cold and bitter day. In the morning I gathered up three sets of license plates and dropped them into the Stevens for future emergency. When I

got back to the Fifty-third Street hide-out, Gentleman Jim, Boston Tommy and Gene were there.

"It's gonna be a cold night for an outside prowl," whined Gentleman Jim, casting his eyes out the window, which was frosted with ice.

Boston Tommy shivered. "You're damned tootin' it's a tough night," he chimed in. "An' what about eats, hot java? You know him"—he nodded at Jim—"him and me are not young guys like you two blokes." Then he spied the bottle of rye standing on the mantelpiece. "What about slipping us some of that fire water?" he grinned.

"Yeah," put in Jim. "A pint of that."

"One pint?" bawled Jim. "Cripes, we'll be separated on this prowl. Give us a pint each, Al, so we won't have to be hanging on the other guy when our bones freeze."

"All right?" I asked Gene.

"It's an all-night prowl," Jim cut in.

"Yeah, go ahead," said Gene. "Give 'em the oil."

I poured the whiskey into two pint flasks which still wore their original labels—Old Crow. I slipped them to our plants. I was sorry for this later.

In half an hour we were in the Stevens. I drove slowly, because it was not yet dark. The spiked iron fence and solid steel gates told us that we were in front of the mansion. It was set back in the trees. Lights were blazing in the windows and the great house loomed up like a mountain full of fiery eyes. The gates were closed, so we dropped Jim and Tommy at the adjoining estate, which was penned in by a stone fence.

The two prowlers had no guns. Gene wanted to gat them, but they insisted that if they happened to be picked up and had no guns they could stall themselves out of the jam by saying they were just full of booze and happened to get lost in the estate.

"Be back at our flat bright and early," said Gene. "And don't bring us a load of guesses and this and that. Get the lay of that estate—the stable, the walks, the roadway, everything."

As we pulled away, Jim and Tommy were vaulting the stone fence. More lights had gone on in the big house; automobiles were parked all around the house, and three or four men in chauffeurs' uniforms were coming out.

"Hey, Gene," I called out. "We didn't make any allowance for the chauffeurs."

"Hell, you don't need to. Can't you see them guys coming out? They're blowing down to the village to get themselves cheap rooms while the big-shots and their ladies stay in the palace."

Half of Friday night Gene oiled and monkeyed with eight rods he had picked up. Everything that looked like a nick or a number he filed out. Each man was to have two gats.

We slid into the sheets about 2 A.M. For a long time Gene sat up against the head of the bed. Part of the time he was in a dream, and the rest of the time he was talking about Paris, London, Canada, Bermuda, trunks full of swell clothes and knicks-knacks for girl friends—foreign motor cars—the things big money could buy. I listened. There was no need of me dreaming, too, when he was doing it for both of us. Bright and early Saturday morning we were up.

Kindling called to ask how things were moving—and to take the last shot of Old Crow out of the bottle on the mantelpiece. We told him the prowlers hadn't come in. He went out saying he'd be back after.

By 10 A.M. they hadn't showed. Gene and I went out for breakfast and to look over the Stevens and have it greased and aired. On our way back I bought an evening newspaper to study the racing entries and dope about the horses, for on Sunday or Monday I would be lamming for a race track with my first load of jack from the fence.

"We'll need a suitcase to pile that swag in," said Gene. "We'll grab only the biggest stuff, but five millions of that is some heap."

"A big laundry basket is what we'll need," I said.

Gene laughed.

We reached the hide-out. I studied the racing dope and had big bets figured out for the Monday races. With this off my mind I skimmed through the newspaper hoping to find more names and more details of the big party we were going to wreck.

Gene was fidgeting with the gats.

"Gene! Gene!" I yelled. He dropped the gats and looked at me. I read him this item in the newspaper.

> Two men, believed by Roslyn police to be hoboes, were driven early this morning from the private estate of ———, wealthy oil man, after a dozen shots were fired at them by gardeners and caretakers.
>
> The police believe that one of the men was hit, as he fled under fire. Searching the estate detectives found two empty whiskey flasks bearing Old Crow labels.

"That's enough!" bawled Gene. "Those lousy yeggs!"

"We can still pull the job without them," I said. "We're in two thousand bucks to Kindling. The cops don't know what Jim and Tommy were up to. They think they were just soused bums that got lost on the estate." I paused and wondered aloud whether Kindling had double-crossed us.

"Double-cross us?" cried Gene. "Never. He isn't built that way."

"All right. Then let's take on the job ourselves."

"Naw, we'd be running into them two yeggs' heat. Another time, Al, when we can use The Marquis. They'll have other parties."

I threw the paper on the bed in disgust.

"Maybe it's just as well," said Gene. "With a swag like that we'd have had one hell of a time keeping our mob under control. I'd probably had to bump off a couple of them to keep 'em quiet. I'll meet up with Gentleman Jim and that Boston Tommy of yours and then—" He jabbed a fist into the air, which meant that if he ever ran across the two yeggs he'd bump them off.

WE awoke to a gloomy Sunday morning. Gene brought in the fat Sunday newspapers. They contained long accounts of the oil man's party. I read off each guest's name, and Gene kept nodding his head. What a marvelous party it had been. A paragraph was given to each prominent woman guest, with a description of the grand gowns she wore and the jewels. It had been a battle of jewels.

Gene figured that there must have been more than $5,000,000's worth there. Once again we ran over the details of what might have happened.

"It was certainly a swell affair," I said. "Those guests'll never forget it."

"Yeah, and if they only knew what they almost ran into," leered Gene. "I wonder what they'd be thinking this morning if we'd pushed in on them."

"Most of them would be in the hands of doctors this morning," I grinned.

Gene's eyes were hardly visible between their tight-drawn lids. "And to think," he remarked, "that it turned out a five-million-dollar flop because we gave two yeggs a couple bucks' worth of bum booze."

"That's the way the breaks come in this racket." I couldn't help breaking out with a short little laugh.

"What's the idea?" boomed Gene.

"I couldn't help thinking how that couple bucks' worth of booze wet our kindling," I said.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Queen of Diamonds

IT was a blue, drizzly day in November, 1922. The old year was fading out. Gene and I sat in the hide-out drumming our fingers on an old mahogany table.

"It'll soon be a new year," I cracked. "I'd like to make one big killing and maybe lay off. I'm getting old kind of fast, and so are you, Gene."

Gene ran his hand down his limp left arm. "The older this gets, the worse I feel it," he said.

"This hi-jacking is a tough grind," I said. "The truck drivers they use are getting to be more hard-boiled by the minute. And when you get a good load of booze what happens? A mob of chiselers tries to muscle in for a cut, and when you kiss them out you've got an army of soreheads to face, and we can't afford enemies."

"Every stew-bum in the town is out hi-jacking," said Gene.

"And another thing, Gene, there's a lot of lousy work to hi-jacking. You've got to monkey around with a lot of greasy trucks, bottles, barrels, bags and cases. That all means labor and a lot of time. It seems to me we ought to cut out all that, take our gats, and go out and get dough direct and cut out the bags and bottles and that stuff. Why monkey with them when you don't have to?"

"You're spouting sense," said Gene.

"What I'd like to do is to find something that'll net us a million or more and then cook a set up to grab it if it takes us a year to figure it out. Cripes, some guys take a lifetime to make a million bucks. I guess we can afford to plan for just a year to make one big killing."

"Why don't you go out and finger something big?" said Gene. "A load of jewels, maybe."

"Now what good would I be as a finger? Can you imagine me knocking around among people that have jewels? I'd look like a wolf among the doves. And so would you. As fingers we're out."

"It's funny we don't get a rumble from Mickey Biddulph," Gene scowled.

"I think that guy's gone high-hat. Maybe some swell jane has fallen for him."

Gene got up from the table and went over to a dresser. He pulled out the drawers and rummaged among shirts and neckties.

"Geez, Al," he bawled out, "I'm getting so poor my shirts are getting ragged around the neck." He slammed the drawers shut and came back to the table. We sat in silence, except for the nervous drumming of our fingers on the table top.

Suddenly the door flew open. Gene and I sat up and reached for our guns, but when we saw Mickey Biddulph's face with its sharp spiked mustache, we sighed.

"Alone, fellows?" Mickey grinned. There was a money sparkle in his eyes as he glanced around the room and saw that we were alone.

"Something hot, Mickey?" I asked.

"Hot and ripe," he replied. "One of those things that makes you feel you ought to close the door and lock it before you breathe." He closed the door in his slow, wise way, and turned the key. He slid into a chair at the table.

"But before I open up," he began, looking first at Gene and then at me, "I want to know that I'm in for ten per cent."

"Sure," said Gene.

"Cert," said I.

"What do you think of champagne?" he asked, arching his eyebrows.

"Only the rich can drink it," laughed Gene.

"Well, this is rich," said the finger. "Very rich."

"If it's a hi-jack, I'm out," I put in. "I'm off the bags an' bottles an' barrels."

"And I'm through, too, being a bottle heaver," said Mickey. "I'm thinking now of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, stuff like that, not in singles, but in big bunches." He held up his hand and closed it tight. "Clusters . . . piles . . . oodles . . . enough to—"

"Hey," blurted Gene, "are you shooting junk into your arm or something?"

Biddulph sat erect and pinched at the ends of his spiked mustache. "I was born to the purple," he grinned. "'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, if the whiskey don't get you the cocaine must.' I go as far as the whiskey, but that's all. How does half a million bucks in jewels make you feel?"

Quickly Gene and I realized we were being talked to in dead earnest by a slick gent who, in our hi-jacking jobs, had never gone wrong. We bent low over the table and closed in for a huddle to listen to Mickey liquidate the money sparkle in his eyes. Mickey grinned as he saw our eyes yawn.

HE began slowly like the teller of a fairy tale. "There's a certain queen named Irene Mamlock Simon Schoellkopf," he said, and paused to see the effect of the name on us.

"To me it doesn't mean any more than Mrs. John Smith," said Gene.

"Same here," I put in.

"If you mingled like I do you'd know what it means," said Mickey. "When Irene, the queen, goes out, she's always cargoed with a half-million dollar load of sparkle on her lovely throat and her fingers."

Gene looked at me.

"She's a Buffalo, New York, dame," Mickey went on. "Lives in one of the swellest mansions up there."

Gene's face puckered around the eyes. "Big mansion?" he queried.

"Aw, but you don't have to crash that," said Mickey, quickly. "Irene—now wouldn't she like to hear me getting so personal?—Irene comes to our big town pretty often and puts up at a suite at the Ritz-Carlton."

"Is that so hot?" I frowned. "The Ritz with its slick dicks?"

"I didn't say we had to crack the Ritz," grinned Mickey. "Anyway this queen can't get a kick wearing her stuff in her mansion or in the Ritz. She has to go places where the flash will be seen or she'd just shrivel up to a shadow. She goes out to swell parties to give her jewels the air . . . to make other people envy her."

Gene scowled. "But suppose she's got big connections, a heavy political pull, or she's related to some big shot in the police department?" he asked.

"Yeah, what's the queen's background?" I asked, thinking of the same precaution that Gene had thought of. "It's never safe to go blind into a job and pick off somebody lined up politically or with the police."

"Say," exploded Mickey, "you birds don't think I'm moving in the dark. Why, I've got this queen's history from the cradle to this minute. She's the wife of one of the biggest money kings in the country. His name is Charles P. Hugo Schoellkopf. He's the big gun in the dye trust in this country, in a lot of banks and up-and-up in the highest society."

Mickey paused and sat straight. A shaft of sun broke in through a high window and spot-lighted his face. His eyes flashed. He held up both hands and spread their fingers.

"Just get an earful of this," he said, and he began to count on the tips of his fingers. "One . . . two . . . three bracelets with square-cut diamonds, one bracelet with square-cut rubies, and another with square-cut sapphires, and all bedded in solid platinum. Rings all over her hands. One diamond alone of a dozen carats, and a wrist watch crusted with diamonds and pearls."

"Pearls!" I sat up. He had touched the live spot in me with that word.

"You said a mouthful," said Mickey. "I'm leaving the pearls for the last because they're the big prize." He wet his lips. "Two pearl necklaces worth at least a quarter of a million bucks," he added, "and one of the pearls in her ropes is alone worth thirty-six thousand berries. That brings the whole pile of booty up to half a million, maybe more."

"Somebody else'll have to handle the pearls," I said.

"Superstitious, Al?" asked Mickey.

"No, just burned by pearls."

"I'll handle any pearls," Gene put in. "Go on, Mickey."

"She just drips stuff," said Mickey, "and her jewels are her life. It was a piece of the stuff she's wearing now—a square-cut diamond bracelet they call a Byzantine—that led her to Schoellkopf."

Gene's and my mouth flew open at the same time.

The finger was a marvel at getting inside information.

He went on. "One night," he said, "there was a swell blowout at a country club in Buffalo, and she was there. She had just divorced a poor tailor named Simon. Well, Schoellkopf just happened to take the Byzantine piece out of his pocket at the country club ball and flash it around. It caught her eye and that's how the romance began."

The shaft of sun had moved to Gene's face. His gray eyes were all sparkle and he wet his lips. "How'd you get all this deep stuff?" he asked. "The queen get soused in a speakeasy?"

"Nix," said Mickey, "she don't play no speaks." He waved an arm toward the window. "I picked all this up just around the corner from here, at a private camp where she quietly hangs out. A Fifty-second Street studio . . . low lights . . . purple hangings . . . rich stuff like that. Outside, the place isn't so hot, just another old brownstone billet broken up into studios and apartments. I had an invite and went up expecting to drink a lot of swell liquor, but once I got a look at the lady and her blaze I forgot the liquor and just stuck there looking and listening . . . and counting everything one by one." He paused and grinned his widest. "And," he finally added, "nobody else but Nicky Arnstein's wife, Fannie Brice, owns the brownstone

house and a millinery shop on the second floor!"

CHAPTER XXXII

Barry Carman

NICKY ARNSTEIN'S wife owned the house! This news made Gene sit up like a general at attention. It made me slump a little. All my life I've considered Fannie Brice the funniest comedian on the stage, and one of its finest women. She's given me tons of laughs when I was as sour as a pickle, and I guess millions of others have been made happy by the laughs she gave them. If it would harm her in any way to lay down a raid on an apartment in a house she owned, I wanted out on the picture.

Mickey sensed that I wasn't as hot about the job as Gene, for he quickly assured me that Fannie did not live in the house and there'd probably never be anything said in public about the job if we pulled it off.

"Oh boy, it's a beaut of a set-up," Gene thrilled. "Nicky Arnstein, one of the best known wrong ones in the land, big bond thief, transatlantic card cheat, and so on, and his wife owns the house! Would they suspect Nicky if the job was pulled off in a house he was interested in?" Gene looked at me. "Of course," he added, "the dicks'd never be able to pin the job on Nicky, but they'd suspect him and you birds know what a great help a red-headed herring is."

"You think it's a great set-up, huh, don't you?" grinned Mickey.

"Never saw one to beat it," said Gene.

Mickey waved a hand at Gene. "You don't know the half of it," he chuckled. "Instead of one set-up, there's two—two phony trails. Now get me. This private camp is some dugout. It belongs to Irene's nice boy friend, Barry Carman, and when she comes to town from Buffalo she meets Barry there and Barry does the gigolo stuff, taking her around down to the swell dancing places while Mr. Hugo Schoellkopf sits before the fireplace up in his mansion in Buffalo. Do you get the set-up now? Do you see what the police would be thinking about Barry Carman, unattached, good looking sheik and gigolo, when it's discovered that his lady friend's swarm of jewels have vanished?"

I couldn't excuse myself now from joining Gene and Mickey in the enthusiasm they both displayed. For here was a double-ended set-up, a pair of frames that would string not only one but two red herrings across the trail while we were spotting the jewels to a fence. And furthermore—but Mickey was talking again.

"And don't forget," said Mickey, "that whatever happens to Irene Schoellkopf in her boy friend's studio is not going to be shouted about from the housetops so that Mr. Hugo Schoellkopf, up in Buffalo, will get wind of what young Barry Carman, interior decorator, one time chorus man, means in his wife's life. None of them would dare peep, even to the cops. Would she? Not on your life, not even on the chance of getting back the jewels. Look at it this way or that way, front, back or upside down, we've got the perfect set-up, the perfect out."

Although I was giving Mickey the closest scrutiny, while he made his build-up, to find a weak spot in his reasoning, the only indication of weakness seemed to me to be in the tapering of his fingers. The set-ups were perfect, as an experienced thief knows. There

was the victim, a married woman robbed in the studio of her boy friend. Even if jewels were her life she'd swallow the loss without a peep to the police or anybody to protect her honor, to keep her love affair from her husband. It's an old situation, one that a thief usually looks for. There wasn't any reason why I should suspect that the graceful finger might overstep himself in his enthusiasm and size up the situation wrong. He had always got the real dope on other jobs. He was wise, at least Gene and I felt that way about him.

And there wasn't much time, right now, with everybody steamed up about the job, and Mickey full of pep, to reflect in my mind about slip-ups. The plan had a swell build-up. Mickey had Gene and myself in a spell. A half million dollars' worth of the classiest jewels, and a set-up that was perfect. I could see all that brilliant stuff on her hands, her wrists, and her throat, and then I could see it in our own hands and plenty jack to last us a long time.

There was a long silence, but I could see by the gleam in the eyes of Mickey and Gene that they were having the same kind of a rosy dream I was having.

FINALLY Gene spoke up. "Give us some more about this Carman guy . . . his income, stuff like that," said Gene.

"He's got a regular allowance from some rich old gent in Philadelphia," said Mickey. "'A patron,' Carman calls him. He's trying to make a cultured gent, an artist out of Carman, and he pays the bills. So Carman says, but, I figure Irene is the real bankroll for him, not any old duffer. Anyway, he gets the jack, because he has two floors in the house. The fourth and top floor, and the third."

"Two hang-outs, huh?" I asked.

"What's he running," put in Gene, "a speak, or an inside gambling joint, or what?"

"He lives in the studio and rents the one below."

"Is he alone?" Gene asked.

"No; he batches it with a sweet looking chap named Renault."

"That name says something to me," I said.

"He's on the stage," said Mickey. "Maybe that's where you got an earful of his name. He's a comedian." Then he snickered. "He's a female impersonator on the stage, and a good one," Mickey added.

We all laughed.

"There's always a bunch of lads like Renault up at Carman's studio," Mickey went on, "but Barry Carman himself is not their type. He's pretty regular, a good strong young fellow about twenty-five. A polished chap. Talks French, knows art and music. A refined guy."

"A he-guy," remarked Gene.

"Yeah; and he can put up a fight," said Mickey. "And Irene is no weakling. She's about forty, but well cared for, and I think it'll take some handling to snatch the stuff from her without a fight. Right now she's in town. At the Ritz."

There was a pause and both men looked at me as if they expected me to add a word or give them the go ahead. On all the big jobs when we were building them up I was considered a kind of a judge. I was supposed to pick flaws in a plan, suggest changes, or call the whole thing off. That's why I didn't do a great deal of the talking. My job was to listen and use my bean and weigh the details of a

scheme, and then, when it came to the actual job, do my part.

"It all sounds reasonable," I said.

"Give us the rest of the details," said Gene.

"Well," Mickey resumed, "this third floor that Carman leases is vacant now. As I see the lay it's up to one or both of you boys to rent it, move right in, and tail Irene or Carman every time they make a move."

"Wait a second," I cut in. "This tailing business. That's not so hot to me. Suppose Schoellkopf suspects his wife and Carman, and he's hired some cat-footed private dick to tail them? The dicks might get wise to us, or Carman himself might get a wire on us and wise Irene to be on the lookout, thinking we were dicks. No, figure something safer than that."

"All right," said the quick-witted Mickey. "I've got it. "The telephone in Carman's studio is on the same line with the floor below. It goes with the apartment when you rent it. You can listen in on his calls and get an earful when Irene calls him up. What's that for a set-up?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

Set for Christmas Eve

"A NATURAL," I said.

Then, stage by stage, we went back over all the details. This was a $500,000 job. I didn't want any bugs in it. Finally Mickey assured us that he would team with one of us, go to the Ritz, and put the spot on Irene when she showed up. He said he expected she would be going to lunch tomorrow with Carman and he'd spot them both to us.

"Does this lady take all that flash with her when she goes into the street?" I asked Mickey.

"She wears only the stuff that shows outside when she goes out," Mickey explained. "Some big rings and the diamond-set wrist watch. She keeps the bigger stuff for the lights at night."

"Then if he's going to lunch with her tomorro you can pilot one of us up to his studio and catch the lay of it without the risk of him seeing us?"

"Tomorrow morning about eleven we'll go up."

"Okay," I said. Then I got cautious again. I wondered if by some chance Mickey had not declared somebody else in on the deal. I couldn't clearly figure out how he originally made the Carman bunch, so I asked him how he happened to break into a crowd like that.

"The Indian gave me in with them," said Mickey. "Of course they don't know me as Mickey Biddulph. I'm Mr. Marshall to all of them."

"Indian? Who the hell . . . what's the Indian?" Gene asked.

"He's a real honest Indian," said Mickey. "Was raised by a tribe. I forget what tribe. He's got a white wife. She's got a beauty business, herbs and face lotions and stuff like that for a high class private trade. I think he calls himself a medicine man. Knows Indian magic, handles love powders. He's got the chorus janes on Broadway all steamed up about his magic powders."

"Medicine man?" Perhaps it was my generally superstitious nature that made me cut in with this question. Indians and magic. Not such a hot combination for a man that has superstitions about goofy things.

"It doesn't make any difference what he is," said Mickey. "He doesn't know my line and as far as I know he's not an underground worker."

"You gotta cut him in on a piece of this?" asked Gene.

" Not a sou," Mickey assured. " All he did was to introduce me to Carman and the bunch. I made a hit with the crowd; I'm in right with him, but he hasn't as much as a hair in on this thing."

" You're sure he's out?" asked Gene.

" He was never in so he couldn't be crossed out," said Mickey.

" Fair enough," said I. " You and me, Mickey, run up to Carman's studio in the morning."

" Maybe Renault'll be there," said Mickey. " But he's soft and sappy."

" Okay with me," I said. " As long as the big chief medicine man won't be there to pull any magic stuff it's okay with me."

Moran split the air with a big laugh.

" Laugh your head off, Gene," I said, " but these Indians are mysterious guys and I wouldn't want to be hooked by their magic stuff."

BARRY CARMAN'S studio was a knock-out. Mickey and I gave it the once-over next morning. Renault was there. The first eyeful of him tagged him as not anybody to be afraid of. Gene introduced me as Lewis, and we hung the name of McGowan on Gene and referred to him as a friend with a wife who was interested in taking the apartment on the floor below. Mickey gave McGowan a heavy send-off. While Mickey was holding Renault's attention with a lot of chatter about Carman, I took in the studio.

It was plenty rich, a perfumed hideaway. The floors were covered with Oriental rugs. There were deep couches everywhere covered with sky blue silk. The couches were loaded with big soft pillows done in the colors of the rainbow. There were silk drapes and tapestries on the walls, ivory inlaid tables and a thin line of smoke kept curling up from punks in brass incense burners. It was swell, but not a place I'd take to. I kept off my feet while I was there because I was pretty heavy and not used to rugs on waxed floors that slipped under your feet.

Now and then I caught a drift of the chatter passing between Mickey and Renault. Something was said about Schoellkopf having taken Carman with her on a trip to Europe the year before when Carman gave up a job in vaudeville to make the trip across the ocean with the Buffalo lady. Then something was said by Renault about the lady's jewels; how Lottie Cantor, who was in business with Fannie Brice in the millinery shop on the floor below, had referred to the display of diamonds and pearls as " barbaric in their splendor." I guessed that Mickey was bringing out this stuff to tease my appetite and to make me understand that he wasn't undervaluing the stuff we were going after.

Then Mickey drifted in with a line of chatter about himself. He spoke of being in a motion picture at Hollywood. Renault knew about Mickey's experience in Hollywood and he tittered when he remembered aloud that the picture Mickey had been in was a detective story, " Wanted at Headquarters." I laughed to myself when I heard that. Renault seemed to want to talk about Irene, but Mickey made a play of not being interested in anything more about her because he did not want Renault to think he had the slightest interest in the lady. Mickey switched back to the apartment below.

Renault explained that the empty apartment was laid out like the studio, but not so full of lavish furniture. He described the layout . . . a big front room that got plenty of sun, then a kind of an alley, a butler's pantry, he

called it, with chests and closets and drawers on both sides and this led into a big sleeping room with bathroom, and off the bathroom a kitchenette.

"This is a kind of an old building and McGowan would be up pretty high," I chipped in. "What about a fire in here? How would a man and his wife get out?" I was thinking of an emergency getaway, a fire escape. Renault said there were no fire escapes and he hurried to explain that everything was spick and span and what wasn't in first class shape a colored maid would fix up.

