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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY TUESDAY

The Joker's Last Card

by Hugh Kahler

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Daintiness? **NO!**

Wit? **NO!**

Youth? **NO!**

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

E V E R Y T U E S D A Y

Vol. XXVII ▣ Contents for October 14, 1919 ▣ No. 1

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

SIX SHORT STORIES

DEPARTMENTS

MISCELLANEOUS

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and

In the Other Box

Showing how an astute detective brings to light the disastrous consequences of overlooking a clew in a murder mystery.

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EVERY TUESDAY

Vol. XXVII October 14, 1919 No. 1

The Joker's Last Card

by Hugh Kahler

Author of the "White Rook" stories, etc.

CHAPTER I.

MORE ROGUES THAN ONE.

"IT'S like a skylight in the roof of hell!" Martin Quay spoke in the lowered, vague tone of the man who thinks aloud. He straightened his thick body with a visible effort, as if it needed a sharp exertion of his strength to draw back from the thing that glowed up at him from the square black velvet on the tablecloth. He drew in a long breath. "No wonder they call it The Rogue. I'm not much on superstitions, but I'll say frankly, Mr. Trow, that you couldn't make me a present of this stone!"

Trow, his right-hand neighbor, smiled thinly, with a trace of annoyance. He was a big man, inches taller than Quay himself, with thick, vigorous white hair which seemed to accentuate the wholesome color of his face, to suggest youth rather than age. He spoke quickly, with a faintly superior intonation.

"It's a remarkable thing that some superstitions should survive so stubbornly in this age of enlightened skepticism, isn't it, Doctor Playre?" He drew the strip of velvet away from Quay and passed it across the table to the bearded, spectacled man he addressed. "Beautiful stone, isn't it?"

The motion threw a changing light

on the facets of the big diamond, light which was broken, absorbed, refracted in a succession of glinting flashes, which, to Martin Quay's fascinated eye, seemed to endow the fragment of carbon with life and fire of its own, to transform it under his eyes to a living, malevolent, satanically beautiful being. He tore his eyes away from it with another effort of will. The Rogue was hypnotizing him. He hated it, he told himself, and yet, as he leaned back, his brain was busy with a nebulous scheme for possessing it. He sat at Myron Soule's table and pondered on the chances of stealing the jewel he had been brought here to guard! He heard Doctor Playre's dry, professorial voice without heeding its touch of satire.

"This particular superstition dies very hard, Mr. Trow. As long as the race attaches value to precious stones there will be such legends and traditions as those which cling to The Rogue. That is because men confuse consequence with effect. Because The Rogue has been famous, because its owners have necessarily been people of extraordinary wealth and position and power, it is an easy inference to attribute their misfortunes to its supposedly malign influence. Mr. Quay is only one of a good many thousands who have the same delusion that one stone is more harmful than another. I have written a small book on the subject."

"Yes—a brilliant thing, too, doctor." Myron Soule spoke quietly, his pleasant, even voice seeming to seek to administer a gentle rebuke to the unkindly tenor of the talk. "It was that book which first gave me the idea of buying The Rogue."

The three others glanced at him with interest. He smiled. Quay felt better. Myron Soule was a gentleman all the way through; these others were merely surface counterfeits.

"Yes. I was intrigued by the notion of putting the alleged power of such stones to a severely practical test. We all know the record, I think—an unbroken succession of disasters from the time the Nizam of Jaipur made war on his cousin to get possession of the gem, down to the unfortunate affair of Lord Francis Clough. It occurred to me that I might be able to disprove, once for all, the idea that The Rogue brings misfortune to its owner. It will be an interesting experiment, at least."

He paused as the butler moved behind him with a decanter of port. Quay glanced up at the servant. It was merely reflex action. His eye chanced to lift as the man's soundless motion distracted it from the face of his host. But as it rested on the countenance of the stiff, wooden fellow, strutting with his tray, it told Quay that he was not the only man in the room who had felt the uncanny lure of The Rogue. The butler's head was held up and back, in the correct posture of his calling. He continued to act the rôle of automaton precisely like all the well-trained butlers of Quay's experience. But his eyes had come suddenly to life. They were twisted obliquely, straining down at the great, glowing diamond that Quay had called a skylight in the roof of hell. Quay's own stab of desire was too recent to leave him in any doubt as to the significance of that slanting, fascinated gaze.

The Rogue had lain on Myron Soule's table less than five minutes, and already it had inspired two men with a desire to steal it! Quay heard Doctor Playre's academic voice with a swift sense of contempt for the man's blindness to fact.

"You *will* disprove the idea, Soule. Men like you don't yield to little weaknesses. The Rogue's reputation is based on the characters of those who have owned it—the Nizam of Jaipur,

for instance, who seems to have earned a reputation for cruelty and cowardice and rascality in an age and country where competition in those respects was unusually keen; Colonel Chinn, who robbed him in the name of the king and brought the stone into Europe—a thieving scoundrel who promptly got himself cashiered out of the army and cut his own throat after beggaring himself at the gaming table! You haven't much in common with such gentry, Soule. Nor with that chinless regent of a monarchy, who bought The Rogue instead of providing his troops with decent guns, and gave it to an infamous woman of the music halls! As for the Cloughs, their family history accounts for the insanity of the present title-holder, without any help from The Rogue. No; proof isn't necessary to intelligent men, but you will supply it."

"I hope so," said Soule gently. "I must confess, however, that I agree with Mr. Quay—there *is* something ugly in the thing. It's history seems to cling to it."

Doctor Playre wagged his head tolerantly. Myron Soule's superstition was a very different matter from that of a common detective, like Martin Quay. The doctor could afford to be indulgent with a millionaire, particularly with a millionaire who had bought a small fortune's worth of stones through Gormel & Co.

Quay understood the man accurately, and didn't blame him. Doctor Playre was unquestionably the greatest living authority on precious stones. Gormel & Co. had given him what amounted to a partnership interest merely to secure his services as consulting expert about the gems in which they dealt. He was the author of a formidable array of scientific and popular books on the topic. If any man in the world knew what he was talking about, Doctor Egbert Playre deserved respectful attention when he lifted up his voice on the subject of diamonds. It was exceedingly natural that he should defer to Myron Soule, who must be one of Gormel's most profitable customers. As for Trow, his interest obviously lay in selling The Rogue. Quay knew him slightly as an independent dealer in jewels, an expert who bought such stones as The Rogue and resold them to collectors like Myron Soule. He had tied up a tremendous sum in this diamond, and he was only humanly interested in getting it back.

"All diamonds have histories, Soule," said Playre quickly. "It's inevitable that wealth, compressed into the size and weight of a hazel nut, should attract lawless men. All jewels invite the thief and the murderer and the fraud. If every stone carried its history with it Mr. Quay would see the same uncanny light in nine out of ten of them. It's only a few spectacular jewels whose records become public property. You asked me here to give advice, I take it?"

Soule nodded, smiling.

"Then I counsel you to buy. At Mr. Trow's price The Rogue is a bargain. It is worth, intrinsically, thirty to fifty thousand dollars more than he asks for it, and its value should increase with every day you hold it. I should like to buy it for our firm, if our business made it possible to deal in such exceptional gems. Unfortunately we are merchants, not collectors." He smiled apologetically.

Quay cut in impulsively: "It's not my affair, sir, but I'm going to butt in before the deal's closed. My advice is not to buy."

"Mr. Soule might cross his fingers, Quay, or nail a horseshoe over his door. That would keep off the curse, wouldn't it?" Playre sneered with deliberate offensiveness, but Quay refused to be angered by it. He shook his head stubbornly.

"This isn't superstition, doctor. It's cold common sense. And it's in my line, where, if you don't mind my saying so, I'm about as much of an authority as you are in yours. The Rogue is too famous. If you buy it, Mr. Soule, you'll be advertising yourself to every thief in Christendom. The fool newspapers will make Sunday articles about it and speculate on how long it will be before you run into the bad luck that's supposed to go with The Rogue. I've been in the business long enough to know just how such things work out. As it stands now your collection, big as it is, isn't a matter of general knowledge and envy. Advertise it, as you will if you add this stone to it, and you have every big thief in the world wondering how to rob you —and trying it. Doctor Playre is right about one thing: the bad luck that goes with a stone like The Rogue is partly due to the fact that so many people are constantly trying to steal it. Compressed wealth always tempts the thief. You'll find that out, I believe, if you buy The Rogue."

Trow scowled lightly. "Well, if Mr. Soule should find it out, hasn't he already protected himself by retaining the services of the world's greatest detective? Who's going to rob him with Mr. Martin Quay on the job?" He laughed shortly. "'The Joker?'"

Quay sobered. "The Joker's dead. I'm sure of that. But there are plenty of clever thieves left alive. You can poke fun at me all you please, but a stone like this is just an invitation to the whole criminal fraternity, big and little. Let me add that Mr. Soule keeps his collection under his own roof; more, he keeps it within ten steps of his bedroom. If he's robbed he's very apt to be killed."

Soule chuckled. "You've argued yourself out of the case, Quay. That was the one thing that would have decided me, if I'd thought of it. If you're going to make it a question of courage I've got to buy the thing, just to satisfy myself that I'm not afraid. I'll take it at your figure, Trow."

"I congratulate you." Playre spoke eagerly. "You're getting a wonderful bargain. I'm sure that Mr. Quay will keep the bad luck away from you."

He seemed to lose his malice the instant the deal was closed. He bowed toward the detective with every appearance of sincerity. "I may differ from Mr. Quay in matters that lie more in my field than his, but I'm the first to concede that he heads his profession."

Quay scarcely heard him. A curious sense of oppression had come over him. He kept his eyes away from the great, blazing diamond on the square of velvet. If The Rogue could beckon to him so compellingly, if it could inspire him with a blind, passionate desire to steal, how much more effectively would it tempt men who made thievery their science and their art? He liked Myron Soule, and the idea of the danger which the rich man was needlessly inviting depressed him. He turned to Soule, impulsively.

"Nobody doubts your nerve, sir. But I wish you'd be guided by counsel. Don't keep this stone in your own safe. Put it in a safe-deposit vault—anywhere except under your own roof. And don't advertise it to the public. Let the thieves find out for themselves where it is. I——"

Soule laughed. "Quay, you're a lot more nervous about it than I am. I've kept a pretty fair collection of stones in my house safe for the past five years, and haven't had a bit of trouble. Let's not talk about it any more for the present. Come into the library. I want to write a check for Trow."

He folded the square of velvet around the jewel, crowded it into the small satinwood case in which Trow had brought it, and thrust the case care-

lessly into his waistcoat pocket. They went out of the dining room in a group.

Quay shot a parting glance at the butler. The man was immobile against the wall beside the door, a wooden image, absurdly stiff in the artificial posture prescribed by social usage. Only his eyes transgressed the rules. They followed Myron Soule with an oblique, intent gaze which Martin Quay could interpret all too easily.

The Rogue was already at work. It had begun by corrupting Soule's old, trusted servant. It would end—he did not dare to guess where and when and how. To be sure, he was forewarned. He understood the danger, if Myron Soule did not. He even knew where to look for the first and nearest manifestation of The Rogue's influence. The butler must go, if Soule could be persuaded to discharge him. But Quay knew that his client would be hard to convince even on that point. And the butler was only the first. There would be others, many others, as soon as the word of the transaction reached the newspapers. From every corner of the world men's thoughts would turn toward that safe in Myron Soule's apartments, and presently, one by one, men would follow those thoughts.

Whether or not the persistent legends of evil which had grown up about The Rogue were true, there was a compelling attraction in the stone which had drawn master thieves toward it, time and again, even since it had first appeared in Europe. It had been stolen six times, and there had been many unsuccessful attempts besides. Three times its owner had lost his life in attempting to protect it; the name which had followed it out of India was richly deserved. It was like a rogue among elephants, Quay thought. Probably the Hindu princes who had named it had had rogue elephants in mind.

He was conscious of an unusual tension as he followed the other three men into Soule's library. He tried in vain to shake off a stubborn presentiment of evil. The great, dim-lighted room, with its high ceiling and long, gloomy rows of dark bindings along the walls, seemed ominous and forbidding. He stopped on the threshold without quite knowing why, and turned to flash a quick glance along the hall which divided the library wing from the main body of the house. He stiffened as he caught a brief glimpse of Jevons, the butler, crossing the hall at the far end.

There was nothing suspicious about this. Jevons' duties must make it necessary for him to cross that twelve-foot corridor many times in the course of a day. It was the man's posture and motion which arrested Quay's attention. Jevons had lost his erect, wooden poise. He stooped forward, and his gait was no longer the pompous strut of his trade, but a gliding, stealthy motion as of one who seeks to avoid notice.

Quay hesitated a moment, and then, observing that Soule and his other guests were busy at the desk, turned back and followed the butler, treading carefully on the thick rugs. He didn't know what he suspected, but he was convinced that there was mischief in the air. He stopped again as he caught sight of the man, and a slow smile of satisfaction lighted the stern intensity of his look.

Jevons was at the small telephone switchboard just off the hall. Quay knew that it was one of his duties to receive messages as they came in over the wire, but his instinct told him that it was no ordinary message which Jevons was hearing or sending now. He flattened himself against the wall and moved cautiously nearer to the curtained doorway of the alcove in which the instrument was located. He could

hear Jevons' voice now—lowered, but distinct enough.

"I tell you I saw it. Trow brought it with him. . . . No, there can't be any mistake—Doctor Playre was here and recognized it. . . . Yes, he said so. Quay wanted him to put it in some downtown vault, but he wouldn't. . . . No, they're all in the library. Don't worry. . . . Yes, I'll do my best."

Quay waited for no more. As soundlessly as he had approached he crept back. Circling through the end of the library he rang the bell in the small morning room beyond it and rejoined the group at the desk. Soule was blotting a check deliberately, and Quay's lips curled as he observed the well-controlled eagerness with which Trow waited to receive it.

The detective accepted a cigarette and lighted it, seemingly at his ease. But his ears listened intently for the muffled footfalls which would tell him that Jevons was on his way to answer the ring in the morning room. The moment he heard them, he strolled casually away, puffing at his cigarette. In the hall he sped toward the switchboard, moving with a speed astonishing in a man of his bulk. He spoke quickly into the transmitter.

"Central? Reconnect me with the number I just called, please." There was a momentary wait, a buzz, and the sound of a man's voice.

"Hello. This is Jevons again," Quay whispered into the transmitter. "You'll have to get it to-night. Quay's persuaded him to take it downtown in the morning. Come to the front door about one. I'll let you in. I can't argue—I'm taking a long chance to talk at all."

"But I can't. Well, I suppose I can, though, if I've got to." The voice was rather sullen. "How about the safe? Got any line on it yet?"

"Of course. I can manage that end of it or I wouldn't be sending for you," Quay improvised happily. The thing was working out better than he had dared to hope. He would trap Jevons, at least, and Jevons' outside accomplice along with him.

He rang off and regained the hall just as Jevons returned. Quay stopped him. "I say, Jevons, can you dig me up a regular he-cigar? I can't smoke this mild stuff, and I forgot to fill my case."

"Very good, sir." Jevons bowed. "Did you ring for me just now, sir? The indicator pointed to the morning room, but there's no one there."

"Yes. Guess I missed you." Quay grinned. "Came through the library. Didn't want to talk in front of the rest of them, you see. Get me the strongest, blackest thing you can, will you?" He turned away, rejoining the others.

Soule had taken The Rogue out of its case, and held it in his palm, watching the wicked play of light on its facets. He glanced up as Quay approached.

"There is a sort of—of power in the thing, Quay. I can understand how it should have affected you. But it's a wonderful stone, nevertheless."

"A perfect blue," said Playre. "Forty-eight carats. About the finest and largest blue diamond in existence. It lifts you collection out of the commonplace, Mr. Soule. I envy you."

"I'll admit now that I hated to sell it," confessed Trow. "It got me, while I had it, more than any other stone I ever handled. If I could have afforded it I'd have kept it myself, just to look at. Gad, isn't it wonderful, the way that blue underlies the other lights!"

Quay refrained from looking at it. The stone had already exerted an unwelcome influence on him, and he wanted to keep his wits as clear and

cold as he could. He had decided to say nothing before Playre and Trow. He would simply outstay them and confide in Soule after they had gone. Meanwhile——

"I'll feel better when you've locked the infernal thing up in your safe," he said with an attempt at a jocular tone. "It makes me nervous to have that much—what was it you called it, doctor?—that much compressed wealth lying loose. I feel responsible. Would you mind putting it away now, Mr. Soule?"

Three laughs greeted the suggestion, but Soule rose, nevertheless. "Afraid Trow and the doctor may decide to murder us for it, Quay? Well, we'll just put temptation out of their way then."

He led the way upstairs to the suite of rooms he used as his private sleeping quarters. A large dressing room opened into the hall. Beyond this was the bedroom, as bare as a cell, with tiled walls and floor, a narrow, white metal bed such as hospitals use, and a single white metal chair. Beyond this, reached through a steel door, was the small, windowless room in which Soule had built his safe. He gestured toward it, smiling faintly.

"Looks fairly thief-proof, doesn't it? I don't know that I'd trust many safe-deposit vaults any more than this one of mine. That door doesn't open any too easily, and it's only the beginning. The safe is about the best thing of the sort that can be bought. Quay, I wanted you to see it again, just to quiet your apprehensions. You know that no thief could possibly get inside of it."

"None has, anyway." Quay looked sober. "But any safe that a man can build another man can open. That's an axiom in my business. I wish you'd keep your collection farther away from your sleeping quarters, Mr. Soule. I don't like it."

"And yet you think The Joker's dead," gibed Playre. "He might have robbed this safe. But he didn't. I doubt whether the world will ever see another thief of his ability."

Soule shook his head. "That's very probable. There have been great thieves in plenty, but only one who showed positive genius, like The Joker. I've always been exceedingly interested in his case. He impressed me as a man who must have tremendous ability, which, if properly directed, would have carried him very far in some honest line of endeavor. Evidently he didn't steal for revenue. He seems never to have disposed of his plunder. I've always wished that I could meet him and talk to him—even at the price of being robbed by him."

Martin Quay was thoughtful. An idea had begun to take shape in his brain. As he pondered on the situation which confronted him he felt strongly tempted to bring The Joker back to life for one night only. But he thrust the temptation back. The Joker mustn't reappear. His career had gone too far, as it was. One more of his spectacular robberies might be sufficient to turn men's thoughts in the direction of the truth, might lead some clever thinker to the correct conclusion that Martin Quay and The Joker were one and the same person. It was not to be thought of.

Soule had knelt before the safe and was manipulating its combination. The door swung outward, revealing the compartments which housed his collection of jewels. He opened a small drawer in the center and placed the case containing The Rogue in it. The safe door closed again and Soule rose.

"There, Quay—I suppose you feel better now."

Quay shrugged his shoulders. "A little. But if you don't mind, I'll stay here to-night and send for a few of my men to make things doubly sure.

I've got a feeling that The Rogue is going to mean trouble right away. Have I your permission?"

Soule's brows rose, but he spoke cordially enough. "That's very good of you, Quay. I think you're inclined to exaggerate the danger, but of course I shall be glad to have you take any precautions you like."

He ushered the group out of the strong-room and closed the door carefully. Glancing back over his shoulder Quay saw him move the standard of his bed light slightly, and the circumstance puzzled him. He guessed instantly that there was something deliberate in that action, that it was not a mere chance adjustment. A vague inspiration enlightened him; his brow cleared as he went downstairs with the rest. He telephoned to his lieutenant, Angus McPhee, and gave brief orders for an extra guard of the agency's most trustworthy men to be posted outside of Soule's house that night.

As he turned away from the instrument he was conscious of a confusion at the front door. Jevons was apparently arguing with some one outside. The butler's voice was lifted a little, so that Quay caught a word or two.

"It's quite impossible, sir. An ambulance—telephone fro n here——"

Evidently the circumstance had attracted Myron Soule's attention as well as Quay's. He appeared suddenly at the door of the library and spoke sharply to Jevons. The butler came toward him.

"There's been an accident in the street, sir. A young woman has been struck by a motor, which has made off. They asked leave to bring her inside, but I thought——"

"You shouldn't, then. Of course they must bring her in—at once." Soule spoke harshly and moved toward the door, followed by Quay and the disgruntled butler.

A man in evening dress stood on the threshold. Over his shoulder Quay saw two or three other men bending over a dark figure which lay motionless on the stone flags beside the curb.

"I'm storry to trouble you, sir, but there's been a bad accident, and we'd like to bring the victim into the light at once. As it happens, I'm a surgeon, and I may be able to do something for her. We've sent for an ambulance, of course, but she may die before it gets here."

Soule interrupted him. "Bring her in, of course. Anything we can do——"

"Thanks." The doctor whirled quickly and sprang down the steps. Quay and Soule followed more slowly, but their assistance wasn't needed. The volunteer Samaritans carried the slight figure easily enough, and, guided by the chopfallen Jevons, laid her on a couch in the reception room. Then they departed, leaving the charitable doctor in charge of the patient.

As the light fell squarely on his face, Quay repressed an impulse to cry out. He had seen that face three times before, and he knew it instantly, in spite of the fact that the graying beard was new to him, and the evening clothes were not at all the gray convict suit which Art Conger had worn on their last encounter.

Quay stood back, one hand carelessly in the pocket of his coat, where his fingers could reassure themselves by the comforting contact of an ebonite gun grip. Art Conger had made one serious blunder in his career and had paid for it with four years at Denwood, but Quay knew that he was one of the most ingenious thieves in the world, in spite of that single misstep. Conger had the cool nerve which is the most valuable asset of a criminal, the ability to think fast and straight, the person and manners and speech of a gentleman, and the insouciant rascality of the utterly conscienceless. The

Rogue was working fast! It had been under Myron Soule's roof less than three hours and already there were two distinct attempts under way to steal it!

He laughed grimly as Conger closed the door, shutting out the spectators. The fellow was carrying out his bluff beautifully, but luck was against him. Quay wondered whether he himself had been recognized. Conger had scarcely glanced at him—indeed, Quay had not been able to observe that he had looked at him at all—but there was no certainty that he hadn't spotted the detective as quickly as Quay had identified him. Quay hesitated. Should he tell Soule at once, or let the game proceed a little further? It would be interesting to watch Conger's work.

He decided on the spur of the moment to hold his tongue for the present. Nothing was to be gained from showing his hand too soon. Trow and Playre had joined the group outside the door, and were discussing the accident with Soule in hushed voices, agreeing that reckless driving had reached a point at which drastic police measures were necessary. They were debating the advisability of the death penalty for motorists who killed pedestrians and ran away from their victims, when Conger opened the door and emerged.

"Well, gentlemen, there's nothing very serious after all. A badly sprained ankle and a severely wrenched back. If you will excuse me I'll stay with her till the ambulance arrives, which can't be much longer, now. I am Doctor J. E. Slade, eighty-eight Carnavon Square."

The doctor turned to Soule, who introduced himself and his companions. Quay watched the self-styled physician narrowly as his own name was mentioned, but Conger showed no trace of surprise or displeasure.

"Inspector Quay, indeed?" He shook hands cordially. "Inspector, I wish you'd undertake to send some of these reckless drivers where they belong. You're the man to do it, if it can be done at all."

Quay shrugged his shoulders without speaking. He was too deeply interested in Conger's technique to pay attention to persiflage. A steadily developing scheme of his own was also engaging him with increasing temptation. He was wondering, too, how Conger was going to dispose of the ambulance when it arrived. It would take neat work to stand off the ambulance surgeons, unless, of course, Conger's confederate had slipped up somewhere and been painfully injured.

He strolled back to the library with Soule and his fellow guests as Conger excused himself and went back to his patient. But Quay stood near the doorway, instead of resuming his seat near the fireplace with the others. After a moment, without being missed, he stepped out into the hall.

He took shelter behind the heavy portière which concealed a coat alcove, and waited patiently, his eyes fixed on the door of the reception room. If his guess was correct Conger meant to act at once. That would be exactly like the cool-headed rascal. Circumvented by the chance summoning of an ambulance by a witness of the accident, thereby being prevented from carrying out his original scheme of spending the night under Soule's roof in attendance on his "patient," the thief would probably make his attempt at robbery before the ambulance responded. Quay had no doubt that he already knew something of the lay of the land. A man as resourceful as Art Conger would have ascertained in advance the location of the safe and a good deal concerning the routine of the household.

But he waited in vain. The door did not reopen, and presently he heard the

clang of an ambulance gong at the head of the street. Steps beat on the stone stairs outside, and Jevons admitted a white-coated surgeon and his driver, with a collapsed stretcher.

Quay kept to his invisibility of necessity now. He couldn't risk observation by emerging from behind the hangings while the hallway was so crowded. Trow and Playre and Soule stood by as the ambulance men bore their moaning burden out of the reception room. He scowled as the self-styled Doctor Slade repeated his thanks to his involuntary host and departed with the others. Had Conger abandoned his scheme? Was he choosing discretion as preferable to valor, under the unforeseen circumstances which had spoiled his original plan? He was quite capable of it, Quay thought. He chose the first opportunity to leave his hiding place and rejoined the group before the library fire.

Trow was speaking. "I thought I'd seen him before!" he exclaimed, slapping his knee. "I've a pretty good memory for faces. He was on the *Adriatic* last week. Came across with me. I remember him perfectly now."

Quay repressed a chuckle. His guess had been rather accurate, after all. Conger had been trailing Trow all the way from Europe, waiting his chance to steal The Rogue!

The detective continued to hold his tongue as Trow talked on. Gradually he was aware of a certain new buoyancy in the jewel dealer's speech. Trow talked like a man lately relieved of anxiety. He laughed immoderately at his own wit, he radiated an excess of cheerfulness, which puzzled Martin Quay not a little. As for Doctor Playre, the detective fancied that he observed a change in his manner, too. The gem expert was silent, thoughtful; his intellectual face, illumined by the wavering firelight, was absorbed and grave, and he answered mechanically when the others addressed him directly.

Quay had a brief talk with McPhee when the phlegmatic Scot arrived with his men and posted his guards carefully at the front and rear of the house. Somewhat to his surprise both Trow and Playre seemed to approve now of these precautions.

"Of course it has nothing to do with superstition, but you've got a very valuable stone in that safe of yours, Soule," said Playre, as he took his leave. "I'm glad you've decided to have Quay keep watch. To-morrow, if I were you, I'd take his advice and put The Rogue downtown permanently."

"Right," said Trow. "I'll admit now that I felt pretty nervous while I was bringing it over. I used to fancy that every man or woman I saw was plotting to cut my throat for the thing. It's a distinct relief to have it out of my hands, in that respect. Keep a good watch, Quay; won't you?"

Quay smiled slowly. Perhaps it was only the influence of The Rogue at work in him, but he began to harbor a strong distrust of Trow. He made very sure that the intricate night latch was closed when the dealer had departed, and that the wiring system was in working order. Soule, observing him, chuckled softly as he took his arm and led him back to the library.

"My dear Quay, I'm going to take you into the plot before you spoil everything. I rather fancied that you might see through it for yourself, with so much evidence to give you a lead. Haven't you guessed that my sole object in buying The Rogue is to get myself robbed?

Quay could only stare blankly at this amazing news. After a long silence he said, with a trace of grimness: "Well, if that's all you want, I can tell you right now that you won't have any trouble getting your wish!"

CHAPTER II.

SOULE'S SCHEME.

"I CERTAINLY hope you're right," said Soule good-humoredly, as he settled himself comfortably in the deep chair before the fire. "I've gone to so much trouble and expense that I own that it would be a disappointment if nothing came of it. Quay, I'm trying to catch the most wonderful thief in the world."

Quay opened his eyes. "You mean The Joker? He's dead."

"He may be. And again he may be the man I hope to meet as the result of all these preparations. Sometimes I fancy that he is. Quay, have you noticed that during the past three years there have been some remarkably peculiar thefts in the jewel line? I don't mean that they've happened right here in the city—or even in this country. Two of them have been managed in London, one in Petrograd, one in Milan, and another in Bucharest, besides the three that have happened in the States. Do you follow now?"

Quay scowled. He kept fairly close account of all criminal activities everywhere, and his brain had classified and arranged his recollections rather methodically.

"I suppose you mean the Green Star business, for one," he said. "The Milan case would have to be that Lancia diamond. In Petrograd—let's see——"

"The Dolgoroff crescent, of course. You surely haven't forgotten that. I'll finish the list for you, to save time. Besides the three you've named, there's the loss of the famous Swope coronet in London, the clever business of the Pole Star in Bucharest, and three on this side of the water—the Lewis matter, in which the Blue diamond was taken, that Chicago job, which cost McCallum his big South African stone, and one right here."

"Donovan, of course. I'm beginning to see your drift." Quay sat up. "Your idea is that one man is back of them all?"

"Yes. Evidently the cleverest thief that ever lived. In less than three years, if my guess is right, he has stolen eight of the largest and most valuable stones in the world, without once leaving a hint of his identity or his methods. I've been through the records on every case, and although they differ amazingly in every other respect, they're identical in that most important one—there hasn't been a scrap of a clew to the criminal. And they have another common point, Quay. I wonder if it impresses you. It ought to, after what you said to-night."

Quay scowled. "They're all well-known stones, of course, and it would be impossible to sell them without cutting them up and practically destroying their value."

"Yes. What else?"

"I don't see—unless you mean that there's been violence in most cases. Come to think of it there's been a murder in——"

"Yes—a cold-blooded murder in all except two of them. But that's not all, nor the most interesting feature, Quay. Think again."

"I've got it!" Quay slapped his thigh, and his eyes blazed. "Every one of those stones had a bad reputation, to begin with—just like The Rogue! Is that what you're driving at?"

"Good! Yes. It took me a long time to see it, myself. I wasted a lot of effort in collecting well-known stones and advertising the fact broadcast through those newspaper articles which you disapproved of so strongly, without attracting any attention from my man. Then I thought of The Rogue and commissioned Trow to buy it for me, on the chance that it might do the trick. My theory is that this thief is obsessed with the idea of collecting all

the supposedly unlucky diamonds in existence. He's probably a very brilliant man with a quirk in his brain somewhere. And I want to take him, Quay."

"Why? It's risking your own life on a bit of idle curiosity, isn't it?"

"No. Not that. You see, Quay, I'm pretty rich, and it's a pet doctrine of mine that wealth entails an obligation, just as birth used to. I owe something to the world in the way of service. The idea of paying that debt by trapping this wonderful criminal fascinates me. It's an absurd whim, perhaps, but it's taken hold of me so that I don't care about much else."

Soule laughed half bashfully.

Quay understood his feeling perfectly. He nodded. "Yes, I can see that. But you forget that you're taking a long chance. This man's a killer. The reason he hasn't left a clew behind him is precisely that. He's killed the evidence, on principle. As I recall those cases the murders were all more or less unnecessary, except that if the owner had lived he might have been able to give the police a hint. If I were you, Mr. Soule, I'd——"

"Yes. But you're not. I'm going through with the thing, Quay. I'm not afraid; I needn't be. I'll let you into a secret. This thief doesn't kill until he's done his stealing. That's evident from the record. He gets the jewels first and strikes afterward. Well, if he follows that rule in my case, I'm perfectly safe. Because, when he steals The Rogue—well, he'll never hurt anybody after that! I won't explain, but you may take that as settled. He's a brilliant rascal, but I'm not exactly stupid, myself."

Quay reflected. "I suppose you knew, then, that that whole business to-night was a pure fake. The girl wasn't hurt, and the doctor who brought her in was——"

"Arthur Conger. I've thought of him several times, but he can't be the man I want. He was in Denwood at the time most of those jobs were pulled off. Still, it was amusing to see how quickly the bait did its work. I rather fancied that I was wiser than you were about that accident, till I saw you slip out into the hall to keep watch. You pleased me very much by doing that, Quay."

Quay couldn't restrain a laugh. "I guess I can take off my hat to you, for that matter. You've been two steps ahead of me all the way. But perhaps you don't know that your butler——"

"Jevons? Of course! I let him imagine that he is fooling me, but I spotted him the moment he applied for the place. It was very interesting to watch his crowd get rid of Leggat, my former man. I was afraid they might dispose of him, so I sent him back to England instead of letting him go out to Chicago to take the new position they obligingly offered him. Jevons has been a joy. He fancies himself so! I've really had my money's worth in pure amusement so far, Quay."

Quay interposed with an account of what he had done in the direction of forcing Jevons' hand, and Soule chuckled over the story.

"Good. We'll eliminate them at once. They're small fry. I don't want them in the way of the genius. Nor Conger, either. Do you suppose he was only after a look about the place, or has he some deeper scheme up his sleeve?"

"I think he hoped to stay here with that patient of his," said Quay. "But I want to repeat my warning, Mr. Soule. Here are two dangerous crooks already on your trail. Either of them might wipe you out if you got in his way. And if you're right about the other man——"

"Quay, I verily believe he's The Joker!" Soule lowered his voice. "It

all fits in, if you look at it carefully. He has the same sort of brilliance; he doesn't steal for profit; he picks difficult jobs by choice, and leaves no trail behind him. It's just my fancy, but I can't help thinking that I'm going to succeed. That's why I retained you. I wanted you in on the scheme because you're a sort of Joker specialist."

Quay opened his mouth to voice a contrary opinion, but thought better of it. He had been declaring for the past year or two a firm conviction that The Joker was dead, but it occurred to him suddenly that it would be wiser to agree with his host. He couldn't afford to be too positive in his convictions, although he knew that they were right. The Joker was dead, and Martin Quay had killed him.

Quay had a perfect right to destroy him, for the simple reason that he had created him, invented him, constructed him very much as the late Mr. Frankenstein had created his mechanical monster. Unlike Frankenstein, however, Martin Quay had chosen to kill his invention before it had a chance to destroy its author. The Joker, as the world knew him, was the most whimsical, impudently clever rascal in criminal history, and he had a right to be, because behind him was Martin Quay's art of detecting, his intimate acquaintance with the science of thievery, his close study of two or three thousand of the wiliest malefactors the law had been able to overtake.

When an overturn in municipal politics brought into control of the city a group of men who kept themselves carefully out of the limelight and proceeded to use the machinery of local government for their own criminal ends, their first step had been to fling Inspector Martin Quay out of his place at the head of the detective bureau. They had done it very cleverly, without bringing charges which Quay could have challenged, and which might have forced them to show the hostility they concealed. They retired him, with hollow-sounding phrases of compliments, "for the good of the department," and left him no chance to appeal or complain.

After thirty years of stubbornly honest service Quay found himself not only out of a job, but fighting a strong and insidious hostility. He turned to the only recourse available, and opened a private detective agency, with the idea that his experience could thus be made useful in a personal way, even if he was deprived of employing it for the public interest. But the antagonism of the men who had retired him followed him there, and his business quickly consumed the capital he had been able to put into it from his savings.

He was facing practically certain bankruptcy when he conceived the idea of inventing The Joker, partly as an advertisement, and partly, too, with a faint idea that if he failed as a thief-taker, he might perhaps decide to go over to the other side in earnest and use his store of knowledge in a career of careful crime. Very quickly, however, he discovered that there would be no necessity for this. The Joker proved a far better asset to the Quay agency than Martin Quay had dared to hope.

His modus operandi was as simple as it was novel. He began his career by robbing Martin Quay himself, in his rooms at the Hotel Denning, and writing a full and humorous account of the affair to the newspapers. He made Quay ridiculous, to be sure, but he also provided him with a tremendous amount of free newspaper space, in which Quay managed to convey the idea so effectively that he was prosperous and successful, that business began to come to him almost immediately. But that was only the beginning.

The Joker manifested from the first a spiteful antipathy toward Quay, but

in his expressions of that malice never failed to leave his readers with the idea that he hated Quay principally because he regarded him as much more dangerous than the police themselves. And evidence of this was speedily forthcoming in the facts.

Quay offered to give his service gratis to anybody who suffered at the hands of The Joker. The Joker responded by warning a very rich and equally parsimonious citizen that he intended to rob him, merely to show that Quay couldn't prevent it. The citizen went straight to Quay, who accepted the challenge and undertook to guard the premises in person. It was child's play, under these conditions, to fake an attempted robbery, "recover" the stolen property, and narrowly miss the "capture" of the foiled thief.

With minor variations this scheme succeeded a dozen times, always with increasing credit to Quay's reputation, and improving conditions in his finances. If the warned victim went to the police instead of to Quay, the latter actually carried out the robbery —and he had learned the criminal profession as well, and knew the workings of the police machinery so intimately, that he was able to steal where even a brilliant professional thief would have failed. This made the exasperated police seem even more clumsy than they were, and heightened the contrast between their blunders and Martin Quay's successes. Sometimes, after these affairs, he contrived to "recover" the loot in such brilliant style that he gained more credit than if he had prevented the crime. He was very careful never to profit by his stealings. If he couldn't safely restore the loot to its owners he saw to it that it was destroyed, if intrinsically valueless, or distributed among deserving charities if it could be disposed of without risk.

To be sure, it was not always smooth sailing. There had been times when The Joker had stumbled into tight places, and on two occasions his identity had been penetrated. Luckily for Martin Quay the person who knew his secret had far more reason to keep it than to tell. But he had long since decided that The Joker had served his turn. His agency was prospering on a solid foundation of honest service; he had no more need for advertisement, and The Joker, instead of an asset, had become a grave liability. Wherefore Martin Quay killed him by merely refraining from bringing him again before the public eye.

The newspapers still speculated occasionally about the baffling rascal. Quay's outspoken opinion that he had died found plenty of believers, as the months passed and The Joker did not reappear, but there were many who clung to the idea that he would come back when it suited him. Among these was Peter Kane, the stubborn fellow who had succeeded Martin Quay in control of the city's detectives. He was loud-spoken in his belief that The Joker was merely lying low. Equally positive was he in his declarations that the police would eventually succeed in trapping the criminal. Quay had often chuckled over these interviews, and they had served to stiffen his determination that The Joker should never appear again.

But now, as he faced Myron Soule, it struck him that it would be more discreet to betray an open mind. Nobody could say that The Joker was dead, unless he knew more about that elusive thief than any honest man had a right to know. Quay shrugged his shoulders tolerantly.

"Of course I haven't any particular reason to believe he's dead," he conceded. "And you make out a more or less convincing theory, too. But if The Joker's in this, all the more reason to play safe. Put this diamond downtown, where, if he should go after it, he won't

have to walk through your sleeping room."

"But that's exactly what I'm hoping he will do," said Soule. "The whole plan hinges on that. I——"

He started suddenly, his face intent, his body tense and strained as one who listens with all his might. Quay listened, too. Faintly, but distinct and clear, the hurried clicking of clockwork came to his ears. He sprang up, a swift suspicion awake in him. There was no clock in the library. That sound could only come from some hidden mechanism placed there for an evil purpose. He searched methodically but rapidly, under the chairs and divan and the wide, long table, his pulses hammering unsteadily. Twice before in his career he had dealt with infernal machines, and one of them had exploded while he searched as he was searching now. A kind of desperation woke in him. He *must* find the thing before it exploded. He must!

Soule's sense of sound was evidently keener than his own. The millionaire moved deliberately across the big room, pausing after each step to listen, his head tilted. Suddenly he sprang straight at the bookcase nearest the hearth, where the shelves were separated by a space wide enough to accommodate the tall volumes of an encyclopedia. He dropped to his knees and tore eagerly at the unwieldy books, tumbling them out in a disorderly heap on the rug beside him. On the second shelf he found what he sought. Quay saw that his hands shook perceptibly as he lifted the long, thin wooden box which lay behind the books, and carried it nearer to the light. It was made of red cedar, like a cigar box, but much longer and narrower than the common shape of such cases. Within it, plainly audible now, a restless mechanism clicked like a clock gone mad.

In spite of himself Quay's nerves quivered. He wasn't given to light terrors, but devices like this affected him with something of the involuntary, blind fear inspired in most men by venomous snakes. He knew what to do, however.

"Don't try to open it!" he warned Soule sharply as the man's long, nervous fingers fiddled with the nailed lid. "Here—let me have it!"

He fairly snatched it out of Soule's hands and sped with it, Soule following, straight toward the rear of the house. In the garden, surrounded by a high, vine-grown wall, the detective laid the machine gently on the turf and sprang back.

"There! Let it go off when it likes, now," he said. "There's no sense in risking our lives by trying to put it out of commission, and it can't do much harm where it is. Oh, Andrews"—as one of his own guards moved up to him—"keep away from this, but watch it. Some sort of bomb, all right."

The man stepped back quickly. "Shan't I douse it in a pail of water, sir?"

"Don't touch it," replied Quay. "Keep away from it, as I said. And keep your eyes open, too. We're doing business to-night."

Soule would have preferred to stay within sight of the machine, but Quay drew him back to the house. His breath was coming fast now, and his eyes gleamed with excitement.

"I might have guessed it would be something like that. Conger's cleverer than I thought. He must have framed the whole play just to smuggle that contraption behind those books. You see the idea, don't you? There's an explosion that tears out half the wall. Everybody's excited. You come running downstairs to see what's happened, and the police and my men are all over the place, your servants running around half dressed and altogether crazy. While this goes on, in walks Conger and takes his time to rob your safe.

Simple and effective, eh? Well, it won't work this time, thanks to your sharp ears. But it's sheer luck that it didn't."

Soule shook his head. He had recovered his self-control now, and his eyes were steady and bright, his face touched with an eagerness that was almost boyish.

"Well, I'm getting action for my money; eh, Quay? This is better than I hoped. First Jevons and next Conger and now—this! What next, I wonder?"

"Conger did this," said Quay quickly.

"Impossible. He wasn't in this room. Trow and Playre and I were here all the time he was in the house. You forget that——"

"You think so. As a matter of fact he had two chances to do it. Of course it would have been quick work, but I distinctly recall that twice, while they were bringing in the girl, we were all out of the room and Conger wasn't in evidence. That's the genius of the fellow. He's made you a witness in his favor, you see, by merely working fast."

Soule shook his head again. "Very plausible, but wrong, because I heard that ticking before he appeared at all, while Playre and I were talking. I thought it was Playre's watch. He's a crank, you know, and carries one of those pocket alarm clocks that make a noise like a junior coffee mill. I remember joking him about it. It was there before Conger came on the scene, Quay. What do you make of that, unless there's a third party, or unless this is Jevons' little scheme?"

"Not Jevons. He doesn't know there's a party scheduled for to-night," said Quay, scowling. "You're right, Mr. Soule. We've got three crowds to deal with. I—I wish you'd take my advice and put that stone somewhere else. Throw it away—get rid of it before one of these outfits wipes you out to get it. I tell you, sir, I'm worried. The thing has brought more than enough crooks down on you already!"

Soule laughed heartily. "Didn't I say that I was getting action for my money? Quay, if you knew how I'm enjoying this! Even if I don't draw The Joker to the bait, or the other master thief I'm angling for, I'm having more fun to-night than I've ever had in my life. You can't realize how dull things are for a man like me. I've never had anything like an adventure till now, and all my days I've dreamed of gambling against destiny with life as the stakes, like the men who explore or fight or fly. I'm fifty-eight years old, Quay, and the only exciting thing that ever happened to me before to-night was getting stopped for exceeding the speed limit in my car! Taking risks is your business, so you can't expect to get much fun out of it, but it's the first really interesting evening I've ever spent, and I wouldn't spoil it for ten such diamonds as The Rogue!"

"The Rogue! You've bought it, then?"

Quay's taut nerves brought him to his feet with a whirling spring which left him facing the door behind the divan. A girl in a soft evening wrap stood just inside the room, her young face curiously set. Quay stared at her blankly, his hand slowly releasing the butt of the automatic in his pocket as he saw that she was at home here. He turned to Soule with a frank question in his glance.

"Yes, Paula, I have. It's in the safe at this moment. Let me present my friend, Mr. Martin Quay—my stepdaughter, Paula Renfrew."

"Martin Quay?" The girl repeated the name in an altered tone as she bowed in mechanical acknowledgment of Quay's gesture. "The detective?"

"Yes. I know it will make you easier in your mind to hear that Mr. Quay is going to spend the night with us, Paula, and that he has a small regiment

of men guarding the doors. To-morrow we'll put The Rogue in a safe-deposit box; to-night I'm sure Mr. Quay will be able to protect it—and us." His tone changed. "You had a pleasant evening, I hope?"

"Very, thanks." She spoke curtly. "But you promised me——"

"Pardon, my dear, but it was scarcely that, you know. I said I'd think it over very carefully. I did. Really, you needn't take it so seriously; after all, it's only susperstition." Again he took the conversational tone. "The Tarrants brought you home with them, I suppose?"

"Yes." Again a touch of impatience lay in her voice. She turned to Quay. "I wish you'd persuade him to send that diamond out of the house, Mr. Quay—at once—to-night. I can't help feeling that the curse on it——"

"I've already suggested it, Miss Renfrew," said Quay. "Unfortunately Mr. Soule can't be brought to agree with us about it." He stopped as a glance of disapproval from his client warned him. He forced a more casual manner and grinned deprecatingly. "But it's of no consequence, anyway. With my men outside, and with me on guard inside, there's really no danger. I shan't shut an eye, I promise you."

She lifted her shoulders in the gesture of one who submits, unconvinced. "Of course you know best, sir." Her glance moved to Soule. "I'd like a word with you, father, if Mr. Quay will excuse you a moment."

Soule's brow gathered into a frown for the fraction of a second. It was gone almost instantly, but Quay's keen eye saw it and noted it as one of the phenomena of this mad night. He stepped back toward the hearth as his host moved toward the girl. They stood in the doorway, speaking in lowered voices, so that their words did not reach Quay's ear, but he knew from their tones that the conversation was not in the best of humors. Soule's final speech rose clearly enough to be distinct.

"I don't care to discuss it, Paula. I've given you my final decision about it. You must be guided by me in the matter."

"But——"

"Please. It's settled. I don't wish to hear any more." He turned away and came back toward Quay. It was self-evidently a means to the end of putting a stop to the argument. The girl stood a moment in the doorway, her face a study in conflicting emotions. To Quay, accustomed to reading trivial changes of expression with the accuracy of print, she was angry, and something more. He couldn't be sure whether it was regret that underlay her anger—or fear. But as she vanished he felt, with a touch of uneasiness, that Myron Soule had antagonists within his household as well as without.

Soule shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry to have forced that scene on you, Quay. Being a stepfather has certain trying phases. My daughter is amazingly susperstitious about this diamond matter. Ever since I unfortunately allowed her to know that I intended to buy the stone she has been begging me not to do it." He smiled a little shamefacedly. "I confess that I intentionally arranged that she should be away from the house when I took possession."

"She's right, sir. There is a very real curse on the thing. I don't mean the supernatural sort of shadow, but the cold fact that it attracts such attempts as those we know about. Somebody has planted Jevons here, to be in readiness for a try at stealing The Rogue. That's the clumsiest effort of the three, and yet, as thieves go, it took an exceptionally able one to plan it so far ahead. Then we have Conger. His scheme is cleverer still. Lastly, there is this infernal-machine affair, which looks like the best of the lot. You can

surely see that there's plenty of reason on her side."

"I never denied it." Soule spoke testily. "Don't you see that it's exactly what I wanted? Excitement, adventure, danger, romance—my wits against those others, my defense against their attacks. That's what I wanted, Quay, and I'm getting it. As for any danger to my life, that's part of the game. You face it every day, don't you, as a mere business? Well, you can't criticize me for facing it for fun."

Quay dropped the argument at once. He saw that Soule was beginning to be irritated by his persistence, and he could understand the man's yearning for something more than the level, placid existence which had been his by inheritance and circumstance. It was human to crave adventure. Quay himself had been actuated by this same motive again and again. A certain pity for the man rose in him. He had the soul of a buccaneer, a freebooter, and destiny had given him the lot of a burgess! He longed for wild, free adventure, and life had given him nothing better than humdrum affairs of investment and reinvestment of dividends!

But his sympathy only quickened his desire to protect Soule against himself. Realizing the spirit which had prompted the whole undertaking, he was even more aware of its very real perils. So long as that great blazing diamond lay in his safe upstairs, Myron Soule was a target for the attacks of men who would gladly cut his throat for a mere fraction of The Rogue's value, men who were drawn to it as iron filings are attracted by a magnet, and who would stop at nothing to possess it. A sudden resolution took hold of him. Soule craved adventure, did he? Well, he should have it—have his fill of it! He wanted to stand face to face with a master thief, did he? Well, he should meet the greatest of them all! He should have an experience that would satisfy his craving for excitement for the rest of his days, should give him his fill of danger. And he should never suspect that it had all been no more than a pretense, an innocent, kindly intentioned scheme to satisfy and protect him at the same time.

The Joker would come back to life for one night only. In that one night he would put the final touch of triumph to his career by stealing The Rogue—stealing it under the very eyes of its possessor, and leaving the eager thieves who had plotted the same deed to grit their teeth over their discomfiture!

Quay almost chuckled aloud as he realized that he himself was tempted by the same thing which had led Myron Soule to stake his life for sheer excitement's sake. As he began to arrange the details of his project, he knew that what most allured him was a sudden, overpowering thirst for adventure!

As he recognized this truth, there was a dull roar from the garden, and a red glow against the windows. Quay sprang to the nearest one. He stared out into the night at the weird spectacle of green, living sod blazing like oil-saturated kindling! As the first incredulity ebbed from his brain, enlightenment came to him. It had not been a bomb that had lain behind Myron Soule's staid encyclopedia, but a cunning device for starting and spreading a quick, savage fire. Quay laughed as the patches of flame on the turf began to die.

Martin Quay had seen phosphorus burn before. He paid the author of the scheme a deserved tribute of admiration as he watched it burn now. If that bomb had exploded in the library, even with a dozen people in the room, nothing could have prevented an ugly fire. He saw his guards trying to stamp out the blaze, and shook his head at their failure. He explained briefly to Soule,

who stood beside him, as eager and interested as a boy. The millionaire seemed to have shed his years in a single moment. He rubbed his hands together delightedly.

"By Jove, Quay, I'm enjoying all this! I've never had so much fun in all my life. It's the first time since I can remember that I've felt really alive!"

Afterward, when Quay recalled that speech, it had a very different significance from that he gave to it now. As he listened, it served only to quicken his determination that Myron Soule should have his fill of adventure for once, that, for one night only, The Joker should come back to life. But he was not ready yet to carry that part of his plan into execution. Whoever had placed that bomb behind Soule's books, whether it had been Conger or some other wily rascal, he must have been warned by the illumination in the garden of the miscarriage of his plot. But Quay was on guard, nevertheless, for some swift attack on his part. He watched closely from his window and suddenly flung up the sash at what he saw.

"Mac! Mac!" McPhee came toward him. "What's the matter with you? I told you expressly that no matter what happened your men weren't to leave their posts. You've got all six of them around here! There's nobody watching the front of the house!"

McPhee whirled without a word, and three of his men, followed him at a run around the angle of the building. Quay sped to the front door and joined them.

"It's all right, sir," said McPhee, when Soule had unlocked the door. "There's no one here. I'm sorry we fell for it, but——"

Quay cut him short. He refastened the door. It had been only a matter of minutes since the startled guards had deserted their appointed stations, but it had been long enough. As Quay turned away from the lock, he heard a deep-toned clock strike one.

CHAPTER III.

THE JOKER'S TRICK.

THEY waited patiently for an hour. The minutes dragged interminably as they sat in the darkened library, and Myron Soule's mood changed under the strain. The brief excitement of the explosion waned quickly enough. He twisted restlessly in his chair and several times spoke fretfully.

"I wonder why he doesn't show up, Quay. What do you suppose has happened? He must have been frightened off by your men. They've bungled the whole thing by running back that way."

Quay agreed with him. He couldn't explain the failure of Jevons' accomplice to put in his appearance on any theory except that the man must have been near enough to observe the confusion incident to the fire and have seen the guards return to their posts. It was not his habit to waste any regrets over what couldn't be helped. Whatever had interfered with his plans as they concerned Jevons and his companions, he realized that it was past remedy now. Conger's scheme had failed and the clever crook in all probability would be discouraged from making another attempt to-night, so Quay devoted his thoughts to his own half-formed scheme for the temporary resurrection of The Joker. He had already worked out the principal problems, but there were some puzzling details which continued to perplex him, and he was glad of the opportunity to ponder on them. It was well on toward two o'clock when Soule's restlessness gave him a chance to get his scheme under way.

"I guess I might as well turn in," announced Soule, rising. "It doesn't look as if we were going to have any more excitement to-night."

Quay got to his feet at once. "I'm afraid you're right—or rather I hope you are, sir. By all means go to bed if you're sleepy. I'll be on watch, and if there's anything interesting I'll see that you don't miss it."

Soule shrugged his shoulders, plainly skeptical. Quay accompanied him to the foot of the stairs and bade him good night. He couldn't commence operations until his host had retired, and he was anxious to be at his work as soon as possible. He waited by the fire in the library for another hour, controlling his rising impatience as best he could. When he heard the clock strike three he went to the front door and called McPhee for a brief conference. The Scotchman didn't dream that his chief was scarcely listening to his weighty remarks, nor that Quay's only reason for interrupting his vigil was to get a quick glance up at Myron Soule's windows. They were reassuringly dark. Quay came back into the house and closed the door carefully.

A night light burned dimly beside the stairs. He paused a moment, considering whether or not to leave it behind him, and decided to extinguish it. He had a perfectly valid explanation ready, in case the action should ever be called in question. He could say that he had put it out in order to convey the idea that the household had all retired, and so put a possible marauder off his guard. He went up the stairs without any special effort at caution. He knew better than to display even so much of the criminal's normal attitude. As Martin Quay he had every right to be here and to move about as he saw fit. If he crept upstairs on tiptoe he was acting as a thief would act. It was in such seemingly trivial details as this that The Joker's success and safety had chiefly lain. Martin Quay didn't make even little mistakes.

He walked the length of the hall, listening for any hint of wakefulness in the house. At Myron Soule's dressing-room door he stopped and listened more intently still. It was a bit of luck that the bedroom lay beyond. The chances were against Soule's having locked the door between the two rooms. Quay stooped to the lock. He had already noticed it, as he noticed every lock that came under his observation, and he smiled at the old-fashioned simplicity of the contrivance. People spent a great deal of pains on their outer fastenings, he reflected cynically, and installed stock locks on their inner doors—cheap, clumsy affairs that any common thief could open with a pair of thin-nosed pliers or a bit of bent wire. Myron Soule was no exception to the rule. He had carefully locked his dressing-room door, to be sure, but he had obligingly left the key in place. Quay listened again before he inserted his thin steel pliers and turned the key back. There was scarcely a sound as the bolt moved. Quay repocketed his pliers and drew on a pair of very thin gloves before he laid his hand on the knob. The door swung inward on oiled hinges, and Quay stepped inside, closing it soundlessly behind him.

He saw, with a flash of satisfaction, that the bedroom door was open. Standing very still he could distinctly hear Soule's deep, even breathing in the inner room. The thing was childishly simple after all! He slipped swiftly across to the rectangle of diminished darkness which revealed the doorway, and paused again to make sure that Soule was asleep. Then, with a quick motion, he moved to the side of the bed. His hand held a folded bit of surgical gauze, on which he deftly emptied the contents of a small flat bottle. A sweetish, pungent odor rose as he held the cloth carefully within an inch of the face, permitting the emanations of the chloroform to reach the lungs by gentle gradations.

