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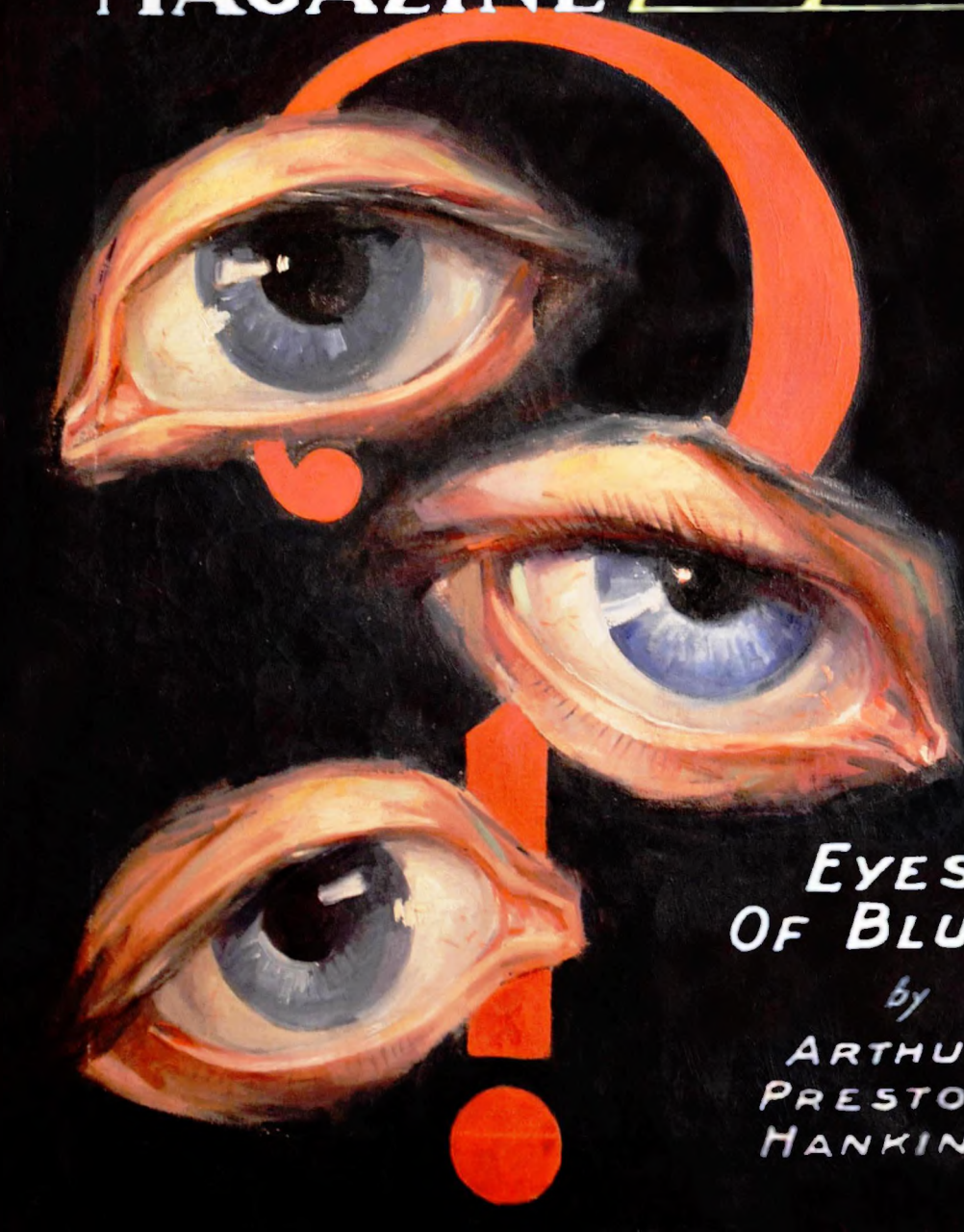
DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY TUESDAY



EYES OF BLUE

by

ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY TUESDAY

Vol. XXVIII ▣ Contents for December 2, 1919 ▣ No. 2

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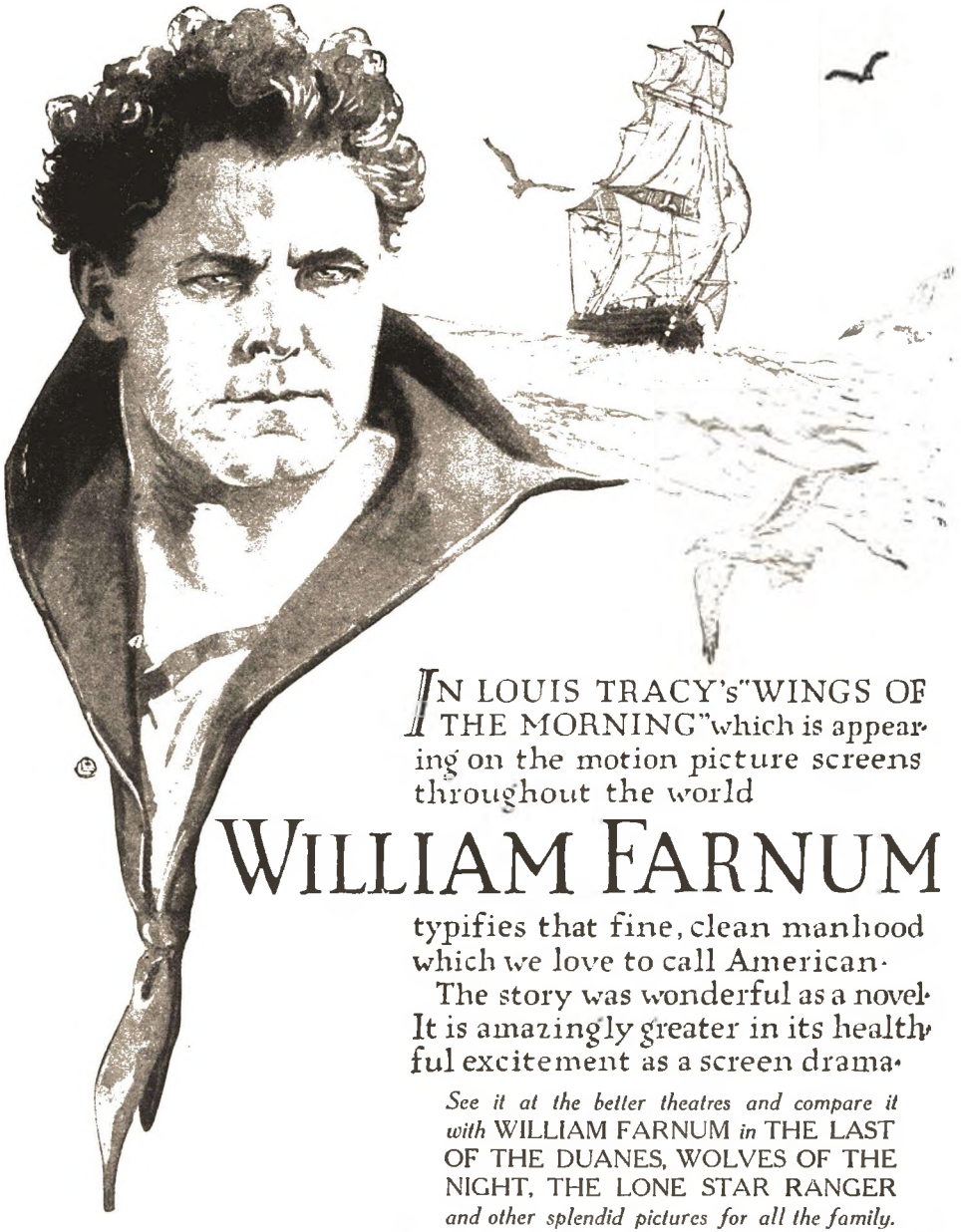

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY TUESDAY

Vol. XXVIII December 2, 1919 No. 2

Raw Silk

by

Charles W. Tyler

Author of the "Blue Jean Billy Race" Stories, etc.

NOTICE! **To Readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE: Owing to labor difficulties, during which our entire plant was shut down, it will be necessary to issue DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE more frequently than weekly, in order to make up for lost time. Hereafter DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE will be published about every five days, and we strongly advise our readers to watch the news stands so that they will not miss any number of this magazine.**

CHAPTER I.

HUMPTY DUMPTY.

THERE are, in the records of our institutions and among certain of their art collections, more complete classifications anent a personage known as Humpty Dumpty than is supplied by the mere name itself.

However, Humpty Dumpty can safely stand as a means of identification without supplying any of a long line of aliases, none of which are in any away associated with this man's original parentage.

Humpty Dumpty was the strange title by which men of the Great Southern's Mountain Division first knew of this dwarfed hunchback, and it was the only title by which they ever knew him. It was enough. It struck fear to the heart of many a train and engine man. It brought little beads of cold perspiration to the forehead of more than one operator in his lonely

mountain telegraph office. It was a name to conjure with.

Men did conjure with it, in a way; the women, too. Men spoke of it in association with sacred names and in solemn manners; they implored, conspired, and adjured. Many a mother substituted the name Humpty Dumpty for the bogey man in her efforts to establish the habit of obedience in some perverse youngster of her flock, and usually with startling effects.

But always, so far as officials of the Great Southern were concerned, Humpty Dumpty was a fleeting, awesome specter, a will-o'-the-wisp, darting out from some unexpected nook or cranny, stinging, and disappearing again in the vast and intricate maze of woods and mountains and cities.

The nearest that Humpty Dumpty came to suffering any penalty for his crimes on the Mountain Division was that night in a back room of the old Medicine Lodge bar when Dan Devine, then a fugitive himself, though later becoming associated with the railroad police, armed with a hatchet and an automatic, elected to back against the wall and have it out with the hunchback and three of this merciless outlaw's immediate friends.

The result of the fight that night, which had for its beginning no connection whatsoever with the part Humpty Dumpty was playing in the mountains, was a lull for a considerable time in the activities of a famous band of outlaws known as the Silkworms. Two of Humpty Dumpty's men, as a result of Dan Devine's skill in the gentle art of self-defense, aided and abetted by one automatic pistol and one able hatchet, cashed their chips and passed on; the hunchback himself received temporary lodging in the local calaboose, and the fourth man faded into the night never to return.

That Humpty Dumpty escaped within twenty-four hours thereafter was hardly a reflection on the local guardian of the law. That gentleman died, in an inadvertent moment, of shortness of breath. This was induced by the almost superhuman power in ten itching fingers, all long and steel-like, that settled themselves into the throat of the victim as he was carrying in the prisoner's supper.

The ugly part of it was that those clawlike fingers should not release their hold when unconsciousness came, but held firm till life was extinct.

That night Humpty Dumpty, too, faded somewhere in the gloom of the Rockies. The years rolled around, and this merciless leader in many of the division's most daring silk thefts was half forgotten.

Many a fervent prayer found its way out of a rocky ravine from the cab or caboose of a rumbling train when it was learned that Humpty Dumpty, of the far-famed Silkworm gang, had gone to other fields more fertile and less hazardous than the Great Southern.

The Great War ended, and a new era of life came. Ships resumed their bright-hued markings, and went again about their business of collecting merchandise from the markets of the world. Slowly trains that had been side-tracked for war supplies once more found their way onto the main line.

The Mountain Division quietly resumed its own natural order of things. The boys began to drift back for their old jobs, from the army and the navy to footboard and cab. The faces of the older men lighted, and they filled their pipes and gathered in the old nooks and corners to repeat the tales of their heroes.

And then it happened.

Ray Davenport, sitting in temporarily on the third trick at Squaw Hill, was found dead in his chair—with the finger marks of some strange, grim assassin on his throat.

Apparently there was no motive for this savage attack. Nothing had been disturbed except the slight displacement of such things as had, it seemed, been upset in the death struggle, and before the operator had at last been jammed lifeless back into his chair.

Robbery was out of the question at Squaw Hill; there was nothing to steal. Men who have worked at this barren tableland office have often asserted that the station building and the country for forty miles wasn't worth the blast of powder it would take to blow the whole works to blazes.

There were, however, several little details about the murder at Squaw Hill that seemed a bit queer. At first scarcely any attention was given them, but later they came out with startling distinctness—for that was the night that the Mountain Division lost a train of silk.

CHAPTER II.

"WHERE'S THE SILK TRAIN?"

IT was one o'clock in the morning, the Mountain Division was handling a train of silk, and the goose hung high.

When everything was going nicely the despather's office at Castle Rock was a fine place to listen to yarns, to borrow the makings, or to roost on a table in a back room and try to get a rise out of one James Freemont Hallet, who sometimes called crews and sometimes copied train orders for the despatcher, and sometimes got lost in Kelly's pool parlors up the street. James was sixteen years old in size and appearance, and a hundred and six in experience.

But when things went wrong the dispatcher's office was not a healthy place. And when something snapped it usually broke from a clear sky with a swish and a roar. Things have had a habit of letting go in that manner ever since the Great Southern first began nursing trains over the Continental Divide via the Great Southern Pass and Summit Spur.

Train robberies have been a thing that the Mountain Division has always had to contend with in one way or another. Sometimes it has been just plain old-fashioned stick-ups which were one hundred per cent the real article; sometimes it has been freight-car thieves; sometimes it has been outlaws who have operated with bold and systematic precision anent certain shipments of bullion; sometimes it has been sly thieves who have worked from the inside.

It is a peculiar thing that some mobs who specialize in one particular line of "grifting" will turn up their noses at opportunities which pass at their elbow, and which, seemingly, offer much easier methods both as to cracking the crib and making the get-away.

To-night the Mountain Division had been handling several startlingly valuable shipments of both bullion and currency, to say nothing of long crowded trains of wealthy tourists bound for the coast. And here it was after one o'clock and No. 12 was just reported as arrived at Livingston, the eastern terminus of the division; No. 4 had hung to her schedule to the dot, and had been past fretting about for nearly three hours; No. 1, the famous Golden Gate Flyer, had poked her nose down through the yards and by the dispatcher's office at ten o'clock, and the Prairie Division had taken over the Pacific Mail in two sections, away late, at twelve-thirty.

Truly this was one of those nights when each man loved his brother exceeding much, tobacco smoke was thick, and peace on earth was second only to that hour when the boys would eat.

Hallet tilted his chair back and straightened from his train sheet, throwing his arms high above his head

and yawning with luxurious commotion.

"One o'clock and all is well," he chanted. "The wind is east and blowing like—like——"

His eyes roved to the clock on the wall before him.

"And now what to heck has happened to Hammond?" he broke off. "At times that danged old woman does get my nanny something awful. A light hitch and a clear road all the way—and the pussy-footing old hyena hasn't made Squaw Hill. Ho-hum, a wild night!"

The dispatcher reached out a hand for the train wire key. With his second finger he boxed it open and lazily began calling S-w. It was not that Hallet was in the habit of calling every station along the line and asking "please" had number so and so showed up in that burg yet, but rather that at the moment he had nothing else to do.

He called Squaw Hill for some little time; then prayed aloud for the loan of a cigarette. After several petitions, which same were beginning to get colorful, his supplication was rewarded. He lighted the pill and once more began methodically thumping: "S-w, S-w, S-w, C-r," signing the Castle Rock call at various intervals.

But Squaw Hill did not answer.

"Yes," muttered Hallet, banging his key shut at length, "it's a dull night, all right; even the operators have gone to sleep. Probably old lady Hammond is doing better than I gave him credit for. I'll wait a few minutes and see what Enumclaw says about that silk train."

Be it understood that the silk trains always get the best of everything—fast engines, the best engineers available, and clear rights over pretty nearly all trains of whatsoever class, right, or direction.

It had been understood that if the Prairie Division got the silk train in sufficiently early in the evening it would go over the Divide as second No. 12, but the Princess Express had been scooting along far down the eastern slope before a weary, dusty crew from the plains to the westward brought their precious load of raw silk into the yards at Castle Rock.

Engine No. 2675 of the Mountain Division's staff of fast freight pullers was waiting below the water plug on the coal chute lead, the steam crackling at her dome and the yellow glow of her fire showing bright and clear below her grates.

With a most businesslike precision the big hog backed on ahead of her train, engineman and conductor received their orders and clearance—and Extra 2675 was streaking it out through the foothills. With the promptitude of one of the great transcontinental flyers she made White Horse Plain, dropped Helper behind her, Stillwater, Red Rock Cañon, White Water—and then faded into a grim, mysterious nowhere.

Certainly Extra No. 2675 had gone out of sight of Hallet on the third trick, and for a man who had recently been expressing himself concerning the brotherhood of his fellow creatures this was not good.

It was true that in those days when Humpty Dumpty had been operating in the mountains the silk trains had been stuck up, trainmen had been killed, and the Great Southern had suffered considerably in more ways than one. However, most of the looting of the silk cars had been done when the train was in motion, and, on occasions, nothing had been known of it till the special reached Livingston.

The method Humpty Dumpty had used in disposing of his loot without apprehension was a thing that the railroad police had never been able to solve.

While the richness of the silk trains was almost unbelievable the raw silk itself was a bulky commodity that ordinary holdup men would find hard to

handle in those precious hours of their get-away. Even though a bale of silk measuring approximately three feet by three feet by one foot, and weighing at an average of one hundred and twenty-three and a third pounds, was worth a thousand dollars, the weight and size of it was one great obstacle when it came to choosing raw silk in preference to gold bullion or currency.

Everything was perfectly logical and within understanding until Squaw Hill failed to make a report on the passing of Extra 2675, then due; or, later, failed to respond to repeated calling from the dispatcher's office.

There was one possibility, and that was that the man sitting in at S-w was asleep. Yet, strangely enough, operators have been known to remain undisturbed by the passing of a train only to awaken almost at once in response to the insistent demands of the metallic tongue of the telegraph sounder. Hallet knew this, and, therefore, found himself suddenly in a state of uneasiness when Squaw Hill remained dead.

There was nothing, however, to be done until the special was due at Enumclaw. If Enumclaw failed to OS Extra 2675—well, then it would be time to sit upon one's hind legs and proceed to howl.

Hallet's eyes were glued to the face of the clock. One-thirty came, one-forty, one forty-five. Hallet fidgeted, his fingers tapping up and down the train sheet, playing on and about the hard rubber disk of the telegraph key and snapping nervously against the table's edge.

At one-fifty he could stand it no longer. He cuffed the key open and sent a snappy, insistent call flashing over the wire. "N-u, N-u, N-u, N-u—C-r."

Almost instantly Enumclaw broke. "I-i—N-u."

"Has X 2675 got there yet?" rapped the dispatcher.

"No." The reply was terse.

"Go out on the platform and see if you can hear them coming," was Hallet's next spasm of "Morse."

Followed considerable of a pause on the circuit. At last the reply came:

"Nothing doing."

"I-i." Castle Rock's acknowledgment was brief; Hallet was very much perturbed. He breathed deeply, and swore.

"A silk train is a silk train, worth a couple of million and all that," he muttered. "And there is a whole lot to it that more than half a dozen crooks would want to lug off on their saddle horns or in their vest pockets or some place, and maybe I'm more of an old woman than Hammond, and maybe again I ain't, but I want to know what's the matter with Squaw Hill, which is two, and what's the matter with Extra 2675, which is two more, and what's it add up to is what I would like to savvy."

However, there was one thing sure about it; Squaw Hill could be located even if Hammond and his raw silk were out of sight temporarily.

The dispatcher proceeded at once to get Squaw Hill. This was done through help of the telephone exchange at Helper, because when curfew rang Squaw Hill went to bed; everybody but the operator at the station.

Twenty minutes passed, during which time Hallet not only invoked the aid of the gods but promptly set about several little chores, in true railroad fashion, that had to do with getting ready for most anything.

Then came something that was a clean blow from the shoulder. For a moment it stunned Hallet, even though he had been getting himself nerved for the unusual.

Ray Davenport was dead at his key at Squaw Hill. There was evidence of a struggle. There were hideous finger marks on the dead man's throat.

Yes, yes, great Jehovah, it was that first hunch working out true to form! To-night, in the midst of a veritable calm, poor young Davenport had bowed to the Fates because of the clutching fingers of some merciless assassin. And now where was the silk train?

Not for a minute did Hallet cease to believe that there was a connection between the two. Others who came chose to think differently, for, they said, it was ridiculous to suppose that Extra 2675 was not somewhere between White Water and Squaw Hill, or between Squaw Hill and Enumclaw; probably minus a cylinderhead or tied up with a hot box. Again, in the confusion of some idiot's babblings from that sleepy town on the table land, there was the possibility that the distraught personage who had found the body might have imagined most anything. Perhaps the operator had died of natural causes.

"What's that? What's that you say?" boomed Conrad, the chief dispatcher, when he came and as he proceeded to assimilate as briefly as possible the facts of the case. "Davenport dead at Squaw Hill! And the silk train not reported at Enumclaw! Where did you hear from 'em last?"

"White Water OSed them at twelve-fifty," declared Hallet. "Hammond was rolling them for crimminy's sake."

"Did you get Holden on the phone?"

"He didn't get back from Livingston yet."

"Huh! Thought he was coming over on No. 1."

"Well, he didn't. I phoned the assistant super, though. Wilcox said he'd be right down."

"Oh, me! Oh, my!" fumed Conrad, crashing into a chair beside Hallet and reaching himself for a key. "And now it's the silk train. I thought we had passed through every stage of stick-up there was. Man, wouldn't it make you think of that hunchback and his blasted band of silk thieves we had so much fuss with a few years ago? Wouldn't it now? Har-r-h? Who've you got in touch with at Squaw Hill?"

"I got Matthews, the second-trick man, on the phone at the hotel. He's going over and see if he can't give us something a little more accurate. The guy who runs the place there went over first and found Davenport, and when he came on the line he was wild as a hawk, said the operator had been choked to death, and that there were nasty looking marks and little scratches on his throat."

Conrad roared. "The dang fool was probably scared so stiff he couldn't see anything straight to save his soul. Maybe this thing is more of a scare than anything else, Hallet, after all. I thought from what you said at first that Davenport was all shot up or hacked to pieces or something, and that made me think possibly there was something all-fired suspicious in the wind when you said that the silk train hadn't been reported by Enumclaw. Let's wait a while before we get all worked up about this thing. Perhaps we have nothing more to contend with than the regrettable death of young Davenport of natural causes, and, possibly, a hot box or something."

At that moment Squaw Hill came in with a shrill call for Castle Rock. Matthews had arrived at the station; his "Morse," however, was but little more coherent than had been the hotel proprietor's conversation over the telephone. Twice Conrad himself broke, interrupting with brisk and skeptical interrogatives concerning the exact state of affairs in the telegraph office at Squaw Hill.

After a little the chief dispatcher sat back and scoured his cheeks with the palms of his hands, while he scowled meditatively at the clock.

"I don't know," he muttered after

a little, "just what to think of this thing. Nevertheless, you hear me, I'm not going to think a great while. Either that silk train is all right, excepting for some trifling delay, or it isn't."

"Well," suggested Hallet, "there's No. 230, the manifest train, that went into the hole at Red Rock Cañon to let the silk job by. White Water has just OSed them; we can put the board against them at Squaw Hill and tell 'em to keep an eye open up through Little Boy and Portal Gap."

"Do that." Conrad was sore perplexed, and each minute now only added to this state of mental disturbance.

Wilcox, the assistant superintendent, came in, a thin-faced, nervous man. He was a little dubious about doing anything that was not strictly according to Hoyle. Mr. Wilcox lived very close to the book of rules. He deliberated and fidgeted and fussed and fumed—and got nowhere.

Then in the midst of it all there came a message from George Holden himself, the Mountain Division's big-hearted, two-fisted superintendent. It was brief, but it contained a terse warning that suddenly set the temperature mounting here in the dispatcher's office.

Hallet received the message, jotting it down as it came clicking over the wire. It was dated at Medicine Lodge. It read:

> Warn all train crews of possible attempts at looting. Have just learned that Humpty Dumpty is in the mountains. Double the guard on those silk shipments.
>
> (Signed) HOLDEN.

"Why—er—what—what——" babbled Mr. Wilcox. "Certainly. By all means."

Conrad, however, was not wasting mere words. He was at the telephone, cranking the roundhouse call. While he waited with the receiver to his ear he called back over his shoulder to Hallet:

"Tell that operator at Medicine Lodge to get in touch with Holden and have him come to the wire."

Then, into the transmitter:

"Coogan? . . . . . Got an engine there? Something that can get out of its own way? . . . . . All right, put a fire in her and get her hot."

James Freemont Hallet was already on the job. Any touch of anything unusual always stirred James to activities as nothing else could. A promise of excitement and he was on the mark.

"Get a crew!" boomed Conrad.

Already the call boy was jotting down in his book those names of men who were first out from the lists on the yellow sheet at the counter.

Suddenly Mr. Wilcox was mildly remonstrative.

"Now—now let's sum this thing up a little more thoroughly before we go too far. Let's wait a little before——"

"Wait! Hell!" shouted the chief dispatcher, whose years of experience on the Mountain Division had taught him to take things easy up to a certain point—and then get going. "There's a dead operator at Squaw Hill, the silk train, due at Enumclaw twenty minutes ago, hasn't showed up, George Holden has got a tip that the Hades worm of all time, that hunchback killer, is somewhere out there in the hills! Three reasons—three of 'em—for not waiting one solitary second longer. Five minutes ago I was doubtful myself; not now.

"Mr. Wilcox, you are comparatively new to the Mountain Division; I've been here since they used to have to shoo buffalos off the track. You will pardon me for not consulting you and debating this thing pro and con, but I don't consider that there is time for your views and mine to receive the proper airing. Hallet has been up in

the air ever since the death of Davenport was first brought to his attention. I thought then that he was a bit previous in getting me down here without further confirmation of the possibility that there had been foul play. But when George Holden wires at midnight, or rather one or two o'clock in the morning, from out there in the Rockies to look out for a depraved human fiend like Humpty Dumpty, the silk thief, then, by all that is high and mighty, I consider that it is time to get a coroner and some railroad cops and go to Squaw Hill and see what kind of Satan's own sweet mess we are getting into."

Conrad concluded his address with a snort, and went into session at once with central as concerned an emergency call for several of the division's railroad police officers.

Still the assistant super demurred; he felt that until something more definite had been learned it would not be exactly good judgment to order out a special train or anything like that. He was quite insistent.

Conrad was more than insistent; he was profane.

"You learned railroading back East in some yahoo seminary when I was out here playing tag with Jesse James and Three-Finger Musgrove, Jack Kennedy, and this here Dutch Charley at Laramie!" howled the chief in a manner distinctively characteristic of old-timers of the rail.

Mr. Wilcox subsided with bad grace. True he was the chief dispatcher's superior, but at the same time Holden had a way of backing up the veterans of the road which left open small opportunity for appeal.

"No. 230's out of Squaw Hill," called Hallet. "I told them to look out for Extra 2675, and if they were in trouble to help them into Enumclaw when they would receive further instructions."

"That's the eye!" was Conrad's brief acknowledgment. The chief was still shooting nervous, jerky orders into the telephone transmitter.

Soon men came hurrying into the dispatcher's office, their eyes bright and their breath short. Out in the hills fast freight No. 230 was pounding along toward Enumclaw, with the crew of the big freight hauler ahead, and the crew of the helper locomotive scanning every inch of the right-of-way for those flickering red tail-lights of Extra 2675.

But all the way the road was clear. No. 230 slowed to a stop before the telegraph office at Enumclaw. Past lonely sidings she had come, past tiny, black day offices, along the windings of the Little White Water, through the famous Portal Gap, past the blood-spattered mile-post 87 of other days —and nowhere along that pathway of steel was there trace of the silk train.

The third-trick man at Enumclaw beheld the two giant engines and their gray and grimy string of many-colored cars—instead of the huge black shapes of the big steel express cars of the silk train—and gasped.

"Great Jehovah!" he cried, hurrying down along the platform to meet an engineer and conductor who came piling from the cab of the leading engine. "Where's the silk train? What happened to it?"

"Ain't she *gone?*" called 230's conductor, panting.

"Gone?" yelled the white-faced operator. "Gone? Yes; but she hasn't gone by here!"

"You're crazy!" denounced the engineer. "In the name of Peter and Paul what have you been drinking? Man, didn't we see her come through the sag at Red Rock Cañon helafluking? Well, I'll say we did. Didn't we come right out behind her? I guess

yes. You've been asleep. Of course she's gone. She must have!"

"You lie," shouted the "Morse" man, flinging himself back through the door of the telegraph office, tumbling into his chair, and snatching frantically for the train-wire key. He was still ranting over his shoulder at the engineman. "Ain't Castle Rock been after me about that blasted train for the best part of an hour? Suffering Moses, Hallet was calling me five minutes before they were due at all. He even had me out in the gosh-blasted night listening to see if I could hear them coming up the hill from Antlers. Me-e, sleep? One whale of a chance of me sleeping the same night that Ray Davenport is found dead with the finger marks of some killer on his throat. Maud, godfrey, not me—asleep!"

At Castle Rock Hallet received the news almost like a man in a daze. A telegraph sounder is a cold, unemotional messenger. Now the sending was slow, distinct, but with a plainly nervous touch. Conrad, slamming into the room on his fourth trip from the platform below, suddenly hung poised in his tracks at the door, his head half turned toward the slow-speaking tongue of the wire.

No man in the room who could read "Morse" missed even a single letter of that transmission from the nerve-tense operator at Enumclaw.

"No. 230 is here. Her crew have n-o-t seen any sign of the silk train, Extra 2675."

Hallet was speechless; he gazed blankly at Conrad, and almost mechanically opened his key and formed the letters: "M-i-n," meaning wait a minute.

"Tell 'im," sputtered the chief, when he was able to speak at all, "tell 'im to give 230 a clearance and let her go."

And then suddenly addressing the assistant superintendent he said with a savage fury:

"Now what do you say to a special to take us to Squaw Hill—or any other part of this pike it may be necessary for us to go? They can't locate Holden up to Medicine Lodge, and when it comes right down to hammers and toenails you're the authority for this thing during his absence. What's the verdict, Mr. Wilcox?"

And then a strange thing happened.

From Echo Bowl, miles to the eastward of Enumclaw, came the familiar Castle Rock call.

Hallet's fingers played on the key.

"I-i, C-r," he answered.

Came a stunning bolt from an already turbulent sky.

Clear and distinct the "Morse" flowed.

"OS, OS, Extra 2675 E. by at two twenty-one a. m. MY, UA."

It was a train report. With Enumclaw *behind* her, the silk train was reported as having just passed the famed Echo Bowl station in Hermit Pass.

A wide-eyed operator at Enumclaw heard that report go rippling over the train wire, went ghastly white, gripped the table edge; then suddenly he grabbed for his key.

"B-k, B-k, B-k," he pounded frantically. Then called the despatcher's office with lightning "Morse." "C-r, C-r, C-r, N-w."

"I-i, I-i, C-r."

In one swift movement the Enumclaw operator was at his small switchboard, where he instantly grounded the train wire to the eastward of his station, therefore limiting the circuit to stations to the west. Castle Rock would hear the nervous chatter from the wire; Echo Bowl would not.

Swiftly the "Morse" man sent:

"The man who just OSed X 2675 is n-o-t the regular op at U-a. I know Morgan's 'touch'; it's not his. I am gnded (grounded) east. Will lift the gnd now."

There was a spasmodic rattle of the sounder for an instant—and once more the line was clear.

Hallet was gray; Conrad silent. Both had heard; so, also, had the assistant superintendent. For a moment there was no word spoken—and then Castle Rock went up into the air. Figuratively speaking, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth. A train that was lost at Enumclaw showed up at Hermit Pass. An operator was dead at Squaw Hill, and there was a strange hand at the key in Echo Bowl. What would come next?

There lay ahead of the Mountain Division a weird, grim something that, it seemed, must plumb the uttermost depths of the criminal mind.

CHAPTER III.

MISS SUSIE SMITH

IF a man has lived all of his life on top of the world where the air is clean and the light is clear, it stands to reason that when he shall descend to lower, darker lanes there must be some little time till his eyes shall become accustomed to the new surroundings.

We refer to one Matthew X. Cardiff, born of the rugged stock of our pioneers of those first trails that came creeping across the western plains.

A large part of Matt's life, previous to his becoming associated with the police department of the Great Southern, had been spent doing such work as falls to the lot of the forest ranger in the mighty national forests of our West.

From doing fire patrol duty among the highest ranges of the Rockies to picking his way along the trails of some of the worst habitués of the present-day underworld was a long and rather abrupt step—from pine trees to muck, Mr. Cardiff has remarked on occasion.

Nevertheless, as has been related in other chronicles, Mr. Cardiff proved himself very capable of sorting the goats from the sheep in the ruck of things. Yet there was always about that rangy gentleman an indefinable something that may, for example, be likened to the unapproachable wholesomeness of clean clothes fresh from the line.

It was in Matt Cardiff's eyes, together with a certain amount of almost childish innocence; it was in his walk; it was in his speech—those things that the mountains and the pines had created there.

Seldom, if ever, was the Mountain Division combed as it was in those hours which followed the discovery of Morgan at Echo Bowl bound and helpless in his lonely telegraph office. The operator at Enumclaw had been right. It was a strange hand that OSed the silk train, a train that had already faded somewhere in the vast fastness of the mountains.

And yet the fine-tooth scouring of the right-of-way between Red Rock Cañon and Enumclaw was barren of any clew whatsoever that might help clear the startling atmosphere of mystery that enveloped Extra 2675, the murder of Ray Davenport, and the assault on the operator in Hermit Pass.

This fact added to the ever-growing confusion of the hour. For it was something for the officials of the Great Southern to explain to the world. That two locomotives with their crews, a way car, carrying conductor and flagman and two armed men, and eleven huge express cars full of raw silk, should disappear as completely as though transformed into some strange wraith of the rail was aplenty for the officiating force to struggle with for a while.

The publicity of the press and the free advertising afforded might be all right in a way, but it was certainly not of the kind most desired. That out-

laws could pick up a whole train and stuff it in their pocket, so to speak, was not exactly reassuring either to the traveling public or to shippers.

Holden sought to impress this fact on Matt Cardiff out at Squaw Hill in those wee small hours of the morning when, with day creeping into existence from the East over the Continental Divide, a grim little group of men agreed that Ray Davenport had met death at the hands of parties unknown.

"Matt, boy," boomed the big super, clapping a time-seamed hand onto the other's shoulder, "you showed us all a thing or two when it came to tracing down the man—and the wife—who were at the bottom of the plot to murder Mel Eason. You handled the case in your own way, and that's what I want you to do now. I'd pair you up with Danny Devine, only that he is laid up with an attack of the flu, for he's had one run-in with that hunchback devil. There is mighty little question in my mind but that Humpty Dumpty is at the bottom of this thing. We must not dodge the fact that the runt's got brains. But look out for him; he's a killer. He killed the sheriff at Medicine Lodge; the same kind of marks are on the throat of poor young Ray Davenport; you saw them."

Matt's eyes were squinting speculatively toward the peaks far to the eastward; his fingers were mechanically playing about a brand of home-made "smoke" that was rapidly taking shape. He did not speak immediately, when the superintendent paused in his summing up. Mr. Cardiff never hurried his speech; rather he was prone to relax to a near drawl when his brain was laboring steadfastly.

"Ah—ah-h, you ain't no ways super—superstituous are yeh, Mister Holden?" he asked after a little.

"No!" said the superintendent emphatically. "No, sir, I am not! Why?"

"Well," stated Matt slowly, "you don't believe then that this here train of silk has gone and plumb evaporated, or has been overtook by some filigreed jamboree of spooks, or has gone to hades on a drunk, or anything like that, do you?"

Holden glanced sharply at the other, but he had witnessed the peculiar workings of this lanky ranger's mind before; therefore answered patiently:

"No, Matt, I'm not a bit superstitious. I never did make much progress with a belief in things other than of the material world."

"You ain't got a doubt but that your train of silk is some place, have yeh?"

Holden laughed shortly.

"No," he said, "not a doubt."

"You figure two hogs pulling eleven express cars loaded and a hack ain't liable to sprout no wings and go zooming off some place without considerable time elapsing for them wings to sort of take root?"

"Meaning that you consider the silk train is somewhere between here and Enumclaw, or between here and Red Rock Cañon?"

"Meaning, cap, that six or seven or eight hundred tons, or whatever your old train tips the scales at, *must* be some place between where it was seen last and the place where it wasn't seen, along the right-of-way or adjacent thereto."

"I suppose that's what we have got to concede, but for the time we've had we've made a fairly thorough search between——"

"Remember that yeh ain't no ways superstituous," admonished Mr. Cardiff, his lazy gray eyes studying the face of the Mountain Division superintendent.

Holden exploded. "But, Lord Harry, man, it isn't that! It's fact! Cold blasted d-blanked fact. The train is not on the iron, and there is no place that it could go to."

The ranger inhaled deeply; then sud-

denly he let go a wild volcanic eruption of smoke from both nostrils and his mouth. He was as near impatient as anybody had ever seen him. He snapped the half-burned cigarette savagely at a gentleman's hat which had been laid carefully on a corner of a table.

"Be double-d-dummed to your confounded train," swore Mr. Cardiff. "Finding your cussed silk ain't getting the root of your evil, and until you get rid of said root you're going to keep right on having to stamp out stick-up sprouts indefinitely. A guy who has got nerve and brains enough to steal a whole blasted train is just as likely as not to come back at you one of these fine days by lugging off your little tin railroad. Ain't it so?"

Holden didn't answer. Mr. Cardiff resumed, after a little:

"Maybe it ain't according to this guy Hoyle for me not to waste time examining the right-of-way between Red Rock Cañon and Enumclaw, but if your old No. 8 is on time"—glancing at his watch—"I'm going to start on the trail of your hunchback friend in just ten minutes. I'm going east on the Continental Express. Will you kindly ask your brass-pounder who is sitting in yonder to stick the board out against her?"

"But why do you go East?" demanded Holden. "Why isn't there just as big a chance that the leader of this mob would make his get-away to the West? That is, if he has gone at all. Wouldn't he be more likely to be hovering in the vicinity of his loot?"

Matt Cardiff was working nervously on another pill. Holden stepped to the door of the telegraph office and gave a brief order to the operator.

"East," the ranger was saying as the super returned, "because that is where your silk markets are. He's got to handle the end where the cash is. Probably he'll want to look after his interests personally; a thief ain't always as trusting and confiding among his own kind as he has been given credit for. Is he going to stay near his booty? He is not! He's going to get just as loving far away from it as quick as he can after the job is pulled. If something flivvers *he's* going to be out from under. Ain't that the customary etiquette of the 'caunfort ladran', which, I believe, is Irish slang for the head of the mob? Yes, and then, too, just consider that the gent is wanted for previous little musses, like shutting off friend sheriff's wind."

Holden nodded his head slowly.

"I guess you're right, Matt. I guess you're right."

"And now just sketch me out a little picture of what this here Humpty Dumpty gent looks like. You saw him, I believe you said."

"Yes," admitted the superintendent, "I saw him a few years ago up at Medicine Lodge. He was in the calaboose, and it was a little while before he choked the sheriff to death and departed for parts unknown. There isn't much I can give you to go on outside of what you already know. He's not what you might call a dwarf, and he's not so badly deformed; it's more the shortness of his body and the length of his legs and arms—his fingers, too, as I remember noticing them as he stood glaring out at me, each hand gripping a bar of his cell door. His eyes are what I would say that I remembered him by most. They were small, close-set, and jet black. His nose was large, and the rest of his features rather small in proportion. Ugh! But those eyes. They are what you will know him by. You'd never forget them. All the demons of hell look out at you from them."

And soon Matt Cardiff had good and sufficient reason to remember the superintendent's warning concerning the almost animallike eyes of Humpty

Dumpty; for when he gazed into them he saw there the look of the killer.

At Livingston Matthew X. Cardiff engaged a compartment in a Pullman right through to Chicago. Also, in the same car there was a woman of a type a little foreign to Mr. Cardiff. She was good to look upon, and rather sweet of voice; but the ranger felt that she was, maybe, just a trifle forward. She, too, was bound for Chicago.

She had been in evidence when he boarded the Continental Express back there at Squaw Hill in the gray light of the new day. No. 8's last car was a compartment, drawing-room, observation-library car. There were four compartments and two drawing-rooms—the drawing-rooms were in the center and were bounded on either side by the compartments.

There were no connecting doors between the drawing-rooms, but each drawing-room and its adjacent compartment had connecting doors, that a compartment and drawing-room might be arranged en suite if it was so desired. Also, there were connecting doors between the compartments.

Subsequently Mr. Cardiff learned that the conversational young lady whom he had encountered in the observation room shortly after No. 8 had pulled out of Squaw Hill occupied compartment "E," the second compartment ahead of the library-observation room.

The ranger examined the train and its passengers; he interviewed the ticket agent at Livingston and the Pullman conductor, but learned nothing that ordinarily should have led him to believe that the man he was after was aboard the Continental Express. If the theory that the head of the mob would choose his line of retreat by first selecting the quickest manner of getting away from the scene of his labors held water, then certainly it was only logical to suppose that Humpty Dumpty would be riding East this morning on the Continental Express.

It must be remembered that the Mountain Division and its officials and police had no justifiable reason for associating Humpty Dumpty with the disappearance of the silk train, other than the fact that some years previously this gentleman of the underworld had specialized in the theft of silk on the division, and that it was reported that the outlaw was again in the hills.

The looting of the silk trains in the Rockies had received more than its share of publicity, and for a long time when anybody mentioned silk instantly there was brought to mind the picture of the hunchback outlaw; for his mercilessness when opportunity for attack had been provoked was a thing that men of the Great Southern would never forget.

Hence it was but natural that in anything so audacious and stupendous as what appeared to be the theft of a whole silk train the first thought should be of the crook of the hills known as Humpty Dumpty.

But there had been no alarm sent out for the apprehension of the man; only a few were in possession of the facts, what few facts there were. As yet there was not evidence enough to provoke any sort of an offensive on the part of the railroad police, other than that which had to do with getting at the bottom of things generally.

Matt Cardiff realized his position, his limitations, and the obstacles that were before him this morning when he found himself at the beginning of a task that almost took his breath away.

Even if he received an introduction to Humpty Dumpty there was nothing in the world, under the present handicap, for him to do but bide his time till he had his man bang to rights.

There was much that Mr. Holden

and the railroad police might suspect, but as yet the only thing they could lay their finger on was the fact that they had lost a darn good operator and one whale of a rich shipment of silk, not to mention two locomotives and a way car; also some express cars that did not belong to them.

These were some of the thoughts that were chasing themselves through the brain of Mr. Cardiff in a dizzy and congested whirl as he sought to assure himself that he was performing a perfectly rational act in going East on No. 8 instead of hustling back up into the Little White Water country and looking for Extra 2675.

Concerning the Continental Express Matt felt that he had looked over its passengers pretty thoroughly. He had arranged in his own mind, their status pro and con very satisfactorily. He had had a good fair look at everybody but the occupant of drawing-room "D," which was next ahead of compartment "E," that compartment graced by the young lady of Matt's earlier acquaintance.

Compartment "F" was vacated at Livingston and Mr. Cardiff at once seized the opportunity to occupy it.

"Perhaps," thought Matt, "this talkative young woman can advance a little information about the gentleman who is bunking in number 'D.' All we savvy to date from this here George guy is that it's a *he* in there who is wearing a number eleven grouch. George don't remember scarcely at all what his nibs looks like. It do plumb seem though that if it was this here crooked crook I-all is combing the world for the coon would be aware of that much anyhow."

Further meditation on Mr. Cardiff's part was interrupted at this point by the appearance of the lady from compartment "E." Matt was standing on the observation platform; No. 8 was just pulling out, and was already slipping along through those bordering lanes of many-hued cars in the great yards at Livingston.

"Why the long, sour face?" the young lady was asking. "Do you find the outlook so terribly gloomy this fine morning?"

Matt's eyes slowly left the mighty, snow-capped range that loomed, seemingly, almost above them, and at length came to rest on the face of the "rather forward" young woman who had first addressed him in the observation room shortly after he boarded the train at Squaw Hill.

It has already been written that when one steps from the clear, bright air of outdoors to some less luminous area it requires a little time to become accustomed to the change.

Matt Cardiff, patroling the great forest reserves that had been a part of his domain, in the years gone by had had little opportunity for acquainting himself with the ways of the world along those paths which traverse a more or less shady area. His standards so far as women in general were concerned had lately been revised to fit a certain ideal that had been formulated since his acquaintance with Miss Janet Belton began, which is not to intimate that Matt took every woman whom he met at her own face value, but rather to suggest that Matt's general belief in the sincerity of the female of the species left him a bit more credulous than was good for him in his present capacity as a police officer.

The faithlessness and treachery of Melville Eason's wife had not jarred the intensity of his belief that the stock of woman as a whole must maintain a pretty high average when a person of his own uncouth mannerisms should be so fortunate as to be engaged to one of the sex so absolutely adorable as Janet Belton.

However, there was a lesson coming to Mr. Cardiff which, while not a whit

lessening his faith in one Janey, firmly left the imprint in his mind concerning the truth of a certain bit of verse of Mr. Kipling's.

"No, I just allow you are gazing at it while it is yet in its normal state," Matt was explaining in reply to the other's interrogations.

The woman laughed. Matt found himself almost unconsciously comparing that laugh to Janey's—the one just a little cold, unemotional; the other free and sweet.

"Ever since you joined us back there at that dingy old station in the mountains you have looked as though there was something weighty on your mind," the young lady hinted, glancing at Matthew coyly.

Mr. Cardiff hitched his neck up a bit out of his collar; then scratched his ear, which was a sign that Matt's gear works were working a twenty-four hour shift. After a little he said:

"Wasn't it Caruso who said something about great minds trying to handle four-track traffic on a one-way iron?"

"I don't know," admitted the young lady.

"Well, it don't make much difference anyhow," said Matt dryly, "so long as brain fever don't set in."

"I think you're awfully droll," returned the policeman's acquaintance.

"Which is a polite way of saying that 'John Bates' has a winning way."

Mr. Cardiff was not looking at his companion on the observation platform when he slipped out the underworld translation for a sucker or he would, perhaps, have noted a strange quick lift of a much pampered eyebrow.

"Well, certainly you speak a language all your own—*Mr. Cardiff.*"

There was no question now about the ranger's beginning to pay some attention to the conversation of his friendly acquaintance of the opposite sex. Mr. Cardiff, it may be stated, sat right up, figuratively, and began to take notice. He was not aware that he was known to any members of the particular crew that had been handling No. 8 on the Mountain Division; he had, in fact, been somewhat circumspect about letting his identity become public property since leaving Squaw Hill.

And yet, here was a perfectly strange young lady speaking his name with as much assurance as though they had been introduced. Next thing he knew she would be telling him what his business was, which was a truth soon realized.

Whatever surprise at this turn of affairs that Matt may have felt he kept very much within himself.

"Cardiff, Cardiff," he murmured. "Now it seems like I done heard tell of that gent before—some place. H-m! You must have got me plumb mixed up with the other feller though, Miss—Miss—— Why, dog-gone, what did you tell me your name was?"

"I don't believe I told you, if anybody asked you."

"No?" Ain't that too bad now, but if anybody asked me to guess I'd say it was probably Adelaide or Abigail, or something like that. What might your last name be, pretty miss?"

"Smith," stated the young lady promptly. "Susie Smith."

"My-y," said Mr. Cardiff admiringly, "what a reliable name. Good enough for most anybody. Easy name to remember. Thank yeh! My name's Jones. John Jones. Nice reliable name, too. What?"

Miss Smith admitted that it was a perfectly good name, good as any; then she suddenly shifted the channels of the conversation.

"What was all the excitement in the Rockies last night?" she asked. "I overheard the Pullman conductor and brakeman talking in the observation room at an unearthly early hour. That's how I happened to be up and

dressed when you joined us. Something was said about a silk train and an operator that had been found dead. Really, it was so exciting that I couldn't think of remaining all cooped up in a compartment. Could you?"

Matt sighed and hunched his shoulders with a queer, listless sort of shrug. "No," he said without enthusiasm, "I allow probably I couldn't—being of the he variety and always more or less a hankering for brawls and the like. I didn't know that women was so keen after that sort of spice. Wasn't you scared none?"

"Scared? Scared of what?"

"Scared of getting shanghaied by some of them descendents of Cap'n Kid who it seems have took up abode in our midst."

The woman tossed her head and laughed shortly. "I'm afraid the old masters like the captain don't frighten me much any more."

"I want to know." Matt half closed his lids and once more resumed his contemplation of the far-away peaks. "Mind if I smoke a nail?" he asked after a little, still apparently mindful only of those silvered ranges.

"Certainly not; two if you like."

Mr. Cardiff proceeded with the makings, then glanced about him. The car, it seemed, was deserted; even the observation room beyond was vacant.

"Why not let's sit down and take a load off our feet," he suggested, after he had the smoke burning. He pushed a chair toward the woman and dragged another one for himself.

Miss Smith eyed him keenly for a moment, then sank into the seat proffered.

"Queer duck in that drawing-room next to you," Mr. Cardiff ventured as a random shot at the thing he was trying to fathom.

"Yes?" The woman raised her brows slightly and coolly eyed Mr. Cardiff. "I hadn't noticed."

Matt's finger—the forefinger of his right hand—immediately got busy with the back of his ear again. Just what sort of a party was he sending out invitations for. He wondered.

"Funny," he mused, cocking his head a bit to one side and lying glibly, "the porter said he was a friend of yours."

"Even so," said Miss Smith craftily, "it doesn't go to say that he is necessarily a queer duck, does it?"

A strange something was seething around inside of him, a something that made him feel all on edge, a little nervous, a little irritable; nevertheless he was fully determined to maintain the present line of advance till something dropped. He felt that there was something most peculiar about that occupant of drawing-room "D," and he was sure that there was some sinister connecting link between this unknown and Miss Smith.

Matt studied the woman's face for a long minute before he answered; then he drawled:

"Par-don! No offense, kind lady, none intended whatsoever."

Mr. Cardiff bowed with exaggerted mock gravity. The other smiled and nodded, but deep beneath that outer expression of amusement Matt believed he glimpsed in those piercing eyes a vivid flash of intense hate. He got up, tossed the butt of his cigarette away, and excused himself, promising to return shortly.

People were beginning to come back from breakfast in the dining car ahead. Mr. Cardiff passed among them, scrutinizing each face carefully. He stopped a trainman and inquired for the Pullman conductor. There was one little question that he wanted to ask this gentleman.

Following his brief interview with the latter individual Matt Cardiff again sought the lady of his earlier acquaintance. On the way back toward the rear of the train he secured a tele-

graph blank, stopped at the writing desk in the forward part of the observation room, and for several minutes was busy jotting down a message.

This task completed he searched out the train conductor, gave the telegram into his keeping, made his own identity known, laid down a few terse instructions, and withdrew.

Miss Susie Smith, true to her word, was waiting when at length he returned to the observation platform.

CHAPTER IV.

"WATCH CARDIFF'S SMOKE."

THE Mountain Division was slowly awakening to the fact that a thing that would ordinarily be considered absolutely impossible was, after all, very much possible. With several hours of daylight already gone there still was missing one silk train.

And what was infinitely more disconcerting was the fact that there had been no developments which would point to its immediate recovery, or of ever recovering it, for that matter.

Holden had been over the road himself once in those hours immediately after Mr. Cardiff had departed on No. 8. Eight-thirty o'clock, however, found the big superintendent back at Castle Rock. Much to his surprise there already was a wire awaiting him from Matthew. It was dated at Livingston; it read:

> Have met a nice lady who I strongly suspect is trying to flirt with me. I don't know why—yet. Sit tight. Be ready to reply as directed instantly if you receive another wire this a. m.
>
> (Signed) CARDIFF.

Holden got up on his ear, and then got down again. The lanky ranger had never yet failed to get his man, but at times his methods were most gosh-awfully trying to a person's nervous system.

Some tourist daisy was trying to flirt with him, and because of this fact he chose to wire the superintendent of the Mountain Division to look for developments. Holden snorted and said things that would have made an outburst of college yells seem weak and unsatisfactory.

Conrad, however, offered the shrewd opinion that any tourist daisy who was flirting with a homely Swede like Cardiff at four or five or six o'clock in the morning was good for developments any day in the week.

"Most of the corn-fed tourist daisies I ever saw," stated the chief dispatcher, "don't get up at any such hours as that, and if they do get up that early, to my mind, they are suspicious characters. You watch Cardiff's smoke," concluded Conrad emphatically, "and if you take my advice you will keep the home fires burning to the extent of maintaining a strict watch on the movements of No. 8 on the Eastern Division, the while you have a wire all ready and waiting to handle anything that it may be necessary for you to put over."

"All right," conceded Holden, reaching for an Eastern time card, and at the same time glancing at the clock. "The Continental Express is due at Arrow River in about ten minutes. She'll make Meadow Valley, if she's still on time, at nine twenty-five. Tell Livingston to line us up a wire on the Eastern Division for emergency, although I can't see for the life of me what good it's going to do."

"It ain't to be expected that you can," Conrad shot back crustily. "You ain't close enough to this tourist bell to cultivate your foresight."

"We're going to cultivate something if we don't locate that silk train pretty soon," stated the super.

Leighton now sitting in on the first trick suddenly straightened in his chair.

"Hey!"

The train-wire sounder was suddenly chattering frantically. The dispatcher

listened a minute; then grabbed for a long blank. Even as he started taking down the message he concluded the sentence that was on his lips.

"Something doing here. Holden's wanted on the wire. Want you to talk to the super of the Eastern soon as you read this."

The dispatcher's pencil was flowing rapidly across the yellow sheet. Already George Holden was hanging over Leighton's shoulder listening himself to the strange instructions which were chattering over the wire. Again the message was signed Cardiff, but this time every word was terse, explicit. Instant and drastic action was called for.

As unusual as were the instructions, as wholly suggestive of the spectacular as was the whole thing, it made no difference to George Holden now. Already he was at the wire that had been provided, a copper line, one of the best of the Western Union's many that stretched across the Rockies.

In a span of time so short that it was almost unbelievable the superintendent of the Mountain Division was in direct communication with the superintendent of that division of the plains far over the Continental Divide, the Great Southern's Eastern.

Already the superintendent of the Eastern Division had been made familiar with the entire array of developments of the night in the mountains. Now he listened intently to the rather ragged "Morse" of the super of the Mountain Division which jerked from the tongue of the sounder at his elbow.

Even before the message was through he was formulating the wording of the relay for the benefit of the train dispatcher of the Eastern. There was no time to be lost; there must be no delay to No. 8; there must be no delay to that flying limited that was coming west, No. 7, the Yokohama Mail.

And yet on those frail wires that yoked Castle Rock and Livingston there were other messages snapping over the circuits this morning, sinister cipher messages that suddenly went out to marshal certain of the forces of the man called Humpty Dumpty.

Even as Castle Rock made a move in the vast and intricate play of the game, so also did those who acted under the cunning guidance of one who was closely associated with both law and outlaw.

CHAPTER V.

KING OF THE SILKWORMS.

WITH a full realization of the grimness of the task that confronted him, of the utter barbarity of that man who sat across this chessboard of life and death, Matt Cardiff coolly arranged those details which he believed necessary for the success of the man hunt.

Even in those moments when he was thrusting and parrying in a conversational duel with a woman who called herself Susie Smith, Matt was preparing, in the deep recesses of his brain, for the move called checkmate. He was heartily tired of the baiting, bantering tongue of the other, and yet he allowed his mild blue eyes to meet her black, fathomless ones with marked admiration in their telltale depths.

The woman thought:

"The poor dub, for a smile and a wink he'd unburden his blessed, overloaded soul to me with the freedom of an erring son. Ha! A fine dick away from his best girl's apron strings. No 'jamb'—difficulty—to this little game at all. 'Silk' Annie McCoy, you haven't worked up from a cold-hands broad for nothing."

Aloud she said:

"I think I shall go inside now, Mr. —er—Jones. I have a little writing to do, but, if you care to, I shall be pleased to show you a few little trinkets that

I brought from the Orient—that you might be interested in, interested enough to step into Compartment "E" when you—are at leisure."

And Miss Smith withdrew, flashing over her shoulder a smile that was intended to convince the farmerish gentleman of the Rockies that the strange lady whom he had met in the observation room was not in the least opposed to a continuance of the acquaintance, which was becoming exceedingly interesting.

Mr. Cardiff assured the lady humbly that he would be plumb tickled to death to accept her kind invitation, and shortly would present his unworthy person at her shrine.

He watched her move away, and then remarked to Mr. Matt Cardiff in confidence:

"'Walk into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly, 'and I will show you how to spin a lovely silk gown.' And the simple country fly walked in and the spider made a silk suit for the fly—only it was the suit they laid him out in, and the fly looked perfectly natural and all was well."

Once more Mr. Cardiff sought the train conductor, which gentleman lent a most attentive ear.

"Get that wire off O. K. at Arrow River?" demanded the ranger.

"You bet your life," affirmed the conductor.

"All right; now one thing more."

"Yes."

"When we slow up for Meadow Valley rap on the door of Compartment 'F.' If you receive *no* answer, carry through to the dot those instructions which you will receive there from the superintendent of this division. Otherwise there will be no occasion for any procedure other than your customary stop. Do you understand? If, when you tap on the door of compartment 'F,' I come *out*, why, then I'm on the trail of the wrong man. H-m! But if there is nothing doing—and I don't come out—well, just follow out those instructions with as little disturbance as you can."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Car——"

"No, no! Jones. John Jones from Jonesville, a hick from the wild and woolly."

The conductor smiled; Matt held out his hand.

"Till we meet," he said a bit grimly. "So long."

"Good luck."

Matt returned to the observation car; the conductor moved toward the forward part of the train, there to impart certain instructions to a brakeman.

"Come in!"