Colored maid! That was another thing that gave me a little shock. Colored maids and black cats. The two always traveled together in my mind; not anything to be afraid of, but just two bad break signs that I always took into consideration when building up a job. They were reminders to be a little more cautious.

The interview ended with Renault explaining that he expected Carman in at about six to dress for dinner, but before he arrived he would ring up the studio. After that Mickey and I took the air and I was glad to get out of the punk smoke. Mickey said he was sorry he had to get out of the place. It was the kind of a hang-out he liked.

About five P.M. Mickey rang up the Carman nest, and he was in. Gene and Mickey dashed out, went around to the studio and closed the deal for the third floor apartment. Moran got away clean with the McGowan stuff.

Mickey and Gene came away from the nest with bad news. Carman had told them that Irene would be in town only for that day and the next; that she had to flit back to Buffalo for some big social affair, but about Christmas she'd come to town again. Off-side, Carman told Mickey there would be a big party when the lady came to town and he was invited, but he whispered to Mickey not to bring McGowan. It didn't make a dent in Gene's feelings not to get an invite. He was after bigger stuff than a bid to a party, and he felt that he could afford to be snubbed. And he didn't like the Oriental touch of the studio.

On the next day Gene and his steady girl friend, Lou, carried a few bags into the apartment.

Moran didn't come back to our hide-out in Fifty-third Street after he had settled Lou in the apartment.

I was getting ready to move too when I ran into that trouble with the wop bootleggers I described at the beginning of the story. It nearly broke up the whole lay-out we had fixed, but I got out of it and finally landed safe in the apartment under Barry Carman's place. I had brought along my clothes in a couple of suitcases.

We started to unpack the bags. I put all the stuff that had been laundered, shirts, socks, handkerchiefs and underwear in a pile, and then cut off all the marks that were on them that would link them to me.

"You better do this with your stuff," I suggested to Gene.

"Aw, these flat-footed dicks haven't got sense enough to look at one of these, and, anyway, Al, when this job comes off you can bet every nickel you've got that never a word will be spilled about it."

Then the phone upstairs in Carman's jangled. Gene picked our phone up and listened in.

"It's Irene," he whispered. He nodded and I stepped up to him. He eased the receiver away from his ear and we listened together to her chatter with Carman. She was calling just to say she was all right. There wasn't

any endearing language between them, and when Gene finally hung up I said to him, "Geez, Gene, she don't sound so sweet on him."

"I don't expect her to over the phone," he said.

About an hour later the phone upstairs rang. It was Irene calling Carman again. She wanted to tell him it was all right for Christmas eve; she'd be at his party!

Gene slid the receiver into its hook and grinned all over.

"Boy," he said, "this is gonna be some Christmas for us. Come on, let's get the air before I burn up with excitement."

We went out. We breezed over to Fifth Avenue. On every street corner there were Salvation Army Santa Clauses and lassies shaking tambourines over iron pots in which coin was piling up. All the windows in the shops were blazing with Christmas tinsel and gold and silver gifts. I nosed up to some of the windows.

"Aw, never mind that stuff," said Gene. "You'll have your Christmas present and so will I. And it won't be no five and dime junk."

The Schoellkopf jewel robbery! One of the most sensational hold-ups in the history of New York City's crime, it was smeared across the front pages of newspapers. Many stories have been recounted about it, but here, for the first time, is the real, inside story. It is told by the man who committed the crime! Read it next week, in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—the story of how Al Hurwitch and Gene Moran robbed Irene Schoellkopf of a half million dollars' worth of jewels.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

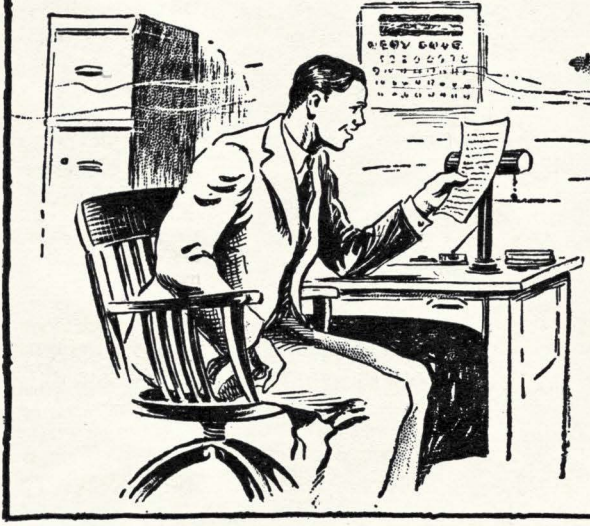
THE CLUE OF THE SUGAR COOKIES.

By Stook'z Allen

ONE NIGHT IN 1902 TWO BOYS GOING FISHING IN THE NEW JERSEY MARSHES, CAME UPON THE BODY OF A WOMAN, HORRIBLY MUTILATED. SHE WAS A BLOND AND ALMOST NUDE. AROUND THE BODY WAS TIED A HITCHING POST WEIGHT. OTHER THAN THIS THERE WERE NO CLUES. THE POLICE WERE STUMPED.

SYLVESTER SULLIVAN, A YOUNG REPORTER FOR THE N.Y. JOURNAL, WAS SENT BY HIS PAPER TO COVER THE CASE. THE NEW JERSEY POLICE COVERED EVERY TOWN IN THE STATE BUT COULD LEARN OF NO MISSING GIRL. THEY DECIDED SHE WAS A FACTORY WORKER WHOSE MOVEMENTS WERE HARD TO TRACE AND THEY WERE READY TO DROP THE CASE. SULLIVAN, NOTING THE BEAUTIFULLY FORMED BODY AND WELL KEPT HANDS, THOUGHT OTHERWISE.

SYLVESTER SULLIVAN



ONE NIGHT WHILE SITTING IN THE NEWS ROOM PONDERING OVER THE CASE HE WAS HANDED A DISPATCH FROM CHICAGO WHICH THE EDITOR THOUGHT MIGHT BE CONNECTED WITH THE GIRL'S MURDER. THE DISPATCH STATED THAT A BLOODY TRUNK, BEARING A NEW YORK LABEL, WAS FOUND IN A CHICAGO STATION CONTAINING CLOTHES, A BLOODY KNIFE AND A BAG OF SUGAR COOKIES. SULLIVAN GASPED — BY AN ODD COINCIDENCE HE KNEW SOMETHING OF SUGAR COOKIES.

A Regular Pictorial Feature

SULLIVAN BEING OF A THEATRICAL TURN OF MIND OFTEN HUNG AROUND THE PLAYHOUSES. A FEW DAYS BEFORE HE HAD BEEN ACCOSTED BY A CHORUS GIRL FRIEND OF HIS WHO WAS WORRIED OVER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER CHUM, WHO WAS IN THE SHOW WITH HER. SHE ASKED HIM TO TRY AND LOCATE HER. HE HAD GONE TO THE GIRL'S LANDLADY AND FOUND OUT THE GIRL RARELY WENT WITH MEN AND WAS EXTREMELY FOND OF SUGAR COOKIES! FROM THE CORNER BAKERY SULLIVAN ALSO FOUND THAT ON THE DAY OF THE MURDER SHE HAD BOUGHT A BAG OF COOKIES. SULLIVAN THOUGHT NOW THAT THE DEAD GIRL WAS ANNA KINGSTON, HIS FRIEND'S CHUM, BUT HE HAD TO BE CERTAIN.

HE PERSUADED HIS EDITOR TO SEND TO BOSTON FOR THE GIRL'S AUNT. THE AUNT IDENTIFIED THE BODY BY THE BIRTH MARKS. NOW TO FIND THE KILLER.

TAKING THE HITCHING WEIGHT FOUND TIED TO THE BODY, SULLIVAN WENT TO HOBOKEN AND MADE THE ROUNDS OF THE LIVERY STABLES. HE FINALLY FOUND THE OWNER OF THE WEIGHT. THE MAN REMEMBERED RENTING A CARRIAGE TO A MAN WHO HAD RETURNED IT MINUS THE WEIGHT BUT HE COULD GIVE ONLY A VAGUE DESCRIPTION OF THE FELLOW. ONE DAY, HOWEVER, HE WAS LOOKING THROUGH A TRADE MAGAZINE WHEN HE SAW THE VERY MAN POSED IN A GROUP PICTURE!

HE TOLD SULLIVAN AT ONCE AND SULLIVAN HAD THE PICTURE ENLARGED AND PRINTED IN HIS PAPER. IMMEDIATELY THE TOWN WAS IN AN UPROAR. THE PICTURE PROVED TO BE THAT OF W.H. YOUNG, SON OF J.W. YOUNG, A PROMINENT FINANCIER. HE WAS ARRESTED AT ONCE. BELL BOYS AT A SMALL HOTEL REMEMBERED HAVING HELPED YOUNG GET THE TRUNK INTO A CARRIAGE. THE CASE WAS NOW COMPLETE. YOUNG CONFESSED THAT HE HAD LURED THE GIRL TO HIS ROOMS AND KILLED HER BECAUSE SHE HAD RESISTED HIS ADVANCES.

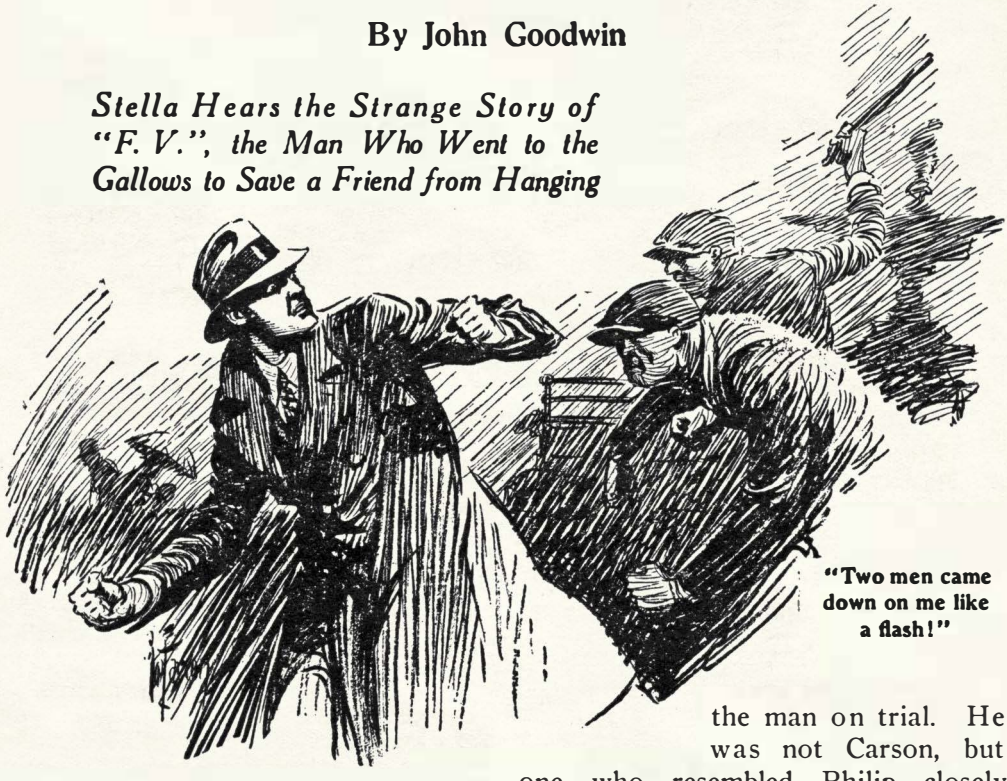
AT THE TRIAL JOURNALISTS REFERRED TO YOUNG AS "MR. FUZZY," BECAUSE OF HIS PECULIAR BEARD — HE WAS GIVEN LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

Next Week: THE COUPLING PIN MURDER

The Shadow Man

By John Goodwin

Stella Hears the Strange Story of "F. V.", the Man Who Went to the Gallows to Save a Friend from Hanging



"Two men came down on me like a flash!"

DON T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE

CLIVE JERMYN was murdered by a man identified by his servants as Jermyn's nephew, Philip Carson. While police were looking for Carson, he appeared at the home of Peter Donelli, dealer in murders, and demanded £5,000 for this crime.

Donelli was supposed to pay that sum to a mysterious man called The Killer for Jermyn's death, but Carson claimed he had beaten The Killer to it.

Then Carson surrendered. He was brought to trial, though he confessed. Stella Harvey, Philip Carson's sweetheart, went to the courtroom. She saw the man on trial. He was not Carson, but one who resembled Philip closely enough to be easily mistaken for him.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Doctor

FOR a while Stella sat dumb, trying to marshal her thoughts, to find the key to this amazing situation. She turned her eyes away from him and scanned the faces of the crowded court. Then back to the prisoner.

Here were a hundred people, all save one accepting him without the shadow of a doubt as Philip Carson. There was nothing surprising in that. If he stood up and challenged the evidence, declaring: "I am not Carson," who would believe him?

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for May 28

Who was he? Was it possible that Stella could be deceived?

Her mind cast back to the night of the murder. That horror she had tried to forget—the meeting at Waterloo in the gloom of the archway—the chase in the taxi. Those few minutes of blind nightmare, swinging through the dark streets of the Borough, with Philip—as she thought—by her side, till she found herself alone in the night, the police car flashing past her through the haze.

This was the same man. She could not take her eyes from him. He was no longer looking at her; he had turned his head away and was watching the faces of the jury with an air of lazy contempt.

This was the murderer. No sane man would, of his own free will, give himself up to the hangman for a crime he had never committed. That was beyond belief.

Why surrender in Philip's name? The problem baffled Stella utterly.

Philip's safety—Philip's innocence—that stood first with her. How was she to uphold it? Could she, in the face of this astounding revelation at the eleventh hour, dare to keep silence?

The trial was nearing its end; Beth Hammond's cross-examination was concluding.

"Answer this carefully, Miss Hammond, and remember you are on oath," said Marston. "When did you last see the prisoner?"

Beth answered without hesitation.

"I have told you. It was when I parted from him in Queen's Square, outside my uncle's house."

"And you did not see Philip Carson again that evening—neither in the house nor anywhere else?"

"No."

"Neither then nor since?"

"Never since, until to-day."

Marston paused.

"How long have you known the accused?"

"I have known him all my life. We were brought up together, children in the same household."

"Always on pretty good terms with him?"

"Excellent terms," said Beth quietly. "Cousins and lifelong companions."

Stella, listening, watched Beth Hammond's face. And now a second revelation came to her.

Beth knew.

She knew this man in the dock was not Philip. That marvelous resemblance had fooled the authorities, the police, the C. I. D.—Inspector Magill himself. That was natural enough. It could not deceive Stella—or Beth. Beth, who had known him from a child, and who loved him.

Equally sure was it that no suspicion of the truth was in Marston's mind. He was seeking quite another line of defense, doing his utmost to shake the evidence, fighting against odds; he could not have any shadow of a doubt that the prisoner was Carson.

Stella realized now that Beth shared that knowledge with her. Stella's lips were sealed; she had not spoken.

Beth went far beyond that. On her oath, facing the Court and defending counsel, sworn to tell the truth and nothing less than the truth, from first to last she withheld that vital fact. Never once did her answers reveal it, never did a sign or a glance from her betray it.

The fate of the man in the dock, guilty or innocent, was evidently nothing to her. Did she know who he was? Beth was in the house when Jermyn met his death. What did she know? Whatever secret was locked in

her breast, Beth guarded it well. She defended it against the inquisition of the law.

SITTING at the corner of the bench just below was a man who seemed perfectly oblivious to the witnesses, the trial, or the questions of counsel, but who betrayed an extraordinary interest in the prisoner himself.

He was a grave, distinguished looking man, apparently in the prime of life, with well-cut features and a neat black beard. He was well dressed. His steady, shrewd eyes rested unwaveringly on the impassive face of the accused; he was bending forward slightly in an attitude of close attention.

Just as Beth's cross-examination concluded, the man rose, slipped out of the court, and approached the sergeant in charge of the barrier on the landing.

"Officer," he said, "I've just come from the Carson trial—and I've a communication to make. Whom ought I to see?"

"Anything important, sir?"

"Important—urgent!" said the stranger emphatically.

The sergeant directed him to the office of the Recorder's clerk. Before he reached it a pleasant mannered young man overtook him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Dr. Savernake, isn't it? I'd like to have a word with you."

"Eh!" said the man with the black beard sharply. "How do you know who I am?"

"Everybody knows the most celebrated consultant in Harley Street. You were in court just now, weren't you? You're interested in the Carson case. So am I. By the way, my name's Clifford."

Dr. Savernake stared at the young man.

"Of course! You're Jermyn's secretary. But you must excuse me, I'm in a hurry."

"You want to see the Recorder's clerk, don't you? Step this way."

Savernake found himself led gently to an empty anteroom farther down the passage. As soon as they were inside his guide closed the door.

"You're interested in the accused, Doctor. Tell me what you know about him."

Savernake stiffened suspiciously.

"Pardon me, I wish to see an official of the court."

The young man smiled.

"Of all professions, Doctor, one trusts the medical profession. A man can entrust his secret to a physician—he knows that the confidence will be respected. I'm trusting you with mine. Don't trouble the officials of the court. I'm Inspector Magill, in charge of this case."

He showed Savernake his badge.

It took Savernake a moment or two to recover from his astonishment.

"You are the last man I would ever have taken for a policeman," he said, eyeing his companion with a new respect. "But let us get down to it. I want to ask, first, whether this man in the dock—Carson—has been medically examined?"

"Examined! Well, of course. Every man who is arrested automatically undergoes a medical inspection."

"These jail doctors," said Savernake impatiently, "all they want to know is that a prisoner has no infectious disease. You should equip that doctor with a new head. It's clear to me the authorities don't know there's something wrong with this prisoner, Carson. Something vitally wrong!"

"Do you mean he's insane?" asked Magill.

Dr. Savernake shook his head.

"No; I never met a saner man. He has a brain above the average. I only met him once. He came to consult me at my house in Harley Street. I didn't even know who he was."

Magill sat up.

"When was this? You can give me the date?"

"Date and hour," said Savernake, producing a notebook. "One P.M. October nineteenth."

"Seven days before the murder!" said Magill. "What name did he give you? You say you have only just learned who he is."

"He called himself Philip Connor. I guessed at the time it was a false name."

"You are *certain* it is the same man?"

"Absolutely certain. It was the man they are now trying as Philip Carson. Not a ghost of a doubt about that!

"I very rarely see a patient without an appointment. But he sent up a message that it was very urgent; would I admit him? I did. He impressed me."

"How was he dressed?"

"Gray overcoat. Dark blue suit. He said to me: 'I want you to examine me, doctor. See if you can pass me for a first-class life.'

"I examined him," said Dr. Savernake, "and found out what was wrong.

"He is suffering from a deadly and incurable disease. One that can be detected by no outward sign, and not of very long standing. Easily overlooked at that stage by a prison doctor examining him casually. When I had finished I told him the truth."

Dr. Savernake paused.

"I've had to pass many sentences of death in my consulting room. I never knew a man take it better than he did. He smiled at me.

"'Any hope for me at all, doctor?' he said.

"I had to tell him there was none.

"'How long do you give me?' he said.

"I told him—a month for sure. Two months—perhaps. He certainly could not live more than that. A painful, wretched business at the finish. Doomed.

"'Thank you, doctor,' he said, as casually as if he had been a rich man ordered to winter pleasantly in the South of France. 'Good day to you.' And out he went.

"I SHOULD have thought no more about it—such cases are common—but to-day in the *Sketch* I saw his portrait: 'Philip Carson, on trial to-day for the murder of Clive Jermyn.'

"It seems strange, doesn't it? From what I've already read about the case—the papers were full of it at the time of Carson's arrest—it was suggested that he arrived in England on the very day that Jermyn was murdered. But he was here ten days earlier. What do you make of that, Inspector?"

"It doesn't surprise me," said Magill. "I was not satisfied that Philip Carson only arrived on the twenty-sixth—though he was certainly at Waterloo Station that night."

"Well, that's for the police to settle. What I do find amazing is that this man, apart from any process of the law, is doomed, and he knows it. And I know it. But evidently no one else does. He has preferred to remain silent, to keep that secret to himself! Well, I lay this vital fact before you, for you could not have known it! Judge and jury, within a few yards of us, are trying for his life a prisoner who is little better than a dead man."

"This is astonishing news you bring me, Doctor," said Magill. "Certainly no one suspected it. And, of course, I believe you." He paused. "What then?"

Dr. Savernake seemed taken aback.

"What then! What will happen?"

"What will happen? That depends on the jury. If they convict him, it will be because the evidence is overwhelmingly against him. If convicted, he will be sentenced to death, and it is quite certain in that case that he will be executed within three weeks."

"In the face of what I have told you?"

"Yes. Unless he happened to die beforehand or was obviously near to his end. And I gather that even you cannot foretell it within a month or so. This will make no difference, Doctor. The law takes its course inevitably."

Dr. Savernake rose with a sigh.

"Well," he said. "I have discharged my conscience. You'll report what I've told you in the proper quarters?"

"Of course I shall. At the same time, I ask you to keep it strictly to yourself."

They parted outside. Magill walked slowly back to the landing, where Sergeant Scarfe came up to him and drew him aside.

"Wasn't that Savernake, the Harley Street man, who was earwigging you?" said Scarfe in an undertone. "What did he want, Cliff?"

Magill did not resent his subordinate's familiarity. It was Scarfe's way.

"Yes, that's Savernake. He gave me a remarkable bit of news. I'll tell you what it was later, Jim," said Magill. "How goes the case?"

"Closing. Marston's ending his speech for the defense. Hasn't called any witnesses — he had none to call. Carson refused to go into the stand. Had the right to refuse, if he chose, of course!" said Scarfe. "Did you notice—"

"What?"

"That Hammond girl has beaten them! For all the twisting both counsel have given her, she came out on top. She was in it. She may think she's beaten me. This man may have murdered Jermyn. We've got to take it that he did, since he says so. But listen here; let me tell you one thing."

He touched Magill's chest with a huge forefinger.

"They haven't got The Killer. They may think they have, Cliff, but they've not! Biggest mistake they ever made in their lives."

"They?" repeated Magill. "Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"All the damn fools at the Yard," said Scarfe impressively. Magill smiled.

"All—except yourself, eh, Jim? When shall we know if you are right?"

"You'll all know before long."

"How?"

"There'll be another killing," said Scarfe.

"I hope not. But consider this, Jim. What do you suppose will happen if the jury should acquit this man?"

Scarfe's broken nose wrinkled, and he smiled grimly.

"Ah, that would be a miracle, if you like," he said dryly. "They won't!"

CHAPTER XIX

The Verdict

STELLA came down the Old Bailey steps with white face and unsteady feet. She could endure the tension no longer. She found it impossible to sit silent and wait for the

end, there in the middle of things, facing the man in the dock. Impossible to think or to come to any decision as to what she must do, under such conditions as that.

It was a matter of minutes now before the case concluded. It was not lack of courage that drove her to retreat; it was sheer physical and mental exhaustion. The only desire left in her was to get out of this house of doom.

The street seemed to spin round her as she came out through the porch. She found herself caught by the elbow and steadied by a policeman on duty.

"Better go back inside and sit down a minute, miss."

"Can you get me a taxi?" said Stella faintly.

He found her one; she sank back against the cushions.

Where was Philip? What had become of him?

Was there anyone living in whom she dared confide? She would have to speak, there was no getting away from that. And yet—

Arrived home, sitting alone in the darkness of the parlor, she found herself as far from a decision as ever. How long she sat there, thinking the thing out, she could not have told. Less than an hour. Already the result of the trial was out; the evening editions were selling through the busy streets.

The *Courier* was dropped on the mat outside. She brought it in. There was only a brief announcement—a late flash.

CARSON TRIAL
DEATH SENTENCE

The trial of Philip Carson for the murder of Mr. Clive Jermyn concluded at 3.15. The jury, after a brief deliberation and without leaving the box, returned a verdict—guilty of wilful murder.

The prisoner, in a few quiet words, thanked the jury and the Bar somewhat cynically for their patience and courtesy, bowed to the judge, and left the dock in charge of the warder.

The paper fell from Stella's hand. She stared blindly before her.

The thing could not end like this. It had become something more than an unsolved mystery; it was sinister and terrible—the shadow of death hung over it. Silence was no longer possible. She was withholding from the ministers of the law knowledge that was vital—vital to Philip himself. Beyond doubt, she must speak—tell all she knew. Stella rose and pulled down the blind. The sooner she got this off her mind the better. To whom should she go? Inspector Magill?

There came a double rap on the outer door.

Stella's heart missed a beat. Here was Magill himself. She might have expected that. She became panic-stricken; she would have given anything to escape that interview.