There is an art in the use of the

soporific. Your bungler holds the saturated cloth tightly against his victim's nose and lips, and wakens him in time to struggle against the drug. Quay knew that he was in all probability strong enough to overcome Soule in a hand-to-hand struggle, but he saw no reason to risk even the remote chance that the sleeping millionaire might be able to give the alarm. He had already brought Soule far enough under the influence of the chloroform to make it sure that he would not wake before he permitted the wet cloth to touch his skin. Then very gently he held it against the nostrils and lips, so that the fumes entered the lungs without any labored effort for breath. He kept a sensitive finger on the pulse as he waited. He was as deliberate as if he had all the time in the world, instead of needing every possible second.

When he stepped back from the cot, he moved swiftly enough. He touched the switch of the reading light without hesitation, and, stooping low, so that he was well below the level of the window sill, lifted the metal standard clear of the floor. It was a portable affair of coated brass, with an adjustable upright telescoping into the lower part of the support, and it drew its current from a wall socket in the white-enameled baseboard. Quay leaned close to the floor to look below it. His eye brightened as he saw the polished metal disk which projected a little below the felt pad and the corresponding contact in the floor. He did not know what the exact nature of the mechanism might be, but he was very sure that it was controlled through these hidden contacts. Soule had moved the standard after he had stowed The Rogue in the safe. It must have been to reset his protective device by closing this circuit. Quay made sure that it was broken now. He moved the standard well to the right, exposing the floor contact.

As he turned to the door of the strong room, he paused again, thinking hard. How could he be sure whether it was to open or close that circuit that Soule had moved the lamp? Had the thing been closed just now or open? Martin Quay had had one enlightening experience with a trap safe, and he was not at all desirous of repeating it. He examined the door of the strong room minutely as he hesitated. It was of enameled metal, and it seemed to have no lock whatever. A small knob on its outer side was the only break in the smooth surface, and its hinge device was the modern swivel affair, working in sockets let into the top and base of the frame. Quay shook his head slightly. He didn't trust such a door. It looked altogether too innocent.

But time pressed. He couldn't afford to stand here debating the chances with himself. He drew the door toward him, barely touching its edge with the tips of his gloved fingers. He set the stout chair in the opening, placing it very carefully indeed. Then, with a return of his earlier swiftness of motion, he fairly sprang at the safe.

He had watched Soule narrowly when the millionaire had opened it. He knew that there were three turns to the right, one to the left, and two more to the right. It was a better beginning than he usually enjoyed, and he bent to his task with a sure, confident touch on the dials, his ear pressed tightly against the silk handkerchief he had interposed between his cheek and the cold metal of the safe. It was one of his precautions, this handkerchief. He had once identified the author of a clever safe robbery through the clear print of an ear on a safe door, and he had kept the idea to himself instead of sharing it with his subordinates. But there was no telling when somebody else would hit on the same device. Hence the care with which The Joker saw to it that no part of his body came into direct contact with the safe he robbed.

It took him perhaps five minutes to unriddle the combination. The bolts gave, and he tugged gently at the knob. There was a dull whirring behind him, a sharp crack of splintering wood. He whirled, his hand on his gun butt, the other holding the handkerchief over his face. Then he lowered it, grinning at what he saw. His guess had been accurate. The trap was meant to take its victim alive and unhurt. The moment the safe door swung out, the steel door of the room itself slammed shut, imprisoning the thief until it should suit Myron Soule's pleasure to release him. Quay had a little thrill of something like fear at the thought of his plight if he had neglected the precaution of interposing that chair in the doorway. As it was, the strength of the concealed mechanism had snapped off two of its legs and only the solidity of the heavy wooden seat prevented the door from closing! He saw that a generous section of the frame had moved, too, a lock which would have held the door fast against anything short of nitroglycerin.

The narrowness of the escape did not deter him. He made short work of the inner lock and pulled out the drawer in which Soule had stowed the satinwood case. It was still there. He opened it, his hands shaking a little, and unfolded the wadded square of velvet. The Rogue lay on his palm, its weird, smoldering fire glowing wickedly into his eyes. For a moment he yielded to the hypnosis of it. Then, with an effort, he closed his fingers and thrust the stone itself deep into a waistcoat pocket. The velvet went back into the satinwood box, and the box itself into its drawer. Quay meant to play safe. In case of trouble there was just the chance that the presence of the box and the velvet might give him breathing space. He had wadded into the cloth a small oblong bit of cardboard—a joker, taken from a deck of miniature playing cards, the famous signature which had given The Joker his nickname.

There was barely room between the door and its frame to give egress to his bulky body, but he squeezed through it, taking care not to move the ruined chair in doing so. He moved the standard back into place, and saw the door frame resume its normal aspect. Trying the door itself, he found that it swung easily once more, so he released the wreckage of the chair. He went to the pains of propping this up on its broken legs in a corner of the room before he lifted the gauze from Soule's face.

He was quite cool now. The difficult part of the job was done. There remained only the finishing touches. And Martin Quay knew exactly what these were to be. The Joker's technique had been developed by practise on a foundation of sound theory—a theory constructed from thirty years of close contact with criminal minds of the highest order, with criminal methods which had succeeded most frequently, and with the inestimable advantage of an equal familiarity with the machinery and methods of the police.

As in this instance, The Joker simplified the usually formidable problem of contriving a safe and unperceived entry to the scene of his projected operations by persuading his intended victim to take him there in the capacity of a private policeman. Once there, his task was to secure an opportunity for the robbery itself without revealing his own dual character. This he usually accomplished by mercifully putting his client and victim out of action through the anæsthetic he carried in the flat metal flask which fitted a waistcoat pocket. After achieving his purpose his tactics would vary with the special circumstances of the case. Sometimes he cleverly simulated a desperate hand-

to-hand struggle with the mythical intruder, in which, slightly wounded, perhaps, he contrived to recover the plunder while permitting the thief to "escape." On other occasions he had recourse to a different stratagem, such as that which he now proceeded to carry into effect.

He slipped into the hall, closing the dressing-room door after him, but leaving it unlocked. The long corridor, in utter darkness, was easy enough to traverse, the wall serving as a safe guide to the head of the stairs. Quay crept down the steps, treading close to the wall. He entered the library with only the simple task of counterfeiting an alibi still before him.

This was easy, after his repeated experiments. He first of all thrust The Rgoue deep into the crevice between the seat and back cushions of the divan —a hiding place where he had excellent reason to believe it would be quite safe until he chose to remove it. Very carefully he upset several chairs and rumpled the smaller rugs, in simulation of a scuffle. He stretched himself flat on the floor amid this confusion and bound his knees and ankles tightly with strong, thin cord he carried for the purpose. The gauze pad which had been used to stupefy Myron Soule he bound firmly between his teeth as a rudely effective gag, and, twisting his arms behind him, managed to close his own handcuffs on his wrists.

Any one who found him thus would have been skeptical indeed to have doubted appearances. Martin Quay was trussed helplessly. He could not have wriggled to his feet had his life depended on it. The pad which gagged his mouth still reeked of chloroform, although evaporation had so weakened the power of the drug that it scarcely affected his consciousness. The same appearance of defeat had convinced the police on several earlier occasions, and Martin Quay had every reason to believe that it would have the same effect once more.

He meant to lie in his strained position for half an hour in order to provide The Joker with ample time in which to have made his escape. It would probably be safe to give the alarm at once, but Martin Quay invariably sought to approximate reality as nearly as he might. If a real Joker had attacked and overpowered him and repeated the process with Myron Soule, an interval would have elapsed before either of the victims would have been able to make an outcry. Quay deliberately permitted this interval to pass now. He was a tireless stickler for accuracy in the trivial details which, in sum, amount to the genius or dullness of the thief.

But his calculations, thoughtful and reasoned though they were, had failed to consider one very serious aspect of the situation. He was not long in learning the degree to which that single oversight was to affect his plans.

He was on the point of raising as much disturbance as his helpless position would permit, when his ear, close to the floor, caught distinctly the sound of a step in the hall. More; it instantly recognized that the step was furtive, that whoever had caused that faint noise had been endeavoring to move as silently as he might. The Joker was not the only intruder in Myron Soule's household. In a flash Martin Quay realized that his elaborate precautions had left him helpless against this other marauder. Handcuffed and gagged and hobbled, he could only lie still and rage at his lack of foresight. He had been warned plainly enough. Not only Jevons and his outside accomplices, but the canny and formidable Conger had served notice of an intended descent on Soule's treasures; the fire bomb had hinted strongly of still a third attempt. In the face of these ominous signs Martin Quay had deliberately put himself

out of action! He struggled futilely against his gag, lifted his bound feet, and was on the point of bringing them down with as much noise as possible. Then he realized that to attract attention would be only to advertise his helplessness. Better, by far, that this soft-footed rival should believe himself still pitted against Martin Quay, than that he should know definitely of Quay's self-imposed inability to interfere with him. He lowered his feet carefully to the rug and lay very still.

He listened with all his might, but no other sound reached him. He began to doubt whether he had really heard a step. But the incident had altered his plans enough to persuade him against any immediate betrayal of his plight. He might have been mistaken, but it was the part of discretion to wait a little before proceeding on that assumption. He waited, therefore, without dreaming of the price to be paid for that inactivity.

He heard the clock intone the hour of four at last, and his hesitation ended. He brought his feet down thunderously on the floor, contrived to reach and upset a table with a heavy glass electrolier, which crashed heavily on the hardwood flooring where the rugs had been moved. Bound and shackled and gagged as he was he managed to make an astonishing amount of noise, which presently brought help. It was Jevons who appeared first—Jevons, in a shapeless dressing gown of red stuff, which bagged and bellied comically about his stately figure, and heelless felt slippers which slapped and slithered on the polished floor. In spite of himself Martin Quay was seized with an impulse to laugh at the absurd difference which a change of raiment had worked in the butler's majestic appearance.

"Mr. Quay, sir!" Jevons was indubitably a thief in butler's clothing, but he kept to his adopted rôle with a tenacity which stirred Quay's admiration. Had he been the most stupidly honest menial alive he could not have acted the part much more convincingly than he did now. He stared so blankly at Quay's trussed body that Quay was obliged to perform another complicated wriggle or two to remind him that contemplation was not all that might be required of him. He loosened the gag first.

"Quick—get my man from outside," ordered Quay. "Go to the front door and call McPhee. He's got a key to these cuffs."

Jevons departed at a shuffling trot. A few seconds sufficed for McPhee to appear, his stolid countenance revealing no trace of emotion as he took in the scene and stooped to release his chief's manacled wrists. Quay tore at the cords which bound his legs, and lifted himself stiffly to his feet.

"Get back to the door, Mac—and keep your men posted so that no one can get in or out of this house. I believe we've got him this time. Don't be afraid to shoot if any one tries to get out. He must be still in the house, unless you've been asleep on the job."

McPhee departed as stolidly as he had come; and Quay, followed by Jevons, raced up the stairs toward Myron Soule's rooms. The household was awake now. He could hear steps, voices, the opening and shutting of distant doors. He saw a strip of light below one of the doors he passed. He guessed that it was Paula Renfrew's, but he did not stop to enlighten her. Time enough for that later.

He flung himself at Soule's dressing-room door, and, still followed by Jevons, sped to the bedroom. Enough light came through the open casement window to show him the motionless figure on the narrow cot. He plunged toward it, crying out:

"Soule—Soule! Wake up, man! We've got him—we've got him this time!"

There was no responsive sign from the bed. He stretched out a hand eagerly and seized Soule's shoulder, shaking it vigorously. Suddenly, with a tingling thrill of repulsion, he stepped back and spoke to Jevons in a curiously altered voice.

"Get a light here—quick! Something's wrong."

The butler found the wall switch, and the room was filled with a blaze from the ceiling globe. In its relentless illumination Martin Quay stood staring at the cot. Myron Soule lay flat on his back, his eyes wide and horrible, a great, crimson blot dyeing the white linen of his pajama jacket above the heart.

As Quay's reeling brain strove to bring order out of the chaos of his thought, one idea was persistently uppermost. The night which Myron Soule had called the best of his life had been the last one, too. He had declared that never had he felt so thoroughly alive—only an hour or two before life had left him!

Whoever had killed him, Martin Quay knew too well who was to blame. He had slain Myron Soule almost as surely as if it had been his hand which had plunged a knife into the sleeping man's heart!

CHAPTER IV.

PETER KANE'S IDEA.

INSTINCT guided Quay while his mind still refused to function coherently. He dropped a hand on Soule's wrist, already perceptibly cold; he inspected the ugly wound itself with an eye trained to read such sinister data at a glance. Still in a mental turmoil which completely obscured his powers of ordered reason, he moved quickly to the telephone on the stand beside the bed.

There was no response as he lifted the receiver, and he was aware of the peculiar sensation which indicates a dead wire. He turned to Jevons.

"Don't you plug in this extension at night?"

"Yes, sir—always." Jevons was the color of wood ashes, and drops of moisture stood out on his forehead, exaggerated by his impressive baldness into a semblance of intellectuality.

"Somebody's cut it, then," said Quay. "Hurry down and plug it in again. If you can't get me come to the foot of the stairs and I'll go down and phone from the switchboard myself."

Jevons obeyed.

Quay turned to the door of the strong room. It stood just as he had left it. The broken chair was still propped in its corner. The safe door itself was shut. He went to the lamp standard and inspected it narrowly. Suddenly he realized that in his haste he had blundered hideously. Instead of resetting Soule's trap, he had carefully put its mechanism out of commission! When those two hidden contacts were in juxtaposition the swinging door was harmless. It was only when they were separated, as they had been when he opened the safe, that the trap could be sprung! If he had stopped to reflect the man who had killed Myron Soule would have been prisoned fast in that steel-walled room, and Myron Soule would be alive and safe!

Again he faced the consciousness of guilt. If he had not meddled, in his silly desire to amuse and protect his patron, by bringing The Joker back to life, all would have gone well. As it was, Myron Soule had been killed and the assassin had escaped—escaped, at least, from the plight in which his guilt would have been indubitable. That he was still in the house Martin Quay believed and hoped. That he had managed to open the safe, either before or after the murder, and to remove the signature which The Joker had left behind, he hoped even more passionately.

He heard a step behind him and whirled swiftly, his hand moving instinctively to the butt of his gun. But it was Paula Renfrew who faced him, Paula Renfrew, fully clad and wholly self-possessed, except for a pallor which accentuated the appeal of her quiet beauty.

"Mr. Soule has been killed," said Quay with the bluntness he had discovered to be the most kindly method of stating an ugly truth.

She nodded slowly. "Yes, I know. Jevons has told me." She hesitated. "Have you—have you any idea who did it?"

Quay lifted his shoulders. "Somebody jumped on me downstairs and chloroformed me. I came to, to find myself gagged and tied and handcuffed. That makes it look very much like a Joker job. They're his regular methods, as I have too much reason to know. But killing isn't in his line. There were other people who had their eye on The Rogue."

"Yes. My stepfather told me." She spoke evenly. "Is—is The Rogue gone?"

"I can't tell till we can get the safe open," said Quay quickly. "That will be a job for an expert."

"I can open it, if you like. My stepfather always gave me the combination." She seemed not to realize the folly of the admission.

Quay stared at her. "I think you'd better do it, then," he said slowly.

The telephone hummed softly, and the detective lifted the receiver. Jevons' voice came to him.

"All right, sir?"

"Yes. Get headquarters, quick, and see if Inspector Kane's there. If not, get McGilveray." He hung up, turning to the girl.

"Wait. You'd better not leave finger prints just yet. Get a pair of gloves before you touch the dial."

She eyed him with plainly evident distrust. "I don't see why I shouldn't leave prints."

"My dear young lady, I'm trying to safeguard you from any possible hint of unpleasantness. A man has been murdered in this house. Nobody could have entered or left it to-night without being seen and stopped by my men on guard outside. That means that everybody here will inevitably lie under some suspicion unless we can catch the thief, as I hope to do. If your finger prints are found on that safe there will be some officious ass to try to twist an inference out of it. Am I clear? I tell you I shouldn't dream of touching that knob myself. I'm under suspicion, too, you see. Better get your gloves."

She yielded without more words. The telephone hummed again as she departed, and Quay braced himself for the interview with his rivals at headquarters. His failure would be joyful news down there. He knew in advance what Peter Kane would say. He hoped that it would be McGilveray who answered, but the first word told him that luck was against him. It was Peter Kane's voice.

Quay reported succinctly. The news was amazing enough to occupy Kane's mind to the exclusion of lesser matters. He forbore to crow over his enemy.

"You say you've got the place covered? How many men?"

"Seven, besides myself," said Quay.

Kane indulged in a heavy attempt at irony. "That makes fourteen in all, then, I suppose? Well, we'll be right up and see if we can't pick up the pieces for you, Quay. Next time, maybe, you'll have the sense to tell us before you get your client bumped off."

The receiver clicked and Quay replaced it, turning just as Paula Renfrew came back, wearing a pair of white kid gloves. He stood back as she knelt before the safe, his pulses hammering. He was going to have a chance, after all, to eliminate The Joker! It would

be easy enough to manage, thanks to the incredibly good luck of the girl's knowing the combination. If the satinwood box was still in the safe he could surely contrive to recover the telltale bit of cardboard he had left in it.

The door swung back. He leaned over the girl's shoulder and opened the inner drawer. The satinwood box was gone!

"They—they got it, then!"

Quay scarcely heard the girl's low speech. His mind had leaped at the altered situation; it was clear and collected now, in the face of this new emergency. The signature which linked The Joker to the crime had been removed, and the man who had removed it had added murder to his theft. He could not denounce The Joker without confessing his own deeper guilt. So much was clear gain for Martin Quay. But the murderer would soon discover, if he had not done so already, that The Joker had anticipated him. At least one man knew that the famous thief had made away with The Rogue of diamonds.

"Yes, they did." He agreed mechanically. "Better close the door again, Miss Renfrew. If you'll be guided by me you'll just forget that you ever had it open, and that you ever knew the combination. I'm quite serious. You see, I used to be a policeman myself, and I know a good deal about their mental processes. In a few minutes Inspector Peter Kane will be here. He worked under me for twelve years, and I can almost watch him think. His one idea is that every mysterious crime is an inside job. He always pins his first suspicions on the household—on a man's wife or children, say, or his trusted servants. You're Myron Soule's stepdaughter—not related to him by any tie of blood. Yet, I suppose, you're his chief heir. Those two circumstances will be enough to make Peter Kane morally convinced that you killed him. If you strengthen that conviction by letting him know that you had the combination of the safe I wouldn't put it past him to go to the length of an actual arrest. You see, my men outside will be emphatic in saying that nobody left the house after the crime was committed. They'd say that, anyway, but it will be another point for Kane's pet theory. Really, you'd better be guided by me."

She stared at him with wide, curiously opaque eyes. "You mean that they may think I—I killed him?"

"I know you didn't of course," said Quay. "But Kane is a pig-headed fool. I'm only trying to spare you the annoyance and humiliation of his suspicions. All you need to do is to keep quiet. It isn't as if you had to tell any lies. Just neglect to say that you knew how to open the safe. That's all."

She nodded, seemingly a little reassured. "I didn't realize that I'd leave finger prints," she said. "Suppose I'd touched it—is there any way I could have removed the marks?"

Quay grinned. Her simplicity delighted him. "Of course, a little alcohol or gasoline would polish them off in a moment," he said. "The print is left by the natural oils of the skin, and anything that will remove grease will take off the finger mark."

She nodded. "I see." There was a silence for a moment. Then: "Have you any idea who did it?"

Quay shrugged his shoulders. "Too many; that's the trouble. But whoever did it, he's still in the house. That's reasonably certain. Nobody could have passed my men. And if he's in the house we'll find him. As soon as Kane comes we'll have men to spare, and then we'll go over every inch of the house from cellar to roof. If my guess is right, though, we won't find anybody who doesn't belong here."

She opened her eyes again at this.

"You mean that somebody who lives here did it?"

"Something like that." Quay's mind had swiftly performed a simple process of elimination. He believed that no one had entered the house since his guards had been posted. Unless, therefore, the murderer had been hidden there before he had placed his men outside, the crime must obviously have been committed by some member of the household itself. Of these it was easy to exclude Paula Renfrew and himself. That left the several maids, whom, for the present, he also chose to ignore, and Jevons—who, he knew positively, had been bent on robbery, at least. He must have misinterpreted that overheard snatch of telephone conversation. He had erred in supposing that the butler was no more than a spy, that the actual theft was to be attempted by his accomplices outside. Events had demonstrated that Jevons had received no reënforcements. It followed inevitably that he had done the murder. But Quay had no intention whatever of accusing him. He knew better. Already his plan of action had been formed. Not even Peter Kane would be able to spoil it, although Quay knew that the inspector would do his best in that direction.

There was a ring at the door, and the sound of steps and voices. Quay sped to the head of the stairs, forgetting all about the girl in his eagerness to make sure that no chance neglect was permitted to leave a gap in his cordon. He heard Peter Kane's heavy tones and Jevons' monotonous voice in response. He ran down the steps as the burly inspector approached.

"Well? Dug up anything yet?"

Quay was relieved that Kane wasted no time in satirical comment on his failure. "I've been waiting for you," he said. "I didn't dare pull my men inside, and I thought it best not to start a search till I had plenty of help. I believe we've got the fellow trapped, Kane. He can't have got out."

"Humph! You got a lot of faith in your dicks, eh? Well, I haven't. But you might be right. We'll take a look at the body first."

He issued curt orders to his escort of four men in plain clothes and joined Quay on the stairs. They went up together.

As they entered the dressing room Paula Renfrew confronted them. Quay regretted that he had warned her. She was palpably nervous in the presence of the police, and a less able man than Peter Kane would have observed her constraint and her pallor. Quay presented the inspector casually. Kane shot a shrewd glance at the girl, the lower lids of his eyes lifting slightly in his favorite expression of sagacity and penetration.

"Stepdaughter, eh? Well, Miss Renfrew, this is no place for you, I'd say. Better go and lie down till I'm ready to talk to you."

He spoke kindly enough, and Quay saw the girl's nervous tension relax under the tone. She murmured a word of acquiescence and moved past the two men into the hall.

"Hard hit, eh?" Kane wagged his head. "You ought not to have let her in here, Quay. Only upset her to see it—and besides——" His eyelids lifted again, and he left the sentence unfinished.

Quay repressed an impulse to grin. Kane's brain was working in its regular groove, precisely as he had known it would. He said nothing, while Kane made a brief examination of the body and the room, but he watched the inspector's every motion. Kane turned to the strong room.

"Still shut, eh? That's funny. Why didn't they get into it? They had all the time in the world, after they'd put you out of business. Tested for prints?"

Quay shook his head. "Thought I'd wait for you," he said.

Kane nodded. "Good thing you did. About time you got it through your head that it's a police job to handle these little affairs, Quay. You fly dicks have no license to butt in the way you do. Well, we'll have a look."

He produced a small box of powder and a camel's-hair brush, with which he proceeded to spread the fine dust over the surface of the safe. Quay leaned over to watch for the first telltale sign. But Kane suddenly bent forward, bringing his nose close to the metal. He sniffed. Then, with an ugly laugh, he got to his feet.

"I guess that's all I need to know," he said. "Somebody's been swabbing it off with alcohol—and not more than a few minutes back, either. You can smell it perfectly. I guess that girl is responsible for this."

"Looks like it," said Quay, who knew better than to disagree. The surest way to convince Peter Kane that his deduction was correct would be for Martin Quay to challenge it. "I was going on that theory myself, but I thought I'd let you form your own judgment. It looks bad, I admit."

"Uh-huh." Kane glanced around him. Suddenly he dived into the bathroom, which opened off Soule's bedchamber. "I thought so." He showed Quay a pint bottle, belonging to a toilet set, and labeled plainly in black letters: "Alcohol."

"Let's get her away from her room," he said. "I'll bet you anything you like that I can find a handkerchief in there with enough of this stuff on it to cinch the case."

"All right. You talk to her while I hunt," said Quay quickly. "She'll be expecting you to subject her to a third degree, and you can give me all the time I want."

It was a bold stroke, but it was his only hope of preventing Kane from tightening his net of suspicion at once about the girl. She might have done the murder, Quay admitted, but even if she had, he rebelled against the idea of her falling into Kane's hands.

His career as The Joker had worked a curious change in his nature. In the old days he had detested criminals with a kind of blind passion, similar to the instinct which compels a dog to follow the scent, or a cat to sit patiently before a rat hole. Latterly, as he conducted his experiments in crime on his own account, he had come to feel a certain sympathy for men and women who had put themselves outside the law. In his days as inspector of detectives, he would have pursued this clew as relentlessly as Peter Kane himself and felt scarcely a twinge of compassion. To-night his impulse urged him straight to the girls' defense.

Kane accepted the suggestion readily. He was off his guard for once, his distrust of his old-time chief allayed by the latter's agreement with his theory and by his own superior strategical position. He knocked at Paula Renfrew's door. She answered it at once.

"I'd like to talk to you a little, Miss Renfrew," he said, with an uncouth gentleness in his voice and manner. "You understand that it's my job to find out what anybody and everybody can tell me about this bad business."

"Of course." The girl bowed. "I can't tell you very much, but I'll be very glad to answer your questions."

"That's right. That's the way to look at it." Kane spoke heartily. "Just step this way, please."

He led her back toward Soule's dressing room. Quay stopped where he was until they passed out of sight. Then he stepped quickly into the girl's vacated apartments.

They were arranged in suite, very much as Soule's own quarters—a large dressing room nearest the hall, a bedchamber and bath beyond. Quay be-

gan with the dressing room. He searched it methodically, without finding anything to confirm Kane's guess. The bedchamber proved equally blank of incriminating evidence, and the bathroom likewise. He returned to the dressing room, thinking hard. Kane had been guessing. Martin Quay knew positively. No one but the girl could possibly have swabbed that safe. She must have carried away with her the cloth with which it had been done. His eye wandered to the reclining chair, and inspiration came to him. He plunged his hand into the crevice between its thick cushions, exploring carefully. His fingers touched a wadded lump of damp cloth. He drew it out, his face very grave. It was a diminutive square of lace-edged linen, with a small letter *P* embroidered in one corner. He lifted it toward his nostrils. The fumes of alcohol told him that he had found what he sought.

Peter Kane had been right for once in his premature conclusions. Quay stood staring at the handkerchief, his eyebrows drawn together. Quite apart from his intuitive sympathy for the girl herself, he was displeased at the idea of admitting that Peter Kane had hit the correct solution at his first guess. He hesitated only a moment. Then he thrust the telltale bit of cloth into his pocket and strode out of the room. He had made up his mind. He'd help Paula Renfrew all he could, chiefly on her own account, to be sure, but also a little because he wanted to outwit his old enemy.

He found Kane and the girl in the dressing room, and his first glance reassured him on one point. So far, at least, Kane had not given her reason to know that he suspected her. She was more self-possessed than she had been; there was a touch of color in her cheeks, and her hands lay quietly in her lap. Kane glanced up quickly, a question in his eyes. Quay answered it with a negative motion of his head. He was relieved when Kane rose.

"Well, we haven't got anywhere yet, Quay. Miss Renfrew can't tell us much, I'm afraid."

"We hardly hoped she could, did we?" Quay smiled. "Let's get your men and go through the house. I'm convinced the fellow's still here. All we've got to do is to find him, and that ought not to be very hard."

"We'll find him, all right," said Kane. "But will we know it when we do? That's the question. It's an inside job, Quay. That's plain on the face of it."

"Not quite. But I grant you that it looks that way now. Still, if The Joker were alive, he might have done it. I've been thinking that perhaps he did."

"Not him! He'd have left his calling card. He's got too much conceit to overlook that." Kane turned to the girl. "I'd sort of like to have you help us hunt, Miss Renfrew; you know the house, of course, and we can trust you. If we took one of the servants we might happen to pick on the one that did the trick, or was in on it. Do you mind?"

"I'd prefer it," she said quietly. "I want to do everything I can to help you. I want the man who killed him to pay the full penalty. It's—it's all I can do for him, now."

"Yes, that's right." Kane ushered her out of the room with a crude courtesy, and the three descended the stairs together. In the lower hall they found a group of panic-stricken servants, showing signs of not too gentle treatment at the hands of Kane's men, who had marshaled them here in obedience to his orders, and were standing guard over them. Kane questioned them in order, wasting little time on the maids, and confining his inquiries chiefly to Jevons, who answered them, in his correct butler's voice, without hesitation or confusion.

He had gone to bed after locking up,

about one-thirty. He hadn't been able to sleep, however, because of the excitement of the evening, and so it happened that he had heard Quay's attempts to waken the household some hours later.

"What time was that?" Kane interjected the question casually.

"About four, sir, I think. The clock struck just before I heard a crash downstairs."

"What time do you get up in the morning, Jevons?"

Jevons opened his eyes. "Usually at seven, sir."

"And you stayed awake in your bed from one-thirty till four, after having been on duty for seventeen hours before that?"

"No, sir. I always have a rest in the afternoon. I slept from about three until close on to six to-day. And, as I said, there had been so much excitement over the explosion and all——"

"All right." Kane turned away. "Jim, you stay here with these people; the rest of you can come along while we search the house. Don't worry"—this to the maids—"I'm doing this to protect you. The murderer's probably hidden somewhere in the house. You're safer here than anywhere else."

He questioned Paula briefly about the arrangement of the rooms and doors. Quay listened with unwilling approval. Kane was undeniably competent at some parts of his duty. He went about the job of ransacking the premises very capably indeed.

They took the ground floor first, locking up one room after another as they finished with it, and leaving no possible hiding place untried. Quay was not surprised that the search proved fruitless here. He was reasonably certain that the murderer would try to conceal himself either in the cellars or on one of the upper floors. But he began to scowl a little when the cellar failed to reveal any trace of an intruder, and the second and third floors had been ransacked with no better results. He could see that Kane's conviction was steadily deepening. Unless they found somebody else to receive the burden of suspicion, Kane would be utterly sure that the girl had done the murder herself, and would act accordingly.

They finished with the servants' quarters on the fourth floor at last, and Kane, with a straightening movement of his big shoulders, turned abruptly to the girl.

"Any place we've overlooked, Miss Renfrew?"

"No. We've been everywhere." She spoke quietly, but Martin Quay saw the slight closing of her fingers. He knew that gesture—knew, as many thoughtful and observant men have discovered, that when people nerve themselves to a lie they almost invariably close their hands. The gesture gave Quay a sudden insight. She knew where the man was hidden, and she was deliberately shielding him!

His mind worked fast. He could fairly see Kane's brain coming to its conclusion, knew that in another moment the big detective would solemnly place the girl under arrest, knew that once he had put himself on record as believing in her guilt, no power under heaven would persuade him to alter that opinion. Yet Quay shrank from pressing the search which would save her. He did not quite know why he refrained from the easy expedient of suggesting that they must have missed some insignificant corner somewhere. Something in the girl's face as she lied to Peter Kane checked Quay's half-spoken words on his lips. She was hiding the man who had killed her stepfather. She was doing it, then, for some sound reason—some reason which Martin Quay wanted to find out before Peter Kane should pass judgment on it. He played a bold shot just as

Kane drew himself up for his pronunciamento.

"Oh, pshaw, Kane—what's the use of bothering any more? I told you this girl did it. Put her under arrest and let's go and get some sleep. Any bonehead except you would have done it long ago."

Kane turned a dull purple at the words and tone. He glared at his old rival as the girl stepped toward him as if seeking his protection from this unexpected attack. Precisely as Quay had guessed, Kane's instinctive tendency to disagree with any theory propounded by his detested predecessor weakened his belief in the girl's guilt. He preferred to differ with Quay on every possible question, and his old habit guided him now.

"Say, Quay, when did you get back on the force? I don't know who told you to give orders around here. I'm doing that. There's nothing to show that Miss Renfrew had anything to do with this crime. It's outrageous to insult her with such a——"

The girl cut in quickly, her quiet voice faintly tinged with passion. "Thanks, Mr. Kane. It's a great good fortune for me that you are so unlike Mr. Quay's description of you. He gave me to understand that you never saw anything but the obvious surface, that you would be certain to suspect and arrest me, merely because I was likely to profit by my stepfather's death! Evidently it is Mr. Quay himself who is blind to everything except the superficial, and you who are able to look deeper and find the truth."

Kane's body seemed to swell with affronted dignity. He glowered at Quay. "Say, where do you get all that inside dope on me, Quay? If you're looking for trouble you can find it pretty easy, you know. I'd be within my rights if I detained you as a material witness. About one more crack like that and I'll do it, by George! You've got it coming to you right now!"

Quay shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, all right, Kane. I thought you'd got over falling for that sort of salve, but you're the doctor, as you remind me. It's no funeral of mine if you want to show yourself up again; I was just trying to keep you from pulling your usual bonehead play, that's all."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and swaggered off as insolently as he could. He knew that if Kane's anger against him could be maintained at its present temperature, the inspector would do almost anything else before he would order Paula Renfrew's arrest. The impromptu strategem had succeeded beyond his hopes. The girl was safe, temporarily at least, from any danger of a direct accusation. This suited Quay, not only on her own account, but also because he particularly wanted her to be left at liberty. He relied on her to lead him inadvertently to the track of the real assassin. Once Kane arrested her there would be no chance to use her as an involuntary guide.

He went down the narrow, curving stairway briskly. On the landing at the third floor he paused a moment, listening intently. Kane's heavy voice floated down to him, booming in fatherly reassurances to the girl. Quay grinned. He slipped swiftly along the corridor to the front of the house, where an angle afforded him shelter against discovery on the part of any one descending the stairs. Here, flattening himself against the wall, he waited while the group came down. They would take it for granted that he was ahead of them, he believed, and evidently he was right, for they passed the landing without stopping. He waited until they had had time to reach the second floor, and then he sped back to the steps. He had an idea—not a theory, as yet, but a faint, nebulous

hypothesis which he wanted to put to the test without enlightening Peter Kane regarding it.

He climbed the stairs swiftly and ran to Jevons' room—a fairly large one occupying the gable end, its walls sliced in half by the slope of the ceiling, except for the central portion, and for the dormer windows which looked out over the gardens. They had searched it even more thoroughly than the rest of the house, partly because Quay was more interested in it than in any other single room, and partly because Peter Kane evidently had his doubts of the butler, too. As Quay paused in the doorway, however, he glanced about him with satisfaction twinkling in his eyes. He had noticed something which had escaped Kane's fairly observant eye during that first search. He drew it from his pocket now and contemplated it with a touch of triumph. It was a short nail, with a broad, thin head—a common affair, even when found in the middle of a bedroom floor. But it was the only clew that Martin Quay had thus far discovered.

The room, like the remainder of the fourth floor, had evidently been part of an attic, finished for sleeping purposes long after the rest of the house had been built. The walls and ceilings were covered with a patented plaster-board composition—a material which had not come into use until well within Quay's memory. It was common enough, to be sure, to excite no remark. Had it not been for the chance discovery of the nail on the floor, Quay would have given it no second thought. But now, as he dragged a chair to the spot where he had found the nail, and clambered up to its seat, he was wholly certain that he was on the right track.

He examined the thin strips of wood which covered the joints of the board. He knew that the stuff was manufactured in large squares, which were nailed to the studding, the cracks between them being concealed by the wooden moldings. He scrutinized these strips narrowly, looking for a nail hole, a splintered edge, or any other betraying mark of recent disturbance.

He climbed slowly down again, his eyes very bright. So that was it, eh? His chance shot had found the center of the target! Jevons had hidden the murderer of Martin Quay in the low, narrow space between the ceiling and the roof! It would have required only a few moments to loosen those protecting strips and pry down a square of the patent surface, and as many more to replace them after the culprit had scrambled through the gap. It would be an absurdly simple matter for Jevons to supply the hiding place with food and water, and in case of need the man could lie there unsuspected for a week—a month, even. Quay's opinion of Jevons underwent a swift revision upward. The butler was very far indeed from being as stupid as he looked.

He debated with himself the advisability of calling for help and searching the place at once. It would be simple and effective to bring Kane back with his men and drag the fugitive out of his attic refuge. But Quay disliked the idea of sharing the fun with his old enemy. Besides, he knew very well that Kane would get the credit for the feat, and that he himself would be elbowed out of the case with scant courtesy the moment the police had the solution in their hands. There was still another consideration. Paula Renfrew was involved in it all, to what extent and for what reason Martin Quay could not guess. But he was sufficiently foresighted to realize that if he precipitated the dénouement without being enlightened on that point, he might very easily complicate the situation immeasurably for her.

He went downstairs, therefore, without carrying his investigations any further. It did not surprise him to find that Peter Kane had admitted half a dozen of his favorites among the newspaper men to an audience in the library, where he was holding forth learnedly for their benefit.

"It's simple enough, now that we know who did it," he was saying as Quay came in. "I was pretty sure, all along, but this makes it open and shut. It's one more item in our little bill against The Joker."

Martin Quay forgot his discretion. "Nonsense, Kane! It couldn't have been The Joker."

Kane cocked a leering eye at him and waved a hand in a gesture of exaggerated deference.

"Boys, meet Mr. Martin Quay, the famous detective who knows all about everything. If he says The Joker didn't kill Soule, that settles it. I'm sorry, but I'll have to cancel that part of the story now."

Quay shook his head. "You're very funny, Kane. Everybody knows that. But you're never half so amusing as when you're serious. Of course you've got a right to charge this thing against The Joker, but I tell you right now that you'll get a laugh you won't like when the truth comes out. The Joker wasn't in it at all."

"Just as you say, Quay. I'm not arguing with you. It wasn't The Joker, then, boys. It was his ghost that bumped off Myron Soule to-night and stole The Rogue out of his safe! It was just his ghost that put his calling card into that jewel case and dropped it in the garden, where Martin Quay's fly dicks were sleeping peacefully all night!"

He flung out his hand, palm upward. Quay could only stare stupidly at the satinwood box, still containing its scrap of black velvet, on which, creased and crumpled, but unmistakable, lay the tiny sign manual of The Joker!

Kane chuckled. "It couldn't have been The Joker, boys. Martin Quay knows. He's just proved that he knows, by letting The Joker walk past his gang of clever dicks, break into a house where Quay himself was on guard, knock him out, and chloroform him for the third time, and then calmly murder the man who was trustful enough to believe that Martin Quay could protect him! Oh, yes—Quay knows, all right. Why, it's not ten minutes since he was fairly begging me to arrest Soule's stepdaughter and charge her with having killed her father herself!"

Quay's mind moved fairly fast at all times, but now, as he faced this new emergency, with six alert youngsters waiting to repeat every word he said to half a million newspaper readers, it leaped as light leaps. There was scarcely a perceptible interval between Kane's last word and Quay's quiet answer, and yet, as he hesitated for just that fraction of a second, he reasoned out his course as clearly as if he had taken an hour in which to ponder it.

The Joker was entangled in the affair now. Nothing could change that. Even the capture and arrest of the real murderer would not serve to clear the name of the master thief. He would be held responsible, as an accessory, at least. It was even possible that the man who lay hidden behind the plaster boards upstairs might wriggle out of his just deserts on some clever manipulation of the evidence against The Joker. Again, so long as Peter Kane was convinced that The Joker was guilty of both theft and murder, he wouldn't think of fastening his suspicions on Paula Renfrew. It was this thought that decided Quay.

"Well, that makes me feel a whole lot better," he said with the best of humor. "So long as it's The Joker

who's made a fool of me, I don't mind. He's done it before, once or twice, and he's done it to Inspector Kane here, oh, a dozen times, isn't it, Kane? I'd hate to think that any other crook could put it over me, but The Joker—well, he's all alone in his class. I'm really glad it's turned out this way, and I guess the inspector is, too."

"You bet I am!" Kane's jaw closed aggressively. "I've never had an open-and-shut case of murder against this bird before. Now I've got it, and you can quote me, boys, as saying that this means The Joker's finish! I'm going to get him, and when I get him, *he's* going to get the chair!"

CHAPTER V.

A BID FOR THE ROGUE.

QUAY left the room, the words jarring in his ears. Kane's threat was based on exceedingly grim facts. If The Joker were caught now the evidence against him would be overwhelming—so convincing, for all its circumstantial nature, that not even the presence of the real murderer, hidden behind the plaster-board ceiling of Jevons' room, would suffice to clear him. Jevons and his accomplice might share the ugly fate in store for the master thief, but they would be fools indeed if they did not unite on a common story accusing him and accounting more or less innocently for their own part in the affair. Quay knew how joyfully the police and prosecutor would bargain with these lesser lights of crime in order to double rivet their case against The Joker—especially if they dreamed that The Joker was Martin Quay.

He had faced deadly danger often enough, in his career, but never before had he been so deeply entangled, so near to an ugly death. He thought quickly and moved almost as fast as he thought. He went straight to where the servants huddled under their guard in the rear hall.

"Mr. Kane wants Jevons out in front," he said curtly to the plain-clothes man who stood sentry over the group. "Come along, Jevons."

The guard offered no objection, and the butler rose and followed Quay without a word. As they passed the door, however, Quay turned quickly into a small room off the main hall and shut himself in with his man. Jevons faced him soberly, a vague question in his dull eyes.

"Jevons, I'm going to give you one chance to come clean," said Quay quietly. "It looks pretty bad for you, but if you tell all you know I'll do what I can to keep you out of the chair. You were in on the job, before and afterward. You telephoned to your pal and brought him up here; I can prove that. You must have let him in when he came. I can prove that, too. You helped him pull off the trick upstairs, and then you hid him in the ceiling of your bedroom. He's up there now, and we're going to get him in a minute. When we've got him it'll be too late for you to talk. This is your only chance to come through with the truth."

Jevons listened without any outward sign of emotion. His stolid face did not change; his dull, slow eyes met Quay's scrutiny without wavering. When he spoke it was in his usual butler's tone.

"I'm quite willing to talk, sir, provided Miss Renfrew gives me leave. I realize that appearances will be against me, but I can protect myself, if necessary. I don't wish to do so, if it can be avoided, however. Miss Renfrew——"

"She'll give you leave fast enough, then," said Quay. "Stay here. I'll call her. No funny business, Jevons, or you're apt to get yourself shot. The place is guarded, and all the men have

orders to shoot first and ask questions afterward."

"Very good, sir. I shall be right here when you come back."

Quay locked the door on him and sped upstairs to Paula Renfrew's rooms. He tapped gently at her door, and her voice answered him.

"Please come downstairs, Miss Renfrew, you're wanted for a few minutes. This is Martin Quay."

The door opened and the girl appeared, self-possessed and erect. Quay's admiration for her mounted as he observed her splendid control of her nerves. She was pallid, but otherwise wholly herself.

"I'll explain my remarks upstairs when there's time, Miss Renfrew," he said quickly. "It was just a sham—that blunt accusation."

She smiled faintly. "Oh, I quite understand that, Mr. Quay. It was to prevent Mr. Kane from carrying out his rather obvious intention of arresting me. He would have done it in another minute or two if you hadn't spoken as you did. I'm very grateful to you."

Quay stared. A woman who could think as clearly as this, when under such a mental strain as that which must have tested this girl's spirit, was a wonder. He said so bluntly, and she smiled again.

"Thanks. But I'm afraid it's all useless. The circumstances are against me—and there are other circumstances, that you don't as yet know, that will make it still worse for me."

"You mean Jevons and the man he has hidden in his ceiling?" Quay whispered the question as they reached the stairs.

She flashed a quick, terrified look at him. "You know, then?"

He nodded. "I've got Jevons downstairs alone. We'll thresh it out before we go any further. There's just this one thing to be remembered—I'm on your side, Miss Renfrew. I don't believe you had any part in it, and appearances aren't going to change that belief. I'll help you all I can. In return, I want the whole truth, without any reservations. I can't accomplish anything if I have to work in the dark."

She studied him narrowly, and what she read in his face seemed to reassure her. She smiled a little. "I'll tell you all I know," she said.

He ushered her into the room where Jevons sat, seemingly without having moved a muscle during the detective's absence. He locked the door again. Kane would be busy with his beloved reporters for another half hour, at least. After that the coroner was to be expected, so that there was plenty of time to get to the bottom of the story before they should be interrupted.

"Well, Jevons," he said briskly, "I've brought Miss Renfrew to give you her full permission to talk. If you don't she will. Let me warn you to stick very closely to the truth. One little lie will mean the chair for you. That's in sober earnest."

Jevons nodded placidly. "Very good, sir. I'll talk. I don't deny that I intended to steal Mr. Soule's diamonds. I've been here for upwards of six weeks with that idea in mind. I would have turned the trick a month ago if I could have got the hang of his safe. I knew that there was a trap connected with it, and I couldn't get a line on how it worked—until to-night."

"You telephoned to your pal outside about The Rogue; I heard you."

"Yes, sir—and you invited him to come up, in my name. I guessed as much when he appeared. That was very clever, sir, if I may say so. I was obliged to let him in or risk his getting into trouble with your men outside. It was a bit of luck that he came just as that bomb exploded, or your guards would have caught him. I got

his signal just in time, as it was. I came downstairs with an idea of answering the doorbell and giving him a quick warning, but he was inside before I could stop him, and before he could get out again your men were back in their places. So the only alternative was to hide him—which I did, as you've evidently discovered, in the space above my ceiling."

"Yes. But what about the crime, man? Never mind the details; get to the point."

"I'm coming to it now, sir. We were in my room, trying to figure out a way out of the tangle, and discussing, I regret to say, some means of putting you temporarily out of commission, when we heard something downstairs. I came down to look, leaving my mate where he was. It was then about three-fifteen, sir. I remember that the clock had just struck the first quarter. I saw Miss Renfrew at the door of her uncle's dressing room. She was using a small electric torch, but the door reflected enough light to make me quite sure that it was she. I guessed at once that she meant to steal the stone, sir."

"Is there any truth in all this, Miss Renfrew?" Quay glanced at the girl.

She bowed gravely. "Yes, it's quite true, so far. I meant to take The Rogue out of the safe. I couldn't sleep, for thinking of it in there. I knew that it meant some terrible misfortune, and I thought that if I took it away and kept it overnight I might be able to prevent my stepfather from suffering from the evil influence it exerts on every one who owns it. Jevons saw me as I was examining the door, which I expected to find locked, but which proved to be open, after all."

Quay nodded. "I see. Well, Jevons, what next?"

The butler smiled thinly. "Why, sir, I had what you might call an inspiration. It struck me that Miss Renfrew might be just the person we needed. I wasn't sure that she knew the secret of the safe, but it was worth trying. I listened for a minute, to make sure that you were quiet down in the library, and then went up and called my mate. We came down together and went into Mr. Soule's dressing room. From there we noticed that the door of the strong-room was open. We could see into it across the bedchamber, and we watched Miss Renfrew open the safe and take out the small jewel case containing The Rogue. It was not our original plan, sir, to steal that stone. We wanted the smaller and more marketable diamonds already in Mr. Soule's collection, but we were willing to take what we could get, of course. Miss Renfrew closed the safe carefully and came toward us. We let her pass through the dressing room and into the hall. She did not see us, and we followed her back to her own room. There, before she had locked her door, we—we seized her, as gently as possible, of course. We had no wish to harm her, sir, and we did not harm her."

Quay glanced at Paula Renfrew for confirmation. She nodded, without speech, and his eyes returned to the butler's placid face. Jevons went on:

"We took the case from her, sir. We made it clear that she could not denounce us without confessing her own part in the transaction, sir. She saw that, and I am glad to say that she simplified matters by acquiescing at once."

"I only wanted to get the stone out of the way, Mr. Quay. I didn't care who got it, or how, so long as it wasn't in my stepfather's safe. I didn't know then that—that he was——"

"I understand. Go on, Jevons."

"Yes, sir. We left her and carried the case up to my room. Our idea was that my mate should hide above the ceiling there till it was possible to let him out without any risk. But we

opened the case and found that the stone was already stolen, sir—that The Joker had been there before us, so to speak. That altered the whole affair, of course. We debated what to do, and decided to go on as we had planned. My mate was to hide overhead and I was to pretend to go to bed, as if nothing had happened. We had just got him safely stowed up there when I heard you, sir—the noise was quite distinct. I went down, but first I chucked the jewel case out of the window into the garden. It seemed best to know nothing of it, sir. The rest you know as well as I do, Mr. Quay. I don't know who killed Mr. Soule, unless it was The Joker or Miss Renfrew. I don't think it was Miss Renfrew. Only, if my mate and I get into trouble, why, of course, we shall have to tell what we know, and the police might take the view that it was Miss Renfrew who did it all—and again they mightn't. That's all, sir."

Quay saw plainly enough that the man was right. He believed that he was telling the whole truth. Jevons was extraordinarily intelligent, obviously. He had seen the wisdom of putting his cards on the table before Quay instead of before the police. Quay was under no obligation to arrest him for an attempted robbery, as Peter Kane would have been; Quay could hold his tongue without being false to his duty, as Kane could not; Quay could spare the girl and pay the price of sparing the two rogues who held her secret—and it was plain that the butler calmly counted on his doing exactly this.

The minor mystery was cleared up, only to leave the major puzzle deeper in darkness than before. To Jevons and the girl it must seem obvious that The Joker had slain Myron Soule. Only Martin Quay could know that he had not. The presence of the man who lay hidden above Jevons' bedroom was only an additional embarrassment now, instead of an asset to Martin Quay. If he hoped to protect the girl he must also protect that hidden thief, who, if caught, would assuredly tell what he knew, in sheer self-defense.

"All right, Jevons," he said absently. "I shan't talk about this just yet. Your pal is safe for the present, and so are you. But if I find that you've been lying to me——"

"I haven't, sir. I've told you all I know."

"Well, go back to the rest of them, anyway, and stay there. I shan't give your pal away just yet, at least. It looks very much as if The Joker had done the whole job before you came into it. If that's so, I think we'll forget your attempt to rob your employer. That's all."

He led the butler back to the group in the rear hall and returned to the girl. She held out her hand impulsively.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am. It was a crazy thing for me to do, but I—I had a horror of that diamond. Something seemed to keep whispering to me that it would destroy us all unless I got rid of it. I couldn't sleep."

"I know. I felt something like that, myself. There *is* something uncanny about it. I made myself ridiculous at dinner by insisting that there was. We were both right, evidently. See what it's done in the few hours it's been under this roof!"

"Yes. But it's gone now. I'm so foolish that I can actually be glad of that, in spite of all the dreadful things that have happened. The Rogue's gone. It can't do us any more harm now. And the man who has it—well, the thieves who have stolen it before never got any good of it, did they? It was always recovered—generally with pretty terrible consequences to the thief. I'm superstitious enough to believe that The Joker will come to grief

over it, just as the others did. And that's a very real comfort, Mr. Quay."

Martin Quay realized, with a curious thrill of something very like fear, that if The Rogue could bring misfortune to any one, it was on Martin Quay that its evil influence must fall! He was no more superstitious than any normal man, but a cold tingle crept along his spine as he faced the fact that in so far as it owed ownership to any living man, The Rogue was his!

Already, in the brief period of his possession, it had brought him under a charge of willful murder—a charge which any one of a thousand possible contingencies might bring home to Martin Quay instead of to The Joker!

He was as ignorant as ever of the answer to the chief question before him. His best clew had gone astray completely. Jevons and his partner had seemingly not done the murder, and he could not even accuse them of it without involving Paula Renfrew in a situation almost as sinister as that which threatened them—and threatened Martin Quay himself!

He led the girl into the hall just as the coroner arrived, and had only time to whisper a sharp brief caution to her before they both were summoned to submit to that worthy's questioning.

"You must stick absolutely to the story you told Kane," he said. "If you vary it by a hair you may get us all into terrible trouble."

She glanced at him calmly. "I quite realize that, Mr. Quay. I'm an accessory after the fact, now—and so are you, aren't you? That's what they call it, when you help conceal evidence? You needn't be afraid; I'll be very careful."

Martin Quay moved to face the coroner with a deepening sense of disaster strong upon him. As The Joker he stood in deadly danger of arrest and swift conviction on the charge of murdering Myron Soule. As Martin Quay he was in scarcely less imminent peril of a provable charge of complicity after the fact! Yes, The Rogue's reputation for bringing misfortune to its owner was being rather fully borne out by the facts.

He remembered Myron Soule's ingenious theory of a master thief who devoted his talents to stealing ill-omened jewels. The conclusion was forced upon him that Soule had been right, and that the man who had murdered him to-night was the archvillain he had plotted so painstakingly to attract and trap. Only the folly which had led The Joker to interfere had prevented The Rogue from passing into the possession of that thief and murderer. With all his heart Martin Quay wished that he had permitted that event to come to pass.

He did not breathe freely until the ordeal had ended and both Jevons and the girl had told their respective stories without variation, while Peter Kane's complete conviction that the whole affair was merely another one of The Joker's masterpieces served to distract suspicion from the household. So long as no one knew who The Joker was, it did no great harm to have him regarded as the murderer. But Martin Quay was too farsighted not to realize that in self-defense he must unravel the inner mystery and lay hands on the real assassin. At any moment, by any one of a thousand chances, his identity might be penetrated, and when that happened the only thing which could conceivably save him was definite proof against the man who had killed Myron Soule.

His mind settled to its task in earnest as the coroner reprimanded him sharply for his manifold shortcomings. He knew that the published accounts of the night's events would make Martin Quay and his agency appear to be exceedingly incompetent, but this lesser misfortune was negligible, compared to

the infinitely greater one which he had to fear. He could afford to disregard a loss of prestige and money when he confronted a very imminent possibility of losing his life.

He cautioned Jevons briefly regarding his partner. On no account was the man to try to escape for the present. The police would certainly be watching the house very narrowly, he pointed out, and until the excitement had ebbed away it would be suicide to attempt to smuggle the hidden accomplice away from the premises. Jevons agreed soberly. Again Quay had to admire the man's stolid command of his nerves. He might have been accepting a casual order concerning dinner, for all the emotion he displayed.

"Very good, sir. We'll do nothing foolish, you may rest assured. We both realize the situation as clearly as you do, sir, and we know that we can count on you to help us out of it."

Quay stared. "Count on me? What on earth does that mean? Do you think I——"

"Why, sir, it's evident, isn't it, that you're in it, along with the rest of us, now. You've helped us so far; you'll have to help us the rest of the way or stand beside us in the dock. It's a case of all or none of us now, sir. We're counting on that."

As Quay turned away, he knew that the man spoke the simple truth. He had already committed himself by holding his tongue during the coroner's examination. If the police caught that hidden rascal upstairs both he and Jevons would certainly implicate Martin Quay, as well as Paula Renfrew. It was their only chance, and they were far too clever not to see and grasp it.

Yes, The Rogue was showing its power rather plainly! He was not even tempted to try to remove it from its hiding place in the library, as he took his departure in the early morning; it was bad enough to feel that so far as any one might be said to possess it at present, he was its owner.

Even now he did not know the full extent of his disaster. He had scarcely reached his rooms at the Denning when his telephone bell rang. A disguised voice came over the wire:

"Well, Mr. Joker, accept my congratulations. And take very good care of The Rogue. I may decide to buy it from you, and if I do the price I'm prepared to offer will be worth considering, I'm sure."