Matt Cardiff paused a moment, glancing first toward the observation room on his right; then along the narrow passageway on his left. It was funny. The car seemed almost deserted, and if not entirely so, yet it gave indication of being soon; for a porter was removing two suit cases from drawing-room "C," and a lady from a compartment still nearer the forward end of the car was apparently transporting her belongings to the car ahead.

Slowly Mr. Cardiff pushed the door of compartment "E" open and entered. The woman was seated near the window. She glanced at the visitor and smiled; then nodded in the direction of the seat opposite her.

"Sit down," she said.

Almost automatically Matt's eyes flashed one swift glance toward that door at his left, as he entered, which led to drawing-room "D." The woman caught the look and there crept into her black eyes the slow, mounting light of exultation.

The railroad officer from the Mountain Division stood for a moment seemingly half uncertain of himself. Standing with its back directly in front of

the connecting door which led to his own compartment, compartment "F," was a chair. It faced the door which led to drawing-room "D."

Certainly the chair was infinitely more to be desired than the seat by the window. The latter would place that door from drawing-room "D" practically behind him. To observe any movement of that door it would be necessary for him to sit with his head turned in a plainly suspicious, not to say tiresome, attitude.

It seemed, however, that the woman had provided for this contingency by placing a hat and several articles of feminine wearing apparel on the chair while that seat which faced in the opposite direction to the movement of the train, was painfully bare of anything that might furnish an excuse for the gentleman to seize upon in his efforts to politely decline the lady's evidently positive invitation.

"Riding backward always makes me sleepy," demurred Matthew, "glancing first at the chair, then at that space beside the lady herself which was unoccupied.

"Oh, I won't let you get sleepy," she said, reaching forward and patting the soft, huge-patterned seat across from her. "Sit right here where I can look at you."

With a little half-hearted shrug Mr. Cardiff followed the lady's bidding, but not till he had shot a last speculative glance at that door of mystery. Certainly it was a room of mystery, that drawing-room "D," for neither the Pullman conductor nor the train conductor had been able to throw any light on who its occupant might be or what he might look like.

The drawing-room had been reserved away back at Castle Rock. The porter had been entrusted with the ticket strip and the Pullman ticket, which foresight had saved either of the two gentlemen in question from disturbing the passenger. Just when he had boarded No. 8, also, was not entirely clear. There were, for that matter, as revealed by a close examination, several little matters that were not exactly lucid.

They were the things that had come to the attention of Mr. Cardiff as soon as he began to make inquiries concerning the gentleman in drawing-room "D." More than ever they were before him now, for he felt certain that in choosing the trail that he should follow he had in no way erred.

In the present moments Matt could almost feel a strange menacing presence there beyond him, and yet he would play this thing through as he had planned. Bang to rights! That was the way he wanted to get his man; the rest would take care of itself, he believed.

"You were speaking, before we left the observation platform, of silk, I believe," Miss Smith reminded Mr. Jones, eying this personage quizzically.

"Yes-s," admitted the gentleman of the party, a trifle reluctantly, it seemed; "I—I'm some interested in silk, raw silk."

"R-raw silk?"

"Yea-ah. I'm looking for some."

Matt Cardiff was positive at that instant that he heard a slight movement in the room beyond. He glanced at his watch. It was five minutes past nine o'clock.

"You're looking for some raw silk?" There was a sudden flush of color in the woman's face and a glitter in her eyes that Mr. Jones had not seen there before. Her interrogation was tensely vibrant with passion. It was almost a challenge.

"Ye—yea-ah," admitted Matt bashfully. "Mister Holden, I—I mean the Mount—the—the Great Southern lost some."

Silk Anne McCoy suddenly relaxed. She laughed shrilly, and, almost, it ap-

peared, in relief. All along she had believed that, at least, this dick possessed a few brains; evidently he did not, or else he was crazy.

"My, my," she breathed half aloud, "that is certainly rich." And then again addressing Mr. Cardiff: "And you are really an elbow, after all? I heard you were last night, but I thought that porter was trying to kid me."

"No," corrected Mr. Cardiff modestly, "I'm a d-detective."

"You mean you think you are," gibed the woman. "Some uncouth person has been imposing on your good nature, Billy."

But Mr. Matt Cardiff went on unheeding, stolidly:

"And I'm looking for a guy called Humpty Dumpty." His eyes were studying the face of the woman, for he knew that, unless she was an exceptional actor, the first movement of that door there almost behind him would be reflected by the emotions which showed in her face.

Silk Anne stiffened; she leaned forward slightly and her eyes were cold and penetrating as she bent her gaze on the other's face.

"And why, my dear man, should you be looking for Humpty Dumpty?"

"Do you know him?" Matt's voice was soft; his eyes very mild and almost innocent, although there was something in them now that had not appeared there before. He purposely evaded the query and interposed one of his own.

The atmosphere of the place was suddenly charged with a vague something that threatened to break each successive instant. Matt felt it and could almost imagine that portion of his anatomy which a person would draw a bead on if said person desired very much to suffer him a painless and abrupt ending.

It would be only necessary for that door at his right to open a very little before there would be plenty of room to insert the barrel of a gat. The thing of it was that the door opened into compartment "E," and from the tail of his eye he would be apt to observe any unusual movement in this direction.

Matt Cardiff, however, felt reasonably certain that "gunning" his man was altogether too crude stuff for Humpty Dumpty; besides, it was too noisy a method, would attract unwelcome attention, and so on.

After a little the woman, her voice suddenly low, but containing all the venom of a coiled serpent, asked:

"Would you like to see—Humpty Dumpty, Mister Cardiff?"

Matt's eyes were half closed now, one eyebrow cocked a little higher than its mate; his head was canted just a bit to one side. He was still intent on observing the play of passion on the face of his friend, Miss Smith.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I just plumb would like to see this here Silkworm they tell about. I—I sort of wanted to ask him what the devil he did with that train of silk the Mountain Division lost early this morning."

Matt's voice was steady; his words deliberate and painstakingly set forth. Slowly the bit of drama being enacted here in the observation car of the Continental Express was drawing to a head. Something soon must drop. At last the ranger was absolutely positive that he was close to the man whose brains and daring had been the chief resource of those who had carried out the gigantic scheme concerning the disappearance of the silk train.

Suddenly the woman stiffened, almost imperceptibly, nevertheless the movement was there, while there came a slightly noticeable widening of the eye, even as it slowly shifted the course of its gaze.

Matt Cardiff sat perfectly still; his hands he took great pains to keep folded in plain sight before him.

Except for the noises of the swiftly moving train the place was absolutely still, so quiet that even the click and drum of steel on steel seemed less pronounced.

From the very telltale tenseness of the woman Matt Cardiff realized instantly what was coming. Out of the corner of his eye he was able to detect the first faint inward movement of that door that led to drawing-room "D." Its opening was like the slow, ponderous swinging of some huge barrier.

Scarcely without being aware of the unexplainable trend of his thoughts Matt found himself half attempting to analyze the working of the brain that should choose to act so methodically. He decided that it must be the same peculiarity that prompts a cat to play with a mouse.

Silk Annie's face slowly lost its tenseness, while reflected in its place was a cold, calculative scrutiny, which again had for its objective the person of Mr. Cardiff.

At last the door was opened to its full extent, while now a figure was framed there, a figure silent, menacing, a figure whose eyes bored steadily straight into Matt Cardiff's innermost existence. The man was so close that the ranger could have almost reached out his hand and touched him.

It seemed a long time before any word was spoken. At last the man in the door uttered a half inarticulate, grating sound.

"Yah-h-h!"

It was the voice of the king of the Silkworms.

Matt turned his head slowly, still keeping his hands crossed before him. With the utmost deliberation he eyed the hunchback from head to foot. Holden had spoken the truth. It was the eyes one would remember Humpty Dumpty by; for now, looking square into the face of Matt Cardiff, were two colorless wells of hatred from which was reflected the barbarous gleam of the killer.

Other than for those unforgettable eyes the outlaw was possessed of no unusual characterizations, as Holden had explained, except for the shortness of the body and the length of arms and legs—and fingers. Matt noticed the latter, and remembered the marks on the throat of Ray Davenport, dead in his chair there at Squaw Hill.

The outlaw was dressed faultlessly. He was smooth and sleek. A diamond stud peeped out from a shirtfront of white silk; two large diamonds sparkled from the third finger of his left hand.

"The big cheese himself," thought Matt. "King of the Silkworms."

Aloud he said, speaking, as always, with great deliberation:

"Are you the guy they call Humpty Dumpty?"

"Yah-h!" cackled the hunchback, moving forward into the compartment. "See," addressing the woman, "he wants t' know if it's Humpty Dumpty! What can we do t' prove t' th' fly cop it's th' hunchie—so's he'll be-e sure 'n' not forget?"

Slowly the outlaw raised his arms and extended his hands toward, and about on a line with, the ranger's throat. The fingers were flexed and stiff and quivering slightly, and were half crooked like the talons of an eagle.

"What can we do-o, Annie? Yah!"

"Yea-ah," said Mr. Crdiff, nodding his head slowly, "I understand you perfectly. The introduction is acknowledged. Glad to know you, Humpty. My name's Jones, that is when I am in disguise; other times it's Cardiff, Matt Cardiff, railroad bull. Say, won't you sit down, while we're jogging along? I've got something on my mind that may be of interest to you."

Matt paused and glanced at the woman. In her right hand she was clutching an automatic, the muzzle of

which was staring unblinkingly at the middle of Mr. Cardiff's stomach.

"I'd suggest," said this gentleman, eying the lady disapprovingly, "that if you are thinking of doing anything rash, it might be as well to sort of pull down these here curtains, because we will be pulling into Meadow Valley by and by and you might scare somebody to death."

Without a word Silk Annie reached out with her left hand and jerked the curtains nearly to the sill.

The hunchback snapped the catch on both the door leading to the corridor and the one leading to compartment "F," the same having been previously unfastened for a purpose; then he brushed the woman's garments from the chair and seated himself, while never for an instant did he allow his eyes to leave the face of the officer.

From away up ahead there sounded the shrill wail of a locomotive's whistle. No. 8 was whistling for Meadow Valley. In the distance there was a black smudge of smoke from the stack of the big passenger puller on No. 7. Already she had taken water, kicked a car, which she was ordered to drop, far up a leg of the Y west of the station, and was ready to go as soon as the Continental Express came.

Exactly seven minutes later the Yokohama Mail had completed to the dot those instructions that had been included in that telegraphic communication, which earlier that morning had so startled and perplexed George Holden there in the despatcher's office at Castle Rock, and was hurtling her steel train toward Livingston.

CHAPTER VI.

RAW SILK.

IN the half light of the compartment Matthew X. Cardiff picked up the thread of the conversation where he had dropped it. It seemed that the hunchback and the woman were quite willing for him to finish anything that he might wish to say.

Matt felt that there was something strangely grim about this fact. Nevertheless he went on unwaveringly:

"Susie," he inquired almost pleasantly, "ain't nobody ever told you about the guy who said that a lying tongue don't gather any moss? No? Well, now, that's what I call a sinful neglect. Powerful sinful.

"Why, listen. Away back there when you and I first met, and just about the time I was beginning to think that we was going to get along like two pods in a burr, you told me that you heard the Pullman conductor and a brakeman talking about how there had been a silk train stole, and a poor feller had got choked to death at Squaw Hill. Now how could you have heard the Pullman con and anybody telling such things when they didn't know anything about any of them little didoes themselves until after No. 8 got into Squaw Hill? You was up and dressed a long time before that, Miss—er—Smith. That's how I first come to suspect that you-all wasn't as pure and sweet and—and toothless as you tried to look."

The hunchback swore at the woman with ugly ease; then laughed harshly.

"Ah-h," he half crooned, patting his hands together with little quick gestures, "you're a rotten liar, Annie." Then he suddenly turned a face distorted with passion toward the ranger. "Yeh dirty, rotten cop yeh, what's it t' yuh?" The man paused, working his fingers open and partly closed slowly; his eyes narrowed to two slits from which gleamed hate almost inconceivable, his voice was lowered to a harsh bass tone. "A croaked finger-flatty peddles no music!"

The hunchback fired the last words at the man by the window with a slow, deadly earnestness that left absolutely no doubt in Mr. Cardiff's mind as to

the ultimate intentions of this sleek leader of the famous Silkworms. The question was, just about how long could Matthew postpone this pleasing ceremony by the use of a strategic tongue? Certainly he had arranged for this little lawn party; he must expect to see it through.

"When was it you was going to perform this dastardly deed?" asked Mr. Cardiff evenly. "Being involved, more or less, I feel like I had ought to be enlightened and sort of given a little time to prepare my last will and testament."

The hunchback laughed. Matt didn't remember that he had ever heard a laugh like that before; he suddenly found himself wondering as to the sanity of this strange outlaw. That laugh, as nothing else could have, brought forcibly home to him the extreme slenderness of the silver thread by which his future hung.

"When-n there's a little bit of night t' bury yeh in!" The thin, shrill voice of Humpty Dumpty seemed to hang almost caressingly on the words. He rose and moved slowly toward the Great Southern's officer, his hands slightly extended before him.

Without haste, yet with no instant of hesitation the hunchback advanced, advanced till he had set his fingers about the throat of Matt Cardiff, tightening them just a little.

"When-n there's a little bit of night," the outlaw repeated with a low deadly earnestness, "and we're almost into Omaha and nobody will notice yeh slipping from the window of a Pullman. Yeh came t' catch th' man who set his mark on th' operator at Squaw Hill. In a few hours yeh'll know yuhself how that mark was made!"

The fingers at the throat of Matt Cardiff relaxed; the hunchback returned to his chair. The ranger moved his head slightly and half mechanically felt of his throat. Never in his life had he known a touch like that. The man was not human; his long, white hands, almost slender in their appearance, were like steel; they were iron rather than flesh. Matt breathed deeply and his mouth twitched.

He doubted, in this moment, even his own ability to match strength against this outlaw, granting, of course, that the woman was not there with that deadly automatic leveled at his heart.

There was nothing to do but wait. He glanced at Silk Annie. Matt's eyes had suddenly become more fully accustomed to those shady ways traveled by the women of the underworld. From the top of the Rockies where lived women like Janet Belton he had stepped to that level below where man must contend with the luring smile of the female who plays well the part of decoy.

"Well, anyhow," said Mr. Cardiff with apparent resignation, "you've got to hand it to me that my hunch was right. I come after yeh like a beadle hound after a hare."

"Sure! Oh, sure!" The woman sneered. "And jammed your fool head right into the trap we framed for you. I had you spotted for a bull the minute you got on the train, a fathead jay. You fool, you were outwitted and outclassed from the very first, even if I did slip in my conversation. How do you know it wasn't intentional? You were out to get a man who was a master at the art of beating the bulls before you knew what a real crook looked like. Honest, now, was you thinking for a minute that you were going to get the leader of the Silkworms, a man so clever that he could steal a train of silk and escape detection?"

Mr. Cardiff ignored the woman's gibing interrogation.

"And so it was Humpty Dumpty who engineered the job, eh? Nice little haul, I'll say. Wouldn't mind telling me what you did with Extra 2675, see-

ing that you have got Matthew labeled for an early peaceful death, would yeh?"

Humpty Dumpty was silent for a long time; the woman glanced first from the ranger to the outlaw and then back again. There was something distinctly unusual in the air. The famous silk thief, with all the natural instincts of the man who had been hunted much, seemed to sense it.

Born to lust and to gloat, he was on the point of explaining to this gangling railroad bull something of his great secret, the mystery of the lost silk train, when came a vague dim premonition of something that was not as it should be.

However, in a moment it was gone. It was the man's nature to vaunt; vanity was a passion with him. As gold is a god to many, so to the hunchback outlaw of the Rockies was the wonderful thread of silk, of the pure raw silk of the Orient.

He arose and entered the drawing-room beyond. In a moment he returned. In his hand he carried a skein of that wondrous tiny thread which for twenty centuries has been known to man, that creation which is of the Divine Hand itself, and which, according to Chinese authority, can trace its course to 2650 B. C.

White, pure white, and so fine that before it can be used for commercial purposes it must pass through a throwing operation into tram or organzine yarns, was this raw silk in the hands of Humpty Dumpty. For a moment his fingers caressed it; then he slowly began to undo from the skein strands of the twisted silk.

When he had prepared sufficient lengths the outlaw proceeded to frisk the Great Southern's representative with great thoroughness. From beneath the gentleman's left armpit the hunchback unearthed an automatic; that was all.

"Yah!" jeered the latter. "What kind of a cop are yeh? No twisters, jewelry at all?"

"No," said Mr. Cardiff slowly, looking straight into those wells of malice so close before him, "because sometimes when I get my man I don't need them."

Humpty Dumpty, again busy with his silk, paused. He shot a swift glance at the policeman; then his eyes wandered to the face of Silk Annie McCoy, thence to the windows with their drawn shades. For a long minute he stood, then, listening. For a car that had been so quiet when the Continental Express stopped at Meadow Valley, there now seemed to be unusual activities. There were voices in the observation room, steps along the corridor. There were, apparently, more people tramping back to the observation car.

The outlaw suddenly seized the ranger's hands, crowded them behind the gentleman's back, and then bound them fast with raw silk. In like manner were Mr. Cardiff's feet secured.

When he was done the leader of the Silkworms stood erect and surveyed his handiwork. After a moment he said, his voice shrill, exultant:

"Yeh came looking for silk; yeh found it. Are yeh satisfied now? Beautiful raw silk! Yah-h! Silk from th' silk train t' tie th' dick with."

The man's eyes glistened. He knew his subject well.

"Silk from th' Orient," he continued, still fondling the remainder of the skein between his long, thin fingers. "Silk, from th' reels of China and Japan, in skeins, thirty t' th' book, thirty books t' th' bale, a hundred and twenty-three pounds and a third for th' average. Silk, fine, soft, strong as steel, a thousand dollars a bale, and one hundred an' eighty, maybe two hundred, maybe more of 'em t' th' car. Eleven cars, and th' bulls nor th' Mountain Division's officials can find 'em."

The outlaw was drunk with his success; he paced the compartment, his eyes blazing, his face sneering, contemptuous.

"My men will handle th' beautiful thread, while Humpty Dumpty and Silk Annie are slipping from Colorado int' Nebraska, then int' Omaha where there's a swell 'mouthpiece,' and alibi's and, by and by, a fence t' handle our silk."

The man paused for breath, rather than that he was done with his thin vaunting utterances. Again he cocked his head a bit to one side and listened. Then suddenly he turned to the woman.

"Help me drag this jay dick into my drawing-room; then you go out and look over th' train."

Once more the hunchback glanced uncertainly toward the curtains at the windows.

"Leave 'em down," he ordered.

His own had been tight to the sill since that moment away back there in the Rockies when he had slipped aboard the train.

"I should think you swell crooks would want to gag me," Mr. Cardiff made bold to suggest. "Ain't you scared I'm going to holler before we get to this here Omaha hamlet?"

The hunchback's eyes instantly became those unforgettable depths from which cold, premeditated murder looked out, while his fingers swiftly searched for the ranger's throat, tightening there with the first lightning touch of almost superhuman power that was hidden in them.

The woman laughed.

"No, he won't yell," she said; "he's scared dumb now."

After a little Humpty Dumpty relaxed his hold. Matt coughed and gulped; he was breathing heavily.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, gasping. "I'm beginning to plumb suspect that you would just love to shut off my breathing apparatus—like you did the sheriff in Medicine Lodge a few years ago, like you did poor old Davenport at Squaw Hill some time last night."

The hunchback did not reply, but his eyes were fixed squarely on Matt Cardiff's face.

The woman called Silk Annie uttered another short laugh, a laugh that was beginning to get on the ranger's nerves almost as much as those eyes of Humpty Dumpty; then she tidied her compartment a little, closed the door which led to drawing-room "D," gave her face a careful plastering with a powder rag—and went out into the observation room.

CHAPTER VII.

TOWARD THE ROCKIES.

AN hour passed. The Yokohama Mail, west-bound, moved swiftly across the broad, flat plains toward that long line of white which hung above a thin blue bank of haze that was the Rocky Mountains. The Continental Express was wheeling her big transcontinental train toward the North Platte.

On the Mountain Division little groups of men were everywhere between White Water and Enumclaw examining every spur, every bit of old, disused siding, every yard, every nook and cranny where, even by any wild freak of imagination, a train might be hiding.

But came chattering into headquarters at Castle Rock no wild burst of "Morse," flooding over the wire from an excited operator somewhere in the hills, blazing in the telegraphic tongue the news that the lost silk train was found. Humpty Dumpty had performed his task too well for that.

At Livingston in the corridor just outside of the dispatcher's office a little group of men from the ranks of the railroad police were gathered. They were armed, heavily armed—and waiting.

On board that observation car where Matt Cardiff, the manhunter, and Humpty Dumpty, the outlaw, were entertaining each other in drawing-room "D," Silk Annie McCoy was searching for the familiar face of the car's porter.

But something, vaguely insistent of a general state of topsy-turvyness, was off color. Everywhere the woman turned there were new faces. Where was the thin, fussy woman who had been in compartment "A?" Where was the fat little drummer who got on at Livingston? They were all gone; there were strangers in their places.

Slowly, very slowly, the woman came to the full realization that there was no face in the observation car that she remembered having seen before. Of course, the porter—the porter—why, yes, he might have exchanged places with one of the others for a little while —or something.

Next it was the Pullman conductor. Silk Annie suddenly went white, her fingers clasped, gripped with a tensity that made her knuckles crack. Here, too, was a new face. Why, why, she thought he went right through to Chicago; she didn't know they would change.

Oh, what a fool she was! What was the matter with her? Of course, there had been one or two stops; once there had been some switching; they must have picked up another car. New passengers must have got on. Yes; that was it, surely.

Soon the train conductor came back.

"Smoking gats," muttered Humpty Dumpty's first assistant, "either I am mentally unbalanced or—or this mud-daubed old pike changes crews every hour by the clock."

She moved toward the observation platform. Once in the air, she thought, she would probably feel better. That compartment had been pretty stuffy. She almost imagined that she had a headache.

On the brass-trimmed platform of the big car she breathed deeply and glanced out across the plains—then for an instant she stopped breathing entirely. No. 8 had been going East, straight East; the Rockies should be squarely behind them. But now, why —well, in the name of Heaven, what had happened to them? Just as far as the eye could reach the prairie rolled and billowed there to the rear.

Silk Annie's hands flew to her face. She rubbed her eyes, brushed the back of her hand across her forehead, half turned and stared out ahead, past the sleek and varnished cars, past the smoke-plummed locomotive, on, on straight toward—a mighty range that was covered with snow there before her.

An hour, less than an hour, ago those mountains had been behind her. Hadn't she watched them while she coaxed the dick to the bait that she offered? Hadn't she? Of course she had! She glanced up and found several of the other occupants of the platform eying her curiously. She heard one say in an undertone: "The lady looks ill."

Miss Susie Smith straightened up, shook herself, and hurried inside. Near the forward end of the observation room she saw the train's conductor; she stopped in front of him.

"What is the next stop?" she demanded a little bit shakily.

The old veteran of the rail glanced at her sharply; then said distinctly:

"Livingston, madam!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT.

CONRAD had been right. He had been right when he stated that any tourist daisy who got up at four or five or six o'clock in the morning to make eyes at a homely Swede like Matt Cardiff was good for developments.

And he was right when he had advised George Holden to clear a wire to Meadow Valley for an emergency.

In the mountains Matt Cardiff had learned, before he was in knee trousers, that the best way to fight a forest fire is with a back fire.

When he discovered that there was a mystery man riding in drawing-room "D" of No. 8's observation car. Mr. Cardiff instantly set his back fire. He prepared at once the telegraphic communication which he subsequently placed in the hands of the conductor of the Continental Express.

That message, which was addressed to George Holden, superintendent of the Mountain Division, read:

Wire immediately superintendent of Eastern Division make arrangements hold No. 7 at Meadow Valley for No. 8. No. 8 and No. 7 will utilize Y at this station for purpose of exchanging observation cars. Passengers be instructed accordingly on q. t. Instruct crews use utmost care that substitution remain unnoticeable if possible as concerns change of direction. Under no circumstance allow drawing-room "D" or compartments "E" or "F" to be disturbed. All depends on success of this operation. Play it sure. Leave rest to me. (Signed) CARDIFF.

That the curtains of both compartment "E" and drawing-room "D" were down assisted in that bit of strategy which Matt Cardiff had planned. It had been, after all, not a difficult problem.

Upon arrival at Meadow Valley, the passengers having already been transferred to the car ahead for the time being, the Continental Express had merely backed its observation car up the long leg of the Y to the westward of the station and quietly pulled the pin; then had moved ahead sufficiently to clear that leg of the Y on which the Yokohama Mail was waiting.

Already No. 7's observation car had been cut off. Now she backed slowly onto that car which No. 8 had dropped, coupled up—and proceeded on her way toward Livingston. No. 8 had backed again into the long leg of the Y, coupled to the observation car previously on the Mail—and proceeded eastward toward Omaha.

So intent were the man and the woman on their captive, there in drawing-room "D" that, except for the fact that they were half conscious of the backward and forward movement of the train, they had paid not the slightest attention to what was going on outside their rather limited range of vision.

The change of direction on the long easy curve of the Y had been so gradual that neither were aware of their transposition from tourists eastward bound to tourists westward bound, although it had been the development that had aroused in the person of Humpty Dumpty that vague sense of uneasiness.

Instead of Omaha ahead, where waited their mouthpiece, where their alibis were framed, where safety lay; instead of a chance to get their breath and continue along the paths they had chosen for their get-away; instead of this there lay square ahead of them—Livingston!

Livingston, the eastern terminus of the Mountain Division, the last place on earth they had desire to visit. They were being hurled thither bang to rights; the goods were on them. From a hand that counted every pasteboard a winning card, they were backed against the table hands down.

But! *How?*

This was the question that roared through the head of Silk Annie, the question that snatched her strength, sapped her cunning, and left her like a sadly battered fighter who is "out" standing up.

How they had been turned around was the baffling mystery, the stunning bolt that sent Silk Annie darting through the door of her compartment

with a most unladylike oath on her fair lips.

With the inward crash of the door Humpty Dumpty was on his feet and at the throat of Mr. Cardiff. The woman flung herself on the hunchback.

"No-o!" she cried hoarsely. "We've been double crossed! We're pulling into Livingston! They've carried us back to the Mountain Division! My soul, we're trapped!"

Seemingly in answer to the woman's frenzied, half-subdued exclamations there sounded the scream of the whistle, calling for the yards of Livingston.

"You fool," panted Silk Annie. "No! *No!* The silk! Hide it! Throw it away! If they get us with that—we're bang to rights. And that dick is tied with it, too!"

But all the wild, animallike fury of the hunchback was unleashed. It was the nature of this strange outlaw, the ungovernable fury that swept him when cornered. They had been tricked. Even in those moments when this railroad bull was bound and apparently helpless the result of his foresight was steadily bringing to the outlaw and his partner that ever-overshadowing arm of justice.

"Yah-h-h!" From deep in his throat the hunchback produced the harsh gurgling cry that was characteristic of him. "Yeh'll know th' marks! Feel 'em! Feel 'em! The fingers of th' hunchie!"

Certainly Matt Cardiff did know the death touch of the long, slim talons of Humpty Dumpty, felt them clutching, sinking, drawing tighter, the fingers that had left their marks on Ray Davenport at Squaw Hill so short a time gone. Full and bright shone the light of the killer in those terrible eyes of the hunchback.

Silk Annie was beside herself. She tore frantically at the other, struggling to waken the man to a fuller sense of their danger, of the close impending possibilities, of the cops who must be waiting at Livingston.

"Quick! In Heaven's name don't pull that stuff now; it ain't getting you anything. It's only sticking our blasted necks right into the halter. Untie 'im! Untie 'im! Chuck the silk. Chuck the silk before it's everlastingly too late."

With a savage oath the hunchback loosened his grip and hurled the woman away from him.

"Get back! Th' dick drove me to it! Drove me, I tell yeh!"

Excited voices sounded in the observation room. Somewhere up ahead a trainman called. A hand was on the knob of the door of drawing-room "D." Silk Annie hurled herself toward the door of her own compartment and jammed in the catch.

Once more the hunchback was struggling at the throat of the policeman. The man was half mad. He was still muttering.

"He drove me. He made me crazy. He laughed at me. He said I didn't have the nerve t' kill 'im. I was afraid. That's why I wouldn't tell 'im where the silk train was. But I showed 'im. He *knows*. He's going t' get what he was looking for. He wanted it!"

"Oh, my soul," half sobbed Silk Annie. "And you spilled it! He was playing you! The cursed cop! And you tumbled!"

Then she laughed again, the same short, mirthless laugh that had so worked on the nerves of Matt Cardiff, and jerked her automatic into play.

"Plug him," she spat in the hunchback's ear. "Plug him quick then. What the difference? We've got to fight our way out anyhow!"

Previously Mr. Cardiff had allowed his body to relax fully. He had neither struggled nor made any attempt to shake off that animated steel trap that seemed to be all over him. But now he pulled his knees under him and straightened his body.

Slowly, a bit uncertainly because of the gripping strands of silk that held his ankles, but nevertheless very surely he got himself up out of the corner of the seat. All the vitality born of years in the great outdoors, of clean living and temperance in all things, Matt Cardiff now brought into play.

The hunchback was clinging to him like a leech, like a wolf at the throat of its prey. Matt's wind was shut-off as completely as though his windpipe had been locked in the iron jaws of a vice. Matt's brain, however, was very clear. The power of his lean, wiry body had not failed—yet, though it was threatened every instant.

There was no chance to steady himself; his hands were held too tightly behind him by more of those strands of silk. But by turning his body slightly he could bring the hunchback between his person and that paneled mullion between the windows.

Suddenly the ranger lurched on his uncertain feet; then lunged forward. There was a sound like the thud of some solid against wood, which sound was produced by the back of the hunchback's head coming in violent contact with that framework between the windows, the while the gentleman's nose was driven against that portion of Mr. Cardiff's anatomy known as the breast bone.

The ranger instantly wriggled himself free of those clutching fingers and reeled backward, sprawling grotesquely aginst the sofa at the far side of the drawing-room. Humpty Dumpty, somewhat shaken and considerably jarred, came up with an exceedingly generous crimson flood oozing from the olfactory member.

For a moment Silk Annie hesitated, even in that instant when she jerked her automatic this way and that in an attempt to keep covered the suddenly animated person of Mr. Cardiff. She would feel no repulsion whatsoever when it came to dropping a bit of lead into the bull; it was, however, quite another matter when things had narrowed down to so fine an angle that there was considerable question whether the act was merely an open invitation to sit in the electric chair.

"Let 'im have it!" screeched the hunchback, teetering forward, a flood of vile profanity on his lips, and at the same time reaching for his own weapon. "Give it t' 'im! What are yeh waiting for?"

There was a crash against the door of the drawing-room at this instant. The thin door bulged inward, while closely associated with it was a blue-uniformed trainman. With her left hand cuddled nervously back against his cheek Silk Annie flung her right, which held the deadly automatic, to cover the brakeman.

"Get back," she shouted at him with shrill warning. "Get back quick, everybody!"

Now, the hunchback, too, was swinging the black muzzle of his pistol before the faces of those members of the train crew who were close on the heels of the man whose bulk had crumpled in the door.

Mr. Cardiff, on the floor, rolled himself onto his back and cuddled his knees close to his stomach for an instant; then let drive with all his supple might at the midriff of Silk Annie, the lady being more entirely within his range than was Humpty Dumpty.

The blow threw the woman off her balance, but the steel superstructure with which she was surrounded saved her wind. She fumbled her gat, however, and lost a chance to squeeze from its butt one of those tiny death lozenges which it contained, which had been her intention; for Silk Annie McCoy, cornered, was as deadly as any diamondback of the plains.

The next moment came the grind of emergency brakes and the accompany-

ing buckling surge of the cars. There was a shot, somewhere ahead; then another closer at hand.

The Yokohama Mail lost its mighty momentum and slid to a racking stop. Instantly sounded loud voices, commands, threats, and again the spiteful crack of an automatic. No. 7 was being stuck-up square in the yards of Livingston.

Came hurrying, masked men—two on either side of the train—making their way quickly toward the observation car. A frightened porter appeared inadvertently on the rear platform.

"Open that gate," ordered a man from behind his mask. "Quick!" His pistol punctuated the command. The colored gentleman obeyed promptly, than shrank back into the partial protection of that sheltered portion of the platform.

Passengers who had been chattering excitedly in the observation room, retreated toward the forward end of the car. The narrow aisle became almost jammed with frightened women and others of the sterner sex who provided their own share toward the general stampede.

The vast organization of the Silkworms had been at work. Subtle and far-reaching was their influence. No sooner, it seemed, than was their natural leader threatened by the toils of the police than his associates appeared from a strange nowhere in a manner no less strange, and snatched the leader and his partner from the very jaws of the law.

"Back! Every one of yeh! Up forward! Way up! The first man or woman who makes any attempt at resistance will be shot! Nobody will be hurt otherwise."

Short, and leaving no doubts in the minds of trainmen and passengers alike as to the sincerity of the man who uttered them so far as his intentions toward carrying them out were concerned, were the commands of that voice in authority.

Once more Humpty Dumpty was coming into his own. He was in the aisle now snapping orders, blasphemous, exultant, the pilot of his outlaw band again at the helm. Silk Annie came crowding close behind him.

"All right," called the leader of the rescue party, "come on."

Humpty Dumpty flung a swift calculative glance along the aisle ahead, then toward the observation room. The woman was at his elbow, the same half hysterical laugh on her lips.

"Kill the dick," she shot into the ear of the hunchback, resting a detaining hand on the man's arm. "You peached. You can't afford to lose your silk. We've got a long-shot chance now. Make it!"

Glad to be out from under the deed herself, Silk Annie was, nevertheless, revengeful enough by nature to crave the extinction of Mr. Cardiff at a hand other than her own. It was the woman's makeup. In a pinch she would welch even on Humpty Dumpty himself so quick that it would make a gentleman's head dizzy.

The king of the Silkworms hesitated for just the fraction of an instant; then he turned again toward the broken door of drawing-room "D," his automatic clutched tight. There was no time now to allow any sentiment he had for a handmade death to creep in.

The conductor of the Yokohama Mail, a veteran of many clashes in bygone years with outlaws of the rail, had, it was true, retreated with the others to the forward end of the car—there to go into action with characteristic dispatch.

"Turn that shut-off here," he commanded, "so those devils can't pull the air on us."

A trainman tumbled in between the cars to obey; a second was sent sprint-

ing in the direction of a switch shanty a little farther up the line. This gentleman was the recipient of not a little unwelcome attention from the two outlaws who had taken up a position at the rear of the train. The brakeman was a good sprinter, upon occasions—and this was one of them—and weathered the sprinkle of lead that buzzed about him.

With the air cock closed the conductor jerked twice on the communication cord. No matter if the air was set on that last car, he rather believed under existing conditions old Maud up ahead would jerk the train along into the station without much coaxing.

In the switchman's shanty a distraught brakie was bellowing tidings into the transmitter of the phone there that no human being could understand.

It did not matter though. Far up the track toward the station there was already action aplenty. Several gentlemen were moving eastward with great enthusiasm. They were ably led and directed by Mr. George Holden, the fighting superintendent.

No locomotive being handy, the ties were used to a great advantage.

It was Holden himself who had first glimpsed the black plume of smoke which had announced the coming of the Yokohama Mail. Also, this hairy-fisted gentleman had been the first to note the unusual activities in the region of the yard limit board, there to the east.

The conductor's surmise concerning the big passenger hog up ahead had been correct. The engineman shot the handle of the air equipment into release and jerked out the throttle. There was some trifling delay while the brakes were easing off, but this was more than made up for when the locomotive took hold of her string.

Nothing let go, so No. 7 started to show what she could do when it came to picking 'em up, even with a sticker on the tail end.

Even as she had started so she stopped when she was abreast of Mr. Holden and his little band of uncorked nitroglycerine.

In drawing-room "D," Matt Cardiff, as always, was playing the game, playing it as only men, real, full-blooded he men know how to play it right across the face of that precipice called death.

He was on his feet when Humpty Dumpty returned, steadying himself slightly by pressing his shoulder against a protruding corner of the drawing-room "annex." He was fighting desperately to wrench his hands free, but the silk held firm; the knots the hunchback had made would not loosen.

"Oh, I knew you'd be back, you quitter," said Mr. Cardiff derisively. "You're the guy who was going to put some marks on my throat, the same like you put on the boy at Squaw Hill, and here you come bulging to the attack with a shooting iron. Why, you crawling, crooked, yellow skunk even with my hands and feet tied, you can't put me down for the big count. The hunchie's got to use a gat to finish the dirty work. You're a pie-bald liar when you said you ever put a guy out with those weak, skinny lady's fingers of yours. Bah! They told me you were a killer, and that you used your hands. You're nothing more or less than a plumb cowardly gunman!"

Humpty Dumpty pointed his weapon; then hesitated, his face going purple with a sudden frenzied rage. He couldn't do the business with his hands, eh? His fingers, those long, beautiful members of steel were weak and skinny, were they? He did not have the strength to put those blue-pink markings on the throat of that sneering dick, didn't he?

"Yah-h-h!!" screamed the hunchback hoarsely, suddenly gone mad with an uncontrollable rage, and hurling his

automatic to the floor. "Weak? Yellow? Lady's fingers? *Mine?*"

He stretched his hands out before him.

"Yuh big police stiff! Now feel 'em!"

Humpty Dumpty flung himself onto the ranger like a cat. Together they crashed to the floor, but the outlaw had set his hold and would not be shaken off.

Silk Annie, hearing the shriek of the man, darted back into the compartment, realizing on the instant that the hunchback had lost his head and was resorting to that ugly method that seemed to be born in him. Frantically she tore at his coat.

"You fool," she cried. "You fool! Can't you see he tricked you again? He's playing for time. The bulls are coming. They're coming, I tell you. We're pulling down toward the station. We've got to jump. Oh-h, you devil, can't you cheese it?"

But Humpty Dumpty did not hear her. He was intent on only one thing. The woman rushed from the drawing-room, and, with the outlaws who were waiting reluctantly, swung down and out away from the moving train.

A moment later and Silk Annie McCoy and four of the famous band of original Silkworms were scurrying away through the maze of cars that flooded the Livingston East Yard.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SLOUGH OF NORMAN'S FLAT.

NORMAN'S FLAT is at the end of a rickety piece of light and twisted track that trails through a gulley of sand to the eastward of Squaw Hill.

Norman's Flat itself was one day a busy little adjunct to Squaw Hill, and about three quarters of a mile distant. Here more or less extensive quarry operations had been carried on. The old quarry was below and out of sight of the Mountain Division's main iron. Many of the ramshackle buildings which had made the place still stood, a mute reminder of rim-rock outcroppings there.

The whole lower part of the old quarry is filled with turbid water, the overflow, partly, from the Little Muddy beyond the swale lands to the north. Alone and utterly deserted, void even of neighboring human habitation, the only connecting link to the old quarry of Norman's Flat is that bit of brush-grown trackage which fades through the sand gulley beyond the yard at Squaw Hill.

The quarry abandoned, the track has never been removed; occasional Ishmaels of the road that wandered into Squaw Hill with a car that had, maybe, lost its drawhead in a racking start on White Water Hill found it a great place to get rid of a cripple when the yard was full.

The operation, though, necessitated a run through a long lead to the farthermost corner of the lot. From time to time these cripples were removed, some being taken out and unloaded, then kicked unceremoniously back in to await the pleasure of the chain gang, so to speak.

So much for Norman's Flat.

When George Holden reached the side of Matt Cardiff that gentleman was in a bad way. The fingers of Humpty Dumpty were still at his throat. Matt's face was losing its healthy color and his eyes were growing big, when something collided with the side of the famous Silkworm's head, a very substantial something that raised a lump on the gentleman's brow and produced a feeling of absolute peace in his black soul.

"Lord save us," murmured the big-hearted superintendent, "what have we here?"

Then his eyes rested on the ranger's

throat. The markings were there, the same markings that were on the throat of Ray Davenport in those early morning hours when a frightened hotel proprietor found him dead in his chair there in the telegraph office at Squaw Hill.

Matt Cardiff, however, was alive yet, though not exactly in a state of great boisterousness.

Mr. Holden's associates in this errand of mercy withdrew as soon as it was seen that their services were no longer needed in this quarter, and took up that pursuit of happiness which had to do with an early and interesting interview with certain of a band known as the Silkworms, who now must look for fatherly guidance to one Silk Annie McCoy.

No. 7 pulled slowly into the Livingston station. Humpty Dumpty was adorned with jewelry that was very becoming to his style of beauty, and then removed to a place that would look well to his comforts, to say nothing of his further restricted activities.

When it became time to remove Mr. Cardiff to a downy rest in some institution for the afflicted and oppressed this gentleman exhibited signs of negation that nearly rocked his poor head off. His apparatus for articulation was not working very well yet, but his brain was clear; so he twiddled his fingers and looked appealing at Mr. Holden.

A little later he made a scribbling motion with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. The superintendent understood, and at once produced a pad and a pencil.

Mr. Cardiff wrote waveringly:

Squaw Hill. Highball.

"You mean that you want us to pull our freight for Squaw Hill?" asked Holden.

The ranger nodded his head emphatically.

"Well," said the other, "I guess that's the medicine. But why Squaw Hill?"

Again Mr. Cardiff scribbled the pencil across the pad and wrote:

Bang to right. I bet that hunchback couldn't shut off my wind entirely before some of the boys came.

"H-m!" rumbled Mr. Holden, looking at Matt fondly.

"Some bet, I'll say! Oh, boy, some bet!"

Something like an hour later Matt Cardiff was conversing slowly and very hoarsely. He was still an occupant of drawing-room "D." He was surrounded by Holden and two of the Great Southern officials. In compartment "F" were five police officers, agents of the big transcontinental road.

"And the silk train," Holden was saying, "what's the answer to that, Matt?"

"You were looking too far from home," whispered the ranger. "If I'd had more time to look into the thing, more time to talk to you before No. 8 came, I would have suggested that it was not far from the man who died for it, young Davenport."

"What! You don't mean that Extra 2675 is anywhere in the vicinity of Squaw Hill?"

Matt nodded. And after he had rested a little he said:

"When you couldn't find that train of silk, didn't it ever occur to you to poke around a little for some bales of raw silk?"

"Why—why, no," the superintendent admitted. "I guess we were too excited and too busy looking for eleven big steel cars, to say nothing of nine or ten perfectly sound healthy men, to think of looking for just silk. What's the answer?"

"I don't hardly know yet myself," the ranger admitted. "Only I suspect when we find your old silk train there won't be any silk aboard it."

"How do you know so much about it anyway?" Holden demanded. "One would think you knew just where that silk train went to."

"I do." Matt Cardiff nodded his head emphatically.

"Well, in the name of thunderation then, where is it?" exploded Traffic Manager Calkins.

Matt waited a minute. His throat was a long way from allowing of absolutely unimpaired speech. At last he said:

"In the Slough of Norman's Flat!"

For a moment there was absolute silence. George Holden looked at Traffic Manager Calkins and Traffic Manager Calkins looked at first one and then another—and then relieved himself to a considerable extent, so far as dead languages that were alive were concerned.

"You mean it's in the old quarry hole?"

The ranger nodded, a faint smile hovering in the vicinity of his mouth. Then he looked at Holden:

"Another little bet," he murmured. "I bet one perfectly good funeral against the Silkworm's goat. He lost. After that little shift at Meadow Valley I went to work on him. What I didn't call that hound wasn't worth thinking of. I bet he couldn't put me out by the choking process in five minutes, against the secret of the silk train's disappearance.

"He got so mad that he told me pretty near the whole story—just for the fun he would have in shutting off my breath after I had enough dope to locate that train of raw silk and send him to the chair to boot."

Matt rested. So, also, did the gentlemen present. They sat silent and stared at Matt Cardiff. Trainmaster Getty took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. He had discovered that little beads of perspiration were standing there.

At last the superintendent muttered half aloud:

"In the Slough of Norman's Flat! In that dim-danked old quarry hole! Extra 2675! Two hogs, eleven cars, and a way car——" He paused abruptly. "Say," he flared, "where the hades did the crews go? Are they in there too?"

Matt shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. Then he added irrelevantly: "I hope those guys at Livingston get the twisters on Susie Smith. Gosh, that laugh of hers pretty near got my nanny."

CHAPTER X.

CLEAR THE RAILS.

MR. Wilcox, assistant superintendent of the Mountain Division, had business which brought him to Squaw Hill a little after noon of this day that dawned on a railroad that had lost a silk train.

Mr. Wilcox was at Squaw Hill when the Yokohama Mail pulled in from the East. Consequently he was very much on hand to greet his superior and congratulate Mr. Cardiff on the state of his present good health.

It must be recorded that on Mr. Cardiff's part there was a distinct coolness, a very perceptible coolness. Mr. Cardiff even went so far as to be rude. He demanded, immediately after alighting, that Mr. Wilcox be placed under arrest.

Matt's voice was not normal yet by any means, but no one could mistake his words when he said:

"Put that hound in irons. He's the inside ring of this little game."

The blow was pretty stiff, but Mr. Wilcox survived and came back strong.

"You're a liar," he shouted.

For which remark he received a short straight-arm jab that rocked his head and caused a starry constellation to hover temporarily within his horizon.

"Call the station agent," ordered Mr. Cardiff, "and ask him what Wilcox wanted out here."

When the former gentleman arrived he stated that the assistant super was merely looking up some freight cars that had been on the cripple track, that was all.

"How many of 'em?" demanded Holden crisply.

"Nine or ten, I think."

"What was he going to have done with them?"

"First No. 8 was going to pick them up to-night and take 'em to Livingston."

George Holden looked at Mr. Wilcox long and earnestly. His voice was very mild when he asked:

"What's in those cars, Arthur?"

For a long minute the other was silent; then he muttered, sullenly, just one word:

"Silk!"

Holden's voice, so Matt explained afterward, would have reminded one of a cat's soft purring when he said:

"If you were in a ring and I were the referee and the other man knocked you down and then kicked your contemptible head off, I should not disqualify him."

The superintendent turned to the station agent.

"And those cars now," he said, "are——"

"Down at the lower end of the yard on No. 2 track."

And there was where the Mountain Division found its consignment of raw silk—nearly two million dollars' worth—crowded to the roof in a short string of rickety box cars, waiting for the first section of the manifest train to start them on their journey East, to the biggest "fence" in the underworld.

In the old quarry at Norman's Flat they found the silk train, found it in the square acre depression of the old workings in fifteen feet of water. The crew and the guards were located in one of the old buildings of the quarry, securely bound and gagged against all hope of release till they should be discovered.

Slowly a party of men traveled along that bit of old track which led up through the sand gully. Part way up the grade they paused, and looked back into the Slough of Norman's Flat. After a little the conductor told his story.

"They got us up here at the station," he began. "They had the board out against us. I thought it was a little bit funny because we had pretty near clear rights, and Hammond was sure wheeling 'em for gosh sake.

"The guards came out with me—and, bing! they had us before we knew what was up. There was the hunchback and, I should say, half a dozen. I glanced into the telegraph office and there was poor Davenport with his head limplike over the back of his chair. It got me, I'm telling you.

"The most of us they took right down to the old quarry and tied us up. They kept Hammond and the helper's flag to work the switching stunt. They had to pull out those cars that were in there, way back onto the main line, then run around them and pull them in after 'em. They closed and locked everything, and set the board to clear. Once in this blasted gulley, they were all set.

"A couple of them dumped the fires, started the injectors, and baled green coal in to kill the engines and get them as cold as they could. You see they had till daylight to transfer that silk. Some of it I guess they left in there, or it may have been tea.

"Everything was far enough away from the station so that even when you fellows found the operator there wasn't any danger of hearing any of the doings down at Norman's Flat. In good time all the beasts had to do was ease off the hand brakes and let Extra 2675

drift down the grade and just plumb submerge, like a blasted submarine.

"That's the extent of my knowledge. Gad! What a night!"

After one last look down into the Slough of Norman's Flat the little group moved away in the direction of the Squaw Hill station.

"How about the shift of observation cars?" Holden asked. "How did these coyotes at Livingston get the tip that something was wrong and be out there already to try and save the hunchback's hide?"

Matt Cardiff smiled a bit grimly.

"I guess," he said slowly, "that you will either have to charge that up to friend Wilcox, or, maybe, this guy Morgan in Echo Bowl. One or the other of them was hep to everything that was going over the wires, and were in constant touch with the apparent headquarters of this bunch of Silkworms in Livingston."

"But why Morgan at Hermit Pass?" Holden insisted. "How do you get him in on this. He was found bound, tied to his chair. And it wasn't Morgan's 'Morse,' that OS," Holden added.

"Easy enough for him to fake it," snapped Matt. "Oh, sure! That guy was, what I expect you-all would call, subsidized—or something. Very proper it was, most gosh-awful likely that this here bunch of Silkworms was going to hoot off some fifty or sixty miles up this old pike just for the sake of OSing Extra 2675, when there wasn't nothing to be gained by it only a little time, and, maybe, throw a little more shady mystery into the affair. I'd suggest that this guy Morgan be interviewed—with a club, I'd do it, from the way I feel about this bunch just now."

"But those cripple cars that used to be in on that old track," said Trainmaster Getty.

"Cripples, me eye!" exploded the station agent of Squaw Hill. "There hasn't been any cripples in there for two weeks. The local has been setting empties off though for ten days, a car or two at a time. Lord knew what for; I couldn't find out."

"Nice work by friend Wilcox," muttered Holden. "Nice work."

"I wonder when this Humpty Dumpty got aboard the Continental Express," mused Traffic Manager Calkins.

"I don't know that," stated Matt, feeling of his throat gingerly, "but if you want to do me a favor just don't scare off that porter who had charge of No. 8's observation car. I want just one crack at that guy! He knew who was in drawing-room 'D!'"

Again in the cool, clear air of one of those nights that only the Rockies know, a train was streaking across the Continental Divide. Two big road hogs were handling her, and she was dropping the miles behind her as steadily as the ticking of a clock, for she was handling a train of silk—raw silk—and she had clear rights on the Mountain Division.

ALMOST KILLS FATHER IN SLEEP

STARTLED by the noise of splintering wood, W. Warner, of Seattle, Washington, hurried from his room one night recently in the house of Henry Semmern, sr., his father-in-law, and began a tour of the premises. He reached Mr. Semmern's room just in time to rescue the old man from the clutching fingers of the latter's son, who, sound asleep, was choking his father to death. Young Semmern had walked to his father's room, which was on the floor below his own, and had broken open the door in his sleep.

Eyes of Blue

by Arthur P. Hankins

Author of "The Carved Trail," etc.

MY name is Ace Keck. I was among those present when they pinned it on me, but was not consulted in the matter. I learned later that I was too busy at the time to take notice. The baptismal water was dripping down into my right eye, and I was telling them about it at the top of my voice. And I came out of the deal Ace Keck for life.

Does shoplifting pay? Well, if you're after statistics don't interview any department-store managers. They'll smile in a superior way and say: "Of course not. How absurd! We lose a belt, a silk handkerchief, a necktie now and then. But pay—ridiculous!"

Uh-huh—I know all about that!

Let me tell you how it paid me one thousand bucks once upon a time.

I'd been working Frisco a month. I? Certainly. You thought all shoplifters were women, didn't you. Well, I shave regularly every morning, anyway, and I don't lie flat on the ground and roll over seven times to get on the other side of a barbed-wire fence. I was working with Battleship Kate, out of Cincinnati, however, for a woman and a man make a most invincible team. But Kate doesn't figure in this yarn.

In one big store entitled "Fisher & La Moure" I was beginning to have a hunch the dicks were onto us. Still, all was quiet as two p. m. on the day they buried my Aunt Samantha; and, as Fisher & La Moure alone were paying me about ten bucks a day, I didn't like to play the piker and drop them from our list.

I was working the side-flap suit case, the artificial third arm, the false parcel, and the false-bottomed, hinged-flap gladstone bag. The pickings were fine, and, with only a hunch that the store detectives had their eyes on me, I stuck around.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and I was resting in my room at the Palace after a hard week's work. The Palace? Surest thing you know! Let me inform you that I was wearing evening clothes during the proper hours, and an astrakhan coat over them, and had a hired car with my own chauffeur. The ten a day Fisher & La Moure were donating to my placid life was not a quarter of the pickings.

Well, I'm in my room at the Palace when I'm called to the phone by the office.

"Gentleman to see you, Mr. Keck," says the clerk.

"Card?" I asked.

"He has no card, Mr. Keck. He gives the name of John Smith."

I studied. "Where have I heard that name before?" I laughed.

Of course it was some old pal that had got onto my hangout and probably wanted to touch me for a ten-spot. Poor old John Smith—he certainly has to work overtime.

"Send Mr. Smith up, please," I told the clerk.

And a little later the bell boy ushered into my suite Mr. Dick la Moure, junior partner of Fisher & La Moure, almost my chief benefactors.

"Have a seat, Mr. Smith," I invited politely, "a drink of Scotch, a cigar, a match, and an ash tray."

I could see by the look in his eyes that he had no idea I knew who he was. But he knew who I was—that was dead certain. So everything was comfortable and satisfactory.

He declined my hospitality, all but the chair. The calmer of the pair of us was not Mr. Richard la Moure, of Fisher & La Moure.

He was not over thirty-five, with a face that looked younger, a healthy skin, a good eye—well, just about the sort of a man I'd always wanted to look like; and I might have made it stick if they hadn't taken advantage of me when my eye was full of water that time.

La Moure didn't look like the sort of man who clears his throat before plunging into a matter. But he did it now, and was ill at ease all over; and I knew that whatever was afoot I had the psychological jump on him from the start.

"My name is not John Smith," he began.

I tried to look interested.

"It is Richard la Moure. I'm junior partner of the firm of Fisher & La Moure."

I politely lifted my eyebrows.

He waited, ready to grab me and dash a glass of water in my face. Then he laughed nervously.

"You're like flint, Mr. Keck," he said. "Let's have no more horseplay. I know you, and it seems now that you know me. Our store detectives pointed you out to me some weeks ago. About all that, though, I have nothing to say. In fact, I have come to you with another matter entirely. If you take any more goods from our stock after what I have to tell you—why, let the best man win. But just at present I want to engage you to—to do a little job of shoplifting for me. And I assure you the pay will satisfy you."

"I know you smoke," I said. "I've seen you. Please make this little gathering as harmonious as possible."

He laughed and lighted one of our twenty-five-cent Havanas. And after that he was more at ease.

From a vest pocket he took an oval trinket that resembled a half-grown poker chip after a hearty meal. He tossed it on the table.

From its oval surface a perfect human eye looked up at me.

Curious, I picked it up and examined it carefully. It was a work of art, no kidding—hand-painted, natural as life—a living blue orb, it seemed.

"Painted by a famous miniature artist on ivory," murmured Mr. la Moure. "There is in the hands of a certain detective in this city a miniature similar to this one. But, though the eye is blue, as is the one you hold, the painting he has is of another person's eye. The mountings are identical. The miniature that the detective has is his best clew in the unraveling of a recent murder mystery. I want you to go to him, pretend that you know a person whose eye has been reproduced on ivory, and ask to see the one he has, in the hope that you may be able to help solve the mystery. Notice of the eye clew has been printed in the papers, which will account for your knowledge of the miniature being in the detective's possession."

He paused.

"Yes?" I urged softly.

"You are the most expert shoplifter in the United States, they tell me," he went on. "I want you to get possession of the eye in this detective's hands, and substitute for it the one you now hold."

I looked up quickly. The eyes of the junior partner of Fisher & La Moure were blue.

"Can you do it?"

"All depends on the luck I have, and on—the detective."

"Jefferson Mercer," he said.

"Oh! Well—er—you couldn't just as well make it some one else, could you?" I laughed.

He smiled.

"If it were one of the regular city force," I told him, "for ten dollars, payable when the job's done, I'd guarantee to gouge an eye out of his head, and substitute this one, even if his eyes were black. But I think that if I were to consent to approach Mr. Jefferson Mercer with this little trick up my sleeve, my price would be one thousand dollars, half in advance, the other half to be forfeited if I couldn't pull it off."

La Moure pulled out a roll of yellowbacks so big that I became diffident in their company, and began peeling them off till twenty-five of them blinked up at me and whispered: "Hello, Papa Keck!"

I disdained to look at them. Instead, I gave the ivory trinket closer examination, turning it over in my hand.

On the concave side was a metal button.

"Why, it's a cuff button," I remarked.

"Yes," said Dick la Moure.

"Suppose you tell me something of its history," I suggested.

His lips straightened. "What was it curiosity killed?" he asked.

"But I'm not a monk," I reminded him.

"There's your five hundred dollars," he said. "Am I to put it back in my pocket?"

"I think mine is large enough," I said, and I gathered those beautiful asters into a bouquet and put them in a dark place to keep them cool.

"When?"

He stirred. "Monday morning will be the best time to approach him," he said. "He—he doesn't know you, of course?" It was a question.

"Please let's don't get personal, Mr. la Moure," I said soothingly. "I know him. If he knows me he's taking a very deceptive way of showing it, as I've passed him several times in the streets. A dick of Mercer's type, Mr. la Moure, never knows a gentleman of my profession till—well, till events bring them together. In other words, Mercer may know me, and he may not. I'm taking that chance. That's one reason why it costs you so much."

"Then if he does know you you mean that, even when you go to him with this thing in mind, he won't allow you to become aware that he knows you?"

"Darn him, he won't!" I said. "So you see, the odds are always against the —I almost called myself a name!"

La Moure rose.

"And what shall I do with the eye I get from Mercer?" I asked.

"Bring it to me at my apartment," he said, as he gave me one of his cards.