She went slowly to the door and opened it. Beth Hammond stood in the shadow of the porch.

STELLA stared at her in blank amazement and hostility. Beth pushed past her and entered the parlor; Stella followed.

"What do you want?"

"What do I want?" Beth peered round her, looked into the little kitchen at the back, as though to make sure they were alone, and, returning, shut the parlor door. She flung her gloves on the table.

"You were in the Old Bailey this afternoon. I saw you," said Beth bitterly. "You might have had the decency to stay away. *You* brought all this on Philip!"

"*I* brought it on Philip?" gasped Stella.

"You and your folly. If you had

left Jermyn alone it wouldn't have started."

"What do you mean! You know as well as I do that man who was in the dock is not Philip!"

Beth shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course I know it. No use denying that. Well, what then? You and I are the only two people living who know for sure. All the rest of them haven't even a suspicion of it. We know that isn't Philip; he's beaten them all; he'll go on beating them. That brings me to you. What are you going to do about it?"

"There's only one thing possible. I'm going to the police right away, to tell them what I know and get this cleared up."

Beth's eyes blazed at her.

"You fool! You unutterable little fool!" she said. "If you do that, you'll hang Philip yet. Is that what you're trying to do? Or is it just stupidity? I think I'll kill myself, rather than let you do that."

"You're crazy!" said Stella. "If this man they've got is guilty, how can Philip be anything but innocent? That's plain sense. He's guilty, or why would he give himself up? And if there's any possibility that he's innocent, why doesn't he say so and claim his freedom?"

"That is his affair, not yours," said Beth. "Who are you to judge? The man's nothing to you, and, anyway, they won't hang him for three weeks. You say he's guilty. The jury and the judge agree with you. Leave it at that. It's not your business. And it's certainly not mine. Though, as far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't hang a dog for killing Clive Jermyn. Does that shock you?"

"You certainly sicken me," said Stella.

Beth remained unruffled and merely looked at her with cool contempt.

"Oh, you can be mealy mouthed about it, if you choose!" she said. "But you didn't know Uncle Clive quite so well as I did. I needn't pretend that I miss him. And what about yourself? It seems you may have £50,000 coming to you, which you'd never have got if he had lived. By the way, it's rather curious that they didn't call you as a witness, isn't it? It looked as if somebody at headquarters has rather a crush on you, Stella. You might have had a hot time in the witness box; much hotter than I did."

She curled a glove round her finger and laughed, watching Stella's face.

"I'm wasting my time with you," she went on. "You'll do the right thing; just keep silence and don't meddle. Queer, isn't it, to think that for the time being you and I are allies? Philip's safety and whatever happens, that's going to stand first with you—as it does with me."

"Are you daring to suggest that Philip's safety depended on that man being condemned for murder at the Old Bailey?" exclaimed Stella.

"My good girl, I'm not suggesting anything, am I?"

Stella came up to her, and struck the table with her hand.

"Listen!" she said. "You are hinting that I know something against Philip which nobody else suspects. That I understand this ghastly mystery, which even the police haven't solved. I don't! Where is Philip? Who is that man? Why should he give himself up; above all, why should he be tried in Philip's name? I don't understand it; it's beaten me. But there's an answer to it; and *you* know what it is. You're going to tell me! You've *got* to tell me!"

Beth looked at Stella from beneath drooping eyelids.

"Why ask me? I know no more about it than you do," she said.

"You *do* know!" insisted Stella. "You are lying to me—just as you lied in the witness box today, on your oath!"

"That's so, I lied on my oath," said Beth coolly, "sooner than let any harm come to Philip. Seven women out of ten would have done it in my place, and I'd think very little of one who didn't."

She picked up her gloves and turned away.

"Philip's the only living creature I care for. *You've* fallen for him, too. You're not the first, by many. You'll never get him; maybe I shan't, either. But, anyhow, I know you won't give him away. The only reason I came to see you was just to make sure of that. That's all I want. And, as you've told me that I sicken you, we needn't distress each other any longer. Good night!"

Beth opened the door quietly. The next moment she was gone.

STELLA stood motionless, her eyes hot and dry, her cheeks burning. Beth's visit had shaken her resolve. Could she go to the police with her story; defy the warning?

Was it true that even if she knew Philip to be guilty, she would still shield him at any cost? Could her love survive such knowledge as that? If not, was it for her to take the action which must inevitably destroy him? The thought was appalling.

She did not believe him guilty. She told herself firmly that it was impossible. And yet—she hesitated.

What was she to do? While Stella stared blankly out through the uncurtained window, trying to quell the turmoil in her mind, to come to a decision, she noticed—as one does notice trifles during moments of intense concentration—that the ground floor window of the house directly opposite was lit. A shadow passed dimly across the drawn blind.

Her mind noted this with a sense of uneasiness; she had felt it before, though this was the first time she had seen a light there. For as long as she had lived in the street the ground floor of No. 13 had been empty. She knew the rooms were untenanted and unfurnished, except for the shabby blinds that were always kept drawn.

But lately she had found a queer, unexplained fascination in those empty rooms. Were they indeed empty? It might be only that her nerves were jumpy, but she had a disquieting feeling that she was being watched.

For some time past she had been unable to shake herself free from it. It had started a fortnight ago, while she was still in her old quarters on the top floor of No. 20. That place was surrounded and faced by other attic bedrooms. She had never liked the little flat. The landlord had long ago promised her the ground-floor parlor, with its little bedroom and makeshift kitchen, when it should fall vacant, which it had ten days before. And though caring little enough then where she lived, or whether she lived at all, Stella had moved down from her eyrie.

So far from getting rid of that queer uneasiness, here facing the quiet street she found it worse. Whether it was some psychic sense or mere imagination, it began two days after she moved. The only view was the dirty blinds of No. 13 opposite, and twice she thought she saw them stir, and a face peer furtively across the street, watching her. It occurred to her that it

was likely enough. As things were, she might well be under police surveillance.

Then she told herself she was a fool, and suffering from nothing more than overwrought nerves. That did not help. Now, for the first time, there was a light in the opposite room; it seemed an indiscretion. Anybody who had a watching job would surely not show a light if they could avoid it. Probably it had nothing at all to do with her. In any case, what did it matter?

Nothing mattered but the revelation of the truth. The truth about Philip.

Philip! Was it conceivable that if he knew of this sinister drama that had ended today in the Old Bailey dock he would have failed to come forward? It was impossible.

Only one explanation remained. Tragedy had overtaken him; he was dead. Or in some extreme danger—danger at whose nature she could not even guess.

Stella's decision was made. No more hesitation. She snatched up the hat and coat she had slung on to a chair, donned them quickly, and switched out the light. She had been duped—fooled. She would carry this burden of silence no longer.

The street door clicked behind her. As Stella was stepping on to the pavement she stopped short. Again that shadow passed across the blind opposite. This time it was clear and sharp; the profile of a man, outlined on the screen of the blind. It remained motionless for a second, then passed furtively on and vanished.

The corner of the blind stirred, showing a spark of light in the room behind.

To Stella, it was as though she stood again in the Old Bailey, her eyes on the profile of the man in the dock. Her heart stood still. She shrank back into the doorway, staring. Once more the shadow passed.

It was Philip! Brief as the glimpse was, to her, of all people, those clean-cut features, silhouetted black against the blind, were unmistakable. The shadow paused, dissolved into a dark blur as it retreated from the window. Then the light faded out, nothing left but blackness.

CHAPTER XX

The Vigil

STELLA caught at the railings for support. She was trembling violently.

Philip—here in the same street—within a hundred feet of her. Hiding from the law—not daring to show himself. Or might it be that he was afraid to bring danger upon her? She did not care what the explanation was; she would be content to hear from his own lips. All she wanted was to help him.

Instantly her resolve to consult Magill was cancelled. He was the last man to whom she dared breathe a word of what she had seen. Here was a secret she must keep at any cost; one she must solve for herself.

She waited a while, keeping control of herself with an effort, peering up and down the street. The Terrace was deserted, not a soul in sight. She stole quietly across the roadway and tried the front door of No. 13. Locked, of course. But by leaning over the spiked area railings, from the step, she could just reach the window where the shadow had passed. She tapped on it with her knuckles softly, and waited. Then tapped again, louder — louder still.

No answer. The house was dark as the tomb, and as silent. This was a futile thing that she was doing, and

to stay there was impossible; the policeman on the beat might pass. She rapped once more, then retreated quietly across the road to her own room, drew the curtains right back, opened the sash a foot or two, placed an armchair a little way back from the window, and sat down to watch, her nerves tense and her heart beating.

Surely the sign would be repeated—there would be some answer! She was invisible to any passer-by in the street level, but not to anyone who might be in the house opposite. A street lamp a little farther down shed a dim, diffused light into the room.

Had it been intended that she should see that furtive shadow? or had she made a discovery that was not meant for her? For an hour she watched and waited—nothing happened. The black front of No. 13 seemed to mock her. Worn out by bodily and mental exhaustion, she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was past seven; the winter daylight was invading Stanley Terrace. Stella was stretched in the armchair, stiff with cold and faint with hunger.

She made herself a pot of strong tea, took a hot bath, cooked breakfast—the first decent meal she had taken for a fortnight—and felt better. That over-night glimpse of Philip, brief and sinister though it was, made all the difference. Here was something definite, which she was ready to face and deal with. She must find out all she could about No. 13. She would have to be careful. A false step might bring about disaster.

The house looked so commonplace in the full light of day, so dingy and unromantic, that she began to wonder if that vision of the night before was not an illusion, born of a tormented brain.

At a quarter to eight the front door of No. 13 opened; an elderly man with bent shoulders, carrying a little black bag, emerged and shambled away down the street, leaving the door wide open. She had expected this; it had happened every day for months past, punctually at the same hour. She knew who the elderly gentleman was, and had no interest in him; his only virtue was that he left the door open. Front doors on the Terrace usually stood open during the day and often till well into the night; most of the houses had several tenants, and so long as their own inner doors were secure, the occupants were satisfied.

It was Stella's opportunity to explore No. 13. She chose her moment, crossed the road, and walked in.

The front door gave upon a passage. Inside on the left a door connected with the room of the drawn blinds. She tried it and found it locked. Nor was there any entrance to it by way of the narrow stairs at the end of the hall. She ran up these quickly, and found they led right away to the two top floors. It was a puzzling house; it had evidently been reconstructed into a sort of self-contained maisonette and a single upper flat. As she came down, baffled, she collided with the postman, who was coming in at the front door. He knew Stella, and stared at her in obvious surprise.

"Does anybody live in this place?" she asked unconcernedly.

"Only Grierson, the old gent at the top back," he said.

"No one here?" She nodded towards the locked door.

"Hasn't been anybody there these twelve months, nor likely to be."

"Is there any other way into it?"

"No. There's a stairway inside and two floors above. Why, miss?"

"I thought of taking that ground floor if I can find who the house belongs to; there's more room here than where I am. Who are the agents?"

"Never heard of any. I did hear, there was something queer about the owner. Disappeared or something. If I were you I'd stay, and let it alone. Damp, mouldy house. Smells queer, too."

HE went up the stairs, and she retreated to her own quarters. There *must* be some other entrance to the place. She would find some means of getting in.

She rose and crept out into the porch. Philip! Beyond all vestige of a doubt. The edge of the blind stirred, as though someone was peering furtively. Then the shadow ducked swiftly out of sight. A second or two later the light was turned out. Darkness again.

Stella nerved herself for a dash across the street. But she had to wait. Someone was passing along the opposite pavement. A woman. She seemed to appear quite suddenly, out of the gloom and the rain, and after another minute—it seemed an age—she turned the corner and was gone.

Making sure the street was clear, Stella slipped across into the passage of No. 13, and, groping for the door inside on the left, turned the knob.

The door was open.

No need to force an entrance—no difficulty at all! Yet last night the door had certainly been locked. She thrust it back and passed in.

The room was dark as the pit. A rank mustiness smote her nostrils, mingled with the sickly odor of warm paraffin.

"Philip!" she whispered.

A waft of damp air touched her cheek, eddying round the room.

The door swung gently and closed behind her with a click.

She slid the switch of the little electric torch she had brought. It flashed and went out; the bulb filament had failed just when it was needed.

She was trembling slightly. But the room was not wholly dark, as she had thought at first. A very faint glow came in from the street, and as her eyes focused themselves to it she saw something white close by her, shimmering dimly; put out her hand and touched it. It was the shade of a paraffin lamp, still warm.

She had matches. She struck one and lit the lamp. Unwise, perhaps, but anything was better than this blind gloom. She turned the wick very low and looked about her.

The room was empty save for a large packing-case in the middle of the floor, on which the lamp stood; and a grocer's sugar box that had apparently served as a seat.

The place was incredibly dirty and squalid, the corners of the ceiling festooned in old cobwebs thick with dust. But in the rusty fireplace were recent ashes, stiff black paper ashes, as though somebody had been burning postcards. And beside the grate were crumbs of food and a few scraps of broken biscuit.

At the far end were two doors. She opened the right-hand one—another empty room. The door on the left was ajar. She pulled it open cautiously, moving on tiptoe.

Beyond was a recess, and a small wooden stairway leading to the upper floors. As she stared up into the darkness, nerving herself to get the lamp and explore, a cold air current came down and stirred her hair. Silence still.

Somewhere, far above, a stair creaked. Then a soft, stealthy footfall.

Someone was descending.

A sudden dread seized her and turned her bones to water—the fear of the Unknown. In a panic she ran back to the door she had entered by—anything to get out of this. It was shut tight and she could not open it; there was no handle on the inside.

She was trapped.

Stella cowered by the door. The lamp flickered smokily. The soft, heavy footfall on the stairs continued inexorably, the cushiony tread of rubber soles, slowly descending—*pad, pad, pad!*

Her heart was racing as her fingers clawed at the lock—she could have screamed aloud.

CHAPTER XXI

A Mysterious Letter

THE cry that terror had nearly made her utter died on Stella's lips. Never before in her life had she such need for courage, and there was none left in her; it had been shaken and stamped out.

The man who was descending reached the foot of the stairs. She could see him now, a dim outline, standing motionless in the gloom of the recess. The lamp, flickering smokily in the draught, throwing alternate light and shadow, showed a face amazingly sinister and evil.

Then as it moved slowly into the room it resolved itself into the broad, homely features and flattened nose of Sergeant Scarfe. "Well, well!"

Her knees gave way under her. He took her firmly by the arm.

"And what might you be doing here? I thought your place was over the way, miss."

She trembled. Did this mean arrest?

"Didn't know anyone was here. I saw a light—flickering. Came over to see. I—I thought the place might be on fire—"

Scarfe looked at her closely. His small eyes twinkled grimly, yet there was a gleam of sympathy in them.

"Thought the place was on fire? I'd say it wouldn't be a bad thing if this house was burned out."

He drew her gently away from the door against which she was leaning. Still holding her by the arm, he produced a little pair of pliers from his jacket pocket, took hold of the steel spindle that protruded from the lock where the doorknob was missing, turned it, and opened the door.

"Do you know what I should do, miss, if I was you?" he said. "I should go across to my own rooms and go to bed and get some sleep."

He shepherded her out into the passage.

"And I wouldn't come back here on any account, not if I was you. If it wants to burn, let it. Never go chasing lights and shadows, miss; and never talk about 'em. But I'm afraid I've scared you a bit; you're all shaky."

"I was frightened—when I saw you at the foot of the stairs," said Stella.

"My face isn't much to look at, especially in a half light," said Scarfe. He released her arm. "Can you go across without me, or shall I see you over the road?"

She shook her head, and, not trusting herself to speak again, crossed the terrace and dived quickly into her own quarters. Scarfe watched her go with an odd expression in his small, bright eyes.

He went back into the empty room, turned up the lamp, and made a careful examination of the charred ashes in the grate. After a rapid search of the room he produced a couple of staples and a

small padlock, and fastened up the door leading to the stairway. Then he secured the door of the front room and, leaving No. 13, walked quietly away towards the river.

"Not a bad night's work. I wasn't thirty seconds behind him," mused Sergeant Scarfe. "Killer, I wasn't ever quite so close to you as tonight."

Secure in her own quarters, Stella remained behind the curtains in her darkened parlor, watching the street.

Then she saw Scarfe emerge and walk away down the street—alone.

What did it portend, this mystery of No. 13? It had not escaped the vigilance of the police. Scarfe was wise to it, and if Scarfe, surely Magill also. The trap had been laid for Philip; it had failed. Here was Scarfe, empty-handed, defeated. But Philip—where was he?

She recalled Beth Hammond's words.

"He has beaten them all. He'll go on beating them."

A strange exultation filled her. Whatever the danger, however long the odds, her man was still unbeaten.

NEXT morning the post brought two letters. One of them, in a long envelope, was addressed to "Miss Stella Harvey," in a neat, characterless round hand. She did not recognize it, yet there was something about the formation of the capitals that seemed familiar. She opened it first.

It contained a smaller envelope, sealed, bearing nothing but the printed initials "P. C." With this was a sheet of plain paper, with a couple of sentences on it in the same neat writing, unsigned.

To the Little Lady of the Taxi Cab.

Waste no pity on me. For what one does one must pay. One day you will understand.

Keep faith and silence.

If the chance offers, deliver the enclosed.

Her hand trembled. This came from the man upon whom sentence had been passed. She looked at the postmark on the envelope. It had been mailed in the West 5 district on the previous night; the date was on it, the midnight collection for first post delivery.

Could it be from him who lay in the condemned cell at Wandsmere, and who, on their first meeting, had steered her clear of the blind police chase through the foggy streets? The man she had seen sentenced only yesterday? It must be. But if it was written before his arrest, who had held it till now, and mailed it for him?

She looked at the enclosure—to "P. C." Philip Carson.

She was to deliver this to him, with her own hands—keep it till that time came.

How could she tell whether it was in Philip Carson's interest? She had to know what the message was; whoever used her as a messenger must trust her.

She slit the envelope.

Inside was another slip of paper, and a message in the same hand, even briefer than the first, and at first sight just as puzzling.

Dear Flip,

I have squared our account. If this reaches you, and you have wit enough, you should win.

Look after the boy.

Moriturus te salutat,

F. V.

The familiar Latin tag she understood. It was the cry of the gladiator in the arena, dedicating his life to

Cæsar: "He who is about to die salutes you."

The rest of it was baffling. What account was squared? Who was the boy?

She went into her bedroom and slid the note under the lining paper in her dressing table drawer. Let the secret remain there, till it was claimed and solved.

The second letter which the post had brought her was as plain as the first was obscure.

Ayscough, Saul and Ayscough,
Solicitors,
100B, Gray's Inn.

DEAR MISS HARVEY:

Re your claim on the estate of the late Mr. Clive Jermyn, will you call here and see me without fail at 10 A.M. tomorrow, the 15th?

Yours faithfully,
PETER AYSCOUGH.

CHAPTER XXII

The Black Flag

ON the stroke of ten she presented herself at Gray's Inn. Mr. Peter Ayscough, the senior partner, was a tall, spare man, who wore gold-rimmed pince-nez glasses perched on a beak of a nose.

"I have a copy here of the late Mr. Clive Jermyn's will, Miss Harvey," he said, as he lifted a typewritten sheet from the table. "And I have been into this matter thoroughly. As far as I can gather, there are only two relatives of the late Clive Jermyn living. One is his niece, Miss Beth Hammond. The other, his son, Copley Jermyn, a man of forty, at present abroad, and unmarried."

"I don't know anything about his relatives," replied Stella. "I knew Miss Hammond is his niece."

"There is, of course, his nephew—Philip Carson, the man who is at present under sentence of death for his murder," said Mr. Ayscough. "But he is a nephew by marriage, and not a kinsman of the deceased—not a blood relation. Nor is he mentioned in the will.

"Now, Miss Harvey, when you consulted me here on the first of the month, you made what seemed to me a very extraordinary statement. You said that, unless circumstances altered completely, you didn't intend to claim the legacy of £50,000 to which Mr. Jermyn's will appears to entitle you."

"I have changed my mind," said Stella. "I'll take whatever I'm entitled to."

The lawyer smiled and rubbed the tips of his thin fingers together.

"You would be very foolish to do otherwise. I learned that Miss Hammond was entering a *caveat* against you."

"A what?"

"A warning. She challenges your claim under Clive Jermyn's will and forbids the executors to pay it."

Stella sat up.

"Beth Hammond did that?"

"Yes. And now she has withdrawn it."

"Withdrawn it? When?"

"Yesterday."

Stella reflected. Beth must have made that move immediately after the trial and sentence at the Old Bailey.

"It's evident," said Ayscough, "that this young lady has decided not to oppose you after all. What she opposed you for at all I can't tell. But I thought you ought to know about this."

"Does Miss Hammond get anything under the will?"

"She gets £50,000—precisely the same sum as yourself. That's all she gets, though Mr. Jermyn was an im-

mensely wealthy man. All the remainder of his fortune—except for a few small and unimportant bequests—goes to his son, Copley Jermyn.

"Now, Miss Harvey, it will be some months before the will is through the Probate Courts. If you happen to be in need of any money, I shall be pleased to advance you any reasonable sum on the terms usual in these cases."

"How much can I have?"

"A check for two hundred pounds now, if you like," said Ayscough smiling. "Should you want more, at a few days' notice—"

"Give it to me now, please!" said Stella.

He wrote out a check; she signed the acknowledgment he drew up for her.

"Mr. Ayscough," she said, "I want you to know that this £50,000 was a restitution—a debt. Clive Jermyn owed that to my father."

"A late settlement, then," replied Ayscough, "for he died on the day that he acknowledged it. So this was a debt, was it?"

"If it hadn't been, I don't think I could have touched it."

"I believe you, Miss Harvey," said Ayscough quietly. "I've had a long experience, and I'm a pretty good judge of men—and women."

She left him, went to her bank, paid in the draft, and drew £100 in notes which she took home and hid carefully in her own room, so it should be ready to her hand.

EIGHT thirty is the hour officially fixed for executions. At eight thirty to the second, on the third Monday following the Jermyn murder trial, a man in uniform emerged from the skylight on to the roof of Wandsmere Gaol with a little black flag under his arm. He climbed to the short jackstaff on the dome, bent the flag to the signal halyards, and waited. The winter morning was thick and murky.

The man on the roof was visible from the street skirting the north wall of the prison, where a small knot of spectators had gathered. Seeing the watchers in the street staring upward, a passerby halted and stared, too.

"What's on?" he asked.

"A swinging," said the man next him.

"Who's going to swing?"

"Carson, the chap that killed Jermyn, the oil millionaire. The flag don't go up till the hangman pulls back the drop, see?"

"Queer, ain't it? It was foggy the night he killed Jermyn," said another watcher, with a shiver, "and it's foggy now they're putting him down."

"There she goes!"

The flag moved suddenly up the staff in little jerks, and hung at the top, a lifeless rag.

A dozen yards away, standing alone with her back against the wall, a shabby woman in draggled clothes stared up at the flagstaff, her eyes smouldering, her face turned skywards. It was not an attractive face; once it had been good looking, but now it was coarse and bloated. While she watched, she slowly twisted a wedding ring round and round upon her finger with a queer, nervous motion.

A little wind stirred the black flag on the prison staff; its folds curved out like a crow flapping its wings. It hung limp again. The prisoner's soul had passed.

"*He's* finished," said the onlooker who had spoken first. He turned away as a policeman approached the little crowd.

"Pass along here," said the con-

stable gruffly. "Loitering near the prison isn't allowed." He stepped across to the shabby woman, who was still staring upwards. "Move on, please."

The woman did not move. She looked at the policeman with cunning, defiant eyes.

"Move on?" she said. "I'm always movin' on, I am. You cops! You owe me something."

The constable looked at her suspiciously. He began to doubt whether she was sober. She drew her left hand out of her shawl and showed it to him.

"See that? I'm a 'spectable married woman—or was." She nodded towards the prison roof. "Owe me something! You cops! You've done my old man in, among you. And all you can say to his widow is, 'Move on'!"

She checked herself with a hiccough.

"You think I'm talking empty, don't you?"

"I should go home if I were you," said the constable stolidly.

"Home!" said the woman, turning away. She dabbed her eyes furtively with a corner of her shawl.

On the roof the black flag fluttered on from the staff. The constable watched with a puzzled face as the widow, drawing her shawl about her, shuffled away down the street and disappeared into the fog.

CHAPTER XXIII

On the Trail

SERGEANT SCARFE sat on the arm of the old leather easy chair in Magill's office and thoughtfully rammed down the hot ashes of his pipe with a callous forefinger.

"Cliff," he said suddenly "*was* that Carson they hanged this morning? If it was Carson, how comes it that I saw Carson with my own eyes in Thirteen, Stanley Terrace, the night after the trial?"

"You think you saw him. That's a different thing. Why do you ask me to believe the impossible?"