"I don't know what you mean!" Quay could only stammer as the amazing words impacted on his brain like so many stunning blows. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll be more explicit then," drawled the voice. "You've got The Rogue. I want it. I may decide to take it away from you, and I may prefer to buy it from you. If I buy it I'm ready to offer you—— Are you interested, Mr. Martin Quay?"

"I'm interested in hearing the extent of your insanity, yes," retorted Quay. "Go on; say it all and be done with it. What are you going to offer me for what I haven't got?"

"I hope that's a lie, Quay—I do, really. Because if you haven't got it, things will be rather unpleasant for you. You see, the price I intended to offer you for that little sparkler was pretty high. I was going to give you *—your life!*"

There was a click. Quay rattled the receiver frantically until the operator answered. He shouted a frenzied entreaty into her ear. The call must be traced instantly—did she understand? —instantly—it was life or death. She cut him short with a flippant assent. He waited for what seemed to be an eternity before the message came to him.

"You were called from Harbor eight-seven-six-five," said the operator.

"That's a coin-box pay station in the Western Terminal."

Quay hung up. Soule had been right. There was a master thief who was greater than The Joker. He held The Joker's secret—and with it, Martin Quay's liberty and, perhaps, his life!

CHAPTER VI.

JUSTICE.

THERE is no danger so potent in its menace as that which threatens from the dark. A peril seen is robbed of half its terrors. Martin Quay had as much courage as it is good for a man to possess. Had he been confronted with a visible enemy, however formidable, he would have measured the odds coolly, cudgeled his wits to meet them, and kept his nerves under their normal subjection to his will. But the mocking voice over the telephone frightened him, left him staring helplessly at the silent instrument, as if to see through it and along the wires into the booth whence the mysterious arch-thief had sent his sinister message. Somebody, somewhere, held not only the knowledge that Martin Quay was The Joker, but also knew that Martin Quay had stolen The Rogue last night. With that knowledge, Martin Quay's life lay in his hands, to save or destroy as he chose. Against him, for all his cleverness and strength, Quay was powerless. He could only wait for the blow to fall.

For a few minutes his mind was numb under the shock. Gradually it cleared, and he faced his new danger as calmly as he could. He tried to tell himself that it was no more than a lucky guess on the part of his invisible accuser. Some one cleverer than the police had put two and two together and arrived, by good fortune, at the right answer to the riddle. Some one had called him up merely to put a theory to the test. No one could possibly know what this man seemed to know. He was only guessing, bluffing.

Even so, it was bad enough. He had merely to telephone to Peter Kane, just as he had telephoned to Quay himself, to implant the same suspicion in the inspector's stubbornly hostile mind. Once there, Quay knew, Kane was clever enough to develop it, and malicious enough to take a keen pleasure in the process. There was already a mass of circumstantial evidence pointing to him as The Joker, even without last night's events. With these added, even Kane could work up a plausible case against him. He had been in Soule's house, perfectly free to move about as he pleased; he had had opportunity to commit the crime at his leisure, therefore. More, he had a motive. He had clearly shown too much interest in the great diamond in the presence of Soule's guests. With incredible folly he had quixotically tried to shield an innocent girl by protecting two confessed thieves and thereby making himself their accomplice. Even Jevons held a mortgage on his liberty, and knew it.

Under such conditions even a transparent attempt at bluff became formidable, for the reason that Quay could not afford to call it. His life was at stake, as against the other man's mere loss or gain of money. He might be able to trap an extortioner, but in doing so he exposed himself to a dangerously plausible charge of murder in the first degree—aggravated by the circumstances under which it had been committed. He saw plainly that he could not afford to fight back yet. He must improve his defenses before he invited a direct attack. If he could win even a faint clew to the man who had done the killing, he could venture to present a bold front to the invisible enemy who had guessed so much of the truth. Otherwise he stood helplessly at the man's mercy.

As he reached this conclusion Martin Quay did a remarkable thing. With a recognized and terrible danger threatening him from three different directions he proceeded to remove his clothes and go to bed. More; he went almost instantly to sleep. It was characteristic of the man. A lesser mind would have fought back sleep while it tried desperately to reason out a path of escape. Not so Martin Quay. He knew accurately how untrustworthy the shrewdest brain will become when it is denied its intervals of rest. He had been nearly twenty-five hours without sleep, and even his immense bodily strength had begun to show signs of a dangerous fatigue. The first thing for him to do was to refresh his body and his brain. After that he could take the next step.

He woke late in the afternoon, a new man, heartened to face the situation. He sent for the newspapers and digested them slowly over a frugal luncheon. The reporters had treated him rather unkindly, but, on the whole, he had escaped with less discredit than he had expected. The sensational nature of the crime, the prominence of the victim, the sinister repute of the diamond which had precipitated the chain of events, all distracted attention from Quay's failure. Indeed, except for a slurring reference or two, his part in the affair was almost omitted.

Quay read the accounts through twice very deliberately. He was interested in the interview which Doctor Egbert Playre had given out as a sidelight on the tragedy. In the face of this newest demonstration of The Rogue's evil influence the diamond expert clung to his skepticism.

"Of course it is sheer medievel superstition to attribute powers of good or evil to any inert, inanimate object. The so-called rogue diamond is nothing but a fairly large specimen of pure carbon, cut and polished like every other stone. Except that it is immensely valuable, and therefore attractive to any criminal mind, it has no more influence on human events than a cobblestone. I have no patience with the type of mind which interprets subsequence as consequence. It is as sensible to say that The Rogue brought about this murder because Mr. Soule purchased it, as to attribute his death to his choice of shoes or shaving soap."

Quay shook his head over these words. He admitted that Doctor Playre had reason on his side of the argument, and yet—— He remembered the queer, uncanny appeal of the glowing diamond as it had lain on the black velvet under the lights. Quay wasn't superstitious, either, but he did not forget that his own hands had itched to possess themselves of the jewel.

He folded the papers, lighted one of his blackest cigars, and settled himself to think out his own situation, as affected by the latest development in it. He saw quite clearly that his safety might very easily depend upon his ability to surrender The Rogue to the unknown enemy who had guessed so much of his secret. As things stood he could not afford to challenge that enemy. A word to Peter Kane would be almost as fatal as downright evidence of his part in last night's events. He must be able to buy his freedom with the stone, if need arose. Instinct told him that the price would suffice. The man who had threatened him over the telephone had not done so out of mere bravado or cruelty. If Quay's theory —and Soule's—were correct, he had intended to prevent The Joker from making any disposition of his plunder. It had been flippantly phrased, to be sure, but it was meant as a serious warning not to get rid of The Rogue.

Quay came inevitably to his conclusion. When he had reached it, he acted on it without any further delay.

He needed The Rogue, with which to buy back his life from the man who seemed to know that he had stolen it. It was necessary, then, to get it back into his possession as soon as possible. He set out to accomplish this without wasting any time on regretting the circumstances which compelled it.

He was admitted without question when he rang the bell at the Soule house. The police were still in control of the premises, but the man on duty at the front door knew Quay and remembered certain kindnesses from the days when Quay had been his chief. He let him in and listened to his request to see Miss Renfrew.

"She's refused to see anybody so far," he said dubiously, "but maybe she'll talk to you. I'll send up, anyway."

He dispatched another plain-clothes man, who had been lounging in the hall, on this errand, and himself ushered Quay into the library to wait for the girl's answer. Nothing had been touched, evidently. The shattered pieces of the lampshade were still scattered on the thick rugs, and the fat volumes of the encyclopedia lay as Quay's own hands had left them last night. He strolled carelessly toward the fireplace, his hands thrust in his pockets, chatting casually with McGuire about the case. When Paula Renfrew entered Quay was standing close to the divan before the hearth. She came straight toward him, still very pale, but with a certain relief visible in her eyes.

McGuire incautiously left them alone together. He would have been slow to trust an ordinary visitor so far, but he had worked for ten years under Martin Quay, and the habit of obedience and deference was still strong on him. The girl sank into a chair and Quay dropped to the divan, his big body between her eyes and the spot where he had hidden The Rogue.

"It's all right," she said quickly, as McGuire retreated. "We got him away soon after you left. He simply wouldn't stay up there, with the police swarming all over the house, and Jevons managed it very cleverly—let him out of the front door right behind the inspector himself. They never suspected him."

Quay stared. "Who was he? I—this is all wrong—I wanted to talk to him."

She shrugged her shoulders. "That's very true, but you forget that as long as he was hidden up there we were all in terrible danger. It was ever so much better to be rid of him at once. If he had been caught both he and Jevons would have turned on us."

Quay saw the force of her argument. He was relieved, of course, that the most immediate source of danger had been removed, even though it had cost him his opportunity to identify Jevons' accomplice. He dropped the discussion abruptly.

"Miss Renfrew, I came to see whether you want me to do anything about recovering The Rogue. That's more in my line, you know, than catching and punishing the thief. I don't guarantee anything, but if you want me to try to get it——"

She moved her hands in a gesture of repulsion. "No! Not for anything in the world! I wouldn't have that diamond in my possession for a second! I hate the thought of it."

Quay nodded. "I rather fancied you'd take that view, but I wanted to be quite sure. You see, I feel responsible in a way, and if you wanted it I'd do my best to get it for you."

"I don't—I don't!" There was no mistaking the earnestness of her voice.

Quay rose. "Very well. If there's anything else, you'll feel perfectly free to send for me?"

"You're very good. I think they won't trouble me, though. Everybody

seems perfectly sure that it was The Joker—and of course it *was*."

"Of course," assented Quay gravely. "We'll hope to catch him and prove it. Good-by, Miss Renfrew."

He went out, his shoulders back, his head up. McGuire, saluting respectfully as he passed, never dreamed that The Rogue had been within easy range of his hands. Martin Quay went downtown to his office and bolted the door of his inner room before he took the big, blazing stone from his pocket. He laid it on the blotter and leaned over it, watching the play of blue fire in its heart. His own figure of speech came back to him:

"A skylight in the roof of hell!"

The Rogue deserved the description, he told himself. It seemed to wink and glitter of its own volition; it was like a living, evil, beautiful thing, created to poison men's souls. He covered it suddenly with one hand, as if to shut out the sight of it. He felt better when he had locked it in his safe.

He had just resumed his seat when the hum of his telephone interrupted his meditations. The same disguised voice came to him as he lifted the receiver.

"You got it, I see. That's just as well, because I've made up my mind to buy it—at my price, Quay. Do you want to sell?"

"See here—I don't know who you are nor what you're driving at, but I'll tell you, once for all, that you're likely to get yourself into trouble. It doesn't pay to play practical jokes on the police or on——"

"The Joker? No, I suppose not. You ought to have a monopoly of the joking, Quay. I'm quite willing that you should. Because I'm serious. There's no jest about what I'm going to say. Either you deliver that bit of compressed wealth to me to-night, according to instructions, or you'll sleep at the detention prison, with a provable charge of murder lodged against you. You can take your choice. It will suit me just as well to have the police get the stone, and I can tell them where to look for it, too. It's in your office safe, where you put it not ten minutes ago. You see, I'm not bluffing about my knowledge."

Quay could think of nothing to answer. He had a sense of suffocation, as if walls were closing in on him. This man knew everything!

"Listen closely, for I shan't repeat," said the voice. "*Are* you listening?"

"Go on," said Quay. "You might as well get it all off your mind at once."

"You will be standing on the corner of the Park drive just in front of the Washington statue, at ten sharp to-night. You will go there alone, and you will make no attempt to post any of your men there ahead of you. You will have the stone we have discussed in your hand, without any wrappings of any description. A car will stop in front of you and a hand will be stretched toward you. You will place the stone in it and stand where you are for exactly one half hour by your watch, making no attempt to follow the car or to have it followed. If you carry out these orders to the letter, you will have no further reason to be uneasy over what I know. If you play false in any least respect I shall know it, and nothing will save you. You may take this warning at its face value. I mean it. You will have this chance, but no other. That is all."

The receiver clicked. Quay mechanically rattled the hook. But before the operator answered he thought better of it. Nothing was to be gained by tracing the call. It would assuredly come from some coin-box pay station, like the earlier one, and leave him none the wiser, whereas, if the man who was threatening him were in earnest, as he seemed to be, the attempt itself might become known to him and be con-

strued as an effort to play false with him.

Martin Quay thought the whole situation out once more. To admit that he had The Rogue in his possession was tantamount to a confession that he had killed Myron Soule. It was madness to think of carrying out the orders to which he had just listened. If he entered the park with The Rogue in his pocket to-night he was carrying his own death warrant along with it. The moment he could be connected with that ill-omened stone, all doubt would vanish from the case.

On the other hand, if he defied the unknown persecutor and paid no heed to the threat, was he any better off? The man might be bluffing, but there was nothing to be made of that. He need merely transmit his guess to Peter Kane in order to accomplish Martin Quay's destruction. A simple hint would be enough for the police.

There was a third consideration which weighed heavily with him. He wanted to be rid of The Rogue, and he wanted to meet the man who had guessed at the truth. His instinct cast the deciding vote. It might be a trick or a trap, but something deeper than reason told Quay that it was neither, that the warning and its promise might be taken literally. He carried The Rogue away from the office when he left, and although he told himself that he hadn't yet made up his mind, he knew that ten o'clock would find him in the park, with the stone in his pocket.

He was there well in advance of the appointed time. Three hours of further deliberation had brought him to a decision. Foolhardy as the risk was, it was better than the continued torment of suspense which he must otherwise endure—the torture of waiting for the blow to fall. He must stake everything on one bold cast, win or lose at a single throw. He thought he saw how to win. The Rogue was not in his pocket, but something else was. He derived a lively satisfaction from the feel of it, as he waited.

It is always a dangerous business to drive a man into a corner. The most abject coward will turn at the last and fight, and Martin Quay was anything but a coward. He had come to the point where nothing but a fight would serve, and he meant to make it a winning one.

He heard a chorus of church clocks boom out the hour, and his shoulders stiffened a little. The drive was dark except for the occasional cone of white radiance from the headlights of a passing motor. He approved of the choice of location. Evidently the unknown oppressor had been at some pains to find a spot where the darkness would help serve his purposes. Quay grinned at the thought. It would also serve the purposes of The Joker, cornered and at bay, fighting for his life.

A small, single-seated motor whirred around a corner and thudded toward him, swerving sharply to the side of the drive and slowing with a mournful creak of brakes and tires. A hand flashed out between the side curtains, and a voice said softly: "Quick, now!"

Martin Quay was something more than quick. Almost before the words reached his ears he moved. One hand closed fast about the wrist of the man in the car. The other thrust the muzzle of Quay's gun between the curtains.

"Is that quick enough?" said Martin Quay. "Stop your engine. I'm getting in."

"This is very foolish, Quay. You're throwing away your chance."

"I'm taking another, then. Stop her! Man, do you think I'll hesitate to shoot if you force me? What have I got to lose? You're clever enough to know that I'm where I don't care what happens."

The hum of the engine diminished as

the ignition was cut off. Quay chuckled.

"Open the door."

He climbed in, the gun still covering the man at the wheel. It was so dark that he could barely make out the outlines of a human figure. He slammed the door shut, releasing the man's wrist at last. "Switch on your dashlight," he ordered. "Let's get acquainted, first of all."

There was a soft laugh from the other. "What? Don't you know me? You disappoint me, Quay. I rather fancied that you'd spot me."

Quay started. "I've spotted you, right enough," he said. "But I've been slow about it. I ought to have known it the minute you phoned me that first time. You're Doctor Playre!"

"At your service," replied the other. "Now that you've penetrated my mysterious anonymity, where shall I drive you—to police headquarters? It will save time, you know, because, of course, I arranged that if I didn't return on schedule time a certain interesting statement of last night's occurrences should be delivered by special messenger to Inspector Peter Kane."

"Naturally. But that wasn't what you wanted," said Quay quickly. "You wanted to come home on schedule time—with The Rogue in your vest pocket. You'd rather do that now than turn me over to Kane's tender mercies."

"Would I?" Playre's voice was softer than ever. "I wonder why you think so, Quay?"

"Because of what I might tell Kane about the Dolgoroff crescent, perhaps—or the Swope coronet, or Lancia's Green Star. You wouldn't care to have me mention those little affairs to him, would you? Playre, we're quits. You can make things look pretty bad for me, although not so bad as you think; but I can show you up in a much worse light. Poor Soule almost guessed your secret; I *konw* it."

Playre sat very still. Then he laughed. "What an absurd notion, Quay! You ought to write romances instead of chasing will-o'-the-wisps like that in sober earnest. The idea of a man like me being involved in those dreadful affairs. Why, it's laughable."

"Glad you feel that way about it," said Quay. He was wholly sure of himself now. His mind had leaped straight at the answer the moment he recognized Playre's voice. "I can prove you were involved in every one of them, and last night's little business was all a put-up job to catch you red-handed in another. I don't think you had a hand in that, unless you were behind Jevons."

Playre chuckled in the darkness. "I wasn't, Quay. I meant to lift The Rogue myself, until I saw you on the job. Then I changed my mind. There's no use in running risks when you can get some one else to run them for you. I merely waited for The Joker to do the job for me. The moment I saw you fingering it at the table I knew you wouldn't be able to resist The Rogue. I knew right then that you were The Joker. I'm a good reader of faces, Quay; and when you leaned over that infernal diamond you let every criminal instinct in you come straight to the surface. I left my little fire apparatus where I'd put it, because I couldn't recover it without running a needless risk, but I relied on you to get The Rogue for me. You did, of course."

Quay's frankness matched his own. "Ah! So you were responsible for the fire bomb. I thought Conger had done that. Yes, I got The Rogue. But I didn't kill Soule, and if you didn't, I'm in the dark as to who did. I thought you must have slipped in after me and——"

"No. It was Jevons, I think. I'm glad it wasn't you, Quay. Killing is necessary sometimes, but for a genius

like The Joker it—well, it's a bit undignified, don't you think?"

"But you've——" Quay stared through the darkness at the man he knew had committed seven cold-blooded murders.

Playre sighed. "Yes, unfortunately. But I had a high motive. I wasn't a thief, stealing for profit. I was doing what I did for a great and good purpose, Quay. I couldn't betray my trust, be false to my duty, over a mere scruple against taking life. Let's not speak of it. I want The Rogue, in spite of the way you've upset my plans. Where is it?"

"Safe," said Quay. "Tell me why you want it, and perhaps you may get it."

"You'll approve," said Playre earnestly; "I know you'll approve. But I would rather show you than tell you. Have you brought it with you? I suppose not. You would realize the danger, of course."

"I've got it with me, all right," said Quay. "Only it would be hard to find if you didn't know where to look. Tell me or show me why you wanted it, and, as I said——"

"All right."

Playre started the engine and the car moved ahead, gathering speed swiftly. He drove rapidly across the park to its northwestern exit, turned into the boulevard, and continued westward for perhaps a mile. He stopped before a house which stood well apart from its neighbors.

"We get out here," he said. "It's my place. Come in and I'll show you."

Quay submitted, keeping a ready hand on the butt of his gun. Playre led the way into a comfortably furnished living room, and across it to a sort of study, which was half a workshop, with a jeweler's lathe on a small bench, and an orderly array of other tools in evidence.

"Now let me see The Rogue, please," he said calmly. "You needn't be afraid; you've got more on me than I have on you. We can't lift a finger against each other."

Quay hesitated, and then, reaching a sudden decision, removed a plate from the bottom of his gun and let the great blue diamond fall on the green cloth of Playre's table. The doctor seized it eagerly and brought it near his eye, as if to make sure that it was no counterfeit.

"It's The Rogue, to be sure," he said in an unsteady whisper. "I'll show you, Quay—I'll show you now." He moved to his workbench, his hands busy among his tools, his voice running on a breathless, excited monotone. "You were right, you know, when you talked about its being a skylight in the roof of hell. There are stones like that—not many of them, but *too* many—stones that are criminals, murderers, thieves. I've written books to prove they weren't, but that was just a blind. I knew, I knew, I tell you! I found out the secret years ago, when I was a young man studying in Amsterdam—the secret of the rogue diamond! Nobody else knows, and I've kept it to myself all these years. When a diamond turns rogue there's no cure; you can't reform it. There's only one way of treating it, and I've treated them that way. I'm going to treat The Rogue that way now, while you watch. See here."

Quay approached him, vaguely disturbed by the change in the man's tone and manner. He had seen other men act like this, and he knew the symptoms.

Playre touched a switch, and a dull light glowed up from a small apparatus on his table. He snatched up a pair of tinted goggles and fairly forced them on Quay. "The glare would hurt your eyes without them, you know," he said in the same queer breathless fashion.

Quay saw that he was right, as the light intensified to a blinding glare.

"The electric arc," said Playre. "Watch now." He lifted the great diamond with a pair of long-handled forceps, and, with a swift gesture, dropped it in the very center of the incandescent glow. There was an instant while the stone seemed to defy the heat, and then, as Quay tried to bear the pain of the blinding light, it vanished. Playre snapped the switch and whirled toward him.

"Now do you see why I did it?" he demanded, his hands uplifted, his face distorted with a passion of excitement which, too late, Quay began to understand. "We kill men when they commit a murder, but I'm the only one who dares to kill diamonds that have killed men! It's justice, Quay, justice! Do you hear?"

He collapsed suddenly, a shrunken, quivering wreck of man, whimpering in a chair, while Quay bent over him. He understood now. He had seen other men with brilliant minds fly to pieces exactly like this; he knew that Egbert Playre, for all his seeming strength of intellect, was a monomaniac, insanely clever and insanely cruel when his single obsession gripped him, but normal at all other times.

He was still trying to reason out his own course of action when Playre's head went forward on his chest, and his limp hands hung still at his sides. Quay felt for his pulse. He dropped the wrist, after a moment, with a vast sensation of relief.

Egbert Playre had electrocuted his last rogue diamond. And The Joker's secret was safe again.

Quay let himself out cautiously. He read, in the afternoon papers next day, that Doctor Egbert Playre, the well-known jewel expert, had died suddenly last night of cerebral hemorrhage. There was some mention of his connection with the Soule case, but nothing to indicate that Martin Quay had seen him die.

Jevons, after the inquest, followed his copartner into obscurity. Quay let him go, although he guessed now that it had been either Jevons or his unknown pal who had killed Myron Soule. There was no sure proof of this theory, however, and to charge the butler with the crime would have been to drag Paula Renfrew into the dock beside him, to say nothing of Martin Quay himself. It would have been a poor service to Myron Soule to seek to avenge his death at such a cost. Better, Quay thought, to let Jevons and his fellow murderer go their ways than to reopen a matter which police and press and public considered closed.

The Joker could bear the burden of this unjust charge. Martin Quay saw that it was better to let the blame rest on that elusive criminal, the more so because he knew, beyond any chance of error, that The Joker had disappeared forever.

CHINA'S REMEDY FOR PICKPOCKETS

CHINA has a novel way of dealing with pickpockets. The Far Eastern republic tries to put the criminals out of business by advertising them. Under guard, the offenders are taken to a railroad station or other busy public center. Placards hung from their necks tell to passers-by who the criminals are and of what they have been found guilty. The public having become familiar with their appearance, the pickpockets ply their craft thereafter under a handicap.

The Price of a House

by J. J. Bell

MR. MAURICE FRAMPTON came out of the new station, at which persons alighted for the new garden suburb, and turned into the new road leading to the new house of which he was the owner. There were other new houses, but so new that they were not yet ready for occupancy. Consequently the foot traffic on the road was never great. At the moment it was limited to the shiny boots of Mr. Frampton and the shabby ones of a tradesman-looking person, who walked, or rather, slouched a dozen yards in advance.

It was a fine spring evening, and, after a good day in the city, Mr. Frampton was returning to his bachelor residence in fine spirits. Only those fairly intimately acquainted with Mr. Frampton could understand why so urban a gentleman should have decided to settle in so suburban a neighborhood. As a matter of fact, Mr. Frampton was not at home every evening, but he was invariably there with a party of guests over the week-end. His house was elegantly appointed within. One of the internal features was the window curtains, so handsome and heavy and nicely fitting that no ray of light could pass them. Another was a roulette table. By such pleasant, easy, and recreative home employment did Mr. Frampton add to his "respectable" income.

In the city he was a financier, a term which covers more sins than charity. His thoughts were still in the city as he walked up the unfinished road, this fine spring evening, and in all probability he would never have noticed the individual in front but for an extraordinary happening.

From the clothing of this individual fell a small object which, striking a stone, gave forth a faint musical clink, spun, rolled a couple of feet, and came to rest, a shining disk. Mr. Frampton was blessed with good sight, but he could scarcely believe his eyes. It was so long since they had seen a piece of gold! Involuntarily he quickened his pace, and as he did so, another piece of gold fell from the same quarter, then a third. And the loser slouched onward, obviously unaware.

Mr. Frampton collected the three sovereigns. Though a gambler, he was an honest man, so far as he knew. Certainly he was not to be tempted by a few pounds. Yet the beauty, the feel, both so long unfamiliar, caused him to pause for just three seconds. Then he called:

"Hold on, my man! You've dropped something."

The man halted and slowly turned. His age might have been thirty. Mr. Frampton thought he had never seen a more stupid look, bovine or beery, on a human countenance. But intelligence dawned at the sight of the gold on the gray deerskin. A grimy hand was withdrawn from a shabby jacket, and opened, disclosing to view five sovereigns.

"Must be a hole in the pocket," was the muttered remark.

"Odd place to carry money, isn't it?" Mr. Frampton observed.

The man glanced at him. "So it is, but, ye see, I was enjoyin' the feel o' them jumpin' out and in my hand as I walked along. Much obliged to ye, sir, I'm sure," he added politely enough. "Bein' out o' work, I couldn't afford to lose one o' the beauties." He took the three so providentially restored, and laying them beside the others, held out the lot for Frampton's inspection. "Only eight now, which was twelve last week," he said, and then, with an uneasy glance about him, dropped the lot into his hip pocket. "Yes, sir, I'm greatly obliged to ye, and now I'll be wishin' ye a good night."

"You had better come up to my house and drink a glass of ale," said Frampton, whom the furtive look had not escaped. "I suppose you are looking for work."

"Thank ye, but I won't drink just now, though I could do wi' a cigarette, if ye don't mind," the man returned, falling into step. "Yes, I was thinkin' o' lookin' for work hereabouts—so much buildin' goin' on—but I came by road and arrived too late to see anybody to-day. Now I'll take a walk into the country, and maybe come back tomorrow."

"The war stopped building here for a long time; it was only restarted recently. If you like, I'll speak to one or two of the foremen, on my way to business in the morning."

"'Twould be kind o' ye, sir," the other replied. "But ye don't know anything about me." Then abruptly, in a nervous whisper, he said: "Ye won't tell anybody about them sovereigns."

"Certainly not. Still, mind you, I'm curious," said Mr. Frampton, smiling. "I haven't seen so much gold for years."

The owner of the sovereigns did not look happy. "It's easy enough to get one changed here and there, but I'd not be showing any one the lot, if I could help it," he remarked.

"You showed me the lot."

"I wasn't thinkin'—— But ye've promised not to tell anybody. Mind ye, I didn't steal them sovereigns. I—I only found them."

"Then they're yours, no doubt." Mr. Frampton gave a sympathetic laugh. "Is there any reason why you should not tell me your name—in case I want to mention it to the foreman?"

"John Maxwell; and, I'm sure, I don't know why ye should take so much trouble."

Mr. Frampton lightly waved aside the remark. As it happened, he had a use just then for a man not too clever and not too particular.

"Suppose you take that walk into the country," he said, "and call on me on your way back, say, about nine o'clock; and we'll talk things over. Ask for Mr. Frampton."

After some hesitation Maxwell assented. "But ye'll forget about the sovereigns," he added.

"Don't worry, Maxwell. There's my house, the last on this road," said Frampton, a trifle impatiently. "See you about nine." With a nod he hurried off.

"Don't know that the fellow will be much good after all," he reflected, entering his house.

Yet a surprise was in store for him. It was fated, so it seemed, that "the fellow" should become, not a creature under his thumb, but his equal partner in the biggest operation of his money-chasing career.

Maxwell arrived at the hour appointed, sober, and extremely awkward. He looked perfectly miserable in the luxurious smoking room. A single bottle of beer, though, had an astonishing effect. The host had ready a number of cautious inquiries respecting the

man's past, but before he could begin, Maxwell, setting down his tumbler, said:

"Ye've been that kind to me, Mr. Frampton, I'm goin' to risk tellin' ye about the sovereigns. But first I will ask ye a question. Suppose ye bought a house and then found money in it. What would ye do?"

"Inform the man who sold me the house, of course," was the prompt reply.

"But suppose it was thousands and thousands o' pounds?"

"What difference would that make?" Frampton coldly demanded. Yet he found his visitor's gaze confoundedly disconcerting.

"And suppose," went on the other, as though he had not heard, "that the man before ye had been a German—a pre-war German?"

Mr. Frampton sat up, then lay back in his chair again. "In that case," he said, "it would be my duty to report it to the authorities."

"Would it now?" said Maxwell in dull tone of disappointment.

"But I'm wondering whether an ordinary man like myself would do his duty. What about yourself, Maxwell?" The query was lightly put.

"What's the use o' askin' me, sir? Ye can't even suppose that I had bought the house."

"Am I to suppose that such a house exists?"

Eying the sadly chewed end of his cigar, Maxwell said:

"Did ye ever hear tell o' a place called Sharmouth?"

"Never was there, but I understand it's on the East Coast, about three hours from London."

"That's it! Well, there's a house on the cliffs, about two mile out from the town—and that's where I got them sovereigns, Mr. Frampton." He brought the coins from his hip pocket, and held them out in his open hand. His other hand, after laying down the cigar, went into a side pocket, fumbled, and came forth again. "And this is what I found them in." He displayed a small bag of fine canvas; boldly printed upon it was: £1000.

"Ye can see for yourself," he proceeded, handing the bag to his host, "that it's been slit open in a hurry—the knot o' the string bein' a hard one. Must ha' been a hurry, since twelve good quids was left in it. I picked it up in the foundations o' the house I've told ye about. If it's not too forward, I could do wi' another bottle o' beer. Talkin's dry work, and I've more to tell."

"Put away your gold," said Frampton, ringing. "Go ahead!"

"If ye don't mind, I'll wait till we're sure o' bein' alone again, and I'll ask ye to make certain that nobody's listenin' at the keyhole."

"It becomes quite thrilling," remarked the host, looking amused.

"That's the word for it," was the solemn rejoinder.

The refreshment having been served, and Maxwell having been assured that all was secret, he resumed:

"Ye see, sir, the old man that bought the house, a fortnight ago, had a sudden sanitary notion to examine the foundations, but he wasn't fit to do it himself, and I was sent to make a report as to——"

"So the house is not now for sale?"

"More's the pity! If it had been standin' empty, as it was for near five years——"

"Never mind that for the present. Come to the point. Are you hinting at buried treasure, Maxwell?"

Maxwell took a pull at his tumbler, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said:

"There's hundred o' bags like the one in your hand—only, they're full!"

Mr. Frampton's countenance was slightly flushed. "And you didn't

think," he said slowly, "of bringing one or two away with you?"

"Steel door!"

"Ah! So the hundreds of full bags are to be imagined!"

"Well, imagined by you, sir; but my eyes ha' seen them, clear enough. There's a little grated slit high up in the door—for fresh air, maybe—and I shone my lamp inside. And there was the bags, hundreds o' them, I swear, all neatly sittin' in rows on steel shelves, the one thousand pounds on each sorter smilin' a fat smile!"

There was silence till Frampton asked: "You are assuming that the old man who has bought the house is unaware of the treasure—if treasure it really is—under his feet."

"Would he ha' sent me down if he had known about it?"

"True. Still, he may have found it out by now."

"Not likely. I made him satisfied that the foundations was O. K. Anyway, I'm goin' to take another look tomorrow, or next day."

"How will you manage that?"

"I left some o' my tools down there, the last time."

"Intentionally?"

"What's it matter? I expect they'll let me in all right."

"Who is there beside the old man?"

"A girl—his daughter—and a servant. 'Tisn't a big house."

"Do you know anything about the German?"

"Only what I picked up in the town. No doubt some of it's true. 'Tis said he was a spy, and did signaling just before the war, but didn't expect this country could come in. When we declared, he took fright and bolted—some says in a submarine, which somebody thought he saw in the bay at the time. Anyway, he must ha' gone in a hurry, for he took nothin' with him, not even extra clothes. Of course, he took the sovereigns that was in the one bag. I can see him stuffin' all his pockets!"

"You have a fine imagination, Maxwell," remarked Mr. Frampton calmly, though his nerves were scarcely so steady as usual. "Now, have you any theory as to why this German was storing gold? Had he the reputation of a miser?"

"Not a bit of it. He spent lots. But he was workin' for his blessed Fatherland, as was many another, in the same line—so I've heard. The sovereigns was intended for Germany, which was likely to need all the gold she could get."

The other nodded. The man was more intelligent that he had at first reckoned. In the new circumstances, however, this could not be deemed an objection.

"Well, Maxwell," he said pleasantly, "and what are you going to do about it?"

Maxwell's face clouded. "What do ye mean, sir? I've put myself in your hands," he said, rather sullenly.

"In other words, you are asking my help."

"Would it be worth your while?"

"Have you been to any one else?"

"No, sir! Didn't know who to go to. But when you spoke to me on the road, I sorter felt you was the man for me—no offense intended."

"You have told a very interesting tale, but you must forgive me if I keep on asking myself the question: 'Is the gold really there?'"

"Come and see for yourself!"

"What's that?"

"Rig yourself out same as me, and come and help me to look for my tools."

"Bit of a risk, eh?"

"Hardly any; and if it was a big risk, surely 'twould we worth it. The old man's half blind, the girl—well, she's only a girl, and the servant's just a lump of a woman. Yes, that's the

idea! Come and see for yourself, Mr. Frampton."

The financier's restraint gave way.

"Hanged if I don't!" he exclaimed. "But I must know how I stand," he said presently, "in the event of the gold being there."

"Halves," said Maxwell.

"The expenses may be great," came the objection.

"I must have my half, Mr. Frampton."

"Well, well, so be it," agreed Frampton, reflecting that, after all, he held the whip.

Their talk went on for another hour, and then Maxwell took his departure.

Two days later they met on the road, a mile out of Sharmouth.

"Am I anything like the genuine article?" was the financier's rather anxious inquiry.

"Oh, ye'll do, so long as ye keep your mouth shut. No offense intended."

It was a gray afternoon; the prospect was a bleak one. As they approached the house, an old square building, somewhat grim and forbidding in its bare solitude, Mr. Frampton began to feel that this was a spot wherein anything might happen.

They passed up the weedy walk of a neglected garden, and at the stout door Maxwell whispered, before he knocked: "Leave it all to me."

A middle-aged servant opened promptly and made no difficulty about their entering. In fact, she said nothing at all.

Presently they were among the ancient foundations.

"Now," whispered Maxwell, directing his light upon a gray door that looked as if it covered the mouth of a cave, "go and see for yourself."

Mr. Frampton stumbled over to the door. He was fairly tall, and the grated slit mentioned by Maxwell was just on a level with his eyes. He had brought an electric torch, and soon its rays were flooding what he took to be a chamber excavated in the rock beyond the foundations.

Then he drew a deep breath. Maxwell had neither dreamed nor invented his tale! In orderly rows were the plump canvas bags, each bearing its cheerful, inviting imprint—£1000! And his keen eye seized on something that Maxwell's had probably missed—a bag with a flaw in it, so that it was in danger of bursting, and betrayed the nature of its contents—the contour of coins and, yes, a glint of gold itself!

There was perspiration on Mr. Frampton's brow, fever in his gaze.

He began to count the bags. He counted one hundred and sixty-eight, and there were shelves not within the range of his vision. Great Heaven! The chamber must contain somewhere about three hundred thousand pounds!

"Halves, mind ye," said a voice in his ear, and he started violently.

"Of course, Maxwell, of course," he replied, recovering himself. "There was no need to remind me of that."

"Perhaps not," said Maxwell. "But the sight o' them bags might make many a man forget a little thing like a promise. No offense intended, but I'm takin' no chances." And he gave the other a glimpse of a revolver. "Now we'd best be goin'. Carry them tools, please, and don't speak a word till we're out o' the house."

He did not, himself, speak a word until they were half a mile down the road. Then he put the blunt question:

"What are ye goin' to do?"

"There's only one thing I can do. Buy the house."

"Oh!" said Maxwell blankly.

"What else have you to suggest?"

"Don't know that I've anything. Only, it looks as if you would have all the power, and me none. But, I suppose, I ha' got to trust ye."

"You have," said Mr. Frampton, with something of his old assurance. "Now we're going to part for the present," he proceeded. "What are your plans?"

"Stay in the town yonder, and keep an eye on the house. Ye can write to me at the post office."

"Very well. I'll get to work at once. If the deal takes time, it won't be my fault."

"How much will ye offer the old man?"

"I've got to find out first what he paid. By the way, do you want some money to go on with?"

"No. Nothin' but my half share, thank ye all the same."

"Good-by, then. Don't watch the house too closely." And Mr. Frampton walked off to catch his train.

Within forty-eight hours he had learned that the new owner, Mr. William Palfrey, had paid fourteen hundred pounds for the house and furniture. "Might have been worse," was his comment.

That night's mail carried the following epistle to Mr. William Palfrey:

DEAR SIR: I trust you will not regard this as an unpardonable intrusion. A client and friend just invalided home from foreign service learns with dismay that the house which he has long desired to possess has been purchased by you. It may be, I will readily admit, a sick man's fancy—obsession, if you will—but he has convinced himself that the sole hope of curing his nervous malady depends on his being able to reside in that house. He has persuaded me to write to you, which I do with all diffidence, offering the sum of two thousand pounds for immediate possession of the house and its contents. He is, I may say, a wealthy man, and has already placed the sum named in my charge.

May I hope for your consideration and an early reply? Faithfully yours,

MAURICE FRAMPTON.

The early reply, at least, was not denied him. It ran thus:

Mr. William Palfrey is obliged to Mr. Maurice Frampton for his letter and the offer contained therein, and begs to state that, while sympathizing with Mr. Frampton's client, he is not disposed to vacate the house which he, too, long desired to possess, and which he finds most suitable for the retired life he needs.

"Damn!" remarked the recipient. "Looks as if he had made up his mind." Frampton, however, did not believe in minds made up irrevocably. It all depended on the weight of the golden lever.

Accordingly, and forthwith, he dispatched a quite pathetic letter increasing his client and friend's offer by five hundred pounds.

Mr. William Palfrey's response was prompt and courteous, but just as discouraging as before.

Without delay Frampton offered three thousand pounds. Rejected also!

"Curse the old profiteer," the financier observed, a little unreasonably, perhaps, and fell to wondering whether honest burglary were not the only hope, after all. But he was no adventurer where his skin was concerned.

He wrote that the poor desperate invalid was now willing to pay four thousand pounds.

Two days later came a letter with the Sharmouth postmark, yet not in the now almost familiar shaky, spidery handwriting. He read it with growing excitement.

DEAR SIR: My father is not so well today, and is unable to write. He desires me to decline, with his thanks, your last kind offer. May I add that I deeply regret his attitude in the matter, and would give much to see this house disposed of. Its purchase on his part was a mistake. The sea air does not suit him at all, and it is painful to me that he should be risking his delicate health, and, at the same time, I fear, depriving your poor ill client of a possible means of recovery. For myself, I will only say that I find the place too deadly dull for words.

But I write this solely for my father's sake, and beg that you will treat it confidentially. You say that your client is wealthy. Well, my father is not, and I feel

that if the offer were further increased—it might have to be largely increased—he might be induced to do as you wish. I think that if you came to see him, showed him the money, and were prepared to settle everything on the spot, he would give in.

In the circumstances, I believe you will pardon this liberty. Yours truly,

LEONORA L. PALFREY.

"Now or never," muttered Mr. Frampton, his gambling spirit thoroughly roused.

He dispatched a telegram, called on his bankers, and caught the train, all within the space of one hour. He arrived at Sharmouth early in the afternoon, lunched, and took a cab, hoping he might not be seen by Mr. John Maxwell on the way. The word "halves" may have been troubling his mind, but decidedly not his conscience. Maxwell would receive a share, of course, but it would be no more than seemed good in the eyes of the financier.

However, the house had still to be purchased, and by the time Mr. Frampton arrived at the door, the optimistic effects of the luncheon champagne had somewhat evaporated.

Entering a gloomy and rather shabby hall, he was conducted along a short passage and shown into a study of sorts, indifferently lighted.

In his dressing gown, a man with a long gray beard and untidy gray hair, his eyes protected by darkened glasses, sat at the writing table. By the fire sat a girl whom Frampton mentally appraised as "uncommon handsome."

She rose, returning his bow, and said:

"Father, this is Mr. Frampton, who wishes——"

"Yes, yes," the old man interrupted testily, as though roused from meditation. Then, in a more genial tone: "Be seated, sir. I received your telegram, and regret that I could not reply in time to save you a tiresome journey."

"But not a vain one, I still must hope," Mr. Frampton gravely but pleasantly returned, taking the chair proferred by Miss Palfrey, at some distance from the table.

Mr. Palfrey shook his gray head. "The house is not for sale," he muttered.

"You will permit me to state my case, as it now stands?" said the visitor.

"Considering the journey you have taken, I cannot forbid you; but I warn you that you will but waste your breath. I would not part with the house for twice the sum you have already offered."

Mr. Frampton sighed. "Still," he said, "I must do my duty by my client. Mr. Palfrey, my client has worked himself into a deplorable condition over the matter. I saw his medical adviser only last night. There is no doubt whatever that his recovery hangs on the satisfying of this one overwhelming desire. But even my client's wealth is not unlimited. He cannot go on increasing his offer indefinitely, and the offer I am about to make must be taken as final." The speaker paused and cleared his throat. "Sir," he resumed with emotion, "for the immediate possession of this house and its contents, I am empowered to offer you the sum of ten thousand pounds."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Palfrey, while an inarticulate exclamation escaped the girl.

"My client insisted on my bringing that sum with me—in Bank of England notes of one hundred pounds each." From his breast pockets Mr. Frampton produced two bundles. "If the title-deeds are not at hand, my client will accept your simple acknowledgment for the present."

"Dear me, dear me!" said the old man helplessly, his chin on his chest.

The girl stepped forward. "Father, you will accept," she said softly. "You cannot refuse." She turned to the vis-

itor. "How soon should we have to go?" she asked.

"It is so urgent," he replied, "that I must beg of you to vacate within twenty-four hours from now."

"It can be done," she answered. "Father, what do you say?"

Mr. Palfrey threw out his hands. "So be it!" he cried wearily. "For your sake, Leonora, I accept the price."

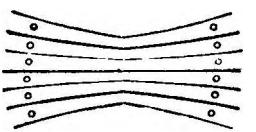
Five minutes later, Mr. Frampton rose to go. "I can just catch the express," he said, after gratefully refusing refreshment. "My client cannot have the good news a moment too soon."

Leonora went with him to the door, and watched until the cab was out of sight. Then she returned to the study.

"The car will be here immediately," she remarked as she entered, smiling.

She did not appear in the least astonished at what she saw: A young man engaged in executing a cheerful dance upon a wig, beard, and smoked glasses.

At a second glance you would probably have identified him with a person of the name of John Maxwell.



ADVERTISEMENT TRAPS BURGLAR

A SERIES of burglaries, all of which had been committed by a negro elevator operator, led the police of New York to insert an advertisement in the newspapers recently with the purpose of trapping the elusive thief. An apartment house was selected as the scene of the drama in real life, and a detective, Sergeant James McCormack, assuming the rôle of janitor, interviewed applicants for the position.

When Robert Oolin Lynard, a well-dressed negro, called upon the "janitor" and declared his fitness for the place, Sergeant McCormack decided that the man's prosperous appearance indicated that he was the much-sought thief. Lynard was engaged and straightway began work.

Shortly thereafter he called up the various apartments in the house to ascertain whether any of their occupants were not at home. While he was still engaged at this, one of the tenants went out, leaving the key of her apartment with the new employee.

Lynard waited only a few minutes. Then he hurried to the elevator, ascended to the absent tenant's apartment, and, opening the door with the key entrusted to him, went in.

The "janitor" and two other detectives hastily climbed the stairs and also entered the apartment. They found the negro gathering up various articles of value, preparatory to making a quick get-away. They arrested Lynard and hurried him to his own apartment, where, the police say, they recovered fifty-eight pawn tickets, twenty-five walking sticks, one hundred and fifty assorted keys, and a large cache of jewelry and silverware.

The Wrong Face

by Giles Bradbrook

CHAPTER I.

THE FACE FROM THE DARKNESS.

"WHY, Frank! You're back again and safe!" The young woman in mourning who had just alighted from the train held out her hand in surprised greeting to the chauffeur. "My aunt wrote me that you were a prisoner in Germany some months before the armistice was signed, but I heard nothing further about you, although I tried to make inquiries from Paris by way of Berne. I'm so glad!"

The chauffeur shook hands awkwardly, grinning from ear to ear.

"It's fine to see you home, too, Miss Fay. They turned us loose after the armistice. It was rough getting back to our lines, and I was in hospital till February, when they shipped me home and Mrs. Tudor took me back." He hesitated, and his homely, good-natured face reddened. "I—I'd like to say, miss, that we all felt something terrible—the servants, I mean—when the news came about poor Mr. Tudor. It was a great shock. I met him over there just a month before."

"Oh, did you?" Fay Tudor paused with her foot on the step of the car and turned glowing eyes on the chauffeur. "You must tell me all about it some time, what he said and how he looked. You know I never saw him after his regiment sailed."

"Yes, miss." Frank's tones were low with sympathy, for every one around the Tudor place knew how deeply attached to each other this orphaned brother and sister had been.

He shut the door and, climbing in behind the wheel, drove swiftly off down the village street and out upon the broad, curving road which led toward the cove. Fay's soft blue eyes had blurred at the reference to her brother, but she winked back the tears determinedly. Not even his memory must mar this home-coming; he would have been the last person in the world to wish that.

Sandy Cove was one of the most exclusive and plutocratic of summer colonies, and Fay looked about her at the superb estates which lined the road on either side, and which had once been so familiar to her, with a vague sense of bewilderment. Everything seemed just the same, just as she had remembered it, and yet there appeared to be a subtle, intangible difference. Could it be merely her nerves again, those wretched overtaxed nerves which had driven her from her reconstruction work in France?

She leaned forward impulsively.

"My aunt and cousin; they are both well, Frank?"

"Yes, Miss Fay. Mrs. Tudor told me to say that she knew you would forgive her for not coming to the station to meet you. She didn't expect that

your ship would dock until late this afternoon, and your telegram only arrived an hour ago."

Fay sat back once more with a little smile. At least Aunt Clara had not changed! She could not imagine her uncle's widow exerting herself to rise to any occasion which interfered with her own self-centered daily round. But surely Laurel must have altered; the little dark-eyed vivacious cousin, so different from her calm, phlegmatic mother, had just graduated from school when Fay went into service two years before, and had been consumed with grief because the horrid war threatened to prevent her prospective début. Fay had always had a fond affection for the temperamental, high-spirited girl who, though only a few years younger than herself, had seemed a mere frivolous child, and she wondered what this period of transition had done to her.

The car turned in between two low gateposts, swirled up the smooth driveway, and halted before the steps of the wide porch, upon which a slender, white-clad figure stood.

Fay had only time to note that the piquant little face seemed as childishly naïve as ever and the dark eyes as ingenuously eager, before her cousin folded her in a nervously tense embrace.

"Oh, Fay! Fay! You wonderful thing! We've got you home at last! I thought that transport never would get in!"

"Laurel, dear!" Fay kissed her warmly, and then, disengaging herself, mounted the steps to meet the gracious figure advancing toward her with outstretched hands.

Mrs. Tudor was thirty-seven and looked twenty-five, with the delicate tender irregularity of feature which just escapes actual beauty. Everything about her was pretty; her blond hair and soft blue eyes and the rose-leaf skin, which was innocent of the slightest line. Her still girlishly slender figure moved with a slow, rhythmic grace, and her manner was always placid, reflecting sympathetically the moods of those about her, yet seemingly unaffected by them.

Her voice fluttered prettily, too, as she greeted her niece. "My darling girl! You cannot know what a relief it is to have you back safely from all that horror! I would have gone to the station to meet you, but when your message came——"

"Frank told me." Fay smiled. "Ah, it is good to be home! To look at you all I would not think I had been away a day!"

"We must make you forget that you were." Mrs. Tudor led her toward the hall door, where a stout, middle-aged woman waited, her broad face wreathed in smiles. "Here's Martha to show you to your room—I've put you and Laurel together, just as you used to sleep—and Anna and Louise are still here, too. Go right up, dear, and I'll send you a glass of sherry before lunch."

Later, during the meal, Fay studied her aunt and cousin covertly. At first only snatches of the conversation reached her ears.

"She couldn't get a divorce, of course, because her husband was in the service. . . . Only runner-up last year and now it looks as though he might win the cup. . . . Not announced yet but every one knows it."

She realized that they were endeavoring to post her as to the current gossip and was grateful, but she felt somehow like an outsider, a stranger. It seemed to her that there was a strained note in Laurel's vivacity, a curious hesitancy now and then which betrayed a sort of nervous tension for which the mere fact of her own return would in no way account, and she was puzzling over it when the girl turned to her and remarked:

"You haven't asked about any of the old crowd, Fay. There are a few

changes, of course, and the place has been like a morgue for the past two summers, but now that the men are back it is like the old Sandy Cove again." She caught a warning glance from her mother and, to retrieve her tactlessness, went on hastily: "They've built an annex to the Country Club exclusively for bachelors, and Mr. Clayton and heaps of the others stay there."

"Mr. Clayton?" Fay glanced up quickly. "I've heard of some of the things he's been doing."

"Yes. One of the dollar-a-year men in Washington, but he can afford it, with all his factories and things."

"But he has been so magnificently generous and has given so wisely!" Fay's eyes glowed. "I *shall* be glad to see him again!"

Mrs. Tudor glanced across the table at her niece and then shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"He's quite the same as ever," she said. "Plays abominable bridge and talks shop."

"Oh, mother only abuses him because he is as insane about her as ever!" Laurel laughed, but there was a nervous little quiver in her voice as she hurried on. "Jack Huntington is stopping at the club, too, and Lieutenant Pearsall—he's an aviator and he dances divinely—and—and Harry Cadmus."

She drew a quick breath as she mentioned the last name, and her eyes seemed to burn into her cousin's, but Fay merely responded quietly:

"Is he? Are there any newcomers among the cottagers?"

She scarcely heard the reply. Harry Cadmus! Fay actually had forgotten his very existence for more than a year, and now the mention of his name brought back a memory at which she could afford to smile. How much she had thought that she cared, and how heartbroken she had fancied herself when the big test came and he had frantically pulled wires to obtain an assignment at home rather than face the hazards of active service! With what hot scorn had she parted from him! And now it was only with difficulty that she could conjure up a fleeting post-impression of his personality!

It was Laurel once more who broke in upon her reverie.

"Oh, Fay, did you bring any pretty things over from Paris with you, or wouldn't the horrid regulations permit you to? Madame Lucette's buyer is back and she says that the gowns at the openings were simply fascinating, quite as they were before the war."

Fay gazed at her in amazement.

"No, Laurel. I didn't bring anything home with me. I haven't been thinking of pretty things for a very long time."

"Oh, of course not, being in mourning" Laurel caught herself up and, rising abruptly from the table, moved to her cousin's side and put her arms about her. "I think you know how I feel about losing Wilbur; it was almost as if he had been my brother, too."

"Let us go out on the porch." Mrs. Tudor rose. "Fay, I did not mean to touch upon our common grief so soon after your return, but I felt nothing so deeply since your uncle left us. I think you may be glad to know that Wilbur's friend, the one who tried to reach him immediately after he fell, brought all his things to us, and they are in his old room now. The key is on your dresser."

"Thank you, Aunt Clara," Fay answered quietly, adding, after a pause: "It was Captain Warren who brought them? Did you like him?"

"We did not even meet him, unfortunately. We were up in the Berkshires when he came. By the way, I fancy we shall have a crowd trooping over from the club for tea. They will all be so anxious to see you."

"Oh, please, Aunt Clara," Fay protested, "not on this first day! You will let me escape, won't you?"

"But they will be so disappointed!" Laurel exclaimed. "Seeing them again like this in such an informal, impromptu way will be easier than if they all paid stiff calls of condolence. You'll have to meet them some time, you know, and if you put it off there will be talk."

"Why?" Fay demanded.

"Well, they'll think it queer of you! 'nervous breakdown' is such an elastic term——"

"Laurel means, dear, that they will think you are really ill, when all you need is a good rest. Let them exclaim over you and they will soon drift back to their own immediate interests and leave you in peace," Mrs. Tudor interrupted smoothly. "As a matter of fact, I think you look extremely well, Fay. It is odd that Laurel should be so unlike me and you resemble me so closely; the same coloring and all, except that you are a younger edition! I am almost afraid to have you about the house. You are like a challenge to my fading charms."

She laughed in a pretty, tinkling fashion, and Fay smiled again.

"No fear, Aunt Clara! You haven't even stood still while I have been away; you've grown quite ridiculously youthful! I feel as though you and Laurel were both children!" She passed her hand over her eyes. "I am a little tired from all the excitement and red tape of landing; if you don't mind I think I shall go upstairs and rest for a while, if I am to meet all these people later."

"I wish Fay wouldn't be so standoffish," Laurel remarked when her cousin had disappeared. Her dark eyes snapped with something very like resentment. "She doesn't meet one halfway at all!"

"She is going to be difficult, I'm afraid," Mrs. Tudor conceded with a sigh. "You were not very tactful, Laurel."

"But, mother, what was it that doctor said, the one who had treated her in Paris just after her breakdown? Didn't he say that we were to behave right from the start as thought there hadn't been any war or anything?" the girl demanded. "Well, I certainly tried, and I don't believe she heard a word I was saying! Of course I'm terribly glad to have her home again, but if she is going to hold herself aloof from every one it will be dreadfully awkward. I'm glad we didn't know earlier that she was coming, or you would have had to postpone the dance next Friday."

Mrs. Tudor shook her head.

"If she does not put in an appearance people will understand that it is because she is in mourning. Wilbur has been dead more than a year now, and I must persuade her to discard that somber black as soon as possible."

Fay's tired nerves relaxed in the dim quietude of the room which she was to share with Laurel. She drifted off into fitful slumber, awakening only when laughter and the subdued chatter of voices was wafted up from the teahouse on the lawn, accompanied by the tinkle of silverware and porcelain.

With a sigh she arose and, taking from the closet one of the thin black gowns which Martha had unpacked, dressed slowly. Would she ever be able to slip back into the life about her once more?

As she picked up her hand mirror for a final glance at her hair, a key tucked behind the powder box on the dressing table caught her eye and she put the mirror aside. The key to Wilbur's room! The room in which he had cried himself to sleep on the first night after they had come to live with their uncle's family and she had stolen from her own bed to fumble her way through the strange house to his side to comfort him.