"I thank you for your confidence in me," I ventured as I followed him in my graceful manner to the elevator.

He made no reply as he passed into the cage.

Ten minutes afterward the bell boy brought in the files of the San Francisco papers, dating back to a month before; and for the rest of that afternoon I was a busy man.

I learned that a man whose identity was still a mystery had been found by the side of the road near Golden Gate Park with a bullet hole in his brain. One scrap of identifying evidence found upon him was a single ivory cuff button on which was painted a blue human eye—the left. In the right cuff was a plain gold button.

Another piece of evidence was the upper fifth of a sheet of typewriter paper, containing the letterhead of the firm of Fisher & La Moure, Architectural Department. There was no writing on it whatsoever.

Fisher & La Moure, I learned later, conducted an achitectural and ready-made house department. You could buy a submarine of Fisher & La Moure, I guess, if you had the price. But as a shoplifter I'd confined my activities to gloves, waists, neckwear, silk stockings,

novelties, et cetera, and, though an old hand in the game, I had not yet risen to lifting ready-made houses from the counters of department stores.

Naturally an investigation was made in the architectural department of Fisher & La Moure. The paper glibly told me this, then left me dripping at the mouth with curiosity. So far as further news of the case from the papers was concerned, there was nothing doing.

I can't say that I relished the task before me, for this Jefferson Mercer was an ingenious bird, but I relished those yellow certificates. So at ten o'clock Monday morning, with my third arm in good working order in my right coat sleeve, and the right arm I'd been born with under my coat and ready to pick up any loose eyes that might be carelessly mislaid, I sauntered languidly into Mercer's office, my campaign all mapped out.

I was dressed as a working man, a hod carrier, if closely quizzed; and as my mother was an actress, and my father a poker shark, I had hopes of getting by with the Paddy stuff. My artificial hand was covered with a bandage. There was a little dried blood showing through the none-too-clean cloth. It had come out of my regular arm at the insistence of a needle point.

A girl that couldn't have had much salary left after she'd settled with her hairdresser and manicurist asked me if I'd just come in for luck, or did I wish to interview Mr. Mercer.

I replied that, since I'd seen her, it was plain that luck hadn't deserted me, but that my original idea in passing those portals was to set eyes on a real detective just once in my life.

"You. name, please?"

Oh, say, can't they pull that stuff!

"Michael O'Halloran," I suggested.

"And what did you wish to see Mr. Mercer about, Mr. O'Halloran?"

"Blue eyes," I says.

Hers were blue. She showed them to me slantwise. I don't look so awful bad even in overalls.

"I'll tell Mr. Mercer," she said, and took thirty-seven steps on her leather stilts to a door marked "Private," ten feet from her desk.

"Mr. Mercer will see you," she confided in the voice of a dentist's confederate when she ties the bib about your neck.

I took one good look into the dark eyes of that big detective fellow. Something hurt me at the back of my skull. It was his glance just working its way through to see if that was a fly on the wall behind me, or just a speck.

"You're Irish, Mr. O'Halloran?" he asked pleasantly.

"No, Swede," I said—for an Irishman has to be funny.

"Oh, I see. County Cork or County Sligo? Which?"

"County jail," I flipped out boldly.

He laughed. "What about blue eyes, Mr. O'Halloran?" he said.

My mother had sung Irish songs for beer swillers in a garden where no roses grew. She came from the old sod. I wasn't hard pressed to slip just a tiny bit of brogue here and there in my speech, as I told Mercer my little tale.

No need for details. A wealthy employer and benefactor of mine had had his eye transferred to ivory, and I'd lost track of him for several years, and so on, and so on, till, from his safe, the dick brought the blue eye and placed it on the desk between us.

"The eye, Mr. O'Halloran," said this clever bird, "has been aptly termed the window of the soul. I have been reading up on the subject of eye paintings. It is an old fad, recently revived. A famous miniature artist of London tells us that it is possible for him to take portraits of a person's two eyes, and, with these as his only guide, reproduce

a recognizable likeness of the face of the owner of the eyes from which the portraits were made.

"If this is the case, and investigation has convinced me that there is no little truth in the statement, you will readily see what a valuable clew I have in this painted eye. If I can only obtain a close view of the eye from which this portrait was made, I am confident that I can identify the person. But what connection the owner of the eye had with the dead man remains, of course, to be seen. At any rate, the association must have been rather close, for a man would scarce wear on a cuff button the eye of a mere acquaintance."

There lay that confounded eye before me. The eye I was to substitute for it lay moist and warm in my hidden hand. I must pick up the eye on the table with my left hand. Then I must detract Mercer's attenion elsewhere while I made the switch. Now I knew that I'd have done better not to have brought along the false arm. I could have held the substitute in my hand, picked up the eye desired with the same hand, and made the switch as I pretended to replace it on the desk. All with the same hand—see? But I had been taking no chances with this bird. I listened, showing interest, as he rambled along. As yet I hadn't found the nerve to pick up the ivory button. The back of my head still hurt me.

He ceased speaking presently, and pushed the ivory toward me.

"But you haven't examined it," he said. "Do so. I'm anxious to add to my information on the subject by noting whether or not you can tell if it is the likeness of your friend's eye."

My left hand plucked the thing from the polished surface of the desk. And I was stuck. How I wished now that I'd left my old third arm out of the deal! But how was I to know this Ike would pass the thing to me so readily? I'd come prepared for any emergency. Now the substitute was in my right hand, hidden under my coat. And the eye I wanted was in my left hand; and those black eyes of his were boring through the wall behind my head to see if his stenographer was flirting over the telephone.

"Stung!" I said to myself. "Absolutely stung, Ace Keck!"

And stung I was. I could only lay the eye back with a sigh, and say: "It ain't his, I'm certain, Mr. Mercer. No, that'll never be his eye, I know."

There was one chance left for my old third arm. If he'd leave the eye on the table a moment, and—— But he didn't. He scooped it up and took it back to his safe, and the curtain dropped on Act One.

Back in the Palace I threw that old cork arm at the wall, then got it, doubled up its fist, and handed myself one in the jaw.

"That for you," I said. "Get a third leg for yourself, and walk on it to the cuckoo house. There's always room there for one more, Ace Keck!"

That evening I called on Dick la Moure at his department out in the Richmond district.

"Heavens!" he gasped, when I'd told him my tale of woe. "I thought you of all men on earth would not bungle such a job. Tell me how you came to fail."

"That," I said, "would cost you about twenty-five thousand dollars, and I'd spend the remainder of my days about two jumps beyond the reach of brother and sister department-store workers. No, let's talk about something else. Surely all is not lost."

He flopped heavily into a deep leather chair, and rested his forehead with a hand.

"There may be one more chance," he added finally. "Just one. I'll have to tell you, I suppose, what I didn't intend to.

"Mercer has made arrangements

with Mr. Fisher, my partner, to go to the architectural department to-morrow and inspect the eyes of all our employees there. He is to pose as an eye expert, and will be presumed by our employees to have been hired by the firm to make tests of our workers' eyes, to see if our lighting arrangement is all that it should be. Architectural drawing, as you may imagine, is a severe strain on one's eyes. We have always tried to look out for the welfare of our people. So Mercer's rather clever scheme will seem to them quite plausible.

"Posing as an optometrist he will examine the eyes of all our draughtsmen and draughtswomen through an optical instrument. The clew of the ivory eye points to our architectural department, as you have perhaps learned by now. With all conflicting influences excluded Mercer will be able to look directly into the eyes of all of us; and I'll warrant that if the person he is after is in that department, he'll be able to find the eye from which the painting that he has was made."

"The eyes of all of us," I repeated innocently.

"Yes," he said after a pause. "Mr. Fisher, in agreeing to the plan, told Mercer of his own secret interest in detective work. To throw off all suspicion he volunteered to subject his own eyes to the test, and volunteered for me as well."

I looked up with a roving glance. Yes, the eyes of the junior partner of the firm of Fisher & La Moure were blue.

"And my second chance?" I asked.

"Mercer will doubtless have the ivory eye along with him to make comparisons," he replied. "If you can't make the substitution to-morrow in our store while he's testing eyes, we'll never have another chance."

"Will he take it out of his pocket, though?" I asked.

"He will if he thinks he has found an eye to match it," snapped La Moure.

"The switch must be made before that," I remarked casually.

He said nothing, but lapsed into gloom.

"A dip might turn the trick," I suggested.

"What is a dip?" he asked.

"He's a shoplifter with only an elementary education, doing outside work and hoping for advancement," I enlightened him. "In short, a pickpocket."

"Do you know any?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't say that. But I might meet some policeman on the street, and ask him if he knew anybody that knew an honest and deserving pickpocket looking for an odd job in his line."

"Would the cleverest pickpocket have a chance with an experienced man like Mercer?"

"Well, bartenders are not altogether without their little sidelights on life," I said. "I once saw a dip steal a cat from behind a bar, go out in the street, and come back and trade the bartender's own cat to him for a round of drinks. There had been several rounds before that, though, and this bartender wasn't just what you'd call an aloof person."

"Suppose you try it," he said, smiling. "It seems to me that when the detective is looking through the instrument would be a mighty good time for a—a dip to go through his clothes. He could pose as an employee of the store, you know."

"Why, you're simply wonderful, Mr. la Moure," I said. "I had much the same idea in mind. But another time when you have a little job like this on hand," I hinted, "instead of picking a man who's made a life study of—er—people like myself, select Hiram Hicks of Hicksville, or Norton van Yorick of New York City. Either will do. But

fight shy of dicks like this Mercer, and of that fellow who figures in the cartoons of the day as the ultimate consumer. For under the hats of such Wisdon finds her throne."

"You're something of a philosopher, Keck," he said, smiling wearily.

"I'm worse than that," I said. Then I looked out the window and added, soft voiced: "But tell me—is it necessary for you to look into Mercer's eye through the instrument?"

He didn't answer immediately, and when I looked around I faced an angry glare. But it faded, and he said:

"So long as Mr. Fisher has suggested it, it would scarce be wise for me to refuse."

Then I left him, promising to have a dip on hand at the appointed hour next day.

Dressed as my own dear normal self, with a red rose in my lapel—a weakness of mine—I put in an appearance at Dick la Moure's private office next morning. We were alone.

"Where's your—er—dip?" he asked, looking up nervously.

"I spoke to several cops about that dip," I said. "They told me not to spread it around for fear the force would be reduced, and some of their friends would lose jobs, but that there wasn't a crook of any character in town. I hated to raise a dispute, but during the time I was talking the matter over with them I saw no less than three plain-clothes men, a corporation lawyer and a dealer in butter and eggs."

He smiled. But at once his face grew grave. "You couldn't get one, then. What in Heaven's name am I to do?"

"I've decided to keep the home fires burning," I said.

"I don't just follow you."

"In other words, then, to collect all of that thousand dollars myself, and beware of entangling alliances."

"Can *you* pick Mercer's pockets?"

"There you go again," I warned him. "Has the chief instructor in mathematics at Harvard forgotten how to cut an apple so that James, John and Jane will each have an equal share?"

"But you can't go into the architectural department and pose as an employee," he pointed out. "Mercer will recognize your face."

"I can't," I agreed. "I must wait outside until he gets to going good with his eye examinations, then stroll leisurely in behind him, conversing genially with you. We pause behind Mercer, quite close to him. We're so interested, you understand."

"But, Keck, you worry me. Mercer will surely learn that—— And some of our employees may see you at work on him."

"Why worry? Hair dye has advanced since the war. Try this cigar while we think it over."

I passed him one and held a lighted match for him.

"But wait," I said. "Isn't it about time for Mercer's arrival?"

He reached for his watch. "Why—why—— Surely I didn't forget my watch this morning."

"Is this it?" I asked, and let one of these thin little gold-wafer timepieces slip down my wrist into my hand.

"Why, where did you find it?" he asked, gasping.

"In your pocket."

He grinned foolishly. They hate a thing like that.

"Pardon me," I said, "but isn't your tie pin coming out?"

He reached for his cravat. His tie pin had already come out.

"Where is it?" he demanded, half angry, half interested.

"You can search me," I told him.

"Do you mean that literally?"

"Surely," and I approached him with hands held over my head.

Eager as a boy, he frisked me like an

elephant hunting for a peanut in his ration of hay. He did not find his pin.

I pressed a tiny spring on the under side of my coat lapel, and his pin dangled on a hook and thread from the center of the rose I wore.

"I guess you'll do," he said. "Now I'll see if Mercer has arrived."

"Just a moment," I interposed. "Has it occurred to you what might happen to me if I get caught while putting on this performance?"

"That's your look-out," he retorted.

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "I pulled off the first act blindly, did my best, and failed. But act number two is a little more difficult still. There'll be too many witnesses. I've earned my five hundred, and got it. But I've decided it's going to take a pretty good reason to get me to try for that other bunch of kale."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Frankly, I must be told why I'm to get that ivory eye from Mercer. I'm an honest shoplifter. I'm not aiding and abetting the escape of a murderer, Mr. la Moure."

"What do you mean by that?" he flashed at me.

"Blue eyes," I told him meekly.

He laughed a little bitterly and sat down.

"Keck," he said, "when you go out there to the architectural department you'll see a blue-eyed girl. Back in New York she had two suitors—one of them the man who was found dead in Golden Gate Park, Floyd Graff. An artist friend of the three painted the eyes of all of them; and for sentimental reasons they changed them around so that the girl wore in one cuff the eye of one of the men, and in the other cuff the eye of the other one. One of them—the man found dead—followed her when she came to San Francisco. What he did against her she has not told me. But he persecuted her. I only know that—that——

"Well, I went to her apartment when she was away and managed to distract her landlady's attention. I got an ivory eye—the eye of the suitor who is still alive—the man back in New York. You have it now. It must be substituted for the eye found on the dead man before Mercer gets a chance to compare that one with—with——"

"The girl's eyes?" I murmured.

"Yes," he said.

"The rôle of Cupid always has appealed to me," I told him after a pause. "Go see if Mercer has come."

Mercer had arrived with his apparatus, and a little later Dick la Moure and I left for the architectural rooms.

We paused near the entrance. A dozen or more pen-and-ink artists of both sexes were at work over capacious tables. At a smaller table near the center of the room stood Jefferson Mercer, his back toward us, arranging his paraphernalia for the tests. I stepped back partially out of sight and watched through a glass panel beside the door.

Fisher, the white-haired old senior partner, was at the detective's side. When all was ready he cleared his throat, called attention, and told his people what was on the cards, gradually working up to an oratorical outburst about fifteen times as long as necessary.

While all concerned waited for the old bird's vocabulary to fail him I took a slant at a dame who seemed to be giving me a lengthy once-over from where she was perched on a high stool.

She was an apricot. Other pretty women might be peaches, but after one look at that unbelievable gold-red hair of hers no one would have thought of a peach. It was like the last touch of the sun on a distant California mountain covered with chaparral. The sun on the sea gives the mountain its wonderful hues as day dies—maybe the sun had caught the trick of playing on this girl's great blue eyes so that the miracle was recorded in her copper hair.

But I was in error. She was not enraptured with my manly physique. A look at Dick la Moure, beside me, convinced me as to the fortunate object of her regard. And Dick was looking at her as an artist looks at a pool of water mottled with splashes of sun and the shadows of wild-grape leaves overhead.

Her lips, red as the berries of the California holly, were slightly parted. A pucker, half of perplexity, half of growing worry, crossed her brow.

Her eyes were blue as tropic bays made wells by jungles all about.

I had seen those eyes. But where?

La Moure touched my arm. I stepped back farther out of sight.

"Keep in the background," he said. "I'll tell you when your chance is good."

It was five minutes afterward that he gave the whispered signal. Then, conversing amiably—at least on my part, for he was white of face and almost speechless—we walked in side by side.

Mercer's broad back was toward me. A man sat across the table from him. The two of them were squinting at each other through some sort of optometrist's instrument.

As we approached Mercer told the man to rise. While the detective was penciling some fake data in a notebook old Fisher, master of ceremonies, called:

"You next, please, Miss Hearn."

And, casting one appealing look at La Moure, the girl with the hair of the mountain top arose and went toward Mercer.

A vise closed on my arm. A hoarse whisper grated in my ear:

"Lord! Keck, get it now—now—*now!*"

Her eyes were blue.

I pulled him along. Behind Mercer we stopped. The girl sat down, her red lips still parted, her skin like snow.

She placed an eye to her end of the instrument. Mercer leaned toward his end.

"Good Lord!" breathed La Moure again. "Keck! Keck!"

I couldn't stand to hear his misery. I took a step, and, with the blue eye La Moure had given me in my hand, I went straight for the lower right-hand pocket of Mercer's vest.

I had known I'd find it there. It lay in my palm, moist and warm, in the flirt of a linnet's tail. And in its place reposed the substitute.

Outside again La Moure grasped my coat sleeve.

"Did you—did you——"

I laid the miniature in his hand.

He took one long look at it. I did the same. A great sigh of relief escaped him as he slipped it in his pocket.

I knew now why I thought I'd seen the eyes of the girl of the mountain top before.

"You'd better go now," suggested Dick la Moure quite impolitely.

"No use," I said. "I'll stick around and see the finish. If I were you I'd hide that eye right now," I added.

He was paying little attention. His eyes were on the girl.

We waited. I knew from his movements that Mercer was secretly holding in his hand the eye I had given him, and was comparing it with the girl's.

La Moure sighed gratefully as Mercer bade her rise, and old Fisher called another victim before the lens.

"You may go now, Mr. Keck," said La Moure once more, his voice trembling with a new thrill. "I'll meet you in the office and settle up."

I glanced in at Mercer. I saw him lean his head sidewise from his glass and point a finger across the table at a slim young man who was gazing dutifully into the other end of the instrument.

"That will be enough, Mr. Fincastle," came Mercer's clicking tones.

The man's eyes left the instrument. He found himself staring across the table at Mercer's leveled finger.

"Hal Fincastle," Mercer's tones rang out, "when did you leave New York City?"

"I—I—why, about three months ago," the young man faltered, his face blanching.

"Why did you kill Floyd Graff?"

The detective shot the question in with the precision of a rifle bullet. Fincastle staggered, then fell back in his chair. His countenance was like putty.

"Because he slandered Miss Hearn," he muttered.

Mercer held up the piece of ivory I had just slipped into his vest pocket.

"This is your eye, isn't it?"

"I—think so."

"You are under arrest."

Mercer turned and looked at me, grinning. "Much obliged, Keck," he remarked. "In another five minutes I'd have had to pick *your* pocket. I've been trying to get hold of this eye"—he glanced down at the ivory in his hand—"ever since Mr. la Moure took it from Miss Hearn's apartment."

He was about to say something else when there was a diversion. La Moure had walked over to the girl, and was taking her in his arms, right in front of us all. She was crying.

"What was the reason you wouldn't marry me?" he demanded.

"My—father—was in the penitentiary once, and—and Floyd Graff said he would keep me from marrying——" She came to a dead stop, blushed, and lowered her eyes.

He passed his hand over that wonderful hair. "Is *that* all?" he exclaimed, drawing a long breath.

I collected the five hundred from La Moure, and had the doubtful satisfaction of waving it under Mercer's nose.

MAGISTRATES WANT MORE PROBATION OFFICERS

ALTHOUGH the number of persons placed on probation by the magistrates' courts of New York City has increased fifty per cent since 1912, there are six less probation officers in 1919 than there were in that year. The forty-two men the city employs to supervise those offenders it places on probation each has in his charge from two hundred and fifty to three hundred cases, to be watched over for from six months to a year. These are more than any one man can handle with proper efficiency, authorities agree, declaring that there ought to be so many officers in this work that no one would have to care for more than fifty probationers.

The duties of the probation officers are to see that the paroled offender works regularly, keeps away from questionable acquaintances, and, if ordered by the magistrate to do so, increases his provision for his family each week. By putting men on probation instead of sending them to jail or prison the city has saved approximately $3,416,742 in the last four years, for it costs sixty cents a day to send a man to jail and keep him there, and only six cents when he is on probation, and twenty-one thousand, nine hundred and one persons were paroled under suspended sentences during that time. The extent of the work of the probation officers is shown also in the statement of one of them that, on one day recently, there were four hundred and twenty-eight more people out on probation in New York State than there were in all the jails, reformatories, and prisons.

To further the good done by the "big brothers" the board of magistrates has asked that the city make an increased appropriation in the 1920 budget so that more men may be engaged in this field.

The Unseen Clew

By V. S. Hayden

WHAT happens when a policeman dies?

Many things happen that you or I or any observant citizen knows. The police force turns out in a body to the funeral, the flag over headquarters is flown at half-mast, and if he is sufficiently well known or has died in the performance of duty, the newspapers print eulogistic articles about the dead policeman.

Nor is that all. Down in the lurking shadows of the underworld crooks bare their lips in mirthless smiles, grimly pleased that another enemy has passed beyond. If the "bull" has been especially active in the conviction of criminals there is unmasked rejoicing among those who are on the other side of the pale called respectability.

Another thing occurs at the death of a defender of the law—a thing sinister, inexplicable; something that strikes terror to the superstitious, and has never been explained by the wisest. It is like the foot on a poker-player's chair that changes the luck, or the strange, hair-bristling horror that grips us if we are forced to pass a cemetery after nightfall. We cannot explain this curious incident in connection with a policeman's death, and yet there it is, proven by countless records that all may see.

The phenomenon, or whatever you call it, is nothing less than this: Whenever a policeman in active duty dies, within a week of his death a strange dog comes to his station and remains unless he is killed or driven away.

Why this is I do not know. Some say it is not true, yet it has been proven so often that the rule may be accepted as universal. Others say it is coincidence, but coincidence cannot occur constantly; even the law of averages has its point of diminishing credulity.

Policemen are mostly Irish, and the Irish are superstitious. So among the men of the blue coat and badge it has come to be generally believed that the strange dog has taken up the soul of the departed policeman. This is why the animal is always given a home with the officers, and why even the most brutal among them will not abuse the dog. Even if he himself has no faith in the whispered doctrine of transmigration of souls he would not risk the wrath of others

Maybe the theory about a common, mangy dog carrying the soul of a dead policeman is all nonsense. But here is the occurrence at Cottage Grove Avenue station. Explain it if you can. Frankly, I cannot.

Patrolman Pat Cassidy was a fine, upright young lad who was fast making his mark in the department. Cassidy came to the notice of the precinct captain the first night he was pounding a beat by bringing in single-handed four toughs whom he caught attempting to do a holdup, and who tried to brazen it out when caught by Cassidy.

"Sure the b'hoy is due for a step or a coffin within the year," said Captain Ryan the night this occurred.

Inwardly rejoicing at the mettle of the lad, Ryan assumed official dignity in warning him.

"Patrolman Cassidy," said he, "don't be getting the idea that you are alone responsible for the peace and dignity of the entire city. You can't clean up a precinct with one hand and pull the patrol box with the other. Remember, the department gives you your whistle to blow for help, and not to wear for a watch charm."

Cassidy said nothing, but went forth from roll call into the thick of the very beat where his feat had set the gunmen whispering. That night he raided a gambling house. When the wagon arrived he had ten men backed against the wall and was covering them with his revolver. Two were insensible.

So it went. An ominous roar ascended from the underworld. The "men higher up" crept secretly to the chief with their whining complaint, but a reform mayor had passed the word and nothing could be done. Cassidy had developed the unusual theory that the duty of an officer of the law was to prevent law violations. In the consistent following of such a heresy it is not remarkable that he acquired a number of enemies who plotted darkly, and mumbled evil threats as he patroled past, his swinging baton tapping the left curb—strictly according to regulations.

Among the most active of these enemies was Rudolph Beissinger, proprietor of a hectic dance hall just on the edge of Cassidy's beat. Beissinger's wrath dated from the February night when Cassidy entered the dance hall and took away Etta Jones. He was not in love with her, but Etta had not turned her sixteenth year; and Cassidy had a queer idea that a reeking beer hall was not precisely the atmosphere in which to have a birthday party. Neither did Beissinger love the girl, but her young face had sent many drink orders to his dirty, beer-soaked bar, and he felt that Cassidy in removing the girl had reached into his pocket and taken out so much real money.

So one hot, sticky night, in June Cassidy did not pull his box at midnight. The failure was reported to the desk sergeant, of course, and a reserve man was sent out to investigate.

He found Cassidy lying helpless in front of Beissinger's dance hall—stabbed through the back.

"You said he'd get promotion or a coffin within a year," the reserve officer telephoned Captain Ryan. "It won't be promotion. Cassidy has been murdered."

"Get Beissinger!" snapped Ryan. He liked Cassidy.

"I can't," said the reserve. "I've been in, but Beissinger left an hour ago. They don't know where he went."

It was true. When the homicide squad arrived they could do no more than the reserve patrolman had done. Beissinger had gone, no one knew where.

And he did not return with the passing of the days. It was discovered that he had sold the fixtures of the dance hall, and had turned everything into cash and disappeared.

The customary police warning was sent broadcast over the country. And as usual it produced results. Newspaper criticisms to the contrary notwithstanding, few men escape a nation-wide police search. Beissinger was arrested in Seattle, hundreds of miles away, ten days after the murder.

His story was so weak that even his lawyer doubted it. He said that the dance-hall business was going bad and he sold the place, meaning to try again in the West. He had said nothing to any one because he had no intimate friends, and he did not see any reason for discussing the charge. He professed surprise but no regret over Cassidy's end. Within two weeks of Cassidy's death Beissinger was held without bail on the charge of murder.

That night the strange dog came to Cottage Grove Avenue police station.

And queer things began to happen.

He wasn't much of a dog—just a mongrel breed of the streets, some homeless wretch that the unthinking might consider had crept into the police station for the same reason that impels many a human derelict—to get a night's warm lodging and maybe a bit of food, even though it be given with harsh words and blows.

So this dog came in. The policemen were about to put him out when, for some strange reason, Captain Ryan spoke.

"Let him stay," said the captain.

I had never been able to understand this, on purely natural grounds, for the captain was not a lover of dogs. He himself has never understood why he ordered the dog kept. He says it was a sudden "hunch." Maybe it was also a "hunch" that helped Solomon to give the contested child to the right mother, or made Daniel save Susanna from death by asking that famous question about a tree.

But anyhow the dog stayed. I noticed him particularly after the captain spoke. As I have said, the dog was not handsome, but in his eyes was the most baffling look we ever saw. It was almost human. Sometimes he would look at us earnestly as though he was trying to tell us something. It seemed as if his dog mind contained some information, and he longed for speech to utter it.

"Probably he's hungry," said one of the younger policemen with a laugh, when we were discussing this one night.

"The dog's not hungry," said the captain sharply. "The matron's just fed him." And at the time we all wondered why he was so angry over a trivial utterance of a patrolman.

Things went on that way for several weeks. The dog became the accepted mascot of the precinct. Some one remembered that Cassidy had been friendly with this dog when on his beat, and in compliment to the dead policeman they named the dog Pat. And from the way the mongrel wagged his stub of a tail I believe he was pleased with the compliment.

Well, things wore on the way they do when dogs like this come to a police station. I mean that the dog seemed to make friends with all the officers, like as if the sight of a uniform was enough to tell him the man was his friend. He'd take to going out on the beats with the policemen, first one and then another. Why, he even went out with Captain Ryan, even though the captain was known to dislike dogs; but this fellow's liking seemed to please Ryan as much as it did any one else.

The dog had become very much at home by January sixteenth.

I remember the date, because it was the night set for Beissinger's execution. On account of his having been condemned for the murder of a policeman of this very station, all of us were talking about it. Beissinger was to go to the scaffold at midnight.

You may talk about coincidences, but the more I think of it the more I believe there is a Wiser Intelligence that plans lots of things which we think "just happen." For instance, January sixteenth was the date set by Judge Munroe for the execution of Beissinger. And Chief of Police Waltham decided upon this very same day for a general shift in the personnel of the various precinct stations.

The two actions seem as wide apart as any two actions could well be. And yet if Chief Waltham should have selected the seventeenth, or should have shifted the men differently than he did, this story could never have been written. That seems strange, I know, but it is logical enough in view of what occurred.

For Sergeant Carroll was sent to the Cottage Grove Avenue station.

He was brought over from across town, and replaced one of Ryan's sergeants who had been put in the plain-clothes squad.

"Pat don't seem to like him," said one of the men as Sergeant Carroll came into the back room of the station where the idle men waited their turn to go on duty.

It was true. The dog had made friends of all policemen, but he seemed to have developed an absolute antagonism for Carroll. His hair bristled, and a throaty growl told his opinion of the new sergeant.

Carroll aimed a kick at the dog.

"Aw, let him alone!" said one of the men. "He's the station mascot."

"Keep the brute out of my way!" cried Carroll. "What right's he got growling at me like that?"

"Well, don't kick that dog. Fight a man if you're looking for trouble."

The crowd was silent, not knowing what to expect. A fight in the station meant trouble, with bad marks on the record book. Carroll made no reply, but passed silently into the drill hall for roll call. Yet it was not fear that stilled his tongue, for Carroll had proved himself on more than one occasion.

Trouble began again after roll call. Sergeant Carroll was marching out at the head of his platoon when the little dog came at him again. Its hair was on end and it seemed infuriated. We could not understand the sudden change.

"Gr-r-r-!" growled the dog savagely.

Sergeant Carroll looked down and his face fairly blanched. His fear would have been ridiculous considering the size of the dog and its incapacity to do him any real injury, but knowing the Irish nature I understood it was not physical fear. His face was white as paper, and wore that strange look which is seen on the faces of Irish crones when they talk of banshees.

"For Heaven's sake take his eyes off me!" screamed Carroll.

"His eyes?" said Captain Ryan sharply. "Sergeant Carroll, have you been drinking?"

"No. But his eyes! His eyes! Good Lord, they're boring into me."

"The man is either drunk or insane," said Captain Ryan.

"I'll kill the brute!" cried Carroll drawing his revolver.

The dog darted behind a door and Carroll after it, wildly waving the revolver. As he started forward his foot touched a policeman's mace which was lying on the floor—I believe the dog had playfully dragged it up the stairs—and he fell heavily.

As he fell he was pulling the trigger of the revolver, and the fall was so sudden that his arm was jerked around so that the pistol pointed toward himself when it was discharged. There was a sharp report and blood was seen to drip from the silver badge pinned to the sergeant's left side.

We put him on a cot and sent a hurry-up call for the nearest department surgeon, but by the time he arrived Carroll was beyond help. The surgeon shook his head and Sergeant Carroll, weak as he was, saw the motion.

"Doctor, how long can I live?" he asked weakly.

"About an hour," replied the surgeon.

"What time is it now?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Then there is still time," said the dying sergeant, forcing himself to speak by sheer force of will power, while we wondered what he meant. "Captain Ryan, get your stenographer and have him take down what I have to say."

Thinking the sergeant wished to deliver some last message to his family Captain Ryan hurriedly summoned the police stenographer and placed him at the bedside. The stenographer laid out

some sharpened pencils and placed his notebook on a little stand.

"I am ready, Sergeant Carroll," he said.

Carroll pulled himself together by another strong effort.

"Then take this down, for it is important. And hurry, because there isn't much time to make things right.

"Beissinger did not kill Pat Cassidy. I killed him. Cassidy and I loved the same girl. He won her in fair contest because he was the better man, but I wasn't white enough to be a game loser. There was a sergeantcy to be given out and it lay between Cassidy and me. At the last minute I learned that Cassidy had been picked. I thought with him out of the way I'd get it, and that with Cassidy gone and I a sergeant maybe Nora would look at me. But she wouldn't. She seemed always to see murder in my eyes, and my sergeant's stripe has been smeared with blood for nothing.

"I decided to let suspicion fall on Beissinger because he was out of luck with the gang at City Hall, and I thought if they got him they wouldn't inquire too close whether they had the right man. So on my night off I met Cassidy on his beat, apparently accidentally, and walked about with him.

"It wasn't easy to carry on a friendly conversation with a man you intended to kill, but I did it. I felt like a Judas all the time.

"When we got to that dark corner by Beissinger's place I put the knife in Cassidy's back. It was quieter than a gun. But Beissinger told the truth about selling out and leaving town. I didn't know he was going to leave town, and thought he would finally clear himself of the murder charge. But I couldn't clear him afterward without going to the dock myself. If it hadn't been for that dog's eyes——

"But it's all clear now. Tell the governor——" His voice trailed off. His heart still beat, but the voice that saved a life had failed.

Captain Ryan looked at the clock and panic flamed in his eyes. It was eleven fifteen. Beissinger was to be hanged at twelve.

"Get into the car, boys," he shouted to two of us, and we did not wait even for our overcoats.

I tremble when I think of it now. A blowout or any little delay would have cost Beissinger his life. As it was we broke into that deathroom just as Beissinger was mounting the steps of the scaffold.

At first the sheriff didn't know what to do. He said it wasn't legal to stop the execution on the word of a precinct captain, and technically he was right of course. But we were not going to have an innocent man choked with red tape.

Finally Captain Ryan said a stay of execution was on the way from the governor's office, and the sheriff was glad of this excuse to hold things up. This was not true, but it delayed matters until ten o'clock next day when the governor wired a pardon on the strength of Carroll's confession.

The dog that had started all this had followed us to the county jail, and when Beissinger stepped down from the scaffold the dog capered to him in ecstasy.

"Why, here's my dog!" said Beissinger.

Nobody contradicted him, yet none of us had ever seen the dog about Beissinger's place.

Now, was it Beissinger's dog or was it a stray dog carrying the soul of Cassidy, seeking justice for his murder? Or was it just coincidence, and everything "merely happened?"

Well—your guess is as good as mine.

But don't ever kick a stray dog if a man from the Cottage Grove Avenue station is within looking distance. And for the life of you don't ever tell Beissinger you think dogs are a nuisance.

The Curse on the House of Carson

by Ernest M. Poate

Author of the "Doctor Bentiron" Stories, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

SOON after meeting George Carson and Alice Macy, Carson's stepdaughter, Arthur Ward, an ex-soldier, learns that his host is in great terror of ghosts, especially in the vicinity of Lakeside Park. After a quarrel with her stepfather, Alice Macy leaves the house he has rented on Chautauqua Lake, and speeds away in a big motor car.

Ward and Mr. and Mrs. Carson are sitting on the veranda of the house that afternoon when an antiquated automobile, with a woman driving, approaches. As the car passes the house a shot is fired, wounding Carson dangerously. Many of the villagers believe Alice Macy responsible for the shooting, and Ward finds a revolver, with one cartridge discharged, in the automobile she had used.

Mrs. Salome Jacobs, a witchlike old woman, who lives, with her son Billy, a motor-cycle enthusiast, in a cottage across the road, warns Ward to keep away from Lakeside Park. Nevertheless, the ex-soldier goes there and discovers an ancient automobile in a carriage house on the deserted estate. He learns also that a murder had happened there fourteen years before, when Mrs. Sol Caldwell and her son, Ed, had been shot while sitting in an automobile, and that her daughter Grace had become dumb and insane after the tragedy. Geoffrey Caldwell, another son, was suspected of the crime.

After Carson suffers a relapse through fear, and two attempts have been made on Ward's life, Constable Ed Hopkins suggests to the soldier that George Carson and Geoffrey Caldwell are the same person, that Billy Jacobs had tried to kill Ward, and that the woman in the "ghost car" was Grace Caldwell. A telegram to the sanitarium where she had been confined brings the reply that she had escaped and later committed suicide.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CONFERENCE.

WARD was bitterly disappointed and more than a little awed. He had hoped much from the telegram; the clouds had seemed to be lightening. And now the darkness was blacker than ever. If Carson were really Geoffrey Caldwell, the lips of the last person who could have told his part in that grim drama years ago were sealed now.

Hopkins looked at him queerly. "August 11th," he muttered. "Must of died 'bout two days before you come here, young feller. And right away her old automobeel begins to run 'round the country. What was it Gran'pa Watson called it? Ghost car?"

Ward shivered; the old man's quavering, senile tones rang in his ears: "It's the Caldwellses ghost car, I tell ye—lookin' fer Jeff!" Had it found him? And who had been its spectral driver?

The constable spat disgustedly. "This ain't goin' to get us nowheres," he grumbled; "all foolishness, such talk." Although Ward had said nothing. "Le's go see the doc." And then, inconsistently enough: "Say, young feller, s'pose Alice seen Grace Caldwell's ghost, out yonder? Ain't no wonder she wouldn't talk."

Without more words the two repaired to Doctor Otis' house, mounted the peeling steps and entered his bare waiting room. It was dusty and ill kept, its hideous green wall paper undec-

orated save by a battered black-framed diploma, which set forth in academic Latin that one Robert Dwight Otis had had conferred upon him the degree of doctor of medicine, "with all the rights and privileges here or elsewhere thereunto appertaining." It was dated Anno Domini 1896, "and of the Republic the one hundred and tenth."

"I didn't think he was so old," murmured Ward.

"Uh-huh," whispered the constable. "He's gettin' along. Ain't it dreadful how that housekeeper scamps things? Look at 'at dust in the corners. S-sh—here he comes!"

The office door opened and the doctor appeared, ushering out an elderly calico-dressed woman.

"D'ye s'pose them pills'll help my liver, doctor?" she asked anxiously. "My liver's dretful bad this summer."

"Yes, Mrs. Johnson," said the doctor patiently; "I'm sure they will—if you take 'em—you didn't the last ones, you know. And you might eat a little less pork, and more greens. Hello, Ed! How do, Mr. Ward. What's on your minds?"

He led them into the stuffy little office, with its old-fashioned, leather-covered operating chair, its rows of dusty shelves, bearing bottles with formidable inscriptions, and its pervading, druglike odor of iodoform, cascara, and a dozen mingled tinctures. Above the littered desk the doctor's narcotic drug license was fastened to the wall with strips of adhesive plaster.

"We wanna talk about this here Carson," explained Hopkins, subsiding into a straight-backed chair. "Go ahead, young feller."

Thus urged, Ward began his tale, looking into the doctor's extraordinary brilliant little blue eyes.

He began with his coming to Dunkirk, and told of the first appearance of the ghost car.

"I—see," commented Doctor Otis. He was listening intently, the two wings of hair upright. "So that was what scared him so."

"Yes," agreed Ward. "He was just plain scared. And when we got home he bolted for the telephone. I heard him say 'What—dead?' and drop the receiver. That was when Alice went for you."

"Callin' up Buffalo, I bet," interjected Hopkins. "Just you wait, doc," to the latter's look of inquiry; "we'll get to that prit' soon."

"Well," the boy went on, "you know about the next time we saw that car; it was when Carson was shot. And ever since there's been all this talk about ghosts and curses, and neither Alice nor her father would explain anything. And you know how people have been talking. So finally I took the Carson's car and drove out to Lakeside myself. And I traced Alice right out there. She must have gone into the old Caldwell place just before the ghost car"—he flushed at the doctor's angry glare, then went on defiantly—"yes, just before the ghost car came out. And she didn't leave until it got back. She must have been there nearly two hours.

"Well, I drove in and went up to the old house." His voice trembled slightly. "It's a spooky place; *I* was frightened myself," with an uneasy laugh. "I looked into the barn, and saw the Caldwell's old auto; and I'm sure it was the same one that drove past here. It didn't look as though it could possibly be run by any human being—and perhaps it wasn't. Anyway, I'd told old Mrs. Jacobs I was going out there; and on the way home I ran into that accident. I suppose you know broken glass had been put in the road? Well, I think it was meant for me.

"Then you know what set Carson off last night: somebody calling 'Oh, Jeff, don't!' under his window. Billy Jacobs

was out there, and he must have been in the garage. This morning, when Mr. Hopkins and I started back to Lakeside, a front wheel came off—some one had taken the nut off the axle. Perhaps I can't prove it, but I *know* it was young Jacobs."

"That is to say, his mother," corrected the doctor. "The boy hasn't sense enough to think that up for himself. We-ell, there must be something pretty important out there at Lakeside, if they'll try murder to keep people away."

His thick fingers plowed through the two tufts of hair, leaving them more wildly erect than ever. His twinkling eyes shifted from Ward to the constable and back again.

"There seems to be a very definite relation between Carson's shooting and the old Caldwell place," said he, "with Sloam Jacobs as the connecting link. No doubt it has occurred to both of you that Carson may really be Geoffrey Caldwell?"

Both nodded. "Carson came from California, his wife says," Ward pointed out.

"And Caldwell went to California," finished the doctor. "And nobody's heard of him since. Well, I can't help you much there. I did see Geoffrey Caldwell at his trial, but never close to. He was clean-shaved in those days. I remember that he had queer light eyes. Of course, fourteen years would make a good many changes. It might be—I think it *must* be. Who else would have been so shocked at sight of that old car? If he is Caldwell I don't wonder that that voice under his window scared him into delirium. Those were the last words his sister ever spoke, you know. I remember her well; a wonderfully handsome woman; only a girl then. I'll never forget how she watched her brother out of those big black eyes, there in the courtroom. She had beautiful eyes—rather like Alice Macy's eyes."

Ward started. "She says her father was always uneasy when she looked at him," he recalled. "He told her he didn't like black eyes."

"And when he was coming out of the anæsthetic," supplied Doctor Otis, "he looked at her and said, 'Grace, you've done for me,' or some such thing."

"But if he's Caldwell, wouldn't he have known his sister's maid?" objected Ward.

The doctor shook his head. "I think not. She was a healthy, fine-looking woman in those days; it was before she married Jacobs. He knew her as Jed Martin's wife. And the Caldwells always called her Sal-o-me; the natives say Saloam. Billy was just a baby; his name's really Martin, you know; people have gotten into the habit of calling him by his stepfather's name. And now the woman has an advanced case of arthritis deformans—and that has changed her more than the most elaborate disguise could."

Ward agreed silently. He could not picture the crippled, distorted, grimacing old witch as young, upstanding, fine looking. No, her own mother could not have recognized her now.

The doctor returned to the main subject. "We can set all that aside for the present," said he. "Granting that Carson is really Jeff Caldwell; that he changed his name, married and brought his wife and stepdaughter back to his old home, the question remains: Who drove up in the old Caldwell car and shot him?

"It must have been somebody who knew the old story. Who else would have thought of the old car? It was a queer, conspicuous means to take; it must have been done with a purpose. Let us suppose that Carson is Caldwell, and that Salome Jacobs knows it. She's vindictive enough; but certainly *she*

couldn't have driven that auto. Anyway, she sat on her stoop at the time—and Billy was with her, wasn't he? Well, let's go a step further. Assume that Caldwell was really guilty of the murder of his brother and mother. Who else could have known his secret? No one except his sister, Grace; and she has a complete motor aphasia—can't say a word—and has been locked up in a sanitarium in Buffalo for fourteen years."

Ward looked at Hopkins; Hopkins looked solemnly back. "You tell him," he whispered.

The doctor glared at them impartially. "What's all this whispering?" he demanded. "More secret stuff, hey?"

Ward turned upon him. "No," said he in a hushed voice. "But Grace Caldwell is *dead!* Drowned."

The doctor's breath came out in an audible grunt, as though a heavy fist had driven into his midriff. For the moment he was silent; Ward read in the little blinking eyes a hint of his own superstitious dread. Then he rallied.

"Yah!" he shouted, glaring at them defiantly. "Yah! And of course you two idiots were finally converted to spiritualism as soon as you heard that. Dead woman comes back from watery grave to haunt her murderer, hey? Make a great headline for the Sunday magazine section of the *Daily Scream,* wouldn't it, now? With half-tone illustrations of Ed Hopkins, the village sleuth, all smeared up and looking like a melancholy scarecrow. Yah! How'd it happen, hey?"

Silently the constable handed him the telegram; he read it, scowling.

"The eleventh," he repeated. "Just before the gh—before that old car first appeared!" Then he checked himself, his broad face flooded with crimson; the little eyes blinked furiously. "Well, what *of* it?" he demanded violently. "Grace Caldwell ain't the only black-eyed woman ever was in Chautauqua County. It must've been somebody else, that's all. And we've got to find out who.

"Anyhow," he went on more mildly, "we've made a start. If Carson is really Jeff Caldwell it explains Salome Jacobs' interest in him; it explains why he was so frightened by that old boat, and why he went into a delirium when Billy yelled 'Jeff, don't!' under his window last night. And that's something."

Hopkins sighed; he was gazing mournfully at the bare wall. "Yeah," he groaned, "we've made a start. We've made consid'able many starts; too many, 'pears to me. Kinda 'minds me of Alviny Ruggles an' the white sweater she was makin' last year.

"They was a perfessor out here then, f'om some college er another, said she made him think of some woman out here to Utica—no, Ithaca, it was. Somebody'd written a book about her, he says. Well, this here Mrs. Molasses—fust name was Penny-lopy, I 'member—seems her husband was a travelin' man. Some sort of a dago he was, I guess. Well, while he was gone his wife was weavin' him a fancy nightshirt on her hand loom—must of been a long time ago. An' seems ever' night she useta ravel out all she'd done the day before. I fergit why she done it."

He paused, while Ward and the doctor exchanged amused glances at this new version of the tale of Penelope and the much-traveling Ulysses; then resumed his narrative, a melancholy twinkle in his faded eyes.

"Well, that was the way with Alviny an' her gray sweater. Start right off brisk, she would, an' knit a few inches, terr'ble fast. An' then she'd get into a awful snarl in a minnit er so, an' rip!—out comes the needles, an' she'd ravel the whole business. Alviny,

she knit all summer on that there black sweater, an' 'tain't done yet. Huh? What color'd I say the sweater was? Oh, 'twas white—when Alviny started onto it." He subsided into contemplative silence, his long face solemnly surprised at the others' laughter.

Then Ward returned to the subject. "Well," said he, "the only thing to do is to drive out to Lakeside and see what we can find. The key to the whole thing must be out there somewhere, or Mrs. Jacobs wouldn't be so afraid to have us out there."

But the others disagreed. "It'll take all day to patch up that car of yours," objected Hopkins.

Said Doctor Otis:

"Don't be in a hurry, young man. Suppose we try to find out first what we're to look for. Alice Macy was out there; and she saw something. I move we talk to her first. Even if that old car has been driven, it proves nothing more than we already suspect. No; we'll go see Alice and make her talk."

"She won't say a word," declared Ward hopelessly. "I've tried it."

"Yah!" snapped the doctor. "Think you're irresistible, don't you, young man? Well, maybe an old country doctor can worm something out of her even after a beautiful young soldier has failed. You wait and see." He rose determinedly.

Hopkins also heaved himself up. "Guess I'll be goin' on," he drawled. "I gotta little bus'ness to 'tend to, with Bill Jacobs. I calc'late t' make S'loam's boy sorry he ever mixed inta *my* affairs!"

He departed, and Ward and the doctor started back toward the Carson house.

To the half dozen who waited in the outer office Doctor Otis vouchsafed only a negligent: "Called out on an emergency case. Back after while," and lurched out on swaying bandy legs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL.

ALICE MACY sat alone on the wide porch, somber eyes brooding upon the still surface of the lake, unsuspicious of the forces being marshaled against her secrets. Ward felt a twinge of remorse at their intent; almost he resolved to leave the girl what peace she might have found, instead of disturbing her further. He plucked at his companion's sleeve.

"Let's give it up," he whispered. "I know she won't tell us anything. What's the use of making her feel badly for nothing?"

The doctor gave him a cynical glance. "Yah! Rot! Chivalric slush, hey? Get out then," he finished unkindly; "I'll talk to her myself. I was case-hardened to that sentimental slop before you were born, my son." And he lurched up the steps.

Perforce Ward followed. He did not intend to leave Alice Macy to the tender mercies of this cynic.

The girl looked at them absently, then started. "Why, Arthur!" she cried. "Back so soon? Where's the car?"

"Why—why, I had a little accident," replied the boy; he had almost forgotten it in the strain of this impending inquisition. "I'll have it fixed up, of course."

The girl rose, her face ivory-white. "Oh, Arthur!" She sobbed. "You, too? What was it? Did it happen out at Lakeside Park? But I know it did! It must have. Oh, *why* did you go there, when I begged and begged you not to?"

"I wasn't at Lakeside," answered the boy. "But I was on my way out there," he added honestly. "A front wheel came off."

Alice gasped. "Oh! You might have been killed. Tell me all about it —quick!"

But Doctor Otis intervened, pinning her with a keen, probing eye which quite disregarded both her beauty and her evident distress.

"That wasn't the first accident," said he. "Did this young fool tell you that? I rode past here yesterday in an ambulance with another young man who got smashed up on the hill here. He's dead now; and the boy that was with him is dying." His voice rose with brutal emphasis. "Did Ward tell you that those two saved his life, that they were killed by broken glass which was spread in the road for him?"

The girl's eyes closed; her lashes lay startlingly black against the pallor of her cheeks. She swayed like a broken lily, clutching blindly at a pillar. "No," she whispered. "No!"

"Yes," declared Otis relentlessly. His manner announced that he was not to be cajoled by a pretty face or diverted from his purpose by any display of feminine weakness. In that moment Ward almost hated him. "And what's more," he went on, "it was no accident this morning. Some one deliberately loosened that front wheel, meaning to ditch the car and kill your young man!"

Alice dropped limply into her chair; she did not attempt to deny the implication. Her lips moved soundlessly; her eyes were closed. In a moment, however, she turned them upon Ward, and the boy gasped at the sweetness of the revelation which lay unashamed in their depths.

"Arthur!" she whispered. "You'll give it up now, won't you—dear—for my sake? *Don't* go out that way any more!"

But he could not give up now. "No," said he stubbornly. "I must go on. These people, whoever they are, might think I was afraid!" It is the deepest fear of hot, impetuous youth: that some one might believe him fearful.

"Oh," moaned the girl. "What shall I do?"

Doctor Otis snatched at the opening. "Do?" he said. "Have some sense; that's what you'd better do—open up! Let us go on in the dark, this way, and Salome Jacobs'll be getting some of us killed before we get through."

"I *knew* that old hag must have been in it, someway. She's a witch, I tell you!"

"Yah!" said the doctor impatiently; then controlled himself. "Witch or not, she and that brat of hers came near enough to killing Ward here—and it's your fault!"

"How?" demanded the girl, startled.

"Let him go on in the dark, didn't you? Let him start for Lakeside without even telling him what you saw there to frighten you half sick, didn't you?"

"Oh!" she moaned. "You're not fair to me."

"If the boy goes on and gets killed," pursued Doctor Otis inexorably, "it'll be all your fault!"

But at this the delicately chiseled lips set in a straight line. "Let him give it up, then, as I begged him to," said she stubbornly.

But Ward could be stubborn, too. "I'm going on!" he declared. The black eyes and the blue clashed for a long moment; at last the black ones fell, and a faint rose-petal flush crept into the girl's pale cheeks.

But she still protested weakly. "I'm afraid to tell," she murmured. "Every time any one has gone to Lakeside, something dreadful has happened. The place is cursed—haunted! First I went, and father was shot. Then Arthur went, and while he was gone father got so much worse—and then Arthur had these accidents. And I'm afraid even to talk about it now. But I will, if you make me, Arthur," she finished meekly.

Otis glared in dumb wrath. "'If *you* make me, Arthur!'" he grumbled under his breath. "Precious lot *he'd* have found out if I hadn't got after

the young one for him!" And then, aloud: "Well, talk it out, then; tell your sad tale and get it over with. And hurry up; I'm due in Buffalo to-night. I want to hear Munroe Clarke at the Clinical Club dinner."

But another thought was troubling Arthur. "Before you begin, Alice," said he gravely, "I ought to tell you that Ed Hopkins found your pistol in the car."

She gave him a puzzled look. "What of it?" she asked.

"Why," he stammered, "it's a thirty-two, like the one they used to shoot your father—and it had an empty cartridge in it!"

Despite her troubles, the girl gave a silvery little giggle. "I think it was just *mean* of him!" she protested. "Ed Hopkins did that himself! I gave him a lift a couple of weeks ago, and he shot at a woodchuck. I'd forgotten all about it."

Flushing, Ward recalled the constable's quizzical glance at the little pistol. Hopkins had given him an object lesson upon the foolishness of trying to conceal evidence, he reflected grimly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DRIVER OF THE GHOST CAR.

THE doctor looked impatiently at his watch. "Come on," he urged; "tell it. I'm in a hurry."

And so Alice began her tale.

"Well," said she, "you know how father scolded that day, because we were late for dinner, and how dreadfully he acted when I said we'd been out to Lakeside." She broke off, flushing crimson at the recollection of his anger. "Well, I was just terribly angry at him. I didn't want anything to eat; I just wanted to get away by myself and cool off. I sputtered at you, too; didn't I, Arthur?

"I took the car out and drove away, just as mad as I could be. It was wicked for him to scold me so—right before you, too. So I started off. I'd made up my mind I'd go straight out there and drive into the Lakeside Park road, just to spite him. And I did.

"Before I got there I felt a little better. I got thinking how sick he looked, and wondering if there mustn't be some reason for his forbidding me to go that way. He'd been so dreadfully earnest about it, you see; he said evil would surely come of it. And I nearly changed my mind; I was going to turn round and go back. But I thought how unjust he'd been, and finally I went on." She paused, sighing.

"Well," she went on, "I turned in between those stone pillars and drove up the old road. There were lots of trees; the branches hung down till I could scarcely drive the car under them. And then I came out, all of a sudden, into a big field. It looked awfully neglected and desolate, as though nobody'd been there for years and years. I drove along between two overgrown rows of hedge for a way, and then came to a stone wall with rusty old gates in it. Behind was this old house, all covered with vines. It was a creepy-looking place; I began to wish I'd never come. Then I saw a motor cycle lying on its side in the grass, and I thought there must be somebody alive round there, and so I went on. The old house seemed to be drawing me; I felt fascinated, like a bird must when a snake looks at it.

"At first the place looked as if it had just been left alone a few minutes ago. The windows were curtained, and there were chairs and magazines on the porch, and all; but even then I was sure nobody lived there. When I came closer I could see everything was mildewed and deserted. The vine had grown all over the veranda and across the windows and the door, sealing it better than any lock. I stood there, staring at

things and wondering, and something came over me. I don't know how to describe it, only that it was as if the empty house had a voice of its own and whispered to me.

"'Go away, girl,' it seemed to say. 'You are still alive; there's no place for you here. I am a house of death and dread and desolation. Go away before you disturb the uneasy spirits of my dead and they take revenge on you!"

Her eyes widened, as though gazing through a veil at strange, half-seen visions; her hushed voice, touched with fear, dropped to an alien timbre. It was as though she repeated words actually heard. The two listening looked at each other uneasily.

"Well," Alice went on in the half-apologetic tones of one repeating the remembered terrors of a dream, "then I heard a rustling in the grass behind the hedge. I looked 'round, but there was nobody there; I knew there wouldn't be. I knew, someway, there couldn't be any natural, living thing in that place. But I couldn't run away. I tried to, but my feet were like lead. I think I must have been hypnotized —bewitched. I couldn't help it; I just had to stay. My feet carried me 'round to the back, where somebody had left a washing half done. The tubs stood on the kitchen porch; I wondered if the washwoman was dead, too.

"Behind the house were big ruinous barns; swallows flew in and out through great gaps where the boards had fallen down. The nearest one leaned way over to one side; I wondered how it stood up at all. It looked as if I could have tipped it over just by a touch. And right under it, almost, was a little old building, like a carriage house or a garage. It had wide swinging doors, and they stood open."

"Open!" interrupted Ward excitedly. "You say they were *open?*"

She nodded wonderingly. "Wide open. And I walked up to them and looked in. It was dark in there. I looked and looked, and after a while I began to see things dimly, all dusty and cobwebbed. There was an old carriage on one side, and on the other"—her voice shook—"a forlorn-looking old motor car. It had a queer old square hood, and the radiator cap was as big as a saucer. The tires were all flat, and the top was torn and rotted away; a flap hung down over the wheel, almost touching it. It had tarnished brass rods, running up from the fenders—but you saw it, Arthur. It drove past here. It was the same one; I *know* it was!"

"Go on!" urged Doctor Otis impatiently. He sat far forward in his chair, hands upon his widely separated knees; his bright little eyes were intent upon her tale.

"It gave me the strangest feeling," resumed the girl. "Someway I knew that old car had a curse on it. It seemed to talk of wickedness, to carry with it the atmosphere of some terrible thing done long ago. I imagined that all that tragedy, whatever it was, had been locked up here with the old auto until it had soaked into every corner —until the very walls creaked with the weight of some terrible secret. I suppose you think me very foolish," she apologized, with a deprecating look at Arthur. Then she went on, in the measured periods of one who, moved beyond self-consciousness, strives to describe indescribable things.

"And here was the strangest thing of all. I crept up to the car so carefully, and put my hand on it. The dust came away in great, thick, cobwebby layers, all over my glove; but under it the varnish was bright and new. It must have stood in that barn for years and years, almost ever since it was bought. And it was a Winston, made in either 1905 or 1906. I know

—my own father had one just like it, when I was a little girl. And I looked into the tonneau, and in the high back of it were two little round holes, like bullet holes!

"That was too much for me. I didn't dare look down into the bottom of the car, for fear I'd see the moldering skeleton of a murdered man lying there. I turned 'round to run away—and then I screamed!

"A woman stood right behind me—the strangest-looking woman! She was very tall and thin, and her bony face was all eyes, so big and black and dreadful looking. She had on an old stained dress with those funny sleeves they used to wear about fifteen years ago, biggest at the wrists; 'bishop sleeves,' they called them, I remember. And she had black hair, cut short all over her head, with one great streak of snow-white in it—and there was a long, wicked-looking scar right from her eyebrows to the back of her head.

"Oh, such a terrible woman! I knew right away that she couldn't be anything *human*. She'd been dead for years and years, locked up in that awful place with all the other dead, forgotten things. She was a ghost! I just stared at her and made funny noises in my throat; I couldn't help it. I couldn't speak; I couldn't even whisper.