Scarfe snorted, and stared thoughtfully into space.

"Cliff," he said suddenly, "whoever they hanged, one thing's sure—they didn't get The Killer, nor the man who's behind him! Can you tell me something about a man I'm gettin' very interested in, and who's not on the books? A man called Donelli."

"Yes. Peter Donelli, 12A Athens Street, alleged expert on antique furniture. A man who deals in big values. Christened Pietro, born at Palermo, later of Chicago. Not a breath or a whisper against him. And a dangerous crook. And yellow! Yellow through and through."

Sergeant Scarfe rubbed his hands together.

"That's fine, Cliff! Can you give me a pointer on another man who has never been 'inside'—Moran Ricks?"

"Moran Ricks, ex-prison doctor of thirty-five years service, retired. Looks like a schoolmaster. Brown eyes, pointed brown beard. Intensely respectable. Has money to burn—"

"I'm very interested in Dr. Moran Ricks. Maybe I'll give you news of him."

He left the Yard and made his way toward Soho. It was late in the evening before Sergeant Scarfe came upon his man, and he found him just where he expected to find him.

At five o'clock Dr. Moran Ricks, complete with neat brown beard, well cut serge suit, and carrying a slim cane, appeared at the south end of Conyers Street.

He turned the corner into a frowsy

little by-way where all the odors of the East met him—a hot whiff of frying oil, eels, garlic, and decaying fruit.

Dr. Ricks was evidently a man of sensitive nostrils, for he shuddered, felt in his pocket for his gold cigarette case, opened it, and found it empty. He frowned with annoyance, glanced round him, and stepped into a tiny tobacco and newspaper shop opposite, with the name " E. Stephoulos " over the window.

Two minutes later Scarfe came round the corner. Dr. Ricks was not in sight. Scarfe drifted into the tobacco shop and found nobody there, but the greasy little proprietor.

" Gimme the best cigarettes you've got," said Scarfe genially, paying for the cigarettes with a pound note. " You can keep that bit of paper, Mr. Stephoulos, and I want you to let me out of this store by the back way."

" The back way?" said the little Greek blankly.

" You know me, don't you?" said Scarfe, with a glance back over his shoulder at the street. " I'm a bookie, an' some of the boys are tailing me. If I can slip out of here on the quiet and lose them—" He dropped another note on the counter.

The Greek shook his head uneasily.

" I am zorry," he said, " zere is no ozer way out of here at all."

" Well, well," said Scarfe resignedly. " I'm big enough to look after myself. You do the same. S'long."

He drifted out of the shop, flicking the ash from his cigarette. He had learned all he wanted to know. There *was* another way out of the store, and it was not worth Mr. Stephoulos' while to betray it for a bribe of two pounds. Dr. Moran Ricks, knowing himself to be shadowed, had taken that way out. Scarfe was well content.

" The best day's work yet," he said, half closing his little eyes. " We're gettin' near The Killer's head office."

MR. PETER DONELLI was pacing the carpet of his luxurious flat on the top floor in Athens Street. There was a gleam of venomous resentment in his usually placid eyes.

He turned sharply as a tap sounded on the door. Dr. Moran Ricks entered and laid his hat and cane carefully on the table.

" Don," said Dr. Ricks, " Philip Carson was hanged at eight-thirty this morning. To be strictly accurate, I should say the man who called himself Philip Carson."

Peter Donelli's face reddened with fury.

" Damn him!" he said bitterly. " Hanging was too good for him!"

Dr. Ricks shrugged his shoulders.

" Think so? I've been present at over forty hangings in my time, and it never struck me it was too good for anybody. I could give you details that would interest you, in case you should come to it yourself, Peter." Dr. Ricks eyed his friend with a sardonic smile, chose a cigar from the silver box carefully, and lit it. " Still, I'd have thought you'd be relieved that his mouth is shut for all time."

Donelli glowered at him.

" On the night of Jermyn's death he bluffed me out of five thousand pounds!" he said. " The price of killing Jermyn."

Moran Ricks grinned.

" You're not built for dealing with tiger-men at first hand. You fell for him."

" Why damn it, man, how could I doubt him?" said Donelli. " He came up here almost before Jermyn was

cold. I thought he was Carson. How could I take him for anyone but Carson? He'd got Jermyn's note case—he showed me Jermyn's signet ring. He was in Jermyn's house that night!" Donelli squirmed in his chair. "I had to pay for that job *twice!*"

Moran Ricks nodded.

"You had to pay twice," he said, "because in the first place you allowed yourself to be fooled by a clever crook who needed £5,000, and who didn't value his own life at a cent."

He flicked the ash from his cigar.

"You paid twice because when The Killer sent in *his* claim and showed beyond question that he'd earned it according to contract, you got the shock of your life! You paid because you didn't dare refuse The Killer simply because somebody else had rung in a dud on you."

Dr. Ricks reached for the whisky.

"After all, does it so much matter, Don? You paid double—ten thousand pounds instead of five; don't ask me to shed any tears over that. You must have cleaned up the biggest scoop on record over the Jermyn deal."

Donelli snarled.

"What happened, Ricks, is that you bungled it!"

Ricks turned on him in sudden exasperation.

"I bungled it? I failed? Donelli, don't pull any of that stuff on me! You told me to get *Jermyn*. I chose the only man who could be trusted with a big job like that. Jermyn went down—and that's all that matters. If you were bluffed by this crook who called himself Carson that's your affair!"

Donelli groaned and sank into the armchair.

"Who's this man they've hanged? We know he isn't Carson. Who the devil is he?"

"Ten years ago," Rickey said, "when I was doctor in Southampton Gaol, there was a fellow there—a lad of twenty-one—as like Philip Carson as one pea is like another. All I remember of him is that he'd a bad record. It sort of sticks in my mind that his name was Valery."

"Valery—but who's Valery?"

Dr. Ricks shrugged his shoulders.

"There you have me beaten."

"Why in the name of sense should he let them swing him instead of Carson?"

"The man's dead. Breathe a little prayer of thanksgiving, Don. A dead man can never get back at you."

Donelli winced.

"I'd be a lot more thankful," he said slowly, "if it was The Killer himself they were planting today in the yard at Wandsmere."

"Well, I agree with you there," said Ricks, "but I doubt if the rope's made that will hang him. He's clever as hell."

Donelli huddled in his chair, staring before him vacantly, and shivered.

"How many jobs has he done for us, Rickey? Five! I'm scared of him, Ricks; this last job has scared me."

Dr. Ricks smiled wryly. "If it suited The Killer's book to kill you, I haven't a doubt he would do it."

"Ricks," Donelli said, "he's been gone a long time now. I'm hoping we're rid of him!"

"Do you?" said Ricks. "So do I. When The Killer returns—look out."

CHAPTER XXIV

"Like a Thief in the Night"

FOR three weeks and two days, Stella waited for the sign that did not come—the sign from Philip. Then the night of that day when the

man who had called himself Philip Carson died on the scaffold, a step sounded on the stairs outside. The rain was beating down; a cold wind rustled along the street. The darkness was full of ghosts.

She rose and turned the switch, flooding the shabby little room with light.

There was a stealthy tap on her door. Stella shrank back.

Had anybody knocked, or was it her imagination?

Again the soft tap.

"Who's there?" she called huskily.

Panic seized her; a foreboding of danger . . . an impulse to escape, to hide herself, anything rather than face him.

"Stella!"

She darted to the door and snatched it open. A tall form brushed past her into the room, thrust the door to, and, turning, faced her in the light.

"Philip!"

But for his voice she would scarcely have known him; this disheveled tramp with his wet jacket buttoned high about his throat and the cap pulled low over his eyes. He tore the cap off, flung it on a chair and held out his hands to her.

She stared at him a moment; she could not find her voice. He caught her in his arms, holding her to him, his lips sought hers.

She surrendered, and clung to him. Everything else was blotted out.

"Stella!" he said. "They couldn't take you from me!"

She freed herself.

"Philip—you're mad to come here!" she said breathlessly. "Do you know you are accused of murder!"

"Yes."

"You knew it—and you know another man has been condemned in your place?"

"Yes, I know it."

She looked at him. That lurking horror crept back swiftly, and took possession of her.

"Answer me this, Philip!" she said. "Did you kill Clive Jermyn!"

"No."

He looked her in the face, but his own for a moment became stony. Then, just as quickly, it cleared. The light shone through the brown-gold of his hair, two compelling blue eyes looked into hers and held them; his firm lips relaxed in the challenging little smile she knew and loved.

"You never believed that, Stella! Though I wouldn't blame you—"

"Phil, I didn't believe it. Never—never! I didn't doubt you—not once. I knew—I knew you weren't a coward and a monster."

He pulled a torn and crumpled newspaper from his breast pocket, the date of it was three weeks old. On the open page was the headlines: "Carson Guilty. The Prisoner's Confession. Elizabeth Hammond in the Witness Box." Below was the portrait: "Philip Carson." He pointed to it.

"What's happened, Stella? Convicted and sentenced—but what then? You saw this man?"

"I saw him. I was in court at the trial."

"Of course you were! But you knew it wasn't me? You knew—"

"I knew."

He stared at her.

"You told no one! Neither then—nor since?"

"No! I knew it wasn't you. But I didn't know where *you* were, Philip. And you never gave a sign—till it was too late."

"Three clear Sundays since the trial! Do you mean nothing's been done, Stella? They haven't—"

"He died this morning. Didn't you know that?"

Philip seemed utterly stunned. He turned away from her, she saw his hands clenched at his sides. He moved slowly across to the fireplace, and leaned his arm on the mantel. She could not see his face.

SHE watched him silently. He neither moved nor spoke. She went quietly to her own room, took out the envelope with its two cryptic messages from its hiding place at the back of her drawer, and gave it to him.

He opened it and read, first, the note addressed to herself. Then the second message, signed "F. V."

"When did this reach you?" he asked.

"Two days after the trial. Philip—do you understand it?"

"Yes."

He dropped the notes on the table. His face was white and drawn, he seemed to be thinking rapidly. He turned, stumbling a little, and dropped into the armchair. In a moment she was at his side.

"Philip! You're ill. You're—"

"I'll be all right in a moment. This is worse than I thought. But at least I know where I stand, and that's something. Pull up that chair, Stella."

"Why didn't you come before? Why didn't you face the charge? You were here—in the house opposite—on the night of the trial. I saw you myself. Saw you with my own eyes!"

He turned to her with apparent amazement.

"What do you mean?"

She told him of the shadow on the blind.

"You didn't see me, Stella. I wasn't within forty miles of the place."

"Where were you?"

"I've been a pawn in a murder game, and it looks to me as if I'm left with it on my hands. But they won't beat me! Sit here, and listen.

"To get it straight, we've got to start where I left you—right here in this house, on the night of Jermyn's death. I left you, and went after him. I was furious with Jermyn; I'd already stood as much as a man could stand, that night, and I was out to settle things up with him. But of course it never occurred to me to do him any violence—he was an old man. That will, Stella—the codicil he made in your favor—I'll never forgive him . . . But what happened about that?"

"That bequest's legal, they tell me," she said. "And—I've claimed it."

Philip drew a long breath.

"You've done the right thing! But never mind that now . . .

"When I reached Jermyn's house, he was out. I saw his man servant. Beth Hammond came out. She said—"

"I know, Philip! All that came out at the trial, we can pass it."

"Very well. I'm answering for myself, not for Beth Hammond. I left the Square. What I meant to do was to come back at eight—the butler said Jermyn would be back by then—and have it out with him. And I never got there.

"I remember seeing a black closed car pass me on the opposite side by the Square railings as I turned the corner; the night was a bit thick and foggy, one couldn't see very clearly. I think it must have swung and followed me. Anyway, a few seconds later I heard footsteps on the roadway behind me.

"I whipped round, sensing trouble, and two men came down on me like a flash. I didn't stop to think, but hit out and caught one of them under the

chin—I saw him spin round, and the other lashed out at me with a loaded stick or something, and I went down like a log.

"WHEN I came to—it must have been an hour or two later, I think, I was in a car bumping along over a bad road. I could see a driver sitting in front; I was huddled in the back seat between two men, and feeling pretty sick. I hadn't a notion what it was all about, but I went for the man next me and started scrapping with him.

"I was too weak to do any good, and the pair of them soon got me down and out. One of them said 'Hold him!' and he jabbed a needle in my arm. 'That'll keep you quiet,' he said.

"My body and limbs felt heavy as lead. The whole thing was like a nightmare. Presently the car stopped and they pulled me out.

"They marched me off down a muddy path, holding me up and half carrying me, each of them with an arm locked under mine.

"I could see water shining ahead; we came to a sort of creek, where they got me into a boat and moved off across the stream. One rowed, while the other, the bigger man of the two. who seemed to be running the show, looked after me. There was nothing round us but raw mist and the smell of ooze and sea water, and I could hear curlews whistling. There seemed to be a strong tide running. We grounded on the far side of the creek; I was hoisted out and marched across a stretch of rough rushy land; I was feeling half dead by that time.

"Some sort of building loomed up; one of the men had a pocket torch, and I can remember them hoisting me up two flights of narrow stairs, a door was open, and I was hove down on a bed. I heard a key turn, and a bolt shooting home, and then I just dropped off in a stupor. That, for me, ended the night of the 28th—the night that Clive Jermyn died.

"When I woke it was daylight; I was lying on a rusty iron bedstead and a lumpy mattress, with an old army blanket thrown over me. When I tried to move my arms I found they were tied behind me.

"The room had bare brick walls. There was a heavy oak door on one side, and on the other was a door opening through a matchbox partition that divided the place into two rooms. I seemed to be in some sort of a tower; and yet it couldn't be that for it was built of cheap modern brickwork. The light came from a small window high up in the wall; too high to get through, and too high to see anything out of, except the sky.

"No one came near me. As I lay and tried to puzzle out what this crazy business meant, there was a crash like the day of judgment, and I felt the building shake. Then I got on to it. Big guns! The heaviest kind of guns. Sometimes they sounded quite close, and sometimes a long way off, the way gunfire often does sound. It was like a barrage in Flanders—it was like a new war starting.

"I lay listening to that awful racket for half an hour, at a loss what to make of it. Then the guns stopped. After a while a cold mist began to creep in through the little window.

"Presently a new noise started; a bull began to bellow. It was a giant bull, as big as an elephant, by the row it made. Long dismal roars. Sometimes far off, sometimes near, as if the roarer were wandering about. But it was worse than the guns.

"I wondered if I was delirious. Then—suddenly my head cleared, and I knew that noise for what it was. A fog horn! It was the big hooter on a light ship.

"The Nore Light! I got to counting the intervals. One long hoot . . . two seconds pause, and hoot again. Silent two minutes and start afresh. I checked it with my old silver watch—the only thing those two thugs had left me; it was worth nothing—they'd stripped me of everything else.

"The Nore Light; she swings in the mouth of the Thames, where London River meets the sea. She's the lamp on the front doorstep of England. She was the bull I'd heard bellowing a warning to the shipping; I was somewhere in the Thames-Mouth marshes.

"I've done a lot of sailing round there and I know the old Nore like a sister. The guns too—the only heavy gun range in England is at Shoeburyness, on the north lip of the estuary, where they fire over the Maplin Sands that stretched fifteen miles seaward, dry when the tide's out. When the fog started, of course the guns had to stop, and the old Nore started her song.

"All along there is a maze of forgotten marshy islands. On one of those islets there's a windmill, the only one for miles. I'd placed myself, sure. I was in the old mill on Wakering Island.

"You couldn't pick a lonelier hiding place in creation. I heard steps coming up the stairs; the door opened, and two men came in."

CHAPTER XXV

The Escape

"THEY were the pair who'd brought me in the night before. I knew one of them by his voice. He was a big, hefty fellow with shoulders like a gallows, and short black hair. His mate called him 'Sam,' and that's the only name I know him by—assuming that he's still alive. The other man was a lean, cunning looking rat who stared at me all the time and said nothing.

"It was Sam who did the talking.

"'Well, how are you feeling?' he said. 'Pretty sick, by the look of you. By rights you should be dead, and you can thank me that you're not.'

"'Who are you?' I said. 'And who on earth do you take me for?' said I.

"'I can tell you what you are,' he said. 'You're a business asset. You're a stock that's going to pay for holding till the market rises.'

"'If you think you're going to make money out of me, you won't,' I told him. The man laughed.

"'If you can't pay—which I never expected—I know who can and will,' he said. 'But you're going to be my guest a while. Mick, here, has some bully beef and water for you—put them on the floor, Mick.'

"He pulled an automatic pistol out of his pocket and handed it to his partner. He turned me over and cut the rope off my wrists. He took back the pistol and tapped it with his fingers.

"'You see this?' he said pleasantly. 'So long as you keep it in mind and behave, you'll be safe enough while you stay with me. If you try and start anything when we come up to you, you'll be shot down. You'll be food for crabs.'

"'Look here,' I said, 'I don't know what you figure to do, but you've made a bungle of this business. Whoever it is you want, you were on the wrong track when you got me. Somebody's made a fool of you!'

"He tucked his pistol away, and laughed.

"'The man doesn't live who could fool me,' he said. 'Cut out that line of talk. And now we'll leave you to yourself; you've plenty of time before you.'

"They went out. The other man, Mick, never said a word. All he did was to stare at me. I heard the bolts of the door shoot home, and I was alone. They'd left me some food; I couldn't eat, but I drank half the water in the jug, and tried to think the thing out. What were they holding me for? Money, of course. But from whom?

"There must have been something deeper in it than that; some graft that I hadn't even begun to understand. I explored the place. There was no getting out of it, and even if I did it seemed there was not a dog's chance of quitting the island.

"Neither of my two thugs would ever answer any questions, and they never asked any. They came up twice a day, always the pair of them together, and brought me food."

HE shifted in his chair.

"It was a week before my head healed, and on the fifteenth or sixteenth day my two captors came up into my room. They both had guns; they locked the door. Sam threw me a thumbed, dirty copy of the *Evening Standard*—there it is on the floor; it's been with me ever since.

"'Read that,' he said.

"It was the account of the Jermyn murder trial. Jermyn dead! Here it was in black and white, straight from the Old Bailey Session. The prisoner's written confession; the cross-examination of the witnesses . . . Beth Hammond's evidence. The verdict and sentence.

"Philip Carson's trial and conviction! And here was I sitting in that old mill on Wakering Marsh, reading it in a paper already two days old. That man in the dock, why, he was a dead man before they tried him. *I* knew that. I could have told them that. But I couldn't have saved him; he wouldn't save himself. He surrendered, faced the penalty, and *he assumed my name!* He left me to bear the weight of it, if ever I came back and claimed to be innocent. That's how it looked to me.

"And then, as I read, the light broke through and I began to see where I stood. What was my story worth, anyway? Who would believe it?

"As I finished reading the report, I looked up, and there was Sam, sitting across the corner of the table, the gun in his hand, staring at me.

"'Who the devil are you?' he said. 'Damn you! Is that Philip Carson the cops have got? Because if it isn't—'

"'If it isn't you're beaten!' I said. 'Can't you see, you big stiff, that you've got hold of the wrong man? Your game's broken down and you're left. Let me go, man, while there's time—let me out of this!'

"'Let you go!' he said. 'This job is panning out better than we figured it would. You're too dangerous to let loose, and I'm afraid you must stay on as our guest till we get a decision. Meanwhile we'll do you as well as we can. Mick brought in some beer today, and we'll bring you up a bottle.'

"You know now, why I wasn't there to face that charge.

"WELL, Mick was alone in the mill. Sam must have been away I think, getting in touch with the news. It was the third Monday after the trial. Anyway I heard Mick's step coming up the stairs, and he was certainly alone . . . They'd always come up together before. It

was the first chance I'd ever got and I was ready for it . . . I waited behind the door and as Mick came in I downed him with an iron rod I'd haggled out of the bedstead."

Stella caught her breath. It was, as she remembered, precisely like that that Inspector Magill had been felled, on the night of Jermyn's murder.

"I don't know how badly Mick got it. Didn't wait to see. I got away with Mick's gun, and down the stairs and outside, ready for Sam. No signs of Sam, and I didn't waste time hunting for him. I was on Wakering Island all right enough—the old mill behind me and the marshes and the creek in front.

"I reached the water, and hoped I might find the boat. No boat! But it was a dead low spring tide and I found a place where the creek could be forded. I struggled through mud and salt water up to the thighs and reached the next island—New England it's called; there are three all in a line, and so across the farther creek to the mainland. It was just as simple as that."

He laid a stained, muddy automatic pistol on the table.

"Keep that for me, Stella. It's Mick's gun. But as I'm still under charge of murder I'd as soon not be taken with a gun on me. My story isn't going to help me much unless I've something to back it. And that's all, except that I tramped to Southchurch and on into Southend; the nearest town where there's a railway. Got there in the afternoon

"I hadn't a cent about me; nothing but the old silver watch. I hocked the watch with a Southend pawnbroker, bought this cloth cap for a shilling—a man with no hat attracts too much attention—and that left me with just the fare to town. And I came here, Stella . . . Maybe I oughtn't to, but I couldn't think of anybody to come to but you . . ."

Philip dropped back in the chair, his voice failing. His face was white and pinched; he seemed exhausted.

"I hate to bother you, but have you anything to eat in the place? Or a drink? I've been traveling against time, and the old silver watch didn't run to a meal—"

Stella sprang up.

A match flashed to the gas stove, she wheeled his chair to it, and running to the cupboard, brought out a tin of biscuits, the only food ready to hand. She snatched off the lid and put them before him; there was a bottle of burgundy on the top shelf that had been there a month. Stella dragged the cork out and poured the red vintage into a coffee cup that lacked a handle; there wasn't a glass in the room.

"Drink this!" she said, putting the cup to his lips. "I'll get you some hot food directly."

Her heart smote her as she heard his teeth chatter on the rim of the cup while he drank. She slipped an arm around his shoulders.

"Philip, you're wet through!" she said. "You can't sit in these clothes. Get your jacket off."

He laughed, caught her hand that was loosening the buttons of his coat, and kissed it.

"Let the old coat be! You aren't going to nurse me, Stella, you darling. This heartens a man more than wine—the wine's good, too! Fill it again." He crunched the biscuits between his strong, white teeth. "Don't worry about me. I'm ready to face 'em. And I'll beat 'em all. I'm officially dead. And a little wet and cold isn't going to hurt a dead man! They haven't done with me yet!"

"And you haven't done with me!" said Stella "Get out of this jacket I tell you; I'm not going to let you catch your death of cold."

He laughed, and yielded.

She hung his coat over the gas stove, and taking down her fur coat from its hook, draped it deftly and warmly about his shoulders as he sat before the fire.

"I'VE told you why I wasn't here to face that charge," he said. "You believe me, don't you?"

"Believe! Of course I do. If I didn't believe in you, Philip, I—well, I wouldn't care to go on living. I've got you back, and we'll face this together."

"That's just how I feel. I've been through so much that I couldn't lose you. And whatever I am, you won't find me a coward. Now I want to hear what has happened to you."

"But, Philip—who was that man I saw on the night of the trial?"

"If you saw anything at all, it was because you were meant to see it. A man's profile on a lit blind. A fake put up by the man who planned the murder of Jermyn. You didn't see me. All you saw was a shadow. Unless you dreamed it."

"Dreamed it!" she said. "Did Sergeant Scarfe dream it, too?"

"Who?" he asked sharply.

She told him of her encounter with Sergeant Scarfe in No. 13.

Philip sat silent a few moments, staring into the fire.

"Scarfe, eh?" he said slowly. "He must have been pretty close on the heels of—the Shadow. And that's all he said to you! And what has he done about it?"

"So far as I know, he's done nothing—yet."

"There you are, then! This Sergeant Scarfe of yours was wise to that. He knew that whoever the man in that house might be, it couldn't be Philip Carson."

She nodded, watching him.

"I've an idea he knows more than that, Philip. I think he knows who the man was."

Philip's eyes narrowed

"That may be. The Yard generally knows what's doing. But—it looks as if he wasn't quick enough to get him. For the present, I should say that the Shadow Man has got away with it.

"You've heard of The Killer. There is a gang who have made a market in murder. The police know it. The motive behind Jermyn's murder was money. Just cold, hard dollars. His death, coming when it did, shook half the world's oil stock. If there was trouble here, in England, it's nothing to what there must have been on Wall Street. A million to scoop in, for those who knew when to scoop it. The man who killed him wouldn't get that. All he would get was the price that was paid.

"Now, the man who was in the inside ring of that gang, must have been Francis Valery. How he got into it, I can't tell. No one but himself has that knowledge, and he's taken it to his grave with him. We know that he died at Wandsmere this morning, and he was silent right up to the end. He got his price. And he was a dying man when he faced the judge. Hand me that note again, Stella."

He opened the written message.