So many memories crowded all at once upon her mind. Their pony races over the sand dunes to the shore, the tragic parting when he had left for the

military school, the picnic which celebrated his first holiday homecoming, and her own frantic jealousy over the red-headed little girl across the way, whom he had elected to choose for his first sweetheart!

There were later memories, too, so poignant, so dear that she closed her eyes as though to shut them out from her mental vision. Those people down there on the lawn, who awaited her appearance merely as the bearer of a new sensation in the jaded mid-season, could wait just a few minutes longer. To enter that quiet room once more would be her real homecoming.

Taking up the key she made her way to the one closed door down the hall and, unlocking it, paused upon the threshold. The curtains were drawn, but in the cool, dim light she could make out the familiar outlines of the furniture and the more personal touches, which brought the quick tears springing to her eyes. There were his polo and hockey sticks in one corner, his golf bag and tennis rackets in another, and on the table between the windows, the model of the fast little sloop with which he had won his first race.

Her eyes strayed to the mantel, and, with a little exclamation of surprise, she drew nearer to it. What were those strange objects which were at the same time so vaguely familiar, and which brought back in a rush the impressions of the red months through which she had but lately passed?

A hand grenade, a "tin hat," and a gas mask in its case! Then all at once she recalled what her aunt had said—that Captain Warren had brought Wilbur's things home. She touched the helmet with tender reverence, and took up the gas mask, but the dark stains upon its case made her recoil, and for the first time the full horror and desolation of her loss swept over her. The numbing shock of a year ago had been dulled by ceaseless work which taxed her strength to its uttermost limits, but now the inevitable reaction came and she put her forehead down upon the mantel and wept unrestrainedly.

When at last she crept from the room it was with a sense of peace such as she had not known before settling about her heart. She returned to her own room to remove the traces of her recent emotion in the determination to take up her life again among those carelessly happy people below as soon as she could. She must "carry on," for that was what he would have wished.

As she came down the stairs a few minutes later a man standing in the hallway came quickly forward.

"Oh, there you are, Clara! I heard voices out on the lawn and was just about to——"

He paused as the girl advanced and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Clayton? Am I so very like my aunt? I am complimented."

"Miss Tudor!" The newcomer recovered from his surprise and shook hands cordially. "I did not know—I hadn't heard. By Jove, but you *are* like Mrs. Tudor! I could have sworn it was she coming down the stairs! When did you return?"

"Just this morning. It is good to be home again. But do you know, I feel somehow like a dancer who suddenly finds herself out of step?" Fay smiled. "Nothing here seems to be changed, so it must be that the fault lies with me. You may not believe it, but I actually dread going out there to the others. Silly, isn't it?"

Kenneth Clayton shook his head gravely. He was a man of forty, with a touch of gray at the temples, but there was no hint of approaching middle age in his clean-cut features and straight, slim, broad-shouldered figure. He had regained his poise, but he still regarded Fay in a bewildered fashion, as though he were just awakened from sleep.

"No, I don't think it's silly," he responded. "You've been living under such high pressure that this little backwater and its atmosphere seem unreal to you, as though you were looking on at some pleasant-mannered comedy on the stage."

"Yes, that is it!" Fay exclaimed. "How well you understand, Mr. Clayton! Come and help me to brave them."

"They won't miss us for a little while. I want to talk to you." He gestured invitingly toward a window seat. "Do you know, I haven't yet gotten over the shock you gave me just now? I often remarked the resemblance you bore to your aunt, of course, but you always seemed to be like a rather solemn-eyed child before you went away, and I never could realize that you were actually grown up, even when we read about you and the citation from General Petain."

"We heard about *you,* too, over there." Fay seated herself. "I wish you could have seen for yourself the practical results of your generosity, as I saw them! There is no greater tragedy than to be compelled to turn away those in sore need who come with trust and confidence to you, and our unit was at the very last of its resources when, as if from a fairy godfather, your trainloads of food and clothing and building materials came! I wish I could tell you what it meant to us and to them."

"I am glad it was of service." Clayton paused. "You find your aunt and cousin unchanged, then?"

"I don't know," replied the girl thoughtfully. "I've scarcely had time as yet to form any impressions. Aunt Clara, at least, seems the same as ever; she's quite wonderful, isn't she?"

"Well, upon my word!" Mrs. Tudor's voice sounded from the doorway. There was a slightly acidulous note in the usually unruffled tones. "When did you arive, 'Ken'? I'm glad you found Fay, and I know you've been interested in talking to our returned heroine, but every one else is anxious to see her, too, and you've kept the whole crowd waiting for ages out on the lawn."

"I'm sorry." Clayton rose. "I *have* been interested."

Fay gasped, for there was something almost rude in the coldness of his tone. She rose also and went out to the tea-house with them both.

The next hour was less of a trial to her than she had feared, for, as Mrs. Tudor had prophesied, after the first exclamations and flurry of greetings, the conversation quickly turned back to the current gossip of their set, and the girl was content to sit back and look on.

Only Kenneth Clayton stayed for dinner, and, when later Laurel murmured something about a dance at the Country Club, Fay insisted on both her aunt and cousin going, pleading that she had a headache and would retire very early.

After they had departed with Mr. Clayton she strolled into the library, and, extinguishing the lights, seated herself by the open window and looked out over the sloping lawn to the darker shadows which marked the clump of trees surrounding the tea-house. The porch did not extend to that side of the house. The window was about the height of her shoulder from the ground, with massed shrubbery on either side. In the moonless, starry night everything seemed indistinct and blurred, and with nothing to focus her attention her thoughts drifted back to that locked room upstairs.

So it had been Captain Warren who brought Wilbur's things home. He had come to see her in Paris on his first furlough after her brother was killed, and she recalled him as a tall, quietly self-contained man, with a homely, bronzed face and kindly gray eyes. She wished that she had been at home here to receive him when he came.

With a start her thoughts came

abruptly back to the present and she leaned forward. Had something moved there beneath that clump of trees? It was nearly midnight; surely no one could be abroad at that hour except possibly Frank or one of the gardeners, and they would not wander aimlessly about the grounds.

It must be simply her nerves, which peopled the shadows. With a shrug she sank back among the cushions, and her mind reverted to the captain once more.

He had been Wilbur's chum. Fay wished that she knew where to find him again. Of course she might send him a note in care of the war department, but if he had been relieved of his commission——

How long she sat there musing she never afterward knew, but all at once she became aware of a rustling in the shrubbery directly beside the window and without warning a face appeared within a few inches of her own!

It was a white, drawn face with disheveled hairs and eyes which stared wildly into hers for a moment, while she held her breath in surprise and terror.

The next instant it had disappeared, and there remained only the night breeze rustling through the shrubbery and casting wavering shadows beneath the stars.

CHAPTER II.

COLD ASHES.

THE next morning, when Fay awakened, she was ready to laugh at her own fancy of the night before, hideous as it had been. Her overwrought imagination had played her strange tricks more than once since her nerves had given way beneath the strain of the superhuman work she had for so long struggled to accomplish, but never had her visions taken so startling a turn.

She felt that she had not come home a day too soon if this sort of thing were to be the penalty for overdoing herself, for it must have been only her fancy that pictured that face. The pallid horror of it, and the staring, almost maniacal, eyes were like nothing she had seen in a human being; it could only be the stuff of which nightmares are made.

"Good morning, honey." Laurel turned over in her twin bed near the window and smiled sleepily. "We never got in until all hours, for we went to supper at the Patterson's. What on earth were you dreaming about last night?"

"Why?" Fay asked quickly.

"You were fast asleep when I came in, and I didn't disturb you, but just after I got into bed you screamed out something about a face, and for some one to come and take it away. I got up and went over to you, and tried to wake you, but you only muttered again about a face from the darkness. What did you mean?"

"I can't imagine." Fay laughed lightly. "I do have nightmares lately, but I never seem able to remember them afterward."

Instinctively she shrank from confiding in her cousin. If she told of her fright on the previous evening it would only make matters worse, for Laurel's remark, "'Nervous breakdown' is such an elastic term," stuck in her memory. They might even think that her brain was affected by the horrors through which she had passed!

After breakfast she wandered off alone down the winding side path which led to the shore. Her nerves had steadied, and she realized with a sense of relief that the worst was over! She had taken the plunge back into the old life and now there remained only to drift along with the others.

Wisely the strip of woodland which bordered the rocky beach had been untampered by landscape gardeners, and the oaks and holly shrubs grew picturesquely down to the very edge of the

sands. Fay paused for a moment on the natural terrace above and stood looking out over the dancing blue waters of the bay, white-capped now as the brisk morning breeze ruffled its surface. Tiny shimmering sails skimmed by, swooping as they gybed, and a few gulls wheeled low inshore with their plaintive, insistent call.

The girl seated herself in the shade with her back against a convenient rock. A delicious feeling of lassitude came over her. It was good to relax, to sit with idle hands and dream.

"Fay!" A masculine voice sounded close to her. She started violently, her unstrung nerves jangling again. A dapper young man in immaculate flannels, with a bit of blond mustache above his weak mouth, stood beside her. "Awfully sorry I startled you."

"How are you, Harry?" She held out a slim, cool hand. "It seems odd to see you in 'civies' again. Won't they let you wear your pretty uniform any more?"

"Oh, I say, that isn't very kind!" He flushed and dropped her hand. "You —you're looking awfully well; heard you'd been ill, but one never would think it! May I sit down?"

"Of course." Fay's tone was not enthusiastic, however, nor did she move to make room for him beside her. After a moment he seated himself in the sand near her feet.

"Laurel told me last night at the dance that you were home, and I thought that perhaps I might find you out here; I remembered that it used to be a favorite spot of yours." Harry Cadmus spoke with a curious, reluctant hesitancy, as though spurred on by some unwelcome but acknowledged motive.

"Did you? I find I have forgotten most things that were habits before I went away," Fay retorted coolly. "I wandered here without thinking this morning."

"I suppose I was one of the habits which you have forgotten, too, Fay." The young man laughed with an air of sad resignation.

"You were," she returned frankly, but without unfriendliness. "Until Laurel told me yesterday that you were staying here at the club, I had forgotten that you were even alive for ever so long. You see I—so much has happened."

Cadmus winced but persisted.

"You are quite sure? There is not a live spark left among the ashes?"

"There aren't even ashes!" Fay picked up a few grains of sand and blew them lightly from her palm. "They are gone like—that!"

He sighed sentimentally, but a light of something very like relief glimmered in his pale eyes.

"Then all the bitterness is gone, too? That fiery contempt of yours because you misunderstood my motives so cruelly?"

"Oh, please, Harry, don't let us rake up all that again!" Fay stirred with a nervous, impatient gesture. "I realized as soon as I got in the thick of things that your going over wouldn't have mattered; it was just as well that you had your knees under a nice mahogany desk at home. Have you gone back into your father's office now?"

He nodded sulkily.

"By Jove, but you can sting, can't you? I wanted to see you first alone, Fay, to tell you that I—I hope we are going to be friends, anyway. Cannot we at least have a little armistice of our own?"

"Why, of course we are friends! It would be decidedly awkward if we weren't, with all the colony looking on; wouldn't it?" There was a hint of amusement in her eyes. "Cheer up, Harry. This is too nice a morning for post mortems! That's the sheriff, isn't it? Who is the young man with him?"

She nodded down the beach to where a tall, thin man with a grizzled mus-

tache was talking to a younger, boyish-looking stranger, gesticulating awkwardly the while.

"A police official from the city who is visiting him, named Larry or Barry or something," Harry Cadmus responded with alacrity, as though glad that the subject had been changed. "You know what a character old Hulse is. He introduced the fellow with as much ceremony as if he were the mayor, when he came up to the club yesterday to make some inquiries."

"Inquiries?" Fay repeated. "About what? Don't tell me that the placid waters of Sandy Cove have been disturbed by any hint of crime!"

"Hardly. I believe that somebody's maids were scared a night or two ago on the way home from the 'movies' in the village by something they took to be a wild man." Cadmus laughed. "They'd heard talk, I suppose, because some seat cushions and a steamer rug were stolen from Pearsall's launch and he'd been 'beefing' about it. Old Hulse hasn't had anything to interest him since the Patterson robbery a year ago, and he is determined to earn his pay."

Fay was silent. A wild man! What if that face—— But she put the thought resolutely from her.

"They're coming this way," Cadmus observed suddenly. "He's an old nuisance! Shall we go back to the house?"

"Why?" asked Fay. "They are only walking along the beach. I'm rather curious to know what they are looking for down here."

Sheriff Hulse recognized her with a start and came forward, beaming with all the half-belligerent democracy of one who knows he is on his own ground in spite of the wealth and distinction of the summer invaders.

"'Morning, Mr. Cadmus—lieutenant, I should say! How de do, Miss Tudor? Right glad to see you back again."

"Thank you, sheriff." She nodded cordially. Her gaze wandered to the younger man, who had lingered in the background. "I hear you have had a little excitement around here."

"Just a couple of servant girls scairt by a tramp, I reckon." The sheriff's small eyes twinkled shrewdly and he rubbed his chin with his hand as he sent a sly, sidelong glance at his companion. "Sergeant Barry here, from police headquarters in the city, who's down visitin' me on his vacation, don't think there's anything more to it than that; but we don't want any tramps in Sandy Cove."

"Of course not," Fay agreed. "Hope you find him, sheriff."

As the two moved off her eyes followed them idly.

"Do you know, there used to be a tiny cave somewhere about here," she remarked to her companion. "We played all sorts of games of pirates and buried treasures there when we were children. No stranger could find it in a hundred years, but it would be a splendid place for any one to hide out in."

"Oh, that tramp must have been on his way long ago—if he ever existed!" Cadmus dismissed the subject with a shrug. "Shall you put in an appearance at your aunt's dance to-morrow evening?"

"No. I'm not yet quite in the mood for dancing." Fay rose and shook the clinging sand from her skirt. "I promised Aunt Clara to help her this morning with the decorators, though. They are usually such a nuisance to have about."

They walked back through the spicily scented wood, to meet Laurel playing with her collie on the lawn.

She raised her eyebrows at their approach. "Mother has been looking everywhere for you, Fay," she announced loftily. "She could not imagine where you had gone, but I might have guessed; you always were fond of the bay."

She seemed deliberately to ignore Cadmus' presence, and Fay gazed at

her in astonishment. What could be the matter? She knew her mercurial cousin's moods well enough to recall that this assuption of cold sarcasm always indicated an aroused fury raging beneath. Laurel's temper was uncertain at best; what could have awakened it now?

"Have the decorators come?" Fay merely asked quietly.

"No, but your lawyers have," Laurel retorted. "They're sitting in the library now boring mother to death. You have oceans of papers and things to sign."

With a word of apology Fay left them, but at the steps of the porch she glanced back. Laurel and Harry Cadmus were standing as she had left them, evidently in animated debate.

Mrs. Tudor met her at the library door, and the rest of the morning was spent in a maze of legal and financial detail. Fay was astonished and not a little dismayed to learn the extent of her own wealth. She had inherited her brother's share of the family estate, and that, together with the increased interests from the investments made for her with her own money during the past two years, amounted to a sum which staggered and depressed her.

Until she had put it aside for sterner things she had always known luxury and accepted it as a matter of course, but the realization of her new responsibility almost overwhelmed her. Possessed of natural executive ability and a certain business acumen inherited from her father, she mastered the complicated details easily enough, but when the conference was over and the attorneys had departed she retired to her room with a splitting headache.

In her present weakened physical condition the thought of effort of any kind was repugnant, but she was determined upon one course: as soon as she could pull herself together she must arrange to make some settlement on Laurel, whose fortune would not be one-fourth of hers, and then she must outline a plan of philanthropy for herself. She would never have need of more than a fraction of what she possessed, and it seemed almost criminal that she should have so much and others so little.

When the waitress brought up her luncheon Fay noticed that the girl was smiling covertly, as though inwardly amused.

"What is it, Louise?" she asked.

"Oh, Miss Tudor, it's cook and Frank!" The girl dimpled. "He was teasing her this morning because she declared that there were ghosts or witches about, and now he has found out that his best suit is gone from his rooms over the garage and she has the laugh on him!"

"Frank's suit is gone?" repeated Fay. "Stolen, you mean?"

"Yes, miss. Gone from his closet some time last night, and there's no trace of how the thief got in or out of the garage, any more than he left any signs behind him in the pantry."

"The pantry?"

"That was why cook thought there were ghosts about, but ghosts don't eat real food, miss; do they? If you remember, the refrigerators are right off the lower pantry and Anna put down two chickens in jelly for to-day's lunch last night, besides all the rest of the things which were on ice. This morning the chickens were gone and the other food was all mussed about, but everything was locked up just as she had left it."

"Has my aunt been informed?" Fay's tone was guarded.

"Oh, yes, miss. She told Frank to notify the sheriff just now."

After the maid departed Fay sat for a long time with her luncheon untouched before her. So that face which she had seen could not have been a figment of her sick brain, her overwrought imagination, after all! Should she tell? There was undoubtedly some marauder

abroad and his depredations were bold if not serious in their results as yet.

Thus far he had seemingly confined his thefts to the bare necessities of life, but if he were irresponsible he was a decided menace to the community. That strained, white face with the wildly staring eyes appeared once more before her mental vision, and she shuddered. What course must she pursue?

Her aunt and cousin departed for the Country Club in the afternoon. When the shadows were lengthening Fay descended and strolled about the lawn. Her headache had lessened, but her problem still worried her, for she dreaded the questioning and flurry of excitement which would follow her disclosure.

Near the garage she saw Frank standing in evidently earnest conversation with another young man, who from the distance looked very like the sheriff's companion of the morning. On an impulse she approached him.

It was Sergeant Barry, as she had thought, and the last part of his sentence reached her ears:

"——not an ordinary tramp, but some one who knows the premises thoroughly."

"Good afternoon, miss." Frank stepped forward. "Did you want to see me about anything?"

"Louise told me that you had been robbed. I'm sorry."

"Yes, miss. This is Sergeant Barry from the New York police department."

Barry removed his cap, with a boyish smile.

"I think we met on the beach this morning." Fay smiled, too. "What do you make of these depredations, sergeant?"

"Nothing as yet," he responded frankly. "As far as I have been able to learn, yours is the only house which has been entered, and no one seems to have seen the man except possibly two maids who were frightened by a stranger on the village road the other night."

"It must have been well past midnight when he broke into the garage, for I was working late on Mrs. Tudor's own little car, a fast little two-seater she drives herself."

"Does my aunt drive?" Fay asked incredulously.

"Yes, miss." Frank grinned. "A regular little racing car, too, and she has learned as much about the mechanics of it as I know myself. Lots of the ladies around here have taken it up since you've been away, and I guess their fines for speeding about pay the county expenses! The thing that gets me is how the thief managed to break in without leaving a single trace behind him."

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow, Frank." The sergeant lifted his cap once more to Fay and turned to leave, but she intercepted him.

"I'll walk as far as the gate with you; I want to speak to you about something."

"Well, Miss Tudor?" he asked when they were out of earshot of the staring chauffeur.

"Some one else has seen the man beside those two maids," she began nervously. "*I* saw him, Sergeant Barry! I hesitated to speak before, thinking I had only imagined it, and I would prefer that you say nothing about this to any one, for I've been very ill and I cannot yet endure any excitement."

"You may rely upon me." The sergeant was studying her closely. "When did you see this man, Miss Tudor? Did you get a good look at his face?"

"Yes. I shall never forget it!"

Shuddering, she told him in detail of her experience of the night before, and he listened with close attention. When she had finished he asked:

"Would you know him again if you were to see him?"

"Of course! That dreadful face is stamped upon my brain! I saw it last night in my sleep!"

"Was there anything familiar about it, Miss Tudor? Was it like any one who has been employed about here in the past?"

"No," Fay declared emphatically. "It was like no one whom I have ever known.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE LANTERNS.

MRS. TUDOR'S cottage was the smallest and least pretentious of the colony, but invitations to her small "affairs" were more eagerly sought after than those to many a formal dinner or dance given in one of the huge conglomerate piles of concrete and marble occupied by her wealthier neighbors.

The prestige of the family name, and the fact that she was the aunt and official chaperon of the rich Miss Fay Tudor, together with her own great personal charm, had placed and kept her upon the pinnacle of popularity. She was wise enough not to attempt to compete with the rest of her circle in their manner of entertaining, but to adhere to the simpler, more informal style to which her modest establishment lent itself.

For her dance on the Friday night following her niece's return, Mrs. Tudor had arranged to station the orchestra in the hall and to serve supper on the broad veranda, so that virtually the whole lower floor of the house was thrown open to the dancers. The lawns were a fairyland of swaying colored lanterns, with unexpected bowers temporarily festooned here and there for those who preferred to sit out.

Fay had gone with a favorite book to one of the guest rooms on an upper story, but the music reached her even there, and the laughter and hum of voices and whirring of arriving motors made her treacherous nerves quiver.

After a hopeless effort to concentrate she threw her book aside and wandered over to the window. A soft night breeze was blowing, and the lanterns below winked like a thousand friendly little eyes. If she could only escape from the house without being seen, and ensconce herself in one of the more secluded nooks where she would be least likely to be discovered, she felt that the cool air would refresh her. Sleep would be out of the question until the affair was over and the guests had departed, in any event, and she longed for darkness and quietude.

Slipping down to her own room she caught up a thin wrap of Laurel's and descended the back stairs, where she found herself face to face with Martha.

"Did you want anything, Miss Fay?" the good woman asked anxiously. "I didn't hear the bell, but what with the commotion the caterer's men are making, and being everywhere at once——"

"No, Martha," Fay replied, "I only want to get out without being seen, for a breath of air."

"Then try the side door, miss, and take the path around back of the tea-house. You won't be disturbed there."

Fay accepted the advice and made good her escape. It was still too early in the evening for the promise of a semisentimental tête-à-tête to lure many of the young people from the fascination of the dance, and the gardens were virtually deserted.

Like a moving shadow she glided past the tea-house and to the edge of the wood, to a well-remembered seat which had been built between two stalwart oaks, and there, as from a darkened auditorium, she watched the gay scene which she had left behind.

The blatant syncopation of the orchestra came to her ears now only in occasional gusts of melody, softened and subdued by distance, and the woodland breeze, scented with wintergreen and bayberries, lulled her like an ano-

dyne. The bobbing, swaying lanterns blurred before her eyes and swam in a liquid haze, then gradually faded; she sank into a dreamless sleep.

It was with a violent start that she came to herself and for a moment gazed about her in a bewildered fashion. Then the strains of the orchestra penetrated her half-awakened consciousness and she saw couples moving to and fro beneath the lanterns. She could not have slept long, for the dance was still in full blast. What could have awakened her?

Then all at once she became aware of the crunch of gravel upon the path by which she had come and she rose to avoid any chance encounter with some couple in search of seclusion, but paused as a peculiarity in the sound of the approaching footsteps was borne in upon her. They were dragging, halting steps, with an odd sort of thump in between; surely not made by the light feet of any of the dancers! Fay waited to see who it could be.

In a moment a lesser shadow detached itself from the deeper ones and the girl saw to her amazement that the intruder was a man on crutches. Could it be the miscreant who had invaded the house and garage two nights before?

She had turned to flee, when a low, vaguely familiar voice fell upon her ears.

"Miss Tudor! Miss Tudor, are you here?"

Surely she knew that voice! Where could she have heard it last? Not here, not in Sandy Cove! Then the memory came to her suddenly of the bare, bleak reception room of a hospital and a homely face with kind, sympathetic gray eyes, and with outstretched hands she advanced from beneath the trees.

"Captain Warren. Oh, I am so glad you found me! But how did you know where to look?"

"Your maid told me." A hand was lifted from the rung of the crutch and clasped hers warmly. "I did not know your people were giving a dance tonight or I should not have intruded. I heard that you had returned and I wanted so much to see you. I've been staying with friends in the neighborhood, but I am leaving to-morrow."

"It was good of you to come." There was a shocked note of pity in the girl's tones. The man who had come to her in Paris, her brother's friend, had been no cripple, but a rugged person, sentient with vitality and strength. "Sit down here with me under the trees and tell me all that has happened since I saw you in Paris."

"This, you mean?" He indicated the crutch as they seated themselves and he laid it, together with its fellow, upon the grass beside him. "I got it in the Argonne about a month after I called on you. However, I hope to discard my props before long and get about as well as before. But tell me about yourself, Miss Tudor. I heard that you had been very ill."

"Just a breakdown." Fay's tone was lighter than it had been for a long time. "It served me right for trying to do too much. I was packed ignominiously home when the real work was only commencing; the reconstruction work, I mean. I never knew that I had nerves before."

"They're treacherous things; play the very deuce with one if they are overtaxed." Captain Warren paused, and then asked: "How do you feel now that you are at home? It must be a relief from the never-ending strain."

"It isn't," Fay retorted. "I feel as if I had been cut adrift and were wabbling about in a strange current. I'm out of tune with things; I don't speak their language here any more; the things that interest them seem so petty that I marvel at the enthusiasm they are able to work up. I marvel at myself, that I was ever a part of the life

here. Of course I know that the fault lies with me, and I suppose before very long I shall get back in the thick of things once more, but just now I find myself avoiding old, stay-at-home friends like a gun-shy horse."

He nodded.

"I know. I've felt that way, too; but we've got to carry on, you know. You'll feel easier after a bit, here in your own home, with your own people about you."

There was an unconscious wistfulness in his tone, and Fay said impulsively:

"You didn't tell me anything about yourself in Paris, captain; we hadn't time to become really acquainted. Where is your home?"

"I haven't any, unless you dignify a bachelor apartment by that name." His laugh had a rather dreary note in it. "I was born in the South, but all my people are dead, and my professional interests are here when I am able to practice law again. My partner was away, and when I left the hospital and dropped in at the club people looked at me as though they had encountered a ghost, so you see my homecoming wasn't overburdened by the attentions of friends, as was yours."

"I'm sorry." Fay's voice was very gentle. "You make me feel ashamed of my ingratitude. People mean to be kind, but I cannot help the desire to keep in the background just at first. I haven't thanked you yet for your kind thoughtfulness in bringing Wilbur's things home to us. I can't tell you what it meant to me when Aunt Clara told me, and I only wish I had been here when you came. I was wondering the other day how I could find you again."

"Really?" There was a boyish eagerness in his tone. "I meant to write to you later if everything went all right with me and ask you if I might come again. I could not speak of your brother's things to you in Paris, I knew that it would distress you too much then; but I had saved them for you and I was sure that you would want them."

"I do; more than anything else in the world they are precious to me." She spoke very low, and there was a pause. After a time she asked in a change of tone: "But what did you mean by 'everything going all right with you?' "

"This." He gestured toward the crutches lying beside him. "I was wounded in the hips, you know, not the legs, and things haven't gone just right. I have my choice of going on like this for the rest of my days or taking a big chance, and I have decided to gamble."

"A big chance?" Fay repeated.

"There is a certain operation which will either leave me utterly helpless or restore me to health again, and I am going to the hospital to-morrow." He spoke with forced cheerfulness. "That is my one reason for counting myself lucky not to have any ties; I shall be the only one to pay the penalty if the wrong number goes up. It's make or break, you see, Miss Tudor."

"Oh, I shall be thinking of you and wishing for the success of the operation with all my might!" the girl cried softly. "I hope you will let me come to see you as soon as you feel like having visitors. It is wonderfully brave of you; I think if I were able to get about as you do now I would not have the courage to risk such a hazard."

"You would, of all women!" He checked himself, and added: "I did not mean to come to you again until—unless—I could come as I was before, but being so near I could not resist the temptation of a—a little chat with you. Having come, I was fully determined not to tell you of my chance to get really well, but you see how your kindness has disarmed me. Please don't come to the hospital, but if all goes well

may I—may I look you up once more."

In the darkness Fay could feel her cheeks suddenly flush and tingle, and a little, uncomprehended warmth and glow settled about her heart. She had an odd, panicky idea that her voice had somehow got out of control and she was surprised to hear herself say steadily but with infinite gentleness:

"I shall be here waiting to see you, Captain Warren, whenever you come."

He bent and picked up his crutches from the grass.

"Then I am quite sure that the operation will be a success. I won't keep you out here any longer, for it is growing chilly and damp, and the wind is rising. It may be weeks, months before I shall see you again, but please believe that I shall come."

The other couples had vanished from the lawn, and the scraping of chairs and chatter and laughter from the veranda indicated that supper was in progress as they made their way toward the house.

When they reached a turn in the path which brought them parallel with the driveway Captain Warren paused beside a car that was parked at a little distance from the others, and held out his hand.

"I won't go quite to the house with you, Miss Tudor. I'm not an invited guest, you see."

"I am not appearing myself." She glanced down at the black gown beneath the light wrap. "I shall slip in undiscovered if I can, just as I came out. If—if things shouldn't go just right, you must promise to let me know, but I am sure, I *feel* that they will! So I won't say 'good-by,' captain, but just 'good night,' until you come again."

He held her hand very tightly for a moment, then stepped into the car and was whirled away down the drive while she stood quite still where he had left her, watching until the lights of his car had disappeared around a turn in the road. Then she went slowly toward the house, her brain awhirl and a strange, fluttering sensation within her breast.

Was it pity for this strong man brought so low which made her feel so oddly light-headed, and which sent the blood racing through her veins? She had only met him once before in all her life; he was a comparative stranger to her; and yet somehow she felt as though she had known him always, as if he were nearer to her than her own people. Was it because he had been through the same ordeal, and worse, that she had experienced herself; because he, too, felt alone, an alien in a once familiar world? So engrossed was she in her own thoughts that she did not hear a footfall upon the grass beside the path and started in surprise and alarm when a hand was laid for a moment upon her arm.

"I beg your pardon; did I frighten you?" Kenneth Clayton stood before her. "I could scarcely believe my eyes at first when I saw you coming toward me just now. Have you been for a little stroll?"

"Yes, I—the house seemed to stifle me," she stammered, her one thought being to get away. She liked the grave, quiet man and admired his forcefulness, but just now she wanted to be by herself, to try to analyze this new emotion which had all but swept her off her feet. She went on hurriedly: "The dew is heavy, though, and I think a storm is blowing up."

"Come and sit on the porch for a while; the small one, I mean, which opens off the breakfast room. No one has been there all evening."

"Oh, I cannot, Mr. Clayton, really!" Fay protested. "I must slip up quietly to my room; I don't want any one to see me or talk to me."

"No one will see you and no one will talk to you except me, and I have

something that I am very anxious to say to you." There was more of command than pleading in his tone. "I looked for you everywhere both yesterday and to-day, but you were not in evidence. Won't you spare me just a few minutes, Miss Tudor?"

Fay capitulated.

"I must not stay long," she said. "Let us creep in at the back door and directly through the pantry into the breakfast room. I would not for worlds have Aunt Clara know that I had appeared at her party in this fashion; she would think that I had taken leave of my senses!"

Like thieves they stole into the house and out upon the little porch, which was scarcely larger than a balcony. Fay sighed with relief that none other of the guests had marked their advent. Kenneth Clayton brought chairs from within the room, and they seated themselves well in shadow.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" he asked. "Yesterday morning, when I came over from the club, I understood that you were engaged and could not be disturbed, and in the afternoon——"

"In the afternoon I had a violent headache brought on by finding out in the morning from my lawyers what a disgustingly rich young person I am," she interrupted him. "It is a horrible feeling, all that responsibility! I shan't shirk it, though, and I have already decided upon what I shall do. That is one reason why I am glad to see you to-night; I want you to advise me, Mr. Clayton."

"I shall be glad to be of any service to you that I may," he responded. "Whatever happens, I want you to feel that you can always rely upon me, that I shall always be at your service."

She glanced up in momentary surprise at his tone, and then went on:

"I want to arrange a settlement for Laurel and some fitting sort of memorial to Wilbur, and then, setting aside a little for myself, I want to put the rest at the disposal of the world." She smiled. "It is rather a large order, isn't it? But all this money is useless to me. You will be able to tell me how to dispose of it in the wisest way, to help the greatest number of people. Later, when I am strong enough to undertake it, you will help me, won't you?"

"You have decided upon a course that is both good and wise." He spoke gravely, but there was a certain note of satisfaction in his voice. "You will not need the money, and if my advice will be of any value to you, it is yours for the asking. But don't let us discuss that now, Fay. I am not in the habit of talking about myself, but I should like to now for a little, if you will be patient with me."

"Of—of course," Fay stammered in bewilderment and uneasiness.

"I have never married, as you know," he began. "I had my work and I have never felt that I cared enough for any woman to ask her to share my life. I admire your aunt sincerely for her beauty and charm as a woman, and her congeniality as a splendid pal. I had felt that perhaps we might drift into a mutual feeling of still warmer comradeship in time, but I have never mentioned it to her. At least I thought that was what I felt, and I permitted it to draw me here from time to time during your absence, but now I know the truth. I knew it the other day when I stood in the hall and you came down the stairs."

"Mr. Clayton!" Fay rose precipitately from her chair. "Really, I——"

"Please hear me out," he pleaded. "I should not have spoken now, but serious disorders at one of my factories demand my immediate presence there, and I should like to feel before I go that you have at least listened to me. It was that strange resemblance to you

which drew me to your aunt. I hadn't realized it; to me you seemed like just a fair, lovely child before you went away; but I know that always I have carried the image of you in my heart and tried to solace myself with the double, the counterfeit, as many a man has done before me. I have no delusions that you love me now, Fay; but I have never failed in anything that I have undertaken, and I cannot fail now in the one thing which I desire more than all else in the world. I ask, I beg of you that when I return you will give me an opportunity to win your love, to make you care!"

"Oh, I should not have listened to you!" Fay cried in distress. "I should not have permitted you to tell me, Mr. Clayton, for what you ask is utterly impossible! I admire you, I honor you for the splendid things that you have done, and I—I am proud of your friendship, but I could never feel toward you as you wish!"

"Will you tell me one thing truly?" He possessed himself of one of her hands and held it firmly. "Is there any one else? Am I trespassing? Have you found some one else for whom you care?"

Fay shook her head.

"There—there is no one," she said faintly.

"Then I am satisfied." He towered above her and laid both hands gently on her shoulders. "I am willing to take my chance. Oh, my dear, my dear, I shall make you love me!"

For an instant his hands tightened upon her shoulders, and she could feel them tremble. The next instant they dropped. He stepped aside for her to precede him.

She paused for a moment more.

"I must not let you go away with that thought, Mr. Clayton. I can never care for you, not in the way you mean."

He smiled.

"We will wait."

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT MARTHA FOUND.

THE orchestra was silent at length; the last of the guests departed; and the lanterns in the gardens below were extinguished string by string, like vanishing necklaces. The caterer's men had packed up and long since started back for the city, during the general frolic into which the after-supper dances had merged, and still Fay lay wide-eyed on her bed.

The scene with Kenneth Clayton had taken all the glow and wonder from that earlier meeting with Captain Warren, and Fay felt cold and dispirited and dimly dismayed. She had known Clayton since she was a very young girl and had come to look upon him as a family friend and more or less of a fixture; now all at once he had shattered that point of view and she felt as though he were a stranger.

His swift wooing had come as a most unwelcome surprise. Fay, realizing his forcefulness and tenacity of purpose, saw that a new difficulty would confront her in the immediate future. He would not accept lightly her refusal; he had spoken truly when he said that he had never yet failed in anything that he had undertaken, and the natural egotism of a man of achievement, a man who ruled over hundreds of his fellows in the factories which bore his name, would not permit him to accept her word as final until he had exhausted every effort to persuade her.

And what would Aunt Clara think of her? Even if she did not care for him the older woman would not relish the fact that he had been won from his platonic allegiance to her by a younger replica of herself, and if he pressed his suit too obviously she would of course blame Fay for his defection. Life at Sandy Cove was not going to be as free as she had anticipated.

Soft footsteps nearing her door and a whispered "good night" aroused her from her troubled thoughts. She turned her head as the door opened and Laurel tiptoed in, a shimmering vision in her pearl-beaded gown.

"Goodness! Are you awake yet, Fay?" she whispered. "I supposed you would have fallen asleep ages ago, when the music stopped, anyway."

"No. I don't feel sleepy," Fay responded. "Don't try to undress by that low night light, Laurel; turn on the others—they won't disturb me."

"I—I think I'd rather not have any more light." There was a curious hesitancy in her tone, the same nervously tense attitude that Fay had observed on the day of her return. "I'm glad you aren't sleepy, for there's something that I want to tell you; I wanted to ever since you came home, but I didn't know how you would feel about it."

Fay raised herself upon her pillows.

"Tell me," she said. "Is it something about yourself?"

Laurel nodded as she stepped out of the shimmering gown and slipped a kimono over her shoulders.

"I wouldn't for the world have you think that I had been a deceitful little cat and deliberately set out to take away from you some one you cared for, while you were sacrificing yourself over in France." Her voice was very low, but she raised her head a bit defiantly as she let down her rippling dark hair. "But people can't help changing sometimes; they can't help the dictates of their own heart."

"Whatever are you trying to tell me, Laurel?" demanded Fay. "'Some one I care for!' I cannot understand."

"It's Harry!" Laurel blurted out. "When you misjudged his motives so terribly and treated him with such undeserved contempt two years ago you simply killed his affection for you, and you may as well know it! He says that you don't care either, any more; that you told him so flatly at the beach yesterday morning, and I do hope for your sake, Fay, dear, that it is true."

"It is," Fay affirmed. "I'd forgetten he was alive until you mentioned him the other day. You don't mean to say that you—you——"

"Yes," replied Laurel slowly. "After you had gone Harry turned to me for sympathy. I did think that you had treated him very badly. He realized that it was all for the best and that you really weren't suited to each other at all, and then something drew him to me and he saw at last that we had been meant for each other from the very beginning."

She uttered this highly original explanation in a dreamy, ecstatic voice, and Fay restrained a smile.

"I'm very glad," she said soberly. "Harry and I never really cared for each other, Laurel, dear; we only thought that we did. I hope with all my heart that you will be happy. Does Aunt Clara know of this?"

"No. You see, nothing was settled until you came back and Harry and I could find out how you felt toward him. He wanted to tell mother tonight, but we couldn't get her alone to ourselves a minute!" Laurel giggled. "Mother must have had a pleasant hour! You remember how she loves to dance? Well, the Pattersons brought their celebrity with them, that Professor Somebody-or-other who is such a famous chemist and who did such marvelous things during the war, and he pinned mother down for ages in a corner of the library. She sent distress signals to me, and I looked everywhere for Mr. Clayton to go to her rescue, but he wasn't to be found and he left without saying good night. Funny, wasn't it?"

Fay did not reply. So this was the first result of that interview on the porch! Trivial in itself, it was significant of the possible difficulties of her

situation in the future unless she could immediately convince Clayton of the absolute hopelessness of his cause.

Laurel shivered as she came to Fay for a good-night kiss.

"It is almost like autumn," she observed. "I believe a storm is coming. Do you think we had better leave all the windows open like this? There is a perfect gale blowing in!"

"Oh, we must have the air!" Fay protested. "If you are cold in the night you shall change beds with me; I'm inured to all sorts of weather."

"Night!" Laurel exclaimed with a little laugh. "It's almost morning! Oh, Fay, dear, I'm so glad you don't care about—about Harry and me! There have been times when I almost hated you, and I dreaded your coming home. Think of it! We're going to tell mother to-morrow, and I don't think I was ever so happy before in all my life! Will you forgive me for being so horrid to you in my thoughts?"

Fay laughed.

"Of course, dear. I wish you and Harry all the happiness in the world. Good night."

It was nearly noon the next day when Martha opened the door softly and entered with the breakfast tray. Outside, the wind swirled through the trees and a hard, driving rain slanted in at the opened windows. Cold gray clouds were banked solidly overhead, and there was an autumnal chill in the air.

With a shiver the maid placed the tray upon the table and went over to close the windows. As she passed the bed upon which Fay lay the girl stirred sleepily and turned over, but did not awaken, and from the other bed there came no sound or movement.

Martha approached it with an indulgent smile. Last night's party had been a bother, to be sure, but Miss Laurel had enjoyed it; she had danced her very head off all the evening, and it was no wonder that she slept so deeply! Should she awaken her for her morning chocolate, or permit her to sleep off her natural fatigue?

The younger girl was lying on her side with one arm thrown up over her head, which was almost buried in the pillows, and her dark hair fell over the side of the bed nearly to the floor.

Martha hesitated for a moment and then touched the bare arm lightly.

The next instant she had recoiled, for the arm was icy cold, and now for the first time she noticed that a strange, bluish shade had crept over the fair skin!

With a little sob of terror and dismay Martha put out a shrinking hand to pull the girl's arm down from her face, but at the first touch it fell at her side. Martha parted the rippling hair and thrust it back.

Laurel's lips had fallen slightly apart, her eyes were half unclosed and showed dull and glassy to the other's horrified gaze, while over the piquant features, tinged with that same hideous bluish pallor, it seemed as though a hand had been passed, robbing them of all expression.

"Miss Laurel!" The words came in a strangled whisper from Martha's lips. "Miss Laurel, what is the matter? Speak to me!"

Her voice died away in her throat and she laid her trembling hand for a moment on the girl's breast. Then with a half-stifled cry she turned and fled from the room and down the stairs.

Benny Sticks Around

by J. R. Ward

Author of "Lottie Wins a Beau," etc.

A VACATION is one of them things that do some folks more harm than good. They's a whole lot of guys that worry all year about how they are gonna spend their next year's vacation, and when they get it, what do they do? They go down to one of them two-by-four seashore places where you don't get as good eats as you get to home, and they spend most of their time singin' fool songs while some other nut plays the ukalele; and after comin' across with half of their year's salary for the privilege of sleepin' on a bed which resembles the family ironin' board, they go home so tired and wore out that it takes 'em 'til next vacation time to get to lookin' like theirself again.

This was told me by no less than Benny Foley, crook extraordinary, as he calls hisself. Benny is one of them guys, to hear him tell it, that don't believe in vacations for the above set-down reasons. Therefore, I ain't surprised when he throws me the evenin' paper one evenin' and says:

"I see in the society column where Charlie Vandiver is goin' to Cape Maurit for his summer vacation. The simple loafer is always vacationing."

I picks up the paper and runs my lamps down the society column. I notices that they's a lot of people that are home so dog-goned seldom that when they are gonna be at home they put it in the paper, but middle way down the list I sees what Benny's pickin' at.

Mr. Charles Waldecker Vandiver, son of Judge Hiram Fenton Vandiver, left Tuesday for Cape Maurit, where he will spend the summer months.

"Pretty soft for Charlie," says I, after I gets finished spellin' it out. "Some guys certainly do have it tough."

"Tough," says Benny. "Say, Hank, I wouldn't be that guy for a lot of money."

"Why?" I asks. "His daddy sops up money with a sponge, and if I ain't mistaken I read in the paper last week where a aunt of Charlie's had died and left him a few thousand berries to remember her by."

"What's a few thousand dollars to that guy?" demands Benny. "His daddy's got several millions, and Charlie is the only child to get it. The old man is a widower, and he ain't got a relation in the world. Charlie can spend his few thousand for cigarettes while he waits for the old man to croak."

"Well, what's the big idea of sayin' you wouldn't want to be him?" I asks, thinkin' that I got Benny in a corner.

"Because he's got so much money that he should be pitied," says Benny promptly. "His money has made a weakling out of him. All he cares about is spending, and he has no initiative, because he was never in a position where it was necessary for him to have

it. And so—what happens? He gets weak in every way but the ability to spend money."

"Why?" asks I. "Does he spend much money?"

"Spend!" yells Benny. "The old man has had a peck of trouble with him. Has to keep an eye on him all the time, so he won't get put in jail. Always fighting and smashing up automobiles and——"

"Kind of a rough mug, eh?" I cuts in.

Benny shakes his head. "No, I wouldn't say that. He's just a kid that's got too much money. He's twenty-four years old, and I'll bet he's spent half a million since he was twenty-one."

"How?" I wants to know. "It can't be done."

"Oh yes it can be done, too," Benny tells me. "He gives dinner parties to all the chorus girls in town, and he loses a lot of money on the ponies."

"It's a wonder the old man don't sit on him and make him behave," says I, all took up with this champeen spender.

Benny nods his head like he knowed somethin'. "He's wise, all right," says he. "I got it from good authority that the next time this kid gets in any trouble, his daddy is gonna leave all his money to the African missionaries."

"That'd be tough on Charlie all right," I says.

"No it wouldn't, either," says he, pointin' his finger at me like he was gonna show me a deep point. "It would be the best thing ever happened to that kid. Put him to work and make a man out of him—that's what I say."

"That's right, too," I admits. "Loafin' hurts some people."

Benny ain't payin' no attention to me. "Look at me," he goes on. "What would I have amounted to if I hadn't had to take care of myself?"

"That's one of the thin's I have always been tryin' to find out," I tells him, lookin' real innocent.

"What's that?" he asks, bitin' hard.

"What you've amounted to," says I, grinnin'.

Instead of gettin' a laugh out of him the way I sort of expected, he gets peeved. He jumps up from where he was sittin' and starts wavin' his arms around like a windmill. "Don't poke fun at me, Hank," hollers he. "You know that I've got brains, and I know how to use them. You know what I've amounted to without asking. There ain't a better con man in the United States than I am." He waves his arms around some more. "All you've got is due to me. I've got you everything; good clothes and——"

"You got me in jail once, too," I tells him.

He looks at me kinda disgusted on that one. "Sure," says he. "That's the way. You don't appreciate anything. When I met you, you were a common burglar and a pickpocket, and look what I've made of you." He pauses; then he turns to me and nods his head real sadlike. "Hank," says he, almost with tears in his eyes, "do you mean to insinuate that I'm not clever?"

"I'm beginnin' to doubt it," says I. "The best meal I've had since I been partners with you is the last one I got at the jail house before we got out."

I kinda hate to bawl Benny out that way, but they's times when he gets so chesty that you gotta do somethin' with him. I ain't sayin' that he ain't a bright boy, though. He's just as clever as they come, this boy is, but I got to say that he has hard luck sometimes. There is times when Benny, however, forgets about those times when he didn't bring home the bacon, and it's up to me to keep him reminded of 'em. Just the same, I hate to do it. This time I kinda felt sorry for him. He's rubbin' his chin and thinkin' hard. He lights a cigarette and looks out the window, and then he starts to play with that big blond curl of his which he always has draped

down between his eyes. All of a sudden he claps his hands together.

"I've got it," says he.

"You got what?" I asks.

"A peach of an idea," he squeals, dancin' around. "I'll have to find out a few things first, though."

He grabs his hat, and throws me mine, and we both starts for the door. We ends up at a telephone booth where Benny calls a number. I kinda gets a shock when I hears what he's sayin' over the phone:

"Hello. Is Fifi there? What say? On her vacation? Where is she going to spend it? Where? Cape Maurit? Oh! how lovely. This is Clarence talking. Are you sure it's Cape Maurit? How perfectly lovely! What say? Going to stay all summer! Oh! isn't that lovely? G'by."

"Ain't you feelin' well, Benny?" asks I, after he hangs up the receiver.

He don't pay no attention to me on that one. "Well, I was right," says he. "That's her maid on the phone, and she says that Fifi has gone to Cape Maurit to spend her vacation."

"Who the Sam Hill is Fifi?" asks I.

Benny gives me the wink. "An actress," says he. "And she's some queen. Charlie Vandiver is crazy about her, and I understand they're gonna get married some time soon."

"What's the old man got to say about that?" asks I.

"He's put his foot down on it," says Benny. "He told Charlie, accordin' to the dope I got, that he wasn't even to see her no more. She's a bright, intelligent woman of good family, but the old man don't like her and won't have her for a daughter-in-law, although she is a very nice girl. I guess the old man don't like the idea of Charlie marryin' a actress." He pokes me in the chest with his finger, and slides his dome-warmer back on his head. "Now what have we?" he asks. He answers hisself. "Charlie's at Cape Maurit—so is Fifi. The both of 'em have gone to the same resort for their vacations so they can be together most of the time."

"Kinda puttin' one over on the old man, eh?" says I.

Benny nods me a "yes" and he grabs me by the arm. In a coupla minutes we're in a stationery store, where we buys a coupla real long sheets of paper with lines on 'em. Then we goes to a public stenographer. Benny hands her a line of talk, and we waits about five minutes while she's typewritin' our job up for us. When she gets through, Benny takes the letters she hands him and then he gives her the long sheets with the lines on 'em. He tells her what to put on 'em and then he shows 'em to me.

I gives a war-whoop when I sees what's comin' off. They read this way:

> We, the undersigned business men of this city, do hereby assert that we are in favor of the policies of the Tobacco Comfort League, and we hereby pledge our support.

When we gets to our rooms, Benny gets a pen and some ink, and starts writin' names down under the headin'. One name he writes fancy, and another he don't. It takes him about a hour before he's finished. When he gets through, he's got about a hundred names which he has all wrote hisself, and every one of 'em looks different.

We then set sail, and in about fifteen minutes we're up at the court where Charlie's daddy, Judge Vandiver, works.

We has a little trouble gettin' in to see the old man, but Benny hands the judge's secretary a big line of chatter about how he must see the judge personally at once, and this seems to turn the trick. I finds that the old man is one of these guys that's got a face like they're eatin' a sour grape all the time. He gives us the once over as we drifts in, and believe me I got the idea right there that he ain't particular we called.

However, this don't stop Benny none, and he starts right in on the old boy, who is sittin' at his desk puffin' on a pipe that looked like it was old enough to be his grandfather. It takes more than a sour face to stop Benny when he gets started.

"Judge," says he, "my name is Foley. My friend and I represent the Tobacco Comfort League. As you know, there is a movement afoot at the present time to secure by law the prohibition of the culture, sale, and use of tobacco in any form. Indeed, my dear sir, there have been any number of Anti-Tobacco Leagues formed within the past few months, backed by influential people, whose sole object is to prohibit tobacco by constitutional amendment."

Very smooth line of chatter, I call it. When Benny first starts in, I kinda felt like he wasn't gonna make very much headway with the old boy, but by the time he gets this far I can see by the old man's eyes that he's interested.

"Now," says Benny, continuin' with his sad story, "to combat the influence of these so-called Tobacco Prohibition Leagues, the Tobacco Comfort League has been formed. It is made up entirely of wealthy, influential, free-minded Americans who enjoy their tobacco, resent the implication that it is injurious to them, and who will prove to the world that it is not, by their own wonderful accomplishments." He stops a minute to let this sink in, and then he waves his hand in the air. "You, Judge Vandiver, are the kind of man we mean. You are a living proof that tobacco is non-injurious to either the mind or the health."

"Humph," grunts the old judge, layin' his pipe down, for which I was thankful, and takin' a cigar out of his pocket and chewin' the end off.

Benny sees right away that he's makin' headway, and he goes right on. "Now, your honor," says he, "we are not soliciting subscriptions or donations of any kind. The league is well taken care of, being financed by a wealthy Chicago stock man, who is willing to put up any amount of money in order to crush these professional reformers who have nothing else to do but to intrude on the personal affairs of the free American man and his pleasures."

The judge grunts again, and I can see that Benny's makin' a big hit with his spiel.

"Well, young man," asks the old boy, "what do you want me to do?"

Here was Benny's cue, ad he grabs it. "Merely let us have your signature that you are in favor of the Tobacco Comfort League and its policies," answers Benny, takin' the sheet out of his pocket that he has wrote all the names on. "I have here the signatures of some of the wealthiest men in this town, and I feel that it would not be complete without your honor's."

The old man gives the sheet the double O.

"Is this Howard Josselyn's signature here?" he asks, pointin' to one of them with his finger. "I mean the oil man," says he, lookin' at Benny over his specs.

Benny takes a look. "Yes, your honor," lies he. "Mr. Josselyn gave me his signature this morning."

"Humph!" grunts the judge. "I thought he was out in Nebraska."

Believe me, I like to got heart failure on that one, but Benny, who is the champeen liar of the world, comes to the rescue.

"Mr. Josselyn made a flying trip into town this morning on business. I was lucky enough to catch him for a moment, and he expressed his appreciation of the good work the league is doing and is about to do."

"Humph," grunts the judge again, "I didn't think he smoked."

Once again I nearly falls out of the chair, but Benny laughs loud. "Oh!" chirps he. "He's an inveterate smoker, isn't he, Mr. Morgan?"

This last question is directed toward me, and if I'da had the chance I'da give him a tap that woulda made him take the count, but I nods me head real solemnlike, and then makes him a sign to leave me out of it. Believe me, I like a liar, but Benny suits me too well.

"Well," says the judge, "I like my pipe and cigars, and I guess it won't hurt to give you boys a lift, if my signature will do you any good." He reaches for his pen and scribbles his name below the last one.

That was what we come for, so we backs out graceful while the judge was wishin' us good luck, and in a coupla minutes we're home again, and Benny is writing away very carefullike on the typewritten paper we got from the stenog. Finally he straightens up, and when I looks at what he hands me, I pretty near took the count.

MR. BENJAMIN FOLEY, New York City, N. Y.

MY DEAR FRIEND: I am informed that my son is spending the summer months at Cape Maurit, and while there he sees a certain actress quite frequently, with whom I have strictly forbidden him to associate at any time. I have nothing against this lady personally; in fact, I understand that she is a woman of culture and refinement. Nevertheless, I feel that on account of her profession she is below my son's social standing, and I therefore object to her on that ground.

As I have explained the circumstances to you personally on a former occasion, and I am sure you understand the situation from my point of view, I would ask you, as an old friend, to take a trip to Cape Maurit, keep your eyes open, and report to me. If my son has again disobeyed my wishes, I shall disinherit him. I shall be guided by your judgment in the matter.

Hoping to see you in the near future, and with best regards to our friend Mr. Volley, I am,

Your old friend,
HIRAM FENTON VANDIVER.

"Who is the Mr. Volley?" asks I.

Benny grins. "That's you," says he.

"Gee!" says I. "I got more names than a directory, ain't I?"

"You will be willing to have a million names when you see the coin I'm gonna get out of this game," says Benny.

"How you gonna work it?" asks I.

Benny blows a few smoke rings with his cigarette, and smiles serene. That's the way he always does when he is sure of hisself.

"Well," says he, "here's this kid down at the seashore, and so is Fifi. It stands to reason that if they're both at the same resort, they're going to see each other a great deal. Now, I had that public stenographer write me this letter, and then, knowing that the judge was a great smoker, on account of having seen cartoons of him in the newspapers with a big cigar in his face, I called to see the judge; and after handing him that spiel about the Tobacco Comfort League, I gets his signature. After that, with the aid of a little tissue paper, it was a simple matter to transfer his signature to the bottom of this letter."

"You'll go up the road for forgery, too, if you get caught," I tells him.

This makes him sore. "I'm not going to get caught, you poor fish," says he, frownin' at me. "We're going to get at least a thou out of this fresh-mug kid, and then, besides, we'll get a much needed vacation."

"Vacation!" chirps I. "I thought you didn't believe in vacations."

"I don't," says he. "This is a situation where a vacation has been thrust upon us. We will start on our vacation this afternoon, Hank."

"I hope we don't end it up in the jug," I tells him.