"And after a minute she spoke, looking at me out of those dreadful dead eyes. Her voice creaked and groaned, just like the pump of that rusty old windmill back on the hill, as if she hadn't tried to talk for centuries. And yet it sounded natural, coming from her. I felt—oh, I can't tell you how I felt! It was too ghastly.

"'Who are you, woman?' she asked me; and her eyes shone, there in the dark, like a cat's eyes. I tried twice to answer, my throat was so dry. But finally, 'Alice Carson,' I told her; 'no, I mean Macy.' I was so mixed up, I couldn't remember which it was.

"'*Carson!*' said she; and I thought she was going to strike me. 'Is your father the man who calls himself George Carson?'

"I just nodded my head; I couldn't say a word.

"'Ah-h-h!' she said, like that. 'Ah-h-h!' It was the most dreadful sound I ever heard. 'So you have come to spy? Not matter! Nothing matters now. For I am going to visit this man who calls himself George Carson—to visit him, and bring him a message from the dead!'

"Well, I knew she must be dead, but it made it worse, someway, to hear her say so.

"'W-who are you?' I asked her; and her eyes just got bigger and bigger, and blacker and blacker. She seemed to grow taller.

"I am a ghost," she whispered, in the awful, grating voice. 'I am a ghost, from his dead past—long dead, yet unburied! I go to bring the curse home to him.'

"I guess I must have fainted then. When I came to myself I was all alone in that dark place. The strange woman was gone, and the old motor car was gone, too. The doors were shut, and I ran to them and beat on them, and screamed and screamed. But they were locked; I couldn't get out. I thought I'd go crazy! I must have stayed in there for two hours—all alone. The wind came up and howled and whistled and chuckled under the eaves like the voices of the dead, calling—calling. It blew in through the cracks and moved the dust-cloth that was over the carriage, like shrouded arms waving at me. And there were tiny whisperings and scurryings in the walls. Mice, perhaps; but they frightened me. And then it began to thunder, and the sky got dark. There wasn't any more light through the dirty window; it was just

black in there. And all the little sounds and flutterings—oh! I thought I'd surely die, there in the dark, locked in and forgotten. And there I'd lie, with all those other dead things, and nobody'd ever know what had become of me. I wondered if you'd hunt for me, Arthur, boy—and maybe come to that horrible old place years from now, when you are an old, old man, and find nothing but my bones there on the floor." She stopped, shuddering, and hid her face.

"Well," she went on at last, "it stayed dark an awful while, and then began to get lighter. I thought I must have been there all night and that the morning was coming on. Finally I heard the most dreadful clanking and banging outside, and I knew it was the ghost car coming back after me. I screamed again, I think, and ran around like mad, looking for a place to hide. And then somebody unlocked the doors, and they swung back and the blessed, blessed daylight came in. I was *so* glad, for a minute.

"But that same dreadful woman stood in the doorway, and I didn't dare run past her. She peered into the dark with her great ghost's eyes, and 'Who's there?' she said, as if she'd forgotten all about me. Perhaps she had; her voice sounded as if she'd forgotten how to talk, even.

"Then, 'Oh, it's you!' she said. 'Well, I have seen the man who calls himself Carson—and the curse has come upon him! Go now, child.' It sounded as if she was trying to be kind to me, and had forgotten how, as she had forgotten everything else. 'Go, child. Go back to him, and be happy, if you can, near his black soul. Be happy, as I was once—when I was young and strong and alive, as you are!' And then she laughed; such a terrible, hopeless, despairing laugh. It rings in my ears still.

"I started to creep out past her, but she put out her hand. She didn't touch me; she never touched me at all. I don't believe she could. I think my hand would have gone right through her, like mist.

"'Stop!' she said. 'Remember, child, if you breathe one word of this, if you tell one human soul how you came here and disturbed the rest of us poor dead' —I suppose I must have looked startled, seeing her all alone there, for she laughed again. 'Oh,' said she, 'my mother and Ed are here, too. Don't you see them out in my automobile? They've been for a ride with me—a little family party, to call on my brother Jeff!' And she pointed out at the old car.

"It had been empty a minute before, I knew; but now I didn't dare to look at it. I might have seen more ghosts sitting there! But she was talking again, and shaking her bony finger at me.

"'Dare to speak of this," she threatened, 'come here again, and the black curse that is on him shall spread and cover you—yes, and all you love!'

"And with that I cried out something and just ran past her and back to my own car. I climbed in and started it—I thought the motor would *never* catch —and raced away as fast as I could. When I came to the gates the motor cycle was gone. I didn't dare look 'round until I was safe on the State road; then I slowed up and looked at the auto clock. I'd only been in there two hours; I thought surely it had been days and days! I looked to see if my hair had turned white," she finished simply. "And that's all.

"Then I began to think, and wonder what dreadful things had happened to father and—and all of you. So I drove home as fast as I could; I didn't even know it had been raining until I took off my wet things. And I found father had been shot!"

CHAPTER XXV.

INCREDULITY.

THE two men still leaned forward, eyes intent upon the picture she had drawn. She glanced from one to the other appealingly.

"Now do you wonder," she asked in a pathetic voice, "that I was afraid to talk? Do you blame me for thinking there was a curse on our family? There *is!* If I'd never disturbed the shadows of that haunted place it wouldn't have come. Do you blame me?" she repeated.

"No," declared Arthur sincerely. And "No," echoed Doctor Otis, albeit with visible reluctance.

He gazed intently at Alice. "And so you believe," he inquired, "that you stirred up a nest of spirits—that you really saw ghosts?"

She nodded, unspeaking.

"And you," turning to Ward, "believe, of course, that she saw the ghost of Grace Caldwell, dead and drowned in the Niagara River two weeks ago, come back to shoot Carson or Caldwell or whoever he is?"

The doctor restrained himself with evident difficulty, awaiting Ward's reply. His color deepened slowly; the two crests of rusty hair erected themselves, as does the ruff of an angry collie; his clenched hands crept up and out.

"Yes," said the boy simply. "Who else?"

"Yah!"

Then the wide lips compressed themselves upon the imminent outburst. The freckled face crimsoned in suppressed anger; the doctor's little blinking eyes turned an infuriated glare upon the luckless youth before him.

"Yah!" he repeated, and stopped in a disgust too deep to be relieved by one of his familiar explosions of speech. "Well, I don't," he went on, his voice low but emphatic. "I don't! You hear? I—don't—believe—any—such —*rot!* I'll believe in ghosts when I see one, and not until!

"It was Grace Caldwell, all right," he said, still in that restrained, careful manner. "Looked just as I remember her at the trial, only for the white hair; head all shaved, and a great gash clean across it. But *if* it was Grace Caldwell, she's not dead; that's all! They didn't find her body, anyhow. Of course she was mute—aphasic. But aphasias do recover, sometimes—and Alice described her as talking as if she'd forgotten how. No, she didn't drown at all; she must have escaped, and come out to the old place. Insane people have queer fancies; and it's quite evident that she's still crazy."

He stopped to look at his watch. "Almost two! Got to hustle. I'll take a look at Carson, now I'm here, run home and see those patients, get a bite to eat and hurry into Jamestown for my train. I told you I was going in to Buffalo to-night to a dinner? Well, I'll just stay over, and in the morning I'll go out to this Rest-Haven place and see Doctor Lawlor and find out exactly what *did* happen there. Ghosts, hey? Rot!" And he stalked into the house.

There he remained for half an hour or more, and at last emerged, shaking his head as though puzzled.

"Can't understand the fellow," he grumbled. "No fever; no distension. Seems to be doing well enough—but I bet he's going to die on me, spite of everything. Just out of obstinacy, too. Hey? Still delirious? No, he's clear enough. But he still insists there's a ghost after him. Calling him, he says —and he's got to go. Presume he will, too."

He lumbered down the steps and waddled off toward his own house. "You wait till I get back from Buffalo," he called over his shoulder. "Then we'll see about these idiotic phantoms!"

Left together, the two young people gazed at each other with the shy gaze of love as yet unconfessed. Then Arthur's hand stole out to cover the girl's slim fingers.

"Poor child," he whispered; "poor little girl!" though she was almost as tall as himself, he used the lover's diminutive. "It must have been dreadful. How I wish——"

He fell silent, longing for the right to carry her far away from all this sordid atmosphere of crime and suffering, to some fortunate isle of love and happiness.

Her fingers settled more comfortably in his; she sighed, gazing at him with tender, brooding eyes. The words of avowal trembled on his lips, but he held them back. He could not take advantage of her troubles. He must wait—wait until this thing should be settled, until the clouds rolled back, leaving her life in sunlight once more. Then he could speak freely.

With a little frown for the delay he rose.

"Whatever the doctor finds out in Buffalo," said he, "we'll have to go back to Lakeside Park, sooner or later. The answer to all our questions is out there, somewhere, I'm sure."

Alice sighed once more, fearfully. "I'm afraid the answer will be death," she murmured. "But you're right; we must go there once more."

He looked at her for a moment.

"Yes, we!" she repeated. "You don't think I'm going to let you go alone do you—after all this danger? No, I'm going, too. I don't feel quite so scared when you're along," she confessed with sweet naïvete. Then her face clouded once more. "But I *am* scared," she declared. "The way Doctor Otis talked, it all seemed so foolish and I was ready to believe I'd imagined a whole lot. But now he's gone it all comes over me again. Oh, Arthur, you never saw anybody like that dreadful woman! She was a ghost; I know she was!"

Ward sighed perplexedly. "I don't know," he confessed. "A lot of strange things have happened. I'm going down to see if your car is fixed yet. Want to come along?"

Alice nodded. "I'm not going to be left alone any more," she declared. "Was it badly smashed?"

"Why, not very, I hope. Enough so I shall hate to pay for it, probably."

"Of course you shan't pay for it," declared the girl warmly. "The idea! You were using it on our business. Father will pay for it, of course!"

But when they reached the garage it seemed that there need be no argument about the cost. The yellow car stood out in front, and Billy Jacobs was giving a last, unnecessary polish to its shining sides; an extraordinary humble and affable Billy Jacobs, who even doffed his greasy cap in greeting.

"Yessum, Miss Alice—yessir, Mr. Ward," said he confusedly. "Jus' polishin' 'er up a bit for you. All fixed up good, she is; tuned 'er, an' ever'thing. You c'n get right in."

"What's the damage, son?" inquired Ward.

Billy kicked at one tire, flushing uneasily under his coat of grease. "Why, 'tain't nothin', mister," he mumbled. "Didn't take me hardly no time at all; jus' fixed that wheel on an' brought 'er down here. 'Sall right, mister," He paused, swallowing hard. "I—I was glad to fix it fer ye," he finished desperately.

Ward eyed him a moment, saying nothing. Ed Hopkins must have used some very cogent arguments upon this young man, he thought. A jewel, that man Hopkins! He was glad he had left things to the constable; there was something rather pathetic in the disquiet of this half-grown youth.

"Good boy, Billy," said he kindly; and helped Alice into the car.

They drove about for a time, the motor running wonderfully after young Jacobs' expert ministrations, then turned homeward.

"I feel as though I ought to be there," Alice explained. "Of course, there's nothing I can do—father doesn't even want me in the room—but I'd rather be close by."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DOCTOR'S RETURN.

SO the afternoon passed, and the night. Next morning the sick man seemed a little better; after a good sleep things looked brighter to both the young people. They even essayed a few mild jests at the breakfast table.

Both felt that the mystery was now in process of solution. Despite his eccentricities Doctor Otis was a man to inspire confidence; they leaned upon the memory of his sturdy skepticism and were comforted thereby.

After breakfast they went out to the porch and sat in the morning sun to await his return. Here Mrs. Carson joined them, and the three talked desultorily for a time.

Opposite, old Mrs. Jacobs brooded on her stoop, staring at them with even more than her usual malignant interest. Her manner betrayed a certain agitation; she grimaced continually and tapped the floor with her thick cane.

"What's she look at us so for?" asked Mrs. Carson finally. "She makes me nervous. I believe I'll go in."

As she rose, the old woman opposite half raised herself in her chair, extending one thin crooked arm as though about to speak, then subsided once more, as her son rattled up on his motor cycle with a side car attached.

He was about to drive by, when she screamed after him: "Where ye goin', Billy?"

Stopping the motor, the boy called over his shoulder, "Gotta go into Jamestown fer parts fer that Gulick o' Tanner's. Back by sundown!" And he drove on.

A few minutes later the familiar sounds of Doctor Otis' battered car came to their ears. He swung 'round the corner, coming from Jamestown, and pulled up in front of the Carson house. Leaving the little car in the road, he panted up the steps, every gesture speaking important news.

"I got it!" he declared triumphantly. "Phew!" He pulled off his plaid cap and mopped a heated brow, leaving his hair more grotesquely disordered than before. "Ward, you go get Hopkins—right away! Take my car."

His tone was imperative, foretelling important disclosures. Ward hurried down the steps and drove off in the clanking automobile, which hopped over the smooth road with a jerky motion strikingly unlike the smooth speed of the big roadster.

But it moved; within five minutes he had reached the litle house boat.

At his hail Hopkins poked out his head. "'Smatter?" he inquired. "Jus' cookin' me a bite." Indeed, it was almost noon.

"Doctor Otis wants you," called the boy, above the rattle of the noisy motor; "up at our place. Come along!"

With leisurely speed the constable emerged from his cabin and clambered into the little car. "Giddap, son," he drawled. "So Doc's got a hen on, some 'ers? I s'spicioned mebbe he might, onct he got goin'. What'd he get outa Miss Alice yestiddy?"

"She went out to Lakeside," answered Ward briefly. "Saw some woman out there; Grace Caldwell—or her ghost. Here we are."

They climbed out and mounted the wide steps under the intense, blinking gaze of Mrs. Jacobs.

Alice and Doctor Otis sat side by side on the porch. Scarcely waiting for them to arrive, the latter began.

"All rot," he jeered, "this ghost stuff —rot I told you! Didn't even have to go to Rest-Haven—saw Lawlor at that dinner. Told me all about it. Decent chap, Lawlor.

"Well, he's had Grace Caldwell out there ever since the murders. Told me all about her; complete traumatic motor aphasia—interesting case. But you wouldn't understand it. Anyhow, she's been there, right along. Expenses all paid through some lawyer—California first; last few years, St. Paul. Instructions: give her every care, but avoid all notoriety. Never any visitors but one; old woman, last month, all crippled up with arthritis deformans—evidently Salome Jacobs.

"Seemed brighter lately; tried to talk at times. Then, the eleventh, escaped; stole nurse's keys. Reported to the police without giving name, because of orders about notoriety; that's why nobody out here knew about it.

"Well, they hunted all over; finally found somebody'd seen her—scar on head and all, walking down to the river near Fort Porter. About dusk, it was. And they found the coat she'd worn, down in the water, pockets full of stones. No more trace of her: decided she must have killed herself. Too crazy to be about long without attracting attention, you see. Reported to firm of lawyers in Minnesota that she was dead, and notified State Hospital Commission, and gave it up. Funny thing, too; Lawlor said two days after she'd gone somebody called up on long distance—from Amidon Point, it was. A man's voice. Asked for Grace Caldwell, and when Lawlor said she was dead he yelled something or another. And then the connection broke. *That* must have been Carson, the night you came.

"So that's all they had; just probability. Body not found or anything." He inflated his chest with obvious pride. "And right there's where Old Doctor Otis, 'the Chautauqua County sleuth,' hopped onto the trail. I figured if it was Grace Caldwell Alice here saw out at Lakeside she must have come by train; too far for motoring to be likely. So I started where they'd left off; went straight to Exchange Street. Found the gateman on duty evening of the eleventh; talked to him. Had he seen a tall, skinny, black-eyed woman, scar all across her head?

"Yah! Too much afraid of 'notoriety,' that man Lawlor. Sure, he'd seen her; queerest bunch, said he, that'd come through that gate in years. There was three of 'em—black, sulky-looking boy; little, bent, crippled-up woman that kept making faces at him; and this other one. Noticed 'em particularly because she kept talking in a funny, croaking kind of voice.

" 'You don't need three tickets,' she kept saying. 'You hadn't ought to've bought three tickets; two's enough. There's only you and the boy, Sal-o-me. Why did you get a ticket for me? Ghosts don't need railroad tickets!'

"Naturally enough that fixed 'em in his mind. Sure, he remembered 'em —who wouldn't? Even remembered where they were going; three tickets to Westfield, New York—one way."

He glared at them all impartially. "So there you are, with your fool talk about 'ghosts,' " he finished. "You saw somebody all right, Alice, and it was Grace Caldwell, too—in the flesh, and no spirit."

"But I don't understand," protested the girl. "Who is this Grace Caldwell, and why should she want to curse father?" For Ward had not had the heart to tell her his suspicions of Carson's identity; nor did she know the story of the Caldwell murders.

The doctor's eyes softened as he stared at her. "Never you mind about that, young woman," said he gruffly. Evidently even this man's truculence had limits. "You've had troubles

enough. Well, Ed, now you know what I want of you. Grace Caldwell's out there at Lakeside. The Jacobs woman brought her, and left her there alone —a helpless lunatic. Dangerous, too —look what she's done already! We can't leave her there. Got to go get her; take her into the State Hospital this time. Be safe there. Start right away. You come along; make it legal. I'm health officer, you know."

"I ain't had no dinner," objected Hopkins plaintively. "An' how c'n I make it legal, huh? You got the authority, bein' health officer."

Doctor Otis glared at him. "Authority for breaking and entering?" he inquired acidly. "That's a locked house —has been for fourteen years. Think Carson-Caldwell here's going to offer us his keys—even if he's got any? I don't intend to have Hi Dudley howling next time the board of supervisors meets, about how the health officer's exceeded his authority, and let the town in for a damage suit. You start right out, Ed Hopkins; go get me a search warrant. Hurry now!"

The constable rose obediently, but his lean face was mournful. "Awright, doc," he moaned. "But ain't I goin' t' git no dinner?"

"Oh, *dinner!*" roared Otis. "Yah!" Then he smiled unwillingly. "Takes a lot to get you warmed up, dont it, Ed? Go on and *get* your darned old dinner, and hurry up about it!"

The girl intervened, eyes wide with excitement. There was a touch of color in her cheek. "Where must you go for a search warrant, Mr. Hopkins?" she asked.

"Over to the county court, there to Mayville. Twelve miles," murmured the constable.

"Well," cried Alice, "we'll take you —Arthur and I, in my car. And we can get that dinner for you there, too. I'll stand treat. How's that, doctor?"

"All right," was that gentleman's impatient response. "Settle it among yourselves—*I* don't care. Only get going, for Pete's sake! Want to get out there before dark, remember. So hurry. And while you're gone, I'll be gitting my own dinner."

With a wide grin at the constable he lurched down the steps to his car and drove it into his own yard.

Ward backed the yellow roadster out and brought it 'round to the front of the house, while Alice and the constable descended the steps to him, followed by the watchful eyes of old Mrs. Jacobs.

This lady evidently realized that something important was about to happen. Her jerking features expressed deep anxiety. She half rose, and dropped back again, fiddling with her thick cane. At last, as Hopkins started to clamber into the back seat of the roadster, she could bear it no longer.

"Hey, Ed!" she called shrilly. "You, Ed Hopkins! C'me 'ere."

The constable looked at her, reflectively. "What ye want?" he inquired. "I'm in a hurry, S'loam."

"In a hurry, be ye?" Her voice rose to a scream. "So be I! You set right there, Ed Hopkins. I'm comin' out."

With a painful effort she heaved herself out of the old armchair. Leaning heavily on the crutch-handled stick she hobbled down the steps and toward them, one crippled hand pressed to the small of her bent back. When she reached the side of the car she peered up at them, her twitching face anxious, and demanded:

"Where ye goin'?"

The constable deliberated for a moment. "Ain't you mixed up in this business just a mite too much already, S'loam?" he asked mildly. "But we might's well tell ye; don't know's it makes much diff'rence now. Goin' out to Lakeside Park, S'loam. Uh-huh! Out to the old Caldwell place, to look 'round a mite." He spat into the ditch.

But his words had infuriated the old

lady. "No, you ain't, neither!" she asserted defiantly. "You ain't *neither!* Not one step." She shook her heavy stick at them menacingly.

Hopkins looked down at her with a sort of pity in his faded eyes. "Ain't no use takin' on like that, S'loam," he soothed her. "'Sgot to be done. Goin' aft' a search warrant right now."

"I'll stop ye!" shrieked the old woman as Ward, anxious to end this unpleasant scene, started the car. She stood in the road, gazing after them; glancing back, Ward saw her shake the crutch-handled stick.

"Search warrant er no search warrant, I'll stop ye!" she promised.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED PROTEST.

THEIR business at the court done, and the constable's dinner duly served him, the oddly assorted trio drove swiftly back toward Amidon Point. The whole expedition had taken little more than an hour.

Old Mrs. Jacobs was in her wonted seat upon the narrow stoop, no longer agitated. She glared boldly at them; her twitching face expressed vindictive triumph. She did not speak.

Leaving the car at the side of the road the three started toward the big house. The porch was deserted, but from within came a tearful voice. Alice stopped, grasping Ward's wrist.

"Something has happened," she cried. "Something has gone wrong again. Oh, dear, I knew we ought not to have done this."

"C'me on," urged Hopkins, waving the search warrant. "Got t' finish it up, now."

The three hurried up the steps and into the living room. Here stood Doctor Otis, scowling angrily, while a flushed, tearful nurse made agitated apology.

"I know I oughtn't to have done it, doctor—but I was so dreadfully tired, being up two nights with him, and everything. And he was perfectly comfortable, sleeping like a baby, and I just dropped off in my chair—there wasn't anything to do for him until three, anyway. And how was I to know she'd sneak in that way? I supposed of course Mrs. Carson or somebody would be about."

"Yah!" snorted the doctor. "Cut the alibis—get to it! What happened?"

Thus admonished, the frightened girl sniffed and resumed her hesitating story.

"Well, the first I knew was hearing Mr. Carson say 'Salome!' in a perfectly dreadful voice. I opened my eyes and looked around, and there was a little, humped-over woman there by the bed—that awful old woman from across the street. She was all dressed in black, and leaning on a big stick, making the most terrible faces. She looked just like a witch; it gave me such a start.

"'Yes, it's Sal-o-me,' she said, just glaring at the poor man. 'And you know what they was going to do, now—and I look for you to stop it, Jeff Caldwell,' she said. 'Keep those folks away from Lakeside—you her? They's somebody out there you wouldn't want 'em to meet. Know who it is, Jeff Caldwell?' And she leaned 'way over and put her face right down to his. 'It's a ghost!' she whispered. And then she turned around and hobbled out, before I could move to stop her. That was just a minute ago—and I called you right away, doctor," she finished defensively.

"Yah!" cried Doctor Otis. "The nerve of that old hag! Mrs. Carson was upstairs, lying down; and she knew you two'd gone away. I suppose you told her what for, too—didn't you?"

The constable hung his head. "Didn't think it was any harm," he muttered. "She couldn't do nothing about it."

"Well, she did, just the same. And now I suppose we're in for a time with Carson. A fine mess you've made, between your loose mouth and this dummy's sleepy head. Yah!"

"He wants to see you, doctor," said the nurse timidly. "He says he's got to see you right away—and Mr. Ward and Mr. Hopkins, too—all three of you. He's sitting up in bed, waiting for you, and he looks just terrible!"

Doctor Otis sighed. "We're in for it now," he declared. "Let's get it over with. Come along, you two!"

So the three men entered the sick room.

As the nurse had said, Carson was sitting up in his bed, gazing impatiently at the door from haunted eyes. His face was dead white, with a curious, puttylike undercolor; it was scarcely distinguishable from his white beard. Tiny droplets of sweat stood out on his forehead; about his nostrils was that sharp, pinched look, and over his whole face that strange, gray shadow which old women call the "Finger of Death." Looking at him, Ward knew that his life was flaring up in one last effort, like the flame of a dying candle.

The white lips opened and he spoke steadily enough, but in a hoarse, unnatural tone, as of one already dead.

"You are going to Lakeside Park," said he. "No, don't interrupt," as the doctor stepped forward with open mouth; "my time is short." He paused, gasping, then went on with renewed strength. "I forbid it. You cannot go." His pale gaze challenged them.

It was Hopkins who answered, his drawling voice commiseratingly lowered. "Sorry, Mr. Carson. 'Sgot t' be done."

"No," said the sick man flatly. "Doctor, go to the safe in my study. It's open. Bring me my dispatch box."

Otis vanished and presently returned, bearing a rusty old metal box, secured with two padlocks.

The sick man fumbled at his throat with feeble fingers. "My keys," he cried fearfully. "Where are my keys?"

The nurse, who had tiptoed in, unnoticed, snatched a little bag from the bedside stand. Two long ends of tape dangled from it. "Do you mean this, Mr. Carson?" she asked. "I took it off your neck before the operation."

He snatched at it greedily, and opened the tiny bag, drawing out two small, rusted keys. "Always on my neck," he muttered; "always." He unlocked the dispatch box and swung back its creaking lid. A mass of newspaper clippings lay exposed. Ward's eye caught an old headline: "Geoffrey Caldwell Arraigned To-day!"

Carson's trembling hands plowed through the litter, turning it out onto the bed. From the very bottom of the box he brought forth a long, legal-looking envelope.

"There," he whispered, thrusting it toward the doctor, who stood nearest. "All there. Read."

Opening the envelope, Otis unfolded a stiff yellowed document, sealed with red wax. "Why," he cried, "it's a deed! A deed to 'the Caldwell estate, known as Lakeside Park,'" he read slowly. "And made out to Geoffrey Caldwell!"

The haunted gray-green eyes met his unflinchingly, grave with the dignity of imminent death.

"I am Geoffrey Caldwell," answered the sick man clearly. "I own that property; and I forbid you to enter it!"

To be concluded in the next issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, out on Tuesday, December 9th. Do not forget that, as the magazine is published every week, you will not have long to wait for the final chapters of this interesting serial.

Benignant Vengeance

by Frederick Ames Coates

Author of "Too Much Alibi," etc.

AFTER a three-weeks' man hunt in the West, Burton Enderby, head of the Haldane Detective Agency, returned to his office with the entirely normal expectation of taking several days' rest before engaging himself again upon a case. His every efficient assistants were perfectly competent to relieve him of all work as long as he wished; and as a matter of fact he personally interested himself only in the most important or most baffling of the commissions that came into his office. It was partly with a view to avoiding unnecessary exertion on behalf of insistent clients, and partly from a natural desire to avoid the limelight, that his business, instead of bearing his own name, still operated under the designation which had been given to it by his predecessor, who several years before had retired and sold to Enderby a small and unimportant investigation bureau which, under the latter's management, had become one of the best and largest aggregations of private detective ability in the country.

Enderby frowned as the young lady who served as his secretary delivered the message.

"H'm! Ferdinand Mann-Marston—that fish-blooded, hyphenated millionaire! Must see me personally, must he? Wonder if somebody has been throwing a bomb-plot scare into him? You say he told you it's a personal and not a business matter?"

"Yes," replied the young lady gravely. "Of utmost moment. Those are his very words."

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed Enderby in disgust, thinking of his promised vacation. "Anything that touches him personally is of utmost moment—to him. Probably his butler has neglected to say 'sir' to him, so he suspects him of being an anarchist. When did he call up?"

"Yesterday, about noon, the first time," said the girl. "He called up again late in the afternoon, and twice more to-day. He did the phoning himself, too."

"Well, well, it must be important, then," said the detective, laughing. "I suppose I'll have to see him. He's the head of one of the oldest and wealthiest families, and his business connections are too important to run the risk of offending him. Tell him I'll see him at his house right after dinner to-night—half past seven, say."

Enderby spent the rest of the afternoon in looking over reports, getting in touch again with the loose ends of his ever-changing, always-fascinating business, and assigning work to his various operatives. He was not too busy, however, to retain a live curiosity concerning the matter that had upset his wealthy client to such a de-

gree; and he approached the interview that evening with a hope that it would put him in touch with a case of real interest.

He was ushered into Mr. Mann-Marston's study by a pompous, grave-faced servitor. He selected a chair beside the glowing open grate, and his glance took in the luxurious surroundings of the little den. He had time for no more than a single look, however, for his host, who had evidently been awaiting his arrival with great nervousness, hurried in.

He was a little, dapper man, with a light-colored mustache turned slightly upward at the ends. His clothing bore the unmistakable stamp of high-priced tailoring, and he wore, or rather he carried in his hand most of the time a pair of pince-nez glasses attached to a black ribbon.

"Mr. Enderby?" he inquired before the detective had a chance to rise and introduce himself. "I'm awfully glad you're here. I'm nearly frantic! And my poor wife is quite prostrated—she's canceled all her engagements."

"Well," said Enderby reassuringly, "let's have the whole story, and perhaps I can help you out."

"I pray that you can," said the other fervently. "It's about my boy."

"Your son?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Got into trouble, has he?" inquired the detective.

Mr. Mann-Marston, in the act of polishing his glasses, stopped in surprise.

"No—oh, no! Not exactly, that is. You see, he's not six months old yet."

"All right, you tell it," said Enderby. "My guessing doesn't seem to advance matters any. He's not been kidnaped?"

"Why—yes, in a way. But not exactly. You see he's here in the house now—up in his nursery."

"For Heaven's sake, man!" exclaimed the detective testily. "Out with it! Is this a joke? What's the trouble?"

Mann-Marston, who probably had never in his life been thus spoken to before, not even in his own childhood days, looked very startled. "A joke?" he repeated, stuttering. "No, no—far from it! It's the most important thing in the world for me. My boy—my only child—— You see, there are *two* babies up there. One of them is my son—son and heir; and I don't—I don't know which is which."

"Why don't you ask the nurse?" suggested Enderby.

"That's just the point," said the other eagerly. "The nurse left yesterday; she was discharged, in fact, and the new one of course is not able to help us out of the difficulty at all."

"Do I understand," asked Enderby, "that a strange baby has been brought into your house, and that nobody can tell them apart?"

"Exactly. You see, it's almost the same as having the child kidnaped, because while I know he's here, I can't point to him and say with certainty: 'This is my child.' Why, he might almost as well be out of my reach entirely. Don't you see? My son is—well, he's my son, and will, of course, be a very important personage, both financially and socially; while the other—the other is a nobody. It would be terrible—absolutely terrible—if I were to make a mistake, to bring up the wrong one as Ferdinand Mann-Marston Third."

"Oh, yes, of course—quite absolutely terrible," agreed Enderby rather cynically. "We must avoid that at all costs. Of course you yourself have seen your baby too little to identify him?"

"I always made it a point to see him, except when out of town, at least three times a week," said the little man with a touch of pride, "and so did his mother. But I tell you they're as alike as two peas in a pod. That is—of

course there must be a vast difference in their characters and abilities; but that won't show for a long time yet, and in the meantime—well, I don't want to let it come to that."

"Am I to assume that the discharged nurse is the one responsible for the mix-up?" asked the detective.

"Yes. That is, she must be. She's neither admitted it nor denied it. But no one else would have had the opportunity, except with her collusion."

"And so you want me to find her?"

"Not at all—oh, no!" exclaimed Mann-Marston. "The fact is she's coming here to see me to-night. At least she's agreed to come. I expect her any moment."

Enderby at this last bit of information was completely floored. "Hang it all, man," he exclaimed, "if there's no crime, no mystery, nothing to be found out except the identity of the two babies, why do you call on me? I'm no Solomon. A doctor might possibly be able to help you, or a nurse. Not I."

"But," faltered Mann-Marston, "I hoped that you might be able to tell me what to do."

"Do?" repeated Enderby. "Why, persuade the nurse to tell you which is your baby—if she can."

The other's face went white at the last words. "If she can?" he asked, gasping. "You don't mean—that she won't be able to—that she can't be sure, even if she wants to? And suppose she won't tell? And suppose she tells me the wrong baby is mine? I should have had her arrested as soon as we discovered the second baby."

"Arrested? For what?" asked Enderby pointedly. "She hasn't done anything criminal so far as I can see. However inconvenient it might be to you, leaving a strange baby in your house is nothing that the criminal law makes any mention of. But if she attempts to blackmail you, to extort money—that's a different thing. Has she done that?"

Mann-Marston shook his head. "No, not exactly. But I sent her five thousand dollars this morning."

"Five thousand dollars! Man, why did you do that? Did she demand it?"

"No. As soon as we found out about the babies of course I sent for her, to the address that she had given. She sent back word that she couldn't come because she had already made an engagement to go abroad with a family as a child's nurse, and would be too busy packing in order to start to-day. I then sent my secretary to prevail on her to cancel her engagement, offering her the sum mentioned to make it worth her while. To this proposition she agreed. I acted, I may say, with the knowledge and advice of my lawyer, though he seemed to be as much at a loss as I myself. Would that constitute blackmail?"

"No," answered Enderby. "By George, sir, that woman, if she is a crook, mind you, is one of the brainiest it has ever been my good fortune to run across. She practically—as you say—kidnaps your child, then she works it so that you yourself offer her what we may call ransom money, and all this without doing a thing for which she can be legally questioned. Of course a man in your position could easily use influence to have her arrested on suspicion, or on some trumped-up charge; but that would defeat its own end, because you've got to remain on the best possible terms with her, and not arouse her antagonism. If you did, you see, you'd have no assurance that she was telling the truth, even if she should consent to identify the kiddies."

The father shuddered involuntarily at the suggested possibility. "This is terrible," he said, moaning. "You must help me—you must find some way."

"Well," said Enderby soothingly, "we'll see what the lady has to say when she arrives to-night. Perhaps our hypothesis is all wrong. And while waiting let's have a look at the babies."

The nursery was dimly lighted, and the new nurse sat, half asleep, in a wicker chair near the two cribs. When Mr. Mann-Marston explained their errand the woman gently pulled down the covers to expose the two infants' faces. Placid in sleep they were, as if mocking the momentous question that agitated the father—unknown and uncared for by them—of one of them. The soft blankets barely moved with the light breathing; tiny hands were clenched in meaningless gesture. And between the two of them no distinguishing mark or feature was discernible. In addition to the general resemblance due to their age they were undoubtedly strikingly alike. The eyes were closed, but the nurse assured Enderby that they were of almost precisely the same shade. And she gave the further information that they differed in weight only by two ounces.

"I can tell them apart, though," she volunteered, "and I think any one who is very familiar with babies could, too—if only we knew which is which to start with."

Enderby turned quizzically to the frantic parent. "I think," he said, "that if I had a son and heir I would get well-enough acquainted with him to know him—even if I had to see him more than two or three times a week. But I hear a bell downstairs. It may be our woman. We don't want to keep her waiting."

The butler had shown her into the study recently vacated by the two men; and as they entered she rose to meet them. Viola Denton was a tall, graceful young woman of twenty-four or five, with a wealth of reddish golden hair and piercingly beautiful eyes of an indescribable, changeable shade. Her movements, her every word, and the modulated voice in which she spoke proclaimed her unmistakably as a person of refinement. Enderby revised his hypothesis that she was a clever crook: however guilty she might be in the present instance, and from whatever motives, she was evidently not of the criminal class. The detective took the burden of the conversation upon himself.

"Mr. Mann-Marston has been so upset by the events of yesterday, that he has asked me to help him out," he said. "So with your permission, Miss Denton, I'm going to ask you a few questions. You know, of course, that the new nurse, taking charge yesterday morning, found, after you left, two babies instead of one?"

"Yes," said the girl in a low voice.

"Did you bring the second baby?"

"I see it would be useless for me to deny it," said the girl, "and there is no reason why I should do so. Yes."

"But you can tell them apart?"

"Yes—now. Of course a baby changes a great deal in a comparatively short time."

"Then you'll go upstairs with us now, and tell Mr. Mann-Marston which is his child?" asked Enderby quickly.

The girl looked at him in momentary defiance. "No, I won't!"

"That is," went on Enderby, "you had a deliberate object in doing what you did; and until that object is fulfilled you're not going to help us—if ever?"

Viola Denton nodded.

"Of course, my dear young lady," said the detective, "that object can not be money—blackmail." The girl flushed. "And equally you can have no objection—quite the contrary, in fact—to telling Mr. Mann-Marston what it is that you want of him."

"Of course not," assented the girl. "Though I'm not at all sure that he can do what I ask."

"Just ask it, Miss Denton," cried the father, "ask anything, and I swear to you I'll——"

The girl ignored the interruption. "What is past can not be undone," she went on in a listless voice. "And for that Mr. Mann-Marston deserves to suffer—as I have suffered, as another, dear to me, has suffered. But for the future—he has influence, he has money and power; perhaps he can use them to get a pardon—a pardon for James Bradlaw."

"That thief!" exclaimed Mann-Marston, forgetting the rôle he was to have played in soothing Miss Denton's feelings. "He robbed me," he explained to Enderby; "he robbed me, or rather a corporation in which I am a director, of a very valuable document. I did all in my power to have him brought to justice, and now he's where he belongs, for a term of years." He stopped short at a significant look and gesture from the detective.

Miss Denton sat with eyes flashing scorn. "He began his sentence a month ago," she said. "And you know as well as I that he is no more guilty—morally—than—than those babies upstairs."

The father quailed. "I'll do anything!" he cried. "I'll use whatever influence I have with the governor, with the trial judge. I'll get Bradlaw out again if it can be done. But what—why should you ask just that?"

"Because," she said, "before you ruined him, drove him to disgrace and a prison, Jim Bradlaw and I had become engaged to be married!"

It was not until after Miss Denton had looked in upon the sleeping babies upstairs and had departed, leaving an address at which communications could reach her, that Enderby learned much about Bradlaw. Mann-Marston told him the outlines of the case; but not relying on his story alone the detective next day looked up the records of the trial, and made a few other investigations to be sure that he had the facts. And when he had them his respect for his millionaire client had suffered somewhat, while his admiration for the girl who had so successfully and ingeniously defied him, increased.

James Bradlaw was the chief owner of a small bicycle factory in an up-State town. His business, on the wave of returning popularity that the bicycle was enjoying, prospered moderately, and would have prospered still more if his chief interest had been in making money. Instead of that it was in making bicycles—in making them ever better and better. He was in his way a genius, and he had invented a number of improvements that made his machines the most perfect in the market, though not the best known.

No doubt most men would have considered him unbusinesslike in that he did not try to stifle competition. He was a firm believer in the principle of "live and let live;" and in pursuance of his theory he gave a license under one of his patents to another factory turning out a product similar to his own. The license was for a term of ten years, and was not on a royalty basis, but provided for the payment to him of a moderate sum annually during the life of the contract.

When the big moneyed interests had been attracted by the possibilities of the bicycle business their emissaries had approached Bradlaw with a proposition to sell his factory and patents to a large company then being formed. This he had not chosen to do. They went ahead and secured control of the company to which he had granted the license, and by legal legerdemain made it the nucleus of their new corporation, thus securing the right to use Bradlaw's patent without paying him anything more than the small sum stipulated in the original contract. With this as a weapon they used every

means known to big business to drive his little factory to the wall. They had the right to use his patent for ten years, though he entered a hopeless suit in the courts in an attempt to take the right away from them; at the end of that time, while his patent would not yet have expired, they hoped that he could be brought to terms, or forced, through bankruptcy, to sell the patent.

It was at a crisis in his affairs that James Bradlaw concluded that the only way out for him was to get possession of the patent license. He found out that Mr. Mann-Marston was one of the organizers of the new corporation, and that he had possession of the precious document. He found, too, that it was well guarded, and that it would be practically impossible for even an experienced professional burglar to gain possession of it.

Yet he succeeded in getting it—the manner being still unknown to the police. They suspected that it was an "inside job," that some trusted employee in the office of Mr. Mann-Marston had accomplished the actual theft. If so he had covered up his tracks well, for the crime had never been brought home to its author: indeed, there was nothing on which to base even a suspicion of any one of the numerous employees more than another.

But the long arm of Mann-Marston's influence had succeeded, by means none too legal, in finding the missing license in Bradlaw's possession before he had opportunity to destroy it; and his possession of the paper had been enough to make possible his conviction. He had gone through the trial and finally to prison steadfastly refusing to implicate his accomplice. And that was another fly in Mann-Marston's ointment of content: he felt certain that he harbored a traitor in his office, without having the slightest clew to his identity.

Burton Enderby was no sentimentalist; yet when he had the full particulars of the story in his mind he could not but wish that his task were one into which he could put more enthusiasm. His sympathies were entirely with the inventor, Bradlaw, and with the brave woman who was doing —and doing so well—her utmost to aid him, the man she loved. Yet his training had given him the true judicial attitude that it is better in the long run to maintain the integrity of the law than to permit it to be defeated in any instance, however extenuating the circumstances. His plain duty was to use all his powers to outwit the man and the woman for whose courage and ingenuity he had nothing but admiration.

Of course it could do no harm to have Bradlaw pardoned; that would, in fact, be the most satisfactory solution of the case. But the detective was by no means sanguine that it could be brought about. The case while in the criminal court had attracted too much publicity—publicity not at all favorable to Mann-Marston, it is true. Some of the papers had pictured him as the heartless grasping octopus, the unscrupulous financier who moved about crushing the life, the very soul of any who dared oppose his avarice. And if this same man were now to petition for a pardon so soon after Bradlaw's sentence had begun, there must immediately be cries of collusion, hints that Bradlaw was a henchman of the banker, a scapegoat who had gone to jail to cover up some transaction too shady to be brought into the lights of the courts, and whose patron was now carrying out a bargain by petitioning for his release.

No, there was little if any chance of a pardon. The governor was human, and a politician besides. He would not grant the desired release unless in response to a popular clamor; certainly not at the behest of one who

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But the long arm of Mann-Marston's influence had succeeded, by means none too legal, in finding the missing license in Bradlaw's possession before he had opportunity to destroy it; and his possession of the paper had been enough to make possible his conviction. He had gone through the trial and finally to prison steadfastly refusing to implicate his accomplice. And that was another fly in Mann-Marston's ointment of content: he felt certain that he harbored a traitor in his office, without having the slightest clew to his identity.

Burton Enderby was no sentimentalist; yet when he had the full particulars of the story in his mind he could not but wish that his task were one into which he could put more enthusiasm. His sympathies were entirely with the inventor, Bradlaw, and with the brave woman who was doing —and doing so well—her utmost to aid him, the man she loved. Yet his training had given him the true judicial attitude that it is better in the long run to maintain the integrity of the law than to permit it to be defeated in any instance, however extenuating the circumstances. His plain duty was to use all his powers to outwit the man and the woman for whose courage and ingenuity he had nothing but admiration.

Of course it could do no harm to have Bradlaw pardoned; that would, in fact, be the most satisfactory solution of the case. But the detective was by no means sanguine that it could be brought about. The case while in the criminal court had attracted too much publicity—publicity not at all favorable to Mann-Marston, it is true. Some of the papers had pictured him as the heartless grasping octopus, the unscrupulous financier who moved about crushing the life, the very soul of any who dared oppose his avarice. And if this same man were now to petition for a pardon so soon after Bradlaw's sentence had begun, there must immediately be cries of collusion, hints that Bradlaw was a henchman of the banker, a scapegoat who had gone to jail to cover up some transaction too shady to be brought into the lights of the courts, and whose patron was now carrying out a bargain by petitioning for his release.

No, there was little if any chance of a pardon. The governor was human, and a politician besides. He would not grant the desired release unless in response to a popular clamor; certainly not at the behest of one who

had been the chief complaining witness, and who in addition was extremely unpopular with the average run of citizens.

But that, after all, thought Enderby, was his client's affair. He himself had no intention of moving in the matter of a pardon for Bradlaw. His sole task was to find some means of establishing the identity of the heir to the Mann-Marston fortune; and, baffling as the problem seemed, he felt a confidence born of long and successful experience that he could solve it.

In the afternoon Mr. Mann-Marston called up and made an appointment to see the detective at the latter's office at four o'clock. When he came in despondency was apparent in every feature.

"I saw the governor," he reported. "He's been staying in town for a few days, and I have a slight personal acquaintance with him, so it wasn't hard. But I'm afraid—well, he said the matter would have to go before the pardons board. In fact, he didn't seem to warm to it at all."

"I didn't think he would," answered Enderby. "My advice is not to bank on his doing anything. We've got to go at the problem from an entirely different angle. Have you had any further talk with Miss Denton?"

"Yes. I went to see her myself this morning. She's going to call at the house every day and see the babies. I wanted her to come back as their nurse, but she refused."

"Did you press any more money upon her?" asked the detective pointedly.

"I tried to, but she wouldn't take it."

"You'd better leave things entirely to me," said Enderby. "You may tempt her too far, so that she'll start blackmailing you in earnest. Not that I think she would. She isn't that kind. You must see for yourself that it's no criminal we're dealing with, but a very fine woman. Only—she's started something that we're bound to circumvent, and I'll do it even if I have to use rather crude and forcible methods. There must be some way of making her talk. We might arrest her, of course, but that would have just the opposite effect."

The little banker turned pale. "Don't do anything of the sort, for Heaven's sake," he pleaded. "As it is now, she will tell if Bradlaw gets a pardon. Otherwise she might keep her secret forever."

Enderby looked at his client in some scorn. "Well," he observed, "she certainly chose the one best method to keep you in line. Do you want me to work on the case or don't you? There are other ways of getting at it than through her, you know."

"How?" asked Mann-Marston eagerly. "She's the only one that knows, isn't she?"

"Not of necessity," said Enderby. "Don't forget there's the mother of the other baby. Most parents, you see, are rather better acquainted with their own children than you and Mrs. Mann-Marston."

The other man flushed at the implication, but eagerly grasped the hope held out.

"You really think you could find her?" he asked. "But the child may be an orphan."

"Yes—or it may not. At any rate there's a line along which I might proceed. Was Miss Denton at your house practically all the time during the past several months, until her discharge?"

"Yes," replied the banker. "Why?"

"Has it not occurred to you that to find a baby like enough to yours to answer her purpose would require a great deal of searching?"

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Mann-Marston. "To be sure. Yet I am certain that she never left the house for more than a few hours at a time, and only rarely at that."

"Then, too," pursued the detective, "It is not so easy as some people imagine to adopt an orphan baby. All institutions conduct an exhaustive inquiry of any prospective foster parent. Not only that, but they send their agents to the home, both before and after the adoption, to make sure that the child receives proper care. Thus it would be hard for Miss Denton to gain control over any baby, to say nothing of one that would be, in age, weight, sex, and general appearance, suitable for her purpose."

"What do you make of it then?" asked the father eagerly.

"For a guess," replied the detective, "I should say that the child is one that she had often seen, probably the child of a relative or a near friend; that its resemblance to your boy perhaps first suggested the plan to her; and that the child's mother knows where he is now."

"But why?" asked the banker. "Surely Miss Denton would not tell her, even if she persuaded her to give up the infant voluntarily."

"That's just the point," said Enderby. "A mother doesn't look on her baby as a mere piece of property. Even though she might have every confidence in Miss Denton, she would want to know where and in whose care her baby was. And what more natural, from the nurse's standpoint, than to tell her? She could thus assure her that the baby would have the very best of care, of surroundings, of medical attendance, of food—because he would be treated as your own son. Yes, if my guess—and it's only a guess, of course—is correct, that was one of the chief arguments that Miss Denton used in persuading the mother. Find that mother, and our problem is solved."

"But she too might refuse to tell," objected Mann-Marston.

The detective smiled. "You don't know mothers," he said. "We could threaten her, you see—threaten that unless she told you would ask the court to straighten it out by giving you legal custody of both children: in which case her baby would be forever lost to her."

"But we can threaten that now—to Miss Denton."

"Of course," said Enderby. "But that lady would be quite unmoved by our threat; and the mother, on whom it might have an effect, would not know."

"Then you purpose to try to find the mother?" asked the banker.

"That's one line it might pay to investigate," admitted Enderby. "Perhaps you could help by giving me a list of Miss Denton's intimates."

Mr. Mann-Marston shook his head. "No; I haven't the slightest idea about her relatives or friends. She came to us from another wealthy home in which she had been a nurse for over a year; previous to that she was a nurse in a maternity hospital. Both spoke in highest terms of her character and ability. I don't think she had any relatives."

"But she came from the same town as Bradlaw," suggested the detective. "That might give us a clew. And we can have her shadowed here in the city. You can give me her present address."

"All right," said the banker. "But I want to keep in touch with her, as we've arranged. And I'll continue to try and push that pardon through. I think that's the best chance, after all. Follow out this line if you want to, or any other. But don't let her know you're working on the case; and above all don't do anything drastic without my consent."

The detective nodded. "Very well. We'll leave it that way. And you, of course, will let me know at once of any new developments that may arise at your end concerning either the children or Miss Denton."

When his visitor had gone Enderby called his secretary and dictated to her,

from notes and memory, all the material facts in the case. "Hand this over to Smithson," he ordered, "and tell him to look for the child's mother, and to get any other information he can about Miss Denton—anything, in fact, bearing on the case. He will report to me at once if he makes any discoveries."

A week passed—a week in which Enderby's attention was preëmpted by other pressing affairs—before the case was recalled again to his mind. He arrived at his office late one afternoon to be informed that Mr. Mann-Marston had twice called up, and had left a message requesting an interview at the earliest opportunity.

The detective looked at his watch. "Tell him I'll be at his house at seven-thirty, as before," he said. "Has Smithson reported anything?"

"Nothing of importance," replied the secretary. "Miss Denton is living at a hotel, and sees nobody. He visited the up-State town where she used to live, too, but without much result. Shall I get you his report to date?"

"Yes," said Enderby. "And my own original report on the case. I'll read them while I have dinner."

He took the typewritten papers and went out to his favorite restaurant. When he had finished his meal, and refreshed his mind on the matter in hand, he hailed a taxicab and was driven to the home of his client.

Mr. Mann-Marston greeted him in great excitement. "I just got word from the pardons board that my application has been refused," he said.

"It was a foregone conclusion," answered Enderby. "The papers took it up, didn't they?"

"Yes," said the unhappy father, groaning. "Some of them claimed that it was all a part of a plot. They've given me more undesirable publicity in the past week than I'd expected to have in a lifetime."

"Both the babies are still here, and all right?" asked the detective.

"Yes. But Miss Denton—I should have told you, but you weren't in when I called your office—I gave her more money yesterday."

"At her request? How much?"

"Yes. Twenty-five thousand dollars, cash."

"Phew!" said the detective. "It looks as if I was wrong in my estimate of her character after all. But—she gave you the information you wanted about the babies?"

"No she didn't," said Mann-Marston miserably. "The money was sent to her; she was to come here to-day to identify them. I've been home all the afternoon, and she didn't appear!"

"But this," said Enderby excitedly, "this puts her beyond the pale of the law. This is blackmail, pure and simple. I can't understand, though, how she failed to keep her promise. I would have banked on that woman."

"But what shall we do?" wailed the banker. "We can't let her get away! We've *got* to find her!"

"Or the mother of the child," corrected Enderby. He stepped to the telephone and called up Smithson at his home. "Get on the trail of Viola Denton at once," he said. "Don't let her out of your sight. As soon as you can do so phone me for further instructions." He turned to Mann-Marston. "I suppose your prejudice against drastic action is gone by this time?"

"Yes, yes! Do anything—anything at all so long as it will show results."

"You'll take your share of responsibility, of course?" asked Enderby. "This new development changes things, you see; and the plan I have might possibly be questioned by the authorities—though it's nothing criminal, of course."

"Yes, yes—anything. What is it?"

"We'll have both the children kidnaped," the detective announced. "And

we'll let it become public, too. That will convince the mother that the thing has gone beyond Miss Denton's hands, and she'll be around here frightened to death. Then we'll have Miss Denton arrested as a suspect, owing to her former act with regard to the babies. Thus she won't be able to get away, or to communicate with the mother; and we'll get the facts in spite of her. It will mean a lot of publicity, of course—in fact, the scheme depends on it. We want everybody in the city to know that your boy has been kidnaped: that'll make some good headlines. And as for the mix-up of the two babies, the mere truth about that will insure its making a good news story. Do you say the word?"

"Yes," said the father eagerly. "It sounds as if it ought to get results."

"It will," said Enderby grimly. "I'm going to call for one of my operatives to drive here in a car. He's a family man, and his wife can take good care of the babies until to-morrow. You fix it so he can get in without the servants' knowledge; I'll get the new nurse out of the nursery and engage her in conversation down here. As soon as they're safely out of the house we'll make a show of discovering the loss. We'll give the story to the newspapers, and I'll have Smithson get Viola Denton. And I've a notion that by to-morrow afternoon you'll have a very anxious mother coming here to learn what she can—and to tell you what she knows."

"But——"

"Is it a go, or isn't it?"

"All right, go ahead."

A half hour later, while the nurse sat in the study with Enderby answering innumerable questions about her two charges, a limousine drew up in a dark spot near the entrance of the Mann-Marston house. Not even the detective himself heard so much as the opening of a door. Twenty minutes later the nurse returned upstairs, and her arrival in the nursery was signalized by startled cries. Mr. Mann-Marston bounded up the stairs; his wife rushed from her boudoir; the detective ascended more leisurely. Two little cribs stood yawningly empty: two cribs, one of which had held, up to a few minutes ago, the tiny unconscious heir to the Mann-Marston fortune.

It was not necessary to simulate an uproar. Mrs. Mann-Marston, who was not in the secret, did her part; and the servants of the house, as in duty bound, according to their lights, helped to bring on a reign of pandemonium. Enderby did not need to take any steps toward giving publicity to the disappearance; that was taken quite out of his hands.

He was worried, however, at not hearing from Smithson; and felt a great relief when he was called to the telephone.

"Smithson?" he said. "Plans are changed. We want Viola Denton arrested at once. What! Disappeared?" He listened for a few minutes more, then turned to Mann-Marston.

"She's gone," he announced. "I was too late to get her. But that ought not to affect the rest of the plan—might help it, in fact. When the mother learns of the disappearance of Viola Denton, in addition to the kidnaping, she'll be frantic."

"Can we do nothing but wait?" inquired Mann-Marston in a tone which told that he, too, was half frantic.

"Until to-morrow," said the detective. "If the police call in about this kidnaping tell them you've retained me. You might mention, too, that we want Viola Denton. Good night."

His host, loath to part with him, accompanied him to the door and looked down the street after him. Enderby was walking toward the nearest car stop when he heard the raucous cries of newsboys approaching with extras.

He paid little heed until one of them was so close that his words were distinguishable.

"Bradlaw escapes!" was what he heard.

He beckoned to the boy and got a paper. The headlines corroborated the startling information.

As soon as he could assimilate the news a number of things became clear to him. Viola's demand for money, for example: in expectation of her lover's escape she had had need for a large sum to aid him. And no doubt she had intended to fulfill her promise to Mann-Marston, but the escape coming a little sooner than she expected had prevented her doing so. He was relieved to think that she was not as bad as he had begun to fear; in his business he had to deal so much with the seamy side of human nature that he was glad to be able to think well even of a lawbreaker. As for the outcome of his own plot its chances were by no means lessened by this unexpected contingency.

On reaching his home he called up the man who had put through the faked kidnaping, and received assurance that the children were safe and in good hands.

In the morning he returned again to Mann-Marston's house. He was early, for he wished to make sure of being there if a woman called—and he anticipated that she would not delay. He persuaded his client to let him interview her alone, for he did not know what the frantic father might do or say.

He was not mistaken. It was scarcely a quarter after nine when a strange woman was ushered in. She raised her veil as she took the proffered chair, uncovering a very pale face in which youth and good breeding could both be discerned. Yet the veil was black, as was also the tailor-made suit.

"Mr. Mann-Marston?" she asked, in an agitated voice.

"No, madam. I am a detective"—he did not fail to note her change of color at the word—"a detective employed by him to inquire into the kidnaping which took place last night. My name is Enderby."

For a space of several moments they sat silent: he, not wishing to press the conversation, for fear of frightening her out of fulfilling her errand in spite of all; she, evidently disturbed and trying to come to a decision.

"Of course," she said in a low voice, as if to herself, "of course he would employ detectives." She gazed at him keenly; then, as if reassured, she sighed deeply and spoke again.

"There were two—two babies, Mr. Enderby?"

"Yes, Mr. Mann-Marston's and another."

"That other," she said slowly, with averted eyes, "that other was Samuel Craig Wetherell—my baby!"

"You are his mother, then—Mrs. Wetherell?" asked the detective, with partly concealed eagerness.

"Yes."

"And you knew—before this happened—that he was here?"

The young woman nodded dumbly.

"And for what purpose?"

After another moment's silence she faced him determinedly and spoke again. "Yes. Oh, I'm guilty, Mr. Enderby—I only now realize just how guilty—now that my boy is—lost!"

"Tell me about it please," suggested the detective gently. "I want you to feel that you can trust me—and I can assure you for Mr. Mann-Marston that no steps will be taken against you. You knew the nurse, Viola Denton?"

"She and I were in the same class at the hospital. We were the closest of friends. I trusted her implicitly—I almost do yet, in spite of her disappearance. I tried to communicate with her as soon as I had read the paper this morning, but was told that she was

gone. I was married soon after I left the hospital. My husband—James Wetherell—was an aviator, and he met his death in an airplane accident while doing exhibition flying."

The silence that followed was finally broken by the detective.

"You knew Mr. James Bradlaw?"

"Yes," she went on, "that is, I had met him only twice, but I had often heard Viola speak of him. And when she told me of how his business was being stolen—taken from him, I wanted to help her. Oh, I had been so happy since my marriage! I wanted her, my best friend, to have the same chance of happiness. And it all seemed so wrong—that matter of the patent.

"My brother—I can't shield him now, now that I see how guilty we've been—my brother, Samuel Craig—the baby is named for him, you know—he is employed in Mr. Mann-Marston's office. It was he who took the document for the theft of which James Bradlaw went to prison. He did it for me, after much urging. He was never found out, and Bradlaw was too loyal to tell."