"'F. V.' Francis Valery."

"Valery! Was he—?"

"The man you rode through the Borough Streets with on the night that Jermyn died Crooked as they make them, the man didn't live who could

beat him; but I never knew him to be crooked with women, and I didn't think he'd go back on me."

"You say you knew him?"

"No one better. I've never acknowledged this to anyone but you, Stella. I'm the only person living who can tell you who Francis Valery was, and how he came by his end, and why."

CHAPTER XXVI

Francis Valery

"TO place Francis Valery, Stella, we must cut back thirty years to the time of my father, and his brother Desmond Carson of Carrigaholt, County Donegal. Uncle Desmond was the family black sheep, and not the first in the Carson record.

"He married with some frequency. Two of his wives had money. Another was a Montmartre singing girl, Lola Valery, who had no money at all; Francis was her son. Uncle Desmond left Paris for Brisbane where he married an Australian lady, and while his three wives were looking for him in Australia, Desmond slipped away to the Society Islands and married a Society woman. As far as I know he died there.

"To return to Francis, son of Lola Valery, the Frenchwoman . . . He called himself Francis Valery. He hated his father, he never used the Carson name; of course he'd no legal right to it; he didn't want it anyway. Francis inherited a good deal of Uncle Desmond's temperment and twice his brains.

"I was his first cousin, and a year younger. He never troubled the family. He hated them all, and kept clear of them—all except me. I came across him early, and I liked him. He was as likeable a man as I ever met.

"I think he liked me. I helped him, once or twice. If he was straight with nobody else, he was with me in all our dealings. He had brains and the pluck of a tiger.

"He was in gaol more than once. He married, quite young, and went straight for a while, but he lost his wife, and drifted back into crookdom. There was one thing ought to have kept him level, and for a time it did; that was his boy, Sidney Valery. He was left with the kid when his wife died. Sidney was born a cripple, but he was the brightest, pluckiest kid you'd want to meet. It seemed to me he'd brains above the average. His father thought him a genius. In some ways his intelligence was uncanny. It wanted turning the right way."

Philip paused.

"What help I gave Francis, was mostly on Sidney's account. Sidney had no idea his father was a crook who had done several terms; he believed he was a sailor, often away on long voyages.

"Francis said to me once, 'If any man told Sidney the facts about me, I'd kill him without thinking twice. And I'm going to take care he doesn't take the road I've travelled.'

"In the early days, everything Francis could make went to the doctors, trying to get the boy's body right. But a cripple he'd always be, and finding that was hopeless, he attended to his training. Francis Valery lived for him, worked for him, starved for him when things were tight, and rather than his boy Sidney should go wanting, if he couldn't get money honestly, he'd steal it.

"I LOST sight of them for a long time, and supposed they must have gone under altogether. Two years back, however, I ran into Francis

Valery at Cardiff Docks—after a four years' gap.

"'Flip,' he said—he always called me Flip, 'Francis Valery and his record are dead and buried. I've done with all that. Frank Vance is my name. And henceforth I'm going straight. I've reformed.'

"All I said was, 'How's the boy?'

"'Sid is doing fine,' he said, and then he hesitated. 'He remembers you. Would you like to see him?'

"I said I would, and he took me to a decent small house behind the docks, where we got together with the boy—all three of us. The kid was always glad to see me—of course he didn't know who I was. His father's friend—that was enough for Sidney. Though Francis didn't much like it, the boy always called me 'Kinsman.' The likeness between us interested him. The difference was that, while I was clean-shaven, Francis generally wore a short trimmed brown beard. But he was uncommonly clever at altering his appearance.

"We Carsons come true to type as a breed of fox hounds. My father and Uncle Desmond were much alike in looks, and Frank's resemblance to me was uncanny; you'd have to stand us side by side in the daylight to tell us apart.

"Francis told me that Sidney—he was fourteen then—had always shown a natural turn for mechanics, and was to be trained as an engineer. I saw Frank several times after that, and finally, at the beginning of this year, he told me he was leaving for Germany and would be away a while. I knew nothing of his affairs, though he generally seemed to be abreast of mine. Three days later, I left for Mexico.

"The last time I ever set eyes on Frank Valery was at Waterloo station on the night of Jermyn's murder, and five weeks before he himself went to his death."

"At Waterloo! *You* met him there, Philip?"

"He met me. He knew when I was due, and as my train drew up he came along the platform and ducked into my carriage, and got me into the corridor on the off side of the train. He'd a big ulster buttoned round his chin, and he was in a hurry.

"'Flip,' he said, 'you've been a good friend to me. I want to warn you—keep away from Clive Jermyn. Keep clear of that damned uncle of yours. And Flip, I'm afraid I've done you a bad turn; if that's so, I'll square up in full for it—you'll forgive me. I shan't be troubling you much longer, and you won't bear a grudge against a dead man.'

"I asked him what on earth he meant.

"'The doctors tell me I'm going out,' he said. 'They give me a month or two, but I think I'm going sooner. Don't let that worry you; I'll be a damned good riddance, and I'll be glad to go. I'm only worried about Sidney. There'll be nobody to look after him. Flip, if I go under, will you do what you can for him? It's the last thing I'll ever ask of you.'

"IT was a shock for me. It looked to me as if he'd been doping himself. He told me what was the matter with him; I never felt sorrier for any one. Of course I said I'd look after the kid, but wasn't there anything I could do for him?

"'Nothing,' he said, 'unless you've a little money to spare. I haven't enough to get me through the night.'

"I gave him what I had; ten shillings and some Mexican five-dollar

bills that he could change at a money office.

" ' Bless you, Flip!' he said, ' you've never gone back on me when I was in trouble—and I hate to go back on you. You'd better not be seen with me. Good-by, old man, and good luck to you.'

" He slipped away out of the carriage and was gone. The thing shook me up. I didn't know what to make of it. When I got out, I saw him going into a telephone booth. I checked my baggage and went after Frank to have it out with him. I couldn't find him; he'd left the booth. And then—I saw you, Stella! Over beyond the end of No. 2 Platform."

" That's right! I was there, looking for you—"

" You were! With Valery. But by the time I reached the outside rank, you were both off in that taxi as if the devil were after you.

" I saw your cab turning out through the station exit; I remember there was a black car a little way behind it. And there I was—left. I grabbed the first taxi, and told the driver to follow yours.

" But when we got into the Waterloo Road you were out of sight. The traffic was all held up. The next thing I saw was a red police car, shooting along the street like a fire engine; where it went to I don't know. All I knew was that I'd lost you, and I was helpless. That was the worst two minutes I ever spent. I couldn't tell what devil's game Valery was up to. All I could think of was to get along here to your rooms and wait for news of you. I couldn't go to the police.

" Lord knows it was no fault of yours, Stella, no one could blame you that you mistook him for me. And looking back at it afterwards, I couldn't see that it was Valery's either. I saw him make a dive into that cab, and you in after him. Off you both went."

" Yes! that's just what happened."

" He had trouble enough on his hands that night. You must have been an added embarrassment to him."

" I was! I'd hardly got in when the chase started—it was dark in the cab . . . How could I know?"

" He'd got to make his getaway; he knew what he was up against. Of course he wouldn't give himself away to you. It must have been ghastly for you. Tell me, what did he do?"

She told him of the chase through the Borough, and how he left her on the curb in Exton Street. Philip listened.

" Well," he said slowly, " I'll set that to the credit side of his account. He got you out of that. Himself, too—he gave them all the slip! His hour of reckoning came later. It came when he was ready for it; he chose his own time. That's Valery!

" Valery was the man who got into Jermyn's house that night. It was Valery who unlocked the desk with Jermyn's keys; Valery who burned the letters. It was Valery who was seen leaving the house—not me. He recorded his confession, faced his trial, and went to his death. He was a man without hope, a dying man. He knew he would soon have to leave his son unprotected and destitute. He was willing to sell his neck, if the price was high enough. And so—he sold himself. Did he get the price? He did!"

" Do you mean," she said slowly, " that this man went to Jermyn's house with the deliberate intention of killing him? That he was nothing more than a hired murderer?"

" I don't know what took him to

Jermyn's house. I know what came of it."

CHAPTER XXVII

The Sacrifice

STELLA turned to him, her face white.

"Philip, did he kill Jermyn?"

"That's one thing I'm sure of. *He did not kill Jermyn!*"

"He believed *you* guilty!"

"Yes; he believed me guilty! Else he would certainly not have surrendered in my name. When he entered the library *Jermyn was dead.* Valery knew I had serious differences with Jermyn. More than likely he saw me go to the house; saw my interview with Beth Hammond in the street.

"Soon after that—it must have been less than twenty minutes—he got in. He says he broke in. I don't believe that; I believe he was admitted . . . the doors were left open for him. And he found the job done. Murder.

"Who had done it? He didn't know—he could only guess. He got busy. It was he who used Jermyn's keys, went through the desk, burned the letters—letters that he must have known about. Why did he do that? I can't tell you. He cleaned up the evidence—cleverly. Only one blunder he made in his hurry. He dropped one of those Mexican bills I gave him. Scarfe found it!

"Then he cleared. He was nearly trapped, yet he got clear easily enough . . .

"He was free. In the morning, every paper in England and America reported Jermyn's murder, and the hue and cry was out after me. Philip Carson wanted on a charge of murder! Every clew pointed to me. The evidence against me was overwhelming. At three o'clock that day Francis Valery stepped into the breach. He gave himself up.

"He was a dying man. That confession of his was a brilliant, gallant lie. It cost him his life. He gave that life to save me.

"It's the only explanation possible, Stella. He knew he could get away with it—unless I came forward to confront him, and claimed to be innocent. If I could have done that I could have cleared myself, but he didn't know that. Now it's too late. *You* couldn't have saved him, Stella.

"If you had got up on your feet in the Old Bailey and declared: 'This man is not Carson,' you'd have stopped the trial, but they'd have traced his record; a new indictment, a new trial, and he would still have hanged—as Francis Valery.

A little gasp escaped Stella.

"Philip, are you sure of that? If you knew how that thought had been torturing me . . . that if I had spoken I might have saved an innocent man."

"Just quiet your conscience on that point. Valery didn't wish you to speak, but if you had you could have done nothing for him."

"Yes, I see that now . . . All the same, I should have spoken—told them the truth. I would have saved *you,* if I had!"

"Would you? How?"

"Why, if the police had known you were missing they'd have searched for you and they'd have found you. Every newspaper in the country would have been full of it. You'd have been found and rescued . . . your name cleared."

"Rescued!" he smiled, a little grimly. "Within an hour of that news being broadcast, I would have been dead. My friend Mick, and his worthy partner Sam wouldn't have stood for

that. A bullet from Sam's gun and I'd have been food for crabs. They weren't taking any chances, and they wouldn't have waited for a police hunt.

"Who were those men, Philip?"

"You're asking me more than I can tell you. I believe they were after Valery; they were in the pay of this murder gang, and their orders were to get him. They'd lost him, and it was my track they picked up. Just why they were after Valery I can't tell you. All I'm sure of is that they took me for Valery. That's how I see it."

STELLA looked at him, turned away, and stared thoughtfully at the fire. Her heart sank. Was all this an ingenious lie—designed to cover that fatal absence of his? She thrust the thought away from her.

"Yes," she said. "I'm sure you're right. Philip—if you had been free—you would have gone to the police as soon as you knew—"

"Just as quick as I could get there. Can't you see that if I'd done that, *at the time,* I could have saved both Valery and myself! My evidence would have shown up that confession of his and torn it to pieces. No jury would ever have convicted him; not after I'd shown them why he made it—and that's what I would have had to do.

"Let them try me. I could have brought evidence that would have acquitted me, I could have proved my innocence. They would have released us both; the C. I. D. would have had to look elsewhere for the murderer of Clive Jermyn. That, if I could have done it at the beginning, would certainly have cleared me. But not now. It's too late.

"The case against me is black as pitch. 'Why did you not come forward and tell the truth, when this man was being tried for a crime of which he is clearly not guilty? Where were you when Clive Jermyn was murdered, why were you silent?' Who would believe my story? What is my alibi worth? Would Sam the Gunner and his dumb friend be likely to help me out?

"Who killed Clive Jermyn? We don't know. But I can tell you who'll answer to the charge. I've got to face it myself. It's not likely I can clear myself. The cold truth won't do it; it's as likely to hang me. My name is smudged for life; there's a stain on it that nothing will wipe out.

"If I return from the dead and have to account for myself—as Philip Carson—I'm in a deadly position. If I keep my freedom, start clear, assume any personality I choose, my position is immensely strong. Philip Carson is officially convicted, hanged, and under the flagstones at Wandsmere Prison. You can't hang a man twice. It would baffle the law to bring it home to me; if I'm in a tight place, so are the police.

"Frank Valery made things very safe for me. When he made that sacrifice, he laid a charge on me that he knew I would never betray. What did he expect me to do? Sit tight till it was over—to get out of the country? Isn't that the best thing to do?" His face was gray and drawn. "If I stay, I'll be bringing trouble on you. And if I go . . ."

He stood up and suddenly grasped her hands in his.

"If I say to you: 'I'm leaving England tonight; will you come to me when I send you word'—would you do it?"

There was a pause.

"Yes!" she said under her breath. "If you think that is the only way."

His hands tightened on hers. For a

moment there was silence; it was broken by three quick, light taps on Stella's door.

It sent a thrill of dismay through every nerve in her. The blood left her face.

"Philip," she whispered, "it's the police!"

She saw his eyes harden. He looked alert and dangerous.

"You mustn't be found with me, Phil!" She caught him by the arm. "You mustn't be found in my rooms. Quick—there's a way out at the back—"

"Too late for that," he said quietly. "Run for it? No! After all, why should I? They're as hard up against it as I am! Sure it's the police?"

"It's Magill!"

He looked at her quickly, a queer, dancing light in his eyes.

"Magill! Will I run away from Magill? Forget I was a fool just now, Stella—forget it for good and all. Magill, is it? Why, I've got him"—he opened his hand, clenched the fingers quickly together—"like that!"

He caught up the pistol from the cloth, slipped it into the table drawer, and closed it.

"Open the door. Let him in."

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK

Prison Rain Checks

ALL the prisoners of the Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, jail were recently released from the prison on tickets-of-leave. It happened when the insane hospital burned down. Having no other place to put the maniacs, and feeling safer with the convicts at large than the violently insane patients of the hospital, the authorities emptied the prison cells and told the inmates that they might go free until they found another place for the insane.

The city fathers of Charlottetown should have got together with those of Grandville, Michigan, for that town has a calaboose that they have no use for. The jail was inside the village hall and was left intact when recently they tore the hall down. Since a new structure was being built, they decided that they had no further use for the calaboose and offered it for sale for one hundred dollars cash.

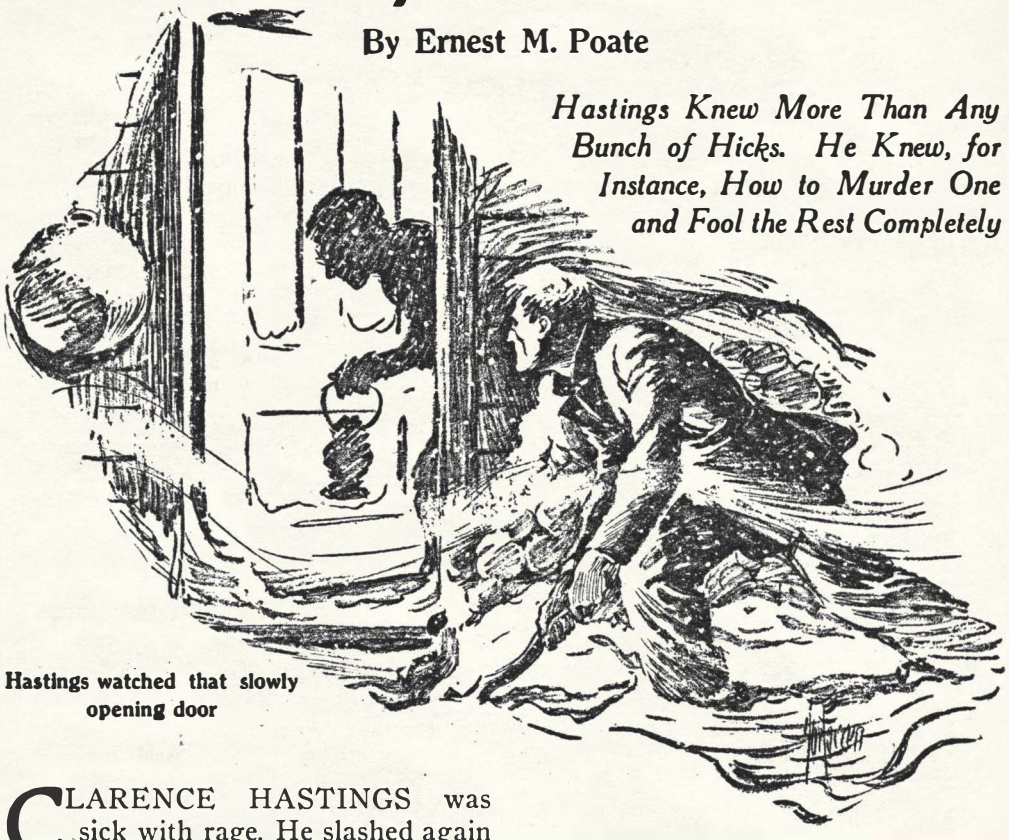
Here's a job for a good detective to solve the mystery of how Charlottetown can make use of Grandville's jail, and receive rewards for good service to both communities.

—Jay Carter.

City Slicker

By Ernest M. Poate

Hastings Knew More Than Any Bunch of Hicks. He Knew, for Instance, How to Murder One and Fool the Rest Completely



Hastings watched that slowly opening door

CLARENCE HASTINGS was sick with rage. He slashed again at his horse's flank, and the whip broke in his hand. He stared at its splintered stock, breathing heavily, spent and shaking with blind, animal fury.

The handsome bay gelding did not move. Feet planted firmly, head lowered, back a trifle arched, it continued to balk stubbornly. Clarence Hastings scrambled out of his rubber-tired runabout and groped his way, swaying a little, toward the beast's head. It looked around at him, ears laid back, the whites of its eyes showing; its sides, scored with whip-marks, heaved; it snorted defiance, hind feet dancing, fore-feet wide-set and firm-planted as ever.

There was foam on Clarence Hastings's lips. "You would, would you?" he muttered, drunkenly, and kicked the balky animal.

Someone laid a hand upon his shoulder. Hastings turned, staring dully. His eyes were blood-shot, his lips trembled; he seemed far gone in drink, though he was quite sober.

"Listen, Mister Hastings," said a placative voice. "That won't do no good. You're liable to lame him. Besides," as Hastings shook himself free, "he'll kick the daylights out of you in a minute."

Clarence Hastings swung back a foot, and the other, a tall, raw-boned individual with a long, thin, sadly humorous face, sighed in perplexity. "You're just making a show of your-

self," he argued. "Ever'body's looking at you. Better take the flivver and drive home, and leave me lead him in, after."

Clarence Hastings shook his head, as though to clear it. His vague stare focussed; he looked around, still panting and shaking.

He stood in the middle of Grantville's wide main street. All around, from parked cars, from wagons and buggies standing by the curb, from the sidewalks, from store windows, folk stared at him solemnly, and turned their heads to whisper, and stared again. Beneath Hastings's furious gaze, their faces were expressionless, but from the corners of his eyes the harassed man saw how they grinned and winked as soon as his glance passed them. Hastings drew a deep breath, and passed a hand across his forehead. Damned hicks! Of course they were looking at him, laughing at him, gloating over his misfortune, as they had ever since he first came to Grantville.

"All right, Taylor," he agreed, unsteadily. His fury past, he was shaken by self-pity: he could have wept. "All right. You take care of the blasted brute, and let me get out of this." He started toward the little car which was parked close by, and stopped short.

Beyond it stood a gaunt, stooped old man, clad in faded overalls and torn red sweater. He was chewing tobacco vigorously; his wispy, gray chin beard wagged to the movement of toothless jaws. Seeing Clarence Hastings, the old man grinned widely.

"Guaranteed yuh he'd stand without hitching!" he cackled. "Heh, heh!"

The man called Taylor came toward them with long, awkward strides, and laid his hand again upon Clarence Hastings's shoulder. "You'll just make it worse," he urged, in an undertone. "Just don't pay any attention to him, boss. Just go on home."

For an instant Hastings, tall, thick-shouldered and dangerous, towered above the little old man, then he yielded to Taylor's plucking hand.

"M-making a show of myself," he mumbled, thickly. "You could have told me, Lamont."

"Tried to," said Lamont Taylor, laconically. "Yuh wouldn't listen."

"Well, anyway—" Hastings climbed into the flivver and stamped upon its starter. "Well, anyway, I'll fix that old Dodge Morgan for this!"

He let in the clutch and drove off with a clashing and grinding of gears, while Taylor stared after him, sighing.

CLARENCE HASTINGS drove back to his new-bought farm, four miles out of Grantville, his mind a welter of sick regret and disgust. Why on earth had he ever been fool enough to want to settle out here in the sticks? He must have been crazy. Nothing had worked out as he'd expected.

City born and bred, Clarence Hastings had always cherished a secret longing for farm life. Always he had dreamed of a healthy, leisurely, outdoor existence; of managing a model farm, to the envious admiration of the surrounding natives. Thus, as a youth of nineteen years, he had jumped at the chance of becoming office-boy to the editor of the *Farming Journal;* it was next best, he told himself, to country life, and he would learn a lot which must be of use to him later.

He remained on the staff of the *Farming Journal* for ten years, working his way up from office-boy to assistant editor. With the help of Pouis-

sant on "Diseases of Domestic Animals," he conducted a column of veterinary advice to the apparent satisfaction of all, and thus convinced himself—though he scarcely knew a cow from a horse—that he was an authority on farm animals. For a while, also, he substituted for "Aunt Alice," and conducted her column of Advice to Young Lovers.

And then, a year ago, his Uncle James, whom he had never seen, died and left him a modest fortune—thirty-five thousand dollars. It wasn't riches, but it was enough. Forthwith, he bought himself a farm, and stocked it lavishly, and settled down, so he assured himself, to a life of happiness in the country. Armed with the knowledge acquired during his years on the *Farming Journal,* he could not help succeeding. He'd be able to farm so much better than the ordinary dull country hick; they would all admire him, and envy him, and seek his advice. Meanwhile, in his spare time, he would write the Great American Novel.

In spite of his longing for a farmer's life, Clarence Hastings held the born city man's patronizing scorn for all real hicks. He took it for granted that they must acknowledge his superiority, must see him as a man of wider vision, of more culture, than themselves—and also, of course, as a much better farmer. He would be the big toad, even if his puddle were small.

It hadn't worked out that way. It hadn't been like that at all. From the very first, these ungrateful hicks had been aloof, suspicious, quietly sarcastic. They had even seemed secretly amused, had been inclined to act as though *he* were the hick and they—Heaven knew why — were wiser and more experienced than he.

He had hired Lamont Taylor to run the farm — under his direction, of course. Hastings did not intend to stoop to drudgery, himself. Taylor did the actual plowing and dragging and seeding and harvesting, while he mapped out operations. And Taylor's wife, Sally, did the cooking and housework.

At first he had supervised the work very closely, ignoring his employee's suggestions. But after a few trivial errors, such as planting buckwheat in April, he withdrew very gradually, until Lamont Taylor practically ran the place unaided. The man was good enough, Clarence Hastings admitted, grandly, to manage the ordinary routine: he, the boss, could concentrate upon matters of strategy, such as the rotation of crops. And Taylor was always respectful; he had never caught the fellow grinning behind his back, as so many of the neighbors did.

The attitude of those neighbors perplexed Hastings. He couldn't understand them. One would have thought they'd be grateful, but they not only failed to act upon his freely given advice, they seemed to resent it. They even joked about it, led him on, in the stores or at the milk station, to give his views, and then laughed almost openly. He had come to Grantville in February, and now, though it was only December, he was already convinced that he had made a mistake.

But his gradually growing resentment against these ungrateful hicks had not crystallized until now. Old Dodge Morgan, whose house was scarcely a hundred yards from Hastings's, though on another road, had been disagreeable throughout, and had more than hinted that Clarence Hastings knew nothing about farming. At last, only yesterday, Morgan had driv-

en up behind this very bay gelding, and had offered to trade for Clarence's driving-horse.

Secure in the knowledge acquired on the *Farming Journal,* Hastings had agreed. He knew horse-flesh, he told himself; this old rube wouldn't get the better of him. He hadn't asked for a guaranty, preferring to depend upon his own judgment. Remembering this now, Clarence Hastings flushed darkly.