He gives me the laugh on that one, and starts right off tellin' me how clever he is. I ain't got no ear for this music, and I grabs my hat and starts for the door. He ain't but about two seconds behind me.

"Do you know where we're going now, Hank?" he asks.

I admit that I don't.

"We are going down to the station

and buy two tickets to Cape Maurit," says he.

"I hope they don't bring us back free of charge," I tells him.

Well we arrives at Cape Maurit without gettin' pinched, and we gets a room at a hotel where we could listen to the wild waves bein' wild.

That evenin' we drifts into a robber's den and gets soaked the price of a coupla automobiles for a coupla bathin' suits, and I'll say right here that a barber pole was a shrinkin' violet alongside of the one I drew. It's pink with some kinda purple edges on it, and when Benny sees it, he goes into raptures.

"Ain't that a lovely color?" he asks. "Won't you look like a real sure-enough summer boy in that outfit?"

"I'll look more like a summer girl," I tells him. "After I get this rig on I'll be bitin' my finger-nails and blushin'."

Later we looks up Charlie Vandiver. Just as we expect, we finds him and Fifi havin' supper together at the dinin' room on the pier. Charlie is tryin' his darndest to buy her everything on the program, and it's easy to see that she's strong for him. Looks like a nice girl, too, and as pretty as a million dollars. We walks around a little and keeps an eye on 'em meanwhile, and after a while they goes over to the dancin' pavilion, and they starts to shake a foot. I'll say that this pair was a pair of dancin' fools, and no mistake. They're just as full of fancy steps as the ocean is full of water. Charlie is all dressed up in white, and I'll say he's a good-lookin' boy, and the flapper is all togged out in some kind of white creamy stuff, and the pink in her cheeks and her big violet eyes—well, she's a peach, this lady is.

I'm watchin' 'em dance and I'm pretty much interested when I happens to look at Benny. He's standin' with his hands in his pockets, and he's gazin' at the flapper like she owed him somethin', he was just that interested. The wind's blowin' that big blond curl of his, which is always poppin' out kinda carelesslike from under his hat, and which he never allows to get out of order; and the minute I seen him payin' no attention to how the wind was blowin' said curl to pieces, I knowed right away there was somethin' wrong.

"What's the matter, Benny?" I asks.

He wags his head, and slaps his hands together. "By George, Hank," says he, "she's a peach, isn't she?"

"Yes," I admits. "She's right smart of a good-looker."

The rest of the evenin' Benny was walkin' around lookin' like he'd lost somethin', and he don't seem to be much interested in nothin' except this dame.

The next mornin' I and Benny goes to see Charlie. Benny sends his name up with the bell boy and in a coupla minutes we're up in his room, or his apartment, I should say, 'cause Charlie is livin' in class, and he's got a parlor and everything.

Benny knocks hisself down to Charlie and then he gives me a knockdown, and we all sit down real sociable to chat. Charlie's smilin' and is offerin' cigars, and I kinda hated to take one, knowin' what was gonna happen to him.

"Mr. Vandiver," starts in Benny. "My friend here and I noticed you dancing last evening with a lady. May I ask who the lady was?"

Charlie straightens up on that and his face gets kinda red.

"Why do you ask?" he wants to know, gettin' ready every minute to try his hand at throwin' us out. "What do you mean, sir, by coming here and questioning me?"

Benny remains cool. "I feel that I have a right, Mr. Vandiver. I have been noticing you for the past few days, and I feel that duty compels me to come here and talk this matter over with you."

Charlie gulps on that one, and he jumps to his feet.

"Are you insane?" he yells.

Benny nods his head real solemnlike. "No, I'm not insane," says he.

"Well, what do you mean, sir?" yells Charlie, who is all worked up by this time.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Vandiver," says Benny, kinda soothin'. "I have a very delicate mission here to-day, but I feel my duty toward your father so strongly that I cannot help but come here and talk this matter over."

"My father!" exclaims Charlie, sinkin' into his chair.

Benny nods his head again. "Yes," says he. "I had hopes that you wouldn't make it necessary for me to explain the situation, but you drive me to it."

With that he reaches in his pocket and takes out the letter. "I think this will explain the matter," says he.

Charlie gives the letter the once over, and when he's finished I kinda had a idea he was gonna faint. Benny goes right on, talkin' mighty smooth, I'll say.

"Mr. Vandiver, I regret very much that I shall have to make an adverse report to your father. You have been disobeying his orders, and while Miss Delores is a charming young woman, I feel that it is my duty toward your father to let him know."

Charlie is comin' out of his stupor by that time, and he is almost in tears. "Mr. Foley," says he, in a pleadin' tone. "You know my father, and how unreasonable he is at times with me. I cannot afford to offend him, and still Miss Delores means a great deal to me. She has chosen Cape Maurit for her vacation, and her aunt is chaperoning her while she is here. Father is so old-fashioned at times, and he doesn't——"

"I know that, too," says Benny, lookin' fatherly, "but your father is an old friend of mine, and he asked me to come down here and find out what you were doing."

Charlie is all upset, and he looks like he is about to turn on the weeps. He looks from one to the other of us like a frightened kid. Finally he tries to bring me over to his side.

"You understand the situation, don't you?" he asks, almost with tears in his eyes.

"Sure." I tell him.

"Well, can't you do something with Mr. Foley?" he entreats. "This is terrible."

I takes my cue right away. "Aw, let him have a little vacation with his lady friend," says I. "You know what it is to be in love, Mr. Foley. Have a heart."

Charlie sees that he's got me on his side, too, so he starts right in tryin' to buy things his way. That was the only thing he knowed.

"Mr. Foley," says he, in a dignified way, "don't think I'm trying to buy you off, but if you will be accommodating enough to look the other way when you see me with Miss Delores, I'll give you five hundred dollars."

Benny shakes his head. "Nothing doing," says he. "Your father ought to be told about this thing. He trusts you, and if you are deceiving him he should know of it."

Charlie appeals to me again, and I gets ahold of Benny's arm. "Aw, have a heart," says I. "This boy is all right."

Benny looks like he's startin' to weaken, and Charlie grabs the opportunity. He gets ahold of Benny's arm real affectionate, and grins like a bad kid.

"Mr. Foley," says he, "what dad don't know won't hurt him. I'll just give you a sort of a little vacation present of five hundred dollars, and all you'll have to do, turn your head when you see Miss Delores."

"Well, I don't know——" starts in Benny. "Your father told me——"

"Aw, come on," says I, real pleadin'-like.

Well, Benny was a good actor, and I

wasn't no slouch that day meself, and after a little while we has Benny acceptin' the money, and after he has passed Charlie some fatherly advice, we goes outside, and we has five hundred berries between us.

"Well," says I, as we're walkin' up the street, "I kinda hoped that we was gonna stay here and I'd have a chance to wear that thunderstorm bathin' suit of mine once or twice; but the kid came across so easy, it looks like the game is over already."

"No, it isn't," says Benny, waggin' his head. "We both got a vacation comin' to us, and we're goin' to have it."

"Here?" I gasps.

"Why not?" he counters.

"Suppose the kid catches on?" I asks him.

Benny wags his head again. "He can't catch on unless he writes to his father—and that's the last thing that kid'll do."

"All the same I don't see no use hangin' around here," says I. "I don't like this scheme anyhow."

"Why?" asks he.

"Because there's a dame mixed up in it," I tells him. "A man that's had as much experience as you ought to know that when a dame is mixed up in a con game, it means bad luck with a capital B."

"The game is over, Hank," says he, kinda irritable. "We got the money, and the trick's been turned, and the whole scheme is so air-tight that there ain't a chance in the world of gettin' found out."

"The game ain't over 'til we're out of reach," I tells him.

I ain't sayin' that I'm a bright guy, but it don't take me long to see right then and there that there was somethin' on Benny's chest that oughtn't to 'a' been there. Any other time when we snagged a roll, Benny is the fastest guy in the world gettin' away from that locality, but on this occasion he don't seem to be in no hurry atall. Right away I sees that there's somethin' wrong, but I ain't got no idea what it is.

That evenin' I and Benny is sittin' in the hotel listenin' to a yap ticklin' the ivories. I'm talkin' to Benny about how this piano-hound ought to get arrested for disturbin' the peace, when I turns around to where Benny was sittin' alongside of me, and—he's gone. It's dog-goned wonder I didn't get pinched for talkin' to meself.

Well, I looks all over the joint for him. First off I thinks maybe he got kidnaped or somethin', but the more I figure, the surer I get that the big stiff sneaked off while I'm shootin' my bag off. I makes up my mind to find him, and then bawl him out, so I starts in and I goes to every hash house and hotel in the burg.

Whatever led me to go into Charlie's hotel is more than I can tell you, but I do, and when I hits the front door, I sees right away that there was big doin's on hand. They's a jazz band that's playin' somethin' raggy, and they's a lot of people dancin'. Although I has trouble keepin' me own walkin' pins from dancin' around by theirself, I gives the gang the double O, and it was right then I spots me brave Benny. He's out in the middle of the floor with Fifi, and they're shakin' a foot. Benny's checkered suit is bobbin' up and down, and I'll say that boy was havin' a good time.

After a while he looks over my direction, and he spots me. He grins as he goes by. Right away I see there ain't no use tryin' to tear him away from that gang, so I goes out on the front porch and joins the rockin' chair squad 'til the dance is over.

"Say," says I to Benny, when I gets ahold of him a little later, "what's the big idea of walkin' off and leavin' me talkin' to meself? I mighta got took up."

He laughs on that one. "Oh," says he, like he didn't think it amounted to much, "I thought you probably wouldn't be interested over here. You don't dance and——"

I grabs him by the arm. "Say, listen," says I. "You remember what I told you about dames bein' bad luck."

He laughs hard on that. "Miss Delores is a very charming young woman," says he, straightenin' his tie. "She is beautiful, intellectual——"

I don't wait to hear no more. I walks right out on him in the middle of his monologue and goes back to the hotel and crawls into the hay.

The next day it was the same thing. He's up and out before I'm awake, and I don't see nothin' of him all day, so along toward evenin' I puts on my noisy bathin' suit and goes out fishin', me feelin' like a plugged nickel in a bank down where they was all bathin'.

I has a lovely time all by me lonesome, and while I can't say I come back with any fish, I was feelin' pretty good when I gets back to the hotel. I buys a cigar on the way up to my room, and when I hits our door I'm puffin' away and singin' a tune. As I walks in I notices that the curtains have been drawed down, and there's a smell like medicine hangin' around. However, I keeps on puffin' and singin' until all of a sudden I hears a groan.

"Oh!" says somebody. "Cut out that racket. My head's splittin'."

I lifts up the curtain and takes a slant at the bed. There was Benny propped up in bed, and one of his eyes was closed for the season.

"Why——" I starts in.

"Put that torch outside," he yells. "My nose hursts, and I can't breathe that punk smoke. If that's a cigar I'm a giraffe."

"You look like a hard day's washin' right now," I tells him, chuckin' my smoke out of the window. "Who give you the shiner?"

With this he goes into a big long spiel about how he'd been dancin' with Fifi and—well, from what I gathers him and Fifi had been dancin' together too much to suit Charlie, and Charlie gets jealous and he gives Benny a tap on the lamp; and as Benny falls down his head hits the floor with such a thump that he takes the count. It seems, from what he says, that somebody was kind enough to bring him to, and then they put him to bed.

I gives him the double O, and outside of the shiner he's got I don't see nothin' wrong with him.

It was right there that he gets a big idea, and I and Benny talks it over. I runs down to the drug store and I gets a coupla rolls of bandages, and then I comes back and I wraps his head all up. Then I pulls down the curtains again, and I look up Charlie.

He looks kinda worried when I reaches him, and right away he wants to know how Benny is.

I shakes my head kinda sadlike. "He's in a bad way," says I. "I just got a doctor for him, and he says he's got a fractured skull."

Charlie turns white to the gills, and swallows hard a coupla times.

"I'm afraid it's all up with you, son," I tells him. "I was kinda strong for you at first, but this ain't no way to act; and I'm right here to state that your old man's gonna know about this."

Charlie gulps some more.

"The doc says that it'll take almost a thousand dollars to have Mr. Foley's head put in workin' order again," says I. "And besides that, if he dies—you'll go to the pen."

First off I thought maybe Charlie was gonna faint, and I was just gettin' ready to run for some smellin' salts when he grabs me by the arm.

"Can I see him on the quiet?" he asks.

"Well," says I, like I'm thinkin' it over, "I'm goin' after a nurse for him

now, and there ain't nobody with him. If you wanta go up there with me now, I'll take you up, but you can't say nothin' to him."

He agrees to that, and within three minutes we're standin' at Benny's bedside. Believe me, he certainly did look like the last rose of summer, and Charlie shakes like a leaf when he gets a slant at him. When I gets him outside I starts in on him again.

"I'm afraid you'll have to work for a livin' after your daddy gets my letter," I tells him. "You can't go 'round killin' people and then inheritin' millions of dollars. If Mr. Foley dies, you'll go to the electric chair."

"Can't we arrange this thing in some way?" asks Charlie, almost in tears.

"How can you?" demands I, yellin' in his face. "It will cost a thousand dollars to put him together again. He'll lay in that bed up there for three months if he does get well. There ain't no hospital here, and it'd be dangerous to move him to another town. Besides, we ain't got a thousand dollars to take care of him with."

This gets Charlie to thinkin'.

"Well, of course, I'd pay that," says he, bitin' his lip to keep from turnin' on the weeps. "I'm responsible for this man's condition, and I'd cheerfully pay that."

"When?" I asks.

He looks at me kinda funny. "Right away," he says, wipin' a tear out of the corner of his eye. "As soon as I can cash a check."

"Well——" I begins.

"If I pay for this man's treatment and everything, do you think he would tell my father?" he asks, almost blubberin'.

I scratches my head. "Well," says I, "of course, you payin' that thousand dollars would kinda alter the situation a little. When Mr. Foley gets a little better you can talk that over with him."

"You won't tell my father, will you?" he asks, still uncertain about just what to do.

"Oh, no," I tells him. "If you pay this money for Mr. Foley's treatment, I'll step out and leave the whole matter to him."

He still seems not to be able to make up his mind.

"Of course, if he *dies,*" says I. "Well—that'll be a different story."

"Come on," says he, grabbin' me by the arm. "I'll give you my personal check right away."

"I can't use a check, Buddy," I tells him. "I couldn't get it cashed around here."

He stops short. "But I gave Mr. Foley all the cash money I had," he whimpers. "I just brought six hundred dollars down here to have a good time with, and I gave him five hundred of that. All I've got now is my bank account containing the money my aunt left me, and the only thing I can do is to give you a check for a thousand."

"Can't take a check," says I, shakin' my head. "I got to have the money right away. Mr. Foley might die and you——"

He grabs me by the arm again. "Please don't talk like that any more," he implores. "We'll go up to the hotel and see if we can't get the check cashed."

Well, we wanders around the place, and finally we finds a guy that knowed Charlie, and he owns a hotel, so he cashes the check. Right away I wanted to get rid of Charlie, but he insists on walkin' along beside me and tellin' me how sorry he is this thing has happened, and askin' me a million times not to tell his father.

Just as we gets about a square away from the hotel I and Benny was stoppin' at, I hears a big rumpus. The fire engines is comin' down the street and the crowd is runnin' in all directions. Right away I figures that there must be a fire some place, so I run in the

same direction the fire engines was goin'; and pretty soon I'll be dog-goned if I didn't end up at our own hotel. Smoke was comin' out of the windows on the fifth floor, and as I gets to countin' 'em, I sees right away that it's Benny's room that was on fire. Charlie was standin' alongside of me puffin' like a steam-engine from runnin' so much, and he's so excited he's blubberin'.

"Oh!" he moans, ringin' his hands. "Poor Mr. Foley. And to think that I am responsible for it all!"

Just at that minute he stops groanin' and he grabs me by the arm.

"Look!" he yells, pointin' a finger up to the fifth floor.

One slant, and I nearly took the count. There was Benny, all dressed up even to his collar and necktie, his blond curl awavin' in the breeze, and he's runnin' down the fire escape like a two-year old. He ain't got a thing on his head but his derby, and he's the liveliest lookin' half-dead man I ever seen.

Charlie looks at me, and I try my dog-gondest to look innocent, but I musta made a fizzle out of it 'cause—well, Benny told me once that this Charlie was a roughneck when he got started, but the way he mauled me around was a caution. Before I knowed it my whole map was out of order, and when it comes to bein' wrecked, some of them French villages didn't have a thing on me. Before I knowed what was comin' off, I was lyin' on the ground and Charlie was takin' that thousand berries away from me, and he like to pulled me apart doin' it. I'm right here to state that I had to do some mean runnin', and the fact that I could do that better than Charlie was the only thing that saved my sweet young life. Knowin' that the best place for me to be would be on a train, I heads for the railroad station.

As I turns the corner of the hotel, a added starter joins the race; and lookin' around, I see that friend Benny is with us. Just as we're comin' around the curve leadin' to the station, with Charlie about three lengths behind, I hears a whistle, and there leavin' the station was one of the most welcome trains I ever seen. By the time we gets to the platform she's about a hundred feet away. We hits the turf alongside of the track like a coupla thoroughbreds, and after runnin' on all twelve cylinders, for about fifty miles, it seemed to me, Benny, who was leadin' me by a nose, manages to grab ahold of the end of it, and after hoistin' hisself aboard, he reaches over and gimme a lift. When I looks back I sees that Charlie has give it up, and he's standin' on the track shakin' his fist.

"Whew!" snorts Benny. "That was close, wasn't it?"

"You're dead on," I tells him, puffin' like a steam engine. "I hope he don't telegraph to the next town."

"He can't," says Benny, real positive. "If he did the judge will hear about it, and that will be the end of it for Charlie."

Suddenly I remembers somethin'. "What's the big idea of settin' the place on fire?" asks I.

He looks at me like a kid that got caught stealin' preserves. "Honest, Hank," says he, "I couldn't help it. I was getting dressed and when I looked around the whole room was on fire." He rubs his chin like he can't understand it. "I guess it must have been the sparks from my cigarette," says he.

With that we goes into the smoker.

"Do you know, Hank," says he, "I'm sorry we had to leave Cape Maurit. I was having a wonderful time, and I was making a big hit, too."

"You ain't got nothin' on me," says I. "They didn't want me to go." I points to my spoiled mug. "If you don't believe it," says I, "look at that. That's what Charlie give me tryin' to get me to stay."

Built for Weight

by Herman Landon

Author of "In Three Rounds," etc.

PETER, sedate and impeccable servant of Carlton Masters, awoke with a start. He felt quite sure that a door had slammed somewhere. Sitting upright in bed, he touched the electric light button at his back and looked about him with a scowl. It was after one o'clock in the morning, and that a door should slam at such an hour in the well-regulated bachelor establishment of Carlton Masters was offensive to Peter's sense of the fitness of things.

With an injured air he slid from the bed and opened the door a crack. Not the slightest sound reached his ears, and he wondered who had been guilty of slamming the door. His employer had told him that he would be out till quite late, and that Peter need not wait up for him; but Carlton Masters, whatever his other eccentricities, never made unnecessary noises. There were no visitors in the apartment, and, with the exception of a woman who came twice a week to scrub and dust, Peter was the only servant. Hence, he concluded, the sound that had roused him from his slumber must have been produced by a burglar.

He flung a bathrobe over his short, rotund figure, and somewhat nervously proceeded to make a search. It would not take long, since the ground-floor apartment occupied by Masters contained only four rooms and bath. Peter found nothing of a suspicious nature in the hall, but he noticed with perplexity that the outer door was unlocked. In the drawing-room, which he entered next, everything was in meticulous order. It was not until he reached the door leading to his employer's bedroom that Peter saw anything of an alarming nature.

Despite the fact that the room had been dark when he made his customary rounds before retiring, a light was shining through the transom window. He knocked, discreetly at first, then a little louder, finally beating a clamorous tattoo on the door with his knuckles. No response came, and the silence was beginning to impress Peter as a trifle ominous. He tried the lock, but the door appeared to have been bolted on the inside, for energetic pressure failed to budge it.

"Queer!" he muttered. "I don't like the looks of it."

A little shiver shook his body while he hesitated, dreading in anticipation the sight that might meet his eyes behind the door. Finally overcoming his diffidence, he dragged a chair from the adjoining room, placed it beside the door, mounted it, and peered through the open transom window.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed quaveringly, his rigid stare fixed on a point at the opposite side of the chamber.

On the snow-white covering of the bed lay a grotesquely twisted figure. The face, turned toward the ceiling, bore a look of terror such as Peter had never seen. The figure, fully dressed, was lying on its back, and the arms seemed pinioned under it. Directly beside the heart the coverlet was stained a bright red.

Peter drew a long, quick breath, then exhaled gaspingly. His first shuddering glimpse of the ghastly features had told him that the man was dead, but it had also told him that his first instinctive suspicion had been unfounded, for the body on the bed was not Carlton Masters'. At first, awed by the silence that had reigned behind the bolted door, he had feared that his master had been murdered or had committed suicide. Now, gazing fixedly through the transom window, it took him only a moment to recognize the hideously distorted features of his employer's friend, Jason Walling.

He scrambled from the chair, an aching confusion in his mind, and ran to the telephone in the hall. With trembling fingers he snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Police!" he called shakily.

II.

Captain Wittler of the detective bureau swung around in his creaking swivel chair and faced the youngish, lynx-eyed man who had entered in response to his summons.

"Brill," he inquired, grinning gingerly into his bristly mustache, "what would you rather do than anything else in the world?"

"Get the goods on Carlton Masters," replied Brill without a moment's hesitation. His figure was lean and lithe as a wolf's, the sharp, furrowed features suggested a razor-edged mind, and the calm, flinty eyes denoted a keen vision and a coolly calculating nature.

"Thought so." Captain Wittler chuckled. "You still stick to your hunch that Carlton Masters is a sort of Raffles—a crook masquerading as a gentleman?"

"It's more than a hunch, sir," remonstrated Brill. "I know Masters is one of the slickest diamond thieves in the country, only so far I haven't been able to get anything on him. I will some day, though." The young detective's jaws came together with a click.

"Wish you luck. In the meantime, here's something that may interest you. Masters' servant telephoned a few minutes ago that there's a man lying dead on Masters' bed."

Brill's eyes narrowed.

"The servant was too excited to give a full and clear report," the captain went on, "but it seems the dead man is Jason Walling, one of Masters' friends. Knowing that you've been on Masters' trail for some time I'm turning you loose on the case, Brill. The medical examiner has been notified and I've got men watching the house, but I want you to go over there and take charge. I've given orders that nothing is to be disturbed till you arrive."

"Thanks," mumbled Brill, showing sudden symptoms of being in a great hurry.

"Maybe your hunch will pan out, and maybe it won't. Anyhow, this will give you a chance to size up Masters at close range."

Brill nodded and went out. At the corner he swung aboard an owl car which would take him within two blocks of Masters' residence. Leaning back in his seat, he stroked his firm chin and tried to piece together the stray facts concerning Carlton Masters that had come into his possession.

They were not particularly illuminating. Masters was reputed to be rich, though the origin of his wealth was veiled in mystery. He was a member of several clubs, owned a yacht and four motor cars, was an indefatigable first-nighter, and moved in one of the upper strata of society. Physically, he was a giant of a man, and there was something elephantine about his great bulk. He was lazy, good-natured, and a confirmed bachelor.

The rest, Brill was forced to admit to himself, was nothing but conjecture

and surmise. He believed that Masters' polished manners and social accomplishments were cloaking a predatory career. Time and again, while on the trail of some stolen collection of jewels, he had unearthed clews that seemed to point straight to Masters as the thief. Bit by bit and step by step his suspicions had grown into a moral certainty. Brill was firmly convinced that Masters was a daring and accomplished crook, but so far he had been unable to produce a tittle of tangible proof.

Brill did not like to jump to conclusions, but he sensed something of significance in the fact that the man found dead in Masters' bedroom was Jason Walling. He had long suspected that Masters and Walling were partners in villainy, though here again his suspicions had been hazy and resting on a groundwork of surmises. Nevertheless, it pleased him to indulge his fancy for a moment or two. He had seen indications that Walling and Masters, though outwardly the best of friends, had of late grown cool toward each other. Crooks had been known to fall out before. Brill remembered several cases in which one partner had slain the other in a quarrel over loot. Perhaps this was what had happened in Masters' bedroom. At any rate, Brill hoped the tragedy would give him a chance to probe a little deeper into the secrets of the man's life.

He was at his destination now, and, as he leaped from the car and swung into a dark side street, he swept every jot of conjecture and preconceived notion from his mind. The night was misty and raw, and the street-corner lamps struck paths of blurred yellow light through the gloom. Scanning the numbers as he went, Brill proceeded to the middle of the block, pausing outside a three-story building with a brownstone front. A light was reflected against the shade of the window at the left.

"'Lo, Wilke," he said in low tones, addressing a shadow leaning against the iron railing in front of the building. "Anything stirring?"

"Not a thing. Nobody's left the joint since I got here. Gidding is watching the rear."

Brill nodded, ascended the three stone steps, and rang the bell. The door opened almost instantly, revealing an ashen face and a trembling figure swathed in a polka-dotted bathrobe. Peter, after assuring himself that the visitor was a detective, led the way to the door of his employer's bedroom.

"It's in there, sir," he announced queasily, pointing. "The door's bolted on the inside."

Brill mounted the chair on which Peter had stood fifteen minutes before, and, looking through the transom window, took in every detail of the interior with a swift, comprehensive sweep of the eyes.

"How long has the door been bolted?" he inquired as he stepped down.

"I don't know, sir. I made the rounds at ten o'clock, just before I went to bed, and it wasn't bolted then. Everything seemed to be all right. I retired and heard nothing till the slamming of a door woke me up a few minutes after one."

"Which door?" demanded Brill, scanning the servant's twitching features in the faint light shed by the electrolier in the ceiling.

"I couldn't say, but I had a feeling it was the outer door. I may have been mistaken."

"H'm." Brill stroked his chin reflectively. "If you are right, then somebody left the house shortly after one. When did you last see Mr. Masters?"

"About seven o'clock. He told me he was dining out and wouldn't be back till late. He often stays out till all hours, sir," added Peter apologetically.

Brill permitted himself a faint grin. "As far as you know, Mr. Masters did

not return after leaving the house at seven?"

"Oh, no, sir!" The question seemed to have suggested something of a disquieting nature to Peter's mind. "I'm quite sure he didn't."

"But you're a sound sleeper, aren't you?"

"Well, in a way," admitted Peter hesitantly. "There are sounds and sounds, you know. Some kinds never disturb me at all, but other kinds, like the slamming of a door, wake me right away."

Brill nodded. "When did you last see Mr. Walling alive?"

The servant's brows knitted. "I guess it was last Wednesday afternoon, sir. He and Mr. Masters talked for about half an hour. Mr. Walling left about five, as near as I can remember. I never dreamed then that I was to find him like *that.*" Peter regarded the bolted door with an awed expression.

The detective pondered for a moment. "Did your employer expect Mr. Walling to call to-night?"

"I don't think so, sir. If he had he would have said something about it. I don't understand how Mr. Walling got in during Mr. Masters' absence, or how he happens to be lying in there, dead. The whole thing is beyond me, sir."

"We must force the door," muttered Brill. He backed away a few steps, and made as if to hurl himself against the door, then seemed to change his mind. "Could you crawl through the transom, Peter?"

The servant's eyes opened wide. He patted his comfortably protruding stomach. "I crawl through the transom? You are joking, sir!"

Brill gave a low chuckle as again he mounted the chair. "I forgot. It would be quite a feat for a man of your build. Maybe I'll have better luck."

He thrust his head through the narrow opening, executed a quick and agile wriggle with his lean body, squeezed arms and shoulders through the aperture, and, hanging over the cross beam of the transom, gradually lowered himself until he could reach the bolt. It stuck in the slot, and he had to exert all the nimble strength of his fingers to draw it back. That accomplished, he lowered himself and opened the door.

Followed by the trembling Peter, he walked straight to the bed. He glanced at the wound, guessing that Walling's death had been caused by a knife thrust to the heart. Then he was struck by the peculiar position of the arms, which were turned back under the body. Without disturbing the dead man's position, he inserted a hand between the lifeless form and the coverlet. His expression grew blank for a moment.

"Peter," he inquired, puckering his brows, "where do you suppose those handcuffs came from?"

III.

Peter swallowed hard. "Handcuffs!" he echoed.

"Walling's hands are manacled at his back," explained Brill.

The servant stared incredulously. "I'm sure I—I don't understand," he stammered. "Why should Mr. Walling be handcuffed?"

Brill shook his head. "Why should he be lying dead on Mr. Masters' bed?" he grumbled, addressing himself rather than the servant. "And where is Masters? There seem to be several queer angles to this case. One thing's sure. With his hands linked at his back, Walling could not have committed suicide. He was murdered, and the person who murdered him was probably the same one who slammed the door a little after one o'clock. The doorbell is ringing, Peter."

The servant came out of his abstraction with a start, left the bedroom, and returned in a few moments with a stocky, pink-cheeked individual whom

Brill recognized as the medical examiner. While the latter went about his work, the detective examined the fastenings of the three windows in the room, noticing with surprise that all were securely locked.

"Strange!" he muttered, his brow a maze of wrinkles. Then he began a systematic examination of the walls, tapping occasionally with his knuckles as if expecting to find a hollow space. The floor was subjected to a similar inspection, but evidently Brill found nothing that verified his suspicions. He turned a frowning face on the medical examiner.

"Well?" he demanded.

"It's simple," said the official, going on to explain that the wall of the heart had been pierced by a sharp-pointed instrument, presumably a knife, and that death had ensued almost instantly. "Have you discovered the reason for the handcuffs?" he added.

Brill shook his head.

"This is the first time I've seen a murdered man with handcuffs on," he declared. "Looks like an interesting case, Brill. Found any leads?"

"The only thing I've established is that the murderer is a man of about my own size."

The examiner picked up his kit and turned from the body. "Even a dwarf would have an easy time with a handcuffed man. But how do you make that out?"

"The door was bolted on the inside," explained Brill, "and the window fastenings are applied securely. The only way the murderer could have got out of the room was by the transom. No person bigger than myself could have crawled out that way. I know, because I found it a tight squeeze."

The examiner scratched his head. "Why didn't the murderer draw back the bolt and walk out through the door?"

"The bolt works hard, and the murderer was probably nervous," said Brill speculatively. "Perhaps he—or she—thought time could be saved by going the transom route. A murderer, especially if excited, doesn't always do the logical thing, you know. What I'd like to know is how Walling happened to come here to-night, and what's become of Masters. The mystery of the handcuffs can be solved later."

The examiner gave Brill a level glance. "I understand Masters is a big man," he observed.

"Big as an ox." The detective's face changed expression. "He could no more crawl through that transom than I could crawl through the eye of a needle."

"That seems to let Masters out, eh?"

"It does," admitted Brill, scowling. "Just the same, he might be able to throw some light on the question why a friend of his should be found in his bedroom with a knife wound in his heart. Peter, I hear the phone ringing."

The servant jerked himself erect, then slunk out. Brill darted sharp glances about the room, wondering whether he had drawn the correct inference in regard to the murderer's stature. It seemed plain that the only way a person could depart from the room and leave the door and windows locked behind him was by the transom, and this afforded a mean of egress only for a person of Brill's own size, or a smaller one. Clearly, Carlton Masters had been elinmated as a possible suspect, and Brill felt a twinge of disappointment as he realized the fact.

"You're wanted on the phone, sir," announced Peter, reëntering the bedroom.

As soon as he had put the receiver to his ear, Brill recognized Captain Wittler's booming bass voice.

"A young woman has just been caught robbing the wall safe in Jason Walling's apartment," announced the

official, and the intelligence caused Brill to start sharply. "It seems she opened the safe by working the combination, and Walling's man caught her just as she was going through the contents. I sent an officer over to pinch her. It may have some bearing on the murder."

"H'm," mumbled Brill. It seemed a strange coincidence that a woman should be robbing Walling's safe while Walling himself was lying dead in another man's bedroom. "I'd like to have a talk with the lady. Walling's apartment is only two or three blocks from here, isn't it? Wish you would send her over."

The captain promised, and Brill walked back to the bedroom with slow, deliberate steps. He had barely acquainted the medical examiner with what he had just learned, when the door opened and a huge form in evening dress appeared in the doorway. At a glance, Brill recognized Carlton Masters. The man looked bewildered at first, but this expression changed swiftly into one of horror as his eyes met the grisly sight on the bed.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, advancing. "What's happened? Why, it's —it's Walling!"

Brill eyed him narrowly. Consternation, mingled with utter perplexity, was written in the pursy face and in the piggy little eyes that stared out of vast layers of flesh. A tremor wriggled down from the corners of the eyes to the heavy jowls. Masters took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"What in Heaven's name has happened?" he demanded shakily.

Brill explained briefly, meanwhile feeling a curious sensation that he might have been mistaken in regard to the man. Masters' vast bulk and elephantine manners seemed to preclude the very idea of his being engaged in shady enterprises. Robberies such as those which Brill had secretly ascribed to Masters required quick wits and nimble muscles, and Masters seemed to possess neither. As for his being able to crawl through the transom, the mere thought would have been laughable if the circumstances had been less tragic.

"Awful," groaned Masters. "Awful! I am inexpressibly shocked. And that it should have happened in my apartment! I don't understand at all. Won't somebody please explain?"

"We were hoping you would be able to throw some light on the subject, Mr. Masters," said Brill pointedly. "In fact, we were wondering where you were."

"I was walking off a headache," said Masters absently, his deepset eyes still fixed on the bed. "You see, I belong to an amateur dramatic organization called The One-act Club. Once in a while they need a fat man for a particular part." He gave a short, mirthless laugh. "We have been putting on a play called 'Roses of Evil' to be given for charitable purposes, and to-night we were rehearsing it at the home of Mrs. Aldrich Barrisford. Walling and about half a dozen others were there. I was seized with a headache toward the end, and had to leave ahead of the others. A couple of bromo-seltzers and a long walk in the park fixed me up. But this—I never imagined that anything like this would happen." The enormous figure shuddered.

"Your man tells me you left the apartment about seven," said Brill, still watching him intently. "You did not return after that?"

"I did not." Masters spoke as if the matter could be of no possible importance. "I dined at one of my clubs and went from there to Mrs. Barrisford's house."

"How do you account for Walling's presence in your apartment?"

"I don't account for it," declared Masters, a trifle testily. "The matter

is utterly beyond me. I am completely at sea."

"Can you explain why Walling is handcuffed?" persisted Brill.

"Hand——" Masters stared for an instant into the detective's inscrutable face; then a look of understanding leaped into his flabby features. "Why, of course! What an idiot I am! I completely forgot those handcuffs."

"Perhaps you will explain," suggested Brill dryly.

"There isn't much to explain. You see, Walling had the villain's part in 'Roses of Evil,' and the action of the play required that he be handcuffed in the third secene. Some one suggested that a touch of realism could be added if he wore *real* handcuffs instead of makeshift ones, and I undertook to get a pair from a friend of mine who is a private detective. I put them on Walling myself to-night between the second and third scenes. Then, when my headache came on, I made my excuses to Mrs. Barrisford and went out, never giving the confounded handcuffs a thought."

"You took the key to the handcuffs with you?"

"It's been in my vest pocket all the time," said Masters, taking a small metallic object from his pocket. "How foolish of me! It never occurred to me that Walling wouldn't be able to get the handcuffs off without my help. This is——" He checked himself abruptly and looked appealingly at Brill. "Do you suppose," he added in anguished tones, "that the murderer knew Walling was handcuffed and took advantage of his helplessness?"

"Perhaps. Why do you ask?"

Masters wrung his hamlike hands. "Because in that case I would be partly responsible for his death. Don't you see? This is dreadful, really! I think I see what happened. Walling, being unable to rid himself of the links, went to my apartment after leaving Mrs. Barrisford's, knowing I had the key. Not finding me in, he sat down to await my return. In the meantime the murderer, who presumably had followed him from Mrs. Barrisford's entered this apartment and knifed him. Walling, of course, was unable to defend himself. This is awful! How could I have been so thoughtless?"

Masters' enormous body shook from head to foot. He seemed a prey to grief and unspeakable horror.

"Your theory hangs together fairly well, except for one thing," remarked Brill after a few moment's reflection. "It is conceivable that Walling, after entering your apartment, left the door open, facilitating the murderer's entrance. But how did Walling himself enter? Peter did not admit him. Being handcuffed, it would have been impossible for him to force his way in. How do you explain that?"

"I am not trying to," said Masters, groaning. "Perhaps the spring lock is out of order. Maybe the bolt didn't snap when I passed out this evening. Maybe—but what does it matter? The main thing is that Walling is dead and that we must find the murderer. Have you any clews?"

"None of importance. Have you, Mr. Masters?"

The big man seemed to ponder. "Perhaps I shouldn't mention it," he began reluctantly, "but while I was putting the links on Walling's wrists to-night, one of the young ladies, a member of the cast, watched me with a somewhat peculiar expression. Her demeanor didn't impress me as very strange at the time, but now—I wonder——" His voice dropped to a hoarse whisper.

"Her name?" demanded Brill.

Masters hesitated again. "Clarice Hayden. There—it's out. I wouldn't have mentioned it if I didn't feel quite sure that Miss Hayden had nothing whatever to do with this horrible affair. She's an estimable young lady and——"

He started nervously. "What was that?"

"Only the doorbell," said Brill calmly. "I think Miss Hayden is paying us a visit."

IV.

The detective squinted glumly at the ceiling as Peter went to answer the door. He had no doubt that the visitor was the young woman who had been caught in Walling's apartment, and he was almost certain that she would prove to be the Clarice Hayden mentioned by Masters.

Things were not turning out to the detective's liking. He had hoped the tragedy would give him an opportunity to verify his suspicions in regard to Masters, but the big man was slipping out of the coils his imagination had woven. For the simple reason that it would have been impossible for Masters to crawl through the transom, it would have been impossible for him to commit the murder.

Brill chanced to look down just as he heard the outer door close. He was standing on the slate-colored slab of stone in front of the built-in fireplace, and a tiny, reddish object near the tip of his left foot caught his eyes. Stooping and exploring with his fingers, he discovered that it was a large drop of blood. Evidently the murderer had stained his hands and the blood had dripped from his fingers as he made his escape from the scene of his crime. But why——

Brill had no time for further reflections, for at that moment the door was opened and a uniformed officer escorted a young and stylishly-gowned woman into the room. Her face, surmounted by coils of exquisite black hair, bore a deathlike pallor, and she swayed a little as she passed through the door.

Brill, watching her intently, noticed that her gaze went straight to the dead man lying on the bed. A queer sound trembled on her lips, but the dark, mistily luminous eyes held neither surprise nor alarm, but only a quavering look of terror. More eloquently than words could, her manner told the detective that this was not the first time she was looking upon the body of Jason Walling.

"All that's lacking now is the motive," he reflected gloomily. For an instant his eyes rested on the slab of stone beside the fireplace, then he looked questioningly at the officer.

"Captain Wittler told us to bring her here," announced the latter. "She's Miss Clarice Hayden. Walling's man caught her rifling the safe."

"How did you open the safe, Miss Hayden?" inquired Brill gently.

The big, troubled eyes flitted from the bed to the detective's face. Something in his gaunt, homely features must have appealed to her, for she began to speak in low, tense tones, alternately clenching and unclenching her hands.

"Some years ago I imagined I was in love with Mr. Walling," she began. "I wrote him several foolish little letters. I often wished that I had them back, but Mr. Walling refused to surrender them. He seemed to think that he could use the letters to force me to marry him."

"I can scarcely believe such a thing of Walling," interjected Masters, his lumpy features creased by a frown.

The girl ignored him. "The other day Mr. Walling threatened that unless I broke off my engagement to marry a certain young man, he would make the letters public. I determined to get them back, whatever the cost. Mr. Walling had often tried to tease me by declaring that the letters were in a place where I could never reach them. I guessed he meant the wall safe in his apartment."

"Shrewd guess," mumbled Brill.

"I knew that the safe had been installed recently, and it occurred to me that Mr. Walling had not yet memorized

the combination. I thought it likely that he was carrying a memorandum about with him. I had often seen him consult a little red-covered notebook he carried in his vestpocket, and I guessed the memorandum was written in it. I thought if I could get hold of the memorandum, and then have an opportunity to visit Mr. Walling's apartment during his absence, it would be an easy matter to get the letters."

"And to-night, when you saw Walling leave Mrs. Barrisford's house handcuffed, you thought the opportunity had come," suggested Brill.

Miss Hayden gazed at him curiously, then gave a little nod. "I followed him, and saw him enter a taxicab a block from Mrs. Barrisford's house. I summoned another and ordered the chauffeur to follow. Instead of going home, as I had expected, Mr. Walling drove to this place, and I guessed then that he intended to call on Mr. Masters and ask him to remove the handcuffs. You see, I thought that with his hands manacled at his back, it would be easy for me to snatch the notebook from his pocket, and then take the letters from the safe."

"She has spunk, anyhow," muttered Brill to himself.

"Mr. Walling opened the door without ringing, and I guessed that he had telephoned Mr. Masters before leaving Mrs. Barrisford's house and apprised him of his coming."

"He did nothing of the kind, my dear Miss Hayden," declared Masters. "I don't understand how Walling got in, unless he had a duplicate key."

"I waited a few minutes after Mr. Walling had entered the house," continued the girl, her large, brown eyes fixed on Brill's face. "I stole up to the door, and suddenly I heard something that sounded like a shriek. Scarcely knowing what I was doing, I slipped inside. The door was unlocked —it seemed the bolt of the spring lock had been pulled back and the catch applied. I walked in the direction where I had heard a shriek and saw a light against the transom window. I tried the door knob, but the door seemed bolted on the inside."

"And so," suggested Brill, noting the firm, athletic lines of her slender figure, "you seized the cross bar of the transom, raised yourself, and looked in."

Miss Hayden shivered. "I did. I saw Mr. Walling lying on the bed. His face looked terrible. I didn't know whether he was dead or alive, but his coat was parted, and I saw the red notebook protrude above the rim of his vest pocket. I don't know how I managed it, but all I could think of was that I must get possession of those letters. I felt that, even if Mr. Walling was dead, they must not fall into any other hands."

"Yes? What then?" prompted Brill.

The girl's voice was scarcely audible now. "I raised myself a little higher, climbed through the transom, and let myself into the room. I ran up to the bed, and then, for the first time, I realized Mr. Walling was dead. I was almost mad with horror, but somehow I took the book from his pocket. Then I tried to open the door and let myself out, but——"

"The bolt stuck," interjected Brill.

"I pulled at it frantically, but I was hysterical and couldn't move it. It had just begun to dawn on me that if I was found in the house I might be accused of the murder. Finally I decided the quickest way was to leave as I had entered—by the transom. I raised myself again and crawled through, then ran out."

"You slammed the outer door as you left," remarked Brill, "and spoiled Peter's sleep." Then he added in an undertone: "That much of your story jibes with the facts, anyhow."

"I hurried to Mr. Walling's house," the girl went on, "and told his man that I must see his master on a very impor-

tant matter. He said Mr. Walling was out, and I told him I would wait. The moment he was gone, I went to the safe, and, with the aid of the memorandum I found in the notebook, I opened it. I had barely got hold of the letters when Mr. Walling's man rushed in. He must have been watching me all the time."

"Very likely," observed Brill dryly. Shrugging his shoulders dejectedly, he began to pace the floor, finally stopping directly in front of the girl.

"Miss Hayden, don't you see that your story won't do at all? Somebody murdered Mr. Walling. If you didn't, who did?"

She shrank back and drew a quick, sharp breath. "I don't know," she declared in moaning accents. "I swear Mr. Walling was dead when I entered the room."

"But what became of the murderer?" demanded Brill, thoroughly hating the ordeal. "He could not have gotten away, for the doors and windows were bolted on the inside."

The girl stared at him with frenzy in her eyes. "Maybe he was hidden in the room when I crawled in through the transom. I didn't think of looking around; I was too terrified. After I left, he might have made his way out by the transom, just as I did."

Brill's eyes ran up and down her slender, willowy figure. "He might," he admitted, "provided he was no bigger than you or I. You had the motive and the opportunity, and you admit entering this room about the time the murder was committed."

"Yes," she declared.

Brill backed away toward a corner, motioning the girl to follow. She came toward him with the slow, uncertain gait of one under hypnotic influence. Suddenly he stopped and bored his steely eyes into her face.

"Miss Hayden," he said tensely, emphasizing each word, "did you murder Walling?"

She swayed a litttle, but her eyes did not leave his face for an instant.

"I did not—I swear I didn't!" she declared.

For a moment longer his piercing gaze rested on her face. Then, out of the tail of an eye, he glanced at the others in the room, and at one in particular.

"I wish I could believe you," he muttered.

V.

Fifteen minutes later Brill and the medical examiner were alone in the room where the dead man lay. The detective had asked Peter, Miss Hayden, and Masters to withdraw to the drawing-room for a few moments. Now he found himself peering abstractedly at the tiny drop of red on the slab before the fireplace.

"Well," inquired the examiner, "who did it?"

Brill made a wry face. "I *believe* Masters did it, but I *know* he couldn't have done it," he grumbled.

"Rather paradoxical, isn't it?"

"I know it," admitted the detective. "I believe Masters was determined to kill Walling when he put the handcuffs on him. He knew a chunk of beef like himself stood no chance against a man like Walling in a fair and even fight, but the handcuffs more than equalized the physical difference. I believe he invented the headache and purposely forgot to unlock the bracelets. Then, knowing Walling would probably come to his apartment to have the links removed, he went here ahead of him."

"Plausible so far," granted the examiner.

Brill stroked his chin reflectively. "Let's suppose Masters comes here after leaving Miss Barrisford's house, entering so quietly that Peter doesn't hear him. He admits Walling when he arrives, leads him into the bedroom, and bolts the door to make sure his

quarry won't escape. Then, while Walling isn't looking, he draws a knife and plunges it into the fellow's heart. Then," and Brill scowled a little, "Miss Hayden appears on the scene."

"How does she get in?"

Brill reflected for a moment. "Masters must have left the outer door unlocked after admitting Walling. Maybe he did it purposely. He told us Miss Hayden looked on in a sort of queer way while he put the links on Walling, and maybe he guessed that she, too, meant to take advantage of the handcuffs. He couldn't have any objection, since the girl would probably incriminate herself and divert suspicion from the murderer. At any rate, I'm inclined to believe Miss Hayden told the truth."

"A pretty face sometimes raises the very devil with logic," observed the examiner.

Brill ignored the dig. "What puzzles me is what became of Masters, provided my dope is right. If he was hiding in the room when the girl entered, how did he get out afterward? Not through the windows, for the fastenings were applied when I got here. Not through the door, for I had to squeeze through the transom myself in order to get in. And Masters could no more crawl through that transom than I could crawl through a crack in the floor."

"It looks like quite a problem," observed the examiner. "To fasten the crime on Masters, you'll have to show how a man about five feet in diameter can crawl through a hole about two feet wide. Some puzzle!"

The detective frowned; then he stepped toward the bed. "He must have been standing here when he stabbed Walling," he mumbled, gauging the distance between himself and the bed. "From here he must have walked to the fireplace, for there is a drop of blood on the slab, which might have dripped either from his hands or from the knife. What I don't see is what he was doing at the fireplace."

"You don't suppose he crawled up the chimney?" The examiner's face brightened with a sudden inspiration.

Brill explored the opening with his hands. "Impossible. It's no wider than the transom. A man of Masters' bulk could never have got through, unless——" Brill gave a start and his eyes flashed with a sudden idea. "Did you happen to notice Masters while I was talking with Miss Hayden?"

"No."

"Well, I did, and I saw that every now and then he stole a glance at the fireplace. I wonder if——"

The next moment Brill was down on his knees, examining the narrow rim between the slab and the flooring. He shook his head in a disappointed way as he arose. Then he executed a series of short jumps, each time landing heavily on the slab.

"Will you ask Masters to step in?" he asked, his voice throbbing with subdued excitement. As the examiner turned to leave the room, he planted both feet on the slab, placed the palms of his hands against the under side of the mantel shelf, and pushed hard and steadily.

A few moments later, when the medical examiner ushered Masters into the bedroom, Brill was nowhere in sight.

VI.

The examiner opened his eyes wide, then stared bewilderedly at the lubberly Masters.

"Mercy!" he ejaculated. "What's become of him?"

A faint suggestion of pallor crept up under Masters' ruddy skin. "Stepped out for a moment, perhaps," he suggested, a trifle uneasily.

"Impossible! The windows are still latched, and I wasn't out of sight of

the door for a second. Queerest thing I ever saw. Brill seems to have disappeared just as the murderer did—vanished into thin air!"

"Preposterous, my dear sir!" protested Masters, looking about him nervously.

The examiner gazed perplexedly at the stone in front of the fireplace, where Brill had been standing only a moment ago. The slab looked exactly as it had then, and as far as he could see nothing in the room had been disturbed in the brief interim.

"We shall probably find him in one of the other rooms," suggested Masters moving with rolling oxlike gait toward the door.

"Wait!" commanded the examiner sharply.

Masters paused and turned. A board in the floor creaked under his weight. There was a look of defiance in the small, nervously peering eyes.

"Why shouldn't I come and go as I please in my own house?" he demanded. "Aren't you forgetting yourself?"

The examiner was about to reply, but in that instant the door opened and Brill strolled in. He walked with a careless swagger, but his eyes gleamed brightly. He was followed by Miss Hayden and Peter.

"Masters," he said quietly, fixing a calm gaze on the big man's puffy features, "how much do you weigh?"

"Why do you ask that?" Masters' eyes hardened.

"I have a reason. If you won't enlighten us, I'll make a rough guess. I should say about two hundred and forty-five pounds."

Masters' face turned an ashen hue. The others stared as if utterly unable to see the connection between the murder of Walling and Masters' weight.

"You're a remarkably heavy man, Masters," continued Brill in tones of light banter. "I guess you don't often see a man your equal in weight. How about it?"

Masters mumbled something unintelligible.

"I don't get the drift of all this," observed the examiner.

Brill chuckled. "I didn't see the light until I did the vanishing act a few minutes ago. It seemed to me Masters had a perfect alibi. It looked as though it would have been impossible for a man of his bulk and weight to leave the room after committing the murder. Well, he had a sort of alibi—a two hundred and forty-five-pound alibi."

"This is the silliest nonsense I have ever heard," declared Masters.

"You see," explained Brill, turning to the examiner, "it was because of his bulk and weight that Masters was able to leave the room after killing Walling. A lighter man couldn't have managed it, unless he happened to try the experiment I tried a few minutes ago. Masters," and Brill's tones were suddenly hard and stern, "why did you kill your friend Walling?"

"You're crazy!" cried Masters, his huge bulk trembling with excitement. "You are only guessing. You haven't an iota of proof. If you want the murderer, why don't you arrest her?" He pointed a pudgy finger at Miss Hayden.

Brill smiled patiently. "You hoped Miss Hayden would be caught in a snare of circumstances, but it didn't work. She told us the full and unvarnished truth. I'll tell you why you killed Walling. You and he have been pulling off a lot of jewel robberies in the last few years, and you had a quarrel over the spoils. You thought the easiest way out was to kill him, and to-night the handcuffs gave you the opportunity you were looking for."

"Prove it!" said Masters.

"I have the proof," declared Brill coolly. "I have found a part of the jewelry you and Walling salted away.

I also have found the knife you killed him with. For further proof I'll ask you to place your two hundred and forty-five pounds on the slab beside the fireplace."

Stifling a groan, Masters shrank back. Brill seized him by the neck and roughly shoved his gelatinous bulk toward the fireplace. The giant made clumsy and furious resistance, but he was no match for the detective's agile strength. Step by step he was pushed closer and closer toward the slab. At length Brill gave him a mighty shove which landed him squarely on the stone.

Miss Hayden gave a gasp of surprise and the examiner rushed forward to see what had happened. The slab had given way the moment both of the big man's feet touched it. Masters uttered a little squeal, waved his arms frantically, and disappeared. A moment later the slab was back in its usual place.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the examiner.

"It makes a nifty little exit," observed Brill. "Masters is a farseeing crook, and he realized that some day he might find it advisable to make a quick get-away. That's why he had this contraption installed. The beauty of it is that the slab won't budge except under a weight equal to that of Masters' body, so he felt sure nobody would be able to follow him. The only way I could operate the contrivance was by shoving against the mantle, adding about a hundred pounds of pressure to my weight."

"Great Scott!" The examiner stared bewilderedly at the slab. "What's down there?"

"A compartment barely big enough for Masters to be able to crawl back and forth through on his stomach. There's a box down there, almost full of swag, and the knife he used in killing Walling was hidden in it. There's a trapdoor in the floor of the compartment through which one might drop down to the basement, but when Masters undertakes to get out that way, he'll drop into the arms of a policeman whom I placed there a few minutes ago."

A light of understanding spread over the examiner's chubby face. "I see," he mumbled. "After killing Walling, Masters made his way out via the compartment under the slab. And all the time we were trying to figure out how he could have squeezed his two hundred and forty-five pounds through the transom. Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Oh, by the way, Miss Hayden," inquired Brill casually, "did you bring those letters with you?"

The girl, smiling faintly, touched her bosom.

"Here's a match," said Brill, taking one from his pocket, "and here's a perfectly good fireplace. Go to it!"

FORGER GETS JOB INSTEAD OF SENTENCE

SEVENTY-FOUR years old and unable to get work, Edwin Austin, who had previously held positions as secretary to presidents of railway companies, forged a check for seventy dollars. He was arrested and brought before Police Judge Fitzpatrick of San Francisco.

When the judge heard the prisoner's age and the story of the work he had once been able to do so well, he decided that it would be best to give Austin a chance to make good. Instead of sentencing the old man to spend his last days in prison, Judge Fitzpatrick found work for him in a bank and provided him with new clothes. Austin is paying his debt by weekly installments.

Helen's Birthday

by Evans Emoe Kel

IN an effort to provide his wife, whom he loved devotedly, with all the little luxuries that gladden the heart of womankind, Bruce Walton overstepped, technically, the law's boundary. His arrest followed almost before he was aware of his transgression, and he was placed on trial for fraudulently obtaining money in connection with the formation of a company to exploit mining property.

A partner whose testimony would have cleared up much of the muddle in which Walton found himself, and would undoubtedly have cleared him of the criminal charge, although leaving him open to civil action for the return of the moneys, was strangely absent during the trial. Although Walton's attorney made a desperate plea for a stay of proceedings, an assistant district attorney in a vindictive mood objected so strongly and pressed so hard that the case be heard at once, that a somewhat bored judge overruled the request. Walton's conviction followed.

Seven years at hard labor was the sentence imposed upon him by the court, a sentence that Walton knew was unmerited and unjust. He turned his dumb, aching eyes, first upon his lawyer, who quickly averted his head, and then upon his wife, who, with tears in her deep brown eyes, held wide her arms across the railed space within which she dared not encroach. Later in a small anteroom, where they were allowed their farewell, there was a painful ten minutes during which, with her arms clasped tightly about his neck, she assured him of her absolute belief in his innocence and tearfully pledged her undying love and unswerving loyalty. It was with a heavy heart that Walton suffered himself to be torn from her and led to a cell, and later transported to the large, almost factorylike building that was to house him within its walls for a goodly share of the best years of his life.