"I think, Mrs. Wetherell," interposed Enderby, "that I can reassure you on that score, too. Mr. Mann-Marston has had too keen a taste of trouble to be vindictive now. I think I can assure you that your brother shall not suffer."

The woman looked her gratitude. "Then, after the trial and conviction," she went on, "poor Viola was heartbroken. She had originally taken the position here to be a sort of spy in the house of Mr. Mann-Marston; but she had often commented on the remarkable likeness between little James and the baby here; and when Mr. Bradlaw went to prison she was quite beside herself. It was then that she conceived the horrible plan.

"And it was then, too, that my husband died. I had very little income, and the shock of the news had made me ill; I hardly knew what I was doing. I had to go to a hospital, and I had no friends with whom I could leave the baby. And I did want to help Viola Denton, too. So I consented. I knew he would have better care here than anywhere else I could send him. And I think that's all. Oh, no—I did get money from Viola—she paid my hospital bill. I protested, because I feared that the money came from Mr. Mann-Marston, and didn't want to touch it. And I intended—and still intend—to repay it."

"Would you know your child?" asked Enderby.

"Yes," she said sadly. "If only I could have taken him before—this——"

"Are you positive you could identify him?" persisted the detective. "Because—well, I've done some very satisfactory work on the case already, and I know where the two babies are."

Mr. Mann-Marston, who had been excluded from the interview at Enderby's request, accompanied them in a taxicab to the place where the children were being kept. There was absolutely no doubt about the identification: the Wetherell baby recognized his mother with little chuckles of glee, and frantic smiles and out-reachings of his tiny hands. She picked him up and cuddled him, uttering the syllables of nonsense that mother's fondly imagine are endearing baby words, and which at any rate answer the purpose as well as the purest English could do. And to the great amazement of the detective Mr. Mann-Marston did likewise with his own infant. Whatever ill effect his trying experiences might have had, they had at least succeeded in making him human.

It was several weeks after the records of the affair had been placed in the files of "Finished Cases" in Enderby's office, that he received another call from Mr. Mann-Marston. He ten-

dered a letter which he had just received. "From Miss Denton," he said by way of explanation.

The detective took it. "Posted here in New York," he commented after a glance. "Remailed, of course, after being sent from some foreign country." He drew the contents from the envelope and read.

DEAR SIR: I read in the papers recently of the solution of the mystery of your son and the strange baby, so I know that you want nothing more of me now. I did not intend, however, to leave you in doubt, particularly after I received the large sum of money from you. As you must have concluded before this, it was to aid in securing Jim's escape; I would not have taken it otherwise. The first money you gave me was used partly for my own expenses, partly to aid Jane Wetherell. I trust that you will take no steps against her. She is one of the noblest of women, the truest of friends.

Mr. Bradlaw escaped from prison a day earlier than we had planned. It was, of course, impossible to delay our flight; so I had to go without fulfilling my promise to you. We were married immediately, and have come to a place where you will never find us. From the twenty-five thousand dollars we have enough left to start Jim in business. I think he deserves that much at your hands—don't you?

VIOLA DENTON BRADLAW.

"I certainly do think so," said the banker fervently. "And I've about concluded that I'm actually in the woman's debt. Why, do you know, she opened my eyes to the greatest genuine pleasure I've ever found in life: the pleasure I have of playing with my baby boy."

BANK ROBBERY PROVES GIRL'S METTLE

WHEN seven bandits in broad daylight invaded the First National Bank, which is just across the street from police headquarters in Roselle, New Jersey, they counted on their audacity and speed to enable them to "clean up" and make a quick get-away. But they did not take into reckoning the keenness and courage of Miss Margaret Carpenter, a stenographer at the bank.

While three of the holdup men waited outside in a high-powered automobile the other four entered the bank and vaulted over the low railing that separates the public from the offices. Miss Carpenter rose from her seat at a typewriter desk to order the man nearest her out of the premises, but before she could speak she was commanded to elevate her hands above her head and keep them there. She did, indeed, obey this demand, as did the other employees, but while the others helplessly watched the robbers gather up the money within reach, Miss Carpenter stepped backward carefully until her foot came in contact with a little electric button in the floor. This button was connected with an alarm bell in police headquarters. Miss Carpenter retreated no further, but stood pressing upon the button which was to summon aid.

No alarm rang in the bank, but across the street the police heard, and Sergeant Fenton Keenan, in plain clothes, hurried to the scene of the holdup. The lookouts in the automobile saw him and opened fire, wounding him seriously.

The unexpected interruption disconcerted the bandits and saved the bank from a far greater loss than it suffered, for the leader of the gang was about to loot the vaults when the shots in the street made him decide that it would be discreet to run. The men escaped in the automobile.

The Royal Northwest Mounted Police

by Louise Rice

Author of "True Stories of Supercriminals," etc.

WHEN George of England was crowned every country owning allegiance to the British throne sent a number of men, representative of its best, to be a guard of honor at the ceremonies.

There were the tall, haughty rajahs from India, and the lean, browned Australian constabulary; the magnificent Highlanders, and a selected number of the most famous English regiments. Among them all one squad of men attracted universal attention. Of all those wonderful specimens of manhood they were the most wonderful.

They wore black knee breeches with yellow stripes, a red tunic, broad, picturesque Stetson hats, spurs, and a gun. They were representative members of the Northwest Mounted Police of Canada, to whom, in admiration, the king afterward gave the appellation "Royal."

It is probable that more detective stories, and stories of heroism, have been written around this unique body of men than about all the other police bodies in the world, with the possible exception of the members of Scotland Yard.

The relentlessness of the "Northwest Mounted" is proverbial. Its single-handed bravery is known from one end of the world to the other. Our magazines and our motion pictures are full of the brave, cheerful, smiling, dead-shot-never-give-up chap and his wonderful and beautiful horse. What is more, those stories, though fiction, could be overmatched any time by the cold facts as set down in the "Mounted's" records. From the motion pictures and from stories we know the Northwest Territories, too, with their brief spring and their long and cruel winter. And we are perfectly familiar with the solitary horseman on whom the life and safety of its inhabitants hang, but hardly any one knows of the very precise and exact life which that horseman leads.

The force was first mobilized in the seventies. At that time the Territories were not provinces of Canada, as they are now, nor had the Indians and half breeds been put on reservations. McCloud, on the border between the United States and Canada, was a place at which innumerable fugitives from our country slipped through into the practically unchartered country. Ranchers, already trying to establish homesteads on the fertile plains, were at the mercy of thieves and bandits, both red and white. There were no railways in the whole country.

Officers of the law from Quebec Province made efforts to secure the

persons of notorious criminals known to be hiding in the Territories, but any man with a knowledge of outdoor life could easily evade them. The Canadian Government, therefore, determined to put a mounted force in the Territories, and called for volunteers, the same to be subject to the most rigorous physical examination.

The standard set has not only been maintained, but made higher. Every man, to have even a chance at becoming a member of the "Mounted" must be at least five feet seven inches tall. Many of the men top this by a full foot. The health of the applicant must be perfect, not only at the time of the application, but previously. Teeth, eyes, hearing, heart, lungs, feet, spine—all must receive that laconic symbol, which has passed into our language from Lloyd's—"A1."

The year 1874 saw the first muster roll of the force, which was soon up to the full number of one thousand, at which it has always remained, except for a brief period during the late war. The first place at which a post was established was Battleford, then the capitol of the Territories, and the next was Fort Pelly. Edmonton Post, that of the important border town of McCloud, and then of Prince Albert were established in rapid succession. When, three years later, Regina became the capital, the Territorial headquarters of the force were removed to that place, then little more than a hamlet.

The official headquarters of the force has always been at Ottawa, the seat of the Canadian government. The reason for this has never been brought out, so far as I know, in any tale of the Northwest Mounted Police.

This body is a most singular one, in that it is both military and civil, and operates under both authorities. The form of life led is strictly military, as is the training and the discipline; but the powers are civil. The "powers that be" at Ottawa have to do with all civil matters, while the commanding officer in the Territories has to do with all matters military.

Any man of the force has the right to arrest an offender against the law; and all commanding officers are sworn in as justices of the peace, and sit in regular courts, at the posts, whenever necessary. They are the magistrates for that locality, as well as for any cases brought before them by a man of the force. All the force must attend lectures, given every week by the commanding officer, upon the interpretation of the laws of Canada, and upon the interchange of relationships between Canada and the United States. Every man of the force must know exactly how far his authority extends, how and when to use it, and what are his limitations.

In all matters of daily living the details belong to military post life, as we know it in our Western army posts. There are barracks, canteens, parade grounds, officers of the day, guards at night, morning inspection, and so on and so on. A United States cavalry regiment would be quite at home with a post of the Mounted. The privates are called constables. The non-commissioned officers are known by the corresponding military titles. Next to them are inspectors. Above them are superintendents, who are always commanders of posts. Above them all are the chief commissioner and his assistant.

A constable begins his work at the wage of fifty cents a day. It must be borne in mind, however, that absolutely the only things any man or officer of the Mounted needs to spend money for are tobacco and books. Everything is furnished—and that of the best—down to sponges and toothbrushes. The food in the mess is of the best that can be procured, and is more than abundant. Every comfort that civilization has in-

vented belongs to the ordinary private of the force, without a cent of cost to himself. The recreation halls have billiard tables and games of every possible description. There is a great field day twice a year, in which any one may participate, and for which ample leisure is given for training. Polo, la crosse, boxing, swimming, winter sports are all given a place, and valuable prizes are awarded.

Every post has a quadrille club, which meets twice a week in winter and gives a dance at least once a month, to which all the people of the section are invited.

A corporal gets one dollar and a quarter a day, a sergeant forty-five dollars a month, a sergeant major sixty a month. Inspectors receive fourteen hundred a year, superintendents one thousand eight hundred, assistant commissioner two thousand, and the chief commissioner three thousand five hundred.

These salaries do not sound like a great deal, but remember that every dollar of them is clear profit.

No married officers need spend a penny except for the clothes his family needs. Every item of his household, always of the very best, is supplied. The furnishings are kept up-to-date. The grounds of his house receive attention. He need pay nothing for food, light, heat, or service. Transportation is given him. His grocery bill is not audited. Old Mr. High Cost of Living need have no terrors for him. He can raise a large family, and fill every hungry young mouth without a cent of expense. He will never be discharged, except for a gross neglect of duty. Even to mention the possibility of such a thing to a Mounted will make him turn pale. It has never happened.

Promotion comes only on an evidence of unusual fitness, but is sure, once that evidence is produced. The work of the men is of a nature to give unusual opportunities for bringing out the superior caliber of individuals. It is detective work, often of the most difficult kind. Frequently it requires the constable to pit his wits and his courage against the hardiest of criminals, for no man will seek refuge in the Territories who is a physical coward. The country is too rigorous to attract the sneak and the weakling. The men who seek to evade the law either of Canada or the United States by losing themselves in this still almost tractless country, are the men who have superlative cunning, and who are not afraid to kill, with their bare hands, if need be. The Indian population, always getting out of bounds, is another problem, and the half breeds, with the vices of both white and red predominating, are among the most "difficult" of the earth's criminals.

Besides the one thousand, there are many men belonging to the force who are "extras." These are men who are expert at some trade. A carpenter, for instance, will join. He, as well as the regular constables, must fulfill the physical requirements. He will be taught horsemanship along with the active force. And he will be paid, and have all the perquisites and allowances of the regular man, but, in addition, he will be paid the regular wage per day for all work he does belonging to his trade. These "extras" are numerous, since each post is a complete little world in itself. Everything possible is made there. Every bit of artisan's craft needed will find a man for it.

These men are not required to do full military duty, except that they must take their turn at standing guard; and must, in the event of a posse being formed to hunt down some particular criminal, be prepared to do active service. If married, they are given houses just outside the post for their families. This is true also of the constables; the official houses of the post are reserved for officers.

Every post has its well-defined area of jurisdiction. Every constable has as well-defined a "beat" as the New York policeman. Each Monday morning the force scatters from the post, each man with such provisions as he will need, and with himself and his horse in the best of condition. His route always lies along the route of ranches. At each ranch or homestead or little hamlet, he stops, asks for complaints, and inquires if any suspicious characters have been seen. Receiving his report, some responsible person at that place signs a card, testifying that the constable has been at that place, at the appointed time, and fulfilled his duties. This is repeated until the full round is completed and the constable returns to his post at the end of the week. Constables or inspectors who are sent out to "get" certain criminals are given carte blanche; they are to come home *when they get their man.*

At present there is a good deal of talk about greatly increasing the force, and putting part of it into the Province of Quebec. This is due to the many strikes and great labor agitation there, as well as to the fact that the local police of many cities and towns have struck, from time to time, along with other less important bodies. The Mounted, being sworn in for a period of five years under the crown, cannot go on strike. Nor can any one who knows its history or its morale imagine it doing anything of the kind.

FINDS "DECEASED" LIVING AS HERMIT

AFTER a search lasting two years Robert L. Barnes, special investigator for several insurance companies, has at last run down Narciso Arellano, whose death was reported soon after he had taken out two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of life insurance with American and Canadian companies. Arellano, who is a member of one of the oldest and most prominent families in Nicaragua, tried to obtain one million dollars in life policies in 1917, but the companies, after comparing notes, refused to let him have an amount in excess of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Shortly after he had paid his premiums, amounting to ten thousand dollars, Arellano disappeared and the companies were notified that he had either fallen from a boat or had jumped into Lake Nicaragua. Proof of death was not conclusive, however, so the insurance companies withheld payment on the policies and sent Mr. Barnes to investigate the case.

At first he heard only stories that the Nicaraguan had committed suicide, and that his body had probably become the prey of sharks. But later, after exhaustive questioning of the man who had been with Arellano on the "fatal" boating trip, Barnes learned that the supposedly dead man was living in a remote mountain section of Nicaragua as a hermit. He followed the clew given him, and finally came upon the perpetrator of the attempted fraud and obtained from him a written confession.

It is said that Arellano may be committed to an institution for the mentally irresponsible, as his friends believe only a deranged mind can account for his illegal actions. During the time he was supposed to be dead premiums were not paid the insurers, the policies have lapsed, and Arellano will be unable to recover the ten thousand dollars he thought would bring him such profitable returns. His many creditors, who believed they would receive money due them from his estate, will be at his heels, so without doubt Arellano is worse off than he was before he conceived the ingenious scheme for making a fortune easily.

Rings of Dust

by Scott Campbell

Author of "Without Air," etc.

IT was after three o'clock when Mr. Walter Carson, private detective, responding to an urgent telephone call from Lieutenant Joe Donlin of the city force, entered the main office of Sheldon & Fiske, bankers and stock brokers, whose spacious business quarters adjoined the second-floor rear corridor of the Hadley Building. The Stock Exchange had closed for the day. The streets in the throbbing heart of the financial district were alive with departing speculators, with bankers, brokers, and weary floor operators hastening to their respective offices.

Consternation and dismay reigned in the office of Sheldon & Fiske. It was showed in the faces of the firm members, the clerks, that of a tall, sallow young man seated near one of the windows, and even in the stern, dark countenance of a private detective employed there named James Logan, who was at that moment interrogating a slender, graceful, pale-faced girl in the senior partner's private office.

Walter Carson knew him slightly. He frowned perceptibly, and glanced at Logan, a bit sharply through the partly open door, and then he turned to the grave-faced police lieutenant who had hastened to join him.

"What's the idea, Joey?" he asked quietly. "Why did you send for me? Logan seems to have charge of the case."

"Logan be hanged!" Donlin muttered, scowling. "I wouldn't bank on his ability, or on Logan himself, as far as that goes, even though this firm has confidence in him, and he's been employed here for years. You've worked with me on many a case during our years of friendship, and I thought maybe you'd like to take a hand in this. It promises to be good. But I don't like the way things are going," he earnestly added, voice lowered.

"You mean?" Carson eyed him more intently.

"I know Arthur Boyd. I've known him since he was a lad in knickerbockers," said Donlin impressively. "He's as square as any I know. But he's in wrong, I fear, and I hope you can dig out the truth. I'm morally sure he did not commit this robbery in spite of the incriminating circumstances and Logan's evident determination to fasten the crime upon him."

"What are the incriminating circumstances?" Carson inquired.

"Boyd is employed as bank messenger by the Fidelity Trust Company," Donlin quietly explained. "He left the bank about two o'clock with eighty thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds for this firm. They were wanted before three o'clock as collateral for a big stock-market transaction. Boyd came straight from the bank. It's less than ten minutes' walk. As a precaution against an accident or the bare possibility of a hold-up he was trailed by one of the bank clerks, Frank Morton, that chap seated near the window. He is the last person by whom Arthur Boyd was seen, as far as we know."

"Seen where?" Carson questioned.

"Boyd did not wait for the elevator," Donlin proceeded. "He hastened up the front stairway and around to the rear corridor. Morton was only a few yards behind him. When about to follow Boyd around the corner from the side corridor, however, he collided violently with a man just turning the corner. He stopped to apologize and was briefly detained."

"You mean where the collision occurred?"

"Exactly. It then was only a few steps to this office, and Morton supposed that Boyd, whom he had briefly lost sight of, already had entered it. He waited about fifteen minutes for him, thinking he was detained here for some reason, and then he entered and learned that Boyd had not been here. He had disappeared. He was mysteriously missing, also eighty thousand in Liberty Bonds," Donlin pointedly added. "Morton states——"

"One moment." Carson checked him quietly. "I'll question Morton myself, Joey, if I decide to butt into the case. Aren't the police at work on it?"

"A general alarm has been sent out, with orders to arrest Boyd, if possible, but Logan is the only detective now on the case," Donlin explained. "Knowing Boyd so well, however, and believing him quite incapable of such a crime, I came here to learn the facts, if possible, hoping to set him right."

"I get you, Joey." Carson's fine, clean-cut face had hardened slightly. "Who is that very pretty girl Logan is questioning so sharply?"

"Logan be hanged!" Donlin repeated, frowning again. "Threats and intimidation are his chief assets. Her name is Clara Ward. She's Sheldon's stenographer. She was with him in his private office yesterday afternoon, when he telephoned to the bank and arranged for the bonds to be sent here at two o'clock to-day."

"Alone with him?" Carson inquired.

"Yes. I happen to know, too, that she and Boyd are lovers, and that they are saving up to get married. Logan is making capital of that, the dirty cur, and of the fact that she——"

"Wait!" Carson's grave eyes took on a momentary gleam. "Don't butt in, Joey, whatever I say or do. I'll see what I can make of the case."

"Good on your head!" Donlin whispered. "More power to you!"

Walter Carson did not reply. He had no eye for the furtive scrutiny of the clerks in the spacious main office, several of whom knew him by sight, and were aware of his enviable reputation as a private detective. He had been watching the fair, agitated girl in the adjoining room, white with distress and indignation under Logan's merciless grilling, with which neither member of the firm, both seated near by, had ventured to interfere. Carson walked that way and paused at the partly open door, unobserved by Logan, who was standing with his back toward it.

"You're quite friendly with Boyd, Miss Ward, aren't you?" he was curtly asking. A strong-featured, dark man, he was, close upon forty, whose searching scrutiny of the agitated girl was not without singular sinister qualities.

"Yes, Mr. Logan, I admit that I am," she replied. Her lips were quivering, and her hands tensely gripped the chair back of which she was standing. "But that has no bearing upon——"

"That's enough! Merely answer my questions," Logan interrupted. "Isn't it a fact that you two are planning to be married?"

"Yes, that is our intention," Miss Ward again admitted. She drew up her girlish figure a bit haughtily, then flushed slightly, though he was a stranger to her, when she saw Carson intently regarding her.

"Did you see Boyd last evening?" Logan demanded.

"I did. He spent the evening at my home."

"Did you tell him what you had heard?"

"I don't know what you mean." Miss Ward gazed at him perplexedly. "Heard about what?"

"You know what I mean." Logan shook his finger at her with sinister assurance. "Don't try to evade me. You were the only person with Mr. Sheldon in his private office when he telephoned about the bonds, weren't you?"

"I think so." Clara hesitated for an instant. "I admit that I heard him telephone about them."

"Except the two members of the firm, then, you are the only person employed here who knew anything about them. You are, in fact, the only person who could have supplied the information that made this robbery possible."

"But I know nothing about it. I——"

"Wait!" Logan cut in sharply. "Tell me the truth. Didn't you tell Arthur Boyd last evening that the bonds were to be sent here to-day?" he sternly demanded.

"I did not."

"You must have told him."

"I did not!" Miss Ward repeated, with a flash of passionate indignation. "I would not do such a thing. I would not be guilty of such treachery as you imply. The bonds were not mentioned last evening. You——"

"Stop right there!" Logan commanded, striding nearer to her. "The transfer of those bonds, as well as the precise time, must have been known in advance or this robbery could not have been committed. The difficulties were anticipated. Boyd knew about the bonds, and he knew also that he would be sent here with them. His plans were carefully laid. He darted ahead of Morton and into the rear corridor. He knew how he could elude him from that point and get away with the bonds."

"But——"

"There aren't any buts," said Logan snappily. "You are the one who made this crime possible. You told him about the bonds. Come across with the truth, now, instead of with lies and evasions, or I'll arrest you at once and——" He stopped involuntarily, for the trembling girl, alarmed by his threatening gaze and his harsh accusations, had covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Walter Carson had waited only to learn precisely what Logan suspected. He had been coldly viewing him from head to foot—chiefly his feet, in fact, and the rug under them, when the browbeating detective strode forward and confronted the agitated girl. He now stepped into the room, and nodded to both members of the firm, with whom he was slightly acquainted.

"Slow down, Logan," he advised a bit curtly. "Don't go so fast, or you may land in a ditch."

Logan turned as if pricked with a knife. He now saw Carson for the first time. He flushed hotly for a moment, then went white with sudden resentment upon seeing Lieutenant Donlin at the open door. He knew the two were close friends, and he at once guessed that Donlin had secretly sent for the private detective.

"What's the big idea, lieutenant?" he demanded, frowning darkly. "Did you think I couldn't handle this case alone?"

"It doesn't matter who handles it," Mr. Sheldon quickly interposed, scenting trouble. "The main thing, Logan, is to learn the facts and to insure the arrest of Arthur Boyd as quickly as possible. If Detective Carson can aid you we will be very glad of it."

"Mr. Sheldon is right," Carson said approvingly. "I'm not here to butt in needlessly, Logan, or to rob you of any

laurels. This girl, however, appears to me to be telling the truth."

"That's your opinion, eh?" Logan forced an incredulous smile to his frowning face.

"Decidedly."

"I don't agree with you. How do you account for Boyd's disappearance?"

"I cannot yet account for it," Carson frankly admitted. "The fact that he came nearly to the door of this office, however, seems to indicate that he intended to deliver the bonds," he pointedly argued. "Furthermore, if he'd been bent upon eluding Morton he could have done so out of doors much more easily than in the office building, assuming that he had no confederate here. He would not have waited until he reached the adjoining corridor, so near his destination, before undertaking it."

"By Jove, there's something in that," Sheldon declared.

"Nonsense!" Logan growled derisively. "It's a lame argument, Mr. Sheldon, infernally lame, in view of all of the circumstances."

"Why so?" asked Carson.

"Because Boyd is the only reasonable suspect," Logan forcibly insisted. "Why is he missing? Who else could have stolen the bonds, or known anything about them? It's absurd to suppose that he was waylaid and robbed in the adjoining corridor, through which persons are almost constantly passing. The disturbance would have been heard, and his body would have been left there. Crooks would not have delayed to remove it. Boyd is the thief, all right, the only thief——"

Carson interrupted him. "Even if you are right, Logan," he said, "Boyd's disappearance must be explained. He could not have retraced his steps and left the building by the stairway and door to the street, or Morton must have seen him."

"That's true," Logan quickly agreed with him. "That's precisely what I claim."

"And there is no exit from the farther end of the rear corridor," Carson added. "I noticed that when I came in. Nor is it probable that he had a confederate in any adjoining office, who would have hidden him until he could escape undetected, or in disguise."

"No, surely not," Logan again agreed. "That's wholly improbable."

"He must, nevertheless, have found some way of escape," Carson declared perplexedly. "He would not have remained in the building. Mr. Sheldon, is there any way to reach the paved court back of the building, which leads out to the side street?" he inquired quite abruptly.

"Only through a narrow entry back of our main office and the adjoining one," Sheldon told him. "There's a stairway leading down to a rear door. But Boyd could not have gone that way," he quickly added. "He would have had to pass through our main office, or the adjoining one, in order to reach the rear entry."

"By Jove, I have it!" Logan suddenly cried, eyes lighting. "I've been a lunkhead; or I'd have thought of it. The office next to this one is vacant."

"Vacant!" Carson echoed, gazing at him.

"It's not been occupied for weeks," Logan said hurriedly. "Boyd must have known it. His duties bring him here almost daily. He may have taken advantage of it and fled that way. We can find out by going there," he said, leading the way.

"Have you a key?" Carson questioned, following him. He appeared oblivious to the grateful gaze of the pale, anxious girl for whom he had interceded.

"No, no key." Logan replied as they hurried through the main office. "But

I'll send for the superintendent. He has one."

The police lieutenant followed them and both members of the firm came also. There was a brief delay in the corridor. The door of the vacant office was locked, and Carson tried vainly to open it.

"I guess you're right, Logan," he remarked. "There's no dust on the knob. This office has been entered recently."

"It's a safe gamble, now, that I'm right." Logan's dark eyes had a gleam of covert exultation. "I thought you'd soon agree with me. Boyd knew of this, and took advantage of it. He could easily have got a key. The building is an old one, and the locks on the office doors are not of the latest make."

"Far from it," Carson observed.

"Boyd has stolen the bonds, all right, and made his get-away."

"There now seems to be no reasonable doubt of it, Logan."

Carson appeared blind to the cloud of disappointment that had settled on the face of the police lieutenant. He was gazing a bit sharply through the dimly lighted corridor, noting that the door of the vacant office was about twenty feet from the entrance to it, and between it and that of the bankers' main office, which was some six yards beyond.

Something on the floor, too, had caught Carson's eye, and he presently drew back a little to furtively gaze down at it. It was hardly perceptible. No one else had observed it. It was a dark gray ring faintly inscribed on the faded bare floor. It was about ten inches in diameter, and somewhat broken in places, though the circle was nearly perfect.

Not until after the superintendent had arrived and opened the vacant office, into which Logan hastened with the others, did Detective Carson make a closer inspection of the dim gray circle. He bent quickly and touched it with his finger, then glanced at the tip of it.

"Dust!" he muttered, brows knitting. "Gray dust, or powder. By Jove, that's a bit singular. A ring of dust!"

Carson did not linger to speculate upon it. He obliterated it with his foot, then hastened into the office. He trod on a key which the janitor had found in the lock and forced out upon the floor inside. Bending to pick it up Carson discovered on the floor in the nearest corner another faint gray ring, almost the same as that in the corridor.

Two rings of dust!

Detective Carson was puzzled. He wondered what had caused them, and why they were there. Two rings of dust, one in the vacant office, the other near by in the corridor, with a locked door between them, presented a problem not easily solved in a moment. Carson's attention was almost immediately diverted, moreover, by a cry from Detective Logan, who had found on the floor to the rear a soft felt hat and a plaid coat and vest, which evidently had been discarded hurriedly.

"These, Carson, may clinch it," Logan cried, displaying them. "If they are Boyd's he must have come here before committing the robbery."

"Why before?" asked Doulin, frowning. "What's the idea?"

"Idea!" Logan echoed derisively. "Isn't it perfectly plain?"

"Plain to you, maybe, but not to me," rasped the lieutenant.

"I'll make it plain, then. He could not have brought them when he came with the bonds or Morton must have seen them," Logan pointed out. "He must have come earlier. He left other garments, of course, to be worn when he fled, so that no definite description could be sent out. He took no great risk of their being discovered in a vacant office. He had a disguise, too, most likely, and was well made up when he bolted."

"But would he have left these here to fix the crime upon him?" Donlin demanded.

"Fix it be hanged! These are not needed to prove him a thief," Logan declared. "They would have been a needless burden to him when he fled. That's why he left them. One sleeve of the coat is nearly inside out, showing that he removed it in a hurry. See for yourself, Carson." He turned again to the detective. "In his haste, too, he may have left something in his pockets."

"Possibly," the detective admitted. "Search them."

Logan hastened to do so. He could find only a few small sheets of paper in the inside vest pocket, on each of which were some typewritten memoranda relating to several speculative stocks most active on the market, with a list of their recent fluctuations.

"These certainly tell the story, Carson," he said, while both examined them. "Boyd wanted money to get married. He has been speculating secretly. We may find that he is deep in debt, and perhaps guilty of other thefts from the bank. This was a last desperate step, a temptation he could not resist. He cast all by the board and——"

"One moment," Carson interrupted. "Let's make sure these are his, Logan, and then I will concede that you're right. Morton will recognize the garments, of course, if they are those Boyd wore when he was seen last. Let's make sure of it."

They were not long in doing so. He made doubly sure of it, in fact, after all had returned to the banker's office. For not only Frank Morton, but Clara Ward, also, the latter weeping bitterly, immediately identified Boyd's hat and garments. Then was added the last straw to the disappointment and chagrin of Lieutenant Donlin. For Walter Carson's face, clouded for some little time with mingled doubt and perplexity, had turned more hard and severe.

"That's evidence enough for me, Logan, with some to spare," he said brusquely.

"I thought you'd agree with me." Logan grinned broadly.

"There's nothing else to it," Carson retorted. "Boyd has turned crook, and the sooner the wheels are thoroughly set in motion, the sooner the rascal will be rounded up. You'd better hasten to police headquarters, Logan, and report all of the facts. Not a moment should be lost. I would go with you, bar other important duties. You'd better accompany him, lieutenant, and see that nothing is overlooked."

Carson turned with the last and glanced sharply at Donlin, and Logan seemed to approve of the immediate step. He lingered only to ask quietly, with a furtive glance at the weeping girl:

"Do you think we had better arrest her?"

"No need of it, not the slightest," said Carson. "Boyd is playing a lone hand. I feel sure of that."

"I'll be off at once, then," said Logan. "Going with me, lieutenant?"

"Sure!" Donlin complied with remarkable alacrity, in view of their recent verbal tilt and his grim dislike for the speaker. "Surest thing you know!"

II.

Detective Carson had, indeed, other important duties. He did not hurry away, however, after the departure of Lieutenant Donlin and Logan. He turned abruptly to Morton, instead, whom Logan had detained during the investigations, and drew him aside.

"About that man with whom you collided in the side corridor," he said quietly. "Do you know him?"

"I do not," said Morton. "He was a stranger."

"Logan said you lost sight of Boyd while waiting to apologize," Carson told him pointedly.

"I did rather more than that, Mr. Carson, for I supposed that Boyd already had entered this office," Morton frankly admitted. "I did not dream that he had other designs, or that anything could befall him almost at the door of his destination."

"What more did you do?" Carson inquired.

"The man was carrying a box of cigars," Morton explained. "It was knocked from his hand when I collided with him. The cover flew open, and the cigars were scattered over the floor. I waited to help him pick them up, as the fault seemed to be more mine than his."

"Hm, I see!" Carson's brows knit a little closer. "Did you have any talk with the man?"

"Only relating to the mishap. He did not resent it. He was quite polite, in fact, and gave me three of the cigars. Here they are," Morton added, taking them from his pocket.

"Very good of him," Carson observed dryly, while he examined them. "They appear to be of good quality. May I have one?" he asked smiling. "My case is empty."

"Surely!" Morton eagerly assented. "Keep all of them if you like."

"No, indeed, thank you. I may not like them. Besides, one will serve my purpose as well as three," Carson told him, with subtle significance. "I'm not a heavy smoker. That's all, Morton."

He put the cigar in his pocket instead of lighting it, and Morton hurriedly departed to return to the bank. He was about to follow him, too, seeing both members of the firm engaged in the private office, but a hand timidly touched his arm.

"Do give me one moment, Mr. Carson, before you go," Miss Ward requested, when his gaze met her tearful blue eyes. "May I say something to you?"

"Why, certainly." Carson took her hand for a moment.

"First I want to thank you for having had confidence in me," Clara Ward said gratefully. "I hardly knew what I said while Mr. Logan questioned me. He was very harsh and unjust."

"Logan isn't quite all a man should be," Carson told her.

"It was very kind of you to intercede, and to believe I was telling the truth."

"I knew that you were. Logan, however, is not very discerning."

"I want to tell you, too, if I may, that you are terribly mistaken," Clara digressed with pathetic earnestness. "I am sure, absolutely sure, that Arthur Boyd did not commit this robbery. He is incapable of such a crime. You would be sure of it if you knew him as I do. We were soon to be married. He would not wreck all of our cherished hopes and fond anticipations with such a dreadful deed," she said, sobbing softly. "I know you are mistaken, Mr. Carson, terribly mistaken, in suspecting——"

"Hush!" Carson checked her gently and placed his hand on her arm. "You are a very loyal girl, and I hope all of your sweet anticipations may very soon be realized. Whisper!" He smiled a bit oddly and gazed intently at her. "If I am mistaken, terribly mistaken, Miss Ward, you may be sure of at least one thing—that I will soon discover it! I must go now."

Carson did not wait for an answer, or to note the effect of his somewhat enigmatical assertion. His fine face turned ominously severe when he returned to the corridor, however, and his narrowed eyes had a threatening gleam. He strode quickly to the door of the vacant office, where he again examined the corridor floor, and then that of the bare, deserted room. The

faint ring of gray dust remained in the corner. Near the middle of the room, and in the corridor as well, were several marks and scratches, quite inconspicuous, which he inspected with a lens.

Abruptly Carson arose, and went into the back hallway, noting faint gray spots on the floor and on the back stairs, which he quickly descended. He found the lower back hall half filled with mason's tools, a few bags of cement, two barrels of lime, some short planks, and a piece of soiled canvas.

Carson saw the occasion for all this upon reaching the narrow court. Repairs were being made in a part of the foundation wall of the old building. Several laborers were at work on the floor below the street. Beyond the door from which he had emerged the court was obstructed with large stones, empty barrels and planks, some dirty wooden pails, a quantity of dry cement, and a pile of sand. Near by was a bed of mixed cement, from which a laborer was filling one of the pails.

A large, roughly clad man of about fifty, with red hair and a florid, somewhat grim and sinister face, was watching him. His gray eyes turned quickly upon the detective, however, when he came from the rear door.

"That's enough for now, Rafferty," he said gruffly, as the laborer turned to take the pail of cement inside the building.

"Are you the boss here?" Carson inquired. He had heard, and had approached him.

"I am, sor," was the reply. "I'm the conthracter—Martin Gaffney."

"How long have you been here?" Carson glanced at his watch. It was half past four. "Were you here in the court about two hours ago?"

"I was." Gaffney nodded quickly. "I'm here near all the time. What about it?"

"A robbery has been committed," Carson told him. "I want to learn whether the crook fled this way. Did you see a man come from that door?"

"A robbery, is it?" Gaffney's narrow eyes took on a searching squint. "Faith, it's amazing, sor, what men are afther doing these days. That door is not used much, sor, save to bring out rubbish and the like. I wouldn't have noticed him, maybe, but for that."

"You did see a man, then?"

"I did, sor." Gaffney nodded. "He's the only one I've seen, bar you, sor."

"What time was it?"

"I'd say near three o'clock. He came out in a hurry, and went out to the side street. That's the last I saw of him."

"Can you describe him?"

"After a fashion, though I didn't notice him much," said Gaffney. "He was a medium-built man, with brown whiskers, I'm thinking, and he was lugging a small leather bag."

"I see." Carson frowned thoughtfully. "How was he clad?"

"He wore a dark overcoat and a stiff black hat, as I remember, though I'll not be dead sure," Gaffney informed him. "I didn't take much notice of him."

"Your description of him will help," said Carson. "I'm trying to trace him. Did you happen to see which way he went after reaching the side street?"

"He turned east, sor," said Gaffney promptly. "I'm sure of that."

"He's the man, all right," replied Carson. "Many thanks, Mr. Gaffney. I'll look farther."

He did not look back to see whether Gaffney had any further interest in him, as he hurried out of the narrow court. He glanced at the brick wall of an adjoining building and saw that the ground floor was occupied by an express company, also that a man at a desk near one of the windows was busily writing. Carson entered a moment later and beckoned him away from the window.

"I want to learn whether you saw a man leave the opposite building about three o'clock," he explained. "Were you at work here at that time?"

"I've been here since dinner," was the reply. "All I've seen was two men with a covered wagon. They backed it in to get some cement."

"About three o'clock?" Carson inquired.

"Just about that," said the other. "They backed up to the door and put several bags of cement into the wagon."

"Did you see any name on it?"

"I did not. One of the men was quite tall, with a square-cut black beard. I didn't notice the other particularly. It must have been all right, I think, for the boss of the job, named Gaffney, was directing them. They are the only men I've seen, except a half dozen laborers employed there."

"Thanks!" said Carson. "Pardon me for detaining you."

It was half past eight that evening when Mr. Walter Carson approached the door of a modest wooden house in Brooklyn. Quietly he mounted the steps and rang the bell. He did not come from the street. He stole from behind the house and through a narrow side yard, where the strip of lawn and a clump of shrubbery were wet with the mist of the dismal night. The front rooms of the house were in darkness.

Carson's summons was not immediately answered. About three minutes passed before the door was opened, when the tall figure and dark face of Detective Logan were discernible in the dimly lighted hall.

"Good evening, Logan," said Carson affably. "Got a few minutes for me? I was over this way, and thought I'd drop around here. I hardly expected to find you, however, seeing your home was dark. I want to talk with you about that bond robbery."

"What about it?" Logan eyed him sharply. "Come in, Carson. I was half asleep over an evening paper. My wife's gone to the movies."

"I'll not remain long," Carson told him, as he followed him to a sitting room and took a chair. "No, I'll not smoke, Logan, thank you." The latter tendered a box of cigars. "Lieutenant Donlin telephoned me that you reported all of the facts of the case at headquarters."

"Surely." Logan nodded, lighting a cigar. "There is nothing to the case now except to get the crook."

"I agree with you." Carson drew up a little in his chair. "But getting the crook, Logan, does not consist of getting Arthur Boyd," he pointedly added.

"What do you mean?" Logan lurched forward, brows knitting, and gazed more sharply at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say, Jim," Carson told him familiarly. "Boyd is not the crook."

"You be hanged!" growled Logan. He laughed derisively, but his dark face was losing its color. "Sure, he's the crook. Why do you think he isn't?"

"Because of several discoveries I made after you and Lieutenant Donlin left me," Carson informed him. "I think you know the man I suspect, as you are employed in that building, and you may be able to help me find him to-night, as well as his confederates. There were three or four, at least, in the job."

"What are you handing me?" Logan demanded more seriously. "Come across. I don't get you. What discoveries did you make?"

"Enough to convince me, Jim, that Boyd was knocked out and robbed immediately after Morton lost sight of him."

"Rats! That's absurd," said Logan snappily. "I already told you why that could not have been done."

"I know, nevertheless, that it was done." Carson's voice hardened slightly. "Not only that it was done, but also how it was done."

"You'll have to show me."

"To begin with, then, I questioned Morton more closely," Carson said deliberately. "Morton was stopped in the side corridor by a man who dropped a box of cigars. It opened, and the cigars were scattered over the floor. That was a suspicious circumstance. A box of cigars is ordinarily carried in a wrapper. The cover is secured, moreover, in either case, and would not open easily. I got one of the cigars from Morton, intending to try to trace the man by it, but I have found it isn't necessary. Morton was detained in that way only to prevent him from seeing what was done in the rear corridor."

"What do you think was done there?" Logan demanded, staring fixedly at the detective's face.

"Two or more men were waiting for Boyd," Carson proceeded. "Not in the corridor, but in that vacant office. They were clad like the laborers at work in the basement. They had a pail partly filled with cement, a saw horse or two, and a short plank. They knew just when Boyd was approaching. The man with the cigars was waiting and watching. He put them wise. The saw horse and plank then were quickly put in the rear corridor, also the pail of cement, between the door of the vacant room and that of Sheldon's office. All this served to partly obstruct the way, and to lead Boyd to immediately believe what he was told."

"What was he told?"

"I don't know just what it was, but that's not material. One of the supposed masons could have told him that repairs were being made in Sheldon's office, that the door was blocked temporarily with a staging, and that he could enter only by going through the vacant room. Naturally, seeing reasonable evidence of such a yarn, Boyd at once stepped into the vacant office."

"You think he did, eh?" Logan spoke with a smile, but it very plainly was forced, and his drawn face was almost hueless.

"I know that he did," Carson asserted. "The moment he entered, too, he was knocked out by a man waiting behind the door. The articles mentioned were quickly returned to the vacant office, and the door closed and locked."

"Very clever, I'm sure, if that is right," Logan said sneeringly. "But I don't believe it."

"I know it is right, or very near it," Carson insisted.

"How did you find it out?"

"I found two rings of dust left by the pail, which had stood in some dry cement before it was used for the knavish job," Carson told him. "They were left by the edge of the chimes around the bottom of the pail. They showed me the way. They pointed to laborers downstairs where I knew that work was being done. I went down and questioned Gaffney, the boss, who tried to make me believe that he had seen Boyd leaving the building. I knew he was lying, of course, after what I had discovered, which convinced me that he was one of the crooks."

"It did, eh? Logan's lips took an ugly downward slant.

"Surely! The crooks had overlooked the faint rings of dust, also slight scratches caused by the legs of the saw horses, when hurriedly moved. They overlooked them in their haste to finish the job and get away with Boyd."

"Get away with him?"

"Exactly. He was taken away in a covered wagon by the rascals. They backed it in near the rear door, and put the body into it undetected by concealing it with empty cement bags, all

of which could have been done in thirty seconds. One was a tall man, with a square-cut black beard. That, Logan, is how the job was done."

Detective Logan did not reply for a moment. He stared with lowering gaze at his companion's face, as if undecided what to say.

"I guess that won't stand washing," he said at length. "How could Gaffney have learned anything about the bonds? How could——"

"I'll tell you how," Carson interrupted. "Not all the men who wear a badge, Logan, are on the level. You left spots of gray on the rug when you stood accusing Sheldon's stenographer, and there were flecks of dry cement on the edges of your shoe soles. You were the man with the square-cut black beard. You helped put Boyd in the wagon. I did not suspect you, however, until I fathomed those rings of dust, and learned——"

"You don't mean——"

"I mean just what I say!" Carson cut in with sudden severity. "You, Logan, were the big finger in this job. You heard Sheldon telephone about the bonds. You rang Gaffney and others into the crime. You put the typewritten sheets into Boyd's vest pocket. I don't know where he is now, but you yourself will tell me very soon."

"I'll see you hanged first," Logan cried.

"You must have felt very sure you were not suspected, since you would let Gaffney and the others come here tonight with the bonds, which you did not dare to retain in your possession. Oh, I know they are here! Keep your seat, Logan, for you cannot escape. Donlin and a dozen policemen are waiting outside. We have been watching here since dark, expecting a move of some kind. You and your confederates are cornered—— Oh, they are bound to try it, eh? Well, well, that will end it."

Loud cries, a pistol shot, and then a triumphant shout from Lieutenant Donlin, these from outside the house had caused Carson's sudden digression. He arose and took handcuffs from his pocket.

Detective Logan, ghastly white, had leaped up from his chair—but an automatic in Carson's hand had him covered, and he did not so much as utter one word of protest.

It was eleven o'clock when Mr. Walter Carson arrived home; he was given a telephone number that he had been requested to call up. He smiled, as if deeply pleased, and proceeded to do so—when the following, mingled with sobs of gratitude and delight, came over the wire:

"This is Clara Ward talking. I want to thank you, Mr. Carson—oh, so much! I—I just can't wait till I see you. You have made us happy—oh, so happy! I can never repay you for what you have done. Arthur is here with me. He has told me all. I'm glad Mr. Sheldon has the bonds, and that all the real robbers are in prison."

GIRLS HELD AS BANK ROBBERS

ACCUSED of having participated, as members of the Will-o'-the-Wisp gang in numerous robberies occurring recently in California, Mrs. Viola Jeffries and Mary Thornton were arrested in Los Angeles. Raymond Osborne, a confederate, gave the information which led to their being taken into custody.

Osborne alleges that not only did the young women aid in the theft of fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewelry from a store in San Francisco, and the looting of a drug store in San Diego, but they also took part in the robbery of at least two banks.

The Disappearance of Kimball Webb

by Rowland Wright

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

EARLY on the morning of the day set for his wedding to the beautiful Elsie Powell, Kimball Webb, a playwright, disappears from a locked room in his home. Wallace Courtney, a rival playwright, is suspected of having abducted him, and this suspicion is strengthened when Courtney is found to have engaged Lulie Lloyd, Webb's stenographer, to work with him on his forthcoming play. Mrs. Webb, a spiritualist, believes that her son has been carried off by supernatural agencies, while Elsie accuses Henrietta Webb, Kimball's sister, of having imprisoned him in order to prevent the wedding. Another who has a motive for removing Webb temporarily is Joseph Allison, who, under the terms of the will made by Elsie's eccentric aunt, will inherit the latter's millions, provided Elsie, the natural legatee, does not marry before she is twenty-four years old. The time limit for fulfilling this condition is drawing near. Both Allison and Fenn Whiting, Webb's best man, want Elsie to marry one of them, and she is urged by her mother and sister, who are financially dependent on her, to marry some one in time to inherit the money.

Coleman Coe, a private detective, takes up the case, but fails to find any secret exit from Webb's room.

Elsie pays fifty thousand dollars ransom vainly to the abductors of Kimball Webb. The girl's health then breaks down, and she goes to Atlantic City, where Whiting tries to force her to marry him immediately. She runs away from him, only to be abducted by one of the kidnapers of Kimball Webb, and taken to a house in New York. From somewhere in the house she hears a shout, in what she believes to be the voice of her fiancé.

CHAPTER XVI.

ODOR OF BANANAS.

THERE was consternation in the Powell household when Miss Loring arrived without Elsie.

"Where is she?" cried Gerty.

"Here, isn't she?" returned the bewildered nurse.

"No, of course not! Why did you think so?"

And then Nurse Loring told how she had received a message from Elsie saying she had been obliged to return to New York suddenly, that she had gone with some friends, and for Miss Loring to follow as soon as she could pack.

"Did she write you a note?" asked Mrs. Powell.

"No; the word was brought by a man."

"What sort of a man?"

"A decent-appearing person, who said he was the chauffeur of Miss Powell's friends with whom she had gone."

"What did he look like?"

"Ordinary looking, like a servant, but respectful and well mannered; and he had a great many gold-filled teeth. Do you know him?"

"No; and I think there's something wrong. Elsie never would have done such a thing. She hasn't any friends down there with their car, that I know of. Has she, mother?"

"No," Mrs. Powell agreed. "There is something wrong." She clasped her hands nervously. "Do send for Mr. Coe, Gerty."

Coley Coe came on the jump and listened to the tale with a grave face.

"I should say there was!" he exclaimed; "something *very* wrong! That girl has been kidnaped, and the villains mean to keep her till after her birth-

day! I've been fearing some such performance, but I thought she was safe with the nurse."

Miss Loring spoke quickly: "Oh, I was so careful of her! I never let her out of my sight for a moment, but if I had known there was any danger of this sort, I should have been doubly careful! Why didn't you tell me?"

"My own suspicions were not definite enough," said Coe. "Nobody blames you, Miss Loring; you could not help it. In the crowd the trick was easily turned. Now, Mrs. Powell, don't cry so; you need fear no harm for your daughter—no bodily harm, I mean. She will likely be treated with the greatest consideration and kindness, but——"

"But I don't understand." Gerty looked doubtful. "Why should any one want to kidnap Elsie?"

"It's a moil, Mrs. Seaman," Coe said, shaking his long thatch out of his eyes. "I'm not yet discouraged, but I'm getting to see that we're up against not only a very clever villain but an utterly unscrupulous one."

"Aren't all villains that?"

"Not entirely. Some draw the line at certain crimes. But this master fiend, for that's what he is——"

"Do you know him?" Gerty asked eagerly.

"No, I don't! I know so much about him—I've so many side lights on him, so much evidence against him, and yet I lack the one connecting link that would give me his identity. I have my suspicions—but, oh, there were some things I wanted to ask Miss Powell!"

"Perhaps I can tell you; she talked over everything with me."

"No; I only wanted her to tell me over again the little things she picked up that first morning at the Webbs. You know the white marks on the floor? Well, they're explained. Miss Webb was in the room that evening, but it was before her brother came home, and she, foolishly enough, tried to conceal the fact, lest she be suspected of having Kimball Webb in hiding!"

"She was suspected."

"Yes, but she isn't now—at least, not by me. That speech, 'If it *should* be!' referred to spooks. And I had her trailed you know; and though she was reported as going on mysterious secret errands, they were—what do you suppose?"

"Oh, what?"

"Trips to a beauty doctor!"

"Poor Henrietta! It's pathetic, but I can't help laughing. And Mrs. Webb, she went on secret errands, too; didn't she?"

"Yes; and hers were to séances with people that she didn't want to acknowledge as her friends! Common people—as mediums usually are—and some cronies that Mrs. Webb only cultivated in the pursuit of her psychic researches! No, there's no reason to suspect that the mother or sister knows where Webb is. Nor do I see any chance of finding his hiding place before the thirtieth. After that, I'm very sure he will be freed."

"But now Elsie's gone, too!"

"Yes; and I've no doubt, taken away by the same people."

A few questions asked of the nurse, gave Coe the information concerning the man with the gold teeth.

"Oho!" he cried; "it is the same gang, then! We *must* get them! Do describe him further, Miss Loring!"

But her detailed description was only such as called up a picture of an average-looking man, large, strong, with dark hair and eyes, healthy color, and with no striking characteristic but the unusual number of gold-filled teeth in the front part of his lower jaw.

"Enough to identify him," said Coe, "but not enough to find him! We could scour the dentists' records, but we'd have to visit thousands and then, may-

be, fail because the work was done in another city! If we only had one more line on him."

"Maybe he's the Binney's man," mused Gerty.

"What! What's that?" said Coe quickly.

"Why, Elsie picked up a paper in Kim's room, and it was one of those little toothpick wrappers—tissue, you know—and it was stamped 'Binney's.'"

"Yes, the big restaurant."

"Yes. Now Kimball Webb never went to Binney's in his life! I know he didn't, and Elsie says she knows he didn't. He isn't that sort of a man."

"Why, Binney's is all right."

"Yes, for the class of people that like it. But Kim is fastidious, and Elsie says she knows of his prejudice against Binney's. Of course she's been out with him so much she knows his tastes."

"And this paper was in Webb's room! When?"

"Elsie found it the day after or a few days after his disappearance. She threw it away."

"That doesn't matter; the fact of its being there is the important thing! You see, the man who got in the room may have dropped it."

"How could any man get in the room? You're crazy!"

"'Deed I'm not! Some man *did* get in that room and carry off Kimball Webb while Webb was unconscious! Now, you put that away in your mind and keep it there, for it's true!"

"How did he get in?"

"Mrs. Seaman, if any one ever asks me that question again, I'm going to run away! I don't know *how* he got in—but he *did* get in, and, if this interests you, I'm going to find out how he got in! But even more than that, I want to find the man! That's the objective point. To find how he got in would be fearfully interesting and would gratify my overweening curiosity—I think overweening is the word for it! Anyhow, it's the biggest order of curiosity I've ever experienced in my career! But *overweeninger* yet is my desire to get the man! It's an obsession with me, a craze! My fingers itch for him, and I feel he's so near—and yet so far! But this little old toothpick paper may be a clew. You know what flimsy little bits they are, how they cling in a pocket and are easily flirted out with a handkerchief or such matter!"

"Wouldn't it be a good deal of a coincidence if your man, a frequenter of Binney's, left the paper, as one might a visiting card?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Mrs. Seaman!" Coe smiled good-naturedly. "The coincidence wouldn't be so extraordinarily strange! They say a man can't enter and leave a room, without making half a dozen, at least, ineffaceable marks of his presence there. Now, the only reason I doubted the entrance of my man, as you call him, was the fact that I hadn't been able to find any trace, not even the slightest, of his visit there. That made me think Webb might have been lured out. Stop! Don't you dare ask me how he got out! We know he did get out—and, as I told you, I'm going to find out how. Well, this little paper changes the whole map of my cogitations. Now, do you know of anybody who does go to Binney's?"

"I do not. My friends don't care for the place."

"Probably not; but I'll bet it's the great little old rendezvous of Friend Gold-teeth and his boss."

"Oh, he isn't the principal, then?"

"Surely not! The man higher up is a big-brained chap, and working for big stakes! Binney's! Ho, ho! Pardon my unholy glee, but I'm 'way up over this thing! And now I'll skip. Look for me when you see me!"

Coe went away and hurried straight to Wallace Courtney's.

He began by saying frankly: "Do you

want to help me to find Kimball Webb, or don't you?"

"I do," returned Courtney; "I'm not a heathen! I'm working on my hay while the sun shines, but I'd do anything in my power to find Webb even if it meant the failure of my masterpiece. You know I think he had a spell of divine afflatus and went away to finish his own play by himself."

"Leaving a bride practically at the altar!"

"Oh, I think Elsie's in the secret. She knows where he is. I shouldn't wonder if they were married before he went; that would make her fortune all right."

"Well what do you think of this? Elsie's kidnaped too, now!"

"That carries out my theory. She's gone to him."

"Oh, you're impossible! Well, tell me this, and I'll scat: Do you know anybody who frequents Binney's, or who goes there occasionally?"

"I should hope not! Why?"

"Oh, don't be so supercilious. Binney's is decent if it *is* popular."

"I know it; I've been there. It's just a big, gay dance hall. No, I don't number any of its regular patrons among my friends. Kimball Webb was not one, if that's what you want to know."

"That isn't what I want to know. Don't any of your crowd go there at times—anybody who was at Webb's bachelor dinner?"

"Why, Coe. I'd tell you if I could. I suppose every chap at that dinner has been inside of Binney's, but I doubt if many of them have been more than once or twice, as a mere matter of curiosity. If that's all you're asking me clear out; I'm busy."

Coe was about to clear out when Lulie Lloyd stopped him.

"I know somebody who goes to Binney's a lot," she said; "he sometimes takes me there."

"Thank you, Miss Lloyd," Coe said politely, "but I mean some one of Mr. Webb's friends."

"So do I," said the girl, her color rising and her expression a little defiant.

"Oh!" Coley Coe began to see things, as in a glass darkly. "Some one who was at Mr. Webb's dinner?"

"Yes." She spoke almost sullenly.

"May I ask his name?"

"I'll tell you, but I don't want Mr. Courtney to hear."

"I don't want to," the busy playwright returned; and Lulie Lloyd leaned over and whispered a name into the ear of Coleman Coe.

He nodded his head, as one who was not overwhelmingly surprised, and continued in a low tone: "And do you know a man with ever so many gold-filled teeth in his lower jaw?"

"Do I?" she cried. "Why, he's that man's valet!"

"And a friend of yours?"

"He was! He isn't now!"

"Ah! He went back on you?"

"He did all of that—and then some!"

And then Lulie Lloyd looked frightened, looked as if she regretted deeply what she had involuntarily blurted out, and she returned to her typewriter and began madly pounding its keys.

But Coe had learned enough.

He left quickly, and hopping on a street car, he arrived at the house where lived the man whose name Lulie had whispered to him—the man whose valet had the auriferous teeth.

The man he asked for was out, and though not an easy matter, Coe succeeded by dint of threats and bribes to gain admission to his rooms, where, he said, he would await his host's return.

Left alone Coleman Coe proceeded to ransack the desk, which stood carelessly open. He ran rapidly through a sheaf of letters and bills, now and

then shaking his feathery forelock wildly, in mad bursts of satisfaction.

The bills, paid and unpaid, were illuminating, the letters even more so, and Coe grew more and more beaming of face as he proceeded.

He kept a wary eye on the door, and at last, finding an old letter that specially interested him, he read it three times, though this was the quickly mastered gist of it:

I think Simeon Breese will be a *safe* man for you.

The address of the said Simeon followed, and this short bit of information seemed to afford Coley the deepest pleasure. The underscoring of the word safe particularly entertained him, and he laughed as at a great joke.

"I knew it!" he cried, though silently; "I knew it!"

Then, replacing such papers as he had visibly disarranged, Coe sauntered forth and left the house.

"Tell him I couldn't wait any longer," he said casually to the doorman and went his way, which took him to the establishment of Simeon Breese, safe maker.

"You make safes?" was Coe's totally unnecessary query.

"Yes, sir," admitted Breese. "What can I do for you?"

"I don't exactly want a safe," Coe said, with what was meant to be an ingratiating wink. "I—that is"—he looked embarrassed—"I want a sort of a—well, a very confidential matter."

"I don't understand, sir." There was no invitation to proceed, but Coe went on. "I want a secret entrance built."

"Whatever made you come to me on such an errand, then? My business is building safes, not building means to rob them."

"Nonsense; that's not the idea. I merely want a private passage from one room to another in my house."

"You're 'way off, sir. You've come to the wrong place, entirely. Good morning, sir."

"But stay—wait a minute. I'm recommended here by——" And Coe whispered in the ear of Breese the same name Lulie Lloyd had whispered to him.

Breese looked utterly blank.

"Don't know your friend, sir; never heard of him. Good morning!"

This last dismissal was accompanied by a glance that meant a very definite invitation to leave, and, as there seemed small use in staying, Coe left. But he was disappointed. He had hoped to get a line on the secret entrance which he knew gave into Kimball Webb's room.

One forlorn hope came into his breast. He would try to get hold of the valet, the gold-toothed valet, who had played fast and loose with Lulie Lloyd. This showed him to be a man of not unimpeachable morals, and he might be useful.

He went boldly back to the house he had so recently left, and inquired if his friend had yet returned.

"No, sir," the imperturbable doorman informed him.