Taylor had tried to dissuade him, too, but he had made the trade. And Dodge Morgan, driving off behind Clarence's neat little roan mare, had called back, chuckling:

"You don't need no guarantee, seeing as you know all about horses. But I'll guarantee yuh this much: he'll stand without hitching. Yes, sir-ee. Anywheres!"

Remembering, Clarence Hastings ground his teeth. The dirty, cheating old skunk! He'd done it deliberately, just to make a better man ridiculous: and Clarence knew, now, that he had been driving about the countryside, spreading the story, ever since. No wonder all those rubes downtown had stared and giggled! They'd been expecting just this. And he, Clarence Hastings, had been held up for the ridicule of hicks by this evil old man . . . He wouldn't live it down for years . . .

II

CLARENCE drove faster, so that his flivver bounced and skidded over rough, frozen roads. It was cold and raw; four inches of snow covered the fields, and the roads were rutted with frozen mud. Why on earth had he ever been fool enough to come out here into the sticks?

His thoughts returned to Dodge Morgan. Against this old man he focussed all his disappointment, all the bitterness accumulated in his heart. Dodge Morgan became a symbol. He stood for all the troubles Clarence had had in Grantville. To the man's heated brain it began to seem that Dodge Morgan was to blame for everything.

Yes, it was a personal matter, now. Old Morgan had challenged him, had thrown down the gauntlet. He must get the better of Dodge Morgan, or he could never hold up his head again.

He'd punish that old cheat. He'd fix the fellow so—Clarence Hastings drove into his dooryard and stopped. Sitting in the flivver, he stared across the snow-covered field toward Dodge Morgan's house, and smiled a slow, cruel smile. He'd show these hicks! He'd prove himself smarter than any of them, as a city man should be. He'd find a way to punish Dodge Morgan, and no one—not one of these smart alecks—would ever guess how it was done, or that he had done it . . .

Dodge Morgan must die. It wasn't just that horse-trade, Clarence told himself: it was because the old fool had humiliated him, had gone out of his way to make him appear ridiculous. It was because—it was because he hated the toothless, grinning old fool, as he hated the whole village of Grantville, and its hayseed inhabitants. Dodge Morgan must suffer for the rest, whom he could not reach.

Hastings went into the farm-house, and to his own study. This was a large downstairs room, which faced Dodge Morgan's house. Looking out of the window, Clarence could see it across a snow-covered field, some three hundred feet away. The field lay virgin, its snow untracked, for there was no intercourse between the two houses. For all they saw of him, Morgan might have lived two miles away, for his

house faced another road, so that one must drive a mile or more to the cross-road, down that, and back along the other highway, to reach it.

Clarence Hastings rubbed his hands together with a pleased smile. Already his plan was complete. He glanced about the room. On a table at one side stood the dictophone which he used in composing the Great American Novel that should one day astonish the country. Being unwilling to pay for a secretary, he was accustomed to dictate into this machine, and to send the completed cylinders to town for transcription there. This, also, he decided, should bear its part in his scheme. On the wall hung a battered old megaphone, relic of Clarence's days as cheer leader for the Bronx high school football team. This, too, he could use.

He sat himself down and pondered deeply. Yes, the scheme was watertight. He couldn't be suspected; or, if he was, he'd have an unshakable alibi. All he need do was wait for a snow-storm, or for this snow to melt, so that his tracks wouldn't show across that field.

A snow-storm would be better, he decided. It would make the matter so much more puzzling. Meanwhile, he would watch and perfect his knowledge of Dodge Morgan's habits.

Each evening after supper, it was Clarence Hastings's habit to enter his study-room, and there, behind locked doors, to dictate for an hour or two upon his book. It was understood, already, that at such times he must not be disturbed. Each evening at seven o'clock, too, as he was aware, old Dodge Morgan emerged from his back door, lantern in hand, and went to the barn to bed down his stock. With the finicky exactness of an old bachelor, he appeared at exactly the same moment, nightly. One could have set a watch by his movements.

All that was splendid, Hastings told himself. And that very evening, behind a locked door, he busied himself in his study, making necessary arrangements. He removed the head-set and ear tubes from his dictophone, and after some tinkering succeeded in fastening that old megaphone to the machine with adhesive plaster. Thus he had a fairly adequate horn.

Now he slipped a filled cylinder into place, and started the machine. His own voice came back to him through the megaphone, distinct and clear, and almost as loud as if he were really speaking. Fine! Tomorrow he would start the machine when no one was about, and make sure that it could be heard through the closed door. Lamont Taylor and his wife were accustomed to sit in the dining-room, just outside the study door; they must be able to hear.

Last of all, with an alarm-clock from which he had removed the bell, and with some bits of string, Clarence Hastings constructed an ingenious device, whereby the jerkings of the alarm-clapper moved levers, and thus reset the dictophone, so that it would play the same record over again.

Now let it snow!

He was forced to wait for a week and more. He grew nervous and uneasy; he could not sleep, but lay awake enacting and re-enacting the drama which he had planned. Exhausted, he dropped into slumber troubled by horrid nightmares. His temper grew short; he could not eat. Lamont Taylor and his wife worried about him, but he snarled at their solicitude. The strain increased, until he could have screamed aloud. Fifty times a day he examined the heavens tensely, searching for

signs of snow. Time stretched interminably, yet all his sufferings merely fixed his purpose more firmly. Dodge Morgan should pay, also, for this time of anguish.

AND at last, after a morning of dampness and chill, raw mist that was full of the sounds of water, dripping from the eaves, trickling along the ground beneath the snow, there came a change. It grew colder; thick, gray clouds spread across the sky. Lamont Taylor rubbed a shoulder and said:

"They'll be snow before night. My rheumatiz is worse."

Clarence Hastings drew a long, quivering breath. His hands clenched; he could have shouted aloud. Taylor was right, he knew; the man was always right about the weather. Well, it was high time—yes, and long past time!

He watched the sky all day, unmindful of the others' curious glances; and at last, an hour before nightfall, he saw the first feathery flake of snow come drifting down. It was still thawing; the snow upon the ground had diminished perceptibly, but at last there was to be a storm. Clarence could not wait.

The early winter dusk fell, earlier even than usual because of the gray skies, and now it began to snow in earnest—great, soft, feathery flakes that dropped wetly, and melted on the window-panes, making them opaque.

Hastings choked down a tasteless supper, and at six o'clock locked himself into his study.

"Got a lot to do tonight," he said, and his voice was strange in his own ears. "Don't bother me for anything."

Within his own room, shades drawn tight—though the window-panes now began to frost over, so that none could have seen through them—Clarence Hastings set to work with fingers oddly numb and clumsy. He rigged up his dictophone, fastened the megaphone in place, slipped on a cylinder and played it over. It sounded exactly like his own voice; and he knew by last week's tests that it could be heard outside in the dining-room, where Taylor sat.

Now he ran a shade up part way, rubbed the glass clean and began to watch the formless bulk of Dodge Morgan's house, s c a r c e l y visible through the thickening snow. Yet he could see a lamp there . . . Absently, he talked aloud, at random, saying he knew not what. He must make sounds, must convince the Taylors that he was here.

He had a record already prepared: a half-chapter from his novel. With a cunning forethought which he was forced to admire, he had interspersed the dictation with a bit of whistling, and a strain from some old song. It was his habit when working to whistle occasionally, or hum a tune; and tonight, of all nights, everything must sound right.

Time dragged and dragged, but at last it was five minutes to seven. He wound his alarm clock, rigged its strings, adjusted them. Now, when he started the dictophone it would run through that prepared record. Within a minute or two afterward, the alarm would go off, and its bell-less clapper would jerk the strings, re-setting the machine so that it would play the same record over again . . . That, he calculated, would give him plenty of time.

Now! He must go. He drew a deep breath, opened the window wide, reached back to start the dictophone and slipped out. As he lowered himself to the ground, only a few feet be-

low, he heard the dictophone blare forth:

"Amy was filled with sudden fear. She screamed aloud—"

He chuckled, and set his face toward Dodge Morgan's house. The window he closed again, save for a crack.

III

THE air was thick with snow. Clarence Hastings noted this with satisfaction. If Taylor or his wife should glance out of a window —even though the glass had not been frosted over—they couldn't see far. It had grown much colder; there were icicles on the window-sill, and the snow flakes which had been large and soft and feathery were small now, and hard. They cut into his cheeks sharply. But the snow underfoot was still wet; it packed beneath his feet, and clung to their soles.

Hastings hurried across the field, head bent against the snow that drove into his face. He could see nothing of Dodge Morgan's house except the dim glowing of a lamp in the window. He shivered violently, between cold and nervousness, for he wore no coat or hat. It had seemed best that Taylor and his wife should know he had no overcoat in his room.

Here was Morgan's house. He almost blundered into it. Now he groped his way along the wall, to the back door. He'd have to hurry. It must be almost seven. He fancied he could hear the old man's shuffling steps, inside.

Beside the back door was a woodpile, and beside the woodpile, its blade sticking into a chopping-block, there should be a double-bitted axe. Clarence had often watched the old man out here, splitting wood . . . The axe must be here: it must, or his whole plan was ruined!

At last! He found it leaning against the wall, and breathed hard as he swung it tentatively. Now let Dodge Morgan emerge when he would. A sudden chill gripped Clarence Hastings: he shuddered convulsively, a faint, cold nausea stirring within him. But he dare not think, now, of what he was about to do.

There came Dodge Morgan, now! He heard the old man's step: waiting breathlessly, he followed his victim's leisurely movements, while snow flakes drifted steadily down and whitened his shoulders and his uncovered head. The old man was lighting his lantern. Clarence heard the clink of glass as he closed its chimney . . . And now Dodge Morgan's hand was upon the door-knob.

Clarence Hastings poised himself; he swung the axe up and back. His eyes were upon the crack of that back door as it widened slowly, slowly . . .

Out came Dodge Morgan, stooped and frail and unsuspicious. By the light of the swinging lantern the old man's face showed as if contorted into a toothless grin. Clarence shifted a foot; his grip tightened upon the axe-helve; he swung his weapon furiously, striking downward with all his force, straight upon the old man's unprotected head . . .

Dodge Morgan fell without a cry. The lantern dropped from his limp hand, rolled over twice, and flickered out.

No need for another blow. Morgan was dead—rather horribly dead. The murderer dropped his axe and fled across the snow-covered field.

His thoughts raced aimlessly, like mice in a cage, around and around. Could he ever forget that last glance at Dodge Morgan's gashed head? But he mustn't think of such things now. It was snowing harder than ever, and the

murderer noticed this with delight. Already the tracks he had left on the way over were drifted almost full; in ten minutes no one could guess that any man had passed that way.

Already his blind, plunging run had brought him home. Half amused, half frightened, Clarence saw that he had almost missed the corner of his house. What if he'd lost his way in the snow and dark? What if he'd passed by the house, to wander on through the cold?

He hadn't. He was safe, now, his lighted window only ten feet away. He changed his course.

Another thirty seconds, and he had pushed the sash up, had scrambled into the warm, quiet room. Clarence Hastings shook himself violently, brushed off what snow he could, and closed the window behind him. That trusty dictophone was still at work, grinding out his own words:

" The woman sobbed faintly. Now she was alone indeed, deserted by her last friend. Now—"

Let it go on. Let it finish, while he caught his breath; then he would take its place, and dictate another chapter. He was flushed with triumph, now he felt quite in the mood to write a masterpiece. Hadn't he just proved his own ingenuity, his own genius? He guessed Dodge Morgan wouldn't laugh at him again. None of these hicks would dare laugh at him now, if they knew . . .

In high good humor, Clarence Hastings began to sing to himself: " Betty Co-ed with eyes of blue!" He bustled about, chuckling beneath his breath; he removed the megaphone and hung it in its proper place upon the wall. He untied those strings, screwed the bell of the alarm-clock back into place and set the clock upon its shelf. Everything was in shape, now.

He gave a final glance about. The room was orderly; nothing was out of place. His coat was drying rapidly, hung over a chair-back by the stove. He took off his wet shoes and tucked them beneath the sofa in one corner, putting on a pair of slippers. Seven-twenty, the clock said. It hadn't taken him long!

Hastings opened the door. In the dining-room, Lamont and Sally Taylor sat by the table. The man read a newspaper, while his wife darned socks. They both glanced up, surprised.

" I'm out of matches," said Hastings. " What time is it?"

Lamont Taylor consulted his silver watch. " Seven-twenty-two. Ain't going to quit work this early, be you?"

" No-o. But I think I'll leave the door open. It's getting colder. I've got some writing to do."

He took a few matches from the safe on the mantelpiece, and went back into the study, being careful to leave the door open so that Taylor, whenever he looked up, could not fail to see him there, bent over his desk. Now who, the man asked himself in secret triumph, who could ever dream that he had left this house tonight—that he had been gone long enough to commit a murder?

IV

CLARENCE HASTINGS slept well that night, and awoke just as the sun's bright rim peered over the eastern hills. He leaped out of bed and ran to the window. As far as the eye could reach, the fields all about lay white and virgin, unmarked by any foot-fall. Clarence laughed aloud.

A hundred yards away, Dodge Morgan's house stood empty, and all about it lay untrodden fields. When, at last,

these hicks found the old man's snow-covered corpse, they'd be puzzled indeed. Likely they'd think his murderer had come in an airplane, or maybe that he'd worn wings. They were fools enough, the stupid, superstitious idiots! But certainly he, Clarence Hastings, could never be suspected. Even if that untrodden expanse of white hadn't proved his innocence, Lamont Taylor and his wife would swear that he'd been in his own room every minute.

Clarence dressed light-heartedly, humming to himself. His conscience was untroubled; he felt no emotion, save a mild curiosity. He wondered when and how the old man's corpse would be discovered, that was all.

It came rather sooner than he had expected. While they were at breakfast the telephone rang, and over the party-line Sally Taylor heard the news. She retailed it to the men, interrupting herself with exclamations of horror.

Some wicked tramp had murdered Dodge Morgan with his own axe, it seemed. The driver of the milk-truck had found the old man's milk-stand empty of cans, and, seeing no smoke from his chimney, had gone to investigate. Almost at once, he had stumbled over Dodge Morgan's frozen body.

"I declare to goodness!" cried Sally Morgan. "Lamont, didn't I tell you they must be somepin wrong? We could hear the cows bellering so, Mister Hastings: didn't you hear them? I knew Dodge couldn't of milked this morning. It does beat all what these tramps'll do. I do hope the sheriff catches him right away. Why, we might all be murdered in our beds!"

At ten o'clock, Sheriff Earl Farley appeared, lank and stoop-shouldered and taciturn, tugging at his drooping mustache, to ask a few inept questions. Clarence Hastings could scarcely keep a straight face, the fellow was so obviously bewildered and helpless.

"Can't you tell anything by the tracks?" he asked, and the sheriff blinked faded eyes.

"They wasn't any tracks," he explained, dully. "Snowed most all night, and covered 'em all up. Maybe—" But he broke off here, his faded eyes wandering, and tugged again at his mustache.

"Didn't you have a kind of a run-in with old Dodge?" he asked Hastings, vaguely. "Seems as if I'd heard—"

Clarence forced a laugh. "Oh, no! Nothing, only he kind of did me on a horse-trade. But I didn't hold anything against him for that. You ought to get busy, Sheriff," he went on, severely. "You ought to get right to work and catch the scoundrel that killed poor old Mr. Morgan. Maybe if you got some good detective down from the city—"

"Oh," said Sheriff Farley. "Yes. A city detective . . . Uh-huh. We-ell, likely he mightn't know so much about how things goes out here in the sticks."

His manner was entirely courteous; there was no least hint of a smile upon his sadly solemn face. But Clarence Hastings flushed darkly. Still rubbing it in, were they, about his being from the city? Maybe if they knew, they wouldn't be so smart.

"Of course you'll have to manage it your own way," said Clarence Hastings stiffly. "Only, I'll bet you never catch the man."

"Likely we won't. You never can tell." Sheriff Farley sighed, and turned away.

THEREAFTER, nothing seemed to happen. Dodge Morgan's murder furnished a topic of conversation all over the county; it was discussed and re-discussed, and every

farmer within twenty miles had his own theory and his own suggestions. But Sheriff Farley did nothing except sit around his tiny office in the Grantville jail.

Exasperated, Clarence Hastings taxed him with his inefficiency.

"Why don't you do something?" he demanded. Already it had begun to seem to Hastings as if some stranger had committed this crime. He had almost forgotten his own part in it.

Sheriff Farley only eyed him mournfully, and tugged at a drooping mustache. "Do something?" he repeated. "W'y, Mister Hastings, I am! . . . I'm a-waiting."

Hastings laughed aloud, sneeringly. He felt perfectly secure. "Waiting for what?" he challenged. "For Christmas?"

"No-o. Prob'ly it'll be some time after New Year's." And with that cryptic utterance the sheriff left the subject.

And so things went on very much as before, and Clarence Hastings felt quite happy and content. He had proved his own superior cleverness; he'd punished his chief enemy, and if these hicks only knew what he knew, they'd realize that he was a man to be feared. Maybe, he told himself, relishingly, he'd kill another of them some day, just to keep his hand in. It was easy—almost too easy to be interesting.

Christmas came, and passed, and New Year's Day also. And the weather continued to be bright and cold, and the snow lay on the ground undiminished. The first week of January passed, and the second.

And then, one afternoon, the skies clouded over, and a warm, damp wind blew up from the south, and it began to rain in little gusts and spatters. Lamont Taylor squinted at the western sky. "We're about due for the January thaw," he prophesied.

It grew warmer momently, and by dusk it was raining steadily: a straight, dreary downpour that melted icicles from the eaves like hot water. The night was filled with the sounds of water dripping, running, gurgling: it dripped from the roof, it pattered down from the sky, it trickled and ran in growing streams along the ruts of the frozen roads. Across the fields, in swales and low-lying places, small rivulets appeared, and ran together into brooks. The January thaw had set in.

V

CLARENCE HASTINGS went to bed quite cheerfully, filled with a sense of well-being. He lay and admired his own cleverness until the restful sound of the rain lulled him to sleep.

He over-slept. It was full day when he awoke, and the rain was still falling steadily. He yawned, and dressed himself, and descended the stairs.

The dining-room was empty, but he heard voices from his own room, and so stepped to the door and peered in.

Lamont Taylor stood there, looking very uncomfortable, and, strangely, Sheriff Earl Farley was with him. The two men turned at Hastings's entry and eyed him unsmilingly.

Then the sheriff went on talking; he ignored the owner of this house. "You say you heard him, 'Mont? What's he doing—talking to himself?"

Taylor fidgeted. "W'y, no. Talking into that thing. He—he's writing a novel-book."

"Huh." The sheriff bent over the dictophone, breathing hard. "Kind of a graphophone, ain't it? Yeah. Well, couldn't it of been this here that you heard, and not him at all?"

Clarence Hastings had begun to perspire freely. He wiped his forehead with an unsteady hand. "You can't hear it," he put in, and his voice was strained. "You have to wear these ear-pieces, see?"

"It's just like a regular graphophone," the sheriff argued. "S'posing he fixed a horn onto it? They's one hanging up there." He pointed to the megaphone on the wall. "I bet anybody could hear it outside, then."

He turned, and for the first time addressed Clarence Hastings. "Want to try and see?" he challenged.

Clarence strove to seem bewildered. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"About old Dodge Morgan being killed, a while back."

"But— But you can't— I was right here in this room. Taylor and his wife saw me—heard me. You can't prove—"

"Heard you, or this here?" inquired Farley, skeptically.

Clarence Hastings began to tremble. His knees knocked together. This sudden attack unnerved him. Then he plucked up heart. "Fiddlestick!" he cried boldly. "I'd have left tracks, wouldn't I, if I'd gone out?"

The sheriff laid a hand upon his shoulder, and led him gently toward the window. Clarence resisted hopelessly, but his fascinated eyes were drawn in the direction of the other's pointing finger. He stared through the glass.

Outside, the field lay bare and brown; the snow had vanished, washed away by last night's thaw. The field was bare and brown—except where a series of shapeless, dirty-white lumps led straight to Dodge Morgan's house and back again in a double line. They were gouts of stained and frozen snow, and some of them still preserved vaguely the imprint of a man's foot.

"I was just waiting for this thaw," said the sheriff, mildly, "to see if something like this hadn't happened. They wasn't any tracks acrosst that field before Dodge Morgan died, because 'Mont, here, remembers. And that night it snowed." He paused, a contemptuous pity in his faded eyes.

"Seems like," said Sheriff Farley, "seems like even a city slicker had oughta know that foot-marks in wet snow 'll pack down so's you can see 'em when there comes a thaw."

Clarence Hastings said nothing. His tongue was thick and numb; he could not control it. His shoulders were bowed, and a tight band seemed drawn about his forehead.

But he must say something, must deny, excuse. He wet his lips.

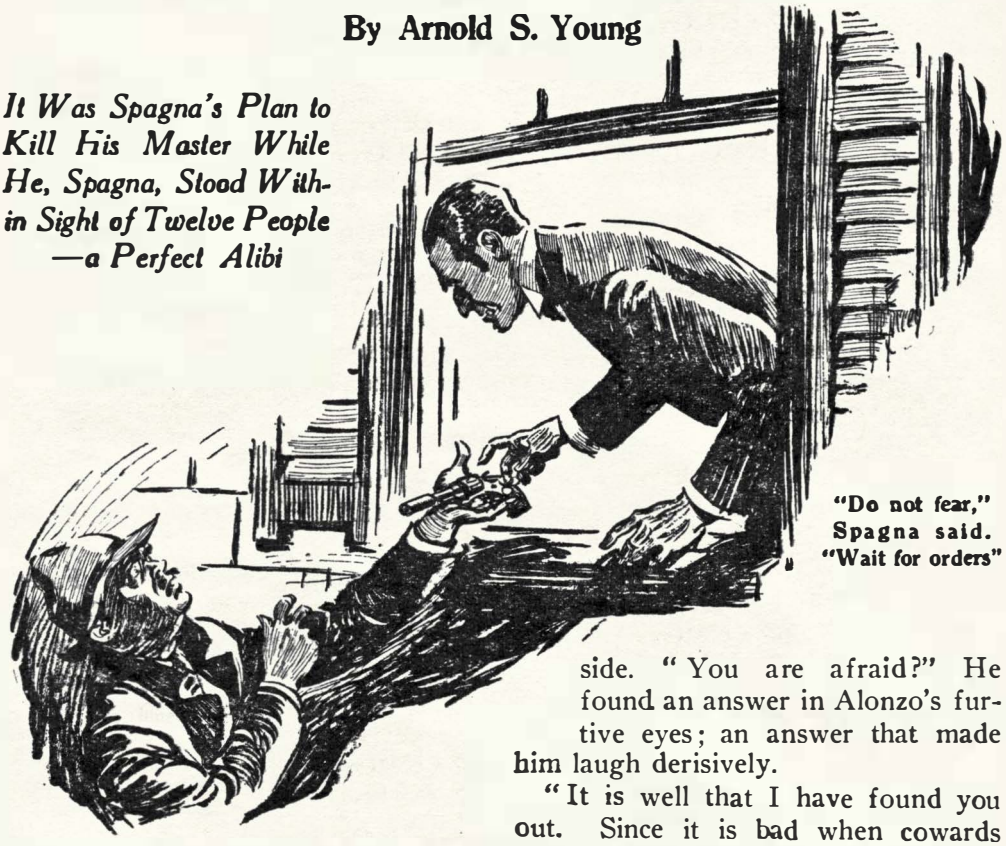
"The—the axe slipped," he muttered, and stopped short. What had he said?

"Better not say anything more," advised Sheriff Farley, almost kindly.

Canned Justice

By Arnold S. Young

It Was Spagna's Plan to Kill His Master While He, Spagna, Stood Within Sight of Twelve People —a Perfect Alibi



"Do not fear," Spagna said. "Wait for orders"

"TONIGHT I will kill him!" said Hugo Spagna. The sibilant threat came from the gash of a mouth that was the finishing touch to his vicious face and mood. A confident gleam in his smouldering black eyes, he caressed the revolver with the silencer. "Tonight you will help me right many wrongs, Alonzo."

The heavy-set man in the chair by the window squirmed and ran pudgy fingers around the collar of his blue shirt. "I do not like this business," he mumbled. "Yesterday they electrocuted Jimmy Hale. He too planned what you call the perfect murder."

Spagna's eyes narrowed. Three quick steps brought him to the other's side. "You are afraid?" He found an answer in Alonzo's furtive eyes; an answer that made him laugh derisively.

"It is well that I have found you out. Since it is bad when cowards mix in murders, I release you from our agreement. Alone I will kill that Tierney dog. But mark this well. *All* the profits shall be mine."

A mute plea appeared in Alonzo's eyes.

"You—you will lend me the money as you promised, Hugo?"