For almost a year after his commitment the weekly letter from his wife brought him a message of hope and cheer. Couched in terms of endearment, the reading and rereading of them helped to take away much of the utter misery of his surroundings. Together with the memory of their affectionate good-by, they helped to dispel the hopelessness of his position. He faced each new dawn, not with a restlessness or an impatience for the day to pass, but with the certain, calm surety that time *must* pass and that one day he *must* be a free man, to take up once more the threads of life where they had been so rudely and abruptly snapped asunder.

And then, so subtly did it creep in, and so gradually, that it was unnoticed by him, there came a change in the spirit of her letters. The expressions of love, faith and trust in him gradually disappeared until, finally, he awoke to the fact that her weekly letters had become a banal, forced acknowledgment of his own letters and a recounting of trivial happenings in which he could have absolutely no interest. There was also about them a suggestion of impatience, as if they had been written merely to discharge a duty, and because they were expected.

Suddenly and without warning the letters stopped altogether, and three months later Walton was served with the formal complaint in his wife's suit for an absolute divorce on the ground that makes imprisonment for a period of two years or longer a cause for the entering of a decree. A few months later he was served with a subpœna which, in all the solemnity of its court dignity and legal phraseology, commanded him to be present at the hearing of the case, failing which a divorce was liable to be granted in his absence —a decidedly naïve piece of mockery, the humor of which failed of appreciation in the eyes of Walton.

In vain he wrote to his wife asking an explanation. His letters remained unanswered. Shortly following the subpœna he was advised by his wife's lawyers that a decree had been entered, and that his clothing and a few personal effects had been packed in trunks and stored in a warehouse pending his release. The receipts from the storage house were inclosed.

The divorce proceedings had at first caused Walton a keen, almost unbearable anguish. It was the tearing away of almost his last prop in the structure of memory he had erected to support him during his imprisonment. The memory of the ten-minute parting that had been such a comfort to him, now became a taunting, hideous profanation of the love he had borne his wife. Instead of lying awake nights upon his hard-mattressed cot, a smile on his lips, living over again those sweet minutes of silent grief in which their souls had intermingled, he swore horrible oaths each time that a fleeting thought of that farewell crossed, unbidden, his consciousness. In place of the sweet dreams that formerly peopled his sleep with many repetitions of the face and form he loved so well, his restless tossings were rendered almost unendurable by nightmares in which he struggled vainly against the suffocating clasp of a hideous serpentlike monstrosity that invariably bore a head, out of which gleamed the well-remembered brown eyes of his wife, eyes no longer alight with the fire of love and devotion, but wickedly seeking that which they might lure and tempt to destruction.

His days in the workshop became a weary round of brain-racking efforts to shut out the slightest thought of the woman he loved, transforming him from the former willing, almost light-hearted worker, to a sullen, snarling shirker who sneered at the reprimands of those in charge. As a result he was disciplined on several occasions, a proceeding that eventually left him broken in spirit and almost childishly eager to obey the slightest command of his jailers.

Gradually also he was able to shake off the ugly nightmares that had tortured him in the first days following the divorce, and he found himself, to his own amazement, reviewing the situation in a calm, detached manner that left him without a trace of anger toward his former wife.

More and more he turned to the one memory that enabled him to retain his reason during the first shock of his wife's disloyalty—the memory of his little daughter, Helen.

A little less than three years old she had been when he was so ruthlessly torn from her side; barely able to make herself understood, prattling volubly in the baby talk that is so dear to a parent's heart, the talk that assumes an importance that not even the weightiest discussions may ever hope to approach.

The memory that persisted above all others and was most vivid in his mind was the child's unwavering loyalty and love for a battered rag doll that had been one of his first gifts to her. It was just such love and loyalty that he

had expected from his wife, only to be disappointed.

Larger and handsomer dolls had been given to the child from time to time—dolls that slept, cried and squeaked "Ma-ma," but she remained steadfast in her affection for the ugly, shapeless, sketchy-faced effigy in rags, reserving for it the intense all-powerful love that marks the awakening of the maternal instinct.

Never a night since the child's acquisition of "Becky" had she failed to give it her last thought before dropping off into the fairy-populated slumber of childhood. Engrossed as she might be in whatever other interesting toys, bedtime brought with it the invariable request for Becky, and she would hug the doll tight to her little breast and smile herself into sleep.

A wistful smile, behind which there lurked a tear, would flit across Walton's face as he visualized the shapeless bit of make-believe with its shoe-button eyes—one black and one brown. Instinctively his glance would stray to his fingers and an uncomfortable lump rise in his throat as he recalled the child's tears upon the occasion of the doll's emerging from an unequal battle with a playful kitten minus its right eye, and the lump would become acutely painful as he heard in memory the delighted hand-clappings and lisped words of satisfaction and joy as he, with clumsy fingers, undertook to repair the damage. Nor was the child less pleased because the new eye had once graced a brown boot. Her Becky was again intact!

Through the long weary years of his imprisonment this memory persisted, and when, in consideration of good conduct, the State at the end of five years and two months considered itself sufficiently repaid—or avenged—upon Walton for his breach of its laws, and he found himself upon the train that would carry him to his home city, his one thought was of the child. His former wife occupied no part in his love hunger. His soul, starved for so long a time, cried only for the clasp of childish arms about his neck and the prattled innocence of his baby.

As he stared sullenly from the car window, with eyes that saw nothing of the neglected, rusty grass-covered fields and dingy farm buildings past which the train rushed, he alternately crumpled and smoothed the five-dollar bill that, with his train ticket, had been the State's parting gift upon the completion of his sentence. An observant eye could easily trace a resemblance between the crushed, broken man and the frayed bit of currency he held so listlessly in his fingers. Both bore the marks of contact with a ruthless world. The countless hands through which the bill had passed had long ago robbed it of the crisp, fresh, upstanding newness it had once possessed. The years in prison had done the same for Walton. His spine, as he sagged in his seat, seemed as crumpled as the bill; his face was seamed with as many wrinkles.

During the latter part of his imprisonment Walton had not marked off each day at its close with an anxiousness that looked forward to the day upon which he would be free; nor had the announcement that his good conduct had won for him a shortening of the original sentence been greeted with the joy that usually follows such a declaration. He was beaten, his nerve was gone, and he was curiously afraid to face the world. There was no desire to fight back, no desire to regain the lost ground or to take the place in society that once had been his. He felt deserted and alone—an outcast. After the first wild, unreasoning anger that had attended his wife's suit for divorce he had settled down to a colorless acceptance of prison life, curiously content, and rather glad than otherwise to be thus sheltered from the

world and its activities. The confinement that had at first exacted heavy toll from his nervous and mental systems seemed later to cloak him with a sense of security. He became almost childishly simple in his acceptance of the inevitable. Even his bitterness toward the partner who had deserted him in time of trouble vanished.

As he sat in the speeding train he presented a pathetic figure, one whose eyes avoided those of his fellow travelers, and in which there shone the hopeless, aimless indecision of the battle weary. That he was free and speeding toward his home town did not awaken within him any feeling of satisfaction other than the hope held out to him that he might for a short while hold in his arms the child that was his. Custody of the baby had been awarded to the mother, and he was not at all sure that he would be a tolerated, much less welcomed, visitor at her home.

Upon his arrival in the city he proceeded at once to his bank, where a contemptuous paying teller, illy concealing his distaste for dealings with former convicts, allowed him to withdraw his pitifully small balance. Less than a hundred dollars was all that Walton possessed in the world, including the State's gift.

His next step was the renting of a furnished room in an obscure neighborhood, after which he rescued from the storage warehouse two battered and dust-covered trunks, which he found to contain a goodly supply of clothing and a valueless collection of odds and ends, that somehow seemed disassociated with him, linked as they were with his once happy past.

Since the styles in men's clothing change but little from year to year, he found himself in possession of a fairly extensive wardrobe of good quality. Arrayed in clean linen and a freshly pressed suit he was outwardly the prosperous business man that he had been in reality when last he had worn it.

His first call was in answer to the tug at his heartstrings. Love for his child drew him irresistibly to the fashionable apartment hotel in which they had made their home, only to find that his wife had relinquished the suite while her suit for divorce was yet pending. Nor could the employees of the hotel, many of whom were new in their positions, tell him anything of her whereabouts. The fact that she had been an orphan and practically alone in the world when he had married her left no parents to whom he could go for news of her. His heart sank as he realized the hopelessness of the task that confronted him and his helplessness to face it.

For three weeks he searched unceasingly, making diligent inquiries of those of her friends and his own that he could bring himself to face, but without result. After the entering of the decree she had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and engulfed her.

And then, suddenly, while wandering aimlessly about the streets, his money almost exhausted, although he still possessed the crumpled five-dollar bill given him by the warden, he met almost face to face the man who had been responsible for the years he had spent in jail. For the moment Walton was so taken aback by surprise that the man had disappeared in the hurrying crowd before he could accost him, but a hasty, shaky fingered search of the telephone book revealed the addresses of both the man's home and office.

Hot resentment blazed within Walton at the prosperous, alert, businesslike air of his former partner. He knew instinctively that the man had in some manner absolved himself of all blame in the transaction that had sent Walton to jail. His former partner was now

living the usual almost luxurious life to which he had always been accustomed, liked and respected by all those with whom he came in contact, while he, Walton, was an outcast, a pariah, almost on the verge of starvation. It was a sudden awakening from the lethargic acceptance of fate's decree, and Walton's very bearing, the flash of his eye, the carriage of his head, underwent a startling change. The dejected stoop left his frame, the half-hearted shuffle with which he dragged one foot after the other was gone, and in their place they left an erect, level-eyed, firmly stepping man, whose squared jaw seemed to hold a menace.

He called that afternoon at his former partner's business address. The legend, in gold letters, "Richard Bennett, Broker," that stared at him from the ground-glass background of the office door seemed to mock him and but added fuel to the fire of his wrath. He entered and was informed by an alert office boy that Mr. Bennett could not be seen except by appointment. His card, with a penciled note on its back, was returned him a few minutes later with the information, "Mr. Bennett is out," a palpable untruth.

A glance at the well-trained office assistants in view warned Walton of the futility of attempting to break in upon the man by force. He decided to call upon Bennett at his home, located in a small and exclusive suburban development a few miles from the noise and bustle of the city.

That evening, shortly after the dinner hour, a dignified butler was surprised and mildly grieved at the unceremonious manner in which he was roughly shoved aside by a determined-looking man who made his way unannounced to the library. The intruder paid not the slightest heed to the butler's protests; that worthy, trembling for the rage of his master, followed him into the library.

As he flung open the door Bruce Walton took in the handsome, luxurious furnishings of that apartment with a brief glance of the eye; then it traveled on to meet the inquiring gaze of the tall, severe-looking occupant of the room, who was seated at a large table in its center, engrossed in a stack of typewritten pages that lay before him. The butler coughed apologetically; but, before he could speak, Walton advanced to the side of the table opposite to that at which Bennett sat.

"Well, Bennett," he said in a cold voice, "for a man who is as careless of his moral obligations as you have proven yourself to be, you seem to be fairly prosperous." There was no cringing in Walton's manner as he uttered the words. A cold contempt for the man who had deserted him at a time when his testimony would have served to clear him dominated his attitude.

Bennett, startled at first, rapidly gained his composure. "You may go," he said easily to the butler; and then, turning to Walton, he allowed his gaze to travel searchingly over him, pausing to gaze keenly into eyes that gave back a glare for a stare. He was a little astonished at Walton's outward show of well-being. Apparently he had expected something different.

"Hello, Walton," he said at last, without warmth. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this——" He paused, searching for a sarcasm to pierce the armor of the intruder.

Instantly there leaped to Walton's lips a flood of bitter accusation, intermingled with the curses that had been dammed up within him all the years of his suffering. Quietly Bennett heard him through, and when Walton stopped speaking he carelessly flicked the ash from the end of his cigar. With eyebrows that raised tantalizingly, and with a sneering smile on his lips, he asked:

"Have you quite finished?"

"No, damn you, no!" shouted Walton. "I haven't finished. I am going to have an accounting! You are going to settle your score with me!"

"I settle? What score?" questioned Bennett easily. If his calm, assured manner was adopted to irritate further the raging Walton, it served its purpose admirably.

"The years of torture you made me endure," was Walton's answer; "the torture I am enduring now."

"Tut! tut!" Bennett laughed. "Don't you suppose, Walton, that during your" —he paused, and invested the succeeding word with a nasty emphasis—"*absence*, I have taken steps to cover any possible connection I may have had with the Blake Development Company? Surely you will give me credit for, at least, ordinary intelligence?"

"There must be a way to get at you, Bennett," said Walton; "and I am going to find it. Somewhere, somehow, there must be evidence that you have failed to cover up, evidence that will show that you were as much involved as was I. While it may not be strong enough to send you to jail, its broadcast publication will discredit you with your business associates and show you up for the sneaking yellow scoundrel that you are." Walton's manner, as he spoke, had cooled somewhat from his former fiery attitude, although an intense earnestness pervaded his words.

"Oh, come now, Walton," said Bennett. "Let's not quarrel. I admit that things broke tough for you, but at the time it would have been suicidal for me to have jumped into the breach. It would have left us high and dry on the sands. We would have been wiped out entirely. As it was, I managed to save enough to start anew."

"And where do I get off?" demanded Walton.

"That's very easily arranged. We can arrive at some sort of settlement that I am sure will satisfy you. As for the last five years"—Bennett shrugged his shoulders—"I am afraid that you will have to take that matter as philosophically as you can. Now I am willing to make a settlement with you on one condition."

"And that?" questioned Walton.

"Is that you leave this part of the country."

"Why?"

"Obvious reasons. Perhaps the main one is that you might feel a desire at some future time to attempt to cause me annoyance, notwithstanding any agreement at which we might arrive. You see," said Bennett frankly, "I am laying my cards face up on the table. I expected a visit from you, but not quite so soon—I had not heard of your release—and, naturally, I have given some little thought to the matter. Do you agree to my plan, providing the amount of money I offer is satisfactory?"

Ignoring the question, Walton looked for a long minute at the other.

"Bennett," he said at last, "where are my wife and daughter?"

Surprised at the question, Bennett let fall from between his fingers the paper knife with which he had been toying idly while he spoke. He looked keenly at Walton for a second and shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't the least idea," he said at length.

"You are sure?"

"Absolutely," was the answer, although there was a decided tendency on the part of Bennett to change the subject. "Now as to the——" he began, but was angrily halted by Walton.

"Never mind the settlement, Bennett. The years I have been through cannot be measured by mere money. You owe me five years of hell and that is what I intend to collect. That is the only thing that will liquidate your debt to me. Money! *Bah!*" Again Walton's anger had risen. The other's

offer of money had merely tended to inflame him and make more bitter the hate he bore the man before him.

"Do you realize," he went on, "just what you have made me suffer? Do you realize that I have been deserted by my wife, my child has been torn from me, and I am now a lonely outcast in the world, but little better than the dirtiest, raggedest tramp who shuffles along the street? Do you, *can* you, realize just what you have caused me to become?"

Bitterly the words dropped from his lips, searing themselves into the consciousness of the man who had betrayed him. Bennett, his head bowed so that he would not have to face the look in the other's angry eyes, sat uneasily through the low-voiced venom of the other's arraignment, as he graphically reviewed the agonies of mind he had endured during the past five years and the further tortures of his unsuccessful search for his former wife so that he might hold in his arms, even if but for a fleeting instant, the child in whom all his love was now centered. Suddenly Walton stopped, his voice, strident with accusation and reproach, softening in the midst of a sentence, to almost womanly tenderness.

His tirade had been interrupted by the clear, silvery-throated tones of a child. They floated in to him with a sweetness that gripped his heartstrings. The child without, in imperious tones, that were obviously a counterfeit of those used by the elders in her house, delivered a command to the butler, who answered with a respectful: "Yes, miss; very good, miss."

A moment later the butler swung open the door leading into the library and entered.

"It's the young mistress, sir," he answered Bennett's questioning gaze. "A matter of a doll that she left in the library, sir, and which she 'as sent me to fetch."

Bennett nodded an indifferent consent, and the butler proceeded about his search.

Walton, the child's voice still ringing in his ears, seemed to lose suddenly some of the vengeful bearing that had marked his interview with Bennett. The voice of that other child, his own, seemed to call to him across the years. There was a dull ache at his heart.

"Did you marry?" he asked Bennett.

"Four years ago," was the answer, in a voice and manner that Walton misinterpreted.

"Oh, don't worry!" he said sharply. "I won't insist on being presented." He almost snarled as he finished. "I'm not anxious to break into society. I'll not trouble you on that score."

He hesitated, a further question on his lips. Obviously the child whose voice he had heard could not have been the result of Bennett's marriage. The voice was that of an older child. He paid not the slightest heed to Bennett's hasty, overdone disclaimer. Before, however, he could put into words the question half formed in his mind, he was attracted by the butler, who, crossing the room to the door leading from the library, clutched carelessly in his hand the doll for which he had been sent.

Even from where he stood, Walton could see that it was old, woefully old and tattered, and made of rags. And one of its shoe-button eyes was black, the other brown!

Like a man in a dream, Walton's eyes followed the butler until the closing of the door hid him from view. Then, sweet as the tones of a silver-tongued bell, came the voice of the child without:

"Thank you, Bevans. Come, Becky, dear; it's bedtime."

Instantly the truth dawned upon Walton. Torn between surprise and anger, he whirled to face the startled

Bennett, who, face livid with fright, had half risen from his chair.

"My baby!" said Walton half to himself, and then he addressed the frightened Bennett, who had cowered back into his chair. "Bennett, that's my daughter! My daughter, do you hear? My Helen!" His words, as he spoke, caused the other a sense of distinct uneasiness, although notwithstanding the menace they carried, they were delivered in a tone of wondering disbelief.

Suddenly Walton lost all control of himself and shook his fist vigorously under Bennett's nose, leaning far across the table to do so.

"So that's why you were anxious to make a settlement and have me leave this part of the country, is it? Not content with robbing me of honor and liberty, you have taken my wife and child, and now want to hide them from me. I'm going to kill you! I'm going to throttle you until the last breath leaves your foul carcass!"

He leaned still further across the table and, grasping the cowering Bennett by the coat, yanked him to his feet. Before the nervously twitching fingers could entwine themselves about Bennett's throat, Walton was seized from behind in the powerful grip of the butler, who had appeared in answer to Bennett's surreptitious pressing of a button below the edge of the table. Together they subdued the wildly excited Walton and half carried, half dragged him out of the room and down the wide hall to the front door. Opening this, they shoved him out into the deserted street and slammed the door behind him.

Staggering under the impetus of the final shove, Walton brought up at the curb line. Every vestige of reason had left him; his brain was aflame with the desire for murder. Running quickly up the steps he pounded wildly with his fists upon the closed door, shouting curses and threats as he did so, but there was no answering movement from within. The door remained a barrier to the fulfillment of his savage desire.

Tired at length by his fruitless efforts to gain admittance, he descended the steps and made his way around to the side of the house. A window from which there shone a light attracted his attention, and after securing a precarious foothold upon an outcropping section of the masonry, he found himself gazing into the library. Within the room Bennett was nervously pacing the floor, his eyes fixed upon the butler, who was in the act of pouring a stiff drink of whisky from a decanter.

Thoroughly maddened now and utterly without reasoning power, Walton released his hold and fled blindly through the night, the one thought uppermost in his mind being the necessity for a weapon of some sort or other with which to kill the man who had wronged him. Dimly he remembered having passed, on his way from the station, a sort of small-town department store. Thither he hurried, rage quickening his footsteps until his gait became almost a run. With a feeling of exultation he saw that the store was yet alight, and as he drew near he noticed in a corner of the window a small collection of firearms. Breathless he burst into the shop.

As he made his wants known to the polite clerk, he managed by an almost superhuman exertion to conceal most of his agitation, and when a variety of weapons of different sizes and prices were laid before him, he selected the largest and most evil-looking of the lot and inquired its price. Eagerly he reached into his pocket and grasped the crumpled five-dollar bill that he had carried since his release. It gave him a certain satisfaction to think that the State had provided the money that would enable him to kill his enemy.

Slowly he withdrew the bill from his

pocket, a grim smile lighting up his features, but even as the clerk's anxious fingers were about to close upon the bit of legal tender, Walton's eyes encountered a calendar that hung upon the wall.

"October twelfth," he muttered to himself, and his smile grew more sinister as he reflected that that date would go down in whatever books the Almighty may keep as the day upon which Bennett would die by Walton's hands.

Suddenly, and with an abrupt movement, he drew back the hand that clutched the five-dollar bill. The date before him held a vague something that he could not quite call to memory. It had something to do with his former life; of that he was sure; but what? And then his head dropped forward upon his breast; memory had come to him. It was the anniversary of his daughter's birth. His little Helen's birthday—his little Helen!

No, it would be better not to add to the disgrace he had already brought the child. She had probably long since been taught to forget him. At most, he was but a vague memory to his darling now. Revenge would indeed be sweet, but, in accomplishing it, the life of little Helen would be wrecked, even more than the lives of all the others concerned. He would go away and start life anew, the world forgetting, by the world forgot.

"Can you beat it?" was the clerk's puzzled question of a fellow worker. "That old nut comes in here with his chest out, his fists all doubled up, and a look in his eyes like he's got a date to lick the world. He hollers for a gun and picks out the biggest one in the place. And then he goes out, without buying it, and he's all shriveled up like a punctured balloon, and his eyes is kinda wet, and there's a smile on his face that makes a lump come in your throat to look at it."

"INDIAN" IS LONG-SOUGHT SON

STOLEN from his parents' cabin in the wilds of Idaho twenty-four years ago, when he was only six months old, Robert Denley has recently been reunited with his mother. During the time the Denleys were without their child, the parents made frantic search for him, and the son had extraordinary adventures.

The persons who kidnaped him are supposed to have been two white women and a man who appeared with the child at an Indian encampment at Lapwai, Idaho, and asked the redskins to take care of the child. When this request was refused the visitors departed, but abandoned little Robert where he could not fail to be found by the Indians.

Instead of leaving the white child to die, an Indian woman took him into her family and tended him for a time. Later he was given to a squaw man in exchange for a cow and was brought up by this man and his Indian wife as their son. Then the squaw man died and Howard Wilson, as the foundling had been renamed, was adopted by the Nez Perce Indians, and became the heir of his Indian foster mother.

In the meantime, Mr. Erick Denley, the boy's father, had died, and his mother had left Idaho for Oakland, California. There, twenty-four years after her son's disappearance, the widowed mother was brought the tale of the white boy adopted by the Indians. She investigated the story at once, with the joyful result of finding her long-lost child after heartbreaking years of separation.

Alias Madam Madcap

by Harrington Strong

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

GROWING tired of his life as an instructor in the university, Professor James Xenophon Salwick decides to embark on a career of crime. In his quest of adventure, he falls in with a mysterious young woman of rare beauty, who generally wears a black mask over the upper part of her face. The girl, who wishes to be known as Madam Madcap, is apparently the head of a band of criminals.

She kidnaps Hamilton Brone, a well-to-do man about town and holds him a prisoner at her headquarters. At the same time, she manages to give the police the impression that Brone has been murdered by his friend, Wallace Melkington, in a quarrel over her. She enlists in her service several underworld characters, known as "Brute" Wilger, "Gentleman Joe" Marget, "Red" Riley, and "Shifty" Slade. With these and the professor, she robs the residence of Miss Dorcas Darcan, a wealthy orphan heiress living on upper Fifth Avenue.

Later she sends Gentleman Joe to rob the apartment of Rufus Throckton, and tips the police off. Gentleman Joe is arrested—caught in the act of robbing Throckton's safe. As Madam Madcap is leaving the scene of the frame-up, she is confronted by Lionel Throckton, a private detective who is investigating the disappearance of Hamilton Brone.

CHAPTER XX.

A PUZZLE.

DETECTIVE LIONEL WALDRON was a man with a proper pride in his profession. The fact that he had met Madam Madcap and Professor Salwick as they were leaving a residence they had robbed, and that he had been put out by a single neat blow from the professor's fist, thus allowing Madam Madcap to make an escape, irked him, to say the least.

Moreover, he wanted to solve the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Hamilton Brone. He was eager to locate Madam Madcap and ascertain the facts before the police got their hands on her. There were two reasons for this: Waldron had little in common with the police, and he wanted to save Hamilton Brone, if possible, for the sake of the man's wife.

Waldron did not know which way to turn. He made an attempt to analyze the character of Madam Madcap from the little he had seen of her and the one time he had held conversation with her. He decided finally that she was far above the ordinary class of criminals and would do things differently.

It became a belief with Waldron that Madam Madcap would not make her headquarters in that section of the city where criminals and persons of the underworld had their *habitat,* but would live in a better section where the police ordinarily would not look for a criminal, probably not far from the house she and her associates had robbed. So, in an effort to pick up a trail, he haunted that part of the city.

Walking down the street that evening, Waldron observed the approach of the taxicab and glanced idly at it as it started to turn around. Instinctively, his eyes followed the glare of the headlights and he saw Madam Madcap. It was the last thing he expected.

When he first caught sight of her, she was drawing off her cloak, and the mask was still over her face. As the headlights were turned away, Waldron saw her remove the mask and start down the street. He immediately followed. Her manner of walking convinced him that it was Madam Madcap he was following. He had seen her face. He would be able to recognize her again, at any time, in any place.

He called to her and, off guard for the moment, she whirled around to face him, startled, fear in her countenance. Lionel Waldron darted toward her. Madam Madcap realized in that instant that she had been recognized, that Waldron had seen her both with and without her mask, and so identify her.

Sambo, her big negro chauffeur, and the limousine, were some distance away, and she could not hope to reach the big car in time to escape in it before Waldron came up. She could not suffer arrest with that mask in her pocket and with the possibility that Marget, frightened, might tell of her part in the Rufus Throckton affair. She did not care to have the detective question her —not after having met him in the alley back of the Darcan place, and the professor having knocked him down. It was a moment of danger.

She did not reply to Waldron's salutation. One terified look she gave him. Then she left the walk, darted between two machines standing at the curb, sprang in front of a surface car, and made for the other side of the street, with Waldron in pursuit.

There was a confusion of traffic for a moment as chauffeurs applied their brakes and a surface car stopped quickly. That confusion hindered Lionel Waldron. Madam Madcap reached the opposite side of the street before he was halfway across. Standing at the curb was a powerful roadster, and its owner was a few feet away talking to an acquaintance.

Madam Madcap did not hesitate. She sprang into the roadster, started the engine, turned the car, and swung into the traffic. Waldron shouted at her from the middle of the street. But, at that moment, the traffic opened at the next corner, the line of cars darted forward, and Madam Madcap dodged ahead of a limousine with the stolen roadster, and gave the car all speed.

Waldron seized a taxicab standing near and shouted his instructions to the driver as the cab started to move. But Madam Madcap had sufficient start to enable her to turn into the first cross street, where there was scarcely any traffic. Waldron's taxicab was a block behind her when it finally got free of the long line of cars.

Then began a race through a select section of the city where a driver could indulge in speed. The taxicab was no match for the big roadster, but its chauffeur did his best and kept the car ahead in sight. Madam Madcap drove furiously, turning a corner now and then, and finally stopped at a curb.

A block behind, Waldron, bending through the window of the taxicab, saw her spring from the roadster and rush through a gateway. The cab drew up behind the other car, and Waldron, shouting to the driver to wait, ran in pursuit.

The detective could follow the woman's flight. He saw her open a second gate and dash through it and into a small garden. He followed and saw her reach the house, unlock a small door at the side, and enter quickly.

Waldron came to a stop at the door. It had been locked on the inside. The thing that puzzled the detective was that this was the residence of Miss Dorcas Darcan, which Madam Madcap and her associates had robbed!

He listened at the door for a moment, but heard nothing. Then he made his way rapidly around the house and to the front entrance, went up the

steps, rang the bell. There was a moment of waiting. Then the door was opened, and Jordan, the butler, regarded him with something akin to austerity.

"Isn't this the residence of Miss Dorcas Darcan?" Waldron asked.

"It is; yes, sir."

"I'd like to speak to Miss Darcan at once on a very important matter," Waldron said. "Kindly take her my card."

If he had anticipated the reply that Miss Darcan was not at home, he was surprised that he got no such answer. Jordan ushered him inside and went away with the card. Waldron waited impatiently. He imagined that he held the clew to the mystery now. Undoubtedly, Madam Madcap was a servant in the employ of Dorcas Darcan, possibly a maid. Small wonder, in such case, that the robbery of the residence had been carried out so successfully.

Jordan finally returned. "Will you please follow me, sir?" he said. "Miss Darcan will see you now."

Waldron followed the butler eagerly. Jordan ushered him into a sort of intimate living room, where there were several persons laughing and chatting.

"You wished to see me?" a voice asked.

Waldron turned toward the lounge from which the sound of the voice had come. The voice itself had a reminiscent tone, but what he saw now caused him to blink his eyes rapidly. The face into which he looked was that of Madam Madcap!

He stood speechless, unable for the moment to gather his wits, sensing that he was making a fool of himself before the company, trying to think of something to say.

"The butler said that it was something important," she reminded him.

Waldron gulped and regained his composure in some measure as he stepped nearer to her.

"It is Miss Darcan I wished to see—Miss Dorcas Darcan," he told her.

"I am Dorcas Darcan."

"I beg your pardon," Waldron said. "Yet it is scarcely my fault that I did not recognize you as Miss Darcan. I know you only as Madam Madcap."

"You—what did you say?"

She had been half reclining and now she sat up, an expression of surprise in her face. Waldron knew that the others were breathless at his words.

"I say that you are Madam Madcap," he declared, "that you escaped me a few minutes ago on the street, and that I trailed you to this house and watched you come in at the side entrance. You must have the knack of changing clothes quickly. You were dressed in a blue suit and carried a cloak a few minutes ago, and now——"

"Is the man mad?" Dorcas Darcan asked the others, looking bewildered.

"I am not mad and I am not to be hoodwinked," Waldron declared, with some show of anger.

He looked at her closely again. The face was the same—he could not forget that. Her voice was the same, too, as that of Madam Madcap. He had held that interview with her in the restaurant, had listened carefully to her voice, and he knew.

"It is a very pretty game, Miss Darcan, but I am afraid that it will not work," Waldron said. "I do not pretend to understand why you robbed your own residence—if it is your residence—if you *are* Miss Dorcas Darcan!"

"You must be insane!" she exclaimed. "Are you trying to tell me that I am not Dorcas Darcan? I never heard of such a thing. You say that you followed me here?"

"Less than fifteen minutes ago. You know that I did!" Waldron persisted.

"But I have been right here all afternoon and evening," she told him. "These friends of mine have just dined

with me. Here is Doctor Sells—possibly you are acquainted with him?"

Waldron had not noticed the physician, whom he did know quite well. Now the doctor came from the easy-chair in one corner of the room and stood before him.

"There is some mistake, Waldron," the doctor said. "I have been with Miss Darcan since late this afternoon. She has not been feeling well, and I have been treating her. She asked me to remain for dinner, and I did. These friends of hers dropped in. Allow me! This is Miss Carleigh, the actress, Mr. Lionel Waldron, criminal investigator. I believe that is the correct term, Waldron? And here is Mr. Hansel, the broker. And this lady——"

"Pardon me, but I cannot be mistaken!" Waldron declared. "If this is Miss Dorcas Darcan——"

"I assure you that I am, Mr. Waldron," that lady put in.

"But I saw her a short time ago down the street, saw her taking off her mask, followed her here and watched her enter. Do you mean to tell me, doctor, that I have not good eyes, and that I cannot remember a face?"

"Waldron, you must have been working too hard lately," the doctor told him. "I give you my word of honor—which never has been abused—that Miss Darcan has not been out of this house since about four o'clock."

"And have you been constantly at her side since that time?"

"All except an hour, say——"

"Ah! And when was that?"

"I should judge that it was between six and seven o'clock, when the lady left me to dress for dinner," the doctor replied. "Confound it, Waldron, since seven o'clock I have not been more than twenty feet away from her."

Waldron looked at him, puzzled. He knew that the doctor was not the sort of man to tell a falsehood under the circumstances; neither was he an easy man to fool. But Lionel Waldron believed in his eyes, too.

"Miss Darcan have you a maid servant about your own size and appearance?" he asked.

"Both my maids are about my size, and—and very good looking," she answered, smiling at him. "But I can assure you that you were not following one of them to the house a few minutes ago. They have both been in constant attendance. I am at a loss to understand this affair."

"And so am I," Waldron said. He looked at her again searchingly, and she smiled at him once more. The same face! He knew that. And the same voice. Only for the presence of the physician, Waldron would have believed himself the victim of a trick, but he knew Doctor Sells would not participate in one.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said. "It appears that I have made a mistake."

He backed out of the room, apparently in confusion, but Lionel Waldron was not confused. He still sensed a trick and believed the doctor to be a victim also. Furthermore, he was not willing to let the matter end in that fashion. He followed the butler to the door. Jordan had the ghost of a smile on his lips as he held it open.

"We all make mistakes, sir," Jordan said.

"I do not care to have a servant comment on my actions," Waldron told him freezingly.

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir!" Jordan said.

After he had closed the door, he smiled openly.

CHAPTER XXI.

TANGLED THREADS.

WALDRON hurried to the corner and signaled the chauffeur of the taxicab. The limousine he had pursued had long since disappeared. He was driven back to the nearest drug

store, and there he entered a telephone booth and called the number of a prominent private detective agency, getting the night manager.

"This is Lionel Waldron," he said. "I want four of your best men at once, and I want another four to relieve them. Understand? I want a house watched day and night until I call your men off. Send me operatives that are dependable."

He made arrangements, gave the address, drove back to the corner nearest the Darcan residence, dismissed the taxicab, and walked down to the house to stand watch himself until the other men arrived. He realized that Madam Madcap, if she was in the house, had had an opportunity to leave while he was telephoning. If she had not left he would be able to shadow her carefully henceforth, for he would have the place under surveillance soon.

The doctor came from the house a few minutes later, and Waldron crossed the street boldly and stopped him as he was about to get into his car.

"When you left that place just now, was the young lady who called herself Dorcas Darcan in it?" Waldron asked.

"She was in the hall when I left; her guests are just leaving," the physician replied. "What's the trouble with you, Waldron? That girl is all right. I tell you that I was with her all evening, ate dinner there——"

"There are certain things that may be explained later, doctor," Waldron said.

"I think that you are on some wrong track, but it is none of my business if you make a fool of yourself and endanger your reputation," said the doctor. "Don't bother Miss Darcan too much, however; she has not been feeling well recently."

The doctor went away, and the guests came from the house and followed him. The operatives ordered by Waldron arrived, and he described Dorcas Darcan to them, explaining that he wanted the house kept under surveillance, and that anybody who left it was to be shadowed. He posted the four men at such points that all exits of the residence could be watched carefully.

Waldron remained on the scene that night and was there when the four operatives were relieved. He gave the new men their orders and assigned them to their positions. Standing across the street, almost in front of the house, Waldron saw Dorcas Darcan in a window for an instant and went toward his rooms rejoicing.

"If she comes out and makes a move, I've got her," he told himself. "I don't pretend to understand how she fooled the doctor, but she certainly did it. The woman who calls herself Dorcas Darcan is the one I followed to the house last night; the woman I followed is Madam Madcap, and that is all there is to it."

Waldron slept until after noon, then was up and out again. He visited police headquarters and had a talk with Macguire, who said that they had made no headway in the Madam Madcap case. Uptown again, he walked slowly up the Avenue, wondering where to begin the hunt if Madam Madcap escaped the men watching the house.

And then he saw her! She was but a short distance ahead of him, just turning into a shop. Waldron quickened his pace, walked past the entrance and glanced inside. The woman he followed was speaking to a salesman. He stepped back to the curb to locate the operative who should have been shadowing her, since she was not in the house farther uptown, and was unable to do so.

He crossed the walk again and looked into the shop. His quarry was examining some goods that were on display. Waldron slipped through the entrance and behind a display case; he

could not see her, but he could hear what she said.

"Very well, Miss Darcan. I'll have them sent out on approval," he heard the salesman say.

He stepped back behind the case as she passed him and went out upon the street again, turning north as if to go to some other shop. Waldron followed her for a block and then stepped quickly to her side.

"Good afternoon, Madam Madcap," he said.

She turned slowly and regarded him. "Mr. Waldron, isn't it?" she asked. "Really, it is very annoying to have you call me by the name of a notorious criminal. I was willing to overlook your miserable mistake of last night, since we all make mistakes at times, but I shall not continue to overlook what begins to look like persecution. I am Miss Dorcas Darcan, as I told you, and as Doctor Sells told you. Do you want more proof?"

Waldron stepped closer and spoke in a low tone. "I am not an utter fool, madam," he said. "I do not pretend to be able to read this riddle at present, but I shall do so before I quit. That is all I have to say now."

He lifted his hat and walked on up the street. He did not care to take her into custody as Madam Madcap, and have her prove conclusively that she was not. He would have to solve the puzzle first, have to gather evidence that could not be disputed. He confessed to himself that he was sorely puzzled.

Was Dorcas Darcan another name for Madam Madcap? If so, why had she robbed her own house? And why, having robbed it, had she left it with the professor, who had knocked Waldron down that they might escape? If she was Madam Madcap, why was she masked in the side street adjoining her own home, when she could have walked out of the front door as Dorcas Darcan and entered her own car?

The doctor had declared that she had been in the house all the early evening before, and yet Waldron had seen her on the street and had pursued her and watched her enter the house. Was there something behind all this that he did not even consider possible, something big that concerned even the truthful, sterling Doctor Sells? And how was Hamilton Brone concerned.

He remembered that Brone's finger prints had been found on the Darcan safe. That meant, certainly, that Brone had touched it. Was this Dorcas Darcan leading a double life? Was she Dorcas Darcan to one group and Madam Madcap to another?

Waldron could have followed her, of course, but he guessed that she expected it and would try to outwit him. It would better serve his purpose, he thought, to pretend to be giving up the chase. Vigilance relaxed, she might grow careless.

He engaged a taxicab and drove immediately to within a block of the Darcan residence. The first squad of his operatives was on duty. He made the rounds, interviewed all four of them. Nobody had left the Darcan house since early morning, they declared, with the exception of the butler, and he had been gone only an hour.

"You fools!" Waldron told them. "I saw that woman downtown less than half an hour ago. She slipped past you in some way."

"Just come here, sir," one of the men said. "You can see the side balcony of the house from here. Do you see the woman sitting there reading? Is that the woman?"

Waldron looked at the balcony in surprise. "That's the woman," he said.

"Well, she's been there since about eleven o'clock, sir, reading and working at a bit of embroidery. They even served her luncheon there. She hasn't left that balcony since about eleven

o'clock. And yet you say that you saw her downtown?"

Waldron walked briskly along the street until he came directly opposite the balcony. There was no doubt about it—the woman who called herself Dorcas Darcan was sitting there. Yet he had met her on the street, and she had spoken of the affair of the night before!

"We're being fooled—fooled!" he declared to the operative. "And we've got to get to the bottom of this! If that is one of her maids made up to look like her, sent to stay on that balcony as a blind while she goes out——"

"But nobody has gone out, except the butler."

"Rot!" Waldron exclaimed angrily. "I saw her downtown, talked to her. Is everybody going crazy?"

"Not everybody," said the operative.

"Well, keep on watching. I'll get in closer with the night men. I want to know what is going on inside that house. I'll let you in a little on the secret. That woman is Madam Madcap! I know it! Last night I chased her into that very residence. Yet she can prove, and by reliable witnesses, that she is a respectable young woman named Dorcas Darcan, and that she was not out of her house last evening at all!"

"Man, you're crazy!" said the operative. "It was Dorcas Darcan that Madam Madcap robbed—stole her pearls—chloroformed her. Can a woman steal her own stuff, chloroform herself, and make a get-away and lie unconscious on a bed at the same time? Could a woman——"

"Oh, shut up!" Waldron exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXII.

BRONE LEARNS THE TRUTH.

SHIFTY SLADE looked up as Brute Wilger entered the lounging room, and put aside the deck of cards with which he had been playing solitaire. Wilger dropped into a chair and touched match to cigarette.

"Seen Marget?" Slade asked.

"Not since late yesterday afternoon."

"Neither have I," Slade said. "He ducked out of here early last night, and he hasn't shown up this morning. I took the trouble to find out that his bed hadn't been slept in. What's the answer?"

"Search me," Wilger said.

"Do you suppose this Madam Madcap has fallen for the good looks of Gentleman Joe Marget and is letting him work on the side? It's bad enough to be bossed by a woman, and I ain't hankerin' to be bossed through a woman by a man that's been in the habit of takin' his orders from me."

"Well, I suppose we can find out when Marget does show up."

"You're right, we can! I've never seen the time Marget could lie to me and get away with it. I can look him in the eyes and make him come through with the truth every time!"

The door was thrown open, and the grinning Sambo entered.

"Madam Madcap wants y'all to come down to the parlor," he said. "I reckon she's done got some 'formation to impaht."

"Probably got some more coin to split," Wilger suggested.

"Or another stunt to pull off," said Slade. "I hope it's as good as that Darcan thing."

They followed Sambo down the stairs and walked into the room. Madam Madcap, masked, sat at her usual place at the head of the table, and on one side of it were Red Riley and the professor. Marget was not there.

Sambo closed the door and stood with his back against it. Madam Madcap looked down the long table at her men, one at a time. The professor cleared his throat and looked expectant; the others merely waited, some curiosity in

their manner. Madam Madcap's first sentence startled them.

"Gentleman Joe Marget is in jail!" she said.

"What's that?" Slade cried, bending forward, an expression of amazement in his face.

"I have ascertained that he was arrested last night a little before nine o'clock."

"Then things ain't covered as well as we thought!" Slade exclaimed. "You're a fine head of a gang if you can't give your men some protection."

"Mr. Slade, I'd suggest that you wait for fuller news before condemning our leader," the professor put in. "It is not quite the thing to interrupt a lady when she is speaking."

"I have nothing to do with Marget's incarceration," Madam Madcap went on. "He was not arrested because he is associated with Madam Madcap, nor because he was implicated in that Darcan robbery. He was caught robbing an apartment far uptown—caught in the act. Gentleman Joe Marget, it seems, found my methods too slow for him, and decided to go it alone for once. You know the result."

"Why, the poor boob! He never did have sense enough to work alone, unless it was swindlin' a hick!" Shifty Slade declared. "I always was a bit suspicious of that bird. I've watched him at times. So they got him, did they?"

"I have called all of you here for this conference to decide what is to be done about it," Madam Madcap said. "He really was a member of your gang, Slade, as I understand it. I told you that, if disaster came, all you had to do was to sit tight, and you'd be released on bail in a short time. But this thing is just a bit different. If he had been caught while helping to carry out one of our plans——"

"The big boob!" Slade interrupted.

"It is for you men to decide. Shall we bail him out, let him make his getaway, and forfeit the bail money? Or, shall we simply let him handle his own affairs?"

"It seems like he wanted to, when he went out by himself," Wilger offered. "If he'd landed, we'd never have seen any of the loot, you betcha!"

"I'll say we wouldn't!" Shifty Slade added. "I can't see any picture of Gentleman Joe Marget dividin' with the crowd."

"Well, I suppose that he has some money, enough to hire an attorney," Madam Madcap said. "But, if he has violated one of the rules, shall we give him more? He will have a big share coming from the Darcan job as soon as the fence reports to me. If we stand by him, he gets it. If we decide to punish him by letting him drift, his share will be divided among the others. I have determined to let you men decide it."

Shifty Slade licked at his lips. Red Riley and the professor had no hand in this, nor did Brute Wilger. Marget had been Slade's man, and it was for Slade to decide his fate.

"Let him get out of it the best way he can!" Slade decided finally. "Maybe it'll be a lesson for him. A man like that would be liable to double cross his pals."

That seemed to settle it. Madam Madcap announced that she agreed with the decision, and the men left the parlor. She smiled after they had gone. She knew very well that leaving the decision to them had forced them to the belief that she was fair and square, and she wanted Shifty Slade especially to hold that opinion and have greater confidence in her.

Slade returned to the lounging room with Brute Wilger, and for some time they discussed the case of Gentleman Joe Marget, and speculated on the term the judge would give him.

"Good riddance!" Slade said. "I hate to work with a man when I can't

trust him. Marget acted mighty peculiar at times. Tried to go it alone, did he? Why, the poor simp! I guess it'll be a lesson for him, all right!"

"It looks funny to me, though," Wilger said.

"Well, it doesn't to me! He tried his side graft once too often. That's all. I'll bet he's pulled off somethink like that a dozen times, and we never knew. I don't remember of him ever handin' us a share, either!"

Slade and Wilger went out for a time and became separated. It was late in the afternoon when Slade returned alone and met Sambo in the hall on the lower floor. Slade knew of a likely crib that might be cracked, and he asked for Madam Madcap, to give her the information.

"She am gone out and won't be back until time foh eats," Sambo told him.

"Well, how does she go out?" Slade wanted to know. "It's a cinch she can't go out wearin' that mask in broad daylight."

"I 'spect dere is a lot of things 'round hyar y'all don't understand," Sambo told him. "Better not 'vestigate too close, either, man. Better jus' 'tend to yoh own business."

Slade went on up the stairs. Sambo's words had reminded him of the mystery of the locked room. What was in there? Why did Riley wear the uniform of a prison guard when he entered it, and the professor dress like a convict?

"Money we ain't gettin' in on," Shifty Slade told himself.

Wilger, he knew, was out somewhere. Red Riley he had seen on the street less than fifteen minutes before, and they had passed without speaking. Slade did not know of the whereabouts of the professor, but he located him. Professor Salwick was reading in the parlor.

Slade went up the stairs quietly and, at the top, stood and listened for a time. Sambo was still in the hall far below. It seemed to be an opportune time to investigate the locked room. Slade slipped along the hall to the door.

He stood there for a minute, listening, but heard no sound to indicate what might be on the opposite side of that locked door. Then Shifty Slade took from his pocket a set of keys. They were excellent keys, and had cost Slade considerable money a few years before. There were few locks that one of those keys would not pick.

Alert, cautious that Sambo did not come up the stairs and discover him, Shifty Slade worked with his keys until he found one that would open the lock. He turned it, extracted it, put the keys away, and grasped the knob. Slowly he turned it. Then he opened the door an inch at a time, pausing momentarily to listen.

When it was half open, Shifty Slade slipped inside. What he saw amazed him. There were the two little cells, and in one of them a man sat on the bunk, holding his head in his hands. He glanced up as Slade closed the door behind him; then sprang to his feet.

"Who—who are you?" he asked.

"If it comes to that, who are you, and what are you doin' in that hen coop?" Slade countered.

"Are you—another guard?"

"Not as I knows of," said Slade.

"You're the first man I've seen, except a guard and one trusty. Are you a convict, too?"

"Stow that!" Slade exclaimed. "Who are you, and what are you doing in here?"

"I'm Hamilton Brone."

"You? You're Hamilton Brone? For the love of Mike!" Slade gasped. "What kind of a game is this? And your finger prints on that safe, accordin' to the newspapers."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," Brone said. "They tell me that I was sentenced for life, for mur-

dering Wallace Melkington, but I don't remember any of it. I remember being intoxicated, and leaving the cabaret with Madam Madcap—and that's all."

"Um!" Slade grunted. He walked nearer the cell and conducted the conversation in a lower voice thereafter. This thing was highly interesting to Shifty Slade. So Madam Madcap was playing some sort of a game. Riley knew about it, and so did the professor, and Shifty Slade did not. Slade did not relish that. Into his suspicious mind flashed the idea that Madam Madcap was playing double with him.

"Say, where do you think you are?" he asked.

"They told me that this is State's prison," Hamilton Brone replied. "I haven't seen anybody except the guard and a trusty. I want to see the warden. I'm being punished for being violent, they tell me, and I don't remember anything about it. I—I want help. I can't remember the trial—or anything."

"I should think not!" Slade told him. "There didn't happen to be any trial. I don't know what kind of a game you're up against, but I do know that you're bein' played for a fool. Penitentiary, my eye! You are in a room in an ordinary building, old top, and you're not a million feet from Pearl Street."

Hamilton Brone grasped the bars and looked at Slade wild-eyed, unbelieving.

"Don't—don't play with me!" he gasped. "I've had about all that I can stand. I can't remember—and I can't communicate with anybody. I—I want to see my wife. I want to get lawyers busy——"

"You poor nut, you ain't in prison!" Slade said. "Try to get that into your bean. They're workin' a game on you, a deep game of some kind, and I'll be blamed if I know why."

"Then where—where am I?"

"I told you. You're in a house in little old New York, and don't forget it. On the third floor of a house not three blocks from a subway entrance, you poor fish."

"They told me that after I attacked Madam Madcap and ran away——"

"Forget it! It's Madam Madcap who's keepin' you in that little cage. This is her house, simp! She's the niftiest crook out of jail."

"But—why——"

"Ask me somethin' easy," Slade begged. "Oh, boy! You're bein' played proper, you are. The cops are lookin' for you and the public thinks you're a bum! Madam Madcap's gang robbed a house the other night, and the cops found your finger prints on the safe, accordin' to the newspapers. You simp, everybody thinks you fell for this Madam Madcap so hard that you turned crook to please her."

"I—what's that?" Brone cried.

"Keep that voice of yours down, or they'll be on top of us in a minute!" Slade warned. "Looks to me like your lily-white reputation was bein' ruined forever. I don't know why this Madam Madcap is doin' this to you—but she sure is doin' aplenty!"

"Help me get out of here!" Brone begged. "If you're telling me the truth then——"

"Oh, it's the truth, all right."

"And who are you?"

"Names don't matter just now," Slade said. "But I've been workin' with Madam Madcap. I'll say that much, and I guess it won't hurt me any. You won't be findin' any cop to turn me over. They'd like to get their hands on you."

"But I could prove——"

"Prove nothin'!" Slade exclaimed. "She's got you right, and don't you forget it! Don't ask me why! I don't know the secret."

Hamilton Brone breathed deeply for a moment, wiped the back of one hand across his eyes, tried to reason it out.

"I—I want to get out of here!" he said.

"I don't doubt that a bit—not a little bit!"

"You'll help me out?" Brone asked. "I'm rich—maybe you know. I'll make it right with you."

"What do you call makin' it right?" Slade asked.

"You just let me out! And then, if you're mixed up with this woman, make your get-away, because I'm going to attend to her and her tribe!" Hamilton Brone explained. "I'll give you time to get under cover—plenty of time."

"And what do I make my get-away on?"

"The thousand I'll give you."

Shifty Slade laughed. "Here you are," he said, "caged up like an animal out at the zoo. I'm the only man you can get to and bribe. It won't be any use tryin' it with that man who pretends to be a guard, or the one who poses as a trusty. Just let them know that you know you ain't in the pen, and it'll be curtains for you. I'm givin' you that tip first."

"I—I'll not let them know."

"If you do—curtains. Remember that. They'll probably slit your throat. Here you are—and Madam Madcap makin' folks think you're a crook. Your friends won't ever look at you again, even if the coppers let you go, and your wife'll be done with you, and——"

"Stop it, man! I understand!" Brone cried.

"And you offer me—me, the only man that can help—a thousand," Slade continued.

"I'll make it two——"

"You'll make it ten. What's ten thousand to you? And I'd have to beat it, wouldn't I? The cops would be after me, and my own pals would be after me for throwin' 'em down. It'd be worth ten thousand, all right."

"It—it's a bargain! Let me out!"

"And how do I get the coin?" Slade wanted to know.

"I'll give it to you."

"You might conveniently forget it after you got out."

"I'll not! I'll get it for you the first thing!" Brone declared. "You have the check ready and I'll fill it out. I'll ride to the bank with you in a closed car, wait until you go in and cash the check. I'll play fair! Go out and ask about me. I may be a rotter in some things, but I'm a man of my word."

"Well, I'll think about it."

"Do it now, man!" Brone said. "Let me out! Things are going to ruin while I'm in here. I want to get out—to protect myself. I want to have people know the truth—get this Madam Madcap behind bars—find out why she has done this thing——"

"Well——" Slade began.

The hall door was thrown open. Madam Madcap and Sambo came into the room, Red Riley behind them.

"I think you can stop negotiations, Slade!" Madam Madcap said. "You'll not earn that ten thousand. We've been listening outside the door—quite an interesting conversation."

"Aw, I was just stringin' this boob!" said Slade in quick defense.

"And how does it come that you are inside this room? Didn't I tell you that you were to stay out of it?" she demanded. "Are you taking every means to show me that you cannot be trusted?"

"Aw, I didn't have anything to do and got to prowlin' around," Slade said. "I've got a right to know as much as Riley, ain't I? What's the harm that's been done?"

"You've told this man that he isn't in prison, haven't you? That has disarranged some of my plans. Get out of here, Slade, and go to the parlor. I'll be there in a few minutes. Sambo, you see that Slade goes to the parlor, and not out of the house."

"Oh, I'll not run away. I'll stay and get mine," Slade said.

He swaggered through the door and into the hall, giving Red Riley a glare of hatred as he passed. Sambo conducted him to the parlor on the floor below. Madam Madcap motioned for Riley to go out and close the door. Then she stepped close to the cell.

"So you have been told some things, Mr. Hamilton Brone," she said. "I'll tell you a few more. I went to that cabaret purposely to attract you, to get you where I could drug you and bring you here. I've tried to make you suffer and I imagine that I have succeeded. You have had several days of anguish. There are more to come, Hamilton Brone. The city thinks you have turned crook because of your infatuation for me. I'll see you disgraced, Hamilton Brone, see you a broken man!"

"But why——"

"And when I am through, I simply shall disappear. Then nobody will believe your wild story. I'll simply take off my mask and walk in the crowds, unrecognized. Can you understand? You'll never be able to explain."

"But why? Why are you doing this?"

"I do not care to tell you now," she said. "Explanations will come later, perhaps. In the meantime, suffer, imagine what people are saying of you, whether your wife is getting a divorce and preparing to marry Lionel Waldron, whom she threw over to marry you. Let your mind dwell on those things, Hamilton Brone, and don't make too much noise about it, or I shall send in a powerful and loyal negro to attend to you!"

She opened the door, went out and locked it behind her without another word to Brone. Down in the parlor, Shifty Slade was sitting at one end of the long table, a sneer on his lips.

"Well, Slade," Madam Madcap said, "am I to understand that we are enemies? Are you going to make an attempt to help Hamilton Brone to escape? Are you ready to have me give the police a few facts concerning you? It wouldn't harm me in the least, Slade. I have another place prepared and could move there with the others in an hour. I could leave you in one of those cells upstairs, send word to the police, and let it go at that. Can't you see where you stand, Slade?"

Slade, terrified, saw where he stood. "Aw, I wouldn't take his ten thousand," he said. "I told him where he was before I thought. How was I to know the game you was playin' on him? You didn't let me in on the secret."