"Then is his man in—his valet?"

"Bass? That he ain't. He's left."

"He has? How long ago?"

"Oh, a matter of a coupla months or more now."

Ah! Not a great discrepancy between that and the date of Kimball Webb's disappearance!

"Funny-looking man, Bass," Coe said casually.

"All right, I should say."

"Queer teeth, at least."

"Yes," the other admitted. "I shouldn't care to carry round such an El Dorado, but Bass is rather proud of it."

"Well, we're all more or less proud of something. You don't know where Bass hangs out now?"

"I don't."

Coe sighed and turned away.

He had so little to work on. That ridiculous toothpick paper—Webb might easily have dropped that himself. Many a man would go to Binney's without the knowledge of his sweetheart and think it no crime.

The safe builder seemed to dwindle to even greater insignificance. For if he hadn't built the secret entrance which *had* to be in existence, who had, and how was Coe to find him?

There was only one answer to it all. Coleman Coe was up against the necessity, the actual bare necessity of finding that entrance for himself. No matter whether he could do it, or not, it had to be done, and he had to do it.

As he had previously argued, the finding of the secret didn't prove the perpetrator of it, nor did it produce Kimball Webb, but those things might result from the discovery of how he was taken away, and, anyway, there was no other way to find out.

The master mind of the villain who took him was so clever, so diabolically canny, that there was nothing to work on or to work with.

And now Elsie was gone, there was added necessity for hasty action and result.

The motive, Coe had long ago decided, was the fortune. Just how that affected the case he wasn't sure, but he felt an unshakable conviction that had it not been for the freak will left by Miss Elizabeth Powell there would have been no disappearance of either the bridegroom or the bride.

This naturally turned his mind to Joe Allison. But he had long ago ceased to suspect Joe. He had at first, but now he knew the chap, and it was impossible to connect him with such a crime as abduction to gain a fortune. Allison was money-mad, that Coe admitted, but, well, he wouldn't put it on Joe till he had to.

He decided he'd go to the room of Kimball Webb and once again make those hopeless rounds of walls, ceiling, and floor; doors and windows; chimney and bathroom window, which were all the points to be examined.

He asked Miss Webb a few preliminary questions—how long had they lived in the house, and such things.

This led nowhere. How could it possibly help to know they had lived there six years; to know where they had lived in Boston; to know when Kimball first met Elsie Powell; to learn why the Webbs didn't fully approve of the match? All these things were as chaff, which didn't even show which way the wind blew.

And Miss Webb's attitude had greatly changed since the last time he talked with her. She had now begun to despair of ever seeing her brother again.

With a womanly injustice she was inclined to blame Elsie for the whole trouble, but when Coe told her that Elsie, too, was mysteriously missing, she saw the thing as he did—that a gang or at least a pair of able and ingenious villains was at work.

Coe was tempted to tell her of the valet, Bass, and his master, but concluded to wait a little longer.

He asked for a talk with the two menservants, who had broken into Kimball's room that morning, and, this being willingly granted, he asked them again of any point or hint they might remember that hadn't yet been brought.

"No, sir," said Hollis thoughtfully; "I've had all sorts of notions, but they've all been wrong, and sometimes I'm ready to agree with Mrs. Webb herself that it's the spirits as done it."

"Rubbish!" Coe observed; and Hollis really agreed, though he had no wiser suggestion to make.

"How long have you been here?" Coe asked idly.

"Two years, sir."

"And have you seen or heard anything mysterious?"

"No; not myself, sir. But I've heard the other servants' stories."

"So have I." Coe groaned wearily. "I've heard the tales of moans and groans that grew weirder each time—the tales did, I mean. But I've heard nothing definite. Have you, Oscar?"

"No, sir," said the chauffeur, a taciturn chap. "Nor I've never seen anything myself, nor heard anything. But, Mr. Coe, everybody laughs at this, so I haven't harped on it. You know I did smell bananas as I opened that door that morning, and I'd swear to that on a stack of Bibles!"

"Bananas!"

"Yes, sir. And Mr. Kimball Webb didn't care for bananas. I mean he wouldn't think of having them in his bedroom to eat! He never did things like that. Now, doesn't that smell mean something?"

"It's queer, but I can't see any indicative evidence in it."

"No, sir; I s'pose not. But I'd like to know what made it. Maybe ghosts eat bananas."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET ENTRANCE.

AGAIN Coe went over the room.

"I'm sick and tired of looking for a mousehole when the mousehole isn't here!" he cried. "Not a baby mouse could get in or out of this box, let alone a swashbuckler villain, carrying a drugged, unconscious man on his back!"

For that was the way Coe visualized it. He felt sure the abductor had entered by his confounded secret entrance, had drugged or chloroformed the sleeping Webb, and had returned the way he came, carrying his prey.

For how else could it have been done? And, anyway, details didn't matter. Even if Webb had been cajoled—say by a tale of Elsie in immediate danger, or her sudden illness—even so, the secret entrance must have afforded the way in.

So the secret entrance had to be found, and Coe vowed he wouldn't leave the room until he left through that entrance itself!

Patiently he went over the walls again, the floor, the ceiling, noting the unmarred decorations that precluded an opening of any sort.

But this he soon finished and set himself to work with his brain, thinking up some other type of entrance than any he had yet thought of.

"Suppose the whole side wall swings out," he thought. "Suppose the wall between this house and the next swings like a door—no, that's too wide—suppose it swings on a pivot, a central pivot. Oh, shucks, it couldn't! Well, suppose the whole hall door came out in one piece, frame and all. Suppose the frame is hinged on like a door, then the bolted door wouldn't matter."

But this ingenious plan likewise failed to work, because the door wasn't built that way. It was just an ordinary, regular made and regular hung door.

The windows, too, failed to prove themselves freak windows of any sort, but insisted on remaining the regulation, prosaic windows of commerce.

The chimney was the only outlet left.

Coe had peered up this so many times, poked up it with so many rods and poles, invented and discarded so many clever schemes of how it might work that he felt no hope of further light from this source.

He glared at the great fireplace with an air of righteous indignation. Why, oh, why couldn't it obligingly turn out to be some sort of a mechanism that would solve his puzzle.

He scrutinized every inch of it.

All he got for his trouble was the conviction that certain parts of it had been recently touched up with gilding, where the gilt iron filigree work decorated the edges of the wide opening.

Moreover, the newer gilding was of a slightly different shade and luster from the old. Of course, all this meant that in their housekeeping zeal the Webbs or their servants had touched up some points of the oak-leaf design that needed such renovation. They were here and there among the leaves and acorns that surrounded the opening of the fireplace.

Grasping at any straw Coe went downstairs and made inquiry, learning that no such gilding had been done.

Coe went back and sat looking at the oak leaves.

It seemed more conspicuous now; indeed, he wondered how he could have missed seeing it sooner. Then he realized it was not really conspicuous; it had doubtless been done last housecleaing time. But it was too bright for that theory. No, sir; that gilt had been applied to those scratched or marred leaves lately, and it had been done carefully and well; done by somebody who knew how—not a professional decorator, necessarily, but some one who knew about that sort of thing.

Why, he used to do it himself when he lived at home, and he remembered even yet the way the gold paint got all over his fingers and the way it smelled of—— Great Scott! of bananas!

It did! Every metal paint he had ever used, gilt, bronze, copper, all smelled of bananas.

Had Oscar's reference to a banana odor proved valuable after all? And what could it mean? Why, the answer flashed across his eager brain, it meant that the entrance, the secret entrance, was somehow connected with that fireplace; that the kidnaper had scratched the gilt leaves so badly when making his exit, that he had, to escape detection, to retouch the marred places!

To work uninterruptedly Coe went and closed the room door and locked it. Then he sat down on the floor in front of the fireplace and pondered.

Not the chimney. No. He had long ago discarded that as a course of exit. But the fireplace, somehow.

He peered and scrutinized; he fingered and pinched; he reasoned and cogitated; and at last his patient effort was rewarded by seeing the tiniest bit of rust or rubbed enamel that looked as if it *might* mean a hidden spring.

And it did! Careful manipulation, gentle urging, without forcing, made the fireplace give up its secret at last. The whole grate with its back piece, all, swung round on a pivot into the house next door, and the fireplace that belonged in there swung into Coleman Coe's astonished ken! The back of the fireplace was a mere gate hung on a pivot, instead of on side hinges, and it swung as easily as if recently oiled, which it doubtless had been.

Half dazed, Coe went through the opening—a wide enough one, as the grates were exceedingly shallow, though very broad.

He found himself in a pleasant bedroom, almost a duplicate of Webb's own as to size, shape, and arrangement. The secret entrance was found at last!

Eagerly Coe examined every part of it. The grates in the two rooms were alike, the Webb one being much cleaner and brighter, however, than the other.

Coe's mind flew back to the story of the servant who smelled a newly kindled fire without reason therefor.

It was, of course, because some hand had turned the revolving grates around when there was or had been a fire in one side and not in the other.

"Slick!" mused Coe admiringly. "Very slick!"

And then he remembered the *poltergeist!* What easier than to enter noiselessly, pull the bedclothes off the drowsy sleeper, and with a toss of the sheets over the victim's face, and escape again before discovery could be made?

And this was the way Kimball Webb had been abducted. The kidnaper had

come through the opening, had chloroformed Webb, and had carried him back with him. The opening was wide enough for that, or would be if the victim were, say, dragged through after the abductor.

Oh, it was possible. Possible? Why, it was what had been done! The mystery of the disappearance was explained as to means. And the ghost, too, that had been meant to frighten Coley Coe and had only roused his hilarity. That, too, had been prepared and exhibited by the same clever "artful dodger" responsible for all the rest.

Yes, the discovery explained everything. The rogue, having so marred the gilt leaves that attention must necessarily be drawn to them, had crept back and touched them up with gold paint, that smelled of bananas! Thus overreaching his own cleverness! Good old Oscar, to remember to mention the banana odor!

Hesitatingly Coe went through to the other house. He looked about the room. Unused, evidently. Dust on furniture, windows closed, dry atmosphere, and blinds drawn. He switched on a light that had not been cut off.

Then he remembered the people were away and the house was closed. Well, one of them could have returned from his summer resort to carry out his full purpose, and return again. Who were the people?

Oh, yes; the Marsden St. Johns. Coe didn't know one iota about them, but he proposed to find out.

He tried to learn the character of its inhabitant from the room itself. But it seemed to him the abode of a lady. There were no clothes in the wardrobe; but a stray hairpin or two, and a scantily furnished workbasket were indicative of a departed feminine incumbent.

Still this didn't make it probable that a lady had carried Webb off. Her room, in her absence, might well be used by another.

Coe returned to Webb's room, closed the fireplace carefully, unlocked the door and went downstairs.

He went to Miss Webb and asked about the people next door.

"A delightful family," she said, "but very quiet. They are away much of the time. They leave very early for their summer place, and close the house the first of April. Then they return about October. But before the holidays they go South, and after the holidays to Califronia or somewhere else, so that, as a matter of fact, they're almost never at home—if you can even call it their home."

"Who occupies the front room on the third floor?"

"I think Miss Marsden, the old spinster aunt."

Coe nodded. He felt sure the kidnaper was not the one who belonged in the room with the turning fireplace. Of course she knew nothing about it. Really it was mysterious enough still! He told Miss Webb of his discovery. Naturally she wanted to go up at once and see it.

Calling Mrs. Webb they all three went up and Coe showed his treasure-trove.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs. Webb. "Why, it's big enough to crawl through!"

"To go through without crawling," returned Coe, as, squatting, he fairly shuffled through on his feet.

"And you think that's the way Kim went out?" asked Henrietta, as Coe returned.

"I know it's the way, but I think he was taken out unconscious."

"Of course he was!" cried Mrs. Webb. "He never would go through into a strange house of his own accord."

"Well, where is he?" asked Henrietta, as if, Coe having done so much, must now produce the missing man.

"I don't know. But, Miss Webb, are you sure the Marsden St. Johns had nothing to do with the kidnaping?"

"Of course they didn't! They were away, and, aside from that, the thing is preposterous! Why, we scarcely know them, and, moreover, they're the quietest, most reserved people! That's why we like them.

"Steal Kimball! They'd be more likely to protect him! But I tell you they were not at home then.

"Let me go through," and Miss Webb looked at the open way.

"Certainly, the people are not home. Come along," Coe agreed.

"Why, Henrietta," cried her mother, "I don't think you ought to."

But curiosity triumphed, and soon all three stood in the room in the next-door house.

"What awful housekeeping!" Mrs. Webb cried, and her daughter's expression of distaste spoke volumes.

Coley Coe stood smiling to himself at the way the aristocratic ladies descended to the vulgar depth of prying. They peered into cupboards and bureau drawers until he was positively shocked.

But it brought about a strange result.

"Why, here's the diamond pendant!" exclaimed Henrietta.

Sure enough, in a small drawer in the dresser was the very jewel case Mrs. Webb had last seen in her son's hands the night before his mysterious disappearance.

"Impossible!" Coe cried.

But it was, beyond all shadow of a doubt. The four magnificent stones, hung one below another, of perfectly graduated sizes, sparkled and scintillated as Henrietta let it dangle from her finger.

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Webb, utterly bewildered.

"Who could!" exclaimed Coe. "I'm all at sea! Tell me more about these St. Johns. What sort of people can they be?"

"Oh, they aren't thieves; they can't be!" Miss Webb stared, wide eyed, at the gems. "And yet, how else explain all this? Tell me, Mr. Coe, why did they take Kimball away?"

"It looks to me as if whoever took him, did it to get the diamonds, at least partly for that."

"But the St. Johns are wealthy; they could buy these stones and never miss the money."

"Well, let's look further. Suppose somebody utilized this empty house of the St. Johns' to——"

"Oh, they don't own the house," Mrs. Webb interrupted; "they rent it."

"Millionaires, and rent a house!"

"Yes, there in the city so little, you know. And it's a most desirable house. Fenn Whiting owns it."

"What?" Coley Coe was stunned.

"Yes, it belongs to Mr. Whiting. It was left to him with several other houses by an uncle who died years ago."

"Oh! Whoopee! Wow! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Webb, but I *must* be allowed to yell! Fenn Whiting owns this house. My heavens and earth!"

"What is the matter? Are you crazy, Mr. Coe? Why does it so please you to learn that?"

"Oh, because—because—excuse me, ladies, I must run away; I've most important business. I'll see you again later—this evening, say—and then I'll tell you, oh, a whole heap of things!"

"Wait a minute." He started back through the fireplace. "Help us through please!"

"I beg pardon. Miss Webb. I guess I *am* crazy! Come, give me your hand."

The trip was safely made by all three, and then Coe carefully closed the fireplace and noted that it showed no crack or crevice where the pivot turned.

"Please don't tell about this just at present," he requested. "It's all most important! We shall not only recover Mr. Webb very soon now, but bring his abductor to justice and punishment, and also find Miss Powell, and oh, maybe it will all be in time for the wedding."

"What shall I do with this?" Miss Webb held out the jewel box helplessly.

"Oh, put it—haven't you a safe?"

"No."

"Well, lock it up in your room somewhere. Nobody knows you have it, so there's no danger of theft. Hide it."

With a brief word of good-by Coe ran downstairs and out of doors.

First of all, he went to Fenn Whiting's home, only to be told that that gentleman was not at home. He was expected any minute, however, and Coe waited. This time he did not go up to Whiting's rooms, but waited down in the lobby.

But his wait was in vain. He grew restless and began to cast about in his mind how to find the man he sought. He telephoned various clubs and homes of friends, and some business houses, but not a word of information could he get concerning Mr. Whiting.

At last, in hopeless despair, he went away, after leaving word to telephone him as soon as Mr. Whiting came home.

"I do have the hardest stunts to do," poor Coley Coe told himself.

"Now I've found my criminal and I can't lay my hands on him. And something tells me I may never lay my eyes on him!"

He went to the Powells, for he must tell them that he had a hope, at least, of recovering Elsie before long. Yet had he? However, he told the Powells the whole story of what he had found in the way of a secret entrance.

"I should think it was secret!" Gerty exclaimed. "I don't see how you were clever enough to find it!"

"I was stupid not to find it sooner," Coe replied.

Then he told his further discoveries. Allison was present and with the two Powell ladies made a most interested audience.

Mrs. Powell was in a nervous and brokendown state, but she rallied perceptibly at Coe's hints of good news.

"You see," he told them, "Mrs. Seaman's tip about the toothpick paper put me on a scent. I went to Courtney's to see if I could trace anything, and by sheer luck, Miss Lloyd, bless her! told me that Fenn Whiting frequently, or, at least, occasionally, took her there."

"Why, I thought Fenn looked higher than that!" Gerty sniffed.

"Some men look high and low by turns," commented Joe.

"Well, anyhow," Coley went on, "I took her tip for what it was worth. Then she also informed me that Whiting's valet, named Bass, possessed just such gold-filled teeth as Miss Elsie described, and as the nurse mentioned in connection with the man who brought her that fake message."

"Do explain clearly," begged Mrs. Powell, "I'm getting all mixed up!"

"This is how I dope it out," Coley said slowly. "Whiting is the master villain. He has all the earmarks of a depraved, criminal type."

"Why, I never thought so," Gerty said.

"I saw it," said Allison. "His jaw and the shape of his head gave it away."

"Yes, and his ears. Those points at the top—and his steely gray eyes. That color marks the sly, even murderous type."

"Oh, I never dreamed Fenn was so bad!" Gerty almost cried.

"Well, he is," Coe declared. "Now, after Lulie Lloyd's tip, I went to Whiting's rooms, and I found a letter from somebody recommending a safe man for him to employ.

"At first I thought this meant a reliable man, but it turned out it meant a man who built safes! To make a long story short, Whiting engaged that man to build that fireplace door some time when his tenants were away, and, of course, when the Webbs were away also. He owned the house; he could do it; and too, he doubtless paid the fellow well to do it and keep quiet about

it, for the safe builder denied all knowledge of Whiting. Then I found that the diamonds were hidden in that house."

"Elsie's diamonds!" Gerty gasped.

"Yes, put there by Whiting, of course, after he stole them from Webb that night. A perfect hiding place!"

"Where is Kimball?"

"That's the point of the whole thing. As I reconstruct it all, Whiting sneaked into the room that night soon after Webb went to bed, chloroformed him, and then dragged or carried or shoved him through into the next house. He must have taken his clothes along and put them on the unconscious man. You see, he had that brute of a man with the gold teeth, his own man, to help him."

"How do you know?" Allison's eyes gleamed with interest.

"I don't know, but it must have been that way. Then he and his precious helper managed somehow to get Webb away and carried him off, doubtless in Whiting's own car, to some place of concealment, where he still is."

"And stole the diamonds, too!"

"Yes; and has since stolen Elsie, too—and, worst of all, has now disappeared himself!"

"Whiting stolen?" Allison's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"No; he is the thief, not a victim. He has those two people hidden and he has now hidden himself."

"Why? What for?" Mrs. Powell was unable to comprehend.

"This, I think. He wanted to marry Elsie—he really loves her—but even more he loved the fortune she would get. He planned to remove Webb and step into his shoes. The rest is all consequent on that determination. He took the diamonds because they were there in Webb's room, and Whiting's predatory instinct couldn't resist the temptation. He hid Webb securely—time has proved how very securely—and then he tried every way to win Elsie."

"But he always said he didn't want her fortune," Gerty interrupted. "He said he'd just as soon marry her the day after her birthday as the day before."

"He said that, because he knew it was a safe bet if the girl would marry him at all, she'd secure the fortune, too. If she had agreed to marry him the day after her birthday he would have changed his schemes a bit. So, as he couldn't get Elsie to marry him—I happen to know how hard he tried—he determined she shouldn't marry at all, and kidnaped her. I'm sure he has her somewhere where he can use every influence still, to make her consent."

"And was he at the bottom of the ransom scheme?" asked Joe.

"Sure he was. His gold-toothed tool trapped Elsie, and they secured the fifty thousand dollars without a bit of trouble. He never meant to return Webb or, if he did, he changed his mind when he found how easily he could get cash from Elsie. Oh, you've no idea of the depths of this man's baseness!"

"And where is he now?" Allison half rose, as if he couldn't longer keep himself from meting out punishment to this prince of malefactors.

"That's it"—Coe's bright face clouded—"I've not the slightest idea! Nor do I see a glimmer of a light toward finding out. He has hidden Webb and hidden Elsie so thoroughly, he can, of course, conceal himself with equal surety. I don't know where to look."

"But let's look all the same!" cried Allison, boyish in his haste.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE TERMS OF THE WILL.

IT was the twenty-ninth of June.

Elsie Powell had been nearly a week in confinement, under the care and at the mercy of the woman she called

Mrs. Pike, but who was in reality the wife of Bass, the valet and general factotum of Fenn Whiting.

When Elsie had asked his name he had said "Pike" on the spur of the moment, and Pike he had remained to her.

Elsie was not at all uncomfortably housed. She had comforts, if not luxuries. She was allowed to go in the several rooms of the basement of the house, which were fitted up with more elaborate appointments than most basement floors are. Mrs. Pike, as Elsie knew her, was kind enough to the girl, except when she took it upon herself to advise her. This Elsie invariably resented, and there was war. For Elsie had a temper of her own, and when it was roused it was by no means inconsiderable.

There was a door at the foot of the basement stairs. This was always locked. From the time when Elsie had heard that shout the first night of her arrival, that door had never again been opened. Elsie was positive that it had been Kimball's voice, but the two Pikes denied it, and she thought she might be mistaken.

Every afternoon at four o'clock Fenn Whiting came to talk with Elsie and urge her to marry him. But now, knowing that it was he who had brought her where she was, she vowed she would stay there till she died rather than marry him! So angry did she become at mere mention of it, that she flew into passionate rage and looked so wondrously beautiful with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes that Whiting was more infatuated than ever.

The days went by somehow. By turns, Elsie stormed, sulked, wept, coaxed and pleaded with her keeper, the imperturbable Mrs. Pike, but all to no purpose. The woman was adamant. She had been inclined to listen to Elsie's suggestion of higher pay than they had been promised, but her husband had forbidden her any such ideas. The days went by, and Elsie wondered what would finally become of her.

And so came the twenty-ninth, the day before her birthday. Elsie resolved to make a final desperate effort with Mrs. Pike. She did, and she had the satisfaction of seeing that the woman was interested, at least.

"If you'll let me out," Elsie begged her, "I'll see to it that you shall never be blamed or punished in any way for what you have done; I'll give you ten thousand dollars, and I'll find you a pleasant home somewhere in the country—which I know you want."

It was the mention of a home in the country that touched the woman most deeply, and for a moment she wavered. But even as she began to speak, Fenn Whiting arrived and the conversation was stopped.

"Now, Elsie," Whiting said, "here's your last chance to be sensible. I'm nearly at the end of my rope, but so are you. If you're not married by tomorrow—that's your birthday—you lose all that money. And I tell you plainly, I swear to you, you shall not leave this house until after your birthday, unless you marry me first. You've no chance at all, you see, for nobody knows where you are; you don't know, yourself! But here you are and here you stay, unless you agree to my wish. Remember your mother and sister, and remember your sister's two little kiddies. Will you doom these innocent children to a life of poverty, when you could so easily make them happy and comfortable for life? And I'm not a bad sort, Elsie. I'll let you have your own way in everything. What I've done, I've done for love of you. Not the money—you know I don't care for that—but my devotion to *you* is unbounded. Come, Elsie, dearest, say yes."

"I say, 'No!'"

"Think of your mother. The loss

of you and the loss of the fortune both, may kill her. Then you would be her murderer!"

"Hush!" Elsie clapped her hands over her ears.

"I won't hush. I want you to see what you're doing. Yes, you may be the death of your poor, invalid mother. You will surely spoil the lives of Gerty and her dear little ones, and what do you gain by it?"

"Did you do away with Kimball Webb?"

"I most certainly did not! I know nothing of him or his fate; but you must see that he left you willingly, deserted you, and on the very eve of your wedding."

"I don't believe it!" But Elsie's tortured soul could bear no more, and she fell in a dead faint.

Whiting was a little scared. He called Mrs. Pike quickly.

"Poor lamb!" she said, gathering the unconscious girl in her arms. In the days together she had learned to love Elsie, and she turned on Whiting. "Go, you! How dare you torment the darling so! Away with you; you shall trouble her no more to-night."

Whiting went away, and Mrs. Pike helped the sick girl to bed.

"There now, dearie, try to rest and forget your troubles," she crooned over her, with real affection.

"I will." Elsie whispered to her," if you'll help me out. Can't you let me get away to-night?"

"Oh, me, I wish I might—but I daren't, I daren't!"

"Tell me this, then: Isn't Mr. Webb in this house?"

"Hush, hush, now; don't say such things!"

"But isn't he?"

"I can't tell you; I daren't."

"I am answered!" cried Elsie triumphantly. "I know he is! Oh, what a refinement of cruelty! Are you a human being, that you countenance such fiendish cruelty? Please, please, dear, good Mrs. Pike, let me get away! You needn't do anything. Just let me steal your key when you're not looking."

"There now, there now, go to sleep, my girl. I can't do a thing for you, and you know it! If I could I'd have done it long ago."

"I believe you would." Elsie sobbed herself into a troubled sleep.

The next day was her birthday.

She awoke early, and lay, with a leaden heart, but with an alert brain, trying to think of some plan of escape. She was sure if she could break her prison doors, she could get help and rescue Kimball Webb, who, she felt certain, was confined in the upper part of the same house.

Desperate, she rose early and looked about. Her tiny bedroom, though clean and airy, was protected by the iron-barred windows so often seen in basements, and the one door was locked at night by Mrs. Pike.

There was no chance, and yet she would not give up. She wrote on a bit of paper, her home address, and beneath it, "Take this paper to the house, and tell them the number of this house, and they will give you ten dollars."

This paper she folded small and secreted in her waist. She had a last, a forlorn hope, and she meant to try it.

She maneuvered very carefully to be about when the milkman came, and with what was almost sleight of hand she did manage to tuck the paper into his big red hand almost under the very nose of Mrs. Pike.

The man gave her a sharp glance and closed his fingers on the paper, going off without a word.

"What you doing up so early?" asked Mrs. Pike.

Elsie said: "I couldn't sleep so I got up." Then she quickly changed the subject and managed to divert the woman by her chatter.

The milkman, not at all averse to

getting an extra ten dollars, concluded to go to the address so strangely given to him, as soon as he had finished his morning rounds. It never occurred to his limited imagination that he could do otherwise than continue his daily routine. So it was nearly noon when he arrived at the Powell home.

The wooden-faced doorman advised the caller to go around to the tradesman's entrance, and the milkman expressed his entire willingness to do so. "But," he said, "these people are going to be mighty glad to see me! I bring them a message from a young girl."

"What!" for the doorman knew the principal facts of the tragedy in one apartment of the big house. "Here, you, go right up. Take that elevator!"

So it happened that the uncouth and unkempt person went up in the shining and luxurious elevator and was eagerly shown by the elevator man to the Powell door.

"I want to see the head of the house," he announced as he stepped inside the hall.

"I'll do," said Coley Coe, on the alert for anything new or strange.

"Well, sir, here's a note."

Coe read the few scribbled words, recognized Elsie's writing, and gave a low, but very triumphant shout.

"Oh, Gerty, Mrs. Powell, Joe, everybody—listen here!"

Coe capered about like a happy child; he grasped Gerty around the shoulder; he grabbed Mrs. Powell's hand; he shook his queer forelock until he looked like a shaggy dog, and then he read out the words on the paper.

"Do I get my ten?" asked the milkman stolidly.

"You do!" shouted Coe. "You get twenty—and here it is!"

Murmuring his astonished thanks, the man disappeared.

"Hold on," Coe yelled; "wait a minute, you! Where's this house? Where'd you get this paper?"

The man told him the number, a high number, on Madison Avenue.

"Good gracious! In a classy section! Whose house is it, my man?"

"It's Mr. James van Winkle's house, but it's closed for the summer; the folks are away."

"Closed!"

"Yes, but there's a coupla caretakers there, and they keep things going. And, between you and me, sir, I think there's something wrong."

"If this young lady's there it's something very wrong."

"She is, sir; and to my way of thinking, she's kept there against her will."

"You bet she is! But she won't be there long! Thank you, my man; here's another five. It's worth it. Now, good morning!"

The milkman left, and Coe made ready to depart also.

"You'd better come with me, Joe," he said; "and I think I'll be on the safe side and take a brace of policemen. I'm looking for trouble. Hold on; I want a word alone with Mrs. Powell —just a minute."

Then Coe was ready, and he and Allison went off.

"I'll let you know as soon as possible, Gerty," Coe called back; and the two hurried on.

It took a little time to gather up two policemen and get over to the Madison Avenue house, but they arrived before two o'clock.

The house was boarded up after the manner of houses vacated for the summer, and repeated pulls at the bell brought no response.

"Nothing doing," opined a policemen. "Guess you people were strung."

"I guess we weren't!" declared Coe. "Break in. I'll take all responsibility."

"Try the basement door," suggested Allison; "that's where the milkman would see the caretakers, you know."

Down they trooped and recommenced their knocking there.

"I'm scared they'll escape at the back," warned Coe. "One of you chaps scoot around there."

By this time, though there was no response to their summons, they heard faint sounds of a commotion inside the house. And at last a girl's shriek rose high, though muffled at once by interception of some sort.

"That's Elsie!" whispered Coe, not so much from recognition of the voice as from an intuition of the facts.

At sound of the shriek the policeman burst in the door, and they rushed in. Nobody was in sight, but they went on to the rear room, and found there Elsie and Fenn Whiting. The two caretakers had managed to hide themselves, but small attention was paid to that.

It was quite evident from the girl's trembling, nerve-wracked condition that Whiting had been frightening her with some terrible threat, and his brutal countenance corroborated this.

"Drop that lady's arm," the brawny bluecoat ordered; and Whiting turned in startled surprise and fury.

"What do you want here?" he bluffed. "This is my house; get out!"

"Not so fast, Whiting," said Coley Coe, as Elsie flew to Joe Allison's protecting arms.

"Arrest him," Coe went on, "on the charge of abduction and theft and housebreaking, and—oh, lots of other things! Anything to say, Whiting?"

"No, except that you'll pay for this. I tell you this is my house, and you've no right here!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" commented Coe. "But how do you make out it's your house?"

"I've rented it—sublet it from the owners."

"Who are away for the summer. Oh, yes, I see! I especially *see!* And, ahem, just when did you take the house over?"

"Long ago; I've had it for months. I tell you, it's mine!"

"Sure it is. I don't dispute you. And you rented it before the sixth of April, didn't you? And you've used it ever since as a——"

"Yes, Coley, he has!" Elsie cried out. "Kimball is upstairs; I know he is! Oh, find him, find him quick!"

The other policeman was now present, and he and Allison ran upstairs by leaps and bounds, leaving Coe and the other to attend to Whiting.

Elsie was quite herself again, hope and gladness having restored her like magic. She was for running after the man, but Coe said: "Wait, Elsie; they'll soon be back. You stay here," for he was all uncertain as to what the men might discover.

On the two rushed, finding no one in the rooms on the first or second floor. On, up to the third floor, and there, from a closed room, they heard faint sounds.

Smashing the light door in, they found Kimball Webb.

Allison had never seen the man before, nor had the policeman, but they knew him from his photographs, and they gasped at his condition. Emaciated, pale, with a hunted look in his big dark eyes, the man seemed half crazed. But at sight of them he revived instantly. "Police!" he cried. "Oh, thank Heaven!" He mumbled unintelligibly, because of a diabolically clever gag which impeded his speech while it allowed him to breathe and to eat.

This was removed quickly, and the restored man cried, imploringly, "Elsie?"

"She's all right," said Allison cheerily.

Webb smiled happily; then, immediately his face darkened, and he said, "Whiting?"

"Safe in custody, sir," the policeman assured him, staring as if he could scarcely believe that the long-lost man was really found.

"Let me at him!" Webb's look of righteous revenge was something so awful that the other two stared in awe.

"Tell me everything, quick," Webb went on, for he was rapidly regaining poise, strength, and activity. "Where is Elsie? Where is Whiting? Oh, men, I've been here an eternity!"

"You have!" cried Joe. "I say, have you been here all the time?"

"Yes, every day, every hour of it! I thought I'd die—I wanted to—but I wanted to live to give Whiting his!"

"And for Elsie's sake," put in Joe, to divert Webb's thoughts from the more dangerous channel.

"Yes; Elsie! Where is she? Can I see her now?"

"I don't see why not," said Allison; and the other man nodded as Joe ran to the stairs and called down over the banister.

At the sound Elsie came flying upstairs, and the men, unable to hold Webb back, followed him as he descended one flight to meet her.

They met in the second-floor hall, and clasped in each other's arms were so silent in their shock of joy that the others went rapidly downstairs and left them to themselves.

"Oh, Kimball, I knew I'd get you back," Elsie kept repeating: "I knew I would!"

"I didn't, dearest; I didn't dare even hope for it. I've been so helpless, gagged always, lest I attract attention from outside, and bound much of the time, lest I break out, somehow."

"And you couldn't manage an escape?"

"Not possible. Bass—that Whiting's man——"

"Mr. Pike?"

"No: Bass is his name. And his wife's here, too. They've looked after me with decency, but they were absolutely unapproachable as to bribery."

"I know it." Elsie smiled ruefully. "Oh, Kim, never mind, now, dearest; I've got you at last! At last! Did they force you to write that note to me?"

"Yes, at the point of a pistol!"

She wept softly in his arms, and he held her close, forgetting all his misery in his present joy.

"How did he get me?" he said presently. "How did Whiting pull it off?"

"Oh, he had a contrivance in the fireplace, by which he could get into your room; and he carried you off, drugged, I suppose."

"Yes; I remember the sweetish smell of chloroform, and that's the last I knew."

"Well, never mind. You can hear all those details some other time."

"After we're married—you *will* marry me, won't you, Elsie, dearest? You—you—haven't married anybody else, have you?"

"No!" she cried, frightened at the grasp on her arm.

But her assurance restored his poise.

"Forgive me, dear; I'm weak from being housed and tortured so long. Come, can we go away from this dreadful place?"

"Yes, we will. And I will marry you, of course. Haven't I waited for you? But—but we can't get the money, Kim; it's too late. To-day's my birthday, and the time is up."

"Never mind, dear heart. I'll make money enough for us. Don't worry. I've finished my play since I've been here—and it's a corker! I had to work on it to keep from losing my mind; I almost did, anyway. But they let me have paper and pencil, and I finished the thing some time ago. Oh, Elsie, it has been the most unutterable hell!"

"Yes, dearest, but I'll make a heaven for you that will cause you to forget it all."

"You shall, my beloved. I've forgotten it already! The sight of your dear face has blotted it all out."

"You're awfully thin, Kim, but otherwise you look just the same."

"Good! I feared I'd but a small remnant of my former beauty. Come on, girl, darling; let's go home. Lord, I don't know a thing that's going on—and I don't much care! I've got you, and some day I shall have a go at Whiting. But I'm too happy now to tackle him. Is he about?"

"He is, indeed! Very much about. Here comes Coley Coe."

"Who's he?"

And then, at Elsie's introduction, the two men shook hands.

"I've hunted for you long enough," said Coe; "I'm right down glad to see you!"

"And I'm glad to see any one who was instrumental in bringing about my rescue!"

"Miss Powell did that," Coe said; "she cleverly corralled a milkman and made him serve her ends!"

"But Coley did lots—oh, lots!" Elsie cried, her eyes sparkling with appreciation. "You'll adore him after you know him better, Kim! I do!"

Webb smiled happily at his lovely fiancée, and said, "I see I must marry you out of hand, to be sure of you! When can we pick up our broken threads?"

"Pretty soon," Elsie promised him. "There's no special hurry for a day or two," she added, "for it's just too late to get the fortune. That must go to Joe."

"Never mind," Webb reiterated. "But I won't wait very long for you, I can tell you that!"

"Want to see Whiting?" Coley Coe asked of Webb.

"I do, indeed! But you'd better hold me!"

"Stay here; I'll have him brought up."

In the parlor of the Madison Avenue mansion the master criminal and his principal victim met.

Whiting was blustering, bragging. Subdued at first by the defeat that had so suddenly overwhelmed him, he later became cocky and insufferable.

"Hello, Webb," he jeered. "You're on top at last, but I led you a dance! And I achieved my purpose, too! You won't marry a great heiress after all! You've lost your chance!"

"Hush!" Webb took a step toward him, though warily watched by the two policemen.

"Let him come; I'm not afraid of him!" blustered Whiting.

"No, you coward," Webb said, "you are not afraid of a man weakened by months of confinement, and suffering from a lamed knee! You are bravery itself! And, furthermore, you are beneath even my scorn! I refuse to tell you what I feel for you. I scorn to speak to you at all. Let the police deal with you and all such as you!"

The repressed wrath, the scathing tones, the loathing evident in Webb's glance made even the depraved Whiting shrivel as if seared with a hot iron. He said nothing, but his cocksure manner fell from him, leaving him limp with futile anger.

"You—you——" he muttered, but could find no words.

"Come, Elsie," said Webb, without a further glance at Whiting, "may we go, officer?"

"Yes, Mr. Webb, and all joy go with you."

Whiting found his voice, and called out: "Small joy to marry a poor girl when you hoped for a fortune!"

Webb's face flushed darkly, and but for Elsie's restraining hand he would have turned on his tormentor.

"And you must hand it to me for cleverness!" Whiting went on. "I had that connection between the houses made four years ago. I meant to get you sooner or later, you stuck-up aristocrat. You won't be quite so proud when you find you've married a penniless bride!"

A chattering laugh broke from the

speaker, and Elsie shuddered. Without doubt the wicked brain had snapped its tension and Whiting was demented! But he wasn't, except momentarily.

"Or," he resumed, "I thought I'd scare you to death with ghosts and things, but I didn't; I waited and I had the best scheme after all. It all worked perfectly; only scratched the gilt so badly—had to regild it—just a little—just a little——" He babbled on like a veritable idiot, and, fearing lest his next phase might be one of violence, the policeman urged Webb and Elsie to go at once.

Coe and Allison went, too, for they all wanted to be at the reunion.

"And," said Coe, as they were seated in a swiftly rolling taxi, "Friend Whiting is 'way off about the fortune, Elsie. For I chance to know the will is worded: married before you are twenty-four years old. Nothing is said about marrying before your birthday. Just before I started I asked your mother what hour you were born, and she said, 'Late in the evening—after ten o'clock!' As it isn't five yet, you've ample time to set your wedding bells ringing!"

"Yes," said Joe Allison, his fine face lighted up with honest joy. "Yes, Elsie, that's so; and I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart! I'll probably feel mighty different later on, but now I'm so keyed up with excitement and noble generosity that for today, at least, I can say I'm glad you've got the money—glad for you, I mean."

Elsie couldn't help smiling at his qualified joy over her prospects, and she was a little excited herself.

"Are you sure, Coley?" she asked. "Then we must be married at once. Will you have me, Kim?"

"For richer for poorer," he murmured. Elsie, laughing, went on making plans. "You're only the bridegroom, anyway," she said, "and you haven't a word to say. Joe, don't cry, dear! I'll give you a goodly slice of that old money. I'll give you a hundred thousand dollars, anyway, and maybe more."

"Lord! Elsie, that's enough! I wouldn't wish any more than that! Now I'm truly happy, all over!" His round young face beamed joyously.

"We're 'most home," went on the happy bride to be. "We'll telephone everybody we want to, and we'll be married. Let me see. Well, we'll be married as soon as I get things ready enough! I shan't trust you out of my sight, Kim; you stay right at our house, and somebody can bring you clothes from home, and all that."

Elsie had her way. She called the Webb ladies over first, and then arranged all sorts of things to make a pretty wedding, and the ceremony took place in ample time to make her the inheritor of her aunt's fortune.

Later Allison received his promised portion. Coe earned the fifty thousand dollars reward, for his efforts were at the bottom of the final discoveries.

Elsie even remembered the elevator girl and all others who had helped her, and the use of the money proved a source of genuine satisfaction to the newly married pair, as well as to the mother and sister of the bride.

Both Joe Allison and Coley Coe insisted on being best man, and were allowed to share that honor.

The wedding was a happy one, for every one put aside all present thought of the base and despicable man who had tried so hard to prevent it. He received his due reward in good time, but Elsie Webb and her husband refused ever to hear his name mentioned.

The beautiful diamond pendant, the gift of the bridegroom, flashed at the bride's fair throat, and there was no discord or jangling of the merry marriage bells.

THE END.

Red Lure

by Stephen Lee

Author of "Robbed by the Dead," etc.

THE district attorney of Sagamore county knitted his brow as he glanced at the card his secretary had brought him. For a moment or two his white, finely tapering and nervously active fingers drummed on the desk. An inscrutable expression crept into his keen, icily composed face. He looked scowlingly at a huge stack of mail; then the steel-blue eyes reverted to the card.

"Mr. Ford Thornton," it read, and in the lower left-hand corner was scribbled in pencil: "Re the Merkle case." For an instant, as his eyes rested on the nondescript scrawl, the district attorney's slight but dynamic figure was tense and rigid, and an acute observer might have judged from his expression that the Merkle case was a delicate subject with District Attorney Gifford Milliken.

"Show him in," he said finally, speaking in his usual quick and incisive tone.

He looked up with a faint trace of curiosity as the caller entered. Milliken had heard of Ford Thornton, but this was the first time the two men had met face to face. There was something about the visitor that, like the handwriting on the card, baffled analysis. He was neither tall nor short, but of medium height; and at first glance his appearance seemed neither prepossessing nor repulsive. He was dressed in tweeds of neutral tints, his face was almost wooden in its lack of positive characteristics, and he crossed the floor with a shuffling, uncertain gait.

The district attorney indicated a chair, at the same time glancing at the accumulation of mail to impress upon his caller that his time was precious.

"Mr. Milliken," began Thornton, speaking in tones as flat and unimpassioned as the man himself, "you are an ambitious man. You have made a brilliant record as a district attorney. You are in hopes of some day occupying the governor's chair. From the State executive's mansion it is only a step to the United States senate, and from there to still higher places. Am I right?"

Milliken smiled frigidly. "For the sake of saving time, I will grant that you are. Will you come to the point, Mr. Thornton?"

The caller sat motionless, arms folded across his chest, and peering fixedly at the district attorney. "You realize, I presume," he went on in matter-of-fact tones, "that your future success depends upon your ability to maintain the record you have made. Up to last Thursday your record had been almost flawless. There had been minor failures, of course, but nothing worth mentioning. On last Thursday, however, a black mark was registered against you. An ambitious politician can't afford to have such things happen to him."

The district attorney scowled. "You refer, I take it, to the acquittal of Jasper Hodge?"

"Exactly. Everybody knows that Hodge murdered Thomas Merkle, and your inability to convince the jury of his guilt is the talk of the town. The case is commonly regarded as a gross miscarriage of justice. Press and pulpit are denouncing you——"

"I am a busy man, Mr. Thornton," interrupted the district attorney tartly. "You don't need to twit me on the Merkle case. I realize that I failed, and I am making no apologies. Nothing can be accomplished by discussing the matter. I am firmly convinced that Hodge killed Merkle, but I couldn't prove it to the satisfaction of the jury, and that was the end of the matter."

"Why the end, Mr. Milliken? Shall a wicked murderer go unpunished? Can you afford to have such a glaring failure registered against you? Why not make a second attempt?"

The district attorney turned and regarded the speaker sharply. "Just what are you driving at?" he demanded. "The case is closed. I can't try Merkle for the same murder a second time."

"I know," said Thornton calmly. "I followed the case closely, and the circumstances, as I understand them, are these: Merkle's housekeeper, upon entering the library one morning about four months ago, found her employer lying dead on the floor. There was a gash in his chest, near the heart, evidently inflicted with a thin-bladed knife. The safe, which was known to have contained a considerable amount of money at the time, had been drilled open, indicating that the murderer's motive was robbery."

"Why go into all this ancient history?" protested Milliken impatiently.

"On the floor of the vestibule," continued Thornton, unruffled, "was found the body of Merkle's son, John. He, too, had been stabbed to death with a knife. Presumably the commotion in the library had awakened him. It is probable he ran down to investigate, encountered the murderer in the hall, and was killed with the same weapon that had pierced his father's chest.

"Along toward noon the following day, the police arrested Jasper Hodge, Merkle's butler, on suspicion of having committed the crime. Hodge was drunk when found in a speak-easy on the river front, and he was plentifully supplied with money; a significant circumstance in view of the fact that Merkle's safe had been looted. He was sweated and third-degreed, but the police were unable to wring any damaging admissions from him. He refused to give an account of his movements on the night of the murder, or to explain where he got the money. Nevertheless, the circumstantial evidence, and especially the discovery that Hodge had been a professional safe-blower before he reformed and took employment as butler, was so strong that the grand jury indicted him for murder in the first degree, and he was promptly placed on trial charged with having murdered the elder Merkle. Am I right, Mr. Milliken?"

"Substantially, but I don't see——"

"Just a moment. The trial had no sooner begun than you discovered that it would be difficult to convict your man. Thomas Merkle had been a big, powerful man, in perfect health, strong as a bull, and noted for his athletic achievements. Hodge, on the other hand, is a frail, dried-up, timid fellow. Merkle had frequently boasted that, despite his advancing years, he could take care of himself in any kind of scrape, and several times he made the boast good. Hodge, on the contrary, is the kind of man that runs whenever there is a sign of a fight. Your difficulty consisted in explaining to the jury how a man like Hodge could have got the better of a seasoned scrapper like Thomas Merkle."

The district attorney, who appeared to be listening against his will, nodded gravely.

"Your difficulty was aggravated," proceeded Thornton, "by the fact that there was no sign of a struggle. The body was found in the doorway between the library and the sitting room, and as far as appearances went, Merkle

had made no resistance whatever. That was the circumstance that lost you the case, Mr. Milliken. The jury simply refused to believe that a husky brute like Merkle stood passive and unresisting while he was being stabbed by a weazened, chicken-hearted fellow like Hodge. Yet yourself and nearly everybody who attended the trial or read about it in the newspapers are morally certain that Hodge committed the murder."

Milliken's lips curved into a thin smile. "Moral certainty and the kind of evidence that convinces a bunch of ivory-domed jurors are two vastly different things. Frankly, though, I don't see why you are wasting your time and mine. What's your interest in the matter?"

For the first time since the interview began, a ghost of a smile flitted across Thornton's face. "Mostly curiosity," he declared, "and perhaps a trace of professional concern in the matter. As you may know, I have had some little success in unraveling crime mysteries."

Milliken nodded. Thornton's name never appeared in the newspapers, and he always worked quietly and without ostentation, accepting only such cases as appealed to him strongly because of some novel feature or some particularly baffling mystery. The district attorney knew that an astute, nimble, and wondrously alert mind was at work behind the man's wooden features.

"There are two things about this case that I am curious about," Thornton went on. "One of them is why a born fighter like Thomas Merkle should give up his life without a struggle. The other is whether there is not some way of trapping the murderer into a confession, despite the fact that the jury has acquitted him."

"Am I to understand that you are offering your services?"

"I never solicited a case before, but this one holds a peculiar interest for me. It is a purely professional—or, if you will permit, scientific—interest, for I am not acquainted with any of the parties involved. With your permission, I would like to look into it a bit."

Milliken drew a hand across his finely chiseled jaw. "You forget that the jury has already spoken. Even if you were to dig up a mountain of new evidence, which isn't likely, the law would not permit us to try Hodge again."

"Not for the murder of Thomas Merkle, but there is nothing to prevent you from trying him for the murder of the son. It seems to be a foregone conclusion that the two murders were committed by one man."

The district attorney pondered again, then chuckled deprecatingly. "It's no use, Thornton. I had already decided it would be nothing but a waste of the tax-payers' money to put Hodge on trial for the murder of John Merkle. The killing of the father was a deliberate and perhaps premeditated crime; that of the son was incidental and probably accidental. If we could not get Hodge on the former, we don't stand a ghost of a chance of getting him on the second crime."

"Just the same, I would like to try," insisted Thornton. "I am offering my services gratis. As you may know, I have a small but sufficient competence. The credit, if I am successful, will go to you. If I fail, no harm will have been done."

"True enough." Milliken leaned back in his chair and regarded the other with a keen, searching gaze. "May I ask whether you are proceeding on the assumption that some one other than Hodge committed the murders?"

"No," said Thornton promptly. "I always try to approach a case with an open mind, but in this instance I am in no doubt as to the identity of the murderer. In fact, I would not be offering my services if I were not firmly convinced of Hodge's guilt."

"H'm. I think I understand. It is the problem presented by the physical inequality of the two men that attracts you. One more question. Have you any clews or any information that is not in the hands of the authorities?"

"Well, I have a—a theory," said Thornton hesitantly. "I should like to go over the ground in the light of that theory. It is so hazy, however, that just at present I do not feel justified in confiding it to you."

"Oh!" Milliken again bent his hard, piercing gaze on Thornton's expressionless face. "In that case, it is, of course, my duty to let you go ahead. Not that you need my permission to do all the investigating you like," he added quickly and with a grin, "but you also have my moral support, and you may call on this office for assistance."

"Thanks. I should like to have free access to the Merkle house."

Milliken stared. "What in the name of reason do you expect to find on the scene of a crime committed four months ago? The detectives made a thorough search, but found nothing directly connecting Hodge with the murders. There were no finger marks or foot prints. The knob on the safe and other smooth surfaces appeared to have been washed with collodion. What do you hope to accomplish by visiting the house?"

"At least it will give me a more intelligent understanding of the essential details of the crime."

"Quite so," murmured Milliken. "The sole occupants of the house are Merkle's daughter and a housekeeper. I will give you a note to Miss Merkle. She hasn't been able to reconcile herself to the prospect of the murderer going unpunished, and will no doubt give you all the assistance she can. Anything else?"

Thornton reflected for a moment. "I believe not. After having a look at the house, I shall cultivate Hodge's acquaintance."

"Better be careful," cautioned the district attorney. "He is a surly, treacherous fellow. He impresses me as the kind of man that's apt to run a knife into you when you're looking the other way."

Thornton seemed unimpressed. "I shall make it my business to win his confidence. He may make some damaging admissions. At any rate, I am sure I shall find it interesting. I thank you, Mr. Milliken. You will hear from me as soon as I discover anything of importance."

The two men looked each other straight in the eyes as they shook hands. Then Thornton, his face as inscrutable as ever, picked up his hat and shuffled from the room.

The district attorney watched his progress with a narrowing gaze. As the door closed upon Thornton, he nodded to himself, and there was a glint in his eyes that hinted that a suspicion was taking form in his mind.

II.

As Thornton, in the evening, following his interview with the district attorney, entered the library of the Merkle house, he felt as though a dead man's spirit were dominating the spacious and somberly furnished room.

At first he was at a loss to account for the impression, which had come to him the moment the tight-lipped and furtive-eyed housekeeper, acting under orders from her young mistress, ushered him into the room. Now, alone, he let his eyes roam over the massive mahogany furniture, the drab, gray-paneled walls, the heavy, dull-tinted carpet which seemed to have been selected solely with a view to deadening footfalls; the long rows of bulky tomes in the bookcases, the queerly assorted pictures hanging on the walls, the immense desk in the center of the room, and the capacious armchair standing beside it. In the ensemble of things he

sensed a vague, unusual quality which he imagined must be characteristic of the dead man, but as yet he could not determine what that elusive quality was.

Looking more closely at the wall paper, he noticed that it was somewhat odd in color and pattern. Its general tone was a murky green, but more careful scrutiny revealed that the outlines of each design melted into a dull red. At first glance, the touch of red seemed subdued by the preponderant effect of somberness, but the longer Thornton looked at the intricate and fantastic tracings in the paper, the more the crimson tinge seemed to stand out, until finally it appeared to dominate the color combination.

Thornton, without knowing why, was strangely impressed. Glancing toward the ceiling, a detail to which at first he had given scant attention impressed itself on his mind. In each corner a rose was designed on the white background. It was done in pink, but of a hue so vivid that it bordered on red. Looking downward, he noticed that the dull tinge of the carpet was here and there slashed with streaks of a brighter color which gradually, as his eyes took in each detail more carefully, brightened into a rich crimson shade.

A little bewildered, he glanced about him further. On the covering of the chairs, with their floral designs, there was a timid but unmistakable hint of red. Touches of red edged the dusky patterns on the portières covering the doorway between the library and the adjoining drawing-room. A row of municipal reports and statistical volumes on one of the book shelves was bound in russet leather, instead of the plain cloth covering in which such books are usually gotten up. The pictures on the walls, which at first had seemed to represent a rather erratic selection, had the one characteristic in common that in each of them there was a haunting note of red.

Thornton understood now why he had sensed a trace of the dead man's personality in the room. But for the all-pervasive note of red, the library was very much like many others he had seen. It was the ever-present red that gave it distinction and a character of its own, suggesting that Thomas Merkle had left his imprint upon its decorations and appointments. Yet the red note was neither obtrusive nor jarring; on the contray, an effort seemed to have been made to conceal and subdue it, and it was scarcely noticeable except to the continuous gaze.

It savored of sentiment to Thornton, though it was hard to conceive of Thomas Merkle, a hard, practical, and domineering man, whose sole ambition had been to control the political forces of the community, as being swayed by any of the gentler emotions. Why a man like Merkle, crafty, unscrupulous, a political boss of the old school, should have evinced a passionate fondness for red, was more than Thornton could understand.

He shrugged, reflecting that what he had just discovered revealed nothing more than an odd trait in the man and could have no bearing on the murder. He had not adhered strictly to the truth when he told Milliken that he had a theory in regard to the crime. The perplexing features of the case had fascinated him, and he had told an expedient lie in order to gain the district attorney's consent to an investigation.

He found himself gazing speculatively at a faintly discolored spot in the carpet, only a step or two from the portières. It was there, he had been told, that Thomas Merkle had been found dead, and he wondered whether there was any significance in the circumstance that the murder had occurred at this particular point. According to the medical examiner's report, the victim had died some time between ten and eleven in the evening. It had been Mer-

kle's habit to read or work at his desk till nearly midnight, after which he would go to his bedroom by way of the door at the other side of the library, diagonally across the room.

What had caused Merkle to leave his desk and walk to the portières? wondered Thornton. Perhaps the murderer, lurking behind the hangings, had made an accidental noise, and perhaps Merkle, getting up to investigate the cause of it, had been knifed through the partition in the center of the portières. The theory seemed as plausible as any that Thornton could conceive, though it shed no light on the almost unbelievable circumstance that Merkle had died without a struggle.

But maybe the murderer had struck so swiftly that Merkle had not had time to defend himself. Thornton shook his head as the thought came to him. No matter how quickly and skillfully the thrust had been delivered, there must have been at least a moment or two during which Merkle could have fought desperately for his life. Besides, the noise behind the portières must have warned him that some one was skulking there, in which case he would have approached the doorway ready for a tussle.

It was possible, of course, Thornton mused on, that the assassin had proceeded by stealth and wile. So frail and shrinking a man as Jasper Hodge, the butler, would scarcely have dared to attack openly such a dangerous adversary as Thomas Merkle, for one blow from the latter's fist would have crushed the butler before he could make a single move. Thornton, his thoughts roaming in circles about the grim incident that had taken place on the spot where he was now standing, wondered whether Merkle had recognized his assailant.

The chandelier above the desk illuminated only a small portion of the room, and it was dusk at the point where Merkle had been struck down. It was doubtful whether the meager light had permitted him to recognize his assailant, if indeed he had seen his face at all. Then Thornton noticed that a small electric light fixture was attached to the wall about a foot from the doorway, but, though there was a globe in the socket, it was not burning. Immediately below the fixture was a push button.

He pressed the little knob, and the room went dark. He pushed it again, and the lights in the chandelier over the desk flashed back, but the globe in the fixture beside the doorway remained dark. The reason, he saw at once, was that the current was shut off at the socket. He switched it on, and found he had enough light to permit him to recognize a face even at a brief and cursory glance.

Then a new idea flashed through his mind, and, deciding to make a little experiment, he stepped through the portières into the adjoining drawing-room. A slight noise in the darkness at the farther end caused him to stop abruptly and listen. He could neither hear nor see anything, but he sensed the presence of another person.

"Who is there?" he demanded evenly.

A quick catch of breath was the only answer. Thornton, guided by the faint sound, crossed the room. His groping hand came in contact with a figure that started violently at his touch. He seized it by the arm and drew it firmly into the library.

"Oh, you, Mrs. Lintner," he said lightly, recognizing the housekeeper who had admitted him on his arrival at the house. Her hostility as she took his card to Miss Merkle had been so marked that Thornton had decided she would bear close questioning.

She stood with face half averted from him, her body shaking, and her white features bearing an expression of intense fear.

"Why were you spying on me, Mrs. Lintner?" he asked gently.

She brushed a wisp of silver-tinged hair away from her forehead and drew a deep, anguished breath. Her lips opened and closed, but she seemed unable to find the right words.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said the detective conciliatingly, but he was watching every shifting shade of expression in the woman's face. "There is one thing I wish you would tell me, however. How long has this electric light bulb," indicating the one in the fixture beside the doorway, "been disconnected?"

The woman turned a little, seemed to steel herself, and regarded him stonily. "As long as I can remember," she declared. "The only lights Mr. Merkle ever used were those in the chandelier over the desk."

"I see. Then this bulb was disconnected on the night of the murders?"

"Why, yes." Her big, hectically glittering eyes regarded him bewilderedly; then another shudder shook her body. "Why did you ask me that question?" she demanded in shrill tones.

"It was a rather foolish question," admitted Thornton soberly. "On second thought, I see that the matter is of no consequence. I was just about to make a little experiment when I found you. It will take only a moment."