"No! You have ruined my plans. It is only just that I ruin yours." Spagna laughed again. "When the prison doors close on you, regret will eat your heart out. You will soon learn that it would have been better to help me—even if you were to die in the chair—than live in that hell for twenty years."

Alonzo gasped. "T-twenty years?"

"Fool! Count yourself lucky if you get less. One pays heavily for the crime you committed—that kind of an assault. But since you prefer prison to a few minutes safe work with me . . ." He shrugged his narrow shoulders and gesticulated idly.

A bead of perspiration rolled down Alonzo's temple. He weakened. "There will be no mistakes, Hugo? No small error that will pave the way to the chair—for both of us?"

Spagna walked over and laid a hand on his friend's trembling arm. "We cannot fail," he purred. "Tierney himself has set the stage and insured our success. I will strike at the earliest moment; then meet you at my rooming house. We will take a train to Philadelphia. At noon tomorrow the steamship Florenza sails for Barcelona. Ah, Alonzo, I picture the district attorney's rage when he discovers that you have jumped bail and disappeared on the eve of your trial. I picture us back in dear old Spain with pockets full of money for sweet wines and fair ladies. For many years we shall live handsomely on the profits of this night's work."

Alonzo moistened his thin lips, turned up his worried face. "Are we not fools? I think always that it were better we just be thieves. It is the murder that makes my stomach roll, Hugo."

"It is his life I want more than all else!" Spagna said. "For years the dog has abused my very soul. Only his life will make me live contentedly."

HE paced the room like a lion, with Alonzo's worried eyes always on his flushed face. Suddenly he paused.

"This very morning the dog loads my back with the last straw. I am fired, he said. Fired, Alonzo! After suffering his thrusts for five long years. But Hugo is clever. Though I itch to strangle him, I make myself as a worm. I grovel at his boots; I beg another chance. Because there is to be a party tonight, the fool agrees, not knowing that long ago I have vowed to kill him before I leave his house for the last time."

"The—the red-headed one is at the bottom of all your troubles. Is it not so, Hugo?"

"The red-headed one! There is a shrewd brain beneath that curly fire, Alonzo. How else does a maid elevate herself to be a wealthy man's secretary? And could one so poor as I expect favors as of old, once Tierney becomes spellbound by her charms? She has cast me aside for him—and there you have another reason why the dog squeals away his last minute of life tonight. Through her I shall strike at him; through him I shall crush her. It has all been thought out, Alonzo; thought out and waiting for this very night. I need but your insignificant help to collect my dues. You are decided?"

Twice Alonzo gulped and thought of tomorrow's trial. "I—I will help you."

Spagna sucked in a breath of relief.

"A sensible decision! One you shall never regret." He thrust the silenced revolver and a bill into Alonzo's quivering hand. "Here is five dollars for car fare and drinks to steady your poor nerves. At ten o'clock tonight you will be at the kitchen window of the Tierney house. In the darkness you will be safe. I will call for the gun. When I have finished, I will pass it back—with enough jewels to make us kings in our native village. You remember the wooden bridge over the river behind the house?"

"Y-yes."

"You will drop the gun into the muddy water and hurry to my room as fast as cars and legs will carry you." He reached for Alonzo's hand. "I owe you much, my friend. I will never forget. *Adios.*"

But Alonzo sat like one paralyzed. "Is it not better you reveal your plans? Perhaps the things that burn within, blind you to some small mistakes that will pave the way to—"

"Mistakes? Bah! For long, maddening years I have kept my mind on this. In good time you shall see how clever I am and how safe I have worked."

Spagna left the dismal room. Certainly this was a heaven-sent night: the long dreamed of night that would transform him from a sniveling valet and cook to a gentleman of leisure in that sleepy Spanish village beyond Barcelona. He turned his eyes toward dark skies and breathed a prayer of thanks.

"I shall laugh when he kisses the red-head for the last time! I shall be reborn when the red-head looks on his cold face, when the house full of guests discover the death of Mr. Hellingswell J. Tierney!"

As he rode toward the remodelled farm house on the outskirts of Clearwater, he retraced every step of his plan. It was perfect!

II

AT nine o'clock Spagna peered out of the pantry adjoining the luxurious dining room. A dozen guests lingered over coffee and cigarettes. At the head of the long table dotted with silver candelabras and urns filled with chrysanthemums, sat the heavy-jowled master. Spagna had eyes only for the vulgar diamond shirt studs, the huge diamond ring on the finger of the hand holding the solid gold cigarette holder, the diamond on the hand clasped over the carved lion's head on the arm of the chair.

"Red-head!" he growled beneath his breath as his half closed eyes shifted to the vivid girl at Tierney's side. "You do well to hang on his every word. Soon he will speak no more!"

He drew back, stepped quickly into the kitchen. The extra help had obeyed his orders. The untidy room was deserted. It was time to get down to business. He tip-toed up the rear stairs, then down a long, soft-carpeted hall.

Quietly he entered the master's bedroom, slipped on a pair of white gloves and shifted an oil painting near the solid mahogany dresser. It had taken him almost two years to get the combination of the wall safe. A good investment! In a minute he dropped the contents of three jewel caskets into a handkerchief, stuffed the white linen into his pocket, and padded from the room.

Nerves tingling, he hid the loot behind the clock ticking away on top of the white cabinet in the kitchen. He went back to the pantry and half-heartedly resumed polishing silverware.

An eternity, it seemed, until the musical laughter of the red-head drifted to him. He saw her clinging to his arm, leading the guests to the spacious living room off to the left. Spagna tensed and listened.

"There are no radios in hell, master!" he muttered as the blare of improper tuning grated on his ears. "And you shall dance differently down there—soon."

Twice anxiety got the upper hand, made him thrust his head out of the

kitchen window and peer into the pitch black silence. The third time his heart raced.

"Alonzo," he called cautiously.

A phantom figure came stealthily to him. Without a word a silenced gun, balanced on a quivering palm, came over the sill. Spagna grasped the weapon.

"Do not fear," he said nervously. "Here is part of a lifetime of easy living. You will wait for orders."

Hugo's finger closed on the precious handkerchief. "Hurry, Hugo. Hurry lest I—"

"Be quiet! The fools dance and drink themselves into a fog. But they will serve the same Hugo they wipe their clumsy feet on. You shall see."

He drew away as a familiar voice shrilled his name. He dropped the gun on the porcelain table, threw a dish towel over it. As he entered the pantry, the red-head pushed open the door at the other end. Spagna approached her.

"Mr. Tierney wants two bottles of that last gin and . . . Will you stop looking at me like that?" she said.

He edged closer, eyes boring into her uneasy face. "I have never looked at you like this before? You know better! Though I have loved you from a distance, time makes me bold and tonight it suits my purpose to have you come here. It is as if you knew how much I need your presence. Ah, you do not understand?"

She backed away from him, face ashen, her fingers brushing the curly red hair from her high forehead. "If you touch me I'll tell Mr. Tierney."

Spagna chuckled. He knew she was going to scream. It was not his plan to have *two* people in the kitchen. Swift as light he seized her, drew her close, sealed her mouth with his lips. Her sharp nails ripped down his cheek. The instant his fingers loosened she wrenched free and ran out.

"Perfect!" mumbled Spagna. Quickly he entered the kitchen, picked up the gun, and stepped behind the open door of the broom closet. If things worked as he prayed they would, a raving mad Tierney would soon come.

SPAGNA waited, every nerve tense, eyes riveted to the tiny pane in the swinging kitchen door. Music and hilarious voices drifted from the living room. Those sharp, furious steps were the master's! The red-head had fallen into his plans as perfectly as though he had rehearsed her.

"Hugo!" Tierney roared the name as he thrust in his head.

"Here, sir," answered Spagna calmly, hoping the master would come closer.

"You swine! How many times have I told you what I'd do if you ever laid a finger on Miss Rhodes? How many times . . ."

His chin sagged; the fire in his eyes died when he saw the weapon in that tense hand.

Spagna grinned. "I treat you splendid, do I not? I let you die to music. Because it suits my purpose. That damnable jazz will spare your guests the shock of hearing you scream."

Tierney stood like a man suddenly paralyzed. "You—you wouldn't . . ."

"I assure you! It will be small pay for the years I've worked here with you; treating me like a dog, telling me what I may and may not do. Then those diamonds you wear, that wallet from which you have drawn my crumbs for five long years. And the red-head, master, the red-head I might

have had but for you. Ah, it is a pity that I can kill you only once."

Tierney's head spun. He was in the hands of a madman. "You can't do this, Hugo," he said, as if he knew better.

The steady finger on the trigger stiffened. Tierney cried out and spun toward the door. A finger of flame leaped at him as he reached the table. He swayed, steadied himself against it, his weight moving it back toward the dish closet. As he slumped to the tile floor, a second bullet plowed into his back.

There was death in that shudder and sudden forward pitch.

Without a glance at his victim, Spagna peered through the pantry. The radio was going full blast; the guests were unaware of events. His eyes dropped to the corpse. Without a glance to left or right he greedily removed the fat wallet from an inner pocket of the tuxedo, ripped the studs from the glossy shirt front and the rings from the fat fingers. Unstrapping the expensive wrist watch, he darted to the window.

"Alonzo!" he breathed. "Alonzo!"

A HEAD popped up. One look at the sprawled figure and Alonzo's mouth stood agape.

"It is done," whispered Spagna. "Done to perfection. Will you cease whimpering and listen? On you both our lives may depend. No less! Here are more profits. Take the gun also. Do you see that clock on the cabinet? It is now exactly eleven o'clock. You will remove the silencer from the gun. At precisely five minutes past eleven you will lean over this windowsill and fire two shots. That is clear?"

Alonzo nodded. But suddenly the blood left his haggard face. "Hugo! You have made the single mistake. We are doomed. We are—"

"Shut your fool mouth. Do as I say."

"But don't you see? The bullets will imbed themselves in the walls. The guests will hear two shots. There will be two bullets in the walls, two in his body. Four bullets and only two shots heard. And if I fire the shots out here, that radio inside will drown the noise."

Spagna laughed. "Imbecile! For five years I have figured on this night of nights. You will fire the shots in this room to make certain they are heard. There will be no bullets in the walls—because the four remaining chambers are filled with blanks. Fail, and electricity will make you much warmer than the cowardice that makes you sweat now."

He turned away. But Alonzo snatched at his arm. "I am to throw the gun in the river and then go to your room?"

"And wait there. The police will probably hold me with the others. But they will prove nothing and I will soon be at liberty. *Adios.*"

He inched past the corpse and entered the pantry. All that remained to be done was to establish an alibi that no sane man could refute. He chuckled as he set two bottles of gin on a silver tray and nonchalantly walked into the living room.

The twelve guests were enjoying themselves without stint; the radio was still blaring. Spagna could feel the red-head looking at him from an easy chair in a far corner. He skirted four dancing couples, filled every glass in sight, gradually worked around to the second of his arch-enemies. He dared smile at her.

"The master orders an apology,"

he said smoothly. "It is well his heart is big and filled with forgiveness."

She looked straight into his hard eyes. "You'll leave or I will. I'm going to tell him so right this minute."

Spagna's heart raced. Four minutes past eleven; one full minute to go before the master would be "murdered by prowling burglars"; but that minute loomed like an eternity. Panic seized him; he stood directly in her path.

"The master has gone down to the wine cellar. If you will wait until I empty the ash trays, I will inform him of your desires."

But she pushed past him. Spagna's nerves snapped. To reach the cellar stairs she must pass through the kitchen. For half a second fear blinded him. Then, just as the red-head reached the alcove, something snatched Spagna back from hell.

"Dance, Miss Rhodes?" A tall, blond man took her slender arm. "I've been waiting all evening to steal one away from Mr. Tierney."

The killer poured out his silent thanks in one breath. He began to make the round of trays heaped with ashes and cigarette stubs. The watch on the wrist of a frail looking brunette read precisely five minutes after eleven.

"That fool Alonzo!" thought Spagna. "It is time. Already these people look at me and wish I'd get back into my kennel."

But he dared not leave the room. His very life depended on being within sight of twelve people when Tierney was presumably murdered. His hand began to tremble as hour-long seconds ticked away. A cold sweat gathered on his throbbing temples; his throat felt parched, his tongue thick. Mentally he prayed. Then, so suddenly that he was genuinely startled, came the sound of sounds; two sharp cracks of a gun!

The man dancing with the red-head was the first to recover his wits. "The kitchen!" he shouted, and hurried toward it, with the others behind him.

Spagna grinned as the red-head snatched up the phone and whimpered a call for the police. And all the while her accusing eyes were on his face.

At the kitchen door the guests huddled and jabbered as the blonde man squeezed himself through. Quickly he returned. His face was solemn, white; as if he were sick to his stomach.

"He—he's dead," he announced weakly. "Dead. And his diamonds are gone. One of the bullets pierced a large can of corn meal. It's still dribbling out."

The red-head's scream brought blood rushing to Spagna's face. Never had he heard such music. He did not try to save her as she sagged in a dead faint.

"It is perfection itself," he mused. "All twelve of them must admit I was in the living room when the shots were fired. I have not failed."

There was a smirk on his swarthy face as he watched the attempts to revive the red-head.

III

SPAGNA rated the police service excellent indeed. Shots at eleven-five; two nattily attired motor cycle State Troopers in the living room at eleven-fifteen.

"Fools! What can they see or do?" he asked himself as he obeyed orders and waited with the others in the living room.

He stood directly opposite the weeping red-head. The two young troopers were behind the closed kitchen door. Suddenly they joined the guests. That they should be calm and smiling made

the killer feel uneasy. He watched them walk over to the red-head and gently elbow aside two consoling gentlemen.

"Are you Miss Rhodes?" the one asked softly.

She choked back a sob, and nodded her head.

"How soon after the shooting did you phone?"

"Before I reached the kitchen door to investigate," the blond man volunteered.

"Who was in the kitchen last?"

"Hugo. But that was at least ten minutes before the shots."

Spagna returned the trooper's stare.

"That correct?"

"*Exactly five* minutes, sir," corrected Spagna with a stiff bow.

"Exactly?" The trooper grinned, looked at his watch. "That makes it just fifteen minutes ago."

"I am positive, sir, because I looked at the clock on the cabinet. Parties are no pleasure for me. Since they generally break up shortly after midnight, I keep watching the clock to see how much more I must endure."

"Okay. At eleven sharp you left the kitchen. At five minutes after eleven Mr. Tierney was murdered. Where were you when the shots were fired?"

"In this room serving refreshments, sir," said Spagna amiably.

"He was right beside me," affirmed the frail looking brunette.

The iron-bound alibi did not affect the trooper. But his steady stare annoyed Spagna.

"I am indeed fortunate," ventured the killer. "Were you not in this room at the time, suspicion would point to me."

"Why?"

"Since you will doubtlessly learn of it soon, I myself will tell you that there was bad feeling between Mr. Tierney and myself."

"Immaterial!" snapped the trooper. Then his sharp blue eyes fell on four vivid red lines on Spagna's vicious face. "Hello!" he exclaimed, brows arched.

"The price of a kiss," explained Spagna, an insinuating glance at the red-head. "It was not worth it."

Every eye in the room turned on him. The glares were wasted. Spagna continued to study both troopers' faces; the one absolutely blank, but determined, the other solemn and reflective.

"That will be all. You may all go home if you want to," said the solemn one. "We'll stay until the coroner arrives."

Spagna felt like singing with joy. This was assurance of complete success. But like a man who cannot drink good liquor without some comment, he had an irresistible urge to talk.

"The work of prowling burglars, is it not?" he asked.

"Yep! The work of . . . You can go whenever you want to."

Fighting back a desire to laugh, Spagna succeeded in making a wry face. Besides, he'd feel more comfortable if the red-head went *first*.

"I should be honored if I could do anything to help catch the thieves. Perhaps it will be better if I . . ."

"You'd only be in the way. Good night. Pleasant dreams."

Spagna took his hat and coat from the kitchen closet. He went out the side door, walked up the cement path alongside the squat house, cast a side look into the brightly lighted room. He chuckled. The troopers were escorting the red-head to the front door.

"Fool!" Spagna grunted. "She

might be sailing for Barcelona with me, were she not so damned clever."

AS he walked to the distant interurban trolley line, Spagna began to sing a Spanish melody. He cut it short as Alonzo's poor nerves and fears popped into his mind.

"A little mistake that will pave the way to the chair for both of us?" He mimicked. Then he growled deep in his throat. "Imbecile! When the ocean is rough and no boat can be manned, I should throw him overboard. It is not right that one with so little faith in Hugo Spagna's ability should share the profits."

He thought of the troopers and chuckled. Were there two bigger fools on earth? Decidedly not!

"Wait until I tell Alonzo how they begged me to go. 'Good night. Pleasant dreams.' Laughable! While they comb the country for a prowling burglar, I sail off for sunny Spain. Beyond a doubt this is the happiest day of all my life."

It was precisely one o'clock when he swung up the stoop of his rooming house.

"It is Dame Fortune," he teased, rapping on the flimsy panel. Quickly he stepped in. His face clouded. "And why are you white as a sheet and shaking as if with ague?"

Alonzo backed away, terror in his eyes. "Something has happened that dooms us, Hugo. I cannot rid myself of the feeling. Let us hasten. I want miles between me and this room, many miles."

Spagna held his sides and laughed uproariously. "You are as a woman who sees in a mouse a ferocious animal. The work is finished. We are safer than an eel in the river's mud, else the police would have me answering questions *now*. And should anything develop later, we shall be on the boat. Bring out the profits, Alonzo, and wine, that we may drink to good fortune."

The steps that carried Alonzo to the rumpled bed were weak and hesitant; the fingers that raised the corner of the cheap mattress trembled. He gasped and let go, hand flying to his mouth, bulging eyes toward the door. He hurried to Spagna's side.

"I—I heard a step in the hall!"

"You are mad," snarled Spagna, pushed him aside. In a flash he had the loot on the table. "Come, feast your eyes on something more comforting than keyholes, Alonzo. Did you ever see such pearls? The dog's gift to the red-head, no doubt."

Alonzo went to the table. The fortune beneath the flickering gas jet might have been paste for all the joy he displayed. He did not even smile when Spagna emptied the fat wallet and spread out assorted greenbacks like a poker hand. He braced himself against the table.

"We will go," grumbled Spagna. "But mark me, Alonzo. I will have no more of your sniveling. Pack your things. Mine are all ready in the depot check room."

Pleasant words! Alonzo dragged a full suitcase from beneath the bed while Spagna heaped the loot on the handkerchief. They took a single step toward the door when something crashed against it. Alonzo screamed. Spagna's blood froze. A man came hurtling into the room as the flimsy lock gave way under the second assault.

It was the solemn-faced trooper. There was a blue-steel pistol in his hand and behind him came another uniformed figure.

"Handcuff 'em, Jack. Hugo first.

The other bird looks as if he needs a doctor."

Spagna tried to speak, but his tongue was stiff as ice. The strength went out of his legs and he dropped heavily into a chair. The click of steel bracelets sounded like the crack of rifles.

"God save us," moaned Alonzo. "The little mistake has happened."

The troopers chuckled. "A flock of little mistakes," said the one. "And we might have overlooked 'em, only Hugo timed himself too well."

He broke off, stepped over to the closet and picked up an egg timing glass. "Watch it," he went on. "In three minutes the sand will dribble into the lower bulb."

Spagna thawed his tongue. "I do not understand what—"

"Too busy robbing Tierney to notice what had happened? One of the first things I saw was that a bullet had gone clean through his body and punctured the container of corn meal on the table. Tierney was *not* murdered at *eleven-five,* but at eleven sharp. And you were quite positive you were in the kitchen five minutes previous to the shooting."

"B-but you told me I could go."

"And you fell for it! You see, we arrived at eleven-fifteen and found meal still seeping through the bullet hole. The minute you made that *exact* time statement and explained the scratches on your face and the bad feeling between you and the boss, I had a hunch you were the killer. After you'd gone, we put all the corn meal back in the container.

"It took *fifteen minutes* to dribble down to the level it was at when we arrived, proving the hole was made at eleven sharp. The bullet was still inside. We figured you had a helper who made off with the gun and swag, and would hurry to him to make sure you got your share. As soon as we'd made our time test, we got your address from Miss Rhodes and here we are."

"Little mistake," whined Alonzo. "What have I been saying, Hugo?"

There was no answer. Spagna thought he heard the red-head laughing.

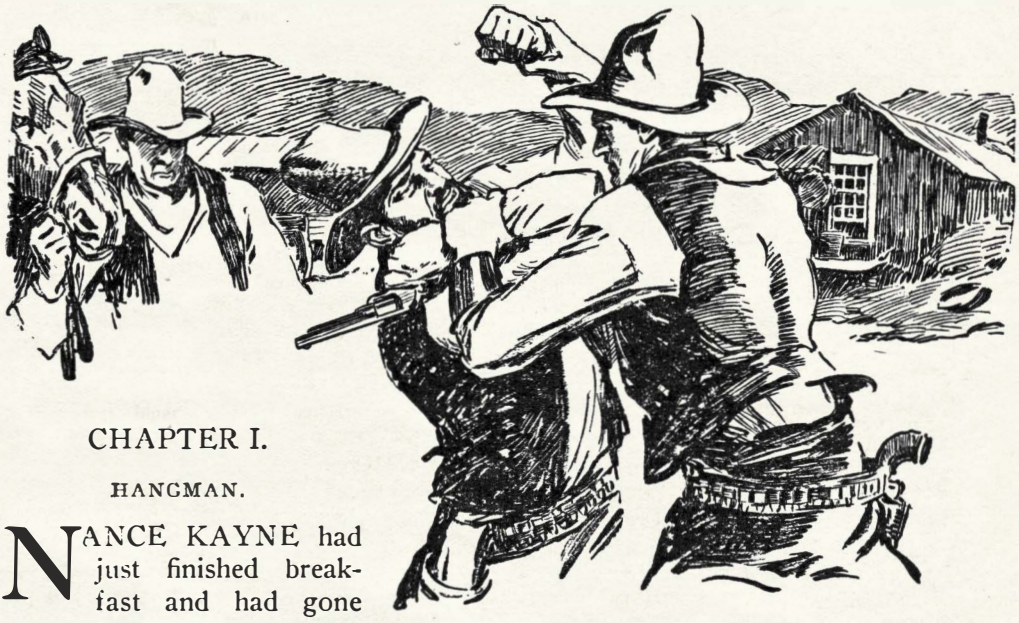
A breathless, exciting novelette is "An Ace in the Hole," by that great story teller, H. Bedford-Jones. Look for it in next week's issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

DO YOU READ THE ARGOSY?

Breath of the Desert

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

To an Arizona cowman like Thor Underhill, some killings were justified, out where the arm of the law seldom reached



Swiftly, Thor bent his gun arm back

CHAPTER I.

HANGMAN.

NANCE KAYNE had just finished breakfast and had gone outside when she heard the scurrying of hoofs. She turned swiftly to see half a dozen riders, almost up with Thor Underhill, who was down near the draw.

A big man with a short black beard, a hooked nose and cold eyes slid off his horse and confronted Thor.

"Damn you, Underhill; you've swung Lafe Morrell and Jay Fargo!"

"Yes, we swung them, Sladen. They were Hat riders. We caught them driving away some of our Flying U horses. Something else you want to know?"

Sladen ignored the question. "I've come to tell you that you can't get away with it. I'm going to blow you all to hell!" His right hand moved swiftly downward, then upward. His heavy gun flashed out of its holster.

But Thor's hand was swifter.