"I told you that it was none of your business," Madam Madcap said. "You do not know all my plans, please remember. You would have turned him loose for ten thousand, whereas, under my plan, he will be worth much more than that to us. Like Gentleman Joe Marget, are you? Want to go it alone? You know what happened to him!"

"I—I'll play square!" Slade said.

"Then stop bothering your head about things that do not concern you," she ordered. "And don't have an idea of double-crossing me! If anything happens to me through you, Slade, a certain friend of mine will put certain information and evidence into the hands of the district attorney. Play false, and we may both do a term. Be loyal, and you'll probably wear diamonds."

Slade gulped and refused to meet her eyes.

"What's the answer?" she demanded.

"I said it—I'll play square!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE STUFF.

PROFESSOR SALWICK was keenly aware that he possessed several shortcomings as a criminal. He picked up the lore rapidly and had the

necessary amount of courage, yet he felt like a rank amateur at times. The professor believed that he did not have enough of that quality designated as "tough." His conversation seemed to be in an alien tongue when he spoke with others of Madam Madcap's band. Wherefore he cultivated Brute Wilger industriously.

He picked out Wilger because it had been the visit of that gentleman to the professor's apartment that had decided him on a life of crime. He explained this to the Brute carefully.

"Of course I do not care to cut myself off entirely from the old order until I am certain that I shall be a success in this new field of endeavor," the professor explained. "You know the old adage about not throwing out dirty water until you get in clean? No matter! As I was about to say, it was my intention to take up a life of crime during these vacation months and ascertain whether I was fitted for the work. If so, then I cease tutoring; if not, I shall sigh and return to my books and experiments."

Wilger blinked at that. "Let me getcha right, prof," he said. "You think this is a trade, is that it? And if you don't make a good crook you go right back and be a law-abidin' gent again?"

"Why, certainly."

"That," said Wilger, "would hand the cops one peach of a laugh if they could hear it."

"And so," the professor continued, "I shall rather depend upon you for instruction. If I can reciprocate in any way, I shall be delighted to do so. You might trade me lessons in criminology for—say—instruction in acoustics. I assure you that acoustics is an interesting study and can be put to practical use."

"What'd I do with it?" Wilger snarled. "It's all about sounds, eh? I don't want to know anything about 'em. Hearin' 'em is enough for me. But I'll tell you anything you want to know, prof."

The professor wished to know a great deal. Wilger was a faithful instructor, perhaps because he got so much fun out of it. The two men learned to respect each other and became firm friends.

"Prof, with your brains and my nerve and knowledge, we'd make one great team," Wilger told him. "We could give this Madam Madcap cards and spades and take every trick in the deck."

"I do not—er—entirely understand, but I grasp the spirit," said the professor. "Madam Madcap! Ah!"

The professor had been thinking a great deal of Madam Madcap since their first meeting. Professor Salwick had had little time for women. He was peculiar in some ways and he was a normal man in others. He had strength. He was only thirty-seven. His body was as well disciplined as his mind. Now that he came to look upon a woman more than once the professor felt the call of a force he never before had recognized as existing save in hearsay.

He was alone in the parlor that evening after dinner when Madam Madcap entered. He put aside his book and stood up. She bade him be seated again.

"It is dirty work!" Madam Madcap declared. "To be surrounded by persons you cannot trust is not a nice experience, but in a business like this it is necessary at times."

"That is to be deplored," the professor said.

"You are one man I feel that I *can* trust," she said.

"I thank you for your confidence."

"I have had you investigated," she admitted. "I did not believe your story at first—not all of it. But I know now that you are deliberately throwing away

an honorable career to begin a life of crime."

"The adventure—the monetary gain that would——"

"Listen to me, Professor Salwick! I know of what I am speaking, too. It is adventure at first, and then it degenerates into a sordid sort of intermittent excitement. About the only real sensation a criminal knows after a time is that of fear, and it is real fear."

"I—er—I suppose so," the professor said.

"You cannot begin to comprehend it," Madam Madcap continued. "It is a terrible thing. Every minute you expect an officer to touch you on the shoulder. Every minute you have a vision of cold stone walls, harsh prison guards, coarse food and clothing. You have the dread of becoming a mere thing, your every move marked out by another man, of losing your identity, trading your name for a number, incurring the stigma that nothing can remove——"

"What a dismal picture!" he said.

"I am not jesting, professor. The general public little knows what the professional criminal endures. And the women? Have you ever stopped to think, professor, what it must mean to the wives and daughters of professional criminals?"

"I must confess that I have not."

"Their men go out to fight society as warriers to fight a foe. Like the wives and daughters of warriors, the criminal's women wait at home, fearing for news, wondering what is happening—where he is now, whether he is in danger. They welcome his return as a warrior's women welcome their return from the wars, but they do not have the uplifting feeling of glory, of excellent work well done, that the warrior's women have. If he fails—and falls—they do not have the knowledge that he did well. They have only shame."

"What a graphic picture!" the professor said. "But why speak of dismal things?"

"I am trying to show you the truth," said Madam Madcap. "I am showing you the reality of the criminal's life. The glamour soon wears away, and there is nothing left but endless misery."

"Really, I am feeling distressed," declared the professor. "Why do you tell me these things?"

"Because it is not too late for you to turn back. This is merely an adventure with you, Professor Salwick. I have been with you a good deal, and perhaps I have studied you a bit, in the days when you escorted me to the cabaret, and since. Pardon me, but you have not the criminal spirit. You'll never make a successful criminal. Believe me, I know. Your feelings, your ethics are too fine."

"Why, I am surprised! I had thought that I was getting along famously."

"Oh, you have, so far—but you have scarcely begun," she replied. "You have been indulging in child's play so far. You are implicated with me now, of course, yet there may be some way out. Think what a wonderful work you can do in your own field!"

"I fear that I am too far along the road," the professor said. "And there are ethics among criminals, I have been given to understand. There is honor among thieves, if you will pardon me."

"That," said Madam Madcap, "holds about as much truth as many other old platitudes. There may have been honor and loyalty among thieves once, and perhaps some of it remains, but never bank upon it, my dear professor."

"Well, there is—er—another reason why I desire to continue with the work," the professor said. "I should like to be in your environment, be in the same social plane."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I presume that this is rather unex-

pected, my dear lady, but I have grown to have a certain feeling for you. It is rather a peculiar thing, for I have seldom given thought to women. There is something about you, it appears, that rather intoxicates me, if I may use the term."

"Why, professor, I do not understand!"

"Your nearness is bewitching," he continued. "I dare not hope to win you, yet it is a great deal to be near you, to be of service, to guard you at times, to aid you——"

"Professor Salwick! Are you trying to say that you—you admire me?"

"Admire," said the professor, "is one of those useless words that have neither strength nor weakness, if you can gather my meaning. I—that is, I love you!"

He made his avowal in a matter-of-fact manner, but his heart was pounding at his ribs, and Madam Madcap guessed it from the expression in his face.

"You love me?" she said softly. "You know me as a criminal, yet you love me?"

"I do not care what your status is among the narrow-minded of the earth, of whom there are a great many," said Professor Salwick. "It is true that I know you only as Madam Madcap. I do not care whether your genuine name is Gertie or Gwendolyn. Is it either? No matter! I have ascertained that love is a peculiar thing. As I have said, I cannot hope to win you. I am not the romantic type. I cannot fancy myself playing a guitar beneath a window, for instance."

"I should hope not!" said Madam Madcap.

"But I know my feelings and can trust them," he went on. "Without doubt, I love you. And so, please, let me be near you. I realize that I am worthless; in a way——"

"You are not!" she exclaimed. "You are a splendid man! You have bodily strength. You have brains. Must I defend you against yourself?"

"I mean that I am almost worthless as a criminal."

"Thank Heaven!" she said. "And let us say no more about this now, please. But I am honest enough to tell you this—I admire you a great deal."

"I thank you!" said Professor Salwick.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROFESSOR IS CAUGHT.

IT was still early in the evening when the professor left the parlor, his heart fluttering, and made his way thoughtfully to the lounging room. It was characteristic of him that he knocked at the door before entering.

"It's the word-machine!" Slade gasped.

The professor ignored him and walked across to Brute Wilger, who looked up at him in wonder.

"Mr. Wilger," he said, "would you care to go out with me a while this evening?"

"What's the idea?" Wilger asked.

"I feel the need of fresh air, for one thing," the professor responded, "and I have a little errand."

Wilger imagined that there was something mysterious in the professor's manner, and it appealed to him. The professor was a canny man, he stood close to Madam Madcap, and perhaps, through friendship, he was about to point the way to added profits. Wilger got up and went to the table for his cap.

Shifty Slade snarled as they left the room, and then began a game of solitaire. He had decided against going out himself that evening. He preferred to be alone rather than in the company of Red Riley. He was thinking of Hamilton Brone in his cell on the floor above, and wondering how it would feel to have ten thousand dollars in his pocket. But he had no idea of

attempting to release Brone at present. He probably was being watched, he thought, by the giant Sambo. He wanted Madam Madcap to think that he was loyal. If he should be caught again in forbidden territory, she probably would cease to trust him altogether and possibly would punish him in some way. Had Shifty Slade seen the fair face behind the mask, he might have ventured to fight this woman, but the mask made her appear dangerous, ominous.

Brute Wilger accompanied the professor down the street and to the nearest subway entrance without saying a word except to reply in monosyllables to the professor's comments, which were varied in nature. Wilger knew that there were times to ask questions, and that the present moment was not one of them.

They traveled uptown, got off at Grand Central Station, went up to the street and walked to Fifth Avenue, where the professor led the way toward the north.

"I must pay a visit to my lodgings," he told Wilger. "There is a volume there that I desire. I find time hanging heavy on my hands during the day. This is a light volume that I have been intending to read for months, but there always was something serious to be perused. Now that I have dropped my studies and—er—taken to a different mode of existence, I can please myself by reading what I am sure is an interesting work."

"I getcha," said Wilger. "You got time now to amuse yourself."

"Precisely! I imagined before that it would be a waste of valuable minutes to read anything light, but now I can indulge myself."

"Love story?" asked Wilger.

"No; guess again."

"I'll bet I know. All about pirates and hidden gold, huh? I knew a highbrow guy once that was always readin' stuff like that. Said it stirred his blood."

"Undoubtedly—undoubtedly. I must read something like that when I have the opportunity. This book I mention is the work of a famous Frenchman, a scientist, and is entitled 'Psychopannychism in its Relation to Psilanthropy.' I am told that it is very amusing."

"Something light—I getcha!" said Wilger. "Don't ever get to readin' me extracts, prof. I'd rather think of serious things."

"A man must give his brain relaxation now and then," the professor replied.

He led the way into a side street, and for a moment there was no further conversation. When they reached a certain corner, the professor stopped.

"My lodgings are in that apartment house across the street, in the middle of the block," he said. "Perhaps it would be well for you to remain here until I return."

"I getcha!" said Wilger. "I'll keep my eye peeled."

"I shall not be long. I do not wish to discommode a pal. Or, was it pard? No matter!"

"Take your time, prof."

"Do you notice the small cement structure this side of the apartment house? It is the garage where tenants keep their cars. There is a night attendant. Those benches in front of it are used by the public at times. You might sit there while waiting."

"On your way, prof! I'll make myself comfortable," Wilger said.

The professor walked on down the street, rapidly, and Brute Wilger went slowly toward the garage and the two benches in front of it. Wilger still felt certain that the professor had important news to impart at the proper time, and he was willing to wait. He found himself liking the atmosphere of the uptown district.

The professor hurried to the entrance

of the apartment house and started up the flight of steps that led to the door. A man stepped out and confronted him.

"You're Professor Salwick, aren't you?" he asked.

"I am, my dear sir!"

"I want you!" said the other, exhibiting a detective's badge.

The professor looked at him peculiarly.

"And don't start anything!" the officer warned quickly. "I've been given to understand that you pack a wallop, but if you try it on me I'll put a bullet in you where it will do the most good —or harm, depending on the way you look at it."

"Why, this—— I never heard of such a thing!" the professor exclaimed. "Do you mean that I am to understand I am under arrest? On what charge, sir? I demand my rights! Can an officer stop any reputable citizen in this manner?"

"Forget the comedy!" the officer urged. "I'm working for Mr. Lionel Waldron, and I've got orders to pick you up. He wants to talk to you."

"Well, why didn't you say so?" the professor asked. "I happen to be acquainted with Mr. Waldron. Why do this melodramatic thing and perhaps disgrace me before the other tenants of this building."

"Nobody's heard me," the detective said. "If you're so afraid of your reputation, we'll just step down to that garage. There's a telephone there, and a good place to watch you."

"Let us have it done as quickly as possible," the professor said. "My time is valuable, I assure you."

The professor accompanied him to the garage, the detective watching him closely. The building was about fifty feet square, with no doors except the wide, open ones in front. There were four windows, but networks of steel bars were outside them.

"Go back and sit down," the officer directed. "And don't try any tricks on me. Wait! I'll see whether you're heeled."

"Heeled?" the professor asked.

"Whether you've got a gat on you."

"Gat? Gat? I fail to understand. A gat, my dear sir, is a natural or artificial channel or passage from a shore inland, as between sandbanks or cliffs. How in the name of heaven could I have one on my person?"

"I said a gat!" declared the detective. "A plugger! A fire stick! A gun!"

"Oh! How peculiar! I have no—er —gat upon me. You may search me if you like."

"I'll just do that little thing," the detective said.

He found no weapon on the professor, and sent him toward the rear of the building. He whispered to the night attendant what he was doing and stepped to the telephone. He got a connection with another man hired by Waldron.

"Tell the boss that I've caught the professor and am holding him in the garage next to his apartment house," he said. "If he isn't coming over, telephone me here."

Brute Wilger had observed all that had taken place. Wilger knew a pinch when he saw one. He knew that his friend, the professor, was in serious trouble. He walked near the door of the garage and overheard the detective's part of the telephone conversation. He also heard the officer mention Waldron while speaking to the garage attendant.

Wilger went back down the street and stepped into a corner delicatessen store. He knew the number of Madam Madcap's private wire and soon had the connection. Sambo answered the call, and what Wilger said brought Madam Madcap herself to the instrument.

"Got the professor!" Wilger explained. "He was goin' in his old apartment, and one of Waldron's dicks

nabbed him. They've got him in the garage just this side of the apartment house, and Waldron's been sent for."

"Get out of the neighborhood and return here as soon as possible," Madam Madcap instructed. "I'll do the rest."

Wilger was only too glad to obey. He was eager to help his friend, the professor, but he did not care to remain in a neighborhood peopled with detectives. He walked rapidly across town toward the Circle, hoping that he would be able to catch a downtown express as soon as he reached the subway platform.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MISSING PRISONER.

NATURALLY the professor was disconcerted, but he did not allow it to appear on the surface. He walked away from the detective, turned, and regarded him as a man does a curiosity of some sort. He adjusted his spectacles, removed them and polished them, put them upon his nose again, and stood with hands behind his back, teetering on heels and toes, as if investigating some new sort of zoölogical specimen.

He was thinking, meanwhile, of escape. A way did not seem to present itself. A glance convinced the professor that getting through one of the windows would be a task that could be accomplished only with the aid of several hours' time and proper tools. One of the two big doors in front had been closed, and the detective and the garage attendant stood before the other.

The professor was not a profane man, yet he muttered something under his breath that was suspiciously akin to an oath. He sat down on a chair that happened to be near one of the walls and looked at the detective again. The officer was a large man and appeared to be of considerable strength. He was watching the professor carefully, and his right fist rested against his hip in a suggestive fashion. The professor did not doubt that the detective had a weapon and was ready to use it.

So he gave up all thoughts of immediate escape. He decided that, if it came to the worst, he merely would refuse to talk at all. If he did talk, it would be to repeat the story that he had told Waldron, of being a hired escort and being summarily dismissed. Regarding subsequent events, only Waldron had seen him with Madam Madcap in the alley back of the Darcan residence, and it would be the professor against Waldron in court—an even affair.

Waldron, at that moment, was breaking the speed laws to get to the garage. If his man indeed had caught the professor, Waldron intended to question the prisoner carefully, threaten arrest, do anything and everything to get Salwick to talk. Waldron was working, primarily, on the Hamilton Brone case. He was eager to get his hands on the professor and Madam Madcap before the police did so, to ascertain all that he could about Brone, to save him if possible, for his wife's sake.

The taxicab he had engaged came to a stop before the little garage, and Waldron sprang out. He looked past the detective and saw the professor, and his heart rejoiced. He had feared that there had been some sort of a mistake, or that the professor would escape prior to his arrival.

Waldron entered the garage and stood regarding the professor through narrowed eyes. Then he waved the garage attendant and the operative back, and advanced toward the prisoner.

"The last time we met," said Waldron, "you knocked me down."

"I remember it distinctly," said the professor. "I skinned my knuckles."

"You also lied to me."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Lied to me!" Waldron declared, watching every move of the other man.

"I maintain that you err," the professor told him. "I shall demonstrate that you err, and then, at the proper time, I shall call you to account for that remark. I told you, if I remember correctly, that I had been summarily dismissed by Madam Madcap. I had been —that particular evening."

Waldron stepped closer to him. "You'd better talk, and talk straight," he said. "I'm giving you a chance to make things easier for yourself. I want to know all that you know concerning what happened to Hamilton Brone. I want to know where I can get my hands on this Madam Madcap."

"Any other little favors you desire?" the professor asked.

"If you don't talk, and that quickly, you're going to jail. The police have been looking for you."

"I am flattered at all this attention. Why don't you turn me over to the police? Do it—and you'll never learn much concerning Hamilton Brone. Nobody saw me that night except you. I shall stick to my story—I was a hired escort for Madam Madcap and was dismissed by her. What she has done since that time is none of my business. Put that into your pipe and smoke it—or was it puff it? No matter!"

Here was a game, Waldron realized, that he would have to play carefully or lose. He turned away for an instant, thinking, glancing through the garage door and down the street. An exclamation of surprise escaped him. Coming up the street from the distant Avenue was a big limousine that Waldron recognized instantly, with Sambo behind the wheel.

He ordered his assistant to watch the professor closely, ran into the street, and held up his hand. Sambo brought the big car to a stop in front of him. Waldron showed his shield.

"Turn right into that garage!" Waldron ordered.

"Mah goodness, boss, I don' want no dickerin' wid de police."

"Do as I tell you!" Waldron commanded.

Sambo obeyed. The professor looked at him in astonishment, and Sambo, sure that Waldron could not see, closed one eye slowly. The professor turned away.

"Get down and come here!" Waldron commanded. He felt that things were coming his way at last. He would take Sambo outside and question him, try to frighten him, compare his story with that of the professor, play one against the other after the old method and so attempt to gain information of value.

He ordered the garage attendant to close and lock the doors and step outside with the agency operative. Waldron knew that the professor could not escape. He took Sambo by the arm and stood him against the garage wall.

"Now, my man, you are liable to be in serious trouble," Waldron said.

"Ah don' understand none ob dis."

"You drove a masked woman known as Madam Madcap, and she is wanted by the police for robbery."

"Mah goodness!"

"You're working with her and you know it. You haven't had your car at the usual garage——"

"Ah moved to a garage downtown, boss, 'cause I'se haulin' a lot ob dem Wall Street folks now an' den."

"I'll investigate that story later. The other evening I almost caught Madam Madcap—and at the time she was walking down the street to where you were waiting for her with that limousine. So you can't pretend that you know nothing. Open that mouth of yours and talk, and it'll be easier for you."

"How you do go on! White man,

you is got me wrong!" Sambo declared. "I hires mah cyar to any folks what hab de coin to pay for it. Y'all can 'vestigate at dat garage downtown. I'se a hahd-workin' colored man, I is, an' I can prove it. Don't you go to 'asperatin' an' rilin' me, white man. Y'all jus' staht somethin' an' see where y'all lands!"

"So you've got a little story all fixed up, have you?"

"An' I'se got 'fluential friends in Wall Street," Sambo declared. "I reckon dey would hire me a lawyer an' sue y'all foh pesterin' me. If yuh wants to take me to de police station, go right ahead an' take me. An', if yuh don't, I'll be drivin' that cyar ob mine away from hyar."

"How do you happen to be in this neighborhood anyway?" Waldron asked.

"I'se returnin' from dribin' a lady from downtown to uptown," Sambo replied.

Waldron was doing some fast thinking. He did not relish the confident manner of Sambo. It seemed to tell him that Sambo had a few cards up his sleeve, in a manner of speaking. Having considerable of the world's goods and a hatred of being made a public laughing-stock, Waldron did not care to be sued for damages. He tried another scheme.

"My man," said he, "you probably have a wrong idea concerning this. I am a criminal investigator, so-called, but I am not connected with the police in an ordinary capacity. Madam Madcap and some of her associates, it is alleged, robbed a certain residence. The police are busy on the case. But what I am interested in is the fate of a gentleman named Hamilton Brone."

"How y'all does talk!"

"He has disappeared, and the night he disappeared he left a certain cabaret with Madam Madcap, and in your limousine. I saw them leave myself. I want to know where you took them, especially Hamilton Brone. It is Hamilton Brone I want. Tell me where to get him, and there is five hundred dollars in it for you."

Sambo blinked his eyes rapidly. "Don' y'all read de papers?" he asked. "Dey have said as how dat gem'man am a criminal. Dey found his finger prints——"

"I want real news!" Waldron interrupted.

"I sure would like to have dat five hun'erd, boss, but I cain't earn her," Sambo said. "Is y'll goin' take me to jail or turn me loose?"

Waldron hesitated a moment and then reached a decision.

"I suppose I'll have to turn you loose," he said. "You won't talk for five hundred?"

"Not a word, boss—not a word."

"Where is that garage downtown?"

Sambo told him, and Waldron wrote down the address. He did not doubt that the big chauffeur told the truth. He saw that the number had not been changed on the limousine, and realized that Sambo would do nothing as crude as that. Waldron decided to let him go, to question the professor further and turn him over to the police as a last resort, and to watch Sambo and his limousine afterward, if his interview with the professor was not productive of results he anticipated.

"You can get your limousine and drive away," Waldron said. "But do not think that I am done with you. I have no time to waste on you now. If you are associated with that woman, you'll be clever enough not to lead me to her; if you are not, there is no reason for bothering about you."

"Dat am common sense!" Sambo said.

"And if, at any time, you feel inclined to earn that five hundred dollars, look me up," Waldron added.

He went back to the door of the

garage, opened it, and motioned for Sambo to go in to his limousine. Waldron stepped inside himself, determined to have it out with the professor. He glanced rapidly around the interior of the building. The professor was gone!

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED RESCUE.

THE professor had watched Waldron close the door of the garage and then had turned to sit down on the limousine step. He realized, naturally, that Sambo would be grilled, and he felt confident that the big negro was a match for the detective. That part did not bother him, but his predicament did.

He wondered how it happened that Sambo had driven by with the limousine at that particular time, and what had become of Brute Wilger, hoping that Waldron would not see the latter and learn of his connection with Madam Madcap. The professor confessed to a certain sort of fondness for Wilger.

He looked at the windows again and once more decided that there was no chance of escape that way. He had some idea of standing near the door, of making a dash when it was opened again, and attempting a get-away in that manner, but he doubted whether it would succeed.

And then he heard a sibilant whisper that caused him to spring aside and whirl around. It seemed to come from the limousine, and the professor turned back to it.

"Professor!" the whisper came again.

"Yes?" he answered.

"This is Madam Madcap. I am in the limousine, beneath the rear seat. Prepare to get beneath the driver's seat, as you did before. Let me know when it is safe, and I'll open it."

"Make haste!" the professor said. "They are outside, and the door is closed."

"Dodge in, then."

The professor glanced toward the entrance of the garage, opened the door of the limousine, and dodged in. The aperture beneath the driver's seat yawned before him. That beneath the rear seat was open, and he could see Madam Madcap's eyes twinkling through the slits in her mask.

"My dear Madam Madcap——" the professor began.

"Get inside! Hurry! Wilger telephoned, and I took a chance of rescuing you this way," she said. "Sambo has his orders. Get in—and do not try to get out until I give the word!"

The professor got in, and the aperture was closed. A moment later, Waldron came into the garage.

The investigator called to his man and bade the attendant close the door again.

"He's gone—gone!" Waldron exclaimed.

"Couldn't be!" the garage man said. "He never came out of the door, did he? And he couldn't get through one of those windows. He's around one of those cars."

Half a dozen cars were parked in the garage. Waldron's man darted back to the door and stood before it, a revolver in his hand. Waldron and the garage attendant began the search.

It did not take them long. Though Waldron scarcely could believe it, he knew that the professor was not in the garage. He stood in the middle of the room, a foolish expresson on his face.

"He couldn't get out—he couldn't!" Waldon declared.

"Well, he ain't here," replied the garage attendant.

"But he didn't go through that door. He couldn't have climbed out of any of the windows."

"And there's no other way out of this cement building except a drain pipe five inches in diameter," the garage man said. "Your prisoner was a thin man, but not that thin."

"Then he's in here!" Waldron cried. "We'll look again."

They did. The professor was not around any of the cars, that they could see. There was no place, seemingly, where he could hide. Sambo, standing against one of the walls with his arms folded, did not even grin. In fact, he appeared a bit frightened.

"I don't like dis business!" he said.

"Shut up!" Waldron commanded.

"Dat professor man looks mighty like a ha'nt to me," Sambo persisted. "Y'all got no business keepin' me where dere is ha'nts!"

Waldron opened the door of the limousine. He stepped into the car, poked at the cushions, lifted them, opened the little storage box. He got out and peered beneath the car again. Then he stood up and scratched at his head.

"I suppose it is simple when you know the answer," he said. "He is gone—that is plain. But where he went is a mystery."

"I don' like——" Sambo began.

"Shut up and get out of here!" Waldron commanded.

"Ef dere is a ha'nt around mah cyar——"

"Dry up!" Waldron shouted.

Sambo, still muttering, got behind the wheel and started the engine. He backed and turned the car, and rolled it slowly toward the entrance.

"Pull up at the curb when you get outside," Waldron instructed. "I'm not done with you yet. We're going to have a little explanation about this thing. I'll leave my man here to watch this garage and I'll have you drive me to the nearest police station."

Sambo did not reply. He guided the big limousine through the door, allowed a passing car to dart ahead of him, turned his own machine in the street, guided it majestically toward the curb —and stepped on the accelerator!

The big car swerved from the curb just in time to prevent a crash, and darted down the street. Waldron gave a shriek and ran after it foolishly, then turned and sprang for his taxicab. But he knew, even as he jumped in, that he had lost. Two blocks down the street, Sambo was turning the limousine into the Avenue.

Sambo had no difficulty in losing the pursuing taxicab in the traffic, in fact Waldron never caught sight of the limousine again. Avoiding the usual thoroughfares, Sambo made his way toward the lower end of the city. Far downtown, he touched a button that rang a little bell in the tonneau.

Madam Madcap came from beneath the rear seat, lowered the curtains, and then opened the storage box and signaled to the professor.

"Come out," she said, "we are almost home."

The professor was glad to comply. He wiped the perspiration from his face and hands, adjusted his cravat, and looked at Madam Madcap.

"Why did you take the risk?" he asked. "They might have captured you. Why did you not merely send Sambo with the limousine?"

"I was afraid you might not think of the way of escape."

"But you ran a great risk," the professor declared. "It were better that I be incarcerated than that you be captured and everything wrecked."

"You see," Madam Madcap said, "I consider you a very important member of my band."

"Of course! I understand! You would have done as much for any of the boys," he said.

Madam Madcap turned toward him, and her voice was softer when she spoke again.

"Professor, for a man of brains, you are wonderfully dense at times," she replied.

The professor blinked his eyes and regarded her thoughtfully. He sensed

that there was something he did not fully understand. Had Madam Madcap's mask been off, he might have read the solution in her face. As it was, the professor sighed, and remarked to himself that women were queer creatures.

"Not long since," he told Madam Madcap, "you attempted to dissuade me from a life of crime, intimating that I did not possess the proper criminal instinct, or something like that. Now you say that I am one of the most important members of your organization. Can I be happy in the thought that you have a personal interest, that it is something more than concern for the safety of one of your associates in—er—business?"

"Possibly," she replied.

"My dear Madam Madcap!"

The professor's voice rang, he moved nearer to her, and attempted to get possession of one of her hands.

"Professor!" she warned.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You are an authority on physics, I believe."

"I have been so designated."

"Then you must know that the farther a body falls, the faster it goes."

"That is a well-known principle," the professor said. "It is the law of gravity. But I fail to understand its application at this moment."

"You must be falling hard—you show so much speed," she replied.

A suspicious, delightful ripple of merriment came from behind the mask, and just then Sambo stopped the limousine at the mouth of the alley.

To be concluded in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out on Tuesday, October 21st. Do not forget that the magazine is published every week, and that you will not have long to wait for another installment of this serial.

GIRL RUNS DOWN ESCAPED PRISONERS

WHILE Miss Alice Schair, a school teacher, daughter of the sheriff of Brule County, South Dakota, was visiting her father a short time ago, two robbers escaped from the jail near by. Their departure was not discovered until several hours later, when searching parties at once went out to recapture them.

The posses, however, were not looking in the right direction. This was realized by the sheriff's daughter when a telephone message was received at the jail, reporting the fugitives as being near Chamberlain.

All available men had been withdrawn from the jail for the pursuit, so Miss Schair acted promptly in the emergency. Taking an automatic revolver with her, the courageous girl persuaded an automobilist to drive her to the locality where the escaped men were said to be in hiding. As the automobile drew up alongside the woods where the outlaws had concealed themselves Miss Schair stepped onto the running board of the car, and, after firing two shots into the air as a warning, ordered the men to surrender.

The jailbreakers hesitated only a moment; then they appeared with their hands raised above their heads. They were escorted back to jail without further trouble and were later sentenced to the Sioux Falls penitentiary.

Suggested by Polly

by John Baer

Author of "A Disciple of Success," etc.

THERE wasn't a better man hunter in the world than Chief Horton. During his long career on the police force of a Western city he had directed the search for some seven hundred criminals and just nine had escaped his net. Once the chief was on your trail, it was all over. It was as easy for a man to lose his own shadow as it was for him to lose the chief.

But—and this is an important but—whenever it came to answering the question "Who did it?" the chief had to rely on others. Once the others had answered that question for him, Chief Horton could do the rest. He could capture the man and have him brought to justice.

It annoyed the chief whenever crimes were committed in which there was no clew to the identity of the perpetrator. In August there were four such cases on his books. Then some one killed Captain Peterson, and the chief was about ready for a stay in a sanitarium. Briefly, the known facts in connection with the Peterson murder were these:

Captain Peterson, a robust man of about fifty, had answered the call of the sea for some thirty years. His business consisted in making trips to India, where, off the coast of Madras, he hired professional divers to procure pearls for him. On his last trip the captain had come away with a goodly collection of the precious jewels. Arriving in the city, he had disposed of his ship and had gone to live with Mrs. Jamise, who kept a first-class boarding house on One Hundred and Twentieth Street.

The captain had become one of Mrs. Jamise's boarders on August first. On the evening of August tenth he had displayed his collection of pearls at the dinner table. All of the boarders—there were ten, seven men and three women—had handled the jewels. The captain anounced that on the following morning he would sell the pearls to a dealer and buy a country home with the proceeds. Then he had replaced his pearls in a small bag of India rubber. After dinner he had retired to his room on the second floor. No one had again seen him alive.

When the captain failed to appear the following morning for breakfast Mrs. Jamise had sent up a servant to waken him. Upon receiving no reply to her knocking, the servant had tried his door and found it unlocked. What she saw when she entered caused her to scream and faint. Mrs. Jamise and a few of her boarders hurried to the scene; they found the captain lying in a pool of blood on the floor.

Some one had presence of mind enough to phone for a doctor and the police. The doctor got there first and established that Peterson had been dead more than nine hours; that is, he must have been killed at about ten o'clock on

the evening of August tenth. His bed had not been disturbed; he had been murdered before he had retired for the night.

Chief Horton personally took charge of the case. You had to give the chief credit for one thing—he kept on trying. For three days he worked on the Peterson case to the exclusion of all other matters. During that time he answered almost every question in connection with the mystery except the all-important question, "Who did it?"

The motive for the crime was clear; Captain Peterson had been killed for his bag of pearls. Chief Horton himself had responded to the call for the police. The chief had every room in the four-story house searched; besides, every boarder had to submit to an examination of his or her person. All to no avail—the pearls were not found.

It was not difficult to make a good guess as to the method the murderer had used. Captain Peterson must have been attacked while sitting with his back to the door; that could be deduced from the position of the only chair in the room. His assailant struck him from behind with some blunt instrument. There had been no struggle—the captain's skull was cracked in three places, and each fracture was in itself sufficient to cause immediate death. On being hit, the captain must have lurched forward and slipped out of his chair to the floor.

As has already been stated, the time of the murder was about ten o'clock on the evening of August tenth. All of Mrs. Jamise's boarders admitted that they were in the house at that time. Some of them were already asleep, some were on the point of retiring, some were busy in their rooms doing this thing and that. None of them had heard an outcry or any suspicious sounds.

There were four rooms on the second floor. Right at the head of the stairway was Joe Munsen's. Next to Munsen's room to the left was Peterson's. Then came Mr. Blake's room, and then Mr. Carney's. All four rooms had doors which opened into the hallway. Naturally most of the suspicion attached itself to the men who were on the same floor with the captain. The chief gave them a severe grilling, and the chief was some griller—but they stuck like glue to their stories. Each one of these three men insisted that on the night of the murder he had retired before ten o'clock and had slept soundly till morning.

The window of Captain Peterson's room faced a small narrow courtyard. This courtyard was all that separated Mrs. Jamise's house from a house on One Hundred and Twenty-first Street. The rear windows of this latter house faced the room of the murdered man. On the night of the crime the moon was full; besides, there was a light in the captain's room, so that if any one in the house to the rear of Mrs. Jamise's had been looking out of the window at the time of the tragedy he or she certainly must have been a witness to it. Chief Horton investigated, of course. Unfortunately no one had been looking out of his courtyard window that evening.

There were no clews to the identity of the murderer—no footprints, no finger prints, no marks of any kind. The instrument was not found. All we could be reasonably sure of was that it was an inside job, for Mrs. Jamise's house door showed no signs of having been tampered with.

An inside job, yes. But there had been twelve people on the inside—Mrs. Jamise, a servant, and ten boarders. It was physically possible for any one of the twelve to have committed the deed. But which one?

Well, after two days of fuming and raging, Chief Horton did what every one knew he would eventually do—he put Walter Gray on the case. At that

time Gray was climbing toward the top rung of his profession at a remarkable gait. The chief was a bit jealous, but he never allowed his jealousy to interfere with his sound judgment. This was clearly a case for Gray, and Gray got it.

He asked for one man to help him, and since I had been working with the chief and was well acquainted with the known facts, I was assigned.

Gray and I headed uptown to Mrs. Jamise's on the morning of August thirteenth. It was a beautiful day, so we decided to walk the short mile.

"Well, buddy," said Gray, "you've been on this case. Give me the facts, will you, and tell me who did it?"

"If I knew who did it," I replied, "I wouldn't tell you; I'd catch the man and get the credit myself."

Thereupon I gave Gray such facts as have already been rehearsed. Then I asked him how he intended going about his task of finding the guilty person.

"Well," he replied, "since there are no clews and no witnesses, it looks as though we'd have to find the pearls and through them——"

"Find the pearls! You've got a fine job on your hands, Gray, if that is your intention. You don't mean to tell me you're going to search that house all over again after the chief——"

"Did he search the *entire* house?"

"From attic to cellar. Every square inch was accounted for. You know how thorough the chief is in his methods. When he does a thing——"

"It's done. True enough, buddy. If the chief searched that house I certainly will not do it again. By the way, at what time did he——"

"He had the place searched twice. Soon as he got there on the morning the body was discovered. All of the boarders were still in. Then, last night, just before turning the case over to you, he dropped in unannounced at Jamise's and made a second search. The boarders were having dinner when the chief entered. He politely requested each one of them to submit to another examination, and each one of them politely consented. Then the house was fine-combed once more. We looked especially for trick doors, trick furniture, trick carpets. I'll bet my soul, Gray, that the pearls were not inside that house on the morning of August eleventh or on the evening of August twelfth."

"Then, if the pearls were no longer in the house on the morning of August eleventh, it follows that they must have been taken out of the house some time during the night of August tenth. Now let us assume it was an inside job—a fact of which we can be reasonably certain. The murderer must have taken the pearls out of the house after he had killed the captain—must have disposed of them—and then returned to his own room! Wouldn't that be unusual?"

"Very," I admitted.

'I suppose all pawnbrokers and jewelers have a description of——"

"Gray, I'm surprised. You don't think for a minute the chief would overlook a detail of such importance, do you?"

We reached Mrs. Jamise's and were ushered upstairs into the captain's room. All of the boarders were out, which saved us the annoyance of talking in whispers.

"Now that we're here, buddy, what are we going to do?" asked Gray.

"Search me," I replied, taking a seat on the bed.

"What do you know about these three fellows, Blake, Munsen, and Carney?"

"Everything, Gray. We got their past histories and their pedigrees way back to their great-grandfathers. They're what they say they are. Blake is an engineer in a milk-bottling plant, Munsen is a floorwalker in a depart-

ment store, and Carney is an architect. The chief manhandled them dreadfully—you know how deliberately brutal he is in his cross-examinations. But those three fellows held their ground and refused to be bluffed. They were asleep before ten and heard nothing—that's been their story every time they told it."

Gray stepped over to the open window. "Isn't it too bad, buddy, that on the night of the murder no one was looking out of any of those windows across the courtyard? What with the full moon and the light burning in this room——"

Gray was interrupted by a shrill whistle. There was a pause. Then the whistler proceeded to plow his way through the song:

Oh, the ocean waves may roll,
And the stormy winds may blow,
While we poor sailors go skipping to the tops,
And the land-lubbers lie down below, below, below.

"I'll be hanged, Gray," said I, "if I ever heard a human being whistle that way before!"

Gray smiled. "It's not a human being you're hearing now. Take a peek."

I stepped to Gray's side. On the sill of a window in the second floor of the house across the courtyard was a cage containing a huge green parrot.

"Fine specimen, eh?" said Gray.

"Never seen a finer."

The polly stopped whistling.

"Hello old sport," volunteered Gray.

"Hello, yourself!" came the prompt response.

"Nice weather we're having," Gray continued the conversation.

"You're damn right, mate," said Polly.

An old, pleasant-faced Irishwoman appeared at the window. "You must excuse this bird, sorr," she called across to Gray. "I got him from a sailor and I haven't had him long enough yet to teach him civilized English. I'll take him right in."

"No, no, please," said Gray quickly. And then: "Madam, do you keep the cage on that sill nights?"

"Yis, sorr; always in warm weather. Day and night so long as his language don't hurt the neighbors' feelings."

"Then, if you don't mind, let him out a while longer now. I should like to talk to him."

"Certainly. I don't mind, if you don't." She closed the window and disappeared.

"What's the grand idea?" I asked.

"The idea," explained Gray, "is that that polly's cage is on the exact level with this window—and directly opposite. And this courtyard isn't more than ten feet wide. If he was really on that sill on the night of August tenth—and if he was awake—he could hardly have failed to see what was going on in this room."

An amused chuckle escaped me. "How does that help us?"

"Probably not at all. But the bird may say something of value. We'll repeat the crime and see how he reacts to the spectacle. Here! You're the captain, I'm the assailant. Sit here in this chair. This way. Now!"

Well, we staged a little murder scene for polly's amusement. And he certainly talked.

"Buckets of blood!" he screamed as Gray struck me a blow from behind. "Croak the critter! Soak him again!"

I lurched forward and fell to the floor. Gray went to the dresser, where it was assumed the captain had kept his pearls, and drew out a small paper bag which happened to be lying in the top drawer.

"The pipe!" cried polly. "The pipe! the pipe!"

"Pipe?" repeated Gray, puzzled.

"When the captain was killed he was smoking his pipe," I exclaimed. "The bird may be referring to that, but I

don't think there's anything to it, Gray."

"Let's do it all over again," Gray suggested. "Perhaps with repetition the bird will vary its comments."

We acted the scene four times. But "Buckets of blood!" and "The pipe!" was all that polly would say.

At length we gave it up. Gray pulled out his watch and made his inevitable remark, which was, "When in doubt, go to a variety show. But first we'll have lunch."

We had a bite to eat and then dropped into the matinée of a cheap uptown vaudeville house. We sat through a pretty good juggling act and listened to a comedian tell new jokes. Then they put on a feature picture. It was one of those "Dangers of Daphne" affairs, in which the hero fights twenty episodes with the villun and then marries the gal, b'gosh!

The particular spasm we watched opened with the heroine in the arms of the black, black scoundrel. She tore away from him and made a hair-raising get-away via the fire-escape, which ran down the rear of the house. The heroine was in a hurry; therefore she jumped instead of climbing down, proving thereby that her soul was more precious to her by far than her neck.

Right at this point Gray seized his hat and started from the theater. I rose to follow him, but he thrust me back into my seat. "I just remembered I got a date," he said. "You stay here and watch the rest of the show. Meet me at Mrs. Jamise's at six."

I arrived at the boarding house promptly at the appointed hour and found Gray in the room which had been Captain Peterson's. Mrs. Jamise has invited us to stay for dinner," he said. "Come on; I want to meet the three men whose rooms are on this floor."

When we entered the dining room, which was on the ground floor rear, all the boarders were seated about the table. Mrs. Jamise introduced us by our real names and also mentioned that we were detectives working on the Peterson case.

Naturally the conversation soon drifted to the subject of the murder. The women expressed their horror; some of the men, regardless of our presence, expressed their indignation that the police had failed to find the guilty person.

"Just how much headway have you fellows made?" asked Mr. Joe Munsen.

"Very little," admitted Gray, "but that is——"

"That's generally the way," broke in Mr. Blake; "those crimes which are most atrocious and which stir up public interest are seldom solved."

"I was going to say," continued Gray, "that while the police have thus far been helpless, we have been assured by an outsider that he will solve the case for us."

I was about to exclaim in surprise at this statement when Gray gave me a severe kick in the shins. I held my peace.

"Private detective?" asked Carney.

"No. Traveling salesman."

"Amateur detective on the side, eh?" mocked Munsen. "Those fellows give me a pain."

"He's not an amateur sleuth, Munsen. "He's the man who witnessed the——"

"Witnessed!" came from the crowd.

"I thought your chief had definitely settled that point," spoke up Blake. "We understand that he examined every one living in the house across the courtyard and that no one admitted having looked out of his window at the time of the murder. The tenants of that house are the only ones who could have witnessed the tragedy."

"Unless," volunteered Joe Munsen, "some one in *this* house has been lying."

"The man in question did not witness the crime," explained Gray. "That's why he hasn't come forward before this. It's this way: He lives on the second floor of the house across the courtyard. His window is directly opposite the captain's. On the night of the crime he saw some one in this house lean out of a window, and that some one had a small object in his hand. On the following morning, before the captain's body was discovered, my witness hurried away to catch an early train to Pittsburgh, and dismissed the incident from his mind. But when he read about the Peterson murder in the newspapers he reached the conclusion that the man he saw was the murderer, and the small object was the bag of pearls. Now my witness saw where those pearls were hidden. He phoned to headquarters and promised to be on hand to-morrow morning to point out the hiding place!"

"If he knows so much about it," said Blake, "why didn't he tell right over the phone where——"

"He said it would be difficult for him to make himself clear, but that if he were right on the spot he could point out the place at once. To-morrow morning we'll find them if we have to take this house apart brick by brick. Once we have the pearls we'll find the murderer, too."

Gray and I finished our dinner before the rest of the boarders and took our leave at once. Mrs. Jamise accompanied us into the hall. We walked along the hall to the front door.

Gray said in a voice loud enough for all in the dining room to hear: "Thank you, Mrs. Jamise, for your splendid dinner. We'll be back to-morrow morning at nine with our witness and four other men. I hope it won't be necessary for us to cause too much disturbance. Good evening!"

"Good evening, Mr. Gray," said the woman.

Whereupon Gray opened the front door and closed it again with a bang. But instead of leaving the house he remained standing in the hall. And to my utter astonishment, Mrs. Jamise, who had seen him remain, turned about and walked back into the dining room!

"Say, what the——" I started, but Gray put his hand over my mouth.

"Silence," he whispered, "or you'll spoil it all."

He headed noiselessly up the stairway, motioning me to follow. We entered Captain Peterson's room.

"No talking and no lights!" admonished Gray. "We may have a long wait ahead of us. Amuse yourself, dear buddy, by reflecting in silence upon all your old love affairs."

I reflected, all right, but not upon my love affairs. I wondered what Gray's object had been in fooling the boarders into believing that he had left the house. I did some thinking, too, about the witness who was to return from Pittsburgh and point out the hiding place of the pearls. But I could arrive at no solution to the puzzle.

Well, for four hours we just sat. We could hear the boarders retiring to their rooms. Gradually things quieted down till all was still. Gray placed his chair near the window, which was open, and seemed to be listening for something.

Near midnight we heard a scratching sound against the outside of the house. The noise must have come from directly beside our window.

Gray plucked me by the coat. "You may need your gun," he whispered. "Ready?" We tiptoed out of the room into the hall and took our position at the head of the stairway.

After some few minutes of waiting the door of Joe Munsen's room was quietly opened from the inside and a man stepped into the darkness of the hallway.

Gray hurled himself upon the man.

There followed muttered oaths and curses, then the flaying of arms and the kicking of legs. I tried to go to Gray's assistance, but in the darkness I could not tell the men apart. Finally one of them was hurled down the stairs. Then came the flash of powder and the report of an exploded cartridge.

"Light, buddy!" It was Gray's voice. "Lights, for Heaven's sake!"

I switched on the hall light. Gray came staggering up the stairs. "Hurry," he called, "see if he's done for himself."

I turned over the body of the man who was lying on the floor. Joe Munsen had a bullet in his forehead; he was quite dead. Beside him lay a leather satchel. Gray opened it and drew out a bag of India rubber. Inside this bag were Captain Peterson's pearls!

The next morning, in the chief's office, Gray made his report.

"First thing I want to know," said Chief Horton, "is how the deuce you discovered the hiding place of those pearls."

"A little birdie told me," Gray smiled.

"The polly!" I exclaimed. "But Gray, about all that critter would say was 'Buckets of blood!' and 'The pipe.'"

"Well, it happened to be suggestive of pipes to me. Not of smoking pipes, which you thought of, but of drain pipes."

"Drain pipes!"

"I found the answer at the theater," explained Gray. "You will recall the scene in which Daphne jumps from the fire escape. That scene showed us the rear of a house—and down the wall ran a drain pipe. It occurred to me that such might also be the case at Mrs. Jamise's, so I hurried from the theater to investigate."

"I'll be doggoned," cried the chief, "if I didn't look at that drain pipe at least a dozen times! But it never occurred to me——"

"It would never have occurred to me, either, that the pearls were hidden inside of it," admitted Gray. "It took a polly and a moving picture to ram the idea into my head. Well, when I investigated, I found that the pipe at Mrs. Jamise's ran down the rear of the house between the windows of Captain Peterson's room and Joe Munsen's. At a point on the level with these windows the pipe was pieced. I found, however, that the soldering had been worn away and the pipe could easily be pulled apart. The pieces overlapped some six inches. The inside piece had a ragged edge, and the India rubber bag had a string to it. Munsen simply hung the loop of the string on the ragged edge of the inside piece of pipe—an act which he could have performed in less than a minute. And then, after the pipe was put together again, the pearls were hidden out of sight. The circumference of the pipe was much larger than the small bag, so the flow of water was not interfered with. Besides, the India rubber bag protected the pearls from dampness."

"What was your idea in manufacturing that story about your traveling salesman witness?" I asked.

"I figured that only one person could know where those pearls were, and that was the man who had hidden them—the murderer. I knew he must be one of Mrs. Jamise's boarders, but which one? I told my story at the dinner table in the presence of all the boarders, because I figured that if he believed the pearls would be recovered in the morning he would make an attempt during the night to get them himself and then run for it. Which is just what Joe Munsen tried to do."

"Tell me, Gray," said the chief, "did you suspect Munsen all along?"

"No. I hadn't the slightest idea which person in the house was the

guilty one. The only person I excluded from my list of suspects was Mrs. Jamise herself, who so very kindly helped me stage that fake exit from her house. But it might have been any one of the others. You see, the pipe can be reached from the captain's window as well as from Munsen's. For all I knew the murderer might have put them in the pipe from the captain's window immediately after having committed the crime."

"It's too bad that Munsen killed himself when he saw he was cornered," I declared. "If he had lived we might have learned the details of the murder."

"The only detail we can't be sure of," said Gray, "is the manner in which Munsen entered the captain's room. It's clear why he didn't wait until Peterson had retired before attempting the crime. Munsen probably figured that Peterson would lock his door when he went to bed. Picking a lock is an easy job if you know how, but Munsen probably didn't know how. So he decided he'd have to get into Peterson's room while Peterson was still awake and the door unlocked. Munsen may have entered the room with the captain after dinner and killed his man during a conversation, or he may have sneaked in unseen and struck him down from behind.

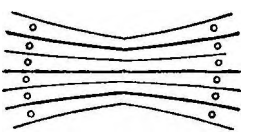
"Munsen knew, of course, that the police would search every room in the house, including his own. He had to hide the pearls somewhere—so much was self-evident. The drain pipe may have been an inspiration of the moment—or he may have planned in advance to hide the pearls there until the excitement had blown over."

"If he had only run away!" reflected the chief. "That would have made it a case for *me*, and——"

"They don't do that any more, chief," said Gray. "That is, not the clever ones. Running away is a confession of guilt. If there are no witnesses it is safer to stay on the spot and take your chances that the police will not be able to get enough circumstantial evidence to fasten the crime upon you."

The chief slapped Gray on the back. "Chance, did you say? My boy, when you're on a case, the criminal has no chance!"

Thereupon he passed around the cigars.



PASSING OF THE "ALIMONY CLUB"

LUDLOW STREET JAIL, New York, most of whose inmates were, until recently widely known as the Alimony Club, lost its reputation during the last year as housing mainly men who had refused court orders to pay alimony to their former wives. Of the two hundred and thirty-eight prisoners placed in the jail in that period, many were held on charges brought against them by the Federal government. Moreover, seventy-five members of the Alimony Club decided before three days had passed since their commitment that they preferred to obey the courts rather than remain longer in their cramped quarters.

Four of the persons detained in Ludlow Street Jail during the year were women, fifty-five were college graduates, while seventeen could neither read nor write. There were more salesmen among the inmates than persons from any other occupation. Clerks were second in number.

Showing the Way

by C. O. Ates

Author of "Blind Clews," etc.

SANWOOD HARRIS sat alone in his darkened library and grimly faced as much of the future as remained to him. The silence of his thoughts was broken only by the very faint and regular sound of breathing that came from above stairs, where Mrs. Taylor, his faithful old housekeeper, slept.

He marveled speculatively at the abnormal acuteness of his hearing that enabled him to detect the sound so readily. It seemed to represent life to him, this peaceful breathing. He thought of the interruption that must soon come to it; of the horror and fright of the good old soul who had ministered to him like a mother ever since he had hung his fresh parchment diploma on the wall and started in a modest way the practice that was, in his bright youthful dreams, to bring fame and fortune to his door. To her placid existence of proud and contented service must come a cruel uprooting, one that he would have given much to spare her; but at least there remained for her other years, new scenes, and the perpetually elusive chance of happiness that gives the zest to life. For him there remained only—this.

He fondled the revolver that lay so harmlessly in his hand. A small thing, a simple thing, to mean so much—to have so great a power over all that was vital to man, its creator. A very small beam of brightness from some distant star danced from the nickeled surface of the barrel mockingly. Yes, for him it was the only way; he had thought everything out to this conclusion. But he felt a twinge at the thought of the woman upstairs; and he was sorry that he could not provide in some way for her, show some measure of his appreciation, so that she, at least, would remember him with tears and blessings instead of curses.

Fame and fortune! The first, in a small way, was his. He was rated as the best lawyer in the county, and outside his profession, too, he had built up a structure of confidence and respect among his fellow citizens. Beyond all doubt he would have been named, even by his few enemies, as one of the strong pillars of the community. That fact, and the pride which he had in it, were forcing him irresistibly to the step he was about to take.

As for fortune, he had prospered moderately. His own tastes were simple, his wants few; much of the money he made had gone into unobtrusive charities of one kind or another. He wondered if the people he had helped would join in reviling him.

But there had come a time when it galled him to see men inferior to himself enjoying a material prosperity which he had never been able to attain; when he wanted to equal, to surpass their success, not so much from selfish motives as to satisfy his own innate sense of the justice of things. How he could have shown them the uses of wealth! Not vain ostentation, but simple helpfulness would have been the keynote; not reckless extravagance, but useful giving and lending—much the same sort of thing as he had always done, but on a larger scale, and

without the accompaniment of sneers to the effect that he had better look to his own bread and butter before being generous.

Well, he had fallen, and there was no palliation of his offense. He could forgive weakness in others, but not in himself. And as a lawyer he had realized perfectly what he was doing when he had used the funds of the Henry Bartlett estate—of which he was the sole executor without bonds—to speculate in the stock market. It had all seemed so certain and so safe at the time—the general upward trend in stocks, together with his particular reasons for confidence in the ones he had selected. But the impossible had happened; his margins had been wiped out, and his dreams of wealth had vanished, tearing down and taking with them even the modest position of esteem and security that he had worked so faithfully to build up.

Through all his bitter meditations on the circumstances one thing stood out noticeably: his regrets were not in any measure prompted by any feeling for the heir whose patrimony he had wasted. Wayne Bartlett, wild, dissolute, mean, and crafty all in one, was far from being a credit to his father or an ornament to the community. Without money he might possibly have amounted to something—might even yet, for that matter, now that the money was gone. With it, on the other hand, he would simply have ruined and disgraced himself and as many others as he could drag into his friendship. So far as he was concerned, Harris had done him a good turn by removing him from the influence of unearned riches.

Old Henry Bartlett had realized this partly. His will had stipulated that Wayne should not come into full possession of the property until he reached the age of twenty-five. Meanwhile he was to be doled out an allowance of one hundred dollars a month by the lawyer, who might, however, increase the amount, entirely at his own discretion. Since the young man was now only twenty-three, there were yet two years before Harris need make his final accounting—two years in which it would be conceivably possible, though not at all probable, that he might largely replace the lost inheritance by resorting to greater frugality, sharper business methods, and more fortunate speculations.

But one fact closed the door of hope against Stanwood Harris: young Bartlett had begun to suspect that all was not as it should be. What had aroused his suspicions was not known to the lawyer; the fact that he had them, and that on investigation they could not be disproved, was sufficient. There had always been an antipathy between the two, based, no doubt, on their totally different characters and habits. Since old Mr. Bartlett's death this had ripened, on the part of Wayne Bartlett, to a hatred of the one man who, as executor, stood between him and his father's money, and who, having the power to grant, so frequently turned a deaf ear to the young fellow's demands. On numerous occasions the lawyer had refused to advance from the estate money to pay Wayne's gambling debts, or to encourage him in his reckless course of spending; and the younger man had been put to much inconvenience and ridicule among his boon associates by his ever hard-pressed condition. It was then natural that, with or without cause, he should have hinted to the lawyer of irregularities; but since they in fact existed, Harris had no defense.