He parted the portières and stepped through. Then, edging to one side, he thrust out an arm between the frame of the doorway and the hangings, and by a quick pressure on the push button extinguished the lights. Chuckling softly, he switched them on again, then reëntered the library.

"I've just verified an idea of mine," he explained. "It would have been easy for the murderer to stand behind the portières and reach the light switch. All he had to do was to stick an arm through, give the button a little jab, and the room would go dark. Mr. Merkle, probably busy at his desk, would not have been apt to see the maneuver. He would merely be startled to see the lights go out all of a sudden."

"What do you mean?" inquired the woman tensely, pressing her long, slender hands against her breast.

"Only that the murderer, if he so saw fit, could have killed Mr. Merkle in the dark. I am not sure that it means much, but it is rather interesting. It doesn't explain why a husky man like him should meet his death unresisting at the hands of a puny wasp like Jasper Hodge."

"Oh!" breathed the woman. "You think Hodge killed him?"

"Don't you?" Thornton's tone was soft and casual, but his keen eyes watched her intently.

"I don't know," she declared hoarsely. "I—I can't tell you." Her voice rose to a shrill half-scream. "I don't know what to think!"

"Compose yourself, my dear Mrs. Lintner," said Thornton soothingly. "I suggest you go to bed and get a good rest. I shall find my way out without trouble."

"Thank you," she said faintly, quick relief in her face. She turned and walked swiftly toward the door. As she reached out her hand to open it, the detective called her name.

She turned slowly and with evident reluctance until her eyes met his.

"I don't suppose, Mrs. Lintner," said Thornton quickly and incisively, "that *you* killed Mr. Merkle?"

For an instant she stared wildly. A long, broken moan fell from her lips. She seemed about to speak, but only a hoarse rattle sounded in her throat. Then she turned swiftly and fled in frenzied haste from the room. A moment later Thornton heard her scurrying steps on the stairs.

For a long time after she had gone, he stood in a thoughtful attitude. "She

is tigerish enough for almost anything, when stirred up," he mused. "So far as strength is concerned, it is no more unreasonable to suppose that she killed Merkle than that Hodge did."

He looked at his watch. It was half-past nine. He wished to question Miss Merkle, but decided to postpone that phase of the investigation until the following day. Taking a magnifying lens from a case in his pocket, he subjected the floor, portions of the walls, and each article of furniture to a minute inspection. It was largely an empty formality, for he could scarcely expect to find anything of importance so long after the murder, especially since the police had repeatedly combed the scene in search for clews. As he had expected, the lens revealed nothing of the faintest significance. Putting it back into his pocket, he stepped through the door by which the housekeeper had passed out, and proceeded to the vestibule.

It was here, close to the hat rack standing against the inner wall, that the body of the younger Merkle had been found. Presumably he had been awakened by the disturbance in the library, and, rushing down from his room on the second floor, encountered the murderer. Thornton wondered what had disturbed him. Had the older man uttered a cry as the knife pierced his chest, or had the assassin made a noise as he made his way out after perpetrating the crime? According to their testimony, neither the servants nor Miss Merkle had heard any unusual sounds during the night.

Almost certain that his search would prove unavailing, Thornton again took out the magnifying lens and ran over each square inch of the floor, which was partly covered with rugs. He had nearly reached the end of his task when, near the spot where John Merkle had been struck down, a small, bright object winked up at him from a tiny crack between two boards in the floor. It was so trivial in size that the naked eye would scarcely have detected it, and it might easily have escaped notice even under the magnifying lens. Taking out his pocket knife, Thornton pried it out of the crack, where it might have lain wedged for months, secure against broom and vacuum cleaner.

Placing the tiny object in the palm of his hand, he examined it under the lens, and saw that it was a thin fragment of glass, stained a bright red. He started a little at the discovery.

"Red!" he mumbled, remaining in a kneeling position and peering down at the glittering object. "Another touch of red! I wonder if——"

"What have you found, Mr. Thornton?" inquired a tense, low-pitched voice at his back.

III.

Before answering, the detective wrapped the piece of glass in a leaf torn from his notebook and put his find in his vestpocket. Then, his face a blank, he rose and bowed.

"Ah, Miss Merkle," he murmured, addressing a slender young woman with large, darkly flashing eyes and face white as alabaster. The curve under her throat rose and fell with the swiftness of intense anguish, and she plucked hysterically at the folds of her dress. "I was just hoping you would grant me a brief interview. Suppose we step into the library."

Taking her consent for granted, he gently conducted her from the vestibule and led her to a chair beside the library table. He stepped aside, noticing that the light shed by the chandelier intensified her pallor and brought the swift play of emotions in her face into stronger relief.

"What did you find?" she repeated tensely. "You said something about—red!"

The detective chuckled softly. "Red

seems to be the dominant note of the color scheme in this room," he observed, regarding her closely.

"Oh, you have noticed it!" Her over-bright eyes opened a little wider.

Thornton glanced about the room. The crimson ingredient seemed to have receded; it was only by prolonged gazing that the eye was able to distinguish it.

"Does this unique color combination prevail all over the house?" he inquired.

"No; only here and in the bedroom father used to occupy." Her shuddering gaze searched his face. "He himself selected the wall paper for the two rooms. He was constantly making changes in the decorations and the furniture, and with each change another touch of red was added."

"Oh!" Thornton, standing with head tilted against his hand, seemed to be searching his memory for a forgotten word or an elusive fact. Miss Merkle's next question brought him up with a start.

"Do you suppose," she asked, her tones terribly tense, "that the red had anything to do with the—the——" A convulsive tremble strangled the rest of the sentence.

"I don't know," said Thornton gravely. "Have you any reason for supposing that it did?"

Her eyes flitted from his face to the floor, her hands clasping and unclasping.

"Red affected father just as strong drink affects some men." She spoke in a low, murmuring voice, and she seemed to be addressing herself rather than Thornton. "He had to have a splash of red around him always. But only a little of it. He couldn't stand much. A great deal of it seemed to intoxicate him, hypnotize him, jolt him out of his senses. Once——"

"Yes?" prompted Thornton gently.

"It was one day about two years ago. He and I were crossing a street just in front of a procession. They were carrying a red flag—a bright red flag. Father stopped suddenly, staring at the red banner, and he seemed rooted to the spot. I shall never forget his expression. He would have been run over by a truck coming in the opposite direction if a policeman hadn't dragged him away. Ever since he always avoided bright shades of red. I couldn't understand it at all, but he was sensitive about it, and so I didn't question him. I had almost forgotten the incident until—until——"

"Until that night four month ago when your father and brother were killed," finished Thornton softly.

The words affected her like an electric shock. She leaped from the chair. "I shouldn't have told you!" she cried. Oh, why did I tell you?"

"Calm yourself, Miss Merkle. Strange! Your father had to have a splash of red around him all the time, but the brighter shades seemed to upset him. As you remarked, it seems to have been something like a craving for strong drink. A little of it may do no harm, while an over-abundance maddens some men. H'm." Again Thornton seemed to ransack his memory.

"For some mysterious reason," he said, a few moments later, "the trial did not bring out the reason for the circumstance that on the night of the murder your father had a large amount of cash in the safe. Do you know the reason?"

The turn in the conversation seemed to relieve her. "Father was what one may call a practical politician," she declared. "Have I said enough?"

"Quite, thank you." Thornton, knowing that Thomas Merkle had put over many shady political deals in his career, understood fully. "Did your father have any visitors the day before the tragedy?"

"Quite a number of his political associates called the following day. They were to have had another session the next morning."

"Can you recall the names of any of them?"

She hesitated for a moment, then mentioned about a dozen names, several of which were familiar to Thornton. "Did any of them remain behind the others?" was his next question.

Again she hesitated, regarding him coldly. "One—a gentleman to whom I am—was engaged."

"I see." Thornton, noting the change from the present to the past tense, smiled queerly. "Did you notice anything peculiar about Hodge's behavior during the afternoon?"

She shook her head, and Thornton paced the floor for a few moments. Then, stopping directly in front of the girl: "Your father did not favor your engagement to the gentleman you referred to a minute ago."

"How did you know?" she asked, gasping.

"I didn't."

She rose and regarded him levelly. "Mr. Thornton, I should prefer frankness on your part. I don't see why you are raking up this awful thing at this late day, but I insist that you stop beating about the bush. What did you find on the floor of the vestibule? Tell me at once."

"A small piece of glass."

"Was that all?"

"A small piece of *red* glass, Miss Merkle."

She reeled a little and a long-drawn out "O—oh!" slipped from her lips. She drew the palm of a hand across her eyes and turned away.

"Was there anything else you wished to ask me about?" she inquired weakly.

"Nothing else, Miss Merkle."

An expression of intense relief in her face, she stepped toward the door. Suddenly Thornton called her back.

"Ah, Miss Merkle. There is just one more thing I want to ask you about."

"Yes?" She turned and faced him.

"Did you kill your father, Miss Merkle?" he asked sharply.

She swayed like a broken reel. For an instant she clutched wildly at the air. Then, with a desperate effort, she steadied herself.

"I don't know—I can't tell you." The words tumbled frenziedly from her lips. "If the piece of red glass you found on the vestibule floor had anything to do with his death, then—*then I killed him!*"

Shuddering, she turned and fled.

"It was cruel," muttered Thornton, "but it had to be done. What's that confounded word I've been trying to recall for the past fifteen minutes? Er—ery—Jove, I have it!"

He ran his eyes over the book cases till he found a large dictionary. Turning to the letter E, he swiftly slipped over the pages till he found the desired word, then read:

"Erythrism. A morbid fondness for red."

IV.

In the evening of the second day following his visit to the Merkle home, Ford Thornton stepped into a telephone booth at the club where he usually dined, and called the number of Gifford Milliken's apartment.

"This is Thornton," he announced when the district attorney's calm and slightly drawling "hello" sounded over the wire. "I promised I would notify you if I turned up something of importance in the Merkle case."

"Discovered anything interesting?"

"Well, yes. The bird has flown."

The district attorney muttered a startled exclamation. "You mean Jasper Hodge?"

"Of course. The fellow has been missing for two days. I have instituted inquiries for him in various directions, and it is just possible that he will turn up. In fact, unless I am greatly mistaken, he will make an appearance

at the Merkle house at eight or eight-thirty this evening. Wish you would be there to take down his confession."

"Confession? You really think he will confess?"

"Can't be positive, but it is just as well to be prepared."

"I shall be there," promised the district attorney. "Anything else?"

Thornton laughed queerly. "Only that I've been digging a garden."

"A garden? Didn't know you were interested in that sort of thing, Thornton."

"Well, I'm not, usually. Tell you all about it to-night. So long!"

Thornton hung up, dined leisurely, spent a quiet half hour over a cigar in a corner of the smoking room, and received two telephone calls which seemed to please him greatly.

At eight o'clock a solemn little group was gathered in the library of the Merkle house. Thornton, his face as emotionless and inscrutable as a mask, occupied the chair beside the desk, the one Thomas Merkle had been wont to sit in during the long evenings he spent in the library. In an armchair a few feet away sat Milliken, his keen, intellectual features as icily composed as ever.

On a settee against the wall, where the dusk softened her pallor and the tension in her face, sat Miss Merkle. Her head was bent low, as if she were deep in somber reflections. Mrs. Lintner, the housekeeper, stood not far away. From time to time she stifled a sob and ran a handkerchief over her eyes.

Suddenly, without making a single gesture, or seeming to address any one in particular, Thornton began to speak. His tones were low, but they sounded distinct and clear in the quiet of the room.

"The murderer of Thomas and John Merkle is in this house," he announced.

Miss Merkle looked up with a little gasp. Mrs. Lintner choked back another groan. Milliken stared incredulously at the detective.

"You mean the murderer is—is one of us?" he exclaimed.

Thornton smiled faintly. "I said the murderer is in this house. That doesn't necessarily mean in this room." He paused for a moment. "I can readily understand why the jury hesitated to convict Jasper Hodge. For a long time I myself could not understand how a frail man like Hodge could overpower a big, powerful, and athletic man like Merkle. The fact that the murderer was armed while Merkle was not did not explain enough. The almost unbelievable fact remained that Thomas Merkle had met his death without, apparently, raising a finger to protect himself. Well, I have discovered how it happened. But first," raising his voice a little, "I must warn you all that the house is surrounded by police."

"You have proceeded in a rather high-handed manner, it seems to me," declared Milliken testily. "According to our agreement, you were responsible to me. You had no right to bring the police into the affair without my consent."

"It was necessary," said Thornton suavely. "All I did was to ask my friend, Chief Kennan, for a little assistance. I would have consulted you, Milliken, but the truth is that it never occured to me to do so. Anyway, your office gets the credit for whatever I have accomplished."

The district attorney appeared mollified.

"Thomas Merkle was subject to a morbid condition known as erythrism," continued Thornton. "It manifests itself in an unnatural fondness for red. In the majority of cases the symptoms are so slight that the subject may not be aware of his condition; in a few cases the morbid craving amounts to a disease. Thomas Merkle had the dis-

ease in an aggravated form. Once, as Miss Merkle told me the other evening, it almost cost him his life. Briefly, he craved the sight of red as some people crave drugs or drink, but, like those addicted to drugs or drink, he could assimilate only a moderate quantity of the color. Any sudden and glaring display of red drove him into something resembling a trance.

"The person who murdered the Merkles was aware of this condition, and decided to make use of it. Being a small man, not overly courageous, the idea of putting Thomas Merkle in a trance appealed to him strongly. I shall show you how he went about it."

He rose and pointed to the chair. "Imagine Thomas Merkle sitting there about half-past ten in the evening. As was his habit, he is reading or writing. The only light in the room is the chandelier above his head. There is an electric light fixture over there on the wall beside the portières, but the current is switched off at the socket. Now watch what happens, remembering that Thomas Merkle is supposed to be seated at his desk, absorbed in a book or a letter."

He crossed the floor quickly and stepped through the portières, the others gazing after him with breathless intensity. Presently a hand appeared between the hangings and the frame of the doorway. It moved toward the push button immediately below the electric light fixture. Thornton's voice, subdued but clear, came to them through the portières.

"Merkle, busy at his desk, doesn't see the hand," he explained. "He is aware of nothing unusual until this happens."

A soft click was heard, and the room went dark. The sudden transition from light to gloom brought startled murmurs and quick gasps to the lips of the watchers. Again they heard Thornton's voice.

"Wondering what has happened to the lights, Merkle rises from his chair. In the meantime the hand that has pressed the push button moves upward, just as mine is doing now. It finds the light fixture, turns the little knob at the base of the burner, where the current has previously been shut off. Then, once again, the hand moves to the push button just below the fixture, and this is what happens."

As Thornton drew back the portières and stepped out a scream sounded and Miss Merkle leaped forward. The others had also jumped to their feet and were now staring bewilderedly at the sudden transformation.

The lights in the chandelier were on again, but their pale radiance was smothered in the dazzling brilliance shed by the electrolier beside the portières. The library, and especially that portion between the desk and the hangings, seemed bathed in red mist. It was a vivid, flaring red. Of a sudden the room seemed filled with live, quivering splashes of dazzling color. All the subdued and half-hidden tints of red in walls, floor and ceiling appeared to leap out and melt into one glaring riot of scarlet and crimson.

Thornton's voice, low and groping, broke on the silence. "You can imagine what happens to Thomas Merkle. He stands transfixed. The world has suddenly turned red. All his senses are mesmerized by the abrupt outburst of blood-red hues. He falls an easy prey to the murderer, who, watching his chance, darts from behind the hangings and thrusts his knife into Merkle's chest. You understand now why there were no signs of a struggle."

"Shut it off!" cried one of the spectators huskily.

Laughing softly, and turning slightly to see who had spoken, Thornton switched off the red light. "I think you understand," he murmured. "The murderer had caused a high-powered incandescent lamp, with the bulb stained a

bright red, to be substituted for the regular burner."

"But how do you know that?" inquired Milliken.

"I shall explain in a moment. After murdering Thomas Merkle, he removes the red burner from the socket, realizing that it might form an important clew. Then he leaves the room, but in the next moment he hears steps coming down the stairway. By the faint light in the vestibule he recognizes John Merkle. Perhaps the young man has seen or heard the murderer. At any rate, the latter is not disposed to take chances. He rushes forward, plunges his knife into John Merkle's body, and in doing so he drops the red bulb, which crashes to the floor and breaks."

"Are you guessing," murmured the district attorney, "or do you really know this?"

"The murderer picks up the pieces and leaves the house," continued Thornton, without answering the question directly, "little realizing that one tiny fragment of the red bulb has become wedged in a crack between two boards. I found it on my visit here two days ago, and it cleared up a good many things that previously had perplexed me."

"Oh!" Milliken peered curiously at the detective. "All this is very interesting. We understand now *how* the murder was committed, but it doesn't get us far toward convicting the murderer. Did you say he is in this house?"

The detective nodded, then turned to the housekeeper. "Will you tell us your right name, Mrs. Lintner?" he asked in placid tones.

She advanced a step, then answered in whispers: "Mrs. Jasper Hodge. I changed my name years ago, when my husband was arrested for safe-blowing. Later, after he got out, there was a sort of reconciliation between us. We entered Mr. Merkle's service about the same time, soon after his wife died, but we never let on that we were husband and wife."

"I see," murmured Thornton. "The other night I asked you whether you murdered Mr. Merkle. You did not answer, and your silence was answer enough. A guilty person would have protested. Your silence, I take it, was prompted by the conviction that Mr. Merkle and his son were murdered by your husband?"

"Yes, sir," came the faint response.

"That will do. Ah, Miss Merkle."

The girl started as her name was spoken. Bending forward a little, the detective searched her white, twitching face without looking at her directly.

"I wish you would tell me," he began in dulcet tones, "why, on the day before the murder, you substituted a red, high-power bulb for the regular burner in the fixture over there beside the portières."

She shrank back a step and fixed her wide, quivering eyes on Thornton's face.

"How did you know?" she whispered.

"I didn't, exactly." The detective chuckled softly. "It was about seven parts of guesswork to three parts of deduction. But now that you have admitted the fact, will you please explain?"

Miss Merkle drew a long, shuddering breath. "I wouldn't have done it if I had had the faintest idea for what purpose the red bulb was to be used," she protested quaveringly. "They told me it was for a legitimate purpose."

"Who are *they*?"

She lowered her eyes and remained silent.

"You are referring to Hodge, aren't you?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly. "I had known for some time that father was engaged in political enterprises that were not strictly aboveboard. One day Hodge came to me and said there was a furor among the reform element, and that the arrest and punishment of the

boodlers, as he called them, was demanded. He said there were papers in father's safe which incriminated father and his—his accomplices. Hodge wanted those papers."

"Was he acting in his own behalf, or as the agent of others?"

"I don't know for sure. I think he was acting for others. He told me that the only way to still the clamor was to hand over some of father's accomplices to justice. That's why he wanted the papers. He didn't know how to open the safe, for nobody but father knew the combination, but he thought that father could be persuaded either to open it or to give away the combination if he was put into a trance by means of the red light. Hodge promised me that only those papers implicating father's associates would be used, and that those relating to father personally would be either destroyed or left in the safe. He told me that if I would substitute a red bulb for the one in the electrolier beside the portières, somebody else would attend to the rest."

"Didn't you realize that Hodge himself could have changed the bulbs?"

"Not then. What he told me about father's danger upset me so that I couldn't think. I see now that Hodge's object was to implicate me in the crime, so that if I should learn his real purpose I would not dare to tell what I knew."

Thornton bent his head and meditated for a moment. "I think you are right, Miss Merkle. Hodge, or the parties he was acting for, wanted to compromise you. When did you learn, or begin to suspect, that Hodge had hoodwinked you, that there were no such papers in the safe as he had spoken of, and that the only purpose behind it all was to afford the murderer an opportunity to kill your father without risking his own skin?"

"Not till after the murders. Then I guessed the truth at once."

"And of course you felt as though you were, in a way, an accomplice of the murderer?"

The girl shivered a little. "I did!" she said, moaning.

"That's all, Miss Merkle. You acted foolishly, perhaps, but, under the circumstances, nobody is going to blame you."

"We seem to be making progress slowly," observed Milliken, looking at his watch. "Where is Hodge? I thought you said the murderer was in the house."

"He is," said Thornton quietly. "By the way, Milliken, who do you suppose killed the Merkles."

The district attorney stared at him queerly for a moment. "Why, Hodge, of course," he said easily.

"It's a lie!" cried a hoarse voice, and a short, unkempt individual with wildly staring eyes sprang through the opening in the portières and pointed a shaking finger at Milliken. "You killed them—*you!*" he shrieked.

V.

Milliken jerked his head back, then laughed sarcastically. "You're crazy, Hodge," he declared. "Why, that's the most insane statement I ever heard. By the way, where have you been keeping yourself the last two days? Our friend Thornton has been looking for you."

"I found him yesterday afternoon," explained Thornton. "His wife, whom we have known as Mrs. Lintner, has been hiding him in the attic. I induced him to come forth and make a clean breast of everything."

"He seems to be starting the wrong way," muttered the district attorney. "The fool is accusing me of having killed the Merkles. Did you ever hear anything so funny in all your life?" Milliken laughed boisterously.

"Does it really impress you as funny,

Milliken?" asked the detective gravely. "To tell you the truth, I share Hodge's opinion. My investigation has fully convinced me that you killed the Merkles, father and son."

"What? Do you dare——"

"Quiet!" commanded Thornton calmly. "It's no wonder you asked me to shut off the red light a little while ago. It reminded you too strongly of the night when you committed the double murder. As for Hodge, he has an alibi, and a good one. He told me about it this morning, and I looked into it. I don't claim that Hodge is a Simon-pure article, but there is no blood on his hands."

"Meaning that there is on mine, I suppose?" queried Milliken.

"Exactly. As I remarked at our first meeting, you are an ambitious man, Milliken. You were dreaming of some day reaching the United States senate chamber. But Merkle had you in his power, and he compelled you to do certain things that were politically inexpedient. You saw that unless you could get out of Merkle's clutches, your future would be ruined. The only way to get out was to kill Merkle, and you are the kind of man that ventures all for the sake of an ambition."

"Very pretty, but prove it!" was the district attorney's defiant retort.

"I have the proof," announced Thornton serenely. "This is about what happened. You were aware of Hodge's criminal record and decided to use him in getting rid of Merkle. You went to Hodge and told him—what did he tell you, Hodge?"

The former butler glared malevolently at the district attorney. "He told me the same story that I told Miss Merkle—that there were papers in the safe that he wanted, and for me to try to scare Miss Merkle into putting a red globe in the electrolier. You see, Miss Merkle wasn't wise to him then, and she and Milliken were engaged on the quiet. Milliken wanted some kind of a hold over her, and that's why he wanted her to switch the globes. Well, Milliken—blast his dirty carcass!—never told me he meant to croak Merkle. All he mentioned was the papers, and I believed him. Ha, ha! I sure acted like a fool.

"The stunt was to be pulled off on a Wednesday night. Milliken said Merkle would have about twenty thousand dollars in cash in the safe that night, and he said I could have the kale if I would help him out a bit. All he asked me to do was to see to it that the back door was left unlocked so he could get in. I left the house about half-past eight. I want you to get me right. As far as I knowed, all Milliken meant to do when he got inside the house was to flash the red light on Merkle and jolt him into a trance.

"The doctors said Merkle was killed between ten and eleven. I left the house at eight-thirty and stayed out till three in the morning. I can prove where I was every minute of the time, so I've got an alibi as far as the murders are concerned. Well, I slipped into the library, and there lay Thomas Merkle in a pool of blood. In the vestibule I almost fell over the body of John Merkle. For a while I was scared stiff. Then, bit by bit, it came to me how Milliken had tricked me. I guessed that what he had said about the papers in the safe was a lie, like the rest of it, but I had a hunch the twenty thousand was there, since Merkle often kept a lot of money in the safe.

"I went out and got a drill. It was daylight when I had drilled through. The money was there, just as Milliken had said. I stuffed my pockets, slipped out of the house, and, like a fool, got drunk. Of course, the minute they noticed I was absent from my job, they thought I had done the murders, and along toward noon a couple of dicks pinched me in a water-front joint."

The shrunken body of the former butler trembled violently as he spoke, and from time to time he sent a baleful glance in Milliken's direction.

"It looked pretty bad for me," he went on, his teeth chattering. "Then Milliken came to me and we had a confidential talk. He reminded me I was twenty thousand to the good—a lot more money than I could 'ave earned in a lifetime. He talked soft and smooth, all right. He promised me that if I didn't say anything about the alibi, he would do his darndest to get me off. He would press the case just hard enough to make people think I was guilty, but not hard enough for the jury to convict me. Well, the twenty thousand looked pretty good to me, and I fell for his line of talk. Of course, the understanding was that if the jury should find me guilty, I was to spring my alibi and ask a new trial.

"I see now that Milliken's scheme all along was to shove the guilt onto me. He thought he'd be safe as long as everybody thought I had done the murders. Well, I'm a pretty hard-shelled crab, and I didn't care as long as I had the kale, and I knowed Milliken wouldn't be very anxious to try me for the murder of John Merkle after I'd been acquitted of the other killing. The other day my wife sent me word that a new dick was working on the case and that he seemed to have dug up something. She took me in and hid me in the attic, and—well, I guess that's about all."

He crumpled into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"It's a pretty sorry tale, Hodge," murmured Thornton, "but turning State's evidence will help you some, I suppose, and they can't send you to the chair for burglarizing a safe. Got anything to say, Milliken?"

The district attorney sneered. "Nothing, except that I guess my word is as good as that ex-con's."

Thornton smiled faintly. "I told you I had been digging a garden, didn't I!"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"A lot, Milliken. You probably recall that, after killing John Merkle, you gathered up the fragments of the red globe and put them in your pocket. Then you drove out to Mayfield, where you were spending the summer months. Arriving there, you suddenly remembered that the pieces of glass were still in your pocket. You got a spade, dug a hole in the garden, and buried them. I found them this afternoon. Here they are.'"

He took a small package from his pocket, unwrapped it, and revealed a litter of brightly-colored fragments of glass. As if gripped by some sinister fascination, Milliken drew closer, stared at the broken bits, then groaned. Muttering something under his breath, he sank into a chair, and Thornton drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped them about his wrists.

He glanced about the room. The splashes of red seemed to creep out of the fabrics, to twinkle and quiver as if suddenly animated by glee.

"Red!" murmured Thornton. "I shall never be able to look upon red again without suffering a slight attack of erythrism."

FIRST WOMAN LAWYER IN ITALIAN COURT

A PRECEDENT was set recently in Italy when, for the first time in the history of that country, a woman lawyer pleaded a case in court. The advocate who appeared was Signora Eliso Orsi Commani. She defended, before a military tribunal, a corporal accused of cowardice, and won her case.

More Inside Histories of Famous Crimes

by George Munson

THE MAHRATTA'S REVENGE

THE Mahrattan country, in the Western Presidency of India, is the home of one of the finest of the Indian races. The pride of the inhabitants and their consciousness of superiority to the tribes of other districts—for the Mahrattas have in their time conquered all India—makes them peculiarly susceptible to the claims of family pride, and this in turn has given rise to tragedies of an abnormal and often horrifying character.

One of the crimes that thrilled the whole country, and incidentally nearly brought to the gallows an innocent man, occurred shortly after the termination of the American Civil War. During the progress of this conflict the native cotton growers had accumulated enormous profits, owing to the blockade of the Southern ports. Cotton was at a premium everywhere, and millions of rupees poured into the Mahratta country from the sale of the staple. Cultivators who had formerly eked out a precarious existence suddenly found themselves enriched beyond their wildest ambitions. In fact, their chief problem was how to dispose of their wealth.

Among the most prosperous of these farmers was Yellapa Patel, who had one son, Bussapa. The boy was the pride of his old father, and had been educated in much better style than was the custom among people of his class. When the family suddenly became enriched through their cotton sales Bussapa easily persuaded his father to launch out into the wildest extravagances in order to "save the face" of the family among the neighbors. All the cultivators vied with one another in display. *Sarees*, or petticoats of the most expensive tissues, were loaded upon women, and gold and silver ornaments as well. High-priced trotting bullocks were purchased, and carts with silver tires, and harness with silver yokes and silver mountings. The blooded bullocks were matched against each other in trotting races at which the whole countryside attended; and the entire population of the district blossomed out with red silk sunshades which were sent out by an enterprising English firm and promptly purchased wholesale. Brandy, gin, and champagne now made their appearance for the first time among the sober country folks. Riotous debauches began, and first among the revelers always was Yellapa, who was rarely sober during the last few months of his life, and, outdoing his son, forced him to become a drunkard also.

Yellapa Patel died when the war was at its height. His son Bussapa plunged into even wilder extravagances. Why

should he think of money when wealth kept pouring in? Indeed, the only persons who did not share the public prosperity were the money lenders, who had always previously held mortgages upon the crops and were the acknowledged masters of the land. Dewchund, the village banker, had no silver tires to his carts, no trotting bullocks; and he went about with a long face, looking malignantly upon his neighbors, and hoping for the time when the price of cotton would suddenly tumble—a time which the longer-headed persons among the Mahrattas had already begun to foresee.

Bussapa Patel had one link that bound him to decency. This was his little son Bhow. Bussapa was a Mahratta, and Dewchund, the money lender, a despised Wania; but their families had been intimate for many years and had had business transactions together, and they were as friendly as persons of their respective stations in life could be. Little Bhow was an almost daily visitor at Dewchund's booth in the bazaar, where he was always sure of being given some sweetmeats or a handful of nuts or some other delicacy dear to childhood. As Bussapa gave himself up more and more to his drunkenness, and as his violence increased, little Bhow began to spend nearly all his time outside school hours with Dewchund, who always petted him, while Bussapa's violence frightened him.

Bussapa was not slow to see the increasing intimacy between his son and the money lender, but he dismissed the subject from his mind. He had nothing against Dewchund; indeed, he derided him because the banking business was at so low an ebb, and contemptuously dismissed him from further thought.

Dewchund, in the meantime, sat waiting in his booth. After a while business gradually began to pick up again, for the Civil War was at an end and the price of cotton went downward, at first almost imperceptibly, then more and more swiftly. A series of bad seasons set in; the monsoon failed and a drought parched the cotton fields. On top of this came a plague of rats which destroyed the crops. The silver tires and silver yokes became less and less in evidence. The women's *sarees* no longer rustled as they went to the well. Trotting bullocks were sold for what they would bring; and those that were not sold died from drought and disease. But the Mahratta farmers could not cut their coats according to their cloth. Habits of drinking and reckless extravagance formed during the period of the cotton boom were not easily laid aside. Farms began to be mortgaged again, and Dewchund sat in his booth and rubbed his hands as he looked over his papers.

One of those most severely hit was Bussapa, whose extravagances had been the worst in the neighborhood. Before the prolonged famine had come to an end his affairs had become hopelessly involved. He had mortgaged his farm twice, he had even mortgaged his *inam*, or land granted for military service, and he was only able to keep a roof above his head by the aid of small temporary advances which Dewchund, the money lender, made him. Meanwhile he drank even more heavily, became extremely violent when under the influence of liquor, and sullen and morose during his occasional sober intervals. So long as his wife lived he made some effort to retain his hold upon his affairs, but her sudden death broke down all restraint.

The only thing that Bussapa still cared for was little Bhow, now five or six years of age; the only evidence of wealth that were left to him were little Bhow's bright crimson tunic and the silver anklets and bangles which his pride forbade him to sell. So long as he could send the boy into the village

dressed as befitted the son of a wealthy man he could shut himself up in his lonely home and "keep up appearances."

Bussapa's relations with Dewchund gradually became less cordial. The banker began to see little chance of regaining the amount that he had lent Bussapa. Moreover, Bussapa angered him by his constant importunities for small sums which he devoted to the purchase of liquor. When in his cups Bussapa was happy, and he continually postponed the day of reckoning.

At last the time arrived when Dewchund found himself unable to accommodate Bussapa longer. One night, when the latter appeared before him in his usual drunken condition, the money lender said:

"Bussapa Patel, there is only one condition on which I will lend you any more money, and that is if you will let me go over your accounts and find out how much you are worth."

Bussapa refused, and began to utter objurgations upon the money lender.

"I tell you what I'll do, Bussapa," said Dewchund, after some moments' thought. "If you will enter into a new bond with me, merging everything into a grand total, I will advance you a small sum further."

Bussapa's only reply was to curse Dewchund for a thief. Then he strode away in the direction of his home.

One feature of the agreement between the two men had been that Bussapa should deal only with the banker. Some little while afterward, however, Dewchund learned that Bussapa had secretly entered into negotiations with a merchant at Coompta, from whom he had obtained an advance upon his coming cotton crop.

Dewchund, immediately upon receipt of this news, went over to Bussapa's home and taxed him with breach of faith. A violent altercation between the two men ensued. Bussapa retorted with vile abuse and threatened to put Dewchund out of business. Finally Dewchund lost control of his temper and told Bussapa that unless he settled all his claims within three days he would file a suit against him without further notice. So saying he betook himself homeward.

Afterward it transpired that Dewchund had never taken any steps to carry out this threat, and he always declared that he had only uttered it in anger. If Bussapa had only shown himself fair and reasonable, he stated, and had consented to an examination of his affairs, he would have been willing to allow postponement of the debt for an indefinite period.

When Dewchund was gone Bussapa shut himself up alone with a bottle of brandy and began drinking. He continued this orgy during the next two days until all his liquor was gone. But this time, instead of stupefying, the potations roused an insane devil in the farmer. He began to speculate upon his future, when Dewchund should have carried out his threat.

He saw himself bereft of his homestead, turned out to starve, or perhaps work as a hired laborer in other men's fields. Worst of all was the blow to his pride. And then there flashed into his mind a picture of little Bhow, stripped of his ornaments, a beggar by the wayside. Better Bhow dead than that!

On the third night after the quarrel Dewchund had put up his shutters and was sitting in his shop about midnight, making up his accounts, according to his custom. All at once he heard a knock at the window. He opened the shutter cautiously and looked out. To his astonishment he saw Bussapa. He let him in, fastened the shutter again, and turned to ask his visitor why he had come, when, to his horror, he saw

that Bussapa had retreated into a corner of the room, and, with outstretched hands and a fearful look in his eyes, was mouthing and muttering to himself and trying to keep off some imaginary enemy. Clearly drink had affected Bussapa's mind.

"What is it? What do you see?" asked Dewchund, his knees shaking as his superstitious fears overcame him.

"Hold your tongue," shouted Bussapa, apparently regaining his self-control. "You told me that you would bring suit against me within three days. Well, I have brought you your money. Give me your account."

Dewchund produced his ledger and at once began adding up the total amount of Bussapa's indebtedness, together with the interest due. Bussapa, apparently calmer, sat beside him and looked on. When the amount had been figured Bussapa began to wrangle for a reduction in the customary manner, so that the money lender became convinced that his visitor had, in some unknown manner, obtained the money and was prepared to pay him. Dewchund, after much bargaining, agreed to knock off a lump sum on condition of immediate settlement, and Bussapa, still grumbling, at length agreed to his terms.

"Now bring out the mortgage deed and the other bonds," said the Mahratta, "and indorse them as discharged. Then you will write me out a receipt in full for all the money due."

Dewchund began to demur to this proposition. "Pay me my money first," he said, thinking that Bussapa carried the amount with him in the form of notes.

Bussapa became highly incensed. "Don't you believe I have the money?" he shouted. "I'm not lying. I have brought the full amount with me, but not in money. I put the bag in your stable. Come and see it."

Dewchund was greatly alarmed at these words, thinking that his visitor meant to lure him out of the house and murder him. But he was physically a match for the Mahratta, weakened as the latter was by dissipation, and, his cupidity conquering his fears, he rose and followed his visitor. Having stopped to light a lantern, he hurried in the wake of the Mahratta into a shed, in one corner of which was a quantity of dried fuel that had evidently been disturbed. Bussapa took the lantern from the money lender and led the way into the farthest corner, where he set it down; then, turning suddenly, he caught Dewchund by the throat with one hand, so that he could not cry out, and forced him down upon the ground. Then he said, hissing into his ear:

"You devil, I have paid you with my son's life. I've killed little Bhow and hidden his body among the fuel. If you don't agree to what I say I'll raise the alarm at once and accuse you of having murdered him for the sake of his ornaments and silver bangles. Quick! Make your decision. Cancel the debt. If you consent, raise your right arm, and then come back with me to your shop."

Stupefied with fear, Dewchund raised his arm obediently, and Bussapa, still holding him firmly, half led and half dragged him back into the house where, after again threatening him in case he should call out, Bussapa released him.

"Now you are paid," he said in a low voice. "Give me the papers and a receipt in full at once."

Dewchund, in whom the first shock of horror had abated, now said:

"What is going to be done with the body?"

"We will take it away presently and bury it in the watercourse," answered the Mahratta.

Dewchund, trembling with fear, duly indorsed the papers and handed them to Bussapa, at the same time writing out a full receipt for all indebtedness. Then he took a light and followed Bussapa to the shed.

Bussapa took the little body from among the fuel, wrapped it in his blanket, and ordered Dewchund to lead the way to a dry watercourse a few hundred yards distant, and to bring a spade with him. There Bussapa dug a deep hole in the loose gravel and buried the victim, heaping large stones upon the body. Toward daylight, after making a considerable detour, they returned to the confines of the village where they separated, Bussapa assuring Dewchund that he need have no fear.

"There are some wandering Kaikarris encamped near the village," he said to the money lender. "To-morrow I shall accuse them of having lured my son away and murdered him."

The Kaikarris are one of the predatory tribes, something like gypsies, who, ostensibly carry on the trade of basket weaving, do not hesitate to rob, or even murder, when opportunity affords. In this instance the silver anklets of little Bhow would have furnished a satisfactory motive.

Perhaps the devilish plot might have succeeded, had Bussapa remained sober. But his brain was in no condition to bear the weight of this conspiracy. Dewchund crept home in a condition of abject fear and collapsed shortly after his arrival at his shop, feeling confident that his fate lay in Bussapa's hands. But Bussapa, returning to his farm, first destroyed all the papers and then began to assuage his grief with brandy.

"Well, at any rate I have saved the honor of my family," he mused. "That money lender devil cannot bring infamy upon me. And I owe him nothing—that's a clear gain. But at what a price! How can I live without little Bhow? And I must give the alarm at once, or I shall be suspected. I can easily slip an anklet of little Bhow's into one of their huts while the search is in progress, and later in the day the body will be found."

He had completed his plot to his satisfaction when the fiendish emendation of it came into his mind. He tossed off another cup of brandy and started out of his place in a delirium of delight.

"Why shouldn't I involve that devil Dewchund in the plot after all?" he muttered. "He forced me to kill my son. He ought to die for it."

He fell at last into a drunken stupor which lasted until a late hour in the morning, when he was aroused by a servant who asked him where Bhow Baba was. Instantly the evil resolution leaped into the drunkard's brain. Crying out that his son was stolen and probably murdered, he called together a search party from among the neighbors and went from house to house in the village, inquiring everywhere and searching among the stables and outbuildings, until they reached Dewchund's shop. At the first question Dewchund fell into a stupor of fear. That was sufficient to excite immediate suspicion, especially of a money lender, always an object of hate among the villagers. A search was made of Dewchund's stables; the disturbed heap of fuel and the spade coated with mud increased the belief that Dewchund had killed the child. Then a neighbor came forward and testified that he had seen Dewchund reëntering his house at an early hour that morning. A Kaikarri, who had been prowling among the houses in the hope of obtaining plunder, stated that he had seen him returning home in a stealthy manner. Tracks were found leading from the

shed. They ran in the direction of the watercourse.

From that moment the discovery was only a matter of time. The searchers traced the tracks to the bottom of the gully, where fresh earth was found and stones heaped up among the debris. The body of Bhow was speedily exhumed.

Dewchund was seized and handed over to the police. Nobody doubted that he had really murdered the boy for the sake of his ornaments, and disposed of the body in the middle of the night. His incoherent protests, his assertions that Bussapa was the murderer, were merely regarded as the last desperate plea of a detected criminal. The *punchayat*, or coroner's jury, found that the little boy had been strangled by Dewchund for the sake of his ornaments, and the money lender was hurried off to jail amid the execrations of the villagers, while Bussapa went home and began again to regale himself with brandy.

So great was the horror which this crime aroused that it was with great difficulty that a *vakil*, or pleader, could be found willing to assume the burden of the money lender's defense. Even he, when one had been found, placed no faith in Dewchund's statements for a long time, but instead recommended that he plead guilty. At last he induced a magistrate to have a search made of Bussapa's house, and there, wrapped in a bundle of his own clothes, were found the silver anklets and the bangles of little Bhow.

Bussapa, in his drunkenness, had forgotten to take them and secrete them in Dewchund's house when the alarm was first given. He had intended to place them in the Kaikarris' camp, but with the change of plan his wits failed him. He had remembered when it was too late, for upon Dewchund's arrest the police had taken possession of the premises and Bussapa had never afterward had an opportunity to carry out his design.

Upon the discovery of the ornaments Bussapa was kept under strict surveillance and forbidden to have access to liquor. The deprivation of this stimulus shattered what little nerve remained to him, and Bussapa made a clean breast of his crime.

The idea of sacrificing little Bhow, he affirmed, had never entered his mind until just before his entering Dewchund's house on the night of the murder. His first intention, in fact, had been to go to Dewchund to plead for a respite in the matter of the debt. It was not until his glance fell upon his son, sleeping at his side, that the idea came to him, in his fury and despair, of what a fine revenge this would be, furnishing at the same time a punishment for the money lender and his own release from his clutches. Immediately upon the thought he strangled the boy, and, before he actually realized what he had done, he had lifted the body upon his shoulder and was out of his house and on the way to the money lender's shop.

Dewchund was released upon the confession of Bussapa being obtained, and the latter was in due course placed upon his trial, convicted, and hanged.

To his last moment Bussapa continued to profess regret that he had not "done for" Dewchund. And, but for the failure of his drink-addled brain, he would undoubtedly have succeeded in this desire. The true story of the crime as told by the money lender would have been refused credence universally. The chain of circumstantial evidence against Dewchund lacked but one link, and had Bussapa not forgotten to take the silver anklets and other bangles to Dewchund's house upon the morning of the arrest, Dewchund would undoubtedly have been hanged in his stead.

To Help a Friend

by John Baer

Author of "Suggested by Polly," etc.

ON one of those hot, sultry nights in early September Detective Herbert Fellows and I were lounging in our room. That afternoon we had returned to the city from a two weeks' vacation in the Catksills where the weather had been uniformly cool and invigorating. By contrast we found the stuffiness and humidity of the city particularly displeasing, and neither of us was consequently in a very happy frame of mind.

I suggested a trolley ride to one of the beaches, but Fellows vetoed the idea. "There's only one way to beat this weather," he said, "and that is to be so darned interested in the thing you're doing that you have no time left to think of the heat. I move we trot around to headquarters and——"

"Not me. We're not due till Monday, and I mean to take off every day I'm entitled to."

But it was not to be. We had no sooner made ourselves comfortable, and settled down to a quart of ice cream, when a request over the telephone summoned Fellows to headquarters.

"The old man is stuck again," he explained. "Come on, let's be sports and see if we can help any."

We found the inspector in charge of the detective bureau at police headquarters nervously pacing his office, chewing a cigar. He didn't even pause to greet us. "'Nother disappearance case," he grumbled. "This time it's Paul Garrison."

Neither Fellows nor I had ever heard of Garrison, so the inspector added: "Young lawyer with an office on the fourth floor of the Quadrangle Building. Sit down, and I'll try to make this thing clear."

The inspector pushed a box of cigars toward us and began: "Garrison has been missing since seven o'clock last evening. Miss Hayes was in this office this morning and——"

"How is Miss Hayes related to Garrison?" asked Fellows.

"She's not related—yet. They're engaged. If we find Garrison there'll be a wedding in two weeks. Garrison lives alone in a rooming house uptown and he quite frequently spends his week-ends at the seashore. Which explains why his landlady didn't miss him when he failed to show up last night. But Miss Hayes has good reasons to believe something's wrong."

He chewed his cigar a bit more savagely. "Here's the idea: Last evening at seven Garrison called up Miss Hayes on the phone, and told her he had a table reserved at a roof garden. Would she like to go with him? Yes, she would. All right, he'd——"

"Did Garrison phone from his office?" asked Fellows.

"He did."

"How does Miss Hayes know?"

"Garrison said so. Said he was helping a friend prepare a case, and that he would leave the office in a few moments, go home, change clothes, and call for Miss Hayes at her own residence. Now here's the funny part of it—the phone call was never completed."

"And Garrison did not keep his appointment?"—this from Fellows.

"He did not." The inspector picked up some papers from his desk. "Let me read you the last few lines of that interrupted telephone conversation.

"Miss Hayes: 'At what time am I to expect you, Paul?'

"Mr. Garrison: 'Oh, let's make it about—wait a minute.' "

"What happened then?"

"Miss Hayes hung up the receiver. She figured—and quite logically—that a client had dropped into the office. She thought that Garrison would call her up again and finish his talk as soon as his client left. But Garrison did not call up again. Miss Hayes waited till eight-thirty, then she tried to get Garrison on the phone. But central told her her number did not answer. Then she became confused. She decided that she had misunderstood her fiancé, and that he intended meeting her at the roof garden. So she went there. An inquiry at the box office showed that Garrison's tickets had not been called for. From the theater-lobby phone Miss Hayes made two more attempts to connect with Garrison. No answer each time. She finally reached the conclusion that he had met with an accident after leaving his office. She went home and wept herself to sleep."

"Hm." Fellows lighted his cigar. "She didn't think of calling up his rooming house?"

"Not till this morning. They told her Garrison had not returned from his office the previous night, and that they had had no word of him. Then she came here." The inspector tapped Fellows on the shoulder. "Now, Herbert, figure it out yourself."

Fellows thought it over a moment. "You looked in at Garrison's office, of course?"

"Certainly. I went there immediately upon hearing Miss Hayes' story. And I found a dozen odd facts which indicated that he had left the place—and in a manner in which a man usually leaves his office. All his papers were in perfect order, and his hat, coat, and cane were gone. His door was locked."

"Did any one in the building see Garrison leave his office?"—it was my question.

"No. And for that matter no one saw him enter. You must remember that the Quadrangle Building is thirty-four stories high, and has between fifty and sixty tenants on a floor. Including the employees of these tenants, the building has a daily population of twenty-eight thousand—more than many cities have. In a crowd like that one man passes unnoticed. Then there are fifteen elevators—and Garrison might have come down in any one of them. In spite of this I did make inquiries, but with the expected result; no one saw Mr. Garrison. You see he has no employees; he's just started on his career, and unfortunately no one in any of his neighboring offices worked later than five o'clock last night."

"How about the hospitals?" asked Fellows.

"Garrison is not in any of the city hospitals," replied the inspector, "and he isn't in any of the city jails or station houses, either."

There was a pause. Then the inspector broke the silence with: "Come on, Herbert, say something."

"Um." Fellows scratched his chin, "from what you've told me it is possible that any one of a hundred different things might have happened to Garrison."

"Happened!" I exclaimed. "Then you don't think his disappearance is voluntary?"

"He has an excellent reputation," put in the inspector. "I worked on this thing all afternoon without discovering a single reason for his wanting to run away."

Fellows rose and plucked me by the sleeve. "I think Buddy and I will run up to the Quadrangle, chief," he said. "They keep the building open on Saturday nights, don't they?"

"They never close it," replied the inspector. "Just ask for the superintendent; he'll let you into Garrison's room and tell you anything you want to know."

On our way up to the Quadrangle I tried to pump Fellows. "From your tone at headquarters you seem rather certain that Garrison did not stage the disappearance himself. What makes you——"

"A man who wants to disappear doesn't call up his fiancée and then break off the conversation with the sentence 'Wait a minute.' That's an excellent way to arouse suspicion, and the surprising thing is that Miss Hayes didn't guess at once or very shortly afterward that something was wrong."

We arrived at the building at about nine o'clock. The entire place was dark except for a few lights which were lit on the eighth floor. Only two elevators were running, and the superintendent escorted us up in one of them.

Garrison's room was on the fourth floor, west side of the building. To the left of it was a stairway, to the right the office of a man named A. Winthrop.

The superintendent opened the door to Garrison's office and switched on the light.

"Somebody's been in here since last evening," said Fellows.

"A police inspector was in here at noon to-day," answered the superintendant, "and the scrubwoman was in at four o'clock. But she was told to leave everything as she found it, and she's the kind of a woman who follows instructions. The floor has been scrubbed and the furniture dusted, but outside of that you can be sure that all is just as Mr. Garrison left it."

The inspector had accurately described the condition of the office. It certainly bore every indication that Garrison had not left it in a hurry. All his papers were filed neatly away; there wasn't a trace of disorder. If anything of a violent nature had happened to him, it certainly couldn't have happened in that room.

The first thing Fellows picked up was a box of cigars which was on the desk. "A most unusual brand," he said. "'Feodosias.' They're not an American cigar, and they're not——"

"Mr. Garrison gave me one of them the other day," broke in the superintendent. "Told me his dealer imported them especially for him from Cuba."

Fellows replaced the box on the desk. He seemed to be at a loss as to how to proceed. At length he asked: "Was any one on this floor beside Garrison, working overtime last night?"

"We have no way of keeping track of such things," was the superintendent's reply.

"Do you know if Mr. Winthrop was in his office to-day?"

"I do not. If you can wait till Monday you can question some of the other tenants, and——"

"Would you mind letting us into Mr. Winthrop's office now?"

"Er—you see—the rules——"

"I'll take the responsibility," Fellows assured him, showing his badge. "I'll not touch a thing unless——"

"All right." The superintendent walked out of the room and unlocked the door to Mr. Winthrop's office, which, as has already been explained, was directly to the right of Mr. Garrison's.

"I take it the scrub woman was in here, too?"

"Certainly."

Mr. Winthrop's office was in much the same condition as Mr. Garrison's. Everything was in its place. But ly-

ing right in the center of a writing table was a cigar. Fellows pounced upon it, and something like a smile began to play about his lips as he read the label—"Feodosias." He faced the superintendent. "Garrison and Winthrop were friends?"

"I can't say. But they've been in each other's company often of late; often enough for Garrison to know Winthrop doesn't smoke."

"What is Mr. Winthrop's home address?"

The superintendent consulted a notebook and was able to furnish the desired information, as well as the telephone number.

Fellows made a phone call. "Just as I thought," he said as he hung up the receiver. "Mr. Winthrop's landlady tells me he hasn't been heard from since he left for his office yesterday morning. That makes two disappearances. But I think, Buddy, we're getting warm on a trail."

He bounded across the room and opened a closet door. A look of disappointment came over his face. He went over to the safe. It was locked. For a long time he paced the room as if in deep thought. Then he turned to the superintendent again.

"I'm sorry, but it looks as though I'll have to call up the Perfection Safe Company and ask them to send around a man to open Mr. Winthrop's safe. It's the only way I——"

"But that's impossible, sir. We have no right to go prying into our tenant's offices, and besides——"

"I'm satisfied that some unlawful act has been committed in this room. Just what has occurred I don't know, but I mean to find out. I'm certain that safe contains part of the secret. It has to be opened."

And without further ado he called up the Perfection Safe Company, which has an emergency force of repairers on hand at all hours. They promised to send a man at once. While we waited Fellows insisted on absolute silence. Also, he switched out the light.

In half an hour or so the man from the safe company arrived. He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and got down to business. It was a pleasure to watch him work. In a short time he had solved the combination.

But as he opened the door of the safe he sprang back with a look of horror on his face.

Fellows jumped forward. "Good heavens!" he cried. "There's brutality for you!"

Crammed in the safe lay the body of a man. "Come here, and give me a hand, Buddy," ordered Fellows.

Together we drew out the lifeless form, and laid it on the floor. It was covered with blood; over the heart was a stab wound.

The superintendent bent over the body. "It's Mr. Winthrop," he said simply.

"Then Garrison—Garrison is a murderer!" I exclaimed.

"Perhaps," said Fellows. "But we won't be able to decide that definitely yet."

"Mr. Winthrop must have been killed before this morning," volunteered the superintendent.

"What makes you say that?" demanded Fellows.

"This." The superintendent was holding a letter in his hand. "I just took it out of Mr. Winthrop's letter box. It's postmarked five p. m. the fourth—that's yesterday. The letter carrier must have dropped it through the letter slot in the door first mail delivery this morning. If Mr. Winthrop had been alive this morning he certainly would have examined his mail. But this letter has not yet been opened."

"Excellent!" said Fellows, smiling. "You've missed your profession."

Fellows took the letter from the superintendent and tore it open. What he read caused him to start. The contents were as follows:

DEAR MR. WINTHROP: I hear you intend to lay your evidence against the Sutkin Brothers before the district attorney to-morrow—Saturday—morning. The Sutkin Brothers have sold me thousands of dollars of worthless oil stock, and if my testimony will help bring the swindlers to justice, I shall be glad to place myself at your disposal.

The letter was signed "Mrs. Sander, 40 Forest Ave."

"Sutkin Brothers!" The surprised superintendent could not check the exclamation. "Their offices are on the twenty-seventh floor of this building—rooms twenty-seven hundred and nineteen to twenty-seven hundred and twenty-one."

"Now nice!" was Fellows' comment.

"Do you mean you think the Sutkins are implicated in this?" I asked.

Fellows shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a pretty mess," I rambled on. "Garrison disappears on Friday night. Winthrop is murdered on Friday night. But where's the connecting link?"

"I don't know," answered Fellows. "What's the use of wasting time theorizing about it before our string of facts is completed? I'm not going to think any longer. I'm going to act. I'm going to follow blindly such leads as I stumble upon. Meaning I'm going upstairs now and pay a visit to the office of the Sutkin Brothers."

The superintendent offered no objections. The man from the safe company asked for and received permission from Fellows to accompany us. We went up in an elevator, and though the Sutkin office was on the twenty-seventh floor, Fellows insisted upon getting off on the twenty-third. As the four of us alighted he put his fingers to his lips, cautioning us to be as quiet as possible. Then he noiselessly led the way up the stairs the remaining four flights.

The entire journey was made in complete darkness. Everything was silent as death. On a Saturday night a New York business house is the most deserted place in the world. As we reached the top of the stairway between the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh floors the superintendent stumbled and fell two or three steps before regaining his balance. A hollow sound rang through the hall; the next moment we heard a noise made by the shifting of a chair. The sound came from our left—and the office of the Sutkin Brothers was to our left.

"This is too good to be true," whispered Fellows. "It seems as though we shall find our friends at home." He stepped close to the superintendent. "You said they had rooms twenty-seven hundred and nineteen to twenty-one. I take it there are three entrances to their place, and that each one of their rooms are connected. That is, from their office they can pass into the hall through any one of three doors. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Good." He nudged me. "You, Buddy, will knock at door number twenty-seven hundred and nineteen. I'll take my place outside of room twenty-seven hundred and twenty. You two," he meant the superintendent and the man from the safe company, "will watch the exit of twenty-seven hundred and twenty-one. And no rough work, please, unless it is necessary."

We sneaked along the hall and took our respective places. At the given signal—a flash from Fellows' pocket light—I knocked at the door of room twenty-seven hundred and nineteen.

The answer was prompt. It came in the form of a bullet which smashed the glass pane and whistled past my head.

"Drop!" commanded Fellows, "and shoot away the lock!"

My third shot broke the lock to pieces. I kicked in the door and entered. As I did so I heard a heavy pounding, and then the noise of falling glass. I knew then that Fellows and the superintendent had also forced their way into the Sutkin offices.

I wish I could describe the struggle which followed. It must have been highly dramatic and spectacular. But it took place in utter pitch-blackness. A revolver flashed at me; there were three or four shots—I don't remember which—and I felt a stinging pain in my left arm. From the next room came cries for help; there were dull thuds made by the impact of body against body, of fist against face. Then a terrible, piercing shriek—and then quiet.

The lights were turned on. Directly before me stood a table. On the top of it lay a man, face down. He was bound hands and feet, a heavy strap passed over his body and around the table so that it was impossible for him to move.

Half crouched on a chair sat another man. A crimson stream was trickling from a wound in his forehead; he was dead. I stepped into the next room. Fellows and the man from the safe company were staring blankly at each other.

"But the other Sutkin!" I cried. "Where is the other——"

The superintendent stumbled in. His face was white as a sheet; he was trying to talk. "Th-th-the window," he stammered. "I—I tried to—to hold him, but—he ugh! twenty-seven stories!"

Fellows was the only one who remained calm. "His body must be lying in the courtyard," he said. He motioned to the superintendent. "Better go down and station an elevator boy at the entrance to the courtyard. And tell him to let no one pass him but the police."

The superintendent hurried to obey instructions.

The man bound to the table was released. He was Mr. Paul Garrison.

The wound in my arm was not at all serious, but it was necessary for me to undergo an operation in order to have the bullet removed. I was absent from headquarters five days, and so had to get the explanation of the strange affair from Fellows.

"Please start by telling me what induced you to go into Winthrop's office," I said.

"I might as well confess that the only real thinking I did in connection with this case," he replied, "was at headquarters while listening to the chief's story. What puzzled me most was that last sentence which Garrison spoke over the phone to Miss Hayes—'Wait a minute.' I was satisfied I couldn't go ahead until I discovered a reason for that peculiar remark so I——"

"Peculiar!" I broke in. "There's nothing——"

"Oh, yes there is. Garrison was talking to his fiancée. He invited her to go to a roof garden with him, and she accepted. The arrangements were completed—all but the setting of the time he was to call for her. No man breaks off a telephone conversation at such a point unless something occurs which compels him to."

"Then you never considered the possibility that Garrison's disappearance was voluntary?"

"Never for a minute. It was clear to me from the very beginning that whatever it was that distracted Garrison's attention was of such a nature as to demand immediate action on his part. I took two guesses. One was that Garrison saw some one enter his office, some one whom he knew came with the purpose of assaulting him.