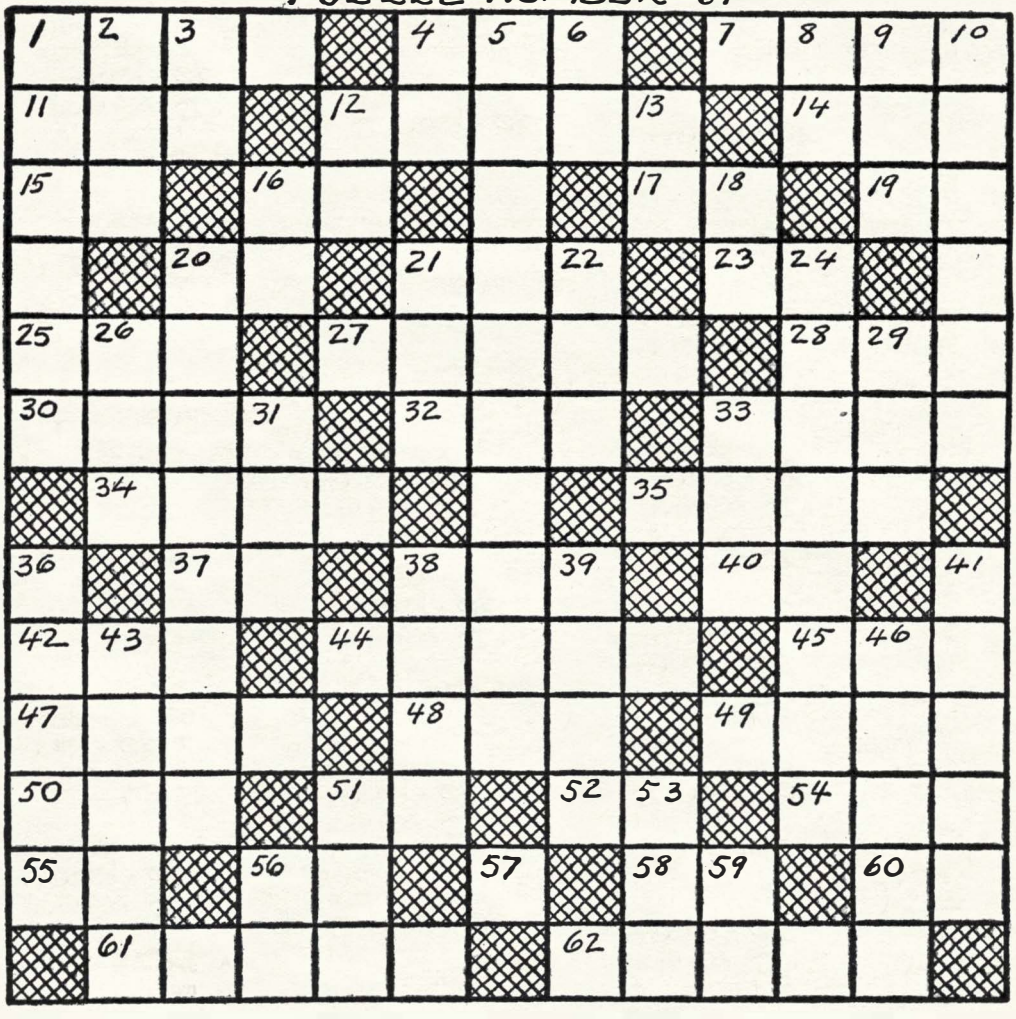
One of the greatest masters of the Western story has written a vivid, smashing tale filled with suspense and action. Read it in next week's ARGOSY—on sale Tuesday, June 14th.

Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

A JEALOUS WIFE ON A RAMPAGE

By Richard Hoadley Tingley

PUZZLE NUMBER 67



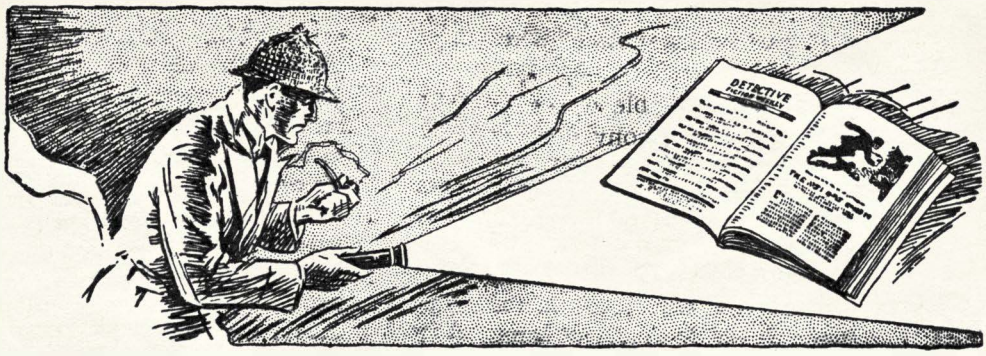
A—ACROSS **D—DOWN**

D 10 Although it was nearly ..... o'clock and old ..... was shining brightly, the air was decidedly **A 14** cold, for it was ..... Patrick's **A 15** Day. Braving the ....., chilling **D 31** blasts, a comely brunette, wearing **D 29** a ..... hat, was seen to enter the **A 1 D 16** (Initials)..... shop of ..... Le- **A 16** (abbr.) vine and ....., located in the **A 37** (abbr.) Bronx, New York City, ... **D 4** "....!" exclaimed Joe Logan **D 36** to his companion, a young ..... who, like himself, delighted to **D 38** ..... about street corners, **A 33** ..... in chilly weather; one of **D 40** the variety of mashers who .....

at all good looking women. "What
D 8 ..... the matter with that
A 54 dame? She seems all ..... up about something. Wonder if she is going to hold up the place and
D 9 ..... Levine. Haven't seen one
D 41 of her kind about here .....
D 43 Suppose we ..... where we are
A 21 on the ..... of the sidewalk and
A 62 see how long she ..... in the
A 58 store. It will do ..... no harm,
D 51(cont.) D 3 and ..... a notion ..... may see something interesting."
A 50 And they .....
D 1 "Give me a .....!" said the
A 35 young woman to the ..... clerk.
A 25 "And please load it." .....
D 56 glance was enough. ..... was clear that the lady was in a high
D 5 state of ....., and that her
D 2 powers in the ..... of dissimu-
A 12 lation were being severely .....
A 52 He felt she was likely to .....
A 40 damage to someone ..... other
D 50 with a loaded gun, ..., not
A 47 caring to ..... a crime he
A 60(prefix) .....loaded the weapon with blank cartridges. The sidewalk
A 61 mashers saw her emerge and .....
D 13(prefix) a store .....agonally across the
D 22 street where a young ..... was earnestly talking to a handsome bleached blonde.
D 21 "You ..... of a man!" they
A 11 heard her shout, her ..... thoroughly aroused. "A nice kind of a husband you are! But you'll
D 6 deceive ..... no longer, nor you, you hussy!"
A 28 And ..... they were aware, *bang, bang, bang, bang* went the
A 56(Rom. Num.) gun; ..... times she shot!
A 30 A 44 "O, ...! I'm a ....." moaned the husband as he and the blonde, slumped to the floor as
A 51 ..... dead, and the injured wife, dropping her gun, fled into the
A 55 arms of police officer ..... Mulligan, who happened to be
A 23 passing. ..... course nobody was hurt, only frightened. She ex-
D 12 A 20 plained ..... Police Judge ..... Groot that she and her husband
D 57 had been married but ..... few
A 38 years, and had ..... a happy life till recently, when the man's af-
A 42 fection had begun to ..... At
A 49 first, she said, she was all ..... as to the cause, though she knew
D 33 his exalted ..... might lead him
D 26 astray. ..... that she had discovered the cause, she resented his duplicity. The judge did nothing
A 34 but ..... her to behave herself
A 17 ..... the future, and let her go.
D 18 But the wife was in ..... mood to behave herself. When she
A 7 saw her gun..... had produced no results, she was more anxious
D 39 than before to finish the .....
A 48 She ..... a hasty lunch and was
D 53 soon ..... again on the war path.
D 24 In ..... excitement she entered another store. "Give me a revolver, quick!" she demanded.
A 19 "And ..... sure it's loaded."
A 4 "....," murmured the clerk. He, also, saw that the woman was
D 20 A 45 ....., or perhaps, seriously ....., and he, too, played safe, loading the weapon with empty shells.
Her next attempt at murder
A 27 produced no more ..... results than the first, but this time the
A 32 judge gave her ..... days in the lock-up to cool off.

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

T	H	E	▒	A	R	E	N	A	▒	G	A	S
H	O	L	E	S	▒	X	▒	T	R	U	S	T
R	A	S	H	▒	I	T	S	▒	I	N	T	O
E	R	E	▒	P	R	O	U	D	▒	S	I	R
A	D	▒	H	▒	A	R	M	▒	H	▒	R	E
T	▒	A	I	D	▒	T	▒	T	I	S	▒	K
E	N	D	S	▒	A	I	L	▒	M	E	T	E
N	O	D	▒	S	T	O	O	P	▒	A	R	E
I	N	▒	S	P	O	N	S	O	R	▒	U	P
N	E	W	▒	A	N	▒	I	T	▒	S	E	E
G	▒	A	M	▒	E	E	N	▒	H	E	▒	R
▒	U	S	▒	A	D	A	G	E	▒	T	O	▒
O	N	▒	O	H	▒	R	▒	M	E	▒	W	E



FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

IN spite of the fact that Arnold S. Young pleads guilty to being the author of many words about the other fellows, he says that writing about himself comes under the classification of hard labor. However, he tells us these things.

ARNOLD S. YOUNG

The first fifteen years of his life were spent in New York in the usual comic-tragic fashion, and early in his sixteenth year the comic evaporated. It seems Young learned that a motion picture company would buy ideas for two-reel Westerns. Since lightning will strike almost any place *once*, his first penciled-after-school effort brought a hundred dollars. That same pencil readily figured out that if two hours' work netted a hundred, why waste time going to school? You guessed it! He resigned and turned out scenarios by the mile. But something happened to the hand that wrote the checks and within six months a mighty disgusted Young was certain that if a good excuse for living existed, it was somewhere in the West.

Hunger terminated this westward flight and destiny dropped a farmhand's job into his lap. He picked tomatoes until his back refused to straighten and he dreamed he was drowning in a sea of ketchup. Eventually he resumed the collecting of free rides on anything headed in *any* direction, and soon fell in with a more experienced traveler who educated him in the art of rod and blind riding; the ducking of brakemen's

lumps of coal, etc. Young confesses that at times it was quite difficult to keep insects at a respectable distance and even more difficult to convince his companion that the always present writing bug would ever amount to a hill of beans. Good gravy, what attention he lavished on that pen and ink insect!

In the course of events, Young visited every State in the Union and wondered how come there were so few. Some well meaning brother of the Wanderlust Union passed a remark about Alaska and though Greeley said nothing about going North—wise guy! —Young went. A winter in Nome caused two tragic deaths; Young's pal, and the germ that causes restless feet. But Young and his cuddled writing bug survived, made the States, crossed the country and hoped to find a spot warm enough to thaw them out—in a few years.

It happened in his native New York. She was English, sweet and sympathetic; skeptical, of course, but Young praised himself so constantly she said "Yes" just to shut him up. And so he chained his footloose dogs to the fireside, borrowed a typewriter and went to work. Though the first few years oozed more tragedy, dawn eventually tinged the sky and, all in all, Young considers himself mighty fortunate.

You'll have to admit that writing isn't as hard on the back as picking tomatoes at ten and a half bucks per month, and to close in the spirit of the day, Young wants it distinctly understood that he still hates those bright red fruits.

WENTWORTH, RIORDAN, MONGOOSE

DEAR SIR:

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for many years and expect to remain so for many more. I like *Jimmy Wentworth, Riordan* and the *Mongoose* stories best.

I miss *Sidney Zoom* and hope that he will return to us soon.

Lester Leith is not the type of criminal that I enjoy reading about, but Erle Stanley Gardner is an entertaining author.

Best wishes for your continued success,

Sincerely,

JOHN D. FEEN,
Miami, Okla.

VARIED AND INTERESTING

DEAR SIR:

The story of *Riordan,* in your April 2nd issue, was one of the most interesting ever published in the magazine, and I have been a constant reader since the book was called *Flynn's.* "Men of Prey" was a ringer, too, but "More than Satisfied" was great!

I thoroughly enjoyed every one of the spy stories and every non-fiction story you publish.

Disregarding prices, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is the best, most varied, most interesting publication of its kind on the entire market.

Best wishes for the magazine.

Sincerely yours,

MARIE A. CHANDLER,
Miami, Fla.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

Editor,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,

280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY drawing.

This coupon not good after Sept. 10, 1932.

6-11

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, *are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used* x *to represent* e, x *will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clews. For instance, affixes* -ing, -ion, -ally *are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first puzzle each week is the easiest.*

M. E. OHAVER

HERE'S a division problem with plenty of clews and not a few points of special interest. Note the divisor, quotient, and products, for instance, where there are only three possible values for R and S, and but two for I. The last subtraction will show the value of P, and the values of U and I will be evident in the first and second subtractions; and so on.

No. 138—Cryptic Division. By Monroe Hood Stinson.

```
R R R R ) U I N E E O O ( S S S S
          I I I I
        -----------
          U I I E
          I I I I
        -----------
            U U I O
            I I I I
          -----------
          P M U C O
              I I I I
            -------
              R M E C
```

The repeated suffix -ZKI (frequencies 12-13-4) was a weak spot in last week's No. 137, by Cliff. A 3-letter ending with a low-frequency final, especially if used more than once, is usually worth trying as *-ing*. Besides, symbol K, used as penultimate letter 5 times out of 13, filled the bill for *n*, which normally occurs about one-fourth of the time in this position.

Another clew to the *-ing* snuggled inconspicuously in the third group, AQOCNMZKI, where the suspected ending followed symbol M. The occurrence of symbol M as a final (word 18) and as second letter (word 15) suggested the letter *y*. And of all 3-letter endings, *-ing* is the commonest after this letter.

Having spotted the vulnerable termination, the cryptogram would then yield by the usual process of substitution. ZHHZKNKY (*i--in-n-*), noting the doubled letter would readily suggest *imminent,* which with PINKY (*-gent*) as *agent.* EKZLEEKPLEG (*-ni---na---*), with due attention to the pattern, would follow as *knickknacks.* And so on with the rest.

Second-position *h* was also rather obvious in this cryptogram. The symbol U, used six times altogether, twice as second letter, was good material for this letter, especially upon noting its repetition in YUOTQIU (*-h- - -h*), which would thus suggest *through.* This, of course, would lead to GQSQOSG (*-u-ur- -*), *suburbs;* and so on.

Now for this week's cryptograms! Comparison of the short words MNG, MS, and QSM afford a start in Nu-

mero's construction. Next try for words 15 and 21, duly noting DOG and DJ. In Henrietta V. Austin's cryptogram you might attack the group ABBATOYRE, having first identified AR and the ending -ART. TJYE, YEEAOU, and XUUX will then lead to word 15.

The two-letter words SY and AX provide entry to the crypt by Ollie, giving all but two letters of XESAYXEM. The solver may then proceed by way of words 10, 17, 9, etc. Compare NTR, NY, and QTHGT in William A. Quinn's cryptogram. Context with this last word will suggest the words for AYF and HB. *LWRFHGLD and DLWR will readily follow.

Guess the symbol U in Irv's Inner Circle cipher and you will have practically one-third of the message to start with! U occurs 28 times, and there are only 90 letters in the entire message! A solution of this cipher will be published next week. The asterisks here and in the preceding cryptograms indicate proper names.

No. 139—Stepping-Stones. By Numero.

PSOVJ YLTG MNG USYYSPLQE DOG QSM NDOV MS VGBLFNGO LU TGFM LQ KLQV DJ FDMMGOQJ: LBLBYG, CDEEDEG, FGDBGDCYG, KLDJKLB, MNLMNGO, FSJMFSQG, KDMNGKDMLB, FYGQLFSMGQMLDOX.

No. 140—Aridity. By Henrietta V. Austin.

ZUZZS *PYNYAAYR ABBATOYRE, AR FYTTS YEEAOU, XLWWUXXDLVVS ZUMMVART XELDDUM TVJNNJOBX, XUUX BUOOS TJYE TLCCVU LRWJRXEAELEAJRYV "VAQQUO."

No. 141—Good Advice. By Ollie.

NZYXL UACLDSYCALO OZYG EXVAYRO NCYONLDSAJL QRPLCO ZYG SY MYDESL EMBYOS EXP XESAYXEM EUJLCSAOLC. GZLX AX UYRQS, DYXORMS SZLB.

No. 142—Medical Note. By William A Quinn.

UKLGY, NFYEHGLS *LWRFHGLD LBNRFLGRYKB JHDR, LDNHPYNR NY BDLMR OHNRB, FRBRWOSRB *JHFUHDHLD BDLMRFYYN, NTR OYNLDHGLS DLWR AYF QTHGT HB *LFHBNYSYGTHL *BRFERDNLFHL.

No. 143—Rendezvous. By Irv.

LYU BYU MURBU PUTRY, *PUS, *DUTOU RUMTU, BZUZU LOUBL VU HOU *BLUS. ZUPS, BUZRY NOUZU BRU NUPH. PUTRY, RUMTU AZU; LOU DOURL.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

132—Key: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
J E A L O U S F I T

133—There once was a wall-eyed galoot,
Who thought he could fish and could shoot;
He did catch a flounder,
About a half-pounder,
Then he whistled: "Te-root-te-toot-toot."

134—"Anyhow," said Uncle Jake, "I kin claim credit fur takin' ther best advice. I ain't never hoarded yit!"

135—Fascists would purge the Italian language of foreign words. A forthcoming dictionary is to contain native equivalents for all words of foreign extraction.

136—"Washington Post," "King Cotton," "Stars and Stripes Forever," "El Capitan," and "Semper Fidelis" are among the marches which earned John Philip Sousa the title of "March King."

137—Rubicund agent purveying precious knickknacks becomes somewhat frantic during nocturnal trip through suburbs. Imminent hysteria avoided when burly policeman approaches.

Answers to this week's puzzles will be given in the next issue. Join the June Solvers' Club by sending one or more answers to this department.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

PETER DENNIS got out of his small roadster in front of the Wynnes' house, walked up the graveled roadway to the front door, and rang. The butler opened the door, and unbent far enough to beam at him.

The family was at lunch, sir, but was expecting him. Of course Mr. Peter would join them. They would be particularly glad to have him come in because Miss Marian was upset, sir.

"Upset!" Peter exclaimed sharply. "What is Miss Marian upset about, anyway? Is it something serious? Is she—ah—dammit, is she in love with someone?"

The butler hesitated. "Beg pardon, sir, I—I think that's why she's upset. You see, sir, Mr. Holmes has disappeared—"

"Who the hell is Mr. Holmes?"

"Mr. Holmes, sir, is a young man who came to Westhaven several months ago and became quite popular. He seemed to be much taken with Miss Marian, and she with him. And a week ago he disappeared."

"Why? How? Why is Marian upset about it?"

"Why—you see, sir," the butler said, "people heard sounds of crashings, sir, and a shot in his flat. They reported it, and the police found the place upset, as if there'd been a struggle there. A bullet from Mr. Holmes' revolver was in the woodwork, and the revolver itself was on the floor with one chamber discharged.

"Mr. Holmes was gone, and his rooms had been gone through and all his valuables taken."

Peter's jaw was set grimly.

"Yes? And then what?" he inquired.

"Well—" again the butler hesitated. Then he leaned forward and whispered: "Miss Marian, sir, has been hearing voices—hallucinations, you know—cries, screams, and things like that, when there was no one around! She's going mad, sir, I very much fear."

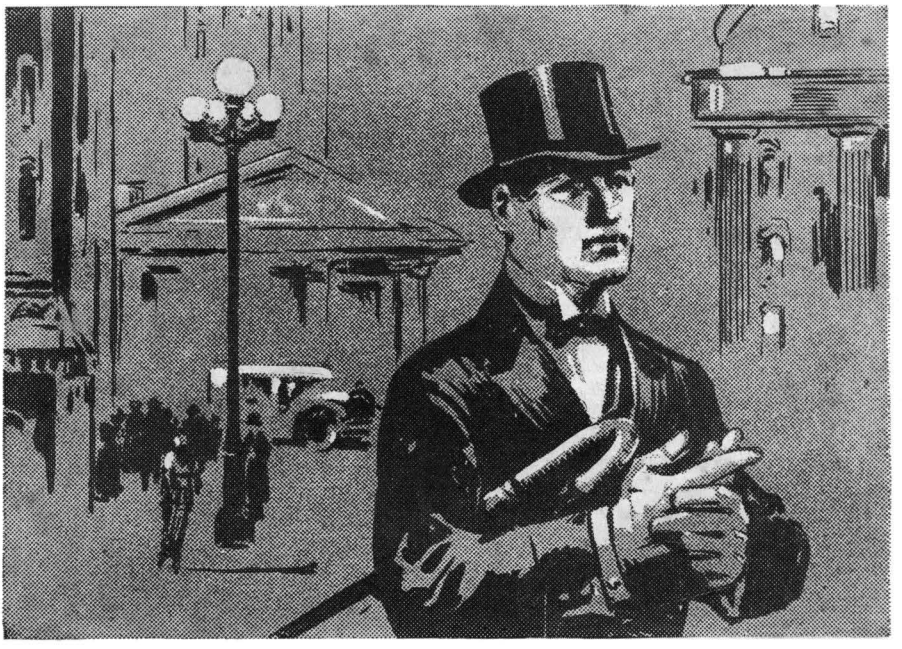
And Peter learned that what the butler said was true—and he also learned that a new and diabolical criminal had appeared, an unknown whose weapons were horror and madness, and who would not stop at murder. Read this baffling novelette—

Something New in Crime

By Murray Leinster

Also stories by H. BEDFORD-JONES, ROLAND PHILLIPS, FRANK KING, THOMAS TOPHAM, and others, next week in

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—June 18 (on sale June 14)



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Resole Wears Better than Most Leather

Leather-like substance makes old shoes like new. Spreads on like butter in just a few minutes. Dries hard and smooth over night. Its action is almost uncanny. No need to wear worn-out shoes or rubbers with leaky soles. Don't pay big prices for shoe repairs. Re-Sole does the job perfectly and economically. So easy to put on a child can do it. Makes a flexible, non-skid waterproof sole. Saves time, money and health.

So widespread is the white hot interest in Re-Sole everywhere—so overwhelming is the demand that we now need more men and women to make deliveries and demonstrate in their communities. Agents everywhere are making big money—get in now on the best profit item of the year. Easy to sell—big repeat business—get started today. Re-Sole is the original genuine plastic product for repairing shoes and **is protected under U. S. patent.**

A Hard Times Item

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PROTECTED UNDER U.S. PATENT

Re-Sole Means Dollars to Agents and Users Alike.

RE-SOLE PAYS UP TO $47 A DAY

HERE'S PROOF

Schmidt of Iowa wrote as follows: **"I have been wearing Re-Soles for over a month, and there is not the slightest sign of wear. These Re-Soles are pliable and easy on the feet, yet are tough almost beyond belief. And the price is less than a shoe shine."** Lindsay of Nebr. **"Express 157 cans Re-Sole. Ship following day 104 cans and third day 200 cans—All 3 orders sold—Will be selling 600 weekly."** White of Maine: **"Received sample today and have 14 orders to deliver right away."** Gallant of Conn.: **"Sold 12 cans Re-Sole the first day."** Ball of Pa.: **"Wears better than leather soles."** Benshoof of Wyo.: **"Tested Re-Sole against leather on an emery wheel—the cows have got to grow tougher hide to make an upper last as long as Re-Sole."** Smith of Mich.: **"Filled a big hole in auto tire with Re-Sole. Drove the car 3,000 miles. The patch is still there and by the looks it will run another 3,000 miles yet."** Cooperrider of Ohio: **"Used one can to advertise among the neighbors and now they advertise it for me. Was out 3 hours among farmers and sold six cans."** Clifford of Wash.: **"Sold 7 cans first day and am enclosing a 25 can order."**

We have hundreds of letters in our files from agents making big money with Re-Sole. **Sell only the original and genuine.** Men and women wishing to make real money should write immediately while good territory is still open. Use coupon below for full particulars.

Hundreds of voluntary letters testify to big cash profits for Re-Sole sales people. Men and women making big money. Customers delighted. Wilson of Wisconsin made $76.00 one day—Blenhart handled 1182 cans first two months—Lake of Minnesota sold seven orders in three hours. Schmucher of Va. sold 6 orders first hour on seven calls. Hundreds of others. Re-Sole nationally advertised in U. S. A. and in 130 countries all over the world.

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My 100% satisfaction money-back guarantee protects you and your customers. Re-Sole needed by every man, woman and child. No wonder distributors are making up to $47.00 a day. Be sure to mail coupon today for full details.

Nearly every home has several pairs of shoes with leaky worn-out soles and run-down heels which the shoemakers would charge several dollars to repair.

With Re-Sole you can repair them quickly for only a few cents. Flexible. Waterproof. All cracks, breaks and holes filled and covered with Re-Sole gives first class job at less than one-tenth ordinary cost.

Hard Times Necessity
Cash In Now on Re-Sole—Rush Coupon

Re-Sole is so truly uncanny in its action—it soles shoes and repairs worn spots so quickly, so easily, so perfectly and is such a genuine hard times necessity that distributors are coining money every day. Get the facts at once. A quick half minute demonstration amazes prospects and compels them to buy. Sure repeat business. Good territory still open. Rush coupon for **FREE SAMPLE** on leather and exclusive territory offer.

UNIVERSAL LABORATORIES, Inc.
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Mail for FREE Sample

MERROLD S. JOHNSON, Pres.,
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TOUGH AS ELEPHANT HIDE

Dear Mr. Johnson: Send me a Free Sample of Re-Sole applied to a small leather sole and tell me how to make up to $47.00 a day. I am not obligated.

Name_____

Address_____

Town_____ State_____

Territory Preferred_____