He could not stand exposure. His reputation was too dear to him, his pride too high. He had thought it over with much deliberation and had decided on the only way out. He had aroused nobody's suspicions; the thirty-eight caliber revolver, and the car-

tridges to fit it, had been in his possession for years; and he had decided on the hour of one for his departure —methodical to the last. So he sat waiting in a well-worn morris chair in the corner of his unlighted library, waiting for the hour, and grimly leaving his mind open to fugitive thoughts.

The clock in the dining room to the rear began intoning with its measured voice the hour of twelve. In the silent house its reverberations sounded startlingly loud, and he wondered that the sleeper upstairs was not aroused by the alarm, until he realized that she had become accustomed to its hourly strokes every night, as he himself had, so that they had no effect. No doubt his wakeful senses, too, were abnormally acute, in anticipation of their approaching dissolution.

His ears caught another sound, this time one that was distinctly unusual. From his dark corner the lawyer turned his eyes toward one of the front windows, whence the noise seemed to emanate. He could see very little; but the window, which he usually neglected to lock, was undoubtedly being raised. A moment later there was a soft scraping sound, and the bulk of a man's body was projected quietly into the room. Then the window was lowered again, and the shade pulled down. From there the intruder stepped to the other front window—nearer to the lurking man in the corner—and likewise drew the shade. Harris held his breath until the man moved away from him.

There was something laughable in it, after all; the burglar with utmost stealth safeguarding himself from possible discovery from without, while within a few feet of him, unseen, sat a man with a loaded revolver in his hand, alertly watching his every move. The lawyer was not beyond enjoying the situation; and while he did so he postponed the disclosure of his presence to the intruder.

The man, apparently believing himself now safe from interruption or discovery, went to the other side of the room and cautiously played the beam of an electric torch along the wall until it disclosed the door of the little old-fashioned safe. He then put out the light, and, relying on his sense of touch, set to work. From the sound Harris judged that he was drilling holes in the steel door with a hand or breast drill; and as it promised to be a long process, the lawyer remained silent.

Then, as he sat there, new possibilities crept into his mind. Suppose that he let the burglar get away unseen with the contents of the safe—which in money represented only a couple of hundred dollars—and that he permit the successful robbery to be accepted as the explanation of the disappearance of the funds of the Bartlett estate. Very probably the burglar would not be caught; even if he were, his word as to the small contents of the safe would not stand against the lawyer's. He had no idea that this was really a way out; little as he respected the dissolute heir, he yet could not bring himself to deal with him thus through the accident that fate had thrown in his hands. He had used the estate and betrayed his trust; the only thing to do was to admit it by his self-destruction. Besides, any such story as he might tell of a robbery could be construed as a subterfuge to conceal his own guilt, particularly if Wayne Bartlett had any basis for his suspicions. Yet the idea fascinated him.

The drilling had now stopped, and the light, for a moment, again came into play. The man's back was toward Harris, and there was too little light to make out his form very accurately; but the lawyer saw a short, heavy machinist's hammer in his hand, and, as the burglar lowered the torch before turning it off, he had a vision of the shoes the intrduer wore, partic-

ularly of the badly run-down rubber heels, a dirty brown for want of blacking, and the right one having in its center a nick or gash as if its owner had stepped on some sharp object.

The intruder had wrapped his cap around the head of the hammer, and a moment later through the darkness came the sound of three muffled blows as the hammer hit the knob of the safe. At the third there was a crash and a metallic tinkling sound as the knob fell inward. A few moments later, the slight warning sound of the hinges told that the door was being opened. There being no inner door, the burglar's work was done, except for collecting whatever of value he could find. Again the light was used, inside the safe this time, as the man leaned in at his work. Harris chuckled inaudibly at the evident disappointment of the burglar. A Liberty Bond or two, and a few bills, were all the things of value that the safe held.

The Liberty Bonds were of the non-registered negotiable kind, so they were as good as money to any thief. They were the remnant of a large number that he had bought for the Bartlett estate with the proceeds of some sales of real property some months before and had brought to his house, from which they could be more easily and safely removed than from the office. The rest were gone; he had secretly sold them in Chicago to provide funds for his speculations.

The burglar was now on his way to the window again, and Harris remained undiscovered. Now was the moment to stop him if——

The plan of a few moments before still fascinated him. He remained a moment undecided; and in that moment the stranger disappeared and closed the window behind him.

Decision came with his exit, and the lawyer was galvanized into action. He crossed to his desk and felt in the little drawer at the left, where he kept the cartridges for his gun. He took one out and held it ready in his hand. Then, resuming his place in the chair, he switched on the lights and fired a shot toward the safe. Quickly he broke the gun in his hand and refilled the empty chamber with the new cartridge, then he turned the gun toward his own body and fired again, taking care to inflict only a flesh wound. The shock and the pain were much greater than he had anticipated, and he felt weak; not too weak, however, to raise a window quickly and slam it shut loudly, and to take the empty cartridge which he had extracated and bury it in the earth of a geranium which stood in a flower pot on the top of his desk. Then he staggered to the door, just in time to meet Mrs. Taylor as she reached the foot of the stairs.

The horrified lady was immensely relieved to find that Harris was apparently not badly injured; and she insisted on washing his wound first of all. Then the telephone was kept busy, summoning first a doctor and then the police.

When two blue-coated officers arrived Mrs. Taylor told them the story of the robbery as she had got it from the lawyer, while the latter was being subjected to the doctor's ministrations. He had fallen asleep in his office and had been awakened by a noise at the safe. There being no light, he had stealthily secured his revolver and fired toward the safe. Before he could send a second shot in the same direction a man had flung himself upon him and grappled with him. A moment later the burglar had fired at close range, inflicting the wound; and, while the lawyer was still reeling from the shock, had made good his escape by the window.

"Did he get away with much?" asked one of the officers.

"I don't know; I haven't examined

the safe yet," said Harris. "There was eighty or ninety dollars in cash, and about eight thousand in Liberty Bonds."

The officer whistled. "They're gone, all right. Were they registered bonds?"

"No—coupon bonds."

"You have the numbers, of course? Perhaps we can trace them."

Harris laughed shamefacedly. "To tell the truth, I had the numbers copied in a memorandum book, and the book was in the safe."

"Careless," muttered the officer. "Perhaps it's here now, though." Further search of the safe, however, failed to disclose the fictitious book.

"Did you get a good look at your assailant?" asked the policeman. "Could you identify him?"

"No," replied the lawyer. He had no reason, he reflected, for wishing the thief caught. "The room was in darkness while he was here, so I couldn't see him at all."

The officers soon went outside to examine the ground beneath the window for footprints. There was a concrete walk, however, leading from the front door around to the side of the house, which passed directly beneath the window in question. On the sill there were streaks in the dust that showed how the intruder had entered, and the walk bore a scratch such as might be made by a nail in a shoe, in jumping down; but neither thing afforded a clew to the identity of the burglar, though they gave evidence of his presence.

The officers soon after departed, after the lawyer had assured them that he would go to the police station in the morning if they needed him, though he doubted very much if he would be able to identify the criminal if he were caught. In fact, he did not expect to be called on; it was hardly likely that the thief would be apprehended; and as far any suspicion attaching to himself of collusion in the robbery, Stanwood Harris knew that his plan, taken in conjunction with his high reputation, had been successful enough to avert the possibility.

Yet the remainder of the night did not bring him rest. The wound no doubt helped to keep him awake; but his thoughts did their full share, too. He could not quite bring himself to accept the solution of his difficulties which fate, with his own quick-witted aid, had brought. It was such a mean sort of thing to do—just such a thing as Wayne Bartlett himself would do under the circumstances. Even Wayne Bartlett, bad as he was, had never transgressed the laws as Harris had done, had never needed to avail himself of accident to escape the consequences of crime. The lawyer felt that he could have no peace of mind until he had unmasked himself, hard as that would be, and owned to his fault. He finally was able to get to sleep and put off his decision until the day.

He slept later than he had expected to; it was after ten o'clock, in fact, when he heard Mrs. Taylor quietly leaving the room, which she had entered to see how her patient was getting on, and to ask him what he wanted to eat. He called her back; and when she had learned his wishes about breakfast, she informed him that the police had called up and asked that he go to the station house as soon as he was able.

As he dressed and ate, Stanwood Harris wondered what the call could mean. Though he had not yet decided his problem, he was sure that they could never suspect him unless he confessed to his part in the disappearance of the bonds. As yet, in fact, it was not known save to himself that the supposedly stolen bonds belonged to the estate. For all that the police knew, they were his own property. So, in spite of Mrs. Taylor's admonitions, he

hurried through his meal and started downtown in a cab which he had the housekeeper summon.

At the police station he was greeted by the desk sergeant, to whom, of course, he was well known. After inquiring about the lawyer's wound, and asking him what sort of a night he had had, the officer broached the reason for the call.

"We've got a man here who, we have reason to think, is the thief who attacked you last night, Mr. Harris. He was seen running away from the direction of your house last night a few minutes after the robbery, and was stopped on suspicion by a patrolman, who let him go when he found out who he was. When we got the report of the robbery, though, we had him rearrested; and since then, near the place where the patrolman stopped him last night, we found these—evidently thrown from him as he ran, so that they wouldn't be found on him." The officer displayed two fifty-dollar Liberty Bonds. "I understand that a number of these were taken from your safe, weren't they?"

The lawyer took the bonds into his hands and examined them. Undoubtedly they were the ones that had been in the safe.

"Did you find the rest of them?" he inquired. "Or the money?"

"No. That was all. I'm having the prisoner brought in here. You'll know him, all right, even if you can't identify him as the robber; but I think our evidence against him is enough, even without your identification."

The lawyer had scarcely time to wonder what the policeman meant, for at a near-by door the prisoner was being escorted into the room. And the prisoner was Wayne Bartlett!

Harris did some rapid thinking. Could it be true that Bartlett was the robber? Why should he jeopardize his safety by such an escapade? The question brought its own answer in the lawyer's logical mind. The young scapegrace, in need of money, as ever, had conceived the idea of robbing Harris, because he knew that the latter, as his father's old friend and adviser, would not have him arrested even if he caught him. At worst he would arrange that any loss should come out of the estate instead of from his own pocket. And for another reason he felt safe, perhaps; having his suspicion, for which he might have good reasons, that the lawyer had embezzled from his property, he could play his threat of exposure against the other's. It was a plan worthy of the young man; and it stilled any sympathies that the lawyer may have had for him. No doubt Wayne had heard the shots from Harris' revolver before he had got far from the house, and, in his fear that he had been discovered and fired at, had broken into a run. Then, when he had seen a policeman approaching, he had tossed the bonds away, as the sergeant had suggested, retaining the money because it could not be identified if found on him.

It took only a moment for the lawyer to think the matter out; and by the time Wayne Bartlett was brought face to face with him, he had decided on a course of action. It was only necessary, first, to make sure that his hypothesis was correct, to learn definitely that Bartlett was the criminal.

"You can't identify him, Mr. Harris?" asked the sergeant. "I forgot to mention another fact that's against him—he can't, or won't, tell where he was at the time of the crime."

The lawyer shook his head. "I can't identify him," he said. "But remember, the only glimpse I got of the man last night was of his back as he was running out the gate—and it was rather dark outside at the time." He walked slowly around in back of the prisoner and looked at his shoes. There, sure

enough, were the rubber heels, brown and worn, with a cut in the middle of the right one!

"I think you must be mistaken, officer," said Harris slowly, after a deliberate inspection. "Now that I think of it, there was one thing that I did notice when I saw the man running. That was the heels of his shoes. They were large heavy leather heels, with metal plates let into the back to take the wear, and studded with nails—not at all like the rubber heels that Bartlett has on his shoes."

"Of course he might have changed his shoes this morning," suggested the sergeant. "We'll have to find that out."

"One other point, now that my memory is more acute," ventured the lawyer. "I was rather shaken up when the officers questioned me last night; but I recall that when the man grappled with me, he was quite a bit taller than I am, and weighed more. I'm sure it couldn't have been this man; he's so short and slight that I couldn't possibly be mistaken on that point. As for his not telling where he was at the time—well, knowing him as I do, I can quite understand that, and I think you can."

The sergeant well knew that young Bartlett associated with a crowd who frequently indulged in quiet gambling; so, though the young man had never been caught in any of the raids that the police had recently conducted against the dens where the games took place, the police officer readily understood the insinuation and favored the others with a wink. "Even a bad reputation is a useful asset sometimes," he said.

"And besides," the lawyer went on, "why should my young friend here rob himself? The bonds that were stolen were all a part of his father's estate, in my keeping as executor; and he, of course, is the sole heir. Mr. Bartlett deserves the pity and sympathy of us all at his loss, instead of our suspicions."

Wayne Bartlett's look of bewilderment was rapidly turning into one of baffled rage.

"I hope that you catch the real thief," continued the lawyer, "and if you do, I'll do all that I can to see that he gets the limit for a sentence. He deserves ten years at least."

Bartlett knew now that the lawyer had tricked him, that the latter's story was a skillful lie, that the suspicion he had had of him was correct; and Stanwood Harris knew that he knew, but no more surely than he knew that Bartlett would never tell. Nevertheless, the lawyer, fundamentally honest, determined, now that he had been given an indefinite length of time to make good his losses, that he would pay back every cent he had taken from the Bartlett estate. Suicide was banished from his mind.

DAILY COSTS OF PRISONER'S FOOD

EVEN though New York State purchases its prison supplies in carload lots, the cost of feeding each prisoner for one day in Sing Sing has risen in the last year from 18.9 cents to 27.1 cents. Clothing for the men has also gone up in price.

While the institution's expenses increase, some of the convicts get better food than the others, and do no work toward earning the money to pay for their food and clothing. These are the men, twenty-five at present, who are held in the death house awaiting execution for murder.

Headquarters Chat

AS a police and court reporter, and, more recently, as we have told you, while serving as a juror on criminal cases, we have had many opportunities to study those accused of crime.

One of the deductions we have made, after much observation, is that it is impossible to determine from the demeanor of a person on trial—impossible to gain the slightest true inkling—as to whether that person is guilty or innocent.

The accused, seated beside a court officer, silent during his trial, save on rare occasions when, indignant at the false testimony of a witness, or at some remarks of the prosecuting attorney, he may, unable to restrain himself, start to voice a protest. Should he do so, he is immediately checked.

This inability to join in the proceedings reduces the prisoner not only to a mere spectator, but a spectator who is the observed of all observers, and one whose interest in the case is greater, a thousand times ten thousand, than that of any one else. And should his lawyer call him to the stand in his own defense, he is in even a better position for observation.

Now do not gather from what we have said that we mean all persons who go to trial for a crime have, during their confinement, become masters of self-control. Such a supposition would be absurd and false, for, as a matter of fact, the actions of persons in this trying position are as varied as human nature is varied.

We have heard casual, inexperienced, or careless observers declare that because the prisoner looked or acted this or that way, they were "sure he was guilty," though, at the conclusion of the trial, it was proved beyond doubt that the prisoner was not guilty. We have seen the innocent prisoner laugh, cry, or seem indifferent to his fate. We have seen the guilty prisoner laugh, cry, or seem indifferent to *his* fate. Thus, at last, we became firmly convinced that, though in some cases actions may speak louder than words, a prisoner's actions when on trial most certainly do not show his guilt or innocence.

In conclusion, we will say, however, that toward the end of the trial, at least, we feel quite sure that the accused, exhausted with strain, is in a kind of trance. He or she, as the case may be, sits down, stands up, "looks upon the jury" to hear their verdict, and soon, in a way that shows they have become beings very much detached from the whole proceedings. And more often than not they take "We find the defendant guilty," or "We find the defendant *not* guilty," without the bat of an eyelid, without a perceptible change of expression. Also, we have seen the defendant who has been found innocnt, weep, and the defendant found guilty, laugh. *So you just simply can not tell.*

What Handwriting Reveals

If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send Louise Rice, in care of this magazine, specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned, and inclose a stamped addressed envelope. She will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Every communication will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in the department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Miss Rice has on hand a thousand or more specimens of handwriting from readers who wished their handwriting analyzed in the magazine. On account of restricted space, it will be a long time before these letters appear. We therefore suggest that these readers send Miss Rice a stamped addressed envelope, and she will give them an analysis of their handwriting in a personal letter.

F. T. L. FLOYEN.—No, indeed, I don't think you would like a monotonous life—not with your writing sprawling all over an enormous sheet of paper, and your pen fairly digging holes in it. Best thing you can do is to get into some occupation that furnishes variety. I tell you what. If you could pin yourself down to learning another language, French, for instance, you'd make a splendid salesman to travel abroad for American firms. There will be many calls for that; and it's the kind of a life you would like—always on the go.

ANON.—So you want to better yourself, do you? Well, I'll say this: if you are going to do it, whether from an ideal or a material standpoint, you'll have to stop your habit of daydreaming, and bring yourself down to hardpan. I don't know what that is, but you know what I mean. You need action, not thought. You need something to put your mental teeth into, as it were. A year of intensive self-training, and persistent struggle against any form of wishing and dreaming, would bring about the betterment that you want.

DAZEL HOFFMAN.—You did not enclose the specimen on which you wanted the reading. Try again.

G. ODELIA DUB.—No, I don't think you are fitted for office work, either. I suppose you can do it, for you have a fair memory and are orderly, but you have none of the special talents required for such work. Women of your type

are usually domestic in their tastes. I don't mean, necessarily, that you need to marry. But, did you ever think of keeping a small tea room—or something like that? You could do it very well.

W. J. C.—You really have a lot of courage; and a frank and sincere personality. You have a terrific temper, too, but I must say, in justice to you, that it probably does not explode without considerable provocation, since you have such a very strong sense of justice. With all the energy and pride that you have, you ought to be very successful. I hope that you are planning to go into business for yourself.

EDITH.—You take the advice of your people, my dear, and let the young man strictly alone. The old folks are often right, you know. Not because they understand human nature so well, always, but because love sharpens our eyes. This young chap is not positively bad, but he is far enough from positively good to make me concur heartily in your parents' decision.

OSCAR MCDONNELL.—But that man that I encouraged to go off on a filibustering expedition was years older than you, Oscar. Seventeen is no age to begin roaming about the world. No lad of under twenty should be away from his home unless misfortune drives him there. No, don't be angry. I do know just how you feel, out in that quiet town, for all that I started out to scold. We'll agree that you *are* a natural adventurer. Yes, your writing shows it. But unless you are going to spell adventure "bum" or "hobo," you listen carefully to this: Get an education first. I don't suppose you think it matters, in adventuring, but I tell you the men who really do things such as you want to, start off with a well-trained mind. Think of the people you'll have to meet, the types you'll have to understand, the many tight pinches you'll be in, the times when you will have to have twice the wits of the ordinary man. You take three years and study like mad, Oscar, and I'll wish you Godspeed.

LILLIE HALL.—Oh, now, really, is it possible that you can ask me "will I move from my present place" when I have talked so much about NOT being a fortune teller! I haven't the slightest idea, Lillie, but I do know that any girl as nervous and fretful and as easily worried as you will have a hard life unless she cures herself of those tricks. She'd take it hard, you know, if it were a bed of roses! Your brother's writing shows hope and courage; a fine fellow. Your mother's indicates very poor health. I hope you are cheering her up. Your friend does not impress me—is too selfish.

ROBERT.—You don't tell me what that proposition is that you are taking up, so I have no means of helping you. Write again, repeat your question, give details, and a stamped, addressed envelope, and I'll answer you by mail.

A. F. G.—Your writing shows that kind of a mind which bends itself readily to the needs of office work and secretaryship. Go right on. I am sure you will succeed. Your nature is a very sincere, straightforward, honest, and unselfish one, and I am greatly surprised that you should have remained friends for so long with the writer of the enclosed specimen. This is a person of a very tricky nature and wholly selfish. I'd drop the connection, if I were you, as unostentatiously as possible.

LAURA D.—I don't wonder that you are worried as to the future, if yours is mixed up with that of the person whose specimen you enclose. People like this

are really subjects for pathological investigation and care. There's no more stability or courage or spine in this writer than there is in a worm. As for you being a help, nobody can be a help. People like this ought to be put to work under severe supervision until the habit of doing something and of stopping their eternal grouch is rubbed out of them. As for you, you have plenty of business ability. Turn to, give it expression, and live your own independent life.

KATHRYN.—People who write your type of hand are always attracted to the theater, and always have at least a fair degree of talent for it. In your case it is not overwhelming, but it is sufficiently accented to warrant me in telling you to take the matter in hand. I don't say that you will have an easy time—nobody does who tries to go on the stage, and they have a harder time after they get there—but if you think you can stand it, you've a fair show of success.

K. N.—You are too moody and too easily discouraged; that's your weakest point, as it is of so many kind, good-natured, well-intentioned and otherwise sensible people. The specimen which you enclose shows a nature far more moody and unstable than your own; but more stubborn and opinionated. You are certainly not good companions for each other.

HOW TO READ CHARACTER IN HANDWRITING

LESSON IV.

Letter Formations in Relation to Margins (Continued)

A large writing with straggling letter formations and almost no margins, shows an absolute lack of any appreciation of beauty. People like this, however, often have quiet tastes, and a negative sort of understanding of what is pleasing to the eye. Such a writer, for instance, will hardly ever want to own a red automobile, but would never in the world think of having one with mauve upholstering and dark purple trimming. This type of writer is apt to be offended by anything out of the ordinary in color or dress; and while having no understanding of art, are very positive in their particular antagonisms to it. You will never find such a person with anything but a sneer for Futurist and Impressionistic pictures.

Very often the man who has succeeded in building up a small, personal business to a fairly large concern—the kind of a man who wants his womenfolks to dress well but "without any folderols," and who disapproves of his clerks' smoking cigarettes—will use this hand. As for margins, it would strike him as a sinful waste of paper to use them.

Practical, calmly efficient, unemotional women who are good housekeepers and nurses are apt to fit into this description of the large, unformed letters, with no margins. They make ideal nurses, since they have almost no nerves to be ruffled, are usually patient, and, not being sensitive or temperamental, they can endure the monotony of a sick room well.

The same type of letter, with wide margins, means something totally differ-

ent. These are the people with instincts for the appreciation of beauty, but without any training of such instincts. They are the men and women who write me piteously that they hate existence, and don't know why. They are just wonderful machines, to which motive power is lacking. All people like that need is to be pinned down to a line of study which will open up to them their own possibilities. The large letter, with wide margins, which is well formed and very definite, is not so encouraging, although it looks so. It shows a nature which has passed beyond that time of possibility, and is now "set" and satisfied, having attained a fair amount of good taste. These are the folks who have discovered that Mission furniture is refined, and have stopped at that!

EXPERT DETECTIVE ADVICE

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM M. CLEMENS

Mr. William M. Clemens is a well-known criminologist, who for thirty years has been engaged in the study and investigation of crime and criminals. Any of our readers may consult Mr. Clemens through this magazine in regard to any matter relating to crime and its detection, to psychological problems, and the protection of life and property against criminals and other evil-doers. Letters seeking expert information along these lines should be addressed to the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. These letters will be answered personally by Mr. Clemens, without charge, if stamp for reply is inclosed; they will be discussed in this department, the names and addresses in all cases to be omitted.

An Old-time Safe Robbery

I WAS talking with an old-timer the other night about Joe Devoe, a famous bank robber of years gone by. Devoe not only robbed a man's safe, but in one instance he stole the safe and carted it away. If any one disputes the oft-repeated contention that the brand of crooks in America is deteriorating, let me put into evidence the robbery of the brokerage office of Marcy & Dorlan in Exchange Place, New York, something like a generation ago. Robberies and burglaries there are in plenty to-day, but happily the safe robber of the time of Joe Devoe and his gang is a thing of the past. Even such a daring cracksman as Joe Devoe would be helpless before the devices of modern ingenuity. He would stand very little chance, for instance, in the vaults of the National City Bank of New York, where the moment he set foot on the space between the outer skin of the vaults and the money chamber he would be played upon by jets of steam that would scald him to death in a second.

Far from being one of those who idealizes a crook, I regard it as simple justice to Joe to record the fact that he is the only man ever to conceive and carry out the "lifting" of a massive safe in broad day, from a broker's office into the windows of which literally thousands looked and watched the thieves at work

ANSWERS TO READERS' QUERIES

NEW YORK DETECTIVES.

G. R. N.—Yes, you must be a resident of New York State. The law requires a State license which will cost you one hundred dollars, covering a period of five years. In the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for May 20, 1919, you will find an article in this department upon the subject in question.

HABITUAL CRIMINALS.

W. C. M.—A person who has been adjudged an habitual criminal is liable to arrest summarily with or without warrant and to punishment as a disorderly person, when he is found in possession of any deadly or dangerous weapons, or of any tool, instrument, or material, adapted to, or used by criminals for the commission of crime, without being able to account therefor to the satisfaction of the court or magistrate; or when he is found in any place or situation, under circumstances giving reasonable ground to believe that he will commit crime.

MARRIAGE RECORDS.

J. C. M.—No, there is no record kept in Washington. The State Board of Health controls the State records, and in most States the reports of towns and cities are kept on file in the State capitol.

INSANITY.

GUARD No. 6.—Insane people are not criminals. If sufficiently gentle, you may pass a lifetime controlling insane people, and never need to raise a club. A blow given to an insane man may render his insanity permanent.

EVIDENCE.

H. W. C.—It is very important that you get witnesses whose evidence will be *corroborative*. In explanation: Assume that a crime has been committed on the street in front of a certain address and that witnesses are being examined. A states that he saw the defendant running, twenty-five feet from the premises; B states that he saw the defendant running, fifty feet from the premises; C states that he saw the defendant running, seventy-five feet from the premises; and D states that he saw the defendant running one hundred feet from the premises. This is good evidence, but it has not the weight that *corroborative* evidence would have—that is, if B would bear out A's statement.

CIVIL AND CRIMINAL.

M. B. T.—Civil cases are cases in which a person is tried for the neglect to pay a just debt or for carelessly injuring another in person or reputation, or injures the property of another. Criminal cases are cases where a person is tried for an act or omission forbidden by law.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

N. T. R.—A United States mail carrier cannot be interfered with while engaged in the performance of duty for a misdemeanor, but he can be for a felony. Striking the laborer would be a misdemeanor. In that case it would be my duty to place him under arrest, but permit him to complete his routine of duty. At the end of the routine I would take him into custody and then notify the post office with which he was connected. In case he committed a felony, I would take him into custody at once and then report the fact to the post office.

UNDER THE LAMP

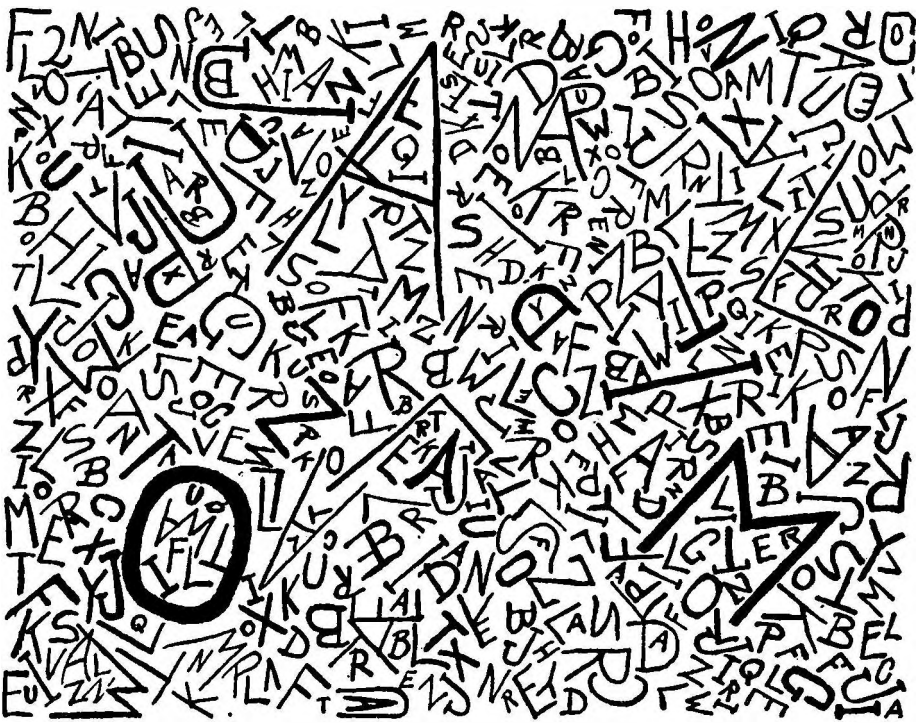
CONDUCTED BY HENRY A. KELLER

PUZZLES have an almost universal appeal. Whether it be a problem in cryptography, or a problem in mathematics, or hidden words, or anagrams, or whatever the particular kind of brain twister we set ourselves to solve, we go at it with a vim and delight in doing so. There seems to be a fascinating something or other about it we simply cannot resist.

Did you ever stop to think why it is so many persons like puzzles? In my opinion it's because a problem represents a challenge to our ability. Subconsciously our sense of honor rises to the fore and says: "I can do that. I'll not let any one see that *that* puzzle is too much for me."

This week's problem is a challenge to your patience. See how many A's you can find in the figure below. Before you begin, let me caution you that in some places the artist was cramped for space, and you may find one letter flush against another—with the back of an F against the side of an A, for instance.

After you have found them all, put away your count, and compare it with the number you'll find in the issue of October twenty-first.



Every two letters in the cipher in last Tuesday's issue represented one letter in the solution. By finding these two letters in the altitude and the base of Mr. Newell's triangle alphabet block, and tracing the columns across and up, the letters at the points of the intersection made up this message: "From the northeast corner of the house one hundred feet north and ten west; dig four down."

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to readers of the DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. Its purpose is to aid readers in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address, often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

When you hear from the person you are seeking, tell us, so that we may take your notice out.

Now, readers, help those whose friends are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MANUEL, JOHN J. He was a native of Virginia, and went to California fifty years ago, and from there to Idaho. His sister Sarah married John Miller, and was in Huntsville, Missouri, in 1888. I would like to get in touch with relatives of either of these persons. W. N. KNOX, Jr., 966 Hawthorne Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

McGEARY, MAMIE. When last heard of was in Peru, Indiana. She formerly lived with her grandmother, Mrs. Mabey, at Millvale, Pennsylvania, and is probably known by that name. Her grandfather seeks information of her, and will be most grateful to any one who can give him her present address. M. N. McGEARY, 538 Horner Street, Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

WAGNER, FRANK. He was last heard from about nine years ago at Akron, Colorado, and was then talking about going to Denver. His father is very anxious to hear from him and will be most grateful to any one who will give him information that will lead to his communicating with him. JULIUS WAGNER, 623 Taylor Avenue, N. S., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

SANDHAM, MRS. JAMES. Some sixty years ago a little girl, born in New York City, was given for adoption to a Mrs. van Tassel, who, when she was dying, told her that she was not her child, and that her own mother was Mrs. James Sandham. She is very anxious to learn something of her mother, or of her family, and any one who can help her in her quest will do a great kindness by addressing "DAUGHTER," care of Missing Department.

TEMPLAR, WALTER CHARLES. Twenty-three years old. He has dark hair and eyes and is five feet six inches tall. His nose and one front tooth are broken, and the letters, W. C. T. are tattooed on his left arm. He served in the navy during the war on the U. S. S. *St. Louis*. The pictures of his mother and his sweetheart were found on the dead body of a man about sixty years old at Richmond. His mother is heartbroken at his disappearance, and will be thankful to any one who can tell her if he is alive, and will help her to find him. MRS. ALBERTA TEMPLAR WEAVER, 2160 Lime Avenue, Long Beach, California.

W. W. WILSON. Last heard of in Racine, Wisconsin. Please write P. O. Box 452, Jacksonville, Tennessee, and plan to meet your old pal in Flint, Michigan.

DAVENPORT, T. J., who left his home in Malden, Massachusetts, twenty-eight years ago. His wife is dead, and his daughter Ida, who was eight years of age when he went away, would be very happy to see her father again. MRS. D. P. CLARK, 2 Binny Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

ROMANCHEK, THEODORE, who wrote in regard to Arthur Charles Reeves.—We have a communication for you from a relative of this gentleman, and would ask you to send us your address, as letters sent to Lascar have been returned to us.

BENNETT, WALTER E. Twenty-six years of age, five feet eight inches in height, weighs about one hundred and forty-three pounds, has dark brown hair, blue eyes, light complexion, and wears glasses. Good news awaits him. Any one knowing his present address please sent it to this magazine.

TURNER, MRS. CORA, who used to live in Denver Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri, and was last heard of in October, 1917. She has two sons in the United States navy. Her brother will be thankful for any information that may lead to communication with her. Address HENRY BROOKS, care of Chief of Police, Billings, Montana.

JACOBS, CLARA.—She left home when a young girl, married Frank Fleming, and was widowed several years later. She also lost her three-year-old son Willie about the same time. The last letter received from her was in March, 1906. She has fair hair, gray eyes, and is of medium build. Her family is very anxious to have news of her, and will appreciate any information that will help them in their quest. Please write to MRS. JAMES H. CLARKE, Imperial Block, Suite One, Fifth Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

KLEINERMAN, MAX, who left home January 19, 1919. He is thirteen years of age, about four feet ten inches tall, and weighs ninety pounds. He has black hair and eyes, and a black mole on his left jaw. Information about him will be greatly appreciated by his mother, who is heart-broken over his disappearance. She offers a reward of twenty-five dollars to any one who will find him. MRS. L. KLEINERMAN, 940 Brunswick Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey.

TRAVER, ERNEST A.—We want to hear from you. You cannot imagine how much worry and sorrow you are causing your parents. Write to your father. CHARLES R. TRAVER, Rhinebeck, New York.

PARKER, JOSEPH S., who used to live at 528 East Adams Street, Jacksonville, Florida, in 1912, and was last heard of in Gulfport, Mississippi. Also LIEUTENANT SIDNEY BREESE, V. C., who was discharged from the British army on account of his wounds. I have important news to deliver to these two gentlemen, and any one knowing of their present whereabouts will do a great kindness by communicating with me. JOHN DE COSTE, care of this magazine.

CREAMER, LEWIS.—Please send us your present address, as letters sent to Dorchester have been returned, and we have information in regard to your brother which we wish to forward to you.

KEDENBURG, LUCAS, who was born in New York City thirty-nine years ago, and was last heard of at Dallas, Texas, in April, 1917. He is a tile setter, and had a foot injured in an accident, which causes him to walk with a limp. Any one who knows where he is at the present time will greatly oblige by writing to his cousin, MRS. P. LAMBERT, R. F. D., Box 44, Orange, Virginia.

BARD, FRANK. Formerly of Hot Springs, Arkansas. He is about thirty-eight years old, rather short, and slim, with light hair and dark eyes, and has a gunshot scar on one arm. An old pal would be glad to have news of him, and to meet him again. FRANK HICKS, 3890 Concord Avenue, S. W., Seattle, Washington.

FERRILL, CHARLES. He was last heard of in May of this year, when he was heading for Chicago. Please write to your pal, ROBERT WALLACE, Smith Apartments, New Castle, Pennsylvania.

CARROLL, MARIA. She was in Atlantic City, New Jersey, when last heard from. Her half brother desires to communicate with her, and will be obliged to any one who will be kind enough to send him her address. Please write to ALVAH BUGBEE, 3d Co., S. F., Fort Winfield Scott, California.

BOKER, ROY.—Our letters to you have been returned by the post office. Please send us another address, as we have information for you in regard to Jack Miller.

DADDY.—Please write and let me know what you intend to do.—F.

VADAKIN, MRS. NELLIE. She was last heard of in Princess Ann, Maryland, five years ago. Her daughter will be thankful for any information concerning her. G. H. F., care of this magazine.

ROICE, GEORGE, about sixty-five years old, and his son CLAUDE, now about thirty-five years old. They were last heard from at Nashville, Tennessee, in December, 1896. An old friend would like to know their present whereabouts. Please write to IV-XII., care of this magazine.

WANTED, information regarding the parents or relatives of a boy born on the 27th of April, 1894, and adopted in May of the same year by a Mr. and Mrs. S. F. Lawrence, of Dayton, Ohio, who took him from St. Joseph's Orphanage in Cumminsville, Ohio. He was christened Paul, and was returned to the institution in 1909, and remained there for about five months. There is important news for the relatives of this boy, if they can be found, and any assistance given in the matter will be sincerely appreciated. Please write to JOHN B. LUTZ, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

LAFFERTY, DANIEL, who was born in Canada about 1861, and left there for the United States about 1883. He was last heard of in Kentucky. I would like to hear from his people in Canada, or from any one who has met him, or who knows where he is at the present time. Please address 4-18, care of this magazine.

SHEARGREN, BEN J., who formerly lived in Burlington, Iowa. He was employed by the Rock Island Railroad in 1905, as dining-car conductor, and went to Oakland, California, in 1906. He is forty-three years of age, about six feet tall, with light hair and blue eyes. Any information that will help to find him will be greatly appreciated by his old friends. Please address M. CARROLL, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

SMITH, ALEXANDER JULIUS. Age twenty-two years, height five feet ten inches, weight one hundred and seventy-two pounds, hazel eyes, brown hair, fair complexion, a scar in the center of forehead. He enlisted in the French army on September 30, 1914, and when last heard of was recovering from the effects of illness caused by mustard gas. He was often called "Colt Al," as he was an exceptionally good shot with a Colt automatic. He was born in Norfolk, Virginia. Please send any information regarding him to his comrade, CHARLES LEE WATKINS, 536 Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

WUNDERLICH, JOHN WHALLEN, who lived in San Pedro, California, with his father until about five years ago, when they moved to Montana. Any information will be gratefully appreciated by LOUIS ERWIN WUNDERLICH, 3 Linwood Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

L. A. B.—I have left Bridgeport and am now staying at 67 Eighth Street, Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Please let me hear from you. I am very ill, and would like to see you. A. G. M., care of this magazine.

LUTZ, HARLEY.—Please write, or come home to your broken-hearted wife.

PIKE, WILLIAM H. He came from Nashville, Tennessee, and is a printer. He was last heard of in Chicago, in 1914. He has light-brown hair and blue eyes. Will, if you see this, please write to me. Father is dead, and I am now all alone. Your wife, N. M. PIKE, 243 Kansas Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

MACLAFFERTY, GEORGE. He left Cedar Rapids, Iowa, about 1904, and was last seen in Los Angeles, California. It is thought that he may be somewhere in that vicinity at the present time. His mother is dead, and his brothers and sisters would be much pleased to hear from him. Please send any information regarding him to U. S. M., care of this magazine.

WANTED, information as to the whereabouts of MRS. RHODA ANN FULLER, FRANK LELROKE FULLER, and SAMUEL LELROKE. They were last heard from in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1904. I am alone. Please send your address to ANNETTE, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

INFORMATION WANTED of MRS. CLARA CONKLIN, or CONKIN, daughter of George Brody, who was also known as George Jones. Her mother's maiden name was Nutting. She lived at one time in Detroit, Michigan, also in New York City, and when last heard from was in Palm Beach, Florida. Any information as to her present whereabouts will be received as a great kindness by M. E. JONES, care of this magazine.

PRYOR, GEORGE O.—He was last seen in St. Joseph, Missouri, in April, 1918. Any one knowing his address will confer a favor by communicating with J. A. Sullivan, 3408 Troost Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

ELMER, P. C.—Please come or write. I am very ill, and greatly troubled. Your lonely wife, P. H. C.

JOHNSTONE, HOWARD DEWITT, sometimes goes by the name of John Stone. He is thirty years old, tall and slender, weighs about one hundred and forty pounds, and is very fair of complexion, with large, light-blue eyes. Has two front upper teeth missing. He left home one Sunday afternoon in June, to be absent only two hours, and no trace of him has been seen since. His wife is very ill, and his three small children are in need of his care. Any one who can give information about him will confer a great favor by writing to his wife, care of this magazine.

MORTIMER, HIRAM T.—I have tried very hard to find you ever since you left. When you wrote to me you did not give an address. If any one who sees this knows his whereabouts and will write to me, the favor will be greatly appreciated. Any news of him will be welcome to his niece, MISS BEATRICE COONEY, Egg Harbor, New Jersey.

LAUBACH, TOM, who resided at Montgomery Street, San Antonio, Texas. He is seventeen years of age, five feet seven inches tall, and is a boy scout. He may be in New York. Any information will be thankfully received by HERBERT S. HERSKOWITZ, 303 Texas Street, El Paso, Texas.

INFORMATION WANTED as to the whereabouts of my mother, whose maiden name was AGNES BETTS. At the time of my birth, in 1887, she was living with my father's parents, whose name was Wooster. Dear mother, if you see this, please write to your lonesome girlie, for she loves you so much. Grandma Wooster is dead. ETHEL, care of this magazine.

HENRY.—Please come back at once. Everything will be all right. M. V. L.—M. O.

JERVICK, WILL.—If he answers this he will hear of some information that will prove profitable to him, and he is asked to send his address to this magazine.

RICHIE, A. H.—Please come to your wife, or write to her at once. Her mistaken sense of duty to Mabel and me is affecting her reason, so do not fail to act without delay. L. F. C.

MARTIN, JUDSON F., who was last heard of on August 23, 1918, when he was with Company C, Sixth Developing Battalion, Camp Grant, Illinois. His letters were miscarried, and were received by his family ten months after date of writing. If any one knows where he enlisted, or has any information that will lead to communication with him, they will contribute to his happiness, and will do a great kindness by writing to his sister. L. M. H., care of this magazine.

ALGUR, HENRY M., who married Lena Thomason in 1902 or 1903, at the home of his sister, Mrs. Hattie Steele, in Colorado City. I would like to hear from him or his sisters, as I have important news for them. MRS. EVELYN KOLY, 515 East Ninth Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

TUTTURLE, HERBERT, who was stationed at Camp Sever, Greenville, South Carolina, in 1918, and received his discharge from that place last December. He is something over six feet tall, is twenty-five years old, and has light hair. Any one knowing his address please send it to M. E. H., care of this magazine.

ELLARD, EDWARD, sometimes called Edward Pillson, who was born in the State of New Jersey, and was formerly a sailor. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his sister, MRS. H. H. POLLARD, Regent Apartments, Colonial Avenue and Olney Road, Norfolk, Virginia.

LAMBERT, WILLIAM.—Any one knowing his present address please send it to the Missing Department of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

WHITE, REUBEN, who left Texas when he was about twelve years of age. His sister and his niece would be glad to hear from him. MRS. BERTIE RUSSELL, 309 Avenue D, Miami, Florida.

CAMPBELL, W. D., who was last heard of in Nashville, Tennessee, is requested to write to MRS. H. C. M., 509 Locust Street, Montgomery, Alabama, who has news for him that it will be to his benefit to know.

DONNER, JOHN FRANZ, who was working at the Dupont Powder Works, Carney's Point, New Jersey, when last heard of. Any information regarding him will be gratefully appreciated by W. B. MACDONALD, 809 Government Street, Mobile, Alabama.

ALLEN, GRACE.—Please write. Your friends are worried. Are you still with Reuben and Cherry? MAC.

HEINRICH, MRS. JOSEPH, whose maiden name was MARY MATHILDA BRAUN, and who was married at Emanuel Church, Dayton, Ohio, by the Reverend Carl J. Hahne, in May, 1891. Her home at the time of her marriage was in St. Louis, Missouri. Her mother's maiden name was Ruth Meidgeth. Any one knowing her or her parents please communicate with her daughter, MRS. F. D. PERRY, 1512 Michigan Street, Toledo, Ohio.

HEWETT, FRANK L.—Age twenty-six, five feet seven or eight inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. He was last heard of at Vancouver some three years ago, when he was discharged from the Canadian army. He was a member of the Duke of Connaught's Own 158th, 12th Platoon, 13th Section, number 3 Company. His regimental number was 646127. In 1916 he married Jean Sutherland, of Vancouver, whose father was a comrade in the army. His mother and sister are very much worried about him, and will be thankful for any information regarding him. MRS. MABEL COPPERBURG, 836 Willamette Boulevard, Portland, Oregon.

LEFLEY, MRS. JENNIE, who left her home at Bowles, Lincoln County, West Virginia, some months ago, with her two daughters, JULIA E., twelve years old, and ELLEN L., ten. When last heard of they were boarding a train at Hurricane, West Virginia. Mrs. Lefley is thirty-six years of age, five feet four inches tall, weighs one hundred and thirty pounds, and has light hair, a Roman nose, and some gold teeth in front. The girls are both fair. Any information that will lead to the finding of these people will be greatly appreciated. MRS. H. H. HAINES, Box 1436, Charleston, West Virginia.

WHITE, BOB Q.—His half brother saw him last in East St. Louis, in 1903, and would like to hear from him. Write to me, Bob. J. B. TOWER, Hansford, Texas.

MEDHURST, CHARLES, who was last heard of at Redfield, South Dakota. If any one knows where he is, or can tell anything about his condition, please write to D. C. PICKARD, Muirdale Sanatorium, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Their kindness will be gratefully appreciated.

JIMMIE ——, a brakeman in January, 1914, on the Rock Island Railroad from Chickasha, Oklahoma, to Mangum. Last name believed to be Ogden, or Onsley. Please communicate with Missing Department.

STRADWICK, LILLIAN, formerly of Hamilton, Ontario, and last heard of at Cleveland, Ohio, in October, 1918. Good news awaits her if she will please write to MR. C. J. STRADWICK, 454 Herkemer Street, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

YOUNG, MRS. MAY.—We have information for you regarding Mrs. Mattie Thompson, and as mail sent to you at Bisbee, Arizona, has been returned to us, we would ask you to send us another address.

BOES, ALICE.—She was last heard of in San José, California. Any one knowing her present address please write me. RUSSELL ZANONE, 1581 Bardstown Road, Louisville, Kentucky.

AMBROSE, BELLE AND GEORGE.—Your daughter Constance was left by her mother at the Children's Home and Aid Society in Chicago, Illinois, and was adopted by Clayton R. Lewis some eighteen years ago. Any one having information regarding either of these persons will confer a great favor by writing to their daughter, P. L. L., care of this magazine.

STEWART, LOUIS, thirty years of age, weighs about one hundred and forty pounds, and has light hair and complexion. When last seen he was boarding a train from Anderson, Indiana, for Greenville, Ohio, in December, 1918. Louis, my boy, please come back to your old friend "Cappie." Do you remember the old Arena? Write to C. A. C., 1318 Ohio Avenue, Anderson, Indiana.

RIVES, DORA.—Your father is very ill as a result of your absence. Please call to see him as soon as possible, and relieve his anxiety. E. R.

BYRNE, WILLIAM.—Why do you not write? I answered your letter, but have received no reply. 10622 Dupont Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

LEWIS, ALLAN H., who was last heard from in Troy, New York, in 1915. He is short and dark, with curly hair and brown eyes, and is an excellent talker. Allan, communicate with your old buddie, R. G. R. I have something of importance to tell you. Write me care of this magazine.

HALL, GEORGE.—He has dark hair and eyes, and is about five feet nine inches tall. When last heard from he was in Philadelphia, but is supposed to have gone later to McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. He is a railroad man, and a brakeman. Any one knowing his address please write to MRS. LELA DRAPER, 305 West Grove Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

MURPHY, JOHN AND WILLIAM.—They were born on First Avenue and Seventy-third Street, New York City; John in 1878 and William in 1882. Their mother, whose maiden name was Mary Fitzmartin, died in 1884. They have not been heard from for about sixteen years. Their father will be most grateful for any news of them, and any one knowing their present whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to him. JOHN MURPHY, Box 316, National Military Home, Los Angeles, California.

ATTENTION.—If any soldier familiar with the circumstances surrounding the death of PRIVATE ALBERT PATRICK, of Company L, Eighteenth Infantry, First Division, A. E. F., who was killed in action, July 18 to 23, 1918, will write P. O. Box 283, Des Moines, Iowa, in regard to same, the favor will be very much appreciated by his father.

EDWARDS, GILBERT B., thirty-six years old, five feet nine inches tall, weight about two hundred and twenty pounds, black hair tinged with gray, and blue eyes. Teeth not very good. He worked as railroad man, and was last heard of in Nashville, Tennessee, in November, 1918. His mother is very ill, and wants him to come home. If any one who knows him will please call his attention to this, or write to his brother, their kindness will be greatly appreciated. CHARLES W. EDWARDS, 910 Garden Street, Hoboken, New Jersey.

SNOOK, GEORGE.—When last heard of he was living in Merchantville, Pennsylvania, or in Camden, New Jersey. Any one who can give information concerning him, please write to M. H. P., care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

WALLACE, WALTER J.—The last two places that he was heard from were Butte and Billings, Montana. He is a sign painter. Any information regarding him will be gratefully received by STANLEY CZARNECKI, 585 East Fort Street, Detroit, Michigan.

SELIM.—Do you remember the G. Flats, and the pal you called Bub? I hear from Dick. Write me in care of this Magazine. B. U. B.

DAVIS, MRS. GEORGE.—We have a letter for JOE from his mother. Please send us your address so that we may forward it as soon as possible.

HANSON, HENRY A.—He was last heard from in Louisville, Kentucky, and is supposed to have gone to New York City. Occupation, soda dispenser; home, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Height about five feet ten inches, light hair and complexion. Weight one hundred and fifty pounds. Any information will be appreciated by GEORGE F. MCNULTY, 22 Burt Avenue, Auburn, New York.

JONES, MICHAEL.—We have received a letter in regard to your notice for Mr. Ralph Jones, and as letters sent to Fort Madison have been returned, we would ask you to send us your present address.

DRAPER, GEORGE LUCIOS, who lived at 641 Twenty-second Street, Oakland, California, and who has not been heard from since October, 1918. If any one knowing his present whereabouts will write to me, the information will be greatly appreciated. E. M. MCGREGOR, 352 Sierra Street, Reno, Nevada.

WILLIAMS, MRS. NELLIE, who was last heard of in Murray City, Ohio. An old friend would like to hear from her, and renew the friendship. Any information will be gladly received by G. W. DRESCHER, R. D. No. 2, Jeromeville, Ohio.

BILL, your old pal of San Antonio, Texas, would like to hear from you. G. R., care of this Magazine.

JACKSON, THOMAS WESLEY.—He is about forty-eight years old, fair, and of rather heavy build. He is a carpenter and worked for the Kreusler Company in Pittsburgh, who have no trace of him. He was last heard of in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1915, since when all trace of him has been lost. He was a member of Local Union No. 11, Cleveland. Any information regarding him will be gratefully received by A. S. BAXTER, 2511 German Street, Erie, Pennsylvania.

GALLAGHER, PATRICK, who went from Hazleton to Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania, twenty years ago, with his children, John, Pattie, Mary, and Helen. His sister is very anxious to hear from him, and will be grateful to any one who can give her information regarding him or his children. MRS. PATRICK MCGRATH, Pleasant Street, Wynd Moore, Pennsylvania.

WILSON, MRS. L. M., who at one time lived at 570 Sierra Street, Los Angeles, California. I will greatly appreciate any information about her, or her descendants, and would be glad to know their present whereabouts. Please address GREG R. WILSON, Machinery Division, U. S. Naval Station, Cavite, Philippine Islands.

SCOTT, MRS. IDA, who lived at 1222 or 1224 McGee Street, Kansas City, Missouri, some two years ago. She has a grown-up son. Any one knowing her present address would do a great favor by writing to B. S., care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

BEALL, WILLIAM J.—He is fourteen years old, dark complexion, with black hair and brown eyes. He has not been seen since he left home to go to work on July 14th last. He wore a striped shirt, black and white check cap, black shoes and stockings, and knickerbockers. Please send any information to MRS. MARY BEALL, 1442 Ives Place, S. E. Washington, D. C.

A. J. B.—Last heard of in Western States. If you are anywhere near Detroit, please write. A. B.

CAMPBELL, LEO BERNARD.—Last seen in Worcester, Massachusetts, in January, 1919. Your family has moved to Baltimore, Maryland, 200 East Read Street. Please write. LYDIA.

CONGER, BRUCE, of Detroit. If he sees this he is requested to write to an old friend whom he knew in Kansas City seven and a half years ago. E. K., care of this Magazine.

WHITSON, ELMER T.—A reward of TEN DOLLARS will be paid to the first person furnishing accurate information regarding the present whereabouts of the above. He has worked as an electrician and rubber-stamp molder, and when last heard of was engaged in the printing business at 2048 Market Street, San Francisco, California, about December, 1918. Address all communications to WILLIAM HARTMAN, 127½ Twelfth Street, Portland, Oregon.

GUINN, HAROLD, fourteen years old, fair complexion, light hair, large blue eyes, a scar on his neck. He was taken from Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, by his aunts, the Misses Jennie and Mary McLeod, in July, 1916. They went to Calgary, Alberta, and from there to Ruth, Nevada, U. S. A. In January, 1917, he left Ruth with his aunt Mary McLeod, and is supposed to have gone to Salt Lake City, Utah. He is probably living with his grandmother and aunts, who are dressmakers. A suitable reward will be paid by the boy's father to any person who can give reliable information that will lead to his recovery. E. J. GUINN, Box 551, Neepawa, Manitoba, Canada.

CRAWLEY, ROBERT N., who was last heard of in Philadelphia, in 1903, or his brother, E. F., who at that time lived in New York. Any one knowing their present address will greatly oblige by writing to M. C., care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

SHELDON, WILLIS D.—He is sixty-five years old, six feet one inch tall, has snow-white hair, with a bald spot on top of head, no upper teeth, heavy voice, slightly round shouldered. Is a member of the Masons and Odd Fellows of Canaan, Connecticut. He left Bridgeport on the 12th of December, 1916, and has not been heard from since. He used to drive a laundry wagon in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Information in regard to him should be sent to WILLIAM E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Avenues, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

FUGITIVE'S INDISCRETION LEADS TO HIS ARREST

ACCUSED of being a receiver of stolen goods and of altering names on registered Liberty Bonds, John W. Worthington, of Chicago, jumped his ten-thousand-dollar bail bond and escaped from the State. He made one serious mistake before his departure, for he paid the last installment on the price of a ruby ring he had purchased, and penned a note on his check stub, to the effect that the check was for "being a fool."

Worthington had intended to give the ring to a woman, but before he could carry out his plan he had had to flee from Chicago. When he reached Seattle, Oregon, he tried to communicate with the woman. The letter was intercepted by members of the secret service and Worthington's whereabouts were discovered. He was found living at a Seattle hotel, under the name of F. W. Woods.

At first he denied that he was the man wanted, but a search of his trunk disclosed the ruby ring and the indiscreet entry on his check book. He was taken back to Chicago to stand trial.

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It is the *business* of the I. C. S. to prepare men in just your circumstances for better positions at better pay. They have been doing it for 27 years. They have helped two million other men and women. They are training over 100,000 now. Every day many students write to tell of advancements and increased salaries already won.

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- MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- STATIONARY ENGINEER
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- Contractor and Builder
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