The second guess was that Garrison heard a cry for help—a piercing cry that had to be answered at once."

"I see. And since the condition of Garrison's office was perfectly normal, and bore no signs to indicate a struggle had taken place there, you decided that your second guess must be the proper one."

"Correct. Now where had the cry come from? It might have come from any office on his floor; that's all I could be reasonably sure of. I had two facts to work on. One was Miss Hayes' statement to the effect that Garrison had told her he was working overtime helping a friend. The other was the superintendent's statement that he had seen Garrison in Winthrop's company often. The fact that Winthrop's office is next to Garrison's, and that the two of them are lawyers, made it probable that Winthrop was the friend in question. Therefore a cry from Winthrop's office would certainly cause Garrison to act instantly. I wasn't sure, of course, but I thought it worth while to drop into Winthrop's place and investigate."

"Then I suppose the cigar——"

"The cigar was absolute proof that something wrong had occurred in Winthrop's office. It was Garrison's cigar —we knew that much by the unusual brand. But the condition of the cigar was the important thing."

"I noticed only that it had not as yet been lighted."

"I noticed more than that," said Fellows, smiling. "I noticed that it was dusty, and that it had been chewed on one end. Now Garrison might have given that cigar to Winthrop in the street, and Winthrop might have brought it into his own office himself. But since Winthrop didn't smoke, the assumption was good that he hadn't chewed the end of the cigar. What was the answer? I pieced it together something like this: While talking to Miss Hayes over the phone Garrison picked up a cigar out of the box which was standing on his desk. He stuck it into his mouth intending to light it as soon as he had completed his phone call. Then came the cry for help, and Garrison, with the cigar in his mouth or in his hand, rushed into Winthrop's office. There was a struggle, and Garrison let the cigar drop to the floor. When the scrub woman came into Winthrop's office on Saturday afternoon to clean she picked up the cigar and laid it upon the desk—where we found it."

"Which explains both the chewed end and the dust," I commented.

"If my theory was correct it proved something more important than that. It proved definitely that Garrison had been in Winthrop's office, and that consequently Winthrop's office must have been the scene of whatever crime had occurred. Which is why I insisted on having his safe opened. Not that I expected to find Winthrop's body. But I didn't feel justified in walking out of the place without having made my search for evidence complete."

"Just what did occur in Winthrop's office?" I asked.

"Well, the two Sutkins are dead, and so is Winthrop—and these three played the leading parts in the tragedy. But from the facts which Garrison has given me I can put together a very plausible story. Winthrop, as we know, had evidence that the Sutkins had swindled many people by selling them worthless oil stocks. He intended laying this evidence before the district attorney on Saturday morning, and he asked Garrison to help him prepare the case. On Friday evening Garrison worked in Winthrop's office till seven o'clock. Then he stepped into his own office—next door—in order to call up Miss Hayes. While he was phoning the Sutkins entered Winthrop's office, their intention being to bribe him to drop the matter. Winthrop refused,

and a quarrel ensued. Blows followed, and then came a cry for help. Garrison rushed from the phone, and came into Winthrop's office in time to see one of the Sutkins do the stabbing."

"How about the cigar? Does Garrison remember——"

"He does. Told me he had it in his mouth at the time and dropped it during the excitement. Well, the odds were two to one—and one of the Sutkins had a revolver and the other a knife. Garrison was given his choice—death, or a three days' captivity in the Sutkin office on the twenty-seventh floor."

"Why three days?"

"The crime occurred on a Friday night. The Sutkins had made arrangements to leave the country for Brazil on a tramp ship early Sunday morning."

"But who was to discover Garrison?"

"The scrub woman. The offices in the Quadrangle Building are cleaned every Saturday afternoon at four. When the scrub woman came to the Sutkin office one of them opened the door and told her not to bother then. She would have come again early on Monday morning and let herself in to clean their office—and discovered Garrison, bound to the table."

"I understand. The Sutkins intended to leave——"

"They intended to leave Saturday at midnight. We got there after ten—not much too soon."

"The plan was full of holes——" I started.

"Certainly. But you must remember this murder was not premeditated. Considering all the surprises they met with they handled the matter pretty well. It was especially clever of them to dare to keep Garrison in the very building in which the crime occurred. And another clever trick—before taking Garrison upstairs they forced him to re-enter his own office, arrange all his papers, and take his hat and coat and cane, and then lock the door. They figured Garrison would be looked for, so they made it appear as though he had left in the usual manner. They didn't know, of course, that a few moments before he had broken off a phone call. They either didn't see or they deliberately disregarded the fact that the telephone receiver was off the hook until Garrison replaced it while he was cleaning up the room."

"It was also clever of them," I put in, "to take with them all the documentary evidence of their swindle which Winthrop must have had in his office. But why did they remain in their own office on Saturday? Weren't they taking chances that Garrison might——"

"Not a chance in the world. He had just seen the Sutkins murder one man, and consequently had every reason to believe they'd murder him too if he cried out. Once in the Sutkin office he no longer had a chance to cry, for he was gagged.

"What reason had they to put Winthrop's body into the safe?"

"They knew that on Saturday afternoon the scrub woman would enter Winthrop's office. And they didn't want the crime discovered before they left the country. When they entered Winthrop's office his safe was luckily—or unluckily—open, and after they had killed him they crammed in his body, closed it, and twirled the dial."

"Didn't the district attorney think it strange that Winthrop should fail to keep his appointment on Saturday morning?"

"The district attorney has learned by experience that lawyers are only human. That's what the Sutkins figured on. They reasoned that the district attorney would attach no particular importance to Winthrop's failing to appear. But on the other hand they

knew that as soon as Winthrop's dead body was found the district attorney would certainly suspect they had a hand in the affair. Which is another reason why they hid the body."

"How did you learn that they intended leaving the country Sunday morning?"

"I found a receipt from the captain of a tramp ship in one of the Sutkins' pockets. Their plan must have been to sneak out of the Quadrangle on Saturday night and board ship at once. You may think it surprising that they remained in the building all day Saturday. But it was the safest thing for them to do. They didn't expect Winthrop's body to be found so soon, and they knew there was no way of connecting them with Garrison's disappearance. Luck was against them. If we hadn't opened that letter the superintendent found in Winthrop's mail box we certainly should never have thought of looking on the twenty-seventh floor of the Quadrangle for Garrison. Then there's another point which explains why they remained in their office. They had to be there at four o'clock Saturday afternoon in order to stall off the scrub woman, and prevent her from finding Garrison."

"They put up a mighty stiff fight when they found they were cornered," I said.

"They knew the game was up, and they preferred immediate death to——"

"One of them—the one who shot himself—solved his problem rather simply. But the one who threw himself out of the window—twenty-seven stories——"

I was given no time to reflect long on this sordid detail. The telephone bell tinkled and after Fellows had answered the ring he told me he had just accepted for the two of us an invitation to attend Miss Hayes' wedding the following week.

EXPERIENCED THIEF AT FOURTEEN

AFTER having gained preliminary training in the art of petty theft through his association with a gang of boys, the "Brotherly Bums," in St. Louis, Rupert Kinsloe, fourteen years old, decided to work alone and go in for bigger game. The lad, who was arrested recently as he sat in a stolen motor car, confessed to the police that he had appropriated four automobiles in less than a week, and had also committed various burglaries, and robbed the United States mails.

When he was caught he had in his possession a revolver, a water gun, and a letter containing seven dollars. The water gun he had bought for twenty-five cents, and the revolver he had stolen from the store at the time he made his purchase. The letter was addressed to a woman who lived in the same apartment house as the boy.

Joy riding was the youthful criminal's delight. When he saw an unattended automobile he would get in and drive it until the gasoline gave out, when he would leave it at the side of a street. The last car he "borrowed" he parked overnight in the rear of his home, being unable to light the head lamps for night riding. At noon the next day he felt the desire to take a little spin and went out in the stolen car. Having been notified of the loss of the automobile the police were watching for it, and so apprehended the juvenile offender.

Headquarters Chat

YES, we mean it when we say that you readers can't send us too many letters. We have made this remark before, as you well know, and we are going to keep on making it. Lots of you do take the trouble to write us, and we assure you that these letters help us mightily in conducting the magazine.

Among the letters which came in to-day was one from "J. B. B." of "N. Y." We wish J. B. B. had given us his full name and address, as most of our readers do, so that we could send him a personal note of thanks, as is our custom.

This is what J. B. B. had to say: "Allow me to congratulate you on your good work. The DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE grows better each week. Kindly tell Mr. McCulley to bring back Black Star. The Doctor Bentiron and Joker stories are fine.

"Now for the most important thing: For the past few weeks I have noticed that the announcement of the following week's contents is printed on page two, and in the Headquarters Chat was an intimate talk about and with the editor. I think this is a fine plan. Why not keep it up? Each individual reader has his or her favorite author. We try to picture the author and guess what he looks like. Why not organize a new department: 'With Our Authors'? In this way we could learn more about the writers for the magazine, titles of new stories that they are at work on, something about their lives, past and present, et cetera."

We think that this is a bully idea. But do you think we need a heading for the department, J. B. B.? We have so many departments now, that it might confuse things. Why not have your idea carried out, right here, in the Chat? We, the editor, stands ready to answer any questions that may be asked him about the authors, their stories, and himself, for that matter, should it happen that any one is interested in such a trivial being as an editor. But we are just as human as authors—all other humans, for that matter. Give us the slightest excuse, and of we will go, talking away about ourselves.

And that reminds us—you may say all this has simply been a dodge to lead up to it, but, honestly, we just thought about it, and think perhaps you will be interested.

You will remember how we got touched for forty-seven dollars, coming down in the subway, and then, later on, how we had to serve for one whole month on criminal cases, as a juryman? Well, it just seems our fate to go and get mixed up with crime, in one way or another.

The most recent incident along those lines, which has just culminated in a decidedly embarrassing manner, started this way: We have a little place off in the wilds of Long Island, "far from the maddening crowd and the world's ignoble strife," where we sleep nights in the summer, and spend Sundays, and take an occasional day off. When winter comes we just lock the door and go away from there.

Well, we did this for a number of years, and when we returned in the spring all was as we had left it. But two years ago we had a hunch that the goddess of good fortune who had watched over us so well and so long must be getting weary of her job.

Bing! Just like that we obeyed the impulse, and took out burglary insurance Came back in spring. True to our hunch, the lovely lady had grown tired guarding our place in the woods; the gentle burglars had been a-burgling. Put in claim to insurance company. Got it. Three hundred dollars. Fine! Come fall, took out another policy. Come spring. More, or the same burglars had been a-burgling again. Put in another claim. Got it. Thirty-five dollars. Fine!

Now, watch out, for here comes the "kick"—the surprise—of this little narrative of ours. Come this fall. Got letter from insurance company reading something like this—will have to quote from memory, for we were so darn mad we ripped the thing up: "While we want you to comprehend thoroughly that we do not for an instant wish you to think that there is anything personal in this, must inform you that it is an unwritten rule of our company that when an assured has two losses, we do not care to continue to insure his property."

Now, wouldn't that and so forth and so forth you? "Ha! Ha!" say you, eh? Well, we don't, for we dare not leave the blamed place, and come back to the city for the winter. And *believe us,* it's getting some frosty out there in the woods. But—and like the insurance company's notice to us, there is nothing personal in this to any of *you*—but let burglars of fiction and burglars of fact, burglars great and burglars small, take notice that we've bought two, and we keep 'em both loaded!

Speaking of burglars, hang 'em, we've noted that J. B. B. wants McCulley to do more Black Star stories. Mac was in the office yesterday; he's been out in Colorado all summer and fall, and not been sending us one-tenth as much stuff as we—and we are sure, you—would like to have him. Well, McCulley said, when we showed him the letter, that he had been turning over in his mind a series of novels that would make the Black Star stories look like the smallest kind of small potatoes. We swung right around, took him firmly by the hand, and made him promise to do it. We are sure he will "deliver."

Be friendly, chummy, now, and let's hear from you, all of you.

The How, When, and Where of Success

Conducted by RUTHERFORD SCOTT

If it is impossible for you to wait for Mr. Scott to touch upon the work in which you are especially interested, in one of his articles, send a stamped, addressed envelope, and a careful, accurate, and brief statement of what your education is, what your experience has been, and where you wish to begin your career; also, the amount of time and money which you can give to your apprenticeship. He will write you a personal letter, and tell you what you wish to know.

The Lumber Business

ONE of the most experienced lumbermen in this country was talking to me recently about the opportunities for young men in his line. I give his words verbatim, as they contain information which is unquestionably accurate.

"The proper way for a young man to get into any branch of the lumber

buisness is for him to begin at the very bottom. Let him go and work at the rough end of it in the woods, cutting, stripping, loading, and trimming, for at least a year. In that way he will learn to know timber, he will absorb a great deal of necessary knowledge, and he will lay the foundation for all his other work, whether he is headed toward the office, or wishes to be a salesman, or has leaning toward surveying and cruising.

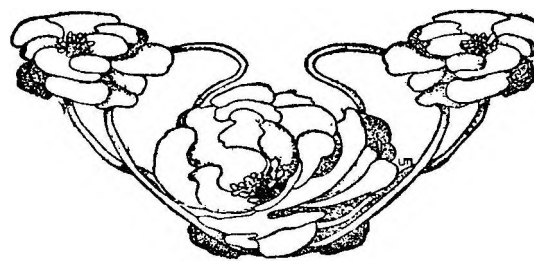
"The ordinary 'jack' gets all the way from two dollars to three dollars and a half a day, and his conditions will vary according to the firm he works for and the part of the country where he is. Wisconsin and Michigan are the big timber States of the central west; Georgia, Alabama, and Texas the best of the southern States; and Wyoming and Washington, Idaho and Canada the parts where the biggest timber is got out.

"Foremen of 'jacks' get from four to six dollars a day, and are always in line for promotion and increased pay, as their ability to handle men successfully is demonstrated.

"A 'timber cruiser,' working under a superior, may receive from five to seven dollars a day. This means that he must go into a piece of timber, look about him, estimate its worth, estimate the different kinds of woods to be got out, and give a correct description of the difficulties of lumbering there. If he is an expert, and is man enough to drive good bargains for his principals, there is a very tidy sum for him to be made in commissions.

"If a man is drawn toward the milling end then his work in the woods will be an extra asset to him, for he will understand the material which passes through his machines as no man can who knows nothing of the out-of-doors. In the mill wages vary greatly, but a fine man can make six to eight dollars a day, with the foreman's position always open to competency.

"The salesman on the road must know lumber accurately, and he must be a walking encyclopedia of lumber conditions and prices. The Lumberman's Bureau, in the Munsey Building, Washington, D. C., issues a yearly book, costing four dollars a copy, which even a lumberjack would do well to read. For ten dollars a year he can have, in addition, the weekly reports of lumber conditions in the United States. The National Hardwood Lumber Association issues 'Rules for Measurement and Inspection of Hardwood Lumber,' which is invaluable, and which may be purchased for a small sum. If a man working in the woods for a year were to take these publications and study them carefully, his chances of speedy success in the lumber business would be splendid."



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.

B. R. M.—Your handwriting expresses a nature which is far more refined, and a mind far more trained, than those of the writer of the inclosed specimen. He is a person, however, of a very sweet and loving disposition, and as you would value that more than other traits, it is likely that you would adjust well to each other. You need not expect him to improve much with the years, mentally. He is not of that type, but he's apt to be a lovable and tender-hearted old man; and that's pretty nice, considering that old people are often not that, despite tradition to the contrary. Your own nature is a progressive one.

A. W. WARD.—People of your type are most successful in work which is a matter of personal rather than of directly mental powers. Selling real estate, demonstrating, selling objects, promoting, dealing in insurance—these are all lines to which your type is adapted. The only question for you is what fields are open, near you, of this description.

VERYAN.—My dear, I admire your frankness and your true estimation of yourself. But you have far more honesty and good sense than you believe; and that "dear and wonderful man" has felt, I am sure, the ardor and power of your capacity for affection. So long as you have that you have the motive power by which you may achieve almost anything. The only thing to do in a case like ours is to drop all thought of what you have been, and determine to be what you should be. If love can't raise us to unknown heights, what good is it?

HAZEL WOOD.—How do I know whether you have any enemies or what your life will be? See my repeated remarks on this point to other people who have asked questions of a similar nature. I can tell you most emphatically that your fretting, worrying, self-absorbed, self-conscious, low-spirited, and illogical way of thinking and feeling will bring you unhappiness and work against your success. It requires no mystic powers to know that. What you need to do is to take a firm hold of your disposition, right away, and yank it around to face in the right direction. You do that and the future will take care of itself, my dear.

ROSE DUNNE.—Your writing expresses unusual poise for one of your age. Good nature, freedom from temper and egotism, and a very sensible attitude toward the world are all shown. That being so, I don't see how you can be pleased with the self-satisfied and priggish person whose writing you inclose. Not worthy of you, at all; sure to disappoint you.

VIOLA H.—Your other specimens were not received. I am putting this in far ahead of your proper turn, as you seem so anxious. Better if you had inclosed a stamped, addressed envelope. The specimen of the older brother shows a person who is entirely too "slick." That outrageous slang word is the only one which adequately describes him. I infer that the younger brother is merely the tool. Sorry. As for yourself, you are indeed a good character reader, but you have not an accurate mind. Remedy this defect, and you will have a strong and practical talent.

BETTY W.—If you'd sent me your home address I would have replied by mail, so that you would have had this sooner. Numbers One and Two are not really insane, but are pathologically out of balance. See an article of mine on "mattoids" published in an earlier number of DETECTIVE STORIES. These people belong to the type, although they are not extreme examples. Neither one of them should be allowed any position of responsibility; nor should anything they say or do be taken seriously. The specimen numbered Three expresses a sense of humor, and a suave, well-poised personality, marked by well-applied knowledge of the world. The specimen numbered Four shows the excitable, emotional, and illogical type of person who is always precisely the one to spend time and energy on the great questions of existence. In a word, this is the man or woman who can tell you, off-hand, just what is the matter with the world's politics, but who is unable to pay off the mortgage on the home.

H. F. L.—For a boy of sixteen, H. F. L., you possess an extraordinarily well-balanced character, and I am sure that whatever your "ambish," as you express it, you will come fairly close to realizing at least some of it. No, I don't really believe that you have that peculiar twist of mind and talent which makes a cartoonist; but you do have an eye for line, and I believe could be an expert letterer. No, I don't mean printing show cards, or marking boxes for shipment. There is really a rather wonderful profession of lettering. Get a book from the library on ornamental alphabets and you'll see. Some men have been famous for their lettering for art purposes, for bookplates, et cetera. Look this up. As for being a movie actor—forget it!

MISS F. L. R.—Bless your heart, let me tell you how to return to the country, and yet make a living! It's such a normal desire, and it's so in line with what America needs just now, that I'll do it with enthusiasm. Ever hear of the girl who raises butterflies? of the one who makes a specialty of pansies? of

hundreds of people who are raising mushrooms? Squabs? Frogs? Guinea pigs? All that's necessary for any of these things is a little space, good health, love of the work, and a very, very little capital. Write me, if you care to, about this, inclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

SUE.—You are a person who is far too apt to be selfish in your relations with other people. Sorry, but I'm sure you do not mean it, and that it is more thoughtlessness than anything else. You are really affectionate, but this does not show in your personality as much as it would if you were to be less absorbed in yourself. The specimen which you inclose shows a person who is unusually kind, forgiving, and tender. Do not let your suspicions rest for a moment on this person, who is far finer, spiritually, than you are.

S. E. V.—"Courage to be a leader?" What d'you mean, a leader? I suppose you mean in labor affairs? Well, now, look here—it depends on what you think a leader should be. You are naturally a pretty unbalanced, impatient, and rather one-sided sort of chap, with a mind which is versatile, but not exactly logical. The leaders of labor should be men of the greatest maturity and wisdom. A man like you, who has been unable to guide his own life wisely, would do better to give his attention to home affairs. Remember that quotation from the wisest of books: "He who conquereth himself is greater than he who taketh a city."

J. J. RICE.—That signature of yours is so expressive of the aggressive, ambitious, and self-contained man that I am going to use it, one of these days, to illustrate my lessons in graphology. A fine type, my dear namesake! Not very spiritual—but then, we can't have everything. The specimen which you inclose shows a person who is far from the ideal office worker. Note "*seno*grapher." Such a slip would have been corrected instantly by a person who really has a talent for detail. It would mean nothing in the case of a person applying, say, for outside work, or for a sales-position.

C. F. B., JR.—Your handwriting shows me that yours is a character in which there is an unusual amount of sincerity and honesty—down-to-the-ground honesty, both of thought, intent, and deed. It's a splendid trait. You lack self-confidence, which gives your personality an appearance of weakness. Boys of your mental caliber should go to college, if it is at all possible.

S. E. COX.—If you had given your address you would have received these readings sooner. Hope the others are now in your hands. M. L. F. is the writing of a person who is of a most peculiar type, and most baffling. The mental condition is not easily outlined. It is really one of delusion, but so subtle that I doubt whether the ordinary practitioner would agree with me. The derangement probably dates from many years ago, and is partly self-inflicted. Ever notice that all these queer cases are self-absorbed and innately selfish? That's the beginning of more mental and nervous trouble than anything else in the world, drink, disease, and shock not excluded.

ANNA Z.—Thank you for offering to let me know "how close I come to being right," but don't you see, I can't trust to that. Mighty few people know themselves well enough to be real judges. The specimen which you inclose shows a person of impetuosity, which is mingled with a certain odd coldness and stubbornness. This combination does not make an especially pleasant personality, but the innate qualities of justice, instinctive goodness, and kindliness which

underlie this win friendship and liking, once they are understood. Your own handwriting shows a nature in which self-satisfaction is far too strong; in which there is much pride and only a fair amount of ambition. What you need is more ideality and a better ability to understand others.

Miss Rice has written to the following readers, but her letters have been returned. Will they kindly forward their correct addresses so that Miss Rice can let them have the result of her reading? Fred Corkron, Lewis Dore, J. A. Melhot, Alphonse Mowan, Fairley Preston Pate, and Joseph Thomas.

EXPERT LEGAL ADVICE

Conducted by LUCILE PUGH

In writing the Expert Legal Advice Department please be careful to give full details of your case, stating whether or not it has been before the courts previously, or whether or not it has been submitted to a lawyer of your locality. If you desire Miss Pugh to find a lawyer for you give your address with care: personal address, city, and State. Unless accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope your communication will be answered in this column.

ANSWERS TO READERS' QUERIES

MERCHANT.—Your liability is wholly a question as to whether you had a legitimate right to place the boxes on the sidewalk. A great deal of litigation has occurred over this question. It would seem to me, however, that you must have exceeded your right, else a passer-by, admitted to be about to cross the street, and therefore on the curb side of the walk, would not have tripped over one of your boxes. Witnesses to the accident would be strong for or against you, according to how their testimony was given. Therefore, if you can compromise with the injured man, it would be best to do so. In the future try to keep obstructions off the sidewalk. They are always dangerous, both to passers-by and to your peace of mind and fullness of pocket.

MRS. MURRAY.—A young man not of age needs his parents' consent to his marriage, and, so far as the law is concerned, your case will probably stand. If the girl chooses to contest the case she may make things most unpleasant for you. A young man, just one day short of being of the age to make his own decisions, is rather splitting hairs when he claims that in one more day he would have known his own mind. If the young people were happy until you interfered, and if your son is earning his own living and that of his wife, you are unwise, apparently, to break up the match. Yes, you can find plenty of lawyers to take the case. I would myself. The case is clear, so far as the letter of the law is concerned, and lawyers can take only that into consideration, *if* a client insists upon the case going to court.

DEFERRED.—Every State has different laws about the inheritance of property. If you will send me full details of your case I will advise you. Your letter is too

indefinite. I do not know the degree of your relationship to the deceased, or when the death took place, or of what the property consists. Don't try to be brief. Write all that you can to cover the ground fully.

HUDSON BAY.—No furs may be brought into the United States without paying duty. Smuggling is a serious crime, and is severely punished.

MRS. D.—Cruelty and drunkenness are causes for separation in any State. The amount of alimony depends on the wealth of your husband, whether you have young children to support, and a number of other considerations. Write me the history of the case and state, especially, how many witnesses you have, and whether they will willingly appear for you.

UNDER THE LAMP

CONDUCTED BY HENRY A. KELLER

AN interesting method of secret writing that was brought to light during the World War was the concealing of a message in the body of an apparently innocent letter. The key by which the secret message could be found was a geometric design drawn across the face of that letter.

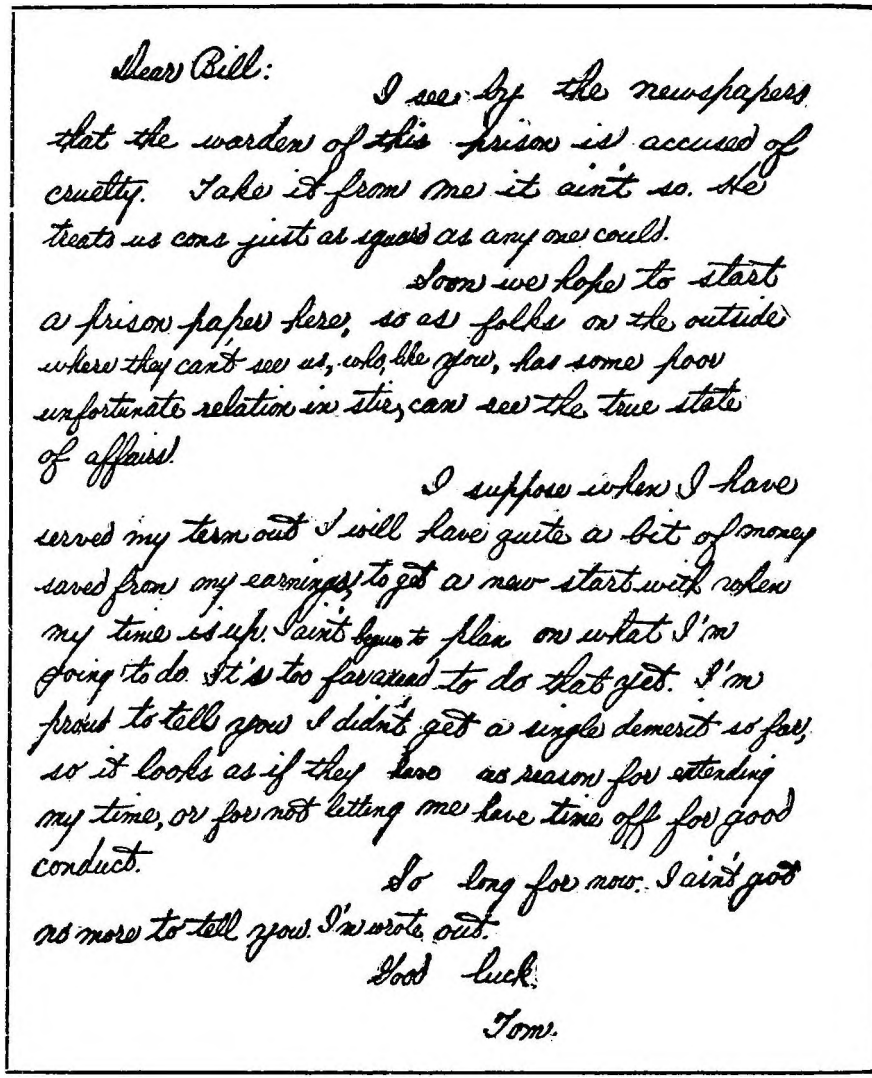
For illustration, let us suppose that a person who is sending a message according to this method poses as the nephew of the person to whom the message is to be sent. A letter is written from nephew to uncle, telling the uncle all about a contemplated journey; but the words in the secret message are so cleverly hidden in the letter that the casual reader never dreams that the communication was written for any other purpose than to inform an uncle of a nephew's proposed trip. It has been arranged previously between both parties that the key will be two lines drawn across the letter from opposite corners of the page; these lines will, of course, cross each other in the middle of the letter sheet. The words that these intersecting lines pass through are the words in the nephew's secret message, and by reading them in their natural sequence, i. e., from left to right and down the page, the message is apparent. The contemplated journey plays no other part in the matter than to cloak the secret communication; any other subject might do just as well.

It will readily be seen that by changing the simple key of two intersecting lines to other and more complicated designs, this method offers almost unlimited opportunities for variety, and difficulty of solution.

This week's problem will be to decode a cryptic message written according to the method described above. The message and history of the case were taken from the late Inspector Steele's scrap book. Solution and key complete will be found in next Tuesday's issue.

"Slim" Tom Johnson was in prison serving a long term. He had a reputation for breaking jail, so the prison officials were on the lookout for him to attempt to escape. Nothing suspicious was found against Tom during the first four months of his incarceration, until he wrote a letter to his "Brother Bill." Slim Tom was well known to the authorities, and the oldest of them had never heard that Tom had a brother. This circumstance was sufficient to arouse the suspicions of the prison warden, and he gave Tom's note to a cipher expert for examination. The expert found that the letter contained a secret message, and, after further investigation, it was learned that the "brother" was a former pal of Slim Tom. In this way a plot to set Tom free was nipped in the bud

Here is a reproduction of Slim Tom's letter. The secret message is composed of fifteen words. Go to it:



Dear Bill:

I see by the newspapers that the warden of this prison is accused of cruelty. Take it from me it ain't so. He treats us cons just as square as any one could.

Soon we hope to start a prison paper here, so as folks on the outside where they can't see us, only like you, has some poor unfortunate relation in stir, can see the true state of affairs.

I suppose when I have served my term out I will have quite a bit of money saved from my earnings, to get a new start with when my time is up. Ain't going to plan on what I'm going to do. It's too far away to do that yet. I'm proud to tell you I didn't get a single demerit so far, so it looks as if they have no reason for extending my time, or for not letting me have time off for good conduct.

So long for now. I ain't got no more to tell you. I'm wore out.

Good luck.

Tom.

Last week's problem was one in concentration rather than mathematics. Jerry had thirty-two dollars and fifty cents when he left the poker game. His losses amounted to seven dollars and fifty cents. He won this back, and three times as much again, making his total winnings thirty dollars, which, added to the price he paid for the last stack of chips he bought, made thirty-two dollars and fifty cents. How did you come out?

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.

GREENMAN, JACK, thirty-five years of age, five feet one inch tall, weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds, and has dark eyes and hair. By occupation he is a barber. His sister Mabel knew of him last in Brea, California in 1914, and would be glad to get any news of him. MRS. WILL SANDERS, 245 South Flower Street, Los Angeles, California.

BRISTOL, STANLEY, formerly of Kearney, New Jersey, who moved to Elizabeth Street, Waterbury, Connecticut, in August, 1915. Please write to your friend, GUSTAVE FLADUNO, 532 First Street, Carlstadt, New Jersey.

EDWIN, W. C. H.—You will never know our grief and sorrow. Your note was not found for twenty-six days after you disappeared. We forgive you. Be sure that we will not insist upon your returning, but mother always awaits you when you care to come. Write often. Our love and prayers will always be for you.—FATHER and MOTHER.

SNELL.—The person who advertised for a boy adopted by a family of this name is requested to send us her address. We have important news for her, and letters sent to Dorchester have been returned to us by the postal authorities.

COATE, TOM.—It is very important that I get into communication with you. A letter addressed to 125 H. Street, Perry, Oklahoma, will always be forwarded to me. Write me at 111 South Willow Avenue, Tampa Florida, up to the first of the year.—M. F. COATE.

SPENCER, CLEM, who was in Clarksdale, Mississippi over a year ago, and who has not been heard from since. His niece is very anxious to hear from him. If any one who knows his address sees this, will they please write to her. WORDIE CLARK, Box 38, Palmetto, Louisiana.

LEHMAN, LOUISE.—She was in Germany in 1881, and returned to Boston in 1883. Any one who can give information of her will greatly oblige by sending it to MABEL NEVINS, Box 15, 37 Astor Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

THE HINDU GENTLEMAN, who sent me a note of appreciation after I had mesmerized his friend, is requested to communicate with me again. I am willing to consider his offer for my services. CHESTER FLINT, 665 Chetwood Street, Oakland, California.

MCLOUGHLIN, WILLIAM.—When last heard of he was with his father in Williams, Colusa County, California. His sister Agnes, who was in Mount St. Joseph's, will be glad to hear from him, and will be grateful for any information concerning him. AGNES MCLOUGHLIN, 2299 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California.

TILLIS, TOM.—He is five feet four inches tall and weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds, and has dark hair. He was last seen in Columbia, Washington, about three years ago. Any one knowing his present address will greatly oblige by communicating with his cousin GEORGE TILIS, P. O. 241, Dallas, Oregon.

POTTER, ELLIS, who left his home at North Ridgeville, Ohio, about twenty-five years ago. He was heard from about eighteen years ago in the State of Texas, where he was known by the name of Brawn. He is the son of Albert and Ellen Potter. His mother who is now MRS. WILLIAM Y. CLARK, 740 Magnolia Avenue, Long Beach, California, will be thankful for any news of him.

LONG, LOYD, who was last heard of in New Richmond, Virginia, in 1918. He is five feet nine inches tall, and has brown hair and eyes. His weight is about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Any one knowing where he is at the present time will do a great favor by communicating with W. L. MCALLISTER, 227 Pine Street, Covington, Virginia.

KRIMMINGER, W. H., engineer. When last heard from he was in Los Angeles, California. His widowed sister would like to hear from him, or from either of his brothers, B. W. and M. A. If any one can tell her their present address she will be most grateful for the kindness. MRS. DORA E. COOK, 3308 High Street, Little Rock, Arkansas.

HENRY, THOMAS.—He is about forty-six years old, and is a well built man. He enlisted in the R. F. C., at New York, in 1917, came to Toronto, Canada, and left again on September 3, 1918, to get his discharge in New York. His friend at Toronto has heard nothing of him since. Any news of him will be gratefully received by A. STONE, 42 Sorauren Avenue, Toronto, Canada.

MITCHELL, HOWARD, who disappeared from his home, 447 West Sixteenth Street, New York City, fifteen years ago. His mother is very anxious to find him and will be grateful for any assistance from readers of this magazine. MRS. H. L. MITCHELL, 251 Madison Avenue, Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

MANNING, SYLVESTER J.—On November 2, 1892 he disappeared from his home in Ashtabula Harbor. He was five feet seven inches tall, had light hair and blue eyes, and on one arm his initials, J. S. M. or S. J. M. were tattooed. Any news of him will be gladly welcomed by his sister, MISS MAUDE M. MANNING, 611 Augustus Street, Youngstown, Ohio.

MINCH, G. C., who served on the U. S. S. *Colorado* from 1909 to 1911. He gave his home address as some part of West Philadelphia. His shipmate, J. H. HILL, would like very much to get in touch with him again, and hopes that, if he sees this, he will write to him in care of this magazine.

HASSEY, J. W.—Will any reader of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE please give me his address, or that of any member of his family? They were last heard of in Farmersville, Texas, about two years ago. If they see this their old schoolmate hopes they will write to him. HARVEY N. DANIEL, Flying School Detachment, Love Field, Dallas, Texas.

GEORGE.—Please write to me. Father is dead, and I am wondering whether you are dead or alive. Are you in trouble, and was the report of your injuries correct? Please trust me. Any communication will be strictly confidential.—BESSIE, care of this magazine.

VERTZ, DAVID.—Age sixty-five, hair brown but partly gray, height six feet, weight one hundred and ninety pounds. He has a mustache. When last heard of he was in Arcola, Wyoming, in 1910, and said he was going South or West. Any one knowing his present address will do a favor by sending it to me. JACK, care of this magazine.

FINDLEY, GEORGE.—He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and was last heard of about twenty-eight years ago. It was supposed at that time that he had been in the United States, and had left there shortly after for Australia. Any information regarding him will bring great happiness to his sister Margaret, who has been longing for years to see him or to hear from him. M. F. J., care of this magazine.

WITTER, CARL, ALICE, and LILLIAN, children of L. O. Witter of Lexington, Kentucky. Any one who can give information about these persons will confer a great favor by addressing BROTHER, care of this magazine.

CHAPMAN.—I was born on the 25th of October, 1892, and was cared for by the State. The State people of Boston told me that I was born in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and that my name was Frances Chapman. This is all that I know. I would like very much to find my mother, and will be grateful to any reader of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE who may be kind enough to assist me in doing so. My address is 1666 Purchase Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

DE WOLFE, M. A.—Your brother and pal wants to hear from you. Address C. L. K., care of this magazine.

THE following persons are requested to send their addresses to the missing department. We have information for them, and letters sent to addresses given have been returned. MRS. ESTELLA OLSEN. CHARLES L. TAYLOR. FRANK H. HORBACH. GEORGE C. COLLINS.

SMITH, HENRY D. and ALBER M. my two brothers, and my sister, MRS. EMMA MITCHELL.—When last heard of they were in Philadelphia. I am very anxious to find them, and will be most grateful for any assistance from readers of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE. MRS. ELSIE KEETH, 311 North Main Street, Wichita, Kansas.

DROWN, FRED H.—He has been missing since 1915. When last heard of he was in Dexter, Maine. He has light hair, blue eyes, is five feet eight inches tall, of medium build, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. "Dear father, did you know that mother died in January, 1919 of influenza? The children have all separated. L. and I shift for ourselves. K. is in a private school, and B. is with your mother. Please write to me, father. I want to see you so badly." If any reader of this magazine can tell me where he is, I shall be deeply grateful for the information. OLIVE DROWN, 462 Deerfield Street, Greenfield, Massachusetts.

CROZIERO, Doctor W. J.—I wrote you at Monticello, Indiana, as you requested, on May 1, 1917, but received no answer. Please write to me in care of this magazine. Things are still the same.—L. P. W.

MILLER, BERTHA, who, about fifteen years ago, was working as a manicurist in the Old Century Building in St. Louis, Maine. Information regarding her present whereabouts is desired by a friend. X. Y. Z., care of this magazine.

INFORMATION WANTED as to the present whereabouts of BRUNO GLOBY, LOTTIE JANSON, and MR. AUBREY, an attorney-at-law. They were last heard of in Galveston and San Antonio, Texas. Any one who can give me news of them will do a favor by writing to me, HERMAN GLOBY, 225 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

ALLEN, LILLIAN, who left Lincoln, Nebraska, about twenty-five years ago. She was last heard of in Clovis, New Mexico. She has black hair and brown eyes, is four feet and one inch tall, and weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. I shall be most grateful to any one who will give me information that will lead to my getting in touch with her. FRANK BRADLEY, 1306 O Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

SCHEER, ABE, formerly of Detroit, and now supposed to be somewhere in California. Also RUBY TILLY, of Detroit, who worked at Himelhoch's store about five years ago, and is believed to be still in Detroit. I would like to hear from both these persons. Address Mrs. B. P., care of this magazine.

ROBISON, MRS. DOROTHY.—When last heard of she was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, North side. A friend would like to know her present address, and will be grateful to any one who may be kind enough to send it to her. E. R., care of this magazine.

BOWEN, EVERETT.—A sailor who enlisted in the navy at San Francisco, in July, 1918, and was sent to San Diego, and from there to Brooklyn. His home is believed to be in Colorado. He is about twenty years old, has light hair and blue eyes. A friend would like to hear from him. A. N. L., care of this magazine.

GUNDY.—Information wanted of Mrs. Gundy, the second wife of George Gundy, an Englishman, who went to Canada in 1874, and died in Montreal in 1910. After his death the second Mrs. Gundy, who was an American, left Montreal and went to the United States, taking with her her husband's will and some deeds. It is not known to what part of the States she went. She died a few years after her husband's death, and later an advertisement appeared in a newspaper for a claimant for the will and deeds, but the persons interested did not see it, and are very anxious to get in touch with the person in whose care these papers were left by Mrs. Gundy. I will be deeply grateful for any information that will help me in this matter. J. WALL, care of this magazine.

MacPHERSON, ANGUS, who was born at Rixford, Pennsylvania, and has not been heard from for seven years. His sisters, Marie, Sadie, and Margaret, would like to hear from him. Please write to Margaret. MRS. F. W. REID, 145 Washington Street, St. Mary's Pennsylvania.

POLLOCK, FRED.—A tinner, who worked for George Hauck at Springfield, Ohio, ten years ago. He is about five feet five inches tall, has brown hair, blue eyes, and a big dimple in his chin. He is asked to write to "SHERLOCK HOLMES," at 257 South Wittenberg Avenue, Springfield, Ohio.

MURPHY, HARRY, sergeant in Headquarters Company, Third Infantry, Eagle Pass, Texas. He was a "regular." He expected to be sent to China, or to Germany, in the permanent army of occupation. He is tall, and has very black hair and gray eyes. He was twenty-seven years old last August. All mail addressed to him at Eagle Pass has been returned, and his friends fear that some accident may have befallen him. Any information will be gladly received. F. ROCKWOOD, Hotel Hannah, Cleveland, Ohio.

WALLACE, ROBERT, my uncle, who was last heard of in Chicago, and my step brother, EDWARD JORDAN, who was last heard of in the United States army in 1901 or 1902. He was mustered out of the Fifteenth Cavalry in California. Any one who can give me news of either of these two relatives will confer a great favor. PHILLIP H. SMITH, 171 Martin Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

LOEHR, LUCY DALTON.—If any one knowing the whereabouts, or, if dead, the date and place of death, of the above-named person, who once lived on Staten Island, New York, and at 500 East Eighteenth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1909, and perhaps later, will communicate with me, I shall be greatly obliged, and will pay a suitable reward for reliable information. JAMES BURKE, JR., attorney, National Bank Building, Port Richard, New York.

BOURQUIN, POLIGNAC.—He is wanted at once. A large estate awaits him. He sometimes goes by the name of Paul Gaines, nicknamed "Gub." He is about forty-nine years old, has a prominent nose, and is very erect in his walk. He is requested to write to his brother, ELLIOT BOURQUIN, 1616 West Broad Street, Savannah, Georgia.

EDWARDS, CHARLEY EDWIN.—He lives on a ranch in Montana, somewhere near Medicine Lake, and was with the marine corps during the war. A friend has a very important message for him, and will be grateful to any one who can give his present address. H. N., care of this magazine.

HAYES, MARGARET.—She was last seen in Dallas, Texas. I have important news for her and would like to know her present address. J. G. PUTMAN, Waxahachie, Texas.

RICHARDS, EUGENE, who was last heard of in Camp Eustis, Virginia, and SILAS FOSTER who was last heard of in Cement, Oklahoma. Any one knowing the whereabouts of either of these men, please write to MILTON MAGEE, care of O. W. Culp, First View, Colorado.

McHALE, JOHN T., of Baltimore, Maryland.—When last seen he was boarding a train for Eldridge, Maryland, on the night of September 2, 1919, at about half-past eight. He is six feet tall, weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, has dark hair and blue eyes, and wore a dark suit, black necktie, and soft collar. He can be identified by United States army discharge papers, which he always carries with him. Any one knowing of his whereabouts will do a great favor by sending their information to the missing department.

TO MY DADDY.

Dear Daddy, won't you please come home
To Mamma, Sister, and your Boy?
Then you would see dear Grandma, too,
And fill so many hearts with joy.

Our Grandpa told me, long ago,
That you would surely soon return,
I'm sure you would, could you but know
How sadly for your love we yearn.

Why won't you come and see us now?
You know we live in Grandpa's home.
Just let me tell you, Daddy, how
We need your help. Why won't you come?

If you can't come to see your Boy,
Mamma, and Annistasia, too,
Then write a letter, Daddy, dear,
And we will all write one to you.

ANDREW FRANKLIN,
A little "Michigander" who seeks his father.

MANN, JOE J.—He enlisted in the United States navy about twelve years ago, and was discharged in Seattle Washington, after four years of service, when he wrote, saying that he was returning to his home town, Chicago, but he did not come. In November, 1918, an insurance card from the government was sent to his mother, who was then dead. This card stated that he was in the army, but no further news was obtainable from the government. It was heard from other sources that he was in the Thirty-seventh Field Artillery, and was about to sail for France when the armistice was signed. He was discharged February 5, 1919. We have been unable to get any information about him, although we have written to the war department several times. He is twenty-nine years old, and has auburn hair and brown eyes. Any one who will help me to find my brother will be gratefully remembered. CHARLES W. MANN, care of this magazine.

ABOUT thirty years ago a young girl was placed in an orphanage near Springfield, Massachusetts. Her name was MARY. She does not remember her surname, but knows that her father's first name was WILLIAM. She also remembers something of being with her grandparents at their home near Willamansett, before being placed in the orphanage. She thinks that her parents' home was in or near Chicopee, Massachusetts. Any one who can give information that will help her to find her relatives will do a great favor by writing to MARY, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—AN ORPHAN BOY wishes to find his father and mother. He was born on May 30, 1901, and was taken from Bethany Hospital, Kansas City, Kansas, by W. L. Brown, of Neosho Falls, Kansas, when he was a few days old, and was adopted by him and his wife. They are now both dead. They never told their adopted son anything of his real parents, and he is anxious to learn something of them. Any information will be greatly appreciated. W. R. BROWN, Neosho Falls, Kansas.

CAVENEY, WILLIAM, last heard of in Chicago about 1910 or 1911. His parents are very anxious and worried, as they have had no news of him since that time. It is feared that he may have been in a railroad accident, and perhaps has lost his memory. Any information will be gratefully appreciated by his family. 443 Athabasca Street West, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada.

MEBIN, CARRIE, JOHN, and JAMES.—They were placed in a home by their father on August 21, 1917. John was four years old, Carrie three, and James a baby one year old. Their mother has been unable to find out where they are, and will be grateful to any one who can help her in the matter. Please send any information to DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

MUIR, ANNA.—She was last seen in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the spring of 1917, working as a waitress at 444 Liberty Avenue. She is earnestly requested to write to an old friend, H. B., care of this magazine.

ALBERS, JULIA, formerly of 40 Hill Street, Newark, New Jersey. Mr. Henry Fasting, of Rotterdam, wants to hear from you. Any one knowing the whereabouts of this person, who is also known by the name of Waltjen, please communicate with O. WEHRENBERG, 2 Stone Street, New York City.

BASCOM, FLORENCE V., who used to live in Lynn, Massachusetts, and was last heard of in 1908. She came to Lynn from Texas. Any one knowing her present address will do a great favor by sending it to a friend who is interested in her welfare. A. L. L., care of this magazine.

BLOOM, MARY ANDERSON, formerly of North Dakota. In 1913 she left Minneapolis for St. Louis, Missouri, where she worked as a presser and tailoress during the summer of 1914. Any one who can give news of her please write to "HIGH," care of this magazine.

LONVILLE, VALERIA, who lived at Shortz Court, Philadelphia, about December, 1909. It is thought that her home was St. Thomas, Canada. An old and true friend would like to hear from her, and will be grateful for any information concerning her. J. QUINN, care of this magazine.

O'HARE, EARL.—Your wife is very ill and needs your assistance. She begs you, for old times' sake, to write to her. MARIE, care of this magazine.

OLIVER, DOROTHY CAROLINE.—She left Liverpool, England, six years ago, and lived for some time in Clinton Street, Brooklyn. An old friend has been trying to find her for over a year, and will be grateful to any one who can give information as to her present address. Please write to the missing department.

COLLINS, JOSEPH W., who was last heard of in Philadelphia, on the 13th of June, 1919, where he was employed. He is five feet nine inches tall, weighs about one hundred and forty-five pounds, has light hair and blue eyes, and at the time he left he was wearing a green cap, a gray mixed suit, and a dark tie. Any one who has seen or heard anything of him will do a great kindness by writing to his anxious wife, MRS. CECILIA COLLINS, 304 North Mechanic Street, Cumberland, Maryland.

JOHNSON, SAMUEL, formerly of Birmingham, England. He left Liverpool for this continent about 1875. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his nephew, A. PENN, 442 Merton Street, Toronto, Canada.

RIDINGS, MRS. ROBERT.—On September 25, 1910, a baby girl was adopted by Mrs. Robert Ridings, of 26 Hilarity Street, Providence, Rhode Island, and was named Evelyn. Her mother has made every effort to find her child, but without success, and has great hopes of hearing of her through the medium of this magazine. Any information will be of comfort to her, and will be most thankfully received. Please write to the missing department.

BOARDLEY, HERBERT.—He is a Canadian by birth and was last heard of in Youngstown, Ohio. He travels about a great deal, and does not stay long in one place. Any news of him will be gratefully appreciated by an old friend. H. M. FROHNER, West Fairlee, Vermont.

MIDERMAND, CHARLES E., formerly of Port Burwell, Ontario, Canada. An old friend is longing to hear from him again, and will be glad of any news that will lead to communication with him. I. S., care of this magazine.

PALMER, MARGARET and GENEVIEVE, who were last seen at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in the fall of 1906, and when last heard of were touring the Middle Southwest, and were at Lawton, Oklahoma, in 1909. Any one knowing their present address please send it to "HIGH," care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

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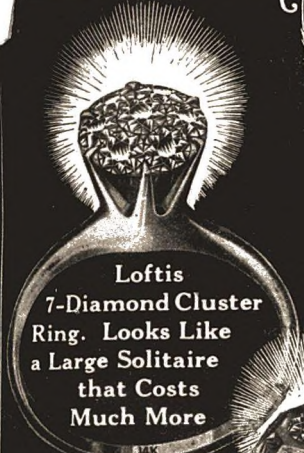

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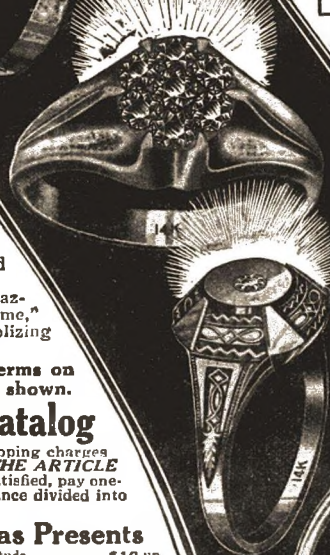

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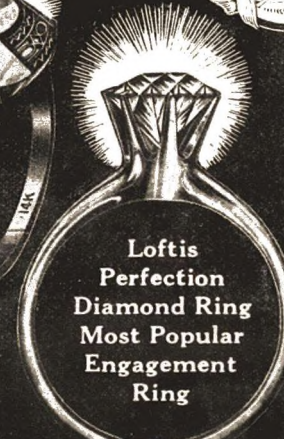

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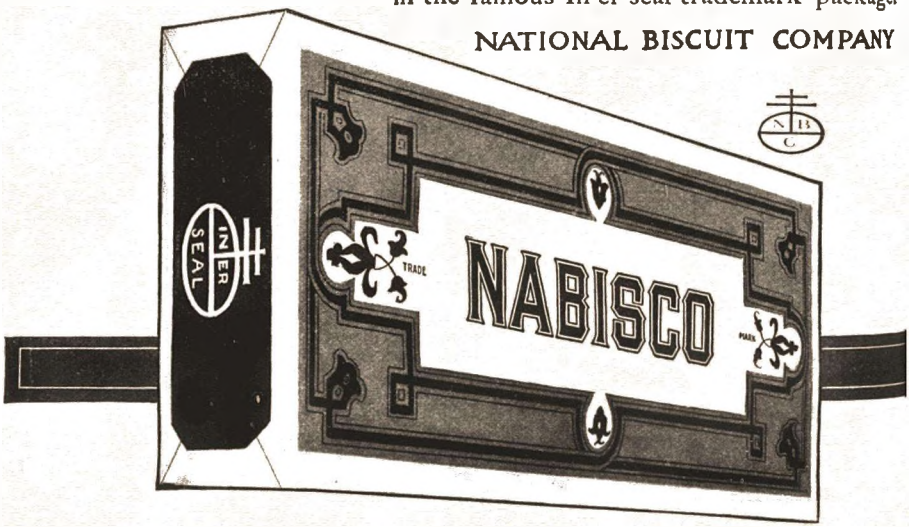

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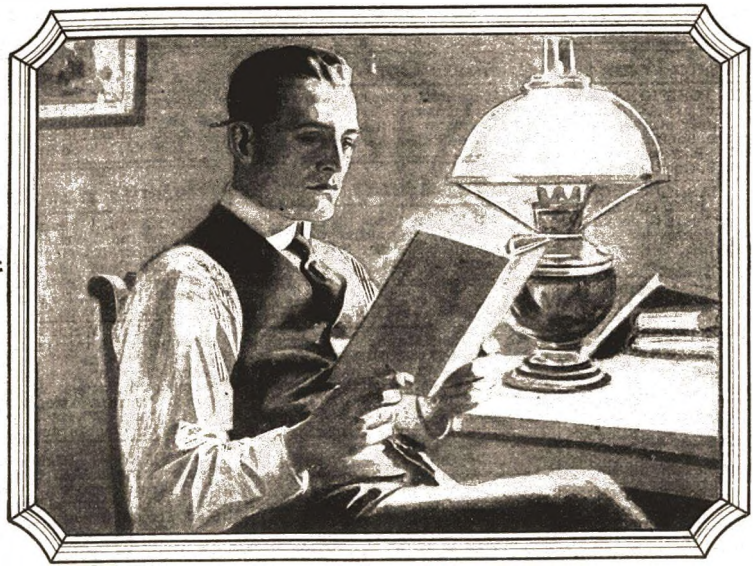

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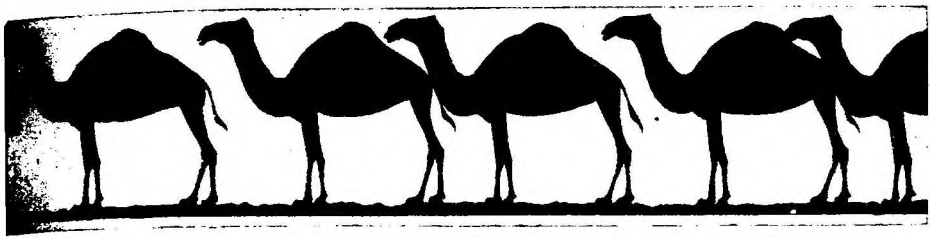

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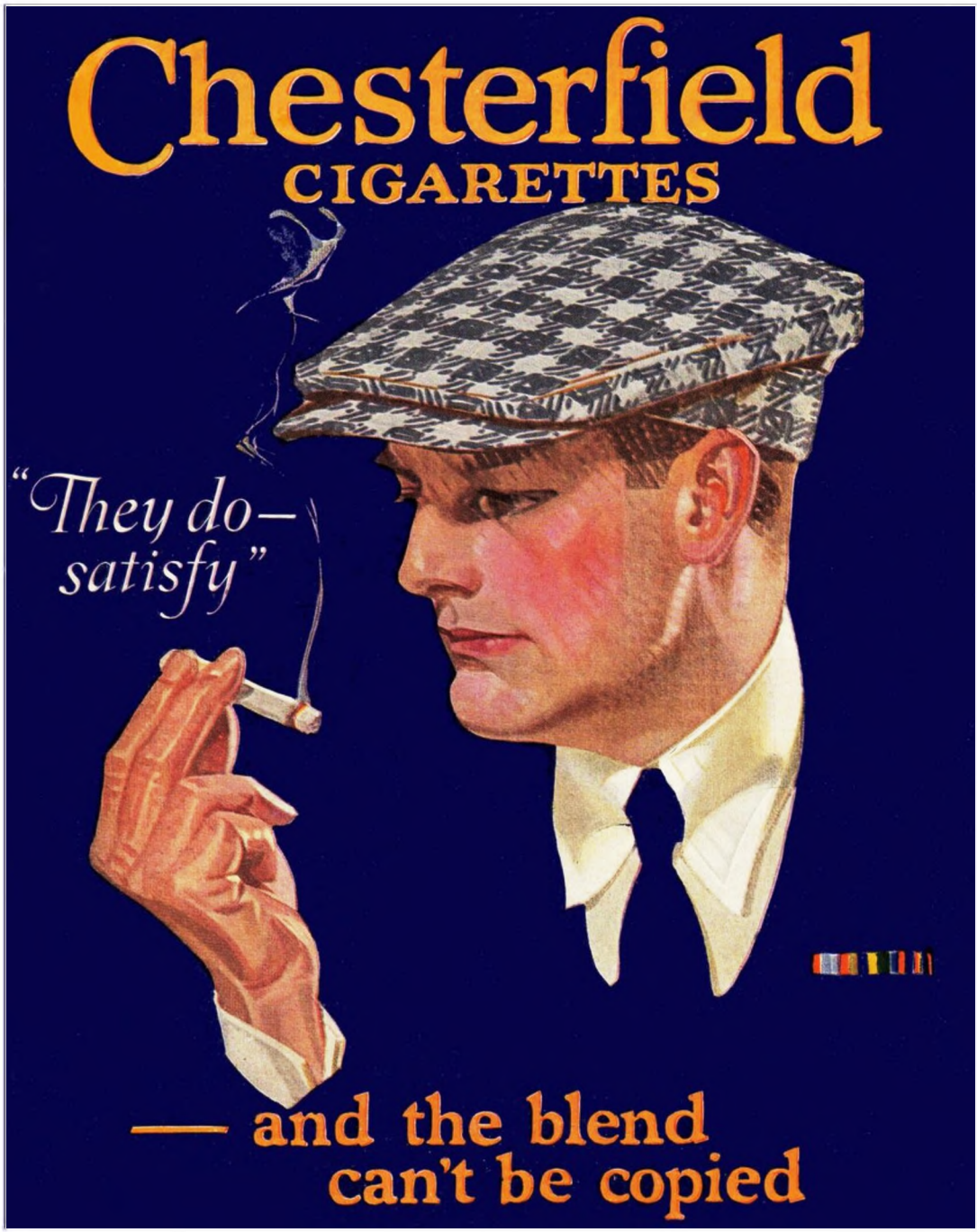

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